2021

**Bully Me: A graphic novel; The Return: A graphic novel; Comakademix: A comics anthology; Leadbetter: A comic; Laundry: A minicomic -and- The Erotics of Comics: An exegesis**

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Bully Me
A GRAPHIC NOVEL

The Return
A GRAPHIC NOVEL

Comakademix
A COMICS ANTHOLOGY

Leadbetter
A COMIC

Laundry
A MINICOMIC

The Erotics of Comics
AN EXEGESIS

THIS THESIS IS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BRUCE ROBERTS MUTARD
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
2021
Thesis declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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iii. contain any defamatory material;

Bruce Roberts Mutard 21/11/2021
Beholding a comic is ideally, a pleasure. The work informs, entertains and stimulates the mind in some way. There is no gainsaying which works will affect which beholders however it does, yet the expectation of pleasure from a work of comics makes beholders seek it. Making the comic is also a pleasure, even if the process can be long-winded, winding and difficult. The maker wants to give others the same pleasure they drew from beholding comics, but in their way, making their vision of Batman, Lieutenant Blueberry or, their own story worlds. What this research seeks to explain are many of the considerations and constraints that makers have when producing a work of comics, which can often shape the finished artefact in ways that are not obvious by looking at it. In specific, it seeks to answer a narrower question: can exploring the way tacit knowledge accumulates and is applied, offer a ‘thick’ understanding of comics?

Michael Polanyi argues that tacit knowledge is knowing more than you can say, which in comics is the knowledge makers possess about tools, surfaces, materials, storytelling, pacing, mise en panel and logistics among others. This knowledge is rarely codified. In the comic as commodity, it is hidden from view so that beholders may immerse themselves in the work. Unknown is the iterative process that went into making a work: the moment of inspiration; grappling with the ideas via voluminous preparatory works; handling of materials and tools; working out the logistic dimension and constraints that will determine the type of encounter with the work beholders will have. I propose a Cycle of Erotics as a means to codify this knowledge and give critical commentators another lens for their use in analysing comics; a way of looking through and not just at comics.
DEDICATED TO AND IN LOVING MEMORY

VALERIE MUTARD

1942—2020
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It is something of a standing joke among those who make a creative work, that the worst question beholders ask is ‘where do you get your ideas from?’ Alan Moore wrote of a somewhat tongue in cheek evisceration of a typical querist’s temerity, with one reason for it inducing eye-rolls is the frequency with which it is asked, but Moore is right when he continues ‘… we don’t know the answer and we’re scared somebody will find out.’ While I do not agree with him that artistic theory and criticism is a ‘… dismal and confused sludge of opinion and half-truth,’ I do agree that it is a ‘question worth asking.’ This thesis is an attempt to provide a general answer using the comics register as a base because I am foremost, a maker of comics.

The second irritating question asked of makers is ‘how did you get started (in writing, drawing or whatever register ones makes in)?’ This is also often hard to explain succinctly, although it is common for the answer to be something along the lines of, ‘well, I’ve been making since I was a child.’ Except when that was not the case.

There are many cultural cliches (in Western culture at least) about making creative works such as the ‘flash of inspiration’, the ‘lightbulb moment’, the passionate movement of the body to carve stone, hands

curved around spinning clay, dashing brushstrokes on a canvas, scratching with pencil on paper, or a writer looking up from a keyboard not realising that the sun is rising and they had not been to bed. They lend a quality of mysticism to the artistic process in the absence of any rational or mechanical description. To paraphrase Arthur C Clarke: ‘any sufficiently advanced artwork appears to be made from magic.’

Almost all makers will explain that the process by which they come to make a work is frequently time-consuming, difficult, tortuous, frustrating, passing through many iterations before finally being passed as ready to be beheld by others. In addition, it takes years of practice and hard work to get ones skillset to a point where it is at the level of professional work found in bookshops, comic shops, art galleries, theatres and cinemas, in other words, that beholders want to behold and will pay to do so.

What these makers are referring to is their tacit knowledge, which is the accumulated wisdom comprising of skillsets, use of materials and tools, systems, structures and logistics that go towards making a creative work such as say, a comic. Michael Polanyi codified tacit knowledge as ‘we know more than we can say,’ by which he meant that it is possible to know about things that are not readily explained through scientific, or other reasoning. What makers have trouble speaking about above, is an example.

What this research seeks to explain are many of the considerations and constraints that makers have when producing a work of comics, which can often shape the finished artefact in ways that are not obvious by looking at it. In specific, it seeks to answer a narrower question: can exploring the way tacit knowledge accumulates and is applied, offer a ‘thick’ understanding of comics? Following Gilbert Ryle and particularly the ethnographic formulation of Clifford Geertz, a thin description is surface observation – of the thing as it is. A thick description places those observations within details, context, emotion and social connections that a thing, idea, imagining, is within. In this case, I refer to the aspects of comics that rarely get examined because they are not generally visible by looking at the published commodity that is a comic. A thick description of a comic is not just what it is and is communicating through its multifarious signs (of a comic, pictures, words, emanata, publishing format, etc.) but how and why did it come to be made at all. I will elaborate on its value, below.

Through making, I have developed the Cycle of Erotics as a way of conceptualizing and explaining the process by which a person comes to be a maker,
and how a work of comics comes to be made. It is a map in the sense that the elements of the cycle can be abstractly projected onto a surface, with lines as paths between them that are not directional. It is a tool that can enable those scholars who do not make, to describe and analyze processes that are primarily tacit.

To describe it briefly before a detailed description in chapter two, it is a cycle that begins and ends with the beholder, which all makers (and scholars) are, to wit: while all makers are beholders, not all beholders are makers. A beholder encounters a work of comics and cognitively processes it through their visual literacy (as Stephen Apkon describes it), to arrive at new knowledge: about the work, about the world, perhaps about themselves. No encounter is without some impact on the beholder, even if it is a re-encounter, as this always occurs in a new time and possibly a new place. For some beholders, encounters with works inspire them to make their own comics, and how they arrive at wanting to make comics varies as much as there are makers. Following that desire to make, they acquire tacit knowledge about the tools, surfaces, structures, features, signs and logistics of comics. At some point, the maker desires to make a new work (most makers have several on the go) which is often

An early iteration of the Cycle of Erotics made in early 2018. Research proceeds iteratively as does making works of comics. The value of showing this is seeing the mind trying to work things out on the page, wherein I used the tacit knowledge I had of making pictures using pencils, pen and paper.
done with an eye on the ante-logistics: what are the haptic forms the commodity will take the form of (if not digital only), and how will it reach beholders? This forms part of the grappling with the material, an iterative process wherein the maker works on the content, the form, researching, sketching and making until they arrive at a final/original. This is what will be presented to publishers, or that they have decided is ready to self-publish. Then, through the logistics of mechanical and digital reproduction, distribution, marketing and the input of capital, the work is made available for encounter by others.

It is to be noted that what is visible to beholders, is often substantially different to what the maker beheld as they made, inasmuch that all the iterations, notes, sketches, models, variants and so forth usually remain invisible on the page. For instance, a beholder might read my graphic novel, The Sacrifice in perhaps 4 or 5 hours, but it took me three years full time work to make, involving a year of reading and research, seven drafts of the script not counting revisions to each, two sets of breakdowns, one false start on final art when I shifted from the brush to using nib for lines, then two years making the final art. Only then came editorial revisions, cover designs and preparations for publishing. Behind every comic is an odyssey that the maker(s) have undertaken in its making which can belie the cohesiveness and polish of the mass-produced commodity. This is some of the ‘thickness’ to which I was referring and believe useful when looking at comics analytically.

While the cycle is directional, starting with the beholder and then going clockwise in order to arrive at the work, many of these elements are continually operating as part of the making process, so it is provident to bear in mind its rhizomatic quality, where each part is related to the other, or, as Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome: ‘a map and not a tracing that it is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; … detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modifications.’ For instance, a maker continually beholds new works or revisits familiar works while making, and these could impact how they grapple with making a work. An example would be how research into a historical period can reveal something that proves useful to a story and is thus included as pivotal (or incidental) to the diegesis. A maker can either deliberately seek new knowledge or it is happenstance, where beholding a comic, film or novel, some aspect of its storytelling—a visual, colour scheme or denouement—causes them to revise some aspect of their work in progress.

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6 More will be said about this in chapter two.
7 ‘Thickness’ and ‘thicker’ both refer to Ryle and Geertz’ concept of ‘thick’ description.

Above: four out of nearly 70 cover ideas I offered to the editors and marketing department at Allen & Unwin over a period of three months. Behind many books is a narrative that is worthy of exploring in order to better understand that work.
One of the key features of the cycle is to incorporate the felt experience of making and beholding: the emotional investment, the desire to express or say something, the pleasure that can be found in the making process, of beholding, or indeed, frustration and anger when it does not go well. These feelings are always part of the experience inasmuch that our emotional states are never ‘off’. We behold works because we derive pleasure from them, whether that be the thrill of learning something new that makes sense of the world, or being invested in characters who are in peril and escape by the narrowest of margins. We get joy from laughter, turned on by eroticism, sad when characters we have become attached to die, get shocked or outraged when they turn out not to be who we thought they were. We can also get bored when a work offers nothing new, or recycles tropes such that you already know what the outcome will be. We have all beheld comics where we encountered the work in the shop or online, adoring the art, but then find the story does not match it for quality. As I will show, it is this well of pleasure that initiates the desire to make in certain beholders, who then go on to make works, deriving pleasure in the process, hoping that other beholders will get pleasure from what they have made. As Amy Maynard shows, it is also
why makers put up with dubious labour conditions when doing work for hire. This desire in the making and beholding is what I propose in this thesis to be a key to understanding not just presence of comics, but why they appear as they do, in other words, it is to inspect the comics register from a perspective rarely taken: from their point of origin, rather than as the finished work.

Almost all extant comics scholarship starts with considering the comic as commodity, that is, the mass reproduced printed works available for purchase, for loan, digitally downloaded or specifically created for the world wide web. This is perfectly reasonable: it is what is out there in the world, available for encounter. Scholars then apply the theoretical lenses of their training and interests to these objects to arrive at salient insights about the work, its place in culture or part of say, a cultural hegemony. So, in no way am I implying their writing (and it is almost all writing) is ‘thin’ in the sense Geertz points out. But it could be ‘thicker’. By drawing inferences from scrutiny of a polished, edited, cleaned up and (not always) maker approved edition, it misses a lot of the how and why the work came to be in the first place. For instance, there is the largely correct assumption that say, the product of Marvel Comics and DC are created to sell lots of comics based on the commercial appeal of their intellectual properties – superheroes. Ditto DC Thomson, Fleetway or the album series put out by Castermans, Dargaud, Lombard and Dupuis. Be that as it may, this elides the motivation on the part of the writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists and letterers who performed the work. They make because they desire to work on these intellectual properties, many of whom read such comics as fans when they were young, such as Mark Waid pointing to a particular page in Action Comics #500 where he realized that it is the lived experience of being a Superhero such as Superman which makes reading the comic more interesting. Paul Dini expands at length on what Batman meant to him as a kid and how he wrestled with the character as part of his recovering from a mugging and thus, the book Dark Knight: A True Batman Story. Observing comics that fall under the variety of labels such as ‘alternative’, ‘independent’ or often its synonym, ‘graphic novels’, the preponderance of these have auteurs who write, draw and sometimes design the books, therefore it is assumed largely correctly, that the works were self-initiated. As the practice-based component of this thesis will show, this is not always the case (see chapter three and

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9 Working for the love of making comics is one reason comics publishers historically, and now, have been able to pay what is the equivalent of poor hourly rates for the work contracted. See Maynard, A. A Scene in Sequence: Australian Comics Production as a Creative Industry 1975-2017. PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2017. 111-113.
12 Like Seth and Chris Ware, who also work as occasional designers on other series such as Seth on Fantagraphics Peanuts collections, Ware on Walt and Skeezix and Krazy Kat. As Ware says, designing such collections is personal in ensuring that the works are treated with all respect to their deceased makers. See Ware, Monograph, 171.
four). Often there are other actors who make a space available for a maker to produce something. Robert Crumb did not spontaneously produce the infamous Zap #0 and #1, but was asked to make a comic book by a Philadelphia underground newspaper editor Brian Zahn, who promptly disappeared with the art for #0. The publisher at Apex Novelties, Don Donahue wanted a comic from Crumb after having spotted his work in Yarrowstalks, so the first official underground comic, Zap #1, was made. As Charles Hatfield has demonstrated, from this began the eventual rise of the ‘graphic novel’ that I, and so many makers, produce today.

Comics were not made for academic scrutiny, but they feature elements tractable to it, such as a narrative, narrators, characters and their arcs, set within familiar genres that appear in literature: autobiography, speculative fiction, thrillers, crime, horror, humour, non-fiction, journalism and instruction. Comics also feature several genres that rarely feature as novels: superheroes, slapstick humour and gags, primarily because comics have visuals. It is difficult to imagine verbal equivalents of Krazy Kat, Little Nemo in Slumberland or Spy Vs Spy much less Building Stories. Quite reasonably, scholars examine the signs present, particularly written words, pictures, speech bal-
loons, emanata, motion lines, character design and other elements that are pertinent to their argument, which may include peritextual matter. I will not attempt to summarise this large corpus of scholarship as it is not pertinent to this thesis because as mentioned, their point of departure is the commodity, whereas I am approaching comics the other way: from point of origin. Similarly, I will not analyse the writings and scholarship on how comics make meaning through its formal devices (Eisner, McCloud, Groensteen, Postema, Cohn) for they too, look at the commodity and the signs of comics. What should be noted however, is that these scholars (and makers) demonstrate a passion for comics, which can only have arisen from beholding works that they love, inspiring them to write about them with the tools of their academic training. Their passion has set out the field of comics studies that enables a thesis such as this to be possible.

The only work of scholarship that I have encountered which truly captured the essence of what it is to make a comic is Pat Grant’s thesis *Bodies on Boards*. It is no surprise that he is like myself, primarily a maker of comics, who has undertaken a practice-based PhD in creative writing from an auto-ethnographic perspective. I responded well to it because of the way he described the rhapsody of feeling through the body, of performing the work that is a comic through the nib or brush. It is a feeling I know explicitly since I use those tools on boards myself. That he caches his methodology in auto-ethnography and graphic anthropology is less interesting (and I felt, ultimately neglected) does not take away from his ability to describe that feeling of making a work, how long it takes, the frustration, the tremor of getting it seen by others to ensure one is on the path (or, getting some distance from the work). If tacit knowledge is knowing more than one can say, it does not mean it is not unsayable nor is it left to hermeneutics of published works and working materials. As Pat mentions:

> I do think there’s a way to explain it. I think we just have to talk about it more because (...) that’s what language is for. There are things that you feel like you did this thing and you know you have some tacit knowledge and I have this tacit knowledge, so, if we work hard enough or long enough, we’re going to build this vocabulary to talk about it.

And that at base is what the Cycle of Erotics hopes to achieve. If comics are to be fully explained—in other words, become thicker—within comic studies, the process of making from conception to the commod-
it has to become tractable to scholars who do not make. The vast corpus of tacit knowledge that makers have must become accessible through a language that offers words, tools, a map that can articulate what has hitherto been ‘more than one can say’. Grant suggests that his thesis offers insights into comics generally, but he is careful to mention that his poetics is specific to his practice and to works that are made with pencils, nibs, brushes and ink (such as my own). I aim to make the Cycle of Erotics adaptable to any kind of making process, regardless of the tools and processes used. The hope is that the cycle gives scholars a way to look at a work, back to its origins by asking questions, interviewing makers, printers, designers and publishers and looking at the mass of working materials (if available) that went into making a work. The cycle is a descriptive model that attempts to show how, why and where the processes of making a work of comics comes to be, therefore offers no prescription; it should cover any type of comic.

In chapters one and two I describe how the Cycle was derived from and through eight comics that I made over 2017-2019 which form the practice-based component of this PhD. It shows how my works derive from the tacit knowledge that I accumulated through both this research and thirty years of making

Comics are generally printed in factories on enormous machines that take a two ton roll of paper and print 20,000 comics in thirty minutes.
comics prior to this undertaking. The theoretical basis for this approach follows Barbara Bolt’s conception of (visual arts) theory arising out of practice, which she also grounded in Michael Polanyi’s conception of tacit knowledge and Heidegger’s notion of handability; that form of knowledge that ‘arises from our handling of materials and processes’. We do not know the world through contemplation first, but ‘only after we have come to understand it through handling’.20

In chapter three I apply the Cycle to the eight works I made to show how it can draw out the thicker description I believe it can offer. Each work had different origins, grappling and logistics that demonstrate tacit knowledge in action, be it accumulating new knowledge, or solving problems arising at some stage of the process.

To avert the problem of this research being solipsistic, in chapter four I interviewed a number of Australian comics makers to show that there are as many ways of coming to be a maker and making comics as there are makers. I have also referred to a number of works by makers themselves or those who have interviewed them, since it is a great resource of making methodologies.21 I feel a great deal of resonance when reading such works, as I know what these makers describe about their relationship to the medium, practice and logistics of making comics.

A conclusion follows with some suggestions for how and where the cycle might be applied and what sort of further research could be applied to it.

Metal printing plates containing Will Eisner’s first comic strips Uncle Otto and Harry Karry**. This was the method used in the early part of the 20th Century.

19 Grant, P. Bodies on Boards 2014. 313
21 See: Ware, 2017; Spiegelman, 2011; Hignite, 2006; Meadows, 2019.
** Source: https://locustmoon.com/2015/11/10/eisner-kickstarter/
In her seminal essay, *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag called for an erotics of art, where she inveighed against what she saw as a turn to hermeneutics in art criticism, hunting for meanings embedded in art works rather than doing as she thought ought to be its remit: describing ‘how it (art) is what it is, even that it is what it is.’ In *Comics and Communication*, Paul Davies called for an erotics of comics where he seeks a description of the comics register that accounts for ‘…its humanity, its room for inventiveness, its specific character as a medium of interplay between consenting like-minded adults.’ They were/are asking for a way to put the maker back into the scholarly and critical discourses; that works of art were not just an object or performance put out there for beholders to dissemble or as conveyors of the structural pathologies of society. It is very easy to behold a work and then dismiss it as uninteresting, wretched, ‘crap’, ‘meh’ or brilliant, oblivious to the fact that most works took its maker(s) tens, hundreds or even thousands of hours to produce. Chris Ware dyspeptically estimates it takes him forty hours to produce something read in twenty seconds. That is the fate of art as a commodity, in particular comics, which are mostly mass produced, marketed, sold and readily disposed of. But observing those finished works rarely gives
a clue to what, why and how it was made. It is usually obvious that a comic was say, hand-drawn with ink on paper, but sometimes a little harder to work out if it was made with a nib, a tech pen, or a brush. Less obvious is why a maker has chosen one method of making marks over another, and still less obvious whether that method has any correspondence to the content. But questions like this are worth asking if a work is to be understood as something more than a commodity, as a felt expression of its maker, in other words, asking for a thicker description.

