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Over the past forty years, comic books have gained cultural legitimacy as a medium, and, as that has happened, a theoretical and critical literature has emerged around their study. Broadly speaking, the field of Comics Studies combines two kinds of writing. A long tradition of fan scholarship (focused primarily on creator practice and bibliographic detail) exists in parallel with the theoretical writing developed out of mid-century American sociology and cultural studies (see Rosenberg and White 1957, which devotes four chapters to the sociological effect of comics and only one to jazz). Like Jazz Studies, Comics Studies has proven an exemplary interdisciplinary field, often operating on the fringes of academia and consequently pioneering digital forms of scholarship. Notably, several key works of comics theory have been published as comics (McCloud 1993; Soussanis 2015), representing an integration of theory and practice which might present useful models for the New Jazz Studies.

In this chapter I use Harvey Pekar, author of the autobiographical comic series American Splendor, as a frame through which to view comics’ interaction with jazz music. Many readers will know that Pekar was himself a jazz fan, an obsessive record collector, a prolific jazz critic, and a tireless supporter of experimental music, enthusiasms which he often worked into his comic books. However, my interest here is not in determining how “successfully” Pekar represented jazz or in developing what film studies would term an auteur study. Rather, I wish to view Pekar’s comic book treatments of jazz as extensions and developments of his prose criticism in publications such as The Jazz Review, Downbeat, and Jazz Journal. I contend that in these comic strips Pekar is experimenting with the form of jazz criticism itself, and is developing its language and effect.

A Poet of the Quotidian

Harvey Pekar (1939–2010) was, for most of his life, employed as a file clerk at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital in his hometown, Cleveland. In a youthful reminiscence written late in life entitled The Quitter (Pekar, Haspiel, and Loughridge 2005), Pekar describes a troubled working-class adolescence in which street fighting and obsessive interests in sport and jazz defined his identity within the local community. A self-diagnosed obsessive-compulsive, Pekar dropped out of college, was rejected by the US Navy and worked short spells for local businesses before securing a file clerk post with the federal government in 1965. He would remain in this job until he retired in 2001. Through a friendship with countercultural star Robert Crumb, Pekar became interested...
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in expanding and adapting the bohemian idiom of underground “comix” to develop his notion
of the “quotidian”:

I thought, “Jeez, comics can be about anything.” I was also impressed by the fact there
was so little realism in comic books. [. . .] I started theorizing about comics and what
else could be done with them. [. . .] I also wanted to write about everyday life, quotidian
life, because I felt that writers in just about every area had ignored a lot of what goes on
in everyday life.

(Rhode 2008, 147)

From 1976 onwards, he would write, self-publish and self-distribute the American Splendor
comic, an anthology series of autobiographical vignettes drawn by a changing roster of artists working
in different styles.

In the early 1970s, Pekar’s first comic strip stories had been published in existing underground
publications such as The People’s Comics, Bizarre Sex, and Flamed-Out Funnies. At this point he had
not fully committed to autobiography and so presented himself through analogs such as “Jack
the Bellboy” (see Pekar 2003, 61–71). Even in his earliest writing, Pekar self-identified through a
caricature of working-class labor; in this chapter I use “Pekar” to refer to the writer and “Harv”
to refer to the autobiographical construct featured in the comics. While many of these early strips
anticipate the subject matter of American Splendor, others conform tonally with the obscene idiom
common to subversive comix.

