



History *and* Politics
in French-Language
Comics *and* Graphic Novels



EDITED BY Mark McKinney

WITH ESSAYS BY

Baru, Bart Beaty, Cécile Vernier Danehy, Hugo Frey, Pascal Lefèvre,
Fabrice Leroy, Amanda Macdonald, Mark McKinney, Ann Miller, and Clare Tufts



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à Louise,

qui a appris à lire grâce à Astérix et aux Barbapapa,

dans sa langue maternelle and her father tongue,

et qui vient de terminer son premier stage

de dessinatrice de bandes dessinées

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Editor's Acknowledgments

This book, like any, is a collective accomplishment, but more obviously so because it is an edited volume, with many visible contributors. Moreover, it grew out of a conference, “History and Politics in French-Language Comics,” held at Miami University (Ohio) on November 11–13, 2004. That conference was funded principally by the L. P. Irvin Fund of the Department of French and Italian, with additional generous funding from the College of Arts and Science, the Department of English, the Department of History, and the International Studies Program. For their crucial support of the conference, I thank Jonathan Strauss, Chair of French and Italian; Steve Delue, then Acting Dean of the College, who made a wonderful opening speech; Charlotte Newman Goldy, then Chair of History; Keith Tuma, Chair of English; and Jeanne Hey, Director of International Studies. My departmental colleagues generously gave of their hospitality, time, ideas, and many skills: Michel Pactat produced a beautiful poster for the event; Jesse and Diana Dickson welcomed us to their home for a pre-conference reading group; Elisabeth Hodges, Chloé Hogg, and Michel Pactat assisted in various important ways with the hosting of our guests; and many other colleagues attended the events, asked questions at the talks, and helped out in innumerable ways. As always, Juanita Schrodtt, our departmental Administrative Assistant, was very helpful with the many conference arrangements and attendant paperwork. Bill Wortman, then the Humanities Librarian, worked together with me to set up a special exhibit on comics at King Library. Daniel Meyers kindly shared his expertise on how to make the audio-visual systems work. Sean Duncan loaned his portable computer at a very opportune time. Christine Armstrong, from Denison University, drove several hours to attend the conference with some of her students. To all of you, I am deeply grateful.

Of course, there would have been no conference without those who presented their research findings. This one was a real treat for many reasons, including the fact that it was one of the very first in the United States to be devoted solely to French-language comics. The presentations were outstanding, and most of their authors traveled from far away to participate in the conference: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and from elsewhere in the United States (Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan). I offer my warmest thanks to Dominique Le Duc, François Le Roy, and Randy Scott, who made fascinating presentations on important topics and who contributed greatly to the discussion and debate. I also owe an enormous debt to the contributors to this book: Baru, Bart Beaty, Cécile Vernier Danehy, Hugo Frey, Pascal Lefèvre, Fabrice Leroy, Amanda Macdonald, Ann Miller, and Clare Tufts. They invested much careful thought and effort in reworking their conference presentations to produce book chapters. The kind patience, good humor, and collegiality of all have been fabulous and made my editorial tasks far easier.

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I thank the cartoonists and publishers who generously agreed to let us reproduce the artwork in this book.

Finally, I thank my family, who have helped out in ways too many to tell. My parents introduced me to *bandes dessinées* long before I could have read them in French: the copies of *Astérix*, *Tintin*, and *Lucky Luke* stories in English translation that I, my brother and my sisters read countless times are now in tatters—a testimony to the pleasure that we derived from them while we were growing up (I also enjoyed *Rupert*, the *Bash Street Kids*, *Donald Duck*, and *Mickey Mouse*). My parents-in-law have been very supportive of my continuing interest in *bandes dessinées* and have helped out during many comics-related expeditions to Lille, Brussels, Paris, and Angoulême. As I have worked on this project I have often consulted the *BDM* that they gave me. Valérie carried much of the weight of this project from beginning to end. She provided a great deal of help with the conference. Her intellectual contribution to my research and writing has always been crucial. Her encouragement has been essential to the completion of this volume. I also thank Louise, for her patience and for the inspiration that she has given me. I wish her a long and happy time with the *bandes dessinées* that she loves, and shares with others.

French-Language Comics Terminology and Referencing

Album: In French-speaking Europe and many other French-language regions, comics are mostly sold in book form, oftentimes hardbound and almost always in the European A-4 paper format, which is a bit taller and narrower than U.S.-size letter paper. Paper is often of good quality and glossy (not pulp paper). A comic book is called “*un album (de bande dessinée)*.” Some of the contributors to this volume have preferred to use the term “album” in order to distinguish French-language comic-book formats from other types.

Bande dessinée: “*Une bande dessinée*” translates literally as “a drawn strip (or band).” “*Une BD*” or “*une bédé*” are less-formal versions of the term. As has often been noted, it has an advantage over the English term, “comics,” insofar as the French-language term contains no suggestion that the material is comic or funny. It also draws attention to the way that the art is generally produced (through drawing) and the strip-like form in which it has often been created, and thereby to its sequentiality (like the term “comic strip”). However, this last aspect of the term can also be misleading, because for decades the overall *page* layout (as opposed to the strip) has been an essential aspect of the art of many cartoonists and comics. Contributors to this volume use either the English-language term (comics) or the French-language one (*bande dessinée*), or both.

Bulle: The English-language equivalents of “*une bulle*” have generally been used in this volume: “speech bubble” or “speech balloon.”

Case and vignette: Both “*une case*” and “*une vignette*” refer to a comic-strip “frame” or “panel” (the latter two terms are generally taken as synonyms here). The English-language terms have generally been used. The chapters in this volume contain references to both specific pages and panels/frames. The latter are usually given in the format “3.1”—this would designate the first frame or panel of the third page of the comic book. It should also be noted that many French-language comics artists number their comic-book plates, but that their publishers then often insert another page number on each printed page, so two different numbers may be found very close to each other. Except where specifically indicated otherwise, the contributors to this volume have given the numbers furnished by the publishers, not the artists.

Ligne claire: The invention (in 1977) of the Dutch term “klare lijn,” translated into French as “*ligne claire*” [clear line], is attributed to cartoonist Joost Swarte (Gaumer and Moliterni 1994: 394). It refers to a drawing style of comics and cartooning originally associated with artists such as Hergé [Remi, Georges], Edgar Pierre Jacobs, Jacques Martin, and Bob de Moor. The “*ligne claire*” style has influenced many generations of cartoonists.

Page and plate (planche): Although “*une planche*” [(printed) plate] is often used interchangeably with “*une page*” [a page] in Peeters (1998: 49–52), at least one French-language theoretician (Groensteen 1999: 38–42) of *bande dessinée* has made a conceptual distinction between “*la planche*” (corresponding to, or the printed equivalent of, the actual artist’s sheet on which she or he drew and/or painted) and “*la page*” (a printed page of *bande dessinée*).

Récitatif: The term “*un récitatif*,” taken from musical terminology (recitativo), is used in French to refer to the text usually found in rectangular boxes at the edges (bottom, top or side) of a *bande dessinée* frame. It generally allows the author or (textual/verbal) narrator to provide temporal (“On Tuesday”), geographical-situational (“In Paris”), or logical-sequential (“Meanwhile”) indications to the (implied) reader. *Récitatifs* are usually functionally and visually different from “*bulles*” [speech balloons], which are generally oval-shaped spaces, delimited by a black line, that contain words or thoughts of characters. Authors in this volume use “*récitatif*” or “recitative.”

Scenario, script, and art: French-language comics are scripted, drawn, and colored (if they are in color) by one or more people. The scriptwriter is gener-

ally called *un scénariste* or *une scénariste*, and his or her product is *le scénario*. The illustrator, who draws the art (*le dessin*), is *un dessinateur*, if a man, or *une dessinatrice*, if a woman. The *coloriste* does the coloring. The contributors to this volume generally refer to the “script” or the “scenario.”

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Representations of History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels

AN INTRODUCTION

Millions of readers worldwide have been introduced to Belgian and French comics through translations of the Tintin series, by Hergé [Georges Remi], and the Asterix series, by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. Given the iconic status of these works, they have perhaps inevitably been read as incarnating various aspects of French or Belgian cultural identity. However, even during what is often considered a classic age of so-called Franco-Belgian comics (the 1950s–60s), such identities were problematic constructions, riddled with contradictions and shaped by tensions of various sorts, including ethno-linguistic, class, national, and racial ones. Although those tensions and contradictions tended to be suppressed or smoothed over in the earlier works, many French-language cartoonists are now foregrounding issues of national and cultural identity in their work. Both the form and content of many such books depart significantly or even radically today from traditional French or Belgian cartooning techniques, and from received notions of French or Belgian cultural identity (or some theoretical combination thereof).

Today, French-language cartoonists are increasingly familiar in the anglophone world, in part thanks to the recent and ongoing publication of their graphic narratives in English translation. Although comics readers and even the wider public may be most familiar with authors such as David B., Marjane Satrapi, Joann Sfar, Jacques Tardi, and Lewis Trondheim, works by several other notable French-language cartoonists have appeared in recent years in English, with publishers such as ComicsLit, Drawn and Quarterly, First Second, IBooks, Nantier Beall Minoustchine (NBM), and Pantheon: Baru, Christophe Blain, Nicolas de Crécy, Guy Delisle, Emmanuel Guibert, Manu Larcenet, Benoît Peeters, François Schuiten, Jean-Philippe Stassen, and others (cf. Beaty 2007: 245–48). Readers of *The Comics Journal* (Bart Beaty’s column on “Euro-Comics for Beginners”) and the *International Journal of Comic Art* have been introduced to many of these, and other, French-language cartoonists. For a few of these artists (notably Satrapi and Sfar), publication has been accompanied by lecture tours, speaking invitations, and bookstore signings in the United States, appearances on National Public Radio, and articles in mainstream magazines and newspapers (cf. Beaty 2007: 114).

As the title of this volume indicates, our focus in this book is on history and politics in French-language comics. It joins a small but growing number of books and journal issues published in English about French-language comics (Frey and Noys 2002; Forsdick, Grove, and McQuillan 2005; Grove 2005; Screech 2005; Beaty 2007; Kunzle 2007). However, it intervenes from an angle that is underrepresented in, although certainly not entirely absent from, much previous scholarship about French-language comics. This volume addresses the following basic questions: what were the importance of history and politics to French-language comics in the past, and what do those older representations mean to us, as readers, and to cartoonists working today? How have French-language cartoonists engaged with history and politics in recent years? What artistic possibilities offered by the medium have they used to do so? How might one view colonialism, Nazism, and racism in past works, some of it produced by the acknowledged masters of the medium?

These are not easy questions, but they are important and—increasingly, it would seem—relevant to English-language readers. If we take an older comic-book story, originally published in French and now available in English translation, we may face difficult questions related to history and politics: witness the recent international flap over *Tintin in the Congo*, first published 1930–31. It was criticized as racist by the British Commission for Racial Equality and moved by Borders bookstores in the United Kingdom and the United States

from the children's section to the adult one (www.cre.gov.uk; AFP 2007). It is only by carefully analyzing issues of history, politics, and representation that one can adequately grasp the meanings of French-language comics and graphic novels, including those in translation that are migrating and reaching new readers around the globe. Whereas earlier French-language comics, such as *Tintin in the Congo*, come to us from an older colonialist context, newer ones must be situated with respect to the colonial legacy and also to a world order whose references have shifted dramatically, to modified or new forms of influence, domination, and contestation. This book seeks to help supply some of the missing information that can be used to interpret books by Hergé (cf. chapters 2 and 8, below) and other French-language artists.

This chapter is designed to help contextualize the rest of the essays. It presents some of the specificities, contributions, and tensions of the French-language field of comics, criticism, and theory. I begin with a general survey of "French-language" comics, a category that reaches wider than the commonly used term "Franco-Belgian" comics (cf. Screech 2005; Beaty 2007: e.g., 177–78; chapter 4, below). I then provide brief overviews of some of the more striking features of the French-language comics field today: formal experimentation and its connections to French-language comics criticism and theory; state support for the medium in French-speaking Europe; and efforts to strengthen the domain of *bande dessinée*¹ elsewhere in the French-speaking world (e.g., Africa) and to export it beyond those regions. I then turn to the place of history and politics as they relate to French-language comics, including politicized attempts by the French state to control the medium. I end this chapter with an examination of history and politics in French-language comics criticism and theory. At that point I will outline this book's project and structure.

The field of French-language comics includes artists from the three European countries where French is the main language (France; about 60 million inhabitants) or is the mother tongue of a significant portion of the population (Belgium—about 4.364 million native French speakers out of a total population of 10.35 in 2003 [Frémy and Frémy 2004: 1135]; and Switzerland—in 2000, 19.5 percent of its population of 7.2 million was French-speaking [Frémy and Frémy 2004: 1414c]). The field also includes other regions and countries where there is a large French-speaking population and—almost necessarily—cartoonists who produce comics in French. These consist primarily of artists from former or present-day French or Belgian colonies: for example, Algeria (Slim), the Congo (Barly Baruti), New Caledonia (Bernard Berger), Québec (Julie Doucet), and Reunion Island (Téhem). Although I

have mentioned only the best-known artist per country or region listed, there are additional geographical areas where French is spoken, and each of these has produced a lively comics scene, with at least several cartoonists active today. However, the main centers of French-language comics production, publication, and distribution remain in Belgium and mainland France. It is therefore appropriate to provide a bit of background here on the French-language comics industry in those two countries, beginning with a snapshot of the state of things today.

Even though comics have been called a “niche market” in Europe and the United States, in comparison with the status of mangas [comics] in Japan (Pinsseau 2007), the comics market and industry in French-speaking European countries (Belgium, France, and Switzerland) are far from insignificant, in economic terms. *Le Monde* journalist Alain Beuve-Méry (2007) reported that in 2006 the comics sector was the third largest part of the European francophone book market, after literature and children’s books.² Sales totaled 382 million euros, which was down slightly from the previous year (by 4.2 percent). Approximately 40 million comic books or *albums*³ were sold in 2006, which was down by about 5.4 percent from 2005. The total number of new and reissued book titles was 3,807, or about 300 books per month. This was up by 15 percent from the preceding year, making 2006 the eleventh consecutive year of increases in the number of new or reissued publications. According to Beuve-Méry, there had been 550 titles published in 1996 and 1,142 in 2000. In terms of volume and economic clout, the French-language comics market is dominated by five large publishing houses or groups: Média Participations (40 percent of the market), owns the publishers Dargaud (French), Dupuis (Belgian), Le Lombard (Belgian), Kana, and others; Flammarion owns Casterman (Belgian) and Fluide Glacial (French); Glénat (based in Grenoble, France); Soleil (based in Toulon, France); and Delcourt (French). Together, they accounted for 2,024 out of the 3,807 new or reissued titles in 2006. The top-selling new book in that year was volume 11 of the “Titeuf” (i.e., “Petit oeuf” [Little Egg], or “Little Shrimp”)⁴ series, drawn by the Swiss artist Zep and published by Glénat—it sold 600,000 copies (out of 1.8 million printed [Labé 2007a]), but this was down from the typical sales for new titles in the series. By comparison, 1 million French-language comic books from the combined titles (23 completed works) of the Tintin series are sold each year, down from the two to three million volumes sold per year from the late 1970s to the early 1990s (Quillien 2007). Asterix, the other top-selling series, broke all previous comic-book sales records in 2005, when 3.2 million copies of the French-language version alone (not counting transla-

tions) of the latest volume (*Le ciel lui tombe sur la tête* [*Asterix and the Falling Sky*]) were printed, of which 75 percent (2.4 million copies) were sold in two months (*Le Temps* 2005).

These large numbers should not skew our vision of the comics industry in French-speaking Europe. At the other extreme, one finds publishers of alternative, experimental, or art comics, which deal habitually with far lower volumes. Belgian cartoonist and publisher Xavier Löwenthal (2007b) said that *La Cinquième Couche*, the publishing house that he helped found in Brussels, has print runs of six hundred to one thousand copies, down from eight hundred to two thousand copies in 2005. Many of the more mainstream cartoonists do not approach the huge production figures and corresponding book and spin-off-product royalties of Uderzo, Zep, and a few others. For example, French cartoonist Jean-Christophe Chauzy stated that his print runs did not exceed fifteen thousand copies (Lemieux 2004).⁵ In 2004 that figure was cited as the cutoff point for the average cartoonist: “the young cartoonist is condemned to succeed by the third book. If [at that point] he [or she] is [still] under the float line of fifteen thousand copies, he [or she] will have trouble getting back into the club.” One result is that those who produce alternative comics may expand the scope of their production and create more mainstream, better-selling comics as well (Menu 2005b: 36; Beaty 2007: 13–14, 171–204), and some cartoonists also have side (or day) jobs: for example, Chauzy earned a prestigious teaching license from the French Ministry of Education (“agrégation en arts appliqués”), allowing him to teach visual communication at a school in Paris; Cambodian French cartoonist Séra teaches *bande dessinée* at the Sorbonne, in Paris, and even holds down a third job; other cartoonists work in advertising or a wide range of other jobs. Séra has made ends meet in part by diversifying his production, drawing comics in the fantasy genre (one of the largest sectors of the market) in addition to his more personal books about the traumatic events of Cambodian history over the last four decades (from devastating American bombings, to the murderous Khmers rouges). He reported that the average advance [à-valoir] that he received per *album* was ten thousand euros. Chauzy was paid four hundred euros per *planche*⁶ on average and split this 60/40 with his scriptwriter when he had one, and many script writers earn as much as 50 percent in France (Lemieux 2004). It was reported in 2004 (Lemieux) that in French-speaking Europe there were 1,264 comics professionals, which included 190 scriptwriters who were not also visual artists [dessinateurs/dessinatrices] and 93 women. In his 2006 report on French-language comics in Europe, Gilles Ratier, the general secretary of the Association des critiques et journalistes

de bandes dessinées (ACBD), stated that there were currently 1325 comics authors,⁷ including 134 women and 223 scriptwriters.

French-language comic books are sold in a variety of ways, including through: hypermarket chains, such as Carrefour, Intermarché, or Leclerc (see below), which sell both food and dry goods; high-volume, general bookseller, and multimedia chains, especially the FNAC in cities throughout Belgium, France, and Switzerland, and Le Furet du Nord in northern France (12 stores); generalist bookshops and newspaper/magazine shops [*maisons de la presse*]; and specialized, independent comics bookstores, scattered in cities and towns throughout French-speaking Europe. Many of the latter have organized themselves into a network, which claims 109 member stores, principally located in mainland France (73), but also in Switzerland (11), Belgium (7), overseas French territories (6; in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Reunion), and one each in Quebec, Italy, and China.⁸ There are additional comics stores that are not members of this network. As is true in many countries and regions around the world, the Web is increasingly a vehicle for advertising, selling, and distributing French-language comics—sellers there range from high-volume retailers (*fnac.com*; *amazon.fr*; etc.) to small, alternative comics publishers. Comics and graphic novels are also purchased and lent out by municipal libraries, which often have reasonably sized collections.

One of the major developments in the French-language comics industry in Europe over the last couple of decades has been the arrival of Japanese mangas in French translation. As many as one out of three comic books sold in France today are mangas or other Asian comic books, and the sector represents about one-quarter of the sales revenue of the French-language comics market (Beuve-Méry 2007). France is the largest consumer of mangas outside of Japan. However, various signs both within the manga sub-market and in comics publishing more generally seem to indicate that the European French-language comics market is overheating from overproduction (cf. Groensteen 2004). The growth in the sales of mangas has slowed from the astounding 30–40 percent rates of 2003–4 to single digits in 2006, and the huge number of new comic books in general—among other factors—has led to confusion among booksellers, consumers, and journalists. According to Louis Delas, the CEO of Casterman, “overproduction brings a drop in the average number of copies sold per title and a weaker rotation of the back stock” (quoted in Beuve-Méry 2007). A marketing strategy to maintain company growth, used especially by the largest comics publishers, is to create tie-ins between comic books, video games, movies, television cartoons, and toys. On the other hand,

for the publishers of the Tintin series, market stagnation is not the result of publishing too many titles, but precisely the opposite: Hergé, the creator of the series and the principal artist behind its success (although he also hired studio artists to work for him), released the last completed comic book in it (*Tintin et les Picaros*) in 1976 and died in 1983, after having made clear that no other artists should continue the series. The result is that, with no new comic books appearing, the series is attracting fewer young readers in French-speaking Europe. Attempts to maintain the revenue stream have included maximizing profits from a range of spin-off products and working to create film tie-ins with the comic books—animated television cartoons in the 1990s (Dayez 1999: 94–99), and a projected trio of films to be directed by Stephen Spielberg, Peter Jackson, and an unnamed third director. The first is reported to be scheduled for release in 2009 (Delcroix 2007; Quillien 2007). Indeed, French-language *bandes dessinées* have inspired a whole spate of films over the last decade or so.

Some readers of this volume are no doubt aware that another major tendency in French-language comics during the past two decades has been the rise of alternative comics presses, artists, and their innovations (Beaty 2007) and, in the eyes of some, their shameful recuperation or cooptation by the large comics publishers (Menu 2005b). For example, the French-language edition of *Persepolis* was published by L'Association, the most significant of these publishers, in terms of its impact on the status of French-language European cartoonists and other recent transformations of the medium and the field (cf. chapters 4 and 5, below; Beaty 2007). Several of the artists mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are, or were, members of L'Association. The publisher has succeeded as a vehicle for transforming the field of French-language comics and, for at least some artists, bringing a measure of fame and economic fortune. One telling example has been the achievement of quasi-blockbuster status by *Persepolis*: three hundred thousand copies of her French-language “Persepolis” series of books sold in France by 2005 (and many more since); and a first print run of seventy thousand copies for her *Poulet aux prunes*, which won the best book award of 2004 at the Festival international de la bande dessinée at Angoulême (Festraëts 2005). This was no mean feat for a publisher that started out in the early 1990s with its artists collectively producing some of their works by folding and stapling them together, in what amounted to artisanal self-publishing (Beaty 2007: 29). Another significant sign of success was the 2007 presidency of cartoonist Lewis Trondheim, a founding member of L'Association, over the three-day Angoulême comics festival, the largest French-language comics extravaganza

(about two hundred thousand fee-paying comics fans in 2007; Labé 2007b), held on the third weekend of January each year in the southwestern French town where the French national comics library and museum are located. The jury of cartoonists and critics over which Trondheim presided gave what some industry players felt was undue attention to alternative comics: books by the five largest publishers received only three prizes (Labé 2007b).

However, these and other successes can also be interpreted as a mainstreaming of the alternative comics publishers and movement. The large comics publishing houses and even general book publishers quickly began copying the creative innovations of the alternative press and even hiring its cartoonists (examples recently published in the United States include the “Dungeon” series by Sfar and Trondheim; *Astronauts of the Future*, by Trondheim and Larcenet; and *Ordinary Victories*, by Larcenet). A threshold was reached in 2003–4, when Jean-Christophe Menu, a founding member of L’Association, became so incensed that he authored *Plates-bandes*, a pamphlet lambasting mainstream French-language comics publishers, especially Soleil, a relative newcomer founded and run by Mourad Boudjellal, a Frenchman whose parents were working-class Algerian immigrants. Menu (2005b) essentially accused them, and what he viewed as phony alternative presses, of producing *bandes dessinées* that were “plates” [flat/uninteresting] for crass commercial reasons, “trampling the flowerbeds” [marcher sur les plates-bandes] of the genuine alternative press (L’Association, Cornélius, Frémok, and others) and stealing the precious legacy of true artistry and genuinely innovative publishing that L’Association especially had salvaged from the history of French-language European comics and carefully nurtured over the preceding fifteen years (cf. chapter 4, below; Beaty 2007: 241–44). Soon after this outburst, L’Association started losing some of its founding members and mainstays (David B, Sfar, Trondheim), suggesting that its experiment may have run its course, or at least entered a new phase.

Whatever lies ahead for L’Association, one thing is certain: it has created its own artistic legacy, much of it related to the formal aspects of the medium. One of its most striking endeavors consisted of the creation and activities of OuBaPo, the Ouvroir de Bande dessinée Potentielle [workshop of potential comics], modeled on a Parisian experimental literary group called OuLiPo, founded in 1960 (well-known members include the writers Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, and Italo Calvino). The example of OuBaPo provides a compelling demonstration of how French-language comics production is connected to the elaboration of French-language comics scholarship. Theoretical discourse and artistic innovation were intertwined in the essays and

comics of French-language Swiss cartoonist Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846), viewed by many as the founder of modern comics (cf. chapter 9, below; Töpffer 1965, 1994, 2007; Kunzle 1990, 2007; Macdonald 1998; Miller 1999).

So far, L'Association has published four volumes of comics experiments: *Oupus 1* (1997), *Oupus 3* (2000), *Oupus 2* (2003), and *Oupus 4* (2005). In several ways, these books exemplify L'Association's book-publishing aesthetics and sometimes contrarian sensibility: they are softcover, not hardback, because the latter is the norm in French book publishing (and perhaps also because it is more expensive); they are printed on high-quality paper; each is of a different size and shape, none of which are standard in the French-language European comics industry; they are entirely in black and white (except for the cover); and—last but not least—they combine visual examples of various *bande dessinée* acrobatics with comics theorization written in prose (cf. Beaty 2007: 77–81). The OuBaPo experiments are anchored both in a European tradition of formal experimentation and theorization in art, literature, and film (OuLiPo, etc.), and in the international comics history of formal innovations.

The inclusion in *Oupus 1* of an extended analysis of OuBaPo's activities written by the Belgian French comics theoretician Thierry Groensteen helped provide a critical consecration of the OuBaPo project and added to the strong tradition of comics criticism in Belgium and France (cf. the dossier on OuBaPo in *9e art*, no. 10 [2004]). The connection between comics theory and art formed a significant impetus for the creation of OuBaPo, according to the account given by L'Association cartoonist Jean-Christophe Menu in his introduction to *Oupus 1* (1997: 11). He dates the beginnings of OuBaPo back to a conference on “Bande dessinée, récit et modernité,” organized by Groensteen and held in August 1987 in the conference space of Cerisy-la-Salle, where OuLiPo had also been founded (cf. Groensteen 1988). Menu reports that Groensteen in fact proposed a conference panel on “la bande dessinée oulipienne.” It has been convincingly argued that interconnected groups of European cartoonists—L'Association, OuBaPo, Fréon, La Cinquième Couche, Amok, and others—have engaged in modernist experimentation in a post-modern age, and that their innovations were inspired by key works produced by previous generations of cartoonists, both in French-speaking Europe and in anglophone countries (Screech 2005; Beaty 2007).

It also bears emphasizing here that this experimental activity on the part of cartoonists has gone hand in hand with theorizing (and curating) by European comics scholars and critics, including Pascal Baetens, Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, Groensteen, Pascal Lefèvre, Peeters, and Thierry Smolderen.⁹ For

example, Baetens, a Belgian university professor and poet, curated an avant-gardist comics exhibition in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2001, in a way that helped define the field, according to Beaty (2007: 70–71). He published a theoretical essay on comics in *Frigobox*, Fréon's periodical, that he later reworked and published in *Formes et politique de la bande dessinée* (1998: 119–33).¹⁰ In the field of French-language comics scholarship Peeters is perhaps best known for his *Lire la bande dessinée* (2002b), previously published as *Case, planche, récit: Lire la bande dessinée* (1991), but he is also the scriptwriter for a series of graphic novels drawn by cartoonist François Schuiten. Without being didactic, the series offers an ongoing reflection on the medium of comics, and on the possibilities and limits of representation in general (cf. chapter 6, below). Smolderen too has curated comic art shows (as has Groensteen), for example, the one in 2006 on Swiss cartoonist Cosey, held in the Belgian city of Charleroi (cf. chapter 10, below). He also scripts comic books, including some for (former) students from the *Ecole européenne supérieure de l'image*, where he teaches. Most of the critics mentioned above contributed in various ways to the *Cahiers de la bande dessinée* (1969–90), a French periodical named after the *Cahiers du cinéma*, the journal of cinema studies, and which facilitated interaction between scholars and producers of comics (Groensteen was editor of the comics journal, 1984–88).

One could elaborate at great length on the many other connections between cartoonists and comics scholars in French-language Europe.¹¹ However, I have provided enough evidence to support a few simple but significant points. First, French-language comics scholarship, which is now becoming known to English readers—for example, via the translation of Groensteen's *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999b; *The System of Comics* [2007]) and Smolderen's contributions to *Comic Art Magazine* (no. 8)—has a history stretching back decades. Second, as I suggested above, the turn to experimentation in French-language comics in the 1990s owes something to the development of comics scholarship, and vice versa. A third and related point is that both French-language comics and scholarship have roots in other cultural spheres (e.g., prose literature, as with *OuBaPo*) and intellectual traditions, including Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics, which have developed to a considerable extent in France. One of the most obvious examples is Peeters, who was a student of Roland Barthes and modeled one of his first analyses of comics on Barthes's *S/Z* (it was Peeters's master's thesis, directed by Barthes): in *Les bijoux ravis*, Peeters (1984) offered a barthesian reading of Hergé's *Les bijoux de la Castafiore*. In *Système de la bande dessinée* Groensteen (1999b) proposes a semiotic approach to the medium, building on comics

scholarship by Baetens, Lefèvre, Peeters, and others, but also drawing on the work of French cultural theorists such as Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Christian Metz.

The fact that Groensteen was director of the French national comics museum at the Centre national de la bande dessinée et de l'image (CNBDI) at the time that he contributed to *Oupus 1* helps illustrate the existence of a vital sponsorship of cartoonists and the comics industry by the French government, something that also exists in Belgium, although to a significantly lesser degree. Groensteen opened the pages of *9e art*, a French journal of comics theory and criticism sponsored by the CNBDI, to articles by, and about the projects of, L'Association and its members. A landmark event in the history of French comics was the opening of the CNBDI in 1990, under the impetus of president François Mitterrand (Miller 2003). The visually striking structure, which combines modern elements of glass and steel with the remains of a sixth-century abbey, was designed by Roland Castro, a famous French architect. For years it has included a museum, a well-stocked bookstore, a comics lending library, a research center, and a comics archive, which is associated with the French national library (BNF), thanks to which the CNBDI receives a copy of every *bande dessinée* or comics periodical published in France (the "dépôt légal" [legal deposit]). The museum owns a collection of original artwork by cartoonists, which it has acquired through purchase and donation—significant additions to it are regularly described in a section of *9e art* entitled "patrimoine" [patrimony]. Recently, a beautiful eighteenth-century wine warehouse ("chais") across the river from the CNBDI's original building was renovated to house the museum and bookstore. Although the CNBDI has been understaffed and underfunded, it has acted as a pillar around which various other comics-related institutions have been built. These include a Maison des auteurs [authors' house], with a helpful staff, studios, equipment, exhibition space, and lodging for cartoonists, who may apply for fellowships to live and work at the institution for several months at a time. Close to the CNBDI there is an institution of higher education for cartoonists (Ecole européenne supérieure de l'image). However, the comics institution for which Angoulême is most famous (and to which the CNBDI contributes, notably through the exhibitions that it helps to research, organize, and house) is of course the annual comics festival, already mentioned, which celebrated its thirty-fourth year of existence in 2007. Virtually all currents in French comics publishing and collecting meet in Angoulême, from small alternative publishers to the largest mainstream ones. Comics publishers and fans contribute to the financing of the event, and two of the main sponsors are a

hypermarket chain (E. Leclerc; it is a major bookseller too) and the Caisse d'épargne (a savings bank), but various state institutions also help support it. The French government contributes to the comics industry in other ways too. For example, the Centre national du livre [National Book Center] (CNL) subsidizes the creation and publishing of comics, including canonical works deemed to be missing from the market today.¹² Most of the classics it helps fund are French, although there are influential comics from other national traditions on the list (e.g., American and Italian). The CNL also provides various grants to cartoonists. According to its 2005 report ("Bilan annuel des aides 2005"),¹³ it distributed seventeen "discovery grants" (3,300 euros each), nineteen "encouragement grants" (6,600 euros), and six "creation grants" (13,200 euros) to forty-two individual artists, for a total of 260,700 euros. It also distributed grants for festivals: 125,000 for the Angoulême one and 12,000 euros to three smaller events. In 2005 the CNL also distributed 39,900 euros in grants for comics-related magazines and journals, including to *9e art* and *Le Collectionneur de Bandes Dessinées*. It gave 11,700 euros to publishers to subsidize three books, including 4,500 euros to Amok (now Frémok) to help publish *Lettres au maire de V.*, by Alex Barbier (cf. chapter 4, below); and provided 69,000 euros in loans and advances to publishers to help publish ten other *bandes dessinées* (cf. Bellefroid 2005: 47–48, 102).

The Belgian government's support for that country's cartoonists has been significantly less than what France provides, but it has grown recently, thanks in part to the efforts of avant-garde comics publishers and artists Löwenthal (La Cinquième Couche) and Thierry van Hasselt (Frémok), a Belgian government official (Denis Fierens) and cartoonist François Schuiten.¹⁴ This led to the creation in 2002 of a governmental group now known as the Commission d'aide à la bande dessinée, modeled on the comics branch of the French CNL. In 2007 the commission was presided over by Schuiten and included various other people professionally connected to the field of Belgian comics. This governmental aid may be understood as part of a general policy of cultural assistance, also found in other French-language countries and regions and, more generally, in Western Europe (cf. Beaty 2007). The amount and kinds of public funding provided to cartoonists and comics publishing are related to the position of comics of various types (alternative and mainstream) in hierarchies of cultural production, to conceptions of national prestige, and to the general health of the economy. In Western countries where French is not the sole national language (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland), governmental funding of comics is also linked to issues of cohabitation between different linguistic and ethnic communities. Public funding of French-language com-

ics in Belgium is therefore partly a function of the relationship between the country's ethno-linguistic groups, especially the Walloons and the Flemish. The commission distributes funds "first to authors, through grants for creative work; secondly to assist with publication (as grants, thankfully); and last, to support events (like the Quinzaine de la BD)" (Löwenthal 2007a). For example, in 2005 *La Cinquième Couche* was provided a grant of 2,017 euros to help publish two books (it had also received 7,000 euros in 2003).¹⁵ Sums provided in 2003 to nine cartoonists averaged 4,806 euros and grants ranged from 2,000 to 7,000 euros, whereas a gallery in Liege received 15,782 euros and a Brussels museum dedicated to the deceased cartoonist Joseph Gillain (Jijé) was allotted 15,000 euros. The sums involved, though not insignificant, are not as much as the amounts distributed by the French government. Like France, Belgium has a comics museum, library, and research center, the Centre belge de la bande dessinée (CBBB), located in downtown Brussels. Although it is located in a renovated architectural gem (a former textile showroom/warehouse designed by Victor Horta in the art nouveau style and built in 1906), the CBBB has been handicapped by low levels of public funding. This is especially visible to the visitor in the small library and research center, which have useful research materials but are understaffed and bursting at the seams for lack of space.

In the same way that the French government supports French novelists, poets, and film directors, it provides funding and other resources, such as hosting at French cultural centers outside of France, to a few cartoonists willing to serve as cultural missionaries, helping to export French culture abroad: for example, François Boucq participated in comics workshops and had an exhibition at the French Centre culturel de Belgrade (April 2007);¹⁶ in the preceding years, another French cartoonist, Jacques Ferrandez, had made the rounds of French cultural centers in the Middle East and North Africa, which allowed him to produce a series of illustrated travel books, recounting his visits to a variety of foreign cities (Istanbul; Sarajevo) and countries (Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria). Continuing this tradition and mining the autobiographical vein that has become the norm for the new wave of comics, Sfar published a notebook, *Missionnaire* (2007), about his French-government-sponsored trips to Japan (2005) and the United States (2006).¹⁷ France also promotes French-language comics from other parts of the Northern Hemisphere, through festivals in France, to which delegations of foreign cartoonists are invited: for example, there were special exhibits at the Angoulême festival dedicated to art and artists from Belgium (1999), Quebec (2000), and Switzerland (2001). These events help structure the field of French-language comics.

Through their cultural centers and via international development agencies, the French and Belgian governments have helped finance the production of French-language comics in Africa, the organization of African comics festivals, and the artistic preparation of African cartoonists (Hunt 2002: 108–10; *Matite africane* 2002; Repetti 2007). Organisms that have helped finance and organize these projects include the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie, the Association française d'action artistique (an extension of the French Foreign Ministry), the Administration générale de la coopération au développement (a Belgian governmental agency; cf. Hunt 2002: 109), and outreach programs of the European Community. Beaty (2007: 111–37) has demonstrated the importance of comics festivals to the creation of the alternative comics movement in Europe and to the emergence of cartoonists from countries (e.g., Portugal and Switzerland) outside the dominant comics markets of France and Belgium. One function of these artistic and commercial events, which are often supported by various governmental agencies, is to facilitate personal contacts between artists, which can be crucial to the advancement of their careers (Beaty 2007: 120). For cartoonists from non-Western countries where French is spoken, events such as comics festivals and book fairs can play a similar role, but one that is riddled with pitfalls, ambiguities, and contradictions, which are related to the colonial heritage and to current economic inequalities between the participants. Some of the most successful cartoonists, including Barly Baruti, from the Congo, have produced comics for Western development organizations and NGOs (Hunt 2002: 109–10). Repetti (2007: 536–38) argues that Western development grant support for one-shot comic books by African cartoonists, and the sponsorship by countries such as France and Belgium of a combination of festivals (such as the second Journées africaines de la bande dessinée, in 1999, in Libreville, Gabon) and short internships for African cartoonists in Europe (e.g., at the Maison des auteurs, in Angoulême, in 2006) or of brief cartooning workshops in Africa, are problematic, insofar as they do not address the fundamental needs of artists in Africa. What African cartoonists really need most are a healthy African economic environment in which to work, a sufficiently large African readership able to afford their comics, a strong publishing industry in their home countries, and freedom from censorship and repression.

There is no doubt that France makes considerable efforts to export its cultural products, including comics, to foreign countries. In the past, some French legislators have also tried to keep foreign cultural influences out of its national comics market. In 1949 the passage of a censorious law that created a commission overseeing youth publications, especially comics, was predi-

cated in part on keeping out cultural influences, primarily American ones, such as Tarzan comics, and defending the French comics industry (Crépin and Groensteen 1999; Groensteen 1999c; Crépin 2001; Jobs 2003; Morgan 2003). The effects of this campaign to moralize and properly educate French youths by watching what they read in comics is not over: for example, the law remains on the books, and the surveillance committee that it created still exists,¹⁸ although these can no longer really be blamed or thanked for significantly keeping out foreign competition, as the example of the mangas shows.¹⁹ However, the parliamentary debates over the postwar law may remind us of more recent discussions, regarding both film (the cultural exception of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT]) and music, over how to protect France's national identity, its cultural industries, and its youths (cf. Warne 1997: 136).²⁰

Well-known French cartoonist Moebius has expressed some concern over the effects of the manga trend (Pinseau 2007), and the specter of a cultural invasion in French comics was raised again by the publication of Uderzo's *Le ciel lui tombe sur la tête* (2005), in which Asian and American invaders try to steal the indomitable Gauls' magic potion (cf. Beaty 2007: 112). This was a transparent allegory of the increasing economic and cultural impact in France of Japanese mangas and anime, and of American comics and animated cartoons (Larrive 2005). It was, in some ways, an unsurprising move for a comics series built on the theme of foreign invasion, whether of Gaul by the Romans or of France by the Germans, and of both national(ist) defense and celebrating *European* cultural differences (cf. Screech 2005: 75–92). The historical irony, which cannot be a coincidence, is that the series was begun during the Algerian War, when Algerian nationalists were fighting off French colonizers (cf. Screech 2005: 86).

Today French-language “comics are entering politics” in a manner that has not gone unnoticed (cf. Bernière 2003; Labé 2007a). However, politics and history—for example, in the guise of European imperialism—have always been tied in fundamental ways to French-language comics: for example, Töpffer's *Histoire de Monsieur Cryptogame*, initially drafted in 1830, includes a foray to Algeria, which France invaded before Töpffer finished first sketching the story. France was in the midst of its long war of conquest in Algeria when Töpffer returned to his story, in 1844 (Kunzle 1990: 28–71; 2007: 104–6). History and politics are also pertinent to the past division of French-language comics along the lines of social class and gender that structured French society as a whole.²¹ *Tintin* magazine (founded in 1946) was often considered to be a middle-class publication, whereas *Vaillant* (founded in 1945) and its

successor *Pif Gadget* (from 1969) were left-leaning publications affiliated with the French Communist Party (PCF) and geared more toward the working class. Moreover, *Vaillant* should not be confused with *Coeurs vaillants* [Valiant Hearts] (launched nationally in 1929) and *Ames vaillantes* [Valiant Souls] (begun in 1937), both Catholic publications directed at boys and girls, respectively (cf. chapter 3, below). The Catholic Belgian publisher Dupuis launched the magazine *Spirou* in 1938. Tensions over ideology and politics helped structure the field of French-language comics in recognizable ways up through the 1950s, with Catholic and middle-class publications competing against working-class and left-leaning ones to reach the minds of French youths, but also—more obviously in the case of the more commercial products (e.g., the “*petits formats*” [pulp comics])—their piggy banks (and parents’ pockets). Nonetheless, as Ann Miller (2003: 136) points out, the Catholic Church and the Communist Party found a common ground that allowed them to get the censorious law of 1949 passed. As it was in many areas of cultural production, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a transformation of French-language comics, one that disrupted the older, binary cleavage to a certain extent and created a more complex field: for example, innovative magazines such as *Pilote* (in late 1959), *L’écho des savanes* (in 1972), and *Métal hurlant* (in 1975) were launched. Some artists began to produce realist comics with working-class characters, often with autobiographical overtones. Baru, a French cartoonist and contributor to this volume (chapter 11), has played a major role in the ongoing, post-1968 transformation of French-language comics. He began publishing in *Pilote* in 1982.

Today, the roles of history and politics in French-language comics are often foregrounded in publications by the new wave of artists now arriving in English-speaking countries. Whereas Töpffer did not actually show the French army’s invasion in his *Histoire de Monsieur Cryptogame*, cartoonists such as Baru, David B., Satrapi, Sfar, and Stassen engage more directly with historical and political themes. *Road to America*—a masterful, fast-paced graphic novel by Baru, Jean-Marc Thévenet, and Daniel Ledran (2002)—is set in the midst of the Algerian War (1954–62; cf. chapter 7, below), whereas Sfar’s *The Rabbi’s Cat* (2005) weaves a fascinating story about the life of Jews in colonial Algeria. For Satrapi, it is the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq War that are key events in her autobiographical story, *Persepolis* (2003, 2004). Stassen’s *Deo gratias* (2006) represents the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. David B.’s autobiographical graphic narrative, *Epileptic* (2005), features a breathtaking range of historical events and political topics, including the conquests of Genghis Khan, the two world wars, the Algerian War, as well

as the French student uprising and worker strike of May 1968. These artists are among the most talented and successful cartoonists publishing in France and Belgium today, so it is not surprising that all have received prizes at the annual French comics festival, in Angoulême. The importance of history and politics to many of their publications is clear.

Another significant development over the last few decades has been the increasingly prominent role played by women artists in French-language comics. *Ah! Nana* [Ah! Gal] (1976–78) was an emblematic publication featuring women artists, including French cartoonists Florence Cestac and Chantal Montellier, but also the American cartoonist Trina Robbins (Delaborde 2006). Like another groundbreaking French comics magazine, *L'Hebdo Hara-Kiri*, *Ah! Nana* was a victim of the government censors—explicit sexual imagery was cited as the reason for the restrictive measures that struck them both, although it was a potshot at de Gaulle that was really behind the demise of the former (it was immediately resuscitated, as *Charlie Hebdo*), and a challenge to sexual politics that led to the disappearance of the latter (cf. Crépin and Groensteen 1999).²² Today, French cartoonists still sometimes define their political and class affiliations through references to one side or the other of the earlier, more or less bipolar, field (cf. chapters 4 and 11, below; Barbier et al. 2001). For example, working-class comics are nostalgically celebrated by French cartoonists such as Farid Boudjellal (1998–2002, 2006a, 2006b) and Baru (1999, 2000, 2002, 2003).

Scholarly criticism and theory about history and politics in French-language comics reach back at least to the 1960s. A Belgian university thesis from that era is still sometimes cited in studies of colonialism in Belgian comics (Craenhals 1970; cf. chapter 8, below). Groundbreaking studies by art historian David Kunzle (1973, 1990), on European comics from their origins through the nineteenth century, remain key works in the field, and include analysis of representations of European imperialism in comics and cartoons by Töpffer, Cham, and others (cf. Kunzle 1998, 2007). In 1975 several university students in the Institute of Political Science (IEP) at Toulouse published a volume on *Le message politique et social de la bande dessinée*, under the direction of their professor (Carbonell 1975)—the five chapters dealt with issues such as: the cold war in Edgar P. Jacobs's "Blake et Mortimer" series; French foreign policy and racism in the series "Les chevaliers du ciel" [Knights of the Sky]; the image of women in *Spirou* magazine; and—already—a chapter that analyzed charges of racism and fascism that had been leveled against Hergé and his work. A special journal issue on comics, published the following year (*Communications*, no. 24), was a landmark in French-language comics

criticism. Although it mostly contained structuralist or semiotic readings that avoided history and politics, one does find a few articles that touch on the kinds of topics that the present volume explores.²³ Three notable works on politics and history in comics were published at the end of the 1970s: a study of the Asterix series (Stoll 1978);²⁴ the first edition of a study that French historian Pascal Ory (in 1979; cf. 2002) made of collaborationist comics in France; and a volume published by *Bédésup*, a journal that included authors from the political Far Right (Faur 1979). A more recent contribution to the study of history and comics is the edited volume on *L'histoire . . . par la bande* (Mitterrand and Ciment 1993). Another book that analyzes the politics of form in comics is *Formes et politique de la bande dessinée* (Baetens 2001), already mentioned above.²⁵

Nonetheless, history and politics are often absent from, or minimized in, analyses and discussions of French-language comics, for several reasons. First, there is a tendency in some scholarship on French-language comics to focus on form in the medium, to the exclusion of the ways in which form and content are articulated. Of course this is not necessarily problematic in and of itself. Yet it is true that even in the area of experimental comics, a political and historical approach is not without value, nor in most cases can such work plausibly be entirely reduced to its formal features. The same was the case for the French “nouveau roman” [new novel] movement and for the “nouvelle vague” [new wave] in French cinema: obvious examples in comics include references to the events of September 11, 2001, in New York City and to capital punishment, in strips by Menu and François Ayroles, published in *Oubapo 2* (2003: 30–32; cf. chapters 4 and 5, below).

There has also been a felt need of some fans, critics, and institutions, in France and Belgium (since French and Belgian comics form much of the historical core of the tradition), to elevate a select group of historical figures and works in the comics tradition to a quasi-mythic status for reasons of national pride and belonging (cf. Kotek 1995). To some degree this is not surprising. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed great changes for Europe, including the end of formal colonial rule in several European colonies, which often involved the loss of many lives, especially but not only among the colonized, and considerable political upheaval on all sides. There has been a rapid transformation of European cultural landscapes and economies through migration (often from former colonies), the sometimes unsettling construction of the European Community, and the structural violence of global capitalism, through both expansion and, more obviously, contraction (e.g., jobs lost when companies move to regions of the globe where labor is cheaper).

Taken together, these forces have created a genuine need to seek reassurance in certain figures associated with childhood and traditional values. For the art historian O. K. Werckmeister (1991), these upheavals together with the cold war produced a “citadel culture,” a kind of siege mentality, which he analyzed in the French-language comics of Pierre Christin and, especially, Enki Bilal—history is acknowledged in some adult comics, but only enough to keep threats at bay, beyond a “citadel” or “fortress Europe” (cf. Nederveen Pieterse 1991). In an article about colonialism in Belgian comics production, Pierre Halen (1992: 377), a Belgian scholar, suggested that the European comics market of the 1980s may have been characterized by a “*désir de nation*” [desire for nation]. Although national myth-making can have positive features (cf. chapter 9, below), it is important to remain lucid and vigilant about potential negative aspects of this activity, which are glaringly obvious from even the most cursory look at twentieth-century history. The construction of national comics literatures or a Franco-Belgian comics canon on foundational figures such as Hergé is a risky business, given their close association with some of the most troubling events and movements of the previous century (cf. chapters 2 and 8, below). On the other hand, French-language cartoonists have provided trenchant critiques of national myths founded on the exclusion of despised immigrants and colonized others (cf. chapters 7 and 11, below).

The turn away from historical and political analysis can stem from a perceived need to protect a product, a work of art, or a person. Raising sensitive issues such as the possible existence of racist imagery in a published work could understandably be viewed as dangerous to a company’s profits, to the aura surrounding a beloved *bande dessinée*, or to the reputation of a favorite artist. This has clearly been the case with some of Hergé’s works, including *Tintin in the Congo*. As Hugo Frey (2005: 63) has argued, the company that has the legal monopoly over Hergé/Tintin-related materials generally plays down or evacuates historical and political material that might jeopardize its profits: “the current Moulinsart strategy . . . exaggerates politically neutral images from the Tintin books, as well as minimizes all reference to Hergé’s politics.” Comics are of course products that enable many people to earn a living and a select few to amass considerable wealth (e.g., Hergé’s widow and her second husband), but that fact should simply spur us to become better informed readers and more discerning consumers. Although in some sense each of the reasons enumerated above for turning away from history and politics is understandable, there can be great value in bringing those dimensions back into the frame when we analyze comics. There is also great value

to including comics in debates over history, politics, and memory that are taking place in other fields, from which this area of cultural production is usually left out (cf. Frey 2002). The essays assembled in this volume carefully and thoughtfully analyze political and historical dimensions of representation in *bandes dessinées*.

By way of conclusion, I offer here a short overview of the structure of the present volume and of its project. Part 1 focuses on the comics tradition, including comic books considered to be classics (e.g., *La bête est morte*), early periodicals (*Coeurs vaillants*; *Le journal de Mickey*; *Tintin*; *Vaillant*) and cartoonists—mostly, though not exclusively, French and Belgian—some of whom are widely viewed as “masters of the ninth art” (i.e., comics; cf. Screech 2005). These include Hergé (chapter 2, by Hugo Frey); Calvo and Marijac (chapter 3, by Clare Tufts); and Baudoin, Forest, and Tardi (chapter 4, by Bart Beaty). Chapter 4 provides a bridge between parts 1 and 2: it analyzes the ways in which a new generation of cartoonists views its predecessors. Part 2 continues the investigation into more recent works by cartoonists from France and Belgium: Menu and Blutch (chapter 5, by Ann Miller); Peeters and Schuiten (chapter 6, by Fabrice Leroy). In the *bandes dessinées* analyzed, an exploration of the medium’s possibilities, a reevaluation of the comics heritage, and an interrogation of regional, national, and European identities are closely connected. The yoking together of politics and the artistic reevaluation of comics history by cartoonists today is understandable, given the strong associations between artistic style and political ideology in the work of earlier, influential “masters of the ninth art,” for example, Hergé or E. P. Jacobs (cf. Miller 2006). Part 3, the longest, brings together four chapters that analyze how colonialism and imperialism of Belgium (in the Congo), France (in Algeria and the Pacific), and the United States (in Vietnam) have been represented in comics. The artists studied are from mainland France (chapter 7, which I wrote), Belgium (chapter 8, by Pascal Lefèvre),²⁶ the French possession of New Caledonia (chapter 9, by Amanda Macdonald), and Switzerland (chapter 10, by Cécile Vernier Danehy). These chapters move the field of investigation toward what some might view as the periphery of French-language comics and issues, and contribute in this way to the volume’s general interrogation of the ways in which *bandes dessinées* express themes of power and identity (national, European, Western). However, as will be clear by that point in the volume, in some ways the so-called Franco-Belgian center has always been fractured, and built on discourses of otherness and exoticism. Moreover, part 3 is not mainly about peripheral cartoonists or comics: many of the artists studied there—Baru, Cosey, Hergé, and Jijé—are among the most celebrated Belgian,

French, and Swiss cartoonists; and several of the comics analyzed in the four chapters have won prizes or are considered to be “classics.”

The final chapter (11) consists of a personal meditation by Baru, a French cartoonist who deserves to be better known in the English-speaking world. He describes here his search for a personal language and style in comics, and expresses his belief that *la bande dessinée* is a medium capable of complex artistic expression on a par with film or the prose novel. Throughout his chapter, he connects these concerns with issues of social class, immigration, and national identity—in other words, with history and politics.

Notes

I am grateful to Ann Miller for her careful reading of a previous version of this chapter and for her very helpful suggestions. All responsibility for the chapter is mine, of course. I also thank Xavier Löwenthal for his very informative and prompt replies to my several questions about public support of comics and cartoonists in Belgium.

1. For a definition of this and other French terms related to comics, please see the glossary, above (pp. xiii–xv).

2. The following passage draws heavily from Beuve-Méry.

3. Cf. the glossary, above (pp. xiii–xv).

4. All translations from the French are mine.

5. Much of the following passage draws on Emmanuel Lemieux’s article, which in turn borrowed heavily from a report produced by Gilles Ratier (cf. below).

6. Cf. the glossary, above (pp. xiii–xv).

7. Defined as “having published at least 3 *albums* and with at least one current contract, or else working steadily in the press.”

8. These numbers found on the Web site of “réseau Canal BD,” www.canalbd.net (consulted July 31, 2007). When added up, the number of stores broken down by geographical area (100) was smaller than the total membership claimed (109).

9. Nonetheless, the university system in France and Belgium has been slow to provide a place to scholars working on *bandes dessinées*, as Harry Morgan (2005) and others have argued.

10. I thank Sven-Erik Rose for having kindly given me a copy of this work.

11. It is also remarkable that several of the most important comics scholars are of Belgian background or lived in Belgium for many years. The Belgian contribution to French-language comics and related scholarship cannot be underestimated, nor does the term “Franco-Belgian comics” explain precisely what is “Belgian” in French-language Belgian comics (cf. Russo and Leroy 2005). I am well aware that some of the Belgian comics critics whom I have mentioned, specifically Jan Baetens and Pascal Lefèvre, are Flemish and have also published on Flemish comics and cartoonists (see, for example, Lefèvre and van Gompel [2003]). This other body of Belgian comics and scholarship complicates further both the notions of “Franco-Belgian” comics and identity (Screech 2005) and the term “French-language” comics, which I am using

here. The same holds true, but to a lesser degree, for Switzerland, where Swiss German and Italian are also native languages.

12. Cf. www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/Lacunes-bande-dessinee.html (consulted October 12, 2007).

13. Retrieved at www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/spip.php?rubrique224 (consulted July 26, 2007).

14. This section relies heavily on information kindly provided to me by Xavier Löwenthal (2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Cf. www.5c.be/annales.php?news_id=54&, on the Web site of Löwenthal's publishing house, La Cinquième Couche (consulted October 12, 2007).

15. Löwenthal (2007b); these figures come from budgetary reports located on the Web site of the Direction générale de la culture of the Ministère de la Communauté française de Belgique (www.culture.be/index.php?m=convention_view&fi_id=80; consulted July 26, 2007). According to Löwenthal (2007a), the commission distributes 100,000 euros per year. By contrast, the budgetary reports mentioned above give the following sums distributed: 87,500 euros in 2003; 40,880 euros in 2004; and 2,017 euros in 2005. Löwenthal (2007b) could not explain the discrepancy between the figures, was surprised by the low amount listed for 2005, and wondered whether there was an error in the document that I had consulted, but did state that in two instances budget problems had cut the commission's budget in half.

16. Cf. www.ccf.org.yu/fr/02c.htm#boucq (consulted July 26, 2007).

17. On the autobiographical trend in French-language European comics and beyond, cf. the dossier in *9e art*, no. 1 (1996: 56–83); Baron-Carvais (1997); Mercier (1999); Baetens (2004); Beatty (2007: 138–70).

18. Cf. www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/Vous-etes-editeur.html; Crépin and Groensteen (1999); Joubert (2005); Menu (2005b: 75–76).

19. Although Ann Miller (2003: 136) states that “recently, in the 1990s, a number of *mangas* (Japanese BD) were banned” in France (cf. Pascal 1996).

20. On the corresponding debate in Belgium, cf. the chapter by Michel Defourny in Crépin and Groensteen (1999).

21. For a very useful English-language survey of the field, cf. Miller (2003).

22. For additional information on this commission and the issue of censorship as it has affected comics and cartoonists in France and Belgium, cf. the special dossier in *9e art*, no. 4 (1999: 14–45); Crépin (2001); Morgan (2003); Joubert (2005); Menu (2005b: 75–76). Of course, the French history of censorship of comics and especially of editorial cartoons (another broad topic in itself) is only partially due to the 1949 law and to the existence and activities of the commission: for example, it occurred notably during the Algerian War.

23. E.g., Umberto Eco on “Le mythe de Superman”; Vicky du Fontbaré and Philippe Sohet on “Codes culturels et logique de classe.”

24. I thank Sylvie Durmelat for having kindly brought this work to my attention.

25. The bibliography at the end of this volume provides references to many other significant works in the field.

26. As a reading of Lefèvre's chapter makes clear, we have markedly different views of some key issues and texts that he analyzes: for example, “Blondin et Cirage: Le nègre blanc” [The White Negro] (1951), by Belgian cartoonist Jijé. I read that work as a representation in fiction of the transition from direct colonial rule to neocolonialism, and am convinced that it owes much to the racist, colonialist, and American tradition of blackface minstrelsy.

Part 1

History, Politics, and the *Bande dessinée* Tradition

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Trapped in the Past

ANTI-SEMITISM IN HERGÉ'S *FLIGHT 714*

INTRODUCTION

The political sympathies of Hergé (alias Georges Remi, 1907–83), the famous “father of Tintin,” have become a well-known part of the historical record.¹ Since the publication of two major biographies it has become even clearer to comics readers that, in his youth, Hergé was positioned on the right wing of Belgian politics, and drifted to the extreme-right wing in his thirties (Assouline 1998; Peeters 2002a). His activities during the Nazi occupation of Belgium (1940–44) are, in fact, notorious. Instead of avoiding collaboration with the Nazi-dominated press during the period, he maximized opportunities for work in it. For example, he joined the paper *Le Soir* after it came under the control of the Nazis: he published his Tintin strips in it from October 17, 1940, through the issue of September 2–3, 1944 (Assouline 1998: 236–47, 330).² He also worked closely with Jacques Van Melkebeke—an artist, journalist, and friend who was found guilty of collaboration with the Nazis. For whatever motives—whether expedience, cowardice, or politics—Van Melkebeke expressed anti-resistance views in the collaborationist press (Mouchart 2002: 86–89). During the war, Hergé and Van Melkebeke cowrote the script for a theatrical production, *Tintin aux Indes ou le Mystère du diamant bleu*, which was staged at the Théâtre

Royal (a.k.a. the Théâtre des Galeries), in the Galeries Saint-Hubert, Brussels, on April 15, 1941. Shortly afterward, the two also wrote a second Tintin play together (Assouline 1998: 289–90; Peeters 2002a: 191–92; Mouchart 2002: 66).

Hergé's comic-strip material produced during the Occupation dovetailed precisely with Nazi political doctrine. His Tintin adventure entitled *L'étoile mystérieuse* (henceforth *The Shooting Star*) was serialized in *Le Soir* "volé" from October 20, 1941, through May 22, 1942, and was first published in book form, with modifications, in September 1942. In that adventure Hergé cast Tintin, Milou [Snowy] (Tintin's dog), Capitaine Haddock [Captain Haddock], and friends in a narrative that was deeply racist in its implications. In *The Shooting Star* Hergé tells the story of an international race to capture an asteroid that had fallen into the ocean. Tintin and a Jewish banker from New York, named "Blumenstein," compete to locate the asteroid—the "star" of the title. Whereas Hergé portrays Tintin as being noble, generous, and adventurous throughout, he depicts the "Jewish rival," Blumenstein, as being devious and malicious in his determination to obtain and to exploit the new metal of which the asteroid is made. He draws him as a cowardly manipulator who sends others off to do his dangerous and dirty work. Plainly, Hergé's underlying implication is that men with Jewish names, such as "Blumenstein," are powerful and not to be trusted (Assouline 1998: 271–80; Peeters 2002a: 194–96). The political subtext to the story is not especially complex. Hergé shapes the world of Tintin via a Manichean competition between forces of good and evil. Here, Hergé uses Blumenstein to represent evil, thereby replicating a common strand of popular anti-Semitic belief. It is this negative role that creates the basic anti-Semitism of the work. Moreover, in depicting Blumenstein as a manipulative figure who is plotting against Tintin and the positive forces that the latter represents, the work evokes the commonly held idea of a Jewish world conspiracy, along the lines of the anti-Semitic "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" slander (cf. Cohn 1967).

Hergé's visual depiction of Blumenstein is marked by racist cartooning techniques. For example, the character's facial features are disfigured in the classic anti-Jewish fashion. Hergé drew Blumenstein with a large and bulbous nose, a rounded forehead, receding black hair, and small beady eyes. These are some of the most common racist stereotypes of the "Jewish face-type" and were a staple of racist imagery in the 1930s and 1940s (cf. Kotek 2005: 77, 149). Hergé's art evokes the words used by the leading French anti-Semite, Edouard Drumont, to describe the physiognomy of the so-called Jewish type (Winock 1990: 129). Drumont's paper *La libre parole* had been distributed in Brussels and so helped shape opinion there as well as in Paris.

Furthermore, Hergé's Blumenstein contains other visual references that were common in anti-Semitic representations. For example, Hergé repeatedly presents us with Blumenstein smoking a cigar, because the association functioned as a shorthand visual reference to financial power. The plumpness of the Jewish capitalist's cigar, often mirrored by the rather fat body shape that anti-Semites often attributed to Jews, symbolized power and excess (cf. Pasamonik 2002). It was alleged by anti-Semites that capitalist "financiers" were too often Jewish and that they profited when non-Jewish citizens suffered from economic hardship, that they literally "grew fat" from the suffering and misery of non-Jews. Therefore, cigar-smoking was part and parcel of the negative presentation of Blumenstein as a conspiratorial, Jewish banker. Anti-Semitic postcards from the 1930s had made similar racist jibes to amuse those Belgians who enjoyed this view of the world. Furthermore, in a recent history of anti-Semitic postcards the two main Belgian examples that are cited in the text revolve precisely around the Jew-as-banker stereotype. One of these cards printed a quote from the Belgian socialist anti-Semite, Edmond Picard, which directly warned that Jewish power was based on the illegitimate accumulation of capital (Kotek 2005: 203). These perspectives are very similar to Hergé's treatment of Blumenstein.

