READING COMICS: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF TEXTUALITY AND DISCOURSE IN THE COMICS MEDIUM

A Dissertation

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Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Reading Comics: A Theoretical Analysis of Textuality and Discourse in the Comics Medium

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When James Kinneavy presented his seminal Theory of Discourse in 1971, he posited that, deriving from the traditional discourse triangle, the modes of discourse and the aims of discourse shared a matrix with the media of discourse. One of the media types identified by Marshall McLuhan in Understanding Media (1964) as having particularly rich potential for social impact is comics. The potential for scholarly examination of the textuality and discourse features of comics remains underdeveloped. Comics creators have already offered some explanation of the visual potentials of comics to express, inform and influence audiences. This dissertation seeks to increase understanding of the discourse and communicative power of comics by developing and applying a theoretical apparatus to the textuality and discourse features of the comics medium. Theory is applied to comics in two parts, the structure of textual cohesion in comics and the nature of discourse situations, including modes and aims, in comics. In the development of the analysis, a general background of comics is explored, including definitions, description of common features, historical development and current literary theory. The dissertation then focuses

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on a close, detailed analysis of comics in respect to certain aspects of reading and discourse theories. Subsequently, cohesive principles of English, as outlined by Halliday and Hasan (1981), are applied to the written utterances in comics as well as to the pictorial images to develop a matrix of cohesiveness. Via the application of cohesive principles to both word and picture in comics, an overall comics textuality is described. After the examination of cohesive principles in comics, the study examines the larger discourse structures and events represented in comics through an application of the traditional discourse triangle. Comics are explored in terms of addresser, addressee and referent to derive a general theory of comics discourse. Ultimately, this dissertation invites future scholarship in comics by seeking to provide a theoretical framework for future inquiry into comics as a communications medium.

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I. THE PROBLEM OF COMICS TEXT

In the May, 1939 issue of the fledgling Detective Comics, a new pulp figure was born, materializing in ink lines and watercolor splashes over ink and watercolor rooftops. With his black cape and belt of limitless gadgets, the Batman arrived, bringing untouchable, Eliot Ness-like justice to the dark, brooding streets of a Gotham City that both was and was not the New York of the end of the Depression.

More than sixty years later, the Caped Crusader, the Dark Knight, the protector of Gotham, remains a powerful pop icon. This strange, even absurd character can now be seen everywhere that marketers can display his image or his name: on hats, on shirts, on cups, on television. Toy stores overflow with Batman action figures and Batmobiles that run by remote control. The "Batman" movies have been box office sensations, luring some of the top names in Hollywood. The character has leaped off the colorful comics pages to become, along with cohorts and rivals like Superman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, The Hulk, and the X-Men, among the greatest legends in modern American mythos.

These comics legends can be found not merely in the volumes of "superhero" comic books. Comics present themselves daily in millions of homes. In newspaper pages across the United States, generations of readers have grown-up with the perpetually young, yet strangely adult children sprung from the imagination of Charles Schulz: the clever beagle who flies doghouses, writes stories, dances and cries; the blanket-toting intellectual who sits in pumpkin patches; the unfortunate, misunderstood

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and socially outcast round-headed boy; the bossy, disdainful girl who practices psychiatry on the side for five cents a visit. The Peanuts characters have become an American institution, with animated holiday specials, audio recordings, T-shirts, posters, stuffed toys, and collectible mugs. The comic strip, like the comic book, has insinuated itself into our cultural identity.

Beyond their obvious marketability, we embrace these characters, and we share with them their struggles: Will Charlie Brown ever get to kick the football? Will he ever get to kiss the red-haired girl for whom he has pined for half a century? Comics can introduce us to social issues, challenge our attitudes, thrill us with adventures, or make us laugh at our foibles. Like Pogo or like Doonesbury, they can be bitingly political. Like For Better Or Worse, they can involve us in the complexities of family life and values. Like Calvin and Hobbes, they can be whimsically philosophical. Comic books, despite their pop-culture trappings, can show us the best and worst of hatred and heroism, triumph and despair. The Amazing Spiderman preaches endlessly that with great power comes great responsibility. The Uncanny X-Men offers adolescent readers a world of people whose very bodies make them outcasts from society, a metaphor with which most adolescents can readily identify. Underground artists, like Robert Crumb (1988) and a number of radical feminist artists (Noomin, 1991), have used comics to challenge authority and subvert cultural norms, presenting images and tales of drug use, sexual exploitation and political anarchy.

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Comics have become ingrained into our shared culture so much that even critical, literate audiences have begun to explore them. Scholars like M. Thomas Inge (1990) and Bradford Wright (2001) have tackled the issue of the socially-forming and transforming power of comics. Both Inge and Wright argue that comics are a vital, thriving force within our culture, especially for young people, shaping us and reflecting our values in pictures and in words. Comics explore and comment upon relationships, on class, on race, on gender, on faith and on sexuality. Comics can reveal our fears and biases and can model our ideals for behavior.

Comics are now also respectable targets for literary criticism. Articles such as Kenneth Barker's (1994) "A Theological Reflection on Krazy Kat" investigate the deeper social values of comics. Some critical essays, like those collected in the anthology The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media, edited by Pearson and Uricchio (1991), demonstrate a whole range of critical theory applied to the Batman comics and character, from deconstruction to reader-response, from feminist critique to queer theory. Reviews of comic books have also appeared in newspapers and magazines such as The Washington Post, The New York Times, and Rolling Stone. In 2001, Michael Chabon (2000) won the Pulitzer Prize in Letters for his comic-book inspired The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay, a novel in which the heroes come to better understand themselves, their world and their values through intense experiences as comic book writers and artists.

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Perhaps even more noteworthy than Chabon's prize-winning novel about comics is the success of Art Spiegelman's (1992) Maus. Maus, constructed in comic book format, won a Special 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Letters. Readers recognized the remarkable achievement of his work, even though its narrative was in an unconventional form. Perhaps, though, it is worth noting that Maus received a Special Pulitzer and was not included in the voting for Pulitzer in Letters category that Chabon won. A stigma still exists surrounding the literary merits of comics, and perhaps also a recognition that comics as a communication form are something separate, apart from, and perhaps lesser than, traditional literary forms.

Comics have also frequently appeared as teaching tools in elementary classrooms. Dorrell, Curtis, Rampal and Kuldip (1995) record that comics have been used in education for over seventy-five years in the United States. Generally, the use of comics has been limited to "leisure reading," a vehicle allowing students to read on their own to encourage an appreciation of words and to engage young readers' imaginations. Krashen (1993), moreover, notes the use of comic books in the classroom as a popular and effective means not only of developing a love of reading but also as a means for vocabulary building. In some cases, specialized comics have been used to teach lessons in history or industry in the classroom (Dorrell, et al.; Eisner, 1985). Eisner details how comics have been used in military training (comics showing the proper methods of loading or repairing weapons, for example) and continue to be used in technical

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documents wherein the visual communication of comics is thought to overcome problems with audience language or literacy level.

Comic book creation has also appeared in classrooms. Chilcoat (1993), Klein (1993), and Mosher (1996) each relate their individual experiences using the creation of comics as a teaching tool in the classroom. Klein and Mosher describe lesson plans focusing on student-generated comics to promote ideas of narrative and communication, while encouraging student participation and ownership. Chilcoat views his comics-creation exercise as a means of involving students in content courses, in his case using the creation of comics to teach students about the United States' civil rights movements of the 1960s. Students were asked to research an event in civil rights history and to present the results of their research as a narrative in their own comic books. Chilcoat suggests the power of co-opting the comic book, a popular format for his students, and using the students' fascination with the comics form to increase student participation with curricular content.

School-age children are not the only people who have incorporated a fascination with comics into their work. Popular painters such as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and Keith Haring (Klein, 1993) have drawn upon the social power of comics and visual narrative, adapting comics forms and images into their works. Finally, the comics industry itself is a vast corporate enterprise in America alone. Klein relates that in the early 1990s "an estimated one-hundred million Americans enjoy[ed] the comics in daily newpapers, and more than two-hundred million comic books … [were] published every

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year. [In 1993 there were] … over 300 comic-book publishers, and 10,000 comic book titles to choose from" (p. 44). Although the independent comics publishing boom of the late 1980s/ early 1990s may have passed, these numbers are still a reasonably good indicator of the size and scope of the comics industry in America.

As the comics industry has grown both in America and worldwide, critical voices are beginning to reach America from France and from Japan, where comic books frequently top weekly best-seller lists, saying that this medium is a valid and potent artistic vehicle, it appears that the modern comic book is showing signs of a coming-of-age.

However, though recent scholarship reveals just how much political and social indoctrination comics can effect, particularly in young readers, few serious studies have yet been done on how comics are able to achieve this communication or on how a comics reader linguistically processes the visual information in comics. The bulk of scholarship directly relating to comic books, as hinted at above, has focused upon the literary content and socially-transformative power of the medium. Indeed, though scholarship exists in related fields like the study of how children read picture books or the study of the cognitive processing of graphics in science texts, little work has specifically examined the textual or linguistic elements of the comics form to discuss how a sequence of pictures or how the words and pictures of comics work together as a text, either as a strictly pictorial text or as a "composite" text (a text composed of written and pictorial content in combination), and/or how the reader of a comic is able to extract

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deep meaning from the pictorial sequencing of the medium. An entire field of theoretical and pragmatic study into word-image interaction has investigated the use of textual signs (letters or words or fragments thereof) as art, the use of text on objects of visual art (ephraksis), as well as the above-mentioned use of art as elaboration and decoration in verbal texts (e.g., children's illustrated books) (Heusser et al, 1998). However, such studies inevitably focus on the opposing natures of images and words and upon a sustained tension between the forms. These scholars, as Chapter Two explores more fully, view word and image as irreconcilable sign systems that do not merge and that do not share a common basis for meaning. Curiously, word-image studies have found little value in the investigation of comics and the unique word-image interaction of the medium.

Even the recent interest in critical cultural analysis of comics has shied away from textual or linguistic analysis of the form. Hatfield (2000), in his investigation of comics as relevant cultural art and artifact, not only avoids making specific mention of the textual processing of comics, he balks at highlighting any connection between the processing of comics and the processing of traditional written texts. He sees, in the potential comparison between reading comics and reading written text, a continuation of a traditional bias against comics that perceives and promotes comics not as a separate and unique medium but as a "step-child" of traditional written texts. Hatfield raises the idea that any effort to categorize or describe the processing of comics in terms traditionally used to categorize and describe the processing of written texts does little

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more than reinforce existing biases against comics as a valid medium. He couches this objection, however, in a discussion of whole-language reading theory versus phonics and signal-based reading theory, favoring a signal-based reading theory over a view of reading that begins with meaning or context. By favoring a strictly signal-based view of reading, he decries any possible comparison between the reading of comics and the reading of written text because of the obvious variation in semiotics. In addition, like the word-image scholars previously mentioned, Hatfield views comics reading as a matter of conflict and tension between pictures and words. Hatfield does usefully posit that if any theory on the reading of comics is to be developed, it must be able to manage the varying cognitive processings of word and of image.

A review of existing literature related to a theoretical investigation of the textual processing of comics, i.e., into how comics are read, would need, therefore, to consider a range of scholarship from several related areas. On a foundational level, it is necessary to define exactly what comics are, how they are constituted, how the form developed, and how words and images are cognitively processed. Scholarship regarding the definition and construction of comics is readily available; however, the definition of comics has been complicated by a tendency toward prescriptive definitions based on surface features of the comics medium. In developing a theory of comics reading, it is necessary to first examine how comics achieve 'text' and secondly to redefine comics based on notions of textuality and reading theory rather than strictly on surface descriptors. Existing literature can, however, provide an outline of the history or

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development of comics into its modern form and can describe the basic features and components of comics. Also necessary in an investigation of textual processing of comics is a review of literature that grants insight into how the mind processes images and icons as compared to the linguistic processing of standard printed texts (See Chapter Two for a full discussion).

Table 1

Sample of Linguistic Utterances Excerpted from a Comic Book

My flagella are my hands
Ding
I see the world through my vacuole
I wear a bag over my head because I am ashamed of what I am
And what I'm going to do
Why me?
If – If –
Because you really piss me off
If – Oh, sweet Jee—
If I hadn't been born
I am called the Sleepman
Let me go. Haven't you done enough?
You must fly Celeste

Note. Observe the lack of grounding and the difficulty of assessing anaphora and reference without access to the accompanying pictorial text. (Mills & O'Neill, 1990, p. 15)

Drawing on this literature, the next relevant area of discussion must consider whether or not comics are indeed 'text' in the traditional sense. A simple analysis of the writing found in comics quickly reveals a text that is scattered, disconnected, and often

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meaningless in terms of plot, narrative voice, even in regard to simple anaphoric connexity (See Table 1, p. 9). Moreover, it is fully feasible to produce meaningful comics that contain no written text whatsoever. Are these pictorial sequences 'text'? Are these comics read? How can text or reading exist if there is no writing? Even if we regard the images and graphical layout of comics as carrying textual meaning, interpretable by a reader as constituting 'text,' a reader is forced to deal with a semiotic system that effects meaning in a radically different way from the syntactically articulate system of verbal texts (Vos, 1998). Sparked by these considerations and questions, this dissertation endeavors to study the nature of comics textuality and of the reading of comics.

If comics are indeed read, they likely contain many of the common features of textuality and discourse situations that scholars usually reserve for analysis of traditional printed texts. However, it would be a mistake to automatically assume a quid pro quo equivalence between written texts and comics texts in terms of the processing of meaning by readers. Comics and standard printed texts are not the same in many aspects of their structure, presentation, and content. If comics are indeed read according to common linguistic principles, how do these principles apply when dealing with a text that is largely pictorial rather than strictly linguistic? We generally accept the idea that comics are "read" (we use the term instinctively when speaking about comics, e.g., "he's reading a comic book"), but the reading of comics must problematize traditional understandings of what reading is. If both written texts and comics texts (as I will

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attempt to define them) are read, either these reading processes must be categorically different, or it may be necessary to re-envision reading as a cognitive process at least partially independent of syntactically articulate sign systems (e.g., linguistic sign systems).

Text, according to DeBeaugrande and Dressler (1983), must meet seven standards: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. The first two standards deal with perceptible surface features of the text. Intentionality and acceptability deal with the needs and motivations of the creator and of the receiver of the text, respectively; whereas the final three standards are concerned with "higher-order" content and context of the text. Because issues relating to authorial intention and to a reader's acceptance are pragmatic concerns best applicable only to individual, discrete reading events, intentionality and acceptability cannot be addressed adequately in a general discussion of the entire comics medium. However, the investigation of comics textuality can, and must, address issues related to the surface of the text as well as to the content and context of comics as texts. Therefore, a discussion of comics textuality must deal with comics cohesion and coherence on the one hand and with informativity, situationality and intertextuality on the other. A full investigation of comics intentionality and acceptability must be left to future comics scholars.

What formal investigation currently exists regarding the reading of or meaning-making of comics comes mainly from comics creators rather than from academics and looks primarily at the role of art and of art in sequence to carry

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interpretable meaning. If comics are a vital force, as other studies have argued, in the shaping of social and political awareness, then a more complete study of the comics medium is warranted in order to better understand its structures, rules and uses, its inherent advantages and limitations as a carrier of meaning.

This investigation of comics, therefore, needs to explore on the one hand the specific sign systems and signification of the surface text and on the other hand the larger concerns of meaning and context in comics. To accomplish these goals, this dissertation will focus on the following research questions:

- How are writing and other sign systems in comics read/processed in the creation of comics textuality?
- What discourse situations, incorporating meaning, purpose and context, do comics create and present to a reader?

After the brief discussion of these questions below, Chapter Two will offer a breakdown of some of the current scholarship in areas related to these questions.

<u>How Are Writing and Other Sign Systems in Comics Read/Processed in the Creation of Comics Textuality?</u>

Writing is not completely necessary in comics, though it is typically present. Writing may appear in a variety of forms, usually isolated from the pictorial elements through visual contrivances such as textboxes or in balloons, but also sometimes represented graphically as acoustic effects or as “framed text” (text appearing as part of the pictorial image itself) (Weber, 1989). The lines of written text generally interact

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with the pictorial sequence in a meaningful fashion, that is, in a fashion such that a reader is able to attach the writing to the picture in a meaningful way.

In addition to words, two other sign systems may be deemed to be present in comics: representational art and comics icons. Representational art, in the context of this dissertation, refers to the artistic content of comics: the graphic representations of people, places, objects, along with suggestions of action, causation, proportion, relation, etc. Some critics may wish to question whether such representational images (representational because they signify specific people, places, etc., rather than abstract types or culturally constructed ideas) are indeed sign systems. Disputing this objection is important and is pivotal to an understanding of comics as text rather than as static image. The representational art in comics must, I argue, carry articulate linguistic meaning and signification in order for us to say that comics are indeed read. An inextricable part of this argument is the idea that the images in comics are understood by readers to carry signification. In essence, the reader of comics accepts that the pictures are signs.

A basic groundwork for the representational sign system in comics has already been presented by Eisner (1985), Lee and Buscema (1984), and McCloud (1993) (More discussion in Chapter Two). These writers are comics creators themselves and primarily approach their examination in terms of the artwork of comics, its arrangement, features, and conventions. Eisner as well as Lee and Buscema discuss the importance of perspective and artistic style in the pictorial sequence. They explore how comics artists

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must be aware of such notions as "body language" when designing the pictorial content of comics, explaining how the positioning of visual elements, particularly when representing people, gives the reader clues to mood, attitude and motive. McCloud goes further, spending considerable time establishing the importance to meaning and understanding of line quality and color in comics art, of page layout and design, and of how artistic elements in various panels of artwork can cause the panels to cling together in a deliberate sequence.

The phrase 'comics icons' will refer, in this study, to the second type of non-linguistic sign system present in comics, a sign system that must be interpretable by readers according to contextual understanding and learned convention. The term 'icon' is, of course, problematic because the term is used in a variety of contexts within the field of semiotics. For this study, icon refers to non-linguistic, visual signs that are self-referential, having meaning not through representation of a concrete thing or idea but through cultural convention and a shared understanding between the producer of the sign and the reader of the sign (Mitchell, 1986; Vos, 1998). In comics, these icons represent many concepts related both to informative content and to layout and presentation of the comics text (the visual demarcation of panels, or the lines and circles that visually signify speech or thought, for example).

Both Eisner and McCloud explain that the presence of written text is not a specifically required element for successful meaning-making in comics. As such, none of these writers makes a formal attempt to examine or analyze the contribution of written

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text to comics since written text falls outside their focus on the artistic structure of comics. McCloud does raise some unanswered questions concerning the role of words in comics, noting that the accepted and nearly universal use of words in comics is one element of the form that separates comics from other visual media. Ultimately, he invites future writers to explore more fully the idea of words and their role in the medium. Following McCloud's invitation, this study will examine the presence of words within comics, classify types of word usage in comics, and describe the primary ways words interact with the representational art in comics and with comics icons to help the reader create meaning.

In standard printed texts, words are presented in a mostly continuous linear flow, arranged into sentences, paragraphs, even chapters in an ever-expanding hierarchy of meaning (Smith, 1994). Readers in English, for example, read from left to right, starting at the top-left corner of a page and working down. As readers scan the text, they select clues to meaning as they build their predictions about the overall text. The line of writing creates a text that moves primarily in one direction, with the reader perceiving lexical, syntactic and semantic clues to create connexity and cohesion within the overall text (Smith; Leech & Short, 1981). If comics are read, they likely demand some of the same elements of connexity and cohesion, yet the formal arrangement of these elements differs in marked ways.

Comics do not present a relatively unbroken line of writing. Linguistic utterances are broken into small, disparate chunks that often have little obvious

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connexity to each other. The writing in comics cannot typically be read as a continuous linear flow in isolation from the artwork (c.f., Table 1 on p. 10). It would seem that the successful comics reader is employing a variety of specialized cohesive strategies to build meaning, employing rules of cohesion and connexity in a fashion that is unique to comics yet analogous to the typical fashion in which cohesive principles are used in standard printed texts. In other words, if we are to accept the proposition that comics are read, then we ought to be able to logically apply to comics the principles we understand so far about reading itself. Seeking to test this hypothesis, this dissertation presents an application of current reading theory to the comics form. Among the elements of current reading theory is the idea that reading requires a reader to use connective linguistic strategies to form a text from the clues in the writing. If the reading of comics is comparable to the reading of more standard texts, then it would seem that the reading of comics, including the reading of the representational and iconographic elements in comics, must also require the use of connective linguistic strategies.

In order to address the overall question of how writing is read and processed in comics, I will explore several corollary questions:

- How is text visually presented in comics?
- How do the lines of linguistic text interact with the representational and iconographic text of the comic?
- How do the various textual elements work together to help create an overall sense of textuality?

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What Discourse Situations, Including Meaning, Purpose and Context, Do Comics Create and Present to a Reader?

