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# Making Meanings with Comics

Volume 1

A Functional Approach  
to Graphic Narrative

Paul Fisher Davies



Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Sussex  
February 2017

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: .....

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PhD LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

MAKING MEANINGS WITH COMICS: A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO  
GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

ABSTRACT

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This thesis proposes that, viewed at the appropriate level of abstraction, pictures can do the work that language does; and a framework that describes the functions served by both will usefully enable discussion of graphic narrative. In the thesis, I outline such a framework, based largely on the work of Michael Halliday, drawing also on the pragmatics of Paul Grice, the Text World Theory of Paul Werth and Joanna Gavins, and ideas from art theory, psychology and narratology. This brings a complete Hallidayan framework of multimodality to comics scholarship for the first time, and extends that tradition of multimodal linguistics to graphic narrative.

I illustrate and apply this framework using a range of graphic narrative, drawn largely from Anglo-American and European traditions, but intended to be useful across the full spectrum of work we recognise as ‘comics’ across cultural and historical productive contexts. The aim is to develop an approach based in linguistics which is appropriate and adequate to account for what we do when we use ‘comics’ to communicate with one another: incorporating the construction and organisation of pictorial images into the sorts of discourses that have otherwise been pursued with words.

I present a range of approaches to describing the meaning-making resources of graphic narrative structured around Halliday’s three metafunctions of language: the ideational, accounting for ways in which comics represent experience; the interpersonal, accounting both for ways in which comics mediate interactions with readers, and incorporate personal judgements into the text; and the textual, accounting for the information structure of the comics text and points of cohesive connection. I also explore the logical structures available to comics, emphasising the hypotactic, nested nature of graphic narratives, over and above their sequentiality.



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This thesis is dedicated to my family and to the memory of my father.

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# Introduction

## Communicating in Comics

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Comics are a handmade medium, mass-reproduced though they may be, and in that, they are human. When I draw a comic, I lay down lines that describe, that imply, that associate words to images, that depict an experience for you to share in. The mark of my hand is on the page; you feel my 'style' in that hand, my signature (see Goodman 1976 on 'autographic' styles). I may be working under time pressure, or pressure of space; but I can trust you to understand, and even to enjoy the thinking you have to do, if I skip bits, if I leave things for you to work on, as long as I give you enough to follow me in making the meanings we are making. We know comics, you and I: we know the resources comics draw on; we are in this together.

Comics are a way we communicate. The 'basic scene' of communication is the situation of face-to-face talk between human beings, embodied and taking place in the context of the environment and social relations, as well as the context of genres of talk, both immediate and historical (Thomas and Turner 2011). It is on this that writing, in its classic prose form, is modelled; and, I propose, that is how comics discourse can be modelled too.

In comics, some of the contexts of talk, such as the bodies and environments of speakers, are inscribed into the text, alongside and around the verbal language upon which such communicative scenes have tended to focus; comics incorporate the body by rendering its expressions, its body language, its physical creativity and visual modality, and its surrounding environment: the objects it touches and the spaces by which it is surrounded, as well as the emotional environment (communicated through colour and abstraction) in which the communication occurs. We enter into communion with one another, when we read a comic created by another: we share in the space the creator has constructed for us, and collaborate in a mutual act of meaning-making.

This thesis aims to offer a framework and set of vocabulary for describing the work of comics communication. The framework is intended for scholars, creators and readers, to aid in producing ‘thick descriptions’ of comics texts that will capture the specificity of their nature. That nature is taken to be a matter of making meanings using images and words in compatible ways, collaborating together on the same endeavour: the communication of experience, construction of texts, and interaction with other human beings. I will consider the ways in which we can treat the collaborative, combined comics imagetext as a form of *utterance*, and identify a model of language which can most fruitfully be adapted to describe the work images and words mutually perform.

### **Comics as communicative action**

In viewing comics-making as a communicative practice amongst others, emerging from language use, and from the communicative use of the whole body, I aim to take a fresh approach to the nature of the medium and offer a critical framework that may be of general use to the creator, the teacher, and the critic of graphic narrative production. I aim to keep the terminology and frameworks I offer as open as possible, so that they will allow for and account for innovations in form, and even suggest and enable new usages of the register. If the comics image-text, the drawing with or without text, is viewed as the core of the comics utterance, then we can usefully look not for a syntax of comics panels which treats panels as words, but a discourse structure of comics and a pragmatics of usage. We can attend to the functional salencies of comics and describe the nature of its text according to the roles of the functional parts, however we describe them and carve them up; always bearing in mind that critical discussion of comics is also a creative discourse practice, a work of meaning-making conducted between people in a social nexus, just as comics are too.

Here I break from a semiotic literary critical tradition that holds the text itself as the only possible object of study (see, e.g., Barthes 1993); whilst accepting that the text is the immediate point of access to a reader of comics, I would like to propose a theory which, as theories of language do, takes into account the usage of the text, the purposes of the communicators, the choices of the creator(s) of meaning as well as the construals of those on the receiving end of meaning exchange. This perspective does not aim to reify the author as a god-figure, or bring back into critical discourse an outmoded idea of ‘authorial intention’ as a recoverable principle which will govern the interpretations

of texts; it just aims to recognise comics making and comics consumption as a social exchange, engaged in by human beings, whose mutual experience is a valid object of interest, even if it is in the text which we find the locus through which this exchange is mediated.

The growth of autobiographical and factual writing in graphic narrative (see, e.g., El Refaie 2012; Chute 2010; Mickwitz 2014) has meant a growing understanding of the medium as a site of self-expression, and less as a factory-produced commodity designed to maintain sales among an audience eager for a stream of new material. Without downplaying the materiality of the text and the conditions of production (see, e.g., Beaty 2012), this has meant that the study of comics is more amenable now to an approach which treats comics creation as a communicative act, and focuses on the work of a singular creator desiring to ‘get across’ an understanding of the world to a reader through this new means. This approach can be turned back on older forms, and on collaborative teams, reifying the author as ‘implied’ or as a ‘voice’ or ‘author-function’ (Booth 1983; Foucault 1984, 101–20); as a figure that has been felt to be communicating with comics readers, even when no single figure existed: a voice of Stan Lee, or of Marvel, a collective voice of one’s favourite team of creators – inkers, pencillers, letterers, writers and so on. An older semiotic approach which treats the text as an object carrying meaning in itself, distinct from any creator, might give way to a social semiotic approach which treats meaning exchange as a social act between human beings, and the text as the material trace of that exchange of meanings. Whilst the material, text-based focus aims to bring to our attention the situation of the text in a system of material production, subject to the forces of capital, the social, exchange-based focus aims to orient us towards another materiality: that of human beings engaged in social systems, humans that under structuralist semiotics are effaced as the ‘dead’ author and the variable reader-as-interpreter of a sovereign text.

### **‘Narrative drawing’**

To produce a comics text is to produce what Thierry Groensteen calls a ‘narrative drawing’ (Groensteen 2009), or in other words, to use images to do work normally done by language. This is not in fact limited to narration per se, though historically, narrative forms have dominated comics production; we might take a more general description, and call it ‘pictorial utterance’ or ‘speaking with drawings’. This is a functional

practice: we are using images to do what words do, to serve the same purposes. For this reason, functionally-based descriptions of language are best suited to account for the ways in which images can do the work of storytelling, description, arguing, and so on.

If we recruit a framework from linguistics which has already been adapted to account for the ways that spoken interactions function, and use that same framework to account for message exchanges that use or include images, then the descriptions we have of both endeavours will necessarily be compatible; and so points of ligature, and ways in which the one mode can ‘seamlessly’ hand over to the next, can be identified, and their hidden ‘seams’ unpicked. We will not have to have recourse to notions of ‘hybridity’ or ‘alchemy’ which remain unexplored or mysterious. We might indicate ways in which both words and images, not just in general terms but specific features or elements thereof, collaborate in the shared endeavour of fulfilling the communicative functions the theory identifies.

## **Language and comics**

Drawing in comics, then, may be understood as not only a ‘way of thinking’ (Ball and Kuhlman 2010), but a way of speaking, of articulating ideas in the full range of ways that are possible with language. I propose, then, to use a model of linguistics that will be appropriate to describing the resources comics use to do this. I will discuss below some contemporary arguments about the nature of comics and language, and describe some of the major ways in which linguistics has been brought to bear on this task. Let me first outline, in broad terms, my own case for choosing to treat comics as a language.

### ***Comics as a language***

Most current work on comics treats ‘language’ in a general sense, as a metaphor for the complex set of codes that comprise comics (see the introduction to Bramlett 2012). Whilst the terminology of fine art and of film has been frequently incorporated into discussion of comics, the terminology of language has not. In a collection such as Varnum and Gibbons’ (2007), there are many terms to do with comics (259 mentions of ‘balloon’, 223 of ‘panel’, 78 of ‘caption’), many to do with narration (192 mentions of ‘character’, 152 of ‘story’, 98 of ‘narrative’), and some to do with film (8 mentions of

‘shot’, 9 of ‘soundtrack’) but, despite the title of their collection, few specific to linguistics (7 occurrences of ‘verb’ and ‘noun/pronoun’, one of ‘adjective’ and none of ‘adverb’ or ‘clause’, though there are 18 of the more general ‘sentence’). Discussion of word-image relationships in comics thereby becomes impressionistic, metaphorical, mystical. And where comics are seen as in some way ‘a language’ in themselves, this mysticism can creep into discussions of the ‘readability’ of image-image relations, too.

We should be specific, then, about what it is that language does in comics; and what it is that language does with images; and in what way comics can accomplish with images the things that language can, or things that are compatible with the functions of a language or languages. Thereby, having established such a mutual set of functions, we should be able to specify in what ways word and image ‘work together’: we should be able to specify what work a particular word is doing here, what a phrase is doing in relation to an image, how an image serves the work of a sentence there, how a line may articulate with a word to collaborate on a meaning.

And if comics do function in this way, we should be able to demonstrate that *silent* comics operate in the same ways we see in the verbal/visual texts; that the same operations and functions occur, but with the images alone now handling all of the work. If there is a compatible framework, it should be evident in the arrangements of images, independently of words; otherwise the images really do merely illustrate a text, and it is the text that leads to the apparent readability of the images.

Ultimately, such a system should be able to account for the extent to which we can read such marginal texts as *abstract* comics. Attempting to read these texts exposes the methods by which readers make sense of comics, and they pare down the resources with which creators can aim to make meaning. An account of comics adequate to dealing with this will have undergone a sturdy test of applicability and explanatory usefulness.

I will tackle a range of comics styles in this thesis, including the abstract and the silent, some mainstream work, some recent, some older. My bias will be towards the contemporary book-length graphic narrative, the ‘graphic novel’, and towards Western versions of this. I will include some francophone work, though the majority will be North American and in English. Though I use few examples from other traditions, notably manga, the body of theory I will outline is intended to be applicable in general terms to that tradition too; indeed, to anything we might want to call a ‘comic’. That includes single-panel or single-page works too, though those are also not my focus here.

I will use the terms ‘comics’ and ‘graphic narrative’ more or less interchangeably; preferring ‘graphic narrative’ when it seems necessary to specify the nature of the medium itself, and at times acknowledging the use of ‘comics’ to refer to the particular magazine-format packaging in which the form developed through much of the last century in the West. My definition of the form will become apparent as I describe how comics work.

### **Models of comics**

In working through a detailed account of comics as communicative action, I would like to challenge two trends of thought in describing how comics work. These are highly influential not only on readers and critics of comics, but also on artists and writers and creators. They are compelling because they offer ready-made frameworks by which we can get a handle on comics, but I think they are limiting and misleading because they miss some elements at the heart of comics ontology.

The first is that comics are, to adapt the wording of Scott McCloud, like a very very slow movie (McCloud 1993, 8). That is to say, that they are built using the same techniques as those of film: the selection of shots of various types, their arrangement in montage, a linear sequence which differs from film itself primarily by the fact that the comics images are not time-bound, but rather co-present in a spatial arrangement, through which it is the task of the reader to navigate according to rules of reading in order to recreate the sequence intended by the creator. As well as McCloud, this is the basis of Eisner’s understanding (Eisner 2008a; 2008c), and for both, the guidance of the reader through a clear sequence is of great importance. Both consider the relationship between panels as being akin to the relationship between shots and/or frames of film: they operate by adjacency and imply motion, supplied by the reader in a sort of ‘tweening’ process as traditionally handed off to lower-ranking animators between the lead animators’ key frames (Eisner 2008a, 39).

This is an unhelpful and restrictive way of conceiving of comics on two counts. Firstly, the image of comics panels as akin to film frames ignores the co-presence of words in the frame itself, and the operation of borders to frame the words (alongside framing the image with a physically present, drawn border) and linear elements to link them deictically and indexically to the images. Secondly, the ontology of the image is different: the film image was conceived of as photographic, whereby the assembly of

actors, props, locations occurred prior to the recording of these by mechanical means on rolls of film, from which selections were literally made in the process of editing. Animation presents a challenge to this claim of ontology; but animation too lacks the co-presence of image and word and the nesting created by framings.

The availability of terminologies and models of scholarship on film make the adoption of film terms and concepts in discussing comics highly tempting. Indeed, comics have influenced the development of film and film has influenced the development of comics. But if we use categories and terminologies lifted from film to discuss comics in an unexamined way, we risk losing sight of what separates them and those very points where they do deliberately borrow from one another.

The second major way of thinking about comics is as the ‘hybrid’ combination of two separate arts: drawing and writing (Harvey 1996). This is compounded by the historical frequency with which these tasks have been allotted to different individuals, tasked to collaborate in more or less closely coordinated ways, and often with different agendas (see, e.g., Sabin 1993; Sabin 2001; Lente 2012). The metaphorical image here also reflects a notion from film: that of two tracks, the visual and the verbal, by analogy with the image on celluloid and the separately recorded (and separately innovated, conceived of, and devised, only later synchronised) soundtrack, which will itself be edited and processed by a different team with a different skill set from those encoding the images. In the age of the ‘talkies’, the words were prior and separate, devised with an imagined image sequence in mind; but then subject to editing and cutting, supplementing and reworking by a unifying director. But in comics there are not two such ‘tracks’, not by nature or technological requirement, though economics and cultural practices may well produce this in many cases. Nor is their ‘hybridity’ an inchoate ‘blending’. Image and text collaborate immediately on the same page, articulating with each other directly, operating neither in linear sequence nor in parallel separately, but in a shared endeavour simultaneously participating in the construction of a common structure.

To articulate the nature of that shared, common structure; to identify the roles played within it by the image and the text, and by those elements of comics that operate as both and neither; and to identify and unpack the simultaneity of communication in comics, in preference to their sequence or syntax, dealt with on their own terms, not by analogy to film or separately as art and language, is the task of the comics theorist.



## **Ut pictura poesis? *Comics as resources for meaning-making***

Is it possible for images to perform the same function as words? They do not do so in identical ways, but the resources of painting and poetry are recruited to the same ends in comics art: that is to the *making of meanings*. Comics pursue the making of meanings via the resources of the human body, in at least a fourfold way.

First, by the *representation* of the human body in drawing or painting, indicating in a more or less abstracted way the semiotic resources of the body: its gesture, its disposition, its proxemics in relation to space and to other bodies; its ‘body language’, ‘expressions’ and so on. These dispositions can be rendered in sequence, within or across panels.

Secondly, by the representations of the *modality* of the visual, for instance the blurring and heightened or reduced saturation of reverie, dream or memory, the streaking of motion, the simplifications of internal representation, the embodiment in space signified by perspective, the limited high resolution foveation of the human eye delineated by relatively small panels or implicit panelisation and ‘episodes’ within the comics page. Conventional signs as well as rendering styles may assist this modalisation of the image, in the conventions of line styles in framing and the nesting of images or text in word balloons, implying text worlds created within each other.

Thirdly, by the *indexical* encoding of the body in the marks of ink on the page, the brushstrokes and pen lines with which character, abstract framings, linguistic marks and more are constituted on the page; this claim indicates my own preference for a human hand evident in the creation of the comics work, but allows for other forms of creation with a recommendation for consistency across them and a cohabitation in space. This is one of the means by which comics are textually *cohesive*: image and word have been crafted either by the same hand or with a compatible line and printed in the same ink. Implicit here also is my preference for single-creator works, though collaborations are not thereby excluded.

Fourthly, and optionally, by the resources of human *verbal* expression in all their fullness; including the synaesthetic encoding of sound, especially by visual modularity of the writing style, represented also in compositional co-presence of words on the page: whereby their physical indexicality, the combination in shared space of related image and symbol, aids in the co-reference of symbolic/conventional meanings with iconic/mimetic meanings, via their indexical/proxemic relations. Verbal expression constitutes a means by which *abstract relations* can be supplied, and by which *reference* and *deixis* can be encoded, alongside the proxemic and indexical materials offered by the visual.

To these four one might add the representational and imaginative capabilities offered by the *parable*, the *metaphor*, the *analogy*, as described by cognitive linguists as at the heart of abstract human cognition.

With these varied, sometimes overlapping, complementary resources of meaning at the creator's disposal, comics can aim to represent the full range of human experience, a goal championed by practitioners since Eisner. Using a widening range of creative approaches which combine these resources in innovative ways, comics can construe experience freshly and engage in a communion with the readership, who share in the experimentations proposed by creators, building on a tradition of comics representation and pushing towards newer configurations of meaning, new mappings of experience and convention. These creators and readers can fold these innovations into an increasingly rich, stratified patina of *grammaticalisation*, the codifying of representational images into functional conventions, which will lead the medium to increasingly powerful expressive capabilities. These notions will help shape the present thesis.

### **Three problems of comics expression**

To bring together what is at stake in this thesis, it will be useful to gather together some of these issues into three broad areas that present problems to be solved by a model of comics poetics: cohesion, abstraction, and the verb. These problems arise from attempts to use images to do what language does: to narrate, to capture abstract thought,

and to construct extended texts. The questions raised in these three areas will operate as an initial sketch guide for the organisation of later chapters.

### ***The verb: How can comics enact processes?***

Comics is not a time-based medium. Its images are static. How then can comics represent the action that is at the heart of every tale and every clause, the verb? In what ways can wordings supply this need, and in what ways can the images or their sequences handle this silently? What sort of work is expected of the reader to ‘animate’ the comics text? Chapters 2 and 3 will explore this problem, as well as Chapter 4.

### ***Abstraction: How can comics incorporate the abstract?***

Comics image sequences constitute a concrete, visual form of storytelling. Given this, how can they represent the unseeable, abstract elements of a discourse; its conceptual or emotional material? The verbal elements may perhaps be recruited to do this, but how can they integrate with elements of the narrative expressed by other means? And how could silent comics sequences handle these meanings, without words? Would a completely visually abstract comic be readable? These questions are raised in Chapter 2, explored later in Chapter 5, and raised again as metaphor in Chapter 9.

### ***Cohesion: What makes a comic one text, not many?***

Comics are commonly multimodal, but along the two so-called ‘tracks’ of the verbal and the visual, and with those two collections of semiotic resources, they express a single narrative (or other discourse). Even when image-only, comics present multiple representations that must ‘hold together’ to constitute a single discourse. How can comics marshal their resources to do this, and why are they not read as a disparate collection of representations? How does a reader piece together the comics world(s)? How is this different from illustrated narratives like storybooks and picture books? Questions of cohesion are central to Chapter 6, and the structuring of comics is explored in Chapter 7.

These problems demand a theory base that will account for the specific functions of text, that is applicable across modes, that moves beyond notions of ‘hybridity’ or a mystical ‘alchemy’ and that acknowledges the human communicative roles of both creators and readers of texts.

### **The imagetext as utterance**

Let me summarise this introductory section with a comment on definitions and a central question. My question is not so much the standard definition question ‘what *is* a comic?’, but closer to the functionally-oriented question ‘what are we *doing* when we’re doing comics?’. By ‘we’ I mean both readers and creators; and my focus on comics as *action* reflects my theoretical basis in *social* semiotics (Halliday 1978; Hodge and Kress 1988), wherein the object of study is meaning-*making*, rather than signs per se. Social semiotics emerges from the study of language as a system of functions, and so my project may be reframed as asking this: ‘what follows if one treats the comics imagetext as an *utterance*?’ — that is to say, a move in communicative interaction between people. This posits a status dually as action on the part of the creator(s), and a site of linguistic work, as well as an object of study, for the reader. The ink on the page of the graphic narrative object, then, is a *medium* of communication; it mediates the meaning-making act, standing in a space between creator and reader, and constitutes just a trace of the total meaning-making process, being just the fixed part of an act of meaning that takes in shared and assumed social contexts, including socially agreed procedures for meaning-making on which both reader and creator rely.

The answer that is emerging to that question ‘what follows if one treats comics as utterance’ is threefold, along the lines of the threefold division of the metafunctions of linguistic utterance described by M.A.K. Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). They reflect the three problems of comics outlined above. On the one hand, we are rendering our experience in images and words, building a world and a sequence of events that contain a message. This is the representational or **ideational** function, and it centres on the process, the verb. On the other, we are operating on other human beings — causing them to engage with us in a shared creation of meaning, showing them what we think about the world we’ve rendered and encouraging them to respond to it. This is the **interpersonal** function: the inscription of the self and engagement of the other in meanings. We will see that it is this that is handled by abstraction, and what remains

when representation is abandoned. And underpinning this, we are constructing a text, weaving together images and perhaps language, making threads of connection that tie the elements we inscribe together so that identities, links, continuities, causalities and affinities can be seen between them. This is the **textual** function, which manages the organisation of information and its cohesion.

By adopting an underpinning framework that evolved from the need to describe the compatible, translatable natures of disparate language types (English vs Chinese, children's protolanguage), and a framework which has fruitfully been used to describe visual as well as verbal texts (Halliday 2005b; Halliday 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), we should arrive at an account of comics communication that is compatible with accounts of verbal communication, and thus is able to deal with wordless or silent comics and able to focus on images and their functions, as well as accounting in some detail for the interaction of word and image, and the specifics of the shared endeavour which they may undertake together. I will outline Halliday's system, and applications of it, more fully in Chapter 1's Methodology section.

To ask 'what follows *if* one treats comics as utterance?' is to acknowledge that this is just one approach; it is not to attempt a 'final word' on what a comic is, though it does offer a useful set of tools for determining what we can do with a text, and may be helpful in deciding how fruitful it may be to consider a text as a comic. A comic may also be treated as a commodity for trade, no doubt, and a vessel or wrapper for narrative which might equally well be a film or a novel. Those treatments of comics are frequent in the literature (e.g., M. J. Smith and Duncan 2011; Duncan and Smith 2009; Baetens and Frey 2014); a linguistic approach to graphic narrative is only just now emerging (see, e.g., Bramlett 2012; Cohn 2016). In the first section of Chapter 1 I will give an overview of the history of comics and approaches to theorising them.

The nature of a linguistic approach to comics — or the scope of possible approaches — is still up for negotiation. I hope this functional, pragmatic approach will prove fruitful and lead to further research.

## **Guide to the thesis**

Chapter 1 will lay down the **groundwork** and outline the goals and methodology for the thesis, establishing the grounds for a functional approach to graphic narrative. After an initial lead-in to the notion of comics readership via **abstract** comics in Chapter 2,

exploring how the nature of the imagetext is revealed when content is suppressed, the following chapters will broadly tackle Halliday's three metafunctions, as follows.

Firstly, then, like utterances, comics construe processes. In Chapter 3, I will approach Halliday's tripartite division of language through the **ideational** function, focusing on **representation**, and in particular how comics can represent the 'verb' — ways to communicate processes of all types in comics images. This four-part breakdown of approaches to the verb will also provide a way in to the following chapters. I will argue that the particular ways in which the comics image, and the image sequence, encode and imply these processes are defining of the medium. They build processes into the images, and distinguish themselves from the illustrated text by construing processes in the image primarily, rather than just illustrating participants. The words in comics are more likely to supply circumstances, to embed noun phrases, to be the verbiage in verbal processes and mental processes, and on occasion to supply the more abstract processes by appearing indexically in suitable parts of the image. Comics may also *imply* processes, by illustrating participants in dispositions which reveal the process in the manner of an illusory triangle, and by an implicature which relies on our mapping of identities between participants illustrated in images separated by space. This 'transition' creation of action has by some prominent theorists been viewed as the only, or the primary, way in which comics handles the verb. I will argue that it is just one among a range, and I will propose a different terminology for describing this. I will draw on Halliday's model of process types (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), on Paul Werth's Text World Theory models of narrative structure (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007), and Grice's model of cooperative conversational implicature (Grice 1975) to build this theory. Here I will also explore the way in which drawing a verb/process commits the creator to (re)drawing other assertions about the participants, creating a simultaneous 'stack' of processes, which extends Kress & van Leeuwen's (and other multimodal theorists') model of process representation in images.

Secondly, comics engage a reader in interaction. Not only does this occur through conversation-like Gricean processes of implicature, which rely on co-operation between creator and reader, but also through the recruitment of game-like interactions with a text on the model of the moods of language as described by Halliday: supply of information, demand for action, and so on. Chapter 4 will outline a number of ways in which comics engage readers in interplay in the course of creating meaning. I will refer back to the

‘maxims of comics readership’ asserted in the prelude, and argue that comics engage in conversation-like exchanges of panels and **interpersonal interactions** with a reader. Taking a specifically Hallidayan model of interactive functions, I will describe and classify a range of ‘games comics play’: *spot-the-difference*, *where’s Wally?*, *spot-the-ball*, *join-the-dots*, *jigsaw*, *rebus*, and other textual constructs which invite assorted modes of reader interaction. This will supplement and to some extent replace Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) gaze-based approach to image interaction.

Further to this second metafunction, comics like all texts will encode opinion and judgement. The rendering style, using the resources of line, colour and techniques of reproduction, can signal emotional content and motion by indexical means and by symbolic connotation. Chapter 5 turns to this second aspect of Halliday’s **interpersonal** function of communication, exploring **modalisation** in comics and the inscription of the self into the text. This will discuss in more detail the nature of abstraction, an issue which was raised in the Prelude chapter, and will consider the *cline* between ‘abstract’ and its range of opposites, arguing that this forms a space of possibility in which the creator of comics narrative can mark the ‘reality status’ of sections of text, as well as personal involvement with and evaluation of what is represented. The rendering style of core abstract enframing elements such as the panel border and the word balloon can further indicate elements of the story that are imaginary, unreal, possible worlds. Both Text World Theory and Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) modality of the image, adapted from Halliday, will inform my discussion of this.

Thirdly, comics constitute a unified text, rather than being structured as parallel ‘tracks’ in the ways that have been identified by other theorists, notably McCloud. As implicit in the comments below about hypotaxis, I see language as contained *within* image (and vice versa) rather than running alongside it. Image and text co-operate in construing processes and their participants, hand off the work of textual structuring and world-building to each other, supply the resources the other lacks or chooses to omit in a complex array of specific interactions. These particular operations are currently under-theorised, grouped instead under general taxonomies of the degree of dominance of ‘word’ over ‘image’, as though ‘word’ sufficed as an account of language, or that language had been discussed in this role fully enough elsewhere and needed no more accounting for. Connecting the use of abstract line and the incorporation of verbal text in comics, Chapter 6 will consider the **textual** organisation of comics, and in particular,

the forms of **cohesion** that can tie the text together: image to image, word to word, and word to image. This will draw on Halliday and Hasan's detailed account of cohesion (1976), and specify the range of ways in which complex connectivity in the comics text can be described, given its multiple layers of structure and multiple modes. It will critique and extend other recent approaches to this feature of texts as applied to comics.

Furthermore, in an extension of the first, ideational metafunction, comics are a nested, hypotactic form: images (and words) are enframed within other images, and thereby made subordinate to them. By enframing images in this way, and asserting to them modal qualities through the qualities of the line used, they can attain depths of content that match those of other literature, and have a range of resources of meaning at their disposal that are unavailable to film. Comics have sometimes been viewed as being language-like in the sense of having a grammar based on a syntactic sequence, or a series of juxtapositions of images arrayed paratactically. I will argue that hypotaxis is key to comics form; that the text inside the image inside the text enframed in an image is a commonplace of comics, and that strict sequence is thereby of less importance than has been attached to it by theorists since Eisner (2008a). I will use Text World Theory to discuss hypotaxis and the related operations of world-building and function-advancing in the text. In Chapter 7 I will draw together a number of comments on the hypotactic, nested structure of comics, and argue against a conception of comics that treats it as 'sequential art'; stressing, over against this paratactic view, the systems of subordination at work in the comics text and recalling the simultaneity and stacking of many of its forms of communication outlined above. This leads us back to the **ideational** function of communication; in particular the **logical** component. This chapter will also recap the presumed conjunctions implicit in the reading of comics, and place comics in language theory at the level of discourse structure, arguing against Neil Cohn's attempts to describe a 'grammar' of comics panel sequences (2013b).

Finally, to move beyond Halliday's core structure for meaning-making, comics employ **metaphor**. To reach the communicative power of abstraction (in the signified, rather than in the signifier, though I will discuss both forms of abstraction), comics can exploit the reader's willingness to map the images they see onto each other and onto their own experience in order to communicate conceptual material that might seem unavailable to a mimetic pictorial form. The act of mapping in the reading of comics is fundamental; one can only begin to make sense of a comic as a text featuring persistent



entities engaging in action with each other once one takes the leap of perceiving multiple drawings as drawings of the same entity from multiple perspectives, existing in space and time. Fortunately for comics, once this leap is made, readers find it irresistible to attribute intention to these existents, seeing them as actants, and bringing into being narrative forms, tales of human-like agency to map to them, as we will see in Chapter Two. This mapping behaviour of the human brain is one of the core concepts of cognitive linguistics. I will briefly explore metaphor in Chapter 8, including the notion of ‘grammatical’ metaphor, as described by Halliday (2004), and how this might apply to comics; as well as considering the development of comics resources over time by processes of grammaticalisation. I would like to draw parallels between comics discourse and ‘magical realism’, in the incorporation of the abstract and the playful alongside representations of the real.

I will end with a **summary** of the arguments of the thesis, and in the **Appendices** outline routes for further research, including possible applications, the possibility of quantitative checking of the claims of the theory, and ways in which the specifics are open to innovation. I will ultimately appeal for the use of a theory particularly tailored to comics, and argue against discourses drawn uncritically from film theory or literature which have not adapted to the specifics of comics communication. Though I use the notion of the ‘utterance’ to frame my approach, the framework will specifically account for the ways in which the comparable functions of discourse are distinctively realised in the resources available to comics.

# 1

## Background: History, Theory and Methodology

Before pursuing the body of the argument in this thesis, I outline below some history to contextualise the work. I will offer a potted history of the medium, and of comics scholarship; then an account of some of the major comics theories, leading to a discussion of how linguistics has been used to explore and theorise comics so far. I will outline the Hallidayan linguistic framework I will be using, and some applications of that framework to visual texts which have already been pursued. This will lead to an overview of the approach I will be taking, and the path I will follow through the thesis.

## Literature Review

### Graphic Narrative(s) & Scholarship(s)

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My research, then, is in theorisations of graphic narrative, using models derived from linguistics to make sense of the resources creators of comics and graphic novels use to construct meanings. It is broadly a formalist project, aiming at a poetics of graphic narrative — but one that aims to be sensitive to the social, human, interactive nature of the text as a process, rather than as an inert, isolated object of study. The materials that tend to be the focus for comics scholars in the Anglophone tradition are North American comics and, recently, graphic novels, though my own theorisations are intended to hold in principle for Japanese *manga* and French *bande dessinée* too. Though there are different histories to these (see, e.g., A. Miller 2007; Kinsella 2000), they represent a recognisably similar mode of creation. For my project, it is the formal aspects of these works that bind them together, and I will rather loosely refer to ‘comics’ and ‘graphic narrative’ as interchangeable terms for this mode, though at times I will make distinctions such as graphic *novel*, as an extended book-length form per se, and occasionally to resources specific to Japanese or European forms. There is

significant ‘cross-talk’ between these traditions; they do not appear in isolation, nor in isolation from other media, markedly film. I will outline below a necessarily selective and partial short history of the medium as I will be using it, to give a sense of the textual grounding of the theory I will develop.

### ***A Very Short History of Graphic Narrative***

Traditions of visual storytelling trace their origins back in different ways. The French see as their progenitor Rodolphe Töpffer (Kunzle 2007), and this is a path that David Kunzle has traced too, through the political illustrations of early popular and topical print publications, through Hogarth’s narrative sequences, to the illustrated newspapers such as *Punch* published in Europe (Kunzle 1973; Smolderen 2014). The American story highlights as a crucial early text *The Yellow Kid*, and the large-scale colour comics pages promoted by William Randolph Hearst, the ‘funnies’, which achieved some sophistication in format and invention, as well as such qualities as growing and developing characters (as in *Gasoline Alley*), in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later theorisations of the form, notably Scott McCloud’s in *Understanding Comics* (1993), trace the tradition of visual storytelling back even further, to the Bayeux Tapestry and Trajan’s Column, and even to cave paintings.

While European comics developed into the large, hardcover album format, as exemplified by the work of Hergé in *Tintin* through the 30s and 40s, American comics took their own distinct and defining course, emerging from the pages of newspapers into distinct, small-scale magazines, mostly collecting short stories or ongoing continuity serials. The huge popularity of comics during this period meant a widening range of subject matters, taking in romance comics, detective mysteries, science fiction and later crime and horror stories. It is these latter genres that led to the schism that would set the nature of comics in America for the second half of the twentieth century. In true-crime titles like *Crime Does Not Pay* (see Lind and Simon 2011 for a sample), and horror-genre works like *Tales from the Crypt* (collected in Chabon 2015, etc.), material appealing to an ageing readership was becoming increasingly lurid and explicit, particularly in the details of criminal activities: stories of gangster criminal activity were re-told, always with the framing narrative (grinningly narrated by ‘Mr. Crime’ or ‘The Crypt-Keeper’) that the perpetrators would ultimately be captured by the

law or otherwise come to an unfortunate end, and with the constant reiteration of the claim in the title. But in his notorious publication *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), Fredric Wertham mounted a fierce attack on the comics publishing industry. He claimed that these works were being widely purchased and even more widely distributed and read among young children, who did not attend to or could not read the framing text, and were using the images (in some cases diagrammatic) to learn how to do criminal activity, as well as how to respond with violence to social threats, how to treat women, and to be inured to graphically violent images. Prominent publishers EC (Entertaining Comics) faced the Senate Subcommittee of Juvenile Delinquency to defend their publication of this material. The outcome was the construction of a Comics Code Authority (CCA), a code of conduct regulating the content permitted in comic books; comics that adhered to the code could wear their stamp of approval, and would thereby have access to the distribution systems that would allow the publishers to make money. If a publication did not sport the CCA badge, it would not be carried (Sabin 1993). This meant the end of ‘adult’ themes in comics; no real-world violence with visible effect, no sexual behaviour, no stories without a wholesome moral at the end. The mainstream of comics production became anodyne fantasy, an unrealistic tale of simple superheroism and the combat of good vs evil in unlikely costumed guises, which became the sort of material still associated with ‘comics’ today.

Whilst the widespread, mainstream distribution of comics material was limited to this conservative fare, there emerged among those who had grown up with the earlier material and had witnessed its neutering a desire for more ‘racy’ content. In the 1960s onward there emerged a ‘small press’ market, as simple printing methods became available to individuals, in which counter-culture ideas and contents were written and drawn about in a simple, often crude, black-and-white style, taking on a pre-code attitude and set of formal features — including the use of ‘funny animals’ drawn from the earlier newspaper comic strips, as well as their playful caricature and hatching, in opposition to the square-jawed, more realistic styles that had emerged in the now-censored action and adventure comics styles. Gilbert Shelton’s *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* (collected in Shelton 2008) existed in a caricatured real-world setting in search of drugs; Robert Crumb’s *Fritz the Cat* (see Robert Crumb 2013) exploited the hippy women around him for sex and a lazy, louche lifestyle. Crumb also explored his own darker psyche: increasingly eager to expose himself as a sexual predator, using racist

images and misogynistic caricature to portray himself as a charlatan, either explicitly autobiographical or through substitute characters like Fritz, Mr Natural, the mundane 'Schuman the Human', and others. This was an instance of the increasing usage of graphic narrative writing from this period to illustrate the personal, and often extreme and confessional, experiences of creators; a seminal work in this regard is Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (J. Green 2009), first published in 1972. As well as the personal, during this period there (re)emerges political and social satire, rather more sanitised for the mainstream, represented by *MAD* (edited by EC's William Gaines) and its imitators (Sabin 1993).

Arising here was formal invention, and engagement with real-world issues, and increasing sophistication in creative style. In the serialised adventure comics through the second world war, creators such as Will Eisner had also innovated in storytelling style, tackling both real-world problems in the service of the military (Eisner's *P.S.* training manuals) and personal stories of New York life, fictionalised or more explicitly autobiographical, leading to his *A Contract with God* (Eisner 1996). Eisner had been developing a melodramatic style in which to present extremes of emotion as well as a formal playfulness with titles and the exploitation of composition for storytelling effects in his ongoing work *The Spirit* (see Eisner 2005 for a selection). But *A Contract With God* was the first book to be marketed as a 'graphic novel' (Sabin 1993, 239), bound as a book-length work of literature, and thereby distinguished from the serialised magazine story that had characterised comic books up till then. *A Contract with God* was itself rather unlike a novel, being in fact four short stories illustrating different lives in a New York tenement. But the grounded, real-world setting, and the extremes of emotion represented there, including some incursions into explicitly sexual and violent material, marked this out as a new, more sophisticated and literary kind of experience. As a 'novel', it escaped the Code, which in any case would weaken and disappear at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Alongside this were two other developments. Art Spiegelman had been part of the 1960s underground movement, producing formally playful and painfully confessional comics, and bringing the work in contact with art movements and French approaches to comics, later founding *RAW* magazine with his wife Francoise Mouly (Sabin 1993, 80). Published in the '80s were the two parts of his seminal work *Maus* (Spiegelman 2003), which explored his father's experiences as a Jew during the '30s and '40s, representing

his experiences in Auschwitz using the visual metaphor (and the early-comics trope of anthropomorphised animals) of Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. Despite this apparently disrespectful treatment — Poles in particular were upset at Spiegelman for his extensions of this animal metaphor; they were represented as pigs (Spiegelman 2011, 125) — the work showed that comics, as a form, could tackle the most serious of subjects, and could be disassociated from the genres of teenage power fantasy such as superheroes which had dominated public understanding of the medium. The second volume of *Maus* acknowledged that recognition of this use of the medium by further incorporating Art's story as creator into the narrative itself (Spiegelman 2003, 201), and showed the sophisticated embedding of narrative comics could effect, an ability of the medium which chimed with the postmodern zeitgeist.

Also increasing in sophistication, self-awareness as a medium, and engagement with popular culture and history, were a pair of mainstream comics series later collected into trade paperback editions and marketed as 'graphic novels'. These emerged from the superhero tradition dominant in mainstream comics: Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), which reimagines Batman as a damaged, rightwing vigilante and pitches him against a government-sponsored Superman as well as gangs of wild, punky, drug-taking youths; and the superhero pastiche *Watchmen* (1986), by Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore, which likewise considers the inner life of superheroes, seeing them age (alongside a history of comic-book iconography) and placing them into events from history such as the Manhattan project and the Vietnam war. Though both works were originally serialised alongside other comics, when collected as paperback books (large-format and colour, unlike the black-and-white, bookshelf format of *Maus*), they showed the sort of overall narrative closure and unity traditionally expected of the novel.

Other such brands of graphic narrative emerged through the 1990s (Sabin 2001; Beaty 2006). The work of Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, taking southern US/South American experience as their material, showed sophistication of characterisation, uncensored looks at sexuality and human behaviour, and adopted magical realist modes of storytelling popular in literary fiction at the time (such as the work of Isabelle Allende or Marquez). These again were collections of stories from their self-published '80s periodical *Love and Rockets*, adopting 'underground' initial modes of distribution and creation (the use of black-and-white, for instance), and taking advantage of the taste for 'mature' content via their repackaging as 'graphic novel' format books, though the

material was ongoing narrative rather than a single cohesive plot. The Hernandez brothers acknowledge the history of comics in their background use of fantastical contexts, but reach back to the pre-code EC comics styles as well, and the brush styles of children's comics. From Japan, *manga* started to appear in translation, including part of *Barefoot Gen* (Nakazawa 1989), a story of Hiroshima, somewhat misleading published as a paperback novel, failing to acknowledge that the work was the first part of a very lengthy story series, and drawing on the idea made prominent by *Maus* that serious subjects could be addressed in comics form. There was a movement towards more sophisticated art and writing in mainstream comics production, more comics available from Japan (where a huge amount of adult — if lurid and fantastical — material was awaiting translation), and some translation and reprinting of European comics, via magazines such as *Heavy Metal* — though the subtle, literary material was subordinated to explicitly sexual and science-fictional content on the covers.

This short account so far will seem marked by the omission of female creators. As well as the women quietly working in comics production through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, arising from the underground traditions of the '60s were independent women's comics, often partaking in themes reflecting the second wave of feminism (Sabin 1993, 221–34). Work by women creators has picked up on real-world issues, offering vivid accounts of lived experience in memoir and biography, often traumatic, as Hillary Chute has shown in *Graphic Women* (2010). Aline Kominsky produced confessional work alongside partner Robert Crumb (collected as Robert Crumb and Crumb 2012), and later powerful life narrative emerged from Phoebe Gloeckner (see Gloeckner 2001; and, recently reissued, Gloeckner 2015) and Julie Doucet (diary comics as collected in Doucet 2007; and Doucet 2011). In France, Marjane Satrapi produced a powerful account of her Persian childhood in *Persepolis* (2007), which would later reach global fame; and Alison Bechdel's account of her own upbringing and its relation to her sexuality in *Fun Home* (2006) and *Are You My Mother?* (2012) is becoming graphic novel canon.

In more recent years, the novel format, the real-world content, and the confessional and autobiographical trends in comics production have been dominant among the small press and bookshop publishers. Craig Thompson's *Blankets* (2003) tells a story of first love set alongside a strict Christian upbringing and a history of early trauma; trauma and repression is at the heart of Charles Burns' *Black Hole* (2005) and Chris Ware's

*Jimmy Corrigan* (2001), too; and Canadian Chester Brown has produced both history/biography (C. Brown 2006) and confessional (C. Brown 2013) in recent years. This trend continues.

### **Towards comics scholarship**

Since the 1990s, comics scholarship, too, has been a gradually emerging field. Comics had been written about in the journals of popular culture and occasional special issues from the '70s (for instance, Faust and Shuman 1971; Abbott 1986), but no dedicated journals existed, nor a work of theory, in the Anglophone tradition. There were 'how-to-draw' books, however, from creators such as Burne Hogarth (Hogarth 1970) or the Marvel studios (Lee and Buscema 1986), and so some degree of thought about how comics function was occurring, at least amongst practitioners. In the next section of this chapter I offer an overview of some of the major theories that emerged of how comics work, starting with Will Eisner's influential entry into the how-to tradition, continuing through the central figure of Scott McCloud in the 1990s, and the more recent emergence in English of a Francophone tradition of more academic theorisation, dominated by Thierry Groensteen. I will then turn particularly to a recent focus on language, linguistics and comics, which will lead to an account of my own theoretical base, and the space carved out by this thesis.

### **Classic theories of comics**

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The earliest theorisations of comics emerged from practitioners trying to make sense of what they do. This was often treated in a playful and self-effacing way, as with Mort Walker's 1980 *The Lexicon of Comicana* (Walker 2000). This presents a range of playfully-coined words for the elements of comics semiotics ('symbols' for Walker, p.9), which include concrete elements of the face — for example, 'oculama', 'oralology' and 'protusilation' for representations of eyes, mouth and tongue respectively (14–15), and abstract elements indicating sound, motion, and emotion (28–30), such as 'plewds' (sweat beads emanating from a face to indicate distress), the 'waftarom' (lines indicating smell) or 'briffits' (clouds of dust or smoke to indicate rapid motion). Few of these coinages have been taken up more generally, though his



overarching term for symbols that emanate from an object, ‘emanata’ (28), has stuck. Implicit in Walker’s work is the framing of comics as a ‘language’ of sorts, though he is aware in his playfulness and neologisms that a lexicon is not actually feasible, and in places he quietly foreshadows some later arguments about the prehistory of comics, for instance in his instances of ‘early forms of fumetti’ (word balloons, borrowing from the Italian term), which give 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century examples across Europe without comment (40–1). As well as speech and thought balloons, he discusses ‘borders’ (42–5), though the word ‘panel’ for an enclosed individual image is not used, perhaps because his focus seems to be on the individual cartoon as much as the short strip – page layout gets no mention. Walker’s enterprise of naming the parts of comics, though not treated fully seriously, nonetheless points the way an academic approach might take. But the book is published as a satire, and presents an irreverent and deliberately impractical pastiche of ‘how-to-draw’ books (74–83), a cynical mock analysis of one of his own cartoons (86–7), and even a joke at the expense of the reader (93) wasting money on such a book. Comics creators and cartoonists have commonly taken a self-deprecating stance towards themselves, though this began to change with Will Eisner.

### **Eisner: Seeking respectability as ‘sequential art’**

From the practitioner tradition emerged Will Eisner’s early theorisations of comics: *Comics and Sequential Art* (Eisner 2008a), and its sequels *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* and *Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative* (Eisner 2008c; 2008b). He illustrates his discussion largely with his own drawings (later additions supplement this with examples from others’), and so his own *oeuvre* influences his theory.

### ***Comics and Sequential Art***

In 1985 creator Will Eisner published the first ‘serious’ account of how comics work as a longer-form narrative. Eisner wants to claim comics as a ‘valid form of reading’ (Eisner 2008a, 1). He brings up themes that will resonate through comics theorisation: a ‘grammar’ of sequential art (a term he coins), a comparison to language, and a ‘cross-breeding’ of word and image (2). He claims both that one can treat text as an image — and it often appears in concretised form in his work, represented as

brickwork or dripping with liquid — and also argues that posture works like calligraphy or hieroglyphics. (8–9) Whilst gesture and posture is certainly meaningful, it is dubious to claim that it functions like a writing system. As Nelson Goodman (1976) points out, there are fundamental differences between a ‘notational’ communicative code like language, where items are discrete and sequenced to accrete meaning, and ‘replete’ codes like drawing, where each indivisible feature is potentially meaningful: images are ‘dense’ with meaning in fact and cannot be reduced to a code in this way. Eisner’s use of the idea is to appeal to comics’ functional ability: that one can tell a story with images alone.

He is concerned with the management of the reader’s experience: governing the ‘timing’ of the images, which is managed in large part through the organisation of panel frames. The panel is a ‘unit of time’, and while he acknowledges that the contents will govern the perceived time (26), he later argues that the shape of the panel also does this (30). The idea that time is ‘frozen’ in a panel is introduced on page 40, where he also claims that the purpose of panels is to ‘control the reader’s attention’: “The most important obstacle to surmount is the tendency of the reader’s eye to wander”. Yet he expects a great deal of work from the reader: to ‘fill in’ action (109) and even to perceive a complete body not depicted in a frame (43). He recognises codes in the panel borders, spoken of in scare-quotes as a “language”; this seems unusual for a creator who often does not employ borders at all — for him, “The non-frame speaks to unlimited space. It has the effect of encompassing unseen but acknowledged background” (44). Eisner’s comment on this tactic in action, in his own work which richly illustrates the book, is simple: “An open panel that narrates space, time and location” (58). The ultimate frame, treated in the same extensive chapter, is the page — “Pages are the constant in comic book narration” (65) — and the organisation of panels within this comes in for discussion; though Eisner also considers the internal composition of the panel (90), particularly drawing attention to the way in which a frame establishes a point of view (90–3) but also, later, determines a central ‘focal point’ (163–4).

Having been an innovator with a belief in the expressive power of the form and a desire to separate it from the content that had been associated with it since the creation of the CCA, Eisner sought to characterise the modes by which comics could communicate emotion through the representations of the body and face, ‘Expressive Anatomy’ (103). He presents ‘dictionaries’ of such gestures, as if these are lexical

items. In a move familiar in the search for legitimization of comics, he uses culturally high-value material (the plays of Shakespeare), illustrating *Hamlet on a Rooftop* (115–124), but placing it in contemporary context (hippy clothing, a New York roovescape), and somewhat heavy-handedly tracking and externalising the sequence of emotions experienced by Hamlet during his famous ‘To be or not to be’ speech. This use of caricature and highly expressive exaggerated figures is central to his work and to his theorisation of comics: the ability of figure drawing to capture emotional states offers Eisner’s comics the access to interiority available to the novel.

### ***Expressive Anatomy and Graphic Storytelling***

The material was later expanded into the posthumously-published *Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative* (Eisner 2008b), which seems to take its cue from Burne Hogarth’s how-to books (e.g., Hogarth 1990), but with a focus on two types of human action: ‘reflex’ and ‘emotional’ (36), to which he also adds ‘intelligent’. The book is dominated by exemplar depictions of human figures in these communicative postures: classified for example with abstract nouns for emotions (57–80) or other categories of social interaction. This material, given its late appearance in his canon and the practical bent of its tone, has been downplayed in discussions of his theory; but it reflects a concern with the human and the communicative in comics, the representation of the resources of the human body, which do seem central. The mapping to language as a lexicon or dictionary of such forms is less convincing, since the range of possible variations seems infinitely divisible and extensible, as proposed by Goodman (1976): this is not a code from which one merely selects and sequences, though it is a resource from which one may adapt and improvise.

The first and most influential follow-up to *Comics and Sequential Art* was 1996’s *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (Eisner 2008c), which turns its claim for comics from readership to storytelling, a practice which ‘lies deep in the social behaviour of human groups’. Here Eisner discusses the function of story and structures of narratives in a medium-independent way, though supporting his prose with his own comics narration (as McCloud had recently innovated at the time of publishing). Notions of stereotype and symbolism are at the heart of his account, and again he proceeds by presenting exemplars: resources on which the budding storyteller might draw, offers for the creator to adapt and be inspired by. The language is second-person:

“To whom are you telling your story?” (47) and the tips are full of insight and wisdom — he briefly alludes to a ‘contract’ with the reader (49), a notion I will expand upon and flesh out in this thesis — though this does not add up to a systematic theory. In the middle section of the books he offers specific advice about frames and timing, dialogue and lettering, drawn from his earlier work, but moves also in later chapters to more general challenges of coming up with ideas, and a general discussion on the influences between comics and film: he distinguishes comics as ‘readerly’, 71–3, emphasising the work a reader must engage in to realise the text.

### **McCloud: Comics theory as comics**

Eisner is acknowledged as an innovator, with these early attempts to treat comics seriously as a reading and writing medium, but his models were how-to-draw manuals and he writes very much as a creator to other creators, offering examples and tips based on his own experience. Raising the bar with more research behind it, and committing to fully representing his theory in comics form (no doubt a key to its great success), is the work of Scott McCloud.

### ***Understanding Comics***

Still the most influential work of comics theory, Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993) took a more thoroughgoing and historical approach to comics form, tracing it back to distant historical origins, and drawing on gestalt psychology to tackle a misconception about comics — that it is more facile than literature because all is given to you in the drawings — by proposing that the key to comics is *closure*: the mental operation that takes place between every panel, in the space he calls the *gutter*, whereby what has been omitted is ‘filled in’ by the reader. This involvement of the reader in fleshing out the content of the work, a sort of reader-reception approach (see Fish 1976; Iser 1978), enables McCloud to reclaim for comics a creative, literary respectability built into their very form, in ways that chime with contemporary literary preferences prioritising the interpretative work of the reader at the expense of the ‘death of the author’. As noted in the Introduction, Eisner had pre-empted this with the idea that readers did a sort of ‘tweening’ between frames, as an animator does, when characters engage in expressive action; but McCloud extends this to incorporate a range

of types of interpretation, including, when no relationship is apparent between panel pairs, an ‘alchemy’ of comics where a free play of interpretation is enabled.

McCloud further picks up on Eisner (2008a) in the definition of comics as ‘sequential art’ — ruling out the single-panel strip with the idea that *sequence* is essential and also making one of a number of intellectual land-grabs with the use of *art*, which Eisner had not specifically defended. This tilts comics towards the visual, and many have pointed out the important — and for some, like R.C. Harvey (1996), definitional — role of words in the work of comics, so McCloud progressively extends this phrase to arrive at the definition: *Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence* (McCloud 1993, 9). On this definition, he claims for comics a connection to ancient works, to hieroglyphics, to the Bayeux tapestry, to medieval woodcuts and to William Hogarth, and thence into the history outlined above (10–19). This polemic appeal takes comics beyond simply the ‘readerly’ status which Eisner claimed for them (Eisner 2008a, 1), to an historically-grounded, culturally significant and above all flexible medium, capable of a full spectrum of communication genres (McCloud 1993, 22). McCloud seeks to extract comics from their social and cultural history, with the stigmas attached to traditions of content that have arisen from that history, and by a formal turn, to recuperate them. This has proven a successful move, arguably influential in opening up the field of comics scholarship, to which we will return below.

Sequence and closure, then, meet in the ‘gutter’ found between juxtaposed panels, which McCloud sanctifies as the home of the ‘life-blood’ of comics, where the ‘invisible art’ of his subtitle happens. This is the centre of McCloud’s rhetorical claim: that the work of comics happens not in the visual, what is depicted, but the invisible, what is inferred. This is realised in his account of ‘transitions’ between panels, which he classifies in six ways, based on narrative grounds: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and the non-sequitur. These ‘transitions’ are generated when panels are brought into juxtaposition, crucially even in the last condition, where the contents are unrelated (73). He makes use of these to classify different traditions of comics creation, markedly the Japanese tradition, which shows much more frequent use of moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect approaches. I will argue below that there are significant difficulties with this system. It takes the panel to be the basic unit, and its classifications rely on the depiction of recognisable

characters; it does not cope well with unpanelled sequences, splash pages, or pairs of panels more widely distributed. But the fundamental idea that readers work to infer material beyond what is depicted is significant: the question it raises and leaves not fully answered is, how is this done? I will return to this later, offering a more concrete account of the ‘silent, secret contract between creator and audience’ (69) or the ‘alchemy at work in the space between panels’ (73).

McCloud’s theory also proposes a ‘continuum’ between word and image, where the text takes on ‘graphical’ qualities and the image simplifies to an ‘iconic’ mode, enabled by the psychology of pareidolia (the human tendency to see faces in even simple objects). This is a ‘closure’ that is not predicated on inference of change between separated images, but on gestalt perception, assumptions of wholeness despite occlusion of the frame or objects within it. He proposes that the more simple, the more abstract the image is, the more a reader may personally invest in it, perceiving it as subject rather than object (36). The principle is extended into the abstract world of the word, in an impressive diagram of comics styles (52–3). However, this does not take quite seriously Nelson Goodman’s distinction between notational and non-notational systems (Goodman 1976); nor does it use the grounding of C.S. Peirce’s symbol-icon-index classification of signification (Peirce 2011), using those terms in idiosyncratic ways, as McCloud also does with a distinction between ‘perception’ of words vs ‘reception’ of images (McCloud 1993, 49). McCloud’s theories are not entirely rigorous: eclectic in their sources, outside the mainstream of scholarship (McCloud too is a creator rather than a scholar), they are provocative, polemic, inspirational, but begging for further work.

As regards the role of language, McCloud both employs the notion as a metaphor, and offers a broad taxonomic classification of relationships between image and language. He presents his account of pictorial and iconic codes as the ‘vocabulary of comics’ (24) and later proposes that “if visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar” (67). He does not pursue a closer mapping than this, though he comments for example that certain conventionalised codes approach ‘the abstract status of linguistic symbols’; he follows Eisner (2008a, 8–9) to some degree in the connection between pictograms and ‘comics language’ (McCloud 1993, 131). Largely, however, he treats language and image as different codes, on the metaphor of ‘soundtrack’, classifying relationships between the two taking the panel as the fundamental unit:

word-specific and picture-specific or duo-specific, then additive, parallel and montage (composed-in) relationships, and finally ‘inter-dependent’ (153–5) as ‘the most common type’ of relationship. These are characterised in general terms, though the particular functions of specific words or of images within the panel are not specified. The possibility that detailed specific work might be done within regions of the image is effaced under a more generalised continuum and categorisation. Later in this thesis, in Chapter 6, I will propose a more detailed account of specific deictic and cohesive resources of comics, which will aim to flesh out this account.

### ***Reinventing Comics and Making Comics***

Whilst *Understanding Comics* remains a central text for comics theory, McCloud produced two follow-ups. *Reinventing Comics* (McCloud 2000) is little cited, being a thematic exploration of twelve ‘revolutions’ McCloud perceived as being in progress at the time of writing. These incorporated the literature/art debate in discussions of comics; industrial, institutional and social issues; and the emerging challenges and opportunities presented by the rise of the internet and digital production and distribution. These were timely but have dated as technology and the industry has changed; McCloud’s theory is not greatly developed further here, so I will move on.

*Making Comics* (McCloud 2006), like Eisner’s later work, changes focus toward the creator, and is tilted more as a how-to book. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud had described a six-step path towards creation (McCloud 1993, 170): idea/purpose–form–idiom–structure–craft–surface. Here in *Making Comics*, he specifies five choices for the creator to make: of Moment, Frame, Image, Word and Flow. McCloud acknowledges (McCloud 2006, 38) that this is not a strict order, unlike the six-step path; but when he offers an example putting into effect this model, he starts with character design (39) which is not part of his list of choices. He abandons the language of comics to describe what he is doing in favour of film vocabulary (40), and interestingly does not use his own ‘transitions’ taxonomy. Even when he does not use the technical vocabulary of film, he relies on film tropes: 180° rule, shot-reverse shot, the vignetting of the binoculars (41). (On that page he uses ‘camera’; ‘pulling back’, ‘long shot’, ‘middle shot’ and ‘close-ups’ are used on pages 43–44.) In a chapter on ‘world-building’, he seems to address some of the weaknesses in his earlier work identified by Dylan Horrocks (2001), who emphasises the creation of rich ‘text worlds’ as an under-

explored and crucial feature of comics; but again, McCloud uses the terminology of film to assert how comics build their worlds: on one page (McCloud 2006, 160) he uses 'establishing shot', 'long-shot', 'zooming in', 'medium shots', and 'close-up' — though this is coupled with a recognition that, for example, a tree may be rendered more loosely in some panels than others, since readers will assume identity between the drawings and carry over the detail. But this is not made explicit.

In many ways, McCloud's work is still the most central comics theorisation, and no detailed alternative account has yet been produced in comics form. It is accessible and comprehensive — though it is not entirely scholarly, and not framed in a consistent grounding of theory, rather being eclectic in its sources. For much of the time in which McCloud's seminal work was being developed, comics scholarship essentially did not exist.

### **Journals dedicated specifically to comics scholarship**

Journals dedicated specifically to comics scholarship have begun to emerge in the past couple of decades (Steirer 2011). In America, *The Comics Journal* (first published 1977) has been a long-running source of criticism, interviews and reviews, though it is not peer-reviewed. *IJOCA* (the *International Journal of Comic Art*) is, and has been the longest-running academic journal of US descent (since 1999). From the UK, with some crossover with the US, further comics studies journals have emerged: *ImageText* (from 2004); *European Comic Art* (2008); *Studies in Comics* and the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (both 2010); and from 2013, the online open access journal *The Comics Grid*. As a scholarship, the field is still in its infancy, and has yet to form into 'schools', though some distinct approaches are emerging (see Heer and Worcester 2009; M. J. Smith and Duncan 2011; Kukkonen 2013, 125–38), including the linguistic approaches I will discuss in later sections. It is radically interdisciplinary, which is to say that comics scholars may well not know where to find themselves within an institution: mostly in the literature departments, perhaps, and approaching comics though the methods familiar to literary studies — feminist readings, perhaps psychoanalysis, semiology and a range of cultural studies readings focusing on the representations of groups and social situations. There is some application and adaptation of narratology to comics (e.g., Lefèvre 2000; Kukkonen 2011), and some movement towards a poetics (e.g., Uchmanowicz 2009; Bukatman 2012), though often works are



read and interpreted with adopted terminologies from film (such as shot, angle, cut and so on), as we have seen even in McCloud's work, and literature (character, plot, theme, dialogue and the like), with little specificity about the interactions of drawing *per se* and language in its situation within an image. From McCloud (1993) onward, the wordings in a comics are commonly treated as a 'track', by covert analogy with the mechanics of film, alongside the 'track' of the image; their agreement or contrast may be commented upon in general terms.

### **French scholarship**

More recently, attention has been turned amongst English-speaking scholars in this emerging tradition to the better-established continental body of work. French scholarship has a longer tradition, and one of more direct debate and challenge among scholars (see A. Miller and Beaty 2014). The French *bande dessinée* has not suffered directly from the restrictions enforced by the self-regulatory Comics Code Authority in America, and the glossy 'album' format of medium-length, hardback, full-colour work that became established at the heart of French visual narrative promoted cohesive, high-quality work in a range of genres, including historical fiction and more 'literary' work alongside the fantasy and children's products that continue to thrive (see, e.g., A. Miller 2007; Beaty 2006 for an overview.). There is a continuum of graphic narrative forms available for French readers, to take them from humorous adventure in childhood through to more sophisticated and/or mature stories for adults, whether this is just increasingly explicit adventuring or more anchored and complex real-world narratives. This in turn has meant that theorising about the material has for longer been seen as respectable; and it is only with recent translation of the work of Thierry Groensteen, discussed briefly below, and collections such as *The French Comics Theory Reader* (A. Miller and Beaty 2014), that these ideas and debates are beginning to enter Anglophone theory.

### ***Groensteen's 'system of comics'***

Gaining most attention amongst Anglophone theorists is Thierry Groensteen, in whose 1999 *Système de la bande dessinée*, translated as *The System of Comics* (2009), an alternative overarching account of comics form is described. Groensteen's work

emerges from academic traditions, and explicitly locates itself in a history of these traditions, as a ‘semiology’ of comics (Groensteen 2009, 1–3). Neither creator-led, illustrated with his own work, nor styled to any degree as a ‘how-to’, *The System of Comics* uses examples from prominent European creators, rather than American or Japanese styles, which he addresses in his more recent follow-up, published in English as *Comics and Narration* (Groensteen 2013), and rests on academic underpinnings including full annotations and indexing.

Groensteen’s key ideas are those of ‘iconic solidarity’, which seems to mean the co-reliance of comics images on other images in the text, and ‘arthrology’, the creation of threads of connected images throughout the text, whether nearby (on the same page) — ‘restricted arthrology’ — or more radically separated ‘general arthrology’, where images may echo and recur across a separation of many pages (a possibility McCloud, for instance, is less clear about, since his notion of relations between images focuses on adjacency). Groensteen and other French scholars are interested in the possibilities of compositional division of the page into panel layouts (the ‘spatio-topia’); the process of so dividing the page and its content is seen as key to comics (Groensteen 2009, 21), and the idea of the ‘breakdown’ is becoming current in Anglophone discussions.

Distinctions are made between regular and ‘rhetorical’ formats (where the panels are variously sized to fit the content, rather than the content fitted into panels of identical size, for instance), and arguments mounted about how best to classify the various formats on offer (91–102). The value of the page and double-page layout is considered (30–9), and the frame itself discussed in detail, identified as the site of a number of comics’ functions: enacting ‘closure’, separating, creating ‘rhythm’, structuring, an ‘expressive’ function, and a ‘readerly’ function. All of these are interesting and the material is treated thoroughly and systematically, appealing to analogy from film and music, and gathering together an eclectic range of functions to describe the frame (39–57) — derived, it seems, from induction rather than fitting to a prior framework. For Groensteen, the ‘strip’ or ‘tier’ is also proposed as integral (57–67), influenced perhaps by the ‘*bandes*’ integral to the French name for graphic narrative, and perhaps by the histories and typical traditions of layouts found in French-language albums. The word balloon is discussed separately but comparably as an ‘additional space’ (67–77), and treated again to a taxonomic organisation (77–9).

In his chapter on ‘restrained arthrology’, Groensteen discusses the local relationships between images and, later, words. His materials for these discussions are not those of linguistics but of narratology and semiology, including Genette (1983) and Barthes (1993), for instance (Groensteen 2009, 128–29). He later offers a ‘translation’ of a comics sequence into linguistic terms (134–141), following his notion that comics are an ‘utterable’; this means that he uses a sentence to capture what is going on in a panel, and discusses how this experiment reveals the relationships between word and image in the text. That selection of one sentence to capture the text is interesting; it generates an utterance *from* the text, and presents this as translation *of* the text. It is my argument that a comics drawing may be treated *as* an utterance, and the ‘reading’ that we can generate from it can only ‘peel off’ a certain, probably a more-salient, layer of a multiple and simultaneous communicative act. He ends with a declaration of the centrality of what he calls ‘narrative drawing’ to comics (161–2).

