ILLUSTRATING AUTOBIOGRAPHY
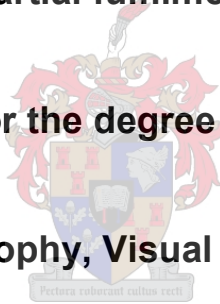
Rearticulating representations of self in *Bitterkomix* and the visual journal

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Roberto Millan ....   A Uf W ˙&$%&

Signature   **Date**

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores an analysis of autobiographical illustration, as it relates directly to autobiographical devices employed in *Bitterkomix* and my own visual journals. The result is a practitioner-specific approach that frames my own work within a discourse of comics and consequently within the larger discourse of visual narrative. These devices are analysed in the works of artists in *Bitterkomix* who employ autobiography, not only as a means of effecting more intimate interactions between the reader and the narrative, but also as a form of legitimising narrative. A principal deduction that I have made is that autobiographical writing operates through the filter of memory and language translation. A divergence occurs within *Bitterkomix*, as well as within my own work, between the artist as himself and the artist as his autobiographical self - the two are never identical. I choose to define autobiographical illustration as an interpretative and experimental visual writing process used to affirm and negate perceived concepts of self through the filters of memory, language translation and imagination. Imagination acts as an extension of current memory from which perceived past, present and future identity constructs emanate and extend. These constructs are by no means indicative of historical fact but often appear to be so given autobiography's association as a referential text. The visual journal as an autobiographical object, like *Bitterkomix*, seeks to legitimise itself in 'naturalising narrative' by feigning to make it the outcome of a documentative process. It is exactly the tension between autobiography's perceived characteristic as a genre that involves 'real' experiences and its actual function as a narrative construction of identity that merits its use as a strategic device. I argue how my visual journals constitute autobiographical narrative objects and archives of autobiographical illustrative form and content. This tension is amplified in my visual journals in their association as deeply personal objects and as a result of what is perceived to be the artist's natural process. Most importantly, these narrative objects are placed within the public's gaze and are made to be read as autobiographical texts, ultimately as documents of this process.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek outobiografiese illustrasie wat direk verband hou met outobiografiese praktyke wat in *Bitterkomix* en in my eie visuele joernale gebruik word. Die resultaat is 'n praktisyn-spesifieke aanslag wat my eie werk binne die diskoers van stripkuns plaas, en sodoende binne die groter diskoers van visuele narratief. Hierdie praktyke word geanaliseer in die werk van *Bitterkomix*-kunstenaars wat outobiografie gebruik, nie net as 'n manier om meer intieme interaksies tussen die leser en die narratief te bewerkstellig nie, maar ook om die narratief legitiem te maak. Ek maak die afleiding dat outobiografiese skryfwerk deur die filters van geheue en taal werksaam is. In beide *Bitterkomix* en my eie werk is 'n skeiding tussen die kunstenaar self en die kunstenaar se outobiografiese self sigbaar – die twee is nooit identies nie. Ek verkies om outobiografiese illustrasie te definieer as 'n interpretatiewe en eksperimentele visuele skryfproses wat gebruik word om waargenome begrippe van die self deur die filters van geheue, vertaling en verbeelding te bevestig en te negeer. Die verbeelding dien as 'n voortsetting van huidige geheue waaruit waargenome identiteitskonstrukte van die verlede, hede en toekoms voortvloei. Hierdie konstrukte is geensins aanduidend van historiese feite nie, maar kom dikwels so voor gegewe outobiografie se assosiasie as verwysende teks. My argument is dat my visuele joernale beide outobiografiese narratiewe objekte én argiewe van outobiografiese illustratiewe vorm en inhoud is. Visuele joernale as outobiografiese objekte, soos in die geval van *Bitterkomix*, probeer sigself legitiem maak deur middel van 'naturaliserende narratief', deur voor te gee dat dit die resultaat van 'n dokumenterende proses is. Dit is juis die spanning tussen outobiografie se aard as 'n genre wat gegrond is op 'ware' ervaringe, en outobiografie se funksie as 'n narratiewe konstruksie, wat die gebruik daarvan as 'n strategiese middel die moeite werd maak. Hierdie spanning word in my visuele joernale verhoog deur hulle diep persoonlike aard, en as gevolg van wat gesien word as die kunstenaar se natuurlike proses. Belangriker nog is dat hierdie narratiewe objekte binne die publiek se sigveld geplaas word om as outobiografiese tekste gelees te word, en ook uiteindelik as dokumente van die proses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Bruner (1993:38) summarises the autobiographical process in stating:

> Life is created or constructed … [through] the act of autobiography. It is a way of construing experience – and of reconstruing it. Construal and reconstrual are interpretative, subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us, and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language.

This study aims to produce an analysis of the manner in which autobiographical representation operates within *Bitterkomix* and extends itself within the broader discourse of visual narrative, through the application of techniques synonymous with comics and in the more specific focus of my own visual journals. I do so by investigating narrative representations of self in *Bitterkomix* issues 1 to 15 and through an exploration of my own visual journals as autobiographical devices and narrative objects in themselves. My critique is framed by a theoretical understanding of comics within the larger discourse of visual narrative, through an analysis of the relationship between word, image and cartoon. I argue that my visual journals constitute an alternative form of remembering through their use of autobiographical representation contextualised within the private realm of my own creative process. It is necessary to redefine the boundaries that constitute contemporary autobiographical writing practices, in order to apply these processes to my visual journals. The practical component of my coursework is directly related to this study and involves the application of theoretical research produced in both Chapters 1 and 2, culminating in the production of a number of illustrated autobiographical narratives. These visual narratives take the form of autobiographical comics, constructed autobiographical vignettes, the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative object and the published artist's sketchbook, all of which centre on my visual journaling process.

Chapter 1 comprises a contextualising of the relationship between image and word, its relationship to the process of cartooning within comics discourse, comics discourse as an analytical tool in analysing autobiographical visual narrative and contemporary autobiographical writing practices. It is not my intention to differentiate between factual and fictional elements within autobiography, but rather to explore

their application through visual forms of autobiographical representation within comics discourse, as this is relevant to my own work (refer to previous examples) and that of *Bitterkomix*. It is the tension between real and imagined events within autobiographical narrative that requires one to reassess the manner in which this form of visual representation operates and the devices it uses.

Foisner and Görtschacher's *Fiction and Autobiography* (2006) provides a theoretical basis for a description both of contemporary autobiographical writing practices and of the autobiographical subject. Essays included in that volume do not limit autobiographical practices to the discourse of literature, but rather expound a cultural flexibility that can just as easily be applied to visual narrative, without resorting to an analysis that views the genre in direct relation to biography. This is important in redefining a more flexible understanding of autobiographical visual writing processes and its application within alternative forms of autobiographical representation (such as the visual journal). Debates surrounding the study of autobiography, specifically those dealing with the more philosophical concepts of truth and reality, do not fall within the scope of this study and are only briefly discussed as they relate to the subject at hand. This topic merits a separate inquiry on its own but is useful in the application of basic concepts pertaining to the operations of fiction and biography and its influence on autobiographical analysis.

According to Beaty (2008:228), one preconceived notion within academia is the conducting of autobiographical research using critical conventions that are common to biographical analysis. Researchers have made use of the same critical devices employed in written literature to analyse autobiographical comics, a practice that has often proved problematic. My study focuses less on autobiography as a genre of visual narrative or literature than it does on its operation as a visual form of representation. It is for this reason that I have chosen to contextualise visual autobiographical writing practices by first investigating the relationship between word and image and then applying this critique within a theoretical discourse of comics.

I aim to contextualise an analysis of autobiography within visual narrative using comics theory. One result of this approach is that word and image need to be viewed in relation to discourses of cartooning as they operate within comics. McCloud provides recourse in establishing a stern theoretical relationship between comics and

cartooning in his book *Understanding Comics* (1994). Roland Barthes provides an analysis of the relationship between word and image in *Image, Music, Text* (1977), stating how the image forms 'an area of resistance to meaning' in that it indeterminably 're-presents, re-creates and resurrects' (1977:32). It is also necessary to establish a critique of comics that does not seek to legitimise it as an art form. The work of Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester proves valuable in this regard with their location of the relationship between word and image within a discourse of comics in *The Comics Study Reader* (2009).

Chapter 2 explores curatorial strategies used by *Bitterkomix* artists in narrating autobiographical content through the filter of memory, language and imagination. The artists most relevant to my study are Anton Kannemeyer, Karlien de Villiers, John Murray, Andy Mason, Ina van Zyl and Paddy Bouma, with specific focus placed on the first four. I have chosen to base my study on the comic strips of more than one artist for two reasons. The first is that I aim to investigate multiple forms of autobiographical representation and devices used within the publication. Secondly, it is necessary that the work of these artists is viewed as a collective body of narratives in order to assess the manner in which the publication has chosen to market itself. Intrinsic to this process is the way in which each artist utilises memory, interpretation and imagination in visually articulating representations of self. The process of 'narrating identity' reveals discrepancies between the artist's narrated public persona through his art, the artist's constructed identity and a socio-cultural collective identity. Robert Folkenflik articulates this process in *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (1993). Narrated identities are created in *Bitterkomix* through an application of autobiographical writing techniques that subvert identity and compartmentalise the narrative self. I argue that Anton Kannemeyer's adoption of differing narrative personas (Boetie, Frikkedel, Joe Dog, Uys and Max Plant) allows him to inject deeply personal sentiments into his stories, which ultimately simulate a sense of intimacy between the narrative and the reader, causing the reader to engage further with the text.

I also examine the *Bitterkomix* artists' use of confession as a device in further propagating notions of intimacy and authenticity in an attempt to legitimise autobiographical identity, more specifically the artist's autobiographical image. I do so by applying theories of the confessional speech act described by Michael Foucault in

The History of Sexuality (1978), while providing the context for its application within *Bitterkomix* using Andy Mason's *What's so Funny?* (2010), as well as Anton Kannemeyer's and Conrad Botes's *The Big Bad Bitterkomix Handbook* (2006). The personal is made public through an act of 'confession' in which forms of intimacy are evoked between the reader and the narrative. The autobiographical writer, as a result, has the option to either initiate his own catharsis through the confessional act, or to use confession strategically. Autobiographical visual writing strategies can be used to empower an individual or group of people, by reconstructing personal and public identity along different narrative lines, in a manner that is unique to the form. Hilde Lindemann Nelson refers to this process as a counter-story in her book, *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair* (2001). I argue that these strategies incorporate the construction of an identifiable visual vernacular by the artist, either as an individual (in my case through my own visual journals and autobiographical narratives) or as a collective (*Bitterkomix* as an anti-establishment Afrikaner youth 'zine) through which communication is acquired even before engaging with the narrative.

Chapter 3 of this study relates directly to the practical component of my work and investigates how my visual journals function autobiographically, as well as their use of strategic autobiographical devices in instigating forms of intimacy and participation between the reader and the text. A significant part of this involves an exploration of my visual journals as autobiographical, visual narrative objects in themselves. Deductions made in Chapters 1 and 2 are contrasted with my own methods in creating autobiographical content and employing autobiographical strategies. I subsequently argue that my journals are used as a device to broaden interpretative reading methods through an application of more abstract illustrative mark-making and editing techniques. Umberto Eco's description of the 'open text' and the 'informal artwork' in his book *The Open Work* (1989) proves useful in its focus on the poetics of language and interpretation of form. Eco states:

> The richest form of communication - richest because most open - requires a delicate balance permitting the merest order within the maximum disorder. This balance marks the limit between the undifferentiated realm of utter potential and a field of possibilities.

I initially aim to reconcile the legibility and 'openness' of abstract marks made using cartooning techniques that help the reader to co-create meaning and, as a result, to

identify with the autobiographical subject. The placement of these images in a fixed narrative sequence, although compromising the openness of the work, completes this process and increases legibility, while leaving behind a visual trace of the process in which illustrated marks were created. The result is what I argue to be a strongly autobiographical approach to illustrating forms through the creation of my own visual vernacular within my visual journals.

Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) serves as a secondary source in affirming Eco's description of poetic language. Eco describes this as the 'performance' of language. These concepts focus on the writer as scriptor, as opposed to the writer as author, shifting the focus from author to reader by encouraging interpretive reading strategies and participation, while emphasising the poetics of language itself. Marks made in my visual journals are interpreted, edited and placed in a sequence, a process whereby the reader is afforded an opportunity to see what the artist saw when interpreting what would otherwise have been a completely abstract illustrated mark. The reader, as a result, is invited to co-create meaning by participating in the creation of the narrative and is thus more able to identify with the artist and ultimately the autobiographical content.

I also apply Scott McCloud's notion of 'narrative closure', articulated in *Understanding Comics* (1994), in reconciling the 'openness' of my illustrations in my journals with the legibility of the work. This is achieved through what McCloud (1994:29) describes as cartooning techniques that have in large part been synonymous with the comics form, though not necessarily limited to it. The result is that my visual journals encourage interpretative approaches to reading autobiographical visual content, both by the artist and the reader, through illustrated narrative forms that focus on an autonomous mark-making process. The illustrations archived within my visual journals form a visual language of representation that is self-referential in the decoding of their messages. The result is a visual vernacular that is in large part indicative of the artist's personality and personal approach to autobiographical illustration.

The visual journal has the potential to also operate as a document of the artist's personal experience and as an autobiographical archive, where narrative devices can be developed and explored. This would encompass the possibility of the visual

journal as an autobiographical narrative object in itself, consisting of images and text that can be read in sequence. I do not claim that all artists' visual journals are indeed autobiographical, but I rather focus on my own journals. I briefly analyse some of those journals belonging to South African artists Pete Woodbridge, Heleen Shroder and Anton Kannemeyer. The visual journal has comfortably placed itself on a plinth as a testament to the artist's process and an indication of who the artist claims to be and, more appropriately, who the artist wants us to think he is.

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION PRACTICES

1.1   INTRODUCTION

An analysis of autobiographical representation in *Bitterkomix* requires an exploration of the relationship between word and image, and as a result, an investigation into comics discourse as a research tool in analysing visual narrative. I have chosen to frame my analysis using comics discourse for three reasons. The first is that the examples I have critiqued in *Bitterkomix* consist of autobiographical comic strips. The second reason resides in the fact that there is already a well-established discourse of autobiographical comics and academic analysis. Finally, comics discourse can be used to critique my visual journals through its use of sequential imagery and by framing it within visual narrative. The inherent characteristic of comics as a hybrid form in its use (to varying degrees) of images and words in sequence, provides an appropriate theoretical framework within which the autobiographical visual writing process can be analysed and investigated with reference to the examples used. Included in this process is the codification of form through the practice of cartooning, an inherent characteristic of comics, as described by McCloud (1994:30).

It is not my intention to argue about what does and does not constitute art or literature in comics. The focus of this study steers away from the debate around the legitimisation of comics as an art form. Emphasis is rather assigned to the process of illustrating autobiographical narrative using autobiographical writing techniques. Chapter 2 of this study explores its application within *Bitterkomix*, while Chapter 3 investigates its operations and further application within my visual journals.

Beaty (2009:228) identifies two key misconceptions surrounding autobiographical writing practices that he feels are problematic. The most relevant to my study are

autobiography's association as a 'referential text'[1] (namely its relation to historical fact) and its tendency to be analysed in comparison to the biographical genre. I choose to define autobiographical writing as an interpretative and experimental process used to affirm and negate perceived concepts of self through memory, translation and imagination. Imagination acts as an extension of current memory from which perceived past, present and future identity constructs emanate and extend in different directions. These constructs are by no means indicative of historical fact but often appear to be so given autobiography's association as a referential text. Löschnigg (2006:2) states that '[a] conception of the autobiographical act as a creative rather than a mimetic process raises profound questions about the generic status of autobiography, since autobiography then oscillates between the factual and the fictional.' Consequently, autobiographical writing can be used strategically by the artist to create and communicate identity constructs in a manner that is unique to visual narrative. The curatorial aspects of autobiographical writing are, however, further explored in Chapter 2.

Another area of research that has proven problematic is the analysis of autobiography using criteria normally reserved for biographical discourse. This stems from autobiography's establishment as a genre of written literature. While this may be relevant to understanding the operations of autobiography in literature and visual narrative, it also imposes outdated conceptions of autobiographical discourse originally found within literature (such as autobiography as historical fact) on visual narrative. It is just as necessary to locate the attempted categorisation of the relationship between word and image within the broader discourse of literature. By doing so, I am able to identify more conventional notions of what has formerly constituted autobiographical writing and the nature of word and image. The result is a more expansive definition of autobiography that takes into account its use as a strategic narrative device, as well as its application through alternative visual narrative forms such as the visual journal.

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[1] I use 'referential' with regards to what Beaty (2009:228) describes as a misconception relating to an analysis of autobiography in relation to historical truth.

1.2 COMICS AS A FORM OF REPRESENTATION: IMAGE, WORD AND CARTOON

A brief investigation into the relationship between word and image is necessary in order to theorise existing conceptual links between comics discourse, analysed representations of self within *Bitterkomix*, and autobiographical representation within my visual narratives and journals. I critique what I believe to be fundamental narrative techniques, as they relate directly to the use of image and word, which are both synonymous with the comics form and relevant to my own work. More importantly, by focusing on comics form as opposed to comics as a categorical genre of literature (namely a combination of the graphic arts and literature), I am able to place less emphasis on the combination of image and word than on the process of writing, which is unique to every artist. The result is a more expansive definition of what can constitute autobiographical visual narrative. The definition would take into account both the possibility of the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative object, as well as its function as a device in the creation of autobiographical visual narrative. Examples of this include the published artist's sketchbook, autobiographical comics, and constructed autobiographical vignettes using imagery produced in my visual journals.

I am opposed to the idea of comics as either a medium or a genre. I agree with Andy Mason (personal correspondence, Stellenbosch, 6 Dec 2010) that comics do not constitute a genre of visual representation, illustration or literature but rather a form of representation. Mason (2010) suggests that comics also cannot be considered a medium, for a medium consists of the media or the carrier through which form is communicated. An example would be the comics page, a poster or the graphic novel.[2] Comics assume a hybrid form in adapting itself to the media through which it is transmitted, and the medium through which the comic is transmitted ultimately affects the form of the comic (A Mason, personal correspondence, Stellenbosch, 6 Dec 2010). The carrier, in my own view however, also constitutes the format, which can and has been used by comics in a manner that is unique to the form, as a design tool to further communicate narrative by encouraging a more intimate interaction

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[2] According to Mason (personal correspondence, Stellenbosch, 6 Dec 2010), the branching out of comics into the field of graphic novels ultimately manifested as a result of artists feeling constrained by the traditional limitations imposed by the media of transmission.

between the viewer and the work (a concept which is further discussed in section 1.3).

Groensteen (2008:10) describes comics as being 'an art of details', a 'medium' which inherently instigates a fetishistic relationship between the reader and the work. While I disagree with Groensteen's assertion that comics is a medium, I do agree that it is this fetishistic relationship that makes it unique in relation to other forms of visual narrative. This is partially due to the relationship of the frames/images on the page, to the page as an image in totality (Groensteen 2008:10) and ultimately its relationship to the page spread and format of the narrative as an object. In order to read the comic, an individual is required to focus on isolated sections of the page at a time while simultaneously viewing these images in direct relation to each other. This technique can be applied strategically as a narrative device in other forms of visual narrative. By designing the medium of the form to further communicate narrative content, this process is amplified (a concept discussed in further detail in section 1.3 of this study). It is for this reason that the most negative evidence against the image/word combination ultimately stems from a comparative method that analyses text and image in isolation from each other (Groensteen 2008:123). This method of analysis proves problematic in that it imitates a critical method emanating from the disciplines of literature and art history and not necessarily visual narrative.[3]

According to Cohn (2005:236), comics contain the visual and verbal structures of language and do not only form a juxtaposition of the two. An interaction occurs between text and image, which facilitates a visual language of representation that is more than only the addition of its two parts. Focus needs to be removed from the process of combining word and image to the actual act of writing/illustrating, which is unique to every artist. Cohn argues that this is not necessarily "language", just as it isn't necessary for one to label it as comics. It should rather reflect a holistic 'semiosis' that emerges out of the combination of the parts in a form that merits a 'natural' progression (2005:236). While I aim to produce an analysis of the manner in which autobiographical representation operates and extends itself within the broader

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[3] Mitchell describes a purist mode of logic emanating from literature that classified mixed media as an inferior form of representation that should be avoided in the name of higher aesthetic values. He articulates how it is not the fact that mixed media is fundamentally wrong, but rather that the combination of elements within mixed media is bad for us. Analysing image and text in juxtaposition to each other must be reconsidered; it only 'rearranges and reiterates existing dominant paradigms of analysis in the disciplines of literature and art history' (Groensteen 2008:123).

discourse of comics by analysing *Bitterkomix* and my own autobiographical visual narratives, it is not necessary categorically to define my own work as comics per se. For reasons of practicality and the fact that *Bitterkomix* has labelled itself as such, I have chosen to use the label comics. It is necessary that one acknowledges *Bitterkomix* as a subversive comics 'zine that originated from a tradition of underground 'comix' directly inspired by the 1960s American tradition.[4] To deny this is to reject a crucial understanding of *Bitterkomix* as an anti-establishment publication (a concept further explored in Chapter 2 of this study). Rather, it is important to consider my own visual narratives and visual journals as possible applications of what the comics form can achieve. The result is an alternative way of writing visual narrative.

Susan Sontag (1977:85) eloquently describes the relationship of reality to representations of reality in photography: "To experience the world in the form of images is to experience the unreality and remoteness of the real". While Sontag may have been referring to the process of taking a photograph, the same statement can be considered in its relation to the illustrated image. Sontag goes as far as to describe what she calls a 'primitive notion of the efficacy of images' in which images are said to contain the qualities of real things. She elaborates by saying that 'modern' society more often associates real things with the qualities of an image, to the extent that images even become replacements for human experience (Sontag 1977:83). As mentioned earlier, it is not my intention to discern between concepts of truth and fiction. This argument is, however, applicable in extending representations of self as they relate to the manner in which individuals assert their own identities through the use of images. One only needs to consider the milieu of social networking websites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *My Space* to grasp the manner in which people choose to brand themselves using photographs, videos, status updates and other image-based applications. Sontag mentions how neither photographs nor hand-drawn images provide a means by which an objective reality can be represented without some form of inaccuracy or bias. They do, on the other hand, provide the depicted image with a conceptual idea (see Fig. 1) that can be used to communicate a particular subject (Sontag 1977:86). Discrepancies are inevitable, of which the

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[4] According to Mason (2006:7), *Bitterkomix* cofounder Anton Kannemeyer has always admired American underground cartoonist Robert Crumb, and, like Crumb, portrays himself as the protagonist of his strips while speaking directly and rhetorically to the reader.

most relevant to this study is that which stems from interpreted representations of self by the artist and interpretations by the reader of the artist's persona through his work.

Fig. 1. Anton Kannemyer, Alphabet of democracy, *S is for Shamefully South African* (2005). Acrylic on paper, 8 x 12 (*Bitterkomix 15* 2005:58).

Roland Barthes describes the relationship between image and word, as well as the manner in which they co-exist, in his *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977). Barthes postulates that the image has, in contrast to the written word, for the most part been traditionally conceived of as being "an area of resistance to meaning" in that it indeterminably 're-presents, re-creates and re-surrects' (1977:32). I argue that propagated views of the image/word combination as being a less effective form of communication originate in the image's direct comparison with written and spoken language, and its framing within the broader discourse of literature.

According to Barthes, it is crucial to take into account that the denoted word does not in its entirety refer to a particular essence of meaning. The word itself contingently jumps from one utterance to another in order for meaning to occur (1977:33). McCloud makes a similar observation in stating how language, science and communication consist of what he calls 'non-pictorial icons'[5] (symbols that consist of letters, numbers and written characters) where meaning is 'fixed and absolute.' These icons function as images but differ from pictorial icons in that they bear no resemblance to what they refer to (1994:28). McCloud describes the pictorial icon in relation to comics:

> 'In pictures the level of abstraction varies. Some … so closely resemble their real-life counterparts as to almost trick the eye! Others … are a bit more abstract and, in fact, are very much unlike … [anything] you've ever seen!'

This concept proves crucial in revealing how comics are able to use tensions between more abstract and realistic pictorial forms to communicate narrative content. It is here where one of the single, most important characteristic traits of comics makes itself evident.

McCloud (1994:30) describes the process of cartooning as amplification through simplification. By focusing on specific details and simplifying an image, an artist can amplify meaning in a way that realistic art cannot. McCloud (1994:30) states: 'When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details.' This process is amplified through the use of these images in sequence.

A second crucial concept pertaining to cartooning practices within comics is the space that it allows the reader to identify and actively participate in the narrative. The process of cartooning has allowed the reader of comics to engage actively with content and identify with characters through simplified illustrated forms. McCloud (1994:31) states: 'The more cartoony a face is … the more people it could be said to describe.' According to Barthes (1977:47), language is not simply the 'totality' of the 'utterances' given but also the 'totality' of the 'utterances' received. The result is two-

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[5] McCloud differentiates between pictorial and non-pictorial icons in comics where the former acts as an image used to represent a person, place or thing based on resemblance. Non-pictorial icons can consist of either symbols (images that represent concepts and ideas) or icons used for language, science and communication (namely letter forms, numbers) (1994:27).

fold in that the reader's interpretation is taken into account, forcing one to accommodate 'surprises of meaning' when reading the image (Barthes 1977:47). Reader participation through cartooning practices has permeated the comics form in varying degrees of which the most relevant to this study will be discussed in section 1.3.

Bitterkomix founder, Anton Kannemeyer (1997:15), describes McCloud's conception of cartooning as a form of caricature. Kannemeyer argues that realistic caricature is most often unsuccessful in comics (1997:15) given the lack of technically skilled artists practicing in the form. While comic art can and does successfully make use of more realistic forms of visual representation, the space for reader interpretation and consequently reader participation, decreases.

1.3   READING VISUAL NARRATIVE: COMICS DISCOURSE AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

Examples analysed in *Bitterkomix* issues 1 to 15 consist of comic strips that are either autobiographical or use what I argue to be autobiographical devices in their communication. This study, as a result, requires an analytical method that incorporates the use of comics discourse and does not necessarily limit itself to the comics form. The result is a critique that can be applied to other forms of autobiographical visual narrative, such as the visual journal. While comics theory is used to aid an analysis of examples discussed in both *Bitterkomix* and my own work, it is not within the scope of this study to label the latter as comics necessarily. I make use of a critical approach that accommodates an analysis of word and image under the theoretical umbrella of comics where the two are not viewed in isolation from each other. Where Chapter 2 focuses on techniques and devices used in *Bitterkomix* as they relate directly to autobiographical representation and comics theory, Chapter 3 explores these forms of representation as they relate directly to my own autobiographical visual narratives, more specifically my visual journals.

