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FR1: Comics, Cyborgs, and “In Between” Identities

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FRI:

Comics, Cyborgs, and “In Between” Identities

by

Ella Lehavi

Submitted to Scripps College in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Professor Kasper Kovitz

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Intro

Cartoons and comics exist in between realistic depictions and abstraction. This makes them a great place to express all sorts of “in-between”-ness: in between Jewish and American, in between gender presentations, in between technology and human. As someone whose identity carries much “in-between”ness, I worry about being accepted for who I am. Comics let me be playful, cartoony, and silly but also open and honest. From scenery to dialogue, I borrow many elements from my own experiences to inform the world of my comic. Sharing my comics lets me build a space for myself.

The comic in my thesis is available online on both Tapas([available online here](#)) and Webtoons([available online here](#)).

Relevant Theory and History

As a queer Jew who grew up surrounded by immigrant cultures and communities, I find myself in a liminal space between my identities and the dominant culture of my country— one where my perspective on gender and my cultural experiences aren’t fully understood by the world I exist in. Comics and cartoons are an explorational platform for concepts of reality and identity; they are one of very few spaces where I see my identities explored with so much depth and care.

In my comic, I aim to use the boundaries between humans and robots to communicate my experiences with Jewish, immigrant, and agender identities. Additionally, I intend to take advantage of the properties of comics such as stylistic abstractions, panels, and gutter space to visually narrate those experiences. I draw on Jewish comics and graphic novels such as *Maus* and *Blood of the Virgin*, gender-nonconformity and queerness in comics such as *Let’s Get*

Burgers and *Nimona*, Scott McCloud's theory around the visual language of comics, and theory around cyborgs from authors such as Donna Haraway, to create my comic and develop a visual display using computational diagrams as a form of paneling. This section of my thesis contextualizes the artworks and theory that inform my project.

Abstractions through artistic style, narrative elements, and fictional/fantasy worldbuilding allow comics and cartoons to develop their own internal realities and languages to communicate with audiences. According to comics theorist Scott McCloud, "the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled," since its simple visual qualities allow readers to "fill... up [the] very iconic (cartoony) form" with their own perspectives and experiences (McCloud). This quality of cartoons means that readers have a more intimate relationship with characters and stories, even if those characters and stories don't directly reflect on the readers and their identities or experiences.

As comics invite readers to project themselves onto more cartoonish forms, the gutter, or the space in between panels, invites readers to use what McCloud describes as "closure," to connect separated panels and images and "mentally construct a continuous, unified reality." (McCloud). McCloud's perspective on comics emphasizes how they expect readers to fill in certain gaps, creating a space in between reality (and direct representations of it) and concepts. From Jewish and immigrant narratives in superhero comics and graphic novels, such as *X-Men* and *Maus*, to queer stories in webcomics, such as *Nimona*, these liminal qualities of the comic medium provide a space for expression of liminal identities.

Additionally, growing up in the information age and studying computer science have made me consider technology's role in my relationships with my identities. The cyborg is a concept that combines human (or other organic species) and mechanical/robotic parts. As cyborg

technology, such as Steve M Potter's Animats that connect rat neurons to a computer, or Kevin Warwick's linking of his own nervous system to a computer, become more ubiquitous, discussion continues on the social roles of cyborgs both in literature and reality. Warwick and Potter's combination of organic brains with computers lead to questions in how we define human consciousness, and whether we could consider anything artificial as conscious. The implications of this discussion extend beyond technical definitions, opening discussion surrounding human identities in the age of technology. I intend to explore this discussion and its applications to gender identity through the narrative of FR1 (Fred), the cyborg character in my comic.

Occupying a liminal space, the cyborg opens many debates on what defines human consciousness, and the boundary between man and machine. According to sociology professor Scott Jeffery, in superhero comics specifically, characters with artificial bodies often "search for an authentic 'identity'... to be accepted as 'human.'" (Jeffery) This narrative is often applied to explore the boundaries of what defines human consciousness, but the concept of the 'artificial' being accepted as 'human' can be applied to other identities and concepts. Feminist author Donna Haraway describes the cyborg as "a creature in a postgender world," that "does not expect its father to save it," and "does not dream of community on the model of the organic family." (Haraway) Haraway's cyborg is separated not just from 'humanity,' but from Western culture and notions of gender through its artificiality. As Haraway explains, its existence is not rooted in birth into a nuclear family, and it is therefore free from the social implications of those familial roles, such as submission to a father figure. The cyborg's existence between artificiality and nature makes it a strong narrative vessel for similarly liminal identities and experiences— it is human enough to exist as a member of human society yet artificial enough to forge its own identities separate from the biases and narrow labels that exist within human society.

