Introduction

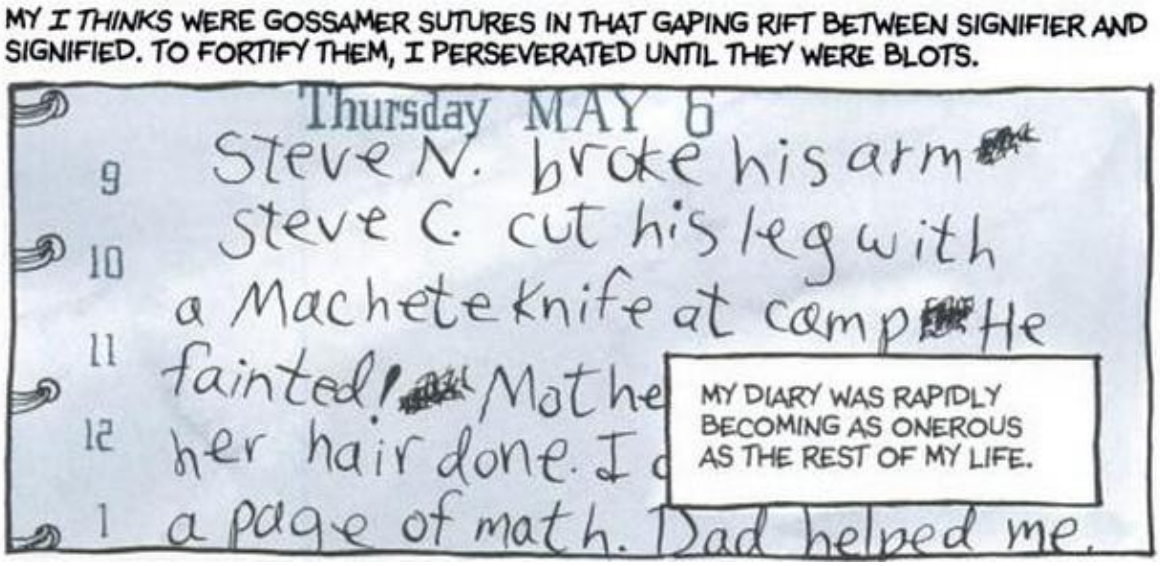

Figure 1Bechdel, Alison, *Fun Home*, London: Jonathan Cape (2006), p. 142.

In Alison Bechdel's autobiographical *Fun Home*, her developing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder seeps into her childhood diary, filling it with scrawls of unsure '*I think*'s (see fig. 1).[1] Alison declares in frustration that her 'feeble language skills could not bear the weight of such a laden experience' (143), and the inevitable devolution of her words into 'blots', which then become a 'curvy circumflex' (142), reflects Bechdel's own consequent preference for *graphic* representation.[2] *Epileptic, The Nao of Brown* and *Jimmy Corrigan* respectively focus on Jean-Christophe's epilepsy, Nao's Primarily Obsessional OCD and the multitudinous anxieties of the Corrigan family. This essay focuses in turn on these texts, exploring the simultaneously tangible and nebulous quality of mental suffering and its corresponding mimesis in the comic form. If comics represent, as Scott McCloud suggests, 'the invisible world of emotion',[3] then when this world becomes distressed so does the form itself – Alison observes, 'My diary was becoming as onerous as the rest of my life'.

[1] Bechdel, Alison, *Fun Home*, London: Jonathan Cape (2006), p. 142. All subsequent references will be from this edition and embedded in the text.
[2] When discussing autobiographies, first names will denote reference to characters, whilst surnames reference authors.
[3] McCloud, Scott, *Reinventing Comics*, New York: HarperCollins (2000), p.2.

1) ‘We express it differently’: Subjective bodies in David Beauchard’s *Epileptic*

*Time’*s Andrew Arnold declares: ‘While other cartoonists visualise the merely incredible, David B. visualises the invisible’.[4] In *Epileptic,* the ‘invisible’ forces of epilepsy, death and pain are obsessively anthropomorphised by Beauchard, who tracks the trajectory of his family’s suffering since his childhood. Susan Squier gestures to the somatic quality of the comic medium:

> …combining verbal and gestural expression, comics can convey the complex social impact of a physical or mental impairment, as well as the way the body registers social and institutional constraints.[5]

The bodies in *Epileptic* manifest psychological turmoil in a variety of external subjective projections, through both other-worldly creatures and the manipulation of Jean-Christophe and David’s own bodies.

Beauchard’s visualisations undergo a kind of neurotic dysmorphia throughout *Epileptic*’s progression, constantly mutating as David becomes increasingly disillusioned. He declares, ‘I give up. I relinquish my saber, my bow and my arrows, and my armor. It’s not what I want anymore.’[6] when no longer exhilarated by battle imagery, before eventually leaving behind even his trinity of fictional Jean Ray characters after almost a hundred pages of their companionship.

Fig. 2 sees David turn away from the characters, stating ‘I need to be alone’ and entering the shadowy, solipsistic world of his own artistic inventions. The full-page spread which follows depicts David immersed in reams of his own artwork (276), referencing what Beauchard describes as an endeavour to ‘mount my own ceremonies and build up my own symbolism’.[7] As Douglas Wolk remarks, *Epileptic* sees the representation of ‘metaphor as illness’ as well as ‘illness as metaphor’,

[4] Arnold, Andrew D., ‘Metaphorically Speaking’, *Time*, http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1015442,00.html, n. d., Web, 18/01/15.
[5] Squier, Susan M., ‘So Long as They Grow Out of It: Comics, The Discourse of Developmental Normalcy, and Disability’, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, vol. 29, no. 2, (2008), p. 74.
[6] Beauchard, David, *Epileptic*, trans. Kim Thompson, London: Jonathan Cape (2005), p. 182. All subsequent references will be from this edition and embedded in the text.
[7] Beauchard, David, int. Matthias Wivel, ‘The David B. Interview’, trans. Kim Thompson, *The Comics Journal*, vol. 275 (2006), p. 109.

Figure 2Beauchard, David, *Epileptic*, trans. Kim Thompson, London: Jonathan Cape (2005), p. 275.

describing Beauchard's discharges of expressionism as his own 'epileptic spasms of unreality'.[8] David's surrogate bodies of self-expression repeatedly mutate, becoming as chronically unremitting as the epilepsy itself. Published in six volumes over seven years, *Epileptic* also operates as a *Kunstlerroman* tracking Beauchard's artistic maturity; as David renounces previously established systems of images for his 'own symbolism', so does Beauchard's penning of battles and mythologies fade from the final volume of the novel, favouring corporeal abstractions. Squier's description of the epilepsy dragon as a 'reptilian, mythic intrusion into normal family space and time' is familiar to us in the earlier volumes, which depict the creature as an independent, invasive presence in the family's lives.[9]

[8] Wolk, Douglas, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*, Da Capo Press (2007), pp. 143-4.
[9] Squier, Susan M., 'Literature and Medicine, Future Tense: Making it Graphic', *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2008), p. 136.

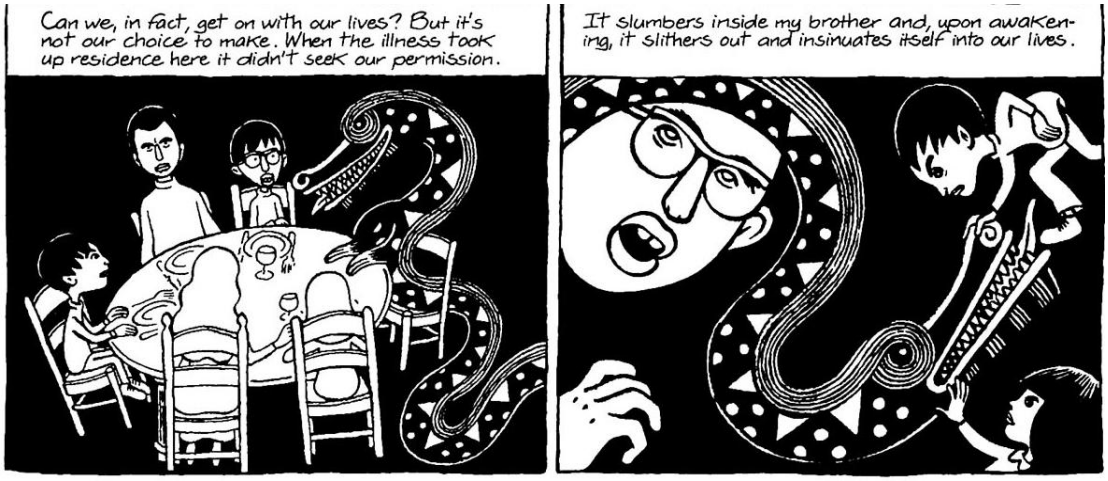

Figure 3Beauchard, p. 78.