It is necessary that one be aware of basic reading conventions in autobiographical comics, in order to read, write and fully engage with autobiographical narrative. More importantly, it allows for an understanding of how autobiography operates and can operate in other forms of visual narrative. The comics 'form' is often considered to be

an accessible means of communication, given its combination of image and word, the emphasis on the former and its popularity as a pedagogical visual tool.[6] It is, however, by no means an inherent characteristic of comics that they are easy to read. According to Hatfield (2009:132), comics can be a complex form of communication and are more often than not 'radically fragmented and unstable' in their interpretation and meaning. An example is Andy Mason's autobiographical comic strip *Autobiographical Comix* in *Bitterkomix 14* (2005). The story condenses large amounts of information into single frames where concentrated quantities of written text appear alongside images (see Fig. 2). Mason even goes as far as to provide written sources for information contained within each frame (an example is an insert of text just below the third frame referencing *The R. Crumb Handbook* (2009)). The text forms part of the image, giving the strip the characteristic visual trait of the almost claustrophobic underground 'comix' produced by American artists throughout the 1960s. While the reader of Mason's comic may not fully understand its visual coding and subversive narrative, he is still able to read it. It is, however, through an awareness of the less apparent conventions of autobiographical comics (in this case a self-reflexive reference to the visual vernacular of American underground 'comix' in the 1960s) that one is able to fully engage and enjoy reading *Autobiographical Comix*.

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[6] The image-word combination may allow for a more reader-friendly approach in communicating narrative. This entirely depends, however, on the genre of comics and its visual narrative approach. The use of comics for educational purposes in South Africa has long epitomised and propagated the idea that comics are easy to read. Many commercial comics such as Vuka Shift's and Joe Dog's (Anton Kannemeyer) *Zeke and the Mine Snake* (1999) limit the use of text in proportion to images (see Fig. 3) in an attempt to make it easier to read.

Fig. 2. Andy Mason, *Autobiographical Comix* (2005). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 15* 2005:59).
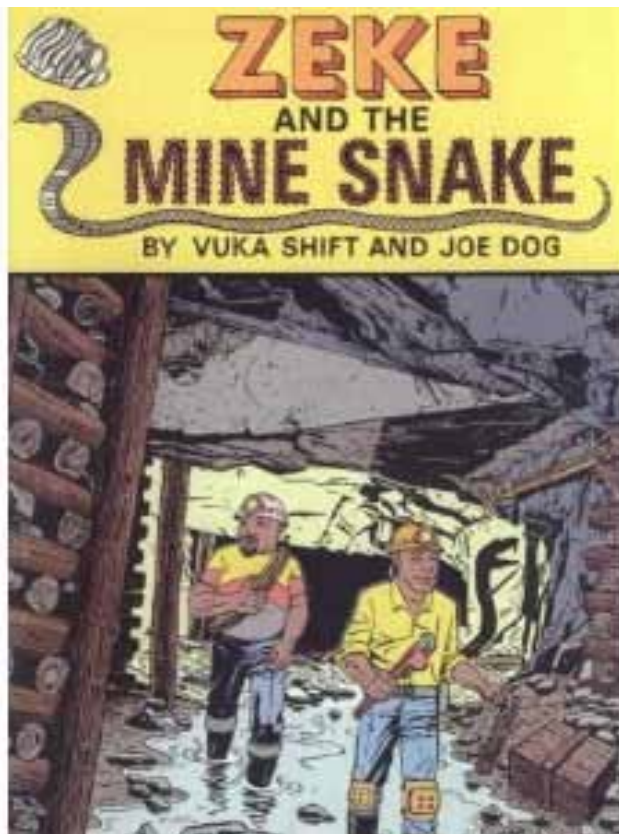
Fig. 3. Joe Dog & Vuka Shift, *Zeke and the mine snake* (1999). Colour comic book, 28.8 x 21.9 (http://www.kalahari.net/books/Zeke-and-the-Mine-Snake/632/739340.aspx).

It is interesting to note how artists Andy Mason and Anton Kannemeyer make use of conventions not only used in comics, but more specifically those used in autobiographical comics. Firstly, both artists appear to make use of strategic visual devices (namely illustrated instructions) that show the viewer how to go about reading their work. Mason illustrates a 'page turner' at the very bottom of *Autobiographical Comix* (2005) in the form of a severed hand pointing avidly towards the next consecutive page (see Fig. 2). The reader is encouraged (quite politely so) to continue reading the narrative through the use of an accompanying text which reads: "Please proceed to the next page". Mason intentionally makes reference to the well-known reading conventions of the form in a manner that is both self-conscious and ironic when aimed at the informed reader. These basic reading conventions are used as an ironic self-reflexive device that are intended to be characteristically humorous while revealing aspects of the artist's autobiographical personality. The result is that the content of the strip is given a subtext by the artist, which I argue to be autobiographical in that it further communicates autobiographical

content through the use of a strategic device. Simply put the artist is consciously illustrating/writing autobiographically within the larger discourse of autobiography.

A similar device is used in the final frame of the strip, which reveals an illustration of Mason standing nude, shielding his genitals from the viewer's gaze. Mason describes his own aspirations of wanting to conform to the subversive tradition in underground comics of depicting oneself naked or having sex, but not having the bravado to do so in an accompanying speech bubble. "All I am going to be able to offer are these watered-down, wishy-washy …" after which the page-turner provides a modest instruction to read on. Not only does Mason make reference to the subversive tradition, synonymous with autobiographical comix, of depicting oneself having sex, through the use of an autobiographical comic, he also goes as far as to appropriate the autobiographical image of other artists within the strip by illustrating their perceived public personas (as a result of their own autobiographical comix) and literally putting words into their mouths. This is not only relevant to autobiography's potential use of visual vernacular as determined by a community of artists practicing in the form (in this case South African autobiographical artists influenced by the 1950s American comix underground), but also the potential creation of an artist's own codified system of visual signifiers. Here lies Joe Dog the pessimist with the glasses and balding head, Joe Matt the pervert and R. Crumb the old, fetishist bastard who started it all.

Kannemeyer follows a similar approach in the first issue of *Bitterkomix* in a page-long anecdote of a strip entitled *The Last Page* (1992). Again the title is ironic in its use as a device to lure the viewer into reading the strip by appealing to his or her sense of curiosity (see Fig. 4). Kannemeyer illustrates himself as having one last thing to say in the first of the three frames: 'For my last page, William has kindly offered to share a thought with us today, over to you William …' Kannemeyer refers to William Blake by his first name, as if placing him into the autobiographical narrative as a character or a friend. Again Kannemeyer quite literally places words into Blake's mouth (albeit out of its original context), after which Blake's ownership of his own image is subverted. The result is that the artist is able to appropriate the image (be it biographical or autobiographical) of other artists and figures based on their perceived public persona or autobiographical image, and associate different meanings through autobiographical writing practices.

It is worth noting how many South African comics artists have followed in the American tradition of signing their works using pseudonyms or 'pen names'. Mason has branded himself using the alias 'N.D. Mazin', a somewhat neurotic character though never without some form of political commentary or personal insight. The *Bitterkomix* publications gained notoriety through controversial depictions of explicit sex (especially in later issues) framed within the context of mainstream Afrikaner culture. Kannemeyer and Botes used the pseudonyms Joe Dog and Konradski respectively to label their comics from the very first issue. Both artists did, however, without exception, publish their real names in the opening editorial page of each issue. I argue that the artists did not use a pen name for the purpose of protecting their identities (a back-up plan if they later would want to disassociate themselves from their earlier work) but rather to afford themselves the space to experiment and play with narrative identity. This device is synonymous with autobiographical comics (most specifically underground comix) in its articulation of self as other and is relevant to this study in its application as an autobiographical device. A few other notable examples of South African comic artists who use pen names in a similar context include Mark Kannemeyer (Lorcan White) and Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro[7]).

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[7] Zapiro is an unusual example of how a seminal South African political cartoonist has used comics and cartooning, alongside self-reflexive representations of self (see Fig. 5), as a subversive discourse in mainstream editorial media.

Fig. 4. Anton Kannemyer, The last page (1992). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 1* 1992:41).

Fig. 5. Zapiro, *Couched regret* (2010). Pen and ink on paper, 20.5 x 16 (*Mail & Guardian* 2010:33).

Reading conventions within autobiographical comics are not only limited to their use as self-reflexive devices through the creation of autobiographical visual vernaculars. Forms of representation and the media through which they are transmitted can function as signifiers in themselves. Autobiography has, since its inception, had a history of using the media through which it is transmitted as a device to communicate and legitimise personal narratives. According to Hatfield (2009:140), a comics page functions both as a 'sequence' as well as an 'object' where reading operates on varied levels and in different directions (linear, non-linear or holistically). The tension between the experience of reading images in sequence and the physical format of the object being read (namely the comics page, book or object used to transpose narrative) allows comics to use form as a communicative device. What this suggests is that any visual narrative can use the medium in which it is transmitted to further communicate narrative and can ultimately be read as a narrative object. As a result, varied levels of communication exist between the reader and the work. This not only allows for further reader engagement and the possibility of a more intimate interaction between the reader and the narrative, but also accommodates a definition of autobiographical comics that would include less conventional media, among which the visual journal would function as an autobiographical narrative object.

An example of this is *Dompas* (2011), a visual narrative I co-wrote and illustrated with author and South African human rights activist Zackie Achmat (see Fig. 6-9). The narrative functions as a translation of a chapter in Achmat's documentary film, *Law and Freedom*, and constitutes a biographical description of how the passbook system came to be abolished in South Africa. The narrative itself also consists of autobiographical instances and personal conversations between Achmat and myself during the correspondence process. The narrative deals with Mr and Mrs Komani, their love story and their battle to stay together after marrying in 1950s Apartheid South Africa. The comic takes the form of a passbook, the very object that prevented the Komanis from living in the same province as a result of the Group Areas Act. The dompas required all black people living in the country at the time to carry a document that dictated where they could work while restricting them to certain parts of the country. I argue that the handbound comic, accompanied by a series of removable documents, including photographs, letters and other illustrations, uses media through which the narrative is transmitted to further communicate content. By narrating the story through the use of personal objects, a more intimate interaction is instigated between the reader and the narrative and communication happens before even opening the book.

For communication to be able to take place between two individuals, it is presumed that each individual has understood how to use and interpret the signs that constitute the message between them. When photographs were shown to an isolated community of Bushmen who had never been exposed to the medium, it was necessary to illustrate how to read the photographs for textual communication to have taken place (Burgin 1999:44). It is crucial therefore, in my opinion, to learn how to read comics before one is able fully to engage with them.

Another important attribute of comics is the space it leaves for reader interpretation. Joseph Witek (2009:151) suggests in his essay, *The Arrow and the Grid,* that it was the exact historical moment when the 'reading audience' no longer found it necessary for the creators of comics to allocate sequential numbers to each consecutive frame (in order to understand that the combination of words and images connoted a sequence), that constituted the start of comics' independence from other related forms of representation. More importantly, it signals a shift within critical visual

narrative discourse that can be applied to other forms of visual narrative where interpretive reading and writing strategies are accommodated and employed.

Fig. 6. Roberto Millan, *Dompas*, (2011). Mixed media, 14,8 x 21.
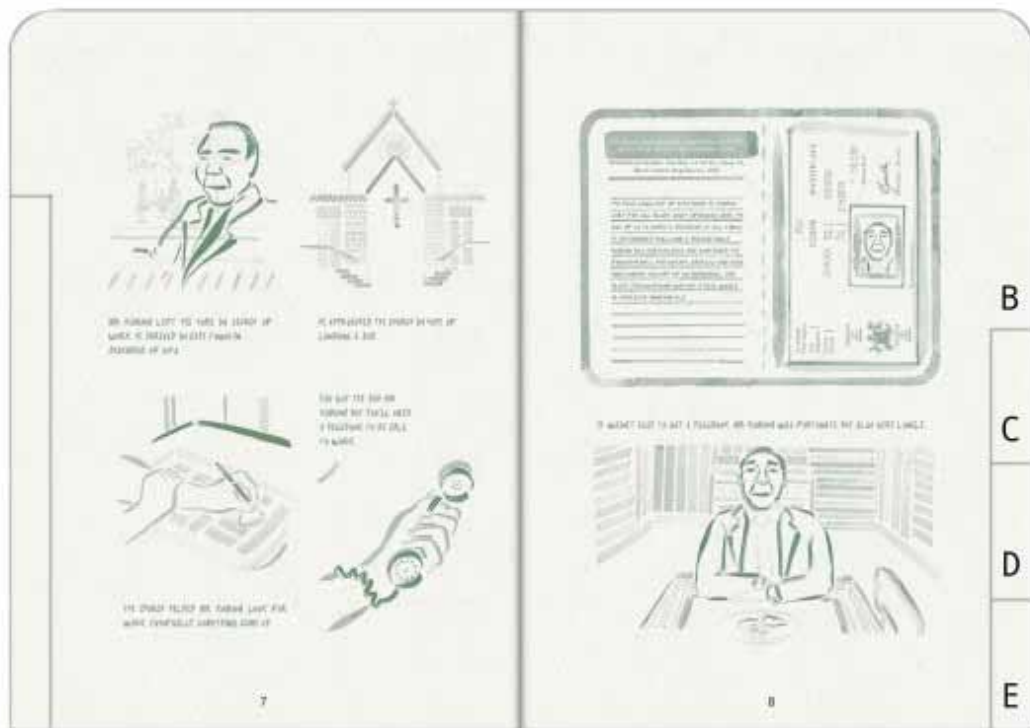
Fig. 7. Roberto Millan, *Dompas*, (2011). Mixed media, 14,8 x 21.
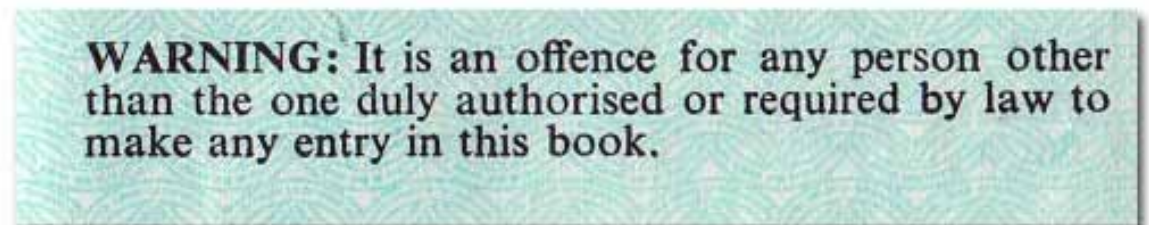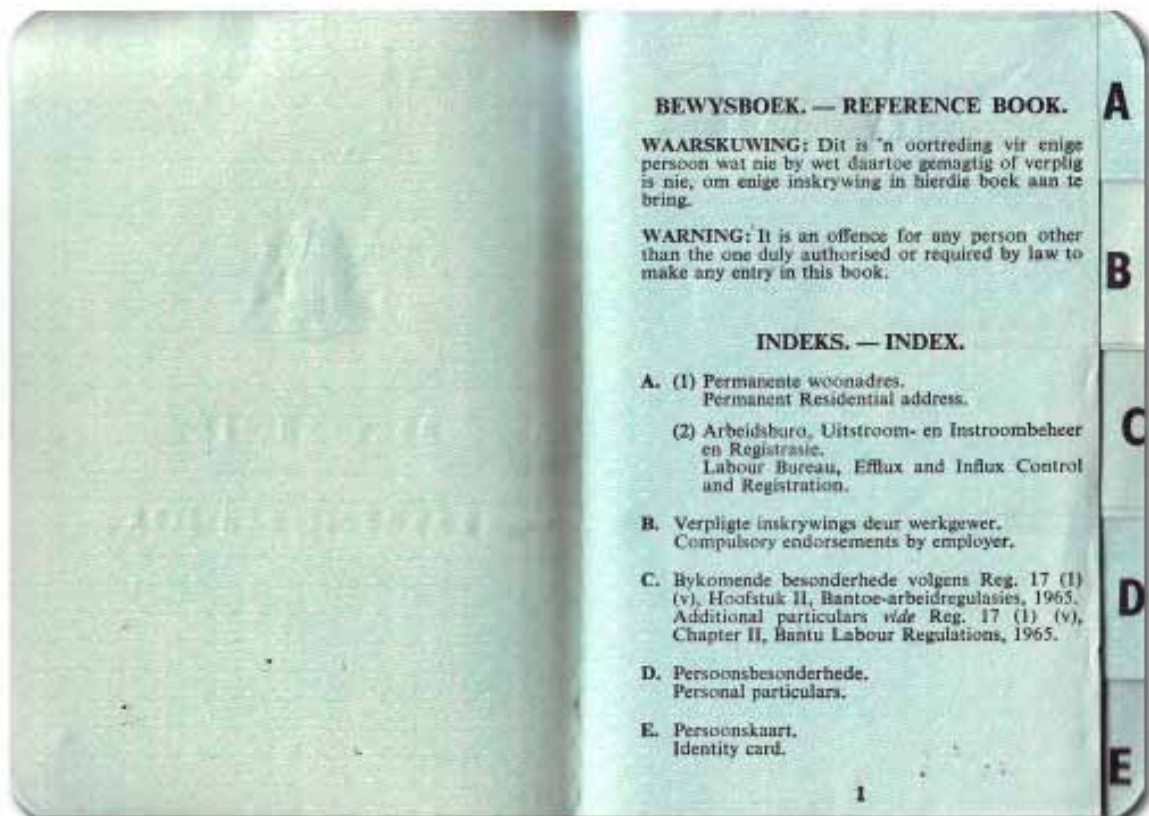
Fig. 8. Roberto Millan, *Dompas*, (2011). Mixed media, 14,8 x 21.
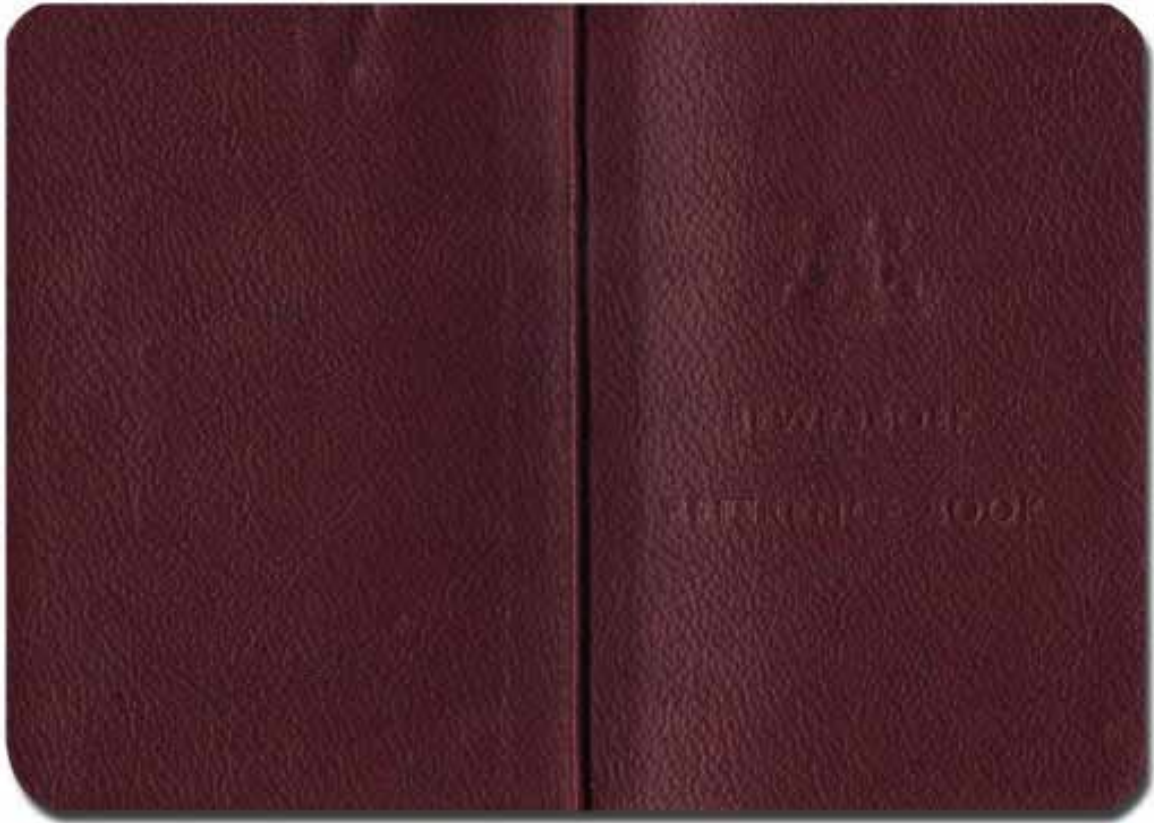
Fig. 9. Roberto Millan, *Dompas*, (2011). Mixed media, 14,8 x 21.

In *Understanding Comics* (1994), his historical account of the origin of comics and its characteristics, Scott McCloud articulates a 'reader-response' theory, describing the author's task in evoking "an imagined sequence by creating a visual series", as well as "the reader's task to translate the given series into a narrative sequence by achieving closure".[8] Hatfield states that the reader's participation forms a crucial step in facilitating an understanding of visual narratives, whereby 'learned competencies' are required to achieve 'closure'. It is through the process of 'closure' that the reader remains actively involved in the reading of a text, stimulating a process of active participation (2009:135). Greater reader participation signals a marked shift within the discourse of visual narrative, one which, although not unique to comics, is synonymous with the form. It is here that varied understandings and interpretations of a visual narrative can resonate with theories of the open text as stipulated by Lyotard

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[8] McCloud defines closure as a process of amplification through simplification using illustrative forms. He designates this as the reason why people enjoy cartoons: they are able to amplify meaning in a manner that realistic art cannot. McCloud claims that cartoons trigger reader involvement through a process that causes them to identify with the image by seeing themselves in it.

in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) and Eco in *The Open Work* (1989), a concept which is further explored in Chapter 3.

Comics theory in this study is applied within the framework of a practitioner-specific approach. My research shows that individual artists bring their own unique approach to the comics form, whereby the peculiarities of individual style introduce a subtext that the reader is able to become familiar with, facilitating the decoding process but at the same time allowing a high degree of reader agency in the process of interpretation (this is explored in further detail in Chapter 3). Kannemeyer's characteristic use of his Hergé-inspired *Tintin* comics characters (see Fig. 10), already evident in the second issue of *Bitterkomix*, creates a point of reference from which his work can be critiqued through the use of a codified visual signifier that ultimately functions as a subtext within his comics (further explored in Chapter 2.3.1). McCloud (1993:67), Horrocks (2001:37) and Eisner (1985:8) have both made reference to similar visual "language" terminology with regard to the comics form, due largely to the fact that they are themselves comics practitioners. In the third chapter of this study I directly relate research produced in the second chapter of my analysis to an understanding of my own practical work as a visual language that is unique to myself. This, in turn, adds to the larger dialect of comics language as a whole.

Fig. 10. Anton Kannemyer, *Drug raid at 4am* (1997). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 2* 1997:40).

1.4 CONSTITUTING CONTEMPORARY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING PRACTICES

1.4.1 Beyond traditional methods of autobiographical analysis

In his essay *Autobiography as Authenticity* (2008), Bart Beaty identifies two prominent ideas pervading autobiographical discourse within the field of comics. Firstly, it is within the field of literature that academia has traditionally placed great emphasis on the relationship between autobiographical narrative and objective 'truth.' The 'referential pact' is often considered inherent to the process of autobiography, where representation is only autobiographical if it is historically accurate. This precedent contradicts any form of fiction or biography that may otherwise be commonly associated with the genre. Autobiography does not, however, necessarily position itself as referential (Beaty 2008:227). This study defines a more flexible conception of what can constitute autobiographical visual narrative and the use of autobiographical visual narrative devices by analysing representations of self in *Bitterkomix*. A trend in contemporary autobiographical writing defines how "the aim is [no longer] the effect of the real but the image of the real" (Beaty 2008:228). James Olney (1998:19) claims in *Memory and Narrative* that 'the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, a creation and an imitation of self.' This in turn reveals the operation of fiction within the autobiography.

A good example of an autobiographical comic strip that blurs the boundaries between referential and fictive representation is Anton Kannemeyer's *Swart,* published in *Bitterkomix 10* (2000). The six-page comic strip (see Fig. 12) begins with a scenario depicting Kannemeyer visiting his friend Tienie. The strip positions itself as an autobiographical narrative, dated November 1997 with a journal-like inscription 'Ek kuier by Tienie.' The strip can be considered, to a certain extent, as referential in its representation. The first two frames show Kannemeyer and Tienie conversing on the topic of 'the New South Africa', shortly after which Tienie reveals to Kannemeyer the story of his new neighbours in the remaining frames. The narrative coalesces into an imagined visual sequence as described through Tienie's memory of the event, filtered through Kannemeyer's own memory of their conversation. The neighbour's son, a young black child, decides to visit Tienie's home to play with his son. It is ultimately Kannemeyer's own frame of reference that provides for a visual articulation

of events through which his memory appropriates the narrative. The result, in the final two pages of the comic strip, is a personal interpretation, through a series of illustrated definitions by Kannemeyer taken directly from a 1979 version of an Afrikaans *HAT* dictionary, that unmask the origin of a number of racially charged, colloquial South African words through the use of irony. The reiteration of narrative through memory allows for a process of recycling, whereby personal subjectivity and interpretation influence the sequence of events.

What is more interesting are the formal qualities of *Swart* and the style in which it is depicted. Kannemeyer illustrates the black child using the Belgian clear line method (*ligne claire*) directly associated with that of Hergé's *Tintin* comics. Kannemeyer is notorious for his use of what Mason (2010:144) describes as a "dispassionate parody of white fear" in portraying racist stereotypes throughout *Bitterkomix*. Mason makes this observation in reference to Hergé's racially-charged comic (see Fig. 11), *Tintin in the Congo* (1931).[9] What makes an analysis of *Swart* so valuable is not only the way in which it reveals the conventions of interpretive memory indicative of autobiographical writing, but also how comics, through the use of strategies that encompass cartooning and comics techniques, may allow for broader possibilities in representing the self unique to the visual narrative form.

