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INTRODUCTION: GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven

The explosion of creative practice in the field of graphic narrative—which we may define as narrative work in the medium of comics—is one with which the academy is just catching up. We are only beginning to learn to pay attention in a sophisticated way to graphic narrative. (And while this special issue largely focuses on long-form work—"graphic narrative" is the term we prefer to "graphic novel," which can be a misnomer—we understand graphic narrative to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics.)¹ Graphic narrative, through its most basic composition in frames and gutters—in which it is able to gesture at the pacing and rhythm of reading and looking through the various structures of each individual page—calls a reader's attention visually and spatially to the act, process, and duration of interpretation. Graphic narrative does the work of narration at least in part through drawing—making the question of style legible—so it is a form that also always refuses a problematic transparency, through an explicit awareness of its own surfaces. Because of this foregrounding of the work of the hand, graphic narrative is an autographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives. And graphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language—the language of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and the way these two representational modes interact on a page.

This special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*—the first special issue in the broad field of modern and contemporary narrative devoted entirely to the form of graphic narrative—demonstrates the

viability of graphic narrative for serious academic inquiry, and also reveals what it does differently from the kinds of narratives with which we have more typically been engaged. It is no longer necessary to prove the worthiness and literary potential of the medium of comics (which has always contended with much denigration). Comic strips like Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–1913; 1924–1926), George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* (1913–1944), and later long-form works like Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986; 1991) have, as with many other comics works before, in between, and since, demonstrated clearly how moving and impressive comics can be. In our current moment, in which an array of new literary and popular genres aim to further the conversation on the vital and multilayered work of narrative, graphic narrative has become part of an expanding literary field, absorbing and redirecting the ideological, formal, and creative energies of contemporary fiction. Our work is now to explore what the form can tell us about the project of narrative representation itself. What do we gain from works that are, in their very structure and grammar, cross-discursive: composed in words and images, written *and* drawn?

Here, we are interested in investigating the language of comics. It may be helpful at the outset to describe in general terms around what this issue is invested in developing a critical conversation. To start with, Scott McCloud's landmark treatise *Understanding Comics* (1993), a book theorizing comics in the medium of comics, helpfully reminds us that "comics" is "used with a singular verb" (20). Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*, arguably the world's most famous comics work—and the work that introduced comics to the academy—defined comics in a recent talk as "a medium using words and pictures for reproduction" ("Interview" n.p.).² Although there is not a significant tradition before the twentieth century that accounts for the specific manifestation of today's book-length graphic narratives, there are yet important historical precedents. In the sixteenth century, the swarming images in Brueghel's paintings suggested that a single image could yet be narrative, and so implied, even without directly representing, the mixture of word and image that appeared in later cross-discursive work. The "sister arts" tradition in the eighteenth century, building on analogies and points of resemblance between word and image (deriving from Horace; *ut pictura poesis*, "as is painting, so is poetry") laid the groundwork for investigations of relations between word and image, and their correlates time and space, even as G. E. Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766) famously suggested that comparisons of the "sister arts" were not a good idea.³

More importantly, William Hogarth's work is fundamental to understanding how graphic narrative builds on a tradition integral to the

history of the novel in the eighteenth century. "A Harlot's Progress" (1731), much like graphic narrative, is a picture story: Hogarth presented a sequential pictorial narrative in six paintings. Like much of Hogarth's later work, including "A Rake's Progress" (1735), "A Harlot's Progress" represents punctual moments. As Sean Shesgreen writes, "every item in the series represents a dramatic moment chosen for its consequential nature" (xvi). While Hogarth's images were designed to be viewed side by side, and comics, on the other hand, presents multiple frames on one page, Hogarth continues to inform debates about comics today. We may understand Hogarth's influence by reading his work as extending *ut pictura poesis* from poetry to the modern genre of the novel: he introduced a sequential, novelistic structure to a pictorial form. (Hogarth's work is also apposite to comics because it was reproduced: first exhibited as paintings, his stories were later sold as portfolios of engravings.) In the mid-nineteenth century, when Rodolphe Töpffer established the conventions of modern comics in Switzerland, such as panel borders and the combined use of words and images, he specifically described his work as drawing on two forms—the novel, and the "picture-stories" of Hogarth.⁴

