HILLARY CHUTE

The Space of Graphic Narrative

Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form

It is striking that at a symposium filled with scholars of queer and feminist theory and narratology, such a huge proportion of the critics present are engaged with graphic narrative. "Graphic narrative" refers to work composed in the medium of comics—a form in which the fundamental narrative procedure is one of turning time into space on the page through frames on the page. (Graphic Narrative is also the title of a special issue of *Mfs: Modern Fiction Studies* I co-edited in 2006, in which I was interested in expanding the terminology of "graphic novel" to be more inclusive of nonfiction.) At least *one quarter* of the scholars who presented papers at the 2011 Queer and Feminist Narrative Theory Symposium has done scholarly work on comics. Robyn Warhol has an essay on Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* in *College Literature*; Valerie Rohy published on *Fun Home* in *GLQ*; Ann Cvetkovich published an essay on *Fun Home* in the *Women's Studies Quarterly* special issue on Witness, co-edited by Irene Kacandes; and Julia Watson wrote on *Fun Home* in *Biography.*[1] Susan Stanford Friedman has written on Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and cosmofeminism; Sidonie Smith writes on human rights and comics in the recent anthology *Graphic Subjects*; Rebecca Wanzo, as she announced

1. See Warhol; Rohy; Cvetkovich (this issue of *WSQ* has a three-essay section whose title, "Graphic Narrative as Witness," is borrowed from the original title of my contribution there on Marjane Satrapi); Watson.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

at the symposium, has a second book project examining "representations of African American citizenship in comic art"; Frederick Aldama has edited two volumes about comics, *Your Brain on Latino Comics* and *Multicultural Comics,* the latter of which includes an essay by James Peterson on the cartoonist Aaron McGruder; and David Herman's book *Basic Elements of Narrative* offers a long section on Daniel Clowes's graphic novel *Ghost World.*[2] Graphic narrative, which has emerged only in the past few decades as an area of scholarship, brings to the forefront a form in which we see an overlap of intellectual questions that occupy feminist, queer, and narratological studies: namely, I believe, the issue of *narrative space* and embodiment.

I am going to touch on how I understand comics proposes these connections, and what kind of questions and issues it brings up for thinking, particularly, about the shape of lifewriting today. For me, a burning question for feminist narrative theory is connected to the large number of feminist life narratives in the form of comics.[3] My own recent book *Graphic Women* is on feminism and life narrative—specifically, on comics and life narrative: it examines the work of Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Lynda Barry, Marjane Satrapi, and Alison Bechdel.[4] Among symposium participants gathered at The Ohio State University, we had represented in the conference hall over *half* of the extant critical scholarship on Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic,* a 2006 graphic memoir that quickly ignited academic inquiry.[5]

2. See Friedman, "Cosmopolitanism"; Smith, "Human Rights and Comics"; Aldama, *Your Brain on Latino Comics* and *Multicultural Comics*; Peterson; and Herman. Wanzo, in addition to the forthcoming book, has published several essays and book chapters on comics, including in *Multicultural Comics.* Further, Sidonie Smith, a past president of Modern Language Association, gave her 2011 Presidential Address on "Narrating Lives" and discussed the work of Bechdel and cartoonist Art Spiegelman (*Maus*).

3. Although here I focus broadly on feminisms and comics narratives, there are many specifically queer comics, and these have been and will continue to be of interest for feminist and queer theorists and narratologists.

4. Following Nancy K. Miller's 2007 *PMLA* essay on "entangled selves" in lifewriting, I use *autobiography, memoir,* and *lifewriting*—or, as I prefer, *life narrative*—more or less interchangeably in this essay, although useful distinctions are spelled out, as Miller points out, in Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography,* as they also are on the first page of Yagoda, and in Couser (18). Lifewriting scholars (Miller, Smith and Watson, Marianne Hirsch, Gillian Whitlock, Linda Haverty Rugg, Bella Brodzki, and Leigh Gilmore, among others) have been interested in comics, as have narrative theory scholars (the journal *Narrative* has published interesting and important essays on comics over the past fifteen or so years, such as Jeanne Ewert and Erin McGlothlin's essays on *Maus,* from 2000 and 2002, respectively).

5. *Fun Home* has continued to generate scholarship. See, for instance, Gardiner; I have heard discussions around a proposal for an MLA volume on *Approaches to Teaching "Fun Home"* (which would join their current volume on *Teaching the Graphic Novel,* which came out in 2009).

