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### Comics realism and the Maus event

*Comics and the dynamics of World War II remembrance*

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Comics Realism  
and the *Maus* Event:

Comics and the  
Dynamics of  
World War II  
Remembrance

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Rik Spanjers

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Rik Spanjers  
University of Amsterdam  
2019



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COMICS REALISM AND THE MAUS EVENT:

COMICS AND THE DYNAMICS OF WORLD WAR II  
REMEMBRANCE

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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde

commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit

op vrijdag 1 november 2019, te 11.00 uur

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geboren te Deventer

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# Introduction:

## Comics and the Dynamics of World War II Remembrance

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There have never been as many ways to remember World War II as are available to us today. You can visit museums, participate in reenactments, listen to family members tell theirs or other's stories, play computer games, read books, listen to podcasts, visit monuments, watch films or documentaries, travel to historical sites, take courses, and still would not have begun to exhaust the options. Remembering the war, moreover, is not a purely private matter, to be attended at will. World War II is woven into the identities of nations, communities, families, and individuals. It is taught in schools and remembered publicly by officials, besides being available for consumption and contemplation across media. When the remembrance of the war changes, therefore, the way in which nations, communities, families, and individuals think of themselves changes with it. Precisely because of its continuing impact, the remembrance of World War II, instead of being comprised of one narrative that remains largely unchanged

through time, is continually amended, added to, and subtracted from (van Vree and van der Laarse 8-9; Erl and Rigney 2). World War II memory culture should therefore be seen as a dynamic process in which many stories, told in different ways, shape and reshape both past and present.

Yet, despite its omnipresence in contemporary culture, World War II is also often seen as defying representation. Those who aim to represent it have struggled with the practical impossibilities and moral implications of this daunting task. The atrocities of World War II, with the Holocaust at the center, are a limit case for representation in its many forms. In historiography, the *Historikerstreit* is the most prominent example of the impact of the catastrophic past<sup>1</sup> on representation.<sup>2</sup> While initially waged over the positioning of the Holocaust in relation to the broader history of West-Germany, one of the many results of the *Historikerstreit* was that questions concerning the limitations of historiographic representation began to be discussed more widely within the discipline (Ankersmit 2007, 12). In literary studies, philosophy, and memory studies, the latter of which is at least partly founded upon the analysis of the afterlives of the Holocaust, there exist a considerable number of studies of the representation of World War II and the Holocaust in a wide range of different practices and media.<sup>3</sup> Here, the stark contrast between Adorno's often misread prohibition of Holocaust representation<sup>4</sup> and the ubiquity of it in the public sphere sparked a discussion over the ethics of historical representation that is still ongoing. The works of the writers and artists that are studied in this context demonstrate the ways in which the catastrophic past defies narrativization and forces creators to find new forms to present the past in. Take for example Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), a famous novel that describes the bombing of Dresden. In this novel, Vonnegut ingeniously collapses past and future into the present in order to more adequately depict the continuing impact of the catastrophic past on the life of the protagonist.<sup>5</sup> Another example can be found in the work of the French

photographer Christian Boltanski, who confronts his audience with the Holocaust through archival installations rather than by narrating this past in a more traditional form (van Alphen 69). While these and other representations can and have been called successful, however awkward this word is in this context, their creators are often highly critical of their ability to do justice to the past that they attempt to represent and often also express these doubts in the works themselves. Letting the past lie, however, is out of the question. While it is difficult or impossible to represent the catastrophic past adequately, it is far worse to forget it. World War II representation thus continues to exist between the impossibility of adequately representing a past that is too horrible to convey, and the compulsion and/or obligation to never forget.

As fewer and fewer of those who have firsthand experience of the war are still alive, its remembrance has become more noticeably reliant on mediation. The increasing dependency of World War II memory culture on media combined with drastic changes in media landscape and hierarchies has reignited and repositioned debates concerning World War II representation. Instead of questioning if World War II representation is acceptable and/or possible, scholars have started investigating in what ways the remembrance of World War II changes when the media and/or practices through which it is remembered change. One of the results of this shift is that—alongside a wider move from a textual to a more visually oriented culture<sup>6</sup>—the central position of text as the most reliable and realistic form in which to remember has been challenged by the increasing popularity of a range of visual media.

Comics does not immediately spring to mind as one of the likely challengers of more traditional forms of World War II remembrance. Photography and documentary film might be more probable candidates based on their perceived realism. Yet a well-documented tradition of World War II representation in comics exists going back to the wartime period itself.<sup>7</sup> Up until the 1990s, however, World War II

representation in comics was approached by scholars and critics mostly with disdain. The medium's widespread association with frivolity, heroics, childishness, and gratuitous violence—characteristics which a vast majority of World War II comics did very little to combat—eclipsed the few comics that attempted a more critical treatment of war (Witek 1989, 13; Mickwitz 13).<sup>8</sup>

Besides its relatively low cultural status, comics about World War II were also seen as problematic because they are drawn. In the context of World War II, any representation that strays too far from what is considered historical truth and a realistic way of depicting that truth invites severe criticism. Because drawing is, above all, associated with subjectively based renditions of the world (Rawson 1; Kenin 6; Berger 149), comics seems predisposed to aid rather than dispel the critiques of those set against the medium's attempts at World War II representation. That is, even when comics render the past in near-photorealistic detail, the fact that they are drawn causes them to be perceived as less suitable for historical representation.

Set against this double disenfranchisement of comics in relation to World War II representation, the success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–1991) appears all the more spectacular. *Maus*—Spiegelman's rendition of his father's eyewitness account of Auschwitz and the crippling burden of this past on father and son—was noticed by mainstream critics as early as 1985 (Tucker). Critical consecration, already budding in early reviews, soared with the comic's nominations for the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1986 and 1991, and came to full fruition with the special citation awarded to Spiegelman by the 1992 Pulitzer Prize Board.<sup>9</sup> Academia snapped to the attention of *Maus* in 1987. Throughout the 1990s, *Maus*' fame in academia steadily rose, until in 1997 and 1998 it came to occupy a central position in the then booming field of memory studies. In a short period, a sizable number of the most prominent memory scholars, such as Marianne Hirsch, Andreas Huyssen, Dominick LaCapra, and James E. Young, published on *Maus* in the context of their



broader research. Through the publications of these scholars and others, *Maus* became a prominent object within the field of memory studies and as such was not only assured a place in research but also on the reading lists of humanities courses around the globe.

The popular and critical success of *Maus* changed the perception of comics' abilities for historical representation. Since *Maus*' success, there is little reason to question if comics can or should represent World War II. Instead, I investigate how—through *Maus*—comics came to be seen as capable of realistic representation and, subsequently, in what ways other comics amend, add to, and subtract from *Maus*' particular style of war representation.

What is needed to begin to answer these questions is an approach to realism that allows room for the contradictions inherent to it. Despite the stringent, and often valid, critiques of realism by postmodern thinkers such as Roland Barthes, it is still a concept that is central to contemporary cultural criticism, and perhaps even more so in the context of World War II representation, where the catastrophic past forces the question of realism back into view (Rothberg 2000, 8). What is perceived as realistic World War II representation, however, has differed greatly over time and among different audiences. Indeed—as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter—realism has a history that is far less a gradual perfection of technique than it is a development of or quarrel over taste. What is positioned by creators and perceived by audiences as realistic is under constant negotiation. In this research, I approach realism as a site of continual struggle between various modes of representing the past. These modes, moreover, have a tendency to authenticate themselves as realistic by challenging or demystifying others. Because my view of realism is relational, my analysis of it is contingent on the specific context in which I study it. In relation to World War II representation in comics since *Maus*, I single out three groupings of formal and/or cultural characteristics that are most prevalent in the struggle surrounding realism: the subjective, historiographic and

mechanical modes of realism. These modes—which I elaborate upon in the subsequent chapter—can be distinguished from one another based on how they propose to bridge the gap between representation and reality. In short, where subjective realism privileges subjective experience, historiographic realism relies on historiographic method, and mechanical realism on mechanical reproductions of the world. Each of these modes comes with its own poetics. Subjective realism, for example, can often be discerned in first-person narration and point of view drawings. Historiographic realism, in turn, frequently favors omniscient third-person narration. And mechanical realism, finally, can be found in World War II comics in reproduced or retraced photographs.

In this thesis, I consider realism in relation to World War II representation in comics on two different but connected scales. First, the perceived realism of comics in relation to World War II representation in other media, and second, the way in which comics, through their formal affordances, can incorporate different modes of realism into their representations of the past.

In order to better understand the perception of the comics medium's affordance for historical representation in relation to other media, I investigate the reception of *Maus* in Anglophone and Germanophone academia in chapter two. Instead of analyzing historical representation in *Maus* directly by way of a close reading, this chapter examines the impact of the success of *Maus* on the perception of comics in academia. My study of the reception of *Maus* shows how scholars—in order to distinguish comics from other media—have emphasized the ways in which the comics medium affords a rendition of the past and its presence in the present from the point of view of the experiencing subject.<sup>10</sup> This focus on the suitability of *Maus*, and with it comics, to the subjective mode of realism, I argue, has obscured what I see as comics' greatest strength regarding the representation of the past: its ability to incorporate and juxtapose different modes of realism. Because they combine various ways of representing the past

that stem from different media, comics can be read as interrogations of the interactions of a continually expanding media landscape with the dynamics of World War II memory culture. Analyzing a comics page that combines, for example, historiographic third-person narration, drawings, dialogue, and photographs not only shows that comics' representation of the past is more multilayered than is often thought, it also offers insights into how different ways of representing the past coexist in World War II remembrance.

In the three chapters that follow my discussion of the reception of *Maus*, I bring this broader affordance of comics for historical representation into view. For my case studies, I have selected three comics that are quite dissimilar in terms of cultural context. They do not only come from different comics cultures—Dutch, American, and Japanese—but they also differ in terms of mode of publication and intended audience. The diversity of these case studies should not be mistaken for an attempt to offer up a completely exhaustive view of World War II comics since *Maus*. Instead, what binds these comics together is that each of them, in its own way, exemplifies comics' ability to combine different modes of realism in texts and images. Bringing these particular comics together in this thesis allows for an exploration of comics' affordance for historical representation that expands from the dominant approach to it set into place by the success of *Maus*. Furthermore, the fact that each of these comics is so affluent in terms of the number of different ways of representing the past that it combines, allows for a reading of them that draws in broader discussions concerning the (im)possibility of representing the catastrophic past in comics as well as other media.

The first of these close readings focuses on the juxtaposition of different kinds of texts in comics. The fact that comics are a primarily visual medium by no means prevents text from playing an important role in them.<sup>11</sup> In comics, the visual characteristics of texts can be made to matter in ways that are largely foreign to literature and historiography. Investigating comics' text, therefore,

offers insights into the ways in which texts change when they are embedded in a visual medium, and how these changes impact the remembrance of World War II that is established through them. In my analysis of text in comics, I focus on Peter Pontiac's *Kraut* (2000). *Kraut*, which is generally considered the most famous of Pontiac's works, was created in direct reference to *Maus*. *Kraut* suits my analysis because in it, text is more prevalent and more significant than is the case for most World War II comics. On the pages of *Kraut*, Pontiac deals with a past that is problematic both on a personal and a societal level: his father's collaboration during World War II. For the countries that were occupied by the German forces during World War II, collaboration is a highly emotionally and politically charged subject.<sup>12</sup> What distinguishes Pontiac's depiction of the collaboration of his father are his attempts to incorporate multiple perspectives on it, including that of his father. Besides his own and his father's (hand) writing, *Kraut* also contains several short historiographic texts as well as parts of court transcriptions. In my analysis, I show how these different texts can be distinguished from one another based on their visual appearance and position on the page. I examine, moreover, how Pontiac makes use of the visual characteristics of text and page composition to forge meaningful relations between these texts. By combining these different texts on the pages of *Kraut*, I argue, Pontiac both authenticates his version of the past and questions the capabilities of different ways of writing as means to bring the past into the present.

In my second exploration of comics' ability to combine modes of realism, I research how a supervillain origin story attempts to meet the demands for realism in Holocaust representation by drawing on the strengths of other media. While the success of *Maus* made World War II representation in comics more feasible, it did not by any means eliminate or even alleviate the pressures exerted by the catastrophic past. In order to demonstrate in what ways comics creators use combinations of modes of realism in texts and

images to render the wartime past adequately, I investigate Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's *Magneto: Testament* (2008–2009). Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic recounts the experiences of a young Jewish boy in Nazi Germany. Max and his family are forced to flee when the Nazi's rise to power. They are caught, however, and he is transported to Auschwitz. Seen in its wider context, the representational difficulties that haunt *Magneto: Testament* are abundantly clear. Unlike *Maus*, which is an independently published alternative comic, *Magneto: Testament* is a superhero comic published by Marvel. Readers of this comic, moreover, are expected to know that young Max will survive Auschwitz and grow up to become the supervillain Magneto, a well-known character of the *X-Men* comics series. With *Magneto: Testament*, Pak and Di Giandomenico have to navigate the considerable distance between a superhero origin story in comics form and more traditional conceptions of Holocaust narratives. In chapter four, I consider how they juxtapose modes of realism in images and texts in an attempt to do so.

In my final close reading, I focus on the interactions between the different kinds of images that can be found side-by-side in World War II comics. In the case of a majority of World War II comics, it would probably be possible to point to at least one instance where different kinds of images are combined on the page. It is not uncommon to find, for example, photographs scattered throughout a World War II comic. At the same time, most World War II comics largely consist of a singular and relatively consistent graphic style. And while it is true that for all World War II comics graphic style has a significant impact on the past that is represented, a particular graphic style becomes especially recognizable when it is contrasted with another.<sup>13</sup> In order to bring out the affordances of comics in this area, I analyze Shigeru Mizuki's *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* (1971).<sup>14</sup> In this fictional rendition of his wartime experiences as an infantryman in the Imperial Japanese Army, Mizuki makes nimble use of his ability to draw in a wide range of different graphic styles.

On the pages of *Onward*, therefore, schematic, or cartoony, images co-exist with near-photorealistic ones. In my analysis of Mizuki's work, I analyze in what ways the juxtapositions of graphic styles on the pages of *Onward* challenge the preconception that drawing always only connotes subjectivity. I argue that *Onward* confirms that the range of possibilities for the representation of the past in drawing is much more extensive than is often assumed. A reading of how graphic style is made to matter in Mizuki's work thus allows for a broader examination of how different ways of visualizing the past impact its presence in the present.

In more than just chronology, this thesis picks up where Joseph Witek's seminal *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (1989) ends: with the burgeoning success of *Maus* in academia. I am not the first to succeed Witek in researching historical representation of comics.<sup>15</sup> The success of *Maus* was followed by a steadily growing number of analyses of World War II representation in comics. To a large extent, these studies—as I show in more detail in my reception study of *Maus*—focus on comics' ability to represent the past from the point of view of the subject. Many of them do so because it allows them to distinguish World War II representation in comics from that in other media.<sup>16</sup> By looking not only at what sets historical representation in comics apart from other media, but also at the ability of comics to incorporate ways of representing the past that are native or more common to other media, this research broadens the perspective on historical representation in comics to show the complexly layered representations of the past of which comics are capable.

Another benefit of pivoting towards comics' ability to incorporate and juxtapose different modes of realism in image and text is that it reveals comics as miniature doublings of the broader discussions that drive the dynamics of World War II memory culture. Besides as innovative contributions to memory culture, then, I also read comics as reflections of it. What the comics brought

## INTRODUCTION

together by this research show is how different ways of bringing the past in the present work alongside or in opposition to one another in World War II remembrance. By studying these experimentations with World War II representation in comics form, this research thus aims to foster a better understanding of the manifold way in which comics represent the past as well as contribute to our knowledge of the impact of an ever-widening media landscape on the remembrance of World War II.





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# 1.

## Comics and Realism

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As early as 1922, the Russian-born linguist Roman Jakobson complained about the often-confusing ways in which the term “realism” was used by art historians and literary scholars. In his essay, “On Realism in Art,” Jakobson notes that while at face value the concept of realism is used to describe a certain verisimilitude of a work of art to everyday reality, the apparent clarity of this definition dissipates because perceptions of what is realistic change over time and among different currents of art (Jakobson 20).

Regardless of Jakobson’s critique of the concept, realism remained a fashionable concept in the study of literature. Georg Lukács referred to it—in the context of his study of the historical novel—in order to indicate a connection between superstructure and base from which he attempted to remake literature into an asset, both in the study of the historical development of capitalism and in the struggle against it (Lukács 285). Erich Auerbach’s *opus magnum*, *Mimesis, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) is, as its title indicates, devoted to a study of realism throughout Western literature.

Auerbach tackles the different and often contradictory forms of realism that confuse any attempted unidirectional approach to the concept in the study of literature. He acknowledges that there are different ways in which the outside world is represented but sees them converging over the history of literature. According to Auerbach, the “swings of the pendulum” of realistic representation can only be understood in the context of a wider historical development that culminates in the union of its different modes in the realism of Stendhal and Balzac; a revolution that contests the classical and renaissance separations of styles in literature by bringing together “everyday practical reality” in a tragic framework (Auerbach 554). For Auerbach, the development of Western literature equals the development of mimesis. Something similar can be said of Ian Watt’s use of the concept in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), in which a modern, subjective realism—a view of the world from the point of view of the embedded subject—is posited as the central defining characteristic of the development of the novel form in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. For Watt, the novel is separated from preexisting literary forms because it begins from the particulars of everyday reality, instead of from standardized formal conventions, characters, locations, and plots (Watt 13-16).

Through the work of these and many other scholars, realism has become interpretable as a set of formal poetic conventions, a specific period in literary history, and a focus on “everyday practical reality,” even if these three readings of the concept are at times mutually exclusive. Notwithstanding their many differences, however, most approaches to realism in art from before the 1960s have in common an implicit trust in the existence of a reality to which representations refer. Reality, in these approaches, can still be used as a rule by which representation can be measured.

This strict separation of reality and representation is what was challenged by postmodern critics. In “The Reality Effect” (1968), Roland Barthes starts to unravel it in an analysis of Flaubert’s description of Rouen in *Madame Bovary*. Barthes succeeds in showing

that in representation, what seems real is always necessarily an illusion, and never reality itself. The trick of realism, for Barthes, is that it hides itself in plain sight by pretending to be the one thing that it can never be: reality. Instead of conjuring into existence the city of Rouen, Flaubert's words are merely signifiers referring to that real (Barthes 1989, 148). For Barthes, realism becomes an effect, and whoever falls for this magician's trick, moreover, has not been paying close enough attention to the structure of language. In the words of Joseph Hillis Miller: "[The] chain of substitutions and transformations creates illusion out of illusion and the appearance of reality out of illusion, in a play of language without beginning, end, or extra linguistic foundation" (Miller 123). From such a perspective, language can never establish contact with that which is outside of it, if such a world outside of language even exists. Under postmodernism, the study of realism is downgraded to a study of illusions.

Such a conception of realism leads to two seemingly contradicting results. The first is a fundamental distrust in the human's ability to grasp reality through representation. From this point of view, human perception is always stuck in representation. If this is the case, it is not possible to establish a reality alongside which representations can be judged more or less realistic. That which appears to audiences as real cannot be anything but another illusion of representation. The second result is that the disconnect from reality established through postmodern theory is often experienced as a loss. The theoretical impossibility of grasping reality through representation has become the basis for a renewed desire for the real. For Linda Hutcheon, the desire to address this loss of connection to the historical, political and social is a central characteristic of the postmodern historical novel. Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) also reads postmodernism as an expression of loss: loss of the subject (11) and a loss of connection to history:

[W]e are now, in other words, in “intertextuality” as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of “pastness” and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history. (19-20)

Jameson argues that postmodern culture turns to history because history is out of reach, because it is locked away in an endless circle of representation. Both these scholars thus see the explosion of historical culture under postmodernism as a knee-jerk reaction to the loss of connection to reality.<sup>17</sup>

Starting from this loss central to postmodern culture, contemporary movements away from it, such as cosmopolitanism,<sup>18</sup> metamodernism,<sup>19</sup> or new sincerity,<sup>20</sup> have styled themselves as departures from the all to theoretical reflections on loss in which postmodernism is said to be stuck, and a reengagement with the world and its socio-political issues, conveniently forgetting that a turn towards the world was also a central characteristic of postmodernism.<sup>21</sup> But even if these new currents allow for a breath of fresh air, it is doubtful that such good intentions are enough to remedy the loss at the heart of postmodernism. Instead, these new movements might be only slightly different expressions of the same loss that afflicted postmodern culture.

For all its confusions, realism thus remains a concept that is central and structuring in contemporary cultural criticism. This is certainly the case for my discussion of post-*Maus* World War II comics, in which the impossibility of reaching reality through representation is lamented or contested, instead of accepted. Besides the fact that realism remains one of the primary goals of creators of historical comics, the concept also invariably surfaces in reviews of World War II comics. Critics and audiences often reward works that remain “true to the past.” In the shadow of the catastrophic past, it seems, realism becomes less an esthetic choice and more an ethical

obligation. Or, in other words, the sheer gravity of World War II as subject matter continues to push questions concerning realism back into view (Rothberg 2000, 8).

Yet as I have already discussed in the introduction, realism presents the creators and audiences of comics with a difficulty: comics are, on the one hand, drawn, and on the other, traditionally associated with the frivolous and fanciful (Witek 1989, 13; Mickwitz 13). As I argue in the subsequent chapter, however, the immense success of *Maus* caused a shift in the perception of comics' ability for historical representation. Because of *Maus*' success, drawn images and dialogue could make claims to realism that rival those made by photographs and historical discourse. *Maus* can thus be seen as having turned the perceived weaknesses of comics in relation to realism into strengths. But even if it ultimately privileges a subjectively based approach to historical representation, *Maus* also incorporates ways of representing the past that seem to contradict its emphasis on experience, such as photographs or historical writing. The copresence in *Maus* of these different ways of establishing a realistic representation of the past suggests a need for an approach that focuses on the often-contradictory directionalities of different forms of realism that coexist in World War II comics.

For me, analyzing realism in comics does not mean comparing them to a specific current in the history of art or literature, or examining how comics recover the experience of the common soldier or civilian. Nor does it mean completely reducing the aims of creators and readers to effects. Instead, I approach comics alongside a conception of realism that allows me to bring into frame the contradictions central to historical representation in comics form. Doing so enables an investigation along the lines suggested by previous studies of realism in the arts without limiting the analysis to one set of formal and/or historical characteristics by which works are judged. In this research, examining realism means analyzing the continual struggle fought over it between different ways of

representing reality. And while the number of ways to represent reality is unlimited, it is possible, within a specific context, to abstract the complete range of representational positions that can be taken into groupings of formal conventions and/or subject matters. I refer to such groupings as modes of realism. The most privileged of these modes within a specific context is the one that is called (most) realistic. What is perceived as realistic, however, as Jakobson already demonstrated, is subject to constant change. In any given context, therefore, there exist alongside one another several prevalent modes that each produce a different kind of realism through different means. These different modes of realism cannot be compared based on some kind of absolute reality. Any conception of an absolute reality that can be used as a rule to measure representation is still subject to postmodern critique. Instead, a mode of realism is authenticated through its positioning in a broader network of modes of realism. In other words, it is not a verisimilitude to an “outside world” that authenticates the representation of the past in a photograph, but its perceived realism in relation to other forms of representation. In this research, I investigate the existing perceptions concerning the realism of historical representation in comics and analyze the different means through which World War II comics attempt to make use of these perceptions and/or modify them.

This approach to realism is based on Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) and Ernst Gombrich’s *The Preference for the Primitive* (2002). Both these works historicize realism and envision it as a development in which one mode of representation follows or overtakes another. The work of these scholars demonstrates that realism thrives on opposition. The realism of one set of conventions, Jameson argues, is always realistic in relation to another set of conventions, and not in relation to a fixed notion of reality. With such a conception of realism, *Don Quixote* is realistic because it renders the realism of medieval romance literature illusory, and *Madame Bovary* is realist because it demystifies the romance novel (Jameson 2013, 4).

In art, a juxtaposition of Pablo Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon* (1907) with William Bouguereau's *The Birth of Venus* (1879) serves as an introductory and thus necessarily simplistic impression of the way in which Gombrich sees the preference for the primitive as a rejection of one form of realism in favor of another (Gombrich 2002, 202-203). In these two images (see figs. 1 and 2), two modes of pictorial representation are at odds with one another. The realism of the first, Bouguereau's, is based on the training of the artist in an institution and his ability to portray the human figure with the correct anatomy and perspective. The second, Picasso's, emerges from the idea that the subject's impressions of the world are much less ordered and studied. In Picasso's case, the artist attempts to portray the body as it is perceived subjectively by emphasizing different points of view and focus. Gombrich traces the movement between these two approaches to artistic expression through the history of art. And while Gombrich ultimately prefers art that moves away from the primitive, even by way of primitivism (297), the historical overview he provides with *The Preference for the Primitive* brings into focus the question of how different currents of art engage with the question of realism. In his history of tastes, Gombrich uncovers, much like Jameson, that realism in visual art does not involve a gradual process towards perfection but a field of struggle between different ways of seeing reality. Like literature, albeit in very different ways, art always implies a specific way of experiencing reality, instead of reality itself. In the work of both of these scholars, analyzing realism is not so much about verisimilitude, but about the ways in which reality is claimed and what is at stake in these claims.

These images are only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 1 & 2: Bouguereau, William. *The Birth of Venus*. 1879, Musée d'Orsay, Paris and Picasso, Pablo. *Demoiselles D'Avignon*. 1907, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

While Jameson and Gombrich's studies of realism occupy a central position in my approach to realism in World War II comics, I also deviate from their approaches. In relation to Gombrich, I resist his reversal at the end of *The Preference for the Primitive*—one already implied by word choice—in which great art is posited to display “wealth and mastery of resources which transcends ordinary human comprehension” in comparison to art that displays the “understandable reaction” of the preference for the primitive (Gombrich 2002, 297). For all the moves and counter-moves that his work exposes in the history of art, Gombrich, in the end, is first and foremost concerned with advancing his own aesthetics, rather than encouraging a study of the movements and shifts of different ways of rendering the world in relation to one another. With respect to Jameson, I separate his conception of realism as oppositional from the subsumption of this notion of realism into what he calls “a historical and even evolutionary process” whereby realism, having just been unbound quite spectacularly, is chained to literary history anew (Jameson 2013, 6).



In this research, I make use of both Jameson and Gombrich's approaches to realism as a site of struggle that tends to function in terms of opposites but let go of their attempts to find a resolution for its large-scale historical development. Instead, I hold that the struggle for realism is fundamentally unresolvable. What I do instead of grasping for yet another resolution, is analyze the ways in which the struggle for realism surfaces in the specific context of World War II comics.

### **Broad and Narrow Comics Realism**

As already mentioned in the introduction, I relate World War II comics to realism in two distinct, yet interconnected, moments, which I identify by the terms broad and narrow. By comics realism in the broad sense, I mean the realism of comics in opposition to other media. Comics realism in the narrow sense indicates comics' ability to incorporate and juxtapose different modes of realism in a single representation of the past. My treatment of comics realism in the broad sense is here limited to my reception study of *Maus*, and thus necessarily builds on already existing research in this field. The most important of which is Thierry Smolderen's analysis of Rodolphe Töpffer's (1799-1846)<sup>22</sup> work and writing in relation to French Academicism (27-28), and his discussion of drawn images versus photography, both of which can be found in *The Origins of Comics* (2014). Smolderen's history of comics is central to my conception of representation in comics in relation to other media. Basing his views on Gombrich's discussions of Töpffer in *Art & Illusion* (1960) and *The Preference for the Primitive*, Smolderen demonstrates that Töpffer's conception of his art of drawing was constituted on a rejection of the rules of perspective and anatomy prescribed by Academicism. Töpffer argued that his art allowed the artist more direct access to "the principle of life" (Töpffer qtd. in Smolderen 28). In order to establish his art against the background of Academicism and its focus on naturalistic depictions of the physical world, Töpffer emphasizes

that comics require little or no training and flow freely from the intuition of its creator (Töpffer 11).<sup>23</sup> Even if it might not be entirely true that no training is needed, it is important to recognize that comics were, from their outset, posited as intuitive and expressive in opposition to the stilted and training-intensive style that dominated the mid-nineteenth century French academy. Töpffer, two decades before the infamous Salon des Refusés of 1863, declares the goal of his art to be the expression of the experience of the artist, rather than the representation or creation of objective reality through studied methods.<sup>24</sup> The earliest positioning of comics thus foreshadows the later positioning of *Maus* as demonstrating comics' suitability to historical representation from the viewpoint of the subject.

In my discussion of "the *Maus* event," I examine how comics came to be seen as capable of historical realism through the success of *Maus* and argue that *Maus*' success was dependent on a postmodern reconfiguration of the initial subjective connotations of the comics medium as described by Smolderen. It is only in the context of a postmodern study of memory culture that the subjective approach to historical representation in *Maus* could be perceived as realistic. Thus, the rise of the study of comics in an academic context became closely connected to a positioning of comics as a medium that foregrounds a subjective, rather than an approach to representing the past that is grounded more in, for example, historiography.

What was obscured by the *Maus* event, however, is that the catastrophic past often forces comics to move beyond a purely subjective approach. For comics creators such as Spiegelman and Mizuki, focusing purely on their own viewpoints might be considered a form of betrayal of the ones who experienced alongside them.<sup>25</sup> Faced with the limits of representation, creators search for other ways of representing the past in comics in both image and text. One such way can be found within the medium's history itself. Besides comics that foreground the subjective through overt use of caricature, there are also comics that seek to approximate a different kind of realism

by employing a more naturalistic graphic style. Here, the historical fictions of Hal Foster, the creator of *Prince Valiant* (1937–present) spring to mind. Foster’s naturalistic style was not influenced by comics artists (Kane), but by illustrators such as Howard Pyle (1853–1911) and E.A. Abbey (1852–1911). The resulting style claims historical realism by rejecting the overt caricature with which comics drawing was primarily associated. One need only look at the work of the countless artists who drew the many installments of the British war comics series *Commando Comics* (1961–present) (see fig. 3), and many similar series in the United Kingdom and the United States,<sup>26</sup> to see that a more photorealistic representation in comics has long been, and continues to be, part of war comics’ graphic repertoire.

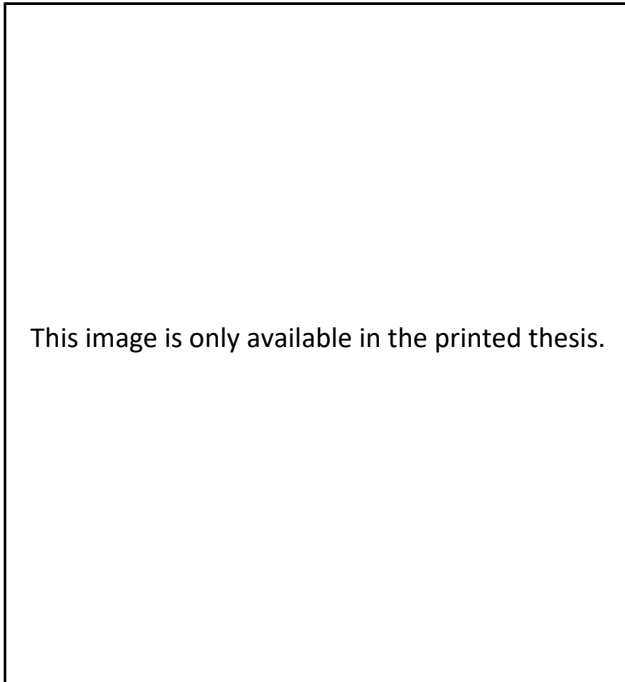


Fig. 3: Parsons and Solbes. *Sudden Death!*. *Commando Comics*, no. 114 (re-issued as no. 631 in 1972 and as no. 4696 in 2014), 1964, 5.

If comics realism in the broad sense designates the perceived realism of comics representation in relation to the expression of the past in other media, comics realism in the narrow sense considers the way in which comics, in combinations of texts and images on composed pages, incorporate and juxtapose different modes of realism. While the success of *Maus* cemented the perceived suitability of comics to a subjectively based representation of the past, comics are, as Hal Foster and his many present-day disciples show, by no means limited to subjective realism.

Instead, comics have the ability to combine different modes of realism in their representations of the past. This, more than anything, is what sparked my interest in World War II representation in comics. On a single spread, comics can combine different positions in the development of realism as portrayed by Jameson, Gombrich, and Auerbach. In World War II comics, historical discourse can be found in close proximity to drawings, handwriting to photographs, and dialogue to maps. Comics do not only authenticate themselves by committing to one mode of realism, they can also do so by combining modes of realism. By doing so, these comics invite contradiction into their depictions of the past. For if one mode of realism authenticates itself mainly in opposition to another, what happens when they are deployed together? How different World War II comics navigate the contradictions that arise from combining modes of realism can only be examined case by case. What can be said on the outset, however, is that the contradictions that comics face because they combine different modes of realism can be read as smaller scale repetitions of the contradictions that drive the dynamics of World War II remembrance. Analyzing realism in World War II comics thus offers insight into how different ways of representing World War II in different media are related to one another, and how a conception of the past can come into being from these juxtapositions.

### **Modes of Realism in World War II Comics**

In the World War II comics that I have studied in this research, three modes of realism are most prevalent: subjective realism, historiographic realism, and mechanical realism. In this section, I distinguish these modes from one another by looking at the different ways in which they approach the gap between representation and reality. Before I do that, however, it is important to note that the three modes of realism that I begin to formalize in this section are nothing more than tools. I use them to dissect and engage with the plurivocal representation of the past in comics. By reading these modes of realism into comics, the different ways in which the past can be represented in one comic and the traditions and practices on which these forms of representations are based become discernible and, to an extent, categorizable. Extending the use of these tools beyond the specific context for which they are created—World War II comics—pushes them past their limits.

#### *The Subjective Mode of Realism*

To understand the subjective mode of realism' approach to the gap between reality and representation, we must start from Kant's famous distinction between the noumenon, the object as it exists independently from human perception, and the phenomenon, the object as it appears to the human senses. From the perspective of the subjective mode of realism, humankind only has access to the world as it appears to us and the primary way in which we have access to this world, is through sensory experience. In this sense, subjective realism is aligned with phenomenology:

All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular points of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. (Merleau-Ponty ix)

It follows that within subjective realism, the imitation of experience is the most realistic form of representation. Subjective realism is thus centered around a phenomenological outlook which prefers perception and description over analytic synthesis (Merleau-Ponty x). In relation to the other modes of realism prevalent in World War II comics, subjective realism stresses that experience comes prior to all representations of the past produced by historians and that the objectivity of mechanical representations is illusory.

But even if subjective realism authenticates itself through recourse with the idea that an embedded subjective position comes prior to all forms of representation, it does not dispel all doubts concerning the universality of subjective experiences, and frequently exposes the limitations of the human perspective. Theoretically, subjective realism need not be self-reflexive or critical about its abilities to represent the reality of the past. It is possible to imagine a World War II comic that is completely convinced that its own subjectively driven account of a historical occurrence is absolutely real and transferrable unproblematically to others. Yet as the question “is this flower red” is in practice quite different to “why did my father join the SS during the war,” and “how should I represent my father’s choices,” comics creators are often unsure about the equivalence of their answers to those of others, especially under the pressures of a catastrophic past.

This emphasis on self-reflexivity in the deployment of subjective realism is specific to the context of post-*Maus* World War II comics. Although self-reflexivity need not necessarily be present in subjectively realist accounts of the past, *Maus*, with its relentless commitment to self-reflexivity, set a peculiar standard for the authentication of subjective realism, which was characterized well by Charles Hatfield with the concept of ironic authentication (2005, 140). The subjective mode of realism in the post-*Maus* context authenticates itself by taking stock of its own limitations and flaunting them, as well as basing its representation of the past in human experience.

The mode of subjective realism, in the context of post-*Maus* World War II comics, is thus based on the notion that embedded subjective perception underlies all other forms of knowledge of the world, and is often combined with the idea that the most realistic way to represent the past within this worldview is by making explicit the limits of any subject's perception and representation of the past. The theoretical basis for my readings of the subjective mode of realism stems mostly from my readings of the many analyses of *Maus* that can be found in the subsequent chapter. In terms of the poetic characteristics, many of the most recognizable aspects of historical comics can be considered as favoring the subjective mode of realism. Think, for example, of the inclusion of a self-reflexive author-character, handwriting, dialogue, point of view shots, schematic drawing, and a focus on remembering, testimony, and eyewitness accounts.

#### *The Historiographic Mode of Realism*

The historiographic mode of realism approaches the gap between reality and representation by deploying historiographic methods in order to produce texts that can be called history. Such methods, contrary to subjective realism, entail a different kind of distrust in the capabilities of the remembering subject.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, as the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur notes in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), “the gift of writing is held [...] to be the antidote to memory, and therefore a kind of challenge opposed by the truth claim of history to memory's vow of trustworthiness” (Ricoeur 2004, 138).<sup>28</sup> Yet historiographic realism is also a thoroughly human practice, rooted in the same limitations that lie at the foundation of subjective realism. In lieu of a resignation to these limitations along the lines of the subjective mode of realism, historical realism attempts to overcome some of them by referring to both the methods and the discipline of history. According to Michel De Certeau and Paul Ricoeur's work in this field, the methods of history roughly consist of three phases: documentation, explanation/understanding, and representation,

which are taught and preserved by an—ideally—collaborative community of historians.

This causes historiographic realism to be at a different distance to the object of reconstruction than its subjective counterpart. While the testimony or eyewitness account of subjective realism often concerns the one who sees and thus builds on a notion of closeness, historiographic realism is first and foremost concerned with the other, or others, instead of with the self (De Certeau 3; Ricoeur 1988, 147). This distance is at times seen as a strength that allows for a more detached and therefore objective approach, and at other times as a weakness that loosens the historian's grasp of the past. In relation to the often-oppositional relation between subjective and historiographic realism, historiographic realism's relation to mechanical realism is less antagonistic. Mechanical documents are often used as source materials for the historian's reconstruction of the past. Still, even mechanical documentation must be subjected to the historiographic method before it can become history. For the historian, the perception of the machine, as is the case for the perception of the subject, is to be treated with distrust.

Historiographic realism can be recognized in World War II comics mainly in techniques of writing:<sup>29</sup> omniscient third-person narration, the use of visual and textual references, and academically structured presentations of different sources in the guise of written arguments, all of which are discussed in greater detail in my case studies. Occasionally, moreover, direct references to collaboration with historians or institutions can also be encountered in World War II comics.

It is not my intention to ignore the radical changes that the discipline of history has undergone in relation to postmodern challenges to the presumed veracity of its writing (White; Ankersmit 1989). I certainly do not want to portray historians as unflinchingly trustful of their methods and the truths that are produced through them. A strong tradition of self-critique is one of the greatest strengths



of both the historiographic method and the texts that it produces. Here, it is important to repeat that these modes are not to be taken as absolute forms that remain unchanged, but as ways of engaging with the demands of realism; the historiographic mode of realism is not the same as the historiographic method.

Take, for example, the self-reflexivity that can seem to be well suited to the subjective mode of realism. Under the pressures exerted by postmodern theorists mainly on historiography's mode of representing the results of its methods, a kind of self-reflexivity has become part of historiographic method as well.<sup>30</sup> The difference is that while the subjective mode of realism often aims to reconstruct the past as it was experienced by a certain subject, historiographic realism is based on the historian's implicit promise to create history, that is, a transparently written representation based on the evaluation or understanding of documentation. Where self-reflexivity in the subjective mode of realism often considers the limitations of the subject's perception of what happened in the past—that it can be incomplete or colored by the subject's emplacement, for example—self-reflexivity in historiographic realism most frequently concerns a critiquing of the self's ability to collect documentation, impartially explain or understand it and transparently write it down. Thus, while self-reflexivity occurs in both modes, it targets the ways in which the modes operate in different ways.

#### *The Mechanical Mode of Realism*

The last mode of realism common to World War II comics is the mechanical mode of realism. Mechanical realism bridges the gap between representation and reality by taking the human out of the equation. In opposition to the embedded realism of the subject or historiographic method, the mechanical mode of realism presents its viewers/readers with the realism of mechanical perception in the shape of photographs, films, or other kinds of records produced by machines. The mechanical is perceived as realistic because it exists

completely outside the human, exceeding, in a certain sense, both the world available to the subject and to historiography. Poetically, the use of mechanical realism in comics often implies a move away from the subjective connotations of the medium in the broad sense by way of incorporating not human, but machine-made images. Human-made machines, being operated by humans, however, are not altogether “nonhuman.” The “nonhuman” is best characterized as forms of agency that lie outside the sphere of the human, such as viruses (Thacker 4; Bonneuil and Fressoz 32). Instead, following McKenzie Wark’s terminology, the notion of the “inhuman” must be understood in order to grasp the role of mechanical realism in comics. The inhuman is an intermediary position, in which the human and the non-human can meet: “The apparatus is the *inhuman* that mediates the *nonhuman* to the *human*, each of which is at least in part coproduced by this very relation” [emphasis in original] (Wark “Slavoj Žižek”). In my analyses, the notion of the inhuman indicates a representation of the world that comes into being through the perception of human-made machines, which are relayed within a context—post-*Maus* World War II comics—that is thoroughly human.

Before I can move on to discussing how the different texts and images that can be found in comics tend to be divided alongside the modes of realism, I want to stress that even though the three modes of realism are often differentiated from one another on the basis of seemingly absolute differences, it must be kept in mind that within the confines of a comic, the differences between the modes can only be relative. By positioning a near-photorealistic drawing alongside a cartoon, even a technique as thoroughly subjective as drawing can be imbued with mechanical realism. The same relativity applies to the different texts that can be found in comics. The mode of realism evoked by a particular kind of text is at least partly determined by the differences between this form of writing and the others with which

it is presented. In Peter Pontiac's *Kraut* (2000), handwriting can be differentiated from typewriting by stressing its uniquely subjective qualities.<sup>31</sup> However, when typewritten court documents are presented alongside handwritten accounts and typeset extracts from published books, the typewritten texts—due to their association with the obsolescent technology of the typewriter and in contrast with the typeset texts from books—also gain subjective, as well as mechanical, characteristics.

The advantage of conceiving the relations of modes of realism as relative instead of absolute is that it allows for an approach to the comics page that can encompass the convergence of the handwritten and the mechanical in the codified world (Flusser 40–41). In the time of *Photoshop*, photographs are hardly less malleable than drawings. What precisely is the absolute difference between different kinds of texts and images when all of them can, and in all probability, have been translated into code and back again; when comics artists draw using digital means and comics are read on websites and screens? The goal of my approach to realism in modes is not to separate different forms of representation based on their ontology, but to show how the comics medium affords the combination of a wide range of different kinds of writing and drawing. And how through these combinations, a conception of the past arises. From this perspective, the fact that one mode authenticates itself by demystifying another can also be read as a reaction to the loss of ontological difference that occurs when different ways of rendering the past are placed alongside one another in comic book form. In place of an absolute difference between the images and texts through which the modes of realism are constructed, a web of oppositional relations has been constructed that invites another kind of difference. If this difference is not continually pronounced, moreover, the different modes risk collapsing into the surface of the comics page.

### **New Wars in Text and Image**

Examining the use of modes of realism in World War II comics means studying the representation of the past in a medium that is located, in both a contextual and formal sense, at the breaking point of the connection between history and the written word. Contextually, because the overwhelming success of *Maus* is part cause and part result of the breaking open of the domain of history in the second half of the twentieth century. This breaking open originated in critiques of the presumed objectivity of history's mode of production (White; Ankersmit 1989; Jenkins; De Certeau) and subsequently found wider expression in the increasing focus on the wide range of practices of bringing the past into the present in the emerging discipline of memory studies (Erl 2). Moreover, these academic shifts developed against the backdrop of widespread reevaluations of the boundaries between high and low culture, which shifted comics, a medium traditionally located in the very heartland of popular culture, into view of academia. Yet despite their inclusivity, a vein of iconophobia has been shown to exist in the foundational texts of the linguistic turn (Jay 1994, 14). Comics' visuality thus rendered them an anomaly in the paradigm that made them appear as an object of study. This problem that the image posed to language-based theories of culture was what led W.J.T. Mitchell to proclaim that a pictorial turn would follow the linguistic one (Mitchell 1994, 13).