We may trace this productive building on and refiguration of the genre right up to today's graphic narrative. The form's fundamental syntactical operation is the representation of time as space on the page. While we have suggested that contemporary graphic narrative be considered, or grouped together, with contemporary fiction, the graphic narrative differs from the novel, an obvious influence, not only because it is mainly composed in handwriting but also because its spatializing of narrative is part of a hybrid project. We read this hybridity as a challenge to the structure of binary classification that opposes a set of terms, privileging one.⁵ We further understand graphic narrative as hybrid in the following sense: comics is a mass cultural art form drawing on both high and low art indexes and references; comics is multigeneric, composed, often ingeniously, from widely different genres and subgenres; and, most importantly, comics is constituted in verbal and visual narratives that do not merely synthesize. In comics, the images are not illustrative of the text, but comprise a separate narrative thread that moves forward in time in a different way than the prose text, which also moves the reader forward in time. The medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of verbal and visual narratives that do not simply blend together, creating a unified whole, but rather remain distinct.

The diegetical horizon of each page, made up of what are essentially boxes of time, offers graphic narrative a representational mode capable of addressing complex political and historical issues with an explicit, formal degree of self-awareness. The graphic nar-

rative, too, differs from the only proximate medium of film—also a visual, sequential art form—because it is created from start to finish by a single author, and it releases its reader from the strictures of experiencing a work in time.⁶ While seminal feminist criticism has detailed the problem of the passive female spectator following and merging helplessly with the objectifying gaze of the camera, the reader of graphic narratives is not trapped in the dark space of the cinema. She may be *situated* in space by means of the machinations of the comics page, but she is not ensnared in time; rather, she must slow down enough to make the connections between image and text and from panel to panel, thus working, at least in part, outside of the mystification of representation that film, even experimental political film, often produces.

There does not yet exist an established critical apparatus for graphic narrative. In fact, from a literary perspective—as regards critical works by professional academics—there is little rigorous critical apparatus for any genre of comics, with the notable exception of a significant body of essays on *Maus*, Spiegelman's two-volume work about his father's experience in Auschwitz and beyond that depicts Nazis as cats and Jews as mice. The book was a bestseller and is now translated into over twenty languages; more importantly, for this discussion, it inaugurated a paradigm shift. Spiegelman maintains, simply, "I think anybody who liked what I did in *Maus* had to acknowledge that it couldn't have happened in any other idiom" (qtd. in Gussow E6). Sophisticated and complex, *Maus* threw open the question of "serious comics"—and the problem of taxonomy that graphic narrative provokes—when Book One was nominated for a 1986 National Book Critics Circle Award in Biography. (Certainly, mice aside, graphic narratives usefully challenge the transparency of realism in integrating prose and drawing, rendering the question of verisimilitude productively unstable.) Book Two was published in 1991, and by the time the series won a "Special" Pulitzer Prize, in 1992, *Maus* had entered fully into public discourse, defining the potential of the field but existing as essentially its only example.⁷ It is largely—if not entirely—because of *Maus* that graphic narrative is now gaining widespread acceptance in the academy and in the press.⁸ But while there are 80-plus entries on *Maus* listed in the MLA International Bibliography, there are only a handful of note about any other graphic narrative work. This special issue seeks to help develop literary academic discourse from the study of one exceptional text to the study of an enormously powerful narrative form that is changing how we think about the work of popular representation.

Many critics struggled with the language of comics, in the sense that they virtually ignored the fact that *Maus* is a work of comics.

