

Anatomy of the Medical Image

*Knowledge Production and Transfiguration
from the Renaissance to Today*

Edited by

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BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Illustrations	VIII
Notes on Contributors	XII

Introduction	1
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Axel Fliethmann and Christiane Weller

PART 1

The Epistemology of Anatomy and Aesthetics

- 1 Rembrandt and the Dutch Cartesians: The Medical Body and the Body of Christ in the Anatomy Lessons 21
Jill Redner
- 2 Pathologies of Imagination and Medical Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe 57
Axel Fliethmann
- 3 Re-Imagining the “Birthing Machine:” Art and Anatomy in Obstetric and Anatomical Models Made by Women 74
Elizabeth Stephens
- 4 The Body in Motion: The Image of Man in Physical Education in Late Eighteenth-Century Schnepfenthal 95
Heikki Lempa

PART 2

Identity and Visual (De)Formation

- 5 Photography, Arrested Development, and the Facial Expression of Emotion 115
Corinna Wagner
- 6 The Living and the Dead in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Medical Portraiture 140
Joanna Madloch

- 7 Picturing Pathology: An Affirmative Reading of Lam Qua's Medical Portraiture 157
 Carolyn Lau
- 8 "The Quickening:" Embryonic Stages in Visualising and Understanding Depression and Anxiety 171
 stef lenk

PART 3

Power, Consumption and the Pathological Body

- 9 Capitalism without Desire: Economic Thinking and the Visualisation of the Biomedical Body ca. 1900 197
 Claudia Stein
- 10 The Pitfalls of Utilitarianism: Capillary Images and Biopolitical Interventionism during the Weimar Republic 218
 Michael Hau
- 11 Sex Murder, Photographic Evidence, and the Weimar Cultural Imagination 233
 Birgit Lang
- 12 Imagining Madness: The Conceptualisation of Mental Illness in Psychiatric Art Collections 248
 Christiane Weller
- 13 Biomedica in the Flesh: Imagining Biomedical Interventions as Horror 262
 Barry Murnane

Bibliography 279

Index of Names 307

Index of Subjects 309

“The Quickening:” Embryonic Stages in Visualising and Understanding Depression and Anxiety

stef lenk

Research on wordless comics and visual narratives is ever increasing, specifically within the area of graphic illness narratives. This can be seen by the continuing growth of the Graphic Medicine movement (USA and Great Britain),¹ the development of the PathoGraphics project (Berlin),² and the general rise of interdisciplinary based medical humanities courses attempting to address human medical experience from both artistic and scientific perspectives. In this growing line of research, however, there seems to be a decided focus on content and context rather than the actual creative processes with which people (both artists and non-artists) construct internal personal narratives of their lives.

Visual thinking and drawing provide a unique language with which to convey liminal experiences.³ Because we do not have a codified dictionary of meaning for images, using them to communicate forces us to start new dialogues based on atypical visual and experiential landscapes. As a result, taking a closer look at graphic narratives made by someone who has themselves experienced depression and anxiety might provide new perspectives and avenues of conversation on the topic. Artworks tend not to be stigmatised in the same way illness is: they provide visual externalisations which can act as non-threatening middle grounds for discussing otherwise uncomfortable topics such as mental illness, initiating new conversations between private (individual/artist/client) and public (reader/therapist), which might lead to de-stigmatisation and/or positive change.

Cognitive scientist David Kirsh in his article “Using Sketching: To Think, To Recognise, To Learn” describes the use of sketching as a fundamental problem-solving strategy. He points out that the more elements there are to a problem, the more projections and associations between elements have to be made within the brain, and the harder it is to keep all that information reliably

¹ See graphicmedicine.org.

² See www.fsgs.fu-berlin.de/pathographics.

³ See Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage, 2nd ed. 2007 and 3rd ed. 2012).

structured. Externalising these mental projects through language, images, symbols, or diagrams gives them a reliable anchor in the outside world [and] keeps them from disappearing, making it easier for the individual to successfully process complicated problems. Projection, Kirsh says, “is a way of compensating for the limits of our imagination.”⁴

The comic to be analysed in this article, entitled “The Quickening,” uses drawing and visual thinking to create a graphic narrative and then to visually analyse it to find perspectives on personal experiences of mental illness. The research process involves examining and evaluating the work at all stages of development in a search for cycles of thought and narrative meaning which might not be evident through mere evaluation of the artwork itself. Also used in the analysis are elements of autoethnography, an approach to research and writing which “seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*).”⁵

The project has varied goals: 1) to seek connections between the creative process and the process of understanding mental illness; 2) to discuss how illness has been stigmatised in public/personal discourse, and how art can provide a middle ground that moves beyond these stigmas; 3) to demonstrate that visual works can open up new conversations between private (individual/artist/client) and public (reader/therapist) about mental illness, particularly through taking a closer look at their developmental process; and 4) to encourage increased visual literacy by breaking down artworks in language from conception to completion.

This chapter provides a short description of my art practice followed by a preliminary analysis of drafts and developmental stages of “The Quickening,” to examine how imagery changed over the course of the story’s development in order to create a comprehensive narrative about a specific aspect of mental illness, namely the potential genetic inheritance of depression and anxiety.

1 “The Quickening,” a Preliminary Overview

The focus of my art practice to date has been the use of narrative drawings to create stories about inner landscapes of human emotion which, due to their

4 David Kirsh, “Using Sketching: To Think, To Recognize, To Learn,” in *Thinking Through Drawing: Practice into Knowledge. Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Symposium on Drawing, Cognition and Education*, eds. Andrea Kantrowitz, Angela Brew and Michelle Fava (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2011), 123–125, here 123.

5 Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011). <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589>.