As Roger Lewis notes, the comic strip form was inherently subversive: “Wall posters in
China and anarchist comics in pre-civil war Spain suggest how much earlier revolutionaries in
other countries realized the potential of the illustrated medium” (Lewis 1972, 69). Like that
other mass-produced visual medium, the cinema, comics were a powerful communications
tool, easily digestible by the poorly educated and the young but also possessing hip counter-
cultural appeal for intellectuals. In the conservative climate of postwar America, concerns over
the damaging effects of comics on youth had led to the establishment of the Comics Code. 3
While DC, the major American comic publisher of properties such as Superman and Batman,
remained resolutely staid during the 1960s, their new rival Marvel “developed a complexity
that coincided, in time, with the first ripples made by the emerging drug sub-culture,” often
depicting “spaced-out, light-show-type illustrations” (Lewis 1972, 68). One only has to pick
up a collection of Marvel’s Greenwich Village-set Dr. Strange from the late 1960s or early
1970s to see the extent to which the imagery of the counter-culture had been subsumed, and
defanged, by this time. 4

Pekar’s decision to stop submitting to existing underground comix anthologies and create his
own title, American Splendor, was motivated by his desire to experiment with graphic narrative.

I published it because I frankly had more and more grandiose ideas about what I could
do in terms of stories in comic books—more complex stories and longer stories. And
frankly, there weren’t any publishers around that I thought would accept any of these
stories.

(Rhode 2008, 151–152)

Pekar would work with artists local to Cleveland as well as others from further afield such as Frank
Stack, Joe Sacco, and Crumb (Rhode 2008, 18). Printing each issue was an onerous process: in an
interview conducted at the 2005 Small Press Expo in Bethesda, Maryland, Pekar recalled print
runs of ten thousand generated by two local printing companies (one handled interior black and
white pages, the other color covers) which were then assembled at a bindery: “Then I had to pick
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them all up, take them back home, stick them in my basement, and start soliciting orders” (Rhode 2008, 153).

Between 1976 and 1991, Pekar self-published and distributed sixteen issues of American Splendor. From issue 17 onwards, Dark Horse Comics distributed the title up until issue 26 (September 1999). Pekar would regret ceding control to a large company who “were really interested in putting out comics like Star Wars” (Rhode 2008, 153). For a later 2006–2008 mini-series (Pekar 2007, 2009), he developed a more amenable relationship with Vertigo Comics. After a number of false starts, a film adaptation (Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini 2003) successfully wove together a number of American Splendor stories; the actor Paul Giamatti took the lead but Pekar narrated the film and appeared as himself in docu-drama segments. The film brought Pekar a level of international publicity that he had never before experienced. Contracts with major publishers resulted that led him to work more in the graphic novel form, publishing book-length stories rather than the single-issue anthologies of short stories which had characterized the American Splendor series between 1976 and 1999.

The subject to which Pekar’s comics continually return is the coexistence of banality and beauty in everyday life, provoked by his lifelong love of the European naturalist novel. In particular, a passion for early twentieth-century Russian writers inspired Pekar’s interest in the microcosmic. Minor events like the breakdown of a car (Pekar 2005b, 23–35), a delayed supermarket queue (Pekar 2003, 78–82), or the loss of a front-door key (Pekar 2005a, 238–251) become, in Pekar’s hands, miniature studies of American life in the twentieth century, portraits of the neurotic American working-class male. No draftsman, Pekar always worked in collaboration, providing rough stick-figure storyboards that a variety of artists would interpret in different styles. The ever-changing visual style of American Splendor ensures that the only constant is Pekar’s authorial voice, generating an intimacy with the reader usually only experienced in the diary form. While his work is predominantly autobiographical, Pekar would sometimes act as a reporter of others’ life experience, a mode in which he grew increasingly ambitious in later years.

