

**JEET HEER**

**IN  
LOVE  
WITH  
ART**

**FRANÇOISE MOULY'S  
ADVENTURES  
IN COMICS WITH  
ART SPIEGELMAN**





JEET HEER

**IN  
LOVE  
WITH  
ART**

**FRANÇOISE MOULY'S  
ADVENTURES  
IN COMICS WITH  
ART SPIEGELMAN**

**COACH HOUSE BOOKS, TORONTO**

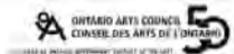
copyright © Jeet Heer, 2013

first edition



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

Canada

Published with the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Coach House Books also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Heer, Jeet, author

In love with art : Françoise Mouly's adventures in comics with Art Spiegelman / written by Jeet Heer.

(Exploded views)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-55245-278-3 (PBK)-- ISBN 978-1-77056-351-3 (EPUB)

1. Mouly, Françoise--Interviews. 2. Spiegelman, Art--Interviews. 3. Graphic artists--United States--Interviews. 4. Cartoonists--United States--Interviews. 5. Periodical editors--United States--Interviews. I. Title.

NC1429.M69H43 2013

741.5'973

C2013-904099-4

*In Love with Art* is available as an ebook: ISBN 978 1 77056 351 3.

Purchase of the print version of this book entitles you to a free digital copy. To claim your ebook of this title, please email [sales@chbooks.com](mailto:sales@chbooks.com) with proof of purchase or visit [chbooks.com/digital](http://chbooks.com/digital). (Coach House Books reserves the right to terminate the free download offer at any time.)

*For Robin and Bella, book lovers both*



Françoise Mouly.  
Portrait of the editor/publisher as a young printer, circa 1977.

## The Author's Preface

In 2004, I wrote a newspaper column in the *National Post* arguing that Art Spiegelman, the cartoonist who crafted the graphic memoir *Maus*, is not only a great artist but also a tremendously influential editor. My contention was that *RAW*, the magazine Spiegelman co-edited with his wife, Françoise Mouly, was the seedbed for the efflorescence of the comics form that had started in the 1980s. 'Like all great editors, Spiegelman and Mouly have performed an essential taste-making task, testing out new work with their own refined palates and offering deeply informed guidance to the public,' I wrote. 'Leaving Mouly aside for a second, it is easy to see that Spiegelman's editing is an outgrowth of his intense historical consciousness, his awareness of how comics have evolved and where they need to go.'

My partner, Robin Ganey, rightly challenged both the formulation and thinking behind the last sentence: 'Leaving Mouly aside for a second ...' Why should Mouly be left aside? Hadn't Mouly been as important as Spiegelman as editor of *RAW*? After *RAW*, hadn't Mouly gone on to have an equally impressive career as art editor of the *New Yorker*, where, starting in 1993, she has been responsible for some of the most contentious and admired magazine covers of our time? And hadn't I met innumerable cartoonists who confided to me that Mouly was the best, most thoughtful and incisive editor they've ever worked with? Why was I so quick to relegate Mouly to the status of a clause in a sentence where her husband enjoyed centre stage?

I had no adequate response to these criticisms, and they got me thinking about the sexism of my article and the imbalance of attention given to Mouly and Spiegelman. Spiegelman is famous and Mouly is largely unknown, except to the cartooning cognoscenti. Journalists and academics love writing about Spiegelman. Not only is *Maus* meaty fare for analysis, but Spiegelman himself is an ideal interview subject, gifted with the ability to talk in quips that are both funny and intellectually stimulating.

Beyond the shadow cast by Spiegelman's fame, Mouly's invisibility springs from her gender, her profession and her milieu. As

a culture, we still undervalue women, even (or perhaps especially) those as accomplished as Mouly. Editing, her chosen career, involves doing backstage work; it's an invisible profession, often made up of invisible women. And the comics field, which Mouly played a crucial role in remaking, has long been even more hostile to women than the culture at large. Mouly's achievements, remarkable in themselves, are even more impressive given the hurdles she's faced.