As mentioned earlier, it is not my intention to differentiate between factual and fictional elements within autobiography, but rather to explore its use as a device within the work of artists who have published in *Bitterkomix*. It is through the exploration and extension of self-representation within visual narratives in *Bitterkomix* that I am able to apply similar visual writing techniques to my own autobiographical narratives in Chapter 3. My visual journals facilitate a process whereby these same autobiographical writing techniques can be further applied, investigated and developed, unmasking the potential of the visual journal as an autobiographical device and an autobiographical narrative object in itself. My thesis places less emphasis on the operations of truth within autobiography writing than it does on a poststructuralist understanding of 'performativity' through the visual writing process.

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[9] According to Mason (2010:78), Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo* (1931) 'unashamedly' portrays 'the racial attitudes of the European colonial nations in the first half of the 20th century, and demonstrates that the portrayal of black people in a demeaning way was not a South African invention, but … [rather] typical of the colonial period in general.'
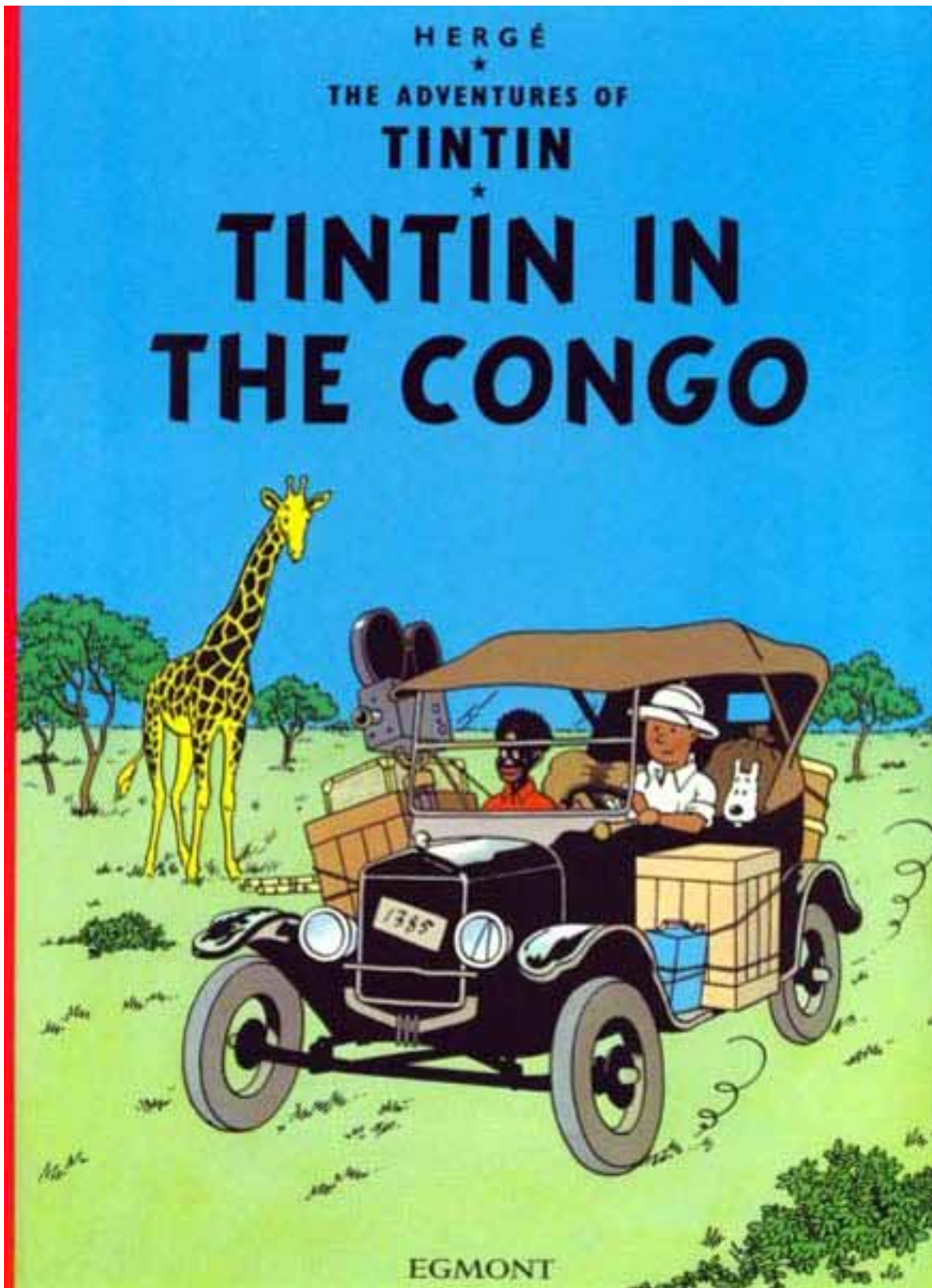
Fig. 11. Hergé, *Tintin in the Congo* (1931). Pen, ink and watercolour on paper, 30 x 22.6.

Fig. 12. Anton Kannemyer, Swart (2000). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 10* 2000:1).

According to Lyotard (1979:44), a postmodern and poststructuralist approach to theory reveals that one fundamental aspect of research that is necessary in order to win acceptance for a new statement is the production of proof. The production of proof no longer stipulates a perceived 'truth' as the final goal. It is the augmentation of power through optimal performance that constitutes proof's principal task (Lyotard 1979:46). After being asked if his comic *Boetie* in *Bitterkomix 5* (1995) was indeed autobiographical or not (namely if the event indeed happened to Kannemeyer himself), Kannemeyer replied that although the strip can be regarded as autobiographical, it should rather be seen as 'fiction disguised as autobiography' (Mason 2010:146). It is through the investigation of this notion of 'performance', as described by Lyotard in his critique *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), as well as by Eco in *The Open Work* (1989), that this study is able to explore the curatorial aspects of identity construction within autobiography. These curatorial characteristics refer to the production, affirmation, reconciliation and experimentation with the autobiographical writer's own identity through the process of autobiographical writing (in this case by means of visual narrative writing processes). This is applicable to both the form and content of autobiographical visual texts.

Beaty identifies a second preconceived notion that surrounds academic analysis when dealing with autobiographical content. This comprises an analysis of autobiographical narratives in accordance with commonly accepted conventions of biography. It is crucial to understand that it was through the renewed importance of the autobiographical genre, within the field of French literature during the 1970s and 1980s, that autobiographical comics were able to flourish (Beaty 2008:228). The problem does not only reside in the fact that certain conventions used within biographical discourse (such as the prioritisation of referential representation) are often replicated by artists within the genre of autobiography. Beaty (2008:228) states, with reference to autobiographical representation:

> "critics have narrowed debate to the precise definition of genre where it's trapped in merely formal questions … rather [than] focus on how authors have adopted autobiographical work as a distinctive device that sets them apart … where it is better thought of as a social process."

Having identified the use of two largely prevalent analytical methods within the field of autobiographical literature, I am now able to broaden the field of analysis, leaving

room for potentially more interpretive form and content. It is also important, however, to assert that the focus of this study comprises visual narrative examples that do not necessarily mimic the methods of investigation of autobiographical narrative used within the field of written literature. By accommodating an analytical strategy that broadens the definition of autobiographical practice, I am able to explore more closely the relationship of its operations within the field of visual narrative through its application within *Bitterkomix* and my own work.

1.4.2 Reconstituting identity through narrative

Sontag (1977:80) notes how a photograph forms both a representation of its subject as well as an extension of it.[10] The result, in Sontag's opinion, is a potent means of acquiring subject and the possibility of gaining control of it (1977:81). Autobiographical visual narratives, through the image-making process of illustration, can be said to perform a similar function in that they reconstitute their subjects, be it either the artist himself or the subjects he represents. Bruner (2008:40), in his essay *The Autobiographical Process*, mentions how perceiving and remembering are themselves constructions and reconstructions.

The manner in which a photograph 'possesses' subject, however, is different to the way in which autobiographical visual narratives 'possess' their subject. Photographic memory displaces the need of a photographer to re-imagine or remember details, since the technology captures details irrespective of whether or not the photographer was aware of them in that present moment or not. The illustrator, on the other hand, is forced to act on memory and interpretation. Bruner (2008:40) states:

> "Any reconfiguring of life … is not so much [just] a matter of making new discoveries in the archaeological record of our experiences, or of revealing the contents of previously hidden "memories," but of rewriting a narrative along different interpretive lines."

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[10] One needs only to consider the manner in which a person may prefer one photograph of themselves over another, or how members of a social networking website such as Facebook fuss over choosing an appropriate profile picture (See Fig. 13 & Fig. 14).

Fig. 13. Andy Mason, *Facebook Profile* (2011). Internet networking website (*Facebook* 2011:[sp]).

Fig. 14. Andy Mason, *Autobiographical Comix* (1997). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 15* 2005:59).

A process of interpretation is performed by both the narrator, who constructs the autobiographical narrative using interpretive methods through memory, as well as by the reader, who interprets the narrative. Agency and the possession of subject thereby extend themselves in both directions, as is clearly made evident in Mason's *Autobiographical Comix*. Mason possesses the autobiographical image of other cartoonists, made available by their own autobiographical comics through an interpretive process based on memory. Mason acts as both the reader and narrator of autobiographical narrative, after which this process is repeated by other artists who represent his autobiographical image in their own work, and so on. One example of this is Anton Kannmeyer's appropriation of Mason's image in *Autobiographical Komix (Yawn) featuring Andy Mason* (2008) (see Fig. 15).

Having elaborated on Mason's concept of the way in which comics constitute a form of representation as opposed to a medium or genre of visual arts, I have been able to better locate autobiographical comics within the discourse of visual narrative. By doing so I also make void the debate surrounding comics as a sub-genre of literature that analyses image and word in isolation from each other. The result is a more flexible definition of autobiographical visual narrative that can accommodate less conventional forms of autobiographical story-telling. It prepares the way for an analysis of the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative object and a device in the creation of other autobiographical narratives.

Fig. 15. Anton Kannemyer, *Autobiographical komix (yawn)* featuring Andy Mason (2008). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 15* 2008:25).

CHAPTER 2

CURATING IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF IN BITTERKOMIX

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The *Bitterkomix* publications have been described as a 'psychosexual, socio-historical critique of Afrikaner culture and South African society' (Mason 2006:7). This can largely be attributed to the 'zine's autobiographical content and its use of autobiography as a visual narrative device. Each artist contributes to the larger conceptual narrative by framing their own autobiographical stories within the given social context. Intrinsic to this process is the way in which each artist acts on memory and interpretation in visually articulating representations of self. Representations of self are explored strategically within *Bitterkomix* to varying degrees and with different intents and purposes. This same process has allowed for a curatorial strategy with which these artists have been able to visually articulate a post-1994 South African, and more specifically, Afrikaans identity, a result of which can be partially attributed to the use of autobiographical writing practices as a subversive narrative device within the publication. This is also in part due to the creation by its editors and artists of a visual vernacular in South African comics. Narrated representations of self are made available to the public (in this case initially by way of self-publication and distribution) and are for all intents and purposes strategic in their use. The autobiographical writing process, however, first and foremost, allows for an interpretive and conscious reconstruction of one's own identity and is used by particular artists within *Bitterkomix* to do just that.

Of all the artists who have published autobiographical content in *Bitterkomix* over the years, the most relevant to my study are Anton Kannemeyer, Karlien de Villiers, John Murray, Andy Mason, Ina van Zyl and Paddy Bouma, the first four of whose comic strips prove the most useful to analyse. The process of 'narrating identity' reveals discrepancies between the artist's asserted identity, the artist's perceived public

persona through his art, and a perceived socio-cultural collective identity by both the public and the artists who have been published in the 'zine. I argue that the latter is a result of numerous artists who have published autobiographical content within the publication, even if they did not necessarily consciously use autobiography as a strategic device,

Sean Burke identifies a theoretical gap intrinsic to autobiographical writing in his critique, *The Death and Return of the Author* (1992). He who writes and what is written form two different subjects, which exist separately in space and time. An individual who creates autobiographical content eventually comes to realise that language often resists and deviates from intended meaning once made available to the public (1992:140). Bruner (1993:41) notes that while autobiography is filtered through the subjective and personal intent of the author, it is simultaneously made accessible for public interpretation and consumption. A result is that the personal is made public through an act of confession.

I argue that confession, like autobiography, has been used within *Bitterkomix* as a strategic autobiographical device that encompasses two very different approaches. The first is used to validate narrative by making it appear referential. The second is that the autobiographical writer is able to initiate a process of catharsis by reconstituting his/her sense of identity using visual narrative through the confessional act. In *Bitterkomix*, the same process of catharsis is made available to both the autobiographical comics artist and the anti-establishment Afrikaner youth to whom the 'zine is marketed.

2.2   PERFORMING MEMORY

The operation of memory within autobiographical visual narrative forms a crucial component of the practice that merits an investigation alongside visual representations of self. Stefan Herbrechter (2006:317) describes autobiography as a translation of self that is filtered through language, inevitably leading to varying degrees of fictionalisation. He writes in reference to autobiography as a 'language memoir' (2006:325):

"I can only speak one language (at a time), but this language is never mine and is never itself. It does not coincide with itself and I can never be 'at home' in it, because it is the language of the other who precedes. It is a 'politics' of translation that administrates the hybridity any manifestation of translation engenders … language is the other, it has come from the other, it is the coming of the other."

One must take into account, however, that in order for the mind to conceptualise a narrative event, it must first be articulated in memory even before the act of translation through language takes place. It is through the application of Herbrechter's perspective on autobiography as a product of translation that I am able to apply an understanding of a similar translation process that occurs through the filter of memory.[11]

Nicklus refers to the notion of the autobiographical 'aporia' which describes the impossibility of an author becoming identical with autobiographical writing. It is the meddling with memory that ultimately disables the unification of object (autobiographical writing) and subject (the autobiographical writer) (2006:13). I argue that the effect of memory on the rearticulation of narrated self is not exclusively limited to events having occurred in the past. Olney cites Warnock in revealing the overlapping of memory with imagination, where a combination of the two encompasses a manner of thinking that regards 'things' in their absence. Warnock's reference to 'things' can constitute anything from objects to persons, events, experiences and more (1987:12). In my opinion, this also means that a visual articulation of narrated self based on future (or imagined) events is possible. In extending its reference, I am able to include a conceptualised notion of the autobiographical self as other irrespective of whether narrated events actually occurred. It is through this concept of self as other that I am better able to articulate and analyse operations of autobiographical writing practices within *Bitterkomix* and my own work.

John Murray's *Portraits Uit Pretoria* (see Fig. 16 & Fig. 17) in *Bitterkomix 7* (1996) clearly illustrates the operations of memory and imagination in autobiographical

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[11] Olney (1998:347) points to ways in which language carries with it a strong individual sense of emotive association and designates how memory operates in a similar manner. He claims that every word, sentence and phrase in language is loaded with what he calls both personal and cultural 'memorial freight'. These 'emotion-drenched localisms' would be lost in translation, were an individual to write or speak outside of the confines of his or her own natural language. The repetition in the text mimics repetition in memory (Olney 1998:367).

writing. The comic strip can be argued to function autobiographically given the title (the word 'portrait' signifying the presence of an author) and its acknowledgement to the author (John Murray), a reference to his school principal 'Nolte' and the use of localised references to specific areas in Pretoria, indicative of a person who is familiar with the city. The narrative consists of two pages depicting illustrated portraits of people living in and around the city (both imagined and based on people he knew). Murray's recollections of the depicted figures are based on memory and interpretation. He uses stereotypes commonly associated with certain parts of the city including Arcadia, the eastern suburbs, the University of Pretoria (TUKS), and certain Afrikaans high schools. Tension lies in the fact that one cannot be sure whether Murray's portraits are of actual people or simply generic caricatures.
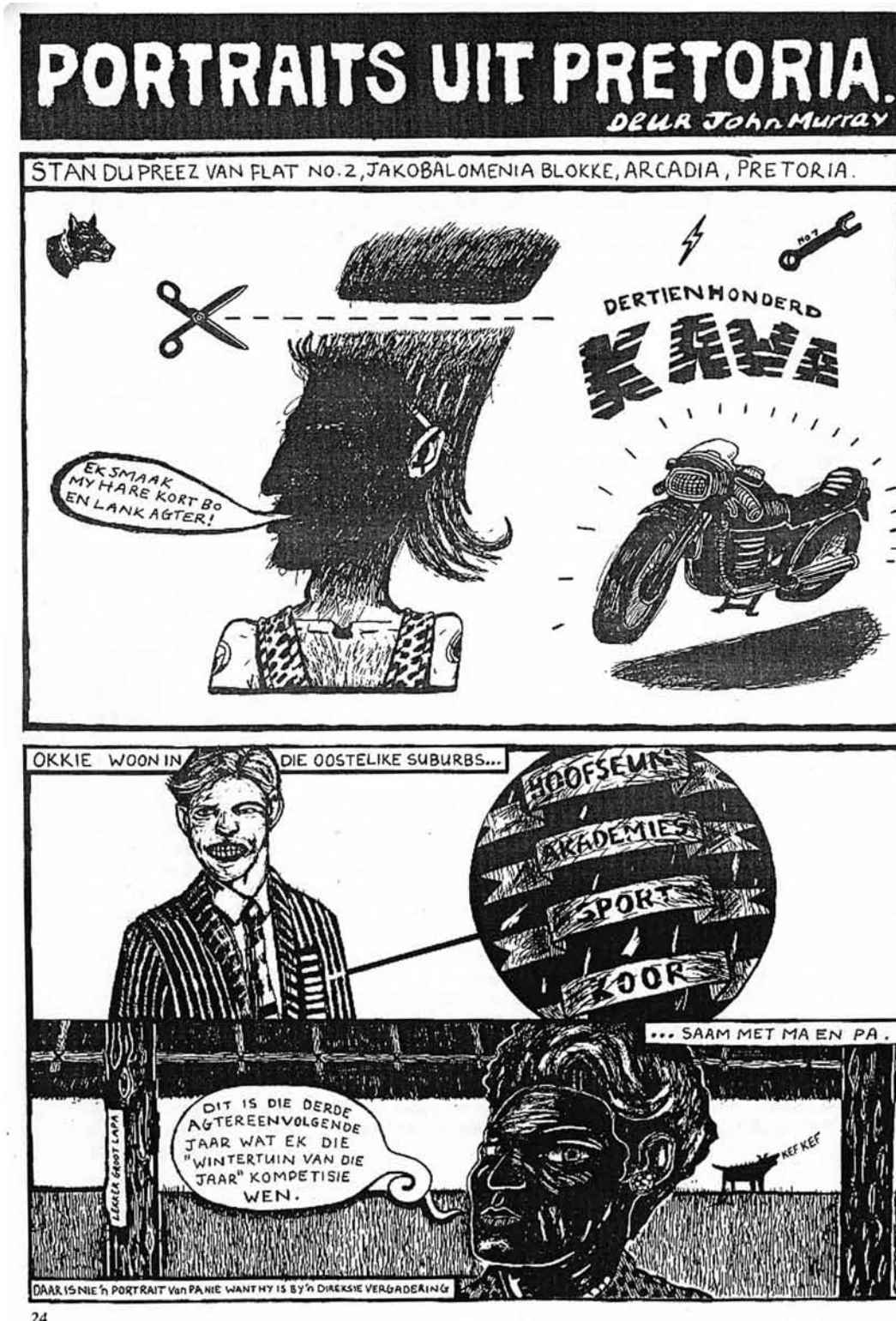
Fig. 16. John Murray, *Portraits uit Pretoria* (1996). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 7* 1997:24).

Fig. 17. John Murray, *Portraits uit Pretoria* (1996). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 7* 1997:25).

I propose that Murray has illustrated *Portraits Uit Pretoria* in a manner purposefully meant to emulate autobiographical narrative in its use as a strategic device. In what may have otherwise been an emotionally distant social commentary on representations of class in Pretoria, the comic is successful, not in its ability to represent figures from Murray's past, but rather in his ability to draw from memory his own unique description of the city and its people. This process of interpretation is amplified by Murray's use of cartooning techniques and illustrated forms.

In the first frame of *Portraits Uit Pretoria* (1996) Murray creates a visual reference to the 'mullet' hairstyle, a motif commonly considered a typical symbol of kitsch Afrikaner masculinity in the city. The 'mullet' in Pretoria also carries connotations of class and references to the blue-collar, working-class male. The hairstyle forms a visual signifier based on a collective understanding of what is understood to be kitsch in South African popular culture, which in turn communicates commonly held perceptions within the city itself regarding residents in Arcadia (a residential area close to the University of Pretoria). The illustrated 1300 Kawasaki motorbike, lightning bolt, spanner (size number 7) and angry Pitbull function as symbols which further communicate patriarchal notions of Afrikaans masculinity and class through the use of cartooning techniques. This is echoed by the labelling of the figure as 'Stan du Preez van flat No. 2, Jakobalomenia Blokke, Arcadia, Pretoria.' It is through the juxtaposition of these symbols within the first frame that allow the informed reader (that being the individual who is more familiar with the city and the connotations of the symbols and locations represented) to achieve a measure of understanding through narrative closure.

The second frame illustrates what Murray insinuates (in Afrikaans) to be two members of a typical Afrikaner nuclear family living in the eastern suburbs. The son, smiling somewhat disingenuously, sports a school blazer littered with a variety of school badges demarcating respectable achievements and leadership positions. These are stipulated in Afrikaans and acknowledge that the child attends an Afrikaans high school. The bottom half of the frame depicts the boy's mother, domesticated and preoccupied with her award-winning garden. A small by-line notes how 'Pa' (the father) is missing from the portrait having been obligated to attend a managerial meeting at work, suggesting his position as the bread-winner and patriarch of the family. An alternative interpretation would be that the father's

absence is meant to be ironic and signifies an underlying superficiality that all may not be as well as it seems. Murray satirises ideological aspirations associated with the nuclear family in the context of Afrikaner suburban culture by making them seem obvious, superficial and consequently transparent in their meaning. He achieves this through bold stylisation and an almost violent application of ink through the process of cartooning. The success of this comic strip lies in its use of satire in unmasking and revealing these same ideological conventions, a process *Bitterkomix* has become known for.

It is important to note that *Portraits Uit Pretoria* (1996) was first published in *Bitterkomix 7* (2006). The publication had by now already formed an identifiably strong voice in its attempt to unmask and challenge status quos that fed off the ideological remnants of apartheid. Michael Morris (*The Big Bad Bitterkomix Handbook,* 2006) refers to *Bitterkomix*'s success in revealing 'the neuroses and hypocrisies of patriarchal and conservative white … and particularly Afrikaner - society.' Morris quotes Botes (2006:47) as saying: 'The thing about the Afrikaner is that we're always hiding things. And above the surface there is that pretence of righteousness.' A concurrent theme of 'revealing' appears continuously throughout *Bitterkomix* and is a technique commonly associated with autobiography.

The second page of Murray's comic strip extends and explores themes of upbringing and education in the Afrikaner community. Murray uses memories of his own experiences in high school and university as a point of reference. Pollock cites Freud's conception of the image as an archaeological metaphor. An image memory consists of a remnant of 'unfinished emotional business' that borders between an incomplete past and a never fully experienced present. Subjectivity, as a result, can only be grasped in relation to that which lies between what is absent and what is imagined (or more appropriately 'imaged') as a trace in the psyche, as constituted by representational systems produced in response to these experiences (2006:6). This statement is important in that it provides insight into how we visualise images of events in memory. It also suggests the possibility of interpretive memory being used by the artist to initiate his own catharsis through a directed rearticulation of remembered events.

Memory operates as a filter through which past experience is mediated and our recollections of those same experiences archived. Olney (1998:339) claims that there is neither perception nor cognition that has not been altered by the intervention of memory.

Olney elaborates:

> It is before a perception can even be acknowledged within one's consciousness that time passes, leaving it within the confines of memory, where ultimately other memories 'affect and transform it (1998:339). Memory, at least in part, is an adaptive function, with a self-adjusting and self-defining plasticity about it, turning back to the past so as to position itself and us for what is to be dealt with in the future: it adapts continuously to changing circumstances, external and internal, to constitute the self as it is at any given instant … Memory reaches toward the future as toward the past, and balance demands a poised receptiveness in both directions (1998:343).

Memory is entrenched in the autobiographical writing process but is not exclusively limited to an unconscious, visual rearticulation of self within *Bitterkomix.* Olney (1998:232) goes as far as to ask whether or not we can conceptualise memory as "the sole ground of subjectivity and source of identity." I would argue that this is not the case. Autobiography is used within *Bitterkomix* as a strategic communicative device and is therefore intentional. The publication clearly holds an anti-establishment agenda and successfully aimed to create socio-political commentary. Individual artists are able visually to curate identity through the use of autobiography, after which their comics were selected by the editors of *Bitterkomix* to communicate the broader topic of the publication. Individual memory becomes a shared, collective memory. Botes and Kannemeyer can be credited with intentionally curating a comic that reformulated what it meant to identify as white and more specifically Afrikaans in post-apartheid South Africa. It is without a doubt the inclusion of a number of autobiographical strips within *Bitterkomix* that helps to legitimise the publication, similar to the manner in which autobiography as a visual form of representation has traditionally offered cartoonists a form of legitimisation as authors (Beaty 2009:229). Memory evolves in the present and changes form over time. The *Bitterkomix* publications represent a shift in memory, a wake up-call instigated by artists who use memory intentionally through autobiographical representation within their work.

According to Olney (1998:233), there exists at the same time a yearning for an impossible return to the past. This proves relevant in terms of what pulls artists to

autobiographical forms of representation. Olney takes this even further by articulating how narrative drive mimics the function of memory through its recollection of what has happened in the past. He claims that it is through memory and its 'repetitional, restorative capacity that the first, second, and beyond that multiple readings of experience are performed.' Repetition and restoration manifest each time as different from previous experiences, due to the most immediate and previous repetition. The text is being constantly renewed and reconstructed, where it evolves as both a story and a work in progress (Olney 1998:296).

2.3   CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH VISUAL NARRATIVE

2.3.1   Autobiography as a subversive discourse in *Bitterkomix*

Lang makes an astute observation in *Fiction and Autobiography* (2006) when referring to autobiographical discourse. He states that the source of autobiographical narrative and creativity resides in a subversive discourse that negates truth as a necessary requirement and as a source of narratives (2006:XI). It is the characteristically subversive trait of the autobiography that makes it ideal for socio-political commentary, in that it can accommodate a more autonomous approach to representation. The artist is able to express himself without censorship.