The immense success of *Maus* at the end of the 1990s and during the 2000s is thus both an effect of and a generative force in discussions taking place that simultaneously concern the representation of the past in text and image, fact and fiction, high and low culture, and as history and/or memory. Following Mitchell's approach to image-text relations, not as an attempt to settle their relationality in a new, all-embracing semiotic theory, but as a way to read the "struggle" between image and text as laying bare "the fundamental contradictions of our culture" (Mitchell 1986, 44), the aim of my analysis of World War II comics is to study them as

objects which render visible the many difficulties that arise when one attempts to bring the past into the present. As such, this research can be envisioned as an analysis of the different oppositions of modes of realism as expressed through juxtapositions of texts and images.

What is needed, is a way to analyze modes of realism in World War II comics that takes into account but is not completely reduced to the significant role that image-text relations play in the comics medium. In order to do so, two tempting but ultimately reductive ways of considering realism alongside image-text relations need to be resisted. The first is a conflation of image and text through which one becomes the metaphorical proof of the other's realism. In criticism, such a switch from the pictorial to the textual or vice versa is often used in attempts to articulate the realism of a certain mode of representation. Many of those who write about realism aim to prove the realism of, for example, the novel by likening it to painting, and the other way around. One particularly early example of this can be found in Louis Edmond Duranty's introduction to the first issue of *Réalisme* (Duranty 1-2).<sup>32</sup> The ways in which image and text can start to approach one another in comics,<sup>33</sup> however, outdate such metaphorical extensions whereby the realism of one form is proven by likening it to another. In the practice of World War II comics, images can be used to show that which is unutterable, and words are used to speak that which cannot be shown. Instead of using images to confirm the realism of texts, comics are able to put the gaps between the two modes of expression to different uses. As I demonstrate in my case studies, the versatility of image-text relations in comics allows creators to put to use and interrogate the inexpressible through widely varied modes of combining images and texts. Comics thus uncover the inexpressible as a locus, rather than a vanishing point, of representation in post-World War II Europe.

Another approach to the linking of image-text relations and the modes of realism that must be resisted is the equation of a particular mode of realism with comics representation in either text

or image. Subjective realism is not restricted to either the textual or pictorial spaces on the comics page, nor are historiographic or mechanical realism. Instead, I will reserve some space for a productive messiness regarding the ways in which the different modes of realism are considered alongside the image/text divide.

I do so because the pages of comics contain much more manifold combinations than only that of image and text. Rather than thinking of comics as combinations of image with text, I approach them as combinations of images with images, texts with texts, and these texts and images with one another. *Maus*, for example, does not continually juxtapose subjective images in the form of point-of-view shots, to name one example, with omniscient third-person narration. On the contrary, one of the strengths of *Maus* is that it is able to blend different types of images and texts, thus operationalizing the different modes of realism in a much more complicated way than through a one-dimensional opposition along the lines of image and text. One of the central goals of this thesis is to argue against the simplification of comics representation into a univocal image-text relation by demonstrating how historical comics combine a wide range of different kinds of images and texts and by doing so explore and interrogate the possibilities and limits of historical representation in comics form.

In my taxonomy of the different kinds of texts that can be found on the comics page, I remain as practical as possible. In terms of text, I distinguish between dialogue, first-person and third-person narration, onomatopoeia, and titles on both the basis of their visual embedding on the page and the content of the writing (Groensteen 2007, 127). It is best to leave more detailed considerations of the different functions of texts and the importance of their visual characteristics to the analyses of *Kraut* and *Magneto: Testament*, especially considering that the use of text in both of these works invites an in-depth discussion of functions of texts in World War II comics that would occupy too much space here.

In opposition to the discrete differences that can be found between different kinds of texts on the comics page, my approach to the different graphic styles that can be found in comics is necessarily more chromatic. Following Pascal Lefèvre, I consider graphic style as emerging when “replications of patterning in drawings” can be distinguished that are repeated from panel to panel (§4). By focusing on a number of markers of style—detail, deformation, line, distribution, depth, light and color—and the coherence with which they are used from panel to panel, one graphic style can be distinguished from another (§5).

Lefèvre’s approach offers the grounds on which to distinguish different styles from one another; beyond that, a scale is required on which the different graphic styles of World War II comics can be compared. To do so, I position different graphic styles in relation to the two extremes of schematism and photorealism. My use of the term schematism builds on the work of Gombrich. The concept of schematism, Gombrich argues, implies that there exist certain socially constructed visual shorthands that can be used to effectively express events, people, and emotions.<sup>34</sup> Schematism, or the often-used synonym, “the diagrammatic,” is thus used to denote a degree of abstraction away from that which is perceived as an objective representation of the outside world.<sup>35</sup> The more schematic an image, the more abstract, deformed, or open to interpretation it can seem. At the same time, for those who have the cultural background to read them, schematic images can effectively communicate a wealth of information in just a few strokes.<sup>36</sup>

At the other end of the pictorial spectrum that I use to compare different graphic styles in World War II comics stands photorealism. Before anything else, any notion of photorealism as objective in any abstract sense must be eliminated. It has been continually proven that photorealism is itself a convention that is based on mechanical and/or social conditions and used for representation.<sup>37</sup> However, it is also true that the particular set of conventions

headed by photorealism is also often regarded as objective to such a degree that any deviation from this set of conventions is perceived as a deviation from objectivity towards subjectivity and—within the context of the comics image—schematism. The photographic appears as objective through its mechanical realist connotations. That is, the photographic is experienced as a move away from human intervention and convention and towards a mechanical process of registering the outside world. This effect, moreover, is compounded by the use of photographs in historiography as relatively objective documentation. Conversely, venturing away from photorealism implies a higher degree of subjectivity. Because of the perceived absolute faithfulness of its representation, photorealism became a measure for representation in other media as well. This is why novelists, at the time of the Goncourt brothers and Émile Zola, were commended for “photographically” describing the world (Jay 1994, 112). In a similar way, graphic styles in comics that approximate the conventions of photographic representation can be called, to a greater or lesser extent, photorealistic.<sup>38</sup>

By relating the graphic styles of a comic to schematism and/or photorealism, the claims to realism of certain graphic styles can be analyzed. Doing so allows for a reading of the images of a comic that is able to contrast different styles with one another while refraining from making grand statements concerning the different ontologies of the images that can be found in comics. As was the case for the different modes of realism, and as I show in more detail in my analysis of *Onward*, different graphic styles authenticate themselves not by way of a direct connection to the “real” world, but by demystifying another style’s claim to realism.

To reiterate, my analysis of modes of realism focuses on their presence in both the images and the texts of comics. When analyzing texts, I investigate the way in which the different kinds of texts that can be found on the comics page make claims to realism through their form and content. With images, I study both the depictions



themselves and the impact of graphic style on the depictions. That is, I analyze the way in which different ways of seeing the world are implied by drawing styles and how these strengthen or produce tension in the object that is depicted. Finally, I see the forms and contexts of images and texts as taking place within the overarching context of the comics medium, which affords the placement of the different elements out of which it consists in cooperative and/or conflictual juxtaposition with one another through page composition.

My opening up of the analysis of a singular image/text relation in World War II comics to an investigation of how different texts and images are placed alongside one another on the page synchronizes well with recent developments in comics studies. With the translations of Franco-Belgian approaches to the study of comics, emphasis has shifted from seeing the relation between image and text as primal and central to the medium of comics (Eisner 8), to a more integrated view of the comics medium and the place reserved within it for manifold relations not just between text and image but also between images and images, and texts and texts. Such approaches to comics consider the interaction between image and text within a more fundamental structure that might be called the language or system of comics (Sabin 46; Peeters 13-15; Groensteen 2007, 127-128; Saraceni 13-14; Hatfield 36-7; Cohn 2; Horskotte 45; Postema 2013, 81-2). Of these, the most central to my approach is Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (1999). Comics, according to Groensteen, should be understood as a system; a conceptual framework that enables various ways to tell stories. Groensteen's approach to comics requires a perspectival switch: instead of focusing on relatively small units of meaning such as the panel, or on a linear sequence of panels, Groensteen's point of entry for comics analysis is always initially the page, or spread, as a whole. Looking at the comic book page or spread, Groensteen describes the different kinds of places that occupy the space of the page (*spatio-topia*) and the different ways in which these places engage with one another (general and restricted

*arthrology*) (2007, 21-22). Neither the *spatio-topia* nor the *arthrology* takes precedence in the meaning-making process of comics. Rather, their relation is dialogic and recursive, meaning that it is through a specific combination of them that comics signify. Comics thus create meaning not just through what is said in them in separate images and texts, but also through the way in which they combine the different elements out of which they consist on the space available to them. In a slight deviation from Groensteen's terminology, I use the term "page composition" in order to refer to this process of spatial organization.<sup>39</sup>

Groensteen's claim that comics are a predominantly visual medium must also be understood from the perspective of comics as a system (2007, 8). In Groensteen's view, comics cannot be a neutral site of confrontation or collaboration between images and texts because the pages that facilitate this confrontation are anything but neutral. Each image-text relation in comics is already encompassed in a meaningful page composition, which follows a visual and not a textual logic. Groensteen's pronouncement of the primacy of the visual in comics thus follows from his conception of page composition as central to comics signification.

But while I read comics from Groensteen's perspective of comics as a system, I do not completely follow his approach to image-text relations in the medium. Groensteen's analysis of image-text relations closely follows Barthes' early work on the relation between image and text in *The Rhetoric of the Image* (1964). Groensteen adds to Barthes' notion of anchorage and relay five other functions: the effect of the real, dramatization, suture, control, and rhythm (2007, 134). My approach to image-text relations in comics does not seek to semiotically ground the possibilities of engagement. Instead, I intend to read the separations and couplings of images and texts as sites of confrontation that draw into them a history of thinking about the possibilities and limitations of image and text for historical representation. Groensteen's sketch of a semiotic theory of image-text relations within the system of comics has proved to be of little

relevance to the way of reading World War II comics that I develop here. Instead, I remain much closer to Mitchell's approach to image-text relations. From this perspective, the fact that the relation between images and texts is semiotically subordinated under a broader system of articulation does not diminish how comics can relate images and texts to one another in ways that play on preconceptions of the limits and possibilities of these forms for historical representation. Within Groensteen's systemic approach to comics—which can be read as abolishing image-text relations as the starting point of comics analysis—I therefore reclaim some space for the study of the juxtaposition between images and texts from a historicist perspective. That is, an analysis of the way in which image-text relations become significant because of their allusions to a cultural history of opposing images and texts, rather than through an innate or absolute semiotic difference.

Lacking the specificity of a particular analysis, it is difficult to comment on the ways in which the modes of realism interact with the images and texts that are combined in comics. By doing so I run the danger of making too general statements that are easily refuted. Keeping this danger in mind, I will attempt to make initial remarks regarding the paths of least resistance for the different modes of realism in post-*Maus* World War II comics. I choose to run this risk because offering some insight into the conventions for historical representation in comics here will allow me to more clearly state how and why they are followed or challenged in the subsequent analyses.

Subjective realism is well suited to both the images and texts of historical comics. As such, it is by far the most prevalent mode of realism in comics. In case of the images of World War II comics, the fact that most of them are drawn lends a subjective quality to them, even when they are rendered in near-photographic detail. Regarding the texts, it can be argued that dialogue and embedded narration point to a framing of the past from the point of view of a subject. The fact that comics text is often either handwritten or a font which

mimics handwriting also imbues the texts of comics with a certain subjectivity.

In comparison, historiographic realism is somewhat biased towards text as its natural habitus. History, after all, is a practice that is enveloped by writing on all sides. In *History, Memory, Forgetting*, Ricoeur writes that “the professional historian is a reader.” (166); a reader who produces writing, one might add. Writing, then, is both the preferred source and the preferred mode of production for history (Burke 10; Horsley 1317). Moreover, certain types of writing that can be found in a number of post-*Maus* World War II comics, such as footnotes or omniscient third-person narration, refer more or less directly to historiographic discourse. The second half of the twentieth century has seen the hegemony of writing in history challenged in different ways. Images are more frequently included as historical sources, if not as a way of producing history. Furthermore, outside the disciplinary boundaries of history as practiced in academia, other visual modes of representing the past have steadily gained ground: films, photographs, monuments, and a wide variety of other practices can at least be said to have challenged the implicit hegemony of writing for the representation of the past.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding this slow rise of the image, however, text remains central to historiography both as its object and its product. In a medium that combines texts with images, therefore, I expect to find the mode of historical realism first and foremost in text. Alongside this initial expectation, however, it might be hypothesized that images too can be seen, to a certain degree, as realistic in a historical sense, especially when they are rendered in a photorealistic style. Think, for example, of the appearances of soldiers, machines of war, and land/cityscapes, which are often based on a combination of photographic—mechanical—sources and description taken from historical sources. Or think of a footnote that refers directly to an image, instead of a text. The historical mode of realism is thus, in the context of World War II comics, inclined towards texts, yet might be found in images as well.

The opposite is the case for the mechanical mode of realism, which from the outset looks to be more at home in images than in texts. In spite of studies such as Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927), the written world often still appears as decidedly more infected with notions of the subject than its visual counterpart. Language still implies humanity more directly than drawing or seeing, even if our way of seeing the world might be wildly different from that of other animals or machines. Images of the world are not perceived to be as connected to the human as stories of the world. As such, it is much easier to ascribe the inhuman to a depiction of the world than is the case with a description.

Invoking mechanical realism in comics can be somewhat difficult because of the perceived suitability of the medium to subjectively based representation of the past. Comics realism in the broad sense—that is, the perception of the realism of comics in relation to that of other media—has a dampening effect on the possibilities for mechanical realism in comics. At the same time, this also means that comics creators can use mechanical images and texts to thwart these expectations. Besides diminishing the possibilities for mechanical realism in comics, the perceived suitability of the medium to subjective realism can also provide a clear contrast against which mechanical images and texts speak loudly.

Having put forward my approach to World War II representation in comics, I can now turn to an investigation of the ways in which the struggle for realism surfaces in the texts and images of World War II comics. In the remainder of this thesis, I first consider one of the most significant moments in the history of comics realism in the broad sense: the *Maus* event. In the three chapters that follow my discussion of *Maus*, I examine how other World War II comics have furthered or departed from the perception of the affordances of the comics medium for historical representation that came into being with the success of *Maus*.



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## 2.

# The *Maus* Event

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Though Spiegelman's project is as yet unfinished, the unprecedented critical reception for *Maus* has changed, perhaps forever, the cultural perception of what a comic book can be and what can be accomplished by the creators who take seriously the sequential art medium (Witek 1989, 96-97).

If there is such a thing as a World War II comic today, it takes place in a context that is thoroughly post-*Maus*. Not in the sense that it might be aesthetically or thematically past Spiegelman's comic, but in the sense that *Maus* is the defining work for all subsequent World War II comics. Rather than discussing *Maus* directly, this chapter focuses on the causes and effects of what can be called the *Maus* event. I use the term event here somewhat against the spirit in which the famous French historian Ferdinand Braudel uses it. Arguing in favor of history of the *longue durée*, Braudel denounced event-based history as a history consisting of only explosions, which emit "deceptive smoke" that hinder the understanding of processes

of history over longer periods (Braudel 1958, 727-728). To spectators standing further away, *Maus* certainly seems to envelop all World War II comics: covering preceding and subsequent efforts to render World War II in comics in smoke. Moving in closer, however, it quickly becomes clear that Spiegelman was neither the first nor the last to attempt to represent World War II in comics. That being said, the success of *Maus* has also made visible and possible subsequent publications and/or translations of World War II comics. The *Maus* event, then, has not only obscured—as a Braudel centered approach to the concept of the event in history would hold—but has also made visible World War II comics, yet in a particular way. Accordingly, my analysis of the *Maus* event first focuses on how Spiegelman's work became central to historical representation in comics, and second, on how the success of *Maus* created a mold through which other World War II comics had to pass in order to become visible.

Analyzing the *Maus* event means focusing on the reception of *Maus*, instead of the comic itself. In order to limit the scope of this reception history, I have elected to focus on the academic reception of *Maus*. Luckily, academic reception does include—through the work done by Kai-Steffen Schwarz (1993 & 1995), Thomas Lysak (2009), Ian Gordon (2010), Andrew Loman (2010), and Bart Beaty & Benjamin Woo (2016)—a wider reception history of *Maus*, albeit in a distilled and necessarily somewhat partial fashion. My analysis of the academic reception of *Maus* reveals the contours of a process of canonization as well as the formation of a poetics for historical representation in comics out of the perceived strengths of *Maus*.

In the reception study that follows, I will demonstrate how *Maus*' success coincided with both the rise of memory studies and discussions of the strengths and limits of postmodern historical fiction in relation to historiography in literary studies in the late 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. *Maus*' content and form suited the agendas of these disciplines and caused the work to be appraised by leading scholars of the field such as Marianne Hirsch, James E. Young, Andreas



Huysen, and Dominick LaCapra. The discussion of Spiegelman's work by these scholars caused *Maus* to become a canonic object within the fields of memory and literary studies. *Maus* as an object of study allowed scholars to demonstrate the potential of a distinctly postmodern testimony<sup>41</sup> in opposition to more traditional modes of historiography, which, in turn, harmonized with memory and literary studies' centered attempts to strip history of some of its privileges and reposition it as just one of many practices of bringing the past into the present.<sup>42</sup> The next phase of the academic reception of *Maus* revolves around the increasing popularity of comics as a subject of analysis. I argue that in the course of the 2000s, scholars aiming to increase the newly acquired position of the 9<sup>th</sup> art in academia emphasized the medium's suitability to the kind of representation for which *Maus* was being lauded, which resulted in a further cementing of the over-emphasis of comics' capabilities for what I have called, in the previous chapter, the subjective mode of realism. The investigation of the medium specific characteristics of comics thus became biased towards the particular kind of expression in comics that best fit both the particular comic that became so central to the medium's discussion in academia, and the position and direction of the academic disciplines in which it was initially welcomed. If there is such a thing as smoke emitting from the *Maus* event, it is the notion that comics are uniquely, and at times even only, suited to subjective realism. I certainly agree that subjectivity and its problems concerning the representation of the past are central to *Maus* and comics representation of World War II. Still, as I will argue, working from a line of thought present most distinctly in Ole Frahm's analysis of *Maus*, Spiegelman's representation of the past also incorporates other modes of realism. In the face of the overwhelming tragedy of the past, no one mode of representing the past can ever suffice. Seeing *Maus* as continually combining different modes of representing the past—subjective, historiographic, mechanical—reveals that the strength of *Maus* and other post-*Maus* World War II comics is not that

they are uniquely suited to a subjective approach to the representation of the past, but that they combine and put into dialogue different modes of representing the past in word and image. The ways in which World War II comics juxtapose different modes of realism—as I argue in more detail in the following chapters—strengthen and are strengthened by a number of formal and contextual juxtapositions, such as that between high and low culture, father and son, and image and text. Post-*Maus* World War II comics thus show the wide range of historiographic expression that is still possible between knowing that any seemingly transparent representation of the past is illusory and a denial of complete relativity in the face of the tragedy of the past.

Because of the scope of this reception study, it also comes into contact with the roles that Spiegelman's comic has played in other academic fields, such as oral history, memory studies, autobiography studies, and comics studies. In terms of academic reception, *Maus* is certainly the most successful comic book in existence and has profoundly influenced judgments concerning the kinds of comics deemed fit for academic treatment, and, subsequently, for use in various classrooms. Comics studies recent shift away from emancipation and canon creation has sparked a self-examination in the course of which scholars aim to rid it of its biases towards adult, (auto)biographic, self-reflexive, educational, historical, alternative, underground, literary, or artistic comics (La Cour 2016; Beaty and Woo 2016); biases set in place at least partially by the success of *Maus*. This chapter is clearly a part of this shift, but by no means do I aim to provide here a complete narrative of these canonization processes concerning *Maus* within the many fields in which it has played a role. Rather, I focus on the way in which *Maus*, through its success, became a synonym for historical representation in comics, and how this success obscured all but one specific kind of historical representation in comics.

### **A *Maus* Archive**

The archive of publications on which this academic reception history is based was gathered together by searching for the search terms [MAUS]+[SPIEGELMAN] in the Bonner Online-Bibliography für Comicforschung, ProjectMUSE, JSTOR, University of Amsterdam Digital Library, Glasgow University Digital Library, and Picarta. These queries resulted in, after applying my selection criteria,<sup>43</sup> a list of 137 items. This list of items divides into five book publications, 22 book chapters, 42 essays in edited volumes, 67 essays in academic journals and one website.<sup>44</sup>

The archive is limited to English and German. I have chosen to omit Dutch, my native tongue, because I only found one result in it, which, due to it only being available in Dutch, plays no role in the wider reception of the comic. I have also had to cut Francophone scholarship on *Maus*.<sup>45</sup> My limited grasp of the French language combined with the profoundly different discourses on comics, postmodernism and, subsequently, *Maus*, has prompted me to make this choice. Considering these omissions, this is certainly not a complete archive. Furthermore, I have not been able to gain full access to 28 of the 137 items in the list, reducing the number of texts I have been able to read for this chapter to 109.<sup>46</sup> These texts, I hold, nevertheless provide an adequate representation of the academic reception of *Maus* in German and English.

# THE MAUS EVENT

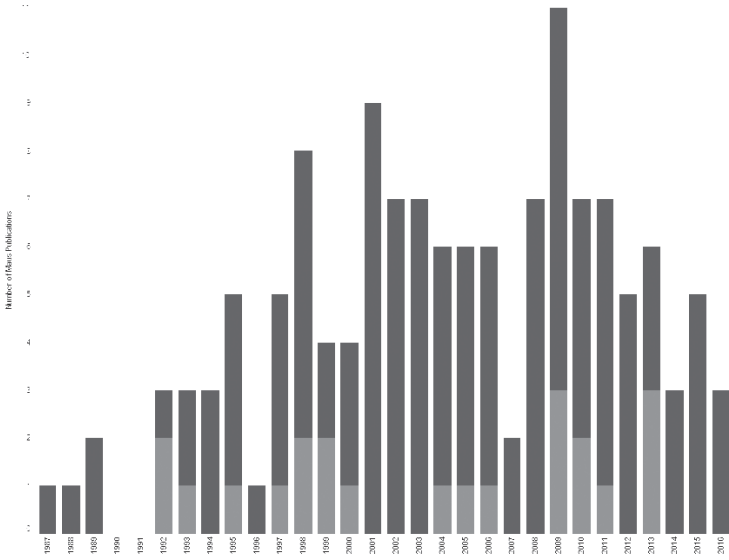


Fig. 4: Maus academic publications in English (light grey) and German (dark grey) between 1987 and 2016.

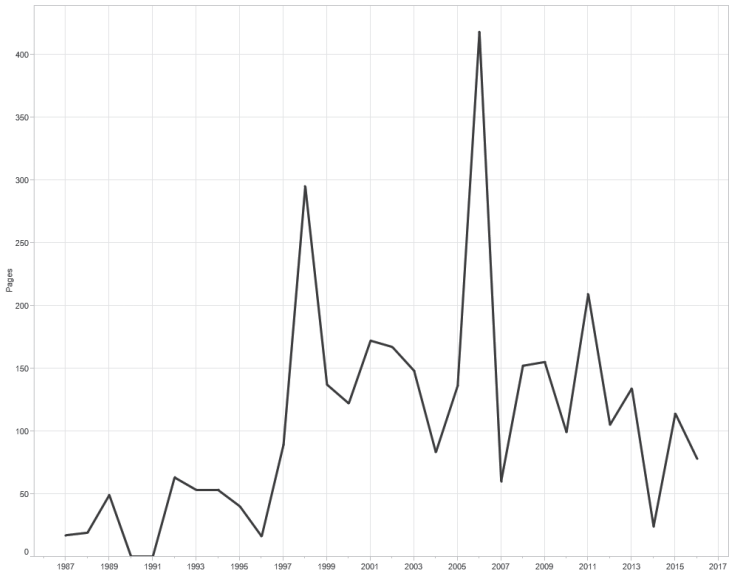


Fig. 5: Number of pages of academic texts on *Maus* per year between 1987 and 2016.

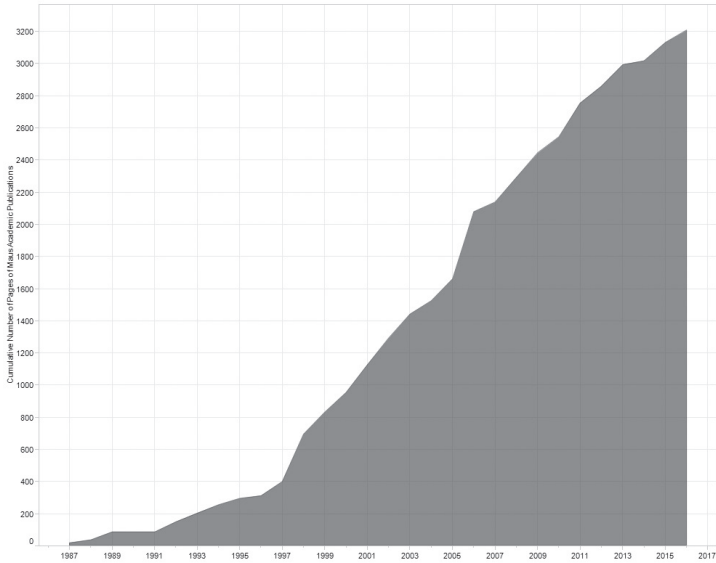


Fig. 6: Cumulative number of pages written on *Maus* in academia between 1987 and 2016.

### Early *Maus* Scholarship

David A. Gerber’s “Of Mice and Jews: Cartoons, Metaphors, and Children of Holocaust Survivors in Recent Jewish Experience: A Review Essay,” published in *American Jewish History* in 1987, is one of the first academic publications on *Maus*.<sup>47</sup> Gerber’s article, which was published while *Maus* was still being created, already touches upon the motifs that return again and again in the reception of *Maus* in academia. First, Gerber notes the novelty of a comic book rendition of the Holocaust. Second, Gerber explores the concept of secondary trauma (Gerber 1987, 163–164), a notion that would later be developed in Marianne Hirsch’s influential reading of *Maus*. Third, through its use and continual self-reflexive questioning of the animal metaphor, Gerber argues, Spiegelman is able to subvert the cliché that the Holocaust had become in representation, through the overt use of a cliché. Fourth and final, Gerber identifies the aesthetic

of *Maus* with that of “post-modern movies and rock videos” (174) and thereby initiates a connection of the aesthetics of *Maus* and the poetics of postmodernism.

Of the other academic treatments of *Maus* that were published when *Maus* was still being serialized,<sup>48</sup> Joseph Witek’s influential “History and Talking Animals: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* is the most significant.”<sup>49</sup> In this chapter from Witek’s *Comic Books as History* (1989), he characterizes *Maus* as an autobiographical project that heavily focuses on the process of its own coming into being (Witek 1989, 98). What Witek adds to the more narratively focused early discussions of Spiegelman’s comic is a sensitivity to the medium’s affordances in relation to the representation of the past. By connecting the animal metaphor in *Maus* to the funny animal tradition in comics (109), Witek is able to demonstrate, in much greater detail because of his knowledge of the comics medium and its history, how Spiegelman deploys a comics cliché as a means to defamiliarize and sidestep clichés of Holocaust representation (103). Besides aiding Spiegelman in escaping sentimentalism and kitsch, Witek argues that Spiegelman’s self-reflexive use of the animal metaphor also serves to authorize the narrative in an indirect fashion. By openly drawing attention to the ways in which the metaphor fails, Spiegelman demonstrates that no representation of the past can be complete, and that the only realistic representation of the past is one which often and openly admits to its shortcomings.

What these early discussions of *Maus* in academia begin to make visible is how the success of *Maus* coincided with an important shift in comics realism in the broad sense, through which comics representation began to be perceived, quite contrary to previous conceptions of the medium, as more realistic in relation to a wider media landscape. Paradoxically, it was the way in which *Maus* seemed to distance itself from historiographic and mechanic conventions—through the depiction of characters as animals and overt metafictional self-reflexivity—that made *Maus* appear as realistic. Where before the

heavily subjective and pop cultural connotations of the medium were considered an obstruction to realistic depiction of the past, hence the surprise expressed by so many to find such a topic discussed in a comic, now the connotations of the comics medium came to be seen as disarming clichéd forms of representing the holocaust. What previously made comics a troublesome medium for the representation of the past now made it especially suitable to it. In a relatively short period of time, the perceived clumsiness of the comics medium—that is, its inability to render the past in historiographic or mechanical realism because it is dependent on drawn images—became its strength.<sup>50</sup>

The attention paid to the animal metaphor as the focal point of *Maus*' novelty and success, furthermore, is indicative of this tectonic shift in comics realism in the broad sense. As Witek also recognizes, Spiegelman's stylistic choices work to visually reduce the individuality of the characters he draws; distinguishing a mouse from the mice in Spiegelman's rendition of Auschwitz is near impossible. However, by continually reflecting on his stylistic choices Spiegelman wards off the dangers of dehumanization. The representation of humans as animals and the continual reflection on this stylistic choice, Gerber and Witek argue in extension of Spiegelman himself (Spiegelman et al.), is an encoding that allows *Maus* to circumvent the heavily standardized representation of the Holocaust that had taken hold of popular imagination. The basic shape of this argument is repeated in much of *Maus* criticism. Some show how Spiegelman's exaggeration of racist imagery actually serves to undermine any easy race-oriented reading of the work (Orvell 120-121; Ma 117). Others emphasize the graphic style in which the animals are rendered and argue, anticipating or extending Scott McCloud's argument concerning comics identification (McCloud 30), that these abstracted figures invite or obscure reader identification precisely because they are devoid of individual characteristics (Wilner 175; Smith 2015, 501). Only in a much wider context of Holocaust representation in comics,

film and literature is such a strange and elliptical argument conceivable; it took a postmodern and decidedly counter-historiographic poetics to make what seemed to be the least transparent medium for historical representation to be suddenly considered as best suited to it.

### ***Maus*, Memory Studies, Postmodernism, and Canonization**

*Maus* was incredibly well attuned, as Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo claim, to, on the one hand, 1980s academia with its focus on representation, memory, and testimony, and on the other, a rising interest in Holocaust narratives (20). But besides as only a proponent of these larger shifts in the landscape of academia, *Maus*, and the kind of poetics it proposed for the treatment of the past, should also be seen as a shaping force in these shifts. *Maus*, by combining a mass cultural form with modernist representational strategies (Huysen 1997, 175-176), offered a way out of the dichotomy between American “Holokitsch,” such as Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and European Holocaust art like Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). Over the course of the 1990s and the 2000s, building on the fame garnered through the initial academic analyses discussed above, *Maus* became one of the central theoretical texts of the exploding field of memory studies. *Maus*’ fame started to soar especially when prominent scholars in the fields of memory and literary studies—Marianne Hirsch, James E. Young, Andreas Huyssen, and Dominick LaCapra—found in *Maus* an approach to the past that suited the direction of their researches, which, *grosso modo*, can be approached as investigating and/or elevating memory practices in relation or opposition to historiography. The work of these scholars set in motion a process of academic canonization that resulted in *Maus* becoming a fixed staple in the postmodern Holocaust fiction canon. The first and one of the most significant of these is Marianne Hirsch’s “Family Pictures, *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory” (1992). Hirsch’s conceptualization of post-memory, especially after the publication of her books *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997)



and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), in both of which *Maus* plays an important part, have been very influential in memory studies at large. Central to Hirsch's conceptualization of how children can inherit, in changed form, the traumas of their parents, is her reading of photographs in *Maus* (Hirsch 1992, 8-9). For Hirsch's argument, *Maus* is a "paradigmatic and a generative text [...], allowing her to carve out the aesthetic and political parameters raised within [her] particular reading of postmodernity" (Hirsch 1992, 13). Hirsch's analyses of *Maus* are attempts to pull memory away from the purely personal into larger, transgenerational structures. But Hirsch's approach, although it attempts to establish a wider, transgenerational impact of memory in society, still considers *Maus* as a work that, through its retelling of both the father and son's past, shows the possibilities of a representation of the past in a doubly-layered eyewitness—and thus subjectively based—account.

Andreas Huyssen also discusses the subjective point of view as a central characteristic of Spiegelman's representation of the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup> For Huyssen:

*Maus* acknowledges the inescapable inauthenticity of Holocaust representation in the "realistic" mode, but it achieves a new and unique form of authentication and effect on the reader precisely by way of its complex layering of historical facts, their oral retelling, and their transformation into image-text.  
(2000, 76-77)

Huyssen recognizes that *Maus*' double fixation on the past—that is, both the father's and the son's—is expressed through a critical incorporation and thus combination different modes of representing the past. However, Huyssen concludes that *Maus*, in the end, privileges oral testimony over the other modes that it incorporates (2000, 77).

Huyssen's emphasis on *Maus*' oral transmission of the memories of his parents (78), harmonizes both with literary studies' emphasis on texts over images and memory studies' privileging of memory over history.

In an article in *Critical Inquiry*: "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Afterimages of History" (1998), James E. Young approaches *Maus* slightly differently than Hirsch and Huyssen. This difference lies not so much in Young's characterization of *Maus* as a model of "received history, a narrative hybrid that interweaves both events of the Holocaust and the way they are passed down to use" (669), which is enabled especially by the comics medium's ability to combine images and texts (676). Rather, what differentiates his discussion of *Maus* from those by Hirsch and Huyssen is that he focuses on the co-presence in *Maus* of an insistence on seeing the work as reality and a realization of the impossibility of any real representation of the past (697-698). In the face of this insolvable contradiction, one possible solution is an integrated history that combines historiography with memory and resists the need for closure (668). *Maus*, for Young, is not directly an example of such an integrated history, but an illustration of the dilemmas that call for such a historiography (669), which, in itself, is already quite valuable. Young, focusing more on *Maus*' visual dimension, locates in comics the ability to combine different moments in time as well as "the artist's own aching inadequacy in the face of [...] reality," (675). This, in turn, enables a showing and telling of both the act of testimony and what is testified, which, for Young, can be considered a combination of memory and history (677)—a combination, moreover, that allows for these different modes of representing the past to critique one another.

In a book published in the same year as Young's article, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998), Dominick LaCapra locates in *Maus* a similar dual devotion to accuracy and irony in the face of the traumatic past (146). Michael Rothberg published

*Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000) two years after Young and LaCapra's texts. Even if Spiegelman's work, which is featured on the cover, is only briefly discussed in the introduction, Rothberg's conception of traumatic realism as consisting out of two elements—documentation and narration (100)—that seem to run contrary to one another, but that are brought together in face of the demands of the traumatic event (100), is indebted to Young and LaCapra's readings of *Maus*.

Hirsch, Huyssen, Young, and LaCapra's discussions of *Maus* from a memory studies perspective should be considered, alongside a number of other memory studies focused texts,<sup>52</sup> as converging with, or at the very least very close to literary studies focused approaches to *Maus* that were published over the course of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Some of these studies approach Spiegelman's comic from the sub-field of autobiography studies, a framing that, as evidenced by Rick Iadonasi's 1994 article "Bleeding History and Owning his [Father's] Story. *Maus* and Collaborative Autobiography," cannot but approach first and foremost the subjective realist side of *Maus*. Other analyses of *Maus* from a literary studies perspective from this time also tend foreground the subjective in *Maus*. Thomas Doherty, in "Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: Graphic Art and the Holocaust" (1996), even goes as far as to conclude that Spiegelman's hand-drawn cartoons render photographs "pallid and duplicitous" (82), thus positioning comics' graphic style as a victory over photorealism, rather than in continual dialogue with it.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), and its characterization of historiographic metafiction, serves as the conceptual foundation on which many of the literary studies-based analyses of *Maus* in the late 1990s and 2000s were built (Orvell; Martin; Berlatsky 2003). Hutcheon herself saw *Maus* as a good example of what she christened historiographic metafiction (2009, 4). By being at once realistic and profoundly distrustful of the "transparency of both its visual and verbal media" and the genres of historiography

it deploys, Hutcheon argues, *Maus* is said to practice in art what has “obsessed theorists of historiography for several decades now” (2009, 11). Hutcheon positions *Maus*’ brand of historical representation against the more traditional conceptions of historiography that were being challenged by postmodern theorists. In unison with Hutcheon’s positioning of *Maus* in the corner of postmodernism and therefore in opposition to traditional historiography, the wider positioning of *Maus* alongside memory and literary studies and against history caused scholars to emphasize how the comics medium allowed for a representation of the past focused on the subject, and, subsequently, muted the medium’s other capabilities. This is not very surprising in light of Spiegelman’s at times almost obsessively self-reflexive portrayal of the Holocaust and its afterlives, which suits postmodern attacks on traditional historiography well. A wide majority of subsequently written discussions of *Maus* roughly follow the outlines set in the studies that I have just discussed. Using the frameworks offered by concepts such as (auto)biography, testimony, identity, and trauma,<sup>53</sup> these researches deepened the existing understanding of the comic as well as further cemented *Maus* as a canonical text for both the study of the memory of the Holocaust (Geis 6) and that of postmodern historical representation. And while I would not go as far as to argue that discussions of *Maus* after the 1980s only expand on the ideas put forward by the likes of Brown, Hirsch, Witek, Huyssen, and Young, it is difficult to find entirely new discoveries in this once fertile yet now somewhat tired field of study. One road towards innovation that scholars took is through the application of new theoretical frameworks to *Maus*.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, it is fair to note that, notwithstanding their individual qualities, these studies did not dramatically alter the ways in which *Maus* was read in memory and literary studies. Secondary to this main body of *Maus* publication, and often very close to it in terms of approach, are the articles published in the context of education<sup>55</sup> and translation studies.<sup>56</sup> The attention paid to Spiegelman’s comic in these fields—which mostly investigates the

use of *Maus* in classrooms around the globe and the challenges raised by it in terms of translation—demonstrates the extent to which *Maus* has become a household name in academia. A reading of the many academic discussions of *Maus* in the 2000s and 2010s, reveals that the already described positioning of *Maus* in academia alongside memory and literary studies and against history remain virtually unchanged.

### ***Maus*, Comics Studies, and the Struggle to be Taken Seriously**

The widespread academic discussion of Spiegelman's work propelled *Maus* into canonicity and comics into academia. Through its success as one of the examples of postmodern Holocaust fiction, *Maus* became the best-known comic in academia and came to stand for the medium as a whole—often in its more *salonfähig* rebranding as the graphic novel. One peculiar result of this shift is that the specific characteristics attributed to *Maus* were also more and more associated with the medium of comics as a whole. The overwhelming preference for historical and (auto)biographical comics in the academic study of comics can at least partly be explained through the impact of the success of *Maus* as the first substantial gesture of comics studies.<sup>57</sup>

*Maus* made comics visible to academia, but only in a particular way. And, subsequently, this particular way of making visible has instilled in the study of comics in academia a number of biases. Initially, however, these biases were not perceived as a pressing issue. More pressing, for scholars more familiar with the comics medium, was the need to counteract the overwhelmingly language or narrative focused approaches of much *Maus* scholarship,<sup>58</sup> as well as researches that authenticated *Maus* as a unique achievement in the field of comics, thus singling *Maus* out at the cost of the medium as a whole (Wilner 1997, 171). In opposition, investigations of *Maus* more aware of the comics medium and its history discussed the work not as an exception but as a rule for the medium. Comic scholars did so while being attentive enough to note—alongside their oppositions to studies that signaled *Maus* out at the cost of the medium as a whole—that

while *Maus*' treatment of the past was certainly discernable in other historical comic, Spiegelman's approach was neither the only possible nor the only good way to represent the past in comics. Still, any attempt to foster academic attention for comics by showing that *Maus* was a rule more than an exception also inadvertently strengthened the biases already set in place by earlier studies; reducing the broader potential for historical representation in comics to expressions in comics that are, in some way, shape, or form, *Maus*-like.

Gene Kannenberg Jr.'s contribution to the early Anglophone comics studies volume *The Graphic Novel* (2001) is a good example of how comics scholars argued against *Maus* as the exception within the field of comics:<sup>59</sup>

I'm perhaps preaching to the converted here, but my appeal comes from reading a large amount of *Maus* criticism which makes this fundamental error. Those critics who speak of *Maus*' "mice" usually do not have a background in comics criticism, and thus they miss such nods to *Maus*' "comics-ness," its indebtedness to comics conventions. (Kannenberg Jr. 2001, 82)

Without claiming that all historical representation in comics is alike to that of *Maus*, Kannenberg Jr. notes the importance of the cultural context of Spiegelman's work for an academic understanding of it. Implicit to this argument is the idea that *Maus* does not exist in a vacuum but is the product of comics history. This is certainly true. Moreover, it is a point that—after the incorporation of *Maus* in the disciplines of memory and literary studies—needed to be restated. In his subsequent analysis of *Maus*, Kannenberg Jr. investigates the impact of drawing of self-identification in Spiegelman's comic (81). Without making any excessive claims concerning comics proclivity for subjective realism, Kannenberg Jr.'s focus on the subjective

effects of drawing also unintentionally furthers the association of *Maus* with a subjective approach to historical representation. Furthermore, because Kannenberg Jr. stresses the importance of seeing *Maus* within a wider comics tradition, the association of *Maus* with subjectively-based representation bleeds over onto the medium as a whole.

In comparison to Kannenberg Jr., the way in which *Maus*' perceived subjective realism is transported to the medium as a whole becomes more obvious when more overt claims to the importance of *Maus*' comicsness are made. Rocco Versaci, for example, in *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* (2007), argues that by combining word and image, comics draw on both documentary photography and written memoir, the two main forms of Holocaust testimony (83). Furthermore, because the medium inherently highlights artificiality (92, 94), the effect of this combination is not only a higher degree of mimesis, but also a continual questioning of the nature of representation (91). There is some truth to all of these statements. The danger in such a conflation of the medium as a whole with *Maus*' particular brand of representation, however, is that while it highlights the capabilities of the medium, it can also obscure the other ways in which comics use the medium's affordances to represent the past.

As the object of study that opened up comics studies to wider readership and funding from other disciplines, *Maus* and academic discussions thereof came to dominate the perception of historical representation in comics. While Versaci might be among the more polemically written examples, even the more nuanced accounts such as Kannenberg Jr., caused a number of the characteristics associated with *Maus* to transfer to the medium of comics as a whole. Much more than the actual arguments of these essays, the combined effect of their dominance in the discourse of comics studies crowded out discussions of comics that might have highlighted different approaches to representing the past.

In the time of its inception with Rodolphe Töpffer, the argument for comics over literature or art was that it provided more direct or intuitive access to experience. The *Maus* event bolstered this perceived strength by highlighting the subjectively focused representation of the past in Spiegelman's comic, and added to it that comics' strength also resided in the way in which the medium, because it was deemed less capable of transparent representation than photography, film, and literature, automatically highlighted the constructedness of all representation. Within the shift caused in comics realism in the broad sense by postmodernity, comics' continual focus on the artificiality of all representation of the past almost became a realistic mode of representation in its own right. The increasingly close connection between the comics medium's affordances and *Maus*' poetics exacerbated the effect of the *Maus* event. To be clear, I do not think that it is in any way a mistake to argue that *Maus* heavily makes use of a kind of subjective realism, certainly its representation of the past is heavily colored by its focus on the subject's point of view. However, as I show below in my discussion of Ole Frahm analysis of *Maus*, focusing only on the subjective realism in *Maus* does obscure the other modes of realism that the comic deploys in its representation of the past.

Extrapolating the perceived poetic characteristics of one comic to the medium as a whole is a recipe for misrepresentation. The extrapolation of *Maus*' poetics to a certain kind of comic, as can be seen in Charles Hatfield's *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, is subtler. In his study, Hatfield places *Maus* within a wider context of direct market comics shops (25), the opportunities offered by industry decline (30), and the creative developments of the American underground comix movement that originated in the counterculture 60s (19). But what Hatfield's analysis also does is further cement the association of the "good," "literary," or "alternative" comic with a postmodern poetics centered around ironic and self-reflexive approaches to autobiography, reportage, and historical fiction (x).