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

Feminist autobiographical comics were first published in the early 1970s—and antecedents of all sorts, especially in the form of the artists' book, can be traced back earlier—but in the past twenty or so years there has been a veritable explosion of significant feminist, and queer, works in comics form.[6] Howard Cruse's semi-autobiographical *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995), about homosexuality and racism in the Civil Rights Movement, is a major comics work of the 1990s—and a new edition appeared in 2010. (Cruse founded the influential comic book series *Gay Comix* in 1980, spurring the careers of figures like Bechdel.) *Stuck Rubber Baby* appeared in the wake of the groundbreaking success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986 and 1991), a two-volume biographical, and autobiographical, comics work about Spiegelman's father's experiences in Poland during World War II. The *Maus* series, widely acclaimed, won a Pulitzer Prize, and cleared the way for increased attention to "comics as a medium as self-expression," as Spiegelman put it.

A year after Cruse's book, *Seven Miles a Second,* the comics autobiography of celebrated queer artist David Wojnarowicz, who collaborated with cartoonists James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook, appeared: it was published posthumously, became a cult classic and was reissued in 2013. A few years later, famed writer and critic Samuel Delany, with Mia Wolff, published the autobiographical comics love story *Bread & Wine* (originally published in 1999, it is also to be reissued this year). Even more recently, in the past ten years, the substantial critical focus on Bechdel's *Fun Home,* a memoir about the gay daughter of a closeted father that meditates on identifying and defining queerness, has generated, as I discuss here, attention from a wide range of scholars and cartoonists alike. Comics works like Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Marjane Satrapi's international bestseller *Persepolis* (2003), about growing up as a young girl in Tehran in the 1970s and 1980s, have shifted up the field of life narrative.[7] These authors have followed up, too, with further works that

6. For a brief history of feminist and queer autobiographical comics, see *Graphic Women.* There is also a rich range of queer and feminist comics work that is not autobiographical. Attention to queer/gay comics on the whole is increasing, as is evident in the 2012 anthology *No Straight Lines: Four Decades of Queer Comics,* which sold out its first printing by publisher Fantagraphics. Other well-known and relevant queer comics works include Diane DiMassa's series *Hothead Paisan,* Roberta Gregory's *Bitchy Butch,* and Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For,* which ran for twenty-five years. For lesbian comics specifically see the collection *Dyke Strippers.*

7. *Persepolis* came out in four volumes in France starting in 2000; in the United States two volumes appeared in 2003 and 2004. In 2007 Satrapi and fellow comics artist Vincent Paronnaud directed a feature-length black and white animated film adaptation of the same name, which won a prestigious award at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

explicitly address feminism and queerness, as we see in Bechdel's *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* (2012), and Satrapi's *Embroideries* (2005). Other feminist/queer comics in the autobiographical vein include those by Barry (*One Hundred Demons*), Gloeckner (*A Child's Life; Diary of a Teenage Girl*), Kominsky-Crumb (*Love That Bunch; Need More Love*), Diane Obomsawin (*On Loving Women),* Michelle Tea (*Rent Girl*), Ellen Forney (*Marbles*), Ariel Schrag (*Awkward; Definition; Potential; Likewise*), and A. K. Summers (*Pregnant Butch*). Some recent shorter works, among a large proliferation, include pieces by Jennifer Camper in her *Juicy Mother* series.

In their complex word and image form these graphic narratives call fresh attention to the broad category of "narrative" and its direct connection with feminism. Feminist narratologist Robyn Warhol and I have disagreed in the past about the value of what "word and image" as a descriptor of comics makes legible for analysis. I acknowledge her position, which focuses on describing comics as composed of three rather than two separate channels that carry forward the narration, although I continue to use "word and image" here.[8] Warhol and I agree, however, that "the new genre of graphic memoir stretches narratological understanding of how storytelling works," as she articulates it ("The Space Between" 13).[9] One of the benefits of the recent prominence of graphic narrative is that interest in the form has focused attention on the intersection of the long tradition of word and image studies (and visual theory and culture studies) and narratology—or what Warhol calls postclassical narratology.

Further, comics narratives are meaningfully broadening academic discourse across departments and disciplines. As a narrative form that is both

8. Warhol, "First-Person Graphic in Bechdel's *Fun Home,*" a 2008 MLA Convention session; and "The Embedded Looker: Charting Narration in Graphic Memoir," a 2010 MLA Convention session. See Warhol 2011 for further articulations. Warhol's essay "The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*" describes, as in her earlier papers, her preferred schema as the three narrative levels intradiegetic, extradiegetic, and images (3). Although Warhol understands my definition, first articulated in *PMLA,* as too binary, as I explain in *Graphic Women* and elsewhere, I am deeply interested in the empty spaces and gaps of comics, as Warhol is too; our interests are actually quite similar although I do not focus in the way that she does, after Genette, on the two diegetic locations of the prose dimension of comics.

