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**COMICS ARCHITECTURE,
MULTIDIMENSIONALITY, AND
TIME: CHRIS WARE'S *JIMMY
CORRIGAN: THE SMARTEST
KID ON EARTH***

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In an early passage of Chris Ware's graphic novel, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, the more-or-less conventional sequence of panels and pages that the book presents to its readers is interrupted by a page that shows a series of cut-outs: complicated shapes that can be literally cut from the pages of the book and assembled into a working zoetrope, a cylinder with a series of images on the inside (visible from the outside through vertical slits) that can be seen as a moving picture when the cylinder spins. The robot on crutches that would be seen inside this particular zoetrope, as the preceding pages make clear, is a figuration of one of the novel's title characters, and the cut-out itself, as the instructions printed on the reverse of the page indicate, is to be understood as a project or toy that Jimmy himself attempts to construct while traveling on the plane to meet the father he has never known. The inclusion of the zoetrope at this point in the narrative, I believe, functions on several levels, thematizing issues of narrative linearity, circularity, two-dimensionality, and three-dimensionality that the book will return to at various points and in various ways throughout.

Specifically, of course, the cut-outs literally interrupt the sequence of panels; where the ordinary comics panels that precede the cut-outs function normatively as images or representations of the events narrated, the zoetrope (at least potentially) stands as the thing itself: the reader can literally cut it out, construct it, spin it, and even watch the proto-film that would result. At one level, then, the zoetrope represents a literalization of reader-character identification: the reader who cuts out and assembles the zoetrope is literally engaged in the same activity as Jimmy. But such an act of construction, even if only accomplished in the imagination, also raises powerful questions about the relation between what I will call the architecture of narration and the narration itself. Present in two-dimensions in Ware's book, the three-dimensional zoetrope, if constructed, is capable only of presenting a literally circular narrative of the robot on crutches, as he takes the same two steps, over and over. The architecture of the narrative device (in this case, the zoetrope) constrains the form of the narrative that it can contain.

Jimmy Corrigan concerns the experiences of a grandson and grandfather; both are named Jimmy Corrigan. In the primary narrative, the younger Jimmy, abandoned by his father as an infant, agrees as an adult to meet with his father, with the father eventually dying during his visit. Interwoven with that narrative is the story of the elder Jimmy, who is ultimately abandoned by his father on a visit to Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition. The location of that defining act of abandonment is surely intentional: on the rear endpaper of the hardback edition of the book, the word "exposition" is itself defined as "The main body of a work, esp. that which explicates a main theme, or introduces a fundamental motif"—and the definition accompanies a drawing of the Columbian buildings. As even this brief bit of word-play indicates, the novel frequently interrogates the relationships between the architecture of the narrative and the narrative itself. The metaphor of architecture is one that Ware himself is clearly invested in:

In comics you make the strip come alive by reading it, by experiencing it beat by beat as you would playing music. So that's one way to aesthetically experience comics. Another way 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. (qtd. in Raeburn 25)

The interchange here between the metaphors of music and architecture invokes the structural practice in comics of using space to

represent time, but Ware's ultimate recourse to the idea of a three-dimensional structure in this passage marks a startling departure from conventional associations between linear space and linear time. Specifically, the notion of a musical beat invokes linear time, which is usually expressed in comics in two-dimensional pages that are, in turn, analogous to "the façade of a building." But Ware's compositional "structure," his final comment suggests, operates in a third dimension, and in this essay, I explore just how the architecture of comics negotiates the relationships between time, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional space in the service of narrative, using *Jimmy Corrigan* as my central example.

The functioning of the zoetrope itself can stand as an introduction to some of the key issues. Because of its presentation of a seemingly "moving picture," the zoetrope has often been identified as a precursor to the technology of film. In a discussion of an image of a zoetrope used in Max Ernst's *A Little Girl Dreams of Taking the Veil* (1930), Rosalind Krauss notes that the users of such devices necessarily have a "double vantage," seeing the apparent moving picture while simultaneously seeing the entire apparatus, with its multiple pictures (58). "Uniting the experience of both inside and outside," she writes, "is the beat or pulse that flickers through the zootropic field" (59). Krauss's notion of a visual "beat or pulse" recalls Ware's musical analogy, and her suggestion that this pulse positions the viewer "both within the scene as its active viewer and outside it as its passive witness" recalls how readers of *Jimmy Corrigan* both see the zoetrope cut-outs as two-dimensional images and (at least potentially or imaginatively) see it as a working zoetrope (60).¹ The "double vantage" implied by the two- and three-dimensional structures at this early point in the novel sets the stage for a number of the book's narrative concerns.

Importantly, however, for our consideration of the narrative, we must note that the three-dimensional screen of the zoetrope (in contrast to the two-dimensional screen of the cinema) cannot readily accommodate a narrative that escapes the essential circularity of its mechanism. Conversely, the two-dimensional screen of the cinematic film, while also presenting a sequence of two-dimensional images to the viewer, is powerfully constrained by the logic of sequentiality: if filmic images cease to be presented in time-sequence, the image freezes or the film itself stops. In this sense, the time-sequencing of images appears to be an unavoidable characteristic of the architecture of film itself.² As these divergent architectures constrain their respective narratives' relationship to time and sequence, Jimmy's zoetrope implicitly raises the question of how the particular architecture of comics does and does not constrain comics narratives in terms of time and sequence.