What makes comics alternative comics, besides their specific context of their production and distribution, is a commitment to an ironic, self-reflexive approach to a number of genres. Such distinctions partly on the basis of types of comics result in reproductions of the high/low culture divide within the field of comics, even when the works discussed under the flag of alternative comics often seek to undermine such divisions. These classificatory difficulties generated by the concept of alternative comics, however, do little to disqualify Hatfield's insightful analysis of Spiegelman's comic, of which the main take-away is the term ironic authentication, which is used to characterize *Maus*' blend of irony, self-reflexivity, and its insistence on historical accuracy against better judgement (140).

Hillary Chute's "The Shadow of a Past Time: History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*" (2006) is an example of how it is still possible to make claims concerning medium specificity while, at the same time, refraining from making too sweeping statements that bend the conception of the medium out of shape. The article begins with a claim reminiscent of Kannenberg Jr.'s:

Most readings of how *Maus* represents history approach this issue in terms of ongoing debates about Holocaust representation, in the context of postmodernism, or in relation to theories to traumatic memory. But such readings do not pay much attention to *Maus*'s narrative form: the specificities of reading graphically, of taking individual pages as crucial units of comics grammar. The form of *Maus*, however, is essential to how it represents history. Indeed, *Maus*'s contribution to thinking about the crisis in representation, I will argue, is precisely in how it proposes that the medium of comics can approach and express serious, even devastating, histories (2005, 200).

Chute's focus is on how the form of comics enables a persistence of the past in *Maus* (2005, 200). While Chute does not eschew formal claims concerning comics' capabilities, she never universalizes such claims to the medium as a whole, nor does she place them in relation to perceived strengths and weaknesses of other media. Instead, Chute's more modest claims allow her to refrain from adding to the deformation of the medium caused by the *Maus* event. *Maus*, to Chute, stands at a significant juncture in the history of the medium and shows the possibilities that the medium affords, and that are now furthered in Marjane Satrapi and Joe Sacco's work (2005, 220). For all its innovation in terms of looking at the comics form in relation to the representation of the past, however, Chute's approach keeps close to Young's. Chute, like Young, sees in *Maus* a possibility for historical representation that evades, or at least indicates the problematics of, closure (2005, 214). As such, Chute's text demonstrates how to argue for a greater sensitivity to the medium of comics without externalizing the specifics of *Maus*' representation of the past to the medium as a whole.

In their struggle for the medium of *Maus* to be taken seriously, comics scholars made use of *Maus*' position as a canonical text in memory studies. Acting on an opening caused by the increased attention for the interactions between media and memory within memory studies, these scholars aimed to make the medium visible to Anglophone academia, in which it had, notwithstanding a few exceptions, remained relatively obscure. Arguing against the singularity of *Maus*, scholars inadvertently added to the obscuring effect of the *Maus* event by centering academic discourse on comics around *Maus*. And while this is a danger that is difficultly averted—with this discussion I am bound to do the same—awareness and a better understanding of the effects of the *Maus* event are the only things that will ultimately allow us to see past it.

### **Moving Past the *Maus* Event**

Through my review of the Anglophone discussions of *Maus* in academia, I have attempted to shed some light on the impact of the success of *Maus*. The wider effect of the *Maus* event for comics, I argue, is that it made the medium visible to academia as a subject for memory and literary studies. At the same time, the canonization of *Maus* within these specific fields of study, and the type of attention this caused to be paid to it, limited the attention to comics of a particular kind: that is, comics that are, in one way or another, *Maus*-like. The narrower implication of the *Maus* event for post-*Maus* World War II comics is that the subjective mode of realism came to be seen as the best or even only suitable mode of representing the past in comics. While the subjective mode of realism is incredibly important for the representation of the past in comics, I will not concede that it constitutes the only possible way of representing the past in comics. The privileging of the subjective mode of realism in readings of *Maus* is related to a shift in the perception of realism, where the subjective mode of realism, through the advent of postmodernism and memory studies, started to pose a serious challenge to historiographic and mechanical realism. In this wider struggle, *Maus*, and subsequently comics, were positioned with subjective realism in opposition to historiographic and mechanical realism. This positioning caused the mode of subjective realism to be emphasized in researches of the representation of the past in *Maus* and comics.

Contrary to this singling out of subjective realism, I will argue that the strength of the subjective mode of realism in comics arises precisely from the ways in which it is combined with other modes of realism. And while such a conception of *Maus* can already be found in the analyses of Young, LaCapra, and Rothberg, it shines through most clearly in the work of the German scholar Ole Frahm. His *Genealogie des Holocausts* (2006) differs from most works discussed here because it is a dissertation spanning 244 pages. Unsurprisingly, Frahm can go into much more detail than most articles and is able

to approach Spiegelman's comic from a much wider framework, which encompasses both memory studies and a more comics-minded literary studies analysis.

Central to Frahm's approach is that *Maus* is a comic book example of the genealogical analysis developed initially by Nietzsche and expanded upon by Foucault. The genealogy that Frahm likens *Maus* to is one that is based on meticulous documentation, that is parodic in relation to the realism of traditional history, contests the identity of both the narrative and its narrators, and interrogates the possibility of historical truth (Foucault 1998, 369, 385). Through these contestations, *Maus* lays bare the power relations that shape Holocaust representation (Frahm 2001, 73). For Frahm—and this is where it is most clear that his approach can be read as an extension or deepening of Young and LaCapra's readings of Spiegelman's comic—*Maus* is able to address Holocaust discourse in such a fashion because it creates, page after page, different tensions between the most prominent forms that Holocaust discourse takes in both text and image. To Frahm, *Maus* is (auto)biography, testimony, documentary, history, and comic, and at the same time it is none of these things exclusively (2006, 96). The different juxtapositions between these different identities of *Maus*, instead of one of them, is what makes up any sort of final identity of the work as a genealogy. By applying the *mise en abîme* logic that can be found in *Maus*' use of masks to the comic as a whole, Frahm is able to get past Huyssen's characterization of Spiegelman's comic as deconstructing historical documentation through oral testimony, or LaCapra's identification of *Maus* as an ethnographic depiction of survivor culture (170-173). Instead, Frahm argues, Spiegelman's comic resists being pinned down to such a singular identity. *Maus*' resistance to identification should be read as a reaction to the reduction of a plural structure of identity to that of Jewish, and concomitantly, less-than-human, that was forced upon many during the reign of the Nazi Party (86). By stressing the fluidity of identity, *Maus*' genealogical comics

practice resists the Nazi conception of identity as tied to a singular descent and place.

The truths that can be told about the Holocaust are dependent upon the practices that surround the representational forms in which they are told (97). By showing these different truths and the practices that lead to them in juxtaposition on the comics page, *Maus* does not only destroy the possibility of historical reference in a relativistic sense. It also shows that there are different kinds of truths resulting from different kinds of representing the past. And while that does not suture the rupture that the catastrophic past leaves us with, it offers insight in the different ways of living with it.

If there is any place where the perceived or maybe even self-willed weakness of the comics medium needs to be injected into the discussion of its capability for the representation of the past, it is here. The insecurities caused by the perceived lack of the comics medium add to a more general inadequacy of representation in the face of the catastrophic past. World War II representation in comics is still frequently considered an uphill battle; how does one render such a past in a medium that seems so unsuited to it in terms of the medium's long association with fictional, comical, and/or children's narratives and the perceived inability of the medium to transparently represent the outside world? In reaction to such perceived lacks—which are more a cause of the medium's by now somewhat outdated cultural and historical contexts than of its medium specificity—comics artists, following Spiegelman, often incorporate many different forms of realism in order to authenticate their representation of the past. Furthermore, and this is where comics cultural positioning meets medium affordance, because comics are combinations of images and texts in a deliberate sequence, they are able to juxtapose different modes of realistic representation alongside one another. Through these juxtapositions of different modes of realism in word and image World War II comics express both an obsession with realism and a moral and philosophical denial of the possibility of any kind of absolute realism

in historical representation. In the following chapters, I will analyze post-*Maus* World War II comics in order to demonstrate that what makes them valuable is not that they exemplify one mode of realism, but that they can be read as expressions and interrogations of the war of positions that is realism.

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# 3.

## Interrogating the Past: Collaboration, Handwriting, and Composed Text in Peter Pontiac's *Kraut*

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Having discussed the *Maus* event, I now pivot to an analysis of comics that challenge the characterization of historical comics set into place by the success of *Maus*. In the three case studies that follow, I explore World War II comics' ability to combine modes of realism. Of the comics that I study in the subsequent chapters, closest by far to *Maus* is Peter Pontiac's<sup>60</sup> *Kraut*. Completed in 2000, Pontiac's work can be considered a direct reply to *Maus*, as the parallelism of their titles suggests. Before working on *Kraut*, Pontiac worked as a letterer for Jessica Durlacher's Dutch translation of *Maus*, which was published serially by *Het Parool*, a Dutch newspaper, in 1995. Writing the translations of Spiegelman's texts into the emptied text balloons and boxes of the original kindled Pontiac's desire to address his own family's wartime history in comic form (Pontiac Personal Interview).

*Kraut*, the comic Pontiac made at least partly as a reply to *Maus*, is a 167-page illustrated letter that seeks to answer two questions: why Joop Pollmann, Pontiac's father, collaborated with the German occupiers during World War II as an SS (*Schutzstaffel*) war reporter, and why he disappeared in February 1978 while on holiday in Curaçao. To avoid confusion, I refer to the son/implicit author by his pen name, Peter Pontiac, which is a pseudonym for Peter Pollmann and thus helps remind us of the fact that we are dealing here with an author character, and to the father/object of biography as Joop Pollmann.<sup>61</sup>

*Kraut* is Peter Pontiac's coming to terms with, and investigation into, his father's past. Yet rather than having as its object the heroic father figure that is also a concentration camp survivor, *Kraut* revolves around one of Dutch memory culture's greatest villains: The World War II collaborator. This dramatic shift in context, which I discuss in more depth below, underlines the importance of approaching *Kraut* not just in relation to the *Maus* event, but also in the other contexts with which it engages. Here, the most pressing of these contexts concerns the position of the collaborator in Dutch World War II memory culture. Dutch remembrance of World War II has been characterized as extremely black and white in terms of ethics. Much of it rigidly divides the Dutch population in a good and a bad group. In the collective memory landscape of the postwar Netherlands, resistance against the German occupation was seen as a norm (Blom 151). For a long time, conversely, the variety of different kinds of collaboration or accommodation was lost in the rigidity of post-war outrage and judgement. Accordingly, even the families of perpetrators of collaboration were stamped as bad and were socially spurned. In recent years, this black and white conception of World War II history has made way for a more nuanced approach that takes into account the variety of circumstances and motivations that led to collaboration (Heijden 15).



Joop Pollmann's collaboration as a SS war reporter is in most ways more clear-cut than that of most Dutch collaborators. His writing for a number of National Socialist publications alone is more than enough to prove his support of Nazi philosophy. In these writings, Pollmann shows himself to be a staunch follower and perpetrator of Nazi ideology, which places him squarely as bad against his so-called good fellow countrymen who actively resisted the Nazi occupation. However, to be perceived as good during and after the occupation, one needed not to have actively taken part in the resistance. Rather, being considered good required that one was not perceived as actively having taken part in collaboration with the occupier, a litmus test which Pollmann by no means passed. Pollmann's role as a war reporter meant that he, in all probability, did not take part directly in acts of war either during his time in Russia or on the western front. And while it is fair to note this, it does very little, at the same time, in the way of mitigating the wrongdoings he did commit.

Pontiac's reconstruction of his father's life is an attempt to understand how Joop Pollmann came to support the Nazi cause, to what extent he was aware of and supported the existence of the extermination camps, and why he disappeared in January 1978. In order to do so, *Kraut* takes from *Maus* the structure of the double testimony. But because his father is not around to answer his questions, Pontiac reconstructs a voice from his father's writings, drawings, and historical documentation. Pontiac thus moves from a juxtaposition of two testimonies to combining a whole range of voices speaking in different genres. The epistolary novel, biography, testimony, the essay, and historiography each have their place in *Kraut*. All these forms, moreover, imply their own brands of realism through combinations of elements of the subjective, historiographic, and, to a lesser degree in *Kraut*, mechanical modes of realism. What is most remarkable about *Kraut* is how it combines different forms of writing on deliberately designed pages, and how these combinations of texts bring out the tensions of Dutch World War II memory culture and

image-text relations. Pontiac shows himself a comics artist in his distinctly visually oriented use of the letters that he writes and the ways in which he makes the location and adjacency of different kinds of texts on the page matter.

*Kraut* uses the visual aspects of texts in order to afford a representation of the father's collaboration that combines and interrogates the different modes of realism implied by different kinds of texts. As such, Pontiac uses a semiotic conflict, the blending of image and text, to portray a conflict between father and son that is ongoing. Through its juxtaposition of different modes of representing the past in text, *Kraut* is able to evade closure and present itself as both a collection of documents open to interpretation by the reader, and as a more traditional epistolary narration with a beginning, middle, and end. By repeatedly juxtaposing different ways of writing the past on the page, furthermore, *Kraut* can also be read as an investigation of the strengths and limits of the kinds of writing that Pontiac employs in his attempt to reconstruct his father's life.

In the analysis that follows, I will first further introduce *Kraut* by contextualizing Pontiac's work in relation to *Maus*, underground comix and the Franco-Belgian comics tradition. Second, I demonstrate how handwriting in *Kraut* brings to the fore questions concerning the differences between the realism implied by the subject and the machine. Third, I argue that because of the way in which Pontiac places texts in visual relation to each other, *Kraut* becomes a site of conflict between different modes of representing the past in text. Through its page composition, *Kraut* allows different modes of representation in text to coexist on the page, thereby showing the conflict between different ways of rendering the past in text, instead of resolving it. Finally, I consider the co-presentation of different forms of text in *Kraut* as an interrogation of the potential and limits of both archive and narrative.

### A Comic among Comics

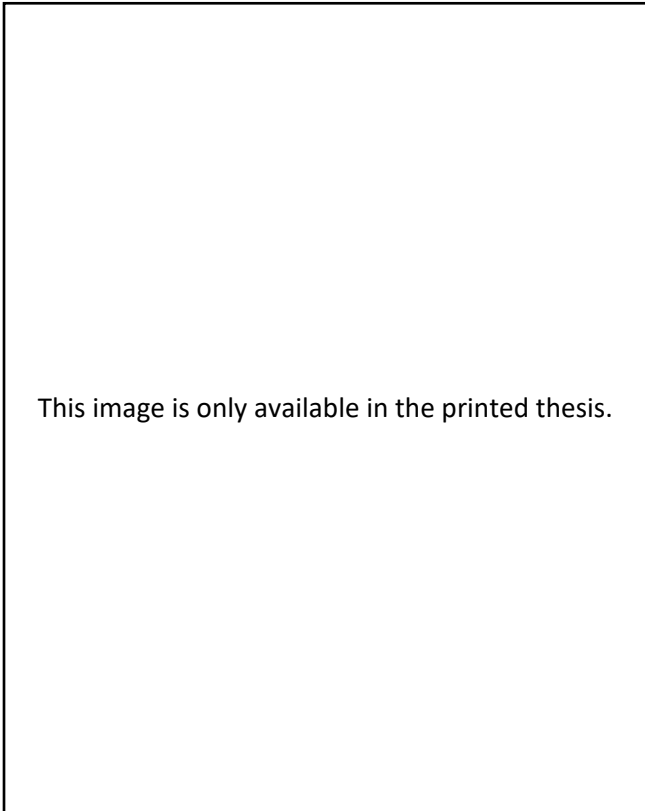
Page 115 of *Kraut* shows Joop Pollmann together with his comrades enjoying some time off from their training as war reporters for the SS (see fig. 7). While the trainees find amusement in a certain passage of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, two familiar figures take up the space to the far right of the page. As Pollmann enjoys himself with friends, a mouse-figure in striped clothing sweeps the hallway guarded by a cat donned in a SS uniform.



Fig. 7: Detail from *Kraut* 115.

The ghostly presence of Spiegelman's figures in *Kraut*, besides being a homage, establishes a relation between *Maus* and *Kraut*: while *Maus* revolves around a victim of National Socialist ideology, *Kraut* deals with a staunch follower of that ideology. Regardless of this essential difference, however, Spiegelman and Pontiac's comics have quite a lot in common. First, both works deal with a tension between the presence and the absence of the father.<sup>62</sup> *Maus* starts from the overbearing presence of Vladek Spiegelman in the day to day life of the young Art Spiegelman. Vladek's erratic behavior indicates both

the persistence of the catastrophic past in the present and a wish to exorcise this past through continual activity. Ultimately, however, Vladek's behavior is precisely what motivates Art Spiegelman to ask his father to recount the past, and in this way bring it into the present. Conversely, *Kraut* starts from the absence of the father in the life of Peter Pontiac. This absence, however, causes the memory of the father to continually haunt Peter Pontiac's present, which is reflected by the incorporations of the father's images and texts in *Kraut* (see fig. 8). These images and texts aim to make Joop Pollmann's voice present, yet they stem from an attempt to reach someone who is unreachable.



This image is only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 8: Kraut 36.

Second, both comics continually renegotiate the boundaries between biography and autobiography and are self-reflexive through and through. As in *Maus*, Peter Pontiac at times point to his own mistakes—on page 42, for example, he admits to a historical mistake made in the drawing on page 23. Rather than smooth over inconsistencies, *Kraut* continually focuses on its difficult process of creation in order to show the impossibility of its representational project:

I HAD LONG PLANNED TO END THIS LETTER WITH THE IMAGE OF MÜHSAM STUMBLING ONTO THE BEACH OF THE DAAIBOOIBAAI, STRETCHING OUT HIS CRUSHED HANDS IN ORDER TO SUBSEQUENTLY STRANGLE YOU.. A GOOD FRIEND WITH A BIG HEART WHO HEARD THIS BEGGED ME NOT TO DO IT, TO FORGIVE YOU... MAYBE HE IS RIGHT. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A BIT “GRAND GUINOL” [SIC]... BUT I WILL ALWAYS DOUBT WHETHER THE CONCEPTS OF “TASTEFUL” AND “SHOAH” CAN GO TOGETHER NICELY. (Pontiac 2011, 111)<sup>63</sup>

Because of this focus on its own creation, *Kraut*, like *Maus*, is a narrative about its author as much as it is about its object, and about the past that is recounted as well as about the relation of this past to the present. *Kraut* meticulously details the emotions of Peter Pontiac in the process of creating his work, blurring the traditional boundaries between biography and autobiography. Take for example the following passage, where Peter Pontiac presents the readers with his trepidations concerning the humanizing effect that all biographies have on their objects as well as showing how his experiences as a cartoonist in the underground counterculture scene in the 60s and 70s influence his framing of his father:

MUST I JUST SEE YOU AS ANY ANGRY YOUNG MAN OF 19? JUST ANOTHER TEENAGE REACTION AGAINST THE UNACCEPTABLE SITUATION FOUND ON EARTH? A PROVOKING NAZI GREASER? AN INCITING PUNK BOY SCOUT? [...] I WOULD HAPPILY MARK THESE KINDS OF “INNOCENT” MOTIVES AS THE CAUSE OF YOUR BEHAVIOR, BUT IT IS NOT THAT SIMPLE: GREASERS ARE NOT AIMING TO COMMIT GENOCIDE...<sup>64</sup> (Pontiac 2011, 109)<sup>65</sup>

By incorporating his own perspective in his biography of his father, Pontiac makes clear that his representation of the past must be read as arising from his situated subjectivity. *Kraut*, a post-*Maus* World War II autobiographical comic, combines the perceived proclivity of both autobiography<sup>66</sup> and comics to a realism that is centered around the subject’s experiences. As in *Maus*, however, the subjective mode by itself is not presented as an adequate solution to the problem that the past poses. In order to escape the dictatorship of his own writing, Pontiac includes the writings of his father and others in an attempt to present a more complete picture of the past. In other words, showing that the subjective mode of representation is flawed is neither only an authentication strategy, nor a capitulation in face of the catastrophic past. Rather, the incorporation of a range of different modes of representing the past reveals that *Kraut*, like *Maus*, strives for realism in its representation of the past, while at the same time remaining aware of the illusionary character of any such realism.

*Maus* is not the only comics context that matters for *Kraut*. Most pragmatically, *Kraut* can be related to comics culture because its author is a famous Dutch comics artist whose work is predominantly read in a relatively small Dutch domestic market for comics.<sup>67</sup> Pontiac was awarded the Netherland’s most prestigious comics prize, the Marten Toonderprijs, in 2011. The press statement for the prize explicitly mentioned *Kraut* as the most remarkable Dutch graphic novel (Pos 2011). Internationally, however, because *Kraut* has not

been translated, there has understandably been little critical reception. In spite of this, Paul Gravett included *Kraut* as one of the seven Dutch comics in *1001 Comics You Must Read Before You Die* (2014, 727).

Pontiac also embeds *Kraut*, in interviews and through references in the work itself, in European and American underground and mainstream comics traditions. In relation to the American underground comix, it should be noted that other work by Pontiac was published in magazines such as *Anarchy Comix* and *Mondo Snarfo* (Pontiac 1911, 4). Furthermore, Pontiac names Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) as one of the principal inspirations for his work in general and *Kraut* in particular. In an interview I did with Pontiac, he recounted that reading Green's work was for him, as someone who shared with the American comics artist a strictly 1950s Catholic upbringing, a transformative experience (Pontiac Private Interview). Green's style reminded him of the *Illustrated Classics* series (1956-1976),<sup>68</sup> but instead of the graphic style of *Illustrated Classics* being coupled with stiff adaptations of famous novels, Green used it to tell a brutally honest autobiographical story about the neuroses that his upbringing produced (*Peter Pontiac: Vlamme brief*). Besides Green's autobiographical work, Pontiac cites the famous American underground comix artist Robert Crumb as one of his major inspirations in his autobiographical series *The Pontiac Review*. In *Kraut*, Pontiac also explicitly refers to the work of another household name of American comics, Will Eisner, by depicting, on the first page of *Kraut*, a Greek cigarette box on which Eisner, whom Pontiac was in contact with through his work as a letterer for a Yiddish translation of *A Contract with God* in 1983, wrote: "do a graphic novel too... I need company. It's too lonely out there" (see fig. 9).

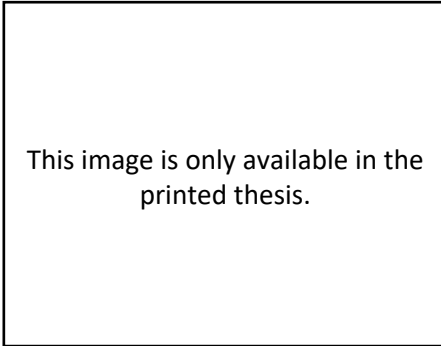


Fig. 9: *Kraut* 0.

Besides referring to a number of its American counterparts, *Kraut* also refers to a number of Dutch and Franco-Belgian comics. On page two, Pontiac recounts being inspired by the comic *Oscar and Isidoor*,<sup>69</sup> which was published in the Dutch Catholic magazine *Taptoe* between 1955 and 1961 (Comiclopedia *Okki, Jippo en Taptoe*). Later in the book, Pontiac draws his father seated at a table between Willy from *Willy and Wanda* (1945–present) and *Tintin* (1929–1976) (Fig. 10). *Kraut* here cleverly connects Joop Pollmann’s work as a propagandist for Nazi Germany with that of Willy Vandersteen, under the pseudonym Kaproen, and Hergé, who both drew for collaborating magazines and newspapers during World War II (Visser).

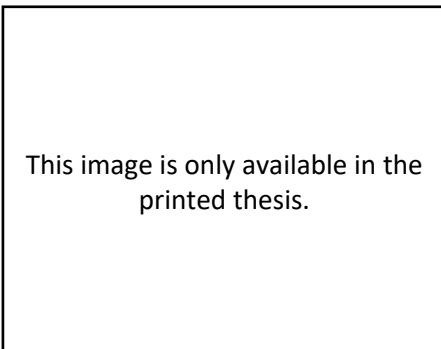


Fig. 10: Detail from *Kraut* 114.



But even if *Kraut* was received as a comic and places itself in different comics traditions, its form does not immediately resemble other comics. The most significant difference is the complete absence of a panel structure. Even though in some comics panel borders are not be as immediately visible as in others—Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978), to name a related example—there is almost always a visible distinction between the different moments displayed on different parts of the page. And even when it is possible to read against the implied ordering of these panels, the very existence of an implied order betrays that most readers understand in what order to read the panels. *Kraut* does not use the standard comics temporality of boxed moments in time that follow one another in a sequence. It follows that *Kraut*’s temporality also differs from most other comics. The main temporal drive of *Kraut* is the handwritten text, even when it is interspersed with images or other graphic elements (see fig. 11). The reading experience consists of jumping in and out of the handwritten text to the different elements—visual or textual—and back again. Therefore, *Kraut*’s images are not as much in the driver’s seat as is the case for other comics, nor are its texts positioned on the page in a for comics conventional ways such as text balloons and blocs.<sup>70</sup> As I will argue in the section “Composing Texts,” this remarkable visual ordering on the page of a variety of texts is the comic’s greatest strength. *Kraut* is a comic not so much in its use of comics conventions such as text balloons or panels, but rather because the visual characteristics of texts, as well as the way in which these texts are combined on the page with other elements, play a significant role in *Kraut*. In the subsequent sections, I will analyze how the visual characteristics of text and its placement on the page enable a representation of the past that succeeds in reconstructing the past while it questions writing’s ability for such a reconstruction.

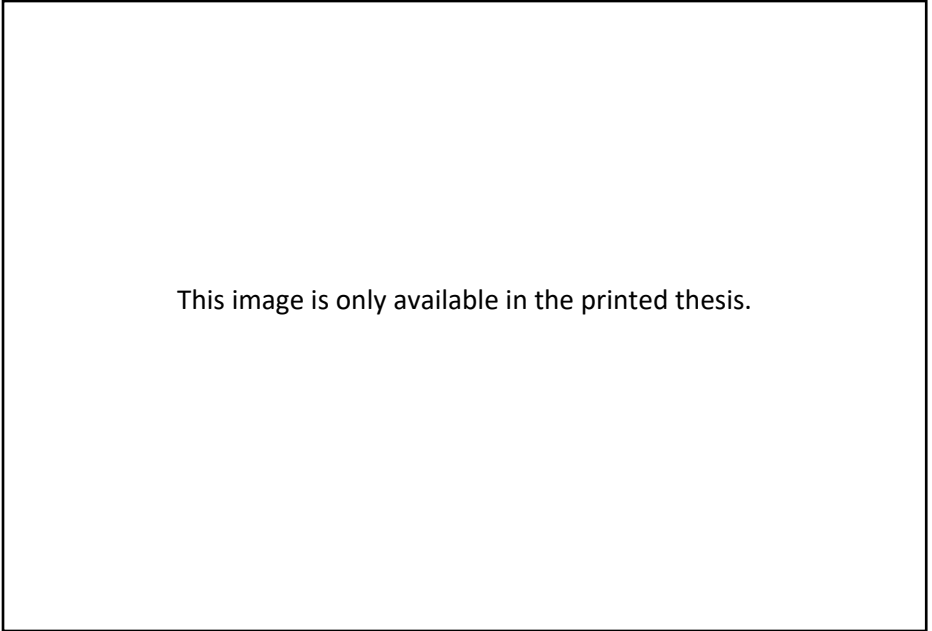


Fig. 11: *Kraut* 128-129.

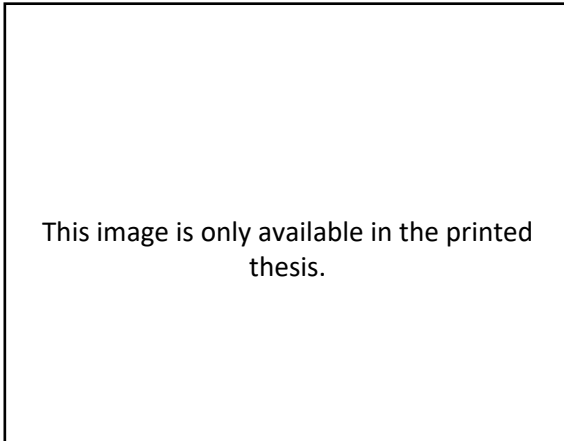


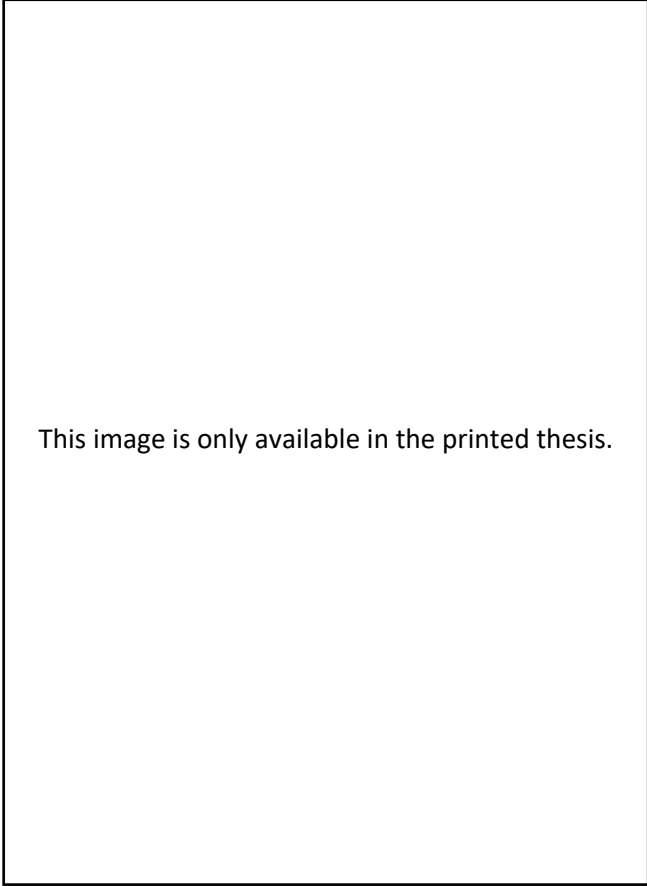
Fig. 12: Detail from *Kraut* 40 (text in balloon reads: "YOU GOT YOUR FIRST PAIR OF GLASSES AROUND YOUR 10<sup>TH</sup> YEAR").

### Handwriting, Letter Writing

Pontiac's handwriting is one of the most dominant visual characteristics of *Kraut* (see fig. 13). Like most comics' text, which is epitomized by the *comic sans* font, *Kraut's* handwriting does not make a clear distinction between capital and lowercase letters. However, instead of bold for emphasis, a convention of American comics in particular, *Kraut* uses underlining in order to stress certain words or parts of words. Another characteristic of Pontiac's writing that is both visual and textual is his frequent use of parentheses, which at times contain information that might be found in footnotes in other texts, while at other times containing information vital to the narrative. The overuse of parentheses is a way in which *Kraut* uses bad writing—forever adding besides—to create good writing. The parentheses here illustrate Peter Pontiac's insecurities as a biographer and so strengthen the way in which *Kraut* shows that the past is never dealt with in a satisfactory manner. Instead, the narrator wants to continually add to, revise, and/or revoke it.

These visually centered observations concerning capitalization, underlining, and the use of parentheses, however, already go a step too far regarding how I intend to approach handwriting here. For what does the fact that *Kraut* uses handwriting add to its representation of the past? It would have been much easier, for its initial creation, its readability, as well as for its potential translatability, to have used a computerized font. In an interview, Peter Pontiac stated that he had to fight his publisher over the use of handwriting in *Kraut*: "They rather wanted typographic letters but I stuck to my guns because I felt that without the handwriting, it would not be a letter anymore" (Pontiac Personal Interview).<sup>71</sup> Pontiac here reiterates a connection—most famously discussed in Friedrich A. Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999, 198)—between the word, the hand and the human subject in opposition to typewritten text. For Kittler, the travel of the word from the subject to the subject's hand and, finally, to the machine can be seen as a gradual distancing and thus as a process of

alienation. Handwriting, in this process, is located further towards the subject than to the machine, and as such is more naturally at home in subjective realism than in mechanical realism. At the same time, in comparison to the spoken word, handwriting also already constitutes a move away from the subject and towards standardization. The intermediary position of handwriting in the history of language is why cultural analyst Sonja Neef considers it to be “both unique and repeatable, singular and iterable” (29).



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Fig. 13: *Kraut* 78.

In the case of *Kraut*, where the unique handwritten text of the author signifies subjectivity, authenticity, and intimacy but at the same time is ultimately printed ink in a mass-produced book, this contradiction is even more stringent. Despite that *Kraut* has been mass-produced and therefore does not meet the standards of Nelson Goodman's autographic art (113) it establishes, by using handwriting, a material trace that performs a distinctly subjective realism.<sup>72</sup> Pontiac presents himself through his handwriting, but by presenting this handwriting within the context on a printed book, the aura of handwriting is problematized as well as established. Here, as in Tonnus Oosterhoff's poem *Unrest*, "what is at stake is a tension between reproducibility and aura" (van Dijk 2011, 73). A tension that is produced by the impossibility of a complete presence of the author or the past through representation. In the same way in which it is impossible for Pontiac to truly reach his father or the past through Joop Pollmann's drawings and handwriting, an unbridgeable distance forestalls any true presence of the author for the reader. But it is from this lack that the many attempts to simulate such presence—though handwriting, drawing, the incorporation of historical documents, and more—ultimately spring.

The performance of presence through handwriting is a frequently commented upon aspect of comics. Hillary Chute, working on the handwriting in the comics of Alison Bechdel, writes:

The subjective presence of the maker is not retranslated through type, but, rather, the bodily mark of handwriting both provides a visual quality and texture and is also extrasemantic, a performative aspect of comics that guarantees that comics works cannot be "reflowed": they are both intimate and site specific. (2010, 11)

But just because handwriting is often seen as embodied, subjective, and private, does not mean that computerized fonts or any other kinds of typesetting are by definition the opposite. This point is well made in both Kashtan's analysis of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) (105), as well as in more general analyses of handwriting, authenticity and digital memory culture such as van Dijck and Neef's *Sign Here* (9) and van Dijk's *Picking up the Pieces* (122). Rather, the presumed subjectivity of a form of writing is established relative to another form of, in this case, textual expression. Realism is antinomic, instead of absolute. The strength of *Kraut*'s use of text is not only that it problematizes the aura of handwriting by presenting it in a context of reproducibility, but that different forms of text are here placed alongside one another. This co-presentation of text on the comic book page allows for a cross-examination of the different connotations of these forms of text in relation to the representation of the past.

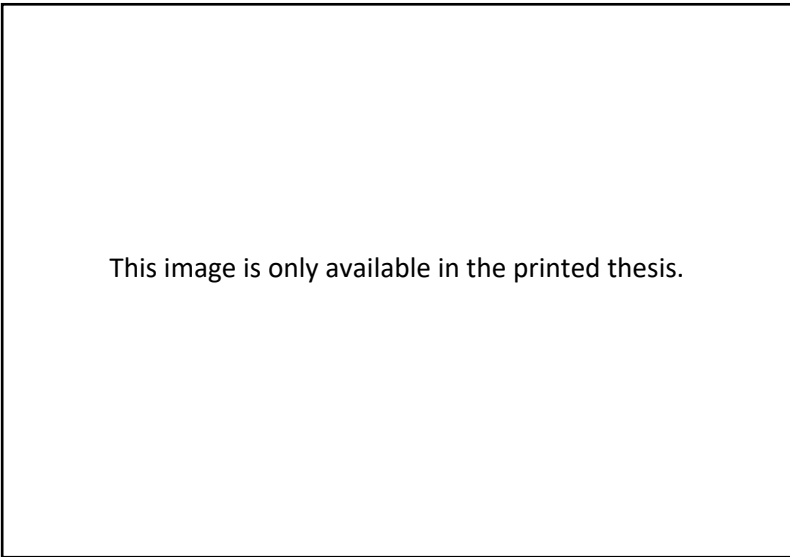
Take, for example, the typeset testimony taken from Joop Pollmann's post-war trial. These accounts, because they remind their viewers of the typewriter, a machine that has become obsolete in the computer age, now refer to a unique past much in the same way as the narrator's handwriting. The fact that typeset accounts can be objects of nostalgia does not erase all differences between the handwritten and typeset texts. Where, in *Kraut*, handwriting evokes a distinctly subjective realism, the realism of the typewritten court documents is better described as a blend of the subjective, historiographic, and mechanical. Because of their obsolescence, the typewritten accounts are not able to seamlessly evoke the objectivity of the machine, yet they still retain a kind of allusion to objectivity. Furthermore, while these texts look mechanical, they simultaneously evoke the unique historical moment when they were written, and the hands that touched the keys, much more than would be the case with a digitally set text. Finally, because of their look, the typeset accounts can appear to the contemporary reader as historical documentation.

By incorporating these texts visually as well as textually, *Kraut* also includes the materiality of documentation and as such can rely on their perceived proximity to fact and/or truth (Briet 9-10).

The fact that *Kraut* is a handwritten letter, rather than another kind of handwritten text further adds to its performance of subjectivity, authenticity, and intimacy. The epistolary form implies a singular writer and addressee and as such comes with a certain intimacy that is strengthened through its combination with handwriting. The tension between aura and reproducibility here becomes infused with a second tension: that between the private and the public. *Kraut*'s performance of privacy is heightened through the inclusion of Peter Pontiac's handwriting and drawings as well as those of Joop Pollmann (Pontiac 2011, 36-37). Ultimately, however, the juxtaposition of the father's and the son's text takes place within the confines set by the author, who is the one who has selected and ordered these texts for publication. As such, *Kraut*'s staged dialogue points back to the fact that it is a monologue intended for an audience, rather than a dialogue between family. As a letter, *Kraut* still awaits response. The absence of this response being in part a reference to the general absence of the father and, in other part, a way to underline the fragmentary nature of any representation of the past. One can write to the past, but it does not answer.

Emma De Vries, in her PhD thesis on the rise of Neo-epistolary practices in the wake of the obsolescence of the traditional letter, argues that new epistolary forms often question mail's dependence on "a sound system of delivery, and therewith on a logic of functionality" (224). *Kraut* clearly shows that its message is sent without any rational hope of its arrival at its original addressee. On pages 1-2, where the letter form is introduced, it is immediately made clear that this letter is not only literally addressed to a question mark but also floats around instead of finding its addressee. The white space marked out by the absence of clouds in the background of the drawing is shaped in the form of Joop Pollmann's head; a powerful illustration

of how Joop Pollmann structures this narrative around his absence (see fig. 14). Through its handwritten letters, *Kraut* demonstrates the impossibility of ever truly establishing contact with the past in a form that highlights the seductive strength of the possibility of such contact, even against all odds. It clearly is Pontiac's wish to reach or find his father with his letter, if only to hold him accountable. But in Joop Pollmann's absence, Pontiac created his own narrative. The power this grants him over the past of his father at times frightens him and, in lieu of a reply, Pontiac incorporates his father's and other texts in an impossible attempt to bring some balance to his account of the past.



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Fig.14: *Kraut* 1-2.

Besides presence and subjectivity, the visual characteristics of handwriting in *Kraut* also produce another effect. A side note on the first page of *Kraut* introduces this theme: “hope that my handwriting is decipherable?!” (Pontiac 2011, 1) (see fig. 15).<sup>73</sup> By underlining the word decipherable—specifically the part of the word that spells



what I would translate as cypher but that also can be taken to mean number—*Kraut* hints at the centrality of the activity of deciphering to the book. *Kraut* certainly is a comic that aims to decipher the life of the father by scrutinizing a mixture of mnemonic and documentary evidence. Yet it presents itself less like the result of such a research and more like a folder in which the documents pertaining this subject were stored. In this way, *Kraut* is both a product of a deciphering and a work which forces the reader to decipher.

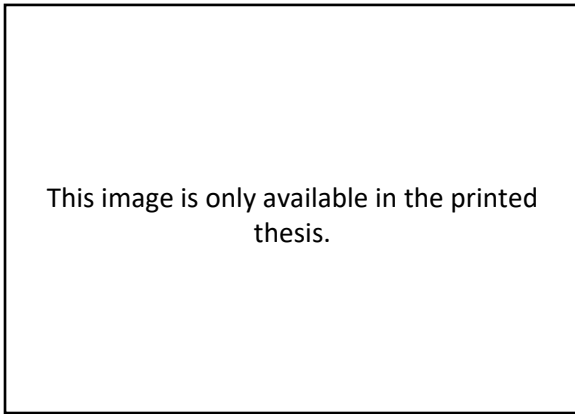


Fig. 15: Detail from *Kraut* 1.

While Peter Pontiac's handwriting is not by any means difficult to read, it does require much more effort than reading a typeset or computerized font. As such, Pontiac forces the reader to decipher the idiosyncrasies of his writing, thus pointing to both subjectivity and the process of deciphering itself. The reading experience that is set up through the use of this specific handwriting echoes the larger scale deciphering central to the project. But what makes the focus on deciphering in *Kraut* particularly significant is that more than just presenting a reading of the documents, or, in other words, a synthesis of the research done, *Kraut*, like the artworks of Christian Boltanski discussed by Ernst van Alphen in *Staging the Archive* (2014),

also presents the archive alongside a narrative. The handwriting of *Kraut* is a tool which indicates the importance of deciphering and aims to activate the reader as an investigator of the past, rather than a recipient of it.

In order to make up one's own mind concerning Joop Pollmann's disappearance and his collaboration, the reader must go through Peter Pontiac's handwriting and drawings, Joop Pollmann's (hand)writing and drawings, transcriptions of court testimonies, extractions from history books, eyewitness accounts, (drawn) photographs, poetry, and a short story (see fig. 16). *Kraut* appeals to the reader as a detective/historian by presenting a range of different sources that must be made sense of. Instead of a ready-made narrative about the past, Pontiac offers his readers the building blocks of such a story and, to make matters worse, openly displays doubts whether any sound construction can ever be made of them. With respect to handwriting, this is expressed most clearly when the different handwritings of Joop Pollmann and Peter Pontiac are placed alongside one another. The handwriting suggests two different authors whose rendition of the past differs greatly. Rather than smooth over the difference, *Kraut*—building on *Maus* double testimony—presents us with both texts, thus creating a certain open-endedness regarding the possible interpretations of the work. By incorporating his father's texts, Pontiac offers the reader the opportunity to question his reading of the documents in a way that is even more accessible than the annotation systems used in historiography. Pontiac does so, however, and this cannot be stressed enough, in a context created solely by the point of origin of one of the handwritings. To better understand how this context is created and what kind of effects it has, we must now turn to *Kraut*'s page composition.

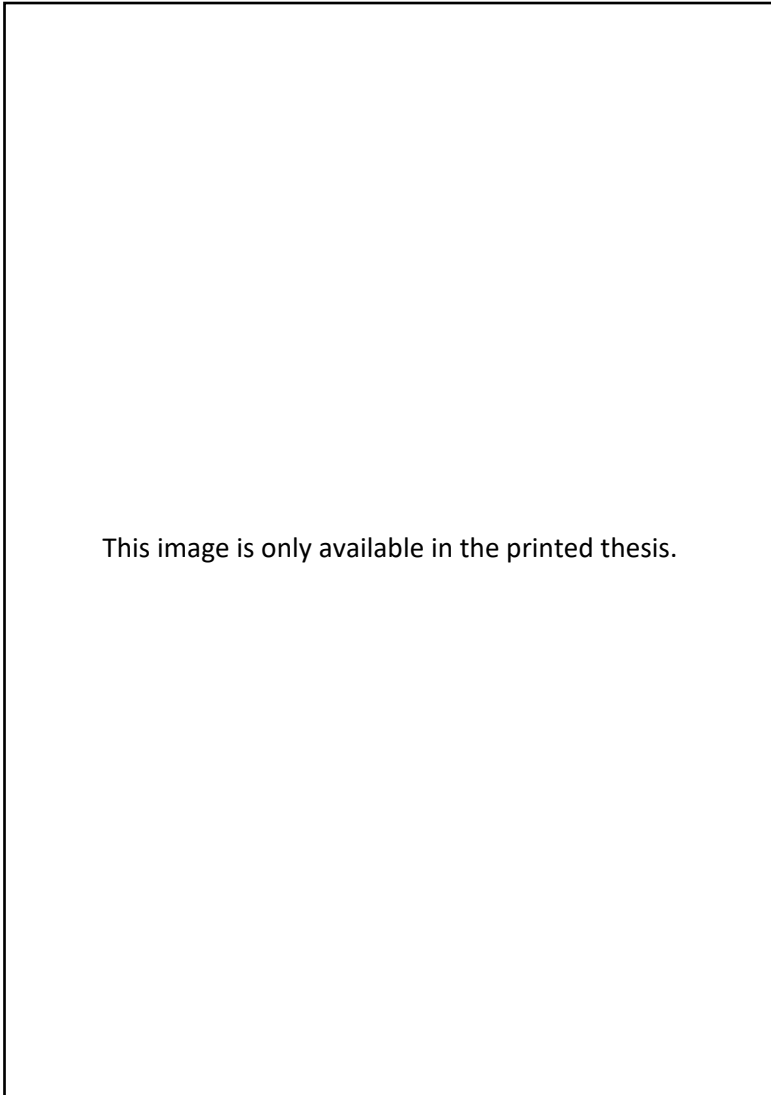


Fig. 16: *Kraut* 73.