My neglect of Mouly is, sadly, nothing new. For every article on Mouly, there are at least a hundred profiles of her husband. *The Comics Journal*, the leading critical magazine in the field, has conducted novel-length interviews with Spiegelman, most of the major RAW artists and even a few RAW interns who have since gone on to prominence as cartoonists, editors and educators. They've never once published a solo interview with Mouly. (The magazine's editors did have an extended conversation with Spiegelman and Mouly in 1980, but the cartoonist rather than his wife was the clear focus of the discussion).

My 2004 column was not just sexist but also journalistically stupid, because Mouly's career, which I already knew in broad outlines but hadn't fully investigated, raised all sorts of intriguing questions that any wide-awake writer should've keyed into: how did Mouly, born in France in 1955, come to play such an outsized role in North American comics? How did she and Spiegelman successfully transform the public perception of comics, a long-marginalized art form? How was she able to so radically remake the public face of the *New Yorker*, a magazine notoriously resistant to change?

Françoise Mouly has a fascinating story, which I and other writers have neglected to tell. This book – based largely on interviews with Mouly, her husband and key artists she's worked with – is an attempt to redress that omission. Aside from fresh interviews, I've made extensive use of secondary sources. As this book will make clear, the editor I was so thoughtlessly willing to 'leave aside' in my 2004 article has had a career that commands attention.

## The Invisible Woman

One afternoon in March 1993 in Manhattan, two powerhouses of the magazine world, Tina Brown and Françoise Mouly, met to discuss remaking the *New Yorker*, probably the most venerable periodical in America. They came from strikingly different backgrounds and had, arguably, entirely different ambitions, but they had in common an ability to generate controversy and bring visionary change to their medium. Born and raised in the U.K., the contentious and flamboyant Brown, then thirty-nine, had previously reinvigorated both *Tatler* and *Vanity Fair*, and she had been hired in July 1992 to similarly inject some life into the *New Yorker*, which had become somewhat stagnant and self-satisfied under her predecessors. The then-thirty-seven-year-old Mouly, for her part, was running her own publishing company, RAW Books and Graphics, and for the decade previous to this meeting, had been the co-editor, along with her husband, cartoonist Art Spiegelman, of *RAW*, a magazine that had revolutionized the world of comics by bringing to the form a new level of graphic intensity and artistic seriousness without losing popular appeal. Not least among its achievements, *RAW* serialized Spiegelman's *Maus*, a long-form comic-book story that played a pivotal role in creating the new genre popularly known as 'the graphic novel.'

Brown had already introduced several controversial new features to the *New Yorker*: photography, more celebrity- and news-driven pieces, and topical covers that were a far cry from the tasteful, quiet illustrations the magazine had been favouring. Even more than book jackets, magazine covers serve as both the public face of a publication and its most effective marketing tool; captivating, even scandalous, covers were a clear signal of Brown's intentions. Art Spiegelman created the most provocative of those early covers for the 1993 Valentine's Day issue: an illustration of a Hasidic man kissing a black woman, a sly comment on ethnic tensions that had been erupting in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighbourhood. The cover, predictably, sparked outrage, but it also made people talk about the *New Yorker* in a way they hadn't



Art Spiegelman's *New Yorker* cover for February 15, 1993, titled *Valentine's Day*. One of the earliest *New Yorker* covers to tackle explosive political and social issues.

been doing for years. For Brown, the key to successful publishing was generating buzz: she wanted the *New Yorker* to be the talk of the town, and the Spiegelman cover certainly achieved that goal.