This notion of a multifunctional ‘narrative drawing’ — more broadly, drawing as a speaking act — is what I wish to pursue in this thesis, with the framework of an appropriate linguistic theory in support.

### **Linguistic approaches to comics**

Linguistic frameworks, as opposed to the general semiology employed by Groensteen, and the loose adoption of concepts from film and narrative or literary theory as pursued by many writers on comics, have recently come into focus as a ‘turn’ in comics scholarship, about which there is some heated debate (See the discussion in Cohn 2014; and reviews by Davies et al. 2014 in *Studies in Comics* 5.1). Collections with titles such as *The Language of Comics* (Varnum and Gibbons 2007) might contain very few actual references to either language or linguistic theory, utilising instead literary and cinematic tropes as well as some acquired orthodoxies from Eisner and McCloud (panel, layout, gutter). Some recent work focuses on the verbal language in comics (Bramlett 2012), downplaying the notion of comics *as* language and applying linguistic methodologies to the language found *in* comics. Authors such as Neil Cohn take linguistics as a scientific model that will offer grounded ‘truths’ about how comics function (Cohn 2014). Others argue that comics are structured quite *unlike* language, though linguistic relationships and mappings may prove fruitful lines of research (Miodrag 2013). I will discuss three approaches below, including the early work of

Mario Saraceni (2000; 2003), from which I will pick up certain key threads in this thesis; of Cohn (2013b), drawing attention to some assumptions underpinning his work; and the intervention of Miodrag (2013) in the debate about language and comics. I will then clarify my own approach.

### ***Saraceni's 'Language of Comics'***

In *The Language of Comics* (2003), Mario Saraceni presents material from his thesis (2000) in simplified form in an A-Level textbook, part of the Intertext series which explores a range of text types with classroom exercises for elementary language/literature analysis.

Saraceni's work takes a number of systemic-functional concepts, and here as in his thesis uses them to account for meaning-making in a way that is compatible with McCloud's broad notion of transitions (1993), anchoring that concept in a system of 'relatedness' which builds on Halliday and Hasan's discussion of cohesion (1976). Chapter two (Saraceni 2003, 13–33) grounds his approach in the Peircean distinction between icon, symbol and index, though he sets aside the possibilities offered by the indexical nature of the sign, though appealing to it later when discussing the embodied nature of handwriting (21). He outlines a continuum between word and image, and discusses levels of abstraction, comparably to McCloud though without explicitly citing him, nor using 'abstraction' as a term, preferring 'stylised'.

Saraceni's chapter three contains his version of a Hallidayan approach to text/discourse structure, using 'cohesion' (and 'coherence') and the given-new distinction (interestingly allying this to patterns of repetition). Unlike in his thesis, Saraceni does not cite Halliday here; and he does not ground this in a model of the other elements of the textual, interpersonal or ideational metafunctions, either here or in the thesis. He points out that cohesion can happen across a distant range of panels through the text, though he does not here explicitly criticise or mention McCloud's juxtaposition taxonomy or Groensteen's braiding and arthrology (which would likely not have been available to him). Panelisation is taken to be basic to comics, and he takes as given the roles of panel, gutter, balloon and caption (7–11).

In his chapter four he discusses viewpoint, broadly conceived as direct-indirect speech and thought with some discussion of the intrusion of narrative voice, comparing the caption to the voice-over in film, for example (63). Perspective and pictorial

focalisation is discussed in chapter five, though this doesn't quite integrate its narratological categories; reference is made to story and plot (74), but this segues into a comparison of two of Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (2006), abandoning the distinction for a return to focalisation.

Saraceni leaves somewhat open here his theory of cohesion — the examples are image only, and he doesn't make the links between words and images or fully flesh out the idea of collaboration he outlines here. His discussion of voice does not attempt to tackle the possibility of 'visual voice' — including the use of images in word and thought balloons.

Neil Cohn's review of this text (2007) critiques it as lacking almost all academic armature, unsurprisingly given the focus of the series in which it appears. But Cohn also dismisses the core systemic-functional framework in which Saraceni's thinking occurs, which I will argue is fruitful. Saraceni's research interests seem to have moved on from comics, though a portion of his thesis was recently republished in Cohn's own collection *The Visual Narrative Reader* (2016). This elaborates on the cohesive notion of 'relatedness', and I discuss it in some detail in Chapter 6 on cohesion in comics below.

### ***Cohn's 'Visual Language'***

For his part, Cohn takes a different theory base for his account of a linguistics of comics. He uses methods from psychology and neuroscience to support with evidence what he sees as a 'visual language of comics' to be described on a Chomskyan model, replete with tree-structure diagrams for a syntax of panels. He has written extensively around this topic, and his ideas are still developing; here I will focus on the most complete published version to date, presented in *The Visual Language of Comics* (Cohn 2013b).

Here he argues not that 'comics are a language', but that there is an underlying *visual* language which he aims to account for, seeking to separate the situated, cultural product 'comics' from the visual 'system of communication' on which they are built (1–2). This is also distinct from the verbal language used in comics, which Cohn here places outside his sphere of concern. His focus is on this language as a *cognitive* construct, rather than a social one (3). This places him in a particular branch of linguistics: this premise would be rejected by Halliday and other sociolinguistic

thinkers, for whom language is a social phenomenon, to be derived from corpora of language very much available ‘out in the world’ (see Halliday 1978; Hodge and Kress 1988).

Cohn counters two challenges to the notion of a ‘visual language’. First, he tackles the notion (somewhat outdated, but as Cohn argues, still in some fields current) that language must be arbitrary, derived from Saussure (Cohn 2013b, 17–20). He uses C.S. Peirce’s account of signs motivated by resemblance and physical connection to the world to counter this view, and turns to the second challenge: that there can be no systematic *lexicon* of panels (21): panels are too variable to be thus captured. This he attempts to tackle by appealing to the notion of ‘synthetic’ languages, in which ‘words’ can accrete morphemes and operate as extensively as sentences. This seems a less successful challenge: it leaves in place the notion that panels might map in comics to words/lexemes, and faces the further difficulty that morphemes too are a finite resource in a language, similarly selected from a more or less fixed system and governed by a describable grammar. Moreover, when Cohn comes to discuss morphology, in a chapter which nonetheless proceeds under the title of a ‘visual lexicon’, the ‘morphemes’ he describes attach to characters and images *within* the panels, rather than to the bordering frame or to the panel as a whole. Following Goodman (1976), I would wish to argue that panels are too ‘dense’ to be analysed into a ‘notational’ system of morphology: each element of any line constituting the panel and its contents is potentially meaningful.

There are interesting elements to this mapping, however. Something useful is captured in a distinction between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ classes (Cohn 2013b, 24–48), those images which are drawn freely versus those drawn from a set of rarely-varying tropes; though these perhaps occur on a continuum in comics, rather than as clearly separate items. (A process of ‘grammaticalisation’ is likely to be identifiable, in my view, as an image or convention arises as first a concrete, representational rendering, and later as an abstract or metaphorical indication of a concept. I discuss this idea further in Chapter 8 below.) Cohn plausibly describes the ‘emanata’ collected by Mort Walker as examples of ‘closed class’ items, and proposes both grammars of usage (subject to ‘violation’) and experiments in deletion, suppletion and other variations intended to test the ‘grammaticality’ of possible usages. These variations seem to me to create different effects than do ungrammatical sentences; they may be ‘bad style’ but

are nonetheless generative of meaning, unlike nonsense sequences such as ‘cat the the mat on sat’ in English.

It is in his section on ‘Narrative Structure’ (Cohn 2013b, 65–89) that he proposes a ‘syntax’ of panels to go with his morphology, using Chomskyan tree diagrams. This is intended to reveal a hierarchical structure to comics narrative, rather than mere sequence; though unlike transformative/generative grammars of language, no generative rules are offered to produce his categories and hierarchies. In his examples, he freely constructs sequences of ‘initials’ made of subordinated ‘initials’, and classifies ‘initial-peak’ sequences as constitutive of ‘initial’ and ‘peak’ at the level above in different places. The fundamental insights are powerful: that comics, like language, contains recursive, nested structures; and that different orderings of panels will create different readings. But it is troubling that the panel is still here treated at the level of a ‘word’ (or perhaps a ‘phrase’) in a sequence organised by a ‘syntax’ on the model of the structures with which language realises meanings. It is not entirely convincing that these are the right levels on which one might ‘map’ language to comics communication; Saraceni (2000), for instance, maps the panel to the *sentence* (somewhat more plausibly). That still suggests that it is structured with an internal syntax to be discovered, and it seems that comics image complexes are not so rule-governed.

Cohn also uses tree structure diagrams to account for the reading path taken through various organisations of panels, based on tests done with ‘readers’ reporting their likely path through arrays of empty frames (to control for bias that might be produced by content). This leads to a plausible model, though if syntax operates in this way, can one have a dual syntax which also operates in the other way, organised in ‘initials’ and ‘peaks’? Renaud Chavanne (2010) has also introduced further challenges to the use of this model: it uses a visual structure to account for a visual structure, and cannot be ‘spoken’, only seen; so on Chavanne’s view it is not useful to scholars in speaking or writing about layouts. This astute requirement — that a model of comics should be usable and useful to scholars and critics — is a significant one. Discourse around comics is social, and at times Cohn’s scientific approach — he tests his theories in a range of ways in his chapter six — leads to a narrow focus on the ‘mind/brain’, rather than the communicative acts that occur between human beings in social space. He argues for a ‘principle of equivalence’ (Cohn 2013b, 195): “that the mind/brain treats all expressive capacities in similar ways”, which underlies his mapping of linguistic units

and categories onto his ‘visual language’, on the basis of the coupling of both in cognitive abilities. But this perspective is not the only one available, and this mapping is contestable not only in detail but in principle.

### ***Miodrag’s critique of languages of comics***

Hannah Miodrag (2013) has written extensively about the problems inherent in the mapping of comics to linguistics, notably the difficulty of identifying minimal units of comics which might serve as its lexis or morphology, upon which a syntax could be determined. She denies that Cohn can find minimal units on which to build his grammar; Cohn in turn claims that Miodrag’s conception of linguistics is based in a dated, Saussurian model that is prevalent among scholars with a literary background, for whom this early linguist at the root of literary structuralism is their only contact point with linguistics as a discipline (Cohn 2013c).

Her foundation texts are indeed structuralist, though she makes some solid use of them, exploring the distinction between *langue* and *parole* introduced by Saussure and arguing for the inventiveness of comics (which she opposes to the selectiveness of linguistic structures) in that each instance may generate its own ‘*langue* of the text’ (Miodrag 2013, 176), improvising new rules against which the content is to be read, over against Cohn’s notion that comics are a *parole* versus the *langue* of ‘visual language’ (42). She denies the possibility of a visual *langue*, suggesting that “there proves to be something of a difficulty in describing, in any useful level of detail, a semiotic model that applies to both signifying systems equally.” (195) It is this sort of model that I aim to propose in the thesis, pitching it at a *functional* level.

Miodrag has encountered the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) based in Hallidayan systemic-functional models (which I will discuss in detail below), but finds them also guilty of using overly rigid external models to impose on visual communication in comics. Since her argument is based on a) the impossibility of isolating minimal units in comics, b) the motivated nature of images as opposed to the Saussurean arbitrary sign, and c) the operation of an external determinate system, a *langue*, which guides and pre-exists its usage in enabling selection from a lexicon of signs to create *parole*, she underplays the functional, pragmatic features of language. She rejects the idea of a lexicon and a syntax of comics (as would I) but passes over possible mappings of language and comics as systems of meaning-making negotiated



socially. This would allow for the creativity she sees in comics discourse, but without abandoning any structure external to an individual text.

## Methodology

### Functional Linguistic Approaches to Visual Forms

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In this section I will outline how M.A.K. Halliday's functional linguistics has been used as a framework for describing and explaining visual art forms, including those which incorporate both text/wordings and images/visual forms. This will lay the groundwork for my own development of the framework and the adaptation to graphic narrative presented in this thesis.

#### Halliday's model

It is Halliday's conception of language that has most often been used to discuss the visual in linguistic terms, since this is a model that attends to the functions and usage of linguistic forms, and is open to variability in realisations of these functions in different languages (such as English vs. Chinese in Halliday 2005b), including the protolanguage of young children (see Halliday 2004), whilst also detailing with some specificity the particular kinds of work such languages must do, and allowing for a detailed account of the realisations of these communicative functions as separate from the governing system.

As we have seen, Halliday treats languages as a *social* semiotic (Halliday 1978): a set of agreed resources and practices by the use of which human beings can exchange meanings with each other. Meanings are improvised in their context by the participants in each instance of use; the systems of choice in which participants partake are contingent and flexible sources of interaction, amenable to description but also subject to change over time. They develop, they are constrained by mode and by the physical materials humans have to work with (human bodies and environments and situation in space and time), but a 'lexicogrammar' can be described for any given language which, in functional terms, will characterise a) what language does (similar across languages

and modes) and b) how it *realises* those functions (distinct for each language, mode, dialect, depending on one's desired level of 'delicacy of description').

This basis has been used by Kress and van Leeuwen to characterise the multimodal features of language as used in print media, advertising and so on, in their *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006); and by Michael O'Toole, in *The Language of Displayed Art* (2010), to offer commentators a way to characterise the operation of gallery art, sculpture and architecture, alternative to the discourses of art history and technical descriptions of mediums and methods. In both cases, the approach is to adopt Halliday's high-level descriptions of the functions of language, and adapt the specific realisations to be appropriate to the medium in question. In this way, the compatibility and interaction of the functions of the different modes can be made available for discussion, rather than features being isolated into different fields of enquiry. I will adopt a similar approach in this thesis.

I will discuss their work in detail, and then give an overview of the applications of Hallidayan structures to illustrated narratives. So far the visual narrative texts selected for study have been children's illustrated storybooks, rather than graphic narrative. As texts that depend to some extent on the visual as well as the verbal to communicate meaning, these bear some similarity to graphic narratives, though the audience, the genres of stories told, and the specific norms of the texts are quite different. Since these have been described and discussed in some detail, I will give a brief account of the uses to which Hallidayan approaches to these multimodal narratives have been put, before introducing and outlining my own application of this approach to comics and graphic novels, to which it has not yet been fully applied.

### ***O'Toole's application to visual arts***

Though an earlier version of Kress and van Leeuwen's *Reading Images* had been published by Deakin University Press in 1990, Michael O'Toole's *The Language of Displayed Art* predates the fuller 1996 version by a couple of years as a full-fledged application of Halliday's model of meaning-making to a range of visual arts (O'Toole 2010, 193).

O'Toole maps Halliday's tripartite metafunctional model of language (ideational, interpersonal and textual) to the three arts of displayed gallery art, sculpture, and architecture, adapting his terminology according to the art form in question. He presents

his argument as a means for non-experts in each field to be enabled to discuss the meanings that the visual arts carry for onlookers using the same categories that can be used to describe language. He acknowledges that this means adopting new vocabularies, and that the entire structure, especially when presented all at once in a tabular array, may seem daunting; but points out that particular works are likely to reward analysis under just some of these areas (O'Toole 2010, 1–3), and indeed his Chapter 8 focuses particularly on 'monofunctional tendencies', the dominance of one of the three types of functions in particular *oeuvres*.

O'Toole's concern is not only to adopt the three-part approach to meaning-making from Halliday, but also the notion of stratification — that language may be analysed at a range of levels, from entire texts, through clauses, down to morphemes and phonemes. O'Toole therefore distributes the features he recognises serving his three functions across different levels of attention one might pay to displayed art, for example: the work (the whole framed image), the episode (a region showing interactions between figures), the figure (normally a human being, though animals and other 'participants' may be included), and the member (hands, fingernails, branches of trees — the metonymic or meronymic component parts of a figure). This may seem to meet with the objection about attempting to identify 'minimal units' in visual texts, but O'Toole makes it apparent that his terminologies and categories are materials for use in another kind of discourse: the critical discourse one might engage in *about* art (10, 30–1).

For gallery art, O'Toole's functions are the Representational (mapping to experiential/ideational), the Modal (mapping to interpersonal) and Compositional (mapping to textual). For sculpture he retains these same terms, though for architecture he returns to Halliday's wordings (64–66). For art, his concerns are focused on events and actions, processes, at the level of 'episode'; on figure drawing (participants) at the level of figure, under the 'representational' metafunction. This is the sort of content that is normally the priority for people when discussing paintings (16–17), but it is because of this that O'Toole stresses and foregrounds the 'modal', interpersonal metafunction. Modality for O'Toole incorporates 'address' in the form of the figures' gaze (12) and also 'modality' — "the 'slant' the painter gives to the reality depicted" (13). His later analysis of two artists with 'monofunctional tendencies' toward the Modal function (174–183), Turner and Riley, reveal that his interest is in representation of the perceptual experience of the onlooker, and play with that experience, as in Riley's op-

art. He points out that Turner was attacked in his day based on expectations of the Representational function in art — but his work instead innovated under the Modal function (178). The ‘compositional’ metafunction is presented as underpinning the others (25) — as Halliday also described his ‘textual’ metafunction. O’Toole’s top heading for this at the level of the work is the ‘gestalt’, a notion that arises in Arnheim’s (2004b) discussion of art and visual perception, and has emerged in McCloud’s (1993) account of ‘closure’: the human tendency to view things as holistic patterns, seeing parts as in relation to an understood whole (O’Toole 2010, 25). O’Toole’s main concerns are for the structuring and relative positions of elements in the work; though at the level of ‘member’ he shows some interest in ‘cohesion’, reference between members, and microstructures of contrast, rhythm and parallel organisation (24).

O’Toole puts his categories of analysis to work not only in attending to ‘monofunctional tendencies’ among groups of artists, but also as dimensions along which to compare certain works (132–149). He argues that this semiotic structure is both systematic (so, transferrable between works) and enabling of discourse (122–125) and is alive to the characterisation of semiosis in painting as thereby, like language, a *dynamic* and *social* discourse (150–153). This foreshadows Kress and van Leeuwen’s use of the structure as enabling a social and political critical discourse of meaning-making with images (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), and these qualities will also transfer to the use of a version of this framework to describe comics.

O’Toole tackles the relationship between the verbal and the visual with a detailed discussion of two works by different creators at different times treating the same subject: Bruegel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, and Auden’s ekphrastic poem about it, ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’ (O’Toole 2010, 99–115). This exploits the mappings of rank and metafunction to create a close comparison of the ways in which these works handle their shared subject. Despite the range of comparisons of works, and this cross-modal analysis, O’Toole never discusses sequential art, graphic narrative, comics or cartoons.

### ***Kress & van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design***

Kress and van Leeuwen’s work (2006) is subtitled ‘The Grammar of Visual Design’, though they stress that this word ‘grammar’ is not to suggest prescriptive rules; rather than they are interested in combinations and organisations of semiotic elements

rather than the semiotic slant they perceive as having been historically oriented towards isolated signs, the ‘lexis’ or ‘words’ of visual texts (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 1). They assert that “meanings belong to culture, rather than to specific semiotic modes ... some things can be ‘said’ either verbally or visually, others only visually, again others only verbally” (2). The choice of which mode to use makes a difference, because whilst the same thing may be broadly expressed, the realisations are different — different semiotic *resources* are used to serve the functions. This separation between function and realisation is central to Hallidayan approaches to linguistics; different languages may handle a given function in different ways, some with intonation for example, others with syntax (see Halliday 2005b). Likewise the same resource, such as intonation patterns, may serve a textual function in one language and an ideational function in another. The languages are in principle translatable, however, because they are doing the same work. What goes for language, then, goes for modes: the visual and the verbal.

Kress and van Leeuwen frame their approach in a history of semiotics, which they take to pass through three phases: the formalist Prague School of the 30s and 40s, applying early linguistic notions to literature, art theatre and film; the Paris School of the 60s and 70s dominated by Barthes which still has currency today (it is the basis of Miodrag’s work discussed above); and ‘Critical Linguistics’, a third school emerging from the work of Halliday in the 70s and 80s, applying to other modes of representation, into which their work fits (6). Signs are not arbitrary, on this view, but motivated; the product of acts of sign-making in social contexts, in which the creator draws inventively on the resources of language amongst all other conventions of signification in order to make meaning (8–9). Miodrag (2013, 43) claims that inventiveness in language is nevertheless a matter of selection, to be contrasted with the invention of images; but this is perhaps a continuum rather than a sharp distinction, and both writers are arguing for a creative improvisation in meaning-making, as would I. Miodrag perhaps underestimates Kress and van Leeuwen’s commitment to this brand of creative and social semiotics, as opposed to the other brands they describe.

Halliday’s three metafunctions retain their names here: ideational, interpersonal and textual (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 42–43). Under ideation, Kress and van Leeuwen focus on the process, separating this however into two broad types: narrative and conceptual. They do not use Halliday’s division of process types but create their own: Action processes, realised through arrows; reaction processes, engaged by eyelines;

conversion processes in chains of arrows; and speech processes and mental processes, which for them are realised in comic strips in word and thought balloons. Halliday likewise uses this image as a way of explaining ‘projective’ processes (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 443); Kress and van Leeuwen outline a history of transfer of this balloon device from comics to other media, though they recognise that other forms such as ‘ribbons’ had been used to contain text before (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 68). For me, this is only *one* way of representing this kind of process, and as I shall argue below in Chapter 3, these are both not the only realisation available, but also more than one realisation may be required in visual texts. For Kress and van Leeuwen, representing these processes commits to presenting certain participants, but they treat processes as in principle isolatable. The kinds of texts Kress and van Leeuwen seem to have in mind here are diagrams from news, textbooks and advertising. This corpus is also evident in their second categorisation of processes: conceptual processes, broken down into classificational processes such as taxonomies and hierarchy diagrams, and analytical processes, with a range of types of structure — temporal, topographic, compounded, unstructured, and so on (79–104). They further distinguish ‘symbolic processes’, signalled by marked saliency of certain elements in the image; these are exemplified in art, newspaper photography, book cover design. The image types are broad in scope, but tend to be single images, often composed with text. Image sequences of any length, co-composed on a page — graphic narrative images of the kinds used in comics — are not analysed in any depth. Non-fiction is also a bias, emerging from their location in the field of critical linguistics, which is concerned with power relationships expressed, for example, through contemporary news media.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s account of interaction, then, also serves these concerns, and emerges from other semiotic discussion of the ‘interpellation’ practised by the image in locating the viewer as a subject with a gaze to be engaged, invited or challenged (116–7). Though the interpersonal engagement they are concerned with includes that between creator and reader or viewer of a text (114), their discussions tend towards relationships between *represented* persons and a reader/viewer, implied or actual (118). This enacts a sort of ‘metalepsis’ (Genette 1983) across levels of reality and places of discourse in the text, which is no doubt possible, but I shall argue below in Chapter 4 that there are other levels on which a creator of a visual text may engage and interact with a reading or viewing ‘interlocutor’. Perspective situates the viewer in a

‘virtual’ relationship with the represented material, so that vertical angle of view might imply power relationships, distance might imply social relationships, and horizontal angle a degree of involvement or social inclusion with what is depicted (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 133–48).

The second element of the interpersonal function is ‘modality’, the degree of ‘realism’ of a text. Kress and van Leeuwen discuss in detail the effect of colour, saturation in particular, on perceptions of this (160), describing a range of ‘clines’ across different text types (166), though they do not tackle graphic narrative. El Refaie challenges their general assumption that the standard of the ‘real’ is 35mm colour film (El Refaie 2012, 138); she points out that this is very much not the case in autobiographical graphic narrative, which is her concern, where different criteria apply. In general, Kress and van Leeuwen’s claim that modulation of colour and image quality is a resource for representing the status of images as imaginary, remembered, fantasised, and so on, is plausible and well argued, and I will return to it in detail in later chapters.

Their influential claim about composition is that ‘given and new’ are reflected in left and right organisations of the page, or double-page spread; that the ‘ideal’ appears at the top of the image and the ‘real’ at the bottom; and that information value is reflected in centre-margin organisation of the image (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 175–210; summary image on 197). These are not treated as ever-present frameworks, but as systematic options for the organisation of a single image — or page. Again, the focus is not on extended sequences of image as in graphic narrative, and it is left to the analyst to decide when and at what level to apply these structures, which Kress and van Leeuwen plausibly do.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s work, then, represents a thorough and detailed application of Halliday’s framework to media texts. Many of their mappings are more generally applicable, and I will adopt some of their claims about how images function in my own application to comics texts in this thesis. However, they do not incorporate graphic narrative in their examples to any great degree, and their work would need some adaptation to the particular resources of graphic novels and comics. I will build my own interpretation of Halliday to approach comics rather than attempting to adapt Kress and van Leeuwen. The task of comics is largely to tell stories over an extended sequence of images and text in specific combinations, with their own ‘grammars’, in the non-prescriptive sense that Kress and van Leeuwen use. This calls for a specific application

of Halliday's framework to the structures peculiar to the graphic narrative form. The closest that scholarship has come so far to a Hallidayan approach to long-form verbal/visual narrative is the work that has been done with children's illustrated storybooks. Though these represent a distinct form, that form is close enough in its functions and components to warrant some consideration before I begin to build my Hallidayan framework of graphic narrative.

### **Multimodal narratives: Children's storybooks**

One prominent form of extensive storytelling incorporating images is represented by the corpus of children's illustrated narratives. Two major book-length studies have explored this genre in recent years, and I will discuss both below. This kind of text sits at the border of graphic narrative: it 'blends text and image', tells stories, and at times the boundary between the two is blurred. I will wish to sharpen that boundary, at least to the extent of enabling a more focused discussion of how and why edge cases exist. This work is very recent, and demonstrates that Halliday's frameworks have been brought to the very borders of graphic narrative as work on the present thesis has progressed.

#### ***Painter & Martin***

Painter, Martin & Unsworth's work bringing Kress and van Leeuwen's brand of analysis to children's picture books has been under development led by Painter since 2007, emerging from exploratory research over the previous five years (Painter and Martin 2013). In *Reading Images*, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) had often discussed children's productions of images; Halliday's own work similarly paid special attention to children's development of resources for meaning, presenting language acquisition as a process of 'learning to mean', a functional, practical activity of semiosis (Halliday 2004). As have other authors, Painter and Martin find that "visual grammars currently available need expansion and refinement to be maximally useful" for the particular text type under discussion. In particular, they note the need for an extension of the foundational approach to tackle "the nature of relations between images in a sequence" (Painter and Martin 2013, 3).

In their overview of the application of Halliday to multimodal texts, they observe the range of terminologies used for the three metafunctions: Ideational may be



‘presentational’ or ‘representational’, Interpersonal may be ‘orientational’ or ‘modal’, Textual may be ‘organisational’ or ‘compositional’, and each application has made its own adaptations in descriptions of the resources of realisation of these as well as the attendant terminology. Painter, Martin and Unsworth follow Halliday (2005c) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in using the original terminology, as will I, in part to facilitate a mapping to language — though, as they stress, this does not imply mapping to the verbal grammatical categories of linguistic *realisation* of these functions.

They use a corpus of over 70 texts by “well-respected authors and artists” of picture books (10). Their ‘default unit’ is again the single image (11), though they attend to the page and double-page spread as important units of organisation. The ‘gutter’ is not a device for engaging the reader in inference between panelled images, but merely the physical valley between pages, structuring the layout of the text; they cite McCloud (1993) but do not make use of his categories.

They adopt Kress and van Leeuwen’s use of gaze and perspective in their discussion of interpersonal features, though they also adopt the notion of ‘focalisation’ from narratology to frame this, since their texts are all stories (29). Their interpretation of realism and detail vs simplification and abstraction is dealt with as ‘pathos’ and ‘affect’, charting a continuum similar to McCloud’s (McCloud 1993, 52–53); they propose (Painter and Martin 2013, 33) that greater naturalism suggests individuation and more mature ethical concerns, however, rather than the objectifying and distancing effect claimed by McCloud. Options in colour and lighting are described in terms of emotional affect rather than reality status — similar (though not identical) to the distinction between deontic and epistemic modality in language. Included here is the possibility of ‘graduation’, indicating of the impact or importance of images in the style in which they are rendered, perhaps reflecting the framework of ‘appraisal’ developed by Martin and White (2005). This focus on continuum counters the critique of Miodrag (2013) that linguistic approaches to the image might lead to ‘minimal units’.

Their discussion of ideation starts with participants, and they take a detour into what seem to me to be cohesive features of the text in the need to make characters identifiable, with textual ‘hooks’ that enable the character to be re-identified from image to image when they reappear (Painter and Martin 2013, 58–61). Verbal and mental processes are glossed as represented by thought or speech bubbles, though mental processes of sensing may also be depicted by ‘vectors’ between participants (69). They

group material/behavioural processes as ‘actions’ here, though they also draw what seems to me a useful distinction between single-participant (intransitive) action and multiple-participant (transitive or ‘transactional’) processes. They do not systematically break down possible alternative approaches to representing these processes, nor do they take O’Toole’s approach of dividing representations on a rank scale (O’Toole 2010, 34).

Textual meanings revolve around ‘intermodal integration’ (Painter and Martin 2013, 92): the ways in which text may be brought into relationship with images. A distinction is drawn between ‘complementary’ approaches, where text is separate, and ‘integrated’ approaches, where it is composed in among the images. Painter and Martin explore systems of weighting and privilege enacted in these layouts (94), as well as possible options in the system; and with integrated layouts, describe the word and speech balloon as ‘projected’, again following Halliday. The idea that *image* may be projected within such enclosures is not entertained, and nor are other comics options for using emanata sound effects, labelling, different options for the balloon enclosures, and so on. ‘Framing’ is discussed in general terms (103), with the assumption that it is the image that is framed; the notion of *bound* or *unbound* images is taken to be fundamental, and their reading of the meaning of this is one that I find also resonated with comics: “there is in effect no boundary between the world of the child reader and the depicted story world” (104). I will make more of this not only as an interpersonal feature, but a logical structuring device. The existence of a frame aids in inscribing a range of focalisation options in the composition of what is framed (111), and they make useful mileage too of the idea of ‘polarised’ images which employ opposed corners for contrastive meanings (116–7).

Throughout, *Reading Visual Narratives* is accompanied by detailed accounts of texts from its corpus, presenting breakdowns of the features tagged on a page-by-page basis in the manner of stylistic studies produced in the systemic-functional framework. It touches on some resources that will be key to comics texts, but none of its corpus are squarely ‘comics’, and the audience for its texts is declaredly children; it is not just interested in the form of visual (and jointly verbal) texts, but in this specific text type and its effects on this particular audience.

## ***Moya Guijarro***

Moya Guijarro (2014) is likewise squarely focused on children's narratives. The differences he finds between texts for different age groups are the declared aim of his study, differentiating it from Painter, Martin and Unsworth and others (2). The concern here is less to innovate new frameworks as to apply the existing ones. Moya Guijarro employs Halliday's process types for the verbal, and Kress and van Leeuwen's categories for the visual, to quantify the sharing-out of representational work between the two modes (62–84). A similar approach is taken to the interpersonal meanings, with Painter's frameworks incorporated too (90, 93). Moya Guijarro notes some difficulties both in visual and verbal categorisations. He finds that subordination complicates the quantification of mood choices in the verbal text (98), and in the visual, he encounters the problem of genre specificity already discussed in relation to what textual features indicate what level of modality or 'reality-status' in the work — different for scientific diagrams, photography and illustrated depictions in storybooks, for example (100).

Embedding of clauses likewise complicates his theme-structure analysis of the texts (Moya Guijarro 2014, 123–24), and he finds that Kress and van Leeuwen's left–right compositional pattern is not always observed in his corpus (125); rather, the rightward motion of represented participants is congruent to reading order, rather than carrying given-and-new meanings, and where directionality is reversed, different ideational meanings arise instead. He does not encounter the sort of projected dialogue in word balloons that are so frequent in comics, described in Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013), and does not apply their discussions of framing and organisational options in great detail. Interesting 'synergies' and 'interplays' between verbal and visual modes are uncovered in his systematic analysis of his corpus in chapter 3,4 and 5, and his work embodies the kind of detailed close analysis, including quantitative analysis, that can be attempted when a rigorous framework has been described that is tailored to the particular genre under study. It is this kind of framework for comics and graphic narrative that I propose to describe in this thesis.

## A Functional Approach to Graphic Narrative

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Moya Guijarro offers a detailed justification for the use of a Hallidayan approach to the analysis of visual narrative texts. He explores a range of possible functional grammars (2014, 24–27), and argues that Halliday’s is neither overly formalist, like more Generative models, nor as broad as ‘Emergent Grammars’, which share their generalised account with cognitive models of grammar. Halliday’s approach is preferred because it is founded in natural data, despite its top-down organisational principles (28–9); because it is committed to socio-cultural aspects of language (29–32), treating language within its context of use rather than as an idealised formal system; because its simultaneous, metafunctional approach to meaning has been shown to be applicable to multimodal texts by, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen; and because of its orientation towards human choice in the generation of particular texts (32–38). These justifications serve well to support the choice of this approach in tackling comics and graphic narrative.

The present thesis, then, seeks to take Halliday’s flexible and high-level model as a basis for organising a theory of comics communication, mapping comics to language at a *functional* level, rather than at the level of *realisations*, the specifics of a given language’s grammar.

In particular, on Halliday’s model (Halliday 2005c), language always needs to serve the three simultaneous overarching functions, called *metafunctions*, in order to fully do the social work of meaning exchange. Language as a meaning-making system represents the world of experience, putting into wordings the ‘content’ which is to be imparted (the *ideational* function); in uttering to another human being we also operate upon them, requiring work of them, asserting our role in relation to them, and imposing on the content our attitude towards it (the *interpersonal* function). Underpinning these two, language needs to be sequenced, organised, and anchored in relation to other contextualising language and to the context in which the utterance takes place (the *textual* function). This three-part model treats verbal and visual utterance as an act of meaning which socially engages, aims to deliver a cohesive message, and makes public an experience of the world to be shared among interactants.

So on this model, the image is approached not as an isolate, but as a move in an ongoing social process. For Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and from the Critical

Discourse Analysts who likewise adopt Halliday's models (e.g., Fairclough 2010; Machin and Mayr 2012), this offers a way to describe the position of text and image in relation not only to each other, but to all cultural modes that condition our identities as human beings. For O'Toole (2010), this takes displayed art, for example, out of the technical and historical discourses of academic discussions and enables us to engage with it as human beings brought into a discourse with it, even when we as onlookers may not have other specialist academic training. For Painter and Martin (2013), and for Moya Guijarro (2014), this has offered a way to describe the workings of narrative texts with a significant visual component.

To bring this functional model to comics, which is to say combinations of images, perhaps including text or not, and commonly but not always in a longer sequence — something that none of the theorists mentioned have yet done — is to treat each individual comics image as a *move* in a comics discourse, which can be described in ways that characterise it as compatible with the words involved, and both can be seen as collaborating in the textual construction of the entire comic or graphic novel. Little attention has been paid to the comics image as a work of art, though qualities of the drawing or allusions to art history may be described in passing, perhaps especially by those writing of the comic in a literary tradition. But it would be my argument here that treating a panel or page of comics in isolation from the rest of the work would not be a good idea: its context in the unfolding of meaning of the text as a whole would be a crucial component of the meaning we may make of it, and its role in the making of meaning practised by the creator or team who generated it. Whilst the work of Lichtenstein (see, e.g., Dunne and Lichtenstein 2012) extracts from mainstream comics the iconography of the image and places it for contemplation in a gallery of art (inviting the kinds of responses to it that O'Toole discusses, including those of which he disapproves: those centring on technical features or the cultural histories of the work), I would implore an approach to graphic narrative that does not see it as a sequence of Lichtensteins to be analysed. Nor, however, is the graphic narrative just a packaging for a narrative, to be discussed in terms of its characters, plot, themes and motifs, with scant attention paid to the realisations of those in the modes of image or text (or the implicatures and interaction between them). I aim to describe a *poetics* of comics — an account for the medium that aims to evade the trap of a fixed grammar, minimal units and a 'lexicon', but that might attain the 'specificity' of the medium (see A. Miller and

Beatty 2014) that has been argued about in French scholarship (with the tentative conclusion that specificity would imply fixed definitions and thereby essentialism); a terminology that might capture those effects of comics that are particular to the drawn, co-present word/image combinations that constitute the graphic text. If I dare paraphrase Sontag (2009), what is needed in fact is an *erotics* of comics: which I take to mean a description of the medium that accounts for its humanity, its room for inventiveness, its specific character as a medium of interplay between consenting, like-minded adults.

### **Relation to other work**

My work picks up on the approach initiated by Saraceni in *The Language of Comics* (2003) and his doctoral thesis (2000), using the model of MAK Halliday's systemic functional linguistics to make sense of the textual identity of graphic narrative. In this way, I am following O'Toole (2010), in his use of systemic functional frameworks as a model for approaching the language of displayed art, covering painting, sculpture and architecture, but not sequential art or graphic narrative. Similarly, though Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have developed Halliday to extend to a range of multimodal texts, including brief accounts of comics, an extensive account of the specificity of graphic narrative under this sort of framework has not yet been written.

A particular focus will be on the points of ligature and interaction between elements of the graphic narrative text: between specific kinds of words and the accompanying juxtaposed image(s), and between images themselves, both within and between compositions, in a manner that serves compatible purposes and functions to those of the verbal. This work can be seen to constitute a clarification of what could be meant specifically in Groensteen's concept of braiding and arthrology, the threads that both hold together a comics text and produce specific meanings by means of metaphor and implicature (Groensteen 2009). I will argue that graphic narrative is distinct from, for example, the illustrated story, or from film, by virtue of the specific methods by which image and text, and image and image, are dependent upon each other and collaborative in the creation of meaning. I will argue not that comics is 'a language' in the sense of having syntax (Neil Cohn's position), but that it does share the functions of language, in particular the Hallidayan textual metafunction, in that graphic narrative does have discourse structure, at the micro level as well as the (narrative) macro level.

The argument will emerge from the stance that the comics image-complex is a multifunctional multiplex of simultaneous ‘utterances’, hence the perception (in Groensteen and others) that the panel is an ‘utterable’. Panels say many things at once, and images are already themselves an utterance, a rendering; and words can enter at multiple levels to take on the function(s) of one or more of these simultaneous communications. Halliday’s taxonomy of process types (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 311) will serve as the model for this, alongside his conception of language as being always multifunctional.

Comics utterances presented in array follow one another, like a conversation, including the possibility of reporting conversations nested within it. The basic comprehension of comics depends on a collaborative set of assumptions on the part of the reader, akin to Paul Grice’s (1975) maxims of conversation: the assumptions that repeated figures are the same, that place is constant, that time is continuous; all of which are most interesting when they are breached rather than observed.

The panel is always already a speech balloon. That is to say, we can read comics as always already being projections of the creator’s, or narrator’s thoughts. A study of the ways in which comics manage the transitions between characters’ speech and thoughts and the framing context, in particular where images are used inside word balloons and the balloons transform into (and out of) a sequence of panels, will draw attention to the fluidity present here and the value of reading the comics image as utterance.

### ***On the nature of the ‘system’ in comics texts***

Hallidayan approaches to language involve the creation of a ‘system diagram’ of choices, options from which the speaker or writer selects in order to arrive at the wording that will realise the functions they wish to convey (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 22–24). Some such choices are clear alternatives, sometimes binary, sometimes multifaceted; often, especially when binary, there is a clear statistical weighting towards an ‘unmarked’ construction, as against a ‘marked’ construction, which Halliday claims approximates to a 9:1 frequency ratio. In other cases, the choice is free and the options are more or less equal in frequency and likelihood (Halliday 2005a, 42–62).

For many choices in such systems, more than one option may be selected at the same time, and Halliday offers a notation for these. In the image, specifically for my concerns the imagetext of the comics drawing and sequence, more or less all options are

simultaneous like this. One approach may be chosen, but often several are, and in many cases, as with the process stack, the choice of one option may entail, oblige or imply another. In this way, comics texts are essentially plural and simultaneous in character: rather than sequential art, comics are layered, hierarchical, multivalent.

Choice is still essential to the comics text, and function is key to motivating the choices that are made; but systematisation is resisted by the text, and the categories offered by theory and perceived by the reader are artefacts of the process of conceptualising and discussing the text, mapping the grounds on which commentators can agree or disagree on interpretations and readings. The categories offered here do not aim to specify a fixed system, but to afford hooks with which to conduct talk about comics, as comics themselves offer us hooks whereby we can read them. The systems here suggested are a background, extracted from comics that have been read, around which new ones can be innovated and new systems improvised. The ‘system of comics’ is not inert, not an object: rather we should describe a set of behaviours of creators and readers, meaning-making behaviours that engage in a variety of modalities simultaneously.

The paths of choice in comics texts are more like *desire lines* than concreted pathways: formed by routes so far taken on the whole in the history of the formation of graphic narrative as a medium. The paths remain to be further trodden, or new ones innovated, as the medium continues to develop.

## Summary

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The final section of this chapter will summarise the approach to be taken, and offer a guide to the shape of the thesis.

Halliday’s systemic functional framework for the analysis of language use was designed to explain what languages do, in a way that will account for the similarity of function in radically different language systems (English and Chinese), and later to account for the development of language from non-language and proto-language in children’s language acquisition. It is designed to bridge the gaps between human semiotic systems, whilst retaining a rigorous and specific account of those systems that is useful for study, for teaching, and for criticism. It has been adopted by social semioticians and by multimodal textual analysts; and adapted to the analysis of



displayed art, of architecture and of sculpture. It has been used in Critical Discourse Analysis to unpack the power relationships and persuasive rhetoric of visual, linguistic and multimodal media products. There have been some first moves in applying it to comics, notably by Saraceni (2000; 2003); but this route has not as yet been fully pursued. I propose to reconsider the possibilities offered by Halliday's system and to incorporate its tenets into a model of comics meaning-making that will take the contribution of language as seriously and specifically as images, treating language not as a given, offering supporting and framing functions to the images in more or less transparent ways, but as a distinct resource to be reappraised in its functional role among the constituents of the comics text.

Halliday views language as serving three simultaneous 'metafunctions'. Language serves to *construe* experience: wordings identify participants in processes, which operate in certain circumstances; these are the constituents of the clauses that make up sentences, which make up texts. As well as this *ideational* metafunction, language also enacts social relationships and embodies human attitudes to the experience of the world they are representing. This is the *interpersonal* metafunction, pursued through grammatical patterns of question, answer and command, and crucially through the resources of *modality*, to embed human judgement in the language. Underlying these two core functions is the *textual* metafunction, which describes the way in which language co-refers, depends on other stretches of language, coheres with the world, and creates patterns that identify and provide structure for a text.

The system of comics serves compatible purposes to these. I will argue that it too construes human experience of the world, that it embodies human attitudes to that experience, and that it can recruit both words and images to these compatible purposes, simultaneously, binding them together through systems of textual *cohesion* identified by Halliday and Hasan, and the visual corollaries thereof.

Halliday's is not the only generalised theory of meaning that might be fruitfully adopted and applied to comics meaning-making. Though it will form the core of my work, I will find it useful to draw on other contemporary traditions of linguistic thought to help articulate my model. Cognitive linguistics has drawn the link between the mental, the linguistic, and the literary, seeing metaphor and parable as basic to human thought. A tradition of cognitive poetics has arisen (see Stockwell 2002; Gavins and Steen 2003), accounting for literary texts and their effects on readers using the models

of linguistic functioning in the brain as tools to unpack the operations of creative language and narrative. A *multimodal* cognitive poetics, however, has yet to be founded. Later in the thesis, in support of the Hallidayan underpinning, I will recruit concepts from cognitive poetics, including Text World Theory and approaches to metaphor, to bolster my theory of comics' functions, and aim to show that this body of theory is compatible with Halliday's social semiotics, which has a multimodal branch already being developed, notably by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

But to begin, in Chapter 2, I will set the scene with an unusual approach to comics, considering the possibility of abstract comics. What happens when we create a text which aims to avoid 'representation'? What does confronting this kind of text teach us about the nature of comics and how we go about reading them? I will introduce some principles of comics readership, which will be developed into a set of 'maxims of comics' in Chapter 3, asserting an underlying pragmatics based on the work of Paul Grice.

# 2

## Prelude: ‘Animating’ the narrative in abstract comics

### Introduction

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This preliminary chapter will approach the question of comics as meaning-making by exploring comics that challenge the notion of meaning itself: the recently-affirmed subgenre of *abstract* comics. In the absence of the representational function — a component of Halliday’s ideational metafunction — what is revealed about how we read comics? What do we find ourselves doing when we attempt to make sense of a text that not only does not offer us words as a framework, but apparently offers no mimetic content at all? What survives of comics form under these conditions? This exploration will lead to the groundwork for a pragmatics of comics, and will raise issues about the nature of reading and the reader’s active approach to creating meanings from comics texts, as well as the nature of abstraction, and how it is realised in the comics text, ready for later chapters which will return to its function. Abstract comics present challenges for traditional definitions and accounts of graphic narrative, identifying areas in existing theory that a functional model of comics meaning-making may illuminate.

### Comics and Abstraction

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In *Comics and Narration* (2013, originally appearing as *Bande dessinée et narration: Systeme de la bande dessinée 2*), Thierry Groensteen alludes to the ‘test’ that abstraction offers to comics, especially in defining the form: “It is in the nature of experimental works that they shift the boundaries or contest the usual definition of the medium to which they belong. This general rule is particularly applicable to comics” (Groensteen 2013, 9). Groensteen’s chapter on abstract comics opens the book, perhaps surprisingly, given the relative rarity and obscurity of these works, collected for the first

time in Andrei Molotiu's 2009 'inaugural' compilation; the justification is that they present a test case of the nature of comics that helps to identify issues at the core of comics textuality and readership. I follow Groensteen in this theoretical approach here.

Abstract comics have certainly proved challenging for commentators so far. For Neil Cohn (2009), abstract comics simply cannot happen; lacking the features of the 'visual language' he has identified in other comics texts, they fall outside his formal definition of 'comics'. To Jan Baetens (2011), abstract comics lose their identity in the face of narrative; it is an either/or relationship between abstraction and the ability to be a storytelling medium, the two functions effacing each other. Even for Molotiu, who compiled the collection of abstract comics under discussion here, there is a similar tension in abstract comics between the 'dynamism' of the reading of narrative and the 'iconostasis' of contemplation of the pictorial, abstract features of a comics page (Molotiu 2011). Abstract comics tend to be discussed in terms of what they are not, even what they cannot be. What has not yet been articulated in relation to this form is a fuller account of the positive features of the 'readerliness' of abstract comics: a focus on what affordances their existence as book-like texts gives to an onlooker who makes a choice to read them, to reify them as narratives, and what actions on the part of the reader could constitute bringing them into being as a unified text that is both *abstract* and *narrative* at the same time. Indeed, at the end of his chapter, Groensteen does draw attention to the 'interpretive work', the 'initiative' and the presumptions that a reader brings to the texts (Groensteen 2013, 18–19). My aim here is to elaborate a theory of some of that interpretive work and those presumptions.

**Figure 1: from 'e-z see' (n.d.) by Troy Lloyd (in Molotiu 2009)**

The term 'abstract comics' would certainly appear at first glance to be a contradiction in terms. One might expect from a 'comic' a narrative, a term which itself implies characters, settings and action. 'Abstract', on the other hand, implies an absence of representation (see below for a fuller discussion of this). How do viewers make sense of an image like Figure 1 when presented in a book as a reading text? In what ways can it be said to be a 'narrative' or even a 'comic'? How can a static image be 'animate', and how can an 'abstract' image tell a story? These questions present four terms, used in my title, that need defining through this chapter: *comics*, *abstract*, *animate*, and

*narrative*. I will take each in turn, and in this way build towards a model of abstract comics readership that stresses the role of the reader in bringing to life the narrative potential in the abstract comics form. This will lay down the pragmatic communicative basis for much of the work in this thesis.

### **‘Comics’**

First, let us cautiously adopt a definition of ‘comics’, with the recognition that such definitions are always problematic and disputable. As was discussed in the overview of theory in the previous chapter, Scott McCloud’s widely-cited definition from his *Understanding Comics* is ‘juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence’ (McCloud 1993, 9). He takes Will Eisner’s seminal coinage ‘sequential art’ from the 1985 book (Eisner 2008a is a reprint) introducing that term, and explores and refines it to allow for the incorporation of words as well as pictures, and to avoid ‘accidental’ sequencing of images being included as comics. McCloud explores some competing definitions and makes efforts to square the demands of an unseen audience with each other: the need, for example, to make space for the possibility of using words in comics, whilst avoiding the *requirement* to include them, as proposed by, for example, R.C. Harvey (1996). Later writers, notably Thierry Groensteen, have offered other frameworks for understanding comics, but McCloud’s text, being widely available in English (Groensteen’s focus in *The System of Comics* is on *bande dessinée*, and it originated in French in 1999, only appearing in English translation in 2007), and produced in comic book format, has become a dominant body of theory for creators, readers and academics alike. Andrei Molotiu, compiler of abstract comics in his blog and in the 2009 collection discussed below, embraces this definition as admitting of the possibility of abstraction in comics (in M. J. Smith and Duncan 2011, 86–87).

McCloud, then, proposes that comics images communicate by means of the juxtaposition of images in sequence, and that these can be organised into a taxonomy of ‘transitions’, as follows:

1. Moment-to-moment
2. Action-to-action
3. Subject-to-subject
4. Scene-to-scene

## 5. Aspect-to-aspect

## 6. Non-sequitur

Each ‘transition’ type here is predicated on the narrative content of the pair of enclosed images, or ‘panels’, either side of a juxtaposing gap, or ‘gutter’. McCloud claims that these represent the core way in which comics communicate: by psychological ‘closure’, the ‘filling in’ of the gaps created in the gutter between these juxtaposed images. They appear here in order according to the ‘amount of closure’ needed to make sense of the narrative: for ‘Moment-to-Moment’ it is a minimal recognition that the same image has moved, transformed or shifted slightly, whereas ‘Action-to-Action’ requires readers to ‘fill in’ a more substantial portion of action. Other transitions expect other work on the part of the reader than the mental completion of motion of the depicted entities: ‘Subject-to-Subject’ and ‘Scene-to-Scene’ require an understanding that the onlooker’s *viewpoint* has shifted, and perhaps that time has moved on more substantially. This time shift is not the case with ‘Aspect-to-Aspect’ transitions, however, where different elements depicted in consecutive panels are to be seen as elements of the same scene, and the implication is that time stands still. (This seems to be *less* mental work than required by the previous transition types, but perhaps McCloud’s motivation in placing them later on his ‘continuum’ is that for Western readers, this transition type is less familiar, as will be commented on below.) Finally the ‘Non-Sequitur’ transition leaves it entirely open to the reader whether any ‘logical’ sense can be made between the panel pairs (McCloud 1993, 70–72). In relation to this transition type, McCloud speaks of an ‘alchemy’ of comics (1993, 73), whereby any two panels, regardless of their content, will be related or combined by the reader. Abel and Madden (2008) extend McCloud’s taxonomy here to incorporate the ‘symbolic’ transition which implies a *metaphorical* reading, noting that McCloud’s ‘non-sequitur’ tends to regress to this. It seems that some work is being done by the reader in this transition — that a reading is being made from panel pairings, which must be generated by some set of principles. One of my aims in this work is to push beyond what McCloud here calls ‘alchemy’, to approach a firmer description of what work a reader might be doing in drawing connections and inferences between images.

McCloud uses this set of transitions to characterise approaches to graphic narrative creation in different cultures. He surveys a range of comics from different traditions,

classifying the transitions used in them according to his taxonomy, and presenting the data in graphs to reveal some interesting differences between storytelling approaches. He finds that Japanese *manga*, for example, tend to use more aspect-to-aspect transitions to establish space and mood, illustrating static images of segments of a kitchen, for example, so that a reader may construct the scene metonymically; whereas Western Anglophone comics are action-to-action oriented, featuring as they have done heroes and slapstick characters involved in sequences of physical interaction and muscular, material processes (McCloud 1993, 75–80).

### **‘Abstract’**

But what about ‘abstract’ comics? Artist and academic Andrei Molotiu has been working on the possibility of abstract comics since the 1990s. He created the collection *Abstract Comics* in 2009 as a first attempt to compile works of graphic narrative that operate solely by abstraction, and “to establish, largely post facto, a tradition for this genre”.<sup>1</sup> The dates of his texts range from 1967 (R. Crumb’s ‘Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics’ at the start of the collection) to the time of publication, though in his Introduction, he traces some roots of abstract comics in the Bauhaus art of the 1920s and ’30s, Abstract Expressionists in the ’50s and ’60s, and dream or fantasy sequences from mainstream comics tradition back as far as the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with ‘Little Nemo in Slumberland’.

As Molotiu notes, the comics in the collection fall broadly into two types. The first is the type used by Crumb, wherein recognisable mimetic images (a cityscape, a woman’s body, albeit distorted, a tank, eyeballs, and so on) are combined in ways McCloud’s system would classify as ‘non-sequitur’, following a meandering thread of associations that do not add up to a narrative: there are not consistent characters, little or no causal relationships between images, no apparent ‘act structure’. Writing is used, but it is empty syllables or numerals, and some ‘asemic’ script (writing-like but meaningless). Some others in the collection follow this pattern, notably Jeff Zenick’s 1992 ‘Because’ (in Molotiu 2009). Most of the collection, however, follow a second

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<sup>1</sup> A note on page numbering: Molotiu uses a set of symbols to stand in for numbers, which can be translated to page references, but are opaque without a key. Chapter titles, author names and titles of pieces have been supplied here for preference. Dates for the pieces are not always supplied or traceable, but I have given them where they are offered in the artists’ bios, or where they can be tracked via separate publication.

pattern: where the images themselves are abstract, which is to say that they do not mimetically represent recognisable real-world images (see below for a fuller interrogation of this concept). Identifying the transitions between them represents a challenge to McCloud's system.

If McCloud's transitions are adequate to explain the functioning of comics, it should be possible to use them to explain the way a reader might attempt to make sense of the abstract comics in Molotiu's collection; and perhaps the range of panel transition types that prove useful to do so might reveal something about the nature of this genre of comics production, as they proved useful for McCloud in exploring differing national traditions and practices. Let us attempt such an application with a selection of these works.

Greg Shaw's contribution to the collection (Figure 2) shows apparently contentless coloured squares. At the upper half of the page, it is unclear whether the two blue and green sections are separate panels or not. But looking below (and one needs to know by convention the order of 'reading' – for instance that the two smaller panels lower left are to be read in order top-to-bottom before the tall panel on the lower right) we can make out some patterns. A red-brown dappled box is depicted in the green-yellow patterned area in panel two. This occludes the barrier between green and blue in panel three, implying that they are not to be read as panel transitions, and the area is larger than it was in the previous panel. Perhaps this may be read as a moment-to-moment transition, then, McCloud's category one. To do so is to interpret the green and blue patches as a continuous, persistent 'ground', and the brown patch as a 'figure', persistent in colour but changing in shape. Under this interpretation, in panel four it has 'grown' tall, and can be read as 'emerging' from the green patch.

**Figure 2: From 'Parcours Pictural' (2005) by Greg Shaw (in Molotiu 2009)**

But perhaps it is disingenuous to discuss 'patches'. What manner of abstraction is this? Might we not rapidly come to read these coloured areas as 'grassy ground' and 'clear blue sky', the brown areas as 'growing trees', and interpret away the abstract nature of the image? Also, these all appear to be 'moment-to-moment' transitions, and rely on this 'minimal closure' for onlookers to perceive a persistent object across the panels in the first place. Perhaps nothing more sophisticated can be attempted in



‘abstract’ narrative without recourse to imposed representation and doubtful or ambiguous readings, or to the tracking of shifting objects as if reading the storyboard for an abstract animation — comics as reading each frame of an animated short. Indeed, McCloud (1993, 8) describes film as akin to a ‘very slow comic’ before it is projected. Jan Baetens, in his 2011 article ‘Abstraction in Comics’, proposes that abstraction stands in opposition to narrative, and that the two are in tension against each other — abstraction ‘dissolving’ when narrative is read in. Perhaps moment-to-moment ‘shifting’ is all that can be achieved in abstract comics, and narrative is beyond their means?

Bill Shut’s entry (excerpted in Figure 3) problematises this simple moment-to-moment panel reading and points to the possibility in abstract comics of a more sophisticated and complicated management of the panels. It is not entirely clear how to go about reading tier one, the first three panels. Are those *two* panels at the top left, one inset inside the other? Or is this a window onto another world, which the viewer ‘approaches’ since the pattern ‘grows’ bigger in the middle panel of tier one? That would be a moment-to-moment transition, but the content of the inset panels changes in a more radical way, apparently subject-to-subject. (Note that the only way to establish that this is not merely ‘non-sequitur’ is in arrears, by looking ahead at the repetition of the images in panels elsewhere on the page.) Inset panels create something of a challenge for reading order in any case, and between which two panels is one to note a ‘transition’ — between the inset panel and the enclosing panel, or between consecutive inset panels within a larger panel that holds several insets?

**Figure 3: From ‘Time Lapse Growth’ (1973) by Bill Shut (in Molotiu 2009)**

On the second tier, the yellow and red shape appears to grow (or perhaps the viewer moves closer) and one looks more closely at the black-and-white shape (or perhaps it grows). It is possible to trace overlapping patterns of moment-to-moment growth and movement by assuming an *identity* between the similarly-coloured and similarly-shaped depictions, and to interpret the comic as a parallel moment-to-moment telling, alternating subject-to-subject. This is only manageable after recognizing the whole-page array of patterns and making the interpretive decision to treat some elements as

representing a persistent entity that exists through time, represented from panel-to-panel. (McCloud's '*moment-to-moment*' nomenclature presupposes a reading of panels as representing different moments in time rather than as a polyptych of similar-looking figures adjacent in space.)

What is happening in panel six, the last on tier two? It is ambiguous between one large, irregularly shaped panel, and a smaller panel *overlapping* a large trapezoid one dominating tier three, between which an implicit panel border is to be understood. Since the overlapping panels are to be read in sequence anyway, perhaps this distinction does not matter. But if not, this presents a challenge to McCloud's 'gaps and transitions' theory. It is unclear how one could count such a transition in order to create the charts of transitions McCloud offers. The transition taxonomy has proven fruitful and shown explanatory power so far, but difficulties in applying it have appeared, and it suggests that there is more to a successful model of how comics function than juxtaposed discrete panels. It is possible to pursue the model still: the three horizontal panels at the bottom half of the page appear to be aspect-to-aspect transitions, travelling downwards across the landscape (moment-to-moment?), though the panels can also be seen as an occluding barrier through which is revealed a continuous landscape in space. A straight mapping of the gaps between juxtaposed panels and the 'transition type' that is represented — the sort of work that McCloud suggests is possible when he creates charts of the proportions of transitions used in a range of comics genres (McCloud 1993, 75–80) — is challenged by abstract comics (at least): it is unclear which transition is occurring.

In suggesting the word 'landscape' above to describe the depictions here, it seems that this excerpt has not escaped representation either. Can 'abstract' be defined as the absence of representation? It will require a brief aside to explore this question. I will turn initially to a starting definition of 'abstract' from the Oxford English Dictionary to attempt a first pass at addressing this element of 'abstract comics'. This will beg a more detailed discussion of the tradition of abstraction, but will offer at least a beginning way in for now.

### ***Definitions of abstraction***

It is only the 6<sup>th</sup> definition from the OED that addresses the specific application of the word 'abstract' to the field of art:

6.

a. Fine Art. Designating art which is *not founded on an attempt to represent external reality*, but rather seeks to achieve an effect on the viewer purely by the use of shape, colour, and texture; of or relating to art of this kind. Also (of an artist, esp. a painter): producing art with these characteristics.

b. Designating music, dance, film, etc., which *rejects representation of or reference to external reality*, esp. in dispensing with narrative:<sup>2</sup> (originally) spec. designating instrumental music which is not intended to be illustrative or representational in any way.

[My emphasis.]

Here it is indeed defined as not seeking to *represent* — at least, not seeking to represent an ‘external reality’. So if a reader or viewer can perceive ‘landscape’ and ‘sky’, by this definition these works should not be included as strictly abstract. (It is worth noting that *comics* are not mentioned in this definition, falling at best under the rubric ‘etc’.)

Scott McCloud’s account of abstraction opposes it to ‘representational’ along a continuum between ‘reality’ and ‘meaning’, which appears to map to the semiotic distinction between the ‘iconic’ sign and the ‘symbolic’ sign, but also opposes it to *meaning*, showing that images approach abstraction at the apex of a triangular map of comics images which he terms ‘the picture plane’ (McCloud 1993, 46–53). At the peak, “shapes, lines and colours can be themselves and not pretend otherwise” (51). By this account then, abstraction ultimately carries no meaning at all. This is the position Neil Cohn takes in his blog post on the subject of abstract comics (Cohn 2009).

Rudolf Arnheim’s account of abstraction from 1969’s *Visual Thinking* (2004a) separates abstraction in the *image* from abstraction in *experience*. A high level of abstraction in the image is represented by ‘non-mimetic’ forms; low abstraction by replicas. Abstraction in experience is increasingly general, rising from the low-abstraction specifics to increasingly generalised concepts, via ‘symbolism’ (in the sense of specific emblems which imply general concepts or notions, as when a given rose may

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, and perhaps disconcertingly, definition 6b here, into which graphic narrative might fit (under the rubric ‘etc.’), even explicitly mentions ‘dispensing narrative’ – but perhaps the modifier ‘especially’ does not imply ‘necessarily’. Jan Baetens asserts this opposition frequently in ‘Abstraction in Comics’ (Baetens 2011).

stand for the broader concept ‘love’, or a skull appear as a *memento mori*), to ‘forces’ or ‘ideas’ (Arnheim 2004a, 151). This certainly preserves the meaningful, and Arnheim argues that abstract drawings can be a way of thinking, and can represent emotions, relationships and concepts (see chapter ‘Concepts Take Shape’, 116–134); and this brings us back to the sorts of functions comics are expected to pursue. Thus we might summarize accounts of abstraction by what abstraction is opposed to, as follows:

- Non-signifying: thing-in-itself
- Non-mimetic: not resembling, operating symbolically
  
- Non-specific: categorical, descriptive of connections or general properties
- Non-concrete, non-visible: conceptual (in the *signified*)

The objection to abstract comics being narrative would appear to fall out of the first two oppositions here, which focus on the *signifier*. However, possibilities open up for contentful abstraction with the second two, which focus on abstraction in what is *signified*. I will return to this account of dimensions of abstraction in Chapter 5 on interpersonal uses of the abstract later.

With that discussion in mind, let us assume with Arnheim the possibility that abstract images may have some meaning, but preserve the requirement that abstraction be non-mimetic, and turn to another example from Molotiu’s collection to seek a piece which evades recognizable elements such as ‘landscape’, ‘tree’, ‘sky’ and so on.

This piece by Andy Bleck (Figure 4) seems to qualify as avoiding representation of ‘external reality’. One cannot identify these shapes as belonging to a real world; any mimesis is a mutual resemblance of one image to another. It is indeed the ‘ink on paper’ that comprises the materiality of these images.<sup>3</sup> (What stops this sequence from being ‘non-sequitur’ is the continuity of colour and shape we can match between panels; these appear to be moment-to-moment or action-to-action transitions once again.) Perhaps the reader will imagine them as being very small, or existing some time long ago, floating

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<sup>3</sup> See McCloud 1993: 50 for this phrasing. Shaun Tan, in conversation with Paul Gravett for the Comica Festival in August 2012, commented that “the character *is* those lines” with which the artists draws. Nelson Goodman, in *Languages of Art* (1976) comments that depictions of fictional beings are ‘non-mimetic’ in that they do not re-present a thing (it does not exist) but bring it into being; so, a picture ‘of a unicorn’ is rather to be thought of as a ‘unicorn-picture’, escaping the assumption of reproduction. (See the section ‘Fictions’, 21.)

in an ocean, and appearing as amoebas? The ‘ocean’ is not blue to support such a reading, and the colours and shapes of the foreground objects do not seem to match an identifiable organism. So the piece seems to evade the critique of Shut’s piece as covertly mimetic proposed above.

