

# **Giving Voice: An Exploration of Different Narrative Voices to Communicate Experiences of Depression**

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## Abstract

How can I design a graphic novel that allows me to share my traumatised experiences of depression through conversations between different personae, so that other people who resonate with me may receive comfort? This practice-based graphic novel project, *Visiting Marianne Knorr*, has been created based on auto-ethnographic and pre-visualisation methodology.

*Visiting Marianne Knorr* tells the story of an Asian university student, suffering from depression, who has been given some letters written by an Austrian female writer Marianne Knorr, who died in the 1960s. Relying on these letters, the student comes to Austria to track down any remaining traces of Marianne, and at the same time manages her spiritual pain while thinking about the significance of life. In this project, I have designed a fictional semi-epistolary narrative based on my experience of depression and the diary entries I wrote during that period, which also aims to enable me to communicate with my voice in the past, in addition to the above content.

After considering the broader field of the illustrated novel by means of the contextual review process, this project has focused upon several existing works and experimental books made by contemporary graphic novelists. Following that, I employed a heuristic method to explore the various narrative structures that are made possible through the graphic novel format, including adjusting and experimenting with the relationship between images and text, and time and space. Through the content that I have outlined above, the project tries to play with the formal characteristics that are inherent to the graphic novel medium, so as to create for readers a sympathetic and interesting reading experience, that suits the narration.

Key words: graphic novel, practice-based research, auto-ethnography

## Acknowledgments

In this project, first of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and high respect to my supervisor Dr Miriam Harris. She led me into the academic field of the graphic novel, and has been teaching, guiding and helping me as much as possible in the English proofreading and production process of the project. It was her erudition, patience, understanding and constant encouragement that helped me to complete the production of this graphic novel and the writing of this thesis. And kind regards to Dr Layne Waerea, whose guidance helped my thesis get on the right track.

Also, I would like to thank AUT university and its faculty and staff for allowing me to start the project and helping me get more time when I can't finish the project on time due to personal reasons.

Finally, I also pay tribute to my parents and friends. Although they are not around me, their support in all aspects has become my pillar.

## Table of images

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**The following images are cited from several graphic novels and the copyright belongs to their original authors.**

Figure 2: Marjane Satrapi, “Covers of the English version of *Persepolis* Books 1 and 2”(graphic novel covers), New York: Pantheon Books, *Persepolis* The Story of a Childhood: 2000, *Persepolis* The Story of a Return: 2004.

Figure 3: Art Spiegelman, “Covers of the first volume of *Maus*”(graphic novel cover), New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except that which appears in the citations and acknowledgments. Nor does it contain material which to a substantial extent I have submitted for the qualification for any other degree of another university or other institution of higher learning.

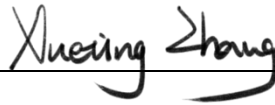
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Date (YYYYMMDD) 2019/12/08

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Signature of the candidate:



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# Introduction

*Visiting Marianne Knorr* is a graphic novel containing narration from the perspective of a young Asian woman, who suffers from depression. Having discovered some letters by an Austrian female writer, Marianne Knorr, who supposedly committed suicide in the 1960s, this lonely young woman comes to rely upon these letters, and consider the writer a friend of hers. When her mental stability deteriorates, the young woman considers giving up her life, but instead embarks upon travels within Austria, searching for traces of Marianne.

This fictional narrative draws upon my own experiences of depression, so in the first chapter I have positioned myself in several roles: as a commercial illustrator, a patient with depression, and also a researcher of existentialist philosophy. Due to the fact that this project is based on an auto-ethnographic methodology, I initially outline the personal reasons why I decided to do this research, in the first chapter of this thesis.

In the subsequent chapter, Contextual Review, I discuss the larger field of graphic novels and examine several case studies. Although comics were once regarded as a format for children, like animation, the scope of the graphic novel has gradually developed over the years. Following the founding of *Raw* in 1980 - an underground comic magazine for adult audiences - by the graphic novelist Art Spiegelman and his wife Françoise Mouly, graphic novels with serious topics have gradually increased in popularity. Amongst these graphic novels with serious subject matter, I have been particularly interested in works that express personal traumatic experiences. Through the writing of case studies focusing on several famous examples, such as *Maus*, *Fun Home*, and *Persepolis*, I gained a better sense of how they communicated with readers. In addition to the ways in which these works express traumatic experiences, I also paid attention to the extent to which the definition of the medium “graphic novels” can be expanded, and therefore studied certain experimental works and was enlightened by several of their methods.

In Chapter 3, Methodology, I introduce two basic methodologies and methods: auto-ethnography and pre-visualisation. In relation to the auto-ethnographic methodology, I have documented how I designed the fictional narrative based on my experiences, and also, how I drew upon my past to design the voice for the character of Marianne Knorr. With regards to the pre-

visualisation methodology, since the project utilises practice-based research, I have described in greater detail the steps involved in my practice through my use of the contextual review and heuristic method.

In Chapter 4, Practice, I explain how I have developed my project. This includes the plans, tests, and experimental steps I designed, the problems that occurred and how I solved them, and the choices I made.

Finally, the Conclusion chapter summarises the whole project, considers the questions and problems it raises, and thinks about further research that can be extended into the future.

# Positioning Statement

## -1- Internet Commercial Illustrator

In 2008, I graduated from high school and became an undergraduate at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing. In China, more than a decade ago, drawing was not taken seriously by most adults as a subject worthy of study and was considered to be useless. Thus, although I have loved art ever since my childhood, I never had the opportunity to participate in courses which would have trained me to develop artistic skills. Following from the latter, my choices in college were restricted, which led me to pursue art history as my undergraduate major, given that it was the closest subject to art which was accessible to me. At the beginning of my studies, I began teaching myself how to paint digitally in my spare time, which is easier than developing traditional fine arts skills. The four years which I spent doing that have formed the entire basis of my current skills.

Four years later, I slowly entered the field of internet commercial illustrators. Having read Japanese comics from an early age, my artistic style was inclined towards resembling a Japanese one. However, learning about art history during my undergraduate courses led me to incorporate classical oil painting techniques in my creations. Career-wise, as a modern commercial illustrator, my source of work largely depends on its popularity online. After I started artistically training myself, it became difficult for me to maintain an interest in and connection to real people. Yet owing to the Internet, I was able to find friends, since minority groups with the same interests can easily gather through it. I thus gradually began spending most of my time online.

These years spent mostly online have brought me into contact with many people whom similarly to myself, struggle with depression. Although depression is a common problem in today's world which affects people of many career paths, such a form of trauma is even more common among artists. According to one of the group experiments conducted by the University of Iowa, 80% of creative workers have experienced depression or mania during their lives.<sup>1</sup> The distance which the Internet allows people to maintain between each other's real lives grants a sense of safety

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<sup>1</sup> Higier, et al. "Creativity and Mental Illness: Prevalence Rates in Writers and Their First-Degree Relatives," American Journal of Psychiatry, April 2006, <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/ajp.144.10.1288>.

in communicating one's thoughts and feelings, especially negative ones that are hard to share with one's family. This facilitates the process of getting to know the other and connecting through similarities, despite coming from different backgrounds. In my 'real' social circle, a person such as myself is not understood by most, not even by my closest relatives. Given this, some of us feel as though we are only taken care of by connections with each other through the Internet. I find this mode of interaction mode to be very similar to the kind of friendship which was once maintained between pen pals in the past, so I have chosen to use this relationship as the basis upon which the characters in my book are defined (the issue of narrative structure design will be explained in detail in a later chapter). The purpose of my graphic novel is thus to convey the difficulties that my friends and I have experienced over the years. I hope that through this medium, people will gain a better understanding of the pain which those suffering with depression are experiencing around them, thereby enabling those who are depressed to feel understood.

## -2- Depression Group

Depressive emotions have always been with me, even before I was in high school. The pressure of studying suffocated me until I started my undergraduate degree. But things did not necessarily improve after I became an illustrator. Due to relying too much in my life on the Internet and the comments of others, internet bullying became a trigger of my depression. In China, many parents regard depression as psychopathology, similar to a shameful scandal. Not only did my parents not believe that I was being attacked at that moment, but they also refused to provide me with any financial support for medical aid and strictly forbade me to seek any psychological help. Although my religious faith had helped to alleviate the illness, the same states would periodically return because of severe trauma in my mind. Thus, I have spent so many years struggling with depression, that I have lost count of how long it has exactly been.

During my struggle with depression, painting and writing have held a uniquely significant position for me, because doing either creates a haven for me in an otherwise depressing real world. When I was in junior high school, I felt isolated by my classmates, which often led me to feel inferior to them. During that phase of my youth, artistic creation imbued my life with a sense of meaning. I often express my feelings and comfort myself through drawing and writing and even if much time has passed between an image I have drawn and the current moment, I can still be comforted by turning to it(Figure 1).



Figure 1.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Figure 1: This image was created to ease my emotions during a phase of depression. The male character is the original design for one of the characters in my graphic novel. (2018)

In most cases, a lot of the people I know who suffer with depression hate it, but there are also a few who like myself, who do not consider the trauma to be a complete disaster. Despite the enormous pain and inconvenience I have had to suffer, my personality has also significantly changed in positive ways due to it. Firstly, as a self-taught illustrator without any artistic foundations, I derived more inspiration and emotional sensitivity from depression, which has led my improvement of drawing skills to unfold rapidly. Secondly, my ability to sense things mentally has also slowly grown ever since my depression led me to become interested in psychology and philosophy. Therefore, the other purpose of my project is to assist in furthering my understanding of myself.

### -3- Existentialism Researcher

As previously mentioned, my depression led me to develop an interest in philosophy, and especially its existential branch. In recent years, I have been on my own in New Zealand and the stress of loneliness, schoolwork, and illustration work has worsened my depression. Apart from the occasional mental breakdown, I don't derive a sense of accomplishment from any action in life. Given this, upon the recommendation of my friends more than a year ago, I began reading Albert Camus' philosophical essays<sup>3</sup>. In Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he suggests that both types of suicide (philosophical suicide and physical suicide) are due to an awareness of the absurdity of the world<sup>4</sup>. Camus' works thus opened the door to existentialist philosophy to me. After that, I briefly read some works of other existentialists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>5</sup> and Søren Kierkegaard<sup>6</sup>. Although I am by no means a professional philosopher, their different ideas have broadened my understanding of myself and awakened my interest in the human mind.

In Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*<sup>7</sup>, he mentions the concept of "choice". A person can change his life by relying on a series of different choices, and when faced with a choice, not choosing also consists of a choice.<sup>8</sup> Kierkegaard proposed that each individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely, or "authentically."<sup>9</sup> Under this idea, the main theme of existentialist literature has often been descriptions of the individual's loneliness in an absurd world, of the dark mentality of solitude, and of disappointment and tremendous fear, but it has also inspired people to change these states or conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus (7 November 1913 – 4 January 1960), French Algerian philosopher, author, and journalist.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, *MYTH OF SISYPHUS* (New York: VINTAGE, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (21 June 1905 – 15 April 1980), French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic.

<sup>6</sup> Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (5 May 1813 – 11 November 1855), Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Lowrie, "Attack upon Christendom by Søren Kierkegaard," Goodreads, April 21 1968, [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/352087.Attack\\_upon\\_Christendom](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/352087.Attack_upon_Christendom).

When I look back upon my experience, the choices of the past cannot be changed, but I *can* reproduce the feelings and struggles of the past through fictional stories. As such, in the narrative design of my project I have divided myself into three roles:

- Marianne: a writer who lived in the 1960s.
- Lawrence: Marianne's illustrator pen friend.
- "Me": an illustrator who happened to hold Marianne's letter in 2019.

They have similar artistic backgrounds and have also suffered from depression, but they make different choices, which lead them to experience different outcomes. Through the setting of this scenario, I can examine my own choices and clarify my inner thoughts. At the same time, the story between these three characters can also convey to readers what I previously mentioned, namely what it is like to live as a person suffering with depression.



## Contextual review

My project is about sharing my traumatic experiences of depression through the medium of a graphic novel. There are many artists who choose to express their traumatic feelings in a variety of ways through graphic novels. Through the use of allegory to express and visualise such invisible emotions, people can empathise with and have more cognition of such a mental state. However, even though many attempts have been made through narratives and images, the possibilities of graphic novels and their ability to reach an audience are unlimited. By conducting research into these three related contexts, I will create a certain foundation for how to design a graphic novel that fits my project:

- 1- Traumatic experiences expressed through graphic novels
- 2- Giving voices: the Emotions of Silent Stories
- 3- The Structure of a Graphic Novel

### -1- Traumatic Experiences Expressed through Graphic Novels

Although, much like animation, graphic novels were once regarded as something for children, the scope of this genre has gradually developed over the years. Comics addressing serious themes directed at adult audiences became more popular after the 1980s. Graphic novelist Art Spiegelman<sup>10</sup> and his wife Françoise Mouly founded *Raw*, an underground comic magazine for adult audiences, in July 1980. In this magazine, he invited many young, unknown comic artists to serialise, and also serialised his own graphic novel called *Maus*<sup>11</sup>, which is about his father's painful memories as a Jew during World War II. According to James Campbell, “*Maus* looms large not only over Spiegelman's body of work, but over the comics’ medium itself”. While Spiegelman was not the

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<sup>10</sup> Art Spiegelman (February 15, 1948 - ), American cartoonist, editor, and comics advocate best known for his graphic novel *Maus*.

<sup>11</sup> Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (London: Penguin, 1992).

first to create a biographical comic, it was *Maus* which popularized this medium.<sup>12</sup> Nowadays, the graphic novel has already become a medium that can be serious and considered to be an art form of its own.

Among these graphic novels addressing serious subjects, I am interested in works that express personal traumatic experiences. As mentioned before, depression is a common problem in today's world: over 11% of the population in developing countries and 15% of developed countries suffer from this mental health problem<sup>13</sup> and such trauma is even more common among artists than ordinary people. According to one of the group experiments which have been conducted by Nancy C. Anderson, a psychiatrist at the University of Iowa, 80% of creative workers have experienced depression or mania in their life.<sup>14</sup> I chose three well-known nonfiction graphic novels as case studies of my research. What they have in common is that they all use graphic novels to express certain traumatic experiences and depressive emotions. However, each one also has its differences in representation.

In determining the artistic style that my project will use, *Persepolis* has broadened my understanding of the visual presentation of serious-themed graphic novels. *Persepolis*<sup>15</sup> was created by Marjane Satrapi in 2000 and introduces the author's traumatic childhood experiences in Iran, aiming to broaden the reader's understanding of war history. With regards to the images, the author uses a black-and-white style similar to the simple and loose drawings of children. Although the aesthetic of this piece appears to be simple, it conveys a sense of seeing through a child's perspective to the reader, which offers proper visual support to the narrative of this work. According to Hillary Chute, academic and author of several seminal texts about the graphic novel medium, she believed that “The stylization of *Persepolis* suggests that the historically traumatic does not have to be visually traumatic”<sup>16</sup>. In fact, in order for the story to successfully arouse empathy from its readers, rather than displaying artistic skill of a nature that is associated with more

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<sup>12</sup> James Campbell, *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald C. Kessler, and Evelyn J. Bromet. “The Epidemiology of Depression across Cultures,” Annual review of public health. U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4100461/>.

<sup>14</sup> Higier, et al., *Creativity and Mental Illness*, 1288-1292.

<sup>15</sup> Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (Paris: L'Association, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 135.

commercialised comics, it is more important that the story's aesthetics be suited to the idea and perspective of the story. *Maus* exemplifies this well. (Figure 2)(Figure 3)

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Figure 2.<sup>17</sup> ↑

Figure 3.<sup>18</sup> →

*Maus* caught my attention due to its unique artistic style of using animal heads on top of the bodies of human characters; the author intentionally omitted the features of his characters' human faces and chose to use a simple animal head to make distinctions between race. For example, being Jewish is represented through the image of a mouse, while Germans are represented as cats. Although the characters are real human beings, due to their differences in nationality and race, their relationship can be perfectly compared via animal symbols. Through such a setup, the author conveys to readers more subtle information about the story, such as race being one of the its most important themes. Other unnecessary information, such as the different characteristics of every individual, is omitted and de-emphasised. In the third chapter of McCloud's *Understanding Comics*<sup>19</sup>, it is stated that to simplify and conceptualise characters means making them more iconic than bound to a specific role, which will enable readers "to see themselves".<sup>20</sup>

Based on my understanding of and research into *Persepolis* and *Maus*, I created a distinctive artistic style for my project. Compared to a simple pursuit of visual beauty or an intuitive

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<sup>17</sup> Figure 2: Marjare Satrapi, "Covers of the English version of *Persepolis* Books 1 and 2" (graphic novel cover), New York: Pantheon Books, *Persepolis The Story of a Childhood*: 2000, *Persepolis The Story of a Return*: 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Figure 3: Art Spiegelman, "Covers of the first volume of *Maus*", (graphic novel cover), New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 36.

expression of depression, I chose to make it a narrative aid. There are two artistic styles in my project: the first one is used within most of its chapters and real-life events, and the second one is used to express imagination and dreams. In my story, one character is trying to learn about another character's life by travelling to her homeland, Austria, so most scenes involve the character's process of discovery. I hope that readers can follow in this character's footsteps and have a stronger sense of what is happening, so I have made a very simple design for the character's head, while other people she meets in the story have their own human characteristics (Figure 4). In addition, the character has suffered from years of depression, and although she is an adult, she is immature and escapes from her true image. Referring to the figure below, the first style is rendered in a child-like way, yet although the character has an oversimplified and childish head, her height is the same as that of an adult. By contrast, in the second style, when she has to face herself in her dream (Figure 5), her understanding of herself manifests the image of a little girl. In addition, similarly to *Maus*, in which the author distinguishes his own story from that of his father's by using a different style of painting, the second style of my story is more detailed and professional in order to deliberately separate the reader from her. The details of these designs will be described in later chapters.



Figure 4.<sup>21</sup>

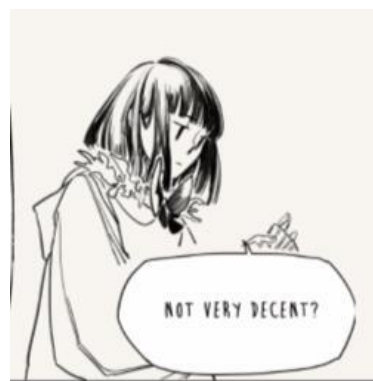


Figure 5.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to their way of expressing traumatic experiences visually, I also pay attention to how these writers have achieved the purpose of reflecting trauma through such productions. Although the dictionary's definition of 'auto-biography' includes self-written accounts of one's life, Pascal has claimed that the genre is actually meant "to focus less on self and more on others during

<sup>21</sup> Figure 4: An image from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Figure 5: An image from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 50.

the autobiographer's review of his or her life".<sup>23</sup> In addition to the two works mentioned above, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*<sup>24</sup> is also a typical example of addressing the theme of trauma in this way. (Figure 6) (Figure 7)

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Figure 6.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 7.<sup>26</sup>

*Fun Home* was created by Alison Bechdel in 2006 in order to assist her through the grieving process over her father's passing. As such, it focuses on the complicated relationship they shared. In order to create references for her drawings, Bechdel photographed herself dressed and posed like her father. Even if there were already old photos, she would repose for another image.<sup>27</sup> In *Graphic Women*, Hillary Chute claims that such a process "allows the author the intimacy of touching her father through drawing him"<sup>28</sup>. Besides, the narrative structure of the book also enables her to connect with her father through various layers. Firstly, *Fun Home* differs from typical comic scripts in that its text is based on a literary writing style, which enabled Bechdel to tell stories, along with her feelings, throughout the entire book. In this work, we can thus see that the author has integrated textual narration into the comics in a way similar to the aside of a script, which even if it were extracted and read on its own, could become a complete literary work; the content of the comics and their dialogues are like intuitive supplementary information of memories. Secondly, the relationship between the chapters is not that of a straightforward linear narrative, but through the different themes of each chapter, a full picture of the author's father emerges. As described in *Graphic*

<sup>23</sup> Roy Pascal, *DESIGN AND TRUTH IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>24</sup> Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: a Family Tragicomic*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Figure 6: Alison Bechdel, "Covers of the hardback edition of *Fun Home*" (comic book cover), Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Figure 7: Alison Bechdel, "A panel from *Fun Home* depicting" (comic book), Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Chute, *Graphic Women*, 200.