On November 11, 1941, Hergé included two more stereotypical Jewish characters in the daily strip version of *The Shooting Star* published in *Le Soir* "volé." He introduced a pair of grotesquely drawn Jewish men named Isaac and Salomon (Assouline 1998: 276; Benoît-Jeannin 2001: 23–25; Benoît-Jeannin 2007: 140–44; Peeters 2002a: 196).³ Hergé used these characters to make a mean-spirited, anti-Semitic attack. One of the men, no doubt a businessman of some sort, laughs because he thinks that the crash of the asteroid to earth will end the world and in so doing free him of the debts that he owes to his suppliers. In this brief sequence Hergé smears Jews as being stupid misers who are only concerned with money. Again, there is nothing original about the insulting rhetoric. Benoît Peeters underlines the fact that the material in *The Shooting Star* is horrendous because it was being published just when new racist legislation was being used to expel the Belgian Jewish community from public life (Peeters 2002a: 197–98; cf. Assouline 1998: 297–300; Benoît-Jeannin 2001: 22–35). A few months after the story's publication, Nazis and their Belgian collaborators rounded up Jews in Belgium and deported them to be exterminated. Already in April 1941, during the holiday period of Easter, in the city of Antwerp, Christian Flemish Belgians rioted against their Jewish Belgian neighbors. These terrible actions had followed a public showing of the Nazi propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*, dir. Fritz

Hippler, 1940). The city's two synagogues were brutally attacked and two hundred windows were smashed (Steinberg 1992: 240–41). Hergé concluded *The Shooting Star* with Blumenstein hearing the news on the radio that he is to be tracked down and severely punished for his conspiracy against Tintin. This is a chilling threat on which to conclude the Tintin story, especially after the Antwerp pogrom and just before the Nazi roundup of Belgian Jews, sent to the death camps. Anti-Semitic films, cartoons, and popular assumptions were critical vectors of discourses that normalized anti-Semitism and legitimated its violence. Hergé's Tintin series in 1941–42 contributed to this sinister, Nazi-led process. Not all the wartime Tintin strips were as politically colored as *The Shooting Star*. In others Hergé avoided an overt political stance. It is also worth noting that, unlike Hergé, members of the Belgian resistance bravely challenged Nazism. For example, at the Université Libre in Brussels, professors went on a labor strike against the Nazi occupation (Ory 1981: 94). Elsewhere in Belgium, in the town of Jamoigne, a boarding school hid Jewish children from Nazi deportation and almost certain death (Zachary 2000). These are two historical episodes, among many, that contrast with Hergé's decision to draw and publish *The Shooting Star*.

After the war, the father of Tintin came close to being sentenced to prison for collaboration. Ultimately the case against him was dismissed because the authorities deemed comics an unimportant field of public activity, although some argued that, through the Tintin strip, Hergé had attracted readers to *Le Soir* "volé" (Assouline 1998: 344, 355–56; Peeters 2002a: 241–42). Slowly but surely, Hergé relaunched the Tintin series and his works became hugely popular. In the late 1940s and 1950s new Tintin books won generation after generation of readers. Supporting most of these projects was *Tintin*, a weekly comics publication that was the home where a generation of francophone *bande dessinée* artists practiced their trade. In retrospect, Hergé's postwar status as a Belgian national cultural hero sits uncomfortably alongside his anti-Semitism under the Nazi occupation. Today some scholarly commentators continue to find the gulf between the two roles he played too great a chasm to bridge. For example Matthew Screech implies that *The Shooting Star* was only anti-American propaganda (Screech 2005: 29; cf. Apostolidès 1984: 147). His interpretation of *The Shooting Star* ignores the fact that Blumenstein is an anti-Jewish stereotype and that the narrative is structured through a Jewish conspiracy against Tintin. He overlooks the role of "Isaac and Salomon." Other responses to Hergé's political record have been published. In 2001, Maxime Benoît-Jeannin published an antifascist and antiracist booklet about the cartoonist. It discusses many aspects of Hergé's racism and calls for

the cessation of publication of *The Shooting Star* (Benoît-Jeannin 2001: 85, see also more recent assertions in Benoît-Jeannin 2007). Adopting a different line of argument to both Screech and Benoît-Jeannin, Peeters (2005: 165–66) suggests that present-day readers must not be too judgmental of Hergé, because we have not witnessed Nazi occupation and have ourselves too often made social and political errors. Given that Peeters has contributed so much to our understanding of Hergé's war record, this is an important comment. However, it should not prohibit careful scholarly research on comics and their political content.

It has been common for writers (including Pierre Assouline, Benoît Peeters, and Maxime Benoît-Jeannin) working on the historical and political controversies that I have sketched out above to focus on Hergé's xenophobia and racism in his interwar and Occupation artwork. However, at least one Tintin book published after the war is equally marked by a complex bias. In the rest of this chapter I analyze the use of anti-Jewish stereotyping in one of the postwar Tintin adventures, *Vol 714 pour Sydney* (1968; henceforth *Flight 714*). Its content shows that Hergé continued to use anti-Semitic clichés long after the war. Notably, Hergé's use of the character Roberto Rastapopoulos deserves attention. Like Blumenstein in *The Shooting Star*, Rastapopoulos is another stereotypical "Jewish villain." Moreover, *Flight 714* sheds light on how Hergé was enthralled by esoteric religious theories. This is a social-religious outlook that some political scientists consider part of the extreme right-wing tradition (Mosse 1961; Winock 1990: 106, 130; Taguieff 2005). As I will demonstrate, the comic book relies on an underlying narrative of conspiracy that replicates and reinforces anti-Semitic notions of "Jewish plots."

FLIGHT 714 AND THE CHARACTER OF ROBERTO RASTAPOPOULOS

Flight 714 is a convoluted thriller. It begins with Tintin, Snowy, and two friends—Haddock and Professeur Tournesol [Professor Calculus]—traveling to Sydney, Australia, where they have been invited as guests of honor at a scientific conference. The main protagonists spend time waiting for their connecting flight at the airport in Djakarta. In the airport stopover lounge, Haddock literally stumbles into an old friend, the Estonian pilot, Szut. Readers learn that Szut, having abandoned his career as a military aviator, now flies the private jet of a famous international businessman, Laszlo Carreidas. Carreidas is mocked for being egotistical and dishonest and is a dour and

humorless character. Nonetheless, he invites Tintin and company to continue their onward journey in his private jet plane.

High above the ocean Carreidas's jet is hijacked. A group of mercenaries takes control of the aircraft and lands it on a makeshift airstrip on the exotic, volcanic island of Pulau-Pulau Bompá. There, Tintin is confronted by the arch-villain Rastapopoulos, who has Carreidas drugged to force him to provide access to his fortune, hidden in a Swiss bank account: the sinister Doctor Krollspell, an underling of Rastapopoulos, administers a dose of truth serum to try to extract this vital information. With it, the gangsters would be poised to win a decisive victory. However, the interrogation session goes awry, and Tintin escapes from his captors, rescues Carreidas, and flees Pulau-Pulau Bompá with his friends. Their escape unfolds in an extraordinary fashion. Hiding in ancient caverns beneath the island, where he finds religious relics from a lost, ancient civilization, the boy-hero meets a new ally: Mik Ezdanitoff (Mik Kanrokitoff in the English-language version). Like Tintin, Ezdanitoff is a journalist, but works for *Comète*, an internationally renowned esoteric "science" magazine. Ezdanitoff pays a visit to Pulau-Pulau Bompá once or twice a year to report on the state of the world to aliens who have been landing there for thousands of years. Ezdanitoff is able to communicate with humans and the aliens through a small telepathic transceiver attached to his ear. He ensures that Tintin and friends are successful in their bid for freedom. So it is through the good offices of Ezdanitoff, the aliens, and their flying saucer that Tintin and his friends make their dramatic final escape.

Flight 714 concludes where the adventure began, back at the airport runway in Djakarta. Hergé provides a deliberately ironic denouement to the most bizarre adventure in the Tintin series, when the reader is given a post-escape update through the filter of a television news interview of Tintin and his friends. Their memory of the entire episode has been erased by the aliens, so they cannot recall anything that has happened in the previous days. The only remaining concrete evidence of what really transpired is a photograph of an unidentified flying object that was spotted in the night sky, and a mysterious object made of a metal from outer space found by Calculus in his pocket. The book ends with a panoramic image of the main characters now taking their appropriate flight. Hergé invites the reader to glimpse that Haddock is holding a copy of *Le Soir* newspaper to read on his journey. This very small image hints at the history of the Occupation years and the pro-Nazi press, in which Hergé had serialized "L'étoile mystérieuse."

An anti-Semitic thread runs throughout the story. First, the return of the evil Roberto Rastapopoulos to the Tintin series constitutes a repetition

of a long-standing stereotypical construct. Although as yet unnamed, the nonetheless visually unmistakable Rastapopoulos had first appeared briefly in *Tintin en Amérique (Tintin in America)* (1932: 111), in a scene set in New York (cf. Farr 2001: 38). Pictured at a dinner party, he appears to be a member of the upper class. Key facial features of Rastapopoulos are remarkably similar to those of the other New Yorker in the series—Blumenstein in *The Shooting Star*: specifically, both have the large, drooping nose of anti-Semitic caricatures. In fact, there is little visual difference between the two characters, aside from the fact that Blumenstein's head is slightly rounder than that of Rastapopoulos. Despite the fact that Hergé's clear-line drawing style differs from the styles of many other artists who produced anti-Semitic caricatures, the essential facial characteristics of Blumenstein and Rastapopoulos are consistent with a wide range of anti-Semitic illustration.⁴ The first appearance of Rastapopoulos as a full-fledged character in the Tintin series fits with clichéd anti-Semitic assumptions about Jewish control of the media. In *Les cigares du pharaon* (1984; serialized from December 8, 1932, through February 8, 1934; first revised, book edition published in October 1934) we learn that Roberto Rastapopoulos is a major film producer, who owns Cosmos Pictures, and is making “‘Petite-fille de Sheik’ ou ‘Haine d’Arabe’” [“‘Sheik’s granddaughter’ or ‘Arab hatred’”] (12–13, 33–35). This fits the anti-Semitic cliché that Jews dominated the film industry, and the title of the film potentially also implies Zionist domination. In the same story and its sequel, *Le lotus bleu [The Blue Lotus]* (first book edition 1936), the reader discovers that, besides his profession as a film producer, Rastapopoulos is the chief of a gang of international drug smugglers and arms traffickers. They conspire in secret meetings, and use code words and mysterious cryptic symbols, although publicly Rastapopoulos and the members of his gang are respectable figures, including middle-class intellectuals.

By the later, postwar Tintin books a further thematic is added: Hergé depicts Rastapopoulos as a nouveau riche millionaire who sports the latest outrageous fashions—a pink cowboy shirt and hat in *Flight 714*. However, this characterization is more subtle than Hergé's treatment of the character in *Coke en stock (The Red Sea Sharks, 1958)*, where Hergé uses the device of a fancy dress ball to represent Rastapopoulos dressed up as a devil, literally.

Hergé's Rastapopoulos is a secretive and conspiratorial, criminal mastermind, who attempts to destroy Tintin throughout the series. This role continues right through *Flight 714*. Had Hergé completed his final book, *Tintin et l'Alpha-Art [Tintin and the Alpha-Art]*, the role would have recurred there as well (edited sketches and script republished in 2004). The conspiratorial

gangster is a key figure of anti-Semitic myths, such as the “Elders of Zion” conspiracy. The latter, widely circulated in late nineteenth-century and interwar Europe, claimed that a Jewish conspiracy aimed to dominate the world. Norman Cohn (1968) argues that this negative conspiracy prepared the way for the Nazi-perpetrated genocide of the Jews. Hergé was by no means alone in borrowing from anti-Semitic conspiracy theories to create fictions: novels and films frequently included Jewish characters who were depicted as dangerous to society. What is notable in the case of Hergé is that he continued to use Rastapopoulos in this stereotypical way into the late 1960s. In *Flight 714* Rastapopoulos is still the same malicious plotter, drawn in an unpleasant caricatural style and obsessed with money, power, and domination. At least one commentator has suggested that the depiction of the character in *Flight 714* provides an example of Hergé’s comic brilliance (Screech 2005: 44). However, the book in no way redeems the character or makes him more likable to readers. He is not given a shred of human decency, so the anti-Semitic stereotype is simply repeated in *Flight 714*.

The whole issue of the visual representation of Rastapopoulos is especially difficult because Hergé generally denied, downplayed, or tried to explain away instances of xenophobia and racism, including anti-Semitism, in his work and especially regarding this character. For example, he defended himself in the following way: “Rastapopoulos ne représente exactement personne en particulier. Tout est parti d’un nom, nom qui m’avait été suggéré par un ami; et le personnage s’est articulé autour de ce nom. Rastapopoulos, pour moi, est plus ou moins grec louche levantin (sans plus de précision), de toute façon apatride, c’est-à-dire (de mon point de vue à l’époque) sans foi ni loi! . . . Un détail encore: il n’est pas juif” [Rastapopoulos does not exactly represent anyone in particular. Everything started with a name, a name that had been suggested to me by a friend; and the character was worked-up around this name. For me Rastapopoulos is more or less a shady Greek Levantine—with no more detail than that. In any case he is stateless—that is to say, from my point of view at the time, he had no faith and no law to bind him. One more detail: he isn’t Jewish] (quoted in Assouline 1998: 125–26; and Peeters 2002a: 105).⁵ The denial is far from convincing. In fact, Hergé was not alone in creating ambiguous—that is, presented in implicit rather than explicit terms—“Jewish,” conspiratorial characters in his work. This is similar to the racism of the British novelist John Buchan. Gina Mitchell explains that Buchan also had the tendency to create a series of references that implied an anti-Semitic caricature of a Jewish conspirator. Mitchell argues that Buchan provided strong references to common cultural stereotypes to

suggest a negative popular conception of Jewishness in his writings. It was then up to readers to make the obvious connections: "The reader is left to deduce this [anti-Semitic, stereotypical image of Jewishness] himself from the information. He can if he is so inclined, select the skull cap and the pawn shop, and possibly the hinted association with some kind of secret society and label the character linked with them as a Jew" (1973: 26). The discursive strategy charted by Mitchell is just as apparent in Hergé's publications. More than enough signifiers of the "evil Jewish conspirator" are associated with the character to invite an anti-Semitic reading, whatever evidence or statements exist to the contrary. Even Hergé's denial is double-edged. It is revealing that, in his biography of Hergé, Assouline uses precisely the same phrase, "sans foi, ni loi" [neither faith, nor law], to characterize the anti-Semitic image of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Belgium. Assouline correctly argues that this is exactly the kind of caricature that Hergé inserted into *The Shooting Star*, as the character Blumenstein (Assouline 1998: 277). Moreover, Hergé's description of Rastapopoulos as "apatride" [stateless] also suggests the stereotype of the "wandering or rootless Jew."

The antifascist and antiracist critic Benoît-Jeannin offers another plausible commentary on "Rastapopoulos." He argues that the character's name is derived from the word "rastaquouère," which—he claims—was a term used in the late nineteenth century to mean "foreigner" (2001: 50). Benoît-Jeannin speculates that the character might have also been inspired by an infamous Greek drug dealer, Elias Eliopoulos, who—ironically—was an anti-Semite and a Nazi sympathizer (2001: 51). That is certainly an intriguing possibility.

Rastapopoulos functions as a classic xenophobic stereotype through at least two interconnected modes. If one is to follow the "rastaquouère" thesis then the character is an offensive jibe against Southeastern Europeans. If one picks up on the visual look of the character then it is plainly an anti-Semitic characterization. As Pierre Assouline (1998: 125) rightly underlined in his biography of the cartoonist, the combination of Hergé's (anti-Semitic) milieu when he created the character, the profession of Rastapopoulos, and his facial features could allow one to think of the character as an anti-Jewish stereotype (although Assouline dismisses this possibility, because of the character's surname). Besides, anti-Semites might well have subconsciously connected Jewishness with Greek identity in this period. Categories of prejudice can slide into one another. Before the Nazi genocide in occupied Greece, Salonika was relatively famous for its prominent Jewish community. It is also worth mentioning in passing that the literary trope of the "Greek Jew" was once deployed by the British crime novelist Agatha Christie. She invented a Jewish

Greek diamond merchant—named Mr Papopolous—for her novel of 1928, *The Mystery of the Blue Train*. That character predates the inclusion of Rastapopoulos in the Tintin books by several years but may not have been a direct model.

Certain details from *Flight 714* confirm how politically disturbing Hergé's work continued to be in the 1960s. He includes a very offensive sequence in *Flight 714* that involves Rastapopoulos and deserves careful analysis. As I noted above in my summary of the comic book, Rastapopoulos has Dr. Krollspell use his truth serum to try to force the kidnapped billionaire Carreidas to reveal his secret Swiss bank account number (24). This episode could appear to constitute a comic scene, especially because the plan backfires. However, when one digs deeper, this section of the book begins to take on a very sinister aspect. As Assouline (1998: 598) reports, the fictional character Laszlo Carreidas, Hergé's sour billionaire, was loosely based on the real-life engineer and businessman Marcel Dassault, who was born Marcel Bloch. Dassault was persecuted by the collaborationist French Vichy regime in 1940, imprisoned by it, and deported to the Buchenwald camp in 1944. In Nazi Germany he was almost hanged for refusing to lend his expertise to the Nazi air force. After his liberation he changed his name to Dassault (Dassault-Aviation 2005). The third character in the scene is Dr. Krollspell, apparently a fictional psychiatrist. In one of his published conversations with the journalist Numa Sadoul, Hergé stated that Krollspell had "probably 'worked' in a concentration camp" (Sadoul and Hergé 2000: 187). Several years later, in a book co-copyrighted with Moulinsart, the company that manages the Tintin franchise, the British journalist Michael Farr (2001: 180) expanded on Hergé's remark, stating that Krollspell "is clearly another ex-Nazi—modeled no doubt on the notorious Dr Mengele of Auschwitz" (cf. Apostolidès 1984: 270, 274; Assouline 1998: 599). Remarkably, Farr refrains from drawing any political conclusions about the presence of Krollspell in the comic book, his association with Rastapopoulos, and his injecting of the truth serum into Carreidas/Dassault.

Krollspell certainly has a German-sounding name, inspired by Brussels slang as well, but there is no overt reference in the book to Nazism. Nonetheless, the implications of describing Krollspell as a Nazi death-camp worker or as Mengele are extremely troubling. Hergé and the assistants who helped him produce *Flight 714* were toying with extremely reactionary and anti-Semitic material that went far beyond the inclusion of Rastapopoulos as a character in the story. In this sequence they created and brought together a most shocking set of caricatures and historical references. The truth drug sequence of *Flight 714* includes an anti-Semitic caricature as the primary

villain (Rastapopoulos), who employs a former concentration camp worker (Krollspell) to forcibly interrogate a parody of a famous, once of Jewish faith, businessman and survivor of deportation (Carreidas/Dassault), before the latter is to be killed by the villain. Slyly, the episode confuses many of our understandings of who the persecutors and victims of the Third Reich were. Hergé portrays Krollspell—the potential former Nazi concentration camp doctor or worker—as the least nefarious of the three characters: he later switches sides and helps Tintin and Haddock against Rastapopoulos, thereby gaining Tintin's confidence (35–37; cf. Apostolidès 1984: 274). Moreover, he is the only one of the three initial plotters (including Rastapopolous and Allan) to reappear after the aliens save all the principal characters from the island's erupting volcano, toward the end of the story (62). In turn, the potentially Jewish characters, Rastapopoulos and Carreidas, are depicted as the twin incarnations of evil (cf. Apostolidès 1984: 270–71). Hergé makes them both look ridiculous (an interpretation noted but not expanded on in Assouline 1998: 594, 598). Even the setting of their confrontation constitutes an insidious reference: the entire truth-serum sequence takes place inside the bleak walls of a Japanese military bunker from World War II. Consequently, the wisps of Rastapopoulos's cigar smoke might even suggest the terrifying fumes of the Nazi gas chambers (19).

The “bunker sequence” from *Flight 714* is a visually encoded revisionist fantasy. Hergé leaves much for the reader to decode and then reconstruct. He is careful not to spell out the full implications of the crude anti-Semitic joke of the bunker torture scene, instead allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. The stereotypes that Hergé used remain scrambled because of his preference for distracting “Greek” or “Hungarian” names like Rastapopoulos and Laszlo Carreidas. The horrifically offensive implications of the scene are embedded in both the visual and verbal levels of *Flight 714*. Hergé's description of Krollspell as a concentration camp worker makes it plausible for us to interpret the cruel administering of truth serum by the doctor as a torture scene that is, for us, a nightmarish vision of history, but is presumably simply humorous for anti-Semites. The careful codification of the anti-Semitic meanings suggests that Hergé knew exactly what he was presenting in this sequence and that he realized that he had to handle these offensive references with a certain level of discretion in order to make his shocking, anti-Semitic jibe in a widely read children's publication. Over the years some of the key information needed to decipher the jibe, including the fact that Dassault was the model for Carreidas, has been popularized.⁶ The scene is therefore potentially offensive to those who pick up on the Dassault reference, although I

suspect that many readers still do not know that Marcel Dassault was abused, tortured, and nearly killed by the Vichy regime and the Nazis.

Hergé's biographers have described the emotional toll on the cartoonist that his fear of being imprisoned for collaboration took in 1945 and afterward (e.g., Assouline 1998: 402–19; Peeters 2002a: 276–99). Did he see the torture scene of *Flight 714* as a belated vindictive response to the members of the Belgian resistance who, he felt, had persecuted him and many of his friends? It is plausible to suggest that Hergé thought that he would have the last laugh by showing that former Nazis were not so evil and that Jews were still the devilish figures, as they had been depicted in *The Shooting Star*. Drawing one anti-Semitic character torturing another one and then, under the influence of the truth serum, arguing about who was the most evil genius might indeed have amused Hergé. Could it possibly be a coincidence that the final frame of the book appears to show Haddock carrying a copy of *Le Soir*, the newspaper on which Hergé collaborated (62)? Surely we can read its inclusion as a kind of triumphant statement or mark of loyalty to the past.

Some further context can help explain Hergé's stance in the comic book. He was a member of the reactionary postwar literary society, "Les Amis de Robert Brasillach" [The Friends of Robert Brasillach] (Brami 2004: 66–67; cf. Assouline 1998: 368). That group was organized by Maurice Bardèche, who in turn was one of the first advocates of Holocaust denial writing. Likewise, Hergé had maintained good relations with several collaborationist friends from Occupation Belgium, including the novelist Robert Poulet (Assouline 1998: 661–62; Peeters 2002a: 364, 425). In the postwar period, Poulet was a frequent contributor to extreme right-wing newspapers, in which he advocated support for another prominent Holocaust denier, Robert Faurisson (Delau-noy 2003: 306; Frey 2005: 62). Often Hergé's association with these figures in the postwar period is dismissed as loyalty to old friends and sympathy for colleagues who had been punished by the anti-Nazi trials of 1944–46. However, the more one examines these connections the more complicated is the picture that emerges. Hergé did not follow Robert Poulet in publicly denying the Holocaust. But my analysis of *Flight 714* reveals an ugly, anti-Semitic jibe against Jewish survivors of the genocide.

A PREFERENCE FOR THE ESOTERIC TRADITION

The importance of the esoteric tradition in *Flight 714* is a further link to the extreme right-wing subculture. For example, the character Mik Ezdanitoff

(Mik Kanrokitoff) is based on the then famous esoteric writer Jacques Bergier, and Ezdanitoff's fictional review, *Comète*, refers to the real-life periodical *Planète*. The latter was created to provide a forum for spreading the ideas that Bergier and the journalist and editor Louis Pauwels had offered in their earlier, coauthored monograph, *Le matin des magiciens* (1961; cf. Apostolidès 1984: 272; Assouline 1998: 598; Peeters 2002a: 420–21). Pauwels and Bergier—the latter had fought in the French resistance and survived deportation to Mauthausen concentration camp—used these publications to explore mysticism, world religions, mind-reading, telepathy, parapsychology, and the like. These quasi-theological writers celebrated a mystical deep past, stretching from the Renaissance back to the Middle Ages and into the early mists of time itself. They attributed equal importance to “new sciences” and speculative future “possibilities,” never fully defined. Bergier and Pauwels imagined a world that was shaped by occult powers that separated initiates from non-initiates. They were contemptuous of Enlightenment humanism, as well as of nineteenth- and twentieth-century democratic initiatives. Their vision of history valorized ancient traditions, post-democratic opportunities to come, and gifted superelites who possessed special powers (cf. Renard 1996; Veraldi 1989).

Hergé's *Flight 714* implicitly replicates the vague but distinctive philosophy that was developed in *Le matin des magiciens* and *Planète*. For instance, Hergé begins the comic book with a series of satirical comments on the hypocrisies of contemporary society. Carreidas is portrayed as a rich industrialist and mercantile art collector unable to understand the true, aesthetic value of art: at one point he buys expensive masterpieces only to keep them out of the hands of rival billionaire Onassis (8). Moreover, Carreidas is so alienated from the ordinary pleasures of everyday life that he has even forgotten how to laugh (3–4). The focus on the contemporary period of the 1960s means that, when images of Second World War Japanese bunkers appear in the middle of the book, lost in the tropical jungle vegetation of Pulau-Pulau Bompa, the reader almost unquestioningly accepts them as part of the exotic, Pacific island scenery—they appear simply to be convenient places for the villains to lock up the protagonists. In part because so little is made of the bunkers by the characters (22), the structures might be viewed, on the surface, as the signs of a disappointing, murderous twentieth century, but one that pales in significance when compared to the past and future epochs to which Hergé refers in the conclusion of his book. There the cartoonist depicts a deep and ancient past infused with fantastic futurist speculation on flying saucers. Hergé's depictions of the ancient stone monuments and

drawings of Pulau-Pulau Bompas suggest a mystical reverence for artifacts from an era before the birth of recorded history. Like the writings of Bergier and Pauwels, Hergé's work celebrates deep and ancient mysteries that are explained by astounding, futuristic, scientific discoveries. In *Flight 714* rationalism and the modern period are displaced by a "cosmic" or "esoteric" history of the ancient past and a fantastical, science-fiction future, and in using these ideas Hergé popularizes Bergier's and Pauwels's vision of history. In showing Ezdanitoff/Bergier as an elect being who guides, hypnotizes, and rescues Tintin and his friends, the comic book legitimates the idea that a secret elite of visionaries should lead humanity.⁷

In its day *Planète* was roundly criticized for its links to the reactionary, right-wing intelligentsia. André Breton, the veteran surrealist, asserted that Bergier's and Pauwels's work represented "une tentative de lobotomie généralisée" [an attempt to provide a general lobotomy] (quoted in Torres 1997: 184). Other critics highlighted a sophisticated revisionism in the pages of the new and fashionable magazine. In his review of *Planète*, Robert Benayoun noted that the magazine ran an insidiously nostalgic line on Nazism and the Nazis' links to esoteric traditions (Torres 1997: 184). When alluding to the Nazis and esoteric traditions, writers in *Planète* did not concern themselves with the historical record of Nazism per se. By implication, and by *Planète*'s own position, such secular political violence was incomparable to the eternal mysteries of time and space, which were the editors' primary concern. However, other contemporary references were frequently made in the magazine: for example, positive references to the work of onetime French fascist collaborator, Raymond Abellio. Similarly, short book reviews paid special attention to issues related to the Nazi past. Already in the second issue of the magazine there is a rather glib commentary on the history of the Holocaust that provides a problematic interpretation of events.⁸

The editors of *Planète* magazine employed Hergé's friends Bernard ("Bib") Heuvelmans and Raymond de Becker, who had both collaborated with the Nazis in Belgium during World War II (Peeters 2002a: 171–76, 269, 420; Mouchart and Rivière 2003: 201). When de Becker had been editor of *Le Soir* "volé" he had overseen the publication of *The Shooting Star* in its original, daily, serial form. Before working for *Planète* Heuvelmans, another former contributor to *Le Soir* "volé," had closely assisted Hergé on the two Tintin moon stories, *Destination Moon* and *Explorers on the Moon* (Assouline 1998: 505–8). There were other links between *Planète* and Hergé or his friends. For example, in 1962 *Planète* printed a photograph from, and made a sympathetic reference to, the first live-action film adaptation of a Tintin story.⁹ It has also

been suggested that Edgar P. Jacobs, a cartoonist and collaborator of Hergé on *Tintin* magazine, shared some reference points with *Planète*. His comic book *L'énigme de l'Atlantide* (1958) features a character named Horbiger (Mouchart and Rivière 2003: 201). Hans Hörbiger (1860–1931) was a subject of discussion in *Planète* and *Le matin des magiciens*, because he had been an esoteric figure in interwar Austria, where he devised the “world ice theory” and expressed support for Hitler (Mouchart and Rivière 2003: 201).

The positive showcasing of *Planète* (as *Comète*) and some of its core ideas in *Flight 714* indicates that Hergé broadly sympathized with an esoteric vision of history that, like anti-Semitism, had informed and shaped fascism. As Michel Winock (1990: 106–7) explains, a belief in the mystical and sacred was common in the European extreme right-wing from the late nineteenth century onward (cf. Mosse 1961; Goodrick-Clarke 1992). Specifically, ultraradical nationalists glorified esoteric beliefs in pagan theology, which they contrasted to the decadence of the modern world. Among proto-Nazi and Nazi thinkers this viewpoint was wedded to anti-Semitism. In simple terms, mystical spiritualism was valorized by them, whereas modernity, and the Jews who represented it, were blamed for almost every contemporary public disaster, from floods to the outbreak of wars. Therefore, in *Flight 714* Hergé included material from two traditionally related lines of reactionary politics and ideology: anti-Semitism and an interest in the esoteric. However, in the comic book the two themes were not explicitly articulated, as they were in Nazi ideology.

CONCLUSION

Anti-Semitism is a recurring subtext in the Tintin series, linking the openly anti-Semitic, Nazi-era story, *The Shooting Star*, to the later, and seemingly anodine, *Flight 714*. The characters Blumenstein and Rastapopoulos share a core set of characteristics common to the francophone anti-Semitic tradition, especially: stereotypical somatic features (large, bent noses, especially) and activities, specifically compulsive cigar-smoking; participation in evil, global conspiracies connected to the world of finance and, in the case of Rastapopoulos, the media—and these conspiracies are directed against good Europeans (represented and headed by Tintin), who must work hard to undo their dastardly plans.

Pierre-André Taguieff (2005: 39–44) suggests that the willingness of an individual to indulge in one kind of conspiratorial thought (say, a belief in the esoteric) creates a greater propensity to support other conspiratorial positions,

which may include anti-Semitic ones. Replicating these ideological structures through popular culture keeps prejudice alive and invites new readers to think about the world through similarly illogical and undemocratic conceptualizations. Hergé's *Flight 714* continues to circulate ideas and images that are horrific in their implications. Yet the comic book is generally considered part of mainstream children's literature and adult pop culture.

Although other plausible interpretations of *Flight 714* offer a different take on the book (e.g., Apostolidès 1984: 266–74), the evidence that I have marshaled suggests that we should reread the later Tintin books, often considered to be less politically or ideologically marked than Hergé's earlier Tintin stories (*Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*; *Tintin in the Congo*; *The Shooting Star*), to see whether they too carry a political subtext and what that may be. How did Hergé depict other marginalized groups in those books? Were his representations less stereotypical than in the stories published from 1929 through the 1940s? It is time to engage in an open debate over the meanings and value of these books. To paraphrase Karl Marx: admirers of Tintin have nothing to lose but the chains of their childhood past.¹⁰

Notes

1. Hergé produced twenty-three Tintin stories, as well as many other works. He is often considered the father of the modern European comic book and the inventor of the “clear line” drawing style. The Tintin series books were consistently best sellers, with the first edition of *Flight 714* (1968) selling half a million copies (Peeters 2002a: 421). Further biographical information is presented throughout the chapter. All translations of quotations from French to English are mine.

2. It is now commonly referred to as “*Le Soir* ‘volé’” [the “stolen” *Le Soir*] during the period when it was controlled by the Nazis.

3. The book versions never included Isaac and Salomon. Blumenstein was renamed Bohlwinkel and his hometown changed from New York to São Rico. Much of the visual material associated with Blumenstein/Bohlwinkel is relatively unchanged (cf. Hergé 1946; Assouline 1998: 477–82; Peeters 2002a: 198).

4. As noted earlier it is important to compare Blumenstein and Rastapopoulos with the anti-Semitic materials analyzed in a work on racist postcards: Joël Kotek and Gérard Silvain (2005) *La carte postale antisémite: De l'affaire Dreyfus à la Shoah*. That work points to the sheer banality of visual anti-Semitism in European culture. Cultural histories of “holiday resort anti-Semitism” are also significant in this context. On this subject see Bajohr (2003)—the anti-Semitic postcard caricature reproduced there (p. 65) closely resembles the images of Blumenstein and Rastapopoulos that are a subject of this chapter.

5. The right-wing literary critic Pol Vandromme (1994: 202–3) offers a disturbing sidelight on this denial. His study of the Tintin books simply acknowledges that Rastapopoulos is an evil conspirator and then suggests that he is a similar figure to the men that the infamous anti-Semitic journalist Léon Daudet used to attack in the 1930s.

6. Detailed information on the Carreidas/Dassault link and other sources was presented in a special edition of *Vol 714 pour Sydney* that was printed by Casterman in 2000 for the gas station chain, Total. The dossier was produced by Bernard Tordeur. It was offered as a promotional product in France.

7. Ezdanitoff is another character whose real-life model, Bergier, is Jewish. Certainly, Hergé's interpretation of Ezdanitoff/Bergier can be used to identify a philo-Semitic tone in the work. However, as Martin Reissigl and Ruth Wodak have argued, depicting "the Jew" as having special powers (for good or evil) is itself a sub-myth of people's fantasies about Jewishness (see Reissigl and Wodak 2001: 44, 92). They explain that after the war in Germany and Austria it was common for people to invest the idea of the Jew with special virtues, but these attributes were direct inversions of the prewar and Nazi-era stereotype. Hergé's portrayal of Ezdanitoff is a comparable phenomenon since he continues to link a reference to Jewishness to ideas of power and conspiracy, albeit via a positive characterization and narrative schema.

8. An article in *Planète*, no. 3 (1962: 122–25) suggested that the Nazi death camps were a huge experiment to test theories of human control. Reviews in the previous issue praised royalist historian Pierre Gaxotte and an extreme right-wing, anti-Masonic collaborator, Bernard Fay, the Vichy-era director of the French National Library. This material is very different from Jacques Bergier's (1977) autobiography, which provides a powerful insight into survival inside Mauthausen camp.

9. Actor Jean-Pierre Talbot is pictured in his film role as Tintin in *Planète*, no. 4 (1962: 134). The live-action film *Tintin and the Golden Fleece* was made in 1961 (dir. Jean-Jacques Vierne).

10. I would very much like to thank Mark McKinney for his comments on a draft of this essay. They were very useful and thought-provoking.

Re-imagining Heroes / Rewriting History

THE PICTURES AND TEXTS IN CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPERS IN FRANCE, 1939–45

INTRODUCTION: "THE BEAST IS DEAD!"

When Paris was liberated in the summer of 1944, a beautifully illustrated, twenty-nine-page, hardback comic book about the war appeared on the market seemingly overnight. This publication, *La bête est morte!* [The Beast is Dead!] (Calvo, Dancette, and Zimmermann 1944; 1995), presented a pictorial account of a world war among animals who represented all the major players of the Second World War. Thanks to a facsimile published by Gallimard in 1995, this *bande dessinée* with its extremely positive vision of the French and their actions during the Occupation is more familiar to a wide audience today than most publications available to the young people in France in the late 1930s and early 1940s. According to this story, France's enemies were barbarian hordes from other countries (with Hitler as the big bad wolf, Mussolini as a hyena, and the Japanese as yellow monkeys), all evil came from outside the borders of the homeland, ordinary French citizens were docile rabbits and industrious squirrels, and their savior was a great white stork wearing a Lorraine cross. Although de Gaulle and the

Resistance are glorified through the symbolism of purity and rebirth in the figure of the stork, the story barely touches on the subject of collaboration.

What is less well-known is that the juvenile press in France between 1939 and 1945 provided children and adolescents a regular diet of fact, fiction, and outright propaganda about the Germans, the Vichy regime, the Allies, and eventually, the Resistance. The present study looks at a selection of those publications, focusing in particular on the messages they passed on to their readers and the heroes they created for them as they evolved over the course of the war to reflect the prevailing political ideology. Out of the more than two dozen papers that were available between 1939 and 1945, we will consider seven: three weeklies available in France on the eve of the war that migrated south to unoccupied France (*Le Journal de Mickey*, *Jumbo*, and *Coeurs vaillants*); three papers started in Paris during the Occupation; and the weekly *Vaillant*, born with the Liberation and filled with realistic images of fighting and resistance.¹

FRENCH COMICS PUBLICATIONS ON THE EVE OF THE OCCUPATION

Le Journal de Mickey revolutionized the juvenile press in France when it was launched in 1934, and it soon became the standard by which other French weeklies were measured.² Children were easily seduced by the four vividly colored pages (out of eight) filled with classic American strips designed strictly to entertain, and by 1939 the average weekly print run had reached an astounding 365,000 copies.³ The issue of *Le Journal de Mickey* published on May 12, 1940—a mere thirty-four days before the Germans invaded Paris—is an excellent example of all that distinguished this paper from most of its competitors (figure 1). The colors of the front and back pages and center spread were so vivid and the ink of such high quality that they are still clear and crisp today, and those pages were dedicated exclusively to American comic strips (rebaptized with French names).⁴ The noncolor pages contain a variety of rubrics and a message from the fictitious “Onc’ Léon” [Unc’ Leon] to all members of the Mickey Club.⁵ Onc’ Léon’s messages tended to instruct readers on how to be a good student or an honest person, but the message of May 12, 1940, talks about food shortages. This remark is the only indication that something is amiss in the daily lives of the young Mickey fans, but it is more an acknowledgment of an inconvenience rather than of the impending political crisis.

The Italian paper *Jumbo* was first published in France in 1935, a year after *Le Journal de Mickey* hit the market, but it did not become a top seller until its look was updated and its content was changed to include several popular American strips in 1939 (Crépin 2001: 49). On the eve of the war *Jumbo* was still focused primarily on entertainment, but it already differed from *Le Journal de Mickey* in one important respect: it regularly ran several strips that portrayed the Germans as enemies. Was it because the editor of *Jumbo* was Italian, and therefore perhaps more sensitive to the political tensions of the *drôle de guerre* [strange war], that his weekly was politicized early on? One of those strips was “Au service de la patrie” [In the Service of the Homeland]—an explicitly anti-German saga whose main character, Michel Francoeur [Michel Trueheart] (his name alludes to his Frenchness), the son of a World War I hero, escapes all attacks by the enemy and makes them look like fools (Guillot 1991: 20). Two months before the Occupation, in *Jumbo* of April 20, 1940, we find Francoeur and his mother paying their respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe before the former leaves on a secret mission for the French government. In the same issue there is a small strip about two characters named “Bouboule” and “Frisaplat” who are escaping from German soldiers. The remainder of the issue of April 20 copied the features of its biggest competitor by offering eight American strips⁶ and various rubrics similar to those found in the noncolor pages of *Le Journal de Mickey*. To ensure a faithful readership among children drawn to the “exoticism” of America, *Jumbo*'s nameplate declared it to be the “Paper of the Far West,” and this subtitle was written with the lasso of the Lone Ranger, whose image adorns the upper left-hand corner (figure 2). Unsurprisingly, the overt American features of *Le journal de Mickey* and *Jumbo* became problematic during the Occupation, and were dropped or modified, as we shall see.

The third paper in our study—the weekly *Coeurs vaillants*—had a very different mission: it undertook to teach its readers to be morally upright, model citizens and, most importantly, good Catholics. The editors of *Coeurs vaillants* positioned their “100 percent French weekly” as the patriotic alternative to the scandalous foreign press even before the Occupation, but they did not shy away from occasional format changes to put it on a more equal footing with that press. For example, *Coeurs vaillants* was the first weekly in France to publish a science fiction strip on its cover (Crépin 2001: 38).⁷ The paper also had the loyal collaboration of the Belgian Hergé, who contributed a selection of his immensely popular Tintin comics, and of a young French comic artist whose popular strip “Jim Boum” was signed “Marijac.” As we shall see, Marijac's decision to have his character play a patriotic, anti-German

le Journal du far west

Jumbo

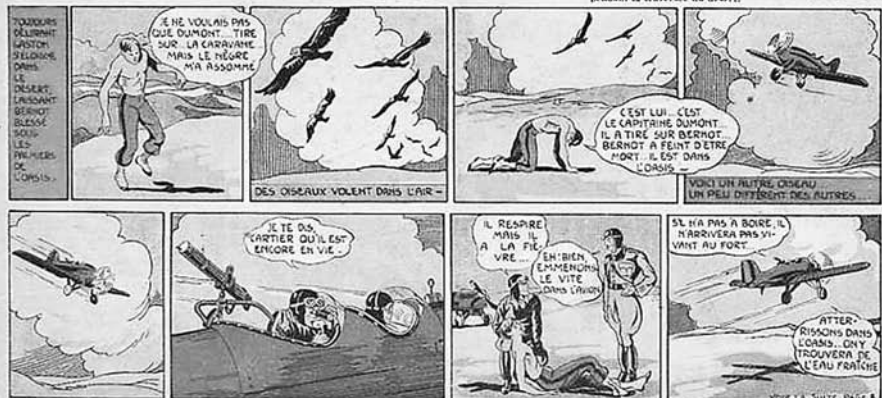
ADMINISTRATION-RÉDACTION
12, rue du 4-Septembre, PARIS (2^e)

ABONNEMENTS : 25 fr. par an sans prime
30 fr. par an avec prime



L'EMPEREUR DE LA BROUSSE

RÉSUMÉ : Hunt et Givison sont entrés ensemble sur un service d'un banail qu'on appelle l'Empereur de la Brousse. L'activité propre à allonger une transportait des nouvelles premières. Le chef de la garnison essaye de remonter une escorte qui le protègera pendant la traversée du désert.



role in the strip in 1940⁸ did not prevent him from being accused at the end of the war of having collaborated with the occupiers, much as Hergé was accused by the Belgian resistance at the liberation of Belgium.⁹

Coeurs vaillants of May 19, 1940, is filled with references to the war. The first page is not vividly colored, nor is its feature strip drawn for lighthearted entertainment. Instead, the black, white, and rose colored page includes a message to the readers from Cardinal Suhard,¹⁰ and the cover strip "Patrouille en mer" [Sea Patrol] is about a sailor looking for a new deckhand because the other young men have been called to war. The center spread is quite unusual in its layout and content when compared to the same pages of competing papers. Instead of full- or half-page color comic or adventure strips, *Coeurs vaillants* of May 19, 1940, retains its dull color scheme throughout its various rubrics that include messages to the reader, a song, and several stories thematically related to the current political situation.¹¹ The rest of the paper includes strips by Hergé¹² and Marijac, additional serialized stories (many with wartime themes explicitly or implicitly related to contemporary events),¹³ and direct messages to the readers, including a notice that the daily press run of the Vatican newspaper has expanded tenfold because it is one of the few papers that prints "nothing but the truth."

The cover page of *Coeurs vaillants* of June 2, 1940—twelve days before the Germans arrived in Paris—carries a message from Maxime Weygand, named Supreme Commander of the French military just two weeks earlier and soon to be named National Defense Minister for the Vichy regime: "I am full of confidence, provided everyone carries out his duty with irrepressible energy" (figure 3). Faithful readers of the paper, who are themselves called "coeurs vaillants," are instructed in a letter from the fictional editor Jacques Coeur to follow the lead of Weygand and remain confident, calm, and optimistic. They are also informed that they can help the war effort by recruiting new subscribers to the paper! Throughout this issue, opposing the Germans and striving to be a good Christian are conflated into a single moral directive for the young Catholic public, and there is even a series of questions on page 7 to test the reader's comprehension of the paper's moral instruction. A new installment consists of a full-page illustrated story about a messenger of hope who comes to Jerusalem to confront the sinning Israelites with their false piety and impure hearts—a clear warning to the French population of 1940 about God's wrath toward the unfaithful. In this installment, the imperative to convert sinners to Christianity as the enemy moves ever closer to Jerusalem constitutes a thinly veiled reference to the impending arrival of the Germans in Paris.

12^e année. — N° 22. — 6 fr. 50. DIMANCHE 2 JUN 1940.

COEURS

A COEURS VAILLANTS RIEN D'IMPOSSIBLE

VAILLANTS

Abonnements : 1 an, 25 francs. - 6 mois, 13 francs. * 31, RUE DE FLEUROS, PARIS * Abonnement d'ami : 30 francs. - Chèques postaux : PARIS 1223-59

J E SUIS PLEIN DE CONFIANCE, si chacun fait son devoir avec une énergie farouche.

Weygand.

Patrouille en Mer

KIP
C'EST MON CHIEN !

ALORS, DE KIP JE SUIS REGRANDISSÉE... MAIS JEAN-PIERRE... UN HOMME... C'EST PLUS DUR QU'UN CHIEN APPRIVOISÉ...

SOIS TRANQUILLE JEAN-PIERRE, NE SERA PAS LONG A TE SOUPESER ET TOUT DEPEND DE LA PREMIERE RENCONTRE !!

Quelques heures plus tard, à l'île d'Yeu... près du Port... le « Saint-Pierre », tout flambant neuf, repoint... est à l'ancre.

Les hommes lavent le pont.

Derrière le Père Natole, Jack regarde le pont sur lequel un grand bonnet rouge comme un « loup », les ventres se font, son regard portant fixé sur l'enfant.

...qu'il ne voit pas le site étendu sur le pont, s'y penche les pieds...

et s'aplatit juste aux pieds de Jean-Pierre. Une voix sarcastique crie :

Jack est tout étonné : tout dépend de la première rencontre... a dit le Père Natole... et Jack songe si bien à ce qu'il devra dire...

EN ! PÈRE NATOLE... C'EST UN BONGHE OU UN AVEUGLE QUE TU NOUS AS TRAVUÉ ?

Tout confus, Jack s'est relevé.

Fig. 3. Coeurs vaillants, June 2, 1940.

A strip featuring the model “coeur vaillant” Jean-François shows his determination to convert his friends in order to accomplish the “magnificent mission” that France has been charged with by God. Next to a story about two French soldiers who fight to their death against the Germans is an ad-

monishment to the reader to take communion more frequently because "it is from Christ, living in the communion wafer, that we draw our courage and strength." However no attempt is made to hide the fact that God cannot always save even the most devout Christian or the most faithful "coeur vaillant," as attest the references in stories and other rubrics to "coeurs vaillants" who have recently died in the war. One of the most unusual rubrics, titled "Dialog with Roger," contains an eerily prescient reference to the Holocaust, when an abbot says: "The field of chemistry, for example, aids the discovery of wonderful drugs that can save human lives, but it also aids the creation of toxic gases that facilitate mass exterminations." The final page of this issue of *Coeurs vaillants* is filled with a kind of "how to" strip that vividly explains to the reader how to remain physically safe during this time of war: four panels drawn in red ink show what to never do, and four panels drawn in black ink show what to always do.¹⁴

UNDER THE OCCUPATION: COLLABORATION AND PÉTAINISM, SHORTAGES AND SURVIVAL

The Germans arrived in the French capital on June 14, 1940. *Jumbo's* last issue published in Paris hit the newsstands on June 15, and those of *Le Journal de Mickey* and *Coeurs vaillants* followed on June 16. A significant shift in the availability and dissemination of these three papers took place during the Occupation, with the average print run for the immensely popular *Le Journal de Mickey* dropping more than 86 percent and that of *Jumbo* by over 75 percent after their move out of Paris to the unoccupied southern part of the country. *Coeurs vaillants* suffered a reduction of only 29 percent at its lowest point during the Occupation, thanks to the Catholic Church's heavy support of the Vichy regime, and of that government's reliance in turn on *Coeurs vaillants* to disseminate its message.

When *Le Journal de Mickey* was resuscitated on September 22, 1940, following the relocation of its office to Marseille and a merger with another of its editor's papers (*Hop-là!*), full color was temporarily replaced by pale shades of blue and rose. The first issue of these combined papers contained a selection of exclusively American strips that had regularly run in the papers when they were still in Paris. There is only one reference to the political upheaval of the moment, and again it is found in Onc'Léon's message to the reader: "We have just lived through a painful time. We have all felt enormous anguish for France. However, you must look to the future, because

the future of the country depends on you. Marshal Pétain, by lending you the support of his prestige and showing a confidence in you that you rightly deserve, has indicated the way. . . . You know, my dear nephews and nieces, that *Le Journal de Mickey* was never simply a publication to amuse you. . . .” Though this short message is somewhat overshadowed by ten comic strips, a serialized story, poetry, games, and other miscellaneous rubrics, it nonetheless stands out as a calculated effort on the part of Paul Winkler and his editorial staff to court favor with the newly established Vichy regime and to redefine the paper’s goal as something more than crass financial gain in the eyes of the censor.

As the Occupation continued, Winkler’s papers steadily lost ground. By December 1941 the paper shortage had reduced the merged *Le Journal de Mickey—Hop-là!* to four pages for most issues. Frequency of publication went from weekly to every ten days to bimonthly. Little by little the American strips were replaced by French ones and the images became smaller in size so that more strips could be added to each page. A look at the issue of August 9, 1942—almost two years after the move to Marseille—shows a very different publication. The format has shrunk from the eye-catching 11 x 16 inch page to the much less attractive size of 8.5 x 12 inches; a fuller spectrum of color has replaced the earlier shades of pink and blue, but they are much less vibrant than those of the prewar years; American strips have all been replaced by works of French artists;¹⁵ there is no message from Onc’Léon; and, most surprising of all, the speech balloons within the frames have been replaced by narrative text underneath. In keeping with *Le Journal de Mickey’s* goal of entertaining its readers, the issue of August 9, 1942, contains only one, somewhat oblique, reference to the war in a strip featuring two male characters who are working for the secret service for coastal defense and trying to help a woman whose house is being expropriated by the government. *Le Journal de Mickey* disappeared from the newsstands after the issue of July 2, 1944, and would not be published in France again until 1952.

Jumbo’s Italian editor Carozzo managed to restart production of both *Jumbo* and its sister paper *Aventures* in December 1940, but publication was suspended twice (once for almost five months), and it ceased publication altogether in December 1942. In its last rendition, the paper was a merger of *Jumbo* and *Aventures* that featured strips by French artists and sang the occasional praises of Pétain. The cover page of the issue of February 8, 1942, reveals to what length the editor must have felt he had to go to save his paper from censorship and demise. No longer the paper of the “far west” with the Lone Ranger and his lasso serving as backdrop to the title, a revised name-

plate features a dark-haired Frenchman wearing a beret and proclaiming the merged publication to be the paper of "the French youth." Gone are the prewar references to overt resistance to the Nazi invasion; instead, the cover strip, "La belle aventure de François," is dedicated to the glorification of Marshal Pétain and his Vichy government: François is an orphan wandering the streets of Saigon when he hears Pétain's radio speech of June 17, 1940 (and in particular, the famous line "I give myself to France"¹⁶). When Pétain asks all French people to help heal the wounds of the homeland, François has a vision of the marshal superimposed on the French flag, and he resolves to help by sneaking onto a ship and setting sail for France (figure 4). In the same way that Onc' Léon's message of September 22, 1940, was written to placate the censors, this undisputedly pro-Vichy front page of *Jumbo/Aventures* was only a cover for the remaining seven pages filled exclusively with strips drawn to amuse or entertain.

As mentioned above, *Coeurs vaillants* became the mouthpiece of Pétain in the Vichy regime's effort to win over the hearts and minds of French youth to the vision of a New France at the beginning of the Occupation.¹⁷ Although it took three and six months respectively to restart publication of *Le Journal de Mickey* and *Jumbo*, the first issue of *Coeurs vaillants* (merged with its sister publication *Ames vaillantes*) was published a little less than a month after its flight from Paris to a provisional address in Clermont-Ferrand. It was not by accident that the publication date of this paper was July 14, the French national holiday commemorating the creation of a new government following the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. The cover page of this issue offers an apology for three weeks of silence, and for the absence of color and of a *Tintin* strip. In fact, its four black-and-white pages contain only one comic strip.¹⁸ The rest of the paper speaks of the political and social upheaval its readers were currently living, and of what the future would bring. Like the story about the sinning Israelites in *Coeurs vaillants* on the eve of the war, the resounding message to be understood here is that the war and the Occupation are God's punishment of the wayward French. A letter from the fictitious "Jean Vaillant" (role model for the Catholic male youth) that is featured prominently in the middle of the center spread ends by saying that things "will be difficult, but the future will be beautiful. The 'coeurs vaillants' and 'âmes vaillantes' will grow up and create a brand new France, a France with a valiant heart and a Christian soul." Two unusual sections of this atypical issue of *Coeurs vaillants* and *Ame vaillantes* summarize the "plots" of the regular strips of the two papers that are missing here, as if to say that the morally upright characters that peopled those strips actually existed



Fig. 4. *Jumbo*, February 8, 1942.

outside the world of flimsy newsprint and could be taken as role models for the reader's own behavior during the Occupation. The other rubrics in this four-page paper contained stories with religious or war themes,¹⁹ messages to readers, and the regular set of comprehension questions.

The last issue of the merged *Coeurs vaillants*—*Ames vaillantes* series, published on September 8, 1940, names Lyon as the new “provisional” address of the paper’s editorial office. The nameplate contains a message from Pétain superimposed on an image of the French flag: “All French people, proud of France; France, proud of each French person; such is the law that we want to instill.” Although still reduced in size, with only four pages instead of eight, it contains three brightly colored strips, including an installment of Hergé’s *Land of Black Gold*.²⁰ The inside spread offers three morally instructive stories, solutions to previously run puzzles, and guidelines on how to help rebuild France (using Pétain as a role model because he “is working harder than everyone else”). Another reminder about the need to work hard to build a new France is found in the issue of February 14, 1943, in a visually striking strip showing two outlines of France. The outline on the left is filled with lazy, complaining little boys lounging on a country full of fissures, while the one on the right is peopled with boys wearing the “coeurs vaillants” uniform, working hard to push the broken pieces back together, and calling on the lazy boys to help them. Across the top is the caption: “There are those who destroy. There are those who build.” And across the bottom, the question is posed: “Which team will you join?”

When the Germans entered Paris in June 1940, the publication of all children’s papers was suspended. Several months later a few of those weeklies had returned to newsstands, nine had moved to unoccupied France, and at least nine new papers could be found in the capital (but many of those survived only a few months). One paper created during the first fall of the Occupation that outlived all its competitors was *Gavroche*, whose first issue came out seven days after the signing of the Armistice on October 24, 1940, and sold 127,000–198,000 copies a week over the fifteen months of its existence. The choice of title is interesting for two reasons. First, it is immediately identifiable as being “French,” but in case the origin of the name escapes some readers, the first issue announces that “from the very first page, you will follow the escapades of the descendant of the famous Gavroche, hero of *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo.” Second, rather than suggesting entertainment for young children, as *Mickey* and *Jumbo* might have done, the title gives a more mature name and face to the same virtues highlighted in the title *Coeurs vaillants*, but it emphasizes at the same time the notion that life is not all work and no play by describing the character Gavroche as “witty, fun-loving, but full of courage.”

A close look at the sixty-six issues of this weekly shows that its primary goal was to entertain its readers who were anxious to find a new weekly to

fill the void left by the departure of so many popular papers. Indeed, in the very first issue readers are informed that *Gavroche* exists “to amuse you, to distract you, to move you, to interest you; it will certainly please you,” and they are invited to become members of the “GAG” (Groupement des Amis de Gavroche [Organization of the Friends of Gavroche])—a club similar to those offered in *Le Journal de Mickey* and *Coeurs vaillants*, which gave access to special activities, including movie outings:

Without doubt the press is a marvelous vehicle of penetration, but the cinema, because of the magic of its images, allows the spectator seated in his chair to become familiar with countries and regions where he’s never set foot, to study their habits, their customs, their lifestyle, and to observe scientific phenomena and experiments that the common man does not have the opportunity to witness. Therefore, in order to fill this gap, *Gavroche* plans to organize movie screenings for members of the Organization of the Friends of Gavroche. To teach through entertainment, and thereby contribute to a better understanding among peoples of different nations—that will be the motto of the Organization of the Friends of Gavroche.

This goal of promoting communication and understanding across cultures is found again in an announcement of plans to organize trips to other European countries for GAG members “as soon as circumstances will permit.”

In keeping with its mission to entertain, *Gavroche* contains a bare minimum of references to war or the Occupation. From the beginning this weekly was filled with numerous comic strips covering a wide variety of themes.²¹ However, the only time during the life of the paper that the war was ever referred to directly in a strip was in the first issue’s strip, “Le retour de Vica.”²² In the first panel the character Vica declares: “Peace has returned! My children, you have no doubt cried during the war. Now we will laugh and laugh some more. Your Vica has returned.” When Vica returns to Paris following the signing of the Armistice, he (and we) see a poster on the side of a building declaring “Armistice. Demobilization. Disarmament. Back to Work!”

It was not possible for *Gavroche* to completely ignore the current situation in Paris, however. The reference to the “circumstances” that prevented immediate trips abroad was one example, and the word *circonstances* reappears in other issues, especially in the next-to-last paper, in January 1942, where the editor announces a reduction in the number of pages and expresses confidence that *Gavroche* will continue to be the readers’ paper of choice until “circumstances” permit it to regain its normal size. Other acknowledg-

ments of the ongoing war include the organization of a movie outing, with invitations for children whose fathers are prisoners of war (February 13, 1941); an announcement about sending a check for ten thousand francs to Pétain (February 27, 1941); and another movie outing in late November “to support the efforts of Pétain” (December 4, 1941).

The paper *Fanfan la Tulipe* is included in this study for several reasons. Although it survived for only ten months (May 1941-March 1942), and its limited number of strips are not outstanding in content nor in artistic quality, it is worthy of note because of its blatant devotion to Marshal Pétain—more explicit even than in the papers in Vichy France. Published under the watchful eye of the German authorities in Paris, *Fanfan la Tulipe* managed to remain completely void of racist or anti-Semitic content as well as of pro-German propaganda (Denni 1978a: 13). Each issue includes instructions about how to help Pétain and his government rebuild France. On October 16, 1941, *Fanfan* announces that it has received permission to sell the weekly in unoccupied France, and in the special Christmas issue we find a notice that the editors have sent Pétain a check for three thousand francs. The letter that accompanied the check informs Pétain that:

We [the editors] are speaking for our one hundred thousand young readers in offering here, along with this gift that they enthusiastically send, their heartfelt gratitude and affection. One hundred thousand young French people hear about you each week in *Fanfan la Tulipe*; one hundred thousand children try to be worthy of the role that you have handed down to them, a role of helpers, however young they might be, to bring to fruition the rebuilding of the homeland. Their common goal is to serve, to be devoted, to surround you as small auxiliaries to make the beautiful country of France be reborn in all of its former grace and generosity. In their hearts the two cries “Long live France” and “Long live Marshal Pétain” are intertwined—two cries they would gladly combine into one: “May France be reborn, thanks to Marshal Pétain!”

Even though the average print run for *Fanfan* is unknown, the figure one hundred thousand is repeated multiple times in this Christmas issue. Elsewhere in the same issue Pétain is referred to as the “admirable grandfather that a defeated France has found in its misery,” and a full page of photos and text highlight the Vichy regime’s motto of “travail, famille, patrie” [work, family, homeland].

A second feature that set this paper apart at the time was the design of its nameplate. The title *Fanfan la Tulipe* (the name of an imaginary, seventeenth-century adventurer French hero popularized in numerous songs and even in

a silent movie made in 1907), and the subtitle “Your Paper, Young Frenchman, Conceived, Written, and Drawn Only by the French” go a significant step further than *Gavroche* to establish the “pure Frenchness” of this weekly’s inspiration and production. Its first issue informs readers that “Fanfan” is a little boy whose family has been evacuated. He hears a voice (understood to be Pétain’s) “good and full of warmth . . . comforting . . . a little hoarse like that of a grandfather . . . of the great soldier loved by his troops . . . still standing like a deep-rooted oak” (Denni 1978a: 12). They also learn that the weekly is a sequel of sorts to the publication *Fip-Fop Magazine*, and that the three names have a special significance: “. . . three friends instead of two, Fip, Fop and Fanfan, three names that begin with F like France . . . three little French boys who love their country and are determined to help her find her place in the New Europe” (Denni 1978a: 12). All these efforts to win favor with, and support from, the Vichy government were not enough to keep *Fanfan* afloat for long, however. Its impending demise was signaled in February 1942 when the format shrank from 10.75 x 14.75 inches to 8.5 x 11 inches, and one month later it ceased publication altogether.

LE TÊMÉRAIRE: NAZI PROPAGANDA IN A FRENCH CHILDREN’S PUBLICATION

Le Téméraire stands in stark contrast to the other weeklies in this study for reasons both artistic and political.²³ Propaganda saturates the entire paper, not just on the cover or in an editorial column, and not simply through singing the praises of Pétain or a New Europe. In each issue²⁴ one finds ideologies that are pro-German, pro-fascist, anti-Semitic, racist, anti-Russian, anti-British, and anti-American spread throughout the rubrics of historical or “scientific” reports; serial comic, adventure, detective, or futuristic strips; and editorial messages. When the first issue came off the German-controlled presses in Paris on January 15, 1943, *Le Téméraire* was the only juvenile paper available in the city, and one of only two distributed in the whole of occupied France.²⁵ It was published every two weeks, and sold on average 100,000 to 150,000 copies each issue. The first issue of *Le Téméraire* explained the origin of its title: “In the winter of 1477, on a frozen pond near Nancy, the great duke Charles de Bourgogne [also known as Charles le Téméraire] died—abandoned by all and devoured by wolves. Since that time, the word ‘téméraire’ [bold] has often been used as an insult. . . . In our opinion, if too much temerity can be detrimental, an excess of caution is even worse, and,



Fig. 5. "Les mémoires de la Tour Eiffel," *Le Téméraire*, March 15, 1943.

especially for young people, it is best to be somewhat rash. This is the reason we have given our paper this title, and also the reason we invite you to enter into the Cercle des Téméraires. . . ." This "Cercle" [circle] was no longer the club of earlier papers that gave members advice, entry into contests, prizes, and occasional outings to the movies. Becoming a member did give access to those same activities, but it also meant that the children had to compete with each other to advance through a hierarchy of levels that ultimately created a corps of elite participants. In overall design *Le Téméraire* included the most popular elements from the decimated press of occupied France. Although its large format was no different from that of the prewar versions of *Le Journal de Mickey*, *Jumbo*, and *Coeurs vaillants*, or of *Gavroche* in the early years of the Occupation, it is remarkable that this paper was able to retain its original size, number of pages, vivid color, and high-quality paper throughout the Occupation, while other papers were severely crippled by paper rationing and a general lack of resources.