But when reading these panels, do readers not interpret them as engaging in recognizable, human-like or creature-like *behaviours* rather than just growth, change or neutral movement? (Bill Shut’s title was ‘Time Lapse Growth’.) In tier two here, does that salmon-coloured shape not seem to be *seeing* and *fleeing* the looming blue object above? Or engaging some defence mechanism, and in tier four, having become red with rage, *attacking* the rising and conglomerating pink splotch approaching from below? The sharpness of the angles and the blending of colours in the last two panels suggest piercing, penetration, bleeding-into. The verbs are hard to avoid when describing the image. Jan Baetens argues that to do this is an imposition of narrative on abstract comics, acting in opposition to their abstract nature, and thereby depleting it (Baetens 2011, 100–101).

**Figure 4: Andy Bleck (2009), in Molotiu (2009)**

### **‘Animate’**

Verbs are at the heart of the clause, representing processes in its ‘constellation’ of meaning, and the clause is at the heart of discourse (Halliday 2005c, 203). What we perceive as being the ‘verb’ at work in a comics drawing, the process that appears most salient to us as readers, is central to how we interpret the text. Is the application of verbs of animacy and agency to the changing relationships of the images in Bleck’s work in Figure 4 an unfair over-interpretation, an imposition of unwarranted categories of intentional action onto the text? Perhaps those categories are an inevitable or natural outcome of language, thought, and perception.

In 1944, psychologists Heider and Simmel showed a short film of moving shapes to a number of observers and asked them to *describe* what they saw, in an effort to see

under what conditions naïve observers might be inclined to use such verbs of intention and agency. Figure 6 gives a representation of the film shown; the original film can also be viewed online (e.g., Kenjiro 2010). Overwhelmingly, the respondents described the relative motions of the shapes in terms of desires, goals, internal states, beliefs and other ‘animate’ concepts: for example, chasing, bullying, fleeing, cowering. This was true regardless of the instruction given, the demographic of the onlookers, and even (with differing details) when the film was shown backwards. Observers seemed to be strongly inclined to view certain types of movement by continuous shapes in space as purposive, and seemed unusually ready to perceive another mind in the motions of bodies in space. Heider and Simmel proposed that this was a hard-wired tendency, exposed through language, and adaptive in that this perception more readily enabled prediction about the behaviours of entities human beings were likely to encounter in their environment. So readers’ tendencies to interpret images in this way, reading intention into the behaviours represented, is unsurprising even in sequences that purport to present ‘abstract’ action. To preview the argument pursued below, readers ‘naturally’ seek out characters, actants, and motivated action in what they see. This is not an additional interpretation imposed by a readership used to, expecting and insisting upon narrative content, but a basic way in which human beings perceive the world.

In the terms of philosopher Daniel Dennett, people took the ‘Intentional stance’ in order most effectively to explain what was happening. Dennett (1989) outlines three stances towards explanations of the world: the *physical* stance, which uses concepts from basic physics (e.g., “the water boiled because the temperature reached 100°”), the *design* stance, which explains things in terms of functions (e.g., “the lever clicked up to stop the heating element from overheating the water”), and the *Intentional* stance, which attributes internal states, desires and goals to things (e.g., “the computer’s got confused because it wants to print but can’t communicate with the network”). Dennett uses this to account for our willingness to perceive other minds, and to predict that sufficiently advanced artificial machines will quite naturally be accepted by human beings as being invested with ‘minds’, even before it is clear whether they ‘actually’ have them, and even making moot the debate about what it is to have an ‘actual’ mind or not. If ‘mind’ is in the perceptions of an onlooker in this way, then similarly, character, action and motivation might be in the power of readers to supply, as a matter of course, to figures placed in front of them; and in this way, to enable the possibility of image sequences

that are both narrative and abstract. The imputation of *cause* to sequence of images, the assumption that changes in what is perceived will be due to causation rather than mere transformation, lies at the heart of investing animacy, even humanity, as well as narrative meaning, into visual discourse.

Perhaps this use of ‘animate’ description is just a shorthand, an intelligent interpretation of otherwise hard-to-explain phenomena practised by philosophers and bright people. To what extent is this avoidable, and what kinds of action mark the limits of what onlookers perceive as motivated behaviour? In ‘The perception of causality’ (Michotte 1963), experimental psychologist Albert Michotte reports his 1944 explorations of more low-level perceptual effects, using a sequence of simpler animations than the complex string of events Heider and Simmel used, to test the perception of basic causality.

**Figure 5: Michotte’s demonstrations of perceptual causality. Reprinted from Scholl and Tremoulet (2000), ‘Perceptual causality and animacy.’ *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 4(8), pp. 299–309, with permission from Elsevier.**

Some of Michotte’s test animations are represented in Figure 5. Michotte found that showing a ball moving to touch another, followed by that ball proceeding immediately at the same speed, produced an interpretation in the viewer of ‘launching’. Objects were also perceived to ‘follow’, to be ‘triggered’ to self-power away, and other effects. Changing the time delay in example (c) in Figure 5 had the effect of undoing the perceived causality beyond a certain limit. Interestingly, onlookers instead attributed self-caused motion to the second (green) ball, indicating that it had ‘chosen’ to leave. It seemed that causation, agency and motivation were basic conceptual categories that onlookers used to make sense of the world.

Other researchers followed up Michotte’s experiments. White and Milne (1997; 1999) showed ‘dragging’, ‘scattering’ and ‘exploding’. Other researchers, such as Leslie (e.g., 1984), tested with infants to find that perception of this level of causality appeared to be innate, or at least very early acquired. There is debate still about to what extent exactly these effects should be seen as purely perceptual, and to what extent they are interpretive, but for the purposes of the reading of abstract comics, this is moot, since we are expecting reading to be an interpretive act, and to take place at a slower speed

and with more reflection than in the animations shown by these researchers. (Images and discussion from Scholl and Tremoulet 2000.)

**Figure 6: Figure 6: Heider and Simmel's animation represented in Scholl and Tremoulet. Reprinted from Scholl and Tremoulet (2000), 'Perceptual causality and animacy.' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 4(8), pp. 299–309, with permission from Elsevier.**

To return to Heider and Simmel, then, it seems that it is irresistible (without deliberate guidance or decision to avoid it) for observers to understand these sequences as intentional behaviours, and to interpret these objects as displaying these motions due to desires, beliefs and emotional or dispositional states. As observers, as readers of the image, we 'invest them with animacy', triggered by the animations to adopt the Intentional stance, and read them as narrative actants.

But something has not been mentioned in these psychological reports of these experiments. Figure 6 is a *comic*, by intuition and according to McCloud's (1993) definition. So were the image sequences in Figure 5. It is beneath notice for Scholl and Tremoulet that they, in common with more or less all writers about these phenomena, expect the sequence shown to be *read* as *presenting* motion of continuous, identifiable 'characters' moving around a continuous, persistent 'setting', in a way that other image groups are not expected to be thus 'readable'. (They are 'generic' rather than specific characters, so sustain their abstraction in that sense, and do not *represent* 'real-world' figures mimetically; but they are engaged in a narrative which it takes effort to *avoid* seeing rather than one that is imposed by a wilful reader.)

Molotiu mentions Kandinsky's *Thirty* (1937) in his Introduction as an example of one of the roots of abstract comics (Molotiu 2009). But *Thirty* is hard to attempt to 'read'. There are not enough similarities across the panels to put together the elements of narrative in that way. There appears to be little if anything to track from panel to panel and impute intentionality to. (The evenness and adjacency of the frames even leave you in doubt, should you attempt it, as to which way to read it: left-to-right first, then top-to-bottom, or vice versa? Or some other way?) In contrast, Bleck's text in Figure 4 offers a reader (re)recognisable objects, in relation to other objects, to which he or she can take the Intentional stance and read as 'characters' with desires, goals and dispositions, pursued through their transformations. We should note here, then, a second



essential in the ‘readership’ of comics: that one must be able to track the *identity* of represented participants, so that causality may apply to them.

### **‘Narrative’**

So far, then, the argument has been that each (re)identifiable figure arrayed across the space of a page can be seen as a single persistent entity moving and transforming through time. (This seems true regardless of explicitly-rendered panelisation — the enclosure of these entities in framing borders — as long as the image can be ‘tracked’.) Once an entity is perceived as in motion in this way, onlookers bring to bear their understanding of the meanings of motions in the world to impute to the object *intentionality*, motivations and desires, and this ability and willingness to read images in this way is based in quite low-level perceptual systems as explored by Michotte and Heider and Simmel, amongst others. Even when the apprehension of movement is slowed down with the intervening action of the reader ‘piecing together’ movement across the static images of a comics page, shifting the interpretation of movement away from the immediacy of perception, this way of grasping the world seems to work — indeed, it is assumed to do so by the writers of psychology papers if their readers are to understand the nature of the motion images they are representing.

Let us turn now to how far we might have proceeded towards an argument for ‘narrative’ in abstract comics. Is the representation of motivated ‘characters’ across limited (moment-to-moment or action-to-action) panel transitions the only element of narrative abstract comics can manage? A brief round-up of elements of narrative commonly covered by narratologists might include these *characters* or ‘actants’, defined by their actions, functions in the plot, and attributes given in description; *events* that occur in the story and form the elements of its plot; the *viewpoint* from which the story is told (many narratologists, such as Genette, Bal and Rimmon-Kenan below, prefer the term *focalization* – defined by the character or characters who govern the perspective from which we perceive the narrative); the *dialogue* through which the story is told, which may in turn contain *nested* narratives or ‘metalepses’; and the *order* or sequence in which the writer has arranged the events, giving rise to flashbacks or ‘analepses’, and foreshadowings or ‘prolepses’. Mieke Bal’s (2009) discussion of the elements of narrative (first published 1985), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s (2002) division of the subject (proposed in 1983), and overlap between a range of theorists’ approaches

to the subject, all converge on these elements (among other particular specialisms). The terminology varies from writer to writer – ‘actant’ is derived from Greimas (1983) and Propp (1968), the –lepes from Gerard Genette’s seminal 1980 study of narrative management of time (appearing in English 1983) – but the concepts are similar. For the purposes of simply establishing some legitimacy for applying the term ‘narrative’ to a sequence of abstract images at all, I will gloss over most of the interesting and important distinctions to be made among these approaches here, and focus on these areas of broad agreement for now. I will briefly explore a few possibilities for the employment of these notions in abstract comics below, taking an example of an abstract comic from Molotiu’s collection to explore the application of each of these narrative elements in turn. In this way, I aim to demonstrate that abstract comics are capable of handling all the elements here outlined.

In the Andy Bleck piece it was seen that a ‘character’ could be tracked across images, with desires and motivated behaviours, interpreted in an analogue of the kind of perception explored by Heider and Simmel. But do all abstract comics work this way? It is hard to see any persistent ‘character’ represented in Figure 7. There are patterns of patches, especially the paired sets appearing in panels 3, 4 and 6 on the top tier, or the sequence of smears dominating the third grouping at the bottom. A single centred dot turns up several times, conspicuously in most panels of the first and last tier of the second grouping on this page. But the smears come and go, and the dot does not transform much or change orientation.

When the reader notices that Québécois artist Benoit Joly’s name for this piece is *Parcours*, a way of reading it presents itself. The images can be read as ‘representing’ footsteps, leaps, slides, impacts and the rhythms of running a course, like the urban ‘free running’ for which English adopts the word ‘parkour’.<sup>4</sup> To borrow C.S. Peirce’s (see 2011) semiotic terms again, the representation here is not the *iconic* (imitative by resemblance) mode one might expect, but more *indexical* (in that it represents the *traces* left by the physical action which are then implicit in the reading). The meaning proposed by the title, ‘symbolic’ in Arnheim’s (2004a) terms, can then be used to

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<sup>4</sup> For me, this piece inspires synaesthesia – I feel I can *hear* the footsteps, scratches, scatter of stones, thumps of impact suggested (symbolically?) by the images. Then the piece can fall free of its representational mode offered by the title (many of Molotiu’s selections carry titles that point to a semi-representational interpretation), and can be enjoyed with the status of music, or dance, both modes accepted as abstract under the OED definitions.

interpret the piece, in the sense that it is a cue to the reader to re-orient his or her expectations from seeing the marks as figural (iconic) and to perceive the possibility of indexical representation. Perhaps at this moment of realisation, the abstract collapses into the representational; but perhaps, rather, it is primarily the detached rhythms and motion of the piece being embodied in the comic, borrowed from the physical *genre* of ‘parkour’, rather than any representation of a specific real-world action. Any ‘character’ here is likewise disembodied, implicit only in the traces left in the marks on the page.

**Figure 7: ‘Parcours’ (1987) by Benoit Joly (in Molotiu 2009)**

This is not mimetic representation, then, though it is a sort of representation; it is to some degree specific, to some degree general — it may represent a particular course, but underdetermines, at least mimetically, what or where that course might be; and whilst it may be read as showing concrete, if indexical, marks of a creator, the notion of energy, running, pace, movement (or musical rhythm) is abstract, in the sense of immaterial, conceptual.

Andrei Molotiu, in ‘Abstract Form: Sequential Dynamism and Iconostasis in Abstract Comics and Steve Ditko’s *Amazing Spider-Man*’ (2011), discusses this piece as embodying what he terms ‘sequential dynamism’. For him the dynamics of the page represent a musical rhythm, rather than the rhythm of physical movement in space that I am suggesting. He opposes this dynamism in comics to ‘iconostasis’, the perception of the comics image as a still arrangement of panels, an ‘n-tych’ of static drawings. It is the act of choosing to ‘read’ the comic that brings out its dynamism, as will be explored below, and the opposite choice can be made, studying a comic for its abstract formal properties even when a straightforward narrative invites such a reading.

Richard Hahn’s undated work in Molotiu’s collection is a piece that again initially resists interpretation and appears to be a pure arrangement of colour. Its panels are numerous and directly adjacent to each other and seem to show a fairly even variation, segments of a red circle. But if one commits to the choice of reading in conventional order, it is possible to perceive that a larger, pink-red object is being viewed through the tiny panels; and when one follows the sequence, one feels that one’s *viewpoint* is revolving slowly around this vast, gently undulating and colour-shifting sphere. (Or is it rotating around the viewer, and is it the lighting conditions that are changing?)

A central convention of the comic strip that has not yet appeared in these pieces is the word balloon, which indicates *dialogue*. Our tendency so far has been to set this aside, as implying the use of text, which from the definition of comics onwards has been excluded as a necessary component. Balloons do appear in abstract comics at times: I have mentioned the use of text in Crumb's opening piece from Molotiu's collection, and Janusz Jaworski's 2001 work contains several balloons filled with asemic script or colour (Molotiu 2009). In a piece by Lewis Trondheim, the balloons impute desires in the object, which refers forward in its 'utterance' to a shape it will adopt later in the sequence (the content in the balloons match cataphorically to shapes which appear to the right or below). When this fails, later in the page, one can read 'frustration' in its more rapid repetitions of the squiggle it intends in the fourth tier, and an enlarged image and balloon (representing, conventionally, raised volume of an utterance). Its references back to re-try earlier forms (a circle) and even its original form (a humble blot) also fail. Ultimately, its empty 'speech' balloon, with reduced size (suggesting quieter utterance) and a bent tail (perhaps representing wavering voice) bring about its disappearance, so that its final panel — established by spatial position alone, rather than by frame — leaves the narrative on a blank page and returns the story to a point prior to its beginning. Has the polymorphous speaker accidentally brought about its own demise, or has it committed suicide? The 'intentional' language helps readers explain the sense they make of the sequence. This use of framing in abstract enclosures, and projection of the internal life of a character, will be important in our later discussions of the logical structures of comics in Chapter 7, as well as interpersonal engagement in Chapter 4. It is worth dwelling more on this use of abstraction in a complex piece of graphic narrative.

If Trondheim's untitled piece begins to suggest a more sophisticated management of narrative shape and time, as well as the introduction of dialogue, then *Stop Quibbling Please* by Ibn Al Rabin (Figure 8) illustrates this even further. Here can be found Genette's 'metalepses' or 'embedded' narrative. The status of the narrative in circle's speech balloon is not fully determined — is it a reference back to a past conversation they have had, a conversation they have often had before (note the second and third level metalepsis in tiers two and three of circle's monologue), a hypothetical about the way square's proposed conversation will go, or a prediction thereof? The order of reading is disrupted here too, as the first panel seen (panel one of circle's 'speech') is not the first to be read in the logic of the sequence (square and circle facing off, left of

the bottom tier). This is part of the play of the comic: it challenges readers' assumptions of how to approach it, and sets one in search of its logic of dependencies and nesting.

**Figure 8: 'Stop Quibbling, Please' (2001) by Ibn Al Rabin (in Molotiu 2009)**

Below I attempt a gloss of how this complex page reads, freely using the 'intentional' verbs of action that Heider and Simmel (1944) found that onlookers need to describe the action of entities, and aiming to represent the 'nested' metalepses with indented paragraphing:

Starting at the lower left panel of the strip at the bottom of the page, black square makes a proposal to black circle in panel 2: 'circle square'. Circle responds with a lengthy and nested monologue in reply:

Square has said 'white square, circle' before, to which circle replied 'black square circle'. Square then proposed, 'white square, black circle', to which circle pointed out that square had said 'square circle' in the past — perhaps above. (Does white signify a past or subjunctive mode?) So circle repeats, 'black square circle', slightly larger than in the panel above — suggesting that this is uttered more firmly. Square says (suggests? Points out?), 'white square'. Circle responds, 'black circle'. The matching of their own physical shapes to the shapes they utter suggests opposition, entrenched views. Circle expands: square said 'white square circle', circle said 'black square circle'. Circle repeats, a third time, in a column: 'black square circle'. Circle's unwillingness to budge, and reference to past arguments in support of this fixed position, is represented by this repetition of the shapes embodying its dialogue. Two panels pass without dialogue balloons, suggesting an impasse. Square starts an utterance, signified by the small but contentless word balloon, but circle immediately repeats (the swiftness of the response indicated by the proximity of circle's word balloon): 'black square circle'. Two more panels pass in silence: square has nothing more to add, and the conversation is ended.

Returning back up a narrative level, as we return to the strip below which we had left in order to parse the contents of circle's large word balloon, circle repeats one more time the conclusion the two had reached in their nested dialogue: 'black square circle'. Black square, in the final panel, is silenced by this argument.

This brief survey has established a number of narrative capabilities shown by these abstract comics. Firstly, in addition to the representation of 'amoeba-like' forms, we have seen a second way of representing character abstractly, as implicit in the traces of movement shown 'indexically'. Secondly, we have seen the ability of abstract comics to show shifting physical viewpoint of a reader by encoding a re-recognisable form around which a viewport-frame itself can be perceived to move. (This leaves aside other interpretations of 'viewpoint' or 'focalisation', but the intention here is to offer an example that demonstrates that abstract comics could at least take one approach to managing this narrative effect.) Thirdly, we have seen ways of encoding dialogue in the absence of words by the deployment of comics' symbolic conventions such as the word balloon, in tandem with the reproduction of shapes in the main body of the comics; and finally the use of those same conventions to accomplish shifts of narrative level, tense and perhaps subjunctive status. It is evident that abstract comics are capable of detailed and complex narrative effects.

### **Application**

After a reader has tackled a few works in Molotiu's collection, a piece like Troy Lloyd's *e-z see* (which was the first example of abstraction given above in Figure 1) becomes accessible. The reader has acquired strategies to make sense of the text as a sequence, a progression, a story, rather than interpreting it as a flat array of shapes. A discussion of such possible approaches follows.

A reader might see a potential identity between the three unconnected shapes in the first tier in Figure 9, tracking their movement and transformation between the first and second panel. Assuming that continuity and identity then, the next tiers can be read as an increasingly complex and intertwining dance between the shapes. Later in the piece, as the lines grow in thickness, connectedness and roughness of form, and as panels overlap and disintegrate, one can continue reading through the middle pages as increased energy, volume, passion or anger. We might vacillate between reading as icon

(perceiving perhaps a human shape in some panels) or as index (the energy and vigour of the artist's line representing frenzied mood and motion on the page).

**Figure 9: From 'e-z see' by Troy Lloyd (n.d.), p.1. (in Molotiu 2009)**

Finally, in Figure 1, which ends the piece, panels fall away and the lines alone lead the reader from section to section. Management of the narrative time and negotiation of the space is now up to readers alone, perhaps roughly still adhering to conventional left-right, top-down order, but free to follow diagonal tracks, to loop and reverse. The line communicates too, and one may still be looking for connections beyond the now-absent 'adjacency pairs' of explicitly delineated frames, perceiving this final page as returning to the 'calm' of the opening, but this time free, without the panels to hem the lines and shapes in, following their own, richer routes to encouraging readers to impute to them action, animation, animacy and meaning.

My proposal is that the reading skills exposed by our efforts to make sense of abstract comics, and these boundary-testing ways of composing texts, have something to say about how readers enjoy and make sense of the apparently 'transparently readable' sorts of images shown in predominantly representational graphic narrative. The much-noted superficial simplicity of comics masks a detailed set of readership practices applied to interpreting and motivating the nature of these images and lines. Readers make a string of *decisions* in reading graphic narrative, which have been touched upon throughout this chapter:

1.) The decision to read images as *metonymic* — as representing a *fragment* of a larger process. Comics thereby operates by a system of visual '*différance*' — where meaning is dependent on material elsewhere, in the text or its context. This stands in opposition to a 'meaningless' abstraction which emphasises the qualities of the image/text itself, and also in opposition to mimetic representation: it is not just resemblance to an object in the world that constitutes this *différance* of meaning, but a

reliance on implicature of material outside the frame or implied before or after the events depicted.<sup>5</sup>

2.) The decision to read similar images as *identical*. This choice is key to understanding comics at all. This is a core sort of abstraction to be made: in the sense that there are existents in comics that persist beyond each individual rendering of them, which the reader needs to ‘generalise’ from the string of particular instantiations given in the text.

3.) The decision to read these entities as *animate*. The reader invests in the image-sequence not only identity but motivation; engaging with the action represented by means of 1.) and 2.) above as purposeful accounts of human-like and physical behaviour. Daniel Dennett’s *physical* and *mechanical* stances account for backgrounds and world-building; the *Intentional* stance in addition accounts for narrative. This is a set of assumptions that account for patterns of *causation* in the graphic narrative.

In making these choices to *read*, built on the affordances offered by the text, the reader is recruited into bringing to life the narrative worlds of comics, including ‘abstract’ ones. What is exposed here, by repressing representation, is the way that comics can engage us in meaning-making, involving us in the mutual work of constituting the text.

## Summary

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This chapter has opened up the multifunctional nature of graphic narrative by examining what happens when just one of those functions is withheld, the one that typically draws most attention when discussing comics: their representational function, part of the ideational metafunction. What is exposed is some practical tenets of comics, which the next chapter will develop into a series of pragmatic ‘maxims’ of comics readership, building on the readerly decisions described above. Abstract graphic

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of *différance* comes from Derrida (1985); for its application to comics see Groensteen (2009)



narratives, in eschewing the experiential function of representation, reveal some of the interpersonal function: the engagement of the reader in interaction with the text, in a challenging play of meaning-making by identifying difference and reading in personal and emotional value. The expressive nature of the abstract images is not to be ignored either: without anything concrete to represent, the sheer energy and emotion of the lines and colours is foregrounded, and the interpersonal value of these will be picked up on in Chapter 5 below. Finally, the reader here needs to do work in tracking identities between different patches of the text, seeing and drawing connections between elements, whether links are made in the text or whether it is left elliptical, for the reader to infer.

The following chapter will turn to Halliday's ideational metafunction, with this framing challenge in mind, to think of the work of ideation as non-obvious, not a 'given' in graphic narrative. In considering the work of representation, the experiential function of comics, as a set of *writerly* choices — options a creator may choose, offering affordances that enable a reader to make meaning from the text — the routes out to the remaining metafunctions will be mapped.

# 3

## Representing Processes in Graphic Narrative

### Introduction

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The task of comics, as we have seen, is to create *narrative* drawings, to adopt the term used by Thierry Groensteen (2009). These are not simply drawings of characters and places and things, but drawings that are meant to communicate action, sequences of events which add up to a story, fictional or otherwise. A semiotics which attends to the marks on the page as static items, or a visual criticism which attends to qualities of the artwork as artwork, drawing on the language of isolated individual works rather than elements from a sequence, will miss important elements of the nature of comics: that they are applied images, images that serve a story, images that are used to get across world-building or function-advancing moves in a narrative. In a formulation attributed to Joann Sfar, ‘you’re not drawing the cat — you’re drawing the *pounce* of the cat’.

As described in the Introduction, I adopt M.A.K. Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) as a way of talking about multimodal communicative practice, following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), O’Toole (2010), and the others (e.g., Painter and Martin 2013; Moya Guijarro 2014) who have adapted Halliday’s practical, functional model of language to discuss advertising and news media, displayed art, architecture, and children’s books — but not yet sequential art in comics, though that form has been mentioned tangentially, including by Halliday himself (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 443).

Halliday’s model rests on a tripartite conception of meaning-making in language, emerging from exploring children’s functional needs to communicate using language (see for example Halliday 1973; and the essays collected in Halliday 2004), and helpful in conceptualising and translating between starkly different language structures, such as English and Chinese (see Halliday 2005b). It aims to capture the simultaneous and multifaceted functions of communication in whatever form, which is why it has proven

so productive a model for such a range of multimodal enquiry. Halliday claims that human meaning-making is always serving three purposes simultaneously, in each utterance. As described in Chapter 1, these comprise firstly an ideational purpose, representing the experience of the speaker, and putting into words — *construing*, which is to say both reflecting and constructing — the processes the speaker observes and claims to be going on in the world (including within themselves), the participants involved in that process (including non-human participants), and the circumstances of manner, place, time and so on in which the processes occur. Secondly, always and importantly, language serves an interpersonal function: language is always a medium of social exchange between human beings, produced by and for them, not independently existing entities outside of a social context; so language enacts social relationships between people, casting the interlocutors in their roles in relation to the utterance, and necessarily involving human attitudes towards the contents of speech — as Halliday puts it, this represents the *intrusion* of human interactants into the discourse (Halliday and Webster 2009, 103). Thirdly, and underpinning the other two which are perhaps more prominent in utterances, language maintains itself as a message: it serves a textual function, organising itself as a text and making links with other bits of text and with the world, and presenting information in a sequence which permits later elements to rely on and build on earlier elements, as well as signalling to the listener/reader which elements belong together and where the breaks are — that is to say, marking cohesion. Halliday terms these ‘metafunctions’, reflecting their composition of many more specific sub-functions.

The focus here will be on the *ideational* element in Halliday’s system, though the tripartite view of meaning-making presented here means that we will necessarily discuss the interaction between this and other elements: two aspects of the *interpersonal* metafunction will be invoked, including a dependence on interaction and the element of modalisation of the image which involves the creator’s attitude towards the reality-status of the images. I will also comment briefly on the ways in which *textual* elements underpin all that will be said.

The ideational component of Halliday’s system focuses on the clause. The clause is at the heart of grammar, and systemic functional grammars present it with an interestingly visual metaphor: as a “configuration of elements centred on a process”. Halliday at times refers to these configurations as “constellations” of elements (Halliday

2005c, 203). The clause is comprised of wordings of, realisations of, three core elements: participants, represented in language by noun phrases, who are the originators and targets of the process; the process itself, instantiated by a verb group in language; and optionally, circumstances in which the process occurs, worded as one or more adverbial phrases. As the clause is at the heart of the grammar, the process is at the heart of the clause.

In the visual mode, it is fairly easy to see that *participants* may be rendered as drawings of figures in the foreground — at least, insofar as they are concrete participants. *Circumstances* may be rendered in the background — this is clear for adverbials of place, and by implication, times; the manner in which a process is executed is less obvious, but as we will see, abstract elements may be used in the image, background or foreground, to communicate manner. How then, can a *process* be represented in drawing? I outline four possible approaches to doing so, each of which have been the focus of prior studies in comics theory.

## Four Approaches to Rendering the Process

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Comics can represent processes in three basic *visual* ways:

1. Implicit action through dynamics of composition. This is usually given more specific content through the nature of the participants represented.
2. Implicated action through processes akin to Grice's maxims of conversational cooperation, operating between visual 'utterances' (panels or 'episodes'.)
3. Represented action through grammaticalised abstraction. This is normally achieved by a set of established metaphors extracted from their original iconicity or attempts to represent modal effects of vision.

All three may be at play on any given page or within any given panel, handling the same or different processes. The second operates in a comparable way to Scott McCloud's (1993) 'transitions', which he sees as the central means of comics communication. He acknowledges the existence and operation of motion lines and other abstract conventional signs, but does not model them as partaking in the same work: the representation of processes. The dynamics of composition, in particular the dispositions

of human bodies, is of especial interest to Eisner, in particular in 2007's *Expressive Anatomy*.

Comics have a further resource: the verbal. This can carry process meaning in the following further ways:

4 a) Apposition of a verb of action in the place of an onomatopoeic sound effect, usually indexically related by proximity to the pose of the participant(s) engaged in the process.

4 b) Narration of the action in dialogue or captions, whereby the participants construed in the text refer cohesively to the participants represented in the image.

Since 4b takes us into the world of the verbal, rather than the visual, I will focus only on 4a here. This gives four visual resources for realising process that may be exploited by comics. I discuss each in more detail in the following sections.

## **1. Participants imply processes: Composition**

The rendering of concrete participants commonly places their bodies in relationships to other participants and with dispositions that may imply actions, behaviours, events. In particular, rendering bodies with diagonal vectors, in positions of imbalance, pointed towards one another, or in physically unstable relationship to the space in which they appear, will all imply motion and interaction to an observer. Here I am drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's notion of vectors as the heart of processes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 45–78), and on a source which they also use, Rudolf Arnheim's account of dynamics in art as explored in *Art and Visual Perception* (2004b, 410–43); this in turn rests on the work of the gestalt psychologists, which explores the ways in which we group images and interpret compositions (Arnheim 2004b, 4). This method of rendering the verb is central to figure drawing, and is the focus of many comics art manuals, such as cartoonist Burne Hogarth's series (Hogarth 1970), or Eisner's (Eisner 2008b, 36; Eisner 2008c; Eisner 2008a). It is how action may be represented within a single, isolated frame, in any art style, and is not restricted to comics or graphic narrative (see O'Toole 2010).

## **2. Difference leads to Implicature: McCloud's 'invisible art'**

The second approach is more distinctive to comics, and is at the heart of one of the key texts in comics theory: Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). When two images are drawn in sequence, for instance representing the same participants but with different dispositions or relationships to each other, then what is represented is not just the process implied by composition in each of the two panels, but also a third process — that which is implied to *have happened* between the pairs of drawings to 'transition' the participants from the first position to the second. This I will call implicature through difference — because what is essential is that the onlooker perceives both a set of basic similarities between the image pair, and a set of differences between them, which are read to have been brought about by a process of change 'between the panels'.

For McCloud, these can be classified into a set of core *transitions* that make up the heart of comics art: for him, sequentiality is essential to graphic narrative, the 'invisible art', because these processes occur unrendered in the 'gutter' between panels, brought into being by the mind of the reader — and here, the act of 'reading' is foregrounded, as a creative act, since sequential apprehension is at the basis of this action, and work needs to be done by the reader to imagine the events (McCloud 1993, 68). In the spirit of Wolfgang Iser's 'act of reading' (Iser 1978), and others in the reader-reception theory tradition, this posits the work of comics art as being an experiential entity that is only brought to life in the reading-off of the elements by the consumer of the work. This notion serves several rhetorical and polemic purposes for McCloud: he can claim an imaginative response and intellectual work on the part of the comics reader which had been denied in earlier denigration of the medium as impoverished, for children, because the visual material is 'given' to the reader rather than imagined by them actively as in literature. If comics essentially goes on in between the drawings, this claim for literature as creative work, imaginative work, intellectual work, can be transferred to comics. Also, if sequential presentation of art in whatever format is the key to comics, then other works previously classified as 'art' can be claimed for the comics canon: the Bayeux tapestry, the Trajan column, the sequential work of William Hogarth, and so on (McCloud 1993, chap. 1) — thus escaping the visual tropes and historically-emerging typical content of comics (superheroes, funny animals, pulp entertainment).

### **3. Abstract line: The ‘Lexicon of Comicana’**

But this is not the only way in which comics communicate action, as McCloud acknowledges in a separate section on the qualities of line (McCloud 1993, chap. 9). Lines may ‘concretise’ the vectors in a drawing, bringing them into visible form despite their status as abstractions. These abstract elements have often been the focus of semiotic studies, which commonly pitch them as the ‘symbols’ of comics, as opposed to the ‘icons’ of comics content; but this distinction does not hold well, since often they adopt iconic images or work by metaphor, or by rendering the modality of the visible, such as blurring of vision when looking at objects in motion, or ‘ghosting’ of multiple images overlaid; they may indicate impacts by ‘splash’ images which derive from patterns in physical material when impacted, but are carried over into purely abstract ‘impact flashes’. These are the abstract elements collected and given tongue-in-cheek labels by cartoonist Mort Walker in his *Lexicon of Comicana* — ‘hites, vites, dites and briffits’, ‘sphericasia’, ‘blurgits’ and so on (Walker 2000). He groups these under the general rubric of ‘indicia’, but it is his term for elements which emanate radially from the participants, particularly their heads — the term ‘emanata’ — which has been adopted most often by scholars, as noted in Chapter 1, and which I will use here.

This ‘visual lexicon’ is one of the most striking indicators of comics as a mode, though not all comics use these forms: it is just one of the approaches to representing non-participant elements of the material which the comics creator has access to. It is tempting to equate these to the lexicon of a language, particularly since there are ‘dialect’ forms and the conventions often need to be learned — readers of Japanese manga will encounter standard forms not used in Western work, such as the emanation of a bubble from a participant’s nose to indicate sleeping (McCloud 1993, 131). But often they derive from embodied metaphors (see Lakoff and Johnson 2003), and can be improvised by the creator along those analogical lines. Here I treat them according to the nature of the line used to render these elements (abstract/concrete), and again that comes with a ‘health warning’: that I do not propose absolute distinctions here, but a continuum of abstraction along which a given line or pattern may be placed by a critic, reader, creator or observer. I will return to this point below.

#### 4. Verb supply: ‘Blending’ words and pictures

As a final choice the comics creator can take, we turn to what Walker (2000, 46) playfully classifies as ‘cheating’: the incorporation of a verb into the composition *per se*. The word ‘poke’ emerging from an image of a finger touching a character can distinguish the nature of that contact from ‘scratch’ or even ‘prod’, in a way which may be hard to render in drawing. This is a special form of the familiar use of onomatopoeic words in support of action in comics, and there is crossover here: ‘smash’ may function both as a verb and an enactment of the sound made by the process. In many cases, the verbiage used may be ‘verbed’ in language, as in such constructions as ‘the plane whooshed by’. However, the appearance of other words than verbs in the composition I would class as instances of abstraction or composition, where the verbiage takes the role of one of the participants in a drawn or implicit action or relationship: the fact that the content ‘krrrshh’ is produced by the impact is indicated by abstract lines linking the contact point and the letters, or by the arrangement of the letters composed as if emanating from that point, physically ejected by the process. For some theorists of comics, notably R.C. Harvey, the ‘blending of words and pictures’ is the pre-eminent defining feature of comics (Harvey 1996, 3); Harvey seeks to include the single-panel cartoon by adhering to this criterion, but of course thereby excludes many silent narratives — or at least, non-verbal narratives, or wordless ones (the categories overlap).

### Six Classes of Process Types

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All this is to treat the verb in its ‘folk’ understanding — as a process of *doing*. But in Halliday’s system, reflecting the usage of verbs in the grammar, this is not all that verbs can do: they cover processes of *being* and *sensing*, too (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 172). Beyond the **material** processes of physical interaction, and the **behavioural** processes of non-transitive physical action, there are also **mental** processes of sensing and thinking, and **verbal** processes of saying and otherwise vocalising. Also, and crucially, there are **relational** processes, which attribute qualities and identities and attributes to participants, and, reflecting the most frequent verb in the language (*to be*), **existential** processes, which assert simply that a participant exists.





Figure 10: Complete Diagram of Process Types and Approaches

This array of process types reflects the grammar of English in particular, and is defined not only by the types of meaning expressed, as recounted in the last paragraph, but also by the patterns of grammar around the verb: what tenses are typically used, whether they take an object or complement in the clause structure, and so on. There is some complexity and overlap here, and the processes and their grammars share features, so this classification is open to debate (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 171–73); but it has been relatively stable over the development of systemic-functional grammars. For my purposes, I think it is useful to treat them in three groups, which are separable in many cases but may be hard to distinguish or operate in strikingly similar ways in other circumstances. Firstly, the verbal and the mental processes are both commonly ‘projective’ — which is to say, they may carry other content inside them, and lead to recursion in comics, especially via the means of abstract enclosing lines. Second, the behavioural and material overlap, and it may not be clear under which to classify a given drawing, since the distinction relies in part on the relationship between different participants. Behavioural processes are closely tied to mental processes (in that outward behaviour expresses internal states), but also to relational processes (in that any disposition of a body, any rendering of the relations and qualities of its parts, is likely to represent a given behaviour, even if it is a subtle or neutral one). Finally, the relational and existential processes are closely tied too: any rendering of the relations within or between participants entails that those participants exist; and any effort to render the existence of a participant in drawing is likely to entail at least something of its relations to the world, its physical qualities, its attributes.

Figure 10 on page 88 shows an array of example drawings created to illustrate how each of the four approaches described can handle representing these six process types. At the risk of labouring in language what may be quite clear in image, in the next sections I will elaborate and discuss each approach in turn.

### **Processes rendered by composition**

Composition may render verbal and mental action through the disposition of elements of the face, head and mouth. Expressions are key to communicating mental processes, though gesture may support this, including the disposition of the whole body (hence the affinity with behavioural processes, and the common intertwining of the two). Verbal processes will usually be rendered using an open mouth, and are more

directed than the mental: a second participant, a listener or interlocutor, is commonly rendered or at least implied. Composition more or less entails the rendering of relational processes: the positioning of a participant in space, in relation to other participants; designs and colours of clothing, texture or hairstyle and skin; facial features, size, and all other relevant attributes. (These may be evaded by certain moves we will discuss below, but must normally be present at some point.) The mere existence of an object may be rendered by its depiction isolated from space, in a neutral, flat and perpendicular angle; the closest one can get to rendering a participant's existence without its qualities is a far-distance rendering as a dot — but even that will be located in space.

### **Implicature of processes by difference**

Differences may communicate verbal and mental processes by *implicature*: between the picking up of a telephone, and a second character slamming a phone down in anger, a verbal exchange may be implied, along with some of its character. Between the scratching of the head in one image, and the presentation of a gift in the next, a decision to purchase may be implied (alongside a number of other actions: purchasing, wrapping, the action of revealing). In this very open space between two drawings, relational processes may be implied: a detail drawing of an insect on a windowsill may present through composition its bodily features; a second drawing may show a whole windowsill and a speck upon it, and what is implied here is the identity between the insect-drawing and the speck, as well as the relation between the first drawing and the second, which may be 'mapped' onto it. A drawing of the impact of an object that follows a drawing of the object in its earlier state may imply, alongside a material event, the existence of a thing causing that event: in a puddle, a tyre track implies the existence of a car (as well as other, relational properties about it). It will be clear that this taxonomy is not exclusive or exhaustive, and an attempt to pigeonhole any given image will not succeed — images are simultaneous, multivalent, rich and dense, rather than notational, in the terms of Nelson Goodman (1976). The value in the model is in offering affordances to the analyst to 'tease out' certain features of an image set, rather than making the claim that it is constructed from absolute components.

I used the term 'implicature' in the preceding discussion, rather than simply 'implication', because I wish to draw on a particular theorisation of pragmatic understanding of unrepresented content, such as that which seems to take place between

turns in conversation, or here, between images in sequence. The term derives from Paul Grice's model of conversational cooperation (Grice 1975), whereby interlocutors rely on tacit adherence to a set of norms in order to be able to communicate clearly, even when the meanings they exchange are not literally present in the wordings of the conversation. Though Grice's idea was designed to account for the management of meanings in face-to-face collaboration, the underlying principles may usefully be adapted to offer a way of explicating the kinds of deduction a writer may assume that a reader will make in graphic narrative. The properties the two modes share are a) their division into more-or-less discrete units, conversational turns on the one hand, and 'panels' or separated pictures on the other; and b) the reliance on a shared code whereby inferences may be made, a play of mutual, cooperative expectations on the part of both the 'encoder' and the 'decoder' (note that actually there is much more going on here than code-decode, since much of the material is improvised from shared cultural contexts). Though the creator and reader of graphic narrative do not swap roles, a set of assumptions still holds between them, and I adopt Grice's original word 'maxims' to capture their law-like but tentative and tacit nature.

### ***Maxims of comics readership***

A basic assumption when reading a comic is that the array of images and perhaps text that faces the reader is 'to be read' — that there is a whole to be constructed from the many parts, and that images are co-dependent on each other. This idea chimes with Groensteen's notion of 'iconic solidarity' (Groensteen 2009). The **principle of synecdoche** states this: an image is to be read as representing part of a larger object, event, space or narrative — even if it is abstract. This principle is foundational, like Grice's principle of *relation* is held to be by those who succeeded him, such as Sperber and Wilson (1995) who build on this as the foundation their theory of textual relevance. The following carry the proviso, *unless we signify otherwise*; their frequent breach and flouting will be signalled elsewhere in the text.

The **maxim of identity** holds that a sufficiently similar figure appearing across (or sometimes within) panels *is* a single individual. I use the term 'panel' here, but the use of a frame to divide the graphic narrative into separate images is mere convention, like punctuation marks: I claim that the 'cluster' of images centring on a process, or rather

an overlapping and simultaneous network of related processes, is the ‘unit’ of comics discourse. It is the repetition of images — and our choice as readers to adopt this maxim and interpret the multiple renderings as renderings of a single figure, which persists through time and space in the text-world of the story — that is essential to enabling the implicature of processes in this way.

The next two maxims capture some frequently-flouted continuities — the **maxim of continuity of time** and **continuity of space**. When we see a matching image, similar enough to identify, located nearby on the page, our default assumption is that the place in which the figure appears is the same for both, and that time has moved forward a contiguous but to-be-determined amount. In fact, comics frequently signal to us changes of location and time, by visual means — relational accounts of a new location, a clock face, the disposition of the sun, changes of clothes or look of a character — and by verbal means in caption boxes (‘Meanwhile...’ ‘That evening...’, ‘New York, 1954...’), and the need for these is motivated by this default assumption.

Finally, a **maxim of causality** is in general operation across comics images and text: that what happens in comics diegesis is caused by elements elsewhere in the diegesis. This is the underlying principle of narrative recognised famously by EM Forster (2005): that stories are not just successions of events, but events caused by others. We may read physical and mechanical causation (implying material action), as well as intentional action, in the sense of the deliberate enactment of desires by characters (implying behavioural, mental and verbal action), as discussed in Chapter 2. An upshot of this maxim is that the impossible may then be read as an abstract expression of something mental rather than material: we treat as metaphor that which flouts the maxim of causality, restoring its causality through an alternative interpretation. The character has not suddenly turned into a pig: he feels like one — boorish or foolish. (And arguably, even where the story-world does permit of fantastical transformations and impossible actions, those may still also be read metaphorically.)

### ***Breaching and flouting***

The caveat *unless we signify otherwise* — that is to say, all other things being equal — is crucial, since all other things are commonly *not* equal. As with Grice’s

conversational maxims, these ‘rules’ are as commonly honoured in the breach as in the observance; and usually that is an acceptable ‘flouting’ of the maxims which leads usefully to intended implicatures. To breach the maxims may cause confusion and difficulty in reading the text, but most commonly they are noticed by creators as reasons to add certain elements to ‘signify otherwise’, or they are exploited by creators to pull off special effects. Some illustrative instances follow.

The maxim of **identity** may at times be breached as in the ‘cloning’ of Calvin in a stretch of Bill Watterson’s celebrated strip *Calvin and Hobbes* (Figure 11). Several identical characters appear in the same panel and are to be understood as separate Calvins, rather than one in motion. (Having said that, note that the appearance of multiple renderings of the same character enclosed in a single panel usually does signify the rapid motion of the one character; and I would argue that motion is implied by the co-presence even of the non-identical Calvins in a pleasing effect Watterson is deliberately exploiting.) To clarify this, Watterson needs to signal the separate identity of the clone-Calvins by their speech balloons and interactions verbally and physically with one another to establish their continuity in space.

The maxim of continuity of **space** is intended to explain how backgrounds, once established in a detailed drawing at the start of a scene, may then be elided or attenuated without confusing disruption to the reader’s imagined space. Backgrounds may be completely blank, rendered partially (the line of a wall) or simplified and left incomplete. George Herriman’s disruption of this in the polymorphous backgrounds of *Krazy Kat* (see, e.g., Herriman and Yoe 2010) is one of the distinctive features of his style, and readers are to recognise that the rock, the horizon, the moon, are indeed identical despite their variations in style. This maxim is also here to motivate the existence of the ‘establishing shot’ to mark changes in place, the necessity for ‘world-building’ drawings (if that is what the creator is interested in), and to motivate captions and narration which identify changes of place verbally.

The maxim of continuity of **time** similarly motivates such common comics tropes as ‘meanwhile’, ‘later’, ‘that night’ and so on. These are needed when there is an ellipsis of time, the sorts of temporal shifts described by Gerard Genette (1983). Chris Ware’s simple, non-temporal conjunctions ‘AND’, ‘BUT’ and the surprisingly contiguous ‘THEN’ and ‘SO’ both exploit and disrupt this pattern (see, e.g., Ware 2001; Ware 2012). Also motivated by this assumption of continuity is the need to signal flashback

clearly, often by changes of modality in colour as well as changes in character appearance, which will need to be substantial to achieve their effects in reorienting the reader's expectations away from this maxim. Such effects as 'cross-cutting', the alternation between two sequences of events to be understood as occurring simultaneously, may seem to present problems for this maxim; but such temporal arrangements do need to be signalled as a change from the ordinary, by marking separations in space using colour coding, the inclusion of backgrounds to establish the characters' different locations, and by the arrangement of the panels on the page, often in chequered or mirrored patterns to indicate this simultaneous alternation.

**Figure 11: from *The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes* (Watterson 1992, 185, 186)**

Continuities and discontinuities of time and space are exploited in Pierre Wazem and Frederik Peeters' *Koma*, in which the narcoleptic protagonist finds herself uncertain whether she is in a dream-world or a real world (Wazem and Peeters 2012, 229, 253). By not marking the status of the reality by means of modalisation of borders or colours, the text similarly puts the reader into a deliberately uncertain state, finding their assumptions about the coherence of space and time in the narrative flouted. Jaime Hernandez likewise exploits the continuities, and identity, to bravura effect in 'Bob Richardson' (Hernandez 2004, 45–48): Protagonist Maggie is abruptly slapped by an angry character from the main diegesis in a panel lower right, and this is followed by a full double-page spread of slaps by many characters from different periods in her life. The reader gradually realises, in the absence of any indicators that time and space is discontinuous, with backgrounds elided and no markers in the borders, that this cannot be a possible continuity sequence: causality at the literal level is also flouted, and so the reader is cued to the implicature that the sequence is dream or fantasy. After the double-page spread of slaps, Maggie finds herself younger, amongst characters from her past. This sequence progresses according to the maxims, until on page 51, in the upper left, a drawing of a slap recurs; by the maxim of identity, the reader takes the implicature that the dream sequence is concluded and we return to the main diegesis (Hernandez 2004, 697–703).

The maxim of **causality** is an effect observed in the experiments described in Chapter 2 stemming from Heider and Simmel (1944). It is irresistible for most

observers to ascribe intentionality to entities moving in complex ways, and physical causality to even simple changes in disposition. Desire, intention, orientation to a goal, is central to narrative too. It is by this maxim that readers attribute to the drawings life, animation, and agency. It is most interesting in what comes of its flouting: many impossible things appear in comics on the face of it, from the appearance of balloons full of words to the physical co-presence of lines emanating from the heads of characters and trailing from the rears of moving objects. All these things, being impossible, may be understood as *metaphor*; and it is by this ability to stretch the mind to make links between increasingly disparate images that comics and graphic novels are able to reach higher levels of abstraction in what they can signify. I will return to this in the final chapter. This maxim is most vulnerable to misunderstanding across culture, and to naïve readers, where the appearance of a character with a nosebleed, or as a pig, or having grown horns, may confuse a reader not familiar with these cultural tropes.

### **Rendering processes with abstract line**

Abstract lines communicate relational processes in diagrammatic ways: using linear elements including enclosures for labels, to match the relationships between elements in exploded views, or indicate the area from which a close-up detail view is taken, or using arrows to indicate where an element fits. The lines are non-diegetic but supply relational information for the reader. Emanata from the head are key to communicating mental processes in comics — exasperation, excitement, shock and more. Often these elements are iconic — e.g., sweat as drops of water — but non-literal: they are not understood as physically appearing in the world, but indicating abstractly or metaphorically the mental state of the character. They may include elements of the character's face, in some drawing styles: eyebrows in particular may appear off the faces of the character to indicate emotional states. Metaphorical elements may appear, sometimes in modalised line with indeterminate diegetic status.

The classic item of comics iconography is the word balloon or thought bubble. In my model, this is a special case of emanata — an emanating and enclosing abstract line, non-diegetic, the function of which is to contain elements expressing speech or thought. Often this is accomplished with a switch of mode — words may appear in the balloon — but not necessarily. Commonly images occur there instead or as well. Indeed, it is a frequent trope in comics that a story starting in a word balloon or thought bubble may



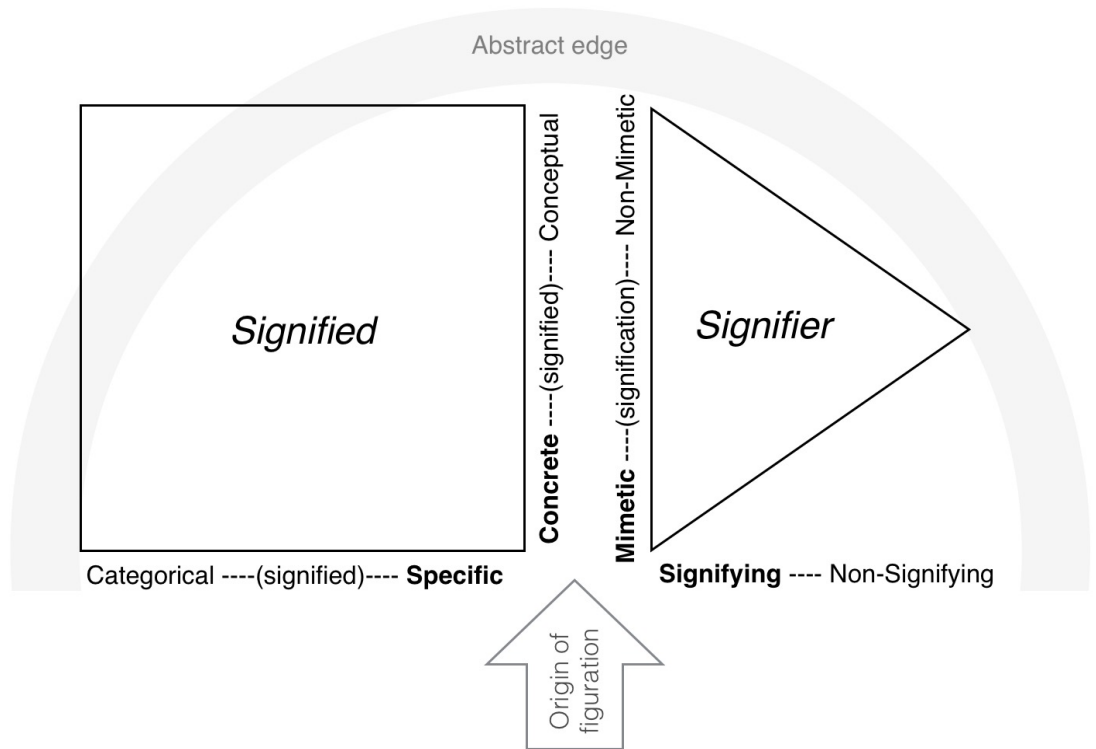
‘expand’ in consecutive panels to be told as a sequence, where the abstract enclosing line for that text-world, which was at first the enclosing line of an emanating balloon, becomes the enclosing line of the frame itself, so that the word balloon and the panel are equated. For a classic example, see Hergé’s *The Secret of the Unicorn* (in Hergé 2012, 16); for just one more recent usage of the trope, Linda Medley’s *Castle Waiting* (2006, 273). This identity between balloon border and panel frame is crucial to comics, in my view. The panel is indeed a content balloon, and its anchor point is the creator — or at least, the implied author, the narrator. In this abstract enclosure, all the functions of comics fold back in on themselves, and comics become recursive, self-containing — a mark of human language in general. I will return to this issue, and to these examples, in Chapter 7 on the logical function of comics.

I have spoken of the continuum between abstract and concrete line, literal and non-literal line above; now it is time to explore the dimensions at stake in this classification. Abstraction, as I explored in Chapter 2 on abstract comics, can be classified along four related criteria, most helpfully approached by what the abstract is opposed to (See Figure 12 below). Firstly, abstraction is seen as non-signifying: the abstract work has value in itself, as with the colour fields of Rothko or abstract sculpture. Secondly, even if abstract works do carry meaning, that meaning is non-mimetic: it may carry emotional content, for instance, but not by resemblance or imitation; by symbolism or indexical expressiveness perhaps. These first two definitions focus on the nature of the signifier — and implicit in them is that abstract works cannot thereby carry narrative. A second pair focuses on the nature of what is signified, providing one’s ‘abstract’ work is seen to signify at all. An item may be abstract in the sense of general, non-specific: so categorical, descriptive of connections or general properties, abstracted from sets of particulars to capture notions or concepts. Finally, as with the usage of these terms in linguistics, abstract may be opposed to concrete, to signify the non-visible, intangible, conceptual. Along all these dimensions there is a continuum; we might place them as radii of a circle, where the origin represents the most figurative and concrete and the borders are the most clearly abstract. This diagram will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, on abstraction and the interpersonal in comics.

## Four Types of Abstraction

1. Non-**signifying**: thing-in-itself
2. Non-**mimetic**: not resembling, symbolic
3. Non-**specific**: categorical, descriptive of connections or general properties
4. Non-**concrete**, non-visible: conceptual (in the *signified*)

'Non-narrative' seems to fall out of 1 and 2. They focus on the signifier.  
Abstract art is frequently 3 and 4. They focus on the signified.



**Figure 12: Abstraction Diagram**

There I will argue that the position of a line in this space of abstraction is an indication of its *modality* — the status accorded to it by creator and reader. In particular, a line is *modalised* as it shifts from its expected or ‘unmarked’ position: where concrete lines take on abstract qualities, that is a modalised line; when abstract lines take on material qualities, it too is modalised. Deictic qualities of the line may similarly mark the entry of modality — even where the line is being used to delineate a concrete participant in the diegesis, abstract qualities of that same line may communicate emotional content, not to mention offering pleasures and a contact with the creator in and of itself.

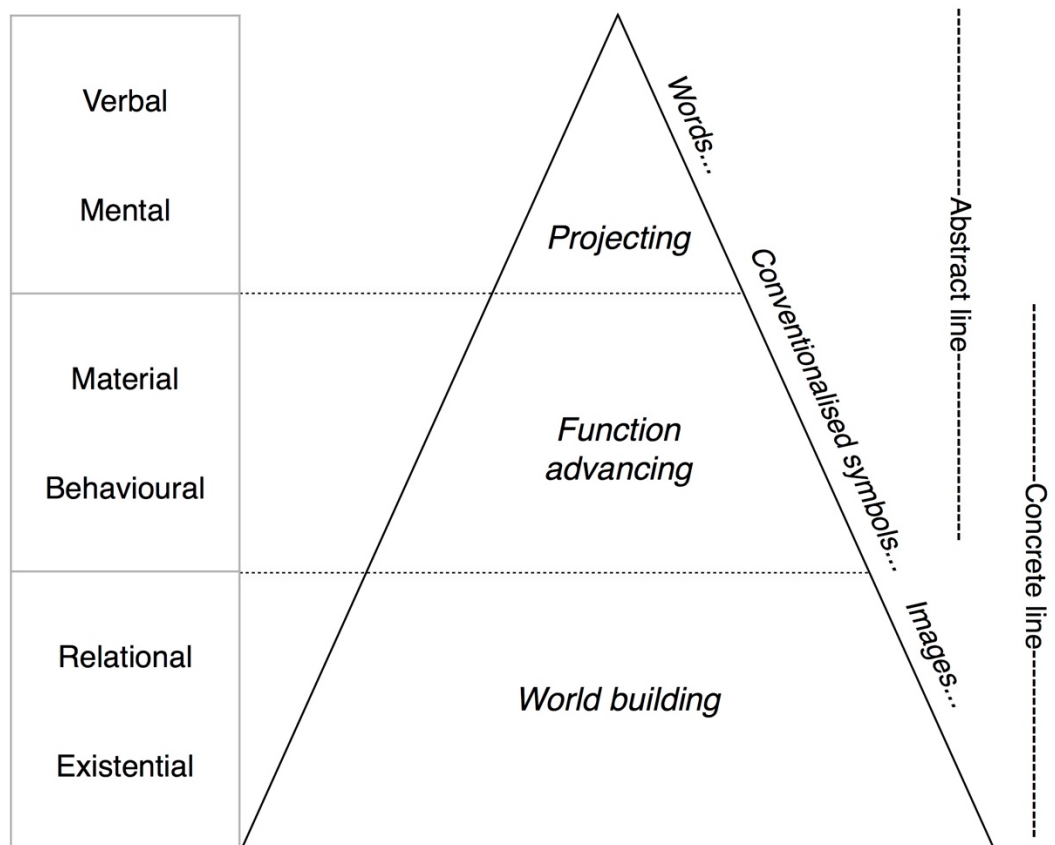
### **Verb supply to specify processes**

A little care needs to be taken when applying the ‘verb supply’ category to comics communication. I do mean the use of a verb *per se* here: so verbal processes would be communicated in this manner by the appearance in visual composition of a verbal process lexical item such as ‘yell’ or ‘gossip’; a container with wording *inside* it would be the use of abstract line to carry the content of the verbal process itself, and the words would be the participant in that action represented by the ‘verbiage’, to adopt Halliday’s nomenclature (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 255). Similarly, whilst the word ‘touch’ appearing near a rendering of a finger against a body would be an instance of verb supply, the adjective ‘broken’ linked by an arrow would not: the arrow is serving to carry the relational process of being or having, linking the attribute ‘broken’ to the element indicated. Existential processes are more or less impossible to supply a verb for: at this point in progress rightward through the diagram in Figure 10, we are in the world of language, and have left the visual mode.

The general diagram presented in Figure 10 above on page 88 maps these methods of representing processes against the process types, creating a grid that aims to capture the full array of approaches to comics creation without focusing on just one as the lynchpin. Off to the right of this diagram would appear the entire resources of lexicogrammar in verbal language, which may appear in composition alongside the comics images, and as so often, in rendered abstract enclosures, whether tethered to a represented speaker through the deictic mark of a tail or line, or free-floating to be attributed to a narrator, who may or may not be found rendered in other panels and may or may not be equated with the creator(s).

The first two columns of approaches, the Composition approach and the Difference approach, make use of concrete line, leaving the process implicit; the next two, Abstract Line and Verb Supply, make use of non-diegetic line to render the processes explicitly using abstract line, whether operating iconically or semi-iconically, by a visual code or the verbal codes of language. The processes align in a ‘stack’, broadly speaking, with the pairs of process types arranged in a hierarchy of commitments, as shown in Figure 13 (below): the existential and relational at the base, mutually entailing each other; the behavioural and material at the second level, with behavioural as disposition of bodies forming a part of any material process which depicts the interaction of such bodies; and

at the upper level, the projective mental and verbal processes, with the mental states of characters closely tied to behavioural renderings of dispositions of the body, especially the head, and verbal processes arising from mental processes, so coupled with renderings of expressions of the mental, disposition of the body (especially the hands and the orientation of the face), and thereby entailing rendering relational features of that body, its components, its position in the world, and finally its existence, in a cascade of commitments down the stack. At the bottom, relational and existential processes are closely tied: one cannot normally by visual means signify that something exists without rendering relational properties of that thing; and if one draws the features and properties of a participant, one thereby asserts existence, at least in some modality. At the top, verbal and mental are loosely tied; one may certainly represent a mental process without committing to a verbal process, though the reverse is less secure. Similarly represented in broad strokes on this diagram are the tendencies to represent those higher in the stack with more abstract lines and verbal resources; those lower with more concrete and mimetic images. These are to be viewed on a continuum, a ‘cline’, of which I will have more to say in later sections.



**Figure 13: The Process Stack**

This set of commitments is loose, and not logical: this is why I am tending to use the term ‘commitment’ rather than ‘entailment’, which would suggest an absolute dependency. There are fuzzy edges to these ‘knock-on’ effects: the requirement to render elements down the stack fades as the rendering approach moves towards the right end of the diagram in Figure 10, for instance — where wordings escape any such commitments, and each selection of a verb in language to represent these process types is independent, and not the overlapping, simultaneous set of representations in which drawn rendering results. Much of the work of comic creators — and the work is demanding and labour-intensive — is about escaping and finessing these commitments: by metonymy, rendering only part of the participants involved; by substitution, rendering from afar so only a dot may stand in for a speaking character, for instance, or silhouette, minimising the relational details which need to be rendered, or ellipsis, omitting entirely certain details, such as backgrounds, which can be supplied by the reader according to a set of common principles from earlier panels. (These are cohesive features of the text, therefore, serving Halliday’s *textual* function, and I discuss them further in Chapter 6.) In particular, as abstract enclosures and deictic tails are used to contain wordings, serving a *projective* function as in the speech balloon and thought bubble, the commitment to render the speaking or thinking character may be completely escaped: the tail may lead off-panel, or even off-page, or may lead to a building, a vehicle, in which the character dwells. Nonetheless, these devices do entail the *existence* of such a speaking or thinking participant; and *something* is rendered in the panel, even if it is not the speaker or thinker. A comics creator’s commitment to render and re-render the world, and the will of the creator to avoid being committed to mere repetition, is one of the drives to make the dominant rendering of relational processes varied, polyvalent, inventive, rendering characters’ features from many angles, with differing levels of detail, metonymically, metaphorically, via their environment, and so on. This contributes to comics’ pre-eminent position as a *world-building* art, as Horrocks claims (Horrocks 2003). This description is also used by Text World Theory, to which I will turn in Chapter 7; alongside the world-building work of texts is that of *function-advancing*, moving the narrative forward, and that is handled by material and behavioural processes.

The upshots of this ‘stack’ structure are twofold. I do not claim that there is a hierarchy of *value* represented here, but just a couple of practical implications. Firstly, that the comics creator will find him or herself committed to re-representing process types lower down the stack: continually reasserting relational properties, as discussed above, and thereby motivated to invention in this field to avoid mere repetition. Secondly, readers of comics, including creators who talk through their work aloud, will find more salient in any given panel the process types at the top of the stack: if there is dialogue or narrative wording, this will be read; if none, the material/behavioural action will be the focus, and may be narrated in a live reading of the text; and only where these processes are suppressed in some way will relational aspects become salient. This is why ‘establishing’ drawings tend to be silent and omit foreground figures. Of course, this pattern is open to disruption: comics creators may seek to evade the commitment to re-represent speaking figures, by using textual cohesion resources and variation of images as I will describe later in Chapter 6; and all elements rendered may be of interest to any given reader, so that more attentive or slower readers may well linger on details rendering relations in panels which feature speech or thought. But it is relevant for comics creators who wish to manage the pace of their narratives that the ‘density’ of a panel, and thereby its pace, is managed not only by the number of processes collected together within an enclosure, but by the process type represented as well.

The process types have different implications as regards time in the narrative: verbal and mental processes presented as projective forms using abstract enclosure slow the narrative down, and pace its reading according to the rhythms of speech exchange (even if images are used in sequence). Behavioural and material process capture an event ‘in progress’, akin to ‘continuous aspect’ verbs in language; they have implicit duration, but not determinate. (Implied processes through difference carry the sense of the ‘perfect’ aspect — implying what *has happened* between drawings.) Relational and existential processes have no temporality attached to them: it is a predominance of these process types that produces the sense of ‘timelessness’ that McCloud ascribes to ‘aspect-to-aspect’ transitions and page bleeds (McCloud 1993, 103).

