

**THE CASE FOR GRAPHIC COUNTER-MEMORIALS IN THE COMICS OF JOE SACCO, ART
SPIEGELMAN, AND BRIAN WOOD AND RICCARDO BURCHIELLI**

by

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Abstract

The Case for Graphic Counter-Memorials in the Comics of Joe Sacco, Art Spiegelman, and Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli

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My dissertation considers a group of contemporary comics about war by Joe Sacco, Art Spiegelman, and Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli, as examples of a larger genre I call the graphic counter-memorial. Graphic counter-memorial comics address history, memory, and trauma as they depict the political, violent, and collective aspects of war and social conflict. I argue that the particular comics I study in this dissertation, which mingle fiction and non-fiction and autobiography as well as journalism, follow the tradition of the counter-monuments described by James E. Young. Studying commemorative practices and counter-monuments in the 1980s, Young notes a generation of German artists who resist traditional forms of memorialization by upending the traditional monument structure in monument form. Young looks at the methods, aims, and aesthetics these artists use to investigate and problematize practices that establish singular historical narratives. Like these works of public art, the graphic counter-memorial asks the reader to question 'official history,' authenticity, and the objectivity typically associated with non-fiction and reporting. I argue that what these comics offer is an opportunity to re-examine comics that incorporate real and familiar social and historical events and wars.

Comics allow creators to visually and textually overlap perspectives and time. Graphic counter-memorials harness the comic medium's potential to refuse fixed

narratives of history by emphasizing a sense of incompleteness in their representation of trauma, memory, and war. This makes possible a more complex and rich way to engage with Western society's relationship to the past, and in particular, a more complex way of engaging with collective memory and war. Their modes of mediating history produce political intervention through both form and content.

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Introduction:

Comics and Representing War and Conflict

"In fact everything I call philosophy is rooted in my miseducation in reading comic books."

- W. J. T. Mitchell, quoted in "Public
Conversation: What the %\$#! Happened to
Comics?"

To many, the controversy around the publication of the Muhammad cartoon images in the conservative Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September of 2005, is a perfect example of the power of the image. At the time of the cartoons' publication, the media explained that since any portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad was banned by the Quran, these cartoons—one Muhammad was wearing a turban that resembled a bomb, while another Muhammad was stopping men from entering heaven because heaven had run out of virgins—were profane. The controversial cartoons were described as Islamophobic and racist, and they sparked debate and violent protests around the world. Whether one agrees that these cartoons are blasphemous, they are indeed racist and provocative because they depict Muhammad as a terrorist or in some other disparaging way. What makes these cartoons compelling in a discussion of image theory or the power of the drawn image is that they not only parody what is prohibited, but they also simultaneously parody those who prohibit the parody in the first place.

As it turned out, many of the protestors had either not seen the cartoons at all because they were removed from online sites or destroyed in some other way, or had only seen and reacted to inaccurate reproductions of the cartoons. Nevertheless, the cartoons inspired violence in which 200 people were killed. A second critical point emerges from this: print and online publications struggled over whether or not to reprint the images,

authentic or otherwise. For many news outlets, the decision to not reprint the cartoons boiled down to the assumption that the images could be adequately described in words alone. A *New York Times* editorial wrote that refraining from reprinting the cartoons was the right choice for organizations that typically avoided the unjustified use of images that acted as insults, especially when cartoons are so easily expressed in words (“Those Danish Cartoons” 2006). The cartoons were met with



Figure 1. Kurt Westergaard's 2005 cartoon published in *Jyllands-Posten*.

passionate criticism, refusals to sell the newspapers, legal action, and protests. Danish journalist and the culture editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, Flemming Rose, initially wrote an editorial that accompanied the cartoons, in which he explained the reasoning behind the illustrations. He believed that the fear of taking on issues about Islam was causing a political correctness that teetered on self-censorship. He also wrote an article in 2006 in *The Washington Post* continuing his rationale. In it he writes, “The cartoonists treated Islam the same way they treat Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions...We are integrating [Muslims] into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims” (Rose 2006). Both Joe Sacco and Art Spiegelman responded to the cartoons in their 2006 article “Only Pictures?” in *The Nation*. On reprinting the cartoons or not, Sacco states, “There is a value in showing people what the fuss is all about, but the impact might be violent, and an editor does have to think about those things” (Sacco and Spiegelman 2006). In contrast, Spiegelman claimed that “this notion that the images can just be described leaves me firmly

on the side of showing images...We live in a culture where images rule..." (Sacco and Spiegelman 2006). While the images might be 'easy' to describe in words, to say so misses the point: reading a description of the images and reading the images are not one and the same.

A second drawn image that provoked similarly intense and passionate responses was the July 21, 2008, *New Yorker* magazine cover by Canadian-born Barry Blitt, "The Politics of Fear." The cover shows First Lady Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama dressed in stereotypical 'militant' terrorist attire, fist bumping in the Oval Office. There is an American flag burning in the fireplace and a portrait of Osama Bin Laden hanging on the wall. As well, the depiction of Michelle Obama with an Afro adds to the stereotype of militancy in a racial context.



Figure 2. Barry Blitt's 2008 cover for the *New Yorker*.

While *The New York Times* called Blitt's cover the most memorable image of 2008, there was unprecedented emotional commentary from across the political and popular culture spectrums that denounced the image. A senator at the time, Obama and his campaign condemned the magazine's cover, claiming that despite the illustration's intent of satire, "...most readers will see it as tasteless and offensive. And we agree" (qtd. in Allen 2008). In a letter in response to the cover published by *The New Yorker*, Kareem Shora of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee writes, "Regardless of the artist's intent to produce satirical commentary, it is possible that the imagery may reinforce the fears and prejudices that it was meant to critique." But, Shora

continues, it is more important to look past the noise created and see the deeper questions that the illustration is provoking (Shora 2008). Blitt also defended his cover illustration by stating, “I think the idea that the Obamas are branded as unpatriotic [let alone as terrorists] in certain sectors is preposterous. It seemed to me that depicting the concept would show it as the fear-mongering ridiculousness that it is” (qtd. in Pitney 2008). Françoise Mouly, art director of *The New Yorker*, defended Blitt’s cover image in an interview, saying that Blitt’s cover did not create anything new. Rather it visualized what people were already saying about then-Senator Obama: “That image crystalized what was going on. This is what Barack Obama was up against when he was running” (“The Cultural Impact” 2011). As Mouly also stated in a different interview with Jeet Heer, “Images are closer to the way we truly react and then we dress up our reaction in words” (111). Blitt’s cover mirrored the way many people perceived Obama at the time, primarily due to the media’s narrative, which simultaneously showed people their own biases and assumptions about the ‘war on terror’ and what a terrorist looked like. In fact, it is the latter sentiment that the viewers likely reacted to so venomously: themselves, not the Obamas clad in terrorist garb. This is to say that the public were not exclusively reacting to Blitt’s cover and the meaning in his image; the public’s reaction was based in part on a stereotype the public already imagined the soon-to-be-President and First Lady to embody.

I bring up these two examples because they illuminate some of the most fundamental elements of the comics medium that this dissertation will explore in further depth as it studies what I call the graphic counter-memorial genre, a genre that has emerged out of the autobiography and journalism comics genres. The links between comics and power and comics and history are complex, and are eminently worthy of study. These

examples show the inherent power and immediacy of a drawn image, and its capacity to spark outrage. They also show that the cartoonist can rely on and therefore use the reader's own biases or preconceived notions in order to up-end or counter them, especially as is related to history and memory.

In this dissertation, I will study longer, more complex comics texts, that, like the single-panel political cartoons I refer to above, tackle political issues in ways that challenge 'official' historical narratives. They range from Harvey Kurtzman's war comics, Will Eisner's and Harvey Pekar's comics on Vietnam, to Joe Sacco's and Art Spiegelman's comics, and the more mainstream comics series written by Brian Wood and illustrated by Riccardo Burchielli. These texts all contend with history, memory, and trauma as they depict the political, violent, and collective aspects of war and social conflict. Studying the relationship between their words and images in connection with conflict, trauma, and memory, I wish to bring into focus the problems of representation and the ethical questions that are explored through that representation. Each comics I study here borrows and utilizes tropes from autobiography and journalism and reportage, as well as counter-narrative strategies, and does so in order to problematize a reader's mediated experience with war and conflict, and to explore how war and conflict are memorialized and portrayed. Inherent in the comics medium is its ability to invite the reader into the storytelling and meaning making; the comics I study use this medium-specific feature to implicate the reader in the violence and conflict depicted on the page in ways that emphasize the ability to both shape and question modes of representation. The immediacy and power of the drawn image has made it particularly effective in depicting and narrating the intrinsic quality of war and collective trauma. My goal in delving into the words and images of comics is, as W. J. T. Mitchell puts

it, to open up a “space of intellectual struggle, historical investigation, and artistic/critical practice” in need of further exploration (47).

Comics studies have largely been concerned with tracing the historical, cultural, and social developments of the form, and understanding the specific features that comics deploy to produce narrative and meaning.¹ Will Eisner’s 1985 *Comics and Sequential Art* represents one of the first serious discussions about comics as art and literature in the comics form, and also introduces the term ‘sequential art’ as a definition of comics: “the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (7). In his 1993 graphic guide *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud adapted Eisner’s definition of comics² to be the “juxtaposition of pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence” in order to produce an aesthetic response (19). As Hillary Chute has noted, “comics conveys several productive tensions in its basic structure. The words and images entwine, but never synthesize” (*Graphic Women* 4). Charles Hatfield also uses the idea of tension to describe the word-image relationship in comics: “the written text can function like images, and images like written text” (“An Art of Tensions” 133). Understanding how the comics medium works revolves around displacing the word-image dichotomy, but also around the medium’s ability to represent time as space, or its ability to shape time in panels (also referred to as frames). Panels—their size, shape, placement on the page, integration—not only have the ability to shape time spatially, but they also have the potential to overlap past and present moments and, in doing so, can also layer space. As McCloud rightfully states,

¹ See Chute, 2010; Dekoven, 2012.

² Along with most other comics scholars and writers, I follow the accepted standard of using comics in the plural form with a singular verb, as initiated by Scott McCloud.

“...comics is the only form in which past, present, and future are visible simultaneously”
(*The Believer* 2006).

Panels create another important feature in comics, the gutter. The gutter is the space between the panel lines and it represents a gap, or an absence, that is intended to be ‘filled’ with the reader’s experiences and direct the reader’s sense of time and duration. Eisner stresses the importance of time and timing in sequential art, as he says that the reality of a comics is established through the use of time and timing. In many comics, the expression of time and memory are laced together and become part of both the narrative and the structure. I identify these particular features of comics because they are critical to visually representing history; the comics I study here attempt to recall historical moments and trauma in ways that counter official narratives, invite the reader to participate in meaning making, and include other marginal voices.

This dissertation focuses on both the serialized comic book form as well as what Chute has called “graphic narratives”—historical graphic narratives that destabilize standard narratives of history and claim their own historicity, that emphasize the crisscross between history and fiction, without privileging one over the other. The works I study in this project pull from both fiction and non-fiction in their representation of memory and trauma and war, and issue a new challenge to contemporary memorial culture.

Memorial and commemorative culture encompasses a wide range of entities and practices such as memorials and monuments erected in public spaces, public holidays, anthems, symphonies, moments of silence, poems, and films, that are designed to represent official culture’s remembering of collective trauma and loss. The intent of traditional war

monuments, raised in public spaces, has largely been to glamourize war in a way that preserves the event, while also justifying and even absolving it. As Sarah Henstra notes in her book *The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction* (2009), the memorial or monument often serves as a substitute for direct experience with death. Traditional memorials and monuments publically assert political and national myths and ideologies. Traditional memorials and monuments also express a “desire to commemorate, to mark a place, to represent the past to the present, and future,” but do so as they “emphasize one narrative of the past at the expense of others” (Nelson and Olin 2). In other words, traditional modes of commemoration are often fraught with issues about who is remembered and who is forgotten.

In his 1992 article “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” James E. Young develops a theory that makes it acutely clear why the traditional monument is problematic. Looking at Germany after the war, Young asks how a state that caused the devastation of the Holocaust could “incorporate its crimes against others into its national memorial landscape?” (270). Germany’s solution to the problem of commemoration manifested in the rise of the counter-monument: a monument that is created with a self-consciousness and awareness of its responsibility to authentic representation while at the same time challenges the very notion of the monument’s possibility. The counter-monument grew out of a distrust for how traumatic events and stories were commemorated and memorialized, and has emerged in recent decades as a unique and critical mode of commemorative culture. Counter-monuments also address absence and loss by reproducing it as part of the memorial experience. The counter-

monument is a confluence of interactive public art, politics, memory, and, often, death; the problems of representation are also bound to counter-monument projects.

While the traditional monument aims to remind the public about loss and about the act and duty to remember, James E. Young warns against allowing memorialization to do the ‘memory work’ for us, as this displaces memory altogether; instead of remembering the event, we become even more forgetful of it. The counter-monument, then, is conceived in opposition to traditional commemorative practices; it demonstrates “the possibilities and limitations of all memorials everywhere,” Young writes, and “it functions as a valuable “counter-index” to the ways time, memory, and current history intersect at any memorial site” (“The Counter-Monument” 270). In his ground-breaking book *At Memory’s Edge* (2000), Young extends his notion of the counter-monument and states that its purpose is not to create memory objects that reconcile, remain fixed, or last forever; instead, the counter-monument is meant to provoke, change, and vanish. Artists whose works stem from this notion understand both the “moral obligation to remember and the ethical hazards of doing so in art and literature” (*At Memory’s* 6). The counter-monument projects he describes, and others that have been created more recently, use the problematic structure of the monument as their very medium.

Young is speaking of art and literature that resist any sense of closure and allow us to live with the trauma, conflict, and horror without ever fully understanding it; to him, the counter-monument project should provoke and sustain perpetual contemplation and irresolution. It is in this vein that I explore comics and graphic novels as a textual form of

Young's counter-monument. The term I am proposing for comics studies is the *graphic counter-memorial*.³

The prelude to the works I study here is the long history of North American comics being tied to war, conflict, and reportage. Comics directly before and during World War II commonly represented war in heroic terms that rejected or ignored the harsher realities of warfare and its aftermath. Western war comics of this time did not merely tell war stories; they told readers how and what to remember about wars. The title *War Comics* (later to be called *War Stories*), first published in 1940, presented military-themed stories and characters, followed by other publications such as *Wings Comics*, *Liberty Scouts Comics*, and *Fight Comics*. As part of the domestic war effort, *How Boys and Girls Can Help Win the War*, a single-issue parent's magazine, was published in 1942 and its sales went to the purchase of war bonds (Conroy 12).⁴ While the public at the time embraced and demanded these stories, these comics were understood as simple, disposable entertainment that either promoted American nationalism or served as children's entertainment, or both. I would argue that this tradition of early war comics can be considered part of traditional memorial and commemorative culture, and expresses the many problems around it, specifically the glamourization of war and the naturalizing of memory. Whether written during wartime or

³ In keeping with the practice of memory studies scholars like young, Zygmunt Bauman, Jay Winter, and others, I use the term monument when referring uniquely to public art. I use the word memorial more loosely; a narrative, a ritual, and even a monument can all be memorials. What is important for me is to signal the formal and conceptual similarities between the counter-monuments described by Young and the graphic counter-memorials I am studying. Part of my intention is to mark the fluidity of the term memorial, as other scholars have done, and that these terms are so anchored in memory studies.

⁴ Conroy's graphic history is a wonderfully comprehensive account of war comics, including contemporary comics that deal with 9/11 and the aftermath. The graphic history includes many examples of the works discussed.

years later, most war comics instructed readers on how properly to remember the events of war.

However, there were many war-inspired and themed titles in the late 30's in America that were created by Jews who, at the time, were more in tune with the growing devastations in Europe (many superheroes and other characters fought and defeated Hitler in various ways⁵). Moreover, the 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of comics that dealt directly with the horrors and bleakness of war, namely stories published in *Frontline Combat*, *Two-Fisted Tales*, and *Blazing Combat*.⁶ In his excellent graphic history of war comics, Mike Conroy writes that with the Vietnam War, “the US public’s attitude to conflict was changing, and comics began to reflect the new zeitgeist” (13).

The ‘Golden Age’ of comics in America lasted until the crucial year of 1954 and the publication of Dr. Fredric Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent*, which further perpetuated public outcry over the contents of comics. The public’s concern for comics’ negative influence on children was established as early as 1940 with Sterling North’s editorial “A National Disgrace and a Challenge to American Parents,” which made similar cries as Wertham later would. In the editorial, North described comics as “sadistic drivel...Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed—a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems—the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant” (qtd. in Hajdu 49).⁷ The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency was struck the year before Wertham’s book was published. Despite this objection to comics, the public’s taste started

⁵ For examples, see Captain America, 1941; Superman, 1941 (though Hitler is not named as himself); Johnny Canuck, 1942; The Fantastic Four, 1962.

⁶ *Frontline* series published 1951-1954 and *Blazing combat* series published 1965-1966 by Warren Publishing; *Two-Fisted Takes* series published 1950-1955 by EC Comics.

⁷ David Hajdu’s *The Ten-Cent Plague* provides a good overall history of the comics scare.

to shift and accept the new war comics of the 50's and 60's, which represented a growing distrust and rejection of blanket nationalism, the government, and American war policies, and challenged how the public viewed war and how war would be remembered in popular culture. This shift is best seen in the war comics of Harvey Kurtzman, and the tactics he employed that lay the foundation for comics creators working within the genre of contemporary war comics and Comics Journalism. In many ways, Kurtzman's aim with his comics was to shock readers into an awareness of the realities of war. I see all of these comics offering self-reflective critiques of war as building the framework for later works, works that I am calling graphic counter-memorials.

The primary focus of my dissertation is contemporary American comics.⁸ I look at how Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), and Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli's comic book series *DMZ* (2005-2012) deal with an inability to represent war and conflict while also feeling a sense of obligation to do so, but outside of any institutional or mainstream narratives. These three comics creators raise issues around the representation of war and questions of ethical representations; however, they cannot answer them because ethical representation is supposed to be a problem. It is a perpetual problem shared between these comic creators and their readers.

My intent is to extend contemporary critical discourse about the comics medium by analyzing the above innovative comics as graphic counter-memorials in connection with

⁸ I have focused on American comics in part because the US has such a long tradition of war comics, and in part because Sacco's, Spiegelman's, and Wood and Burchielli's works have such striking formal and conceptual parallels with each other and with the counter-monument strategies. There are many more writers of graphic counter-memorials in the US, Canada, and beyond whose works would be equally responsive to the reading strategies I explore here. Future research on the graphic counter-memorial might productively follow up on the significance of nation.

memory studies, and by arguing that comics have the potential to change the way we currently think about reportage, witnessing, and commemorative practices. I am interested in the how—the formal features that make comics *comics*—but also in the why—what is it that comics offer to creators wishing to re-trace or re-map personal and collective histories. And by extension, I am asking the question: what do comics offer to readers and what is at stake in representing memory, especially collective mourning and memory, in this medium? and how does the participatory nature of comics reading parallel the experience of viewing a counter-monument?

The field of comics studies has recently turned its focus to autobiographical comics and graphic novels that depict personal memories and trauma, with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (serialized from 1980-1991) and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Alison Bechtel's *Fun Home* (2007), and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000) in particular receiving significant scholarly attention. With roots in the underground comix movement of the late 1960s in San Francisco and New York, these particular works have brought serious academic and mainstream attention to the medium of comics and their potential to address important issues. Autobiography has developed as a growing and compelling genre within comics with comics creators such as Lynda Barry, Julie Doucet, Craig Thompson, Adrian Tomine, Marjane Satrapi, Alison Bechtel, Chris Ware, Seth, and Chester Brown, to name a few, build on the momentum achieved by the underground comix movement. Many, if not all, of these creators are involved in creating works that deal with personal memory, history, and trauma. What distinguishes the works I attend to here from those in this important autobiographical/memoir comics tradition is that they all turn more towards public and collective memory trauma than dwell on private or personal memory. Their indebtedness

to Comics Journalism and reportage further lends the graphic counter-memorial a critical edge, while also pushes these comics beyond the Comics Journalism genre. The comics in my dissertation borrow from autobiography, memoir, and reportage, and parallel the important function of counter-monument projects as described by Young; the result is what I am referring to as a graphic counter-memorial.⁹

I look at how these graphic counter-memorials deal with war, conflict, and reportage and journalism, and how they resist any inclination toward redemption and unity. Instead, I argue that they offer not only a further complexing of ‘visible language,’ but also they offer an opportunity to reexamine the theoretical language about collective and cultural memory, Comics Journalism, and contemporary commemorative culture that has yielded such fruitful inquiries in comics studies. Furthermore, I connect this language to comics studies in order to emphasize the political nature of comics and the medium’s ability to disrupt and fragment stable narratives on both formal and content levels. In her book, Henstra carves out a way to discuss novels as part of the counter-memorial or monument tradition. She writes that while the novels she studies are not monuments, “the rhetorical texture of counter-memorial efforts in fiction relies on a long tradition of reading literature as going against the grain of dominant discourses in society” (10). She is also right to point out that counter-discourse ultimately utilizes the very methods and conventions it wants to upend, which means a counter-discourse needs the dominant

⁹ Key contemporary contributors to Comics Journalism about war who are known for expanding the genre also include Guy Delisle, Sarah Glidden, and Josh Neufeld. My choice in Sacco, Spiegelman, and Wood and Burchielli should not suggest that other comics about war and reportage are not doing similar work; instead, my selection of comics reflects my sense of an initial analysis into the overlaps between the comics medium and the counter-monument.

discourse for its very work. The tight relationship between dominant and counter-narratives is, for Henstra, part of the novels and narrative she analyzes. Comic books, though, do not share the same cultural privileges as works of literature, despite the current popular and academic ‘approval’ of the medium. Comics retain their cultural marginality, even comics published by mainstream publishers like Marvel and Vertigo, precisely because they are in part working outside of the dominant culture.¹⁰ This is mostly tied to comics’ serial context and their stigma of being children’s entertainment; however, as Douglas Wolk points out, comics are not merely vehicles for stories “but primary documents that tell us something about our history as well as their own” (3). While the comics I study in this dissertation are both fiction and non-fiction, they each draw from and mobilize counter-narrative strategies in ways that echo Young’s counter-monument projects.

The term counter-narrative has been commonplace in discussions of texts of resistance that offer stories and voices that complicate dominant discourse.¹¹ Counter-narrative emerged as a term used within post-war, postcolonial, race, and feminist literary contexts, and as a theoretical foundation upon which to analyze forms of resistance in text. As already pointed out, counter-narratives exist in relation to the dominant narratives they wish to upend; they are not dichotomous to each other and therefore produce a meaningful tension that should be explored. Broadly applied, the term counter-narrative marks a rich

¹⁰ I use the word *popular* as outlined by Stuart Hall in “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” where he emphasizes the relationship ‘popular culture’ has to the dominant culture, and the “question of cultural struggle and its many forms” (189). His sense of the popular is linked to class and the social and material conditions of cultural forms and objects. I think this fits well with the history and culture of comics.

¹¹ See Molly Andrews and Michael Bamberg’s collection *Considering Counter-Narratives* (2004) where they note the popular use of this term emerging in the 1900s.

and complex history of cultural resistance and subversion that can encompass many types of texts and stories. In my use of graphic counter-memorial, I offer a unique way to not only analyze the tension between counter- and dominant narratives, but also to analyze comics about war that work against master and memorializing narratives. I think one of the central characteristics of the counter-monument is to use the dominant mechanism as a vehicle to challenge that very mechanism; I think the comics I study here are doing something similar through their use of space, for one, and through calling attention to their own apparatus and cultural position. The comic medium is especially capable of visualizing, layering, and complicating this tension given its formal features that can fragment memory, self, trauma, time, and space on the page or across several pages. The graphic counter-memorial are comics that aim to depict both the dominant and the subversive or counter-narratives within the scope of war and traumatic memories. In using the word *graphic* as part of my term, I am capturing both the artistic and aesthetic elements of comics and the graphic content the comics I study depict.

The tendency in comics studies, and in the humanities more generally, to view comics in either literary or aesthetic terms has generally subsided. The suggestion that the text is to be read and the images and illustrations are to be viewed has been negated by the more productive notion that comics are a hybrid form. Image and text in comics constitute not a blending of two structures, but a communicative track separate from that dichotomy. I agree with W.J.T. Mitchell's stance that, "*comparison itself is not a necessary procedure in the study of image-text relations*. The necessary subject matter is, rather, the whole ensemble of *relations* between media...." (89, original emphasis). This communicative track gives readers the ability to read at their own pace (against the grain of the passive viewer),

to interpret based on personal experience more freely, and to utilize multiple literacies simultaneously. It also allows comics creators to layer time and space and various perspectives on the page. It is this aspect of comics—this communicative track—that makes the comics form uniquely and particularly appropriate for addressing questions about representing war and memory, and for challenging commemorative practices. I argue that the graphic counter-memorial is highly attuned to the public and dominant accounts of the histories they depict, while it is also socially and politically aware of the dominant narratives that have influenced the public. As a result, it interrupts stable and explainable meaning in order to recast, retrace, and retell narratives.

In order to delineate the contours of the graphic counter-memorial and its approach to war and trauma, I first review a framework of memory studies. Chapter One traces the conceptual turning away from viewing memory as individualistic to viewing memory as shaped by the collective. While I do not intend to transfer or project a Holocaust-specific model onto other forms of trauma and conflict, I am interested in discussing what happens when the counter-monument concept and principles are applied to the comic medium, and as such, this chapter then focuses on Young's contributions to memory studies. When Young describes his concepts of mediated memory, after-images, and vicarious past in *At Memory's Edge*, he is describing the memory of an event that was not experienced directly. Mediated memory from an artist's perspective, for instance, is a composite of the event itself and the ways the event has been passed down, and I explore this in Chapter One.

Chapter One also argues that a particular challenge that contemporary comics creators face is the potential that their work offers a sense of redemption in representing a traumatic event. Young speaks of this from a post-Holocaust perspective, and Jacques

Rancière also looks at the potential of art to redeem trauma. Rancière's central question in *The Future of the Image* (2007) is "under what conditions might it be said that certain events cannot be represented?" and this leads to his understanding of representation "as a regime of thinking about art" (109). His concept of representation is helpful, as it embraces more nuanced lines of inquiry such as presence and absence, the thinkable and sayable within the problem of representation. Moreover, I argue that the potential risk of redemption is present post-conflict more generally, especially in an art form. Yet, the formal features of comics, especially the ability to fragment and offer multiple simultaneous perspectives, refuse any sense of redemption, and instead depict an event as unfixed and unresolved. The comics studied here are uninterested in re-establishing a master narrative constructed by the media or other power structures and insist on including voices typically silenced by such a narrative.

Chapter Two focuses on an important stepping-stone in the development of the graphic counter-memorial comics form: the development of anti-war comics in the twentieth century. Specifically, I look at Harvey Kurtzman's 1950s comics collected in *Corpse on the Imjin and Other Stories* (2012), which are noted as some of the earliest comics to tell anti-war stories that offer a realistic perspective of the impacts of war. The works of Spiegelman, Sacco, and Wood and Burchielli, I argue, reflect those gestures established by Kurtzman while they also extend the questions raised by representing and reporting war and conflict artistically. Alongside Kurtzman, I include an analysis of Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam* (2000) and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor Unsung Hero* (2003), illustrated by David Collier. They too represent stories that encompass reportage, autobiography, and the journalist as surrogate during the Vietnam war. Eisner and Pekar depict the realities of

war using the interview style, a style that is an integral tool of the graphic counter-memorial genre. This historical backdrop and investigation leads into my analyses of the works of Sacco and Spiegelman in subsequent chapters. I argue that the comics medium is distinctly positioned to address and represent political and traumatic events—its visual-verbal narrative; its versatile panel, frame, and page configuration; and its layering of the visible and invisible and the past and present all make possible the graphic counter-memorial, emphasizing a distrust and rejection of contemporary commemorative practices that seek to solidify rather than negotiate world events. Kurtzman's writing and illustrations often stretch time, or create the sense of duration in a way that places a focus on violence.

Chapters Three and Four look at Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, respectively. In my analysis, I establish that it is not enough to say these are works of Comics Journalism or that they are documentary; instead, I make a case for why they should be considered as graphic counter-memorials, a genre born out of Comics Journalism. I see these works as attesting to a mingling of distrust and responsibility when it comes to representing history and conflict, and as intentional efforts to interrupt and challenge commemorative practices. What is more, Spiegelman and Sacco address the representation of war by the media by including commentary on media's portrayal of war and by incorporating aspects of information collection into and for their own comics. Sacco and Spiegelman draw on similar strategies in order to call attention to their counter-narratives, such as drawing themselves into their comics, incorporating other mediums into their comics pages, embracing the reporter role, and borrowing from the autobiography genre. By considering these two comics as examples of graphic counter-

memorials, we can better understand the complexities of representing war in the comic medium.

From here I turn my focus to Wood and Burchielli's series *DMZ* in the final chapter, and focus on its critical political and cultural take on post-9/11 America, memory, and reportage in the comics form. The central character is a photojournalist who struggles with documenting horrific events, recording people's stories, the war, and how or if he can do this appropriately, adequately. From my medium-specific framework, I argue that the narrator both directly and indirectly experiences the traumatic events in the story; he is, like Sacco, aware of what he cannot know or witness as an embedded journalist, and yet he is also, like both Spiegelman and Sacco, directly impacted by the war that unfolds. Along with Sacco's and Spiegelman's comics, *DMZ* acts as a commentary on how the mainstream media portrays and circulates images of 9/11 and the aftermath, and establishes a growing distrust of that narrative. While *DMZ* is technically not a single story or comics, and while the series is a fictionalized account of the aftermath of 9/11, it shares so much with Sacco and Spiegelman that a comparison produces valuable insights. What is more, the series develops what has been established by Kurtzman, Sacco, and Spiegelman.

These comics all have a first-person narrator who is present on the page. Eisner and Pekar draw themselves onto the page as a way of remembering WWII and Vietnam and remembering a soldier of Vietnam, respectively. Sacco and Spiegelman also draw themselves into their comics, with a moral urgency that reflects their different projects. Wood and Burchielli use a fictional character, Matty Roth, as a reporter character who is meant to, along with the other creators, act as an interlocutor on the page for the reader. These comics are also intentional in including the interview process as part of the story's

content and structure. Eisner spent a lot of his wartime not as a soldier, but on assignment with the military drawing instructional comics in the form of brochures and magazines for soldiers; his interviews with soldiers were for the purpose of educating them.¹² A by-product of that, of course, are the stories collected in *Last Day in Vietnam*, where he is privy to soldiers' day-to-day survival, their background stories, and the frontlines of combat. Pekar's *Unsung Hero: The Story of Robert McNeill*, retraces the experiences of a black soldier who fought in Vietnam. The comic oscillates between present-day interviews with Pekar and McNeill, and McNeill's flashbacks to combat.

These two comics are often grouped together as memoirs; however, I think there is more going on here than a consideration of them as graphic counter-memorials makes visible. Part of what makes these comics more than autobiographical and more than reportage or journalism is their focus on political and ethical representation, and their foregrounding of questions relating to subjectivity. Through different stylistic modes, what these comics share is not only a unique approach to reporting on war, but also a critique of the kind of reportage fed through mainstream media with links to power structures like the government and military. All of these comics deal with and show violence, and all of them use the comics medium as a way to intentionally interrupt mainstream media that often

¹² *Army Motors* was a troop-level magazine teaching soldiers how to fix their gear and tools in the field, in comic book form, written and created by Will Eisner. It fictionalized common problems in the field using the character Private Joe Dope. Later on, *PS Magazine* (1951-1972) was published as a preventive maintenance magazine. The Virginia Commonwealth University has a digital collection of the magazine: <http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/psm>.

and historically cultivates and perpetuates singular narratives about war and collective trauma.¹³

The graphic counter-memorial can testify to the complex modern understandings of space and the often conflicting testimonies of complex pasts. While the comic book is taken into our private and domestic spaces, it is also part of a history tied to mass and public consumption, in similar ways to the counter-monument. Counter-monuments present multiple meanings, stories, interpretations, and voices; the comic form allows for this kind of testimony. My contribution to comics studies is to carve out a space in the discourse about documentary comics or Comics Journalism that can account for the kinds of comics that subvert singular narratives. Sacco, Spiegelman, and Wood and Burchielli, and other comics creators working in this genre, are making a separate and compelling point about what it means to problematize representations of war and conflict, and the trauma and stories that people experience in those wars. To make their specific point, each of these creators utilize tools from the same box. With a sense of immediacy that anyone can take hold of and understand, they are part of a cultural memory that is distinct and unique from other kinds of memory and media.

¹³ Two female cartoonists working in a similar vein to the comics I am studying and of comics journalism and graphic counter-memorials are Sarah Glidden (*Rolling Blackouts*, 2016) and Kate Evans (*Threads: From the Refugee Crisis*, 2017). Phoebe Gloeckner's recent work on murdered women in Juárez might also be interesting to take up within my framework, even though this particular work of hers is not comics. She created miniature dioramas of murder scenes and then photographed them for a collection of work, *I Live Here* (2008). She continued this work, creating a series of vignettes that focused on one single family; she discusses her role as an author while also wanting to reject her role as a reporter.

Chapter One:

The Framework of Memory Studies and the Counter-Monument

"Remembrance as a vital human activity shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present."

- Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age"

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the modern obsession with memory. Initially, memory was framed in terms of the individual. Later, memory studies began to view memory as a shared or collective phenomenon expressed at memory sites—places, objects, and representations—where forgetting and remembering become part of a dialectic. My central argument is that graphic counter-memorials need to be understood in relation to the framework of this latter kind of memory studies.

Before discussing the complex relationship between representation and comics and graphic novels, it is important to take note of the fundamental concepts of memory studies. For me specifically the concepts of collective memory and the counter-monument that developed in the early twentieth century are most valuable when paired with the concepts of trauma and traumatic memories. Over the last three decades, memory studies as a field within the humanities has grown in popularity and breadth. There are writers who approach memory from an archival perspective, while others emphasize social forgetting and amnesia.¹⁴ Still others approach the study of memory through the lens of trauma, witness, and testimony; and through feminism and gender.¹⁵ As Jan Assmann and Astrid Erll have pointed out, the discipline of memory studies tends to agree on two points: first,

¹⁴ See Jan Assmann, 2008; Andreas Huyssen, 1995, respectively.