9. Warhol states that postclassical narratology can help comics theory push past the dual model ("Space Between" 5). Postclassical narratology is and will continue to be very useful to scholars thinking about how the form of comics functions. However, I believe Warhol's model doesn't account for the flexibility with which many scholars put the "word and image" rubric to use. Many comics scholars and cartoonists, myself included, consider "word and image" an only putatively binary formulation—one that opens up into other dimensions, many of them, like the gutter, productively awkward or unclassifiable. See, for instance, my chapter on *Fun Home* in *Graphic Women,* particularly the sections "The Gap Between Sentence and Symbol" and "Gaping."

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

visual and verbal, comics rests uneasily between disciplinary or departmental locations, but this slipperiness is part of what makes its study so productive. In spring 2012, for example, Alison Bechdel and I co-taught a theory and practice mixed graduate and undergraduate course at the University of Chicago called "Lines of Transmission: Comics and Autobiography." "Lines of Transmission" was cross-listed with Gender Studies, English, Creative Writing, Art History, and the Department of Visual Art.[10] Our course focused extensively on "narrative" as a category of analysis, and, along with several key works of structural linguistics, the classic 1981 volume *On Narrative* was a significant reference point. (I remember before our collaboration, years ago, seeing a marked-up copy of Hayden White's "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," from that volume, on Bechdel's studio desk.) We taught Bechdel's own work—the two graphic memoirs *Fun Home* and *Are You My Mother?*—along with other primary works of graphic autobiography, and essays on the history and theory of autobiography; students wrote a final analytical paper and produced "minicomics"—self-published editions of their own autobiographical comics. Comics's cross-discursive form necessitates analysis that crosses boundaries: we had art and art history students focus on narrative theory, and literature students focus on reading the space of images, attending to line and composition.

Perhaps the most truly basic, yet to me crucial assertion I could make about comics is that it calls important attention to form and formalism—a formalism that is enabling. Comics is a medium that wears its form on its sleeve, so to speak: it is patently artificial, juxtaposing hand-drawn boxes, meant to represent moments of time, on the page. And each page of a graphic narrative functions as a discrete unit, where the size, shape, and arrangement of panels and tiers and balloons and text boxes and gutters dictate narrative pace and suggest meaning. Comics has a different relationship to mimesis than photography and film; it never suggests transparency. Unlike film and theater, comics does not unfold *in time.* And, unlike most narrative prose, comics is conspicuously site-specific: it cannot be "reflowed" like the text of a novel can be. Readers of comics are left to "decode" (as Spiegelman put it) the relationship of lines on a page. In 2003, as a graduate student thinking through how to write a dissertation about nonfiction comics, I remember seeing W. J. T. Mitchell's "Theories and Methodologies" piece in *PMLA* about form, titled "The Commitment to Form, or, Still Crazy After All These Years," and thinking, *aha.* The explosion of gripping, narratively intricate, sophisti-

10. Bechdel and I had students from nine different departments in our 27-person class: Anthropology, Art History, Comparative Literature, English, Gender and Sexuality Studies, International Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Theater and Performance Studies.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

cated graphic narratives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries seemed exactly to demonstrate what he framed as a renewal of form when he wrote, "The modernist moment of form, whether modeled on organism, perceptual gestalten, or structural coherence, may be behind us, but that only means that some new notion of form, and thus a new kind of formalism, lies before us" (324). I was also particularly interested at the "Post.45" annual conference in 2011 to hear Brian McHale and Amy Elias on a panel titled Rethinking Formalism(s).[11] McHale's "Against Historicism? Or, Can We Imagine the Present?" proposes the importance of Russian formalism, a movement whose lexicon, including defamiliarization, has been useful to considering the moves that comics works make—Spiegelman even cites Viktor Shklovsky in his recent work of comics about comics, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!*. In Elias's "Dialogics and the Avant-Garde," the different dialogics she analyzed seem to potently combine in comics.[12] In my view, comics is a form that is *internally,* conspicuously dialogic, or cross-discursive, across its words and images. The words and images in comics do not match, or synthesize. It is not a redundant form in which illustration repeats the words, but rather one in which both images and words move the narrative through a constant, active, uneasy back-and-forth: comics stages a dialogism in its basic narrative processes, where words and images work in relation to each other but necessarily never blend. (This notion might also be clarified in Lyotard's discussion of the *différend.*)[13] Further, comics is *externally* dialogic, drawing its readers *in* to construct meaning in the spaces of the gutters between the panels that constitute its most fundamental narrative grammar.