<sup>28</sup> Chute, *Graphic Women*, 175.

*Women*, it is like “unfolding a layered, recursive narrative in which events and images overlap and repeat”, conveying how the author is “revisiting the past”.<sup>29</sup>

This design inspired me to use multiple layers as a means of supporting the narrative of my story. With a similar purpose and importance of expressing abstract emotions, the effect of literary writing is also an important part of my project. Given that the main focus of my project is on my past experiences, its primary reference consists of a diary I formerly wrote. For this reason, instead of putting the novel inside the comics, I decided to integrate imagery within the novel. Through a combination of novels, letters, illustrations and comics, different atmospheres are created, and its focus is multi-layered. This allows me to touch upon and share my traumatic experience in my own unique way.

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<sup>29</sup> Chute, *Graphic Women*, 180.

## **-2- Giving Voices: the Emotions of Silent Stories**

Besides those autobiographical works, many artists choose not to speak directly about the topic of their traumatic experiences. Instead of speaking for themselves, they use allegorical drawings or create personae that can speak for them. Such types of "fictional" narratives also protect the author's privacy by creating a distance between reality and the book. Moreover, just as depression itself is mostly silent, many dark emotions are hidden below the surface until an outburst of them occurs. With regards to this aspect, Shaun Tan, who is very intelligent in presenting silent stories through metaphors, is one of my essential references in studying the metaphorical narration of words and paintings.

One of his wordless graphic novels titled *The Arrival*<sup>30</sup> tells the story of a male character's journey to a strange land. The land is full of alien creatures and people who communicate through a language which the male character finds incomprehensible (Figure 8). Shaun Tan didn't write any words in this book, so the audience must rely on using their imagination and knowledge to understand that there is another story hidden beneath this 'sci-fi' adventure. Actually, every strange thing inside this book is intended as a metaphor of the immigrants' experience of dislocation and unfamiliarity. For example, the alien language represents how an immigrant might feel about the English language when he first arrived in Australia, because he couldn't speak English at that time. Carl Jung once said that getting to know about symbols and metaphors is like learning a language that can speak everything.<sup>31</sup> The use of allegories in this way, as a means of prompting certain understandings in the reader through plots or images, is an indirect approach which has been commonly adopted in literary works. My project uses these silent narratives as well, because in a similar way, the human spirit and emotions are as quiet, vague and hidden as them.

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<sup>30</sup> Shaun Tan, *The Arrival* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> C. G. Jung, and Sonu Shamdasani, *The Red Book = Liber Novus: a Reader's Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012).

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Figure 8.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 9.<sup>33</sup>

With respect to the drawings, in his other graphic book titled *The Red Tree*<sup>34</sup>, Shaun Tan uses animals or plants with dark colours to express depressive emotions. For example, we can see a girl walking in the street who is covered by a huge dead fish and its shadow, and yet nobody appears to notice it.(Figure 9) Another several pages later, the same girl stays in her room as it slowly becomes filled with dead leaves. These two images convey a state of being haunting by depression and drowning in sorrow. The feelings are beyond words, but the images allow readers to imagine them. They become even more clear through the use of a surrealist drawing style, which exhibits metaphors in an understandable way to audiences, even if they are not involved in the art field. I am very inspired by the strong sense he brought to readers through his art works by telling them metaphorically. It not only renders the silent emotions graspable, but also gives another layer to the narrative. For example, in my book, sadness and unconsciousness will be represented as wheat fields, and when the character feels down, this will show up in her dreams and views.

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<sup>32</sup> Figure 8: Shaun Tan, “First edition cover of *the Arrival*”(graphic novel cover), London: Hodder&Stoughton, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Figure 9: Shaun Tan, “A page from *the Red Tree*”(illustration), Australia: Lothian Books, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Shaun Tan, *The red tree* (Australia: Lothian Books, 2001).



### -3- The Structure of a Graphic Novel

In a graphic novel, the relationship between images and text determines part of the experiences it provides to the audience. As I read several graphic novels, I noticed the different effects of various structures that can be adapted to different needs. The most common types of graphic novel structures are comics, illustration books and the novel itself featuring illustrations inside it. But there is no correct or wrong way to do it. In the adventure novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*<sup>35</sup>, words and drawings form a narrative relationship of mutual acceptance. We can see that the reader's perspective changes from text to image, and then back to text again. However, this kind of design is too straightforward for my project, which as explained earlier, will focus on the effects of different layers of images and text. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud states that “a part of the (comics) world will always lie in shadow: a mystery” and that we should always keep in mind that “this world is only one of many possible worlds”<sup>36</sup>, so the boundaries and definition of graphic novels will never become limited. In this regard, I would like to mention two other graphic novels, the boundaries of which exemplify the experimental approach of many graphic novelists.

Nick Bantock's *Griffin & Sabine*<sup>37</sup> has successfully combined text and image in a rare way, while also providing some interactive experiences to its readers. This book tells the story of two pen pals who use postcards and letters to communicate in order to shift their relationship from one of strangeness to familiarity. The story is told by depicting their interactions, which includes their written letters and drawings on postcards. The interesting part of this book is that Bantock put the letters inside of envelopes in the book, which requires readers to extract them if they want to read them. (Figure 10)

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Selznick, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (London: Scholastic, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Nick Bantock, *Griffin & Sabine: an extraordinary correspondence* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1991).

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Figure 10.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to its epistolary novel<sup>39</sup> structure which shares some similarities to my project, his book design has significantly inspired me with respect to the use of interaction between readers and books. Based on this idea, I have made a variety of interactive attempts with my project, including the use of letters, foldouts, or researching experimental binding methods and so on. I hope that through this kind of interaction, readers can get involved in the story and generate their own thoughts.

The other book, which is by Richard McGuire and titled *Here*<sup>40</sup>, conducts a very enlightening experiment on the relationship between graphic novel, time, and space through the telling of the history of an old house. In this book, the author sets a permanent place and perspective where the story happens in each double spread. Unlike the similarly illustrated location, we can see that the period in time is randomly changing in different frames(Figure 11). Many characters go through the same position at different times, and something similar happens as if time coincides. *Here* is thus a perfect example of what Scott McCloud described in *Understanding Comics* when he stated that the use of time in film is similar to the use of space in comics<sup>41</sup>, meaning that they are not only different from the real world, but also from videos. For example, in a video or animation, there is only one frame at a time, but in a comic book, the frames are side-by-side, taking up their own spaces. This leads time and space to become the same thing in graphic novels.

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<sup>38</sup> Figure 10: Nick Bantock, “A photo of *Griffin & Sabine*”(graphic novel), Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> An **epistolary novel** is a novel written as a series of documents. The usual form is letters.

<sup>40</sup> Richard McGuire, *Here* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 7.

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Figure 11.<sup>42</sup>

I designed the ending of my project based on the inspiration I derived from this book and the theory mentioned above. In my project, the main character is looking for a person who has been dead for a long time. Throughout the entire story, both of them are in different times, but this does not mean that they cannot meet in a specific location. I chose the end of the story to take place at the end of their journey – the same cliff. Therefore, I am interested in the ways that such research and theories might contribute to the expressiveness of my narrative.

In this part, I have so far explored the field of graphic novels, in the next chapter, I will discuss the methodologies I used to build my project.

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<sup>42</sup> Figure 11: Richard McGuire, “A page of *Here*”(graphic novel), London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014.

## Research Methodology

This practice-based research requires me to design a graphic novel based on suffering with depression for years. Given that I will discuss feelings related to depression from my own perspective, my methodological approaches consist of pre-visualisation and auto-ethnography. In the latter part, I will introduce these methodologies in detail.

Due to the private nature and complicated emotions of my experiences, I develop methods through which fictional personae can be created and incorporate my multiple voices in them. This is also helpful in providing me with a multi-perspective form of narration while generating a creative graphic novel structure. Therefore, developing an auto-ethnographic persona is my main method. Besides, some subsidiary methods will also be introduced later.

### Methodology:

#### -1- Evocative auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography requires the researcher to use their personal experiences and connect them to a broader group within society. Albert J. Mills defines it as “a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing”.<sup>43</sup> In the 1970s, the definition of auto-ethnography was more narrowly perceived as “insider ethnography”, which meant that the researcher studied a group of people by being one of them<sup>44</sup>. However, nowadays, its purpose and how it can be used to reach others has been broadened.

The auto-ethnographic approach is divided into two different types: analytical auto-ethnography and evocative auto-ethnography. Laura L. Ellingson and Carolyn Ellis(2008) have stated that

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<sup>43</sup> Albert J. Mills, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 43–45.

<sup>44</sup> David M. Hayano, "Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects," *Human Organization* 38, no. 1, 1979, 99-104.

analytic auto-ethnographers concentrate more on “developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena”, while evocative auto-ethnographers “focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses”.<sup>45</sup> Due to the fact that my project does not aim to contribute to any psychological research by analysing the experiences of depressed people, rather than being analytic, it will consist of evocative auto-ethnography.

## **Methods:**

### **<1 Writing journals**

Writing journals will ensure that I have enough resources while actually producing the text of my graphic novel. With regards to my experience of depression, if I want to express my memories, the most important thing is to convey what I was thinking and felt at a given time. In *Writing technology*, writing methods are described as tools used to make languages legible<sup>46</sup>. In the context of my project, writing journals renders my emotions readable. A year ago, in preparation for this project, I began writing in journals after reading or whenever I felt depressed. This has developed into sufficient records which enable me to grasp vague memories and thought processes, which then become the material of my narrative design.