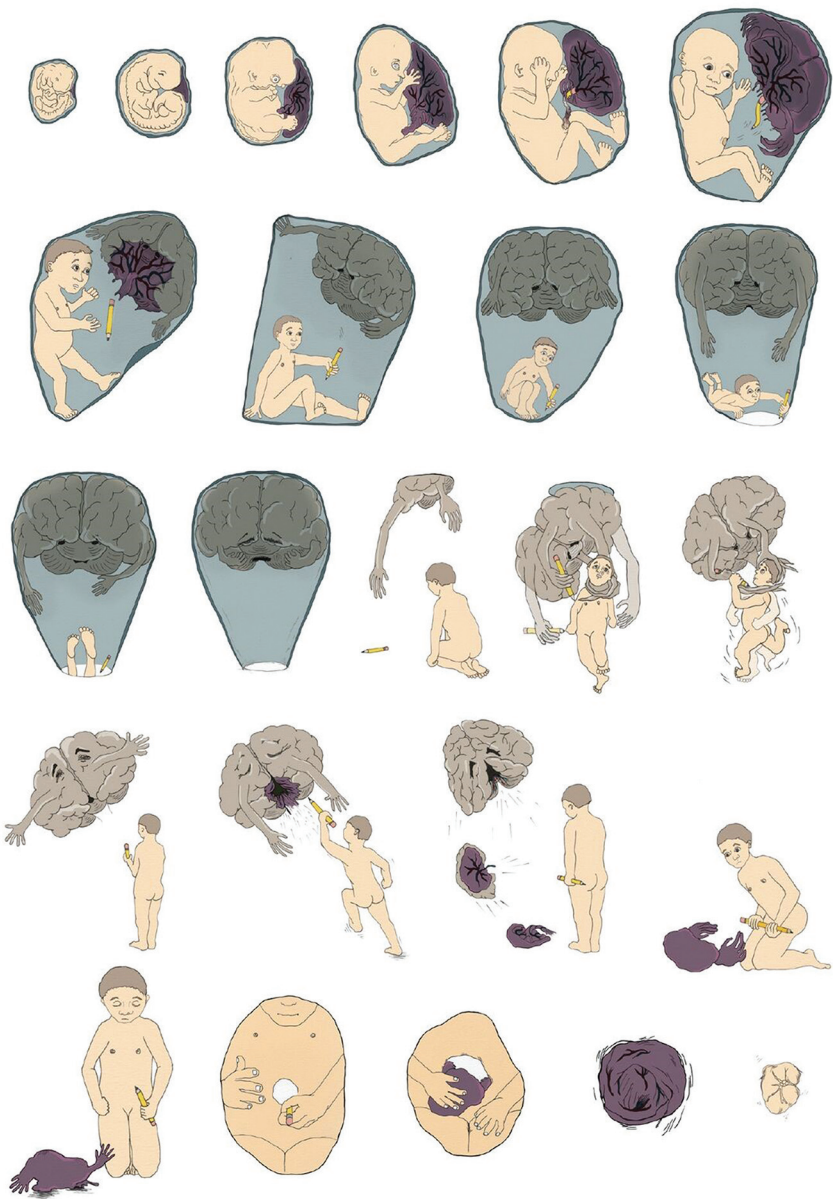


FIGURE 8.1 “The Quickening,” stef lenk

transient and unreliable nature, potentially blur the lines between reality and fiction. The use of sequential pictures and minimal to no text is intended to recall a time pre-language and to reflect the intrinsic solitude of being an individual trying to psychologically understand the world “from the inside out,” as it were. The use of metaphor in fictional narratives allows room for projection

(by the reader/audience) of new interpretations and multiple meanings specific and significant to their own private worlds, which can open up the potential for private stories to take on universal or public meaning.

2 Conception and Beginning Stages

The artistic process begins in a relatively fragmented series of sketches where diverse elements are put to paper and then combined, contrasted, and integrated to begin forming a cohesive narrative. The story is drawn and redrawn, focusing on different visual elements which will eventually have to blend comprehensibly if the chronicle is to be believable as a story.

“The Quickening” (Figure 8.1) was created based on the theme of genetic inheritance of depression and anxiety, addressing both the destructive and the creative nature of that “inheritance.” The wordless narrative reflects psychology specifically by establishing a visual similarity between the placenta and the brain, while the contrast between panelled and unpanelled comics distinguishes what happens *in utero* from what happens after birth. Susan Merrill Squier, in her analysis of “The Quickening” (for the exhibition “*Sick! Kranksein im Comic / Reclaiming Illness through Comics*” at the Berlin Museum of Medical History) points out: “As the child struggles to separate from potentially smothering maternal influences, the transformation from umbilicus to pencil implies that the maternal transmission is both damaging (depression) and curative (artistic ability).”⁶

Looking beyond the final comic to the process of its creation yields further evidence on how ideas (first framed in language) were developed and integrated into a visual narrative. Preliminary brainstorming on the idea of genetic inheritance brought up associated circumstances such as the development of the foetus, time in the womb, and the nourishment of the embryo by the placenta of the mother. This was then visually extrapolated through illustrations of stages of embryotic development. The placenta, the source of the child's nourishment and development, comes to represent epi/genetically inherited fears, etc. It grows along with the child; their close relationship is visually established through their proximity in the constrained space of the womb and connection via the umbilical cord. Only when the two figures separate from each other, in real life through birth and in the graphic narrative via severance

6 Susan Merrill Squier, Irmela Marei Krüger-Fürhoff, Uta Kornmeier, Nina Schmidt and stef lenk, *Sick! Kranksein im Comic / Reclaiming Illness through Comics*, 1st ed. (Berlin: Patho-Graphics project / Freie Universität 2017), 16–17, here 16; my emphasis. http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/receive/FUDOCs_document_00000028132, accessed 8 January 2018.

of the umbilical cord, does the conflict begin. In the narrative we are made visually aware, however, that the interrelation remains in the guise of a pencil, which will be used as 1) a tool of escape: used to draw the hole through which the child falls; 2) a tool of aggression: puncturing the brain to render it small and harmless; and 3) a tool of creative resolution: used to redraw a navel to "allow" the placenta to be internalised at the end of the comic.

The image of the placenta is representative of "*in utero* nourishment, the growth of the character, [and] the relentlessness of genetically inherited traits."⁷ The pencil becomes a metaphor for creativity, drawing, and the child's initial gain, subsequent loss to the placenta, and regaining of control. The growth of the placenta through panels six to ten and its subsequent metamorphosis into a brain demonstrates the growing/overwhelming power of genetically inherited memory. The navel in the last panel of the comic echoes in shape the first panel with the embryo, visually indicating that the cycle has the potential to repeat itself through generations via rebirth.