In the second issue of *Le Téméraire* the subtitle "the paper of modern youth" was added—a subtle but important change from subtitles like "young people's weekly" (*Le Journal de Mickey*) or "for young French people" (*Jumbo*). The opposition of "modern" youth to "French" youth is one that reappears in other rubrics, as we see in the Vica strip of March 15, 1943. Vica is upset because the moon has sneezed and blown apart the Eiffel Tower, and he thinks young French people are too lazy and indecisive to help put it back together. The strip ends on a high note, however, when a busload of members of the "Cercle des Téméraires" (i.e., "modern youth") arrives to fix the problem (figure 5).

A striking feature of *Le Téméraire*'s design is the full-page cover image that announces the theme to be treated in one or two inside pages of text with photos, drawings, statistics, and graphs. Although *Le Téméraire* was not the first paper to print a full-page image on its cover (we find this feature even in early twentieth-century papers such as *L'Epatant*, for example), it was the first to consciously and systematically combine strange or even shocking images with sensational captions in order to entice its readers to pay attention to the message of the featured text. The numerous cover images and accompanying texts make it impossible to pick only one or two issues to highlight the paper's general ideology. As Claude Guillot (1978: 6) notes in his article on *Le Téméraire*, the exposition of the themes announced on the cover takes up 40 percent of the paper, and he resorts to listing the themes of all forty-one issues. Nevertheless, it is easy to see, by a review of some of the more blatant racist or anti-Semitic themes, that the paper's mission was a far cry from pure entertainment (prewar *Mickey* and *Jumbo*), Catholic moral instruction (*Coeurs vaillants*), or even proselytization of Pétain's vision of the National Revolution. The fourth issue of *Le Téméraire* features an article about blood types and the purity of Aryan blood versus the impurity of the blood of the "mixed" races in Russia (figure 6); issue 10 recounts the ritualistic sacrifice of children by the Semites of ancient Greece; issue 18 criticizes the Ku Klux Klan because its members were supposedly Freemasons (therefore descendants of the builders of the Temple in Jerusalem).

Le Téméraire ran serialized stories about certain political or historical situations (for example, the struggle of the Irish against the oppressive British in "Le secret du Professor O'Brien"). It also ran a number of strips in which the paper's ideology was treated with realism ("Marc le Téméraire"), futuristically ("Vers les mondes inconnus), or in a humorous way ("Vica" and "Le Docteur Fulminate et le professeur Vorax"). Fulminate, a good scientist with a blond beard, tries to invent things to help the world, while Vorax, his evil enemy with the classic stereotypical Semitic features of black beard and hooked nose, constantly tries to sabotage those inventions. Although the "Vica" strips were often nonsensical and generally designed to amuse, a few included direct references to the war, as in the issue of March 15, 1943, described above. "Marc le Téméraire," the only realistic strip of the paper, followed the efforts of Milice members Marc and Paul working with the Germans to rout out Soviet spies.²⁶ In "Vers les mondes inconnus" the blond, blue-eyed (i.e., Aryan) hero named Norbert (imaginary champion of the previous Olympic Games, which were held in Nazi Germany), struggles with evil extraterrestrial beings that have certain Semitic features.



Fig. 6. *Le Téméraire*, March 1, 1943.

LIBERATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHILDREN'S COMICS PUBLICATIONS

Most presses came to a standstill again in late summer 1944, when Paris was liberated and members of the Vichy government went into exile in Germany,

and the Minister of Information declared a suspension of all children's weeklies on January 13, 1945 (Crépin 2001: 118). Despite the suspension, a new weekly called *Vaillant* was born just six months later, on June 1, 1945, thanks to the efforts of several members of the Resistance who were also members of the FPJ (Front patriotique de la jeunesse) and who "piggybacked" their publication onto an underground Communist paper called *Le Jeune Patriote* (Birkan 1986: 16). For the editorial team, the title *Vaillant* signified the courage that young people in France were expected to show in the face of the suffering and hard work that would be required to rebuild the nation, but its choice provoked anger among priests and other supporters of *Coeurs vaillants*, who charged that it was stolen from their paper (Crépin 2001: 150). *Vaillant* survived amidst a severe paper shortage and the censorship of every paper suspected of collaboration with the Vichy or German governments, because *Le Jeune Patriote* was originally a simple publication to inform the communist youth fighting in the Resistance. During the first year of its existence, *Vaillant* had frequent run-ins with the Information Ministry because it evolved very quickly into a more traditional weekly, with a format and layout not unlike that of *Le Téméraire* and a title that led many to assume an association with the pro-Pétain *Coeurs vaillants* (Crépin 2001: 150–51). The paper's format and content stabilized in 1946 with an average print run of 125,000 copies, at about the same time that many new weeklies came into existence, or old ones resurfaced after a period of silence (figure 7).

The first issue of *Vaillant* has a cover illustration of Allied soldiers planting their flags on French soil, with the word "victoire" [victory] printed across the bottom. The nameplate contains the original title *Le Jeune Patriote*, and underneath that, the subtitle proclaims it to be "the most captivating paper for young people." In the top left corner is the announcement of a new strip called "Fifi gars du maquis." This realistic strip, which sings the praises of the Resistance fighters and inspires hatred of the German occupiers, ran as a regular feature of *Vaillant* from June 1, 1945, until November 20, 1947, and some of the episodes were reprinted as stand-alone comic books. The main character, Fifi, is the archetypal *maquisard* [French Resistance fighter], who engages in all kinds of resistance efforts (figure 8): he delivers secret messages, captures German officers, hijacks convoys to get arms and ammunition, sabotages train trestles, and carries out summary executions of members of the Gestapo. He is also captured and tortured by the enemy before being freed by his companions (Birkan 1986: 16). Other strips in the early *Vaillant* did not dwell on the war, however. One highlighted the escapades of two boys with their dogs, another depicted a sailor with his duck, and there was a popular science fiction strip ("Les pionniers de



Fig. 7. *Vaillant*, February 7, 1946.

l'espérance") that has been called a "masterpiece—the most famous science fiction comic after the war" (Filippini 1989: 412). The remaining pages of the early issues of *Vaillant*—filled with the usual array of news stories, reports, songs, sports articles, folktales, and serialized novels—closely resembled those of the prewar *Journal de Mickey* and *Jumbo*, and of the Occupation-era *Gavroche*.



Fig. 8. "Fifi, gars du maquis," *Vaillant*, February 7, 1946.

CONCLUSION: THE MYTH OF RESISTANCE

It can be argued that both *Le Journal de Mickey* and *Jumbo* played a significant role in converting the young reading public of 1939 into fans of comic weeklies—even though the former did not create or promote any heroes who experienced or participated in the war and the Occupation, and the latter made only the occasional, halfhearted effort to address the ongoing political and social crisis—and that their fan base would eventually ensure a market for editors whose mission was more ideological, and in some cases, more sinister. Those same editors were able to “borrow” the eye-catching format and design techniques and the most popular elements of the content of those foreign publications to make their own productions more appealing. One might also argue that *Gavroche*, the other less politicized paper in

our analysis, played a similar role in occupied Paris by creating an avid fan base that was easily attracted to *Le Téméraire* and, in particular, to its strips by artists who moved to the pro-German paper when the less militant *Gavroche* folded.²⁷

Praise of Maréchal Pétain disappeared from children's comics weeklies in occupied France with the early demise of *Fanfan la Tulipe*, and from the pages of *Coeurs vaillants* shortly after the Germans crossed the line of demarcation on November 11, 1942, and it became clear that the head of the Vichy regime had no real power. From that day until the end of the war, however, *Coeurs vaillants* continued to sing the praises of "France the homeland," and this strong show of nationalism is what allowed it to survive the postwar purges of the press. An anecdote recounted by Marijac (Jacques Dumas, creator of "Jim Boum") in his memoirs reveals just how influential this pro-Vichy, Catholic paper was in shaping the thoughts of French youth in unoccupied France. After having fought in the war and escaped from a German prison, Marijac was living in Auvergne and working for the underground paper *Le Corbeau déchainé*, when he was denounced in May 1944 to the local *maquis* [Resistance network]. They wanted to know the source of his money, thinking that he was being paid by the Germans. When he answered that he earned it from his drawings, they told him to prove it. Marijac (1978: 25) continued: "I then noticed how young these men were, sixteen to eighteen years at the most, probably dodgers of the STO [obligatory work service in Germany]. I asked: 'Surely some of you used to read *Coeurs vaillants* or *Pierrot*?' Three, including the leader, said yes. Well, . . . I'm the author of 'Jim Boum.' . . . My execution was immediately transformed into a demonstration of friendship."

The Resistance fighter and hero of "Fifi, gars du maquis" (*Vaillant*) is a realistically drawn, gun-toting young man who has escaped from work service in Germany to come back to France to route the enemy in bloody hand-to-hand combat. This image of the actions of the French in occupied France is very different from the one found in *La bête est morte!*, where the few pages dedicated to the work of the *maquis* show cute rabbits hiding out in the woods listening to the BBC. As much as they differ from each other, these two Liberation tales were among the very first postwar published images of French people fighting for their homeland, and in both they are shown as unified in their efforts to rid the country of the evil oppressors. Likewise, in both versions Nazi atrocities are depicted as being perpetrated against all the French, rather than primarily against the Jews. This myth of the Resistance and of the romantic heroism of the victimized French that was presented to

young readers in such a graphically seductive way in both *Vaillant* and *La bête est morte!* was to become the official version of these catastrophic events for many years to come.²⁸

Notes

1. Among the children's publications consulted for this chapter are the following: *Ames vaillantes*; *Coeurs vaillants*; *Coeurs vaillants—Ames vaillantes*; *Fanfan la Tulipe*; *Gavroche*; *Hop-là!*; *Jumbo*; *Le Jeune patriote*; *Le Journal de Mickey*; *Le Journal de Mickey et Hop-là! réunis*; *Le Téméraire*; *O lo lè*; *Vaillant*. For a list of dates of specific issues consulted, please see the entries for these works in the bibliography at the end of this volume.

2. The publisher, Paul Winkler of Opera Mundi, had exclusive distribution rights in France for American comics from Hearst's King Features Syndicate.

3. The average print run for each paper referenced in this study comes from Crépin (2001: 69,73).

4. "Mickey and Goofy," "Pluto Junior," "Curley Harper," "Tim Tyler's Luck," "The Katzenjammer Kids," "Don Winslow," and "King of the Royal Mounted."

5. These black-and-white pages (2, 3, 6, and 7) contain the following rubrics: an adventure story, jokes, a new chapter of a cowboy saga, puzzles, contests, ads, "strange facts," and two additional strips.

6. The strips cover a variety of themes: cowboys ("Zorro"), detective ("Secret Agent X-9"), comic ("Pete the Tramp"), and a different translation of "Tim Tyler's Luck," in which the characters' names have changed from Richard and Fred (c.f. *Le Journal de Mickey*) to Raoul and Gaston.

7. "Fred, Bobebig et Bibebog."

8. For nine years the character Jim Boum was a hero of the American west, but in 1940 Marijac transformed him into the original character's grandson, brought him back to France, and sent him off to fight the Germans. In the strip of May 19 we learn that Jim was captured by the Germans in Poland, escaped from a concentration camp, hid on a German train, and made his way across Poland to a port. We also learn that he speaks fluent German, and that these events take place a few days before the German invasion of Denmark and Norway.

9. On accusations of collaboration and anti-Semitism made against Hergé, please see chapters 1 and 8 in this volume.

10. "The world's recovery depends on a France that has reconverted to Christianity." Cardinal Suhard became the archbishop of Paris on May 8, 1940. He supported Pétain and the Vichy regime throughout the Occupation.

11. The featured strip is about a boy named Jean-François, who has been evacuated with his family to the countryside. In just six panels Jean-François attempts to track down a spy, works harder than ever before in school, reads the latest issue of *Coeurs vaillants* to his little brother, and tries to find a way to listen to a "Coeurs vaillants" radio program. Additionally, there is an announcement that May 26 will be a day of charity to help the suffering in Norway brought on by the "odious German aggression"; a story about a boy who writes anonymous letters of encouragement to a woman in his village whose only son has died in the war; an article about

France's colonial empire and missionary work; and a song to the Virgin Mary, with instructions about how to pray to her during this month of "May—the month that is preparing for victory."

12. In this issue the Tintin strip is six panels from the adventure *Le sceptre d'Ottokar* [*King Ottokar's Sceptre*].

13. There is a story about a boy who prays for, and brings flowers to, two families who have lost children to the war; a story about Israelites, described below; a narrative text with several illustrations about evacuees in World War I; and a story about a boy in Poland who delivers a letter from the French army to a general in the field.

14. "Do not play with your gas mask, stay outside during a bombing raid, pick up strange objects or accept packages from people you don't know, or stand in the open watching airplanes overhead. Do keep your gas mask and other possessions neatly organized, lie down flat on the ground during a bombing raid, alert the authorities if you see someone acting suspiciously, and alert the authorities if you see planes or parachutists landing."

15. "Bernard Tempête" (originally "Don Winslow of the Navy") is still there, running across the center spread and in color, but it is now signed by the French artist Sogny instead of the Americans L. Beroth and C. Hammond.

16. "Je fais à la France le don de ma personne."

17. Fourment (1987: 245–46) notes that *Coeurs vaillants's* unconditional fervor toward Pétain abruptly stopped at the end of 1941, with only one mention of him in 1942 and another in 1943.

18. "Zimbo et Zimba," by Cuvillier, about two children in Africa.

19. Pages 1 and 4 are primarily taken up by the story "Never Give Up," about a Brittany family whose descendant has become friends with a war evacuee. The inside pages contain a story about a boy who spent his entire life building a cathedral to honor the Virgin Mary (ending with the message that the "coeurs vaillants" and the "âmes vaillantes" should emulate this boy and become builders of Christianity and of the New France), and a second story about an old man who proclaims that his beloved cherry tree—cut down by French soldiers—died bravely in battle . . . "Long live France!"

20. Crépin (2001: 96) notes that during the four-month run of this Tintin adventure, all references to the hostilities between the Jews and the Palestinians were removed from Hergé's original story, and the Jewish leader Salomon Goldstein was renamed "Durand."

21. E.g., western, detective, comic, life in the jungle, naval, and air force exploits, and classic tales from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages.

22. For a detailed analysis of "Vica" comics in France from 1940 to 1945, and of the artist Vincent Krassousky's subsequent trial for collaboration, see Tufts (2004).

23. *Le Téméraire* was the most important weekly printed in occupied France, and it deserves considerably more attention than is possible in this study. Readers are encouraged to see, especially, Pascal Ory's impressive *Le petit nazi illustré: Vie et survie du Téméraire, 1943–4*, as well as the detailed articles by Claude Guillot (1978) and Michel Denni (1978b).

24. There were thirty-eight regular, and three special, issues of *Le Téméraire* published between January 15, 1943, and August 1, 1944.

25. Between November 1940 and May 1944, *O lo lê* was published in Brittany. This paper was written in French and in Breton, and had an average press run of three thousand copies. Although the issue of August 11, 1941, printed a letter Pétain sent to thank the paper for a birthday card, for the most part *O lo lê* was devoted to illustrated stories about independent and courageous Bretons throughout the history of the region.

26. The Milice was a paramilitary unit created by the Vichy government in January 1943.

27. Vincent Krassousky (“Vica”) drew his “Vica” strips for both *Gavroche* and *Le Téméraire*, and Andre Joly (“Erik”) drew “Le Professeur Globule contre le Docteur Virus” for *Gavroche* and more or less the same strip with a different name (“Le Docteur Fulminate et le Professeur Vorax”) for *Le Téméraire*.

28. Henry Russo, in *Le syndrome de Vichy* (1990), refers to the years 1945–53, when France was the most conflicted about the role its citizens played during the Occupation, as a period of “unfinished mourning.”

The Concept of “Patrimoine” in Contemporary Franco-Belgian Comics Production

The reeditions of Mattioli, of Forest, of Gébé by L'Association; those of Crumb by Cornélius; those of Breccia by Rackham; those of Alex Barbier by Frémok; reveal to comics its own history, and the respect with which it can and must be treated (and this is to say nothing of our own contribution to “patrimoine” [patrimony]).

—JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MENU, *Plates-bandes* (2005b: 66)¹

INTRODUCTION

A curious footnote appears in the indicia of the second edition of Jean-Christophe Menu's book *Meder* (2005a). Alongside a dedication to Paul Carali and Etienne Robial, a note by Menu reads: “The first edition of *Meder* was published in the ‘Gros Nez’ collection by Futuropolis (1972–94) in November 1988.” What is to be made of this statement? On the one hand, it is very nearly a simple declaration of fact. Yet the parenthetical dates indicate that something unusual has transpired. These dates suggest that Futuropolis is dead; it was a twenty-two-year comics publishing experiment that concluded more than a decade previously. Why mark such a passage in a new edition of a comic book? Importantly, the note serves an important discursive purpose in an ongoing debate about the

French comic-book industry. In the simplest terms, Menu's note signals his refusal to recognize the relaunched Futuropolis as a legitimate continuation of the company run by Robial.

In 2005, comics editor Sébastien Gnaedig launched a comic book line under the banner of Futuropolis, the name of the comic-book publishing house founded by Robial and Florence Cestac and saluted by Menu's footnote. The new imprint, under the joint auspices of book publisher Gallimard and comic-book publisher Soleil, created considerable controversy in the field of French comics. Robial and Futuropolis had worked with Gallimard from 1987 until 1994, when Robial left to pursue other ventures after having sold Futuropolis to the book publisher. When Gnaedig sought to revive the imprint in 2004, Robial himself dissented, and many cartoonists who had been published by the original Futuropolis objected as well. Menu (2005b), in his book-length essay *Plates-bandes*, was the most vocal critic. He condemned the move as a cynical marketing ploy, indicative of the consumerist ethos of the French comics industry. From Menu's perspective, no publisher was more dedicated to commercial imperatives than Soleil, and few were less celebrated for the work that they published. Menu (2005b: 41) suggests that by aligning itself with the name of the most celebrated French comics imprint (i.e., Futuropolis), which was "the avant-garde itself," Soleil co-opted the cultural capital that had accrued to the long-dead publishing house and took a shortcut to critical respectability. For Menu (2005b: 40), this was akin to reviving the Miles Davis Quartet with four stars taken from the French pop-singing television contest *Star Academy*, a marketing ploy pure and simple. In light of his arguments in *Plates-bandes*, we can interpret his statement about Futuropolis in the republication of *Meder* as a death notice, suggesting that: first, there can only be one Futuropolis, and it no longer exists; second, the new Futuropolis is fake, a zombie-like creature revived to resemble the dead; third, L'Association, the publishing house run by Menu, and the publisher of the new edition of *Meder*, is the true heir to the legacy of the original Futuropolis, and the protector of its avant-gardist tendencies.

The dispute between Menu and the new Futuropolis is a particularly visible eruption in what has been a long simmering battle over the future—and the past—of French comic-book production. Since at least 1990 (the year that Menu and five other cartoonists founded L'Association), many contemporary small-press French cartoonists have been particularly concerned with the transformation of the field of comics production from a writerly space revolving around the adventures of mass market characters, toward a space more closely aligned with painterly traditions. This transformation has

taken place through a reconceptualization of the place of the comic "book," and by the adoption of new techniques and dispositions to storytelling that are rooted primarily in a series of oppositions: cultural, ideological, social, national, and aesthetic. These oppositions have led small-press publishers and associated cartoonists to reject the normative traditions of the publishing field—the hardcover, forty-eight-page comic book typified by Soleil's publications, for example—in favor of a more fluid set of publishing priorities. Yet this rejection has not taken the form of an absolute break. Small-press cartoonists, for the most part, continue to regard themselves as working in the field of comic-book production, broadly defined, even while they challenge its dominant forms and understandings. One weapon in their arsenal has been the republication of long-neglected works from the history of French-language comics publishing, books that allow small publishing houses to define their own production relative to an imagined artistic past, rather than merely against the commercial realities of the present epoch. In this way, the smallest publishing houses are able to draw upon a notion of "patrimoine," the "heritage" of comics publishing, and mobilize it as a discursive weapon.

By mining the history of French-language caricature and comic-book production for its neglected heritage, contemporary small-press publishers have assiduously worked to rewrite the entire history of French-language cartooning through the creation of counter-histories that tend to privilege their own unique positions as creators. By this I mean that the contemporary small-press comics publishers that I will discuss in this essay—notably L'Association, Cornélius, and Frémok—are seeking to rewrite the received history of French-language comics publishing, moving it from a focus on popular writers, artists, magazines, and characters to a more "heroic" narrative of aesthetic resistance to the notion of comics as merely a product of the consumer mass market. This transformation has occurred in three ways. The first is through the dismissal of "crassly commercial" publishing histories as unimportant, poorly informed, or biased toward the largest publishing houses. The second way is through the celebration of neglected artists or overlooked works as the true heritage of the comics medium. Significantly, each small-press publisher has adopted several differing strategies in order to resurrect the forgotten history of French-language comics publishing. Cornélius, for example, has focused on the retrieval of forgotten artists such as Gus Bofa. Fréon, or Frémok as it is now known since its merger with Amok, has resurrected works that have been deliberately, and politically, effaced. L'Association, the largest and best established of the small-press publishers, has focused on atypical works of consecrated artists. Third, and finally,

contemporary small-press publishers have focused on transforming the comics industry's emphasis on best-selling characters by placing renewed attention on works that contain forms of social criticism or unfold an anti-conformist vision of history. Therefore, one can see in the recuperation of artists such as Gus Bofa, Massimo Mattioli, Jean-Claude Forest, Gébé, Touïs and Frydman, Edmond Baudoin, and Alex Barbier an emergent counter-history of comics publishing in France and Belgium intended to position the contemporary small press, rather than the large-scale mass market publishers, as the logical culmination in the development of the medium.

The current transformation of the French comic-book publishing industry is rooted in a series of oppositions whereby the contemporary avant-garde is seeking to distance itself from the dominant traditions of the field. This is not unlike the process that occurs in all fields of cultural production, when new players seek to challenge the legitimacy of more powerful actors by transforming the criteria of value by which works of art are judged. These transformations create new ways of understanding the field and its history, and open opportunities for new voices to attain power within the game of culture. Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 60) outlines this tendency: "The history of the field arises from the struggle between the established figures and the young challengers. The aging of authors, schools, and works is far from being the product of a mechanical, chronological slide into the past; it results from the struggle between those who have made their mark ("fait date" [made an epoch]) and who are fighting to persist, and those who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock, eternalizing the present state of things." In the field of comics production, the young challengers are the artists who came of age in the 1990s, in the wake of the demise of Futuropolis as a publishing house, and who are now primarily clustered around Cornélius, Frémok, and L'Association, despite their many connections elsewhere and to other publishers. Their struggle to redefine the criteria of value rests primarily on the construction of what Thierry Groensteen (1999a: 84) has termed a "bande dessinée d'auteur" [auteur comics]. This term demarks a type of comics that are rooted in the unique vision of a single author, in distinction to comics that are primarily defined by their participation in a series with one or more well-known characters, such as Spirou, whose adventures have been told by numerous artists and writers over the years. Central to this conception of comics is the notion that the artist will be more important than the results of his craft. Whereas Tintin may be more famous than Georges Remi, the presumption of the "bande dessinée d'auteur" is that Joann Sfar will be better known than the rabbi's cat, in the

book series of that name. Key to this effort has been, in the simplest terms, the survival of these new publishing groups—many of them artist-run cooperatives—as viable alternatives to the traditions of the large, corporate publishers. The success, however limited or restricted, of these collectives offers a positive contribution to the argument that an artist-centered comics culture can be sustained. Moreover, their ongoing success helps demonstrate the fact that the history of Franco-Belgian cartooning is not fixed, but continues to exist as a battleground, and, further, that these struggles exist alongside broader political and cultural struggles that have defined social life in Europe since the events of May 1968. History may be written by the victors, but in the cultural politics of contemporary French comics publishing the ability to write history is itself an important step on the road to victory.

MAKING SENSE OF THE HISTORY OF FRANCO-BELGIAN COMICS

The history of Franco-Belgian comics publishing as it has been conceived by a variety of scholarly and fan historians is a narrative that privileges the eminent artist and his or her best-known work. Indeed, one could theoretically classify all artists and works in the history of Franco-Belgian comics into five categories identified by Vicenç Furió (2003: n.p.): the eminent, the famous, the known, the criticized, and the unknown. When normative histories of the medium are constructed, they are built around the accomplishments of the eminent to the detriment of the unknown artist, or the criticized—that is, the artist upon whom history has closed the door as a failure. Because it offers a broad but cursory examination of the field, the dominant mode of comic book historiography strategically omits critical failures, and only occasionally brushes upon atypical works. Instead, histories such as Claude Moliterni, Philippe Mellot, and Michel Denni’s *Les aventures de la BD* (1996), to cite but one example, present the development of comics as a series of personal aesthetic triumphs, and moments of inspired genius created by great men (and the very occasional great woman) who, centrally, are responsible for the creation of great characters rather than specifically great works. The received history of the medium can be quickly sketched by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the field, as an unbroken chain of transitions from one eminent artist to the next—Töpffer, Saint-Ogan, Hergé, Franquin, Goscinny, Tardi, and so on. This same account can likewise be expressed as a history of key characters: Tintin, Spirou, Astérix, Adèle Blanc-Sec, and so on.

Les aventures de la BD is a brief overview of the comics medium intended primarily for an audience of casual comic book readers. The authors, who have long-standing associations with traditional comics fandom in France, as well as historical connections to popular comic-book magazines (*Pilote* and *Charlie mensuel*) and publishing houses (Dargaud), have organized the book around a series of key moments. The book is broken into five chapters, which roughly correspond to the origins of the form (1827–1929), the golden age (1930–49), modernization (1950–69), the creation of an adult market (1970–80), and the present (1980–present), which they term “le 9e art sans frontière” [the ninth art without frontiers]. Each of these chapters is anchored by a few key players who define the important moments in the history of the medium about which every fan should be knowledgeable. Limiting my discussion exclusively to their francophone choices, the origins of the form are defined primarily by Töpffer, the “Bécassine” series, Alain Saint-Ogan, and Hergé. The so-called golden age is exemplified by *Le journal de Mickey*, *Coq hardi*, and Edmond-François Calvo. The age of modernization in French-speaking Europe is represented by the Charleroi school, associated with *Spirou* (including Jijé, Franquin, and Morris) and the *ligne claire* [clear line] school of *Tintin* magazine (including, in addition to Hergé, E. P. Jacobs, Jacques Martin, and Willy Vandersteen). The adult age of comics is defined by a wide array of magazines newly launched in the 1960s and 1970s, including *Pilote* (and artists including Goscinny, Uderzo, Charlier, and Jean Giraud), *Hara kiri* (and its artists—Cabu, Reiser, Wolinski, Gébé, and Fred), *L'écho des savanes* (Gottlieb, Mandryka, and Bretécher), *Métal hurlant* (Druillet, Moebius, Dionnet), and *Fluide glacial*. Finally, the contemporary comics scene is represented by the artists at (*A Suivre*) (including Tardi and Forest), the *couleur directe* [direct color] artists (including Bilal and Loustal), the novelistic artists (ranging from Hugo Pratt to Jean Van Hamme), and the new realists (including Baru, Ferrandez, and humorists like Frank Margerin).

Their brief overview paints a particular image of the field by narrowly delimiting a range of cartoonists who are considered important enough to be mentioned. *Les aventures de la BD* is not unique in this characterization of comics history and should not be singled out for special disapprobation. Titles such as Filippini, Glénat, Sadoul, and Varendé's *Histoire de la bande dessinée en France et en Belgique* (1980), the Bibliothèque nationale de France's *Maîtres de la bande dessinée européenne* (Groensteen 2000b), and even Thierry Groensteen's *Astérix, Barbarella et cie* (2000a), the least traditional of the comics histories cited here, chart relatively homogenous trajectories, creating a powerfully uniform vision of the field. Indeed, the prevalence of comic-

book histories written by fans for fans, and the near-total absence of national or international comics histories that attempt to come to terms with the entire range of production from the eminent to the unknown, have resulted in an image of comics history that is neatly aligned with the publishing agendas of the largest comic-book publishers in France and Belgium. Thus, attention is drawn to artists whose entire oeuvre—or the vast majority of their work at the very least—remains in print and available even to new readers and fans. By constructing a history of the medium around best-selling works, to the near total exclusion of all other material, histories like the one authored by Moliterni, Mellot, and Denni (1996) privilege what Bourdieu (1993: 29) has termed the heteronomous principle of legitimation, which suggests that success as measured through book sales functions as the primary means through which works are acclaimed. In brief, the most popular books are the most important books because they are the most popular. This is an endlessly self-replicating logic, which automatically transforms one era's contemporary best seller into the next generation's classic.

Whereas the history offered by *Les aventures de la BD* highlights, and contributes to, the importance of the heteronomous principle in the creation of a notion of "classics" in the field of comics production, the logic most aggressively mobilized by the contemporary small press is one of autonomous legitimation. Contemporary cartoonists engaged in avant-gardist production practices tend to downplay the importance of sales as a marker of value, preferring instead "the degree of recognition accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize" (Bourdieu 1993: 39), or, in other words, the mutual recognition that great artists accord each other, which, as Bourdieu notes, is itself an arbitrary criterion of value. As a historical intervention, this plays out most obviously through the appropriation of past works in the present. The resurrection of long-neglected, out-of-print works performs a key role in this process of recognition insofar as it permits contemporary publishers and artists to align themselves with important artistic traditions on their own terms. By republishing material that the well-established publishers have allowed to fall out of print, the small presses seek to define a direct link between their own particular artistic practice and the neglected autonomous traditions that are marginalized by normative accounts of comics history. This is accomplished in a number of differing ways, and each method suggests the unique position occupied by the publisher that utilizes it. Therefore, contemporary small-press publishers, who are united in their appeal to autonomous principles of legitimation, define themselves collectively against the dominant orthodoxies

of the field, but also against each other in terms of the manner through which they deploy historical material.

CORNÉLIUS: THE REVIVAL OF GUS BOFA

An instructive example in this process is the work of Gus Bofa. A figure completely absent from *Les aventures de la BD*, as well as from most other histories of the comic book, Bofa was the subject of a retrospective exhibition at the 1997 Festival International de la Bande Dessinée [International Comics Festival] in Angoulême. This exhibit, held in the Hotel Mercure, exposed Bofa's illustrations and cartoons to a generation of artists that had relatively limited knowledge of it up until that point. In 1997, Bofa's work from the 1920s was being republished by the art-book publisher La Machine, in editions as small as two hundred. The La Machine edition of Bofa's *Malaises* (1997) contained an illustration by the noteworthy young cartoonist Nicolas de Crécy, who would win the festival's prize for best comic book the next year, making the artist's connection to the cutting-edge comics scene more apparent. Problems with the distribution of La Machine's reedition of the book led the small-press publisher Cornélius to purchase the print run, and to reissue the book in 2001. Subsequently, Cornélius has published two additional collections of Bofa's work: *Slogans* (2002) and *Synthèses littéraires et extralittéraires* (2003; figure 1). Situated in the Cornélius catalog, Gus Bofa's work performs a number of functions, and marks the publisher in a particular manner. Most importantly, Bofa serves as a marker of the quasi-comic-book concerns that characterize much of Cornélius's output. Although the publisher is well-known for its translations of important American cartoonists such as Robert Crumb, Dan Clowes, and Charles Burns, as well as for publishing a wide array of French cartoonists ranging from the well-established left-wing political satirist Willem to up-and-coming artists such as Nadja and Ludovic Debeurme, it is also celebrated for its high-end prints and illustration collections by cartoonists like Dupuy and Berberian. Thus, the presence of Bofa, an illustrator on the historical and formal fringes of comics, in the Cornélius catalog tends to legitimize the presence of more pictorial and nonnarrative works such as Dupuy and Berberian's *Carnets* [Sketchbooks] series. In this way, Cornélius mobilizes the oeuvre of an artist who had been largely neglected in the history of comics publishing to make a connection between their own contemporary projects and an artistic practice of cartooning, illustration, and art-book publishing that existed in France in the 1920s



Fig. 1. Gus Bofa depicts French poet Paul Verlaine as an angel. From Gus Bofa, *Synthèses littéraires et extra-littéraires*, Paris: Cornélius. © Marie-Hélène Grosos/Cornélius.

through the 1940s. This is not so much a radical break from the dominant understandings of comics history, as it is a supplement. In recuperating the work of Bofa, Cornélius adds an artist to the canons of comics history without seeking to overturn the entire structure. This disposition accords nicely with publisher Jean-Louis Gauthey’s willingness to seek value in comics of all sorts: “I buy comics from all the publishers. I have very few books from Glénat, Lombard, and Soleil, but I have some” (in Bellefroid 2005: 45). In short, therefore, the Cornélius project can be seen as both connoisseurist and expansionist, opening the field of comics to a greater number of comics influences, whether from the American underground, Japanese manga, or the field of illustration.

FRÉON: THE POLITICIZATION OF AN AVANT-GARDE

A much different republication project has been undertaken by the Brussels-based publisher Fréon, indicative of their oppositional approach to the

dominant traditions of Franco-Belgian comics publishing, and to their willingness to extend themselves on the political front much further than a publisher such as Cornélius. Fréon—whose regular stable of artists includes Thierry van Hasselt, Vincent Fortemps, Eric Lambé, and Dominique Goblet, among others—has established itself as a publisher with a particular interest in difficult or experimental comics that exist far outside the norms of the field. An unsigned editorial in *Frigorevue* no. 3 stated the Fréon credo bluntly: “Fréon is the search of an author for the tools that they use. You refer to the material means. Yes, which paper, which means of production, which work tools. . . . All that is experimental, every time that you approach a new work, you put in place a new technique, whether it is etching, collage, or whichever other process. Yes, but this approach signifies something, experimentalism is not an end in itself. Of course not. You experiment because you’re looking for openings” (Anonymous 1994: 3). Fréon’s explicit emphasis on experimentalism marked it as distinct from the rest of the Franco-Belgian comics scene in the early 1990s, which often rejected its work (Bellefroid 2005: 65). Its anthology, *Frigobox*, was conceived as a workshop for serializing large-scale projects by the group’s core members and a few invited guests, as well as densely theoretical articles on the history and current state of comics as an art form. The aesthetic challenge posed by Frémok to the dominant conception of the European comic book is rooted in its examination of the traditional limitations of the comics form with an eye toward the expansion of possibilities. In the simplest terms, Frémok seeks to mine the territory that other publishers have neglected. An editorial in *Frigobox* no. 5 put it directly: “We are nomads in search of impossible territories” (Anonymous 1995: 6–7). Fréon’s opposition to the traditions of comics is so strong that the group goes so far as to reject the notion that it constitutes an avant-garde. Thierry van Hasselt (in Bellefroid 2005: 73) argues that the term “avant-garde” fails to describe their work because it is historically loaded and fails to take into account the permanence of their opposition: “Those that claim the avant-garde today are nothing but the conformists of tomorrow.” Thus, van Hasselt positions himself and his publishing house as more radical than even the avant-garde, a position that revels in a certain aesthetic militancy.

Nonetheless, Fréon’s intersection of modernist visual aesthetics and a critically engaged politics is as close to a comic-book avant-garde as the field has ever seen. Fréon entered this arena with the 2001 publication of *Che*, the comic-book biography of the famed revolutionary leader by Hector Oesterheld and Alberto and Enrique Breccia (figure 2). One of the most celebrated antigovernmental and anti-imperial comic books ever published, *Che* was



Fig. 2. The Cuban revolution is victorious. From Alberto Breccia, Enrique Breccia, and Hector Oesterheld, *Che*, Brussels: Fréon, 2001, p. 51.

originally published in Argentina in 1968, and subsequently outlawed by the Argentine military regime that suppressed the work and murdered Oesterheld. It was out of print until the publication of a Spanish edition in 1985. As late as 1992 Alberto Breccia (2001: 5) indicated in an interview that the

publication of this work in France was nearly impossible: “I understand perfectly the reservations of the other publishers, because *Che*’s chances of success in bookstores would not be very large today.” Fréon’s decision to defy the reticence of the market in publishing the work, by serializing it in *Frigobox* and subsequently publishing it as a stand-alone book, is central to the self-conception of the publisher as an oppositional force within the contemporary comics market. More aggressively, perhaps, than any other single comic-book publisher, Fréon has rejected the heteronomous principle of artistic legitimacy. Confining its publications to a small subsection of the comics-reading audience that is concerned with the aesthetic and political questions raised by the intersection of comic books and the visual legacy of high modernism, Fréon exists as a renunciation of the dominant orthodoxies of the comic-book market. From this vantage, the publication of *Che*, a politically committed work whose troubling history points toward its importance, denotes a clear demarcation between the avant-garde publisher and the more commercial houses (such as Humanoïdes Associés and Glénat), which have long published Breccia’s widely acclaimed genre-based works while shying away from the more personally expressive *Che*. In bringing to light this Argentinian comic from three decades prior, Fréon not only reshapes the collective understanding of Breccia as an artist, but reconstructs its decision to republish the work in heroic terms, subtly sliding from the very real physical threat posed to the artists and readers of the work in 1970s Argentina to the more conceptual aesthetic threat created by the work’s rejection of comic book orthodoxies.

A similar approach can be discerned in Fréon’s work with Alex Barbier, the artist who explicitly serves as the group’s aesthetic forefather: the group’s “pope,” and the artist who “invented it all” (Thierry van Hasselt, in Bellefroid 2005: 76). Barbier began his cartooning career in the late 1970s, publishing books with Editions du Square and Albin Michel, before taking a twelve-year hiatus from comics when he was no longer able to find a publisher for his work. Barbier’s highly expressionistic comics, produced in oil paints and more akin to the work of Francis Bacon than to André Franquin, were regarded as a radical departure from the traditions of the field when they were published in the 1970s by *Charlie mensuel*, with one reviewer terming it “one of the strangest comic stories that has ever been published” and another, in the “cutting edge” 1970s magazine *Métal hurlant* [*Heavy Metal*], suggesting that it was “artistic in the worst sense of the term” (quoted in Barbier 2003: 9). Barbier’s aesthetic distance from *Métal hurlant*, a magazine celebrated by the likes of Moliterni as ahead of its time (Moliterni, Mellot, and Denni 1996: 93), is indicative of



Fig. 3. Sexualized violence and animal imagery in one of the destroyed pages of *Lycaons*. From Alex Barbier, *Lycaons*, Brussels: Frémok, 2003, p. 17.

the way that his work challenges the dominant history of the field by being too avant-garde for the avant-garde. Significantly, the semipornographic nature of Barbier's work tinged it with a countercultural appeal rooted in sexual liberation and antiauthoritarianism. In the mid-1990s, Barbier returned to

comics, publishing two books with Delcourt, but he found a more fitting home with Fréon, which serialized his work in its anthology, *Frigobox*. Fréon has now published four books by Barbier, including one collection of his erotic paintings (*De la chose*) and a reedition of his first book, *Lycaons* (2003; figure 3). What is significant about this republication, aside from the fact that it resurrects a long-neglected work, is the story behind the disposition of the original art. In 1983, four years after the book's initial publication, a young man deliberately set fire to Barbier's art studio, destroying the original art for the book, except for some pages that were on loan to an exhibition, and some that had been sold, as well as the entirety of the art for his 1982 book, *Dieu du 12*. The Fréon edition of the book marks this incident through the inclusion of burnt match icons on the bottom of pages that were destroyed in the violent act of vandalism. In highlighting this action in this way, the editors position the book as analogous to Breccia, Breccia, and Oesterheld's *Che*, another aesthetically innovative comic book subjected to radical forms of suppression, despite the fact that their histories are very different. Fréon thereby celebrates Barbier as a forefather of the most creatively intransigent comics movements in history. By aligning with these works through republication, Fréon can be seen to be conflating the economic pressures faced by Barbier with the political and personal dangers faced by the authors of *Che*. Furthermore, the publisher identifies its own, more contemporary, work—which is as radical in its own historical moment as Barbier's was in his—with a marginal yet defiant tradition within the field. In short, Fréon articulates the need to recall works that have been deliberately and purposefully effaced for their unpopular politics and aesthetics, an editorial decision that serves to legitimate its own claims to importance within the field.

L'ASSOCIATION: RESURRECTING GREAT "MINOR" WORKS

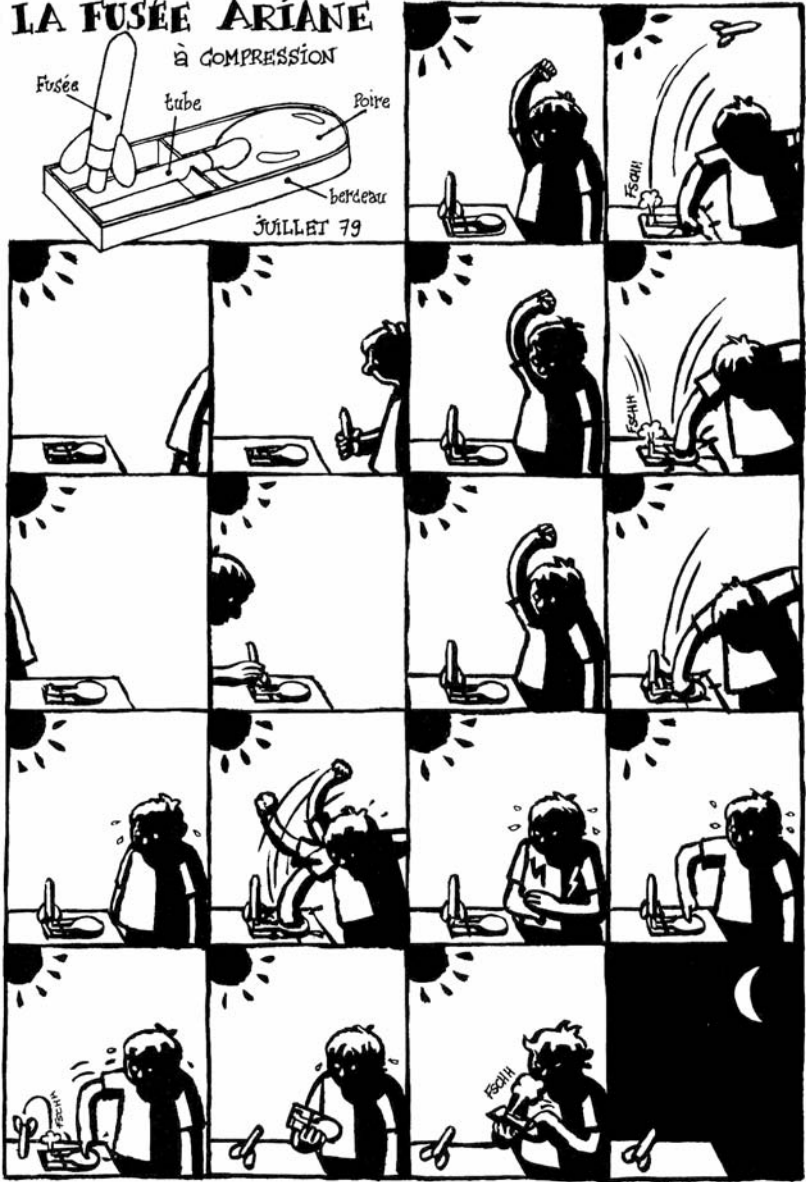
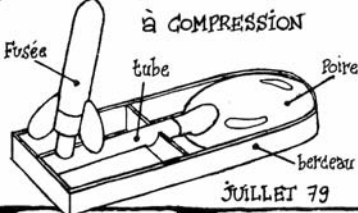
The strategy of historical writing undertaken by Fréon is clearly at odds with that of L'Association, the largest and best-established of the artist-run comics presses launched in the 1990s. Created by a loose-knit group of six cartoonists in 1990, L'Association, more than any other publisher, has come to be regarded as the exemplar of the artist-run comic-book publishing cooperative that defines the contemporary generation. L'Association specializes in long-form comics work, with a focus on novelistic material, often in an autobiographical idiom. L'Association's books are characterized by their atypical sizes, and by the fact that they were, like fanzines, primarily in black and white, but also,

like traditional comic books, professionally printed. Although L'Association's visual style is widely eclectic, ranging from Trondheim's anthropomorphic minimalism to Stanislas's Hergé-inspired neo-*ligne claire* stylings and Matt Konture's labored underground-influenced and text-heavy pages, the work published by the group tends to shy away from the nontraditional techniques associated with Fréon and the illustratory material favored by Cornélius, suggesting a distinction from the dominant orthodoxies of the previous generation but not a rupture or outright rejection of those traditions.

As the best-established small-press comics publisher in France, it is not surprising that L'Association has undertaken a more expansive revision of comic-book history than have Cornélius or Fréon. In 1997, for example, L'Association included in their flagship anthology, *Lapin*, a tribute to *Pif* magazine, the children's magazine published by the Parti Communiste Français. Artists—such as Olivier Josso, François Ayroles (figure 4), and Jean-Christophe Menu—detailed their childhood memories of *Pif*. This tribute signaled an affective affinity with works from the classical Franco-Belgian tradition that were the earliest comics loves of many of the best-known alternative cartoonists, and, moreover, positioned the turbulent late 1960s as the wellspring for the contemporary comic book avant-garde. As Menu told interviewer Thierry Bellefroid about L'Association: “But we are classical! That is why certain people have difficulty categorizing us, because we are simultaneously within the avant-garde and within a certain classicism” (in Bellefroid 2005: 11). In the ensuing years, L'Association began the process of resurrecting a number of works from the era of their collective adolescence. While they had long published collections of older material—including a compilation of early works by Dupuy and Berberian, and work by Daniel Goossens and Blutch that had been originally serialized by *Fluide glacial*—recent publications have taken on a distinct tendency to resurrect uncommercial or unpopular works by celebrated artists. So, for example, L'Association has published a number of books by Gébé, including a reedition of his 1982 antinuclear roman dessin  [graphic novel], *Lettre aux survivants* (G b  2002; figure 5), and *Une plume pour Clovis* (G b  2001), which had originally been serialized in *Pilote* in 1969. Similarly, L'Association published a large collection—their first in color—of single-page gag strips by Massimo Mattioli (2003) that had originally appeared in *Pif gadget* between 1968 and 1973. Further, the group has published three little-known works by the celebrated cartoonist and *Barbarella* creator Jean-Claude Forest. *Hypocrite et le monstre du Loch-Ness* (Forest 2001) collects a series of daily comic strips originally published in *France-Soir* in 1971, whereas its sequel, *Hypocrite: Comment d coder l' tiracopyh*

LA FUSÉE ARIANE

à COMPRESSION



FRANÇOIS AYROLES

Fig. 4. François Ayroles wears out the "gadget" from the July 1979 issue of *Pif*. From François Ayroles, "La fusée Ariane," *Lapin*, no. 15, April 1997, p. 57. © François Ayroles / L'Association, Paris / 1997.

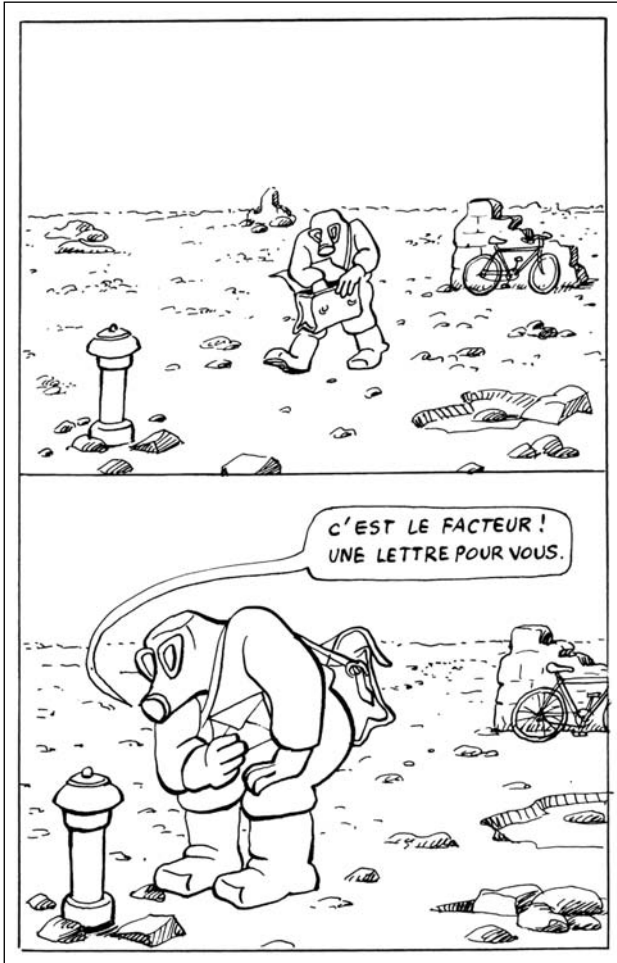


Fig. 5. Even in a postapocalyptic world, the mail must get through. From Gébé, *Lettre aux survivants*, Paris: L'Association, 2002, p. 3. © Gébé / L'Association, Paris / 2002.

(Forest 2005), was originally published in *Pilote* in 1972 and 1973. *Mystérieuse: Matin, midi et soir* (Forest 2004) collects work that originally appeared in the Italian magazine *Linus*, and which was partially published in French by *Pif gadget*, also beginning in 1971 (figure 6). In 2006, L'Association released a complete collection of Touïs and Frydman's starkly antimilitarist humor strip *Sergent Laterreur*, originally published in *Pilote* from 1971 to 1973 (figure 7).



Fig. 6. Lost in an exotic land. From Jean-Claude Forest, *Mystérieuse: Matin, midi et soir*, Paris: L'Association, 2004, p. 6. © Jean-Claude Forest / L'Association, Paris / 2004.

So, it is evident that recent republications from L'Association focus on the historical era addressed by the artists in the *Pif* tribute found in *Lapin* no. 15 (e.g., Ayroles 1997). That period coincides with the changes in sensibility that marked French cartooning following the student uprising and general strikes of May 1968, but predates the arrival of the key modern adult-targeted comics

JE REVIENS DE L'ENFER

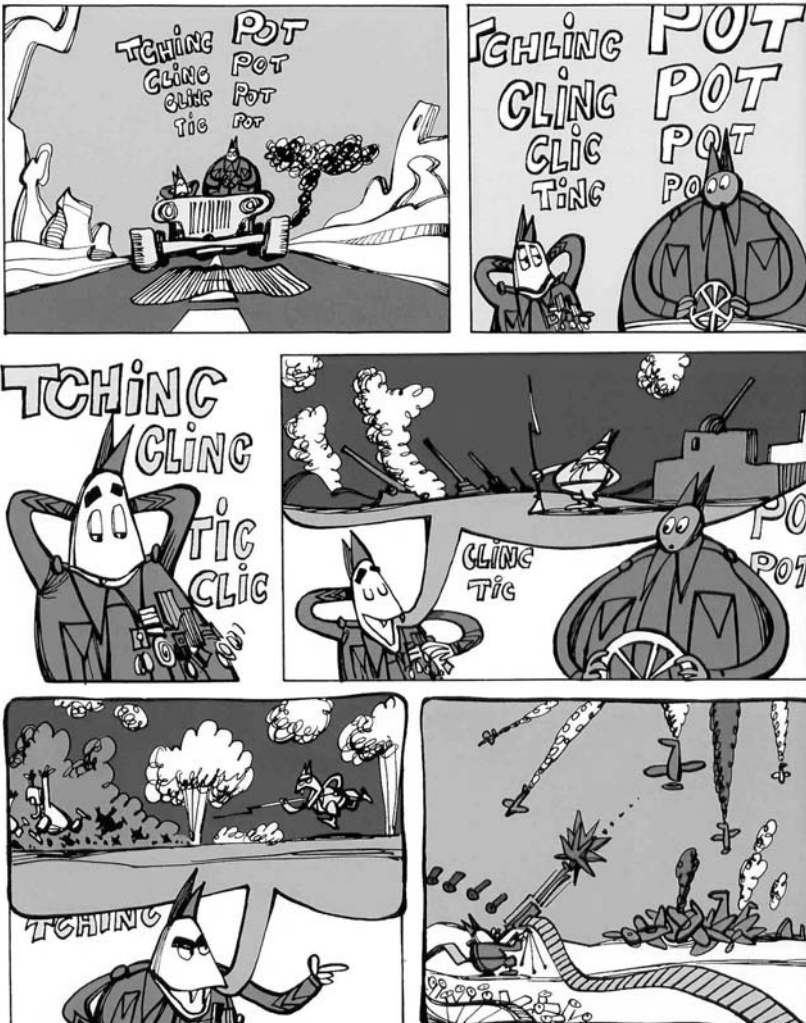


Fig. 7. A boastful sergeant recounts his wartime heroics. From Touï and Frydman, *Sergent Laterreur*, Paris: L'Association, 2006, p. 6. © Touï and Frydman / L'Association, Paris / 2006.

magazines that began with the 1972 founding of *L'écho des savanes*. Through their republication of work by Gébé, Forest, and Mattioli, L'Association establishes itself as a bridge to a proto-adult comics sensibility of the late-1960s. This connection to proto-adult works serves to preempt the entire history of

science-fiction and fantasy-derived experimental comics (such as Moebius's *Arzach* [1976]) that dominates discussion of the 1970s in traditional histories of the comic book in France.

Another republishing project by L'Association similarly reframes the 1980s. If Alex Barbier, with his difficult painting-based work, serves as the aesthetic forefather of the Fréon group, the artistic tradition that inspires L'Association is largely rooted in the work of Edmond Baudoin. This cartoonist, whose 1980s publications were mostly issued by Futuropolis, is one of the central early figures in the autobiographical comics movement. Working in a loose visual style and with narratives that highlight the poetic aspects of memory, Baudoin was a crucial figure for Futuropolis in the 1980s, a leading artist for the least traditional publisher of the period. When Futuropolis ceased publishing comics in the early 1990s, Baudoin moved much of his production to L'Association. In 1995 and 1996 the latter released three new works by the artist: *Eloge de la poussière* (1995a), *Made in U.S.* (1995b), and *Terrains vagues* (1996). Since that time, L'Association has been Baudoin's primary artistic home, although he has also published with Seuil, Viviane Hamy, and Dupuis, among others.

In 1997 L'Association republished one of Baudoin's most celebrated Futuropolis works, *Le portrait*. The story of a painter and his model, the book is a rumination on the intersection of love and art. As the first work by Baudoin to have been reprinted (first published by Futuropolis, in 1990), *Le portrait* draws an explicit link between Futuropolis in the 1980s and L'Association in the 1990s. An even stronger connection appeared in January 2006 with *Les sentiers cimentés* (figure 8). This large book collected, in one volume, six of Baudoin's books that had been originally published by Futuropolis between 1981 and 1987, as well as one book from Zenda. In this way, L'Association—an organization that is itself a partial offshoot of Futuropolis, having grown out of that publisher's abortive young-cartoonist anthology, *LABO*—is able to lay claim to the aesthetic heritage of Robial and Cestac's defunct publishing house as a space for nonconventional comics. This appropriation, coupled with the particular and peculiar connection that L'Association makes to the proto-adult comics sensibilities of the late 1960s, defines comics history through a series of aesthetic leaps. Essentially, the republication activities of L'Association jump from 1973 to the late 1980s, from a proto-mature comics sensibility, to its rejection of adventure-bound comic-book genres, and avoids the era of "standardization" in the comics marketplace that Menu (2005b: 18) criticizes in *Plates-bandes*.



Il était vraiment un garçon sympathique qui ne rendit jamais malheureux les gens qu'il côtoyait. Tout de même, il a fait un peu de peine à sa mère car il n'a pas fait le métier qu'elle avait imaginé pour lui, au fond elle ne s'en est jamais remise. Il a aussi fait du mal à Martine, car il n'a pas quitté Catherine son épouse pour vivre avec elle.

Fig. 8. A confrontation with a waiter. From Baudoin's *Le premier voyage*, reprinted in Edmond Baudoin, *Les sentiers cimentés*, Paris: L'Association, 2006, n.p. © Edmond Baudoin / L'Association, Paris / 2006.

The history implied by L'Association's republications effaces nearly the entirety of the 1970s and much of the 1980s. Specifically, what is written out of comics history by L'Association are those works that have a strong connection to science fiction and fantasy—precisely the work that would come to dominate the field by the early 1990s. By bracketing this historical moment, L'Association more clearly defines itself as a rejection of the mass market traditions of the comics field, while at the same time resurrecting overlooked or forgotten works by some of the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed artists of the previous generation. In this way, L'Association self-identifies with the previous generation through connoisseurship, by celebrating only the least known works of the consecrated cartoonists who preceded them on the stage. This tendency is summed up by the unsigned introduction of L'Association's edition of Jean-Claude Forest's *Mystérieuse: Matin, midi et soir*, which concludes by noting that “L'Association is happy to republish this masterpiece by one of the most inventive cartoonists, and a precursor of the modern comic book” (Anonymous 2004: i). L'Association signals two interests here: a concern with the consecration of the past because it deserves to be remembered on its own merits, as well as the utility that the past has for the present in terms of justifying contemporary cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

The use of the past is, of course, central to Menu's previously cited concerns about the appropriation of the Futuropolis trademark by Gallimard and Soleil. One significant reason for this is the fact that in the 1970s and 1980s Futuropolis itself was very much caught up in the same sorts of reclamation projects with regard to the history of comics, as are the publishers that I have discussed here at greater length. Significantly, Futuropolis was the publisher who republished several noteworthy, neglected classics of the Franco-Belgian school, including Calvo's 1944 Second World War allegory, *La bête est morte!* and Saint-Ogan's “Zig et Puce” series, and whose “Collection Copyright” offered translations of many canonical American comic strips from the early twentieth century, including *Popeye*, *Krazy Kat*, and *Terry and the Pirates*. Thus, it is possible to conceptualize L'Association's interest in “patrimoine” as an extension of a project that was initiated by Futuropolis, and which is now perceived to have been lost with the adoption of that trademark by Soleil. Similarly, Jean-Louis Gauthey of Cornélius has suggested that the desire to create his own publishing house was inspired by his interaction with Menu,

but also by the hole left in French comics publishing by the disappearance of publishers like Futuropolis and Artefact (in Bellefroid 2005: 34). These small-press publishers, intent on replicating the Futuropolis model at the current historical moment, make a forceful connection between the publishing epochs of the 1970s and the 1990s–2000s, to the notable exclusion of the 1980s, a period which both disdain.

Significantly, of course, these publishers have sought to create an equivalence between the radical politics of the past and the present day. While Cornélius's repackaging of Gus Bofa's anguished and existential work from the interwar period only vaguely recalls the politics of the Popular Front, a more direct connection is made by Fréon and L'Association to more contemporary political upheavals. If, following the logic of Moliterni, Mellot, and Denni, the events of May 1968 profoundly transformed the Franco-Belgian comic-book publishing industry by creating an opportunity for artists to be more self-expressive and politically engaged, little of that political sense has survived in a market intent primarily on creating a perpetual back catalog filled with "timeless" adventure classics. By resurrecting politically engaged and aesthetically charged works from this period, therefore, L'Association and Fréon create a bridge between the politics of the past and the contemporary social concerns of the present.

Writing about the state of the field of comic-book production in France in 1975, Luc Boltanski (44), a colleague of Bourdieu, argued that cultural capital was being accrued in this domain for the first time. What had begun to elevate comics from their perception as the mindlessly juvenile products of mass culture were "the republication of older series that had disappeared from the market" and the "establishment of specialized bookstores," notably the Futuropolis store, run by Robial and Cestac. I would argue that more than thirty years later the historical excavation project begun by Futuropolis and continued by the contemporary small press is a central facet in the struggle for cultural capital and the creation of aesthetic legitimacy within the field of comics. Even in 1975, Boltanski could diagnose an emerging polarization of the comics field, a development that the small presses of the 1990s pushed even further. Conceptions of connoisseurship have been central to the establishment of distinction, and the recognition of the neglected elements of a comic book heritage has become an important element of discourses about comics. The establishment of a "bande dessinée d'auteur," to borrow Groensteen's term, has been dependent, at least in part, on the possibility of identifying overlooked artists from the past who serve as important forebears in revisionist histories. The intellectualization of this

tendency has been considerably bolstered by the presence of a “Patrimoine” section in each issue of the annual comics journal, *9e art*, long edited by Groensteen. Further, the commercialization of this tendency, through processes of republication, has recently been recognized at the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée in Angoulême with the creation, in 2004, of a Prix du Patrimoine. Significantly, nominees for this prize have included two of L’Association’s Jean-Claude Forest books, their reprint of *M le magicien*, and Barbier’s *Lycaons* from Fréon. It is therefore possible to affirm once again that the process of recuperating lost or abandoned works is oriented, at least in part, toward the accumulation of prestige.

The prestige generated by these publishing efforts is not an end in itself, but a piece in the larger struggle to legitimate the contemporary small-press publishers as the most important in the field, at least critically if not financially. Of course, the idea of consecrating forgotten cultural artifacts, producers, and forms in order to rewrite history from a new perspective is nothing new. Indeed, it plays out in all fields of cultural production where the past is taken up in a new context and provided with new meanings, often for strictly mercantile ends. For example, Casterman, one of the largest and most traditional of the Franco-Belgian publishing houses, has recently begun to repackage out-of-print works from their back catalog, by artists such as Baru, Ted Benoît, Jacques Ferrandez, and even Jean-Claude Forest, for a new generation of readers, in a line called “Classiques.” Nonetheless, publishers such as Cornélius, Fréon, and L’Association employ a distinct strategy of canon formation, whose primary purpose is explicitly reconceptualizing the criteria of value within the field. On the one hand, this may not seem to be tremendously different from the reissuing of so-called classic works that is a standard part of catalog maintenance as practiced at the largest publishing houses. Yet what sets this practice apart is the curious relationship that these small-press publishers have with the canon, wherein they express an opposition to established notions of canonicity but fail to truly undermine notions of exemplary works of art. In the recirculation of forgotten works, the production of the canon remains a primary concern, as it does in all forms of art history. Yet at the same time, the process of relegitimation, which carries with it a constant threat or promise of delegitimation, draws our attention to the specific power relations that structure notions of cultural value within the comics field. For the cartoonists involved in the process of redefining the nature of the comic book over the past fifteen years or so, this shift away from the best-selling series revolving around a beloved character has been of primary importance, and forms the logical basis upon which notions of con-

secration and legitimation might be transformed. Central to this notion is the importance of recreating history not as the story of the great artists defined by fame and commercial success, but as a story of artists and works that were so great that no one but the true connoisseur knew how great they were. This shift in emphasis serves the needs of the contemporary small press, defined by small print-runs, at the expense of the established publishing houses and their large-scale production methods. The key to rewriting this history is the tendency to champion the economic failures of the large presses as morally and aesthetically superior to their successes, thereby shifting the understanding of historical trajectories and challenging the economic logic of the field.