Sequentiality, of course, appears to be virtually definitive of narrative, at some level, and surely the simplest narratives take the form "X happened, then Y." In practice, however, the sequentiality or ordering of the events being narrated and the sequentiality of the narration may have little or nothing in common: "Y happened after X." As such examples suggest, then, all but the simplest narratives have some fairly complicated relationship between two kinds of sequentiality: the sequence of events happening (chronology) and the sequence in which they are narrated (narrative line). These examples, of course, also serve as a reminder that narration is often accomplished entirely within the realm of language, in which the narrative line corresponds (at some level) to the sequence of words.³

In the architectures of language and the cinema, then, the narrative line in both modes involves the crucial element of time-sequencing, especially if we understand written narratives as being time-sequenced by the actions of our eyes, hands, or vocal apparatus in the reading process.⁴ The nature of time-sequencing itself, however, whether in chronology or narrative line, is that time is uni-directional and irreversible: time passes, or we pass through time. The underlying metaphor, of course, is that time functions like one dimension of space: the narrative line is linear, precisely because language itself (or the procession of images that we see in film) is sequenced uni-directionally in time. In contrast to film or language-based narration, however, the medium of comics offers the possibility of a narrative mode that disrupts time-sequencing itself, and it appears to be the case that it is the specifically two-dimensional architecture of the comics page that allows comics narration to break the linearity of a time-sequenced narrative line. The crucial two-dimensionality of the comics page is, of course, often commented on, but it is equally clear that much important critical work still needs to be done.⁵ In particular, thinking about the two-dimensionality of comics and its narrative possibilities has sometimes been more enthusiastic than rigorous: in 2001, for example, the editors of a collection of critical essays on comics made the following claim: "The second key difference between words and images was noted by Gotthold Lessing in the eighteenth century. It is that while words must be spoken or written one after the other in time and are apprehended sequentially, the elements of an image are arranged side by side in space and are apprehended all at once" (Varnum and Gibbons xi).⁶ Such a claim may have made sense in the eighteenth century, but as Martin Jay, Jonathan Crary, and others remind us, while images may form on the retina in more-or-less fully-formed and instantaneous completeness, the apprehension of vision is anything but a straightforward and natural process, but rather one which is both constructed and contingent.⁷

Importantly, the two-dimensionality of the comics page operates differently from the two-dimensionality of individual panels that are intended to be read sequentially, because individual pages generally feature multiple panels. Thus, the two-dimensionality of the comics page also differs from the two-dimensionality of the cinematic screen, which is more properly analogous to the single comics panel. While films can mimic some of the effects of the comics page by employing split screens and other devices, this crucial architectural difference is nevertheless very real. In this context, it is useful to consider Figure 1, a simple visual joke that McCloud uses to make a similar point in his important book *Understanding Comics*. Here, in a six-panel page made up of two tiers of three panels each, Matt Feazell's Incredible Mr. Spot finds he is broke and uses a fishing line to pull money from his own wallet in a later (and lower) panel. In this comic, the vertical juxtaposition of two panels that readers understand to be sequenced in time (via the conventional left-to-right, top-to-bottom ordering of comics panels) allows the joke to function. Specifically, the two-dimensionality of the page allows panels that represent different moments in time (according to the narrative line) to be vertically juxtaposed (raising the possibility that they are contiguous in time). The fishing line, which crosses the boundary between panels, stands out as the very image of the way in which this joke operates by toying with conventional interpretive rules.

But it is crucial to be more specific here, as a third type of time-sequencing is at issue: the logic of causality, in which causes always precede effects. Except in cases like the one at hand (or, for example, in time-travel narratives), causality usually overlaps chronology: the order of events is hardly separable from the logic of cause and effect. But in the case of Feazell's page, the page layout and fishing line serve to disrupt causality (thus allowing effects to precede causes) precisely because the vertical juxtaposition of two panels clashes with the use of horizontal space to indicate time-sequencing.⁸ The two-dimensional architecture of the comics page allows the simultaneous presence on the page of panels depicting various points within a chronological or narrative sequence; Mr. Spot's fishing line offers one image of how such two-dimensionality can be mobilized to challenge at least some familiar interpretive rules.

A different aspect of two-dimensionality, however, can be seen in Figure 2, from Brian K. Vaughan, Pia Guerra, and José Marzañ, Jr.'s *Y: The Last Man—Unmanned*, a recent comics text that depicts a fictional earth devastated by a plague that kills all terrestrial males except the protagonist Yorick and his pet monkey Ampersand.⁹ Encountering pages 30 and 31, a two-page spread or opening, readers must negotiate ten panels simultaneously in two dimensions. At one

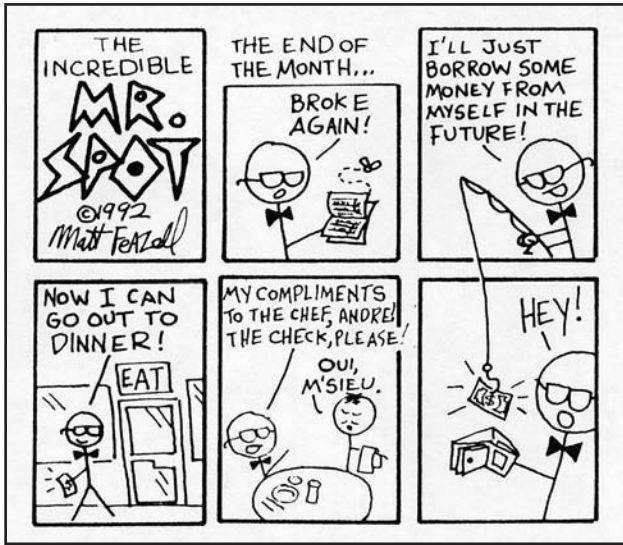


Figure 1

The Incredible Mr. Spot, by Matt Feazel. Used by permission of Matt Feazel.