It is this participatory aspect of comics that Seymour Chatman took up in 1978 in *Story and Discourse,* when in a four-page section called "A Comic Strip Example" he analyzed a ten-frame Sunday newspaper comic strip, demonstrating how the reading of comics is a kind of "reading out" as opposed to ordinary reading because it "[leaves] the burden of inference to the reader" (38).[14] Comics weaves what I think of as *interstice* and *interval* into its constitutive grammar, and it provokes the participation of readers in those interpretive spaces that are paradoxically full and empty. To the extent that the formal

---

11. Amy Elias, "Dialogics and the Avant-Garde," and Brian McHale, "Against Historicism? Or, Can We Imagine the Present?," session on "Rethinking Formalism(s): The Association for the Study of Arts of the Present," Post.45 Conference, 30 Apr. 2011, Cleveland, OH.

12. For Elias on dialogics, see "The Dialogical Avant-Garde."

13. See Chute, "History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*."

14. Chatman analyzes a syndicated comic strip from 1970, "Short Ribs" by Frank O'Neal, which appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle.* In Chatman's view, "reading out" is qualitatively different from ordinary reading, though so familiar as to seem natural (41).

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

proportions of comics put into play what we might think of as the unresolvable interplay of elements of absence and presence, we could understand the gutter space of comics to suggest a psychic order outside of the realm of symbolization—and therefore, perhaps, a kind of Lacanian Real.[15]

Stepping back, what does this description of comics form have to do with feminism? In my opinion, everything. My interest here is not *necessarily* in feminist "content" in narrative, although that can, of course, be relevant, but rather in *how comics texts model a feminist methodology in their form,* in the complex visual dimension of an author narrating herself on the page as a multiple subject. The proliferation of different bodies and voices of an author (say, a child body, an adult body, and separate adult narratorial voices in speech and in overarching narration) existing in the space of a single page, for example, collapsing or protracting temporal dimensions, is a feature of autobiographical comics that is hard to replicate in other mediums. We can see this, to name just one example, in the figure by Phoebe Gloeckner, an image to which I will return—it is an image of the adult author kissing her own child self. In the introduction to *Graphic Women* I write, "Graphic narrative brings certain key constellations to the table: hybridity and autobiography, theorizing trauma in connection to the visual, textuality that takes the body seriously. I claim graphic narratives, as they exhibit these interests, 'feminist'" (4). For me this means that even work without explicit, stated feminist content—for example, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*—is a work we can consider feminist. (Of course, it is possible for there to be misogynistic comics; comics form must not necessarily always express feminist concerns. But I am interested in emphasizing how, say, positionality, location, and embodiment—key feminist issues—are part of the basic grammar of comics form.) The form of comics powerfully addresses itself to the linkages between lifewriting and feminist theory. In locating iterations of their earlier bodies in space on the page—and in making these bodies, perhaps, interact and overlap—cartoonists force us to confront a non-overdetermined materiality of the body and the proliferation, or multiplicity, of selves that are both driving concerns of feminist narrative.

A central preoccupation of feminism—and of narrative and sexuality studies in general—is embodiment (the briefest definition from the *OED* is yet useful: Corporeal inhabitation).[16] In particular, the embodiment that we

15. Alan Sheridan describes Lacan's Real in language apposite to the gutter: "the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped" (280).

16. See *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "embodiment," 2.a.: "The corporeal 'vesture' or 'habitation' *of* (a soul)."

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

get in comics, indicated by the mark of the hand as an index of the body, and also represented by a proliferation of narrating bodies in space on the comics page, demonstrates why the form is so urgent for expressing life stories, particularly stories of development, of trauma, and of hybrid subjectivity. What does it mean for an author to literally reappear, in the form of a *legible, drawn* body on the page, at the site of her own trauma, for example—what I think of, following Lynne Huffer, as at the site of "her inscriptional effacement"? Comics life narrative establishes what I think of as an expanded *idiom of witness,* a practice of testifying that sets verbal languages with and against visual language in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form.[17] Leigh Gilmore's formulation of the public and political dimensions of speech is useful: she writes of "the nexus of trauma and gender as the terrain of political speech, even when that speech explicitly draws on a rhetoric of private life" ("Jurisdictions" 715). With comics, this important conceptualization of speech is even further amplified and accounts for both the verbal and the visual elements of the narrative. Drawing your body can be an act of political speech. In their provocatively titled "The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists," autobiography scholars Smith and Watson underscore the materiality of narrative—how autobiography insists on "the inextricable connection of narrative and the materiality of the body" (367). There is, perhaps, at least in the world of print, no place this is more clear than in the form of comics. A comics autobiography is drawn by hand—so that we are always aware of the presence of the body of the maker; it is a haptic form that proposes the materiality of the body on every page. Further, a comics autobiography calls our attention to key issues of perspective and positionality: the location of bodies in space, within frames: the view frames take, the kinds of bodies that are located within them (often, powerfully, in recent work, the author's own child body).[18] Comics makes literal and active in narrative self-constitution the crucial feminist concern that Adrienne Rich identified as "the politics of location."