### **<2 Heteronym Development**

The literary concept of the **heteronym** refers to one or more imaginary character(s) created by a writer in order to write in different styles.<sup>47</sup> My idea of developing personae to tell the entire story comes from a Portuguese writer named Fernando Pessoa<sup>48</sup>. I chose this approach because I found it to be a smart way of managing multiple voices and choices in my head. I thus created three

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<sup>45</sup> Laura L. Ellingson, and Carolyn Ellis. “Autoethnography as Constructionist Project.” Scholar Commons, 2008, <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/gender/34/>.

<sup>46</sup> Christina Haas, *Writing Technology Studies on the Materiality of Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Fernando Pessoa, and Richard Zenith, *The Book of Disquiet* (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa (13 June 1888 – 30 November 1935), a Portuguese poet, writer, literary critic, translator, publisher and philosopher, described as one of the most significant literary figures of the 20th century and one of the greatest poets in the Portuguese language.

heteronyms in this project: an Austrian script writer, a modern Asian young woman, and an English illustrator, as I described in a previous chapter. These three characters' lives are similar because they have all experienced depression and have thus undergone a series of similar choices when experiencing it. But given that each of them eventually chooses differently, they end up in different places. As I mentioned before, this way of designing a story is not only chosen in order to share my experiences, but also to help me rethink and listen to my inner voices. To create heteronyms, I have also used several other methods, such as:

- Archive research on history and geography and so on;
- Designing three characters' drawing and writing styles;
- Using 3D modelling to create immersive environments; etc.

### **<3 Watercolour style drawing**

The focal point of depression in my memories and understanding is concerned with emotions, so I chose a watercolour drawing style to convey it. In watercolour drawing, the watery layers can evoke more emotion than flat colour, due to tonal gradations, texture, and a delicate transparency. Being more familiar with digital tools, I normally use the computer to simulate a watercolour style. By controlling the amount of water, the different atmospheres created by the character's emotions are distinguished on the screen.

## **Methodology:**

### **-2- Pre-visualisation**

Pre-visualisation is a method that has been used by the film industry, and also can be used in any design project. Its advantage is that it allows designers to try different plans and methods before making a finished product, prior to knowing the actual costs of production<sup>49</sup>. This approach is often used in practice-based research. In the process of making my graphic novel, I used it to complete the preparatory work of concrete production. In the course of practice, trial and revision, I can gradually explore a most suitable scheme through it. This includes combinations of images and words, the fluency of narration and segmentation, the emotional expression of different painting styles and so on.

## **Method:**

### **<1 Contextual Review**

By conducting a contextual review and reading a large number of theoretical books and other authors' graphic novels, my vision has been greatly expanded. These readings have given me a lot of inspiration in design, and more importantly, they have proven wrong my original notion that graphic novels are equivalent to comics. More specific details on how I am using this method to help my research can be found in the previous chapter.

### **<2 Heuristics and Making a Dummy book**

For a pre-visualisation project, a heuristic method and making of dummy books is an important step to adjust narrative structure before production. At the beginning of the production, I had an idea of the story, but I didn't know how to make it happen, so I decided to use a heuristic method which is most fundamentally a matter of trial and error. After designing several plans, I then started making dummy books, which could provide me with a whole picture of what the book would be like, including how its flow worked, before finalising it. I made three dummy books in a sequence, and by reflecting upon and solving problems that occurred, each one led me to the next one. In the

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<sup>49</sup> Bill Ferster, "Idea Editing: Previsualization for Feature Films," POST Magazine, 2008, <http://stagetools.com/previs.htm>.

next chapter, I will introduce the specifics of how the dummy books were designed and progressed, as well as how I built my project based on practice.



# Practice

Given that this project is practice-based, after the previous research investigation and development of research methods, I did not strictly formulate a plan, but rather made repeated attempts and received feedback in order to find solutions. In this chapter, I will introduce some of the graphic novel's design ideas, as well as the selection and progress made through the heuristic method.

## **-1- Narrative Design and Dummy-book making**

### **<1 Narrative Structure**

When I started this project, I needed to decide its narrative structure first. In this graphic novel, I hope to make the past and the present communicate, so that I can look at my experience from a new perspective. In choosing the place where the story happened, I chose Austria, a country I had never been to before. As mentioned in my Positioning Statement, my depression has healed over the past year, and Marianne represents my period of mental stability. However, after I had a relapse, my mind was extremely confused, and what I had built was forgotten. All I could see were the words I left behind. "Marianne" represents the state of my past, but it seems to be far away from me, as if the beautiful scenery of a foreign country is only in my imagination.

The subject I conceived of at the beginning is a dual-narrative composed of communication between two characters. In this way, I have created five story schemes, among which I have chosen the fifth scheme. (Figure 12) The reason why I chose the fifth scheme is that it adds time to the works by separating the ages of the two characters. Although I have access to my memories, things in the past can't be changed, so instead of two characters communicating in real time and influencing each other, the fifth plan chose to take the modern role as its main perspective, so that readers can follow this role to review what happened in Marianne's same location at different times.

[1]The first way to do my original idea is to make it with **no comics**.

The book contains the letters they write to each other, the diaries maybe, and the newspapers. The pictures are black and white photos, illustrations and sketches from the artist. I'll only give(list down) all these informations based on time sequence.

Time: follow the sequence

Narrative structure: it will be very much like the book 《griffin and sabine》

Advantages: stronger immersive experience.

Disadvantages: not very clear of the narrative. More literature than graphic novel, which means if I want to make it as graphic novel I'll need more efforts on how to design the book with images.

[3]a story about the artist.

This idea separates the story into three parts, maybe I will do it three books as well. The first part is the depression life of the artist, next the writer came in his life and give him support, at the end he feels much better.

It can also disrupt the timeline. At the beginning of the book, the writer heard the artist's death news, so his mental status suddenly dropped to the bottom. And here I can put his feelings and background, every experiences of depression, the past of him and ect. in the start of the book. By going to the writer's place and reread everything they talked before, he defeat the darkness. At last he found out the writer is not died of suicide, he relieved.

Time: disrupt, but in normal sequences of each story. the stories sequences are based on the artist's emotion(?)

Structure: Mostly comics.

Advantages: I like this one.

Disadvantages: I need to find a way to reduce my work or extend the time, but I don't think it need to be too long(maybe 3 months?)

[2]Try to add some comics: make the book under the artist's name(as the artist draw the book himself) a biography of the writer

In this way, the book will be a mourning for the artist's friend(the writer), who dead long times ago. So it will contains the letters inside the comics as well, it is a book the artist made after he found so much informations about the writer, and made a biography of her.

Time: disrupt the sequence. Separate her life as different topics.

Narrative structure: like <fun home>, but not all comics.

Advantages:

Disadvantages: Too much drawing work.

[4] thinner book

For this idea I just try to make something really thin and short, for the other ideas are both seems too long.

So for a short book, I don't think comic book is a good form, because the comics are long: even they are short, it still requires a lot of efforts(and time). I would like something like an **illustration book** or like <griffin and sabine>(**a much shorter and easier way of the first idea**).

But in this way it maybe to similar with the book <griffin and sabine>. Or even more simple. I don't really want to do something so like others'.

I also think about something more like ART than graphic novel: such as a series of **Stereoscopic books**, with narrative inside. But in this way, the story will be so much unclear itself, which means I don't really need personas to set the distance between the book and me. I can do my own story in this idea.

However, in that case I need to give up the personas which I really like. And this is not like a graphic novel.

[5] An investigation book of the writer.

In this way, the artist is a 'nobody'. She(or he) is not the artist character I made, but a person whose hobby is drawing, and from modern time. She is in the same age with me, and the writer character is one of her favorite writers(the writer is still from 20th century). The modern artist went on a archive research and field trip about the writer(through fictitious places). So the book will also be a special biography of the writer.

In this book, the artist have depression and her problem too, but her story will not be shown in her investigation book. I may put other things to mention it as well. But the story about artist is basically express through the changes of her emotion which are shown in the images she made. This is more like under surface narrative. Also I will do a epilogue under the artist's name talking about some changes this trip gaved her.

Time: follow the time of the new artist's investment. So it is like follow the sequence of space.

Narrative structure:

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Figure 12.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Figure12: These were the first 5 plans I wrote intending to decide the general story in the beginning of the research.

After deciding the general story, I continued to create four other plans on this basis(Figure 13). In the end, although I chose scheme 4, I did not follow the direction of scheme 4 completely in the subsequent creation process, but gradually integrated the ideas mentioned in my various schemes for this stage.

【1】

Figure 13<sup>51</sup>

Narrative Structure:

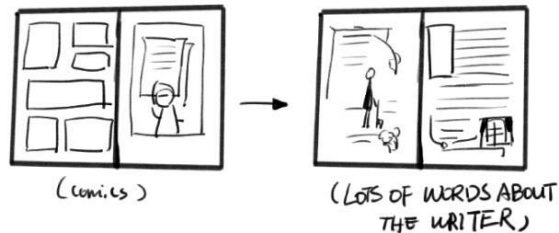
While the author investigating the writer in a foreign country, she did several hand drawings. And the story will be unfold based on each places of the drawings: how are they connecting to the writer.

The narrative is based on the author's journey, with what she has been through during searching the signs of the writer, how she talk to other people, what it the place the author used to live.

Visual style:

Two art styles:

Hand drawing(colorful) with comics(about investigation)-black and white. From the painting or illustration, the art style jump to comics in the next page, and the author starts to tell the story about what she find.



So in this way, the narrative about 'now' and 'past' will be divided intuitively. The art styles of the images are not very different, but consider the text as another type of image, more text with little illustrated can give people different feeling: more space with imagination. Further away with what happened in the past. For the 'current' story, what happened to the author, comics will tell a simple scene that everyone can understand quickly. But the two different styles are not separated totally, there will be some transition(By using the knowledge of the 'gutter', like show the same thing with different style(eg1), or the same story, to help readers changed it with their imagination.) At finally, when the author figures out everything the writer had remains, she get closer to the writer, the process can be shown in the art style, she can actually talk to the writer in the same frame.

Materials: I prefer Dowling paper(80g), a little yellow, make people relax, and like a diary or note.