¹⁵ See Marianne Hirsch, Leo Spitzer, Susannah Radstone for example.

that remembering is constructed; second, that its relationship to the past also has to do with its shaping of the future (8). Contemporary memory studies tends to focus on the tension between memory, remembering, and forgetting. They typically congregate around two concerns: one is the possibility of too much memory and of too little.

In his celebrated book of essays *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1995), Andreas Huyssen refers to a spectrum of philosophers from Heidegger to Adorno. He claims that we are a culture obsessed with memory (Huyssen 7). In part, this is because our experience of the present and what is imagined as the future is rolled up with a particular past: “The twenty-first century looms like a repetition: one of bloody nationalisms and tribalisms, of religious fundamentalism and intolerance that we thought had been left behind in some darker past” (Huyssen 8). In part, our obsession with memory is neither exclusively about amnesia nor exclusively about memory; instead, he insists that the two are merged as a reaction to an accelerated progression of technological innovation. Huyssen writes that memory functions as an attempt to “slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information...to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity....” (8). This is most exhibited, he says, in the monument. There is more focus put on the memorial practice or the monument structure than there is on the memory to be preserved, and this is a chief concern to counter-monument artists as well as to the comics creators studied here in the context of their comics texts. That the monumental structure persists in contemporary culture only intensifies the need to be critical of the relationship between monuments and memory.

Similarly, Richard Terdiman's premise in *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (1993) is that the past influences the present, but because of the specific nature of our past, we suffer from a "mnemonic dysfunction," which has produced a crisis of memory. On the one hand, we mistrust memory, "even the most familiar content is imperfectly retained in recollection," he writes (Terdiman 14). We are overwhelmed by a fear of forgetting. On the other hand, we fear there is too much memory, that we might be overwhelmed by and fraught with memories, which would impair our daily lives. Through a series of essays, he provides an overview of the complex relationship between memory and history in the nineteenth century. Many of his essays refer to Friedrich Nietzsche's 1874 essay entitled "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" because it offers some insights into the nineteenth century's foundations for the memory crisis. For Nietzsche, forgetting is a necessity, as the remembering of history becomes more and more painful and burdensome, and this restricts the potential for active life. The past, he says, makes a person's life difficult: "like an invisible and dark burden" (Nietzsche 78). Nietzsche urges the reader to consider: "*that for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential*" (78, original emphasis).

This paradox embedded in this need for remembering *and* forgetting is often central to discussions of identity and nationhood in memory studies and trauma studies. The nineteenth century developed scientific models of the traumatized individual, discussing diseases of memory, such as neurasthenia and hysteria. It also developed a narrative tradition focused on the inner lives of people with psyches wounded from internal and external causes. The works of Chekhov, Ibsen, Dostoevsky, as well as Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and many others, plumbed traumatic symptoms related to the

loss of traditional life, technological progress, conflict, and industry. In this, these writers articulate the same points that theorists like Freud, Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Adorno considered, linking 'traumatic' memory to modernity. Terdiman's argument is that the past persists into the present, and the preoccupation and interest in the issue of memory that is typically associated with the late twentieth century.

Individual Memory and the Turn Toward Collective Memory

Underlying the arguments that we have too much memory, or the debates about the trustworthiness of memory, and the concerns with forgetting in memory studies, rests a concern with traumatic memories. Freud's analysis of memory is essential to nineteenth century and contemporary understandings of individual memory and trauma. From his earliest writings on memory, Freud maintained that his theory and his therapy depended on understanding memory. A discussion about the turn from individual memory to collective starts with Freud.

Many of Freud's critical and long-studied theories—desire, dream interpretation, neurosis, repression, the unconscious—were central to his understanding of memory in relation to psychology. In the late 1800s, Freud described hysteria as a symptom that preserves the traumatic experiences from childhood and retains them as unconscious memory. Unconscious memory, for Freud, is not transformed by time, and therefore is immune to outside influences. He believes that the unconscious mind is cut off and completely inaccessible from what we can consciously understand of ourselves. In "Screen Memories" (1899), Freud questions the reliability of childhood memories, and suggests that the childhood memories, once 'unlocked' by the analyst, are not in any original form

and cannot be trusted. Instead, he argued that childhood memories are more linked to the present than the past from which they originated. The memories emerge as having been shaped by the person's current circumstances, as opposed to resembling the actual past. This essay concludes with Freud's claim that it is doubtful "whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess" (*SE III*, 332, original emphasis). Further on, he states that "childhood memories did not...*emerge*; they were *formed* at that time" (*SE III*, 332, original emphasis). This suggests that memory is individual; it is the individual's present that shapes the experience of a memory, and the memory is solely 'housed' within that individual. Freud points to an individual's present circumstances as the element that shapes memory; however, he is more interested in how those circumstances are tied to the analyst and the analyst's role, and less interested in what constitutes those circumstances, something Maurice Halbwachs would later address in his work. By the end of "Screen Memories," Freud's idea of memory is more about the process and mechanism of remembering, than about the original memory itself. What is inherent here, however subtly, is the idea that the past persists in the present; the past is not passively dormant, but is instead transformed within and by the present circumstances.

For Freud, forgetting is an individual act achieved without the individual's knowledge or understanding; we forget almost on purpose, as part of a learned memory function, in order to fulfill some other need. The analyst's role is thus necessary to draw out the forgotten memory. Freud believed that dialogue made recollection possible because "the therapist has a different memory and a different past from the patient's and hence is not bound to reproduction of the patient's blockage...." (*Memory: Histories* 95). As will be

noted in the following chapters, the relation between recalling memory and dialogue, and how this dialectical relation plays out in comics is important to many of the works studied here. While Freud gestures toward a conception of memory that includes other memories (that of the patient and the analyst), the two individual memories are strung together, yet they do not constitute a collective in Freud's theory.

These ideas from Freud, in many ways, form the basis for twentieth century memory studies—a vast field with a particular focus on the tensions between memory in excess, incomplete, and the question of forgetting, traumatic memories, and the relationship between memory recall and narrative. The turn from viewing memory as individual to memory as collective is particularly indebted to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and his concept of collective memory, which was developed in his major works: *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* in 1925 (translated in 1992 as *On Collective Memory*) and *La mémoire collective* in 1950 (translated as *The Collective Memory* in 1980). In these works, Halbwachs proposed that memory be understood as a social phenomenon, dependent on social structures. His theory departs from the earlier arguments made by Freud, or still others such as Henri Bergson. Yet, the concern over an excess of memory expressed by Freud is shared by Halbwachs, in his discussion of memory. Halbwachs' concept of collective memory tied together two seemingly divergent ideas: first, that collective memory is understood as individual memory dependent on social structures; and second, that collective memory is understood as shared perspectives of the past, collected through communication and media (Erll 14-15). Central to Halbwachs' thinking is the idea that communication with others is integral to how we acquire information, knowledge, and concepts of time. Social structures are, according to Halbwachs, intrinsic to any act of

remembrance. In the first chapter of *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs states that memories remain collective, “and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone” (23). He gives the example of walking through a new city with several different companions, who all provide him with details on the city from their own individual perspectives and knowledge. Halbwachs claims that if he were to take that exact walk again alone, he would still be with the remembrances and knowledge of his companions; therefore, never alone, never without those shared memories. He continues: “...each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory...” (Halbwachs 48); ‘viewpoint’ is understood as each person’s perspective, which is formed by social and cultural structures and experiences.

Halbwachs makes a clear distinction between history and collective memory. He claims that there are several collective memories, but that “history is unitary, and it can be said that there is only one history” (Halbwachs 83). By this he means that while we can distinguish between France’s history, Germany’s history, the history of certain periods, and so forth, these segments never change; they are facts that are continuously divisible and marked by conflict and upheaval. History makes claims to authenticity and singularity. Collective memory, however, is formed of many (sometimes even competing) histories, each aiming to “perpetuate the feelings and images forming the substance of its thought [the whole]” (Halbwachs 86). He further states that, “the greatest part of [collective] memory spans time during which nothing has radically changed” (Halbwachs 87). For Halbwachs, history is facts seen from the outside, whereas collective memory is a record of remembrances of the group seen from the inside. These remembrances can, of course,

become foggy or distorted; however, Halbwachs makes no claims that memory should be a 'true' reproduction of the past. Instead, he makes a distinction between constructed memory and shrouded memory. For the former, he argues that remembrances are "in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered" (Halbwachs 69). He expands on the concept of shrouded memory with the example of remembering one's father. The image of his father evolved over time until his death as his father changed, as he himself changed, and as his perspectives changed as a result of different social structures, and time and space. "New images overlay the old," he writes, so that we only know one based on what we know of the other (Halbwachs 72). The point here is that history may be more misleading than the knowledge of collective memory; the latter, moreover, makes no claims to authenticity. Collective memory, for Halbwachs, does not attempt to be a singular vision of the past.

Important to my discussion of how comics and graphic novels can share this framework of memory studies is a specific passage from Halbwachs that I highlight here. Memory as a collective function means that memory is multilayered and even different from one individual to the next within the social group. According to Halbwachs, in order for remembrances to be kept alive, individual memories must be communicated and shared:

All memories, however personal they may be and even if witnessed by only one person...are linked to ideas we share with many others, to people, groups, places, dates, words and linguistic forms, theories and ideas, that is, with the whole material and moral framework of the society of which we are part. (38)

These references and accumulated experiences allow us to understand and participate in a past that was previously isolated from us. I include this passage at length because it reflects Halbwachs' claim that the person who tells a story is closely related to the person who hears it; the common ground that exists between these two identities is necessary for the transmission of the memory. This is of particular use for discussions about the reader and the comic; Eisner states in *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) that the comic creator can connect with the reader through creating and illustrating shared experiences:

"Comprehension of an image requires a commonality of experience. This demands of the sequential artist an understanding of the reader's life experiences if his message is to be understood" (7).

Historian Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992) is another important seven-volume work that is foundational to understanding the scholarly memory boom of the 1980s. The volumes act like an inventory of knowledge about history, memory, and nation within a French context. If Halbwachs was concerned with collections of memory and social conditions, Nora's public memory is concerned with 'sites' of memory. In his introduction "Between Memory and History," Nora, like Halbwachs before him, makes a distinction between memory and history. He writes that "memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition" (Nora 8). Where Halbwachs and Nora differ, though, is that Nora ultimately believes there is not enough memory: "we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it" (Nora 8). Nora's central contribution is the notion of memory as 'site,' and this is seen when he writes, "*a lieu de memoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial

heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)” (*Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory* xvii).

Nora ‘s memory site has three specific coexisting characteristics: material, functional, and the symbolic. The material characteristic of a memory site has to do with objects such as paintings, statues, texts, but also events and even moments of silence (Erll 24). Memory sites must also achieve a function in/for society, by which Nora means that a book teaches and a moment of silence provokes memory; thus, both objects are sites of memory (Erll 24). Finally, Nora understands observing a moment of silence as an example of the symbolic characteristic of sites of memory: “Even an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de memoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura...the observance of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity” (“Between Memory” 19). While Nora’s work has been criticized for being intensely connected to nationalism and nationhood¹⁶, his concept of sites of memory has influenced many other writers within this field¹⁷ and is frequently used as a theoretical departure point from which to deepen and extend contemporary memory studies theories.

The Role of the Witness in Literature

Important to setting up my framework of memory studies as it relates to my study of comics and graphic novels is an understanding of the witness and how witnessing functions in literature. Testimony is a critical mode or vehicle that works through what we

¹⁶ James E. Young himself challenges Nora’s emphasis on nation and acknowledges the many facets of national memory. Also, Lawrence D. Kritzman, 1996; Peter Carrier, 2005.

¹⁷ See Jay Winter, 1998 and 2007; Grome Truc, 2012; Richard Terdimen, 2010.

have experienced as trauma. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman claims that we live in an age of testimony whereby works of art describe the significance of testimony in literature and art that “use testimony both as the subject of their drama and as the medium of their literal transmission” (5). Felman describes testimony in literature and art as “composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition....” (5). The language of testimony, she continues, is partial, in a process, while testimony itself is always incomplete. Felman, in *Testimony*, traces the relationship between the acts of witnessing, testifying, writing, and reading, illuminating the core structure of the graphic counter-memorials I will be treating.

Cathy Caruth connects testimony to larger issues pertaining to the representation of trauma. On the one hand, trauma cannot be represented adequately or authentically; yet on the other hand, it must be represented in order to preserve the trauma, or to intervene in its potential repetition. She argues that attempts to represent traumatic experiences, specifically through testimony, can “bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred” (*Trauma: Explorations* 151). She is skeptical of any attempt to reconcile the gaps in memory or incoherence associated with traumatic memory because to reconcile or to derive a cohesiveness is to again repress the memory. According to Caruth, literature and trauma hinge on a “complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (*Unclaimed Experience* 3-4). She investigates the ways literary texts confront and confound traumatic experiences through the act of writing.

Writing specifically about the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch shows a shift in how witness testimony has been understood over time. She uses the Adolf Eichmann trial and its “procession of witnesses” to illustrate how witness testimony has shifted from operating strictly within a legal context to also being within a memory studies context more broadly. She further claims that testimony was once thought of as an archival document; more recently, testimony has lost its air of trustworthiness and has been blurred and obscured over time (Hirsch and Spitzer 393-4). The common thread between these writers is the perception of the witness or of witnessing as, on the one hand, part of a larger collective voice speaking to a historical moment, and on the other hand, fragmented.

Questions about the relations between the witness and testimony and narrative have been taken up by many comics studies theorists and comics creators. Jay Winter looks at the role of the witness in terms of its opposition to history. He claims that witnesses forget and they reconstruct pieces of memory. Hillary Chute ties the role of the witness to the comic medium when she says that comics can “perform the enabling political and aesthetic work of bearing witness powerfully because of its rich narrative texture” (*Graphic Women* 4). She means here that the formal features of comics enable many characteristics of the witness function and testimony. More than traditional text, comics perform the act of bearing witness in multiple and unique ways, which I will discuss in the chapters on Sacco, Spiegelman, and Wood and Burchielli.

One of the formal features of comics that makes it such a powerful vehicle of testimony and bearing witness is its ability to resist the kind of closure that other narrative forms tend to achieve. Comics use the frame, panel, and gutter to fragment images and can thus bring visual expression to an understanding of memory as being fragmented. When

comics creators are interested in memory work, their very medium affords formal possibilities and power to engage with memory in open-ended and resistant ways. For example, the Canadian cartoonist Seth has connected drawing to memory and claims that memory is more than a repository; it is also an emotional state that plays out alongside the actual creation of comics. As he writes in a *Walrus* magazine piece entitled “The Quiet Art of Cartooning,” “when I’m drawing, only half my mind is on the work...the other half is free to wander. Usually, it’s off in a reverie, visiting the past, picking over old hurts, or recalling that sense of being somewhere specific....” (Seth 2012). He remarks upon the importance and connection of this memory work on the cartoon and drawing work. The work of American cartoonist Chris Ware is often associated with memory and with the act of witnessing. Ware states that, “A cartoon is not an image taken from life...a cartoon is taken from memory. You’re trying to distill the memory of an experience, not the experience itself” (qtd. in Heer 2006). In an interview with *Poets and Writers’* Kevin Larimer, Ware uses the terminology of false memories to explain his storytelling and comics creation when he says, “we all have these alternative realities playing in our minds – false memories about both real and imaginary people....” (qtd. in Larimer 2012). What this shows is the comics medium’s ability to include perceptions and ideas about memory and remembering, and the relationship between drawing and memory.

Other scholars have also commented on the relationship between memory work and comics more broadly. Hillary Chute has written several articles arguing that the comics medium has a particular relation to representing life stories, especially autobiography and memoirs. In her “Comics Form and Narrating Lives” (2011) essay, she describes comics as a form that “fundamentally relies on space to represent time, carving punctual moments out

of the space on the page” (Chute 108). She uses Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (2006) and Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009) as examples that illustrate the medium’s inherent potential to narrate life stories, both personal and otherwise. She also shows how the concept of the archive can be embedded within the comic medium to function both structurally and contextually. Both Bechdel and Sacco use photos, letters, and diaries as part of their stories and as part of the comics’ structures. Chute further argues that in addition to its ability to express life stories, graphic narrative is especially capable of representing trauma “because [comics] makes literal the presence of the past by disrupting spatial and temporal conventions to overlay or palimpsest past and present” (109).

Speaking of *Maus* in ““The Shadow of a Past Time”: History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*” (2006), Chute says that the past and the present are entwined in the tight spacing of panels. She claims that the graphic novel “exploits the spatial form of graphic narrative...so compellingly, refusing telos and closure even as it narrativizes history” (Chute 202).

Marianne Hirsch has emphasized comics’ ability to call attention to its own devices and to layer mediation. She uses the term “post-memory” to describe a “powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection, but through representation, projections, and creation” (Hirsch “Surviving Images” 8). The use of photographs embedded in comics, for example, denote both memory and a sense of destruction, according to Hirsch; comics’ pages and the photographs drawn in are the layers of mediation. What these two scholars have in common is an emphasis on space and time in comics, and how those shape an understanding of history and memory.

Collective and Counter-Memory: The Comic Medium

Halbwachs' understanding of collective memory is another core concept from contemporary Trauma Studies that pertains to the comics medium's unique ability to visualize elements of memory. Since the Memory Studies boom in the 1980s, the question or issue of public commemoration and contemporary commemorative practices has persisted. Remembering or commemorating the Holocaust, for example, was (and is) a critical problem, one that weaves questions of how to represent this event and for whom. Many scholars have addressed the ways literature and art approach and contend with memory and trauma, and as is common in such discussions, I point to Theodor Adorno's often cited statement in "Cultural Criticism" (1982) that, "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (34). Adorno places emphasis on poetry and representation to highlight the risk of refocusing the trauma into beauty. The meaning of this passage is also about the risk of the artistic representation not being able to acknowledge its own impossibility, as well as a tension between ethics and aesthetics.

Shoshana Felman suggests that Adorno was writing of the limits of representing such horrors in poetry, but also of the potential of artists and creators to represent those horrors using the very impossibility of doing so. To put it another way, illustrating the impossibility of representing the horrors of the Holocaust, for example, is part of the artistic process and meaning. This idea is central to my own interests with comics and graphic novels because the tension raised by counter-monument projects is between creating a memorial structure knowing that the structure is limited precisely by its own

devices. In other words, a counter-monument project is conceived as a self-reflexive structure. Graphic counter-memorials, I argue, aim to achieve a similar tension by unsettling the very narratives they contain. The tension in both types of counter-memorials is rooted in the question of representability, and comics have not been excluded from this line of inquiry.

Jacques Rancière, who has written widely on the politics of literature and aesthetics, asks in his recent book *The Future of the Image* (2007, translated into English in 2009) whether some things are unrepresentable? Although it does not address comics directly, his work exemplifies many of the debates over representing history, traumatic history, and traumatic narratives in the comics form. He takes issue with the “inflated” postmodern suggestion that some things are unrepresentable by artistic means, arguing such a claim is a contradiction (Rancière 109; 123). Instead, he asks, “...under what conditions might it be said that certain events cannot be represented? Under what conditions can an unrepresentable phenomenon of this kind be given a specific conceptual shape?” (Rancière 109). He understands representation as a regime of thinking about art, and wonders what is being said when it is said that some events or situations cannot be represented through artistic modes. An answer to this, for Rancière, is twofold. First, claiming that some events or situations cannot be represented through artistic means posits that it is impossible for art to present the essence of the thing being represented. Secondly, some events or situations are considered beyond artistic means precisely because of the nature of those means (Rancière 109). Rancière argues that there are three characteristic properties of artistic means that restrict representation. First, there is the issue of a “surplus of presence, which betrays the singularity of the event or situation, recalcitrant as it is to any plenary

material representation” (Rancière 109). The second characteristic stems from this surplus of presence, which imparts a sense of unreality on the thing being represented, and thus renders the event or situation inexistent. Third, “this interplay of surplus and subtraction operates according to a specific mode of address that delivers the thing represented over to affects of pleasure, play or distance which are incompatible with the gravity of the experience it contains” (Rancière 109). By this he means that artistic representations of some events run the risk of rendering that event beautiful to the extent that the essence of that event is lost, echoing Adorno. If, for example, a horrific event is artistically represented, there is the risk that the viewer finds pleasure in the art.

Most people would think that this is the purpose of art and artistic expression. This affect of beauty or pleasure is what Young warns against in the context of memory. Monuments risk construing something or someone as beautiful and satisfying, which is then what the monument comes to represent instead of the atrocities of the Holocaust, to use Young’s context.¹⁸ If a viewer is left with a sensation of unity or pleasure after looking at a monument, then that viewer has not participated in memory work that sustains thinking and questioning. Instead, the monument conceals the memory. According to Young, memory should remain vivid. Young emphasizes contemplation and study of the past over memorializing it. Comics offer this kind of sustained contemplation.

While Adorno’s statement is an important one to consider in light of representation, his position on reconciliation and forgetting and the role that art plays is more applicable here. In his 1959 essay “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” Adorno asserts that

¹⁸ As I have discussed, one of Young’s central concerns is that the traditional monument displaces memory, replacing it with national myths and singular narratives.

forgetting is the destruction of memory. This comes directly from the phrase ‘working through the past,’ which was used postwar to inspire Germans to consider a future that moved on from the Holocaust. Adorno, however, viewed it as Germany’s “attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven” (89). He saw this type of forgetting as actually a mode of conformity or unity, which resulted in an inability to experience contradiction (between those who suffered and those who perpetrated the suffering). The impact of this destruction of memory was, to Adorno, that the events of the Holocaust were ultimately ‘worked through,’ but without any kind of contemplation or reconciliation. He uses the term reconciliation as a philosophical framework through which to stave off the type of forgetting that would eclipse the Holocaust and its survivors.

In “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” he claims that it is possible for art to provide us with the capacity for reconciliation, but how so, and what kind of art? Brian O’Connor suggests that Adorno’s idea of art excludes “art that sets out to produce reconciliation through the representation of harmony or oneness (typically that of propaganda art)” (145). Adorno’s understanding of ‘authentic works’ of art, which he posits in *Aesthetic Theory*, informs my analysis of the graphic counter-memorial. O’Connor offers an understanding of Adorno’s mimesis when he writes, “it is precisely the dynamic of a subject-object interaction in which subjects ‘adjust to a moment which they themselves are not’” (145). Adorno writes that, “For the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory” (*Aesthetic Theory*, 234). He continues, “The memory of reconciliation – of moments of satisfaction in contemporary society – must be set aside in order to create the conditions in which full reconciliation would be achieved” (Adorno 243). What he means with this statement is that reconciliation is not about unity;

instead, disruption and an ongoing dynamic between the subject and object is necessary in order to achieve his notion of reconciliation. This strongly resonates with Rancière's worry that artistic representations risk turning horror into beauty, and his emphasis on the *conditions* under which we might say something is unrepresentable. Young, too, cautions against a sense of unity that is so often established by the traditional monument, and he insists that part of the function of the counter-monument is to inspire and sustain contemplation in the subject in relation with the object, the monument, but also the history. Reconciliation is often associated with unity; however, Adorno has used the term as a way to disrupt unity and to replace it with contradiction. Comics disrupt unity in a similar way, and can be considered as the kind of art that can achieve reconciliation as Adorno has outlined.

As Bart Beaty has asserted, one factor contributing to why comics have not been viewed as art is that because so much of comics studies takes literature as its reference point for value.¹⁹ He notes that even scholars and writers who deal with the visual element and the form of comics tend to slip into privileging the medium as a narrative form.²⁰ I think it is worth noting that just as W.J.T. Mitchell has attempted to stave off a theory that distinguishes between image and text, I too think that comics are beyond the simplistic

¹⁹ Not to mention the long history of comics being perceived as 'low' art drawn by inexperienced, untalented artists. Tom Gunning has recently written that the question of comics as art has become beside the point: "the question whether a new medium fits into the category of art became irrelevant, when we consider that photography, cinema, television—or comics—have already redefined our expectations of what art forms do" (36). See "The Art of Succession: Reading, Writing, and Watching Comics" (2014) in *Critical Inquiry*.

²⁰ *The Art of Comics* (2012) edited by Aaron Meskin and Roy T. Cook is a collection of essays giving primary focus to the visual aspects of comics; however, the essays use traditional paintings as their point of reference, comparing comics to paintings. This, too, slightly misses the point.

designation of either art or literature, and this is what makes the medium productive as the *kind of art* or aesthetic experience that Adorno is concerned with.²¹ In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno details the kind of art that would constitute reconciliation as being “objectively the counterimage of enchained forces” (226). What he means by this is art that goes against the conformity of society. This aligns with Young’s counter-monument, and gets at the heart of what I am interested in: artistic representations of memory that go against a singular, harmonious view of history or a single narrative of conflict and war, and instead emphasize unsettling and competing narratives. The medium of comics is unique in its potential to do this type of *counter-memory* work.²²

Indeed, comics have taken up issues such as the unreliable nature of memory, generational memory and what Young calls the after-image, and the problems associated with commemorative practices. The possibilities *and* the limitations of representing trauma, violence, war, terrorism, and conflict in the comics medium have emerged via the question of *should*, but also, and more so, of *how*. Can trauma and conflict be represented, and what are the ethics in representing conflict aesthetically?

Comics studies dealing with texts about memory tend to be focused on auto/biographical elements and tropes. Hillary Chute, Charles Hatfield, Julia Watson, Michael A. Chaney, Bart Beaty, Candida Rifkind, Linda Warley, and Leigh Gilmore, to name a few key scholars writing on this innovative genre, have largely focused on such comics

²¹ See *Picture Theory* for Mitchell’s discussion of this.

²² Foucault developed his use of the term counter-memory in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977); he describes the importance of counter-memory as recovering “other voices which have remained silent for so long” (18). In his emphasis on counter-memory, Foucault makes an argument that all discourses are partial. See Barbara A. Misztal’s *Theories of Social Remembering* (2003) for a useful summary of Foucault’s term.

artists/writers as Art Spiegelman, Alison Bechdel, Marjane Satrapi, Chester Brown, Julie Doucet, Seth, Craig Thompson, Robert Crumb, and Harvey Pekar.²³ These comics scholars all address the individual when they emphasize the comics medium's predisposition to represent stories, histories, and memories, particularly (though not exclusively) those of women. This scholarship has raised many critical questions about the comics medium's potential and has instilled a dynamic focus in comics studies. In order to add to this scholarship and lead in a different direction from the contemporary focus on individual memory, I now want to approach similar thematic issues, but from a collective memory framework, and from a counter-memorial perspective, using example texts that, while drawing from the autobiographical tradition, also have a greater interest in more broad social and collective conditions.

James E. Young's writing on commemoration practices, specifically those involving the Holocaust and German identity, has contributed innovative and important ideas. Specifically, Young's concept of the counter-monument has brought a new critical model to critique contemporary commemorative practices to the forefront of memory studies. Drawing from Pierre Nora, Young suggests that instead of embodying memory, traditional monuments displace memory entirely. "Once we assign monumental form to memory," writes Young, "we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory-burden" (273). His critique of traditional monuments aligns with those of many memory studies scholars, such as Michel Foucault (1980) and Jacques Derrida (1995), who note

²³ Among these comic creators, I too take up Pekar; however, part of my analysis is to account for the ways *Unsung Hero* works beyond the auto/biography genres.

that, while recording tragic events in archives, heritage sites, and curricula establishes the promise that traumatic collective events will be forever remembered, we should be critical of commemorative practices that aim to structure and master the memory narrative of traumatic events because these practices ensure a limitation on the voices that are heard. This is because forgetting and memory are tethered to one another.²⁴

In his 1992 article “The Counter-Monument: Memory Against itself in Germany Today,” Young presents what he calls the counter-monument, that is, a monument that overtly rejects traditional commemorative practices that seek to fix narratives of history, events, and people—whether to glorify or vilify them. The counter-monument attempts to re-negotiate the memory of and public interaction with a particular event or person, and is understood as expressing opposition to a dominant narrative rather than validating it. This type of monument invites careful, multi-sensory public interaction, rather than the simple occupation of a public space dislodged from public life.

In this essay, Young wonders how Germany is to remember its suffering and those who suffered, and asks, “How does a state incorporate its crimes against others into its national memorial landscape? How does a state recite, much less commemorate, the litany of its misdeeds, making them part of its reason for being?” (271). The counter-monument arose in response to these types of questions, with the aim of challenging the very premise of establishing a monument in the first place.

By way of an introduction to this essay, Young provides examples of young German artists and sculptors who erected monuments to the Holocaust that were meant to erode the traditional monument, in places that set a visual contrast between the monument and

²⁴ See Sarah Henstra, 2009, and Assmann, 2008, for their critical and in-depth takes on this.

its surroundings. As part of a generation after the Holocaust, according to Young, these artists were seeking to emphasize the distance of both time and experience between themselves and the Holocaust. To expand on his term the counter-monument, Young gives the intense example of conceptual artists Jochen and Esther Gerz's 1986 12-meter high

"Monument against Fascism, War and Violence – and for Peace and Human Rights," which was a pillar located in a busy center in Hamburg. Viewers were invited to write on the monument, and over the years, "the more actively visitors participate, the faster they cover each section with their names, the sooner the monument will disappear"

(Young 276). Eventually, the monument sank into the chamber beneath, effectively vanishing from sight. What

remained, as described by Young, was "the memory-tourists, [who

are] forced to rise and to remember for themselves" (276) (see figures 3 and 4 above). The burden of memory is returned to the people. This matters not only because this monument negates common understandings of memorialization and provokes instead an



Figure 3. Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's The Harburg Monument Against Fascism, 1986-1993.



Figure 4. Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's The Harburg Monument Against Fascism, 1986-1993.

uncomfortable (and literal) void that must be explained in some way, but also because it calls attention to the complexities of generational memory, or what Young later describes in his book *At Memory's Edge* (2000), as a weaving of both the events of the Holocaust and how those events are passed down to a younger generation. Marianne Hirsch would refer to this as post-memory, not because we are beyond memory, but because it is “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Post-memory should reflect back on memory, revealing it as equally constructed, equally mediated by the process of narration and imagination” (8).

In his chapter entitled “Memory and the Monument After 9/11” in *The Future of Memory* (2010), Young again approaches the relationship between the monument and memory, with a focus on the World Trade Centre memorial in New York City. Using his earlier theories on the monument, he examines “how the need for a unified vision of the past as found in the traditional monument necessarily collides with the modern conviction that neither the past nor its meanings are ever just one thing” (77). Counter-monuments have also been described as being built only to disappear over time, which is the case in the above example. This type of monument “stimulate[s] memory just as permanent monuments or memorials do, but...also intentionally change[s] over time just as memories change, offering an alternative to the illusion of the permanence of memory that most monuments perpetuate” (Nelson and Olin 2). Young explains that as societies become more fragmented and more diverse, the nation’s need to connect and unify competing memories in the form of memorialization intensifies. He describes the contradictory nature of monuments like this: “In the absence of shared beliefs or common interests, memorial-art in public spaces asks an otherwise fragmented populace to frame diverse pasts and

experiences in common spaces. By creating common spaces for memory, monuments propagate the illusion of common memory” (Young 80). In order for a monument to be ‘successful,’ the monument must be composed or be comprised of the competing debates, arguments, perspectives, and tensions provoked by the trauma, conflict, or violence meant to be commemorated. I agree with Young, and come to the term graphic counter-memorial to explain the ways the comic form exemplifies this type of memory work.

There are parallels between the layout and features of comics and the structure of memory and collective memory. What makes the counter-monument *counter* is the participatory nature of the monuments. They are impactful precisely because they call on the viewer to interact on some level with the structure, with space, and with other viewers. Like the counter-monument, the form of the comics medium makes it highly participatory, especially the gutter and its ability to disrupt, construct, and dictate time. The gutter has also been described as the space or gap in which readers’ imaginations play a key role in the meaning-making process through closure. As McCloud points out, while the panels fragment the temporality and spatiality of stories, closure “allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (67). McCloud also refers to universal identification as a form of audience involvement that immerses readers into the story and directs attention to the messages the comics artist is conveying. Comics readers interact with the reality created by the writer/illustrator, and in the cases of Sacco and Spiegelman, they also interact with the authors themselves as they are graphically depicted on the page. While Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli do not appear in *DMZ*, their main character Matty Roth still serves a similar function to Sacco’s and Spiegelman’s personas,

providing the kind of witness and testimony that is crucial to the graphic counter-memorial.

Throughout this chapter, I have traced a brief account of the intersection of memory studies and comics studies, as well as the connections between late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' conceptions of memory and forgetting, and the later development of traumatic memory and testimony. Within this discussion, I have shown the deepening preoccupation with questions of representing trauma narratives and history aesthetically as a backdrop to the comics I am analyzing. Before turning to these works, it is important to look at the specific genre of war comics and their early American development in order to establish a history from which these works emerge and within which they work. Sacco is widely known to have established the genre of Comics Journalism, and while I think he is absolutely a critical and preeminent figure, there are important precursors that need to be acknowledged. Crucial to the genre of war comics is Harvey Kurtzman and his work with EC, and I focus on his *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* in the following chapter. As well, Will Eisner's *Last Days of Vietnam* (2000) and Harvey Pekar and David Collier's *Unsung Hero* (2003), while not published at the same time as Kurtzman's powerful war comics, are key examples of comics using reportage/the reporter, autobiography, and journalism, which further attest to a growing distrust of official narratives of histories.

Chapter Two:

Harvey Kurtzman and the War Comic

"Only the dead have seen the end of war."

- Plato

In the last chapter, I provided a framework of memory studies in the context of comics in order to establish the key terms and lines of inquiry that I will be exploring in later chapters. Before discussing and analyzing the contemporary works of graphic counter-memorials by Sacco, Spiegelman, and Wood and Burchielli, it is important to outline the emergence of war comics by looking briefly at the early traditions of American political cartoons and their influence on later comics. With this background, I will then look specifically at Harvey Kurtzman's comics and aesthetic tradition in the early 1950s, which show a deep contribution to contemporary comics about war and conflict.