However, there are important exceptions, and much of the early analysis of *Maus*—which gave us terms and concepts like Marianne Hirsch's important, oft-cited "postmemory"—was groundbreaking and remains influential. While we agree with Umberto Eco's suggestion, in his "Four Ways of Talking About Comics," that "to talk about adult comics does not only mean to talk about the evolution of language, topics, genres. It means to talk about a proliferation of tendencies, and levels, on which comics can be spoken of as written literature is spoken of," we strongly disagree with Eco that this approach involves "forgetting" the medium of comics (3). The project of this special issue is to bring the medium of comics—its conventions, its violation of its own conventions, *what it does differently*—to the forefront of conversations about the political, aesthetic, and ethical work of narrative. For many of us interested in graphic narrative, without any clear-cut methodology established for considering contemporary comics texts as multilayered narrative works (aside from debates within the field of postmodern fiction and postmodernism generally), and, until recently, without a range of examples to sit next to *Maus* on our bookshelves, *Maus* itself set the terms for ways to talk about what comics could do. It continues to set the terms, as a great, lasting work.⁹ Yet this special issue, moving forward, attempts to open up a field about which little has been written in the academy.

Right now, we are not only witnessing the publication of more and more significant graphic narratives from hugely talented authors—like Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003), Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Daniel Clowes's *Ice Haven* (2005), Charles Burns's *Black Hole* (2005), and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006)—but it seems as though, one might say, in the present moment, images have never been more important, or more under siege. Donald Rumsfeld, detailing the trajectory of his own response to prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison, famously claimed, "Words don't do it." Rumsfeld went on: "You read it and it's one thing. You see the photos and you cannot help but be outraged."¹⁰ Perhaps this is why images of dead American soldiers, even at funerals and ceremonials in their honor, are currently prohibited. Photography is an embattled medium in the wake of recent disasters in the US: after 9/11, the "falling man" photograph by the AP's Richard Drew, which showed a man who jumped from the North Tower falling head-first before the building collapsed, was censored; in 2005, as the devastation of Hurricane Katrina unfolded, photographs of struggling blacks and whites in New Orleans were presented with different frameworks by a press corps who then faced serious accusations of racism. In the academy, there has already been a significant response to the images produced by Abu Ghraib and the Iraq war,

and to 9/11 photography; the fraught representation of Hurricane Katrina is sure to follow.¹¹

Even more recently, cartoons have been at the center of a major controversy over images. In September 2005, the conservative Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* ran cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, outraging Muslims worldwide, and prompting violent protest of the cartoons in January and February that led to deaths in Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Michael Kimmelman, in a *New York Times* article titled "A Startling New Lesson in the Power of Imagery," asked, "Over art? These are made-up pictures. The photographs from Abu Ghraib were documents of real events, but they didn't provoke such widespread violence. What's going on?" (E1). There are many complex, delicate, and thorny issues attached to the Danish cartoon debacle: the parameters of free speech, the force of religious proscription, and the current global context of dire religio-political conflict. What we would like to underline, however, in mentioning the Danish cartoons, is the power of *drawn images*, which this example shows is undiminished even in our current age of the camera and of digital media.

W. J. T. Mitchell notes that we might call the division between word and image "the relation between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling." No method, writes Mitchell, is going to rescue us from the dilemma of the "contested border between words and images" ("Word and Image" 47, 55). Indeed, Spiegelman, responding to the Danish cartoons in the *Nation*, suggests that the "picture/word divide" is "as big a divide as the secular/religious divide." Graphic narratives, on the whole, have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation; it is unsurprising that Spiegelman believes that the Danish cartoons should be shown (and that they had a right to be drawn and published). "Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Outrage," Spiegelman's June 2006 article in *Harper's*, not only broke new ground by actually offering *readings* of each of the twelve *Jyllands-Posten* images—taking them seriously aesthetically as well as politically—but it also cemented Spiegelman's status as perhaps the world's only public intellectual cartoonist, someone who could explain the stakes around the right to tell *and* show.¹² This special issue opens with Spiegelman's "Letter to the Jury," a piece that puts us in the middle of a profound political-aesthetic moment that reflects directly on graphic narratives, discussing how we determine and judge the boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown. With his trademark incisive humor, and again, as in *Harper's*, examining both ideological effects and aesthetic properties, Spiegelman addresses fellow jury members of

the Israeli Anti-Semitic Cartoons Contest—an endeavor that developed in response to Iran's anti-Semitic cartoons contest after the Danish cartoons appeared—on the ultimate banality of trafficking in irony and stereotype.