In the next chapter I will propose the Cycle of Erotics as a way of accessing how and why makers make, however they do so, but the use of the word erotics is potentially problematic because most people understand its use to describe artefacts and performances that are sexual in nature. I use ‘erotics’ in a narrower way, specifically how Plato describes it in the Symposium dialogues between Socrates and Diatoma as ta erotika. For Socrates, this is a desire to know. And that, is scholarship writ simply; the desire to know deeply about natural processes, human endeavours, the metaphysical realms, how it is we know anything at all. Makers also make artefacts or performances as a way of grappling with the world, of coming to know it and then expressing that knowledge. Similarly, works of art exist because makers desire to make or perform them and enjoy the process as much as they do beholding them. As we may observe, this desire is rarely replete. For makers, when a new work is made, the desire to make a new artefact or performance is frequently there, as evidenced by the fact most makers end up with an oeuvre. For beholders, the stimulation of emotion in some way—happiness, sadness, numinous, shocked, revulsion, having thought moved—often induces a desire for more such encounters, such that they become, say, a fan of comics.

These desires are not often discussed in comics scholarship because it is hard to codify. The initial response any beholder has toward a work is always primal, operating as a felt response as mentioned previously. Yet whether a work is considered good, bad or inconsequential, critical analysis tends to strip the felt experience out of the writing (and it is almost all writing) and sublimate that response into analysis of content and/or formal characteristics through whatever theoretical lens the scholar feels is applicable. Even if the felt experience is the underlying motivator to writing, it is prescinded because it is not rational, objective scrutiny, which for better or worse, is the measure of scholarship.

23 Davies, P. Comics as Communication. New York, Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels, 2019. 21
24 Ware, C. Monograph. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc. 2017. 127
25 When comics for children were sold for a penny or 5 cents, it is very easy to dispose of, just as the gorgeous Sunday strips of George Herriman, Frank King, Winsor McKay and others where printed with the intent to be read once and then disposed of, or to wrap garbage in.
Comics scholarship is predominantly made by academics that produce work in the prose register, reflecting their academic training which is typically English studies, literary studies, social studies, linguistics, language studies, film studies, media studies and interdisciplinary variants within them. Because comics are primarily made to tell stories and non-fictional subjects, presented in the form of codexes, pamphlets or online, it is not surprising that these scholars find it easy to write about them. If it looks like a book, feels like a book, it must be a book. As noted by Paul Davies, it is curious that for a medium that is full of pictures, few comics scholars pay attention to them as a work of visual art inter alia. This reflects the fact that few comics scholars come from the fields of visual arts, visual communication/graphic design, photography and animation, much less art and design theory and history. As Dr Bart Beaty demonstrated in his book *Comics Vs. Art*, there has been a longstanding disposition of mutual suspicion if not outright hostility between the two titular mediums for as long as comics—the younger medium—has existed, although this is much less the case in the 21st Century. My suggested explanation is twofold: one, that comics have largely been thought of as a branch of literature, therefore outside the re-
mit of the visual arts; two, that comics were popularly considered ‘entertainment’ and for ‘children’ therefore not just unworthy of serious inspection, but offering nothing worth inspecting. As Kim Munson’s book *Comic Art in Museums* demonstrates, art museums¹¹ are showing a growing interest in the display of and collecting of original comic art, although the problem of displaying comics pages made to be read intimately, one to one in the hand, is still a problem to be solved.³²

Most comics scholarship takes the existence of an artefact of comics as a given; it is there, in the world, found most likely in a specialist comics shop, bookstore, library or perhaps bought off the maker in the ‘artist alley’ at a comics festival or Comicon (now generally a pop-culture convention which still includes comics). This is included in the cycle as the ‘encounter’ which is divided into two parts: finding it, then the work is most often engaged with in another time and place, such as the home, on a train, library carrel or some other location. Comics are a commodity, something one can exchange for money or borrow from a library or friend. The question how it got to be on the shelf or made is less interesting than the anticipation of the felt experience of encounter; will this be good, exciting, provocative, sincere? The assumption is that makers and publishers invested in the work and there it is, available for encounter, so how do I feel about it? The question less asked is how the maker and publisher felt about it.³³

It is that felt experience which motivates the scholar into wanting to know more about why they respond to the work in such a strong way, however that may be. It is visible in the way positive adjectives about the works are sprinkled throughout their writing, and how certain works tend to be featured more than others, coalescing into a canon. An example (among many) is *The Comics of Chris Ware*, edited by David M. Ball and Martha B. Kulhman. The back-cover tag line itself is indicative: ‘An assessment of the achievement and aesthetic of one of America’s brightest comics innovators.’³⁴ This was published in 2010, even before the publication of *Building Stories* (2012) and the first volume of *Rusty Brown* (2019), much less Ware’s pictorial autobiographical statement, *Monograph* (2017). All the chapters are written by scholars embedded in departments of English or literature (at the time it was written). Collectively, they examine Ware’s work from different points of view, no doubt a consequence of the editors ensuring there is no repetitiveness. For instance, Jeet Heer looks at how Chris Ware has become involved in bringing two of

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²⁸ Examine the contributors bios to any volume of comics scholarship to confirm.
²⁹ Davies, 2019. 20.
³¹ Note, the remit of an art museum is to collect, conserve and showcase artefacts, whereas the art gallery has a commercial imperative to showcase and sell artefacts on behalf of makers and collectors. This latter is different again to art auction houses, whose remit is to find buyers of artefacts for their current owners. The very high prices now paid for final originals has provoked major auction houses and art museums interest. That is no surprise since there is money in it. See Salkowitz, R. *Splashing Ink of Museum Walls*, in *Full Bleed: The Comics and Culture Quarterly*, Issue 2. Portland: IDW, 2018. 138-145.
³² Several of the commentators in the collection Munson, K. *Comic Art in Museums*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020, mention this, including Art Spiegelman, 351-2; Charles Hatfield, 309; Rob Salkowitz, 304 and Alexi Worth, 366.
his major influences, Frank King and George Herriman, back into print and scrutinises his role as silent editor and designer. Marc Singer charges that the anthologies that Chris Ware edited: *McSweeney’s Quarterly Concern #13* and *Best American Comics 2007* (an advantage of being highly regarded is you get offers to edit volumes like this) ‘situates the alternative comics… as a new middlebrow… fleeing the ossified conventions of the visual arts (and simultaneously, recreating the ossified conventions of literary fiction).’ In *Monograph*, Ware himself does not hold back on his views on art or the value of ‘literary’ or comics that feel to him, come from real world emotional experience. As editor, Ware is entitled to promulgate his obviously passionate views about the value of comics (simultaneously ‘junk’ and the most powerful medium), especially when given free reign, but Singer made a cogent point. It is doubtful Ware has read this volume of criticism. As someone who wanders in both the world of makers and comics scholarship, I can say unequivocally that very few makers are aware of the scholarship being done on comics.

Therein lies the point. Comics scholarship operates in its sphere, comics makers operate in theirs and they rarely intersect except through the commodi-
fied object that is the comic, which may or may not be what the maker intended or desired. Of that, the commodified object itself betrays no evidence one way or the other, but the obvious (and reasonable) inference upon encounter with a comic is that it is a finished, whole and complete expression of the maker’s intention, although it is known that say, the comics produced in the Marvel and DC Universes are tightly controlled expressions of the property’s owners. But even within those universes, makers hired to work on them find ways to bring their own felt expression – passion to the story worlds and universes.38 Only deeper investigation – or thicker description – may reveal a maker was not happy with the finished result. I make no secret of the fact that I really dislike the dimensions and the cover to my graphic novel *The Sacrifice,* nor did I like the cover for the collection, *Stripshow.* Both were designed under duress, or as I derisively call it, ‘by committee.’

This brings me to ask what value it will confer to the scholar to know how and why comics came to be made. That is, what can the Cycle of Erotics offer to their own training and praxis in the critical analysis of a comic? As someone who straddles both comics studies and making comics, I do come across what I feel are errors in their description of comics, such as referring to comics as an art of drawing, implying exclusively. This is most obviously revealed in the definitional trap,39 that is, attempting to define what a comic is, to wit: ‘the most significant fact about comics is so obvious it’s easy to overlook: they are drawn.’40 Or, Thierry Groensteen’s analysis of abstract comics: ‘Let us turn first to comics that are abstract in the strict sense of the word, that is to say composed of a series of drawings that are themselves non-figurative.’41 In *Making Comics,* Scott McCloud promulgates the idea that comics is about drawing not only in the process of taking an idea from the mind to the page through storytelling, but that his advice on tools is exclusively made up of drawing tools (including digital stylus).42 In essence, he lapses into solipsism by showing how he makes comics, not showing what the plethora of possibilities for making are. It is of course, good advice for beginning makers if they want to make narrative,
cinematic, action driven comics like McCloud.

Any glance at the comics shelves in bookshops will reveal many comics that are not drawn, but painted, collaged, photographed, sculpted, or made of any art medium that can be manipulated to make images that communicate an idea explicitly or implicitly. Dave McKean’s artwork in *Mr Punch* has some drawing, but it is also painting, puppetry and photography manipulated by digital tools.43 Tommi Musturi’s work varies between splotches of paint to clinical outlines like Joost Swarte, to thick, black sculpted strokes like Charles Burns uses.44 David Mack’s *Ka-buki*,45 often features a cascade of painted figures in a field of colours and shapes rather than panels in a spread. Gareth Brooks’ *The Black Project*46 combines embroidered panel borders (and some images) with linocut printing. The error is forgivable because most comics have been and still are drawn with pencils, then redrawn with ink via nib, brush, brush-pen or fineliners and tech pens and their digital equivalents, each imparting their own quality to the line. A thicker description, however, might look more closely at these lines, what they were made with and ask why. For instance, I have used nib and brushes for ‘organic’ lines, that is, representing objects that occur in nature, and technical pens and fineliners for man-
made objects. To me, the latter's consistent line gives a machine-tooled edge (as the pen is, itself). Does Nick Drnaso's line used at the same weight to outline every object, and colours chosen with the same pastel tint lend qualities to his alienated subject matter? I contend it does, but did he?

Similarly, no one has really asked why it is that the drawn image is the main method by which pictures in comics come to be made. One way to answer would be to follow the logistics of the commodities through which comics evolved as a medium, starting with the pictorial cycles that William Hogarth etched off his original paintings. It had long been established that the engravers burin's ability to delineate form through hatching was the best means to reproduce paintings in print and therefore, for the enjoyment of a wider number of beholders since the original paintings were in private hands. Hogarth was unusual in doing the engraving himself, whereas most publishers hired specialists. The early satirists such as Rowlandson, Gillray and Cruickshank used the same method because of its facility for mass reproduction and the fact they proved popular. If one follows the history of comics through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the types of cartoons and comic strips made were tied not just to an evolving tradition of content and form, but the ability of presses to reproduce them and the response of the market to this combination of factors. For instance, the popularity of Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* was derived in part from McCay’s inventiveness, but also the astonishing colour work occupying the large space in the Sunday supplements. But while McCay instructed what the colour was to be, it was the team of specialist colour separators led by Alfred Benjamin Hunt, who hand-coloured the pages and supervised the ‘labour intensive artistic/mechanical/chemical (ben day) operation that lent McCay’s *Little Nemo* and other *Herald Sunday* comic strips the most subtle, stunningly beautiful array of colors ever seen in early news print. The constraints of materials, tools and the printing process can dictate what is possible to appear and thereby what is thought possible in the eyes of other makers looking to make in the same register. The Hearst newspaper group could afford the labour and machines to produce such comics, but only in the Sunday supplements so long as high sales and the commensurate advertising and classifieds this attracted, kept up. Small regional newspapers had no such resources, so budding makers exposed to the black and white versions of say, *Popeye* would not have known about colour comic strips because they never...
er saw them. What you are exposed to shapes what you make because visibility equals possibility and opportunity. An example of this is the rapid diminution of white males in all areas of comics making in the 21st century with women, people of colour and those identifying as queer, utilising their tacit knowledge to make comics. One only need have attended the artist alley of a comic art festival or zine fair over the past twenty years to see this change in action. The more you see people who look like yourself making comics, you realise it is an area you can make in. I cover this in more detail under Inspiration in the next chapter.

I do not want to give the impression that I feel comics studies lacks for thick description of process in making comics. It has been argued that works like Will Eisner’s *Comics and Sequential Art* and Scott McCloud’s seminal *Understanding Comics*, opened the field by providing a window into how comics make meaning (Brienza and Johnston, 2016, 14). Because the authors were practitioners, they offered insights that ‘unlocked’ comics and allowed scholars a way to write past content and start discussing the formal aspects, which has since become a major part of the comics studies field. Neil Cohn has made it his research goal to find a universal cognitive basis
for meaning making from (and in) comics via scientific empirical methods beginning with the contestable idea that comics have their own language-like structure, one I find difficult to believe exists as Simon Grennan argued (2017, 37-48). Grennan’s own A Theory of Narrative Drawing offers a deep insight into the aetiological and theoretical nature of drawing pictures that narrate (not necessarily comics, but applicable to them). As one expects in scholarship, these works build upon their predecessors, bringing ever wider interdisciplinary input to comics theory, no less so than my own research, which ‘stands on their shoulders.’ (Mutard 2014). A great example of the possibilities of interdisciplinary comics scholarship is documented in the Spring 2014 edition of Critical Enquiry—a special edition entitled Comics & Media—edited by Hillary Chute and Patrick Jagoda.* The conference from which it sprang had the unusual feature of having a considerable number of comics makers present: Art Spiegelman, Robert Crumb, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Alison Bechdel, Lynda Barry, Gary Panter, Chris Ware, Dan Clowes, Carol Tyler and Phoebe Gloeckner to name a few*. While these makers sat on panels or participated in on-stage interviews, several also made new comics for the journal although none of them could be called scholarship as comics. This latter is a very new field* (Inks), one which I have made a project to explore and is part of this thesis in the publication Comakademix.

The vast corpus of fan literature and comics journalism such as the venerable Comics Journal, provide a rich lode of reviews and crucially, long-form interviews that investigate why makers have entered the comics field and made the choices they did, if there were a choice, in the works they made. It is a mystery to me why I do not see these interviews referenced more in comics studies literature. If one wants to know how and why a comic exists, the makers have likely said so. This is particularly the case for those works published by trade publishers, as it is more than likely a brace of interviews with the makers exists since they form a core part of the marketing strategy of publishers, employing publicists whose job it is to set up this media campaign. Even small self-published comics can attract media attention as part of the comics community they participate in, via online interviews on podcasts.* (In Australia, that includes Com X and Graphic Nature).

In their introduction to Cultures of Comics Work,
Casey Brienza and Paddy Johnston propose their edited collection as a way of asking,

‘... who made the comic in question, how they made it, why they made it and in asking these questions, we draw our own picture of the labour involved in the creation of a comic.’

The chapters approach the question from three angles. The first is Locating Labour, wherein scholars describe the comics scene in various countries such as Australia, Colombia, India, Brazil among others, detailing how comics makers formed communities and collectives that enabled them to make comics outside of, or in lieu of an existing comics industry. They point to the fact almost all makers do not enjoy a salary or benefits. Most comics labour is piecework, contract labour or self-made speculative works where financial reward or security is a rare achievement. As Amy Maynard showed anecdotally in her ethnographic thesis A Scene in Sequence, makers persist in making because they love to make comics, which does not mean they like the insecurity of it.

The second part is Illustrating Workers, wherein scholars point to the privilege given to writers over the many other contributors in a comic: artists, pencillers, inkers, colourists, letterers. This derives from...
the structured field (in Bourdieu’s sense) of literature which struggles to contain comics frequently collaborative authorship when it has long adhered to the Romantic notion of genius auteur. This, despite the deconstruction of the ‘author’ by Barthes, Foucault et al. Benjamin Woo thinks that the comics world constructed by (comics) scholars is biased by ‘fannish notions of celebrity and importance and provides little guidance for understanding comics as a market or labour process’.38

The third section is Pushing the Boundaries, which describes some ways comics scholars are attempting to widen the scope of subjects and methodologies in the field of comics studies, some of which I mention below.

The reason I have outlined this book in more detail than others is that the methodology I have used for this research follows the methodologies used in the book. Brienza and Johnston note that sociologists and media scholars research on creative work and the ‘wider cultural economy’ derives from ‘case studies in these areas that often involve extensive fieldwork, interviews and firsthand accounts by practitioners and participants in the creative economy.’39 This is necessary because making comics is work, made by cultural workers. As noted above, the comics artefact gives few clues to the story of how and why it was made, nor as to how it became available where the first encounter occurs. The only way to understand that is to ask those all those creative workers who participated in some way to the existence of a work. This should include what Pascal Lefevre calls the ‘gatekeepers’, by which he means the editors, designers, publicists and others in publishing,40 and also what David Palmer called the ‘tail that wags the dog’41 or the logistics industry that makes comics available to be encountered whether it be a newsstand, comics shop or these days, crowdfunding platforms and mechanisms.42 These actors participation in comics making may constrain how makers can get their works before beholders, as some of my case studies will show (see Chapter 3). It is for that reason that I placed their role as ante-logistics and logistics in the Cycle of Erotics.

For this thesis, I have the advantage of being a comics maker by profession, having many graphic novels and short comics published in a wide variety of publishing scenarios: trade, education, academic, journals, work-for-hire, graphic medicine, anthologies, online to name the most prominent. For my Master of Design, I made a comic explicitly for encounter in a gallery scenario as a way of breaking outside the

58 Brienza, C. and Johnson, 2016. 13
62 Woo, B. To the Studio! ‘Comic Book Artists: The Next Generation’ and the Occupational Imaginary of Comics Work in in Brienza and Johnston, 2016. 191
63 Brienza, C. and Johnson, 2016 19-112
64 Lefevre, P. 2016. 205-206

29
conventions of comics making and using that new perspective to see back in. As a maker, I am very aware of—and interested in—how and why comics appear as they do, primarily because of my tacit knowledge about making, materials, tools, logistics, economics, publishing, distribution, translation and marketing comics.

Tacit knowledge was coined by Michael Polanyi to explain how we can possess certain knowledge that is difficult if not impossible to codify, which he phrased as ‘knowing more than we can say.’ Donald Schon takes up this idea in his theory of learning, where knowing-in-action describes actions that reveal spontaneous, skillful execution that we cannot make verbally explicit.* In comics, an example is knowing how to delineate male musculature on a superhero, or make the hero look as if they are flying. Similarly, drawing a tree can range from something resembling a specific species to the common generic ‘tree’ to an image approaching abstraction or the iconic. A skillful practitioner may choose a different style of delineation to suit a particular context such as the age group to which the picture is intended to be beheld by. Any practitioner will tell you the acquisition of such skill comes from practice, which Schon has theorized as knowing-in-action, followed by reflection-in-action (28) and reflection on our reflection-in-action (31). In other words, through practice or knowing-in-action, a maker finds many reasons to adjust an action to achieve an outcome, like the sketchy lines the prefigure the line which we used in a drawing; what David Hockney called groping for the line*. Reflection-on-action is this groping, where the maker continually adjusts the lines knowing the right one is going to be among them. When the marks are made, one reflects on our reflection-in-action to decide if the marks are indeed the ones desired. As any maker knows, often they are not, just as a writer knows the first draft of a work will rarely be satisfying and require many revisions if not outright reworks. But as Schon points out, all this action and reflection takes place as a skill which cannot readily be verbalized, therefore is tacit. (add Kolb in notes).

