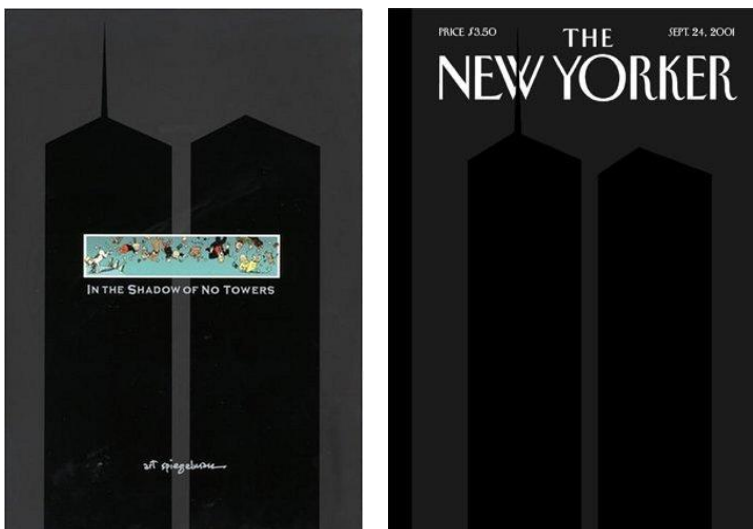


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The Temporalities that Inhabit Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In this paper I will investigate Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a collection of 10 comic pages he created from 2001-2003 in response to his eyewitness experience of 9/11. I will prove that the physical composition of *In the Shadow of No Towers*, with its metatextual incorporation of 7 plates from early-20th century comic strips and its auto-citations of *Maus*, is an effort to make sense of the present through historical reflection. Furthermore, the incorporation of characters from the old strips, including *Maus*, on Spiegelman's contemporary pages represent the fragmented and perpetual notion of trauma. Each page is deeply invested in historical context, and he cites these old strips in order to make sense of his shattered world.

Before even opening *In the Shadow of No Towers* let's look at the cover of the book



which includes characters from *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Little Lady Lovekins*, *Happy Hooligan*, the *Yellow Kid*, and *Krazy Kat*. We should also note the striking resemblance to the cover of the September 24, 2011 *The New Yorker* magazine, also designed by

Spiegelman. The only difference between the two covers is the strip of historical comic characters running across the panel, apparently running from the tragedy of the attacks.

Here on the cover Spiegelman already tells us he will be using his own work and early-20th century comics to tell his version of 9/11 (Spiegelman, from *The New Yorker*).

When I refer to Spiegelman's incorporation of his own work within *No Towers* I am referring to his autocitations of *Maus*. *Maus* became the first graphic novel to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, officially establishing the graphic novel as a serious literary medium. "It is a work of such stunning narrative that it is no exaggeration to point out that it has single handedly inspired the academy to recognize the complexity of comics" (Chute, "In the Shadow of No Towers," 233). The novel skyrocketed Spiegelman to stardom in the comics world rivaled only by R. Crumb. It's worth noting that only after the publication of *No Towers* in 2004 was Spiegelman named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential people in the world (Satrapi). In *Maus*, Jews are symbolized by mice, Germans by cats, Americans by dogs and Poles by pigs (Spiegelman, *Maus*). In *No Towers* Spiegelman's character takes on mouse form in eight of the ten pages.

We first see the mouse head in Comic 2, when Spiegelman depicts himself sprawled across his desk, defeated, and surrounded by tiny versions of old cartoon characters. He is holding a color comics supplement of Hearst's *New York Journal*, complete with a mini-comic strip (Comic 2). The mini-comic strip is legible, and we can see a pig (the representation of Poles in *Maus*) falling in love with a woman, then getting his heart broken. On the next page, Comic 3, the mouse is present in nearly every panel. Spiegelman the mouse recounts, "I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like... The closest he got was telling me it was 'indescribable'... That's exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after September 11th!" (Comic 3). Here Spiegelman directly links his experience as an eyewitness of 9/11 to his parents' experience in Auschwitz. If we

examine the fifteen panels in which the mouse appears on this page, he is always smoking Cremo brand cigarettes, like he does in *Maus* (Spiegelman, *Maus*). Here is another autocitation. Critic Hillary Chute points out that in *Maus*, "Spiegelman drew the character Artie's smoke as the smoke of the human flesh drifting upwards from Auschwitz, a move that implied Artie's guilt at commercializing the Holocaust and also the impossibility of escape from the traumas of the past" (Chute, "In the Shadow of No Towers," 233). These themes of recurring events, recurring emotions related to trauma and recurring symbols, like smoke, are central to the theme of *No Towers*.