American Jews have used comics as a means to navigate their immigrant identities and position themselves within American society. Jewish Studies professor Lawrence Baron explains that *X-Men* co-creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's experiences as American Jews during the Second World War birthed narratives encoded with their own desires to assimilate. In the *X-Men*, a subspecies of humans called mutants are born with a gene that causes them to develop superpowers. The X-Men itself is a team of mutant superheroes, founded by a mutant called Professor X, who believes in using the mutants' powers to protect the non-mutant human population. Baron points out that Professor X's "mission to acculturate the mutants and train them to defend their host society mirrors the integrationist strategies pursued by many of the first generation of Jews born in America". (Baron) Arie Kaplan presents a similar scenario involving Jewish superhero Ben Grimm, a character in the *Fantastic Four*, another series created by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. Grimm, also known as "The Thing," is covered in rocky skin— giving him a nonhuman appearance. When asked by a civilian why he hasn't publicly mentioned his Jewish identity, Grimm responds that "he just figured that 'there's enough trouble in this world without people thinkin' Jews are all monsters like [him].'" (Kaplan) Lee and Kirby write of nonhuman (or rather, superhuman) characters with a desire to integrate into and protect human society, in part as a means of creating a narrative where these social outsiders hold power, but also as a means of narrating their own experiences assimilating into American society.

Art Spiegelman also uses nonhuman qualities to mirror Jewish experiences in his graphic novel *Maus* by depicting his characters as anthropomorphized animals, portraying "Jews... as mice, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, and Nazis as cats". (Kaplan) *Maus* tells the story of Spiegelman's father in the Holocaust, using a distinction between species as a framework for narrating Jewish oppression and identity.



Spiegelman, Art. "Self Portrait with Maus Mask". 1989.

In many cases, Spiegelman's characters are seen wearing masks of other animals, showing a more forced and less noble assimilation than that of Lee and Kirby's characters. Spiegelman's work proved that "autobiographical comics about average, everyday people were not only an art form, but one that could strike a chord with the American public." (Kaplan)

Borrowing from Spiegelman's narrative techniques and tone, Sammy Harkham paints a blunt portrait of Jewish experiences in 1970's LA in his graphic novel *Blood of the Virgin*. Seymour, the protagonist, is an Iraqi-Jewish filmmaker in Los Angeles, struggling to balance his career with his family life. Harkham's realistic portrayals of married life, relationships, and the struggles of immigrant identities are more direct through his cartoony style. The exaggerated expressions of his characters and consistent compositions across panels keep reader attention on

the underlying conflicts, while the use of simple dots for eyes and abstracted noses keep characters cartoonish enough for the audience to relate to.



Harkham, Sammy. *Blood of the Virgin*. 2023.

Queer comic artists use cartoons and non-human characters, ranging from anthropomorphic animals to shapeshifters, to explore their own identities. ND Stevenson's *Nimona* follows a character named Nimona, who is capable of changing into various human and non-human forms. Nimona works as a sidekick to disillusioned knight turned villain Sir Ballister Blackheart, who aims to uncover the truth behind the corrupt Institution of Law Enforcement and Heroics. Throughout the story, Nimona's identity as a shapeshifter is explored as Blackheart learns to respect that Nimona can't be contained in one form, and appreciates her powers not as abilities, but as an identity.



Stevenson, ND. *Nimona*. 2015.

Although he was not out as gay or transgender at the time of writing *Nimona*, Stevenson claims that “narratives have been [his] way of exploring these identities,” and that this story is intended as an allegory (Ito). Stevenson uses Nimona’s identity as a shapeshifter as a projection of his own queer identities and experiences.

Ash S’s *Let’s Get Burgers* stars Knife, an agender anthropomorphic cat, and Cheddar, a transgender male anthropomorphic dog, both drawn in an extremely simple and cartoony style. This collected webcomic follows its protagonists from mundane scenarios, like going out to eat, to absurd events, such as meeting aliens or ghosts. Although Cheddar, Knife, and many of their companions are drawn as simplified cartoon animals, characters like Knife’s ex-boyfriend, the rabbit that supports a police officer baselessly beating up Knife, and the hamster that arbitrarily calls Knife and Cheddar a homophobic slur are drawn with more realistic proportions and details. Following McCloud’s logic on iconic/cartoon styles and relatability, this stylistic choice

places narrative power in the hands of the queer characters by making them the vessel through which the audience experiences the story.



S, Ash. Let's Get Burgers. 2022.

Throughout the comic, Knife and Cheddar also grow and shrink in size in proportion to each other and other characters to represent their presence. For example, as Knife asserts that they are an agender lesbian, they grow in size compared to Cheddar, showing their willingness to take up space as a queer person confident in their identity, and letting that confidence in their identity define the narrative.