3 Beyond the Product: Searching for Meaning in Process Materials

Developmental scientist Jaan Valsiner, who investigates mental and affective processes in human development, believes that culture provides the substance from which the mind and society are actualised.⁸ He proposed that an individual is "constantly creating meaning ahead of the time when it might be needed—orienting oneself towards one or another side of anticipated experience, and thus preparing oneself for it."⁹ Through empathising (positively and/or negatively) with characters in a self-created story, the artist determines at each stage how the narrative will unfold. The artist's mental state also influences this development, therefore each stage of the development of a story can provide clues as to her mental processes which might be significant and/or meaningful in understanding the final artworks. Direct analysis of artistic products is a conventional way of understanding graphic narratives, but what of the developmental process that led to their creation? Can we learn more about the implicit meaning of cultural artefacts through also examining what thought processes went into making them?

Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward's grounded theory analysis of creativity in the domain of art-making provides an excellent breakdown of artistic process

⁷ Squier, "Sick!," 16.

⁸ Jaan Valsiner, "Culture in Minds and Societies: Foundations of Cultural Psychology," *Psychological Studies* 54 (2007): 238–239, here 238.

⁹ Valsiner, "Culture in Minds and Societies," 238.

into four phases which will be used as part of the foundation for analysing the work created:

Phase 1 | *Artwork conception* | [the] process of identifying an implicit or explicit idea that could be a potential artwork [derived from three major sources]: the artist's ongoing art-making enterprise, the interplay of life experience, and external influences.

Phase 2 | *Idea development* | The complex process of structuring, extending, and restructuring a particular artwork idea through a range of decision-making, problem-solving, experimental, and information-gathering activities.

Phase 3 | *Making the artwork* | [The phase where] the work undergoes a transformation from a purely conceptual entity into a conceptual and physical entity. At this point the artwork can also be further influenced by the physical constraints of its making.

Phase 4 | *Finishing artwork and resolution* | An evaluation of the work by the artist resulting in preparing the work for exhibition, publication, etc. or abandoning/shelving the work for further development.¹⁰

This chapter uses aspects of Mace and Ward's breakdown as a basis for the analysis of the comic.

4 "The Quickening"

The artistic process for the making of this comic begins in a relatively fragmented series of sketches where diverse elements are put to paper and then combined, contrasted, and integrated into a cohesive narrative. The story is drawn and redrawn, focusing on different elements of the narrative which eventually will have to join seamlessly if the chronicle is to be believable.

5 Draft 1

Concerned with the visualisation of an internal world, as well as conveying the beginning phases of human development. At this stage of the comic's development the narrative begins with a close-up of the mother's belly (figure

¹⁰ Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward, "Modeling the Creative Process: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Creativity in the Domain of Art Making," *Creativity Research Journal* 14, no. 2 (2002): 179–192, here 182–187.

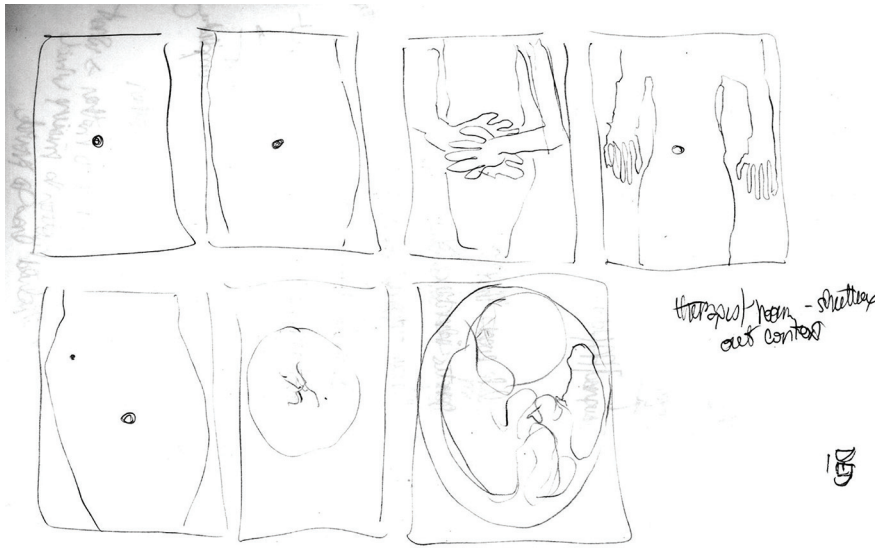


FIGURE 8.2 "The Quickening," stef lenk

8.2). The first two panels would be meant to establish this; in the third panel the mother's hands cover the belly, and in the fourth are removed, revealing a "peephole" inside the body. Subsequent panels "zoom in(side)" the mother's body through the navel to a close-up view of the foetus *in utero*. At this point the mother is still a part of the narrative, even if only a portion of her body is visible.

6 Draft 3

Visualising depression first as an invisible illness without tangible parameters: frantic, black sketchy lines are used which surround the figure, whose despair and frustration is visually reflected through physical posturing in panel two (Figure 8.3). (A similar use of scratchy amorphous lines was also used by Ellen Forney to illustrate her illness in her 2012 comic *Marbles* (about depression and bipolar syndrome)¹¹ (Figure 8.4), as well as by Katie Green in her graphic memoir *Lighter than my Shadow* (Figure 8.5).¹²

11 Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* (London: Robinson, 2013), 92.

