Spring 2009

Architecture, Construction, and the Comics Reading Experience in Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

Michelle Gamboa
*Occidental College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholar.oxy.edu/ecls_student](https://scholar.oxy.edu/ecls_student)

Recommended Citation
[https://scholar.oxy.edu/ecls_student/19](https://scholar.oxy.edu/ecls_student/19)

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the English and Comparative Literary Studies (ECLS) at OxyScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in ECLS Student Scholarship by an authorized administrator of OxyScholar. For more information, please contact cdla@oxy.edu.
Architecture, Construction, and the Comics Reading Experience in Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

Chris Ware is a master architect of comics. With painstaking precision, he deftly creates complex narratives that nevertheless exude a harmonic unity. Rather than adhering to a more traditional comic composition, Ware pushes the medium to an entirely different level by incorporating intricate designs and diagrams, cutout toys, and trading cards within the story itself. Far more than a cartoonist, Ware is an author and an artist, a poet and a musician, a draftsman and a craftsman, a typographer and a calligrapher, a creator equipped with images and words to construct graphic narratives. Conscious of the language and structure of the medium, Ware importantly reveals his philosophy on comics through his architecture analogy:

> Another way [to aesthetically experience comics] 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)

Thus, in his most ambitious work thus far, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Ware displays the architectural relationship inherent to comics. Essentially, the narrative chronicles the Corrigan family history by following two separate storylines of a grandfather and grandson, both named Jimmy Corrigan. While the younger Jimmy (Jimmy III) agrees to meet his estranged father (Jimmy II) in the 1980s, flashbacks of the elder Jimmy (Jimmy I) recount a lonely childhood spent roaming around the construction site of the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. The story primarily focuses on themes of fragmentation and the subsequent
desire to (re)construct, but, in all its complexity, the essence of the work lies in Ware’s decision to orchestrate Jimmy I’s paternal abandonment at the World’s Fair.

The thematic importance of the World’s Fair cannot be stated enough. At the end of the book in his corrigenda, Ware juxtaposes an image of the Fair with his definition of “Exposition” as “The main body of a work, esp. that which explicates a main theme, or introduces a fundamental motif” (Figure 1). By doing so, Ware underlines the thematic richness that pervades the Chicago setting, for it is in the Exposition and its purported representation of a collective American identity that the Corrigan family ironically begins to fracture and break down by disappointed hopes of a unified family. More importantly, though, by drawing attention to the prominent role of architecture and construction inherent to the Fair, Ware also alludes to the comics reading experience. Just as characters construct buildings, families, and ideals, the readers, too, construct meaning from the images and text of the comic. Thus, Ware recreates architectural elements

Figure 1. Ware, Chris. *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. New York: Pantheon, 2000.
encompassed by the World’s Fair through the thematic and formal aspects of the comic, underlining the perpetual need to (re)construct hopes and communities as well as the continuous challenge of the reader to create a cohesive narrative.

Historically, the World’s Columbian Exposition represents a Progressive era shift in the entire American mindset. Reid Badger explains that world’s fairs displayed “the age’s faith that man could have his revolution and control it too” (xvi), and the 1893 Exposition was no exception. The Fair was a utopic vision of a contained community and American identity. Though veiled with honorable endeavors of uplifting a downtrodden national atmosphere, the Fair was nevertheless surrounded by memories of the recent devastating fire that struck Chicago, a nationwide economic depression, and anxieties over what America meant both racially and ideologically. Thus, the Fair appeared at an opportune moment in which the nation could project a promise of progress and a unified national identity amidst social uncertainty. Although the Exposition functioned as a national dream of “mythopoeic grandeur” (Rydell 4), Badger suggests that the Fair “expressed far more clearly the confusions and contradictions that existed at the core of the society” (xiii). William Cronon describes the Fair as a “fantasy landscape” (349), and despite its “apparent unity,” some observers remarked on the “incoherence that lay just beneath the surface” (344). Specifically, the Fair reflected the values of the dominant hegemony by disseminating ideas of white supremacy and excluding racial minorities in the supposed American identity, physically reflected in the architectural layout of the exhibits of “savage” cultures in the Midway Plaisance leading up to the grand “White City.” Ware carefully selects these contradictory aspects of the Fair to further emphasize the breakdown of national and familial unity, despite the desire to create a unified identity.
Ware emphasizes the optimism of the World’s Fair by depicting it in all its brilliant, architectural grandeur. Brightly colored images of the Fair stand out among the more bleak sepia tones that pervade the 1890’s narrative. Echoing the national goal of unification, Ware presents the Chicago Fair as a symbol of hope, a seemingly graspable paradise. Left alone at his grandmother’s house, Jimmy I climbs a tree, overlooking the Exposition through the leaves (Figure 2), his very act of physical ascension mirroring his mounting optimism. Here, the visual and verbal tracks align in the narrative observation, “Up here he can see all the way to The Ocean.” Although the ocean that Jimmy I sees is, in fact, merely a lake, he projects an optimism that makes the reality irrelevant. The same act of hopeful ascension occurs later as he sneaks into the construction site with his female classmate. Following her, Jimmy I again climbs to the top of the Columbian building, reaching an endless view of “The Ocean” that he saw from afar (Figure 3). Awe-struck and speechless, Jimmy I looks out at the lake and the city, feeling as though “the whole world / is for that moment / the single strand of red hair / which dances silently around his nose and eyelashes.” The Chicago Exposition, then, provides Jimmy I with a moment of clarity,
comfort, and connection to another person. Nevertheless, Jimmy I’s friendship with the girl immediately turns cruel and mocking, as she unflinchingly calls him a “bastard,” inciting physical violence between the two. The wonder he envisions and the hope he projects onto the Exposition only exist for a fleeting moment, further underlining the Fair’s false representation.