The classifications offered here are not intended to be absolute. Unlike verbal language, images do not represent clear-cut options — they are not *notational*, in the sense explained by Goodman (1976). Rather, these classifications present a spectrum of approaches, which may be adopted by creators or read off by readers, to representing

experiences in graphic narratives. When we discuss comics as readers and critics, and when we conceptualise and plan them as creators, we will, I claim, tend to think of them in these categories, and may speak of them in these ways. In this manner, the mapping of comics rendering onto verbal/linguistic wordings is justified. In the social practice of discussing comics, we reach for wordings with which to exchange meanings about the processes represented in comics: we need to show an action here, to establish a world there, this panel shows such-and-such a relationship here, such-and-such a mental state there. Part of my argument is that these categories are overlapping, and mutually entailing, broadly in line with the ‘stack’ that I propose. So we cannot expect categorisations of comics representation to be strictly notational, on a model of mathematics or even physical laws: we cannot expect to be able to ‘do science’ with them, at least in the neutral sense that is often claimed by such studies. It will need to be a tenet of the system that such judgements as to categories are essentially subjective: they are made by human beings who have an interest in analysis of comics, a need to make their components and methods amenable to discussion, exposed to thought and manipulation.

## **Applications**

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In the following section I illustrate some uses to which this model can be put: to position existing theoretical approaches to comics, and to illuminate how particular texts and text types work.

### **Mapping theories and genres**

The ‘map’ just presented of comics practices and affordances can usefully be employed to situate a range of comics theories, and genres of production that commentators want to include under the rubric ‘comics’, despite presenting problems when those theories try to account for them. Whilst approximate, tentative and likely incomplete, the map does present a framework through which one might identify and take account of the array of resources available to creators, and for comment by critics, and reveal the preferences, focuses and biases inherent in those engagements with comics.

## 1. McCloud's transitions

Scott McCloud's work on comics does comment on the full range of resources presented here, though he does not lay out the field in this way or organise these practices according to an established model such as the Hallidayan one I am employing. His focus, and the element of *Understanding Comics* which is most commonly cited and reproduced, is on the *difference* approach here, through his taxonomy of transitions (McCloud 1993, 74). This chart offers a different way of dividing the 'transitions' that are possible, and puts them on a different footing, with specific motivations underlying the work reader do with them. McCloud's categories have been criticised as reliant on narrative categories — the idea of 'subject' and 'scene' which presuppose the sort of narratology used to describe film storytelling, for instance (Molotiu 2011). The notion of panel as 'moment' persists in McCloud's work — he explicitly compares the panel to a film frame (McCloud 1993, 8), though its ontology is different: a panel will contain multiple processes, on the present model, at different levels and with different temporalities attached to each; they are drawn or painted, not captured mechanically, and there is no 'shutter' to capture a scene at a particular time. Nor even is the frame mandatory — panels are often treated as the basic unit of comics storytelling, but panelisation is not always employed, and transition events may occur within panels as well as across them. The difference model takes the 'cluster' around the process, the image-complex, as basic, rather than the panel, and unlike McCloud's model does not depend on adjacency — rather it is similarity between images, as perceived by the onlooker, that can lead to a game of spot-the-difference and inference about processes that must have caused one image to follow from the previous one. This model handles 'aspect-to-aspect' metonymic rendering of a scene in a different way: here, what is important is that *relational* processes are depicted, which do not carry a temporal value, and in the 'difference' between images, insofar as they overlap, relational processes may be inferred. Underlying an onlooker's reading of these scenes is the set of 'maxims' proposed: the synecdochic principle by which we assume the array of images to hang together to form a whole; assumptions of continuity of space and time; and seeking for identity in images that are sufficiently similar, in the judgement of the reader, so that any difference between them is read as caused change.



## **2. Dylan Horrocks' world-building**

Creator Dylan Horrocks is among those critical of McCloud's view of comics' functioning (Horrocks 2001), and stresses the role of comics — alongside videogames and tabletop role-playing games — as 'building worlds', over the telling of sequential stories. His influential article *The Perfect Planet* rejects McCloud's formulation that in comics  $\text{SPACE} = \text{TIME}$ , and suggests instead that  $\text{SPACE} = \text{SPACE}$ , 'creating an environment and a situation' (Horrocks 2003). This is reflected in this map of comics resources in the lower rows, the relational and existential tier — perhaps pre-eminently the relational. The dominance of this tier — the richness of comics as revealed in its constant reassertion of relational processes — is reaffirmed by the notion of the 'process stack', whereby such relational processes are at the broad base of the stack and the creator is committed to depict them more frequently than others, or even that rendering other processes by certain means (for instance, composition) *entails* rendering relational features. The resources creators have used to do so tend strikingly towards the left edge of the diagram: compositional approaches dominate; though McCloud notes the tendency for Japanese artists in manga to use difference approaches (McCloud 1993, 77, 80) — or at least to 'clear the stack' above to leave the relational compositions salient. Other innovators reach further to the right and use abstract line in their world-building, notably Chris Ware in texts such as *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001), where it is often social relationships that are relationally mapped through networks of abstract lines and enclosures, and *Building Stories* (Ware 2012).

## **3. Neil Cohn's 'Visual Language'**

As discussed in Chapter 1, Neil Cohn's recent work (Cohn 2013b) has been an effort to describe a 'grammar' of comics, generalisable into a 'visual language' with cognitive underpinnings, akin to the Universal Grammar posited by Noam Chomsky. This use of linguistic theory to account for comics production, in the broadest sense and in ways which may be applicable beyond comics, is admirable, ambitious, wide-ranging and bears some striking similarities to my own project. However, there are some salient differences. Firstly, the nature of the model Cohn is using maps comics production closely to specific units of Chomskyan transformative/generative grammar, positing for instance 'morphemes' of comics (Cohn 2013b, chap. 2), its emanata, and a 'syntax' of

the four-panel strip presented as a tree diagram (Cohn 2013b, chap. 4). The model I present here takes a functional approach, explicitly disavowing the possibility of decomposing comics into grammatical or morphological units, but proposing to map the *functional* aims of comics texts using the same frameworks as for linguistic communication — with an aim, in the long view, to being able to discuss the interplay and shared, collaborative endeavour of bringing both visual and verbal resources to bear on the enterprise of comics communication. Comics images do not map directly to elements in the lexicogrammar, but have comparable *realisations* of the functional semantics shared with verbal language. This unity of mapping should enable a discussion of both modes under the same framework. Cohn’s work on comics so far has focused on visual language alone, and he has not addressed the involvement of verbal language in comics creation. So, it is wide-ranging, considering both abstract line elements and images in sequence, but rests on very different grounds, and limits itself to the non-verbal: it does not consider ‘verb supply’ under the present model.

### **The ‘comics zone’ and prototypicality**

There is a centre-and-margin relationship on display here, whereby some elements in this taxonomy seem more ‘comics-like’ than others; it displays a prototypicality effect of the sort discussed by cognitive linguists (Evans and Green 2006, 254ff) — that some birds seem more bird-like than others, and some comics seem more comics-like. There is a trend to be seen in the chart as laid out in Figure 10 (page 88), with the most typical array of resources a comics creator might draw on selected from a band ranging from bottom left to upper right: which is to say that relational and existential processes are most frequently handled with composition; behavioural and material by differences between panels and abstract lines, though composition plays its part; and mental and verbal by abstract line, notably emanata and abstract enclosure — projected material in such enclosures being most likely to switch into a verbal mode.

A full range is visible in comics pages by Craig Thompson, for instance from *Goodbye, Chunky Rice* (Thompson 1999, 26–27), excerpted in Figure 14 below. Thompson uses difference within a single frame to indicate the motion of a character, and the composition of his body in relation to the box carried expresses a material process. Simultaneously, mental processes are carried by sweat-bead emanata and the

rendering of facial expression; and (limited) verbal processes in the abstract enclosures of the word balloons containing the verbiage ‘erk’ and ‘wheeze’ — with that last perhaps shading into verb supply, as with the word ‘creak’ appearing by the door, or ‘snap’ to indicate the clicking of fingers. Difference is employed differently between panels in the lower left corner, with Chunky’s small head movement becoming salient as the rest of the panel remains (sufficiently) identical to the previous one.

The recto page presents a fundamentally relational composition, with a great deal of interplay between types of panel relationship in a non-linear sequence: patterns of similarity here enable us to map relational processes between panels as they are placed metonymically within the central scene, and the sequences of self-similar panels reveal through their differences little behavioural and material processes, supported with verb supply (‘SNAP’, ‘Creak’) and abstract line for movement of the washing line, the ‘tag’, the match strike. Notable here also is the use of contiguity of line across panels. There is no need for a special principle to be added to account for these: it is just composition, coupled with the choice to enclose elements in the abstract line of the frame, but it encourages us to engage with the image as a ‘jigsaw’, as I will discuss in the following chapter. The principle of synecdoche operates between such enclosed drawings, and continuity of place is both maintained and shifted by such a move. We are mapping and building the world and the action in our identification of differences and similarities across the drawings, engaged in a dialogue of play with the creator on the basis of our shared assumptions about the resources and uses of comics.

**Figure 14: from *Goodbye Chunky Rice* by Craig Thompson (1999, 26–27)**

But comics are not restricted to this prototypical style, using the full range of the resources on offer. Plenty of other forms of production draw on a selection from this array, and still feature in the family of ‘comics’, more or less centrally, and more or less susceptible to exclusion by theories which focus overmuch on a particular subset of comics resources.

**Figure 15: from *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2007, n.p.)**

Silent graphic narratives, prominently, are capable of creating full-length works using a number of comics tropes, but excluding words, or at least projected verbal or mental processes depicted with verbiage presented as written language. (They may appear as pictures, for instance.) Such narratives may even exclude most abstract line resources, delivering a rich narrative almost exclusively with composition and difference. Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2007) manages a full range of process types in this way, exploiting the possibility of doing so to bring attention to the languageless state of his protagonist. Difference is the dominant mode, but the work features many large splash pages with rich relational detail — Tan's aim is in part a monumental effort of world-building, though this is also achieved metonymically on the assumption of synecdoche and continuity of space. In the double-page spread shown in Figure 15 above, in panel 9, Tan uses a rare instance which approaches abstract line — but this reveals the ambiguity there between the pure abstract and the 'modal', which is to say line which reflects conscious experience or is uncertain in its reality status, perhaps only making concrete the experience or opinions of the creator or protagonist. Striking to me is the instance on the recto page where the protagonist uses drawing to communicate with the local inhabitant; he holds the page up to his mouth, it encloses an image of a bed in a room, simplified and elliptical, he points to it with his finger — making concrete that which as abstraction and metaphor is carried out more traditionally in other comics. This image neatly captures the nature of comics drawing as a way of communicating, as serving the same purposes as language, and so amenable to description by compatible means.

I alluded earlier to McCloud's appeal to older art forms as being before-the-fact instances of comics under his definition. His claim on William Hogarth's work rests on its sequentiality, but much of the narrative work, such as there is, in Hogarth is carried out via composition — it would place in the upper left corner of the diagram in Figure 10. But the 'transitions' between Hogarth's richly detailed images in his cycles seem to require too much work of the putative 'reader', at least without supporting text offering an exegesis. Even under McCloud's account, these would be scene-to-scene transitions; and under my model here, they offer too much 'difference' for implicatures to be safely made. The images of the individuals are too dissimilar for the maxim of identity to be pursued in collapsing figures into continuous characters, and the breaches in continuity

of time and space are too large and not sufficiently signalled within the imagetext — it is clear that there *has* been a leap, but not what that leap has been. Without these anchors, it then becomes hard to follow any implied causality, quite what has led to what. This is compounded by the nature of the ‘panels’, on McCloud’s account the basis of transitions: Hogarth’s work is certainly dense in a range of processes, instantiated in the compositions — many participants are interacting, behaving, expressing emotions and possibly exchanging verbiage (though it is not represented what the content is). These clusters of processes are collected in a single framed image, so the task of mapping each to their counterpart in the following assemblage (if a counterpart appears) becomes insurmountable for the reader. More is offered from reading these images as individual frames, rather than as collaborating on a narrative with a range of comics resources; so Hogarth seems a less prototypical graphic narrative, stretching the definition.

Also often excluded from discussion of ‘comics’, by definitions which hinge on transitions and sequentiality, are the single-panel newspaper editorial cartoon and the single-frame ‘gag panel’. But these commonly use a considerably wide range of the resources of comics as presented here: excluding only ‘difference’ between isolated panels as a resource for the implication of processes. Even then, difference may come into play *within* that single panel, or a picture may be subdivided into ‘before and after’, for instance, and salient differences between pairs of figures may make a *relational* point rather than implying material or behavioural action. The newspaper cartoon is especially rich in its exploitation of abstract resources, and projected verbiage in abstract enclosures or linked by deictic abstract line — dialogue, labelling, projected mental processes in thought bubbles whether represented visually or verbally — and also in the play with the modality of the figures: abstract concepts are rendered as concrete, and idiomatic figures and metaphor are common.

One more visual genre that should be accounted for in its shared resources with comics is the flight safety booklet. On the face of it, this genre is very comics-like: it uses framed images in sequence to communicate action, and exploits abstract elements such as arrows to indicate relational processes such as location and behavioural processes such as desired actions in case of emergency. Such booklets tend to exclude verbal elements, including projected verbiage, in part because of the linguistic restrictions this would place on understanding; a particular language would have to be

chosen and this would thereby exclude an international and multi linguistic audience from accessing the information.

But it is not only language that is excluded from this genre: certain types of process are also restricted to the point of exclusion. Facial expressions are neutral and figures perpendicular; mouths closed and figures simplified even to the point where facial expressions are abstracted away as with international signage (such as male/female indicators for WCs). Mental and verbal processes are limited, and behavioural, material and relational processes dominate. When these restrictions are breached, as in Figure 16 below, the dissonant effect is apparent, and in equal parts unsettling and humorous.

**Figure 16: from *Fight Club*, dir. David Fincher (2002)**

## Summary

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This chapter has presented a framework for describing how processes may be represented in graphic narrative, taking the semantic framework proposed by Halliday of six process types and mapping them against four resources for delineating or implying those types with the visual means available to comics. This framework has enabled me to lay out some essential groundwork for the remainder of the thesis, identifying engagement of the reader in constructing implicature of action through difference, and employing the means of abstraction in order to both structure and pass judgement on the text, as well as to inscribe types of processes that occur in comics discourse. The map of approaches to realising processes in comics has also helped to locate existing comics theories, and genres of comics production, according to the kind of communicative system on which they focus.

In discussion of these modes of representing processes in comics narrative, I have touched also upon some *interpersonal* and interactive features of the text, which co-occur and intertwine with the ‘experiential’ functions of comics writing and reading: the dependency of meaning-making on a mutually-cooperating set of assumptions, the maxims of comics readership, and the modality of line in the continuum between concrete and abstract rendering, whereby the creator engages in the text-world, bringing

abstract elements such as actions and relationships into visible form and rendering diegetic elements of the world in abstracted forms. More is to be explored here, however; and furthermore, underpinning these elements are the ties and structuring devices that serve the *textual* function of comics communication — the affordances whereby images may be seen as ‘similar’ (in order then to discern differences), the methods by which abstract elements can point to concrete ones in the story-world, and the ways in which the verbiage in word balloons and boxes can interact with what is rendered visually, beyond what is implicit here: that what can be worded as a verb to realise a process may also, through any of the range of resources presented here, be rendered in a visual form. But this chapter has taken as its focus the *ideational* element of the tripartite metafunctional model of communication, and this provides a useful map through which to access the others. The map is not the territory — but it aims to help navigate that territory.

## 4

## Games Comics Play: Interpersonal Interaction in Graphic Narrative

### Introduction

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Chapter 2 on abstract comics raised some basic questions of how a reader can make sense of comics in the absence of representational material. This led to some key observations about the nature of graphic narrative: the ways in which comics images may be abstract, and the ways in which the reader's approach to the text, the reader's *use* of the affordances comics offer, can be construed as a defining feature of a graphic narrative text. This led to outlining a number of pragmatic principles of comics readership: 'what we do when we're doing comics'.

The preceding chapter turned to representation, as a Hallidayan metafunction of comics discourse, subordinate to the ideational function. The *verb* was taken to be central to comics communication as a narrative form, and a range of resources for representing the process were explored, covering the range of process types outlined in Halliday's theory. This provided a framework around which a Hallidayan theory of comics communication may be constructed.

The engagement of the reader was largely taken to occur, then, when images imply processes by inviting the reader to make inferences between panels, whether adjacent or otherwise. We saw that this would occur even when the images were abstract: readers impute causality and intentionality to them in the act of reading. The principles of comics readership were expanded as a set of 'maxims of comics', which both readers and creators bear in mind when collaborating in the shared act of meaning-making enacted in the comics text. This is allied to Halliday's *interpersonal* function — the way in which texts interact with readers, enacting social relationships with them, here a mutual agreement to construct meanings which exploits assumptions similarly to the way that conversational cooperation works.



But for Halliday (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), the interpersonal function splits into two related halves, focused on interaction on the one hand and modality on the other; and the theory base that has so far been used in constructing the theory of synecdochic cooperation has drawn on Grice (1975) rather than Halliday. So, in this chapter and the next, I will outline an approach to interpersonal engagement and the intrusion of the self into the comics text which cleaves more closely to the structures outlined by Halliday in his systemic functional accounts of language. I will present this as a form of interactive ‘play’, borrowing some of the approach to terminology, though not all of the commitments, used by Eric Berne (1967) in describing human interaction. The next chapter will attend to the resources of modalisation, the ways in which play with abstraction and representation can encode personal attitudes to what is represented, and judgements about the reality status of what is represented. First, this chapter will present a way of conceptualising the core interactions of language as a set of ‘games’ in which comics texts propose to engage the reader.

### **Relation to pragmatic approach**

Under the Gricean model of conversational co-operation (1975), shared assumptions about the intentions of both utterer and listener both guide the interpretations expected by both conversational parties, and enable parsimony in the amount of content encoded in the speakers’ exchanges. Pragmatic assumptions about intention underlie this communication. In my use of this kind of model to account for comics readership, I treated drawings as ‘turns’ in a conversation-like exchange (see H. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), with a comparable set of assumptions underlying them, so that when a reader takes up this text with the ‘maxims’ in mind, she will be able to deduce from them a set of meanings comparable to those the creator had in mind when producing the text, by following that same set of maxims. Their roles here are not equally distributed in the way that conversation partners’ are: instead of swapping roles as listener and utterer, these roles remain stable. (An exception might be with the ‘jam comic’, in which two or more collaborators improvise a story between them, but that is a rare instance.) Nonetheless, the principle of shared assumptions about how the communication works is still in place: I know that you know, and you know that I know, and so on. It is possible for a reader to come to a graphic narrative text *not* knowing the assumptions required and the approaches expected to engage with it; this

may lead some readers, especially of recent, more challenging narratives, to find the texts difficult to engage with. Hence a possible value of the initial formulation offered at the end of Chapter 2: maxims may be given as a set of instructions, a ‘user’s manual’ of the graphic narrative.

But interaction with the reader can amount to more work than just understanding some axioms of readership. In Halliday’s approach to interactivity, language may prompt material or verbal reactions from an interlocutor, and there are grammatical resources available for these purposes (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 134–72). Conversing is not only about understanding what is implicit in the unsaid segments of conversation, or tracking the purposes by which a conversation may change course or (apparently) shift topics; it is also about knowing that when a question is asked, some information is required, and it is now the next speaker’s turn; or when an imperative is used, some action outside of the conversation may be required. It is to this sort of interaction that I turn in this chapter.

### **Halliday’s model**

In Halliday’s tripartite model of the metafunctions of language, the *interpersonal* function divides into two halves, both focused on the ‘intrusion’ of the interlocutors themselves into the text (Halliday 2005c, 199). Language enacts social relationships, by intruding/incorporating judgements about the content that is expressed, building in attitudes and beliefs and casting that content with a certain reality status or degree of social or personal desirability, but also by getting things done in the world with other human beings: prompting action whether it is verbal or material, and involving the physical and material presence of the other, connecting the interlocutors each to each and to the world which they share.

### ***Halliday’s description of Mood***

For Halliday, then, interlocutors take a role in the communicative exchange in which they engage, and those roles are reflected and/or determined by the *mood* used in the utterances they exchange. These moods reflect both the role in the exchange taken by speaker and listener, and the nature of the commodity exchanged: broadly

categorised as either ‘goods-and-services’ or ‘information’. This is diagrammatised in the table taken from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 136) below:

role in exchange	Commodity exchanged	
	(a) goods-&-services	(b) information
(i) giving	‘offer’ would you like this teapot?	‘statement’ he’s giving her the teapot
(ii) demanding	‘command’ give me that teapot!	‘question’ what is he giving her?

**Figure 17: Table of exchange functions from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004)**

These create a matrix, then, which produces four fundamental functions of language in interaction: *offering*, which can take a range of grammatical forms, though often, as here, a modal verb will be used; the *statement*, in which information is provided to the listener usually using a declarative mood (subject-verb); a *command*, impetus to act, coded prototypically with an imperative form led by a verb; and *question*, requiring information of the interlocutor and signalling their turn to speak to provide it. Many other functions are possible as variations of these, perhaps most notably the exclamation, an expression of emotional response from the speaker, which may carry little or no new information content; this is frequently captured in a minor sentence (with no finite verb) or a specific construction using *wh-* words in theme position at the start of the utterance (such as ‘what a lovely day!’ or ‘how beautiful you are!’). These four, however, are marked by specific resources of language and form a neat core of functions around which the other refinements may be arrayed (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 135).

### **Kress and van Leeuwen’s interpretation**

Kress and van Leeuwen, in their adaptation of Halliday to visual images in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), pick up on the fundamental notions of *demand* and *offer* (giving), but map these notions to the stance of persons represented within the image, rather than the persons interacting as interlocutors in a communicative exchange. For them, the gaze of a represented participant determines whether anything is ‘demanded’ of the viewer: if eye contact is made, that is taken to be a ‘demand’ image; otherwise, the image may be construed as an ‘offer’, the theory being that eye

contact is indicative of direct communicative engagement, whereas without eye contact the viewing subject is cast in the role of observer, eavesdropper, onlooker, partaking in what is depicted as an outsider, looking ‘over the shoulders’ of the participants in the text itself (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 117–24).

Something important is captured in this view, but it presents a number of problems. *Prima facie*, this seems to require the presence of animate beings in the image, with eyes. It seems animals would engage this ‘demand’ function; one might think of sad-eyed puppies appealing to the viewer in a charity advertisement, which is the kind of text Kress and van Leeuwen have in mind in their discussions; but would an image of a worm in a science text count? What about its general facing? For an image to be read as an ‘offer’, without eye contact, should there be figures looking away, or no figures capable of looking; and are these equivalent? (The orientation of entire bodies would seem to be salient here; a marked turning away from the viewer, a presentation of the back to the onlooker, would surely be different from the presentation of a consumer object without any human in the image at all.) Would eye contact from any participant in the image change the status of the text? In a crowd scene? In the background of some other salient main image dominating the centre foreground? Further, to what extent do hands count as well as eyes? A gesture of proffering, open hands in which an object appears, isolated from the gaze, would certainly appear to constitute an ‘offer’ on this sort of reading (see Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 118). Eye contact does seem a significant and charged visual image to depict, and clearly serves functions for the text: it is often the signal of frame-breaking, for instance, in realisms where the viewing subject is cast as an effaced onlooker to depicted action. To me, this seems most usefully mapped to language as ‘address’ rather than as a function of exchange, as Kress and van Leeuwen acknowledge (2006, 117): eye contact triggers a ‘second-person’ cast to the text, but in my view this may or may not occur with a demand for information or goods-and-services. Eye contact in a Shakespearean play or a TV show may indicate conspiratorial intimacy rather than a demand that the onlookers supply anything concrete (other than their attention, which was already engaged in meeting the gaze). It is interpersonal to be sure, but not, I think, in quite this way.

Similarly, in Kress and van Leeuwen’s treatment of the interpersonal in the image, the positioning of viewing subjects in space carries value by analogy to human proxemics. The language used is predicated on the ‘shot’ in photography or cinematography, and levels of intimacy (shot distance), involvement (lateral angle), and

power (in the vertical axis), can all be read off from the perspectives automatically captured in the taking of the shot from these positions relative to the content (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 124–48). All these seem likewise plausible and are demonstrably employed in visual images static and moving, and, to return to the language of comics, all may be employed by a creator for comparable set of effects. But in comics, perspective may not be used at all; images are not infrequently flattened, or perspective is improvised, distances governed by relative size, by occlusion, by qualities of colour, and may be inconsistent. These are resources of meaning on which comics may draw, but they are not the only ones available.

## **A Practical Reinterpretation**

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Overall, then, Kress and van Leeuwen's treatments of the interpersonal in visual images are useful but not sufficient for a discussion of how comics images might work. I wish to propose a new sort of mapping of the core functions of language to the comics text, building on resources available to the creator from comics' history, and aiming to cleave more closely to the possibility of interaction between humans in Halliday's sense: engagement in material action, supply of information to collaboratively 'flesh out' the text, and more demanding roles in constructing the text world and inferring content in the narrative presented. This picks up on the collaborative interaction implied in the application of maxims of readership that enabled inference beyond the text as presented on the Gricean model, and extends it to account for the sense of involvement and play inherent to an 'erotics' of the comics text — a term I borrow, as opposed to an interpretive hermeneutics, from Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation' (2009, 3–14), in which she appeals for an approach to art that attends to its sensory experience.

### **Interactions with the reader: 'Games Comics Play'**

Though comics are 'monologic', in that it is only one participant (or team thereof), the 'creator(s)', who produces the text with which readers as interlocutors engage, they may be construed as 'dialogic' in a couple of ways. Firstly, in the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin 1982, 278–79) that they present, especially in the long-form graphic novel, an array of voices and perspectives brought into dialectic, arrayed through the text in image, words, enclosed in balloons projected from participants, in captions attributable

to a narrator, and with these perspectives separate from the ‘monstrator’ — to use Thierry Groensteen’s word (2010; 2013, 84–86), adopted from Gaudreault (1987) — who draws the image(s). Secondly, as has been the basis on which Grice’s co-operative model was adopted, the text is assembled from an array of ‘turns’, separated images (clusters or episodes) normally in enclosures, which partake in a complex of exchanges with a set of assumptions helping a reader to (re)construct the relationships between them. There is a to-and-fro enacted between the images into which the reader intervenes, lending a set of readership assumptions to collaborate with the creator to (re)constitute the comics text. This is a sort of ‘play’ between the interlocutors; imbalanced, since it is the creator that has laid down the marks on the page, but not entirely one-sided, since the role of the reader is central to the construction of the text and the making of those marks, and the creator relies so thoroughly on their shared assumptions in the creation of the text. Here this theory cleaves closely to the ‘reader-reception’ approaches of Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Stanley Fish (1976) in the notion of a text which is in significant part constituted by the action of a reader; writers on graphic narrative such as Barbara Postema (2010) have also pursued this sort of approach to comics.

The title for this chapter, ‘Games Comics Play’, is adopted from Eric Berne’s seminal work on the psychology of human relationships in which they are viewed as a series of ‘transactions’ (Berne 1967). I do not subscribe here to the psychoanalytic underpinnings of his work (for instance, that persons speak from three possible ‘ego-states’, parent, child or adult, reflecting Freud’s tripartite division of the mind), but do wish to adopt some of his method of presentation. His use of the notion of a ‘game’ as a prototype of interaction, and his adoption of ‘colloquial’ titles for those games (such as ‘Alcoholic’, ‘If It Weren’t for You’, ‘Now I’ve Got You, You Son of a Bitch’), is in the service of making these interactions as vivid as possible, and adopting a terminology that would be both usable and clear, appropriating connotations that do, in fact, capture some of the flavour of the game and associated assumptions about it. In Berne’s words:

The first requirement for colloquialisms is aptness, and if they often sound amusing, that is precisely because they hit the nail on the head.... [T]ruths may be stated for academic purposes in scientific language, but the effective recognition of emotional strivings and practice may require a different approach. So we prefer playing ‘Ain’t it Awful’ to ‘verbalising projected anal aggression’. (Berne 1967, 63)

In the following, then, I will adopt titles for forms of interaction that borrow from the contents of the magazines and newspapers and children's books in which comics form had long been developed, though the texts to which I then apply these models will largely be contemporary graphic narratives in a range of styles. The implication that there is a story of the development of these resources is intentional, but it would be a task for future work to attempt to trace in detail the specific textual histories of each. Here I aim to present an overview.

My main focus will, of course, be on visual ways in which these interactions are accomplished. In some cases, text will form a necessary part of this. I take it to be given that the comics text may draw on all the resources of verbal language to accomplish these tasks too, and often those approaches will be employed alongside the visual engagements I outline.

## **Giving Information: Making 'Statements'**

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The most immediately salient task of comics is to give information — to make statements about the world of the text. The core of this is in the depiction of that world, as discussed in Chapter 3 on approaches to representing the process in comics. However, some such approaches may imply some additional work on the part of the reader to extract the information given, to decode it or to locate the salient elements of the image which are information-bearing. I will discuss three such games below.

### ***Spot the Difference***

I have already identified 'difference' as a key approach to communicating the 'verb', the process in comics' visual discourse. It is this communication of salient action by implicature 'between the panels', in the 'perfect aspect', that is central both to McCloud's theory of 'transitions' (McCloud 1993, 70–74) and my own use of Gricean maxims of comics readership. Of course, within each drawing, it is the presentation of information that dominates; the task of the reader is to a) recognise that some elements have been re-presented, and so are to be played down in terms of their salience, and other elements are different, *new* (to allude to Saraceni's (2003) use of Halliday's text-

structuring concepts, to which I return for fuller discussion in Chapter 6), and thereby represent more than just their existence in the composition of the current drawing, but in addition a process that must have happened to bring about this element in a time period that has elapsed between the two drawings.

This leads to engagement in a pleasurable play with the reader, a game of close attention to the image to identify unchanged elements and changed elements from matched drawings. These do not need to be adjacent panels; as long as the images can largely be mapped according to sameness, then difference can be inferred between them. (This allows for the interleaving of events, for instance, and escapes the assumption that images must be juxtaposed to generate ‘transitions’, as well as the idea that adjacency alone generates such a ‘transition’.) When images are dense with renderings of participants and simultaneous processes (including relational processes, ‘descriptions’ of the content), and when many such renderings are repeated across the drawings, this may prompt the reader to a careful and close scrutiny of the text to recover the information given. The reading time of the text may be thereby slowed, especially when material is evenly distributed across the enclosure rather than focalised in a central ‘new’ area (for more on these image regions, see Chapter 6 on the textual metafunctions of comics); or the reader may be given the option to dwell on the image, to engage in this game if desired, or to move on with the most salient events in the story, which may be exposed at the top of the ‘process stack’ — especially, for instance, if there is dialogue to guide the reader through.

From the earliest days of comics, in Rodolphe Töpffer’s 1845 *M. Cryptogame*, for example, whilst events are narrated in language below the main image sequence, the central events may be inferred by mapping the characters to one another from image to image and inferring action in the differences between them. In between enclosures two and four below, for instance, the change of location may be inferred from the depiction of the interior and the appearance of a chair; the removal of the hat and donning of a blindfold may likewise be inferred to have happened. Similarly, between that and the last image, an exchange of roles may be inferred by the change of blindfold, and the legs disappearing up the stairs may be construed as *Cryptogame*’s by the assumption of similarity = identity to indicate that he has left the room.



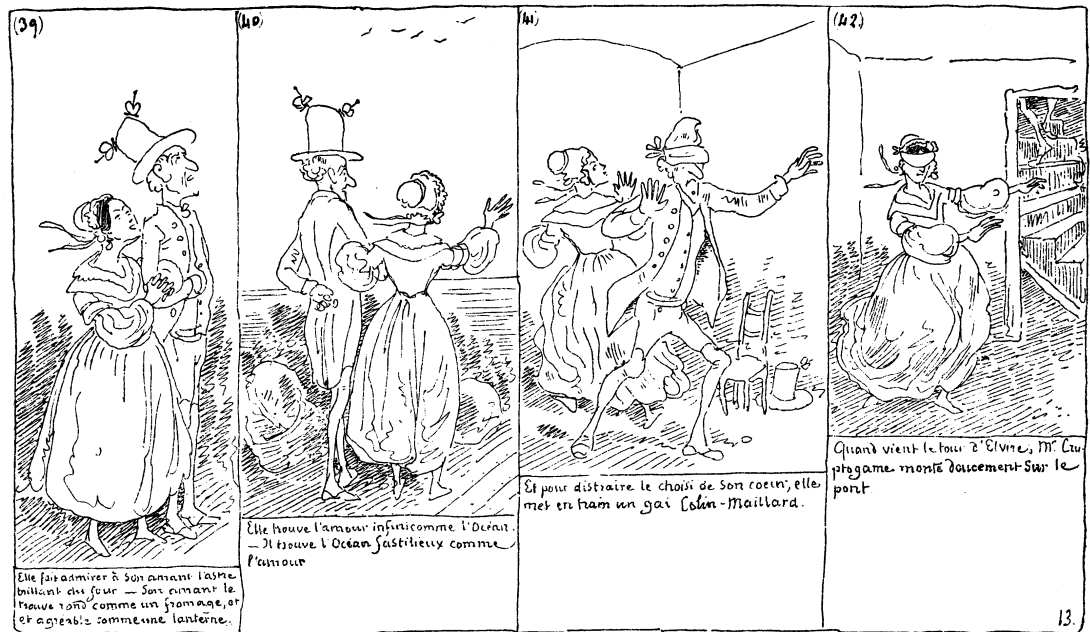


Figure 18: from *M. Cryptogame* (Töpffer 1845), in Kunzle (2007, 462)

A seminal work which depends entirely upon spot-the-difference, this time at a transcendental timescale, is R. Crumb's 1979 'A Short History of America' (Robert Crumb and Poplaski 2005, 14–17), wherein decades of fundamental change afflict the American landscape he repeatedly depicts. Recognisable similarities from drawing to drawing underpin the developments Crumb depicts, and the multiple events that 'must have' led to these changes become increasingly overwhelming as the images become more complex and busy. It is the wealth of change, the multitude of differences from image to image that are salient here, and part of the effect of the story is the reader's work in looking from image to image for what has happened to the landscape — always with the pastoral starting image at the upper left, setting the theme for the text, remaining there to be referred back to; the time scale is dependent on which pairs of images the reader chooses to look between, so that the accretion of change becomes increasingly onerous. This is more than mere panel-to-panel transition, but an array of games overlapping one another to create this bravura construal of historical upheaval.

Figure 19: 'A Short History of America' (Crumb 1979)

### ***Where's Wally?***

Another way of detaining the reader and prompting her to dwell on a *single* image, commonly a 'splash' image occupying a full page or double-page spread, is to conceal the salient information in a sea of detail. This is the tactic of the 'Where's Wally' books created by Martin Handford, which offer pleasurable looking as an engagement with the text (Handford 1987). Information is still being given, but rather than presented focally and centrally, or provided dependent on implicature between matched panels as with Spot-the-Difference, in this game a plenitude of information swamps the reader and the narratively salient events are de-centred and de-emphasised. The two games are not mutually exclusive, however; Crumb's 'A Short History of America' plays both.

This provides the creator the affordance of supplying a wealth of detailed relational description of the text-world of the comic, and the opportunity for non-linear presentation of 'episodes' (in O'Toole's (2010) terms), clusters of events that enrich the background of the narrative. Surprises, jokes and backstory may be secreted within the image as rewards for the reader's close looking.

Scenes of crowded human activity especially lend themselves to the playing of this game, particularly if the aim is to communicate overwhelming action. In Aude Picault's *Transat*, for instance, a journey on the busy Paris Metro uses this tactic to communicate the protagonist's challenging journey: we are challenged to find her in the crowds of people passing through the tunnels, then in the packed train carriage, then in the queue to exit the station. (Picault 2009, n.p.) The central figure is represented multiple times in each drawing, so that we are also playing a little spot-the-difference, and depending on the maxim of identity to recognise that this is one and the same figure, transitioning from place to place in the crowd (place stays the same) as time passes contiguously from figure to figure. The textual underpinnings of this are exploited by Picault: the darker shading of the character's coat help us in the first few images, but this fades to just a few lines in the train carriage drawing; clothing elements of other characters in the crowd share the same dark shading, distracting us with a pleasurable loss-leading effect from our task of finding the protagonist, in the same way that an evenness of colour and image density and a misleading use of 'Wally's red striped patterning on other clothes may playfully slow us down from finding Wally in the classic game books.

**Figure 20: from *Transat* (Picault 2009, n.p.)**

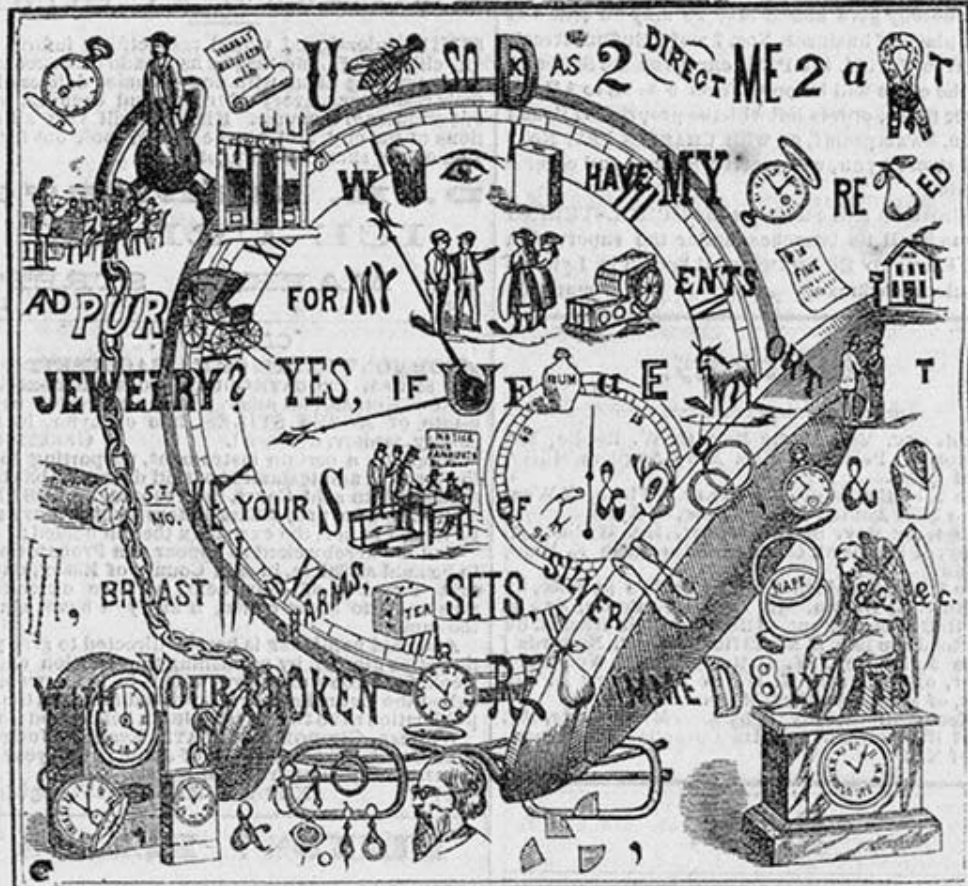
With more serious intent, but nevertheless recruiting this game of pleasurable close looking at an evenly-detailed large-scale image, is the work of Joe Sacco in his panoramic representation of *The Great War* (2013). Whilst there are at times specific figures to identify, such as Field Marshall Haig visiting the troops, there is not usually a specific target for the viewer to seek. Rather, the ‘loss-leading’ incident becomes itself the salient point of the drawings. Densely packed episodes of material and relational processes fill out every segment of Sacco’s panorama, detailing the exhaustingly myriad events of the war; in each area of focus, a small drama may be played out, and the eye is permitted to wander from cluster to cluster, broadly following a left–right thread but encouraging in its intertwined vectors a nonlinear and looping track around the image. The mode of looking the reader is engaged in enacts a fascination and absorption in minutiae that reflects the soldiers’ focus on the details of their work, and a similar sense of overwhelming scale. The reader too is engaged in work to extract the information supplied in the image.

### ***Rebus***

Sacco’s work here is silent, but another way in which the reader may be led to work for the supply of information in a comics text is via the piecing-together of words and images when they share playfully in interaction, rapidly mode-swapping. This has a long tradition as the Rebus, appearing not only in children’s magazines but the late 19th-century illustrated magazine too. In the 1873 example here (Figure 21), the rebus is so challenging as to be set as a competition; the reader is challenged to decide whether to read an image for its sound-value (as in the number or letter homophones 2 and *U*, or the drawing of a bee for ‘be’), whether as a word with its normal meaning (as with most of the function words *me*, *my*, *and*, *for*, etc.), or an image with its normal meaning (such as the image of a watch or pocketwatch throughout, where the lexical choice does not matter), or disregarded as incidental detail (the specifics of the watch’s face, or the background image which serves as a distractor).

## OLIN'S PRIZE REBUS!

I will present to the first of my LADY CUSTOMERS who will bring me at No. 29 MARKET STREET, LYNN, a correct solution of this Rebus, a HANDSOME GOLD RING. To the first Gentleman, a SET OF GOLD STUDS. To the first Miss, a PAIR OF BRACELETS.



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by CRANE & CO.,  
in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

The solution to the above must be enclosed in sealed envelopes, with the name, which will be numbered as they are received, and on the 4th of July next, when all the contestants are invited to be present, the envelopes will be opened and the prizes awarded to the successful competitors.

Notice will be given in the Lynn Transcript to the persons entitled to the prizes.

**LADIES' GOLD WATCHES, \$25, \$30, \$35, \$40, and up**

**SILVER WATCHES \$12, \$15, \$20, \$30, and upwards.**  
**A Large Assortment of PLATED WARE, KNIVES, SCISSORS, RAZORS, POCKET BOOKS, &c., &c.**

By mutual agreement all Jewelry Stores in the city are closed on Wednesday and Friday Evenings at 6 o'clock.

J. C. OLIN, 29 Market Street, Lynn.

**52- Notice the Turning Table in the Window.**

apr 5 1964

**Figure 21: Rebus from *The Lynn Transcript*, Lynn, Essex County, Massachusetts, June 7, 1873 (accessed at ‘The Olden Times Newspapers for Genealogy & History’ 2016)**

This particular sort of challenging play is rare in comics discourse, in particular the breakdown of individual words into segments, some of which rely on a sound-only reading (as with the use of an image of a pear as part of the word ‘re-pair-ed’), but the reader may be challenged in comics to switch from mode to mode rapidly, and to take

some images as salient only for their general denotation, others in all their specificity, as well as to accept the introduction of verbal material — again the functional items above all — as connecting visual material. Chris Ware frequently uses this tactic, with panels that hold only connective words such as *THUS* or *AND*, or incorporating into the composition of panels connective and adverbials such as *PLUS*, *BUT*, *THOUGH* or *SUDDENLY*, *HENCE*, and so on. Arrows may appear also, to indicate visually a similar sort of function: and-so-then..., leading the reader to the next enclosure to read (Ware 2001). In a more general sense, the reading of a text which combines verbal signifiers with visual ones, and expects visual signifiers to be read with different values, at times literal, at others abstract and/or metaphorical, is key to all graphic narrative texts.

## **Demanding Information: Setting ‘Questions’**

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The resources so far described are games in which the task of the reader is still to extract information; readers are distracted by loss-leading material, challenged with what to attend to and tasked with how to apprehend and combine the images, but they are not supplying information themselves. There is a certain amount of ‘filling-in’ to be done with spot-the-difference inferences, but it is largely a case of understanding what must have occurred. In the following set of games, the focus is more on ways in which a text can demand that the reader supply information: ‘questions’ are set, to which the reader can contribute content. There are grey areas here, no doubt; I have been led in my classifications by which methods might involve actual marking of a page, actual engagement with drawing or writing information, and games in which the product is only complete when such marks have been made. These were often historically presented as ways in which a reader might actually interact with the magazine: to be cut out and sent in, for a prize or for recognition, or to be kept as a pleasurable image in which the viewer had collaborated in the construction. The Rebus just described (Figure 21) is an example of an edge case; this was a work fundamentally of interpretation, and the reader was invited to enter their reading as a competition. Normally the rebus would be simply understood and enjoyed rather than exchanged; and, in the later development of the comics texts I am steering towards discussing, the interactive elements which follow will have become attenuated to a mental or in-principle supply of information rather than a physical marking of the page. Nonetheless their game-like nature stems

from an urge to physical interaction; and, just as a question remains a question even though it may go unanswered, and perhaps even be deliberately rhetorical, I group them here because they seem to propose a supply of information to a page which leaves gaps composed for the purpose — physically present gaps, rather than the conceptual ‘gaps’ implicit in the differences between drawings.

## **Questionnaire**

The prototypical form of question-setting using visual means might be the questionnaire. Whilst much of the interrogative content may be carried in the accompanying language, such means as tickboxes, dotted lines/underlines and text boxes, linear elements or star ratings on which to mark strength of response, are all visual means to request information from the reader. This might be supplied in written language, or by marks in the boxes or on the lines. Drawing in response would be rare, but a medical form might invite a reader to mark a region on the body where pain is felt, as in the below example (Figure 22) from a Palo Alto medical centre (‘Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Questionnaire - Pain\_questionnaire.pdf’ 2016). This then is a language-like interaction, an exchange of meaning-making, conducted through the creation of images.

Even without marking the image, the reader is invited to read it with a response in mind — mapping the text to their own felt experience, visualising where to make the mark before it is made — or instead. It is in this sense that I would wish to treat such images as ‘interrogative’, serving a questioning function.

Questionnaire forms used directly in graphic narrative texts will tend to appear as mockeries of the sorts of advertisements and promotions that have tended to appear in the paratexts of comics, such as the classic ‘Charles Atlas’ advertisements. Chris Ware uses these in his own peritexts: for example, in the endpapers to *Jimmy Corrigan* (2001), *The Acme Novelty Library* (2005) and *Quimby the Mouse* (2003), where the reader (if female) is indeed invited to do a drawing of themselves to return to the creator. Lynda Barry sets questions to her readers, replete with checkboxes, and in her *Syllabus* (2014), which derives from a genuinely interactive text produced for her students, we are presented a mixture of completed and blank versions of elements explicitly to be responded to.

**Figure 22: Palo Alto Medical Questionnaire**

### ***Caption Competition***

Also requiring a response, and to be found in the paratexts of comics and magazines with cartoons, is the ‘Caption Competition’. Here readers are invited to supply a text to accompany a single-panel cartoon drawing, usually of some unlikely situation, and usually with at least one character open-mouthed in a drawing of verbal process. The reader submits to the magazine the projected verbiage that might come of that speech act, and the most apt or humorous contribution wins.

**Figure 23: from ‘The Passion of a Man’ (1919), in *Passionate Journey* (Masereel 2008)**

The thought involved in the supply of imagined verbal content to an otherwise ‘silent’ drawing may be inspired by any wordless graphic narrative. This may be fairly straightforward, and/or well-supported with gesture and surrounding action, as with the work we have seen of Shaun Tan in *The Arrival* (2007). But leaving the verbiage missing may not only enable international availability of the narrative, as perhaps is part of the intent of *The Arrival*, but also potentially the space for the reader to understand and supply a political message, one which might even be dangerous to utter explicitly. The overtly political woodcut novels of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by such creators as Lynd Ward (2010) or Frans Masereel (2008), as above (Figure 23), remain wordless for just such purposes. It is not for the creation of humour or the pride of winning a competition that we are left to imagine what is being protested against, or what the judges conclude, but as a way of achieving a more generally applicable message about the nature of political struggle, and as a prompt for the reader to supply the content about which they might be protesting, and might come up against the institutions of the state.

### ***Spot the Ball***

The competition, in which the actual response of the reader stands to gain a prize, and which puts to the test their visual readership and contribution to the diegesis, is

fighter reflected in the ‘Spot-the-Ball’ competition. Here the skill the reader must apply is that of diagnosing the dispositions of the participants (players in a sport) to triangulate where the ball must have appeared in an original photo which has been doctored to remove it. The dynamics of the bodies must be closely read: eyelines, implied motions, forces resisting gravity or momentum, and so on. The reader’s response is simply to mark a location with a cross, and the nearest cross wins. In fact, this is likely to be more a matter of guesswork than skill, but again, it is that close examination that is prompted by such a game that marks the interactive, interpersonal nature of such a text. (These games will be accompanied by questionnaire elements too, and cut-out lines; further action is also to be taken in response to the text.)

Whilst a specific missing element is not to be marked, this close reading of the dynamics of human bodies is a skill key to interpreting the comics image. This is especially the case in the dynamic compositions of artists such as Burne Hogarth and Jack Kirby in classic 20<sup>th</sup> Century action comics, and whole texts have been devoted to the details of drawing such dynamic compositions to create such implicature of action and consequence. What is suggested here is that we do not just read the nature of the pose itself, but extrapolate from that an implied future of the motion: we see where the body is going and closely attend to the vectors and momentum of such images. Will Eisner’s *Expressive Anatomy* (2008b) focuses on the emotional content of cartooned bodies as well as the physical implications.

### ***Join the Dots***

Whilst ‘Spot-the-Ball’ invites only a focus mark in response, despite the detailed analysis of trajectories and forces and dynamics expected of the reader, the game of ‘Join-the-Dots’ lays out a sequence of points to be connected by lines. The pleasurable activity for the reader and interactant is to draw in these lines following a numbered sequence and reveal the image encoded by them. In many cases, some line elements will already be supplied, and the reader completes an outline only, or makes connections that bring initially obscure figures into clarity. As a reader becomes more used to these figures, it may not be necessary to physically draw in the line; the task may be shortcut by imagining them in, and it is perhaps at this point that the physical task becomes less pleasurable.



**Figure 24: from *Map of my Heart* (Porcellino 2009, n.p.)**

The leaving of gaps is, of course, central to comics. We will return to ‘ellipsis’ as a cohesive device in Chapter 6, wherein elements of the diegesis may be sustained and presumed to persist in related drawings, even where they are not re-drawn — for example, entire backgrounds may be so elided, and the text relies on cohesion in that the background could not be inferred from the drawing alone. But some gaps may be completed on the basis of lines indicated in the drawing itself, without reference to other drawings or elements of the text. We do not physically draw in these lines, of course, but they are to be ‘imagined in’ by the viewer, who thus collaborates in ‘completing’ the image. I do not wish to suggest that there is ‘mental ink’, Daniel Dennett’s mockingly coined ‘figment’ (Dennett 1992, 346), used to do this, but only that this could be in principle done and that the image is consciously seen as complete rather than unrecoverably fragmented. John Porcellino’s style is notably sparse in Figure 24 (Porcellino 2009, 182–83), inviting completion in this join-the-dots way as well as cohesively; but more replete artists such as Jaime Hernandez also leave tactically empty spots for the reader to ‘close’. (This is one of the elements Scott McCloud (1993, 64) wishes to call ‘closure’, though it strikes me that there are notable distinctions to be made between this sort of connective completion of lines, the cohesive supply of elided elements, and inference of action between matchable panels, all of which he wishes to group as the same thing.) In Figure 25 (Hernandez 1988, 23) Hernandez leaves the details of ears absent; the space between nose and lip; and uses silhouette as well as black-on-black shapes the counters of which the reader is left to infer. We play ‘Join the Dots’ games to engage with comics’ abstracted pictures frequently when reading.

### ***Colouring In***

A final element commonly left for the reader to supply to the text is colour. In children’s (and increasingly, recently, adults’) magazines and activity books, line drawings are provided for the pleasurable activity of selecting and completing colours to fill the regions. A more directed activity, again marked by the use of numbering, is the paint-by-numbers game which, as with join-the-dots, leads to collaborative creation of a visual artefact in interaction with the text the creator offers.

**Figure 25: from *The Lost Women* (Hernandez 1988, 23)**

Again, in applying this principle to graphic narrative, I do not wish to suggest that black-and-white pages are coloured in physically by the reader. But it is an openness in the text that invites engagement, as these details are left to imagination. I suggest, then, that black-and-white comics offer more interpersonal engagement than colour ones; and, perhaps, that this implicit interaction reflects the sense that black-and-white is more involving and honest, more authentic than colour. Elisabeth el Refaie (2010) takes Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to task for their claim that the 35mm colour photographic image is the unmodalised, neutral ‘truth standard’ for the image, and I suggest that this is one of the components that leads to that view. It certainly seems the case that black-and-white versions of graphic narratives feel different to read from later colourised versions, for instance the reissues of *Bone* (J. Smith 2004; J. Smith 2005) or *Scott Pilgrim* (O’Malley 2010; O’Malley 2012). Colour does, of course, provide a whole range of different affordances for modality, and offers its own set of visual pleasures; we shall return to colour in Chapter 5 on modalisation next.

## **Demanding Goods-And-Services: Instructions and Actions**

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The foregoing grouping focused on resources for the image which engaged readers by inviting them to supply information, in the sense that something should be added to the image to complete or transform it, or that an inscribed response might in principle be returned to the creator, or stand alone as a new collaborative text offering its own pleasures. This was the case whether the text was materially completed by a respondent’s inscription upon it and returned or not; a question remains a question even if it goes unanswered, or even if it is not intended to be answered, as in the rhetorical question.

The following grouping invites action on the part of the reader, whereby nothing is to be added to the text, but rather it is to be used in a certain way, manipulated or followed or transformed materially; again, whether this is physically completed or not

does not detract from the interactive function of engaging the reader. I have divided these further into those that seem most to invite mental action, following a path or mentally transforming the image; and those that invite physical action, a manipulation of the material substance of the text itself. This is not a clear-cut distinction, especially when the interactions may remain merely potential, and there is room to re-categorise these; I will comment on the specifics as we meet them. The analogy is to imperatives: instruction to act, though that action may be mental or verbal; the function is ‘command’, the supply of goods or services in response to an utterance. They aim to require action rather than content.

## **Mental action**

### ***Mazes***

Mazes may be physically followed, with the help of a pen or pencil, and this is likely to be the approach used at first by child readers. I categorise them here as action rather than information because lines that would be so produced are not the end in themselves; they do not complete an image or supply further information as such, but trace the motion of an action, the movement through the space of the maze. The purpose is to pass from one region of the page to another, rather than to make a mark for its own sake.

Since the more sophisticated reader may be able to navigate a classic maze by looking alone (or perhaps with the trace of a finger or other non-marking indicator?), this visual tracing of a path is the interactive game that is taken over into graphic narrative. Chris Ware’s complex non-linear mappings of interrelationships are the most recognisable instance of this; often in outsized forms — for example, the fold-out dust jacket of *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001) — these mazes may not come with an entry or exit point, but may loop and require several tracings of paths through to cover all the material presented — and this sense of being lost in a maze, of nonlinearity and complexity, is a significant part of the value of what is communicated. The interpersonal engagement then is crucial to the text, and the reader that skips this process of interaction is missing a substantive component of the narrative.

**Figure 26: from *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 1993, 105)**

Other graphic narratives may use this device to a lesser extent, particularly as a component of the richly-textured splash pages of the sort previously discussed as ‘Where’s Wally’ images; though in that instance, leaping from focus to focus rather than following a path is what constitutes the game: it is punctual rather than progressive in its function. A simple maze is presented in the navigation of panel layouts; usually this is unchallenging and follows a Z-path which the text is designed to facilitate so that it falls beneath notice, though there is the possibility both for errors in plotting this path for readers, and exploitation of readership practices, to lead the reader into perhaps temporary versions of ‘Maze’ gameplay.

The notion of ‘game’ may be literalised in more experimental comics forms: McCloud alludes to this possibility in *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 1993, 105), and innovators in the field of interactive comics such as Daniel Merlin Goodbrey may also use the physically-navigated maze to experiment with non-linear stories, enabling reader agency to affect the narrative that is read by selecting the preferred direction of reading (see Goodbrey 2013).

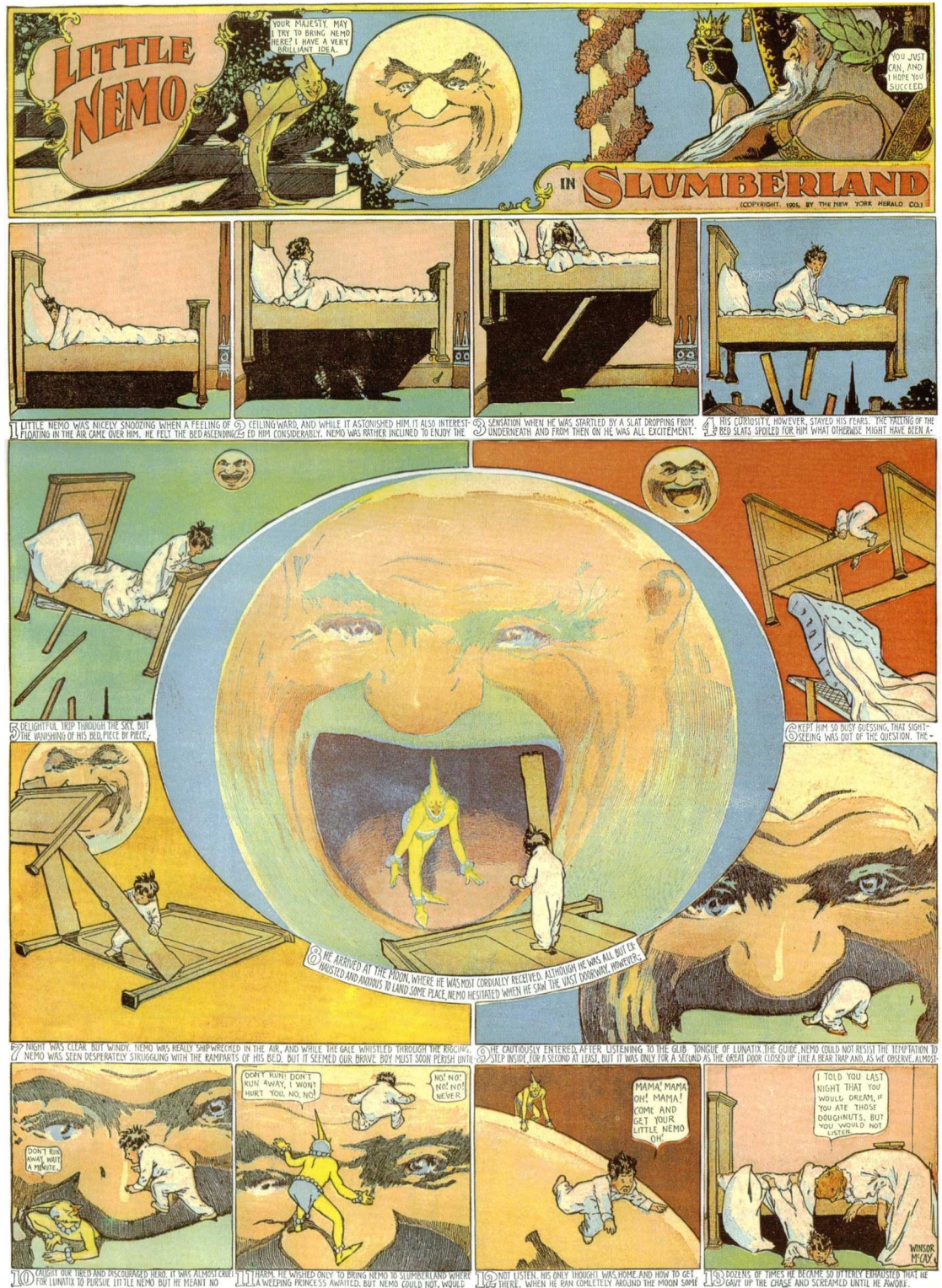
### ***Follow the Numbers***

Numbering of the images or clusters also implies a path and a course of action. This may be a reading path, particularly salient before convention of panel navigation had been settled — see, e.g., Cohn (2013a) for a discussion of American-style panel navigation assumptions, though there are questions about the applicability of this — or it may be signalling physical action to take. (This is one of those instances where the game might have been classified in the following section; but though physical activity may take place beyond the page, it is a sequence of looking that is marked in the text itself, rather than transformation of the page or the material substance of the text necessarily.) McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (collected in McCay 2016), for instance, numbers its panels, and thereby indicates paths that may not be followed by current-day readers; the first example (Figure 27 below), showing staggered rows of images, defies Cohn’s suggestion of ‘blockage’ causing readers to take a downward rather than rightward path; and the second example (Figure 28) indicates that the prominent circular inset should not be read until after the fourth tier has been reached.



**Figure 27: ‘Little Nemo in Slumberland’, 31<sup>st</sup> December (McCay 1905)**





**Figure 28: ‘Little Nemo in Slumberland’, 3<sup>rd</sup> December (McCay 1905)**

Numbering may not only mark reading order, but action too. In Will Eisner's work for the military (see Eisner 2011), numbered images feature prominently as instructional texts to indicate sequences of action to be taken by the soldier. Numbering in the example below (Figure 29) not only assists navigating the panels, but also shows

conceptual reversal of the assembly/disassembly of the weapon depicted. Note also here the Kress and van Leeuwen style of ‘interaction’, which I am classifying as ‘address’, in the figure indicating ‘stop’ with an upraised hand and eye contact. I claim that the numbered images with hands and no eyes indicate interactions, operating as demands for action, as much as this eye-contact form does.

**Figure 29: Army Maintenance pages (Eisner 1968), accessed via Persoff (2015)**

### ***Jigsaw***

The final piece of ‘mental’ action here emerges from a clearly physical form of game, and is another instance where the game might have been reclassified. The ‘Jigsaw’ challenges the reader/player to reconstruct an image from its component pieces, matching edges to edges and shapes to shapes, to reconstitute a target image that is often, but not always, available for comparison.

In comics it is rare, though possible, that the reader is actually invited to cut up and reorganise the images, physically manipulating the page. It is frequent, however, to the extent of being integral to comics discourse, that we are invited conceptually to reconstitute a scene from fragments. This, indeed, is the underlying ‘synecdochic principle’, a fundamental assumption of metonymy, that is core to comics readership, as we have already explored in previous chapters. Graphic narratives may present us with a number of elements which contribute to a total picture when assembled into a scene, as in the example below in Figure 30 and Figure 31 from *The Arrival* (Tan 2007, n.p.), or may present the same subject from many viewpoints, so that we can construct a sense of that subject as a three-dimensional figure, shown in its purest form in Crumb’s ‘Bo Bo Bolinsky’ (Figure 32).

**Figure 30: from *The Arrival* (Tan 2007)**

**Figure 31: from *The Arrival*, consecutive page (Tan 2007)**

Another approach to the skills of jigsaw are those images wherein the edges of panels show continuity of the content — so that line and colour match and the panel contributes to a larger image which then appears as seen through a grid. (We saw an example of this in Chapter 3, Figure 14 on page 106.) What is shared here is the challenge of mental *assembly*: conceptualising the space and reconstituting it, whether that is by the skill of edge-matching and attention to the qualities of the signifier, or more conceptual, organising the materials into regions of space that assemble the diegesis that is signified.

**Figure 32: ‘Bo Bo Bolinsky’ (1970; in R Crumb 1998, 78)**

## **Physical action**

### ***Cut Out and Make***

Sometimes a comics text will be designed so that, at least in principle, it may be physically deconstructed and assembled into an object that will then exist in space outside the text. This may be a game or a model, and is presented to the reader as an activity and a ‘gift’, both a service that is required of the reader and a good that is then in their hands. There may be game boards to assemble, cards to cut out and shuffle, and flattened models to cut, fold and glue into shapes. As we have seen often, Chris Ware has been among the first to embrace this in adult graphic narrative (Ware 2001), enjoying the nostalgic indebtedness to the older forms of comics for younger readers where this material work would be expected to be literally carried out, permanently transforming the disposable material of the comic book. It seems unlikely that most readers will dismantle the expensively-produced, hardback-bound, often embossed and gilded material in which Ware’s work is presented, but the diagrams are presented as a conceptual exercise, assembling the world of the diegesis in a different way than the ‘jigsaw’ assembly from fragmented images discussed in the preceding section.

Ware is drawing on the historical resources of the comics text, pursuing his theme of the disposability of the medium and its childish appeal, as well as playing with the contrast between that formal presentation and the serious, adult content of his stories:



note the ‘coffin’ in the example below (Figure 33), and the wry note that this activity is directed ‘to those for whom experience in matters of the flesh is not necessarily a defining personal characteristic’ — the implication being that this manipulation of the material substance of the book is a substitute activity for material, sexual, involvement with other human beings.