Figure 2

The "NOW" Moment. From *Y: The Last Man—Unmanned* © Brian K. Vaughan & Pia Guerra. All Rights Reserved. Used with Permission of DC Comics.

level, the narrative here is explicitly, almost mechanically, linear in terms of its time-sequencing, as the panel captions on page 30 literally count down the seconds one-by-one until the "NOW" moment at the top of page 31, and with succeeding panels seemingly continuing to occur at one-second intervals. But the middle three tiers of panels, it is important to notice, feature horizontally juxtaposed images involving identical scenes and characters: these panels ask to also be read (or sequenced by readers) horizontally. Here the unit of composition is the two-page opening, rather than the single page, but the logic of juxtaposition clearly operates in both dimensions: vertically and horizontally. And, importantly, neither dimension has clear precedence over the other. While we might think that the logic of chronology, so explicitly invoked in the captions on page 30, urges us to read both pages vertically, the horizontal juxtapositions in the middle panels (and that of Yorick, in the first panel of page 30, with the "NOW" panel at the top of page 31) serve to indicate an alternative narrative logic and to identify Yorick as the character on which the narrative (and its "NOW") are focused.¹⁰ This sort of two-dimensionality, it must be noted, is quite different from the two-dimensionality of a single image or film frame: the *Unmanned* opening is simultaneously sequenced in both dimensions, and readers are expected to perceive both sequences.¹¹

The two-dimensionality of this opening might call to mind the dual functioning of Latin magic squares, which date back at least to the Middle Ages and are preserved as magical formulas or curiosities. One such example is printed by Gunnar Liestøl, in his discussion of narrative, linearity, and the multiple linearities at issue in hypertext:

S A T O R
 A R E P O
 T E N E T
 O P E R A
 R O T A S.

Liestøl discusses such examples in the context of the limited sorts of "bidirectional linearity" available in non-hypertextual writing (109). The textual example and the comics example, however, operate somewhat differently. While the magic square can be read (and, in some sense, demands to be read) in multiple directions, its functioning almost certainly lies outside the realm of language entirely: at the least, no reading of the magic square can be understood as narrative. Indeed, the association of such puzzles with magic—a heightened realm of linguistic alterity—reminds us that the very import of such puzzles lies in their failure to adhere to normal linguistic expectations, precisely by so powerfully disrupting the (mono)linearity normally

inherent in language. To put it in other terms, the magic square lies outside of language precisely because language is so powerfully time-sequenced, and the multidirectional readability of the square is virtually irreconcilable with that time-sequencing. Thus, while the magic square and the example from *Y: The Last Man—Unmanned* both serve to enforce a two-dimensional reading protocol, the magic square is radically disruptive, while the comics example, conversely, is constructive, adding to the narrative effect of the ongoing narration. Even here, however, we should probably understand the effect of the *Unmanned* opening as invoking two different narrative lines, operating in two dimensions (horizontal and vertical), a kind of bilinearity or dual sequencing.¹²

Ware's comics, as his comments above about two- and three-dimensional metaphors for reading comics suggest, are frequently characterized by complex and intricate structures; his works often utilize the space available on the comics page to especially powerful effect. Ware is widely seen as one of the most influential comics artists working, and his book *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* is at one level a narrative meditation on the twentieth-century American family. Several of the book's most crucial narrative sequences significantly depend on Ware's two- and three-dimensional interventions. A close reading of an example of each sort of strategy will clarify what is at stake.

Some fifteen or so pages after the zoetrope example discussed above, Ware uses a particularly interesting example of a two-dimensional narrative structure (Figure 3).¹³ Here, the page as a whole narrates the history of a photograph in a drawer beside Jimmy's chair.¹⁴ At the beginning of the page (that is, the upper left corner; Ware begins by assuming or invoking the usual spatial conventions), we see a sequence of panels that corresponds to a filmic zoom: a cityscape in the first panel becomes a view from a window, which in turn is revealed as the window in Jimmy's apartment. These three panels, sequenced across the top of the page and down the right-hand side, are linked (in an almost Escher-esque fashion) across the panel boundaries by elements of the panels that are both continuous and discontinuous: drawn as one element, but clearly representing different things in the various panels, as a billboard frame becomes a window frame and so on. Importantly, these continuous elements demand that readers abandon the left-to-right, top-to-bottom convention, as they cause readers to turn a corner and begin reading down the right-hand side of the page. Following this sequence leads readers to a second sequence of smaller panels, connected to one another by lines of background color, in a fashion similar to the connections seen in the first three panels: we see first a drawer, a flat-