When people think of Harvey Kurtzman, they invariably first think of the creation and long publication history of *MAD*, and with good reason. Kurtzman founded *MAD* in 1952 as a satirical comic book with EC (Entertainment Comics), and then in 1953 began publishing it in its familiar magazine form. *MAD* has been described as having a critical eye for culture and politics, using satire and absurdist humour to get at a wide range of issues.²⁵ As Terry Gilliam describes, *MAD* comics were comics using parody at the service of political and social commentary, and at the time, this was rare ("My MAD Mentor" 2009). *MAD*, with its roots in politics, is an important advancement in American comics of the time. Yet, I

²⁵ See *Harvey Kurtzman: The Man Who Created MAD and Revolutionized Humor in America* (2015) by Bill Schelly as a recent and extensive example; *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman: The Mad Genius of Comics* (2009) by Denis Kitchen and Paul Buhle is another good source.

want to focus on Kurtzman's earlier work, his development of a new kind of war comic, which until recently, many biographies of Kurtzman have tended to skim over.

Kurtzman's war comics laid an important foundation that contemporary comics about war have taken up: the use of a journalist as the main character (whether a surrogate for the writer/creator or the writer/creator themselves on the page), the use of the interview as a framework through which the story unfolds, and the employment of research within a story. Kurtzman's war comics also went against many other comics at the time, depicting violence, blood, civilian and soldier casualties, and limbs being torn from torsos. In both form and content, Kurtzman's war comics were different and sophisticated; they were drawn with detail and a high level of realism, and they were researched and historically accurate. Along with Kurtzman, I will also analyze Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam* (2000) and Harvey Pekar's *Unsung Hero* (2003), illustrated by Canadian David Collier, which was part of Pekar's *American Splendor* series. These two comics, while not published at the same time as Kurtzman's war comics, offer similar contextual and formal strategies that can be understood as stepping stones to the later development of the graphic counter-memorial. This chapter establishes that comics about conflicts and wars that are engaged in unsettling and dismantling singular historical, cultural, or political narratives are part of the counter-narrative tradition. That these are comics and not traditional texts offers something different to the genres of war comics and to the later Comics Journalism, as well as to Young's counter-monument form. By viewing the comics in this chapter as early precursors to the graphic counter-memorial, we can better understand the implications of war as a mediated event, and how comics deal with collective memories of war.

Early Comics and Politics

Early political cartoons and comics share a history of political and cultural intervention. Probably one of the most influential American political cartoonists of the nineteenth century was Thomas Nast, whose familiar work appeared in the *New York Times*

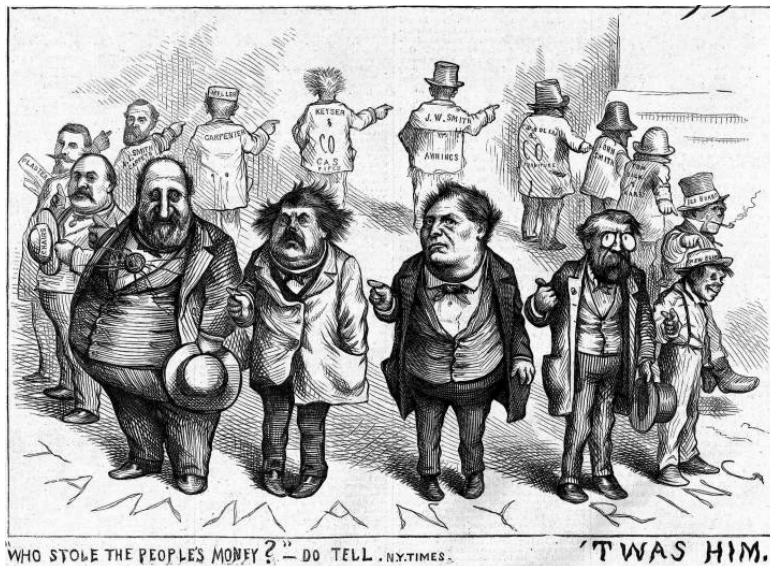


Figure 5. Thomas Nast's anti-Tweed Ring cartoon, "Who Stole the People's Money?" published in *The New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly*, 1871.

and *Harper's Weekly* during the 1860s and 70s.²⁶ Indeed, it has been noted that Nast is considered the father of political cartoon satire.²⁷ Nast was a cartoonist and is widely known for his political cartoon campaign against William M. Tweed, or 'Boss Tweed,' and Tammany Hall. Nast's political cartoons

showcased Tweed as part of a wider corrupt New York political scene and as destroying the 'good' of America, the American dream, and American politics. His cartoons sparked the now famous statement from Tweed: "Let's stop them damned pictures...I don't care so

²⁶ Honoré Daumier is also typically noted in this category. I refer to him only in footnote because my focus within this context is primarily American; however, his caricatures and political cartoons in *La Caricature* are significant contributions to the type of satire Nast was doing. His object of political lampooning was the incompetence of government and law. *Censorship and Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (1989) by Robert Justin Goldstein and *The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power* (2013) by Victor S. Navasky are two good books on Daumier, and his trial.

²⁷ Victor S. Navasky's (2013) *The Art of Controversy* is a prominent example of work that makes this assertion, and which dedicates a large chapter to Nast's contribution to art using this medium.

much what the papers write about me – my constituents can’t read – but damned they can see pictures” (Halloran 132).²⁸ Writing of this time in Nast’s life, Fiona Deans Halloran in her book *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (2012) makes a critical point about the Tweed period: “Nast’s participation in the campaign against Tweed catapulted him to the forefront of his profession. He became the man whose work could change minds, topple leaders, and influence elections. Not mere editorials, Nast’s cartoons captured public attention and inspired public outrage” (120). Nast was also a favourite of Kurtzman. As Bill Schelly quotes from Kurtzman in his biography, “I did a lot of research on Nast. His criticism at a certain period was very useful. His most important years were...before and after Boss Tweedy’s period of power” (42). The combination of attention grabbing and outrage spurring is important to understand the nature of cartoons and comics, and how and why people react so strongly to them. Nast’s work is known for using both “humour and gravity,” as being “so true that they [were] terrible” (qtd. in Halloran 132).

I mention Nast here because his work in *Harper’s Weekly* not only contributed to the growing public and political influence of cartoons, but also because of his contribution to the further development of the conventions of comics, even to the genre of war comics. Furthermore, Nast’s use of the drawn image to call attention to social and political issues in a way that people of varying levels of literacy and English proficiency could have understood is a sentiment and purpose that comics, especially comics that challenge war, have retained and utilize to this day.

²⁸ *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (2012) is an intriguing and critical look at Nast’s life and political cartooning career.

As many comics historians have claimed, political cartoons evolved into the American entertainment comic strip.²⁹ Hillary Chute has noted that “This is a period in which the appearance of comics in newspapers, taking on a range of genres, was developing concurrently with the press itself in reporting war, and reporting it visually....” (*Disaster* 20). While the comic strip was largely aimed at children and thought of as disposable entertainment, the medium ultimately and pervasively had a significant role in framing and explaining American culture and society. There is a certain power associated with being pushed to the margins of society and literature, which is where comics have perpetually been relegated; that power is accompanied by the ability to question mainstream media, politicians, and government under the guise of silly entertainment.

The comics medium appealed to both young and adult readers. Early creators such as Richard Outcault (*The Yellow Kid*) and Winsor McCay (*Little Nemo in Slumberland*), for

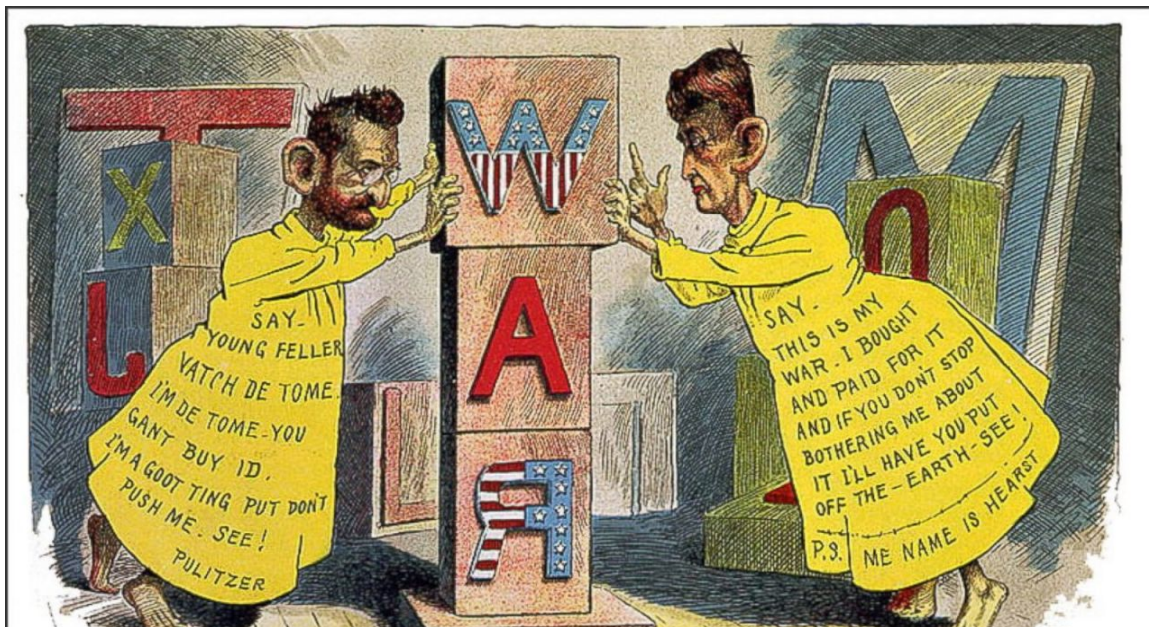


Figure 6. Leon Barritt's "The Big Type War of the Yellow Kids," 1898, Library of Congress.

²⁹ Much has already been said on this; for a comprehensive history, see David Kunzle's *The History of the Comic Strip: The Nineteenth Century* (1990).

example, used children as their main characters, which allowed them to reach a younger audience and still criticize political figures and issues in a seemingly simplistic way. Using the comic strip in the newspapers to report on war became controversial as Hearst and Pulitzer “tried to outdo one another in circulation with more and more aggrandized headlines” to the point where they themselves were criticized in the comics form, as shown in figure 6 (Roy 2014). “The Big Type War of the Yellow Kids” by Leon Barritt in 1898 shows Hearst and Pulitzer dressed as The Yellow Kid pushing against each other on opposite sides of the word war, built out of printing blocks. This shows them in competition with each other in reporting war, and in conflict over who owned Outcault’s *The Yellow Kid* strip. By dressing them in The Yellow Kid’s over-sized t-shirt, the two men are also regarded as children and childish. Barritt’s cartoon also gets at the sentiment that war, as is written on Hearst’s shirt, is something that can be bought and sold and used as a mode of manipulation in the press.

While the stories in many comics at this time were exaggerated and distorted, their stories were commonly rooted in historical or current political conflicts and experiences that would have been recognizable to many readers. Despite this, as comics historian Roger Sabin has also pointed out, comics like *Nemo* and *The Yellow Kid* became associated with children precisely because they were stories from a child’s perspective. Moreover, because the stories were written at a level accessible to the illiterate and immigrants, the medium became associated with the lower class (Sabin 2006). Sabin is right to point to this factor as both a negative and a positive aspect of comics: on the one hand, comics have retained the stigma of being children’s literature, if literature at all, and therefore incapable of taking on serious issues or warranting serious study. On the other hand, comics of this nature could

get away with political commentary in a way that would have probably been censored in another medium.³⁰

An important stepping-stone to understanding Kurtzman's comics and why I have focused on him is the development of war comics more generally in the early twentieth century. Political cartoons during the First World War relied on exaggeration and caricature to capture the reader and convey a message. Some of the more popular political cartoonists at the time were E. H. Shepard and William Heath Robinson whose illustrations typically characterized the enemy as beast-like figures. One of the most recognized political cartoonists was British Bruce Bairnsfather, creator of *Old Bill*, a series about life in the trenches. Extremely popular among British troops, *Old Bill* portrayed the enemy as pigs and characters that were half man, half beast (Conroy 46). As Daniel Perlmutter has described, comic strips and cartoons were not intended to be accurate depictions of events, and in fact allowed cartoonists to distort events and people (8-12). The popular images of the First World War, according to Perlmutter, were "metonymies," meaning that the images of an event or figure connoted the broader condition of the reality of the war without being realistic (8-12). This means that both the enemies and the soldiers were drawn according to visual cues that readers could easily decipher. So, while the enemy was beast-like,

³⁰ There is a wide range of contemporary comics and graphic novels that use a similar strategy—using an abstract or cartoonish illustrative style to tackle graphic, controversial, and difficult issues. For example, I think of *Persepolis* (2000) by Satrapi, *Weapons of Mass Diplomacy* (2014) by Abel Lanzac (pseudonym for Antonin Baudry), and *Pride of Baghdad* (2006) by Brian K. Vaughan and Niko Henrichon, to cite but three, which all use a cartoon or exaggerated style or personify animals in order to comment, politicize, and attend to issues that perhaps would be censored or resisted otherwise. In fact, *Persepolis* and *Pride of Baghdad* have repeatedly been challenged for their content, as tracked by the Comic Book Legal Defence Fund. *Persepolis* was banned in 2013 by Chicago Public Schools administrators, specifically grades 8 and under. The ban was highly criticised many students and teachers.

signifying grotesqueness and 'otherness,' the hero soldier was also exaggerated beyond reality. Often, soldiers were represented as being indistinguishable from each other, suggesting an element of abstraction and untruth. While these were still modes of propaganda, all sides of the war were made to be strange and exaggerated.

Leading into WWII and Beyond

American comics after the Great War were largely propagandist in nature, and functioned mainly as fuel for morale among both the American public and soldiers; they positioned adventure stories as combat and soldier stories, and looked to either nostalgic or futuristic ideals. Some examples include *Tarzan* (1929, Hal Foster), *Dick Tracy* (1931, Chester Gould), *Terry and the Pirates* (1934, Milton Caniff), *Buck Rogers* (1929, Philip Francis Nowlan), and *Flash Gordon* (1934, Alex Raymond), which were all introduced on the brink of the 1930s or early in the 1930s. I pull out these examples because they are most familiar and because they represent common themes at the time. They represent the three extremes of the American public's interest: a throwback to the harsh jungle or wild nature dominated by man and brute strength; domestic crime and gangsters; and visions of the future and planets beyond earth optimistically dominated by man and technology. Both the jungle and the future posed threats that were overthrown by either individual strength/the body or futuristic technology, respectively (W. Young 410). "For the Depression audience," writes William Young in his article "The Serious Funnies" (1969), "the theme of the self-reliant individual would be more meaningful than one which shows the hero controlled by external forces...." (422). While these examples illustrate a preoccupation with and desire for escapism and adventure, they also represent the

possibility of power beyond the audience's current state, a "symbolic visual and narrative search for order and stability" (W. Young 425). William Young concludes his article with the claim that while the Depression is never referred to or depicted in these comics, the idea that economic turmoil and political strife will eventually come to an end is implied.

Comics that did reflect the war projected a glorified version of fighting and death, especially in the superhero genre. Combat was not awash in blood and if a hero protagonist died, it was depicted as an honourable death, as opposed to a casualty of war. War comics before the start of World War II were not exactly a widely popular genre, as the medium was thought to be too superficial to address such serious topics as the harsh realities of war, particularly by those who were still dealing with the aftermath of the first war (Conroy 11).

By 1940, comics were dealing explicitly with war, fighting real and imagined threats to America with the help of superheroes and combat soldiers. Two superheroes stand out in the 1940s—The Shield by Harry Shorten and Irv Novick and Captain America by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Predating Captain America, The Shield was a patriotic character outfitted in red, white, and blue and with superhuman abilities. He used his speed and bulletproof body to avenge the death of his father in WWI, which had been made to seem like a desertion of duty.³¹ The origin stories of The Shield and Captain America revolved around the ideas of counter-intelligence and science and technology. The Shield acquired his superhuman abilities by way of chemicals and a formula his father was experimenting with that would give super strength to American soldiers fighting in WWI. Similarly,

³¹ See Cord A. Scott's *Comics and Conflict* (2014) as an excellent source and timeline of WWI, WWII, and Cold War comics.

Captain America's abilities were the result of a government-run experiment also involving chemicals and the supposed limitlessness of science. I point this out because both superheroes cast science as the means to creating a future dominated by America; and science, unlike superhuman strength and speed, is a kind of knowledge that an everyday ordinary person could gain and use. "A new kind of popular hero had emerged," writes Richard Reynolds in "Masked Heroes" (2013), "the self-reliant individualist who stands aloof from many of the humdrum concerns of society, yet is able to operate according to his own code of honor, to take on the world on his own terms, and win (109). Captain America in particular, and the more popular of the two heroes, fought real and recognizable enemies such as Hitler, and as Reynolds shows, these battles acted as proxies for American foreign policies and readers. Another consideration in these two comics series is the depiction of violence. "The level of violence in these issues is striking," writes Cord Scott. People are stabbed and tortured, and only the superhero can come to the rescue (Scott 59).

Yet, American soldiers are visible only as heroes and victors while bloodshed falls only on the side of the enemy. The depiction of the enemy as 'other' carried on in comics of this period, and was significantly amplified in superhero and adventure comics. An example would be *Young Allies* (1941), a group consisting of young superhero sidekicks created by friends of Captain America and the Human Torch. These young sidekick characters were targeted at teenaged American readers to model the kind of spirit they should embody. They also served to advance racial stereotypes. Mike Conroy writes that comic artists depicted "Germans as thick-set, heavy-browed, near-Neanderthal thugs...Most Japanese soldiers were depicted as buck-toothed, myopic morons and sadists wearing

Coke-bottle glasses” (70). These kinds of racist caricatures dominated many of the comics of this period, and lasted long after the wars.

Harvey Kurtzman’s War Comics

The emergent adventure and war comics genre charged ahead with American propagandist storylines; however, Harvey Kurtzman confronted this rhetoric with his own war comics. Kurtzman was born in Brooklyn, NY, and grew up with comics. He is noted as being part of the “first generation of comic book artists who had grown up with the medium and who were therefore familiar with it as a narrative form” (Harvey 126). Kurtzman first took his idea of a war comics to his publisher William Gaines of EC Comics disguised as an adventure comics in 1950. The stories in *Two-Fisted Tales* were not just about the wars that Kurtzman would have been directly familiar with, but they also included the Civil War, the Roman Empire, medieval knights, and the Spanish Conquistadors; wars that Kurtzman extensively researched (Conroy 27). The Korean War heavily influenced the line of adventure stories published by EC Comics and changed them into war comics, and *Frontline Combat* was added to *Two-Fisted Tales* in 1951. The publication of *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* was, for Kurtzman, a direct result of the overwhelming patriotic and propagandist comics of the prior two decades. Comics at the time were not given much prestige, yet this allowed comics like *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* to subvert the dominant ideology about war by using comic language to inject political messages, and to pose questions about truth to readers. A significant element of Kurtzman’s strategy of resistance came in the form of overthrowing the division between the soldiers as American heroes and the enemies as foreign ‘others,’ a dynamic

that he felt was distorted in other comics. He pursued “moral truths,” as he says in an interview with Kim Thompson, Gary Groth, and Mike Carton in *The Comics Journal* in 1981. When Groth asks, “*How do you feel about the idea that there is not one but many truths?*” Kurtzman replies, “I feel pretty good about that” (“The Man Who Brought Truth” 79, original emphasis). Kurtzman also recalls that, “I was absolutely appalled by the lies in the war books that publishers were putting out...they focused on what [the publishers] thought the reader would like to read, which was ‘Americans are good guys and anybody against us is the bad guys. We’re human. They’re not. And God is always on our side’” (“The Man Who Brought Truth” 78-79). He called these comics trash and out of touch with reality.

Upon starting *Two-Fisted Tales*, Kurtzman states that “When I thought of doing a war book, the business of what to say about war was very important to me and was uppermost in my mind, because I did then feel very strongly about not wanting to say anything glamorous about war. Everything that went before *Two-Fisted Tales* had glamorized war” (qtd. in Schelly 169). Referring to WWII and America’s involvement in the Korean War, Kurtzman explained that: “what I was trying to tell my reader was what I perceived as being true. I didn’t want to be a preacher, but I did want to tell the truth about things” (“The Man Who Brought Truth” 78). I argue that this is a sentiment that Spiegelman, Sacco, and Wood and Burchielli have implemented in their comics, and is a core principle of counter-narratives such as the graphic counter-memorial.

While Kurtzman’s comics are usually referred to as ‘anti-war’ comics, to be clear, they did not oppose war. What he was opposed to was meaningless death. As one character asked in issue #22 of *Two-Fisted Tales*, “What does the future mean when everything you love is dead? What is left? What good is your revolution?” (“Dying City” 1951). Bob Levin

argues that Kurtzman's comics did not disrupt or disturb enough. Levin writes that his "American soldiers did not butcher prisoners of war. They gang-raped no women. They did not live in fox holes amidst their own bodily filth" ("The Anti-War Comics" 2013). However, that would have been a simplistic inversion of what Kurtzman saw as misrepresentation and untruth. Moreover, Kurtzman was far more interested in dissecting and depicting the realities of war than he was in protesting war. He was acting against the depiction of war and the public's interaction with war stories. As Robert C. Harvey notes, "in deglamorizing warfare, he did not oppose the effort in Korea. His stories acknowledged the lamentable necessity of the fight" ("Introduction" to *Corpse* viii). And in the Groth interview, when Kurtzman called attention to his pursuit of the truth, it is clear that he does not mean the one and only truth.

Kurtzman's stories were meticulously researched and were often based on testimonies from soldiers. He interviewed soldiers for content and for particular narrative and phrases to use in his comics to show conflicting accounts of experiences and events. In interviews from 1979 and 1982, Kurtzman recounts his methods, stating, "I picked up my

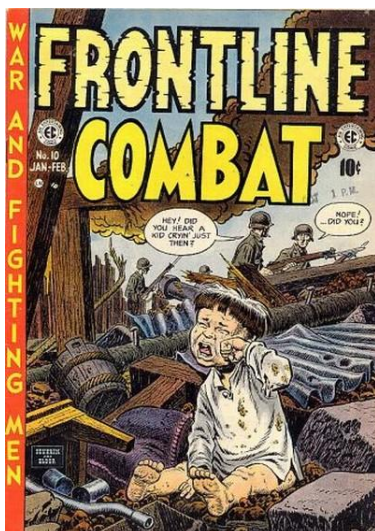


Figure 7. *Frontline Combat* #10, published by EC in 1953.

material largely from interviews, and the guys would ramble on and talk about their experiences...I usually contacted [soldiers] through the various services. The Army would send me to veterans who were still there, in the Army" (*Corpse* 210-211). In fact, he spoke at length about how important research and interviews were to his comics: "I *had* to find out about things—suddenly history became a fascinating subject" (qtd. in Groth and Dean 48, original

emphasis). He would spend days and sometimes up to two weeks in the New York Public Library reading and scanning history books so that his comics were not only accurate, but also able to challenge a perceived truth.³² In an interview, Kurtzman clearly criticized the textbooks he used as references, saying that they churned out misleading facts from the “censorship mill” to “deliberately mislead[sic] you” (qtd. in Groth and Dean 48-49). So, while he used material from his research in history textbooks in his comics, he did so to challenge the textbooks’ perceived trustworthiness. This challenge and subversion to a perceived truth or to a cohesive and linear understanding of historical events is fundamental to the counter-narrative model, and the comics medium allows for a verbal and visual representation of multiple narratives.

The first story in *Two-Fisted Tales*, “Conquest” (1950), was written and illustrated by Kurtzman, and was about Spanish invaders stealing gold from the ‘savage’ Mayans in Gulf of Campeche off the coast of Mexico.³³ When a Mayan King confronts the Spanish Captain about the invasion, the Captain says, “We come from a noble country from across the sea! A country that will teach your people about civilization!” (*Corpse* 5). At the end of the story, the Mayans, under the cloak of night, defeat the Spaniards and end up subjecting them to the same kind of torture and treatment that was inflicted upon them. The concluding narration describing the killed Spanish soldiers is as follows: “Peace descends on the city, and the invaders lie rotting in the sun like so many dead flies! For they were

³² Robert C. Harvey’s chapter “The Comic Book as Individual Expression, Harvey Kurtzman and the Revolution” in *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* is an excellent source in general and details Kurtzman’s early days in comics and his work with Gaines.

³³ It should be noted that while Kurtzman did not illustrate all of his comics under these titles, he wrote all the scripts and could be quite pointed in his directions to the illustrators. He wrote directions for the page layouts and panel composition for each script. A veteran of WWII, Kurtzman was the developer, writer, and editor of *Frontline Combat*.

indeed flies...conquering flies...flies who had conquered the fly-paper!" (*Corpse* 8). While this particular story is not about a conflict that would have been familiar to Americans at the time, the fighting and violence did have some basis in the current culture and attitude about conflict. The description of the Spanish soldiers as flies marks one major theme that Kurtzman's work would come to adopt, that is the representation of an indigenous population as 'savage' by an invading and dominant group who then go on to inflict savage-esque actions against the so called 'savages.' Highlighting this kind of hypocrisy was part of his drive to 'tell the truth' to readers, and "Conquest" is not the only example where Kurtzman disrupted the roles of the dominant and dominated to inspire his readers to think critically about what other comics or media were depicting.

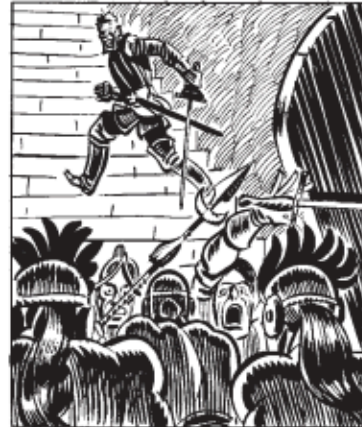
Another story in *Two-Fisted Tales* was "Ambush!" (1951) written by Kurtzman and illustrated by Jack Davis. The story is about American soldiers riding in jeeps through a forest in North Korea, surrounded by enemy fire. The American soldiers are all picked off one by one as they try to make their way through the terrain. This early story contains motifs that would become Kurtzman staples: "the suddenness of death, the way soldiers deal with the deaths of their buddies, how men react under great stress" (Schelly 177). Another Kurtzman hallmark can be seen in figure 8 taken from "Conquest," specifically the

CONQUEST

CAPTAIN ALVORADO AND HIS PERSONAL GUARDS HAVE BARRICADED THEMSELVES BEHIND A HEAVY DOOR, BUT NOT FOR LONG!



THE DOOR GIVES WAY, AND A HORDE OF YELLING INDIANS GO UP THE STAIRWAY AFTER THE LEADER OF THE SPANIARDS.



UP... UP THE STONE STAIRWAY GOES THE SPANISH CAPTAIN. UP TO THE VERY TOP... TO THE ALTAR OF THE SUN GOD!



STAND BACK, YOU HEATHENS! LISTEN! I AM YOUR CONQUEROR! MY COUNTRY WILL SEND MANY MORE SOLDIERS TO PUNISH YOU! STAND BACK, LEST I CUT YOU ALL TO PIECES!



BUT JUAN ALVORADO IS TOO FROZEN WITH FEAR TO REALLY USE HIS SWORD, AND HIS LAST SIGHT ON EARTH IS OF THE TERRIBLE MAQUAHUITL WAR CLUB...



...WHICH COMES CRASHING DOWN ON HIS HEAD AS HE LEANS AGAINST THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR OF THE INDIAN SUN-GOD!



AND SO, THE VIOLENT CAREER OF JUAN ALVORADO, THE CONQUEROR, IS ENDED! HIS BODY LIES BROKEN AT THE BASE OF THE TEMPLE, WHERE, FROM THE HIGHEST PARAPET, IT HAS BEEN THROWN. PEACE DESCENDS ON THE CITY, AND THE INVADERS LIE ROTTING IN THE SUN LIKE SO MANY DEAD FLIES. FOR THEY WERE INDEED FLIES... CONQUERING FLIES... FLIES WHO HAD CONQUERED THE FLY-PAPER!



Figure 8. Harvey Kurtzman's "Conquest" originally published in *Two-Fisted Tales* #18 in 1950.

three middle panels: the use of panels to break up violence, creating movement and

fragmented action. Hatfield has commented upon this in Kurtzman's work and argues that this type of panel progression connotes "the broken rhythm of warfare," contrasted with the "painful slowness of war" (56). The pace that Kurtzman sets up in many of his comics alludes to the monotony of combat, something that was rarely showcased in war comics before Kurtzman's. There are instances when Kurtzman depicts soldiers in relentless marches, and others when they are picked off at an almost slow-motion speed over several panels. By removing the flash of the heroic narrative typically associated with war comics and soldiers, Kurtzman reveals the drudgery of war. The degree to which the character in the last two of those three middle panels above experiences violence is left to the reader; the weapon is held above the head, and drops in the gutter, and in the last panel, the aftermath of the strike is out of view. This use of the panels and gutters is what McCloud describes as the reader's "special crime," that the reader commits as part of participating in the medium (68).

Thierry Groensteen characterizes the reader's participation as having to do with gaps. He writes that the story of a comics might well be full of holes, "but it projects me into a world that is portrayed as consistent, and it is the continuity attributed to the fictional world that allows me to effortlessly fill in the gaps of the narration" (Groensteen 11). Groensteen's sense of continuity should not be mistaken for unity, as he later writes that panels and frames offer a separation. There is an important connection between the kind of participation comics ask of readers and the kind that counter-monuments ask of viewers. A reader must imagine the gore associated with the strike of that axe/mallet as a result of how the illustrator has used the gutter and the panel; similarly, the artist of a counter-memorial helps shape the viewer's response by provoking a reaction from how public

space, for example, is used or disrupted. Gutter space and public space are uniquely positioned to elicit emotional and aesthetic responses from the reader/viewer, and this space is a perpetual problem that is shared between artists and creators of counter-narratives.

Kurtzman changed the image of the American soldier from one who was unabashedly in support of the war and impervious to death, to one who was not only vulnerable on the frontlines, but also who potentially suffered from the memories of the frontlines after returning home. He was interested in emphasizing the humanity within war, as opposed to romanticizing the violence and bloodshed; he was concerned with the public's level of understanding, visually and contextually, the human side of warfare. Kurtzman notes that "when a story makes you feel the humanity of someone, it touches you, and it really works" (*Corpse* 211). Note that the story 'touches' the reader. It does not disturb or shock, as later counter-memorial forms would. The kind of political intervention Kurtzman is interested in has a lot to do with juxtaposing the perception of the enemy, with all its racist undertones, and how Americans view themselves, as patriotic. "In an effort to get the reader to recognize the humanity of the soldiers fighting on each side of the [Korean] war, Kurtzman creates a variation of the trope of ascribing animalistic characteristics to the enemy," writes Christopher B. Field (52). In Kurtzman's narrative and artistic style, animalistic characteristics either suggest the inversion of savagery or signify

the psychological toll on the mind. In one story, "Big If!" a lone American soldier recounts his last several moves to get back to his squad, repeating a mantra of 'if': "if! Not much of a word! A little word! But lots of meaning!" (*Corpse* 68). And then toward the end of the comic, the narrative reads, "If Paul Maynard hadn't stopped to buckle the combat boot!...If Paul Maynard walked faster...or slower...or not at all!..." (*Corpse* 74). The reader



Figure 9. Harvey Kurtzman's "Big If" originally published in *Two-Fisted Tales* #5 in 1952.

learns that Paul Maynard is the contemplative, mentally tortured soldier depicted in the comic, and while the story starts with the narrative calling out the 'ifs' about Paul Maynard, toward the end, it is revealed that Paul is talking to himself in the third person. Ultimately, in the last panel, Paul is dead on the ground, having, in death, imagined or dreamed himself retracing his last moments. This story attempts to depict the anxiousness and dissociative psychological torment that soldiers face both at the frontlines and away. The content of Paul's imagination or dream comes from a destructed landscape and his isolation from the

rhythms of everyday life. The representation is a sympathetic indictment of war using the comics medium that was so often reserved for mythologizing war and obscuring its repulsiveness. Of the last panel with a close-up of Paul's crying face, Kurtzman says, "the crying [soldier] face...was taken from a photograph from *Life* magazine...I built the character around that one picture...The crying face was the strong point, the visual strong point of the whole story" (*Corpse* 211). Schelly comments on the poetic nature of some of Kurtzman's narrative, and writes that he "found some aspects of poetry appealing and realized such elements as rhythm, repetition and personification, as well as poetic language, could be used to enhance and even shape the way a story was told" (191). The repetition of language is also mirrored by the use of repetitive panels. In the same above comics page (figure 9), the two triptych panels signify movement, duration, and rhythm, the poetic language of comics that immerses the reader in various ways.

In another story entitled "Dying City!" the reader gets the perspective of a North Korean grandfather and grandson who survived the bombing of their city, Suwon. The young son, Kim, leaves to become a soldier to help protect his city; when he returns, his entire family, except his grandfather, has been killed by the highflying bombers. Kurtzman's focus on a single family, the two characters of the grandfather and grandson, demonstrates his interest in showing all sides of casualties and agony in war. Portraying a story that is sympathetic to North Koreans goes against the typical war stories of American glory and valour. This is also, as Hatfield points out, a characteristic of Kurtzman's stories, that "warfare is meaningless and numbing" for everyone, no matter what side of the conflict they are on (57). By personalizing one or two characters, Kurtzman does not let the reader forget or disregard the human aspect and cost of war. There is the absurdity of war, the

idea that anything can happen at any time, and then there is the very real human face of war, which the reader gets with the close up of Paul's face in the triptych. This sentiment is especially true in "Enemy Contact!" written by Kurtzman and illustrated by Jack Davis. The main character is a medic who runs through enemy fire to try to reach a group of soldiers, one of whom requires an emergency appendectomy. While the surgery saves the soldier's life, he is still killed by flying bullets. The concluding text reads like this:

...And so, men marched off to kill men! And isn't it strange! While one instinct makes man move heaven and earth to save a life...makes man give his all to his fellow man...another, less noble instinct, makes man a cold, brutal, dispassionate monster...lets him tear other men to bits without mercy! This paradox, this puzzle marches on forever, but here is where our story stops!
("Enemy Contact!" 1951)

The final statement that the 'story stops' is a self-reflexive narrative strategy that is perhaps meant to be a cliffhanger at the precise moment of social commentary, that the paradox, while not in this story, will inevitably emerge in other forms. To me this also seems congruent with Adorno's comments that there comes a point where these traumatic events can no longer be spoken about. There were no other comics writers doing the kind of stories Kurtzman was doing in 1951 and 1952.