The first group of essays in this special issue, using important and yet little-discussed texts, addresses key issues of contemporary critical concern by exploring the connection between graphic narrative and modernist/postmodernist formal paradigms, particularly those involving urban space (the first two in the group identify and elaborate a modernist ethic operative in the work of one of today's comics luminaries, Ben Katchor; both draw connections with Benjamin's *Arcades Project*). Crucially, however, each of the three essays also discusses comics in relation to the work of other, different media, and, as such, this group models the kind of multi- and interdisciplinary thinking that comics as medium powerfully provokes. In "Archives, Collectors, and the New Media Work of Comics," Jared Gardner, as his title indicates, explores comics' relation toward new media, in particular the "new database 'narratives' by which we will imagine ourselves and our communities in the next century." In "Found Objects (Ben Katchor, Jem Cohen, Walter Benjamin)," Nathalie op de Beeck compares the "verbal-visual practice" of Jem Cohen's experimental film *Lost Book Found* with the syndicated work of cartoonist Katchor. And in "Paul Auster's *City of Glass*: the Graphic Novel," David Coughlan describes how the graphic narrative adaptation of Auster's celebrated novel of New York City managed to contend with the postmodern experimentation that book relies on by doing something more than simply mirroring its storyline. All three essays show, concretely, how comics can operate both alongside and also beyond more widely studied media.

Gardner's essay tackles a prominent issue that even a casual observer of contemporary graphic narrative surely has noticed, which is its frequent obsession with the forgotten artifacts and ephemera of American popular culture (Terry Zwigoff's acclaimed documentary film *Crumb* demonstrates this clearly about R. Crumb, for example, through focusing on his fixation with, among other collectibles, old 78-records). This, Gardner posits, is the "ghost world" haunting so many of the most trenchant comics works (particularly, of course, Daniel Clowes's powerful *Ghost World*, from which this issue draws its cover). Why? Through his readings of the work of Katchor, author of the book *The Jew of New York*, among others, and fellow cartoonist Kim Deitch (*The Stuff of Dreams*), Gardner argues that the archival drive, the work of collecting—"the compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues"—is itself the serial gap "inherent to comics production," both on the page and in the productive collaboration between writer and reader.

Nathalie op de Beeck also writes on collecting, but shifts the focus to the ways in which two artists deeply critical of mass culture reenvision commodity fetishism. She argues that some work in contemporary visual culture is "closely observant to overlooked details, outmoded artifacts, memory and forgetting" and thus, through form, manages distraction and directs attention in particular ways that gesture towards how we might be induced to linger on that which we might usually overlook. Filmmaker Cohen, and Katchor (namely in his series *Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer*), who both use techniques of dialectical montage, are fascinated by how memory resides in objects, yet they ultimately resist a romantic view of the archive as having transcendent capacities. We see in this essay how they make nostalgia productive through their own art forms, by themselves giving attention to objects that aim to integrate an understanding of past, present, and future moments.

While Gardner and op de Beeck explicitly frame the positive work of comics by suggesting that they are contemporary corollaries to Benjamin's modernist meditations on archives and arcades, David Coughlan addresses the question of what a comics adaptation of an experimental urban novel has to accomplish to serve the vision of the original in a different medium (the self-reflexive instability of language Auster's *City of Glass* proposes). Adaptation gives graphic narrative the opportunity to shed its reputation for merely illustrating written narrative, and for serving the function of simplifying (as opposed to condensing, which is anything but simple), as in the *Classics Illustrated* series that was most prominent in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, and which simplified even such works as *Moby Dick* into easily-digestible comic books. (A related publishing endeavor to which comics has been attached—and which has perhaps contributed to the erroneous view that it is a simple medium—is the series of explanatory books with such titles as *Introducing Derrida, Introducing Feminism, and Introducing Hawking*).¹³ Coughlan argues that Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli's graphic novel adaptation—which is heralded within the comics community as a sophisticated success, but has previously received little sustained attention outside of it, despite being recently reprinted in the US—responds to the experimental nature of Auster's postmodern detective novel not by mirroring its form, but rather with a narrative experimentalism that is unique to the form of comics, particularly in attention to reforming the standard grid of the comics page.