Spiegelman doesn't pretend that his experience on 9/11 was worse than that of his parents, but they were both traumas. He said in a 2004 *New York Times* interview, "I don't posit the scale of what was happening to me on 9/11 to what happened to my parents, but of course there I was standing at the same juncture of personal and world history" (Dreifus). Like in *Maus*, the intersection of past and present is crucial to the theme and form of *No Towers*. While in *Maus* there are two main spaces in time where the story takes place (current-day New York with Vladek and the years of WWII), in *No Towers* the timeline is more jumbled. Structurally, *No Towers* is imbalanced. Hillary Chute points out that, "Throughout *No Towers*, the past and present jostle and layer each other, 'smashing' into each other to make graphically legible their co-existence" (Chute, "In the Shadow of No Towers," 240). It's narrative composition is confusing, there is no linear time and it is further mixed up by the inclusion of old comic broadsheets. There is no end, time skips from the 1902 "Comic Supplement" in *The New York American* to 2004 and back to 2001. In fact, the old works come at the end, which implies a return to the old.

Spiegelman acknowledges this jumbled timeline in the address of the book: “these pages are a slow-motion diary of the end of the world” (Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*). His timeline in completing the pages was also jumbled, as some spreads took him five weeks to complete. Partly for this reason, *No Towers* was a hard sell to American publishers and wasn’t published in book form until 2004. From 2001-2003 the pages were published sporadically in the European and American journals *Die Zeit*, *The Forward*, *Courrier International*, *The London Review of Books*, *Internazionale*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *The Chicago Weekly*, and *World War Three Illustrated* (Chute, “In the Shadow of No Towers,” 229). In the address he cites the “the large format, quirky content and erratic schedule,” combined with controversial political views as the reason American publishers didn’t jump on the spreads immediately (Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*). In the liberal journals the spreads were published at irregular intervals, as they were produced at irregular intervals. This is a direct reflection of the traumatic experience of 9/11. Cathy Caruth in her book on trauma states that, “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (Caruth, 4). Spiegelman was traumatized by the events of 9/11, and he felt possessed to the point of losing all sense of regulated time.

One of the only ways Spiegelman was able to deal with his shattered world was by reading old comic strips. He writes in “The Comic Supplement,” which introduces the seven historic spreads that follow, “The only cultural artifacts that could get past my defenses to flood my eyes and brain with something other than images of burning towers were old comic strips; vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the 20th century” (Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*). He found solace in comics, and therefore included on his modern pages characters from Frederick Burr Opper's *Happy Hooligan* (1900-1932),

Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1911; 1924-1926), Rudolph Dirks's *Katzenjammer Kids* (1897-1918), and Gustave Verbeck's *Upside Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo* (1903-1905). The serial production of these strips were comforting to him because they, "were made with so much skill and verve but never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper" (Spiegelman, *No Towers*). These strips were regular, daily or weekly, and therefore futile in their existence. This was the very beginning of comic art, and it wasn't until Spiegelman himself won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 that graphic novels, the grandson of comics, started to actually be considered an art form by the literary world. It was this very futility in creating art that wasn't meant to last that made comics pertinent to the falling of the towers. The twin towers, too, wouldn't last. They now exist only in memory and on paper.

From the first spread in *No Towers*, Spiegelman introduces us to his relation with old comics. In the upper right corner, the first panel with words, we read, "in our last episode, as you might remember, the world ended" (Comic 1). This was of course the first episode in the series, there was no depiction of the world ending before. Spiegelman here is making a historical reference to newspaper strips in which stories continued from week to week. This reference to regularity of the comic medium is used to demonstrate the perpetual, seemingly never-ending nature of trauma.

In the second strip of panels in Comic 1 we see Spiegelman's old-fashioned-style gag-comic invention "Etymological Vaudeville," but it isn't until Comic 2 we are introduced to real historical comic characters. The face of a woman in downtown Manhattan on 9/11 is depicted as Mama Katzenjammer. In the panel below her we see the so-called Tower Twins characters, which bear striking similarity to the Katzenjammer Kids themselves:



(From Comics Kingdom)

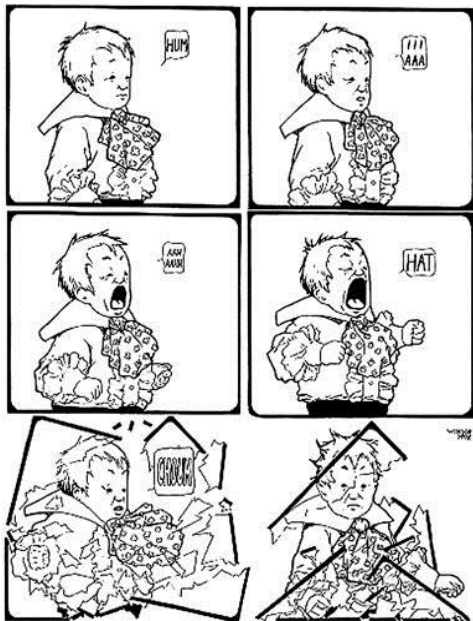


(Comic 2, *In the Shadow of No Towers*)

We see this pair again in Comic 4 being harassed by the paparazzi, then again in Comic 5 where their large, faded faces shadow the burning bones of the north tower of the World Trade Center. Their skeletal bodies close this page too, as they star in their own comic entitled, "Remember Those Dead and Cuddly Tower Twins" (Comic 4, 5).