### Composing Texts

Depending on our vantage point as readers, *Kraut* can be both an illustrated letter and an archive. While the comic is certainly not an archive in the more traditional sense of the word, it is a collection of documents concerning a specific topic, in this case the life of Joop Pollmann. By combining different kinds of texts and images on the page, *Kraut* makes use of the authenticity of the historical document and the archive. At the same time, this archive is presented alongside a handwritten letter. While the archival context lends the handwritten letter some objectivity, the handwritten letter hints at the subjectivity that can often be discerned in archival collections. With *Kraut*, we get both the collection of documents and the collector. Presenting them together, however, here does not work to complete *Kraut*'s picture of the past but to show the limitations of both approaches. Pontiac clearly critiques fetishistic notions of a complete archive, even if he too at times longs for such a Gods-eye-view of the past. As such, Pontiac critiques his father's ideology by demonstrating that the bureaucratic fantasies of Nazism can never completely succeed in their attempts to confine through inscription. They must fail both because of the overabundance of any subject for archival inscription and because inscription is never neutral. By subjecting private documents to classification, they are changed as well as made public (Derrida 1996, 4-5; van Alphen 54). What is found by looking through such documents is not so much the individual they describe, but the archive that holds them. If Pontiac demonstrates one thing in *Kraut*, it is how impossible a complete (re)constructing his father's past through the available documents is. By doing so, he also shows the limits of the apparatuses that the Nazi regime used to confine and determine the identities of its enemies.

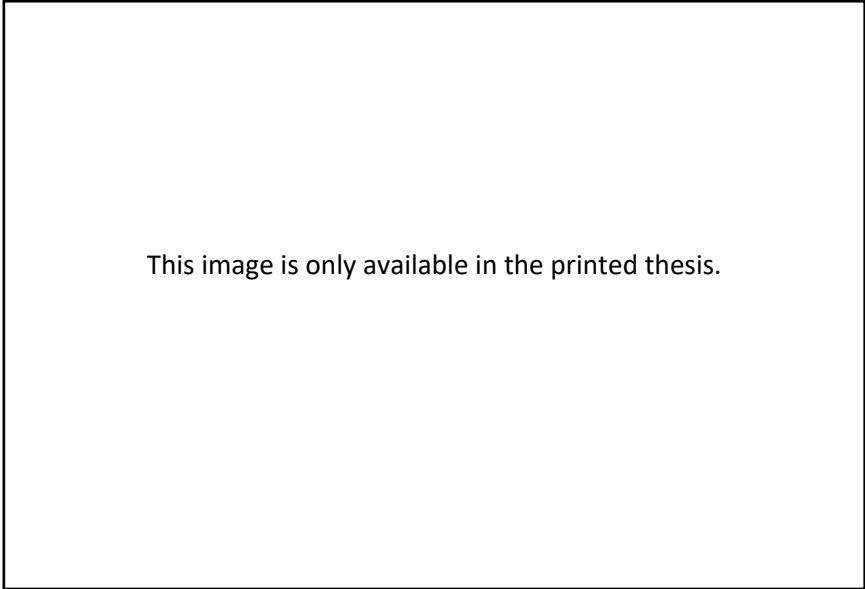
In its self-presentation as an archive, *Kraut* depends on page composition. For comics scholars such as Benoît Peeters, Thierry Groensteen, and Renault Chavanne, page composition is the fundamental operation in the creation and meaning making process of

comics. Page composition governs the placing of the different elements out of which comics are constructed on the page in a significant relation (Groensteen 2013, 91). Though page composition, comics are able to generate additional layers of meaning that can overlay, strengthen, or contradict what is put forward in the separate elements that make out the page. Because of the way in which physical location on the page can (be made to) matter in comics, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Pontiac shows himself as one of the foremost Dutch comics artists most clearly in the pivotal role that he makes page composition play in his representation of the past.

But who organizes these pages? Is it the letter writer whose handwriting fills the pages? Or should we regard the composition of the page as another and higher level of narration, as is suggested by Thierry Groensteen? In an attempt to cover a hiatus left by his hugely influential semiotic analysis of comics called *The System of Comics* (1999), Groensteen discusses narration in comics in the fifth chapter of *Comics and Narration: System of Comics 2* (2011).<sup>74</sup> Here, he suggests dividing narration in comics into three narrating instances: the monstrator, designating the instance that is responsible “for the rendering into drawn form of the story” (2013, 86), the reciter, responsible for the narrative text (88), and the narrator, “the ultimate instance responsible for the selection and organization of all the types of information that make up the narrative” (95). Groensteen’s comics narratology suggests that the organization of materials on the page happens on a narrational level that supersedes the handwritten text, which runs contrary to the primacy of the letter in *Kraut*. If one approaches *Kraut* as epistolary fiction, the letter format encompasses the archival collection of documents in the sense that these documents were added to the handwritten letter, and their composition is a result of the act of the letter writing of the author-character. Looking at Pontiac’s work as a comic turns this perspective upside-down. Now, the selection and ordering of materials on the page encompasses the handwritten letter, rendering the letter only one of the forms

through which a connection with the past is established in *Kraut*. The letter, in this view, is but one document among many. While the letter-focused approach suggests a reading that remains closer to the perspective and subjectivity of the author-character Pontiac, a more archive focused reading submits the handwritten letter to a higher-order organization realized through page composition. A letter-centered reading, in short, stresses only the subjective realism of *Kraut*, while a page-layout oriented reading reveals how different modes of realism stand side-by-side in *Kraut*.

How does Pontiac's comic establish relations between the different elements out of which it consists, and what are the effects of these relations? The largest part of *Kraut* consists of juxtapositions of handwriting by the author, handwriting and typeset texts by Joop Pollmann, other incorporated texts, drawings by the author, drawings by Joop Pollmann, and other recontextualised images. On by far most pages, there is a relatively clear compositional distinction between the different elements that are combined. Besides the compositional tools which Pontiac uses to connect different texts to one another—which I come to in detail below—texts in are also connected by way of direct quote and reference. Often, the handwritten text by the narrator's comments upon his father's texts. Pages 100-101 (fig. 17) show one such interaction.



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Fig. 17: *Kraut* 100-101.

The right-hand side of this spread shows a copy of a text written by Joop Pollmann. Translated, its title would read: “The Narrow Road: A Question and Answer by a Youth.” In it, Joop Pollmann argues why the Dutch youth has chosen the narrow road of the National Front, a Dutch fascist and anti-Semitic organization that existed in the Netherlands between 1934 and 1941. Joop Pollmann’s writing is incredibly pompous and he does not shy away from military metaphors. On the preceding page, the narrator explains how Joop Pollmann’s father prohibited his son from joining the National Socialist Movement (NSB), but did allow his son to join the National Front: “IT WAS ALLOWED, FEARLESSLY, YOU JUMPED INTO “FRONTISM,” WITH HEART, SOUL AND PEN. YOU STARTED WRITING FOR THE FRONT-NEWSPAPER “DE WEG,” IN WHICH YOU DID NOT TAKE KINDLY TO “DANCINGS AND (KITSCH-)MOVIES”!” (Pontiac 2011, 100).<sup>75</sup> The narrator quotes his father’s text even though the complete text is right there on the adjoining page.<sup>76</sup>

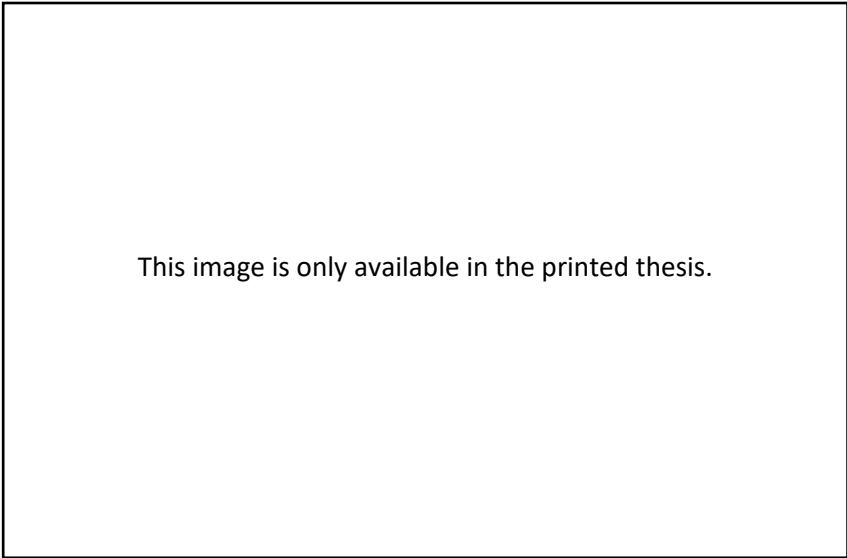
Because of their spatial vicinity to one another on this spread, moreover, Kraut also establishes a visual connection between the texts that both strengthens and alters the relation established between the texts by way of direct quotes and references: “JUST LIKE YOU I ONCE RAGED AGAINST “HEDONISTIC” EGOISM (HYPOCRISY!), BUT NOT AGAINST “FOREIGN ELEMENTS”...” (100).<sup>77</sup> The writing of the son becomes a repetition of the writing of the father shown through direct visual juxtaposition. Pontiac’s style, however, is a direct opposite of his father—an opposition that is reiterated by the juxtaposition between handwritten and typeset text. Where Joop Pollmann’s is an over-constructed text, Pontiac can almost be heard speaking, or, at times, shouting. Pontiac’s autobiographical handwritten monologue authenticates itself by rendering the stilted typeset style of the father disingenuous. Adding insult to injury, the two images which bookend the spread leave no doubt about Pontiac’s framing of the political leanings of his father. On the bottom right, the dialogue between the texts of father and son is closed with a depiction of Joop Pollmann smiling maniacally and saluting. The drawings remind the reader of the importance of location in comics and add to the dramatic juxtaposition of the two texts. At the same time, Pontiac does not, in the end, completely commit to denouncing his father. Whenever he is about to, and I will come to this in more detail later, he finds that taking the moral high ground leaves him with a bad taste in his mouth.

The initial visual relations between texts take on a more radical form on pages 113 to 119, the section of *Kraut* that directly deals with Joop Pollmann’s wartime experiences. Here, a wide range of different texts are positioned in a collage-like manner on the pages. This invasion of foreign texts stems from a lack of information. Peter Pontiac never heard his father speak about his wartime experiences and is forced to use his father’s testimony from his trial for collaboration after the war instead. This testimony, moreover, in a quest to illuminate this obscure period in his father’s past, is placed



adjacent to the narrator's handwriting, drawn and retraced images, and excerpts from history books, court documents, and a family chronicle (see fig. 18). Absence here breeds presence. Visually, this presence is quite overwhelming: the pages are crowded with different sources vying for the reader's attention.

But while the reader can feel like a sort of amateur historian who stumbles upon a fascinating source and is working to decipher it, or as one of the jury members listening to the interrogation of Joop Pollmann having to decide on his guilt or innocence, it is also clear that the reader is not the one compiling the archive of documents or case file. And even though the visual juxtaposition of these different sources on the page is not ordered in a strict sense—the reader is free to choose a path through the page—the reader is limited to the selection and presentation of sources dictated by *Kraut*. Moreover, *Kraut* makes use of reading habits—top left to bottom right—to guide the reader's gaze across the parts out of which its pages consist in a premeditated sequence.



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Fig. 18: *Kraut* 118-119.

Looking closely at the compositions of different kinds of text on these pages of *Kraut*, it becomes clear that the visual characteristics of these texts are highly significant for the narrative that is told through them. How these texts are reproduced highlights their varied origins. Typewritten texts for Joop Pollmann's at times underlined court testimony, typeset excerpts from *Mein Kampf* and Gerard Pollmann's<sup>78</sup> family chronicle, excerpts from Nazi documents, Peter Pontiac's handwriting, and other texts crowd the pages (see fig. 18). The multitude of these sources changes the character of the comic's representation of the past on these pages. Here, *Kraut* seems transform from a handwritten letter addressed to Joop Pollmann into a historiographic narration based on a wide range of sources. By presenting these different sources visually and juxtaposing them with the handwritten account of Peter Pontiac and the typewritten rendition of Joop Pollmann's testimony, *Kraut* establishes a different kind of connection to the past. Instead of the authenticity of the testimony—which is openly distrusted by Peter Pontiac—*Kraut* here presents the reader with a compilation of relevant documentation needed for a judgement of Joop Pollmann's collaboration.

Complete objectivity, however, is neither attainable for historiography nor the archive of documents on which it is often based. Instead of implying any sort of objectivity through historiography, these pages of *Kraut* go back and forth between the subjective and the historiographic in order to show the dialectical relation between these two modes of representing the past. If the historiographic mode can be found in the compilation of documents and viewpoints, the subjective is given voice through the handwritten text, which here shifts from commenting on the document to a more interrogatory stance. On these pages, Joop Pollmann's court testimony is once again subjected to a thorough cross-examination by different sources brought to bear by an especially strict, but also necessarily biased interrogator: his son:

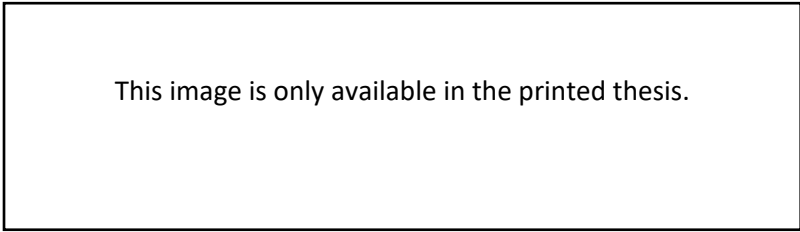


Fig. 19: Detail from *Kraut* 114.

Boxed text from the court testimony of Joop Pollmann: before I went to report for duty, I wrote a final essay about the struggle against communism. After handing in this essay to the German war correspondence bureau in Hague, I was asked to report back to them.

Handwriting by the main narrator: “STALER VERSUS HITLIN FOR THE HONOR OF EUROPETTE!”? (Pontiac 2011, 112)<sup>79</sup>

Peter Pontiac almost becomes a kind of pulp novel prosecutor in these sections. A prosecutor, moreover, that besides submitting relevant information to the court—in this case the readers—also cannot help but make ironic remarks and openly questions the defendant’s testimony:

YOUR POST-WAR JUDGES ALSO TOOK YOUR SPEECHES SERIOUSLY... IN YOUR DEFENSE PLEA IT IS CLAIMED THAT YOU “OBJECTED” TO THE RECRUITMENT SPEECH (BUT THAT THIS WAS NOT “ACCEPTED”!) I FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE. YOUR CAREER WAS SWINGING, MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION... (Pontiac 2011, 116)<sup>80</sup>

By assuming an accusatory stance, Peter Pontiac attempts to show that he will not go easy on his father. Instead, it is precisely because he is Joop Pollmann's son that he has a personal drive to find the truth hidden beneath all the documentation. At the very least, what the testimony yields is the width of Joop Pollmann experiences during his work as a war reporter. Not only did he witness the battle of Leningrad, was injured, recovered, and worked as a translator in Berlin, he also was sent West when a new front opened there in the wake of D-Day. The interrogatory tone authenticates the narrator as a critical historiographer who tries his sources. At the same time, Pontiac's at times aggressive attempts to try his father can be reminiscent of the politically judgmental historiography that aimed to cleanse the nation of the stain of collaboration by singling out and sectioning off the culprits (Haan and Romijn 323).

Immediately after the text previously quoted from page 116, however, *Kraut* shows one of the limitations of such an approach: "YOUR ATTORNEY ALSO SPEAKS ABOUT LETTERS, WHICH I WOULD HAVE LOVED TO READ!" (Pontiac 2011, 116).<sup>81</sup> This small sentence intervenes in the interrogatory atmosphere by re-injecting the private and affective relation of the interrogator to the accused. With it comes a moment of self-interrogation and doubt central to *Kraut*. Because the narrator is unable to relocate all the relevant documents, he can never completely reconstruct the past. The allusion to missing evidence is a subtle yet effective reference to the form of *Kraut*: for it to be a narrative, at least part of the evidence that has shaped the recreation of Joop Pollmann's life story has to be omitted. And for *Kraut* to be a comic with a beginning and an end, it cannot reproduce the entire archive of evidence on which it is based. In other words, while *Kraut* features sections from the interrogation of Joop Pollmann, the complete report is as obscure to the reader as the mysterious letters of which the advocate speaks are to the narrator. *Kraut* continually slips between the fragmentary and the whole, and the different kinds of realism that are associated with

them. Where the subject's point of view seems too fragmentary, the comic presents us with the mechanical and historiographic realism of the archive. But when the archive is uncovered as incomplete, the comic complements it with the authenticity of the witness. This double substitution becomes especially noticeable in the sections that detail the war past of Joop Pollmann, where the fragment is often the only kind of whole there is access to. As Dutch literary scholar Sem Dresden showed in *Persecution, Extermination, Literature* (1991), the fragmentary is a characteristic of war representations in Dutch literature (222). However, the composition of text in *Kraut* allows the work to play with the theme of fragmentariness in a distinctly visual way by showing different fragments of the past alongside other (fragmentary) texts.

The composition of texts in *Kraut*, while supporting *Kraut* as a document combined with a sort of judicial source criticism that is supposed to lead to the truth about the past, at the same time shows what it omits: the complete texts from which it recontextualizes snippets. The complete history that *Kraut* attempts to recreate and the truth about the past can of course, never fully be recovered. By juxtaposing the subjective realism of the eyewitness accounts of both Joop Pollmann and Peter Pontiac with the historiographic and mechanical realism of documentation and source critique, *Kraut* interrogates the limits of these modes of representing the past. And even if taking recourse to different modes of representing the past is what authenticates *Kraut*, they are at the same time shown to be fundamentally flawed by way of their co-presentation. *Kraut* uses the visual characteristics of text in comics as a way to create room for and express the unresolvable conflict that the collaboration of Joop Pollmann poses for the narrator. The conflict between word and image here sets the stage for conflicts between private and public, reconciliation and vengeance, testimony and documentation, and memory and history. By recounting the conflicted past in a conflicted form, *Kraut* represents Dutch collaboration open-endedly, allowing

readers to make up their own minds. Rather than the truth about his father, *Kraut* juxtaposes different ways of dealing with the theme of Dutch collaboration during World War II and reveals the effects that this past still exerts on the inheritors of this troubled legacy.

### Ongoing Conflicts

It is tempting to situate *Kraut* in relation to other Dutch representations of collaboration during World War II in order to try to establish in which medium different ways to represent World War II happened first or best. Such a comparison would probably yield that *Kraut* resembles other second-generation World War II representations from the Netherlands written by the children of collaborators. These narratives began to appear in literature around the 1980s (Vanderwal-Taylor 121), which makes *Kraut* belated by about twenty years. But even if *Kraut's* grey—as opposed to black and white—approach to World War II and its focus on collaboration can be considered belated, the comic carves out a place for itself in the history of the representation of World War II through its form, which allows it to portray the past differently than completely text-based accounts. The question here is not whether *Kraut* was earlier or later, or if *Kraut* does it better or worse. Such a line of questioning would only lead back to *Kraut's* double disenfranchisement as a comic written by the son of a collaborator. Seductive as it is to situate *Kraut* in such a fashion in a larger narrative of the emancipation of the comics in the Netherlands, this is not a struggle that is played explicitly on the pages of the work, nor does it reflect the international comics culture from which *Kraut* takes its cues.

*Kraut* is far more concerned with questions concerning the limitations of representation of the past itself than its place among other representations. By combining its performance of the archive with a number of more experientially based renderings of the past, *Kraut* shows that no representation of the past can truly establish a connection between past and present. However frustrating such an

open wound towards the past might be, it remains the only possible way to represent this conflictual past that cannot be forgiven or forgotten, but which also continually frustrates attempts at reconciliation:

BESIDES, I ALSO FIND IT HARD TO COMBINE “AUSCHWITZ” AND “FORGIVING.” EVEN THOUGH YOU YOURSELF MIGHT HAVE NOT HARMED A JEW PERSONALLY, YOUR “CRYSTAL(NIGHT)-CLEAR”<sup>82</sup> IDEALISM AND YOUR COMPATRIOTS DID NOT SEE ANY HARM IN THAT, RIGHT? MY FORGIVENESS WOULD BE A DROP OF WATER IN AN OCEAN OF GUILT. ALTHOUGH I MUST ADMIT THAT THE GOOD FEELING I GOT WHEN WRITING THE PRECEDING WORDS IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE SENSATION. (PONTIAC 2011, 112)<sup>83</sup>

For Peter Pontiac, forgiveness can only be conceived of in the form of a conflict. Throughout *Kraut*, the letter writer resists sympathizing with his father. At the same time, whenever he judges his father harshly, he reflects that such an approach to collaboration is also somehow unsatisfying:

OR IS THAT JUST WHAT I WANT TO BELIEVE, MUST I SEE YOU ON YOUR KNEES BEFORE I CAN TELL YOU THAT I LOVE YOU, THAT I MISS YOU? MY LOVE FOR YOU IS AS AMBIVALENT AS YOUR “DEATH”.. IT ALMOST FEELS INDECENT TO LOVE A FATHER WHO HAS FASCIST VIEWS, ESPECIALLY IN A TIME WHEN THAT IDEOLOGY SHOWS ITSELF TO BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ERADICATE [...] I CAN APPARENTLY ONLY FORGIVE YOU THROUGH SUICIDE, A VOLUNTARY AND SELF-INFLICTED DEATH PENALTY.!? (PONTIAC 2011, 162)<sup>84</sup>

A strictly negative view of the collaborator has in itself become part of the way in which the good Dutch citizen viewed its country's past and as such leaves the narrator feeling uneasy. The narrator does not absolve himself from fascism by blaming it on someone else. He understands the hypocrisy of using divisive tactics against a fascist and avoids making the same mistakes as his father and those who persecuted the families of collaborators in postwar Dutch society.

Through page composition, *Kraut* is able to juxtapose the familial past—as represented in handwriting, letter writing, and family photography—with national historiography—present in court testimonies, references from historiographic works, and other documents. The strength of *Kraut*'s form is that it does not have to choose between private and public, presence or absence, documents or handwritten letters, and memory or historiography. It shows where and how these perspectives strengthen one another and where they contradict and cause friction.

### **Conclusion**

As in *Maus*, handwriting in *Kraut* connotes subjectivity by making present the author. By incorporating different kinds of (hand) writing, *Kraut* undermines the illusion on which the presence of the author through handwriting is based and shows the limits of a purely subjectively authenticated realism. Furthermore, the remarkably text-based page compositions of *Kraut* allow the comic to present itself as a collection of historical documents and a handwritten letter addressed to Joop Pollmann. Using the visual properties of text in combination with their presentation on the page, *Kraut* authenticates itself as a subjective eyewitness account and an archival collection of historical documents. I have shown how *Kraut* undermines these forms of authentication through their co-presentation on the page. By demonstrating that the documentation can never be complete, *Kraut* performs the fundamental incompleteness of the archive. In this sense it has something in common with the works that Hal Foster



described in *An Archival Impulse* (2004), Ernst van Alphen in *Staging the Archive*, and Marianne Hirsch in the chapter “Postmemory’s Archival Turn (2012). *Kraut*, however, does not entirely fit with either the works that Foster describes as critiquing the archive by “connecting what cannot be connected” (21) or Hirsch’s works that function as “correctives and additions” to the historical archive (228). Rather, *Kraut* does both by offering a semi-convincing whole only to proceed to show the cracks in this presentation through the co-presentation of the subjective mode of realism, in the guise of a handwritten letter, with a blend of historiographic and mechanical realism, through the visual incorporation of historical documentation. Through page composition, *Kraut* presents opposite ends of a false dualism between the subjective realism of the handwritten eyewitness account and the realism of historical documents and method together on the page. The comic’s strength lies not in transcending this false dualism or opting for the subjective over the historiographic or vice versa, but in highlighting the different ways in which they clash. *Kraut* represents the conflicted past by representing the conflicting ways in which this past might be represented and so shows that Dutch collaboration during World War II is an ongoing conflict.



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## 4.

# Documentation, Transparency, and the Limits of Representation in Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's *Magneto: Testament*

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*Maus* was not only influential for comics written in direct relation to it. The true width of the *Maus* event far exceeds direct lines of inspiration. Its ripples pass through comics much further removed from *Maus* than *Kraut*. At first glance, one might be hard-pressed to find two comics as dissimilar as *Maus* and the one that I examine in this chapter. *Maus* is an archetypal expression of alternative, author focused comics printed in small volume and was a tie-in to the critically acclaimed alternative comics magazine published by

Spiegelman and his wife Françoise Mouly. Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's five-part superhero comics series *Magneto: Testament* (2008-2009), on the other hand, lists as many as nineteen people on its credits page and was catered to a global comics market by the cultural powerhouse Marvel.

Marvel's rise to prominence in comics publishing started against the backdrop of the formation of the Comics Code Authority (1954) in the wake of public outcry over the possible harmful effects of comics. The guidelines enforced by the Comics Code Authority rendered comics somewhat stale, especially in contrast with burgeoning youth culture in the United States.<sup>85</sup> Marvel's reluctant, or downright anti-, heroes, such as the Thing (1961), the Hulk (1962) and Spiderman (1962), found space for themselves between the Comics Code and youth culture in the 60s (Wright 223).

The bulk of what initially made Marvel one of the most successful comics publishers in the world came from the creative cooperation of creative director Stan Lee with artists Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. After surviving the 90's, which was as bad a time for superhero comics as it was good to *Maus*, Marvel learned that its future laid in toy licensing in combination with films and television series (Flanagan et al. 23-24). After several false starts, *Marvel* films started to gain box-office success with *X-Men* in 2000 and *Spiderman* in 2002. Part of the success of these films was a return to both the anti-hero approach and the reestablishment of ties between the heroes and (contemporary) history. The publication of a longer treatment of the Holocaust past of supervillain Magneto in 2008 with *Magneto: Testament*, cannot be seen outside the context of the opening scenes of *X-Men* (2000), which show Magneto discovering he has the ability to bend metal at will while being dragged away from his parents at the gates of Auschwitz.

*Magneto: Testament*, then, is quite far removed from *Maus* in terms of cultural context. But precisely the fact that it attempts Holocaust representation in a superhero comic is what makes *Magneto:*

*Testament* a rewarding object of study. In my reading of *Magneto: Testament*, I examine how Pak and Di Giandomenico attempt to bridge the considerable gaps that audiences perceive between a superhero comic and Holocaust representation. Despite these perceptions, however, there has always been a connection between the *X-Men* series and the Holocaust. While in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's original 1963 run the connection of a group of genetically different superheroes fighting anti-mutant sentiment in the United States with the Jewish persecution under the Nazi-regime remained mostly allusive, in Chris Claremont's 1974 run of the series, this connection was made literal by making the series' supervillain—Magneto—a Holocaust survivor (see, for example, *Uncanny X-Men* 150, 274 and 275).<sup>86</sup> Pak and Di Giandomenico's miniseries promises to reveal Magneto's past experiences, which were present only fragmentarily in Claremont's run, in full historical detail. In its attempt to render truthful the war experiences of a fictional superhero character, *Magneto: Testament* presents its readers with a biography of a Jewish boy living in Nazi Germany based on eyewitness accounts, photographs, testimonies, historical documentation and historiography.

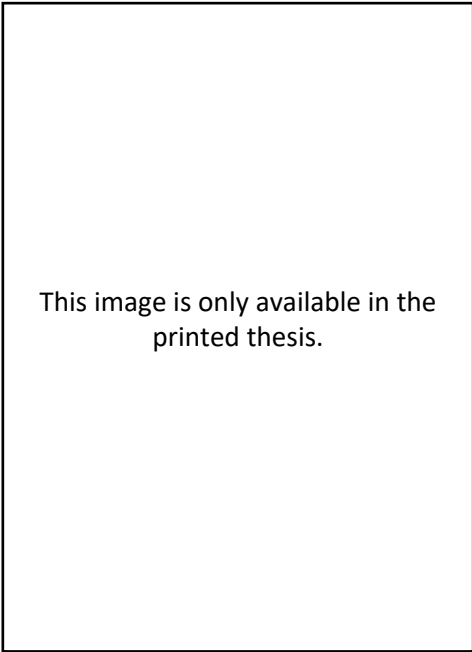
In this chapter, I examine Pak and Di Giandomenico's attempts to navigate the space between superhero comics and Holocaust narrative through an analysis of the ways in which *Magneto: Testament* combines modes of realism in texts and images. To do so, I will first shortly characterize *Magneto: Testament's* approach to historical representation. Then, I examine its use of modes of realism in texts and images separately. Finally, I will investigate the ways in which *Magneto: Testament* brings together modes of realism in texts and images on its page.

### **A Post-*Maus* Fictional (Auto)Biography**

If there is a moment when the titular character of *Magneto: Testament* could have come close to manifesting his signature superhuman ability to generate magnetic fields and thereby manipulate magnetic

metals, it is on the final pages of the third issue. In this scene, the young Max Eisenhardt—who will later become Magneto—and his family are cornered by a group of German soldiers who caught them fleeing from Warsaw. As the family lines up in front of a mass grave and Max's father wraps his arms around his son for the last time, there is a dramatic slowing down of the pacing of the comic. As the bullets slowly transverse the few meters that separate the soldiers from their victims over the course of several panels, Max remembers his father saying:

SOMETIMES... YOU GET A MOMENT... WHEN  
EVERYTHING LINES UP. WHEN ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.  
WHEN SUDDENLY... YOU CAN MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.<sup>87</sup>  
(Pak & Di Giandomenico 2008 issue 3, 20)<sup>88</sup>



This image is only available in the  
printed thesis.

Fig. 20. *Magneto: Testament* issue 3, 20.

As per the conventions of the superhero comic in general and the origin story sub-genre specifically, the protagonist's powers can be expected to manifest at precisely such a moment of unbearable emotional stress. This, for example, is the case in the opening scene of the X-Men film adaptation by Brian Singer, *X-Men* (2000), where Max, when he is forcefully separated from his family upon entering the concentration camp, bends the iron gate that stands between him and his family. This blending of the supernatural and the historical in the context of the Holocaust was, to put it mildly, not received well by critics (Kerner 35).

In *Magneto: Testament*, however, no such blending of the supernatural and the historical occurs. Max does not stop the bullets magnetically but is shoved out of their way by his father, who sacrifices himself for his son. Pak and Di Giandomenico choose not to include Magneto's superpowers anywhere in the comic. This absence of the fantastic in a fictional (auto)biography is probably intended to be read as an unconventional sign of respect for the subject matter of the work. The history that is dealt with here is, in the minds of its authors, more important than either the genre conventions of superhero comics or the continuity of the comics series. Instead of challenging the high-low divide in Holocaust representation, as Andreas Huyssen argues *Maus* does by portraying a Holocaust memoir through a sustained animal metaphor, *Magneto: Testament* is more inclined to hide its comic book roots than flaunt them.

*Magneto: Testament* is not a typical swashbuckling superhero narrative. To begin with, the comic presents itself as an (auto)biography committed to historical accuracy. But the way in which *Magneto: Testament* hides its fictionality runs contrary to contemporary biography studies, which is more embracing of the necessary impacts of subjectivity and form on biography (Nadel 151-152, Kersten 19; Renders et al. 4). Pak and Di Giandomenico thus measure their project against the non-existent stick of purely objective biography. The combination of many different ways to represent the past in *Magneto:*

*Testament* can be explained from a perceived lack of the medium and its generic context. Instead of using fictionality, the comics medium, or generic characteristics of superhero comics to push the envelope of historical representation, Pak & Di Giandomenico compensate for the perceived failings of their medium and genre by clothing their representation of the past in a plethora of modes of realism in images and texts. Not unlike in *Maus* and *Kraut*, the pressures exercised by the catastrophic past here pushes the problematics of representation to its outer limits. There is, however, one difference: *Magneto: Testament* is less convinced that representation necessarily fails in the face of the catastrophic past.

Precisely the fact that *Magneto: Testament* tries so hard to succeed in transparently representing the past by combining different modes of realism is what makes it an exemplary object for analysis. By studying the representation of the past in this one comic, much can be discovered about the ways in which historical reality is thought to be conjured up in comics form in a more general sense. Furthermore, investigating a comic that combines modes of historical representation, yet does not continually criticize them, allows for an investigation of the remaining illusory prowess of different modes of realism in the comics medium in a post-*Maus* context.

### **Dialogues of the Dead**

In its textual representation of Max Eisenhardt's youth, *Magneto: Testament* makes use of dialogue, embedded narration, external narration, onomatopoeia and titles (see fig. 21). In my analysis of *Kraut* I established, following Groensteen (2007, 127), the importance of the visual characteristics of text in comics. Contrary to *Kraut*, where the use of text is highly unusual, *Magneto: Testament* makes use of standard comic conventions in its embedding of text on the comic book page. Text in *Magneto: Testament*, with the exception of onomatopoeia and titles, which I discuss below, can be found on the page in spaces reserved especially for it, as is the case in most comics



(Baetens and Lefèvre 19). Almost always, these spaces take the shape of balloons for dialogue, and blocs for narration. The comics medium thus allows for strict visual distinctions between different kinds of text. These strict divisions structure the way in which the text and pages are read. Misdirection within this system is possible, as it is with any established set of rules, but this is not the case in *Magneto: Testament*. In their commitment to accuracy and transparency, Pak and Di Giandomenico distinguish as clearly as possible between the different kinds of text that they use: dialogue always appears in text balloons clearly rooted to the speaker by a tail and narration is invariably placed in text blocs. For clarity's sake, a further visual distinction is made between embedded and external narration by way of a color-coding system (see fig. 20 and 21).

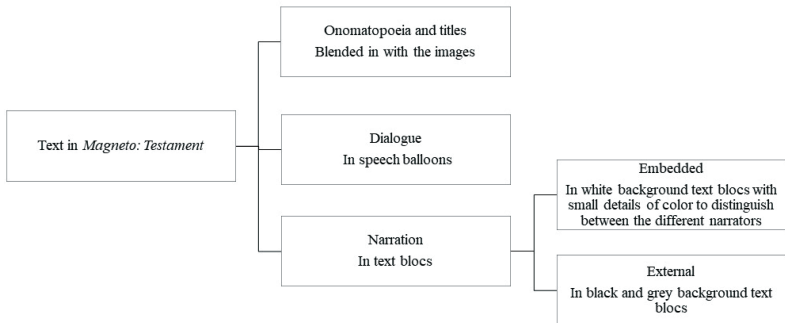
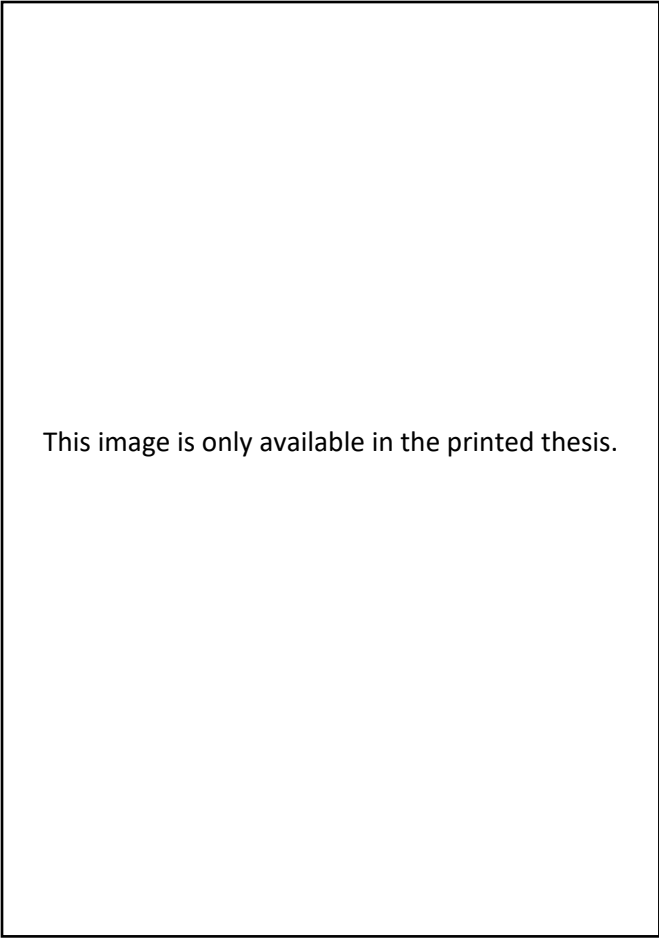


Fig. 21: Different types of text in *Magneto: Testament* ordered by their visual carriers.



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Fig. 22: *Magneto: Testament* issue 3, 4.

By making use of the various ways in which the comics medium affords text to be distinguished visually, Pak and Di Giandomenico juxtapose different kinds of texts on the pages of *Magneto: Testament* while steering clear of narratological confusion as to who is speaking. The visual characteristics of the text thus work to anchor the possible connotations of the text and as such make the way in which the comic communicates more transparent.<sup>89</sup>

In onomatopoeia and titles, images and texts blend in a more intricate way than is the case for texts that are placed on specially reserved spaces on the comics page. Because they are positioned in direct relation with the images of the comics, onomatopoeia and titles challenge preconceptions concerning the distinctions between texts and images in a more directly noticeable way than is the case with texts in balloons and blocs. With comics onomatopoeia, I mean the various “CRAK,” “B-BOOOM,” “SLAM,” and “BAM”’s that are one of the most recognizable characteristics of superhero comics. For onomatopoeia as well as elaborate letter-art titles, the visual impact on the page often exceeds the significance of what is spelled. Most remarkable of *Magneto: Testament*’s use of onomatopoeia and titles is how sparingly Pak and Di Giandomenico make use of them, in comparison to other comics. A glancing comparison with, for example, *Night Patrol!* (1952) or *Buzz Bomb!* (1952), two of Harvey Kurtzman, John Severin, and Will Elder’s classic American war comics, already shows how toned down the use of onomatopoeia in *Magneto: Testament* is in relation to other comics.<sup>90</sup> In EC war comics, onomatopoeia are used, for example, to convey the maddening droning of an experimental German jet-propelled bomb and the insanity inducing cacophony of a Korean Battlefield (see fig. 23 & 24).

These images are only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 23 & 24: Severin, John, Will Elder and Harvey Kurtzman. “Buzz Bomb.” *Two-Fisted Tales*, no. 25, 1952, p. 3 and Severin, John, Will Elder and Harvey Kurtzman. “Night Patrol!” *Frontline Combat*, no. 7, 1952, p. 5.

By adding a sonic dimension to a representation of the past, onomatopoeia might be said to add realism to a depiction of the past. The relative absence of onomatopoeia in *Magneto: Testament*, however, shows that the effects of onomatopoeia on the representation of the past are more complicated than they might seem at first glance. Onomatopoeia, through their visual impact much more than through their ability to convey sound, have become a synonym for comics. If onomatopoeia, because of their history of use, connote the fantastic fight scenes of superhero comics, suppressing their use can be read as a backing away from the medium of comics and as a move towards a kind of immediate perceptual realism focused on sight rather than hearing.

Besides onomatopoeia and titles, which do not play as dramatic a role of the pages of *Magneto: Testament* as is the case for other comics, Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic makes frequent use of dialogue and embedded narration in its depiction of the past. By far most text in *Magneto: Testament* is dialogue. In *The System of Comics*, Groensteen argues that for comics, text in general, and dialogue specifically, has a realist function (127). Like a drawing literally presents a character to the reader, written dialogue makes present a character's speech and thoughts: "there is a reality effect that attaches to the verbal activity of the characters, for the simple reason that in life, people talk" (127).<sup>91</sup> In historical comics, dialogue not just makes speech, but also the past, present. In other words, dialogue allows the reader to directly witness the past as present. Instead of narration, which is often a retelling from a point in the future, dialogue almost always activates the temporality of the present, even when this present is a printed present that is accessible at any time. The presence of acting subjects is closely intertwined with the temporality of dialogue: for if dialogue occurs, there must be subjects present. As a rule, in comics, these subjects are then also visible on the page and connected to the dialogue via the tail of the speech balloon. Exceptions to this rule, as we shall see, exist, but they prove the strength of the convention rather than its weakness because they demonstrate that the subject can be made present through speech balloons alone, even if a character is visually absent from the page.

A last characteristic of dialogue in comics, besides its temporality and subjective connotation, is that it affords the inclusion of speech of different actors. Dialogue enables a polyphonic representation of the past and can be used to counteract a perspective on the past that is too limited to one actor. Including a substantial number of spoken texts by different subjects through dialogue might be seen as counteracting the subjective connotation of dialogue. However, a multiplication of perspectives rather strengthens the subjective realism of a text. The past, from this perspective, is the

sum of the experiences of those who lived through it.<sup>92</sup> For this sum of experiences to become realist in a historiographic or mechanical sense, an intervention of method embedded in a disciplinary tradition or a machine is necessary.

The embedded narration that can be found frequently in *Magneto: Testament* is not that different from its dialogue. Just like dialogue, embedded narration makes a telling of the past in text subjective. That is, it presents the reader with a past recounted by a subject that is part of the story that is told. At the same time, there are a number of differences between dialogue and embedded narration that are worth briefly looking at. Take page 17 of issue 1, for example. Embarrassed because a Jewish boy beat his Arian counterparts in the javelin throw during the school athletics competition, the teachers set out to humiliate Max Eisenhardt by having him throw again under the pretense that the javelin used in the competition was defective. As one of the teachers addresses the students, the location switches from the classroom to the athletics field. The teacher's speech, however, switches from dialogue to embedded narration, indicated by a switch from speech balloons to text blocs, while remaining in the present tense (see fig. 25).<sup>93</sup>

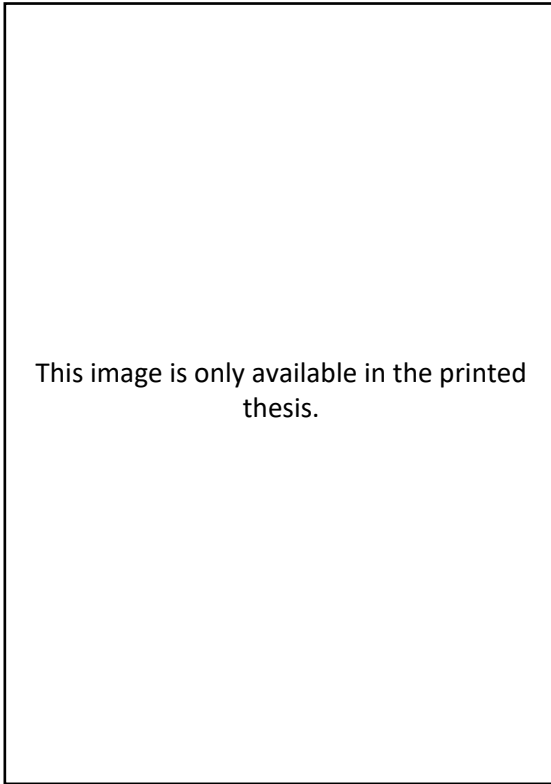


Fig. 25: *Magneto: Testament* issue 1, 17.