Brown asked Spiegelman to recommend art directors who could help her come up with covers that would keep up the buzz. He provided a list. Brown was also bouncing around ideas with Lawrence Weschler, who had profiled Spiegelman for *Rolling Stone* in 1986 and served as Brown's informal advisor. She asked Weschler why he thought Spiegelman hadn't included his own wife; Mouly and Brown had met once before at the office of RAW Books and Graphics, when Spiegelman was working on the interracial kiss cover, and Brown had been very impressed by the issues of *RAW* she saw there. It hadn't occurred to either Spiegelman or Mouly that they'd be interested in someone with Mouly's unconventional background. Weschler told Mouly Brown was considering hiring her.

A staff position at the *New Yorker* is a dream for many writers, artists and editors, but Mouly didn't initially leap at the opportunity; she had mixed feelings about both Brown and the magazine. As Mouly says, 'I heard Tina was brought in to the *New Yorker* at a dinner party in the summer of 1992, and I couldn't understand why everyone was so excited and opinionated about it. The *New Yorker* meant nothing to me except for being the place I sent artists I thought were too staid for *RAW*.'

Nor was Mouly impressed by the fact that Brown, as editor of *Vanity Fair*, had published a photo on the June 1985 cover showing an elegant Ronald and Nancy Reagan dancing during the presidential inaugural ball, accompanied by a gushing essay celebrating the couple penned by William F. Buckley, Jr. In *RAW*, Mouly and Spiegelman had frequently published comics that abrasively challenged the right-wing turn of American culture under Reagan. 'I hated Brown's *Vanity Fair* cover that had the Reagans dancing,' Mouly recalls. 'That was the enemy speaking, glamorizing a rear-guard reactionary who was starting a grand squeeze of the middle class for the benefit of the super rich.'

But despite her political reservations, Mouly liked Brown personally. 'I was impressed by her when she came down to the

office,' Mouly remembers. 'She's very charismatic, quick-witted, full of energy.' And like Brown herself, Mouly was thrilled by the firestorm of controversy Spiegelman's cover ignited. Both women had a strong visual sense and appreciated the power of images to stir debate. Nor was a love of inflammatory imagery the only thing the women had in common: both were dynamos, famous for pushing both themselves and the artists they worked with. Spiegelman describes Mouly as a 'whirling dervish,' someone always feverishly working on many projects at once. It was a good match.

Yet a *New Yorker* job would mean becoming an employee. Accustomed to being her own boss, and more at home with subversive art than subservient work, Mouly didn't want to be just an employee at a mass-market magazine trying to please subscribers: 'It really was visceral,' she explains. 'Why would I want to be somebody's secretary?' As she thought it over and discussed the possible job with friends, her feelings changed. Brown wasn't seeking just assistance, she realized, but rather Mouly's singular expertise. 'If Tina Brown knew what she wanted, she wouldn't be asking me,' Mouly said.

Mouly set about studying the magazine's visual history (aided by the fact that Weschler gave her access to the magazine's library). No admirer of its recent covers, which tended to the pastoral and decorative, she was delighted to discover that during its first few decades the front of the magazine had been dominated by flashy, poster-like images of New York life obviously inspired by one of the great French cartoon magazines of the early twentieth century, *L'Assiette au Beurre*. (Harold Ross, the *New Yorker*'s founder, had been a soldier in France in World War I, where he likely encountered the country's rich graphic culture, just as he had been influenced by American humour magazines such as *Judge* and *Life*.) To reshape the front of the *New Yorker* as a contemporary, American version of *L'Assiette au Beurre*, with each cover an exuberant cartoon commentary on the world? That was an ambition that Mouly could put her heart into. 'Harold Ross and Tina Brown were both visual editors,' Mouly concluded.

Spontaneously, she drew up a proposal that argued the *New Yorker* should return to having artists as featured contributors,

with not just more daring covers but also an increased use of photos and illustrations inside the magazine to be integrated with the prose and poetry. Soon after sending in the proposal, Mouly got a call to meet Brown for lunch.

