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Trauma and Visuality:
Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and
In the Shadow of No Towers

ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS* AND *In the Shadow of No Towers* are parallel books, devoted to historical crisis as family history—the former to the Holocaust, the latter to the attack on the World Trade Center—both narrated through the experiences of the author's family.[1] These two high points in Spiegelman's career so far are separated by a good fifteen years. After its publication, *Maus* was quickly canonized and is now an influential work of second-generation Holocaust narrative. Winning a Pulitzer Prize Special Award in 1992; achieving continued critical and popular success; seeing numerous translations, exhibitions, and a multimedia CD-ROM of *Maus*—Spiegelman barely survived this transition from the relative anonymity of the alternative comix subculture to his sudden success and fame as a graphic artist (a success he worries about in the second volume of *Maus,* for good reason).[2] Indeed, over the next decade and a half Spiegelman was many things—the creator of memorable, at times scandalous, *New Yorker* covers; a comix expert; a writer of introductions; the promoter and illustrator of little-known, unusual works by others; the editor of comix collections—he was everything but the writer of his own next major book after *Maus.* In this respect, the rubble of the World Trade Center was a historical "gift" that fell into his lap—almost literally, since he lives in Lower Manhattan—a trauma finally his own, in which historical catastrophe is both personal and family history, as it was in *Maus.* If the transmission and reception of the testimonial narrative is a heavy burden in *Maus,* the listener's difficult gift to receive and to give, this new, personally experienced shock also seems both arduous and liberating for the artist who can at long last move beyond the vicarious narrative of the Holocaust.

The link between the two books as cases of traumatic memory is made explicit in a panel of *No Towers* through the "indescribable" smell, a challenge

ABSTRACT   In Art Spiegelman's comic books, ambivalence about visuality in representing the historical and private traumas of the Holocaust and 9/11 manifests itself as blindness: seeing inwardly and seeing through touch. The emphasis on materiality and proximity links the haptic visuality of *In the Shadow of No Towers* to other visual practices memorializing 9/11 that withdraw to the local landscape of the neighborhood and demonstrates the challenge posed by the images of 9/11 to historical interpretation.

to representation that refers the reader of the book to perception outside the entire realm of the word and image—though in words and images, of course. Spiegelman's autobiographical character, drawn in the style familiar from *Maus*, says: "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 Sept. 11!" (3). The unrepresentable smell draws attention to traumatic memory as both close and out of reach, far from the father's failing powers of description, but close to somatic experience, the sense least accessible to intentional recall or blocking, and it exceeds the powers of description offered in either book. This connection between the two events and stories marks both crises as cases of traumatic memory in a multigenerational chain of remembering, transmission, and reenactment anchored in the body.

There are some important differences between the two books, however, and I will focus on their relationship through a particular one—the role images play in them—in order to address some broader questions about visual representation in the contexts of the Holocaust and September 11. While both books have a tortured, ambivalent relationship to their own visuality in representing historical and private trauma, they differ in their motivations for this struggle. (The image presents a different kind of problem in each book, given their different subjects.) While they both attempt to resolve their image problems by using the image against itself rather than by nonvisual means, they adopt two very different strategies, including two distinct notions of blindness mobilized as a key either to unsighted contemplation or to learning to see differently. Finally, however, the distinct uses of the image in the two books reveal an even more important underlying continuity: an effort to reorient the reader from the "awesome" sublime to a more contingent history that does not transcend material bodies and traces.

"The historic crimes of this century are in no small part due to extreme abstraction, the nearly pathological furor of thought accompanied by a complete lack of imagination," says novelist Imre Kertész in a lecture on the role of intellectuals in ideological totalitarianism. When Kertész contrasts the fascinating attractiveness of a closed world of thought with the artist's "agonizing proximity" to the surrounding world's experiential reality, he imagines this experiential closeness primarily as looking and presents this "eyeing" of the world as the alternative to the reality of the theoretical intellectual who is only vexed by experience and must at all cost be protected from freedom.[3] Aligning vision so comfortably with one side of the equation requires ignoring vision as the exemplary, representative observation of the world in modernity: vision is a powerful regime of abstraction that presupposes distance and is a rival form of world-making

easily allied with the furor of thought Kertész holds responsible in his comment. The question whether vision and the image serve or rather hinder a difficult proximity to one's subject is central to both of Spiegelman's books, which offer a far more complex and ambivalent answer than that of the novelist Kertész, as is to be expected from the comix, a genre that both relies on and supplements the visual.

In terms of visuality, one of the crucial distinctions between the two historical events that have been compressed into the shorthand signifiers "Holocaust" and "9/11" is the role visibility plays in them, and particularly in the traumatic core of both historical crises: the mass destruction of life. In the case of the Holocaust, this destruction is functionally—and, according to many, in retrospect even normatively—invisible. To clarify, the mass destruction of life in the Holocaust is functionally invisible insofar as the idea of its efficiency was predicated on a negative or deferred visibility. Removal of victims and facilities from sight into enclosed, and at times underground, spaces played an important role in the operation of the entire machinery of extermination. From the ghettos through sealed boxcars to the camps and the sites and modes of killing, the conditions of the "concentrationary universe" restricted the visual records that could be made. Thus, there is a visual black hole at the core of the Holocaust, which not only is a contingent feature of the process of efficient mass murder as designed by the perpetrators but also recurs as a normative and positive invisibility in the response when its status as a limit event is connected to some version of the *Bilderverbot*.[4] By contrast, in the case of September 11, and most acutely in the attack on the World Trade Center, the destruction is functionally visible and, with certain limitations, extensively recorded in contemporaneous images. It is functionally visible in the sense that it is designed as a constitutively visual event that can (and did) become a real-time global media spectacle, where maximum exposure, rather than concealment, ensures terror's success as an act of communication.[5]

The role of visibility is, of course, far more complex in both cases than this simple contrast indicates. We *do* have an extensive array of what are considered images of the Holocaust, though instead of clustering most powerfully around the moment of the destruction of life as they do in the case of September 11, Holocaust images overwhelmingly capture a prolonged approach or aftermath (such as images of people known in retrospect to have died shortly after having been photographed or images of what was found upon liberation of the concentration camps), thereby arguably further emphasizing the void between approach and aftermath. In the case of the attack on the World Trade Center, the destruction of life is only *indirectly* captured in the real-time images of the implosion of the towers, and it is questionable to what extent the destruction of

architecture displaces rather than expresses the destruction of human life. Nevertheless, I offer this contrast as a starting point, because the difference it admittedly accentuates for emphasis can be helpful for understanding the different visual strategies of the two books. It can also help to explain why *Maus* has been so successful in its response to the traumatic memory of the Holocaust and why *No Towers* has only partly met the challenge September 11 poses to representation, to the comix form in particular, and to an adequate historical understanding of the events. More important, to the extent that Spiegelman's later book is symptomatic of these difficulties, the contrast also points to some broader issues: the danger of trauma and memory discourses supplanting rather than complementing historicization, and the danger of a substantial displacement of narrative historicization by types of association closer to a logic of images than to inherently temporal causality.

Given the contrasting contexts of visibility in the Holocaust and September 11 just outlined, the ambivalence about the image plays out in dramatically different ways in the two books. *Maus* negotiates its use of the image in the broad context of a generalized *Bilderverbot* (a standard of positive invisibility), but more specifically relative to the documentary photograph and film, as standards against which visual *invention* is measured and questioned in the representation of the Holocaust. Within the debates concerning the propriety of nondocumentary response to the Holocaust, visual representation has been particularly controversial. This is because, in addition to raising the general question of how well and how appropriately the imagination can cope with this historical event and its significance, visual representations also encroach on what became the predominant mode of documentary representation in the twentieth century, when the image became more closely associated with authentic documentary truth than the word was, thanks to the advent of photography and film. Such visual prohibitions apply to *Maus* even more acutely, because roughly half of its plot takes place in the "concentrationary universe" itself. *No Towers* needs to negotiate the powers of the documentary image, but in the context of image saturation rather than of image prohibition: its images are vulnerable to the visual text's unintended absorption into the lightness of the infinitely repeated and repeatable televisual documentary image, into the CNN-image-as-document. So in *Maus* the work's main concern is how *not to overwrite* another visual archive of its subject; in *No Towers*, it is how *not to be overwritten* by it.