Why do I draw from these examples? It is here that I find the framework of memory studies so integral to understanding counter-memorial culture and the relationship between the comics medium and memory. It is worth returning to Halbwachs' distinction between memory and history. He viewed them as opposing modes of recollecting the past. For Halbwachs, history makes claims to authenticity, truth, linearity, and singularity, whereas memory is understood as multiple, varied, and often competing accounts of the past. The comic medium can enact Halbwachs' notion of memory in contrast with history in

that comics can displace and disrupt a linear, straightforward, and cohesive line of history through its fragmented and overlapping nature. This also reflects Halbwachs' model of memory, which is for him partial and perpetually incomplete; recollection is not an individual process, but rather initiated externally and communally. Halbwachs argues that we are always part of one group or another, and it is the group that provides the individual with a capacity for memory.

In *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs presents the most foreseeable objection to his theory that an individual remembers only as being part of several groups, which is the question of agency. "The fact that we could think about a certain object only because we act as a member of a group," he writes, "is sufficient reason to state that an obvious condition of that thought is the existence of the group" (Halbwachs 34). In this regard, he also poses the question, "But don't some remembrances reappear that can in no way be connected with a group?" (Halbwachs 34). He answers this by stating that it is individuals within a group who remember, and qualifies this by stating that "individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them" (Halbwachs 48). He goes on to add that individual memory is "a viewpoint on the collective memory" and that this viewpoint changes as members' positions and relationships change within the group or groups (Halbwachs 48). He concludes this passage with the understanding that individual memory could collapse were it not for the group; individual memory is absorbed into the collective memory.

Are Harvey Kurtzman's war comics reconstructing memories as part of a group? In a way, yes; his war comics straddle trauma and memory theories that focus on the individual and on the collective. Paul Maynard as an individual represents not only the breakdown of

the social—as he is alone, isolated from his community—and the consequences of the kind of fracturing resulting from war, but also he represents Kurtzman’s attempt to unify through appealing to a reader’s sense of humanity. Through his interviewing of soldiers and others involved in combat, through his own experiences of war, Kurtzman’s war comics are part of Halbwachs’ model of collective memory.

When people talk about Joe Sacco’s Comics Journalism, it is often said that what his work is doing is collecting multiple perspectives from different groups and giving them a voice. I am arguing that as an early precursor to this type of comics, especially given his attention to research and the interviewing process,³⁴ Kurtzman’s comics are an expression of the realities of war. Furthermore, Kurtzman’s war comics allow the reader to participate and join another group in two ways: first, the nature of the comics medium is participatory—the reader is engaged through the formal features and must ‘fill in’ certain aspects of meaning with their imagination. Second, Kurtzman’s war comics are retellings of stories. When readers respond to them, they become part of a larger collective memory of a social group that at its core is part of the political intervention that comics are involved in. The most basic features of comics (panel, gutter, time and space) can be used to depict complex historical, social, and political events and issues. Halbwachs’ concern is not with preserving the past, but rather with creating and sustaining cohesive social ties. And Kurtzman was clearly interested in influencing his readers so they would consider the complexities of morality in war and the psychological and collective impacts of war.

³⁴ Art Spiegelman utilized the interviewing and research process in *Maus*; he interviewed his father, yes, but he also spoke to other survivors and did research that was included in the comic. For more on this see Dan Kois’ “The Making of Maus” (2011) in *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, and Spiegelman’s own *MetaMaus*.

Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory* and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor: Unsung Hero: War and Witness*

Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory* (2000) is a collection of wartime stories about the Korean War and Vietnam. When Eisner was initially drafted in 1941, he did not serve in the military in the common sense; instead, he worked for the Aberdeen Proving Grounds camp newspaper, a position that allowed him to witness the intimate and private lives of the soldiers (Introduction to *Last Day* n.p.). From his work on the newspaper, Eisner was reassigned to work on "preventative maintenance," instructional materials in the form of comics teaching soldiers how to maintain, fix, and alter their gear in stressful situations. Eisner has been a vocal proponent for the educational benefits of comics, and pitched the idea for *Army Motors*, a magazine of instructional comics with a fictionalized and incompetent character named Private Joe Dope (Knodel 2016). In 1950, Eisner developed *P.S. Magazine*, a similar instructional comics manual for soldiers, and it was from his experiences of travelling to Korea and Vietnam for *P.S.* that Eisner created *Last Day*. For both *Army Motors* and *P.S.*, Eisner states that "Research for the comic strips included visiting field units so I could employ realistic situations" (Introduction to *Last Day* n.p.). *Last Day* revisits these field experiences and I include the comics (which is sub-titled *A Memory*) here; it aligns with Kurtzman's comics, because it reflects the impulse to depict war from multiple complex perspectives in the comics medium, and to reflect on how war is remembered. Moreover, *Last Day* draws from autobiographical and reportage strategies in comics form to represent the psychological weight and damage the war has on not just soldiers, but also civilians.

In the first story, “Last Day in Vietnam,” Eisner is sent to Bearcat Base as a civilian reporter and is taken on a tour by an unnamed Major who announces this day as his last in Vietnam. After this day, he will leave to be reunited with his family and meet his newborn for the first time. As the tour goes on, they come under enemy fire and are stranded away from the base. The Major panics and starts recalling and lamenting how close he was to surviving the war. It is Eisner who suggests

making a dash to a helicopter, and they scramble on board just as it takes off.

Eisner is well-known for cleverly distorting panels, or not using them at all in the conventional sense. These two pages from this comic show several aspects of how Eisner uses the form. First, there are no conventional frames, panels, or gutters in his page layout. Instead, there is the window of the helicopter that the Major sits in front of, and this acts as a kind of frame, or view to the outside. The angle of the chopper’s window shifts to suggest the tilt of their ascent; the background and landscape change and pull further from view, suggesting movement and height (see figure 10). Second, the Major looks directly out of the

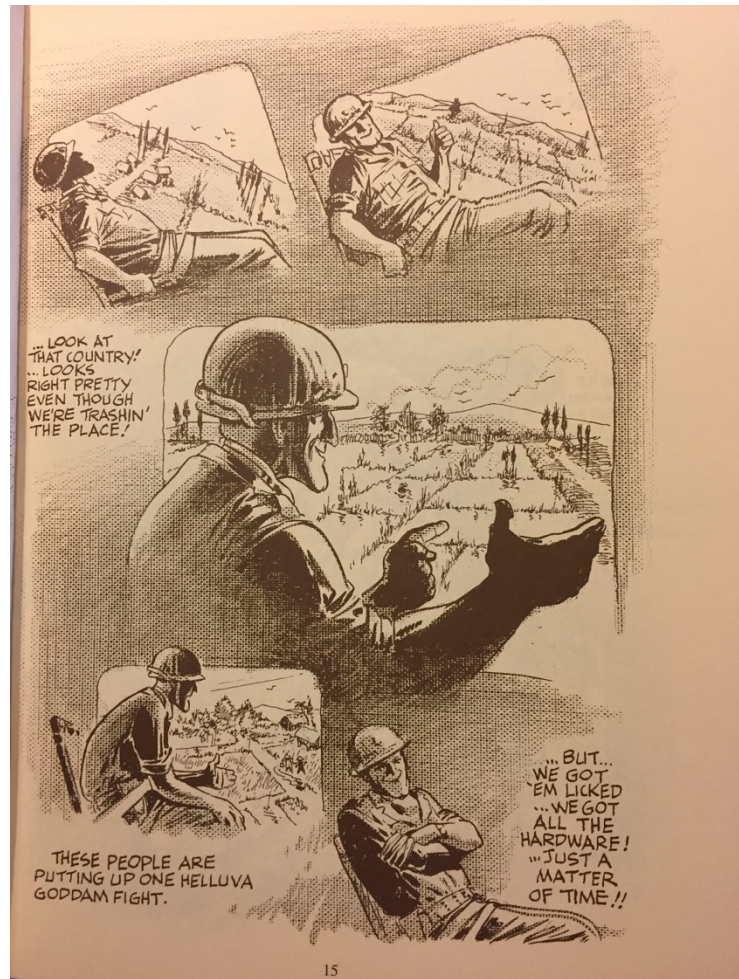


Figure 10. Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory*, 2000, p. 15.

page at the reader, who is Eisner. The reader shares the perspective of Eisner; however, Eisner has no narrative or dialogue throughout the comic. The Major asks questions and Eisner's responses are implied through the Major's ongoing dialogue.

Indeed, aside from a line from a soldier and one from a Lieutenant, the entire comic is told through the Major's dialogue alone. This is also the case when they make a run for the chopper to avoid enemy fire; the Major yells, "Hey, hey, hey!! Where are you goin'? You can't go out on the Pad! We are not cleared!" (Eisner 33). In an interview, Eisner stresses the comic medium as a participatory one: "This is a medium that requires intelligence on the part of the reader. It requires a contribution, a participation." And on the use of silent panels and one-sided dialogue in *Last Day* he states, "I experimented further in having the reader become part of the story itself" (qtd. in Robinson 2000). Eisner and the reader are aligned in a very different way than how Sacco, Spiegelman, and Wood and Burchielli create this dynamic in their comics. Eisner is never seen on the page; the reader and Eisner are instead aligned spatially, through perspective and through the lack of Eisner's dialogue. The lack of Eisner's dialogue functions much like the gutter—as a space for the reader to make meaning. Eisner is a surrogate for the reader, as Matty Roth is in *DMZ*; however, this is achieved through the absence of Eisner, not his presence. When the Major asks Eisner a question, the reader is given space to answer and is drawn, metaphorically but still symbolically, into the page. The silence might also be read in a different way, in contrast to all the noise and sounds typically associated with war and the frontlines, such as the helicopter and other machinery, gun fire, explosions, soldiers marching, and agony. Linda Warley and Alan Filewod describe this kind of graphic silence as a condition of trauma, "the inability to speak of traumatic events and their repercussions" (172).

Most of the comic is told through a series of windows, looking out from within a helicopter, through the windows from within the barracks, from the back seat of a jeep looking through the front windows, and from a second helicopter in their escape. This sets up a sense of inside and outside, or interiority and exteriority: inside the war as in actually in the field; inside the first-person character's mind as we are privy to his candid talking; and finally, outside as in an observer

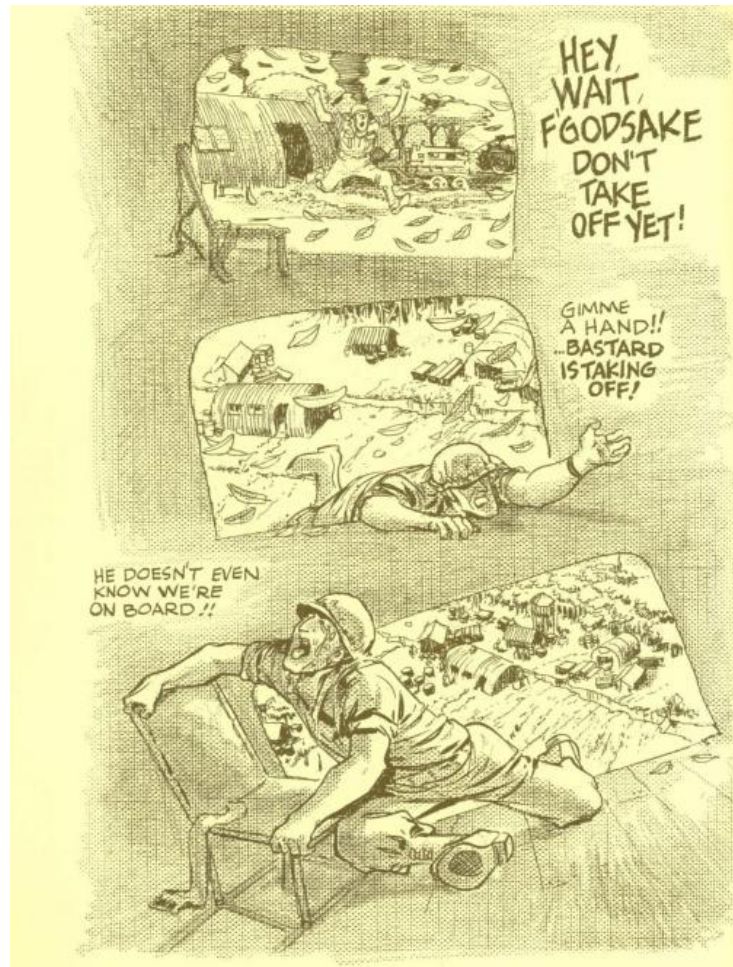


Figure 11. Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory*, 2000, p. 34.

looking in. This constant framing suggests an insider's view to the war, yet we do not learn much of the actual war or conflict. We experience the boasting and panic of a Major who on the one hand, seemingly wants to serve in the military, and on the other hand, is terrified when conflict erupts. The reader's perspective, as seen in the page included here, is from on board the helicopter watching the Major struggle to climb in as it sways during a frantic takeoff; while the lack of Eisner visually and his lack of dialogue work to insert the reader into the action, there is also a sense of helplessness, that the reader is left to watch the Major struggle (see figure 11). This is probably the best page composition of the story

because of the movement and perspective at play. Movement is achieved not only through the titling or angle of the open door, but also through the view the reader has of the ground getting further away through that open door. “In every story in Vietnam,” states Eisner, “I was a participant in the action. And I transfer that to the reader, and I put the reader in my place...” (qtd. in Yarbrough 2000).

The final story in *Last Day* is “A Purple Heart for George” and features a clerk who gets drunk every Sunday and exclaims, “They thought I was a sissy back in Jersey City!! Boy, was they surprised when I enlisted!” while drunkenly stumbling around the sleeping quarters (Eisner 69). He also proclaims his love for “Big Benny,” a soldier on the frontlines: “You always protected me from them, Benny!! Even when they caught us together in the alley...I loved you, Benny, I loved you!...Oops, mustin’t say that...” (Eisner 70). Every Sunday, George drunkenly writes a transfer request to where Benny is and leaves it on the supervisor’s desk to be processed in the morning; however, every Monday morning, two other clerks intercept his letter knowing that George does not remember writing the request, nor does he really want to see frontline action. This routine is interrupted when both these clerks are away and leave the task of shredding the letter to another clerk, who ultimately fails to intercept it. George’s request is approved, he is shipped out to the frontlines, and is killed. In the introduction, Eisner writes that this true story “left a residue of guilt in many of us. I don’t know about the primary actors in that event, which I witnessed, but for me it has never left my mind. I simply cannot forget it” (Introduction n.p.). The emphasis is on the clerks, not soldiers, in this story. As Eisner explains, he tried to show the combat within the combat with these stories, “that these are about people who had their own private combat” (qtd. in Yarbrough 2000). However, these are not private as

in singular; part of Eisner's unique storytelling style is that these stories can be thought of as universal, not individualized. This story also emulates Kurtzman's focus on the absurdity of war, that something horrific could suddenly happen.

The comic also includes photographs as section breakers between each story. The photographs are of civilians and soldiers at times of leisure, in the field, and wounded. There is also a class photo taken of children at an orphanage in Korea. The photos are meant to perhaps supplement the context that Eisner builds with his comics, but they also add a sense of the archival or of research. Typically, when photos are included in comics, the argument is that they lend a kind of autobiographical authenticity; this is the case in critical studies of *Maus* and *Fun Home*, for example. As Michael A. Chaney claims, photographs in traditional texts make claims to historical accuracy, yet, "autobiographies told in the typically exaggerated visual style of comics, by contrast, complicate those claims, juxtaposing them against autobiography's other set of authorial promises—to portray experience in a manner that is emotionally and psychologically true to the unique, often idiosyncratic perspective of the author-artist" (4). However, the photographs used in Eisner's comic are not of his family, himself, or of his interactions with the people in the photos. Instead of the archival or the autobiographical, these photographs offer a sense of the documentary and reportage, which is what Eisner's role was. Unlike Sacco and Wood and Burchielli, these photographs are not drawn; they are reprinted for the sake of the comic, which is similar to Spiegelman's reprinting of 19th century comics as the back pages of *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Eisner's entire comic is printed on linen paper with sepia-tone ink and the photos are black and white, also sepia-toned, which Eisner explains as his way of getting away from the simple black and white. The photos work to remind the

reader that while Eisner's stories are based on his experiences and recall particular times, places, and people, there is a reality to war that is represented in these pictures.

That *Last Day* has the subtitle of *A Memory* and was not published until 2000 is important to both the structure of the comic and to how I have framed aspects of memory studies. On its later publication, Eisner states that "Over the years, you carry with you little snippets of scenes or things that do not deserve a whole book, but they're part of a lot of little things you want to divest yourself of" (qtd. in Robinson 2000). The idea that these stories in *Last Day* are fragmented pieces of his memories of that time and that he felt a need to both uncover and relinquish them speaks to the structure of traumatic memories as both fractured and incomplete. In this same interview, Eisner says, "I'm talking to somebody when I write...I've got a story and I want to tell it to somebody" (qtd. in Robinson 2000). This sentiment paired with his earlier statement that the comics medium involves and invites the reader, suggests Halbwachs' model of collective memory, that we are always part of a group and that different groups give the individual the space or capability for memory. The memory of war, the reflection back on war memories has inspired a reinvention of how words and pictures bear witness to and represent war.

Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor: Unsung Hero* (2003), illustrated by David Collier, is one installment of the *American Splendor* series.³⁵ The *American Splendor* series, more generally, is described as an autobiographical account of Pekar that combines the mundane with the complexities of self-introspection. Pekar is the writer of the series, and is drawn into the stories as the main character, yet each installment of the series is drawn by a different artist. Charles Hatfield writes about the dual persona and describes it this way,

³⁵ Semi-irregularly published during the years of 1976 and 2008.

“By turns gregarious and recessive, openhearted and suspicious, sensitive and coarse, the working-class hero of *American Splendor* emerges as a complex, provoking character who just happens to bear an unmistakable likeness to his creator” (109). The Harvey (the writer) and Pekar (drawn on the page) persona, says Hatfield, perpetually gives readers cause to think that they are one in the same. The series, aside from *Unsung Hero*, is an ongoing engagement with the autobiography genre in the tradition of the late underground comix movement, fixated on intense introspection, the grotesque and exaggerated, and the confessional. *Unsung Hero*, though, is about Robert McNeill, a G.I. who served in Vietnam, and the comic osculates between a present-day interview of McNeill by Pekar, and flashbacks to McNeill in Vietnam. Much of *Unsung* is based on McNeill’s own account of events, experiences, and memories. Like Eisner’s *Last Day*, Pekar’s comic was published almost 30 years after the events described therein.

The comic’s framework is an interview, which is established on the first page, and the opening pages of each section. On the first page of the story, McNeill is sitting across from Pekar, who is engaged in taking notes (see figure 12). McNeill begins with a story about his youth, and immediately the story turns from an interview into a flashback. This is



Figure 12. Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor: Unsung Hero*, 2003, p. 5.

visually cued by the change in writing style; cursive writing indicates a flashback or a memory, and this hallmark is constant throughout the comic. Probably the most remarkable aspect about the comic is that Pekar, while present on the page during the interview, does not say one word to McNeill for the duration of the story. Some of McNeill's dialogue implies that Pekar has asked a question, yet Pekar does not speak, nor does he have narrative in a thought balloon. There are several panels where McNeill in the present day of the comic looks directly at the reader, a tactic Eisner uses as well. The reader is thus invited to assume the role of Pekar. Hatfield characterizes this technique as an interlocutor or a recorder, which "serves not as a mere salve to the author's ego but rather as an authenticating device" (130). When Hatfield describes the interview structure of *Unsung*, he uses the phrase "ironic authentication," meaning that this type of autobiographical comic is reflective of its own creation. It exists in the initial interview form through which it was created: "in the beginning, when I'd write all these stories in the first person...still I'd feature other people and so...when I wrote the thing *Unsung Hero* about the Vietnam guy, I interviewed him and I wrote down what he said. That's the way I used to do it when I would be the protagonist of the story. I use pretty much the same methods" (qtd. in Rhode 179). The technique of using an interview as the structure of the story has been used in many other autobiography-influenced comics, such as Joe Sacco's for example, who has also worked with Pekar.³⁶ And it is a shared element between the comics that I study here. To me another aspect that the interview structure in these comics offers is the ability to get at

³⁶ For example, in 1997, Sacco illustrated an installment of *American Splendor* called *Music Comics*.

issues that are perceived as complicated and multifaceted, such as truth and authenticity, which are so political and culturally charged.

In Hatfield's argument for the urgency of the autobiography comic genre, he says that autobiography became "comic art's most traveled route to growth, enrichment, and recognition as a form of literature" (131). I think this is true insofar as the sub-genre of graphic counter-memorial has come up partially through autobiographical comic tradition. As I said in my Introduction, autobiography and Comics Journalism have been crucial reference points for the comics I study in this dissertation, and these genres have helped to give rise to the graphic counter-memorial.

In this chapter, I traced a brief history of American political cartoons and their roots in early war comics, their propagandist rhetoric, and Kurtzman's challenge to those comics. The comics of Kurtzman, Eisner, and Pekar illustrate the potential of comics that utilize and embed research and the interview structure to examine the often-glamourized aspects of war. As I have shown, these comics in effect put the realities, absurdities, atrocities, and contentions of war and those in conflict at the forefront. By drawing themselves into their comics both literally and figuratively, by evolving the capabilities of the comic form to challenge dominant ways of storytelling, these artists gave rise to a new understanding of what it means to witness and this forms the heart of the sub-genre I call graphic counter-memorial. In the next chapter, I focus on Joe Sacco's Comics Journalism, specifically *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), and show how he has utilized many of these structures and approaches to war, violence, and storytelling in similar ways. His mingling of his own subjectivity as a reporter and, at times, his confessional narrative, with the broader historical context of the Bosnian War and the lives of the residents adds another element to

my case for graphic counter-memorials. It also builds my argument about what these comics all share: an interest in how representations of history, war, and the witness implicate and burden the reader in ways that bear out the principles of the counter-narrative in comics form.

Chapter Three:

Drawing on Conflict: Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*

"It's a visual world and people respond to visuals. With comics you can put interesting and solid information in a format that's pretty palatable. For me, one advantage of comic journalism is that I can depict the past, which is hard to do if you're a photographer or filmmaker. History can make you realize that the present is just one layer of a story. What seems to be the immediate and vital story now will one day be another layer in this geology of bummers."

- Joe Sacco, "The Art of War"

Joe Sacco's Graphic Counter-Memorial and the New Journalism

In the last chapter, I argued that the 20th century and contemporary comics about war and conflict are deeply tied to the early American political cartoon. The political cartoon and the later war comic were both born in and took their shape from a moment when journalists were reporting on war. Both the political cartoon and the war comic demand attention to the medium's complex relationship with power structures and its ability to both shape and question modes of representation and official narratives. However, early war comics tended to be propagandistic, working in favour of a mythology about history that privileged the dominant forces in culture without questioning their complexity. They tended also to construct a binaristic world, pitting hero against villain, good against evil.

My focus in the last chapter was on the changes in the genre's valence with Harvey Kurtzman's war comics, which ran counter to the war comics of his time. Kurtzman was depicting the harsh realities of war rather than glorifying death and heroism. I also examined Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam* and Harvey Pekar's *Unsung Hero* to show a new type of war comic emerging from the underground comics movement along with autobiography and New Journalism. Kurtzman's, Eisner's, and Pekar's comics, among

others from those generations, share an interest in incorporating research, testimony, and the act of witnessing into the comic medium in the pursuit of disrupting a unified historical narrative and the belief in objective truth.

These elements, which harness the inherently participatory nature of comics, I argued, make them work in the same way as does the counter-monument theorized by James E. Young. The important similarities that I am drawing between the counter-monument and the graphic counter-memorial are the elements of participatory storytelling, the disruption of dominant historical and sociopolitical narratives and the use of temporal and spatial strategies to multiply perspectives on history. The graphic counter-memorial, in rethinking how to depict and visualize reportage of history and trauma, is a genre through which to counter prescribed narratives in the comic form.

The next chapters will examine three different contemporary comics to flesh out a fuller picture of how the graphic counter-memorial practice is operating at a visual and verbal level. The focus will be on how graphic counter-memorials incorporate the mechanisms of reportage, the reporter figure on the page, other forms of media, and real historical events. The graphic counter-memorial calls attention to how we remember, analyze, and relate to war and conflict, and these comics have a particular focus on war as a mediated event. The genre of the graphic counter-memorial thus offers intersections between public and collective memory, art, politics, and war, reflecting challenges to official sociohistorical narratives and the wider problems of representation.

In this chapter, I treat Joe Sacco's comic *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) as a graphic counter-memorial. Describing his work under this rubric makes it possible to see how Joe Sacco extends and amplifies the comic strategies of Kurtzman, Eisner, and Pekar. One of my

tasks will be to locate his work in relation to other genres, including war reportage and New Journalism, as well as autobiography, caricature, and witness testimony. I will also look at how Sacco draws himself into his comic, what role he plays as reporter and as witness, and how he depicts the people, events, and violence in Bosnia and Goražde. Attending to these dimensions of the comic will let me make especially clear the counter-narrative strategies of representation that Sacco employs to unsettle dominant understandings of this historical conflict.

A lot has been written about Joe Sacco, whose body of work has ranged from self-reflexive confessional narratives of the 1980s to work on political and military conflicts of the 1990s to the present.³⁷ He is most known for his works *Palestine* (published serially 1993-5, collected 2001), *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), *The Fixer* (2003), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), which have garnered much recognition and several awards, and have very much shaped critical discussions about contemporary comics as journalism and reportage.

Safe Area Goražde was based on Sacco's four visits to Bosnia, during the Bosnian War. It is about the ethnic cleansing that took place in Eastern Bosnia, with a particular focus on the city of Goražde, a United Nations designated 'safe area' settlement that, according to Sacco, was essentially forgotten about by governments, despite being the only Bosnian-controlled area to survive the war. While Goražde was designated a safe area, it has been noted that some of the fiercest fighting and conflict during the war took place

³⁷ To note a few of the influential and recent examples: Hillary Chute; Randy Duncan; Jeff Adams; Andrea A. Lundsford and Adam Rosenblatt; and Daniel Worden's recent collection. These are informative sources on the topic.

there.³⁸ *Safe Area* also offers an extensive overview of the break-up of Yugoslavia.³⁹ The comic is told through Edin, a math teacher and engineering student who also acts as Sacco's translator and guide, and many of the other residents interviewed by Sacco. Early responses to the comic pointed out the differences between the Goražde that was represented in the media and the Goražde experienced by people who lived and worked there. In a *New York Times* review, David Rieff notes that Sacco's illustrations of Bosnia "is the one that those of us who covered the fighting actually experienced day by day, rather than the one we mostly reported on" ("Bosnia Beyond Words" 2000).

The comic mingles subjective perception with facts about the Bosnian War by combining Sacco's own interviews with a range of residents and refugees who had come to live in the settlement, as well as other peoples' personal stories, with research about the conflict, government statements, and media accounts of the conflict. *Safe Area* shows his deepening concern with the complex and competing histories surrounding war and conflict and the people involved therein, while it creates a different perspective on reportage about war. Sacco shows the impacts of war through their daily lives, their memories of war, the dead, and the violence. He provides a rich historical backdrop to how people and the media had come to perceive the residents, who are trapped on either side by conflict.

Truth and Perspective: Comics Journalism and the Graphic Counter-Memorial

Sacco has previously been widely regarded as a frontrunner of an emergent genre of comics called comics journalism. Comics journalism is, I will show, a genre that is separate

³⁸ For example, see reporting by Roy Gutman, John Burns, and Christiane Amanpour, to name a few.

³⁹ Sacco says as much in the bibliography section of *Safe Area*.

from counter-memorial practices, especially when dealing with, as these comics do, war, violence, and death. While Sacco is using strategies of reportage as an imbedded journalist, because his comics are challenging depictions of war and death, which are so often commemorated in terms of heroism and nationalism, he cannot be viewed singularly within the genre of comics journalism. Sacco is a journalist working in the comic medium, but focusing on his work using the convention of a graphic counter-memorial allows us a deeper acknowledgement of what his comics are doing. In order to understand how the graphic counter-memorial is aligned with yet separate from comics journalism, it is important to look at what comics journalism is, how it developed, and why he is considered such a compelling practitioner of the genre.

Daniel Worden in his collection of essays, *The Comics of Joe Sacco* (2015), argues that Sacco's work comes out of the American underground comix movement of the 60s and 70s, which itself grew out of the New Journalism movement described by Thomas Wolfe in 1973. In the introduction to *The New Journalism*, Wolfe examines how American journalism and reportage evolved. Whereas traditional journalism sought out facts, and was written in a self-effacing style of prose that was meant to be objective, the so-called new journalists "were moving beyond the conventional limits of journalism, but not merely in terms of technique...It was more intense, more detailed, and certainly more time-consuming than anything that newspaper or magazine reporters, including investigative reporters, were accustomed to." He continues, "It seemed all important to *be there* when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment...to give the full objective description, plus something that the readers had

always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters” (Wolfe 20-21).

Comics are an especially appealing medium for New Journalistic reporting on war because the medium is able to “be there,” to picture the scenes, gestures, facial expressions, and details of the environment in a way that signals their immediacy. New Journalism’s self-reflexive reporter who reflects on her situatedness in the action finds a visual analogue in comics journalism’s reporter on the page, whose gaze provides a surrogate for the reader, as I will discuss later. Also, because the comic medium develops a complex visual language that draws attention to acts of seeing, it does something unique with the witnesses whose testimonies are made visible on the page. For Katalin Orban, the medium’s “affective, experiential truth” is “linked to lived, embodied experience to which the reporter has access, thanks to being physically present at the scene” (124).

One aspect of the New Journalism tradition that comics journalism embodies is the rejection of the pretense that there is such a thing as an unbiased journalistic narrative. Art Spiegelman underlines that “the phoney objectivity that comes with a camera is a convention and a lie in the same way as writing in the third person rather than the first person” (qtd. in Williams n.p.). Reportage in the comic medium cannot lie in this way: “To write a comics journalism report you’re already making an acknowledgment of biases and an urgency that communicates another level of information” (qtd. in Williams n.p.). Sacco has similarly said that “What objectivity has come to mean as far as its journalistic definition is that there are two sides to a story, you just present both sides...There’s *never* just two sides” (qtd. in Burrows n.p.). For Sacco, the medium’s innate ability to expose objectivity for the lie it allows comics to access something deeper—truth: “If I was on the

ground and met people and saw things with my own eyes, I'm not going to wash that out by feeding people the opposite just for the sake of so-called objectivity. I'm much more interested in truth" (qtd. in Burrows 2012). And in this case, as it was for Harvey Kurtzman, truth is pluralistic, not singular and fixed.

Dirk Vanderbeke has argued that comics journalism forces an eschewing of an assumed truth and detachment, and instead challenges the very notion of accurate representation through an emphasis on subjective experience (75-76). When comics journalism emphasizes the experience of the reporter alongside those experiencing the conflict, it works similarly to the counter-monument. The counter-monument's power, according to James E. Young, is that it documents cultural memory while it acknowledges both its medium and the experience of the viewers. As an extension of the practice of comics journalism, the graphic counter-memorial does this as well. It shows how on the one hand, there are only perspectives on truth, and on the other, how the most important element in reportage is the experience of those who endure the trauma of war.

Sacco contributes to comics journalism with his emphasis on and interest in not only depicting the histories of the conflicts he is immersed in and the people for whom these conflicts and trauma so seriously impact and displace, but also how he (and readers) comes to know these people and their histories. Sacco's use of comics is not just about showing the present-day consequences of war in a verbal-visual medium. Rather, like the artists who construct counter-monuments, Sacco "intuitively grasp[s]...[people's] inability to know the history of...[trauma] outside of the ways it has been passed down;" he "sees history itself as a composite record of both events and these events transmission to the next generation" (*At Memory's Edge* 2). Sacco has commented on how traumatic memory

passes through generations when he reflects on his parents' experiences in World War II. He states, "I was hearing about this when I was growing up, in the shadow of those stories. At some point, hearing my mother talk about what had happened to her, I thought it would be interesting to try and make a comic book out of it" (qtd. in Vagnes 193).

Much of *Safe Area*, as with many of his other comics, is told through interviews with residents who are survivors of the war. Sacco does not simply relay the interviews; instead, like Eisner and Pekar, he embeds the interview structure within the comic, which puts the reader in the interviewer's place, making the reader constantly aware of the fact and the mode of the interview.⁴⁰ Sacco does not pretend to directly understand the traumatic events or the aftermath in which he places himself in his comic. This is why his representation of history and war is made up of both the tellings from others (his interviews and research) and the comics he makes.

Writing about artists seeking to construct counter-monuments specifically in relation to the German Holocaust, Young emphasizes that they "can no more neglect the circumstances surrounding a story's telling than they can ignore the circumstances surrounding the actual events' unfolding" (*At Memory's Edge* 4). He continues, saying that these artists' works force us to question "that narrative or art which ignores its own coming into being, or that which paints this fact, too, into its canvas of history?" (*At*

⁴⁰ Though not speaking of Sacco's works, Candida Rifkind uses the idea of collaboration to account for the simultaneous depiction of father-son narratives in Spiegelman's *Maus*. For her, Spiegelman's representation of his interviews with his father expresses not only "the collaborative process between informant and cartoonist [unavailable in prose], it also accommodates self-reflexive representations of the process of making the comic" (410-402). See her "Drawn from Memory: Comics Artists and Intergenerational Auto/Biography" (2008) for her analysis.