Despite the Fair’s magnificent façade, Ware suggests that below the surface lies a foreboding presence. Importantly, Jimmy I first sees the construction site of the Fair in the darkness of the night. Looking out from his grandmother’s house, Jimmy I espies the dim outline of one of the Columbian buildings against the starlit sky, its obscurity undermining the “seemingly limitless employment” that it provides. The next morning, the Fair reappears not in the same dark colors and tones, but rather, in a muted, deadened aura of dawn (Figure 4). The barrenness of the trees and the exposed skeleton of the building emphasize a lifelessness that further undercuts the hopeful tone of the endless possibilities of the Fair that is previously alluded to in the text. In the center panel, Jimmy I sits on the ground, back facing the reader, as he looks at his father walking away to the construction site of the Fair. These introductory panels to the Fair thus foreshadow

Figure 4.  

Figure 5.
the parental disappointment that later occurs. When his father finally takes Jimmy I to the Fair, the experience is again depicted in vibrant colors. Yet in the final act of abandonment, the image of the building at sunset where Jimmy I naively waits for his father reverts to the muted colors in which the Fair is represented in the beginning of the narrative (Compare Figure 4 and Figure 5), thus fulfilling the paternal desertion alluded to in the Fair’s initial appearance. Also notably, throughout most of the narrative, the Fair is portrayed in its incomplete state. Only in the last nine pages (out of a total of about 380 pages) does Ware display the Fair in its totality. At this moment of architectural completion, Jimmy I’s abandonment occurs, thus emphasizing the magnitude of the disappointment after an enormous build-up of hope and optimism. This undercurrent of falsity subverts the Fair’s supposed utopic dream. Instead, feelings of loss linger beneath the grand veneer, obliterating any sense of hope that previously existed.

Though the Fair itself importantly reveals the failure of construction, Ware further ties architecture with mythic ideals, breaking them down to emphasize the necessary impulse to (re)construct. In an early passage, Ware deconstructs the Super-man figure. The young Jimmy III first encounters Super-man at a public appearance at a car show. However, Ware does not allow readers to experience Jimmy III’s child-like awe, instead unveiling the superhero as a mediocre actor more interested in sleeping with Jimmy III’s mother than in meeting his adoring fans. Ware, then, does not present Super-man in his heroic grandeur, but rather through Super-man’s depressingly human alter ego, selfishly compelled by his own desires. More importantly, Ware draws attention to Jimmy III’s projection of hope and idealism onto the hero, positing all his dreams onto a seemingly invincible man for lack of a father figure in his own life. Rather than seeing through the façade, Jimmy III, wearing the mask that “Super-man” has given him after sneaking out in the morning, tells his mother, “Mom! He said to tell you he had a real good
time!” This over-investment in fictional ideals carries on into Jimmy III’s adult life, as he is seen still reading Super-man comics and eating Captain Crunch, exactly as he was doing a few pages ago as a child. Ware, then, highlights this blind escapism into constructed ideals that ultimately lead to disappointment.