**Figure 33: from *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001)**

### ***Fold the Page***

More likely to be enacted, though still manageable in imagination, is manipulation of the page itself. *Mad* magazine’s long-running fold-ins by Al Jaffee (2011) invite the reader to fold the back cover of the magazine so as to reveal a hidden, satirical message. (The political possibilities of concealment by means of these interactive games have already been remarked under the section on ‘caption competitions’. Folding and unfolding, manipulation of the page other than the simple turn, is also a component of Sacco’s *The Great War*.)

This is a relatively unexplored area in graphic narrative, though it has precedent, and a related set of activities, typically directed at children as with many of the other pastimes presented here, would be those of the ‘pop-up book’ — not only where three-dimensional scenes emerge from the pages as the leaves are turned, but also the possibility of manipulation of tabs and dials built into the pages to reveal or enact story elements. The expense of producing these kinds of text has perhaps been a barrier so far to innovation in the adult graphic narrative; but it presents itself as an interesting possibility.

**Figure 34: Jaffee (1993) fold-in**

### ***Turn the Page***

Though folding and manipulating pages is rare, what does occur frequently in graphic narrative is the simple page turn. The most basic game of surprise revelation is commonly exploited when coupled with a use of the lower right panel of the recto page

as a point of suspense: characters may react to something not depicted, and the wordings may refer deictically to something not co-referenced on the page; characters may look off to the right, guiding the reader to a page turn. This is then rewarded by a revelation of what has caused the response (by the maxim of causality, the reader is driven to find out and to read a causal relationship between the images, further building on the metonymic principle).

This game of conceal-reveal (the erotics of this concept chime with the other material interactions invited by the many engagements listed in this chapter) is not the only possibility afforded by the leaf-turning codex form of the comic book. In Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen* (1986), the hinge point of the chapter centred on Rorschach, 'Fearful Symmetry', enacts its play with mirror images by a careful mirrored arrangement of panels, made vivid in the central pages with a panel unusually straddling the centre margin, highlighting in the depicted content the formal symmetry of the chapter. Page turns may mark modal shifts too, the entry into different nested narratives, as is enacted in *The Arrival* (Tan 2007), for instance, or Katie Green's *Lighter than my Shadow* (2013), particularly in its introductory sections.

## **Giving Goods-and-Services: What Do Comics Offer?**

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The preceding sections have systematically explored the possibilities of interaction outlined by Halliday in his table of functions (Figure 17) that govern the system of Mood. We have accounted for the giving of information, in ways that challenge the reader to interactively extract it. We have outlined ways in which a visual text may require information, inviting the reader to contribute to the text, whether they do so by making physical marks, or are merely led to envisage doing so, as in rhetorical questions or those given thought rather than uttered answers. We have noted some ways in which comics texts might prompt the reader to take action, whether this is mental action enacted in the represented space of the text, or material action carried out, at least potentially, on the physical substance of the text. This leaves one final possibility: the function of providing goods-and-services, the *offering* of action or substance. How might we account for this function using the visual resources of graphic narrative? What is it that comics offer, and how might they do so?

In terms of the English language, Halliday and Matthiessen point out that offers may be realised by a range of moods, and are not separately marked in the grammar (2004, 139). An offer may be realised by an imperative ('Have some cake!'), an interrogative ('Would you like some cake?') or a declarative ('Here's some cake for you'), each choice carrying somewhat different connotations or levels of engagement — seeming more 'pushy' or positively polite, or more circumspect or negatively polite (see P. Brown and Levinson 1987). The 'offer' is a form that is open to the whole range of interactive realisations, and may draw on any such resource to assert itself. It is, after all, the most generous of the functions.

I would like to propose, then, that for comics form, too, the offer is realised in the whole gamut of interactions: comics offer themselves. Their material form constitutes both a good and a service: it is a thing to be owned and handled, and an experience to be engaged in, through all the other forms of interaction it affords. This truth is reflected, perhaps, in comics collection practices: that the material object may be bought, traded, invested in, hoarded, preserved and exchanged like any other good of value. (See, for instance, discussions of economy and consumption in M. J. Smith and Duncan 2011.) However, the comics connoisseur may also choose to purchase a second copy to interact with, to read, handle, and enjoy, rather than to 'slab' to preserve its exchange value.

The range of material affordances and the pleasurable physical presence of the graphic narrative is manifest in the work of that other arch-experimenter, Art Spiegelman, in *Open Me... I'm a Dog!* (1997, n.p.). In its pages, it playfully purports to be a dog cursed by a wizard to take the form of a book, but it nonetheless begs to be interacted with and accepted as a live creature. This is one of those rare graphic narratives that incorporates popup elements, with a tail that wags when you flex the pages, foldout corners that reveal surprises (extending the idea of the page turn), textured inside covers and renderings of the dog's fur ("I want you to *pet* me, not just turn my pages!"), and even an integrated bookmark shaped as a leash. The verbal text enacts the range of realisations of the offer function, too, asking questions with interrogatives, urging action with imperatives, declaring itself, drawing attention to the affordances of its material and its content — it contains a nested narrative of how it came to be a dog in the form of a book, and promises: "If you let me be *your* dog, I'll tell you my story whenever you like!" — which, as a graphic narrative, of course, it will.

## Summary: Games Comics Play

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I have proposed here, then, that graphic narrative texts enact social relationships using a range of visual resources, in addition to those of language which are also available to them, and in ways compatible with the organisation proposed in MAK Halliday's system. These have been classified as a range of 'games' which the text may play with its reader, as a vivid way of describing the array of possible core interactions as mapped to Halliday's account of language functions. Comics offer information, of course, but may expect the reader to work for this, playing games of Spot-the-Difference, Where's Wally? and Rebus, each requiring different ways of attending to what is conveyed. They may demand information from the reader, requiring them to complete the image, at least in principle and whether they actually do so or not: from the possibility of Questionnaires, often in concert with linguistic forms, through Spot-the-Ball interpretations of the dynamics of the image, to Join-the-Dots connections of incomplete line and Colouring-In of black-and-white images. They may also demand action of readers: whether this is done by the eye or mind, following paths as in Maze or sequences as in Follow-the-Numbers, or connecting elements to form a larger whole, as in Jigsaw; or by potential action the material of the book, from physical dismantling of the page in Cut-Out-and-Make, or more frequent manipulations such as Fold and Turn-the-Page. The final possibility, the offer of goods-and-services, is represented in the totality of affordances of the graphic narrative text: it adopts the other forms and presents itself as good and as service.

This chapter has given an account of one component of the interpersonal metafunction of communication as outlined by Halliday: engagement of a human other in social and material interaction. The next chapter will explore the resources available to graphic narrative for intruding the self into the unfolding discourse, making social judgement on what is depicted, and appraising the reality status of the text-worlds portrayed.

# 5

## Abstraction and the Interpersonal in Graphic Narrative

### Introduction

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In the last chapter, the focus was on interpersonal interactions with the reader afforded by comics. It was the reader's involvement as a collaborator in meaning-making that was activated by the text, inviting the reader to act on the text, to supply information to it, to engage with it in a range of ways. The creator sets this up, but through the mediating affordances of the text.

In this chapter we turn to the involvement of the creator, the creator's attitudes and opinions, in the text; the resources available in comics form to communicate firstly the reality status of what is drawn, secondly the creator's affective relationship to what is drawn, and thirdly to whom we should assign the content of what is drawn — how directly we are to attribute this to the beliefs and experiences of the creator, versus a narrating entity or the participants represented in the diegesis.

These two focuses, interpersonal interaction and personal involvement, form two sides of the same coin in Halliday's system: they constitute the interpersonal metafunction. I will start with a recap of what we have encountered so far in the interpersonal system in comics, and then introduce the new resources for 'modality' as it is accounted for in language by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). I will then outline a development of this resource as systems of 'appraisal', using the work of Martin and White (2005), since these chime particularly well with the affordances of the resources of comics. Those resources emerge, in my view, from elements of abstraction; I will return to some distinctions made in the earlier chapter on abstraction, and recap and expand upon a range of dimensions of abstraction, each operating on a 'cline', a continuum of variation. I will outline a mapping of these as realisations of the modal functions of comics communication, and illustrate with a range of examples. Finally, I will turn to colour as a resource in comics, showing not only how it operates as a modal

resource, but how it works multifunctionally, bringing together ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, the latter of which will be the topic of the following chapter. I will end the current chapter with some more specific discussion of abstract enclosures in general, previewing some issues we will return to when discussing the logical function.

### **Halliday's two-part interpersonal function**

For Halliday, then, the interpersonal function describes how language enacts social relationships, using grammatical resources to interact with others (primarily the system of Mood); not only offering information in a 'conduit' communicative model, but also requiring information, discovering about the world and about others' experience of it. Not only information may be exchanged by language, but also goods and services: demanded with the resources of imperative mood (or other alternatives, for the sake of politeness or other social relations and norms), or offered, using the whole range of available grammars. Language thereby is not only constituted through propositions, but through proposals too. (This argues against some earlier, simpler conceptions of language in the first half of the twentieth century.)

### ***Interaction: recap***

In Chapter 4, this exchange function was shown to be realised in graphic narrative in a range of ways. We saw that an essential interaction between reader and creator was enacted through the underlying pragmatics of comics, as revealed in the opening attempt to read abstract comics. In order to make sense of the text, to enable its information-giving function, the reader has to enter into a co-operative pact akin to Grice's co-operative principle of conversation. A comparable list of basic tenets of comics were outlined, maxims of comics readership: the principle of synecdoche, the maxim of identity, maxims of continuity of time and place, and a maxim of causality, derived from Kantian categories as Grice had derived his (Grice 1975, 45).

Over and above that grounding pragmatics of readership, comics use a range of resources to engage readers in other interactions, playfully described as 'games' comics induct us into, that map to the mood functions used in language to give or demand information or action. Spot-the-Difference exploits the maxims of comics to enable implicature of information to be imparted, engaging the reader; but they may be also

invited to close attentive reading of an image in a game of ‘Where’s Wally’, and to cross-modal construction of meanings as in ‘Rebus’. Also requiring participation of the reader in the supply of missing information (at least in principle, though the action will rarely be carried through, rather just understood) is ‘Spot-the-Ball’ reading of trajectories and implied motion, ‘Join-the-Dots’ in incomplete drawings, and the supposition of colour in black-and-white renderings, making engagement one of the functions of colour choices in graphic narrative. Action may also be required of the reader in navigating maze-like paths through the image, with or without numbering, which may demand more specific behaviours from the interacting reader (lowering their agency, with the raising of the creator’s), and the requirement of the reader to ‘jigsaw’ the elements of the world, chiming with the principle of synecdoche, whether this is the assembly of a represented diegesis through the components depicted, or the connection of contiguous edges in the rendering drawings to realise the continuous space ‘beneath’. Physical action on the material substance of the text may even be demanded; and that which is most frequently enacted is the turning of the page to reveal the new elements of story, though more complex or unusual action is possible. What is offered is the text itself, in its material substance and its affordances of these pleasurable actions.

### ***Involvement***

The second component of the interpersonal metafunction is the involvement of the *creator* in the text, in Halliday’s words “the speaker’s ongoing intrusion into the speech situation” (Halliday 2005c, 206). Not only does the speaker assign and act out ‘speech roles’ (demanding or providing information or goods-and-services), but also necessarily involves in the text his or her attitudes, beliefs and judgements about the content of what is said. Halliday’s metaphors for describing this function are tellingly visual: “the interpersonal meaning... is strung out through the clause as a continuous motif or colouring” (Halliday 2005c, 205). It is this notion of continuity, of a continuum of meaning, and the idea of ‘colour’ both literally and in terms of stylistic variation, that will be explored below.

## **Mood, Modality, Modalisation and Modulation**

The system of the first, interactive, component of the interpersonal metafunction, then, is Mood, matching to organisational options in the syntax of a language such as English. This second component is Modality, and it is realised in language through the use of modal verbs and other lexical items with modal meaning, in particular adverbs and adjectives, though verbs and nouns may capture these meanings too. (Note that ‘Mode’ may also refer to the material substance through which a communicative exchange is conducted, such as speech or writing or drawing, hence ‘multimodal’ linguistics.) Modality breaks down into two types, also with similar terms: modalisation and modulation, depending on whether a proposition is being modalised (information exchange) or a proposal modulated (for action). I will break down these distinctions briefly below, and give a sense of how each may map to the visual resources available to graphic narrative. (It is worth recalling, in addition, that all the verbal resources of language are available to be incorporated at different levels within non-silent graphic narratives too.)

Mood in the English language is realised in syntactic arrangements of subject and finite verb. In comics, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it may be realised in the distribution of information on the page, by patterns of ellipsis and salience, and by the adoption and incorporation of codes such as numbering, which encourage interaction from a reader. These patterns draw on historical resources of interactive texts, as well as the reader’s life experience of texts; they are less clearly codified than in language, but nonetheless fall into strikingly similar patterns.

Halliday describes modality as existing between the two poles of Polarity. Between ‘yes’ and ‘no’, ‘is’ and ‘isn’t’, ‘do!’ and ‘don’t!’, lie intermediate degrees of possibility and necessity or obligation: “What the modality system does is to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 147). Halliday characterises this, then, as no longer a matter of either-or options, but as a ‘cline’: a continuum of possibilities with variable gradation available to the speaker.

Modalisation is the continuum between ‘is’ and ‘isn’t’ in propositions. It may be characterised in the image, then, by resources such as intensity, attenuation, colour saturation, stylisation or amount of detail. O’Toole glosses modalisation as “the ‘slant’ the painter gives to the reality being depicted”, incorporating uncertainty, ambiguity, and fictionality, which may be realised by visual qualities of paintings (O’Toole 2010,



13). He distributes these features across his rank scale of units: light, perspective, framing, rhythm, are all features of modality at the level of the work as a whole; scale, prominence and centrality are features of the ‘episode’; contrastive features recur at the level of figure, and Kress and van Leeuwen’s notion of modal ‘gaze’ appears here (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), as well as on the level of the work; finally, ‘stylisation’ features at the level of member. By this O’Toole appears to mean ‘degree of abstraction’, and I will return to this later.

For Kress and van Leeuwen, modality, distinct from methods of interaction realised by gaze and viewer location, cues social theories of what is ‘real’ or ‘unreal’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 154–55), and by extension, what is ‘present’ or ‘past’, ‘diegetic’ or ‘non-diegetic’. The resources for producing ‘reality effects’ are bound up with the technologies available to produce them; I will comment below on an upshot of this for comics. They identify a number of ‘modality markers’ (160–2), which are variable along a cline, though they acknowledge that the interpretation of ‘high’ or ‘low’ modality may be reversed along the same cline in different contexts (166).

They list:

- Colour saturation (from black and white to richly saturated colour)
- Colour differentiation (diverse to monochrome)
- Colour modulation (varied shading and tinting to flat colour)
- Contextualisation (with detailed background to no background)
- Representation (abstract to detailed pictorial)
- Depth (perspective, isometry, flatness)
- Illumination (shadowing and sculpting vs unshaded line art)
- Brightness (which appears to be contrast, from sharp black and white to shades of grey)

Many of these can be taken over into discussions of graphic narrative, with close attention paid to the specific traditions of the medium and of subgenera within it. Some, as El Refaie argues (2010), are starkly different in meaning when applied to graphic narrative; and others I think operate differently in sequential art since it rests on a

principle of synecdoche — in particular the presence/absence of background, which I take to be a cohesive feature of comics, as I shall argue in the following chapter on textual function.

Kress and van Leeuwen, then, cite a range of visual resources for establishing “what counts as real” (2006, 163). Less available in visual forms is the notion of resources for ‘Modulation’: the do-or-don’t, should-or-shouldn’t axis of modality. In their model, the possibility of this sort of interaction is not available, as we have seen: they take eye contact and angle, representing degrees of involvement in the content, to be the extent of image ‘mood’. My own description allows for some possibility of modulation: degrees of salience of an affordance, including size, line weight, contrast, colour brightness, and perhaps material variations like pre-folded sections or perforated sections might modulate the intensity of a demand. The resources of accompanying language, the imperatives and requests made, are most likely to handle this material, however. In *Open me... I’m a Dog!* (Spiegelman 1997), the material affordances are prominent — the unusual (‘marked’) leash-style bookmark, the dog-eared flap to unfold, the bright orange, markedly textured endpapers all seems to strongly appeal to interaction, to urge play; but from the imperative title onward, the language works strongly in support of this reading: “Look!”, “Listen to this:”, “WAIT!” (n.p.)

### **Appraisal**

This intensification function, not necessarily married to judgements of what is real or unreal, true or false, suggests that an extended notion of the interpersonal might be useful in modelling the visual text. Indeed, Halliday’s account of the resources available to serve this function has been extended by later writers. Here I adopt Martin and White’s account of *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (2005) to capture some more useful dimensions of what images can do in embedding creators’ assessments of their material in graphic narrative texts. These extended concepts will be valuable when we turn to the visual resources of abstraction below.

Martin and White break down interpersonal semantics into three aspects (2005, 35): Negotiation, Appraisal and Involvement. Negotiation is their term for speech functions and exchange, the resources of *mood* addressed in the previous chapter. Involvement they gloss as ‘solidarity’ or ‘contact’, the adoption of registers, largely of lexis, which affiliate the speaker to a sociocultural group — slangs, technical language, taboo usage,

naming, accent and ‘secret scripts’. This no doubt has a place in comics discourse; it might be argued that the collective resources of comics, the specific codes of subgenres or national forms such as manga conventions, and such assumptions as the ‘maxims of comics’ here outlined implicitly assume membership of a community of readers. I discuss the notion of ‘contact’, in terms of a ‘phatic space’ or engagement with the reader, elsewhere in this thesis (prominently Chapter 7). The focus for Martin and White, however, and the material which I will take up here, is Appraisal, organised into three broad areas, one of which is then further subdivided into three.

### ***Engagement***

The first area is Engagement, and it deals with “sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse” (Martin and White 2005, 35). This therefore incorporates ‘projection’ in discourse (as accomplished via word balloons in comics) and the attribution of certain views, beliefs and ideas to other speakers. This chimes with Bakhtin’s view of the novel as essentially dialogic, and Martin and White adopt the term ‘heteroglossia’ from Bakhtin and Voloshinov (see Bakhtin 1982), and acknowledge the influence of this thinking (Martin and White 2005, 92–93). It is typical, if not essential to graphic narratives that they incorporate a range of voices, the speaking characters, narratorial voices, and the ‘visual’ narrator — whether the ‘monstrator’ in Groensteen’s terms (2009), or ‘graphiator’ in Philippe Marion’s (1993). These voices may be ‘framed’ in visual markers as well as ‘bookended’ by contextualising material that may judge the text creator’s attitude to and valuation of each voice. Martin and White offer tools to analyse the level of heteroglossia in a text: texts can be dialogically ‘contractive’ or ‘expansive’, either seeking to reduce or open up dialogic alternatives (Martin and White 2005, 103–4); notions may be ‘entertained’ tentatively (104–9), or attributed to others (112–7), as academic discourses like the present one do, either to bolster a view, or to distance oneself from it.

### ***Attitude***

The second type of appraisal, attitude, is ‘focal’ for Martin and White (2005, 39), covering emotion, ethics and aesthetics (42). It can be broadly classified with positive or negative polarity (71), but subdivided into aspects of *affect* (emotions), *judgements* of

persons' capacity, propriety, normality, truthfulness, and so on, and *appreciation* (of the values and qualities of things).

Affect is expressed across the range of lexicogrammatical resources in language (Martin and White 2005, 45). Martin and White divide this emotional response into dimensions of happiness, security and satisfaction (49). These are scaled along a set of clines, illustrating a complex web of shading and intensities of emotions. They may be expressed as 'surges of behaviour' or dispositions (49–51). 'Affect' is the term often used to cover the full range of what Martin and White are exploring (1–2), and it lies at the heart of human behaviour. It is tempting to ally this to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'affect', in the sense that it arises from intensities and underpins action, the ability to 'affect' other human beings; but that is not quite the sense in which it is used here, and Deleuze and Guattari distance themselves from an interpretation of 'affect' as simply 'emotion' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013).

Judgement is also essentially human: one individual judging the value(s) of another. Both judgement and appreciation are 'institutionalised feelings', emerging from affect but codified and externalised. Judgement "reworks feelings in the realm of proposals about behaviour", codifying moral rules about how we should behave or not (Martin and White 2005, 45). Martin and White divide judgements broadly into esteem or sanction, assessing how special, capable or dependable an individual is deemed to be, as well as how honest and beyond reproach (53).

Appreciation, on the other hand, evaluates things rather than people. They may be natural phenomena or works of art (Martin and White 2005, 36). Appreciation may include assessments of their 'value' to us, their 'composition' in terms of complexity and balance, and how we react to them, how powerfully, positively or negatively (56). This last is most obviously allied to emotional affect, with the others more circumspect in their evaluations.

The emotionally expressive qualities available to visual rendering may then express evaluations along all these lines. This framework can be adapted to suggest more specifically what *sort* of emotional content is being expressed through what visual means; aiming to map the functional impact of particular visual choices onto not just 'reality status' in a cline of modality from real to unreal, but evaluations of objects, persons, and emotional reactions.

## ***Graduation***

Graduation of these feelings, judgements and reactions is the last of Martin and White's categories. This means "modulating meaning by degree", and may be a matter of intensification (force) or adjustment of boundaries (focus). Since it is applicable to all the other systems, it is central to the system of appraisal (Martin and White 2005, 136). There are a wide range of linguistic resources available to both, perhaps especially to force (141–8), wherein intensification may be realised through lexis, quantifiers, repetitions, and multiplied through combinations of these. The complexity of these interacting systems move the levels of graduation finely up and down *scales* of force and focus. Martin and White suggest that this scaling "may in fact be a distinctive feature of interpersonal semantic systems in general" (16). They array their systems of meaning along axes representing these clines of variation, the better to map possible gradations in meaning.

That notion of a 'cline', a range of variations along which interpersonal meanings can be arrayed, is crucial to my mapping of these functions to visual resources. It is a feature of drawing that it is not 'notational', but rather semantically dense or 'replete', to use Nelson Goodman's terms (Goodman 1976). On the face of it, this makes pictures unlike language, which is discrete (broken down into symbols and words) at a grammatical level — but we see that, at the discourse semantic level of analysis, language may not be so all-or-nothing, but display arbitrarily fine degrees of differentiation, and so mappable onto drawing — though the realisations may be different.

## **Abstraction as a Set of Clines**

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In the next section, I would like to return to the notion of abstraction, which was the starting-point for this functional investigation of graphic narrative, and consider the multiple definitions of abstraction, initially presented as polarised binaries, as a range of clines which lay out an array of possibilities which is analogous to those in the modal systems of language, including the systems of appraisal. I will first lay out the foundations in discussions of abstraction as a scaled phenomenon from Arnheim (2004a), and then explore the range of scales uncovered when setting this notion against the dimensions identified in the previous discussions of abstraction.

## **What abstraction is**

In *Visual Thinking* (2004a), Rudolf Arnheim explores in detail the relationship between images, abstraction and ‘pictures’. He finds degrees of abstraction essential to what makes an image a picture. It is worth quoting him at length on this:

Images are *pictures* to the extent to which they portray things located at a lower level of abstractness than they are themselves. They do their work by grasping and rendering some relevant qualities — shape, colour, movement — of the objects or activities they detect. Pictures are not mere replicas, by which I mean faithful copies that differ from the model only by random imperfections.

A picture can dwell at the most varied levels of abstractness. A photograph of Dutch landscape of the 17th century may be quite lifelike and yet select, arrange, and almost unnoticeably stylise its subject in such a way that it focuses on some of the subject’s essence. On the other hand, totally non-mimetic geometrical pattern by Mondrian may be intended as a picture of the turmoil of New York’s Broadway. A child may capture the character of human figure or a tree by a few highly abstract circles, ovals, or straight lines. (Arnheim 2004a, 137)

Abstraction is not, then, a ‘withdrawal’ or removal from sensory experience, but an active work of selection and condensation of the objects of experience into a generalisable set of concepts. It is “the art of drawing essentials from a given kind of entity” (Arnheim 2004a, 173).

It is apparent from the wording of the quotation above that Arnheim views abstraction as a ‘cline’, and that it is a concept that is applicable not only to images but the things that are depicted, the objects of experience. Indeed, Arnheim arrays abstraction on a cline in a diagram representing these two dimensions of abstraction, not in an array, but as two competing levels which may be compared against each other. The diagram is reproduced below (Figure 35) from page 151 of *Visual Thinking*:

**Figure 35: Diagram of Abstraction (Arnheim 2004a, 151)**

The image, then, becomes more abstracted as it withdraws from mimesis, through an intermediate zone of ‘stylisation’. Experience is considered more abstract as it moves away from ‘particulars’ to higher-level ‘chunks’ of experience; generalisations, then objects whose value depends on their interpretation rather than specific details of their realisation (‘symbolic vehicles’), then at the highest level ‘ideas’ and ‘forces’. The one represents the other: specific, mimetic ‘symbols’ representing higher level concepts (the rose for love, for example), and pictures, always to some degree representing a section and condensation of features, an effacement of specifics, representing more or less particular objects of perception despite this abstraction in the signifier.

### **What abstraction is not**

Arnheim uses two tracks on which to array his ‘clines’, but in Chapter 2 on abstract comics above, an overview of the meanings of ‘abstraction’ identified four poles on which the term has been used, defined in opposition to what is taken not to be ‘abstract’. Indeed, Arnheim’s own discussion begins with ‘What Abstraction is Not’, noting that its meaning is negative, denoting drawing-away, removal from experience (Arnheim 2004a, 153–54). It will be apparent that what we are approaching here is a set of clines against which may be mapped the graded systems of modality and appraisal, which will be pursued in the following section.

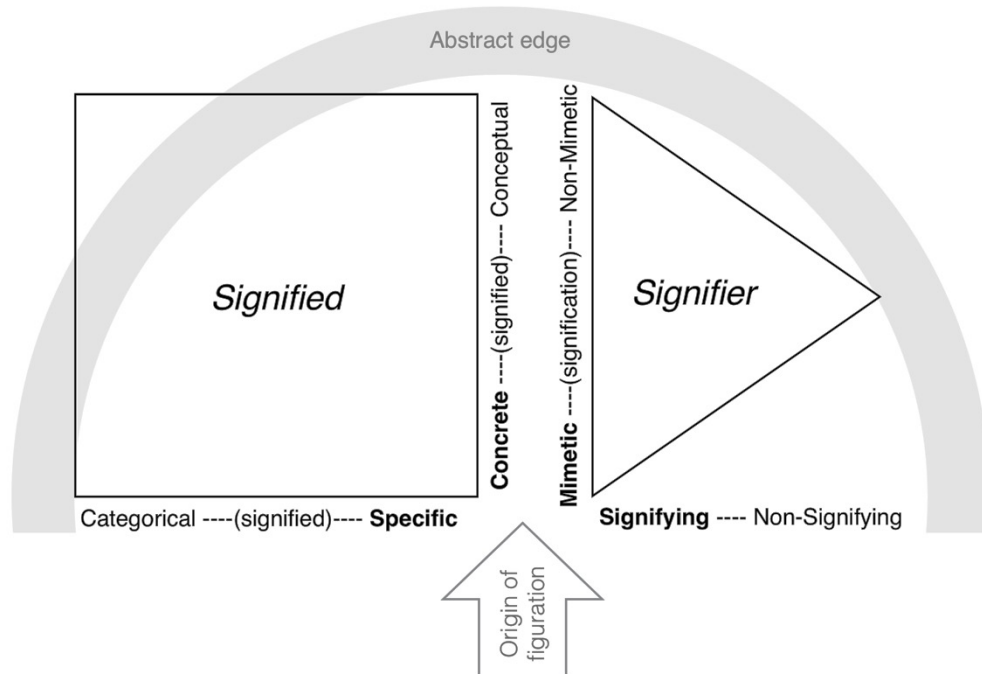
### ***Four clines of abstraction***

The four antitheses to abstraction outlined in relation to abstract comics were as follows:

1. Non-signifying: thing-in-itself
2. Non-mimetic: not resembling, operating symbolically
3. Non-specific: categorical, descriptive of connections or general properties
4. Non-concrete, non-visible: conceptual (in the *signified*).

The first two are focused on the nature of the signifier and how it functions; the second pair attend to the nature of what is signified. These may be arranged and brought

together not just on two parallel continua of abstraction, but two complementary planes of abstraction, as in the following diagram, reproduced in Figure 36:



**Figure 36: Diagram of Abstractions**

The two figures are here arranged so that the least abstract representation would be charted in the lower right corner of the square array, alongside the lower left corner of the triangular array, a point which I have marked the ‘origin of figuration’. In its most ideal form it would exist outside the diagram; absolute reproduction of something without any abstraction would cease, on Arnheim’s account, to be representation in the sense of picturing at all, but pure replication or identity.

The *Signifier* array is represented here as triangular, since as a ‘signifier’ moves away from its ability to signify at all, the differentiation between mimetic and non-mimetic will accordingly be diminished. It should be noted that the diagram might be further complicated by differentiating the non-mimetic into, say, symbolic and indexical, following Peirce (2011, 98–115); but the aim here is to chart what is abstract, and both such forms of signification may be treated as, in different ways, nonetheless abstract, so we may excusably efface the distinction.

The *Signified* is a square two-dimensional array since an item of experience may be both ‘Categorical’, non-specific, and ‘Conceptual’, non-concrete, or gradations of each;



for example, ‘emotion’ may be both general and conceptual, whereas ‘*schadenfreude*’ is a rather specific sort of emotion; and ‘buildings’ perfectly concrete but broadly general in its application.

The chart then identifies not one ‘abstraction’, but a zone of abstraction at the outer end of these clines across the different dimensions. This is indicated as an ‘abstract edge’ — not an absolute, but a limit to which a given image may tend, in a range of possible ways. In the following sections, I will explore each dimension, giving examples of graphic narrative which seem particularly to stretch along one of them, but which may also be seen to vary across the others simultaneously. Indeed, different regions of a given image may vary across the planes of abstraction, at the different ‘ranks’ O’Toole identifies (O’Toole 2010, 10): a given figure or episode may vary in its abstraction, as may whole works; in comics, just the background, or a particular character, panel, page or section of narrative may shift in its abstraction.

I argue that these shifts of abstraction carry *interpersonal* meaning. They modalise the image in the sense of placing it in the intermediate zone between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, between ‘concrete’ and ‘conceptual’, and in the affordances of indexical marks of the creator amongst other resources, they may acquire more or less *appraisal* of what is drawn, encoding judgements, appreciations, graduations of value, and modulations of engagement with what is drawn.

### ***Non-specific***

For McCloud, the more “cartoony” or generalised an image is, particularly the image of the human face, the more people it could be said to describe; hence it invites a reader to invest themselves in it, since it is perceived not as the image of another, which would be distancing, but as of the abstract emotion as felt in oneself (McCloud 1993, 30–1; 36). This contrasts with Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) view, or Painter and Martin’s (2013), which is that more realistic images and more specific representations courage empathy by individuation. (I will comment below that this is also the view of Wilhelm Worringer.) It is certainly a challenge of comics, given the commitment to specify features of a depicted image which may be ignored in language, to describe the abstract in the sense of general categories. The use of stick figures as in *xkcd* (Munroe 2016), or in Chris Ware’s diagrammatisation of comics function in the endpapers to *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001), may approach this generalising function, accompanied

by the sort of distancing modalisation described in Kress and van Leeuwen. If the utterly general, the utterly abstract, is impersonal, and the specific is human but perceived as ‘other’, then the space between the two, the semi-abstract, is modal. The type of empathic ‘masking effect’ that McCloud describes (McCloud 1993, 43) is perhaps not found in the extremes of simplification as he argues, but in the modal area along the cline of abstraction in this dimension; Jeff Smith’s *Bone* (2004), for instance, features right next to McCloud’s neutral face in his triangular diagram of abstraction (McCloud 1993, 52–53), but there expressive, indexical qualities of line lend a human quality that is missing from the neatly diagrammatic.

### ***Non-concrete***

Arnheim is interested in the use of drawing to capture non-concrete conceptualisations of notions and relationships in *Visual Thinking* (Figure 37). He reports on “experiments with drawings” (Arnheim 2004a, 120–29), wherein participants are asked to render concepts such as ‘democracy’ or ‘good and bad marriages’. These are rendered with expressive lines, parallel and divergent; shapes grouped in abstract enclosures, brought into apposition with each other, varied in shape but controlled in size, and so on. The vigour evident in the mark-making reveals some of the ‘force’ with which it has been thought through (121); looseness of the drawing (122–3) versus careful balancing of shapes (124) may reflect a graduation between ‘sharpening’ and ‘softening’ of focus, as well as recruiting qualities of the line to represent the non-concrete affect in question. Metaphorical ‘spikiness’ or ‘gentleness’ may approach mimesis (130, 132), though still not of any specific spiky thing; affordances of the figures in general, like the ‘meshing’ on display in Arnheim’s Figure 42 on 131, capture elements such as ‘conjugation’, and multiple drawings may be presented, with matchable elements, so that processes of change and becoming may be read by ‘spot-the-difference’ inference between images.

**Figure 37: from *Visual Thinking* (Arnheim 2004a, 131)**

In graphic narrative, the conceptual and material may be captured through similar means. Craig Thompson’s *Blankets* (2003) makes a motif of the patterns on the titular gift blanket given to protagonist Craig by his lover Raina, attributing to them the

meanings of sound: breathing, snowfall, “the gentle murmur of spirits” (Thompson 2003, 434–35). The abstract circles, feathery semi-organic patterns, paisley and mandalas combine overlaid on the mimetic image of the room in which the characters dwell (and, to adopt Kress and van Leeuwen’s take on modality, this view appears to be from the perspective of protagonist Craig’s viewpoint in the bed in which he finds himself), and these abstractions are contiguous with rendering of winged angel figures, collocating with the term ‘spirits’ in the narrative, to be read as metaphor, capturing the environment of sounds and emotions, modalised as immaterial. This, then, is abstraction on a *cline* or continuum: the images are to some degree mimetic, to some degree decorative; and what is represented is in part material — the motions of air, sounds — and in part immaterial, the meanings and affective value Thompson attaches to them, communicated by qualities of line and shape, the physical trace of the artist’s brush and the care taken in rendering.

### ***Non-mimetic***

Already, in the foregoing discussion of ‘abstract’ qualities to be signified, I have found myself encroaching upon ‘abstract’ qualities of the *signifier*: to what degree it is mimetic, and ways in which it may be non-mimetic, including indexical qualities and symbolism, conventional metaphorical value of curves, spikes, decorative patterns.

The *semi*-mimetic appears in the modalisation of image in the sense of capturing modalities of vision as well as the qualities of lines as indexical mark of the creator. In *Blankets* again, reproduced in Figure 38 below, Thompson draws himself torn and thrashing with emotion (Thompson 2003, 59), rendered with a line that enacts the rapid strokes of the movement that he is in part mimetically representing, but also exploiting the ‘motion blur’ experienced by looking at a fast-moving object (and likely exposed as a resource for artists through the explorations of photography; likewise with soft focus and other artefacts of seeing and image capture).

Thompson is consciously adopting the brushstroke style and abstraction of French creator Edmond Baudoin, whose expressive line communicates by its indexical presence on the page as much as its mimesis, and the two modes exchange priorities and overlap. In *Le Voyage* (Baudoin 1996), the ambiguity of line as concrete or abstract, mimetic and non-mimetic, not only in the sense of indexical but also in its function of delineating abstract enclosures for thought in particular, is made vivid by the contiguity

of the lines delineating the protagonist's head with lines enclosing the visual content of his thought. It is unclear what is panel border, what is thought balloon, and what is represented character. In representations of sensual, emotional experience such as dance and lovemaking especially, the quality of the line as marking abstract motion through space, in part enacted by the line as a mark of the movement of the creator's brush through representational space, is left liminal, varied on a cline with mimetic representation of the figure in motion such that it is unclear where the abstract line is being concretised, or the mimetic line abstracted. This is the epitome of modality.

In Andrei Molotiu's collection of *Abstract Comics* (2009), many of the works operate like this, in play between 'pure' abstraction and possible mimesis. In that collection, the work of Troy Lloyd, Elijah Brubaker, James Kochalka, Trondheim's *Bleu*, and Ibn al Rabin's 'The Empire Strikes Back' and 'Toads Welcome' (n.p.) represent a range of locations on the continuum between mimesis and expressive, enacting line representing motion through abstraction.

The indexical opposition to mimesis has been the main focus here, but also the symbolic, or coded form of abstraction is also available. Both al Rabin and Trondheim exploit these coded abstract resources of comics, and most of the works in the collection use abstract enclosures — panelisation — as a basis for generating implicature, and as a textual identifier that stakes the work's claim to be a comics text, and invites reading as such. Trondheim's 'protagonist' is a shape-shifting form (there are no panels, but we assume identity through similarity as comics readers) who 'speaks' through projected balloons, which contain the shape it will later become (by assumed progression of time). Though the shapes are abstract, there is nonetheless co-resemblance that is crucial to making sense of the story. On the other hand, codes such as size = volume, and qualities of the balloon tail signifying qualities of speech, are also at work here; non-mimetic, though nonetheless meaningful. Ibn al Rabin's 'Stop Quibbling, Please' (see Figure 8 on page 76) uses the abstract coding principles of 'word' balloons to achieve sophisticated nesting in a complex hypotactic structure of reported speech, also complicating our management of reading order, as well as our understanding of the status of what we read: reported or not. These projective balloons are operating as heteroglossic devices, attributing the drawings as the content of characters' thoughts or speech.

Other works in Molotiu's collection play with enclosures by moving them towards the concrete end of the modal scale, away from the abstract. Al Rabin's 'The Cannibal

Frame' plays with the frame's status as abstract indicator outside the text, promoting it to the status of protagonist, and in Andy Bleck's work the frames are sculpted and made almost as concrete as the figures rendered within, modalising it back towards the mimetic as the figures are modalised away. Anders Pearson's work likewise plays with the materiality of the frame.

As a more mainstream tool for communicating modality, the normally non-mimetic frame of a panel or balloon may take on concrete or mimetic qualities when it appears frozen in ice, dripping with blood, or otherwise takes on topical shapes which more or less mimetically communicate emotional content or motifs related to the story they contain. Metaphorical material which is semi-mimetic, such as spikiness, cloudiness, attenuation, and so on, may be communicated from the frame to the content enclosed. In this way the abstract enclosure is a key tool of modalisation and appraisal — affect, judgement and appreciation.

### ***Non-signifying***

Some accounts of abstraction identify it with a lack of signification at all, where the abstract artwork is to be appreciated for its own sake, a thing-in-itself, with no further meaning implied. This is perhaps impossible to control, since it is in part in the hands of the onlooker to invest meaning in the work. Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966) might serve as a prototypical example of this tradition.

In the *Abstract Comics* collection (Molotiu 2009), some works tend towards this pole on the scales. In Bill Boichel's 'Jim Jam Job', the line is not at all mimetic, nor concrete, nor especially meaning other than itself: it is a path for the reader to follow, playing 'maze' in the pleasurable tracing of its lines and curves, organised into clusters that approximate the shape of panels, but with a single link from knot to knot. Grant Thomas's 'Color Sonnet #3' problematises the limits of mimesis and meaning; the form is clearly meant to reflect the form of a sonnet (10 'panels' on 14 'pages' in groups of eight and six, to reflect the 10-syllable, 14-line, octave-and-sestet structure of the sonnet), and the shifts of colour in the paint patches may be read as marking shifts in tone, including the 'turn' expected of sonnet genre; but since what is 'represented' here is just form, does this count as mimesis? As signification? The patches and patterns of colour are pleasing in themselves, as with the following 'Eggs, Eggs, Eggs' by Casey Camp, the title of which suggests no obvious mimesis or meaning to be read off.

The pleasure of the drawing itself, and the scopophilia associated with viewing drawings for themselves, is present in all comics work. One of Robert Crumb's fans reportedly told him that he enjoyed Crumb's crosshatching more than getting high (*The Guardian* 2005). Non-signifying drawing might be said to communicate an appreciation for the art of comics creation, as well as to inspire it. Lynda Barry decorates her work with geometric abstract shapes, filling the borders with interest. This enacts the pleasures of drawing for its own sake, as well as inscribing the indexical mark of the artist, imbuing it with the affects of attention, concentration, handmade care. The use of found materials concretise the page, too, and draw attention to its status as a real-world object, to be interacted with. In *Syllabus* (Barry 2014), and in her workshops, Barry recommends marking the page 'meaninglessly' with an X, to avoid it acquiring a status as precious or untouchable. She similarly recommends the drawing of spirals while listening, enacting an of-itself mark on the page. This marks the material of the comics as a 'contact' space, and the act of marking as a felt pleasure, to be reflected in the reading. Her geometric lines and shapes communicate a playfulness and pleasure in drawing, and they efface the distinction between mimetic and non-mimetic; some of the images (page 7 for instance) look like leaves, or perhaps eyes, though perhaps they are mere decorative abstraction.

Barry's work is instructional, but this decorative abstraction may adorn more narrative works too. In Craig Thompson's *Habibi* (2011), the geometric patterns in the borders are in part topical (they are derived from the traditions of the world he is representing, and he explicitly discusses their construction on 562–3), but also devotional in a similar way to Barry's decorative edging. At times they modalise projective material, identifying the narration of nested story in many places (e.g., 26–7, 121–2, 578–9, 609–11, and many more); at times they appear just to fill space (36, 132, 253, etc.); they may take up background to communicate intensity of emotion (90, 166, 208, 264); they may be indeterminately topical or emotional (141, 156); they manage the text's structure in the marking of chapter transitions. Examples are numerous, and those given are not exhaustive. They do not signify real things in the diegesis, but foreground themselves as present in the discourse world of the material text. The evident pleasure of the creator in the exquisite detail of the decoration, and the fascination of this for the reader, enacts an 'erotics' of the comics text.

## **Worringer**

Both these sets of forms, used by Thompson and Barry, are on their own cline between geometrical abstraction and the use of somewhat mimetic natural forms: leaves, vines, branches, sometimes creatures. This calls to mind the investment of emotion in abstraction discussed by Wilhelm Worringer in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1953) and *Form in Gothic* (1957). For Worringer, the link between abstraction and empathy is that, in more confident and secure periods of human existence, people seek empathy in art that represents the self mimetically; they can enjoy the reflection of who they are. In more unstable and anxious periods, people seek the security of abstract forms which are ‘absolute’ and transcendent from the world. The underlying thought here is the use of art for interpersonal means: to empathise with. Worringer’s ideas here emerged from his interest in Gothic art, the ‘Northern line’, which operated in an intermediate space between these two extremes, and revealed a civilisation in transition: the abstract form of the Gothic took on organic features, with a freely expressive line which, whilst being abstract, invites empathy with the form, which embodies and communicates organic emotion. That the shapes in this intermediate space, the sort of transitional in-between which I have been calling ‘modal space’, are taken, though enacted in the visual line, to offer space for the investment of human values and emotion, supports my proposals here about the connection between the visual modalities of abstraction across its range of clines, and the various dimensions of modalisation as human appraisals of content in a multifunctional system. Perhaps also, a cultural moment that is interested in the play in this space of intermediate abstraction embodied in comics, reflects likewise a culture in transition.

## **Summary: resources for modalisation**

To summarise, then, let me outline here some key resources for modalisation in graphic narrative.

- Firstly, the **abstraction** of the image, across all the dimensions here outlined.

For Arnheim, this is inevitable in all pictures. This may be accomplished by simplification, tendency to break down the image into geometric forms, the ellipsis of detail, attenuation of line and flattening of shape, foregrounding of the indexical, and so on. This may serve the purposes of graduation of force,

downplaying the salience of elements of the image, or pure modal judgement of the reality status of an image: the more abstract, the more unreal, non-concrete, imaginary, mental.

- Secondly, the variation in attenuation of the line, judging status and importance, and expressing the **indexical** presence of the creator where this is freely varied, inviting affective response and empathy. Brushwork is perhaps especially conducive to this form of modality, though all marks of physical presence of a creating individual may serve this.
- Next, **concretisation** of abstract line and abstract enclosures; the introduction of mimetic or material elements into these, making them more present, drawing attention to them and their role, and communicating valuations, whether judgement or appreciation, of what is enclosed or indicated by the line. This feature may work alongside the last, indicating the indexical presence of the creator and emotional content communicated through the enactment of the line in space — force or delicacy of brush strokes, for example, making the line material on the page.
- Fourthly, the attempt at mimesis of **modalities of vision**, rendering fleeting visual artefacts, whether already conventionalised as in motion lines or improvised in the drawing style; this may problematise what is concrete and what is abstract, and thereby modalises the image. It presents a subjectively perceived ‘monstration’, and draws attention to a viewing subject, also potentially marking appreciations of the relative motion of a figure, or communicating unreality or uncertainty by representing the mental state of the monstrator, as in representations of drunkenness by double vision, for instance.
- Also conventional, the use of abstract forms such as the **enclosures** of frames and word balloons can modalise an image, indicating that it is a projection from another character than the narrator/monstrator, ‘attributing’ the drawn image and contributing to the engagement and heteroglossia of the text. These enclosures may be further modalised by concretisation as noted above.
- Finally, the **colour modulation** of the text, including tonal values in monochrome work, may operate along the lines that Kress and van Leeuwen



have proposed, though not with the same evaluation of reality status that they suggest: the 35mm colour photograph is not the ‘reality standard’. Changes in saturation, tone control, restricted palettes, may all be markers of reality status and attitudes/affective value, with some conventionalised resources available to be adopted (such as sepia or black-and-white for the past), but others that may be improvised through the logogenesis of the work.

These, then, are not the ‘rules’ or a definitive prescriptive ‘grammar’ of graphic modality; but what is offered here is a way of organising the visual resources by means of which creators of graphic narrative can communicate modal content in their work, and through which it will be understood by readers. The framework is intended to enable a reader or critic to articulate how modality is realised in a graphic narrative text, and thereby how appraisals are made of the reality status, affective value, or semantic force of what is rendered. In the next section I offer some example readings, to further illustrate how this framework for modality works.

## Application

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### **Thompson: *Blankets***

In pages 59–60 of *Blankets* (2003), Thompson modalises the images in a range of ways. In the third panel enclosure, the frame is given indexical weighting, symbolising a textual force to the image, but also through the texture of the emboldened brushwork on the border an index of the artist’s presence and a heightening of emotion. This roughened brushwork is shared with the rendering of the barrel in which he is to burn his work — modalising it from the opposite direction, from mimetic towards abstract indexical qualities. The three drawings at the bottom of page 59 (Figure 38) use modalised line to indicate the (metaphorical) thrashing of Craig’s head, in the representation of part-abstract, part-mimetic modalities of vision in the blurring/motion lines that indicated head and hair. The backgrounds, featuring ellipsis of detail in the pure black, continue this hand-moulded quality of the line and seem to indicate motion there too; background circumstance thereby carries affective qualities we impart to what

is depicted. Even the mimetic lines sculpting the t-shirt and sweater Craig is wearing carry this indexical quality, and the rendering of the hand is sketchier in the central panel, to chime with the indeterminacy of the face, especially in the third panel, where the chin tends towards geometric abstraction. The use of doubled enclosures here serves both to mark this rendering as a transition into a more metaphorically modalised sequence, not to be treated as ‘real’, and also to group together the three images as subordinate, projected as part of his reportage, which is now enclosed together within this space rather than kept in the ‘phatic’ contact space of the margins/gutters. Finally here, the use of brushwork on the letterforms allies them to the indexical line used to create the image, thereby indicating a closeness, and adopting some of the aggression of the line — further supported by the instance of capitalisation in the key word ‘buRN’.

Page 60 (Figure 39) is revealed with a page turn, and exploits a range of abstractions to indicate unreality and emotion. The dominant image blends the representational (sharks, birds, monsters) with the abstract (circles, linking lines, carets) and the indeterminate (wheels, arrows, droplets), in a flattened unsculpted rendering eschewing the shadows and brushwork of the rest of the image. This attenuation by its contrast marks this image as metaphorical, unreal; the line itself appears to be avoiding indexical emotion, though the shakiness of some of the line (like the upper edge of the shark) may communicate nervous affect. The face of Craig, vomiting out this modalised image of feeling, shares the indeterminacy and blurring of the previous sequence, here with the eye also prominently simplified into geometrical circle though rendered with loose, anxious line. In the background, the trees, previously rendered with an organic, fluid brushwork typical of the novel as a whole, with sculpturing and shading in panel one on page 59, take on a geometricality with sharp angles and flat hatching, foregrounding the mark-making and further signalling unreality; the sharp edges supporting metaphorically the negative affect the character is feeling (and we should bear in mind that this is Thompson rendering his younger self). There are interesting transgressions of the framing border, with not only the *memento mori* of the skull lower right exceeding the boundaries of enclosures which contain this ‘text-world’, encroaching on the ‘discourse-world’ of the page, but also the shading lines, suggesting that these expressive lines are loose and ‘uncontrolled’, and again casting the text world as non-hermetic, foregrounding the contact marks of the creator. Finally, the billowing smoke shares that rough, expressive line that has been used to describe the barrel: it is partly mimetic, indicating a roughness of texture or rustiness in the object depicted, but partly

abstract, indexical, expressive of the affect invested in the object by the creator: it is modalised line.

**Figure 38: from *Blankets* (Thompson 2003, 59)**

**Figure 39: from *Blankets* (Thompson 2003, 60)**

### **Koch: *The Art of the Possible***

In marked contrast, Kenneth Koch's experimental comics poetry (Koch 2004) predominantly uses words and abstract enclosing lines to organise the text, lines usually neutral and simple. This work tests the boundaries of what might count as 'graphic narrative', given that it largely eschews the visual. But nonetheless, in its handling of the modalities of line, it partakes in the resources of comics, even beyond its overt adoption of the panel and enclosure as a structuring device. 'Tugboat Ted Comics' (Koch 2004, 62) is one of a few to use some semi-mimetic images. Often Koch's comics are text fragments laid out in regular grids without gutters, with only the occasional use of nested enclosures modalising the projection of thought or speech, as in 'Omar Bongo Comics' (32).

Occasionally, as here (Figure 40), simple geometricalised drawings bring mimetic qualities to Koch's enclosures: the approximation of a boat enclosing "Tugboat Ted", which appears to be engaged in a relational process with rounded "aunt Bertha Beverly" — is the rounded enclosure mimetically depicting Bertha, or signifying metaphorically a judgement of her qualities? The hotel sign enclosure seems mimetic at least in part, and the lines along "Rue de Seine" seem at least in imitation of map lines (a second-order mimesis of an abstraction); mimetic renderings of foodstuffs line it in a description of the street. The enclosure of Janice's words below, shaped as a heart, communicate partly by mimesis, partly by convention the affective value afforded to the quotation; the star-shaped enclosure repeats the assertion of "beautiful stars" it encloses, with "night" composed in the 'background'; and "we go out" is both framed in part and supplied in part with content by the stair-shaped stepped line underscoring it — suggesting a descent as they depart. Mimetic? Abstract? These lines exist in the modal

space, where they are intermediate and simultaneous, serving both purposes. In their sketchy roughness, along with all the linework in Koch's comics poetry, they reflect spontaneous, direct contact, in common with the work of other New York poets of his group such as Frank O'Hara. Koch seems also to be adopting some of the structure and idiom of comics, the layout and titling, the sparseness and implicature involved in the juxtaposition of enclosed material in space.

**Figure 40: 'Tugboat Ted Comics' (Koch 2004, 62)**

### **Gipi: *Vois comme ton ombre s'allonge***

Sparseness and closeness of line may appear in contrast to more carefully worked modes of comics production. To shift my attention to *bande dessinée*: Gipi in *Vois comme ton ombre s'allonge* (2013) uses rendering style to mark shifts of time and reality status throughout. The ostensibly most 'real' level of the diegesis is rendered in loose black and white inking, borderless and sharing space with the narration. The effacement of borders perhaps suggests that this is unprojected diegesis; the immediacy of ink on paper may often be adopted as a signifier of truth-value, of unmediated contact between creator and reader. The protagonist's imaginary worlds of memory or fantasy are by contrast rendered in vivid, more or less realist, watercolour; with control of tonalities and saturation helping to distinguish between regions and periods of memory and imagination. Rather than operating along a norm determined by colour photography, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) seem to assert, or even varying according to genre, the text seems to establish its own norms of modality as regards reality status; though line qualities nonetheless carry modal qualities of affect, and enclosures seems to be employed as projective modalisations of the content alongside the resources of colour and line quality. As the images in the story exchange these specific qualities (not always all together) and render the same material using these different modalities, the graphic narrative is able to play with the modalities of experience and enact uncertainties and ambiguities about what is real and what is not; repetitions of images from one drawing to the next, across these modality markers,

problematise our reading of the text as designating continuities of space, time and even identity — the reader is challenged to piece together a causal story from the materials of the text. This play with modalisations as well as expectations of readership lend to Gipi's work much of its richness and mystery.

### **Pedrosa: *Portugal***

In Cyril Pedrosa's *Portugal* (2011), colour is an especially prominent resource which serves the work of both representation and modalisation: it is both used for its mimetic and abstract qualities. Colour suggests the heat of Portugal, and marks the accent and language of speakers; it marks out section of unreal fantasy (48–9) even at one point occupying the border space (124), as well as the affect of energy and enthusiasm (116) and vividly communicating the experience of being drunk (61), placing overlapping colour in relation to the doubling of line. As an example, on page 64 (Figure 41), the Portuguese dialogue is marked in yellow enclosures against the French in white; the yellows suggest the warm atmosphere literally and figuratively, and Pedrosa's typical (unmarked) attenuated line here contrasts with stark stylistic variations which mark a change of reality status (as, for example, on page 81). In the third and fourth tier here, the further attenuation of the line by overlapping and the effacement of bordering enclosures mark a modal shift to memory; and then in the final image in the lower right, the simplification of the figures to an abstract background indicates affective qualities in the protagonist, a graduation of focus, softening out the background figures, with a literal blurring of the enclosing border here; and a foregrounding of the indexical qualities of line, this fluid, organic abstraction, perhaps most emphasised in the physical motion of the inscription of the waves (or is it the sound of the waves?) in the lower portion of the final image. The interpretation of these abstractions is freely available for different readings; but the dimensions along which the modalisation and abstraction of the image can take place are usefully outlined in this framework.

### **Personal work**

As a final example, I offer an instance of my own work as a creator, by way of illustration of the affordances of drawing and graphic narrative to capture experience. In this page of diary comics from 2004 (Figure 42), I aim to capture anxieties about

marking students' projects for the FE college at which I worked, versus the demands of learning lines for an amateur play. The first tier of panels is representational, with the roughly-inscribed enclosures projecting it as an experience from earlier in the week and encoding the rough and immediate inscription of the diary as an 'honest' piece of journaling. The abstract enclosure indicated on tier two, adopting the conventions of the thought balloon, opens up into a borderless section — suggesting that these anxieties were felt as real and immediate, unprojected. Within that enclosure is a further projected speech process, though the ellipsis indicated a failed process; and the anxiety about the production is represented as 'leaking out' into uncertain, modal regions where the panelisation is indeterminate and the line bordering "lineslinesLINES" appears to be bordering the above image too, leaving its status liminal — to what segment of reality does it belong? The attenuation of the lower half of that thought bubble, and the roughened traces of the line, mark indexically the heightened affect that is being represented; this anxiousness is reflected in the rendering of the bedclothes, which are thereby part mimetic, part abstract, the lines exceeding the figure and transgressing into the ground, enacting a 'mental' panic as they adopt and replicate the abstract lines of the thought enclosure. The comment in what I will later call 'tonic position', lower right, also reflects this anxiety and liminality: 'marking unfinished', as the lines depicting the bed are unfinished, and the enclosures incomplete.

**Figure 41: from *Portugal* (Pedrosa 2011, 64)**



Figure 42: Diary comic

### ***El Refaie vs Kress & van Leeuwen***

To return, then, to an issue alluded to at points above: the modal value of line quality and colour is not an absolute, but dependent on the genre in which the line is used, and, in my view, on the particular creator and work in which the conventions of ‘unmarked’ usage are being established. Elisabeth El Refaie in particular challenges Kress and van Leeuwen’s apparent valorising of the colour photograph as a standard or

realism, though they do acknowledge the effects of genre on this standard (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 158). For El Refaie (2010), discussing autobiographical comics and memoirs such as this, the notion of authenticity is most key to truth-value. In this way, the unworked, raw image appears most honest, whether it is genuinely unworked (as in the rough diary comic here) or more deliberately left raw (as in Craig Thompson's artful handling of his line). El Refaie invokes the notion of *graphiation*, coined by French theorist Philippe Marion (1993), which foregrounds the action of the creator and the indexicality of marks made in the act of drawing — that it is not just mimesis, but a deliberate seeing-and-rendering that is of interest in the drawn image (see Baetens 2001b). For Marion, the drawing is an utterance — and the more sketchy a drawing is, the more it reveals the presence of the utterer, the creator (Baetens 2001b, 146–47). Marion's notion, and the accompanying concept of 'mediagenius', the specificity of the multiple complex roles of the graphic narrative creator, are gaining traction in current comics studies; and the underlying principles are compatible with the framework of modalising abstraction and the mapping of comics drawing to meaning-making in language that I describe in the present work.

## Colour and Metafunction

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I have alluded to colour throughout this chapter as a modalising resource for graphic narrative. Colour is likewise, in itself, the ultimate abstraction: abstract art often explores the sheer qualities of colour, in Rothko's colour fields for instance or the coloured patterns of op-art. Colour is not always abstract, of course; it may be mimetic, have symbolic resonance, and indicate quite specific qualities of experience. Colour alone may serve all three metafunctions, and I will briefly outline some examples below.

In Glyn Dillon's *The Nao of Brown* (2012), red is significant throughout. It serves a representational function, in marking diegetically present reds in the environment and, prominently, Nao's clothing. It also serves a modal function: when Nao experiences the anxiety that plagues her through the narrative, red is prominent — often also serving a representational function, rather than foregrounding itself as a marked divergence from an expected representational colour, so that its presence is modalised: an uncertainty to whether this is 'just' red or the symbolic red that indicates an anxiety attack. It might be



chosen as a colour where other options were available; it might appear in the lighting of a scene; it might appear washed out, as a pink, but is always present, and carrying its cultural connotations of alarm and warning whenever present. The colour serves a textual function, too: marking out Nao to allow us to track her through a crowd, and from panel to panel; and also as a binding colour that holds the work together, operating with its value as non-signifying but as a source of cohesive repetition.

Red functions differently in Nicolas Presl's *Orientalisme* (2014), alongside a flat blue. Here the colour is unmodulated, unlike *The Nao of Brown*'s variations and representational sculpting. Presl's rendering is flattened, tending towards geometric abstraction, compressing the represented characters into a space that seems to carry discomfort in its affect. The red here primarily functions to mark significant objects: a prayer mat, a tea pot, a flag; the textual function is dominant, enabling tracking from panel to panel, though also with some modalisation in the sense of distinguishing the representational line from the abstract enclosure of the panel. The choice of red cannot help but carry some further affective connotations, drawing startling attention to the figures it is used to render, and inviting identification between the objects so grouped.

In Lynd Ward's woodcut novel *Wild Pilgrimage* (in Ward 2010), a russet red helps the reader with the challenge of interpreting a complex and politically loaded silent narrative. The world of the diegesis is represented already with some modalisation towards the abstract, incorporating the geometric tendencies of modernism: cubism, futurism, carrying a sense of anxiety as described by Worringer (1953). The work, being a sequential art developed from outside the mainstream traditions of comics, and seeking an internationalism afforded by its silent mode, eschewing language, does not employ the resources of the abstract enclosure: neither word balloon nor panel, perhaps also as a way of innovating a sequential art that distances itself from the 'funnies' that comics represented at the time. With that choice, the work also foregoes the function carried by those lines of projection and nesting, and the affordance to indicate modal status using the cline of abstraction. Full colour reproduction is also unavailable, and perhaps not desired for the same reasons of seriousness. What Ward opts for is to use colour: a russet-red ink that marks out certain sections as imaginary or metaphorical. (The character of the colour varies from reproduction to reproduction.) The red plates may depict images of sexual desire, or of freedom from a burning pit. The sharp changes of location which will already prompt an alternative reading are supported by

the colour change to indicate that this should be metaphorical, or fantasy, rather than an implicated leap of space or time.

## Functions of the Abstract Enclosure

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By way of conclusion, let us bring a range of these notions into focus with particular attention to the functions of the frame and the balloon, the abstract enclosures that typically contain the building blocks of comics image-texts. I argue that these enclosures are fundamentally of the same order, whether they enclose text or images, and whether they are nested, enclosing material depicted as projecting from a represented character, or otherwise. Traditionally, those that are projected are known as thought, speech or word balloons or bubbles; those that are not are known as frames, borders or panels. I argue that these ubiquitous abstractions in comics are, by dint of that abstraction, interpersonal in function.

Thierry Groensteen describes a number of functions of the frame. Frames enclose and separate material, structure it to provide ‘rhythm’, indicate that it is ‘to be read’ and provide ‘expressive’ value to what is enclosed (Groensteen 2009, 39–57). In my view, these are aspects that arise from a metafunctional approach to comics discourse. The ‘readerly’ function represents its interpersonal invitation to engage with the pragmatic assumptions that underlie comics; they afford the application of the maxims of comics readership, though not alone; repetitions and variations of images support the particular readings one is able to pursue. These are a product of frames’ conventional abstraction; they signify only ‘this is a comic’. The structuring, separation and enclosure are textual functions, similarly resting on non-mimetic qualities of the frame, though as regards ‘rhythm’, they may enact a certain pattern and operate by the metaphor of music suggested by Groensteen’s terms. It is the ‘expressive’ function that I have greatly expanded upon here: there are a range of dimensions along which an image may be modalised or afforded affective value, situated as imagination, memory, projected thought or talk, and more. Groensteen’s classifications do not seem to have space for these specific brands of modalisation, which are invited by adopting a Hallidayan framework. He treats the balloon as a separate instance from the panel; but acknowledges its similarities (Groensteen 2009, 84–85) in that it can be seen to serve the same functions he outlines. (He is more detailed in the discussion of expressive

functions in the balloon, though referring the reader for the details to the work of Robert Benayoun.)

In my view they are one and the same; they are abstract enclosures that structure comics discourse, on which I will say more in the discussion of the logical metafunction in Chapter 7, and carry the possibilities of modalisation of what they enclose in parallel ways. Indeed, what is begun in a word balloon may be continued in a sequence of panels; and what has appeared to be panels may, on occasion, be revealed as the content of a word balloon, as in the work of Ibn al Rabin. In *Lentement aplati par la consternation* (2013), after an extensive sequence of silent story dependent on panel sequences nested in word balloons or thought balloons, marked by colour as desires or fantasies, relocated in reading order to serve multiple purposes, and more characteristic play with form, the entire tale so far is revealed to have been the utterance of a narrating character (see Figure 65 on page 231). For me, this sort of play exposes the status of panel as speech balloon, always already indicating that the graphic narrative drawing is an utterance by an unrepresented creator or narrator. The projective function of heteroglossic engagement is alive in these abstract enclosures that both conventionally and indexically mark the presence of their utterer. These abstract marks represent utterance ideationally, projecting their contents as verbiage; they enact utterance in affording the reader's collaborative meaning-making participation, and indexing the presence of the creator, with the creator's affect, judgement and appraisal of what is drawn; and they structure utterance by organising images into sequence and by repetitions, variations and substitutions of line quality throughout a text, potentially independently from those repetitions and variations in what is represented. It is to the structuring function that we turn in the next chapter.

## Summary

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This chapter has outlined in detail two frameworks, abstraction and modality, and has shown how they map to constitute a significant aspect of the interpersonal metafunction as it may be realised in the resources of graphic narrative. The key framework is modality, in particular the modalisation of represented experience as more or less 'real' versus 'possible' or 'imaginary'. Alongside 'mood', the interactive capacities of meaning-making, this constitutes the ways in which a text engages with its audience,

involving both the interlocutor (in graphic narrative, the reader) and the creator of the text in the realisations of the meanings exchanged. That notion of modalisation was extended from judgements of reality status into the more detailed extension of Halliday's notion, in Martin and White's appraisal framework. I demonstrated how the resources of comics might indicate engagement with heteroglossic voices, through conventions of projection enacted by the abstract enclosure such as thought and speech balloons; graduation via indexical aspects of the line, brushwork, attenuation and emboldening; and how abstract qualities of the line may combine with mimetic functions to indicate creators' attitudes: affect, judgement and appreciation. I explored a range of ways in which modalisation, as a cline between polar extremes of yes/no, real/unreal, map to clines of abstraction, along a range of dimensions that have constituted understandings of abstraction: non-/mimetic, non-/signifying, non-/concrete and non-/specific. I have illustrated and exemplified how the location of graphic narrative elements along these clines of abstraction can thereby realise modal functions.