The Cycle of Erotics arose primarily from a reflection on my reflection-in-action and knowing-in-actions. It is practice-led research. It is in essence, a reflexive look at my own practice, and the great many conversations I have had with other makers about how they arrived at making comics and their process in making (that is, before I interviewed the makers in Chapter 4). I knew from this that the paths we all took to start making varied as much as we were in
number, as did the way we make them. Accordingly, the practice-led nature of this thesis enabled me to structure and derive the cycle through making several comics, each with a distinctly different origin in idea, development, execution, and logistics. Barbara Bolt wrote that creative arts research is best achieved through and by practice, and not via a purely theoretical, rationalist and instrumentalist approach as say, the sciences.\textsuperscript{52} Bolt bases her idea on Heidegger’s notion of handability, wherein handling of the world out there must precede theory, ‘the new (knowledge) can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice,’\textsuperscript{53} to which, she reminds us, ‘a central goal of post-graduate research is… to demonstrate how (the) research has made an original contribution to knowledge in a particular research discipline.’\textsuperscript{54} I am not aware of any other attempt to provide a tool that enables non-makers to grapple with how and why makers make what they do. Bolt further contends that the explanatory exegesis—in this case, the Cycle of Erotics—is ‘concerned with articulating what has emerged or what has been realised through the process of handling materials and ideas, and what this emergent knowledge brings to bear of (a) discipline.’\textsuperscript{55} That is why I have tried to ensure that the Cycle of Erotics is not prescriptive, but descriptive, a rhizomatic graph rather than a map.\textsuperscript{56} There is a starting point with the beholder and the way a maker arrives at a work available to beholders, the interested scholar can relate their interest in a comic or maker to any part of the cycle at any time in any way. It is also not intended as a way of understanding how comics work or make meaning, although it may be of use to those for whom that is their project. The Cycle will endure the fate of all theories and models put out there into the world, being in the hands and minds of beholders to make of it and use as they will. However, it is to a detailed breakdown of the Cycle, that we now turn.

Panels from the box that accompanies this thesis before editing and design. They depict me making and accumulating my tacit knowledge. The gap between panels is in the original.
THE CYCLE OF EROTICS

THE BEHOLDER

ENCOUNTER 1

ENCOUNTER 2

FELT RESPONSE

INSPIRATION

MAKER
(Tacit knowledge)

NEW WORK

THE WORK

LOGISTICS

FINAL ORIGINAL

GRAPPLING: MAKING

GRAPPLING: CONTENT

GRAPPLING: LOGISTICS
2 The Cycle of Erotics

This chapter presents the Cycle of Erotics in depth by explaining how and why I have chosen each station presented. To reiterate, while cyclic and logically moving clockwise, continually operating correspondences between each give this a rhizomatic nature. I have presented it in pictorial form with a continuing character representing the stations, which you may see (to the left, here) that it also functions as a comic describing the cycle. Since all acts depicted are done by human beings, it made sense to show a character performing them except where I thought it otherwise.

In the centre is the beholder because all makers are also beholders, but not all beholders are makers. This is to say that no maker becomes so without first, beholding something that inspires them (and this may not be in the register they become known for making).

It is also worth noting that a maker is the first beholder of their own work in progress. A work is made out there, in the world from ideas in there, the mind. There is a constant interplay with what is thought, felt, inspired and moved in there, to manipulating materials and tools out there, such as a stylus on Cintiq when making a comic. They see something of what other beholders will encounter after the process of commodification. More will be said on this, below.

The act of encountering a work of comics is two-fold. Firstly, a beholder seeks out or through happenstance, finds works that exhibit the signs of the comic. This could be in a specialist comics retailer, the graphic novel section in a bookstore or library, in literary anthologies, magazines and other print formats, or at a comic art festival or Comicon. It might also be found online in a variety of specialist comics sites or a makers own site. In addition, the work might be encountered in situ, such as a gallery space, wall art, posters and so on. Flipping through the comic is usually enough for a beholder to know whether a work meets their interests in some way, through the art style, colour, subject matter and/or predisposition to makers whom they already like.

Beholders generally engage with comics genres they know they like – which can be many – and genre often indicated by design: size, paper quality, cover design, typography, art style and so on. For instance, superhero comics are usually standardized self-covered and saddle-stitched pamphlets of 32 pages, or collected into square-bound books with bold typefaces and impactful design. Marvel and DC
tend to ensure their spines are consistent and easy to spot. ‘Alternative’ graphic novels, or ‘literary’ comics feature a much wider variety of sizes, paper stocks and cover types. This design falls under logistics, usually the remit of the publishers and their designers in conjunction with their marketing department. It should be noted that some makers like Chris Ware, Seth, Pat Grant (Blue) and Jamie Clennett (The Dismenois) have very particular visions of the formal presentation of their printed works on the shelf. I will say more about this under ante-logistics and logistics, below.

The second aspect of an encounter is where and when the work is actually engaged with, which is usually separate to the first above. That is, most comics are bought or borrowed in one location at one time, then the beholder takes the work home to read, or reads it on say, public transport. Sometimes this could be months or even years after its purchase or download. Generally, a comic requires an immersive level of attention to its content as there is usually a lot to occupy the visual—and mental—field. Therefore, a beholder makes ‘space’ and ‘time’ for the encounter in the expectation (and hope) that the work will stimulate them at some level.

The act of beholding a comic is in essence, to make meaning from everything it presents (including itself as object). That it is intelligible is because another human mind undertook the cognitive processing to make the marks that appear as pictures and words (or not) to become the artefact that is a comic. The beholder assumes that the comic before them is the intentional statement of a maker(s). The comic then functions as a medium of exchange between maker and beholder, or what Paul Davies describes as comics interpersonal function, a ‘game’ using the shared constructions of words and pictures to communicate. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explain the cognitive processes by which a mind makes meanings from something like marks on a surface of which most comics are comprised. I leave the reader to consult Davies’ book Comics as Communication for a comprehensive examination of existing models of meaning-making in comics, which he calls the ‘standard model’ of comics theory orthodoxies, i.e. Eisner, McCloud, Groensteen and Neil Cohn. Davies offers his own based on the social linguistic model of Michael Halliday.
What I am interested in here is not how a comic makes meaning but the felt response, which is the emotional stimulation derived through engagement with the story or information that the comic possesses. Encountering a comic with a narrative, characters and their story arcs in a story-world and story-time invites—and usually develops—a relationship between the beholder and the characters. Ideally, beholders come away replete, if not richer in knowledge for the encounter, which is the pleasure. We are stimulated by things we see and our emotional states are connected to them in response for the reason that our emotions are always on, always present. What a maker cannot be sure of is the emotional reaction to a depiction, which is entirely up to the beholder. The maker can however, be certain of the emotional feeling they had/have while making the work.

It is this felt response to comics—the pleasure gained—that motivates and inspires some beholders to become makers in the same (or another) register and attempt to give others a similar pleasure. Perusing interviews with comics makers, a large proportion of them read comics as a kid and continued into adulthood, which was backed up in my interviews with makers (see chapter four). I describe some of my own path to making comics in *Vita Longa, Ars Brevis*.

While it is common that a lot of comics makers became enamoured of comics at a young age, for many—including myself—it was not considered a career choice. Indeed, as Thomas Campi explained, he did not imagine comics as a possible career option until he saw an exhibition featuring the original art of Nicola Mari from his hometown. ‘I realized that someone made these comics and I knew I wanted to do that.’ He was then able to be mentored in Ferrara by the same artist who mentored Mari: Germano Bonazzi, who generously taught Thomas the discipline to make comics in Italy.

I call this, getting permission, wherein a beholder does not imagine themselves as a maker until they encounter something made by someone like themselves which demonstrates the possibility of making. This is one reason why ensuring that there is a space for heterogeneous representation is important in any creative art.

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78 Use of terms like ‘mainstream’, ‘alternative’ and ‘literary’ in a classificatory manner in comics is communal in origin and use. They are not currently used in the Dewey Decimal classification system, for instance, which classes all comics and related literature under 741.5, which is a subset of drawing – the 740s – and the arts - 700s. Literature is the 800s. Nevertheless, classification is applied in the comics community where ‘mainstream’ is defined as comics published by the larger publishers in a region, such as superheroes or action and adventure stories (generally). ‘Alternative’ or ‘literary’ comics are those considered not mainstream, in other words, do not have superheroes and are dominated by action. Of course, the boundaries are in no way clean like this and posing and positioning of boundaries is debatable in any case. I have used the terms in the casual way they are among comics makers and beholders.

79 Grant, P. and Clennett, J. Interviews.
80 Davies, P. *Comics and Communication*. New York: Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels, 2019. 11
81 ibid 281
82 I proposed the concept of relationship with characters in my Masters Thesis, *Words into Images*. I established that beholders relate to characters in largely the same way as people because makers have largely replicated human behaviour through the affordances of materials and ability to depict emotional states – or the wordless ‘languages’ of facial expression and body language – in comics. See Mutard, B. *Words into Images*, Masters Thesis, Monash University, 2014, 26–29.
84 Campi, T. Interview.
In order for a work of comics to exist, there must be makers, who might be an individual or a team of specialists. Inspired to make, a beholder starts to begin the slow process to mastery via the accumulation of tacit knowledge in whatever aspects of comics they are interested in: writing, penciling, inking, lettering, colouring, painting and so on. There is no possibility of cataloguing tacit knowledge because it is always specific to the needs of a maker and what it is they want to convey. The maker explores, plays with materials and processes to discover what they must do to achieve the result they want. They arrive at a style of making that becomes their signature, which is to say that it is recognizable and synonymous with their name. All going well, beholders will seek out the makers works because they expect/hope the encounter will give them more of the pleasure they previously derived from that maker.

The work itself is tacit knowledge made manifest. It is the knowledge say, that 300gsm Strathmore Bristol Board with its very smooth surface is very tractable to use of pencils and ink marks made by nib, brush and pen. It can also tolerate a lot of erasing without the fibres lifting, therefore again, suitable for making the clean lines that is frequently seen in comics such as those of the ligne claire school. How does this come to be known? It is knowledge shared among makers, but the maker must try it to see if it works for them. It is knowledge about what nib can make satisfying lines, such as a Hunt 101, or that the Winsor and Newton series 7, number 00 brush is great for making fine, expressive lines. It is knowing how much pressure to apply while using said brushes or nibs to put lines in the right place to give a desired affect such as separating the protagonist’s figure from others in the background and help a beholder recognize it. It is knowing how to create a composition to give a sense of disorientation by tilting the horizontals to one side or other. It is customizing brushes in ClipStudio using an Apple pencil 2.0 on an iPad Pro. It is knowing how to mix watercolours to give a whole range of skin tones. It is knowing that using a large 8 colour CMYK press will cost a lot more than digital printing, but gives the best result in colour and is much more cost effective for print runs over 1000 copies. It is knowing that if you want to print a book in hardcover, with endpapers, ribbon markers and a dustjacket, it is really only cost effective to print them in China, Hong Kong, Singapore or Eastern Europe if you’re a European press, leveraging currency exchange rates that favour the Euro.

A maker uses certain tools and materials because they get pleasure from the haptic experience of handling them, like Pat Grant demonstrates in his thesis when shifting his primary mark-making tool from the nib to the brush. You might think this is more the case with those who produce images than writing only, since writing is done at a keyboard and screen, but some writers like to write longhand: James Patterson uses pencils; JK Rowling a pen. There is no right or wrong to the choice of materials and tools to making comics (or any other art); as a teacher, I advocate that student makers should use whatever it takes to get to the end result desired. But it helps if you use materials and tools you enjoy, considering the effort required to make lengthy works or working on a regular series. I could go on listing the manifold ways that makers come to make and the possible tacit knowledge they might have acquired, but it is with certainty, inexhaustible. There is nothing to be gained in listing, applying some sort of taxonomy and deriving theory from it as each makers tacit knowledge is by definition unique.
There are about as many ways for a comic to come into being as there are makers, and most of them will tell you that they have a lot of ideas that never leave the speculative, sketchbook or notebook phase. I have probably spent more creative time on projects that will never appear than I have on those that have been published.

The cliched origin of works is the ‘flash of inspiration,’ which does happen, but the reality is often more pragmatic. There is no way to list how inspiration arises other than to say that makers are open to ideas as they arrive, where and whenever. The case studies of the practice-based component in this thesis give some example of the variety of reasons for how my works came to be and how they were shaped by the grappling process. No two were the same.

For many works, the origin is pragmatic, involving publishers, editors and companies in control of IP such as Marvel, DC, Castermans or Frew (The Phantom, in Australia), seeking to further exploit it. They invite a roster of specialist makers—writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists, letterers—to produce the work on a work for hire basis. The incentive for these makers is dual: earning money and also, working on IP they might love. This thesis is not the place to expand on the travails of what is effectively piece work (page rates), but studies by Benjamin Woo, Amy Maynard and Casey Brienza\textsuperscript{86} have explored this economy. One interesting thing to note is that makers suffer the economic disadvantage because of their desire to make comics. Woo notes that this is largely a result of most comics makers being firstly, comics fans.\textsuperscript{87} This primary urge or need for makers is to make: to tell a story, to make pictures, to inform. This is why comics exist at all.

\textsuperscript{85} Grant, P. 2014. 253-257
\textsuperscript{86} See Woo, 2015, Maynard, A 2017 and Brienza, C and Johnson, P. 2016
\textsuperscript{87} Woo, B. Erasing the Lines Between Leisure and Labor: Creative Work in the Comics World. Spectator, Vol.35 No .2, 2015. 60-61
Making comics is an act of the hand, controlled as it is by the mind. I use the term grappling to refer to the handling of all aspects of the work in order to make it. Grappling evokes the very act of making marks with a tool like a pencil to find the ones that best capture the likeness of a character with the posture, body language and facial expression required. It evokes the struggle of the mind to initiate the fine motor control of the hand muscles along with the forearm through the shoulder in relation to the surface, something Pat Grant evocatively captures in his thesis "Bodies on Boards." Even tapping the keyboard, pressing typewriter keys or writing with a pen, is a methodical, temporal process that allows the ideas to appear in a form that is graspable by others.

I have broken grappling into three components, but stress that these are not sequential or essential, but ways in which to think and ask about the process of making comics.

At some point in grappling with an idea, the maker(s) wrestle with the comic as commodity, which is to say its logistics: how and where it will appear. Is it to appear in print, or digital (or both)? How big will the printed product be, will it have colour, two tones or black and white only? What screen publishing format will be utilized? Who is the target beholder in terms of age group, interests, genre? And so on it goes. Makers generally desire to make a work with a group of beholders in mind, to connect with and provide them with some pleasure or stimulation as they in turn, have felt as beholders. Ante-logistics is necessarily grappled with because it shapes how a work is to be made, on what scale, with what tools towards what end. Making comics is labour-intensive because it is almost always the work of the hand. Some can work quickly using quotidian materials like Simon Hanselmann's pens, colour pencils and cheap watercolours. Others like Nina Bunjevac labour for days hatching her elaborate tones and textures. Emil Ferris produces her drawings in pens on separate surfaces and the digitally combines them with the 'lined' notebook paper to produce the final original of My Favorite Thing is Monsters.

Few ideas for a comic arrive fully formed. Most pass through a number of stages: sketches, drafts, notes, research, refined drafts, character design, more sketches, layouts all before finished art and processing for publication. But it is safe to say that for the most part, the content of a comic evolves through the working process. For instance, Thomas Campi workshops an idea for the comic with his regular writer Vincent Zablus before the latter goes ahead and writes the script. Upon receiving that, Campi proceeds to draft layouts and make adjustments where he feels the storytelling is better served visually. In most collaborations between writers and artists, there is expectation of adjustment (and professionalism). Similarly, the colourist and letterer may add a considerable texture to the work on top of that.

There is no right or wrong way to approach content, but whatever ones tacit knowledge has developed to get the job done. Julie Ditrich gets an idea or a commission and goes straight to extensive research before writing. Mark Sexton prefers to have an idea, start drawing and work the content out on the page with only some idea of where it will lead. In essence, developing content is really a form of making, but it...
is the hidden iterations and hundreds if not thousands of big and small decisions that go to making the comic what it is and why it is what it is.

By this I refer to making the finished script and/or art, wherein the bulk of the content has been settled and the labour to make what will appear to beholders is undertaken. Many makers allow for improvisation and refinement at this stage; some do not. Whether analogue, digital or a combination of tools is used, the hand-madeness of comics requires time, sometimes years.

In the next chapter I detail how I made the eight comics for this thesis where it will be seen that each had its own grappling process, tailored to its logistics, and in response to the work itself as it was being made. They are my processes, not a formula for making in general, and will serve to show that makers develop a process of making that they know will give them an optimal chance of success in making the desired work. Indeed, makers often develop several processes, which deliver different results as needed. These processes can evolve over time as accumulated tacit knowledge and/or need brought on by publishers, employers, personal desire, finances and bodily limitations, enforce change.

88 The relationship to Heidegger’s concept of handability is also noted.
89 Grant, P. 2014. 256-257
91 All these are observations I made based on looking at their final originals in a gallery scenario at galeriemartel, Paris. I was particularly surprised by the work of Emil Ferris because it so convincingly looks as if it were drawn on notepaper (and frankly, being immersed in such a great story). I should have realized it could not have been because such paper is a poor surface for intense working over with the hard tips of coloured pencils. The paper creases, curls and tears quite easily. Furthermore, the markers she used for lettering and panel borders would bleed through such paper, but have not in this case. Rightly so, as the reverse image would only occlude the pictures on the other side. Also, close inspection of the ‘spiral’ binding shows it is often the same image (scanned from a blank notebook). Ferris, E. My Favorite Thing is Monsters. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2018. Also: https://www.galeriemartel.com/emil-ferris-2018/
92 Campi, interview.
93 Ditrich, interview.
94 Sexton, interview.
Nearly all encounters with comics are with a commodity; a reproduction, not the original work (even in so-called artist editions). It will be a processed version that is different in scale, context, appearance and space to the final original art. Makers approach their process with this in mind, aware that what they behold while making, is going to be different to what the beholders will see. The most obvious example is how the original art is usually made at a larger scale to the published or screen version. Sometimes this difference can be considerable such as pages by Hal Foster in *Prince Valiant*, which are 105 by 83cm versus the printed page of 35.8 by 25.6cm. The surface area of the original boards on which Foster made his marks is a nine and a half times that of what a beholder sees in reproduction in the current printings by Norton Agency Titles. The advantage of doing this—as any maker of comics art knows—is more space in which to make marks given that the size of a pencil/pen/nib/brush tip is necessarily constrained by the size of a human hand to hold, and the eye to discern marks. A maker knows reduction ‘tightens’ the lines/drawing, making it look cleaner, but there is no point making such fine marks if they merge or disappear in the process of reproduction. Still, some makers style is such they can work at one to one or in rare cases, smaller than original. Art Spiegelman chose to make his pages for *Maus* at one to one with the printed version so as not to benefit from that tightening of reduction, ‘Using stationery store supplies, bond paper, typewriter correction fluid and a fountain pen made it more like writing, like offering up a manuscript, something made by hand.’