Beyond a basic analysis of the use of the connective elements in comics, an understanding of how comics readers construct meaning from comics must also take into consideration a variety of other tools readers traditionally use to construct meaning from standard printed texts. One of the strategies of meaning-making which readers traditionally utilize is the recognition and evaluation of the discourse situations presented in the text (Leech & Short, 1981). Readers are placed into a context wherein they communicate with the writer(s) of the text through the medium of the text. Readers create meaning not merely through an understanding of the individual elements of a text, but by interpreting the text in respect to themselves as an audience and in respect to their understanding of other texts. In other words, the reader of a comic, like the reader of standard printed texts, is able to fashion meaning by managing the concepts of implied narrator and audience (Leech & Short, 1981), of voice and tone, of point-of-view (Booth, 1983), and of aim or purpose (Kinneavy, 1971). Moreover, the reader of comics accumulates a culturally-shared understanding of comics as text, learning through intertextual awareness to experience comics as text rather than as image. Chapter Two will discuss these elements and their relation to comics more closely.

In his Theory of Discourse, Kinneavy presents discourse in terms of a traditional communication triangle and identifies several basic ways in which text is approached and understood by a reader. On one end of the spectrum of communication is a reader's

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understanding of the text's signal and reality, represented in grammar and semantics. On the other end of the spectrum of communication is discourse, or the pragmatics of the communication event, including media, modes and aims. Whereas Kinneavy has fashioned a seminal work dealing with modes and aims for one media, writing, he leaves an investigation of discourse in other media to future studies. Comics being one of the other communication media, the basic principles of mode and aim ought to be similarly applicable to a theory of comics discourse. This study therefore seeks to show how modes and aims present themselves in comics, and how the pragmatics of discourse in comics are comparable to the pragmatics of discourse in traditional writing.

To answer this study's second research question and any corollary concerns about discourse situations in comics, the contexts and situations presented to the reader by comics texts will be explored and the features of those contexts and situations will subsequently be compared to the current scholarship regarding discourse in standard written texts. For example, among other discourse issues, this dissertation will explore the use of narrative voice in comics, the relationship of the narrative line of text to other lines of text in comics, and the relationship of the narrator's written text (including perspective and tone) to the visual perspective and tone of the representational text. In other words, the representational art sequence in comics may potentially offer to the reader a discourse situation that does not specifically match the discourse situation of the written text. Moreover, mainstream comic books typically employ separate writers and artists to create a comic in tandem (Reitburger & Fuchs, 1972; Lee & Buscema, 1984;

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McCloud, 1993). This dissertation addresses and categorizes both the kinds of discourse situations presented and the relationships between the discourses of comics' pictorial and written texts.

Additionally, an investigation of comics discourse must address such concepts as transactional meaning, contextual relevance and the reader's intertextual awareness of comics as carriers of interpretable, articulate meaning (DeBeaugrande & Dressler, 1983).

Finally this study provides preliminary answers to some corollary questions about discourse in comics: What modes and aims are traditionally found in comics? Are these modes and aims comparable to those described in theories of traditional written communication?

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II. READING COMICS/TEXT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

A growing body of both scholarship and popular study exists dealing with comics, primarily of three types: history, critical theory, and "how-to" books for prospective comics artists. For purposes of this dissertation, scholarship in related areas of reading theory, textual cohesion, comprehension and discourse analysis will be primary sources for the investigation of a reading theory of comics. The review of literature below is divided into several distinct sections pertaining to the research questions to be studied. The first several sections offer a review of general, background information relevant to a scholarly investigation of comics, including:

- Defining Comics – a brief look at what constitutes comics and what does not
- A Brief Overview of Comics Structure and Features – a descriptive analysis of common comics features and terms
- A Brief History of Comics Media – a general look at the development of the modern comics form
- A Review of Literary and Critical Analyses of Comics – a summation of current literary theory applied to comics
- Reading with Pictures – a review of scholarship in related fields such as children's picture books and illustrated science texts as well as an introduction into the cognition of pictures, and a review of scholarship dealing with the distinctions among word, image and icon.

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Subsequently, the review of literature will investigate current scholarship in reading theory directly related to the two primary questions of the dissertation proposal:

- Principles of Textual Cohesion and Coherence
- An Overview of Discourse Analysis – including reference to textual meaning, purpose and contexts.

Defining Comics

Before a true investigation of comics can begin, one must have an understanding of what exactly constitutes comics. Even the term comics itself is misleading. Nothing is necessarily funny or comical about comics. When comics first began to be published in England, they appeared primarily as satirical publications (Kunzle, 1973). Because these English-language publications of comics were satirical in nature, British comics began to be perceived as synonymous with humor. These satirical publications eventually led to the coinage of the English term "comic strip." Other cultures did not make the same associations with early comic strips, so we find that in other languages, the names given to the comics form are generally less problematic. In French, comics are bande dessinee (drawn strip) and in German, Bilderstreichfen (picture strip), terms much more accurately descriptive of the medium (Kunzle). Even so, some difference of opinion exists regarding which texts are comics and which are not.

Kunzle posits a four-part definition of the comic strip. He asserts that the comic strip must be a sequence of images, not merely a single image; he thus separates comic strips from cartoons. In other words, according to the first part of Kunzle's definition,

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on American syndicated comics pages, Peanuts, with its multiple panels, is a comic strip, whereas The Family Circus, appearing as a single panel, is not a comic strip but rather a cartoon. A key reasoning behind this part of the definition is that comics are categorically different from discrete drawings. Comics are not to be viewed as objects or perceived strictly for aesthetic value, but are to be read as constructed of a series of iconic elements (McCloud, 1993).

The first part of Kunzle's definition further argues that comics must be narrative in form. Comics tell stories using images in sequence to simulate time. Most modern critics have adopted these elements from Kunzle's definition in an increasingly common name/definition for the comics form, "narrative pictorial sequence." However, Eisner (1985) and McCloud (1993) argue that many common manuals, like in-flight emergency instructions on airplanes, are in fact comics, utilizing sequences of simple pictures in combination with symbols and words to provide instructions. If these are also comics, then perhaps the term "narrative" is too restrictive for an accurate definition.

The second part of Kunzle's definition asserts that comics must be primarily pictorial. In other words, the words of a comic strip must be secondary to or supportive of the pictures. Here Kunzle seeks to separate comics from the illuminated manuscript or from the picture book, in which the picture serves to highlight the primary written text of the work. However, this part of the definition could potentially open up a discussion regarding whether some pre-school children's picture books fall into the comics category. Many books for pre-readers offer no words whatsoever, but merely a series of

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pictures, generally one per page or page spread from which "readers" are said to extract narrative meaning and gain general skills in accessing books. On this level, there may be some arguable continuum between the picture book and the comic book, though Kunzle, Eisner and McCloud each dispute the comparison.

The other elements of Kunzle's definition are even more problematic. The third and fourth parts of Kunzle's definition assert that true comics must be in printed form and that comics must have some social or moral value. McCloud (1993) disagrees with the need for comics to be strictly in printed form. McCloud feels that historic works of pictorial sequencing like Egyptian tomb art, Trajan's Column, and the Bayeux Tapestry belong just as much to the medium of comics as the modern mass-printed comic book. McCloud goes further in his book Reinventing Comics (2000), arguing for comics creators to more actively pursue recent technologies to produce and distribute comics. He describes a variety of electronic comics and offers some commentary on how best to utilize the Internet to publish comics in ways that are not feasible or even possible in print.

Eisner and McCloud both also feel that the social or moral value of comics is irrelevant to the descriptive definition of comics, though an argument could be made that, as a medium which is read, comics will always contain some element of social or moral impact based on the experiences and purposes of the reader. Eisner, one of the foremost comics artists of the last fifty years, tries to remove all mention of content from his own definition of comics. Feeling that comics should be defined strictly by form and

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not by content, he defines comics simply as "sequential art," implying that comics require more than one image and that these images must not merely be two random images but rather must be bound together in a sequence via some property of connexity.

McCloud (1993), however, is not satisfied to define comics as "sequential art." He argues that the definition must be more exact, in that "art" could imply music, dance or sculpture, and in that film is in actuality a sequence of images played very quickly in a single visual field of reference. He believes the sequence of images in comics must be defined spatially, not temporally as with film. Also, McCloud prefers to avoid the social or aesthetic implications of the term "art" in favor of "pictorial images." Ultimately, McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9).

For this dissertation, I am primarily drawing on McCloud's definition of the medium, with the caveat that I argue that the person perceiving and understanding the comic is not a "viewer" but a "reader." Moreover, any definition of comics ought to properly establish comics as texts to differentiate them from visual arts like drawing or painting.

A Brief Overview of Comics Structure and Features

An analysis and evaluation of comics as a communication medium must necessarily depend on a shared understanding not only of a definition of comics, but of the descriptive features and parts of comics. Most readers instinctively recognize comics

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on sight, but not all comics share nor utilize common structural elements, and many elements and techniques exist as potentials for comics which comics creators may choose to use at their discretion. The basic layout of a comic strip is a sequence of discrete images or scenes juxtaposed on a visual surface; these discrete images are referred to as "panels" in comics. This understanding is necessary but not sufficient to a full understanding of comics features.

Readers may expect that each of the panels in the pictorial sequence will be surrounded by a border line to indicate the limits or frame of the individual picture. The blank space typically situated between panels in a comics sequence is called the "gutter." McCloud (1993) describes the gutter as being the heart of the comic. In Derridian terms, the gutter is the absence, the lacuna, against which the panels stand. The motion, action, transition, and over-arching meaning of comics is carried in the invisible action or thought that occurs between one image and the next, in the gutter. However, the border is not requisite to the form. Many comics, both in newspaper strips and in comic books, utilize borderless panels, where there may be space between images but where there is no border and, therefore, no ostensible gutter, though the Derridian principle of the lacuna between the panels remains.

Moreover, some comics artists actively deconstruct the convention of panels and gutters by "bleeding" images to the edge of the page, extending the art through the traditional margin area of the page, or extending part of an image out of its surrounding

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border and into the empty space outside of the panel. The "bleed" thus violates the gutter, and in extreme cases, violates other panels of artwork within the sequence.

Further complications of layout may include embedded or overlapping panels. In the former, one or more panels may be drawn "nesting" inside another, larger panel. In the latter, the border of one panel may cross over the border of another panel; thus the first panel may appear to be drawn on top of the other panel.

Panel sizes are not necessarily uniform in comics, nor is there any required shape for a panel. Though typical panels are rectangular in shape, comics panels may be rendered in circles, triangles, or any curved or rhomboid shape the artist can imagine, including panels constructed in the shape of objects like people, animals, or machinery.

According to the definitions of comics forwarded by Kunzle, Eisner and McCloud, there is a minimum number of panels necessary for comics. They each argue that comics consist of at least two juxtaposed images in the aforementioned definitions. However, no upper limit exists, in theory, for the number of panels possible in a pictorial sequence.

Within the artwork inside the panels, comics creators draw upon a number of conventions to convey their content. Readers familiar with the comics format become able to identify a number of standard iconographic lines, images and symbols. For example, motion cannot be strictly drawn in a still image. However, a number of techniques are available to the comics artist to imply motion to the reader. These conventions include "motion lines" which convey to the reader a sense of the trajectory

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of an object inferred to be in motion as well as a sense of the speed and force of the object's motion. Variations on motion lines can be read to signify particular kinds of motion. Motion lines for a person shivering or shaking will be unlike motion lines for a flying object. However, these conventions are not static. An historical analysis indicates that standard techniques for expressing motion have evolved with different artists over time (McCloud, 1993), though most of these conventions, including but not limited to motion lines, are fairly universal with the widespread mass-production of comics and are generally understood by readers who have gained a nominal, basic literacy in regards to comics.

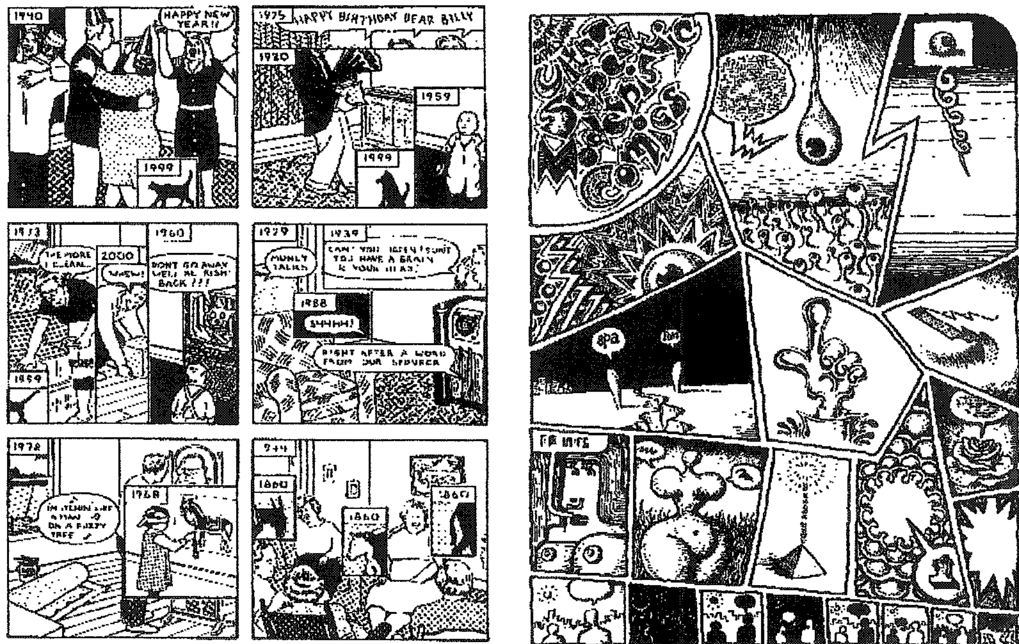

Figure 1. Examples of (left) "nesting" panels (McGuire, 1989, p. 73) and (right) variance of panel size and shape (Crumb, 1988, p. 18).

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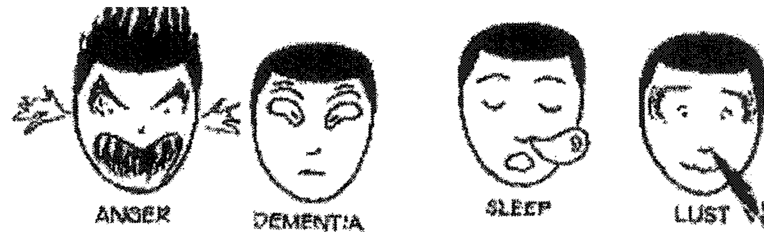

Figure 2. Iconic representation of emotion in Japanese comics (McCloud, 1993, p. 131).

In fact, a number of the lines in a comics panel contain some iconic quality, meaning that they are not simply visual representations of an artifact or event, but that they carry non-visual meaning in a conventionalized set of symbols. For example, McCloud (1993) discusses the use of a standard set of lines to indicate odor in comics. The lines as they are drawn do not represent something visible; instead they carry more abstract meaning in a visual manner. Similarly, specialized sets of lines or other images may be used to convey fear, anger, humiliation, surprise, alarm, pain, sounds, or a variety of emotions, sensations and concepts, including force of impact. Despite the general widespread use of these iconic representations within the artwork of the comics panel, it should be noted that these specific iconic lines are learned conventions. Japanese comics, for example, have sometimes evolved a completely different set of symbols to indicate abstract emotions or expressions in comics (see Fig. 2).

A successful comics reader must be able to do more than simply comprehend the represented subject of the artwork. Comics literacy depends upon readers who are able to infer a wide variety of abstracted concepts from iconic markings within the images. The images in themselves have almost no limits to their form or appearance. Comics

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artwork is typically line drawing in ink and usually is limited in visual detail to only those elements necessary to transmit the clues required for the reader to follow a progression of meaning from one panel to the next. However, that line drawing may be black-and-white or may be in color, whether in four-color printer's separation or in full-color. Comics artwork does not have to be drawn at all, however. Some comics images are painted, others are created from woodcuts, while still other images use actual photographs, either in whole or in part. As comics move into electronic delivery, comics creators are beginning to use a wide variety of digital imaging tools to create comics images (McCloud, 2000). Nothing in the current scholarly definitions of comics mandates a particular artistic material for the artwork. In fact, if, like McCloud, we refute the third part of Kunzle's definition, that comics must be in print on paper, then wall-carvings and even needlework may be authentic means of displaying comics texts.

A Brief History of Comics Media

Perhaps the central text describing and laying out the early history of the comics format is Kunzle's (1973) The Early Comic Strip. Kunzle details the origin of comics' primary meaning-making structure, the series of discreet images often in combination or connection with words to communicate some content to a reader. Reitberger and Fuchs (1972), Perry and Aldridge (1975), and McCloud (1993) are quick to point out a specialized, but unbroken history of popular use of still images in sequence to communicate, dating at least as far back as Egyptian artwork on numerous tombs. In these tomb "comics," distinct panels of artwork, reading in a consistent pattern from the

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lower left of the art surface, moving to the right and zig-zagging upwards and back and forth to the upper right corner, display narrative content relating to either the building of the particular monument or to the deeds of the person buried in that tomb. Also, like the modern comics form, these sequential images are often shown in conjunction with writing (hieroglyphics) which respond to or elucidate on the images. Similar use of the comics format through history may include the narrative of Roman victory displayed in an upward spiral of images on Trajan's Column, the long continuous series of images telling of the Norman Invasion on the Bayeux Tapestry, numerous medieval works showing deeds of saints in pictorial displays, and the folding pictorial manuscripts of pre-Colombian America (Reitberger & Fuchs, 1972; Perry & Aldridge, 1975; and McCloud, 1993).

Like standard text documents, comics, according to Gifford (1984), saw a change and an increase of production and availability with the invention of modern printing. Among the earliest examples of comics in print are various series of woodcut prints which when read in sequence relate a general narrative, though some reviewers prefer to date the start of printed comics to William Hogarth's famous serial drawings The Harlot's Progress and The Rake's Progress (Perry & Aldridge, 1975).

If the previous examples represent the family history of comics, then the father of modern comics is generally considered to be Swiss artist Rudolphe Topffer. Quite popular in his day, Topffer used the first modern blending of pictures and words to tell brief, generally satirical, stories commenting on foibles in society (Robinson, 1974). His

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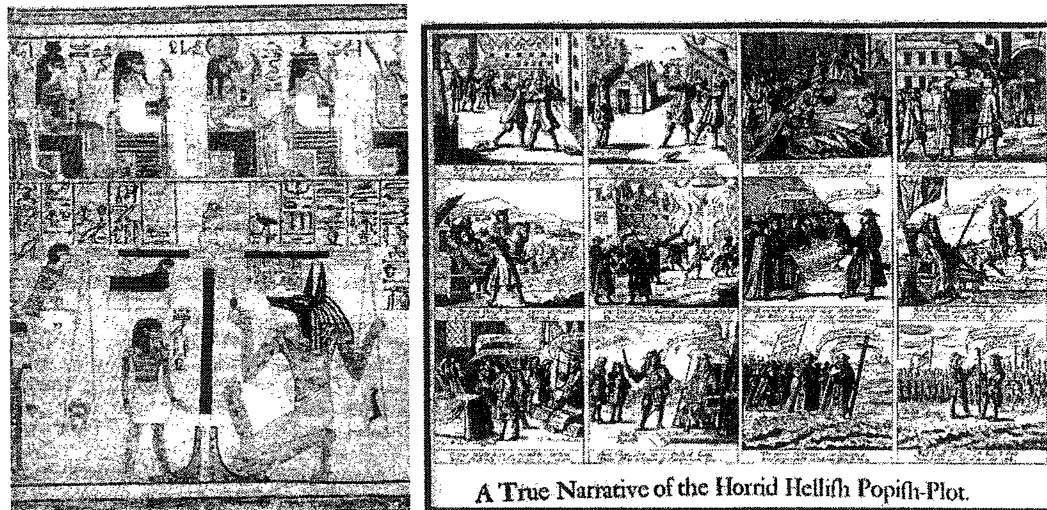

Figure 3. Examples of historical comics. (upper left) Eyption tomb art (reprinted from Aldredge & Perry, 1975, p. 21); (upper right) Francis Barlow, The Horrid Hellish Popish Plot, Part One, circa 1682 (reprinted from Kunzle, 1973, p. 139), note the use of banners or ribbons as precursors to modern speech balloons; (bottom) Comic Cuts, 1 (1), 1890 (reprinted from Aldredge & Perry, 1975, p. 57), an example of British satire comics.

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work became so popular in Europe in the mid-1800s that his political and social satires became the emulated standard for the comics form, and soon comics were seen published primarily in satire and humor magazines and pamphlets.

Comics in America became a household item thanks to a circulation war between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer (Reitberger & Fuchs, 1972; Perry & Aldridge, 1975). By including comics pages in their editions, newspaper publishers began to increase readership and circulation. Soon, comics pages were a fixed part of the American newspaper. Eventually, publishers began to see the financial potential of exploiting the popularity of comics and began to publish entire short volumes of comics themselves, without the rest of the newspaper. The modern comic book was born (Robinson, 1974).

With the financial flourishing of the comic book as its own publishing format, comics are perhaps finally coming into their own as a mainstream medium that is not limited to humor and satire but that is as complex and layered as any other medium in expressing the human imagination and condition.