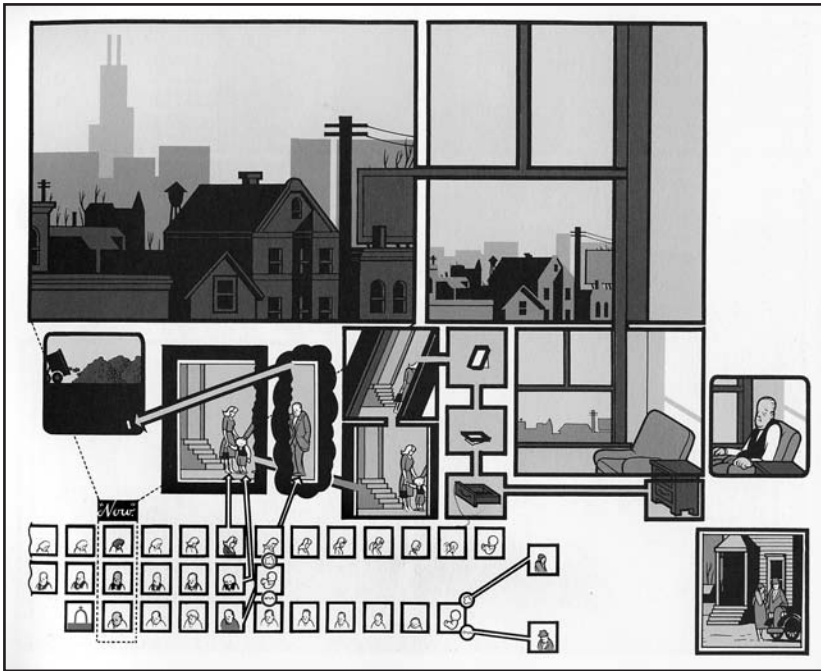


Figure 3

The view from Jimmy's window. From *Jimmy Corrigan* by Chris Ware, copyright © 2000, 2003 by Mr. Chris Ware. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

tened photograph that (we conclude) lies in the drawer, and then a series of increasingly clear drawings of the photograph, completed by a double panel that shows that the photograph in Jimmy's frame has been torn to remove the image of his father, with an arrow connecting the drawing of the missing part to its current location in a garbage dump. The torn picture appears to be largely included within the space marked out by a set of dotted lines labeled "Now," spanning upward to reach to the lower corners of the very first panel on the page: the entire sequence of panels so far discussed, then, is probably to be interpreted as representing a single point in time.

But the "Now" moment, through its associated dotted lines, also stands connected to a series of three tiny vignettes: Jimmy, his mother, and his father. Each of these vignettes falls within a horizontal series of tiny panels, reading chronologically right to left, like the panels immediately above dealing with the photograph. These three right-to-left sequences summarize the lives of the three characters,

referencing the moment of the torn photograph, Jimmy's conception, and even Jimmy's paternal grandparents. Specifically, arrows call to our attention that the vignettes of the three characters at an earlier point in time show them as they appear in the photograph itself: the "now" captured and frozen by the photograph marks an earlier stage in the lives of the three characters. A drawing of a second photograph, showing the grandparents, appears at the bottom right of the page, unconnected to any other panel on this page.

At least four narrative lines, then, are clearly indicated on this page: the timeless narration of place—which takes us from the cityscape to the photo in Jimmy's drawer to the depiction of the photo as torn, with one half in the frame and the other in the dump—and the three time-lines that show the lives of Jimmy, his mother, and his father. Importantly, however, there is clearly a fifth narrative line: while the life-line of Jimmy's father must be understood as reading right-to-left to narrate his history from birth to death, Ware's page-layout, which on one level enforces the right-to-left reading, also demands a left-to-right reading of the same sequence of panels for a different narrative line: the left-to-right reading serves to introduce Jimmy's paternal grandparents and their house, which will be taken up on the next page as the primary subject of Ware's narration. The images of Jimmy's grandparents at the right-hand end of his time line are drawn to correspond precisely with how they appear in the photograph in the corner, although here no arrows appear to make the link quite as explicit.

Ultimately, the narrative effect of the page demands that we read all of these narrative lines simultaneously: to read this page effectively does not depend on choosing a correct sequence for the juxtaposed images or a correct sequence of narrative lines, but to recognize that each individual sequence and line is insufficient to the narrative purposes of the page as a whole.¹⁵ The photograph stands at the center of a variety of narrative lines here, involving various characters and pointing both forward and backward in time. Crucially, however, it is the two-dimensional layout of the page and its disruption of a linear reading convention that allows the multiple narrative lines and directions to function simultaneously.

When the context of the photograph of Jimmy's grandparents that stands at the lower right corner of this page is wordlessly narrated on the following page, we see Jimmy's grandparents entering their home, on the wall of which hangs yet another photograph. In a series of panels that move (again) right-to-left, we see that this latter photograph shows Jimmy's great-grandfather, William Corrigan, on the day that he glazes the windows at a particular address, 1708 Peachwood, as we learn from a series of panels showing the invoice

for the work in his hand. A further series of panels shows William Corrigan glazing the windows at that address, wrapping up with a reversal of perspective, in which we see his work from the inside, culminating with a view out of the window, a view recognizable as the view from Jimmy's own window at the beginning of the previous page. The two-page sequence, then, begins and ends with the view from the same window (though decades apart). The circularity of the narrative of these two photographs is echoed by the way Jimmy unknowingly looks through a window installed by his own great-grandfather, literally inhabiting a space once filled by his ancestor. The generational connections that are hidden from Jimmy but revealed to readers in these pages serve as a central theme of the novel.

Ware's three-dimensional narrative interventions also function to thematize issues of time, knowledge, and space, although the introduction of the third dimension alters the relationships among these issues. Pages 206–207, featuring a set of cut-outs reminiscent of the zoetrope at the beginning of the book, can serve as a focal point for discussing Ware's use of the third dimension.¹⁶ Here the cut-outs represent models of the elder Jimmy Corrigan's childhood home (that is, the home of William Corrigan, the glazier of 1708 Peachwood), complete with horse, coach, coffin, trees and shrubs, and—perhaps most surprising of all—"imaginary giant grasshoppers" (207). As with the zoetrope, the presence of these cut-outs ideally offers readers the opportunity to literally construct a part of the scene of the narrative in three dimensions.