While most beholders will not see these final originals nor care much to do so, there is a qualitative difference between what the beholder encounters to that of the maker. Whereas the beholder encounters the work in a complete form, able to take in any or all of the work quickly, the maker(s) only sees the narrative as it is made, over a long period of time. For starters, comics pages are often produced one at a time, not in the presence of the other in the spread, although the maker may well have a strong idea of it according to layouts. The pages may also be produced out of order, with new sections added in, or, as in the case of Chester Brown and myself, each panel is done by itself and then assembled into pages in a subsequent process of making (see *Bully Me*, below). There is no right or wrong to any of this, since what matters to the maker is the end result. It however, may have some bearing on how researchers understand a work if they knew how the work came to be what it is.
Logistics is my term to cover all aspects of the production of a comic that take the original art from the makers tables and screens into the hands of beholders. This is a little different to ante-logistics as a part of grappling, because that was to work out the how and where a comic will appear so that the final originals are fit for that purpose. Here, logistics means the decisions and processes that actually make the final original into the intended commodity, and thereafter, deliver to beholders. While these are borne in mind when devising a work, the time taken to make and possible changes in social, economic and other contexts may mean revision to the initial conception and intentions.

Publication for print whether it be made by established publishers, small press or self-publishing involves publication design that includes considerations of size, paper stocks, cover stocks, peritext, cover design, page numbering and other elements that will compose the comic. These decisions are refracted through economic considerations of markets: who the publisher considers to be the likely reader (knowing that anyone can still pick it up), what size readership is known and/or likely, the price-point beholders can typically afford, and then design the publication accordingly. Whatever the combination of elements, printing costs money and therefore the design choices are made to provide a chance at making a profit. Choices might include the type of press; offset or digital print, with the former suited to high-volume print runs. A third option is print on demand, wherein books are digitally printed individually to order, then mailed out. This model is growing rapidly as digital print technology improves in comparison with the gold-standard of offset printing. This model also averts the risks entailed in investing up front in a print run, warehousing and possible failure of the book to sell. Secondary to this is the type of binding, then where the printing is to be done. As mentioned above, printing location could be where it is advantageous to leverage favourable exchange rates, factoring in shipping costs, political risks and so forth.

Other costs may also include advances given to the makers in the case where they own the intellectual property, or an agreed price per page if the mak-
ers are on a work-for-hire arrangement. Most small presses have little or no money to pay advances and offer contracts that will pay royalties after their costs have been recovered. Self-publishing means makers fronting up the print costs themselves, usually in very small print-runs that consequently have a high unit cost. A small minicomic costing $5 or £4 might seem steep, but the maker has put in a lot of effort to make a comic that they will not get paid for. Self-publishing at scale, comparable to professional publications incurs substantially larger investment and hoped for ROI. Dave Sim made self-publishing his raison d’etre throughout his long running *Cerebus* title published by Aardvark-Vanaheim, even publishing a how-to guide.

Distribution is the logistics of shipping print comics from publisher warehouses to retailers who order comics for their shop shelves or online stores. Large publishers either have their own distribution arm or use specialist distributors. Distribution relies on both the publisher and maker(s) to market the book and make retailers aware it exists. The burden of marketing falls more on the publisher as they have shouldered the risk by publishing a work with no guarantee it will appeal to any beholders. There are two aspects to marketing which are correlated: first is to retailers and libraries (in Australia these use separate distribution systems), who must feel it is a comic they wish to stock on the basis that they can sell it to their customer base, or that it will be borrowed. But they will only do this if they have evidence the publisher and author have marketed the comic so that the public are aware. For established makers, this is less of a problem because the retailer will be able to see that their work has sold in their outlet previously. But for a new maker, it will come down to whether the work has been well reviewed, interviewed in the media and other visible activity that will provoke potential buyers to order the work. Being short-listed for prizes and winning them is certainly beneficial. Of course, word of mouth through social media and literal sharing of something read can create a work that ‘comes from nowhere’ to be acclaimed. Simon Hanselmann’s *Megg, Mogg and Owl* books built up a large fan base by publishing through his Tumblr *Girlmountain*. That and the prurient content led to offers of publication around the world. This example also points to the need for most makers to take charge of marketing their own work through an online presence, social media and appearances at conventions and festivals, even paying for the tables themselves if they have not achieved name recognition sufficient to be a guest.

Underneath the marketing is the logistics of design: the appearance of the work itself as a physical object, or format for online distribution. This means the choices made over covers, stock, cover image and so forth, which is crucial because the haptic experience of the initial encounter can play a substantive role in the desire of beholders towards a work. Design is a trade-off or risk-mitigation on behalf of the publisher (including self) between the unit cost of production, the retail price and the discounts they have to offer the distributor and retailers off the cover price (usually between 60 and 70%). The cost of production and shipping to the distributor is borne by the publisher out of their 30 to 40%, but they front up that cost against possible returns or failure to sell in the direct
market system. The balance is a tricky one, but it is not necessarily based on the work itself. A publisher may make a decision to invest more in a work by a new maker, amortising the cost across their slate of publications. Again, name recognition plays a factor, enabling Fantagraphics to publish the expensive ‘box’ of books that is Chris Ware’s Building Stories and Rizzoli, the oversized and weighty Monograph.

The other logistical outcome is to publish a work online, either on a recognised comic/comic strip publisher site or host like Webtoon, Tapas or via tumblr, Instagram or ones own site. This is in effect both publication and distribution, but still involves a pro-active marketing campaign online, to draw beholders to it.

It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to cover every permutation and combination involved in logistics because it is vast, varies from one publisher and maker to another, from one country (considered its own market) to another, and even within regions of a country. In the following chapter, I will show how logistics informed decisions made about the eight works based on where they have been or will be published.

At the end of the at times, very long journey from inspiration is the comic as commodity I call the Work. As mentioned, the Work is primarily what beholders encounter because as a comic, it is available in multiple copies from as few as five for a small minicomic to as many as five million for a bestseller such as Dav Pilkey’s Dogman. Alternatively or simultaneously, the works could be available for download through various platforms that the maker– and other stakeholders– have decided to make the work available through.

It is over to the beholders to encounter the work somewhere and have that felt response which might initiate another cycle of erotics for the same maker, or inspire a beholder to become one.
The following detail the making process and application of my tacit knowledge toward making eight comics, all of which were made as the practice-based component of this thesis. As noted previously, the derivation of the cycle came from the observation of this making. It necessarily focuses on the making of the works rather than how and why I became a maker because I had already become a professional comics maker well before undertaking this research. Indeed, it was from this career that the impetus to codify the knowledge I had gained was sprung. That said, some aspects of my path to making is covered within the works made, specifically Bully Me, Vita Longa, Ars Brevis and around the box in which this thesis is contained.

As mentioned, the cycle is more of a rhizomatic graph of how the elements of making relate to one another even if there is necessarily a directional element in that works are initiated, grappled with, finished and made available for encounter. I follow this direction as a matter of economy in organizing these reflections. Similarly, I present the works in the order with which they were made, not by any other metric. All writing and depictions by myself except where indicated.

3. Case Studies
New Work:
The urge was to make and self-publish my first mini-comic, specifically for printing on a Risograph Printer (riso), a popular means of printing small runs of comics (usually minicomics).105 The intent was to sell them at the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival (LICAF) 2017, Thought Bubble 2017 and the Home-cooked Comics Festival 2018.

Grappling — ante-logistics:
I had not made final originals for the riso prior to this. I did know that the affordances of the printer with its transparent inks meant two colours could make a third, so I planned on using a teal, yellow (overlaid to make a green) and black. I also knew that each colour is a drum inserted into the machine separately, and the same paper is passed through each time you change colour, so I expected—and allowed for—slippage.

Grappling — content:
This was a wordless comic about my literally laundering money my deceased father had buried in his backyard. After his passing, I dug up the money which was contained in sealed jars and tins, but discovered moisture had entered many of them and the money had gone mouldy. So, I washed them with detergent in a laundry trough and dried them out.106 My interest was in whether a narrative drive could arise without the presence of visible agents such as characters doing something, which is the most common form of narration within comics. In short, can a narrative arise in a sequence of spatiotopically linked pictures107 where there are no characters visible and nothing depicted as ‘happening’? My guess was that beholders (like myself) will have encountered enough stories about money being laundered and counted after heists, to make the connection with my depictions of similar. I chose depictions I felt would aid that connection, despite actually occurring.

Grappling — making:
I determined the dimensions of the mini-comic as 15 by 20.3cm, a spread easily contained within the A3 size of the risograph platen. It was also within the size of a sheet of 250gsm Schoellershammer hot rolled paper that is my favoured drawing surface. I drew four pages or two spreads to each sheet for twelve pages in total.

I planned this work visually, drawing images from memory of the events, added with associative imagery as they occurred to me, such as mould spores.
Potential images were sketched, arranged, reframed and parsed until the narrative sequence satisfied me. I drew the original art at the scale of the final art, a decision made to minimise the potential of my getting too involved in detailed linework as I am wont to do. I also assumed the riso press affordances leant towards bolder, clean linework rather than detail. This is actually not the case.

**Final original:**
The pictures were made in pencil and ink line art, per my regular practice. I scanned the pages in and coloured them in Photoshop, approximating the colours I was intending to be seen in the riso print, including overlaying the blue and yellow to achieve a green. These were placed on separate layers so that they could be converted to black, and therein make the plates needed for each colour. Where I wanted modulated or gradated tones, the black was set to a grainy half tone, like ben day dots.

**Logistics:**
When it came to producing the work on the riso, the early results showed I had made a mistake with my execution: too much coverage. I had placed the teal and yellow under the black to eliminate what
I thought would be visible ‘edges’ under the black where coverage thickness varies. Instead of 100% coverage, I had 150, 200 or even 300%. The result was saturated colour and an ugly, thick look to the ink, obscuring my linework and drawing attention away from the image. I realized I had to recalibrate my colour saturations and run another test. Upon inspection of these results, I made the decision to produce Laundry on a colour digital press as I had no time to learn the subtle affordances of the risograph so close to departure for the UK. I expanded the colour palette for this purpose since the affordances of a colour digital press are much wider than riso, however I did stick with the yellow, blue, green and black as I liked the appearance it gave on screen. I would never have chosen this palette were I making the work for the digital press in the first place. This work demonstrates how my existing tacit knowledge failed to account for the affordances of a method of reproduction that appeared on the surface, logical when it came to colour separations.

100 copies of the digital minicomic were printed and sold as intended, through artist alleys and online sales through my Facebook page.

BULLY ME OR SOUFFRE DOULEUR (FRANCE).
Published by Editions çà et là, Bussy-Sainte-Georges, 2019.

New Work:
This book was a self-initiated project. In mid-2016\(^\text{108}\) I had a number of personal problems and a graphic novel I had spent more than two years work on—The Dust of Life—ground to a halt.\(^\text{109}\) I was despondent, wondering if I could ever finish a project that was more than ten pages. I was a guest at Perth Supanova in 2016, wherein I was placed at a table in an area that had very little foot-traffic, so I started drawing little panels depicting scenes from my high school experiences of being bullied, particularly the corridor scene that opens the story. I kept drawing the panels one after the other depicting the bullying that happened to me, my revenge fantasies and as memories surfaced, triggering one after the other, I soon realized that this could be my next project. When I started this thesis, I made it so.

Grappling — ante-logistics.
This work began without a view to where it might appear as a commodity; a way to avoid the fear of failure that embarking on a graphic novel might induce. The above-mentioned crisis of confidence stemmed in part from the scale of the failed projects—300-500 pages—and my practice wherein I had developed my tacit knowledge/skill base to make half-toned art with

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\(^\text{108}\) This project had its origin before I began this thesis, but the work itself was made within it.

\(^\text{109}\) Space does not permit me to explain what happened in detail, but The Dust of Life was a graphic novel to replace another failed graphic novel I had spent three years writing, researching and planning. In total, I had spent about 5 years full time work on books that would not and will probably never appear.
a high degree of veridicality that took me four days per page on average to produce; I was facing around 2000 days or about seven years full time work. I decided I needed to go ‘back to basics’, which for me, was to return to the sort of making that characterized my work before I introduced computer aided art in the form of colour and toning around 2006; that is, in black and white, using cross-hatching instead of half-tones. This meant pencil on paper, then inking over that with the nib and brush, followed by use of white gouache for corrections. I also decided that I would ‘simplify’ my style and draw in a ‘cartoony’ fashion, meaning not as beholden to verisimilitude as my practice had evolved to that point. Nevertheless, once it became apparent the material would stand as a book, I imagined it for print, since I have always desired my work to appear that way.

**Grappling — content:**

*Bully Me* is an autobiographical story about my experiences with bullying as I recalled them during high school and to some degree, my first attempt at university. I show how bullying shaped my psychological development in several ways, particularly how I became my own worst bully, impugning myself and trashing my self-esteem. The upshot was that I devel-
oped an eating disorder and became very ill. I show how I managed to find the mental strength to change my thinking with professional and medical help.

**Grappling — making:**

Early on in the making process, I decided I would not write a script so as to allow my memories to be visualized as directly as could be. I reasoned that the script was already ‘written’ by the fact of it having happened. This methodology flowed as a series of scenes but petered out after my first year at University, having no denouement. There is some expectation on behalf of beholders that when encountering a work that is presented as a graphic novel, it will contain a narrative or series of ideas that deliver a cogent message and has some sort of closure. The beholder should feel replete.

I had to change my process and think about the work in terms of a book. I showed what I had made to that point to Erica Wagner, my publisher at Allen & Unwin. She suggested that I show the consequences: the self-bullying and clinically diagnosed eating disorder. Years before, I made a short comic about my problem with food called *Thick and Thin*, published in *Tango #9*. I realized what was said in this could be expanded to explain how the bullying lead to the condition I suffered, particularly the problem of how to depict my mental space, which is where the locus of the eating disorder really lies (it is a mental health issue first and foremost). It did not explain how I got into that mental space, but that was no surprise; I was still in it when I made it.

I attempted to adapt *Thick and Thin* and extend it using my methodology for the book thus far, but it quickly faltered; the scenes simply did not flow from my mind. I had to stop and think structurally about the plot, which was (and is) my usual approach to making graphic novels. My first idea was to have my current self, talking to my twelve and fifteen year old selves as depicted in the high school scenes, offering the benefits of hindsight. I quickly dropped it because it was all exposition; the old rule to ‘show, don’t tell,’ is a good one. I realized what I should be dramatizing is the experience of being in that prison, that is, inside of my head. In a comic, one can depict anything, including mindscapes. What made this more pertinent was that the prison metaphor was one used by Dorothy Rowe in her book *Depression: Your Way Out of Your Prison*, which was instrumental in helping me understand the deep well of depression and low self-esteem I found myself in. Her concept was that depression is a defence against fear and pain, there-

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110 I hesitate to use these terms, for while they do make sense in the commonplace understanding in relation to comics, I am not an advocate of Scott McCloud’s idea that in iconicity (read simplicity) there is more power to the depiction by permitting the reader ‘to be’ (McCloud, 1992). I would argue it is actually more complex since it would take more work for the beholder to make the connection between marks that make up the ‘simple’ face and its referent, than marks that are much closer to the referent.


fore you build a prison which you place yourself into, then guard with a bullying menace that is yourself in the guise of protecting yourself. Her work matched the vision of myself as a ‘comic monk’, my life reduced to a cell with a bed, a drawing table, computer and bookshelves. The best way to use the comic register’s affordances was to show what I was feeling.

The process of working out this section was visual, drawing small sketches of prospective panels and allowing the sequences to follow wherever they might. I did not adhere to a specific ‘prison’ but a generic model derived from memory of lots of prison cells depicted in films, TV shows and comics. It was to be a prison for one prisoner, enclosed from the world with no view of what was outside of it. The bully guard was a self-portrait, another of my imaginary selves in the work, who also had a Hulk-like capacity to transform when enraged.

When I felt I had completed this addition to the book, I started showing prospective publishers to gauge their interest and also, gain more feedback: Erica at Allen & Unwin, Serge Erencywk at Editions cà et là (France), John Anderson at Soaring Penguin Press (UK) and Corinne Pearlman at Myriad Editions (UK).\(^\text{113}\) They all came back with the same advice: powerful stuff, but there was a big ‘gap’ in the nar-
rative between the high school/University bullying years and the eating disorder section. It was like two separate comics; there needed to be a bridge showing how the bullying led to the eating disorder. What had happened that led me to ‘construct’ the prison that I had built myself; were there incidents or aspects of my life that could show this process? It proved difficult to write, not least for having to trawl through a period of my life that I did not remember fondly.

**Final original:**
I started producing the art using a three tier grid per page that I favoured for my works such as *The Silence, The Sacrifice* and *The Bunker*. This favour was predicated on my belief that by assuming such a regular grid, beholders will no longer notice it and immerse themselves more fully into the content. In other words, the spatiotopia does not draw attention to itself.

I soon realized there was a danger in relation to making the art where one is ‘writing’ from memory: I would remember something else that needs to go in between two other scenes or panels. There is always the possibility of inserting a page, provided scenes ended on the turn of a page, but sometimes the additions (and occasional subtraction) were only a panel or two, creating a problem that concatenated across many pages.

I resorted to a methodology that I had used for my book *The Silence*, which was to ‘cut up’ the tiered grid into individual panels and then lay them out on a black background. As an example of how a maker can be inspired by the tacit knowledge of another, I read that this was the technique used by Chester Brown in his early works such as *The Playboy* and *I Never Liked You*. In his case, he drew the panels individually and pasted them down on black boards, whereas I did my cutting digitally. In making this decision, it freed me up to keep drawing panels without worrying about where the turn of the page was, or which panel might become a form of punctuation-like pause, such as single panels on a page. I continued drawing the panels in the three-tiered grid purely on the grounds of efficiency: not wasting the expensive Schoellehammer paper. Once all the panels were drawn, I could begin to place them on a digitally generated black background to scale with the finished product (see logistics below). There was a three tiered guide in place that aligned the panels to the centre vertical of the page (I prefer symmetrical layouts), but I allowed asymmetrical placement as well.

This sort of help is usually only offered if they intend on publishing the work, but they were plainly interested enough to help. Developing and cultivating a network is the surest way to publication.
As can be seen, there are some pages wherein I diverged from this format, such as white backgrounds. Reflecting upon it, I think this was because they derived from the source material *Thick and Thin*, which used a similar approach to the page. In the latter story, I had produced these pages with the intention to compose a visual equivalent to my mental state of the time: racing, circular thoughts, nested in layers of anxieties like a babushka doll. My solution in *Thick and Thin* and these sections of *Bully Me* was to disorient the beholder, with panels, words and pictures offering tangents pulling the eye away from the literal left to right, top to bottom reading of most comics.

**Logistics:**
Serge at Editions çà et là made firm his offer of publishing at a lunch in Paris in November 2016, so I could produce the book knowing it would at least appear in print in one territory. The print run and distribution would be similar to *Le Silence*: around 1100 copies to be placed in Franco-Belgian comics shops that commit to holding back orders of certain comics publishers rather than the punishing flow through of 100-120 albums per week that characterize larger shops and chains in that industry. The other editors and publishers declined to publish either for reasons...
of it being outside their remit, too crowded a publication slate or wanting to further change the work than I was prepared to go.