12 Katie Green, *Lighter than my Shadow* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 163.



FIGURE 8.3 “The Quickening,” stef lenk



FIGURE 8.4
Ellen Forney, *marbles*
(London: Robinson,
2013), 92

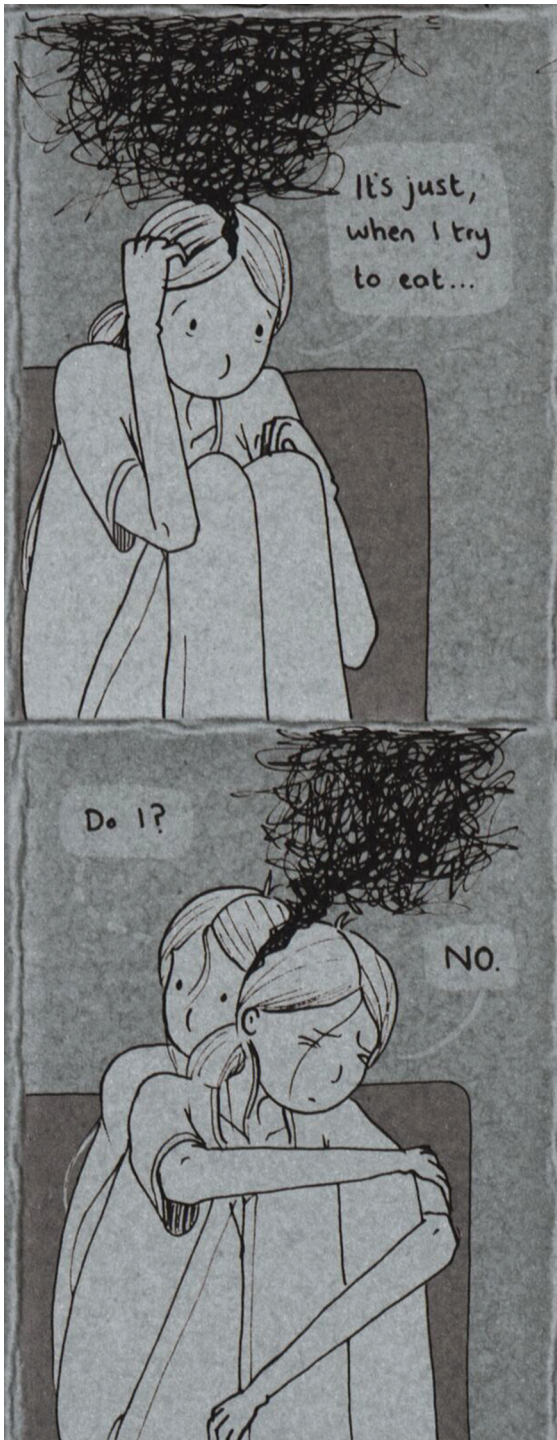


FIGURE 8.5
Katie Green, *lighter than my shadow* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 163

Escape at this draft stage of “The Quickening” presents itself in the guise of a disembodied hand, which uses a pencil to “erase” the panel/border in which the figure is trapped with her thoughts. It then literally draws a three-dimensional environment complete with door through which she can escape. At a later stage the black scribbles will be replaced completely by the placenta, a conscious choice so as to give the illness an actual body, rendering it as something concrete to be fought against rather than something abstract and amorphous.

7 Draft 4

(Figure 8.6) The square-framed panel in which the figure is trapped and the womb begin to come together. The disembodied hand, instead of crafting an escape for the figure, “gives” her the pencil: an act of empowerment. The



FIGURE 8.6

“The Quickening,” stef lenk

mother's body/hands are drawn outside the formal comic panel: in subsequent drafts they will disappear altogether. It is visually significant that the mother's body is not a part of later drafts; the comic becomes a story of empowerment by virtue of (the mother's) absence. The womb, in reality a part of another body (the mother's), exists here anonymously; a setting from which the main figure must liberate herself.

8 Draft 5

(Figure 8.7) Developing variations on how the main figure interacts with the pencil: using the eraser to create "a hole in the depression," turning the pencil onto herself, drawing a door as a way out. At this point the figure is in possession of the pencil, that is, the creative force no longer exists disembodied or outside of herself.

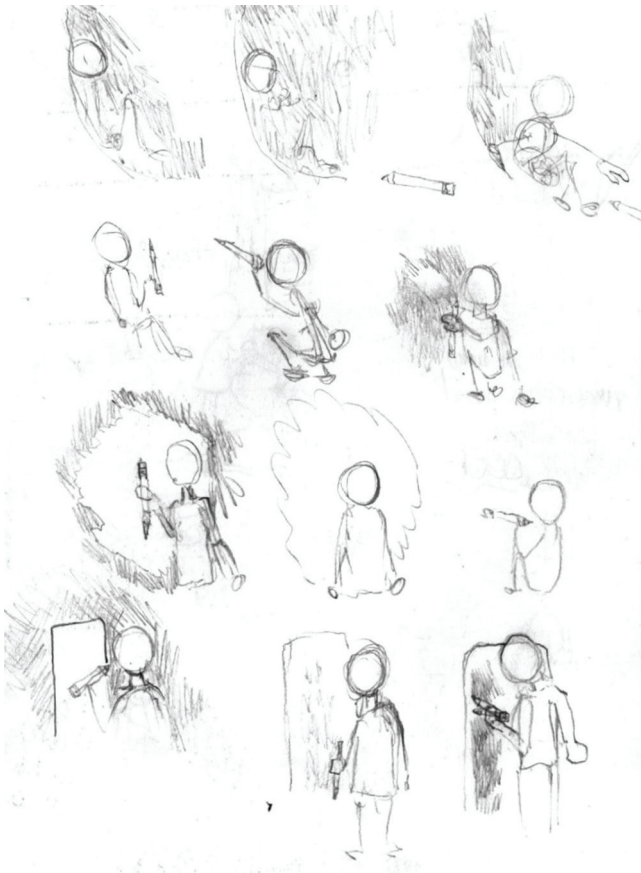


FIGURE 8.7
"The Quickenings," stef
lenk

9 Draft 7

(Figure 8.8) Anxiety/illness is still represented as a shapeless and chaotic scribble of pencil lines, but also innately connected to the figure via a continuous drawn line. It is interesting to note that the figure is itself of course also comprised of pencil lines, visually reflecting how sufferers of depression can associate their illness with their very identity (often describing their state with “I am depressed” as opposed to “I have depression”). This sort of embodiment can make escape from the illness seem impossible.

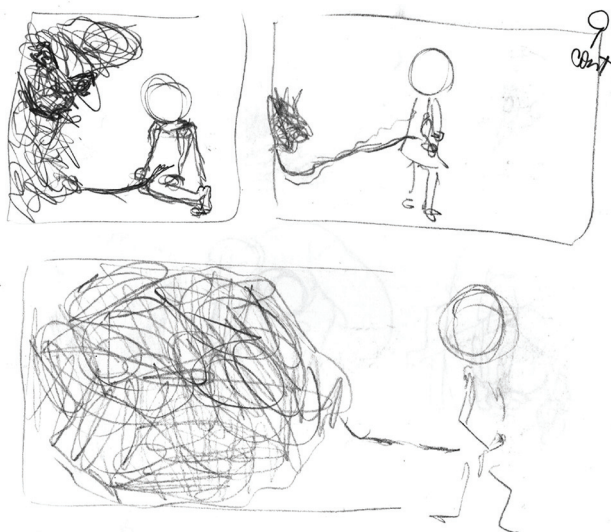


FIGURE 8.8
“The Quickening,” stef
lenk

10 Draft 8

(Figure 8.9) Formative sketches changing the panel frame to the shape of a womb, and anxiety manifests in the form of a placenta. The pencil makes possible the creation of an escape route but the ending is still unresolved. The figure is shown in later panels dragging the placenta behind her, but turning to face it in the final panel, just as one has to confront one's problems to solve them.