Ware further shatters Jimmy III’s naïve fantasies in the mythic Super-man by depicting a haunting image of a man disguised as Super-man leaping to his death. On the phone with his mother, Jimmy III waves back to the figure standing on the precipice of the building across from his workplace until the figure suddenly jumps off (Figure 6). The fall of the Super-man, then, indicates the obliteration of an ideal. Moreover, by illustrating the Super-man’s death, Ware violates mythic expectations implicit to this heroic figure. According to Umberto Eco, Super-man, the mythological character of comics, must necessarily remain “inconsumable” and simultaneously “consumed according to the ways of everyday life” (111). Nevertheless, Super-
man remains in a vague temporality, thus removing him from “the law that leads from life to death” (114) and suspending him in a continuous present. Most importantly, though, Eco adds, “The mythic character embodies a law, or a universal demand, and therefore must be in part predictable and cannot hold surprises for us” (109). By illustrating Super-man’s suicide, then, Ware violates the mythic rule by not only placing him in a finite temporality, but also by destroying his symbolic representation of order. Ware denies Jimmy as well as the readers the predictability and expectations implicit in the Super-man figure. In doing so, Ware suggests that everything is impermanent, that ideals must constantly be destroyed and reinvented, an uneasy feat that we, as comics readers, must necessarily carry out along with all the Jimmy Corrigans.

Significantly, then, Ware frames the entire narrative through this violation of the Super-man myth by aligning architecture with the death of an ideal. Ware parallels the ultimate American cultural icon with a dull, brown, unimposing building, thus underlining the impending failure of construction to uphold grandiose ideals. By equating disappointed ideals with architecture, Ware extends this failure to the false utopian goal of the World’s Fair. Gene Kannenberg suggests that Ware’s work may be seen as an “active critique of the twentieth century’s utopian optimism” (194) and that the “tragedy in the search for connection … lies not entirely within the characters themselves, but rather is symptomatic of the culture which these characters inhabit” (196). Moreover, Kannenberg explains:

… Ware demonstrates the cultural path which has led so many of his stories’ characters to their downtrodden lives: society conditions these responses by building unrealistic utopian goals which cannot be fulfilled by the products and services which are produced and advertised to do just that.
Thus, with respect to the World’s Fair in the story, Ware highlights society’s mistake in imposing overly optimistic, contradictory goals. Such ideals are not self-sustaining, but rather, are exposed as tenuous in their weakness to withstand the harsh reality. Ware unveils the Fair’s utopian declaration of progress as nothing more than artifice and lie. It is no coincident, then, that Ware characterizes the Super-man as flawed in the opening pages of the narrative, for he revisits the feeling of constant disappointment in parental figures and familial integrity, impressing the subsequent necessity to reconstruct meaning and fulfillment.

Ware initially foreshadows the familial breakdown in the 1890s setting by recreating the Super-man not through the mythic figure, but through the failed father. Ware continually contrasts the expectation of the perfect Super-man with the dim reality of disappointing fathers. Thus, the Super-man image resonates throughout Jimmy I’s flashbacks through his abusive father, William. Asleep next to his son, William is depicted wearing a blindfold and red gloves, with red shoes next to the bed, instantly recalling the similar costume of Super-man (Figure 7). Instead of an invincible, awe-inspiring hero, Ware presents a fat, brutish, and insensitive man, reluctant to show any affection for his child. Significantly, William, a self-employed glazier, is
directly involved in the construction of the Fair. Thus, just as Ware aligns the suicidal Super-man with the office building, so, too, does he align Super-man (as father) with the Columbian buildings. In this manner, Ware suggests that the paternal ideal represented through William as Super-man will similarly fail. Moreover, in one of Jimmy III’s fantasies, he envisions himself telling his own fictional son about his reunion with his father when a miniature Super-man appears on the windowsill. Suddenly growing to a gigantic size, Super-man picks up the house, and drops it, dismembering Jimmy III’s son (Figure 8). Unable to appease his son’s pain, Jimmy III resolves to kill him by dropping a cement block on his head. In this instance, Ware highlights the sense of betrayal and violence inflicted by Super-man, or more broadly, the father. Super-man’s unforeseen hostility directly leads to the son’s dismemberment and the subsequent filicide, thereby reinforcing the sense of the Corrigan legacy of patriarchal insensitivity and disappointment that each Jimmy must desperately attempt to overcome. These acts of
abandonment, then, effectively break down the domestic sphere, thus forcing the Corrigan men into a cycle of (re)building familial relationships.