I designed the size at 160mm by 230mm high because I like ‘novel’ sized graphic novels. I also knew my art was ‘clean’ enough to retain legibility despite the reduction from the size I drew it. Serge said that the paper stock and printing would be very similar to their production of *Le Silence*, so I knew they were going to use a thick matte paper that soaked up a lot of ink without it bleeding through to the other side, yet still retained a crisp print quality to fine lines in offset printing.

The work had to be translated into French. Serge wrote to say that we needed to come up with a title that conveyed the essential meaning of *Bully Me*, which the literal translation, *harcèlement*, did not do. That applied to a specific sort of harassment in workplaces, not the sort of bullying I endured. I wrote to a friend of mine, Marie Trinchant, who was a French University-trained translator of English and Spanish into French. She wrote back with her suggestion, *souffre douleur*, which when literally translated back into English, means ‘pain sufferer,’ but in France, was understood and used with the meaning I intended. Fortunately for Marie, Serge was impressed enough by her suggestion to offer her the job of the entire translation, which she undertook. She was able to leverage our personal connection to ask questions of me regarding several things that were unclear in meaning. Marie had also spent several years living in Australia, so understood some of the Australian slang and cultural references to sports that had no equivalence in France.114

Designing the cover was, per usual for me, hard work. Finding a compelling image that sums up the book is not easy, even when it is your own story. It has to catch the eye on a crowded bookshelf, offering something intriguing that entices a potential beholder to browse through it. I sketched a range of ideas but the concept of the ‘comic monk’ in his cell at the drawing board became one I was attached to. Serge was not satisfied with this cover, so asked me to come up with another. After much more wrangling, I came up with the one used. Serge was again unsure about it, however I persisted by varying the colour scheme. The cover has thankfully, drawn praise, which was gratifying considering that I rarely like the covers I make.

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114 For instance, in describing what a ‘mark’ and a ‘kick’ is in Australian Rules Football, Marie knew there was no equivalent in French sports that could offer a parallel. Hence she annotated it with an explanation that can be seen on that page 81 in Bully Me and the equivalent in *Souffre Douleur* (pages are not enumerated).
New Work:
This work was not self-initiated, but arose at the request of Dr. Dominic Davies, who was the organizer and convenor of the symposium *Documenting Trauma*, held at Oxford University in June 2017. I presented a paper under the same title as this comic. A short while after the symposium, Dominic invited all those who presented to contribute a chapter to an edited collection based on those presentations. In my case, he asked if I were willing to make mine in comics form, since I had the skillset to do so. I was delighted to accept the challenge, for that was what it was: can comics scholarship be done as a comic? There were not many precedents I was aware of at the time. Nick Sousanis’ *Unflattening*, was a Doctor of Education thesis that was done in the comics register, but it was not comics scholarship, per se.

Grappling — ante-logistics:
In a typical chapter for an edited academic collection, the writer has about 3-5000 words plus notes and bibliography. In my case, length had to be determined on a page count because from an academic publisher’s point of view, the comic pages counted as figures. I was subsequently informed I had ten pages of black and white first person third person.
I was alert to the printing affordances of the *Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels* series. I had noticed that in a book by Simon Grennan within the same series that the dimensions of the book are fairly small: 155mm by 218mm for the hardcover binding, but 148mm by 212mm (or A5) for the trim size. Pertinent to my purposes, the live area in which my comics would appear was only 110mm by 165mm, which is quite small. In addition, I inspected the artwork presented in Grennan’s book and could see that the books were digitally printed and bound, and that the presses affordances did not lend itself to vibrant colour or half tones, although it was reasonable with line art. Based on this information, I decided the finished art would be made as black and white line art as I did with *Bully Me*. I also determined upon a fairly rigid three tier by two panel grid to ensure I did not attempt to cram too much information per page. This meant I had 60 panels to convey what was in my original 3000-word paper.

**Grappling — making:**
I wrote a script based on my paper, parsing the content to the salient points I wanted to make. It occurred to me that the best thing I could do is show the difference between the first and first person third view-points by drawing a new version of a key scene in my autobiographical work, *Bully Me*. So, page one to three were taken from the graphic novel as it appears in the book, easy enough to do reconfiguration to individual panels, therefore it was formatted perfectly for the Palgrave format. I added new narration on page three to introduce the narrating ‘I’ that is synchronous with the rest of the chapter. I then reproduced the same scene from a first-person point of view on pages four to five to show what that might look like. This is a very rarely used method of depiction because as a beholder, it is easier to relate to characters if you can see them in the frame, exhibiting emotional states.

In other words, what is shown in autobiographical comics with the narrator out there, was not what was seen by the author, which presents a problem if we as a society accord a truth value by the fact it was seen first hand. In effect, what is depicted are the events as if seen by another observer.

**Grappling — content:**
The subject matter of my paper *First Person Third* pointed out that the visual point of view in autobiographical comics is actually in the third person, contrary to what is often a first person narrative voice.
While resident at Seriefrämjandet, or the Swedish Comics Centre in September/October 2018, I produced breakdowns to ensure the pages worked and that all I needed to say was contained within the ten pages allotted. Rather than following my usual methodology of script > thumbnail breakdowns > finished art, I added developed roughs before the finished art stage because I knew that the editors will make suggestions and I expected it to be peer reviewed. So, to ensure that they saw an approximation of the proposed comic without the labour required to make finished art, my developed roughs contained moderately finished pencil art, with all lettering so that the depictions could be edited as much as the script.119

As it happened, the feedback was that the chapter was passed without any edits, other than some minor typos to be fixed. I was a bit surprised by this, making me wonder if presenting scholarship in comics form subverts the usual scrutiny some editors and peers would impose on written work. But the example of Vita Longa Ars Brevis below, is to the contrary.
Logistics:
As of writing, the collection Documenting Trauma in Comics, was published in hardcover by Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Comics in June, 2020. As an academic tome, it retails with a characteristically institutional price of £85, which means it likely that only institutional libraries will pick up a copy, or interested scholars who need it for their own research. It is not a mass market publication intended for wide readership. It was only upon receipt of my copy that I noticed that the publisher's business model uses print-on-demand (POD) technology, meaning rather than ordering and warehousing an offset print run, they contract a local—in this case, Australian—digital printing and shipping firm to print to order.

Origin:
Following the Comic & Creative Contracts conference at the University of WA in December 2017, the convenor Dr Anderson asked Dr Medley and myself to produce and article about some of the points we raised during the conference regarding the use of pictures in contractual forms. We asked if we could produce it as a comic, since it made sense to show what our concerns and ideas were, than just telling.

Grappling — ante-logistics.
As with all cases of comics going into a journal, we wrote to Dr Anderson to ask what parameters we had for the article in terms of page count and dimension. The journal has been a digital only publication since 2015. We were given five pages but also the possibility of colour. Dr Medley and I agreed that I would write, he would produce the layouts and pencil, then I would ink and colour. Both of us would of course, have input in all facets of production.

Grappling — content.
At the above-mentioned conference, it was apparent to Dr Medley and myself that the assembled lawyers and stakeholders in comic contracts had little training in visual arts, therefore were not across the fun-
fundamentals of picture-making through composition, figuration, colour and other elements of design. Our argument therefore was to show the value of collaboration between lawyers, designers and makers in ensuring that the depictions in a contract communicate effectively such as reading order, with whom and how parties should be represented and so forth. In other words, making depictions is a specialist skill just as is say, employment contract law.

Grappling — making:
After some discussion between Dr Medley and myself, I wrote a script that featured us as narrators having a conversation about the issues mentioned above, but utilizing depictions to illustrate (show) the points being made. I was concerned that my script was dense with verbiage, constrained as it was by the fact we only had five pages to make an argument. I knew Dr Medley would use his tacit knowledge to grapple with the script and find ways to sublimate words into pictures where possible. The value of collaboration between writer and illustrator is the trust that the former will consider the skillset of the latter, and that the former lets the latter ‘rewrite’ to the extent that they can discover more visual ways to communicate a point. This was duly achieved, although I feel there
are still a few panels overburdened with words — particularly on pages three and five. When I received the penciled pages from Stuart, I inked using pens and a nib, making minor adjustments as I saw fit. By this I mean some tweaks to his lettering, condensing some balloons and tweaks to Stuart’s caricature of myself (the glasses and hair were not quite right). The finished comic was submitted to Dr Anderson with only minor tweaks required for acceptance into the UWA Law Review.

Final Original:
This is a digital file as the colours were done in Photoshop.

Logistics:
The comic was published in the UWA Law Review in November of 2019 which was a Special Edition on Comic Book Contracts. It was listed under the title Applied Comics for Law and the Avatar Brainstorming, which was of the editors coinage. It is downloadable as a pdf, which also enables it to be modified if needed at no expense other than time. While refereed, no comment or alterations were asked of this paper.

New Work:
This comic was produced at the request of the publisher at Avant Verlag, Johann Ulrich following a meeting held in Berlin in 2015. I had known from friends that he was a fan of my graphic novel, The Sacrifice (2008) but he never made an offer to purchase the rights for German translation. Curious as to why, I met up with him to determine what I might be able to do to persuade him. As it transpired (and with other potential rights sales), the problem was the promise made on the cover that the work would form part of a trilogy of books, The Fight and The Return being the other two. Johann was keen on publishing the book if there was an extra chapter or pages that rounded the story off, as The Sacrifice had ended on an intentionally ambiguous note. I agreed to do this work, so a rights agreement was made between Avant and my publisher Allen & Unwin (contracted to act as international rights sales agents) to publish The Sacrifice with extra pages. The incentive for me to make it was clear: to reach new beholders in the German language regions.

Grappling — ante-logistics:
Given this comic was to be a direct extension of an existing work, it made sense for the original art to be
produced with the same methodology as I had used with the earlier book: pencil and ink on paper using a nib and brush; white gouache for tidying up, scanning the resultant finished art and adding 30% and 50% grey halftones (plus gradients) on a separate layer in Photoshop with a Wacom tablet. I maintained the linear dimensional ratio of the live area with *The Sacrifice*, as well as the structure of three or four tiers of rectilinear panels. The actual dimensions were marginally smaller because I no longer used the paper *The Sacrifice* was drawn on. In short, it should appear to a beholder that there was no gap in making, even if it was in fact, twelve years. What is new is that Johann wanted to make this a prestige publication: hardcover with endpapers and in two colours, so instead of grey halftones, they would be printed in a PMS blue.

**Grappling — content:**
Explaining this story is easier if one has read the graphic novel *The Sacrifice*, since it follows on directly from that book. *The Return* follows Robert’s stay in Heidelberg Military Hospital, recovering from a serious wound in his back, gained in combat in Papua New Guinea earlier in 1943. The bullet had lodged...
in his spine making it too dangerous to retrieve, but also leaving him with chronic pain. A series of visitors stop by who all feature in The Sacrifice, therein the beholder finds out what happened to them all, including Robert in flashback to his war experiences. Ideally, it wraps up the story without being too ‘neat’ and also points to how veterans of WW2 were usually discharged with their pay and a salute, but no follow-up care for their mental or physical health.

**Grappling — making:**
This story did not need to be written from scratch. I had already substantially developed and written out Robert Well’s story-world in preparation for the never completed trilogy. It became a matter of how best to extract a continuation out of the 600 odd pages the two books were to run for. It struck me that closure regarding all the characters would probably leave most beholders replete, and that was the objective that Johann at Avant wanted. As it transpired, writing the script was pretty straightforward, flowing quickly and enjoyably, since it had been many years since I had spent time in this storyworld I had created and invested so much into.

Since The Return was set in Melbourne, I could utilize a lot of the previous research I undertook for The Sacrifice in terms of costume, vehicles, housing, language use and so on. Note that research for comics is dependent on both written and visual sources, particularly the latter, as the comic has to evoke the era, particularly given the verisimilitude I like to depict. The further back in time, pictorial documentation becomes increasingly spotty. I had new locations such as Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, The St Kilda General Cemetery and Ivanhoe. Of particular interest is the former, since research entailed not only what the exterior and interior of the hospital looked like, but what the staff wore at various levels, i.e. were the staff all military and in uniform, or were there civilians? What was the medical treatment of that era? I did not need to go into too much detail as Heidelberg was a convalescent hospital for long-term treatment and last stop before discharge, such as in Robert’s case. I already had done visual research for the flashback combat scenes from the Buna and Sanananda campaigns of December 1942 – January 1943 while preparing to make The Fight.

I looked up previously utilized (and good) resources such as the Australian War Museum, State Library of Victoria, National Library of Australia, newspapers Typical research for this project. The top panel on page 2 is a composite of the above three photos sourced from left to right: Pinterest, State Library of Victoria archives and the Australian War Museum. Without one photo showing the angle I wanted, I used the above model to locate the structures with respect to each other and then placed them as if a picture had been taken from the viewpoint depicted. I found these pictures in advance of making the layouts so that I could begin envisioning the storyworld. A similar process was followed for just about every scene. See next page for finished art.

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122 PMS: Pantone Matching System, an international standard of colour matching that allows designers and printers to guarantee a colour on a specific printed surface through mixing of a specific formulation of inks.
124 This was the subject of my paper *Space = Place: Drawing as Knowledge Making in the Historical Graphic Novel*. Delivered at Comics Forum, Leeds, November 2012.
(now held in state libraries), local councils and what I could track down in books. New to the mix was Pinterest, which did not exist when I made *The Sacrifice*. By typing in the vintage of the era and say, a suburb such as Ivanhoe or a Melbourne city centre street such as Collins St, I discovered a wealth of photos from the era that I had not seen before. I knew that this new resource was made up of old photos held by the general public, hitherto inaccessible. I utilized maps of the areas to accurately plot a path between one part of the city and another, matching them with photos where possible to get an idea of what a ‘street view’ was like 80 years ago.

**Final Original:**
Production of the final art was like the writing, a smooth process, which was not surprising since I was using tacit knowledge developed making *The Sacrifice*. I knew how to frame characters within a confined space (the corner of a ward) and alter the point of view to keep up visual interest. I hand lettered in English on the original art as I had done with *The Sacrifice* despite the fact this section was going to be published in German. My reasoning for that is to maintain consistency with the original book, even though I knew I was potentially going to run into
problems with the German translation. There is every likelihood the German will be expansive in terms of letter-count, but the space available in my word balloons was customized for English. Despite that, neither the publisher, translator or designer at Avant Verlag asked me to make alterations, so I need not have worried.

Logistics:
As of writing, the design and pre-press process has started. I have prepared a cover design for Avants advance catalogue, soliciting orders. This was taken from the back cover of The Sacrifice, except that I redrew the protagonist, Robert Wells, looking up at Mata in the tree. The lettering is to be typeset by someone hired by the publisher, as will the design of the book including the conversions of greyscale tones to PMS blue, but again, as of writing, this has not been resolved.

Origin:
This comic arose out of the authors’ attendance at the ‘Friday Sessions,’ a quasi-academic forum held as part of the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival (LICAF) in Kendal, UK, October 2018. We were invited by its convenor, Aileen McEvoy, to record the days proceedings in the respective forms: Helen Kara – a twitter stream; Stuart Medley – sketches in a notebook; Bruce Mutard – drawings in markers on A2 sheets at an easel. The intention was to have three sensibilities record what was pertinent to each, then combine them to produce an article in comics form for prospective publication in The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics. There was a tacit agreement from one of the journal’s editors, Joan Ormrod that the article would be published in time to complement a presentation on its content, at the following year’s LICAF in 2019.

Grappling — ante-logistics:
At an informal meeting directly after the event, it was decided that Helen would write the script for the article because she recorded the sessions verbally in the form of twitter posts, which lent itself to a script, but also because writing was her primary register. It was decided between Stuart and myself that I would do

SCHOLARSHIP IN ACTION
Writer: Dr Helen Kara
Layouts and pencils: Bruce Mutard
Inks and colours: Dr Stuart Medley
©2019 respective makers.
the layouts, visualising the content, then also pencil. Stuart would then ink over and colour the work, even if we were not sure the article would be reproduced in colour. We knew to keep it short and pithy, below ten pages.

**Grappling — content:**
Following the aforementioned event, we exchanged what we each recorded online, then convened a Skype meeting to discuss what might be the best angle of approach to our article. There were two main points we wanted to convey: one, that scholarship in comics form was feasible, but not without some challenges that would be shown by the example of this article, and two, producing comics scholarship in the comics register is as previously stated, a new field with ill-defined parameters, so this article intended to ask what they might be and how best to test them.

**Grappling — making:**
Dr Kara produced a script with a narrator that represented all our voices as ‘one’, and also featured ourselves as subjects doing the recording, making and discussing aspects of that. I worked hard to ensure that I extracted maximum impact from the depictions where I could. There are sections where I deviated

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**Left:** graphic recording by myself. LICAF Friday sessions, October 2018. Done with markers on A2 sheets at an easel.

**Below:** Dr Helen Kara’ tweets about Benoit Peeters talk on studying comics in France in the 1970s.
from the script because of opportunity, such as the large panel at the seat of page two, wherein I decided that there was no better way to capture ‘scholarship in action’ than to quote Jack Kirby’s emphatic visual style. Another is the lower panel on page one, where I collaged key venues of LICAF into one picture (they are not visible from each other like this) and then added the pounding rain that soaked the festival in 2018.

As a maker, I felt there was a need to ensure that the pictures are not only interesting to behold, but add context to what was being said. To demonstrate, in the top tier on page five, I referenced the three musketeers as a sort of typified gallantry, being curtailed by a ‘critic’ in the form of Cardinal Richelieu. In the panels below, I depicted the actual speakers of the quotes, since caricature\textsuperscript{126} is within my skillset. There is a label on each since the speakers were not widely known public figures. On the next page, I used Scott McCloud’s own iconic (literal and figuratively) self-likeness to represent him since I felt pretty sure most readers of the journal will be familiar with Scott McCloud’s trilogy of books wherein it features.

Once I completed my pencils, I forwarded it to Dr Medley for his portion of the labour: inking on separate sheets via lightbox, lettering, scanning and colouring. We had nine pages in total.

**Final original:**
This is a digital file, as the colouring was done in Photoshop.

**Logistics:**
As of writing the article is still to be published in the journal due to a range of issues that were both in and out of our control during 2020. The hope is it will appear during 2021.

\textsuperscript{125} Budgetary constraints mean that at most, sixteen pages of any issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* could be colour, decided on an issue by issue basis by the editors. Source: correspondence with the editor Dr. Joan Ormrod.

\textsuperscript{126} Caricature is not just funny exaggeration of a person’s likeness, but a depiction that is ‘drawn from’ the referent (even imaginary things) but still identifiable as that thing. There are degrees to how far one can ‘draw from’, but in every instance, a depiction – whatever the art mediums used – is a caricature, since it cannot be the thing, but drawn from it.
Sometime in 2017 my friend Jason Franks wrote to ask if I would partner up with him to produce a short comic for a proposed anthology called *Shots Fired*, wherein the theme was on the plague of gun violence in the USA, sparked in the publisher by the gun massacres in Las Vegas in 2017, and Orlando in 2016.

Typically, I am leery of saying yes to unpaid labour such as this, but Jason was a writer and friend for whom I had produced comic art on several of his projects and had a lot of respect for.

A second reason for agreeing was that I felt the book might get some attention in the US press due to its topical content, so I calculated there was a small chance some publisher or writer might see my art and ask me to work on a project that might help me crack the elusive US market.