The visual register of comics need not be understood as necessarily trafficking in the putatively easy, affectively powerful legibility of the visual—or, on the other hand, the I/eye of surveillance and disembodied power. The visual can sometimes be, critically, conflated with an uncomplicated representational politics of visibility, as in the important but commonplace feminist

17. See *Graphic Women* 3–4 for a similar and more detailed discussion; see also Huffer 4.

18. See, for example, Gilmore and Marshall's essay "Girls in Crisis" in *Feminist Studies.*

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

trope of "making the hidden visible." I claim instead the capaciousness of comics's visual form as an ethical and troubling visual aesthetics, or poetics—a complex literary location for theorizing embodiment and narrative. (By "troubling," I do mean to indicate that the way comics is able to be spectacular can sometimes feel uncomfortable, although I wager this discomfort can also be productive, especially in the realm of feminist and/or queer politics, where comics is able to take on many views and to inhabit ambivalent perspectives.) As Donna Haraway opens her important 1988 essay "The Persistence of Vision": "I would like to proceed by placing metaphorical reliance on a much maligned sensory system in feminist discourse: vision. Vision can be good for avoiding binary oppositions. I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body" (677).[19] In comics we are constantly confronted with the "embodied nature of all vision"—an issue that is suggested by the author's visualization of his or her past through handmade marks on the page, and is further highlighted by the conspicuous, self-reflexive frames of comics form. And in comics, in particular, we see *the mapping of bodies in space.* In comics data moves over space as well as over time, even if the movement is recursive, backtracked, or palimpsested.[20] Bechdel has said, "Cartoons are like maps to me, and *Fun Home* is a pretty accurate map of my life" ("PEN/Faulkner" 4). We see this clearly too in a page from *Are You My Mother?* in which Bechdel charts her years from 25 onwards through a spatialized chart of changing therapists and girlfriends (see fig. 9.1). A colleague in Art History, Niall Atkinson, who works on Italian Early Renaissance urban space recently said to me, discussing contemporary digital construction of maps of Renaissance cities, "When data is plotted spatially it constructs different kinds of knowledge." This applies to the data of the self and it is, centrally, what the form of comics brings to the table at the intersection of feminist and narrative studies.

The kinds of knowledges that come from mapping a life in time and in space are "situated knowledges," to draw on a central feminist concept also named by Haraway in "The Persistence of Vision." One of the key descriptions of comics form is that its procedure *is to turn time into space,* what we can think of as "choreographing and shaping time" through the sculpting of the page into panels and tiers—*boxes of time* that are framed and spatially juxtaposed

19. "The Persistence of Vision" has been excerpted, twice—in Conboy et al. and in Mirzoeff's *Visual Culture Reader.* It initially appeared as part of a longer essay titled "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in *Feminist Studies.*

20. See Chute, "Comics Form," for further elaborations of the importance of comics's mapping abilities, especially in the work of Bechdel and Joe Sacco.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