A switch from dialogue to narration is caused by a switch in location. One might argue that the embedded narration, due to a slight temporal disconnect arising from the fact that this speech resides in the past of the visual present of the panel, is slightly less present than is the case for the dialogue, which is temporally synchronized with its accompanying image. The similarities between embedded narration and dialogue in terms of their subjective connotation, however, far outweigh such slight temporal differences. In *Magneto: Testament*, the subtle shifts between dialogue and embedded narration do not amount to any great effect besides smoothening the transitions of the story.

When the characters that narrate are further removed, temporally and/or narratively, from their disembodied texts, the difference with dialogue naturally increases and embedded narration starts to resemble external narration more. Embedded narration in *Magneto: Testament*, is an in-between category of text that moves between dialogue and external narration, or subjective and historiographic realism. But where the connotations of dialogue and embedded narration can approach one another very closely in *Magneto: Testament*, there is always a clear distinction between embedded and external narration.

Contrary to other comics genres, which in general are more dialogue driven, historical comics utilize external narration quite heavily. This is certainly the case for *Magneto: Testament*. External narration is visually distinguished from the other texts in *Magneto: Testament* in several ways. First, it is printed in a distinctive *typewriter* font—as opposed to its use of more conventional *comics sans* for other modes of text—and includes dates and locations. Second, external narration is placed in grey, instead of white, text blocks. The first four pages of issue four provide one of the instances in which the different modes of text can be found in close proximity to one another. These pages relate how Max's family are forced to flee during the invasion of Poland and how they end up in the newly established Warsaw ghetto. As can be seen on the fourth page of the second issue (see fig. 22), the first panel of this page presents the reader with three different kinds of text: (1) embedded present tense narration in a text block, (2) a dark grey text block stating the date, and (3) a lighter grey colored text block containing external present tense narration. The external narration that can be found in the grey text blocks is situated closely to conventional historiographic discourse in terms of tone and content. As can be inferred from their visual likeness to the text in which dates and locations are rendered, these texts should be read as historical facts in the same way in which a date or a location is factual. Moreover, through the *typewriter* font, these texts visually mimic historical documents from World War II. It is important to note here



that rather than reproducing actual contemporary historiography in one of its many forms, *Magneto: Testament* reproduces a stereotyped version of this writing: a kind of historiographic discourse which one sooner encounters in high school history books than in historical journals. Like many textbooks and in contrast with a strong tradition of discussion within historiography, *Magneto: Testament* presents its representation of the past as fact. The veracity of what is relayed in the texts in grey blocks is nowhere called into question even slightly.<sup>94</sup>

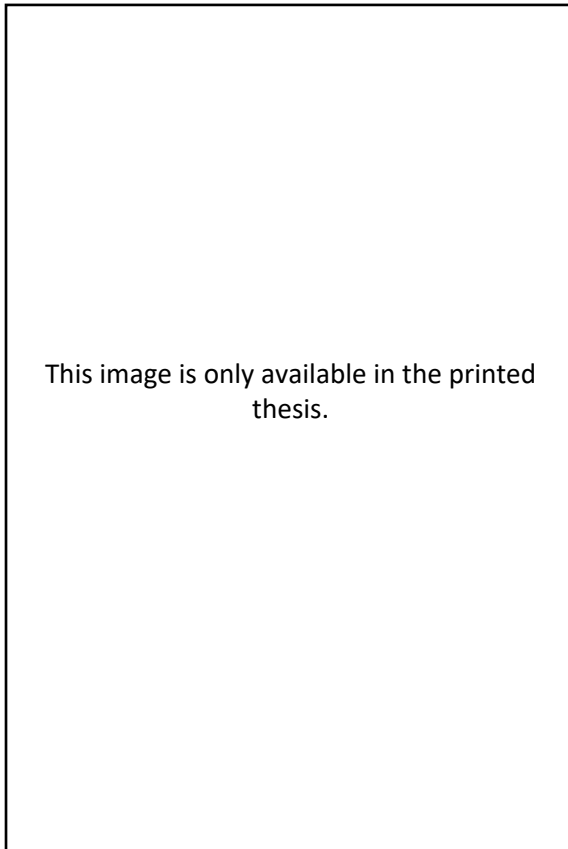


Fig. 26: *Magneto: Testament* issue 3, 3.

The page compositions that blend dialogue, embedded narration, and external narration set up a juxtaposition between two contrary modes of realism: a subjective realism connoted by dialogue and embedded narration and an objective realism represented through omniscient third-person narration. But where—as I discussed in the previous chapter—some comics deal with such juxtapositions by letting these different forms of realism to engage and feed off one another, *Magneto: Testament* upholds strict boundaries between these different forms of text, even when they are in close proximity to one another visually. Instead of allowing the subjective and dialogic representation of the past strengthen its effect by questioning the blind spots its opposite mode, and vice versa, *Magneto: Testament* nowhere really addresses the differences between the modes that are combined in its representation of the past. What the comic relies on instead, is that by placing these different textual modes of representing the past in visual and narrational proximity, the conflictual modes of realism they appeal to will add up. By doing so, however, the comic misses the complexity of contrary implications that these different ways of representing the past in text bring with them. By never addressing the intricate ways in which subjective and historiographic realism in text can be considered related and completely antithetical to one another, *Magneto: Testament* does not invite engagement with the questions concerning the representation of the past that figure so prominently in *Maus* and other historical comics published in its wake.

### **Photographic and Filmic Drawing**

On first sight, there is no real shift or difference in graphic style throughout *Magneto: Testament*. The only exception being that the graphic style of the cover pages differs greatly from the rest of the miniseries, as might be expected from drawings from two different artists. The difference between trade paperback and single issues—two ways of publishing prevalent in the superhero comics industry—here impacts the analysis. Besides the omission of commercials, the

trade paperback at times places cover images alongside the first page of the issue, something that does not happen in the single issues (see fig. 27).

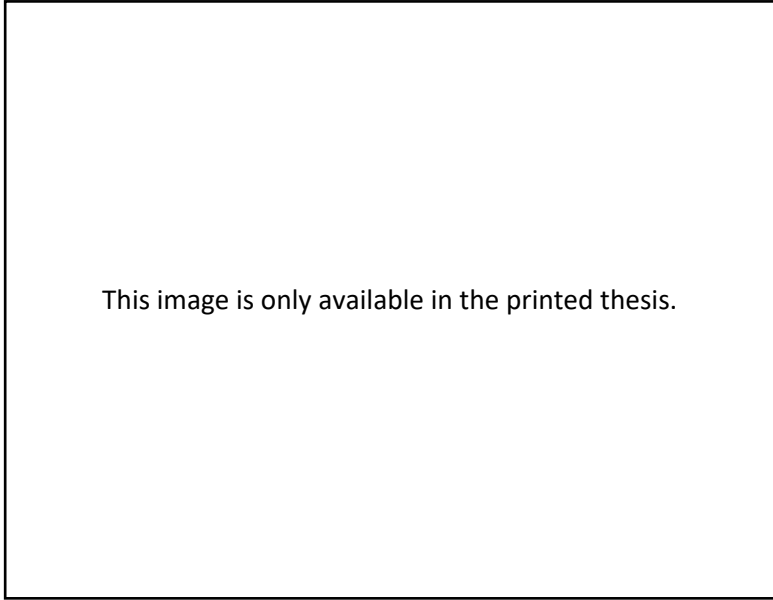
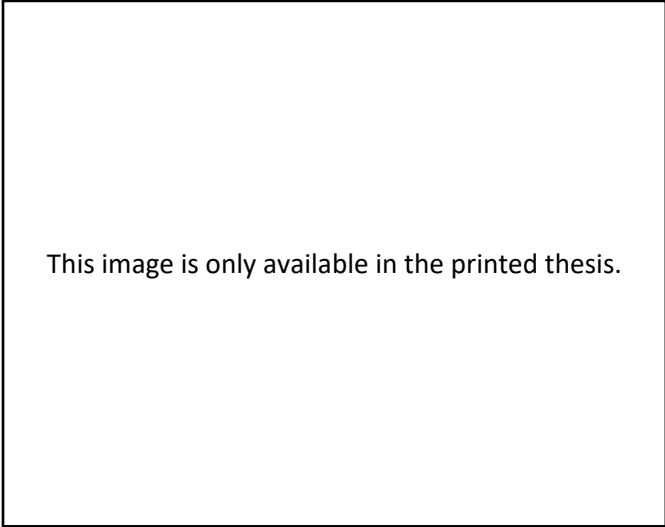


Fig. 27: Cover art of *Magneto: Testament* issue 2 as included in the trade paperback edition alongside the first page of that issue.

The five issue covers made by Marko Djurdjevic are executed in a near monochromatic painterly style. There is little or no deformation of the characters and no distinctive linework can be distinguished. The dark and monochromatic scheme is broken only by bright red details. Because of the near absence of visible lines and the subdued deformation of characters' physical features, these images are not easily identifiable as comics images, for which lines and deformation are usually the most distinctive characteristics. But for all their painterly aspects, these images, because they directly refer to Holocaust films in both form and content, are more closely related to film than painting.

Four of the five covers can be described as formulaic in terms of content and composition. One cover depicts Max behind a barbed wire fence (see fig. 27). Another shows Max behind stern-looking German soldiers. Yet another depicts Max under the “Arbeit Macht Frei”-gateway. And finally, there is a cover image featuring a close-up of Max crying (see fig. 28).<sup>95</sup>



This image is only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 28: *Magneto: Testament* issue 5, cover.

Djurdjevic’s use of monochromatic images with red details establishes a connection to one of the most memorable scenes of Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1994), whose filmic depiction of the camp experience has become a formula for authenticity in Holocaust representation to which many subsequent Holocaust films refer either positively or negatively.<sup>96</sup> More than to the authenticity of the historical event itself, these images refer to the perceived authenticity of representation of the Holocaust in film. *Magneto: Testament* thus clothes its representation of the holocaust in the respectability of another medium.

The images drawn by Di Giandomenico and colored by Matt Hollingsworth differ from the covers in both a subtle and a dramatic sense. Di Giandomenico and Hollingsworth's style is, somewhat like is the case for the covers, quite detailed in its depiction of both objects and characters and uses relatively little deformation in its depiction of humans. The images are overall somewhat lighter and more colored than is the case for the covers, even though the coloring and lighting remains subdued in comparison to other superhero comics; in representation, the sun never shines over Auschwitz. Besides these subtle differences, the two styles can be distinguished most clearly by comparing their linework. Instead of the painterly style of the covers, Di Giandomenico's images are structured by thick and expressive outlines. Instead of the more or less continuous colored surfaces of Djurdjevic, Di Giandomenico's drawings are surfaces divided by lines. Because of this, Di Giandomenico's style is more closely related to comics.

As I discussed in chapter one, the default connotation of the drawn comics image is one of subjectivity. Through more or less overtly drawn images, comics make present the hand of the maker. In the case of historical comics, the more a graphic style is overtly drawn, the more subjectively realist the representation of the past in that comic becomes. Consequently, many post-*Maus* World War II comics stress the individual's necessarily flawed recollection of the past through their drawing style, rather than striving for a mechanical objectivity that might rival photography. But while the drawings that are found in comics are almost automatically associated with the subjective mode of realism, there are still many ways in which the specific graphic style or graphic styles used in a comic can either strengthen or undermine this initial connotation.<sup>97</sup> Here, what I have called comics realism in the narrow sense, or comics' ability to incorporate different kinds of texts and images and by juxtaposition bring them into dialogue with one another enables them to counteract their perceived realism in the broad sense.

Previously, I discussed plotting the different graphic styles in comics between the two extremes of schematism and photorealism. Schematism indicates a representation of the outside world through mental shorthands for it, while photorealism implies a faithful rendition of the outside world as seen by a mechanical eye. As I explained, both these extremes have their own claim to realism. Within the boundaries of comics' connection to subjectivity through comics realism in the broad sense, different graphic styles allow comics to either underline their subjectivity through schematic drawing or run contrary to it by drawing in a more photorealistic style, thus connoting mechanical realism in their representation of the past. In this way, every historical comics' graphic style implies its own visual approach to representing the past realistically.

Keeping the pictorial continuum between schematism and photorealism in mind, let's return to the first pages of chapter two (see fig. 27). On the left-hand side of the spread, Djurdjevic's title shows Max looking at the fourth wall through the barbed wire fence of Auschwitz. Behind him, his signature supervillain mask appears through the smoke, as if looking in on the scene. Unrelated to this, on the right-hand page, Max and his father are conversing while travelling by train. The atmosphere is one of hope, contrasting heavily with the despair that emanates from the other side of the spread. The co-presentation of these images produces an atmosphere of double foreboding: first, this congenial travel by train will be followed by deportation via the same mode of transportation. Second, through this experience, Max will become what looms over him in the cover image: Magneto.

The painterly image, because of its lack of line, is located closer to photorealism than the more conventional comics drawing on the right-hand page, which is by no means completely schematic. However, the fact that the main graphic style of the comic is here contrasted with the painterly image of the cover causes it to appear more schematic. Conversely, no one would argue that Djurdjevic's

image is completely photorealistic. As is the case for the schematism of Di Giandomenico's drawing, Djurdjevic's images only seem near photorealistic in relation to the images presented alongside it.

But outside of placing them in direct relation to one another spatially—which is an accident caused by the repackaging of the miniseries in collected form—the graphic style of the covers is not actively related to Di Giandomenico's drawings at all. While the two styles are close in a material sense, there is no moment in the comic where this physical closeness becomes informed or is explained. The scenes depicted on the covers, for example, neither return in the Di Giandomenico's drawings, nor do the characters bear much physical resemblance to themselves in the different graphic styles.

Compared with the schematic graphic style of the majority of the comic, the painterly covers represent the past in a more mechanically realist fashion. The objectivity implied by the black-and-white images, however, is broken by the red details, through which the work refers to a movie rendition of the holocaust. The forceful red punctums of this drawing break its allusion to photography. Because of this break, the covers, by way of an intertextual reference to the color scheme of *Schindler's List*, is rooted in the past as it is represented in Hollywood film as much as they are rooted in documentary photographs.

Di Giandomenico's images are, as mentioned above, located somewhat more towards the schematic in relation to Djurdjevic's covers. But the subjective connotations of *Magneto: Testament's* graphic style are not used in the depiction of the past in the same way as is the case for *Maus*. Instead of highlighting that the depicted past is based on an experiencing subject or mediated by the experience of the maker, Di Giandomenico blends his drawing with photography and historiography implicitly and explicitly in an attempt to counterbalance the subjective connotations of his style. One way in which Di Giandomenico's makes his drawings seem more photographic is by featuring drawn photographs in the narrative.

Fig. 27 is a good example. On this page, Max and his father are looking at photographs as they are traveling by train. The photographs are rendered in the same style as the other images. As such, these drawn photographs establish the graphic style of the comic as the realist mode within the storyworld. This implicit effect is not nearly as strong, however, as the explicit ways in which the graphic style of *Magneto: Testament* is identified with photography and historiography. One of *Magneto: Testament*'s many appendices is a list of endnotes providing historical context and further explanation for its creative choices. By incorporating a form of writing—endnotes—that is more readily associated with academic writing than with fictional writing,<sup>98</sup> *Magneto: Testament* appeals to historiographic realism, as well as subjective realism. The content of the footnotes, furthermore, anchors the schematic images in two ways: first, by showing that what happens in the story is based on historical documentation, and second, by showing that several key images of the comic are based on historical photographs. The scene depicting Uncle Erich's persecution for *Rassenschande*,<sup>99</sup> for example, refers to the many photographs of Jews who were forced to wear signs with similar or exactly the same texts (see fig. 29 & 30). Similarly, the depiction of the burning of a synagogue is based on the many photographic images of burning synagogues, the portrayal of the arrival at Auschwitz is based on the *Auschwitz Album*, and the images of Max working as a Sonderkommando are based on the few existing photographs of the extermination process, illegally taken by members of the Sonderkommando (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, Online Photography Collection). *Magneto: Testament* thus presents a subjective eyewitness account and an objective rendition of the past in the same imagery.



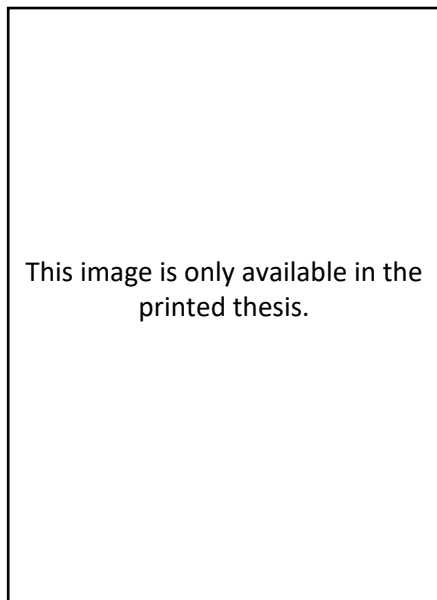


Fig. 29: *Magneto: Testament* issue 1, 13.



Fig. 30: Photograph of *Rassenschande* in Nazi-Germany. This photograph, depicting Mr. Rosenberg and Mrs. Makowiak was taken from Alexandra Przyrembel's *Rassenschande* (66).<sup>100</sup>

In spite that Di Giandomenico's style is thoroughly rooted in the schematic tradition of comics drawing, *Magneto: Testament* aims for a transparent representation of the past. What I mean here by transparency is that Di Giandomenico drawings attempt to hide that they are representations and present themselves as the past as it was. They do so, remarkably enough, by incorporating the representational characteristics of other media. Here, in a process reminiscent of the tension between hypermediacy and immediacy formulated by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), *Magneto: Testament* remediates the representational conventions of film and photography in order to, first, draw strength from these media's mechanical realism and, second, as a way to make its own materiality disappear (Bolter and Grusin 48). Unlike *Maus* and many other historical comics, which use the subjective connotation of drawing in order to engage with the supposed transparencies of other modes of realism, Pan and Di Giandomenico attempt to hide the ontological status of their drawings behind the authenticity of film and photography, however embattled the statuses of both film and photography are in this context.<sup>101</sup> In and off itself, such a combination can produce interesting results, provided the paradox underlying this doubling of representation is addressed. *Magneto: Testament*, however, does not offer much space for a reading that is critical of all the modes of representation that it employs. For *Magneto: Testament*, subjective realism should be overcome or counteracted through the incorporation of photography and historiography. It is doubtful, however, if realism by way of a feigned transparency of the medium is still convincing after the critiques leveled at it in academia as well as in the comics form.

### **The Limits of Representation in Text and Image**

In the previous two sections, I demonstrated how *Magneto: Testament* represents the wartime past of a budding supervillain through a combination of different forms of realism in texts and images. But

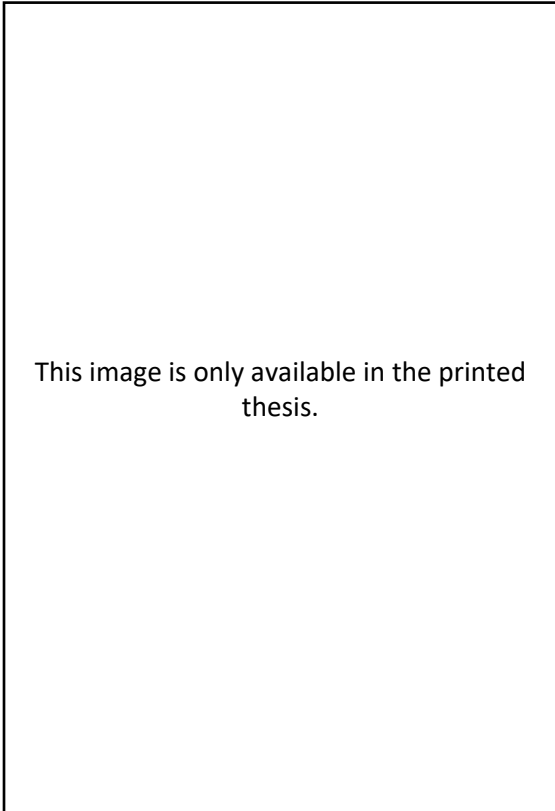
while *Magneto: Testament* combines different modes of realism in text and image, it nowhere directly addresses the aporias engendered by these combinations. In the following section, I demonstrate that a similar combinatory logic pervades the way in which texts are combined with images on the page.

Following Peeters, *Magneto: Testament's* page composition can be characterized as rhetorical, meaning that the panel shapes and sizes vary according to the needs of the narrative (Peeters 49). Compared to most other superhero comics, however, *Magneto: Testament's* page composition tends towards what Chavanne, in a further nuancing of Peeters and Groensteen's approach to the comics page, calls semi-regular page compositions—where the only deviations from a regular grid are combinations or further subdivisions of the panels that make out the original grid (Chavanne 49-50). Rather than emphasizing certain moments in the narrative by allowing the images to break through their frames, *Magneto: Testament* operates on a restrained rhetorical layout that at times even borders the semi-regular. It does so to avoid making a spectacle of the catastrophic past that it has chosen as its subject. Pak and Di Giandomenico use comics' compositional capabilities as a way of toning down the visuality of *Magneto: Testament's* representation of the past.

The second page of issue three is a good example of how graphic style and text are combined in *Magneto: Testament* (see fig. 31). This page recounts the family's flight during the invasion of Poland as well as a more general historical narrative concerning the invasion of Poland and the *Einsatzgruppen*, who followed in the footsteps of *Wehrmacht* to subdue the populace of conquered territories by executing enemies of the state. Page two of issue three shows that the central juxtaposition of modes of realism in *Magneto: Testament* is a juxtaposition between, on the one hand, external narration, and on the other, dialogue and drawn images (see fig. 31). Because the external narration occupies both the top left and the bottom right position, it acts as a frame for the other images and texts on the page.

It reads:

The German army invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. following the main German forces, Nazi Einsatzgruppen, or “operational groups,” hunted down Jews and Polish intellectuals. [...] by the end of the war, the Einsatzgruppen and their auxiliaries had killed 1.3 million Jews. (Issue 3, 2)



This image is only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 31: Magneto: Testament issue 3, 2.

In the accompanying images, members of an *Einsatzgruppe* shoot at an unarmed Jewish family in flight. Looking back while they are running, Max's family witnesses the coldblooded murder of this family as they vanish into the forest. While the text in grey text blocs appears to tell a complete story about the *Einsatzgruppen* that starts with the invasion of Poland and ends in 1945, the images and dialogue that are surrounded by the embedded narration show Max and his family witness one such a killing by an *Einsatzgruppe*. The central image—central both in location and in its relevance to the narrative—establishes Max as an eyewitness to horrors from which the reader is spared. A temporal discrepancy between the text in blocs and the images and other types of text puts the two stories that are being told at odds with one another. The text in boxes is written in past tense, as opposed to the present tense of the dialogue and the images, and spans six years, rather than a few minutes. The subjective realism of the eyewitness, here especially clear in that *Magneto: Testament* shows Max witnessing, is framed by historiographic discourse.

The drawn images that accompany this juxtaposition of texts follow the story that is told in dialogue. As such, Di Giandomenico's drawn images are used for the purpose of the subjectively based representation of the past, instead of its historiographic counterpart. Throughout much of *Magneto: Testament*, the juxtaposition of subjective realism and historiographic realism is mirrored by a similar juxtaposition of texts and images. While text can be used in the subjective as well as the more objective mode, images are often partial to a subjective representation of the past. What becomes visible here is not only the strong initial connection of the drawn image with the subjective, but also the powerful alliance between text and history. In *Magneto: Testament*, as in most historical comics, there is no drawn equivalent to the external narrated text that is most frequently found in boxes. And while text can range between the subjective/present and the temporally removed/objective, the expressive range of images with respect to the different modes of

realism is limited mostly to subjective realism. This allocation of drawing to the subjective representation of the past runs contrary to *Magneto: Testament's* attempts to polish off the subjective connotations of its graphic style. Even though what is depicted in the images is said to be the result of a research process, the images always remain close to Max's experience of the war, rather than attach themselves to the wider historical narrative that surrounds it. In this way, throughout most of the comic, *Magneto: Testament* rehearses preconceptions concerning the capabilities and limits of historical representation in image and text.

A similar tendency to remain close to existing conventions in the representation of the past can also be found in *Magneto: Testament's* depiction of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz. If, as *Maus* has shown, it is already impossible to do justice to the camp experience, the experiences of the men who, while they were prisoners of the camps themselves, led others to the gas chambers and disposed of their corpses, is almost completely beyond recollection. These men were physically closest to the actual acts of genocide as both victims and perpetrators. Any representation of them, therefore, is plagued by unanswerable questions concerning the presentation of these men as victims or perpetrators (Levi 1991, 45). To make matters worse, there are almost no surviving accounts of the *Sonderkommando*. Max's experiences are based on Filip Müller's *Eyewitness Auschwitz* (1979) and Abraham and Shlomo Dragon's testimonies recorded in Gideon Greif's *We Wept Without Tears* (1995). In a regrettable attempt to bypass the moral dilemma that attaches itself to representations of the *Sonderkommando*, Max is tricked into working as a *Sonderkommando* in *Magneto: Testament*, rather than volunteering for it. Through the invention of this highly unlikely happenstance, the comic dodges a discussion of the inadequacy of notions such as guilt or victimhood where it is particularly needed.

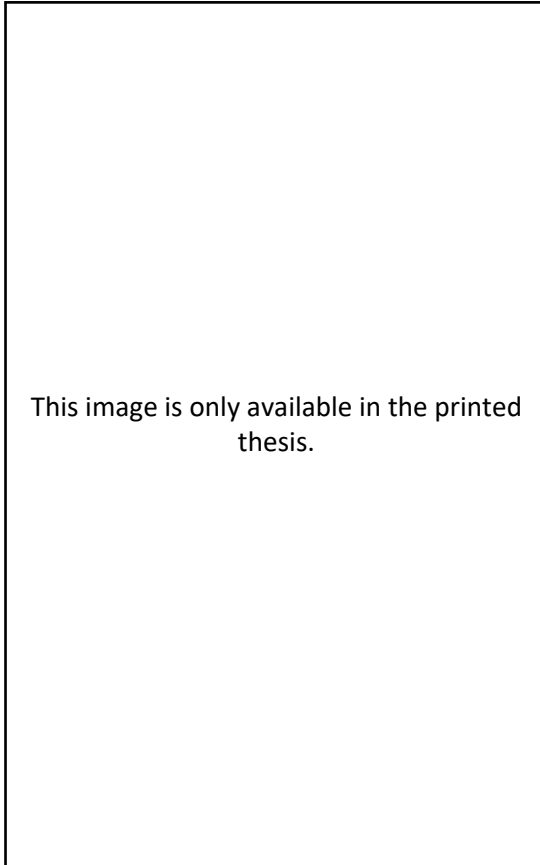


Fig. 32: *Magneto: Testament* issue 4, 13.

During Max's first day as a *Sonderkommando*, he is taken to a storehouse for the clothing and other personal items of the victims of the gas chambers. While cleaning up, Max stumbles into a room filled with glasses. The image that shows Max viewing the mountain of glasses is the only one in the entire comic that spans a complete spread (see fig. 33). In it, *Magneto: Testament* blends mechanical realism—the image is based on existing photographic evidence as well as refers to Alain Resnais' documentary *Night and Fog* (1956)—with subjective

realism: we see Max seeing the glasses, rather than just the glasses; the reader is here made very aware that she/he is witnessing witnessing.<sup>102</sup> The image is thus both spectacularly visual and about seeing. Yet for all that it makes visible, it is also fundamentally concerned with the end of vision, and by proxy, the limits of representation. The glasses represent both the totality of what was seen and the impossibility of representing this totality through the eyes of one.

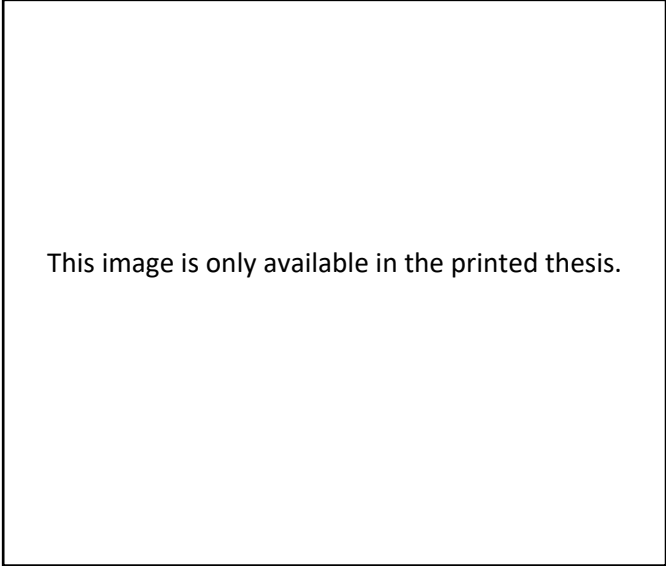


Fig. 33: *Magneto: Testament* issue 4, 14-15.

One commonality among many representations of the Holocaust is that they must somehow portray the impossibility of adequately representing the past that they represent. *Magneto: Testament's* way of dealing with the limits of representation starts with the spread on page 14 and 15 of issue four, which depicts Max and a pile of glasses. On this spread, we see Max eye in eye with a magnitude of death that exceeds all attempts at representing it. In response to it, and with a turn of the page, *Magneto: Testament* fades to black in what is a spectacularly visual display of the end of vision (see fig. 34). Against completely blacked out panels, *Magneto: Testament* reads:



MY NAME IS MAX EISENHARDT. I'VE BEEN A SONDERKOMMANDO AT AUSCHWITZ FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. I WATCHED THOUSANDS OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WALK TO THEIR DEATHS. I PULLED THEIR BODIES FROM THE GAS CHAMBERS. I DUG OUT THEIR TEETH SO THE GERMANS COULD TAKE THEIR GOLD. AND I CARRIED THEM TO THE OVENS, WHERE I LEARNED HOW TO COMBINE A CHILD'S BODY WITH AN OLD MAN'S TO MAKE THEM BURN BETTER. I SAW MY FELLOW WORKERS BURNED ALIVE UNDER AN AVALANCHE OF ROTTING CORPSES. I SAW THOUSANDS OF MURDERED PEOPLE BURNING IN GIANT OUTDOOR PITS. I HAVE SEEN AT LEAST A QUARTER MILLION DEAD HUMAN BEINGS WITH MY OWN EYES... (Issue 4, 16-17)



This image is only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 34: Magneto: Testament issue 4, 16-17.

The most visual spread of the comic is followed by a spread that denies images in favor of oral testimony. A refusal of representation that is, strangely enough, itself strikingly visual. The presence of panel borders, which immediately identify this page as belonging to a comic, accentuates the visual nature of this denial of the visual. Rather than a complete silence in the presence of the catastrophic past, *Magneto: Testament* communicates a prohibition of representation in a representation by silencing part of the medium and foregrounding Max's testimony. The fact that the images and not the texts are blotted out underlines the strangely self-effacing approach of *Magneto: Testament* to Holocaust representation. Comics, as Groensteen has shown, are a predominantly visual medium, instead of an even mixture between text and image. Rather than making use of the comics medium's affordances in order to further explore the limits of historical representation, *Magneto: Testament* defaults to a (fictional) testimony and lives up to its name, thereby repeating the often-heard notion that the horrors of the camps exceed a particular sign system's capacity for representation (Young 1990, 16). If visibility in comics can only be denied in a markedly visual manner, Groensteen's thesis concerning the primacy of the image in comics can be considered proven. The visibility of *Magneto: Testament*'s denial of visibility, however, does not detract from the fact that under the pressures exercised by the catastrophic past, *Magneto: Testament* hides its comicsness, instead of putting it to work. By revoking to testimony, and by way of its title, testament, the comic evokes a speaking of the truth by a witness that is both biblical and legal (18-21). In doing so, *Magneto: Testament* reverts to a conception of testimony in which there are no doubts as to its truthfulness, thereby "ignor[ing] the ways in which Holocaust literary testimony is also constructed and interpretive" (21).

## Conclusion

*Magneto: Testament* is a representation of the Holocaust that holds between what Arno J. Mayer, in *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1990), calls a reductionalist and a dogmatist approach to Holocaust representation (454). That is, *Magneto: Testament* presents a view of the Holocaust as a completely singular event that cannot be historicized with a representation of the Holocaust that is undeniably cliché in terms of the kinds of images and texts which are used, and in the way in which these images and texts are used.

What *Magneto: Testament* shows in relation to the *Maus* event is that not all historical comics, like *Kraut*, base their engagement with the past on the example set by Spiegelman. Like *Maus*, *Magneto: Testament* shows the capability of the medium to combine different kinds of texts and images and so incorporate a range of different modes of realism in its representation of the past. Yet unlike *Maus*, *Magneto: Testament* hides the tears in the fabric of representation by feigning transparency. Instead of allowing the reader to see through the comic into the past, however, the copresence of a large number of different ways of seeing and recounting the past also remind the reader of the medial context through which the past is brought into the present. Furthermore, the internal inconsistencies that arise due to the specific use of different modes of realism in *Magneto: Testament* further undermine the transparency of the comic. The subjective connotations of Di Giandomenico's style are mitigated by the incorporation of mechanical and historiographic-based imagery. However, when these images are combined with text, especially external narration, they always remain closest to a subjective representation of the past, rather than to a mechanical or historiographic one. That is, when images and texts are put together, notwithstanding the attempts made to objectify the imagery, images are used to portray subjective experience, while text can be used for historical discourse as well as for rendering subjective experience. This combinatory use of images

and texts thus diminishes the images' ability to harmonize with the keys of historiographic and/or mechanical realism.

In the end, the pressures exercised by the past that is represented here cause a move towards a transparent representation of the past that is achieved through a denial of elements that evoke comicsness—superhero powers, onomatopoeia, dramatic page layout, schematism, and overt visuality—and the incorporation of elements that, from the perspective of the creators of *Magneto: Testament* allow for transparency—photography, historical film, historiographic method, and testimony. In this sense, *Magneto: Testament* moves against the momentum of the *Maus* event. For many, however, *Magneto: Testament* can be a gripping first introduction to a past that still desperately needs remembering. Through Marvel's reach, *Magneto: Testament* contributes to keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive, which is a worthy enough cause in and off itself. It does so, however, by further strengthening a cliché conception of the Holocaust and how it should be represented that counteracts and limits rather than develops and frees comics ability to represent the past.

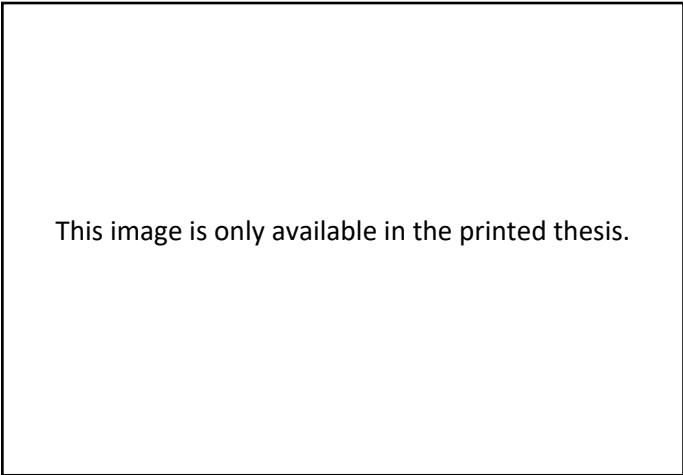
What this analysis of Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic suggests about the impact of an ever-widening media landscape on World War II memory culture, however, is somewhat encouraging. However convincing new ways of bringing the past into the present might seem, their realism is always dampened because they can increasingly only be experienced alongside other ways of representing the past; ways of representing the past, furthermore, whose purposed realism can be based in completely different representational practices. The copresence of such dissimilar ways of representing World War II, to those who notice it, combats the illusory transparency of some World War II narratives and thus thwarts attempts to present a unified narrative of World War II.

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# 5.

## Wartime Weddings: Graphic Style and Realism in Shigeru Mizuki's *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*

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Fig. 35: *Onward* 32-33.<sup>103</sup>

A curious juxtaposition of graphic styles confronts the reader on pages 32 and 33 of Shigeru Mizuki's (1922–2015) *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* (*Sōin Gyokusai Seyo!* 1973). The two largest images on the spread set the scene of a nighttime beach landing on a tropical island in the Pacific in almost photographic detail (see fig. 35). These near-photographic drawings provide a strong contrast to the drawings in the smaller panels at the bottom of the two pages, which show Imperial Japanese soldiers depicted in a cartoony style in close-up against completely black backgrounds. The reviews of the English language edition of *Onward*, which was published in 2011 by *Drawn & Quarterly*, all make note of the juxtaposition of cartoonish or simplified characters against near-photorealistic backgrounds as one of main characteristics of Mizuki's comics style.<sup>104</sup> While this observation holds true for substantial portions of the comic, looking closely, it becomes clear that the ways in which Mizuki juxtaposes different graphic styles in *Onward* is more nuanced and manifold than these reviews suggest.

Only one of panels on pages 32–33 (see fig. 35) unquestioningly fits the description of cartoony figures set against photorealistic backgrounds: the center frame on page 33 that displays soldiers taking cover in the undergrowth. Other panels show: first, isolated cartoony (or deformed) figures set against completely black backgrounds; second, near-photorealistic images of scenery interspersed by onomatopoeia; third, more photorealistically depicted soldiers exiting a landing craft and progressing towards an equally densely detailed jungle background, and last, on the bottom left panel of page 32, a mixture of a photorealistic with a more expressionistic style which utilizes bodily deformation for emphasis.<sup>105</sup>

Characterizing Mizuki's representation of the past in *Onward* as a singular juxtaposition of two graphic styles thus does not really describe what takes place on its pages. Instead, Mizuki juxtaposes a wide range of different graphic styles in *Onward*. By rendering the past in different graphic styles placed in ever-shifting spatial and

narrative relations to one another, Mizuki is able to incorporate the different visual characteristics of various modes of realism and to question the limits of these different graphic styles and the way in which they shape the past. Mizuki's ability to draw in different styles thus allows him to continually put to use the effects engendered by the graphic styles that he uses to visualize island warfare in the Pacific during World War II.

In my analysis of *Onward*, I investigate the ways in which it uses an array of different graphic styles to both enable and destabilize its representation of the past. If *Kraut* can be framed as developing *Maus*' dual testimony into a more polyphonic rendition of the past by juxtaposing different kinds of text, *Onward* might be described as doing something similar, yet with images. Mizuki takes the visual juxtaposition of the three photographs and the comic *Prisoner on Hell Planet* with the general drawing style in *Maus* and multiplies it several times on almost all *Onward*'s pages. By doing so, *Onward* pushes to an extreme the medium's affordance for combining different kinds of images in meaningful way. Because it does so, Mizuki's comic can be read as an experiment with the impact of graphic style on the remembrance of World War II. Studying *Onward* thus also entails examining in what ways the visual characteristics of a World War II representation influence the remembrance of this past. Moreover, because Mizuki places a number of different modes of representing the past in close proximity, it allows for an investigation into how various perspectives of the past arise through different combinations of ways of picturing it.

In this respect, the fact that *Onward* was published in its original language almost ten years before the first issue of *Maus* is staggering. It took *Maus*' success, as well as the rising popularity of the graphic novel and manga, for a translation of Mizuki's work to become viable. The impact of the *Maus* effect on the translation of Mizuki's work is especially visible in the curious fact that *Onward* was the first of Mizuki's comics to be translated, even though in

his own language, he is much more famous for his Japanese ghost stories series called *GeGeGe No Kitarō* (1960–1969).<sup>106</sup> In the wake of the *Maus* event, there was more demand for book-length non-fiction works than was the case for a comics series containing supernatural children's stories.

My approach to *Onward* unpacks its juxtapositions of different graphic styles as, first, made up out of graphic oppositions and, near its climax, as partially collapsing the aesthetic oppositions on which the initial juxtapositions function. To do so, this chapter is divided in three main sections. In the first section I further introduce *Onward* and embed it in the context of Shigeru Mizuki's other war manga. The second section of the chapter details my theoretical approach to Mizuki's juxtapositions of different graphic styles. There, I demonstrate how the contrasts between graphic styles, and the modes of realism they imply, are mutually constituent. In the remaining sections, I apply my reading of graphic styles to the main thematic juxtapositions of *Onward* in three separate sections: "War in Paradise," "A Storm of Steel," and "A Return to the Background."



## Shigeru Mizuki's World War II Comics

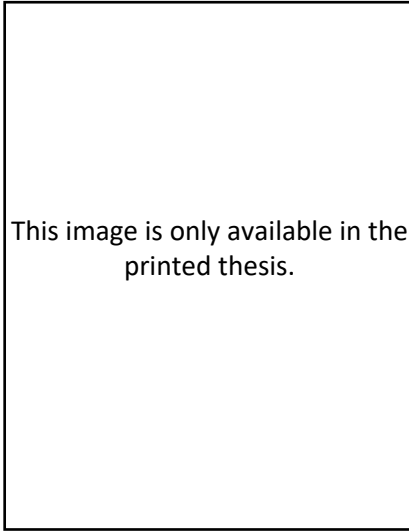


Fig. 36: Shigeru Mizuki portrays himself as a starving artist. Taken from *Showa: A History of Japan 1953-1989*, 586.

Shigeru Mizuki is one of Japanese comics' biggest superstars. His celebrity status, which is second only to the "God of manga" Osamu Tezuka, is founded particularly on his immensely successful comics treatments of *yōkai* (Japanese supernatural beings) stories (Schodt 31). Mizuki received numerous prestigious awards for his work, such as the *Kodansha Manga Award* in 1989 and the *Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize* in 2003. Mizuki's debut as a comics artist came with the *Superman* knock-off *Rocketman*, which shows that Mizuki took inspiration from American comics as well as Japanese folklore and history.<sup>107</sup> The influence of American and European comics as well as other art forms on Mizuki's work betrays the intercultural connectedness of the Japanese comics culture. Instead of seeing Japanese comics as an insular culture, these comics should be considered part of a more international comics culture by which they are influenced, and for

which they are influential (Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 1). Because my burgeoning familiarity of the Japanese language does not qualify me to analyze Mizuki's works in their original language context, I approach *Onward* as a translated work existing and acting in its Anglophone context.

Alongside the commercial success that Mizuki achieved with *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, the manga artist also frequently published in the avant-garde manga magazine *Garō*.<sup>108</sup> Mizuki's proximity to *Garō* and the *gekiga* comics tradition that preceded it explain, to a certain extent, the expressive qualities of his graphic style as well as his combinations of "simplified characters within meticulously realistic decors" (Gravett 2004, 49). However, the way in which Mizuki is able to play with the differences between the graphic styles in the context of a World War II comic is what sets his work apart from others.