Stevenson and Ash S both used comics as a platform to represent their queerness, through allegories and stylistic choices. American Jewish artists like Lee, Kirby, Harkham, and Spiegelman used the comic and graphic novel to explore questions of Jewish identity and assimilation. Additionally, Stevenson, Lee, and Kirby use non-human or even superhuman characters to narrate their liminal identities and ability to assimilate or fit in with 'human' societies. Borrowing from the precedent set by Stevenson and Ash S, as well as Haraway's concept of the postgender cyborg, I intend to use the comic medium and cyborg metaphors as a means of exploring how my queerness places me in between societal expectations and my own performance of gender. Additionally, expanding on Lee, Kirby, Harkham, and Spiegelman's precedent, I intend to use a cyborg as a posthuman character and the comic medium to narrate

my Jewishness in relation to a dominant culture that expects assimilation. Following McCloud's theories on iconic artistic styles and gutter space, and the technological language of circuit diagrams, I intend to create a display that plays on how my audience might read my piece and view the lines of the diagram as "panels" to hide hints and cues relating to both the narrative in my comic and the liminal identities and experiences it pulls from.

Process

The concept for my comic began some time in 2021. I started with the rough idea of a robot with no knowledge of its identity, its rebel friend, and its creator who were hiding from the government. These characters became Fred, Aarón, and Dr. Weintraub.

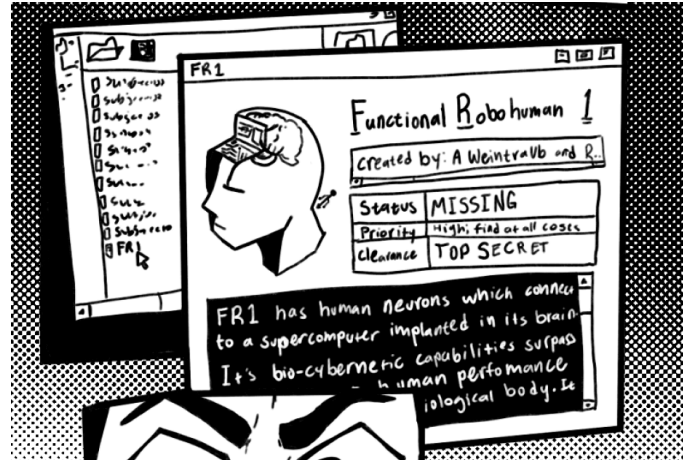
The story is set in late 1990's Los Angeles. The time period was chosen to pay homage to the late 90's/early 2000's "UPA Revival" style cartoons that I watched growing up and that have influenced my art style. With this timeline, the secret military project the plot follows would start sometime during the Cold War, and the main plot would occur during a period of many technological booms and transitions. By setting the story 25 years before it is being written, I am writing about that time period with enough distance to contextualize historical trends within the period and how they relate to current events. Additionally, because this time period is recent enough to exist in living memory, the message within my story on technology as well as the setting itself still resonate with modern readers.

The narratives of my main characters as an 'escaped test subject' and a 'cyborg' are largely told through the lens of my own intersectional identities. I drew inspiration from literature surrounding superhero comics and Jewish narratives in developing Fred's hidden identity as a cyborg. I also used frameworks of queerness in cyborgs and non-human characters,

such as Haraway's cyborg and Nimona. As a nod to their ambiguous past and status as a cyborg, Fred's gender is deliberately kept ambiguous. Aarón's gender expression is also rather androgynous and queer. As an 'escaped test subject,' his narrative is also informed by my own queer experiences such as being in the closet, existing as one of few queer people in less accepting spaces, and finding my own expression and place in the world.

Aarón and Fred are both 18 years old. This choice was made in part because many of the ideas for this story came as I was around that age and undergoing the transition from childhood into living on my own. This was also a time where I became more aware of the parts of my identity that informed this story, and as a result a reason why these narratives are tied to that age.

Another reason is because of how common a choice it is for characters to be teenagers in sci-fi/action stories or in shonen manga, a genre of manga targeting adolescent boys. In many of these stories, teenaged characters are used to draw in a younger audience. However, despite being both subjects and agents of violence and trauma, these teenaged characters are often unaffected by it. For example, in the third part of *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*, "Stardust Crusaders," the 17 year old protagonist Jotaro witnesses his mother suddenly fall ill, develops and instantly masters a new power, embarks on a journey where he is constantly forced to battle enemies, and loses three of his new friends in the span of 50 days. Despite being a normal Japanese high school student prior to this experience, Jotaro ends the story seemingly unaffected by the intense amount of violence and trauma he was both subjected to and forced to inflict. This portrayal of teenage characters desensitizes readers to the violence the characters commit and experience. I chose to make my protagonists teenagers who experience realistic consequences and trauma from their circumstances and the violence their circumstances force them to commit.