The page immediately preceding the cut-outs of Jimmy's home (Figure 4) stands as a different example of the complex relationship between narrative line and chronology in the two-dimensional comics page: here, a sequence of twelve panels appears in three tiers of four panels each and the page as a whole depicts a game of hide-and-seek that takes place around the house, all twelve panels from the same viewpoint and all twelve working together without overlap to show the house's entire lot.¹⁷ This use of multiple panels to show a single large scene in which characters appear repeatedly at different moments of time is also a comics convention; generally, each panel serves as an individual place and time that, in the context of a page or multi-panel sequence, appears visually as a single space or scene. The panels on this particular page are accompanied by an explicit narration in cursive script, the syntax of which indicates a normative linear narrative sequence for the panels: left to right, then top to bottom. But the first two panels of the second tier are explicitly labeled, within that narration, as representing a point in time "A half century earlier," with the third panel showing an intermediate moment, when Jimmy's home was literally under construction, beams and joists

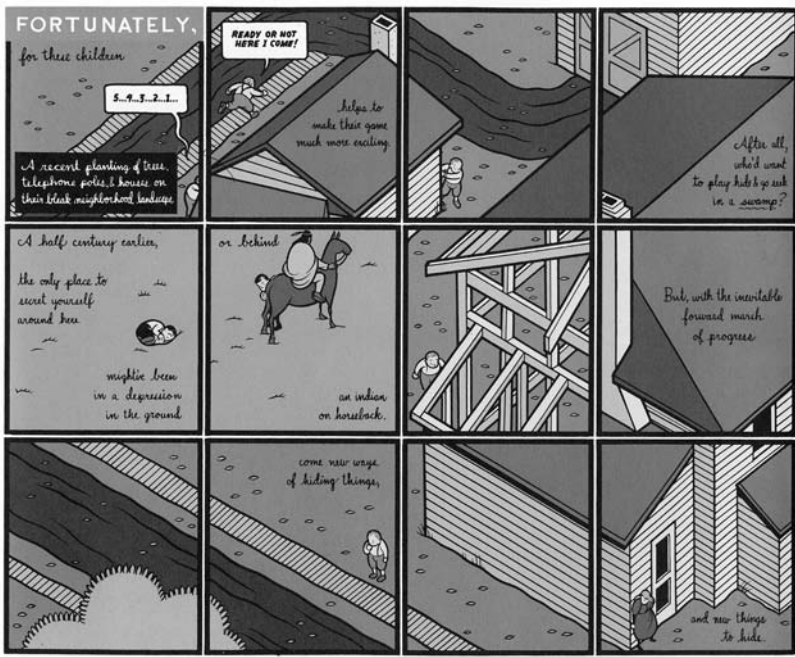


Figure 4

A game of hide-and-seek. From *Jimmy Corrigan* by Chris Ware, copyright © 2000, 2003 by Mr. Chris Ware. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

still exposed. In the terms I used above, this page exemplifies the tension between narrative line and chronological line: the narrative line here easily breaks with chronological sequencing, while remaining relentlessly linear. But the characters, Jimmy and a childhood friend, appear within the panels from earlier points in time: the logic of chronology and causality are both explicitly contradicted, and we must read these panels as literally representing only the narrative line, and failing to represent chronology.¹⁸ In short, although this page plays tricks with perspective, time, and chronology, it nevertheless continues to depend powerfully on linearity: in this case, the unbroken linearity of the narrative line, which here overrules other possible organizing linearities.

Coming immediately after this page, the cut-outs of Jimmy's house, which pick up on the theme of the construction of the house from the intermediate panel of the second tier, offer a response to that page's two-dimensional linearity by invoking the third spatial

dimension (Figure 5). In part, this shift is accomplished because the presentation of the cut-outs implicitly suggests a change of genre: from comics, a narrative genre, to paper toy, a non-narrative genre. Both genres, however, employ a crucially similar architecture: two-dimensional drawings accompanied by text. It is this architectural similarity that allows Ware to subsume the paper toy within his own comics architecture and to allow it to function within the narrative of the book as a whole. But despite this subordination of genres, the use of text on these pages operates somewhat differently from *Jimmy Corrigan's* otherwise typical mode of narration, and a reading of these cut-outs demands attention to two separate but intertwined aspects of these pages: the function and content of the text (including a "Note" and "Instructions" as well as two introductory paragraphs) and the implicit three-dimensionality of the toys.

Because the cut-outs appear on both sides of a single leaf of the book, it is actually impossible to cut them out and build them, at least without employing some method of reproduction or cutting up two copies of the book. And since (as will be seen below) the typeset notes and instructions on page 206 are explicitly presented as instructions and commentary directed towards the reader of *Jimmy Corrigan*, they are probably to be interpreted as being presented in the voice of the narrator, as are the "General Instructions" appearing on the front endpapers of the hardback edition. These various instructions, however, contrast with Ware's hand-lettered copyright and printing information on the title page, which clearly open the door for a compromised or collapsed distinction between author/artist and narrator: the title page and numerous other narratorial interventions are clearly drawn, like the transitional word "Fortunately" which begins page 205. Such drawing and hand-lettering more or less explicitly links the activities of the narrator to the artist's own hand, as in the use of cursive script in the bulk of the narration on page 205. The typeset instructions on page 206, then, generate a mechanical sort of distancing effect that is aligned with the shift to the paper toy genre. This distancing is hindered, however, because pages 206–207 are so obviously impractical as a paper toy, being printed on a single leaf.