Scale: B5

Text/Image relationship: Both using as a medium of expression.

<sup>51</sup> Figure 13: These are the rough 4 more plans.

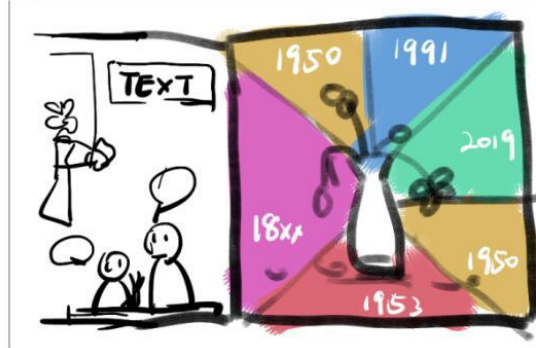
[2]

Narrative Structure: like<HERE>, the position is the family house of the writer. (The writer was born in a valley, she left her family before 18. After her father's death, she went back to the house several times. Finally she spent her last few months in this place as well. )

But unlike <HERE>, this plan will be several books. The each book is with a cover of the house's look in different period. (Or if the content is not much enough, it can be different chapters in one book)

Visual style: graphic novel. With graphic and text, but not too comic. All Colored

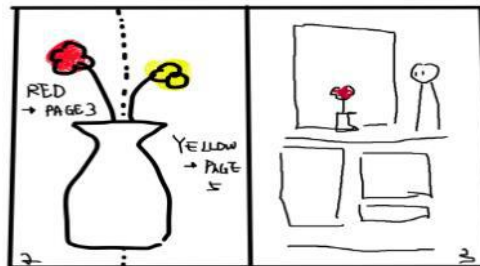
At each book/chapter, there are comics or texts introducing the stories happened both now and past. The time switches by when they reach a same item. In this plan the comic part looks simple.



[3]

Narrative Structure: The Garden of Forking Paths

In is one I will try a way with a narrative structure like <the garden of forking path>. For the investigation is far away from getting fully understand about the writer, so the author started to use her imagination to fill the blank of it, which will lead the story to different events and ends: whether the writer killed herself, nobody knows.



[4]

Narrative Structure: Dual-narrative. Both story about the writer and the author.

The book can be opened from both sides, and for different sides there are different stories. One is the writer's story, another one is the author's investigating process. They focus on different part of the story about the writer. And they(both parts) meet each other at the center of the book.

Visual style:

Writer's side-more comics, linear storyline.

Materials: paper book- black and white. Common comic books' materials.

Scale: B5(Horizontal)

Text/Image relationship: Tell a story together. A trend of merching each other at the center of the book like the two storylines meet each other.

\*I can make some notes or sketches on a card or postcard, piece of paper, and put them inside the book. I won't stick them with the book, just put in particular pages. So while the book is been reading the cards will be collected to see the investigation collections.

## <2 Dummy book Design: the Relationship between text and Image

After the above progress, I started to produce the script and dummy book at the same time. The final plan was to divide the narrative presentation of the graphic novel into two parts, which is also one of the focuses of my continued work. I have made three different dummy books in total, but they are not three parallel choices, but rather a gradual creation progress. The process of managing *Visiting Marianne Knorr*'s narrative structure is almost the same as managing the text and image relationship. As what McCloud has written: "Pictures can include strong feelings but lack the specificity of words, while words can offer that specificity but lack the immediate emotional charge of pictures".<sup>52</sup> Due to their being together in graphic novels, the question of how to manage them "to work miracles"<sup>53</sup> with my story is the purpose of these experiments below.

\*

The first book (Figure 14), was made into a comic book. This first edition roughly sets the tone of the story from the perspective of the modern protagonist, but it has serious disadvantages: firstly, I used a much smaller manual than I expected for the book's size (A5) to create it, so I couldn't correctly estimate the amount of lines in my script; secondly, I directly used English to do the scriptwriting (English is not my native language), but the genre of comics restricts the amount of words and cannot produce enough expression. This made me feel that the plot rhythm is seriously inappropriate and has an atmosphere that is difficult to integrate.

\*

Based on the failure of the first one, I created the second version (Figure 15). I made the second dummy book in A5 size, which was the original size I expected. Due to the fact that Marianne is designed based on texts I wrote in the past, the importance of texts in this book should be no less than that of images. Therefore, I tried to solve the lack of wordy expression while maintaining the comic mode, which meant redoing the textual parts in the format of novels and combining them with the comics in a proper manner. The second version almost met my expectations, but I still find that A5 may be suitable for comic books, but not for text-dominated pages. Each sheet of paper is not able to contain as much information as I wanted, so I could only

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<sup>52</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 135.

<sup>53</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 135.

write a short paragraph of words which was not enough at all. I finally decided to drop this version because of this big issue. On the one hand, I limited myself to the fixed thinking that I have to make my graphic novel in a comic format. On the other hand, I also want to rely on the direct emotional expressions that can arise from a poetic way of writing. While reviewing the result, I found that the relationship between words and images was not satisfying – each was vying for more space than the other, rather than complementing each other, so I decided to restart again.

\*

In the third edition, I first decided to spend a lot of time writing texts in my native language, and to write the text as long as I wanted to. With the increase in text length, I reconsidered the size of the book, and chose B5, which is slightly larger than A5. Therefore, each page could cover more content, but not appear too large. (Figure 16) When writing the text, I tried to design a certain meaning behind its visual arrangement, to prevent the images from either destroying the continuity of the novel or merely serving as decorations. For this, I managed to allow the images to be comic-styled illustrations which carry additional information as dialogues or a way of separating scenes. What's more, I identified parts that are more suitable to being expressed through images, such as chapter four which is entirely in comic style. I tried to make the images and the texts convey their respective strengths in different areas, and to form a rhythm. Such designs solved the structural conflict between the texts and images. The alternation of their positions also forms different narrative layers, which I will introduce more in later sections.



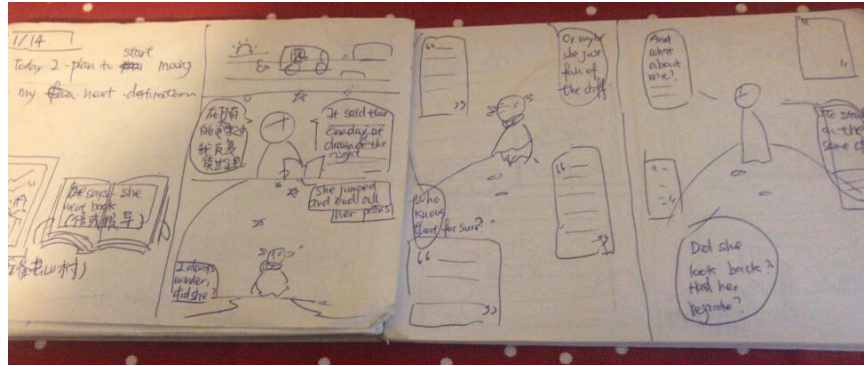


Figure 14.<sup>54</sup>

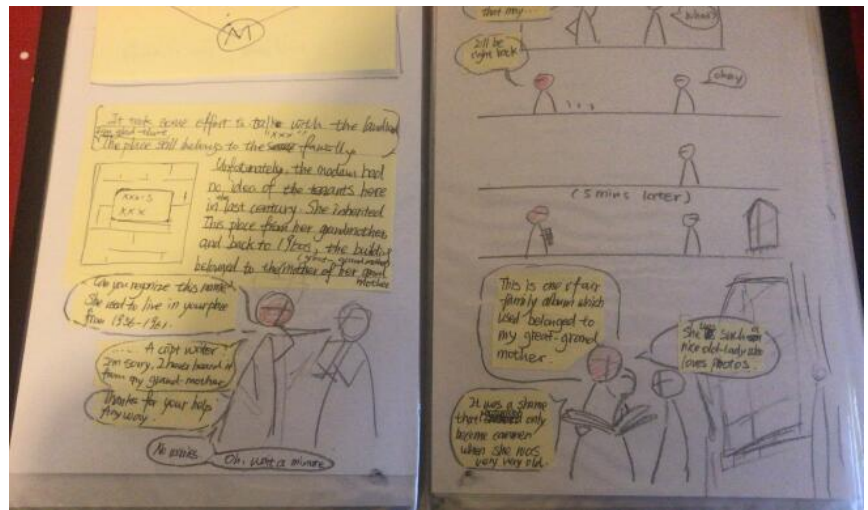


Figure 15.<sup>55</sup>

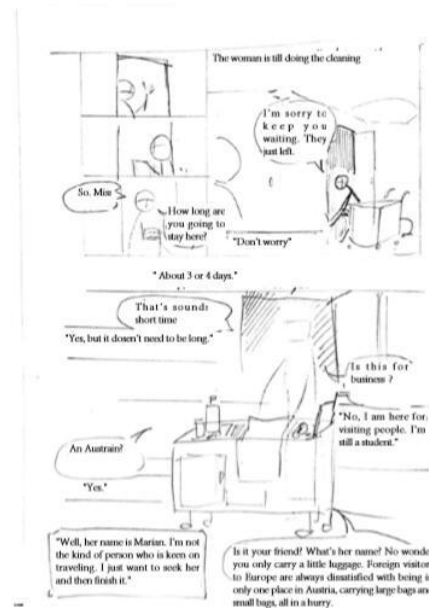


Figure 16.<sup>56</sup>

"这么远来这，只是朋友一面谈吗？看来你们关系一定很好了。"  
"是啊，你的时间过得好了，也祝你享受这假期。"

我大概算是好运的一个，因为我确实有个意外得到的重要东西，与那些“有幸被捐赠”的收藏品完全不同——那是一个普通的小木盒子，里面整齐地放着很多信件。不过我并没有带它们出来，而是将它们留在了我访问的书架上——我原本应该带着它们一起来的，但我却没有，我如此做恰恰是因为我重视它们。

盒子里的这些信来自玛丽安·诺尔——一名奥地利女作家。它们不是写给我的，收件人名为玛丽安·诺尔，是个美国人。这些信就是她收集起来的。当然，我把它们全都读过了，因而我这里的实际目的也就是为了拜访她。不过一方面，虽然她认识她并不认识我，我依然在心里将她当成是我的朋友；但另一方面，我又无法肯定她详细和人说出具体到底是什么样的情况。就好像我遇到别人觉得我不靠谱一样。我这种敢于开口是因为她早在1962年就去世了——请别误会，在我家里没发生过任何超现实的事——机缘巧合我得到了这个盒子，于是我就读它们，并且认识了它们默默无闻的作者，仅此而已。

I think I am one of the lucky ones, because I got something really special. A case with letters. They are from Marianne Knorr, an Austria female writer, written to L. White, an English man.