A Review of Literary and Critical Analysis of Comics

Until recently, very little serious scholarship has been written addressing comics as a literary form. Before the mid-1980s, scholarship devoted to the content of comics usually involved discussion of the psychological impact of horror comics and violence on pre-adolescents. Dorrell, Curtis, Rampal and Kuldip (1995) report on dozens of articles and studies from the nineteen-forties and fifties that debate the merits and perils of

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allowing comic books into elementary schoolrooms. Many of these mid-century critics saw the comic book as devaluing reading skills, offering trivial subjects via minimal vocabulary and distracting young readers from classic literature. Other, more favorable reviewers felt that children's attraction to comics should be co-opted and used to encourage a love of reading. The bulk of the negative criticism came in the early nineteen-fifties when America was swept by anti-comics hysteria, aimed largely at the graphic horror and violence in the EC line of comics, fueled by Wertham's (1954) widely-read book Seduction of the Innocent and by accusations of communist influence in popular comics material. The EC publishing house had produced a series of increasingly violent and suggestive comics aimed at an adult readership returned from World War II. Reitberger and Fuchs argue that some of the comics EC published, widely read by children, are still intensely violent by today's standards. The EC controversy reached its peak with an infamous comics cover showing an ax-murderer holding the severed head of a woman. The resulting public outrage led to congressional hearings and to the creation of a self-governing comics organization called the Comics Code Authority, which heavily censored and restricted future commercial comics content in America. If this criticism stunted the artistic and expressionistic development of comics as a full-fledged popular medium, it also revealed the general public belief/bias that comics should be designed for children. Though the vast majority of modern comics publishing has indeed been directed towards adolescent (or younger) audiences, nothing definitive in the mere act of combining words and pictures ought to lead us to the conclusion that

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comics as a medium can only be for children. Even Marshall McLuhan (1964), in his seminal Understanding Media, recognized comics' powerful promise as a media form, not merely for children but for all readers, noting that the visual potential of comics rivals the visual potential of television in the shaping of social consciousness.

In the early nineteen eighties, corresponding with the rise of the comic book direct sales market, wherein comics began to be sold directly to readers at comics specialty shops rather than through newsstands or grocery store racks, popular mainstream comic books returned to actively courting and addressing adult audiences using adult themes and issues such as miscarriage, rape, homosexuality, homelessness and political activism. Some of the more underground comics artists and material, decidedly not intended for children, began to find a wider circulation and exposure with this new marketplace. Even mainstream comics like Frank Miller's Dark Knight Returns (1986) and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' Watchmen (1986) caused a small stir in some literary circles by virtue of their conscious use of post-modern storytelling and their active deconstruction of comic book characters, situations and stereotypes. Miller questions the bourgeois attitudes of traditional superheroes and problematizes ideas of vigilantism, whereas Moore and Gibbons present flawed characters (e.g., superhero rapists) and explore the real consequences, both politically and morally, of individuals placing themselves in power over others because of enhanced physical attributes. On the heels of this increased public awareness of the changes in the comics field, a small flourish of literary criticism regarding comics has appeared. Because some of these new comics were arguably

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different from more general, popular comics in tone and delivery, that difference apparently warranted an increased examination of the material from a socio-political context.

Modern scholarship in the area of literary or critical analysis of comics probably began with Mattelart and Dorfman (1975) in their controversial How to Read Donald Duck, which asserts that Disney comics are part of a vast military-industrial conspiracy to inculcate young readers into a jingoistic, white, middle-class American paradigm. More recent attempts at serious criticism of comics include Joseph Witek's (1989) Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman and Harvey Pekar, which explores comics as an intensely personal vehicle for expressive narrative; M. Thomas Inge's (1990) Comics as Culture, which discusses the social shaping power of comics; Roger Sabin's (1993) Adult Comics: An Introduction; the anthology Dark Knights: The New Comics in Context, edited by Bloom and McCue (1993); and more recently Bradford Wright's (2001) Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America, which chronicles how comics have both reflected social change in America and helped to teach dominant cultural paradigms to young readers. These works and others are the start of an effort to afford comics the same kind of social criticisms that have been applied to other art and communication forms, like music, painting, literature and film.

One of the stronger examples so far of the trend towards the cultural criticism of the comics form is William Anthony Nericcio's (1995) "Artif(r)acture: Virulent Pictures,

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Graphic Narrative and the Ideology of the Visual," in which the author argues that comics' reliance on visual imagery makes it potentially the most powerful, most dangerous and most insidious of all ideological vehicles. Comics, Nericcio argues, break from the oppressive dictatorship of words to mingle with the seductive and corrupting image in a kind of mestizo narrative. According to Nericcio, the replacing of written exposition with the image in comics creates a "fracturing" of the hegemony of words in traditional narrative and makes comics an ideal post-modern form of ideological expression.

Other, more politically tame scholarship includes published histories of the comics format, such as Kunzle's (1973) The Early Comic Strip, Robinson's (1974) The Comics: An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art, and Ron Goulart's (1991) Over 50 Years of American Comic Books, plus the works of Reitberger and Fuchs (1972), Aldredge and Perry (1975), and Gifford (1971; 1984).

Eisner (1985; 1996), McCloud (1993; 2000), and Weber (1989) have provided a basic analysis of how comics create meaning; or rather, how the comics reader is able to interpret the compound narrative of comics to create meaning. In addition, several articles on syntactical and/or lexical analysis of specific comics have been published in German. These articles are not currently available in English, though Weber summarizes a few of these works in his own essay. Weber does attempt to look at cohesion and connexity in comics from a traditional scholarly perspective. Weber approaches his own understanding of comics from a background in film and film-theory and chooses to use

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cinematographic terms and analogies to explain how readers process comics (for more, see the "Principles of Textual Cohesion" section of Chapter Two). In this dissertation, I seek to pick up what these writers have started and attempt to relate in depth how the reader processes both the pictures and the written text in comics, and, in particular, to examine how the lines of written text connect to each other and to the sequence of images with which they interact. In short, this study is aimed at expanding our knowledge of the nature of comic book reading.

Reading with Pictures

Much of this study of the reading of comics revolves around the reading of pictures. Some scholars may object to the notion that pictures are read in the traditional sense, and indeed the science of language processing is incomplete where pictures are concerned. No studies of neural stimulation have been conducted involving comic books, neither in isolation nor in comparison to the neural stimulation of the brain in the reading of standard printed texts. However, studies have been conducted which have sought to determine whether the mind processes pictures and words via similar processes and/or in a common linguistic processor. Theios and Amrhein (1989) conducted several experiments mixing words and pictures in combinations and monitored the neural response patterns of participants in the experiment. One such experiment featured the substitution of a picture for a word in selected sentences and a measurement of neural responses and response times to determine whether picture meaning is processed in the same processor in the brain as lexical meaning. Theios and Amrhein concluded that both

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pictures and words are processed in an amodal conceptual processor, that is, a common conceptual processor independent of either mode. However, contradictory claims exist. Marmurek (1994) disputes Theios and Amrhein and argues that picture recognition and lexical recognition may be achieved by separate conceptual processors, but stops short of making any definitive claim. Ganis, Kutas and Sereno (1996) in their own series of electrophysiological studies determined that semantic processing of pictures evokes a greater frontal lobe response than lexical semantic processing, and conclude that "the meaning of words and pictures is determined by functionally similar neural systems that are at least partially nonoverlapping" (p. 101).

Still, there are reasons to argue that pictures and words can each be read. Humphreys and Bruce (1989) argue for an historical connection between iconic drawings and words and also note several common features shared by pictures and words. Both pictures and words are recognized and processed visually. Once recognized, pictures and words can be identified in a variety of presentations (different fonts, perspectives, sizes, locations, etc.). Moreover, both iconic drawings and words may be imbued by the reader with subjective connotations.

John Stewig (1992), writing about the visual processing of meaning by children in picture books, posits three elements of reading which can and should be applied by the reader to the accompanying pictures. Though Stewig does not write specifically about comics, his ideas are not unrelated to the reading of comics. Stewig argues that successful readers of picture books 1) must view and interpret the pictures in relation to

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their personal experiences and understanding of the subject and of the world, 2) must be able to recognize not only the subject of the drawing, but be able to identify and select clues which link the picture to a larger textual meaning (these clues include formal and structural elements such as line quality, color, shape, dimension, etc.), and 3) must be able to fashion a semantic relationship between the picture and word clues in the author's text. Although the third of these elements is not a prerequisite for comics, wherein the presence of writing is optional, we may reasonably infer that where words are present, the comics reader might indeed need to fashion a semantic connection between those words and the pictures.

Joseph Schwarcz (1982), in Ways of the Illustrator, contrasts the viewing of artwork as discrete pictures (simultaneous) with the viewing of artwork accompanied by text (continuous). Though, like Stewig, he is writing of children's illustrated texts, the point is relevant to comics as well. Stewig argues that a picture, whether line drawing or painting, is viewed objectively as a discrete object. It is perceived and received. The picture, he contends, is intended to be viewed as complete, as a surface; the reader views its contents "simultaneously" as a whole. However, once the picture is attached to text, the picture must be viewed subjectively, not as an object to itself, but as an aspect of something larger, read as containing elements of a "continuous" or linear flow. The combination of pictures and words, therefore, creates for the reader a challenge of reading both simultaneously and continuously, in a kind of recursive process. W. J. T. Mitchell (1986) complicates this vision of simultaneous reading by challenging the notion that

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pictures are received instantly as a complete surface. Mitchell counters that this concept is a "strawman." Cognition in general, he argues, is closer to continuous reception. We receive pictures in time and we select details. He suggests that a picture is perceived as part of a context that is constructed by the viewer, not merely received. Moreover, just as Frank Smith (1994) notes that writing is scanned selectively for clues to a larger, linear progression of meaning, Don Denny (1971), in the introduction to The Art of the Comic Strip, suggests that comic art is also intended to be scanned and sampled by the reader, not merely seen.

Another area of scholarship tied closely to an investigation of comics reading concerns itself with word-image relationships. This area of study examines visual aspects of writing or writing as a visual object, including explorations of word as image, word as supplement to image, and word as artifice on image. Word-image scholarship offers several interesting insights into the combination of words and graphics found in comics.

On the one hand, word-image studies look at how concrete poetry transforms words into images or shapes that may either reflect the word(s) of the poem or some aspect of the poem's mood or else present the very image described by the word(s) of the poem (Cluver, 1998). For example, a concrete poem might arrange the words of a religious poem into the shape of a religious symbol, such as a cross. Or, an image, such as the photograph of a bird, might be cut into the shape of the word, "bird." Cluver argues that such blendings of word and image represent a search for a "natural sign," a sign that is both text and image, each aspect of the concrete poem accentuating the other.

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In connection to comics, however, the blendings Cluver describes seem to present text as a concrete object whereas comics call for an opposite interpretation, wherein image is perceived as subjective text.

Cluver's search for a "natural sign" is not shared by all word-image scholars, however. Like Hatfield (2000), Weingarden (1998) sees word and image as sign systems in opposition, though unlike Hatfield, Weingarden hopes that although "this relationship may not always be a symmetrical one; we may see 'similarity' and 'collaboration' as well as 'domination' and 'difference'" (p. 59). Weingarden argues for an "interartistic co-existence" between word and image and implores scholars to look for "planes of convergence" between word studies and image studies. Specifically, Weingarden is concerned with "reading" paintings historiographically as discursive statements. Paintings, he argues, must a la "Foucault's model of discourse analysis, [be defined as]... an encoded articulation of a historically-bound... matrix of social systems or cultural events. It is within this matrix that word and image studies can view visual texts as reciprocal objects with verbal texts" (49). Weingarden proceeds to note that her own use of the term text in regards to paintings is a forced attempt to demonstrate convergence between the forms. Other writers disagree strongly, if not with the idea of paintings as culturally constructed matrices, at least with the idea that word and image studies can be successfully integrated.

Vos (1998) argues that integration between word and sign, in terms of semiotic value or interpretation, is not possible because of the variances between the sign systems,

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specifically because of the variance in the manner through which word and image "mean" a concept or thing. Word and image are by their natures opposed to each other, or in Vos' terminology, juxtaposed, in their semiotics. Citing Nelson Goodman's (1978) theory of sign systems, Vos builds a solid contrast between the syntactically articulate symbol systems of alphabetic writing and the syntactically dense symbol systems of representational art. In syntactically dense sign systems, which include paintings or drawings, between any two symbols in the sign system, an intermediary sign can be posited or created. For example, between two images of a bird in flight, an indeterminate number of images may be placed successfully and meaningfully between the original two images. In integral mathematics, an infinite set of values may be placed between 1 and 2, i.e., 1.1, 1.11, 1.111, etc. However, in a syntactically articulate system, such as the alphabet, no intermediary letter exists between "a" and "b," nor can one be invented without recasting the learned conventions of the alphabet.

Similarly, Reynolds (1998) sees an important distinction between various sign systems not only in their methods of articulation of meaning but in the "distance" between the sign and that which the sign represents or that to which it refers. Reynolds describes three basic levels of signification between sign and referent. In the first level, the sign directly shares in the nature of the signified, e.g., a feather may be a sign of a bird. In the second level of signification, though the sign does not connect directly to the referent, the sign may have some clear existential connection. Hence, though a detailed anatomical drawing of a bird may not share any intrinsic "birdness," the sign is "indexical" and the

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reader or viewer may need no special learned convention to tie the anatomical drawing to the concept of "bird." In the third level of signification, the sign has no necessary connection to the referent other than through convention. The letters b-i-r-d have no intrinsic connection to the idea of a bird except that a reader of English has learned to tie the sign "bird" to the concept bird. Having articulated these layers of signification, Reynolds then points out how these layers of signification have been combined in hybrid signs, a la concrete poetry. However, Reynolds does not suggest that these significations are integrated within themselves in any objective state; i.e., there is no "natural sign" such as Culver suggests that would somehow in itself function on multiple layers of signification apart from the receiver. Instead, Reynolds suggests the role of a sign's function and of the contexts and needs of the sign's receiver in finding ways to fashion a combined semiotic. For Reynolds, this process is one of "imagination" on the receiver's part, though the precise mechanism of that imagination remains, perhaps necessarily, vague.

Vos, also struggling with the non-integration of competing sign systems, likewise refutes any "shared representational status of verbal and visual signs" (p. 137). Vos' concern with "visual literature" leads him to a theory of exemplification, which holds that the displacement of either verbal or visual signs causes attention to be drawn to that displacement, irrespective of what sign system is being displaced. Because this exemplification, or displacement, can be a function of any sign system, a viewer of visual literature does not need to wrestle with any integration of sign systems. Complex

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reference, a term Vos prefers to semiotic integration, is a natural, ordinary function of the receiver. Focusing on displacement of sign systems rather than on a simultaneous reading of disparate systems, according to Vos, creates for the receiver no special struggle of semiotic interpretation; people are naturally suited to recognizing displacement.

For example, in describing the 'visual book' Sweet End by Bern Porter (1989) (a 'book' constructed as a collage of pictures, posters and text fragments), Vos argues that interpretation does not call for an integration of sign systems in a 'natural sign.' A viewer is drawn not to either sign system (neither text nor image) but to the idea of displacement or juxtaposition of signs, drawn not to a combination of signs but to the space between the sign systems, thus highlighting difference rather than integration.

For W. J. T. Mitchell (1986) word and image are not separate things in and of themselves but rather are separate manifestations of a common cognitive principle, the idea. Mitchell's seminal Iconology explores a continuum of visual representations of the idea, with the graphic image on one end of the spectrum and the verbal image on the other. Thus, the graphic image and the word are potentially non-overlapping signs of the cognitive idea. Integration of the graphic image and verbal image may therefore not be necessary to understanding. Instead, cognition is perhaps a conceptual function of the idea rather than of the disparate sign systems signifying the idea.

Mitchell argues that images must be understood as non-transparent constructs which are or can be learned and interpreted, instead of being understood as "transparent window[s] on the world" (p. 8). Furthermore, Mitchell suggests that if pictures reach a

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certain level of visual abstraction they may take on verbal powers of conceptual abstraction. Contextualized and repeated, pictures may in fact 'mean' themselves.

Further developing his theory that pictures and words are both signs of 'the idea,' Mitchell explores the nature of mental imaging. Mental images, he claims, are not always visual. He argues that an idea may be imagined (given image) as a word or as nothing visual at all, pointing out the difficulty of visualizing abstract concepts. Ideas (ideal objects) are not necessarily pictures or words; ideas can be understood as propositions or sets of qualities and characteristics. In essence, Mitchell proposes a separation of the idea or cognitive construct from verbal or visual sign systems.

Mitchell claims that the historic need to accentuate the gulf between word and image is political rather than natural. However, Mitchell sees no particular need to reconcile word and image. Though the dialectic of word and image has remained a constant, the quality or nature of that dialectic varies with cultures and times and environments. Perhaps, he suggests, historic searches to isolate the differences between image and word are flawed because there is no essential difference between graphic and verbal representations of the idea; that is, the differences are interesting precisely because they are dynamic and contextualized rather than natural and necessary.

Principles of Textual Cohesion

Textuality, according to De Beaugrande and Dressler (1983), is in reality a procedure rather than a material artifact. Textuality begins with a planning phase and a sense of ideation or conceptualization and works toward a parsing of discrete visual

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features of a surface text. The parsing of these discrete visual features requires a reader to link surface elements of a text using a variety of reading skills.

The primary scholarly text outlining and discussing the elements of textual cohesion in English is Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion in English. The authors lay out a systematic understanding of how textuality is achieved in standard printed writing. The authors describe textuality as the sense of overall texture to writing, the means by which and manner in which elements of writing (phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic) are woven together to create a fabric of meaning for the reader. De Beaugrande and Dressler are somewhat more detailed in their criteria for textuality, including not only visibly obvious writing features but intertextual considerations and the intentions and motivations of the reader and writer. In all, De Beaugrande and Dressler posit seven standards of textuality, including cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. The last three standards, informativity, situationality and intertextuality, deal with 'higher' conceptual elements necessary to textuality. Intentionality and acceptability are elements of discrete reading events that contribute greatly to textual subjectivity. Coherence and cohesion deal specifically with the visual surface elements of the text. Discussing cohesion and coherence, De Beaugrande and Dressler defer strongly to Halliday and Hasan. Halliday and Hasan see cohesion, the way textual elements hang together, as manifesting on several levels of writing and meaning. Lexical cohesion occurs on the level of individual words and how they tie to other words in a text. Grammatical cohesion describes the textual ties that are

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created on a syntactic level. Semantic cohesion occurs on a macro-level, tying elements of the text together on the level of meaning and interpretation.

Halliday and Hasan suggest that textual cohesive ties are generally formed through several techniques: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. In reference, elements of a text can look ahead or refer back to the same element in a different location in the text. The reader recognizes that the elements are co-referential or that they refer to the same idea, object or construct. This recognition creates cohesion by forcing the reader to link the two elements. Substitution occurs generally through the use of pronouns to force a reader to make a connection between the pronoun and the word or term it replaces. Ellipsis is a cohesive technique that works by elimination of an understood word or phrase. The reader knows that a word or phrase is missing and searches through a memory of the text to link the ellipsis with the original elided phrase. Conjunction occurs through words that link passages, utilizing connective phrases that explain how two elements of text relate to each other as additive, adversative, causal or temporal. Finally, lexical cohesion generally occurs either through repetition of a textual element or through the use of a related textual element, i.e., relating a tree with a branch of that tree.

Coherence, relating to the continuity of meaning between elements of the text, is connected to a reader's knowledge and sense of context but is still bound to features of the surface of the text. De Beaugrande and Dressler describe control centers, "points from which accessing and processing can be strategically done" (p. 95), as keys to textual

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coherence. Foremost among these textual control centers are a set of ideas De Beaugrande and Dressler refer to as primary concepts, which include objects, situations, events and actions. In addition to these primary concepts, De Beaugrande and Dressler list a wide range of secondary concepts, including agent, affected entity, relation, attribute, location, time, motion, instrument, cause, possession, volition, and a variety of other conceptual features a reader uses when building continuity of meaning from textual clues.

In considering the connexity of text in comics, one might also consider the mimetic aspects of comics as fiction (in those comics that are not primarily technical or instructional). In the case of fictional content in comics, the comics creator is not only concerned with presentation, that is with the conveyance of information or content to an audience, but also with representation, the simulation or appearance of real information when both addresser and addressee understand the content not to be true. The reader of fiction, according to Leech and Short (1981), understands special principles of textuality relative to the non-real information of fictive discourse. Information, according to this theory, is understood to be sequenced in an appropriate manner that helps the reader to comprehend the flow and the meaning of the text. This sequencing is a type of connexity in the text and consists of three types: presentational, chronological, and psychological.

In comics, the linguistic utterances, that is, the written lines of text, appear in pieces and chunks, typically as textboxes or "balloons." An examination of connexity and cohesion in comics must first look at the cohesive principles at work within and

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between these chunks of writing. However, the meaning and information of the comics text is carried not only by the written portion of the text. Meaning is carried within the pictorial images of comics as well. Therefore a full consideration of cohesiveness must consider whether the same or comparable cohesive elements exist in the images to tie one to another. Moreover, beyond the connexity of written word to written word and the connexity of image to image, the word and image must be connected. If the composite text of picture and word is indeed read and understood as a unified text, there must be underlying textual principles of cohesion linking art to word and word to art.