Memory's Edge 4). As a reporter, Sacco's role and his presence in the conflicts among displaced peoples is constantly integrated into the story both contextually and structurally.

The integration, however, is never complete. As Vanderbeke observes, the difference between Sacco and the people he illustrates shows that "he is the stranger in the environment he depicts and certainly feels to be an outsider who has not suffered with the people he encounters and interviews" (78). At the same time, "Sacco appears frequently as a little ridiculous...." (Vanderbeke 78). Sacco emphasizes that, in Goražde, journalists are warmly accepted because of the attention they bring to the unfolding events of the war. Nevertheless, he is careful to acknowledge that he is still an outsider. Early in *Safe Area*, Sacco remarks: "Oh, they were happy to see journalists in Goražde, to see us, to see me, to see anybody" (5, original emphasis). A few pages later he qualifies that "In Goražde journalists were still exotics, guests from outside—from outside! They welcomed us and all the promise our outsideness implied" (Sacco 24, original emphasis). Sacco's outsider status is illustrated here in two ways. First, he acknowledges his own outsider status as a person with the ability to pick up and leave; he is an outsider who cannot possibly fully understand what he witnesses in Goražde. Second, to the people of Goražde, his outsiderness brings not only a disruption of daily life, but also a view outside of Goražde. This outside status is further complicated in how Sacco draws himself in less detail than those he also depicts.

That Sacco draws himself into his comics has been discussed at length by scholars. Sacco has said that by inserting himself into his comics, he shows his interest in finding the facts, but that this is not the same as being objective; he represents a journalist's voice, but rejects the notion that the reporter is unbiased. By drawing himself into his comics, Sacco also pulls from the confessional tradition of the underground comix movement. He

presents himself as a reporter and journalist, and as a researcher who authenticates his findings through interviewing those who have experienced war and/or its repercussions.

As Hillary Chute has argued the artist-reporter character in comics is not new. The first two chapters of her book *Drawing Disasters* (2016) showcase a history of the category of the artist-reporter. Writing on Sacco and on his role as a witness, she observes that his drawings “make us take stock of the research ritual as part of his own acts of bearing witness to the experience of others” (Chute *Disaster* 29). In *Safe Area*, Sacco refers to his obligation, which is to report on the impacts of war by not only being there, but also by witnessing and listening to the people living in Goražde. His sense of obligation is also reflected in interviews where he describes the research that goes into making his comics. Sacco describes drawing his comics with an intense level of involvement and subjectivity: “When you’re drawing it’s hard to be distanced. In fact you have to inhabit what you’re drawing – the person you’re shooting and the person falling to the ground. You have to feel how their hands would be placed and so on” (qtd. in Burrows 2012). Yet, he also suggests that as the journalist figure, “you’re trying to corral the person telling the story to stay on track...You’re very cynical about it; almost like a technician. There’s a coldness. It’s kind of a good thing because you’re distanced” (qtd. in Burrows 2012). He forces this sense of distance on the reader through his use of splash pages, wherein an entire page is one single frame. Sacco typically uses the splash page for geographical impact, allowing the reader to gain access to a view or perspective that is perhaps privileged and different than that of the people he interviews. Graphically, this distance also serves to highlight Sacco’s outsider status. This focus on distance that he describes calls attention to the inherent subjectivity of drawing the comic and of drawing himself in, which in a journalistic context might be

viewed in sharp contrast to traditional journalistic practices that prescribe a distance between the journalist and his subjects.

Drawing and Seeing the Self: Autobiography and the Graphic Counter-Memorial

Just as Sacco's counter-memorial strategies are indebted to New Journalism and comics journalism, so too are they indebted to autobiography. Borrowing from autobiography allows Sacco to bring subjectivity to the surface of his work, while it also works to implicate the reader in the context and story of the comic; this is of course in partnership with the formal features of comics that already encourage reader participation. Sacco has explained how some of his "earliest comics were in some form autobiography": "when I first started doing my journalism comics, in some ways they were a continuation of my life—it wasn't strange for me to draw myself as a character in the story" (qtd. in Winton

2010). However, the autobiographical qualities of his writing greatly extend the mission of the genre of life-writing. Sacco borrows from the genre of autobiography in order to make his subjectivity visible alongside the experiences of those he encounters. He draws attention to what he, as a journalist, needs from his subjects, as well as



Figure 13. Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Gorazde*, 2000, panel from page 8.

acknowledges how his own voice is but one among the multiple and divergent voices and perspectives of the conflict environments he writes about.

Sacco's illustrations of himself are visually in stark contrast to those of the figures around him in his comics. Sacco's face is almost always cartoonish, even awkward and grotesque at times. His exaggerated lips, his reflective white eyeglasses (as seen in figure 13), and his unchanging outfit facilitate the reader's identification with Sacco. The more simplified or abstract the cartoon is, according to McCloud, the more likely the reader is encouraged to identify with it: "We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it" (36). Sacco does not look like himself, and is even repulsive enough to look 'other' to the characters in the frame. His glaring white eyeglasses do many things.⁴¹ They draw attention to the comic's visual language, and remind us that the medium *pictures* as well as tells. More specifically, they challenge the purported objective vision claimed by classic journalism. They signal instead the complexities in witnessing trauma by inviting the reader to think about who frames our vision, through what lenses, or with what optic. That the reader can never see Sacco's eyes or know where he is looking troubles our ability to identify fully with his gaze. Sacco has said that when his eyes are whited out, people can more easily put themselves in his position, but, he adds, he wants "to throw" the "situation [of his subjects] into starker relief" (qtd. in Cooke 2009).

The graphic style of Sacco's drawing of himself has been linked to self-portraiture and caricature, especially the tradition of underground comix. Charles Hatfield points out the performative characteristics of this kind of collision in autobiographical comics, wherein "the intimacy of an articulated first-person narrative may mix with the alienating

⁴¹ McCloud draws himself with the same type of glasses.

graphic excess of caricature” (114). Hatfield describes the cartoonish self-portrait as the creator’s process of self-objectification that actually allows the creator to articulate his or her own sense of identity. What he means here is that autobiographical comics that deploy caricature rely on a tension in which the cartoonist simultaneously projects and objectifies his or her own sense of self, achieving both intimacy and distance.

In order to explain this, Hatfield uses examples from Robert Crumb, Daniel Clowes, and Harvey Pekar, three comics creators with whom Sacco, especially in his earlier work, is often grouped. Writing about Pekar, Hatfield notes that “The near-constant presence of [the author] himself, as interlocutor and recorder, serves not as a mere salve to the author’s ego but rather as an authenticating device (rather like the foregrounding of the writer’s experience in the New Journalism)” (130). Hatfield also states that those following Crumb’s lead in self-mockery and parody-driven comics were also interested in “comic book parodies [that] were deliberately freighted with broader social concerns, turning spoof into a vehicle for cultural argument” (12). This devotion to cultural argument is an essential mission in Sacco’s comics.

The comic medium’s ability to interlace and overlap past and present moments, histories, and selves, according to Chute and Hatfield, is what makes the medium so productive in representing life stories, personal or collective. When Chute notes that Sacco is present as a character who struggles to verbally and visually represent testimony just as much as those delivering the testimony seem to struggle, she shows how, by illustrating himself in his comics, Sacco achieves both a distance and an intimacy with readers and with the people he is surrounded by in his comics (*Graphic* 113).

In 2014, W. J. T. Mitchell asked Sacco about self-portraiture and how he sees and draws himself: “Why do you have the ugliest mug of all the characters in your pictures?” Sacco initially responds that this is partly coming from the underground comics tradition, where everything is exaggerated, everything is grotesque (Mitchell “Public Conversations” 54). However, Sacco also connects his visual style to his counter-memorialist’s mission of delving into more complex truths. He says that “if this is aspiring for some sort of journalistic truth, I have to be a bit more accurate in how I portray people and things” than himself; “you can draw yourself the way you look or you can draw yourself the way you feel. I sort of fall in the latter category” (qtd. in “Public Conversations” 54). For Sacco, drawing himself the way he feels rather than looks has an element of authenticity to it. If the reader is graphically put in the reporter’s perspective, as Sacco, it is important to understand how the reader is meant to ‘see’ Sacco. Part of drawing himself into his comics is to tie the subjectivity he questions to positions and structures of power.

In “Joe Sacco’s Comics Journalism” (2010), Adam Rosenblatt and Andrea A. Lunsford speak to Sacco’s self-portraiture, referring to it as they do as caricature. The use of the term caricature to describe Sacco’s visual self-representation highlights his coming-of-age in the underground comix movement, but it can also be tied to the history of early American political cartoons I laid out in the previous chapter. Referring to *Palestine*, and the depiction of women and children marching in protest in the streets in the caricature form, Rosenblatt and Lunsford ask:

are the protestors being portrayed as crazed beasts, undermining the legitimacy of their political acts? Is Sacco, even unintentionally, evoking a history of caricatures in Western newspapers that portray the “enemy” (whether Japanese, African-American, or Muslim) as looking all the same, and all ugly? Or

does caricature allow him to evoke a sense of seething rage, adding more emotional depth to this event than traditional journalism could capture? (77-78)

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Harvey Kurtzman acknowledged this tradition and not only called attention to it, but also moved beyond it. While Kurtzman did not insert himself visually in his war comics, he inverted the visual power and identification that the reader would have with the characters he portrayed in the conflicts. This shows how influential Kurtzman's comics were, and how this tradition has been taken up by other comic creators who distrust a unified or dichotomized historical narrative about war and conflict. Drawing himself into the pages of his comics has just as much to do with challenging what it means to be a reporter as it does with allowing the reader to participate, to be implicated in the events.

In *Safe Area*, Sacco also draws himself in contrast to other journalists who arrive, get their footage, and disappear. At the beginning of the comic, he comments on how his status as a journalist makes him 'exotic'; how stories from Goražde were, early in 1992, popular media coverage; and how during a rare cease-fire, journalists rode in with a UN convoy in the morning and were gone by the afternoon. Toward the end of the comic, in the final "Peace" chapter, there is a page that depicts foreign journalists needing their "journalism now, for the top of the hour" and "a few weren't above inducing some quickie action themselves" and some threw candy "at kids to capture the predictable mad scramble" (Sacco 131). While Sacco also gives the kids candy, he distances himself from the other journalists by stating, "My bon-bon policy was to give them out to every kid asking so long as they all got one...I figured the children in Goražde could make their own bon-bon



Figure 14. Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, panel from page 217

decisions" (131). In the next pages, figure 14, Sacco depicts yet another group of journalists collecting 'man-in-the-street' news coverage with one journalist calling out, "We want to see some damaged buildings." Riki, a recurring character who acts as a translator for Sacco,

responds, "LOOK! There is a hole in that wall! There are damaged buildings everywhere!" (217). This interaction seems quick and almost inconsequential; however, the point is that the journalists are literally standing in the middle of a ravaged area and yet are eager for a tour from a 'local' in that area. This page calls attention to the contrast between the kind of footage sought by the other journalists to report to a distant public, and the more complex and ethical type of reportage Sacco is interested in portraying in his comic.

In his introduction to *Journalism*, Sacco describes the journalistic effect of drawing himself into his comics as liberating. He refers to himself as a *character* and says that this gives him "journalistic permission to show my interactions with those I meet. Much can be learned about people from these personal exchanges, which most mainstream newspaper reporters, alas, excise from their articles" (Sacco XIII). In another interview, Sacco comments that he once tried to draw himself out of his comics, but that it was an unsuccessful change. As he states, "It's possible on some level to draw yourself out of a

comic, but what you lose then are these great interactions you have with people that might be interesting to a reader who wants to know how they might fit in that society and how they might react, and how people might respond to them” (qtd. in Winton 2010). While there are many aspects of comics that call upon the reader to engage, what we gain and learn from Sacco’s autobiographical habit of inserting a caricature of himself in his comics is a confessional-style awareness that disrupts traditional reportage and journalism. This disruption is important to how we understand media and war as a mediated event in the comic form. Also, it gives readers access to a variety of perspectives on this event, and is thus analogous to Young’s counter-monument.

Incorporating the Interview as a Counter-Narrative

When Sacco positions himself visually as a journalist in relation to the other characters, other reporters, and readers, he uses a particular visual style. The interviewee faces out toward the reader. The reader thus occupies the journalist’s viewing position, and becomes implicated in his gaze. This feature of the interview ties Sacco’s work to Kurtzman, Eisner, and Pekar in important ways, as well as to Spiegelman and Wood and Burchielli whom I will discuss next. It is the form of this incorporation of the interview that moves his comics beyond reportage and into the realm of the graphic counter-memorial. Sacco presents himself as the reporter, researcher, *and* co-reader of the comic. His interviews add to the history of this particular conflict, and are authenticated by Sacco’s own personal experiences; this gives Sacco the credibility to say, yes, this is true, but also that the truth is subjective. The significance here is that Sacco’s counter-memorial work functions as a

counter-narrative to mainstream media and historical accounts of events, and this is especially poignant for readers because of their place or position within the comics' pages.

Much of *Safe Area* develops through Edin, Sacco's 'fixer-like' character, his guide who helps him make connections with people and places, and who provides historical context. When the reader is learning more about Edin's experiences leading up to the war, Edin faces outward, presumably looking at Sacco; however, because the reader assumes the perspective of Sacco, there is the

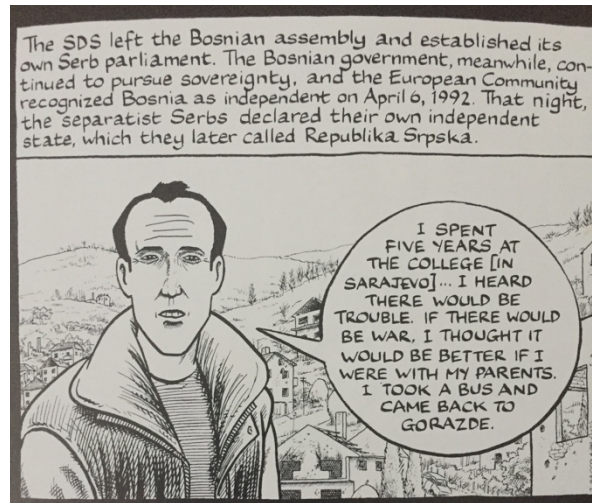


Figure 15. Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, panel from page 39.

sense that Edin is speaking directly with the reader (figure 15). The narrative box above gives historical context, while Edin's speech balloon represents his own personal perspective on the experience. That these two narratives run parallel to each other on the page means that the reader simultaneously absorbs both the political and personal (the individual and history, or the individual *as* history), signifying a tethering of the two. Another example of this device is seen when the reader is introduced to Bahra, another resident of Goražde (figure 16 below). The first, prominent panel establishes the interview tone and perspective in the familiar way Sacco has used, yet, that set up is mingled or overlaid with Bahra's past, as seen in the subsequent panels. This device calls attention to the fact that Sacco is building on the New Journalist immersive reporting tradition, which

draws the interviewer, subject, and reader into the reflection on an event.⁴² The significance of the autobiographical and New Journalist traditions that inform the graphic counter-memorial I am outlining here, then, is that they draw attention to the multiple partial perspectives on history that, all together, give us a more complete and authentic view of its truth. I argue that in addition to exploring and challenging modes of reportage on war and conflict, writers like Sacco, and the writers I will study in the next chapters, formulate a

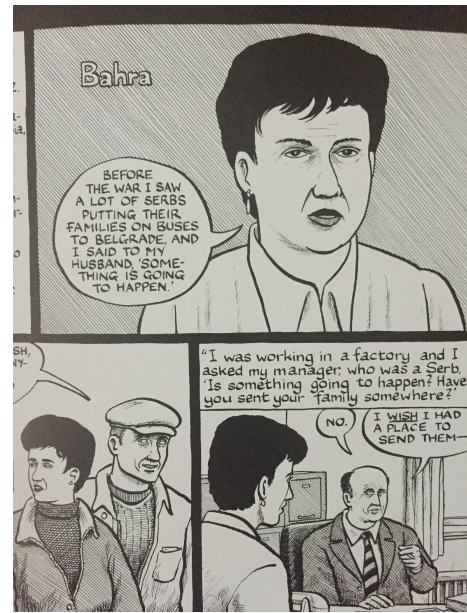


Figure 16. Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, panel from page 41.

powerful counter-narrative concerned with participation, space, history, and silenced voices, alongside larger social structures. Sacco writes that his primary concern is with “those who seldom get a hearing.” He goes on: “I don’t feel it is incumbent on me to balance their voices with the well-crafted apologies of the powerful” (Introduction XIV). Sacco’s comic, like those of the other graphic counter-memorials I study here, is chiefly concerned with visualizing the unheard voices in war and conflict.

Young’s writing on memory and memorialization is a useful framework to return to here because of its focus on challenging a national memory that typically extinguishes competing narratives. In his essay “Germany’s Vanishing Holocaust Monuments” (1994), Young cites an example of a counter-monument by Jochen Gerz, and I would like to

⁴² Rebecca Scherr discusses Sacco’s use of this framing in *Footnotes in Gaza*, and compares it to ‘talking heads’ in documentary style. She notes that “this kind of passport-like, no nonsense framing resonates with a kind of official discourse, and in this way lends the stories—and the faces—legitimacy” (126). See “Framing Human Rights: Comics Form and the Politics of Recognition in Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza*.”

describe it in detail in order to show how these comics are operating in a similar way to his counter-monuments when they use the graphic form to make the invisible visible, or to give voice to a silenced or ignored perspective. The example Young gives in this essay is the Square of the *Invisible Monument in Saarbrücken*. This monument aims to not only continue the tradition of the counter-monument, but also to extend the concept by focusing on and embodying absence, the invisible, in the monument form.

As Young describes it, Gerz, as a guest professor, invited his students to participate in a memory-project that would have them, at night, loosen and rip out the cobblestones from the square that used to be the home of the Gestapo, while pretending to be drunken students. “All the while,” describes Young, the students would “replace [the cobblestones] with the like-sized stones they had brought along, each embedded underneath with a nail so that they could be located later with a metal detector” (“Germany’s Vanishing” n.p.). Other students were tasked with locating the names and locations of the over 2,000 Jewish cemeteries desecrated by the Nazis in Germany; the names of which were then etched into each removed cobblestone. The cobblestones were then returned to their original place in the square, but facedown, leaving not a trace of the entire operation. With the students and himself keeping this project a secret from the public, Gerz realized of course that the meaning of the memorial depended on knowledge of this action, and would therefore have to become public. The artist wrote the minister-president informing him of the action and asked for permission to make it public, to which he said yes. However, “once the newspapers got wind of the project, a tremendous furor broke out over the reported vandalization of the square; editorials asked whether yet another monument like this was necessary” (“Germany’s Vanishing” n.p.). But, as Young notes, visitors came to the square,

wondering which cobblestones had been etched with the cemetery names, and whether or not they were standing on them, or if they were even there. “On searching for memory,” concludes Young in his article, “they would realize that such memory was already within them. This would be an interior memorial: as the only standing forms in the square, the visitors would become [the] memorials for which they searched” (“Germany’s Vanishing” n.p.).

What Claire Feehily calls “the explicit attempt to acknowledge absence” describes Sacco’s political commitment to voices otherwise rendered invisible (179). It needs to be understood that the comics medium offers Sacco and his graphic counter-memorial the ability to make the invisible visible by showing multiple perspectives simultaneously. I have discussed how Sacco’s eyeglasses become a symbol of the comics’ complex attention to acts of seeing and not seeing, and how the composition, wherein interviewees stare directly out of the frame, places the reader in the viewing position of the interviewer. I now want to turn to another graphic feature of comics that becomes essential to the graphic counter-memorial’s ability to construct counter-narratives: the gutter.

Scott McCloud calls the gutter, that is, the space between the panels, the “invisible messenger.” By this, he means that the seemingly empty space of gutters is what allow the comics to convey time and movement. The gutter also constructs a sense of closure; “observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (McCloud 63). The gutters show breaks between panels, but also, more importantly, the gutters allow readers to respond to the content and other cues on the page through imagination and participation. “Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea,” explains McCloud (66). Groensteen writes on the function of closure as

well in terms of framing. He writes that “the frame of a comics panel does not remove anything; it is contented to circumscribe.” Moreover, “to close the panel is not to stop the drawing” (Groensteen 40). The gutter is “simply the symbolic site of [an identifiable] absence” Groensteen 113).

Charles Acheson’s understanding of the gutter draws attention to the special use that writers of the graphic counter-memorial make of it. He claims that in non-fiction comics, the function of the gutter “potentially problematize[s] the comics medium’s ability to tell nonfiction narratives, especially traumatic testimonials, as the gutter seemingly splits ownership of the experience” (Acheson 291). According to him, the ‘ownership’ or participation and thus meaning-making is split between the experiences of the comics creator and the reader. Acheson is concerned with how the reader of non-fiction comics interacts with the gutter when a comics is not only non-fiction, but also traumatic. He writes that “the comics medium expands the role of the traumatic witness creating a more approachable understanding of the surreal qualities of traumatic experience” (Acheson 292). This idea posits that the comics medium can move beyond understanding trauma exclusively as an unspeakable experience giving it verbal and visual representation.⁴³ However, this representation is not merely a matter of the illustrated figures on the page; it is the gutter that changes how the witness interacts with the testimony. It is what creates a “vicarious position of the witness” (Acheson 291). The witness can be the reader, the reporter-artist character, the reporter character, or another character all together.

⁴³ Jennifer Anderson Bliss has also recently noted the importance of the ‘unspeakable’ in Trauma Studies; see “Picturing the Unspeakable: Trauma, Memory and Visuality in Contemporary Comics” (2014) for her take.



Figure 17. Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, page 110.

In *Safe Area*, an example of the gutter being used in the way Acheson describes is when Rasim is detailing how the Chetnik soldiers slaughtered families and threw them over the bridge (figure 17 above). These are some of the more violent pages and sequences in

Safe Area, and yet because of the way Sacco employs the gutter, the reader is left to envision the level of horror themselves.⁴⁴ First, it is noticeable that the gutter spaces on this page are black to indicate a memory and to allude to the level of violence. This happens throughout the comics. When residents' stories flash back to their memory of a traumatic moment where war has interrupted their lives, the gutters which are usually blank white turn black. This suggests the bleakness associated with the memories.⁴⁵

Second, as Acheson argues, despite the obvious bloodshed, the child being dragged in the middle panel of the middle tier disappears from the reader's view. The bottom panel shows the soldier's arms held out over the edge of the bridge, yet the child is not pictured being thrown over. The reader is left to envision what happens, to imagine the brutality and thereby complete the death and murder. Absence, figured in the gutter's empty space, is used to tie to both the reader and Sacco in a way that not only creates the potential for a shared space and understanding about horror, but also acknowledges the comics as an object, *and* as an experience. The graphic counter-memorial uses the comics medium's capacity to create sites and spaces of absence in which the reader/viewer can interpret and imagine. Sacco's counter-memorial comics does not seek to memorialize or preserve, but rather aims to renegotiate and reinvigorate the conflicts and people's memories he

⁴⁴ Acheson also looks at this page in relation to his argument on 'forged memory' and the gutter.

⁴⁵ Another good example is Canadian Michael Nicoll Yahganaas. In his *Red: A Haida Manga*, he uses black gutters or sometimes white gutters with tiny figures drawn in them, in order to challenge the idea that the reader gets to 'tell the story,' as McCloud has suggested. Yahganaas claims that this is an imperialist attitude that allows the reader to 'colonize' already existing stories and cultures, and in a way 'land,' by overwriting them with his/her own meanings. Instead, he wants to show that the space is already filled, just as the pre-colonized space of Canada was already occupied. Richard Harrison's "Seeing and Nothingness: Michael Nicoll Yahganaas, Haida Manga, and a Critique of the Gutter" (2016) is a good source for more on his work *Red* and the use of the gutter.

describes. In doing so, this comics adds to the collective memory of Goražde during the Bosnian War through his visual recreation of witness testimonies.

What moves Sacco's comics beyond comics journalism and into the realm of the counter-narrative is its reflexivity about itself and its own making. The interview structure, especially at points where the reader adopts Sacco's role as interviewer/reporter, combined with Sacco's presence in the comics, forces the reader to acknowledge the transmission of story and information through the mediation of the comics. Chute explains that the medium's "self-consciousness, crucially, exists together with the medium's confidence in its ability to traffic in expressing history" (*Disaster* 198). Sacco forces the reader to interact with the people he experiences. He does not simply quote the people living in Goražde. Rather, he makes their testimony essential to the reader's understanding of the history he is encountering and depicting, emulating the particular strategies of the counter-monument.

Sacco's pages are dense and often chaotic; readers typically have to absorb an entire page before knowing 'where to begin,' just as they do in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Hatfield describes several ways of reading a comics' page: linear, panel-to-panel, and 'tabular.' Tabular reading, according to Hatfield, means that the reader's eyes can move across the page in any which way; he uses this concept to emphasize the different experiences a reader of comics could potentially have. As Hatfield says, "broadly, we may say that comics exploit *format* as a signifier in itself" (*Alternative* 52). We can say that Sacco's dense pages invite the reader to take in the whole page as one single act of reading, then the reader moves carefully through the details of the page as another act of reading, one which generates a different—yet not unrelated—kind of meaning. This also relates to

Groensteen's concept of 'arthrology,' which, unlike McCloud's claim that panels relate to each other by their immediate proximity, panels can relate or be recalled by the reader across any number of pages. The chaos of the frame emulates the chaotic qualities of the scenes Sacco travels to, and the political and militaristic tensions therein. Sacco even uses the positions of narrative boxes and speech balloons, which range from slanted across a panel or panels to winding around an entire page, in order to mimic aspects of the scene he draws. In one example of this (figure 18), the narrative boxes explain how Goražde has been devastated and forgotten, its people and suffering restricted from the public's view. They overlay a dead body with its leg torn from the torso laying in the bombed-out street. The slanted narrative boxes replicate a taped off area or even perhaps a series of coffins as the body on the street aligns with the boxes.



Figure 18. Joe Sacco, 2000, *Safe Area Goražde*, panel from page 126.

Sacco's work is often characterized as realism because of his extreme attention to detail; he aims to depict the atrocities of war, particularly genocide in *Safe Area*, and the everyday lives of the people of Goražde. One description of his type of realism explains that "Sacco's work frames itself around producing a concrete picture of the other through

capturing the rhythms and details of both ordinary and extraordinary experience (Chute *Disaster* 216). Sacco's dedication to details and realism also have to do with an ethical approach to his subjects and reporting.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the complex ways that Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* does more than report, in the New Journalism fashion, on the Bosnian War and the trauma and lives of those in Goražde. While the reportage and journalistic strategies are crucial to an understanding of Sacco's body of work as a whole, it is his use of the interview structure that calls our attention to something unique. In his visual emphasis on the interview process, Sacco pulls the reader's attention toward questions of how we remember and preserve war, how it is reported upon, and that war is a mediated event. *Safe Area Goražde*, among Sacco's other comics, is akin to the counter-monument that emerged alongside the strategies and aesthetics of New Journalism and the Underground Comix movement in America. They share an impulse to disrupt and counter dominant historical narratives, and change how we consume those narratives both spatially and temporally. The purpose of this chapter was to align Sacco with Kurtzman, Eisner, and Pekar and their incorporation of research, the interview, and their selves into comics in order to focus on witness testimony and unheard voices. Read in the context of Young's theories, as I have done, Sacco's comics can be understood as counter-narratives that develop potent ways of communicating history and memory out of older genres. The graphic counter-memorial's intrinsic power stems from questioning how we remember, analyze, and relate to war and conflict. Sacco's comic, and the ones in the following chapters, place an important focus on war as a mediated event. The graphic counter-memorial depicts the overlays of public and collective

memory, art, politics, and war, contemplating and challenging official sociohistorical narratives and the wider crisis of representation.

In the next chapter, I turn to Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2001-2003/4) to further carve out my genre of the graphic counter-memorial. I will first illustrate the strategies he shares with Pekar and Sacco in their ways of borrowing from other genres and using the first-person-witness persona. I will then focus on Spiegelman's use of the comics medium to comment on the distorted images produced by mainstream media of 9/11. As with Sacco, Spiegelman's comics makes political and collective challenges to forms of power by specifically focusing on media as an apparatus of power. Differently than Sacco, how Spiegelman does this is through a commentary on mainstream media and through an intense focus on the materiality of his own comics—its size and shape, its play with absence and presence. Also similar to Sacco, Spiegelman's personal account of his experience of 9/11 moves between the absurd and exaggerated to documentary in order to diverge from the singular narratives about, in Spiegelman's case, 9/11 and its immediate aftermath. Spiegelman's work has largely been categorized as private and personal, which seems in contrast to Sacco's very public and collective comics; however, one thing that my next chapter aims to do is to recast Spiegelman's *No Towers* as dealing with the collective. Furthermore, whether these comics are understood as private or public accounts of trauma, conflict, and war, we cannot escape viewing them as political. Spiegelman's *No Towers* offers similarities between the comics studied so far, and what he does differently equally offers another way to understand the graphic counter-memorial.

Chapter Four:

Drawing on Trauma: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

"Every history is really two histories. There is the history of what actually happened, and there is the history of the perception of what happened."

- W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*

"Nothing like commemorating an event to help you forget it."

- Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In the Shadow of No Towers and Political Imagination

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how Joe Sacco incorporates elements of reportage, New Journalism, autobiography, and the caricature style of underground and alternative comics movements in his *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000). I argued that the ways in which his interviews are embedded within his comic as both content and structure, and his attention to his roles as reporter, comics creator, and witness to trauma—both personal and collective—call attention to something that extends comics journalism, as complex a genre as it is. I argued that these strategies align his comic more with James E. Young's counter-monument theory and that the comics functions as and builds on my genre of the graphic counter-memorial. His visual and verbal emphasis on the interview as both process and narrative pulls the reader into questions about how we remember war and how it is preserved; how war is reported on in the media and how media shapes our understanding of war, conflict, death, and survivors.

Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2001-2003/4) offers another example of the graphic counter-memorial's incorporation of real histories, wars, and conflicts and an interrogation of memory, memorialization, and reportage. *In the Shadow of No Towers* is

Spiegelman's account of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the immediate aftermath as he witnessed from his downtown Manhattan apartment. The comics' large broadsheet pages, together with its frenzied and intense artistic style, mimic the size of the Towers and the event itself, the "oversized skyscrapers and outsized events," as he says (Spiegelman 1). The comic is divided into two sections. The first is Spiegelman's account of the attacks, published as ten full-colour pages; the second section, referred to in *No Towers*⁴⁶ as "The Comics Supplement" is comprised of an essay written by Spiegelman on early American comics, followed by reprints of the Sunday Funnies from the early 1900s. These pages include *The Yellow Kid*, *Happy Hooligan*, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, and *Krazy Kat*, some of the more popular and recognizable characters from early American comic strips. In many ways, the themes and imagery of the pages in "The Comics Supplement" model Spiegelman's own pages in the first half of *No Towers*. For example, *The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins* strip resembles Spiegelman's own page that combines upside-down and right-side -up content in a series of panels; the *Little Nemo in Slumberland* strip features Nemo climbing a city skyline and tall buildings crashing down upon the city. While these comic strips and characters might seem sentimental, their inclusion, which I discuss at greater length in this chapter, help to place Spiegelman's work alongside that of American history.

There are many ways Spiegelman's *No Towers* resembles the previous works I have discussed so far. Spiegelman for example draws himself into his comic as a way to act as reporter, witness, and surrogate for the reader in ways similar to Pekar and Sacco. Like Pekar and Sacco, Spiegelman creates tensions between absence and presence, permanence

⁴⁶ I use *No Towers* as the commonly accepted abbreviation of *In the Shadow of No Towers*.

and ephemerality to comment on how we come to know history and how it is memorialized. Much like Sacco, Spiegelman in *No Towers* is concerned (even anxious) about the ways mainstream media shape and distort images of war and conflict, and how those images are read by people; *No Towers* is a commentary on war as a mediated event.

There have been two main approaches to *No Towers*. Many scholars have been attentive to Spiegelman's use of the autobiographical mode.⁴⁷ They build this understanding upon studies of his earlier work. *Maus*, for example, pieces together Spiegelman's experiences with his father's experiences of WWII as a Holocaust survivor through a structure of interviews and flashbacks. This understanding of *Maus* as autobiography has largely carried over to studies of *No Towers*. *No Towers* is not narrative the way *Maus* is, but the autobiographical argument remains convincing because of Spiegelman's recurring use of self-portraiture. The other common approach to Spiegelman's comic signals its treatment of trauma. The persona of the author throughout the text signals his own trauma over the experience of 9/11, and critics have argued that his seemingly fragmented form expresses his shattered psyche.

However, rather than underline the ways *No Towers* encompasses an individual, diaristic account of the traumatic experience of 9/11, I want to suggest that its importance rests in the ways it offers a reporter's subjective record of 9/11 and the aftermath. Spiegelman's drawings of himself throughout *No Towers*, like Sacco's drawings of himself, can be read as a reporting on 9/11 using the self-reflexive and immersive form of New Journalism. Spiegelman's *No Towers*, however, takes war reportage one step further by

⁴⁷ See Gillian Whitlock, 2006; Karen Espiritu, 2006; Jane Tolmie, 2013; and Jenn Brandt, 2014 for example.

offering an extreme close-up focus on the comics medium itself. Spiegelman's attention to medium and materiality at the levels of content and structure is intense and at times disorienting. The comics text's physicality and its complex and absurd use of formal features reflect upon and extend the comics medium's potential to report on war.

I will show how, in his hands, the graphic counter-memorial closely emulates both the aims and aesthetics of the counter-monument projects discussed by Young. Like these large-scale works of public commemoration, the graphic counter-memorial turns the reader's gaze from individual memory to collective memory while remaining attentive to how collective memory mingles with and shapes individual memory. This genre can thus solicit the reader to share responsibility for the burden of memory without redeeming that memory, while it also delivers a forceful critique of ideological and political underpinnings of post-9/11 or post-war society.