In their efforts to achieve these elusive goals, both works cultivate a distinct kind of blindness in their readers. The first notion of blindness—at work in *Maus* though also seriously complicated by it—is an ability to see inwardly, without the eyes, canceling the visible image. This notion reverses the idea of blindness as a disability, since it offers a deeper immediate

understanding than that offered by the eye. Therefore, in this idea of blindness as true sight, the visual apparatus itself is the more profound disability. This notion of blindness is more compatible with a dual view of the body as either healthy or pathological, and it lends itself to a more metaphorical view of blindness.[6] The other notion of blindness—at work in *No Towers*—is associated with an ability to see haptically, through touch. Unlike the total annulment of the image associated with an immediacy of understanding, this idea of blindness is associated with proximity, the closeness that permits contact and from which the coherent image breaks up into the details of a surface. This notion of blindness has more affinity with the concept of the body on a continuum of diverse imperfections, its different faculties intermixing and aiding each other.[7]

Such ideas of immediacy and proximity are not self-evident opposites to vision, however, even though vision is the mode of human perception that can function at the greatest distance. They are opposites if one treats vision primarily as a transformative abstraction that shapes the reality it perceives and less as an intimate experiential relationship to the objects of observation. His ambivalence notwithstanding, proximity to the particular and material emerges in both of Spiegelman's books as a precondition for interrupting the logic of the sublime and of simulation in an effort to imagine a new kind of reflective thinking.

The Burden of the Visual

One of the main reasons *Maus* has become such a great popular and critical success is that it could serve as one of the paradigmatic works of a generational and cultural transition, a process Elie Wiesel in 1989 disapprovingly called the "general desanctification of the Holocaust."[8] While Wiesel's furious criticism in "Trivializing Memory" ostensibly targets the most lamentable examples of Holocaust kitsch and "simplistic melodramas" in commercial film, his idea of the sacred is clearly more generalized, and its violations include, crucially for my purposes here, retelling from the perspective of later generations and the use of nondocumentary images. The former goes against Wiesel's claims of absolute uniqueness, ahistoricity, and radical unknowability; the latter is captured in his exasperated question "Why this determination to show 'everything' in pictures?" and his injunction to "study the texts" (diaries and historical works) and to "watch the documentaries."[9] This is posited explicitly as a problem of transition—both cultural and generational. It is an alarming changing of the guard where new generations presume to have their own ways of knowing and telling, even knowing "better than the
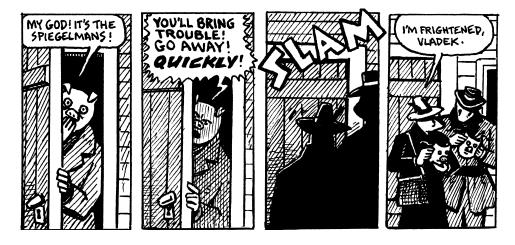
FIGURE 1. Detail from Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, vol. 1, *My Father Bleeds History* (New York, 1973), 136. Copyright © 1973, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986 by Art Spiegelman. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

victims or the survivors . . . how to communicate the uncommunicable," turning the remaining survivors' past into "a no-man's-land where false certainties and arrogance rule." This generational takeover is coupled with a cultural turn away from the text toward the image and a variety of cultural forms less specific to the Holocaust than survivor testimony. Spiegelman's work manages to model this transition in both generational and cultural terms, mobilizing the conflict instead of merely representing either side, and not simply by adopting the comix form but by choosing specific visual and narrative strategies. What serves to model this transition—perhaps less obviously than the complicated role of the father-son relationship—is the visual language *Maus* adopts: one that cancels yet reauthorizes its own visuality and thereby seems to validate both sides of the conflict in an ambivalent and dynamic way, lending itself, at least superficially, to interpretation by readers holding either set of assumptions.

In *Maus*, the use of the image against itself is manifested primarily on the anthropomorphic, hybrid creatures, the antirealism of which is often read as a means of visual masking—an amplification of the mask motif to a more general metaphor (fig. 1). A noticeable trend in *Maus* criticism has employed this idea of the mask to relieve the book of its visual burden. This move is not uninvited by the book, yet, as I will show later, these creatures are also key obstacles to the suppression of visuality, their *bodies* being the most significant gesture in *Maus* reauthorizing vision, inviting the reader to get

deeper into the visuality of the text, even get lost in the material details of visual signs. These images focus our attention on the body as both material embodiment and historically specific idea, thereby orienting us away from a timeless sublime toward a historical reality that includes both the Holocaust and our thoroughly mediated relationship to it. I will argue that ultimately *Maus* needs to be read through these images and not in the spirit of blindness, precisely because it not only models the generational transition as a dynamic conflict but enacts it as a transition, a historical process in time that moves, though not necessarily teleologically, toward the present and the future.

The estranging effect of the hybrid animal characters, which constantly alerts one to the artificiality of visual representation, offers a more radical destruction of the illusion of realism than does the stylized minimalism of the comics in general. We can see both Vladek Spiegelman in the reconstructed workshop in the camp and a mouse working in a striped prisoner's uniform. This antirealist use of the image, confronting readers with what they see and what they don't, draws attention not only to the limitations of images but also to the object of loss itself, that which images are unable to show. This is frequently interpreted in the sense that images do not represent their referent, but rather prompt viewers to mobilize imagination, using the book actively as a starting point: a prompt to remember, to think, and to *see* the best they can. This approach in turn allows the work's images to be somewhat relieved of the burden of visual prohibitions. This use of the image, then, demands a kind of inspired image-blindness of the reader, an idea confirmed by Spiegelman's remark comparing the animal heads to the empty look of the classic American comix character, Little Orphan Annie, and comparing both to "a white screen the reader can project on."[10] In this comic, which Harold Gray began to draw in 1924, Annie's eyes are always empty and white, and they never look anywhere (while she solves problems very capably during the Depression). This infinitely empty or infinitely full gaze, seeing simultane-ously everything and nothing, is an important, recurring motif of Western visual art and culture: blindness as true sight.[11] The true sight of blindness is ostensibly then the means by which the reader of *Maus* can (and *must*) see the Holocaust. Furthermore, the empty gaze—and the animal head that serves the same purpose in Spiegelman's work—evokes not only a *connection* but also a *disconnection.* Besides the connection of blindness and under-standing, it also evokes that dissociation of sight and comprehension that is central to trauma and a recurring element in the Holocaust survivors' accounts. Following Pierre Janet's distinction between traumatic and narrative memory, Ernst van Alphen calls such traumatic memories visual imprints. These imprints, he argues, are images that were never comprehended and

never turned into memories; they were quasi-photographically recorded and return with a "visual and sensorial directness" but they do not lead to understanding, thus contradicting "the privileged epistemological status of the observation of the visual world."[12]

This idea of blindness is replicated in the visual mask, as explained by Spiegelman and his critics. On this reading, images such as those of the *Selektion* scene, its recounting and reenactment, *overtly*, even ostentatiously, display themselves as representations and thereby cease to function as such (2:58). The image is merely a prompt indicating a beyond that is either *directly* accessible in some pure immediacy of comprehension or remains forever isolated and unassimilated. This is what Spiegelman and numerous critics refer to as a directness or immediacy (rather than proximity, which is key to haptic visuality). When comparing Spiegelman's earlier experiments with the final visual style he developed for *Maus*, one critic calls the minimalism of the "masklike quality" of the drawings "a more direct and immediate" style.[13] Disavowing the presumption of representing something "that's actually happening" without adequate knowledge of what things looked like, Spiegelman himself suggests that "to use these ciphers, the cats and mice, is actually a way to allow you past the cipher at the people who are experiencing it. So it's really a *much more direct way* of dealing with the material."[14] This directness supposedly short-circuits experience with experience, bypassing representation, which somehow erases itself in the process. This is the directly, immediately accessible "dark side of the image" into which we are supposedly catapulted by the obvious limitations of the visual in comics—essentially a temptation to make the image bear the burden of representation and therefore to make it disappear. Spiegelman's term "cipher," meaning both code and zero, sums up in a single word this wish for the visual code to erase itself.

This invitation to blindness is the most important way in which *Maus*, as a paradigmatically transitional work, opens itself to reading strategies antecedent to the "desanctification" of the Holocaust. This is further amplified in both the critical reception and the authorial explication of *Maus*, where the inclination to make images disappear by treating them as masks is often combined with a surprising willingness to accept words as transparent. If images are masks and words are not (an idea consistent with blindness as true sight), authenticity can be tied more closely to the survivor's testimonial speech than to the mixed media of the listener's account of it. This concern for authenticity is captured well in references to Vladek's text as *speech* or his testimony as *aural*, as if Vladek's unmediated authentic speech existed in this work separately from its multiple recordings and transcriptions.[15] (This is not a self-evident opposition: even if the notion of authenticity entails the dubious assumption that the signifier stands for a

FIGURE 2. Detail from Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, vol. 2, *And Here My Troubles Began* (New York, 1986), 103. Copyright © 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991 by Art Spiegelman. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

latent, more essential substance, it would require no *necessary* hierarchy between words and images.) Associating the mask exclusively with the image is all the more striking here, because the textual elements and speech conventions of the comics—including captions and speech bubbles—are highly artificial and draw attention to signs as signs. Speech balloons often hang in the visual space of the panels, obstructing our view, although they contain objects that do not exist in the represented space (fig. 2).