11 Draft 9 (detail)

(Figure 8.10) Although the hole provides a plausible escape, the illness naturally follows. In this draft the chaos grabs the pencil and redraws the figure in the end in a supine position.



FIGURE 8.9
“The Quickening,” stef lenk

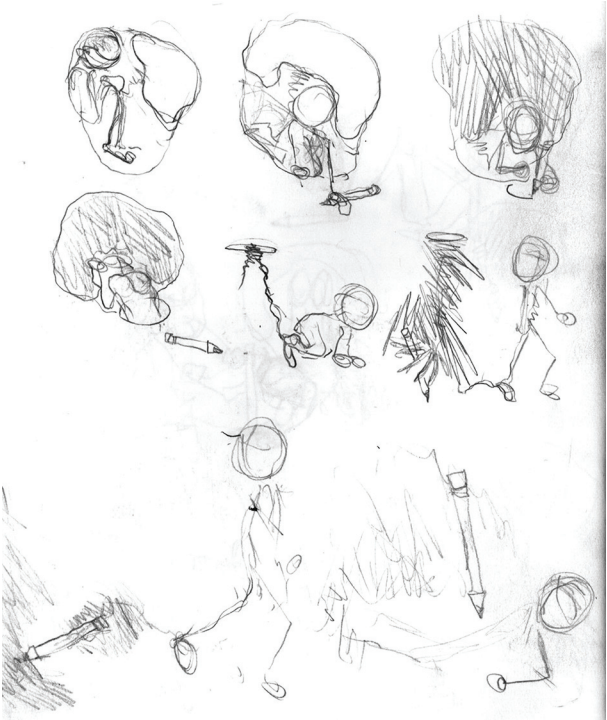


FIGURE 8.10
“The Quickening,” stef lenk

12 Draft 13

(Figure 8.11) In this draft, the illness (consciously rendered to be visually reminiscent of a tornado/natural disaster) pursues the figure and diffuses up and around her into a panel frame, trapping her again within its confines.

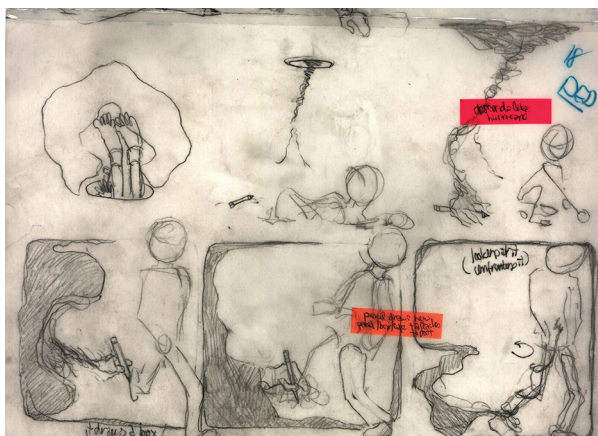


FIGURE 8.11
"The Quickening," stef
lenk

13 Draft 14

(Figure 8.12) This draft further develops the concept of anxiety/negative thought patterns—transforming from a placenta into a natural disaster—which then takes control of the pencil and draws a comic panel to entrap the figure. The last panel has become a padded cell she is stuck inside of; she regains the pencil but is only able to use it to keep track of her time imprisoned there.

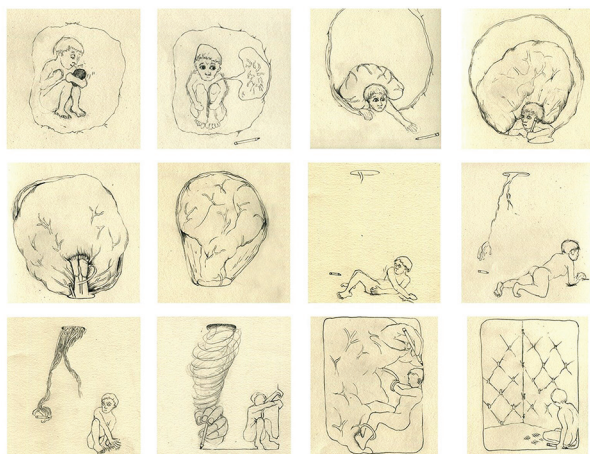


FIGURE 8.12
"The Quickening," stef
lenk

It is almost always the case in early drafts of creative works that images used to embody meaning are obvious and overstated; without language as a crutch, it is an attempt to ensure understanding of the narrative by making visual metaphors very obvious and direct. After this draft the padded cell idea was discarded: it proved melodramatic and inaccurate—a padded cell in reality would be used for someone with a psychotic degree of mental illness as opposed to someone experiencing general depression and anxiety.

14 Draft 22

(Figure 8.13) Experimenting with panels and placement. The story is divided into two phases: the top row of drawings marks the phase of development within the womb while the lower row presents the phase after the escape (visually expedited by the fall "downwards" through the hole). Panel size is also varied: panel frames get respectively smaller as the placenta gets bigger; eventually the placenta gets so large it takes over the entire panel, leaving the figure no alternative but to attempt an escape. To neutralise the large and overbearing placenta the (now smaller) figure pierces and "bursts" the placenta with the pencil, which shrinks to a once more manageable size in the final panel.