As a writer, Pekar narrates in the street argot of working-class Cleveland, embellished with self-parodic hipster flourishes. Ethnic difference is often marked through pidgin forms that can create problematic representations (just like Crumb). Pekar’s depiction of himself as a flawed, often selfish, individual is tempered by street wisdom and casual erudition. The constantly rotating artists’ impressions of Harv ensure continuing commentary and psychological complexity, avoiding self-hagiography. This textual effect is nicely captured in the 2003 film, as Harv’s future wife Joyce Brabner (Hope Davis) anticipates meeting him:

It’s the way all the different artists draw you [. . .] Sometimes you look like a younger Brando but then the way Crumb draws you, like a hairy ape, with all these wavy, stinky lines undulating off your body . . . I don’t really know what to expect.10

I have made a comparison to European novelists above. We might also see Pekar as self-consciously modeling his artistic career on the avant-garde jazz musicians that he admired. Beginning in an established form (underground comix), Pekar pioneered his own mode of production and distribution, using the medium in an innovative way and drawing inspiration from constant collaboration. In later years, Pekar was admired by the mainstream, permitting him to produce more expansive and ambitious work. However, this established narrative of Pekar’s life omits the considerable volume of prose criticism he wrote over his lifetime. In the remainder of this chapter I wish to ask how he integrated his critical impulse within his comics making, and so develop a model with which we might analyze comics in the New Jazz Studies.
Pekar, Jazz Critic

When he embarked upon *American Splendor* in 1976, Pekar had been a published jazz critic for seventeen years. His first jazz review was published in 1959 when he was 19 years old, working as a playground supervisor. The article, reassessing Fats Navarro, had begun life as a long letter written to the editor of *The Jazz Review*, Martin Williams. Impressed by the erudition of the missive, Williams invited Pekar to work it up into an article. This was a watershed moment for the teenager at a time of personal insecurity; its impact may be measured by the frequency with which Pekar returned to this moment in interviews and in his comics. Pekar often framed his reminiscences with mention of his friendship with jazz critic Ira Gitler; the approval of these gatekeepers was evidently important to the young man.12

Reading back Pekar’s early pieces in *The Jazz Review*, we see the righteousness of a young fan protecting his heroes. In the Navarro piece, he writes “various comments on the work of Fats Navarro have seemed to me grossly unfair and inaccurate as estimates of his style and achievement” (Pekar 1959a, 66). Similarly, a month later, he complains “Thad Jones always seems to be in someone’s shadow” (Pekar 1959b, 30). In later pieces for *Jazz Journal*, he mounted stirring rehabilitations of cornetist and trumpeter Johnny Dunn and the avant-garde saxophone style of Teo Macero (later of course a Columbia A&R man) (Pekar 1971, 28–30, 1972, 22–23).

As a critic, Pekar wrote in an idiomatic style but with great technical know-how and discographical knowledge. In later years, he would note “I really like to write in specific musical terms rather than impressionistically” (Rhode 2008, 53). This did not stop him from indulging in colorful metaphor, however, writing of Navarro’s avoidance of cliché: “He was remarkably conscientious in this respect, like a good housekeeper who pounces on dirt the minute she sees it” (Pekar 1959a, 66). His prose was informed but not dry; in a review of the album *Ben Webster & Associates*, he writes of Coleman Hawkins’s contribution:

Hawk makes me laugh. His crashing intensity completely spoil [sic.] the sitting-by-the-fireside-on-a-cold-winter-night atmosphere. He’s the big bully who breaks up the marble game. He sure makes it though. His sound is huge and tough. He never relaxes. You get the feeling someone is holding your mouth open and jamming licks down it.

(Pekar 1960, 31–32)

Compare the demotic use here to the formality of the Navarro piece quoted above. Pekar’s triumph was to find a space where impressionism and technical knowledge could coexist and, as we shall see, this defined his treatment of jazz in comics.

Pekar was an iconoclastic critic, often challenging the rigid historical narratives that pervaded jazz criticism.13 Writing of rock and roll tenor sax, he made the heretical suggestion that “Lester Young may have had quite a bit of influence on this style. It was he who discovered that tension could be built up by holding a note through several chord changes, one of the rockers’ favorite devices” (Pekar 1961a, 24). Similarly, he may have provoked a few aneurisms in readers of *The Jazz Review* when he argued that most of Art Tatum’s records were “interesting only technically” and that “Tatum’s conception of jazz has more to do with Paul Whiteman than with Miles Davis” (Pekar 1961b, 26). In a 1970 edition of *Downbeat*, he would publish a three-page feature on the ambition of Jefferson Airplane (Pekar 1970, 18–20).