In the next chapter I will establish how comics organise their flow of information, and how graphic narrative texts are cohesive, distributing information throughout the work so that each image depends on others. I will return to the functions of the abstract enclosure, the frame, when I tackle the logical function as a subset of ideation in Chapter 7, and this will complete the survey of Halliday's metafunctions.

# 6

## Cohesion and the Textuality of Comics

### Introduction

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This chapter will explore the third major metafunction of comics, the *textual* function. It will situate this function in relation to the other two, the *ideational* and the *interpersonal*, and draw parallels and contrasts with other approaches to the application of cohesion, in particular, to graphic narrative visual texts. The textual function breaks down into patterns of information structure, on the one hand, and cohesion on the other; the chapter will especially dwell on patterns and resources for cohesion, subcategorising and exemplifying these with a range of comics extracts.

### **What makes comics one text rather than many?**

The question of cohesion in comics lies at the heart of discussions of ‘hybridity’ (for discussions of hybridity, see, e.g., Hatfield 2005, 36; Miodrag 2013). Comics are constructed from multiple images and/or a combination of text and image. The challenge for comics theorists is to account for that combination, that multiplicity, and to offer tools which can usefully address the specifics of this hybridity, rather than either resorting to the language of each separate mode, discussing each drawing in isolation as art, the text as a separate act of writing, or abandoning the particularity of the mode and writing of comics only as narratives, commenting on broad arcs of story and content and representation in a manner undifferentiated from film or prose.

It lies at the heart of my project that adopting a Hallidayan approach to analysis should more easily enable a discussion of what different elements of the comic in their different modes do; if we are using compatible frameworks, whereby the functions of the images are described in the same categories as the functions of the words, then we can describe specific forms of collaboration between the modes and draw specific points of connection. The system of cohesion in Halliday’s model, lying within the

general metafunction *textual*, is particularly geared towards identifying these points of connection: ways in which a stretch of discourse coheres and structures itself as a text, distinct from its informational content, and its interaction with the reader or personal communication of the creator's point of view, but fundamentally underpinning and enabling those other functions. Halliday has described this system in a range of writings, but I will focus on his formulation of it with Matthiessen in their *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2004).

Often, discussions of cohesion draw on the detailed separate account of this system in Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English*, first published in 1976. I will outline the discussions of cohesion by other writers in relation to images, storybooks, and comics, in the following section, as a preliminary to my own account.

## Other Treatments of Cohesion

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Since the 1990s a number of commentators have used Halliday's model of language or Halliday & Hasan's account of cohesion to make sense of visual or multimodal texts. Only recently (since 2000) have these models been applied directly to comics, and then only in a partial way, attempting to integrate the model with the comics theory propounded by McCloud (1993). I will give here a very brief overview and evaluation of these discussions, and highlight some work still to do and alternative routes not yet explored. They can be divided into those that focus on the visual image; those discussing children's books comprised of visual and verbal components; and, finally, those addressing comics themselves.

### Textual organisation in the Image

In the context of single images, writers have paid most attention to the organisation of the text as a composition, drawing on Halliday's information structures. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) divide the image into regions which carry thematic and informational content, as well as a conceptual bias. The left-hand side of an image, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1979), is the site of *given* information, already familiar to the reader; what is *new* is presented to the right, following reading conventions (they acknowledge that these are culturally bound). This model is applied not only to individual visual images, but also to layouts viewed as a unit, such as the

double-page spread in a textbook or magazine. Secondly, the upper part of an image contains *ideal* representations, with the lower region grounding in the *real* (186). The notion is that generalised and conceptual ideas are represented above, and more concrete details imparted below; perhaps the analogy is to ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’. This is a tempting pattern for the comics ‘panel’, if not the page overall; enclosures containing the contents of speech and thought tend to appear in the upper part of the panel image (though not consistently, and as I will argue below, I think these are better accounted for by a theme-rheme organisational principle), and their anchoring participants who are the producers of these ideas appear below. Finally Kress and van Leeuwen identify central and marginal regions of the image (194), suggesting a hierarchy of significance — centrality (in the sense of importance, dominance) and subordination. The fundamental notion that there are regions of the image that tend to be used for certain functions is a strong one; Kress and van Leeuwen acknowledge that there are cultural distinctions to be made and that different traditions and genres will deploy these regions in different ways. I will adopt some of their insights and adapt them in relation to comics in what follows.

Since their focus is on the single image and the spatial organisation of relatively short texts, they have little to say about connections over stretches of text, which is to say cohesion in its discourse-structuring sense.

O’Toole (2010) is likewise focused on the single image, most usually conceived of as on display in a gallery. He likewise chooses the notion of ‘composition’ as his way of approaching the textual metafunction in the context of displayed art. His descriptors are general, drawing on psychology (in particular, the *gestalt*) and art, and unlike Kress and van Leeuwen, he does not generalise compositional schemas of the whole image. What he discusses under this category (25ff.) are parallels, alignments, axes, adjacencies, proxemics and so on, which help to account for an ‘aesthetic’ unity to the text. He speaks at times in terms of the ‘reading’ of an image linearly, and perceives segments of an image falling into regions according to internal compositions at the level of what he calls ‘episodes’ (14) — sub-regions of relation within the work of art which have their own unity. This again is a useful notion, arising from his organisation of Halliday’s system against a ‘rank structure’ of levels at which Halliday’s frameworks can be applied; for me, the notion of ‘episode’ offers an alternative for ‘panel’ as a unit of comics, adapted as what I have called the ‘cluster’.

Whilst O'Toole mentions 'cohesion' at the lowest level of his rank structure (24), the 'member' (body part or object), he has little to say about this in particular; for him also, despite its division into episodes, the unitary work rather than the sequence of images is his main concern.

### **Cohesion and textual organisation in picture books**

To turn to narrative sequences in book-length works, Moya Guijarro's application of multimodal functional linguistics to picture books for children (2014) does give more attention to cohesion as a component of the textual function. He adapts Kress and van Leeuwen's compositional model to explore theme development in a children's book text alongside compositional features of the accompanying images (115ff.). Text and image is not co-composed in his examples, however, and he does not attempt to map the structuring of the text to the organisation of the images, nor is he tracking items from image to image within the illustrated text. There is some cross-comparison between the thematisation of certain figures (their patterned recurrence in initial, theme position in the clauses) in the wording of the book he analyses, against the frequencies with which these figures appear in the illustrations (132ff.), and to some degree whether they are central or marginal; but the treatment is brief and in the main accepts Kress and van Leeuwen's model as is. Moya Guijarro interestingly discusses some patterns in the framing of images (137) — but this shades into *ideational* meanings emerging from those features of the composition, rather than textual cohesive features.

A year earlier, Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) had addressed the same text type with more specificity. They show more interest in 'intermodal integration', the composition of text within the image (133ff.), distinguishing between such 'integrated' texts, and 'complementary' compositions, whereby text appears in its own region apposed to the accompanying image. On p.99ff. they briefly touch on comics conventions in the picture book, usefully identifying the word balloon as containing 'projected' verbiage (following Halliday and Matthiessen's usage of the comics metaphor (2004, 443) to illustrate that relation, perhaps); though they move on swiftly to an interesting discussion of framing and then focalisation of the image along the lines of Kress and van Leeuwen. Their detailed account of the relationship between image and verbiage in the later chapters makes excellent use of Martin and White's (2005) model of the resources of appraisal, grounded in Halliday; what they do not focus on is



cohesion of image to image, without the intermediary of words, which again emerges from their focus on the children's picture book as a genre for study, where the words are of most importance and the images primarily a supportive, scaffolding and illustrating device.

### **Treatments of cohesion in comics**

Two writers have begun to explore cohesion and textual structure in comics, both writing in the early 2000s but only recently reaching publication as comics scholarship. Mario Saraceni is something of a pioneer in the use of Hallidayan frameworks to approach comics, though his work has until recently only appeared in a simplified form in the *Intertext* series aimed at UK A Level students (Saraceni 2003). From p.36 Saraceni introduces the idea of cohesion as repetitions, relegating much of the specifics to the student to supply in the practical activities which are set, as is conventional for this series. This reiteration of images is mapped swiftly to the notion of given-and-new, which for Saraceni is realised in the repetition of previously seen material in later frames of the comic, unlike Kress and van Leeuwen's regions of the image itself (though the left-right sequencing survives in the reading order of panels). Saraceni then distinguishes *coherence* as the reader's perception of elements of the comics text as being related in meaning, introducing the shared *semantic field* as one basis for this, and also the reader's *inference*, which both implies an underpinning ellipsis of elements of the text, and also a system of 'filling the gaps' aligned to McCloud's (1993) 'transitions' model.

That model is not explicitly acknowledged in the *Intertext* series book, but is in Saraceni's thesis (2000) and the article drawn from it recently published in Neil Cohn's *The Visual Narrative Reader* (2016, 115), and previously in Jan Baetens' edited collection *The Graphic Novel* (2001a). Saraceni's core notion presented here is that of 'relatedness', incorporating McCloud's 'closure' and, explicitly, Halliday and Hasan's 'cohesion'. He grounds his model in Halliday's categories of repetition and collocation, and where 'ellipsis' might be, he uses the idea of 'relatedness' to ground McCloud's sequence of panel-to-panel transitions as requiring increasing work from the reader to 'complete'. Saraceni thereby moves towards an integration of Hallidayan theory with a close and specific discussion of the resources of comics; nonetheless, the chapter is

again brief, and here focuses only on the visual, not creating a parallel with the verbal nor of the ways these may cross-modally co-reference one another.

Lastly in this brief overview, Eric Stainbrook, in an article following Saraceni's (Cohn 2016, 129), picks up on this broad idea and presents the most sustained account of cohesion in comics yet published. This article cleaves closely to Halliday and Hasan's work, using their categories to comment on 'framed writing' within comics images, and on dialogue balloons, discussing in some detail the ways in which verbal material in balloons may co-reference visual material either in the same frame or in other adjacent frames. He accounts for textual connections formed in image-to-image cohesion, image-to-word cohesion, and word-to-word cohesion, mapping these (151) against an array of cohesive features. He does not address given-new or theme-rheme structures.

Like Saraceni, Stainbrook pursues an interesting mapping of cohesion to McCloud, but he too hastily disposes of substitution and ellipsis (137), proposing that only lexical cohesion and conjunction can be applied to images. He does not consider the deictic referential functions of abstract line and arrows, and he rejects the idea that visual images can have anaphoric and cataphoric reference — which I will argue below can be usefully applied to the cohesive power of ellipsis in the image. He touches on the problem of exophora — the reference of text to referents in its context — for comics discourse, but does not attempt to tackle it, deferring it for future study (144). I will offer a way to address this below.

Stainbrook only cites Halliday and Hasan (1976) as the basis for his model of cohesion in comics. Though it is worked out in some depth, I find several points at which an alternative theory, which I present below, might differ. Ultimately, Stainbrook really needs the rest of Halliday's theory to show why cohesions matter: they underpin the other functions and serve just part of the textual function.

## **Halliday's Model of Meaning-Making**

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As we have seen, Halliday's model of meaning-making in language takes a tripartite structure of metafunctions, the overarching patterns of functions which comprise the core of what any human-like communication system which warrant the name of 'language' has to do. Languages communicate content, which is to say model and

represent, *construe* for listener or reader, the speaker or writer's experience of the world; that is the ideational function, representational and logical. Secondly they necessarily interact with a listener or reader, operating upon that individual or group, and thereby they enact a social relationship between human beings; this is the interpersonal function, and it comprises tools for getting the other to respond and means for intruding the self into the content of discourse. The third function is what is the focus of this chapter: that any stretch of discourse must be structured and must signal its identity as a text — it must be organised as a flow of information and its elements may co-reference each other. This is the textual metafunction.

This textual function then can be divided into a *structural* component, which organises the clause into regions of given and new, 'launching' and 'landing' points, and a *cohesive* component, which enables elements of the discourse separated into different clauses to make reference to each other and mutually to build up a shared construction of the matter: by conjunction, indicating relationships between segments; by co-reference, where deictic pointers may indicate relationships between parts of the text; by substitution of stand-ins for parts of the text, which includes ellipsis of segments that may be understood to persist; and by the repetition of elements, or related elements, which reiterate the focus on a given topic by means of lexical fields.

**(A) structural**

1. thematic structure: Theme and Rheme
2. information structure and focus: Given and New

**(B) cohesive**

1. conjunction
2. reference
3. [substitution and] ellipsis
4. lexical cohesion

(Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 650)

## A Textual Model for Comics: Structural

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Firstly, let us address the **structural** organisation of the comics text. I take this to be broadly in line with Kress and van Leeuwen's model, in that there are left/right regions and upper/lower regions, as well as centre and margin to be distinguished. Since my concern here is comics texts, most frequently a *sequence* of images, I shall use these patterns of organisation in a different way and suggest that different roles should be assigned to them.

### Thematic structure

Since comics text are narrative texts, intended to be read, we should carry across from the verbal text the notion of theme-and-rheme structuring, both at the level of the individual enclosure/grouping (for brevity I will commonly refer to this as the 'panel' in line with other discussions of comics, though I do not take the panel to be basic to comics structure), and of the whole page. The page is a 'natural' structuring unit, emerging from the format in which the comic is contained; other enclosures deriving from this unit may be inscribed to reassert the structuring regions I describe. It is apparent that a reader will start with the top left of the page (if Anglo-European, top right if reading original-format *manga*), seeking the first salient grouping or enclosure (commonly a panel, sometimes a word, thought or narration enclosure, sometimes a salient image grouping akin to O'Toole's (2010) 'episodes'), and then read as a text from side to side and top to bottom. The consistency of the latter even across cultures suggests that top-to-bottom is the most salient sequencing principle in graphic narrative at the level of the page. Given this, I take the upper region of a comics image to be the starting-point for the text, and thereby thematic; the lower portion, the rheme. According with reading principles also, the first-read side (left in Western cultures) will be thematic, and the opposite side the rheme. This creates a strong region for thematic material to appear at the upper-verso of a page or upper and initial segment of an enclosed image. If a panel or other enclosure appears here on a page, it will be first read. Within a panel, this is strikingly the typical position for narrative, for connective or circumstantial textual material in authorial or narrating-voice boxes: 'Meanwhile...', 'And so...', 'Three days later...', etc.

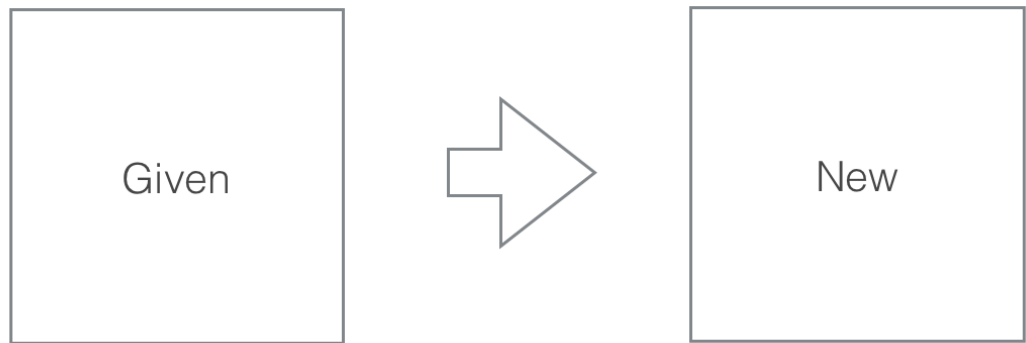
At bottom right is a ‘continuative’ area, where suspense may be created or an ending marked. We may call this the ‘tonic’ area, akin to rising or falling or level intonation on utterances. It marks a ‘turn’, often literally of a page. It will not always be used as such, but is a natural region for either a moment of suspense, or a motivation to mark continuity, to direct the reader to the next area to be read; within a page, it may be the next panel, if that is not immediately to the adjacent side or below. It is an area an analyst of the text might attend to if looking for connective material, or points of tension. (Interestingly, it tends to form a default position to number the page — a continuative signal — or mark the end of the story, chapter or section.)

Theme		
	Rheme	
		Tonic

**Figure 43: Theme and Rheme, and Tonic**

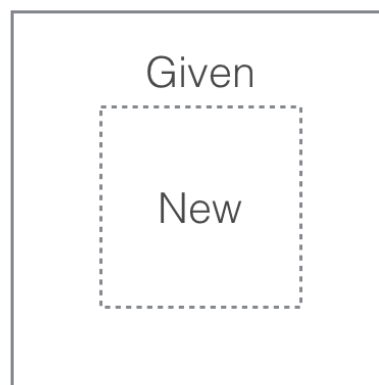
### **Information structure**

Mapping against this structure is the given-and-new flow of information. I do not take this to coincide simply with the theme-rheme ordering suggested above. Rather, acknowledging Saraceni’s reading of given-and-new as being determined by what has already been encountered (2003, 40), previously depicted, versus what is being drawn or seen for the first time, I would like to distinguish between *sequential* structures of given-and-new, normally unfolding across the reading path of a page, though also on a smaller scale within enclosures too; and *compositional* structures of given-and-new, dominant within most panels, but occasionally reflected in the centralised composition of whole pages, particularly when they are not subdivided into panel enclosures. Both principles may be at play in any one page or enclosure.



**Figure 44: Given and New in sequence**

Firstly, then, given and new appear in linear sequence, which I represent in Figure 44 as left-to-right, but intended schematically to incorporate top-to-bottom movement and reversed orders in other traditions of graphic narrative. Given tends to the left, new to right; the reverse is true in *manga*. The basis is reading order. Panelisation, as shown here, is not necessary. Any cluster of images in sequences may simultaneously serve as given and new.



**Figure 45: Given and New in composition**

In composition, we expect any new information to appear more or less centralised. (We might also add, foregrounded; the background is likewise the place where given information is likely to recede, as in the centralised and unobstructed ‘establishing’ image which is then later occluded by actant characters in its foreground.) In the margins will appear contextualising material establishing continuities from what has gone before. This is not only true of circumstantial material like drawings of locations, but also in the less-salient, repeated bodily images of characters; clothing and hairstyle in a detailed view of a face aimed to present a mental process of thought or reaction are

relegated to the margin, with the facial expression central. (A central focus on clothing with the expression marginalised would be an unusual, marked choice, and the reader would take it to be signifying something else in addition to the mental process.) When speech is especially significant in a panel, it will encroach into the central area, marginalising the depiction of the uttering character. Actant participants tend to appear in the centre of enclosures, or the vector between them if they are engaged in a material process, and their surrounding circumstances in the margins. Due not in small measure to their status as ‘given’, it is common for these circumstantial elements to be omitted entirely, as we shall see below in discussion of ellipsis; and they may be replaced by interpersonal emotional markers, since the ‘information’ thereby occluded was already given.

Note that ‘zoom-out’ or contextualising images/sequences seem starkly marked diversions from this assumption, in that what has already been seen normally remains centralised in the image; but this kind of image brings what was excluded from the frame toward the realm of the new, and simplifies what was new into substitute figures, replacing much of the centre ground.

## A Textual Model for Comics: Cohesive

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Here we have begun to appeal to terms which have yet to be defined in this part of the theory: *substitution*, *ellipsis*. Let us turn, then, to the core of this chapter: the **cohesive** elements of the textual metafunction.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 650) list four categories of features that work to provide cohesion in text.:

### (B) cohesive

1. conjunction
2. reference
3. [substitution and] ellipsis
4. lexical cohesion

Firstly, **conjunction** may be *textual* connectives linking sentences together by means of adverbials (e.g., *also*, *however*, *consequently*, *subsequently*) or *structural*

connectives linking clauses into compound or complex sentences (e.g., *and, yet, so, although, because, after*). This makes semantic connections to preceding text; it is not ‘phoric’ in that it cannot also refer forwards and outwards from the text. **Reference**, the second predominantly grammatical form, incorporates personal pronouns (e.g., *he, she, it, they*), demonstrative/deictic items (e.g., *this, that, these, those, the*), and comparative forms (e.g., *more, -er*). Next is a sequence of connected resources: **ellipsis** and **substitution**, which comprise the replacement of referenced items with an empty placeholder token (e.g., *one, ones* for nouns, *do* for verbs: this is substitution) or nothing (ellipsis, which is counted as substitution-by-zero); and finally **lexical cohesion**, wherein lexical items reiterate or are replaced by synonyms, hypernyms, or collocate groups forming a cohesive semantic field.

### **Four comics cohesions**

In graphic narrative texts, there are four approaches we could take to applying the work of cohesion, falling into two groupings, starting with the more established and moving towards the more specific and new. Firstly, the given:

1. **Textual Cohesion** as described in Halliday and Hasan (1976). The systems described above are at work in comics texts where verbal language appears. These are the normal systems of reference essential to any language, and they work not only between elements of the written text in comics, but also refer beyond the text to the images; under this heading we will focus on word-to-word cohesion.

2. **Visual Cohesion** as proposed for example by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and O’Toole (2010). These approaches take Halliday’s three categories of metafunctions, and translate them into visual elements to make them applicable to art and visual design. The textual function is commonly taken to be realised in compositional features of a visual text, according to O’Toole, Kress & van Leeuwen. More recently the idea of cohesion has been taken up by Saraceni and Stainbrook as discussed above.



These first two are ‘mono-modal’: they address only one mode of communication, respectively the verbal and the visual. The following two are the ‘new’, hybrid inter-modal or trans-modal cohesion:

3. **Cross-modal Cohesion** (‘trans-modal’, or ‘intermodal’), whereby textual elements co-reference visual elements. This is key to most comics, and one might expect this form of cohesion to dominate over the purely textual in comics’ verbal texts. Herein may lie the ‘hybridity’ often alluded to in comics theory.

4. **Syntagmatic Visual Cohesion** (which one might call ‘inter-visual’, or ‘trans-pictorial’), whereby visual elements find their cohesive co-referents not within the same image but elsewhere in an ordered sequence or arrangement of images, whether separated by frame elements on the same plane or distributed on different leaves in a codex book. This is key to silent comics or wordless sections of comics.

These additional features of multimodal cohesion in comics present challenges for the terminology — the need to seek words that will capture particularities of relations between elements of different modes, but without, hopefully, becoming fiddly or overwhelming.

### **Phoricity**

**Phoricity**, the directionality of reference, in particular presents something of a problem in the comics text. Halliday and Hasan discuss this in section 1.3.1 of their Introduction (Halliday and Hasan 1976), identifying *anaphora*, reference to an item which appears earlier in the text, as the most common type. When the referent for a cohesive item is withheld until later in the text, this is *cataphoric*; it creates a point of suspense and a sense of completion when the referent is supplied. Both these referents lie within the verbal text: they are *endophoric*, to be contrasted with *exophoric* reference to elements outside of the text. As Halliday and Hasan point out (18) this is therefore not cohesive per se — it is not helping to tie the text together, but to tie the text to the world. But, as we have noted that Stainbrook recognises (Cohn 2016, 144), this is problematised in comics, wherein a verbal text may be inscribed in a visual text that is nonetheless part of a hybrid.

It is useful to draw on the work of Paul Werth (1999) via Joanna Gavins (2007) on text-world theory to help make sense of this problem. Comics are essentially a nested text, hypotactic in that they are constructed from inscriptions within inscriptions. On the comics page, the surface shared between creator and reader forms a space of contact, a *phatic* space to adopt the terminology of Jakobson (1960). In this space many enclosures typically appear, within which are inscribed the *text-worlds* of the comic, distinct from the *discourse-world* shared between creator and reader. In Text World Theory, the world of a narrative is constructed via the assertions of a spoken or written text that is distinct from interlocutors' shared discourse world. The pronouns and referents of the text world, for instance, do not match those of the communicative partners: in the story, 'I' may not be the 'I' in the front of you that is speaking to you. Further, when characters within a tale speak to each other, a projected text world is thereby produced, nested in the other. Stories may 'push' down into a stack of embedded worlds, each with their own personal, temporal and spatial set of referents. Graphic narratives are likewise constructed in just such a fashion, with the added complication (actually a helpful signal aiding the distinction!) that text-worlds commonly alternate between modes: in the visually-rendered discourse-world of the story are contained the projected verbal text-worlds of the stories characters relate to one another. It is possible to see rank-shifting occurring between these levels: a story that begins in a word balloon, in verbal form, may find itself 'promoted' in successive panels to occupying enclosures embedded only in the boundaries of the page, the 'phatic space' shared by reader and creator, rather than being enclosed within a word-balloon enclosure within a panel enclosure. At the end of the story, reference 'pops' up again. (I will return to this model in Chapter 7 on the logical structures of comics.)

Just as projected text-worlds, the verbiage reported by a speaker, may reference the world at a different level, so in comics can the verbiage in a word-balloon reference the depicted world a level above it. Stainbrook certainly deals with this condition in his interesting discussions of word-image cohesions (Cohn 2016, 144ff.). But he does not account for the shift of phoricity between narrative levels. The problem is further compounded by the fact that graphic narratives are typically composed of sequences of images, so that they have a paratactic structure as well as a hypotactic one (indeed, this sequentiality has typically been the focus of commentary on the nature of graphic narrative, with hypotaxis under-appreciated, as I argue in the following chapter); and a referent may refer from one enclosure to another — since we assume in comics that

what looks sufficiently identical *is* identical, what I have called the maxim of identity, a similar principle applies to the enclosures themselves: this sequence of similar enclosures forms *one* text-world, not many. It would be useful to have new terms to account for these types of phoricity, which are exophoric from one nested text-world, but endophoric within the overall text-world — they do not refer out to the discourse-world. We might draw on Latin roots and call that type of reference *intraphoric* where it refers within the same enclosure (panel); and *interphoric* where it refers out to another such enclosure.

### **Breakdown of the cohesive categories**

For the remainder of this chapter, we will explore these categories of cohesion in detail, and offer illustrative examples. The framing organisation will be Halliday and Hasan's four-way subdivision of cohesive types, and within each we shall distinguish the four ways in which that type of cohesion might apply or be translated to comics form, both visual and hybrid, including 'interphoric' reference between panels. We will tackle these in reverse order, moving towards conjunction; and then consider in what ways cohesive features underpin the other metafunctions.

### ***Lexical***

Lexical cohesion breaks down into two broad groups, following Halliday and Hasan (1976): **Reiteration** of various types, including straight repetition, variation, and synonymy; and **collocation** forming **semantic fields** which cohere by their constellation around a binding concept or point of interest.

#### **Reiteration**

1. Textual: Repetition of the lexical item. *I like fish. Fish is good for you.*
2. Visual: Reproduction of the image or re-drawing with close variation, in the same composition.
3. Cross-modal: Image and word identify recognisably identical items.
4. Syntagmatic Visual: Image re-occurs in later panels or pages.

This is familiar from Saraceni's account (Cohn 2016, 115ff.), for example, and relatively straightforward. Reiteration may be (near-)identical, implying stasis or pause; varied, implying processes by difference based on the maxims of comics (especially when separated into different panel enclosures), with semantic elements repeated though angles and scales may be different; or cropped, shaping detail and implying salience, attention, and relational processes, reading as description. They may operate in adjacent panels and sequences of panels, or panels separated on the page or across different pages. *Composition* may be reiterated, implying an identity between figures in matching sites of composition — as with the bird/chicken in Figure 46 from Jason Lutes' *Jar of Fools* (2008, 98), and Craig Thompson's (2003, 39) 'transcendental' matching in the next image (Figure 47).

Panels 2 and 3 here (Figure 46) show the clearest example of reiteration; the difference between them implies the process (waking). A more varied iteration is seen in the next panel, moving the iterated image into the 'given' zone, marginal in the enclosing panel, to make way for the sleeping woman in the central 'new' zone. Her face is reiterated, with additional detail, three panels later, though in an enclosure which is adjacent below. (There is thereby a relational process implied between these matching images, supplying details of the face which were not present in the earlier image. This is *contra* McCloud, who discusses implication only between consecutive panels.) Also, incidentally, such features as the seat panels on the car are reiterated, sustaining its identity. Most of these occur interphorically: they are serving to anchor the world, helping us map each depiction onto the other to sustain the identity from enclosure to enclosure. The background circumstances of the bottom tier panels 2 and 4 are closely reiterated, to support the unusual (and delightful) move of *not* reiterating the birds, but replacing them with the cooked chicken; in the exact repetition of composition (and supported by an altered framing border, marking a shift in modality status of the enclosed image) the image manages to successfully imply a conceptual identity between these disparate images, tying them into semantic grouping of 'food'.

**Figure 46: from *Jar of Fools* (Lutes 2008, 98)**

**Figure 47: from *Blankets* (Thompson 2003, 39)**

The reverse tactic is used in the Thompson extract in Figure 47: in panel 2, young Craig is reproduced in his behavioural pose, but re-contextualised as driving at speed away. Here the indexical qualities of the line, drawing a flexible-looking car and a sketchy road, aid the interpretation as a modalised boulognaic fantasy world (See Gavins 2007, 94), alongside the apparent breach — flouting — of maxims of continuity and causality.

### Semantic Fields

Also here in Figure 47 are semantic fields. We can break these down as follows:

1. Textual: The use of hyponyms, meronyms, collocates, antonyms. *Nurse, this patient needs medication.*
2. Visual: Groupings of semantically related images, and/or metonymic parts of images.
3. Cross-modal: Related words used in text, related images nearby. This type of cohesion is frequent in graphic narrative.
4. Syntagmatic Visual: Distribution into different panels and pages. This is similar to McCloud's 'aspect-to-aspect transitions'.

Panels 3–5 nicely model the third cross-modal category here: *snacks* in the discourse-world narration maps to the image of cheese chomps, and the projected utterance 'rations'. *Clothes* likewise maps to the image of underpants and the word 'underwear'. *Backpack* reiterates the image here, as does *atlas* in the final panel; and all these form a semantic field expanding on the topic of the top panel, 'running away': there is a thematic development structure which breaks down this topical field, introduced in the first panel, occupying upper (theme) position in the page layout, into its components in consecutive (rheme) panels. There are both intraphoric references here, within panels, and interphoric references in the syntagmatic distribution of fields across the panel sequence and page layout.

The Hernandez extract in Figure 48 (Hernandez 2004, 68), with its lengthier stretches of text, reveals textual chains of type 1, the classic Halliday/Hasan cohesive chains. As well as the reiteration of 'food' and variations of 'room', there are other

terms from the field of the domestic: *laundry, sleep, bed, head* (lavatory), *asleep, bath*. Visual and cross-modal fields emerge too: in the first panel, the field of games is created with deliberate playfulness by the clashing but related depiction of the golf club, croquet mallet, pool table, cue and balls, and the swimming costume; these accompany cross-modal verbal *deal me in* from the field of card games.

**Figure 48: from ‘100 Rooms’ in *Locas* (Hernandez 2004, 68)**

### ***Substitution***

Substitution and ellipsis is similarly exploited here. Whilst there are no instances of the textual version of substitution (reference items are used, but not ‘so’, ‘do’ or ‘one’), visual substitutions are used: the very minimal renderings of the girls Hopey and Maggie in panel 2 are supplied cataphorically in the following panel — or, in the case of Hopey, from the preceding panel anaphorically. In the second panel of the bottom tier, Maggie appears as a stick figure and a silhouette. Silhouetting is a frequent substitution tactic and is not always motivated, as here, by specific lighting conditions. It does represent a (relatively rare) instance where co-referents (stick figure and silhouette) are contained within the same enclosure; usually this visual feature is syntagmatic or interphoric.

1. Textual: The use of stand-in words such as ‘one(s)’, ‘do(es)’, ‘so’. *Nice dress... at least I think so.*
2. Visual: The use of stand-in figures, such as stick figures, dots, silhouettes, x marking the spot, etc.
3. Cross-modal: The referent is matched with an image, perhaps connected by an abstract line.
4. Syntagmatic Visual: The referent appears in a separate abstract enclosure or on another page.

Substitution shades into ellipsis for Halliday and Hasan (1976, 142), and we see this feature emerging in the *Locas* extract. Hopey is elided out of the frame, occluded by the door, in panel 5, and this is accompanied by the abstract line of the balloon tail pointing referentially towards her as a source. Detail of the setting is elided in black in panel 5,

and the change to rendering the exterior in the final panel elides Maggie from view, alongside removing the tail of the balloon. This does not cause problems for the reader; the maxims of comics tell us that time and place is continuous, unless we signify otherwise, and the grammatical continuity of the verbiage in the word balloon — marked by ellipsis in the text (‘Nope. [The way to our room is] Not in here’) — supports this assumption.

## ***Ellipsis***

These cohesive features serve an additional purpose of permitting the artist to avoid a cycle of reiteration — substitutions and ellipses evade the commitment normally obtaining when rendering processes in images to keep rendering elements lower down the ‘process stack’ — to keep re-describing the participants in the process you are rendering. Many of these features are used by Wally Wood in his notorious *22 Panels that Always Work*<sup>6</sup> the text of which asserts his motivation for finding these techniques in no uncertain terms (Figure 49):

**Figure 49: ‘22 Panels That Always Work’ (Wood 1981)**

Silhouetting, occluding with frame or foreground, substituting with simplified figures, and more, all allow for visual variation on the assumption that these varied images will nonetheless read successfully in comics discourse.

Evading elements of rendering at all both saves the hardworking comics creator some time and ink, and also gives the reader engaging work to do, ‘joining-the-dots’ or ‘filling in the blanks’, though, following Emmott (1999), I would agree that readers do not as a rule keep looking backward in a text to retrieve referenced and elided items; rather they persist in the mind as part of the reader’s construction of the diegesis, and are readily ‘understood in’ when an elision or inference occurs.

Ellipsis comes in the following four forms:

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<sup>6</sup> Wood’s work has a murky history; the first version from 1980 appears in Wood’s published sketchbooks; (Wood and Crouch 1980) this image is from a 1981 revision.

1. Textual: Omission of elements of the clause which can be supplied by previous text. *Where are you going? [I'm going to the] Pub.*
2. Visual: Omission of elements that can be understood from earlier orientation, e.g. missing backgrounds, or simplifications.
3. Cross-modal: Fragmentary or incomplete wordings, the contents of which are clear from the contextualising drawings (or vice- versa).
4. Syntagmatic Visual: Missing elements that are found in other renderings of the image, that are 'supplied' by earlier or later drawings which contain the detail, e.g. elided backgrounds.

Elided backgrounds are typical and frequent in comics' visual syntagmatic cohesion; they are possible in conjunction with the maxim of continuity of space. The following examples (Figure 50 and Figure 51) from Thompson's *Blankets* (2003, 118, 184) further illustrate ellipsis in action.

I will note just a few features here. The figure of Craig in Figure 50 panel 1 (see below, page 192) elides features of his clothing and face; the bags under his eyes appearing in panel 3 below it may indicate a change of mood, or may be read as having persisted backward, understood to be present in panel 1 though not rendered. That is certainly true of the shirt buttons which are rendered here, and not in the iteration in panel 1 nor the reiteration in the final panel. A reader will not be thrown by this; it is understood that more detailed drawings will reveal things that may be left unrendered in others — these elements of drawing work like description in verbal texts, asserting relational processes, and not necessarily needing re-description every time. The backgrounds to these renderings of Craig are elided to black in the reiterations. In the renderings of the busy sports hall, space is elided within the panels; the room is compressed, backgrounds go unrendered, and especially in the stylised penultimate panel, elements of the setting are implied by composition of the participants' bodies only. We might note here also some other cohesive elements: the semantic field of sports, and a further use of modalised line and framing line to compose an interpersonal, impressionistic dream-vision of the situation, matched by reiteration of certain elements, substitution and ellipsis of others; there is some cross-modal semantic cohesion within the image, as the numbers on the fussball players, 666, allude to the demonic renderings of the human players.



In Figure 51 we see some more straightforward ellipsis at work, without particular visionary intent. Backgrounds are quietly elided in all but panel 2 here, without any problems for following the spatial organisation of the scene. (Note that even the vase of flowers is elided.) Verbal ellipsis is at work in ‘[[you] can do] Nothing. [For [me] in return]’ and ‘I *implore* you [to suggest something]!’, as well as ‘I can think of *one* thing [[you] can do for [me] in return]...’. In the last panel, focusing on the mental process in the expression of Raina’s face, the remainder of her body is of course elided outside the frame. (As Scott McCloud says of this sort of ellipsis, ‘In this panel you can’t see my legs, yet you *assume* that they’re *there*. /[...] Even though they’re *not*!’ (1993, 61).) Ellipsis is a fundamental of comics, and it is one of the things that McCloud means when he speaks at length of ‘closure’ in comics. I would like to draw a distinction here. *Cohesive* ellipsis, following Halliday and Hasan, means that sort of omission that can be supplied from the *textual* surroundings (and here I am including the possibility of cross-modal, interphoric referents), which thereby is tied to those surroundings with a text-forming purpose. Taking Catherine Emmott’s approach to this (1999), it implies that the reader, as they proceed through the text, constructs a world which supports the interpretation of succeeding text; so when elements are elided, these omissions are freely supplied by the sustained model of the text world still salient in the reader’s mind. This is different from the more active sort of inferential ‘filling in’ which may be necessary between certain panels, or the sort of ‘ellipsis’ in Gerard Genette’s system (1983), operating at the level of narrative structure, whereby stretches of time, often quite significant, may be elided from the temporal progression of the narrative.

**Figure 50: from *Blankets* (Thompson 2003, 118)**

**Figure 51: from *Blankets* (Thompson 2003, 118)**

## **Reference**

Reference is a grammatical means which Stainbrook doubts is possible in visual forms (Cohn 2016, 132). I believe that deictic reference is possible, through the means of arrows and connective indicators, though the distinction between personal and

demonstrative reference somewhat breaks down here; and comparative seems not to have a visual corollary in quite the same way.

1. Textual: Pronouns, demonstratives, deictics. *Dave wants his own. That's typical of him.*
2. Visual: Connective lines, arrows, tails of content boxes and word balloons, co-composition of elements in proximity to one another.
3. Cross-modal: Deictics find referent in the image; text is connected to image by abstract lines. This is very frequent in graphic narrative.
4. Syntagmatic Visual: Line elements link images; embedding of images in abstract enclosures; arrows indicate referents.

As with ellipsis, this is frequent in the textual mode, and frequently makes intraphoric reference to elements within the panel — personal pronouns being typical and evident in the use of first person ‘I’ and ‘you’ throughout these examples. Third person ‘it’ is prominent in Figure 51 too, and textual cohesive ‘that’ is the source of a joke in Figure 48 panel 1. In Figure 47, ‘*the motions*’ makes interphoric reference to the following panels, both in deictic reference *the* and lexically cohesive *motions*. Also extremely frequent is the use of deictic pointing tails on the word enclosures: they point towards the speaker and so indicate the source of the verbal process, instantiated in the abstract line of the enclosing balloon, by pointing to them as a pronoun might. (*I said... she says...*) Even when an enclosure is not present, a connective line may link verbiage to its source, either spoken or otherwise emitted (as with onomatopoeia). Tails may be replaced with trails, conventionally indicating thought (as in Figure 47), and we have noted already that they may point outside an enclosure, referencing interphorically, and this may be anaphoric or cataphoric; and tails may be omitted, leaving it to other cohesive ties and reading maxims to settle who is speaking.

Visual-to-visual deictic reference is also possible. Chris Ware is something of an innovator in this field, and the following examples (Ware 2001) provide an excellent illustration.

**Figure 52: from *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001, n.p.)**

The arrows in Figure 52, indicating identity as well as causal implications, relate referent to referent by deixis: the indexical properties of the line, directional in cases where a conventional arrow end is employed. I have earlier treated these abstract lines and arrows as denoting relational processes. Both things are going on: as with such textual fragments ‘this is...’ and ‘there we have...’, where there are both deictic referents in the pronouns and demonstratives, and relational processes in the verbs deployed, so with the linear connective element and the arrow there is dependency on what is pointed to, and an abstractly-rendered relationship between them, of identity or ownership, or sometimes causation.

In this passage from Chris Ware, most of the connectors denote identity — this is, that is, he is, she is — with sequences of panels in adjacency further implying stretches of story, operating on the maxims of comics: causality, identity, continuities of time (though often discontinuous and with changes of colour and ground motivated by the maxim of continuity of space). There are implicit conjunction-like relations here, and that is what we will turn to next.

## ***Conjunction***

Conjunction is primarily a textual feature, though arrow-like elements can denote consecution and causality.

1. Textual: Co-ordination with and, but, or, so; subordination with because, since, when, etc. So, you’re going out? Or staying because we’re watching the film? One may add connective adverbials: consequently, firstly, secondly, subsequently...
2. Visual: Arrows indicating, e.g., causality or option; connectors and separators.
3. Cross-modal: Tabulation of text boxes showing causal chains or relationships (e.g. spider diagrams, flowcharts); introduction of conjunction words into image sequences.
4. Syntagmatic Visual: Assumption is ‘and so then...’; arrows, connectors, visual groupings in layouts.

Another signature device favoured by Ware is the cross-modal use of conjunction, not just in text boxes embedded within a panel, but promoted to the level of the panel

itself in the discourse-world of the graphic narrative, as in Figure 53 below (Ware 2001).

As well as this approach to conjunction, exemplified with ‘Thus.’, ‘And’ and, within panelled images, ‘though’, ‘but’, ‘plus,’ ‘hence.’ and ‘suddenly.’, Ware uses visual means to similar purposes. The arrow in the panel lower left indicates ‘then’, and links the appropriately consecutive panel to be read. That basic relation between panels, ‘and so then...’, is inscribed in the maxims of comics: the assumption that successive images add to the textual whole, that time moves forward contiguously, and that relations between panels are in some way causal. Conjunction thus tends to be left implicit, and it is a marked move of Ware’s to include them so prominently. More familiar are the sentential connectives marking temporal disjunction, exemplified here with ‘years pass, and’.

**Figure 53: from *Jimmy Corrigan* (Ware 2001, n.p.)**

Also at play here is the use of a nested image at the upper left serving a subordinating function, pushing the bulk of the narrative in this sequence down into Jimmy’s imagined text-world. The imagined status of the sequence is further supported by a number of other cohesive features: the reiteration of clothing sustaining the different imagined time periods (starkly different from the superman-costume top in the opening and closing panels, which also cohere by the reiteration of the chair and the background colour scheme); the initial reiteration of the wheelchair image, establishing that what was in thought-enclosure has now been promoted to panel-enclosure; the establishment in top left of the topic of ‘daydreaming’ in the key theme position; the interesting use of deictic connectives across panels (interphoric, anaphoric, unusual for a speech balloon tail) where, in the panel following lower-central *AND*, Jimmy tells the tale of a panel from the tier above, avoiding reiteration by the use of deictic reference; and many more instances of reiteration, substitution, ellipsis and more, in this masterful page of graphic narrative. These multitudinous devices make graphic narrative more than just a co-occurrence of words and pictures, and other than a generic ‘hybrid’ of text and image, nor a ‘movie on a page’: there is a wealth of interacting and specific resources by which comic creators can tie their text together.

## Preliminary Table of Cohesions

There are many alternatives available for categorising and organising cohesion. Halliday and Hasan's approaches varied. In the following section I will propose a number of groupings and mappings, whereby the range of cohesive elements might be organised with the purpose of establishing just how they underpin the other functions of comics.

The following table (Figure 54) is unlikely to be an exhaustive list of features, but it brings together much of what has been discussed above, reversed back into Halliday and Hasan's (1976) order. Textual features are separated from Image corollaries, with the reminder that each of these may operate cross-modally and syntagmatically, between one enclosure and another, or from page to page in an unfolding text.

Cohesion	Text	Image	Textual — Visual
Conjunctives	Conjunctions Captions with adverbials, including linkers	Arrows Flow diagram composition Logical symbols (+ Implicit linking)	
Reference	Pronouns Definite article Comparatives Demonstratives	Arrows Abstract linking lines Proximity/composition Encircling	
Substitution	Nominal (one) Verbal (do) Clausal (so) Ellipsis (zero substitution)	Stick figures Dots in a landscape Silhouette Speaking emanata in darkness	
Lexical	Repetition Synonymy Antonymy Meronymy Lexical field	Identical reproduction Varied re-rendering Metonymy (rendering of parts)  Semantic field	
			Visual — Visual

**Figure 54: Preliminary Table of Cohesions**

Not all these features have been mentioned above, but they will occur with differing frequencies from text to text and creator to creator, with some being relatively rare. It would be a task of further research to attempt to quantify this; in Halliday's approach (See, e.g., Halliday 2005a, 96–97), certain features would be expected to be unmarked, appearing 9 times out of 10 approximately, with the other choice marked; and others

might be equally viable choices as any other. A corpus-based study would reveal any such patterns, with the caveat that images, unlike words, may be especially tricky to classify, and more likely to serve more than one function at once. For now this table stands as a preliminary collection of features, and it may be possible to add some and perhaps delete some in the light of such further research.

### **Mapping cohesion to the Ideational metafunction**

Cohesion and the textual metafunction, then, works with the other metafunctions to mould and support the meaning-carrying text. We will briefly recap these other elements of the theory and point out some ways in which the textual metafunction, and features of cohesion in particular, may underpin the construal of experience and the enactment of interpersonal relations.

### ***Diagram of approaches to the process***

Reproduced in Figure 55 is the map of approaches to rendering the verb in comics. Under composition and difference approaches, to the left of the diagram, the images use ‘concrete line’, understood to represent elements that are part of the diegesis. The images render the participants in disposition towards one another and the world, and the processes are implicit in those compositions, or in the differences readers identify between renderings of the same participants in different clusters, usually enclosed panels. To the right, abstract line is used to explicitly render a conventional symbology of enclosures, lines, metaphorical images and words, which are understood not to appear literally in the world but to describe processes of speech, thought and feeling, action or behaviour, and identity or existence.

The first column, then, is underpinned by systems of *intraphoric* cohesion, since they must communicate in a single enclosure. *Ellipsis* and metonymy will frequently be at work here, and certain kinds of deixis using diegetic elements such as pointing and gesture, directionality of the figures, and so on.
























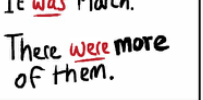
	Composition	Difference	Abstract Line	Verb Supply
Verbal				
Mental				
Material				
Behavioural				
Relational				
Existential				

Figure 55: Approaches to Rendering the Process in Comics

In the second, whereby processes are implied by differences between panels, *repetitions* and *reiterations* are fundamental; they could not work without these cohesive features. *Ellipsis* and *substitution* is similarly supported by the *interphoric* cohesions afforded by this method of rendering the process.

The third, abstract line, commonly uses arrow and line elements, linking the agents of the processes *deictically*. The balloon tail is here, and the arrows discussed above which may imply both relational processes of identity, and causal material processes of motion or impact. *Co-reference* and explicit *conjunction* are managed by abstract line. (*Implicit* conjunction supports processes rendered by difference, according to the maxim of causality.)

Finally, the supply of textual material to represent a process, composed in the image, draws evidently on *cross-modal* cohesion, using connective line elements at times but otherwise depending on deixis expressed just through proximity. The cross-modal matching afforded by *semantic fields* is also at play here: the supporting verb will appear in a semantically salient location near an image which may be a participant in the process so rendered.

## **Mapping cohesion to the interpersonal metafunction**

Cohesive features also form the basis on which readers can engage with the text; without the affordances that allow pairs or groups of images to be seen as inter-relating, a reader would find it challenging to identify salient differences or implicit processes which might have brought those differences about. I reproduce below the list of underlying principles of comics readership, the ‘maxims of comics’ to which I have alluded from time to time above:

### ***Maxims of comics readership***

#### **The principle of synecdoche**

An image is to be read as representing part of a larger object, event, space or narrative.

This principle is foundational, like Grice’s cooperative principle. The following carry the proviso, *unless we signify otherwise*; their frequent breach and flouting will be signalled elsewhere in the text:

#### **The maxim of identity**

A sufficiently similar figure appearing across (or sometimes within) panels *is* a single individual.

#### **The maxim of continuity of time**

Following panels occur at a contiguously later time.

#### **The maxim of continuity of space**

The location has not changed between panels.

#### **The maxim of causality**

What happens in comics diegesis is *caused* by elements elsewhere in the diegesis.



The **principle of synecdoche** might also successfully be called ‘the principle of cohesion’: it states baldly that all the images in a work should be assumed to cohere, to relate to one another. This idea appears in Saraceni’s notion of ‘relatedness’, and, just as Grice’s maxims of conversation (Grice 1975) were challenged by a single underlying notion of ‘relevance’ as proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1995), so one might boil the pragmatic engagement of comics with their readers down to this one principle. To do so, in both cases in my view, would be to disregard some interesting details; but this principle is certainly fundamental.

The maxim of **identity** clearly depends on *reiteration* and *repetition* of elements in the text: ‘sufficiently similar’ implies some such reiteration, and so is founded on cohesive ties.

The **continuities** license both *substitution* and *ellipsis*: the assumption that the world and the flow of time is contiguous allows elements to be omitted (they will be assumed to persist by the reader) and for elements to substitute for them, even when challenging the maxim of identity by appearing substantially dissimilar, attenuating to a stick figure or dot, or even disappearing.

The maxim of **causality**, as was mentioned earlier in our discussion, serves as an underlying implicit *conjunction* which will be assumed even in the absence of particular renderings of explicit links. Causal conjunction supplements the assumptions of addition (by the principle of synecdoche) and temporal progression (continuity of time) implicit in the other maxims.

These cohesive features also underpin the interactions comics might enact with you, the ‘games comics play’: ‘spot-the-difference’ by *repetition*, ‘fill-in-the-gaps’ by *ellipsis*, ‘jigsaw’ by repetitions and spatial *conjunctions*, and so on. Cohesion is motivated by the need to interact and the methods of communicating action; it does not exist in isolation but serves and enables the purposes of the comics text.

## Summary

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This chapter has explored, categorised and exemplified a range of approaches to the *textual* function of language, the third metafunction under Halliday’s system. This is the

set of ways in which comics creators ensure that their texts are organised and unified, and they represent a set of resources for grounding the mappings readers make when interacting with a comics text. Taken as a list, they may seem to be a simple taxonomy of comics tropes; but they serve specific purposes, enabling and underpinning other fundamental functions of comics. Previous work has been done on the system of cohesion, and on the information structure of visual and verbal narratives; but here I have proposed an approach which integrates both, and identifies forms specific to graphic narrative, taking into account both verbal and visual means of cohesion, ways in which these interact, and the interrelation of these means to the work of the other metafunctions in Halliday's model of language.

# 7

## The Logical Structures of Comics: Hypotaxis, Parataxis and Text Worlds

### Introduction

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In this chapter I round up the overview of metafunctions as realised in comics discourse by revisiting the *ideational* function, which comprises two aspects. The first was addressed in Chapter 3 on processes in comics: the *experiential* function, the act of representing or ‘construing’ the experience the creator wishes to communicate. But there is a second element to the work of ideation: the need to structure processes in logical relationship to each other; into sequences of ideas or happenings and into dependent relationships. This is the *logical* function.

The metafunctional description of meaning-making is multidimensional, and finding a linear path through it presents a challenge. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) organise their detailed account of the functional grammar of English using the clause as a starting point, centred on the process. Getting across what happens is the essential task of a clause as representation; enacting interactions is its work as exchange; and organising information is what it does as a message. These tasks map to the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Having dealt with these tasks of the clause, Halliday and Matthiessen look ‘below the clause’ (361) at groups and phrases, the units of grammar. (I do not intend to attempt to describe a parallel between language and comics at this structural level of description; as established in the introduction, comics do not seem to break down into units at the phrase or word level, as language does.) Halliday and Matthiessen present the resources of cohesion, the topic of my previous chapter, as happening ‘around the clause’ (593), connecting different clauses together using ellipses, substitutions and repetitions so that clauses rely on each other to collaboratively communicate their message, as well as each clause structuring their information themselves. Between these two, they take a look at the clause ‘from above’

(428): how patterns of clauses are structured into sequences and dependent networks. These patterns serve the *logical* function of language, the second component of the ‘ideational’ function alongside the ‘experiential’ work done by figures centred on the process: not only construing ideas and events, but the relationships between different processes. It is to this component that I turn in the present chapter. The final view Halliday and Matthiessen take on the clause is ‘beyond’, in metaphor, which I will consider in the next chapter.

## The Clause and the ‘Cluster’

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Language is structured around the clause, which is centred on a verb, a process. Comics’ narrative drawing is centred around the process in the ways outlined in Chapter 3 on representing experience; there will be multiple processes identifiable, but in a stack of salience as I described. In a given enclosure, in a panel, there may be many ‘episodes’ of interaction, in O’Toole’s terms (2010): by parallel with the clause, we might treat these as centred around a salient process, in ‘clusters’, which may include images and words. The notion of a ‘panel’, then, may be substituted for the notion of the ‘cluster complex’. The *logical* function of communication deals with the relationships between, rather than within, these clusters and complexes. As Halliday puts it (Halliday and Webster 2009, 360), the logical function is a structure “of the clause complex, not of the clause”. It describes how clauses lead to one another and how they are dependent on one another. They may be presented in apposition, or connected by co-ordinating conjunctions: this is *parataxis*. Or they may be nested within each other, and/or linked together with subordinating conjunctions: this is *hypotaxis*.

### Ranks

O’Toole, in his discussion of a Hallidayan functional approach to displayed art, pays particular attention to the hierarchical rank structures of visual works, and distributes the realisations of metafunctional work across a number of *ranks*: member, figure, episode and work, in ascending order of scale, roughly equating to word/group, clause, clause complex and text (O’Toole 2010, 14). His focus is on individual images for display in galleries; a discussion of comics might need to add ‘panel’ (intermediate between ‘episode’ and ‘work’ — a panel commonly encloses a single most salient

‘episode’, revolving around a process between figures); ‘page’ for the layout of panels, the ‘hyperframe’ in Groensteen’s terms (2009) in which panels are ‘gridded’; and perhaps also between these ‘tier’, a row of panels, taken to be a significant unit, especially amongst French scholars, having developed from the ‘strip’ and having been inscribed in the French name for comics — *bandes dessinées*, ‘drawn strips’. One might add ‘balloon’ or ‘caption’; my solution to avoid overly multiplying these terms is to use ‘enclosure’ to cover these alongside panels, though a distinction between balloon or caption enclosures nested within panel enclosures may be useful in a discussion of ranks and rankshifting. In language, the lower ranks are fairly clearly defined — the group, phrase and word — but in visual works at this level we meet the problem of ‘minimal units’ and the non-notational nature of drawing. However, where ranks are explicitly inscribed using abstract line enclosures, and organisations appear to be structured around rows that form between the tramlines of a ‘tier’, then it seems fair to make use of those structures in describing the logical organisation of a text. In my view, the central unit of comics organisation is the ‘cluster complex’ — a grouping of images and words, centred around a process stack or a group of connected process stacks, usually enclosed in abstract line: in short, what usually reads as a ‘panel’. But just as ‘sentence’ is a familiar concept to writers and readers of verbal text, despite being imprecisely defined, largely a construct of punctuation, and absent in speech, where the clause complex is a closest substitute concept, so the ‘panel’, familiar as it is, has acquired an illusory primacy. In narrative drawing, I have argued, the process is primary, and so the cluster of images and words that revolve around a process is at the heart of the ranks of comics discourse. O’Toole’s notion of ‘episode’ comes close to capturing this, though that term may be confusing; I prefer ‘cluster’ or simply ‘drawing’; though when a framed panel organisation is used, I do use ‘panel’, with all the caveats about that term in mind.

## Structures of Narrative: Paratactic

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Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 428–29) describe the organisation of narrative as follows: “In narrative text, the flow of events is construed as a series of episodes. Each episode is typically developed step by step as sequences of figures ... That are linked by means of temporal relators. ... [T]he basic relator linking the figures is ‘(and) then’”.

Co-ordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *or*, etc.) are the typical resources of grammar used to construe these paratactic links in the grammar of English; in the previous chapter on textual organisation, we looked at how conjunctions may be used in constructing comics discourse. Even where relation is not marked explicitly, it can be inferred: “if readers are familiar with the structure of narratives, they will expect to find passages developed through this kind of relation”. I also considered this possibility of implicit conjunction in Chapter 6, and this sounds very similar to the maxims of comics readership I have outlined, like Grice’s maxims of conversational cooperation (Grice 1975): socially familiar sets of assumptions that enable meaning-making. I will expand below.

### **And – so – then**

In verbal texts, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 487–90) acknowledge the possibility of classes of paratactic expansion being presented unmarked by explicit conjunctions. This is, of course, the norm in the comics image; arrows or linear linkers might be available in the resources of abstract line to show sequence, but typically apposition and assumptions about reading order are taken to be enough. Halliday and Matthiessen summarise some typical assumptions in English writing, including inferring ‘but’ and ‘so’ relationships, whilst acknowledging the potential fuzziness of these categories (488–9).

In comics, the expansions assumed by the reader are reflected in the maxims of comics readership, in particular the principles of synecdoche, causality, and continuity of time. Maxims of identity and continuity of place are foundational to making these connections. They are reflected in the connectives *and* (additive), *so* (causative), *then* (temporal). We might add the assumption *there* (spatial). These are semantic concepts only; I present the conjunctions here for ease of reference and comparison. As we read the comics text, we assume that additional panels accrete elements of information about the story and its diegesis incrementally (‘and...’), that time proceeds forward contiguously (‘then...’), and that the elements of comics are caused by elements elsewhere in the comics (‘so...’). Space remains the same unless we are clearly signalled otherwise (‘there’).

## Reading Order

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This sequence of accretion of detail as we follow a paratactic path assumes a linear reading of the text. Readers will bring with them further assumptions about textual organisation to decide what section of a comics text to read next. Two current approaches compete to describe and account for this: those of Neil Cohn (2013b), and in French, Renaud Chavanne (2010).

### **Cohn's branching structure**

Cohn outlines a number of approaches to organisation of the comics page (Groensteen, Peeters, Caldwell), but sets the question: how do readers know how to navigate these layouts (Cohn 2013b, 91)? He describes a number of possibilities of organisation of the 'External Compositional Structure', by which he means the arrangement of panel borders, and specifies 'Preference Rules' (ECSPRs) readers seem to follow (98). These are derived from an experiment in which a range of readers are asked to put in reading order different arrangements of empty panels (94). Angled and ambiguous arrangements are explored (99), though without considering where the foci of the images might appear, nor the placement of any captions or balloons.

Cohn uses the notion of hierarchy and embedding to account for readers' choices. He represents vertical and horizontal choices as iterated hierarchically, represented by a tree structure diagram (101). 'Blockage', for example (the tendency for readers to read panels downwards when confronted by a panel that extends downward on its right), can occur iteratively and recursively, in a spiral of shrinking panel sizes, as shown in an example from *Scott Pilgrim* (Cohn 2013b, 103). Cohn later presents a number of instances of actual pages, accompanied by tree diagrams that represent their reading structure (104). Embedding is considered here: an image of a character's face enclosed by an image of the environment. Cohn describes these as 'dominant' (the environment) vs 'enclosed' (the detail), and since the dominant panel has its frame up and to the left, it is considered to be first in reading order. This seems dubious to me: there are areas of interest which might be 'read' (the panels are silent, without words in enclosures) all around the enclosed panel; and most space is to its right. I am not convinced that the choice of reading order indicated here is correct; nor, indeed, whether reading order is important here, as opposed to grasping logical dependencies. Cohn closes his chapter

with the assertion that “this structure is separate from meaning and the narrative grammar”. That notion that meaning, structure and grammar are separable contrasts markedly with the principles of Hallidayan functional linguistics.

### **Chavanne’s subdivisions**

Renaud Chavanne, in *Composition de la Bande Dessinée* (2010), takes the tier or strip (*bande*) to be a fundamental unit of comics — “The vast majority of *bandes dessinées* are organised in strips” (25, my translation<sup>7</sup>). Whilst acknowledging the possibility of unevenness in their baselines, he defines a strip as constituted of all the panels in succession which take the viewer’s gaze from the left margin of the page (for Western comics), across until it must return to that left margin, but below (24). The left margin, then, is privileged as deciding how many ‘tiers’ there are in a comics page; ‘below’ here must mean ‘below the whole group in the tier’, so that Cohn’s ‘blockage’ situations can be resolved. After discussing existing accounts of page layouts, the regular, semi-regular and rhetorical, as adopted by Groensteen from Peeters (see Groensteen 2009), Chavanne turns to the specific use of ‘fragmented’ structures of tiers: those which split the tier into two or more somewhere along its course. He seeks to explore the rhetorical usage of such patterns in carving up the action of the *bande dessinée*. To aid this, he proposes a notation: 1/1/1 would indicate a simple tier of three panels; but 1/2 would indicate that the second potential ‘panel’ in a tier was divided vertically in two. 2/1 would indicate the situation Cohn describes as ‘blockage’: two panels which are to be read vertically before moving on to the third. For Chavanne, this is because the tier as he describes it is a structuring entity, and the reader normally knows to complete each segment of the tier (vertically) before proceeding on to the right. He acknowledges that there may be complications, especially in ‘2/2’ structures, wherein there is a staggered set of panels (Chavanne 2010, 114–15), and in grid patterns. The system is further complicated by the possibility of division ‘in the second degree’, where an already divided tier may be further subdivided in the vertical (downward) direction — indeed, his ‘2° degré’ notation may allow for a wide range of possible layouts (118). A third and fourth degree or subdivision may be possible, though rare.

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<sup>7</sup> Chavanne’s work is just beginning to emerge in English (see Chavanne 2015 for a précis in English of this work).



Chavanne argues elsewhere (Chavanne 2015) that his notation is more useful than Cohn's, in that it is utterable: Cohn's tree structure diagrams replace one visual organisation with another, which adds nothing in Chavanne's view. One can speak, write and argue about types of tier structure using 2/1 notation. He also challenges Cohn's use of *empty* panels in testing viewers' reading order, and is critical of the whole conception of linguistics as a scientifically testable approach to comics: comics are, rather, a creative art. Chavanne uses his notation to discuss the usage of panel organisation for rhetorical effect, with more specific detail than afforded by the general categories 'rhetorical' or 'semi-regular' derived from Groensteen and Peeters. He considers a wide range of works, and takes into account the use of overlapping balloon enclosures to guide the eye and resolve ambiguities in tiering, the way that arrows and numbering might (Chavanne 2010, 212–13); and explores other resources for more complex arrangements outside of the strip (233–280). This focus on the use of semiotic resources, and Chavanne's commitment to the essentially creative element to meaning-making in comics, makes his reading better aligned to Halliday's model than Cohn's.

### **Clusters and reading**

Paratactic relations can operate once a serial order of reading has been arrived at. The assumption that readers will import their top-left to bottom-right reading practices into comics, and seek consecutive areas of interest to the right and down, returning to the left margin when the right is reached, seems a plausible account on which both Cohn and Chavanne agree. In my view, treating the 'cluster' as foundational will help in discussions of reading order: clusters would include not only representations of (multiple) processes in different regions of the panels ('episodes'), but also stretches of written text and abstract elements such as arrows or numbering, which all act as loci for the viewer's gaze when navigating the comics text.

I take it that the default assumption is that you should read the next cluster or cluster complex, down and to the right, with a slight emphasis on that order of priority. That is an unmarked reading order, and left-to-right is reversed where that is true of the dominant reading tradition. Divergences from this tactic will be marked, literally, by such means as arrows to direct the reader, numbering of panels, or using balloon enclosures that cross panel boundaries, linking panelised drawings in sequence. This

was briefly covered in Chapter 6 on the textual function, and Chapter 4, treating them as directives engaging with reader action.

Over the history of development of the page layout, assistive markers such as arrows or numbers have fallen away, grammaticalised into tacitly assumed relations in a discourse structure of panels (I avoid the misleading, if tempting, idea of a ‘syntax’ of panels). Different traditions will settle on somewhat different rules, however, and they are open to gradual change; though the fundamental directionality of ‘where-to-read-next’ will be as stable as the culture’s reading habits. Note, as an exception to prove the rule, the ‘authentic manga’ subculture that adopts right-to-left reading. This is nonetheless marked, still, by the peritexts, commonly with strongly worded verbal imperatives on the cover and prefatory material about where to start reading and how. Even if these were absent, the contrasting functions of front and back covers would serve the same purpose.

Attention to *hypotaxis* and dependency in the nested organisation of the page (more or less eliminated from Cohn’s account, along with the clusters of image and text), will also help determine reading order, identifying and resolving ambiguities. It is possible, for instance, though not in all cases necessary, to treat some of Chavanne’s ‘fragmented’ panels in a tier as ‘rankshifted’ sequences — sequences which might appear in a tier or page, but are instead compressed into the region of a panel. We will explore some such instances in the examples to follow later in this chapter. Finally, the reading order may in some cases just not matter: it is the relationships of dependency that the reader may be expected to comprehend.