**Grappling — ante-logistics:**

Being an anthology, I needed to know how many pages I would be required to do, whether colour was available and the dimensions. I let Jason communicate with the editors as they had contacted him. Page count was given as six or seven and the dimensions as standard American comic book size. We did have colour, which I was grateful for because that gave me...
mind—and even expected—that I deviate from his script. When planning the visuals, I am always interested in getting the most out of the depictions that I can, cutting words even when others write them. In this case I saw visual storytelling opportunities and ‘beats’ that would help the story and/or gags. For instance, the scene where Senator Leadbetter is being interviewed on Bob Connaught Tonight (a satire of a typical Fox ‘news’ show), I imagined Bob’s nose getting ‘erect’ and ‘orgasming’ at the mention of Leadbetter’s tilt at the White House. It was also my idea to steal Ken Adam’s designs for the war room from Dr Strangelove and sundry James Bond films.

Grappling — content:
In discussion with Jason we agreed that the protagonist Senator/President Leadbetter would not be a likeness of Donald Trump, for he was overexposed as it was. In any case, the issue is one that transcends any individual. I decided I would push my visual style and caricature with a vigour associated with makers like Gerald Scarfe and Ralph Steadman, whom I always admired for their ability to push likenesses to extremes. I would push the satire as hard, adding as many jokes to the pictures as I could. My early career works were in this vein, so it was not a new way of making for me. Indeed, I got quite a lot of pleasure out of reverting to a style of storytelling that I had not used for a long time, but with the advantage of all the tacit knowledge I had accumulated since, for instance: clear line, ability to use reference better and digital colouring.

I produced thumbnail breakdowns from Jason’s script, but added two more pages as I felt the flow of the story worked better for it. Jason writes scripts with page numbers and panels numbered, but I knew from our previous collaborations that he would not mind—and even expected—that I deviate from his script.

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Grappling — making:
The art was a pleasure as I enjoyed depicting the right-wing political and military classes with the venom that I feel towards them. I make no secret of my progressive political leanings in my comics. I slipped in a lot of Klan, Nazi, neo-Nazi symbols and sex toys in, among other gags.

Final original:
These are digital files produced after all the colouring and lettering effects have been applied.

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extra ways to extract pungent satire (especially my use of fascist and neo-fascist imagery).
Logistics:
The project was dependent upon crowdfunding to get into print. The first attempt failed to get the support it needed due to the excessive amount it sought (US$60K). A second attempt succeeded by reducing the amount to US$15K. I had delayed making the art until I was certain of this success, because I was not going to spend time on something that was not going to be published. The work was made, files sent, and is at the time of writing, still awaiting publication. As it transpired, the publishing process has been drawn out due to the editor Brendan Wright being embroiled in a sexual harassment scandal and his role terminated. The publisher Sean Williams has suspended the project for that reason and while the Covid-19 pandemic was underway in the USA in 2020.
Origin:
A call for papers came out in late 2017 for contributions to an edited book on Mental Health and Sexuality in Comics. Having made Bully Me, I never addressed aspects of sexuality during the era covered in the book, because I felt that it was too big a topic and would compete with the mental health and eating disorder issues that was its focus. I felt the subject needed its own graphic novel, so this call for papers meant I could start mapping out the subject as a précis for the book.

I wrote to Nancy and Irene to ask if I could submit my abstract for a comic, to which they readily agreed. My abstract proposed to show how a comic can deal with mental health and sexuality through the example of my personal story. Pertinently, I wanted to show how I was given permission to do so by the example of other comics, particularly female makers. That permission is a crucial moment in the process of becoming a maker and/or making a work, inspiring one to possibilities. Both Aline Kominsky-Crumb and Art Spiegelman were inspired to autobiographical comics by Justin Green’s Binky Brown.

Grappling — content:
This details my love/hate relationship with comics that catered for the male-gaze, refracted through my struggles with mental health issues and poor self-esteem. The comics I looked at (and loved/hated) became subject of my own work, especially early career, where the ‘girl’ art became a way to grapple with something I felt unavailable to me in life.

Grappling — making:
I began by making visual notes and writing segments in order to put down the obvious things I wanted
to convey, hoping a narrative thread will arise from it—a technique that from my tacit knowledge, I knew worked in the past. It became apparent this was a big topic, so I had to think carefully about what was most relevant and would make a strong narrative thread. I wrote a script that contained most of what I wanted to say, numbering them by the panel to ensure I did not go past 84. Despite that, the number of written words assigned to many panels were excessive. The subject matter proved difficult for me to grapple with, and I found myself quickly mired in indecision, doubt and dread.

I sent the script to Nancy and Irene asking for help as editors. They could see where the key points lay, what needed expanding or cutting. It was exactly the sort of feedback I needed: enough to keep pursuing the work. Key among their suggestions was encouragement for me to bring myself, my body and feelings to the fore, such as how I found a different way to relate to the female nude while doing life-drawing rather than from men's magazines, and how that became the basis for thinking differently about looking and seeing. By that I mean becoming aware of the female body as it is, not idealized through selection of models and photographic set-ups.

Despite this help, the writing did not get easier. I started rethinking the story, drafting a new script. I began the polished roughs, which began well over the first 3 pages, but then it broke down when I started to deviate from the script, a sign to me that it was not working. I lost confidence in the work and became plagued by doubts as to whether I was able to do it. I stopped the roughs and went back to writing, brainstorming, trying to find narrative threads that would cohere. I even started several new ideas before I put the whole thing aside to work on something else and return to this story afresh at a later date.

When I did so a few weeks later, I again rewrote my script, then continued the roughs except where excerpts of panels from existing comics of (my own, Robert Crumb and Chester Brown) were needed to be included. I still felt disaffected with it when I sent it to Irene and Nancy, expecting that they would pull it apart and that we would agree to withdraw my submission. Their response however, was very positive which was a relief to me. Most interesting was Irene’s comment to consider redrawing the excerpts from other comics so to keep the pictorial diegesis consistent, that is, the visual style. Irene felt a jolt in visual style from panel to panel, not just from the excerpts of Crumb and Brown to mine, but even from excerpts of my early work to now. It seems excerpting panels from one work to a space allotted in a different spatiotopia was a literally a misfit – the compositions looking notably cropped. Choosing the excerpts was difficult. They had to be relevant to the diegesis at that point, but also fit the space. By drawing the excerpts myself, mimicking other makers styles, I could pay attention to the composition and ‘make it fit.’ The final work was submitted to the delight of Irene and Nancy, who liked the way I resolved the ending.

Final original:
This is a digital file.

Logistics:
The article was submitted to the Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics through the Taylor and Francis submission portal, which struggled a bit with a submission that was not the standard academic text and figures (each uploaded separately). The system kept asking for the text, i.e. a Word document, wherein I submitted the file as a print ready pdf. Then I had to submit the files as print ready tiff files, which had the system trying to label the pages as ‘figures’ rather than as text, but it was eventually sorted through communication with relevant personages at Taylor and Francis.
While the cycle was derived FROM making these eight comics (and I could have applied it to the design and making of the exegesis cover, plus the box enclosure), I thought it pertinent to say a few reflective words about what was learned by applying the tool to my practice. Working with collaborators and the hidden workers in editing, publishing, distribution et al had become background noise to me. That is, I knew the publishing infrastructure was working for me, in the same way that my work enabled them to be gainfully employed. But I was always more mindful about the comic being made and ensuring I did my best work regardless of the content or intended outcome with regards to the work.

It was very useful to reflect upon the process of each work and think about these hidden aspects I had worked with in that it showed how frequently the content and form of my works were shaped by the input of others. As makers who continually hustle and struggle to get works before beholders, we are mostly happy to do what publishers, editors and marketers want if that will get our works out into the world. Some call it compromise, or worse, selling out; to others, it’s being pragmatic.

So, the Cycle of Erotics has made me aware my tacit knowledge was not just the ability to write and develop story worlds, or design and delineate characters, but awareness of the publishing processes and how they have evolved over the three decades I have been making. I realised that logistics played a far larger role in shaping works than I had given it credit for, such as noticing that ante-logistics was key; one needed to know how, where and when a work was to appear so that the work and final originals could be shaped to best fit.

Furthermore, the evolution of publishing by new technologies has meant a continual reframing of the possibilities of making and publishing comics. When I started making them in 1989, there were no digital tools like a Wacom tablet or programs like Photoshop and Clipstudio. Digital imaging was very primitive. But comics being composed of images lends itself to being made with such tools, and Clipstudio is a program developed specifically to aid their making as panels, the page and the spread. Similarly, digital printing has made small press and self-publishing cheap and vastly superior quality than even at the beginning of this century. The point is that tacit knowledge of all aspects of making continually evolve, whether it is making or the business models of publishing. The Cycle of Erotics has made me alert to the process of making and beholding in an overt way rather than purely tacit. It is and can only be general, knowing as the next chapter shows, that the manner and methods by which a maker arrives at the work is as numerous and individual as they are.

131 It is bad enough to get too close to your work when writing something that is complete fiction, but another when the subject is yourself and trying not to be indulgent.

132 Based on past experience, or, tacit knowledge, such as the graphic novel The Dust of Life.

133 That is, I did not significantly alter the compositions from other works, but mad adjustments so that the key elements of the panels remained in relation to one another. The excerpts in effect were acting as visual quotes, mimicking the source closely so they gave the sign of that source through the style (and no doubt, cognizance of the works by many beholders). Simon Grennan explored the vicissitudes of doing this in Grennan 2017, chapters three and four.
4 Interviews with makers

These interviews with select Australian (or Australian based) makers were conducted to show some of the ways that the Cycle of Erotics can help map or model the creative process. I chose Australians on the basis I preferred to interview them face to face, in their studio, but three were done in cafés at the interviewee’s preference. Each of these makers were known to me personally through their work and comics maker networks. I felt this was a positive because the familiarity meant that the interlocutors would be comfortable in my presence. I knew from previous experience talking to other makers in comic maker meets, conventions, festivals and pubs that makers love to talk about process. In choosing the interview subjects, I wanted diversity in practice, more so than gender, ethnicity and age. By this I mean I was interested in makers whose backgrounds I knew demonstrated a range of paths and processes to their becoming makers and the comics they make. I am aware that gender, ethnicity and age could add a considerable texture to the enquiry and I hope that the cycle I have created can be used as a tool for other researchers to make such enquiries.

The interviews were drawn from a small sampling by necessity, since the intention was for them to be long form, ranging from 1-2 hours each. To tease out the way each subject became the maker they are and how they think and make, would require a considerable amount of time. I expected that my subjects would be loquacious because it had been my experience that makers are usually very keen to talk about their process, particularly with someone who also makes. A qualitative study permits this.

Makers share a bond over a set of experiences that is uncommon among the general public, therefore with opportunity comes effusiveness. It is from that experience I decided to keep the format of the interviews conversational, allowing the makers to open up as memories of their past trigger others, but always with an eye on the cycle. This discursiveness is one reason why I have emphasised that despite the Cycle of Erotics having a cyclic structure and direction—which it is generally, by which I mean the journey of people becoming makers—the Cycle of Erotics should be seen as rhizomatic, because makers generate their own methodology with regards to their making. That is, in being prompted to recall how they came to make comics (and other arts that they pursued) and evolve their making methodologies, their spoken explanations were discursive in the way that memory operates, bouncing back and forth from say, an influence to a process, to logistics. Each element of the cycle is connected to the other in constant relationships which manifest in the work.

The questions were framed to get at two key points I wanted to discover in relation to the cycle: uncovering what sort of background the makers grew up in and whether that is reflected in the comics they made/make. The other is to tease out the how and why they make the comics they are known for, and what is their feeling with regards to the materials and tools they use when making them. I thought this could uncover their unique grappling process to the final original and its dialectical relationship to logistics and the commodity.

The interviews yielded approximately 140,000 words of transcripts, more than four times longer than permitted for this exegesis, so only a small amount of data can be included here. I have grouped them under the headings of the cycle partly to order the massive amount of data, but also because I believe this demonstrates the efficacy of the cycle as a tool to grapple with the discursive, variegated and elusive memories of how works of comics and their makers came to be. Makers rarely record these sorts of thoughts and it is often far in the past, making it harder to grasp. But it is there—particularly in the works
themselves—and I argue that the cycle gives scholars and other researchers a way to grapple with, and codify it. It is made chiefly of quotes from the makers so they speak in their own words, since making is very much a personal, passionate and emotional part of their being. As Thomas Campi says ‘I’m an artist, that’s who I am, you take that out of me it’s not me anymore. This job is not just a job, it’s who I am.’ Some editing and contractions were made as a concession to readability.

Some general observations can be made from the responses, which is worth bearing in mind when utilising such data to draw conclusions. It was observed that no two makers had the same exposure to comics nor were they inspired to make in the exactly the same way. There were substantial variations on the availability of and the types of comics they beheld when young, which shaped their ideas about the medium and the possibility of becoming a maker. Each of the makers were compulsive in their making in some form from an early age, which was certainly the case with myself and almost every professional comics maker in the US mainstream or alternative comics.¹¹⁹ But none of the makers who grew up in Australia imagined making comics as a living, nor had a conception of what it was to make comics commercially, as comics were seen as something made overseas; there was no industry in Australia. These makers learned how to make comics by making, in other words, accumulating tacit knowledge by looking at what was being made, being inspired by them and going off making their own works. This points to the need to contextualise the use of the cycle in a broader examination of a national comics industry (if any) and perception of comics in a constrained socio-cultural context. By that I mean that a comics culture is derived from what was available to be beheld at the time makers were seeking them out, which itself, evolves over time. While I entered the interviews with a Cycle of Erotics derived by observation from my own practice, it was apparent that however other comics makers diverged from my experience and processes, the cycle could account for it because of its inbuilt non-prescriptive nature.

₁¹₉ For example, Hignite, T. 2006, Groth, G and Fiore, R. 1988 and Meadows, J 2019. Any of the long form interviews in The Comics Journal or other publications might also help as asking how it all started is a common question from journalists doing a profile.

₁²₀ That is, at the time the interviewees were young, meaning the 1970s to 1990s Australia. There was an Australian comics industry from about 1940 to 1960 to the extent that makers could scrape together a modest living due to wartime import restrictions on paper that was imposed on American comics. See Cliffe, G. From Sunbeams to Sunset, Margate Beach: Comic Oz, 2019. pp 35-63 for a breakdown of the changes in law and the publishers who took advantage to make comics.
The BEHOLDER/MAKERS:

Interviews were conducted with the following makers (List of works is not exhaustive):


Several of the interviewees remarked on having easy access to comics from their early childhood thanks to their parents.

**Carol:** I was reading comics from the earliest stage I can remember, following with the pictures even if I couldn’t read the words.

**Susan:** I can’t remember a time when there wasn’t comics. My father liked them. I was reading comics before I could read because in Britain, what they call nursery comics were drawn in such a way that you could follow the story without actually reading the words.

**Dillon:** I had the advantage that my father was a comics man himself and he used to buy a lot and have a lot in the house. So, I remember them being there before I could even read. I remember trying to figure out stories from the pictures and my dad would read them to me: *Donald Duck* stories (by Carl Barks).

**Mirranda:** My Mum used to buy me *Peanuts* comics and *Tintin* comics from the Adelaide Central Markets on the weekends. So, I had that background of reading, but I also have a background of drawing and avidly reading stories.

**Julie:** When I was a kid, I used to read quite a lot of comics. Once a week my father would go and fill up his car at the service station and he gave us some
money to go and buy some comics. So, I would come home with mostly Disney comics.

**Tim:** I still remember when my comic collection was just six comics; Newton reprints of Marvel comics, and somehow knowing that this was an important thing for the rest of my life.

*For others, the socioeconomic or geographic conditions of where they grew up limited access to comics and culture in general.*

**Pat:** I would read (anything) I could get my hands on but there wasn’t a lot in my country town. I had a lot of surfing magazines, which had a very strong graphic culture and sometimes had comics in them.

**Jamie:** My family wasn’t a particularly cultural group of people; they came from farming communities in southern Tasmania. So, they just didn’t have a broad cultural spectrum and I was never really exposed to a disparate collection of material. So, whenever I came across little bits of cultural things, artifacts or whatever you’d call them, I could recognize them even if I couldn’t access (understand) them.

**Mark:** I spent most of my childhood in remote locations on Norfolk Island. We didn’t have television, we didn’t have films. We had radio and we had books. One day my father brought home a couple of *Asterix* books. I read that, and liked it. I didn’t actually get to read anything other than *Asterix* and *Tintin* until I was about 12.

**Emilie:** Comics have always been a big part of my life (with) my upbringing and formative years in France. I (have) also realised that since I moved to Australia, I wasn’t reading that many comics.

**Thomas:** I was around 14. A friend of mine gave me a couple of *Dylan Dog*. It was the number two, it was like a brand a new comic, a big thing in Italy. He gave me that and I read it like, in about 20 minutes, I was like, this is awesome. So, I started to buy *Dylan Dog* every month and then all the other stuff from the same publisher (Sergio Bonelli Editore), like *Nick Raider, Nathan Never, Martin Mystery*, all different series, different genres.

**Jason:** I became interested in comics specifically, because I had a classmate, Gregory,121 who was in my art and my English classes. He looked at what I was doing in art and he said, “Do you read comics?” and I said “No.” He threw Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* – the number 50 special – at me and said, “You’ve gotta read this.” I mean, I also had read *Asterix* and *Tintin* like everyone else as a kid, but I didn’t think of them as comics in my head; those were children’s books not comics.

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121 Yes, it is Gregory Mackay, the interviewee.
Felt response of the interviewees was apparent in the way they described their love or drawing, writing and making when they were young. The encounter with works stimulates the natural childhood propensity to make using what was to hand.

Tim: I have drawn for as long as I can remember. I was always drawing. Most of my drawings seemed to be story based. I just fell in love with comics and I always drew. Why wouldn't you do both? Why wouldn't you love comics by making them? I knew that for a very long time I would keep making images of the superheroes.

Jason: Writing that was just a thing I wanted to do probably from the day I learned to read. I was really keen to learn how to read when I was little because my parents were both voracious readers. What lifted my hair about the Sandman (and other Vertigo) comics was that they were a combination of genres that I was really interested in that I wasn’t seeing in prose at that time: dark fantasy, horror… but quite literary stories.

The availability of materials and tools to make them with in a household where parents made as well, proved to be a key incubator of Gregory and Emilie’s desire to make:

Gregory: I grew up in a ‘making’ sort of house. Mum
would have this big sewing room and Dad had this big workshop. There was this mentality that you would literally make your own fun and you would be entertained by making things, whether (it be) paper planes, plastic models, anything like that. I would be inventing my pastimes and hobbies, and drawing became a part of that because you had to be able to plan those things. Soon the plans become so complex that you can’t make them real, so they have a life of their own.

Emilie: I have very fond memory of drawing, doing crafts at home with my parents. My parents were craftsmen themselves, making jewellery, so I spent a lot of time in their workshop looking at them work. My parents … were pretty broke, but they were always very supportive of me and my creativity. The very first thing my parents got me was a little book and I always loved books and drawing.

As can be seen, exposure to comics or creative materials ignites an interest, whether or not encouragement from parents, siblings or peers was present. What is interesting is how the type of materials available shape the possibilities of making, such as in the following, where the size and format of paper, literally opens the field to making large scale narratives and sequential storytelling.