I read all of them and think she is my friend. But she died in 1962, that's why I don't want to tell people everything, it will make me more strange.

<sup>54</sup> Figure 14: Dummy book 1, *Visiting Marianne Knorr* (2019).

<sup>55</sup> Figure 15: Dummy book 2, *Visiting Marianne Knorr* (2019).

<sup>56</sup> Figure 16: Dummy book 3, *Visiting Marianne Knorr* (2019).

### <3 Others: preparation and translation

In this section, I will briefly introduce further preparatory steps that I made for this book before embarking upon the drawing process. Firstly, since the story took place in Austria during the last century, in order to endow the design of the narrative and imagery with authenticity, I conducted some archive research. Secondly, after completing the whole script of the novel in Chinese, there were some problems in the follow-up translation work, and the content of the novel has also been adjusted accordingly.

#### \* Preparation: Archive research for writing and visual design

My archive research mainly took place through the Internet and the library. In order to collect information and get a general idea of Austria at that time, in addition to visiting various websites, I found both general texts and books with collections of photos from Austria, published in 1950 and 1960, to be the primary source in the library. Based on these materials, I learned about the general culture of Innsbruck, Austria, after World War II, and designed the playwright Marianne and other characters around her. For example, Marianne's carpenter father, due to being crippled, avoided having to serve in the World War II army; her grandmother was a very devout Catholic; both parents were indifferent and severe throughout Marianne's childhood. This caused her enduring mental pain, and she finally decided to run away from home. In addition, the story of the pen pal illustrator and another friend have been imagined and constructed. Based on these plots, I successfully completed the novel. However, due to the limitations of length and translation problems, and in order to highlight the main plot, several threads were deleted in the official version. Furthermore, I didn't visit the local area personally, so I used Google Earth software to understand 3D space and get a general understanding of the local scenery and street features. This also provided the reference for panoramic illustrations in the book.

#### \* Translation

I wrote the full text in my native Chinese, and then I found a translator and a proofreader to translate the novel into English, but the first version was not ideal. Due to the unprofessional translation, the meaning of the original and English versions are quite different in some places. My supervisor and I agreed that the this translation was very stiff and confusing, so after I proofread the text, my supervisor kindly took a lot of time to help me with the final proofreading and make the



full text readable. I also noticed that the translation from Chinese into English has greatly changed the style of the writing. For example, the use of descriptive language in the original Chinese is very implicit, but it becomes straightforward and repetitive after being translated into English; in addition, some paragraphs drawing upon the prose poetry genre are deleted because they are really difficult to understand. Due to these series of problems, there are many differences between the Chinese and English versions in terms of details, and much content has been deleted; however, this deletion of content has made the overall storyline clearer.

## -2- Visual design and Allegorical narrative

After having explained the process of forming the dummy books and scripts, this section will specifically describe the design of this project's art style. There are two different art styles in my graphic novel (Figure 17) (Figure 18). In this book, in addition to the journey of the protagonist discovering things about Marianne, readers also have the opportunity to come into contact with the inner world of the protagonist herself. In the expression of the real world, the protagonist puts on headgear, and the background is composed of quite childlike simple lines; in the inner world, in which the protagonist shows her face, the lines are drawn with dark colours, and a more complicated style of Japanese commercial comics conveys the distance between the protagonist and readers. Instead of speaking directly, allegories are able to convey (semi-)hidden or complex meanings through symbolic figures, actions, imagery, or events, which together create the moral, spiritual meaning, etc..<sup>57</sup> Through this series of designs, many silent messages can be conveyed through images. The following paragraphs will explain how such information is conveyed without words, and how the dislocation between the real world and the protagonist's mind is expressed, by comparing two different art styles.



Figure 17.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 18.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> L. Kip Wheeler, "Literary Terms and Definitions," Literary Terms and Definitions, 2019, [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit\\_terms.html](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms.html).

<sup>58</sup> Figure 17: The first art style in the project, *Visiting Marianne Knorr* (2019), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Figure 18: The second art style, *Visiting Marianne Knorr* (2019), 52.

## **<1 Character Design**

In this book, the reader will follow this Asian young woman through her perspective in experiencing this journey, so my starting point for the character design of the protagonist is to be close to the reader and arouse their sympathy. For this reason, I designed the protagonist's character in the first style, by which I mean the real world. As the legend shows, the character wears cartoonish round headgear with very abstract features. First of all, such a design, as Scott McCloud has observed, can improve readers' recognition of it and make it easier for them to see "themselves"<sup>60</sup> in the story. Secondly, this setting also expresses the isolation and self-closure of the character from the world. In this book, the Asian young woman meets many other characters. They all have normal human facial features. Only the young woman wears "strange clothes". However, no one, including her family, notices her appearance. Only she and the readers can see the differences – she is not compatible with society, so she has to conceal herself and disguises her human aspects at the same time.

## **<2 Hand Drawing and Watercolour**

Not long after the project started, I chose the style of hand drawing and watercolour for the main tone of the book's art. I made this decision for several reasons: first, the sense of random infiltration by water flow can be an efficient way of expressing emotions directly, creating a level for readers to relate and feel closer to. Secondly, because of my background, my drawing style is a completely different commercial style. I had been used to working in this mode for years, so it was hard for me to express myself in that kind of way. Using watercolour, which is a style that I am not familiar with, could thus enable me to speak for myself outside of my usual patterns.

## **<3 Second art Style**

In the fourth chapter, after the investigation, the protagonist falls into a dream of her own, in which a second art style appears (Figure 18). The second art style is different from the first one. It has a more monotonous colour and gloomy atmosphere. Due to the different emotions each colour

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<sup>60</sup> See previous part: Contextual Review.

carries, in the Color chapter of *Understanding Comics*, McCloud said that by managing colours it can express a dominant mood, and tones can add depth.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, I used black in the background of the comics, and the disordered wheat fields and weeds which fill the landscape are meant to express the unconscious of the character's inner world. Meanwhile, the protagonist takes off the head cover in the dream, which means she also takes off her disguise and returns to her comfort zone. The face of the character and the commercialised line style increase the distance between the readers and her, because a commercialised style can have more detail and polish and thereby reveal less vulnerability. Readers can see the character from a more distant perspective, which enables them to think about the true purpose of her trip, which is leaked in this chapter: she actually wants to commit suicide in the same place as Marianne.

#### **<4 Narrative in Chapter 4's Comic**

In this section, I will briefly introduce the intention of the narrative design respective to Chapter 4. In addition to its different art style, Chapter 4 also takes on a different narrative structure, that of comics. By using comics in Chapter 4, the confession of the protagonist is rendered more euphemistically and implicitly, thereby conveying the world of the human mind.

In addition to the comic genre, there is a strange male character in this chapter who represents another voice in the protagonist's heart. My inspiration for designing this character comes from *The Red Book*, in which Jung once mentioned the concept of his own "soul" in his dream<sup>62</sup>. Different from our own consciousness, everyone's "soul" will appear in another form in dreams. According to Jung, the soul of a woman is expressed as a man, while the soul of a man is expressed as a woman, and one's age is the opposite of one's actual state of mental maturity<sup>63</sup>. In this chapter, the male role represents the soul of the protagonist. He can see things that the protagonist can't see or is unwilling to admit, and criticizes the protagonist implicitly. His maturity also implies the protagonist's own immaturity.

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<sup>61</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 190.

<sup>62</sup> Jung, *the Red Book*, 113.

<sup>63</sup> footnote: this means that a mature person will have a young soul.

## <5 Dialogue Bubbles

This graphic novel uses dialogue bubbles in many places and illustrations, the design of which this section will now explain. Dialogue bubbles are often an important part of graphic novels. The bubbles are made with lines, and different textures of lines can convey different emotions, which is also mentioned in *Understanding Comics*, as round and soft lines have a sense of warm and gentle, and direction lines can be seen as passive, etc.<sup>64</sup>. In *Visiting Marianne Knorr*, we can see two different types of design:

\*In the first real world art style, other characters talk with the protagonist through hand-painted dialogue bubbles, while the response of the protagonist is in a different kind of horizontal frame. This horizontal panel is half-embedded in the illustration, with a part of it overflowing from the blank background of the text (Figure 19), and this can also be seen as dialogue bubbles using a different type of line. Such a design is meant to reflect the inner cognition of the character. In contrast to the external daily world, she belongs to her own world.



Figure 19.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> McCloud, *Understanding comics*, 125.

<sup>65</sup> Figure 19: An image from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 8.

\*In the second style of the inner world of the protagonist, the communications with another voice representing herself make her feel safe. So not only does the protagonist remove her headgear, but also the dialogue shifts to common bubbles.



Figure 20.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Figure 20: An image from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 48.

### **-3- The end of the Journey: time and Space interlacing in the Folding**

In this section, I will focus on the design of the second part of the book, especially the image folding. This fold is made up of 10 pieces of B5 paper and describes the panoramic image of the mountain top. In the first part of the book, I tried to study the feasibility of multi-layered narrative through the combination of images and words, the different styles between images, and the different fonts between words. At the end of the story, as in the second part of the book, a series of wordless comics shows the modern girl and Marianne leaving at different times and arriving at the same place: a cliff in the Karwendel mountains. Here, through a folding depicting the cliff, the two characters "meet" in the same space for the first time.