Spiegelman is considered one of the most influential modern comics creators. Some of his earliest accolades were for his work in the magazine *RAW*, which he self-published in the 1980s with his partner Françoise Mouly. *RAW* featured American and European comics artists, and is where the first installments of *Maus* appeared.⁴⁸ In many ways, the purpose of *RAW* was to reject the mainstream media and publishers and publishing conventions of the time, and to offer space to emerging comics artists who were either rejected by mainstream publications themselves or who desired an alternative venue for their innovative work. That *RAW* was a rejection or departure from mainstream publishing

⁴⁸ For more on *RAW*'s development, see Spiegelman's *Co-Mix: A Retrospective of Comics, Graphics, and Scraps*, 2013; Hillary Chute's *Outside the Box: Interviews with Contemporary Cartoonists*, 2014; and Jeet Heer's *In Love with Art*, 2013. Early contributors to *RAW* include Lynda Barry, Charles Burns, Robert Crumb, Chris Ware, and Julie Doucet.

speaks to Spiegelman's propensity to oppose restrictive or dominant voices. *Maus* is another significant factor in Spiegelman's acclaim. *Maus'* publication history spans over a decade; it was first published serially between 1980 and 1991 in *RAW*, after which it was collected and published in two volumes by Pantheon in 1986 and 1992. The comic has been widely written about and analyzed in academic and popular presses; it was one of a small body of works largely responsible for bringing comics and their study to the attention of mainstream academics.

Despite the success of *Maus*, Spiegelman had a challenging time publishing *No Towers*. The traveling retrospective exhibit of Spiegelman's work recounts how *No Towers* was rebuffed by mainstream American publications because the content and tone were too incongruent with what publishers felt they *ought* to publish at that time in history.⁴⁹ *No Towers* was first serialized between 2001 and 2003 in publications outside the U.S., such as *Die Zeit*, *The London Review of Books*, *Internationale*, and *Courrier International*. In the U.S., the serialized broadsheets were eventually published in *The L.A. Weekly*, *The Chicago Weekly*, and *World War Three Illustrated*. Spiegelman would have liked *No Towers* to have been published by *The New Yorker*, but, as he says, "I don't think my tone was appropriate. It was so obvious it wasn't going to be comfortable there...With my shrill, sky-is-falling voice, cracking at every moment" (qtd. in Campbell 2004). It was finally published in its familiar large format in 2004 by Pantheon.

I mention the comic's publication history because Spiegelman was well-known for producing work for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Harpers*, and other prominent

⁴⁹ This retrospective travelled internationally to galleries starting in 2012; I saw the exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in 2014.

American publications; the early rejection of *No Towers* by these publishers was symptomatic of the controlled tone, images, and narratives of 9/11 in mainstream U.S. media at the time. Hillary Chute understands the comic's irregular publication and its chaotic spatiality in a larger historical context. *No Towers*, she says, "works to refigure a traditional notion of seriality for a text registering the crisis of witnessing a traumatic world event" ("Temporality and Seriality" 229). I would add that the hesitation to publish *No Towers* also reflects the comic's powerful production of a politically-charged and subversive counter-narrative at a time of intense control over representation tied to nationalism.

From Autobiography to Comics as Journalism: Spiegelman's Use of Immersive Reporting

Throughout *No Towers*, Spiegelman draws himself into his comics, appearing sometimes as an exaggerated, caricature version of himself, sometimes more realistic in his familiar vest, and still other times with a mouse mask as one of the characters from *Maus*. To read this self-portraiture as autobiography and as a continuation of *Maus*' preoccupation with tragic events and family history, however, is to miss one of most crucial elements of the text. Spiegelman's drawing of himself in *No Towers*, I argue, is best approached as a form of immersive and participatory reporting on 9/11, which offers an important counter-narrative to the story of 9/11 that was being depicted by mainstream media.

Charles Hatfield has written about the tension between authenticating, first-person narratives and the gross, alienating caricatures of many writers whose work is inflected

with the underground comix style of the 1960s and 70s. Like Sacco, Spiegelman draws himself into his comics in what, Tasha Robinson, in an interview, describes as “an unflattering light” (“Art Spiegelman” 2004). Robinson asks, echoing a question W. J. T. Mitchell posed to Sacco about his “ugly mug,” “Are you at all concerned with how readers see you and how that affects your autobiographical stories?” In the interview, Spiegelman replies that in *No Towers* he was trying to give an objective report about a subjective state (“Art Spiegelman” 2004). In another interview, Spiegelman states that when he “deals with his own self-loathing, he tends to project the discomforting results of that self-loathing” (“A Comic-Book Response to 9/11” 2004). His vision of a mode of comics writing that mingles subjectivity and objectivity aligns with the aim of New Journalism, which is not only to transmit the information of an event, but also to give an account of how that information came to be known to the reporter. Spiegelman states:

If one accepts that visual matter lies, you might as well know where your lie is coming from. And you can recognize a voice, a visual voice, in the artist’s hand, and therefore allow that to become part of the information you’re getting. And in that sense...if you know where the artist is coming from and what lies he’s likely to make, you can distill more truth from the image that’s not overtly in that sense objective. (“Art Spiegelman” 2004)

The idiosyncratic distortions of comics’ drawn images are not lies; they locate the objective within a subjective experience to generate a more complex truth.

Spiegelman’s depictions of himself also reflect his struggle to portray a more complex witness of 9/11. The majority of the comic is in first-person, with Spiegelman often looking out of the frame at the reader. However, there are instances when Spiegelman switches from first-person to third-person reporting, referring to himself as

“he”: “He remembers that morning yet again: before they decided to rush to their daughter’s school...” (4). This shift in person suggests that the reporter is himself a fractured, traumatized subject, othered to himself. However, Spiegelman is also trying to subvert the conventions of objective journalism with a style that signals the subjective nature of witnessing. Alternating between



Figure 19. Spiegelman, 2004, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, partial of page 2.

an objective and subjective voice and perspective allows Spiegelman to be the comic’s artist who makes visible his witnessing and testimony of 9/11, creating a story that can lay claim to both public and personal truths; or, in his words, that projects “‘the personal is political,’ to put it—yawn—in its most T-shirtlike form” (“A Comic-Book Response to 9/11” 2004).

Spiegelman in this comics text continually underlines that his experience of 9/11 has traumatized him, but he takes care to situate his own personal crisis over writing it within ever larger sets of political and media frames. In figure 19, above, Spiegelman has drawn himself at his writer’s table as Artie, his character from *Maus*, threateningly flanked by “Al-Qaeda” and “his own government.” According to this narrative, the “hero”—a

bedraggled mouse, dozing at his drawing table, *is* Spiegelman, sorting through the historical spectacle he witnessed from “his ringside seat.” The poster in the background above declares that his brain has been missing since mid-September, 2001. Spiegelman implies here that the historical events of 9/11 could not effectively be processed mentally. The traumatized witness cannot believe what he saw. Moreover, he is caught between—and terrorized by—competing official narratives that seek to reframe the events to serve their own ideological ends.

In the column of four panels, Spiegelman looks at himself in a mirror as though struggling to recognize his self: “issues of self-representation have left me slack-jawed,” he writes (2). The mirror is a clever framing device that alludes to the comic’s own panels through which the reader looks at him. Spiegelman’s image before the mirror changes four times. The observer outside of the frame and the observed image inside of the frame are both unstable and problematized. The only constant through these successive panels is the challenge of writing. This page depicts various versions of Spiegelman in order to register what Spiegelman describes as an objective subjectivity; this remains his method of reporting throughout the text, chaotic as it might be. The comics medium over any other medium can allow for such self-caricature, or what Hatfield calls “the self as successive selves” (117). As Hatfield remarks: “the cartoon self-image, then, seems to offer a unique way for the artist to recognize and externalize his or her subjectivity” (115).

Sacco’s rationale for including himself in his comics is to show the interactions with others he has as a journalist. Spiegelman inserts himself as both reporter *and* witness of the media and its reportage. In the introduction of *No Towers*, he says that he wanted to “sort out the fragments of what I’d experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf

what I actually saw” (Spiegelman n.p.). He later remarks “I’ve consumed ‘news’ till my brain aches...The news just confirms that I’m right to feel paranoid. My subconscious is drowning in newspaper headlines!” (Spiegelman 8).

Wider Contexts: Comics *and* Journalism

An interesting self-reflexive strategy Spiegelman uses on this page relates to the miniature figures pictured on the table at which he sits. The Yellow Kid and Happy Hooligan, among others, are historical *Sunday Funnies* characters. With these intertextual allusions, Spiegelman situates his work in a longer tradition of comics artists who developed their medium in the pages of newspapers, where they too were framed by and often commented upon the politics of their day, war included.

Historically, the success of comics was inextricably bound to the medium of the newspaper. Newspapers published comics like *The Yellow Kid* to sell copies. In turn, these comics developed their story matter responding to the news that literally enframed them. Spiegelman opens *No Towers* with a reproduction of a newspaper page from *The World* from September 11, 1901—precisely one hundred years before the events he is discussing. The page sensationally detailed the shooting of President McKinley, and relays the accusations against anarchist Emma Goldman for conspiring to plot this murder. September 11, 2001 becomes one iteration of a serially repeating cycle of violence sensationalized in the news.

On the following page entitled “The Sky is Fall,” Spiegelman introduces the comic with his essay. Here, he again underscores the importance of the newspaper medium for his project, only now he emphasizes its formal features: “the giant scale of the color

newsprint pages seems perfect for the oversized skyscrapers and outsized events” (Spiegelman n.p.). He talks about how “the idea of working in single page units” suited him, insofar as “the collagelike nature of a newspaper page encouraged [his] impulse to juxtapose [his] fragmentary thoughts in different styles” (Spiegelman n.p.). The first two pages of *No Towers* thus make it clear that this is a comic book about journalistic media. It makes use of their materiality, history, and formal conventions in order to talk about history and traumatic memory in a way that acknowledges intimacy between the experience of the traumatized subjects of the reportage and the now traumatized journalist observer.

No Towers consistently draws attention to newspaper reportage, but it casts a particularly scathing light on televisual reporting. The three panels in figure 20 study the televisual mediation of the two towers. The first panel shows the towers after one has been hit. Spiegelman says that his memory of this is “unmediated” because he saw it “live”

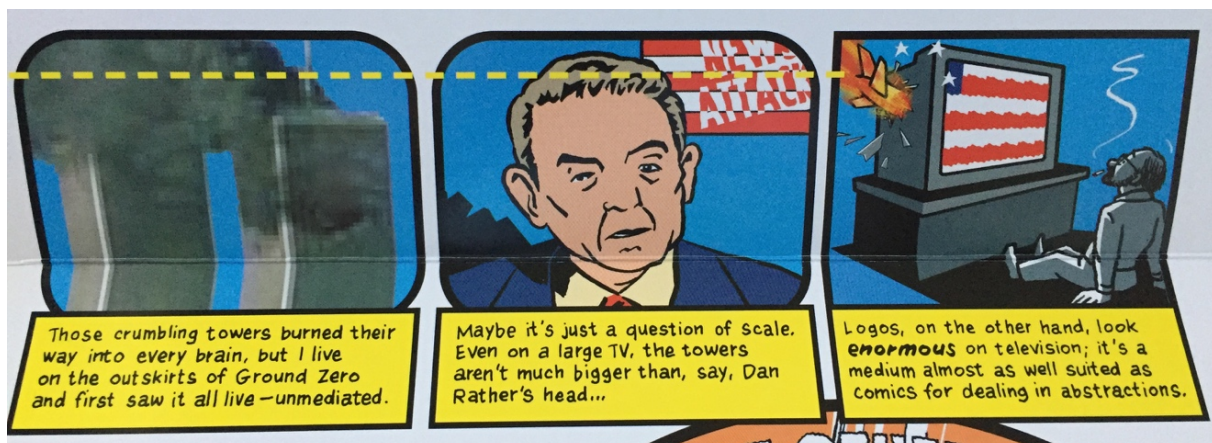


Figure 20. Spiegelman, 2004, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, partial of page 1.

himself. The second panel is of Dan Rather’s head as if we are watching a news broadcast reporting on the event. Spiegelman comments that the scale of television distorts the magnitude of the Towers and their destruction. The Towers become smaller, and thus less

important, than the talking head describing them, until their reality disappears from view altogether. The final panel shows Spiegelman watching the news on TV, with an American flag filling the screen. The singular event burned into the brains of all witnesses, diminished through its televisual frame, is ultimately transformed into a “logo”—a crass symbol of American-brand nationalism. And logos, Spiegelman remarks, “look *enormous*” on television (1, original emphasis). Across the top of the series of panels is a yellow dotted line marking the travel path of a plane as it crashes into the TV in the last panel. This trajectory traces the progression from his own version of what he saw to the mediated version of the event. That the target of the terrorists’ plane in the last panel is the television itself is a powerful indictment of the responsibility that U.S. media bears for the construction of a troubling mythology. This is but one instance of Spiegelman’s commentary on the media’s use of images to turn, as he put it in a 2004 interview with *NPR*, the event into a recruitment poster. It also gets at Spiegelman’s view that the hijacking of the planes can be likened to the government’s hijacking of the media.

Dirk Vanderbeke argues that *No Towers* is more of a piece of political journalism than it is an autobiographical account of 9/11. “Of course,” he writes, “the work is primarily based in the subjective experience of its author; however, this perspective offers a necessary counterbalance to the official appropriation of 9/11 by the Bush administration” (Vanderbeke 74). Throughout the text, Spiegelman is critical of the government and the dominant narrative it dictates through mainstream media. He writes that “the stars and stripes are a symbol of unity that many people see as a war banner” (Spiegelman 7). He despairs: “you rob from the poor and give to your pals like a parody of Robin Hood while you distract me with your damn oil war!” (Spiegelman 5). Part of the point of these overt

political critiques stems from when they were published; Spiegelman is giving an account of his paranoia and consciousness at that time. He is also drawing the connection between his comic and the political statements of early comics and political cartoons, made all the more tangible in the second half of *No Towers* where the *Sunday Funnies* are reprinted. Both *The Yellow Kid* and *Happy Hooligan* share a history of commenting on the unequal class system and political greed. *Happy Hooligan*, for example, depicted an impoverished figure who was viewed in contrast to government greed and corruption.⁵⁰ The capacity and propensity of comics to depict and embrace political commentary has deep historical roots as I discussed in an earlier chapter; this history also mirrors the counter-monument's aim to comment on both the political and historical moment, alongside its own inception, which is also political in motivation.

Using Trauma Studies as a lens through which to read *No Towers* has proved productive. The comics' disrupted sequentiality and Spiegelman's inability to represent his memories and experiences of what he witnessed have been examined in the context of theories of traumatic memories, fragmented memories, and witnessing. Echoing Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma as not fully understood at the time of the traumatic experience, Martha Kuhlman writes that Spiegelman "represents his memory of the fall of the towers through a fragmentary, ironic, and self-reflexive narrative" (850). Karen Espiritu also looks at *No Towers* through a trauma lens and argues that the labour involved in making the comics is akin to grieving and to the inability to understand a traumatic

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive history of these two examples and others, see the four volumes of *Comics Through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas* (2014) edited by M. Keith Booker.

experience. *No Towers* is described as chaotic for both the reader and for Spiegelman himself.

While the use of Trauma Studies and autobiography to understand Spiegelman's comics is common, these approaches unintentionally minimize the political and disruptive aim of the comics. His self-portraiture functions as a way to draw the reader into the content of the comics—a strategy that evokes participation from the reader for both meaning-making and burden-sharing. Spiegelman's overt challenges to the mainstream media's exploitation of the idea that its reporting is objective as opposed to subjective uses strategies similar to those deployed by counter-monument projects, which have been described as anti-redemptory and unresolvable, and as resistant to unity.

From the Counter-Monument to the Graphic Counter-Memorial

My analysis of *No Towers* connects Spiegelman's strategies of self-portraiture and reporting on mainstream media with the strategies of Sacco to show how these two comics act as graphic counter-memorials and disrupt unified historical narratives and trust in an objective truth. Spiegelman's particular contribution lies in his intense attention to the materiality of his comic and the resulting tension he thematizes between absence and presence, permanence and ephemerality. In order to understand how Spiegelman is resisting traditional forms of memorializing, witnessing, and reporting in *No Towers*, it is important to return to the picture of the counter-monument I offered at the beginning of this dissertation and to try to develop it further.

The counter-monument arose out of a deep distrust for traditional monuments that were and are typically imbued with nationalism and used to commemorate and preserve

cohesive historical narratives; to maintain an authority over memory. Young describes traditional monuments as a “big rock telling people what to think...a big form that pretends to have a meaning, that sustains itself for eternity, that never changes over time, never evolves—it fixes history, it embalms or somehow stultifies it” (“An Interview” 11). By contrast, the counter-monument is the artistic project of a generation looking to reject this ‘big rock’ narrative by inviting multiple voices to historical narratives, by challenging the use of space that monuments take up, and by urging viewers to participate in the memory work collectively. Young insists that in order to do memory work and to account for horrific events without rendering them mute, we need to sustain an active relationship with the trauma and loss. We also need repeated contemplation.

Young uses the *Disappearing Monument*, also called *Monument Against Fascism*, in Harburg by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz as an example of the participatory nature of counter-monuments. The urge to memorialize and preserve is usurped in the counter-monument by the need for perpetual contemplation and engagement with the memory; Young explains that once something is memorialized, something else is forgotten. The *Disappearing Monument* is a twelve-meter high square pillar made of hollow aluminum and coated with a layer of soft lead. The soft lead allowed visitors to inscribe messages upon the pillar. Over time, as sections were covered with peoples’ messages, the monument sank into the ground, becoming an empty inverted column underground. As Young describes it, this monument creates a process and experience that will have “returned the burden of memory to visitors: one day, the only thing left standing here will be the memory-tourists, forced to rise and to remember for themselves” (“The Counter-Monument” 276). The artists’ statement describes their intent as inviting both the citizens and tourists of Harburg

to add their names next to the artists', so that "one day [the column] will have disappeared completely, and the site...will be empty. In the end it is only we ourselves who can stand up against injustice" (Gerz and Shalev-Gerz 1994). Part of what makes the Gerzs' project significant is its ability to create a bridge between the public and the monument space, a dynamic that is unachievable by traditional memorials. The project creates a tension between presence and absence, permanence and ephemerality. Young argues that the "disappearing" monument is a provocative example of erasure, not of what the counter-monument marks, but of the constraints of traditional commemorative practices (*At Memory's* 127).

A key aspect of the counter-monument and its power, according to Young, is its ability to return the burden of the traumatic event to the viewer, and to give the viewer an active role in memory work. To "return the burden" is to make the viewer of the counter-monument responsible for remembering; it challenges the form of power traditionally associated with monuments: a master narrative offering a sense of unification and conclusion. Returning the burden also has to do with challenging the artist's and viewer's shared physical and psychical space. While a counter-monument can take up space in ways similar to the traditional monument, it is always deeply reflexive. Young describes one artist's negotiation with space as not just being the ground above or below the structure, but in "that space between the memorial and viewer, between the viewer and his own memory: the place of the memorial in the viewer's mind, heart, and conscious" ("Memory and Counter Memory" n.p.).

The counter-monument relies almost solely on the visitor for its meaning. It is political, it is diverse, and it continuously renegotiates space and memory, and I argue that

the deep parallels between this work of the counter-monument and the work of Spiegelman highlight the transformative potential of the graphic counter-memorial. In the introduction to *The Art of Memory*, Young states:

Only we can animate the stone figures and fill the empty spaces of the memorial, and only then can monuments be said to remember anything at all. In this way, we recognize the essentially dialogical character of Holocaust memorials, the changing faces of memory different visitors bring to them. Given the inevitable variety of competing memories, we may never actually share a common memory at these sites but only the common place of memory, where each of us is invited to remember in his own way...this art consists in the ongoing activity of memory, in the debates surrounding these memorials, in our own participation in the memorial's performance. (37-38)

Spiegelman's comics text engages in the ongoing activity of memory by returning the burden to his readers, who share in its common place. Instead of memorializing 9/11 and his experience of it, *No Towers* embraces a sustained engagement in the fractured, collective, and divergent versions of truth in the medium of comics.

One of the reasons why Young's discussion of the materiality of the counter-monument is so instructive when applied to Spiegelman's comics text is that before they fell, the Twin Towers could be seen as traditional monuments—as a “big form that pretends to have a meaning, that sustains itself for eternity” (“An Interview” 11). As two of the tallest buildings in the world, the Towers had been monuments to American strength and identity. They became targets for terrorists who wanted to challenge the hubris of the buildings' implicit narrative of American capitalist might. In this sense, Spiegelman's comic as a graphic counter-memorial homage to the twinned buildings counters both the narratives of the before- and the after-. His remembrance deliberately resists the urge to reclaim the original cultural meanings of the Towers, just as it resists the narrative that the

government/media sought to control after the fact. Instead, he focuses, as I demonstrate below, on something more complex: the enduring presence of their absence.

Like the artists producing counter-monuments, Spiegelman explicitly concerns himself with permanence, erasure, and the ephemeral in *No Towers*. The cover provides a graphic way to visualize this tension. The cover of *No Towers* is almost identical to the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine published immediately after 9/11 that Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly co-created. Almost immediately after 9/11, Mouly, the art editor of the



Figure 21. Spiegelman and Mouly, 2001, *New Yorker* cover.

New Yorker, started contemplating the tone and image for the magazine's cover, questioning what would be an 'appropriate' response. In *The Atlantic* Mouly recalls, "I want no image. I can't do this. No image can do justice to this" (qtd. in Heer 2003). At first, Mouly envisioned a solid black cover that would, effectively, not be a cover at all, and instead would act as an image acknowledging the inability to imagine and artistically render either the event or a response to it.⁵¹ Spiegelman's solution was to print the black silhouettes of the Twin Towers

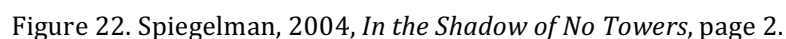
in a black gloss on a lighter black matte background making it impossible to tell which is figure and which is ground, which is present and which is absent. On the cover of the comic,

⁵¹ For more on the *New Yorker* cover and its conception see "Cover: How It Came To Be" *The New Yorker*, October 2, 2001.

which was printed on broadsheet-sized cardboard, Spiegelman added a small horizontal box filled with falling 20th century comics characters in the middle, possibly alluding to the iconic photograph “The Falling Man” taken by Richard Drew of a man falling from the North Tower during the attacks. The falling comics characters on the cover also recall Spiegelman’s repeated phrase, ‘the sky is falling.’ Spiegelman is not cartooning the horrifying image of the man falling from the Tower in order to belittle it or reduce it; instead, he is filling in his traumatic memories with memories of early American comics that, as I have noted in this chapter, offer him a sense of contemplation: “I found a lot of comfort in [those comics] because they weren’t made to last. Every one of these really beautiful things were made for a 24-hour news cycle” (“A Comic-Book Response” 2004). Both the magazine’s and the comic’s covers attempt to negotiate what would be an appropriate representation of the traumatic event and how to represent the absence of something that previously seemed so permanent.

Another graphic way Spiegelman develops his approach to erasure and ephemerality is through the image of the glowing skeletal frame of the Towers he repeats throughout the comic. As he says, “one image keeps repeating, which is the glowing bones of the Tower, which wasn’t the image seen on television, but was the image seen by people standing where we were, five blocks away” (qtd. in NPR 2004). In other words, this image etched into his brain and others’ in close proximity to the Tower who were witness to its fall, represents unmediated, subjective experience. Just as the black-on-black cover image

it is a representation
of an experience. The
three-dimensional
panels/Twin Towers
cast a long shadow
that cuts diagonally
across the page,



underneath the panels. The direction of the shadows takes the reader's eyes to the series of bottom panels that show the glowing bones disintegrating, lowering, and eventually disappearing. The final panel is in the shape of an exclamation mark, within which Spiegelman's previously missing brain is found. Reading the page, the reader's eye moves in a 'Z' direction; however, the reader is then forced to 'start again' and read the rest of the page. I described Sacco's use of this kind of reading in the previous chapter referring to both Hatfield's tabular reading the Groensteen's term arthrology; I do so again here because they so clearly demonstrate how the form invites multiple acts of reading and meaning making, a structural fact of comics that coincides with the aspirations of the counter-monument.

Seymour Chatman, in *Story and Discourse* (1980), describes the comic strip as a picture narrative that, due to its conventions, invites the reader to participate in meaning-making. For Chatman, crucial events in a comics story can "occur in the spaces between" and that comics reading leaves "the burden of inference to the reader" (38). Groensteen similarly argues for "the insistence on the active cooperation provided by the reader. Comics is a genre founded on reticence" (10-11). Comics concerned with disrupting historical and sociopolitical narratives, with incorporating testimony, research, and reportage of real events, and with a dialogical component between the reader and the comics creator offer new ways of talking about counter-memorial projects. That *No Towers* is highly attentive to its own materiality and creation, is resistant to the media images and rhetoric of 9/11 and its aftermath, and is contemplating and engaging in the act of memory, allows us to see this comic as operating as a graphic counter-memorial.

The recurring imagery of the glowing bones not only signifies a tension between presence and absence, but also between seeing and not seeing. Marianne Hirsch looks at *No Towers*' treatment of 9/11 in the context of a complex set of political investments in seeing. At the time, the government wanted control over how people saw the terrorist attack. New York Mayor Giuliani, for example, made a decision to ban cameras from ground zero and the surrounding area. This was not to shelter the memory of the victims. Rather, the government and media controlled the images of this event to justify the war that would follow. As Hirsch elaborates, "the second Iraq war began as a spectacle staged for the American television viewer," until those images threatened to depict wounded or killed Americans (1210).⁵² Spiegelman's *No Towers*, she suggests, makes use of the comics medium to draw attention to and problematize the question of who sees, what is shown, and what is concealed in the reporting of the traumatic event, but at the core of the comics is a paradox: it is as impossible to see as it is to not see. The comics medium can render this paradox visible: "words, images, and word-images work together to enact the impossibility of seeing and the impossibility of not looking" (Hirsch 1213). The *Disappearing Monument*, especially once the pillar had sunken into the ground, rendered this paradox visible as well. Visitors come to see the structure and upon finding the site empty, become witnesses to the fundamental unrepresentability of the traumatic history that the monument records, and the disturbing realization that permanence of such dominant structures is not possible.

⁵² The phrase 'collateral damage' is obviously military-oriented, but it is also the name of an Arnold Schwarzenegger film pictured on page two of *No towers*. The interplay here is that the language used by the government and/or military—collateral damage—also often appears in popular culture and media of entertainment, as seen in figure 21.

In his quest to talk about what can and cannot be seen, Spiegelman turns to sound. On this same page, in a panel featuring Spiegelman and Françoise in the street, Spiegelman's text reads: He didn't actually see the first plane smash into the tower a few blocks south of this SoHo home...They heard the crash behind them while heading North" (2). Part of the text in this textbox is obscured by the "ROARRRRRRRRR"—a visual-textual representation of the sound. This onomatopoeic textual treatment of sound on the comics page can be traced back to early American comic strips of the late 1920s, and is another example of Spiegelman drawing attention to those early strategies. Spiegelman uses the textually-rendered sound to obscure his own third-person narration. The layering of a collectively heard sound over private language graphically depicts the compound objective-subjective experience Spiegelman's reportage seeks to offer. The ROARRRRRRRRRR is what Will Eisner describes as "lettering, treated 'graphically' and in the service of the story," which "functions as an extension of the imagery...it provides the mood, a narrative bridge, and the implication of sound" (10). McCloud comments on this use of text montage, which for him are "words are treated as integral *parts* of the picture" (154, original emphasis). The reader must decipher the text and work for the meaning, another example of how comics can perform the kind of participatory work that counter-monuments ask of their viewers.

The final way Spiegelman draws on the tensions between permanence and ephemerality relates to his inclusion of early American comics characters and the *Sunday Funnies* in the back pages of *No Towers*. These inserted images do not only relate to his treatment of the historical relationship between comics and journalism. Spiegelman has been repeatedly asked about why he included the comics characters throughout *No Towers*

and why he reprinted the Sunday comics as the comics' back pages. In the final page of the comic entitled "The Comic Supplement," Spiegelman writes, "many found comfort in poetry. Others searched for solace in old newspaper comics," and it is this statement that leads the reader into his essay on early 20th century American comics, in which he highlights the principal players such as Pulitzer and Hearst, along with *The Yellow Kid*, *Krazy Kat*, and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (n.p.). The newspaper Sunday comics reproduced on the back pages of Spiegelman's comic draw attention to the ephemeral nature of comics; newspapers were thrown away, comics were regarded as frivolous and as entertainment. This is in stark contrast to the large cardboard pages of *No Towers* and to the modern perception of graphic novels as collectables and as literature. Permanence and ephemerality rub up against each other in the sheer physicality and make-up of Spiegelman's book, as well as in the perception of the medium itself. Spiegelman has said, "I think in a crisis one looks to one's culture, particularly to give validation to why one would want that culture to survive" (qtd. in Fleischer 2004). The two sections of *No Towers*, Spiegelman's own comic book pages alongside those of the past, also reflect the late 20th century notion that the past extends into and shapes the present, discussed in Chapter One, and is especially prominent when Spiegelman states in an interview the importance of interlacing the past with the present: "When I began to finally think of this as some kind of

book, the notion of what's ephemeral and what will last became central to that project...a dialogue between past and present" (qtd. in Fleischer 2004).

In the last page of the comics, Spiegelman's page layout is comprised of two large panels in the shape of the Twin Towers, with smaller panels inside which conjure windows (see figure 23). The bottom panels in the second Tower are again the glowing bones, and as they gradually fade to black, they echo the cover of *No Towers*. Spiegelman's text "Happy Anniversary" in the final panel is sarcastic in tone; it resists the traditional commemorative practice of celebrating and marking anniversaries of tragic events. It is difficult not to think of Adorno when Spiegelman writes in *No Towers*, "New Yorkers needed poetry to give voice to their pain, culture to reaffirm faith in a wounded civilization" and that the only thing that could help him see something other than the burning Towers were "old comic strips; vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the 20th century" (n.p.). In an interview, Spiegelman also says, "the way other people were listening to and reading poetry, I found myself able to take comfort from old newspaper comics that were



Figure 23. Spiegelman, 2004, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, page 10.

used for wrapping fish;" he returned to a sense of the ephemeral when confronted with the impossibility of permanence (qtd. in NPR 2004).

In Chapter One I included a discussion of Adorno and the risk he understood was involved in rendering traumatic events artistically. I also pointed out that, like Rancière, Adorno worried that poetry and art would make an atrocity like the Holocaust beautiful, endangering the remembrance of it as horrific. Discussions about art that take on representations of trauma must contend with the limitations, ethics, and questions involved in representation. In other words, work must illustrate and include the impossibility of representing the horrors of the Holocaust, for example, as part of the artistic process and meaning. Young had a similar concern, yet argued that with the rise of the counter-monument, we might see ourselves in what he called an anti-redemptory age.⁵³ I think Adorno's use of reconciliation can also help account for Spiegelman's statement about poetry and his need for past comics. For Adorno, reconciliation is not used in the typical sense of 'resolution.' Instead, reconciliation is the philosophical framework through which it is possible for art to account for traumatic history. His use of reconciliation excludes art that seeks to show unity or peace. Essentially, Adorno is not interested in the kind of art that would divest the viewer or reader of having to face the horror of the Holocaust, thereby forgetting it or never being aware of it. Instead, Adorno emphasizes what he calls authentic art, art which is against conformity and societal expectations.⁵⁴ This type of art should create a negative or discomfoting experience for the reader or viewer through an emphasis on disjointedness, chaos, and absurdity. We can see this working in

⁵³ See his article in *Harvard Design Magazine*, 1999, and his *Art of Memory*, 2002.

⁵⁴ See Brian O'Connor's "Adorno on the Destruction of Memory" and this idea of Adorno's is found in *Aesthetic Theory*.

counter-monument projects and in *No Towers* with its chaotic and clustered pages, as well as through its commentary on media and mediated images of 9/11. If we agree with Adorno's premise of authentic art and reconciliation, and I think we can, then the graphic counter-memorial is a type of authentic art that promotes sustained contemplation and problematizes how war and conflict are memorialized and remembered.⁵⁵

In this chapter I have read Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* against Young's counter-monument theories and have argued for *No Towers* to be understood as a graphic counter-memorial. Part of this argument is made through my analysis of Spiegelman's intense and chaotic attention to form, presence and absence, permanence and ephemerality through both the physicality and artistic style of his comic. The two sections of the comics text, along with the early American comic strips and characters, situate the comic within a larger idea of history and reflect Spiegelman's aim to create a counter-narrative. Another part of my argument is made through my insistence that this comic be read not as an autobiographical account or exclusively as a personal treatment of Spiegelman's witnessing of 9/11, as other scholars and critics have done, but rather as a complex negotiation of public memory and space shaped by the personal. As well, I have argued that by including the reality of 9/11 and the media coverage of the attacks, *No Towers* offers a critical examination of mainstream media's filtering and distortion of 9/11 and its aftermath. As Spiegelman observes, comics' ephemerality is perpetually juxtaposed to a world that is increasingly marked by war and conflict, "Where the world was ending, as always, on the front page" of the newspapers (as qtd. in Fleischer 2004).

⁵⁵ There might be a sense of irony that comics can act as Adorno's 'authentic' art, given that they are the mass-market products of what he and Horkheimer called 'The Culture Industry.'

The final chapter is devoted to an American mainstream comic book series written by Brian Wood and illustrated by Riccardo Burchielli entitled *DMZ* (2005-2012), published by Vertigo. This final chapter will argue that, like the previous comics studied here, *DMZ* is working within the graphic counter-memorial genre. Through its inclusion and treatment of 9/11 and America's invasion of Iraq, the series is a sustained contemplation of reporting on war through a media lens. *DMZ* also draws from autobiography and New Journalism and reportage and echoes the counter-monument projects described by Young. What makes this especially true and compelling is that both the context within the story and the publication of the series parallel the Iraq war and offer a response to it. Analyzing this series as part of the graphic counter-memorial genre gives us another example of the type of resistance that comics offer—and have been offering—to singular historical narratives and sociopolitical rhetoric.

Chapter Five:

Drawing and Picturing War: Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli's *DMZ*

"The narrative ends in rubble and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative."