That auspicious meal took place at the Royalton, a boutique hotel and Brown haunt close to the headquarters of Condé Nast, which owned the *New Yorker*. 'I knew what I wanted to do and was in a take-it-or-leave-it mode,' Mouly says. 'If it didn't work for Tina, that was fine with me. If she took it, I knew it would be a challenge, but it was an exciting one.' Mouly's main concern was how she would reconcile a high-powered job with raising her two kids, a daughter almost five and a son who had just turned one. Mouly thought about asking if the job could be delayed for a year, but knew the request would be rejected.

Mouly's proposal was barely discussed during the lunch; Brown had clearly made up her mind. Like Mouly, she was a mother of two and, at one point in their conversation, she looked at Mouly and asked, 'Do you have a good babysitter?' Mouly took the job.

The move from *RAW* to the *New Yorker* followed a pattern that had governed her life and career: a semi-steady course from the margins of culture to its centres of power. When Mouly first started publishing comics, they were a fringe and sometimes derided medium. Her tenure at *RAW* changed that, bringing attention and credibility to the form. Working at the *New Yorker* allowed her to further pursue her aesthetic agenda on one of the most prestigious stages in the world.

Even before taking on that challenge, Mouly was, by any estimation, an exceedingly illustrious and talented editor. She's had as massive and transformative an impact on comics as Ezra Pound had on modernist literature, Max Perkins on early-twentieth-century American novels or Gordon Lish on contemporary fiction. At *RAW*, she brought to comics the stringent and demanding conceptualism of modern art while remaining true to the form's democratic appeal as a mass art. She infused a staid *New Yorker* with an eye-catching, often eye-popping, cartoon aesthetic and

added a whole new stratum of narrative meaning. More recently, and concurrent with her *New Yorker* work, Mouly founded TOON Books, a publishing outfit that is likewise revitalizing the formerly moribund field of children's comics.

If Mouly is so impressive a figure in the world of comics and magazine editing, why have her achievements so rarely received the attention they deserve? Sexism is undeniably a factor. All too many journalistic and critical accounts speak of 'Art Spiegelman's RAW magazine' as if he did the editorial heavy lifting all by himself. This sexism exists in the culture at large but is particularly intense in the comics world, a subculture notorious, at least until recent years, for its nerdy 'no girls allowed' attitude. As Mouly notes, during her first few decades in comics she would routinely go to conventions that were more than 90 percent male and where she was often brushed off as an unwelcome interloper.

Another factor is simply the nature of her work. Mouly is an editor. A cartoonist or writer makes visible marks for all to see. Part of an editor's job is to disappear, to let the artist speak for himself or herself; editing has, in fact, been called 'the invisible art.' This book will try to make the invisible visible to show how Mouly's editorial fingerprints can be seen on every project she works on. She brings rigour and imagination to the craft of editing, and in doing so proves that editing can be more than a craft – it is, at its best, an art.

## A Surgeon's Daughter

Françoise Mouly was born to disappoint her parents. She was particularly a bitter pill for her formidable father, Dr. Roger Mouly. A pioneer in popularizing plastic surgery in France, Dr. Mouly had made a name for himself not just as a much sought-after practitioner but also as a theorist and advocate of surgically modifying and improving the human body. With a colleague, he developed the Dufourmentel-Mouly method of breast reduction, which uses a lateral incision that leaves a smaller scar than earlier procedures. An expert whose wisdom was sought by both highly specialized medical journals and newspapers like *Le Monde*, a charismatic and flashy Parisian who managed to charm both conservative politicians such as Jacques Chirac and the student radicals who took to the streets in 1968, a venerated professional who served as the vice-president of the Société internationale de chirurgie esthétique and was inducted as a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, Dr. Mouly thought he lacked only one thing to make his life complete and meaningful: a son who could inherit his practice and continue to make the Mouly name synonymous with French plastic surgery.