Throughout *Epileptic* Beauchard uses dinner settings, conventionally havens of familial union, to delineate the devolution of Jean-Christophe's state and the resulting effect on family dynamics. In fig. 3, the sinister creature accompanies the family meal. The narrative states, 'It slumbers inside my brother and…it slithers out and insinuates itself into our lives.' (78)

Figure 4Beauchard, p. 114.

The dragon's invasion 'inside' Jean-Christophe is represented by fig. 4. Here, Beauchard's brutal amalgamation of reality and fantasy presents a tragic contradiction; for all of Jean-Christophe's protestations that 'It's not me!', the epilepsy winds seamlessly into the cords of his brains and intestines. Into the body is assimilated not only the somatic symptoms of the epilepsy itself, but also the resulting 'social and institutional constraints';[10] feelings of alienation, shame and helplessness literally consume Jean-Christophe's identity. When Hillary Chute states of *Epileptic* that 'illness is

[10] Squier, 'So Long as They Grow Out of It: Comics, The Discourse of Developmental Normalcy, and Disability', p. 74.

materialised as a character, a physicality sometimes contiguous with, but *outside* the body',[11] she touches upon a central concern of Beauchard's: are these external manifestations of mental suffering independent from the body, or ultimately integrated into it? In an email correspondence Glyn Dillon gave me his views on this topic:

> I don't think you can separate mind and body. I understand the temptation to do so. But you can't have one without the other.[12]

Indeed, in *The Nao of Brown* the interrelation of the two is evidenced by Nao's romantic pursuit of Gregory Pope, who resembles her favourite fictional character 'the Nothing'. Gregory comments upon the comparison, 'Am I your tulpa?... it's a sort of a phantom… like a 'palpable being' derived from visualization'.[13] Gregory represents to Nao the bodily actualisation of the psychological calmness she pursues; 'a perfect "nothing"' (47). Despite Chute's proclamation, one must conclude from Beauchard's increasing use of corporeal representations that he too dismisses the 'temptation' to separate mind and body.

[11] Chute, Hillary, 'Epileptic and Black Hole', *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 26, no. 2, (2007), p. 425.
[12] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author, 05/01/15. Attached in appendix.
[13] Dillon, Glyn, *The Nao of Brown*, London: SelfMadeHero (2012), p. 74. All subsequent references will be from this edition and embedded in the text.

Figure 5Beauchard, p. 259.

Considering fig. 5 in the light of fig. 3 one notes an apparent change in dynamics. Whereas previously the family are united in white against the black monster and background, now Jean-Christophe's own black body stands in contrast against the otherwise white panels, disrupting both the social and visual harmony of the scene. Jean-Christophe expands out of proportional scale to swallow up the majority of the first, third and final panels; his body is moving increasingly from the literal world to

the figurative world, and the family thus grapple simultaneously with both man and disease. Beauchard's high contrast characterisation of Jean-Christophe and his mask-like face indicates the absorption of the epileptic monster into his own body. In fig 4, the corporal possession thus also reflects a *semiotic* possession; signifiers which initially occurred '*outside* the body'[14] have now marked their significations *into it*, and the human form becomes the grotesque, metonymic visual for the suffering mind.

In *Epileptic*'s first panels, David examines his brother's adult body for the first time. Beauchard elaborates on this opening scene in an interview:

> It's as if I could read all the episodes of his life, every time that he fell; each crisis is practically written into his body… I did not want to see it.[15]

The uncanny nature of this recognition is only simulated for the reader when the scene reoccurs at the end; having followed Jean-Christophe's life since childhood, we too are shocked by the mangled body before us. David's narration of this later scene reinstates: 'He didn't become this way from one day to the next but I didn't want to see it.' (340). Jean-Christophe's physical state is so difficult to absorb precisely because in the narrative, his body no longer represents its own being, but rather the metaphorical receptacle into which David has poured all his family's suffering. Chute describes how Jean-Christophe's 'wracked body is not only the subject of the story but its literal container', 'a terrain onto which David literally maps his own fears and trials'.[16] In *Epileptic* Beauchard applies that which Peter Brooks describes in *Body Work*: getting writing onto the body is a sign of the attempt to make the material body into a signifying body'.[17] Towards the novel's end David too shares the fate of *significant* bodily mutilation; wearing the same dark mask of anguish as his brother, psychological transmission of suffering has become a physical contagion.

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[14] Chute, '*Epileptic* and *Black Hole*', p. 425.
[15] Beauchard, David, int. Thierry Bellefroid, 'Interview de David B.: *L'Ascension du Haut Mal*', *BD Paradiso*, http://www.bdparadisio.com/intervw/davidb/intdavid.htm, n.d., Web, 18/1/15, (in French).
[16] Chute, '*Epileptic* and *Black Hole'*, p. 424.
[17] Brooks, Peter, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, London: Harvard University Press (1993), p. 1.

Figure 6Beauchard, pp. 301-2.

Fig. 6 depicts a double page spread in which both the dragon figure and Jean-Christophe's body move out of the plot's diegesis into the narrative framework, i.e. the transformation of the comic form itself into a 'signifying body'.

As well as intruding into 'normal family space and time',[18] the figures thus destabilise the space and time of the narrative structure itself. McCloud calls the comic a 'single organism' when explaining the process of 'closure':

> There is a kind of alchemy at work in the space between panels which can help us find *meaning* or *resonance* in even the most *jarring* of combinations.[19]

'Jarring', indeed, is Beauchard's symmetrical alignment of his brother against the dragon, the metaphorical villain of the entire book used by Beauchard as a classical symbol of 'evil'.[20] As the narrative progresses, *Epileptic* becomes much larger than one man's disease, representing a

[18] Squier, 'Future Tense: Making it Graphic', p. 136.
[19] McCloud, Scott, *Understanding Comics*, New York: HarperCollins (1993), p. 73.
[20] Beauchard, int. Matthias Wivel, p. 106.

psychosomatic, collective experience marked into the comic structure itself; we too are plunged into the corpus of the family's anguish.

Figure 7Beauchard, p. 222.

Even the sharp black and white contrasts of the pages can be read as one such psychosomatic symptom, visually simulating the disorientating effects of epileptic suffering. In fig. 7 Beauchard's characteristic alternations of black and white creates a checkerboard effect. Despite the comic form's allowance for non-directional scanning of the page, the 'jarring' effect is retained as David and his mother both lament Jean-Christophe's condition. This is comparable to Chris Ware's employment of deliberate 'optical discomfort' in *Jimmy Corrigan*, as analysed by Isaac Cates:

> Ware flouts the 'rules' of graphic design deliberately in order to ratchet up the visual discomfort that accompanies Jimmy's ever mounting anxiety.[21]

As Beauchard increasingly 'ratchet[s] up' the harshness of his style one notices the influence of 20th century European 'woodcut stories' – often thought of as 'the original graphic novels'.[22]

The four images on the following page compare German woodcut artists Conrad Felixmüller (fig. 8) and Max Pechstein (fig. 9) to comic artists Art Spiegelman (fig. 10) and David Beauchard (fig. 11).[23][24] The heterogeneity displayed demonstrates the influence of the woodcut movement on the comic medium, specifically in its potential for texturing faces and bodies to express psychological anguish. Beauchard's own 'woodcut' effect suggests the physical carving of his family's distress onto the surface of the pages.