Because of this dissolution of the family, Ware subsequently explores the human impulse to construct, reconnect, and form stable relationships. The national need for social integrity and a unified identity, expressed through the construction of the World’s Fair, resonates in the more personal need to find a sense of belonging by reconstructing familial relationships. Thus, Jimmy II suddenly contacts the son he abandoned over twenty years ago, and Jimmy III agrees to meet him. Yet the Jimmies’ attempts to reestablish familial relationships are consistently undermined. Jimmy II and Jimmy III reconnect only to discover that their efforts to become “father” and “son” happen far too late. Their endeavors only amount to a series of awkward, strenuous moments, desperately trying to relate, but finding themselves terribly inept. Moreover, just as Jimmy I is finally shown some paternal care and attention when his father takes him to the Fair, he is ultimately abandoned. This moment of loss reflects disappointed hope not only in social identity, but also, more specifically, in familial unity. By undermining the Jimmies’ efforts to reclaim familial unity, Ware suggests that rather than trying to reconstruct old forms of familial relationships, new family ties must be formed. Thus, Jimmy II’s effort to reestablish himself as a father after abandoning Jimmy III fails miserably, while Jimmy I succeeds in overcoming his abandonment by creating his own idea of a cohesive family. What was once lost cannot be regained. Instead, it must be reevaluated and reconstructed.

Ultimately, Ware gestures towards a recovery of the ideal at the end of the narrative. Depressed and suicidal, Jimmy III returns to his office building on Thanksgiving, unexpectedly meeting a new coworker, Tammy. This chance encounter reinvigorates him with a sense of hope, as the following page depicts Super-man carrying away the child-version of Jimmy amidst a gray
Figure 9.

backdrop of falling snow (Figure 9). This revision of the suicidal Superman to a savior Superman underlines the constructedness of the ideal. Though the dissolution of the traditional Superman marks the death of an ideal, Ware establishes a sense of hope by suggesting that inspirational models may be recovered, but only through constant reassembly. The desire for reconnection is self-renewing, the act itself interminable, as though in a perpetual state of construction. Rather than the ideal being an unchanging, irrecoverable aspiration, it exists as something that may be, and, in fact, must be, reclaimed and revised even after the most traumatic, disappointing moments.

However, these thematic moments of structure, collapse, and reassembly represent only a single level of understanding of the narrative. To return to Ware’s architecture analogy to comics, it is apparent that he applies his keen understanding of the comics reading experience within the formal aspects of the narrative itself. That is, just as the characters struggle to (re)build lost hopes and ideals, the readers, too, are forced to participate in a similar act of assembly. Through this parallel act of construction, Ware allows readers to form an intimate
relationship with the narrative. Thus, by invoking the architecture of comics, Ware underlines two important aspects of the medium: first, that within comics, readers are engaged in an act of construction, and second, that readers may participate and interact with comics, just as they would with an architectural structure. Specifically, the striking inclusion of cut-out toys further draws the readers into the Corrigan world, allowing them to take part in the narrative. Ware maximizes the architectural features of the narrative in order to emphasize the fragmentary nature of the medium and the audience participation necessary to the act of reading comics.

In general, comics demand an active effort on the reader’s part to understand the narrative. According to Charles Hatfield, comics readers must “call upon different reading strategies, or interpretive schema, than they would use in their reading of conventional written text” (36). In this manner, comics are not a passive medium, but are rather “texts that require a reader’s active engagement and collaboration in meaning making” (Hatfield 33). Confronted with a collection of images and words in a non-uniform fashion, readers must work through a series of tensions. The first challenge, what Hatfield calls the tension “between codes of signification” (36), demands readers to make sense of individual panels with their simultaneous, but not always synonymous, visual and verbal tracks. Despite impulses to keep the two elements of image and text separate, comics inherently “collapse the word/image dichotomy,” for “written text can function like images, and images like written text” (Hatfield 36-37). Comics, then, create a new way of reading and seeing, giving rise to a wholly different language that readers must endeavor to learn. The second tension forces readers to connect the panels in sequence to create a cohesive narrative, a necessary act that comics theorist Scott McCloud calls “closure.” Readers must “mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (McCloud 67) from a series of fragmented
moments. Thus, the reader’s attempt to understand comics and establish closure and continuity among the images and text represents the first act of reader construction.