This subversive quality is further amplified through the categorisation of *Bitterkomix* as an underground comix publication, inherently subversive in its very nature.[12] Bitterkomix as a subversive publication accommodates a broadening of traditional definitions and limitations associated with autobiography both in terms of referential representation and representations of self. The result is that the comic strip artist has the opportunity to experiment with and to a certain extent reconstruct and represent various aspects of his identity in a manner that is unique to the comix form. The viewer can be just as aware of these constructs as the artist, if not completely oblivious of them.

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[12] Kannemeyer and Botes published thirteen of the fifteen issues independently while printing and distributing the magazine themselves. It is not likely that any industry publisher would have published the 'zine given its controversial sexual content, a significant portion of which became explicit from the fourth issue onwards. The last two editions of the 'zine, from which all explicit content had been omitted except for some occasional nudity, were published by local South African publishers Double Storey (issue 14) and Jacana Media (issue 15).

In the case of Anton Kannemeyer's *More Death Wish* (see Fig. 18) in issue 15 (2005), subversive representation of self is stretched to the point of absurdity. Kannemeyer illustrates his pet hates in a six-page comic depicting a variety of scenarios he finds displeasing. The narrative climaxes (quite literally) in the form of an illustration representing Kannemeyer ejaculating into the eye of a 'random guy' in a bar after an argument concerning his views on Van Gogh as the most overrated artist of all time. Kannemeyer states boldly 'I'm not a university lecturer! I'm a porn star! Look, I can ejaculate into your eye!' The viewer realises that the narrative cannot be referential, knowing full well that Kannemeyer did not ejaculate into the eye of a stranger he was having an argument with in a bar. The author subverts representation through the intentional creation of an autobiographical persona that satirises himself. This is echoed by his use of cartooning in simplifying illustrative forms to the point where they become symbolic. An example is Kannemeyer's eyeless glasses and balding scalp, which in combination form an example of one strategic visual articulation of Kannemeyer's autobiographical image throughout *Bitterkomix.* His use of this specific image most often occurs when he chooses to openly satirise himself.

Nicklus refers to the deconstructivists of the late 1970s and early 1980s, who dominated autobiographical discourse within literary theory. They felt that representations of self in language should be negated completely, as it was only possible to produce an 'illusion' of self generated by a purely textual subject (2006:2). Olney (1998:369) makes reference to the manner in which memories construct and reconstruct themselves 'as we remember remembering.' He elaborates on the complexity of the process:

> "Each of us individually reconstructs the past in light of earlier and later times, especially in light of a present that is already contemplating the future, but also that we collaborate with other family members in a collective reconstruction that has much more to do with subsequent relationships between children and parents and among siblings than with anything that could be called a historical, factual past."
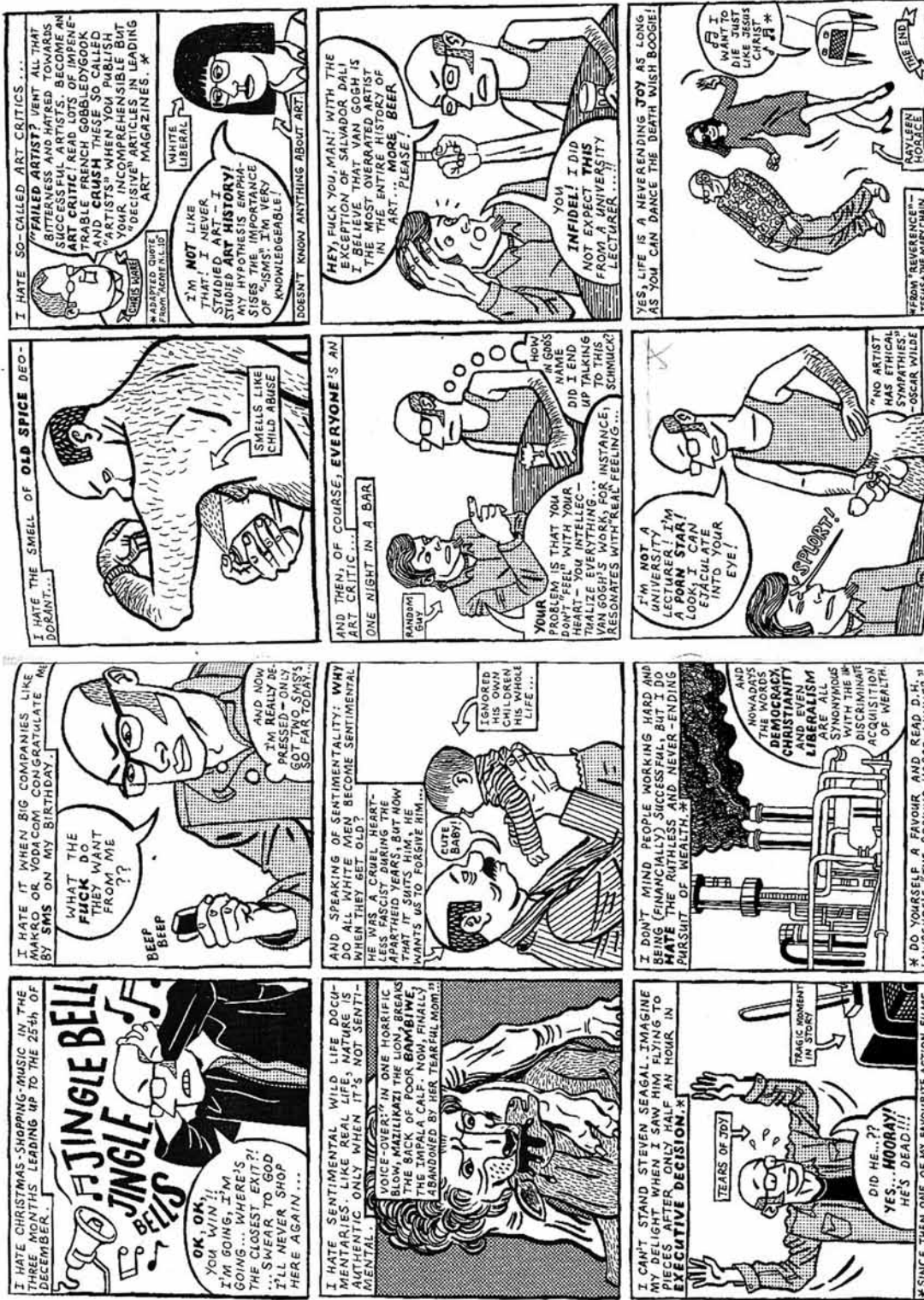
Fig. 18. Anton Kannemeyer, *More death wish* (2005). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 15* 2005:6).

This crucial concept allows us to view the operation of memory within autobiography as a social process, less focused on objective representation than on memory's

interaction with people, things and events (a concept which I touched on in Chapter 1). Olney's reference to the individual and collective reconstruction of the past by family members is also relevant. I choose to view this form of remembering as a process that allows for the rearticulation (or reconstruction) of individual and collective identity through narrative closure.[13] This form of collective remembering of the past is, in my view, not only limited to family but also relevant to groups of people and communities (a process which is further explored later in this chapter). In the case of *Bitterkomix*, a process of collective remembering has been initiated by the editors of the 'zine. The target market of disillusioned, post-apartheid Afrikaner youth were able to recognise the subject matter of the publication and identify with the issues raised. This same target market was consequently afforded an opportunity to resist and reconstruct the labels associated with mainstream Afrikaner culture that were heaped onto them as children, through the use of a subversive discourse that can in part be accredited to the use of autobiographical practices.

The *Bitterkomix* strategy becomes apparent upon observation of some of the covers. *Bitterkomix 5* (1995) depicts an attractive white woman dressed only in her underwear, sporting a traditional 'kappie,' one of which was traditionally worn by the Voortrekker 'vroue' and is, as a result, irrevocably linked to Afrikaner history (See Fig. 19). Conservative Afrikaner values are satirized through the ironic and fetishistic depiction of this woman on the cover of a publication that was described by Mason (2010:144) as increasingly pornographic. The message is asserted through the by-line, 'Komieks deur Suid-Afrikaners vir Suid Afrikaners' and 'Ek sal vergewe, maar nie vergeet nie'. Botes and Kannemeyer are able to trash outdated concepts of what may or may not constitute Afrikaner-ness by ultimately subverting them while simultaneously cementing new cultural assertions by illustrating the title in Afrikaans. Other examples include *Bitterkomix No 6'*s (Fig. 20) cover, which carries the headline 'Afrikaners is Plesierig' (1996), while issue 7's cover (Fig. 21) depicts a Dutch Reformed church, with its undeniably recognisable architecture and connotations of Afrikaner conservatism, contrasted with other provocative images that finally unmask and delegitimise the ideology it chooses to satirise. Though it would be callous to

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[13] I refer to narrative closure with reference to Scott McCloud's description of closure. I would argue that the same process of closure required by the reader in order to understand a comic strip can be applied to the autobiographical comic artist and forms of closure experienced by him while producing his own work. The artist also achieves a form of closure.

argue that the *Bitterkomix* covers are indeed autobiographical, it is important to note that they do, as a series of covers (in retrospect), function as a narrative sequence and make use of collective memory in rearticulating and rewriting identity.
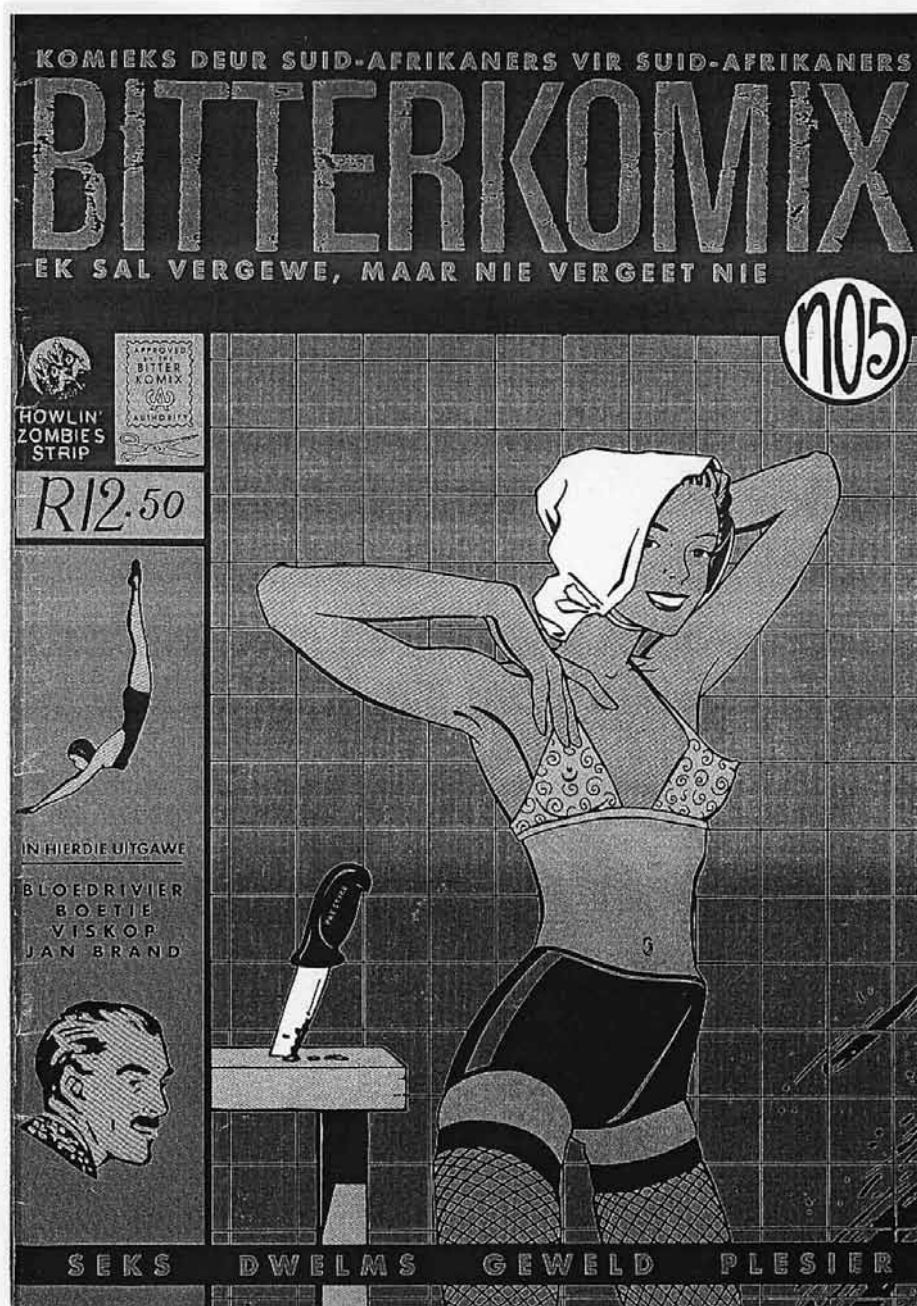
Fig. 19. Anton Kannemeyer & Conrad Botes, *Bitterkomix 5 cover* (2005). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 2005:[sp]).

Fig. 20. Anton Kannemeyer & Conrad Botes, *Bitterkomix 6 cover* (1996). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 6* 1996:[sp]).

Fig. 21. Anton Kannemeyer & Conrad Botes, *Bitterkomix 7* (1997). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 7* 1997:[sp]).

It is in large part through a subversive autobiographical discourse that various artists in *Bitterkomix* are able to transform and reconstruct individual and collective memory, and consequently the meaning of being Afrikaans in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Olney (1998:402), the 'snapshot' memories of early childhood do not

contain the traces of sequenced order and conscious will.[14] We do, however, convert short-term memories into long-term memories, an action he refers to as 'reverie', which plays a crucial role for the narrative act, which has also its source in memory. Memory enables and vitalizes narrative, where narrative in return grants memory form, translating it and often displacing it (Olney 1998:417). *Bitterkomix* does exactly this through a subversive discourse by rewriting memory along different interpretive lines.

2.3.2 Compartmentalising of self as an autobiographical device

I argue how representations of self can be and have been compartmentalised in *Bitterkomix* for specific communicative purposes. Stefan Herbrechter refers to the dilemma posed by the translation of self through language in reference to autobiographical writing practices. It is through translation that the divided or displaced self occurs where variations in degrees of fictionalisation come into effect (2006:317). The difference here, however, is that artists are able to illustrate autobiographically along different interpretive lines, through the use of various styles of illustration (using distinctive cartooning techniques) in creating visual vernaculars that communicate independent ideological themes. The clearest example of an artist who does this in *Bitterkomix* is Anton Kannemeyer. More specifically, Kannemeyer is able to delegate certain autobiographical themes to specific comic strips. This represents an alternative approach to representing self as other within *Bitterkomix,* an approach which is necessary in order to apply such practices in my own work.

One of the more hard-hitting stories in the *Bitterkomix* series consists of a five-page comic depicting the sexual abuse of a young boy by his father. *Boetie* (see Fig. 22, Fig. 23 & Fig. 24) features in *Bitterkomix No 5* (1996) and opens with a three-frame title depicting a slightly intoxicated Kannemeyer, struggling to illustrate what he calls a less depressing story. He states that *Boetie* is regrettably the only story he can think of and opens the narrative with an angry child purposefully kicking a rugby ball through the house window. Kannemeyer quotes the famous Austrian novelist and playright Thomas Bernhardt in the last two frames of the first page, stating 'it is impossible to dismiss the suspicion that our parents had us for one sole reason, so that we could represent their guilt' - a cryptic indication of what is to follow.

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[14] Olney (1998:375) states: '[To] say once upon a time' is also to say 'never again' or 'never again in the same way'. He refers to dreams when referring to how we each impose a plot on seemingly random scenes and in doing so cement those memories into the foundations of our consciousness. It is here that (1998:402), a repetitive process by nature intrinsic to memory that is always transformative of that same memory.
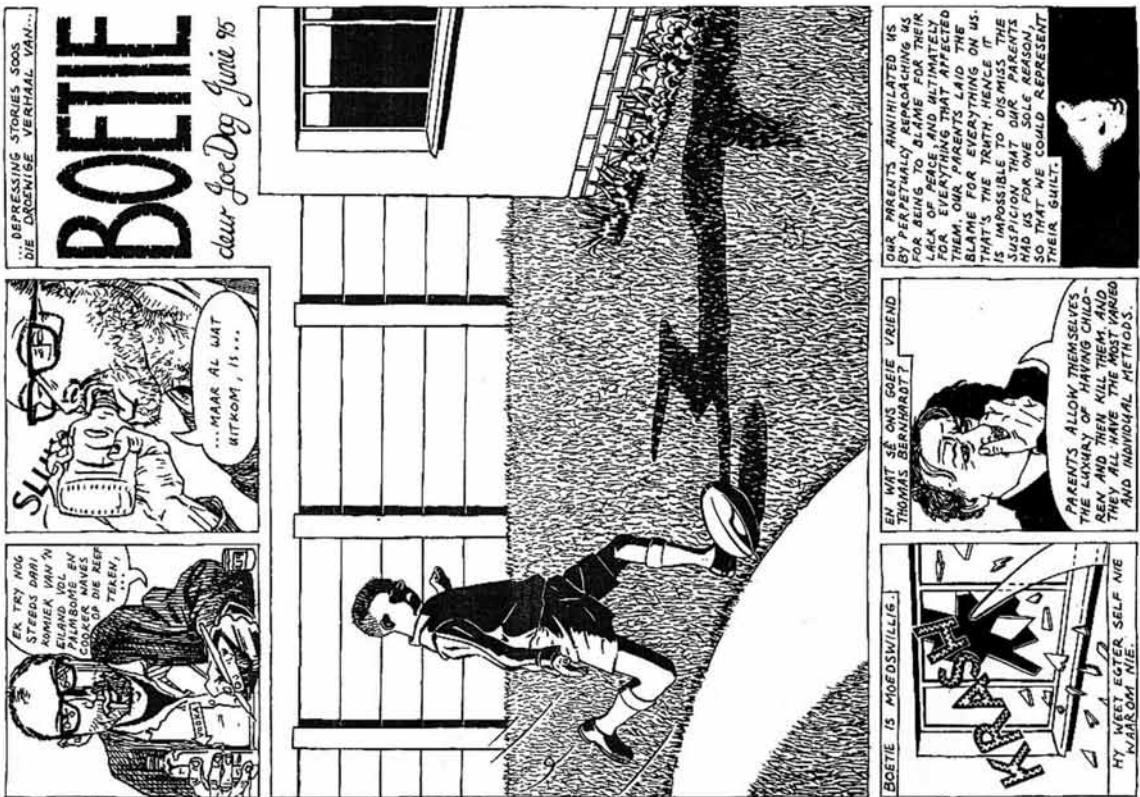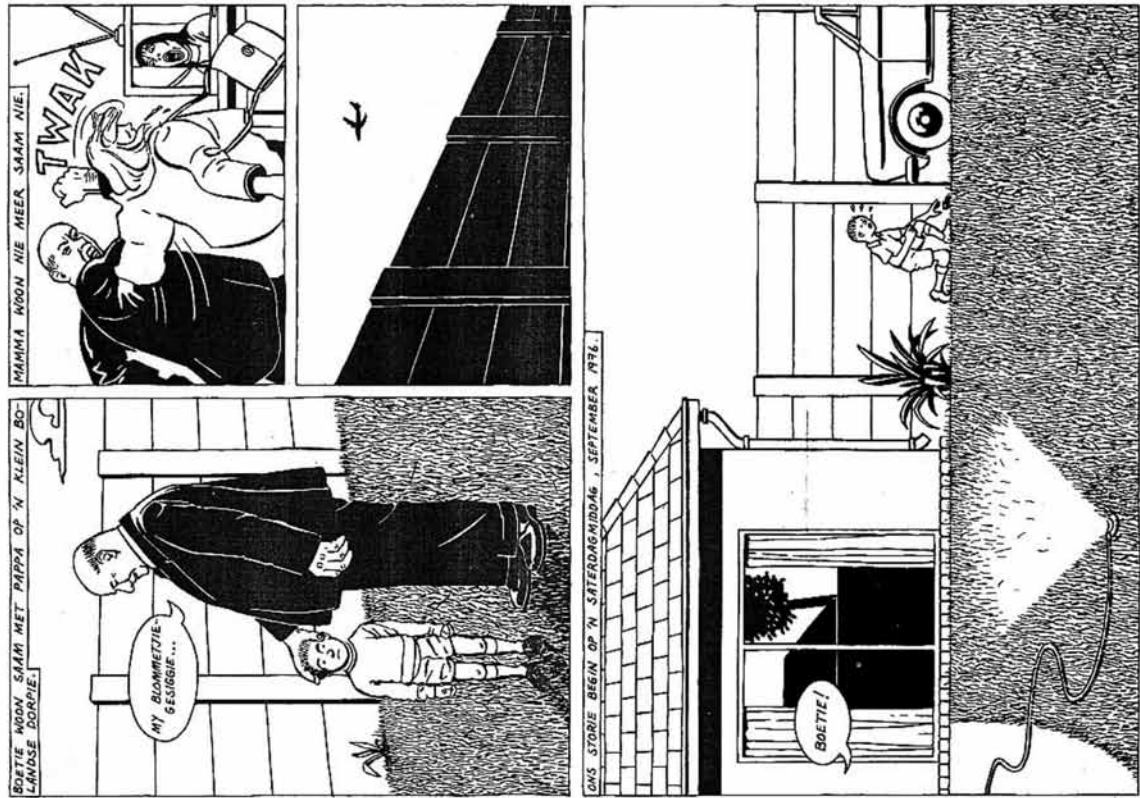
Fig. 22. Anton Kannemeyer, *Boetie* (1996). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 1996:4).
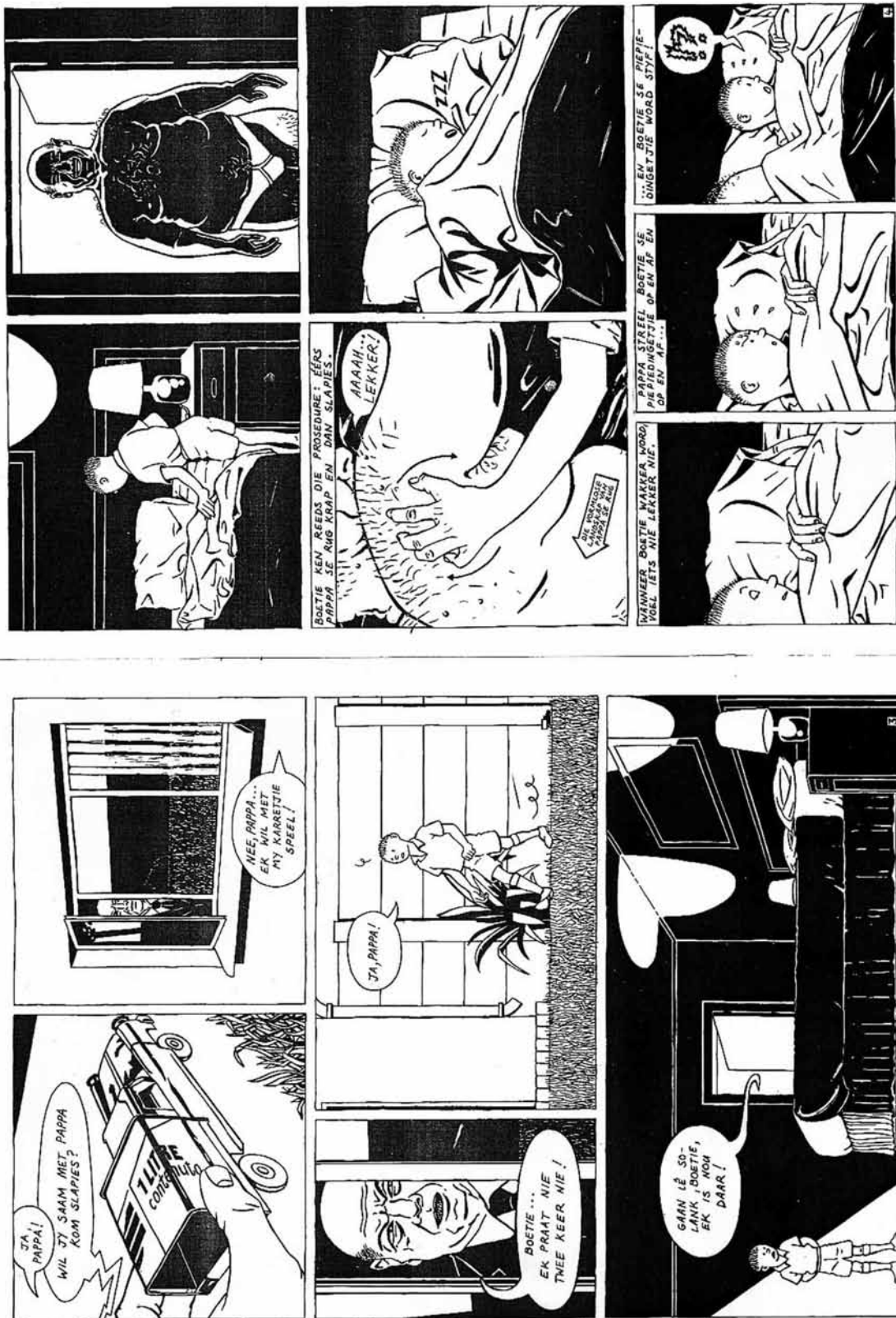
Fig. 23. Anton Kannemeyer, *Boetie* (1996). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 1996:6).
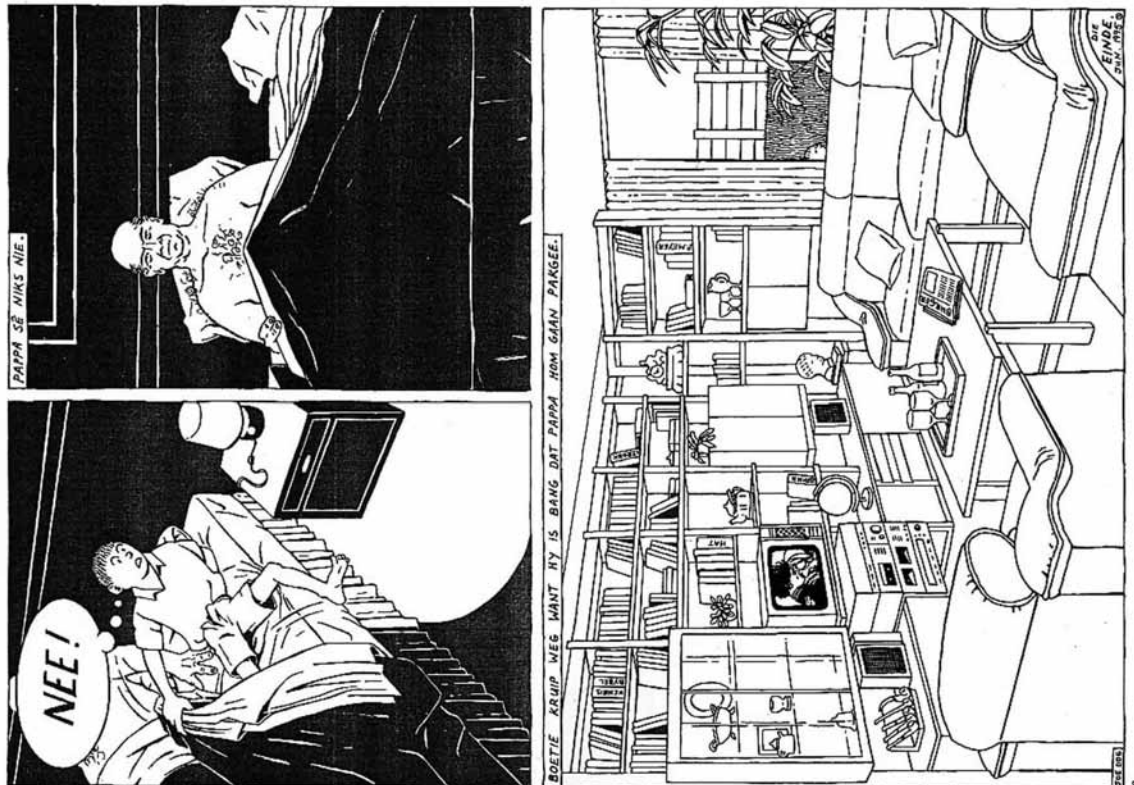
Fig. 24. Anton Kannemeyer, *Boetie* (1996). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 1996:8).