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[21] Cates, Isaac, 'Comics and the Grammar of Diagrams', *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking*, ed. David M. Ball and Martha B. Kuhlman, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi (2010), p. 98.
[22] Beronä, David A., 'Introduction', *Passionate Journey*, by Frans Masereel, New York: Dover (2007), p. viii.
[23] Weller, Shane, (ed.), *German Expressionist Woodcuts*, New York: Dover (1994), pp. 19, 96.
[24] Spiegelman, Art, *The Complete Maus*, London: Penguin (2003), p. 104.

Figure 8Conrad Felixmuller, Self-portrait, 1919, illus. in German Expressionist Woodcuts, ed. Shane Weller, New York: Dover (1994), p. 19.

Figure 9 Max Pechstein, Wounded Man, 1919, illus. in German Expressionist Woodcuts, ed. Shane Weller, New York: Dover (1994), p. 96.

Figure 11 Beauchard, p. 262.

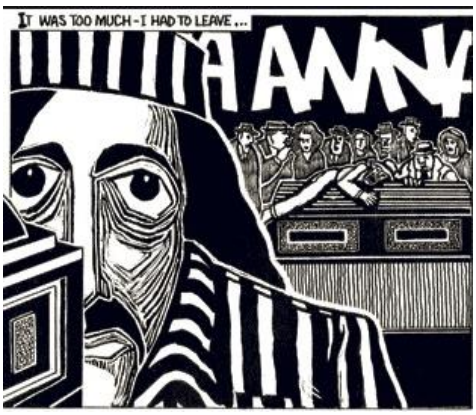

Figure 10Art Spiegelman, 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet', *The Complete Maus*, London: Penguin (2003), p. 104.

In an interview Beauchard elaborates on his fascination with esoteric imagery:

> The graphic shock...It was extraordinary! … I felt as if I was physically touching the problem that affected our family, the problem that affected my brother.[25]

Epileptic's success lies precisely in the 'graphic shock' of its images. With the inscription of his family's psychological suffering Beauchard transforms the monsters, the brothers, and finally the memoir itself, into 'signifying bodies'. Chute describes the subjective potential of the comic form as

[25] Beauchard, int. Matthias Wivel, p. 109.

reliant on 'the presence of the body, through the hand, as a mark in the text',[26] and thus Beauchard renders *Epileptic* as a *psychosomatic* text, whose narrative is textured so viscerally by the suffering within that the pain seems almost 'physically' contagious.

2) 'Everywhere & Nowhere': Mapping the mind in Glyn Dillon's *The Nao of Brown*

Glyn Dillon describes his work to me, 'the marks [he] made on the page', as

> another way of 'mapping' the mind, giving it a physical form, in order to help tell the story or in an effort to transmit a feeling.[27]

Asked about his fascination with mapping, he states outright:

> What appears to be a geographical map could easily become a metaphorical map of one's personal, psychological landscape.[28]

Figure 12Glyn Dillon, Everywhere and Nowhere, illus. in The Nao of Brown, London: SelfMadeHero (2012), dust jacket.

The map inside the dust jacket of *The Nao of Brown* (see fig. 12) illustrates the world of Ichi, Nao's favourite manga series which runs as a parallel narrative to her own. Plotted are Buddhist terms and abstract nouns such as 'integrity' and 'morality'; its resonances with Nao's personal philosophical concerns are immediately recognisable. The red and white colour scheme is mimetic of the book's own design, referred to by Dillon as 'the white book with the blood red "insides"'.[29] If, as with

[26] Chute, Hillary, 'Comics as literature? Reading Graphic Narrative.' *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 2 (2008), p. 457.
[27] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.
[28] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.
[29] Dillon, Glyn, int. Mark Kardwell, 'Glyn Dillon on the past, the future and The Nao of Brown', *Comic Book Resources*, http://robot6.comicbookresources.com/2012/10/glyn-dillon-on-the-past-the-future-and-the-nao-of-brown/, 8/10/12, Web, 18/01/15.

Epileptic, the book itself has become the signifying body, then its narrative world has become the mind within, metonymically represented by the 'psychological landscape' in fig. 12.

Gregory, Nao's love interest, quotes Hermann Hesse:

> Words do not express thoughts very well, everything immediately becomes a little different, a little distorted, a little foolish… (71).

For Nao verbal speech cannot reflect the discordant incessantness of her obsessions. Leaving the Buddhist temple after a spiral of violent thoughts, she can stammer out only '…sorry…', 'Oh? Yes, sorry, I just… … I'm sorry' (31). Ringing hollow within these gaping speech bubbles, it is only in the jagged corners of rectangles, scattered across a page, that words can truly represent the volatility of her mental state.

Figure 13Dillon, p. 96.

Fig. 13 depicts Nao after learning about a violent Buddhist thangka, the floating text boxes indicating a polyphony of distress. Buddhism, an apposite context given its constant presence in the narrative,

understands mental suffering in terms of 'excesses of thought and emotion'.[30] The structural freedom of the comic page allows the reader a sense of this excess, whose eye darts over the thoughts as randomly and uncontrollably as they occur. Just as Ware does with syntactically fragmented text which floats around Jimmy's head,[31] Dillon uses a principle he calls 'show don't tell' to *visually* represent cognitive dissonance.[32]

As in *Epileptic*, the imaginary in *The Nao of Brown* merges with the real in a vicious binary; Nao's thought cycles are as genuine and palpable as the rest of her life.

Figure 14Dillon, p. 30.

Fig. 14 depicts one such obsessive episode. Crucially, Dillon consigns equal halves of the page to the violence of Nao's obsessions and the serenity which it invades; visual proportions which give insight

[30] Smith, Daniel, *Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety*, New York: Simon & Schuster (2013), p. 27.
[31] Ware, Chris, *Jimmy Corrigan*, Jonathan Cape (2001), p. 120. All subsequent references will be from this edition and embedded in the text.
[32] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.

into her psychological duality as well as reflecting the wider thematic importance of duality in the novel. The page's visual echo of a yin and yang symbol relates to Dillon's assertion that 'balancing conflicts and contradictions' is one of his primary aims, exemplified primarily by the pictorial field of circles which pervades the narrative.[33] As we shall see, the circle imagery simulates a sense of harmony despite the psychological distress of the book's subject; Dillon quotes Carl Jung when describing the washing machines' circle as 'the archetype of wholeness'.[34]

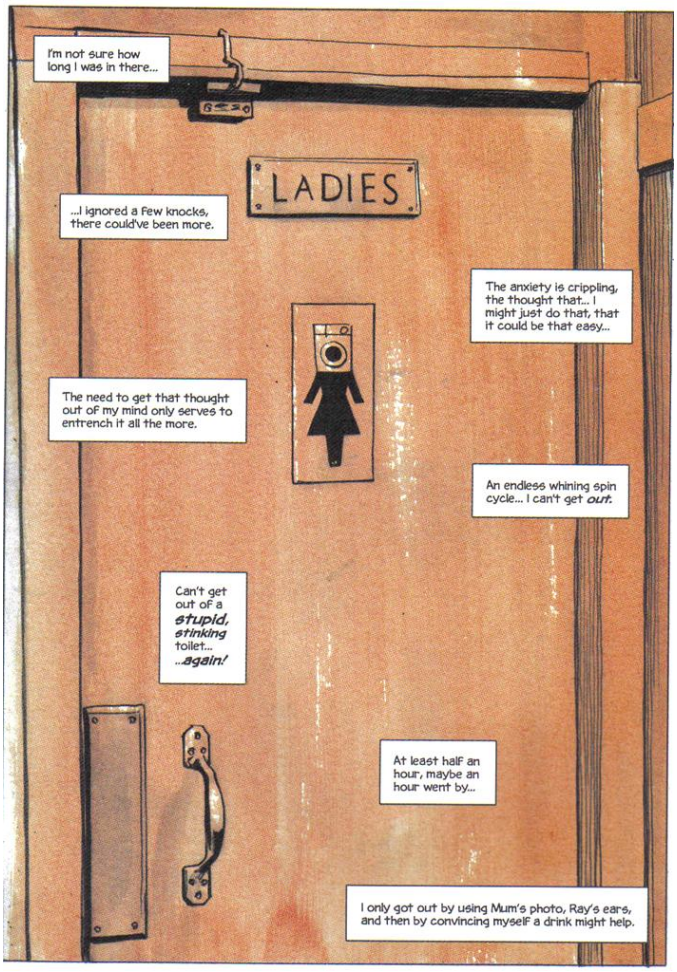

Figure 15Dillon, p. 111.