Pekar’s prolific output as a cultural critic is usually downplayed in studies of his comics work. Yet the critical vocabulary developed by Pekar from 1959 through the 1960s and into the early 1970s is one that persists, in adapted form, in his subsequent comics writing. Pekar published jazz writing often, driven by financial need: in a seventeen-year period, he wrote for top journals such as *The Jazz Review* (US), *Downbeat* (US), *Coda* (Canada), *Jazz Journal* (UK), *Jazz Monthly* (UK), *Jazz Monthly* (UK),
and the *Evergreen Review* (US). During the 1970s, however, he stopped writing for these magazines. Quizzed on this hiatus, Pekar explained: “I was really burned out [. . .] I was on reviewing staffs and things like that, and I was assigned to review records that I wasn’t interested in writing about” (Rhode 2008, 53). In his strip “A Story About a Review,” he goes further: “I wrote for ‘Downbeat’ [sic.] from 1962 to 1971, and I was the garbageman of their reviewing staff, the only guy who’d write about anything because I needed that $5 a review” (Pekar 2005a, 123). He stayed away from journalism for some fifteen years, only picking it up again in the last years of his life, writing for *The Austin Chronicle*, *Northern Ohio Live*, and others.

In a study of anecdote within jazz practice, Tony Whyton suggests that “anecdote confuses the relationship between past and present; anecdotal accounts are almost always constructed in retrospect, yet their narrative is capable of giving the recipient the sense of experiencing an event in the present” (Whyton 2004, 117). In the pages of *American Splendor*, Pekar told and retold significant events in his life, providing different emphases according to context and distance from the event. A common framing device is the image of Harv directly addressing the reader, “breaking the fourth wall,” somewhere between a stand-up comic and a teacher (see, among many others, Pekar 2003, 4–24, the cover of Pekar 1991, 2005b, 78–98, 151–174). Facing out to the reader, Harv comes over as a rust-belt Lennie Bruce; early examples of this kind of direct address in his strips also strongly recall Woody Allen’s framing segments in *Annie Hall*, especially in the use of a blank backdrop. It is significant too that this mode of address, in which a rendering of the author proceeds through consecutive panels addressing the reader like a TV presenter, is later taken up in McCloud (1993), a foundational work of Comics Studies.

In a number of respects, Pekar’s storytelling style in comics mimics the form of jazz anecdote, famously described as containing “candour, conceit, warmth, contradictions, bitterness, nostalgia, fulfillment, and frustration” (Shapiro and Hentoff 1962, 14). The punchline of “The Day Before the Be-In” (American Splendor #7 “Big Divorce Issue,” 1982, reprinted in Pekar 2003, 25–37; pencils by Greg Budgett, inks by Gary Dumm) is bittersweet: absorbed by a conversation about jazz with a (black) parking attendant, Harv has forgotten his wife’s coffee. As with the jazz anecdotes Whyton describes, the story presents a fixed temporal frame: a copyright credit notes publication in 1982; a caption at the beginning of the story establishes the setting as “Saturday Morning Summer 1970,” dramatizing the quotidian moment but framing it with hindsight. Music makes up the fabric of the everyday, something to be recalled and thought through outside of specialist realms. For Pekar, a conversation in a parking lot is as valuable as a feature article in *Downbeat*. Pekar’s jazz comics function as jazz historiography, an ongoing fight to merge critical thought and creativity.

**Retelling the Story**

In a study of Alan Lomax’s biography of Jelly Roll Morton, Nicholas Gebhardt notes how Lomax addresses the inadequacies of jazz historiography.