Note

1. All translations from the French are mine.

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Part 2

Political Reportage and Globalism in *Bandes dessinées*

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Citizenship and City Spaces

BANDE DESSINÉE AS REPORTAGE

REPORTAGE IN COMICS AND *BANDE DESSINÉE*

Reportage has come to take a prominent place in contemporary *bande dessinée*.³ I begin here with a brief survey of the genre, to suggest the range of work produced under this heading. The remainder of my chapter offers a close textual analysis of a highly accomplished example of the genre, “La Présidente” [The Woman President], drawn by Blutch (i.e., Christian Hincker) with texts by Jean-Christophe Menu. “La Présidente” supports my argument that the signifying practices of the medium make it particularly compelling as a vehicle for reportage.

One of the most enduringly famous of all *bande dessinée* characters, Tintin, was a reporter, even if, as has often been noted, he is never seen taking notes or filing a story. His adventures over the period from 1929, when he exposes the evils of Bolshevism, to 1976, when he sides with guerrillas in Latin America, amount to a chronicle of twentieth-century history, and Hergé’s *oeuvre* is all the more fascinating for the evolution of the ideological consensus that underpins the hero’s mission in righting wrongs. Reportage as a nonfictional genre has appeared more recently in *bande dessinée*, and its emergence has coincided with the renaissance since the 1990s of small publishing houses specializing in comics and graphic novels

in France and Belgium: L'Association, Ego comme X, Cornélius, and Vertige Graphic (among others) are dedicated to the exploration of the potential of the medium in relation to both form and content. The desire to break with the genres which dominated mainstream *bande dessinée* led these publishing houses to encourage experimentation with nonfictional material, including autobiography, biography, and reportage, the latter influenced by the work of the prize-winning Maltese American artist Joe Sacco, whose *Palestine* was published in France in 1996 by Vertige Graphic, and whose subsequent reportages arising out of visits to Bosnia and Serbia were published by another small press in France, Editions Rackham (Sacco 2001a, 2006). Mainstream publishers, keen to target the new readership created by the independents, moved quickly to occupy the same terrain.

The rapid growth and artistic impact of *bande dessinée* reportage is attested by the decision of the Centre Pompidou to hold an exhibition called "BD Reporters," from December 2006 to April 2007, which brought together the work of twenty-three artists, including Sacco himself. Not all of these have the political ambition of Sacco's work, some artists preferring instead to portray atmosphere and subjective states of mind. This is the case for Edmond Baudoin, whose *Le chemin de Saint-Jean* (2004) details the changing appearance of a childhood haunt as it reflects his own mood, his graphic line ranging from delicate to crude. The outer landscape seems less important here than the inner landscape that it reveals. In contrast, Philippe Dupuy and Charles Berberian deploy their elegant graphic style to convey the sophisticated glamour of their subject matter. The images in *New-York carnets* (1996) have all the stylishness of *The New Yorker*, and *Tanger carnets* (2004) has an orientalist allure. Both were published by Cornélius. The *Carnets de voyage 2000–3* (2003) by Jacques de Loustal, published by the well-respected tradebook publisher Éditions du Seuil, offers a series of impressions of exotic destinations from Ireland to Namibia, but whereas Dupuy and Berberian maintain a certain ironic detachment, Loustal's images are steeped in sensuality and hint at erotic secrets.

Glamour is less in evidence in the work of a number of other artists who, like Sacco, bring a political perspective to bear on the genre. Etienne Davodeau's *Les mauvaises gens* (2005), published by the mainstream *bande dessinée* publisher Delcourt, falls midway between biography and reportage, offering a painstakingly respectful record of his parents' account of their political education in the post-World War II period. Both manual workers, brought up in a deeply conservative Catholic milieu, they gradually gain in

class consciousness and militancy. Neither is at first convinced that their story is worth recounting, but Davodeau uses his sober, realist line to emphasize the exemplarity of their transformation. The album² won the “best scenario” prize at Angoulême in 2006.

In the three volumes of *Le photographe* (2003–6), published by the mainstream *bande dessinée* publisher Dupuis, Emmanuel Guibert, like Davodeau, brings careful realism to the service of someone else’s story. These three books, classed among the select group of “essential” comic books at Angoulême in 2007, are composed from the contact prints taken by the photographer Didier Lefèvre on a Doctors Without Borders mission into Afghanistan in 1986, at the time of the Soviet occupation. The photographs have been rearranged into a narrative account by Guibert and Frédéric Lemercier, with the gaps where no photograph exists filled in by Guibert’s drawings. The juxtaposition of drawings with photographs reinforces the documentary, almost diagrammatic, effect of this record of the work that the doctors carried out in extreme conditions, and, more particularly, of the lives of the mujahidine with whom they traveled.

The Québécois artist Guy Delisle produced *Shenzhen* in 2000 and *Pyongyang* in 2003, both for L’Association, based on his experiences of supervising the production of animated cartoons outsourced to artists in China and North Korea respectively. Delisle makes no pretense of objectivity, eschewing both the reverential line of Davodeau and the referential line of Guibert, in favor of a highly personal vision of his encounter with two cultures from which he feels alienated. Delisle uses a deceptively naïve drawing style, and makes formidable use of the resources of *bande dessinée*. In Pyongyang, for example, the all-pervasive impression of ideological uniformity is rendered by a vertiginous *mise en abyme*, as the Kim Il-Sung badge worn by his son Kim Jong-Il is gradually enlarged to reveal that the great leader is wearing a badge portraying his son, which in its turn is gradually enlarged, only to reveal a portrait of the father wearing a badge portraying the son, and so on, ad infinitum (Delisle 2003: 30).

“La Présidente” is similarly virtuoso in its exploitation of the potential of the medium. It came out in 1996, the same year as the French translation of Sacco’s *Palestine*, and so predates all but one of the examples discussed above. As well as providing an account of the daily routine of the female politician who is its subject, it dramatizes the process of its own engendering, as the authors abandon fiction for reportage. Before looking closely at the twenty-eight-page strip itself, we will consider its publishing context.

REPORTAGE IN "LA PRÉSIDENTE"

The twenty-six-page comic strip appeared in a volume entitled *Noire est la terre* [Black is the Earth] published in 1996 by Autrement, a publisher with an alternative agenda and an intellectual readership. It was the fourth in a collection called not *bandes dessinées* but *histoires graphiques* [graphic stories], a choice of term presumably intended to reinforce the seriousness of the undertaking. The volumes tackle heavyweight subject matter: the first three, all published in 1994, cover *L'argent roi* [Money is King], *Le retour de Dieu* [God's Return], and *Avoir 20 ans en l'an 2000* [To Be Twenty Years Old in the Year 2000]. The collection was edited by Thierry Groensteen, in a format which clearly distinguishes it from mainstream *bande dessinée*. Like albums produced by independent publishers such as L'Association and Ego comme X, it has soft covers and flaps, described by Genette as "une marque de prestige" [a sign of prestige] (Genette 1987: 30). The series was not successful. In his Internet journal, in an entry for 1995, Groensteen expresses his disappointment at the poor sales: the third volume had sold only twenty-five hundred copies. He blames the failure of the first three volumes on the conservatism of *bande dessinée* readership, on Autrement's inefficient distribution, and on himself, for being insufficiently interventionist in cases where the scenarios were weak. He admits that he was reluctant to be too demanding, given the paltriness of the fees on offer to the artists (Groensteen 1995).

The charge of weakness could certainly not be leveled against the Menu/Blutch strip, or against the contributions of Lewis Trondheim or Chantal Montellier. Trondheim's strip is a witty observation of the rural fantasy of city dwellers as it dissolves into anxieties and bickering, whereas the ever-combative Montellier offers a futurist fable about a female ecologist militant who becomes prime minister, thereby provoking misogynistic reactions. Not all of the scenarios in the 1996 volume would be similarly exempted, however. Hunt Emerson relies on a plot involving evil capitalists who want to build a factory that will pollute the countryside, in a strip heavily sprinkled with magic mushrooms and gloom. The impenetrability of a strip by Frédéric Bézian may also be attributed to poor writing, although it could, alternatively, be taken as evidence of the capacity of *bande dessinée* to require a *disposition esthétique* [aesthetic disposition] beyond that of this reader at least (Bourdieu 1979: iii).

"La Présidente" is the most complex and interesting of the five strips. It begins with a fiction based on an ecological disaster, in which the president and his ministers and advisers attempt to manipulate public opinion

by claiming that the Green Party has deliberately sabotaged a nuclear power station in order to gain votes.³ A number of classic *bande dessinée* techniques are in evidence in this part of the story. The Eiffel Tower appears in the first frame as a metonym for Paris, the center of decision making, followed by the gilded mirrors and the Aubusson carpet of the Elysée Palace,⁴ which evoke the milieu of a powerful and privileged elite. The interframe space is used to convey speed of movement, as the stages of the hastily summoned minister's journey to the palace are elided, and the vehicles are drawn as having left the ground, their élan emphasized by speed lines. Suspense is created by allusions to time: a clock in the bottom right-hand frame of the first page ticks away as the crisis deepens. The dramatic events are reframed on television screens, recalling Hergé's use of newspapers to inscribe the fictional world into a preexisting reality (Fresnault-Deruelle 1972: 112), and the impact of the news is heightened by the progressive increase in the size of the screen across a sequence of three frames, giving the impression of a zoom. The reader's sense of being plunged right into the fictional world is intensified through the absence of recitatives; instead, the president and his entourage are deployed as second-level narrators, interpreting the televisual images with cynicism and taking it for granted that political strategy involves deception and spin.

However, halfway through the third page, the boundaries of the fiction are transgressed as Jean-Christophe Menu appears in the space between the frames, the space of the enunciation, and a speech balloon in the adjacent frame containing the word "merde" [shit] takes on an ambiguous status (figure 1). It seems simultaneously to belong to the diegesis, emanating from an out-of-frame speaker, and to represent a metaleptic intrusion by Menu himself into the fiction, with which he expresses irritation. Prior to this page some indications had in any case been offered that the artists were deliberately undermining the credibility of their story. Writers of political fiction are always faced with the question of how far to make the fictional world congruent with the real world, and specifically, with the question of how far characters should be identifiable as real-life politicians. The president in this story is not identified by name, and is clearly neither François Mitterrand nor Jacques Chirac, although he looks a little like Charles de Gaulle, who perhaps stands as a generic presidential figure. Similarly, the spokesperson for the Green Party is not named, but bears a certain resemblance to Dominique Voynet. However, Blutch and Menu make it hard to believe in any of these figures by using names of *bande dessinée* characters for some of the other politicians. One is called Scramoustache, an allusion to an extraterrestrial (Scrameustache in the original) drawn by Gos in *Spirou*, and another is called Cubitus, after the dog



Fig. 1. Jean-Christophe Menu breaks the fictional illusion. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

drawn by Dupa in *Tintin* magazine.⁵ The story also seems to slip into parody once the fictional illusion has been completely broken by the appearance of Menu at his desk. The dialogue now takes on the redundancy of a discussion between Dupont and Dupond:⁶ "Pour être propres, nous sommes propres" [As far as clean goes, we're clean now]; "Vous l'avez dit" [You said it]. This is

not quite “Je dirai même plus . . .” [And let me add to that . . .]⁷ but it seems to be veering in that direction. The president’s final words are “Passons à côté, messieurs” [Let’s go next door, gentlemen], which suggests some meta-narrative insight on his part into the demise of his own central role as he heads out of the frame. The suspense at the end of this page is also meta-narrative, as the reader wonders what will happen to the scenario.

The answer arrives on the next page, which is devoted to a discussion between the two authors. They decide to abandon the fiction, on the grounds that it recalls too closely the postatomic scenarios familiar from 1970s *bande dessinée*: “J’ai peur qu’on s’embourbe dans une espèce d’histoire baba post-atomique à la Auclair ou à la Cothias, tu vois” [I’m afraid that we’re going to get stuck in a worn-out rut, a kind of hippy, post-nuclear story like Auclair or Cothias would do];⁸ “Un truc ‘Bédé’” [A “Bédé” thing]; “L’horreur” [Horrific]. The danger no longer resides within the diegesis; it lies instead in the temptation to fall into this type of plot, and the image of the nuclear power station in flames may now be read as *mise en abyme* of *bande dessinée* in its hippy period. This rejection of ancestors (which, however, excludes series evocative of childhood reading⁹) is clearly part of the strategy of renewal of the medium that has been led by artists from the independent publishing houses. Blutch and Menu will now go on to demonstrate another plank of the strategy: that of extending it beyond fiction.

They decide to produce a *bande dessinée* reportage that will document two days in the working life of a real politician, Marie-Christine Blandin, the first Green to hold elected office. Blandin had become president of the region of Nord-Pas de Calais after the 1992 regional elections had resulted in a hung council.¹⁰ Blutch and Menu’s visit to the region is arranged with Blandin’s public relations adviser, and is deliberately timed to coincide with the arrival of a delegation from Mali, including the president and his wife. The next section of this chapter will discuss the representation given by the two artists to Blandin’s project, particularly in relation to a spatialized conception of citizenship and regional identity, before considering how the strip demonstrates the particular aptness of *bande dessinée* as a vehicle for reportage. The final section will use the strip to exemplify a more general discussion of what *bande dessinée* can bring to reportage.

“LA PRÉSIDENTE” AND HER PROJECT

Referentiality is established from the outset by exact details of place and time. It is stated that the authors set off from the Gare du Nord on Thursday,

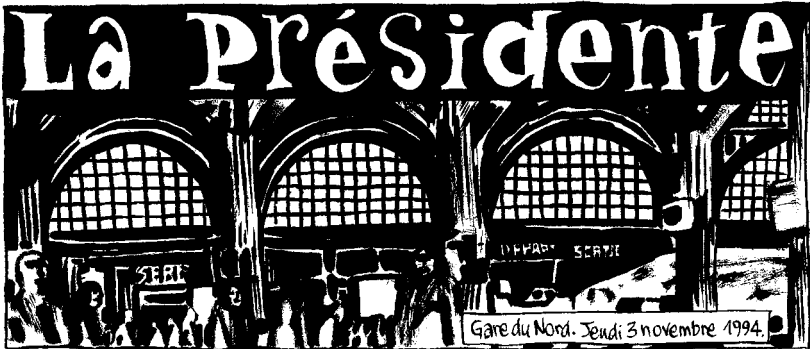


Fig. 2. The title sets the tone for a new vision of citizenship. From Blutch and Menu (1996) “La Présidente,” n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L’Association.

November 3, 1994, situating the reportage near the end of Mitterrand’s second term in office, during the period of political cohabitation with Edouard Balladur (figure 2).¹¹ More prominent, though, is the title, “La Présidente,” the large letters of which emphasize the feminization of the word, a challenge to the principle of universalism on which the Republic is founded. Françoise Gaspard, writing in 1996, points out that it is still generally held that “revendiquer la féminisation de son titre, dès lors qu’il s’agit de fonctions de direction . . . c’est être ridicule ou atteint(e) du virus du ‘Politiquement correcte’” [Demanding the feminization of one’s title, when this is connected to leadership responsibilities, is to be seen as ridiculous or ill with the virus of “political correctness”]. The effect of this prevailing viewpoint is to “rendre invisibles les femmes qui s’infiltrèrent dans un milieu masculin” [render invisible the women who infiltrate a masculine milieu] (Gaspard 1996: 163–64). In this strip women in power will become visible. In addition to Blandin herself, we will meet a pregnant regional councillor who offers a play on the theme of the volume as a whole, as she proudly draws attention to her pregnancy, proclaiming “Voilà l’écologie au pouvoir” [Here’s ecology in power], a gesture accentuated by Blutch with *bande dessinée* speed lines.

The new kind of politics that Blandin aims to create will involve not only a challenge to the “universalized” masculinity of the citizen, but also a conception of what citizenship means at the regional level. It is this particular inflection of citizenship as both gendered and local that the strip puts forward, against the background of a certain dissolution of national identity. The President of the Republic, the abstract embodiment of its values, is evoked, but through the news that has just hit the headlines of Mitterrand’s

more carnal embodiment of bourgeois adultery. This occurs when Blutch, at the Gare du Nord, buys a copy of *Paris Match*, which carries photographs of “La fille cachée du Président” [The president’s hidden daughter].¹² Moreover, as the two reporters, Blutch and Menu, are in transit, a frame with the caption “A travers la France” [Across France] shows the country as no place at all, just a blur, as the TGV compresses space and time, and a collective sense of being French is reduced to shared indulgence in the tabloid press.

It is, then, Blandin’s program for Nord-Pas de Calais¹³ that the strip will present as exemplifying a revival of citizenship and community. This has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. The region has suffered the destabilizing effects of postindustrial decline, devastated not only by unemployment but by pollution of the soil and water caused by the irresponsibility of generations of industrialists.¹⁴ Blandin insists on the importance of making a radical break with the past: “Ce qu’on veut, c’est que les gens acceptent de faire le deuil du système débile dans lequel on vit” [We want people to agree to give up for dead the stupid system in which we are living] and this will only happen through “une pratique de la démocratie au quotidien” [an everyday practice of democracy], a process that is, however, shown to be tortuously slow. Night falls on Lille as roundtable discussions aimed to bring different factions together seem interminable. Whereas the resources of *bande dessinée* were used to indicate the speed and excitement of political decision-making in the fictional portrayal of the exercise of power, they are now deployed to signify instead its laboriousness and banality. The metonym here is not the Eiffel Tower but the bottle of mineral water, the paper cup, and the other minutiae of meetings. A large blank space conveys a long silence, which gives way to a ponderous debate in which everyone must have a turn. The absence of closure of the frame, as one speaker’s flow of words merges with that of another, suggests an unconstrained volubility, filling up all the space that would normally allow dead time to be excised. The unusual placing of the recitative—“La nuit tombe sur Lille” [Night falls on Lille]—at the bottom of a panel seems to show how heavily time is hanging for the two reporters, whose torpor is depicted in the next panel. It is nonetheless clear that the region is moving in a new direction, and *bande dessinée*, as a medium which tends to favor reinscription over mere documentary record, enables them not only to transcribe the present but to symbolize the way forward and impart Blandin’s vision.

This is achieved in large part through the representation of space. *Bande dessinée* is a spatial medium, the region is a spatial entity, the word citizenship itself contains a reference to the idea of city, and the new kind of regional citizenship that Blandin puts forward is based on a particular

conception of space. This has two aspects to it. One relates to the way in which the imaginary space of the region as a whole is constructed. The region is obviously bounded by administrative borders, but it will gain a sense of identity not by reinforcing these borders but by creating transnational relationships. This does not imply the embrace of a globalized marketplace but rather the favoring of decentralized cooperation with French-speaking developing countries from one region to another. It is made clear in the strip that this is not the hierarchical relationship of Paris to ex-colonial capitals, or of bodies such as Unesco to national governments. It involves support for intermediate technology in a Vietnamese village, for example, and cultural exchanges like the one that brings an artist from the Ivory Coast to a local cultural center.

The space of the region thereby becomes postnational and lateral, and the sense of place is created by an openness to other places. This way of imagining citizenship corresponds to Etienne Balibar's description of "la citoyenneté de demain" [tomorrow's citizenship]: "Cette citoyenneté ne sera pas a-nationale, ou antinationale, mais inévitablement transnationale" [This citizenship will not be a-national or antinational, but inevitably transnational] (Balibar 2002: 11). The reinvention of politics, he suggests, must involve "une fonction de réciprocité et d'ouverture *locale* sur les solidarités et les conflits de l'espace *global*" [a function of reciprocity and local openness onto the solidarities and the conflicts of *global* space] (15). This invention of a boundary-crossing definition of citizenship is exemplified by the account of a visit to a new *quartier* [neighborhood] in Faches-Thumesnil, a dormitory suburb of Lille (figure 3). The party, which includes Blandin, the mayor and various other local officials, the Malian visitors, and the two reporters, walks through it in order to inaugurate the street named after a town in Mali.

The arrangement of the frames on the page follows the progress of the group, which winds itself around the centrally positioned frame displaying the Tinkaré street name. Their somewhat ritualized procession, both through the *quartier* and across the page, is akin to the "geste cheminatoire" [walking gesture/epic] in Michel de Certeau's term, through which spatial organization is invested with references and quotations (de Certeau 1990: 152). Names are in themselves an alternative mapping of the city, as de Certeau points out. They articulate "une géographie seconde, poétique, sur la géographie au sens littéral . . . Ils insinuent d'autres voyages dans l'ordre fonctionaliste" [a second, poetic geography onto the literal one . . . They insinuate other voyages into the functionalist order] (158). This new *quartier* explicitly defines itself by its relationship with an African place. Those who come to Faches-

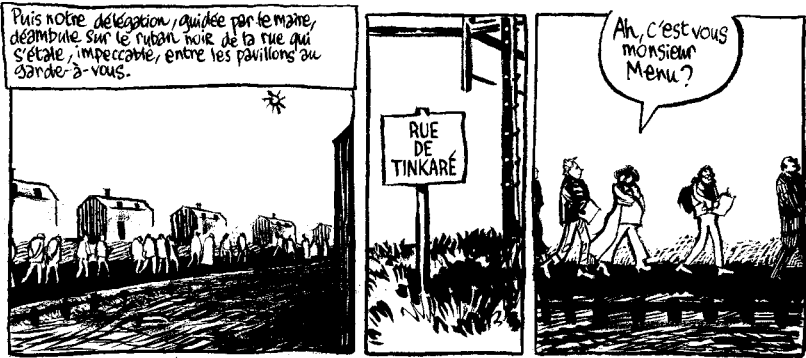


Fig. 3. An imaginary topography of the city. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

Thumesnil will also be taken on a poetic journey to Africa, and the imaginary topography deliberately introduced by the naming ceremony is conjured up by the spatial disposition of the panels.

The sense that citizenship is linked to a certain way of conceiving space has a second aspect in this strip. The city of Lille is resolutely mapped out as public space by Blandin's own path through it. De Certeau (1990: 148) says that the act of walking is to the urban system what enunciation is to language: it is a way for the pedestrian to appropriate the topographic system. In one section of this strip, it seems that the enunciatory system of *bande dessinée*, based on narrative and formal links between frames, as well as the *mise en page* [visual arrangement or editing] of the *planche*⁵ as a whole, has been taken over by Blandin. Disconcertingly and disorientingly for the two reporters and for the reader, Blandin leads them to the Palais des Congrès [Meeting Hall] by an unexpected route (figure 4). They walk out of the page toward the left, before reemerging in the center of the page to follow her through the department store Printemps. But Blandin is very clear about her own route: this is not a space of postmodernity in which citizens have turned into consumers. "Ne vous inquiétez pas. Je ne fais pas mes courses" [Don't worry, I'm not doing my shopping], she reassures them. She determinedly ignores the blandishments of the marketplace and instead uses the shop as a shortcut through to the forum for democratic debate.

De Certeau (1990: 151–52) also assimilates individual ways of walking through a city to stylistic tropes: "L'art de 'tourner' des phrases a pour équivalent un art de tourner des parcours" [The equivalent of the art of 'turning' sentences is the art of turning circuits]. If the geometric space created



Fig. 4. Routes through the space of the page and the city. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

by urbanists is like the "sens propre" [literal meaning] of grammarians, he says, then departures from the orthodox routes create a "sens figure" [figurative meaning]. This contrast is graphically represented at the bottom of the same page: the straight line of the commercial street gives way to the more feminized curved line of the corridors of the Palais des Congrès, and the

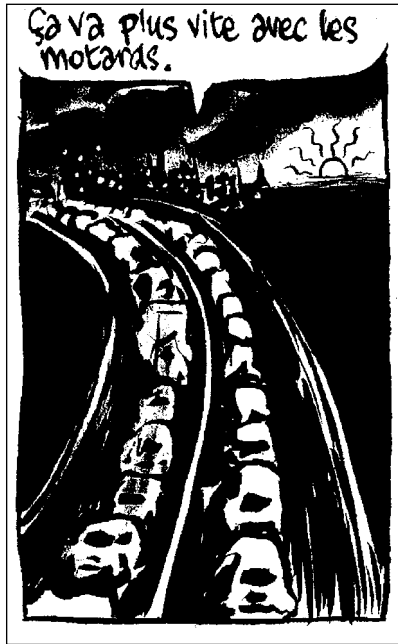


Fig. 5. The motif of the curved line: the democratic project. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

sequence ends on the circle of the roundtable, symbol both of femininity and of participatory democracy. The figure of the curved line is repeated a few pages further on, as the reporters are taken to visit a laboratory that is experimenting with ecologically sound ways of controlling parasites in developing countries, thereby avoiding the need for chemical pesticides. The recurrence of the motif, transferred from an interior corridor to the open road, conveys the dynamism with which the Green project is moving forward on the ground, beyond the debating chamber and out into concrete changes in practice (figure 5).

In his discussion of theories of the postmodern city, Max Silverman points to a concern over the decline of a sense of civic duty and a public sphere. This is a tendency against which, as we have seen, Blandin works. Silverman (1999: 76–95) also highlights perceptions of the increasing fragmentation of city space, and its uprooting from connections with history, memory, and identity. Parts of the Menu/Blutch strip are concerned less with Blandin's political project than with the two reporters' own experience of the



Fig. 6. A gap opens up in remembered time. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

city. At first, they are transported breathlessly from place to place: Blutch says, in a rather panic-stricken way, "Je sais pas dessiner les espaces" [I dunno how to draw spaces]. They travel in a chauffeur-driven car, just like the fictional politician in the opening story, in which ellipses between frames are used to accelerate the journey through Paris to the Elysée Palace. And, for Menu in particular, there will be a sudden disjunction between outer and inner space. As he and Blutch are driven through Faches Thumesnil, they pass "Carrosserie Menu," the car body repair shop that belonged to his grandfather, whose house is next door (figure 6). In the next frame, Menu loses his bearings as they arrive at the recently built Médiathèque [media library] Marguerite Yourcenar,¹⁶ reflecting the rapid rise of the culture industry that accompanied the demise of heavy industry in the region. The interframe space now serves not simply to elide stages of a journey but to emphasize discontinuity, as the familiar is transformed into the unfamiliar and childhood memories are disturbed. However, when Menu goes with Blutch to visit the grandfather a few *planches* further on, white space within the frame becomes invested with remembered time, and then, as they leave half an hour later, depth of focus draws attention to the reforging of a link, however fragile, between subjectivity and outward surroundings (figure 7).

Moreover, as the strip continues, the two reporters' impression of the city becomes less fragmented. The official schedule itself begins to give more importance to transitional spaces, through the tour around the new *quartier* and the amble through the old city, as the Malian delegation insists on walking. Menu and Blutch also follow a more idiosyncratic itinerary, including a zigzag progression through the streets of Lille, after they have taken advan-



Fig. 7. Depth of focus invests space with emotion. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

tage of the hospitality offered at the Palais des Congrès. On the following day they get lost, but, after asking for directions, are able to guide themselves and the reader past local landmarks and make their own way to their destination. *Bande dessinée* is an art form that may eliminate or accentuate distance at will, and can collapse the depth of time into the flatness of space. Here, though, it is used to reestablish meaningful spatial connections and to combat the erasure of the past by giving expression to the intensity of personal memory.

BANDE DESSINÉE AS REPORTAGE

I argue in this section that *bande dessinée* has resources that make it an effective medium for reportage. These include its plurivocality, as speech balloons, expressions, and gestures allow for dialogue and divergence from the narrating instance that occupies the recitative boxes. Furthermore, narrating instances may themselves be inscribed in multiple ways that allow for gradations in detachment or subjectivity.

Plurivocality may not be immediately evident in this strip, given the extent to which Blandin is given the floor through a long interview, and the

degree to which the reporters seem to endorse her viewpoint. Unlike the rest of the strip, the interview is derived from a mechanical recording. However, the physical inscription involved in reproducing her words by hand seems to implicate the artists as co-enunciators, and the close-up images of her that accompany the blocks of text serve as attestations of her sincerity. It is, of course, harder to create engaging *bande dessinée* out of approval rather than disapproval, a point made by cartoonist Robert Crumb (1989) in a recitative preceding his story “I’m grateful! I’m grateful!”: “Why do I have to be so negative? Well, the truth is it’s easier and more fun to draw the bad stuff—it’s a lot more tedious trying to show the nice side of things.” The artists are undoubtedly aware of this: the rhetoric of pious internationalist sentiments, as the Malian delegation are welcomed and make speeches in turn, is, in fact, portrayed as tedious, as Blutch focuses on the somnolence of the audience and depicts his own weariness. Even so, approval is explicitly registered when the polite applause is unexpectedly enlivened by Menu’s solo, and indeed tearful, standing ovation.

Nonetheless, other voices and attitudes, not all in harmony, come into play in the strip. Some of the contradictions inherent in the breaking down of national and cultural hierarchies are illustrated through the page devoted to the Ivoirian artist Théodore Koudougnon. The exhibition of his collages in the Médiathèque and the respectful attention of the delegation invite a reading of it not as exotic folk art but as high culture: this is emphasized when Menu, commenting in the foreground to Blutch, likens it to the work of the avant-garde Catalan artist Tàpies. However, the cultural values that Koudougnon attaches to his own work are resistant to this kind of assimilation and there is an awkward moment when he declares that it celebrates polygamy; the nervous laughter of the attendant officials and journalists is carefully rendered by Blutch through the tiny onomatopoeias. The situation is resolved when this uncomfortable reassertion of a gender hierarchy is challenged not by Blandin, who is pictured with her eyes averted, but by the diplomatic intervention of the wife of the president of Mali, there as a VIP guest.

Recalcitrance to official discourses is also represented by the chauffeur, Guy, something of a *beauf* [redneck], whose attempt to engage the reporters in male camaraderie through references to the Paris Saint-Germain soccer team meets with their embarrassed incomprehension. During the half hour that he waits for them to emerge from Menu’s grandfather’s house, he leaves his engine running (figure 7). Again, this is rendered by an onomatopoeia, the device used in mainstream *bande dessinée* to celebrate the exhilaratingly reckless expenditure of energy on the production of speed and noise, but

here discreetly ironic, since Guy's views on the environmental policies of his employers do not need to be spelled out.

The many different ways in which the presence of the narrators is registered in this strip increase the complexity of their perception of the subject matter. Their graphic selves and their reactions, bored or intensely involved, are frequently included in the margins of frames, and the scene is often drawn from their optical viewpoint in the few frames where they are not present. Some appearances by the narrators are meta-discursive: they draw themselves drawing, and thereby invite the reader in turn to contemplate the process of representing real events through the medium of *bande dessinée*.

The recitatives offer a reflective commentary on the events of the two days, written with some distance and hindsight, whereas the dialogue given to the two narrators in speech balloons gives their spontaneous reactions. Contrasts in the angle of vision replicate this distinction in visual terms. Some images seem to offer immediacy of perception: for example, the artists are caught up in the excitement when the car of the president of Mali comes into view. Others suggest something remembered and composed, particularly where there is a high angle of vision: this is the case for the depiction of the room where the *assises régionales* [regional assembly meetings] are held.

The graphic line is never merely descriptive or documentary: Blutch himself has specified: "J'essaie d'éviter le côté descriptif du dessin" [I try to avoid the descriptive aspect of drawing] (Dayez 2002: 44). The modalizing effect of his style allows for the expression of different levels of certainty and clarity. The key moment of cross-cultural exchange, represented by the panel made up of the president of Mali and the local elected officials, is drawn with elegant precision, whereas the confusion of the dash from one place to another is rendered with blotchy approximation. Sometimes levels of iconicity vary within the same frame: as Blandin greets the president, the crowd of journalists who partially obscure the reporters' vision are dark shadows in the foreground, but the key players are pictured in careful detail, symbolically posed with hands outstretched in friendship. Modalization may imply a judgmental stance: whereas Blandin is granted approval, the portrayal of the *préfet*,¹⁷ who clearly wishes to disassociate himself from her policy of decentralized cooperation, is cruel.

One of the key resources of the medium, the readiness with which it allows for permeability between the external setting of the diegetic world and the purely mental images of characters, at first seems absent, and one supposes that the artists have decided that it would be inappropriate in a reportage. However, the final panel contradicts this assumption (figure 8). The two reporters walk out of the frame toward the left in the penultimate

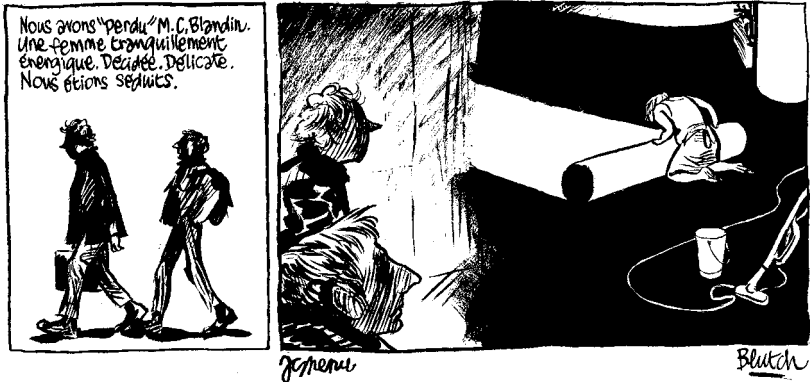


Fig. 8. The work of turning political fiction into political reality. From Blutch and Menu (1996) "La Présidente," n.p.; © Blutch / JCMenu / L'Association.

panel, while a recitative delivers their positive verdict on Blandin. The final panel, apparently illogically, then shows them gazing from left to right toward a woman on her knees rolling up a carpet, presumably red, with cleaning implements in the foreground. However, the dark background against which she is shown indicates that she does not occupy the same space as the artists, and that the image of her is a subjective one on their part. The invasion of the nonfictional space of the reportage by this make-believe element forces the reader to assess its significance.

It may refer back to an exchange that takes place during the long interview with Blandin. Here Menu had explained to her that they had at first set out to write a fiction, "mais on ne le sentait vraiment pas" [we really weren't getting into it]. She had responded by saying that attempts to create a new kind of politics also seem like "de la politique-fiction" [political fiction], a remark interestingly echoed by Balibar a few years later. He asserts that the reinvention of politics through an emphasis on the crossing rather than the reinforcing of frontiers necessarily means venturing out into "les lieux de la fiction" [places of fiction]: profound change has to be imagined before it can become real (Balibar 2002: 15). Blandin's work, we may therefore understand, is to turn fiction into reality. On this occasion, that has involved not only the public fronting of the spectacle of international cooperation at the regional level but also, the artists seem to imply, the kind of behind-the-scenes drudgery often performed by women and often unacknowledged. This silent coda to the reportage would, in this reading, be interpreted as a reflection upon the reality of politics as laborious *mise-en-scène*, the precondition for making the impossible happen.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated a recent tendency in *bande dessinée*, reportage, focusing on a groundbreaking example of the genre. In so doing it has aimed to demonstrate that, as a spatial medium, *bande dessinée* is well suited to the rendering of a political project that depends on a particular conception of regional citizenship, one that seeks to make connections across borders and to reclaim city space as a public sphere. It is, furthermore, just as able to exploit its resources to convey the slow grinding of democracy in action, and to suggest the density of remembered time, as it is to speed up the action in political fiction. The chapter has also argued that the reportage is made more effective by the capacity of *bande dessinée* for plurivocality as well as for the plurality of ways in which narratorial intervention can be made apparent. Ultimately, it is the essence of a medium that does not solely depend on mechanical reproduction but is mediated by the artists' hands and eyes that accounts for the impact of this highly nuanced and personal portrayal of the political process.

Notes

1. For a definition of this term, please see above, p. xiii.
2. For a definition of this term, please see above, p. xiii.
3. Since the strip is unpaginated, no page references will be given.
4. The palatial residence and offices of the French president.
5. *Spirou* (1938–present) and *Tintin* (1946–93) magazines are classic children's *bande dessinée* magazines, Belgian at their beginnings, but which were quickly distributed in France or launched French editions.
6. Dupont and Dupond, the two look-alike Thomson detective characters from the classic Tintin series by Belgian artist Hergé [pseud. Georges Remi; 1907–83]. In the French version, the only things that (barely) distinguish them are the last letter of their surnames, and the slight difference in the shape of their mustaches. The two are usually ridiculous and often serve to provide comic relief.
7. A well-known line said by one of the Dupond/Dupont after a statement by the other one: the humor of the line derives from the fact that the added commentary only ever restates in other words what the first detective had already said, thereby adding nothing to the conversation aside from a reformulation of something previously stated and obvious.
8. Claude Auclair (1943–90) was a French cartoonist whose best-known works focus on colonized cultural minorities (Caribbeans and Bretons). Patrick Cothias (1948–) is a scriptwriter.
9. Including *Les Tuniques bleues* [The Blue Tunics] (Cauvin and Salvé, from 1968), the series which gave rise to Blutch's sobriquet.
10. Blandin, a biology teacher by training and the first woman to be president of a regional council in metropolitan France, is now a national senator from the Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

11. Mitterrand (1916–96) was the Socialist Party president of France, 1981–95. He shared power successively with two different right-wing prime ministers—Jacques Chirac and Balladur—during separate periods of political cohabitation (1986–88; 1993–95), after the right won the majority of seats in national legislative elections.

12. *Paris Match* is an illustrated French weekly that is a cross between *Life* magazine and a tabloid (its famous slogan translates as “the weight of words, the shock of photos”). The Gare du Nord is the Paris train station from which trains run to the northern part of France, including the large metropolitan area of Lille and adjoining municipalities (Tourcoing, Roubaix, etc.), to which the cartoonists travel in this *bande dessinée*. The hidden child that *Paris Match* revealed to the public (no doubt with the blessing of the fatally ill Mitterrand) in 1994 is Mazarine Pingeot (1974–), the daughter of Mitterrand and a mistress, Anne Pingeot, a curator at the Musée d’Orsay, in Paris.

13. The northernmost of France’s modern-day regions, of which there are twenty-six total. Lille is its capital city.

14. Just one year previously, *Germinal* had been filmed in the region, with something of a nadir in postmodern irony being reached through the redeployment of unemployed ex-miners as film extras portraying novelist Emile Zola’s strikers. The media attention arising out of the film led to the opening of a mining museum, partly financed by the region, of which the reconstruction of *le Voreux*, the mine of Zola’s novel, is still the main attraction. Blandin makes no mention of this, clearly more concerned to deal with the real consequences of the past than to recycle a mythologized past as heritage.

15. For a definition of this term, please see above, p. xiv.

16. Yourcenar [pseud. Crayencour, Marguerite de] (1903–87) was born in Belgium and eventually settled in the United States. She was the first woman elected to the French Academy (1980), a prestigious, old French state institution composed of forty authors.

17. An important administrative official at the level of the *département*, of which there are one hundred in France today, and of the *région* (the *préfet* of the *département* where the regional government is located also serves as a *préfet* for the *région*). The state-appointed *préfet* represents the top-down authority of the national government, whereas the elected assembly of the *région* or the *département* theoretically represents a more democratic, bottom-up form of governance. The regional *préfet* has oversight of various aspects of the regional government, including the budget voted by its assembly. Hence the potential for rivalry between Blandin and the *préfet*.

Games Without Frontiers

THE REPRESENTATION OF POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN SCHUITEN AND PEETERS'S *LA FRONTIÈRE INVISIBLE*

“Ainsi fut construit jadis et se construit sans cesse le monument cartographique à jamais présent—hors-temps , hors espace—de la représentation, le monument mémorial du roi et de son géomètre.” [And thus was once built and is unceasingly built the forever present, cartographic monument—outside of time, outside of space—of representation, the memorial monument of the king and his surveyor]

—**LOUIS MARIN**, *Le Portrait du roi* (1981: 220)

“when we make a map it is not only a metonymic substitution but also an ethical statement about the world . . . [it] is a political issue.”

—**J. B. HARLEY**, “Cartography, Ethics, and Social Theory” (1990: 6)

In a chapter of his essay *Le portrait du roi* [Portrait of the King], entitled “Le roi et son géomètre” [The King and His Surveyor], Louis Marin reflects on the hegemonic nature of mapping by analyzing Jacques Gomboust’s 1652 map of Paris, not only as an epistemological object characteristic of scientific endeavor during the reign of Louis XIV, but also as a political



Fig. 1. De Cremer in front of the Cartography Center (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 1, p. 10)
© Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

project designed to assert and glorify Louis's absolute monarchy (Marin 1981: 209–20). Although more recent studies on cartography have furthered the analysis of the inherent linkage between politics and the production of spatial knowledge and identity (Crampton 2002: 23), Marin's essay remains a seminal model in the field of political semiotics and discourse analysis, and clearly shows how power relations are inscribed within representational systems, and vice versa. Interestingly, Marin's chapter also describes quite adequately the codependency of a political leader and his official cartographer, which is at play in *La frontière invisible* [The Invisible Frontier], the latest, two-volume installment of Benoît Peeters's and François Schuiten's ambitious series of graphic novels, "Les cités obscures" [Cities of the Fantastic]. This subject matter echoes a consistent network of meta-representational strategies and political themes within Schuiten and Peeters's body of work, which I will examine in this essay.

La frontière invisible tells the story of a young cartographer, Roland De Cremer, who enters the professional world when he is appointed to the Cartography Center, a strange, dome-shaped structure in the middle of a desert, in his home country of Sodrovno-Voldachia (figure 1). Although De Cremer's new surroundings constitute the archetype of the *fantastique* [fantastic] locus

(isolated, alienating, labyrinthine) and entail intertextual references to Dino Buzzatti or Julien Gracq narratives of a young man assigned to the remote outpost of a faceless power, the story is more Bildungsroman than fantastic melancholia, as it focuses primarily on the professional and sentimental education of the inexperienced cartographer. From the beginning, De Cremer is confronted with conflicting methodologies and agendas. Yet uncritical of his own cartographic training, he tends at first to simply objectify maps, does not question their bias or authority, and remains generally in an undialectical relationship with the documents he is required to archive, analyze, and produce. However, his understanding of mapping devices is quickly problematized, when he receives contradicting advice from two colleagues. I use the word “problematized” here in the Foucauldian sense, meaning that “an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices which were accepted without question, which were familiar and ‘silent,’ out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions” (Foucault 2001: 74).

On one hand, De Cremer must adjust to a recent government mandate, which requires new scientific methods of inquiry: the collection of “objective” data by a computer-assisted process, under the supervision of the mysterious and menacing Ismail Djunov, a *néotechnologue* [neo-technologist] brought in to modernize the center’s methods of mapping. Djunov’s strange and tentacular machines—full of tubes, wires, buttons, and displays of all kinds (1: 31)—are themselves consistent with a recurrent theme in “Les cités obscures”: the early modern machine, retro-futuristic in its appearance, part utopian technology, part monstrous device, which characterizes the alternate, otherworldly modernity of Schuiten and Peeters’s parallel universe. *La frontière invisible* contains other machines of this kind, for instance, some decidedly Jules-Vernian modes of transportation which include a network of suspended bicycles (1: 26–29), which provide city travelers an overhanging perspective akin to that of cartography, and giant single-wheel vehicles (2: 7–8, 39–43) that seem fantastic, yet technologically credible, like the world of the “Cités obscures” itself. Although both modes of transportation appear equally whimsical, they belong to different technological strata. The technological leap between the foot-powered bicycle and the new motorized vehicles is akin to that between the hand-drawn map and the electronically traced one, in that a new technology is making an old one obsolete.

Djunov’s machines are, in essence, mere mimetic operators: they are designed to produce a metonymic *calque* [traced image] of reality, to automatically

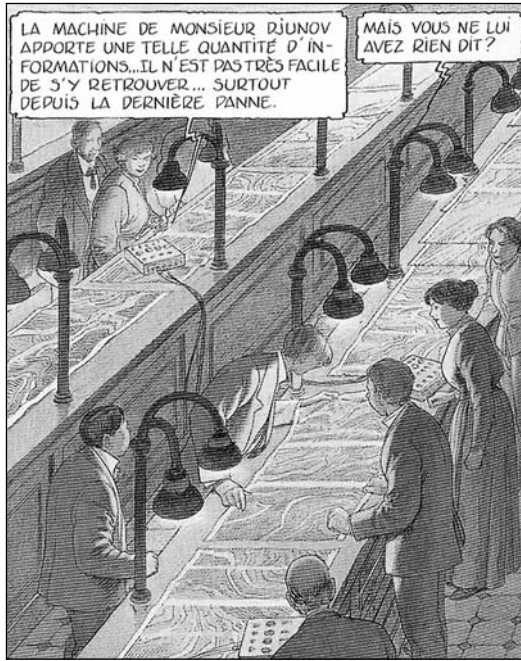


Fig. 2. Djunov's machines produce confusing data (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 1, p. 45) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

translate a geographic referent into its mirror cartographic image, without any subjective interpretation (figure 2). Yet Djunov's project, like Gomboust's, masks a highly politicized one. His "perfect" representation, like that of Louis XIV's official engineer, disguises a political agenda under the appearance of rigorous scientific methods and measurements (Marin 1981: 211). Operating under the authority of science, Djunov, like Gomboust, constructs a referential representation that presents itself as the exact equivalent of its real-life counterpart, as validated and self-validating universal truth. Both men of science work indeed for the *raison d'état* [reason of state]: Gomboust for the Sun King and Djunov for Sodrovno-Voldachia's grim new totalitarian leader, Radisic, who demands an image of his nation-state that mirrors and justifies—Roland Barthes [1972: 109–59] would say "naturalizes," or "mythologizes," as it aims to present ideologically constructed culture as nature—his imperialistic agenda, particularly the conquest of the neighboring principality of Muhka. Djunov's pseudoscientific conclusions are therefore preestablished and guide his research from the onset: he is to represent the state's natural borders as they should be, or as

the dominant political consensus requires them to be carved up. As Radisic himself puts it: “Ce qui compte, ce ne sont pas les cartes mais ce qu’on veut leur faire dire. J’attends de vous [les cartographes] que vous me fournissiez des arguments irréfutables dans mon combat pour la grande Sodrovnie” (1: 60). [What matters is not the maps, but what one wants them to signify. I am expecting that you (the cartographers) provide me with irrefutable arguments in my fight for the great Sodrovnia.] Of course, the concept of natural borders and its accompanying propaganda remind the reader of various twentieth-century territory disputes and their ensuing conflicts—from Third Reich expansionist justifications (Monmonier 1991: 99–107) to tensions in Palestine, Yugoslavia, or Kashmir—yet of none in particular in the transposed fictional setting, although the name Radisic undeniably evokes Serbian connotations, and a dividing wall within a city conjures up images of Berlin (Peeters 2005: 162).

As an agent of the state, mandated to visualize its body as the preconceived image of its ruling power (“L’Etat, c’est moi;” “la Sodrovno-Voldachie, c’est Radisic”), Djunov draws attention to both the power and the powerlessness of political representation. As Marin reminds us, representation is a transitive act: it supposes an equivalence or substitution between two objects, one real but absent, the other symbolic but present (9–10). Representation is also an assertive act: it authorizes and legitimates its own symbolic transformation, in this case, the transformation of actual physical force into the symbolic expression of the ability to produce force if needed (11). Force is real, but power is symbolic: the latter is therefore a fragile construct, because it hides a reluctance or inability to use force once again, to repeatedly use force, and relies on the acceptance or consensus of the public. If representation “is nothing else but the fantastic image in which power contemplates itself as absolute” (12), it is also *de facto* “the mourning of the absoluteness of force,” the paradoxical expression of the impossibility of absolutism. It is therefore understandable that political leaders would find attempts against their image as dangerous as those against their person. This is the conundrum in which young De Cremer will find himself in this story: an accidental and unbeknownst thorn in the side of the political representational machine and its controlling cartographic vision.

At the opposite end of Djunov, De Cremer encounters another conception of cartography under the training of his supervisor and mentor, Monsieur Paul Cicéri, an aging cartographer, whose methods lag behind the center’s new epistemological direction. A man of interpretation (always a dangerous tendency under a totalitarian regime), Cicéri is more concerned with how



Fig. 3. Cicéri's understanding of maps conflicts with Radisic's political agenda (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 1, p. 60) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

things are, with man's Being-in-the-World, with capturing and understanding the many changing aspects of experiential reality within the framework of geographical knowledge. If, to quote Heidegger's distinction, Djunov is a man of ontic predisposition, whose scientific approach consciously distorts, misrepresents, or simply ignores life's real experiences or pleasures, Cicéri is, by contrast, preoccupied with ontological inquiry. For him, borders construct arbitrary lines within a continuum of human experiences (*Frontière* 1: 20, 60). A reader of history, he is concerned that maps, because of their synchronic bias, are fundamentally antihistorical and anti-biographical, and therefore present a false, static representation incapable of capturing an ever-changing territory and the reciprocal cultural exchanges that take place among its people (1: 60). Instead, Cicéri creates counter-maps of human beliefs, values, and cultures in order to highlight the porosity of borders and the absurdity of nationalistic rhetoric, a subversive activity that causes his downfall when Radisic takes control of the center (figure 3). The man who was once critical of Evguénia Radisic's overblown national romanticism (1: 25) is fired by her ruthless descendant and exiled in the basement of the center, a relic living

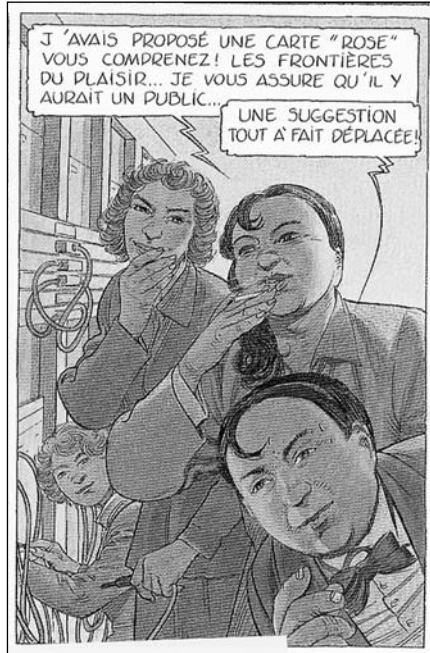


Fig. 4. Prostitutes suggest a "map of pleasures" (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 2, p. 14) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

among strange Darwinian fossils of extinct species—an ironic subterranean relegation of historical perspective by a political power intent on burying any counter-knowledge provided by diachronic critical thinking under the surface of pseudo-hegemonic legitimacy. Amusingly, Cicéri will eventually be replaced by a crew of ex-prostitutes (2: 14), clearly unqualified as cartographers, but nevertheless inclined to continue Cicéri's subversive counter-discourse, as they offer to draft a map of pleasure, unknowingly echoing Foucault's (1985: 58–65) advocacy of the "pleasure of mapping," a strategy to critically challenge the dominant representational paradigm by viewing mapping as a practice of freedom and pleasure, reacting against the state's normalization of people and their individual desires (figure 4).

Caught between his sympathy for Cicéri and his devotion to his duties, as defined by Djunov's new methods, De Cremer grows increasingly confused and weary of his function. On one hand, Radisic promotes him to the enviable position of director of the Cartography Center, and the young man appears to have a promising future in the political realm as one of the leader's



Fig. 5. De Cremer's problem with models (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 2, p. 21) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

chosen aides. The end of the story reveals that Radisic even intended to offer his niece in marriage to De Cremer, to consolidate the link between their two well-respected families (De Cremer's great-uncle is alluded to several times in the narrative as a man of reputation and importance). On the other hand, De Cremer's belief in the cartographic mimesis obtained through Djunov's methods is undermined by the apparent inadequacy of their results (figure 2). Indeed, when the center's workers attempt to recreate miniature versions of computer-imaged cities and landscapes, De Cremer appears unable to reconcile the resulting models with his own experience of their ontological referent, as if the geographic signifiers had been distorted beyond his recognition (2: 21–23; figure 5).

Such a play on the *trahison des images* [betrayal of images]—Peeters is an avowed Magritte admirer—is reflexive on many levels. First, the creation of models duplicates the imaging process in a self-referential, tautological loop: computer tracing reproduces reality; its reproduction is itself reproduced in the shape of models (2: 21). A model is an image of an image; it is twice removed from empirical reality—which, in this graphic novel, is itself but another image. Secondly, the entire fictional device is clearly put *en abyme* in the scenes (1: 48–49; 2: 20–23) where the story's characters walk through a miniature re-creation of their surroundings, as the fictional backdrop literally becomes a cardboard theater set. As a representation within the representation, such a distancing device leads the reader to question the ontological existence of diegetic reality, as if the phenomenological “pour soi” [for itself] of the representation negated the “en soi” [in itself] of any referent. Other works by Schuiten and Peeters similarly play on models, miniatures, and other *trompe-l'œil* effects of scenery and *simulacres* [simulacra]. One remembers that in the first book of “Les cités obscures,” *Les murailles de Samaris*

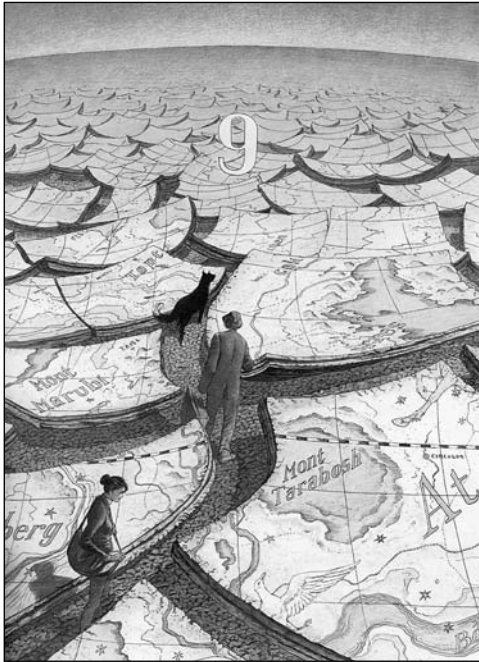


Fig. 6. Lost in the real world (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 2, p. 51) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

[The Walls of Samaris] (Schuiten and Peeters 1988), Franz Bauer explores a city made entirely of two-dimensional panels that move around him and give him the illusion of reality, until he steps behind the machinery and realizes that the city itself is merely an image, one that is its own ontological reality. The mimetic connection between image and referent, copy and model, is often deconstructed in similar ways in other books, such as *Dolorès* (written by Schuiten and Peeters in collaboration with Anne Baltus, 1993), a story in which a model-maker changes dimensions and joins the miniature world of his creations. One can find similar reflexive and self-distancing scenes in *La frontière invisible*, particularly in the chapter-dividing illustrations that show characters living inside a map, walking among the highly codified signifiers of cartographic representation as if they were reality itself (e.g., 2: 51; figure 6).

Thirdly, such recurrent blurring of the line between image and reality, which undoubtedly plays on what Philippe Lejeune calls our “postmodern ontological doubt,” also relies on consistent meta-narrative strategies. As various commentators have noted, the “Cités obscures” offer various reflexive images of themselves, both within the series itself (characters investigate the cities’

existence; newspapers discuss their events; archivists catalog their objects), and through corollary multimedia activities from their authors (documentaries, conferences, paintings, music). Such systematic reflexive commentary fulfills two opposite functions. One, as Benoît Peeters himself noted, can be described as a strategy of self-validation or self-reference: the invisible cities assert their own existence through an internal and external network of meta-discourse that alludes to their existence outside of the two-dimensional graphic realm. The opposite effect, of equal importance but more subtle, is to cast a permanent doubt over their existence, precisely because it is only attested to by discourse, distant echoes, and not firsthand experience of the readers—although several readers have recently begun to participate in this complex representational game by presenting themselves as dwellers of this parallel universe, as characters, or merely visitors (Peeters 2005: 151–54). If, according to Todorov's (1976: 30–37) much debated definition, the *fantastique* is by essence the genre of hesitation, one could argue that it is a form of *referential* hesitation or ambivalence that constitutes the central *fantastique* device in the "Cités obscures."

Maps, of course, are to be understood within such a system of reflexive ambivalence. The cities, which are merely image, offer a meta-image of themselves (maps), which at the same time authenticates and calls into question their existence. Interestingly, the second volume of *La frontière invisible* came with a double-sided ancillary map issued by the Institut Géographique National (IGN) [National Geographic Institute], a genuine French geographic society (see www.ign.fr), some of whose maps of other sites and countries ("Niger," "Lombardie," "Amsterdam") are also listed on a flap of this "physical map [of] Sodrovno-Voldachia." By inscribing the map of their fictional territory within a serialized format usually reserved for real-life locations (wittily described on the map's own para-text as "un univers plus terre à terre" [a more down-to-earth universe] than the invisible cities, whose actual earthly presence is uncertain), Schuiten and Peeters continue to play on the same principle of referential illusion and meta-discursive validation that governed their project from the start: to convince the reader that what is discussed in overlapping sources must de facto exist (and doing so by borrowing the symbolic credit of legitimate discourses, in this case that of an official mapping institute). Furthermore, on one side of the map, they also provide an iconic representation of the respective positioning of the invisible cities, finally removing the reader's blinders and allowing him or her a global, overhanging view of a world only previously accessible through separate fragments, because each book had been devoted to a restricted portion of this universe

(such as Urbicande, Xhystos, Samaris, Brüsel, Pâhry). This iconic perspective fits within a network of clues about the geopolitical system of the “Cités obscures”:

Pour la page de titre [du premier album, *Les murailles de Samaris*], nous avons réalisé la page que Franz arrache au grand livre de Samaris, et sur laquelle on peut lire: “Autour de Samaris sont huit grandes cités.” C’est alors que nous nous sommes posé pour la première fois la question de l’emplacement de ces cités. Qu’y a-t-il autour de Samaris et de Xhystos? Comment ce monde fonctionne-t-il? etc. (Peeters in Jans and Douvry 2002: 37). [For the title page [of the first book, *The Walls of Samaris*], we created the page that Franz tears from the great book of Samaris, on which one can read: “Around Samaris are eight large cities.” This is when we asked ourselves for the first time the question of these cities’ location. What is around Samaris and Xhystos? How does this world function? etc.]

Such global positioning of the cities is, in Plato’s sense, a political endeavor in itself, as John Sallis (1999: 139) reminds us: “Discourse on the city [polis] will at some point or other be compelled, of necessity, to make reference to the earth; at some point or other it will have to tell of the place on earth where the city is—or is to be—established and to tell how the constitution (politeia) of the city both determines and is determined by this location.” Schuiten and Peeters’s “fake” map of the invisible cities relies on our geographic proficiency as readers and users of real maps. Although it turns our spatial knowledge upside down—as it challenges the standard representations by which we make sense of the world, like Arno Peters’s famously subversive map (Crampton 2002: 17)—it forces us at the same time to process our understanding of it by filtering its signifiers through other geographic signifiers, whose shapes and attached signification we have learned to recognize in our own experience of world maps, as if we were translating one language into another by resemblance and inference. Assuming that the reader’s average geographic awareness allows him or her a mental picture of a standard world map, like the IGN’s own *Carte du monde politique* [Map of the Political World], he or she is necessarily led by his or her cognitive predisposition to identify recognizable elements, laid out in what appears as a jumbled order. For instance, he or she may equate the triangular shape of the Urbicande peninsula with that of India, or the contours of Mont Analogue’s island with those of Madagascar, although their scale, their orientation, and their relative positions cause him or her to permanently doubt such identifications. The peninsula that

contains the city of Samaris resembles both Thailand and Florida; the Chulae Vistae Islands evoke the shape of Cuba, Japan, or New Zealand. Brüssel is situated in a territory whose shape clearly reminds us of Belgium, but it is located northwest of Pâhry (an obvious homophone of Paris), itself placed at the edge of a desert. Although it fulfills a long-standing desire for a more global perspective on this mysterious world, the map of the “Cités obscures,” because it recalls and distorts at the same time previous intertextual or inter-pictorial representations, produces therefore an inherently disorienting effect, and does not in fact lift any mystery from this alternate world.

At the top of Schuiten and Peeters’s map, one finds the mention: “Une des premières cartes réellement fiables des cités obscures. Ayant été établie par les géographes de Pâhry, elle privilégie le côté ouest du continent.” [One of the first truly dependable maps of the invisible cities. Having been drawn by the geographers of Pâhry, it focuses mostly on the western side of the continent.] This caption is worth examining in several regards. “Une des premières cartes” suggests that there are other maps, which confirms the existence of this world, since it is attested to in several unconnected testimonies and documents. It also gives this particular map a special value, as a unique, rare document, like a mythical treasure map: because the other maps have disappeared or are not available for our perusal, we should treat this one as a valuable archive, a miraculous *hapax* that we should feel lucky to have had preserved. “Premières” may also account for the style of the map, which appears somewhat old-fashioned in comparison with the IGN *Carte du monde politique*, for instance. It may simply be an “early” map that uses different representational codes than our contemporary ones. Epistemologically, it belongs to a different time than ours, the alternate time of the invisible cities, this retro-futuristic parallel world that resembles Jules Verne’s fictions, a nineteenth-century world that projects itself into the future.