The blindness invited by the masklike image becomes a temptation to validate (and frequently overstate) the "absolute unmediated authenticity" of this *virtual aurality* by contrast to the "multiple mediations" of the visual.[16] So Spiegelman, when read this way, gives us the tape recorder (unmediated authenticity in the word), but not the visual equivalent in the image (the camera)—a distinction that underestimates the importance of the fact that in the book the tape recorder is a little *drawing*. This opposition of the image and the authentic word occurs in texts that are otherwise very sensitive to the role of transmission and representation in historical facts and do not share the idea of the direct, immediate effect of the comix. James E. Young finds Vladek's "*absolutely authentic voice* . . . counterposed to the fabular *images* of cartoon animals."[17] In fact, *Maus* obsesses over the problem of writing as constructed and opaque, where no inscription or transcription is completely innocent or transparent, and it hardly suggests that the pure presence of the witness's word could be transparently communicated (were it not for the interference of visual mediation). In other parts of his essay, Young seems more than willing to concede this about *Maus*, which makes it all the more significant that this opposition appears even in his text. My main point is not that the authentic word is missing from *Maus*, but rather that it is often

wished into existence as a counterpoint to the masklike image.[18] Though it might seem unfair to select the more extreme formulations of these critical statements, I do so to emphasize how a drawn tape recorder and stylized speech in speech bubbles are made to stand in for speech itself, for an aural *presence* opposed to the visual mask. This hope for presence and authenticity is what is at stake in blindness, in strategically suppressing the image.

The Hybrid Body:
A Limit to Blind Contemplation

Yet *Maus* seriously complicates these visual concessions to the "sanctity" of the Holocaust—the idealized cancellation of the image and the concurrent privileging of the testimonial word—primarily because it cannot avoid the problem of the body, not even within its self-imposed visual limitations. This complication recalls one of Wiesel's outbursts of desperation in particular: "Why this sudden explosion of nudity as a backdrop for the Holocaust? What by any rule of decency ought to remain unexposed is exposed to shock the television viewer."[19] The visually represented body, including the naked body, is certainly not a mere backdrop in *Maus*; in fact, it functions as a crucial limit to the notions of visual masking and blindness as true sight, and it ties the book and its reader to the image. (Since blindness is defined in this case as the total annulment of the material image, which yields an immediacy of under-standing, it invokes a sense of the transcendental sublime. Therefore blindness in this sense is *constrained* by embodiment and materiality. As we will see in Spiegelman's book about the attack on the World Trade Center, where blindness is rather a haptic visuality, the case will be the opposite.)

The hybrid body is not the only impediment to the logic of blind contemplation in *Maus*. It is significant, however, in that it does not merely limit the antivisual impulse, but instead anchors the book in the visual positively and affirmatively. The reader's increased familiarity with the animal coding, for instance, merely moderates the antivisual impulse to bypass the image, as it thins out the visual allegory and weakens the insistence on that *something else* that presumably we should be seeing instead of mice, cats, and pigs. (This increased familiarity applies especially to the mice, the characters whose narrative role allows us to get to know them better.) The metaphor of masking is most obviously in play in the stylized animal heads, and this is what the represented bodies complicate within the visual. Since the animal head is the distinctive feature for the coding, the hybrid body is "unnecessary," and it should become invisible and irrelevant, but it does not. The insistence of this body is difficult to interpret in terms of

FIGURE 3. Detail from Spiegelman, *Maus*, 2:26. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

masking, because it incorporates the difference to which it refers; it marks some excess in visual representation rather than sending us elsewhere. It is not an image of *not seeing* that refers one to a traumatic event that even its witnesses are unable to see. Instead, it is an image that captures the excess, the *too much*, of trauma in the visually represented body (fig. 3). The role of the hybrid is to disturb the whole concept of the visual mask and to question the notion of blindness as true sight.

If the "false appearance" of the hybrid body is corrected and the characters are verbally restored to a congruous body, either as animals or as humans, the work is relieved of a source of the very unease it creates visually around the dehumanizing, dehumanized human animal. Not surprisingly, the more a critical reading treats the animal as a fabular mask ("a premise to be absorbed and then put out of mind"), the more it tends to ignore the hybrid body, as something that makes no sense.[20] One critic says, "We are not

really confronted by animals playing people's roles but by humans who wear animal masks."[21] Either way, the human and the animal remain separate for the critic. Yet, these repeatedly shown bodies visually exceed conventions of the animal fable, as the body assumed under the human clothes becomes visible whenever characters are represented naked or half-naked—and they often are represented both in normal, domestic images of casual undress (getting up, lying in bed) and as prisoners and corpses in the camp.

Granted, this question of the hybrid body might never come up in another comic book where characters are always fully clothed or are drawn fully as stylized animals, but the fact that these characters reveal their bodies is not accidental—it goes to the heart of *this* comic book's being about the *Holocaust.* According to Joseph Witek's history of the graphic novel, one of the "distinguishing marks" of the animal comix tradition is a "curious indifference to the animal nature of the characters," and he quotes Carl Barks, who "always conceived of Donald as a human being who happened to be shaped like a duck."[22] This is not so simple when the question *What is not human?* is raised by the subject of the work and when this question constantly appears in the somewhat grotesque image of the shared human-animal body, a body that does not settle what is and is not human but keeps asking this question—quietly but constantly. Potential answers range from precise biological description to moral norms, and between the precision of racial theory and the norms of human dignity lies the entire history of the Holocaust and the split self-image of Western culture. The body is highly significant in this case, both in the ideology of persecution (the pure healthy body as opposed to the contaminating pathological and degenerate body) and in its implementation (as the site of the reduction of human beings to basic biological functions in preparation for their subsequent destruction). So Spiegelman does not really have the option of not dealing with the body. And because he deals with the material body in the way he does—in an image to be *seen* rather than to be *seen through*—he reclaims his images from the blindness the book otherwise cultivates in its reader.

Resisting a blind reading of the image draws the reader into that visual world of meaning where historical reality merges with something that only exists between the covers of the book, a place the book calls Mauschwitz. This immersion allows one to approach the images of the book not as mementos or mnemonic codes, but as visible images, so their meaning depends more on their arrangement, textures, and details, allowing for a more dynamic relationship between visual and textual meaning in interpretation. The attempt to see the image in its materiality has its own problems, however, as the temptation to see into the material and possibly lose oneself in the details can call forth a care that cannot justify itself except as an obsession. Visual details become key evidence that the reader feels compelled to trust

disproportionately. (Let me add that obsession can, of course, be a legitimate approach to interpretion of an event of historical trauma such as the Holocaust.) I will illustrate this effort to see the image with Michael G. Levine's very visually oriented reading of smoke in *Maus*, one that also takes us back to the link Spiegelman himself makes between his two books: the indescribable smell of smoke in the air in Auschwitz and in Lower Manhattan.

The image of the crematorium chimney with smoke coming out of it, which occurs in many panels of *Maus*, is one of the emblematic images in Holocaust iconography and is indeed a strong invitation to indexical reading: it is a reference to something absent that caused the sign to come about. The smoke, though iconic (it looks like smoke), represents an *indexical* sign: the trace of lost human lives. (This is how Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, the most influential filmic argument for blindness as true sight, and for the primacy of the testimonial word, uses smoke, showing traces of it in the present-day spectral landscape of a forest or its echoes in the steam of the train arriving in Treblinka.[23] The smoke is an index of the fire that burns the bodies—a signifier that is a causal effect and trace of what it signifies, like a footprint. If this aspect of the image becomes overwhelming in interpretation, its visual meaning dissolves in a heightened sense of loss, the loss of the people killed in Auschwitz, the trace referring us back to something unshown.[24] Resisting such an approach, Levine attends to small visual details—such as the identification of Auschwitz smoke with the smoke of Art's cigarette in two adjacent panels—to develop an extensive and illuminating analysis of how *Maus* figures the second-generation artist's relation to trauma as a compulsive rhythmic activity that seeks to bury the dead, yet also brings Auschwitz to life time and time again.[25]

This treatment of the image serves as a clue for reading further images and words in the book. In *Maus*, the smoke of the crematoria is always drawn as a densely hatched black shape, and *that* black hatching is limited to the lower panel, while Art's cigarette smoke is white (2:69). How should one read this "whitening" of the smoke in this combined image? As processing or cleansing or a measure of the inadequacy of memory or understanding? What seems important is that such questions send us back into the representational space of the work: if we want to answer them, we need to draw on representation rather than move past it. This, however, creates a new problem. In the same analysis, Levine notes: "If one draws a line connecting the top of the chimney on the upper right to the lid of the cigarette pack on the lower left, it passes directly through the glowing tip of Art's 'Cremo Light.'"[26] True, *if* one draws a line like this, and especially if one draws it correctly (I didn't quite succeed in doing so), it will turn into visual evidence. It is not that there are not sufficient visual clues to support the tenuous connections through which representation itself is made to give

up its meaning. There are always *more* clues. The problem is that it is so hard to decide at what point the reader begins to resemble someone convinced she can receive radio signals from Mars through her tooth filling. In fact, Levine is the first to acknowledge that this reading requires him to "follow the faintest of leads."[27] So the material infinity of the visual text is just as treacherous as the infinity of the transcendent loss that lurks behind the mask. Yet it makes a big difference which of them tempts a reader more: it is the difference between *seeing* and *seeing through* the images of the work.