Françoise Mouly, the second of three daughters, made her unwelcome entrance into the world in 1955. 'Both my parents had a very explicit complaint which they kept bringing up over and over again: that the worst thing that ever happened to them was to have three daughters,' Mouly recalls somewhat sarcastically. 'They only wanted to have a son. They put up with my older sister, but by the time I was born my father was so disappointed he nearly did not declare me at the town hall. A few years later my little sister was born, and shame again. My parents were crushed.' (Mouly is one year younger than her sister Laurence and six years older than Marie-Pierre, whose name is a memorial to the desire for a son who would have been named Pierre).

That heavy burden of parental discontent aside, Mouly's parents provided her with particular kinds of inspiration. Prior to her marriage to Dr. Mouly, Josée Giron had been a stewardess at

TWA. It was a chic and sexy profession at the time (but one reserved for single women), and Mouly says now that her appreciation of beauty is very much tied to her sense of her mother as a 'truly beautiful, graceful, elegant and glamorous person.' Even as a child, Mouly wanted to create art beautiful enough to suit Giron: 'A lot of my early memories as a kid have to do with making objects and paintings for her.'

If her mother's elegance and grace kindled Mouly's aesthetic awareness, her early education gave shape to these interests through a holistic curriculum that combined writing, drawing and reciting. At the beginning of each class, as their homeroom teacher recited a poem, students using crow quill pens copied it out in calligraphic writing on the right side of their notebooks. On the left side, they illustrated the poem. Finally, at the bottom of the page, they were instructed to draw a geometric frieze. The lesson concluded with the students memorizing the poem – not just by rote, but with the passion and emotion of elocutionists.

'It was really great,' she says now. 'It combined the beauty of the words and the calligraphy with images, including the frieze, which had to be in keeping with the mood of the poetry. It brought together literature, memorization and acting out. That's all good training for a very full experience of the power of art and literature.' While this artistic education had broader purposes, it's hard to think of better training for a future editor of comics and illustration.

Aside from newspapers and magazines, neither Roger Mouly nor Josée Giron read much. The only books young Françoise ever received from her family were hand-me-down Jules Verne and Alexandre Dumas volumes from her mother's childhood library. But as a child Mouly loved to read – it was 'the one activity that protected me from my family and from anything in school,' she says – and she craved books, particularly the lavishly illustrated fairy-tale treasuries offered as prizes for top students. 'French schooling is very consistent in never giving you anything but negative reinforcement,' Mouly explains. 'You get threatened all the time. Everyone is always ceaselessly ranked. You have exams every single day.' Ferociously competitive, Mouly's goal every year was to earn the large hardcover that was first prize. 'It was

something I treasured,' she says. 'I read the stories and reread the stories and looked at the illustrations for hours.'

Illustrated fairy tales were a precursor to the comics she discovered a few years later. As a preteen, she loved to accompany her father to the newsstand, where he would buy Mouly the latest issue of *Pilote*, a weekly anthology best known for featuring the squat, quick-witted Gaul Astérix, whose rollicking adventures in the ancient world were then at the height of their popularity. René Goscinny, co-creator of *Astérix* and editor-in-chief of *Pilote*, was much influenced by Harvey Kurtzman – the mastermind behind the early *Mad* comics and *Mad* magazine – and Mouly loved the satirical, *Mad*-inspired sections of *Pilote*, which also included the Kurtzman-inflected work of Marcel Gotlib, whose strip *La Rubrique-à-Brac* she especially cherished. (She read dutifully, but with little pleasure, the melodramatic adventure series found on adjoining pages, notably Jean Giraud's solidly drawn but clichéd Wild West strip *Blueberry*.)