Ever since I had the idea of making the folding illustrations, the question of why and how to design them were of concern. The two characters are nearly 60 years apart. They can't really meet each other, but I can make them look like they are together by fixing the location and disrupting time and space. As mentioned earlier, this image is inspired by *Here's* approach towards time and space<sup>67</sup>, but doing it in folding format and combining it with panoramic photos which actually refer to ideas from the graphic novel *Elvis Road*<sup>68</sup> and the movie *Nostalgia*<sup>69</sup>. In fact, the latter's director, Tarkovsky<sup>70</sup>, used similar techniques in many of his works. In *Nostalgia*, a Russian writer living in Italy recalls the scenery of his hometown and his wife and children, and such a panorama appears before his eyes. In the continuous panorama, which uses a particularly different type of colour scheme, his family appears in different positions throughout the scene more than once. The repetition of the characters and the continuation of the scene, combined with the silent dialogue, create a complex mood and conveys one of his indelible memories, which can only be experienced by the viewers themselves.

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<sup>67</sup> See previous part: Contextual Review.

<sup>68</sup> Helge Reumann, and Xavier Robel, *Elvis Road* (Oakland, CA: Buenaventura Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> *Nostalgia*. Directed by (Андрей Арсеньевич Тарковский. Moscow: Sovinfil, 1983), Amazon.

<sup>70</sup> Андрей Арсеньевич Тарковский (4 April 1932 – 29 December 1986) was a Russian filmmaker, writer, and film theorist.

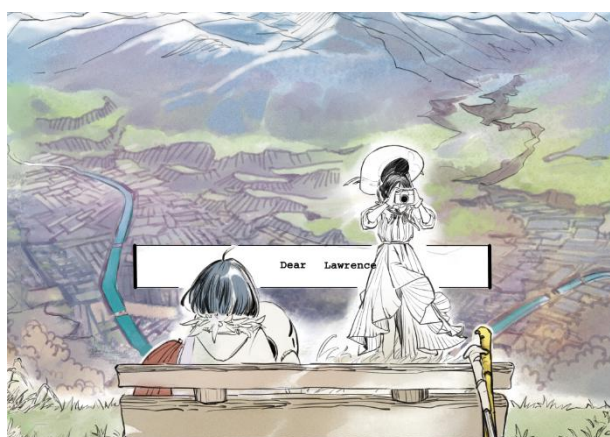


Figure 21.<sup>71</sup>

In the folding illustration, the protagonist's art style is distinguished from Marianne's. The protagonist uses the real-world style mentioned in the previous section, while Marianne looks uncoloured. Such a distinction enables readers to see them "together" while reading, but at the same time realize that they are "not together". By the end of Part 1 of the graphic novel, the theme of the book has been emphasised: that what really matters is what the modern girl wants to see. We can see that in the centre page of the folding illustration, Marianne notices that her hat was blown away while she was taking a picture. During the next moment on the following page, she looks back, which suggests the accident. The protagonist realises her misunderstanding at the end of Part 1: she had only looked at the negative places she wanted to see, and insisted on the necessity of Marianne's suicide wishfully, but ignored the possibility that in reality, it might have been an accident. So, when she realises this and accepts another scenario, she removes her camouflage headgear, and the fusing of the drawing style in the centre expresses that she has finally reached an understanding of the true Marianne. (Figure 21)

<sup>71</sup> Figure 21: The fold image from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 98-99.



## **-4- Reflection and Progression**

In the previous sections, I described how this graphic novel project has been designed in detail. In this section, I will discuss some forms of progress and modification which took place based on feedback and reflections.

### **<1 Script and Story**

Owing to the fact that I use my native language for writing, a lot of translation and proofreading work occupied a large part of the graphic novel's production time. Even after the beginning of the drawing process, there were still plot and dummy book changes. For example, due to the feedback provided by my tutor, I realised that many plots and words were lengthy, and that too much information made the point of the novel unclear. In addition to the deletion of content, the more serious problem was that in the middle of production, the plot of the ending and the content of the last letter left by Marianne left me with some lingering doubts; I found it hard to reconcile the two areas. As a result, I made a lot of edits to the last part. Among them, I finally chose the current one: Marianne describes in her letter how she was once more saved by writing. I chose this version because compared to others, it is more like a chat between friends than an earnest sermon or complaint. What's more, this version also returned to the theme of artists' suffering through creation, which was also the starting point of my project, to help my friends on the Internet who are suffering for similar reasons and believe that they are not talented enough<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> See previous part: Positioning Statement.

## <2 Illustrations

In addition to the story, some changes have been made to the images as well. After having created several illustrations, my tutor and I found that certain images were not suitable in some places. For example, in the first style of the real world, I excessively pursued the difference between it and the second type by trying to make it resemble a line cartoon similar to children's drawing style. But the poor visual effect of the result was not satisfactory. The loss of information and the lack of colour in the illustrations made the images lose their aesthetic richness and communicative expression. Therefore, I added details to improve some of them. The improved versions turned out much better and effective at enhancing narrative immersion, through the evocation of a sense of place. (Figure 22)

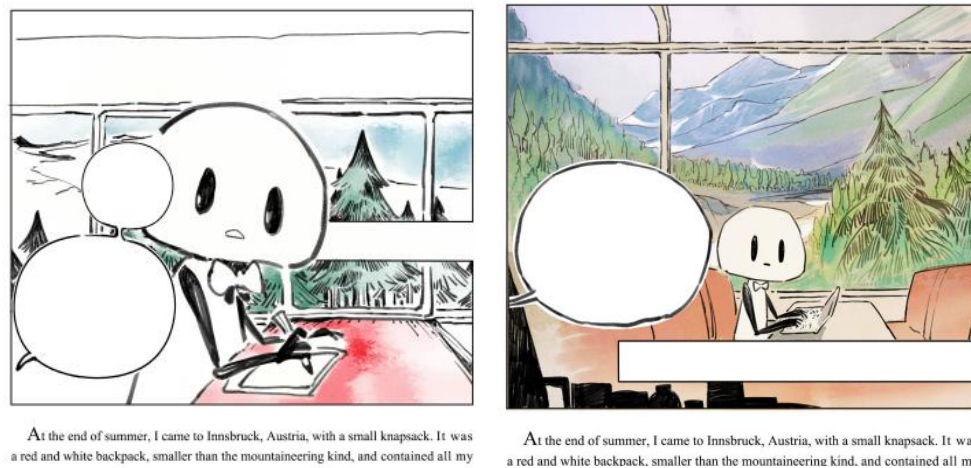


Figure 22<sup>73</sup>

The number of double spread images have also been slightly increased. In this book, small-scale images with short dialogues constitute a greater proportion of the illustrations. However, in the feedback, several of the illustrations were considered to be more decorative and less emotional, which meant that they played a less important role and conveyed less of an emotional impact than a double spread is able to. (Figure 23)

<sup>73</sup> Figure 22: The comparing of how this illustration changed in this project, (2019), 3.

When I looked up at night, I saw stars all over the sky. They were so numerous that each of them was communicating with their brilliance something to people on earth. The other night I realised that there were more than these visible stars in the sky. Against the background of the dark night, there were more stars without light, and it felt like people's ideals might end up like that, even if they were to succeed in getting their plans off the ground.



- 00 -

Dear friend, in your last letter you told me how you didn't want to give in to the illness and had refused medication. You think your painting is mediocre, and sent me this quote: "That being the case I since life is full of inability, what is the point of life if you can't even create? This is a brilliant question that is hard to answer."

A few years ago, I also visited a therapist, but have forgotten her name. I asked her these same questions that are currently occupying you. She gave me no answers, and skirted around the subject, just like your doctor. It wasn't long before I realised my mistake - these questions should not be answered by psychiatrists. How can they be as bold as philosophers in posing questions that are doomed to have no answers?

If you want to know what the philosophers have written, I suggest you start with Albert Camus' book (especially the Sisyphus mythology). If everyone were to listen to others carefully, there wouldn't be so much pain and confusion. You have given me the chance to speak again, and I sincerely implore you to understand that your life is not meaningless, no matter how much barbarity exists in the world. I hope these words will give you some relief.

1960.7

- 00 -



Figure 23.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Figure 23: The comparing of how this page become double spread image in this project, (2019), 40-41.

### <3 Typographic design and Fonts

As it is not the key research focus of this project, I will briefly introduce some attempts and decisions about typesetting design and font selection for the book in this section, which still has its importance in relation to the presentation of this book. Typesetting, in some comic books, is not treated with a great deal of consideration, but in this book *Visiting Marianne Knorr*, most of the content is dominated by words, so the reading experience that typesetting brings to readers has become very important.

For the layout decisions in the chapters other than Chapter 4, because the content is dominated by text, and in consideration of the thickness of the book, I chose to place the type in a position suitable for reading text, by inclining the spine upward and outward. In addition, due to the length of the text and the size of the B5 paper, I have kept the width of the text consistent (the number of words in each line), with approximately a dozen words, which will provide people with a lighter and more comfortable reading experience.<sup>75</sup> (Figure 24)

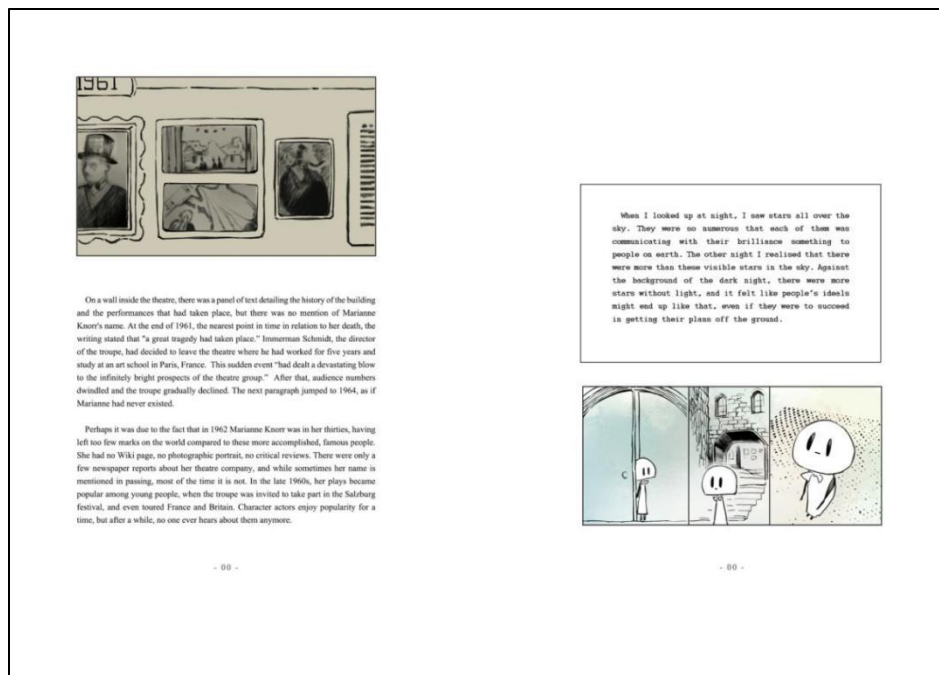


Figure 24.<sup>76</sup>

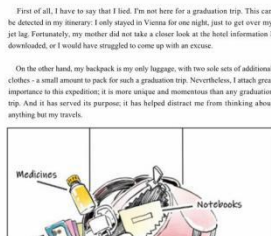
<sup>75</sup> Josef Müller-Brockmann, *Grid Systems in Graphic Design* (Sulgen: Verlag Niggli, 2015), 51.