The files opened by Aarón on the final page of the comic, showing a file with information on a cyborg called “FR1” with Dr. Weintraub listed as a creator,

Although Dr. Weintraub’s full backstory is not fully explored in the part of my comic I completed for my thesis, his connection to the project Aarón and Fred are investigating is strongly hinted at. A former scientist working on the project and creator of the cyborg FR1, Dr. Weintraub is a Jewish scientist who worked for the American government in attempt to assimilate by aligning his identity with government interests. Ultimately, he was removed from the project after the cyborg he created was given consciousness by another scientist on the project. Dr. Weintraub’s story is influenced by Lee and Kirby’s use of superhero comics, such as *X-Men*, to align with government interest for the sake of assimilation. However, the cyborg Weintraub creates ultimately conflicts with government interests through its development of agency– demonstrating that he will never be truly accepted by the American government, and American society by extension, unless he fully discards his Jewish immigrant identity.

Dr. Weintraub is an amalgamation of many older Jewish relatives. In his first appearance, we see him engaging in the universal love language of Jewish parents and grandparents: feeding/making a meal. He continues to nag Fred for their eating, offers Aarón a ride home, and pats Fred on the head while consoling them about their headache. His mix of bluntness and care

are pulled from my own family members and the interactions I have had with Jewish adults from childhood to now. This establishes him as a mentor figure in comparison with the teenaged main cast, while tying my own cultural narrative to this role.

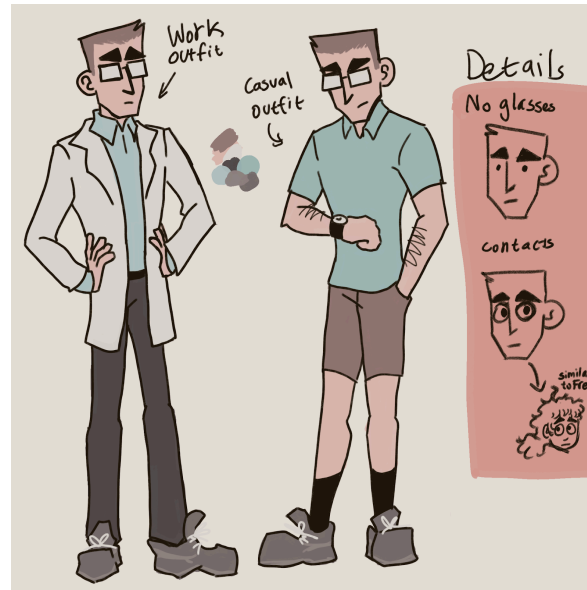
Visual Development/Artistic Style



Left: Fred's character turnaround. Right: Concept art for Aarón.

Fred's design is very androgynous: they have a cute face and longer hair but use a masculine name. Their baggy jacket and fluffy hair create a bulky silhouette that overpowers and obscures their face and body. Aarón, on the other hand, has a tighter, sleeveless top and straight hair that fully reveals the shape of his face. The designs of the two are meant as complements: Aarón has a light, short sleeved shirt with bulky, long, dark pants, while Fred has a bulky, dark jacket and white shorts. Fred's facial features, hair, and even shoes are very round and curved, whereas Aarón's are very geometric and angular. Fred's windbreaker and thick hair take inspiration from the 80's; Because they lack any memory of a childhood, they draw heavily from the fashion trends of the time period of their childhood.

Aarón was designed as a male character with a feminine fashion sense and more feminine mannerisms. His silhouette and fashion were heavily inspired by Hirohiko Araki's feminine male characters in *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*, such as Bruno Bucciarati and Giorno Giovanna. I also draw from Araki in referencing music and pop culture for fashion: Aarón's outfit is largely inspired by TLC, the Spice Girls (especially Posh), Prince, and Aaliyah.

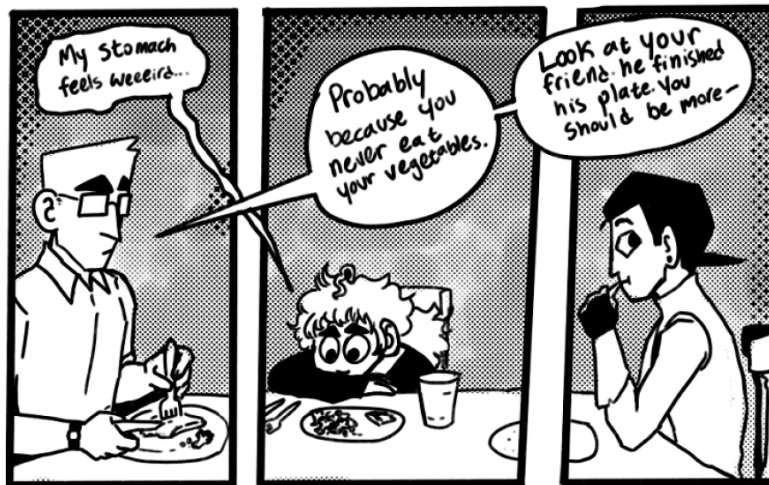


Dr. Weintraub's character reference sheet.