McCloud (1993), concerned almost exclusively with the artwork of comics, posits six different manners through which panels of comics adhere or connect to other panels: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non sequitor. Weber (1989), using the term "graphic sequential connexity," explores how the placement of comics panels contributes to a reader's understanding of connectedness between the contents of separate panels. For example, overlapping panels force a visual sense of connection between the panels. Additionally, "bleeds" from one panel to another create a visual connexity not typically possible in standard written texts. However, beyond the forcing of connexity, graphical sequential connexity offers no insight into the cohesive principles at work, i.e., whether the textual connexity is causal, temporal, psychological, etc.

Weber, though, comes closest to an analysis of the complexities of textual cohesiveness in comics. Beyond graphic sequential connexity, Weber identifies two

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other types of connective properties in comics: cinematographic sequential connexity and textual sequential connexity. The cinematographic sequential connexity comes closest to appreciating the interplay of words and pictures, but is primarily concerned with the comparison between story-telling in comics and story-telling in film, focusing on metaphors of camera angles, and with creative repetition or substitution of a subject to change "scenes" between panels. Weber's textual sequential connexity recognizes the potentials of repetition and anaphoric reference to connect elements of dialogue in comics. He also notes the interesting principle of "completion" wherein an utterance begun in one panel and completed in a second panel forces a connection between the images in the two panels. Aside from these interesting observations, Weber makes little reference to linguistic principles of cohesion. He does, however, offer a brief introductory discussion of how images of objects and actants in a series of panels can contribute to semantic coherence and cohesion in that series. The example he uses is a three-panel excerpt from a comic showing 1) a letter being held by a woman at the top of a stair, 2) a letter falling in space, and 3) a man at the base of a stair picking up a letter. By referencing the repetition of the stairs and the letter in the panels, Weber argues connexity in the series, but stresses that coherence occurs because the reader infers the action of the woman dropping the letter to the man. If the second two panels were reversed, showing a man picking up a letter before showing a letter falling, connexity would still exist but coherence would be broken.

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McCloud (1993) and Weber (1989) therefore offer the best specific insights into connexity in the comics medium, though each deals with the subject only in part. Weber's slightly more thorough treatment is based upon cinematic comparisons, and neither one offers a full examination from a linguistic perspective of cohesive principles at work in the building of text and meaning between lines of writing, between images, or between word and pictures.

An Overview of Discourse Analysis

The term 'discourse analysis' is a problematic one in that it properly deals with the entire interactive events or circumstances of a communicative event. Typically, the term refers to oral communication and the analysis of a communicative event; however, the phrase has also been used repeatedly in investigations of written discourse. Complicating any analysis of discourse in writing are the static nature of the text and the separation, both spatially and temporally, of the sender of the message from the receiver of the message. Several scholarly attempts to explore the features of written discourse have faced understandable criticism that the static nature of written text decontextualizes the individual discrete discourse events that occur anew each time the work is read by a new audience. Understanding the importance of that criticism, we can still find a number of important textual characteristics revealed through scholarly analysis of comics texts as constructs in a universe of discourse.

Beyond cohesion and coherence, a number of other, higher order factors are necessary if a reader is to fashion full meaning from a text. De Beaugrande and Dressler

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name informativity, situationality and intertextuality as being key higher order concepts in the reading of a text. Informativity means, for De Beaugrande and Dressler, that a text, in order for it to be read properly, must contain transactional meaning and value. There must be content that has understandable and interpretable meaning to the audience. A text must also meet conditions of situationality, meaning contextual relevance. A reader must be able to make reasonable predictions regarding purpose and context of the text. For example, the sign "Pets must be carried on escalator" may have several possible interpretations for the reader. The reader interprets the situationality of the text to select between possible acceptable meanings. The next standard of textuality is intertextuality, which calls upon the reader to make predictions about a text based on previous experiences with other, analogous texts.

Two other criteria for textuality, as argued by De Beaugrande and Dressler, are intentionality and acceptability, referring respectively to the goals and purposes of the creator of the text and to the ability and willingness of the receiver to accept the material of the text. These two criteria center around individual acts of writing and reading. As such, an investigation of these standards of textuality is bound to specific discourse events.

Comics, like other texts, are read by an audience in a universe of meaning. Understanding comics requires not merely an ability to perceive the composite text of comics but also an ability to perceive and navigate the discourse situation(s) presented in the comics text. James Kinneavy (1971) fashions his seminal discourse theory around the

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idea of aim or purpose in text. According to Kinneavy, the discourse situation of a written text requires an encoder (addresser), a decoder (addressee), a signal (text), and reality (reference). Text whose aim is encoder-based is expressive; text that is decoder-based is persuasive; text that is reality-based is referential; text that is signal-based is literary. Meaning can be achieved when the reader understands his/her location within the general discourse situation presented in the text.

If the reading of comics is comparable to the reading of standard printed texts, the discourse aims in comics ought to be comparable to the aims of discourse in standard printed writing. That is, comics ought to exist or have potential as expressive, persuasive, referential and literary, with all the attendant differences of content, style and presentation required by these varying discourse aims.

The bulk of published comics do indeed place the audience within a fictional universe of meaning, therefore an application of fictional discourse situations should be appropriate. In standard written fiction, the reader is placed within a context that contains not merely an addresser (author) and addressee (reader) mediated by a message (text), but which also contains an implied addresser (narrator or point-of-view) and implied addressee (an imagined audience) (Leech & Short, 1981). Frequently, this embedding of implied discourse within the "real" discourse can be repeated on multiple levels, i.e., the primary implied addresser relating a narrative as expressed by another implied narrator. Within comics, however, the ideas of implied addresser and implied addressee are often complicated by a contrast in perspective and tone between the written word of the comic

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and the art of the comic. This contrast can be particularly problematic when the comic is created by a creative team. Most mainstream comics publishing houses employ separate writers (addresser 1) and artists (addresser 2). Between these two addressers, interesting discourse possibilities exist for multiple implied narrators and implied audiences working simultaneously.

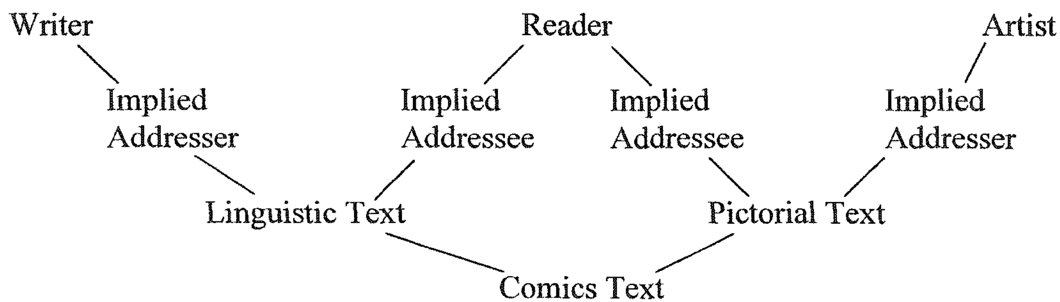

Figure 4. Diagram mapping basic discourse event in comics. Includes implied addressees and addressers for both the written and pictorial text.

Other concerns related to the development of a comics reading theory include an understanding of current theories of reading comprehension in general. Most current reading theory revolves around the notion of schemas and genres (Smith, 1994). Sadoski (1999) offers a description of a schema as "a mental program with a set of variables (slots) that accept only certain types of data and supply default values where no data are given" (p. 493). Reading, according to these theories, is a process whereby readers makes predications about the actions or events implied by the surface of the text. Readers learn story grammars through inter-textual experience, gaining understandings of how texts hold together and how they develop their content or themes. Readers are thereby able to

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make predictions about what information is encoded in the text, reading information not letter-by-letter but in chunks, processing each chunk as quickly as possible to verify whether it fits the reader's prediction, and altering the upcoming predictions if it does not. Walter Kintsch (1998) raises the question as to whether these schemas are properly described as story grammars or as propositions. Kintsch suggests that reading is only one variety of comprehension of the world through our senses and that this comprehension is properly framed by a series of propositions built around a predicate and an argument, i.e., and action and its agents. A reader, then, is engaged in a meaning-making process whereby she chunks information and interprets that information using schemas, by making and testing predictions about the development of the text. DeBeaugrande and Dressler (1983) offer some specific categorizations that describe the primary concepts of such schemas, including objects, situations, events, and actions. A reader learns to seek out and identify objects, "conceptual entities with a stable identity," situations, the arrangement of object, events, "occurrences which change a situation," and actions, "events… brought about by an agent" or actor (p. 95). Reading, according to this theory, is a process of managing these and other, related concepts, not merely a process of decoding surface signs. This dissertation does not attempt to test or verify notions of schema in comics; however, the ideas of schema are important to a general exploration of the readability of comics texts.

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Summary

Though scholarship dealing specifically with comics textuality is limited, a number of related studies exist that can guide this exploration of comics as texts. Within this exploration, a number of potential challenges to conventional understanding can be raised. This dissertation has sought seek to define comics as texts, to present graphic images as textual elements read continuously in a universe of meaning and context, to explore the apparently natural convergence of words and images into a singular and cohesive text, and to question the link between words, text, and the act of reading comics.

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III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose and focus of this dissertation is to study the nature of comics textuality in order to develop a general theory of reading comics. As such, the dissertation is theoretical in construct and relies on rhetorical inquiry over empirical inquiry. Though the de-emphasis on empirical inquiry necessitates a number of restrictions on the results of the study and how they might be used by future researchers, the idea of rhetorical inquiry to develop theoretical frameworks has precedent, including the development of theories by Moffett (1968) and Kinneavy (1971).

Theory Building

Each of these writers drew upon existing theoretical frameworks, from developmental psychology and semiotics, respectively, to fashion theories of discourse production and aims. For the current attempt at theory-building, I recognize, as did Moffett and Kinneavy, that the idea of theory is not an end to itself, but rather part of a process toward the ongoing development of understanding in a field as the theory is subsequently tested, countered and refined by future investigations and empirical studies.

This study of comics intends to draw heavily on currently accepted models of reading theory and discourse theory to develop a comics reading theory. Of course, data must also be collected through close analysis of comics texts in order to allow a reading theory of comics to emerge from comics themselves, rather than simply being imposed onto comics from a traditional reading theory template. The proposed study, then, must be cognizant of dangers of assuming a quid pro quo fit between the reading of traditional

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texts and the reading of comics. Like the development of theoretical dissertations in other fields, such as Chen's (2000) theoretical model of Internet consumer activity, or Lynham's (2000) theory of responsible leadership, this dissertation seeks to effectively fashion a theoretical construct by analogously applying the theory of one field to a related field, while remaining flexible to native characteristics of the field under study.

The questions that inform this dissertation seek broad understandings of comics from a descriptive perspective, looking to classify what is known about comics and what is potential in comics, relevant to their readability as texts. The descriptive abstractions called for in a theoretical dissertation cannot be appropriately addressed by quantitative methodologies. The research questions in this study call not for proofs and measurables, but for descriptions of possibilities. Because the development of theory is largely a process of classification (Kinneavy), much of the data collected will be used to form descriptive categories. A close, descriptive analysis of comics texts forming a practical part of this study, some elements of qualitative methodology will perforce be co-opted into a data collection and analysis process. However, it must be noted that the study is theoretical and not strictly qualitative, and therefore does not propose to meet the strict criteria of true qualitative investigation.

Data Sources

For purposes of this dissertation, data has been derived primarily from directed content analysis of comics texts. To ensure that the resulting theory, built analogously from current theories of reading, is not simply a prescriptive application of current

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theories on the reading of traditional texts to the reading of comics, the study was open to emergent properties of comics garnered from content analysis. Even so, this study makes no claim to adopt a pure grounded theory development as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Being theoretical, the proposed study is not based in any particular physical setting, nor does it investigate people as a primary focus. The primary object of study is the fixed text of comics, analyzed in comparison with traditional reading theories as they have been applied to written texts. Moreover, since no specific comics variables are being measured for quantification, and since the conclusions of the study are not meant to offer proofs about the class of comics, but rather to present a theory for future investigation of comics, random sampling of comics to ensure reliability is not a requirement. However, comics have been examined as models for the proposed theory on the nature of comics reading; therefore, selection of comics for modeling is a concern. For modeling of the theory, I have applied some purposive selection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of comics for several reasons. First, the class of comics is simply too vast and too complex to be adequately managed as a body of study. Moreover, though several research libraries, for example, the Library of Congress, Michigan State University, and Bowling Green State University, maintain well-stocked and catalogued comics collections, no complete corpus exists of all comics material (Serchay, 1998). Additionally, since this dissertation is merely descriptive of the possibilities of analyzing comics reading, the samples selected need only demonstrate a) the presence of the

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elements proposed by the theory, and b) that the theory accounts for the actual text features of comics.

Specifically, this dissertation seeks to apply standard elements of connective and cohesive principles to comics on various levels: linguistic utterance to linguistic utterance (i.e., written text to written text), pictorial image to pictorial image, linguistic utterance to pictorial image, and comics iconography in connection to other comics elements. At each level of this application, representative examples of each connective principle are explored and elaborated on with a number of examples from comics texts. Because the bias of the study is to focus equally on the linguistic and pictorial elements of comics, modeling of linguistic utterance to linguistic utterance and of linguistic utterance to pictorial image and of pictorial images to each other have been each be offered. This aspect of the study seeks to demonstrate an effective theory of textual cohesion in comics as well as answering the first of the proposed study questions: How are writing and other sign systems in comics read/processed in the creation of comics textuality.

Data Analysis

Comics words, comics graphics, and comics iconographic features have been interpreted in the context of meaning-making by the comics reader. Theories of connexity both from linguistic studies and from comics studies have been presented and discussed. Then, through selective sampling, passages of comics writing have been analyzed to confirm the presence of the features normally associated with cohesion and coherence in standard written texts. Lexically cohesive ties, grammatically cohesive ties,

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and semantically cohesive ties have been applied to samples of comics writing. To determine cohesion in the written texts of comics, reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction are analyzed with respective examples of comics texts. The exploration of cohesion among the written elements of comics text also identifies exceptions to standards of lexical cohesion the way they have typically described written texts. A successful reader must be able to interpret cohesion even in the presence of these exceptions to standard rules of cohesion. Additionally, this dissertation categorizes the types of linguistic utterances in comics, including textboxes, speech and thought balloons, framed text and graphic text. It then provides cross-analysis of the connexity of each type of utterance within each class and among classes. For example, do the same cohesive principles of substitution or ellipsis apply between two textboxes as would apply between two speech balloons or between a textbox and a speech balloon?

The analysis of the cohesive principles of the graphic elements of comics texts is based largely on McCloud's six varieties of graphical cohesion as well as on features of visual representation including line, color and style. Each of McCloud's cohesive categories, moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non sequitor, is described and presented with selected examples. Moreover, after these graphic-specific approaches to cohesion have been explored, this dissertation explores whether or not the cohesive elements of standard written texts can be successfully applied to the graphical elements of comics. Elements of textual cohesion traditionally limited to written text, for example, substitution, reference, and ellipsis will

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be discussed in relation to the pictorial sequences of selected or potential comics passages. The presence of traditional elements of cohesion is discussed and explored along with any exceptions and variations revealed in the selected comics samples.

After an analysis of words and graphics in isolation, this dissertation explores the intersection of the two, seeking to classify the various ways in which the words and graphics of the comics texts adhere to each other, or, in selected cases, fail to adhere in conventional ways. Specifically, the dissertation seeks to determine whether or not the words and pictures connect via principles of linguistic cohesion, including lexical, grammatical and semantic connexity, and/or whether they connect in accordance with McCloud's categories of graphical connexity.

Cohesion in comics must also consider the connective aspects of comics' unique iconographic elements, including learned conventions of comics panels and panel layouts. This study examines several typical patterns of comics layout with emphasis placed on how these patterns reinforce or detract from textual unity and coherence. Here, Weber's discussion of cinematographic connexity inform a descriptive analysis of comics cohesion.

Subsequent to an analysis of textual cohesiveness in the comics medium, this study explores the role, in comics, of higher order text features as defined by DeBeaugrande and Dressler, including informativity, situationality and intertextuality, in addition to an application of some elements of Kinneavy's discourse theory to comics. This study explores types or classes of information presented in comics format, paying

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particular attention to how a reader's awareness of informativity affects the reader's ability to successfully construct meaning from the comics text. Next, this study explores situationality, or contextual relevance, and intertexuality of selected comics texts. For this investigation, application of the traditional communication triangle (addresser, addressee, and subject) are made to the reading of comics, particularly in light of issues relating to the multiple addressers and addressees frequent in comics discourse. Beyond this, a theory of comics discourse must include application of modes and aims to comics, with purposively selected comics serving as models for discourse analysis in demonstration of the proposed comics discourse theory. Comics have been selected to facilitate an examination of informative, expressive, persuasive and artistic aims. Furthermore, purposively selected comics are used to explore whether traditional modes of writing are present in comics and whether those modes adequately address the potentials of thematic development in comics texts.

The application of these text and discourse theories to comics has been written as detailed analyses of each point of comparison mentioned above. Each feature, for example, the cohesive principle of anaphoric reference as demonstrated between linguistic utterance in a textbox and a pictorial image, is explored in a selected or hypothetical comics example and discussed in detail, including how the principle in question works, and how it does or does not satisfy the theoretical framework. This method is repeated for each cohesive element in respect to the form of the utterances involved and in respect to the elements being connected.

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Likewise, each of the aforementioned discourse elements is presented and discussed in relation to accepted discourse theory to determine how the discourse situations and events in comics either meet or vary from the framework of traditional discourse theory. Finally, the results have been written into a summation describing the basic textual principles at work in the creation of comics texts by readers.

Limitations

Limitations include aspects of reading theory which fall outside the parameters of this dissertation. For example, the theory proposed and examined herein does not attempt to address all the developmental elements of comics creation. In other words, the process of comics "composition" falls outside the elements of comics reading theory proposed in this dissertation. Moreover, De Beaugrande and Dresslers posit intentionality and acceptability as necessary elements of textuality. However, those elements are best examined within the framework of specific and unique reading events rather than in broad theoretical treatments. As such, this dissertation limits itself to the practical, but politically challengeable, treatment of texts as relatively static objects.

I wholly support the idea of texts as politically-charged and historically influenced constructs. A reader fashions meaning based in large part upon social and cultural influences in a dialectic with larger, cultural 'texts.' A reader is an active participant in text-making and each text is unique to the reader and to the individual context in which that reading occurs. If the theories of comics reading described in this dissertation are to serve any function, they ought to be seen as a backdrop for discussion of individual

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comics readings and their generalities ought to be challenged as scholars increase our awareness of meaning-making in comics. However, like Kinneavy, whose theory of discourse informs this study, I have made the practical choice to deal with comics artificially as stable and objective artifacts in order to better highlight and classify textual elements which properly should not be isolated, but should be treated as integrated and malleable features of a dynamic text. This choice is particularly useful in allowing abstractions to emerge from sample comics texts. Treating comics as fixed objects grants us the ability to offer stable descriptions of the features of comics and provides an opportunity to build comparisons and classifications.

Some aspects of current reading theory are only touched on briefly in the current discussion, notably ideas of reader prediction and scheme as addressed by Smith (1994) and others. These issues fall to some degree outside issues of textual study and analysis, as developed in this dissertation, and deal directly with the cognitive processes of readers.

Other practical limitations to the scope of this study include the use of comics written in English only. Other than for general notions of comparison, comics in Japanese, French, German, and other languages are not investigated. In addition, no attempt is made to apply this theory longitudinally to examine historical development of comics textuality.

Benefits

Marshall McLuhan (1964) called for the need to understand media as extensions of ourselves. The comics medium is an extension of our senses and our ability to

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communicate; it is a popular and widespread medium which helps to shape our culture, but which has not received detailed scholarly examination towards a theory of how comics function as text. Furthermore, Kinneavy (1971), in his theory of discourse, posits media as an element of discourse on an equal level with modes and aims, but leaves the study of discourse in other media to later analyses. The creation of a theory of comics reading and discourse extends our understanding of media and communication, and opens the way for future scholarly study of comics as an important vehicle of language and meaning-making.

This project fills a void of scholarly research both from the perspective of comics studies (responding to McCloud's invitation for academic examination of comics, including the role of language in comics) and from the perspective of traditional discourse theory (responding to Kinneavy's call to apply his discourse theory to other media). As a theoretical dissertation, it faces certain limitations, but its ultimate goal is to provide a framework for future scholars, not to be an end in itself. If the development and application of a theory of comics reading are successful, or perhaps even if they are not, it is hoped that readers will emerge with an enriched understanding and appreciation both of comics and of the nature of reading itself.

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IV. COHESION IN COMICS

The examination of cohesion in comics begins with a structured study of the various surface elements of the comics text. In Chapter Two, three primary classifications of surface textual elements in comics are detailed: graphical representation, comics iconography, and linguistic utterances. The investigation of comics' textual cohesion presented herein begins with an examination of cohesion strictly between the graphical elements of comics texts before proceeding to an examination of cohesive properties of comics iconography and linguistic utterances, with all their related inter-connectivity.