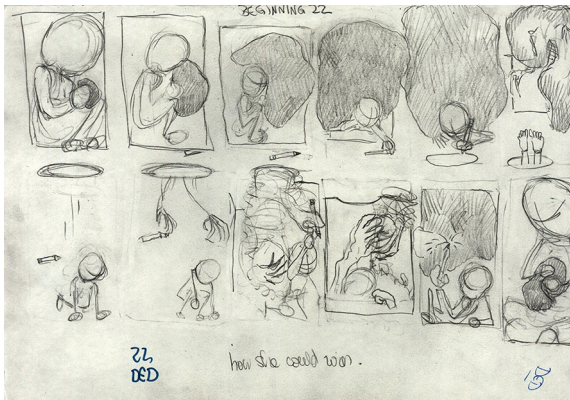


FIGURE 8.13
"The Quickening," stef lenk

15 Draft 23 (detail)

Figure 8.14 shows sketches concerned with visually humanising the placenta. Because the story is about two sentient characters, the placenta is invested with facial features so as to register emotion and reaction: to the child's escape,

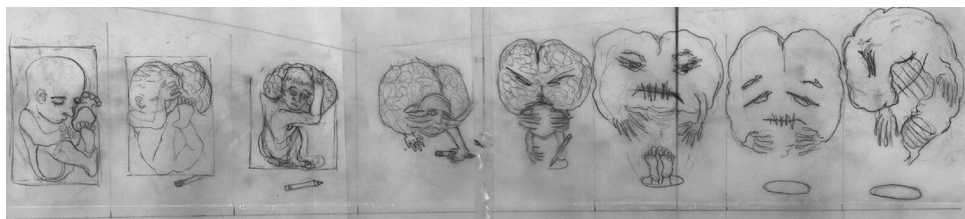


FIGURE 8.14 "The Quickening," stef lenk

the loneliness of remaining alone, the frustration that causes it to follow her. Humanising the placenta is vital in asserting its agency as a character, and to prevent potentially casting blame on the mother for the inherited illness. The anthropomorphised organ is in and of itself harmless, it too feels pain, loneliness, etc. and reacts naturally to being abandoned by following the figure out.

16 Draft 25

Figure 8.15 is similar to the previous draft except with a change in the panel count due to technical considerations. The final comic is to be reproduced in two formats: a one-sheet comic and a twenty-four-page booklet. For the latter the panels will need to span pages which amount to multiples of eight (books are printed in signatures of eight pages, sixteen pages, twenty-four pages, etc.)

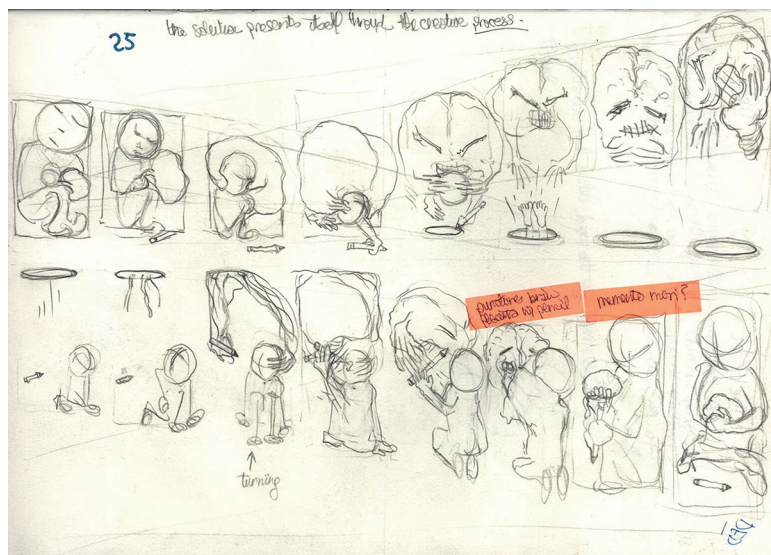


FIGURE 8.15 "The Quickening," stef lenk

For this reason, the twelve panels are first increased to sixteen, which accommodates more detailed illustrations of what is happening at each stage. There is also experimenting with the relative size of the figure to the placenta—as the placenta gets larger the figure gets smaller to represent a shift in the power dynamic, and after the escape the size change happens in reverse, marking the figure's regaining of power over her illness.

17 Draft 26 (detail)

(Figure 8.16) Sketches focusing on the expression of the brain/placenta, based on considerations that the predominant emotional reaction should be one of loneliness and confusion as opposed to aggression. Where both characters have an emotional connection to each other this is a more natural reaction to the figure's leaving the womb; it also resonates with the concept of post-partum depression often experienced by mothers after the birth of a child.

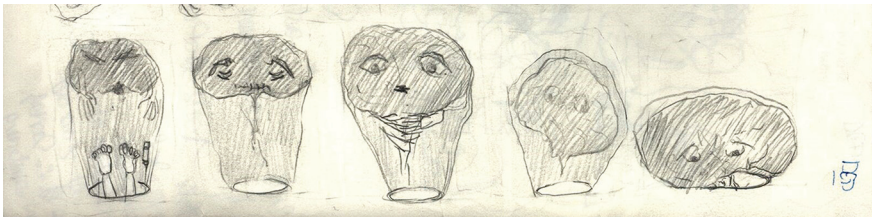


FIGURE 8.16 "The Quickenings," stef lenk

18 Draft 27

Figure 8.17 shows the first sketches in colour. Colour more accurately illustrates the corporeality of bodies and tends to generate a certain liveliness in illustrations that is not always evident in black/white. Because mental illness does not have a binary solution, black/white drawings would also seem too stark visually.

Coloured pencils (as opposed to watercolour) are used at the sketching stage to save time and sketches are made on vellum paper whose surface takes well to multiple erasures without becoming damaged. The pink of the womb is contrasted with the bruised purples and blues which seep into the panels as the placenta/brain develops.

In this draft, the foetus is already fully formed and recognisable at the start of the narrative. The brain in panel eight is rendered with an arched back