Maus plays its cards both ways: it invites the impulse to read its images as if blindly, as self-erasing prompts, and it also sets important limits to an ideal of nonoptical, inward seeing. These two are not equal, however, as the book ultimately takes the perspective of a present when it makes more sense, not only practically, but even philosophically, to think about the Holocaust in terms of the relationship to processed and overprocessed images and texts, including commercial film, television, and forms in which documents such as testimonial accounts are organized, contextualized, and made accessible. This is, in fact, not one, but two steps ahead of Wiesel's ideal: no longer the cultural context in which the image is merely unavoidable and may successfully rival the word, it is rather one of overmediatized image saturation and proliferation. This is the central visual dilemma in Spiegelman's later book, *In the Shadow of No Towers*. In other words, in *Maus* the problem of the image in the representation of the Holocaust catches up, as it were, with the contemporary conditions of visual culture, though in the case of the Holocaust these conditions appear as obstacles to witnessing in an inevitable historicization of the event, whereas in the representation of September 11 the same conditions—contemporaneous with the event—have become problematic *modes* of witnessing that present obstacles to historicization.

The Global Witnessing of Disaster

The challenges September 11 presents to any artwork using at least partly visual representation have everything to do with the constitutive visuality of the event and the changed conditions within which the images and afterimages of the event function. First, September 11 was constituted as a global historical event—indeed, the first such event according to Jürgen Habermas—by being globally witnessed, though in a limited sense (being seen as it was occurring or with minimal delay).[28] Thanks to the global broadcast on television in real time, the images of the attacks have allowed the kind of limited witnessing characteristic of real-time coverage (involving temporal but not spatial presence), and their effectiveness in shaping the event raises the question of whether this global spectacle functions as the *primary*, though problematic, mode of witnessing this event. By the same

logic that makes the real event appear similar to filmic special effects, one could say that the globally witnessed event was *also* seen by those actually present. The claims that September 11 was "the most photographed disaster in history" (or, less restrictively, the most photographed, filmed, and globally witnessed disaster), and that it was a disaster prefantasized and previsualized in films, are probably the two most frequently recurring twin comments about images and September 11.[29] Significantly, both of these claims erode the originary privilege and priority of on-site witnessing.

In fact, this erosion of privilege at times goes beyond mere leveling and amounts to a reversal of priority. This is how John Durham Peters, in his analysis of witnessing and media events, recapitulates John Ellis's optimistic appraisal of the advantages of audiovisual and particularly televisual witnessing:

The stream of data flowing through the unaided senses already exceeds our explanatory schemata. . . . Audiovisual media, however, are able to catch contingent details of events that would previously have been either imperceptible or lost to memory. . . . We thus find ourselves endowed with a much amplified and nuanced record of events, a "superabundance of details" rich with evidentiary value.[30]

The idea of televisual witnessing as an enhanced, detail-rich record seems to ignore the drastic limitations inherent in its framing and limited sensorium. ("For some, it was the smell of smoke that broke the cinematic spell," remarks Kirshenblatt-Gimblett about on-site spectators, but there is no reverse breaking of the spell by a lack of smell for the television viewer.)[31] Though Ellis himself acknowledges these limitations (as well as those of social involvement) more than this summary indicates, at the very least he argues for televisual witnessing being a different, but no "lesser experience" than being present.[32] In Ellis's estimation, the "feeling" of co-presence and unmediated access and the "aesthetic promise" of liveness, even if these are fictions, justify treating televisual witnessing as a powerful act of witness.[33]

Second, the global visibility of September 11 was guaranteed by images that could circulate rapidly as electronically transmitted information. The documentation of September 11 was in great part electronic and instant, without the temporal delay or material connection attributed to traditional photography as a chemical (and thus material) trace of its subject. In her analysis of September 11 as a "'breaking news' production," Brigitte Lebens Nacos points out that comparable events in earlier decades—such as the simultaneous hijacking of four airplanes going to New York in 1970 by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—lacked this degree of global visibility because satellite technology was less developed and prohibitively expensive. (For the same reason, the global reporting of the 1972 Munich attack was not primary coverage, but rather a side benefit of the technology

put in place for the Olympic games that year.)[34] By 2001, however, the easy electronic transmission of images had become widely accessible to the average consumer (in the form of portable digital devices, often with internet access). This dramatic change in the ontology of the photographic image, this shift of the photograph and film to electronic data has weakened the inherent evidentiary power of photography and film, which now depends far more on genre and discursive context, though this ontological change is not discernible in the image itself. This shift results in what Arild Fetveit calls an "*increased compartmentalization of credibility*" in which "the credibility of photographical discourses becomes less reliant on an overarching trust in the technology of photography and more dependent upon institutional warrant" that varies between different photographic discourses such as advertising, news photography, and nature photography.[35]

A visual representation of the attack on the World Trade Center inevitably functions in relation to these images—the ones with the greatest exposure and impact and the ones most constitutive of this extensively filmed and photographed event—both in competition and association with them. This troubled relationship plays a significant role in how *No Towers* represents September 11, as the book is written precisely from the perspective of that on-site real-time witness whose privileged status is called into question and rendered supplementary by the global televisual witnessing of the event. Spiegelman's main strategy for dealing with this problem locates the book among a whole array of visual representation practices that complement the primarily electronic, networked imaging of September 11. These typically local, on-site practices—at the time of the event but particularly in its wake, as in the case of spontaneous memorial sites or shrines, as well as exhibits of photographs collected from the public—put emphasis on materiality, the trace, and the traditional evidentiary power of the photographic image and the relic. The affinity of *No Towers* with these practices is due to Spiegelman's emphasis on haptic visuality and the materiality of the book and to his withdrawal from the global horizon of the event—not to the imaginary space of national identity but to the more local landscape of the neighborhood.

Weightless Images, Material Objects, and Rooted Cosmopolitans

The uneasy relationship of *No Towers* to the eerie irreality of the televisual sublime and to "tele-suffering" (to adopt a term Geoffrey Hartman takes from Luc Boltanski) is thus central to its struggle with its own visuality.[36] Here the issue is not whether the visual representation of

the subject can be appropriate and authentic at all, but rather whether there can be a visual alternative to the infinitely light and repeatable mediatized images, imitating overly familiar film scenes and intimating presence as a convention of genre. The book is a pictorial journal of the days, weeks, and months after September 11, 2001, in ten single-page chapters—how the Spiegelmans ran to get their daughter from the school at the foot of the towers, how someone on Canal Street was painting the burning towers, how Spiegelman quarreled with a homeless "Crazy Lady" who blamed the Jews for the attack, and so on (6). In this visual and verbal comix chronicle, the sharpest distinction Spiegelman draws is not between seeing and not seeing. What he emphasizes is not whether someone saw the plane hitting the tower with his own eyes or only saw the face of another who did see it; as it happens, that someone missing it is Spiegelman himself, narrated in a third-person account of Our Hero's actions. The Spiegelmans, who are walking north, miss the image, but not the moment, at which they hear the sound of impact ("ROARRRRRRRR!!") and see the face of the woman who says "Gott in Himmel!" (2). The sharper distinction is between witnessing in the sense of "being there" and watching television, where witness is not limited to *eye*witness, but is localized, its authority grounded in geographical space and proximity.