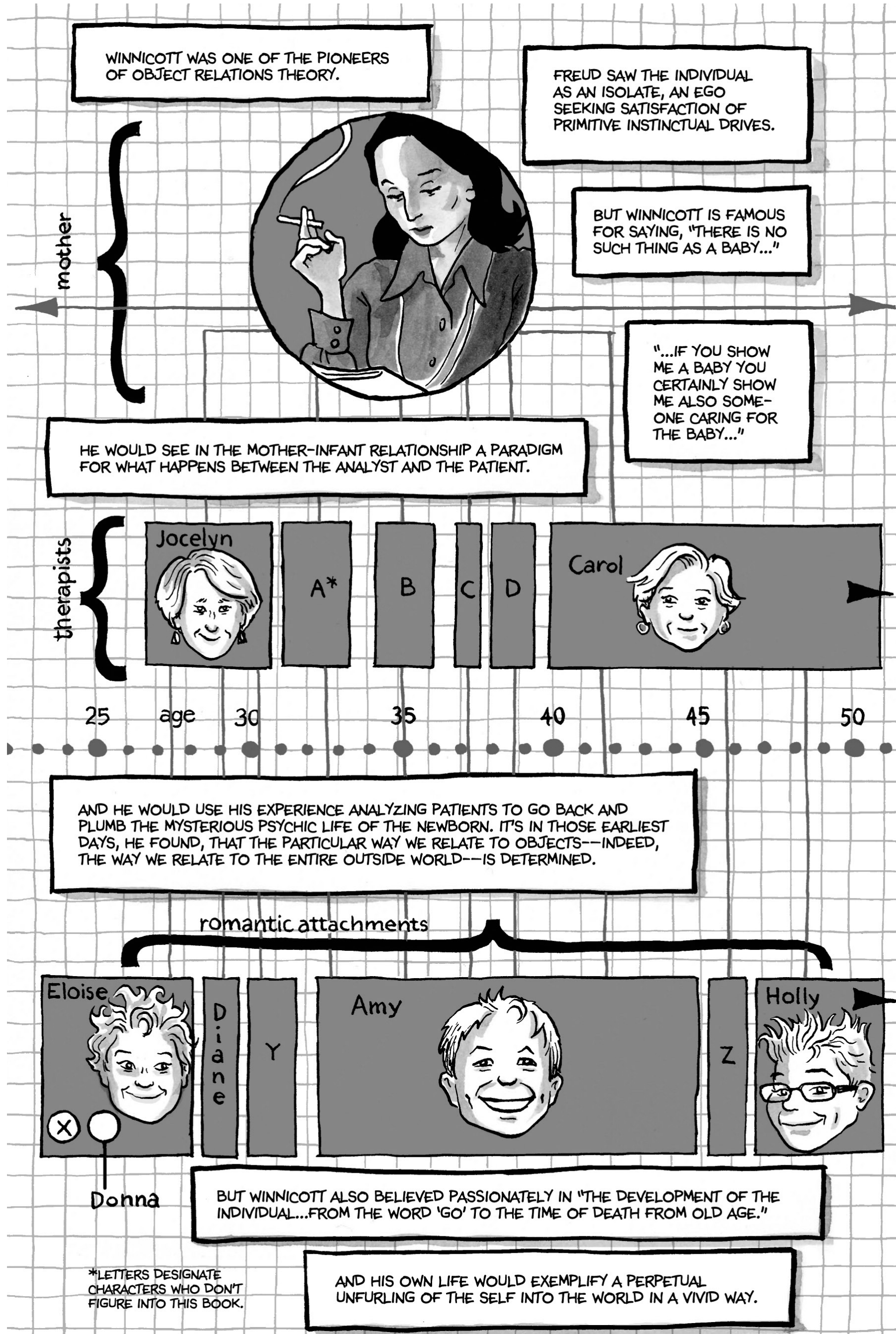

FIGURE 9.1. Page from Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2012; Unpaginated [22]). Used by permission of Alison Bechdel / Houghton Mifflin.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. COPYRIGHT © THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. BATCH 1.

on the page.[21] Conventionally, comics panels are each supposed to represent one punctual moment, one temporality. The way we see authors *layer* temporalities—sometimes literally crushing them up against each other—in the space of the panel is key to understanding how the form expresses complex, proliferated subjectivities for the self. Many scholars, including ones present at the Queer and Feminist Narrative Theory Symposium, have previously indicated the importance of *spatiality,* not only as a dominant modality of the postmodern, something we see across many canonical works of criticism, but further as a central rubric for life narrative. In their book *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (1998), for example, in a section on "Prospects for Theorizing Women's Autobiography," Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, following Susan Stanford Friedman, suggest "spatiality, rather than temporality, as a focus of critical reading practices" (39).[22] In comics, a spatially site-specific form much like concrete poetry or the artists' book, we see an amplification of the importance, theoretical *and* material, of the stuff of space for life narrative. The attention to bodies in space, bodies producing space, and bodies taking up space that comics proposes is about situating the self, to evoke the title of Seyla Benhabib's classic feminist study—and it also makes legible how autobiographers constitute themselves in the very process of creating life narrative. It is striking to me that so much of the conversation at the Queer and Feminist Narrative Theory Symposium was about *temporality.* And particularly, say, in analyses of *Fun Home,* we see the notion of a productively antihistoricist "queer time" or "queer temporality," but much less emphasis on *Fun Home*'s recursive spatiality, and on how the narrative offers the *space of the page* to showcase the protagonist's role not only as subject but additionally as an active archivist and curator of her own life.[23]

I will conclude with a very brief discussion of an image from cartoonist Phoebe Gloeckner's 1998 book *A Child's Life and Other Stories*—an image I wrote about in my dissertation in 2006, and in my book in 2010, and which continues to exemplify something for me (see fig. 9.2). This image enacts, conceptually and materially, what many comics texts accomplish in mapping the bodies that populate, and generate, their narratives. *A Child's Life* offers a full-page picture of a child being kissed on the face, sensually, by an adult woman who grasps her face. We can see two earrings in the woman's left ear,