## Parataxis and Hypotaxis

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So far we have focused on assumed or explicit parataxis, then: the relationship between elements of the text appearing at equal levels, side by side, in sequence. But elements may be subordinated to one another, absorbed one in the other, in a relationship of unequal dependency: this is hypotaxis. The logical function explores the way that ideas may be *expanded* and *projected* across both these structures; though I will tend to focus, in discussion of the visual text, on the distribution of expansions to paratactic structures in comics, and projections to hypotactic structures. As in verbal language, however, it is often possible to use either structure.

Let us revisit the other half of the ideational metafunction, and return to the representation of processes in comics. Components of the logical function were assumed in the array of four approaches to rendering the process in comics:

- **Composition:** The unification of compositions, into what O'Toole (2010) might call 'episodes' and I have called 'clusters' in parallel with the 'clause', or indeed 'cluster **complexes**' on the same parallel. These are usually enframed in an abstract enclosure, whether panel border or balloon, but this is not a fundamental requirement.
- **Difference:** The sequencing of such clusters **paratactically**, to generate inference and provide space for spot-the-difference play with the images.
- **Abstract Line:** The nesting of elements of the text **hypotactically** in abstract enclosures, and dependent linking with abstract linear elements: lines, boxes, balloons, arrows, and so on.
- **Verb Supply:** The co-composition of verbs into the drawing such that they are taken to emanate from, or to identify, particular processes depicted therein.

So parataxis and hypotaxis has already been a basis of this model. In the next section of this chapter I would like to consider further how these systems of parataxis and hypotaxis contribute to meaning-making in graphic narrative. I will argue in what follows that parataxis, whilst important, has been overemphasised in discussion of graphic narrative as 'sequential art'; that it is not just sequence, but also nesting and hypotaxis that is distinctive of graphic narrative — perhaps even more distinctive.

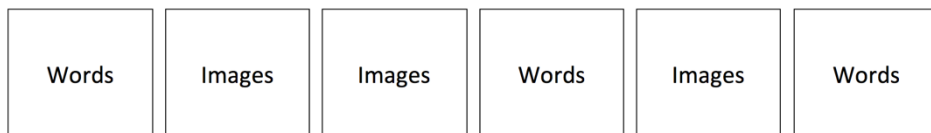
Since Eisner's proposal of the term (Eisner 2008a), and McCloud's adaptation and extension of it (McCloud 1993), 'sequential art' has come to seem definitive of comics: that comics are fundamentally drawings arranged in sequence. Also part of definitions of comics, including R.C. Harvey's, is the idea that images and words both contribute to the 'hybrid' form of comics: a 'blending' of word and image (Harvey 1996, 5–9). Harvey does not specify how such 'blending' takes place; it is left ambiguous, as if homogenous. (In Chapter 6 on cohesion, I have attempted to offer a framework for some of the details, and by describing how comics handle processes, offered a framework that is compatible with how words handle processes.) For McCloud, words and images form 'tracks' which work alongside each other in a series of 'relations' with general categories (McCloud 1993, 153–55), in parallel, as depicted in Figure 56 below.

But these conceptualisations — a paratactic sequence of images; an unspecified ‘blend’ of words and images; two parallel ‘tracks’, one of words, one of images, interrelating — are all misleading. ‘Tracks’ of sound and image appear in the technology of film. Word and image do not ‘blend’ like coffee or tea, but serve specific roles using particular resources available to each mode, as we have explored. And images are not merely sequential in comics; not even in a grid from which the reader is challenged to discover a sequential order (which was Eisner’s concern); they are not arranged in parataxis, but in hypotaxis. Enclosures occur not just next to each other, but inside each other. Typically, enclosures of words occur inside enclosures containing image: the word balloon in the panel. But it has been helpful, as we have seen in discussion of the modal properties available to abstract enclosures, to generalise their function; and that leads to a view of comics as operating largely by hypotaxis, the subordination of some components of the text to others. (In this way, the ‘single-panel’ comic is recuperated from its banishment under the definition of ‘sequential art’.)

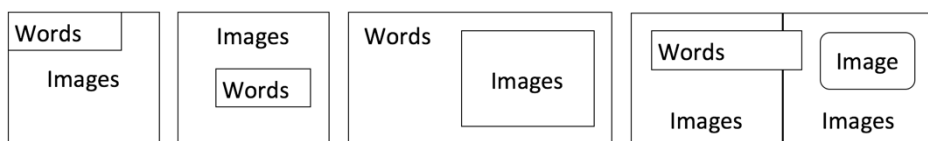
Conceptualisation of Comics #1: Word and Image tracks



Conceptualisation of Comics #2: Paratactic Sequence



Conceptualisation of Comics #3: Hypotactic Organisation



**Figure 56: Conceptualisations of comics**

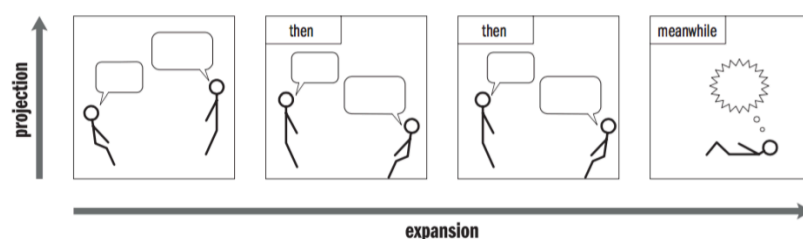
To write the kind of syntax of comics panels Neil Cohn proposes, the paratactic conception of comics must hold. When creating his tree structure diagrams of comics, this panels-in-sequence model is what lies at the basis, even when tackling a ‘dream sequence’ projected by a character (Cohn 2013b, 82). His experiments with deletions, substitutions and changes of sequence (113–135) all operate on this same model. But a glance at the schematic diagram of conceptualisations #2 and #3 (Figure 56) should

reveal that it is nesting of words within images, images within words, not just sequences of enclosures, that is most comics-like.

Comics use hypotactic, nested structures in the development of the text, in addition to paratactic sequence. Both may be used in expansion of the text and in projection of mental and verbal content, though as I have suggested, hypotaxis tends to be used for projection and parataxis for expansion. And it is typical for words to appear in subordinate relationship to images, though images may also be projected and the dependencies may be reversed.

## Expansion and Projection

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) quite often use visual means to clarify logical concepts. Their diagram of clause complexes on page 435 uses arrows and boxes, inset, sequence. A range of visual representations of a complex clause are displayed on pages 458–9, including nested enclosures, arrows chaining together sequences, the use of space to indicate subordination. Perhaps most strikingly, and centrally for the argument of this chapter, the diagram on page 443 uses explicitly comics tropes to illustrate projection. In a somewhat ‘throwaway’ visual metaphor for the notion of projection versus expansion, Halliday and Matthiessen present the following diagram (Figure 57):



**Fig. 7-5 Projection and expansion represented by the conventions of comic strips**

**Figure 57: Projection, expansion and comic strips (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 443)**

Projection is here presented as an upward axis, presenting the contents of speech and imagination above the characters represented. Expansion is represented as the linear sequence of images, developing the logogenesis of the text; sometimes linked explicitly

by conjunctives, sometimes assuming these, as Halliday and Matthiessen note is possible in narrative. This image allies projection with enclosure, a subordinating structure, hypotactic; expansion is related to sequence, a paratactic structure. Halliday and Matthiessen never return to this image in any detail to explore any further the parallels with comics; they take as given the visual resources of comics as a metaphor which is available to help their readers understand the linguistic structures. Here, I am exploring the reverse: that the structures of hypotaxis and parataxis, projection and expansion, can illuminate the structures of comics.

### **Types of expansion**

Halliday and Matthiessen describe three types of expansion: elaboration, extension, and enhancement of the clause. Though parataxis typically deals with expansion, hypotaxis may take these roles. In **elaboration**, “one clause elaborates on the meaning of another by further specifying or describing it” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 396); they represent this relation with an ‘equals’ symbol, and note that it may be introduced with ‘i.e.’, by simple apposition, or hypotactically with a relative clause. **Extension** is a matter of addition, or possibly of replacement or alternative. It may be introduced by ‘and’, though also ‘or’, ‘nor’ or ‘but’; or, in hypotaxis, with ‘while/whereas’, ‘if’ or ‘except’. They represent this with a ‘plus’ symbol. The introduction of qualification or circumstantial detail is covered by **enhancement**, which may be signalled by temporal conjunctions (*when, while, then*), spatial conjunctions (*where, as far as*), conjunctions of manner (*as, like, as if, thus*), and causal conjunctions (*so, because, in order to*). This contextualises the clause and is represented by a ‘multiplication’ symbol. Both paratactic and hypotactic means are available in language for each of these functions, though not all equally. Similarly, in graphic narrative texts, the resources are unevenly distributed. I present a survey of the possibilities below.

### ***Elaboration***

- **Paratactic elaboration:** the ‘aspect-to-aspect’ sequence of relational processes describing the same participant.

- **Hypotactic elaboration:** The inset that picks out a detail, the box-and-arrow or callout using abstract line to render relational processes.

The notion of ‘elaborating’ may be placed in comics as the sequence of relational process panel pairings, what McCloud calls ‘aspect-to-aspect’ transitions (McCloud 1993). A whole is presented, and then details are depicted in sequences that map onto that whole, either with contiguous or compatible shapes, or by the maxims of continuity, of space (and time). Details may be enclosed within abstract lines in the drawing.

### ***Extension***

- **Paratactic extension:** the basic ‘sequential art’ structure of comics, ‘and then...’.  
Note that negations are not typically possible without using wordings or symbology (for example, a superimposed X), though alternative paths may be inscribed and the extension may be modalised.
- **Hypotactic extension:** This is usually not distinguishable from dense drawing.  
Some insets may work like this; narration in captions may do this, though often they contain other verbal expansions.

There is not the category of ‘adversative’ in comics, no ‘but’; and not really an ‘if’ structure, though ‘then’ is a part of the default assumption, and it is possible with maze structures to present ‘or’ alternatives, so conditional organisations should be possible. At present they are rare in comics. A combination of parallel presentations of alternatives, coupled with modalisations of them as unreal, and co-composition with representations of characters’ dispositions towards them, can achieve the effect of presenting alternatives. (I explore such an example in Figure 61 below.)

### ***Enhancement***

- **Paratactic enhancement:** The contextualising image sequence may do this, presenting increased background or surrounding detail; the ‘shot-reverse shot’

borrowed from film may do this, depicting a looker and then what is seen. Other typical sequences may also ‘enhance’.

- **Hypotactic enhancement:** typical in the sense that backgrounds have a contextualising, circumstantial function; cross-modally this is typical, in the text-box inclusion of adverbial logical linkers ‘meanwhile...’, ‘elsewhere’, and so on.

I will explore instances of these resources in the examples presented later in the chapter. First, we need to examine some distinctions in the category of hypotaxis as it compares to similar linguistic resources of nesting, ‘embedding’ and ‘rankshifting’, and raise the question of the ‘inset’. Then we turn to a central category of hypotaxis, projection, which will lead to a further discussion of ‘text worlds’, a notion that can be usefully recruited to account for the function of projected material in comics.

### **Hypotaxis and rankshifting**

Halliday notes that hypotaxis is often confused with *rankshifting* in discussions of language (Halliday and Webster 2009, 358): one clause depending on another mixed with one clause being *part* of another. In graphic narrative, a sort of rankshifting is possible, though it is less clear what it might ‘mean’: several panels may be grouped as one in an enclosure; several panels may combine jigsaw-like to form one image, and are thereby subordinated to a higher structure; several images may be grouped in an abstract enclosure together and we should read them by means of difference to understand a continuum of action. This is a choice of ‘compression’, or parsimony, or downshifting: it repeats within the comic the assertion that, in whatever way, these separate images are to be treated by the reader as one.

### ***Embedding vs Hypotaxis***

*Embedding* in language is specifically the shifting of the ideas usually represented in a clause down to the level of a group. It may be treated in comics as realised in the process stack: whenever drawing, the artist is committed to some degree to elaborate with relational description, and a panel may feature a character doing one thing with



body, another with their head or face, and yet another with their hands, embedding a number of processes in a single cluster. Halliday and Matthiessen note that *extension* is very rarely done via embedding in English (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 497), and likewise we should not expect a neat mapping of all functions to all means in a living, developing system like comics either. ‘Unpanellised’ sequences, where images to be understood as consecutive in time are rendered within one panel enclosure, may be treated as embedding or hypotaxis; a distinction might be drawn between overlapping renderings of the figure in one drawing to represent processes (such as a head turn) as ‘embedded’ versus multiple renderings separately in the same enclosure as ‘hypotaxis’. Or perhaps this distinction is too delicate to sustain. The distinction between embedded circumstantial relative clause and the representation of circumstantial adverbials as backgrounds to an image is perhaps such an instance, though overlap vs co-enclosure may be a distinction worth making.

### ***Inset***

Is the *inset* a matter of hypotaxis or rankshifting? It may be that it ‘superordinates’ the inset image, rather than subordinates it: promoting it to prominence, foregrounding it. Often it is a detail from within the enclosing image, a relational process, elaborating on what is depicted; often it depicts a mental process. At times, it may be better to describe the surrounding image as reaching out to occupy the bordering space, especially where it ‘bleeds’ to the edge, seeking ‘contact’ with the reader. The layout and arrangement of the enclosure alone is not enough to decide; the content of the inset image and its relation to what encloses it will be a determining factor in how it is read.

### ***Hypotaxis in comics***

As an example, the following double-page spread (Figure 58) from Luke Pearson’s *Hildafolk* (2010, n.p.) shows an instance of rankshifting at the top of the second page. The eight subdivisions of this section, fitting in the space of one tier, which has usually been used for two panels, create a ‘microcomic’, construing the incident with the deer as a sub-sequence nested within the larger sequence. It is presented as too small an event to take up a whole page, not at the level of the other incidents, the overarching narrative of settling down to camp; rather, though it is made of multiple episodes, it

counts as only one episode interrupting this ‘higher-level’ action. The diminished status is here further marked by the variation in ‘panelisation’, whereby the panels presented in the deer incident are without gutters to separate them. I do not wish to make a claim for the importance of gutter space in itself; but these panels have been marked as different in status from the others, and under panel-based description systems which account for the layout of the page, including Cohn’s (2013b) readership rules and Chavanne’s (2010) tier fragmentation structures, something will be missed about the hypotactic status of this section.

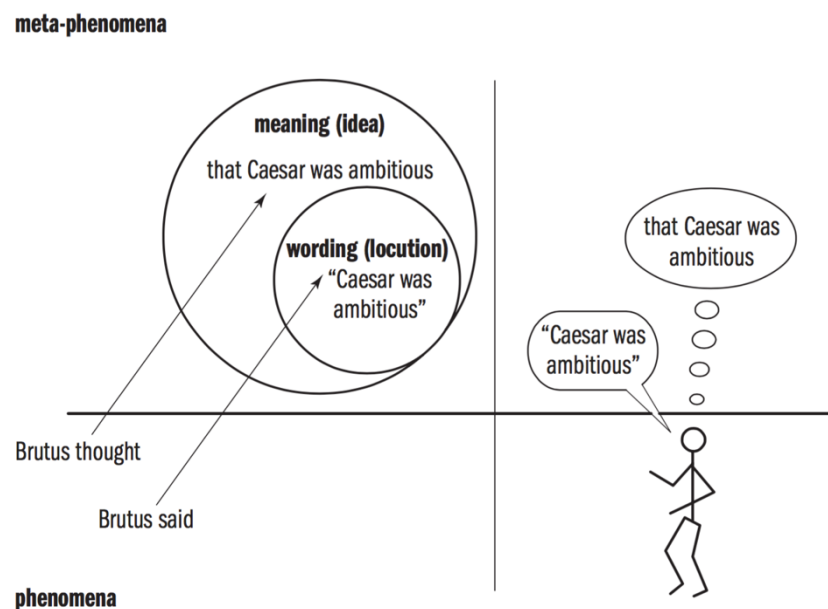
**Figure 58: from *Hildafolk* (Pearson 2010, n.p.)**

Whether a distinction should be made between ‘embedding’ and ‘hypotaxis’ in describing this rankshift becomes salient here. I suspect that a mapping to what Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) treat as ‘hypotaxis’ is probably better in this case, since I take the panel to be closer to the clause/cluster than the group in function. Also brought into question is the notion of the ‘inset’. Are there eight ‘inset’ panels here, since the opening and closing images bleed to the margin and surround the others? Should we treat as the first panel on the second page the blue rainy landscape, since that is the first image we encounter top left, its border contiguous with the edge of the page, following Cohn’s approach? I think it is best to treat the occupation of gutter space up to the edge of the page as a property of the image in the bottom right, claiming the space of the edges as a way of reaching out to the reader (interpersonally), and asserting the presence of the rain as surrounding the other events (ideationally), an idea reflected by the improvised verb supply as the rain ‘pt-pt’s on the canvas. Of course a further hypotactic arrangement is at work in this example: the projection of the text in Hilda’s speech.

### **Projection**

Projection is the incorporation of the verbiage of speech or the contents of thought into a clause complex. Paratactic vs hypotactic projection, as distinguished in English, is also not a distinction worth sustaining in comics. This is reflected in the diagram on page 520 of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), reproduced below (Figure 59), using enclosure for both. The ‘phenomena’ labelled here are the diegetic actions of speaking

or thinking; the ‘meta-phenomena’ are those mental and verbal contents in the experiences of interlocutors within the diegesis. Halliday and Matthiessen assert (547) that hypotaxis is more typical for thought and parataxis more typical for speech, but only conventions of shape distinguish the enclosures in comics. However, the transition between hypotactic enclosure of a story, memory or train of thought and its promotion into paratactic recount at the level of the main narrative is interesting, and we will explore this shifting of status later in this chapter. First, I will turn to a theory base compatible with Halliday’s system, one which uses its categories alongside concepts from cognitive approaches to linguistics, in order to describe what is accomplished in projections, to help distinguish ‘phenomena’ from ‘meta-phenomena’, and to account for shifts of level: Text World Theory.



**Fig. 7-20 The two basic patterns of projection — quoting speech and reporting thought**

**Figure 59: Projection and comics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 520)**

## Text World Theory

Text World Theory offers a useful set of frameworks for discussing the kinds of hypotaxis we see in comics. This theory was innovated by Paul Werth in the 1990s, and left incomplete at his death; his work was collated and edited into a volume of theory in

1999. The work has been continued by Joanna Gavins, who compiled a more accessible introduction to the theory in 2007, and it is this most recent development of the theory which will be the basis for my discussion here. Whilst based in cognitive linguistics (Gavins 2007, 6–8), Text World Theory shares an interest in communication as a collaborative human activity (24, 59–60) with the work of Paul Grice (1975) which I have adopted to account for creator–reader interactions in making inferences in comics, and uses a Hallidayan language of processes (Gavins 2007, 53–71) and modality (91). In its use of the notion of world-building (40), it also chimes with the function that Dylan Horrocks (2003) foregrounds in comics, arguing against Scott McCloud’s focus on sequential narration. He adopts from James Kochalka (2001) the idea that comics’ primary function is to create a space, more than to tell a story; so instead of McCloud’s (1993) assertion that in comics, time = space, rather in comics, space = space. In common with other (maligned) art forms, Horrocks argues, quoting Tolkien in support, building a ‘secondary world’ is a central task of comics.

Text World Theory distinguishes a number of ‘possible worlds’ which are indexed in any communicative exchange, with attention to both conversation and to written text. The context in which this discourse occurs is the ‘discourse world’, the world shared by speaker/writer/creator and listener/reader. The relevant features of this discourse world are settled by the extent to which a given text relies on them — assumptions of, and deictic reference to, shared features of the interlocutors’ world. In the case of written texts, which distance writer and reader in time and space, this is a world of two interlocking parts, from the writer’s perspective and the reader’s perspective. The discourse world of the graphic narrative, then, is similarly a ‘split’ world (Gavins 2007, 26): the world as it is shared by the creator and the reader, which is separated in time and space, but nonetheless shares a number of physical and cultural assumptions, as well as variants (of likely situations of construction and likely reception) which can be competently assumed by each discourse participant. The locus at which these two portions of the shared discourse-world meet is in the material surface of the text, in the plane on which the exchange takes place, whether page or digital screen.

That text then further constructs a ‘text-world’, shared by the creator and reader only in imagination, and this represents the diegesis of a narrative, for instance. Within that diegetic world, there may appear further represented interlocutors, who in their exchanges construct further text-worlds, and so on, in nested fashion. At any level, interlocutors’ language can refer to their shared ‘discourse world’, the environment in

which they are conversing, using the familiar pronouns, adverbs and deictic pointers: *I, you, here, now, this*, and so on. However, language has the ability to ‘project’ different times and places, as when we recount a story; whereby the word ‘now’ refers to story-time, not the shared now of the interlocutors, and the ‘I’ and ‘you’ in *he said ‘I told you so’* no longer refer to the persons recounting and listening. Reporting verbs (verbal processes) serve this ‘projecting’ function of generating a new ‘text world’ which speakers and listeners have to track, but so do references to imagined futures, modal possibilities, desires and so on. Despite the complex, nested nature of these text worlds, language users normally have no difficulty in keeping track of the references. (Gavins 2007, 8–13.)

When Gavins diagrams text worlds (first on p.47), she places each in its own enclosure. These are linked by lines to embedded anchor enclosures within a main text-world. These concentric enclosures are temptingly similar to panels and balloons. The fundamental principle, that an enclosure delineates a text-world, is transferable to discussions of the comics text, especially as a hypotactic phenomenon. The descriptors of the text world, its world-building elements, are noted in Gavins’ boxes in words: time, place, objects, persons (‘enactors’). In comics these are drawn, and/or assumed in continuity and identity from previously drawn images earlier in a sequence. Verbal markers commit to the ‘world switch’ (48) in a text; in comics, these may be words in caption boxes (especially time deictics or conjunctions), images (such as drawing new spatial environments) or modalising abstract elements (changes in borders, colour values, line qualities and so on). Gavins describes how processes move a text world forward and adapt it as the text progresses. This maps well to paratactic sequences in comics. The classification of material processes as ‘function advancing’ (56) has already been mentioned in Chapter 3 on representing experience; existential processes “function as world-builders” (62), and relational processes elaborate on these. This mapping makes the sort of text-world investigation of discourse pursued by Gavins (64–71) available to comics texts.

It is worth noting that each new enclosure in paratactic sequence does not thereby establish its own new text world, any more than each new sentence or paragraph in written text does. Sequences and groupings of enclosures cooperate to partake in a mutually-constructed text world. Just as a principle of identity operates on sufficiently-similar characters and objects depicted in the diegesis of comics, so sufficiently-similar abstract enclosures are ‘identical’ at some level, too — a sequence of cloud-bordered

panels may be read as the same dream; the continuity and cohesion of their contents will govern readers' perceptions of what belongs to this ongoing world and how 'dream-like' it is.

Of most value in text-world theory is the analysis of 'layers' of discourse; within the text-world created by the discourse-world participants, creator and reader, a character ('enactor') may create his or her own text-world, nested a layer below. (In fact, of course, this too is crafted by the discourse-world occupier, the creator; but it is attributed to the diegetic character, and thereby may be unreliable, fantastic, and the discourse-world creator may not be held accountable in the same way for the worlds a character creates. Gavins illustrates this on p.78 by the principle of 'hearsay' in a court.) In this way texts may be richly stratified, framing and filtering their content.

### **Example: *Carnet de Voyage***

The recursive nature of the enclosure — that the same functions are shared by the balloons that enclose speech or thought, and the panels that may enclose the drawings of them in turn — is constitutive I think of the complex, nested, hypotactic character of comics discourse. Rather than 'sequential' art, made of a linear ordering of panel units, it is useful in my view to think of comics as *nested* art, in which drawings occur inside other drawings, and each cluster of drawing and text may serve multiple functions simultaneously. This recursion affords comics their depth: they can represent a number of nested text worlds. When Craig Thompson, in *Carnet de Voyage* (2004), represents his experience of travelling, he is doing more than rendering images of the outer world he sees (he scorns photography in the peritexts), and not just supplying narration of the events which he witnesses or enacts; he represents the stories within stories, and the inner experiences he carries with him into the external world. Comics' nested form is particularly suited to managing that dichotomy.

When Thompson re-tells a story related to him by his friend Catherine (Thompson 2004, 10), he starts with his account written directly on the page, unconfined, telling it to us (see Figure 60 ci-dessous). He draws her telling it to him in a verbal process (by composition) with an abstract enclosure emerging from her mouth: a 'speech bubble', but inside that an illustration from the story she is telling (narrated in Thompson's words here from his point of view). The next drawing depicts, direct on the page, figures identifiable from within her speech balloon, and Thompson offers a partially-

completed panel in which he draws the smoke emerging from the fires she refers to in her story. As the anchoring point of the story changes, so nested text-worlds are rendered in their assorted enclosures: in Craig's memory is Catherine, who relates her memory of living in Cameroon, and then the history of the village she travelled in; and later relates the speech of the people involved in the story. Each shift in referent marks a nested, projected 'text-world', other than the 'discourse-world' in which the story is being told (here by Thompson to us as readers). The story proceeds with interesting 'metalepses', to adopt a term from Genette (1983) for such shifts of frame: for example, that in which the continuing narration features appears in a speech balloon emerging from the mouth of Catherine-as-depicted-in-the-story — though it has been Thompson's voice re-telling her tale up till then, and that same viewpoint resumes immediately. Elements of the story are 'promoted' or 'pop' upward to take the main focus of the page, and we 'push' down into the projected diegesis of her story. These notions of 'pop' and 'push' from a stack of realities is inherited from deictic shift theory, a precursor to Text World Theory (Stockwell 2002, 46–49).

**Figure 60: from *Carnet de Voyage* (Thompson 2004, 10–11)**

### **'Phatic space'**

The normal 'home' space seems to be the bare page itself. This is the shared 'discourse world', within which projected 'text worlds' are inscribed, indicated by abstract enclosures (though they may fall away as narration continues and the story 'pops up' by metalepsis to the discourse level). It seems there is a tendency to use panelisation where a story is being told, and to write or draw directly on the page, without abstract enclosing lines, when we are sharing the discourse world of Thompson speaking in an 'unmediated' way to us. This suggests that it is the function of the unenclosed space of the page to 'reach out' to the reader, to represent a 'candid' or direct contact. I propose that the borderless page represents a 'phatic space', a space that serves the underlying function of shared contact between creator and reader. It will take a slight detour to explain what I mean by 'phatic' here.

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski coined the term 'phatic communion' to indicate that phenomenon which he observed in 'primitive' tribes of speaking to one

another not for the purposes of supplying or demanding information, nor to exchange action or goods or even to express emotion, but merely to acknowledge being in the shared presence of another human being (in Ogden et al. 1923, 313–4). In present-day British talk, the comment ‘Rainy again today, eh?’ carries no news for the listener: it acknowledges the presence of another, broaches a safe topic of conversation, and enacts a shared ‘national identity’. This talk functions as a verbal substitute for deeply-ingrained social grooming behaviours; its point is not its content, which is trite or empty, but its contact. The key word in Malinowski’s coinage is *communion*, as opposed to communication, but the distinctive word *phatic* (from Greek *phatos* to talk) has stuck to describe speech which aims to promote social solidarity. Roman Jakobson (1960) adopts ‘phatic’ to mark the ‘contact’ function of language in his six-part model. For Jakobson, it refers to the maintenance of contact between speaker and listener, keeping channels of communication open. I adopt the term here with Jakobson’s conception perhaps the most salient, but with some of the connotations of Malinowski’s usage intended: that there is a humanity involved in this point of contact; it is not just an empty mechanical channel that is to be maintained, but a personal reaching-out from one human to another.

Thompson makes a point of the direct, unmediated nature of his drawing in *Carnet de Voyage* — repudiating the use of cameras for reference, using a fluid brushstroke that leaves an indexical trace of his hand on the work. His compositions are commonly open; in the more sketchbook-like, relational-dominant drawings, the border of the page serves as a natural enclosure; the page or sheet is the ur-panel, as it were, the emergent edge up to which one can draw. It is the page edge that is held by the creator as she draws, and by the reader as he reads: it is the shared element which both touch directly. This suggests to me that the page itself, underlying and bordering the drawings, serves this ‘contact’ function, and is the locus of communion between creator and reader. Dropping or exceeding panel borders seems in graphic narrative to connote immediacy, starkness, directness; a character ‘reaches out of the page’ when they are drawn outside of borders; at moments of shock or extreme emotion, a character may be drawn reacting without background or border to contain them: they are ‘exposed’. To what? It is almost as if there is an ‘aura’ that dwells in the space of the page, that ‘flows’ through the gutters, and where it contacts a character directly (as we touch this space when we hold the book), the figure communicates via this channel directly to our touch: it is exposed to the ‘discourse world’ of the space on which it is inscribed, the space we are in contact



with, rather than enclosed in an abstract line which indicates that there is a text-world displaced from our own. When Thompson narrates his sadness on a train journey (2004, 86–7), he begins in enclosures as he tells yesterday’s story, separated into its own text world. But as he reaches the turning point, where he reveals to us his most desperate emotions, the enclosures cease, and the increasing caricaturing of his (mental process) emotions are exposed to us directly. The words of his imaginary conversation are pushed down into text-world by the enclosures of the speech balloons; and the metaphorical depiction of his emotional state is promoted to the unenclosed, immediate level of the discourse-world, communicating its stark presence for him. As he calms towards the end of the section, the ‘panel’ enclosures return, containing the emotion once again; and the final panel reinscribes the text-world environment (relational processes), pushing the narrator/character back into the diegesis of his story.

Nor is Thompson alone in using this unenclosed, direct approach to rendering. He has perhaps adopted it from travel diaries and journals in the Collection Côtelette from which he drew inspiration; or perhaps this reflects that the borderless mode is especially suited to immediate, *in-situ* records of a creator’s response to their environment (as opposed to the construction of narrative diegesis for the purpose of storytelling, which employs abstract enclosures as the familiar panels to inscribe the text-world being related). Lewis Trondheim, with whom Thompson collaborated on a page of *Carnet de Voyage* (2004, 168–9), uses a borderless approach in his *Carnets de Bord*, and Joann Sfar similarly in his many sketchbook-journals (e.g., Trondheim 2004; Sfar 2002). There is a rapidity as well as an immediacy, an improvised and loose quality to these borderless pages; and it is the repetitions of figures, participants, environments, and the continuities of language that cohere these texts and enable us to infer processes from drawing to drawing: panels are not necessary or basic; rather, abstract line enclosures are a resource that is available to use or avoid.

### **Modalisation and text-worlds**

In the previous chapter we explored the possibilities of modalisation of line, including the modalisation of abstract enclosures. Modalisation creates text worlds. Gavins (2007, 91–108) distinguishes between boulomaic and deontic modality in the constructions of text worlds — worlds that should or shouldn’t, can or can’t, be the case (deontic) and worlds that one wishes and desires (boulomaic). In graphic narrative, the

deontic, instructional modality is rare — though images of situations accompanied by symbols of approval or disapproval may allow for this (a tick or a cross); this visual approach is more typical of instructional manuals like flight safety booklets or construction guides from IKEA or LEGO. Boulomaic modality is more frequent in comics, handled as projective mental processes: the modality of unreality handled by the shapes of enclosures and perhaps image qualities, and an accompanying mental process in the expression on the thinker's face (see the discussion of Figure 61 below). In either case, a world is inscribed at a different level than the world dwelt in by participants, and more or less marginal comment made on it, in the sense of appearing in the margins or at the borders of the depicted world. This visual construction of a projected mental world, indicated through visual resources of modalisation, may also be used to indicate epistemic text-worlds (Gavins 2007, 110): worlds that do not exist, regardless of characters' attitudes. These are commonly represented in language using mental-process verbs such as 'think', 'believe', 'know', 'doubt' and so on, as well as modal operators such as may, might, could, possible, probably, perhaps and others.

What is shared by all these is containment coupled with some sort of modalisation. The nested nature of text worlds is reflected both in Gavins' diagrams, and in the recursive enclosures of graphic narrative. Many of the subtleties handled in language do not have matching resources in the visual (at present). The Kinnock speech Gavins quotes, warning about the election of Margaret Thatcher (119), is hard to imagine being handled in image alone. But the fundamental notion of text-world creation, the enclosure within the enclosure that creates imagined, human mental worlds, is captured in the logical structures of comics, not by parataxis and sequence, which permits of ideas being strung together, and more handled than could be accomplished in a single page or drawing, but by hypotaxis, which can thereby offer judgments and permit represented characters to take attitudes to what is depicted — as well as can the creator. And language is always there to cooperate in the refinement of these 'sub-worlds'.

### **Example: *The Red Sea Sharks***

*The Red Sea Sharks* (here extracted from Hergé 1992, 65–128) offers a pair of interesting illustrations of these modal and projected text-worlds, as well as the logical structures available to comics. Firstly (96), Tintin's dog Snowy is shown to covet a bone guarded by a fierce cat, projected in an image-balloon from his happy face, licking

its lips in a metonym of desire (Figure 61). (It is interesting that it takes a thought-balloon cloud shape, but with a speech connector; Snowy is awarded speech balloons — such as “That’s what he thinks!” on page 97 — which respond to the speech of other characters, but which are never responded to by anyone else. They have thereby a shaky ontological status: speech for Snowy, but just thought as far as others are concerned.) Secondly, a flattened and disembodied head of the cat is depicted alongside Snowy’s face in distress, assumed to be caused by the thought of the cat, in an image otherwise matched in composition to the first, and ‘rankshifted’ by appearing stacked in the space of one tier: what Chavanne would call a ‘fragmented’ construction as discussed above. The paired images recur on the next tier, this time enclosed together (rankshifted again) either side of Snowy’s distressed face — the jaws of the big cat now emphasised. This ‘bifurcating’ structure approaches the either-or logic available to conjunctions linking complexes of clauses.

In the second example (Figure 62), moral judgement accompanies the boulognaic imagination of events, and it is this deontic value that is depicted in projected text-worlds. Captain Haddock desires a drink, simply indicated by its appearance in the foreground, with Haddock’s startled gaze and projected exclamation mark thematised in the upper marginal space (Hergé 1992, 108). In the next panel, again thematised, projected not in an enclosure but in an otherwise unmotivated colour swatch, with an otherwise-impossible image of Haddock as a winged angel, Haddock is dissuaded; angel-Haddock, floating at his shoulder with legs modalised away with dotted line and fading colour, further projects a deontic verbal instruction: “Stay!” The angel’s word balloon is modalised as a cloud, dreamlike, dissimilar to the idiosyncratic balloon shape Hergé typically uses. In the following image, Haddock-as-devil appears, with modalised jagged line delineating his shape and the shape of the word balloon, urging “Go on!” They are in a ship which rocks; the bottle topples and smashes. In a silent final drawing, angel-Haddock smiles, attention drawn to this with emanata as well as upper-left theme placement, and devil-Haddock slides away off right, his expression of dismay reflected in the imagining projector Haddock, in rheme position lower right, closing this neat sequence.

**Figure 61: from *The Red Sea Sharks* (Hergé 1992, 96)**

As Gavins notes (2007, 130–31) the possibility of text-worlds projected by characters causes one to (re)consider the status of the discourse-world narrator as they are realised in the text, and then the text itself. If projected images in enclosures can present the modalised text-worlds of characters, then can we not consider the panel enclosures in which the story is presented the projections of the narrating creator? This possibility is especially marked when we see that extended stories may start in such a projected balloon enclosure, and then, as they extend paratactically, become ‘promoted’ from hypotactically nested world up to the level of the ‘panel sequence’, at which the mainstream of the narrative is presented. Modalisation markers are usually still present in such instances, but not always; and this calls into question the status of the main narrative.

**Figure 62: from *The Red Sea Sharks* (Hergé 1992, 108)**

## Application

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In the following sections I will explore some more examples of a range of issues arising from the hypotactic logical structure of comics. These are selected for concision and availability, from a range of Anglo-European graphic narrative, but these structures may be seen more sparsely distributed through the full gamut of comics texts.

### ***The Arrival: parataxis and hypotaxis in silent comics***

Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* (2007), being a silent text, largely uses parataxis: it eschews the word balloon and the caption, along with most abstract line within the image; even its panel borders (where present) are modalised toward the concrete, appearing as photograph frames or the paper of albums. In this sequence (Figure 63) with a young fellow migrant the travelling protagonist encounters on the boat to a mysterious new world, Tan largely narrates using and-so-then assumptions. After depicting the protagonist sitting on a bench, the second image offers enhancement, relational processes describing the circumstances around him. The hand gestures and open mouths of the characters depict verbal processes, not projected, and we proceed by

identifying difference between panels, alive to mappings that help assert identity. (Tan plays an interesting game with this, implying a more generalised identity in the mapping of gestures vertically in panel 4–6 and 7–9; the hand to heart followed by reaching for identity papers, mirrored by each participant, identifies them as fellows in their journey.) The logics here are that time moves forward, the behaviours of each character is caused by the others' and implies the content of their talk, and of course that this sequence, cohering textually in the colour values, constitutes a whole accreted from its collection of images.

**Figure 63: from *The Arrival* (Tan 2007, n.p.)**

The lower sequence uses parataxis with some concretised hypotaxis to achieve a shift down into a text-world. The ID paper works as an image-within-an-image, even though the borders are not abstract. Each of the three images in the lower tier exclude given material from their margins, and focus on the central section, elaborating and offering more detailed, relational description of the ID paper, and then the girl's face in detail, offering a mental description of her impassive face, her youth, and meeting our gaze, a second-person address form. The grey colour here is picked up on the second page, and fills the border and gutter, the phatic space of contact. This is a signal that the discourse world has shifted downward; we are in the photo-album world of the woman's past. Modalised borders support this world-shift: concretised as stained photograph edges. The paratactic expansion storytelling then continues: she is reading; and-so-then a man reaches for her and she is fearful; as a result of her reading, the book is locked away; and she is given a shovel; and then put to work; and so the story continues.

**Figure 64: from *The Arrival* (Tan 2007, n.p.)**

A second pair of extracts (shown side by side in Figure 64) illustrate how Tan uses hypotaxis, despite not employing the abstract projected enclosure. In the first, an impossible image appears within the image, disrupting the logic of causality on the concrete diegetic plane; a vision of the protagonist's family appears in his suitcase. The

paratactic and-so follow-up shows the protagonist's mental response, his expression looking bewildered at this impossible image (though not shocked, which might be a signal that this was real); the following image, below, shows what is really seen. Note that its features, the white square of cloth, reflect textual properties of the white square of the table, both in matching isometric perspective and size, asserting their identity by spot-the-difference. This little sequence comes close to implying a 'but' adversative relationship; though there is nothing present to distinguish it from 'and': the sequence is extension, the polarity being left to the reader to judge in context.

Finally, Tan uses the drawn image as a substitute for projected speech with abstract enclosures. In the right-hand page sequence, the protagonist 'asks' about lodging, holding up his drawing of a bed as metonym, holding it in front of his mouth, substituting for the verbal process. This concretises the notion of enclosure and projection, and supports the idea that is fundamental to this thesis: that drawing is a parallel of the utterance, a functionally similar mode of communication.

### **Maus: classic metalepsis**

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) famously presents the talk of an Auschwitz survivor in transformed mode as a graphic narrative. Nesting of stories within story is essential to its structure, and Spiegelman uses a range of means to represent this. Throughout, when he depicts his father Vladek's narration of his history, he promotes the story to the level of panelisation, and depicts Vladek narrating in borderless panels at the edges, the drawing entering into the gutter space, the phatic space of contact (e.g. 16–17, 19–22, 25 in the first chapter). The transgression of elements across panel borders into phatic discourse space is fairly frequent, too: a striking instance (102–5) depicts Artie's hand in the lower left corner of the page, bleeding into the physical page border, holding his past work 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet', the entirety of which is reproduced for us with a black border which marks off the status of the text as not a part of the main diegesis. Spiegelman renders the materials of construction of the story into this unbordered discourse space, too: notebooks on pages 112 and 171 are presented outside of panels, as if intruding into the shared discourse-world. Photographs similarly transcend and overlap borders, first on page 19, and culminating in the sequence 274–6, serving a dual purpose: as in Tan, they are markers of memory, of the past; but also, since they are represented as overlapping the abstract borders that mark the level of the diegesis, they

are presented as realia, appearing present in our discourse world, reaching out to touch us (and, unlike in Tan, not partaking in the paratactic expansion of the narrative: world-building more than function-advancing). On 275, the many photos of individuals killed during the war appear to ‘pile up’ at the bottom of the page, mimicking the work of gravity assumed in the shared discourse-world, and drawn right into the margins. This management of levels of reality, and switching up and out of the comics diegesis, is a hallmark of the depth of *Maus*. Most famously, in the ‘Time flies’ sequence (201), Spiegelman changes the narrative level that is depicted in his panels, drawing himself at work on *Maus* as a human in a mouse-mask, with concretised flies buzzing around the dead bodies of human-mice that surround his drawing board. This startling shift of perspective, and the play with the metaphorical realism that it enacts, is an idea I will return to in Chapter 8. On page 207, Spiegelman shifts out of this mode and back into the text-world of Vladek’s experience, presenting first the dialogue emerging from Artie’s tape recorder, nested in speech-balloons modalised as electrical through the use of jagged borders, and then transitioning into the world the tapes describe by depicting Vladek’s speaking head in the first caption halfway down the page.

### **Lentement Aplati par la Consternation: comics as utterances**

Nesting and switching of discourse levels, then, is essential to comics’ ability to present complexities of interaction and sophisticated narratives: it is this hypotactic element, rather than sequence, that allows for such extraordinary density in graphic narrative. A master of this sort of level-switching is Ibn al Rabin, whose abstract work we have already encountered. In his silent narrative *Lentement Aplati par la Consternation* (2013), Rabin presents an elaborate narrative featuring lots of projected mental and verbal content, without using words. Within his projected enclosures, marked by shape and by colour, he presents content as rankshifted panel sequences, often to several iterations. In the example spread shown (Figure 65), Rabin pulls off his most audacious effect. The protagonist, angry at his situation, projects a range of imaginary text-worlds, presenting in his speech-balloons the other characters in compromising positions as insults to them. Sometimes the balloons express deontic worlds: the barman in the top tier indicates a door in his speech balloon, implying that he’d like the angry protagonist to leave. A whole sequence is rankshifted down into a thought-balloon in the fourth tier, representing further text-world of projected

conversation within that. When the woman runs crying from the bar on the second page, the sequence comes to an end. Note that the separation of panels to the upper left and upper right appear to offer alternative routes for a reader, deliberately: it is not necessary to decide a correct order, but rather the separation in space is metaphorical, suggesting distancing from the scene and isolation from the drama that has been enacted. Finally, in a startling world-shift, it is revealed that all this has been a narrative the protagonist has been relating in a cafe to a third party, using the lower edge of a speech balloon enclosure that runs the whole width of the page to mark all that has gone before as the protagonist's projected monologue. In this epiphany, Al Rabin enacts the principle of this thesis: that comics operate as utterances.

**Figure 65: from *Lentement Aplati par la Consternation* (Ibn al Rabin 2013)**

### **Castle Waiting: from word balloons to panels**

Though this is a bravura effect, and it is unusual for comics to present the end of an embedding or projection without indicating its start, the nesting of narratives and switching of levels is typical. Deictic shift theory uses 'push' to indicate when we move downward into the level of projected narrative (promoting it to the level of the text-world), and 'pop' to indicate where we come back up a level, to the text-world in which that sequence has been narrated (see Stockwell 2002, 46–49). What *Lentement Aplati par la Consternation* does is present the 'pop' without the initial 'push'.

**Figure 66: from *Castle Waiting* (Medley 2006, 140, 273)**

Linda Medley's *Castle Waiting* (2006), being a graphic novel of fairy-tales and gossip, serves as a good example of the resources by which this may be done. Page 140 of Volume 1 (to the left of Figure 66) presents the basic format: a rounded-border panel depicts the projected contents of talk, and what begins in hypotactically-presented speech balloons is promoted to the status of caption, with further content as illustration.



Here also a not-infrequent device is used which we have already mentioned in *Maus* (Spiegelman 2003); the representation of a narrating character, commonly as here in theme position upper left, isolated and outside the border of what is about to be told. As the character ‘pops’ up a level into the discourse-world, transgressing the panel-borders, so we ‘push’ down into the text-world she projects, and the story can pick up paratactically narrating the content in a sequence of panels, perhaps with further projection in nested text-balloons within. The second extract from *Castle Waiting* (Medley 2006, 273) begins to illustrate this tactic. Here (to the right of Figure 66) on the third tier the rounded corners appear only at one edge, indicating that the following panels, though they revert to squared borders, have been modalised as projected discourse; support and a reminder is offered by the use of quotation marks around the text that inhabits the panels starting bottom left. This ‘bracketing’ is distinctive to Medley; often colour is used (as we saw in Shaun Tan), or the whole border of the projected panels sustains a change of shape, colour, or line quality, adopting concrete qualities or shifting along an axis of abstraction to track the level at which we are reading.

**Figure 67: from *Castle Waiting* (Medley 2006, 250–51)**

*Castle Waiting* iterates this and produces double nesting. In ‘Solicotine Part 4’ Medley opens with a page asking for a story, and then on page 350 the entire upper border is marked with rounding to indicate that this is the content of the story requested (Figure 67). Lower in the page, a character commences yet another narrative, and the tier opens with a rounded border, pushing down further into the text worlds. (Within that one, still, there is further projected dialogue.) It does not appear to matter whether captions are themselves enclosed or not; they are taken to operate on the shared level of the text-world presented in the images. In some texts, bordering of captions may be used to maintain contact with who is speaking: a colour or border style might be shared with the speaker’s word-balloons at the level above in the narrative. The interpretations are supported by textual, cohesive features: the reference to ‘circus’ in dialogue on page 350 picked up by the depiction of the big top in the following drawing, and the reference to ‘onstage’ in the caption; the continuation of first person pronoun reference forms *I, my, me, us, me, I*, across the last three panels; the sustained semantic field of

*parents, child, children, fosterlings, teenager.* All the functions of comics work together to form the text, and isolation of panel shapes and sequences, insets and nesting in isolation will be insufficient without consideration of these contextualising and supporting factors.

### **Logicomix: the priority of logical relations**

As a final example, fittingly named for the theme of this chapter, these pages from *Logicomix* (Doxiadis and Papadimitriou 2009) illustrate three narrative levels at which the comic works, each distinguished by modalising devices, as well as visual nesting of forms. The novel portrays its own ‘discourse world’, in which the creators are discussing and planning the text, as a represented text-world, using bright colours as in the three panels opening page 230 (Figure 68). Clusters here are quite often unpanelised, and open up into the contact space, though this is not unique to this level of the diegesis. Running alongside this narrative, down a level into a nested text-world, is Bertrand Russell, the subject of the comic, delivering a lecture which narrates his life and thought. Note that here in the final panel, Russell paratactically projects a quotation yet a further level, using the conventions of language, direct reported speech.

On page 231, the content of Russell’s speech takes over the panel space, as we push down into the narrative. The content of his projected word balloons now continue in the captions, continuity indicated graphically by the lower-case marking of his words, as well as continuities of pronoun reference as with Medley above. Visually nested is the world of Jekyll and Hyde, rendered in the cinema poster at first, then as boulognaic/deontic projections of Russell’s mental struggle, modalised in thought-balloon cloud shapes and nested in the lower panel. What is the reading order here? How many of these enclosures are panels? Which are word-balloons, so outside other accounts of page layouts and logical structures of comics? On my view, borders are resources that help with projection of the content; there are a range of clusters depicted here, at least two visually in the first panel, though possibly more depending on one’s judgement of salience; and the placement of the word enclosures also guides the reading eye. When in the order do we ‘read’ the image of Russell, drawn small and with distress emanata marking the emotional value of his reflections, looking down out of the building? Before or after viewing the Jekyll-and-Hyde depictions of him? Before or after reading the word balloons? I do not think this needs to be resolved. That he finds

himself embedded in that situation; between the two alternative extensions, the either-or; that the self-images are not part of the diegesis but modalised as mental, nested projections of the contents of his thought; these are the salient features of the text that the reader is to grasp. It is logical structure, and narrative status, that is at stake here, rather than sequence: hypotaxis rather than parataxis.

**Figure 68: from *Logicomix* (Doxiadis and Papadimitriou 2009, 230–31)**

## Summary

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This chapter has explored the logical function of graphic narrative, a second component of ideation alongside the experiential component. The logical function governs the relative status of elements of the text, and in combination with the other metafunctions, especially the experiential function that forms the second half of ideation, helps graphic narrative to construe experience, and to manage the reader's understanding of the text. The logical relationship of one element to another is what is at stake here, and I have stressed the hypotactic nature of comics, particularly its ability to project nested 'text-worlds', over against the paratactic sequentiality of the medium. To be sure, parataxis is a crucial component of the logic of comics, and the assumptions of conjunctive relations between panels in sequence, reflected by assumed relations in language, is essential to following the narratives presented. This set of logical assumptions — and, so, then — suitably cohere with the pragmatic principles of comics readership encountered earlier in this thesis: the maxims of comics, additive synecdoche, identity, continuities of time and place, and a presumption of causality. Parataxis rests on adjacency and sequence, and so we have considered some approaches to determining sequence in graphic narrative structures. I have offered some critiques of existing approaches, in that they operate largely at the level of the panel, rather than considering lower levels of organisation in the rank structure of graphic narrative, and that they prioritise determinate order over understanding of dependencies. I described the 'cluster' as a potential unit of reading analysis, and have argued that enclosures are always already 'speech balloons', in that they outline and project text-worlds. Transgressions beyond enclosing borders may be used to indicate immediacy, contact, a reaching-out of textual elements into the phatic space of communion between creator and reader, the 'discourse world' in which both collaboratively make meanings. The nested structure of comics

discourse, its ability to present worlds within worlds, and to shift from one level to another, was presented as an essential resource of comics meaning-making.

# 8

## Coda: Metaphor, magic and making meanings

### Introduction

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Foundational to this thesis has been the principle that graphic narrative is ‘metonymic’: that the text is accreted from fragments of meaning, at the level of the cluster, whether arranged paratactically or hypotactically. In this final chapter I would like to turn to types of metaphor rather than metonym, and consider ways in which these contribute to the making of meaning in comics. Firstly we will briefly make the distinction between the two tropes, and point out that in comics metonymy is fundamental. Then we will explore different types of metaphor in comics, leading from the notion of ‘grammatical metaphor’, which is less well considered in the literature on visual metaphor. This will take us to the idea of grammaticalisation in the comics image, comparable to the transformation of metaphor from ‘live’ to ‘dead’. Then we will settle on metaphor in its traditional meaning, and consider how it has been applied to images and used in comics. I will argue that metaphor is also essential to comics, and tentatively draw a connection between the literary concept of ‘magic realism’ and the mode in which comics operate.

I will sum up the thesis by offering a close reading of some short graphic narrative, employing all the ideas we have encountered to describe how the comic works. This will lead to a recap of the main arguments of the thesis, and a brief outline of possible future directions in which this framework could be pursued.

### From Metonymy to Metaphor

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I wish to approach the notion of metaphor in comics from a variety of angles, considering metonymy, grammatical metaphor, and visual metaphor. Traditional accounts of metaphor, such as I.A. Richards’ tenor-and-vehicle description, derive from

Aristotle (Richards 1965, 89–90), and focus on the use of metaphor in language, specifically literary language. Metaphor has often been taken to be a matter of words, in particular, the substitution of one word for another: a use of an inapposite or ‘foreign’ word to denote a thing ‘impertinently’ (Ricoeur 1979, 143–44). Nelson Goodman speaks of metaphors as “teaching an old word new tricks—of applying an old label in a new way” (Goodman 1976, 69). This is of course a metaphorical way of speaking itself; as Wayne Booth notes, criticism of metaphorical works may itself entail the use of metaphor (in S. Sacks 1979, 64). For Ricoeur, metaphor is not just a matter of denomination but of predication: he takes the work of metaphor to lie in the copular *to be*. But metaphor can appear in other predications than that of identity: it can arise from speaking of one subject in terms of another, using other verbs than the copular to apply to it. Booth’s view (S. Sacks 1979, 47–70) is that metaphor is dependent on context and usage; that it is the interaction between the producer of the metaphor and the audience for it that makes the metaphor do its work. This notion of *interaction* in metaphor suggests its pragmatic nature, a notion that will be pursued below in the application of metaphor to the visual. Much recent work on metaphor (including Lakoff and Johnson 2003; Turner 1998; Fauconnier and Turner 2003; and Kövecses 2010) has treated it not as a linguistic matter alone, but as a conceptual, cognitive operation, thereby available to the visual and to other transformations, for instance in grammatical forms. Not only words, but conceptual ‘domains’ interact with one another to produce the work of metaphor.

Sister to the trope of metaphor is that of *metonymy*. I have invoked metonymy throughout this thesis, implicitly using it to mean the representation of experience by depiction of a part of that experience. In this, I use the concept similarly to the related concept of synecdoche. This principle, that a whole is represented by being split into representative parts, and that these parts collaboratively contribute to a whole — with the concurrent principle that any part is always to be considered in relation to a whole, and treated as an inescapable part of it, always deferring meaning to the collective whole — was taken to be an underpinning principle to the ‘pragmatics of comics’ that emerged from reading abstract comics in the prelude. I have been somewhat loose, then, with my use of ‘metonymy’ so far, and should here explore the concept more closely, relating it to and separating it from the concept of metaphor.

Kövecses (2010, 174–77) stresses that metonyms operate by *contiguity*, whereas metaphors operate by *similarity*. Some of his account of the differences between the two are more salient for us than others. He includes:

- **Similarity** versus **Contiguity**: this stresses that there is a material or proximal connection between the part and the whole;
- **Two Domains** versus **One Domain**: metonymy does not depend on depicting one thing *as* another from a different semantic or conceptual domain;
- **Understanding** versus **Directing Attention**: the role of metonymy is to focus the attention rather than explain relationships;
- **Same Realm** versus **Distinct Realms**: metonymy can occur between form and referent as well as between concepts.

Metonymy is taken to display the second quality in each of Kövecses' pairs. In the way I treat visual metonymy of comics, the material or proximal connection is key; comics may often depict characters by drawing just a part of them, and the whole is to be understood (see McCloud 1993, 61, 63). Whilst a character may be portrayed as something it is not (as in anthropomorphism), this contributes its metaphorical content; drawing just a character's beak or claw exploits the metonymic function. The use of metonymy to direct attention is particularly key: this runs throughout comics, where enclosures draw attention to particular elements of an image — strikingly in inset panels, or in the metonymic trope of 'aspect-to-aspect transitions', the handling of scene description by paratactic sequences of relational panels. The realms distinction may be taken to be in play in types of modality, for example where normally abstract properties of the comics signifier is taken to be a concrete item in diegesis — a border is leant on, a balloon picked up. Perhaps also one might include work where the material qualities of line itself takes on significant functions, as in the expressive brushwork of Baudoin (e.g., Baudoin 1996; 1999; 2007) or abstract comics (see Molotiu 2009).

### **Three types of metonymy in comics images**

I suggest three types of metonymy in comics images, based on ways in which the part is separated from the whole:

1. The division by **border**. Elements of the subject are cropped out by the framing lines. We may see only a head, a hand, a torso, an eye. Hints in the images — colours, textures, line styles — enable us to piece together these fragments to perceive a whole character. Eisner (2008a) discusses this, though he suggests that a reader ‘fills in’ what is missing (as McCloud sometimes does), rather than understanding the figure to be represented metonymically — or to be found elsewhere in the work on which the image depends, perhaps by accretion of yet more metonymic representations, a matter of cohesion.

2. The division by **angle**. The subject is viewed from the front, the rear, a semi-profile, from above, from afar in context. These multiple perspectives in consecutive panels give us a three-dimensional perception of the characters in their space, even coupled with the ellipsis of background or detail in certain views. Some participants may typically only be viewed from one angle, such that elements of them are never seen, yet are still taken to exist.

3. The division over **time**. We only view fragments of whole motions or events: their beginnings, their crux moments, a montage of different stages of action superimposed or otherwise sharing the same space in a panel. The step to the door, the turning of the handle, the look behind, the speech to the onlooker, are all moments in a sequence which may co-appear in the same drawing, or be rendered separately in a sequence of panels. On a larger scale, the whole narrative may be an assemblage of scenes or moments from which we infer a whole (see Genette 1983 on the management of time in narrative). This is a slight stretch of the notion of metonym: applying it to time rather than space.

The comics text is pieced together by means of (re)assembling these metonymic fragments which appear in context with each other, to create a sense of plenitude generated from this multiplicity of views, angles, elements and moments. There are



repeated fragments, motifs and sub-elements, and well as verbal co-reference, which tie these fragments together across panels and image-complexes. The reader is recruited in the ‘jigsawing’ game of construing the world built by the comic and the story it tells.

### **Metaphor: from concrete to abstract**

Metonymy, whilst key to comics production, is not its only trope. The flip side of Kövecses’ (2010) definition above is this: that metaphors operate by employing images, words or concepts from a *different* domain to the one that is to be represented, in order to guide the reader’s understanding of the target concept by drawing attention to *similarities* made salient by the mapping of that concept to the ‘source’ which is used. This mapping or ‘translation’ from one thing to another is metaphor’s distinctive action.

Kövecses points out that metaphors are commonly a means for expressing the *abstract* in terms of the *concrete*. He lists a number of ‘source domains’, the vehicles or imagery of metaphor, and ‘target domains’, the tenor of a metaphor, what is meant by the use of the source (2010, 17). Common source domains include:

- |                               |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. The Human Body             | 8. Money & Economic Transactions |
| 2. Health and Illness         | 9. Cooking and Food              |
| 3. Animals                    | 10. Heat and Cold                |
| 4. Plants                     | 11. Light and Darkness           |
| 5. Buildings and Construction | 12. Forces                       |
| 6. Machines and Tools         | 13. Movement and Direction       |
| 7. Games and Sport            |                                  |

Some of these seem especially concrete in the sense of ‘depictable’ things: the body, animals, plants, buildings, food, light and darkness. It is tempting already to think of the use of some of these in animal stories such as *Maus* (Spiegelman 2003) or the physicalisation of comics as objects in *Building Stories* (Ware 2012) or even *The House That Groaned* (Fransman 2012).

Abstract target domains include:

- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Emotion        | 8. Human Relationships |
| 2. Desire         | 9. Communication       |
| 3. Morality       | 10. Time               |
| 4. Thought        | 11. Life and Death     |
| 5. Society/Nation | 12. Religion           |
| 6. Politics       | 13. Events and Action  |
| 7. Economy        |                        |

There is some crossover here (economics, forces–games–actions), but it is striking how many of these domains have specific abstract conventions ready to express them in graphic narrative. We have seen the use of modalisation and abstract enclosures to manage the first four, along with communication; and have noted the common mapping of time to space in comics. But the range of possibilities for graphic narrative suggested here by these domains is open-ended, and there is room for improvisation, and for transformation of a given image trope from concrete signification to abstract signification, as well as re-mappings of domains from one to the other. It will be useful below to recap the dimensions of abstraction from Chapter 5, and to consider the ways in which metaphor can work a) within the abstract structures of comics, b) to transform concrete depictions to metaphors for abstraction, and finally into abstract conventions, and c) in more overt ways throughout a comics text, as well as covertly: a metaphor which underlies the medium, which may be taken for granted, and which may be perceived as ‘inactive’, though we might reactivate the metaphor along the ‘dynamic’ lines suggested by Cornelia Müller (2008).

### ***Three types of metaphor in comics***

In comics, we can see this mapping of one thing to another as process of *construal*: depicting one thing *as* another. In Halliday’s terms, to *construe* meanings is both to reflect and construct the experience of the speaker or creator by realising that experience with the available resources for meaning-making. This may operate at three levels: on the level of the resources themselves, the ‘grammatical’ structures of comics; on the level of transfer between the concrete and the abstract, carried out over time; and at the level of the straightforward representation of one participant by drawing it as

another participant. These break down as follows, and I will tackle each in the following sections:

- **Grammatical metaphor** — the usage of the different resources of comics to construe meanings for which they are not typically used;
- **Grammaticalisation** — the shift from a concrete representation of something in comics to its codification and conventionalisation as an abstract usage, along the clines of abstraction;
- **Visual metaphor** — the punctual or sustained depiction of something in comics as what it cannot literally be, enough to prompt a reanalysis of that depiction as conceptually metaphorical.

### **Grammatical metaphor**

This is perhaps not the most familiar mode of metaphor, but I wish to start here because of its connection to the logical structures of comics treated in the last chapter, and the related idea of ‘rankshifting’ as a choice in comics discourse. Considering these as a kind of metaphor gives an interesting way to discuss choices of layout and organisation that suggests their motivation and the upshot of choices, beyond a descriptive taxonomy. The distribution of resources to meanings does not follow fixed rules, but may take marked/unmarked options.

Halliday notes that construing experience is already metaphorical, since “it involves transforming the material into the semiotic”. This ‘transformation’ is at the heart of what metaphor does. Traditionally scholarly focus has been on lexical transformations, but Halliday wishes to consider the possibility of ‘grammatical transformations’: whereas lexical metaphor is using the same signifier with a different signified, grammatical metaphor is using different signifiers to capture the same signified (Halliday 2006, 56). Halliday separates the possibilities for this shift in signifiers into two types. Firstly, the wordings used to construe the signified may move ‘vertically’ in rank: a sequence construed as a clause, or a clause as a group, for instance. Secondly, wordings may move ‘across’ in function/class: from process to thing, from participant to circumstance, and so on. In this way, grammatical metaphor is a “remapping of the semantics onto the lexicogrammar”, a ‘reconstrual’ of experience (56–8).

Halliday comments that this is typical of the language of science: that it converts experience into “virtual objects” that can then take part in “chains of reasoning” (60–1). With Matthiessen (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 698–719) he distinguishes interpersonal metaphor and ideational metaphor. Interpersonal metaphor tends to ‘upgrade’ the domain’s grammatical realisation, adding appraisals via levels of nesting within modalising frameworks such as ‘I think...’ or ‘It is probable...’. Ideational metaphor tends to work in the opposite direction, ‘downgrading’ in this process towards nominalisation, whereby sequences of figures become groups that may take part in other figures and sequences, taxonomising experience and making it available for theoretical manipulation. (719–20) They note that in language, this dichotomy reflects a tendency that distinguishes speech from writing: that speech tends to follow the interpersonal pattern, to become more elaborate in structure, more “grammatically intricate”, whereas the written mode tends towards the more compressed, or “lexically dense” (726). How much one makes of ‘metaphorisation’ is up to the needs of the analyst; it may be enough to note the existence of metaphor, or it may be worth pursuing what other, perhaps more ‘congruent’, forms might have been used (730–1).

A sort of grammatical metaphor can occur across a number of resources of graphic narrative. These reflect Halliday’s observation that grammatical metaphor can take place a) ‘vertically’ across the rank structure of language, and b) ‘horizontally’ across the system.

#### A) Structural enclosures (ranks):

- Balloon → panel (a ‘word balloon’ may take up a whole panel)
- Panel → page (a single panel may take up a full page)
- Panel → tier (a panel may be subdivided to take up a page width)
- Tier → panel (a tier’s worth of action compressed into a panel)

and occasionally

- Panel → balloon (a panel’s worth of material shifted into a balloon)
- Page → panel (whole page layouts presented within panels)
- Balloon → tier or page (what begins in a balloon extends into sequence)

This incorporates many of the resources of rankshifting and hypotaxis discussed in Chapter 7 on the logical structures of comics. This may be viewed as grammatical

metaphor: promoting a panel to the scale of the page (a ‘splash page’) emphasises its importance; breaking down an image into an array of metonymic panels emphasises a focus on details; compressing a sequence of panels into the space of a single panel, or a page’s worth of panels into a tier, may stress speed, detail, complexity of a task, heightened focus, or all of these: commonly dance is rankshifted down into a panel, a number of poses of the body presented side-by-side, unpanellised, in a single enclosure, suggesting that the sequence of movements is integral as one action, to be contained in one enclosure. (See the example in Figure 69 below.)