Dr. Weintraub's look is inspired by that of a stereotypical cartoon scientist. Originally, I planned to have him in a lab coat at all times and decided against it. However, I like the look of glasses with no pupils, and the way they make a character appear very serious and very expressive. I felt this choice distinguished him in age and demeanor from the rest of the cast. He also lacks a hairline or any indication of hair while uncolored outside of the tufts on the outline of his head, another stylistic choice to make him more abstracted, with less visually recognizable features to separate him from the protagonists. This depiction results in a less "iconic" face, as McCloud would describe, and prevents audiences from projecting onto Dr. Weintraub, adding a level of mystery and distance to the character.

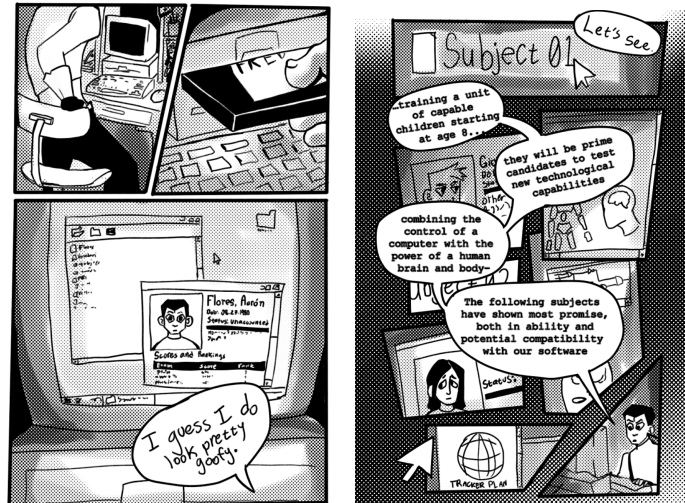
Issue 1

Most of the settings are pulled directly from google street view locations across Los Angeles— from Los Feliz, to the 10 freeway, to Palms and West LA. Many of the indoor settings are dressed with little props that make them more personal, such as the mezuzah on Dr. Weintraub’s door, a Tux sticker on Fred’s laptop, and a tiny Salvadoran flag on the top right shelf by Aarón’s computer. These instances of set dressing provide insight into the characters and spaces they live in, such as Dr. Weintraub’s Jewishness, Fred being a Linux fan, and Aarón’s Salvadoran heritage.



Dr. Weintraub lectures Fred on their eating habits at dinner with Aarón.

Panels and speech bubbles are used to set the flow of a scene and display character dynamics. For example, when Fred, Aarón, and Dr. Weintraub are eating dinner, the scene is cut apart by panel lines and reconnected with speech bubbles that cross over each other and across panels. This portrays Dr. Weintraub as a more authoritative character, and emphasizes the awkwardness Aarón experiences witnessing an intra-household conflict in a household he is not part of.



Left: Aarón inserts the floppy disk into his computer. Right: Aarón browses the files Fred loaded onto the disk from the project's files.

Furthermore, when Aarón inserts the floppy disk into his computer, the panel showcasing the files opening on his screen takes up most of the page. In the next page, as Aarón explores different files, the panels and speech bubbles are scattered throughout the screen, mimicking a chaotic desktop with many open windows to emphasize the overwhelming amount of information being presented. This format breaks the flow of side-by-side panels focused on action by overlapping panels of various sizes that display still shots of screens, without a clear passage of time or action occurring between each panel. This change in structure establishes my choice in paneling as an expression of “in-between”-ness as opposed to a tool used exclusively to express linear narratives.

Issue 2

The second issue shifts from exposition to action by focusing on Aarón's relation to his past through the introduction of his former teammate, Casey. Casey serves as a foil to Aarón. Both escaped from the same experiment, yet Casey was only able to do so after a computer chip

in his head. Casey is more confrontational and aggressive in his approach, tying Fred and Aarón to chairs when he perceives them as a threat and opting to fight when they break free. Aarón, on the other hand, is more avoidant, expressing that he does not want to fight and looking for non-violent ways to de-escalate.



Dialogue between Aarón and Casey

Casey is a grittier character, one who has experienced violence and now sees it as the only way to solve a problem. His willingness to use force can be read as a wiser reaction than Aarón's avoidant tendencies. However, Aarón's caution in contrast with Casey's strength is what likely allows him to successfully escape both Casey and the secret military experiment.

Violence and its impact on the characters plays a subtle yet important role in this issue. In addition to how violence dictates Aarón's relation to Casey and his past, this issue explores how Fred and Navin interact with the violence in their lives. Although neither of them was attuned to violence through the experiment the way Aarón was, when presented with a dangerous situation, both remain calm and find their own way out. In Fred's case, this means gathering intelligence,

strategizing, and sneaking about. For Navin, this means a determination to prove himself and do what it takes, even if it means shooting the enemy with an airsoft gun.



Through the more action-packed plot of the second issue, the role of violence comes to the forefront. The implication that their experiences have forced them to be more accepting of violence in their life emphasizes the role that military propaganda and military-backed technological progress has in pushing youth to commit violence/view force as a necessary means to completing any goal.