> It is not just a collection of people’s memories, an oral history that aims simply to recall and, therefore, repeat a sequence of events from the past in which Morton was the central character; rather, it is a study of how we remember, of the processes of recollection, and of all the issues that such processes raise for our understanding of the present.

*(2017, 197)*

Equally, the meta-narrative of *American Splendor* is a meditation upon memory. Pekar’s comics regularly use modernist distancing techniques to complicate and comment upon the ostensibly realist mode of autobiography. Whether he is recounting his own direct experience or that of
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In “A Story About a Review,” Pekar’s return to jazz journalism is provoked by a realization that Django Reinhardt may have anticipated free jazz elements in Lennie Tristano’s work. Artist Joe Sacco depicts Harv complacently listening, then hearing something new, then sharing the idea with a musician friend. The four-panel sequence culminates in a panel with no illustration, just text containing a quotation from Pekar’s eventual review in arts magazine *Northern Ohio Live* and an addendum.

So I wrote: “He also did some interesting unaccompanied free tempo solo work. In fact it appears that in April 1937 Reinhardt may have made the first free jazz recording, ‘Improvisation,’ because his improvisation on it does not appear to be based on a preset foundation like a chord progression and cannot be divided into units like a chorus.” (Of course it’s always possible that the 1937 “Improvisation” is based on a structure unlike any that the musicians who listened to it and I are familiar with, or even that Django, who wasn’t supposed to read music, could have memorized the entire piece before recording it, but this is unlikely.)

(Pekar 2005a, 124)

Pekar contextualizes his review’s argument within an emotional structure (“Boy, I felt good about making that discovery”) that also notes the limitations of the journalistic form. After reproducing his argument in quote marks, his addendum provides nuance that the original review could not. The comics form permits not only articulation of the musicological argument, but also commentary upon the moment of critical inspiration and its emotional implications.

A similar impulse guides “Bop Philosophy” (Pekar 2009, 87–95), a strip which combines the rhythms of quotidian conversation found in “The Day Before the Be-In” and the explicit analysis of critical process seen in “A Story About a Review.” “Bop Philosophy” depicts a phone conversation between Harv and his friend Tony Lavorgna (creator of the comics *Bebopman* and *Lois*; one-time saxophonist with The Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra). Prompted to be candid, Harv criticizes Lavorgna’s saxophone style for staying within bebop and failing to push beyond, like “the guys that are keeping jazz alive, the ones that add to the musical vocabulary” (Pekar 2009, 94). As their conversation progresses, the strip’s artist Dean Haspiel surrounds the conversationalists with floating images of bop players (Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Horace Silver, Dizzy Gillespie, J. J. Johnson, Dexter Gordon) and Pekar’s beloved avant-gardists (Eric Dolphy, Cecil Taylor). The strip concludes with Harv sketching out stick-figure storyboards as he asks Tony if he can write up their conversation as a comic strip (Pekar 2009, 95).

Dean Haspiel’s art in this strip is unconventional even by *American Splendor* standards. It sometimes foregoes conventional panel borders (the traditional marker of time elapsing in comics), conveying a fluidity of mutual thought as the conversation progresses. Despite Harv and Lavorgna being divided by geographical distance, Haspiel repeatedly chooses to place them within the same frame, especially as their dialog becomes more argumentative. Haspiel also references famous photographs of key musicians (for example, “Charlie Parker,” William Gottlieb 1940; “Bud Powell Performing at Birdland,” Michael Cuscuna, 1958; “Horace Silver At Piano,” Bob Parent 1956; “Dexter Gordon at the Royal Roost, 1948,” Herman Leonard). Beyond nostalgia, we might see Haspiel’s intertextual referencing of jazz photography as engaging with those questions of iconography and musical style problematized by Peter Townsend (2000, 163–166) and celebrated in Cawthra (2011).