In fig. 15 a washing machine icon replaces the female figure's head as Nao's thoughts once again circle the page. The image recalls the cover illustration, in which Nao's own head is replaced by a

[33] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.
[34] Dillon, Glyn, int. Jason Sacks, 'Glyn Dillon: Obsessions, Wholeness and Washing Machines', *Comics Bulletin,* http://comicsbulletin.com/glyn-dillon-obsessions-wholeness-and-washing-machines/, 11/10/12, Web, 18/01/15.

washing machine. In both cases, her mental suffering is localised in the machine's void-like chasm – she describes the obsessive experience as 'an endless whining spin cycle… I can't get out' (111). At the same time however, the circles echo the Buddhist enso symbol, one of which can be found beneath the machine on the cover, embossed into the book, the imagery thus suggesting both chaos and Zen. The interplay between the washing machine and the enso is just one part of Dillon's wider interrelated network of circles, a system in which one is able to create non-sequential, associative links. In *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen terms this process 'braiding'.[35]

Figure 17Dillon, p.64.

Figure 18Dillon, p. 75.

Figure 16Dillon, p. 138.

In figs. 16, 17 and 18, Dillon combines images of the Nothing, Gregory, and the enso by unifying them in the circle symbol. Thus the associations of the three are allowed to bleed into one another: Gregory the 'perfect set of contradictions' (107), the elusive fictional deity of the Nothing in whom 'day was wed with night' (190), and the enso, 'symbolising enlightenment, the universe… the void' (28). In the reader's braiding together of these separate meanings, the images are allowed to share a collective symbolisation of both contradiction and completeness. Perhaps *The Nao of Brown*'s most conclusive example of such braiding is the group of figs. 19, 20, 21 and 22, which includes both the first and final pages of the novel.

[35] Groensteen, Thierry, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi (2007), p. 146.

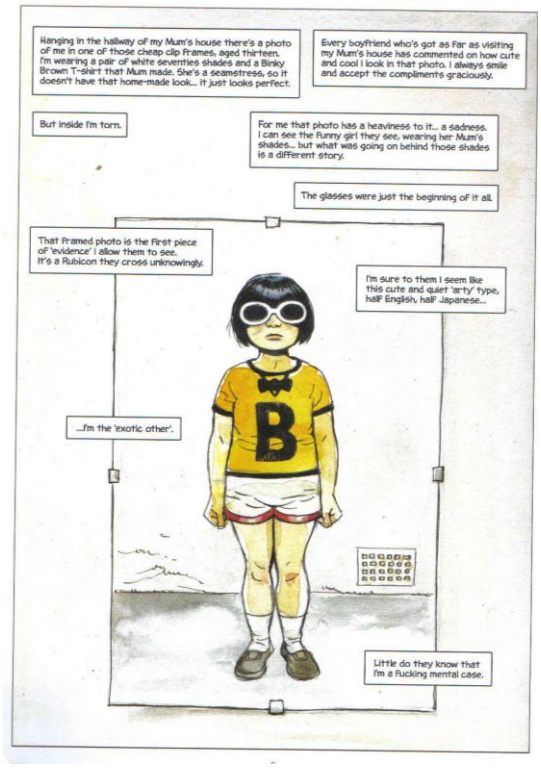

Figure 20Dillon, p. 8.

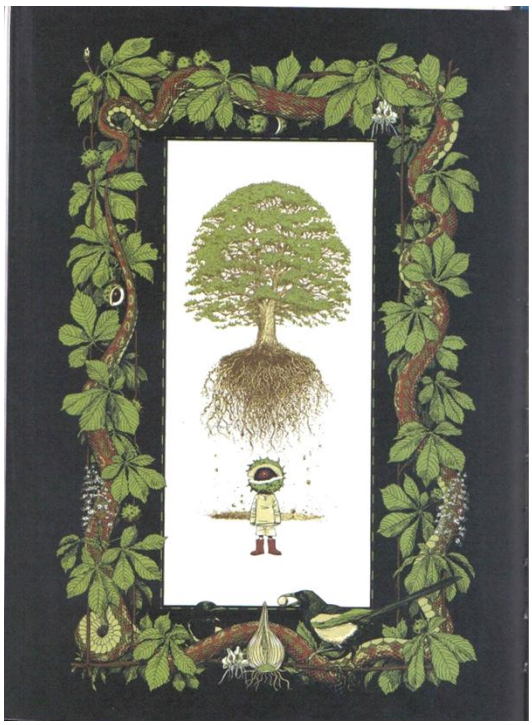

Figure 19Dillon, p. 20.

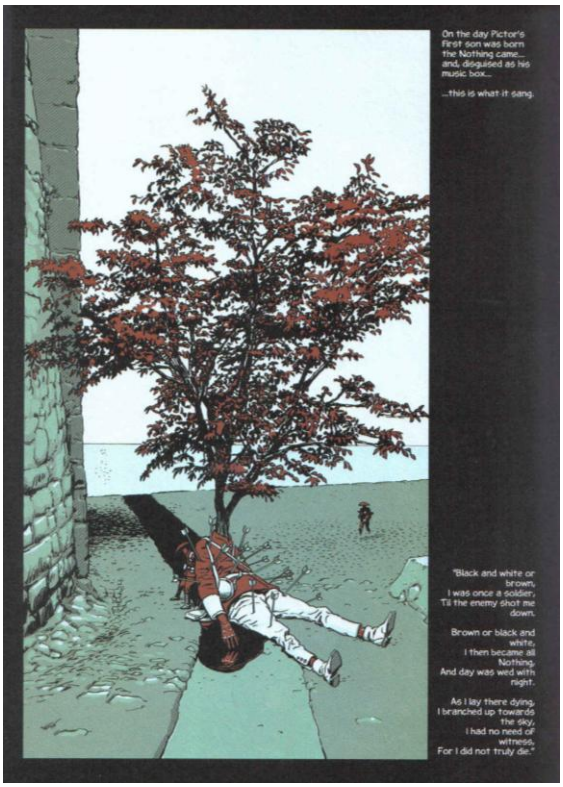

Figure 21Dillon, p. 191.

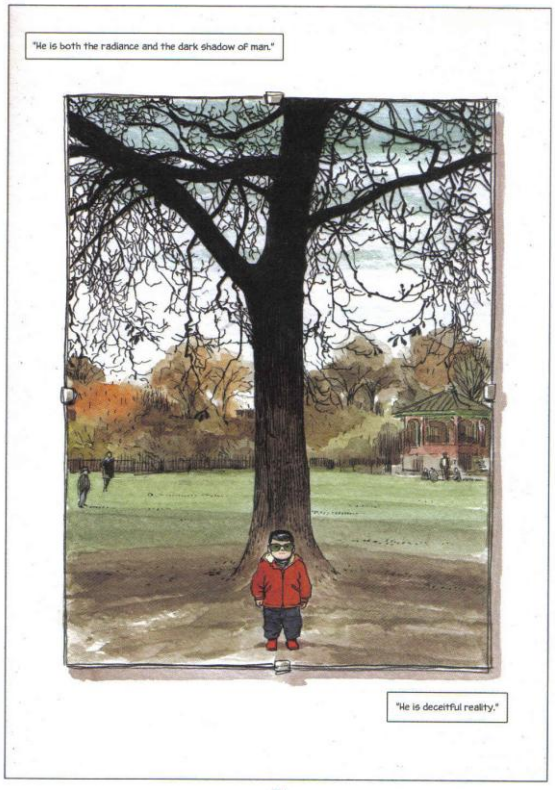

Figure 22Dillon, p. 204.