- Don DeLillo, *Harper's* (2001)

***DMZ* and the Representation of War**

My focus throughout this dissertation has been to create a theoretical framework for analyzing a group of contemporary comics that treat the complex ethical dimensions of collective memory. I build this framework largely from Young's understanding of counter-monument projects; these types of monuments do not reflect traditional modes of memorialization wherein a traumatic event or war is made to be seen as singular, fixed, and complete. Counter-monuments dispel this type of dominant narrative and instead engage in a negotiation of public space and public discourse, while also inviting participation from viewers and multiple ways of representing history. In extending Young's theory of how sustained contemplation of trauma and violence of war is part of the counter-monument project to the comics medium, I have demonstrated the graphic and textual mechanisms of comics that allow for this type of memory work.

The previous chapter focused on Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and made a case for the comic as part of my graphic counter-memorial genre. I argued that by incorporating the reality of 9/11 and the media coverage as Spiegelman saw it, the comic is operating as a challenge to how the media portrayed 9/11, its immediate aftermath, and the impulse to memorialize the event in traditional, and often nationalistic, forms. Through Spiegelman's intense attention to the comics medium itself—its physical size and shape; the play between presence and absence; and the intricate use of formal features—the

comic also offers a unique way to understand the conventions of the counter-monument or counter-narrative in comic book form. Instead of assessing *No Towers* as an autobiographical account of grief and trauma, I argued that the comic is a sustained contemplation of a traumatic event, which is what James E. Young calls for in order for memory work to begin.

In this chapter I aim to situate Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli's comics series *DMZ* (2005-2012) within this theoretical framework and argue for the series to be treated as a graphic counter-memorial. Including this series in my dissertation alongside the shorter (self-contained) comics of Sacco and Spiegelman provokes two possible questions. First, how can I treat this fictionalized comics series in the same way as the non-fiction texts of Sacco and Spiegelman? Second, if *DMZ* is a fictionalized version of an imagined war, what is it challenging and what is it counter to?

From the outset of my dissertation, I argued that the works studied here mingle fiction and non-fiction and objectivity and subjectivity; I have demonstrated the ways in which both Sacco and Spiegelman, as well as Pekar and Eisner before them, incorporate aspects of subjectivity into their comics to re-trace histories and collective memories that run counter to dominant narratives. *DMZ* can be thought of along these same lines. It is a fictional war in which readers are meant to recognize post-9/11 America, and can thus be read as going against dominant representations of the Iraq war. Instead of depicting a journalist headed to Iraq to report on civilian life, as we could imagine Sacco doing, Wood and Burchielli situate the Iraq war in America. The reader is witness to conflict through the distortion of American mainstream news in ways that resemble how Spiegelman framed his experience of 9/11. Secondly, I argue that even though *DMZ* is a work of fiction, it can be

read alongside the tradition of comics upending dominant historical and sociopolitical narratives. In straddling fiction and non-fiction, or fiction that reflects and re-traces real moments in history, *DMZ* offers another approach to thinking about a complex historical event.

As I established in the introductory and second chapters, the history of comics is tied to strategies of reportage, and to politics and dissent. I showed this by tracing a brief history of American political cartoons, detailing how many of those mechanisms of opposition are still used in contemporary comics. Comics' cultural marginality, even comics published by more mainstream publishers like Vertigo, gives them their potential to counter dominant narratives in society, and to offer a different form of documentation and collective memory. As Hillary Chute observes, the seriality of comics is a principle feature that works well for documentary, calling attention as it does to parts of a whole (in serialized comics, parts would refer to issues and story arcs) that develop into an overarching and ongoing story.

In this chapter, I will examine how *DMZ* has been attentive to war as a mediated event in similar ways as Sacco and Spiegelman, with a particular focus on the incorporation of newspapers, TV news, and photographs. Treating *DMZ* as a graphic counter-memorial makes it possible to see the lines connecting the aesthetic strategies of Kurtzman, Sacco, and Spiegelman and their treatment of war and its public consumption. Moreover, I will show how a fictional comics about a real war can account for and contribute to questions about representations of war, collective memory, and memorialization.

Iraq in America: *DMZ*'s Subversive Framework

Brian Wood is an American-born comics writer and illustrator working both as an independent and with major publishers like DC and Marvel. He is best known for his early works such as *Channel Zero* (1997, illustrated by Becky Cloonan), *Demo* (2003, co-created with Becky Cloonan), *Local* (2005, co-created with Ryan Kelly), and *The Couriers* (2003-2005, illustrated by Rob. G.), which earned him a cult-like status among 'indie' comics readers and critics. More recently, his creator-owned works such as *The Massive/Ninth Wave* (2012-14; 2015), *Northlanders* (2008-2012), *DMZ* (2005-12), and now *Starve* (2015-16) and *Briggs Land* (2016-present) have put him on bestselling lists and on an international stage. As well, his company-owned work includes *Star Wars* (2013-14) and *The X-Men* (2012-15). His recent comics straddle past and near-future contexts, and are known for world-building and stories that address socio-political, environmental, and historical issues; they are commonly violent and explore controversial perspectives. Many of Wood's comics ask readers to contend with how complex stories and people are challenged by social and political pressures. At a basic level, much of Wood's work is about expressing conflict (both historical and contemporary) and competing accounts of events on both global and personal stages; conflicts between peoples, relationships, ideologies, countries, and environments are the root of many stories in his comics.

Published between November 2005 and February 2012 by Vertigo, *DMZ* is set in an undetermined near future after 9/11, and parallels much of the aftermath of the American war in Iraq. The compelling and controversial aspect of the comics is that this war is portrayed as taking place, not in Iraq, but in New York City. The war is understood as a second American Civil War in which the U.S. is divided into anti-government militias in

New Jersey, calling themselves the ‘Free States’ or the ‘real’ Americans, and the United States of America (Brooklyn, Queens, and Long Island). Manhattan is transformed into a demilitarized zone (the DMZ) and is largely occupied by disaffected residents who either refused to leave or who were caught there when all channels out were closed off. Those living outside of Manhattan view the DMZ residents as uncivilized traitors and ‘others.’ The residents attempt to rebuild their communities and survive, while being subjected to violence from all sides of the war.⁵⁶

The comics series is told through Matty Roth, a photojournalist intern with a media company called Liberty News, a news agency that comes to resemble something like Fox News. Roth is assigned his first job: accompanying the famous photographer Viktor Ferguson and his news team into the DMZ. They are the first to enter the DMZ and their assignment is to capture the ‘real’ story of those who live there and what life is like caught in the middle of a second Civil War. Ferguson is the first journalist character that the reader is introduced to in the comic, and he resembles the journalists Sacco criticizes in *Safe Area Goražde*: vultures who swoop in to get their story and leave. Snipers shoot down the Liberty News helicopter and Roth, the only survivor, is abandoned in the DMZ, left with little more than his press pass, camera, cell phone, and laptop. The series follows Roth as he

⁵⁶ *DMZ* has been described as dystopian fiction and near-future world-building fiction. New York has long been the setting for dystopian fictions. For example, Anna Bowman Dodd’s “The Republic of the Future” (1887) is a dystopian novella set in 2050 in New York and is considered a prominent voice among a new generation in the late 19th century responding to utopian stories. See “A World Neither Brave Nor New: Reading Dystopian Fiction After 9/11” (2006) by Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol for a more contemporary history of imagining terror in New York through fiction and film leading up to and beyond 9/11. For a history of dystopian fiction in pop culture, See Gregory Claeys’s *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017). Thank you to Candida Rifkind for pointing me in this direction in considering the wider positioning of *DMZ*.

contends with two things: trying to reconcile being a reporter reporting on a chaotic and violent war in a time when media and government are corrupt, and the reality that the sacrifices he makes in pursuit of the 'truth' of the war might in part be perpetuating the war. Roth breaks his contract with Liberty News after learning they are in partnership with the government and the army, and starts reporting as a freelancer for Independent World News (IWN), which is considered a more liberal agency without ties to the government. I mention these plot points because the start of the series sets up two contrasting types of reporters and types of media, which brings war as a mediated event to the forefront of the comic's narrative.

Matty is the only reporter filing news stories from the DMZ and this affords him privilege and access, but also puts him in danger from state-run media like Liberty News, the militias, and the government, all of which want to shape a very particular narrative about the DMZ. This is also a source of tension throughout the comics series: to whom is Matty reporting and about whom is he reporting? Should his stories and work be for the people living in the DMZ, or should they be for the people beyond the warzone, a window into it? Just as Harvey Kurtzman was motivated to depict a version of war in comics that was not glamourized, Wood is also concerned with the images and rhetoric of 9/11 and war that circulated through the media. As Wood points out, "I didn't want to present anything as 100% right or wrong or who's on the right or wrong side of the conflict in the story. I didn't want to favor any one side, but really highlight the fact that both sides do horrible things in war" (qtd. in Irving 211). This is reflected in Matty's work as a photojournalist and reporter because he ends up no better than the mainstream media and

the corrupt figures against which he writes. In the end, Matty is found guilty of smuggling nuclear weapons into the DMZ and turns out himself to be ethically problematic.

Wood, thus, stymies our impulse to see times of war and conflict through a singular perspective that pits 'good' against 'bad' or 'left' against 'right.' As he remarks, "I'm interested in the idea of people with binary points of view being challenged by the fact the world doesn't work that way...I get huge satisfaction as a writer in putting characters in situations where they are challenged and held to account" (Wood personal interview). He also states that part of writing *DMZ* and Matty's character development was to deliberately explore the grey areas of the Red and Blue American political system: in the comic, "I could explore the complexities of a post-9/11 consciousness by probing both sides of the conflict and see how I felt, what I wrote, and how I reacted to the characters...To this day, people don't know which side in *DMZ* is meant to represent the left and right wing" (Wood personal interview). Exploring a multitude of perspectives and eschewing a nationalistic portrayal of war are what, I argue, let us see this comics in terms of a graphic counter-memorial. Its aim is not to console the reader and memorialize aspects of 9/11 and the Iraq invasion; instead, it challenges the reader to question the social and political mechanisms through which consolation and redemption are typically offered in times of war, and when recollecting war.

There are two other main characters alongside Matty in the comics, Zee Hernandez and Wilson, who help establish the comics' structure and the way it borrows from autobiography and New Journalism. Zee is a medical student when the war starts and she decides to stay in Manhattan despite the evacuation to help those who are inevitably left behind. With the hospitals in the DMZ inoperative, Zee makes what she refers to as

neighbourhood rounds to help people whose suffering ranges from illness to gunshot wounds to missing limbs. She acts as Matty's guide and 'translator' in the DMZ. She is similar to Edin in *Safe Area*, she is a "good-natured, sure-footed guide to the horrible and glorious mysteries of a place that had been pushed off the end of the world and then yanked back in the nick of time" (Sacco 12). It is Zee who explains to Matty that the people who live in the DMZ are neither the insurgents nor the savages news reports depict for people outside of the DMZ. In the first issue, Zee takes Matty on one of her medical tours and they cross a site where dead bodies have been wrapped in canvas and hang from a fire escape. The message these bodies convey, Matty is told, is that outsiders do not belong here. Matty starts photographing the bodies but is quickly admonished for this by Zee: "Respect. You can't just waltz in and start taking pictures of whatever you see! Nobody knows you here!" (Wood vol. 1 26). His status as the only reporter in the DMZ does not shield Matty from registering as an outsider. Just as Sacco is able to leave Goražde with a UN convoy, so too does Matty also have the early opportunity to be extracted and return home: "I should be thinking about turning on that cell and asking them to get me the fuck out of here...I could be back home in Southampton in a couple of hours" (Wood vol. 1 72). Ultimately, Matty stays in the DMZ and continues to report on the war.

Another character important to the series is Wilson, who essentially runs and protects Chinatown with a gang of young men referred to as his 'grandsons' in the DMZ. The grandsons protect Chinatown by keeping tourists away and keeping Chinatown off the radar of the Free States and the government. He too acts as a guide and moral compass to Matty. Wilson provides Matty with re-jigged pieces of technology such as an untraceable cell phone and a de-bugged laptop so as to not be traced or followed by Liberty News or the

government. Throughout the comics, both Zee and Wilson remind Matty of his role and his responsibility in the DMZ. As Matty states, “This is all because of me. Just my presence in the DMZ is volatile and affects my friends as much as it affects me. I have a responsibility” (Wood Vol. 2 112). The notion of responsibility, like that of objectivity, is questioned through the character of Matty, and reaffirms the need, within the context of a counter-memorial project, constantly to reflect on the responsibilities that come with representation.

What these two characters give us is a way to see Matty’s purpose more broadly: to examine the war and its impact on the residents in the DMZ. Matty’s outsider status is established early and carries on through the entire series, despite his deep desire to be on the inside. This, along with his early acknowledgement of his potentially negative impact on people in the DMZ, helps make Matty a multifaceted character in the series. He is, simultaneously, a journalist who interviews and observes people, a first-person narrator who also builds friendships with people, and a witness through whom the reader gains multiple and conflicting perspectives about the war. This challenges the reader to consider those perspectives against their own understanding of war, in particular the Iraq invasion, and of the American rhetoric at the time that the comics so clearly reflects. This, I argue, is what not only enables a comparison between Wood and Burchielli, Sacco, and Spiegelman that is so valuable, but also what allows us to see *DMZ* as a graphic counter-memorial. In doing so, the comics offers up a sharp and accessible criticism to post-9/11 America.

***DMZ* and the Counter-Monument Model**

In order to analyze and understand *DMZ* as a graphic counter-memorial, it is first important to offer a picture of what *DMZ* borrows from autobiography, New Journalism, and memory studies similar to the one I developed to demonstrate Sacco's and Spiegelman's strategies in their comics. As I have shown, the parallels between the counter-monument and what I call the graphic counter-memorial stem from participatory storytelling, the disruption of and intervention in dominant historical and political narratives, and the use of temporal and spatial devices to account for multiple perspectives on history. Like the monuments described by Young, the graphic counter-memorial is a genre through which comics creators can challenge supposedly accepted truths about war and history. While employed to different ends, what Wood shares with Sacco and Spiegelman is his use of the artist-reporter on the page, the depiction and narrative strategy of immersive journalism, and the incorporation of real people and events related to 9/11 and its aftermath.

Sacco and Spiegelman draw themselves into their comics and their self-portraits function as the artist-reporter and artist-witness on the page. While Wood and Burchielli do not use Matty as a way to represent themselves, Matty as the reporter-witness first-person character does function similarly to the self-portraits of Sacco and Spiegelman. In the introduction to *Journalism*, Sacco discusses the myth of objectivity and acknowledges the storytelling advantages of a reporter on the page by showing the interactions he has with the people he interviews. Sacco makes a case for an "*informed* imagination" in generating his comics, and the importance of "embrac[ing] the implications of subjective reporting and...highlight[ing] them" (XIII original emphasis). Wood also expresses this

tension through Matty, demonstrating that objectivity is always the ideal that cannot be achieved. Matty starts off naïvely thinking that every real journalist is totally objective, “but he almost immediately finds himself in conflict with that ideal, and the whole run of *DMZ* is a series of instances where Matty runs up to, blurs the line, or outright blows that line away” (Wood personal interview).

While Matty is neither Wood or Burchielli, the series still borrows extensively from the autobiography genre, and this is significant because it is the mechanism that so readily invites the reader into the context of the story. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, the reader is as implicated in Sacco’s actions on the page as much as Sacco himself is, and this is a direct result of Sacco drawing himself as both flawed or exaggerated and as the subjective reporter. In the case of *DMZ*, the reader is equally burdened by Matty’s challenges and actions; readers are forced to question their alignment with a character like Matty, but also to question their own personal ethics in perceiving the politics of war.

Wood purposely draws on autobiography and the concepts of immersive journalism and the imbedded reporter for his character of Matty partly as a fan of Sacco’s work, but also because it situates the reader in a particular way. As Wood states, “Matty was the eyes and ears for the reader, who could discover and learn and experience events in the story as he did” (personal interview). As Michael A. Chaney writes, the “narrating I, or the self that tells the events of a life and gathers together stray details of experience into the legible structures of a story, is therefore pried away from the narrated I that functions as an actor in the story” (3). Matty is the narrating I; the reader sees his work as a photojournalist, but also his life and his interactions with others living in the DMZ, all in the first-person. Furthermore, Matty’s narrative boxes that overlay many panels and pages throughout the

series culminate at the end of the series into his book about being a reporter in the DMZ. In the final issue of the series, an epilogue issue, the reader becomes aware of what the series was all along: Matty's extensive notes, research, interviews, and photos of his time in the DMZ. Wood states, "all those narration captions were meant to be recorded thoughts, and by the end of the series he had written a book" (personal interview). Sacco and Spiegelman, I argued, are the artist-reporters on the page and this, in non-fiction comics, gives the reader simultaneous perspectives on events; the reader sees the events as depicted by the comics creator *and* how the comics creator came to know those events simultaneously. Wood creates this dynamic too; Matty is the reporter and we follow the events *and* how he came to know them, through both *DMZ* the comic and Matty's book within the comic at the end.

Young describes such complexities in design as important features of counter-monuments. He claims that understanding how traumatic historical events happened and how the remembrances of events are passed on to people who did not directly experience those events are of equal importance. Counter-monument artists, he says, are concerned with how to make meaning out of an event that seems beyond representation. All of the comics I have studied here tell history as a composite record of both direct and indirect experiences, whether those experiences are distorted by time and space or by media and memory. In other words, Sacco is in Goražde, but is not directly experiencing the war outside of his role as a comics creator and journalist; Spiegelman and Wood experienced 9/11, but largely through the distortions of the media. These comics force the reader to acknowledge and consider a composite record of experience, collective memory, and distortion in a medium that can show this all at once. And for Young, this is critical to

understanding history and its retelling: “without knowing how such history is being mediated for the next generation and why it is deemed so important to remember in the first place...For these phenomena, too, are part of the history that is being told after the fact” (*At Memory’s Edge* 7).



Figure 24. Wood and Burchielli, *DMZ*, panel from Vol. 3, page 34.

One of the ways *DMZ* visualizes 9/11 and its aftermath is through the incorporation of other media and of Matty’s research. The reader often sees Matty working—writing, recording, interviewing, photographing—and this serves to remind the reader of Matty’s role, and what exactly he (and the comic) is engaged in (see figure 24). The comics emulates what Young describes as historical inquiry that “instead of enforcing an absolute breach between what happened and how it is remembered,” allows us

also to “ask what happens when the players of history remember their past to subsequent generations,” which he claims is “not memory only but also another kind of history-telling” (*At Memory’s* 11). *DMZ* does this history-telling by paralleling real events and people. Like the news agencies in the comics I mention above, there are other recognizable “real” entities and events throughout *DMZ*. For example, Trustwell Corp. in the comics is the corporation tasked with rebuilding the DMZ and it shares many traits with Halliburton and Blackwater in America. A massacre in the comics referred to as Day 204 of the war resembles the fallout from the November 2005 massacre in Haditha, a town in Iraq. As

Wood explains in an interview, “I rely heavily on Iraq’s insurgency model for *DMZ*...As Iraq proves, you don’t have to be a standing army to oppose a larger force. All an insurgency really has to be is an idea. It doesn’t have to win to in, it just has to exist to win. *DMZ* depicts that kind of battle within the U.S.” (qtd. in Walker 2008). The comics also alludes to the infamous Abu Graib photographs with Matty as the ‘hooded man’ in one example and with images of hooded men in orange jumpsuits being led by the military in another.

Another example of how the events in the comics are made to be familiar to the reader is through the depiction and details of New York City. Wood and Burchielli depict New York as bombed, ruined, and sometimes desolate and on fire; they juxtapose “Manhattan as a combination of Baghdad and post-Hurricane Katrina of New Orleans...putting our own citizens through the same trials that civilians in those bombed-out and battered cities face today” (Harlaub 2006). Wood’s decision to put the Iraq war on U.S. soil and to parallel events and media representation of the aftermath of 9/11 produces a counter-narrative structure that disrupts the official narrative of 9/11 and the rhetoric surrounding the invasion of Iraq. The comics’ premise rejects any form of memorialization or consolation and instead, literally, brings the war ‘home.’

On putting the Iraq war in New York City, Wood has said that when he wrote the first pitch in 2003 for what would become *DMZ*, 9/11 was “still very raw...and that was complicated by the fact that the Iraq invasion was pending” (personal interview). Instead of creating a non-fiction comics, which was an option, Wood took an action-adventure comics approach to “create an environment where I could work all this out on the page” alongside the reader (personal interview). Riccardo Burchielli has also commented on using New York as a war zone that reflects not only the conflating of Iraq and America, but also a

conflict between media, information, and representation. Burchielli says, “In New York we obviously have major news agencies. And they fight each other on their information...These agencies are the real villains of history, because during the first five years of this war [in Iraq] they knowingly spread counter-truths....” (qtd. in Albray 2008).

Reporting and Recording the News: *DMZ*’s Use of News Media

The incorporation of newspapers and TV screens throughout the series is a strategy that *DMZ* employs to make visible Matty’s research and to juxtapose the competing narratives of war in the comics. In a series of pages and panels (figure 25 below), Matty is illustrated conducting research on what New York was like before he arrived in the DMZ and before the war broke out for a story he is writing. This sequence of panels shows Matty reading through *The New York Times*’ pages that report on the lead up to the war; the newspaper pages are made to look worn and they attest to a past Matty is distantly related to. Like Spiegelman’s inclusion of the *Sunday Funnies* strips, newspapers here help align *DMZ* with another form of media recording war, one that is authoritative and yet no longer relevant. In the first panel, across Matty’s hat is the word ‘Press,’ positioning him as one informed voice among the others he is reading. We could say that in times of war and crisis, Matty is turning to newspapers and reportage, just as Spiegelman turned to comics. I make this connection to highlight the similar mechanisms and tropes used by comics creators in order to intervene and call attention to the intersections that graphic counter-memorials offer between public discourse, collective memory, and art.

Central to my analysis of these comics and my understanding of Young's theory has



Figure 25. Wood, *DMZ*, panels from vol. 1, page 182.

been the negotiation of presence and absence: whose voices or stories are absent from the historical record.

Matty's narrative boxes overlap the newspaper text and essentially mingle with the competing narratives.

Whereas in Kurtzman's, Pekar's, and Eisner's comics their research is invisible, Matty's research (and by extension, Wood's) is made visible, re-created as part of the narrative and structure of the comics. What is more, as a serialized comics, *DMZ* would

have appeared episodically,

similar to how newspapers and magazines are published. As I indicate in Chapter Two, we can see the modern serialized comics as having roots in early political cartoons, and I think they still operate as the “mechanical reproduction of images finally allowing art to be consumed by the masses rather than the privileged few, with cartoonists leaping at the

chance to communicate complex political situations via their deceptively simple form” (Sneddon 2013).

TV news also features prominently throughout the comics series. Characters are watching TV screens, and the TV is often visible on the page; the panel frames are often beveled in order to mimic a TV screen; and black narrative boxes with the text of Liberty News frequently overlay panels with content that is often incongruent with that text. A common example of this in the comics is when Liberty News reports one thing, while something different is happening in the DMZ. For example, Liberty News reports that little to no action or fighting has taken place in the DMZ during a cease fire, while visually the panels show violence erupting in the DMZ. This creates a coexistence of multiple narratives and perspectives, while also demonstrating propaganda-as-news, on the same page, perhaps even in the same panel. Hatfield refers to this as a tension in comics: “comic art is composed of several kinds of tension, in which various ways of reading—various interpretative options and potentialities—must be played against each other” (“An Art of Tensions” 132). For the reader, the simultaneity and immediacy of the incongruent message reinforces the commentary on how much media can shape and distort a public’s understanding of war and conflict. By incorporating entities like *The New York Times*, Fox News, and Halliburton, and by mimicking documented American massacres or bombings in Iraq, *DMZ* draws the reader into the context of the comic. In doing so, the comic functions as a form of documentary and commentary on war as a mediated event.

However, it is not just what is familiar in this comic that deserves study. To be sure, anyone familiar with the language of war broadly speaking would recognize concepts like ceasefire, suicide-bombers, friendly-fire, militias, and insurgents, all of which appear

throughout the series. The series also depicts the kind of violence and brutality of war that is typically censored, restricted, or otherwise banned from mainstream media, in an attempt to disrupt the narrative dictated by that mainstream media. The degree to which violence is portrayed in *DMZ* allows us to understand the series as a direct challenge to media representation and the glorification of the war in Iraq, and war more broadly. It is also a form of resistance against forgetting the ongoing 'far away' war that is seemingly removed.

The dominant public discourse during the Korean War that glorified war and the American flag was the catalyst for many of Harvey Kurtzman's war comics; *DMZ* shares a similar catalyst in that the comic is a response to post-9/11 rhetoric. The framework of *DMZ* also represents the kind of fragmentation and violence within American society that was largely overshadowed by the Iraq invasion. As I describe above, New York is divided along government, anti-government, military, and militia lines each claiming to be the 'real' or 'correct' version of America, with Manhattan in the middle as the DMZ. As the comic develops, Wood builds story arcs that show fragmentation within the fragments of society that are caused not just by the ongoing Civil War, but also by the deep unrest and dissention that existed in American society before the Civil War. Much of the comic's commentary on a fragmented America stems from "mirroring events we see in real life where the root causes of bombings or shootings are left unexplored by the media in favor of the 'lone wolf' perpetrator, a concept easier to explain, to digest, and to live with afterwards" (Wood personal interview). *DMZ* counters the idealized narrative of war that dichotomizes the players into 'them' and 'us' or 'soldiers' and 'terrorists,' as those lines exist in complex and challenging ways.

Photography and the Drawn Photograph in *DMZ*

Along with its complex commentary on 9/11, the Iraq invasion, American militarization, and war broadly, *DMZ* also offers a critical study on how mainstream media filters and distorts images of war and violence, which it accomplishes through photography. The use and incorporation of photographs in comics is not new to the medium. Some recent and popular examples include Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam* (2000), which I discussed in Chapter Two, Emanuel Guibert, Frédéric Lemerchie, and Didier Lefèvre's *Le Photographe* (2001-2003), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), and Eddie Campbell's *The Lovely Horrible Stuff* (2012). These examples range from reproducing photographs in comics to drawn photographs. In fact, the interaction between early cartooning and photography can be traced back to the start of the 1900s, and between the comics medium and photography as early as the 1950s, as Nancy Pedri has illustrated.⁵⁷

The photograph, like the frame of a comics panel, has the potential to include and exclude. As Daniel Marrone observes: "the standard photograph pictures a discrete moment, and as such suggests the moments not pictured, somewhere beyond the frame" ("Pictures at a Remove" n.p.). Susan Sontag describes the photo's ability to frame as follows: "the point is precisely to see the whole by a means of a part—an arresting detail, a striking way of cropping" (*On Photography* 170). Sontag's description closely resembles how closure in comics works, according to the frequently used McCloud definition of "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (63). Not just closure, but also the gutter in comics produces, among other things, spaces that puncture, fragment, unify, negate, and/or frame. While not speaking about photography, Chute does highlight that comics can

⁵⁷ See Pedri's 2015 article "Thinking about Photography in Comics."

produce gaps and fragmentary spaces when she says, “for if comics is a form about presence, it is also stippled with erasure—in the interruption provided by the ambiguous spaces of the gutter, its spaces of pause” (*Disaster* 17).

The function of photography, especially drawn photographs, in comics highlights the complexity of representation. The illustrations or cartooning in comics signifies its own making, and as a result, we can see a drawn photograph as calling attention to its own subjective nature as well as the mechanics associated with photography more broadly (Pedri 7). For Pedri, the use of photographs in comics offers the opportunity to critically engage with both the differences and similarities between the two kinds of images or imaging. Like Pedri, I am interested not only in how not only Matty’s role as a photojournalist functions in the comic, but also how the inclusion of his photographs and camera intermingles objectivity and subjectivity and raises questions about representing violence and war, and what this representation means to the reader.

The role that Matty’s photographs play in the comic is tied to reportage, but they also function as an extra lens of media in the comic through which the reader experiences and understands the war. Wood has compared his vision of *DMZ* and its use of 9/11 to his own experience of watching the Gulf War. He states:

I was 18 at the time, and there was a lot of uncertain speculation about the U.S. evoking the draft in order to fight the supposed fearsome Iraqi army...And that conflict was the start of the whole embedded journalist thing, at least with significant visibility, thanks to the rise of 24/7 cable news at the time...So, my credibility in writing *DMZ* was not as an ex-soldier, or an aid worker on the ground, or as anyone directly in contact with that war or any war—it was as someone who watched [what] was on TV. Which may come off a little glib, but it’s significant. The war WAS televised non-stop like some sort of program, and introduced to all of us not just these terrible visuals of a modern war, but a new vocabulary, and the means to discuss [it] with people. *DMZ* is told through the lens

of media for that reason—I knew what that looked and sounded like.
(Wood personal interview)

For Wood, writing *DMZ* was another way to unearth and contemplate his experiences of 9/11, and of the Gulf War, his first experience of war. Concerned as he is with the media's role in constructing understandings and memories of war, Wood's comic takes this into account and makes it part of the re-telling of 9/11.

Matty's role as a photojournalist and his photographs that appear throughout *DMZ* call attention to another way the comic plays with the tension between objectivity and subjectivity and the mediated representation of war. This is something *DMZ* does differently as a graphic counter-memorial than the other comics studied here. Photography is widely accepted as objective, scientific even; drawing, though, is thought of as highly subjective and interpretive because it is done by hand. The former is captured immediately and accurately by the tool of the camera and lens, while the latter is retrieved later by memory and constructed by hand. Since the use of photography in comics has a long history, its appearance in contemporary comics does not reflect an evolution of the medium, but rather, offers the chance to explore our understanding of both photography and comic illustration.

Sontag's *On photography* (1977) and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) both address photography and its relation to evidence and perceived truth. Her central question in both texts is about whether photography has the power to move a viewer to question their understanding of war. "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power," Sontag writes in *On Photography* (5). And even when the image in the photograph is distorted, "there is always a presumption that something exists, or did

exist" (6). In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag provides a brief history of handmade art inspired by war, starting with Jacques Callot's 1633 etchings *The Miseries of War* and Hans Ulrich Franck's 1643 etchings of peasants being slaughtered by soldiers, and then focusing on Goya's *The Disasters of War* etchings produced between 1810 and 1820, which, Sontag claims, "moved the viewer close to the horror" (44). She further claims that Goya's etchings evolved the sense of shock that the viewer was meant to experience when looking at images of war and suffering. "The ghoulissh cruelties in *The Disasters of War* are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer. Goya's art...seemed a turning point in the history of moral feelings and of sorrow – as deep, as original, as demanding." She adds, "With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art," turning its attention to framing the image for the viewer (*Regarding* 44-45). Even as she distinguishes art as being 'made' and photographs as being 'taken,' she remarks, "...the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace...cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude" (Sontag *Regarding* 46).

Subjectivity and the choice of framing, and including and excluding, have often been criticisms aimed at Comics Journalism. The point in this is that both types of images come with a certain level of subjectivity, yet the photograph is perceived as more connected to truth-telling than the drawn image. In what follows, I will analyze what it means for comics to have drawn photographs of trauma, violence, carnage, and war, which are then used to document or provide evidence and testimony. Specifically, Matty's photos and/or the illustrations of war and violence in the comic can be understood as Sontag's call to "awaken, shock, wound" the reader, which adds to my understanding of *DMZ* as graphic

counter-memorial and how Matty's photography and camera produce the kind of disruption and counter-narrative associated with the counter-monument.

Pages and panels that illustrate Matty taking photos as well as drawn photographs in the comic's pages are frequent throughout the series. Figure 26 below depicts Zee and Matty visiting a partially bombed out building that functions as an infirmary where a family lives with several orphaned children; they all are suffering from the repercussions of an explosion. The panels show Matty's camera, typically accompanied by the visually rendered text "klik," facing outward toward the reader; his photos of the children make-up the panels below. The photographs' frames make up the frames of the panels and overlap the present scene in the story. As Matty's text boxes reveal, the bombing occurred as a result of his

presence in the DMZ. This is an early and recurring realization for Matty that he is not only an outsider, but also frequently an unwilling instigator of violence.

In viewing the children's wounds through the photographs, two things happen. First, there is a sense of events being twice mediated; these are drawn photographs taken by a drawn camera and so the tension between the 'being-there' authority of a photograph and the inherently subjective nature of drawing are intertwined and brought to the surface. Secondly, as a result of the first effect, the reader is confronted with a graphic reality of war, one



Figure 26. Wood and Burchielli, *DMZ*, vol. 1, page 43.

that perhaps moves the reader "close to the horror," to again refer to Sontag. This is also accomplished through the perspective of having Matty's camera point toward the reader as if photographing the reader; the reader is thus aligned with the wounded children. Finally, the bottom panel that is only partially revealed by the overlapping photos, shows Matty's

back as the reader views him from outside the building and through the window, producing another frame. This reinforces a visual oscillation between inside and outside, looking and obscured vision. This positioning and repositioning of the reader's view reinforces Matty's outsider status, even as he is permitted into the heart of some of the violence and brutality of war.

Two other examples of where we see Matty's photos and his camera illustrate what Burchielli alluded to as the conflict between American mainstream media outlets, how they disseminate and compete over information, and what Matty's role is in the DMZ. The context of the first example, figure 27, is when



Figure 27. Wood and Burchielli, *DMZ*, vol. 1, page 88.

Matty meets the Ghosts of Central Park—a group of ex-Free States of America soldiers who are now environmentalists saving what is left of Central Park and the zoo—and is given a tour of their underground sanctuary. Soames, the leader of the Ghosts, wants Matty to write a positive story about the work the Ghosts are trying to do. “We want the world to know someone is taking care of the Park and the animals, and maybe we’d get some help,” says Soames, to which Matty responds, “P.S.A.’s aren’t really what I do...what you want is me to make you a commercial” (Wood vol. 1 88). While the Ghosts might be seen as doing

‘good’ by preserving the zoo, Matty’s sense of obligation to report the truth of his experiences is here juxtaposed to the corrupted news that also circulate within the story.