The instructions that accompany the cut-outs on page 206, however, note a different difficulty: "Though admittedly printed too small to be constructed with any degree of satisfaction or pluck, pantographic or electrostatic enlargement of all primary shapes and careful study of the construction principia will potentially reward the concerted craftsman with models of relative usefulness." Here the instructions' references to obsolete technologies—along with the fulsome prose itself, complete with apparent malapropisms—encour-

A further disclaimer, however, calls attention to a different issue that concerns this three-dimensional excursus: "Any student of the history of the neighborhood in question will note that the reconstruction presented here is not without its inconsistencies; based, as it is, on reminiscence and fragmentary recollection, some details reproduced may possibly contradict and/or overlap one another" (206). Through the invocation of "reminiscence and fragmentary recollection," the construction of the models here is compared to the (re)construction of the story itself: through the models, the reader is implicated in the act of reconstruction itself. Instead of encouraging identification between Jimmy and the reader, these models suggest a mode of identification that operates to link the reader and Ware, especially as the models printed on pages 206–207 correspond to models actually built by Ware and shown in Raeburn's book.¹⁹ But in suggesting that reading *Jimmy Corrigan* corresponds to an act of reconstruction, these cut-outs remind readers that the entire enterprise of comics—indeed of much two-dimensional art itself—involves a mode of representation in which the three-dimensional world as it exists is pictorially presented in only two dimensions and that the three-dimensional world thus represented is available only through reconstruction. The invitation to reconstruct Jimmy's home into three dimensions thus offers just such an opportunity for readers to at least partially reclaim some aspect of three-dimensionality. But, as the note also warns, "some details reproduced may possibly contradict and/or overlap one another."²⁰

The printing of the two pages of cut-outs on a single leaf guarantees that there are, indeed, overlapping and contradictory details: the models can only be built in the imagination, or if we read (and cut up) not one book but two (or one book and a photocopy). But the comment about overlapping details should not be read at a merely literal level; it is certainly intended to function at least as powerfully as a comment on the problems inherent in the construction not of a model, but of a narrative, or a book. It may be the case that such issues could, in fact, be raised without the use of a three-dimensional narrative intervention, but in *Jimmy Corrigan*, there is a thematic link between the three-dimensionality of the models and the narratively thematized issues of construction and recollection. The fullest expression of this link may, in fact, lie in the seemingly problematic "imaginary giant grasshoppers" that are included in the model schematics on page 207.

The problem with the grasshoppers on page 207 is that they serve to introduce a third mode of reconstruction to the explicitly invoked modes of reminiscence and recollection: imaginary reconstruction. In the context of pages 206 and 207, the imagination in question appears to belong to the author or narrator, although readers

may well imagine placing the giant grasshoppers in various places on or within their finished model. But some twenty or thirty pages further on in the book, the giant grasshoppers make an unexpected appearance, in a dream that the elder Jimmy Corrigan has about his dead grandmother: the "imaginary giant grasshoppers," it seems, belong to Jimmy's imagination, and retrospectively, we understand the reminiscence and recollection that underlie the construction of the narrative and the reconstruction of the house to be, at least in part, his.

The oddness of this moment should not be understated. The constant visual depiction of the main characters in most comics works (including *Jimmy Corrigan*), especially when combined with a general absence of viewpoint drawing, in which we see through a character's eyes, encourages readers to interpret the visual dimension of comics as functioning as a variety of third-person narration.²¹ The appearance of the giant imaginary grasshoppers in the elder Jimmy's dream, however, serves to collapse the implied distance between the implied narrator and Jimmy because it becomes unclear if the imagination invoked belongs to the character or the author. The dream in which the grasshoppers appear is drawn with Jimmy himself visually present, and we see both grasshoppers and grandmother over Jimmy's shoulder. Either it is a dream in which Jimmy dreams of seeing himself, or we conclude that Jimmy's imagination/dream is in fact an artifact of the narrator's imagination. Just as the cut-out models invite a collapsing of the distinction between author or narrator and reader as they invite participation in the construction/reconstruction of the scene, Ware also uses the models to collapse the distance between narrator and character.²²

On the one hand, then, Ware uses such three-dimensional irruptions into his two-dimensional comics in order to challenge a familiar set of boundary lines: the ones conventionally drawn between author and character, author and reader, reader and character. In this sense, Ware's two- and three-dimensional narrative interventions are put to the same kinds of ends as other contemporary challenges or responses to traditional narrative linearity. But the reclamation of three dimensions operative in these examples does even more, presenting a challenge to the pervasive metaphor that links time to space in the first place.

As my discussions of two-dimensionality in the examples from Feazell, Vaughan, and Ware suggest, the two-dimensional architecture of the comics page readily accommodates itself to being read or interpreted as embodying or employing one, two, or even multiple simultaneous narrative lines. Our perception of the comics page, apparently, remains primarily linear or multilinear, and even Ware's

contorted and complex visual narrative of the history of Jimmy's photograph and apartment can only, as discussed above, lead to a complex (though simultaneous) multilinearity in our reading. Nevertheless, such multilinearity can be used to remarkable effect, and it clearly represents a crucial structural aspect of the peculiar architecture of comics in general.