The choppy paneling and action lines in this issue augment the intense tone and pacing. Additionally, the expressions reflect this high stress environment. For example, characters' eyelids are included more often in their expressions to portray suspicion, stress, or sarcasm.



The panels above use a mix of choppy and slanted panels, action lines, and exaggerated expressions to create a feeling of shock and tension. Fred's hair gaining a spiky texture emphasizes their distress. Aarón's smaller pupil in the panel on the left and squinted eyelid in the panel on the right serve to express his shock, then suspicion. The angles and composition set by panel layout, action lines, and posing draw out the sudden pacing of the moment depicted. Overall, this stylistic tone is used in the second issue to transition from exposition into the action.

Issue 3

The final issue in my thesis follows Fred, Aarón, Navin, and Manny on a trip to the pool to take Fred swimming for the first time. This issue is a mix of serious plot and silly character moments, building on the tone shift from the previous issue to set a pace for the next segment of the series.

Issue 3 begins with a flashback from Aarón, with a mix of quotes and computer files from previous issues, including a new one for another test subject named Haven Kadyrova. He is disrupted by Fred, who notices that he seems distant. The next few panels feature speech bubbles that cross over the panel lines, echoing the disrupted chain of thought in the comic.



Speech bubbles leaving the panel as Fred disrupts Aarón's daydream.

The concept of “disruption” is prevalent in Issue 3 as the story jumps between two plots that keep disrupting each other: Aarón encountering an old teammate as a foe, and Fred learning how to swim. The interweaving of these two narratives introduces an element of absurdity and silliness to an otherwise serious story, while further iterating themes from Issue 2 in regards to the mundaneness of violence in the lives of the main cast.



Haven, the antagonist in this issue, revealing that she is after the escaped robot.

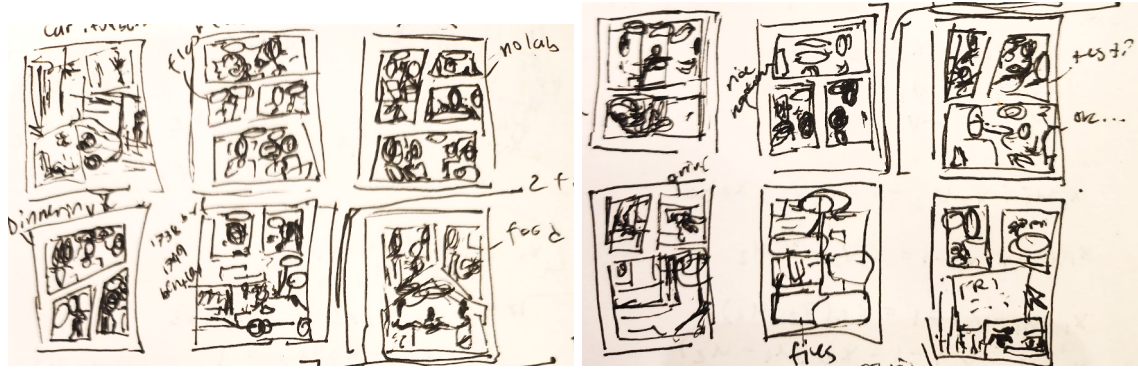
This issue introduces another one of Aarón's former teammates, Haven. Like Casey, Haven had a chip implanted in her brain by the military. However, unlike Casey, she was unable to escape and is the first villain of the series. Through witty dialogue and a mundane disguise, Haven feels non-threatening and entertaining. However, after being pushed into a pile of pool toys, her chip begins malfunctioning, implying something more unpleasant is brewing in regards to the project.



Haven is called back at the end of Issue 3

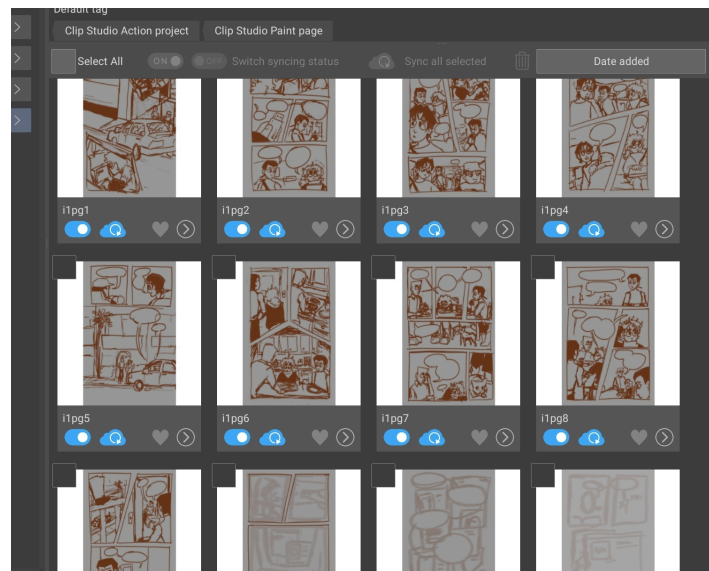
From Concept to Comic

I began writing the first issue of my comic with an outline, where I listed every event I wanted to happen and every detail I wanted to reveal or hint at. From this outline, I began writing a script. I wrote out character dialogue, alongside specific actions or shots I wanted to include. I then broke down the dialogue into scenes that made sense to decide where the page breaks would be. From there, I drew thumbnails, or very tiny versions of each page to figure out what the panels would roughly look like and where each element of the panel would be.