Throughout *Jimmy Corrigan*, Ware employs narrative techniques that both help and hinder the readers’ ability to construct a cohesive narrative. Most apparently, Ware utilizes verbal cues such as “Meanwhile,” “And,” or “But.” Such devices establish a verbal continuity that “help bridge the gaps within a sequence” (Hatfield 44), allowing readers to reconcile ambiguous temporalities from a collection of images. Moreover, these verbal cues “serve as striking, graphic punctuation on the narrative level, linking not verbal sentences but illustrated events” (Kannenberg 187). By utilizing conjunctions, Ware imposes an underlying sense of order, containment, and relatedness in his often perplexing narrative. However, Gene Kannenberg suggests that Ware’s narrative also demands a “non-linear reading strategy” (187). The third- or first-person narrator, indicated by the cursive script, “speaks’ haltingly” and spans across the panels, and even pages. In this manner, readers must “assemble’ a sentence over a long series of non-contiguous panels which may be interspersed with scenes of dialogue as well” (187), thus abandoning typical, continuous, left-to-right readings. In addition to dividing the narration across multiple panels and pages, the spatial register of the narration forces readers to actually look for the narrative thread, for words may read up and down, even inconspicuously buried between images. By refusing to contain the narrative voice, Ware underlines the necessity to evaluate new means of reading. Thus, Ware simultaneously aids and challenges the readers’ necessity to construct meaning from the images and text. By doing so, he frustrates the readers’ effort to assemble a cohesive understanding, mirroring the characters’ failed attempts to create order.

Moreover, Ware’s simple, iconographic drawing style demands a deeper audience engagement in which the readers must actively produce meaning. Primarily concerned with
creating emotion in his comics, Ware magnifies the emotional impact through his use of iconographic characters, maintaining, “Fundamentally you’re better off using ideograms rather than realistic drawings. There’s a vulgarity to showing something as you really see it and experience it. It sets up an odd wall that blocks the reader’s empathy” (qtd. in Raeburn 18). McCloud describes cartoony images as a form of “amplification through simplification” (30). That is, because these simple drawings are more stripped down than the specificity of realistic drawings, they are able to describe a wider set of people. Thus rather than seeing “the face of another” in a realistic image, cartoons allow you to “see yourself” (36). By eliminating the alienating effect of realistic drawings through iconographic renderings, Ware opens the possibility for a direct, universal absorption and identification with the emotional impact of the narrative. Nevertheless, just as Ware creates easily identifiable, iconographic images, the readers must necessarily inject them with meaning. McCloud points out that pictorial icons within comics “demand our participation to make them work” and that “[t]here is no life here except that which you give to it” (59). In their simplified appearance, icons leave themselves open-ended and undefined. Thus, readers must project their own meaning into the drawings. More so, they must create meaning in each image and sustain these meanings across the panels, across the pages, and across the entire narrative. Ultimately, Ware’s style both enhances the readers’ emotional connection to the characters’ failure in construction and underlines the readers’ necessary act of constructing meaning within the characters.

Yet Ware expands the possibility of reader participation and deepens the role of architecture in comics through his unconventional inclusion of a cutout activity of Jimmy’s grandmother’s house. Accompanied with an introduction, note, and instructions, the author/narrator invites the reader to cut out and construct a miniature model of the house (Figure 10). In this manner, Ware
allows readers not only to read the narrative, but also to physically participate and literally construct a piece of the story. Ware thus maximizes the level of reader participation by both mentally and physically involving them in the text. As the note suggests, more than a simple “diversion” for the reader to construct, the cutout model “allows a simulated maneuverability about the spaces described.” Ware’s architecture analogy is thus literalized and given physicality. Moreover, Thomas Bredhoft suggests, “[T]hese cut-outs remind readers that the entire enterprise of comics … 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” (883). By redefining comics beyond simple panel and page designs, Ware breaks down traditional comics forms by incorporating a physical activity into the understanding of the narrative as a whole. Furthermore, the cutout activity disrupts the normal linear reading convention, hindering readers from immersing themselves in the story and thus preventing them from committing the same mistake of his characters of delving too deeply in escapist fantasies. The fact that these narrative form interruptions occur quite suddenly within the story further halts readers in their understanding of the medium. By
unexpectedly imposing these genre shifts upon readers, Ware forces them to reconfigure their perceptions about the comics form. According to Ware, no longer can comics continue as escapist entertainment, rather, they must constantly challenge, question, and create.