In *Jimmy Corrigan's* cut-out pages, however, our experience of three-dimensional space allows the comic to operate on a different basis. Implicit in the architecture of most comics is our tendency to interpret a two-dimensional image (a comics panel, say, or the photograph kept in Jimmy's drawer) as representing a moment in time, a "now," and that perception underlies both linear and multilinear readings of comics panels and pages. A three-dimensional object, on the other hand, feels—subjectively, at least—enduring, virtually incapable of representing only a moment in time, precisely because it occupies space.²³ In a book deeply preoccupied with the passing of time, Ware's three-dimensional models, even if constructed only in the imagination, hint at the possibility of altering or even halting the flow of narrative time-sequence, precisely by virtue of their three-dimensionality.²⁴ At least in this sense, they seem to offer a new take on narrative's very relationship to linearity and chronology, and the extensive and detailed notes, comments, and instructions that accompany these models seem to acknowledge the centrality of these pages within the book as a whole. *Jimmy Corrigan's* themes include not only the passing of time and the recurrence or circularity of events within the passage of time, but also endurance and lack of change as well, and the three-dimensional cut-outs seem especially operative in the expression of that theme, as they seem to (briefly, at least) halt the flow of narrative time.

The medium of comics clearly has the potential to employ two- and three-dimensional structures in order to defamiliarize or challenge our habit of understanding the narrative line as pervasively linear and sequenced in time. And as the examples I have discussed demonstrate, the architecture of the comics page—and that of the comic book—opens the door for new configurations of the relationship between chronology, narrative line, and time-sequence. The two-dimensionality of the comics page can be used to allow a single group of panels to be read simultaneously in more than one linear sequence, calling into question the very idea of a single narrative line. *Jimmy Corrigan* uses images of circularity and repetition to echo narrative themes in the work, but those images often partake of complex visual and narrative structures that simply cannot be contained within a single narrative line, or within the two dimensions of a single page. Whether through their participation in multilinear and two-dimensional

narrative or through their invocation of the third spatial dimension, Ware's pages demonstrate how the unique architecture of comics enables these specific challenges to narrative linearity.

Notes

I want to thank the numerous friends and colleagues who supported and helped shape this essay, especially Mark Berrettini, Michael Kramp, John Loftis, Erin Jordan, Ann Little, and Brian Luskey.

1. See Crary's "Techniques of the Observer" for a fascinating discussion of zoetropes and other, related devices: "A crucial feature of these optical devices," he writes, "is the undisguised nature of their operational structure and the form of subjection they entail" (132). As Krauss's notes indicate, her remarks on the zoetrope are informed by Crary's essay.
2. This is not to say, of course, that individual films cannot make use of freeze frames or time spans without the projection of any image; rather I am suggesting that such interventions work precisely by shifting—perhaps only temporarily—the form of the work into another realm, such as still photography or sound.
3. For a fascinating discussion of some of these issues in a different context, see the beginning chapters of White's *The Content of the Form*. As a historian, White is concerned to discuss "the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story" (4). Narration and sequence, for White, stand in a particular relationship; he describes one of the central understandings of contemporary historiography as suggesting that "events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence" (5). It is precisely the difference between narrative and chronological sequence ("the formal coherence of a story" that narrative seemingly possesses) that communicates an order of meaning for White, as opposed to an order of mere sequentiality.
4. It is important to note that a reader/viewer can also always choose to disrupt the time-sequencing of both film and written language through a variety of means: by simply pausing; by rereading or rewinding/reviewing; by skipping back or ahead; by putting the book aside, leaving the theater, and so forth. My point about the architecture of these forms, however, is that readers engaging in such activities are clearly working against the grain of the forms themselves, which have a normative time-sequenced basis.
5. Interestingly, Pascal Lefèvre's comment on this topic, "the page as a whole (a typical unit of a comic's conventional format) invites us to

contemplate non-linear relations between the panels," appears within the section of his essay titled "Nonnarrative aspects." As I hope my arguments in this essay make clear, I believe that linearity and narrative are very much at issue in the two-dimensionality of the comics page. In the context of Ware in particular, it may be appropriate to note one of Scott McCloud's comments on the unity of the page: "[with more abstract drawing styles] it's the unifying properties of design that make us more aware of the page as a whole, rather than its individual components, the panels" (91). Ware's unique style, of course, is frequently attributed in part to "his skill as a graphic designer" (Raeburn 11), and his interest in the page in particular as a compositional unit is clearly a central one.

6. Later in their Introduction, discussing Kannenberg's essay on Ware, Varnum and Gibbons make the cryptic comment "Kannenberg shows that sequence, if present, may not be linear" (xvi). It is difficult for me to see how sequence can be anything but linear.
7. See Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," Crary, "Modernizing Vision," and the other essays in the collection edited by Foster.
8. To be precise, it is not only horizontal space that is implicated in the time-sequencing of comics panels, but the left-to-right, (then) top-to-bottom ordering that is borrowed from the conventions of Western prose writing. In this system, the right hand boundary of the page, which causes us to drop down a line and begin again at the left, is understood as essentially standing in for the space between two horizontally juxtaposed words or panels, with no other implicit meaning or significance.
9. I want to thank my former student, Ed Day, for calling this particular example to my attention.
10. Likewise, an attempt to give higher priority to the horizontal juxtapositions in this opening must also fail, as the sequence shown in the middle panels of page 31, in which the various male characters progressively grab their throats, begin to spit, and then to vomit blood, must be read vertically, as demonstrating the progression of the deadly plague that has attacked them.
11. It is important to point out, as McCloud makes clear, that many single comics panels do involve or demand a sequenced linear reading, especially when they include speech or thought balloons, which superimpose the time-based linearity of language over the otherwise seemingly static quality of an image. In panels with multiple speakers, then, readers sometimes find a single image accompanying a quite extensive time-sequenced narration. See McCloud's Chapter 4.
12. A different kind of textual bilinearity is exemplified by the acrostic poem, in which the first letters of each line (and sometimes the last letters as well) can be read vertically as spelling out words. But again, while reading clearly happens in two directions in such texts, the narratives of such poems do not demand or invoke simultaneous bilinearity, as does the comics example.