“Réellement fiables” seems equally problematic, as it paradoxically brings into question the accurateness and the dependability of the map: if the map is indeed truly reliable, why does it have to state its reliability with such redundancy, by labeling itself as such and by resorting to an adverb of intensity? Who is making this statement? Finally, the map is identified as the result of the subjective focus of its enunciators, the geographers of Pâhry. Indeed, it places Pâhry in the relative center of the known world, as though the latter revolved around this city, just as the city revolves around the king’s palace in Gomboust’s map (interestingly, the IGN is a Parisian institute, located on the rue de Grenelle). Would the Sodrovno-Voldachian cartographers of *La frontière invisible* have produced the same map, or would their imaging of reality

have differed as the result of an alternative political or epistemological point of view, a radically different *pour-soi* [for-self]? As Jeremy Crampton (2002: 15–16) reminds us, cartographic inquiry is always subject to Gunnar Olsson's "fisherman problem": "The fisherman's catch furnishes more information about the meshes of his net than about the swarming reality that dwells below the surface." In other words, the fisherman's conjecture about the contents of the sea is necessarily related and limited to the size and shape of his fishing net. The iconic representation displayed in the Pährysiyan geographers' map is not physical reality, but their image of it, shaped by their sociocultural conventions and agenda: to paraphrase Magritte, "ceci n'est pas un continent." By exceeding the representational limitations of metonymic tracing, which presuppose a static and fixed object, maps are, as Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 20) have contended, open constructs:

Si la carte s'oppose au calque, c'est qu'elle est toute entière tournée vers une expérimentation en prise sur le réel. La carte ne reproduit pas un inconscient fermé sur lui-même, elle le construit. . . . Elle fait elle-même partie du rhizome. La carte est ouverte, elle est connectable dans toutes ses dimensions, démontable, renversable, susceptible de recevoir constamment des modifications. Elle peut être déchirée, renversée, s'adapter à des montages de toute nature, être mise en chantier par un individu, un groupe, une formation sociale. On peut la dessiner sur un mur, la concevoir comme une œuvre d'art, la construire comme une action politique ou une méditation. C'est peut-être un des caractères les plus importants du rhizome, d'être toujours à entrées multiples. [What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. . . . It is itself part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways.] (Trans. Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987: 12)

Furthermore, one could easily argue that the "fisherman's problem" affects all representations of the obscure cities, because the various discourses or images through which the reader gains access to glimpses of this parallel universe remain similarly problematic. Frédéric Kaplan (1-23-05: 14–15) has gone so far

as to liken the problem of objective reality in Schuiten and Peeters's series to the principles of quantum physics, which famously postulate that objects exist only through the contextual act of measurement, but not outside of it.

By contrast, the other side of Schuiten and Peeters's map, which depicts the country of Sodrovno-Voldachia, is openly political, in the mold of Jacques Gomboust's portrayal of the Sun King's absolute power, mirrored in the map of Paris. This is, we assume, the map that Radisic commissioned (1: 60–61), or one similar to it. In pure "Ancien Régime" [Old Regime] fashion, it is imprinted with a heraldic seal of political power—a large blazon in the upper right-hand corner that contains a strong deictic assertion of legitimacy: two winged dragons on each side of a crown, above the inscription "Terre et Loi" [Land and Law], a formula which mirrors Marin's (1981: 11) observation that representation not only signifies power (translates it into signs), but also "signifies force in the discourse of the law." This map speaks of conquest and territorial claims, because it contains a "frontière contestée" [contested frontier] between Sodrovni and Mylos, another "frontière non délimitée" [undelimited frontier], a "zone neutre" [neutral zone] above Muhka, various "zones revendiquées" [claimed zones] or "zones annexées" [annexed zones], as well as fragments of a dividing wall and sections of trenches between the northwestern and the southwestern parts of the map. To the extent that it attempts to capture political flux and to stake dubious political claims, the map paradoxically represents nothing; it is an ever-changing palimpsest, a text whose imprinted signifiers are subject to being relabeled according to military conquest, and betray a doubt as to their very permanence ("zone d'incertitude" [zone of uncertainty], etc.). Besides, the map is accompanied by an amusing disclaimer at the bottom, which speaks of the fear of power within those in charge of political representation:

Le tracé des frontières n'a pas de valeur juridique. Les informations portées sur cette carte ont un caractère indicatif et n'engagent pas la responsabilité de l'IGN. Les utilisateurs sont priés de faire connaître à l'Archiviste les erreurs ou omissions qu'ils auraient pu constater. [The drawing of the frontiers has no legal value. The information included in this map is only of an indicative nature and does not bind the IGN to any responsibility. The users are asked to kindly communicate to the Archivist the mistakes or omissions that they may have noticed.]

It all goes back to Marin's (1981: 12–13) clever paradox: power, because it relies on the symbolic transformation of physical force into discourse, is also pow-

erlessness. The language of conjecture and uncertainty, on the part of the mappers themselves, speaks of the discomfort of their positions as subjects to power, but also opens discursive gaps that undo their own absolutist construct: this is what the country is or should be, but we are not “responsible” or accountable for the potential mistakes of our representation (do not use against us the force that we are to symbolically convey), in which case power negates itself. The request to communicate mistakes to the Archivist connects this story with another meta-narrative endeavor within the series (see the volume entitled *L'archiviste* [The Archivist], Schuitem and Peeters 2000) and encourages, as always, the interactive cooperation of the readers. On the subject of representation as palimpsest, another telling image can be found in the first volume of *La frontière invisible*: a panel in which De Cremer is depicted standing in front of the Cartography Center's giant dome (1: 10), whose external gates or loading docks have been renumbered or relabeled several times according to different codes (e.g., N 15, ZA 12, LN 103), as if to indicate that the very producer of representation is itself subject to the conceptual instability of naming or renaming. Finally, the “Cités obscures” offer us a map of their mysterious realm, but it is a map that reveals the impossibility of mapping.

If the map of Sodrovno-Voldachia is of any practical use for the reader, it is in conjunction with the travel narrative told in *La frontière invisible*, because it allows us to partially visualize the itinerary of De Cremer from the moment when he flees the Cartography Center. This journey is itself vague, as we often cannot match the landscapes depicted in the panels with their more abstract, larger scale cartographic equivalents. However, the map's unexplored spaces hint at subsequent adventures in the world of the “Cités obscures”: what goes on in the “Grande Déchetterie de Rovignes” [Great Landfill of Rovignes], in the “Réserve Biologique des Deslioures” [Biological Reserve of the Deslioures], or in the “Zone de Silence du Désert de Chartreuse” [Zone of Silence of the Chartreuse Desert]? These are arguably, in Genette's (1971: 112–14) terminology, *amorces* [hints] of future developments in the series.

As De Cremer becomes increasingly conscious of the arbitrary nature of the cartographic signifying process, and of the gaps between maps and their ontological referent, he meets an attractive young prostitute, Shkodrã, who brings yet another reflexive layer to his iconological confusion. Schuitem and Peeters have exploited in various other books the narrative pattern of a male *héros célibataire* [unmarried hero] encountering a mysterious and enticing female figure on his path to change or revelation (for example, *La fièvre*



Fig. 7. Shkodrā's body as a map (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 1, p. 45) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

d'Urbicande [Fever in Urbicand], or *Brüsel*). De Cremer, who reluctantly enters a brothel at Djunov's initiative, discovers that Shkodrā refuses to appear half-naked in public as the other prostitutes do, probably to hide a strange birthmark on her backside that reminds him of one of Cicéri's old maps, a subversive document that contradicts Radisic's image of the State (figure 7). Although the young man is irresistibly attracted by the prostitute's sexual availability,—his map fetish playing, undoubtedly, an important part in his attraction—De Cremer begins to fear for the safety of the young woman and improvises an escape with her.

Shkodrā (1: 34, 44–46) is an interesting figure in several regards. As a prostitute, she is an archetypal subaltern and a suitable equivalent of the territory to be mapped: she is who her client wants her to be—she is an object to name and possess. Indeed, we learn that Shkodrā is in fact the name of the village where she was born, a place that has been destroyed by border disputes and the subsequent building of a wall to divide the countries at war (2: 48). Left nameless, Shkodrā was renamed with the signifier of her birthplace, like many subalterns in history, such as slaves or immigrants. But Shkodrā, like the land to be mapped, equally escapes possession. Charles Bernheimer (1989), in his excellent essay on the representation of prostitution in the nineteenth-century French novel, clearly shows that the prostitute is a much more complex figure than she first appears to be, and that her control and possession only reveal that she ultimately escapes control. She is an agent of dispossession: indeed, the selfish male use of her sexuality and the pleasure it

provides are only temporary, leaving him dispossessed and used in the face of an autonomous and subversive sexual being. Attempted control of the prostitute is a castrating, not an empowering, act. Although De Cremer's feelings for Shkodrā clearly go beyond sexual lust, the possession of her will prove just as elusive as that of the territory.

Shkodrā is also the bearer of a map-like image, and, as such, reverses the entire paradigm of representation. Maps are normally man-made objects that attempt to present a codified image of ontological reality. They function as metaphorical substitutes (founded by mimetic resemblance with their objects) and metonymic transfers (as their existence only duplicates that of the object that they trace). But they remain essentially *images*: "a map is not the territory it represents" (Crampton 2002: 18) but its iconic equivalent, which reminds us again of Magritte's well-known anti-mimetic principle, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" [This is not a pipe]. Yet Shkodrā, the ultimate reflexive device, is an ontological being, whose body mirrors a man-made epistemological construct, a map. Reality copies an image, life imitates art: as his methodological grasp on the world begins to fail him, De Cremer can only run away aimlessly and ponder various ontological questions. Is the image on Shkodrā's body a mere coincidence, the simple projection of his cartographic imagination, or instead the embodiment of Radisic's rhetoric on "natural" borders (1: 56–58, 2: 20)? Since it contradicts Radisic's imperialistic plans and the state's official vision, is it more or less true than the official political truth? Can reality contradict discourse? Can image be ontological? Can bodies be representations, and vice versa? And if so, can body signifiers be subversive per se: can they be deemed antipolitical in the unfortunate eventuality that their natural appearance does not match the state's discourse?

As the army takes control of the Cartography Center, and begins to arrest its administrators, causing a wave of Kafkaesque paranoia among its employees (2: 34–38), De Cremer and Shkodrā escape by boarding a one-wheel vessel (created by Axel Wappendorf, a famous inventor of the obscure world who appears in other volumes of the series) en route to Galatograd, the state's capital. In the meantime, fearing for their respective careers, Cicéri and Djunov denounce De Cremer's subversive relationship with Shkodrā to Colonel Saint-Arnaud, the new military administrator of the center. Djunov accuses the young cartographer of plotting against the government by using Shkodrā's body markings as a "weapon" against Radisic's political agenda—"De Cremer veut l'utiliser comme une arme contre la grande Sodrovnie" (2: 41) [De Cremer wants to use her as a weapon against the great Sodrovnia]—, which is far from his true intentions. Cicéri's motives for denunciation

appear far less political: he seems to be more interested in getting the prostitute back for his own sexual use (it is implied that he had relations with her in the past).

Jumping out of the fantastic vessel as it crosses a river, De Cremer and Shkodrā continue their journey on foot across plains and forests, until they reach Shkodrā's dilapidated hometown and the towering frontier wall that divides it in two. Despite his theoretical training, De Cremer displays a poor sense of orientation and often appears unable to situate himself in the real world: he is literally lost in a landscape whose meaning he is unable to process, a victim of his theoretical isolationism and his travel inexperience (figure 6). Reality is no longer a referent in a meta-signifying process; instead, it is its own signifier, one which bears little meaning for the confused travelers. The people whom they encounter along their aimless journey (2: 53), mostly Slavic peasants (they use the word "Da" for "yes")—perhaps another allusion to Yugoslavia, or even to Hergé's (1939) *Le sceptre d'Ottokar* [*King Ottokar's Sceptre*], a classic graphic novel on a similar topic—are of little assistance, and the two fugitives advance further into unknown territories, which often bear metonymic marks of war (desert sands, abandoned ruins, spent cannon shells, and even a gigantic cemetery, 2: 54–55), while they become increasingly alienated from each other. Finally, a hunting party—composed of Djunov, Saint-Arnaud, and a few soldiers—catches up with them as they attempt to cross the valley separating Sodrovnia from the neighboring principality of Muhka, in a rowboat. The fugitives are then arrested and presented to Radisic as dangerous traitors (2: 62–68).

The dictator expresses his profound disappointment with De Cremer; he had, after all, invested his trust in him and counted on him to compose a glorifying map of his country, but the young man did not hold up his end of the bargain. In the realm of the representational process (but only within it), the cartographer had power equal to the king's, as absolutism can only be achieved when it is signified, consumed, and accepted (as class, in Thorstein Veblen's [1994: 68–100] analysis, depends on conspicuous displays to become reality). A simple mediator, De Cremer was apparently too naïve to realize the favor bestowed upon him, that of being considered the ruler's equal, through a reciprocal exchange of services (Marin 1981: 54). He failed his representational duty and squandered his only opportunity to gain access to power, for the love of a subaltern, whose birthmark Radisic does not even acknowledge as a serious threat, as though De Cremer, Djunov, and Cicéri had all projected their cartographic fantasies on the prostitute's body. Radisic has the final word on the meaning of Shkodrā's body: it is simply meaningless and inconsequential (2: 67).



FIG. 8. Radisic's conquest made the frontier "invisible" (*La frontière invisible*, vol. 2, p. 67) © Schuiten-Peeters / Casterman.

Radisic's disdain for subversive cartographic representation, as we learn, is the product of his newfound power, acquired through the success of his expansionist politics. Mylos, Muhka, and Brûsel have already been conquered and integrated into his empire. Tomorrow, he contends, will be the turn of Genova and Pâhry. As conquest and political annexation become reality, the state has no need for the symbolic justification of propaganda. In Marin's terms (1981: 40–46), symbolic power is not needed in times of conspicuous force, because force does not need to be represented to be effective during the actual battle phase. It is only before and after battle, first as preparatory propaganda, then as institutional preservation, that force relies on discourse. If the pen is sometimes mightier than the sword, the sword can ultimately render it useless as well: in the age of military victories, the cartographer has outlived his usefulness. Indeed, as Radisic puts it, the frontier has become invisible, because it is no longer static, but instead moves each day with the state's military expansion (figure 8). By shifting ontologically, the frontier has become too unstable a referent to match its former signifier; reality moved faster than representation, rendering the frontier, such as initially conceived by Radisic, void as a cartographic construct. The state's official cartographers will have to adapt to this shift, and add yet another layer to the palimpsest, by redoing the model, but on a different scale, to show all the newly acquired territory—a project to which Djunov is supposed to contribute, through his still unreliable machines (2: 67). This pronouncement and the departure of Shkodrā leave De Cremer alone, depressed, and disoriented, incapable of making sense of the world and his life, an impotent producer of signs in a fast-shifting world. Maybe one day, he concludes, he will learn again to see. Maybe one day he will again become a cartographer. However, the last few panels of the story continue to allude to De Cremer's persistent blindness. The final images of volume 2 (71–72), which remind one of the dustcover to the same

volume, show De Cremer wandering through a clearly feminized territory. The last three frames reveal, as the field of view widens from one frame to the next, a landscape in the shape of a naked female body. After the map of the territory inscribed as a birthmark on Shkodrā, we see part of the territory feminized, an ironic inversion and commentary on the previous pages, where De Cremer's vision had been shown to be an illusion. A victim of perspective, De Cremer cannot see that he is literally walking on a woman's body. The book therefore ends on an ultimate reversal of mimesis: the woman mirrors the landscape, the landscape mirrors the woman, representation is reality, and reality is representation, a fitting conclusion to the meta-representational maze of the *Frontière invisible*.

Note

1. Throughout this chapter, I refer to the two volumes of *La frontière invisible* in the following way: "(1: 31)" means "volume 1, page 31"; and "(2: 7–8, 39–43)" designates the pages 7–8 and 39–43 of volume 2.

Part 3

Facing Colonialism and Imperialism in
Bandes dessinées

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The Algerian War in *Road to America* (Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran)

INTRODUCTION: ON THE SIDE OF BOXING

The impossible wish to evade nationalist politics during the Algerian War (1954–62) is the principal theme of *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, a graphic novel by Baru [Barulea, Hervé]¹ (art and script), Jean-Marc Thévenet (script), and Daniel Ledran (colors) (1990, 1998). This graphic novel was recently translated into English and published as *Road to America* by Drawn and Quarterly (Montreal), a comics publisher (1995–97, 2002). Its main character, an Algerian boxer named Saïd Boudiaf, wishes to avoid taking sides either for the Front de libération nationale (FLN [National Liberation Front]), fighting for Algerian independence, or for the French government and army, attempting to keep control of the North African colony. Instead, Boudiaf proclaims himself to be “du côté de la boxe” [on the side of boxing] (plate 12),² which he believes to be a politically neutral position. He thinks that he can achieve success in an arena where, it seems, individual effort and ability reign supreme, inherited social privilege is absent, and working-class men have traditionally excelled. Alternatively, we could interpret the choice of boxing as an unacknowledged displacement, into a violently combative sport, of the aggressiveness created among



Fig. 1. In 1955 Saïd, a young butcher's boy, shadowboxes in the courtyard behind a butchery and cold cuts store in Philippeville, a coastal city of colonial Algeria. From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 1, frames 1–3; © Baru.

the colonized by colonial domination. The cartoonists never completely resolve this ambiguity, even though they have Boudiaf make a de facto choice between the two nations at the end of the story.

AN ALLEGORY OF COLONIALISM

When Saïd fights in his first amateur competition he is still working as a butcher's errand-boy (figure 1). The fight is an improvised roadside attraction, in 1955 in the Algerian town of Philippeville, renamed Skikda after independence (1–4). The match features a Pied-Noir³ boxer, who challenges all comers, most probably as part of a gambling setup, although we never see any money changing hands: the promoter tells Saïd to absorb a few punches that his heavy-set opponent will throw, then land the hardest one that he can, and raise his hands to celebrate an apparent upset victory in a lopsided match that the young, thin boy should have lost, in all likelihood. The opposing boxer is described by the promoter as Bobby Ruiz, the “boucher de Bablouette” [Butcher of Bablouette] and the “canonnier de la Casbah” [Casbah Gunner] (2.4; figure 2). His Americanized first name (Bobby) is the first hint at one aspect of the American theme suggested by the book's title: for a boxer, the road



Fig. 2. An allegory of colonial power relations: on his way to make a meat delivery, Said comes across an amateur boxing setup. From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 2, frames 1–5; © Baru.

to America is the way to a world championship match, given the American influence in the sport (including its commercial aspects), and therefore holds the prospect of the highest professional success attainable. On the other hand, the boxer's family name, "Ruiz," alludes to the Spanish origins of many European settlers in colonized Algeria.⁴ The aggrandizing epithets designate Ruiz as a boxer from Algiers, the provincial capital of what were then still three French *départements*, roughly the equivalent of states in the United States: "Bablouette" is a literary representation of the settler-accented pronunciation of "Bab El Oued," then a working-class European neighborhood of Algiers; and the Casbah is of course the oldest Algerian section of the same city. This suggests that Ruiz has established his dominance over challengers from both working-class European settlers and the Algerian colonized.⁵

It also reminds us that the settlers arrogated to themselves the identities of Africans or Algerians (in addition to their French national identity), and called the Algerians not “Algériens,” but “indigènes” [natives] and “Musulmans” [Muslims].⁶ This interpretation is supported by Ledran’s color scheme in these pages: Ruiz wears warm-up pants and boxing shorts whose colors are borrowed from, respectively, the French and Algerian flags. By the end of the story, these colors have separated out and appear on the flags of the opposing nations, in the context of the war (31, 43). The fact that Saïd, wearing his white and blue butcher’s boy uniform and sitting astride the red errand bicycle (2; figure 2), presents us with a faded version of the colors of the French flag illustrates the idea that integration of the colonized into the French colonial order means occupying a subaltern and alienated position. Deprived by colonialism of full access to both French and Algerian national identities and to colonial privileges, and not sufficiently interested in either of these national poles to be willing to choose one over the other, Saïd is left with the choice between an identity as an errand-boy, or the more glamorous one of a boxer, where—he believes—national identity is not a determining force, as he says later in the graphic novel: “Le sport, c’est le sport . . . Ti’es Arabe, ti’es français, c’est pareil!” [Sport is sport. Whether you’re Arab or French it’s all the same!] (8).

By describing Ruiz as both a “boucher” and a “cannonier,” the cartoonists simultaneously allude to and mask the violence of the Algerian war of independence, which was launched on All Saints’ Day of the previous year (i.e., November 1, 1954): “cannonier” makes us think of military violence and the fight to control the Casbah, although it also reminds us of the nickname “le bombardier marocain” [the Moroccan Bombardeer], given to Marcel Cerdan, the famous French boxer from colonial North Africa who is idolized by Saïd (1–2, 6, 9; cf. Roupp 1970: 75).⁷ The reference to a butcher reminds us more mundanely of the French butcher for whom Saïd works, and against whom the young man is silently fuming when he spots the itinerant boxing setup (Saïd’s thought balloon reads “Marcel Cerdan, il nique ta mère!” [Marcel Cerdan screws your mother!]) (2.1). By nicknaming Ruiz a “butcher,” the cartoonists suggest that this is Saïd’s chance to vicariously take revenge on his boss, who has just ridiculed him. Saïd takes the fight at face value (as a true boxing match), first ducking Ruiz’s punches and then beginning to thrash his opponent, much to the delight of the mixed crowd of Algerian and French men (3). His determined refusal to play the rigged game by the corrupt rules of the French, in exchange for a small payoff at the end, gets him thrown out of the ring by the promoter and trainer (3–4). The hilarious spectacle continues after the abrupt end of the match, as the bystanders watch a gaunt, errant dog steal the raw meat roast that Saïd had been ordered to take to

Mrs. Lopez, a client of the butcher (4). This is the ultimate humiliation: after having been thrown unceremoniously out of the ring, Saïd is frightened off by the dog, which bares its teeth and trots away, leaving the boy with only the insulting sight of its anus and genitals (4.6–8). Clearly, the amateur boxing sequence may be read as an allegory of the colonial situation, where Algerians were allowed only an economic pittance and a semblance of political representation in a system rigged to the advantage of the colonizers. Refusal by Algerians to play the crooked French colonial game meant expulsion from the system: political and socioeconomic exclusion. Fighting back earned them police repression, torture, and execution. However, at this moment of distress and humiliation, a French bystander steps forward, providentially saving Saïd from the ire of his employer and offering to fulfill his most cherished wish, by training him as a boxer.

A CHOREOGRAPHY OF COLONIAL VIOLENCE

It is precisely at this instant that the violence of the war, simmering just below the surface throughout the first four pages, literally explodes onto the scene, when a car bomb detonates, sowing debris everywhere and scattering the men who had been watching the match (5; figure 3). The providential boxing trainer, nicknamed “le Constantinois” [the “Constantine”] (4.10),⁸ warns Saïd ominously that “[l]es conneries là, elles vont mal finir, tu vas voir . . .” [These stupidities, they’ll end badly, you’ll see . . .] (6.1). This prediction was to be fulfilled later that same year, in the Philippeville massacres (remember that this part of the comic book is set in Philippeville). On August 20, 1955, a mob led by the FLN killed seventy-one Europeans and about one hundred pro-French Algerians. Subsequently, up to twelve thousand Algerians were killed by the French army and settlers in retaliation (Horne 1978: 188–22; Droz and Lever 2001: 75–78; Aussaresses 2001: 23–77, 2002: 10–58). This was a turning point in the war: from then on, there was an increasingly widening rift between the Algerian and French populations. It is typical of the cartoonists’ strategy throughout the book that the massacre is only alluded to, in this ominous but very oblique way. Similarly, although a few French soldiers appear on two of the previous pages (2–3; cf. the book’s cover), only here, on the fifth and sixth pages of the story, is the colonial war explicitly revealed, retrospectively illuminating the reason for the earlier, vaguely disquieting glimpses of French soldiers: we now see, in rapid sequence, the explosion, then burning vehicles and damaged store fronts (figure 3); barbed wire, a bombed-out bus with Algerian nationalist graffiti (“FLN vaincra” [FLN will win]), and French

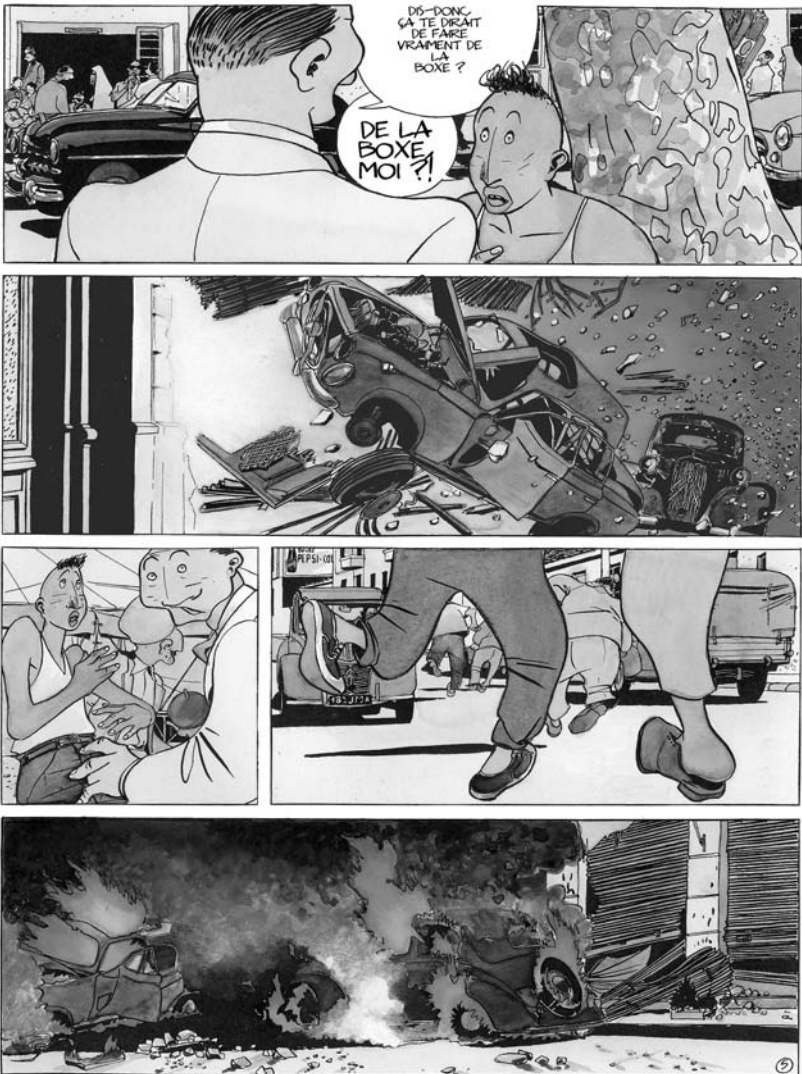


Fig. 3. Just as “le Constantinois” providentially offers to help Saïd realize his dream of becoming a boxer, the Algerian War literally explodes into view when a car bomb detonates—an ill omen for Saïd’s career plans? From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l’Amérique*, plate 5; © Baru.

soldiers frisking Algerians (figure 4). These first few pages are beautifully choreographed, in Baru’s characteristic, elliptical style, which is in part his creative response to the short book-length constraints typically imposed on most French cartoonists by the large comics publishing houses (cf. Peeters 2002b:



Fig. 4. A choreographed sequence follows Saïd from street scenes of wartime violence back into his room at the butcher's shop, where he shadow boxes before a poster of Marcel Cerdan, his hero. From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 6; © Baru.

78). In this introduction to Saïd's career, the cartoonists progressively stoke the tension and then suddenly release it, suggesting how patronizing, unthinking settlers provoke humiliation and anger among Algerians (represented here by Saïd), and the ultimate, inevitable Algerian response to French colonial violence.

Ledran's well-executed coloring emphasizes the clash of nations: the dominant colors are those of the flags of France (blue-white-red) and Algeria (green, white, and red), of the fire of wartime attacks and the blood of their victims.

However, we can discover even more in these very rich, first few pages. A comparison of their opening and closing sequences reveals a pattern that suggests the domestication and naturalization of violence in the colonial setting. The first frame shows Saïd as he shadowboxes, his hands bound up like a boxer's, standing against the flower-lined wall of the courtyard behind the butcher's shop (1; figure 1). The lovely crimson of the flowers is soon joined by the bright red of the bloodstained butcher's apron, then the red of the meat hanging from hooks in his shop. Red is, in fact, the dominant color of the shop, appearing on the shop's door frame, and next on the bicycle that Saïd rides—both on the metal frame and in the lettering on the meatbox attached to it (2.1; figure 2). We find virtually the same sequence, but reversed, at the end of the episode (figure 4): Saïd walks home, holding his bike, with the Constantine's hand paternally resting on his shoulder (6.3); next we see the butcher's apron and a bit of hanging meat (6.4); then the crimson flowers (6.5); and finally Saïd, again shadowboxing, but this time in his room above the butcher's shop, even though it is after three in the morning (6.6–8). The cartoonists' chiasmic use of these two mirror sequences to frame the amateur boxing fiasco, the encounter with the Constantine, and the explosion, is symbolic. In the colonial sequence, violence is naturalized: it is literally part of the scenery and, as such, invisible to many, especially the colonial settlers, because it is they who benefit from it. The Algerian nationalist struggle makes visible the violence of the colonial situation and is a response to it. Individual attempts by Algerians or French to make headway against the violent colonial system are doomed to failure. They can only amount to boxing against one's own shadow (Fanon 2002: 53–59; Memmi 1985).

A NASCENT COMICS TRADITION ABOUT THE ALGERIAN WAR

This still does not exhaust the rich detail of the introductory pages. Embedded in them is a reference that inscribed *Road to America* within a then nascent body of French-language comics about the Algerian War. The cold box on the delivery bicycle bears the name of the butcher (G. Vidal), the type of shop he owns ("boucherie" and "charcuterie" [butchery and cold cuts store]), as well as his address (1, rue d'Isly [1 Isly Street]) and telephone number ("83"; figure 2). In fact, the first book-length French comic book about the Algerian War, *Une éducation algérienne* [An Algerian Education], was scripted by

G. Vidal (Guy Vidal), drawn by Alain Bignon, and first published as a book in 1982.⁹ The type of shop (“boucherie”) and its address cannot fail to remind the reader familiar with the events of the Algerian War of what is known by Pied-Noirs as the massacre of the rue d’Isly, which took place in Algiers (not Philippeville) on March 26, 1962, about a week after the signature of the Evian Agreements (March 18, 1962), which were the negotiated end to the Algerian War.¹⁰ The massacre occurred when a desperate Pied-Noir crowd, participating in a banned demonstration organized on the instructions of the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète [Secret Armed Organization]), a European terrorist group made up of Pieds-Noirs and renegade French soldiers, tried to break through French army lines around the Bab El Oued neighborhood, a stronghold of the OAS. The fire-fight that broke out may have been provoked by OAS snipers. In any case, dozens of Pied-Noir civilian demonstrators were killed during it by a French unit formed of Algerian soldiers, unprepared for this type of urban confrontation with mostly unarmed civilians (Stora 1992a: 105–8; Droz and Lever 2001: 333–34).

How are we to interpret these references in *Road to America*? Are the cartoonists calling Vidal a butcher? Perhaps, but no doubt as a joke. What does it mean to implicitly associate Vidal with the massacre of Isly Street? This is not perfectly obvious, but the allusion may remind us of the problematic politics of *Une éducation algérienne*, analyzed in a groundbreaking article by comics critic Jean-François Douvry (1983): its protagonist, a French soldier recruit named Albert, is awed by the courage and commitment of his commanding officer, who is a member of the OAS. By contrast, *Road to America* is extremely critical of those who want to keep Algeria French, depicting them visually as vampire-like¹¹ characters (13–15). Both books do share at least one thing, in addition to being among the first French comic books about the war: although Albert and Saïd are positioned on opposite ends of the French-Algerian colonial divide, they both hesitate to firmly choose sides in a complex and horrific war that included torture and terrorism. In the case of Saïd, this is because doing so would mean abandoning his personal dream of boxing success on the altar of national interest and endangering his connections to a network of friends and acquaintances who can help him achieve it. Surprisingly, given the opening sequence, even the butcher belongs to this category of characters.

ALGERIAN ETHNICITIES AND A PILGRIMAGE TO PARIS

After Saïd returns with the Constantine to the butcher’s shop we learn more about their relationship: first we see the butcher happily watching Saïd work

out in the Constantine's gym; then we learn that he is named Gaston (not Guy) Vidal, had served in the French army with Youssef, Saïd's father, and had found a job for Ali, Saïd's brother (7–8). Through reference to their long-standing friendship and family ties the butcher succeeds in convincing Youssef that his son should be allowed to box professionally. Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran now emphasize the resemblances between Saïd and Gaston: their Arabic-inflected French is similar (“Ti’étais là!”¹² says Gaston; Saïd states “Ti’es arabe, ti’es français, c’est pareil!”; 8); and they both smile as Gaston drives away with Saïd sitting next to him, having convinced Youssef to let his son box (8.3). In the novel, professional boxing is a working-class, male utopia that to some extent and for a while escapes nationalist conflict. It is therefore oddly appropriate that one of Saïd’s role models is the boxer Cerdan, who was born in Sidi Bel Abbès (Algeria), then the base of the French Foreign Legion, and raised in Casablanca (Morocco). And the fictional Gaston Vidal, like Cerdan’s father, has a cold cuts store [une charcuterie] (Roupp 1970: 63). When Saïd leaves Algiers, Gaston offers his final, fatherly advice: “Mais tu me jures, quand t’iras en Amérique, tu fais jamais comme Cerdan . . . L’avion, tu le prends pas! Tu me jures, dis!?” [But I want you to swear that when you go to America, you don’t do what Cerdan did . . . You don’t take the plane . . . Promise?!] (9.2; figure 5). Cerdan, a lover of French singer Edith Piaf, died in 1949, on his way to America for a championship boxing match and a rendezvous with her, when his airplane crashed into a mountain of the Açores islands. The title’s allusion to Cerdan’s boxing trajectory and fatal trip suggests that Saïd will encounter professional success, but that there are clouds on his horizon, which are already apparent to the reader/viewer of the book. The departure scene cleverly contrasts the dream of interethnic solidarity—represented by the relationship between Gaston, Saïd, and the Constantine, and by the reference to Cerdan—with the divisive reality of the Algerian War, which reappears with eloquent muteness in the background, in the form of French soldiers disembarking from the very boat that Saïd is about to take.¹³ The framing of the speech balloon, disconnected from its speaker (Gaston) and set against the soldiers (9.1), creates an ironic visual-verbal effect, as though an arriving French soldier were being told to leave the country (“Voilà, fils . . . Ti’as plus rien à faire ici, maintenant . . .”; [There you are son . . . There’s nothing left for you to do here now] my translation). The mute visual parallels and differences, and the eerie disjuncture (Saïd and his friends are depicted as oblivious to the soldiers), between the two kinds of fighters—the Algerian boxer leaving and the French soldiers arriving, all carrying their luggage—are made verbally explicit by the words of a letter

TABLE 1

	Boudiaf's Boxing Career	Algerian War
1955	discovered by a trainer in Philippeville	implicit allusion to the killing of French settlers by the French army in the Rue d'Isly, Algiers, on March 26, 1962 ¹ [2] an FLN bombing [5] foreshadows the FLN massacre (123 dead) in Philippeville on August 20, 1955, followed by massive French retaliation (1,273 to 12,000 Algerian dead) ²
?	travels from Algiers to Paris	soldiers disembark from a ferry [9] reference to FLN bombs [11]
1959	September 16, Boudiaf loses European championship match and vows to win rematch [17–18]	September 16, de Gaulle proclaims right of Algerians to self-determination [18] ³
1960	July 4, Boudiaf wins rematch of European championship ⁴ [26], but his draft order is suspended only on the condition (unknown to him) that he will contribute to de Gaulle's propaganda effort for Algerian self-determination referendum [25–26] September (probably), Boudiaf learns that Sarah works for the FLN [30] October, Boudiaf participates in de Gaulle's propaganda campaign (through a promotional boxing encounter) and abruptly quits it [31–32]; ⁵ references to Algerian president Ferhat Abbas and to Belkacem Krim [35]	September, trial of members of the Jeanson network of French supporters of the FLN in France [30] November 16, self-determination referendum is officially announced; it will be held on 8 January 1961 [25, 35] December 9–12, de Gaulle tours Algeria to promote his new Algerian solution (association, not complete independence). ⁶
1961	Boudiaf is preparing for a world championship title fight, set for December 12 [37–38]	February, the Organisation Armée Secrète is formed. ⁷ October 17, Boudiaf walks past pro-OAS graffiti and then witnesses the organized police massacre of Algerian demonstrators and, finally, is drawn into the war—he disappears [38–43]

Notes

1. Stora (1992a: 105–8).

2. Ruedy (1992: 162–63).

3. Ruedy (1992: 175–76).

4. The artists appear to have made a mistake in their chronology. Presumably, the rematch should have been dated July 4, 1960, not 1959, as it is given in the graphic novel. That this was a mistake, not intentional, is suggested by the otherwise careful coordination of fictional and historical events (e.g., references in the book to the Jeanson network trial and to the referendum on self-determination).

5. A historical figure is clearly identifiable visually (but is not named) at this point in the book [31]—Colonel Jean Thomazo, nicknamed “Nez-de-cuir”: “The colonel gained his nickname from an unsightly leather strap he wore across his face to hide where the bridge of his nose had been shot away at Cassino; an irrepressible fighter, Thomazo had refused to take time off from the battle for plastic surgery” (Horne 1978: 275; see also 276–79, 283, 286–88, 294–95, 351).

6. Ruedy (1992: 178–79).

7. Ruedy (1992: 179).

appropriateness of Saïd's pursuit of professional success during a time of national struggle.

A successful career in boxing requires that Boudiaf travel to Paris and, ultimately, to the United States (the trip to which the book title refers). In this case, the professional migration of an athlete in a working-class sport (boxing) coincides with the geographical itinerary of thousands of Algerian manual laborers, and with the pilgrimage of intellectuals, such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who likewise went from French colonies to Paris to complete their education (Anderson 1991: 113–40; cf. 55–61). In all three cases, the voyage to the center of the French empire brought them closer to the cause of nationalist anticolonial struggle, although in different ways. As Boudiaf begins to encounter professional success in Europe, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to maintain his distance from the conflict, because French officials want to use him in their campaign to keep Algeria under French control of some sort (11–12, 25–26, 31–32), whereas the Algerian rebel leadership demands his support for the nationalist cause (16–17, 19–22, 29–30, 34–36). The cartoonists repeatedly juxtapose steps in the progression of Boudiaf's career with key events of the Algerian War (table 1).

HISTORICAL EFFECTS

When Saïd starts to date Sarah Jérôme (23–27), a Frenchwoman whom he meets in Paris and who is secretly helping the FLN, readers are introduced to the material support that some French leftists and anticolonialists gave to the Algerian cause. Sarah is a member of the underground network of French sympathizers called “porteurs de valises” [suitcase carriers], because they helped the French section of the FLN by transporting money—collected from Algerian workers in France to finance the war of liberation—out of the country. It has been estimated that 80 percent of the operating resources of the provisional Algerian government were provided by the contributions of the four hundred thousand Algerian workers in mainland France (Einaudi 1991: 19, 21). Many immigrant workers paid this war tax out of nationalist fervor. Others were reluctant to do so, for example because they were having trouble making ends meet, were trying to save for personal projects, or supported another Algerian faction, such as Messali Hadj's MNA (Mouvement National Algérien [Algerian National Movement]), a rival organization from whose preceding incarnation (the MTLD, banned by the French government

on November 5, 1954) the founders of the FLN had split off (Droz and Lever 2001: 48–54, 83–84). However, failure to pay could mean death by execution by the FLN (Einaudi 1991: 19–22, 30–33). When Saïd refuses to do so, despite repeated warnings from the FLN, his French trainer pays in his place, without his knowledge (35). Sarah and Saïd soon split up because the boxer refuses to let his personal dream of becoming a boxing champion be jeopardized by Sarah's political engagement (30).

Similarly, when he travels home to Algeria on a demonstration boxing tour celebrating his newly reconquered European boxing championship, he rebels when he realizes that he has been enrolled (by his trainers and promoters, blackmailed by a Gaullist government official), against his will and without his knowledge, in a French government propaganda campaign in favor of de Gaulle's position on the upcoming referendum on Algerian self-determination (25–26, 31–32, 35). At this point (31.3–4), the cartoonists plant a recognizable historical character in the scenery: Colonel Jean Thomazo, nicknamed “Nez-de-cuir” [Leather Nose] because of the prosthesis that he wore after having lost his nose in battle at Cassino (Horne 1978: 275–77, 279, 283, 286–88, 294; cf. Droz and Lever 1991: 153, 259; Aussaresses 2001: 140–41). Thomazo played a key role in the military and Pied-Noir coup d'état that brought de Gaulle back to power in 1958—for example, he led the paratroopers that seized control of Corsica (Horne 1978: 294). The inclusion of Thomazo here strengthens the “effet d'histoire” [historical effect], which Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle (1979) analyzed in comics, in an article clearly based on Barthes's theorization of the “effet de réel” [reality effect] in prose fiction. Other techniques, no doubt more obvious to the average reader, that Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran use to strengthen the historical effect in the book include occasional explanatory footnotes about the war (18, 25, 30, 35), allusions to and drawn versions of newspaper and magazine covers and articles containing references to the Algerian War (18, 37, 42), and nationalist graffiti of the FLN (6) and the OAS (38).

When Saïd realizes that he is being manipulated by the French propaganda machine, he loudly proclaims that he has not chosen sides in the war and runs off into the casbah, from which he makes his way to his parents' new house in Biskra, most probably built with money that he, like many Algerian immigrants, sent home (32–33; cf. 17.6). There he learns from his brother Ali, who mysteriously awaits him in the otherwise empty house, that their parents have had to flee to Tunisia. Ali gives Saïd a crash course in politics and the grim realities of the war, which further strengthens the histori-

cal effect, while reminding or teaching readers about the war: for example, he discusses de Gaulle's upcoming referendum and refers to the nationalist leaders Belkacem Krim (called Krim Bel Kacem here) and Ferhat Abbas (35). He also passes on to Saïd the request of the Conseil National de la Révolution [National Council of the Revolution] that he stop boxing, in order to escape being used by the French in propaganda for de Gaulle's neocolonial option of "association." Yet at this point (36), the cartoonists introduce into Ali's speech the split between the political and the personal that, up to this point, had especially characterized Saïd, even though it had been latent in Ali's first letter, mentioned previously (9). After having transmitted the nationalist request (as a good soldier must do when ordered), Ali encourages his brother to continue boxing: "Mais je m'appelle Ali Boudiaf . . . Et Ali Boudiaf, lui il veut que son frère y aille, en Amérique!! . . . Et qu'il leur casse la tête à tous, ma parole!!!" [But my name is Ali Boudiaf . . . And as for Ali Boudiaf . . . He wants his brother to go to America!! . . . And let him break all their heads, I tell you!!!] (36.4–5). By having Ali refer to himself in the third person, the cartoonists suggest that their character must (be) virtually split in two in order to offer brotherly encouragement to Saïd—here, family solidarity trumps national community and nationalist self-sacrifice, but at the price of fracturing the individual. The linguistic division of Ali's self is physically echoed in, and also preceded and justified by, the loss of his left hand, wounded or shot off by a French bullet: Ali suggests that his personal sacrifice for Algeria has given him the right to endorse his brother's project (34, 36). With this fraternal blessing, the boxing story can continue to unfold. One of the things at stake in this split is the ambivalent relationship of the cartoonists to the anticolonialist past and to postindependence Algeria, as the conclusion to the graphic novel makes clear.

THE BATTLE OF PARIS

Saïd Boudiaf must finally choose sides at the end of the story, in the midst of the infamous, bloody police repression of October 17, 1961, carried out on the orders of Maurice Papon, then Prefect of the Paris police, under the authority of Minister of the Interior Roger Frey, Prime Minister Michel Debré and President Charles de Gaulle (figure 6). When we last see the book's protagonist that night, he has apparently just punched a policeman who had struck Sarah and then, it seems, Saïd himself (figure 7). The boxer is holding her, as



Fig. 6. On October 17, 1961, French police begin a racist massacre and massive arrests of Algerian men, women and children, who had been peacefully protesting against a discriminatory curfew imposed on them by Maurice Papon and his superiors (Roger Frey, Michel Debré, Charles de Gaulle). From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 40; © Baru.

he stands wide-eyed and bleeding, with his back against a closed storefront, upon which a menacing shadow is projected (42.5). The dramatic climax to the graphic novel is based on a real-life tragedy, which began when thirty to forty thousand Algerian men, women, and children (Einaudi 1991: 183; Stora



Fig. 7. Saïd, his head bleeding, holds Sarah as he looks aghast at the violence of the Algerian War, which has finally caught up with him in Paris and cut short his boxing career. From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 42, frames 4–5; © Baru.

1992: 95) set out to peacefully demonstrate in the French capital against a curfew that Papon and his superiors had imposed on all Algerians, despite the fact that they were still legally French citizens, which meant that this discriminatory measure contradicted republican ideals of equality between French citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Officially at the time, there were 11,538 arrests, three deaths (two Algerians and one Frenchman), and 136 people hospitalized that night (Einaudi 1991: 183–84; Stora 1992: 95–96; Amiri 2004: 415–16). However, the number of wounded, hospitalized, and dead was surely far greater. Estimates vary, but up to two hundred Algerians were killed (some were quite possibly executed in the central police station, with the knowledge of Papon) and perhaps as many as four hundred disappeared (the FLN estimate). It is likely that hundreds or even thousands of North Africans were wounded, many severely, by police officers. Eyewitness accounts of the event provided by Algerian victims and by French anticolonialist observers are horrific (e.g., Maspero, in Péju 2000: 195–200). The pictures taken that night by activist photographer Elie Kagan, working freelance for the Communist daily *L'Humanité*, constitute some of the most important and shocking visual documents of the event (Einaudi and Kagan 2001).¹⁴ Despite their significant and obvious differences, the photographs and the graphic novel exemplify similar forms of solidarity (cf. House 2001: e.g., 359): both show a few bystanders trying to help Algerian victims of the French police (figure 6); and both the photographer and the cartoonists try to reveal a scandalous, violent aspect of Franco-Algerian colonial history.

There was sharp but limited criticism of the government at the time, but the affair was soon buried by Papon, Frey, Debré, and de Gaulle himself, through public lies, censorship of the press, and silence (Einaudi 1991; Stora

1992a: 92–100; Péju 2000; House 2001: 358). French writer Didier Daeninckx and others have noted that, for the French Left, the event became masked by the Charonne massacre, which occurred later (February 8, 1962) and had fewer victims (eight deaths, plus others wounded), but in which Euro-French Communists were attacked by Papon's police (cf. House 2001: 359). This masking is one of the motivations that Baru (2006b) has given for his decision to focus on the event in his comic book (cf. chapter 11, below):

Une fois que le projet a pris forme, il m'a paru évident qu'il fallait que je parle du 17 octobre, d'autant plus qu'à la fin des années 80, il était encore largement passé sous silence, ou bien masqué par le massacre du métro Charonne qui a eu lieu un peu plus tard, et qui concernait des militants communistes.

[Once the project had taken shape, it became apparent to me that I had to talk about October 17, all the more so because at the end of the 1980s it was still largely not spoken about or else masked by the massacre of the Charonne subway (station), which had taken place a bit later and which involved Communist activists]

It was not until recently that French officials finally began to open the government files on the massacre to historians and researchers.¹⁵ Still it seems clear that some of the evidence had already been removed from, or was never put into, the archives, no doubt to prevent the full truth from ever being known.¹⁶

The cartoonists' powerful depiction of the event in *Road to America* was a milestone in French comics and graphic novels. It is one of several fictional works, published outside of the literary mainstream, that helped keep the memory of the event alive, through the many years of official silence and of neglect by historians. It was serialized beginning in 1989, five years after the publication of the first groundbreaking fictional treatment of the event in popular culture:¹⁷ Daeninckx's detective novel *Meurtres pour mémoire* [Murders for Memory] (1994; first published in 1984; translated as *Murder in Memoriam*), which links that state crime to the earlier deportation of Jews by the Vichy government, in which Papon had also played a key role and for which he was finally condemned, long after the event (cf. Ross 1992; House 2001: 362). Indeed, Baru had read *Meurtres pour mémoire* before he had even thought about drawing the graphic novel (Baru 2006b). In Maghrebi-French novels, the demonstration and massacre of October 17, 1961, symbolize the Algerian immigrants' heroic resistance to historical mistreatment by the French (e.g., Kettane 1985; Imache 1989; Lallaoui 2001; Sebbar 2003; cf.

Hargreaves 1997: 64–65). They now constitute a founding event in the history and memory of the Algerian immigrant community in France (Stora 1993). *Road to America* shares a hermeneutic of historical discovery with many of these novels, although investigation takes various forms in them, depending on factors such as political orientation and ethnic identification. In *Murder in Memoriam*, unearthed evidence from the colonial period serves to indict the French nation-state and its officials for bloody war crimes (Ross 1992: 61). Daeninckx's narrator, a French police detective, discovers a hidden line of continuity leading back from the massacre of Algerians in 1961 to active, official French participation in the Nazi genocide. Moreover, the novelist explicitly traces a line forward from them to continuing racism against Arabs and Jews in the present (e.g., Daeninckx 1994: 88).

By contrast, *Road to America* does not trace the violence of the Algerian War back to active French complicity in the Nazi genocide, although it does connect the French resistance to the Nazis with the Algerian resistance to the French, through an unobtrusive but meaningful allusion. Baru depicted, right next to the entrance to the Parisian gym where Saïd trains, an official commemorative plaque for French patriots killed on August 28, 1944, right at the end of the liberation of Paris (19.1). It is at this same spot that the Algerian War violently breaks through the separation that Saïd had carefully maintained between it and his boxing career, when demonstrators burst into the gym, as they flee from the French policemen who are wounding and murdering Algerians right outside the building (40–41; figures 6, 7). The graphic novel connects the past to the present in a powerful way that invites readers to further investigate the events of the Algerian War, including the massacre in Paris. The cartoonists do this in part by leaving the mystery of Saïd's fate intact (43). Although we learn that Sarah survived, the narrator asserts that he can only speculate about what happened to Saïd: he may have survived the massacre, but he may instead have been thrown by French police into the Seine river to drown or have been otherwise disappeared by them, as was the case with dozens of Algerians in mainland France before, during and after October 17, 1961 (42–43; cf. Einaudi 1991; Péju 2000).

REMEMBERING THE PAST

For Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, Saïd Boudiaf's disappearance and what followed it also symbolize the hopes of Third World liberation that have been dashed since Algerian independence, as a series of historical and fictional

references make clear, to (44–45): the possible sighting of Saïd “dans les ombres des premiers triomphes de Cassius Clay” [in the shadows of Cassius Clay’s first triumphs]; Sarah becoming lost “dans les méandres tumultueux de la révolution castriste” [in the tumultuous meanderings of the Castro Revolution]; the exile of Algeria’s first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, deposed by Houari Boumedienne in 1965; and the assassination of Ali Boudiaf, in a hotel room in Zurich, in 1970. It should be noted that the presentation of historical information in the graphic novel is a bit confusing here. The novel’s penultimate image and the elliptical text under it could suggest that Ben Bella went into exile in Switzerland immediately after having been deposed: “En 1965, le colonel Houari Boumedienne chassait Ahmed Ben Bella du pouvoir . . . Un journal suisse publia une photo du début de son exil . . .” [In 1965, Col. Houari Boumedienne chased Ahmed Ben Bella from power . . . A Swiss newspaper published a photograph from his early exile . . .] (44). In fact, Ben Bella spent fourteen years imprisoned in Algeria, from the coup of June 19, 1965, until July 1979, when he was transferred to house arrest, before being freed and then going into exile in Europe (Ruedy 1992: 207). The use of history in *Road to America* conforms in some ways to Fresnault-Deruelle’s (1979) analysis of history in comics: on some points the cartoonists manipulate and deform historical events, weaving them freely into a fictional structure that is not completely bound to historical facts. Yet *Road to America* contradicts other blanket assertions by Fresnault-Deruelle (1979): the point here is not to effect a reactionary escape from history and memory into fictional adventure, as the critic generally argues in his chapter. Instead, the transformative depiction of historical events by the graphic novel opens wide the trapdoor to history and memory. For the reader familiar with the events of the Algerian War, the unsettling discrepancies between the actual events and the fictional reworking of them are an encouragement to return to the historical record and check the facts against the fiction of the cartoonists, but also against the nationalist fictions and historical distortions upon which the French and Algerian states founded their claims to legitimacy.¹⁸

The enigmatic disappearance of Saïd along with many Algerian demonstrators lynched by Parisian police on October 17, 1961, clearly invites the reader to meditate upon the responsibility of the French state and society for war crimes during the war, and for the amnesty laws and widespread amnesia that followed (Stora 1992a: 214–16). The massacre and its unsolved mystery are closely followed by two frames that evoke the promise of the liberation of colonized peoples in both Algeria and another settler colony: African Americans in the United States, symbolized here by the “first triumphs” of Cassius

Clay, a boxer who clearly stood up to imperialist aggression, and paid a high personal price for it. However, these hopeful references are immediately followed by sadder ones, to the shortcomings of the postindependence Algerian regime. They refer to the downfall of Ben Bella, but also describe the gruesome fate of their character Ali Boudiaf. His patronym brings to mind Mohamed Boudiaf, one of the nine “chefs historiques” [historical leaders] of the FLN (Horne 1978: 74–77). He was forced into exile during Ben Bella’s reign and only returned to Algeria in 1992, twenty-eight years later, to preside over a High Council, which took over leadership of the country in an attempt to face down the increasingly powerful Muslim revivalists (Ruedy 1992: 255; Malti 1999). His assassination, probably ordered by the corrupt Algerian military hierarchy, helped plunge the country into civil war. The details of the death of the fictional Ali Boudiaf recall an earlier real-life assassination: that of Belkacem Krim, the “chef historique” mentioned earlier in the graphic novel (35.2). Krim went into exile after Boumedienne became president. He founded an opposition group and was consequently sentenced to death, in absentia, by the Algerian regime, in 1969. He was found murdered, probably strangled, in a Frankfurt hotel room in 1970 (Horne 1978: 556).

The visual figuring of the narrator, on the final page of the book (45), who describes his quest for the truth about the events just described, helps us to understand the approach to history that the cartoonists propose (figure 8). Significantly the narrator, as historical detective, learned about the events that he has just recounted to us when he traveled to Skikda (formerly Philippeville), the Algerian city where the graphic novel began. This constitutes a return to an important scene of France’s colonial crimes: the Philippeville repression, which followed the FLN massacre of French and Algerian civilians. There, the narrator tells us, he spoke to one of the few Frenchman to have remained in Algeria after independence and the only person who has not forgotten Saïd—Henri Castaneda, called “le Constantinois,” the boxing trainer who first befriended the young man and launched his career. The choice to designate “le Constantinois” as the one who remembers Saïd’s story and to have him remain in Algeria memorializes that rare form of interethnic solidarity, between Algerians and only a few Pieds-Noirs able and willing to stay in Algeria beyond the end of the war. In fact, Baru fulfilled his French military service obligations by working in Algeria for two years during the 1970s as a *coopérant*, and during this time he taught himself how to draw comics (Baru 2001: 32). But the visual depiction of the narrator at the end of the story, and the fact that Baru has lived in Algeria, should not lead us to conflate the two, or read this as an autobiographical account; instead, it is a historical fiction

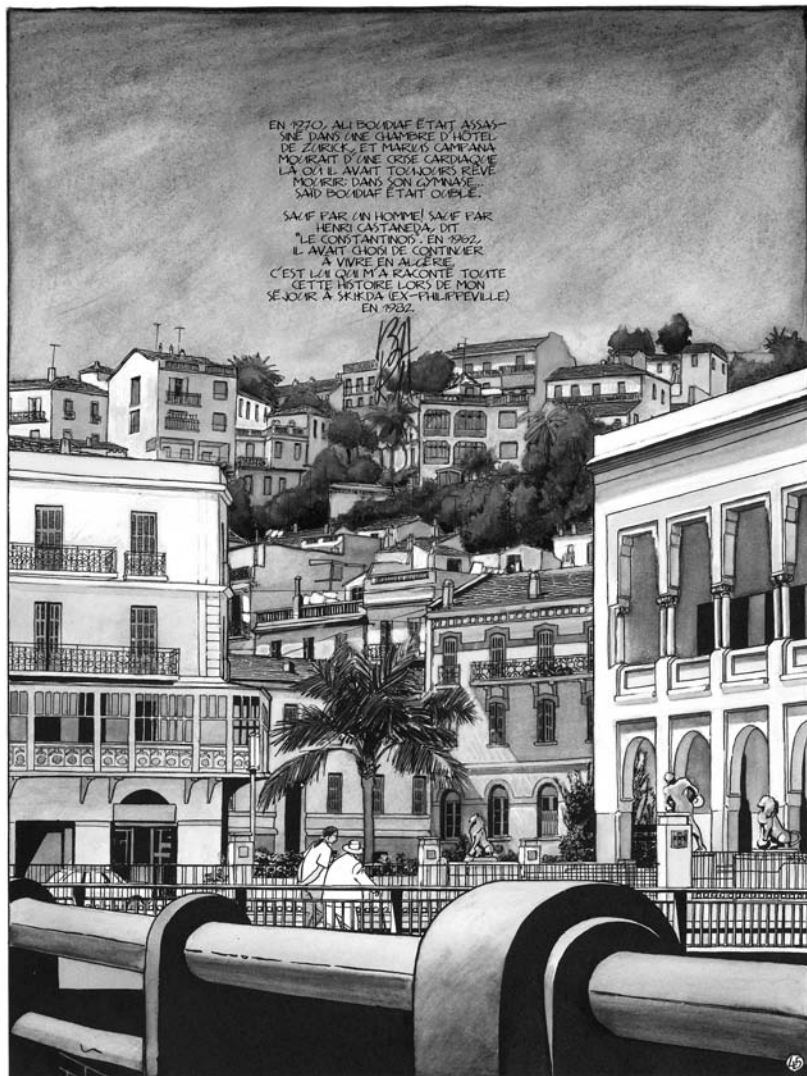


Fig. 8. In 1982 the narrator travels to Skikda, in postindependence Algeria, where Henri Castaneda ("le Constantinois") tells him the story of Saïd, which opens the trapdoor to a neglected history from the colonial past. From Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran, *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, plate 45; © Baru.

with a purpose. Indeed, Baru has complained that some readers have interpreted the final page as an autobiographical statement meant to guarantee the authenticity of the story, whereas it was actually designed to encourage historical reflection (Baru 1996). As Baru has recognized (2004c), his first

published graphic novels encouraged this type of conflation, between himself as author and his fictional characters, because there he named one of them Hervé Barulea (in Baru 2005).

Here the cartoonists are clearly inviting their readers to remember and commemorate the past, by investigating for themselves the historical realities on which the story is based. Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran do not mourn the loss of a colonized land, but of a historical moment when hope burned brightly for the end of imperialist domination and for the genuine liberation of oppressed peoples in the Americas and Africa. The fact that their novel's mixed couple is composed of an Algerian man (Saïd) who probably does finally participate in the struggle to liberate his country and a Frenchwoman (Sarah) who sided with the FLN suggests that they endorse a form of Franco-Algerian solidarity that worked against colonialism, rather than trying to preserve it. There are other excellent reasons to continue reading this book today, years after it was first serialized (November 1989–March 1990, in *L'écho des savanes*). The graphic novel reminds us that imperialist violence ultimately comes home to roost in the Western metropolis, despite attempts to contain it overseas—blowback can be a significant risk. When Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran show Saïd's friend Sarah being bludgeoned by a policeman on October 17, 1961, because she is warning him of the imminent danger that threatens him, they are suggesting that French wartime violence against Algerian nationalism also strikes French supporters of the independence movement (41). Earlier in the book, when she is harassed by two racist passersby just because she had been speaking with a North African (Saïd), we understand that colonialist violence is wielded in France not just by the army and the police, but by civilians too (20–21). These events were preceded by the ugly reception of Saïd Boudiaf upon his arrival in Paris for the first time—he is physically roughed up and is the victim of racist insults by a group of CRS (Compagnie républicaine de sécurité) [French riot police] in the Gare de Lyon. The train station incident is a shocking surprise to him and us precisely because it is in France, not in Algeria, that we first see him attacked in an explicitly racist manner (10–11). This foreshadows the graphic novel's depiction of Papon's "Battle of Paris" (cf. Einaudi 1991; figures 6, 7).

INSIGHTS FROM A NEGLECTED TRADITION

In their study of the large body of cultural production based on James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Martin Barker and Roger Sabin

(1995), both U.K.-based scholars of comics, referred to comics as “the hidden tradition,” in comparison to film and to prose fiction about their topic. *Le chemin de l’Amérique/Road to America* is part of a now well-established French tradition of making comics and graphic novels about the Algerian War, which I analyze at length elsewhere.¹⁹ Given the ubiquity of comics and graphic novels in cultural production and consumption in France and Belgium, it would be more accurate to speak of a “neglected tradition” rather than a “hidden” one, when it comes to describing the place of French-language comics and graphic novels in university studies.²⁰ How would the picture change, if we took this tradition into account? What does the study of a work such as *Road to America* bring to our understanding of the memory of October 17, 1961? It may teach us, or remind us, that comics and the popular culture in which they are rooted constitute an alternative public sphere, in which history is debated and political positions are staked out. This arena is neither entirely separate from, nor a simple derivation of, the mainstream cultural sphere. Remarkably, it was, in part, through genres and media too often considered to be minor that a public awareness of this event was created and maintained in France during the long years of official silence: investigative reports and pamphlets by activists (Paulette Péju’s *Ratonnades à Paris*; Levine’s *Les ratonnades d’octobre*),²¹ crime fiction (Daeninckx’s *Murder in Memoriam*), Algerian French fiction (novels by Kettane, Imache, Lallaoui, and others; cf. Hargreaves 1997) and—neither last nor least—comics (*Road to America*). Jean-Luc Einaudi is often credited with cracking open that silence, by publishing his *La bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* in 1991 and by later serving as a witness at the trial of Papon for crimes against humanity, for having helped organize the deportation of Jews from France to the death camps. As a social worker by training (“un éducateur”), not a credentialed historian, Einaudi too spoke from a somewhat marginalized position, and for a while was denied access to the official archives even after they had been finally opened (through special “dégrogations” [dispensations]), but only on a case-by-case basis, to a few—accredited—historians.