In our current moment, when significant graphic narratives are published regularly and the critical establishment has expanded to accommodate (if not encourage) analyses of works composed in the medium of comics, we particularly need lively and rigorous dialogues

and debates about form occupying a central place in our conversations. This is hardly a call to return to a stultifying critical apparatus that occludes considerations of politics and history, but rather a call to incorporate the crucial questions that attend political readings with the issue of form that graphic narrative makes so manifest in its hybrid composition. Where the first group of essays takes the formal capacities of graphic narrative as a premise for articulating its value among and with other media, the second group focuses primarily on *how* we read comics, paying sustained, detailed attention to its formal attributes (Richard Walsh's "Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* and Narrative Imagination Across Media," and Thomas A. Bredehoft's "Comics Architecture, Multidimensionality, and Time: Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*").

Walsh's emphasis on the cognitive underpinnings of how we read comics represents an avenue of analysis that we suspect is going to grow more important as critics consider the difference of comics as a narrative form. Walsh challenges what might seem to be an obvious assertion from Eco about narrative, that a reader "welds parts together" in her imagination "and then perceives them as continuous flow." In order to make claims for the medium of comics in particular, Walsh grounds his discussion in the varying definitions of "a medium," arguing that narrative ideation is itself medium bound, in both the perceptual and conceptual apparatus of mental representation. Through a detailed reading of excerpts of Gaiman's *Sandman: The Doll's House*, Walsh shows how comics employ not only one but several different kinds of complex self-reflexivity.

Both authors in this group engage narrative theory, but while Walsh is primarily concerned with how a cognitive lexicon enriches our understanding of comics, Bredehoft elaborates a version of comics' own lexicon by turning detailed attention to the grammar and flow of individual pages of Chris Ware's complicated, deeply crafted *Jimmy Corrigan*, one of the acknowledged masterpieces of contemporary comics.¹⁴ Bredehoft writes about "the architecture of narration" in Ware's work, considering not only the page layout, but also, more broadly, comics' relationship to and representation of two- and three-dimensional space (an issue provoked, here, by Ware's inclusion of a cut-out zoetrope in *Jimmy Corrigan*). We believe that the relationship of comics, a medium focused on organizing space, and architecture is a pertinent one. In 1977, Art Spiegelman called attention to this relationship in the introduction to his collection *Breakdowns* by suggesting that the form of comics resembles the windows of a building; his recent book *In the Shadow of No Towers* makes this resemblance explicit (Spiegelman also reported that an "architectonic rigor" was required to compose *Maus*) ("Cultural Relief" 33). Ware himself, as

Bredehoft points out, sees a reader's apprehension of a comics page as similar to viewing a building: "Another way [to experience comics aesthetically] is to pull back and consider the composition all at once, as you would the façade of a building. You can look at a comic as you would look at a structure that you could turn around in your mind and see all sides of at once."

Ware, who published his early work in Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's avant-garde comics magazine *RAW* in the 1980s, is today generally recognized as one of the most important figures in comics. Yet the analytical conversation on this key figure has rarely, if ever, included thoughtful arguments critical of his work.¹⁵ Daniel Worden's valuable, incisive essay, "The Shameful Art: *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, Comics, and the Politics of Affect" opens this special issue's next group of essays, which all explore identity and representation in comics. In addition to Worden, this group includes Jennifer Ryan on black female authorship in a black superhero title, *Icon*, and Theresa Tensuan on how authors Marjane Satrapi and Lynda Barry present narratives of development that collide with normative political, racial, gender and artistic expectations. While acknowledging Ware's incontrovertible talent, Worden yet asks us to consider—and he pushes on—the editorial vision shared by Ware and a cadre of today's independent-comics luminaries; he asks us to contemplate the assumptions undergirding an important slice of comics culture.