As the narrative progresses, we come to realise that Boetie lives with his father in a small suburban town. His mother has left his father as a result of physical abuse. The comic illustrates the luring of Boetie by his father into his bedroom after which he is forced to take a nap with him on the bed. The text makes it clear that this is not the first time Boetie has been lured into Pappa's bedroom. 'Boetie ken reeds die prosedure: Éérs Pappa se rug krap en dan slapies,' all the while Pappa ominously groans 'Aaaah lekker!' Boetie finally falls asleep after which his father proceeds to molest him. Boetie screams 'Nee!' and hides outside the living room in the final frame. Interestingly, the fourth frame on the second page dates the incident to a Saturday morning in September 1976 (a significant time in South African history and the year of the Soweto student uprisings). One asks why Kannemeyer would date the comic, aside from its relevance to the political climate at the time, if it were not directly to aid the narrative in some way. The comic clearly uses autobiography as a device to legitimise the narrative in what would have otherwise simply been a story about child abuse. By appropriating his autobiographical image within the first frame and dating the comic, Kannemeyer creates a direct association between the boy in

the narrative and Kannemeyer himself. The reader is able to care for the character in the story in recognising the possibility that events portrayed happened to the artist himself. I would also suggest that part of the comic's success lies in the fact that one cannot be sure whether the text is indeed referential. A space is provided for readers to empathise, if not completely identify with *Boetie,* using cartooning techniques that allow the readers to place themselves in Boetie's size 5 shoes.

Mason states with reference to Kannemeyer's comics:

> His intensely personal response to the humiliations of his boyhood has since radiated out into a broader psychosexual, socio-historical critique of Afrikaner culture and South African society in general.'

The artist embodies Hergé's clear-line style in illustrating Boetie with an obvious reference to Tintin. Besides the symbolic eyeless glasses and balding head, Kannemeyer often uses the Tintin figure to represent himself throughout *Bitterkomix*. He strategically uses this visual signifier to connote concurrent ideological themes within his work. Examples of this style in some of Kannemeyer's other quasi-autobiographical strips include its first appearance in *Drug Raid at 4AM* in *Bitterkomix 2* (1993), *Swart* in *Bitterkomix 10* (2000), *Frikkadel* in *Bitterkomix 12* (2002) and *Alphabet of Democracy* in *Bitterkomix 15 (*2008). More specifically, the style is applied by Kannemeyer within strips that use autobiographical representation, as articulated in this study, in relation to themes that deal directly with issues of sexual repression (*Boetie* and *Frikkadel),* race (*Swart* and *Alphabet of Democracy)* and authority (*Drug Raid at 4AM)*. Kannemeyer is thus able to compartmentalise representations of self for specific communicative purposes through the application of the Tintin clear-line style as a visual signifier.

Nelson claims that personal identities are narratively constructed and are constituted by a number of 'loosely connected' stories, dealing with formulations of experience that matter most to an individual. These may include anything from experiences to roles and relationships, and mostly the values with which we identify the most (2001:71). I argue that autobiographical identity functions in a similar manner but differs in its translation of self through memory and language.

Other examples of autobiographical compartmentalising of self in *Bitterkomix* are the comic strips *Jeugweerbaarheid* (see Fig. 25 & Fig. 26) and *A Short and Feeble Affair* (see Fig. 27) in the fourth issue of *Bitterkomix* (1994). Both strips are accompanied by the subtitle 'A Max Plant Adventure'. One questions whether Kannemeyer indeed wrote *Jeugweerbaarheid*, if not another writer who may have used Max Plant as a pseudonym. The strip reads autobiographically and is echoed by deeply personal sentiments such as Plant's statement 'Ek was nie een van daai gelukkige (en fiktiewe) 50%+ wat seks op skool beoefen het nie.' The editorial page only credits Joe Dog (Anton Kannemeyer) and makes no mention of another writer. The narrative, although not necessarily autobiographical, makes use of the compartmentalisation of autobiographical self as an autobiographical device. I argue that Max Plant operates as an autobiographical persona, within another autobiographical persona (Joe Dog), written by Anton Kannemeyer.
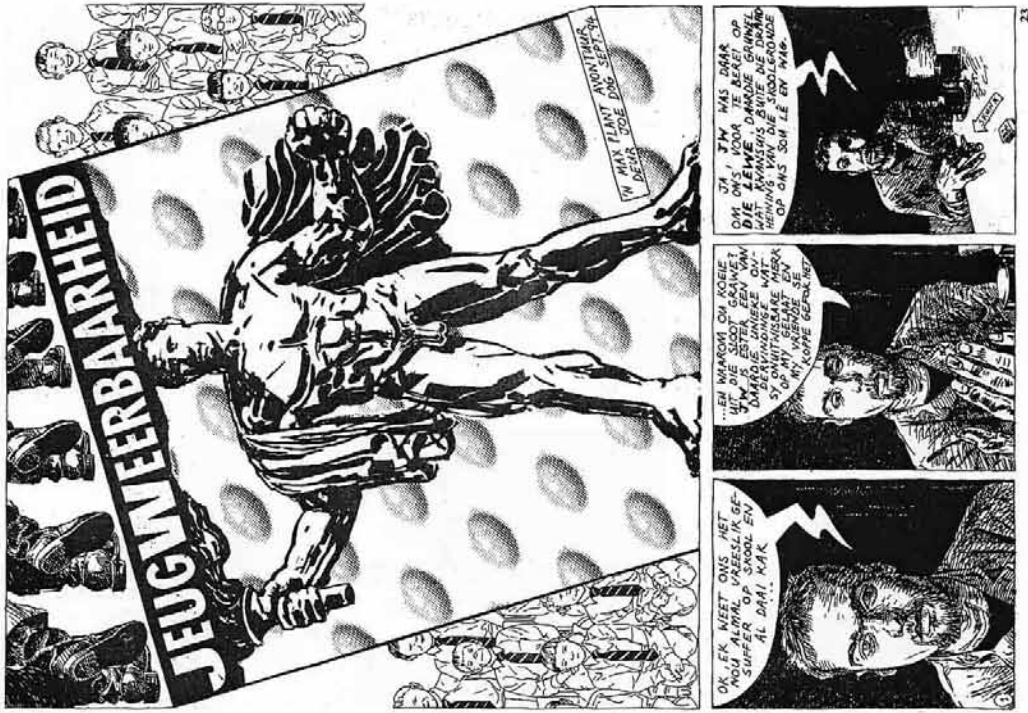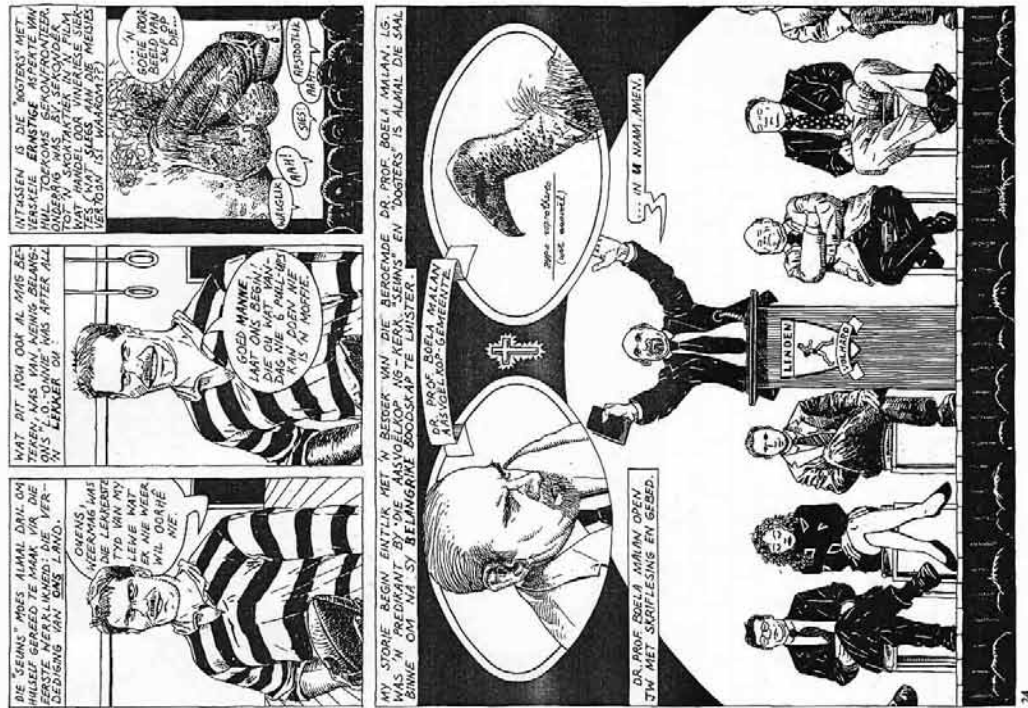
Fig. 25. Anton Kannemeyer, *Jeegweerbaarheid* (1994). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 1996:23).
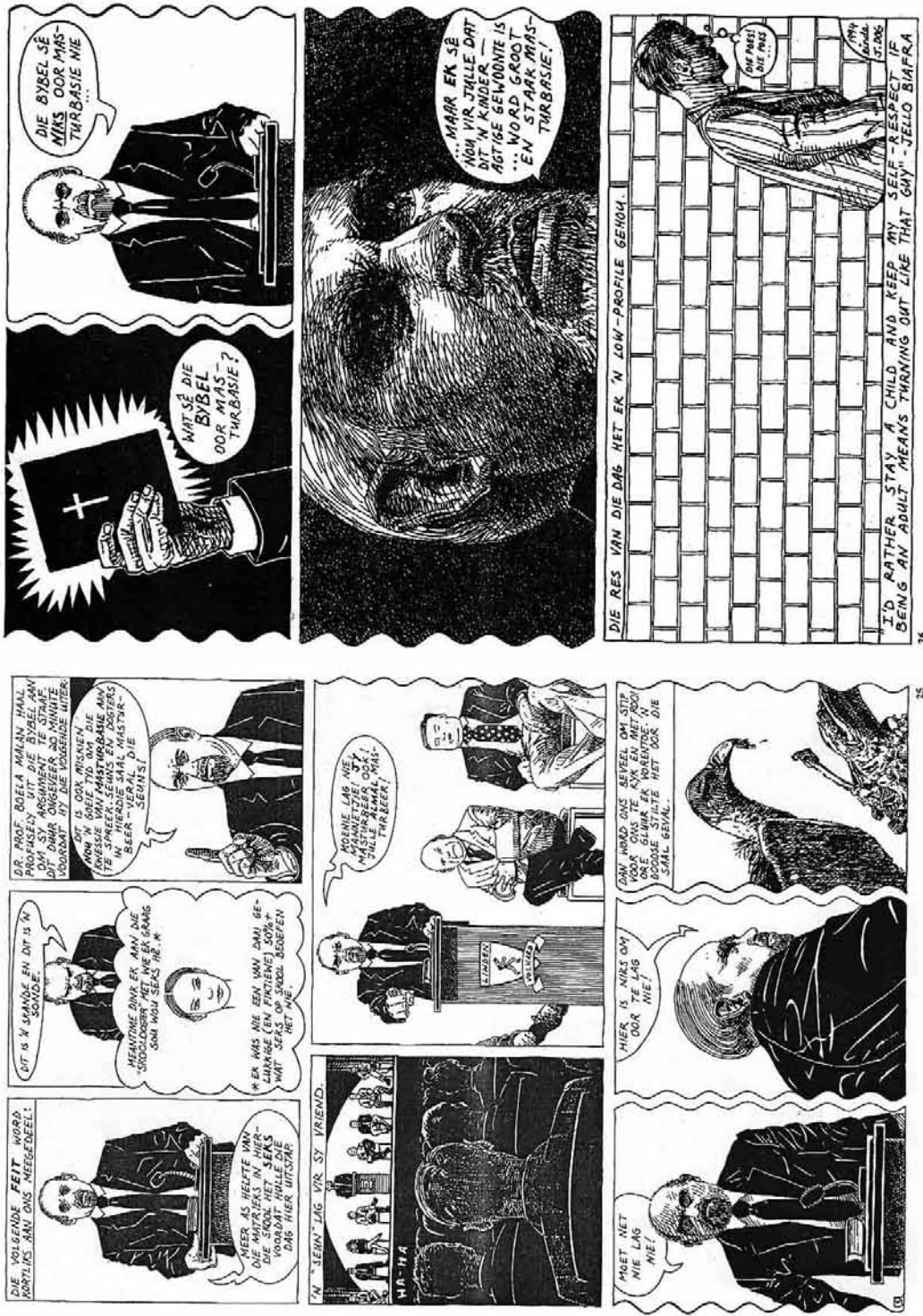
Fig. 26. Anton Kannemeyer, *Jeegweerbaarheid* (1994). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 5* 1996:23).
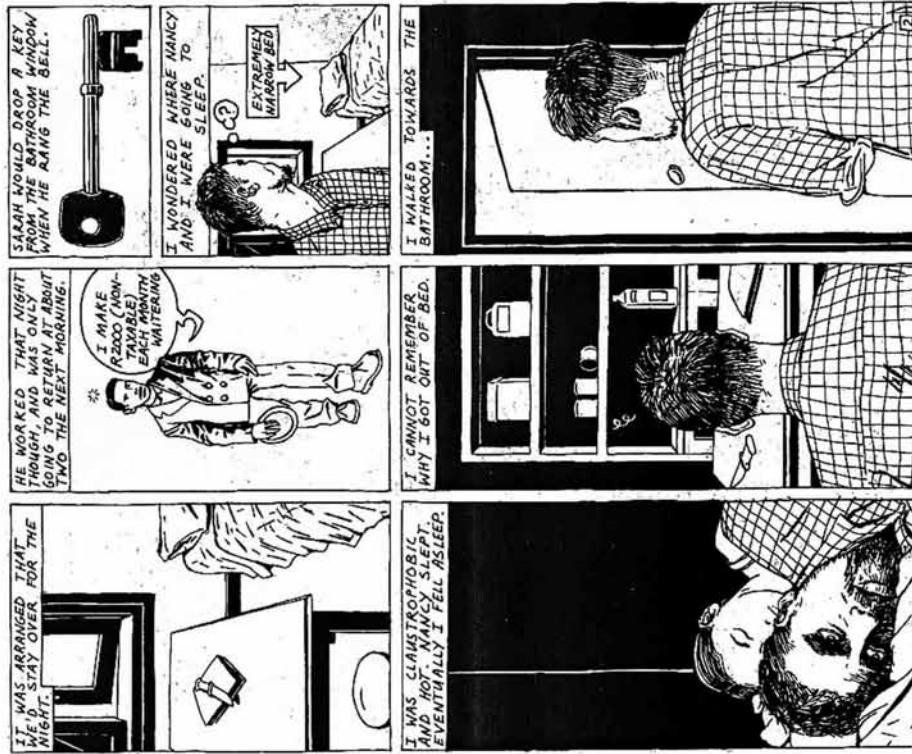
Fig. 27. Anton Kannemeyer, *A short and feeble affair* (1994). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (Bitterkomix 5 1994:18).

A sense of confusion does arise, however, upon viewing the Max Plant character, which does not visually resemble Kannemeyer in any particular way. Max Plant's appearance in *A Short and Feeble Affair* can accommodate an argument that Kannemeyer invented the character to use in representing a more youthful and anti-authoritarian version of himself. Plant and his girlfriend visit her friend Sarah at her friend's apartment in Cape Town and stay for the night. Plant gets out of bed, goes to the bathroom and finds himself standing over Sarah's convulsing body, her skirt raised, the window open and in a state of shock. In the second last frame Plant says to his girlfriend, 'You know … I think we should stop this …' Max Plant functions as a recurring identity construct and visual signifier within *Bitterkomix,* as do Uys (from the comic strip Uys en Buys) and Joe Dog (the balding intellectual with the eyeless glasses).

2.4 WITNESS AND THE CONFESSIONAL

In previous sections of this study, I have taken a less definitive approach towards what may and may not constitute autobiographical visual narrative practices. I have done so by arguing a process of curating visual representations of self through the filter of memory and translation. Forms of self-representation occur as a result of the narrative act whereby an author intends his work to be read by a particular audience. In this section I argue how autobiographical visual narrative is unique in its ability to position the artist as the protagonist of the work and narrator of events, while allowing for an intimate recollection of these events through confessional discourse. The artist initiates a process of confession, after which the reader assumes the role of person being confessed to. Power is not, however, exclusively delegated to the confessee in autobiographical discourse. The result is yet another subversive play of agency and possession between the artist and the reader over the artist's autobiographical image.

It is my view that the confessional act operates along two diverging conceptual lines within autobiographical visual narrative writing practices. The first is the branding of personal identity constructs by the artist, to the public, as created through the filter of memory and articulated through visual narrative (namely through its translation into visual language). This particular quality is characteristically subversive in its propagation of narrative self. The second is identical to the first with the exception

that it aims to be referential, an autobiographical document of sorts. Although still subversive in its contextualisation within the genre, as well as within the context of *Bitterkomix* as a subversive publication, it is so to a lesser degree. The artist allows himself to be the object of the viewer's gaze by exhibiting and objectifying (quite literally through visual narrative) a construction of his own identity, thereby mimicking the confessional act. Bryson (1988:87) articulates a notion of the gaze that allows the artist, through his art (more specifically through the act of painting), to objectify himself through the viewer's gaze. This process of objectification is doubled over as the viewer objectifies the objectified (namely the artist's autobiographical image in the visual narrative), while the artist himself remains to a large extent separate from the identity construct created in his work (largely due to the argument that autobiographical representation need not be referential and that an autobiographical 'aporia' always exists within an autobiographical narrative).

Bryson (1988:96) notes: 'The subject's sense of being a subject is heightened, not undone … and this … is because the entire scenario is restricted to its twin poles of subject and object.' Mason states with reference to *Bitterkomix* co-founder Anton Kannemeyer:

> '*Bitterkomix* has been for [Anton Kannemeyer] a public confessional, through which he has revealed things that most men do not reveal, and dwelt at length on subjects that most men prefer to sweep under the carpet.

Karlien de Villiers's *Amper Twaalf (*1999) in *Bitterkomix 10* (2000) provides a good example of an autobiographical visual narrative that clearly features the author as both the narrator and protagonist of events (see Fig. 28). De Villiers exhibits both the referential happenings of the past as well as her construction of those events through memory. The combination of the two reveals the operations of confession within her work. *Amper Twaalf* depicts a twelve-year-old De Villiers moments before being told by her father that her mother has cancer, and her mother's passing away six months later. The two-page comic consists of five frames, the first of which depicts an illustrated photograph of herself and some friends at a birthday party (dated 1987). De Villiers's strength lies in her ability to narrate the story from the perspective of a twelve-year-old girl. The narrative is largely based on her memory of the event as a child, with the exception of the photograph (which to a large extent still remains referential). De Villiers's deeply personal recollections of that day serve to create a

heightened degree of intimacy between the reader of the work and the narrative. This is amplified through De Villiers's use of cartooning techniques and ultimately the fetishistic process of reading comics. The latter requires the reader to dwell on the image by observing one illustrated frame at a time. This is indicative of a method which encourages the viewer to engage actively when reading the strip. Confession in this instance does not aim to be subversive inasmuch as it forms a cathartic process for the artist. An example of one device that encourages forms of intimacy in *Amper Twaalf* is De Villiers's deeply personal and detailed description of being angry at her father for fetching her so abruptly from her friend's birthday party, just before being told that her mother has passed away. Other references that create a heightened sense of intimacy between the reader and the narrative include the suspense caused by a momentary pause, initiated in the third frame, where De Villiers walks past her classmate Karel Snyman at the local Wimpy (feeling somewhat embarrassed about the way she is dressed) on her way to have a milkshake with her father. The reference to the smell of the family pastor's breath while blessing her home after the passing of her mother in frame 5 serves the same function. I assert that there is a strong correspondence between the confessional act of the artist as narrator of events and propagated forms of intimacy between the artist and reader. The artist visually articulates narrative self through the use of confession as an autobiographical device. The confessional act potentially appeals to the reader's sense of curiosity in wanting to know more. It does this by willingly offering the reader possession of its subject through the objectification of De Villiers's autobiographical image, which in turn leads to an assertion of power by the reader.

Fig. 28. Karlien de Villiers, *Amper twaalf* (1999). Pen and ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 10* 1999:30).

Foucalt examines the confessional speech act in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), demonstrating how thoroughly imbued it is with the relations of power. The speaking subject within confessional ritual also forms the subject of the statement, accompanied by the presence of a 'partner' who constitutes an authority ultimately facilitating the confession and responding to it. Foucalt claims that it is the entity being confessed to as opposed to the one who speaks, who possesses the agency of domination. There is a certain ambivalence in which the speaking subject operates within the dominant power structure represented by the profile of the confessor. Confessions are uttered against the discourse of the confessor, while simultaneously the same utterance can only occur in the manner allowed by the formalised ritual of confession. The result is an illustration of existing power relations within confessional discourse which cannot exist without some degree of subordination, as "by definition… no means of escape." (1978:71).

I would argue that, with regards to autobiographical visual narrative, confessions are made within a formalised ritual of confession against the discourse of the confessor, where agency of domination does not exclusively reside with the one being confessed to. One example is Anton Kannemeyer's *Zoom* (see Fig. 29) in *Bitterkomix 10* (2000). Kannemeyer was asked to produce the comic for Stellenbosch University's *Akkerjol 2010* publication as part of a student-led initiative to raise funds for the university (otherwise known as Rag). The one-page comic consists of five frames, the first of which records a statement most likely made by the student who asked Kannemeyer to make the contribution. Kannemeyer quotes the student: "U bydrae sal nie net deur duisende bewonderaars geniet word nie, maar sal ook getuig van u gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid en steun van sosiale verantwoordelikheid." By then a visual communications lecturer at the Visual Arts Department (the same department where he studied), Kannemeyer is seen standing inside his home in Cape Town staring ominously through the window while brooding over the feedback. In the third frame, Kannemeyer silently contemplates all the things he despises most about Stellenbosch, with the exception of 'die studente wat [hy] van 'n kant af opgenaai het.' He grins in the fourth frame after which he laughs condescendingly 'My … ha ha … my sosiale verantwoordelikheid … ha ha ha!!'
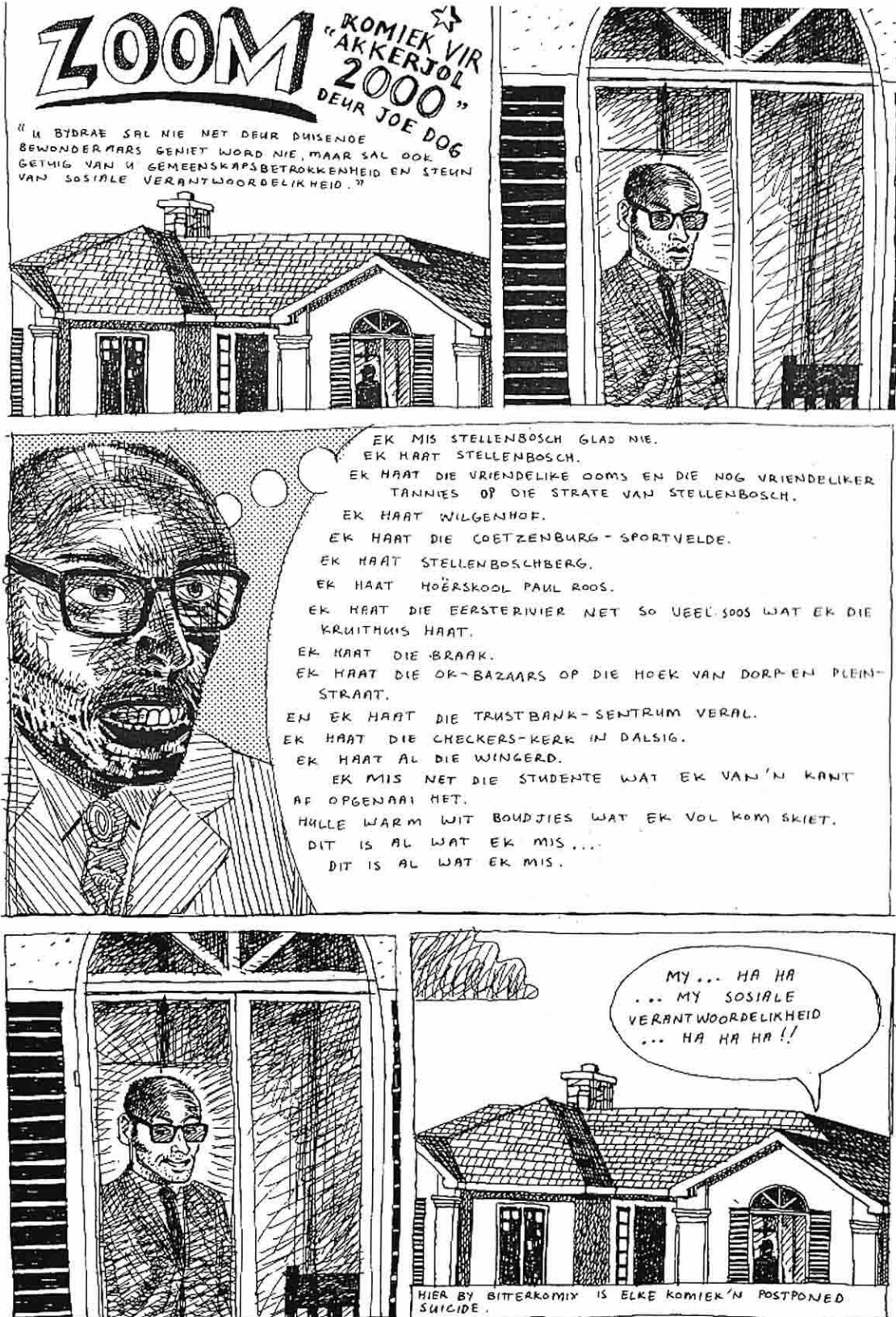
Fig. 29. Anton Kannemeyer, *Zoom* (2000). Colour comic book, 29.7 x 21 (*Bitterkomix 10* 2000:37).