Besides his work for *Garō* and his popular children's comics, Mizuki also drew numerous comics that included, in one way or another, depictions of World War II that were at least partly based on his own experiences as a soldier. In 1964, Mizuki was one of the first Japanese comics artist to draw the Pacific War from an infantryman's perspective in *The White Flag* (*Shiroi Hata*). Where earlier Japanese comics tended to focus on aerial warfare—which removed the reader from the atrocities of the battlefield and focused on an (initially) successful aspect of Japanese warfare (Nakar 2003, 58)—Mizuki's early war stories detailed the stupidity and brutality of the "no surrender" policy (Nakar 2008, 182), a theme to which he would return in *Onward*. In 1970, Mizuki drew his own experiences during the war in a short story *The Flight* (*Hasōiki* 1970), created as part of an autobiographical comics project including the likes of Osamu Tezuka and Jōji Akiyama. In 1971, relatively shortly before publishing *Onward* in 1973, Mizuki authored a graphic biography focused on the life of Hitler (*Hitora*). Between 1988 and 1989, furthermore, Mizuki drew a 2057-page long history of the

*Showa* era in Japanese history (1926–1989) and a shorter educational comic called *War and Japan* (*Sensō to Nihon* 1991). At the beginning of the new millennium, Mizuki once again turned to his obsession with the past in a 1332-page autobiographical series, *Life of Mizuki* (*Boku no Isshō wa GeGeGe no Rakuen da: Manga Mizuki Shigeru Jijoden* 2001–2005).<sup>109</sup> which includes large part of *The Flight*, memories he first drew approximately thirty years earlier.<sup>110</sup>

Almost all Mizuki's historical comics incorporate, in one way or another, Mizuki's own experiences of war in the Pacific. While *Onward* can be called a fictionalized autobiography, *Showa* is a more general history of Japan interspersed with autobiographical reflections. *Life of Mizuki*, finally, focuses, as autobiographies tend to do, on Mizuki's life yet also does not eschew more historiographic or fantastic detours. Mizuki also does not shy away from the blending of more fictional elements within his historical works—the narrator of the history of Japan in *Showa* is a completely unreliable *yōkai* called Rat-man—he also insists on the realism of his depictions on numerous occasions:

THE PAST IS IMMUTABLE. IT'S EASY TO SPECULATE ON WHAT MIGHT HAVE GONE DIFFERENTLY, WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN. BUT THAT WON'T CHANGE A SINGLE SECOND OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED. THAT'S HISTORY. AND SHOWA IS HISTORY NOW... IT'S NECESSARY TO LEARN FROM THE PAST, TO NOT REPEAT THE SAME MISTAKES. AND TO NEVER FORGET IT WAS REAL! THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED TO US! I CAN NEVER FORGET THE WAR. THE FACES OF THE DYING... NEVER FORGET WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MILITARY RULES A COUNTRY. SHOWA... NEVER FORGET THE PRICE THAT WAS PAID FOR THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN NOW. NEVER FORGET THE LESSONS OF HISTORY. IT'S UP TO YOU. DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN!!! (Mizuki 2015, 529–531)

The way in which certain scenes return to haunt Mizuki's numerous World War II comics and his insistence on the reality of what is represented can be read as a particularly apt illustration of the catastrophic past and the pressures such a past exercises on representation. Mizuki is stuck between the impossibility of representing the catastrophic past and a desire or drive to continue to remember. As such, while Mizuki attempts to come to terms with the past in his comics, his renderings of the past never succeed in completely putting it to rest. And even when at times complete pages are copied from one rendering of the past to another, the form in which Mizuki pours his memories changes from fiction to history to autobiography, which in turn causes the implied meaning of Mizuki's different graphic styles to shift.

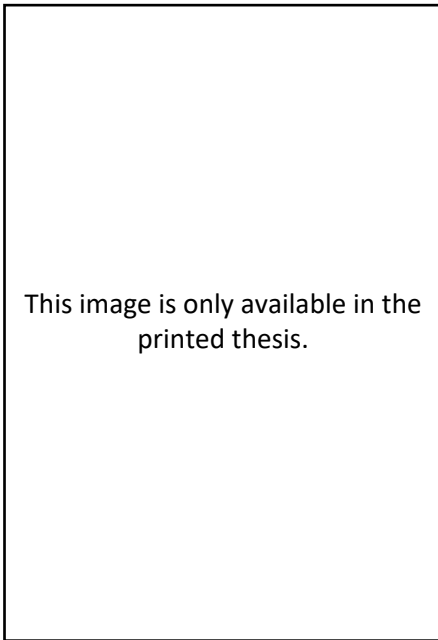


Fig. 37: *Vie de Mizuki* 2, 246. Compare to fig. 35.

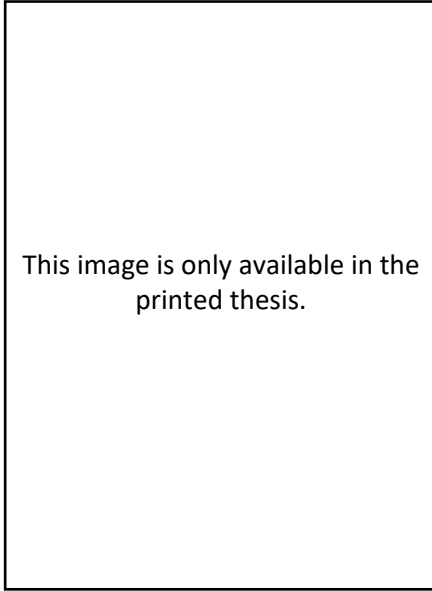
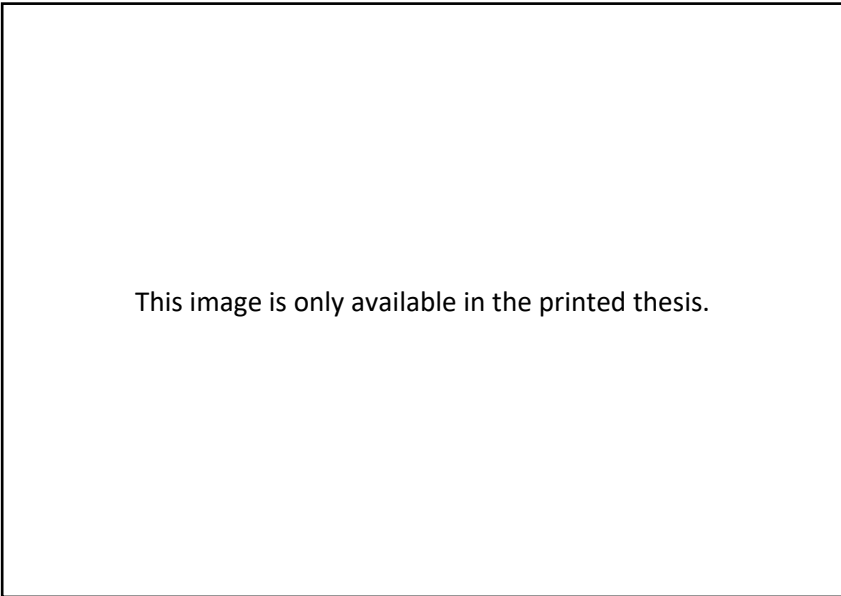


Fig. 38: *Showa* 1944-1953, 265. Compare to fig. 39.

Despite these differences, it is possible to find, by reading Mizuki's renditions of the past alongside one another, a recurring narration of his experiences. Mizuki was conscripted into the Imperial Army in 1942 and was stationed in the township of Rabaul on New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Both in *Life of Mizuki* and *Showa*, Mizuki details the senseless beatings he and his comrades received from their superiors (Mizuki 2014, 235-239). In *Life of Mizuki*, for example, Mizuki describes how he survived the almost complete annihilation of his patrol squad by escaping from Australian troops and natives through the sea and jungle. When he arrives at a Japanese camp, all he receives for his troubles is a beating for having lost the rifle bestowed on him by the Emperor (Mizuki 2013a, 93). Besides the frequent beatings, recurring topics are an almost complete lack of supplies and useless deaths resulting from accidents and sickness.

Mizuki's active service ended when he contracted Malaria and was so saved from taking part in a suicide mission to which he was assigned. But while the Malaria saved his life, it cost him his arm when the field hospital in which he was recovering was hit by an aerial bombardment (see fig. 38 & 39). The combination of Malaria and his wound brought Mizuki close to death. With the help of members of the Tolai tribe, which Mizuki visited and befriended while recovering from his wound, and who supplied him with fresh food when his illness took a turn for the worst, Mizuki survived (see fig. 40).<sup>111</sup>



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Fig. 39: *Vie de Mizuki* 2, 266-267.

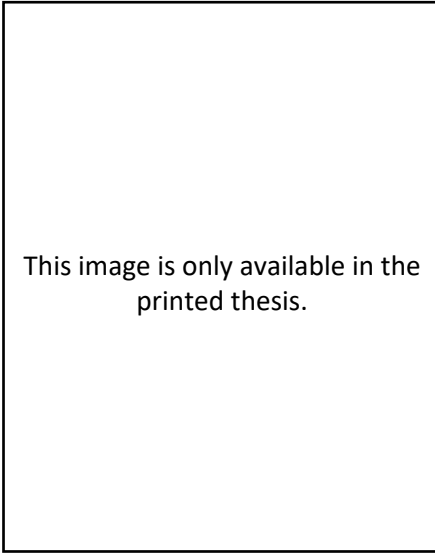


Fig. 40: *Vie de Mizuki* 3, 163.

*Onward* too revolves around the story of an army unit stationed in Rabaul during the Pacific War. Mizuki himself stated—in an interview published in the back of the English translation of the work—that the story is 90% fact (Mizuki 2011, 368). A reading of *Showa* and *Life of Mizuki* confirms that a substantial number of the episodes in *Onward* are based on Mizuki's personal experiences. Moreover, the main character of *Onward*, private second-class Maruyama, closely resembles Mizuki's autographic renditions of himself in more openly autobiographical works. There are, however, also moments when Mizuki fictionalizes his experiences in an attempt to do justice not just to those who survived but also to those who were less fortunate.

*Onward* begins with several distinct episodes detailing the miserable lives of the soldiers on the pacific island. Normally, one might infer that such an episodic structure might be caused by the

pressures of Japanese comics publishing, where parts of the often long-running series are published each month, or even each week, in magazines. However, *Onward* has a somewhat peculiar publication history. A short version of it was published as a special one-shot magazine from Kodansha imprint *Shukan Gendai*, a general interest weekly magazine. This one-shot magazine was called *Gekiga Original Stories* and was published on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1973. The complete version that was used for the *Drawn & Quarterly* translation was published seven days later in *tankōbon* format. Because *Onward* was not published serially like most Japanese comics, the episodic nature of the first part of *Onward* probably has its origins somewhere else than in publication format. Whatever may be the case, the episodic way in which the story unfolds make the war feel like an endless series of miserable occurrences that lead to unnecessary suffering and death. On a very pale bright side, there is the usual camaraderie, song, and laughter that mutual suffering engenders. But almost none of the episodes end happily, and as such, *Onward* paints an overwhelmingly bleak picture of the war experience of the Japanese infantryman.

The absurdity of the war is also addressed in the most significant story arc of the book, which details the forming of a special attack unit for a suicide charge against a force that outnumbers and outguns it. The charge not only fails, it also makes a longer, more tactically advantageous guerrilla war from the mountains impossible. As was already mentioned, Mizuki was exempted from such a suicide charge because of illness and injury. *Onward*, however, follows the troop to the bitter end, which extends beyond the initial suicide charge. After the first suicide charge, the few survivors make their way—in several different groups—to Cape St. George, where another part of the army remains stationed. When they manage to catch up, they find out that they were already reported to have died the honorable death, and instead of embarrassing country, army, and family by pettily clinging to life, they are forced to undertake another—final—charge.



While the mixing of fact and fiction is a recurrent, or even necessary, feature of most autobiographical representation of the past, in the case of *Onward*, the blending of personal experience with fiction and history causes a peculiar insecurity that plays out in the graphic styles of the comic. First, for Mizuki, there can be no complete refuge in some ultimate inner experience of the war. *Onward*, while based on Mizuki's experiences, is, in the end, broader than personal experience: the death that Mizuki aims to represent lies outside his own experience. In his comic, Mizuki is forced to recount a narrative that is necessarily foreign to his experience through the perspective of the author character. The ethical demands of the representation of victimhood here opens up a space where subjective, based on one's own experiences, historiographic, based on historiographic method, and mechanical accounts are necessarily insufficient. Instead of choosing between these modes, *Onward* continually juxtaposes seemingly oppositional modes of visually representing the past and through these oppositions both establishes and continually questions its representation of the past.

### **Wartime Weddings**

In an article for *Documentary News Letter* (1946), documentary film director John Shearman coined the term "wartime wedding" in order to better understand the strange convergence of two oppositional modes of representing World War II: the narrative studio film and documentary:

Documentary directors found that they needed the technical resources of the studio in order to make their films big enough to match the giant size of their subject—war. Feature film makers found themselves wanting to leave behind the fantasy-life of the popular film and turn to a life which was a good deal closer to reality: a fusion of techniques was inevitable. (Shearman 52)

Under the economical and moral pressures of wartime, Shearman argues, two seemingly distant modes of representing war were forced to engage with one another. While the history and practice of filmmaking has more discontinuities with that of comics than continuities, the idea that the pressures exerted by a subject matter can cause a strange coming together of otherwise remote modes of representation is equally applicable to many post-*Maus* comics as it is to the World War II films of John Shearman's time. Accordingly, my approach to *Onward* considers this comics' graphic style as its own kind of wartime wedding between two visual styles of representing the past: photorealism and schematism. Photorealism is here primarily connected to the mechanical and historiographic modes of realism, while schematism is much more closely connected to the subjective mode of realism, and as such to human experience, testimony, and eyewitness account.

When historical, social, and technological changes are factored into the ways in which different sets of conventions are perceived as more or less realistic representations of the past, it becomes clear that any clear-cut opposition between the schematic and the photorealistic is in itself an illusion. Because access to any kind truly objective mode of representing the world is impossible, there is no absolute argument on which either a more objective or a more subjective mode of representing the past can be grounded. Instead, as I foregrounded in chapter one, different modes of representation ground themselves on one another, and aim to be perceived realistically as well as investigate the possibility of realism in connection to or contrast with other modes.

In the case of pictorial representation in *Onward*, the relation between schematism and photorealism should be conceived of as a mutually constituent contrast. The different graphic styles in Mizuki's comic draw their strength from the ways in which they demystify one another.<sup>112</sup> The images in this comic are, following W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of metapictures (Mitchell 1994, 38), self-referential pictures

that comment on the (im)possibility of representation. While the foremost comics theorist Thierry Groensteen argues that the mixture of imaginary and documented drawings in comics is most often geared towards a reinforcing of the credibility of the fiction (Groensteen 2007, 42-3), in this case, the juxtaposition of different graphic styles also functions differently. Instead of only validating subjective drawing by wedding them to mechanically created historical documents, the combinations of different styles in *Onward* generate several different effects. As such, it is possible to see in *Onward*, on a smaller scale, a repetition of the movements that constitute a wider range of the representation of the past in images. Comics can thus be approached as being deeply involved with realism not only because they constitute one further step in a history of demystification, but because they represent a larger portion of the war of positions that is realism.

In my subsequent close reading of the visual styles of *Onward*, I demonstrate that the juxtaposition of different graphic styles, at its most basic, reiterates the opposition between the subjective narrative and a historiographic or inhuman background against which the narrative develops. Furthermore, I propose that this first basic graphic opposition is reiterated in three main thematic juxtapositions in *Onward*: nature and human, war and human, and life and death. The connotations of the more photorealist and the more schematic style shift throughout the expression of these different thematic oppositions. By investigating the ways in which the meanings of the different graphic styles in *Onward* change, I demonstrate how *Onward* can be read as a continual questioning of the abilities of different kinds of images for historical representation.

### **Narrative and Background**

I started this chapter with an analysis of the different graphic styles on two pages of *Onward* because I wanted to draw attention to Mizuki's ability to draw in a range of different graphic styles. Mizuki shows

his talent for comics through a versatility that is almost unmatched in global comics culture. The use of graphic styles in *Onward* reflects the productive messiness that underlies the seemingly neat continuum that connects schematism to photorealism. Over the course of this chapter, I will unpack the ways in which Mizuki deconstructs the antinomic relation between schematism and photorealism. To do so, however, I must first show the juxtaposition of these two graphic styles that is most frequent: schematic characters set against more photorealistic backgrounds.

One of the many examples of such a juxtaposition can be found on page 258 (see fig. 41). Here, a group of five soldiers can be seen wandering somewhere in the southern tip of what is now Latangai Island. There is a noticeable difference between the graphic style in which the characters that transverse the scenery is drawn and the one that is used to portray the scenery. Often, style is defined in relation to larger categories such as a work or even the oeuvre of an author; in such a case, style would function more as the trace of the making of the comic by its author (Mikkonen 101) and its function in a comic in this sense might even approach that of handwriting. In the final instance, therefore, it must be conceded that whatever different graphic styles a work might consist of can be collected into a singular graphic style that is associated with the work as a whole, or, on the level of the oeuvre, with an author. Mizuki's heavily cartoonish or deformed depiction of human faces, including his own or that of historical figures (see fig. 42), for example, can be considered a characteristic of his style that is consistent throughout his oeuvre. Moreover, even the combination of schematic characters against more photorealistic backgrounds can, as can be glanced from the reviews of *Onward*, be approached as Mizuki's style. Yet subsuming these clearly different modes of depicting the past under the heading of the author's style obstructs the understanding of *Onward's* kind of historical representation that I pursue here.

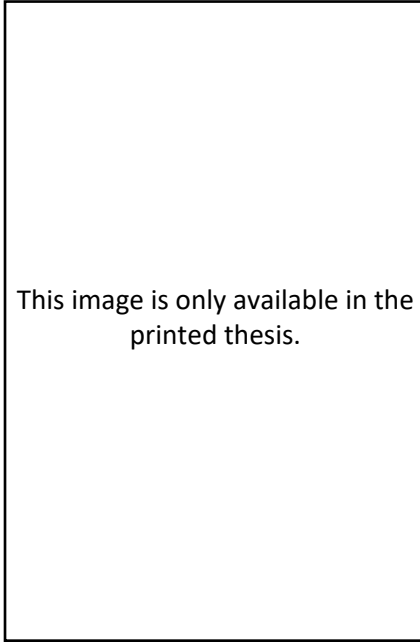


Fig. 41: *Onward* 258.

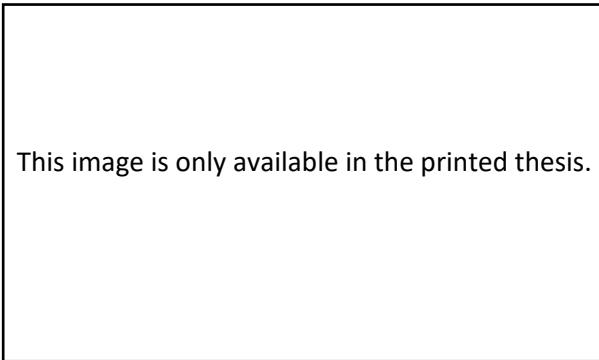


Fig. 42: Detail from *Hitler*, 123.

In order to better articulate the ways in which different graphic styles are combined here, I make use of Pascal Lefèvre's *No Content Without Form: Graphic Style as the Primary Entrance to a Story* (2016). Following Lefèvre, as in the previous chapter, different graphic styles can be distinguished on the basis of seven markers of style: (1) detail, (2) deformation, (3) line, (4) distribution, (5) depth, and (6) light.<sup>113</sup> For each of these markers, there exists the possibility to demonstrate that a certain use of it—within the context of *Onward*—gestures more towards either the schematic or the photorealistic. And even though at times these markers of style overlap somewhat, it is worthwhile to discuss them here separately with respect to page 258 of *Onward* in order to fully grasp how differences in graphic style can be constituted in comics (see fig. 41). (1) Detail: The level of detail in the depiction of the mountains and the foliage is very high compared to that of the figures. Moreover, where the landscape becomes more detailed towards the background, the characters become less detailed the further they are in the background. Different perspectival rules thus govern the graphic styles that are combined in this image. (2) Deformation: In the landscape there is little to no deformation. The figures, conversely, are quite heavily deformed and seem to become more so to the point where they are hardly recognizable towards the background. (3) Line: The difference in line is somewhat slighter between the two graphic styles on page 258 of *Onward*. Still, one might argue that the line density, or even the existence of a clear outline, in the case of the figures, constitutes a move away from photorealism and towards schematism, while less dependence on, or an absence of, outline characterizes the depiction of the landscape. (4) Distribution: Distribution is defined as “[t]he amount and type of traces and the way they are distributed” (Lefèvre 75). The difference between the two styles in this respect is that the distribution of traces is much lower in case of the figures. (5) Depth: There is—outside a difference in the distribution of detail—no significant difference between the perspectival system used for the depiction of the images

and that of the landscape. Both operate according to the cyclopean (or photographic) perspectival convention.<sup>114</sup> (6) Light: Whereas in landscape, shadow is articulated by way of hatching and crosshatching, no such shadow effects are used in the depiction of figures.

Based on Lefèvre's markers of style, there are at least two graphic styles on this page of *Onward*. One might even be able to argue that further differentiation between styles is possible between the figures nearest to the reader and those that trail behind. However, even if this is the case, and I will certainly show more instances of the blending of styles later, on page 256 (see fig. 41) the difference between the graphic styles is divided along the lines of showing and telling, where a more photorealistic background sets a convincing mechanically realist scenery against which characters and narrative are set.

A whole history of comics representation might be sketched based on this simple distinction of two graphic styles in a single panel. Such a history would take much from Joseph Witek's argument in *Comics Modes: Caricature and Illustration in the Crumb Family's Dirty Laundry* (2012) concerning the co-presence in contemporary comics of different graphic modes or traditions: caricature and illustration. In the remainder of this chapter, I will—besides shifting Witek's terminology—demonstrate how in *Onward* these two traditions form a mutually constituent contrast that authenticates Mizuki's portrayal of the past while at the same time implying two different kinds of demystifications of realism.

The first demystification implied by *Onward's* more schematic graphic style is most commonly associated with comics, and usually discussed under the heading of caricature. As I already mentioned in chapter one, Thierry Smolderen, basing himself on the work and terminology of Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and *The Preference for the Primitive* (2002), demonstrates that the work of Rodolphe Töpffer, who is widely regarded as the first comics creator, should be read as a romantic departure from the French academic tradition,

which around the time when Töpffer's started working in 1831 was seen as the most realistic form of graphic representation.<sup>115</sup> Contrary to mathematically supported perspective and the anatomically correct depiction of figures, Töpffer argued that his form of drawing did not stifle the artist with rules and prescriptions but allows for "the principle of life that should animate all parts of art" (qtd. in Smolderen 28). Arguments strikingly similar to Töpffer's initial gesture are still a significant part of comics scholarship today; where the comics form and graphic style are said to enable a representation that is more realistic than representations with a higher degree of photorealism because of the strengths of schematic drawing.<sup>116</sup> This is the first demystification implicit in Mizuki's drawing.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the schematic is not the only style of comics drawing. Working in a tradition of which the Canadian-American comics artist Hal Foster is certainly one of the most famous proponents, many comics creators have rendered the past in a much more photorealistic style. The more a graphic style in comics moves towards photorealism, however—and here I come to the second demystification implied in the graphic styles of *Onward*—the more it can be read as functioning as a deconstruction of realistic representation as well. The simple fact that a photograph is incorporated within the drawn and designed context of a comic book already infuses it with a subjectivity that undermines its perceived objectivity. What counts for photographs incorporated with minimal interference, counts doubly for redrawn photographs, and maybe even more for a drawing style that veers towards the photographic. Smolderen, in *The Origins of Comics*, most clearly demonstrates the roots of the critique of photorealism implied by more photorealist graphic styles in comics in his discussion of the experimentations with photography of comics illustrators such as A.B. Frost:



In a world where the photographic image was slowly becoming the reference by which all graphic representation was instinctively measured, this new visual repertoire also suggested new comic possibilities that were somewhat at odds, stylistically, with mainstream comic tradition. (Smolderen 121)

The subjective doubling that occurs when comics artists imitate the photographic image causes what Barthes calls the invisibility of the photograph to dissipate (Barthes 2000, 6-7). A drawn photographic image calls attention to the medium itself, and the social conventions that dictate its use, instead of transparently depicting the image captured by it, and so challenges the mechanical objectivity of the photograph. If it is true—as Ole Frahm has argued in *Die Sprache des Comics* (2010)—that comics are inherently parodic critiques on the referentiality of the sign through their form and media history (Frahm 2010, 11-12), one could also argue that the graphic style of comics—in its present cultural context—is inherently ironic. The ironically critical layer caused by the subjectivity of drawing and the cultural position and history of the medium is what interferes with Mizuki's retracing of photographic images. Instead of succeeding in establishing an objective and unproblematic representation of the outside world, at least in part, the opposite takes place: the impossibility of vulgar realism is here proved by the overuse of the very mode that is thought to evoke it.

Following Nancy Pedri, I hold that the difference between the photographic and the comics image is not a simple contrast (2015, 8). What is needed is an analysis that pays attention to the differences and similarities in degree between different graphic styles. But while both graphic styles demystify vulgar realism, it is important to recognize that both the subjective mode of realism evoked by the more schematic style and the mechanical mode of realism generated by the more photorealistic style are not completely swallowed up

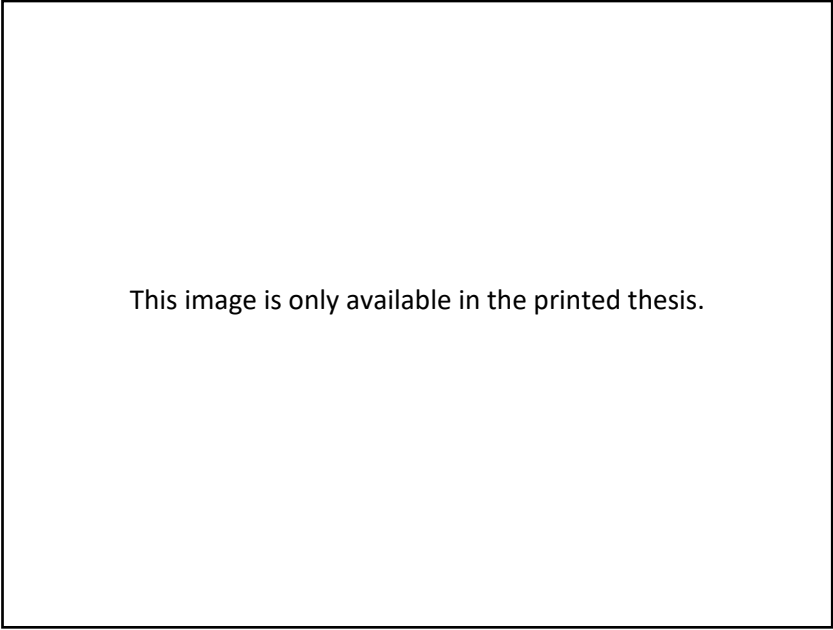
by irony or parody. These graphic styles can be read as critiques, but they also draw strength precisely from the connotations of the styles that they critique; connotations that are themselves based on the refutations of other modes of representation: schematic images seem more subjectively real through a juxtaposition with the cold, inhuman photographic images, and, vice versa, the mechanical objectivity of the photograph becomes more powerful when it is contrasted by drawn images that flaunt their subjectivity. In this way, the relation between the two graphic styles in *Onward* is a mutually constituent contrast that works to authenticate its portrayal of the past as realistic and doubly challenges any kind of claim to an absolute realism through representation.

These connotations of comic book graphic styles follow the figures traversing the jungle on the pages of *Onward*. In case of the more photorealistic graphic style, the doubling of the photographic image in a comic book generates an ironic layer, which, in turn, causes a critique of the mechanical mode of realism. At the same time, the more photorealist style also implies a refutation of the subjective mode of realism. Through visual association, the heavily detailed landscape succeeds in both fictionalizing and authenticating the cartoony figures that venture through it. In the case of the more schematic graphic style, the strengths of schematism regarding the articulation of expressive, or experiential reality are connoted. This use of a more subjective mode of realism, in turn, implies the inadequacy of either a mechanical or a historiographic approach to the representation of the past.

A different reading of page 258 might instead stress the erasure of the schematic figures. Rather than fictionalizing and authenticating the characters, the overpowering qualities of the landscape would swallow them whole. But, as I develop further in the following section, the blending of graphic styles only heightens the contrast between the landscapes and the figures that inhabit it. While the eternal indifference of nature is here juxtaposed with the,

in contrast, insignificant endeavors of the soldiers, I will show how in other parts of *Onward*, the paradise-like environment plays a different role in relation to the characters which are forced to inhabit it.

This first example was at least partly chosen because of its relative simplicity in both juxtaposition of styles and page composition. More commonly, of course, comics pages contain more than one frame. The structure of panels out of which comics pages consist enable a myriad of different ways in which different graphic styles can be combined on spreads. The spread on page 254–255, for example, shows a similar combination of a near-photorealistic background with more schematic figures as could be seen on page 258 (see fig. 43). Here, however, the figures and background are not combined in one frame but in a juxtaposition of frames. The temporal relations between the two large frames on the bottom of the spread and the four small frames are unsettled. Still, the difference in depth between the two graphic styles—one conforming to the conventions of perspective while the other is all surface—blend the images on the page to a similar effect as in the preceding example through quite different means. This page illustrates one other way in which comics page composition enables creators to establish manifold connections between different graphic styles.



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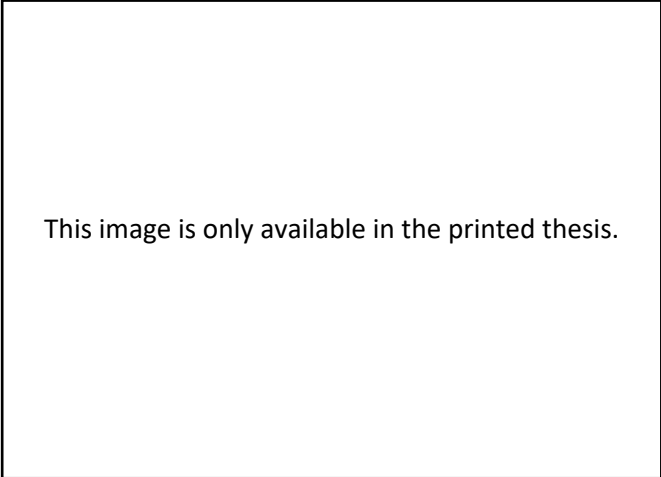
Fig. 43: *Onward* 254–255.

The shift in graphic styles that takes place on these two pages, moreover, is doubled by a shift in the type of text that are used. The more schematic images are coupled with dialogue and the more photorealistic image is text from an omniscient narrator. While I will not delve much further into the coupling and decoupling of images and texts in my analysis of *Onward*, I have done so already in the previous chapter, it remains valuable to note this parallelism between the use of certain kinds of texts and images in the depiction of the past: while schematism implies the subjective moment-to-moment experience of a series of actions taking place, photorealism suggests a more fixed outside position from which it is possible to retell a story that has already taken place and cannot be changed anymore.<sup>117</sup> The different temporalities of the creation process of photography and drawing also come into play here. Drawing, by analogue of its very

creation process, evokes the passage of time, where the photograph shows the eternity of the frozen present (Postema 2015, 85). At their most distant from one another, the juxtaposition between these graphic styles coincides with that of the temporal forwards and backwards movements associated with narration and the inescapability of the eternal present that is caused by a distancing from the human.

On other pages of *Onward*, however, a clear-cut division between near photorealism and schematism is more difficult to discern. This does not mean that in these frames the critique implied by the graphic styles is diminished. Instead, the tension generated by the way in which they are combined produce different, but no less potent, results. One such graphic gesture can be found on page 98 (see fig. 44). While the frame on the bottom right of the page shows the conventional schematic figures against a more photorealistic background, the frame above shows a group of soldiers sitting in what appears to be a clearing in the jungle. The seven figures nearer to the front of the image are rendered in a level of detail that is common to the depiction of figures in *Onward*. Yet the clothing of the figures further behind is, strangely enough, drawn in more detail.

The abrupt shift in graphic style constitutes a strange near-horizontal line in the frame. Instead of following conventional rules of western perspective, where figures become less detailed the further they are in the background, here, they are more detailed. The inversed perspective causes the image to question its own conventions, in a way akin to W.J.T. Mitchell's metapictures, which are "pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is" (Mitchell 1994, 35). But besides unearthing a discourse on the nature of the image itself, the questions and divisions generated by the combinations of graphic styles in *Onward* also co-construct narrative depth for the main themes of the work. *Onward*'s representation of the past thus intersects with the very form of comics and how it affords the usage of different combinations of graphic styles.



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Fig. 44: Detail from *Onward* 98.

In case of this detail from page 98 of *Onward*, the inversion of perspectival conventions which combines two different graphic styles accomplishes two things: first, it can be read as a critique of conventional perspective as a mode for establishing realistic representation. Second, this counterintuitive graphic gesture gives the impression that these figures are simultaneously completely set apart from their environment, and indistinguishable from it. Because this particular group of soldiers are scouts, their blending with the landscape would not be problematic in a more straightforward image. But as can be read, they are here pictured precisely because they are not doing their job, rather than excelling at it. As such, both their ability as scouts and their historical predicament are questioned through the graphic procedure by which they are represented; are these soldiers as much background to this narrative as the jungle? Through a blending of form and content by way of a blending of different graphic styles, *Onward* here gestures towards a rich and often used trope in the representation of the Pacific War, and later, the Vietnam War: the horrors of jungle warfare.

### War in Paradise

The Pacific War has been characterized as an extraordinarily violent conflict. The degradation of the enemy through various means of propaganda—including comics (see fig. 45)—caused a Manichaean moral on both sides of the conflict (Dower 19786, ix). But it was not only the racial tension and the senseless bloodshed caused in no small part by this racial tension that made the Pacific War a devastating conflict. The theater of war also held in store its own set of horrors for the men fighting in it. *Onward*, like most subsequent representations of the Pacific War in film and television miniseries such as *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *The Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006), and, *The Pacific* (2010), takes place on the relatively small islands over which the US Army leapfrogged towards the Japanese mainland. Besides the heavy fighting that was concentrated on the islands, defenders and attackers alike were plagued by torrential rains, draught, disease, supply problems, and all manners of accidents.

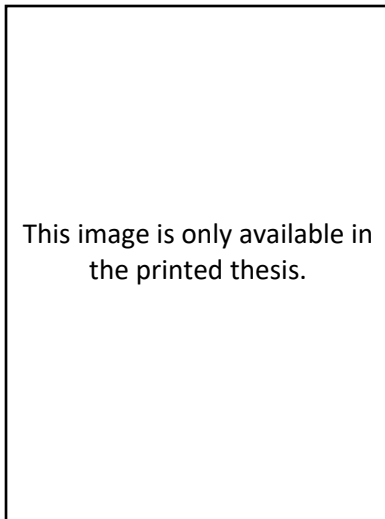
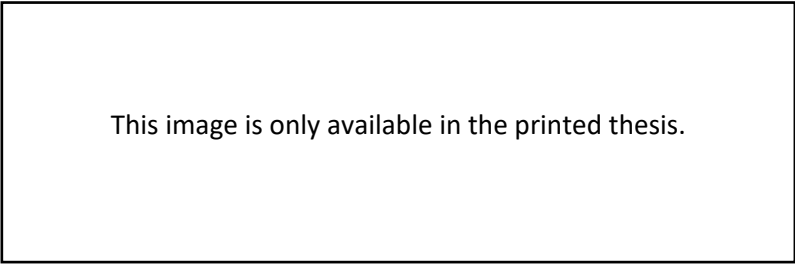


Fig. 45: Cover of *Speed Comics 19* featuring Captain Freedom and an archetypical superhero comics depiction of a Japanese soldier. Published June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942.

Like many of the Hollywood film renditions, *Onward* continually highlights that the islands on which the Pacific War was fought are both paradise and hell.<sup>118</sup> The stark contrast generated by the juxtaposition of the sublime beauty of nature and the abject horror of warfare raises questions concerning the relation between nature and humanity, and war as either profoundly natural or unnatural. It is telling, in this respect, that the original publication of *Onward* in 1973 closely follows the conclusion of the exceptionally heavily televised Vietnam war (Mandelbaum 157). The increased visibility of warfare in general and jungle warfare in particular cannot have failed to have had its influence on Mizuki's rendition of his own wartime memories.

Throughout the comic, most images show a clear division between the natural world and the human along the lines of a near-photorealistic versus a more schematic style. This composition of graphic styles echoes the basic juxtaposition at the heart of mimesis: between an original, natural world in its paradisiacal splendor and the subjective and secondary world of the human. But how can such a notion of an original Garden of Eden-like nature be anything but the product of culture (Jay 1997, 45)? Through a juxtaposition of graphic styles, Mizuki communicates that war is both the most natural state of these island and their complete antithesis.



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Fig. 46: Detail of *Onward* 67.



The top two panels of page 67 show the basic juxtaposition between photorealistic nature and schematic characters (see fig. 46). The panel on the right shows a dialogue scene between the main character Maruyama and another soldier. The style of these characters is abstracted while the background against which they are depicted is less so. The adjacent panel shows a croaking parrot that seems to be retraced from a photograph. The dissonance created by the proximity of these two kinds of images results in a distancing between the human and the natural world in these panels. A contrast is set up where the more schematic style is connected to the characters around which the narrative revolves, while the more photographic style is connected to the natural world which surrounds them. It is telling that the natural world appears most realistically when rendered through mechanically realist conventions. In contrast with the natural world, which is rendered in mechanical realism, the human figures that inhabit it are positively teeming with subjectivity. At the same time, the distance in graphic styles between humans and their surroundings renders the natural world cold and distant. A cold and distant world that is, strangely enough, teeming with life, albeit non-human. However, as was visible in the depiction of the group of scouts, at times the human figures, through a more or less gradual shift in graphic style, are also drawn as part of the natural world. By visually altering the relation between the natural world and the characters of the narrative, *Onward* questions the boundaries between the natural and the human in relation to war.

In extension to this double relation to nature, nature itself is also both a comfortable home for the soldiers as well as extremely inhospitable. As the troops move into the picturesque islands they see from their boats, they are soon confronted with the dangers of the jungle. These dangers are already suggested through the heavier darkness of the more photorealistic images. Because of the difference in detail, the schematic images often are lighter than the depictions of natural environments. The darkness of the natural

environments adds a layer of treat to the depiction of the landscapes that is reflected in the descriptions of accidents, sickness, rough weather, and animal attacks.

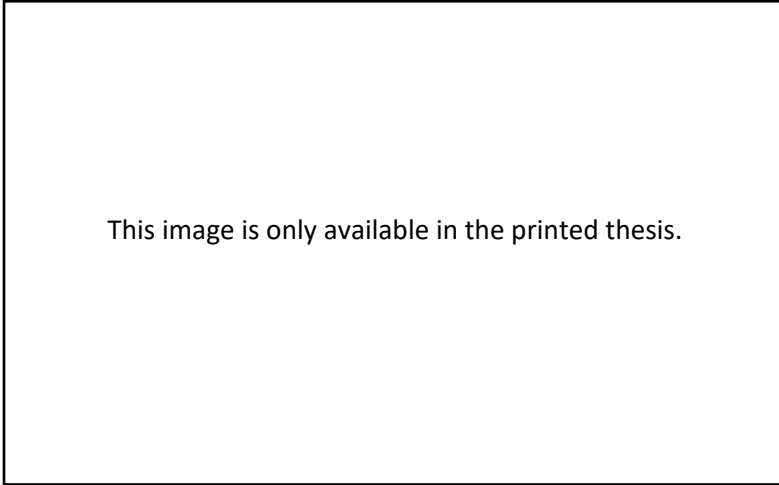


Fig. 47: *Onward* 76-77.

But even if the environment is often deadly, there is still the unshakable sense that the war that was brought to these islands is a sacrilegious disturbance of paradise. The right page of the spread on page 76-77, for example, is composed of three frames that are all drawn in a more photorealistic style (see fig. 47). These frames depict the beauty of nature through Maruyama's enrapture in it. Two of these frames accurately depict local birds—a Wilson's bird-of-paradise and a Yellow-billed Kingfisher—while the central frame shows a wider landscape over which Maruyama muses: "IF IT WASN'T FOR THE WAR, IT'D BE PRETTY PEACEFUL HERE." (76). Through graphic onomatopoeia, the birds add a peaceful soundtrack to the images. On the following page, this atmosphere of quiet is broken by the

appearance of a Martin B-26 Marauder. The plane is rendered as realistically as the birds as it crosses the area where Maruyama is on lookout. Through the proximity of birds and the plane both spatially on the page and in terms of graphic style, a machine is drawn into the natural world and, as such, the natural world becomes infused with war. Mizuki here violently transitions the implied connotations of the mechanical mode of realism. Besides calm and background, the more photorealistic style is also used to represent the engines of war. In relation to the juxtaposition of narrative and background, this shift raises the question if the war is an unchanging backdrop against which the characters of this story attempt to survive; in relation to nature, it questions if war is natural. What starts to become visible here, is the entangling of form and content that is so striking in *Onward's* visual rendition of the past. When the associated meanings with the graphic styles shift, as they do often in the comic, the meanings generated by the juxtaposition of styles shifts as well, without ever completely shedding their initial connotations. The different thematic and formal juxtapositions bleed over into one another to create complex, multi-layered images. Where before the more photorealistic style stood for the natural world and the background of the narrative, it here shifts to also include the machines of war and the violent spectacle they cause.

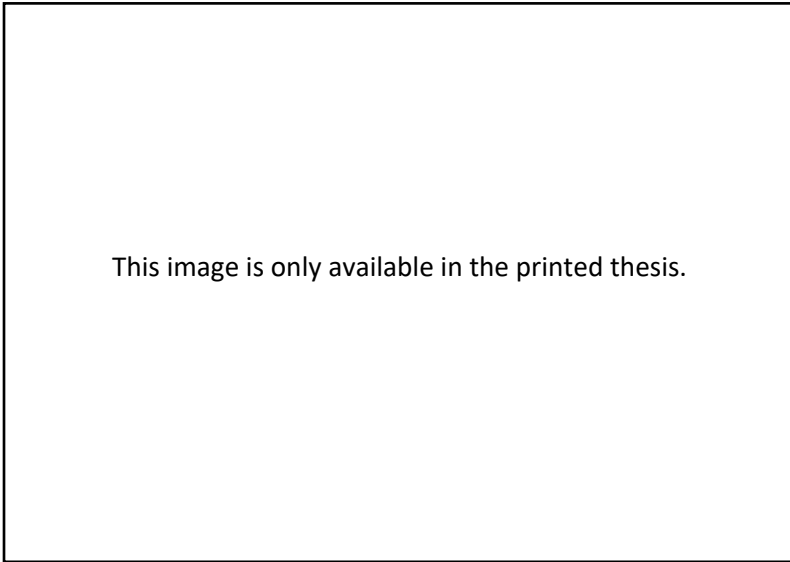
**A Storm of Steel**

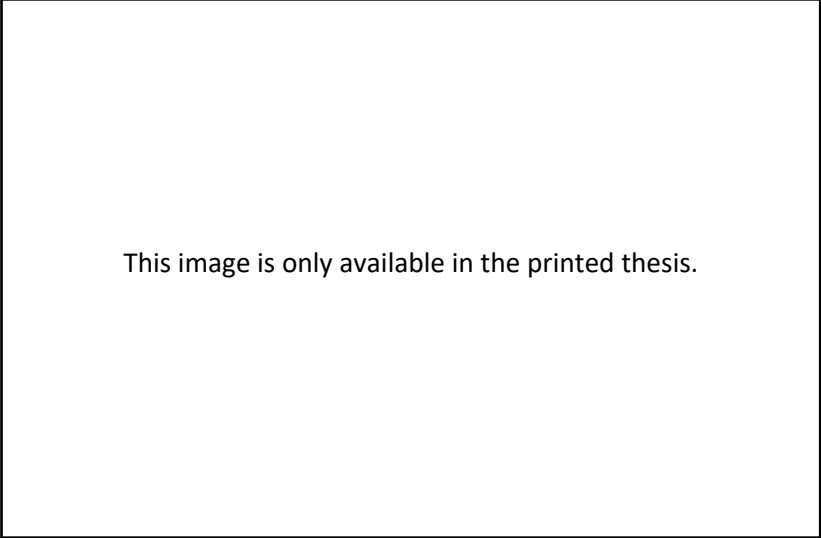
Fig. 48: Onward 86–87.

The spectacle of warfare is most frequently graphically contrasted with the humans that suffer from it by a depiction of the machines of war in a near-photorealistic style and the soldiers in a more schematic mode. The spread on pages 86–87 shows an air raid of the Japanese encampment (see fig. 48). Here, a three-way juxtaposition of graphic styles represents the confrontation between the human and the machines of war. First, the three largest frames of the spread are either very detailed retracings or low quality copies of photographs.<sup>119</sup> Second, the two panels to the top left of the right hand page show less detailed planes from the point of view of those who will be bombarded. Last, the bottom two frames of the right-hand page show Lieutenant Homu jumping out of a hut. The difference between the graphic style used to depict of Lieutenant Homu and that of the three large images is clear in the decline in detail. In the small panels, the literal crosshatching of the material out of which the

hut is made, as well as a lack of shadows, distances it from the more photorealistic images. Moreover, while the uniform and katana of the figure correspond to historical documentation, both the Lieutenant's facial features and face are exaggerated in the drawing. By way of a comic effect consisting of graphic deformation combined with body humor in the shape of clumsiness, the Lieutenant of the military police is humanized, ridiculed, and serves as a human contrast to the machines and the destruction wrought by them. While this particular configuration of photorealism and schematism might be partly caused by the fascination for machines of war and the enjoyment that many artists derive from drawing them, it also generates the idea that the soldiers are subjected a force of destruction which rivals that of nature.