Worden focuses on an issue of the popular journal *McSweeney's* guest-edited by Ware in 2004 and devoted entirely to comics. Analyzing the centrality of gender and affect to how comics creators posit comics as "an abject artform with its own worldview," Worden discusses what he calls "comic shame." The lens of gender has been largely absent from recent academic considerations of comics, and Worden's essay is an important and original contribution to thinking about how comics both operates in and produces culture. The now-famous comics issue of *McSweeney's*, using tropes common to masculinist modernism, Worden argues, relies on "masculine melancholia" to provide "the unifying principle for thinking of comics as a unique aesthetic form that engenders its own resistances to conventional everyday life."

We move from the realm of independent comics to the realm of superhero comics with Jennifer Ryan's "Black Female Authorship and the African American Graphic Novel: Historical Responsibility in *Icon: A Hero's Welcome*," which analyzes one of Milestone Media's series of black superhero titles. "This type of fiction," Ryan asserts, "attempts to reconcile stereotype and truth, absence and presence." The company's conscious attention to its characters' social positions, Ryan argues, translates into complex critiques of contemporary iden-

tity politics (and *Icon* even offers racially aware humor, as when an opponent dubs main character Icon "I-Tom"). Ryan's essay focuses in particular on the relationship between the reluctant superhero Icon, who aside from being an alien who has lived for centuries is a wealthy social conservative in his daily life, and his protégée, a politicized, self-aware working-class young woman who goes by the name Rocket. ("I think I just figured out how a black man could be a conservative Republican," Rocket observes. "You're from OUTER SPACE!") Ryan traces how Rocket's yearning to be writer coalesces with her self-appointed role as Icon's educator on the importance of black history, and argues that popular narratives like *Icon* "give voice to those once historically invisible."

In "Comic Visions and Revisions in the Work of Lynda Barry and Marjane Satrapi," Theresa Tensuan discusses two recent graphic narratives, Barry's *One! Hundred! Demons!* and Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Both feature adolescent female narrators; they are set, respectively, in Seattle and Tehran. Tensuan weaves together an emphasis on comics' formal properties—for instance, she suggests that comics are a productive example of what Ross Chambers has called "loiterature"—with an analysis of how her chosen texts present ignored and invalidated knowledges. Barry's book, about an interracial, working-class family in an American city, traces the development of the artist-protagonist's understanding of how (her own) comics stories are received; Satrapi's book, about an upper-class, leftist family in revolutionary Iran, carefully frames differences between East and West, and yet, Tensuan argues, it is frequently misunderstood to be positing a de-politicized, universal story of childhood.

Tensuan groups Barry's and Satrapi's work together by explaining how both narratives of development represent political realities that exist outside of normative scripts. However, the texts she analyzes share something else crucial in common: they are both powerfully invested in nonfiction life narrative. (This is true however the authors variously approach the category of "non-fiction"; while Satrapi describes *Persepolis* as a memoir, Barry invents the deliberately unstable term "autobifictionalography" to describe *One! Hundred! Demons!*.) The last grouping in this special issue returns us to Satrapi—and to Spiegelman—by investigating nonfiction, which is, we believe, the most striking genre in the contemporary field of graphic narrative.¹⁶ *Persepolis*, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* are three of the most talked-about graphic narratives of the twenty-first century, and we end by discussing these texts.

In "Autographics: the Seeing 'I' of the Comics," Gillian Whitlock considers how the current relationship of visuality to the transmission of personal and cultural trauma (as in Abu Ghraib) is one reason that

comics, as a visual-verbal medium, can free us to "imagine differently" in a time of violence and censorship (and this despite the "cartoon wars"). The prime example of such a text asking us to imagine differently is Spiegelman's *No Towers*, Whitlock argues. In a comment that tellingly describes reading *No Towers*—and many other texts discussed in this special issue—Whitlock writes that comics "are not a mere hybrid of graphic arts and prose fiction but an experience of interpretation." Further, Whitlock argues that "autographics," the term she coins specifically for graphic memoir, gives us "new ways of thinking in life narrative across cultures." As an example, Whitlock compares (as does Tensuan, with different emphasis), Azar Nafisi's bestselling memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* with *Persepolis*, finding that while the former privileges a consensual community of Englishness, the latter—because of its different formal grammar—mediates cross-cultural relations more productively.