Spiegelman methodically works into his record of the events a number of things he did not see: in chapter 6, this is the main role of the recurring image of the tower, variations of which appear on every page. According to the caption, Spiegelman "keeps falling through the holes in his head"; in the image, he is falling from the tower. "He is haunted now by the images he *didn't* witness . . . images of people tumbling to the streets below . . . especially one man (according to a neighbor) who executed a graceful Olympic dive as his last living act" (6). He does not fabricate this visual record (instead of the diver, the panel shows Art tumbling rather ungracefully); instead, he incorporates the verbal account as a witnessing of a "last living act," despite its being hearsay. This generosity toward nontelevisual experience is defined politically as Spiegelman's newfound "rooted cosmopolitanism"—rooted both in the local community of the neighborhood and in accidental, improvised connections in material space, rather than in the symbolic national community represented by the flag. This idea of suddenly finding oneself rooted in a place, an idea somewhat accidental and spontaneous in nature, is very different from the necessity and permanence that underwrites nationalist discourses of rootedness. (A similar combination of spontaneity and materiality and an emphasis on the local, communal context characterized the improvised memorials in Lower Manhattan after September 11 to which I will soon return.) Similarly, even the classic comic book characters that feature in *No Towers* are part of the

neighborhood, having been disinterred by the blast from neighboring Park Row, a few blocks from Ground Zero, where the great newspaper wars had been fought between Hearst and Pulitzer.

In the making of the book, this emphasis on the local corresponds to Spiegelman's partiality to detail, which suggests that his account will never be finished (let alone achieve the status of the *repeatable*). In his ironic synopsis of chapter 2, he notes that "last week the artist began describing his September 11th morning and only got up to about 9:15. . . . Considering that it takes him at least a month to complete each page, he should've started this 'weekly' series in September 1999 to get it all told by Judgment Day" (3). Whatever he does produce is created with emphatically artisanal and ridiculously obsolete methods that cannot keep stride with the "events." Most important, the book emphasizes its relationship to electronic, televisual images by foregrounding them in its material (as *subject matter*) and playing against them in its own material (*paper*). First, the use of classic comics characters and the large format of the book, which imitates the Sunday comic supplement, tie the narrative to the history of American comics, to print popular culture before television. Spiegelman integrates the comic supplement into the book in two ways: by incorporating its styles and characters into his own drawings and by adding a Comic Supplement of six full-page panels to his own ten pages at the end of the book—a very significant gesture, given the proportions. Rudolph Dirks's antiauthoritarian *Katzenjammer Kids* appear as twins wearing the World Trade Center towers as hats. Spiegelman appears as the uncultured nouveau riche father in George McManus's *Bringing Up Father,* fighting a news war with his wife who cannot sleep because Spiegelman watches CNN all night and who wakes him up with the blaring radio in the morning. We also encounter Spiegelman's familiar mouse alter ego in the role of the famous Ignatz mouse in George Herriman's *Krazy Kat.* Making the most of correspondences between current events and the violence, hate, anxiety, surreal New York dreamscapes, and "little terrorist" kids in the early comics, this prehistory bypasses the television-aided image revolution of the second half of the twentieth century and returns to the great newspaper wars of its early decades.

The struggle against the weightless image is signaled even more clearly by the emphasis on the book as a material object. Because a printed book is a three-dimensional object located materially in time and space, its form in general serves as a counterpoint to media in which images circulate primarily as electronic data. *No Towers* heightens this general quality of the book in several ways. Not only is it large in format, it is also made out of the thick cardboard often used for children's first books (typically picture books); just as those are toys as much as books, this is an object as much as it is something to read and look at. The base material necessary for the

appearance of the image and text does not disappear. This book is, of course, a mechanically reproduced mass product (as in the case of *Maus*, Spiegelman eschewed the genre of the unique or limited-edition artist's book, opting for easy reproducibility), but its visual strategy runs counter to this, if not in actual fact, then at least in illusion. The use of disparate tonal scales and surface textures results in more than just a fractured, fragmented visual surface, intimating the difficulty of "getting the picture" after a historical and personal shock; it alludes specifically to collage, creating the illusion of layering, of a depth and materiality of different types of material pasted onto each other. This material depth signals a nontransparent, though archaeologically penetrable depth (an illusion effectively backed up, so to speak, by the heavy, thick cardboard) that sets these images apart from the technology of electronic images.

This emphasis on texture and materiality, the image as material rather than visual object, is not entirely illusory. The inside pages of the ten comix chapters merely look *as if* they were textured and play with the idea of the collage, but the framing pages and covers actually have these tactile layers. On the first and last pages, the words of the title, and two circles containing the incomplete image of the glowing tower and the scampering Katzenjammer Kids as the towers, all in color and superimposed on a faded grayscale newspaper background are, in fact, layers of foil pasted on the image of the hundred-year old paper. The palimpsest of current news clippings and the *New York Times* cover from September 11, 1901 (conveniently covering the arrest of "Anarchist Queen" Emma Goldman and the assassination attempt on President McKinley), merely *imitates* the palimpsest and fades its papers artificially, but these stickerlike layers of foil are actually distinct to the touch. Their separation in color and glossiness invites touch, and they confirm the emphasis on materiality and texture in a tactile rather than conceptual way. On the front and back cover too, the glossy black towers, the classic cartoon characters falling from the sky, and the lettering of the title are all superimposed on the matte black background (recalling Spiegelman's famous black-on-black *New Yorker* cover that showed the towers nearly imperceptibly).[37] It is in the silhouettes of the free-falling, tumbling comix characters on the entire large back cover and part of the inside covers that this strategy of tactile visuality, the touchable image, is most pronounced and where the book most powerfully extends an invitation to blindness quite different from that proposed in *Maus*. This is not seeing beyond and seeing inwardly, but rather seeing differently, through touch, and the analogy with children's oversize picture books takes on another meaning here: *No Towers* is about the desire and challenge to see differently, relearning to see despite one's overexhausted eyes (or, as Spiegelman says, our "jaded 21st century eyeballs").[38] Belying the bulkiness of the book, its surface is vulnerable; the

FIGURE 4. Detail from Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York, 2004), back cover. Copyright © 2004 by Art Spiegelman. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

scratches inevitably left by use become part of the image, the disappearing of the image through wear and tear reappearing as the material object's visible history (fig. 4).

This "seeing differently" amounts to blindness only if one equates seeing with optical visuality predicated on an ideal of abstract illusionistic space, an equation underwritten by centuries of dominant Western traditions. Art historian Alois Riegl used the term "tactile" (or "haptic") visuality in an early-twentieth-century analysis of the parallel rise of figurative space and decrease

in physical tactility in visual and decorative art. In his historical narrative, Riegl distinguishes the *near view* from the *distant view*: withdrawal from the range of tactile contact allows for the distant view, which "leads us to see a flat plane where in reality a modeled, three-dimensional space exists." This is due to sensory deception, the shortcomings of the "human visual apparatus." Restoring the near view works against the optical illusion and returns one from illusionistic space to "memories of tactile experience" and to the impression of an "objective surface." Riegl calls this surface—the one perceived when the eye is close to an object—"objective," in order to emphasize its difference from the illusionistic plane perceived from a distance.[39] (Riegl's assumption that the near view of the material is physically real rather than illusionistic is, of course, untenable in an absolute sense of ontological privilege—the view of what he calls "objective surface" is no unmediated access to matter itself, as is abundantly clear in an era of ever more enhanced microscopic, thermal, and other imaging of matter.) Although the surface of Spiegelman's book is not textured in this "objective" sense, except for a few important pages, the interest in the material and tactile is reinforced in the book's overall visual strategy, in its weight, in the need to turn the object from time to time, and so on.

This emphasis on materiality, which makes the book function as a monument of sorts, places the book in the context of other visual objects that either were or invoked material remnants and traces after September 11—especially photographs and local shrines and memorials. Photographs were transformed into primarily memorial objects in a process that increasingly emptied them of information content, which was replaced with the status of the trace, something that made them far less compatible with the global electronic data transmission of images-as-information. The printed photographic portraits that were frequently used on missing-person flyers, and were later the focus of several exhibitions, are particularly illustrative of this process. They were not only surrounded by "teddy bears and items of clothing" in the memorials but they also became analogous with them insofar as these images, like the toys and the disembodied clothes, begin to work metonymically by the logic of the relic.[40] In fact, these analogous memorial objects coalesced even further in the recursive process of rephotographing and reinstallation, which became a typical mode of collecting and salvaging them, when institutions archived them or when their removal was ordered later on. "As it became increasingly clear that photographs were virtually useless for identifying missing persons," their qualities of visibility and materiality were foregrounded somewhat separately from the specific content of the image.[41] (And their equally visible vulnerability to material decay accentuated this further.)[42] As identification, these photographs provide a counterpoint to the invisible information

provided by DNA for which such images were no match. Ironically, DNA, while it functions as information and is invisible to the naked eye, can, in fact, lay a far more obvious and solid claim to being a material trace than can photographs after the advent of digital photography. For this very reason, the emphasis on the photograph's now tenuous claim to the status of a trace is a significant and not at all self-evident gesture.