These interrelated images represent a psychological journey that thematically and structurally encompasses the entire story. The final page, fig. 22, is suggestive of Nao's triumph over her former

'heaviness' (8) through an acceptance of life's dualities. This image of her child transcends narrative boundaries by visually combining Nao's childhood self (fig. 19) with two figures of contradiction from the Ichi series; the Nothing (fig. 20) and Pictor (half man, half tree, fig. 21). Overlaying the page are descriptions of the Gnostic deity Abraxas, another recurring motif, taken from Carl Jung's *The Seven Sermons to the Dead*: 'He is both the radiance and the dark shadow of man', 'He is deceitful reality' (204). Thus the child, in his embodied representation of unified dualities, is a literal product of Nao's pursuit of internal balance. A structural representation of this same wholeness is in the book's cultural hybridisation, resulting from the duality of style introduced by the parallel narrative. Indeed, this operates even within the two narratives, Nao being a half English, half Japanese 'hafu' (84), and the Ichi storyline penned by the fictional Gil Ichiyama, through whom joint homage is paid to French comic artist Moebius and the Japanese mangas of Hayao Miyazaki.[36] Dillon's extensive interrelation of images and narratives relates to his conception of 'mapping the mind'; creating a systemic, interlinked and intertextual psychological landscape in which one may form seemingly endless associative paths. He seeks through these methods to exemplify the principle of 'As above so below'; 'whatever happens on any level of reality, also happens on every other level'.[37] Indeed, Dillon suggests that even the book's design, its white, 'dry, paper-like pure skin' and 'dark wet, blood and guts of the [red] innards' represent 'Two opposites coexisting in harmony'.[38]

Groensteen extrapolates upon the operation of braiding in an applicable description:

> … every panel exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others. This totality… responds to a model of organisation that is not that of the strip nor that of the chain, but that of the *network*.[39]

This is McCloud's description of meaningful 'closure' applied on a macro level; the reader of *The Nao of Brown* may construct links of meaning across the entire narrative. The concern is for a wholeness of experience, Dillon stating that Nao's condition is never her 'whole life', just as 'life is never all

[36] Dillon, Glyn, int. Chris Mautner, 'The Now of Glyn: An Interview with Glyn Dillon', *The Comics Journal*, http://www.tcj.com/the-now-of-glyn-an-interview-with-glyn-dillon/, 24/10/12, Web, 18/01/15.
[37] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.
[38] Dillon, Glyn, int. Mark Kardwell.
[39] Groensteen, p. 146.

dark, or all happiness and light'.[40] The depiction of mental suffering is one of the journey to accept that life, and oneself, are neither bad or good, black nor white, but rather, 'Brown'. Ensos in Buddhism act as 'visual or poetic koans – apparently paradoxical statements, questions, or demonstrations that point to or suggest the nature of reality'.[41] In this sense *The Nao of Brown*, in which Nao's mental suffering wars against her determination to be 'good', can be understood, in its cyclical wholeness, as its own koan.

Dillon explains to me his desire to create

> layered maps combining to try and tell the story but also, (and maybe more importantly) to elicit a *feeling*. Hopefully a combination of those kind of things build up and create something bigger than the story, something that's very hard to put into words.[42]

In *The Nao of Brown*, Dillon places the trauma of Nao's suffering in the context of a wider psychological landscape of balance and concord. The '*feeling*' which results is a transcendental, optimistic one, as in its polysemous system of connectivity the book suggests the potential for harmony to respond to chaos.

3) 'A convincing model of life': Cerebral three-dimensionality in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*

Dillon proposes an additional dimension to Groensteen's 'network' through his conception of 'layered maps', and this three dimensionality is the exemplifying feature of *Jimmy Corrigan*. Within, as with all of Chris Ware's work, the neurosis is palpable. Ware aligns himself with our other two graphic novelists in stating that the 'book is a fairly obvious metaphor of a human body':

> …aside from the fact that it has a spine, it's also bigger on the inside than it is on the outside, and it can harbour secrets. One can either be put off or invited into it depending on how it's structured and what's offered as the point of entry. It can affect how the whole story is felt.[43]

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[40] Dillon, Glyn, int. Mark Kardwell.
[41] Loori, John Daido, 'Foreword', *Enso: Zen Circles of Enlightenment,* by Audrey Y. Seo, Shambhala Publications (2007), p. xii.
[42] Dillon, Glyn, email to the author.
[43] Ware, Chris, int. Christopher Irving, 'Chris Ware on Building a Better Comic Book', *Graphic NYC*, http://www.nycgraphicnovelists.com/2012/03/chris-ware-on-building-better-comic.html, 06/03/12, Web, 18/01/15.

As well as reiterating the sense of literal embodiment, Ware echoes Dillon in stating the book's potential to be 'bigger on the inside than it is on the outside'. In *Jimmy Corrigan* he pushes this artistic vision to its limits, harnessing the three dimensionality of his visual and narrative structures so that his story might truly be 'felt'. Ware states in an interview that 'art can condense experience into something greater than reality', and in *Jimmy Corrigan* creates a world which seems to harbour even more dimensions than our own.[44]

The structural complexity of Ware's narrative is undeniable, intertwining the lives of Jimmy, his father (also Jimmy), his grandfather James, and even his great grandfather William (101-3). The resulting concurrence allows one to braid together the same personal and social anxieties which echo across all the narratives. Ware's diagrams present the generations simultaneously, further exemplifying the transcendence of temporal boundaries.

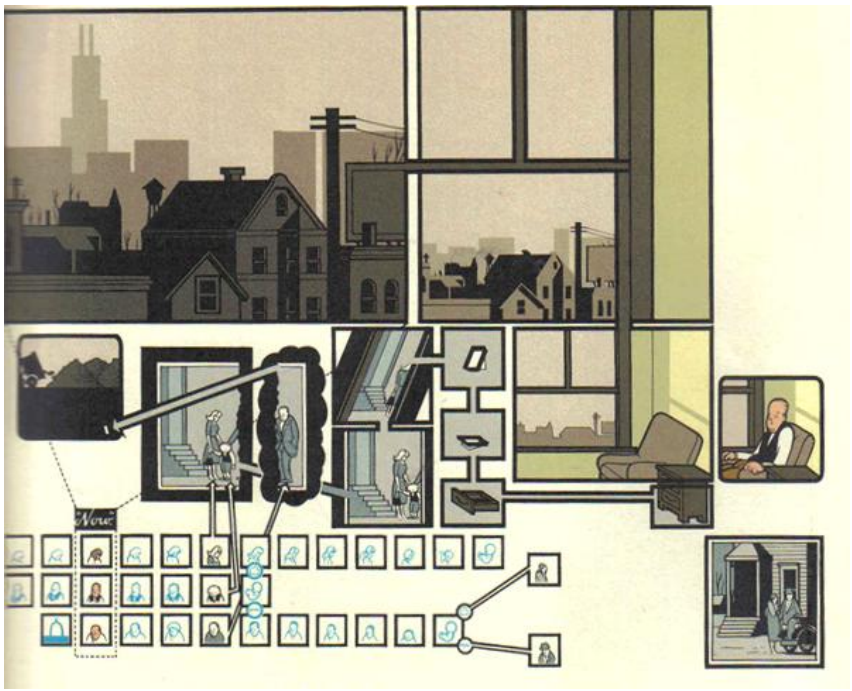

Figure 23Ware, Chris, *Jimmy Corrigan*, Jonathan Cape (2001), p. 40.