Kristiaan Versluys's "Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma," takes Whitlock's premise—that *No Towers* is a hallmark work in its formal achievement and in its (related) political meditations—and unpacks it meticulously and incisively in a wide-ranging essay. Versluys considers the book's relation to *Maus*, noting that it can be seen as "a sequel," an "intensification" of "strategic devices" in the earlier narrative, but ultimately he highlights how the defamiliarizing techniques of *No Towers*—Versluys says the book's pages present themselves as "modernist collage"—present a "formal excess" that is different from *Maus* and yet appropriate to 9/11, an event that was commodified very quickly in the American media (unlike the Nazi death camps). Versluys's essay is a powerful and fitting one with which to conclude this special issue, because his reading deftly addresses both aesthetic and political effects in *No Towers*, demonstrating how, in the case of graphic narrative, the two are inextricably intertwined.

Finally, in an interview with Alison Bechdel, conducted by Hillary Chute, author Bechdel discusses the composition of her intricately-structured graphic memoir. Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* was released in June 2006 to huge critical acclaim (and astonishing mainstream attention for a graphic narrative). A work that is explicitly about readers' relationship to literature, and is at once biographical and autobiographical, *Fun Home* draws on the lives and narratives of various modernist authors to move its own narrative forward, and it also clearly sees itself as drawing on innovations established by authors such as Spiegelman. We conclude with a review essay on recent comics scholarship. A special issue committed to the profound and multivalent importance of graphic narrative ends by emphasizing the diversity and promise of this form.

Notes

1. We are particularly interested in long-form graphic narrative work, which can take the shape of a book, but can also potentially be an individual comic book or comic book series with a sustained narrative. Yet the genre of the comic strip, for example, which has a history distinct from that of the comic book, could also be considered "graphic narrative." While comics practitioner and theorist Will Eisner understands that the term "graphic narrative" is "a generic description of any narration that employs image to transmit an idea" and "film and comics both engage in graphic narrative," we use graphic narrative here specifically to denote a comics text (6).
2. Randall P. Harrison notes that the word "cartoon" comes from Italian and French words for "card" and "paper"—originally, "cartoon" indicated a sketch for a work of art done on paper and then transferred. Yet when the printing press developed, "cartoon" came to mean any sketch that could be mass-produced. This is a connection that the graphic narrative authors I discuss embrace. As Spiegelman writes in a recent excerpt of his work *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@?**! in *VQR*, "Comics just aren't complete til they're printed" (n.p.).
3. For an excellent analysis of this notion, see Mitchell's chapter "Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre" in *Iconology*.
4. Other historical precedents include William Blake's illuminated poetry, in which the words and images are dependent on each other for full meaning; see Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art*. In addition, Goya's "Disasters of War" series of reported images, made between 1810 and 1820, a numbered sequence of eighty-three etchings with captions, set an enormous precedent for many contemporary authors.
5. As William Blake wrote "Time & Space are Real Beings/ Time is a Man Space is a Woman," so Mitchell declares, in his gloss of Lessing, that "The decorum of the arts at bottom has to do with proper sex roles" (109). From Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*; quoted in *Iconology* 95. Images are connected, in Mitchell's ledger, with space, the body, the external, the eye, the feminine; words with time, mind, the internal, the ear, and the masculine (110). Mitchell also suggests that in this schema, blurred genres are feminized, while distinct genres are masculinized.
6. Most works discussed in this issue, with the exception of Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli's *Paul Auster's City of Glass*, are attributable to one author who both writes and draws the narrative. While not every contemporary graphic narrative is created by a single author, it is fair to point out that most "literary" book-length comics are single-authored (one notable exception would be the work of Harvey Pekar).
7. It is worth noting that in 1986, the year *Maus's* first volume was published, two other works also significantly participated in reorient-

ing comics readership towards adults. They are Frank Miller's *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns*, and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*. Neither of these works, however, entered broad public and critical consciousness with the same profound effect that *Maus* did.