As Halliday and Hassan have noted, textual cohesion is said to occur when the elements of the text attach themselves to each other in a consistent and meaningful fashion. This cohesion occurs in most written texts on a variety of levels, including phonological, lexical, syntactical, and semantic levels. However, even a quick glance at comics reveals the first immediate peril of a direct application of the standards of textual cohesion to a text composed of pictures rather than words. Pictures themselves have neither phonology, lexicon, nor syntax; semantics are likely a matter of argument. If indeed cohesion occurs between pictures in a comics sequence, we will need to dispense with our dependency on these traditional linguistic terms. The surface elements that will connect the pictures in a consistent and meaningful fashion must emerge out of the pictures themselves: elements such as line quality, artistic style, color, and, of course, represented content.

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Cohesion through Style

This study proceeds out of a belief that within common or related contexts, people cognitively find or form connections between like things, or among like attributes. Such cognitive connections may help frame a number of conceptual activities, assisting people in the meaningful processing of the world. Specifically, in regards to comics, aside from the useful though as yet undefined ability to recognize comics as comics from prior experience, one of the primary elements helping to form connectivity in comics texts is the predictable replication of visual style displayed from panel to panel in the comics sequence. A reader's ability to recognize that the disparate panels of artwork fall into a common vision of representation likely enhances the reader's acceptance of the panels as part of the same overall unit of meaning.

Through a number of artistic choices, the comics artist typically aids in textual receptivity by repeating key stylistic elements, providing the reader a framework to cognitively link the panels. The comics artist can choose to graphically represent content through a variety of artistic media, including photography, watercolor, woodblock printing and line art, among others. Further, within any given media, representation may occur in a variety of artistic styles: realism, impressionism, expressionism, abstraction, etc. Within these broader artistic styles, individual stylistic choices can make the work of each comics artist, or even of each comics text, visually unique and identifiable. Comics artists may select to present content using long, thin, graceful lines, or by using straight,

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heavy lines, or perhaps by preferring scratchy, broken lines and an abundance of hatchwork, and so on.

Though this study is not concerned with the aesthetic value of any of these artistic choices, the idea that a reader can and does recognize differences between styles (and conversely, that a reader can recognize that two or more panels of artwork share stylistic commonalities) must be useful in an enquiry into connectivity in comics. Even without the attachment of specific, coherent meaning to the comic, the panels of art contribute to textuality by virtue of stylistic repetition, recognizable by the reader.

Of course, stylistic connectivity is not sufficient for a reader to create text out of a series of artistic representations. A series of drawings done in a single medium by one artist in a similar style is not enough to justify calling the series of drawings a text. Nor is artistic connectivity necessary throughout a comics text in toto. Though a comics text wherein each panel of artwork is stylistically inchoate with the other panels in the series is rare, if such texts exist at all, and though wild disconnection in artistic style may reasonably be suspected of being detrimental to a reader's ease or ability to connect the panels, examples do exist wherein multiple artistic styles are present within a single comics text. Unique ventures like Marvel Comics' Heroes for Hope (Claremont, et al., 1985) brought together multiple artists to jointly create a comic book. In Heroes for Hope, each of a handful of artists was asked to graphically present content for several pages of the text before surrendering the subsequent pages of that text to a new artist. Within each artist's multi-page spread, artistic connectivity is relatively straightforward.

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However, for the comic to successfully be a text, the reader must be able to negotiate stylistic leaps between pages drawn by different artists and be able to interpret these pages, and their panels, as constitutive of one text.

More commonly, stylistic variation of this nature may occur in a comic wherein the text is meant to present multiple perspectives or embedded, subordinate narratives. Issue 50 of She-Hulk, Volume 2 (Byrne, et al., 1993) features the work of multiple artists, each one drawing in a disparate style, embedded within an over-all story-arch. In this particular issue of She-Hulk, a comic magazine noted during the tenure of writer-artist John Byrne for its absurdist humor, the She-Hulk and her comics editor are searching for a new artist to draw She-Hulk's adventures. At various points within the narrative, She-Hulk reads sample pages created by different comics artist in a wide range of styles, rejecting each one in turn. Each variation in style is presented within the context of a larger, master narrative. The stylistic variation in this instance does not therefore represent a radical break with reader expectations. However, these changes in artistic style are clearly notable to the reader in so far as these changes represent meaningful and obvious shifts in perspective and are intended to be interpreted as such. It must be concluded that artistic constancy and variation are factors in the internal connectivity of comics, but also that artistic constancy is not a prescriptive factor in the creation of cohesive comics texts.

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Cohesion in Comics Art

Style, however, is not the only obvious connective factor in the artwork of a comics text. Within the artwork of comics, the pictorial content may be interpreted as connective by the reader. The artistic content of one panel is connected by the reader to artistic content in other panels in the comics sequence. A reader must be able to connect images from one panel to others in the sequence. For example, in a Peanuts comic strip, a multi-panel sequence may feature three panels in which the well-known beagle character Snoopy is depicted in various positions or with various attributes. A successful reader must first identify each figure as representing the same character of Snoopy, despite variances in line quality, perspective or figure size. Subsequently, the reader must have at his or her disposal a schema to allow the representations of Snoopy to be connected according to predictable rules.

The reader's ability to properly identify the three different images in the sequence as representative of the character or actor Snoopy is essential to meaning-making in a comics text. The reader must perceive each iteration not as a drawing of a dog, but as a sign that refers to a shared concept. This ability is closely tied to the ability of a reader of a standard English text to recognize individual letters in a variety of font styles and sizes, even in a range of colors (Smith, 1994). The application of this principle to the images in comics suggests a decision to treat the images as signifiers in a text. Once the reader has agreed to identify each drawing as a sign representing the same character, that reader must be able to link those drawn signs in predictable ways.

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McCloud (1993) defines this process as one of closure. He argues that "in the limbo of the [comics] gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells [the reader] something must be there" (p. 66-67). The panels must be reconciled by the reader through a cognitive event of closure that allows the reader "to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (p. 67). McCloud proposes six categories of closure, reflecting various cognitive transitions between panels: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitors. There are problems with this notion of closure. In the "Cohesion through Comics Iconography" section later in this chapter, I will challenge the notion that panels are the true units of meaning in comics. In addition, we must question whether the idea of closure in comics can be described in purely visual terms; a comics reader reconciles not only panels of artwork but a variety of verbal manifestations as well.

The first of McCloud's transitions is based upon temporal closure. In McCloud's moment-by-moment transition, the reader perceives the latter of any two sequential panels as representing content that immediately follows the first panel in time. Suppose, for example, the first panel in a three panel sequence illustrates a man in the air above a diving board. The second panel in the sequence presents a man, head angled downward, mid-way between a diving board and a surface of water. The third panel depicts the lower half of a man's body extended above a surface of water while spray is drawn above the

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point where the man's body appears to penetrate the water's surface. In such a sequence, McCloud argues, the reader is able to apply some cognizance of time to the images in the panels. Somewhere in the gutter between panels, a lapse of time has occurred, or rather, a reader is able to extrapolate a missing moment of time. The reader's ability to conceive of "missing time" between the panels, and to conceptually "fill in" this time, allows the reader to achieve closure in the sequence.

McCloud's second category of closure is action-to-action. In action-to-action closure, we again have a form or variance of temporal closure. In addition, a causative element is argued. If a two panel sequence shows, in panel one, a person about to step on a banana peel on a sidewalk, and, in panel two, a person flailing in mid-air above a sidewalk while a banana peel appears midway between the person's feet and the sidewalk, a reader might, using action-to-action closure, perceive that the action depicted in the first panel must lead to the action or event depicted in the second. The missing element between the panels is again temporal; however, in this example, the reader must also apply some form of logic to arrive at a reading that says the action implied in panel one caused the action implied in panel two. A distinction between moment-to-moment and action-to-action closures must depend therefore on a reader's ability to perceive a causative element that is not, or not always, depicted directly in the visual medium.

The third variety of closure posited by McCloud is subject-to-subject. In panel sequences wherein the reader uses subject-to-subject closure, the missing element between the image may be either spatial or temporal, though McCloud makes the

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argument that the panels joined by subject-to-subject closure must exist within the same scene or idea. In essence, it must be presumed by the reader that an over-arching connection already exists throughout the panel sequence before the reader may correctly interpret subject-to-subject closure. McCloud alludes to this problem with subject-to-subject closure by noting that a "degree of reader involvement [is] necessary to render these transitions meaningful" (p. 71), though the nature and extent of this involvement, and how this involvement differs from reader involvement in other forms of closure, are left unexplained by McCloud. In subject-to-subject transition, a multi-panel sequence might present a series of panels each showing different people at a party or other gathering. Each panel in this sequence may focus on a different person at the party. The missing element between two of the panels may be temporal, for example, if the person shown in the first panel is depicted with a speech balloon containing the utterance "What time is it?" and the second panel presents a different person whose speech balloon contains the words "It's seven-thirty." In such a sequence, the reader would employ a type of closure that would connect the utterance, "What time is it?" with the utterance, "It's seven-thirty." For McCloud, the key difference between this closure and moment-to-moment closure is that the images depicted in the party sequence panels described here present alternate subjects, whereas in the earlier example of a man diving into pool of water, the subject in each panel was the same. To clarify the distinction further, subject-to-subject closure would also presumably be at work if, in the same party sequence, the panel showing the person saying, "It's seven-thirty," were followed by a panel showing a

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clock drawn with its hands in the seven-thirty position. The missing element between these latter panels may or may not be temporal. The reader cannot presume that the clock reads seven thirty after the character says, "It's seven-thirty," in the previous panel; in fact, the panels may be perceived as concurrent, rather than as subsequent, within a larger conceptual scene. This latter example also may provide some differentiation between subject-to-subject and action-to-action; no causal element must be necessarily posited between these two panels. Still, overlap creeps in.

In order for subject-to-subject closure to work, the reader must be able to frame the sequence within a common scene, an understanding of a shared space and time. However, if the shared reference of scene is removed, then the reader is free to interpret the images as referring to alternate places or times. In this situation, the reader would need to apply scene-to-scene closure to link the panels meaningfully. In this type of closure, the reader must apply external logic, using clues in the panel images or texts, to determine the nature and degree of the scene shift. Frequently this type of closure is indicated by, or accompanied by, a text caption explaining the transition, i.e., "Meanwhile..." or "Fifteen minutes later..." or "Tokyo, Japan." As with subject-to-subject closure, a reader must come with an overarching schema in order to properly interpret the scene change and to situate the multiple scenes within a single cohesive text.

McCloud's fifth type of closure is aspect-to-aspect, in which the panels in a sequence are interpreted as representing "different aspects of a place, idea or mood" (p. 72). This type of closure would be at work in a panel sequence wherein one panel shows

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a leaf at the end of a branch, a second panel shows a tree, and a third panel shows a group of trees in a park. To correctly interpret these panels as a sequence, a reader must have a concept that the leaf is related to the tree which in turn is related to the grouping of trees in the park. There may be a temporal element to the sequence, a la moment-to-moment closure wherein the reader is meant to interpret motion away from the leaf to a larger view of the park; however, a temporal connection is not strictly mandated. In the described example, the relationship is spatial in nature, though if McCloud's postulate is correct and aspect-to-aspect closure may link aspects of an idea or mood, then the heart of the relationship may be conceptual or logical rather than strictly spatial. These categories of closure reveal themselves as dependent on conceptual factors at least as much as on visual factors in the panels.

The final type of panel-to-panel relationship as described by McCloud is the non sequitor, which is simply a catch-all term for panel sequences with no apparently meaningful connection. Such non sequitors would most likely be found in experimental comics, whose design may often include the disruption of a reader's standard connective practices.

McCloud's categories work for most practical purposes. Each of these types of panel-to-panel relationships is indeed distinct from the others, and between them, they appear to account for most of the possibilities for inter-panel narrative closure. Several limitations to his categories do exist, however. First, McCloud's varieties of closure are based strictly on the notion of comics as a narrative form. This dissertation challenges

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the notion that comics are strictly narrative in development and structure; therefore, a range of non-narrative relationships must also be accounted for in any classification of panel-to-panel closure. Secondly, McCloud's categorization of panel-to-panel relationships is based on descriptions of the visual content of the panels, on the outward appearance or manifestation of the inter-panel relationships. What is lacking is a theoretical principle upon which to base these particular classifications. McCloud invokes "reader involvement" as a fundamental element in closure but does not offer further clarification into the matter. In the construction of a theory of comics reading, it is preferable to identify varieties of connexity that are based on how the textual features relate to each other rather than on what those textual features depict.

In addition, as will be explored later in this chapter, the comics reader must not only perform acts of closure between panels of artwork, but must also manage connections between instances of written text (i.e., between caption and caption, between caption and dialogue balloon, between dialogue balloon and dialogue balloon, etc.), and between word and image. It is possible that each of these connective varieties, and the cognitive acts they demand, functions via a separate and unique conceptual principle. However, the number of such connections in a typical comic, and the ease with which most readers can navigate these varying word-word, word-image, and image-image connections, suggests that a single theoretical principle is more likely at work in the cohesion of comics texts. At the very least, a single theoretical principle for all cohesive elements in comics offers a more convenient and consistent set of classifications and

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terminology for discussion of comics connexity. And if that single theoretical principle is to be found, we must look beyond McCloud's descriptive classifications of panel-to-panel closure.

Cohesion in Comics Art Redux

To fully develop a concept of cohesion in comics, the connexity of graphical elements must be construed in terms that do not run counter to the connexity of the written elements. If a reader must process contrasting cohesive principles simultaneously in comics reading, that reader's ability to comprehend the combined text might well be compromised too. It is necessary, therefore, to determine whether principles of linguistic connexity could be at work in the reading of graphical content in comics. Specifically, this study must explore the applicability of accepted categories of cohesion in English to the artistic content of the comics text.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) describe several basic forms of textual cohesive ties in written English: reference, substitution (and its subcategory, ellipsis), conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction are primarily grammatical in nature, the first three of these relying on syntactic transformations to link segments of a text, and the fourth relying on the addition of an explicit grammatical marker to indicate a semantic link. The first of these cohesive ties, reference, works by directing the reader's attention to a matching referent elsewhere in a given text. Reference usually functions using demonstrative pronouns or the adjectives "this," "that," "these" or "those" in conjunction with a repeated noun or noun phrase. These references can direct

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the reader's attention forward to a future use of the same term later in the text (cataphora) or backward to a past use of the same term in the text (anaphora). For example, in the passage, "John held the winning lottery ticket in his trembling hands; this ticket would change his whole life," the use of the word "this" in the second phrase directs the reader to link the ticket in the second phrase ("This ticket would change his life") with the word ticket in the first phrase ("John held the winning lottery ticket..."). Such references force a reader to look forward and backward through a text to link ideas, creating connections in the reader's mind between different segments of a text. However, the ideas of anaphora and cataphora, as abstract concepts that point a reader to specific past or future textual references, cannot be represented in non-linguistic form in the artistic content of comic panels. Expressed more succinctly, there is no representational image that depicts demonstrative adjectives or pronouns (the connexity provided by the repetition of the word 'ticket' is an example of lexical repetitive cohesion, an entirely different kind of cohesive tie). It is unlikely, therefore, that referential ties are at work between two panels of artwork.

Similar problems exist with both substitution and ellipsis as cohesive ties in comics artwork. Substitution functions as a cohesive tie in written English primarily through the use of pronouns as substitutes for nouns, noun phrases or verb phrases used elsewhere in the text. Ellipsis functions as a cohesive tie in written English by presenting the reader with a null value for some required syntactic element, forcing the reader to scan through surrounding text to find a matching phrase to satisfy the null value. Because

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neither artistic representation nor the flow of panels appears to function based on syntactic principles, the application of substitution and ellipsis to a comics text would be difficult, even though we could imagine a null representation in comics artwork. The drawing of a figure or object in outline or silhouette might be perceived as presenting a null value, leading the comics reader to look through the artistic representations in other panels for an image that would satisfy the missing value presented by the outline or silhouette. This would indeed help to create connection between panels in the reader's mind. It is unclear, however, whether this "ellipsis" would be processed by the reader using the same connective principle found in syntactic ellipsis in written English. Once again, though, the concept of pronoun does not appear to have an equivalent in artistic representation.

Conjunction, as a cohesive tie in written English, is typically signaled by the use of a simple conjunction (including "and," "but," and "or"), a variety of adverbs, or certain prepositional phrases (Halliday & Hasan). In contrast to reference, substitution and ellipsis, conjunction helps to form textual connections not by directing the reader to other points in the text, but by linking various segments of the text in a number of prescribed manners. A conjunction not only tells a reader that a connection should be interpreted, but it tells the reader the nature of that connection, i.e.., temporal, causal, additive, or adversative (Halliday & Hasan). Temporal ties link semantic units in a linear sequencing based on chronology. Causal ties link two semantic units in a specific logical relationship; the action indicated or implied in one unit is the logical cause of the action

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indicated or implied in the other semantic unit. Additive ties occur when one semantic item adds to, enhances, modifies, or otherwise agrees with the conjoined semantic unit; additive conjunctions may include words and phrases like 'and,' 'also,' 'in addition,' 'furthermore,' and 'moreover.' Adversative ties set up opposition or qualification between two semantic units; adversative conjunctions may include words or phrases like 'but,' 'however,' 'even so,' 'despite this,' 'elsewhere,' and 'meanwhile.' Like the cohesive ties discussed above, conjunction is grammatical in nature, but unlike the first three ties listed above, conjunction is not dependent upon syntactic transformations. Though conjunctions cannot be directly represented in the visual surface of comics artwork, the types of cognitive connections created with grammatical conjunctions are manageably comparable to the types of inter-panel connections described by McCloud; we do link semantic units in comics according to predictable rules. A reader of comics, then, may be using many of the same concepts of conjunctions as a reader of standard written texts; however, there are differences between the manner in which these concepts are activated by standard written texts and the manner in which they are activated by panels of comics artwork. While grammatical conjunction is explicitly designated by particular signs in the text, conjunction between comics panels occurs outside of the specific visible signs of comics art, in the void of the gutter. Additionally, the gutter does not reveal the nature of the conjunction. Addition, causation, etc., are still interpretable between panels of comics artwork, but the comics reader must interpret the nature of the conjunction from other clues or signs in the text. Conjunctive cohesion in comics and in

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standard English texts may be functioning similarly on a conceptual level, but there do not seem to be any correlative signs or markers. Ultimately, it is difficult to translate the three wholly syntactical cohesive ties (reference, substitution and ellipsis) directly to the reading of artwork-to-artwork connections in comics. In other words, there is no apparent quid pro quo between those three syntactic connective strategies in written English and the connective strategies between the artwork in a sequence of comics panels. However, the types of cognitive connections suggested by conjunction do indeed occur between comics panels.

The fifth variety of cohesive tie, as outlined by Halliday and Hasan, is lexical rather than grammatical. Lexical cohesion is based on reiteration of a lexical element. In standard written texts, such lexical reiteration manifests as simple repetition of a word, the use of synonyms, the use of subordinate or superordinate terms, or the use of general nouns that reference a class to which a given word belongs. These four levels of reiteration present a kind of scale of cognitive separation between an instance of a word and its co-referent. Reiteration in the level of direct repetition of a word offers a one to one relationship between two words with the exact same referent (Tom bought two new ballcaps. Tom loved buying ballcaps). When one word in the word pair is replaced by a synonym, the two words still connect to the same or nearly same cognitive referent, though the visible sign is different (Tom bought two new ballcaps. Tom loved buying hats). In the next level of reiteration, one of the paired items is subordinated to the other within a common set or class of cognitively connected referents (Tom bought two new

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ballcaps. Tom loved buying clothes). Here, ballcaps is subordinate to clothes in that a ballcap is a type or variety of item understood by the reader to belong to the category of clothes. The last level of reiteration occurs when a word is paired with a general noun, a word that is broad enough to include an indeterminate number of items (Tom bought two new ballcaps. Tom loved buying things).

Throughout a text, such repetitions can occur repeatedly at any or all of these levels. Each repetition recalls for the reader a set of concepts that reinforce the shared meaning and unity of a text. The power of this repetition does not occur within a conceptual vacuum, of course. Each of the iterations occurs within a context that functions to reinforce the shared reference of the word-pairs.

Along with reiteration, another variety of lexical cohesion generally occurs in written texts: collocation. Collocation occurs when lexical pairings, rather than evoking the same referent, evoke a contrasting but related referent. Take, for example, the sentence pairing, "Helen had always liked cats. Dogs were too messy and needy for her tastes." In this pairing, "cats" and "dogs" are collocates. They are neither synonyms nor subordinates, neither one being subordinate to the other. However, both terms belong equally to a common class or set of referents, in this example, 'pets' or 'animals.' Collocation still creates textual cohesion, however, because the shared class links the two lexical items; moreover, a meaningful interpretation of the text requires a reader to understand that these two items are being contrasted and that each item must be processed with respect to the other. The cohesion is not occurring at the level of the sign but at a

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level of ideation beyond the sign. This distinction will prove to be important to an understand of the reading of comics.