The technology and practice of taking digital pictures differs from traditional photography in a number of ways, so the familiar basics of the ontology of the photograph, as traditionally understood, cannot be taken for granted when one refers generally to "taking pictures" of 9/11 and its aftermath. The temporal structure of delay and the radical removal of the photographic object from its time and space have become less relevant in digital photography than they were in the case of film photography, most obviously because of the instantaneous production of the photographic image that makes the image synchronous with the event. The separation of the framed object from its original space and time is also diminished when the photographer looks at both the camera and its display in space instead of at a viewfinder, and when image composition is therefore an integral part of the total space of the scene in real time.[43]

Since digital cameras were a substantial part of documenting the event, the emphasis on the "old" ontology and temporality of photography in the aftermath of September 11 should be seen less as a simple extension of this "most photographed disaster" and more as a purposeful intervention. "Even as we watched, we wanted to record everything ourselves—however grainy, small, amateurish—on home videos, digital or analog cameras," notes Marianne Hirsch, but this more inclusive and heterogeneous notion of "taking pictures" is almost immediately displaced by one that returns to predigital photography in an exploration of why the temporality of the still photograph makes it the "visual genre that best captures the trauma and loss associated with September 2001." "To photograph," she suggests, "is to look in a different way—to look without understanding. Understanding is deferred until we see the developed image. This deferral is as inherent to photography as it is to trauma."[44] When several exhibitions displayed photographs "unframed and without commentary and provenance," they similarly reinforced a sense of the photograph as it used to be, particularly the sense of its self-sufficiency and inherent evidentiary power (formerly based on its being a material trace), even though in the case of the *Here Is New York* exhibit, for example, all the images were, in fact, digital prints whether they had originated from analog or digital cameras.[45]

Foregrounding qualities that more accurately characterize nondigital photographic images serves two important goals, captured concisely in Hirsch's words: "To be able to stop time is also to be able to hold on to the

trauma and outrage when everything conspires to forget and to go back to normal" (or in Spiegelman's terms in *No Towers*: to move *on*, rather than back, to a "new normal").[46] This strategy holds on to the event, focusing more on the fact that a traumatic event happened than on its interpretation, bolstering the somewhat embattled evidentiary quality of photographs; just as significantly, it also attempts to delay or even arrest that accelerated process of sedimentation in which political discourse and military actions in the aftermath of September 11 rapidly repurpose and obscure the event.

The Near View:
No Original Eden Before Digitization

In Spiegelman's book, too, this retreat from the image to materiality—where the image is not primarily image but rather a tangible object, a thing—reinforces the work's affinity with discourses of memory and trauma. This emphasis on trauma, when interpreted most reductively, is a purely instrumental strategy for forestalling complex historical analysis by claiming a monolithic sense of victimhood and embracing an ideology of innocence (though spurious claims to innocence alone can hardly explain the rise of "trauma" to its recent cultural prominence).[47] "Trauma" is then simply a convenient plot for structuring the representation and particularly the media coverage of September 11. At this extreme, the notion of "trauma" is a tool of that very repurposing and obscuring of September 11 that various emphatically on-site, materially anchored visual practices seek to arrest. Alternatively, and most generously, it can be seen as a poetics of sense memory and bodily affect that invites the viewer into the "state or experience of post-traumatic memory" as a "(compromised and compromising) position to see from." The latter notion of a "contingent and culturally situated practice" that seeks to register a complex subjective experience, as theorized by Jill Bennett in "The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory," does not equate this withdrawal from representing the world with (self-)deception, nor does Bennett's notion oppose this practice to historical under-standing.[48] *No Towers* falls between these two: on the one hand, its effort to register and communicate the experience of September 11 is far more an enactment than an instrumental use of the post-traumatic process of working-through, and its return to materiality clearly contests rather than mimics the mainstream mediatized representation of the event. On the other hand, *No Towers* is far too involved in visual representation (in a field of competing images) to embrace that more radical aesthetics of sense-memory Bennett discusses, even if the book complicates this visual representation by haptic visuality.

FIGURE 5. Detail from Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, 1. Copyright ©
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Retreat from the image to materiality could be a nostalgic attitude, a
search for some original Eden before digitization, which in Spiegelman's
case is perhaps suggested by the evocation of comix history as well. However,
No Towers is not written in the spirit of such a naive analog utopia. It invokes
a postdigital, postelectronic materiality rather than a pre-electronic one. *No
Towers* acknowledges the key role of the mediatized image—never denying
its power, even while subjecting it to bitter sarcasm—and looks for small,
local bearings in an entirely nonedenic world. Spiegelman's book often
shows the TV screen and the act of watching television in its images and
frequently mentions them in its text; in fact, the whole book opens with a
three-panel sequence depicting a nuclear family slumped in front of a
television (fig. 5). Except for the numbers marking the dates "Sept. 10" and
"Sept. 11" on the calendar, this sequence is completely nontextual. As our
perspective is from behind the TV set, we can see only the viewers' faces, not
the image on the screen. In the second panel, the father, mother, and child
jump up in fright and everyone's hair, including the cat's, is frizzled and
stands on end, as if they had just had an electric shock. By the third and last
panel, they have returned to their slumped pose, sinking into the couch,
and one couldn't tell anything had happened if it weren't for their frizzled
hair and the calendar, which has been replaced by an apparently timeless
and permanently patriotic flag. This sequence could easily be taken for a
simple illustration of the passivity of watching television, but its
representation of the effect of the televisual experience on viewers is more
complicated. In its radical simplicity, the last panel combines the horrific,
the comic, and the ironic—the ironically clichéd American family on a
permanent bad-hair day, where hair is both the comically exaggerated signal
of emotion (a convention of the genre) and the unprocessed incorporation

of trauma. Since Spiegelman shows this somatic imprint of trauma in a family who are watching *television*, the sequence weakens the sharp distinction maintained elsewhere between physical proximity and electronically mediated relationships. Consequently, these images do not question the role and effect of the televisual image in contemporary American society, even though they are produced from the perspective of material, nontelevision reality, externally, as it were.

Perhaps the single most contradictory element of the entire book with respect to the lightness and repetition of the image and its relationship to trauma is the way Spiegelman draws the towers. In *Maus* the ahistorical sublimity of the Holocaust is at work as an *antivisual* impulse (that of unsighted contemplation) and resisted through visual representation in the images of the embodied hybrid creatures. In *No Towers*, however, the allure of the ahistorical sublime is concentrated in the repeated *image* of the "awesome" near collapse of the north tower, and it is resisted through an alternative, haptic visuality at work here. Thanks to the oversize picture-book format, the tower can frame the page, extending to the full twenty inches of the longer side of the opened book. It is as if the image were meant to repeat, rather than merely be like, its referent, a tall tower. This oversize and at times fragmented image shows the tower at a particular moment of lightness that Spiegelman tries to reproduce visually in an admittedly manic and obsessive way: at the moment when the tower is poised on the border of material being and abstract nothingness, glowing and almost floating translucently before collapsing into itself—an image Spiegelman *did* see and found "awesome." This treatment invokes the notion of the sublime even as it undermines its totality through the obsessive repetition of the traumatic image. Yet this recurring image (it appears in twenty-seven panels in the ten pages) is *also* the key instance of the dissolution of the coherent image into texture, into a play of color that does not make sense beyond itself. (This translucence is an effect of light rather than a source of illumination and lacks the stable positive meanings associated with symbolic memorial uses of light from candlelight to the *Tribute in Light* memorial, an annual installation of searchlights projecting two vertical beams of light from near the World Trade Center site.) It is a "near view" of the towers, where the effort to understand brings the eye close to the object and disperses meaningful figurative space into a surface that "transfixes" the viewer.[49]

The contradictory role of this repeated image in relation to the sublime corresponds to the title *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which names the site from which and about which the book is written. This site is marked by an absence dense enough to cast a shadow. Does the precarious balance of the glowing towers fall interpretively in the direction of transcendent loss and nonexistence (*no* towers) or in the direction of tangible, material being (one

that can cast a *shadow*)? The answer is far from conclusive, and Spiegelman's indecision is a measure of the respectably modest response he can offer in the way of historical understanding. If the great achievement of *No Towers* is the creative grappling with the spectacular images of the destruction as objects of collective witnessing, the book is also symptomatic of some challenges September 11 poses to historical analysis, and not *only* because of insufficient historical distance. (This lack of distance distinguishes *No Towers* from *Maus* in several ways: Due to the "ownership" of trauma, there is no built-in mediation of the testimonial relationship, and although Spiegelman adopts the old comic characters to serve a similar mediating purpose in *No Towers*, receiving an ultimately unknowable real human being's story is radically different from projecting one's own into Hapless Hooligan's.) The main historical-political commentary *No Towers* offers is a simple, negative one: a challenge to the Bush administration's "hijack[ing]" of the events. The national patriotic master narrative of September 11 leading to the War on Terror is questioned by attending to local micronarratives and withdrawing (visually or politically) to the "near view." While this is meaningful as a visual strategy, it imposes significant interpretive limitations.