More specifically, the contribution of *Road to America* lies in part in its ability to show through images as well as to tell through text, and to tell by showing, to narrate visually—this is an often cited advantage of the comics medium over prose fiction, or at least a major difference between the two. In this book, Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran encourage us to look for visual-textual clues about colonial history from the evidence that we accumulate as readers, including small, apparently anodine details: a number painted on an Algerian house—typical of a French army system for tracking down nationalists in cit-

ies (33.4); the appearance of Sarah in a photo—behind her FLN contact (37); in a beautifully orchestrated, and appropriately mute, sequence of frames, a metonymical reference to a communication network, the “téléphone arabe” [the grapevine]—from which Saïd has voluntarily excluded himself, and which could have informed him about the impending demonstration by his Algerian compatriots in Paris (38.7);²² a frame (43.4; the left one in figure 7) based on a photograph that Baru found in a popular French history magazine;²³ the “rime visuelle” [visual rhyme] (Peeters 2002b: 33–34, 79) or the “tressage” [braiding] (Groensteen 1999b: 37, 173–86) connecting images of Saïd (26.5) and of Cassius Clay (44.1)—that may remind us of the many links that existed between the Algerian revolution and the African American civil rights movement. But it is no doubt the Algerian dead—such as those thrown off the bridge and later fished out of the Seine (42–43)—that haunt us most. Here, as in Baru’s earlier *Vive la classe!* (1987: 17.5; cf. figure 11-4, below), the bodies of dead Algerians, lying half-covered-up in the street, remind reader-viewers of the long failure—or, more accurately, the refusal—of many in positions of power in France and Algeria to metaphorically and literally bring out all the bodies of the wartime dead, so that they can be identified, counted, claimed, mourned, and properly laid to rest.²⁴ The bodies remind us of the wartime violence wielded by the French government and by its Algerian nationalist opponent, the FLN.²⁵ Baru, Thévenet, and Ledran remind us of the failure to account for the crimes of French colonialists, but also of France’s neocolonial allies such as Algeria. That is, they remind us of the failure to set the historical record straight. In other words, like other successful examples of literature committed to resisting colonialism and imperialism, *Road to America* uses narrative fiction to undo the containment strategies that work to keep us ignorant, or badly misinformed, about crucial episodes of history. It does so powerfully, with both pictures and words.

Notes

1. Born in Thil (Meurthe-et-Moselle), July 29, 1947 (Gaumer and Moliterni 1994: 47). For further information about Baru’s life and work, please see his autobiographical essay in the present volume, chapter 11, below.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all specific references to the comic book’s pages will be given as plate numbers (the numbers inscribed on each original plate by the artist; not the publishers’ page numbers), because these are the same in all versions, both French and English. All translations from the French for *Road to America* (2002) are by Helge Dascher, unless stated

otherwise. Hereafter, for ease of reading in English, I generally use “*Road to America*” (instead of the French title) to refer to the work.

3. “Pied-Noir” [Black Foot] is the term now generally applied to the European population of French Algeria. For an analysis of this group’s memorial relationships to Algeria, see Stora (1992a).

4. For example, this is true for French cartoonist Jacques Ferrandez, who is of Pied-Noir background, but also for Marinette Lopez, the wife of French boxer Marcel Cerdan (Roupp 1970: 119).

5. Much as Marcel Cerdan did (Roupp 1970: 46, 57).

6. Benedict Anderson (1991: 122) points out that the French term “‘indigènes,’ always carried an unintentionally paradoxical semantic load . . . [:] it meant that the persons referred to were both ‘inferior’ and ‘belonged there’” in the colony. This is true to a certain extent, but the European population (Pieds-Noirs) also saw itself as, in some ways, more French than the mainland French, and as more Algerian or African than the “indigènes.” Just to give one example, the French military song “C’est nous les Africains” [We’re the Africans] has been adopted as a kind of Pied-Noir anthem. The genocidal elimination of the Algerians by the Europeans was a possibility envisioned by some at certain points in the history of French Algeria, just as it was for the Native Americans by the Europeans in U.S. history. The ironic potentials of the term “indigènes” have been recently reworked in France, through (among other initiatives) a film by that title, on the French regiments of colonized soldiers.

7. The unsigned introduction to *Road to America* (n.p.) refers to Said’s role model “Marcel Cerdan, the famed French boxer killed in a plane crash while on his way to join his lover Edith Piaf in America.”

8. Probably modeled after Eddie Constantine, born Edward Constantinowsky (1917–93) in the United States. He was a singer promoted by Edith Piaf and an actor who played the tough guy character Lemy Caution. Both Constantine and Caution are referred to explicitly later in the graphic novel (18).

9. Baru confirmed my reading of this first element—the reference to Guy Vidal, a journalist turned comics scriptwriter and editor—in a conversation, on November 13, 2004.

10. The Isly is a river in Morocco. It is important in Algerian and French history because it was on the Isly on August 18, 1844, that the French General Bugeaud defeated the Moroccan army siding with the Algerian nationalist leader, the Emir Abdelkader, who had taken refuge in Morocco and had won over its sultan, Abd al-Rahman. Bugeaud was made “duc d’Isly” [Duke of Isly] after his victory. The naming of streets in colonial Algeria after Isly and other colonial victors and victories was a common French practice. There is still a rue de l’Isly in Paris, named after the French victory.

11. I thank my colleague Jesse Dickson for this observation.

12. “You were there!”; my translation.

13. Cf. Gallissot (1990: 339): “C’est le paradoxe d’une guerre coloniale de susciter ce remplacement de main-d’oeuvre en métropole; à la noria des soldats et des gendarmes dans les cales des mêmes bateaux et sur les Bréguet deux-ponts correspond la noria des travailleurs migrants: jeunes hommes contre jeunes hommes.”

14. As part of his negationist strategy of self-defense, Papon suggested that Kagan’s photographs had been doctored. Their authenticity has been vouched for by the publisher, novelist and eyewitness to the event, François Maspéro (2000: 200). Kagan’s photographs are held by the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine in Nanterre.

15. The law of January 3, 1979, and the decree of December 3, 1979, created a sixty-year delay before certain sensitive files could be opened (Stora 1992a: 271).

16. The groundbreaking French accounts of the event are in Péju (2000; first ed. 1961), Levine (1985), and Einaudi (1991).

17. The serialized version appeared in *L'écho des savanes*, November 1989–March 1990 (cf. *P.L.G.* no. 36, 2001: 41). Other allusions to or representations of the police massacre of 17 October 1961, in comics or cartoons may be found in *Le procès Papon*, by Riss (1998: 12–15), and especially in *17 octobre—17 illustreurs*, by Baudoin et al. (2001).

18. Cf. House (2001: 364) on a “mémoire critique” (he refers here to French historian Suzanne Citron).

19. I dedicate a chapter to these works in my book-length manuscript, “Redrawing Empire: Imperialism, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism in French Comic Books and Graphic Novels.”

20. A search of the Worldcat library database on October 22, 2006, showed only two university libraries (including my own), and the New York Public library, as owning a copy of *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, and only one as having a copy of *Une éducation algérienne*. There are similarly low numbers in the same database for other French-language comics about the Algerian War. By contrast, the same database revealed that dozens of libraries in the United States have a copy of *Road to America* (the English translation). Many of these are public, non-academic, libraries.

21. A “ratonnade” [rat hunt] is a lynching of Arabs or North Africans. The term appears to have been coined during the Algerian War and comes from the racist insult “raton” [little rat] used against North Africans.

22. A shop name, “T.S.F. St. Marti[n]”: T.S.F. stands for “télégraphie sans fil” [telegraphy without wire]; in other words, radio.

23. Baru (2006b) confirmed for me that his drawn frame was indeed based on the photograph, when I asked him about it. He also said that he had had trouble obtaining visual documentation for his graphic novel, until a friend of Pied-Noir background kindly provided him with a collection of issues of *Historia magazine* about the war, where he found this photograph and others. I had discovered the picture in Tristan (1991: 79). There it is labeled “Rafle à Puteaux” [roundup in Puteaux] and is given as depicting further repression of demonstrators on October 19, 1961. The book credits “Archives Humanité” for the photo, although it may have been taken by Kagan.

24. On the French army’s practices of torture and of disappearing bodies during the Algerian War, and their legacy in the Vietnam War and in Latin America, cf. Robin (2005).

25. Baru clearly suggests the right and the need of the Algerians to win their independence from France, but also reminds us of the extreme, even murderous, violence that the FLN wielded against Algerians in France, both in *Road to America* (19–22, 29–30, 35) and in other graphic novels (Baru 1987: 17:5, 2003: 34). Growing up in a working-class, ethnically mixed neighborhood, he was a witness to this violence (Baru 1996).

The Congo Drawn in Belgium

INTRODUCTION: A RETURN TO AFRICA

Belgium has begun showing renewed interest in its former colonies (the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi), as is demonstrated by the following events: a parliamentary investigation (2000–2001) into the extent of Belgium’s responsibility for the murder of former Congolese prime minister Patrice Lumumba (1925–61);¹ a popular colonial exhibition, “Memory of the Congo” (Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale 2005); and a controversial television documentary, *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (Bate 2003), on abuses under the rule of King Leopold II (1835–1909). Moreover, the former colonies are caught in a downward spiral: there have been ethnic conflicts and genocides (Rwanda 1994; Burundi 2000); and there is an ongoing war in the eastern Congo. These events launched public debate in Belgium about the colonial and postcolonial periods. However, the debate has remained cautious because of the possibly tricky consequences for the royal family, and the political and economic relations between Belgium and its former colonies.

A SHORT HISTORY OF COLONIAL BELGIUM

In 1876 the Belgian king, Leopold II, claimed most of the Congo basin as his personal possession, and at the Berlin conference of 1884 the larger

European nations agreed on the partition of Africa (Nelson 2005). Leopold II brutally exercised his personal rule over the so-called Congo Free State until a short time before his death, when Belgium took over the colony. Profits kept flowing out of the colony and new methods of forcing people to work (such as taxation) were introduced. Upon formal independence in 1960, 90 percent of the highly skilled positions, managerial posts, and economic wealth were still monopolized by foreigners and expatriates (Gondola 2005). Five years after independence, Mobutu seized power. He later renamed the country “Zaire” (Dunn 2005). He constructed a political aristocracy that engorged itself on the nation’s natural resources. By the 1990s Zaire was in shambles because of its shrinking economy and increasing foreign debt (Dunn 2005). In 1997 Mobutu fled into exile. Laurent-Désiré Kabila seized power and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but soon another war broke out, so the situation remained chaotic, especially in the eastern provinces (Haynes 2005). Even since the presidential elections of October 2006 the country has not achieved real stability. The two other former Belgian colonies, Rwanda and Burundi, were taken from Germany after World War I; they became independent in 1962 (Teeple 2002: 487–88, 618). In both countries the two largest ethnic groups—the Tutsi and the Hutu—have confronted each other regularly (e.g., the tragic genocide of the Tutsi by the Hutu in 1994 in Rwanda).

The relations between Belgium and its (former) colonies are therefore of great importance, but to what extent was this issue present in Belgian popular culture, specifically in comics? Since comics are an integral part of daily life in Belgium, they are supposed to have some influence on how their readers—especially children and adolescents—see the world. To provide insight about popular perceptions of colonialism among Belgians, this article will focus on the representation of colonization and its aftermath in French-language Belgian comics.² A few scholars have already addressed some aspects of this issue, for example: Craenhals (1970) studied racist stereotypes in Hergé’s *Tintin* series and Franquin’s *Spirou* series; Spreuwers (1990) focused on representations of Africa in the weekly comics magazine *Spirou*, 1947–68; and Halen (1992) analyzed the representation of former Belgian colonies in Belgian comics published 1982–92. Other studies dealt more generally with the representation of Africa in comics (e.g., Pierre 1984) and in popular European culture (Nederveen Pieterse 1990). My chapter not only builds upon these earlier analyses, but also offers some different interpretations of the material. I conclude with a close reading of a classic 1951 comic.

For reasons of space, not every French-language Belgian comic with references to the Congo, Burundi, or Rwanda can be discussed here; therefore the focus will be on some of the most representative and interesting ones (please see table 1, below). Very few comics refer to the two smaller Belgian colonies, Burundi and Rwanda. The Congo remains by and large the reference point. With a few exceptions, such as *Tintin au Congo* [*Tintin in the Congo*], most Congolese comics stories or series did not achieve commercial success: many were only published in periodicals and never in book form. Even when published as a book they usually found only a limited readership. All the comics analyzed here were published as books, except for the broadsheet (figure 1, below) and *Tif et Tondu au Congo* [Hair and Shorn in the Congo] (table 1). Three main periods stand out:

- During the early decades of colonization (1880s to World War II) we see direct references to the Congo and, primarily, shameless colonial propaganda, but by the end of the 1930s some more friendly approaches can also be found.
- From the end of World War II to the mid-1970s comics contain no direct references to Belgian colonies, but they use African colonial settings as a backdrop for the adventures of white heroes.
- The latest period, from 1978 to the present, proves the most critical for understanding how Belgians view their former colonies today.

FROM EARLY COLONIZATION UNTIL WORLD WAR II

Like other European colonial powers, King Leopold II proclaimed that it was his task to civilize the indigenous peoples of the Congo, but also exploited the rich resources of the country using forced labor (Gadzekpo 2005; Nelson 2005). It has been estimated that the profit that Leopold II extracted from the Congo amounted to at least 532.5 million euros, in today's currency (Reynebeau 2006: 210). Contrary to Nederveen Pieterse's analysis (1990), the visual culture of the period does not offer a uniformly negative representation of black people: on the one hand, they are sometimes represented as naive and uncivilized, but, on the other hand, brave and intelligent Africans also figure in popular prints. Some comics explicitly question the basic racial prejudices of their time, whereas others glorify the good deeds of the white

TABLE 1. FRENCH-LANGUAGE BELGIAN COMICS: CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WORKS ANALYZED

Author(s)	Title	First Periodical and/or Book Publication (publishers and dates)	Period Represented
Anonymous	<i>Histoire de Belgique</i> , no. 27	Dessain: broadsheet probably about 1910	1878, Stanley; 1892, the sequestration of De Bruyne and Lippens by Arabs
Hergé	<i>Tintin au Congo belge</i>	in <i>Le petit vingtième</i> , 1930–31; Casterman: various book publications from 1931; various translations	contemporary (1930–31)
Dineur	<i>Tif et Tondu au Congo</i>	in <i>Spirou</i> , 1939–40; Jonas: book publication, 1979	contemporary (1939)
Jijé	"Blondin et Cirage": <i>Le nègre blanc</i>	in <i>Spirou</i> , 1951; Dupuis: various book publications and translations since 1952	contemporary (1951); fictive location
Dany and Greg	"Bernard Prince": <i>Le piège aux 100.000 dards</i>	in <i>Tintin</i> , 1979; Lombard: various book publications and translations since 1980	1978; the Shaba crisis
Desorgher and Desberg	"Jimmy Tousseul" series	in <i>Spirou</i> , 1988–2000; Dupuis: 12 vols., 1989–2000; Glénat: 2 new books since 2004 + republication of the 12 earlier volumes	1960s; first years of "independence," but whites stay in power
Wozniak and Lapière	"Alice et Léopold" series	in <i>Spirou</i> , 1989–95; Dupuis: 5 vols., 1991–95	1920s
Hermann	<i>Missié Vandisandi</i>	Dupuis: book, 1991; various translations	end of the 1980s; reign of Mobutu
De Moor and Desberg	"La vache": <i>Peaux de la vache</i>	in (<i>A SUIVRE</i>), 1994; Casterman: book, 1995; various translations	1960s–90s; reign of Mobutu
Stassen	<i>Déogratias</i>	Dupuis: book, 2000; various translations	1994; genocide in Rwanda

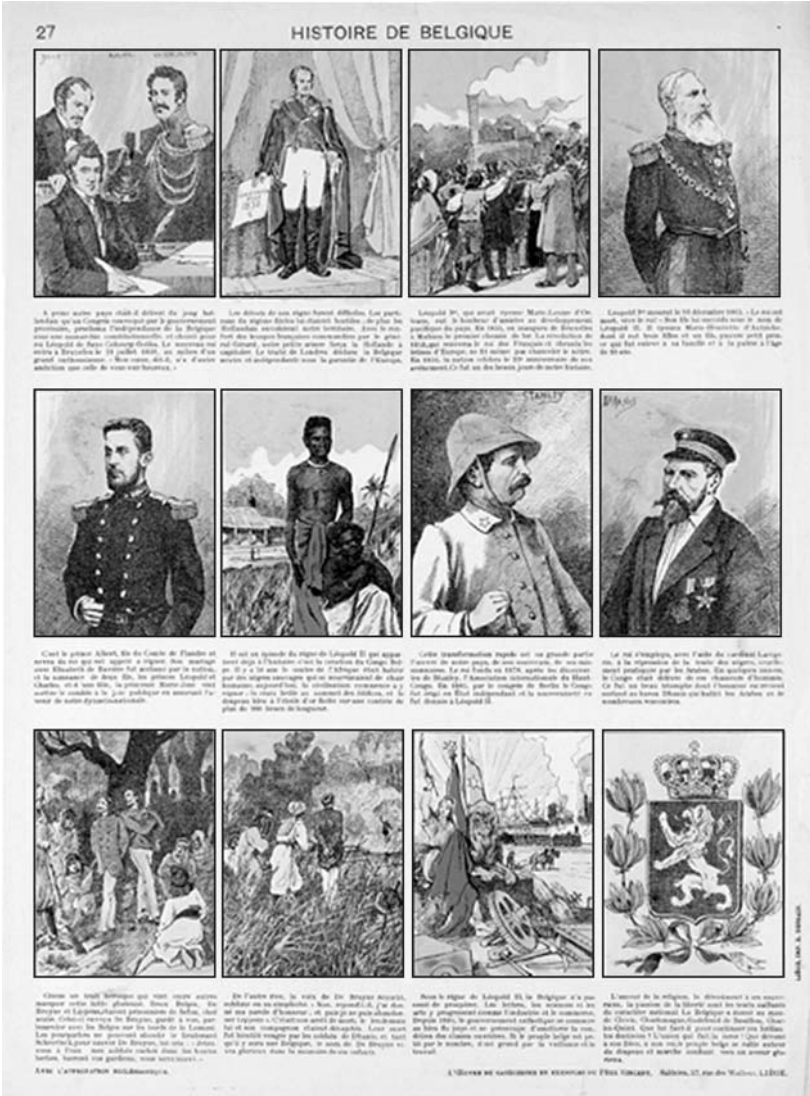


Fig. 1. A Belgian educational broadsheet, *Histoire de Belgique* 27 (circa 1910), which glorifies the work of King Leopold II and his subjects in the Congo. Illustration provided by the House of Alijn, Ghent, Belgium.

colonizers, such as freeing black Africans from Arab slave traders.³ A Belgian educational broadsheet, *Histoire de Belgique* 27 (circa 1910), glorifies the work of King Leopold II and his subjects in the Congo (figure 1). Two decades after this broadsheet, Hergé—for his employer, the abbot Wallez—sent his young

protagonist Tintin to the Belgian colony.⁴ *Tintin au Congo* was first serialized (1930–31) in the right-wing, Catholic magazine *Le petit vingtième*. It was the most successful Tintin story of the 1930s, if we judge it by its publication record (it was reprinted seven times between 1934 and 1944). Of the first nine, black-and-white, Tintin books, *Tintin au Congo* had the highest print run: more than twenty-five thousand copies were printed, whereas the average of the others was about seventeen thousand (Wilmet 2004: 25–29). The original version does not conceal its colonial vision: for example, the natives are lazy and speak simplified French. Whereas the white missionary stands for the true, Catholic faith, the traditional medicine man represents uncivilized superstition. Tintin teaches some geography to a class of young Congolese: “My dear friends, I will talk today about your home country: Belgium!” In the revised version, published after the war, Tintin teaches math instead. Some critics (Pierre 1984; Halen 1992) have noted that many comics follow the “humanitarian scenario” of *Tintin in the Congo*: the white hero goes to Africa to help his black brother against greedy, foreign companies and against a bad African power (over time the sorcerer was transformed into the corrupt government minister)—and in each case the two evil, African and foreign, parties join forces. However, protagonists in Western European comics from the 1930s through the 1950s generally behaved in other countries as though they were morally superior (Fontbaré and Sohet 1976; Masson 1988). Some argue that the Congolese found this episode of Tintin extremely funny. To support this view, Hergé biographer Benoît Peeters (2002a: 434) quotes a review published in 1969 in a Zairian periodical: “the Congolese find something there that enables them to make fun of the white man ‘who saw them like that!’”⁵ But not everyone accepts this interpretation: in the spring of 2007 there was a row over the selling of this album, because the British Commission for Racial Equality claimed that it contained potentially highly offensive material.

Not all Belgian comics artists shared Hergé’s view: for example, in 1939 Jijé (the pseudonym of Joseph Gillain) created a new comics series, *Blondin et Cirage* [Blondy and Shoe-Black], whose protagonists are a white boy and his adoptive black brother.⁶ Cirage is more than a sidekick for Blondin: contrary to the docile and easily scared Coco in *Tintin in the Congo*, Cirage is very active and courageous, and whereas Coco only speaks in simplified French, Cirage speaks French as fluently as his white “brother.” This friendlier approach toward blacks is also present in the Congo adventure of *Tif et Tondu*, serialized in the weekly *Spirou* (1939–40). Like *Tintin in the Congo*, this story deals with wild-animal hunting and bad Americans (who are hunting for the same animals [*Spirou*, July 6, 1939]), but in contrast to the Tintin story the

Congolese take some initiative: for instance a friendly black helps his two white Belgian friends when evil Americans try to drown them.

WORLD WAR II TO THE MID-1970S: THE CONGO BECOMES AFRICA

After the liberation of Belgium by the Allied forces, Belgian comics production boomed. Francophone Belgian publishers aimed at a larger, foreign market, especially other French-speaking countries, but publishers in France were displeased about competition from abroad. Therefore in 1949 France passed a law purporting to protect public morals; in fact it aimed to shield French comics production against imports from the United States and Belgium. Most French-speaking Belgian authors and publishers gave in and adopted preventive self-censorship: they avoided explicit political themes and replaced explicit references to Belgium or its colonies with French, or more general, ones. Therefore the protagonists of francophone Belgian comics no longer traveled to the Belgian Congo, but instead to fictive African ones.

With these adjustments, Belgian comics soon captured a considerable share of the French market. After the war, explicit colonial propaganda for the Belgian Congo mostly disappeared. Instead Africa became an exotic setting where white European heroes met and mastered wild animals, uncivilized and sometimes cannibalistic tribes, malicious medicine men, and foreign schemers. Even decolonization did not fundamentally change the humanitarian scenario: the diptych *Le pays de la mort* and *Les démons de la nuit* (of Mitacq's series *La patrouille des Castors*) from the early 1970s is significant in this regard. Although the artist personally knew some African students, who served as models for some of his black characters, many of the old clichés are still present in the books: a medicine man conspires with the antagonists, including a fat, evil general—a ridiculous operetta figure. The villains try to install an authoritarian regime that would have recourse to foreign trusts.

Nevertheless there are some remarkable evolutions in Belgian comics depicting Africa and Africans. First, from the 1960s on, readers of the magazine *Spirou* saw more Africans in official positions, such as police officers, whereas white colonial employees and traders became very rare (Spreuwers 1990: 154–56). Moreover, although the majority of Belgian comics publishers were Catholic, the representation of Catholic religious beliefs remained rather sparse in comics. Over the course of time, missionaries became quite rare and humble. Third, because of the changing political context (decolonization and

the Third World movement) some older comics fell out of favor: Casterman refused to reprint the revised *Tintin au Congo*, despite repeated requests by Hergé (Peeters 2002a: 432–33). Fourth, while the more caricatural styles continued to be popular, realistic styles became quantitatively dominant (Spreuwers 1990: 35), which suited the relatively new contents well: the humoristic civilizing approach (of Tintin, Spirou, Blondin and Cirage) was exchanged for a more adventurous approach. The more realistically drawn adventures, situated in the deep forests of the Congo, included the search for ivory in a remote elephant graveyard (e.g., Aidans and Duval 1963). Almost all these series are now forgotten by the general public.

None of the comics of this period tackled the problems of decolonization as such, probably because politics were banished from comics by the French law of 1949 and because decolonization was a sensitive topic in Belgium. After May 1968 the French censorship committee relaxed its policy, allowing political and critical comics to be published. It took about ten years before explicit references to the Congo cropped up again in French-language Belgian comics.

THE CONGO RETURNS AS A VIOLENT PLACE

Explicit representations of violence generally became more visible and acceptable in Belgian comics by the end of the 1970s. After three decades of representing fictive African countries, beginning in 1978 numerous Belgian comics were again set explicitly in the Congo. The Mobutu regime faced the Shaba crises of 1977–78, when armed rebels invaded the southern province of Shaba, formerly Katanga, threatening and killing expatriates and locals alike (Dunn 2005). Scriptwriter Greg used this episode as his inspiration for the 1978 Bernard Prince story *Le piège aux 100.000 dards* [The Trap with 100,000 Javelins] with its ravaging black rebels (Dany and Greg 1979). Never before had such a horrifying picture of the Congo been shown in Belgian comics. The 1970s also witnessed a renewed interest in classic comics: many old colonial comics were republished. Halen (1992: 366–67) sees this republication as a return to traditional values in a time of anxiety about European identity in relation to other cultures. Because those comics were viewed as “classics,” argues Halen, their old ideological premises posed no problem to readers in postcolonial times. It is true that various old comics series have been republished as “classics” over the last decades, but they had already been republished before the 1970s (e.g., *Spirou et les pygmées*). The general public seems quite uncritical and

cares little about the supposed ideological content of popular culture, as long as its products are entertaining. Nor do readers mind caricatural representations of other (i.e., non-colonial) foreign cultures in comics. In fact, they are probably more attracted by the way comics are told and drawn, than by their ideological content. The fact that “classic” colonial comics also sold well in other countries, even in ones without a colonial past, proves that the interest in these works was not a local, or typically Belgian, phenomenon. Moreover, the “classics” are not so unambiguously conservative or colonial as some think (cf. my case study of *Le nègre blanc* [The White Negro], below).⁷ In fact, a story can be interpreted quite differently by various readers, as is suggested by the apparent Congolese reception of *Tintin in the Congo*, described earlier. Nevertheless the entertainment value of these old comics is not unlimited: series without new stories—*Blondin et Cirage*, *Tif et Tondu*, or *La patrouille des Castors*—are gradually fading away. They were last republished in the mid-1990s. Even with constant republication the *Tintin* comics sell fewer copies every year.

Together with republications, several new series and individual stories set in the Congo were created. For instance, in the late 1980s Dupuis launched two new children’s series related to the Congo: *Jimmy Tousseul* [Jimmy Allalone], a classic adventure series, with a lion as a pet; and *Alice et Léopold* [Alice and Leopold]. The first episode of *Jimmy Tousseul* is set in 1961, one year after Congolese independence. Jimmy was born in the African colony but his parents have disappeared; now he lives in Belgium with his aunt and his uncle. To fulfill his longing for Africa, he returns to his birthplace, where he discovers a group of racist whites, still trying to stay in power, and begins to learn about the colonial era (figure 2). The group commits many crimes, including murdering a black minister so that a more corrupt one can replace him. *Alice et Léopold*, by Wozniak and Lapière, is another recent children’s series set in the Belgian Congo, but in the 1920s. McKinney (2005) argues that:

Despite the apparently good intentions of the artists, the image of colonialism that is presented is mostly colonialist at a fundamental level, because the colonial economic project is presented as mainly or essentially a legitimate activity, beneficial for all, of well-meaning, sympathetic colonizers (the family-based cocoa farm, in the series), and is seen through the naïve eyes of the colonizers’ children. The major faults of the system are presented as either in the past (the amputation of Mathieu’s hand, vols. 2–3) or as exterior to the primary colonial milieu (again, the family and its plantation, in the series): the actions of the hunting guide nicknamed “l’Africain” (vol. 1); the attempt



Fig. 2. Upon his return to the Congo, years after formal independence, Jimmy Tousseul begins to learn about the colonial past. From Daniel Desorgher and Stephen Desberg (1989) *Jimmy Tousseul*, vol. 2: *L'atelier de la mort*: plate 9 (i.e., page 11), strips 3 and 4; © Glénat.

to mine copper (vols. 2–3); the high-handed, brutal actions of a colonial military man and his soldiers (De Clercq, in vol. 5). It is only at the very end of the last book (46–7) that the economic basis of colonialism in the series (the family plantation) is finally put into question, but it is the outside, military colonial force (De Clercq and his African soldiers, from outside ethnic groups) that destabilizes the happy system of colonial exploitation that had been worked out over the years.⁸

Halen (1992: 368) believes that the old humanitarian scenario became more ambiguous due to decolonization and the Third World movement. He asserts that many comics from the 1980s and 1990s condemn certain aspects of colonialism as brutal, imperialist, and carried out by condescending colonizers, but that they also put forward the good colonial as a well-intentioned character. He (368) calls this a “balance idéologique” [ideological scale], which he defines as an attempt in Belgian and French comics, beginning during the 1980s, to negotiate the distance between the poles of European colonial ideology and support for African nationalism. The nostalgia and worry that stamp many Belgian comics set in the Congo may perhaps be interpreted as “a confession of old guilt” or at least as “a feeling of contemporary responsibility,” according to Halen (1992: 378).

Harsh criticism of the corrupt regime of then president Mobutu of Zaire became a new feature in Belgian comics in the 1990s, most notably in Hermann’s *Missié Vandisandi* [Massa Vandisandi] and in De Moor and Desberg’s

series “La vache” [The Cow]. In *Missié Vandisandi* Hermann represents the real flavor of the Congo and its problems: e.g., a former folk art museum is abandoned and pillaged; and portraits of the dictator are everywhere—his clothing and features clearly designate Mobutu. Police forces violently suppress a demonstration for democracy. In short sequences showing the torture of political opponents, the reader discerns the regime’s reality. Desberg, the American scriptwriter of the “Jimmy Tousseul” series, collaborated with Johan De Moor on the “La vache” series, a satire of contemporary society—its protagonist is a speaking cow who acts as an undercover agent. Mobutu’s corrupt regime is represented allegorically: the riches of the sea are plundered by dolphins for people on the shore. One clever dolphin becomes fatter, while fish starve. A short story from the “La vache” series, entitled “The Rite of Spring,” satirically recounts the moment when Kabila forced Mobutu into exile (De Moor and Desberg 1998).

Another important new feature of contemporary Belgian comics is the use of Burundi and Rwanda (former Belgian colonies) as settings: Frank’s short story “Sandrine des collines,” in the “Broussaille” series, is situated in Burundi; and Jean-Philippe Stassen’s *Déogratias* is set in Rwanda during the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsis. It shows how ordinary people turned into killers. Contrary to the preceding generation or two of artists⁹—such as Hergé, Franquin, or Jijé—these young artists have visited the places they depict in their comics, which allows them to forge personal relations with Africa and Africans. For example, some artists are children of former colonizers or were born in the colonial Congo (e.g., Desorgher), and Stassen has lived in Rwanda and fathered a child with a Rwandan woman (De Paepe 2000). This last period has also seen Congolese artists making comics: e.g., Barly Baruti, Kash, Mombili, Paluku, and Salla.¹⁰ Some Congolese cartoonists, including Baruti, have moved to Belgium to pursue their careers, because there are few publishing opportunities in Africa.

I now turn from my historical overview of the representation of the (former) Belgian colonies in French-language Belgian comics to a detailed analysis of Jijé’s *Le nègre blanc*, in order to show the ambivalences of some colonial-era representations of the Belgian Congo. *Le nègre blanc* exemplifies this ambivalence.

A CASE STUDY: THE AMBIVALENCES OF *LE NÈGRE BLANC* (1951)

Le nègre blanc was drawn by Joseph Gillain (Jijé, 1914–80) and possibly written by his brother, Henri Gillain (not credited in the publications).¹¹ It presents

a typical episode of a classic, French-language Belgian comics series from the 1950s aimed at children—it has: two main serial protagonists and some antagonists; a combination of adventure and caricatural humor; an initial problem that becomes more complicated in the middle and is resolved in the conclusion; simple, chronological storytelling, with causal relations; a standard length of forty-four plates; a conventional twelve-panel grid (four tiers of three identical, small panels or of one small and one large panel); and a variety of shots, although most are from eye level. Because *Le nègre blanc* is drawn in a humoristic way one must expect a distorted, caricatural representation. Not only the black characters, but also the white ones, are quite caricatural: e.g., the white police chief has a rectangular head (plates 6, 12); Firmin, the white butler, is surly (plates 7–12); the baronness de la Froussardière [funky, terrified] is hysterical (plate 10); and there is a vain white couple (plate 12).¹² The only undeformed white is the missionary (plate 43), because at the time authors in the weekly *Spirou* could joke about almost anyone except Catholic figures, including priests.

Due to its limited number of pages the story has to be concise, and the characters stereotypical and easily recognizable. Most character names make a pun in French: for example, Froussardière (plate 10) or the photographer Matufu (m'as-tu vu?) [did you see me?] (plate 15). I will now analyze the context, fabula, language, characters, and main themes of the comic.

THE CONTEXT: SERIAL PUBLICATION

Le nègre blanc is an adventure story in the already popular comics series about the boy team Blondin and Cirage that had started publication in 1939. This forty-four-page story was serialized in twenty-two installments in the weekly *Spirou*, June 14–November 8, 1951. Each week, readers found two pages (in black and white plus an additional color, red).¹³ Elsewhere in *Spirou*, black people played an important role, and in some cases the brutal, colonial exploitation of Africa is criticized:¹⁴ for example, there is “Médecin des noirs” [Doctor of Blacks], a short documentary story about Albert Schweitzer by Paape and Charlier (July 19, 1951), in *Les belles histoires de l'oncle Paul*, a historical documentary series. It begins with Albert Schweitzer standing before a colonial statue in Strasbourg. He thinks, “Here it is, the symbol of the egotism of the whites in the colonies! . . . Blacks suffer and nobody cares for them . . . What a pity!” On the next three pages the good deeds of the doctor in Africa are told. The story fits the myth of Albert Schweitzer as a model humanitarian and philanthropist, but others critique the doctor for being paternalistic, eu-

rocentric, and colonialist (Mbondobari 2003). Like Schweitzer, *Spirou* seems to be critical of some tenets of colonialism, but, on the other hand, supportive of its other aspects. Generally speaking, *Spirou* openly supported Western missionaries in the colonies, as I will demonstrate.

FABULA

The plot of the comic book revolves around the fictive African kingdom of the Bikitililis. A black king, Trombo-Nakoulis, wearing traditional clothes, rules the country and is assisted by two, scheming, high officials: a vain, greedy prime minister, and a sorcerer, B'akelit. By manipulating the weak and naïve king they exploit the country for their own benefit. Thanks to the king's lost son, Pwa-Kasé, and Blondin this problem is solved: the conspirators are exposed and punished. The bad minister goes to prison (plate 42) and the sorcerer will receive a Christian education from the white missionary (plate 43).

LANGUAGES

The Bikitililis do not speak a language of their own, which is common in popular culture: for example, ancient Romans speak English in most Hollywood films. As in most other exotic stories the locals try to speak the language of the white protagonists, but generally express themselves in simplified, short sentences with lots of infinitives. In *Le nègre blanc* some blacks (including the king and the prime minister) speak French as well as the whites do, but some lower-rank characters—including the photographer (plate 15) and a sergeant (plate 25)—speak a rudimentary, elliptical French. They also have trouble pronouncing some syllables.

In the book one finds terms such as “ce jeune macaque” [this young monkey] (plate 24) or “ce jeune ouistiti” [wistiti; marmoset] (plates 20, 33). These terms designate types of monkeys, but figuratively they mean something else: “macaque” (*Trésor de la langue française* 1986: vol. 21, 710) is also used to refer to an ugly person, and “ouistiti” to a person with curious behavior that cannot be trusted (vol. 22, 99). Nowadays “macaque” is also a term of racist abuse, whereas “ouistiti” is not nearly so negative. In *Le nègre blanc* both terms are, remarkably, never used by a white person to designate a black. They are used four times by blacks to describe other blacks (plates 20, 24, 27, 33). Once a black calls another black a “singe pelé” [naked monkey] (plate 15). Blondin is called “jeune ouistiti” (plate 10) once by the white butler and once

(while blackened with dye) “jeune macaque” by the black king (plate 24), who does not realize that Blondin is white. An explanation could be that it looks less racist when blacks insult other blacks.

CHARACTERS

Blondin and Cirage reappear as protagonists in each episode of the series. They are prepubescent boys who have a lot of liberty (their parents are always absent; they do not attend school).¹⁵ They are probably about the same age, but Blondin is slightly taller than Cirage. The “brothers” both have a striking pinhead—the story’s first panel suggests a merging and reversibility of the two characters. Like the other black characters and unlike Blondin, Cirage has bigger eyes, ears, and lips than the whites—this last feature is repeatedly used in comics to caricature blacks. As with other classic protagonists (Tintin, Spirou, Gaston), typical features make the protagonists easily recognizable. They are named after their color: Blondin [Blondy] and Cirage [Shoe Black]—shoe polish was also used by children and actors to blacken their faces. In fact Blondin dyes his skin and hair to disguise himself as a black boy to infiltrate a network of black kidnapers. With his blackened face he looks like his adoptive brother Cirage, but Blondin’s eyes, lips, and ears remain smaller. Judged on initiative, Blondin is unmistakably the main character here (cf. Halen 1992: 366), but he cannot act alone: the help of the crown prince, Pygmies, and even a chimpanzee proves crucial to a positive outcome. His black adoptive brother Cirage behaves more like a clown: he is a clumsy tennis player and golfer, has an uncontrollable temper, and likes reading comics. This makes him more comical, enjoyable, and human than the serious, rational Blondin. Generally, readers do not prefer characters that act in too superior or rational a manner. Tintin, Spirou, Astérix, and Blondin might be the official heroes of the comic book series in which they appear, but it is Haddock, Fantasio, Obélix, and Cirage who steal the show.

The two main antagonists are the prime minister and the sorcerer, B’akelit (plate 20), whose name refers to an early form of brittle plastic, typically dark brown or black [Bakelite]. The prime minister is not named and is mostly referred to as “minister.” Once Blondin calls him “le gros à bicorne” [the fat one with a two-pointed hat], which can be a reference to his diabolic nature. Moreover, his main characteristics are physical vanity and greed (plates 31, 43). To reach his goals he conspires with the sorcerer, who also has other motives (according to Pwa-Kasé, plate 31): he became afraid of losing his influential and lucrative position when the missionaries arrived.

Although most characters never change their clothing, the prime minister often puts on new outfits. His final one, a sports jacket with vertical bars (plate 39), prefigures his imprisonment. It is no surprise that he is wearing it when he is captured with a circular object, a lasso (plate 40). African clothes here have motifs that differ from the vertical bars of the minister's jacket (plate 25): circles or rings on the king's robe, triangles on Cirage's robe, irregular or floral motifs on the women's dresses. The prime minister tries to imitate European or North American styles, but without success. Is the latent message that Africans should not deny their own culture? Moreover, while Pwa-Kasé was living in the jungle with Pygmies, he wore Western clothes (a shirt and shorts), but when he returns to the royal palace he changes into a typical African robe with floral motifs. These new clothes not only reflect his new status (as crown prince) but also his respect for local tradition.

King Trombo-Nakoulis (trombone-à-coulisse) [slide trombone] (plate 20) is fat and easily manipulated. He is not as good as his son thinks (plate 36): for example, he condemns the wrong black child (Blondin in disguise) to forced labor on a plantation (plate 25), perhaps an allusion to slave labor by blacks in the Americas or to the more or less forced work on white plantations in African colonies. This might seem strange, since we usually associate slavery with whites exploiting black slaves, but slavery is an age-old institution in many African cultures (Fomin 2005: 372). Pwa-Kasé, also named Charles, is the product of two cultures. His African name metaphorically indicates his dual, African and Western, upbringing: Pwa-Kasé (poi cassé) [split pea] is culturally split in two halves that still form one entity. Could it be that contemporary events in Belgium inspired this story of a rediscovered crown prince? Only a year before its publication the twenty-year-old crown prince Baudouin had to take the Belgian throne, after a revolutionary climate forced his father, Leopold III, to abdicate. *Le nègre blanc* comfortingly suggests that the country will be in the right hands in the future. Catholics supported the monarchy and *Spirou* was a Catholic publication. This may be the story's implicit or repressed meaning.

A tribe of Pygmies also plays a role in this story—they: were partly responsible for raising Pwa-Kasé (plate 31); help Blondin escape (plate 32); capture the prime minister (plate 40) and begin to cook him (plate 42). In reality Pygmies are not cannibals, but cannibalism is a stereotypical element in the European imaginary about Africa. Nederveen Pieterse (1989: 117–19) explains that the cannibalistic theme was linked to the creation of a hostile image of Africans and used to justify conquest. About 1900, when Africa was already occupied by the Western powers, the cannibalistic theme

became ironic: the pacification of Africa had started and a new image, “the domesticated African,” was necessary. Jijé uses the idea of “the gourmet cannibal” here: one of the Pygmies is reading a fictive book, *La cuisine exotique et l’anthropoïde* [Exotic Cooking and the Anthropoid], by the famous Belgian chef, Gaston Clément, of the mid-twentieth century. But Blondin lectures the primitive Pygmies (plate 42) and orders them to stop cooking the prime minister. With regret the Pygmies obey him, but it remains unclear whether they will permanently give up their cannibalistic practices. It is crucial here that the tribe obeys the white boy, but he is supported by the black boy, Pwa-Kasé. Although the crown prince was brought up partially by the Pygmies, he clearly does not accept this (supposed) aspect of their culture (in the story). Moreover, it is difficult to know to what degree young readers in 1951 truly believed that Pygmies could be cannibals or whether they simply viewed this as a funny image.

THE ABSENCE OF WHITES

Surprisingly, except for Blondin, only one white man, a missionary, appears briefly in the African setting (plate 43), although reference is made to another white person: Dubois, the owner of a plantation (plates 26–27). The African kingdom seems to be an independent nation, which was fairly exceptional at that time (1951), because most African countries (except for Liberia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Libya) were still colonized by Western powers. The presence of whites (the missionary and Dubois) may suggest that it used to be the colony of a Western country—a French name such as Dubois can refer either to Belgium or to France.¹⁶ The idea of an independent African country was quite new for that period: most African territories were still governed by European countries (Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, and Spain). The big decolonization wave started in 1957 in Ghana and ended in the mid-1970s in the Spanish Sahara (Teeples 2002: 438). Most Western colonizers in the early 1950s still believed that the transition would take several decades more, although some Africans were already demanding independence. Though this appears to be an independent African country, the prime minister fears that Blondin might tell other whites what is happening (plate 36). At the same time, hidden in the jungle, Charles says to Blondin, “No, whites should not get involved in this affair. You risk creating problems for my father the king, who is a nice guy” (plate 36). These remarks may suggest that the African monarchy was not stable and that whites could dethrone the king or limit his powers and the influence of those manipulating him. More basically, Blondin cannot go directly to the whites because the

story would end then (on page 36), leaving the standard, forty-four-page comic book eight pages short. It would also be too simple and not a very dramatic way to end the story. Moreover, Blondin would be reduced to a simple messenger. In classic storytelling both the hero and his evil opponent need more glamorous roles, so it is more interesting to have a final confrontation between the good protagonists and the bad adversaries (plates 39–40).

RELIGION/SUPERSTITION

The first reference to religion or superstition occurs when the prime minister mentions the great sorcerer and the king, who is protected by heaven and the great white okapi (plate 20). Although holy animals do play an important role in many African creation myths (Willis 1993: 177), in the animal world there is no white okapi, only chestnut-colored ones with white stripes. A white okapi is therefore unnatural, like the “White Negro” of the title. This remarkable analogy suggests that the whiteness of the okapi can also be read otherwise: this black African kingdom may be protected by a white European or by a white God. On the other hand, there are few clues to support this hypothesis. Although most of the African characters believe in the white okapi, the prime minister seems to be a nonbeliever (plate 38). Nevertheless he does believe that Blondin is transformed into a monkey (plates 34–35).¹⁷ African mythology contains many tales about dangerous animals (such as lions or hyenas) that may take human form for a time (Parrinder 1975: 94), and demons and gods that take the shape of various animals (Cavendish 1982: 208). A simian transformation is shown in a thought balloon: in five steps the head of the black commander evolves into that of a monkey. This is a comical technique already applied a century before in the famous Philippon transformation of the head of King Louis-Philippe into a pear (Gombrich 1987: 290–92). In the case of *Le nègre blanc* the transformation could be interpreted as racist, since there is a long Western tradition of comparing blacks to monkeys and apes (Nederveen Pieterse 1989: 38–51), but in this comic it is a white boy who is supposedly transformed into a monkey (plates 32–34).

From a European point of view some black Africans in this story seem very superstitious, but on the other hand, from an atheistic point of view Catholic or other religious beliefs can be seen as superstition (since there is no more evidence of God than of a great white okapi). Moreover from this perspective the African sorcerer and the European priest are similar. The readers of the weekly *Spirou* probably would not take such an atheistic perspective: as Catholics they could laugh condescendingly about strange African supersti-

tions. In *Le nègre blanc* a battle of religions or superstitions takes place: Pwa-Kasé tells Blondin (plate 31) that the sorcerer B'akelit felt his position to have been undermined by the arrival of the missionaries from Europe. In the end the sorcerer has to be converted to the right, Catholic beliefs: he is handed over to the white missionary, who hopes to make B'akelit his best catechist (plate 43). On the whole this is a symbolic act, because there is no evidence that the king or the country will suddenly reject their African religion and become Catholics. We only know that the king's son was raised by both Pygmies and Catholic missionaries; as such he combines both beliefs. The story suggests that he will be the right man to rule the country in the future. In this respect the story remains ambivalent: the two religions appear mutually exclusive (the sorcerer converts), but the crown prince seems to combine both. How both beliefs can coexist remains unclear.

Le nègre blanc was produced in colonial times and was influenced by the dominant ideas of that period. Laughing at supposedly stupid, superstitious, and cannibalistic natives was not considered problematic in the dominant, Belgian culture. Stereotypical representations of Africans were quite common in Belgian popular culture, as this comic suggests. How earlier readers responded to this kind of cultural product is difficult to know nowadays, but because some representations are often repeated (e.g., gourmet cannibalism) we can assume that they were entertaining then.

Although the story of *Le nègre blanc* may at first appear simple, and it uses many stereotypical images, interpreting it is not self-evident, because its message is not consequent or obvious. The ambivalence is first articulated in the paradoxical title, *Le nègre blanc*.¹⁸ On one level the title refers to the scenes where Blondin is disguised as a black, using the same techniques as white actors in theaters.¹⁹ Indirectly the title can also refer to the crown prince, who is the product of a mixed education by blacks and whites. This was very unusual for the time, because Belgian colonizers were trying to transform the Congolese into a kind of Belgians in Africa. Many short educative films were made for this very purpose (Ramirez and Rolot 1990: 3, 29–54). The Pwa-Kasé/Charles character does not fit the traditional Manichean scheme of savage versus civilized, as other colonial images do (Nederveen Pieterse 1989: 100). This black character with a mixed upbringing proves the possibility of cultural evolution or even the efficient combination of various cultures. This differs from the typical Belgian colonial propaganda of that time: in the educational films progress was only possible if the native adopted the modern world of the whites and rejected his traditional culture (Ramirez and Rolot 1990: 29). In *Le nègre blanc* Pwa-Kasé/Charles may be the utopian ideal: he

selects the best elements of both cultures and switches between cultures as easily as he changes clothes.

CONCLUSIONS

Although several of the comics referred to here still need a thorough analysis, my brief historical overview of French-language Belgian comics on the Congo has demonstrated how representations of the Congo evolved. The first period (from conquest until World War II) was marked by explicit colonial propaganda (e.g., the broadsheet and *Tintin in the Congo*) and the “humanitarian scenario,” but there were also other approaches toward blacks (“Blondin et Cirage”; “Tif et Tondu”). After the war the Congo was seldom explicitly referred to, because of the French law of 1949, which forced Belgian cartoonists and publishers to downplay politics in comics. The “humanitarian scenario” continued in postcolonial times. It took almost two decades after the formal independence of the colonies before explicit references to the Congo were made in comics and a more critical stance emerged. Ambivalence is not only a trait of this most recent period; it had already popped up decades before, as my close reading of *Le nègre blanc* has demonstrated. Therefore, in contrast to other critics (e.g., Pierre 1984), I believe that one should avoid easy generalizations and instead pay close attention to individual comics and their contexts.

Notes

1. The parliamentary investigation began after the publication of Ludo De Witte’s *De Moord op Lumumba* [*The Assassination of Lumumba*] in 1999. Cf. the Belgian Parliament’s Web site: http://www4.lachambre.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=|comm|lmb&language=fr&story=lmb.xml&rightmenu=right_publications (consulted October 25, 2004).

2. Belgium also has a sizable Dutch-language comics production, which space unfortunately precludes from treatment here.

3. For an analysis of the place of the Congo in Belgian art, cf. Guisset (2003).

4. Two years before *Tintin au Congo*, Hergé drew a story scripted by René Verhaegen, entitled “Popokabaka, la bananeraie chantée,” serialized in *Le vingtième siècle* (March 1–July 26, 1938). Cf. van Opstal (1994: 210–11); Craenhals (1970: 85).

5. All translations from French and Dutch are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

6. Jijé described being shocked at the paternalism of *Tintin in the Congo* (Gillain 1983: 6). He was probably inspired by two other black characters in comics: “Suske en Blackske,” a Flemish series created by Pink in 1932, with a white and black boy as protagonists; and Maurice

Cuvillier's French "Zimbo and Zimba" series, with Africans—the latter was also published in Belgium by Jijé's publisher.

7. Since 1968, scores of academics and educators (e.g., Dorfman and Mattelart 1971; Leguèbe 1977; Malcorps and Tyrions 1984; Halen 1992) have scrutinized comics for their dangerous conservative ideology.

8. Although I generally agree with McKinney's analysis, I believe that there are also other aspects to this series, including the positive and effective role of a traditional African healer in volume 5.

9. Except for Dineur, the author of "Tif et Tondeu," who worked in the Congo (1928) before he started making comics, at the end of the 1930s.

10. The first comics magazine of decolonized Africa was *Gento Oye*, started in 1965 in Kinshasa, Zaire (Repetti 2002: 26).

11. Cf. Leborgne, Dehousse, and Hansenne (1986); Martens (1991).

12. References to panels or scenes in this story will be indicated by plate, not page, number.

13. Each issue of *Spirou* contained twenty-four pages (cover included), of which fifteen were devoted to comics and nine to texts (such as short stories, games, and general information).

14. In the issue where serialization of "Le nègre blanc" began, the first episode of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in French. The week after "Le nègre blanc" ended, *Spirou* published a short story on the scandal of slavery in Africa. During the publication of "Le nègre blanc," *Spirou* also published another comic with a black as a secondary character: "Surcouf, roi des corsaires," where a courageous black servant assists and saves his captain (*Spirou* no. 689, June 29, 1951). According to Spreuwers (1990: 32) Africa was present in 10 percent of the pages (1947–68).

15. Their young age is important because it facilitates identification with them by young readers of the story.

16. This might be a subtle reference to the Belgian Congo, whose plantation owners could have French names. Ambivalent references facilitate(d) sales of Belgian comics in France. Nevertheless the uniforms of the African police are quite similar to those of colonial-era Congolese police.

17. This recalls a passage in *Tintin au Congo* (plate 30), where Tintin's African sidekick, a boy named Coco, thinks he sees a talking monkey, but it is Tintin disguised in a monkey's skin.

18. *Le nègre blanc* was also the title of Abel Gance's second film of 1912, an antiracist story about a black child mistreated by white children (Drew 2002). It is unknown whether Jijé knew about this film.

19. His disguise as a black has nothing in common with minstrel shows where whites imitated blacks, and foremost the rural plantation nigger (of the Sambo or Bones type) or the urban dandy (Tambo type) (Nederveen Pieterse 1989: 132–35).

Distractions from History

REDRAWING ETHNIC TRAJECTORIES IN NEW CALEDONIA

I. FACE-MAKING, NATION-MAKING, HISTORY

It is axiomatic for historians that the grand enterprise of nation-making depends upon the commensurately grave enterprise of history-making. In the case of the Melanesian archipelago, dubbed “New Caledonia” by James Cook in 1774 and thereby drawn inevitably into the history of nations, it appears that the incidental gestures of face-making and the landmark feats of history-making are mutually entailed in ways that complicate the nation-making project at those points where representational effects register ethno-racial difference, across the colonial divide. This proposition is notably in evidence where facial representation engages with the marked ethnic politics that have followed since *la Nouvelle-Calédonie*’s annexation by France in 1853. In its broad form, the proposition may be illustrated by the delicate, red-tone drawing of a “man of New Caledonia,” executed in 1774, in the Balade–Puebo area, by the principal artist of Cook’s second voyage, William Hodges (figure 1).¹ More pointedly, it can be shown by a recent New Caledonian instance of a much younger genre than portraiture, the black-and-white *bande dessinée* comic book by Bernard Berger and JAR, 1878 (figure 2).



Fig. 1. William Hodges, drawing of a man from the Balade–Pouebo area in the northeast of the main island of New Caledonia, [*Man of New Caledonia*, red chalk, 1774 (second Cook voyage), bearing the title “New Caledonia,” catalog title “[*Man of New Caledonia*,” held by National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection (permission granted).

As much as these two instances of face-making differ from one another, each acknowledges history while somehow escaping its project, effecting a potent gesture of nation-making that heads away from historicity. Similarly, each of these two modes of face-making acknowledges the documentary function, upon which history depends, while retaining another representational power, a suggestive one. And each face-drawing offers resistance to the contemporary consensus, discernible over the last thirty years in New Caledonian history-making, that the photographic document provides the most potent iconographic instrument of nation-making.

Hodges’s drawn portrait, from a first-contact encounter, seems an inaugural, pre-photographic instance of Europe’s incorporation into its own history—not least through documentation—of a south-Pacific territory-cum-population that it names and thereby marks out for national existence. This nearly three-quarter-profile bust portrait serves, now, as an affirmation of a beginning for

CACHÉ DANS LES BROUSSES, J'AI SUIVI
LES 200 GUERRIERS ET LE CHEF
BLANC SERVANT. CHAQUE VILLAGE
SUSPECTÉ D'ÊTRE AMI AVEC
LES INSURGÉS ÉTAIT BRÛLÉ !! ...

LES GENS DE CES VILLAGES S'ENFUYAIENT
DANS LES MONTAGNES. SI LES GUERRIERS
LES TROUVAIENT, ILS LEUR COUPAIENT
LA TÊTE... ILS GAGNAIENT DES SOUS PAR
TÊTE COUPÉE. JE N'AVAIS JAMAIS VU ÇA.



Fig. 2. Frame depicting dying Kanak, Bernard Berger-JAR, *Le sentier des hommes*, vol. 3: 1878, Nouméa: La Brousse en Folie, 1999, p. 35, frames 1–2.

the country's history. Yet the drawing's tracery effects also render the individual human as ungraspable, suggesting dimensions of character in dispersal beyond history and nation: the extremely soft-edge, individuated portrayal of ambiguously expressive eyes and face, the "crazed," diffuse qualities of beard, skin, and chest that merge into the ground—so much suggestion and so little affirmation—literally draw the character away from the simply documentary. Berger-JAR's anti-photographic, *bande dessinée* personae derive, for their part, from the history of the decisive colonial moment in New Caledonia that was the indigenous insurrection of 1878: in the margins of the documented events, a settler-white and a displaced indigenous man spend a night recounting their pasts, pasts that hold no interest for history. Despite the publication of these nationally significant, historically loaded protagonists in 1999, the first and powerfully "historic" year of New Caledonia's autonomization from France—the year in which this dependency officially becomes a quasi-nation²—the "drawn strips" of 1878 manage to steer away from the repetition of history's ethnic binaries, toward an exploration of potential national character. The Hodges portrait and the Berger-JAR strip are both, then, instances of what we can call "facialization"—the representation of human-ness through the face—which, as drawings, establish human character through "line work." In the exercise of this character-oriented

“line work” each image performs a significant cultural operation that is neither documentary nor historical. With Hodges’s high-register portrait in the role of graphic counterpoint, the low-register *bande dessinée* drawing of 1878 can be examined as a genuine contribution to nation-making, yet one that specifically pulls away from history and its photographic documents in order to open up for new trajectories the racially overdetermined field of (quasi-)national character.

II. LINE WORK, CHARACTER TRAITS, DISTRACTION

To speak of “line work” is to define drawing in relation to the traditions of *trait*-making whereby European conceptions of humanity have literally marked out, through line-based depictions of faces, both individual character and ethnic type. In English, we forget the elementary senses of *trait* as “line” and character as “mark,” yet portraiture and physiognomy have for centuries interrelated line-work or *trait*-making with characterization and ethnography, two traditions that come together in Hodges’s portrait. In exploring the relation between *bande dessinée* and national character in New Caledonia, it is crucial to hold together the elementary, *graphic* notion of “character trait” with the sense of “human quality” in order to understand characterization and portraiture as forms of tracery, as representational elaborations arrived at through *line*-work. The Hodges portrait, a record of first-contact encounter, is evidence that drawing, *trait*-making, may also be the stuff of documents and of history-making. Let us understand history-making as a *project*, etymologically construed, namely a determined, grave, *forward movement* in nation-making, one that amounts, we might say, to a kind of cultural *traction*, where “traction,” as part of the cluster of words deriving from *trait*, is a deliberate *drawing along* a preconceived path. Thus *trait*-making, when it is documentary, is not just etymologically but discursively a function of the *traction* that colonial occupation gains through history’s representations of those it draws into its frame: a Pueblo or Balade man becomes “New Caledonia” (figure 1), providing a starting point for the slow project of national becoming. Yet the unresolved tracery of Hodges’s portrait, its graphic dispersals in diffuse line formations, also exemplify the potential that *trait*-making has to perform *distractions* from—drawings away from—the trajectories of history’s (over)determined moves, to depart from the role of the document that indicates history’s point, to draw away from historical (over)determinations.

This effect of *distraction* from history matters for the imagination of best possible national futures, just as history matters to nation-making for

its grant of a firm national footing in the ground of the past. This grounding effect is what we are calling discursive traction. In an age where the indicative powers of photography recommend it as the inevitable medium of iconographic documentation, not least that of documentary portraiture, drawing has been all but eliminated from the documentary realm in New Caledonia. So displaced, it becomes tangentially available as a medium of national imagination, one able to re-articulate the relationship between drawing, facialization, historical record, and nation-making. If the Hodges image is, ambivalently, *both* documentary *and* “distracting” in relation to history’s indicative deployment of the portrait (“There was a man of New Caledonia,” the history illustration affirms; “What might this man be?” the work of distraction asks), the Berger-JAR comic book, 1878, commits thoroughly to a nondocumentary, line-work response to history’s use of the face to portray the nation’s making. This drawing away from history can quite strictly be cast as a distraction *from* historical survey *toward* human possibility, including the possibility of a human territory resembling a nation, some possible “Nouvelle-Calédonie.”

We can only assert, here, the preponderant role accorded to history and the document in New Caledonia’s nation-making efforts of the past thirty years—through photographic exhibitions, *son-et-lumières* [sound and light shows], public lectures, press articles, monographs, and so forth. It is an article both of common sense and of proto-national conviction that the always-already *unknown* territory of New Caledonia—the forgotten French antipodes, overlooked and under-registered for so long—can best remedy its lack of identity, can best prepare its (quasi-)national future, through an informative culture of the document. In the absence of nationhood proper and given the dirth of institutions of self-knowledge prior to cultural reform in the 1980s (when public debate increased and when a university was introduced), a culture of de facto nation-making in New Caledonia relies heavily upon—gains traction from—the constitutive practices of document-based history. Yet, a simple commitment to history creates a problematic culture for a colonial proto-nation emerging out of hard, racialized pasts: the salutary pursuit of counter-colonialist history necessarily entails the repetition of colonial divisions; it cannot fulfill other needs of nation-making and national imagination. In the context of a historiophilic culture of the document, by taking the notion of line work seriously, an alternative epistemology of drawing is thinkable. By the lights of such an epistemology, *bande dessinée* provides a genre that permits inventive *distraction* from the extraordinarily strong forms of historical knowledge that define New Caledonia’s nation-

making, especially with respect to a mooted self-image that must cleave, historically, along the divide between indigenous (Melanesian/Kanak) and nonindigenous (settler white/Caldoché).

Let us explore an epistemology of distraction through the example of the indigenous counter-colonial campaign of 1878–79,⁴ since it stands as a comprehensively history-making episode in New Caledonia's 150-plus years of French existence, the singular instant at which the colonial project met with concerted, widespread resistance, and when that project, by manifesting itself as violent power, achieved full and determined traction. The campaign of 1878–79 was the first collaborative effort among indigenous peoples of New Caledonia to repel entirely the French occupation, then only just expanding as an invasive settler-cum-convict colony. It was initiated by the "Grand Chef" Atai,⁵ strategist and charismatic leader. An ill-adapted French military was decisively supported by several other chiefdoms. The defeat of the anticolonial resistance marked the beginning of wholesale dismantlement of many of the indigenous groupings of New Caledonia's main island. Thus "1878" has at least two (rival) connotations for the nation-making history of New Caledonia: this date marks the shift from a vulnerable colonial settlement to an absolute colonial possession; it is also looked to as the antecedent of the separatist movement that both generated the violent civil unrest of 1984–88 and led to the proto-national framework that is the Noumea Accord (1998).

The year 1878 marks, consequently, a quintessentially historical moment, one that concentrates all the colonial tensions and legacies with which New Caledonia must grapple, and one that, moreover, has its documentary iconography. Continued investigation and shifting cultural uses of 1878 indicate that there is still a great deal to learn about "what happened" and "why it happened"—the historian's questions. Research that pursues all the possible dimensions of "it happened" does not, however, obviate the desirability of research oriented toward temporalities and ontologies other than those entailed in the straight-pointing indexicality of the iconographic document in the service of history. The document is made "indexical" because it is used to point out, to indicate (*vis-à-vis* some element affirmed by history) that "there it was"; it performs in the indicative mood. Intriguingly, the intensely historicized nature of the significant date, and the iconic status of the documents with which history establishes national terrain and makes indicative points, means that "1878" affords the Berger-JAR comic book, *1878*, an interesting alternative to history-making—what I am calling a "distraction from history"—through line-work. If repeated citations of a *carte-de-visite* drawing of Atai's distinctive head permit history to straightforwardly confirm that

there was a character to be reckoned with; if memoirs of Governor Olry's meetings with him invite history to quote Ataï's political quips and very directly report that *there* was an acute mind; if a studio photograph of Jean Olry's "pale eyes" provides history with ever-immediate evidence that *there* was a man who faced "the darkest days of the crisis" with "[a] perfect sang-froid";⁶ if the Musée de la Marine's photograph of the good ship *La Vire* can occasion history's assertion that *there* was an instrument of war that made all the difference; if Allan Hughan's photographs of *le Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Servan, in full uniform, reviewing his indigenous troops, enable history to show that *there* gathered the devastatingly effective Canala warriors and that they fought for the French with indigenous weapons and in the traditional bare-body manner of Kanak warfare; if ethnographic photographs of skull sepultures compell history to point out that, at the time of the war, *there* still lingered Kanak mortuary practices; and, if an uncommented, museological photograph of a skull, marked as that of Ataï, "chef des Néo-Calédoniens révoltés," serves history's determination simply to indicate that Ataï *was* and then *was no more*, what other order of ambition might *bande dessinée* cultivate in relation to this "1878" that exists principally as documented accounts of what was and what happened? What order of gesture might *bande dessinée* perform other than to direct attention to what *was* once *there*?