The question remains, of course, how these linguistic connective devices relate to the reading of a series of artistic panels in a comics sequence, if, in fact, they are relevant at all. Two immediate concerns present themselves. The first, as discussed above, is the lack of a syntactic structure for the sequence of panels. Though there are some rules governing how panels may be laid out or interpreted, at least in comics as they have been developed in English, nothing clearly equates with the kind of parsing or transforming that occurs in written English texts. The second problem is that there is also a disparity between the sign systems themselves. Even if we accept Mitchell's (1986) postulate that image and word are each signs of an "idea," the manner in which each represents an idea varies greatly, both in form and in the distance between sign and idea. For instance, the written word "dog" is a visual sign of the lexical item "dog" in English. The lexical item "dog" signifies a class of animal with a variety of commonly distinctive characteristics easily identifiable to most speakers of English. The question remains as to how the idea of "dog" is processed. Do speakers of English conceive of "dog" as a collection of abstract qualities that add up to a certain "dogness"? Do they conceive of "dog" negatively, that is, in contrast to other ideas within a larger class of ideas, i.e., as an idea distinct from the idea of "cat" or "horse"? "Dog" may be processed as an image, though of course there is no pure image of dog; readers might imagine a particular dog or dog-type familiar to them. But whereas a physical object like "dog" may be conceived of

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visually, or expressed more appropriately, pictured in the mind, other words like "acceleration" or "truth" do not necessarily evoke any images in the mind.

In comics art, a dog may be drawn in a panel. The reader, if asked whether a dog were in the panel, would readily say, "Yes." However, the comics reader does not read the image of the dog like the word "dog." The image of the dog is seen and the idea "dog" is understood, but there is no voicing of the word for the image. Placed in greater context, a comics panel would probably show the dog in an environment, perhaps next to the image of a trash-can in front of the image of a brick building, etc. The comics reader does not necessarily translate these images into linguistic form. He or she does not think, "A dog is sitting next to a trash can in front of a brick building." Yet the information is stored by the reader at the level of the idea. Is the information processed as an image or as an abstract set of qualities?

A further difference between the image of a dog and the word dog would be that while the word "dog" presents a broad conceptual framework into which could fit all the animals that are dogs, the drawing of the dog presents specific features that narrow the possibilities of meaning for the image. In essence, depending upon the level of artistic abstraction in the comics art, the image could represent the idea of a dog or perhaps a specific breed of dog like a bull terrier. An even greater level of detail could identify a specific dog, i.e., Spuds McKenzie. Does the drawing then represent the idea of dog, bull terrier or Spuds McKenzie? At the level of ideation, a reader of a comics text must be able to hold each of these concepts at the ready until further textual clues tell the reader

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which of these ideas will connect to further panels in the text. This, then, is a key difference between an image in a comics sequence and an image that stands alone by itself. The idea signified by the image in a comics panel is dependent upon the context provided by other images in the sequence.

The drawing of the dog evokes more than just the concept "dog," it evokes a variety of aspects related to the particular representation of the dog in the drawing. In written English, these aspects are typically described by adjectives or other modifiers: "the large, snarling bull terrier." These modifiers in English can be separated from the idea of the dog or replaced by simply the noun "dog" or the pronoun "it" or by any of the forms of lexical repetition mentioned previously. The comics drawing of the large, snarling bull terrier, however, cannot be broken down into disparate cognitive components or attributes. The image signifies a complete matrix of attributes in a single sign.

However, though the linguistic sign "dog" must be replicated in whole with each iteration, the image of the dog on the comics page varies with each presentation. Line quality, size, proportion, perspective, all may vary. Yet each iteration of the drawn dog, no matter its aspects, presents the same dog on the level of ideation. Moreover, to signify the dog in the comics panel, the artist can choose to present the dog only in part, its front half or its head, perhaps. The entire visual image of the dog is not necessary to create an accurate interpretation of the dog. (This discussion will prove important as we classify the connective principles in comics.)

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Despite these differences and concerns, or perhaps because of them, we are left with the question of how to reconcile McCloud's categories of panel-to-panel narrative closure and the cohesive principles of standard written English. Of the linguistic cohesive ties, the ones that may be applied to images (i.e., the ties that are non-syntactic) are conjunction and lexical cohesion. Conjunction is itself subdivided by Halliday and Hasan into four major categories: temporal, causal, additive, and adversative. Lexical cohesion can be split into lexical repetition (at a number of levels of abstraction) and collocation.

The issue then becomes one of exploring whether we can reconcile McCloud's closure categories with conjunction and lexical cohesion. To a surprising extent, this reconciliation is readily achieved. Moment-to-moment closure corresponds fairly clearly to temporal conjunctive ties in English. Action-to-Action closure corresponds with strong correlation to causal conjunctive ties in English. Subject-to-subject closure, however, can be seen as an additive conjunctive tie or as adversative, depending on the relationship implied between the subjects. Similarly, Scene-to-Scene closure can be seen as an adversative conjunctive tie or as additive, depending on the relationship implied between the scenes. McCloud's subject-to-subject and scene-to-scene closures overlap with the additive and adversative conjunctive ties in English, but do so on different principles of classification. McCloud's classification of closure is based on the content of the panels, whereas the conjunctive tie favored in this dissertation and theory of comics reading is based on the nature or quality of the tie. Finally, McCloud's Aspect-to-Aspect

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closure is a clear correlate of lexical cohesion. If we take these comparisons at face value, it is easy to reconcile McCloud's descriptive categories to a broader, more inclusive set of cohesive ties that work not only between panels of artwork but that do not contradict the cohesive ties between the written features of comics. This classification of ties offers us a single set of cognitive principles (if we conceive of linguistic ties as a single set) that can apply to a reading of both words and images in comics.

There are, of course, some problems with this attempt to directly correlate McCloud's categories of closure with the linguistic ties laid out by Halliday and Hasan. One of the limitations with McCloud's descriptive categories is that they only account for classes of narrative closure. As Chapter Five will elucidate, comics are not necessarily narrative in form. In fact, panels can be sequenced according to a number of logical principles, including spatial sequencing, numerical sequencing, and other logical sequencing. A classification of panel-to-panel comics closure needs to account for cohesive ties that would link the images in, for example, a comic of the semaphore flag signals (Zeek, 2001) or a comic depicting items in the food pyramid. The visual surface of a comics page offers a somewhat less rigorous lineation of the text; panels may sometimes be laid out in sequential arrangements that are atypical to standard written texts. For example, Carel Moiseiwitsch (1991a), in her comic "Priapic Alphabet," arranges her panels alphabetically by the first letter of whatever is pictured or implied in each panel; ergo, the panel featuring a prisoner (P) precedes a panel for quadriplegic (Q), which precedes a panel depicting refugees (R), etc. Temporal sequencing, therefore, is

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only one of several types of sequencing a comics reader must process. Halliday and Hasan's category of temporal conjunction is too narrow to accurately manage the sequential conjunctions in comics. I therefore propose a broader category of sequential conjunctive tie in English that includes the temporal sequential cohesion of both standard written texts and comics texts as well as the spatial, numerical and logical sequencing found in non-narrative comics. This theory of comics cohesion then seeks to re-conceive Halliday and Hasan's temporal, causal, additive and adversative conjunctions as sequential, causal, additive and adversative. In essence, temporal sequencing is inadequate to describe the possibilities of panel sequencing in comics. A broader category of sequential tie can successfully incorporate the chronological sequencing of the temporal tie along with a range of non-chronological sequencing necessary to a theory of comics reading.

Another problem with reconciling connexity of image with connexity of word lies in the descriptive term 'lexical cohesion.' In comics texts, a reader is dealing with ties not only between lexical items but between images and between lexical items and images. Can images be connected by 'lexical cohesion?" The earlier discussion of the image of a dog and the sign "dog" reveals that image is not necessarily lexical and does not share definitive features of a language's lexicon. This problem may be merely semantic. The nature of lexical cohesion allows for not only strict repetition of a lexical sign but for synonyms, subordinate and superordinate terms, general class terms, and collocates. The repetition, then, is <u>not</u> of lexical items, but repetition of the idea or concepts signified by

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the lexical items. If this is the more accurate principle behind lexical cohesion, we can certainly apply it to the repetition of concepts in comics, including both words and images. However, 'conceptual repetition' might be a more accurate term for the connective principle, both in regards to comics and to standard written texts.

Figure 5. Comic with non-narrative panel closure. McCloud's categories of panel-to-panel closure cannot explain the connexity between the borderless panels in this semaphore comic (Zeek, 2001, p. 36).

Cohesion via Comics Iconography

The representational artwork in the comics panels is not the only form of sign used by the comics creator to fashion interpretable meaning. The visual surface of the comic page also features a number of specialized comic icons, lines, or other visual patterns that do not represent content but that guide the reader in the management of the content. As described in Chapter Two, the iconography of comics derives from learned sign systems that are self-referential. Their meaning is determined contextually from the

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intertextual experience of comics reading. Though many of these icons are fairly universal with the mass publishing of comics, cultural variations do occur.

To deal with the varieties of comics icons, it is useful to categorize them by function. The first level of iconography this dissertation will address includes an array of intrapanel elements that signify abstract or non-visual content like emotion, odor, force, etc. The next type of comics iconography extends beyond the signs of the comic to incorporate elements of the visual layout of the comics text. The final type of iconography involves panels and the boxes and balloons used to contain the written content of comics.

The first variety of comics icons bears much in common with the artistic content of comics panels. These icons appear as parts of the images and carry specific content information for the reader. McCloud suggests that some of these icons developed over time as comics artists refined attempts to show abstract concepts in concrete image. Motion, for example, cannot be drawn in a still image; therefore, comics artists attempted to simulate motion by showing blurred or streaked images, or by depicting multiple iterations of an image overlapping each other in a panel. Eventually, these techniques were refined to simple lines. The lines themselves do not show motion, speed, direction, or other dynamic features of action, but comics readers learn contextually to interpret these meanings from the lines. Other kinds of comics icons include lines showing mental states like dizziness, delirium, anger, etc. As discussed in Chapter Two, these iconic lines

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are culturally specific and must be learned by readers through context and intertextual experience.

Some of the meaning-carrying icons are more directly interpretable, the use of arrows to show direction of motion or action, for example. Though the meaning of arrows is still socially constructed, this type of icon is found in a variety of contexts outside of comics, contexts most comics readers will already be familiar with. Musical notations, questions marks, exclamation points, dollar signs, water drops and light bulbs are among the common images or cultural icons adopted by comics artists to demonstrate non-visible content. These images are not linguistic in their basis, but they must be interpreted in respect to other contextual clues. For example, a starburst-like array of lines emanating outward from a lamp may indicate light, the same array of lines around the image of a vase may indicate shine or polish, whereas the same array around the face of a character might alternately be interpreted as joy or inspiration or might indicate surprise and alarm. The reader must match the iconic array of lines with associated images in a contextualized passage.

Figure 6. Comic strip excerpt poking fun at comics iconography (Breathed, 1988, p. 33).

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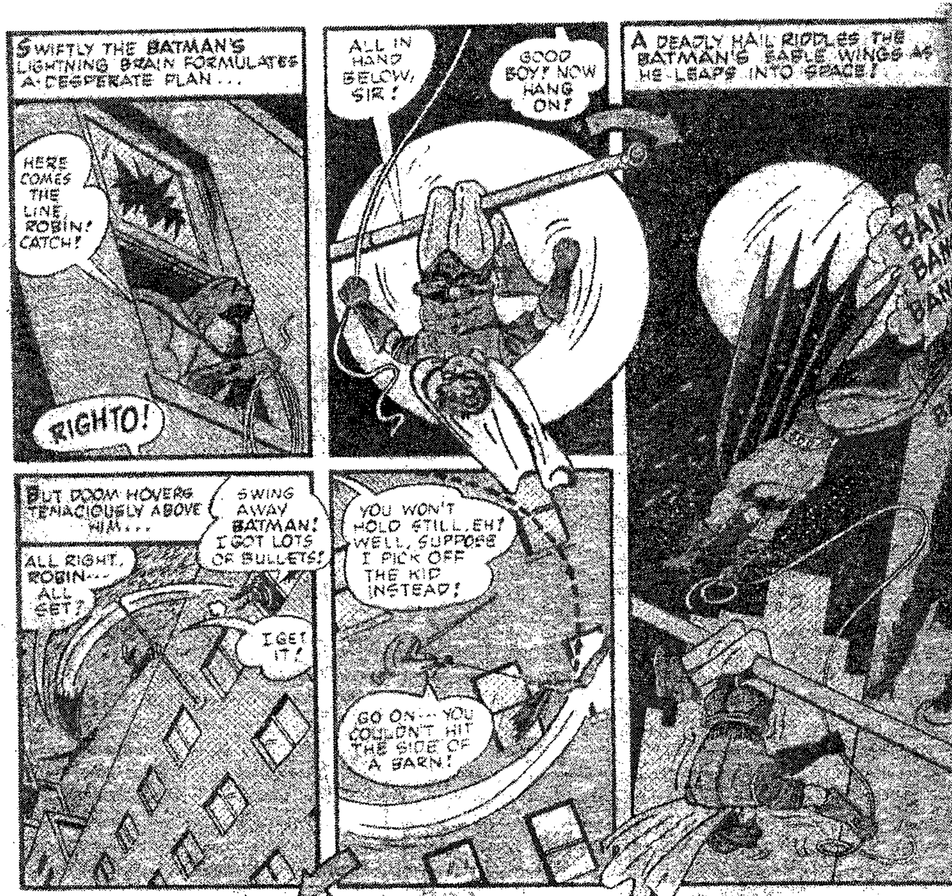

Figure 7. Examples of comics iconography. Note the arrows connecting selected panels, showing a reader the order in which the panels are to be read. Also observe the dotted line showing the direction of motion in which Batman is presumed to travel (Sprang, 1944/1972, p. 13).

In addition to content-based icons within the panels of comics, the panels themselves are iconic. The borders of the comics panels themselves function only by a shared understanding of their meaning. Borders are not necessary to comics texts, but readers can learn to identify their role and function in comics layout. The standard layout of the comic book has become stereotyped in the minds of many Americans; however, it should be noted that comics may physically appear in a variety of shapes and forms.

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Comic layouts are not confined to traditional newspaper comic strips nor to traditional American comic books. Even so, within whatever basic shape or dimension the comics appear, artwork is generally framed within borders that delineate panels. These panels may subsequently be arranged in a variety of patterns on the comics page. Though most readers are familiar with the rows of even squares that make the most economical use of page space in American comics, panel appearance and layout are not always confined to simple grids nor are panel borders confined to simple black lines. A reader must recognize panels, layouts, and other features of basic comic visuals. These visual signs are not a part of the representational artwork nor content of comics, yet they still must be assigned purpose and meaning in the successful reading of a comics text.

Panel borders, though most commonly denoted by single black lines that create clear, white gutters, can be indicated by nearly any technique the artist desires. Some of these variations offer no content-related meaning, other than indicating distinctions between visual units, but other variations may clearly represent meaning in addition to function. For example, in The New Mutants, issue twenty-two (Claremont & Sienkiewicz, 1984), the character Rahne is writing a story. When the artwork shifts from portraying Rahne writing at her desk to portraying the events and actions of the story Rahne is writing, the lines of the panels shift from smooth, straight lines to rough and wavy lines. The line quality designates not only the borders of the panels but indicates that the character of the panel content has changed. Issue 227 of The Flash (Bates & Novick, 1974) tells its narrative using the conceit that the pages of the issue represent the

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contents of a scrap album. The panels, therefore, are presented with small triangles drawn over the corners of panels to simulate pictures in a scrapbook or photo album. The conceit, then, is supported by the manner in which panels are presented. Similarly, in issue number eight of Spider-Man (McFarlane, 1991) a three-panel spread showing a telephone conversation has its panels bordered in lines meant to represent telephone cord. More interesting variations on panels do exist. Artist Bill Sienkiewicz, in The New Mutants, issue 18 (Claremont & Sienkiewicz, 1984) makes use of a common visual technique from technical manuals and maps to present a sequence of panels that continually enlarge isolated segments of the previous panel. In this technique, the comics artist draws upon a non-narrative connective strategy whose interpretation depends on the reader's experience with other visual texts. The connective principle that binds these particular panels is made visual and concrete through the use of dashed lines connecting corners of the panels. Such experiments are more exception than rule, however; most variations in panel borders are simply design elements imagined by the artist.

Of more importance to the reading of comics is the layout of the comics panels. The first question to consider is the necessity for distinct panels at all. Issue number seventy-seven of Cerebus (Sim & Gerhard, 1985), for example, offers what is in effect three panels with one continuous background And here we are conceiving of panels as distinct units of meaning or action in the comics text. This conception itself is problematic, though we shall see that the idea of comics panels becomes further problematized. Against the continuous representation of an aqueduct, a woman is drawn

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three times, each drawing of the woman representing a different moment in the narrative. The successful reader knows to interpret the three women as representing the same woman at three points in time, even though there are no border designations and the background artwork is singular. Successful interpretation can only occur if and when the reader correctly identifies the three women as being the same actor at different moments in time. Previous experience with standard comics panels would help a reader to conclude that the iterations of the woman were meant to be read as distinct panels. Simple logic may also assist the reader, who, correctly assessing that a woman could not be in three places at once, must interpret a temporal break between each of the images of the woman.

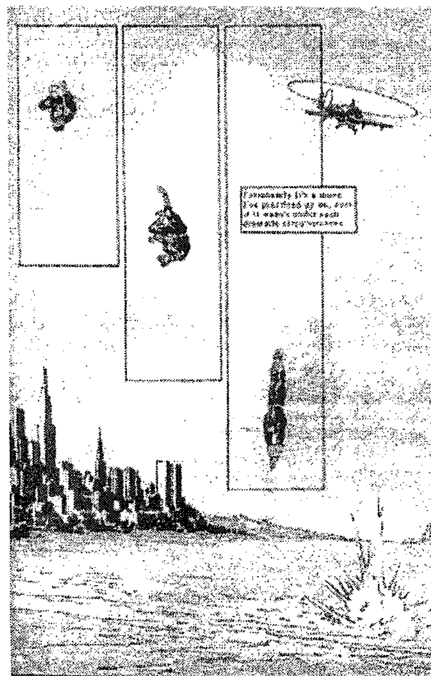

Figure 8. Example of panel variation. The character, the Punisher, is represented multiple times against a single, continuous background. In this instance, the artist has chosen to frame each iteration of the character (Starlin & Wrightson, 1991, p. 11).

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This use of multiple subjects against a continuous background may also occur with the presence of panel denotations. Issue four of Punisher P.O.V. (Starlin & Wrightson, 1991), for example, offers a full-page image of a city skyline and colorful sky as viewed from a harbor, with water in the foreground. Drawn above the water are three iterations of the title character, each iteration (moving left to right) shows the Punisher at a lower altitude in a dive toward the water from a singular image of a helicopter. Like in the Cerebus example, the artist has presented multiple images of one character against a single, continuous background image. However, the artist of Punisher P.O.V. has encased each of the iterations of the Punisher in a simple black box, making specific the need for a successful reader to interpret each iteration as through it were a separate panel.

Figure 9. Example of problematic panel breaks. In this sequence, the foreground is apparently singular; however, the characters in the background appear multiple times. Note that the title character appears twice in the final panel (Chaykin, 1985, p. 30-31).

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Sometimes, the continuous background can be more clearly broken up between multiple panels with traditional gutters. A two page spread from issue twenty-seven of American Flag (Chaykin, 1985) shows five vertical panels separated by traditional gutters. The artwork in the panels represents, as a whole, one continuous scene. In essence, the connection between the panels should be interpreted as spatial, each panel showing a visual frame of reference set exactly beside the next. However, in each of the panels, two key characters are depicted having a conversation; thus, the characters may be interpreted as moving through the space represented by the five sequential panels. The relationship between the panels must logically be temporal, then. However, in the foreground of the panel sequence, a supporting character is drawn as though she is stretched between two panels; one half of her body is in the third panel and the other half is drawn in the fourth panel. This foreground panel break would seem therefore to be strictly spatial and not temporal. Adding to the confusion is that a portion of one of the key characters is likewise drawn as though his arm extends out of the fourth panel and into the fifth. The result is that in the fifth panel of the sequence, this character appears twice, once as a complete image and once as an extension of that character's representation in panel four. It is clear from this example, and from the fact that the panel sequence can be read at all, that the reader is not strictly interpreting meaning and transition on the basis of panel breaks. If panel breaks were the only key for designation of units of meaning, a reader would not be able to interpret the panel spread from American Flag. If a reader were basing the cohesion and coherence of this sequence on

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the linking of separate panels, that reader would have to connect some aspects of contiguous panels using one principle of cohesion and other aspects of those same panels with a contradictory, non-compatible principle of cohesion. Panels, therefore, may be useful in helping a reader to parse units of meaning, but they cannot be the primary basis for arranging or connecting the units of comics meaning.

The third variety of iconic element a comics reader must manage includes caption boxes and dialogue balloons. As with panels and panel borders, lines designating or framing the linguistic content of comics are not strictly necessary, though they have become customary. And, like panel borders, the lines framing captions and dialogue may be presented not merely with smooth black lines but with a range of visual variations.