Magazines such as *Pilote* were the mainstay of French cartooning, but they were increasingly supplemented with wildly popular hardcover albums – both Hergé's beloved boy hero *Tintin* and *Astérix* were available in this format. The typical album was sixty-four pages, thin but sturdily bound, and printed on white matte paper. The format was an offshoot of French children's books, and the volumes were designed, like quality kids' books, to withstand multiple readings. Mouly didn't own very many of these albums, but she read them all the time at the houses of friends. And while they were relatively formulaic and predictable – especially compared to the always surprising books Mouly would create later in life – they were an early attempt to intelligently marry elegant book design with comics. And they stood in stark contrast to the disposable comic books then printed on cheap newsprint in North America. As Art Spiegelman notes, his French cartooning counterparts started off with a natural advantage: 'They didn't have crappy ten-cent comics, they had *Tintin* albums to lean on.'

Though she was not the son they wanted, Dr. Mouly was well aware that his middle daughter was a stellar student, and

Françoise was soon being groomed to take over the plastic surgery practice. She was pushed toward medical studies; novels and poetry were replaced, to her dismay, by math and physics. As a teenager, she spent some of her vacations training in her father's office. Initially she helped her father write research papers on melanoma, and by the time she was twenty she was in the operating room, where she would concentrate on her father's hands – a valuable lesson in creativity. 'The precision of his sutures and scars was really magical,' Mouly says now. 'Surgical gestures have to have elegance and an economy of means. You don't just cut and see what happens. You have to really think about it before you make that one blade penetrate the flesh.'

The pleasure of working with her hands, of reshaping the world through touch, never left Mouly. And it's certainly no accident that some of the artists she later collaborated with, notably Charles Burns, work with images obsessed with anatomy and relentlessly portray the human body as a radically mutable thing. Burns's horror/romance mashup 'A Marriage Made in Hell' (first published in *RAW* no. 6 in 1984) features a woman whose badly charred body is mistakenly transformed into the opposite gender, a case of reconstructive surgery gone unbearably wrong. Of course this subject matter resonated with Mouly; it's not much of a metaphoric stretch to say that, as an editor and book designer, she ultimately did become a kind of surgeon, nipping and folding pieces of paper rather than human skin. The tools she learned to use in the surgical theatre are the same she uses at her drafting table: markers, knives, scissors. As Spiegelman notes, about the editing of *RAW*, 'Françoise was uncannily skilful with X-Acto blades and making hand separations with Zip-A-Tone, cutting Zip-A-Tone strips an eighth of an inch wide, often angled on three overlays to avoid moiré patterns.' And, eventually, she would give that most esteemed of grand dames, the *New Yorker*, a face lift.

Mouly might have stuck with her medical education, she says, if she'd felt her father was a 'real doctor' who helped people. Dr. Mouly did occasionally reconstruct the bodies of those who had been scarred or burned, but his daughter was troubled by much

THE SURVIVING BODY WAS SHIPPED TO A VETERANS HOSPITAL WHERE DOCTORS STARTED FACIAL RECONSTRUCTION AND SKIN GRAFTS...

EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER JOHN DOUGH JOINED THE LIVING AGAIN...

A FEW THINGS WERE OUT OF PLACE...



WE'VE GOT A BIG JOB AHEAD OF US...THERE'S NOTHING MUCH LEFT OF THIS ONE...HOLD THAT PHOTO STILL...YOU LITTLE PEA-BRAIN!



HEY NURSE! WHAT THE HELL DID THEY DO TO ME!



NOW JOHN... JUST CALM DOWN...

BUT MY NAME IS NOT JOHN! IT'S BRENDA!

THE LAST THING THAT I REMEMBER BEFORE BEING KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS BY THE BLAST WAS CLINGING TO JOHN'S DOGTAGS... BECAUSE OF MISTAKEN IDENTIFICATION I WAS A WOMAN TRAPPED IN THE BODY OF A MAN...

I FINALLY REALIZED THE ONLY WAY I'D BE RELEASED FROM THE HOSPITAL WOULD BE TO PLAY ALONG WITH THEM...

I GUESS I REALLY WAS A LITTLE CRAZY... FOR A WHILE THERE I CONVINCED MYSELF I'D BE ABLE TO LEAD A NORMAL LIFE... AS A MAN!