13. Ware's book is almost entirely unpaginated (for the exception, see below), and I take this feature to be one of the book's many challenges to the traditional architecture of the book, a topic that deserves fuller treatment in its own right.
14. In his discussion of this page, Brad Prager describes it as a "map strip," one of "Ware's quasi-mathematical diagrams and flow-charts" depicting "the genesis of Jimmy and others in the text." Prager suggests that these "map strips" are like Mobius strips, writing of this one in particular, "At first this seems like an 'origin' story, but there is neither beginning nor end to speak of" (206). As my reading will suggest, I think this page and the one that follows it have a purposeful, rather than merely unending, circularity.
15. Indeed, it is important to note that only Jimmy's father's chronological timeline ends (with a gravestone) on the page in question, foreshadowing his death at the end of the novel, while Jimmy and his mother survive. The right-to-left reading of Jimmy's father's life line is therefore as necessary to the meaning of the page as the left-to-right reading.
16. As noted above, the book itself is almost entirely unpaginated, and so when readers reach pages 206–207 (which are explicitly labeled "Pages 206–207" on page 206) this labeling itself serves as a kind of reminder or invocation of this aspect of the book's physical existence. Crucially, however, if we understand pages 206–207 as being the two pages of cut-outs (which seems to be the clear implication), page 206 is a recto and 207 is a verso, in contradiction of the regular pagination convention, which associates odd numbers with rectos. Here, too, Ware challenges the typical architecture of the book form.
17. Raeburn suggests that Ware is especially influenced by the comics of Frank King for this technique, reprinting a 1930 page of "Gasoline Alley" for comparison. The King page that Raeburn reprints, however, operates in the typical fashion: the reappearance of the main character in each panel indicates the sequencing of panels in time unambiguously.
18. As Raeburn puts it in his comments on this page, the characters have "time-travelled back along with the narrator" (73).
19. Note Raeburn's explanation of Ware's motive in building these models: "In prose a writer can describe one setting in infinite ways, but in naturalistic comics a writer has to ensure that he draws his setting exactly the same, time after time. Ware built this model to help him keep his facts straight" (73).
20. It is worth noting that the root sense of "recollection" (from Latin "legere") means "to draw together." The same Latin root, of course, also means "to read," suggesting another link between the act of reconstruction, the building of these models, and the act of reading.

21. To be sure, there are moments in *Jimmy Corrigan* when we see through a character's eyes, but the book presents Jimmy before our eyes with an almost obsessive regularity. He is often drawn a dozen or more times on a page, and sometimes appears in twenty-five or more panels on a single page, reinforcing the feeling of a predominantly third-person narrative format.
22. It seems clear that blurring such boundaries is, in fact, one of Ware's abiding concerns in this novel. The directions for constructing the zoetrope that Jimmy attempts to build while he flies to meet his father, for example, read (in part): "Don't use any more glue than necessary and keep your hands and clothing clean. Don't touch the person next to you, or yourself, or Mom. No! Pay close attention to the woman's instructioning—back to business. Class passengers—cut out—cut out of paper like before." Here the zoetrope directions, which are hand-lettered by Ware in a style intended to visually recall the printed instructions of this sort of paper toy, turn out to be interlinked with Jimmy's own internal monologue and the speech of the flight attendant. Although visually presented as construction instructions, the text serves to collapse at least the distance between narrative voice and character voice. Again, the problem of distinguishing between Ware as author on the one hand and the narrator of *Jimmy Corrigan* on the other is made especially difficult because Ware not only draws all the images but hand-letters virtually all of the text, and the constant visual evidence of the author's hand at work seems to minimize the distance between author and narrator. This dynamic of comics clearly deserves fuller consideration.
23. Interestingly, McCloud makes a similar point about the nature of the comics panel: "Most of us are so used to the standard rectangular format that a 'borderless' panel . . . can take on a timeless quality" (102). The architecture of the panel itself, apparently, is thus implicated in the logic of time-sequencing, and the sequence can be partially interrupted by the borderless panel (which, of course, is still a variety of panel) or more radically by the intrusion of the third dimension.
24. While the construction of the zoetrope (since, for Jimmy itself, it is but a paper toy) appears to offer readers the opportunity to encounter "the thing itself" (as opposed to a mere representation), it is crucial to note that the cut-outs of Jimmy's boyhood home operate on another level. The model of the house patently remains a representation, but (perhaps because we rarely see juxtaposed three-dimensional representations, intended to represent moments in time), the reconstructed structures come to feel timeless, capable of representing multiple moments, as we imagine the hearse driving away, or as we place the giant grasshoppers in various positions.

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