The panels showing Wilson looking at Matty’s photos on his camera and the photo image again imply the use of photos to capture the atrocities in the DMZ. The photo that is drawn in figure 28 is of a body tied to a tree; it is drawn as slightly grainy to indicate the camera screen Wilson is looking at. Wilson’s text is also important here, as he

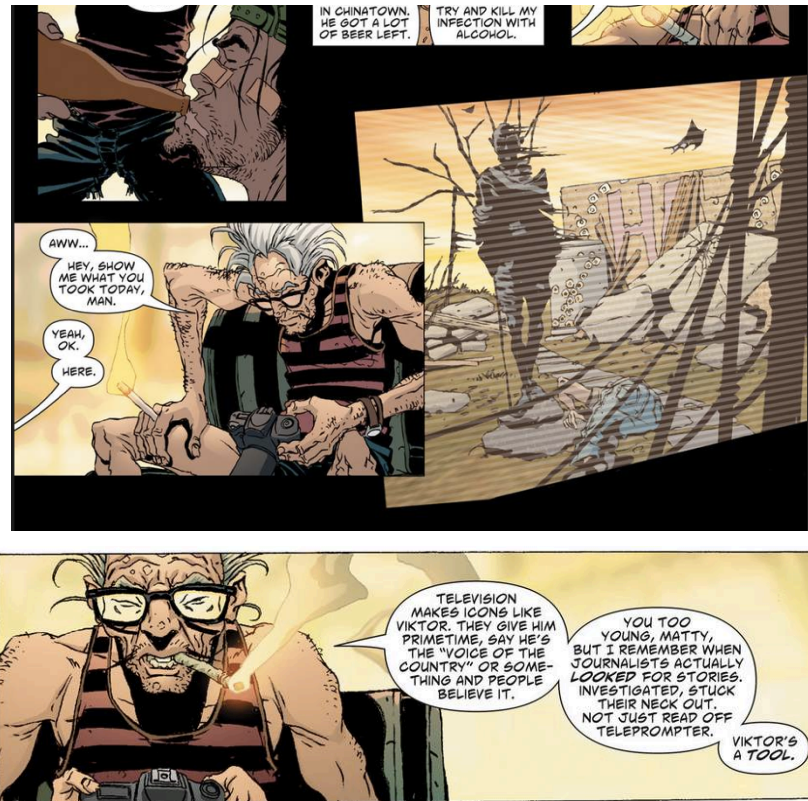


Figure 28. Wood and Burchielli, *DMZ*, panels from Vol. 1, pages 174 and 176.

says, “Television makes icons like Viktor. They give him primetime, say he’s the ‘voice of the country’ or something and people believe it...I remember when journalists actually looked for stories, investigated, stuck their neck out. Not just read off teleprompter. Viktor’s a tool” (Wood vol. 1 174). Wilson is contrasting one type of media, TV broadcast news, with investigative journalism, which he feels is more authentic in informing the public. His comment that Viktor is a tool is of course a colloquial expression meant as an insult, but it also alludes to Viktor and mainstream media as tools of the state or tools of distortion.

Both of these examples show Matty's type of reportage to be against or at least different than the mainstream news media. Moreover, what these examples offer readers is the chance to examine the relationships between photographs as evidence and documentary alongside the distorted and presumed truth projected by mainstream media. This is, of course, coupled with taking photographs as a tourist generally; taking photos of the Central Park zoo and of New York City streets is a common practice for visitors to NYC, and this is set against the destruction and death in the comic. This also reinforces Matty's status as an outsider, or as a tourist, in his role as journalist.

The incorporation of drawn photographs into comics also builds on the medium's inherent nature as a participatory form. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the reader's participation in meaning-making in comics is created and sustained through a variety of comics formal features, most notably closure, perspective, and the use of gutters. The comics reader's involvement in the storytelling largely revolves around how a reader's perspective is situated, how gutters are used to omit content the reader then 'fills' with his/her imagination, and how pace and duration are established by the illustrator.

While photographs are typically theorized as having a close relationship to the thing photographed, drawing or cartooning is commonly thought of in opposite terms: as having little referential tie to the reality of the thing drawn. As Benjamin Woo observes, "while comics do not have a necessary logical relationship to objectivity, they do have such a relationship to the subjectivity of the artist: a drawn image implies that someone drew it" (175). However, when the photographs are also drawn, the objectivity associated with the camera and photograph is inescapably bound to the subjectivity of the comics medium. So, instead of denoting a register of truth, drawn photographs reshape the reader's

understanding of truth-telling “to orchestrate a unique reading experience, one that draws on preconceived notions of readers, that accentuates the mechanics of visual storytelling, and that privileges subjective interpretation” (Pedri 9).

This description has echoes of the strategies of counter-monument projects and their negotiation of representation, and is, I would argue, further underscored by W.J.T. Mitchell when he writes, “but suppose we thought about representation, not in terms of a particular kind of object (like a statue or a painting) but as a kind of activity, process, or set of relationships?” (*Picture Theory* 420). He goes on to wonder about what it would mean for the understanding of representation if, instead of focusing on the referential or indexical ‘thing,’ we focused on representation as “a process in which the thing is a participant, like a pawn on a chessboard or a coin in a system of exchange?” (420). I argue that this line of inquiry has a distinct connection to the comics I have included in my study as graphic counter-memorials and how they are cultural products *as well as* complex participatory experiences that challenge perceived truths about history and conflict. Wood and Burchielli are using photographs, televisuals, and newspapers in a self-reflexive way to call attention to the materiality of the comics and its own making. As Hatfield recognizes, “beyond questions of texture and volume, the materiality of [comics] is often highlighted through embedded visual references to books, other comics, and picture-making in general—things and activities inevitably fraught with special significance for cartoonists and their readers” (65). Similarly, counter-monuments also recall their own materiality and purpose, or their repurposing of the monument’s function, in order to provoke questions about visualizing and troubling history and historical memory.

In this final chapter, I have read Wood and Burchielli's *DMZ* alongside theories of collective memory and Young's counter-monument; in doing so, I have made a case for *DMZ* to be considered as a graphic counter-memorial and I have put particular emphasis on the overall structure of the comics and on the comics' use of other media within its verbal-visual narrative. Photography plays an important role in *DMZ* and in my analysis: how photographs function in comics, specifically a comic about war; how the reader is meant to interact with drawn photographs, especially photos of violence; and how the role of the photojournalist impacts a reader's understanding of documenting and recording war. This look at drawn photographs in a comics parallels my discussions in the previous chapters about the comics as a fragmented medium, but also as a visual medium that forces readers to take in small details and entire pages at once and in succession. The importance of this, as I have demonstrated, is that pages may be read in multiple ways; as Hatfield demonstrates, linear and tabular reading create various reading and meaning-making possibilities, which disrupt dominant narratives in society. In *DMZ*, this kind of reading is not only invited, but is also troubled by the presence of photographs. Taken together, I associate these disruptive strategies with those of counter-monuments as theorized by Young.

As a way to conclude this chapter, I want to refer to the conclusion of *DMZ* itself. The final issue of the series is an epilogue issue set 15 years in the future; the reader learns that, while in jail, Matty has written a book about his experiences of and reporting on the DMZ. This final issue follows a young woman who is reading his book; there are no textboxes or speech balloons from the young woman. The only text is narrative boxes from Matty's book that overlay scenes of a rebuilt Manhattan filled with people who are not wounded or dead.

At first, this final issue might seem like a resolution or as a redemptory ending; however, it is not a resolution at all. Just as counter-monuments do not offer any sense of closure or unity, the final issue of *DMZ* undoes the whole series by re-creating itself into something other than *just* a comics; it is a book within a comics, or as Hatfield terms it, a comics that makes implicit reference to another type of media, which we can argue produces a multimodal reading experience integral to the meaning of the text.

In concluding the series this way, Wood and Burchielli compel the reader to reconsider all the stories, events, and people throughout the comic, as well as the structure of the series. What was read as a serialized comics, is now the memories of each reader, as they are recalled in this final issue. As one of Matty's textboxes reads: "They've cleaned up the city, buried the dead, sanitized the streets...but the corpses litter our collective psyche. We carry the pain, like I've said, and tucked away in quiet corners are plaques and murals that reflect that" (Wood vol. 5 277). These plaques and murals as illustrated in the comic are not commemorating the 'heroes' of the story; instead, they highlight those who would likely be forgotten by traditional memorials or monuments.

To me, Halbwachs' theory that memory is a social phenomenon that is dependent on social structures is emulated in the final *DMZ* issue. In other words, our individual memories are built up by and are dependent upon social structures; collective memory is understood as combined perspectives of the past, collected and shared through communication and media. This final issue also echoes Young's idea of the vicarious past or after-image. The young woman reading Matty's book is wandering the streets of Manhattan visiting the sites Matty recalls in the book for the first time; she is what Young describes as the generation who did not experience the Holocaust, for example, directly, but who is

inevitably shaped by its memory. Young writes that indirectly learning of a traumatic event is a “necessarily mediated experience, the afterlife of memory, represented in history’s after-images....” (*At Memory’s Edge* 4-5). The final issue of *DMZ* is also what Young claims is a preoccupation with not only an event’s circumstances—the details of that historical event—but also with how the event is passed down. This complex account is made visible on the page in this final issue.

This final chapter pictured *DMZ* through the theoretical framework of Young’s counter-monument model and argued for the comics series to be treated and understood as a graphic counter-memorial. The series intertwines fiction and non-fiction, documentary and reportage, and subjectivity and objectivity in order to complicate these categories as well as to re-trace post-9/11 America and the Iraq invasion. The comic’s structure of the Iraq invasion depicted in New York agitates and confronts the dominant narrative about the type of otherness that war often produces, and, like Harvey Kurtzman’s comics discussed in Chapter Two, dismantles singular and unified tellings of war. I have argued that *DMZ* disrupts mainstream media representations of this time in America in similar ways to how Sacco and Spiegelman frame their stories. Important to understanding my analysis of *DMZ* alongside the other works studied here are the ways *DMZ* is attentive to war as a mediated event and how the comic incorporated different types of media such as TV news, newspapers, and photographs. I argued that this fictional comics about a real and familiar war extends theories of representing war, collective memory, and memorialization in the comics medium.

Conclusion:

Graphic Counter-Memorials and Representing War

This dissertation has made a case for the need to recognize a genre I call the graphic counter-memorial that is contemplative of how war is represented, memorialized, and remembered. I have argued that this genre emerges out of Comics Journalism, New Journalism, and autobiography, and that its aims are similar to the counter-monument projects created in Germany in the 1980s. These monuments were created by artists who desired to account for the ways traditional monuments and commemorative practices displace memory. By using the very monument structure they strive to upend, these artists openly reject traditional commemorative practices that aim to fix and master historical events and instead insist upon public interaction and participation with and sustained contemplation of history and trauma.

Using this framework, I have developed a description of the genre of the graphic counter-memorial by first tracing a history of American political cartoons, early American war comics, and the new war comics of Harvey Kurtzman in the early 1950s. I paired this history with Will Eisner's *Last Day in Vietnam* and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor: Unsung Hero* to show a continuation of the aesthetic and storytelling strategies offered by Kurtzman. I argued that, like Kurtzman, Eisner and Pekar disrupt narratives about war and trauma by departing from representing war as glamorous and heroic. I argued that by embedding strategies from Comics Journalism and New Journalism such as subjective reporting, and by drawing the reader into the comics pages and story through formal features, these comics reflect a major change in how war is represented in the comics medium. Moreover, I argued that these comics laid the early groundwork for the more

contemporary comics of Joe Sacco, Art Spiegelman, and Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli, which I investigated in each chapter. Talking about these comics as graphic counter-memorials allows me to draw parallels between the strategies employed by these comics—mingling fiction and non-fiction with autobiography and New Journalism, provoking the reader’s participation—and those of counter-monuments and counter-narratives more broadly. The graphic counter-memorials offer an opportunity to re-examine not only the comics form generally, but also comics that incorporate real sociopolitical and historical events and wars.

I focused on Kurtzman’s war comics in Chapter Two because of the strategies he developed for representing war in the comics medium. By highlighting the realities of war both on and away from the frontlines, and by showing the causalities of American soldiers and inverting the ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ dichotomy, Kurtzman’s comics went against the typical and popular war comics of the time. His comics were unique in that they were realistically drawn and, because Kurtzman was focused on research and the idea that there could be multiple truths when it came to history and memory, they dispelled the singular version of history that occupied mainstream comics. I argued that his comics were important and complex stepping stones for the later comics I studied.

I used Eisner’s and Pekar’s comics to signal an important turning point in comics about war: both comics creators use the reporter figure to show their own subjectivity and to implicate the reader more openly in the storytelling and meaning making. Eisner did this by omitting himself both visually and verbally from the comics; his invisibility and silence, I argued, allows the reader’s perspective and imagination to take precedence. In *Unsung Hero*, David Collier (illustrator) drew Pekar into the comics as the reporter interviewing

Robert McNeill, a Vietnam soldier. Like Eisner, Pekar, too, is silent throughout the comics, urging—obliging, really—the reader to participate in the story. The structure of the comics relies on the visibility of the interview between McNeill and Pekar, which offers a critique about truth and authenticity, as well as problematizes the supposed objectivity of reporting. The interview structure is something that I identify as shared among the comics I study in this dissertation, and because of its inherent sense of participation that it solicits from the reader, it is something that these comics share with counter-monument projects.

As I have demonstrated, Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* makes the interview structure and testimony part of the materiality of his comic, and challenges the conventions of reportage through the act of reporting itself. His interviews are visible on the page as are his interactions with the people he reports about. He draws himself into this comic in order to achieve a blurring of subjectivity and objectivity, some which is integral to re-telling people's lives that have been devastated by war. His use of self-portraiture also acts as a vehicle for readers' understanding; by showing both his work and his interactions, and through manipulating readers' perspective, Sacco makes readers witnesses to the violence and trauma that people in Goražde experienced. This form of witnessing, I argued, is what makes the graphic counter-memorial so powerful: the reader/viewer is implicated in the violence and trauma, which provokes sustained contemplation of that traumatic history.

Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* is his treatment of witnessing 9/11, in which he turns to how media co-opted and shaped the images of this event. He, too, draws himself into the comic and in doing so interrupts or disturbs the dominant media narrative. The format and seriality of *No Towers* also disrupts the sense of unity that media and government sought to establish at the time. The coupling of his own comics pages with

reprints of early 1900s comics at the end of *No Towers*, I argued, establish a connection between comics and journalism, as newspapers, magazines, and comics share a history of seriality.⁵⁸ What is more, the two sections create a temporal connection between histories that reflects the notion in memory studies that the past can overwhelm the present, as I discussed in Chapter One. I argued that the two sections of *No Towers* echo Richard Terdiman's understanding of a memory crisis in the late 19th century, which pictured memory as simultaneously lost and ever-present: people searched for memory while they also felt as if it came to them unbidden. Spiegelman's return to those early American comics as a way to contemplate his witnessing of 9/11 helps extend this memory crisis into the present. Like the counter-monuments' disruption of traditional commemorative practices described throughout the dissertation, I argue that Spiegelman's graphic counter-memorial disrupts the tendency to view history as singular, unified, and linear.

The intense attention that Spiegelman paid to materiality—the size of his comic and the themes of presence/absence and permanence/ephemeral—offers another example of the comics medium operating on the level of the counter-monument. I also claimed that instead of viewing *No Towers* strictly as a personal or individual account of witnessing 9/11, that the comics be understood as a reporter's subjective account; doing this offers a

⁵⁸ This shared history can be connected to the publication of more long-form comics, graphic novels, many of which are also published serially or in installments. Despite the convention of referring to graphic novels as a departure from comic books, serialization is predominant in both comic and traditional literature histories. Charles Hatfield notes this in *Alternative Comics* when he writes, "The practice of serializing long-form comics echoes the well-established (though now unusual) practice of selling novels through part-issue: by library subscription, within magazines, or in successive pamphlets" (154). He goes on to note that throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the English novel was broken up into parts and published serially in volumes and/or periodicals.

reading of the comic as re-negotiating public and collective memory in the comics medium, and this is a strategy I have identified as working in a counter-narrative.

The final comics I included, *DMZ* by Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli, a more mainstream serial comics, helps to link the comics studied in the dissertation and illustrates the complexities of the graphic counter memorial. It also borrows strategies from the autobiography genre and from Comics Journalism in order to establish its fictionalized version of post-9/11 and the Iraq war, which I argued puts this comic alongside those of Sacco and Spiegelman. Like Sacco and Spiegelman, Wood is using testimony to tackle issues of authenticity and truth, representation and reportage. Throughout *DMZ*, the photojournalist character calls attention to the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity in reporting war, the moral obligations of reporting on trauma, and the media lens through which images of violence and conflict circulate. By transplanting the war in Iraq to New York City, and by inviting readers to draw other parallels between historical reality and the story, *DMZ* aims to counter traditional modes of understanding and viewing war.

Though *DMZ* is neither documentary nor non-fiction in the same way as Sacco's and Spiegelman's works are considered to be, the series emulates what Hatfield calls "ironic authentication" in order to mingle fiction and non-fiction, fact and imagination. Hatfield explains his term as "the implicit reinforcement of truth claims through their explicit rejection. In brief, ironic authentication makes a show of honesty by denying the very possibility of being honest" (125-126). *DMZ* is a reflection of the kind of comics art that "is a potentially complex narrative instrument, offering forms of visual-verbal synergy in which confused and even conflicting points of view can be entertained all at once. The interaction

of word and picture...allows for ongoing intertextual or metatextual commentary....” (Hatfield 126-127). Analyzing *DMZ* in this way unifies my purpose in my dissertation, which, in part, has been to address how these comics are attentive to war, trauma, and collective memory; to war as a mediated event; and to how these comics provoke and sustain contemplation of political and historical events.

The comics I studied depict violence, slaughter, and death throughout their pages; they do not shy away from illustrating what many would consider graphic imagery. There is a responsibility in dealing with such images and questions about the relationship between representation and responsibility have been taken up by visual culture and comics studies theorists. W. J. T. Mitchell argues that “There would be no meaning to the notion of ‘responsible representation’ if this were a tautology, if representations were automatically responsible, if responsibilities could be confirmed, affirmed by representations alone. Art, culture, and ideology explore and exploit the gap between representation and responsibility” (421). One way to interpret the gap that Mitchell refers to, I think, would be to discuss what kind of role the reader or viewer has in looking at images of violence and war. Gillian Whitlock also comments on the viewer’s role when she refers to the Abu Ghraib photos. She asserts that, “for what is at stake are fundamental questions about the interpretation of visual images and about their power to relay affect and invoke a moral and ethical responsiveness in the viewer regarding the suffering of others” (Whitlock 965). Part of my argument has been to account for how the comics I study contribute to this discussion about responsibility and representation; I explored how the reader is implicated in the violence depicted on the page through the comics medium’s inherent ability to draw

the reader into the meaning making. This, I argued, underscores the comic's power to both frame and question modes of representation and a reader's response to it.

Counter-monuments take up questions of responsibility, too. The Monument Against Fascism, the pillar that sank into the ground after years of accumulating the inscriptions of visitors, offered a figurative reflection of those visitors and reaffirmed their collective responsibility to contemplate the atrocities of the Holocaust; not to *understand* them. Counter-monuments put the responsibility and burden of memory onto the viewer as opposed to the traditional monument, which can only offer, as Lewis Mumford has observed, "a false sense of continuity, a deceptive assurance of life" (*The Culture* 438). An example of a counter-monument outside of the Holocaust lens that casts responsibility and reflection onto the viewer is Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is a wall that stretches along two acres near the National Mall and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. The wall lists the nearly 60,000 American men and women who died in the Vietnam war; however, the design is such that the granite wall upon which the names appear is so polished that the viewer's reflection is just as prominent as the names engraved in it. The effect has been described this way: "it reflects the face of every visitor across its sea of names, which seems to stretch to the horizon. All Americans are obliquely acknowledged, regardless of their relationship to the event" (Knight 1992). Those who died are reflected, and yet those who visit the site are also forced to reflect, literally and figuratively.

Contrasted to this is another Vietnam memorial, appropriately named "The Other Vietnam Memorial," by Chris Burden. Burden's memorial also includes the names of those killed in the Vietnam war, however, they are written so microscopically on its several copper plates that they are rendered illegible; the people listed are effectively rendered

nameless. The responsibility of memory lies in the viewer's search for the names, much like the German monument entitled "Invisible Monument in Saarbrücken" by Gerz that I mentioned in Chapter Three. The obscured names in both examples forces the viewer to make meaning out of what they search for, not what they find already at a memorial site. What unites these two examples is their ability to engage history in a reflective contemplation and to provoke participation in the viewer.

Comics are a participatory medium for the reader—imaginatively and intellectually—and this participation results in political intervention and in the kind of memory work that Young insists upon. In my focus on comics texts that destabilize standard narratives of history, that crisscross between history and fiction, my dissertation has sought to carve out a new space in comics studies to account for the ways to challenge contemporary memorial culture in the comics form. Comics, I believe, are the most productive and attentive medium through which to make traumatic history visual in a way that incites readers to respond in a reflective way.

Bound up in the question of representation are, of course, questions of authenticity. In many ways, by contesting the objective nature of reportage and journalism through subjective, self-reflexive self-portraiture, these comics assert a different kind of authenticity; one that does not rely on singular facts in order to be or do truth-telling. Like the counter-monument, graphic counter-memorials are self-conscious in their attempt to be authentic, while they also confront the impossibility of authentically representing trauma. These comics do not seek authenticity in the representation of war from a singular perspective; instead, much like the counter-monument projects mentioned in this dissertation, these comics are far more concerned with representation that makes visible

the multiple stories and experiences that signify collective memories of war and trauma. In doing so, what becomes clear is their attempt to explore and exploit the gap between representation and responsibility, to borrow Mitchell's phrasing. I would argue that authenticity in this context is much more about participation than anything else. As Young writes, counter-monuments and memorials "return the burden of memory to visitors themselves by forcing visitors into an active role...In this way, the memorial remains a process, not an answer, a place that provides time for memorial reflection, contemplation..." ("Memory and Counter-Memory" 1999). By emulating this principle of putting the reader into an active and reflective role, the comics I study in this dissertation move beyond autobiography and Comics Journalism and challenge dominant narratives about the wars and histories they retrace.

Throughout my dissertation, I have investigated, using a memory studies framework, how comics generally contend with questions of representation, and specifically how these comics contend with representing war and trauma. Integral to my project has been Young's work on developing a discourse about counter-monuments and the artists involved in their making. A critical element of the counter-monument is the artist's rejection of traditional commemorative practices that, as they saw, are bound up in national ideals; these monuments and memorials lack the crucial ability to produce ongoing contemplation of history and historical trauma. And, as many theorists and writers within visual culture have noted, images—their production, circulation, consumption—

have a role to play. As Butler states, “...there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war....” (827).⁵⁹

These comics are not monuments, nor are they memorials in the conventional and traditional way of thinking. They are conceived to challenge the premise of a completed or resolved history; they offer a sustained contemplation of and commentary on history, trauma, and war in the verbal-visual form. At the end of *Picture Theory*, Mitchell writes that “In short, though we probably cannot change the world, we can continue to describe it critically and interpret it accurately. In a time of global misrepresentation, disinformation, and systematic mendacity, that may be the moral equivalent of intervention” (425). I agree and would add that not only are we tasked with describing, but also with showing and looking.

⁵⁹ Another very recent example of how comics respond to war and politics is found in the publication of *RESIST! An Anthology*, edited by Francoise Mouly and her daughter, Nadja Spiegelman, published by RAW Books and Graphics, an offshoot of *RAW* magazine. Responding to the election of President Trump, this anthology collects a variety of women’s comic works that act as a form of political intervention. For further reading on its inception, see Michael Cavanaugh’s May 22, 2017 article “As Female Cartoonists Respond to Trump Era, a Political Anthology Gains Momentum” in *The Washington Post*.

Appendix

Personal interview with Brian Wood

Sunday, April 24, 2016:

Brooke Winterstein: *Initially, what was the reasoning for putting the war in Manhattan?*

Brian Wood: The question of it being set in NYC or not was never something I considered. I was a New Yorker, I had a history of setting my stories there, it was where 9/11 happened... it was a given. During college in the 1990's I spent a couple years working as a bike messenger, and that experience riding all over the city and exploring its nooks and crannies and really feeling connected to it was profound, and in a way *DMZ* felt like a way to communicate that feeling. Creating an idea for a story that requires a really deep exploration of the city's geography and its street-level culture meant I could finally put my practical experience to work.

Obviously, there was a political aspect to the choice as well. It was 2003 when I first wrote "Wartime", the pitch for what *DMZ* would eventually become. 9/11 was still really raw, we were all still trying to figure out how to feel about it, and that was complicated by the fact that the Iraq invasion was pending. In the back of my head this voice was saying "*DMZ* is your way to talk about this stuff!" but I couldn't voice that out loud, I couldn't handle it at the time. I created this action-adventure framework in order to create an environment where I could work all this out on the page.

Brooke: *What was important to you about making Matty a photojournalist/reporter character?*

Brian: Making Matty a journalist covered a couple bases for me. On the surface, I just thought that was a cool job. You see it depicted in films, and you can get wrapped up in the drama and the action and the romance of it, the rarified access journalists have, the way they can make a difference, how rugged and cool they look with their gear. There was also a real rush of books coming out at the time, accounts from the war's embedded journalists, from both the invasion of Afghanistan but also Desert Storm. So, I had a lot of material to read and reference, as well as a real-life thing to mirror in my fiction and a marketing hook.

From a writer's point of view, having a character be a journalist is a great way to make that character a surrogate for the audience. Matty was the eyes and ears for the reader, who could discover and learn and experience events in the story as he did. For an overwhelming amount of the overall *DMZ* story, nothing

happened on the page that Matty was not physically present for, and this was the reason.

Brooke: *I read in an interview you did a while back that "A nuclear attack on American soil, carried out by Americans, is such a huge thing, and needed a 'lone wolf' type of explain it away in a way that people can understand and accept. Even if it's a lie."⁶⁰*

Can you talk about this a little more? (If you remember saying that at all, and if not, does it resonate with you now?).

Brian: I actually don't remember saying that, but I can figure out what I meant. It referred to the event in the story where the Indian Point nuclear power plant, upstate from NYC, was the site of a nuclear detonation. It was bombed deliberately by the US government as a way to bolster support for its fight against the people seeking to overthrow the country. But in order to obscure that fact, they pinned the blame on a single individual. And that was me mirroring events we see in real life where the root causes of bombings or shootings are left unexplored by the media in favor of the 'lone wolf' perpetrator, a concept easier to explain, to digest, and to live with afterwards.

Brooke: *You've alluded to this and I would like to follow up: Was there any part of the comics or part of Matty (or any other character) that you used as a way to work through or cope with 9/11 and the aftermath? I'm asking this question based on things that Sacco and Spiegelman have said - that they, creating comics, the labour involved, is connected to expressing grief. If you don't think this way, what does the medium of comics do for you in terms of expression, given the serious nature of a lot of your work?*

Brian: I can look back in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and remember thinking and saying some terrible things along the lines of 'finding out who did this and bomb the hell out of them!'. Which, fifteen years later, is both incredibly cringe-worthy, but also easy to place within the context of collective grief. A LOT of my friends were saying the same things, as was much of the country. Still, I had those thoughts, I said those words, I hold biases and suspicions like everyone else, and deny them with overcompensation or denial.

One of the ways *DMZ* helped me deal with these complex, contradictory emotions was in the fact that I deliberately wrote the comic book to be impartial, as much as I was consciously able. It would have been really easy to frame the two sides in this fictional civil war with one being 'bad', "right wing", or 'red', and the other side being the good side that I, as a good little liberal writer, was clearly supporting. *DMZ* would have been a disaster if I didn't walk the line as I did, deliberately creating shades of gray in place of the blue and red

⁶⁰ This is referring to "The *DMZ* Exit Interview" with Brian Wood by Jesse Schedeen on Jan. 3, 2012 in *IGN Comics* (<http://ca.ign.com/articles/2012/01/03/the-dmz-exit-interview>)

of the American political system. I could explore the complexities of a post-9/11 consciousness by probing both sides of the conflict and see how I felt, what I wrote, and how I reacted to the characters. It allowed me to express all sorts of stuff within the story and still maintain a separation between my personal self and the work.

To this day, people don't know which side in *DMZ* is meant to represent the left and right wing, if you can even make that comparison. I've had the Free States Movement within *DMZ* be compared to both the Tea Party and the Occupy movement by fans, and that tells me I did a decent job staying out of it!

Brooke: *The trial of Matty can be read as tensions between truth and justice, ethics, corruption, and accountability. This is the case for The Massive too. This may seem vague, but why are these themes or tensions important to you (I know why they're important, but still)?*

Brian: I'm interested in the idea of people with binary points of view being challenged by the fact the world doesn't work that way. I could hypothesize in a bunch of different ways about why it attracts me - growing up in a fundamentalist religious house, maybe, and rejecting it. Simply getting older and more worldly-wise as a result, perhaps. Or seeing a huge swell of this sort of binary thinking, the my-way-is-the-only-way mentality in politics and social media culture. I get huge satisfaction as a writer in putting characters in situations where they are challenged and held to account. It's just good fiction, it resonates with people's innate sense of justice and balance and anger. A humbled person is, I believe, always a better person in the aftermath. Not better in the sense that punishment has been meted out, but better in that this person has gained experience, perspective, and wisdom.

Brooke: *Following up on that question, something I ask my comics studies students is whether or not they think comics have a social or ethical responsibility to readers? I ask this because there's a lot written about the accessibility of comics and how the medium can be used as a way to disseminate information and commentary much more widely and to various audiences than any other medium. What do you think?*

Brian: It's difficult for me to say that someone who makes comics SHOULD be making them a certain way. I don't think I'm in a position to tell anyone what to do, but what you say is undeniable, that comics is a powerful medium. I'll add to that and say that compared to film or TV, the freedom a creator has to see his or her message make it to the printed page without interference is unparalleled. So, I certainly HOPE that a creator would use the platform they had to add something meaningful to the culture rather than just fart around with things like genre mashups or pastiches that barely scratch the surface.

Something that any creator who's been around a little while can confirm is the reach that comics can have. We moan about the lack of comic stores, or the price

of digital comics, unenthusiastic publishers, and whatever else that seems to get in the way of our work making it out there into the world. But it does get out there, and often it REALLY gets out there and we get reader mail from far-flung places around the globe, from Antarctic research stations, from A-list Hollywood celebrities, from universities that want to order 50 copies for a class, and from musicians that name-check you in songs. And I like to think it's the work that is making the most of itself to say something important, something relevant and human and profound, that makes these journeys.

Monday, May 16, 2016:

Brooke: I'd like to follow up on something you mentioned in the previous email. You mentioned that you're a fan of Sacco's work and that some initial thinking on DMZ revolved around documentary comics or comics journalism. What drew you in to the documentary style for DMZ, what about Sacco's style was of interest to you and how you wanted to pitch and develop DMZ?

Obviously there's the big connection between the ways Sacco and Matty function as characters in this, especially as you said, there isn't much that happens without Matty being involved and witnessing it. Is there anything else you would say about Sacco's influence?

Brian: I was, and am, such a huge fan of Joe Sacco's work and back at the start of *DMZ* my thinking that I could replicate that style was both a reflection of my respect and also something of an overreach, since I don't know who can be Sacco but Sacco. But when my 5-issue *DMZ* pitch was turned into an ongoing [series], it was apparent that a documentary approach probably couldn't be sustained for, potentially, years, so I went with a more straight-forward action comic approach. But I always kept the Sacco influence in the back of my mind and tried to work it in anywhere I could.

Brooke: We give so much credence to the authenticity of photographs, even though we know they can be manipulated. Comics though are considered 'highly subjective' in terms of their truth telling. What I like about Sacco is his explicit commentary on the inflated sense of objectivity in reportage; he continuously rejects the idea that the reporter is objective. What I'm saying about DMZ is that it's part of the new journalism and definitely part of comics journalism, despite it being a mainstream serialized comics (typically, academics don't think that a comics series can be comics journalism) and despite it being supposed fiction or a near future fiction.

Brian: Matty carried a camera, for sure, and part of that was pure visuals. We even used an old 35mm film camera on purpose to evoke the icon of a war photographer from wars gone by. But Matty wrote an awful lot - all those narration captions were meant to be recorded thoughts, and by the end of the series he had written a book. We didn't see this happen on the page in the same way you see Sacco scribbling things down, though.

Objectivity, as an ideal to always be reaching for, was something I enjoyed playing with in *DMZ*. Matty comes into the city, a total rookie, carrying this belief that anyone who's a real journalist is of course perfectly objective. Everyone knows that, right? But he almost immediately finds himself in conflict with that ideal, and the whole run of *DMZ* is a series of instances where Matty runs up to, blurs the line, or outright blows that line [of objectivity] away.

Brooke: *I also think that Matty's photographs or his role as a photojournalist has a lot to do with how people viewed or experienced the war through media. While comics are a medium, there's the extra 'lens' that Matty and the story give the reader.*

Brian: In some very early pitches and in conversations I would have about *DMZ* when it launched, I would talk about how the first Gulf War, in 1990-91, is so heavily influencing my writing the comic book. I was 18 at the time, and there was a lot of uncertain speculation about the U.S. evoking the draft in order to fight the supposed fearsome Iraqi army. I had friends who did join up after high school and were sent overseas. And that conflict was the start of the whole embedded journalist thing, at least with significant visibility, thanks to the rise of 24/7 cable news at the time.

So my credibility in writing *DMZ* was not as an ex-soldier, or an aid worker on the ground, or as anyone directly in contact with that war or any war - it was as someone who watched [what] was on TV. Which may come off a little glib, but it's significant. The war WAS televised non-stop like some sort of program, and introduced to all of us not just these terrible visuals of a modern war, but a new vocabulary, and the means to discuss [it] with people. *DMZ* is told through the lens of media for that reason - I knew what that looked and sounded like.

Brooke: *What was your experience like writing and illustrating the "New York Times" pieces, compared to when you were solely the writer?*

Brian: Well, I'm proud of that work. At the same time, the way I draw is so at odds with how mainstream comic book editors like to work that every little bit was either a battle to get stuff approved, or living with the feeling that my editor was holding his nose the whole time. Which is, well, whatever...it's fine if my work isn't meant for that arena, I don't assume that it should be. But it wasn't so satisfying when I was in the middle of it, though.

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