HERE'S SOME LETTERS AND PHOTOS OF YOUR GIRL. BACK HOME... DO YOU REMEMBER HER?

OH YEAH... IT'S ALL COMING BACK TO ME NOW...



OH JOHN! IT'S SO GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME! I'D ALMOST GIVEN UP ALL HOPE!



BACK WHEN I WAS ACTING IN ALL OF THOSE LOW-BUDGET HOLLYWOOD FILMS, I PLAYED WOMEN EXACTLY LIKE YOU... TRUE-BLUE, ALL-AMERICAN, WAITING AT HOME WITH AN APPLE PIE... BUT YOU, YOU WEREN'T ACTING! I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!



I FELT AS IF I WAS IN THE WORST MOVIE EVER MADE... AND I HAD FORGOTTEN ALL OF MY LINES...

YOU KNOW JOHN... EVERYTIME I HEAR THE "STAR SPANGLED BANNER" I START TO CRY... I THINK ABOUT HOW YOU AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER BOYS RISKED THEIR LIVES TO PROTECT OUR WONDERFUL DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE!



AFTER ALL I HAD BEEN THROUGH, MY BRAIN FELT COOKED... I WAS SO FAR GONE THAT MARRIAGE SEEMED LIKE THE MOST REASONABLE THING TO DO AT THE TIME.

...AND THESE ARE THE GOWNS I'VE PICKED OUT FOR THE BRIDESMAIDS! WHAT DO YOU THINK?

UH...GEE, THEY LOOK REALLY GREAT, HONEY.

A page from Charles Burns's 'A Marriage Made In Hell' from RAW no. 6 (1984). A story about reconstructive surgery gone awry, edited by a woman who was once encouraged to become a plastic surgeon.

of what the profession entailed. 'I had a moral problem with plastic surgery,' she says. 'I saw it as frivolous and downright damaging to people. No amount of surgical procedure can give you a sense of being at peace with your body. Plastic surgery exploits insecurity to such a high degree.' Mouly's objections dovetailed with her own growing political consciousness. She turned thirteen in 1968, a fateful year in France, when extraordinary student and labour protests engulfed the country. At the height of the demonstrations, during three weeks in May, President Charles de Gaulle's government brought in tanks, placing Paris in a near state of siege designed to intimidate the protestors. Many Parisians, including Mouly's mother and sisters, fled the city. Dr. Mouly, however, insisted on staying to look after his patients – as a doctor, he had access to gas coupons when fuel was being rationed – and he kept his daughter/assistant with him.

Prior to 1968, Mouly's Paris had consisted mainly of her neighbourhood in the 17th arrondissement, a sleepy haven for professionals Mouly compares to New York's Upper East Side. The Moullys lived in an apartment on the fourth floor, with the third reserved for Dr. Mouly's practice. (His three daughters were constantly being told to keep quiet when patients were being seen.) The protests, however, revealed an entirely new, and thrilling, city – for the first time, she visited the Latin Quarter, the heart of the unrest, and other bohemian haunts. The 'communal spirit' of 1968 was infectious. 'I was philosophically taken by the anarchists,' she says. 'I painted quite a few A's in circles.' As with many members of the *soixante-huitard* generation, Mouly was an avid reader of the anarcho-left-wing weekly *Hara-Kiri Hebdo*, although she found its politics better expressed in its cartoons than its articles.

In 1970, Mouly was sent to a boarding school, the Lycée Jeanne d'Arc, in central France, and brought the spirit of May '68, still strong in many parts of the country, with her. She encouraged her fellow high school students to join demonstrations with local university students, where they enthusiastically chanted the slogan 'L'union fait la force' ('Unity makes strength'). 'I was expelled something like twenty-four or twenty-five times because I was

trying to drag everybody into demonstrations,' she says. Jeanne d'Arc was an appropriate school for Mouly; as Spiegelman would later say, she has a Joan of Arc side – a passionate desire to save the world.