In fact, the comix form could have provided Spiegelman with a way to compensate for the limitations of the "near view" through a more expansive and temporally less discontinuous—less exclusively post-traumatic—interpretation of the event. Sequential art, as the comix is sometimes called, potentially allows for great complexity and subtlety both in the spatial arrangement and interrelation of panels and in the temporal relationship of these in narrative time. Combining the synchronicity of the tableau as a primarily spatial arrangement with the narrative duration of the sequence as a primarily temporal arrangement, sequential art can lean in either direction. Unlike *Maus*, with its meandering, conversational narrative structure and its distractions and derailings that yield a rich texture of narrative time, *No Towers* stresses the tableau, investing in the image to the point of resisting narrative. Its painfully slow progress is punctuated by repetition, which is a compelling record of the initial stages of working-through, but the book is first and foremost a monument to "when time stopped." It incorporates many small stories into its individual pages, and these individual pages all contribute to an overarching, though lacunar, narrative of the event and its aftermath, but the narrative is predominantly contained within the individual tableaus. Even if the story threatens to explode this container—the big frame of the page within which the dynamic and controlled chaos of the panels plays out—we are invited to face the tableau, to linger rather than to move on. Unlike *Maus*, which unfolds its allegorical premise into an ever more complex narrative flow (a method analogous to the narrative extension of the figure in parables), *No Towers* is a

non-page-turner, where each page encloses and fixes narrative for extended perusal.[50] These tapestries extend the time of viewing rather than the time of narrative progress.

The enigmatic conclusion, which is the most unified and visually homogeneous tableau of all ten, epitomizes this temporality: whether this tableau presents an arrested, repeated, or indeterminate time, it is not time as temporal process. This final page rebuilds the two towers out of the smaller panels, letting them shrink and fade in the final three. In the gap between the towers, we can see flames below and an airplane at the moment of contact at the top. The indeterminate temporal relations within the image do not settle if the time of this composition is a time that keeps stopping as the airplane keeps hitting the tower, a time of discontinuous moments compressed into a single image, or a time when the towers stand once again. In this composition, the meaning of "again" hovers just like the small drawing of the plane at the moment of impact. What is this "again"? Reliving or replay? The repetition of trauma or that of the "teevee" image? (The latter is invoked not only by the image of the moment of contact but also by the panels recounting the anecdote of Spiegelman-as-Hapless-Hooligan being disqualified from an NBC interview as a result of his insufficient patriotism.) Instead of resolving this visually conveyed temporal dilemma, the text accentuates it through the puzzling final words, which may be offered in either high seriousness or melancholy irony: *Happy Anniversary.* This temporality fits both the glowing towers and the disinterred comic characters that resemble the ghostly undead characters often found in postapocalyptic fiction, which in their liminal state exemplify an incom-plete mourning.

Images, Analogies, and Instant History

I propose that this de-emphasis of time as process is not an accidental choice to under-use the narrative potential inherent in the comix form, nor is it simply a function of enacting the post-traumatic state from which *No Towers* is written. Rather, it is related to challenges the broader context of representing September 11 poses to historical time understood as a continuous, though extremely complex, process. Far beyond the quantitative scale of devastation—especially if one dutifully notes, with Jacques Derrida, that "one does not count the dead in the same way from one corner of the globe to the other"—the recognition of September 11 as a major event can be explained by its implications for the post–Cold War world order, which, "in its relative and precarious stability, depends largely on the solidity and reliability, on the *credit*, of American power. . . . Hence,

to destabilize this superpower, which plays at least the 'role' of the guardian of the prevailing world order, is to risk destabilizing the entire world, including the declared enemies of the United States."[51] However, the representation of September 11 has been dominated less by this notion of a major event in a historical process than by a sense of instant history. Though, as Fredric Jameson comments, "historical events are never really punctual—despite the appearance of this one and the abruptness of its violence—but extend into a before and an after of historical time that only gradually unfold to disclose the full dimensions of the historicity of the event," the representation of September 11 has been dominated by time as a dense instant.[52] The concentration of the images of September 11 in the acute event of the attacks and the choice of "9/11" as a temporal shorthand for the event have mutually reinforced each other in this respect.[53] It is beyond the scope of this analysis to address more fully why the representation of September 11 is dominated by the temporally concentrated, yet semantically open, "instant history" of the moment—that of an overexposed and underexplained *major* event—but I suggest that the instant images, which enabled its global witnessing, contributed to this significantly in the way they shaped the event. Even more important, they contributed to the fact that this instant blossoms into displacements, analogies, and myths rather than smoothly "extend[ing]" into the past and future. For the prominence of images—in an environment where images compete with and displace each other—makes it more tempting and easier to "interpret" events using a more image-centric logic, a logic predominantly of juxtaposition.

Static images express temporal processes primarily in two ways: as time sedimented in the making of the image—for instance, in layers of paint or in light reaching the lens and film—or by juxtaposition, often according to a cultural convention of the visual equivalents of *before* and *after*. The logic of juxtaposition allows for the suturing of temporally discontinuous, even wildly discontinuous, elements without necessarily giving rise to a process-type connection between them. In fact, these elements can also come from different kinds of time: one historically specific, the other mythical, apocalyptic, or eternal. This is what critics have called a mushrooming of analogies and, in some cases, mythification in the interpretation of September 11.[54] Most of the analogies are imperfect, even if they do serve as useful heuristic tools. But, more important, they easily become forms of forgetfulness through repetition: "The 'obvious' feel offered by certain historical analogies means that it is not the past so much as its interpretation that repeats itself."[55] Such a logic of displacement fits a loose, multicentered network or information logic and, as such, may well fit September 11 as a "war of networks."[56] However, because extreme emphasis on analogy (even a

somewhat valid analogy) allows for radical leaps over time, that emphasis threatens historical time understood as a complex process, within which rival sequences and causalities yield different, partially conflicting narratives.

It is in this sense that the antinarrative impulse inherent in Spiegelman's tableaus is part of a larger problem. The more an investment in September 11 as shaped by images takes the form of absorption in a few repeated images or, extensively, the logic of loose correspondence by juxtaposition, the more the representation of the event weakens interpretation based on a more extended narrative continuity, in which causality inheres in a temporal process. And while opening up the instant of disaster and spectacle to the micronarrativity of countless private stories may successfully counter the official "hijacking" of September 11, it has limited powers of compensating for this weakened historical interpretation. Rather, it frames the explosive event in the sense of containment, against all odds, within more private discourses of trauma, and memory. Granted, overvaluing narrative continuity runs the risk of obscuring and neglecting the very real ruptures of historical trauma. Dominick LaCapra warns that a complete elimination of trauma, memory work, and "empathetic unsettlement" from historiography is an especially questionable approach in the case of limit events. What is at issue then is retaining *some* investment in causality and agency within the understanding of a historical process (something LaCapra defines as a postpositivistic reformulation of the historiographic goal of objectivity) without necessarily turning it into a "harmonizing" narrative and reductive explanation.[57] Though this goal might be elusive, the chances for a viable historical understanding purely through micronarratives are far more drastically limited, as it is hard to imagine such an understanding without acknowledging positions *beyond*, and not only within, the national framework and the "punctual" time of the event.

In fact, the interpenetration of memory and history discourses—the two sustaining and helpfully moderating each other—can aid in avoiding both the radical abandonment of causality, continuity, and agency and the false sense of agency supplied by a "harmonizing narrative."[58] *Maus* accomplishes such a productive relationship between memory and history, as key aesthetic choices in the book link the work of memory and mourning and that of historical understanding—the embodiment of the hybrid characters, for example, provides a link between the excess in traumatic memory and the larger ideological context of persecution as a historical process. This interpenetration of memory and history discourses works less successfully in *No Towers*, where historical discourse appears primarily as repugnant political deception and sequential art is mined for its potential for a resistant, antihistorical emphasis on memory and memorialization. *In the Shadow of No Towers*, as a nearly contemporaneous monument to the event,

attests to both the power and limitations of this instant memorialization and shows that these limitations cannot be avoided by simply waiting a little longer to gain adequate historical distance—not if the event gets sufficiently buried under the layers of national public discourse Spiegelman invokes with horror and disbelief throughout the book. So the author has two questionable options: to speak too soon or, virtually at the same moment, already too late. As a result, the book is a monument not only to September 11 but also to this double bind, one that is likely to stay with us, global witnesses for the unforeseeable future.