Furthermore, through these cutout activities, Ware creates a more intimate reader identification with the text. Among the ordinary cutout pieces of the house, barn, kitchen, and trees, Ware surprisingly includes cutouts of “imaginary giant grasshoppers.” Though it seems out of place, the grasshoppers, in fact, allude to a dream that Jimmy I has of seeing gigantic grasshoppers sprawled over his grandmother’s house. This inclusion of an imaginary aspect of Jimmy I’s mind links the readers to his own imagination, providing a pathway into his inner psyche. Thus, by framing the cutout model within Jimmy I’s imagination, Ware underlines the possibility of a more intimate reader-character identification. Moreover, Ware includes a cutout of Jimmy I’s grandmother’s coffin and the coach that carries her away. In doing so, Ware links readers to Jimmy I’s actual memory and experience. Readers are not only constructing a setting of the story, but also a specific moment existing in Jimmy I’s memory. By creating this opportunity to construct a piece of Jimmy I’s experience, Ware further involves the reader into the Corrigan diegesis.

Nevertheless, although the cutout activity theoretically involves readers, it simultaneously distances them. Realistically, it is impossible to construct the model simply because the pieces are printed on both sides of a single leaf page. So, cutting some pieces out inevitably eliminates other pieces, making the entire construction impossible. Moreover, the introduction notes that the cut-outs are “admittedly printed too small to be constructed with any degree of satisfaction or pluck,” but may be accomplished through “pantographic or electrostatic enlargement.” Bredehoft points out, “[T]he instructions’ references to obsolete technologies – along with the fulsome
prose itself, complete with apparent malapropisms – encourage us to interprets these instructions as themselves deriving from the turn of the century: another distancing effect” (881-882).

Furthermore, the inner flaws of the model underline the shortcomings of construction. The model exists as a “reconstruction” formed from “reminiscence and fragmentary recollection,” inevitably having its own “inconsistencies.” Because the model is temporally situated in a mere memory, the narrator warns, “[C]are should be taken when projecting any of the aid’s details temporally forward or backward.” While other panels in the narrative exist in sequence with one another, the cutout remains frozen in time. Ultimately, the near impossibility of constructing the model inevitably echoes Jimmy’s own experience of the failure and disappointment of construction.

Thus, the impossibility of building the model places readers into a permanent inability to construct a coherent understanding of the narrative. The introduction to the model states that the reader does not have to build the model in order to appreciate the narrative, but “those who do attempt the feat will find themselves more acquainted with the rivulets and tributaries of its grander scope.” Just as Bredehoft suggests, this disclaimer actually “serves to invoke its opposite” and that “failing to build the models is indeed failing to read the narrative” (882). If the readers do not construct the model, then they effectively forfeit the opportunity to understand Jimmy I’s memory, experience, and imagination. Yet the readers’ failure to construct the model and read the narrative also echoes the characters’ shortcomings in constructing ideals, identities, and communities. In this manner, Ware freezes readers into a state of perpetual construction along with his characters and the model itself. Therefore, Ware conveys the failure of construction and the constant desire, yet inability, to form a sense of unity and cohesion.

Architecture and construction, then, play vital roles in not only understanding Ware’s complex graphic narrative, but also the entire comics reading experience. By first breaking down
all preconceived ideals, Ware places his characters, along with the readers, in a razed state in which we must all find the impetus to rebuild. Through the important setting of the Chicago World’s Fair and its connection to the death of the mythic Super-man, Ware conveys the circular act of construction and destruction that fuels this perpetual re-creation of family, relationships, and ideals. However, Ware extends this act of construction by mentally and physically involving the readers in the actual narrative through his unique narrative and drawing style and his unconventional inclusion of paper cutouts. These cutouts mark Ware’s own understanding that he, as a comics creator, must continually reconstruct and redefine the medium itself in order to create new levels of meaning. In this inclusion of activities in the narrative, Ware also underlines the fact that both Jimmy and the readers are engaged in parallel acts of construction, working towards a sense of unity and understanding. By emphasizing the shared desires of cohesion, Ware demonstrates the unique reader involvement and intimacy found only in the comics medium.
Works Cited