Miranda: I was just drawing ever since I can remember. My father is an architect and I remember as soon as I could pick up a pen, he was putting these large—in those days you had big sheets of paper for architectural drawings and one side was blank. After he’d finished with them, I was free to draw on (them). So, I don’t remember lots of fancy toys as a kid. I remember these really large sheets of paper on which I was drawing and imagining worlds.

Gregory: We had this dot matrix printer. My dad was this computer guy and we just had tonnes of this blank computer paper. It would all fold up and you’d be able to draw this sequence. You could paint really long scenes or people and it would all fold back up again, so it became this book you could use and pull apart. So that influenced how I would paint at quite large scale. As those materials became scarcer, the idea was that you’d use good paper, so the drawings became smaller and smaller.
INSPIRATION:

Tim: There was a period where I would re-draw the cover to the comics that I had. So, I would read the story and I would draw my own cover instead of their cover; I would draw what I thought their cover should be. I would keep making images of the superheroes. You know the official handbook to the Marvel universe? I was making my own one of that maybe 10 or 20 years before they even did that.

Gregory: When I discovered the independent comics movement—out of America in particular—where you had one person … who would write, draw and basically produce these books. And that gave me this inspiration that comics weren’t made by these committees, they were these individuals. So, I thought, “Oh, I can draw and I can write, I may as well put them together.” Looking back on the comics I was reading, they weren’t very good! And I think that’s what allowed me to think, “Well, I can do this.”

Carol: I came across a library book called Make Your Own Comics and suddenly it seemed possible that I could actually make comics in more than one copy.

Dillon: So, I read those How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way books and saw the tools you’re meant to be using. And then I started to go back and study the (comics) I liked, to look at how they were done. I discovered that comics were meant to be pencil first,
not just drawn with a biro straight away.

**Mark:** … it was that limited experience of not knowing how people made comics, so you had to find out for yourself or experiment for yourself. And having not had the formal artistic background, I was just figuring it out. I think I just saw a picture of someone using a brush and ink. And I think I’d discovered Brian Bolland and Mike McMahon were all using brushes, so I thought: ‘I’d love to draw like that (and) use a brush’.

**Queenie:** I don’t know what it was about that particular moment when I was reading some Manga and I decided that hey, I could do this myself too… I could pick up a pen and start drawing as well. And that’s how it all started. I didn’t expect it to be—because I had no real foundation in drawing and before that, no real interest.

*Two of my interviewees were inspired to make comics by seeing original art pages in exhibitions, which had the potent effect of making comics look very graspable for them. In both cases, they were already drawing and making, accumulating their tacit knowledge through theatre set design:*

**Thomas:** I saw (this comics) exhibition (in Ferrara) and you had like a section on professional production … and when I saw the original (comics), like the original pages on the wall and I saw the ink on the paper, you actually see the brilliance of the ink on the paper and the little corrections and you can see the pencil a little bit, the sketch underneath it. I was like, blown away. And I thought this is just wonderful, I mean these people sit down, they take a piece of paper and they start to draw and they make these beautiful books. When I saw that, I said that’s it, I want to make comics. I was already drawing a little bit, but again, it was just for fun because I was okay at drawing. But at that moment I thought: ‘I want to be that guy, I want to have my drawings in some comic book, I want to publish and people to read my stories.’

**Jamie:** I went to an exhibition in London down near The Elephant and Castle. It was an illustration exhibition and there was a lot of sequential art on display there, some really beautiful sequential art - essentially graphic novel like stuff done in all sorts of different mediums … some really beautiful, very warm textural pieces which were done in like charcoal or gouache, and then there was a beautiful one done in ink and it was very atmospheric. So, I went home and I drew that panel. (Then I drew) the first ever page for *The Diemenois* in its entirety … and (that page has) pretty much stayed the same ever since.
Having been inspired to make at some point, all makers then began the process of building their tacit knowledge of making, be it through visual arts, theatre design, writing or illustration. What was interesting to learn was how much the tacit knowledge of making things in other registers helped inform their ability to grapple with materials, tools and subject matter that later appeared in their comics. There is certainly an opportunity here for a researcher to trace any visual and verbal links between the tacit knowledge of other registers a maker has accumulated, and the comics they have made. To do so, it would be prudent to be alert to the sorts of making methodologies present in say, theatre, and how it manifests in comics. It could also be investigated the other way, from comics to say, theatre. Furthermore, aside from Thomas, who was able to conceive of and become a professional from a young age because such a thing was possible in Italy (and France), everyone else developed their own style of making because they all did so in the ‘tyranny of distance’ that was Australia.

**Pat:** I was a writer and I spent (time) trying to get work published. I was trying to figure out how to write short stories and I started drawing … I didn’t understand then that what I was drawing, could also be writing. I just thought (about) the images or graphics and then
slowly the (two) kind of merged together; my writing became more powerful when it was combined with drawing, and my drawing became surer of itself when it was when understood as a kind of writing.

Thomas: I was studying set design for theatre. So, like me, staging (mise en panel) is … something that comes kind of naturally because I studied it. I like to stage something. I mean, I know they are in the room … and I put them in a way that it could also be like a set, just like a piece of cardboard behind them.

Julie: I found that (writing for comics) came very naturally to me… because of the comics I’d read before, but also because I had studied television, film writing and script writing which are visual based. I was able to integrate those in writing and cowriting the script (for *Elfquest: Wavedancers*).

Tim: Studying graphic design you learn how to use art board and technical pens. I knew from graphic design about printing process so I would be giving original art to a plate maker.

Emilie: Comics were extremely exciting and freeing for just that ability to work on personal, autobiographical, inward facing creative project, the (faster) pace of the production and the do–it–yourself aspect and the culture in comics that’s around.

Miranda: My visual language very much stems back to a lot of the metaphorical, visual stuff that I was doing as a print maker … a kind of a meta language. They generally start in my mind and then a process begins where I’ll doodle around on paper and it will generally evolve from that thing that I saw in my head … because I can see it more clearly on paper.

Queenie: I’ve always been more of a programmer and an engineer kind of person. I (was) really good at programming as a teenager. That’s how I think naturally, more so than an artist’s mind which I don’t think I have. I do art but I don’t have the temperament or the way of thinking that an artist does. Drawing for me has always been work so it’s not something that I do for fun. But that is how I got into it, like this desire to create a finished piece of comics work.
New works arise for a myriad of reasons, often derived from a mix of tacit knowledge—that is, knowing one has the ability to make something and/or the possibility of its being made—and seizing an opportunity that enables them to make it.

**Tim:** A real strength and benefit of being in Australia making comics (is that) everybody was just doing whatever floated their own boat. That’s why you got *Bug and Stump* and *Platinum Crit* and *Zero Assassin* that’s what the people wanted to make themselves. Of course, none of us ended up making any money out of it, but at least we had fun while we did it.

**Thomas:** All the books (with writer Vincent Zabus) are ideas we had and we proposed to the publishers except *Magritte*, (which) was commissioned because it was the birthday of Rene Magritte and our publisher, the same publisher of our *Le Petit Gens* (La Lombard) which is in Brussels, wanted to do something so they asked me and Vincent to do this book in collaboration with the Magritte Museum.

**Carol:** I was heavily influenced by *National Lampoon* in my teens and I thought in order to exorcise the demon as it were, if I did a parody of it, that would be fun and it would also leave me free to get onto other things after that. So, we did a sixteen-page spoof of it in *Pox* and it was seen by one of *National Lampoon’s* former
These three titles were part of a ‘wave’ of Australian comics that appeared on Australian newstands in the early to mid-1990s. They were all self-published aside from the latter, which was published by Issue One, a small press publisher run by Xander Black. Their appearance gave the impression to new makers like myself that something was happening in Australian comics. I consequently published Street Smell as part of it, although I did not offer it to newstands because of the onerous conditions that the distributors imposed.

Pox was a self-published comic/zine completely written, drawn and published by Carol Wood and Susan Butcher on their own photocopier. Ran to six issues, published between 1995 and 2005.

In Australia, there has been a long tradition of Royal Agricultural Shows, wherein rural producers and communities show their best animals and produce to the cities and towns. These events are also a carnival, offering rides, sideshows, displays and so on. One feature popular among children (of all ages) is the show-bag, which are branded mostly by confectionary companies, and inside offer these, crisps, toys and sometimes magazines or comics. These are produced by companies who arrange the contents, branding and ship them to shows all around Australia.

K-Zone is a monthly small format full colour newstand magazine aimed at children which started in April 2000 and is still extant. In its early iterations the magazine featured a lot of comics, of which some were commissioned locally. Latterly, the magazine publishes cheap licensed material from Disney, Marvel et al.

Festival of the Photocopier is a annually run zine festival held in Melbourne around February. It is organised by the Sticky Institute, a long-running specialist zine and minicomix shop in that city. https://www.stickyinstitute.com

editors, Michael Simmons. He said ‘I’ve just started a job with a brand-new art magazine (Artillery), and they’re looking for cartoonists,’ so he put in a word for us and we got the gig to make Dead or Alive.

Julie: Warp Graphics who’s the publisher of ElfQuest ... put out a statement to say they’re opening their publishing company for submissions from outsiders to put in pitches for ‘What If’ stories in their universe. So, Bruce (Love), Joseph (Szerekes) and I sat down and we decided they haven’t done anything about water-based elves because we all loved mermaids. Within two weeks we had a really comprehensive proposal put together with entire story arcs for four series, a whole bunch of characters and model sheets and we sent it through. Before we knew it, there was an offer that they wanted to do it.

Dillon: I was sharing a house with, a guy whose uncle owned the show bag company. And he must have told the uncle about me because the uncle rang me up and said, “Would you like to create stuff especially for the show bags” to replace the newsagent unsold returns.” That led me to make Da’n’Dill who I’d already created as part of my self-published Frankie Laine’s Comics and Stories.

While Da’n’Dill got Dillon a regular strip in the newsstand monthly K-Zone, editors will make decisions based on commercial considerations.

Dillon: K-Zone editors told me that Da’n’Dill was very boy-orientated because it only had male characters in it. Could I come up with something else for girls? And so, they didn’t commission me to do it … it was just like, what else have you got? So, I came up with Batrisha and brought that to them. Both boys and girls liked it, so much so that they pretty much dropped Da’n’Dill in favour of Batrisha. And I was OK with that, I was interested in the new character anyway.

Queenie: I started using the computer software for my comics from very early on and that seemed to work out okay. I didn’t really have anywhere to publish (my work) because back then it was in the early noughties so the internet was starting up, so I just stuck everything online and I kind of met people through that and that’s how I got my first publishing job, working for Tokyopop.

Emilie: Most of what I do is self-initiated. I use events, like Festival of the Photocopier, social events, platforms and zine fairs as a motivation goal, to work to a deadline.

Emilie: Most of what I do is self-initiated. I use events, like Festival of the Photocopier, social events, platforms and zine fairs as a motivation goal, to work to a deadline.
For many of the makers, their grappling with logistics presupposes that they will be handling all aspects of making their comic a commodity and available for encounter through distribution. That is the reality for makers in Australia.

**Emilie:** (For me) it’s really project based. I have a project I want to work on and if I think it needs to be an installation I’m going to find a way to make it an installation. The very first comic I worked on was prompted that way. I had an idea and after trying it out in different forms. It clicked, it’s like oh, it has to be a comic.

**Susan:** A big breakthrough was getting our own photocopier. It was second hand. It was a bit cantankerous. It was just the problem of okay you’re going into a copying place and you want to knock up 20 copies of your comic, it takes a long time, you’ve got other people going this is business, hurry up, this is art. We got one of those ones that let you use coloured toner with them. They weren’t a colour photocopier but you could buy coloured toner and change it over.

**Carol:** We like to do cut and paste stuff, it’s hands on. putting it together was just pasting up your sheets. Figuring out how much column space you’ve got for an article and make the picture bigger or smaller. And then sticking the two pages together in the right way.
so they would be printed. So paste up: slow but trustworthy.

For others who have an established publisher or company to handle logistics, this means your decisions are made to suit their needs, but it also means expanding possibilities for making that might not have been afforded through self-publishing.

**Dillon:** (The showbag comics) kept going, two a year. (I was) well paid for it. Three or four years in, I started sub-hiring people. I didn’t really need to, but again, I liked working with other people, so I started to commission bits and pieces to go in it.

**Thomas:** When you work with a (Franco-Belgian) publisher you have a certain number of pages. You have to decide that at the beginning because you’re going to have to sign a contract to say like it’s going to be 64, 72, 80 pages, whatever it is.

**Julie:** When I’ve been hired to do a project … I want to know what the category of comics I’m working in, which in the case of *The Phantom*, is a comic book. So, I need to know the page count, the page extent for each issue, what the whole page extent is for the story (across multiple issues) and then I start figuring out what happens.

**Carol:** On how they create a typical Dead or Alive strip: We just crash two ideas together and (see if) it works. (For example) we look for an art form we haven’t used and we thought of Madame Tussaud. So, I’m thinking about that and how to present it, what to do with the idea. For some reason Ernie Bushmiller came into my head and I thought we’ll do Madame Tussaud as *Nancy*. There’s no logic behind this: a sudden flash and then afterwards Bushmiller’s characters look like little dolls and basically Tussaud’s waxworks are dolls; under close examination, they don’t look human.

**Engaging with publishers can alter the direction of a work.**

**Mirranda:** *Underground* was originally a children’s book concept and I was looking at the Vietnam War through the eyes of a wombat. I was looking at doing something with full colour illustrations. So, when it was pitched (to Allen & Unwin) as a children’s book, they really loved the premise but then Erica had a meeting with the marketing department who came back and said: ‘well, could you make this for an older reader so you could explore more adult concepts’. That was quite a curve ball to be thrown because that meant I had to go down the wombat hole quite literally and really learn about this history I knew nothing
about. They wanted to pitch to a high school age audience. They saw that this history would make great educational material.

**Julie:** Everyone thinks that the process starts when you actually formalise it in a material form but a lot of it is already built in the imagination, so you actually need to get it out from (in) there to (where you can see it).

*But there can be considerable challenges working with publishers who have their interests to secure, which is making an overall profit for their business. To offer a contract of publication means they are taking on risk, investing in a work with no guarantee that the public wants said work (especially untried makers). There is always the risk the relationship can go sour, especially if the publisher is owner of the intellectual property.*

**Julie:** (WaveDancers) went on to sell thirty to fifty thousand copies of every issue. It actually became a big hit for Warp Graphics. The publisher wanted to take complete possession over the story we had brought them and what they tried to do was actually split up the team, splitting Joseph off from Bruce and myself. Joseph refused to do that and then the publisher said well, we’re not renegotiating, so we said okay, no worries. And effectively the publisher killed
the goose that laid the golden egg because none of their other material was selling in the numbers that ours was selling.

**Mark:** My experience of doing the *Mad Max: Fury Road* comics was that I spent eight months doing it, and I was working with George (Miller) who knew nothing about the methodology of making comics. He was unavailable for three months. At the end of the process, we got DC second-tier rates. There were no royalties or anything like that. It was a work-for-hire agreement. At the end of it I was $35,000 in debt.

**Pat:** I've had some discussion (with Top Shelf Comics). I've been trying to get (this) specific UV (coating) on the cover for The Grot. I just couldn't make it happen. I don't think it's gonna happen and that's frustrating because I know it doesn't even cost a lot.

*Establishing a good working relationship with an editor is what keeps work flowing and ones books being published. Or not.*

**Jason:** I know for prose writing, there's certain editors that have bought stuff from me and they've come back to me because they know that I might not be a big name but I'll deliver something people like, and it will be done on time. They expect a level of quality and I do that. It's not necessarily that I'm better than other people, but that they won't get a look in because they're unreliable.

**Dillon:** Editors (at K-Zone) were changing all the time. Right at the start, I had these two editors that were really into what I did, and gave me pay rises at certain points. New editors came in, going “Dillon who?” I drew up samples of new things to try and interest them, but I couldn’t quite manage it. I think you’ve got to connect with an editor, (establish) a personal connection with someone.
One thing that is pertinent about making comics (and any artform really) is that each maker organically evolves their own making process through extensive practice. There are no short-cuts to acquiring and refining skill-sets; just long hours with the tools in hand, making marks on surfaces, or manipulating physical objects. In the case of writers, it is constant writing. But there are always constraints, which can sometimes be physical.

**Gregory:** I’m a cartoonist with a disability. That provides a bit of context as to why there is a really simple style in *Anders*, because ‘What is the least exhausting way I can do this?’ But it’s also why projects take so long for me. I spend a lot of time basically being incapacitated by my fibromyalgia, and as I grow older, it appears to be getting worse. (But that) enables me to focus on that visual preparation. While I’m incapacitated by feeling terrible, I will seek an escape from that by visualising a story in my head primarily, then it ends up on paper.

This led to his choice of tools:

**Francis** and *Anders* were very much clear lines you could use a tech pen for. Very disposable in its nature. The third *Anders* book was drawn entirely digitally just because of the size and because of the time.

**Queenie:** It took me several years to find the kind of

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A page from *Anders and the Comet* by Gregory Mackay, as published in three different editions. Top left: Grayscale in the first edition published by Allen & Unwin, 2015. Top right: Three colour version published as *Anders er le Comete* by Hoochie Coochie in France, 2016. Bottom left. Digital full coloured edition published in the omnibus *Anders*, published by Allen & Unwin, 2019. This contains two other Anders adventures, including *Anders and the Castle* for the first time. This demonstrates the use of the fineline pen that helps Gregory produce pages quickly, but ironically toned or coloured three times at the request of publishers for their logistical reasons: market acceptibility.

All art ©Gregory Mackay

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**GRAPPLING – MAKING:**
(style) that makes me comfortable but it was less of an art style than it was pacing; it's how do I want to pace my stories. I developed a generic pace that I felt that I could use across all genres.

**Tim:** inking is my favourite part of the process when I’m doing it. When I’m pencilling, it’s the pencilling. When I’m doing the thumbnails, it’s the thumbnails. Every step of it is my favourite part… Inking is all about performance at that stage. You’ve only got one chance. I don’t colour because I don’t enjoy it.

**Mark:** We (himself and co-creator of *Bug and Stump*, John Petropolous) had some vague idea of the direction we were going in and we’d talk about it but we didn’t write a script. We just had a vague concept of what the story was and would literally start thumbnailing out pages. We’d write it as we went. Very often we wouldn’t even finish the story before we’d start drawing it. So, I write visually. I’ve always done that. I find it to be the way that I think.

**Julie:** I’ll get an idea and I will then kind of start to develop the idea but then I’ll research. I go straight to research. So I actually end up having about 100 different computer documents just for the research. The other part of the visual research and the research you do is that it actually activates all the imagination and the creative process as well.

**Mirranda:** I was really missing print making, yeah, so I picked up a piece of scraper board and just played with it and I loved it so much because I was marrying two loves, the drawing and the reveal of the linocut. There was that process that working on a surface that would reveal an image in a similar way to a linocut because you’re working with white lines on a black surface.

**Emilie:** I try writing creatively in French I’m going to be too critical and I’m going to censor myself whereas (writing) in English I was really able to just do that punk thing of not caring. I wouldn’t write comics in French I don’t think. I would translate them but it would go through English first. It’s the language I use for comics.