III. PHOTOGRAPHY, THE THAT-HAS-BEEN, DISCOVERIES OF THE PEN

Within this framework for an epistemology of *bande-dessinée* line work, we are pressing at its differential significance with respect to the documentary regime in which history and photography have prime roles, and where we understand the document, especially the photographic document, to be carrying a charge both of essential passéism and of indexicality. This is a twofold charge of limitation qualifying a regime designed to indicate existence. The "charge" is more that of a power than of an accusation, but this power also contains something to be wary of. Roland Barthes (1980; 1981) has famously discussed the punctually limiting effects of the photograph in *La chambre claire*. Barthes looks to identify the *genius* of the photograph, and offers the neologism of the "ça-a-été" [that-has-been] to define its property of casting into a past state any being that it captures. As Barthes describes it, the intensity of the past-tense effect of the photograph upon its object is such that it can be termed a "mortification." Can one not cautiously propose, *pace*

Barthes, that most documents have something of this property, even if the photograph is the medium most potently laden with the analogue quality that arrests Barthes's attention? If this *that-has-been* effect amounts to a mortification, in the case of the photograph, then the implications are sobering for a document-grounded culture investing heavily in photographic self-portrayals. To repeat the commonplace of historicism: by establishing a past, history has the capacity to bestow existence upon a country anxious precisely to exist as a nation, doubtful that it possesses this quality of existence at all, as is the case for New Caledonia. The Barthesian insight provides a caution to nation-makers, however, as to the viability of composing a national iconography entirely out of the documentary photograph: the constitutive indication toward something "that was" in the making of the nation—pointing indeed to a persistent "that" of national coherence across time—through the good offices of the *that-has-been* of history and the document—are accompanied by the dangers of a transfixing *has-been-ness*. Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–89), Kanak separatist leader and aphorist, effectively warned his fellow Kanak against the passéism of document-based culturalism when he said, "Our identity is ahead of us." Barthes and Tjibaou, both, may be regarded as advocates for the inventive idea, conscious of its vulnerability to the assertiveness of the fact-enriched document, where the "fact" is rich because it has occurred, as demonstrated by its partner the document.

There is something suggestive for an understanding of the virtues of *bande dessinée* in the abrupt coupling of aphorisms from a mournful phenomenology of the photograph and an exhortation to ethnic survival. Indeed, the cluster of issues and terms forming here around the contradistinction between the document and line-work, wherein photography figures as the negative term standing against invention and ideas, acquires full coherence when associated with the terms in which *bande dessinée* was conceived. As it happens, Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846), credited as the "inventor" of *la bande dessinée*, also had an argument with photography, in its early realization as daguerreotype. His line-based, narrative albums are defined by minute considerations of face-making and are utterly preoccupied with the ways in which letter-characters and line-characters interact to produce ideas through the inventions of personae-character. In other words, Töpffer interrelates the root meaning of "trait" qua "grapheme" and the culturally expanded sense of "trait" qua "human quality." In Töpffer we find a very thoughtfully elaborated epistemology of line-work that is utterly germane to *bande dessinée*, providing explicit reasons for its advantages over photography as a medium for ideas and invention in relation to "character," in every sense of the word—including, by extension, national character.

As Benoît Peeters (1994) reminds us, Töpffer intently discussed the relative valencies of the daguerreotype and drawing, not least as each medium renders character, in the sense of human disposition. In a Europe where physiognomy still held enormous sway, Töpffer was interested in inventing character literally from scratch, in his “literature-in-pictures,” rather than documenting it from existing reality.⁷ Töpffer found an innovative balance between an appeal to conventional recognition of character traits according to features, and the fostering of a genuine dynamic of unfolding narrative possibility for his characters. The line, the *trait*, is crucial for each of these effects and for their interrelation, as is tellingly conveyed through Töpffer’s insistence upon the value of accidents of “a single bound of the pen” in his accounts of the inherent inventiveness of drawing. There is so much more inventive potential in what “your pen has produced” than in “a preconceived idea”: “the technique of line drawing fertilizes invention admirably: it is quick, convenient, richly expressive, and apt for making happy discoveries” (Töpffer 1965: 14). To gloss Töpffer in our terms, while remaining very close to his own formulations, we can say that when the line performs its own *distractions*, inventions of character are particularly likely to occur. Accidents or no, the line is the thing, for in the throw of the line is a thought, which is why Töpffer insists that one “see in [his] figures an idea and not limbs.”⁸ The drawn line has another “advantage,” namely “the complete freedom that it allows in your choice of features [traits] to be indicated—freedom that a more finished imitation will no longer permit.” The point, here, is that meaningfulness is the objective, not replication for its own sake, and meaningfulness arises out of graphic selection and emphasis. As Töpffer says of those “limbs” that he draws to help inflect character, they have no intrinsic interest *qua* limbs. Where particular emotions are to be depicted in a series of faces, for example, it will be necessary to produce omissions by the standards of naturalist completeness, omissions made in favor of those “linear signs which convey these emotions” (Töpffer 1965: 7–8).

Not surprisingly, photography is, for Töpffer, the arch example of thought-less completeness. Töpffer’s conviction is that the photographic process produces mere identity (“the type of imitation proper to the plate”), while drawing, particularly unschooled, accident-prone drawing of human figures, produces the far more interesting and vital effect of resemblance (“which is the kind of imitation proper to all products of Art”) (cited in Peeters 1994: 47). In Töpffer’s idiom, resemblance is not synonymous with simulacrum, since it renders the quality of its object precisely by eliminating mere detail, whereas photographic identity is the slave of detail, helplessly,

meaninglessly complete. Resemblance is a function of meaningfulness. Photographic processes, not executing a grapheme worthy of the name, cannot achieve resemblance in the Töpfferian sense. And here is a final statement on the matter from the 1841 article, “De la plaque Daguerre”: “Identity can reproduce only a double of the object; the resemblance of the object taken as a sign is able to draw out [make emerge], at will, this or that meaning, this or that impression, this or that sentiment, this or that thought, and thus transform the finite into the infinite, the painting into a poem, imitation into art” (cited in Peeters 1994: 60). Töpffer’s infinite, his poem, his art, can serve as cognates of distraction.

As Peeters rightly points out, Töpffer underrates the capacity of photography to achieve “thought.” Nevertheless, by investing utterly in the *graphic trace* from which all notions of “character” derive, Töpffer is able to generate complexities of character *qua personae* in novel relations between script and imagery that conduct themselves upon pages, quite independently of any biographical (past) entity of reference in the world. Among the many implications of Töpffer’s work, the dissociation of character from reference and indication, through idea-rich line work, for the discovery of a possible “whole society” (Töpffer 1965: 13), vitally reveals the inventive potential of *bande dessinée* as a nondocumentary mode of representation.

In the context of nation-making in New Caledonia, by extrapolation from the logic of Töpffer’s polemic with the photograph, a warning may be sounded about any monolithic installation of the culture of the document by those wishing to serve the future of the proto-nation. The conjugation of documentary photography with national history resolves into a concentration of has-been-ness tending to produce meaningless doubling, identity as merest repetition. Certainly, temporalization of this kind readily translates into the sense of sure ground and firm purchase, but its counter-productivity in relation to invention means that the thought-prone, characterful trait of *bande dessinée* recommends itself as a means of achieving significant, complementary *distractions* from history.

IV. BANDE DESSINÉE EPISTEMOLOGY OF 1878 (TODAY)

I wish to look at the role that *bande dessinée* may play in providing distractions from racialized, colonial history in the redrawing of race relations in New Caledonia. I mean these puns quite literally: I would like to consider what the generic conditions of *bande dessinée* (*drawn strips*)—line work that

is capable of *drawing away from* history and from photographic portraiture—have to offer within the scheme of representations shaping New Caledonia’s proto-national character. I would suggest that *bande dessinée* invites figurations of the nation involving characterful “bounds of the pen” rather than indexicality, and offers a model of character-generation that is powerfully face-driven, as becomes nation-making, without being past-oriented, because it does not fall within the regime of the document. *Race* relations amount very often to *face* relations. So we come to the relatively recent four-album series of *bandes dessinées* by Bernard Berger and JAR (1998–2001), *Le sentier des hommes*. Focusing on the third volume of the series, 1878, this discussion will situate Berger-JAR’s work in relation to two significant histories of New Caledonia, in order to appreciate how it is that the Berger-JAR enterprise contributes to the larger enterprise of knowing about New Caledonia, where the more conventional knowledge practices of historicization and documentation play such a strong role. Firstly, we will consider the paradigmatic work of local history, *Le mémorial calédonien* through its chapter on 1878, “Le grand brasier” [The Great Wildfire]. Berger-JAR’s reference to it is explicit, the better to offer an alternative project. Of precise relevance, too, is a prior *bande dessinée* enterprise in a conventional historicizing vein, *Historial de la Nouvelle-Calédonie en bandes dessinées* (Godard and Loublanchès: no date, c. 1982), with its section on 1878, against which 1878 appears to define itself.

Le mémorial calédonien is, to date, a ten-volume, chronologically ordered and historically driven account of “New Caledonia,” 1774–1988. It is likely to be found in any settler family home, and indeed any public library in New Caledonia, where it is still an actively used reference. The 1977 edition’s chapter devoted to the events of 1878, “Le grand brasier,” constitutes its history of 1878 using starkly racialized terms and a patent us-and-them binary (“us” being the French; “them” being “les Canaques”), even though “we” are all citizens of the Republic “now,” in 1977. “Le grand brasier” presents the very model of a text that can be said to silence and alienate an indigenous minority within a citizenry, negating in the forms and the institutions of history the official gains of citizenship. Although the *Mémorial* implicitly aims to use the historical function to consolidate New Caledonia as a *country* with integral existence, the colonialist promotion of European civilization occurs at the expense of *nation*-making. Nevertheless, the *Mémorial* is substantially responsible for the iconography of 1878: it cites abundantly from archival materials to illustrate its account. Let this briefest of readings of the *Mémorial* record that there is a sense to its grab-bag accumulation of imagery.

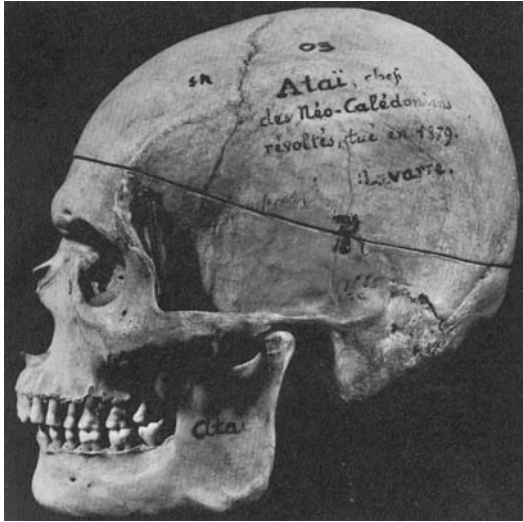


Fig. 3. Uncaptioned photograph of a skull bearing the inscription, “Ataï, chef des Néo-Calédoniens révoltés, tué en 1879” [Ataï, chief of the New Caledonians in revolt, killed in 1879], photograph attributed to “J. Oster, photothèque Musée de l’Homme. Palais de Chaillot-Paris,” no date, in Philippe Godard, “Le Grand brasier,” *Le mémorial calédonien*, vol. 2: 1864–1899, Nouméa: Nouméa Diffusion [Editions d’Art Calédoniennes], 1977, pp. 176–232, p. 224.

The strand of portraiture that runs through “Le grand brasier,” putting faces to a large number of the historical personae, begins with a bold engraving of Ataï, in the most determined- and fierce-looking of the two widely circulating portrayals of the warrior: he is depicted in the junior officer’s jacket and *képi* that the French bestowed upon some chiefs, gimlet-eyed, vital, and most intent of face.⁹ The chapter closes, however, with three very loaded inflections of the portraiture of Kanak: firstly, a photograph of a skull in profile, bearing an inscription upon the cranium that reads, “Ataï, chef des Néo-Calédoniens révoltés, tué en 1879” [Ataï, chief of the New Caledonians in revolt, killed in 1879] (figure 3). The second image is a photograph of an armed Kanak militia member displaying the decapitated head of Noël Doui, one of the leaders of the 1917 Kanak uprising, an event with which the chapter is not concerned. Thirdly, a photograph depicts the low-relief plaque that for many years adorned the base of a prominent statue in the heart of New Caledonia’s capital, where defeated natives make obeisance to Governor Olry

(Godard, 1977: 224, 229, 232). The *Mémorial* presents the first photograph without commentary, neither questioning the likelihood of this in fact being Ataï's skull (archival and eyewitness accounts report that the head of Ataï was preserved in a jar ultimately housed at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, making it unlikely that this skull was Ataï's), nor pointing out the error in the dating of Ataï's death (he was speared in an ambush, then decapitated by Canala warriors in the presence of a French officer, on September 1, 1878). The inclusion of the ghastly mortuary portrait of not-Ataï (i.e., Noël Doui's decapitated head) serves, most explicitly, to illustrate Kanak-against-Kanak cruelty, while implicitly it gratifies the desire to fill the gap in the documentary iconography of Ataï's downfall (*a* decapitated head is shown since *the* decapitated head cannot be presented). The use of portraiture to initially posit excessively vital natives and then assert colonial triumph over them is clear. Of more precise interest, here, is the effect of a perverse use of documentary photography as anti-portraiture to affirm and reaffirm Ataï's deadness as a loss of faciality and character. The skull and the decapitation photographs present as the undisguised urge of the photographic portrait, as Barthes senses it: mortification. Having opened its facializing account of 1878 with the line-work portrait of Ataï that is most vital and characterful, the *Mémorial* deploys photographic representations of the defunct Ataï and his historical analogue, Noël, though they be false or impertinent documents, in ways that exercise the documentary photograph's *that-has-been* function to most deadening effect. The stark dis-connect between word and image functions in the text should be noted in this regard: while formal dissociation is an inevitable function of the image-to-caption relation, it is nevertheless worthwhile observing how excessively mute the depicted figures are. As we shall see, the Berger-JAR response to the "Le grand brasier" is not to dismiss its documentary base or to call its historical scholarship into question, but to offer a genuine *treatment* of the *Mémorial's* iconographic creation, that is to say a "*traitement*," a reworking of it by the line, a reinvestment of its traits.

No such sense of line-work "treatment" applied when the *Historial de la Nouvelle-Calédonie en bandes dessinée* was produced by the principal writer of the *Mémorial calédonien*, Philippe Godard. Perhaps the first significant *bande dessinée* work from New Caledonia, this four-volume, large-format color work was clearly designed as a vibrant illustration of the history already elaborated in the *Mémorial*, and Godard's "script" is ploddingly obedient to established, chronological history, a mere supplement. That said, what emerges most forcefully as the specificity of "the history of New Caledonia in *bandes dessinées*" is a faciality adapted from the repertoire of historical film

drama: Governor Olry, recognizable from the portrait made known by the *Mémorial*, is viewed in the manner of a realist film sequence, although given a cartoon rendering when he explodes at the news of the massacre of Europeans that initiates “1878”; Ataï, graphically hybridized from the two extant portraits that circulate, is figured first as a snarling stirrer of tribal passions, and penultimately in a “close-up” of his grimacing death throes (Godard [c. 1982]: 68.6, 69.4-5, 94.1). These examples show the *Historial*'s injection of never-documented expressions of passion into the historico-documentary record. As supplements, the facializing images offered by the *Historial* extrapolate cooperatively from the available documents of photographic portraiture. The creative potential of *bande dessinée* is thus confined to the production of “the missing image” that the documentary record might itself have offered. This collaboration with the documentary record is most starkly evident when the *Historial* gratifyingly recasts the 1917 decapitation photograph of non-Ataï, referred to above—which the *Mémorial* insisted on presenting, in defiance of its historical impertinence—, so that here a tableau precisely analogous to the “Noël” photograph is provided, one in which a dramatically inflected image of Ataï's own decapitated head can now be seen (figure 4).

Le sentier des hommes responds more inventively to the cinematographic model that the *Historial* clearly registers. Providing, in its treatment of 1878, the first serious *bande dessinée* rendition of New Caledonian pasts since the *Historial*, the Berger-JAR collaboration¹⁰ also takes issue with the documentary record, rather than contenting itself to extrapolate from that record for facial dramatics, as does the *Historial*.

That the comic book *1878* has business with the document, with history, and with national character, through the function of facialization, is given form on the comic book's color cover (figure 5).¹¹ Presenting a date for its title, this third volume in the series strongly invokes historical moment as its object, whereas volumes 1, 2, and 4 are concerned with thematic devices suggestive of decidedly nonhistorical aspects of local humanity (“Langages,” “Eternités,” “Ecorces”). Below the title, three men are figured in a triangulated arrangement: in the left foreground, seated, facing inward as if facing a campfire, a settler-French character is profiled, his morphology and clothing inviting the appellation of “Caldoche”; to the right, somewhat closer, in profile and supine, a Kanak character, also facing inward, i.e., as if sharing the fire with the Caldoche figure, but from the other side; in the center background, splitting the composition, an “old” black-and-white photograph is depicted, its subject a French colonial soldier, standing for the portrayal, bearing arms at rest, and facing outward. This triangulation takes up the principal terms of



Fig. 4. Frame depicting the display of the decapitated head of Atāi by the Canala warrior Segou, in Philippe Godard (script and text), Eric Loublanchès (art), *Historial de la Nouvelle-Calédonie en bandes dessinées*, vol. 2: *Le temps des gouverneurs militaires*, Nouméa: Nouméa Editions [n.d., c. 1982], pp. 68–95, p. 94, frame 5.

New Caledonia's present political situation, where, ever since the civil troubles of the 1980s and the accords that flowed from those events, the country has been formally constituted as a relation between loyalists and separatists as mediated by the French state. In the shorthand of day-to-day politics, the loyalists are oversimplistically racialized as "settler whites," the separatists somewhat more accurately summarized as "Kanak." Here, the stark compositional separations among white settler, French state, and Kanak, repeat that shorthand. While reinstating the colonial ethnic binary, these figures embody the autonomizing New Caledonia *of today*. To take this eventful moment, this post-1988 configuration, as the matter of a *bande dessinée* is unmistakably to take up key elements both of New Caledonian history and of present-day nation-making.

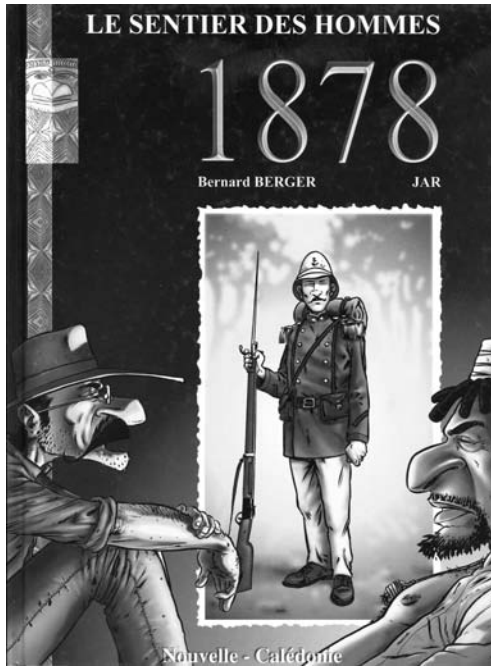


Fig. 5. Front cover, Bernard Berger-JAR, *Le sentier des hommes*, vol. 3: 1878, Nouméa: La Brousse en Folie, 1999.

Just as overtly, the cover of *1878* designates the documentary portrait photograph and marks it out as an object of *bande dessinée* reflection. In this, it is acting quite independently of any established proto-national discussion, yet we can understand *1878* to be articulating the generic issue that it is taking with documentary photography in terms of proto-national historiography and nation-making. Whereas the soldier in the photograph is clearly contemporary with 1878, the Caldoche and the Kanak figures are clothed in ways favoring chronological ambivalence: neither fails to fit the historical period, yet each, upon a second look, is also unproblematically of the present day. The photograph is thus, by contrast, emphatically marked as a past-bound document, just as the emissary of the French state that it depicts is perspectively the most distant character. This twofold distancing involves a diminishment of the soldier's photo-paper-pale face, while the two "New Caledonian" faces are large, subtly defined, and luminous—indeed, as if lit by the firelight of imminent nationhood. The point is elementary: the face is the metonym for the proto-national character, a *bande dessinée* face defined

against the documentary photographic portrait, in an ambiguous relationship to “the past” of 1878.

Certainly, as its title and cover affirm, *1878* takes the history of 1878 as its ground. Whereas the first two volumes of the series, *Eternités* and *Langages*, deal in Kanak pre-origin time and foundation stories, in the third volume, from the first frame, European colonization is abruptly in place, its historical time proceeding: “Nouvelle-Calédonie, quelque part en brousse—1877—La colonisation européenne s’étend peu à peu à toutes les terres qui peuvent servir de pâturage au bétail” (page 7, frame 1). [New Caledonia, somewhere in the bush—1877—European colonization is spreading, little by little, to all the land suitable as pasture for cattle.] The first pages of the album adopt the standard approach for *bande-dessinée* history, as per the *Historial*, that of informally illustrating established passages from conventional works of history. The documentary record serving that history is cited: the famous quip of anticolonial grievance, commonly attributed to Ataï, appears on the first page: “‘Quand mes tarots iront manger tes boeufs, je mettrai une barrière’ avait répondu un Mélanésien qu’un éleveur voulait obliger à enclore ses cultures . . .” (7.4). [“‘When my tarots go eating your cattle I will put up a fence,’ a Melanesien had replied to a farmer who wanted to make him enclose his gardens . . .”] The naval ship, *La Vire*, is duplicated from its photograph in the *Mémorial* (Berger and JAR, 8.1). As in the *Historial*, the formal portrait of Governor Olry used in the *Mémorial* has clearly been the reference for his subtly expressive appearance in this, his second *bande dessinée* performance (8.2–3; 10.3; 11.2–3; 12.2). Likewise, an adaptation of the Hughan photo used by the *Mémorial* makes the officer Servan instantly recognizable (34.1, 3, 4). Ataï is depicted from behind and on a small scale, yet we perceive the reverse view, as it were, of the engraved portrait of Ataï cited in the *Mémorial*, since he is depicted in képi and military jacket, his head posed here at a cocky angle (10.2; figure 6). The famous skull sepultures are also quickly introduced, once again recognizable from history’s use of documentary photographs that repeatedly shows them, as here, clustered in a grove (9.5; cf Bensa: 32). And it is in the depiction of the skulls that a very specifically *bande dessinée* project becomes discernible, one that is concerned to do something rather more than supplement the documentary record as if a *bande dessinée* “camera” were filling in the gaps between history’s various pictorial documents.

This frame, in which a female elder is appealing to the sepulchral ancestors (9.5), puts us in Kanak mythological reality, not so much in the past tense perhaps as in a mood other than the indicative. It places us in the presence of the timeless ancestors who exist in the shape of skulls. These characters,



Fig. 6. Full page representing Atai's reproach to Governor Olyr, Bernard Berger-JAR, *Le sentier des hommes*, vol. 3: 1878, Nouméa: La Brousse en Folie, 1999, p. 10, frames 1-4.

fully worthy of the name, have been appearing in the series since the first volume. Berger-JAR are here endowing with *bande dessinée* thought and trait-born character the skull altars that figure in well-known ethnographic photographs, photographs invoked in historical projects such as the *Mémorial*, which inevitably render these spiritually potent interlocutors as abject charnel-house objects, which cannot render them sympathetically but only as “skulls” (cf. Töpffer’s “members”).¹² In their Berger-JAR manifestation, the skulls are by no means simply duplicates of skull objects, they are *thoughtfully* rendered; they are lusty, wisecracking, piquish beings, responsive to humankind, and who generate significant mythological events. We should take attentive note of the personable jawlines of the ancestral skulls, their engaging eye sockets, and their disposition toward speech (e.g., 24.1, 2, 6; see also, below, figure 8, frames 3 and 5).

As we have seen, the beheading of Ataï is a climactic moment in colonialist accounts of 1878, entailing a documented skull complement very much evacuated of personhood. Bearing in mind the *bande dessinée* antecedent of the *Historial*, depicting Ataï’s decapitated head, and its violent transfer of characterful faciality away from Ataï toward his assassin, Segou (figure 4), and not forgetting the representational deadening effected by the *Mémorial*’s photographic documents, the first Berger-JAR response is a radical and formal exercise of graphic discretion. Having introduced Ataï in an obscured way, as described above (we see him only from behind and then truncated; figure 6, frames 2, 3–4), the Berger-JAR master stroke is to decline to cite the *Mémorial*’s compromised documentation of Ataï’s now-threatening, now-defunct head. Rather—and ironically—the segmentational possibilities of the *bande dessinée* frame¹³ are used to render Ataï’s best-documented moment of diplomatic force through the literal elevation of what might have been a caption to the function of speech: Ataï is made headless by the segmentation of the frame, yet is vitally reconnected with his historically recorded, quick-and-lively verb, that is to say, he is represented in the act of delivering a pithy and witty assertion of land rights to the French administrator: “Voilà ce que nous avons: la terre! et voilà ce que tu nous laisses: les cailloux!” [“Here’s what we had: (the) earth! And here’s what you’ve left us: stones!”] (figure 6, frame 4). What can be read here is a *bande dessinée* activism of the speech bubble, a function that can only be perfunctorily discussed here. A perceptible operation of line-work is occurring in these frames, redrawing a famous sentence so that it does not settle into the role of caption but rises up in the frame to substitute itself for the head producing the speech, thereby insisting that Ataï’s head was a thoughtful thing. This use of the verbal line



Fig. 7. Frame depicting a skull inscribed as that of "Ataï chef des néo-calédoniens révoltés en 1879," after the photograph attributed to J. Oster, Bernard Berger-JAR, *Le sentier des hommes*, vol. 3: 1878, Nouméa: La Brousse en Folie, 1999, p. 48, frame 4.

of *bande dessinée* ought to be weighed against the complete mutism of the documentary portrait record that history cultivates—it is arguably only when perceived through the framework of *bande dessinée*, the genre that makes still images speak, that this mutism can even be registered as such.

It is, however, Berger-JAR's second response to the documentary mortification of Ataï that perhaps most powerfully demonstrates what *bande dessinée* can do for the politics of national character through face. Whereas the first instance, in not showing Ataï's face, declined to appropriate the much-cited and historically credible, engraved portrait of Ataï, the second instance of 1878's engagement with the documentary record on Ataï entails an ample calk on the questionable skull photograph presented in the *Mémorial* (figure 7). This is a "reproduction" that allows Töpfferian resemblance to emerge. It posits Töpfferian thought in a figuration that, instead of being merely identical to its object, is a mournful yet revivifying reinvention of same. Note that the Berger-JAR version of the photograph omits the fatal predicate of the

original descriptor for Ataï, “*tué en 1879*” [*killed in 1879*, my emphasis], refusing to pronounce Ataï dead, subverting the document (cf. figures 3 and 7). Even more significantly, the Berger-JAR rendition of the Musée de l’Homme artifact takes the limit-case of the face, the skull, this almost-not-face, and procures character for it: thanks to the line work of *bande dessinée*, the Berger-JAR skull is characterful and sympathetic in a way that the clinical documentary photograph categorically cannot be. The *categorical* photograph in question (figure 3) portrays an almost-not-face of quintessential colonial significance, since the putting down of the 1878 rebellion, crucially secured through the killing of Ataï, is the point at which the French colony breaks indigenous martial potency and grievously harms the indigenous will to live. For just this reason, the *Mémorial*’s skull photograph betokens attempted genocide for Kanak and their sympathizers. In political terms, it is an impossible remainder of colonial impact, with an infinitely long counter-national half-life, mortifacient yet never susceptible to the stages of mourning so highly developed in Kanak culture. This means that Berger-JAR’s post-Ataï is quite an invention with respect to the excessively dead (not-)Ataï of the photograph. Through the selective art of the drawn line, and in the refusal of mere duplication, this *bande dessinée* skull performs a distraction away from the appalling facts of documentary history (whether or not a given document is entirely factual is not the point here), toward another proto-national imaginary. As indicated above, this is a genuine *treatment*, an outcome of the line, and an inventive one. In the trait-made world of 1878, the unassimilable object that is the artifact of colonialism’s mortal taxonomies is recast as one of those vital ancestral skulls, dislocated from its proper ground, but not abject. Thus, the Berger-JAR treatment adopts the tragic narrative that results in the expatriation of Ataï’s sacred-desacralized remains, but refuses to allow Ataï to be lost to the province of New Caledonian character. We might recall Töpffer’s conviction about the fruitfulness of responding to accidents of the pen, and propose that the Berger-JAR redrawing of (not-)Ataï’s photographic skull is an acutely responsive uptake of the documentary “accident” that blots the *Mémorial*’s account of 1878.

As powerfully characterizing as it is, the face-making gesture performed upon the skull photograph nevertheless produces a character without speech, not a full-fledged *bande dessinée* character then, any more than it can be a functional civic character, whereas we are seeking a contribution to national character formation. Here is a realist limit that 1878 observes. However, the loquacious ancestral skulls, responsive to human pleas and human warmth alike, provide generic compensation for the photographic silence that

persists in the Berger-JAR retrieval of disenchanting skullitude (frames 3 and 5 in figure 8). *Bande dessinée* characterization through the inventive line of figure and word is not just making sympathetic—for a nonindigenous audience—or alive—for a deculturated Kanak youth—the horrors of objectifying science or the figures of arcane mythology. Through the association of the ancestral skulls with the skull marked as that of Ataï, the exercise of character is drawing mythic Kanak reality into the hard reality of New Caledonian polity. For, in the Berger-JAR rendering, 1878 is not the point at which ancestral beings become dead objects: 1878 has mythic time, mythic fact, and mythic imperatives interpenetrating—without excuse or explanation—the “historical” detail of violence (and the violent detail of historicization), just as they intercept the “historical novel” elements of the family saga (figure 8). This is achieved in ways that are concertedly un beholden to the documents of historical record upon which all other available accounts found themselves and by which they are bound.¹⁴

The point is not just that 1878 gives us, in this version of the war projected through imagined side-stories and aftermaths, a figure of a pathetic and eloquent Kanak, some avatar of both *The Dying Gaul* and a never-portrayed Ataï (the Gekom protagonist¹⁵ is dressed in Ataï’s military jacket and képi, no longer superb, but powerfully pathetic instead: see figure 2, frame 2; figure 8, frame 6). Nor is it just that this (sym)pathetic Kanak can be, thanks to the materiality of a black-and-white comic book reliant upon the trait, *not* oppositionally black to some unmarked whiteness, *and* can present, by virtue of the same *bande dessinée* materiality, a great array of expressions as have rarely been represented in Kanak faciality. It is not, therefore, just that Berger-JAR gives us a chromatically neutral (thus racially unmarked) Kanak figure, one that can exist in no photographic or drawn document from the time, and to which no latter-day image-maker has hitherto attempted to grant the status of having-been.¹⁶ It is, moreover, not just that Berger-JAR gives us this non-othered, facialized, emotionally scrutable Kanak, an image-able thus imaginable fellow New Caledonian, drawing well away from the “cruel,” facially limited, and murkily dark Kanak who beheads his own race-kind, such as we saw in the *Historial* calk upon the photo of the beheaded chief Noël. The point, over and above all of these significant matters, is that the Berger-JAR line work uses *bande dessinée* materiality of character to enable mythic figures and scarcely anthropomorphic ones, Kanak-everyman figures and settler-everyman figures, to coexist in one politico-quotidian-mythic land, one character-laden and character-driven life. Indeed, the potential of the word-image traits of *bande dessinée* make it possible to cast the everyman



Fig. 8. Full page displaying the interrelation of various narrative orders and their characters: the Caldoche, Pagnol (frame 1), the Gekom man (frames 2, 3, 6), the ancestral skulls (frames 3, 4, 5), the progenitor ancestor, Iria (frames 3, 4), Bernard Berger-JAR, *Le sentier des hommes*, vol. 3: 1878, Nouméa: La Brousse en Folie, 1999, p. 28, frames 1–6.

Kanak and the everyman European as two species of the one humanity, and, yes, the one people: morphological traits, speech modes, and even coloring, are transposable ([figures 4; 2, frames 1–2; 8, frames 1–2]). This, in a country that has been violently riven by hard practices of race differentiation, is no mean feat. Nor is it the output of a poor-man's "BD" cinema: it is a function of *bande dessinée's* peculiar line work.

Admittedly, this is not an entirely innocent distraction from the drag of a past that could quite rightly be described as harrowing. This is one kind of Caldoche fantasy: to shape-shift into Kanakitude, acquiring cultural traits of ethnic definition where the settler colony has developed an insufficient stock of its own, asserting the heritage of suffering from the convict period, while never feeling the same burden of the imposition of history as the Kanak. Yet this exercising of the emphatic quality of the *ligne claire* to counter the authority of indexical modes with another form of authority, a distracting one, is a significant display of the possibilities of *bande dessinée's* power to draw away from *what-has-been* in order to reconfigure the geometry and the trajectories of potential national characters. If 1878 errs on the side of settler euphemism in redrawing the "was" for the sake of the "could be," it nevertheless elaborates the capacity of *bande dessinée* to tease out possible ethnic futures from redrawn racialized pasts. In this everyday genre of diversion that is the comic book, the minor flights of graphic distraction are animated by the same dynamic that generates the much fuller throws of aspirational, nationalist conjecture. The significance of faciality is always entailed in modern nation-making. The search for "a national character" is likewise habitual, and certainly preoccupies cultural workers in New Caledonia, even today. Doubtless this is a vain quest in any country, most of all in a country with as diverse a population and, yes, as polarized a history, as that of New Caledonia. What Berger and JAR's *bande dessinée* conjecture enables us to think is that alternatives exist to any national project to figure identity or character in a way that relies upon the documentary mode, always in the indicative mood. It may well be that there is a contradiction within such a project, ironically gaining the traction it requires for its forward momentum from determined contact with the past. While Tjibaou urges his people to avoid the trap entailed in such retro-spection by looking *ahead* for their identity, Berger and JAR appear to be prompting their compatriots toward something like "a whole society" of the distracting line, à la Töpffer, where at least some version of "our" characters, plural, may be discovered somewhere indefinitely *to the side* of where "we," the New Caledonian people, are headed.

Notes

My thanks to Bernard Berger, author of *1878*, and to Philippe Godard, author of *Le mémorial calédonien* and coauthor of *L'histoire de la Nouvelle Calédonie en bandes dessinées*, for their kind permission to reproduce their work in this essay. To Bernard Berger, my further thanks for his helpful conversation during the preparation of this chapter.

1. Cf. Hodges, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2717048>, where the drawing is nicely reproduced, albeit in black and white, in the National Library of Australia's digital display of the red chalk original.

2. The Noumea Accord (1998) provides for a unique process of gradual autonomy from France, which will ultimately devolve all but the five fundamental sovereign powers to New Caledonian governance.

3. This term for New Caledonian-born settler whites is embraced by some, rejected as pejorative by others.

4. This event is known conventionally as "l'insurrection canaque" [the Kanak insurrection], or "la rébellion de 1878" [the rebellion of 1878], and occasionally as "la révolte des Néo-Calédoniens" [the revolt of the New Caledonians], although many indigenous groups had not yet ceded sovereignty and were in fact *enforcing* their title.

5. The term "Great Chief" must be understood as approximating an indigenous role and designation.

6. Godard (1977: 197, caption); my translation.

7. My summary representation of Töpffer's views draws upon texts collected in and citations given in Töpffer (1994) *L'invention de la bande dessinée*.

8. Cited in Peeters (1994: 35), my translation. Except where otherwise referenced in English, translations of Töpffer are my own.

9. The more often seen of the two well-known portraits is a *carte-de-visite* drawing of Atai wearing customary headdress and other adornments. One quotation of this image can be seen at www.amnistia.net/biblio/recits/atai.jpg. The engraving used in the *Mémorial* bears the caption "Ataï—l'insoumis" [Ataï—The Unsubjugated], in Godard, 1977: 183, attribution: "Archives Nationales-Paris," no date.

10. A note is warranted on this collaboration and on the seriousness of its project and register: Bernard Berger is best known as the author-artist of a phenomenally successful New Caledonian comic strip and comic-book series, *La brousse en folie*. This is a humorous and irreverent strip that has been running weekly (annually for the books) since 1983–84. It turns on the interaction of New Caledonian ethnic stereotypes, and is so successful that it has generated spin-off products. Given the ubiquity of the characters from the *Brousse en folie* series in New Caledonia, when Berger devised the *Sentier des hommes* project he enlisted the artist, JAR, to provide it with a completely distinct graphic idiom and tone.

11. Also reproduced at <http://www.brousse-en-folie.com/images/nouvelle-caledonie-1878.3.jpg>.

12. See, for example, Alban Bensa (1990: 32): even the photograph by the master ethnophotographer, Fritz Sarasin, cannot render spirituality, only stark anatomy.

13. See Benoit Peeters (1991) on "segmentation."

14. With the notable exception of Téa Henri Wênêmuu, “*La guerre d’Ataï, récit kanak,*” presented by Alban Bensa in Millet (2004).

15. “Gekom” is an invented clan name of Kanak assonance (see *Le sentier des hommes*, volume 1). The name alludes to the gecko ancestor with which the clan is attributed.

16. By contrast, the *Historial* invests heavily in racializing “color” for its black and its white personae, as it supplements the black-and-white photographic/documentary record.

Textual Absence, Textual Color

A JOURNEY THROUGH MEMORY— COSEY'S SAIGON-HANOI

INTRODUCTION: A DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE STORY

Bernard Cosendai (Cosey) was born in 1950 near Lausanne, Switzerland. In 1969 he met Derib, the only Swiss professional cartoonist at the time. After an internship at Derib's studio, Cosey became his assistant and worked with him for seven years. Cosey's own first major artistic creation, the "Jonathan" stories, began appearing in the *Tintin* magazine in 1975. Eleven book volumes were published in the series between 1977 and 2001. Cosey was invited by Dupuis to inaugurate its important new collection, "Aire Libre." In it he eventually published six stories between 1988 and 2003, including *Le voyage en Italie* (1988) and *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000; first published 1992). *Le voyage en Italie*, Cosey's first attempt at dealing with the Vietnam War, was awarded the "Prix du Festival de Courtrai" (1988) and the "Prix Philip Morris" (1989). Although most of Cosey's stories take place in Asia or America, with a European detour (Switzerland and Italy), *Zélie Nord-Sud* (1994) is set in Africa and was commissioned by the Direction de la coopération au développement et de l'aide humanitaire suisse. His *A la recherche de Peter Pan* (1984–85) and *Le voyage en Italie* have been released in the United States by NBM, respectively under the titles *Lost in*

the Alps (1996) and *In Search of Shirley* (1993)—the English titles translate very poorly the richly evocative French ones. In recent years, there have been two major exhibitions on Cosey: “Cosey d’est en ouest,” at the Musée de la Bande Dessinée, in Angoulême (Spring 1999); and “Cosey, l’aventure intérieure,” at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, in Charleroi (Spring 2006).

Many of Cosey’s works stand apart from the traditional *bande dessinée* and mark him as an innovator. In an interview, Thierry Smolderen (2006), the director of the Charleroi exhibition and a noted comic critic, remembers how perplexed he had been by *A la recherche de Peter Pan* and *Le voyage en Italie*: “I saw there a literary *bande dessinée* that stood apart from virtually all other *bandes dessinées*. Even a progressive publication such as (*A Suivre*) had refused to publish [*Le voyage en Italie*] because Cosey’s narrative style was so different from the rest of their production.”¹ He and Eric Verhoest (2006) see Cosey as a precursor to the “new *bande dessinée*,” exemplified by authors such as Sfar, Blain, Trondheim, and others published by L’Association, or Chris Ware in America: “*Saigon-Hanoi* constitutes a remarkable experiment in form which shows that Cosey is indeed a contemporary of Chris Ware, after having been Pratt’s and Hergé’s. . . .” Derib too stresses Cosey’s uniqueness (in “Racines” 2007): “I like very much the originality of his scripts because he attempts things that very few authors would dare to do by pursuing ideas not always commercial but that are interesting. He dares to see them through.” The innovative form of *Saigon-Hanoi*—the work that I analyze in this chapter—won Cosey the most prestigious French prize for a comic-book script (“Prix du meilleur scénario”) at the annual, national comics festival in Angoulême in 1993.

Like many of his characters, Cosey is on an inner quest: “Of course, I look for that inner peace, that serenity, like anyone who is interested in spirituality.” Cosey found some answers to his quest by studying reflections on spirituality and the self by C. G. Jung and Christian mystics. His interest in spirituality and Oriental philosophies and cultures goes far back and has never waned. The motif of the physical and spiritual journey is central to Cosey’s work and life. Traveling is a source of inspiration for him, enabling him to bring something different and original to today’s reader. To Serge Buch, who asked Cosey what had prompted him to write *Saigon-Hanoi*, Cosey (1998) replied that it was a desire to talk about Vietnam, “which one saw at the movie theater but not at all in comics.” From December 1988 to January 1989 Cosey was in Vietnam, where he encountered U.S. veterans, and spoke with one in particular: “I saw one of them again several times during my stay. Extraordinary moments. These men so deeply shocked. We played the guitar, we sang. They said

nothing about the war. One could sense how deeply traumatized they were. They would make allusions, nothing more. I thought to myself that I could have been in their place. They recounted their return to the United States and how they were rejected” (quoted in Smolderen and Verhoest 2006).

These chance encounters, and the conversations they sparked, greatly influenced the making of *Saigon-Hanoi*: “Half of the dialogues in *Saigon-Hanoi* come from these evenings spent conversing with these guys.” Cosey (1998) said that he wove several real anecdotes, recounted to him by an American Vietnam veteran, unchanged into the fabric of *Saigon-Hanoi*—for example: an American soldier’s habit of carrying around letters for several days in Vietnam before opening and reading them, perhaps out of fear that they contained bad news from home (cf. Cosey 2000: 40); and the failure of a returning veteran to recognize his sister at the airport, upon his return to the United States from a one-year tour of duty in Vietnam (30–31). The American veterans with whom Cosey spoke in Vietnam could be the ones depicted in the January 24, 1989, *New York Times* article “Veterans returning to Vietnam to end a haunting,” which was about the first Americans returning to Vietnam as a group “in an attempt to heal their emotional wounds.”² Cosey’s experience in Vietnam was so strong and so rich that he thought about the topic for many months and researched everything he could find on Vietnam at the University of Lausanne’s library, without being able to produce a script. He put aside the project while he produced another comic book, *Orchidea*. When he finally presented the script of *Saigon-Hanoi* to the late Philippe Vandooren, then editorial director at Dupuis, the latter was doubtful: “OK, because it’s you, . . . because I trust you. I know you’re a professional and that you will deliver. But if it were anyone else, whose work I didn’t know well, the answer would be no! This is not a script, your thing. It’s not publishable!” (Cosey 1998). Of course Cosey proved Vandooren wrong when his innovative script won the prize in Angoulême. Still, Cosey has presented us with a very strange tale, whose narrative form is rather peculiar. It is a tale that offers us more questions than answers. Cosey (1998) knew that he was taking a chance with the book, but stresses that it was “the only way that I found to talk about Vietnam. It’s such a painful subject . . . There again I could have depicted really bloody scenes, but I did not see what that would add.” His reticence reveals the author’s personality, his pacifism and his tolerance, which suffuse all his stories. As Ann Miller (2004) has argued in an article on “*Les héritiers d’Hergé*: The Figure of the *Aventurier* in a Postcolonial Context,” Cosey’s work is innovative in both its approach to realism and the clear line school of drawing (311), and in the way that it reworks the figure

of the “adventurer.” The latter has long been central to the French-language comics tradition and reaches back beyond Hergé’s Tintin, to the first comics in the “Pieds Nickelés” and “Zig and Puce” series in the early twentieth century (Miller 2004: 307). Cosey’s choice of a protagonist who is an American Vietnam veteran in the work that I analyze in this chapter may be understood in that framework: this *bande dessinée* reevaluates the meanings of “the adventurer” and “the adventure,” in a world marked by high technology imperialist wars. Cosey heightens our realization that these conflicts create victims among ordinary people on all sides, including the soldiers who—we are told—are supposed to be heroes, as modern adventurers. The “aventure intérieure” in *Saigon-Hanoi* is a trip that brings healing and peace to some of those who have suffered the most, while helping the reader to gain a better understanding of one of the major traumas of recent history, of its causes and effects.

As in *Le voyage en Italie*, in *Saigon-Hanoi* Cosey concerns himself with the lingering memories of the Vietnam War rather than with the events themselves, which are alluded to instead of being depicted. This is, in great part, what makes *Saigon-Hanoi* intriguing and appealing to the reader. To understand and enjoy this graphic novel, the reader must be active, working as part detective and part author, to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the story with both what the author provides explicitly and what he leaves implicit and unsaid. Cosey very much favors this elliptic style and sees it as an invitation to the reader to involve himself with what Cosey calls “la partie ‘en blanc’ du récit” [the blank part of the narrative], and thereby to participate with the author in the creative process (Smolderen and Verhoest 2006). Here I am particularly interested in how Cosey uses silence and color to establish the atmosphere of his tale, evoke moods, emotions, and the shattered lives of those who came back from Vietnam. According to Thierry Smolderen (2006), “[t]he comic book revolves around the unfolding of [a] telephone conversation with the images of [a muted] documentary as a background, and with the blind probings that allow two strangers with nothing in common to ‘meet’ in the end.” The book’s plot is simple: a middle-aged man named Homer holes up in an empty family house somewhere in the United States to spend a lonely New Year’s Eve watching a documentary about a veteran who has returned to Vietnam twenty years after the war. The telephone rings: a girl named Felicity, supposedly thirteen and a half years old (she is in fact eleven [17]³), home alone, has dialed his number because the name in the phonebook had struck her as “abstème et guilleret” [abstemious and chipper] (11). They talk for a while, wish each other a happy New Year, and then hang up (44). Later, as the

man settles down in front of the television set, the telephone rings again. The girl has called back to alert him to the documentary (16).

Their conversation goes on while the images of the documentary they are both watching, with the sound turned off, fill the comic book panels. They joke and talk about everything and nothing. Vietnam does not appear to be central to their conversation. The documentary ends and so does their phone conversation, after they have wished each other a happy New Year again. The end, or so it would seem. For although it is the end of the story and of the first reading, it is only the beginning of numerous questions, some of which are left open even after a second reading of the graphic novel.

TIES THAT BIND: THE BURDEN OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The simple first impression that Cosey's graphic novel gives is deceptive. In fact, almost everything in *Saigon-Hanoi* is multilevel and multilayered: the story, the page layout, the choice of palette, the text, the title, the images that are presented, the names of the characters (Homer and Felicity), and even "Wickopy," the name of the fictitious town where Homer's family house is located (12.1). "Wickopi" is the Abenaki Indian word for the leatherwood shrub, the bark of which was used to make rope. A tea made from the bark induces vomiting. The tough bark will keep alive a branch that has been partially ripped off of the tree.

Whether intentional or a happy coincidence, the choice of the town's name is quite appropriate. Homer is bound to Wickopy by the ropes of his pre-Vietnam life. He has no doubt been deeply wounded, but his connection, however tenuous, to this place of his childhood allows him to watch the documentary in an attempt to purge himself of his Vietnamese past. Different narratives intertwine but do not always intersect, and some images are superimposed on other images, opposing different planes of reality and time: what one could call Homer's "present world," the one that he lives in (Felicity's world too), which is outside of, and separate from, the old family house; the reality and time of the story (New Year's Eve, December 31, 1989); the Vietnamese reality and time of the documentary (set in January 1989, which is the date stamped on a plane ticket to Vietnam [22.1]); and, in between, the more intangible and irreconcilable realities of the years before, during, and after the war (visible, for example, in various objects in the family house), and the constant but unspoken tension between them. Soon the reader realizes that the text and images are often disconnected, which means



Fig. 1. Visual clues/lines engage the reader from the start and set the story in motion. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), front cover; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

that she or he is never quite sure what to do with what is presented to her or him. There are gaps in the narrative, the “partie ‘en blanc’ du récit,” described by Cosey. There is no narrative text at all (no “récitatif”), just a dialogue—which only starts on page 11—between the protagonist, whom we see, and the young girl, who remains unseen. The reader is kept in a constant state of puzzlement and wonder. Because her or his expectations are frustrated or met with intriguing twists, she or he must look for clues, provide the missing text, fill in the blanks, and turn to her or his own experience to impose her or his own narrative upon the graphic narrative, never quite certain of the validity of her or his contribution. To be sure, Cosey’s work cannot be fully apprehended after one reading and each succeeding reading yields new twists, new surprises, and new revelations. This narrative open-endedness is a key feature of Cosey’s innovative script.

The tension between the reader and the story starts with the cover, which shows the crowded platform of a busy train station (figure 1). A close-up of

a railroad car on which are painted the words “Buu Biên” and “Việt Nam” almost entirely fills the top half of the cover. Greenish-yellow and blue-green tints dominate the image and thereby help link these colors to Vietnam in the reader’s mind. The eye is drawn to the oval logo on the train: it reads “BD” (like “*bande dessinée*”?!) and “VN” (no doubt for “Việt Nam”). The lower half of the cover is busy, with a moving crowd of Vietnamese people going about their daily business. Almost dead center, in an otherwise empty “V” space, a Westerner stands out in the crowd, taller than everyone else in the picture. Looking straight ahead and bearing an expression of grim determination, he seems to know where he is going and why. If we were to trace a vertical line splitting the cover in two equal parts, the symbol on the train and the Westerner would be poised on opposite sides. We almost expect these two elements of the picture to begin moving in opposite directions, cross each other’s paths at the median at exactly the same time, and go their separate ways. This opposition seems reinforced by a design on the logo resembling a zigzag, whose left branch points to the north (Hanoi?) while the right one points to the south (Saigon?): the journey has started, but where will it lead?

A COMPLEX VISUAL LANGUAGE OF LAYOUT AND COLOR

Cosey sees himself as a “*raconteur d’histoires en images*” [a storyteller through images], but first and foremost, as a colorist. Therefore, color plays an essential role in Cosey’s storytelling. The first page (5) strikes the reader by the change of place and color (compared to the front cover), its silence and its frozen movement. Blue-gray tints dominate. Cosey sets a different and somewhat melancholic tone, by abruptly opposing the cool palette of that page to the warm colors of the cover. The hushed atmosphere brought by falling snow replaces the noise one might expect from the busy scene of the cover. It is snowing and the tonal warmth emanating from the scene on the cover is entirely gone. The landscape has changed too: where the reader might have expected a Vietnamese landscape, he is confronted with America. A link is missing. Indeed a blank space has been left on top of the shortened page, where the first strip would normally be: the reader finds no frame there and no narrative text, but instead an empty space that invites completion by the reader (figure 2). The following strip, composed of a single narrow frame, shows a close-up of the man from the cover, his face still bearing an expression of determination—or is it now more a look of tired resignation? The bottom half of the page is filled with a large panel, showing a snow-covered



Fig. 2. Blank space: a missing link that invites the reader to write her or his own narrative. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 5; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

American highway, with the flow of prudent drivers in its left lane coming almost directly at the reader. The boundaries between the road and the roadside have been masked, just as the first strip has disappeared. The muffled atmosphere of the snowy landscape at twilight contrasts sharply with the warm tones on the cover.

As we turn the page, the layouts of this page (5) and the next (6) offer another striking contrast, between first “verticality” and then “horizontality.” Here Cosey masterfully combines rhetorical and decorative layouts, according to the categories defined by Benoît Peeters in *Lire la bande dessinée* (2002a: 51). Vertical lines structure the last panel of page 5 (5.2): encased in this tall bottom frame, the image of the highway expands to contain the black electrical posts along the road and the parallel lines of the tire tracks in the snow. The verticality of the image gives impetus to our story and propels the driver of the first frame (5.1) downhill toward his destination. In the next page (6), the driver has left the highway. Laid out in five long

and narrow horizontal strips, this new page imparts a feeling of heaviness, claustrophobia even. As the snow piles up on the landscape, the strips heap visual details on the protagonist. The last and narrowest strip of the page (6.5) offers a close-up of the driver, shown in profile. The top and bottom of his face are cut off, and the corners of his mouth are turned down. It is as though the driver were being squeezed out of the frame by the weight of a heavy preoccupation, still unknown to the reader. Looking straight ahead, he passes “Ron’s Clear Creek Inn” without a glance. He does not seem to enjoy the ride. As he drives by, the reader follows him and takes in the landscape, including the town. The only textual (i.e., written) clues available so far are part of the background: “Happy New Year 1990,” scribbled on the window of “Mickey’s Diner” (6.2), and a “Happy New Year” banner across the street (6.4) date the story. The signs, “Mickey’s Diner” and “Ron’s Clear Creek Inn,” do not give precise geographical clues, but the architecture of the wooden houses seems to place the story in New England (Vermont?) or upstate New York (Felicity says that she lives in New York [12.3]). While these five narrow strips help establish a cold mood, they also set up a décor that acquires its significance throughout the story, thereby starting echoes and a circular visual narrative: the story will end with Homer exiting Ron’s Clear Creek Inn (48.1) and driving away.

The layout of the next page (7) changes again, combining horizontality and verticality: two narrow horizontal strips on the top and bottom of the page flank two tall vertical frames, set in between them (figure 3). By contrast with the horizontality of the panels on page 6, the vertical frames here seem to offer breathing space and momentary relief. Homer has arrived at his destination: a house quite big but seemingly lost in the middle of nowhere. From the busy highway (5.2) to the village’s main street (6.4) to the country road with only a couple of tire tracks (7.1) to the pristine lane that leads to his house (7.2), Homer has traveled less- and less-frequented roads, his journey becoming more and more a solitary one. The bottom frame is a high-angle shot that shows his vehicle in the upper left corner and the small figure of Homer making his way from there to the house, burdened by a bag of groceries. The right corner is filled with a partly seen window. The sense of relief dissipates and a claustrophobic feeling returns in this last strip, which appears to barely resist the pressure of the two vertical frames atop it. The vehicle in the upper left corner of the bottom strip seems half buried under the left vertical frame (7.2). The atmosphere of the whole page is slightly portentous. In the right-hand corner of the top frame (7.1), tree branches extend dark fingers toward the car, while the tall dark pines of the left vertical frame (7.2)

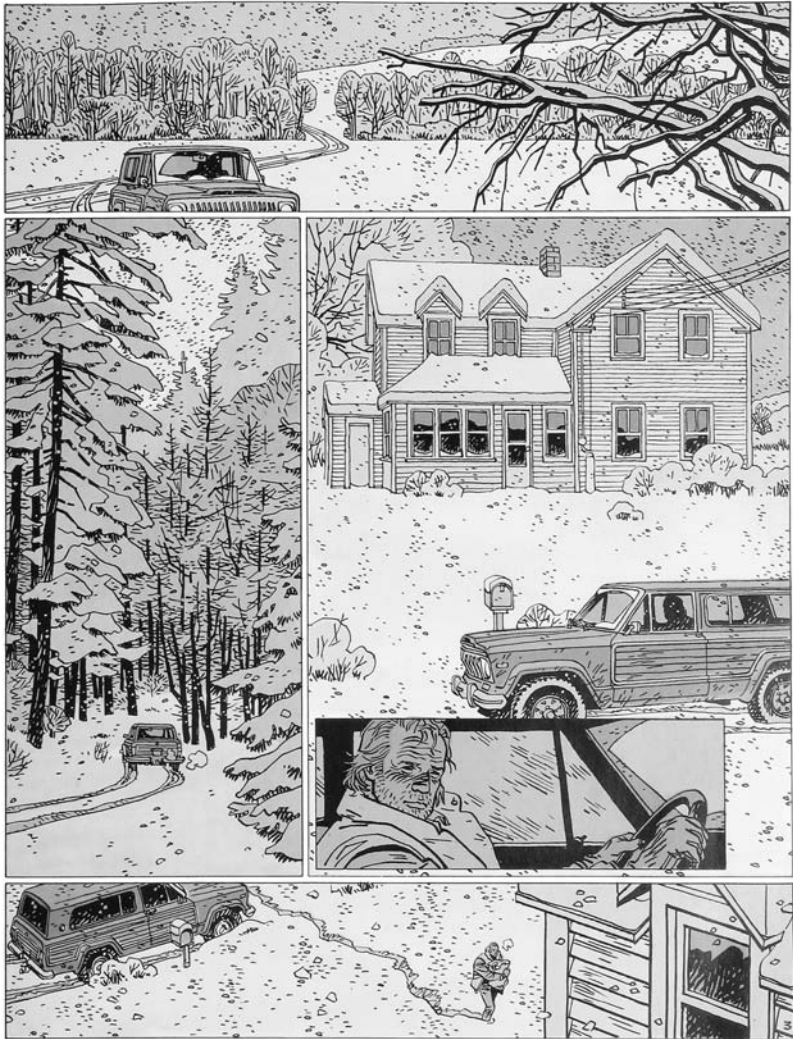


Fig. 3. A rhetorical and decorative layout sets the mood of the story. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 7; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

and, in the last frame, the dark eye of the window loom unwelcoming over the lone, upright figure of Homer.

The silence of the pages—the absence of narrative text—participates in this unease. In the large, right vertical frame (7.3), a smaller one seems to hover above the larger one, a technique that Cosey frequently uses in his

works. Thierry Groensteen refers to it as “incrustation” in *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999b: 100–106). For him (Groensteen 1999b: 103), *incrustation* can give a context to one or several frames and underline the privileged tie it has, or they have, with another semantically linked frame. Although the page is a two-dimensional space, one may think of this technique in three-dimensional terms: for example, as one frame floating above, or superimposed upon, another one (cf. Groensteen 1999b: 101). Cosey uses the technique of floating or overlapping images throughout the story (7, 11, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 27, 31, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44), sometimes to show that Homer is suspended between two planes of reality: for example, that of his present life (New Year’s Eve in Wickopy) and of his Vietnamese past (especially his return to Vietnam, shown in the documentary) (15–16). In this frame (7.3a–b), the superimposition allows the juxtaposition of two points of view—a kind of shot/reverse shot filmic sequence that establishes two perspectives (those of Homer and [from] the house): the bottom plane—the underlying image—shows the car stopped in front of the house and facing to the left, with the silhouette of the driver visible inside. The top or inset plane is a close-up of the interior of the car, showing Homer, his hands on the wheel and presumably looking at the house, but this time the car is facing to the right. This superimposed image of the car apparently pointed in the opposite direction could be a way of indicating the contradictory feelings of the driver—who might be wondering whether he should stay or leave—and his resistance to what the house symbolizes. Nonetheless, when the reader turns the page, she or he sees that Homer has entered the house (8). The first two strips, in the same blue-gray tones of the preceding pages, contrast sharply with the bottom two strips, which are colored in the same warm palette as the cover. Homer opens the door to the house (8.1), his face turned toward the exterior. Next, standing in an interior doorway and leaning against the door frame (8.2), he contemplates the furniture wrapped in protective shrouds, mimicking the landscape in its snowy mantle. As soon as he lights a candle (8.3), finds the circuit box, and turns on the electricity (8.4), the action picks up speed and the page is divided into smaller frames. Without transition, Homer appears on the second floor (8.5), in his old bedroom, set in a palette of muted tones of yellow, yellow-green, khaki, ocher, and army-green. These are also the colors of the Vietnamese sequences (and of the front cover) and, from this point on, the background colors of most scenes inside the house: this associates the house and its history with the Vietnamese reality in the reader’s mind.

The reader becomes aware of a dichotomy between “inside” and “outside”: the “inside” is the old house and the Vietnam and childhood pasts

that it symbolizes and contains (Homer's room and the documentary), and toward which Homer exhibits a certain resistance or ambivalence; and the "outside" is Homer's "present world," a world toward which he is drawn and to which he returns in the end. This dichotomy is highlighted by the use of a distinctive color palette: shades of yellow for the "inside" and blues for the "outside." Homer surveys the room, allowing us to see posters of a semi-naked woman and of the Rolling Stones, a model warplane hanging from the ceiling, a desk, a bed, a small bookshelf, and a chair bearing his name, "HOMER Jr." The little puff of cold breath that escapes from Homer's lips and the choice of colors stress the fact that the room is frozen in time and has become a repository of memories of Vietnam: it is the room of a boy who went off to war.

Although the house is not lived in, it is definitely being used often enough for the kitchen cupboards to contain basic supplies: a bag of coffee, honey, salt, and other jars (13.2). However, Homer's room seems untouched, as though no one had slept in it or moved a single object there in years. The room may be just as it was when he left for Vietnam. Keeping the room untouched might have been a way for the family to deal with the emotional turmoil caused by the war, to make it more bearable. The Vietnam War touched the house but appears to have been absorbed, domesticated, and confined to the boy's room. Nevertheless, the war is what defines and haunts Homer. Visiting his old room, picking up his old baseball and mitt (8.6), and looking at old pictures (8.7) are necessary preparations leading up to Homer's watching of the documentary. These actions are part of a ritual that will allow him to bring together the two realities in which he lives. Homer could have watched the documentary at his usual place of residence, but he has chosen to return "for a couple of days" (12.1) to this childhood home, like a homing pigeon. His name could suggest either that or, ironically, emphasize that the house might no longer be a home. He could have died in Vietnam, just as his best friend did, and although he is tied to the house, he is barely connected to it. Something is missing. The house that he returns to is full of memories but empty of a future and, aside from him, of people. Still, it is a familiar environment that keeps him connected to who he was and to who the members of his family were before he left for Vietnam. It is a sort of mooring. Conversely, visual references to baseball (the bat, glove, and ball in 8.6) underline yet another meaning implicit in his first name—one that hints at the outcome of the story and completes the circular motif of the book: "homer" as a home run. Metaphorically, it evokes a successful journey that ends where it started and carries the promise of a brighter future. For Homer, it is a journey back to the

old family home, and a journey to Vietnam and back. It is also the beginning of a new and more pleasant journey, as suggested in the last page of the book, when Homer drives away from Ron's Clear Creek Inn, the old year, and his past, and into the new year, a smile on his face.