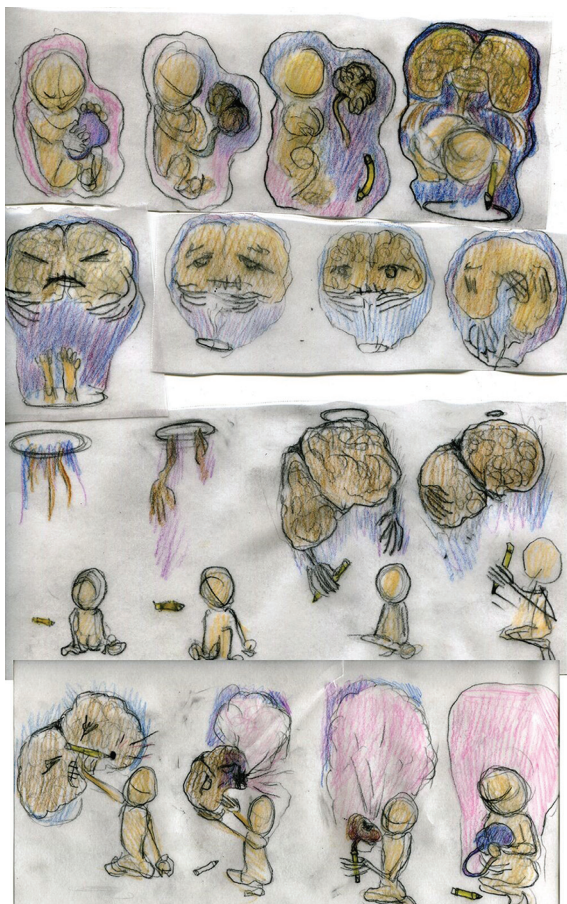


FIGURE 8.17
"The Quickening," stef lenk

reminiscent of a question mark: it realises it has been left behind but not why. What happens to end the comic after the brain is burst and shrinks down is still unresolved. In real life the placenta is disposed of after the birth, so logically it needs to disappear at the end of the story, but for the purpose of this narrative the placenta as metaphor is invested with traits which will not disappear; this also needs to be taken into consideration.

Further considerations revolve around the (as previously mentioned) two intended formats for this comic: a twenty-four-page comic with one drawing per page and a one-page A0 format, submitted for exhibition to the show *Sick! Kranksein im Comic / Reclaiming Illness through Comics* at the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité, organised by the PathoGraphics project in Berlin. The panels are cut up and rearranged to negotiate possible layouts for the one-sheet version so that the drawings fit the space in a logical and visually pleasing manner.

19 Draft 28

At this point the decision is made to add drawings and move from a sixteen to a twenty-four-page panel narrative. The primary motivation for this decision is to “slow down” the story. Scott McCloud points out in *Understanding Comics*



FIGURE 8.18 “The Quickening,” stef lenk

that comic panels “fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments,” and it is via cognitive closure that readers of comics “connect these moments [to] mentally construct a continuous, unified reality.”¹³ More panels, defined by McCloud as “moment-to-moment transitions,”¹⁴ result in shorter leaps in understanding for the reader. In the case of this comic, additional panels are illustrated which move the beginning of the story further back in time to the nascent stages of the embryo. The number of panels in which the figure and placenta grow and detach from each other is also increased, as well as extra panels clarifying how the pencil detaches from the placenta and is grabbed by the figure, who then uses it to draw her escape route. This is an improvement on draft twenty-seven where the pencil seems to appear out of nowhere in the figure’s hand as a drawing tool.

Panel eleven and twelve of this draft involved visually experimenting with the idea of the placenta turning the pencil around and using the eraser to efface the figure’s mouth, metaphorically obliterating her voice. This was later discarded in favour of a struggle between the two beings where the placenta tries to strangle the figure: this more aptly visualises the potential severity of mental illness and is also logical with regards to the actual organ (that is, the vasculature of the placenta wrapping around the figure’s neck is a more feasible echo of “reality” than the placenta apprehending an eraser on the other end of a pencil with which it can silence the figure).

In this draft rectangular panel frames are discarded altogether, and the perimeters of the womb become the formal borders/frames for each panel. Further re-arrangement of the panels in this draft are still necessary because a blank panel at the bottom right of the format would cause the story to appear unfinished and hence unresolved.

20 Semi-final draft

(Figure 8.19) At a certain point, due to time constraints and a certain exhaustion that comes from a seemingly endless drafting process, the decision is made to begin (what I assumed to be) the final drawings, regardless of what might still be unresolved in the narrative. Solutions (as well as, occasionally, new challenges) present themselves frequently at this stage in the creative process.

13 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), 67.