Space does not permit me to fully treat those strips in which Pekar takes on the role of biographer, shifting focus from his own life to those of others. By no means did these all focus on others, the Pekar project matches that of Gebhardt’s description of Lomax, “expanding the field of imaginative possibilities available to the historian” (2017, 195).
musicians (see endnote 6). However, even within his biographies of musicians, we find great variation. In Pekar and Sacco (1997), a collection of music comics originally published in *Village Voice* and *The Austin Chronicle*, two-page strips portray events in the lives of such diverse musicians as Slim Gaillard, Jabbo Smith, Sheila Jordan, Bill DeArango, Teo Macero, Sun Ra, Joe Maneri, Greg Selker, and The Who. Characteristically, Pekar inserts his critical perspective into these accounts, often in a few concluding panels that show Harv looking out at us in lecture mode. Equally characteristic is the tone of anger and frustration that colors many of these commentaries, as Harv rails against the forces that overlook or oppress adventurous musicians. In “Jabbo Smith,” a final panel shows us Harv fiercely observing,

If the jazz crowd at the Lincoln Centre was into anyone but already acknowledged greats like King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Ellington, and Armstrong, they’d be hyping Jabbo “con mucho gusto.” But that’d be too much like right. . . . You could learn about him yourself though.

(Pekar and Sacco 1997, 11)

On the subject of musicians, Pekar’s sincerity is never in doubt, though we might take with a pinch of salt the deprecation he uses to describe his own jazz writing: “The only reason I kept at it was because it made me feel good to think of myself as an author, though I’d already become one of America’s great file clerks” (Pekar and Sacco 1997, 1). In the same piece, Pekar deplores “hack journalists more interested in slick prose full of metaphors, literary imagery, and social and political commentary than the analytical stuff, full of stubby little words, that I wrote” (Pekar and Sacco 1997, 1). In his comics work, we find Pekar exploring the limits of expressive jazz criticism.

### You Can Do Anything With Words and Pictures

Comics are particularly appropriate as a medium to tell stories of everyday life; they are everyday objects, often strewn on the floors of children’s bedrooms. Indeed, Pekar’s use of the medium draws upon the tradition of comics being connected to learning and first experiences with reading and communication (again, note Pekar’s self-deprecation in *Bop Philosophy*, the first page devoted to his unfamiliarity with hands-free phones). The Pekar strips that serve as brief biographies of musicians have a clear lineage from 1940s publications such as *Jukebox Comics*, which provided “origin stories” for jazz musicians such as Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Cab Calloway, and Ella Fitzgerald. However, as I have argued, Pekar’s strips do not merely tell a history; they comment upon it, interrogating jazz historiography through words and pictures.

Evidently, Pekar’s comics use a double temporality common to jazz anecdote. Thinking through criticism’s place in the everyday, they provide a compelling model for ways in which the New Jazz Studies might resolve the sometimes antagonistic relationship between theory, criticism, and practice. For Harv (the comic book character), this attempt at meta-critical analysis of jazz and comics would no doubt be suspect, the defensive verbosity of the pointy-headed intellectual. For Pekar (the author, the critic), the attempt to think creatively about how we account for our engagement with music might represent an opportunity, not to be wasted.