21. Art Spiegelman states that comics works most fundamentally "choreograph and shape time" ("Ephemera" 4).

22. For an important view of space and mapping, see Friedman, *Mappings* and "Locational Feminism."

23. See, for instance, Cvetkovich and Rohy. The space of the comics page allows for the incorporation and repurposing of archives.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

FIGURE 9.2. Page from Phoebe Gloeckner, *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (Berkeley: Frog / North Atlantic Books, 1998). Used by permission of Phoebe Gloeckner.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

one dangling; and the white shirt of the child patterned with dark hearts. This image does not appear in the book's otherwise thorough table of contents, and its absence, paradoxically, appears to underscore its importance. Its title, as we see on the page itself, is "A Child's Life," as is the title of the book in which it appears, but it does not appear in the book's own listing of its contents. Its logic is so central, it seems, that it floats above (or seamlessly threads through) the book. The adult's open lips touch the child's cheek; she looks both aggressive and tender; predatory, even, yet also protective.[24] Gloeckner has explained that the image is supposed to be herself as an adult kissing herself as a child (Orenstein 29).

This image seems to match up with Gloeckner's dedication to her second book—"for all the girls when they have grown"—and we can see it as succinctly expressing Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit.*[25] Gloeckner's claim of addressing girls when they have grown carries both the delayed effect of sexual experience—the cognizance of the sexual dimension of experience—and the delayed effect of trauma, a delayed effect of understanding. By putting her adult body and child body in the same space, contiguous on the page, Gloeckner stages a conversation among versions of self—a conversation we recognize happens not only through the graphic visibility of different selves on the page but also, further, in the collapsing of temporality that enables such a tender—or invasive?—intersubjective (and non self-same) relation. What gets mapped here is this space of ambiguous desire *and* disavowal of the past. The bodiliness of comics—both *pictured,* and expressed *in form*—is a powerful site of exploration in which narrative instantiates sexuality.

There is so much interest in comics right now, from quarters focused on the politics of form, and those focused on the form of politics, because comics reveals the complex creation of subjectivity and unfinished selves. It does this through attention to locating bodies, but not fixing them, in space: older and younger selves collide, and different iterations of the "I" can be literally contiguous, available but not stabilized. In its form, comics adopts so many topics that drive feminist and queer studies—even the idea of pathologized bodies *taking up space*—and is able to make these politics and propositions literal and tangible on the page.

---

24. For more on Gloeckner and this image, see my *Graphic Women* chapter "Phoebe Gloeckner's Ambivalent Images."

25. Thank you to Tom Gunning for proposing this idea.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

Works Cited

Aldama, Frederick Luis. *Multicultural Comics: From* Zap *to* Blue Beetle. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010.

———. *Your Brain on Latino Comics: From Gus Arriola to Los Bros Hernandez.* Austin: U of Texas P, 2009.

Barry, Lynda. *One Hundred Demons.* Seattle: Sasquatch, 2002.

Bechdel, Alison. *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2012.

———. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

———. "PEN/Faulkner Event with Lynda Barry and Chris Ware." Washington, DC. 9 Nov. 2007. Transcript.

Camper, Jennifer, ed. *Juicy Mother.* New York: Soft Skull, 2005.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative." *PMLA* 123.2 (2008): 452–65.

———. "Comics Form and Narrating Lives." *Profession* 2011: 107–17.

———. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics.* New York: Columbia UP, 2010.

———. "'The Shadow of a Past Time': History and Graphic Representation in Maus." *Twentieth Century Literature* 2 (2006): 199–230.

———. "The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis.*" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36.1–2 (Summer 2008): 92–110.

Couser, C. Thomas. *Memoir: An Introduction.* New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Cruse, Howard. *Stuck Rubber Baby.* New York: HarperPerennial, 1995.

Cvetkovich, Ann. "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home.*" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36.1–2 (Summer 2008): 111–28.

Delany, Samuel R., with Mia Wolff. *Bread & Wine.* Seattle: Fantagraphics, 1999.

Elias, Amy J. "The Dialogical Avant-Garde: Relational Aesthetics and Time Ecologies in *Only Revolutions* and *TOC.*" *Contemporary Literature* 53.4 (2013): 738–78.

Forney, Ellen. *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me.* New York: Gotham, 2012.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Locational Feminism: Gender: Cultural Geographies, and Geopolitical Literacy." *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice.* Ed. Marianne DeKoven. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001.

———. *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

———. "Wartime Cosmopolitanism: Cosmofeminism in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis.*" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 32.1 (2013): 23–52.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "Queering Genre: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* and *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For.*" *Contemporary Women's Writing* 5.3 (2011): 188–207.

Gilmore, Leigh. "Jurisdictions: *I, Rigoberta Menchú, The Kiss,* and Scandalous Self-Representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.2 (2003): 695–718.