Zoom remains relevant to this study with regards to the way in which it uses confession as a subversive device. Whether actually responding to Stellenbosch Rag committee's request with this comic strip or not, the narrative ultimately undermines both the initiative and their target market through its visual articulation of Kannemeyer's own resentment towards Stellenbosch. Kannemeyer thereby removes the agency of domination from the person confessed to (namely the reading audience) and places it comfortably back into the hands of the confessor (namely Kannemeyer). His egotism is matched by a stern sense of sobriety while stating in the final frame that every comic produced for *Bitterkomix* is in fact a 'postponed suicide'. Having myself been asked to edit a version of a comic that I published in the same magazine eleven years later by removing the words 'shit' and 'God' from the narrative, I feel it is safe to say that *Akkerjol* never did publish Kannemeyer's *Zoom*.

I have previously argued how the source of creativity in autobiographical narrative, as described by Lang (2006:76), does not anchor itself in the objective truth, but rather in the subversive discourse that purposefully rejects truth as a necessary requirement. It is clear that Kannemeyer's use of confession in *Zoom* functions more as an autobiographical device than as a tell-tale personal document. In doing so, narrative resists dominant powers implicated within the autobiographical genre leading to a form of insubordination, ultimately making the autobiographical subject subversive. I have argued that it is through such subversiveness that one is able to extend a definition of autobiography to include an autobiographical writing form that no longer exclusively places the artist/autobiographer in a position of vulnerability. This signifies that the gaze of the viewing public no longer objectifies the autobiographical artist in principle due to the autobiographical aporia. It is, in fact, the very play of power and subordination, and its constant, if not temporal, switching from author to reader that widens the discourse of autobiographical representation.[15]

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[15] Malathouni (2006:81) makes reference to the 'spiritual' narratives of conversion and the autobiographical colonial chronicles of the 17th century Puritans, in their immigration to New England, America. These accounts centred around a powerful religious axis relating both to an individual's growth to grace (and ultimately salvation) and the social constructs that existed within community engagement (Yemenedzi-Malathouni 2006:82). One can compare the agencies of power existing in the form of the Puritan author's 'designated purpose … 'to convince elder's that the presence of grace was evident in their experience,' to agencies of power existing in autobiographical narrative, according to Malathouni (2006:87). This was achieved through the use of their diaries as proof of such an experience. I argue that the artist's visual journal potentially serves the same function as the Puritan diaries in a similar form of legitimisation, where confessional discourse provides it with a means of

2.5 NARRATIVE REPAIR THROUGH CATHARSIS

An individual is able to reformulate what Nelson (2001:7) calls his or her own life-narrative, through the act of narrative reconstruction. Nelson (2001:7) states that it is possible to alter an 'oppressed' individual's perceptions of himself through a process of 'narrative repair.' This process allows for a 'loosen[ing] [of] the constraints on one's moral agency,' where 'moral agency' constitutes the freedom to act within a given community's social structure (Nelson 2001:9). I argue that narrative identities can be narratively reshaped through the use of autobiographical visual narrative, not only with the intention of changing the way people view the artist through representations of self within his or her work, but also through the way the artist views his or her own identity as a result of the work.

Watson states that, until the 1970s, autobiographical writing was limited to individuals publicly deemed to have already achieved some form of greatness. Content dealt mostly with the events in the life of a 'great' person and the ways in which such greatness was achieved. Historically based 'facts' took precedent as a deaf ear was turned to autobiographical stories considered to be of less public merit (1993:58). Both of these associations stem from the genre's categorisation in relation to the practice of biography. The result was a lack of representation by people of lower social rank and minority groups, including black, female and openly gay individuals. I have previously argued that autobiographical visual narrative (specifically comix), in contrast to the tradition of autobiographical written narrative, is and has been from its inception, indicative of a form of writing that is in its very nature subversive. I believe it is the genre's inherently subversive characteristics that delegitimise autobiography's conception as exclusive, and that one of its defining characteristics lays in its accessibility as an art form.

According to Watson (1993:59), contemporary autobiographical analysis has noted a marked shift away from the 'bio-bias' approach and towards an exploration of 'metaphysical selfhood.' Autobiographical visual narrative has provided a means for

'documenting' and revealing experience through its operation as an autobiographical narrative object (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Both involve a personal and public staging of autobiographical narrative in which standards are conformed to (uttered within the structures of confessional discourse) and ultimately subverted to certain degrees. More importantly, it merits an investigation into the consumption of autobiographical narratives by both the artist and the reader (as an individual as well as a collective) for the purpose of catharsis.

artists to legitimise their work and themselves by providing a platform to reconstruct and reconcile notions of self. Anton Kannemeyer's *Jeugweerbaarheid* (see Fig. 25) in *Bitterkomix No 4* (1994) bears testament to both these sentiments. The title frame depicts the prototypical male athlete as idealised in the classical Roman tradition of representation. The figure stands proudly with legs and arms apart, completely nude except for a draping cape and a lit torch held head-high. The title locates this within a South African context by augmenting an idealised depiction of the young male athlete through a symbolic idealised notion of 'Christelik-Nasionale' preparedness for an all-white future. The image's meaning, however, is meant to be ironic in revealing superficial idealised notions of Afrikaner-ness and is ultimately subverted. Illustrated images of well-behaved schoolboys and the boots of marching men further echo this sentiment in the background. The result is a social commentary on ideological conceptions of gender (namely masculinity), race and sexuality in apartheid South Africa before 1994. More importantly, Kannemeyer is able to use visual narrative to rearticulate his experience of the event as a forced repression of his own sexuality by figures of authority (in this case the principal of his high school) using autobiographical writing devices as a subversive discourse. Not only is he successful in narratively reconstructing the experience in his own mind, but also in the minds of other readers of the strip who have had similar experiences.

The torch signifies a satirical passing of 'civilised' values from one generation to the next and operates on a collective understanding of the cultural values propagated by Afrikaans nationalism at the time. Kannemeyer is able to do this by using autobiography as a narrative device in which he interprets the memories of his own high school experience and appropriates them into the comic. As in his comic *Last Page* (discussed in Chapter 1), Kannemeyer uses quotation subversively and as a strategic autobiographical device in communicating the work's underlying ideological themes. Kannemeyer appropriates meaning in the last frame by placing a quote by American musician Jello Biafra, 'I'd rather stay a child and keep my self-respect if being an adult means turning out like that guy.'

Botes once remarked (Morris 2006:47): 'We're challenging people with things we are challenged by, through work that is as rich and complex as possible … We're opening up things, and that is healthy, not simply as catharsis, which could be

limiting, but to show what's there.' Mason (2010:189) states with reference to *Bitterkomix*, though more specifically with reference to Anton Kannemeyer:

> The themes of outrage and resistance to the dominant cultural ideology of obedience and sexual repression became powerfully evident as Kannemeyer evolved a versatile, incisive style of social criticism, strongly informed by autobiographical themes.

Autobiographical representation in *Bitterkomix* is used as a device to construct social commentary in pushing readers of the 'zine to actively engage with the content by identifying with the work. Rita Barnard (2006:154) articulates, within a South African context, the need for alternative methods of remembering and describes the proliferation of various forms of autobiography, memoir and historiography as a result. I agree with Barnard that *Bitterkomix* is a direct consequence of such a proliferation. Mason (2006:7) states with reference to Kannemeyer's own cathartic process:

> The power and integrity of his confessions have in a strange way purified and absolved him and the vilification to which he has been subjected in the past no longer seems to touch him. Cauterised by his burning revelations, his personal wounds seem healed and he has emerged as a distinctive and very audible South African voice, one of the country's leading satirists.

Nelson states how personal identities are also constructed from third-person perspectives, where narrative activity is formulated by individuals and members of various social groups, who transpose their own narratives onto other individuals and social groups. It is important to be conscious of our own membership of certain social groups, whose identities themselves are narratively constructed (2001:71). I suggest that it is this process of revealing ideological constructs within a certain cultural group and consequently reconstructing narrative identity that made *Bitterkomix* so successful.

It is the combination of first-person narrative constructions by individual artists and third-person narrative constructions by the artists as a collective that has allowed *Bitterkomix* to rearticulate what it means to be white and South African, and more specifically, white and Afrikaans. It is here that the boundaries between public and private selves become less defined, in large part due to autobiographical writing techniques and their strategic use by a number of artists within the publication.

CHAPTER 3

THE VISUAL JOURNAL AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DEVICE

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the practical component of my work in relation to and through the application of deductions made in previous chapters of this study. I have explored the operations of autobiography through memory and translation as it relates directly to *Bitterkomix.* My visual journals provide an accessible device in which autobiographical narrative and illustrated forms can be documented and explored through two principal methods.

The first method involves the use of the visual journal as a platform in which illustrated forms and reader interpretation can be broadened and extended. The second method explores the visual journal as a narrative document of the artist's personal experience, a narrative made possible within a postmodern context in that it can be read as a completed autobiographical, narrative object consisting of personal, illustrated images in sequence.

In the former method, my experimentations with forms of illustration prioritise a process of individual mark-making and the incorporation of 'intentional accident' into the narrative process. I explore the authorial and editorial imperatives that arise as a result, and the strategies I use to resolve these artistic problems. Random marks made in my visual journals are subsequently interpreted by myself and edited for the sake of legibility using cartooning techniques as discussed in previous chapters. The result is that I am able to co-create meaning with the reader by allowing him/her to recognise narrated illustrated forms through my own eyes. By initially placing these images in sequence, I am later able to distinguish my own unique language of visual representation and an autobiographical visual vernacular. The codification of this visual language emanates and is archived within the personal space of my visual journals and is based on concepts relating to the 'openness' or 'performativity' of a

work as described by Eco in *The Open Work* (1989). The result is an in-depth exploration of autobiographical illustrative form and content within my visual journals. My autobiographical narratives are not, however, limited to this technique and only represent one method of creating autobiographical illustrative forms.

McCloud (1994:30) states how the abstract qualities of illustrations can encourage reader involvement and active participation within visual narrative. I argue that this process of reading can be applied to both myself when editing illustrated forms in my visual journals and to those who read these images in sequence as autobiographical narratives. A compromise is reached between communicating autobiographical content and the allowance of more interpretative reading strategies by both myself and the reader, where the combination of the two serves to create alternative forms of reading and writing visual narrative using the visual journal as a facilitator of these processes.

Translating, editing and interpreting this private proliferation of imagery for public display reveals yet another function of the visual journal. I argue that my visual journals operate as autobiographical narrative objects in their own right, and as archival documents of autobiographical content. The visual journal constitutes a visual narrative object, which acts as both evidence of the artist's process, as well as a memory bank of form and content. The result is that the page entries, spreads, images and the visual journal itself can be exhibited and published for public display. The second function allows for the creation of both conventional and alternative forms of autobiographical visual narrative, the latter of which in my own work consists of the published artist's sketchbook (namely illustrated entries, pages and spreads) and the visual journal as a narrative object. A significant amount of content and imagery is made available to the artist through the consistent use of visual journaling. The journal acts as a repository for thought, observation, research and experimentation and a space of absolute freedom (Schröder 2011: http://www.heleenschroder.com/drawingbooks/). The journal uses devices that are both common to visual forms of autobiographical representation and those that are unique to the form. More importantly, it provides insight into the working process of the artist and allows for a more intimate interaction between itself as autobiographical narrative object and the reader. It is characteristic of a highly personal form of autobiographical visual representation. The artist is given the opportunity to visually

reconstruct his experiences using the visual journal, via an accessible means of documentation that does not confine itself within the rules of structured narrative (more specifically chronological narrative) nor limit the artist to what could be considered a less instinctive approach to illustration.

3.2   THE VISUAL JOURNAL AS NARRATOR OF THE OPEN TEXT

3.2.1   Opening form and interpretation

Eco describes the 'informal artwork' or 'open work' in its representation of form through varying degrees of abstraction. The artwork's indeterminacy (its 'informalness') allows for a multitude of possible meanings, since meaning is no longer entirely pre-determined by the artist (1989:80). The conceptual grounds used to define the open work can just as easily be regarded in relation to illustrated forms. I suggest that the 'informal' qualities of a work not only accommodate more varied degrees of reader interpretation and reinterpretation within my own work by both myself and the reader, but also allow for a strategy in which I can use illustrated forms as a conceptual signature mark in communicating autobiographical narrative and content. Eco (1989:92) does however describe the open work as '[freeing] itself [entirely] from man's signature … [acceding] to autonomous movement'.

Given the nature of the open work, one is left asking whether such works can indeed be legible. Eco (1989:87) questions whether there can be a possible agreement between the author and the viewer's response, where one can guarantee that the conditions of their communicability will not be compromised through the open-ness of the work. I argue that I have achieved a compromise within my own visual narratives through a combination of abstract and accidental mark-making, as well as applied cartooning techniques. While the placement of these images into a narrative sequence ultimately closes off their openness, focus is still placed on the artist as abstract and autonomous[16] mark-maker, ultimately encompassing an approach to illustration that requires the reader to participate actively in the meaning-making process. The result is that I am able to produce my own codified visual language, as well as alternative approaches to narrating autobiographical content. One example is

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[16] The Oxford Dictionary defines 'autonomous' as having the freedom to act independently (http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0050540#m_en_gb0050540). I use the word in reference to a process of individual mark-making that is unique to an artist.

the possibility of first interpreting illustrated forms, editing these images to more objectively represent the subject I perceive it to represent through an editing process that encompasses cartooning techniques, and then later placing these images into a narrated sequence. The result is that one can write stories through images as opposed to first producing the story and then illustrating it. My journals serve to reconcile notions of performativity with legibility using illustrated forms, after which I am able to appropriate them into autobiographical narratives. This illustration technique accommodates an understanding of both the artist and the reader as co-creators (interpreters) of illustrated forms, thereby granting both active participation in the meaning-making process.

Our appreciation and understanding of an artistic work, according to Eco (1989:177), stems both from the poetics of the work itself and the process by which a poetic model acquires its physical form. When analysing a Stop sign (see Fig. 30), communication is immediately directed towards the referent; that being the instruction to stop one's car. As a result, communication is never afforded the opportunity to return to the sign in order to relish the effectiveness of its message in the manner in which it has formally been expressed (Eco 1989:104).

Fig. 30. Artist unknown, *Stop Sign* (2011). Traffic sign, 67 x 67.

Dog's Face (see Fig. 31) comprises a journal entry (a somewhat abstract illustration of a dog's face) where communication still persists, while allowing the reader to return back to the sign to enjoy the formal manner in which it has been expressed. The illustration differs from the Stop sign in its ability to reconcile the openness of the work with its legibility, drawing the reader back into the image and allowing him/her to dwell on the poetics of its language. *Dog's Face* originally consisted of a mark made in my visual journal with an ink-brush pen. I interpreted the mark to be the face of a smiling dog, an association that colleagues and friends did not immediately share upon viewing the illustration in its original form as a mark. I later edited the image to more objectively resemble a smiling dog's face by employing basic methods used in cartooning (namely through the process of closure) simply through the addition of two small dots that resembled eyes.

Fig. 31. Roberto Millan, *Dog's Face* (2010). Pen and ink, 2,5 x 2,4 (*Big Black Moleskin Journal* 2010:43).

Eco states in his essay *Form and Interpretation in Luigi Pareyson's Aesthetics* (1989:160) how an artwork can reveal the personality of the artist in the 'unique and personal way in which it has been formed' and not necessarily exclusively through its subject and theme. I perceived a mark I made to resemble what in my own mind looked like a dog's face that I translated through memory and language. Consequently, I was able to encourage other individuals to make a similar association as a result of an editing process, and ultimately by placing it into a

narrative sequence (see *Robbie, I Rode over Snowball*, Fig. 33-58). This is synonymous with McCloud's description of narrative closure in *Understanding Comics* (1994). He defines closure in relation to comics as '[the] phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole (1994:63)' and 'the mental process whereby … lines [can] become a face,' or in my case where two dots and a mark can become a dog's face. McCloud's concept of closure also applies to the viewer's ability to read images in sequence (1994:67). Not only has the idea of a dog been communicated to the reader, but also a unique expression of the process in which the mark was formed. This is not to say that either expression or communication is limited within my own work to the informal qualities of the illustrations. I argue that this method of illustrating is strongly autobiographical in its approach to creating a visual form of representation that prioritises my own interpretation of form, while encouraging the public to make similar interpretations through an editing process within my journals. This formal device allows the public to view the world through my own eyes, a process which can be argued to be strongly autobiographical.

The mark precedes the referent and the process requires that the reader (the first of whom is the artist) seeks the meaning of the sign. The sign in its original form has no intrinsic meaning, nor does it clearly refer to an established iconography of 'a dog's face'. The image, before the two dots were added as eyes, could just as easily signify something else. This indeterminacy necessitates additional marks to direct other readers towards the meaning that I have attributed to the sign (namely my interpretation of the mark made). An open reading of *Dog's Face* is thus compromised by its use of cartooning techniques and its appropriation within a visual narrative (see *Robbie, I Rode Over Snowball*). I do maintain, however, that the poetics of its formal language still remains to a large extent highly interpretive. 'Openness' could be compromised just as easily if I were to isolate *Dog's Face,* remove the two appropriated dots as eyes and place 'Dog's Face' as a written label beside the image. The technique is relevant to my study in its use as an autobiographical device by requiring the reader to participate with the artist in the co-creation of meaning through more interpretive forms of illustration. I have previously argued that comics function as a fetishistic act of reading that requires the reader to focus on smaller parts of the visual whole. This process of active participation in

reading visual narrative is thus amplified and requires that the reader further engage in the reading of the narrative in order to understand it.

A more complex example of an illustration from the same narrative is *Angel* (2010). The mark (Fig. 29) made in my journal with an inkbrush pen resembled, in my own mind, a winged figured, depending from which direction I would observe it. I showed the illustration to four different people, each of whom saw something remarkably different and none of whom felt that it resembled a winged figure (never mind an angel). I edited the image by adding two small lines as legs, two dots for eyes and a smaller slightly curved line as a mouth. I showed the edited image to a different group of people who slowly and consistently started to associate the mark with a winged figure, though more often than not interpreted it as some kind of monster as opposed to an angel. Even after the addition of these marks I still was not satisfied that communication had been achieved, after which I added the label 'Angel'. The addition of a label is my admission that the sign has failed. To remediate the failed sign, I take refuge in written text, ultimately closing off the 'openness' of the work. Barthes (38:1977) refers to this as 'relay' in *Rhetoric of the Image*. The placement of both *Angel* and *Dog's Face* as juxtaposed images in a visual narrative can be argued to further close off an interpretive reading of each individual illustration. I argue that it is the tension between the openness of the illustrations and their legibility as images in sequence, as well as their visual articulation of the process in which they were created, which encourage an intimate interaction between the reader and the narrative well suited to the autobiographical genre in that it allows the reader to further engage and therefore empathise with narrative content.

Fig. 32. Roberto Millan, *Angel* (2010). Pen and ink, 2,5 x 2,4 (*Big Black Moleskin Journal* 2010:43).

Robbie, I Rode Over Snowball (see Fig. 33-58) is an autobiographical narrative that deals with the abrupt passing of my life-long friend and pet, Snowball, after my father unknowingly crushed her with his car while pulling into the driveway. By juxtaposing the *Angel* image with a figure of a lying dog, an association of death is created. The *Angel* image further communicates the conceptual idea of an angel as a result. Placing my images into a narrative sequence provides further legibility, while the illustrations themselves (despite their legibility as conceptual ideas as a result of an editing process) still require a certain degree of reader interpretation in order to be understood. The images in sequence use expressive line and abstract mark-making to give the reader an opportunity to co-create meaning using more interpretive forms. A process of identification is thereby encouraged, echoing the autobiographical content of the narrative. As discussed in previous chapters, it is through a process of individual and cultural identification with the narrative by both readers and the artist, as dictated by the confines of memory and translation, that autobiographical communication is effected. My illustrated forms therefore not only require the reader to participate in co-creating meaning through an interpretive reading method but they also encourage the reader to identify with the images.

Fig. 33. Roberto Millan, *Robbie, I Rode Over Snowball* (2011). Book, 5 x 5.

Fig. 34. Roberto Millan, *Play* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:1-2).

Fig. 35. Roberto Millan, *She barked* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:3-4).

Fig. 36. Roberto Millan, *We swam* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:5-6).

Fig. 37. Roberto Millan, *I love you so much* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:7-8).

Fig. 38. Roberto Millan, *I'm gonna scare ya* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:9-10).

Fig. 39. Roberto Millan, *Boo* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:11-12).

Fig. 40. Roberto Millan, *Grrr* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:13-14).

Fig. 41. Roberto Millan, *Sad* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:15-16).

Fig. 42. Roberto Millan, *Hello* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:17-18).

Fig. 43. Roberto Millan, *Car 2* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:19-20).

Fig. 44. Roberto Millan, *Squeal* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:21-22).

Fig. 45. Roberto Millan, *Squea 2l* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:21-22).

Fig. 46. Roberto Millan, *Oh shit* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:23-24).

Fig. 47. Roberto Millan, *Shit!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:25-26).

Fig. 48. Roberto Millan, *Peeing* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:27-28).

Fig. 49. Roberto Millan, *Robbie!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:29-30).

Fig. 50. Roberto Millan, *Foot* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:31-32).

Fig. 51. Roberto Millan, *Dad?* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:33-34).

Fig. 52. Roberto Millan, *Dad!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:35-36).

Fig. 53. Roberto Millan, *Mom!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:37-38).

Fig. 54. Roberto Millan, *Oh Snowy!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:39-40).
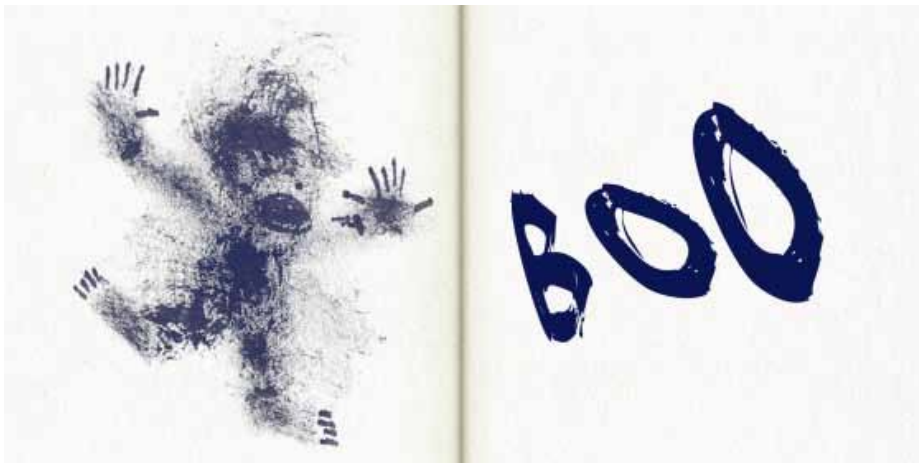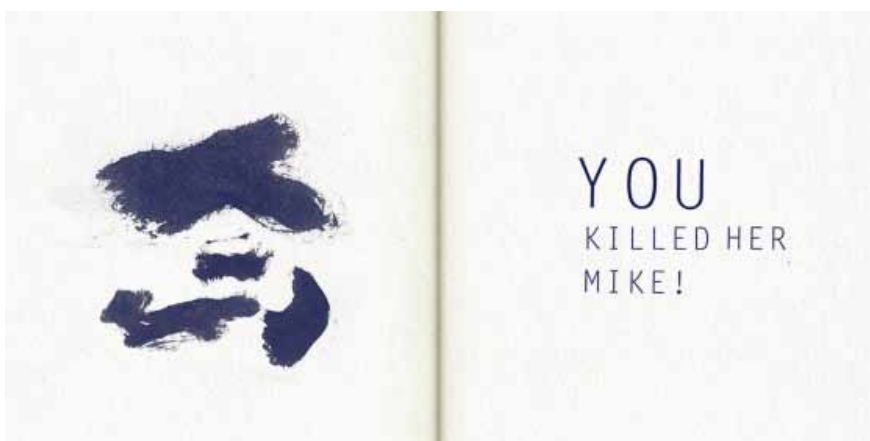

Fig. 55. Roberto Millan, *You!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:41-42).
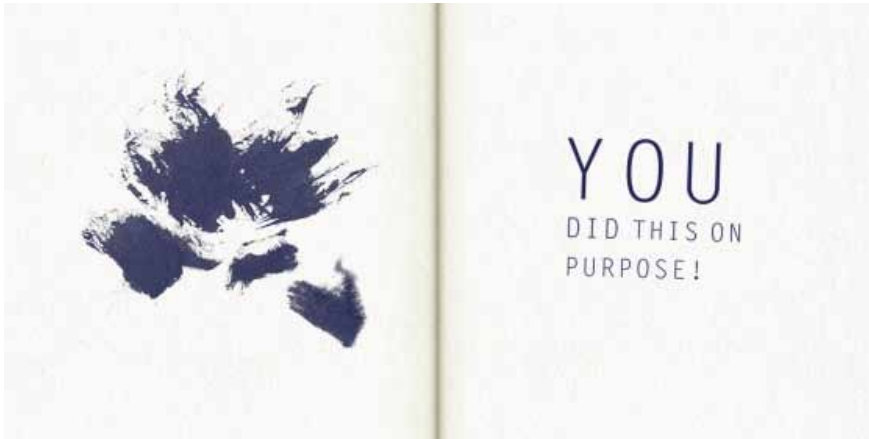
Fig. 56. Roberto Millan, *You did this!* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:43-44).