Most American comics readers are familiar with common types of textual frames, the rectangular caption box, the speech balloon (signified by a smooth oval), and the thought balloon (signified by a "bumpy" or cloudlike oval). Less common variations do exist. Some of these variations carry no specific textual value; for example, Robbins (1972) in Detective Comics 429 presents multiple caption boxes shaped in the rough outline of bats. The shape reinforces a cognitive tie to the lead character of Detective Comics, the Batman; however, the shape is not necessary to any textual interpretation, neither of the text contained within the caption boxes nor of the panels in which the captions occur. More commonly, variations must be interpreted by the reader as representing special qualities of the framed text. For example, excessively wavy or misshapen speech balloons may be interpreted as indicative of dreaminess or of confusion

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on the part of the speaker. Jagged lines framing speech may, depending upon other contextual elements, be interpreted as shock or alarm, or may indicate that the linguistic passage represents audio from a radio or other electronic source. In mainstream American comics, a speech balloon designated by a dashed line is generally interpreted as an indication of whispered speech. The ideas of shouting or whispering are meta-linguistic qualities that may be difficult to represent either by the written text itself or by the artwork of the panel. The lines surrounding the text, framing the text, are therefore modified in regular, interpretable ways to add an extra level of meaning to the presentation of the text.

In many instances, dialogue may be contained within multiple, connected speech or thought balloons. Readers must interpret the order in which to read the dialogue boxes, usually, in English comics, based upon the same principles as standard written texts, moving from left to right and top to bottom. The presence of multiple, linked balloons in opposition to a single, larger balloon might designate a temporal split, indicating a pause or break in the dialogue. As an added cohesive element that text box icons can provide to the overall textuality of comics, caption boxes and balloons are sometimes drawn across multiple panels. By stretching the text box between panels of artwork, a comics creator can force a visual (and textual) connection between those panels. Another common feature of dialogue balloons helps the reader to interpret the source of the dialogue. Speech balloons as they have evolved typically incorporate an angular projection pointing from the dialogue toward the image of the speaker or source

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of the dialogue. In like manner, thought balloons are typically shown with a string of bubbles of decreasing size leading from the enclosed dialogue toward the image of the thinker. Variations do exist, however, including simple, straight lines between dialogue and speaker, or arrows drawn between the image of the speaker and the written dialogue. A reader must not only comprehend the content of the written dialogue, but must successfully process the meta-linguistic meaning of the dialogue balloon icons.

Cohesion through Writing in Comics: Framed and Graphic Text

The complexity of comics cohesion, however, does not lie solely in the comics artwork nor in comics iconography. The complexity of reading comics is found in the dual reading of image and word, two disparate encoding systems that are processed in different areas of the brain. A necessary focus for this study, therefore, must be the use of linguistic signs as meaningful components of comics.

Within the comics text, written words typically appear in four distinct manners: framed text, graphic text, balloon text and caption text. The first two of these manners are related to comics artwork and iconography, respectively. Framed text refers to linguistic signs that appear as part of the representational artwork of the comics panels. For example, in Kuper's (1996) The System, a comic book written entirely without dialogue balloons or captions, a number of panels still contain linguistic signs. One panel on the third page of Issue One shows a character purchasing a newspaper at a newsstand. Displayed around the newsstand are several posters, magazine covers and newspapers with visible headlines reading, "Muir Fights Big Business," "President Muir?" "Why

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America Doesn't Trust Rex," "Last Weeks of Race: A Report," and "City News: Muir Rips Rex in Debate." Later in the same issue, another character is reading a newspaper clipping and portions of the news article are visibly represented in the artwork. Other types of framed text in this particular comic include graffiti on subway cars, marquees outside of businesses, writing on T-shirts and other clothing, and traffic signs. Some of these instances of framed text are not specifically relevant to a coherent reading of the comic. A stop sign at an intersection in the background of the picture, for example, does not contribute meaningfully to the cohesion of that panel to other panels. Other examples of framed text like the newspaper headlines mentioned above are in fact important to the overall plot of the comic. Of the varieties of text in comics, framed text comes closest to the kind of word-art interaction focused on in the word-art studies of Vos (1998) and others. The reader must perceive the framed text as both representational image and linguistic sign: these are images drawn to represent linguistic signs. A reader does not always know, when viewing panels containing framed text, which instances of framed text are important and which are not, which instances are intended merely to be image and which are meant to be read. It is therefore incumbent on the reader to process each instance of framed text and to hold the information at the ready until other clues let the reader know whether this information is vital to the reading.

Graphic text is comics text that is iconic in nature. This category of linguistic sign is often seen as synonymous with comics itself. The Batman TV series made fun of this particular kind of text with its bold-lettered "POW," "SOCK," and "BAM" animation.

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Whereas comics iconography can represent sound or impact with conventional lines, graphic text often attempts to represent the same concepts of sound or impact with onomatopoeic text. Each instance of graphic text must be interpreted within the context of its immediate (or adjacent) panel; the reader must identify the source and "meaning" of the graphic text from the related comics artwork. For example, if a panel shows the image of a series of pipes with steam venting from those pipes, and this image is accompanied by a graphically presented "word," "hisssssssssssss," the successful reader determines that the written text "hisssssssssssss" should be associated with the escaping steam and that it represents the sound of the steam. This successful reading depends upon the reader's external knowledge of steam, that it does make a sound when escaping from pressurized pipes and that "hisssssssssssss" can be reasonably attributed to the sound of that steam escaping. In addition, graphic text must be interpreted as a visual device, not merely as linguistic sign. The color and size, as well as aesthetic features of the graphic text, must be considered by the comics reader. Very large, brightly colored graphic text, for example, might imply greater volume than smaller, less bold graphic text. Such an interpretation is a convention, of course, and can only occur if the reader is applying meta-linguistic or non-linguistic meaning to the graphic text.

Cohesion through Writing in Comics: Dialogue Balloons

The greater portion of linguistic signs in comics, however, is found in dialogue balloons and in captions. On the surface, the difference between these two presentations of linguistic signs appears obvious. Dialogue balloons appear visibly within the comics

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panel and, via comics iconography, the writing within the balloons is directly attributable to specific characters in that panel. In contrast, captions are not visually linked to any particular character and are not necessarily tied to the interior of the comics panel. Captions, and the utterances contained in those captions, may occur outside the borders of panels, and may connect not to an individual panel but to an entire panel sequence. These surface differences, however, are stereotypes and do not account for all possibilities of balloons and captions. Lobdell and Pollina (1999), for example, in Hellhole, issue one, present all dialogue in captions, preceding each line of dialogue with a name to indicate the identity of the speaker. In other instances, a dialogue balloon may visually be presented above a multi-panel sequence, ostensibly tying the sequence together as a cohesive element in the manner of a caption. Therefore, the distinctions between dialogue balloons and text captions must be considered traditions or standards, rather than rules of the medium. Even so, we can speak of general differences in how these linguistic elements cohere to each other and to the panels of comics artwork.

Dialogue balloons are most commonly seen in two varieties, as indicated by comics iconography: the speech balloon and the thought balloon. A number of other varieties are possible, however, as have been discussed earlier. Each of these varieties of dialogue balloon offers similar types of cohesion in the comics text.

Standard written text exhibits several types of cohesive principles that have been discussed previously: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. An investigation of comics cohesion must examine whether these cohesive principles are

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at work between two dialogue balloons and/or between dialogue balloons and comics artwork. Reference, for example, refers to a range of syntactically cohesive elements that include demonstrative adjectives and pronouns, e.g., "I have completed an assessment report. This report will revolutionize our business," wherein the demonstrative adjective "this" causes the reader to connect the report in the second sentence to the report mentioned previously in the text. It should come as little surprise that this cohesive principle can function between two dialogue boxes within a panel, thus linking the balloons in the presentation of a coherent dialogue. However, an investigation of cohesion in comics needs to consider inter-panel reference more than intra-panel reference. Reference can more effectively work as a cohesive element when it functions between dialogue boxes in different panels. If the first panel in a sequence features dialogue reading, "I found a strange device in his office," and a subsequent panel features dialogue reading, "Let me see that device you found," a reader is being asked to make a textual connection between the two dialogue balloons, and, by extension, between the two panels that contain the respective dialogue balloons.

Substitution, as a cohesive element, can occur between dialogue balloons in a comics text when a noun, verb, or clause stated explicitly in one point in the text is replaced by an alternate noun, verb, or clause elsewhere in the text. Ellipsis, a specialized variety of substitution, functions by removing a syntactic element from an utterance, or replacing the original syntactic element with a null value, forcing the reader to scan through the nearby text to find the missing element. As cohesive elements in comics

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texts, substitution and ellipsis can readily occur between dialogue balloons in different panels. For example, if a dialogue balloon in one panel contains the following text: "Will you marry me?" and a dialogue balloon in the following panel contains the text, "I don't think so," a reader is able to use the cohesive elements she would normally use in standard written text to link the word "so" to the clause in the previous panel's dialogue balloon. Likewise, the cohesive principle of conjunction can be easily transferred from standard written text to the text found in comics dialogue balloons, e.g., dialogue balloons containing the utterances "It's time to go to bed," and "But I'm not tired." Conceptually repetitive elements (i.e., lexically cohesive elements) are also decidedly straight-forward when applied to the writing in selected pairs of dialogue balloons. A specific term or phrase uttered in one dialogue balloon may be repeated in a later balloon or may be implied through the use of a collocate term (an item belonging to the same class of items as the original item).

That we can apply these cohesive principles to the written texts contained in comics is not surprising. As a concept, applying these principles to linguistic utterances in comics is no different from applying them to dialogue in standard written texts. But the comics reader is being asked to do more than find coherence between written utterances. A comics reader must perform the less expected task of finding coherence between word and image.

A look again at reference can illustrate the word-image cohesion at work in a comics text. In the example of reference given above, in one panel, a dialogue balloon

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may contain the text, "I found a strange device in his office," and a subsequent panel may feature a dialogue balloon containing the text, "Let me see that device you found." However, comics often present the reader with a situation in which one of these linguistic utterances is elided entirely. The reader may be presented with a panel of artwork showing a character picking up a strange object in an office. Later in the comic, another panel features a different character drawn with a dialogue balloon containing the utterance, "Let me see that device you found." In this instance, the demonstrative adjective "that" is used as a reference to a previous iteration of "device." However, no written iteration of "device" occurs previously. What occurs previously is a non-linguistic image. The reader must match the demonstrative reference to an earlier element in the text, and in this instance, that element is not a word at all; the reference is to an image which may or may not have been understood by the reader to be a "device." The earlier discussion of the differences between the word "dog" and the image of a dog also applies to this example of reference. When the comics reader sees the panel showing a character picking up a strange object, the precise sign "device" is not indicated. How therefore can the demonstrative "that device" connect to the earlier image of the strange object? The reference must not be to the specific word "device" but to a range of concepts implied by the image and that may include the same idea evoked by the word "device."

There are some instances in standard written texts where the referenced item does not appear anywhere in the written text. Instead, the reference would be to some item external to the text and understood by the reader to be the object of the reference:

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exophora. It is not clear, however, that exophoric reference applies to this example of reference in comics; the object of reference, though outside of the written dialogue, is not outside of the visual surface of the comic, nor can it be perceived as an element outside of the textual structure of the comic. At question here for future study is whether exophora can properly be applied to any and all references not explicitly present in the written text or whether it should be applied only to references outside the conceptual framework of the text.

As with reference, word-image cohesion is also possible using the principles of substitution and/or ellipsis. In the example of substitution given above, one panel in a sequence might feature a passage of dialogue reading, "Will you marry me?" and a subsequent panel might contain the passage, "I don't think so." Once again, in the comic, a writer can elide the first written utterance, opting instead to show a character kneeling and extending a ring to another character, with no accompanying text. If the next panel were to feature the dialogue, "I don't think so," the comics reader could still derive the meaning of "so" without the presence of any original clause for which to substitute "so." As with reference, the idea of exophora can be invoked here. In spoken English, speakers can use nominal, verbal or clausal substitution to replace non-uttered concepts. Imagine if the current example of one character extending a diamond ring to another were not describing a series of comics panels but was instead describing an actual event in the physical world. If two people were in such a situation, one could say to the other, "I don't think so," and she would be understood by the other person or by a third-party observer.

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Language rules must be allowing a language user to substitute for the idea behind a linguistic utterance, even if the utterance is not made explicit. The primary condition for such a substitution would be the shared context of the producer and receiver of the utterance. In the comics example described above, the visual artwork presents such a context, and via the reader's search for sufficient contextual clues by which to properly interpret the substitution, textual cohesion between picture and word and between panels can be achieved.

The same kind of contextual clues can help a reader interpret word-image conjunction. In the dialogue pairing, "It's time to go to bed," and "But I'm not tired," the conjunction "but" forces a connection between the utterances by articulating a relationship between the two lines of text. Furthermore, the conjunction indicates the nature or value of that relationship; the conjunction "but" in "But I'm not tired" indicates to the reader that this utterance is being presented in opposition to an earlier utterance. Unlike reference and substitution (including its sub-category of ellipsis), which fashion cohesion by transformation of syntactic elements, conjunction fashions cohesion by the addition of a connective device. A consideration of whether such a connective device could work between word and image leads to an affirmative conclusion. If the first line of dialogue is removed from a panel showing a woman pointing towards a child's bed (or perhaps a two panel sequence showing a woman pointing at a clock, then at a child's bed), the child's dialogue, "But I'm not tired," in the subsequent panel can be clearly interpreted. The conjunction "but" can successfully be read to place the phrase "I'm not

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tired" in opposition to the image of the woman pointing to the bed. Not only are the picture and the dialogue coherent with each other, but the nature of their connection is just as plain as the connection would have been between two lines of written text.

Conceptual repetition and collocation between comics artwork and the written text in dialogue balloons is less surprising if only because of its ubiquity. Even so, the importance of word-image repetition and collocation should not be overlooked. For example, if two dialogue balloons in separate comics panels refer to the action hero "Leopard-Man," the simple repetition of the name forces a connection between the two utterances. Both utterances share a common referent. However, in comics we often find instances where the appearance of a lexical term, like "Leopard-Man," might be followed or preceded by a panel showing an image understood by the reader to represent Leopard-Man. As described earlier, the image and the sign are not necessarily equal in their meaning or interpretation. It is difficult to conclude that one refers specifically to the other. If, instead, the *idea* of the action-hero Leopard-Man is the referent for both, then the lexical name and the image refer to the same character. Such a shared reference would qualify as conceptual repetition. But to call this shared reference 'lexical cohesion' or 'lexical repetition' would be a misnomer, as one part of the connective link is not lexical at all. The question is reinforced, then, as to whether the nature of this cohesive device is indeed lexical or if it is not better described as ideal or conceptual repetition.

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However, despite the apparent ability of the comics reader to substitute word-image cohesion for word-word cohesion, it is important to be aware of specific limitations on how the word-image substitution may occur. Note that in the examples given above for reference and for substitution, the most obviously syntactic of the textual cohesive ties, the first line of dialogue has been replaced by an image, and the written text in the subsequent dialogue balloon either refers back to the image or presents a substitute for the concept presented in the image. If this process were reversed and the first line of dialogue were to be preserved and the second utterance replaced by an image without linguistic features, the cohesive principles of reference and substitution would no longer function as clearly. If, for example, a comic presented a panel showing a man on his knees extending a diamond ring, accompanied by the text, "Would you marry me?" and then presented a second panel showing a woman with a look of disdain or disgust but without dialogue, the reader could still draw cohesive ties but those ties would no longer be formed by substitution. Ironically, the most obvious cohesive tie would be the cataphoric reference "you" in the utterance "Will you marry me?" Without an earlier referent, the reader would need to look to the later panel for the most likely referent for "you," the image of a woman with a look of disdain. But the image itself cannot supply the pronoun necessary to make a reference, nor can it provide a demonstrative adjective, nor can it provide syntactic substitution. The image cannot be transformed the way linguistic utterances can; the image can replace only the referent not the reference. The image can only take the place of the original noun or clause in the cohesive tie of

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substitution; it cannot replicate the syntactic substitution found in the second grammatical element (the "so" in "I don't think so"). In essence, these cohesive ties between word and image are one-way streets, as least as far as reference and substitution are concerned.

With conjunction, the issue is somewhat obscured. Just as a comics image cannot replicate the grammatical roles of pronouns or demonstrative adjectives, that image also cannot reproduce specific conjunctions. However, as described earlier in this chapter, panel to panel connective ties have certain described qualities, even without the presence of any words. If the panel sequence showing the mother directing her child to bed is presented with the line of text, "It's time for you to go to bed" in the first panel, and the image of a screaming or unhappy child in the next panel (without the utterance, "But I'm not tired"), the reader can clearly interpret not only that a connection exists between the dialogue and the artwork, but something of the adversative nature or quality of that connection. Despite the fact that the general nature of the conjunction "but" can be interpreted in this panel sequence, it is not clear that the image itself contains any feature comparable to the conjunction that would indicate that the picture of the boy is in opposition to anything. The interpretation of opposition is contextual rather than dependent on any explicit sign or marking in the representational artwork.

Cohesion through Writing in Comics: Captions

The other major classification of written text in comics is the caption. Captions, in general terms, have a different relationship to the panels than do dialogue balloons. Though there is, as stated previously, blurring between balloons and captions, balloons

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may typically be perceived as part of the content of the panel images. The balloons are tied to specific actors within the image and, in the ideation of the comics text, represent specific communicative acts being performed by those actors. In contrast, the caption is further removed from the content of the comics artwork both visually and conceptually. Because the caption presents content that is essentially external to the action of the comics artwork, the caption interacts with the artwork of comics in slightly different ways from the manner in which balloons interact with the same images, though the basic cohesive principles at work remain the same.

The text in captions can interact with the content of other captions, with the content of dialogue balloons, and with the images in the comics panels (including framed text, graphic text and certain comics iconography). In addition, captions interact with other word-image combinations in a hierarchy of connexity. In terms of textual cohesion, the same principles of word-word interactions that apply to dialogue balloons apply to captions. Syntactically cohesive ties, including reference, substitution and ellipsis, normally function between instances of written text in comics in the same manner in which they function in standard written texts. Likewise, conjunction and lexical cohesion function normally as cohesive elements between written elements in comics, whether caption to caption or caption to balloon.

It is within caption-to-image cohesion that we see some difference from balloon-to-image cohesion, though the difference is not dramatic. Reference, substitution and ellipsis function as cohesive ties between captions and images in the same manner as they

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do between balloons and images. Caption text can refer to images and can syntactically substitute for the content of images, though the images cannot refer to the caption text nor syntactically substitute for the caption text. Also, conjunctive ties can exist between caption text and comics image, i.e., the caption may relate to the image in an additive manner, or in a causal manner, etc. The caption, however, can offer a unique variation by presenting the explicit conjunction that connects two panels.

As discussed earlier, panel-to-panel connections can function in manners similar to conjunctive ties in written English. However, the exact nature of the conjunctive tie is not explicit in panel-to-panel connexity; addition, causality, etc. must be inferred contextually. Captions have the ability to present the explicit conjunction, not necessarily providing traditional content but providing a conjunctive sign or phrase, e.g., "Then...," or "Later," etc. It is possible, then, to conceptualize two panels or panel sequences as the equivalents of clauses being connected by a conjunctive caption (this conceptualization is metaphorical; it would be a mistake to consider panels as actual equivalents of linguistic clauses). This conjunctive function is not typically provided by the other varieties of written text in comics.

One other important consideration to make with regards to the cohesive function of captions relates to the ability of captions to cohere not merely to individual instances of linguistic utterances or to individual panels of artwork, but, in fact, to connect to larger units of meaning or signification. A caption can connect conceptually to the combined whole of word-and-image in a panel or to a combined sequence of such panels. For

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instance, Woodring (1993) in "Manhog Beyond the Face" places a single caption at the bottom of each page of between six and nine panels. The text in each caption refers to all of the visual content in the combined panels on that page.

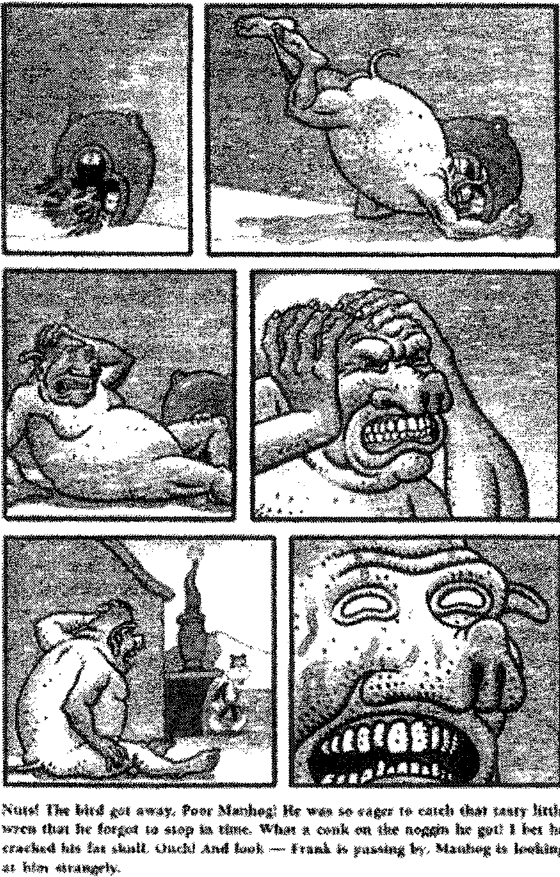

Figure 10. A caption juxtaposed to an entire panel sequence (Woodring, 1993, p. 2).