Depicting the lineages of Jimmy (fig. 23) and Amy (359-60), the two diagrams operate outside the main diegesis whilst still functioning as narrative devices. In Fig. 23 Ware eases us into the breakdown of the syntagmatic structure, by first allowing the window frames to extend outside of

[44] Ware, Chris, int. Tavi Gevinson, 'Work Hard and Be Kind: An Interview with Chris Ware', *Rookie*, http://www.rookiemag.com/2012/11/chris-ware-intervie/2/, 11/29/12, Web, 18/01/15.

the panel borders, and then guiding our eye out of the panels of Jimmy's room into the panels of his family tree; suddenly Jimmy's present loneliness is indicative of a network of abandonment which spans his entire family. Amy's family tree provides the narrative Easter egg that her and Jimmy are second cousins, sharing the same great grandfather. In 'Comics and the Grammar of Diagrams', Isaac Cates describes how this revelation makes Jimmy's lonely return to Chicago 'a tragedy of possible connections unrealized… a tragic failure of family reconciliation' which further compounds the heartbreak of the novel's ending.[45] As is typical of Ware's work, *Jimmy Corrigan*'s ability to 'harbour secrets' is in the essential difficulty of attaining 'closure', presenting information in complex diagrammatic forms. Cates argues that this decoding process is uniquely affective: 'the eventual revelation relies on a process of scrutiny or investigation in order for its emotional impact to feel earned or genuine'.[46] The result is a resonant tragic effect; as in the investigation of Amy's genealogy, Ware's characters become alienated beyond even their own comprehension.

However, Ware's most impressive figurations of the comic form lie in the consideration of his extra-narrative paratextual materials, including paper toy constructions, the 'General Instructions' and 'Corrigenda', and the elaborate double printed dust jacket. The novel's array of parallel components encourages Jeet Heer to compare the text to Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, describing how both include 'elements [which] play off one another to form a disorientating whole'. [47] Groensteen's process of braiding thus takes on an extra dimension as these items form new relations with the diegesis.

[45] Cates, Isaac, pp. 94-5
[46] Cates, p. 95.
[47] Heer, Jeet, 'Inventing Cartooning Ancestors: Ware and the Comics Canon', *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking*, p. 9.

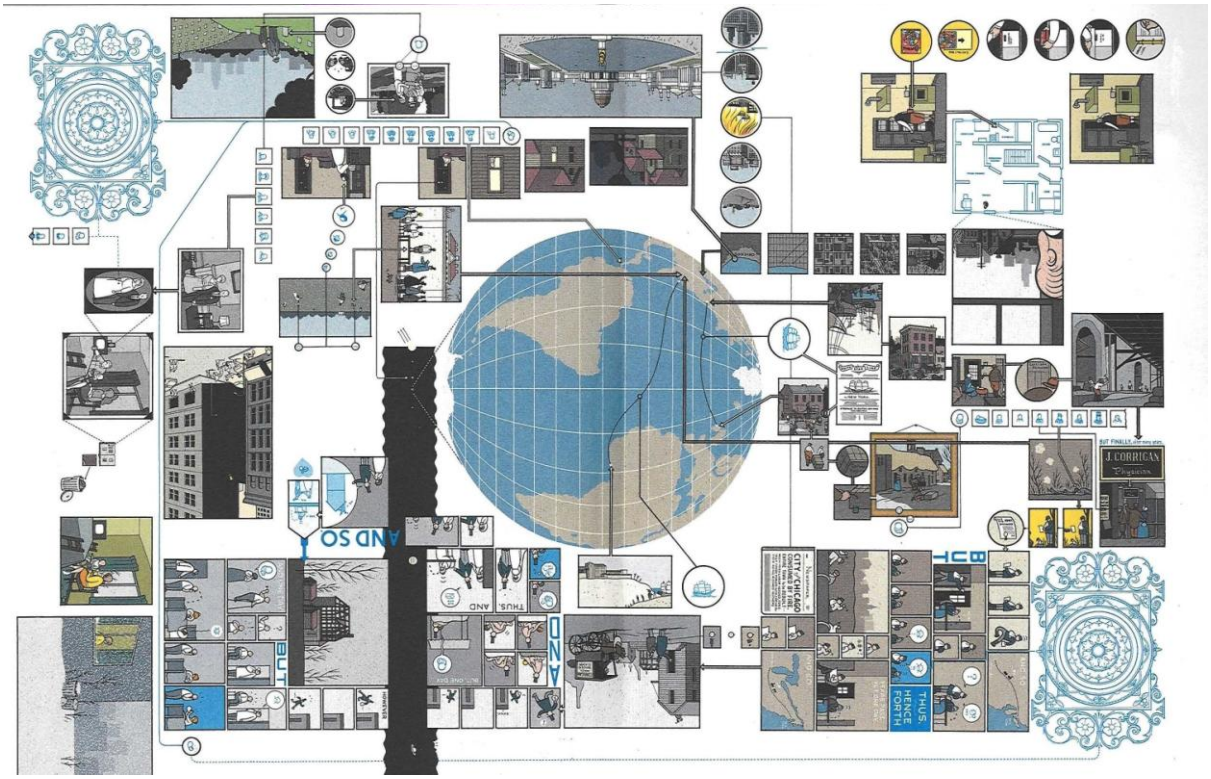

Figure 24Ware, dust jacket.

As in *The Nao of Brown*, the inside of *Jimmy Corrigan*'s dust jacket holds a map (fig. 24). Whereas Dillon's map serves figurative purposes, Ware's map is a three dimensional diagrammatic elucidation of his world's temporal and spatial coordinates, tracking its narratives across the globe. Ware shows us a typical panel of Jimmy looking out of his window, before locating his solitude in the empty spaces of his apartment blueprint, and then resonating it across the earth which is itself placed within the wider solar system. Zooming out indefinitely, Ware allows for a simultaneous panoptic view of the narratives, whilst also extending their temporal scope to include the Irish emigration to America and the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean. In the infinite expansion of Ware's world, one begins to understand his appraisal of a narrative's ability to be 'bigger on the inside than the outside'.

Ware's simulation of three dimensionality is literalised in his inclusion of paper models, which allow the items of Jimmy's world to invade our own.

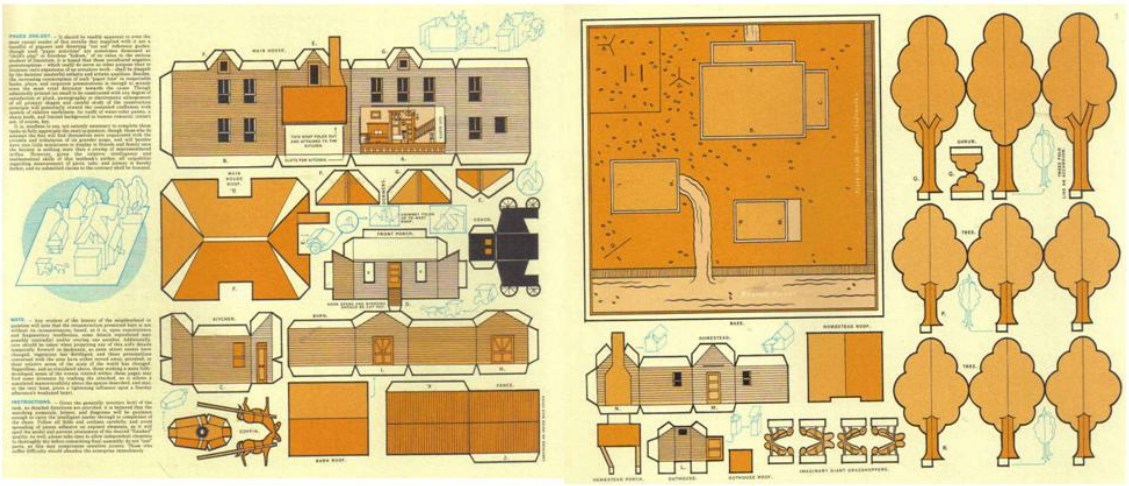

Figure 25Ware, pp. 208-9.