But what of the difference between the bottom two images and the two panels to the top left of page 86? While the planes are here not depicted in full detail, their shape is conventional rather than deformed; here, not a difference in detail but a difference in deformation distinguishes one graphic style from another. Lieutenant Homu, on the other hand, is rendered in comic deformation. The planes fulfill a mediating role between the two more extreme graphic styles on the spread. They are shown as if seen hurriedly from Lieutenant Homu's point of view and as such occupy a curious middle ground between the mechanical realism of the photographs and the subjectively based realism of the characters. More significantly, this three-way juxtaposition of graphic styles demonstrates that *Onward's* use of graphic styles is messier than a purely dualistic, or following Jameson, dialectic, approach suggests. Modes of realism do not necessarily appear in pairs. The way in which I distinguish between subjective, mechanical and historiographic modes of realism, it follows, also supposes a kind of false order supported by the specific contexts of the comics that I analyze. These modes are not set in stone. Instead, what they connote continually changes in relation to the temporal and/or cultural context in which they are read. The strength of Mizuki's comic is that it incorporates such moments

of change and as such is able to represent the possible movements of comics realism in the broad sense through comics realism in the narrow sense.



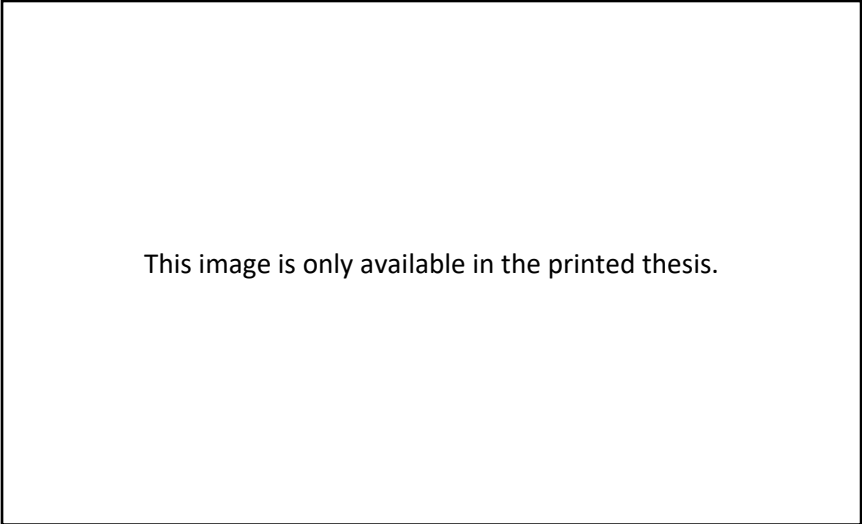
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Fig. 49: *Onward* 236-237.

The images on pages 236-237 are less varied in number of graphic styles, but interesting nonetheless because of the troublesome thematic juxtaposition they conjure up. The spread shows the effects of a naval bombardment on a soldier (see fig. 49). The frames that show the ship firing and the explosions are near photorealistic while the bottom right frame on page 237, which details the captain kneeling because of a heavy injury to his leg, is rendered much more schematically in what might be called a grotesque comic style. The two-way juxtaposition of graphic styles here suggests that the war is done to the soldiers—in this case even the captains—not by them.

Even made implicitly, this would already be a problematic statement for war representations that focus on allied army units. In this case, it is obviously more troubling because of the position of

the Japanese Empire during and leading up to World War II. The question that is asked by the juxtaposition of styles, however, is not completely devoid of urgency: are these soldiers to blame? In a very real sense, I would argue, the war is both being done by them and to them. But while *Onward* clearly blames the Imperial Army for the suffering of the soldiers that it depicts, it does not detail Japanese war crimes. In his more historically themed comics such as *Showa*, Mizuki certainly does not shy away from a more accusatory stance (see fig. 50).<sup>120</sup> *Onward*, however, is first and foremost a monument to the young men who did not survive the battles in which Mizuki took part, and as such is less focused on the crimes of the soldiers it depicts. But even at its most monumental, *Onward* remains critical of any easy identification of the men who fought in the war as purely victims precisely through its use of different graphic styles.



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Fig. 50: *Showa 1926-1938*, 484-485.

The tensions between a depiction of the soldiers as victims or aggressors is brought to the fore especially in Mizuki's depictions of American soldiers, which are often drawn more realistically than their Japanese counterparts. An example of this can be found on page 338-339, where the American soldiers are depicted in the same style as the landing craft that drop them off on the beach. Mizuki's drawing style here supports a reading that renders the Japanese soldiers as more human than their American counterparts (see fig. 51). A disturbing notion, because it seems to confirm the idea that the Japanese remember themselves and their ancestors first and foremost as victims of the war, not perpetrators of it (Seaton 138). Fortunately, this graphic gesture is counterbalanced by two others that shed a different light on the Imperial Army.

First, there are several instances when the American soldiers too are depicted in the more schematic style. For example, when American soldiers come close to a Japanese soldier hiding in the grass (see fig. 51). But the complexity inherent to the schematic mode also comes to the fore here: for if this is a more schematic depiction of an American soldier, it is also a more stereotyped one. Even if schematism means humanization in the graphic system set up in *Onward*, this does not acquit it from the difficulties of caricature in a racially charged context. The main counter to such a negative judgement of Mizuki's work focuses on his heavily deformed depiction of Japanese soldiers as well as his own fictional stand-in to show that facial deformation is not tied one-on-one with race in Mizuki's drawing. Yet even if one takes such a defense into account, Mizuki's at times racially charged drawing—I am thinking here especially of his depiction of the Tolai tribesmen—is an undeniably problematic aspect of the schematic mode's ability to make explicit perceptions of race.



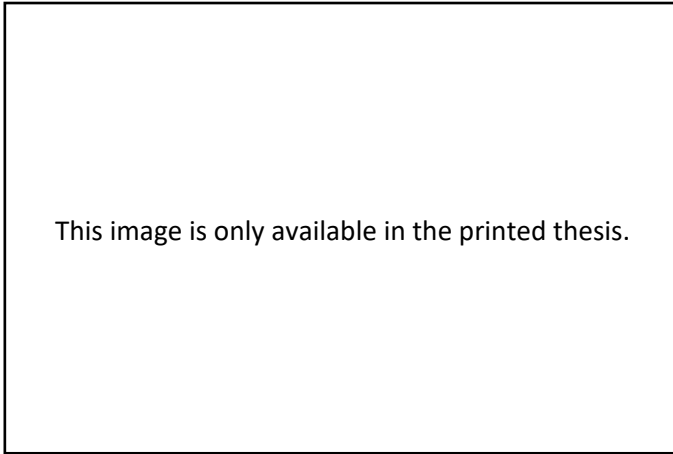
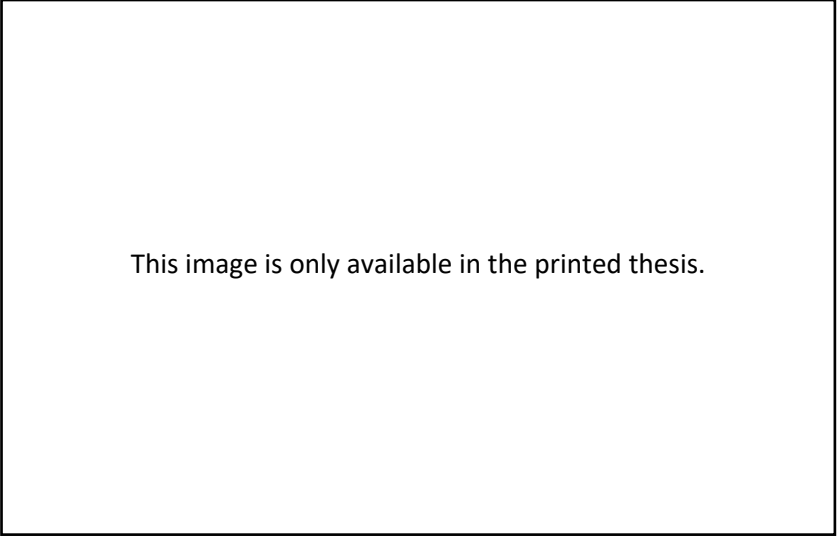


Fig. 51: Detail of *Onward* 190.

The second way in which Mizuki's drawing in *Onward* counters the dehumanization of the enemy soldiers, better illustrates Mizuki's resistance to a too victim centered depiction of the Japanese soldiers; in the moments that the Japanese actively take part in warfare, especially leading up and during the two suicide charges around which the latter part of the comic revolves—their depiction too starts to veer towards the photorealistic. The bottom frame of page 343 (see fig. 52) shows five figures on their way to a suicide charge. While the image as a whole is rendered in the more photorealistic style, two of the men's faces are depicted in a more schematic style. What becomes visible here is the beginning of a collapse between the two graphic extremes, which, in turn, signals a collapse between the juxtaposition of the human and warfare. As these men mentally prepare for the suicide charge, an act during which the men themselves are completely reduced to being instruments of war, their depiction becomes an unstable mixture of styles.



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Fig. 52: *Onward* 342-343.

Zooming out from the single panel on page 343 to the entire spread reveals the connection of this crossing over of the human and war to a liminal state between life and death in the completion of one of the most significant visual motifs in the comic. In total, the moon is depicted in 42 panels scattered throughout the comic. Of these 42, 28 panels solely depict a view of the moon, often against a tree line as is the case in the panel depicting the moon on page 342. In contrast to all the other depictions of the moon in *Onward*, the moon on page 343 is waning, instead of full.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, it is depicted in a much more photorealistic graphic style. As such, the completion of this visual metaphor for life and death runs alongside the obliteration of the humanity of the soldiers through the inhumanity of their wartime acts.

A similar unstable mixture of graphic styles occurs in the depiction of the first suicide charge (see fig. 53). While the graphic style of the domineering image of this spread can be found sporadically in different areas of the comic, it has not been used to


portray such a sizable group of figures before. The image on pages 238-239 is meticulously textured and stands closer to photorealism than schematism. Curiously, it both emphasizes and negates the way in which lines are put to work on the other pages of this comic. On the one hand, the image is clearly lined by way of a very detailed use of crosshatching, on the other, it is one of the few in the comic that does not make use of outlines. Here, the more photorealistic and the more schematic drawing styles are blended together. The suicide charge is presented as a transitory space between war and the human by mixing the styles in which machines of war are depicted with that which is used to draw characters. The overpowering historical forces depicted in a mechanical mode of realism merge with the lives and perspective of the men, which are depicted in a subjective mode of realism.

At the same time, this image carries overtones of the other meanings of the juxtaposition between narrative and background, and nature and human: where war or nature is the background against which the lives of the men either unfold, or by which they are swallowed up. Finally, this blending of graphic styles in *Onward* points to the liminal space between life and death that the suicide charge represents. While the men on page 238-239 are supposed to die in their attack, some survive. Their survival, as was mentioned above, is later considered a disgrace. They were already reported dead and should remain dead; therefore, they are sent out on another futile mission. As such, these pages mark a transition to a kind of being between life and death. These men are still alive and already dead.

In a way, this being in-between life and death ties these characters to Mizuki as a survivor. Mizuki's initial celebration of the soldiers' survival can be read as a redemption of the author as well as the dead. Later in the narrative, however, the soldiers still die and Mizuki is once again left as one of the very few survivors. Here, the central question that drives Mizuki's representation of the past resurfaces: how can a survivor do justice to the deaths of his brothers

in arms. Mizuki certainly cannot find relief in the cause for which his fellow soldiers died, even if some of them died believing in it. Instead, his survivor's guilt drove him to create *Onward*. But within the confines of the narrative, which was created as an attempt to do justice to the dead, the question continues to push representation to its outer limits. Pressured by the catastrophic past, Mizuki, in his depictions of his fellow soldiers' deaths, collapses the graphic juxtapositions—and the corresponding modes of realism—on which his rendition of the past has functioned until now.

In the end, the death of the characters is the death of the narrative, is the death of the book. The pages close and reveal the work to be a sepulchral slab. But like a grave marker, absence is not represented by absence but by something that invokes, or even forces, to remember—to represent. Absence triggers—even the absence of death in the form of survival—an abundance of representation, rather than silence. For Mizuki, this abundance does not only come to the fore in the many times he felt compelled to draw the war, but also in the many different graphic styles in which he chose to render it.



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Fig. 53: *Onward* 238–239.

### **A Return to the Background**

The final thematic opposition in *Onward* arises from the collapse of the graphic opposition between human and nature. While the brittle divide between life and death is at center stage throughout the work, it comes to its most dramatic fruition in relation to the suicide charges near the end of the book and the paradoxical form of life that continues beyond them. Here, the demystifications inherent to the graphic styles of *Onward* collapse into an aesthetic of defamiliarization.

But rather than jump in at the climactic moment when the different graphic styles dissolve into one another due to the enormous pressures exerted on them by the subject matter, I begin my approach of the last thematic juxtaposition in *Onward* with the default rendition of the difference between life and death in graphic styles: where the dead are rendered in the more photorealistic style and the living in the more schematic (see fig. 54).



Fig. 54: Detail of *Onward* 256.

In these cases, death signifies the end of subjectivity and personal narrative. After their deaths, the only way in which these characters are visually present in the narrative is in the style that is used to render the background. Furthermore, the echoes of other thematic juxtaposition make death both a return to nature and a subsumption of the personal narrative into the history of the war. Even if, as I have shown at the closing of the preceding section, the line that separates life and death in *Onward* can be porous, it must also always be, following Camus' in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, absolute. Living in proximity to death does not mean that one understands, is expectant of, or resigns to it; even someone who is supposed to be dead, half-dead, or undead is still alive. One's death is both always present and "at the extreme limit of [even] the condemned man's last thought" (Camus 54). In *Onward*, the absolute divide between life and death is signified by way of a shift in graphic style.

Nearer to the end of the comic, the absolute incomprehensibility of death is rendered differently. The advent of death is here drawn by way of a breaking down of the visual logic of the work. And while precursors to this collapse can be found scattered throughout the comic, on the final pages of *Onward* this collapse takes on special significance. The start of this collapse can be found on the bottom panel of page 353 and the page that follows it (see fig. 55), with Mizuki's grotesque comic rendition of the annihilation of the survivors of the first suicide charge in a second unnecessary and mindless attack.

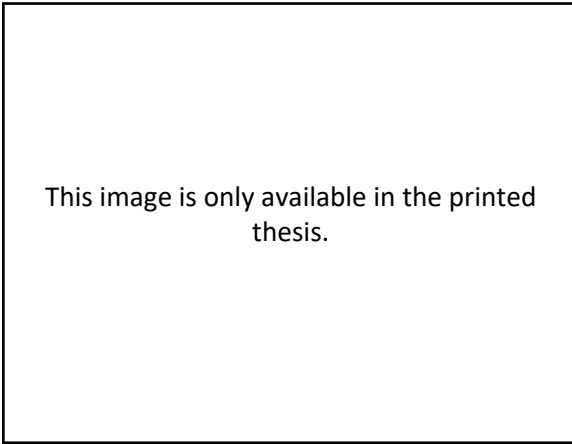


Fig. 55: Detail of *Onward* 353.

While the explosions in the top panel of page 353 are what the reader has been taught to expect on the preceding pages in terms of graphic style, the image in the bottom panel deviates from what came before. A gigantic explosion completely fills the panel. Smoke and fire, however, are not what arrest the gaze here. Our eyes are fixed on the detached head that flies out from the explosion that fills the center of the image. The overtly schematic rendition of this detached head captures our gaze and forces us to wonder what the difference between the schematic and photorealistic means in face of modern warfare. Neither a subjective mode of realism, with its focus on experiential truth and memory, nor a historiographic mode of realism, with its focus on documentation and method, or a mechanical mode of realism, with the illusory objectivity of the inhuman, can do justice to it.

It is telling that these insecurities concerning the limits of representation arise precisely at the moment when Mizuki encounters the frontier of his own memories of the war. As he comes to drawing his own death, or, at least, the death of the character that represents him, the juxtaposition between the schematic and the

photorealistic fails. But rather than letting this failure be some kind of end of representation, *Onward* uses it as a vehicle for the representation of the limit of experience: only a wartime wedding of styles is able to achieve some similitude with the absurdity of the past.

Some time after the explosions ripped his fellow soldiers apart: “MARUYAMA REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS WITH A START, AS THE EGGS LAID BY FLIES IN THE BULLET HOLE IN HIS CHEEK BEGAN TO HATCH” (Mizuki 2011, 355). Half-dead, Maruyama wobbles past his fallen comrades, who are depicted in the more photorealistic style. Clearly snapped mentally, Maruyama burst out in song.<sup>122</sup> Singing and laughing, Maruyama is spotted by an American patrol and shot on sight. In a graphic gesture akin to but more refined than *Magneto: Testament*’s spread of black panels, a black ink spot represents the impact of the bullet (see fig. 56). Much more than blood, the black spot, located precisely on the middle of the page, shows the void out of which every representation of the past must be rescued: all that is not said, not remembered, and all those who are not around to remember. The spot indicating both the impact of the bullet and the splatter of blood looks like a black hole and is intricately crosshatched towards its extremes. To draw it, Mizuki must have pressed down and scratched again and again the point of impact: marking his guilt on a character that represents him. By pressing a hole in the page, Mizuki enacts his own death as a way of coming to terms with the deaths of his brothers in arms.



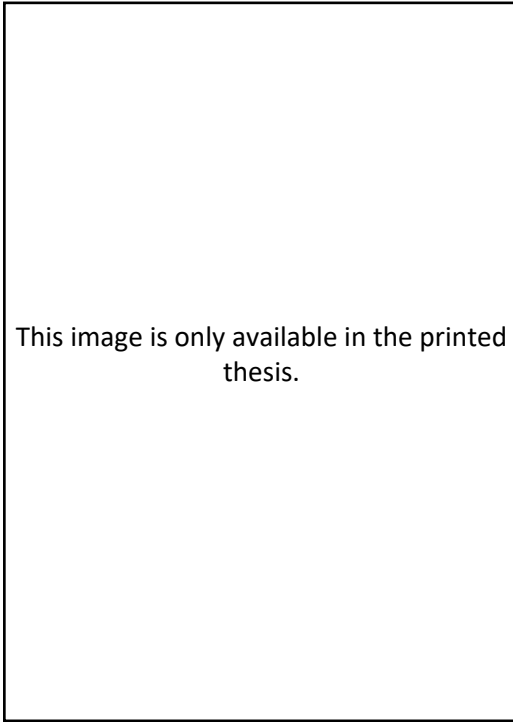
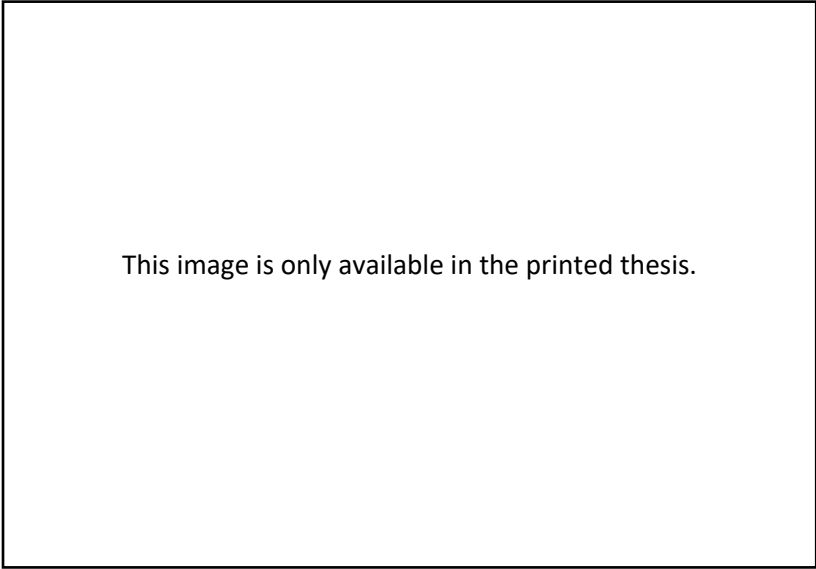


Fig. 56: *Onward* 357.

Another turn of the page reveals Maruyama's final moments. As he falls to the ground and bleeds out, his last thoughts concern his fallen comrades: "GUESS EVERYONE DIED FEELING LIKE THIS. WITH NO ONE WATCHING... NO ONE TO TELL... JUST SLIPPING AWAY, FORGOTTEN..." (Mizuki 2011, 358) (see fig. 57). In these final panels, Maruyama's face is neither a schematic caricature, nor does it correspond to conventional anatomy. His face is swollen with injury and riddled with flies and blood. Graphic deformation and actual bodily deformation have become indistinguishable. The ghastly content of the image here forestalls any kind of graphic mode in which it can satisfyingly be rendered. On the one hand, no archival

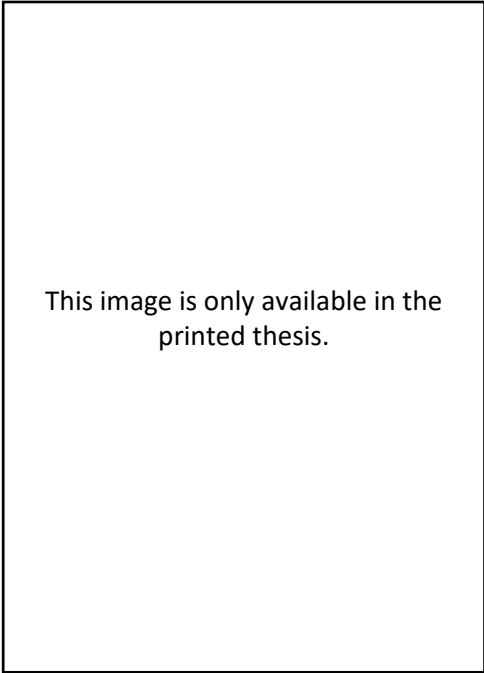
or historiographic gesture, however extensive, can ever completely encompass the moments of death of all the fallen. On the other, a purely experiential, subjective rendition of these moments is forever impossible because one the dead do not remember. Instead, Mizuki collapses the differences between the graphic styles that he uses and turns this formal catastrophe into the ultimate representational mode of the comic. A mode that combines and intertwines the different styles that are used throughout the work as they coincide with the narrative content. Only through this unstable mixture of graphic styles can Mizuki depict the threshold of life.



This image is only available in the printed thesis.

Fig. 57: *Onward* 358-359.

After Maruyama's death, *Onward* moves towards its end in a slow funeral procession of dead bodies in various states of decomposition. In this powerful statement, which is achieved by blending the documentary as well as the mechanically realist connotations of photography, the work drives home its anti-war message. Contrary to the title of the work, there is nothing noble about the deaths of the soldiers depicted here. In near-photorealistic depictions of the soldiers' remains, Mizuki shows how they fade away into the landscape. A death that is a return to nature and a fading into the background and oblivion. But it is precisely through this slipping away into the void that the reader is invoked to remember. Here, representation and remembrance once again show their shared ancestry.



This image is only available in the  
printed thesis.

Fig. 58: *Onward* 362.



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# Conclusion

The skeletal remains on which *Onward* ends invoke remembrance by threatening oblivion. In this way, Mizuki makes clear his reply to the Adornian prohibition on representation that was so central to early discussions of World War II representation: silence is worse than misrepresentation. Caught between the fear of oblivion and cliché, Mizuki—and with him the other comics artists that I have discussed in this thesis—have chosen to attempt to represent, rather than let the past lie. Moreover, they let their struggles with representing the catastrophic past shimmer through in their representations in various ways. In so doing, they have not only rescued the pasts that they set out to remember from oblivion, but also, and more valuably, they have created an index of the human struggle for representation in the face of the catastrophic past.

Besides showing the importance and inevitability of representation in the wake of the catastrophic past, the comics I analyzed also demonstrate that the affordances of the comics medium for historical representation are much broader than is often assumed. In order to bring into view these affordances, I chose to limit my investigation to World War II comics. Not only did this allow me to include the best-known historical comic—Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*—it also permitted me to test the comics medium at an extreme: the horrors of World War II push all representation to its limits, and it is precisely at these outmost edges that the cracks of representation

become best discernable. In my preliminary exploration of World War II representation in comics and other media, I found that the concept of realism, regardless of the critiques leveled at the concept by postmodern thinkers, continually resurfaces. The more catastrophic a past, the more realism is demanded of representations of it by creators, critics, and audiences—and yet, what is perceived by creators, critics, and audiences as realistic, however, continually shifts.

In this thesis, I therefore analyzed historical representation in comics using a conception of realism that takes into account the fact that what is seen as realistic does not stay the same across audiences and over time. Realism, I argued, alongside the works of Jameson and Gombrich, is not the gradual perfecting of an illusion but a constant struggle between different ways of depicting the world. Realism is thus relative: what is experienced as realistic is always dependent on context. In the specific case of World War II representation in comics, I distinguished three main competing modes of representing the past: the subjective, historiographic and mechanic modes of realism. Reexamining comics with this conception of realism at hand, I found that, in relation to other media, historical representation in comics is seen as especially suited to subjective realism. Looking more closely at World War II representation in comics, however, I discovered that many of them combine different modes of realism in their representations of the past.

In chapter two, “The *Maus* Event,” I traced the roots of the perceived suitability of comics to subjective realism back to the impact of the success of *Maus* on the study of comics in academia. As I demonstrated by way of my reception study, *Maus* came to be seen as an exemplary Holocaust narrative in the 1990s and early 2000s. Besides being published in a particularly receptive context, *Maus* should also be considered a generative work for the, at that time, booming field of memory studies. For scholars studying Holocaust remembrance, *Maus* both bridged the divide between American Holocaust art and European Holocaust art and showed how the past

impacts not only Holocaust survivors, but their children as well. The success of *Maus*, I argued, not only made space for comics in academia, but also caused certain aspects of comics culture and comics' medium affordances to be enlarged at the cost of others. Literary and memory scholars positioned *Maus* in opposition to historiographic accounts of the past by focusing on the uniquely subjective perspective that the comic offered on the past. The persuasiveness of *Maus* working together with shifts in cultural tastes allowed a drawn work based on a family's recollection of the past to be perceived as more realistic than historiographic and/or mechanical accounts.

The rise of the academic study of comics, which is at least partly attributable to *Maus*' success, did not counteract this and at times even exacerbated the strong connection between comics and subjective realism sparked by Spiegelman's success. Arguing against seeing *Maus* as the exception of comics, scholars better versed in comics culture argued that *Maus*' brand of representation was not unique to Spiegelman's comic, thus strengthening the connection between the poetics of *Maus* and the affordances of the medium. In this way, the comics medium became closely associated with a specific subjectively based approach to representing the past. And while the subjective mode of realism is certainly central to many of the medium's most famous historically themed works, the confusion of the particular poetics of *Maus* with the much more general affordances of the medium as a whole have caused a substantial part of comics' abilities to represent the past to be neglected.

As I have argued, the most significant of these abilities is the way in which the comics medium allows creators to combine different ways of portraying the past. What makes historical representation in World War II comics interesting is that, instead of offering purely subjective based representations of the past, they construct it in combinations of different modes for establishing historical realism. Alongside Ole Frahm's study, I discovered that *Maus* too can also be read as combining modes of realism. Rather than framing *Maus*

as proof of comics' proclivity to subjectively based representations of World War II, Frahm's work allowed me to consider *Maus* as a practice-based genealogy that combines different modes of realism in order to explore the possibilities and limits of different ways of bringing the past into the present.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I argued this point by showing that post-*Maus* World War II comics are often better characterized as combinations of different approaches to realistic representation. On one page of a World War II comic, for example, it is possible to encounter historiographic third-person narration combined with a drawn point-of-view shot and a photograph. And while in theory combining these different ways of bridging the gap between representation and reality does not always make sense—does the perception of photography as realistic not come with an implicit critique of the realism of drawing?—the comics medium allows various modes of representation to be combined almost seamlessly on the page.

In my first case study, I analyzed how the comics medium enables the co-presentation of different kinds of texts. I did so by way of a close reading of Peter Pontiac's *Kraut*. As the phonetic symmetry between both titles already suggests, *Kraut* was heavily inspired by *Maus*. Like *Maus*, *Kraut* is a son's reconstruction of the father's wartime past. Unlike *Maus*, however, Pontiac's father collaborated with the Nazis as an SS war reporter. What makes Pontiac's comic especially suited to an analysis of how comics can combine different modes of realism in texts is that text is much more prominent in *Kraut* than is the case for most comics. In order to understand *Kraut*'s use of text, moreover, I had to look as much at the visual presentation of texts on the page as at the content of them. Accordingly, my analysis started by focusing on the handwriting that at times seems to dominate the pages of *Kraut*. Even if this handwriting is ultimately printed ink in a mass-produced book, I demonstrated how the author became more present through the visual characteristics of his handwriting.



Besides presence, handwriting connotes intimacy, authenticity, and subjectivity. The presentation of this handwriting in the form of a letter addressed to Pontiac's presumed dead father, furthermore, only serves to further strengthen these connotations.

But *Kraut* does not consist solely of the handwriting of its author. By analyzing how different texts are combined on the pages of *Kraut* I was able to investigate how in comics it is not only the visual characteristics, but also the spatial emplacement of the texts that impact its representation of the past. On the pages where Pontiac represents his fathers' experiences as an SS war reporter in wartime Europe, he incorporates a wide range of different texts. On these pages, handwriting, typeset court documents, and digitally printed text exist side-by-side on the page. By analyzing both the visual characteristics of these texts and their placement on the page, I demonstrated how the different texts out of which *Kraut* is made up engage with one another. At times, these texts support one another's depictions of the past, thus doubly authenticating it. More often, however, they contrast one another. *Kraut* thus makes use of the ability of the comics medium to juxtapose different texts on the page in order to present the past in a distinctly polyphonic manner.

Besides as a narrative, *Kraut* can thus also be read as a collection of texts about a certain past. *Kraut's* archival form allows its more personal accounts of the past to be subsumed in the historiographic realism of the archive. At the same time, however, I established that the strength of both the father's eyewitness account as well as Pontiac's handwritten discourse is never completely subsumed into the archival form. Rather, both modes of representing the past—the subjective and the historiographic—exist side-by-side in *Kraut*. By having both registers at his disposal in his representation of his father's life and death, Pontiac is able to resist the traps of either writing an apology for his father, or an all-too-easy moralistic refutation of him. Instead, by continually staging a formal conflict between two modes of realism, Pontiac is able to represent the problematic past of Dutch

collaboration during World War II as an ongoing conflict. Because he does so, Pontiac does not only find a way to contribute to the Dutch World War II remembrance culture in an innovative way, he has also created an account of the past that can be read as an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of texts for historical representation.

The comic central to my second case study, *Magneto: Testament*, is as far removed from *Maus* as *Kraut* is close to it. Both *Maus* and *Kraut*, however successful, were initially conceived as single-author, small-press alternative comics treatments of World War II. *Magneto: Testament*, contrarily, is a Marvel Comics superhero origin story that takes its supervillain protagonist from the Warsaw ghetto to Auschwitz. The large distance between what is commonly considered a realistic and respectful depiction of the Holocaust and superhero comics poses as a considerable challenge to the creators of *Magneto: Testament*. Precisely the fact that this comic needs to span such a substantial divide, however, is what makes Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic a worthwhile object for analysis. In my close reading of the comic, I investigated how Pak and Di Giandomenico make use of the comics medium's ability to combine modes of realism in order to meet this challenge.

One thing that immediately strikes the initiated superhero comics reader is the complete absence of superpowers in *Magneto: Testament*. My analysis of Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic, moreover, showed how it either tones down or completely omits elements—both pictorial and textual—that might evoke the comics medium. Besides the fact that superpowers are absent, I demonstrated that Di Giandomenico's drawing style eschews caricature and all-too-dramatic visual gestures, its use of onomatopoeia is modest, and its page compositions lack the more outward dramatics of most superhero comics. In place of these hallmark features of superhero comics, *Magneto: Testament* incorporates photography, historical blockbuster film, historiography, and eyewitness testimony—

mostly foreign elements to superhero comics—and never challenges their representative abilities. In this sense, *Magneto: Testament*'s representation of the past differs significantly from that of the other comics that I analyzed in this thesis. Rather than problematizing representation, *Magneto: Testament* hides that it is a representation. The transparency for which its creators aim, however, is also thwarted by its deployment of different modes of realism. In other words, while Pak and Di Giandomenico highlight comics' ability to combine a wide range of different ways of representing the past in text and image, their use of them not only authenticates their representation, it also inadvertently draws attention to the medium in which the past is presented. Here, the completely blacked-out panels on page sixteen and seventeen of issue four spring to mind (see fig. 34). On the one hand, this blacking-out can be read as an attempt to tone down the visuality of the comics medium in order to strengthen the impact of Max Eisenhardt's testimony. On the other, however, this black spread is also spectacularly visual in its denial of the image. Besides drawing attention to the testimony, these pages also draw attention to the fact that this testimony is mediated to the reader in a comic book.

It is thus somewhat doubtful whether *Magneto: Testament* really succeeds in its aims to transparently represent the past. For those who do not see the illusions of the different modes of representation on which its transparent representation of the past is built, *Magneto: Testament* can be a worthwhile and reasonably well-researched introduction to a topic that continues to be in need of remembrance. Ultimately, however, I consider *Magneto: Testament*'s attempt to portray the past transparently to be a step in the wrong direction. It neither embraces the fact that it is a comic book—like *Maus*—nor does it place the different modes of realism that it incorporates in contrasts that draw out their incompatibility, strengths, and weaknesses—as is the case in *Kraut*. Because of this, it ends up lending credence to the view that comics are not capable of or adequate for World War II representation.

In the final case study of this thesis, I examined Mizuki's use of different graphic styles in his depiction of the suffering of Japanese Imperial Army soldiers in *Onward*. In this Japanese comic, Mizuki portrays a fictionalized depiction of his own experiences in a wide range of different graphic styles and, in doing so, allows for an investigation of "the content of the form" of comics.<sup>123</sup> Rather than hiding the fact that it is a comic book, Mizuki continually draws contrasts between what is commonly perceived as a comics drawing style—cartoony or schematic drawing—and a more photo realistic way of depicting the past. In its many schematic renditions of soldiers, *Onward* emphasizes the subjective experiences of these men. Here, the long-standing connotation of drawing with subjectivity—a connotation that is only strengthened by the schematic drawings that are most commonly associated with comics—humanizes the Japanese soldiers that are rendered in this style. Often in *Onward*, these schematically drawn soldiers are pictured in landscapes drawn in a near-photorealist style. In this way, Mizuki shows that comics are perfectly capable of representations of the past in more than just the subjective mode of realism.

*Onward* thus embeds the conflict between the schematically drawn soldiers and their paradisiacal, yet deadly, surroundings in a struggle between ways of seeing the world. The same occurs when the soldiers are subjected to mechanical warfare. Mizuki uses the struggle between mechanical realism in near-photorealist drawings and subjective realism in schematic drawings to allow multiple perspectives on the past to coexist in his telling of it. Moreover, whenever the juxtapositions between different ways of seeing the world are in danger of becoming too simplistic—as is the case when mechanically realist images clash with subjective realist ones to suggest that war only ever happens to the individual and is never perpetrated by him—Mizuki overturns such easy dichotomies by purposely shifting what the different styles signify or by blending them together. As the Japanese soldiers prepare for a suicide attack,

for example, they are no longer solely depicted in the schematic style (see fig. 55). In my analysis, I demonstrated how something similar happens near the very end of the work, where Mizuki confronts his own survival by killing off the character that most resembles him. Here, Mizuki blends the different styles he used throughout *Onward* in order to probe the limits of pictorial representation. In face of the terrible effects of mechanized warfare, what difference is there between a photograph and a drawing? And which of these is better suited to render the horribly mangled corpses of the dead? For Mizuki, neither a representation of first-hand experience, the renderings of machines, nor historiography can truly do justice to the past.

Silence is, as I mentioned above, an even worse option for Mizuki. Throughout his long career—just like he keeps coming back to past in different styles in *Onward*—Mizuki kept returning to his wartime experiences in different comics genres. But it is in the moments of *Onward* where the past is not depicted in one, but in an unstable mixture of graphic styles that he succeeds in bringing both the folly of and the desire for realism into view most aptly. These moments show that all modes of realism are, in the end, inadequate in the face of the catastrophic past. What they also show, however, is how we cannot stop aiming for a realistic depiction of the past, even if these attempts seem to tear the very logic of representation to shreds.

Each of the comics that I have studied in this thesis is an expression—in one way or another—of the desire for some kind of contact with the reality of the past as well as representation's inability to truly reach it. In their grasping at the past, the comics that I researched in this thesis show that the comics medium's affordances for historical representation far exceed the dominant view of it as especially—or only—suited to subjective realism. *Kraut*, *Magneto: Testament*, and *Onward* do not narrow their view in order to make the past more easily intelligible. Instead, they use the full range of

comics' medial affordances to draw and write their pasts in densely layered combinations of the subjective, historiographic, and mechanic modes. In my analysis, I have attempted to unpack these polyphonic renditions of the past in order to demonstrate their substantial contributions to World War II memory culture.

Besides showing that World War II comics' contributions to memory culture are richer than is often thought, I have also read comics as reflections of the impact of an ever-widening media landscape on the dynamics of World War II remembrance. Here, a degree of caution is appropriate: comics are not perfect reflections of broader World War II memory culture. Still, by investigating these comics, I was able to gain some insights into what can happen when different ways of representing the past coexist in memory culture. The first of these insight concerns the ease with which creators combine and audiences read representations of the past that consist of different modes of realism. On almost all their pages, the comics that I studied almost seamlessly combine ways of portraying the past that are based on completely contrary approaches to historical representation. By showing the effortlessness with which different ways of representing the past can coexist, World War II comics offer further proof of how cultural memory does not consist of one hegemonic narrative of the past told in texts by historiographers, but how it comes into being out of the combinations of a host of different ways of rendering it in a wide range of different media. Moreover, these comics, by playing with the expectations of their readers concerning the kinds of pasts that are told in a particular mode, demonstrate how accustomed audiences have become to reading vastly differing representations of the past alongside and intertwined with one another.

The second insight stems from my analysis of *Magneto: Testament*. In that chapter, I concluded that by combining different modes of realism, World War II comics not only authenticate their representations of the past, they also cause—at the very least—a heightened awareness of representation itself. That is, the World

## CONCLUSION

War II comics that I studied make their readers aware of the fact that they are dealing with a representation rather than with the past itself. *Kraut* and *Onward*, moreover, purposefully combine different modes of realism in order to interrogate the strengths and limits of modes of representation that they employ. By combining different ways of portraying the past, World War II comics thus demonstrate that there is no such thing as a representation that offers a completely transparent view of the past. Instead, these comics show that when we set out to rescue the past from oblivion, we find representation.

It would be wrong, however, to lament the inability of representation to completely capture the past. The loss of a unified historical narrative, World War II comics show, is only the shattering of a once convincing mode of realism. The coexistence of multiple ways of rendering the past does not result in memory becoming impure, or in forgetting. Rather, the presence of different conceptions and ways of rendering the past guards against the dangers of all-too convincingly reducing the overabundance of the past into a single story.





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## Endnotes

1. My use of the term “catastrophic past” is based on Walter Benjamin’s discussion of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, in which he describes the angel of history looking back to only see catastrophe (Benjamin 2003, 392). Benjamin wrote this ninth thesis of “On the Concept of History” while fleeing from the Nazi-regime in 1940. The term “catastrophic past” is suited to my approach to World War II representation because it does not imply that the past can only be present as an individual wound, as is much more the case with “traumatic past.” “Catastrophic past” allows for ways to relate to the horrors of the past that are not solely centered around subjective experience. The main drawback of “catastrophic past” is that it can be seen as deindividualizing the causes as well as the effects of the past; rendering past events as inescapable natural disasters. This is not my intention. The catastrophic past is certainly not without its perpetrators.
2. See Jarausch; Torpey; Eley; Evans; Moses; Dworok; and, for a recent forum discussion on the legacy of the *Historikerstreit*, Port. For broader overviews of the Holocaust in historiography, I refer the reader to the essays collected in Stone 2004 and Stone 2013.
3. See Langer; Ezrahi; Friedländer 1986; Young 1988; Patterson; Friedländer 1992; LaCapra 1994; Hirsch 1997; Horowitz 1997; Agamben; Huyssen 2000; Rothberg 2000; Vice 2000; Lang; Wernick; Fridman; Zelizer; Mack; Reading; Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 2003; Eaglestone; Waxman; Reiter; McGlothlin 2006; Bigsby; Bernard-Donals; Spargo and Ehrenreich; Trezise; Lothe et al.; Chare and Williams; Rothberg 2009.
4. “Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno 1983, 34). Adorno’s point in this passage of *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1954) is not that it is unethical to represent the Holocaust per se, but that it is unethical to perpetuate the culture which led to the Holocaust: “hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared” (1973, 362–363). For a more detailed discussion of Adorno’s thinking concerning the Holocaust, see Ryland; Hofmann.
5. For more in-depth treatments of historical representation in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, see Edelstein; Bloom; Rigney 2009.

6. See Mitchell 1994.
7. For overviews of the use and misuse of comics during World War II see Wright; Riches; Scott; Goodnow and Kimble. Historical overviews of the representation of World War II in comics from after 1945 can be found in Nakar 2003; Nakar 2008; Ribbens; Berndt; Streb.
8. I am thinking here specifically of Harvey Kurtzman's highly critical treatment of war in EC comics' *Two-Fisted Tales* (1950-1955) and *Frontline Combat* (1951-1954).
9. During this time, *Maus* also received numerous comics awards in the United States and abroad, including the Inkpot Award in 1987 (United States), the Stripschappenning for the best foreign comics album in 1987 (The Netherlands), the Urhunden Prize for best foreign comics album in 1988, and the Fauve d'Or for best foreign comic in 1988 and 1993 (France).
10. In "'The Shadow of a Past Time' History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*" (2006), Hillary Chute, developing a line of thought already present in the early work of Marianne Hirsch on *Maus*, argues that the strength of comics for historical representation stems from their ability to juxtapose and blend past and present on the comics page. Chute's argumentation is persuasive, especially in relation to *Maus*, where the continuing impact of the past on the present is a central theme. At the same time, Chute's focus on the juxtaposition of past and present in *Maus* is limited to how the continual infringement of the past on the present is experienced by different subjects. As such, she does not point to comics' ability to, for example, juxtapose an eyewitness account with historical discourse. Therefore, even though Chute successfully demonstrates what is certainly one of the great strengths of historical comics, my approach to comics realism can be read as a broadening of hers and others' discussions of comics affordance in relation to historical representation.
11. See Groensteen 2007; Miodrag 2013.
12. For general overviews of this subject see Henke and Woller; Lagrou; Deák. A more detailed discussion of collaboration in the Dutch context follows in chapter three.
13. A good example of the need for contrast in analyses of graphic style is Joseph Witek's discussion of graphic style in *Maus*. In order to bring out the implications of *Maus*' graphic style, Witek compares it with the style of an earlier version of *Maus* (1989, 103-108).
14. From here on out, I will refer to *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* as *Onward*.
15. For recent book-length treatments of historical representation in comics: see Mickwitz; Chute 2016; Earle; in 't Veld.
16. A similar case can be made for the majority of book-length treatments of historical representation in comics. A number of them, like Elisabeth El Rifaie's *Autobiographical Comics* (2012), already declare this focus in their title. In the case of autobiographic renditions of the past, Rifaie argues, the medium shows its ability to challenge more linear conceptions of time and so enables a subjectively based critique of mechanical and historical conceptions of time (97). Furthermore, the fact that the comics artist has to continually draw his/her body on the page leads to a continual interrogation of the self

and its limits (El Rafea 51–52; Tolmie viii). These and other affordances of the comics medium, such studies argue, pose new questions to existing authentication strategies and demonstrate that if there is such a thing as reality, it only exists in the context of the experiencing subject. But when an interrogation of the limits of the self is brought to its extreme, can self-examination not also lead to an attempted transcendence of the self? In instances when the realism produced by experience is not enough, are experiences not also at times combined with differently produced truths that strengthen or question them? Studies that build their conceptual approach to historical representation in comics around trauma also foreground the suitability of the medium to a subjective rendition of the past. Here, Hattie Earle's *Comics, Trauma, and the New Art of War* (2017) is the most complete and recent example. Trauma as a central concept, even when applied on a societal or communal scale, revolves around experience. Psychological wounds only exist in the context of the experiencing subject. Comics' ability to visualize trauma, in Earle's study, becomes its ability to draw readers into experiences. A similar foregrounding of comics' predilection to subjective realism can also be discerned in two recent book-length studies that analyze comics in the theoretical context of documentary: Nina Mickwitz's *Documentary Comics* (2016) and Hillary Chute's *Disaster Drawn* (2016). Both these works admirably demonstrate the possibilities for documentary in comics. Furthermore, they show that, in comparison to other documentary forms such as photography and film, comics seem to be especially suited to a brand of documentary which inserts the subject as its main strategy of authentication (Mickwitz 33). While the aforementioned studies do not deny or even downplay the importance of other ways of establishing realism in comics, they emphasize different comics' affordances regarding historical representation than I do in my research. This does not mean that I disagree wholeheartedly with the emphasis placed on subjective realism in the study of World War II comics. The subjective mode of realism is important in all my case studies, and I will use the valuable insights into it provided by these studies in my analyses. At the same time, I resist the complete identification of the medium with a subjective approach to historical representation.