<sup>76</sup> Figure 24: Two pages as typographic design sample from this project *Visiting Marianne Knorr*. (2019), 38-39.

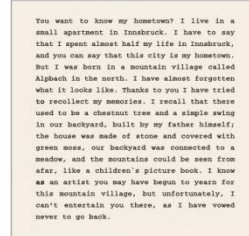
According to Sarah Hyndman's *Why Fonts Matter*, the different shapes and styles of fonts can trigger our imaginations and emotions even before we read them<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, the text itself can also carry visual information beyond its content, which is why I attach importance to font selection. In terms of font selection, the book mainly uses four types of fonts, which are used in different contexts to distinguish the text visually (see the Figure 25 below). In terms of font selection, I also made several tests. For example, when choosing the font representing the inner voice of the protagonist for the comic in Chapter 4, I tried five different schemes and finally chose this font. Its strokes and relatively delicate and childish lines give full play to the sensitivity of the lines.



This hand writing style font called "Ink Free" is Using in speech bubbles(from other people).



This "kokila" font is used for the text.



This "Courier" font is a classic font which is used in type writers. I chose this to show the content of Marianne's letter.



This "Brian Flower" is used in the dream chapter, as the voices from the girl herself.

Figure 25.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Hyndman, *Why Fonts Matter* (London: Virgin Books, 2016), 6

<sup>78</sup> Figure 25: Different fonts using in this project. (2019).

## **-5- Interaction and Book Design**

After finishing the creation of the whole book's texts and illustrations, I began considering the possible design of the physical book and how it could be brought to interact with readers.

### **< 1 Experimental Book Binding (without being used)**

First of all, I considered an experimental book binding design. In the initial design, the narrative structure of this book was more inclined towards a balanced dual-narrative, that is, telling the different stories of role A in the first part and role B in the second part. Therefore, based on this feature, I designed several binding schemes, so that the story of the two characters could be divided into two parts, with one starting from the front cover and the other from the back cover, before finally "meeting" in the centre of the book. However, due to continuous changes made during its production, the content of the second part was shortened, which eventually made the original design redundant. Coupled with some issues related to printing technology, this design was not used in the final version. (Figure 26)

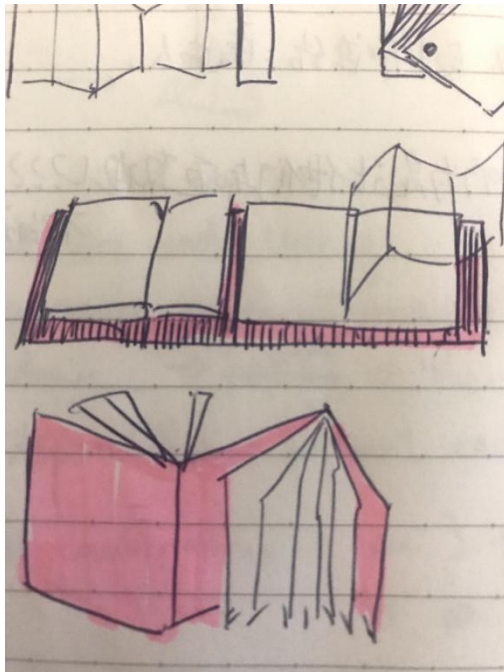


Figure 26.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Figure 26: Notes and concept(image in the bottom) for the project. (2019).



## <2 Envelope and Letter

Another attempt at interactivity is in the second part of the book: Marianne, the female writer character, leaves behind a final letter that nobody has read before. Unlike the excerpts of letters which were inserted in Part 1, this letter was whole and unopened. The purpose of the design is to allow readers to experience opening this letter with the protagonist. Earlier in this thesis, in the Contextual Review section, I introduced *Griffin and Sabine*, which was an important reference book for my work. I was inspired by the interactive attempt of the book through letters. In *Griffin and Sabine*, the author folds the letter paper and places it inside the envelopes pasted on the book's pages, so the reader can take out their correspondence by Interacting with the envelopes. Based on this reference, I designed my own letter scheme. As shown in the figure, I originally preferred to design this scene in a similar way to *Griffin and Sabine*, but finally gave up and chose the current plan. The reasons for this change are as follows: first, the last letter in this book is quite long (occupying five pages), and if readers need to take them out for reading, they have to put these folds back. The folded paper would thus make a heavy impression in the envelope; second, compared to a tedious folding process, simply opening the page disguised as an envelope can not only preserve interactivity, but also arrange the previous folding illustrations' pages and the content of the letter together, so as not to cover up the image and text through the existence of the envelope.



Figure 27.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Figure 27: The envelope page in physical book. (2019).

### <3 Choice of Paper

With respect to physical books, the feeling of the paper is also part of the reading experience, so at the end of this section, I will introduce how I chose the paper of my book. There are three different types of paper used in this book, all with different colours and senses of touch. Below is a sample print test I conducted before printing (Figure 28). As can be seen in the figure, with the same content, different paper creates a different sense, and what's more, it creates very different colour tones when combined with the original illustrations. I chose the current types of paper used in the physical book out of a consideration for the readers' reading experience; the slightly yellow pages and textured surfaces are more friendly and sensitive, and less commercial.

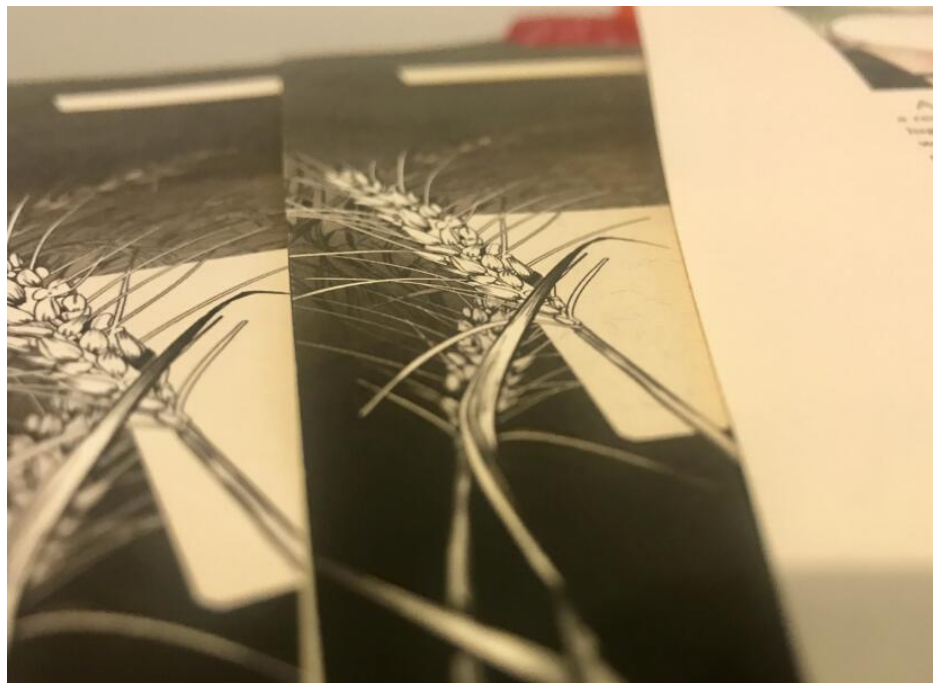


Figure 28.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Figure 28: Print test. (2019).



## Conclusion

To summarise, I have tried to design a story about characters that were created to reflect my experience of depression, and present this in the form of a graphic novel. In this thesis, I first positioned myself by introducing my personal experience and rationale. Then I documented my research and case studies within the field of the graphic novel, and found inspiration for this project through the study of works by other artists. In the next chapter, I introduced two methodologies used: evocative auto-ethnography and pre-visualisation, accompanied by many methods that reflect the practice-based nature of this research project. Lastly, in the chapter documenting practice, I described more specifically how the book gradually evolved through the use of heuristic methods.

Although the book has been successfully created, the project still has the prospect of further development in the future. This is because the potentialities of the graphic novel form have no boundaries, as I have previously referenced by quoting from McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. The form and potential of the graphic novel can be explored to a greater extent than what I have done in this project.

From a personal point of view, when I first started to plan this book, I had a lot of expectations. However, since this is my first graphic novel, and it is also my first time completing a written novel, it has faced many difficulties in the process of production. Some of these difficulties can be solved as mentioned previously, while others remain unsolved. So at the end of the project, although this graphic novel is a complete work in terms of design intention, it is different from my initial expectation: I had hoped to gain comfort through communication with the past me, but in fact, I have achieved little in this respect. But in any case, I learned a lot from this project. My supervisor led me to see the bigger picture and the potential of the graphic novel, and how to make a work on my own. I am sure that these experiences will play an important role in future research, and I believe that in the future, this will not be my only work.

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