As well as a paper figure of Jimmy himself on the outside of the dust jacket, Ware splices into his narrative a paper zoetrope (24) and the paper dimensions of James Corrigan's 1890s home (fig. 25) for the reader's assembly. Ware suggests alongside the house that 'those who do attempt the feat will find themselves more acquainted with the rivulets and tributaries of [the story's] grander scope' (208), whilst writing of the zeotrope's potential to assume 'a convincing model of life in which [the reader] may find some poetic sympathy' (24). Through these self-referential encouragements Ware does not layer his maps as Dillon aims to, but literally brings them into the reader's world. The purpose of creating this 'simulated maneuverability about the spaces described' (38) is again, affective, facilitating a 'poetic sympathy' with the melancholy within through literal interaction with the book's scenes and characters.

The reader's physical manipulation of the book is key to this experience, a process as non-linear as the narrative world within. The fold out map requires rotations in all directions for comprehension of its contents, and the conspicuous lack of pagination suggests that the reader may read the book both backwards and forwards, rereading or skipping ahead as desired. Georgina Banita describes the

structural freedom of Ware's maps and diagrams in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'rhizome' concept:

> In this system, any point may be connected to any other point. Ware's comics resemble this model of connectivity in the allusive form of its non-linear, boundary-less narrativity that lacks temporal finitude and closure.[48]

As I have discussed, Ware invokes this directionless quality in the physical reading experience as well as in his complication of pictorial representations. This surrender of narratorial authority finds its culmination in his *Building Stories*, composed of fourteen shuffle-able interior texts of different shapes and sizes. However, as laid out in Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, as well as this inter-connectivity the rhizome bears another fundamental, three dimensional quality:

> The rhizome has its own outside with which it makes another rhizome; therefore, a rhizomatic whole has neither outside nor inside.[49]

This structure thus pulls Ware's paratextual material into the narrative fray. In its particular allegiance to rhizomatic structure, *Jimmy Corrigan* 'has neither outside nor inside'; whereas Dillon figures *The Nao of Brown* as an exterior body encasing a mental interior, here the physical and the psychological become indistinct. Melding mental and bodily experience together in a single, all-encompassing experience, Ware suggests that they are not merely contiguous, but inextricably one and the same. Thus, 'exterior' components bear essential value to the 'interior' narrative; for example, the book's dust jacket simulates the verisimilitude of Jimmy's life in its inclusion of his doctors report and self-written 'Brief Description'. The doctor's report provides not only details about Jimmy's sprained foot, but also his measurements, the results of medical examinations, and most notably, further insight into psychological fragility;

> While waiting, patient indicated great anxiety regarding travel. Inappropriate emotional anger towards self. Hyperventilation; some tears. Eventually seemed reoriented; inquiries regarding need for psychiatric care dismissed by patient.

[48] Banita, Georgina, 'Chris Ware and the Pursuit of Slowness', *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking*, pp. 182-3

[49] Eco, Umberto, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Indiana University Press (1986), p. 81.

Also printed on the jacket is a 'Brief Description' of Jimmy written by the character himself. Just as it is unclear who speaks the cursive words of the occasional narrative voice within, the authorship of the book is compromised by the 'Brief' moment of Jimmy's own authorship, Ware's self-deprecating 'Apology' for his authorship, and the suggested indebtedness to his father as 'co-author' in the coincidence of his life to the fictional denouement (383). In the 'Corrigenda''s relation to the internal narrative the rhizome thus indiscriminately absorbs author and character alike. Ware muses that:

> the four or five hours [the book] took to read is almost exactly the total time I ever spent with my father, either in person or on the telephone. Additionally, and at the risk of sounding melodramatic, its final printed size seems nearly equal in volume to the little black box, or urn, before which I briefly stood this January, beneath a color photo of the man its label claimed to contain. (383)

This passage indicates how Ware, for all his proclamations of the 'chasm which gapes between the… coincidence of "real" life and my weak fiction' (383), is himself undertaking the most extra-narrative of all braiding; between his experiences of the book and the events of his own life.

Through the all-encompassing nature of his work, Ware renders a meticulously interactive reading experience, remarking of comics; 'the emotion [comes] from the way the story itself [is] structured'.[50] *Jimmy Corrigan* psychologically overwhelms its own reader in what Banita calls an 'excess of narrative connectivity'.[51] If, as Buddhism suggests, anxiety is the symptom of 'excesses of thought and emotion',[52] then the endlessness of the reading experience pulls us too into Ware's world of anxiousness. Puzzling through Ware's toys, maps and extra materials one feels the frustrating impossibility of deciphering a narrative so saturated with things to decipher. As suggested by Barthes, in undermining the 'author-God' that limits a text by 'furnish[ing] it with a final signified', through placing the onus of signification on the reader Ware posits *us* as the powerless reader-God of his disordered secular world.[53] The *Jimmy Corrigan* universe, which explores a series of failed paternal relationships, is devoid of faithful authority figures; looking through his office window into a

[50] Raeburn, Daniel, *Chris Ware*, London: Laurence King (2004), p. 11.
[51] Banita, p. 183.
[52] Smith, Daniel, p. 27.
[53] Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text*, London: HarperCollins (1977), p. 147.

previous age of comics, Jimmy witnesses the suicide of a man dressed as a superhero (19), described by Brogan as a 'brief acknowledgement of a dead form'.[54] Ware enters his reader into a postlapsarian era of the comic in which Superman is as much a victim of life as the rest of us.

Yet despite this apparent desolation, as in *The Nao of Brown* there is a consolation in the sincerity and universality of Ware's creation. Through *Jimmy Corrigan*'s multi-dimensional, rhizomatic narrative structure Ware attempts to recreate a truthful 'shape of life, in an honest, awkward way that feels and hopefully *is* human.'[55]

Conclusion

Thomas A. Bredehoft suggests in *The Visible Text*':

> [Comics] challenge … the notion that 'the text' is ideal, imaginary, linguistic, irreal: comics are real, and their material component is always part of both what comics are and what comics mean.[56]

Epileptic, The Nao of Brown and *Jimmy Corrigan* provide a 'material' verisimilitude to psychological and emotional experience, which urges the reader to literally grapple with the difficult subjects within. In explorations of mental suffering ranging from the diagnosable effects of epilepsy and OCD to indefinable feelings of grief and loneliness, these three graphic novelists invoke what Chute describes as the 'insistent, affective, urgent' quality of the comic medium.[57] Through the harnessing of visual, systemic and rhizomatic structures and the very materiality of the books themselves, these texts present new possibilities for generating reader understanding, or 'closure'. In our direct interaction with the narratives, through absorbing their images, turning their pages and handling their bodies, we form a unique personal relationship with the texts. Ultimately, it is this obscure, *affective* potential which lends the comic form so sensitively to this role of representation.

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[54] Brogan, Jacob, 'Masked Fathers: *Jimmy Corrigan* and the Superheroic Legacy', *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking*, p. 16.
[55] Ware, Chris, 'Live webchat: Chris Ware', *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/aug/15/live-webchat-chris-ware-graphic-novelist/, 15/08/13, Web, 18/01/15.
[56] Bredehoft, Thomas A., *The Visible Text: Textual Production and Reproduction from Beowulf to Maus*, Oxford University Press (2014), p. 149.
[57] Chute, 'Comics as literature? Reading Graphic Narrative', p. 457.

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Appendix

Dillon, Glyn, email to the author, 05/01/15. Questions from the author italicised.

Hello Aileen,
Hope this is okay…

The comic form has recently lent itself to many personal, often autobiographical narratives. Nao is the only one of my three graphic novels that is not explicitly autobiographical and yet, there is still a sense of you in it - your wife suffered from OCD, your son was afraid of washing machine holes, and you have a great interest in manga and toy-making yourself. I feel like elements of autobiography seep into almost all comics somehow or another. Do you agree?

I think it's impossible not to 'include' yourself when writing. By it's very nature writing is a form of personal expression, so even when it's not literal autobiography you are somehow revealing something of yourself... whenever you write anything.

What is it about comics that seem to evoke intimate topics (like mental suffering) so evocatively?