Thumbnails of the first issue.

After thumbnailing, I went into Clip Studio Paint and began drawing. I started with a very rough sketch, then went into a more refined sketch where I included most of the major details.

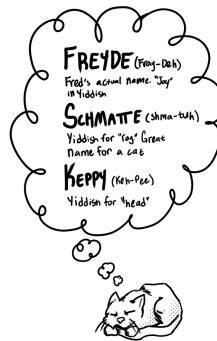


Refined sketches of the first 9 pages, and thumbnails of the last 3.

I then outlined the panels and began lineart, refining the lines from my sketch and adding more depth. After lineart, I wrote out the text and drew my speech bubbles around it. Finally, I shaded the picture with a half-tone brush to separate foreground and background and draw more attention to the characters.



Left: The first page of the comic, lined and shaded. Right: the eighth page of the comic, lined and shaded.



A filler page, depicting Schmatte (the cat) with translation and pronunciation for Yiddish words used in the comic.

To break up scenes and add context, I included filler pages with smaller drawings of characters and information such as definitions and character profiles. I also illustrated a cover for the physical copy of my comic. To format for printing, I exported each page as a PDF and

uploaded it to Mixam. I then organized the pages and confirmed my order. Mixam printed and assembled the physical copies and shipped them back to Claremont.



The finished cover spread of the print comic.

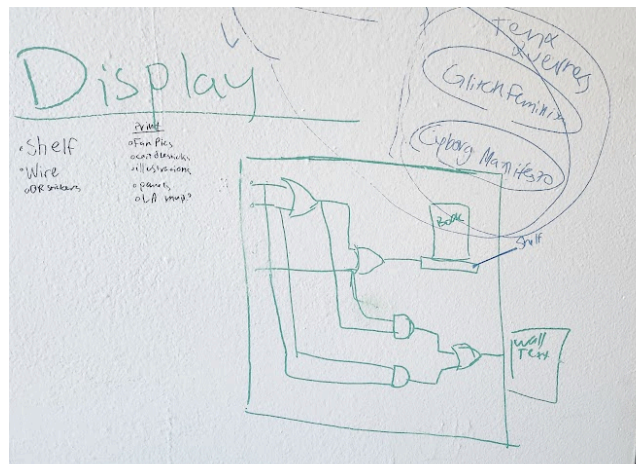
During my second semester, I implemented new techniques to make the process more efficient. First, I drew my thumbnails digitally instead of on paper. This allowed me to create templates for the thumbnail at the exact aspect ratio of the comic, making it easier to transfer the thumbnails onto the actual page. Additionally, I drew out the actual panel lines at the sketch stage instead of during line art. Similarly, I added the actual speech bubbles during the sketch phase as well. This allowed me to develop a sketch with a clearer concept of what the finished page would look like. Finally, instead of handwriting out all the text, I was able to save time by creating my own font with my handwriting.

For the third issue, I spent less time sketching, only drawing the anatomy of the figures and then going directly into the lineart stage. This resulted in more fluid lineart and poses. Additionally, I used a more expressive and sketchy style for the background both for time and appearance.



A panel from the third issue

Fall Wall Display



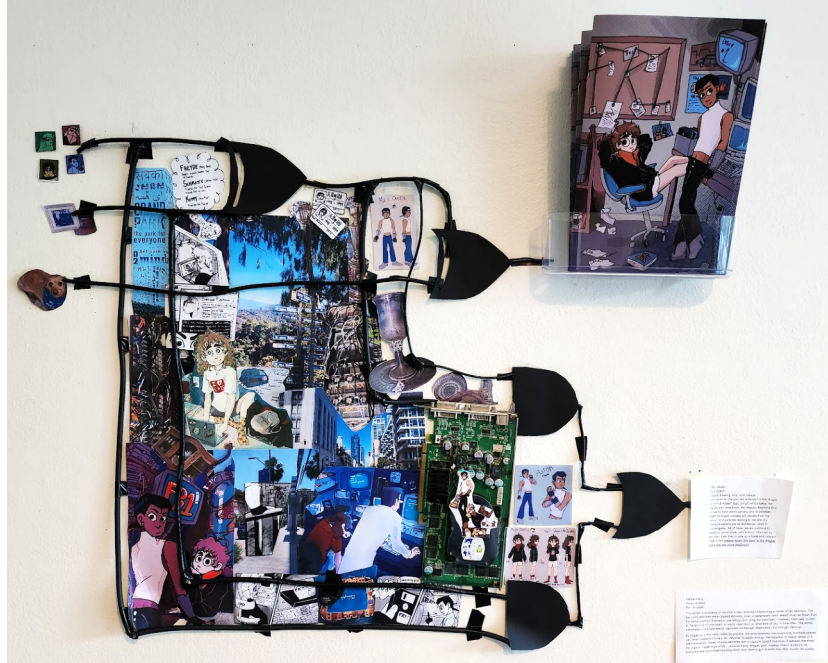
A draft of the wall display's layout.