Publishers and editors can play a considerable role in the shaping of a final work, although as Mirranda relays from Eleri Mai Harris: comics publishers don’t edit, they don’t have in house editors. After taking on board the suggestion that her new work set in Vietnam become a comic, she plunged into an ocean of (research) material and I couldn’t feel the edges… (The editors) played a very important role in terms of reigning me in because … they were able to say well, this is working but that’s perhaps not so relevant. So, we were kind of eliminating what wasn’t working … I really did need those other eyes looking over my shoulder.
Not a lot can be said about this because it is simply a fact that a comic will have a final original that has been made and is then subject to the processing of logistics to make the commodity. As mentioned in chapter two, I have singled it out to ensure the fact that what a maker has made and beheld while making, is in most cases not what beholders encounter. Nevertheless, Thomas and Jaime were inspired by the encounter with originals in the gallery situation to begin making. Gregory points out the value of looking at final originals:

**Gregory:** Years ago, I went to the Tezuka exhibition that travelled the world and you see just how those pages for his comics are held together with tape and chewing gum. They're not this refined final art. To me, as a comic book technician, I really appreciated all the junk on these pages, and all the bits of paper and transparency and liquid paper and texture. That all ends up on the page being seamless, the physical, crusty, chunky page. I think it was Aubrey Beardsley who seemed to create these perfect lines, and then you get to the level where you can do that, then you see an original Beardsley and it's covered with bits of paper stuck on top. It's not a perfect original.
For most makers in Australia, logistics is something they must handle themselves by finding ways to self-publish, distribute, retail and sell comics.

Tim: We were selling thousands of dollars’ worth of *Greener Pastures* every Ozcon\(^{128}\) convention. That was on top of what we were selling in the newsagents. It never made enough money that it was worth our while because the next issue always absorbed the money. But I thought that if there was a way we could do (an issue) once a month, there’s a small possibility we could make a living out of it. But the good times didn’t last: I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that Ozcon stopped. We all had a reason to make a book at least once a year. You didn’t want to turn up to Ozcon without a new issue.

Queenie: Scholastic\(^{129}\) sells comics directly into schools because (comics have) become part of the Australian curriculum. I got a deal with Scholastic to get my non-fiction comics about queens on to (their list) so that’s doing really well. I manage everything myself. I get it edited (and) get it printed, and they just buy the book directly off me at a retail price and then they just sell it to the school. So, I do get money from it, not a lot, but I guess for me it’s just a hobby so I’m glad the schools are interested, and some definitely are.

On the other hand, working with a publisher who is not experienced with comics can result in works that defy what might seem a sensible investment:

Jamie: (At that time, John Hunter of Hunter Press) was interested in doing more graphic novels, so when he found out that I was a graphic novelist, he was like, ‘Yeah, I’d like to see what you got here.’ I took these portfolios of pages (as) I had a good third of *The Diemenois* done by that point and I pitched it to him. It was a really shit pitch, like I was saying: ‘I don’t think there’s a big market. And the kind of book I think I’d like to make (will be) quite an expensive product to produce: hardcover…’ an even a more elaborate cover than (we did). But… (Hunter) is really lousy at marketing and promotion - he’s a poet (by profession). I wanted to push (the book) a little bit more … I wanted to get it overseas and all that sort of stuff and he was like, if you can do it, do it.

As with the final original, this is a element pointing to the fact. All making ideally ends with the work in the form of a commodity that beholders can engage with, or as pointed out, what scholars mostly use as their point of departure in researching comics.

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128 Ozcon was a comic convention that ran annually in Sydney from 1992 to 1998 with one in Melbourne in 1997. It was modelled on the San Diego Comicon as it was the same time, before morphing into a pop-culture convention. Best, D. *Australian Comics: The Conventions 1970-2020*. Unpublished. Courtesy of the author.

129 It is worth noting that Scholastic is the largest publisher of comics by sales and dollar value in the English language speaking markets, not Marvel or DC. https://www.comicsbeat.com/bookscan-2019-analysis/#jp-carousel-357831
Conclusion

This research began with the intention of answering a question: can exploring the way tacit knowledge accumulates and is applied, offer a thick description of comics? Through making eight comics that formed the practice-based component of this work, I developed the Cycle of Erotics, to visually represent how makers come to make and why they make the works they do. I then used this cycle as a basis to ask questions of other comics makers as a way of showing how it can be used to explain their evolution as makers, why they make the comics they do and the challenges of logistics. I have shown that a thick description of comics is possible, allowing for each work and maker to be described and analysed in context of their world, making process and logistics. I did not present an overarching theory since the variety of contexts, processes and works of comics is inexhaustibly diverse and large. Comics is like most arts registers in being describable, but beyond definition since there is no way to constrain what a maker will produce and declare is a part of that register. Furthermore, it is not possible to suppose what sorts of comics may yet be made and by what means. It is entirely possible that technology will enable deeply interactive, immersive, three-dimensional illusionist works with sound; makers like Stuart Campbell (aka Sutu) and Justin Randall are pushing in that direction.

Above: Modern Polaxis by Sutu. The comic can be read in the book form, but by reading through the Eyjacket app, extra content emerges from within.
Left: Nawlz by Sutu. Available online and within an iPad app, it combines comics, animation, music and text for an immersive, interactive environment. The beholder actively engages in the work to make panel transitions.
© 2010-2020 Stuart Campbell
I have not suggested that the current scholarship and critical commentary on comics is ‘thin’ but that it could be thicker than it is by looking at what is hidden by the process of commodification. As the works made for this thesis show, the existence of a work can be initiated externally to the maker’s desire to make a work by publishers, editors, fans, collectors or corporate clients. The logistics of publishing (print or online) further constrain the scope of the work according to a large number of factors such as cost, likely return on investment, target markets and so on. I feel it worthwhile for critical commentators to ask what prompted the work to exist at all rather than accept its presence as a fait accompli. Similarly, a look into the grappling process by which a work is made can deepen a reading of the work, creating opportunity to explain certain choices a maker (or editor, publisher, censors) made, which can also thicken its relationship to context: culture, society, structured and embedded systems of power (in Foucault’s sense).

Access to these materials is of course, problematic in several ways. Firstly, much of a maker’s final originals and process work may no longer exist. This is a particular problem the further back in history the maker was working, when comics were considered ephemeral and the materials that made them, disposable. Secondly, a maker’s final originals and working materials – or some of it – has been preserved by families and/or trustees of the estate, but are located in a specific place, therefore the only means of accessing them is to travel to where that repository is. Similarly, the estate of a maker may now in the custodianship of a museum such as the Billy Ireland Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art in Columbus, Ohio, or La Musée de la bande dessinée, in Angouleme. Other substantial collections are in private hands; indeed, it was these collectors who preserved comic and cartoon art when no institutions valued them. Thirdly, the maker(s) are still living and working, therefore are custodians of all their working materials. My experience and anecdotally of others is that most makers are very approachable and agreeable to researchers seeking them out for a deeper inquiry into their work. These are accessible through organized channels, but still require the means and time to travel to the locations, although makers may be reached socially through networking opportunities at comics festivals and Comicon’s.

Contextual and preparatory materials can sometimes be present with the work as extras: pages of sketches, descriptive essays, makers comments or an interview. Often these are slight, included more as an...
incentive for beholders to re-purchase a story they bought seri-
ally, but is now collected, or similarly, for a new edition. They
can be more comprehensive in publications such as DC Com-
ics Absolute Editions, collecting and reprinting particular titles,
story arcs, characters, series along with supplementary materi-
al in archival quality printing. There are some monographs on
makers such as Modern Cartoonist: The Art of Dan Clowes133 or
Tim Sale: Black and White134 reproducing pages from the final
originals, and there is the rarer ‘deep dive’ of Art Spiegelman’s
Metamaus and Co-mix,135 or Chris Ware’s Monograph. These
works have created an informal canon because publishers have
decided the risk of investing in these works for such ‘behind the
scenes’ look into the mind of a maker, is justifiable. These books
offer a chance to scrutinize some of the final originals, thumb-
nails, character designs and ephemera from the makers studio,
but rarely at original size and are still subject to the process of
commodification and what that entails.

Access to final originals and working material may be avail-
able in the form of exhibitions on a particular maker, or a theme
wherein their work fits. This gives researchers an opportunity
to inspect final originals, perhaps in the context of iterations
leading up to certain pages, but with all the attendant prob-
lems that the gallery context brings in. The gallery is a space
designed to enable works to encountered with what Robert
Hughes called the long look: contemplative, at a distance, tem-
porally generous.136 As many commentators have noted, comics
were designed to be read in the hands, therefore it is physically cumbersome but not impossible to read a comic on the wall however hung.137 On gallery walls, final originals are treated as visual objects, which makes sense in spaces or museums devoted to the display and conservation of visual art. It is an implicit endorsement that comics does in fact count visual art.138 The number of exhibitions have increased this century, although as Kim Munson shows, not without precedents as far back as the 1930s.139 Nevertheless, this trend is easing the general (and still extant) mutual suspicion between ‘Art’ and ‘Comics’ not least because of the exponential rise (and interest) in monetary value of final originals.140 Such exhibitions however, do present the same problem of accessibility in that they are in one location for a certain period, perhaps moving to other galleries and cities before closing. An exhibition catalogue cannot recreate the experience of being in the presence of originals and ambulating around the space however the work draws ones attention. But having reproductions, contextual essays and notes is still valuable; they point to the availability of such material to the interested researcher.

In his essay Comic Book and Comic Strip Art as Aesthetic Object, Andrei Molotiu describes the value of being able to behold the final original of comic makers in gallery contexts, describing the encounter as ‘thicker’ reading.141 He notices on the boards marks that the process of mechanical reproduction into a commodity disguises: scale – usually being twice if not more than the printed work; un-erased non-repro blue pencil lines and editors marks, or faintly visible traces of erased graphite; the browning acid of glues, gums, rub-down letratones and other methods of mechanical half-toning; the raised patches of white-out; the variations in thickness of the ink and how the latter ‘shines’ a bit from the matte paper. Molotiu’s thick reading captures something of the erotics of how the work was made, particularly when the maker is deceased. Molotiu’s felt response to looking at final originals in both the gallery scenario or in artist editions becomes a rhapsody in the way he describes the presence of the maker’s hand through the marks they made, as if retracing the marks and their aetiological quality. It is rare to see a scholar bring this to their writing, but also interesting to note he is a maker of abstract comics as well as a trained art historian. The editor of the cited volume here, Kim Munson is also an artist and an art historian.

This brings this research back to what I suggested in the introduction as a key value for it: bringing the felt
experience of making into scholarship, which is really a variation on the felt experience of beholding that motivates such writing in the first place. Doing this can tease out deeper meanings to why the work exists and how that might add resonance or contrapuntal notes to those derived from reading the work as text. In this, I refer to works beyond the autobiographical works where the maker is present as subject, such as I did in *Bully Me* and *Vita Longa, Ars Brevis*. The same approach could be applied to makers in a work-for-hire arrangement. Almost all of them make comics because they love the medium and want to play with characters they (often) grew up with. By peering into the past and seeing how makers became who they are, how they make and why, could add elisions to a text. There could also be a social and economic value in understanding how and why makers persist in making when there is no financial incentive to do so.

Some of the questions that might benefit from the use of the cycle are: whether there is a deep correspondence between how a work was made and what it was made of, and what it depicts/conveys. Is there a correspondence between the style that a maker has developed and the type of story they choose to work on? My interviews suggest there could be: Tim McEwen’s moving from ‘Avengers’ style musculature to caricature: ‘I was getting serious. I had already started to throw away the proportions of superheroes and was working with more caricature.’ Or of Thomas Campi moving his style from the verisimilitude of Editions Bonelli to the scratchy, delicate (digital) colours of say, *Macaroni*:

I just got tired because like for me the beauty of drawing is – I think the beauty of creating, even in music, is like challenging yourself, every time you try to start you learn something new and then try it. But I couldn’t do that with those kind of comics (Bonelli). I was doing my work during the day and then in the night I was just drawing for myself with a completely different style. So, I started like a blog and I was putting everything on there because I was going insane. In my mind it was the right thing to do. If I can’t do (the art I want), it’s going to be a really big problem for my health. So, I have to do something about it and I cannot hate what I do. This job is not just a job, it’s who I am.”

In her essay *Drawing is a Way of Thinking*, Hillary Chute notes:
I have found that an analytic purview can be enriched by knowledge and engagement with practices of production... (and) to consider its wildly variegated processes and techniques—artistic practice, in other words—is to introduce a suggestive critical language for thinking about how comics works. For Chute, the growth and vigour of comics studies could be found in a dialogue with practice and practitioners, which could ease the vexation of trying to solely use words to describe something that also has pictures. It is in the very spirit of her call that my Cycle of Erotics may help scholars because it models the process in a tractable, approachable way. To reiterate, the Cycle is not reductionist, demystifying some sort of magic that is better left ‘behind the curtain’. It is only offering a way to write and talk about a process that is rendered largely opaque by commodification. Comics are not different to other registers, where all the thought, materials and logistics that went into making and performing works are either commodified (literature, architecture, recordings), gone (performances, historical works) or hidden by being held by some estate or institution. Scholarship has attended to this material in these other registers by the simple fact that scholars have turned their attention to them for longer than has been the case with comics. You only have to note how Universities have departments devoted to these studies, which is not the case (yet) with comics.

This points to the possibility that this research could apply to other registers since the creative mind is the same regardless of the register a maker or performer works in. The human creative mind is still a mix of nature and nurture, feelings, opinions, learned behaviour, ideas and that nexus of physical and mental ability regardless of the register. I do not credit the human creative mind with any kind of exceptionalism, just that within it, there is this urge to make or perform works for others to behold; one which is hard to suppress. All makers and performers start as beholders of other works and for some, become inspired to do that thing they love to behold. It also extends to a self-reflexive examination of scholarship itself, wherein the scholar looks at the desire they have to write (or make) about comics. Indeed, that was my motive to undertake comics scholarship: to better understand what it is that I had spent most of my adult life beholding and making. My hope is that other scholars and critical commentators can utilize the Cycle of Erotics as a way to look through the comics they love rather than at them, and by so doing, through my work and into my reason for being.

Right: In more recent times Thomas is using less line art and more of his digital paintbrushes. From the exhibition Drawjob, Cremona, 2017.
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Acknowledgements

A project such as this, which has taken almost four years full-time labour cannot be accomplished without the support of many people. In making acknowledgments such as this, there is always the risk of missing someone whose support was crucial and therefore their approbation. Nevertheless to not commit this to print is to be remiss and offend everybody, which, I will not do.

To my principal supervisor Dr. Stuart Medley, whose encouragement led me to apply in the first place, then was always steadfast in support as the research progress became its inevitable rollercoaster, my sincere and heartfelt thanks. You have made a scholar out of me. We tried with the gentleman bit, but we dropped that in favour of Theakston’s Old Peculiar in Kendal. It’s been a great journey to share with you and it will continue in great friendship. Thanks also for letting me take over your Illustration unit and earn my stripes on teaching what were great groups of motivated and talented students.

To my supplementary supervisors Dr. Chris Kueh and before his retirement, Dr Alun Price, thank you both for the sterling support and advice.

Thanks must also go to the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University for accepting my proposal (with scholarship) and bearing with the many travails that have had to be borne the past four years. Thanks to Heather, Danielle, Jo, Hanadi, Eko,
Claire, Donna, Marziya and others who've helped make the journey possible and bearable!

Huge thanks must go to Baden Kirgan and Brendan Shields for print production of these works, and to Joanne Shoobert for her wonderful box-making.

Undertaking this research meant a move from rural Victoria to Perth, setting up a new base and making new connections. Chief among them has been the wonderful Perth Comic Maker Network, led by the inestimably talented and kind Campbell, Liz, Andrei, Soolagna, Alyce, Hien, Sarah and others who made me welcome. That is one thing you can rely on about comics: there is a community of makers (and fans) who will welcome you no matter where you are from or what sort of comics you make.

Those crazy people just mentioned also happened to be crucially involved in making the Perth Comic Arts Festival possible. It was a substantial undertaking while doing a PhD. We built a great, successful and accessible festival that I'm sure will live on after the aberration of 2020. Speaking of talent, I cannot thank enough the makers who gave me their time and patience to interview them for this thesis: Miranda, Queenie, Jason, Jamie, Gregory, Thomas, Emilie, Mark, Tim, Julie, Pat, Carol, Susan and Dillon. Their books are listed in the bibliography and everyone should read them. I am certainly biased in their favour, but trust me, you will not be disappointed in their comics (and other art practices).

There are a great many other people around the world who have helped in little ways throughout the past four years through acting as publishers, festival organisers, conferences and so on. I shall try to get you all: Carolina Martins, Enrique and Marie, Dominic Davies, Candida Rikkind, Golnar Nabizadeh, Chris Murray, Philip Vaughn, Simon Grennan, Roger Sabin, Maggie Gray, Ian Horton, Ian Hague, Nancy Pedri, Irene Velentzas, Joan Ormrod, Elizabeth MacFarlane, Leonie Brialey, Jose Alaniz, Julie Tait, Carole Tait, Sharon Tait (aka: the Tait Modern, Britain and Liverpool), Aileen McEvoy, Pat Grant, Camilla Anderson at UWA and the Graphic Law project. Thanks also to Alan Haverholm, Lisa, Katya and all at Servierfjandet in Malmo, where I spent a very happy month making comics. A shout to the many lovely people at SIC, Cologne in 2018. Also Arne of Art-Bubble (Dk), Matthieu of BD Lyon and Jakub Mazeron and Kevin Moore at Miedzynarodowym Festiwalu Komiksow and Gier (PL).

Thanks are also due to my publishers who have helped with either publication or assessment of works that formed the practical component of this thesis: Johann at Avant; Serge at çà et là; Michal at Centrala; Eric, Elise, Carey and crew at Allen & Unwin. Thanks also to Corinne at Myriad and John at Soaring Penguin Press for taking the time to read the manuscript to Bully Me.

There are many makers around the country who while not material to this thesis, nevertheless were instrumental in creating the space and place to make comics in Australia: Gary, Tim, Daniel, Nat and Philip at The Ledger Awards and also supporting my foolhardy venture The Ledger Annual. There are way too many makers around the country and the world to name, but you know who you are.

Next to last are the makers whose works inspired me to make comics in the first place: Rene Goscinny, Albert Uderzo, Floyd Gottfredson, Carl Barks, Hergé (and assistants), Chuck Jones, Mort Drucker, Don Martin, Al Jaffee, Charles Schulz, Lynn Johnston, James Bancks, Raymond Briggs, Robert Crumb, Chris Ware, Dan Clowes, Los Bros Hernandez, Charles Burns, Enki Bilal, Moebius/Jean Giraud, Sepriero, Milo Manara, Seth, Chester Brown, Adrian Tomine, Julie Doucet, Alex Toth, Jordi Bernet, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave McKean, Alan Moore and so many more.

Lastly thanks have to go to my mother, who gave me space to make without complaint, when I needed it, and who is dearly missed, having passed in early 2020. Also to my sister Francine and family, who have always been steadfast. It was a rough year 2020, but we got through it. Also thanks go to Jodie Bell, where although I am sorry we did not work out, you did offer great support for much of this project.