**Figure 69: from *Polina* (Vivès 2011, 51)**

Interpersonal visual metaphor works by ‘upgrading’, rankshifting upwards the content, such that what might normally be rendered in an image is rendered in a sequence or constellation of images; this admits of modalisation and appraisal of each segment of the whole. Ideational metaphor tends the other way: that sequences are compressed into single images, so that within a single enclosure, or image, multiple states are represented as co-present. This may be the superimposed head-turn (two positions of a character’s head drawn on top of one another, to signify within one drawing the turn of the character’s head), or the dancer sequence, or the network diagram of relationships in complex action (as in, e.g., Ware 2001).

The process of ‘nominalisation’ observed in language, in the sense of a shift from another class to the class of ‘nouns’, is less easy to see in visual resources. My reading of the realisation of ideation has focussed on the process, rather than participants, as a deliberate move over against a tendency to look at *things* depicted in graphic narrative as opposed to events and relations. This still leaves space to observe grammatical metaphor as a shifting of representation from using one, more congruent resource, to another, as presented in the diagram of resources to render processes (Figure 10).

#### B) Translations around the process diagram: process type metaphor

- A series of actions may be represented diagrammatically, using resources of abstract line to present them as relational processes: Ware (2001);

- What might be a single relational description may be dispersed among several relational panels, to work by difference: Crumb's *Bo Bo Bolinsky* (R Crumb 1998, 78);
- Mental processes that might congruently be rendered in a word balloon may be presented as figures composed in space, real or otherwise: Haddock's angel (Hergé 1992, 108), Trondheim and Garcia's use of backgrounds as implying mental processes (Trondheim and Garcia 2006, 10), Baudoin's opened heads (Baudoin 1996).

As we can see, these ideas have already been discussed in Chapters 4–7 using the frameworks presented so far. The approach of grammatical metaphor presents an alternative way of viewing them: as motivated and creative acts, which may carry meanings through their divergent choices, rather than simply existing neutrally as resources on which a creator may draw. The option, when faced with a need to describe a place, to present it via promotion of the panel to the space of a whole page is a distinctly different choice of metaphor from choosing to present it as a series of metonymic miniatures. The two approaches play different interpersonal games with the reader: the large, detailed page engaging in a Where's-Wally close scrutiny of the image, and the metonymic jigsawing-together of a space challenging the reader to mental construction, and imposing perhaps a particular sequence of looking: a sense of guidance or transport through a space, rather than a challenge to explore it independently. Both these metaphors, these translations, embody a 'straining-to-express' that would not be communicated by drawing the image in a single-panel 'establishing shot' borrowed from film; though that, too, is an option.

### **Grammaticalisation**

If grammatical metaphor presents a form of *synchronic* variation in a system of meaning-making, then 'grammaticalisation' represents a *diachronic* change, as forms transform over time (see Hopper and Traugott 2003, 2). Halliday represents the development of 'unfolding' of language as occurring on three possible scales: 'logogenesis', the unfolding and development of a text or instance of discourse; 'ontogenesis', the development of language in the individual, which is to say the process of language acquisition, what Halliday characterises as 'learning to mean'; and

‘phylogenesis’, the development of the language system as a whole over generations, whereby the society of users collectively alter their usage practice, and so languages shift, transform, and split into dialects (Halliday and Matthiessen 2006, 17–18). The upshot of these three approaches for graphic narrative is apparent. One might trace the variations of usage within a single text, an idea which reflects Miodrag’s notion of a ‘*langue* of the text’ (Miodrag 2013). One might track the changing approaches taken by a single creator, especially where they have ‘learned on the job’: such transformations are salient in David Petersen’s *Mouse Guard* (2007) or Dave Sim’s *Cerebus* (1991), for instance. And one might take on the bigger challenge of tracking the gradual transformation of comics resources over time, across whole cultures; some work has been done on the development of word balloons, for instance (Smolderen 2006; Forceville, Veale, and Feyaerts 2010; Smolderen 2014, 137–47).

I do not propose to attempt that challenge here, but offer an account of the sorts of grammatical changes that have been observed in language, and then suggest some mappings to categories of graphic narrative, to outline a framework for lines of research that might be pursued.

‘Grammaticalization’ was first coined by French linguist Antoine Meillet in 1912 (Hopper and Traugott 2003, 19). It is concerned with “how lexical items come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions... It highlights the tension between the fixed and the less fixed in language” (1–2). That notion of fixity and openness will be one of the bases on which I apply the notion to the resources of graphic narrative; the other is a mapping of the notion of lexical ‘content’ vs grammatical ‘function’ to ‘representational/concrete’ vs ‘abstract’, as discussed in earlier chapters. Grammaticalised form here, as in language, can be characterised as a shift from content role to functional role (4).

Jean Aitchison characterises grammaticalisation as a ‘pruning-down process’, a natural process of great importance to language change (Aitchison 2013, 114–15). She suggests three kinds of change that might be observed in language:

1. Semantic reduction or ‘desemanticization’, also referred to as ‘bleaching’,  
‘weakening of meaning’
2. Grammatical reduction or ‘decategorialization’, also spoken of as ‘loss of word  
status’

### 3. Phonetic reduction, loss of phonetic substance

The third cannot apply directly to visual forms, though a similar graphological or visual reduction may appear in gradual ellipsis or simplification of rendering styles. The second similarly refers specifically to words, though we might substitute ‘word status’ for ‘picture status’ or for a concrete/abstract distinction. The first, a loss of meaning, whereby an element moves along a cline from signifying to non-signifying, may recall to mind the clines of abstraction used in previous chapters.

We established earlier that four dimensions of abstraction can be used to suggest a set of ‘clines’ of abstraction along which elements of comics can be placed. It is possible to arrange the conventionalised resources of comics along these dimensions, according to the degree of abstraction or otherwise along the four axes of abstraction. For simplicity’s sake, in the proposals below, I largely treat these dimensions as binaries, but in fact, as indicated in their schematisation in the diagram (reproduced in Figure 70), each has its own cline, and instances vary along those clines as a resource of modality. These placements may be considered as starting points.

**Panel borders:** *non-specific, conceptual, non-mimetic, non-signifying*. (The last two may vary for modal effect.)

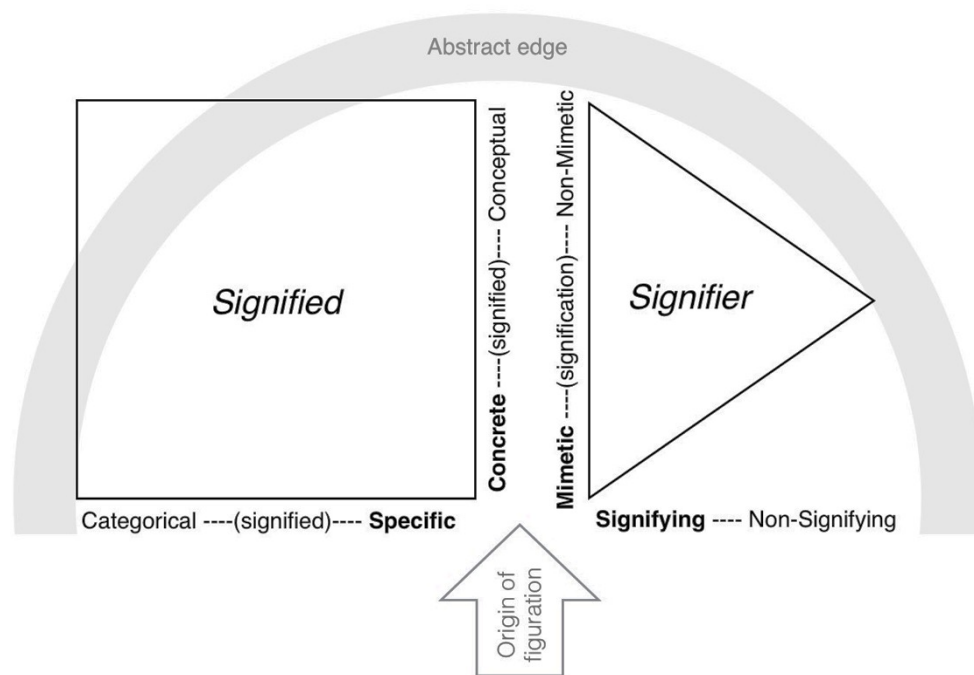
**Balloon borders:** *non-specific, conceptual, non-mimetic*, signifying (they indicate projected content) — may acquire other qualities for modal effect. I have argued that panel borders can be seen as projecting the creator’s (or enunciator’s) content, thus effacing the distinction here.

**Arrows and linkers:** *non-specific, conceptual, non-mimetic*, signifying (relational processes, and perhaps other types such as behavioural or material)

**Motion lines:** *non-specific, conceptual*, but mimetic, signifying (the mimesis is metaphorical, transferring signifiers of motion from other domains)

**Emanata:** *Conceptual*, specific or non-specific (they may project unique content), mimetic or symbolic, signifying





**Figure 70: Diagram of clines of abstraction**

**Concrete line:** specific, concrete, mimetic, signifying. Schematisation may lead to modal non-specificity (e.g., stick-figures); modal line qualities such as incidental or deliberate indexical qualities may be non-concrete; figures may have symbolic significance in addition to their figural existence (a rose, present in the diegesis, also emblematic of love by metonymy or metaphor); and finally, the marks, signifying as they are, will also carry some qualities and pleasures by their mere being (for example, the fetishisation of Crumb's cross-hatching).

These same clines from concrete to abstract can be used to describe the *transformation* of conventions of comics, through their innovation as a more or less concrete mode of representing that some thing is in motion, for example, and then the same rendering's removal from its original context, its *abstraction*, to apply in a non-diegetic, non-concrete way to a comparable motion in another context. This move from the concrete, figurative, representational to the abstract, categorical, functional mirrors the process of grammaticalisation in language, where lexical items take on functional roles and are blanched of their concrete meanings: as in *going to* for future reference rather than physical motion through space, or *bags of* to mean 'large quantity' in all circumstances, including the nonphysical.

More generally, grammaticalisation in graphic narrative can be described as the following:

- Movement from overtly marked features to assumptions (instead of arrows and numbering, an assumed reading order). This reflects Aitchison's (2013) 'loss of substance', a 'pruning-down process', and the role of pragmatics in grammaticalisation noted by Hopper and Traugott (2003, 71–98).
- Movement from concrete images understood to represent literal things mimetically, to abstract images understood to communicate a concept, verb or other immaterial notion (the cloud of dust/smoke and tracks of motion to represent rapid travel of anything). This reflects 'grammatical reduction', the 'loss of word status', taken here to mean loss of literal, concrete representational status. It also may rest on pragmatic inferencing, in particular the invocation of a maxim of 'causality' to account for materially-impossible images by a shift of perceived reality status.
- 'Stylisation': simplification, increasing ellipsis of detail, conventionalisation whereby drawings are imitative of other drawings, rather than of an original in experience (development of the word enclosure from scroll or cloud of breath into caption and balloon). This brings together both of the above: loss of substance, increasing abstraction.
- Conventionalisation of metaphor by re-use, and blanching of meaning (seeing stars → any mental dizziness → any pain) This reflects the 'bleaching' in Aitchison's third category.

A future study might explore the progress within a corpus, whether ontogenetic or phylogenetic, of an image across these dimensions. The specific, mimetic representation of breath clouds in the air become the stylised, general, conventional depiction of enclosures that are understood to contain projected contents of a speech act: the verbiage of a verbal process. The specific, concrete, mimetic depiction of clouds of dust kicked up by a horse galloping across a desert, or the fumes of a car exhaust, become the simplified, stylised motion lines that indicate a fast-running human being, not taken

to be concrete or present. The splash pattern generated by the impact of an object in sand or water is used to render any impact, including metaphorical ‘shock’. These may be transferred from one domain to another, so that the same pattern is used for a word-balloon or panel enclosure. These are ‘just-so stories’ at present, suggested here as possible patterns. Tracing through a corpus may confirm or disconfirm these conjectures. There is room also for some more specific exploration of systems of grammaticalisation, such as reanalysis or analogy (Hopper and Traugott 2003, 39–70).

### **Towards a visual metaphor**

This transference from domain to domain brings us to the final, central notion to be explored here: that of visual metaphor, whereby the drawing of one thing counts as a representation of another, particularly for the concrete to the abstract: for example, when a surprise (conceptual, mental, abstract) is depicted with the trappings of an impact of a solid object into a surface (material, concrete, spatial). I will offer a very brief overview of some work done on visual metaphor so far, and comment on the importance of this possibility to the resources of meaning making in comics.

Max Black (1955) describes the two traditional views of metaphor as the ‘substitution view’, wherein a word is used in place of another which would bear a more lucid, literal meaning, in which case metaphor is a form of ‘catachresis’; and the ‘comparison view’, wherein metaphor is a reduced simile, asserting literally but elliptically that one thing is like another. He contrasts this with his own take, which he calls an ‘interaction view’. This suggests not that one term substitutes in place of another, nor that a comparison is asserted on singular grounds, whether explicit or inexplicit, but that the two ‘ideas’ of a metaphor — the ‘principal’ subject that is being predicated about, and the ‘subsidiary’ subject used to ascribe qualities to it — are brought into interaction with one another, mutually filtering their associated meanings and producing a complex set of relations which cannot be substituted by any literal paraphrase. It is Black’s model that is later used by Forceville (1998) in describing visual metaphor in advertising, which I will discuss below.

In moving from language to images, it becomes especially important to conceive of metaphor as not a matter of words but one of ideas. Zoltán Kövecses makes a fundamental distinction between metaphorical linguistic expressions and conceptual metaphor (Kövecses 2010, 4), drawing on the work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003).

Conceptual metaphor is a set of in-principle ‘mappings or correspondences’ (Kövecses 2010, 7) between domains of thought, worked out in detail in conceptual blending diagrams, which feature a ‘generic space’ of general categories, into which elements of two domains may be classified, such that when they are brought to bear one onto the other, an image of specific correspondences may be pieced together between them (Kövecses 2010, 272–73, 280–81, 316, 319; from Turner 1998; Fauconnier and Turner 2003, etc.). This opens the door for “nonlinguistic realisations of conceptual metaphors” (Kövecses 2010, 63–75); this includes ‘cartoons’, briefly mentioned by Kövecses (64). Work has been done on the representation of anger in comics along these lines (Forceville 2012).

Charles Forceville’s prominent treatment of visual metaphor (Forceville 1998) builds on Max Black’s interaction model. He critiques a number of approaches to metaphor, including challenges to Black; but finds that the two-term model proposed by Black (using the revised terms ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ subject) meets the criteria required for a theory of pictorial metaphor best (Forceville 1998, 64). He adopts a pragmatics of implicature (91–2) to assist with his theory; he uses Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), which derives from Grice (1975). As I have mentioned, Sperber and Wilson’s notion of relevance is often taken to supersede Grice, in that it boils down his several maxims, the distinction between which they dispute, to a single principle of relevance. We have seen that Saraceni in his thesis on comics (2000) follows them, proposing a general principle of ‘relatedness’ as a source of cohesion in graphic narrative. I have preferred Grice’s multi-part model: I find that the specific categories of assumption do make useful distinctions, even if they are indeed subcategories of the general principle of relation; and, in comics, the Kantian categories of identity, time, space and causality are useful ways of carving up the assumptions readers carry to the text. Forceville’s texts are print advertisements; and no doubt for him, the general principle of ‘relevance’ is more flexible than the somewhat narrative categories I have adopted.

Forceville categorises types of visual metaphor in advertising. The first is ‘substitution’ metaphors, with “one pictorially present term”, where an image stands where another otherwise would (corroborated by context). He finds that in this case, the *primary* subject (the one that is the ‘target’ or ‘tenor’ of the metaphor) is the one visually depicted. The second type features two images blended; in this case, either could be construed as primary or secondary, and the focus of the verbal text settles

which is the primary target. (I would account for this by identifying points of cohesion between the verbal text and the image.) A third type shows two images side-by-side, usefully characterised as ‘visual similes’. Supporting text is likewise needed to distinguish primary from secondary subject here. Finally, ‘verbo-pictorial’ combinations present one term visually, and the other in text, finding that usually the product advertised is the visually-represented target. The underlying principle of known intentionality — the intention to advertise — is taken to underpin interpretations here as in Sperber and Wilson’s underpinning communicative intention, a principle shared by Grice’s model (Forceville 1998, 162–64 provides a summary). For Forceville, this pragmatic intention is what distinguishes the legibility of advertising metaphor from the more uncertain and challenging notion of metaphor in art, where he takes ‘intention’ to be essentially opaque (Forceville 1998, 201–2). Narrative, as in film, he allows to be in principle readable too: ‘story’ is sufficiently constrained a purpose to carry this intentionality (202–3).

Forceville’s insights, then, seem transferable to graphic narrative: images may appear one in place of another, or blended, drawn as one, or depicted in parallel, or even appearing alongside a text that is cohesive, in order to prompt the reader to apply a pragmatics of interpretation, to seek the interactions between the primary and secondary terms. The specifics Forceville sees in advertising may not hold the same in graphic narrative; for instance, the assumption that the depicted image is the primary target rather than the secondary source will not hold necessarily, evident from the reasoning behind it (the depiction of the ‘product’ so that the potential ‘buyer’ may appraise it). In graphic narrative, the target participant may be ‘drawn-as’ a metaphorical object or creature — see the example of birds drawn as cooked chicken in Lutes’ *Jar of Fools* (2008) from Chapter 6 on cohesion (Figure 46 on page 187), or, of course, the central metaphor in *Maus* (Spiegelman 2003). This notion of ‘drawing-as’ is key to Nelson Goodman’s conception of metaphor; he takes visual metaphor “of course” to be a “nonverbal label... applied metaphorically, say in a cartoon of a politician as a parrot, or of a despot as a dragon” (Goodman 1976, 84). This reflects Goodman’s useful view of depiction not as the reflection of an existing object mimetically, but as creation, of a ‘unicorn-picture’ or a ‘desk-picture’. Goodman’s claim that representations are “pictures that function in somewhat the same way as descriptions” (30–1) chimes with the argument I am making in this thesis, particularly the claim for ‘relational process drawings’ as acts of description.

As Goodman notes (68–9), metaphors may ‘freeze’, change over time, lose their novelty, as we have noted above in the process of grammaticalisation: they become ‘blanched’ of their metaphoricity and are taken to be transparent. Nonetheless, as Cornelia Müller (2008) argues, metaphors do not simply die or freeze; they may be ‘awakened’ from their ‘sleep’, become activated in certain circumstances — particularly when accompanied by or expressed in images. Graphic narratives may draw on linguistic metaphor, or conceptual metaphor, whether ‘alive’ or ‘dead’, and make them vivid by depiction.

### ***‘Magical realism’***

The availability of metaphor to graphic narrative, by means of substitution, drawing-as, the invention of hybridised images, parallel constrictions, and more, offers a further means of translating the abstract into the concrete, a creative resource for comics to represent experience, to make meanings. I propose that this mode of creation is endemic to comics, with their fantastical beings, personified animals, impossible images, co-composed abstractions, constant challenges to the assumption of causality promoting leaps into the metaphorical along the lines that Forceville has proposed. The mode of comics is a sort of ‘magical realism’, a mode that

facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds — in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism (Zamora and Faris 1995, 5–6).

Zamora and Faris comment that “magical realism is a mode suited to exploring — and transgressing — boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic” (Zamora and Faris 1995, 5). Magical realism breaks down assumptions of rationalism and literary realism, and refashions boundaries between “mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female” (6). The term emerges from post-expressionist art in Weimar Germany, expressive caricatures of the mundane; and then again in *‘lo real*

*marvailloso*’, the specific form it has evolved in south America, tied in this literary sense to the conditions and politics of the place and period in the mid twentieth century. But magical realism, perhaps because of these disparate roots, has been applied to a range of literary forms (see Delbaere-Garant 1995) including postmodern reworkings of fairy tale (Faris 1995), and can be characterised as innovating narrative form and unsettling assumptions (Zamora and Faris 1995, 500). This makes it an appropriate description to apply to graphic narrative: “presenting fictional worlds that are multiple, permeable, transformative, animistic”. It may be used to make the fantastic seem real, and present the real as fantastic; and the political potential so evident in magical realist texts is available to comics too.

## Close Readings

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To bring together all that has been discussed so far, I will use the framework of comics meaning-making I have outlined to describe two contrasting short graphic narrative texts, both of which may be seen as ‘magical realist’ in different ways. They were produced within a decade of each other, one emerging from confessional ‘underground comix’ traditions, the other from a more mainstream superhero/dark fantasy tradition — though both are from creators who might be considered ‘auteurs’. My readings will employ terms and concepts from all the frameworks covered in the thesis.

### **Phoebe Gloeckner: *A Periodic Fantasy***

Phoebe Gloeckner writes about her experiences growing up in a situation of domestic abuse, finding her changing body and emergence into sexuality troubling and threatened by adults, including her stepfather. He appears in her comics under many guises; she represents her own experience through ‘Minnie’, “a child of approximately eight years, who lives with her mother, sister and stepfather” (10). ‘A Periodic Fantasy’ (Figure 71) is classified among “Other Childish Stories” in the extended collection of *A Child’s Life*; it also appeared in R. Crumb’s *Weirdo* (#24) and the anthology *Twisted Sisters*.

In theme position, upper left, an inset appears, with printed material from a book Minnie is reading, entitled ‘A Girl’s Body’. The main title is also thematised at the top, in the upper left panel, as is typical for one-page comics; both title and inset spill out

into the discourse-world, transgressing the enclosure borders. The book is centralised as the ‘new’ information, focalised in this opening panel, with Minnie holding and reading, material processes. The relational processes, describing her body, are also key here; and in rheme position, backgrounded but given prominent relational drawing, are the toys and dolls she stands among. Faces are prominent in the number of clusters on show here: the staring and smiling faces of the toys contrast with Minnie’s frown of concentration, composed close to the book, and the abstract line of the arrow, pointing up to the enclosed content in a relational process of identity. Projected, then, in the nested text-world of the book, the border modalised as a perfect circle (in contrast to the hand-drawn, rounded rectangles that mark the main text-world) to indicate its serious, adult properties — perhaps even ideationally signifying a ‘microscope’ to lend scientific connotations — is a range of wording, not presented as full sentences, rendered as a serif typeface, again marking its modality not as a spoken text (spoken wordings are hand-lettered) but as an object. The semantic fields presented are striking and will recur later in the images, marking textual cohesion as well as topical ideation: ‘drowsy’, ‘little’; ‘blossom’ and ‘flower’; ‘breasts’ and ‘hair’.

**Figure 71: ‘A Periodic Fantasy’ (1989; in Gloeckner 2001, 65)**

Minnie asks after a training bra, her dialogue thematised; her mother refuses, protesting that she is a “tiny child”, reflecting the verbal and visual content in the previous panel. Other cohesive links include deictic ‘this’ as Minnie points to a book she is holding, presumably containing the desired bra (this is elided); personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’; and the word ‘developing’, repeated from the first panel inset. Cataphoric seeds are sown with the marked word ‘men-stru-a-ting’, which will incorporate those hyphens again in mentions later on the page; a depiction will also appear. Centralised in this panel are the mother’s knees balancing an ashtray (mark of adulthood and of her irresponsibility), and her own breasts, with relational lines depicting them ‘straining’ at her blouse. A small change of time and place is marked as occurring here: the toys are absent, and Minnie’s clothes are not the same, so continuities of time and place are disrupted.

The third panel enclosure thematises a lightbulb, impossibly hanging in the air above Minnie’s head: this is to be taken as conventional mental emanata indicating an



idea; further nested emanata indicate the light shining within this embedded image. It is not enclosed in a modalising balloon, but relies on flouting the maxim of causality — it is impossible for this large lightbulb to have appeared and be simply ‘hanging there’ — so that we read it as metaphor: since it cannot literally exist, we switch to a figurative interpretation, in which the image is motivated by the need to represent the character’s ‘moment of illumination’. The projected inset image of the same book (we recognise it from the first panel, assuming identity) is indicated again by a relational arrow, indicating a logical connection, hypotactic elaboration (detail is given): we see fragments of ‘menstruation’, and some other topical material in the semantic fields presented here; ‘electricity’ and ‘light’ make odd semantic links to the depiction of the lightbulb, which is here brought into modal uncertainty: it highlights material, physical features of the signifying ‘secondary’ object, rather than the ‘primary’ idea it signifies. ‘Pituitary gland’ will become important later in the story. Minnie’s mental process is depicted in abstract enclosure in rheme position lower right, and again refers to ‘light’ as a material thing, rather than an idea. Gloeckner seems to be playing with the conventional metaphor of idea-as-light.

In the second tier, Minnie looks down at her body, referring in her projected verbal process to ‘results’; this coheres with ‘cause’ in the previous inset from the book, and ‘develop’ and ‘breasts’ elsewhere cohere with her anticipatory look. The lightbulb recurs, rendered almost identically, but here made plausible and concrete: it is attached to a lamp holder with a visible cable, on a table. What was in imaginary modality has been made concrete here, and this reflects the ideational content, Minnie’s boudoir desire, so far marked by modal ‘maybe’ and ‘I’ll’, in the text world projected in her word balloon.

The next section of the tier problematises the idea of panelisation and parataxis. Thematised is the light, again, its ray emanata appearing upper left, though somewhat oddly in a lampshade above sleeping Minnie. A deal of implicit action must have happened: we assume continuity of place, in Minnie’s bedroom, but she has found and switched on a torch (lying shining into her face), perhaps also added a lampshade to the lamp, and got into bed to sleep — all implicatures brought about by the maxim of causality, in the differences between panels. It is worth noting that the top Minnie wears in the left of tier two matches to the one she is wearing in the opening image upper left of the page; and not to the dress she wears in the upper central image. This might change our understanding of the time relationship between images: perhaps that first

image did not occur first in time; perhaps it exists ‘topically’, outside the timeline of the story; perhaps it occurred on previous night. Minnie dreams: a mental process interpreted as dream rather than thought because of the depiction of sleeping Minnie, and the principle of synecdoche and the maxim of causality. The dream is modalised by the conventional cloud enclosure, which expands and transgresses panel borders; enough that it is unclear whether this is a hypotactic ‘inset’ to the depiction of Minnie asleep, or whether it marks a new ‘panel’ in the sequence. (It is my contention that panels are not basic to comics, so that this question does not need to be resolved.) Further within the dream, a nested text-world is presented, a school situation projected by “the other girls”, address as “Miss Hess”, and the (yet further) projected boudoiaic text world in which the girls “play lacrosse”; also modalised with “you’ll have to” is an otherwise not-yet-represented text world — deontic or boudoiaic? — in which Minnie takes her clothes off for Miss Hess. This multiple nesting across modes gives a rich patina to the representation of Minnie’s experience. The cat which appeared on Minnie’s bed in the rhyme corner of tier one here straddles the text-world in which Minnie sleeps and the sub-world in which she dreams, its tail prominently curling up into the region by her head and the tail of her speech balloon. Is it this that gives Minnie’s jumper the striking ‘hairy’ look? Relational detail has been painstakingly put into describing the texture of the jumper, as well as the prominent imagined breasts that dream-Minnie has developed, description of the cloth reflecting that used for the mother’s blouse in the panel above. Also reflected in repetition of the imagery is the cigarette held by Miss Hess, a semantic echo of the ashtray on the knees of Minnie’s mother. Her mother appears, with her face in a strikingly similar orientation to Miss Hess’s, outside the dream enclosure to the right. Thematic here, at the top, but in rhyme position as regards the tier, mother projects verbally her interpretation of the scene: “isn’t *that* cute”, using cross-modal reference to the image, “*she*’s afraid of the dark. I’ll turn the lights off”. The process of ‘turning the lights off’ is handled by the verbiage here, not depicted in the images. ‘Dark’ and ‘light’ again semantically cohere the text whilst carrying topical, ideational import. Backgrounds are elided in the image of the mother, but we assume continuity of space and contiguity of time: this occurs in Minnie’s bedroom, whilst she is dreaming.

The dream continues, in a matching cloud enclosure that continues to overlap borders, to bleed into the phatic space — or, at least, to exceed the text-world of the diegesis depicted, though still modalised as dream. The motifs ‘blossoming’ and

‘flower’ are picked up from the title cluster, in Miss Hess’s projected declaration about Minnie’s figure. Minnie’s ‘demure’ downward look here and open hand gesture also chime with the word ‘exposed’ in the opposite corner of the page; centralised here is the relational depiction of her now-grown breasts, absurdly adult on her body. In the ‘circumstance’ region of the image, the background/margin, but also thematised in the upper and left portions, are the impossibly-appearing flowers: by flouting of the maxim of causality, we take these to be metaphorical, and treat them as (mental process?) emanata expressing emotion or topical motif, modalisation of the image by the creator. In Miss Hess’s projected speech, the school-world is re-invoked by reference to “the other little girls” and a semantic field of finance is picked up from ‘assets’ earlier on: “such a figure is a great fortune”. The repeated, expanded wording ‘men-stru-a-ting’ from the dialogue projected in the previous dream-image is matched cross-modally in image by a vivid depiction of an oversized sanitary product here. The unlikely exaggeration of these elements is another way of modalising the image as dream; Gloeckner uses enlargement and distortion elsewhere to stress her own judgements of the grotesque and imposing, in particular the bodies of threatening men.

Intruding on the dream-enclosure is a narrative caption, thematised upper left, enclosed in conventional spiked startle-lines: “but that morning...” This adopts the resources that language offers to give an adversative conjunction ‘but’, adding polarity to the sequence, and to mark a disruption of the maxim of continuity of time with the introduction of circumstantial adverbial ‘that morning’. The lamp (with no illumination emanata), Minnie’s face oriented towards it, and her projected, elliptical, exclamation “No results [from her evening’s plan]! And the lights are out!” indicate that her experiment has been disrupted. Gloeckner handles the extinguishing of the lights in the projected dialogue to support the absence of emanata. Centralised in the image here, in ‘new’ position, are Minnie’s hands: touching her chest, pulling aside her underwear. Each of these three clusters is a separate process: this is not one moment in time. The order is not as it would be read, either: she touches her chest, she checks beneath her underwear, she looks at the lights, she declares her thoughts. But it is the light upper left and the hand pulling aside her underwear is the ‘last’ thing drawn, lower and to the right. It is the logical relationship between these that is important, and a reader can without difficulty understand their relationship to each other. The cat is rendered in, smiling and uncaring; perhaps there is a further allusion at work here too.

In the final image, Minnie appears, hands on hips in a behavioural/mental depiction of defiance, projecting her complaint to her mother in terms that pick up on the financial language (“valuable assets”) and reveal Minnie’s youth by the malapropism “my pecuniary gland” — the careful double pun placed there which also chimes with the financial motif. In rheme position here is the mother’s face in response: shock and dismay, simply projecting an exclamation: “Why Minnie!”, without specific content, just startled at Minnie’s being. Some mundane domestic detail is rendered here relationally, as throughout the text: the cat and her food bowl; the patterns of the wallpaper; the patterns on the floor (as elsewhere on bed, carpet, sofa, chair and clothes). This careful inscription of detail carries also interpersonal value: Gloeckner’s close looking and attention, the mark of her hand on the delineation of the mother’s face, the texture of the bedspread, the tweed of Miss Hess’s clothes. “End” at the very lower right marks the boundary of the story.

### **Mike Mignola: *Pancakes***

The second creator produces more mainstream comics, though he might still be considered an ‘auteur’. This is a two-page story that presents an ‘origin’ for Mignola’s signature character, Hellboy, a superhero-of-sorts who operates as a ‘paranormal detective’ working for the United States government. *Pancakes* is described as “perhaps Mignola’s most unusual short story, and, to his surprise, one of his most popular”, though no reason is given for either claim (Mignola 2004, 102). The first page is reproduced in Figure 72.

**Figure 72: ‘Pancakes’ page 1 (in Mignola 2003, n.p.)**

The title panel presents a relational visual description of gothic statuary, as is traditional for *Hellboy* titles, with a title typeface that follows tradition too. These cohesive repetitions bind the *Hellboy* stories together as an overarching work. This is in upper-left theme position; the first panel of story proper, also upper and leftward, establishes time and place in captions. The relational panel describing the cactus and mountains helps to set scene and world-build. Background is more or less elided in the drawing at the right of this tier; place is assumed to be desert by the maxim of place.

Two panels are rankshifted into one here, helping establish Hellboy as outside when he is playing; the colours support this. The narratorial-voice captions are also matched by colour, and composed in the image here, working by proximity to perform a relational function, labelling Hellboy and giving the important adjunct material of his age; and, playfully, labelling the dog too. The ball lower left here may be taken, by a maxim of causality and the synecdochic principle, to be there because Hellboy and the dog have been playing ‘catch’ with it. The projected dialogue upper left names Hellboy and sets a topical announcement that coheres with the semantic field set in the title: ‘breakfast’. Hellboy’s verbal process projects his boulomaic desire for ‘hot noodles’, an odd choice which serves to mark his strangeness. Features of familiar character design also mark Hellboy: the curled tail with hairs and the stone right hand (see Mignola 2004, 72), the signature red colour, the protruding jaw; and, interestingly, full curled horns. These mark his ‘devilish’ nature; in the main run of stories, where he is seen as an adult, the horns have been distinctively cut off, marking his subordination to a human world, which this story will also enact. There is large-scale implicature here, unusually working cataphorically: he *will have had* those horns removed.

The dialogue thematised in the second tier brings together the lexical field in cohesive repetition: “you can’t have *noodles* for *breakfast*. You’re gonna have *pancakes*.” Identification of the speaker has been evaded, the process stack avoided by using speech enclosure with the tail pointing out of the panel to the left. Here the speaker is metonymically represented by a hand, with just a cuff of khaki beginning to represent military authority. The feeding, calling for breakfast, the use of morpheme ‘boy’, the playing of ball, the deontic modals ‘can’t’ and ‘gonna’, all suggest parental authority, too. The middle panel here, with a projected verbal repetition of ‘pancakes’ setting the topical theme, offers an elaboration of the previous material process in which the plate of pancakes was placed before the boy. (This relational-process panel implies no particular ‘transition’.) Hellboy reacts to the pancakes, rejecting them, in projected dialogue and presented with hands held up in a gesture of pushing-away, his face showing his mental process: alarm, supported by little emanata of shock, the ‘startle lines’ emerging from his head. The wording ‘pam-cakes’ implies childish speech, enacting the character’s youth.

In the third tier the speaker of the dialogue is revealed, and labelled; General Ricker’s face is presented neutral in expression, craggy, with prominent stars and US labelling. His word balloon intrudes into the next panel, and the imperative in his

dialogue is emboldened. The pressure he is placing on the child is emphasised. In the next panel, Hellboy appears to push the pancakes away, with a little abstract motion-shadow around his right hand. His speech is modalised by shifting the size of the writing down, and leaving white space around it in the border of the rejected balloon of his speech, suggesting quiet, caution, metaphorical ‘shrinking’ which influences a reading of his gesture and body as fearful, in retreat. The adjacent panel to the right is almost identical, challenging the reader to a close game of spot-the-difference, and reading as *non*-motion, stillness, in the very little difference between them. The butter on the cake drips very slightly further; again this gives the sense of minuteness, tension; the context prompts a reinterpretation of the motion line by Hellboy’s hand — shaking with nerves, now? The General is excluded from the image again, his dialogue reduced to a bold noun phrase.

The single word in the next projected verbal process is an elliptical imperative: ‘Open [your mouth]’. The general’s hand is thematised, however, presented large upper left, wielding the fork, instrument of authority; the rheme to the right and down is a piece of pancake, and a drip that continues the drip of butter from the previous image, but also perhaps suggests the dripping of blood, lending the image menace. Note that multiple simultaneous time tracks are at work here: by causality, the implicature is that the general must-have cut into the pancake and forked a piece, lifting it toward the boy; even though the pacing in the projected dialogue suggests a much shorter beat. This multi-tracking is a feature of graphic narrative, and in no way a flaw. Hellboy’s response to ‘open’ is material, complying with the imperative, and verbal, projected as ‘aaaaahhh...’, modalised as ‘wavering’ by the quivering line of the balloon’s tail shape (this was also done with ‘they’re yucky’); the dialogue suggests a response to a dentist or doctor, further multiplying the authority invested in the General. His further material process is to move the fork-with-pancake proximal to Hellboy’s open mouth; again, there is a metaphor of agency here: he is reduced to a hand, a fork, and the fork is detailed in the elaborating image in the lower right. The swallowing of the pancake is handled by verb supply/onomatopoeia, an unanchored ‘ulp!’, with the crumbs suspended in air supporting the abruptness of that process (the panel simultaneously extends as well as elaborates). A strikingly prominent detail centralised here in ‘new’ position is ‘USA’ inscribed on the fork: it has been metonymic for the general, and here, it is suggested, it is metaphorical for the United States (government). That dark image of the bare fork is left in tonic position of the page, lower right, sustaining suspense.

Upper left on the next page (Figure 73) is a reiteration of Hellboy's startled face, this time with lowered hands and a smile. Suspense is sustained in the verbal process projected into theme position "Hey...", but this is resolved in the rheme position a little lower and to the right: "I love it!". This decisive turning point transgresses the borders as the text shifts space, marked in the thematised caption, to 'Pandemonium'; this resolution of the maxims of continuity is matched by 'meanwhile', affirming that time remains contiguous, though place has changed. The layout of the next image presents a deliberate problematisation of status: it wraps round below the image of Hellboy's face, suggesting an encompassing plenitude, and possibly contextualising that image as an 'inset', seeming to subordinate it to the capital city of Hell. This enacts in the 'grammatical' structure of the text a counterbalance to the power that has been wielded by the General as an instrument of the US, and it is interesting that the two are presented as parallel, competing powers. The panel depicts a burning city in reddened darkness behind black-and-grey rocks, both contrast and reflection of the desert setting previously established. This relational panel, like the first, is rankshifted down to share space with a second depicting material processes, stacking with verbal and mental implicit form behaviour: the 'pandemonium' of tortured souls crying out, their balloons modalised with reddened colour and wavering balloon tails, interestingly matching Hellboy's. The silhouette used here is not a cohesive substitution move, since the relational detail of the figures is not elsewhere given in the text, but serves both the ideational representation of darkness and a useful way for Mignola to evade the process-stack commitment to rendering details of all their faces and bodies. Gesture, as often, supports verbal process: the clawed hands reaching out in pain.

**Figure 73: 'Pancakes' page 2 (in Mignola 2003, n.p.)**

Tiers break down a little in this page as a salient organising principle, but it seems on the face of it to be the second tier that begins with Astaroth's question about 'the noise'. This anaphorically references the wailing depicted in the previous panel. Astaroth's name and title are composed into the image, as with the name of Mammon (and Haborym in the adjacent image); Astaroth's title reflects in its structure and lettering size the labelling of the General. The image of him is largely relational: he is upright and impassive; a snake curls around him in material process, its tongue out

implying a verbal hiss; Mammon appears below him to the right, suggesting Astaroth's authority (upper and to the left, as the General was placed). Mammon's response relies on cohesion: "*It is the boy. He has eaten the pancake.*" *It* may be taken to anaphorically reference Astaroth's *the noise*, though oddly the copula identifies *the boy*; the 'boy' available to anchor this deictic is Hellboy. The maxim of causality comes into play here: Hellboy's actions have (somehow) caused the pandemonium. The reference across these text-worlds to *the pancake* confirm this causal link, whilst also implying that these distant beings are supernaturally aware of the goings-on in the other world. Whether these are *modal* text-worlds is deliberately ambiguous; Mignola does not use border modalisation to suggest that this Hell is not real, and whilst there is some colour shift, the colours are not utterly distinct from the other location. Of course, Hellboy's is a 'magical realist' world where the supernatural is taken to be real, as he is presented as a 'real' figure arisen from a mythical realm to work with governments and institutions of power recognisable from the contemporary discourse-world. In the closing images, Astaroth, with a bestial face and blank eyes that repeat not only Haborym's and Mammon's, but also Hellboy's, linking him textually and ideationally to origins in this milieu, laments the prediction that Hellboy is lost to them, and a detail of Astaroth's craggy and impassive face concludes this 'world' — his verbal projection appearing actually in the final image, its tail off to the left, reflecting the patterning of the General's word balloons in another mapping that analogises them, with the final verbiage "truly this is our blackest hour". The use of the first-person plural pronoun unifies these speakers, and again suggests family, or at least fraternal unity; backgrounds are elided and continuity of space, even intimacy, is assumed, with close focus on the face and implicit mental processes. There is a boulomaic projection in "he will never come back to us now", expressing the desired world contrasting that negative polarity, in which he does 'come back'. The final image is of the fork, again; its end cut off by the black rectangle, apparently thereby abstract, that backs Astaroth's *blackest hour* in cross-modal cohesion with it. The colours of the plate and cool blue-grey of the background mark a shift back up into the main text-world; the crumbs resting on the plate leading to the causal implicature that reiterates Mammon's assertion handled in the dialogue: *He has eaten the pancake*. The perfect tense matches the handling of processes in image by difference and implicature. We know, though it is not depicted in this final image, that USA is stamped on that fork, centralised as focal/new in the frame; it carries over from the lower right frame of the previous page. Here then is the story's



tonic image: the resting instrument that has accomplished this deed; and lower right, *the end*.

Though this is mainstream entertainment, there are metaphors of power at work here as well as sophisticated and careful management of words and images in their specific roles in concert with one another. Some themes of power and even subtle critique of governments and authority are exposed here, reflecting the use that Critical Discourse Analysis has made of Hallidayan frameworks (see, e.g., Fairclough 2010). I do not wish to make too strong a claim for *Hellboy*; but this reading stands as a demonstration of the fruits of close attention to the specifics of comics discourse to which this framework might lead.

# 9

## Conclusion

### Models and Mappings

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As we search for a way to discuss comics and how they work, as we write criticism of comics as an artform, so we clutch for the language in which to describe what we see and read, as a language is not yet decided for us. We need metaphors for the action of comics, since we have not yet agreed on what would not be metaphor. Off the peg, we can reach for the language of film, such as shots, angles, zooms, the camera, and so on. But we should bear in mind that this is metaphor, and a metaphor which has not fully been formalised, and may contain disanalogy as well as analogy. We can reach for languages built metaphorically on literature, and on art, and on other forms.

In proposing linguistics as a model for a critical language of comics, as a model for describing how comics function, I am aware I propose a new metaphor; but a metaphor which has been worked through with some care and with consideration for the mapping of appropriate ‘parts’ of language at an appropriate level of description onto the ‘parts’ of comics (see Bramlett 2012, 1–4 for a critique of *loose* metaphors of comics as a language). It is in the nature of metaphor that these parts are not identical, but parallel; in fact, the non-identity is a prerequisite for the function of metaphor, that it should bring to light, by the effort of mapping, elements of the target that are perhaps not as salient as we should wish them to be; if they were identical, this highlighting of features would not occur. The ground on which the structure of comics is mapped to the structure of language is the functional, social semiotic structure of discourse, which is realised in parallel by the resources of language and by the resources of comics.

But we might find in exploring this mapping of one domain of study onto another that the mappings match sufficiently well, at the appropriate level of abstraction, and we find to our surprise that what we thought of as metaphorical might actually be a workable functional homology. The bird may be a metaphor for an aeroplane, but its

wing really is a wing; and both bird and plane, in their different if mappable ways, are able genuinely to fly.

### **Comics as an ‘utterance’**

Against Thierry Groensteen (2009), I have argued that the comics panel is not just to be seen as an ‘utterable’; it is already an utterance. It is not just a ‘describable’: it is already a description. It is certainly ‘interpretable’; but it is already an interpretation, an abstraction, a rendering, a construal of the material it depicts.

The panel is roughly on the rank order of the sentence; including in its status as graphology, and in its non-reliance on ‘punctuation’ — a border is not obligatory. But it is not a sentence, in the sense of having clearly defined verbs: it is a palimpsest of simultaneous ‘sentences’, a stack of depicted processes.

Panels are always already ‘balloons’, projecting these ‘sentences’: they are utterances. As an axiom, we can choose to read them as so.

Utterances occur in each other’s *contexts*: one is both contextualised and contextualises. The comics page can be seen thereby as an arrangement of mutually contextualising utterances. These utterances occur across two modalities: the verbal and the visual. The visual is essential, most commonly in representational images, but at least as abstract framing lines.

The utterances are made of arrangements of such images, sometimes with words. These images form image complexes; I have called these ‘clusters’ or ‘cluster complexes’, by analogy to the ‘clause’ and ‘clause complex’, in that they centre on a salient process. They are typically bounded by an abstract frame. These frames occur in two-dimensional arrangement, and are read in a guided conventional sequence, though the clusters within each enclosure also have a reading order; and the relationships between the clusters are more significant than the sequence in which the eye passes over them. The frames can and frequently do occur inside each other: most often, the word balloon inside the panel frame. The balloon and the frame are one and the same thing: bounding abstract lines that delineate a verbal/visual utterance.

A panel, or balloon, a framed utterance verbal or visual, draws meaning in part from its contexts. The contexts include: the panel read previously; the surrounding image; the captioning text; the surrounding panels; and panels on preceding pages. These contexts supply meaning, which is ‘carried forward’ to the next framed verbal/visual utterance

under consideration, and may be referred backward too. The accumulated meaning informs the consecutive reading: each cluster is metonymic, to be treated as dependent on surrounding clusters for its meaning.

Graphic narrative is thus multi-layered and **simultaneous**. It cannot be ‘uttered’; it could only generate multiple utterances. It is a simultaneous superimposition of multiple utterances in a visual and verbal mode that sit on top of and within each other.

The comics image-complex comprises a **stack** of visually-rendered processes: always asserting the existence of things and the relations between them; often rendering material processes, implied by the dispositions of participants, rendered through abstract line or the supply of a verb, or implicated through difference with a contextualising (prior read) image; sometimes representing mental states, through enclosed wording or image, or through abstract line or the modality of line; and sometimes, often, representing verbal processes, through projection into a further enclosing abstract line which contains the verbiage, or an image that represents it.

Graphic narrative is **heteroglossic**: the utterers speak in their array of frames, rendering or construing the word through language or through drawing. This includes the ‘primary’ utterer: the creator.

The comics image-complex is essentially **metonymic**: it is only ever partial, and depends on its fellow images to complete its meaning. But even then, it is still only partial.

Graphic narrative is thereby **multidimensional**. The drawings render the participants in the text at different scales, in different dispositions, from different angles, in different styles, in different relationships. They are read as one and the same entity — as an axiom of comics reading — and thereby acquire a rich patina, a texture.

The comics image-complex is an assemblage of **abstract** and **concrete** line: some invisible, metaphorical, structural; some mimetic, representational, material. Between these there is a spectrum of modalities of the line, which communicate human judgments on the nature of what is shown.

Graphic narrative is richly **nested**, always with the utterance of one sitting inside the utterance of another, whether preceding or surrounding it, sometimes running to many levels, as when the story told by a character blossoms into an image sequence and assumes the level of the main narrative for a period.

The comics image-complex is like a **move** in a conversation: the panels speak to each other as the characters do; panels respond to captions, speech responds to panels,

image answers thought. Graphic narrative thereby adheres to a form of comics maxims, a cooperative principle that helps identify the implicatures between panels. Comics prompt us to play with them, to engage with them. They are a collaborative exchange of meanings: with words, with images, with lines.

These lines, these renderings, these words, these images, point to each other: they depend on each other, they repeat each other, they answer each other, they contain each other, they illustrate each other, they stand for each other, they are metaphors for each other. That is to say, they form cohesive relationships to each other, and thereby constitute a single text.

As readers we seek these relationships. We assume a maxim of relevance between components of a graphic narrative. We collapse multiple images into single entities. We read consecutive panels as causally related. We carry over existents from one panel into the next. We infer implicatures between panels not obviously connected. We read the impossible as metaphor. We attach metaphorical identities to parallel compositions. We delight in recognising reincorporated material. This is the pleasure of the comics text, distinct from the pleasure of the narrative it renders: an erotics of the medium.

### **Comparison of models**

I present here some key differences between the framework I have proposed and the model of comics that emerges from existing theorisations in the following table. The bulleted points approximately map, but should not suggest a simple 1–1 translation.

#### **The ‘standard model’ of comics theory orthodoxies:**

- The basic unit of graphic narrative is the **panel**.
- Panels depict frozen **moments in time**.
- The creator **selects** from possible moments and angles.
- These panels contain **word balloons** and thought balloons which contain verbal language.
- The verbal language and visual images constitute separate ‘**tracks**’ which proceed alongside each other with varying relations between them.
- Panels appear in **sequence**.
- Meaning is created by varying types of **juxtaposition** between panels. (McCloud)

- The creator should control the reader's **linear route** through reading these panels.
- There are relationships between panels that create '**braids**' or 'threads' of meaning between them. (Groensteen)
- Comics panels can be **uttered**, **described**, and **interpreted**: that is to say, transformed into language. (Groensteen)

### My proposed alternatives:

- The basic unit of graphic narrative is the image-complex or image-text complex: the '**cluster**'.
- Panels outline a space with an **abstract enclosure** for one or more clusters to appear. This may **modalise**, judge the status of, what is enclosed.
- The image-complexes depict multiple simultaneous **processes**, which may occur in multiple simultaneous differing moments in time.
- The creator **construes** the world through drawing, bringing it into being whilst always rendering it in a more or less abstracted way. This function is comparable to the function of language.
- Word and image can **cooperate** in the same meaning-making process, and they are able to do so because of their capacity to realise the same meaning-making functions. They hand over from one to the other, when they co-exist.
- Meanings are multiple and simultaneous, and **hypotactic**, not just paratactic.
- Image-complexes, text-image complexes, and verbal texts, all appear **nested** inside each other, creating **contexts** for each other mutually.
- Images **co-refer** to each other and between verbal texts, using the specific properties of **cohesion**, such as deixis, anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric reference, ellipsis and so on; so each image-complex draws partly on its preceding, following and surrounding image/texts as context.
- Graphic narrative is thereby always **metonymic**: each image-complex is assumed to be incomplete and reliant on contextualising image/texts.
- Where physical metonymy fails to construe a coherent text-world, the reader will use **inference** between mutually contextualising panels, and may understand the relationships as **metaphor**.
- The images in graphic narratives are already **utterances**: they already construe and represent experience.

## Summary: Making Meanings with Comics

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I have argued that the making of meanings in comics may be usefully described using M.A.K. Halliday's framework for making meanings with language. Beginning with a pragmatics of the medium, treating it as a set of readerly practices, I moved to outlining three 'metafunctions' that the medium serves, mapped to Halliday's three metafunctions of language. I first considered the experiential component of the ideational function, and described four resources by which comics might represent the process, in all the types outlined by Halliday. This fruitfully mapped out the representational territory of graphic narrative, and led to the remaining approaches. The second approach was the interactional component of the interpersonal function. There, building from the idea of pragmatic inferencing between similar-but-different panels, I described how the resource of mood in language, patterns that mark interactions between discourse participants, may be enacted through the resources of comics, in a set of 'games comics play', including their material resources. I used the notion of dimensions of abstraction in graphic narrative to describe the modalising resources of comics, ways in which the images can be appraised in terms of their reality status, and may encode the affective attitude of the creator to what is drawn, as well as attributing sections of the graphic narrative to others, heteroglossically. I explored the way in which texts are structured and made cohesive, using patterns of the frame and page, adapting from Kress and van Leeuwen as I had in the previous chapter, and describing a range of specific ways in which text depends on image, image on image, within and between enclosures in the comics text. Finally I returned to the ideational metafunction in its logical component, and focused on the creation of hypotactic relationships between enclosures, the projecting of nested text worlds in comics, and relations of dependency between panels. In the last chapter I have considered the possibility of variations in the uses of these resources, the types of metaphor on which graphic narrative may draw. I have characterised graphic narrative as a flexible, powerful and still-innovating system, capable of handling abstractions in a plenitude of ways, parallel to language in its capacity to enable human beings to make meanings.

# Appendices

I close with three appendices: the first offers a set of questions students might ask, derived from the ideas in the thesis, to guide analysis of graphic narrative texts; the second shifts from a focus on the reader to the creator, in the proposal of a range of ‘choices’ for the creator of comics in making meanings, explicitly set out as an alternative to those proposed by McCloud (1993; 2006); and the third outlines some future directions in which this skeletal framework may be developed.

## Appendix 1: Questions to Ask about Graphic Narrative Stylistic Choices

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The following set of questions, derived from themes in this thesis, was presented to undergraduates to help them write about graphic narrative extracts on an introductory English literature course at the University of Sussex.

### Representational

What ‘verbs’ (processes) are represented in each drawing? How **dense** is the image -- how many processes are grouped together? What **types of process** are represented -- verbal (saying), mental (sensing and thinking), material/behavioural (doing), relational/existential (being)?

How are the processes being represented?

- By **composition**, the disposition of figures and lines drawn in each ‘panel’ (each enclosed drawing)? Are the images **metaphorical**?
- By the **difference** between drawings -- where we infer change in the ‘gutter’ (the space between drawings)? What, and how much, is given to us to do here? (See *interaction* below.)
- Using **abstract line** -- the marking of motion paths, or symbols emanating from the character, especially the head (‘emanata’)? The classic symbology of comics



is the use of abstract enclosures to represent verbal or mental action: the ‘word balloon’ -- which may enclose images.

- By **verb supply** -- writing a word for the action in the place where the action happens? (This may include onomatopoeia.) Are some events *only* given in words?

### Interpersonal: interaction with the reader

What does the reader have to *do* to make sense of the text? Do we have to **map** certain images together and ‘spot the difference’? Do we have to *hunt* for a matching figure? Join the dots?

What **inferences** do we need to make? Are we assuming **identity** of similar figures? Is this being ‘stretched’? **Continuity** of time and place? Is this disrupted from drawing to drawing? **Causality** -- do we infer that nearby events lead to one another, and what thematic work might we be doing?

### Interpersonal: modality -- intrusion of the creator into the text

How does the *concrete* line, drawing elements of the diegesis, take on *abstract* qualities? Where is the line **indexical** -- revealing the physical presence of the creator? How do the *abstract* lines take on *concrete* qualities -- where do word balloons have indexical qualities or **iconic** qualities, resembling something, or using **synaesthesia** (zigzags for sharp noises or for pain, for example)?

How are sections marked as imaginary, or remembered, or uncertain? *Processed* by the creator?

### Textual

How do the words *refer* to the images? What **deictic** words depend on the drawings to make sense? (*This, here, he, that, her, now*, etc.) What **semantic fields** are set up -- words revolving around the same set of meanings, or images around the same theme? Do these match, contrast, interact? What’s the *starting* image each page, upper left? What’s lower right before the page turn?

What features of the images *tie* them together, or what recurrent properties identify this creator's style? What is distinctive about **line quality**? What features of the figures work to identify them as 'the same person or thing' from image to image? How does **colour** work -- is it representational? Does it mark a personal mood? Does it help identify characters and things from panel to panel?

### Logical

What order do you read things in? Is one drawing inside another? In what way are they dependent on each other? What **text worlds** are inscribed -- how are narratives *nested* inside one another?

Does the creator specify logical links between drawings, or is the connection presumed to be *and so then...*? How does the creator mark shifts of narrative level? (Is modalised line used, see above?) What material is in the shared space of the creator and reader -- exceeding the panels, touching the edge of the page, crossing into the 'gutter'? How is its status affected?

## Appendix 2: Proposed Choices of the Comics Creator

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Scott McCloud in *Making Comics* (2006) proposes that the creator of comics confronts a range of choices to make: choice of moment, frame, image, word and flow. When I ran comics creation workshops with teenage creators at Sussex Downs College between 2006 and 2010, I offered McCloud's framework as a guideline for the choices they would be making as they create; but these choices did not seem to well match the decisions they actually made, nor did they fully help them to avoid mistakes. A panel may include several 'moments', and it is not clear that the operation of drawing is a selection from some pre-existing sequence of 'moments' (as might be true for film editing, for instance). The choice of frame goes hand in hand with this choice of moment, and of image which follows; and McCloud doesn't discuss the possibilities offered by varying the nature of the border itself. Choice of image seems to carry with it several decisions: what is included (McCloud doesn't bring up his concept of a panel's *density* here), what angle of viewing is implied, how much background is incorporated, what style is used, and more. Choice of word is given as a way to afford specificity to

an image (McCloud's example is proper nouns), but words are surely an option for a range of possible usages, including dialect or idiolect, onomatopoeia for sound effects, handling of temporal change, and more. Finally, 'choice of flow' is about governing reading order, which seems reasonable; but in McCloud's example, overly close character design works in tandem with a change of angle to achieve the 'confusing' effect he claims for panel layout.

The following five choices are proposed as more practical and more closely reflecting the sequence of decisions creators need to make, in roughly this order. I tentatively suggest cohesive ties that are related to each of these choices, but they do not map simply and directly.

### **Choice of Character Design: Actants and Participants**

- What style will you use? Simplified? Realist? Will you distinguish between the style of different characters, or character and background?
- How will readers identify the character reliably? What distinguishing feature(s) will mark him or her? This will be telling: it will carry connotation as well as serving pragmatic purposes.
- Will the character design communicate metaphorically, e.g. by using animals?

Related cohesive device: *Repetition* and *substitution* — the recognisable, re-identifiable re-construal and variation of persistent characters and places.

McCloud acknowledges this in discussion of the 'Pictorial Vocabulary' triangle in *Understanding Comics* (1993) but never makes it central there, and omits it as a 'choice' in *Making Comics*. I have played down participants, focusing more on processes, but the elements of design have been key to cohesion.

### **Choice of Verb Style: Events and Processes**

- How will you communicate the process(es) depicted to move the book forward?
- Can composition and figure orientation do the work?

- Can you use implicature by varying composition from an earlier panel to communicate ‘must-have-happened’ events?
- Are there conventionalised signs you can use, like motion lines, emanata, visual metaphor conventions like jagged teeth and flames for anger?
- Do you need to use words to do the work, either sharing space with the images or embedded in an enclosure to indicate speech, thought, narration?

Related cohesive device: *Grammatical cohesion* — conventions and organisation of panel compositions and sequences. What will tie the words to the images? What devices might you need to clarify the action? What assumptions will readers carry from one image to another? Do you need to supplement or cancel *and-so-then*?

McCloud acknowledges this in his transitions, but that is only one style. He also discusses motion lines and emanata, but does not see these as participating in the same activity.

### **Choice of Framing: Narration, Hypotaxis and Projection**

- Do you need a frame... to help elision? To indicate reality status? To communicate attitude or emotion? To allow a character to exceed it to show importance or 3D or postmodern effects?
- Do you need words and narration to frame the action? To manage logical links?
- Are the images inside words, or are there words inside the images? What panels or balloons are inside other panels or balloons?
- If a character is speaking or thinking, can you depict the content visually?

Related cohesive device: *Conjunction*, especially subordination, using line and shape to signify what elements are related to what and how — what is inside whose head and who is in charge of which images.

McCloud acknowledges this in word-image relations, but never equates the frame and the word balloon nor focuses discussion on nesting and metalepsis.

### **Choice of Density: Description, Circumstance and Textuality**

- How many processes do you want to incorporate in each frame? It always shows existence and usually relation as well as any material or behavioural processes; how many mental and verbal processes do you want to fit in per frame?
- How will the processes depend on each other, whether verbal, visual or both?
- How slowly do you want the story to read and how complex should it feel?
- How detailed or redundant are your character designs?
- How much circumstantial material do you want to include? How much background detail?
- How hard do you want the reader to work?

Related cohesive device: *Co-reference and lexical cohesion* — how and where the language will refer to the images and to prior panels; what chains of semantic items will be included and juxtaposed within and across the images.

McCloud acknowledges this in passing several times, mentioning ‘density’ and referring it to ‘pace’ of reading, but never explores what it means.

### **Choice of Metonymy: Ellipsis and Implicature**

- How much do you need to include in the frame? How much can you leave out?
- What elements of the action can you not depict and still imply the whole process?
- What level of detail do you need? What can you get away with? How much do you want to describe? What details are needed to keep continuity of identity?
- How much of the environment and background can you leave implicit to carry over?

Related cohesive device: *Ellipsis* — what you can carry over from earlier or allow the reader to assume from convention.

McCloud acknowledges this amongst his discussions of closure.

How to represent the participants, the persons in the story; how to represent the processes, the actions they undertake and the events that drive the story forward; how to frame these, in terms of the status of the narrative and who governs what elements; how much of the circumstantial to include, and how much is happening ‘at once’, condensed in a single enframing rather than dispersed over several, thereby governing the pace of the reading; and how much to exclude or not represent, to leave to the reader to understand or supply from earlier. These seem to me to be practical choices for a creator to make, and each suggests ways of keeping the narrative cohesive.

### **Appendix 3: On Resources, Frameworks and Futures**

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The comics creator draws on a range of resources, whatever is culturally available, to create meanings for other human beings. That range of resources is potentially the entirety of past productions in the medium – all that looks like comics to the creator, anything that has been seen and recalled and can thereby be drawn upon to create meanings for a reader. In actuality, the range of resources available will be contingent: on culture, history, genre, traditions, trends and fashions.

These contextual categories make a perfectly good set of approaches to analyse a text, but it may be useful to group these resources according to a scheme which focuses on the meaning-making functions each may serve. A given resource may be multifunctional, or may be polymorphic, a different function governing the meaning created dependant on, for instance, the text context in which the resource is deployed. If we approach a text with an awareness of this functionality, of the possibility of multiple functions being engaged, and a framework of key functions compatible with other modalities of communication, with its own hard-won tradition of analysis, then we may come to note elements of the text we might otherwise not attend to, distracted as we may be by the contingencies of history and genre and fashion and our own personal preference; and the pressure of the text’s ostensive main function, to communicate content, to represent.

This focus may blinker creators too; so the framework offered in this thesis may help neophyte creators attend to crucial features of the structuring and styling of their text which carries meaning for a reader; features that may emerge from the aim to represent but carry with them other meanings – ways in which creators inevitably enter

into the text, as well as the assumptions creators have about readers, assumptions they share with them. It offers a way of seeing: a set of things to attend to which may enlighten the creation and interpretation of the work.

The categories of resources I have offered, then, do not represent a claim to ‘truth’ about comics, or to capture their ‘essence’; it is part of the motivation for choosing these categories that they should be compatible with a range of other meaning-making resources, not least of course those of natural languages. The categorisation represents a set of starting-points, direction signs for points of entry, not a thoroughgoing ‘map of the territory’. I am making the claim that comics meaning-making seems this way to me, and it has been useful for me to think about the making of meaning in comics using these categories, and they may be helpful for others’ discussions too. On the other hand, I seek not just to compile a checklist of features of interest, but to craft frameworks with some systematicity, some pleasing symmetry and, hopefully, memorability. These also declare their grounding in compatible theories of meaning, as a validation that they may be worth trying.

### **Future lines of research**

There are no doubt areas of the framework here proposed that are not universal, that are undergoing change, that afford more specificity in their description. I present a grand overall structure, and not all elements can be pursued to the finest level of delicacy in the space that I have. I have aimed, whilst presenting a coherent overall framework based on principled foundations, to enable each chapter to be ‘portable’, in the sense that the models each metafunctional approach gives might be taken forward alone, without committing to the rest of the theoretical framework, in the knowledge that the overarching structure is nonetheless still there. So one might look closely at a text using the maxims of comics here proposed, to explore flouting and breaching of these maxims, without committing to other elements of the model; one might conduct a process-type analysis of a text to reveal its preoccupations, without necessarily paying close attention to patterns of cohesion that tie the text together, though it might be interesting to consider which processes are projected and which are not. Some further routes for research are mentioned below:

- I have already suggested the possibility of exploring grammaticalisation in comics, tracing the development of a number of formerly concrete representations from a range of now-abstract resources;
- Frame analysis – the framing of experience by parataxis, hypotaxis and paratexts, using Goffman's framework (1986) in conjunction with the one laid out here;
- Quantitative studies using process type classifications, as McCloud and Cohn do with their approaches. There are caveats to this: it is to some degree subjective, leading to coding disagreements, and I would not want to rely on panelisation;
- A Critical Discourse Analysis (following Fairclough 2010) that attends to multimodal features of comics texts, using the framework presented in this thesis to square the images' work with the words' work;
- More secure grounds for definition and classification of graphic texts – resting on close attention to the specific ways in which words and images collaborate in graphic narrative. Is the text in question using the cohesive resources of comics? Is the text's function moved forward using process rendered by images?

In general, I have presented a new framework which assigns particular functions to the visual resources of comics, ideational, interpersonal, and textual: this should lead to new readings, considering the representations of processes, logical dependencies between enclosures, use of the phatic space, types of modalisation and interactions in which the graphic narrative engages the reader. Appendices 1 and 2 aimed to bring together some of the ideas in a practical way, attending to the reader's and the creator's work respectively in making meanings with comics.



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