### Notes

1. Michael Kammen reminds us that even earlier, in 1924, Gilbert Seldes had celebrated jazz and comics in *The 7 Lively Arts*: “Seldes explained that he loved the comic strip as a genre because it connected in meaningful ways to the ‘average American life’” (Kammen 1996, 96). Modern Comics Studies would likely dispute this classification of comics as genre rather than medium.
2. This confluence of acoustic, graphic, and digital realms shaped the special collection on jazz and comics I co-edited with Ernesto Priego (see Pillai and Priego 2016).
3. Comics regulation is commonly seen as resulting from psychologist Fredric Wertham’s research during the 1950s into the relationship between comics, delinquency, and sexual behavior. See Warshow (2002, 53–74) for a contemporary response to Wertham. In recent years, Kiste Nyberg (1994) and Beaty (2005) have contextualized the outcry.
4. There is a chapter to be written on superheroes and jazz musicians, tracing parallels between public figures and societal outsiders, the notion of heroism and a world of night. Even a brief survey of Batman comics, as an example, is suggestive. We might note that Batman’s primary antagonist, The Joker, was drawn during the 1940s as a whiteface hipster, often using radio broadcasts to disrupt the social fabric of Gotham City. In a February 1949 strip, bandleader Kay Kyser appeared as a guest star assisting Batman in *Detective Comics* 144. During the 1960s, the popularity of Neil Hefti’s jazzy soundtrack to the Adam West Batman TV series prompted a cash-in record that featured core members of the Sun Ra Arkestra. In 1970, *Detective Comics* 224 saw Batman travel to New Orleans to solve the mystery of a murdered jazz musician, and in 1992, in an episode of *Batman: The Animated Series*, the caped crusader battled the jive-talking gangster Jazzman. Perhaps most intriguingly, in 1995 as part of the alternate-universe *Legends of the Dark Knight* imprint, Batman encountered a Charlie Parker avatar who had faked his own death in *Batman: Jazz*.
5. See Hight (2007) for an account of the film’s adaptation from Pekar’s comic.
6. Pekar’s first major long-form work was written in collaboration with his wife (Pekar, Brabner and Stack 1994). *Our Cancer Year* was a record of Pekar’s diagnosis, treatment, and depression; its plot points provide the structure for the second half of the 2003 *American Splendor* film. Later single-volume graphic novels include the Vietnam memoir of a black serviceman (Pekar and Collier 2003), a reminiscence of Pekar’s adolescence (Pekar, Haspiel, and Loughridge 2005), experiments with biography (Pekar and Dunn 2006), treatises on Macedonia (Pekar, Roberson, and Piskor 2007), student politics (Pekar, Buhle, and Dunn 2008), and the Beat poets (Pekar, Buhle, and Piskor 2009), and final reflections on Judaism and Israel (Pekar and Waldman 2013) and life in Cleveland, published posthumously (Pekar and Remnant 2012).
7. Quizzed on his favorites, Pekar stated, “Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Bely, Pilnyak, Zamyatin, Khlebnikov are among my favourite Russian writers. I’m very interested in Russian modernism from 1900 to 1935” (Rhode 2008, 30).
8. At a public lecture held in Northampton Town Hall on October 9, 2010, my wife Róisín Muldoon asked Alan Moore (*The Ballad of Halo Jones, Watchmen, From Hell*) about the work of Pekar, who had recently died. Speaking enthusiastically, and at length, about Pekar’s ability to evoke the small pleasures of life, Moore named “Hypothetical Quandary” (Pekar 2003, 154–156) as his favorite strip, in which the smell of fresh bread brings solace after a long day.
10. Joyce Brabner is a distinguished author and political activist in her own right. Her work includes comics anthologies critical of the US Department of Defense and the CIA’s involvement in the Iran–Contra affair.
11. Asked in 1994, Pekar was “particularly interested these days in the work of avant-gardists like John Zorn, Dave Douglas, Mark Ribot, Roy Nathanson, and Anthony Coleman, who—in some ways—have gone beyond synthesizing jazz with other forms and are creating new music” (Rhode 2008, 32).
13. Despite containing many interesting passages on jazz, it is telling that the collection *Harvey Pekar: Conversations* omits the second half of an interview with David Garland focused specifically on Pekar’s musical taste (Rhode 2008, 55).
14. In a 2001 interview with Shawna Ervin-Gore, Pekar explicitly noted the influence of stand-up comedy: “For the most part I’m thinking about timing: how to break up the dialogue, or if I’m trying to be humorous, how to arrange the panel for maximum effect. Sometimes it’s just being thoughtful about where to put the final word when I’m finishing up a rap. So pacing and timing are two of the most important things to me” (Rhode 2008, 110).

References
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