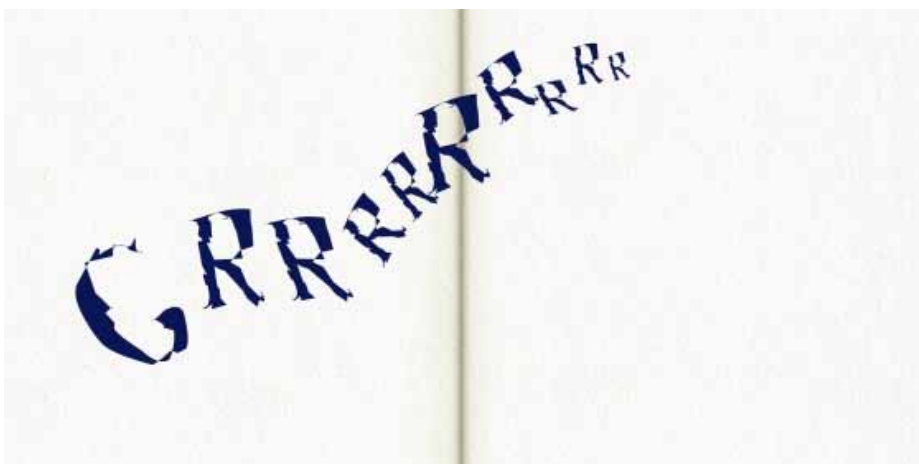**Fig. 57**. Roberto Millan, *…* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:45-46).

Fig. 58. Roberto Millan, *Mike* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:47-48).

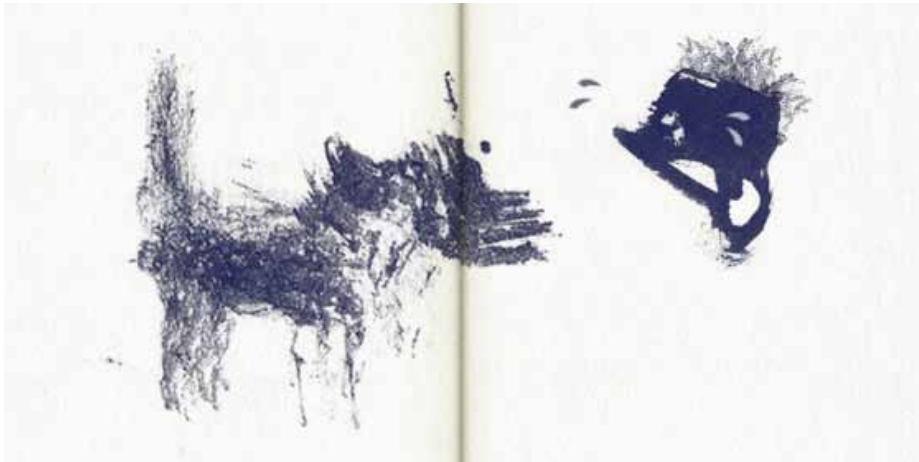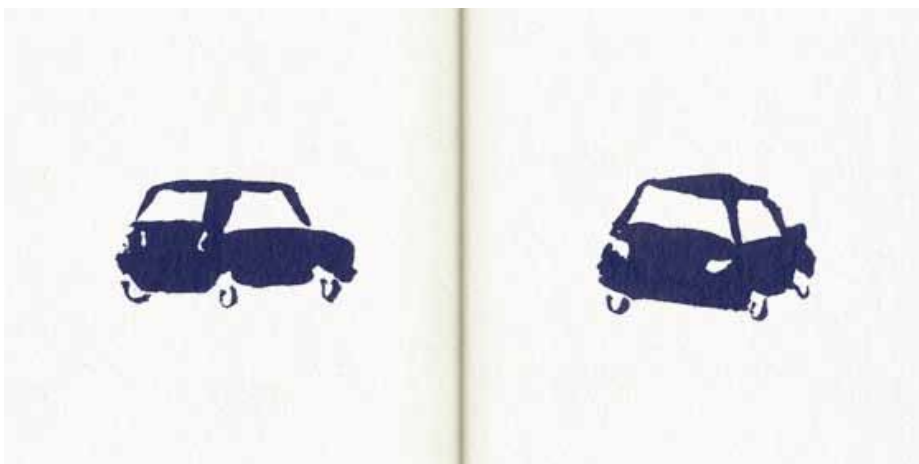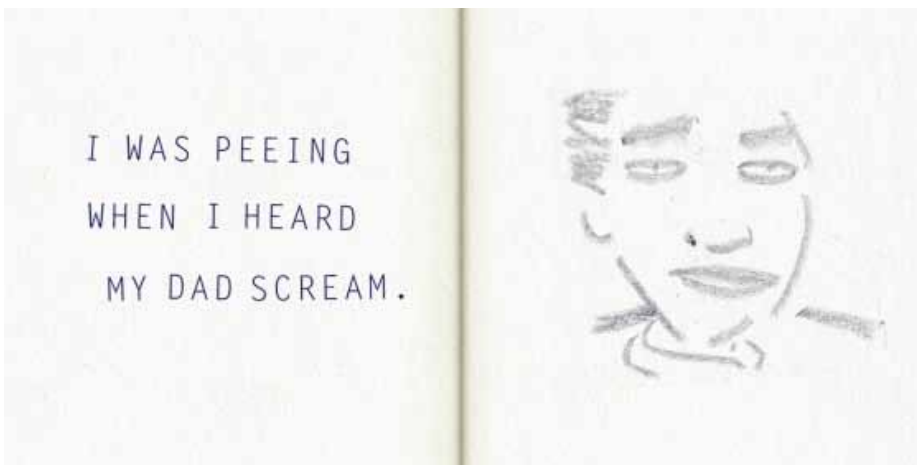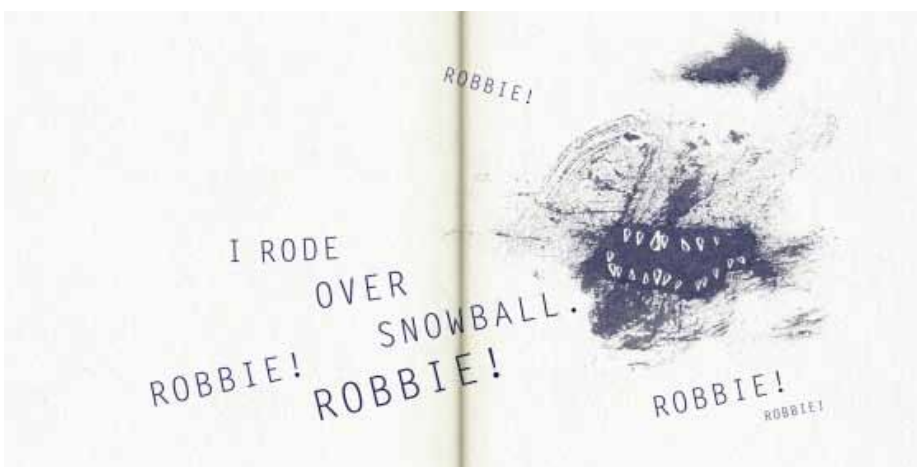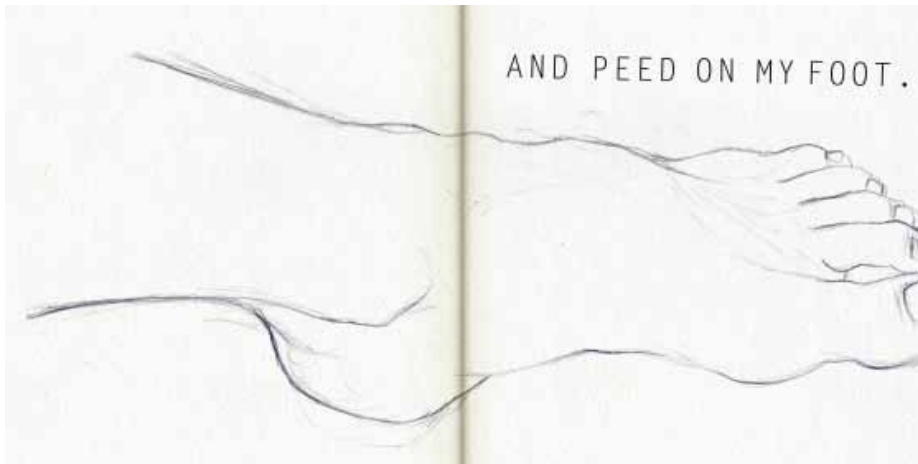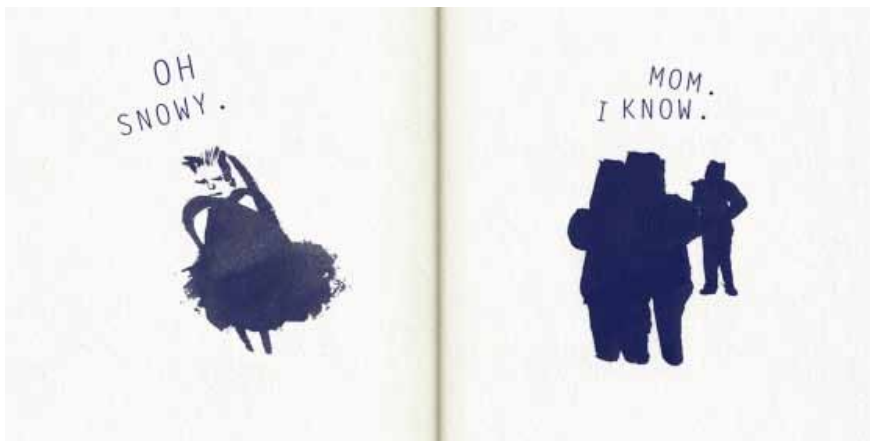**Fig. 59**. Roberto Millan, *Sad 2* (2011). Book, 5 x 5 (*Robbie, I rode over Snowball* 2011:49-50).

Eco (1989:162-163) writes:

> Once completed … the work as a finished model brings about new perspective on the Crocean opposition between "structure" and "poetry," since all parts of a work are seen as integral parts of one artistic organism and no longer subordinated to isolated instances of poetry. Aesthetic contemplation is the active consideration that retraces the process which gave life to form [where] the work is … defined as the narration of the effort that went into its making. Form is at once the "current memory" and the "permanent recollection" of the productive activity that gave it life.

Form as a 'memory' of the process and 'activity' in which it was created, is evident in my own work and significant when viewed in relation to autobiographical representation. It signifies visual proof of the working process used by the artist to make the image, as well as allows the reader to better empathise with the content of the narrative by giving him/her the opportunity to co-create meaning and identify with the images, and ultimately the narrative. The function of memory (both individual and as determined by a specific group or collective of people) within autobiographical writing as a filter through which the past, present and future are re-collected and re-imagined, has already been discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this study. Form as memory can be analysed within my own artistic process in its application through two principal methods. The first method, as discussed above, deals with interpretive, illustrated forms as a personal document, both a testament to the artistic process as well as to the artist's visual language of translation. The second method deals with the manner in which illustrated forms are contained. These are not necessarily limited to the method of illustrating discussed in this section and includes illustrations contained within my visual journals. Illustrations are archived within my own visual

journals where they can be further explored, referenced, edited and eventually placed into a fixed narrative.

3.2.2 The visual journal as reconciler of form and narrative

In previous chapters of this study, I have explained key curatorial writing strategies in autobiographical visual narrative discourse, using examples from *Bitterkomix*. An important aspect of this analysis is the influence of memory on such writing and the visual language in which one chooses to write. The use of visual writing strategies to instigate reader identification and intimacy in autobiographical narrative forms a large focus of this study. In my own work, autobiographical devices are centred on the visual journaling process and reveal the potential of the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative form. The result is the creation of a unique visual language of representation that is both self-referential and highly codified. This process encompasses the use of spontaneous and autonomous mark-making techniques, as well as documented autobiographical instances, usually in the form of quick observational drawings and written anecdotes. While abstract marks can later be made more legible through the editing process, I am able to appropriate interpreted images and observational drawings directly from my journals into what I argue to be alternative forms of autobiographical narrative. Of these narrative forms, the most relevant to the practical component of this study are constructed autobiographical vignettes using imagery in my visual journals, the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative object and the published artist's sketchbook.

My observational illustrations, although less interpretive than my more abstract drawings, still focus on rapid mark-making techniques and can be read as a series of non-chronological images within my visual journals that form an open-ended narrative . My visual journal entries can be contextualised within the framework of the open work and viewed as a permanent recollection of the process that initiated its creation. These illustrated forms operate from the basis of subjective memory, where both autobiographical instances and my own artistic process can be documented and archived. My visual journals act as facilitators of these processes and as a form of memory in itself.

Three concepts remain crucial to my work in relation to my visual journal as a form of representation, memory and artistic process. All three concepts contribute to the idea that the visual journal acts as a reconciler of interpretive illustrated forms and narrative. The first deals with the mark-making process discussed in the previous section of this study as a form of accidental 'discovery.' Something occurs between the mind and the hand that is not governed by a conscious thinking process, but rather through the application of an artistic technique in a heightened moment of free expression. This process involves setting in place the conditions that allow the mark to appear on the surface of the page (as previously discussed). I am able to reclaim the mark from the inchoate realm of preconscious accident and attribute meaning to it. By doing so I am able to anchor the meaning of the mark, proscribing the extent of 'relay,' as described by Barthes (1977:38). The mark can now be marshalled to function within the progression of narrative imagery.

A second crucial concept relating to the visual journal as an articulated form of memory and process, stems from a reaction to structuralism and analytical methods emanating from the French avant-garde (Eco 1989:246). According to Eco, serial thought (a result of thinking stemming from the Italian avant-garde) determines that every message constitutes its own code where every work of art is 'the linguistic foundation of itself, the discussion of its own poetic system'. The result is that the work of art becomes the core of its own reading, self-referential in the decoding of its messages (1989:246). My visual journals operate as a self-referential system where I am able to reference marks made, edit them (if necessary) and produce my own unique mode of communication by narrating them as a series of images (see Fig. 33-59). Identified historical codes are called into question where new modes of communication are produced (Eco 1989:246). Eco states that 'the effect of serial thinking is the evolution of codes and the discovery of new codes, not a progressive recoil toward … [an] original foundational code' (1989:246).
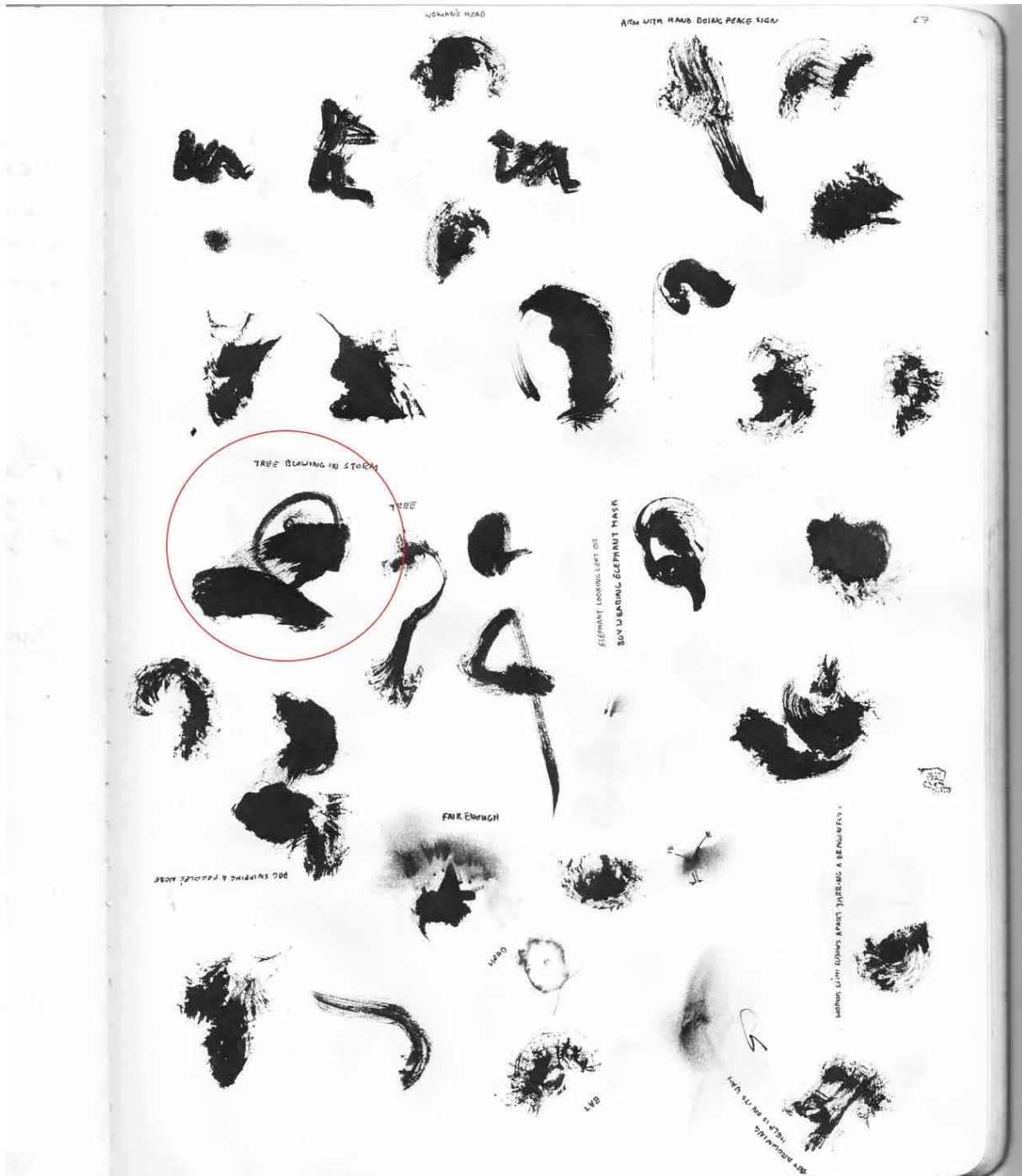
Fig. 60. Roberto Millan, *Big black moleskin journal pg 67* (2010). Pen and ink, 21,5 x 14,2 (*Big black moleskin journal* 2010:67).

Fig. 61. Roberto Millan, *Tree blowing in storm* (2010). Pen and ink, 2,5 x 2,4 (*Big black moleskin journal* 2010:67).

A third important concept deals with the placement of images directly from my visual journals into a visual narrative format. According to Eco (1989:85): 'The informal can be seen as the last link in a series of experiments aiming at the introduction of movement into painting,' without involving the structure of the work itself or the nature of the sign. He makes reference to Van Gogh's painted landscapes as an example, though clarifies that this is not limited to painting and pervades all forms of artistic discourse. This process is evident throughout my journals and visual narratives, and permeates both my observational drawings and accidental marks. In the case of the latter, the mark precedes the referent, and the artist assigns meaning to the sign. The nature of the sign does not change after being read as its association has been established by the artist through a process of editing. The form of the illustration thus retains the quality of movement and spontaneity described by Eco while still remaining legible. Eco (1989:85) explains how movement can also be suggested through the repetition of figures in order to represent characters throughout different moments in a narrative. This is relevant in its application to autobiographical narrative forms, not only in reference to the author as the protagonist and narrator of a given story, but also in relation to visual narrative discourse (especially comics given its fetishistic use of images in sequence). Visual narrative essentially feigns movement by placing images in sequence.

According to Eco, it is crucial to understand that it is not the 'aesthetic value' of an act of vitality which concerns us, as much as it is its ability to communicate something (see Fig. 60-61). 'A work of art can be open only in so far as it remains a work; beyond a certain boundary it becomes mere noise' (1989:100). *Robbie, I Rode Over Snowball* communicates autobiographical content using interpretive illustrated forms

as a document of the artistic process in which it was made, but it is fundamentally through the strategic placement of these images in sequence that legibility is achieved. The result is that communication is never a product of an existing pre-knowledge of the author's process, but rather that the artist aesthetically evokes this visually.

Groensteen refers to an initial distrust of comics by both the public and academia. The comics form represented a severe displacement of the commonly accepted hierarchy between word and image, where the power of the image was somewhat feared because of its ability to allow a reader to project him/herself onto the characters represented, inadvertently identifying with them (2009:6) as well as with a conceptualised notion of the author, as communicated through autobiographical narrative. The manner in which I illustrate my autobiographical narratives (or for lack of a better word, their 'style') provides the reader not only with an identifiable visual context within which one is able to associate with the artist, but also an alternative way of reading that is neither didactic nor pedagogical. My journals initiate a platform for the creation of interpretive illustrated forms, coded visual signifiers through the creation of visual vernacular and an alternative form of representation that can be read as a completed, autobiographical, narrative object. The reader is ultimately afforded an opportunity to identify with the characters represented.

3.3   THE VISUAL JOURNAL AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ARCHIVE

3.3.1   Narrating human experience through documentation

The visual journal can be argued to operate as both a personal and public document of narrated human experience. I place emphasis on the word 'narrated' after having previously discussed the notion of self as other. I argue that the visual journal, in its association as a deeply personal narrative object and its function as an autobiographical narrative device, provides the ideal platform to feign referential representation through a perceived natural progression of illustrated autobiographical instances. Löschnigg (2006:3) notes how 1970s and early 1980s deconstructuralist theory claimed that there could be no representation of true 'self' in language. A similar observation was made by Barthes (1977:145) in *The Death of the Author,* where he describes writing as 'no longer [able to] designate an operation of

recording, notation, representation [or] 'depiction.' I argue that the conceptual grounds on which such a judgement about the visual journal can be made, stems mainly from what Löschnigg (2006:3) describes as the autobiographical referent's reappearance in the 1980s 'in the guise of a personal document of human experience.'[17]

My visual journals function as autobiographical narrative objects that allow me to rearticulate and rewrite constructs of self on an almost daily basis. A tension lies between documenting personal narratives through images and text in sequence while still conforming to public concepts of a profession that serves to legitimise it as a readable art object.[18] A case in point is how artists' visual journals and journal entries are now exhibited in high-end museums and printed in art publications. *Bitterkomix 15* (2008) went as far as to publish sixteen pages of journal entries by Anton Kannemeyer, Conrad Botes and Noyau. This indicates, above all else, that the visual journal, like autobiographical visual narrative, can be and is made to be read. Bruner (1993:41) argues that, while autobiography operates around the private intentions of the autobiographer, it also has been created for the purpose of public interpretation as part of 'a general and perpetual conversation about life possibilities.' The visual journal artist is able to narrate his/her personal experiences, through the filter of memory, visual language and imagination and in a non-chronological fashion. The process of visual journaling is indicative of a natural progression of assimilating illustrated forms and documenting experiences. The result is that the boundaries between referential and fictive representation are further blurred, augmenting the potential for a legitimisation of autobiographical narrative. The visual journal operates as a personal and public document of the artist's experience that is first produced in the personal and intimate space of the author, then made to be read by the public,

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[17] This concept corresponds to what Löschnigg describes as the 'narrative turn' in the human sciences where people began to investigate the framing of human experience through narrative discourse. Narrative began to play a crucial role in contextualising personal and public memory and was prioritised in constructing a sense of self and consequently a sense of individual identity (2006:3).

[18] 'Conversion narratives were the most common form of autobiographical writing in the Puritan colonies of 17th century New England, circulating readily among American colonists and stemming directly from Calvinism' (Yemenedzi-Malathouni 2006:87). These narratives consisted of public expressions of the experience of conversion and an overscrupulous examination of one's daily life through diary keeping (Yemenedzi-Malathouni 2006:81). Potential saints were required to recite their spiritual self-narratives before an elect of the congregation they aspired to join, who then decided whether or not the conversion was genuine, depending on its 'legitimacy'. (Yemenedzi-Malathouni 2006:87).

either through exhibitions or as a result of meeting people in the street who ask to see what you are drawing.

The public views these documents in an effort to gain insight into the artist's personal process and more specifically his/her own narrative context, given the intimate nature of the form and the perception that these objects were never intended for public display. While produced in the deeply private space of the artist, visual journal entries are consumed by the public through a voyeuristic window of opportunity. Smith (2007:http://www.artthrob.co.za/06july/reviews/aop.html) reviews an exhibition opening of Anton Kannemeyer's work entitled *The Days of Our Lives* (2006) at the Art on Paper Gallery in Johannesburg. The exhibition title references the popular daytime soap-opera *Days of Our Lives* and deals with Kannmeyer's 'preoccupation with the parochial … evident as far back as the first edition of *Bitterkomix*,' according to Smith (see Fig. 62-63). Smith notes how much of the show was comprised of sketchbook pages, ideas and images generated in 'the private realm of the artist' and then shown to the public (Smith).
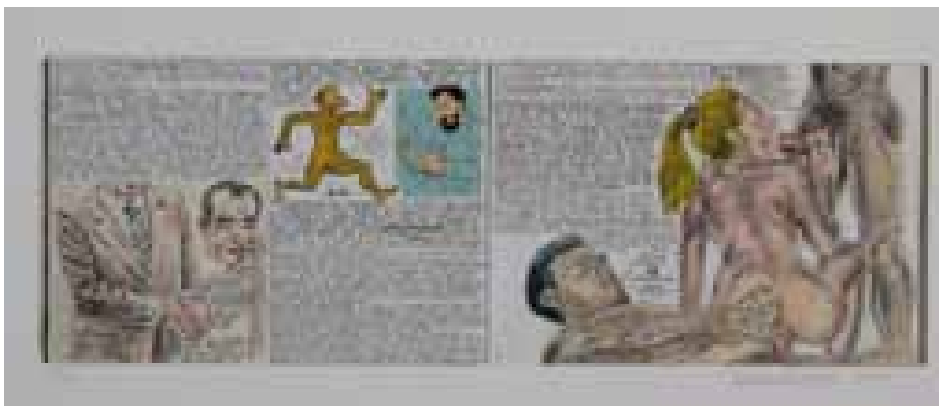
Fig. 62. Anton Kannemeyer, *Page 5* (2006). Ink and marker on paper, 20 x 40 (*Journal 8* 2006:5).