A FELICITOUS INTRUSION INTO HOMER'S WORLD

"Klik" (9.2). A close-up of Madonna bawling out her song "Like a Prayer" pops onto the television screen. This very first text explodes noisily in a visually shocking, orange, jagged-edged speech balloon. It bursts through the boundaries of the gutter between two frames and shatters the silence (9.2–3). As if Madonna's first words "And it feels like home" bothered Homer—indeed, the deserted house may not feel like home—he quickly turns off the television, silencing this disrupting text, and literally runs outside where he finds silence and coolness. Homer is not quite ready to confront again his Vietnam past and running out of the house could be seen here as a momentary return to his "present world" and to "outside," which is a place that may not be entirely comfortable, but yet is not as uncomfortable as "inside" or his past. Once he is outside, the more sedate, peaceful palette of blue-grays returns (9.4). Homer will go outside twice more during the night, both times right after Felicity hangs up (14, 45). Now back in the house after a run through the woods (10), Homer still has two hours to while away before the broadcast, when the telephone rings. Unlike the "KLIK" written in orange on the previous page (9.2), the "DRRING" is colored in blue-violet (10.7). The ring tone is not written in a jagged script that would emphasize the disruptive nature of the noise, and the color sets the phone call "outside." The lettering and color could suggest that the phone call, although unexpected, is not an unpleasant interruption. Homer picks up the phone and utters his very first word: "Hello?" (11.1). His speech balloons are neutral white. Instead of an answer to his greeting, there is only silence, three dots in a blue balloon. This blue both helps to distinguish between the speech of Homer and Felicity, the caller, and sets her in the world of the "present" and the "outside"—she is an intruder in Homer's past. A dialogue ensues: "Who's calling?" "Felicity. Felicity Cosgrove. Am I bothering you?" "It depends . . ." (11.2).

Not entirely ready to allow the intruder inside, yet not averse to that possibility, Homer does not hang up right away. For a middle-aged man to engage in a telephone conversation with an unknown thirteen and a half year

old girl, home alone on a New Year's Eve, and to encourage her to call back later if she so wishes (14.1), is somewhat disconcerting. Nonetheless, by naming the caller "Felicity" the author suggests that she may be a harbinger of good things to come. He also marks Homer's second important encounter in the book through the use of *incrustation*—Cosey had used it only once so far, in Homer's face-off with the house—rather than depicting the beginning of this unusual phone call through a more conventional panel layout (figure 4). The entire page is composed of two main frames. At the top, an almost empty, pale yellow, narrow strip contains a close-up of Homer's face and of his hand holding the phone (11.1). A large, two-layer frame (11.2) fills the rest of the page. The bottom layer of this frame depicts the house at a distance, from the outside, poised between an immense night sky and a snow-blanketed field, with its windows burning bright. The palette of the frame is blue-gray and blue-violet. The second, superimposed, layer is composed of eight frames, all contained in and hovering over the larger frame. Four of these superimposed images show Homer on the phone talking to Felicity (11.2.a, c, d, e), one depicts a brightly lit window from the outside (11.2.b), and the remaining three are independent, blue, speech balloons, containing Felicity's words. Belonging to the world outside the house, the girl's voice shares its blue color, although in a lighter shade. In the third floating frame, Homer stands in front of a window tinted in blue, looking into the night (11.2.c). *Incrustation* on page 11 is not just a device to present in a more visually interesting way what is going on inside the house. The floating frames pull Homer out of the house and place him on an intermediate plane: he is no longer completely "inside" nor "outside." This underlines the tug between Homer's realities—his present world and his Vietnam past—and his hesitancy to bring the "outside" "inside," to attempt a reconciliation between the two. When the first telephone conversation ends, Homer will go back outside, into the world from which the phone call emanated, and stand looking again into the far distance of the blue-violet and peaceful night (14.3). But Homer's healing starts with Felicity's first phone call, because it forces him to identify himself and to begin describing and defining his relationship to home and to the war. Felicity's first substantial question is of a personal nature—"You live in Wickopy year around?"—and in a white speech balloon originating from the house, Homer answers back—"No, I came back for a few days" (12.1). He does not know quite yet how to react to the intrusion, to this young girl and her disconcertingly mature talk. He gets up, phone in hand, and moves about the house while the child continues her string of questions and comments, met at times by Homer's silence (12.3–4). The child worries

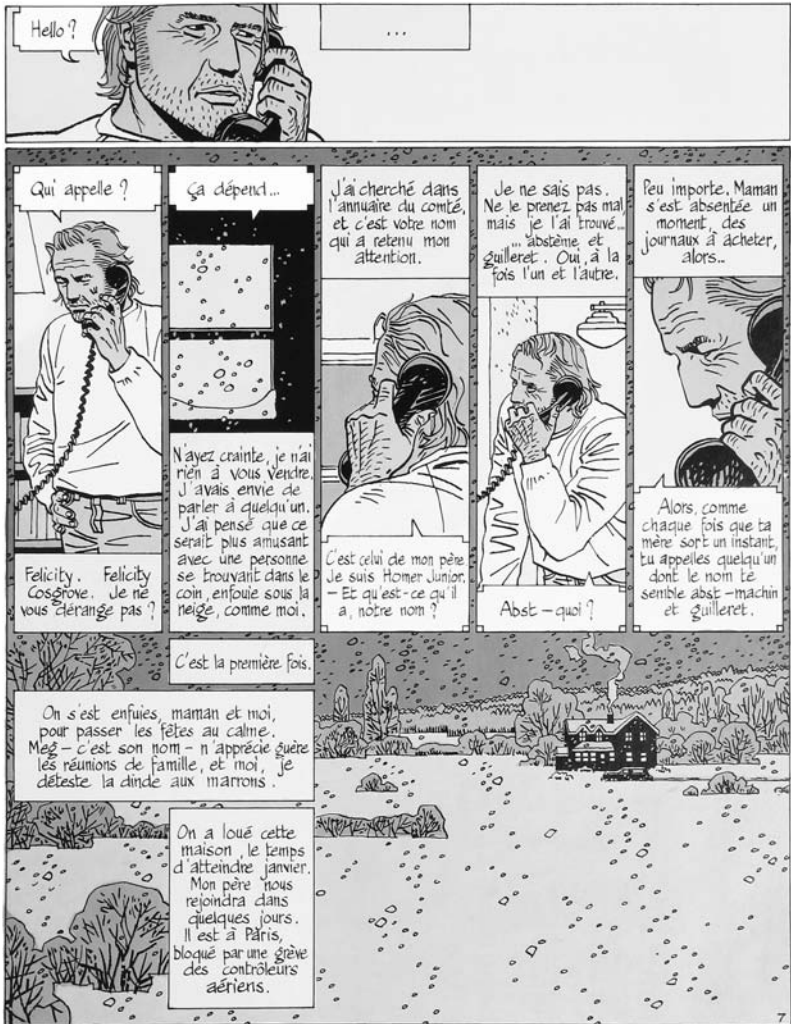


Fig. 4. Floating frames place the character on an intermediate plane: neither "inside" nor "outside." From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 11; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

that she might be disturbing a family gathering (12.4). "I'm alone" (12.5), he replies. Something in his voice has alarmed her: "Is everything alright? Do you need help?" (12.6). "Everything's okay, Felicity, really. If there is one guy in top shape in the whole county, you're talking to him! It's true!" (12.6). Homer is unsettled by the call, but, if Homer's attempt at lightness



Fig. 5. Images echo the layout to express the character's fragmented reality. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 12; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

does not ring true to the reader, the sarcasm of his reply appears lost on the child. Carrying the old-fashioned phone into the kitchen, Homer pulls out a drawer and opens a cupboard—gestures more mechanical than purposeful. With this intrusion of the outside world, Homer's inside world is fragmented: mimicking the layout of this particular comic-book page, the lines

of the white kitchen cabinets (12.4) and the open, compartmented drawer (12.5) seem to divide the kitchen space into frames and gutters, but the story they tell remains indecipherable, very much like the telephone conversation (figure 5). Felicity tells him that he reminds her of her grandmother—her best friend—and asks him whether he has a “best friend” (12.5). This apparently anodyne question invites the Vietnam War into their conversation. Homer hesitates before answering “Hum I had one” (12.5), then adding, “In Vietnam . . .” (13.1), while he opens a cabinet door (13.1). The following frame is a close-up of the cabinet’s contents. Felicity’s “Oh, I’m sorry,” in a blue balloon, is wedged among the groceries underneath a jar of honey, as though her sweet apology could assuage the unhealed psychic wounds that she has inadvertently touched. However, next to the jar of honey sits a big box of salt (13.2), which Felicity will metaphorically and unintentionally keep pouring on Homer’s open war wounds with her witty retorts: “I didn’t mean to enter your territorial waters . . . Especially on New Year’s eve . . .” (13.3). Spoken only as an innocent metaphor for Homer’s private life, “Territorial waters” also necessarily brings to mind the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident, which led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the open involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War. Homer silences his feelings—“It’s nothing. Don’t worry” (13.3). He does not want, or is not ready, to talk freely about Vietnam with the child, and changes the subject by asking what Santa Claus brought her (13.4). As he asks, he himself grabs an orange from his bag of groceries, the fruit that, traditionally, Santa or Saint Nicholas brings to good girls and boys. Could this be seen as a last attempt at persuading himself of the innocent righteousness of the American involvement in the Vietnam War? The conversation ends with a promise of a possible call the next day: “Whenever you want,—Very glad to have heard your voice, Felicity” (14.1).

A BLAST FROM THE PAST: THE SHOCK OF RETURN

Almost smiling now, Homer seems to have enjoyed the interruption (14.2). He now turns the television on to watch the documentary (15). The orange shade that dominates this page glares unpleasantly. The orange balloon (15.9) containing the text of the commentary spreads across the bottom frame and mostly obliterates the gutter above it, while its jagged edge suggests a jarring sound: a visual aggression for the reader and an auditory one for Homer. What is supposed to be limited to the television screen has invaded the whole

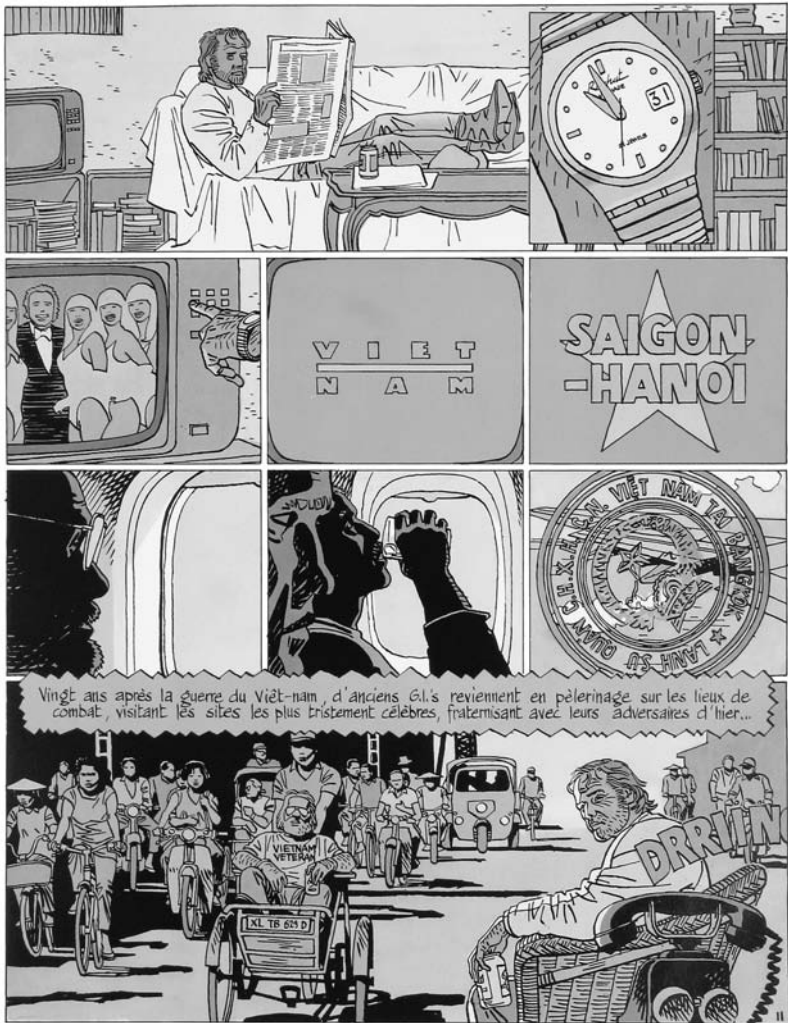


Fig. 6. *Incrustation* shows Homer pulling away from an uncomfortable position to a more mediated one from which to confront his past. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 15; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

strip: wheeled in a tricycle sits a man looking strangely like Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead and sporting a T-shirt that reads “Vietnam Veteran.” He and a throng of Vietnamese on mopeds are literally spilling into Homer’s living room, threatening to engulf in their tide the reader as well as Homer, who is sitting in the right-hand corner of the strip and colored in cool tints.

At this point, Felicity calls again, and the ringing of the phone pulls Homer and the reader from an uncomfortable position (smack up against the invasive sound and image of the documentary) to a more removed, mediated, and perhaps more critical one. The lettering of the phone's ring is again in blue (15.9), bringing the "outside world" back into the "inside world," Homer's Vietnam past (figure 6). Felicity's role becomes clearer here: she is the one to help Homer successfully bridge his dissonant worlds. The first time that she had spoken with him, she had already brought Vietnam into the conversation (12–13). This time her incursion into Homer's Vietnamese reality is deliberate: "Homer? They're showing a report on Vietnam—Channel 31—I thought that it might interest you" (16.1). Her second phone call is more intimate too, because she uses the "tu" form—"J'ai pensé que ça t'intéresserait" (16.1)—instead of the more formal "vous" of her previous conversation—"Je vais vous laisser maintenant" (14.1). From this point on, Homer will watch the muted documentary while carrying on a conversation with Felicity.

CATALYSIS AND CRITICAL DISTANCE: RE-VIEWING A PAST LIFE

Initially, Homer's reaction to this second prod by Felicity is similar to his first one, when he had changed the subject ("It's nothing. Don't worry" [13.3], "Tell me instead what Santa brought you" [13.4]): he again silences Vietnam, this time by turning off the sound to hear Felicity better (16.3) and failing to tell her that he is the veteran that they are both watching on television. Instead he asks her whether her mother has returned home safely (16.4). The layout of the page (16) is significant because of the three distinct layers that compose it, each with its own coloring: neutral white for the first, warm tints for the second and cool shades for the third (figure 7). The first layer is the blank white page on which the story is drawn. The second layer is formed by two frames: across the top of the page, an orange, jagged-edged balloon contains the television commentary, whose lettering progressively disappears as Homer turns off the volume; and a large frame fills up almost the entire page—it contains a high-angle shot of Saigon and the words "Saigon (Hô Chí Minh City)," as a caption at the bottom of the documentary's image. The third layer is composed of six frames that are superimposed, partially or fully, over the large image of the city. They mainly depict the telephone conversation between Homer and Felicity. Three of these images hover above the white strip of the first layer and slightly overlap both the orange speech balloon and the large frame, which together compose the second layer. Whereas the beginning of the first phone



Fig. 7. A masterful use of gutter space and *incrustation* underscores the character's more detached and critical look at his Vietnam past. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 16; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

conversation was depicted in a series of frames hovering over Homer's outside world (the snowy landscape with the old house [11.2]), the beginning of the second conversation hovers over a void—the blank strip of the first white layer that separates the jagged-edged balloon from the large frame. The layering of panels functions here to suggest that the intrusion of the outside world (the

phone call) does not allow Homer to immerse himself fully in his past—a position that might encourage a sterile narcissism—but rather maintains him in an intermediate reality, a detached position from which to look at his past more critically and to progress toward understanding and healing. In fact, in the bottom right-hand corner of the facing page (17), Homer can be seen sitting, holding the phone, and looking out toward the reader. Although he is probably watching the documentary, he is shown as though his back were turned to it, as it plays for the reader on the page behind and around Homer. He is silhouetted in blue tints against the white bottom layer, in a borderless frame that suggests that he has entered a transitional state. This constitutes a juncture in the story, when the two narratives (the visual one of the documentary and the telephone dialogue) enter into a curious dance, sometimes meeting but often apparently distinct and at a distance from each other.

The cathartic effect, for the reader and for Homer, will come from the strange interplay between the superimposed conversation and the silent images, which have become far more powerful and freer to reveal Homer's true motives for returning to Vietnam, with the removal of the distracting, voice-over commentary of the documentary. The visual language of the documentary now predominates, and links America's Vietnam War with a more distant but related past: we see images of Citroen "Etablissements Bainier d'Indochine" (18.2), of an old sign in French ("Crèmerie-Buvette" [37.5]), of a late 1950s French car model—a Renault Dauphine (23.1.3, 23.2.1), and one of Homer's means of transportation (23). These evoke France's long colonial presence in Indochina and the French Indochinese War (1946–54), which led to the Geneva Conference (July 1954) and the partition of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, so prominently featured on Homer's journey map (24.2). This reminds the reader that after having provided material assistance to the French war effort, the United States began its own long war against Vietnamese Communists and nationalists. Historical and personal journeys into the past intersect when Felicity asks Homer: "Did you notice the veteran . . . ? His gaze . . . "; to which he answers, "No . . . What do you mean?" Her perceptive reply—"Well, he looks like a guy searching for Santa Claus's workshop . . . / Or something like that" (25)—suggests that Homer might have been looking for something that does not exist.⁴ She thereby forces him to think about his motives for going back to Vietnam, as do the images that flash up on the screen: for example, we see two young women of mixed race (no doubt the children of American soldiers and Vietnamese mothers), whose stern gaze follows him (30). We may imagine that they question his right to return to Vietnam freely and smile, given the fact that they had been left behind, like

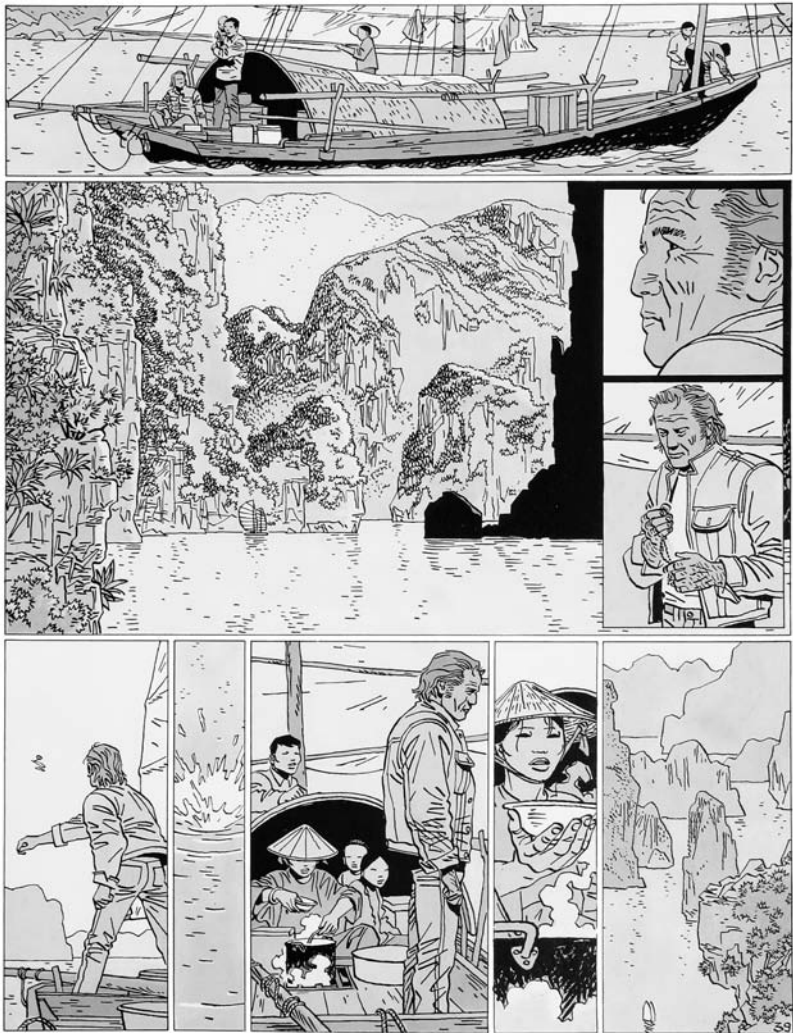


Fig. 8. *Incrustation* establishes a dialogical interaction between the frames. From Cosey, *Saigon-Hanoi* (2000), page 43; Cosey © Editions Dupuis, 2007.

many other children who did not make into the cargo planes of “Operation Babylift.”⁵ This constitutes a brutal reminder of those who destroyed the land and raped its women (30.3–4). Reaching Hué, Homer has completed half of his journey. There he meets two South Vietnamese veterans—friends from the war (34.7)—who take him back to where his friend Dean was killed (31–35),

perhaps during the Tet Offensive. Their visit to the place is solemn and, apparently, silent (34). This allows Homer and the reader to sort out their own emotions, as the evocation of Hué brings to mind the bloody massacre and destruction that took place in that city during the terrible offensive. Then Homer begins the last leg of his journey, taking us through Hanoi to Ha Long Bay. There we witness his ultimate gesture of throwing Dean's dog tag, which he had kept all those years, into the bay (43). This page is entirely silent and is the last one to be exclusively colored in the yellow-green shades of the Vietnamese plane of reality (figure 8). It also contains the last floating frames (43.2.a/b). The bottom image shows the majestic cliffs of Ha Long Bay while, on the right, one superimposed image shows a close-up of Homer's face turned toward the cliffs (43.2.a), and underneath it the second superimposed image depicts him looking at the dog tag in his hand (43.2.b). He seems to ponder what to do with it. Here, *incrustation* clearly establishes a dialogical interaction between the frames (cf. Groensteen 1999b: 101), for it brings into sharp contrast the emotional turmoil that Homer must experience, as he is about to cast away Dean's tag, and the serene, imposing majesty of the natural setting. The reader may hope that a measure of that serenity will touch Homer's soul. As the credits roll on the screen, Homer suddenly exclaims: "Hey, did you see what time it is?" (44.1), as though snapping out of a trance. By watching himself throw Dean's tag into the peaceful Ha Long Bay, Homer has finally exorcised his Vietnamese past, and Felicity's answer of "Midnight!—HAPPY NEW YEAR, HOMER!" (44.1) completes the exorcism. It is truly a new year.

CONCLUSION: AFTER THE DOCUMENTARY, A NEW BEGINNING

The intersection of Felicity's reality and Homer's realities allows the silent viewing of the documentary to reconcile what had been irreconcilable until then. It is no longer a question of trying to erase the past, or of going back to a more innocent and less complicated time, when learning how to throw the perfect pitch may have been the most important goal in Homer's life. It is ultimately a question of accepting that mourning too has an end. Four out of the five final panels are heavily dominated by blue-violet shades. Homer is smiling (44.2, 48.4). In the book's final, large frame, Homer drives away from us (48.5). The landscape has lost its claustrophobic feel. The horizon is no longer the greenish-yellow sky of Vietnam, nor is it the darkened sky—crowded by towering trees—of Homer's return to Wickopy. Instead, it is the wide open, clear, crisp, blue sky of a glorious winter morning after a

snowfall. One can physically feel the positive expectancy of this morning. The unspeakable burden that was squeezing Homer out of the picture and out of his life has been lifted at last, and the reader too feels the relief.

The penultimate page (47) contains several narrative threads that, braided and tied together, help bring the story to closure: the visual thread of the images, the textual thread of the speech balloons, and the textual thread of the signs on the walls of the café. They tell us that both Felicity and Homer are strangers to this place and not welcome,⁶ but that their passage through it is liberating. In the first frame (47.1), as Homer enters the inn, neither of the two other patrons acknowledges him. The owner looks at Homer without greeting him. His exclamation in reaction to Homer's query, "You said "Felicity"?—So you're Homer!—A girl by that name came by a while ago . . ." (47.5) confirms that he knows neither of them. The textual narrative of the signs plastered on the wall implies that Ron's Clear Creek Inn is not a welcoming place. All the signs bear warnings in capital and/or bold letters: "NO CHECKS," "NO CREDIT CARDS" (47.1); "WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE TO SERVE ANYONE," "NON-SMOKING AREAS NOT PROVIDED," "WATER SERVED BY REQUEST ONLY" (47.5). The only pleasant sign is a Coca-Cola poster behind Homer that reads "Enjoy Coke" (47.6), another clue, perhaps, that Homer is ready to enjoy a new life. The frosty welcome at Ron's Clear Creek Inn suggests that Homer would do best to leave the village behind. There is nothing left for him there. He has severed the last strands that tethered him to his Vietnam War past. He is now free.

In *Saigon-Hanoi* the author does not impose his political views upon the reader. Rather his silences promote a deep, personal reflection on the part of the reader and encourage her or him to produce her or his own interpretation of the work. In order to do this, the reader must summon up her or his own knowledge of the historical events suggested through images and names of localities, which, in turn, leads to the questioning of her or his own appreciation, understanding and interpretation of these historical events. In doing so, the reader too completes a journey, faces history, and may find her or his place in it.

Notes

1. All translations from the French are mine.

2. The eight veterans of that group all suffered post-traumatic stress syndrome and hoped that this trip back to Vietnam, done for therapeutic reasons, would allow them to "say good

bye to a lot of dead friends,” or to live with their memories, and that it would bring a sense of closure and a measure of peace to “their mental turbulence” (quoted in Egan 1989). As we read Cosey’s work, we get the sense that Homer’s journey back to Vietnam is rooted in that very desire for closure.

3. For clarity, the illustrations are generally identified with two numbers in parentheses: the first one refers to the page, and the second one to the frame.

4. This searching for something that does not exist is echoed in what Dr. James Reckner, a Vietnam veteran and Director of the Vietnam Project (Texas Technical University) recalled of his first trip back to Vietnam in 1998: “I looked for all the bases where I had served. I saw everything. . . . I was searching for something. After a while, I concluded that what I was really looking for was not the Vietnam I remembered – you cannot go back there, it is gone forever—but rather that I was searching for my youth. . . . Then I realized what it was all about, this thing of aging and nostalgia. . . . For many veterans, it is almost impossible to explain their role in a war they did not understand. Going back, I suspect, for any reflective veteran, becomes a trip of self-discovery”; in Hopper (2005).

5. “Operation Babylift” was the massive airlift of South Vietnamese children, presumably orphans, to be taken to the United States and other countries to be adopted. The airlift started on April 4, 1975, as Saigon was starting to fall.

6. It reminds us that Vietnam veterans were not greeted with open arms when they returned.

Part 4

A French Cartoonist's Perspective on the Working Class and *Bandes dessinées*

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The Working Class and Comics

A FRENCH CARTOONIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Instead of asserting some definitive truths about comics in general, I will attempt to describe to you my own experience as an author who pays attention to what his stories tell. I am therefore going to relate to you my ideas about content, rather than form.

My practice is inscribed in the field of possibilities of comics. Historically, this field has been little turned over or explored. The result is that today we are left with a monstrous pile of publications that are conformist because they are repeated so often. This leaves the many other possible avenues through the world of comics unexplored or barely envisioned. Thankfully, we are not faced with a void. In fact, there are some adventurers who have been able to wander off the well-worn paths and, in so doing, have pushed back the limits of the field of comics. I am thinking here of George Herriman, Moebius, or Jacques Tardi. Personally, I still find Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to be the most important example. By grappling with the Shoah, which had been thought to defy all artistic treatment, *Maus*—with a single stroke—extended the shorelines to which one could steer comics. Modestly, I try to walk in their footsteps, by proposing things that are literally unheard of in comics.

I am therefore going to tell you how and why I came to say what I had to say through the medium of comics and not with novels or films,

for example. To write a book, to make a film or a comic is to take the risk of speaking in public. I have made comics because I wanted to speak out, publicly. The desire to do so has deep roots in my personal history. Rest assured, I am not going to provide you here with a two-bit psychoanalysis of myself. Instead, I am going to give you a few elements of my personal trajectory that legitimate the omnipresence of the real and of social reality in my fictions.

I am the son of an Italian immigrant. My father came to France with his mother when she was authorized to reunite with my grandfather, who was working in the iron and steel industry of the Lorraine region. I am therefore the son of an Italian *and* the son of a working-class man. I grew up with other sons of immigrant workers, not always Italians. I acquired what I would call, for the sake of convenience, “project culture” [la “culture des cités”],¹ which was marked above all by an absence of culture, the official one, the one with a capital C. And I bore its material and economic correlary: poverty, even though we were rich through our solidarity and our mixing [métissage].

I had no problem for as long as I stayed with my own kind: I spoke and thought like them. But I was good at school, good enough for my parents to start down the difficult road of sacrifice and for them to do everything in their power to allow me to finish an educational cursus that would lead me to escape from their own condition in the end. To give you an idea of the exceptional nature of such a will, I must tell you that in the 1960s, only 3 percent of us—children of the working class—were studying in French universities.

I therefore began this route by paying its symbolic price: the repudiation of my original culture, in favor of Culture, the official, the dominant one. But I was not immediately aware of this repudiation, and of the symbolic violence that was being done to me. I even joined enthusiastically in the enterprise, flattered by the distinction that it conferred on me. And I swallowed everything that was presented to me, rejecting everything that I was. I was ashamed of myself, ashamed of my poor man’s clothes, ashamed of my accent from the projects, ashamed of my vocabulary.

I will spare you the details of the things or the events that brought me to become conscious of this process, and then to resist it. I want only to point to a paradox: that of school, which while it was imposing that repudiation on me, was providing me with the intellectual tools to reveal it, understand it, and work on it. Of course school was not explicitly working toward its own unmasking [dévoilement], and I found many of these tools in other structures, namely political organizations and trade unions, which I began to frequent at the end of my adolescence. But it allowed me to forge the keys that opened other doors.

The most radical consequence of this newfound awareness [prise de conscience] of the enterprise designed to format my personality was that I violently rejected “bourgeois” culture, as we called it in the elation of the time, especially philosophy and tasteful literature. The other, extracurricular, consequence was that I was developing a militant activity to combat this violence. This process culminated for me in the two or three years that followed the student activism of 1968. When all this effervescence had died down, I found myself a bit disabled, because I still had the desire to speak out publicly but no longer had any means of doing so.

Many of my friends persevered in the political process, but no doubt because I was fundamentally more individualistic, I chose not to follow them onto this explicit field and instead set out on a different path, that of ensuring that mine and I myself could affirm our cultural dignity, without any more complexes, with respect to the dominant culture. I had seen movies and read novels that had inspired me to do this, but never yet any comics. And it was those films and those novels that directed my will toward that part of the cultural field. My project was clear from then on: to invent fictions, tell stories in which I and mine would have the good role, the main one.

However, I did not have the tools to put this to work. Literature? Impossible, because I had become definitively angry with it, and for so long that I was unable to write a single line of note. Cinema? Even less so, because I had neither the technical skills, nor especially the social relations and the financial means to take up that medium. The solution was going to come from elsewhere.

The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s heralded the arrival in France of comics as a meaningful medium, which broke with the preceding use of comics solely to amuse youths and simpletons. This new practice was especially visible in a newspaper, which I immediately liked, that put comics, among other things, in the service of its editorial project: to contest the world order, with a ferocious humor and a salutary irony. That newspaper, *Hara-Kiri*, was published monthly, before becoming a weekly under the title of *Hara-Kiri Hebdo* and then, after having been banned, *Charlie Hebdo*. It was not a comics periodical in the way that *Pilote* was at that same time.² And its purpose was not comics for themselves. They were simply used there to carry ideas, the discourse of those who drew them.

One of them marked me profoundly. I owe him my decision to speak out, publicly, through comics. His name was Jean-Marc Reiser, and he was a genius.³ Personally, I hold him to be *the* genius of comics. He grabbed the world with ferocious little drawings, almost graffiti. He convinced me that I

too could say what I thought about the world with comics, all the more so because his drawings seemed so easy to draw. I started to draw, as an autodidact, because of course I did not know how to draw, trying as well as I could to do as he did. Of course, I quickly realized that under its apparent simplicity, the drawing style of Reiser was hyper-sophisticated, inimitable in any case, and no doubt unsurpassable. Reiser is to committed comics [aux bandes dessinées engagées] what Jimi Hendrix is to the electric guitar.

But the habit had set in and slowly, with a lot of work, I built a singular way of representing the world. Not by trying to “do style,” but instead by working around my difficulties in representing the real as it is, to succeed in saying it in its truth, in a satisfying and completely unambiguous way, with the technical means that I had at the moment that I harnessed myself to the task. Thirty years later I still work in this way, even though I have a little less difficulty in coming near to the ideal mental images of my projects.

That is how I came to choose comics as the prop for my intentions. But did the state of the editorial space of comics at the end of the 1970s permit such a project? Said differently: were the readers of comics ready to accept the things that I was going to propose? I was not absolutely certain of that. In 1975, comics in France were in the process of tearing themselves out of the legislative and cultural ghetto of productions aimed exclusively at youths (*Hara Kiri Hebdo* was banned in 1970 through the application of the law on publications aimed at youths). But even if comics were freeing themselves from this iron collar, they nonetheless remained confined to the massive exploitation of marvelous universes and pure fantasy: adventure, humor, or poetic science fiction, of the *Lord of the Rings* variety. Even if there were also, on the margins, more radical narrative experiments that were searching for the breach. The most hackneyed narrative universes were built around the central figure of the hero: a quasi-transcendental figure—whereas, for example, the material conditions of his existence were never approached in a trivial manner. A comics hero never eats, never sleeps, and has none of the needs of our ordinary humanity. Yet my goal was precisely to introduce the needs of our ordinary humanity into the universe of comics.

Still, I jumped in and made *Quéquette blues* [Weenie Blues].⁴ When the book appeared, it shocked people. Not because the language of the characters and the situations were vulgar, because during the same period comics were already full of sex and naked women. It was shocking because it exploded the enchanted bubble in which the reader of comics had shut himself up since the beginning of the history of the medium. But it was shocking also and especially because it no longer put heroes on the stage, but characters, just as there

are characters in literature or film. Finally, it was shocking because it affirmed, even though I did not realize it at the time, that comics no longer referred only to comics themselves, but also to cinema and literature. When I started my comic-book stories, I was not thinking of Tintin or Spirou, but rather of Fellini, Risi, Scorsese, Russell Banks, Jim Harrison, or Richard Ford. This intuition that I had about the novelistic nature of comics became a conviction when I discovered *Maus*, by Spiegelman. I therefore chose to strangle the Hero and to introduce, in its place, more complex figures, or more developed ones in any case—but without attempting to express their interior complexity and thereby losing myself in the meanderings of the psychological novel, for which I have little taste, but instead to meticulously relate the sociological conditions of their existence. I conceived of *Quéquette blues* as an inventory, a sort of photograph, of French society of the middle of the 1960s. It was to become the methodological mold of all my subsequent productions. Now I will describe some of my comic books to try to show the part of the story that is related to that inventory.

Quéquette blues was published by Dargaud as three books in the original edition (1984, 1986, 1986), because of course I was unable to find anyone willing to publish a single, 140-page, color volume by a perfectly unknown author. Still, it constitutes a single story, which was later republished in one volume by another publisher, Albin Michel, under the title *Roulez jeunesse* [All Aboard Youngsters] (1991). It was republished under its original title by Casterman in 2005. I associate with *Quéquette blues* two other books that are extensions of it in spirit and in anecdote: *La piscine de Micheville* [The Pool of Micheville]⁵ (Dargaud, 1985) and *Vive la classe!* [Long Live the Class!] (Futuropolis, 1987). These books are very important to me because they allowed me to define the viewpoint from which I wanted people to approach my work. *Quéquette blues* is the portrait of a small iron-and-steel-working city of eastern France, very close to the borders of Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The first page of *Quéquette blues* (2005: 3) is a kind of manifesto in which I condensed everything that was to be my universe and the material with which I would try to develop my work as an author (figure 1). On a formica table a young man and his mother are preparing an Italian dish, “capelletti,” and bandying words in popular French. Everything on this page is inscribed in the exclusive universe of the working-class world in general, and of immigrants in particular: language, food, and the material conditions of existence. I was setting out there the limits of the cultural field that was going to be my reason-for-being in comics. The anecdote of the story, a festive outing of a group of adolescents during the year-end holiday season, is



Fig. 1. A working-class manifesto in a *bande dessinée*: Hervé and his mother talk while making capelletti in the family kitchen. From Baru, *Quéquette blues*, plate 1; © Baru.

set in 1965–66. I chose that date because I think that it is at that moment that the iron and steel industry broke up and sank. *Quéquette blues* is the story of the last days of the working class. The protagonists rattle around and bang up against the strict limits of their cultural universe, that of the factory, which is a compartmentalized one and which lays on the shoulders of those

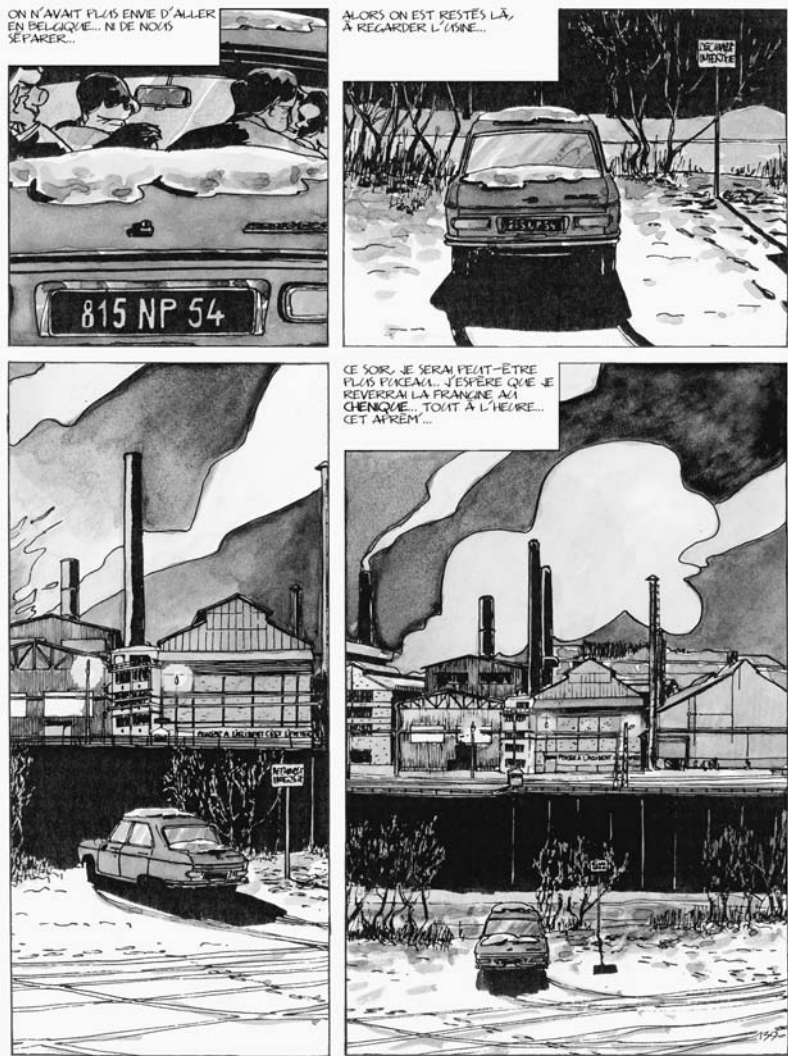


Fig. 2. The factory as the inevitable destiny of working-class young men celebrating New Year's Eve by getting drunk and trying to get laid, in and around Villerupt, Lorraine. From Baru, *Quéquette blues*, plate 139; © Baru.

who maintain it the enormous weight of the determinisms that are necessary to its prosperity. These young men will not escape from it. The last page of the story tells this kind of inevitability of their destiny (figure 2): after having worked itself into a frenzy, the group runs aground and goes to sleep next



Fig. 3. Working-class protagonists from a variety of Italian and Algerian ethnic backgrounds. From Baru, *Quéquette blues*, plate 20, frame 1; © Baru.

to the factory that has dominated it throughout the entire length of the 140 pages of the story (141–42). In fact, the main character of *Quéquette blues* is the factory, because it shuts away those who feed her and whom it nourishes. This closing up is geographical, but also, especially, cultural.

I would now like to draw your attention to another frame of *Quéquette blues* (22.1), because it was to determine the second fundamental axis of my work (figure 3). It presents the brochette of those protagonists of the story explicitly designated by their surnames. Half of them are Italians and French-born Italians (the given names of the latter are French); the other half is composed of children of the other wave of immigration, that of Arabs and Berbers of North Africa, especially Algerians. I need to open a parenthesis here, regarding French immigration policy. The war of 1914–18 had left the country bloodless and incapable of locally recruiting the working hands necessary for the development of its heavy industry. So France intensively recruited foreign workers with, for three decades, an almost exclusive reliance on European immigrant workers: Ukrainians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and especially Italians and Poles. When this immigration began to dry up, the massive immigration of Maghrebians⁶ took over, especially after World War II. The problem with all countries of immigration is the assimilation of foreign populations. You may well know that the French often flatter themselves on having a French model of integration. This model is based on the “droit du sol.”⁷ It is inscribed in the law that makes French any person who is born on French soil. It has a corollary: ethnic nondiscrimination. In France, we have no Italo-French, for example, such as you can say “Afro-Americans” in the United States. There are only French people, because integration in France is a dissolving. To integrate

oneself is to become transparent. Personally, I am the fruit of this model of integration. My father did what I call the “dirty work.” He killed the Italian in himself. I am telling you this because in France today, the integration of Italians is the paradigm for the model of integration—except that it is a falsehood. I have done some research on the subject, and I have found much hatred and violence. There are Italians who were killed in France simply because they were Italian. I have read official documents and newspaper articles full of garbage and disdain for the “Macaronis.”

So I drew a parallel with the situation of the Maghrebians today. Why did what happened with the Italians, the Poles, and the Spaniards not happen with them? I think that the answer is very simple: work. The integration of the first wave of immigrants in France took place simply because everyone had a job, and work gave ipso facto a social reason-for-being. Maghrebian immigration was massive after World War II; it was not even affected by the Algerian War. Having arrived last, the Maghrebians were confined to the most menial tasks. And these were the positions that disappeared when the conservative revolution of free-market economics unfurled at the end of the 1970s. Just as massively as they had arrived, the Maghrebian immigrants were excluded from prosperity and marginalized within French society. This non-assimilation is a human disaster and a social disaster. It undermines French society, it engenders the tensions and fears that have caused the fascistic Far Right of Le Pen to emerge and then grow fat.⁸

This advent precipitated the solidification of something that had only begun in my work and which, from then on, I was to build along two axes: proclaiming the dignity of mine *and* proclaiming the dignity of those who had replaced them, and whom French society refused to consider as theirs. The realization that there was a natural resemblance between the two waves of immigration coincided with my book *Vive la classe!*, where I established the fact that there was a rupture between the children of the “European” immigration and those of the North African immigration. The anecdote of this book is a civic ritual that has now fallen into disuse, which still existed during the 1960s: the army medical board [Conseil de révision]. It involved a quick medical examination that declared whether the young men of eighteen were fit for military service. This formality was followed by three or four days of ritualized debauchery, which also functioned as a symbolic rite of passage to adulthood. But for all the young men of immigrant heritage, this barbarous ceremony held another meaning: from “Français de papier” [paper Frenchmen]⁹ they were transformed into real Frenchmen, because henceforth they were ready to “spill their blood for the Fatherland.” This is what encouraged

the tenacious survival of the tradition—which can be traced back to the French Revolution—in regions where immigrants settled, whereas in the rest of the country, especially in large cities, it did not survive World War II. It so happens that the Maghrebians were excluded from this ritual when they had not been born in France, which was still largely the case at the beginning of the 1960s.

To deal with this rupture I took on the theme of the Algerian War¹⁰ in *Vive la classe!*, for the first time, but in a peripheral way (figure 4). This thematic has never left me, and it was to be present in all my future stories. I either dealt with it head-on, as in *Le chemin de l'Amérique* [*Road to America*] (Albin Michel, 1990; then Casterman, 1998),¹¹ or as a constitutive element of the sociopolitical scenery in “Les années Spoutnik” [The Sputnik Years] (Casterman, 1998–2003), but always with the same function: to situate the fracture zone between the integrated population and the population excluded from full citizenship.

How did this evolution in my work come about, in concrete terms? I had conceived of *Quéquette blues* as a manifesto-reference point, to clearly lay out the viewpoint that was to be mine (i.e., the perspective of the immigrant, Italian working class). Therefore, I needed another book to establish the second point of view in parallel with the first (i.e., the fracture between the European and North African waves of immigration). This was *Le chemin de l'Amérique*. Despite its anecdote (boxing), the story really deals with the Algerian War. But I did not engage it directly, in the historical reality of its facts. I treated it by staging the singular trajectory of a young Algerian boxer, who hopes to escape from History as it unfolds but who will eventually be overtaken and pulverized by it. I created this story at the end of the 1980s. At that time, even though the Algerian War was well-studied by historians, it remained totally absent—in reality, it was repressed—from the public spaces of French society: the media, literature, cinema, and politics. For this reason, I chose to end my story by evoking an event that was even more repressed, almost taboo, in any case largely ignored or unknown: the bloody repression of a demonstration by Algerians in Paris on October 17, 1961 (please see chapter 7, above [figures 7.6–7]). They were protesting against the discriminatory curfew that had been put in place against them (Casterman, 40–45).

From that book on, I therefore developed my work according to this symmetry: on the one hand, working-class culture—that is to say, the result of fifty years of dissolving—and, on the other hand, the life of those who no longer think of themselves as workers [ouvriers]—that is, the immigrants of decolonization and their children. By emphasizing less what should dif-



Fig. 4. A still grieving Italian immigrant mother brings back sobering memories of victims of the Algerian War, including her dead son René and Algerian immigrants. From Baru, *Vive la classe!*, © Baru.

ferentiate them (religion, cultural mores) and more what should unify them: the fact that they belong, historically for one group (the working-class European immigrant community), or right now for the other one (the working-class North African immigrant community), to the most dominated fringe

of French society. Immigrants are beings who are uprooted and therefore destabilized and fragile. They are confined to spaces that are marginal, peripheral, in cultural and geographic terms. Due to this fact, they are at the heart of the tumults that stir up society: delinquency, economic violence, racism, and xenophobia. My characters are always tightrope walkers who dance along the line of social rupture that separates them from a settled France that is all the more haunted by the fear of the other, of the foreigner, that it is close to them, sociologically. They confront the most visible and the most tragic consequence of the failure to assimilate Maghrebians: the growing power of a racist and xenophobic Far Right organized around Jean-Marie Le Pen (he has received 10 to 16 percent of the votes cast in presidential elections over the last twenty years).

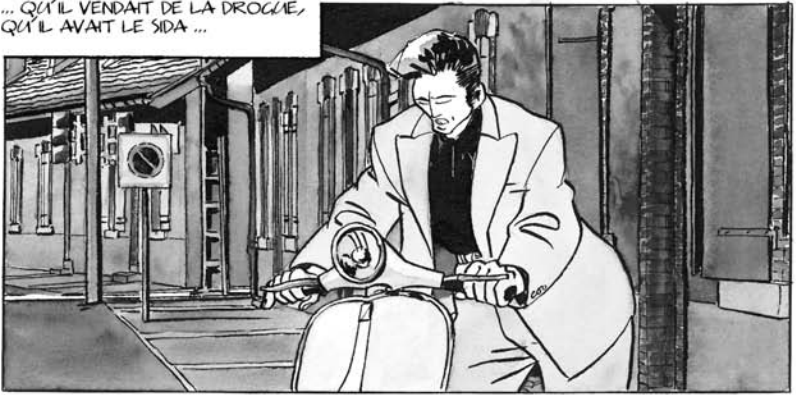
This civic catastrophe has become, in my work, a recurrent theme and has furnished me with the bulk of my material for two books: *L'autoroute du soleil* [The Highway of the Sun] (Casterman, 1995; figure 5) and *Bonne année* [Happy New Year] (Casterman, 1998). I built *Bonne année* in a mirror relationship to *Quéquette blues*—same anecdote: an outing by a group of adolescents during the New Year's holiday, except that in *Bonne année* the party is lugubrious because they are walled into their neighborhood. *Bonne année* is a futuristic, anticipative story, for which I imagined a world in which Le Pen has acceded to power in France (figure 6). He has shut up the *banlieues* [working-class neighborhoods]¹² inside walls similar to those of Berlin during the cold war, to expell into them all the slag that the French heartland produces: economic rejects, drug addicts, and homosexuals. In *Quéquette blues*, the subject was also shutting away, and there the youths of the factory bang against the walls of the social determinisms that paralyze them.

In 2004 I published the first part of *L'enragé* [The Enraged] with Dupuis (figure 7). The second volume was released in 2006. For this book, I built a narrative structure around a couple of characters who still represent this double composition of the dominated fringes of French society. The couple is made up of Anton Witkowski, son of a European immigrant, and Mohamed Meddadi, son of a Maghrebian immigrant. Anton and Mohamed are young men of today and are, because of this, confined to the exclusionary space of a suburban housing project [une cité de banlieue]. But this time I inverted the roles. Both will try to escape from the social determinisms that imprison them, but Mohamed will do it thanks to his studies, whereas Anton will do it with the sole skill that he possesses: his capacity to endure the violence of the milieu. He is the enraged one.

KARIM KEMAL A 22 ANS ET
UNE MAUVAISE RÉPUTATION.
ON RACONTAIT QU'IL
GAGNAIT DES FORTUNES
EN JOUANT AUX CARTES ...



... QU'IL VENDAIT DE LA DROGUE,
QU'IL AVAIT LE SIDA ...



... MAIS QU'AUCUNE FEMME NE
LUI RÉSISTAIT ET QU'IL
COUCHAIT AVEC LES PLUS RICHES
POUR DE L'ARGENT.



Fig. 5. A seductive Maghrebian-French protagonist with a bad reputation. From Baru, *L'autoroute du soleil*, page 6; © Baru.

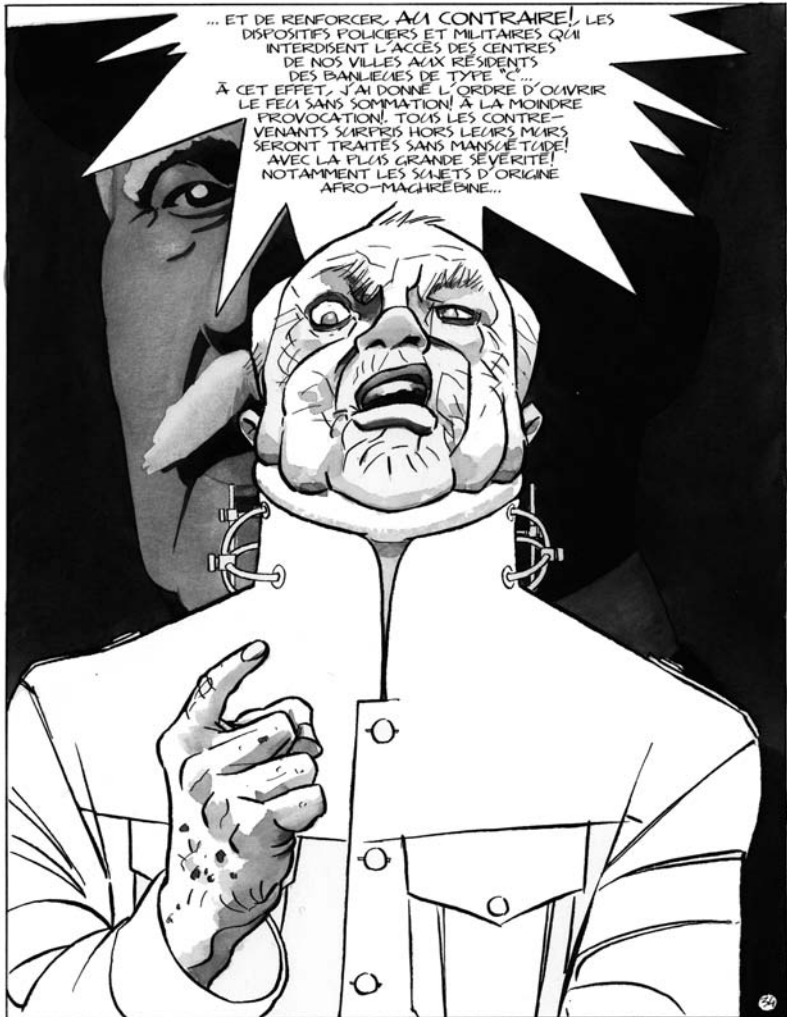


Fig. 6. The specter of fascism: a portrait of Maréchal Pétain looms behind Jean-Marie Le Pen, a monstrous president of France in a dystopian future, as he confirms the relegation of North Africans and others to the *banlieues-as-ghettos*. From Baru, *Bonne année*, plate 34; © Baru.

In 1998, I had successively made *L'autoroute du soleil*, *Bonne année*, and *Sur la route encore* [On the Road Again] (Casterman, 1997), a book a bit apart in my work, because it is much less sociologically marked. I will not dally much over it, because it no doubt met a much more navel-gazing need for

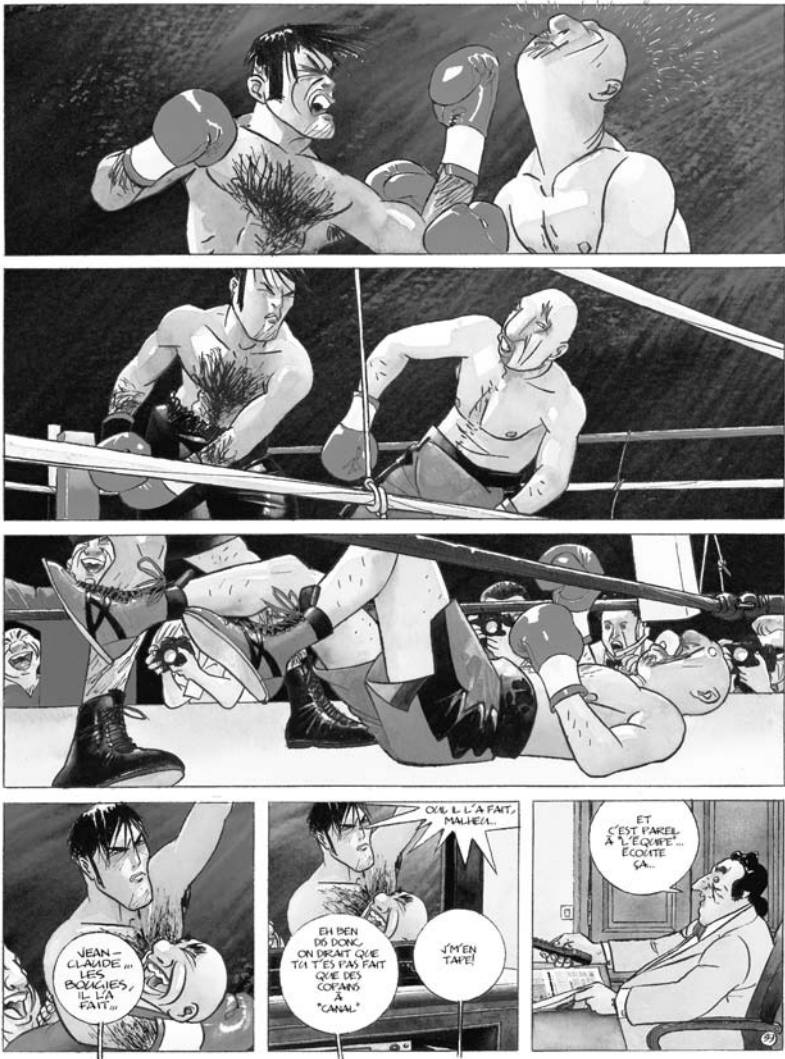


Fig. 7. In a rage, Anton Witkowski, son of a European immigrant, demolishes his adversary as he climbs the ladder to riches and boxing stardom. From Baru, *L'enragé*, vol. 1, plate 39; © Baru.

me: about to turn fifty, I was looking back over my itinerary and trying to see what remained of some of the enthusiasms of my generation. The book focuses predominantly on mores, rather than on social violence, even if the latter comes out here and there. We cannot remake ourselves . . .

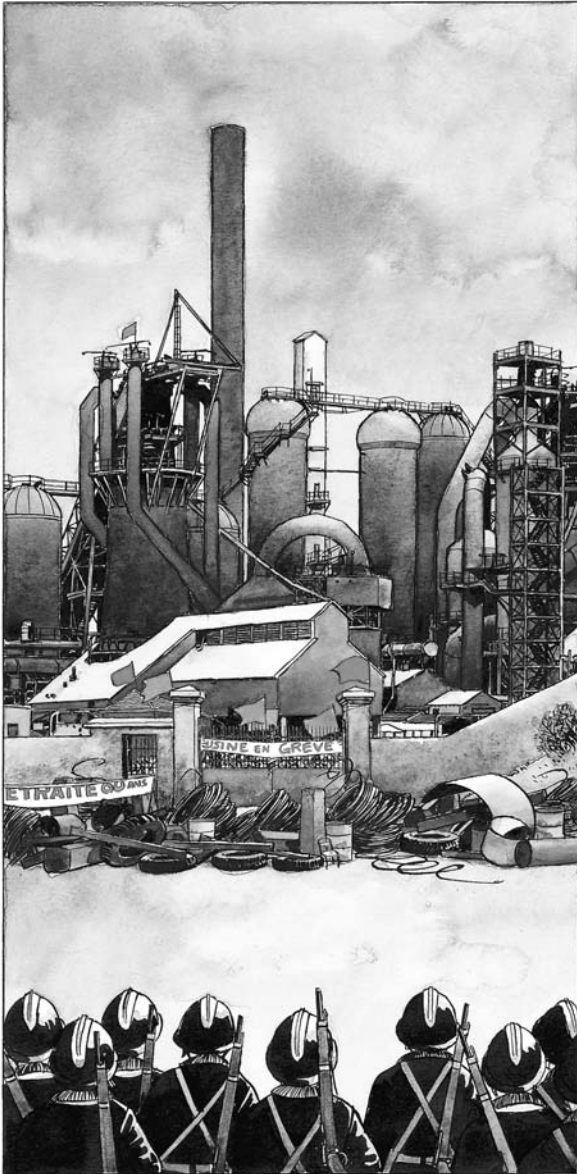


Fig. 8. Working-class solidarity springs into action, as metalworkers go on strike, barricade themselves in their factory and prepare to fight off French riot police (CRS). From Baru, *Les années Spoutnik*, vol. 4: *Boncornards têtes-de-lard!*, plate 37; © Baru.

Once that bout of self-pity had been evacuated, I felt the need to return to a production with a direct, almost reactive, connection to contemporary France and to put it into perspective. And I began building “*Les années Spoutnik*,” with the intention of creating a sort of portrait of the working class at a turning point in its history, just before it was dragged down in the shipwreck of heavy industry, on the one hand, and on the other hand, of the USSR and the French Communist Party (PCF), which had structured the working class for a half century. In four books I laid out a photographic portrait of the working class at the end of the “*trente glorieuses*” [thirty glorious years].¹³ It is then at its apogee, notably with respect to its capacity to make demands and to its self-consciousness. I made this portrait without any sort of nostalgia for a period that, looking back from today, could appear “happy,” but which was not, because the violence done to the working-class world was at least as intense then, even if it did not have the same form as it does today. But there was, at least, class solidarity, which enabled people to endure it first and then to struggle against it (figure 8). Under its pleasing exterior (the carefree world of childhood), “*Les années Spoutnik*” is the bitter certification of the disappearance of that solidarity and therefore, of the loss of a fundamental tool in the necessary resistance to free-market violence.

To conclude, I would like to evoke my next construction site. It is in the works, and I do not know when I will bring it to completion. It is called “*Bella ciao*” [Good-bye, Beautiful]. It is the saga of a family of Italian immigrants between 1918 and 1972 in France. I conceived it in reaction to a discourse that, to my great surprise, is almost dominant among the children of Maghrebian immigration. They are convinced that they are “the first,” the first to be uprooted, the first to be scorned, dominated, rejected and that, before them, those who preceded them, when they are aware that the latter existed, melted into society without any of their present problems. Whereas . . . But, well, I am not going to begin to tell my story.

Notes

All notes are by the translator, Mark McKinney. For a list of Baru’s publications, please see the bibliography at the end of this volume and the one in Baru (2001). In this chapter, plate numbers are given instead of page numbers, except where otherwise indicated.

1. “*Cités*” are generally large-scale housing projects, located in working-class suburban conglomerations.

2. For discussion of these periodicals, please see above, chapter 1.
3. Reiser was born in Réhon, a small town just sixteen kilometers from Thil, Baru's hometown, in the Lorraine region.
4. First serialized beginning in April 1983 in *Pilote mensuel*.
5. Micheville was an iron and steel foundry in the town of Villerupt, in eastern France (Meurthe-et-Moselle département). It figures prominently in *Quéquette blues*, as Baru describes below.
6. I.e., people from North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), or of North African—Arab or Berber—heritage.
7. Nationality conferred through being born in a country (as opposed to ethnic filiation).
8. Jean-Marie Le Pen is president of the extreme right-wing, xenophobic, French political party the Front National, which he founded in 1972.
9. Those who possess French nationality (they are French on paper) but are not regarded by some as culturally or ethnically French.
10. The Algerian War extended from 1954 to 1962. For discussion of some aspects of it, please see above, chapter 7.
11. *Road to America* was serialized and then published in book form by Drawn and Quarterly (2002). For a close analysis of Baru's *Le chemin de l'Amérique*, please see above, chapter 7.
12. Roughly equivalent to U.S. inner cities, but situated in the outer suburbs of French cities.
13. I.e., the period of 1944–74, a time of rapid economic expansion in France.

ADDITIONAL READINGS ON BARU, HIS WORK, AND ITS CONTEXT

Like other serious French cartoonists, and perhaps especially those working in a realist mode, Baru bases his work on careful documentation. In the following list, the references preceded by an asterisk were supplied by Baru, in response to a request for suggestions to add to this list of further readings. For a list of his own publications, please see the bibliography at the end of this volume.

RECENT INTERVIEWS OF BARU

*SVOF, no. 29, June 2001, Switzerland.

**Patate douce*, no. 6, November 2004, Editions du Potager Moderne, France.

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For more complete references to publications by the contributors about *bandes dessinées*, please see the bibliography of this volume, and for works by or about Baru, the list of additional readings, after chapter 11.

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