Mouly returned to Paris to earn her baccalaureate, and the next year she disappointed her father again by enrolling in the architecture program at the *École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts*. Even though it was a profession that made use of her mathematical and scientific training, and in which she would work with her hands, it thwarted Dr. Mouly's plan. Though he lived till 2008, 'In his entire life, my father never forgave me,' Mouly says. 'He was so, so disappointed. He never abandoned the dream that I would be a surgeon. I had already published a few issues of *RAW* and he still said it was not too late.'

She adored being at the Beaux-Arts, and moved to the Latin Quarter with her then-boyfriend, Jean-Robert, a wildly creative though impractical young man who had started his architecture studies the year before. (Spiegelman for his part claims that all of Mouly's ex-boyfriends were named Jean-something.)

The program at her architecture 'atelier' was appealingly hands-on. 'I loved the basic training where they give you an assignment like, "Build a school,"' she says. 'You can't just start sketching. It's a very systematic process where you have to first come up with a concept. You have to take in all of the information about the constraints; you have to analyze the geology, the geography, the economy and as much of the context as you can. In architecture you can't just say, "Oh, I'll put this window next to that door." You have to find a dominant idea or concept and then everything – from the light socket to the facade – becomes an expression of that concept.'

Mouly was enchanted by the loopy futuristic architect Hans-Walter Müller, who created inflatable structures known as *gonflables* – part art objects, part inhabitable structures – but as she became more familiar with architecture as a career, she learned such fanciful design was not common. There was a serious discrepancy between the idealistic notions she was taught at school, where students were encouraged to see themselves as

artists, and the commercial straitjacket that tightly bound the actual profession. 'It was far more interesting as a set of studies than as a practice, because in practice you are a cog in the machinery,' Mouly observes. 'There are only a few name architects and those people spend all their time selling themselves.' To be a successful architect you have to run an office with a team and take many assignments to keep the firm going. It wasn't a life Mouly could imagine for herself.

In 1974, Mouly's disenchantment with architecture was aggravated by a series of personal crises. She had broken up with Jean-Robert but kept running into him because they were at adjacent schools. And the family was disintegrating as her parents went through what she calls 'the bloodiest divorce on earth.' While Giron would eventually reinvent herself, with great success, as an art book dealer, real estate agent, ghost writer (with at least one bestseller to her credit) and interior designer – an unusual career arc that would also inspire Mouly – mother and daughter had an occasionally nettlesome relationship. (Spiegelman says when he first met his mother-in-law, she took him aside to make fun of Mouly for lacking sufficient cooking and domestic skills.) Mouly needed to get away from France.

Travel was one way out. As a teenager she had been, in Spiegelman's words, 'a weirdly adventurous traveller.' In 1972, she, Jean-Robert and two other architecture students hopped in a van for a two-and-a-half-month adventure that included an excursion to Afghanistan. Two years later she made a solo trip to Algeria to study vernacular architecture, which she's always been interested in. 'I was supposed to go with my sister, Laurence, but she dumped me and stayed with a friend in Marseilles,' Mouly explains. 'So I had to board the boat and take the trip alone. I ended up in the M'zab, in the middle of the Sahara, where Le Corbusier had been. It was the trip from hell, travelling alone in a Muslim country. I got robbed of money and passport. The police laughed at me because only a whore would be travelling alone, so that would teach me, but, anyway, I did a great study, one of the most exciting things I did in school.'

Aside from these venturesome journeys, she also made the hostel rounds all over Europe, travelling to Italy, Spain, Holland, Belgium, England, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. This time around, she needed to go somewhere she hadn't been before. She decided to take a sabbatical from her architecture studies, got a job as a cleaner at a hotel and saved up enough money for a plane ticket to New York. Unlike many Europeans of her generation, she didn't have a romantic fixation with New York or even American culture. But it was very far away and, to her, alluringly unknown.