In Comic 6 we are introduced to Happy Hoologin, Little Nemo and we see the "Maus Art" again. These characters from different historical periods, one early 20th-century and one late 20th-century, all meet on the same page. Spiegelman then signs the page "McSpiegelman," after *Little Nemo in Slumberland* creator Winsor McCay. Another reference to Little Nemo comes on the next page, Comic 7, in the last panel. It shows Little Nemo himself, a young boy in the strip, with a mouse head. Every *Little Nemo in Slumberland* adventure finished this way; Little Nemo waking up from his dream in bed, usually his mother was present in the panel as well. This time, Little Nemo wakes up as Maus. Comic 7 is also signed McSpiegelman.

Spiegelman's reference to McCay, and his insertion of his own mouse head on McCay's Little Nemo, is an homage and self-comparison to the comic art pioneer. McCay's *Sammy Sneeze*, which ran from 1904 - 1906 in *The New York Herald*, was a true experimentation in



page layout. In the last panel of every page, Sammy sneezed, and it was the build-up that was important. At times Sammy even broke the panel with the force of his sneeze, a suggestion that the comic medium was meant to be stretch (see strip on left, McCulloch). Every page was exactly six panels, making McCay a true pioneer in what we know now as the Sunday comic strip format (Canemaker, 5). McCay also experimented with animation and film, and his work marks the true

movement from a text-based culture to an image-based culture. We can understand therefore why Pulitzer-prize winning Spiegelman wanted to incorporate this other giant of the medium into *No Towers*.

Comic 8, from which the horizontal band of falling cartoon characters on the book's cover is drawn, features the Katzenjammer Kids, Little Lady Lovekins, Bringing Up Father, Happy Hooligan, The Yellow Kid, Krazy Kat, and Maus. Comic 9 cites a periodical comic book tradition with the fake card deck "The Architects of Armageddon," to which Spiegelman adds "with apologies to Wally Wood & EC Comics." The last comic page features Happy Hooligan, Maus, and a whole parade of serial comics characters, both historical and modern, including Little Orphan Annie, Charlie Brown, even characters from *Doonesbury* and R. Crumb's comic books (for example Mr. Natural, who appears on the t-shirt of Spiegelman's daughter-drawn-as-a-mouse, Nadja).

Bart Beaty, in his essay "Autobiography as Authenticity," suggests that, "autobiography is an attempt to reconcile one's life with one's self and that therefore the core

of autobiography is not historical fact but metaphorical truth” (Beaty). While *Maus* was a partial biography of Spiegelman’s father Vladek, *No Towers* is autobiographical. It was Art who lived through this trauma, it was Art who was the eyewitness. It was Art who breathed in the fumes of burning bodies in the embers of the towers and it was Art who had to find his own way to deal with it. Therefore, the jumbled timeline and the mix-up of historical fictional characters with real people in present-day America is Spiegelman’s personal understanding. It is his metaphorical truth of that traumatic event.

Before concluding, I must address Spiegelman’s choice of the comic medium itself to recount his version of 9/11. Theodor Adorno stated in 1949 that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”). Such a horrific event could never be explained by the survivors because they had not had the true experience of the camps, as they had not been exterminated. Spiegelman created art nonetheless, and chose the comic form in *Maus* because on one page he could illustrate his Vladek’s experience at Auschwitz while simultaneously being in Queens with his father in the present day. He said comics, “are about time being made manifest spatially, in that you’ve got all these different chunks of time – each box being a different moment of time – and you see them all at once. As a result you’re always, in comics, being made aware of different time inhabiting the same space” (Spiegelman qt. from Chute, “Shadow of a Past Time,” 202). Comics lend to memory because they allow for time travel within the page, thanks to their visual and textual composition. Different temporalities can inhabit the same page.

Spiegelman chooses the comics form in *No Towers* because he is once again dealing with different temporalities. The story jumps from September 11th, 2001 to a shell-shocked and fearful present-day Spiegelman, then back to the 1980s when he was interviewing

Vladek for *Maus*, and again to present day all on the same page. Characters like the Tower Twins and Little Nemo complicate matters further as historical guest stars in pages designed in 2003. Hillary Chute writes that, “the medium of comics can approach and express serious, even devastating, histories” (Chute, “Shadow of a Past Time, 200). This is due to the ability in comics to incorporate different spaces and temporalities on the same page. *In the Shadow of No Towers* blends both time and theme. Spiegelman’s incorporation of historical characters add to this dynamic of integrated time periods. He makes sense of his personal trauma through historical reflection and he uses the comics medium because it permits these different temporalities to exist simultaneously.

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