If the hindsight of September 11 illuminates the necessary transformation of the representation of the Holocaust under changed cultural conditions, that transformation itself is a reminder of the significance of the need to avoid pitfalls of accelerated, instant memorialization that can foreclose a process of historicization. The revalua-tion of the particular, the material, and the proximate through haptic visuality is an important imaginative attempt, despite its possible short-comings, to sidestep the logic of simulation and loose association and to set limits to the sublime spectacle. This effort to see differently, if pursued beyond the local landscape of American narcissism or purely private trauma, can make room for a larger shift in the representation of trauma and historical crisis.

Notes

1. Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, vol. 1, *My Father Bleeds History* (New York, 1986); *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, vol. 2, *And Here My Troubles Began* (New York, 1991); *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York, 2005).
2. Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (CD-ROM), produced by Elizabeth Scarborough (Irvington, N.Y., 1994).
3. Imre Kertész, "A fölösleges értelmiségi: előadás a Tutzingi evangélikus akadémián, 1993," in *A száműzött nyelv* (Budapest, 2001), 188, 193.
4. *Bilderverbot*: a prohibition on iconographic representation, in historically changing forms and to varying degrees, in some monotheistic religions, including Judaism.
5. Brigitte Lebens Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Oxford, 2002), 10–12.
6. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape*: *Art, Modernity, and the Ideal Figure* (New York, 1995), 46.
7. Ibid., 40–41.
8. Elie Wiesel, "Trivializing Memory," in *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York, 1990), 169.
9. Ibid., 165–67, 171–72.

10. Art Spiegelman et al., "Mightier Than the Sorehead," *Nation* 258, no. 2 (1994): 46.
11. Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape*, 37–57.
12. Ernst van Alphen, "Caught by Images: Visual Imprints in Holocaust Testimonies," ed. S. Hornstein and F. Jacobowitz, *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington, 2003), 98.
13. Joseph Witek, *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (Jackson, Miss., 1989), 112.
14. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, "Jewish Mice, Bubblegum Cards, Comics Art, and Raw Possibilities," interview by J. Cavalieri, *Comics Journal* 65 (1981): 105–6.
15. Michael Rothberg, "'We Were Talking Jewish': Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as 'Holocaust' Production," *Contemporary Literature* 35, no. 4 (1994): 671; Marianne Hirsch, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992–93): 12.
16. Hirsch, "Family Pictures," 12.
17. James E. Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Afterimages of History," *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*, ed. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer (Madison, 2003), 30; my emphasis.
18. The CD-ROM material (like audio samples included in *Maus* exhibitions) confirms that the idea of the authentic word in *Maus* is inaccurate: the testimonial word in the book, as Nancy K. Miller observed as early as 1992, is a distorted, stylized representation of Vladek's recorded speech. Nancy K. Miller, "Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 12 (1992): 43–54.
19. Wiesel, "Trivializing," 171.
20. Witek, *Comic Books*, 112.
21. Joshua Brown, "Of Mice and Memory," *Oral History Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 105.
22. Witek, *Comic Books*, 110, 109, 112.
23. Claude Lanzmann uses images of the burning brush in the Ben Shemen Forest (Israel), a location intended to remind the interviewed witnesses of the Ponari Forest outside Vilna (Lithuania) where Jews were massacred, their bodies later dug up to be burned. On spectral evidence and trauma, see Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).
24. Dominick LaCapra analyzes the dangers of such an approach extensively in "Lanzmann's 'Shoah': 'Here There Is No Why,'" *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 231–69.
25. Michael G. Levine, "Necessary Stains: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History," in *Considering* Maus*: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's "Survivor's Tale" of the Holocaust,* ed. Deborah R. Geis (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2003), 63–104.
26. Ibid., 91. Levine's reference is to the back cover flap of *Maus*, vol. 2.
27. Ibid., 87.
28. Jürgen Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas," interview by Giovanna Borradori, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (Chicago, 2003), 28.
29. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11," *Drama Review* 47, no. 1 (2003): 12. Despite the focus on photography,

the context of the analysis includes the moving image (in reference to "television . . . segments" and to the mayor's ban on amateur photography prohibiting the use of "cameras and video equipment," for example).

30. John Durham Peters, "Witnessing," *Media, Culture, and Society* 23 (2001): 708, 717.
31. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments," 18.
32. John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London, 2000), 11.
33. Ibid., 10–12.
34. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism,* 39–40.
35. Arild Fetveit, "Reality TV in the Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?" *Media, Culture, and Society* 21 (1999): 797–98; 789.
36. Geoffrey Hartman, "Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust,* ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick, N.J., 2001), 119; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics,* trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge, 1999).
37. *New Yorker,* September 24, 2001, cover. The emphatic connection between materiality and vision, achieved through the technique of superimposition in *No Towers,* had appeared in Spiegelman's commentary on this cover image: "What's on your computer screen is a very rough approximation of a cover that can really be seen only in its printed form. . . . . Those silhouetted towers were printed in a fifth, black ink, on a field of black made up of the standard four color printing inks. An overprinted clear varnish helps create the ghost images that linger"; Art Spiegelman, "Re: Cover. How It Came to Be," *New Yorker, Online Only,* October 3, 2001. http://www.newyorker.com/online/covers/articles/011008on_onlineonly01.
38. Spiegelman, "The Comic Supplement," *No Towers.*
39. Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts,* trans. Jacqueline E. Jung (New York, 2004), 188–89.
40. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments," 19.
41. Ibid.
42. Marianne Hirsch comments on the "faded and washed out" images in the posters. "I Took Pictures: September 2001 and Beyond," in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11,* ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln, Neb., 2003), 73.
43. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also comments on this in "Kodak Moments," 20.
44. Hirsch, "I Took Pictures," 71–72.
45. The organizers' stated primary intentions were to limit offensive aestheticization and to offer a democratic, nonhierarchical presentation. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments," 22–24.
46. Hirsch, "I Took Pictures," 72; Spiegelman, *No Towers,* 1.
47. Fritz Breithaupt, "Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11," in *Media Representations of September 11,* ed. Steven Chermak, Frankie Y. Bailey, and Michelle Brown (Westport, Conn., 2003), 67–69.
48. Jill Bennett, "The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory: Theorising Trauma through the Visual Arts," in *Trauma und Erinnerung,* ed. Franz Kaltenbeck and Peter Weibel (Vienna, 2000), 89, 83.
49. The prefatory authorial comments foretell this contradiction: this "pivotal image from [Spiegelman's] 9/11 morning" is associated with traumatic witnessing and material, bodily affect—"burned onto the inside of my eyelids"— opposed to images "photographed and videotaped into public memory," yet in

its representation digital manipulation succeeds better than the material technique of painting.

50. See Katalin Orbán, *Ethical Diversions* (New York, 2005), 56–59.

51. Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 92–93.

52. Fredric Jameson, "The Dialectics of Disaster," in *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays After September 11*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia (Durham, N.C., 2003), 58–59.

53. Some explain the use of this semantically and interpretively vacant temporal code by the rhetorical necessity of a brief and "neutral" reference that can build or simulate consensus as a "depository" for a wide range of interpretations; Mark Hopkins and Raymond F. Hopkins, "September 11: Symbolism and Responses to '9/11,'" *Forum* 1, no. 4 (2003), article 3, available from http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol1/iss4/art3. Alternatively, "9/11" marks the limits of interpretation—an acknowledgment of not knowing—in a repetition compulsion "at once rhetorical, magical, and poetic"; Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 87.

54. James Der Derian refers to a "host of metaphors, analogies, and metonyms" in "9/11: Before, After, and In Between," in *Understanding September 11*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Paul Price, and Ashley Timmer (New York, 2002), 182.

55. David Hoogland Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2004): 343.

56. Der Derian, "9/11," 181.

57. Dominick LaCapra, "Holocaust Testimonies: Attending to the Victim's Voice," in *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (Chicago, 2003), 217–18.

58. For an extreme example of absent causality and agency, see Jean Baudrillard's "L'Esprit du Terrorisme," in Hauerwas and Lentricchia, *Dissent*, 151–52.