Fig. 63. Anton Kannemeyer, *Part 1* (2007). Mixed media on paper, 105 x 21 (*Journal 9 part 1* 2006:5).

According to Barthes, every narrative relies on a set of protocols in which a narrative is consumed. He uses the epistolary novel as an example of how narrative devices use documents as a form of representation to 'naturalise' narrative 'by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance' (1977:116). This is also evident in the visual journal, not only in terms of its attempt to document human experience under the umbrella of autobiographical discourse, but also through its function as an autobiographical document in itself. It also makes use of collected documents such as letters, ticket slips, written anecdotes, photographs and other assimilated memorabilia to legitimise the assumption that it is indeed referential. An example is a travel journal I recently took with me to Europe (see Fig. 64-68). Not only does the journal contain observational drawings of people, buildings and objects, but it also holds bus passes, train tickets and in this case a map a family member illustrated on a dirty serviette at a bar. Not only does the observational drawing of the woman I drew on the train that day remain archived within a library of autobiographical content contained within my visual journal, but the map drawn on the serviette, accompanied by the pub's logo, serves as a reminder of what I did that day and consequently aids the larger narrative. Barthes claims that this can be attributed to a modern demand for signs which do not appear as signs (1977:117) and is ultimately used to legitimise narrative.

While *Bitterkomix* has made use of strategic autobiographical narrative devices (as discussed in earlier chapters) they only began to include visual journal entries in the fifteenth issue. The epistolary novel does, however, provide an interesting comparison in its approach to communicating narrative. Formal documents such as

letters, newspaper clippings and photographs (among others) are used to narrate the story as articulated by characters in the plot. The epistolary novel, although not autobiographical, makes use of techniques that are synonymous with autobiographical and biographical discourse in an attempt to make its content appear true to life. The objective is to fake referential representation by assigning the narrative a real-life quality. I use the example of the epistolary novel in reference to similar functions found within the artist's visual journal, which in turn utilise similar forms of documentation to illustrate autobiographical narrative.[19]

Fig. 64. Roberto Millan, *Red lips on train, Barcelona* (2011). Book, 18 x 9 (*BEFS journal* 2011:17-18).

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[19] One example of an epistolary novel is Bram Stoker's famous account of *Dracula* (1897)*.* The novel itself is written by several fictional narrators, who also serve as the main protagonists of the story. *Dracula* is made up entirely of addressed letters, newspaper articles and written journal entries. Both these elements give the story a biographical feel by blurring the line between fiction and reality, and making the story appear to be documented through research.

Fig. 65. Roberto Millan, *Catedral de Barcelona, Barcelona* (2011). Book, 18 x 9 (*BEFS journal* 2011:17-18).
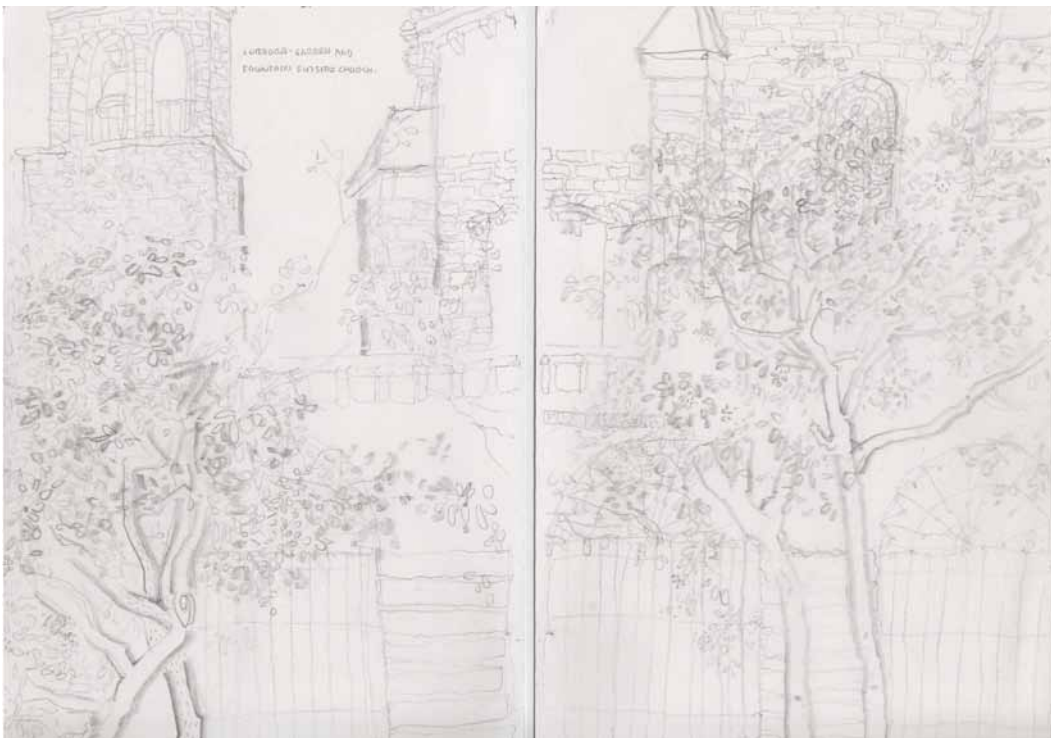
Fig. 66. Roberto Millan, *Church patio, Cordoba* (2011). Book, 18 x 9 (*BEFS journal* 2011:17-18).
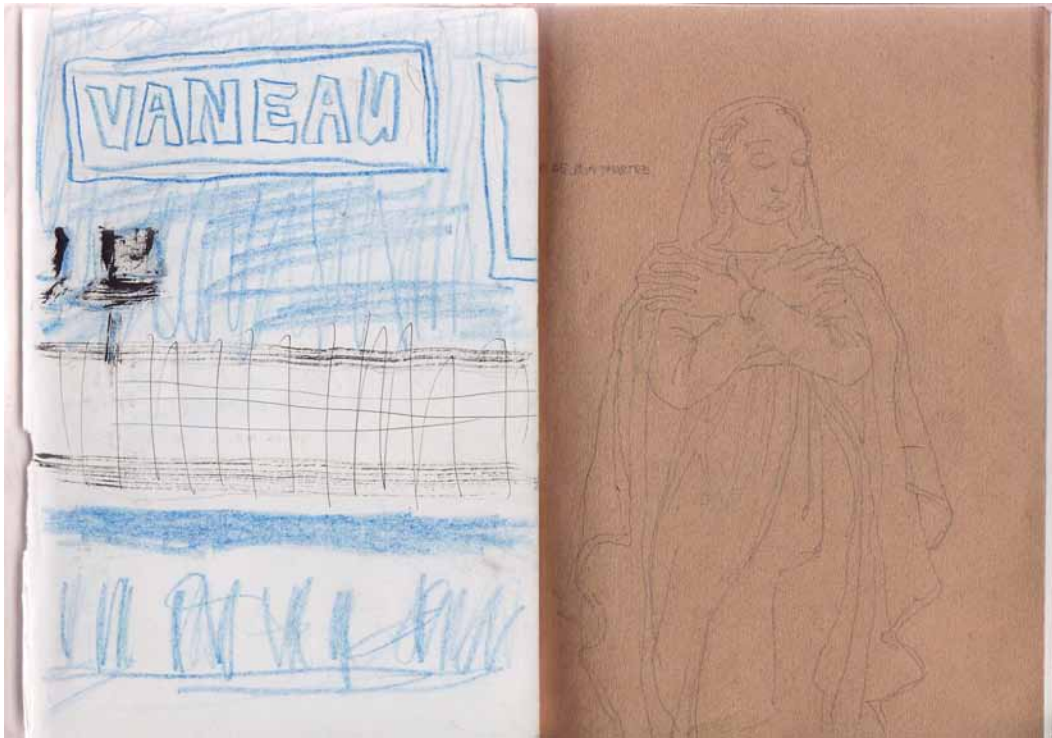
Fig. 67. Roberto Millan, *Vaneau station, Vaneau* (2011). Book, 18 x 9 (*BEFS journal* 2011:17-18).
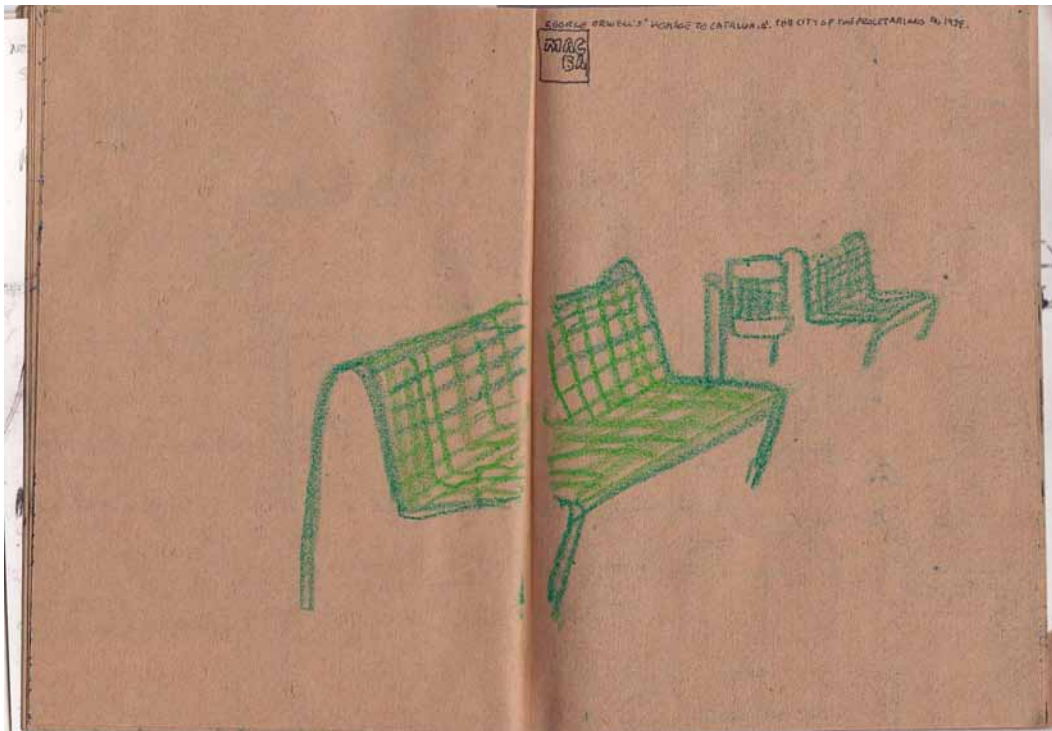

Fig. 68. Roberto Millan, *Plaza de la Policia, Sardanyola* (2011). Book, 18 x 9 (*BEFS journal* 2011:17-18).

South African toy-maker and visual narrative artist Pete Woodbridge refers to his visual journals as 'doodle books'. Having worked for South Africa's most successful commercial comics studio *Strika Entertainment* on the *Supa Strikas* comic book for a number of years*,* he describes his journals as a process where documentation and autobiography intertwine in a manner that challenges conventional notions of what could constitute comic art (2010:s.pag.). Woodbridge acknowledges that his observational drawings *Figure Drawings on Train* (2010) form a sequence within his *Train Journal* (2010) as a result of drawing people on the train every day (see Fig. 62-66). While Woodbridge may not have had any other narrative intention than simply to record his observations during his daily commute from Muizenberg to Cape Town, his journal entries function as a narrative sequence when read one image after the other. The journal can thus be said to constitute a narrative object in its use of the form to communicate a natural progression of events in the daily routine of the artist. This could just as easily be argued to be autobiographical and reveals how Woodbridge's journal becomes a personal document in itself.

Hot chocolate illustration/coffee (2009) and *Hot chocolate illustration/plate* (2009) comprise an isolated narrative vignette (see Fig. 69-70) that propagates notions of authenticity, through the use of mixed media, as documented proof in the form of two juxtaposed images in my *Chequebook journal (*2009*)*. The illustrations consist of two observational drawings, the first a cup of hot chocolate and the second a recently emptied plate of chocolate-covered pancakes. I created the illustrations using hot chocolate from my meal as an ink-wash. The visual journal accommodates an extended remembering of the event simply by smelling the page itself, which still to this day carries a light hint of coco powder. The hot chocolate functions as a document that has the ability to trigger four of the five senses. This can also be regarded as a measure of authenticity or 'proof' in the legitimisation of narrative form.
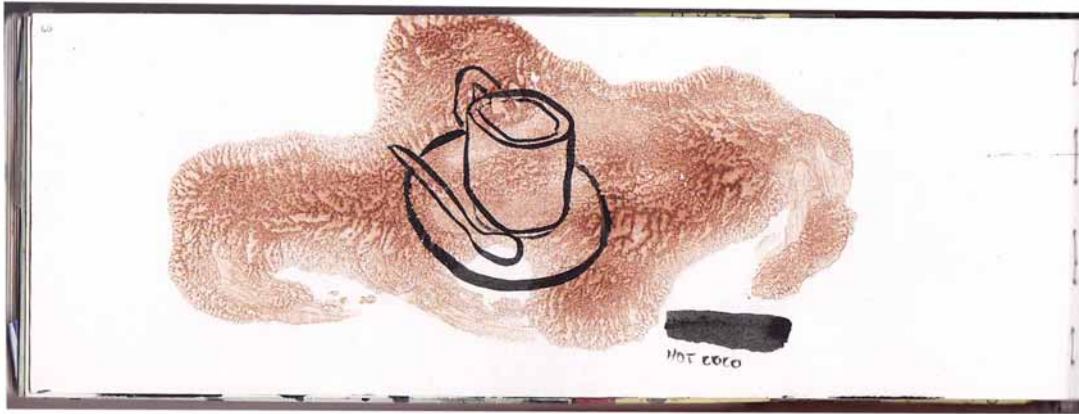
Fig. 69. Roberto Millan, *Hot chocolate illustration/coffee* (2009). Hot chocolate and ink, 14,5 x 7,2 (*Chequebook journal* 2009:60).
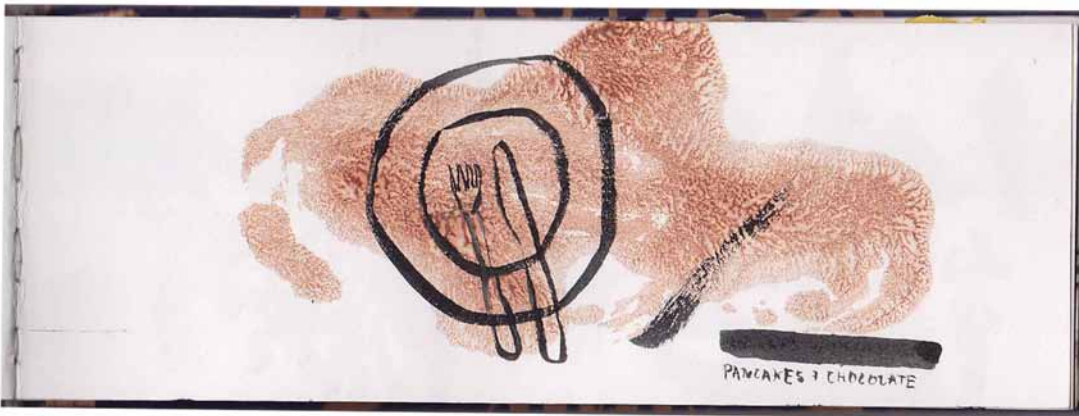
Fig. 70. Roberto Millan, *Hot chocolate illustration/plate* (2009). Hot chocolate and ink, 14,5 x 7,2 (*Chequebook journal* 2009:60).

Fig. 71. Pete Woodbridge, *Faces 32* (2010). Colour markers, 20,5 x 14,2 (*Train Journal* 2010:32).

Fig. 72. Pete Woodbridge, *Faces 36* (2010). Colour markers, 20,5 x 14,2 (*Train Journal* 2010:36).

Fig. 73. Pete Woodbridge, *Faces 50* (2010). Colour markers, 20,5 x 14,2 (*Train Journal* 2010:50).

Fig. 74. Pete Woodbridge, *Faces 54* (2010). Colour markers, 20,5 x 14,2 (*Train Journal* 2010:54).

Fig. 75. Pete Woodbridge, *Faces 67* (2010). Colour markers, 20,5 x 14,2 (*Train Journal* 2010:67).

CONCLUSION

I have framed an analysis of autobiographical visual narrative in *Bitterkomix* and my own work using comics discourse. In doing so I have established fundamental narrative techniques common to both, as they relate directly to the use of image and word. By focusing on forms of visual representation, as opposed to a combination of image and word, I am able to prioritise a process of writing unique to every artist, thereby extending a definition of autobiographical visual narrative to include alternative forms of visual representation. It is not necessary to define my own visual narratives as comics per se, but rather as an extension of what the comics form can achieve.

I choose to define autobiographical illustration as an interpretative and experimental visual writing process used to affirm and negate perceived concepts of self through memory, translation and imagination. Imagination acts as an extension of current memory from which perceived past, present and future identity constructs emanate and extend in different directions. These constructs are by no means indicative of historical fact but often appear to be so given autobiography's association as a

referential text. It is the very tension that allows autobiography to legitimise narrative by provoking more intimate interactions between the viewer and the text.

In Chapter 1 of this study I discussed the manner in which people interact and engage with images through representations of self. Images have largely become a substitute for reality through which individuals and cultural groups are able to create, alter and assert identity constructs. Neither images nor words, however, are able to represent objective reality without some form of inaccuracy or bias. This is especially true with regards to illustrated images. Words can be considered non-pictorial icons consisting of completely abstract images that serve to reference an idea or concept. Images consist of pictorial icons that closer resemble the object they refer to in lesser, though varying degrees of abstraction. By framing the structure of visual narrative as such, it is no longer necessary to view text and image in isolation from each other. This also elucidates the function of cartooning in comics and its permeation within all forms of visual narrative. Cartooning consists of the simplification of illustrated forms through the removal of unnecessary details, while amplifying specific details. This process is defined in each artist's work as a characteristically fine balance between levels of abstraction and legibility. Through the process of cartooning the reader is given the space to interpret the image, thereby identifying with it and ultimately participating in the narrative.

Having further considered the relationship between image, word and cartoon and the relevance of comics discourse in analysing visual narrative, I discussed key reading strategies synonymous with the form. Comics are often marketed as inherently easy to read given their popularity as a pedagogical tool, but can in many cases be quite complex, and in all cases require the use of basic reading conventions. Comics are unique in that there is a tension between the experience of reading images in sequence, the page spread as a whole and the physical format of the object being read. This in turn allows comics to use form as a signifier in itself to communicate autobiographical content. I have argued that this process propagates a fetishistic relationship between the reader and the narrative in requiring him or her to dwell on certain parts of the bigger picture (quite literally), thereby initiating a level of intimacy between the reader and the narrative. The notion of intimacy remains crucial to this study in its relationship to forms of autobiographical visual narrative. Comics mark a

distinct shift within visual narrative in that a reading requires the reader to actively participate in the narrative.

In the final section of Chapter 1 I investigated key contemporary autobiographical writing practices in an attempt to establish a more flexible definition of autobiography, one that would accommodate what I argue to be more alternative forms of autobiographical visual representation. Among the most important deductions made is that autobiography does not operate exclusively as a referential text (a result of its analysis within the framework of biography) but instead is filtered through the confounds of interpretive memory and is eventually translated through language. It is through autobiography that the artist is able to reconstitute his own autobiographical identity, as well as those of his subjects, through an act of possession, a process repeated by the reader. Agency does, however, extend itself in both directions.

In Chapter 2 I explored in detail curatorial strategies used by certain *Bitterkomix* artists to communicate autobiographical content. Autobiography operates as a product of translation through personal interpretive memory and visual language. As a result, autobiographical writing cannot be identical with the autobiographical author, which in turn leads to a formulated conception of self as other. Memory as a filter through which autobiographical writing occurs is not limited to things in the past as much as it is to things in their absence. Subjectivity can only be understood in relation to that which is between the absent and the imagined. This provides the basis for the overlapping of memory with imagination where autobiographical writing projects itself both backwards and forwards in time. The success of John Murray's *Portrait Uit Pretoria* does not lie in its accuracy, but rather in his satirical and personal interpretation of Pretoria and its people. Memory does not, however, form the only source of identity and subjectivity. Autobiography is used strategically within *Bitterkomix* to consciously undermine and unmask the ideological remnants of nationalist Afrikaans culture. Autobiographical strips are consciously delegated by both Botes and Kannemeyer to communicate the broader topic of the publication, and ultimately re-established what it meant to be white, Afrikaans and South African. Autobiography thus helped to assert the legitimacy of the publication.

Narrative identity can be reconstructed and is evident in *Bitterkomix'*s use of autobiography as a subversive discourse. It is the subversive trait of the genre, in its

potential to undermine established authority, that makes it ideal for socio-political commentary and political satire. This is further amplified by the classification of *Bitterkomix* as an underground publication.

The operations of memory within autobiography is ultimately a social process, less focused on objective representations than on memory's interaction with things, people and events. The artist, using his autobiographical image, can use this process to project ideas of self (namely autobiographical self) onto the reader. A process of 'collective remembering' has been initiated by the editors of the 'zine by allowing the target market of disillusioned, post-1994 Afrikaner youth to recognise the subject matter of the publication and identify with the problems raised. This same group of people were afforded an opportunity to resist and reconstruct labels associated with mainstream Afrikaans culture forced onto them as children through a process that in large part can be accredited to the use of autobiography as a subversive genre.

It is also the use of compartmentalisation of self as an autobiographical device, most particularly by Anton Kannemeyer, that allows narrative identity to be reconstituted by artists for different strategic purposes. This is a direct result of an othering of self through the use of multiple, recurring visual signifiers within his work that communicate underlying ideological themes. Joe Dog, Boetie and Max Plant are examples of these visual signifiers in *Bitterkomix*. The Boetie figure reappears in strips dealing with concurrent ideological themes of sexual repression, race and authority, strategically using the Tintin figure, through a process of cartooning, as a reference to the racially charged *Tintin in the Congo*. Max Plant represents a somewhat more fictive representation of Kannemeyer as an anti-authoritarian figure and a younger version of himself. Both Boetie's and Max Plant's appearance constitute an autobiographical persona within another autobiographical persona (Joe Dog) and reveal the complex process in which compartmentalisation is used within *Bitterkomix* as an autobiographical device.

In section 2.4 of this study I have argued how autobiographical visual narrative is unique in its ability to position the artist as both the protagonist and narrator of events, while simultaneously allowing for a characteristic and intimate recollection of these events through the process of cartooning. The confessional act in visual narrative operates on two diverging lines: firstly, through the revelation to the public

of personal identity constructs as created and articulated through narrative language (a result of translation through memory and language); and secondly, through the revelation of more referential events using visual narrative as an autobiographical document of sorts. The subject's sense of being a subject is heightened and therefore represents a further othering of self through narrative constructs regardless of whether events were referential or not. *Bitterkomix* functions as public confessional for artists such as Ina van Zyl, Paddy Bouma, John Murray and more specifically Anton Kannemeyer and Karlien de Villiers, who reveal topics usually considered strictly taboo.

I have also asserted a strong correspondence between the confessional act of the artist as narrator and propagated forms of intimacy between the reader and the work. My extended definition of autobiographical visual writing practices no longer exclusively places the artist/autobiographer in a position of vulnerability, since it is the autobiographical subject that becomes the focus of the viewer's gaze, not the artist himself. The visual journal can also be viewed in comparison with relations of power in 17th century Puritans' spiritual narratives of conversion, which both involve a public and personal staging of autobiographical narrative in which standards are conformed to, and ultimately subverted to certain degrees. This subversion suggests the possibility of a cathartic process through narrative constructions of self.

Individual identity and cultural identity are narratively constructed through memory and translation. Narrative identity can be reshaped through the use of autobiographical visual narrative devices, not only with the intention of changing the way people view the artist and themselves through representations of self within his or her work, but also through the way the artist views his or her own identity as a result of his or her work. This process is evident in *Bitterkomix*. Kannemeyer is successful in narratively reconstructing his personal experience of high school in *Jeugweerbaarheid* (1994), while allowing those reading the strip who have had similar experiences to identify with it. *Bitterkomix* serves a cathartic function and 'reveals' and 'uncovers' underlying ideological conventions of repression. It is the process of revealing and consequently the reconstruction of individual and white Afrikaans narrative identity that makes *Bitterkomix* so successful.

Chapter 3 of this study explored deductions made in previous chapters and applied them to the visual journal as an autobiographical device. My visual journals serve to open up forms of illustration and interpretation through a focus on autonomous, expressive and accidental mark-making techniques. A compromise is reached between more abstract illustrated forms and heightened degrees of legibility, through the application of an editing process that encompasses the use of cartooning techniques and the placement of these images in sequence. It is the tension between these elements, specifically with regards to the mark as a visual articulation of the process in which it was made, which encourages an intimate interaction between the reader and the narrative. I have argued that this approach to illustrating form is strongly autobiographical in its ability to allow the public to co-create meaning alongside the artist and to see the world through the artist's own eyes. It is, however, crucial to understand that the reader is only afforded an opportunity to identify with a conceptualised notion of the author through autobiographical writing, in as much as it relates to the artist's autobiographical image.

The visual journal acts as an incubator and visual archive of artistic processes, ideas and devices, created in the private space of the author and exhibited as an autobiographical narrative object. An obvious tension exists between the documentation of personal narratives while still conforming to public concepts of the profession that serve to legitimise it as a readable object. The visual journal is characteristic of an intimate form of visual representation that is not limited to the confines of conventional autobiographical visual narrative practices, specifically with regards to structural forms of visual narrative. This in turn accommodates a more extensive understanding of what constitutes autobiographical visual narrative. I am able to appropriate interpreted images and observational drawings directly from my journals into what I argue to be alternative forms of autobiographical visual narrative, of which the most relevant to the practical component of this study are the visual journal as an autobiographical narrative object and the published artist's sketchbook.

My visual journals function as an archive of the processes in which my work has been created, and as a form of memory in itself. The journal operates as the linguistic foundation of itself and the open discussion of its own poetic system. The visual journal becomes the core of its own reading, and is self-referential in the decoding of its own messages. The evolution and discovery of new codes as opposed to

progressive recoil towards an original foundational code is prioritised, ultimately revealing that it is not the 'aesthetic value' of an act of vitality which this study aims to propagate, but rather its ability to communicate something. Communication is made even more complex through the 'naturalising' of narrative by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance, amplified through forms of visual journaling and attributed to a demand for signs that do not appear as signs. The result is a renewed focus on autobiographical visual writing techniques within the visual journal which accommodates alternative forms of autobiographical representation.

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