Gilmore, Leigh, and Elizabeth Marshall. "Girls in Crisis: Rescue and Transnational Feminist Autobiographical Resistance." *Feminist Studies* 36.3 (Fall 2010): 667–90.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

Gloeckner, Phoebe. *A Child's Life and Other Stories.* Berkeley, CA: Frog, 1998.

———. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl.* Berkeley, CA: Frog, 2002.

Hall, Justin. *No Straight Lines: Four Decades of Queer Comics.* Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2012.

Haraway, Donna. "The Persistence of Vision." *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory.* Ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 283–95.

———. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (Fall 1988): 575–99.

Herman, David. *Basic Elements of Narrative.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Huffer, Lynne. "'There is no Gomorrah': Narrative Ethics in Feminist and Queer Theory." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 12.4 (2001): 1–32.

Kominsky-Crumb, Aline. *Love That Bunch.* Seattle: Fantagraphics, 1990.

———. *Need More Love.* London: MQ, 2007.

Miller, Nancy K. "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir." *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 537–48.

Mitchell, W. J. T. "The Commitment to Form, or, Still Crazy After All These Years." *PMLA* 118 (2003): 321–25.

Obomsawin, Diane. *On Loving Women.* Trans. Helge Dascher. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2014.

Orenstein, Peggy. "Phoebe Gloeckner Is Creating Stories about the Dark Side of Growing Up Female." *New York Times Magazine* 5 Aug. 2001: 26–29.

Peterson, James Braxton. "Birth of a Nation: Representation, Nationhood, and Graphic Revolution in the Works of D. W. Griffith, DJ Spooky, and Aaron McGruder et al." Aldama, *Multicultural Comics* 105–19.

Rohy, Valerie. "In the Queer Archive: *Fun Home.*" *GLQ* 16.3 (2010): 341–63.

Satrapi, Marjane. *Embroideries.* Trans. Anjali Singh. New York: Pantheon, 2005.

———. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.* Trans. Mattias Ripa and Blake Ferris. New York: Pantheon, 2003.

———. *Persepolis: The Story of a Return.* Trans. Anjali Singh. New York: Pantheon, 2004.

Schrag, Ariel. *Awkward and Definition: The High School Chronicles of Ariel Schrag.* New York: Touchstone, 2008.

———. *Likewise.* New York: Touchstone, 2009.

———. *Potential.* New York: Touchstone, 2008.

Sheridan, Alan. "Translator's Note." *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis.* By Jacques Lacan. New York: Norton, 1978. 277–82.

Smith, Sidonie. "Human Rights and Comics: Autobiographical Avatars, Crisis Witnessing, and Transnational Rescue Networks." *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels.* Ed. Michael A. Chaney. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2011. 61–72.

———. "Narrating Lives." 2011 Presidential Address. The Modern Language Association Annual Convention. Los Angeles, CA, 6 Jan. 2011. <http://www.mla.org/pres_address_2011> Accessed 30 June 2012.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Introduction." *Women, Autobiography, Theory.* Ed. Smith and Watson. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1998. 3–52.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.

———. “The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists.” *A Companion to Narrative Theory.* Ed. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz. New York: Blackwell, 2005. 356–71.

Spiegelman, Art. “Ephemera vs the Apocalypse.” *Indy Magazine* Autumn 2005.

———. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Begin.* New York: Pantheon, 1991.

———. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History.* New York: Pantheon, 1986.

Summers, A. K. *Pregnant Butch.* Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2014.

Tea, Michelle. *Rent Girl.* San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.

Wanzo, Rebecca. “Black Nationalism, Bunraku and Beyond: Articulating Black Heroism and Cultural Fusion in Comics.” *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle.* Aldama, *Multicultural Comics* 93–104.

———. “Narrativizing the Nexus of Difference, Disability, and State Control in Female Genital Cutting Memoirs.” Ohio State's Project Narrative Symposium: Queer and Feminist Narrative Theory. Hyatt Regency Hotel, Columbus, OH. 12–14 May 2011. Conference Presentation.

Warhol, Robyn. “The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home.*” *College Literature* 38.3 (Summer 2011): 1–20.

Warren, Roz, ed. *Dyke Strippers: Lesbian Cartoonists from A to Z.* San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1995.

Watson, Julia. “Autographic Disclosures and Genealogies of Desire in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home.*” Biography 31.1 (2008): 27–58.

Wojnarowicz, David, with James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook. *Seven Miles a Second.* New York: Vertigo, 1996.

Yagoda, Ben. *Memoir: A History.* New York: Riverhead, 2009.

All Rights Reserved. Copyright © The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Batch 1.