The quick answer is - The magic combination of words and pictures. The longer answer I suppose, is the fact that graphic novels have an intimacy to them in the same way a prose book does, as opposed to a film, which is designed to be seen in a cinema and suffers from all the restrictions that go with that. With a book you are in much more control of the speed with which you take in the information, it's a much more personalised experience. So that might go some way to explaining why those kind of stories work well in this medium but I don't think it necessarily explains why comic artists choose to write those stories.

In Epileptic David B. utilises occultism, esoterism and the world of dreams to understand his brother's epilepsy – saying he wants to access a 'hidden dimension'. I see a similar appeal to 'otherness' in the influence of folklore and foreign culture in The Nao of Brown – namely through Gil Ichiyama with the Moebius/Miyazaki presence, Eastern philosophy, and also in Nao herself. You've said 'the mysterious' excites you and that 'duality' is a key theme – why is there something otherworldly about this graphic novel?

I'm not sure. It may sound odd to say but when I was younger I used to feel like I wasn't really 'of this world'... I've felt very 'disconnected' at certain points in my life, I don't think it's particularly uncommon to feel that way, so maybe there's an element of that involved.

Jessica Hynes in your Foreword describes Nao as 'the notes between the notes', 'a depiction of felt and thought experience'. In the book you present a complete lens into emotions and feelings which you can access even without Nao's affliction. You've spoken a lot about the book as a kind of gift to readers who are POCD sufferers. To what extent were you writing for your other, 'neurotypical' readers?

I think if I'm honest, it wasn't a gift to readers who are POCD sufferers, (did I really say that?!)… But I'm happy to say it was a gift to just the one sufferer that I knew (my wife). But it was also definitely for myself, in order that I could learn about the condition by immersing myself in the subject as much as possible. So in that way it starts out as a very private, personal thing and then, weirdly, it becomes a very public endeavour. Something that people feel free to comment & pass judgement on. Which of course I understand... but it don't stop it feeling odd.
For me, it's impossible to imagine an audience when writing.... Well, maybe not impossible, but it's probably a very bad idea, very off-putting & distracting I would've thought.
I was just trying to write something that showed life is more complex... I didn't want it to be all about the OCD because even though, for sufferers it can be an all pervasive, debilitating condition, there is still always moments when things are 'normal' and funny things happen. Life is never all one thing.

Jessica also describes it as a 'transcendental' and 'ephemeral' experience. There is indeed a sense of trying to get at something deeper than what's initially seen, especially as you avoid mentioning OCD

explicitly, which you've explained your reasons for in many interviews. Nao says she feels uncomfortable being labelled. Gregory quotes Hesse: 'Words do not express thoughts very well, everything immediately becomes a little different, a little distorted, a little foolish.' Are you trying to transcend the mere statement of the affliction by evoking a more universal experience of life? It's like you're not telling the reader what Nao is, rather letting them experience who she is; what life is.

Thanks, that is definitely what I was trying to do.

Good writing tips I got somewhere along the way were...
"Show don't tell."
This is something that's said over & over in many writing & script manuals, it's really basic but still an easy trap to fall in to if you're not careful.
And...
"When reading/watching something, I'd rather be confused for ten minutes than bored after two."
This is something I hate about many films, books, stories etc (especially films). When you're not given credit, as the audience, to work something out for yourself. So they spoon feed it to you, in case there's someone a bit slow in the class who doesn't get it. Things become very boring, very quickly this way. I'd much rather be thinking I've missed something & desperately trying to work out what is going on, until it falls into place. When you have to do a bit of work then you get to feel clever when you work something out!

I initially didn't want to have any mention of OCD in the book at all but my publisher convinced me that it should be in the blurb on the dust jacket. They needed something, a 'hook', in order to sell & promote it with.
It might've been better without that blurb, I don't know.

Your fascination with mapping interests me. Chris Ware describes the artist's duty to 'tangle with what seems unnavigable about life', and has drawn many maps of the settings in his work, zoomed out maps of the world, celestial maps. David B. calls his work that of an 'explorer', 'exploring new paths'. To what extent do you think of the panels of the book as mapping out Nao's psychological landscape? And there is of course the beautiful map - 'Everywhere and Nowhere' - inside the dust jacket. What do you think the value is in mapping as metaphor for understanding oneself?

It's always helpful to have a nao (Haha! Interesting typo - I went to write 'map' but looked up and saw my phone had auto-corrected it to 'nao' or my fingers had just missed the correct keys).

A long time ago I read the phrase 'As above so below' and it stayed with me because it seemed to apply to so many things I was thinking about at the time. I later learned it originated in the Vedas but was been repeated in Hermetic texts. Basically it is getting at the fact that whatever happens on any level of reality, also happens on every other level.
A simple example being, when you see satellite pictures of a geographical nature, the patterns you see, formed by the rivers or rock formations etc, are repeated in human biology on a 'micro' level… y'know, that feeling the bare trees look like the bronchi & bronchioles of lungs.

So, by that token, what appears to be a geographical map could easily become a metaphorical map of ones personal, psychological landscape.

So yes, mapping, for me is a great method for depicting & understanding oneself.

There's the character in the book, Pictor, (in Latin pictor means painter). In a map of the stars you can find a constellation by the same name. The constellation depicts a palette & easel, instruments that symbolise the Age of Enlightenment. All that stuff feeds into the ideas & themes, layered maps combining to try and tell the story but also, (and maybe more importantly) to elicit a *feeling.* Hopefully a combination of those kind of things build up and create something bigger than the story, something that's very hard to put into words but has an effect nonetheless.

I see quite an interest in human physicality in Nao - from the metamorphoses in the Ichi story, to Nao as a 'hafu', and the frequent zoom ins on her face, eyes, other physical details. On the first page Nao says 'what was going on behind those shades is a different story'. How do you feel about the relationship between the mind and the body in context of mental suffering?

I don't think you can separate mind and body. I understand the temptation to do so. But you can't have one without the other.

To me graphic depictions of mental suffering often seem to involve a kind of 'bodying' of the mental experiences, such as its manifestation as a tentacled monster in Nao towards the end. I'm reminded of the Tulpa - 'a palpable being derived from visualisation'. How far do you think the mental can be expressed through the physical? What's the relationship there?

Well, I guess the marks I made on the page that were my efforts to represent certain things, are just me trying to express my 'mental' self, in the same way I'm trying to do now by typing these little letters into my iPhone when I should really be going to bed. (Long rambling sentences are a sure sign I should give this up and continue tomorrow)

I guess it's another way of 'mapping' the mind, giving it a physical form, in order to help tell the story or in an effort to transmit a feeling.

I also know that to Chris Ware books are a clear metaphor for the human body. You describe the book as a 'white book with blood red 'insides''. Also I know the physical details of the book - the emboss, the double printed dust jacket - were important to you; something ''digital' could never deliver'. Why were these details important? How do you feel about books as tactile, physical objects?

The physical object is very important to me, the physical world is where I really live. I spend a lot of time in the 'digital realms' but it's out of necessity rather than choice. I still prefer to draw with a pencil on paper even when working, as I do now, in the film industry, where everyone does things digitally these days.
A book smells, it has weight, it has a physical presence that communicates with you just by being in a pile on my studio floor. It's there, reminding you to read it, or suggesting that you read it again. Digital books don't do that. That'd not to say I'm anti digital, I couldn't have made Nao without digital technology. But there's a great satisfaction in having something become 'real', a real object that you can hold.

The mental/physical dynamic, the violent obsessions and then compulsive reassurances, the simultaneous emptiness and wholeness of the ensos, the 'hafu'. Nao calls Gregory 'a perfect set of contradictions', and there's also Abraxas. A lot of the book seems to be about balancing conflicts and contradictions, would you agree?*

Absolutely.

*sorry, I just had to correct 'compulsions' to 'obsessions'

Thanks for these very interesting questions. Some of which I felt you were kind of answering already. But that's nice to read. It feels like you have a very good grasp of what I was trying to do.

Thank you for your kind words.

I wish you all the best success

Take care

Glyn