17. For a more in-depth discussion of the relation between the conceptions of postmodernism of Jameson and Hutcheon see Duvall (1999) and Shirvani (1994). In my discussion of the topic here, I follow Duvall's attempt to see the approaches of Jameson and Hutcheon alongside one another, rather than as purely contrary. For Duvall, the main differences between Jameson and Hutcheon's conception of postmodernism arise because Jameson approaches postmodernism from the perspective of the consumer, while Hutcheon viewpoint is more centered around creators of culture (372). But even though this difference in perspective causes their evaluations of postmodern culture of be almost opposite to one another, both scholars see eye to eye in their description of postmodern culture as an expression of a loss of connection to history.

18. See Moraru 2011.

19. See Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010 and van den Akker, Gibbons, and Vermeulen 2017.

20. Of the movements away from postmodernism listed here, new sincerity is most fragmented. While for cosmopolitanism, metamodernism and transmodernism relatively clear points of origin can be established, new sincerity, like postmodernism, means different things in different cultural practices. In the study of literature, new sincerity is closely associated with the works of David Foster Wallace. See Kelly 2010 and Kelly 2017.

21. Ways out of postmodernism that are less centered around a reestablishment of some kind of connection to the world can be found, for example, in Samuels' automodernity, which frames the shift away from postmodernism as a political, psychological, technological, historical, and economic reaction made possible by a technologically driven interplay between social automation and individual autonomy (Samuels 3–4) and in Turner's post-postmodernism, which sees a return to faith—in religion, institutions, persons, and nations—as constituting a fundamental move away from postmodernism (Turner 8).
22. Töpffer is widely regarded as the first comics artist. See, for example, Groensteen's "Töpffer, the Originator of the Modern Comic Strip" (1999) and David Kunzle's *Rodolphe Töpffer: Father of the Comic Strip* (2007).
23. Töpffer did not refer to his works as comics but as *histoires en estampes* (Willems 227). Considering his canonization as one of the originators of modern comics, however, I believe it makes sense to do so retroactively.
24. The emphasis placed on the experience and unique expression of the artist over studied methods also shows the influence of romanticism on the poetics of Töpffer. In Töpffer's conception of intuition, however, little or no reference is made to the theoretical subtleties concerning intuition and naivety in the work of romantic theorists such as Friedrich Schiller (Veire 70–72).
25. In *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Primo Levi famously considers the dilemmas of representing Auschwitz. Levi's nuanced account of the difficulties of representation in the face of the catastrophic past, I hold, is highly relevant to discussions of World War II representation in comics. For more on Levi, see Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* (2002).
26. In the United Kingdom, besides *Commando Comics*, the series *Air Ace* (1960–1970), *War at Sea* (1962–1963), *Warlord* (1974–1986), and *Battle* (1961–1984 & 1988–1990) are prominent examples of comics that use a naturalistic style in the depiction of war. In the United States, *Two-Fisted Tales* (1950–1955), *Frontline Combat* (1951–1954), *Fighting Army* (1956–1984), *Fighting Marines* (1955–1984) and, *Blazing Combat* (1965–1966) are among the most famous. See Conroy, Riches et al., and Roach for overviews of war comics and Goodwin, Evans, Kurtzman et al., Kendall, and Severin et al. for recently republished collections of war comics.
27. A good example of such pushing back of historiography against memory in the specific context of this thesis can be found on pages 16–18 of Arno J. Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1988).
28. Ricoeur extensively discusses the parody of a Platonic myth on which this conception of writing is based in the prelude to *Memory, History, Forgetting* (7–15).
29. The centrality of writing to the historiographic mode of realism will be discussed in the section "New Wars in Text and Image."
30. Whether history as a discipline has engaged extensively enough with the challenges of postmodernism as leveled against it by the works of Hayden White, Roland Barthes, Keith Jenkins, and Frank Ankersmit is still subject to debate (Breisach; Daddow 2004 & 2006; O'Brien). But even if not all historians have incorporated the theoretical insights

of postmodernism in their practice, there also exist many studies dedicated to integrating postmodern theoretical insights into historical methodology (see, for example, Jenkins, Southgate, Thompson, and Donnelly and Norton).

31. See Kittler; Neef; van Dijk 2012; Brillenburg-Wurth 2014.

32. Other examples of the conflation of painting and the novel in discussions of realism can be found in Jakobson 23; Watt 17; and Gombrich 2002, 7.

33. See, for example, how Charles Hatfield discusses the ways in which images and text can approach one another in comics in the introduction to his *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005, 36–37). A valuable critical addition and nuancing of the coming together (and remaining different) of images and texts in comics can be found in Hannah Miodrag's *Comics and Language: Reimagining Critical Discourse on the Form* (2013).

34. It is important to note that Gombrich does not mean to imply that humans have innate schematic images of the human body or animals that stay the same from individual to individual. Gombrich's schematism relies on acquired rather than innate knowledge and, as such, is not perfect.

35. Comics historians Thierry Smolderen and Gombrich use the term “diagrammatic” to describe similar graphic abstractions. In their works, the schematic and the diagrammatic are used almost as synonyms. For me, there are two significant distinctions: first, the diagrammatic—slightly more than is the case with the schematic—hints at an abstraction away from the human and as such is closer to technical drawing. See for example Smolderen: “Their wordless gags, which often featured mechanical devices, were generally drawn in a clear, diagrammatic style that evoked that of technical schematics” (Smolderen 2014, 113). Second, the word schema refers more directly to Kant's use of it in his philosophical system. This makes schematic the more general of the two terms. Still, the definitions of both terms in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are circular, with schema being used to explain diagram and vice versa.

36. I have neither the space nor expertise to delve into the complex aesthetic and cognitive history of the term here. In short, I would argue that Gombrich's use of the term ventures away from Kant's transcendental idealist understanding of the schema of human cognition. Gombrich holds that the abstraction of the schematic is made legible to the reader at least as much through social convention and/or cultural background as through any kind of innate cognitive apparatus. In my use of the term, the schematic is fully dependent on context, instead of adhering to a preexisting structure of the human mind.

37. One of the more compelling variants of this argument can be found in the introduction and second chapter of Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* (1990).

38. My thinking on the relations between photography to comics is indebted to Nancy Pedri's writing on the subject in both “Thinking About Photography in Comics” (2015) and “Graphic Memoir: Neither Fact Nor Fiction” (2013). Furthermore, Pedri's conception of different types of images as existing in “a pictorial continuum” has opened up a way of thinking about the relations between photography and drawn images that investigates how they can work together without negating their differences. This insight

has been instrumental for my analyses of graphic style in *Magneto: Testament and Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* (2015, 4).

39. While Groensteen prefers “page-layout,” I prefer page composition because it references Renault Chavanne’s *Composition de la bande dessinée* (2010). Chavanne’s detailed analyses of comics pages, seen as an extension of Groensteen’s approach, allow for a more detailed reading of the ways in which page compositions can create meaning in comics and as such have been influential in this research.

40. An especially noteworthy project regarding the inclusion of visual sources in historiographic practice in the context of this research is Jane A. Chapman et al.’s *Comics and the World Wars: A Cultural Record* (2015). The fact that such initiatives are still needed, however, underlines that a bias for writing still exists in historiography today.

41. With postmodern testimony, I allude here to the embattled status of testimony under postmodernism, where testimony ceases to be an at least somewhat trustworthy transmission of truth and becomes much more a discussion of the possibility of telling the truth of oneself or one’s experiences. Testimony in works such as *Maus* folds back upon itself and is at its most truthful when it expresses self-doubt. Instead of a truth-telling about the past, testimony here becomes a discussion of the possibilities of truth-telling. This postmodern shift of testimony finds its genesis in the crisis of testimony in the face of the Holocaust (see: Bernard-Donals and Glejzer and Derrida 2000).

42. For a more extensive discussion of postmodernism in relation to the representation of the Holocaust, see Eaglestone; Berger and Cronin.

43. The selection criteria: (1) Academic article in journal or essay collection, book chapter, book, or dissertation that focuses on *Maus* or has *Maus* as one of its central case studies. (2) Languages: English and German. (3) Longer than five pages (taking into account varying page layout). (4) No interviews. (5) No MA or BA Theses. (6) If previously published, select the earliest publication. If the later publication is longer or altered, use the longer version in the reading process but keep the earliest publication for the archive. The application of this last criterion yields some surprising results in relation to David Smith’s review article of the academic reception of *Maus*. For Smith, 2003 was an especially prolific year for *Maus* scholarship (Smith 2015, 500). This has to do with the spike in publications on *Maus* caused by Deborah Geis’ edited volume. However, after subtracting the previously published articles from the collection, 2003, with seven publications, is not that far above the average of five publications per year and quite far below 2009, for which I have found eleven publications. A spike, coincidentally, that probably has more to do with the peculiarities of academic publishing than anything else. This is especially clear when comparing the number of publications on *Maus* with the number of pages that these publications contain. On the basis of pages, 2006 would be the most prolific year because of the length of Ole Frahm’s *Genealogie des Holocausts*. My point here being that the academic publication history of *Maus* is best characterized as relatively stable between 1987 and 2017, as is illustrated by figure five, which displays the cumulative number of pages written on *Maus* in academia.

44. Robert S. Leventhal’s “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: Working-Through The Trauma of the Holocaust,” was published as part of his online *Responses to the Holocaust. A Hypermedia Sourcebook for the Humanities* (<http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/holocaust/spiegelman.html>).

45. See Delannoy 1998; Delannoy 2002; Delannoy 2003; Lacour; Haudot 2005; Haudot 2008; Théofilakis-Brendahan; Malgouzou; Normandin.
46. See appendix for the chronological bibliography of *Maus* scholarship that was used in this study.
47. There is another publication in 1987: Graham Smith's "From Mickey to Maus: Recalling the Holocaust through Cartoon," published in *Oral History* vol. 15. nr. 1. However, because this article is a long interview it has been omitted from the archive and this study.
48. *Maus* was initially published serially in *Raw* between 1980 and 1991. Two volumes collecting what was then called *Maus I* and *Maus II* were published by Pantheon Books in 1986 and 1991. In 1996 a one volume "complete" edition was published which combined and replaced the earlier two-volume publication.
49. The other two being Brown and Kaplan.
50. The danger of claiming clumsiness as a strength of comics is that it limits comics' representation of the past to one that succeeds because it fails. The more successful this claim, the more difficult it is to argue that comics are able to represent the past successfully through other means than abstraction away from historiographic and mechanical realism.
51. Huyssen's discussions of *Maus* at first appear to be a German original article and an English translation. Upon reading both, it becomes clear that the later English version is a substantial reworking. As such I have decided to keep both of the articles separate in this discussion and the archive on which it is based.
52. See Staub; Klimek; Mandel.
53. See Charlson; Laga; Levine; Marks; Thormann; Glejzer 2003; Miller; Gordon 2004; Costello; Ketchum Glass; Ógi; McGlothlin 2008; Mulman; Eakin; Heller; Copley; Merino; Berlatsky 2011; McGlothlin 2011; Morris; Kolár; Matloob Haghanikar.
54. See Bosmajian; Budick for psychoanalysis; Ewert; Horstkotte and Pedri for narratology; Vice 2001; Meneses for chronotope; Schuldiner for metalepsis; Mandaville for gender; Bredehoft for materiality.
55. See Loewenstein; Adams 1999; Adams 2008; Barr; Chun; Vizzini; Grabau.
56. See Baccolini & Zanettin; Porcelli; Urdiales-Shaw 2013; Urdiales-Shaw 2015.
57. Besides the impact of *Maus*, the overall preferences for "heavier" genres and subjects in academia in general and in fields of study that are not yet comfortably established specifically can be seen as another leading cause of the focus on a particular set of comics in early comics studies.
58. See, for example, Alan Rosen's "The Language of Survival: English as Metaphor in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*" (1994).

59. A convincing illustration of the importance of *Maus* for the early Anglophone study of comics is the fact that three out of the sixteen essays collected in *The Graphic Novel* focused on Spiegelman's comic.
60. Pseudonym of Peter Pollmann.
61. Joost Pollmann, Pontiac's younger brother, is the foremost Dutch comics reviewer and has published several books on comics.
62. There is also a significant difference in the presence of the author in these works. While in *Maus* the author continually draws himself in a form of self-caricature "that allows readers to see and scrutinize how the author imagines her or himself" (Rifkind 402-3), *Kraut* does not feature a similar continual process of self-portraiture.
63. "IK BEN LANGE TIJD VAN PLAN GEWEEST DEZE BRIEF TE BEËINDIGEN MET HET BEELD VAN MÛHSAM DIE HET STRAND VAN DE DAAIBOOIBAAI OPSTROMPELT, DE VERBRIJZELDE HANDEN VOORUITGESTOKEN OM JOU VERVOLGENS TE WURGEN.. EEN GOEDE VRIEND MET EEN GROOT HART DIE IK DAT VERTELDE SMEEKTE MIJ DAT NIET TE DOEN, OM JOU TE VERGEVEN... MISSCHIEN HEEFT HIJ WEL GELIJK. HET ZOU OOK WEL ERG "GRAND GUIGNOL" ZIJN GEWEEST... MAAR OF DE BEGRIPPEN "SMAAKVOL" EN "SHOAH" OOIT GOED SAMEN GAAN BETWIJFEL IK."
64. In this chapter, I use small caps to signal that these passages are handwritten in the original work.
65. "MOET IK JOU GEWOON ZIEN ALS ANY "ANGRY YOUNG MAN" VAN 19? JUST ANOTHER TEENAGE-REACTION TEGEN DE OP AARDE AANGETROFFENWANTOESTAND? EEN PROVOCERENDE NAZI-NOZEM? EEN SHOCKERENDE PUNKPADVINDER? [...] GRAAG ZOU IK GENOEMDE "ONSCULDIGE" MOTIEVEN ACHTER JOUW GEDRAG ZOEKEN, MAAR ZO SIMPEL IS 'T NIET: NOZEMS WILLEN GEEN BEVOLKINGSGROEP UITROEIEN..."
66. See Eakin p. 217.
67. *Kraut's* publication was also met with reviews in national newspapers and was subject of a television documentary for the Dutch network VPRO by Chris Kijne in 2003. A search with *LexisNexis* yields eight relevant results between October 2000 and February 2001. Two of these articles (Eiselin; Brummelen 2000) are more general review articles about the rise of the autobiographical graphic novel. The six other articles are reviews ("Kraut ; Peter Pontiac tekent zijn vaders biografie: een voorpublicatie"; "Bittere biografiek van foute vader"; Meijer; Brummelen 2001; Jongstra; "Peter Pontiac: Vlamme brief aan verdwenen vader").
68. In the United States, these comics were published first as *Classic Comics* and after 1947 as *Classics Illustrated* (1941-1971) (van Eijk and de Vos).
69. Translated from the French *Oscar Hamel et Isidore* (1945-55). This comic by F.A. Breyssse was published originally in *Coeurs Valliants*.
70. The only speech balloons are located on page 24, 97, 113-115, 146, 150, and 155, and there are thought balloons on page 3, 69, and 100. There are also a number of text boxes that look like speech balloons but are actually the narrator's explanation of a certain aspect of a drawing (see fig. 12).



71. “Zij wilden liever typografische letters maar ik heb mijn poot stijf gehouden omdat ik vond dat het dan geen brief meer was.”

72. As such, *Kraut* could also be read alongside other literary works that turn back to handwriting in an increasingly digital age. See Drucker 1995 van Dijk 2012, Brillenburg Wurth 2014, and Plate 2015.

73. “HOOP DAT MIJN HANDSCHRIFT TE ONTCIJFEREN IS?!”

74. A translation of an earlier version of this chapter was published in *European Comics Art*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-21.

75. “HET MOCHT DUS, EN ONVERVEERD STORTTE JE JE IN HET “FRONTISME,” MET HART, ZIEL EN PEN. VOOR HET FRONT-ORGAAN DE WEG BEGON JE STUKKEN TE SCHRIJVEN, DAARBIJ “VLOTTE DANCINGS EN (KITSCH-)FILMS” NIET ONTZIEND!”

76. Another remarkable aspect of Pontiac’s writing is that he addresses his father and, with that, the reader, in the second person quite aggressively. The fact that *Kraut* is a letter then also causes the reader to be interrogated by the narrative that she/he is reading. Besides an investigation of his father’s past, then, *Kraut* also can be read as addressing the past of the reader.

77. “NET ALS JIJ HEB IK OOIIT GEFULMINEERD TEGEN “GENOTZUCHTIG” EGOÏSME (HYPOCRIET GENOEG!), MAAR NIET TEGEN “VOLKSVREEMDE ELEMENTEN”...”

78. Peter Pontiac’s uncle.

79. “Nadat ik het proefwerk had ingeleverd bij de Germaanse berichtendienst te ’s-Gravenhage, kreeg ik bericht dat ik mij moest melden.” Pontiac in handschrift: ““STALER CONTRA HITLIN OM DE EER VAN EUROPETTE!”?”

80. This section was difficult to translate due to a number of puns. The Dutch “als een speer,” literally meaning going as fast as a spear, refers to the Nazi architect Albert Speer. “OOK JOUW NA-OORLOGSE RECHTERS HEBBEN JOUW TOESPRAKEN “ERNSTIG OPGEVAT”... IN HET PLEIDOOI VAN JOUW VERDEDIGING WORDT BEWEERD DAT JE “BEZWAAR HEBT GEMAAKT” TEGEN DE RONSEL-SPEECH (MAAR DAT DIT NIET WERD ‘GEACCEPTEERD’) IK VIND DAT MOEILIK TE GELOVEN. JE CARRIÈRE SWINGDE, ALS ’N SPEER VAN EEN LEIEN DAKJE...”

81. “OOK REPT JE PLEITER VAN BRIEVEN, DIE IK GRAAG HAD WILLEN LEZEN!”

82. Here, the narrator refers to a letter his father wrote to Arnold Meijer on the 18th of Februari 1942: “Er moet kost wat kost iets gedaan worden in deze dagen, er moet een Volk behouden worden en ik ken uit eigen ervaring den prachtige tijd, die zoovele kerels in het zwarte hemd onder het teeken van den wolfsangel voeren in kristalzuiver idealisme en grooten werkelijkheidszin.” (Groeneveld 337).

83. “TROUWENS, OOK “AUSCHWITZ” EN “VERGEVING” VIND IK MOEILIK TE COMBINEREN. AL HEB JIJZELF MISSCHIEEN GEEN JOODSE HAAR GEKRENKT, HET “KRISTAL (NACHT)-ZUIVERE IDEALISME” VAN JOU & DE JOUWEN HAD DAAR GEEN MOEITE MEE, NIETWAAR? MIJN VERGIFFENIS ZOU EEN DRUPPEL ZIJN OP EEN GLOEIENDE PLAAT VAN SCHULD. AL MOET IK ZEGGEN DAT HET BRAVE GEVOEL DAT ME BIJ DE VOORGAANDE WOORDEN OMGEEFT EEN ONGEMAKKELIJKE SENSATIE IS.”

84. “OF WIL IK DAT ALLEEN MAAR GELOVEN, MOET IK JOU OP JE KNIËN ZIEN, VOORDAT IK KAN ZEGGEN DAT IK VAN JE HOUD, JE MIS? MIJN LIEFDE VOOR JOU IS EVEN AMBIVALENT ALS JOUW “DOOD”.. HET VOELT HAAST ONFATSOENLIJK OM VAN EEN VADER TE HOUDEN MET FASCISTISCHE DENKBEELDEN, ZEKER IN EEN TIJD WAARIN DAT GEDACHTEGOED ZICH ONUITROEIBAAR TOONT [...] KLAARBLIJKELIJK KAN IK JOU ALLEEN VERGEVEN DOOR EEN ZELFMOORD, EEN VRIJWILLIGE EN ZELF VOLTROKKEN DOODSTRAF.!?”

85. For more on the Comics Code and the public uproar leading up to it, see Amy Kiste Nyberg’s *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (1998) and Bart Beaty’s *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (2005).

86. The ways in which the comics series and the subsequent blockbuster films use the Holocaust past as a backdrop in order to find some form of redemption for its main villain Magneto as well as facilitating and artificially deepening their treatment of racism, bigotry, and persecution have been well documented in Lawrence Baron’s “X-Men as J Men: The Jewish Subtext of a Comic Book Movie” (2003) and Cheryl Alexander Malcolm’s “Witness, Trauma, and Remembrance: Holocaust Representation and X-Men Comics” (2008). For more general treatments of the thematics of the X-Men universe, see Martin Lund’s “The Mutant Problem: X-Men, Confirmation Bias, and the Methodology of Comics and Identity” (2015) and Marc DiPaolo’s “Gay Rights, Civil Rights, and Nazism in the X-Men Universe” (2011).

87. Small-caps is used in this chapter to symbolize the all-caps comic sans font used in *Magneto: Testament*.

88. I have had to number *Magneto: Testament*’s by hand because it does not have page numbers. As such, my numbering is best read as an indication that can help readers navigate quicker towards the discussed sections of the comic. Please be advised that because I used the collected volume of the miniseries, the numbering I use here might not correspond to the individual installments of the series.

89. This in opposition to, but not contrary to the logic of, Barthes’ analysis of image-text relations in his famous “Rhetoric of the Image,” where he sees text as anchoring the possible connotations of an advertisement image (Barthes 1977, 38–39).

90. E.C. Comics’ particularly dramatic use of onomatopoeia is also noted by Witek in his comparison of *Classics Illustrated* and E.C. Comics’ renditions of the shot that started the Civil War (1989, 42).

91. The absence of thought balloons from *Magneto: Testament* betrays their dual effect for realist representation in comics. On the one hand, thought balloons allow access into the thoughts of characters and thus enable subjective realism by offering direct insight into a character’s experience. On the other hand, thought balloons detract from subjective realism because they make visible something that is not perceivable.

92. I am here purposefully evading a more Bakhtinian notion of dialogue, where dialogism is a characteristic of all language that expands the use of a word in a specific text and sees it in relation to other uses of that word (Bakhtin 1981, 279). From Bakhtin’s point of view, dialogism is certainly not limited to dialogue, but would include the juxtapositions of different kinds of texts in comics as well. Through a deliberate incorporation of different kinds of discourse and by being aware of the other instances of use of the words—this is one of the central claims behind Bakhtin’s *Problems of*

*Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963)—literature is able to offer up an image of civil society that reflects its multi-voicedness or heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1984, 204; Bakhtin 1981, 262-263; Pechey 23). On first glance, there are many parallels between Bakhtin's conception of discourse and my approach to realism in comics. Still, I move away from a Bakhtinian approach for two main reasons. First, Bakhtin's approach to representation is utterly language-focused, leaving little room for a discussion the relation between text and image than my current theoretical framework. Second, for Bakhtin, on a very basic level, it is possible to incorporate another's experience of the world in the novel, which is very thing that he praises in Dostoevsky's novels (Bakhtin 1984, 43). Such a belief cannot be ascribed to the creators of the comics that I discuss in this thesis, who continually emphasize the impossibility of representing another's experiences in their works. As such, Bakhtin's approach to dialogue would more confuse than clarify my readings of post-*Maus* World War II comics.

93. The text in the text box is in quotation marks to further highlight the connection with the spoken text.

94. One way in which other historical comics have questioned historiographic discourse is by embedding historiography within the story world. This makes visible the contradiction inherent to the practice of historiography, which is always caught up in the subjectivity of the historian yet which tries to transcend this subjectivity through method, cooperation, and/or institutionalization. In Shigeru Mizuki's *Showa: A History of Japan* (*Komikku Shōwa-shi*, 1988-1989), for example, historical discourse is narrated by the fictional character *Rat Man* who readers of other works by Mizuki know as extremely untrustworthy. By using such a character to narrate Japan's wartime history, Mizuki's historical comic series finds a way to have historiographic narration while at the same time stressing the fundamentally subjective basis of historiography.

95. In terms of content, *Magneto: Testament's* covers, as well as its main narrative line, conform with the focus on children that can be found in many Holocaust films. For more on this, see "The Jew as Child", in *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (2003).

96. For more on *Schindler's List* specifically and Holocaust film in general, see the third edition update of Insdorf's classic work *Indelible Shadows* (1983), Baron's *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present* (2005), and Kerner's *Film and the Holocaust* (2011).

97. Hagelstein's "How to Capture Life as it Happens? An Aesthetical Approach to Joann Sfar's Drawing" (4-5) points to a pertinent discussion concerning the different levels of realism of Moebius and Sfar's drawing.

98. As Anthony Grafton writes in *The Footnote: A Curious History* (1997): "the text persuades, the notes prove" (15).

99. Race shame.

100. It has proven difficult to locate the exact photograph on which the page in *Magneto: Testament* was based on because the link provided in the notes accompanying the collected volume of the comic no longer works.

101. See, for photography, the controversy that erupted around Didi-Huberman's contribution to the exhibition catalogue of the 2001 exhibition *Mémoires des camps*, which is published in English, together with Didi-Huberman's response to the critique

offered by Gerard Wajcman and Elizabeth Pagnoux, in *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2008).

102. I have taken the notion of “witnessing witnessing” from the title of Thomas Trezise’s *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony* (2013).

103. I would like to express my thanks to *Mizukipro* for extending the rights to publish images from Shigeru Mizuki’s works with the analysis. Obtaining these image permissions, moreover, would never have been possible without the help of Maki Hakui from *Presspop* and Zack Davisson, who is currently the main translator of Mizuki’s work and was generous enough to write a letter of recommendation for me to *Mizukipro* as well as help me untangle the publication history of *Onward*.

104. See Spurgeon 2011, Alverson 2012, Olukotun 2011, Robinson 2011. A similar statement can be found in Paul Gravett’s *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (2004, 49). Of the reviews, only Robinson problematizes this somewhat simplified binary characterization of Mizuki’s use of graphic styles.

105. Please note that *Drawn & Quarterly* published *Onward* in its original Japanese reading direction, which reads from right to left. In fig. 1, therefore, page 32 is the right-hand side page while page 33 is on the left-hand side.

106. The first issues of *GeGeGe no Kitarō* have only recently, after the success of Mizuki’s historical comics, been translated into English. The first three volumes are *Kitaro: Birth of Kitaro* (2016), *Kitaro: Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon* (2016), and *Kitaro: The Great Tanuki War* (2017).

107. In a short article published on his website, Davisson also convincingly shows that Mizuki drew inspiration from images found in 1950s E.C. horror comics (Davisson) (see fig. 38).

108. It is difficult to pin *Garo* magazine to a specific style or ideology since it went through a number of distinctive phases in its development (see Ryan Holberg’s various publications for more information about *Garo*). In the context of the current article, it is noteworthy that for the first years of its publication, *Garo* was an “antiwar, pro-direct democracy political magazine for elementary and middle school children” (Nadel and Holmberg). Mizuki was, as an artist already published in the first issue of *Garo*, involved in this pedagogical anti-reactionary project. In 1991, moreover, Mizuki published a short historical comic detailing Japanese war crimes in *The Sixth Grader*, which further cemented his position as a criticaster of those who attempted to sweep the atrocities committed by the Imperial Army under the rug (Penney 2008).

109. Mizuki’s autobiography has not yet been translated in English. French translations do exist (in three parts: *Vie de Mizuki*. Éditions Cornélius: 2012–2014). In my translation of the title, I have chosen to remain closer to the more economic French variant.

110. There is also a television film adaptation of Mizuki’s war experiences called *Kitaro Witnessed the Noble Death: Shigeru Mizuki’s War* (*Kitarō ga Mita Gyokusai: Mizuki Shigeru no Sensō* 2007). Moreover, between March and September 2010, the Japanese television station NHK aired a drama series based on Mizuki’s wife’s autobiography

called *GeGeGe's Wife* (*GeGeGe no Nyobō* 2008), which also briefly describes Mizuki's war experiences.

111. Mizuki's contact with the Tolai resulted in a life-time friendship (see fig. 43). While Mizuki did not choose to stay and live out his life with the tribe, something they had offered him, he did return to visit as soon as his financial situation allowed him and tried to repay the tribes' kindness to him (Davisson 2013).

112. As was already noted in the theoretical framework of my thesis, Fredric Jameson's work in *The Anatomies of Realism* (2013) is very important for my thinking here. In this work, Jameson argues that realism should not be seen as a period in literary history or as a particular combination of reality effects. Rather, "Realism as a form (or mode) is historically associated, particularly if you position the *Quichote* as the first (modern, or realist) novel, with the function of demystification" (Jameson 2013, 4). While I take from Jameson's work the notion that realism is constituted through demystification of other modes of realism, I do not follow Jameson's subsequent point which ties realism historically to the nineteenth century and the aim to represent the new affects created by a bourgeois society (Jameson 2013, 32) through a specific balance of destiny and eternal present (Jameson 2013, 26).

113. Lefèvre's original list also includes color. Because *Onward* is in black and white and has no dramatic differences in coloring that cannot be approached by way of the other markers, I have omitted it here.

114. The cyclopean perspective is, as was famously analyzed by the iconologist Erwin Panofsky in *Perspective as a Symbolic Form* (1927), a convention rather than a mathematical reality, as which it is often presented.

115. For another discussion of the ties between Töpffer and romanticism, see Willems (2009)

116. See, for example, Witek (1989, 114 and 122), Cvetkovich (114), Medley (55), and Wettlaufer (459). For an example of a similar type argument but centered around the art of drawing, see Rawson (1).

117. In Mizuki's wider historical oeuvre, the distinction between the two graphic styles also at times flat out becomes the distinction between the historical and the personal narrative. See, for example, *Showa* 2014, 434.

118. In this respect, *Onward*, as well as Mizuki's close contact with the indigenous Tolai tribe shows remarkable similarities with *The Thin Red Line* (1998), even though it was published more than 25 years before the film.

119. In relation to *Life of Mizuki* and *Showa*, Mizuki's use of his famous historical photography archive is limited in *Onward* in the sense that he much less obviously directly inserts photographs on the page. In *Onwards*, Mizuki inserts detailed retracings. I wonder, however, how significant the ontology of these images is against both their virtual inseparability before the human eye and technological advances which undermined any fundamental difference concerning the malleability of the photographic and the drawn image.

## ENDNOTES

120. See, for example, the treatment of the Nanjing massacre in *Showa* (2013, 482-485) (see fig. 53), or the description of the underlying motivation of the Japanese expansion in *Showa*: “JAPAN WANTS TO MODERNIZE THE ASIAN COUNTRIES [...] BUT BEHIND THE PURITY OF MANIFEST DESTINY SWIRL LESS BEAUTIFUL APPETITES AND LUSTS. JAPAN’S REAL INTENTION IS TOTAL DOMINATION” (2014, 17-20).

121. In 1889 the English Japanophile Marcus Bourne Huish wrote in *Japan and its Art* that the waxing and waning of the moon is associated with the endless cycle of life and death (134-5). Yet the Japanese is hardly the only culture in which such a notion exists, nor is this the only association in the Japanese culture with the cycles of the moon. The moon means many things in many cultures and I do not want to present a too stereotypical reading of its metaphorical meaning in my analysis of *Onward*. At the same time, the particular use in Mizuki’s comic does strongly suggest a connection of the waning of the moon with the waning of life.

122. It is here that I find the biggest flaw of the English translation in the somewhat obnoxious way in which the letters of the song are placed over Maruyama’s face. In the original version, the letters are placed much more around Maruyama’s face, instead of over it.

123. I have borrowed the phrase “the content of the form” from Hayden White, who uses it as the title of one of his books.

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5. Figure depicting the number of pages of academic texts written on *Maus* per year between 1987 and 2016. Made by author.
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## Appendix:

# List of Academic Publications on Maus by Date

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# Summary: Comics Realism and the Maus Event: Comics and the Dynamics of World War II Remembrance

In this thesis, I consider the causes and effects of the success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-1991) and chart the formal directions in which World War II comics have moved since. I do so through the theoretical lens of realism, which I conceptualize in the first chapter alongside the work of Fredric Jameson, Erich Auerbach, and Ernst Gombrich. Like these scholars, I see realism as a continual struggle between different ways of depicting the world. This means that instead of approaching realism as denoting the degree in which a representation supposedly succeeds in capturing reality, I consider it as a field of research in which there is place for the different ways in which realism has been defined alongside shifting tastes and media

technologies. With this conception of realism in hand, I show how the depiction of the past in World War II comics is often dependent on combinations of different forms of realism in images and text, rather than on a complete adherence to one such form. In order to analyze how the different forms of realism most prevalent in the World War II comics that I study co-constitute a representation of the past, I distinguish between three prevalent modes of realism: the subjective, historiographic, and mechanic. Where the subjective mode of realism is centered around an experiencing subject, the historiographic mode revolves around the discipline and practice of historiography, and the mechanic mode around the perception and reproductive prowess of machines.

In the second chapter, I investigate the reception of *Maus* in academia in order to demonstrate how the success of *Maus* intensified the already existing perceived suitability of the comics medium to subjective realism. *Maus*, I argue, became a canonic work for memory and literary studies because it bridges the all-too-easy divide between American Holokitsch and European Holocaust art and because it broadens the focus from Holocaust survivors to their family and the societies in which they live. Through the success of *Maus*, comics became more visible to academia. But while success of *Maus* made comics more visible, it also caused certain aspects of the medium's affordances for historical representation to be enlarged at the cost of others.

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I analyze three other World War II comics in order to show that the medium's strength lies more in how it affords the combining of different modes of realism in text and image, than in its special suitability to one of these modes. In chapter three, which revolves around Peter Pontiac's *Kraut* (2001), I demonstrate how Pontiac combines text-based modes of realism as a way of authenticating his inquiry into his father's collaboration during World War II and investigating the limits and possibilities of different kinds of texts as a means to reconstruct the past. By decoding

*Kraut's* densely packed and intricately composed pages, the readers uncover a nuanced account of collaboration supported by subjective and historiographic realism. I consider Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's *Magneto: Testament's* fictional Holocaust testimony in the fourth chapter. Like *Maus* and *Kraut*, *Magneto: Testament* combines historiography, testimony, eyewitness accounts, and photography in its depiction of the camp history of the supervillain Magneto. Unlike the other comics I discuss in this thesis, however, *Magneto: Testament* aims for a transparent representation of the past. But because it aims to achieve transparency by combining a wide range of different modes of realism that allude to other media, *Magneto: Testament* unwittingly shows that the illusion of realism produces a proliferation of representational forms, rather than the intended merger between representation and the outside world. Moreover, while it employs all these different ways of reconstructing the past, Pak and Di Giandomenico's comic downplays almost all formal characteristics that are associated with comics, such as dramatic onomatopoeia or expressive page compositions and superpowers. In their denial of elements that evoke "comicsness," and the remediation of media that they perceive as more realistic, Pak and Di Giandomenico return to an outdated conception of the comics medium as inadequate for historical representation. The last comic I discuss, Shigeru Mizuki's *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, is a fictionalized reconstruction of the author's experiences as a Japanese Imperial Army infantryman in the Pacific during World War II. By drawing his rendition of the past in a range of different graphic styles, Mizuki demonstrates the narrative content of graphic style. What is more, Mizuki makes use and deconstructs the connotations of schematic and near-photorealist drawing. In *Onward*, different ways of seeing the world are juxtaposed on the page co-recreate a past. Moreover, because it deploys different modes of realism in such close proximity to one another, *Onward* can also be read as a probing of the limits of different kinds of images for the depiction of the catastrophic past.

## SUMMARY

The works that are discussed in this thesis are marked by a desire to reestablish contact with the past. At the same time, they struggle with and demonstrate the impossibility of reconstructing the past as it was. In their attempts to do so nonetheless, the makers of *Maus*, *Kraut*, *Magneto: Testament*, and *Onward* draw on the comics medium's ability to render the past in densely layered combinations of the subjective, historiographic, and mechanic modes of realism in texts and images. By analyzing the way in which different modes of representing the past are brought together in comics, I not only show that the medium's affordance for historical representation is much broader than is often assumed, I also uncover World War II comics as reflections of the impact of an ever-widening media landscape on the remembrance of World War II.

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# Samenvatting: Striprealisme en het Maus event: strips en de dynamiek van de herinnering

Met dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de oorzaken en gevolgen van het succes van Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-1991) en analyseer ik hoe striptekenaars historische representatie hebben vormgegeven in daarna gepubliceerde strips. Ik doe dit met behulp van een herconceptualisering van realisme dat ik in het eerste hoofdstuk in het verlengde van het werk van Fredric Jameson, Erich Auerbach en Ernst Gombrich uiteenzet. Net als deze academici zie ik realisme als een constante strijd tussen verschillende manieren om de wereld te representeren. Dit betekent dat ik in dit proefschrift realisme niet benader als een concept waarmee een bepaalde mate van mimetische vervolmaking in een representatie wordt aangeduid, maar als een onderzoeksveld waarin plaats is voor de tegenstrijdige manieren waarop realisme historisch gezien langs ontwikkelingen in smaak en mediatechnologieën is gedefinieerd. Door middel van deze opengebroken conceptualisering van realisme laat ik zien dat de verbeelding van het verleden in strips vaak niet gestoeld is op

één, maar op een combinatie van verschillende vormen van realisme in zowel beelden als teksten. Om de manieren waarop in Tweede Wereldoorlogstrips verschillende vormen van realisme het verleden samen representeren te onderzoeken, maak ik een onderscheid tussen drie prevalentie modi van realisme: de subjectieve, de historiografische en de mechanische. Waar de subjectieve modus is gecentreerd rond de waarnemingen van een subject, baseert de historiografische modus zich op de discipline en praktijk van de historiografie, en de mechanische modus zich op de vermogens van machines voor registratie en representatie.

In het tweede hoofdstuk demonstreer ik door middel van een studie van de academische receptie van *Maus* hoe het succes van Spiegelman's strip de bestaande gepercipieerde synergie tussen het medium strip en de subjectieve modus van realisme heeft versterkt. *Maus* werd een canonisch werk voor zowel de literatuurwetenschap als memory studies omdat het de al te gemakkelijke splitsing tussen Amerikaanse Holocaust kitsch en Europese Holocaust kunst tenietdoet en omdat het de aandacht van onderzoek naar de herinnering van de Holocaust verruimt van de overlevenden naar hun families en, via deze families, naar de samenleving. Het succes van *Maus* maakte strip voor de academie zichtbaar als onderzoeksobject. Maar mede doordat *Maus* voor het medium als geheel kwam te staan zorgde het succes van Spiegelman er ook voor dat bepaalde aspecten van de mogelijkheden van het medium voor historische representatie ten koste van anderen werden uitvergroot.

In de op deze receptiestudie volgende hoofdstukken analyseer ik drie andere Tweede Wereldoorlogstrips om te laten zien dat de kracht van het medium schuilt in hoe het een vertelling van de geschiedenis in een combinatie van verschillende modi van realisme in teksten en beelden mogelijk maakt, en niet, zoals in de academische receptie van *Maus* vaak gesteld wordt, in de bijzondere geschiktheid van het medium voor de subjectieve modus van realisme. In hoofdstuk drie demonstreer ik hoe Peter Pontiac in *Kraut* (2001)



door verschillende vormen van realisme in tekst te combineren zowel zijn onderzoek naar zijn vaders collaboratieverleden authentiseert als de mogelijkheden en grenzen van verschillende vormen van tekst in de verbeelding van het verleden bevraagt. Door middel van een ontcijfering van de uiterst informatiedichte en intelligent ontworpen pagina's van *Kraut* toon ik het werk als een genuanceerde overdenking van de motieven voor en impact van collaboratie die overeind wordt gehouden door zowel subjectief als historiografisch realisme. Grek Pak en Carmine Di Giandomenico's fictionele Holocaustmemoire *Magneto: Testament* (2008-2009) staat centraal in het vierde hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift. Net als *Maus* en *Kraut* combineert *Magneto: Testament* in haar verbeelding van het verleden historiografie, memoires, ooggetuigenverslagen en fotografie. Waar Pak en Di Giandomenico met *Magneto: Testament* echter in afwijken ten opzichte van de andere strips die ik onderzoek is in hun poging het verleden van een fictionele superschurk op een zo transparant mogelijke wijze in stripvorm op te tekenen. Maar omdat deze transparantie wordt nagestreefd in combinaties van modi van realisme die verwijzen naar verschillende media demonstreren de makers van *Magneto: Testament* dat het najagen van de illusie van realisme hier de proliferatie van vormen van representatie voortbrengt, in plaats van de beoogde samensmelting tussen representatie en realiteit. Hierbij komt dat de makers van *Magneto: Testament* zo veel mogelijk elementen en kenmerken die met strip worden geassocieerd, zoals onomatopoeën, expressieve paginacomposities en superkrachten, uit hun strip weren of het gebruik ervan sterk limiteren. In hun keuze om dergelijke elementen te vervangen door remediaties uit media die zij als realistischer zien, wordt duidelijk dat Pak en Di Giandomenico met *Magneto: Testament* terugvallen in een verouderde opvatting over de ongeschiktheid van het medium strip voor historische representatie. De laatste strip die ik in dit onderzoek analyseer is Shigeru Mizuki's *Onward Toward Our Noble Deaths* (1971). *Onward* is een gefictionaliseerde reconstructie van de oorlogservaringen van

de auteur, die tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog als voetsoldaat in het Japanse Imperiale Leger vocht. Door dit verleden niet in één, maar in een spectrum van verschillende stijlen op te tekenen toont Mizuki de narratieve inhoud van grafische stijl. In zijn verbeelding van het verleden maakt Mizuki niet alleen gebruik van de connotaties van zijn meer schematische en meer fotografische tekenstijlen, ook deconstrueert hij de schijnbaar absolute verschillen tussen deze vormen van representatie. Zo worden in *Onward* verschillende manieren om het verleden visueel vorm te geven samen ingezet voor een verbeelding van het verleden. Maar doordat Mizuki deze verschillende modi waarin het verleden kan worden verbeeld naast elkaar inzet, is *Onward* ook te lezen als een onderzoek naar de mogelijkheden en grenzen van verschillende representatieve stijlen voor de verbeelding van het catastrofale verleden.

Uit alle werken die ik in dit proefschrift analyseer spreekt een verlangen om een connectie met het verleden te herstellen. Tegelijkertijd zijn deze werken te lezen als overdenkingen of expressies van het onvermogen van representatie om het verleden ongeroerd naar het heden te transporteren. In hun pogingen om ondanks dit onvermogen het verleden zo getrouw mogelijk te representeren bedienen de makers van *Maus*, *Kraut*, *Magneto: Testament* en *Onward* zich van de mogelijkheid van het medium strip om op de pagina op gelaagde wijze subjectieve, historiografische en mechanische modi van realisme te combineren. Door te analyseren hoe het medium strip makers in staat stelt verschillende manieren om het verleden te representeren naast elkaar in te zetten, laat ik zien dat het vermogen tot historische representatie van strip breder is dan vaak wordt aangenomen. Ook toon ik strips als reflecties van de impact van een zich constant uitbreidend medialandschap op de herinnering van de Tweede Wereldoorlog.