Initially, I was unsure how to display my comic. I considered displaying just the book, or creating a display that centered the book such as a reading corner. An unnamed advisor suggested using a diagram or schematic on the wall, an idea that I decided to pursue.

I decided to use a circuit diagram (a full adder, specifically). I liked the idea of exploring how people read by using the lines of the diagram as panel lines, and mixing in photos, illustrations, and the diagram to create the wall display. A full adder produces two outputs: a sum (the actual result) and a carry bit. I included a floating shelf with my comic at the sum output, such that viewers could take a copy and read it while in the gallery.



Left: The print copy of the comic on display on a floating shelf. Right: The comic removed from the shelf in the gallery. Inside the comics is a QR code that allows viewers to access a digital copy, so they have the option to return to the story after leaving the gallery.



The final wall display, including the collage, circuit diagram, comic books, and wall text.

Inside the circuit is a mix of concept art, panels from the comic, pictures of Los Angeles, and pictures from my childhood home that represent the parts of my culture that appear in my comic. This combination of photograph and cartoony drawings emphasizes the “in-between”-ness I describe in my artist statement, presenting two nearly opposite forms of visual art that both aim to honestly portray my experiences. Additionally, the “panels” formed by the lines of the diagram separate these elements into pieces of a story, implying a passage of time in between each “panel,” and an occurrence of events beyond what the viewer is explicitly shown.

The circuit itself was made from cables taken from the Scripps IT e-waste bin taped to the wall with black electrical tape. This framework adds another way of reading my piece: as a diagram, or set of technical instructions. However, by overlaying a more technical diagram with the collage, I draw a link between the technology it represents to my own experiences and identity.

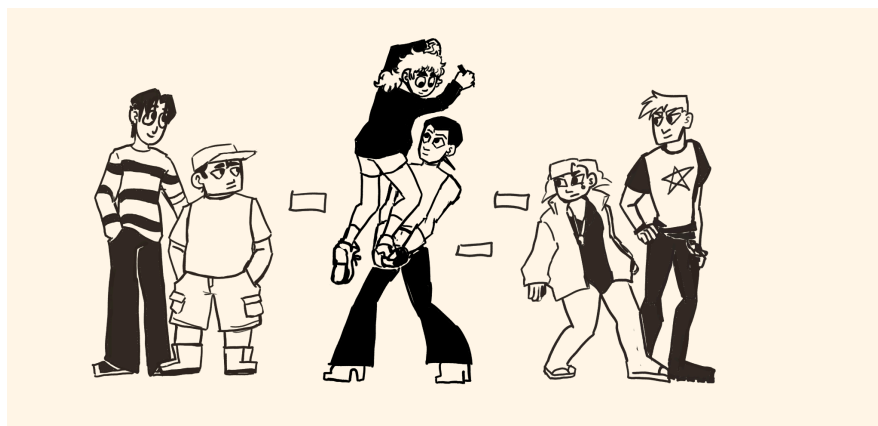
Spring Exhibition



The wall display in Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery

In the exhibition, I present life-sized line drawings of characters from the comic done in acrylic marker. Along the drawing are shelves holding printed copies of the comic. Each shelf has a number, corresponding to the issue of the comic it holds. Though not pictured, there is an additional illustration of Schmatte (the cat) on top of the wall text.

To create these drawings, I began by sketching out the designs digitally on my tablet. Then, I projected them onto the wall and traced them with pencil. Afterwards, I turned off the projector and drew the final images in with an acrylic marker. Finally, I went in with a paintbrush to cover up extra pencil strokes and fill in parts of the wall the marker couldn't reach.



Concept sketch for the wall display

The line drawing draws viewers in from across the gallery and expands the presence of the comic beyond the book. Learning from my experiences last semester, the piece holds enough space for viewers to step back and read a book without disrupting other viewers.

The shelves split the characters in the illustration based on their roles in the story. On the left by Issue 1 are Manny and Navin, two main allies introduced in the first issue. On the right are the two antagonists, placed close to the issues in which they appear. The protagonists are in the center of the display, with one holding a pen to write on the wall. This detail ties the characters and story to the creation of the physical piece, bringing them into the same world as the viewers in the gallery.

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