14 McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 70.

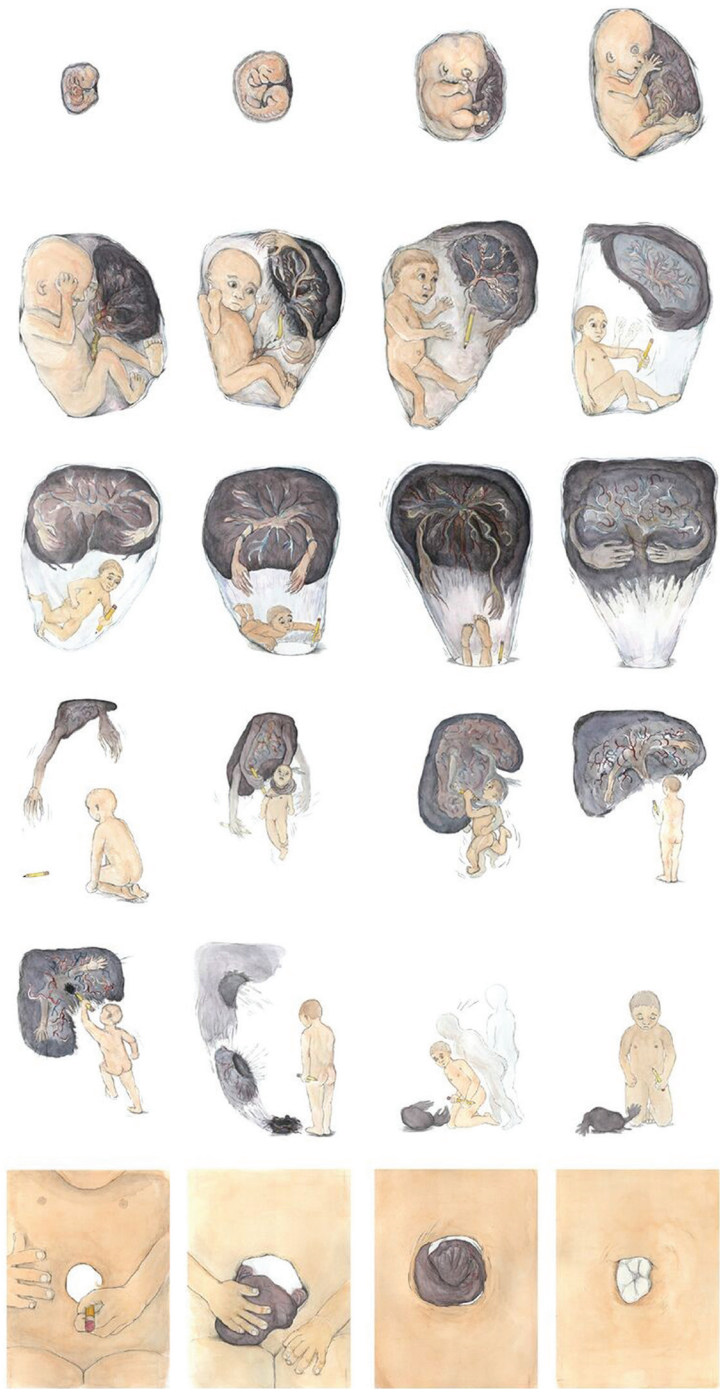


FIGURE 8.19 “The Quickening,” stef lenk

Pencil and watercolour were used for what originally was to be the final version of the panel illustrations. The properties of watercolour allow for a multi-layered building up of washes which have a delicate and transparent quality, resonating particularly with such elements in the story as the wall of the womb and the “shadows” of the figure in movement rendered in panels eight and nineteen. It also reflects the delicacy of the embryo itself.

Contemplating how to draw the narrative to a close, I decided that the placenta will have to re-integrate with the figure much in the way thoughts remain a constant factor in a person's mental state. The figure “draws” a navel through which the placenta is able to return to her core, now, however, at a manageable non-threatening size. Since the navel is the physical place of origin of the placenta, returning the placenta there also adds an additional layer of meaning to the narrative: that of the potential recurrence of the same story and conflict through rebirth (this time with the main figure as hypothetical mother).

Rendering the final panels with a close-up/detail of just the main figure's navel, however, presented a new challenge regarding one of the formats of the comic, namely the Ao exhibition format. When the comic is reproduced as a single page with multiple panels, the natural physical boundaries offered by the limits of a page in the book no longer exist, causing the panels with full-spread colour close-ups of the figure's belly to float on the format, creating an inadvertent visual frame where the colour ends. Having made the decision to avoid traditional rectangular panels throughout the comic, the last four panels would have to be redesigned so as to keep consistency with this decision.

I was not satisfied with the style and medium used in the semi-final draft for several reasons. Despite wanting the reader to be able to apprehend the story slowly, I was concerned that the overly painterly style of the watercolour drawings could potentially stop the narrative in its tracks, as it were. Instead of seeing the images as a sequential series, the meticulous rendering of each image might result in apprehending them as “stand-alone” paintings. I was also interested in considerations of what Scott McCloud calls “amplification through simplification.”¹⁵ He states that “by stripping down an image to its essential “meaning” an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.”¹⁶ I decided to redo the panels in a reduced iconic style, redrawing them in black ink and colouring them in digitally (Figure 8.1). The simplified colour clarified the visual language of the story, allowing the reader to focus on the images as symbols with cumulative and implicit meaning in a larger narrative rather than individual paintings in their own right.

¹⁵ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 30.

¹⁶ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 30.

In the final comic (Figure 8.1) the decision was also made to create a non-rectangular frame (in panel twenty-one) echoing the shape of the navel and creating an organic boundary for the colour in the panel. This frame decreases in size through panels twenty-two and twenty-three until it becomes the size of an actual navel, with the placenta fully internalised and invisible once again. As a result, panel twenty-four becomes (in both colour and shape) a reiteration of panel one of the comic: the closed navel is flesh colour surrounded by white space, which echoes the colour scheme of the embryo in panel one. The final panels' devolution back to the original shape of panel one reflects the story's potential to repeat (just as genetically inherited traits can reappear in subsequent generations). While a mother figure is no longer clearly apparent, the main character of the story and the placenta have become one, which in some sense echoes the presence of an implicit resolution between mother and child.

Other decisions from the semi-final to the final stages of the comic include a return to the metamorphosis of the placenta into a brain in panels seven to eighteen, to make the metaphorical connection with mental illness more evident. The semi-final draft (Figure 8.19) has ghostly renderings of the figure's arm (panel eight) and of her whole body (panel nineteen) meant to visualise movement and clarify the narrative, which were deemed visually confusing and unnecessary so they were removed.

For the final draft of the Ao format comic the panels were redistributed across the five rows on the page; this was done for visual balance. For the book format version of the comic I chose the watercolour version of panel three to be the title page: it is one of the strongest visual expressions of the strange and unfamiliar feelings I imagine to be associated with foetal development, and the alienating predicament of confrontation in the restricted confines of the womb with an organ meant to nourish but instead proving to be a threat. The figure in its embryonic stage looks more like a tiny unusual monster than a human being, emotionally resonating the alienation a person with depression and anxiety can at times feel.

21 The Comic's Title

The initial title given to the comic was "The Beginning," signifying both the beginning of a life and the beginning of what was to be a series of graphic narratives. When ideas of genetic inheritance began to solidify within the narrative the name was changed to "The Inheritance." The title was then changed again to "The Quickening," a term no longer widely used, which means "[to] reach a stage in pregnancy when movements of the fetus can be felt, [or, of

a fetus, to] begin to show signs of life.”¹⁷ In the time before X-rays (when this word was more actively in use), the mother-to-be would have the choice at this stage to either announce her pregnancy or keep it secret, which I felt added a vaguely subversive element to the title, not just for the status of empowerment it lends to the figure in the comic but also for the associated secrecy which resonates with the stigmatised nature of mental illness—the secret no one wants to reveal about themselves—the secret that, if neglected, can grow up and unwittingly eclipse its owner’s own freedom.

22 Conclusion

Both this chapter and the comic it analyses represent embryonic stages in a larger project examining how visualising anxiety and depression might provide greater understandings of the lived experience of mental illness and how it might be made manifest in works of (comic) art. The theme of genetic inheritance seemed an appropriate starting point: visualising aspects of an illness in the time before birth, when external circumstances have not yet begun to shape an individual’s thinking. Examining the development of these creative “adaptations” of pre-existent internal narratives proffers a middle ground for further discussion about the mental states and struggles which inspired them, a middle ground not stigmatised in the same way as traditional discussions about mental health, and which could therefore lead to new insights regarding both graphic narratives and themes of mental illness.

¹⁷ See for the term “quickening,” *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and “quicken,” *Merriam-Webster.com* (2018). <https://www.merriam-webster.com>, accessed 26 March 2018.