8. In the press, for instance, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story on graphic novels in July 2004, speaking of them as a "new literary form" and asserting that comics are enjoying a "newfound respectability right now" because "comic books are what novels used to be—an accessible, vernacular form with mass appeal" (McGrath 24). However, critics often misread graphic narrative: Patricia Storace, for example, writing in *The New York Review of Books*, notes that Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* is "a book in which it is almost impossible to find an image distinguished enough to consider an important piece of visual art" (40). As we hope to make clear, graphic narrative is not interested in creating images to be independent artworks; the import and meaning of graphic narrative is in how images interact with text, and in how they interact with other images on the page, moving time forward spatially.
9. Marianne Hirsch, in an interview with Martha Kuhlman, concurs: "I think that Spiegelman himself teaches us how to read the book," she says. "Some of the observations that come out of film and film imagery and narrative work only to a degree. I almost think that the best reading strategies are taken from the text, rather than the other way around" ("Marianne Hirsch").
10. CBSNews.com. "Picture the Power of Images." New York, 11 May 2004. Hirsch also points this out in her important *PMLA* Editor's Column "Collateral Damage," in a recent issue investigating the role of the visual for literary study.
11. See, for example, Glenda Dicker/sun, "Katrina: acting black/ playing blackness" in the December 2005 issue of *Theatre Journal*.
12. In May 2006, Canada's largest book chain, Indigo Books and Music, pulled the June issue of *Harper's* from 260 stores because Spiegelman's piece reprinted the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons.
13. The *Introducing . . .* series began in Mexico in the early 1970s, when the anti-establishment cartoonist Rius, creator of the weekly comic strip *Los Agachados* (*The Underdogs*), published the title *Marx for Beginners* specifically for his Mexican readership. The book was such a success—within a few years it was translated into 12 languages and sold over a million copies—that its English-language editor commissioned more titles, and, as its website claims, "the revolutionary idea of providing a readership hungry for information on big topics with non-fiction 'comic' books was born" (see www.introducingbooks.com). In July 2003, Pantheon's graphic novels division re-printed *Marx for Beginners* (along with three additional titles in the series).

In 1999 the series changed its title from . . . *For Beginners* to *Introducing*. . . . While many of the books tend to be illustrated in a

traditional sense, and as such do not offer themselves as examples of actual works of comics, one important exception would be Robert Crumb's brilliant *Introducing Kafka* (with David Zane Mairowitz), which includes, for instance, a comics adaptation of *The Metamorphosis*.

14. Its recognition has not been limited to the comics field, either; *Jimmy Corrigan* won the 2001 Guardian First Book Award (which spans fiction and non-fiction), sponsored by the British newspaper of the same name; the prize's two previous winners were Zadie Smith for *White Teeth* and Philip Gourevitch for *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda*. See "Graphic novel wins First Book Award."
15. Ware's work is richly deserving of praise; his aesthetic control and narrative presentation are nothing short of astounding. Some critics feel, however, as though the conversation around his work tends to be less a product of critical thinking and more involved in finding new ways to idolize him. One online comics criticism venue, for example, explains in its "About" section: "We are no more interested in enumerations of the workings of Ultimate Iron Man's armor than we are in rhapsodic recitations of Chris Ware's aphorisms as if he were the Dalai Lama himself." See guttergeek.com.
16. Some notable examples the contemporary field not discussed in this issue might include Ho Che Anderson's series *King* (2005); Chester Brown's *Louis Riel: a Comic-Strip Biography* (2003); Guy Delisle's *Pyongyang* (2005); Julie Doucet's *My New York Diary* (1999); Phoebe Gloeckner's *A Child's Life* (1998) and *Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2002); Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001); *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000); and *The Fixer* (2003).

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