Corollary to the notion of hierarchal captions, it is also important to note that comics captions are not necessarily sequenced in direct, sequential order; a given caption does not necessarily link directly to the preceding nor to the following caption. A caption may sometimes represent only one of several narrative voices in a text. Therefore, if

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three captions appear within a panel, those three captions may or may not represent three utterances in a single narrative thread; they may instead represent three unique narrative or conceptual threads, linking not to each other directly, but instead linking to related captions elsewhere in the text.

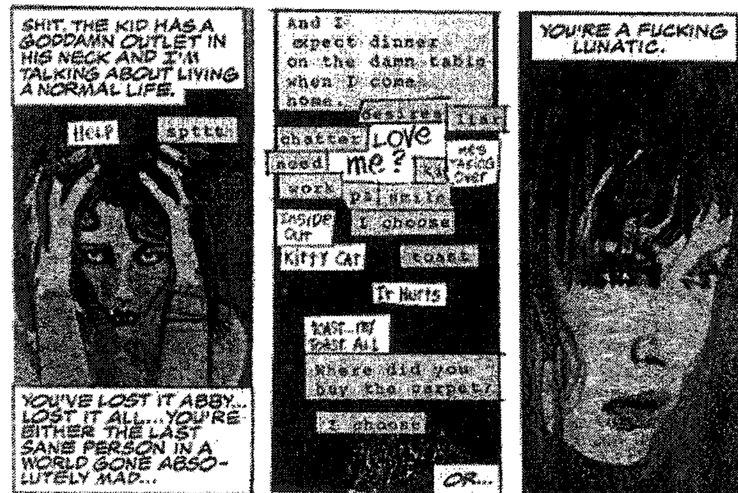

Figure 11. Example of multiple, overlapping captions. Each 'voice' or line of thought has a slightly different visual aspect. Note that these narrative strands are interspersed and are not presented in a single, consistent order (Sienkiewicz, 1988b, p. 32).

Structurally, the ability of comics to create hierarchies of captions and overlapping textual lines gives comics readers a type of cognitive task not generally demanded by standard written texts. The reader must be able to parse various conceptual units subordinate to other conceptual units, link them cohesively, and build a continuous flow of meaning. For instance, a caption within a panel of artwork may cohere conjunctively or via conceptual repetition with the elements depicted in the artwork of that panel; a caption external to that panel may cohere conjunctively or via conceptual repetition with

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the internal caption, the artwork of the panel, and/or the merged concept of the internal caption and the artwork; and an even higher level of caption juxtaposed to a panel sequence may cohere conjunctively or via conceptual repetition with captions in the panels and captions connected to individual panels, with the elements depicted in the artwork of individual panels, and with the entire overarching panel sequence. In order to accomplish this task, the reader must hold key conceptual elements at the ready until they may be called upon. At heart, this cognitive process is not unlike the process of linking elements in standard written texts; however, the degree of this process can be magnified in comics in large part because the textual elements may be broken up into visual chunks and into overlaps rather than ordered in a continuously linear expression of words.

This hierarchical chunking and layering of textual elements is an essential feature in the reading of comics; the visual layout of textual elements creates a reading event that is not always strictly linear in its progression. Even so, the elements remain cohesive according to a common set of textual principles. The connections between these myriad elements appear more manageable when properly conceived as conceptual connections rather than as connections between contrary sets of surface signifiers. Mitchell's insistence that drawings and written words are, at their most basic, simply representations of the idea provides a basis for readers to connect all of the disparate visual elements and layers of those elements in the comics text. However, finer details of cognition in the processing of non-linear texts fall outside the strict bounds of this current exploration of cohesion, which focuses primarily on those surface signifiers.

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Table 2

Standard Word/Image Cohesion in Comics

	Syntactic cohesion (Reference, Substitution, & Ellipsis)	Non-syntactic grammatical cohesion (Conjunction)	Conceptual Cohesion (Repetition & Collocation)
Image-to-image cohesion	None	Yes, but the conjunction is implied, not explicit.	Yes
Image-to-word cohesion	Yes, but the cohesion works only in one direction.	Yes	Yes
Word-to-word cohesion	Yes	Yes	Yes
In addition to word/image cohesion, comics connexity is supplied through artistic style and through comics iconography, including panels and balloons.			

Exceptions and Problems

As with most any system of abstractions, the textual cohesive relationships described thus far are idealized standards; they allow us a framework for future discussions of unique comics texts. However, comics artists sometimes work to push the boundaries of the comics form, and as they do, they create challenges to any attempt at framing comics' textual features.

Most of the preceding discussion on captions has focused on captions that contain complete expressions, phrases, clauses, sentences, or even multiple sentences. However, some more experimental comics may sometimes place only one or two words within each caption, essentially stretching a phrase or clause throughout a panel sequence. Taken to an extreme, individual words can be broken up such that each caption box in a sequence of captions contains only one letter of a word, stretching that word across multiple captions. We must treat the visual iconography of caption boxes like we treat the

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iconography of panels; the visual iconography does not in all cases correspond to the actual units of meaning a reader must manage.

In rare instances, dialogue balloons or caption boxes may contain representational images in addition to or in place of written text. In such instances, the rules of connectivity between image and word still apply, only the reader expectation of balloon or caption content has been disrupted.

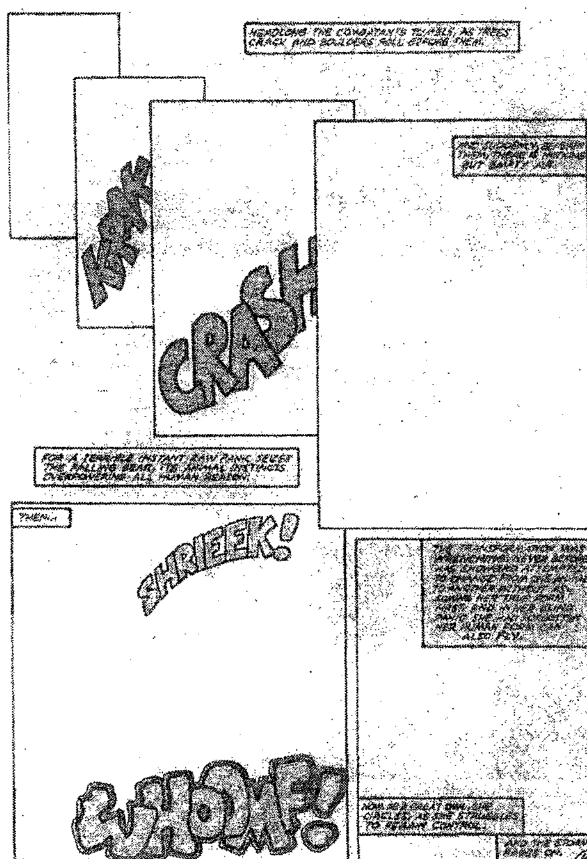

Figure 12. A pictureless sequence in an action comic. The text remains readable because of both captions and comics iconography. Intertextual awareness as well as story schema can help to temporarily fill in the missing pictorial information (Byrne, 1984, p. 10).

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Other experimentations are simply unique. John Byrne's Alpha Flight, Volume One, issue six (1984), features several pages of comics text that contains no representational images, only iconography and written text. The conceit in this issue is that a raging blizzard has obscured all visual references; pages of blank, white panels accompany dialogue balloons, captions, and graphic text. The written text must supply sufficient clues to allow the reader's mind to imagine what is not drawn; references to "the combatants," to "the falling bear," and to "the clifftop" have no referents in the blank panels (p. 10-11).

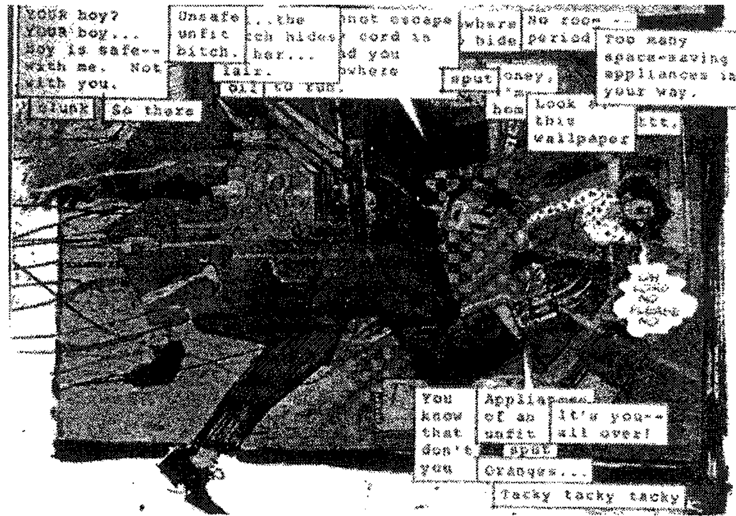

Figure 13. Experimental use of captions. The captions appear to overlap and interfere with each other (Sienkiewicz, 1988a, p. 10).

Such outliers are inevitable in any attempt to build rules of abstraction. These exceptions provide rich opportunities to challenge readers' comprehension and intertextual expectations. Future investigators may wish to examine these exceptions

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more closely. Still, such outliers should not prohibit us from positing general and useful classifications of comics connexity for a theory of comics reading.

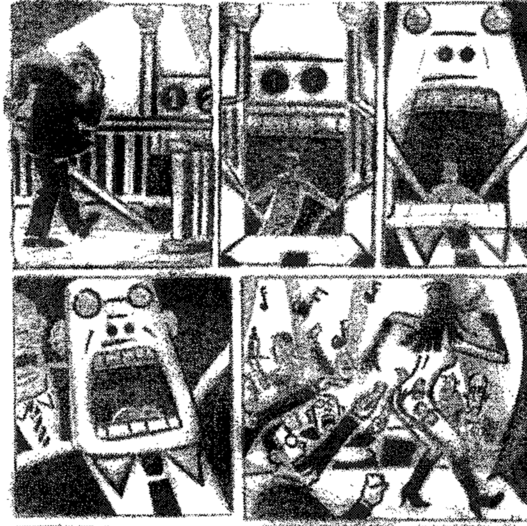

Figure 14. An example of experimental comics sequencing. The artist has linked scenes by utilizing the properties of sequential imaging to "morph" the subway entrance into a face (Kuper, 1996, p. 27).

Discussion

Looking at the varieties of textual connections involving word and image in comics, several patterns should be evident that must guide us in a shaping of a theory of comics textuality and the reading of comics. First, written utterances can cohere to other written utterances via any of the cohesive ties normally found in written English. The utterances are not meant to be placed into a linear order, so a reader must learn to link utterances properly to the images in the panels as dialogue or captions, and they must determine which utterances connect to others. Secondly, word and image can cohere using the same connective principles as word-to-word cohesion; however, the syntactic

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cohesive ties can only work in one direction (the word referring to or substituting for the image). Thirdly, images can connect to each other via ties comparable to the non-syntactic cohesive ties of standard written English (specifically, conjunction and conceptual repetition). Moreover, a reading of comics forces us to challenge the commonly used cohesive categories of temporal conjunction and lexical cohesion in favor of sequential conjunction and conceptual repetition.

A brief look at one two-panel sequence can demonstrate how some of these cohesive features work to fashion a coherent comics text.

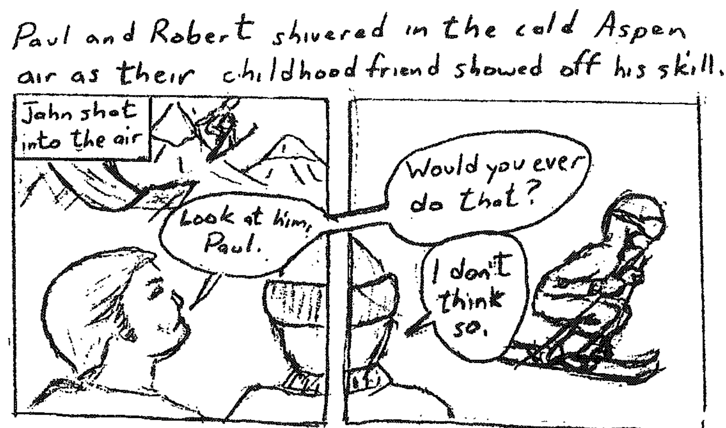

Figure 15. An original two-panel comics sequence.

The two panels in this sample are linked sequentially; the images are linked spatially by both the ski-slope and by the two halves of one character's head and are linked temporally by the repetition of the image of the skier and by the dialogue balloons. The reader must make the successful connection between the two images of the skier to determine that they refer to the same actor. The connection is more complicated than

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McCloud's simple moment-to-moment theory of closure would suggest because the connection is based on several sequential notions. Still, the connection is manageable, despite the illusion of a single foreground image to contrast the multiple background images. The panels are sequentially conjunctive and a successful reading depends on the reader being able to understand the images as representing agents and events in a conceptual schema. Once again, the discussion of a comics reading event evokes the need for conceptualization and for a conceptual framework by which to fashion meaning. This conceptual evocation is at the heart of how comics are read.

The comics iconography also helps to create cohesion in the form of the connected speech balloons connected to the image of the character Robert. The balloon lines cutting across the gutter force the two panels to be joined visually and conceptually through the speech attributed to Robert.

The utterances attributed to Robert and Paul also serve to create cohesion through the use of pronouns and substitution. Robert's utterance, "Look at him, Paul," offers reference to "John" from the caption (and by extension to the image of the skier, which is in turn a form of lexical or conceptual repetition). The use of the pronouns "you" and "I" by Robert and Paul also serve to link their dialogue balloons; as does the syntactic substitution in Paul's dialogue. Just as cohesive is the use of the syntactic substitute "that" in Robert's question to Paul, "Would you ever do that?" The most probable meaning or antecedent for "that" is contained within the image of the skier flying off the

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ski jump. The interpretable meaning is dependent on reading the image and the writing together as signs of a shared conceptual framework of actors and events.

The two captions are also connective in this sequence, but in different ways. The caption within the first panel, by virtue of its visual location, can be interpreted as connecting specifically to the first panel in the sequence. This caption, "John shot into the air," coheres in part by repetition; the word "John" and the image of the skier each refer to the same conceptual character or agent. The general relationship corresponds to the cohesive repetitive tie in standard written English. This particular caption and the image in the corresponding panel repeat or restate much of the same information. The caption is supplying neither cause nor effect; it is not supplying information regarding preceding events; it is not supplying modification or evaluation; it is not providing contrasting or adversative information.

The larger caption, however, applies not only to the first image in the sequence, but to the entirety of the sequence, to the sum of the images and words of both panels. The reader can make a number of connective ties between the text in the caption and the panel sequence, including repetitions of character names and the conceptual repetition of "his skill" with the images of the successful ski jump. Even so, the larger caption's primary relationship to the sequence is additive, offering description and modification that elaborates on the characters and events presented in the panel sequence. Note that nothing in the images provides information regarding the location of action nor the relationship between the characters; the reader relies on the content in the captions for

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this information. In contrast, none of the written material mentions skiing or ski-jumping, which is the core action or event in this narrative sequence. The two images can be linked together without the written text, but the larger narrative as it is presented depends on information supplied by the writing; in the same vein, the writing is loosely coherent at best and depends on the image to complete the meaning for the reader. Two disparate sign systems work together in comics, according to common connective principles, to create a shared representation of conceptual schemas.

None of this is to say that the categorizations of connective ties described in this chapter represents the reading of comics. This chapter has focused on the surface elements of a comics text and how the contrasting elements of images, iconography, and words in comics can be pulled together into a single text. The reading of a comic text, that is, that actual making of unified meaning from the comics text, occurs on the level of conception, not in the surface features of a comic. Hatfield (2000), Vos (1998) and the word-image scholars discussed in Chapter Two focus on the opposition between word and image. However, this chapter has shown that there are certain shared connective features of both word and image that can allow a reader to link the two. Moreover, a successful reading of a comic depends on a reader's ability to translate both image and word into ideas. And it is at this level of ideation, at a level which treats character, agent, action, event and situation, etc., apart from whatever surface signification, that a singular reading can manifest.

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V. DISCOURSE IN COMICS

Even if we can now perceive the composite word-image text of comics to in fact be a single, cohesive text, that is, a text constructed with a unified semiotic that can be cognitively processed as a singular and continuous utterance, we have still not achieved a true understanding of the process of 'reading' the comics text. Smith (1994) is quite clear that reading requires more than the presence of a clear surface signal (the visible text). Reading is an activity, an event, that occurs within a framework of meaning. The reading of signs is situational; a person reads a text in a particular setting for particular reasons that extend beyond the content of the text itself. The reading of signs is also contextual; apart from the reader's situation external to the text, signs and utterance inform meaning based not just on their own, isolated signification but based on their relationships to larger groupings of signs. Though not presented in terms identical to those used by DeBeaugrande and Dressler (1983), Smith's concepts echo a realization that reading requires not only a coherent surface signal, but also requires elements related to the communicative act itself (e.g., a writer, a reader, a situation in which the reading occurs) and related to the readers' awareness of other texts and an associated ability to perceive patterns and similarities in structure and meaning between these texts.

Before we can effectively articulate something approaching a theory of reading comics, we need to address elements of reading that extend beyond the signs in the text itself. Beyond cohesion and coherence, which are sign-centered standards of textuality, DeBeaugrande and Dressler, as discussed in Chapter Two, posit other standards that can

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shape our understanding of reading comics. Authorial intention and the acceptability of the text by the reader are necessary elements of any reading event. Unfortunately, practical limitations prevent this current study from accurately addressing the issues of specific authorial intentions and the acceptability of specific texts to specific readers. Even so, these categories are not mutually exclusive from DeBeaugrande and Dressler's other standards of textuality, which include informativity, situationality and intertextuality. As Kinneavy (1971) points out in his discussion of modes and aims of written discourse, in any system of abstraction there will be the potential of overlap. Abstract classifications that are disparate in theory are not always mutually exclusive in practice. It is likely, therefore, that some elements of intention and acceptability will perforce 'creep' into any investigation of informativity, situationality or intertextuality. Despite this limitation, an understanding of comics textuality and of the reading of comics requires an exploration into these three textual standards.

Just as Smith points out that reading occurs on a higher level of cognition than merely the ability to link signs, Kinneavy points out that a successful reading relies not on a reading of the parts but on a reading of the whole text. Kinneavy describes the entire communicative event of signal, encoder, decoder and signified reality as a discourse event, and stresses the importance of the entirety of the event in any attempt to form meaning from the signal. In respect to comics, this means that an understanding of reading comics must consider an entire comic as a singular piece of discourse. Moreover,

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the comic can only be considered discourse when it is read by a 'decoder' who can fashion interpretable meaning within a larger context.

Though Smith, Kinneavy, and DeBeaugrande and Dressler each express the idea in different terms and settle for slightly different classifications, it is reasonable to extract some commonly held perspectives on the nature of reading from their scholarship. Each theorist agrees on the need for an interpretable signal, but beyond the signal itself, each theorist also stresses the need to understand the signal within the context of a reading situation or event. Each also suggests that a successful reading requires a reader who approaches the text with a purpose or goal, and who learns to understand reading by building sets of expectations based on other reading experiences. Each also agrees on the necessity of a producer of the text, though there is less agreement on the role or importance of the textual producer. For purposes of the current discussion, I am taking the arbitrary and risky measure of pre-supposing the existence of an encoder, though the dual nature of that textual encoder or producer in many mainstream comics complicates this pre-supposition. Finally, a proper reading must depend on the production of some 'meaning' external to the textual encoding, i.e., on a reality or perceived reality outside of the text to which that text refers, a set of reference shared by the producer and receiver of the text.

At its most fundamental, the criteria above mean that a successful reader perceives a set of signs as a text in part because he has had previous experience with similar sets of signs he has treated as texts. For comics, then, a basic point of consideration in an

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investigation of comics as texts is the recognition that comics are perceived as texts in much the same way standard written texts are. We might ask a child who is scanning the words and images of a comic, "What are you doing?" Few would be surprised to hear the child respond, "I'm reading a comic." Or we may ask a co-worker, "Did you read yesterday's Dilbert?" We routinely refer to the act of making meaning from comics as reading; we perceive a comic as a readable text based in part on our previous experiences with comics. The general perception that comics are read also evokes an intertextual awareness of reading in general; our reading of comics is linked to our reading of other texts. We perceive the act of making meaning from comics as reading not simply because we have been exposed to comics previously, but because we understand from earlier experiences something of the nature of reading and of textuality that we can readily apply from standard written texts to comics. Of course, referring to 'reading' comics is also conventional. We call the act 'reading' because others have called it reading. The question can be raised, therefore, as to whether the reading of comics does indeed share an essential nature with the reading of standard written texts and whether a comics text does contain the same distinguishing features of written texts. One possible way to determine whether the perception of comics as readable texts is purely convention or is part of a reader's intertextual awareness connecting comics to standard written texts is to examine whether the defining features of the reading act or event apply to comics. The earlier discussion of textual cohesion establishes part of the proof needed to define comics as text and to define the act of meaning-making from comics as reading.

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However, because reading is situational and contextual and is not defined simply by a cohesive set of signs, an examination of comics as referents in a discourse event is necessary.

To determine whether or not reading a comic satisfies the conditions of a discourse event we must establish basic criteria for a discourse event and posit some reasonable standards of discourse against which to compare comics as texts. Remaining consistent with my earlier decision to treat comics as static objects for purposes of the current theory-building investigation, it is most feasible to apply Kinneavy's treatment of discourse to this study of comics textuality. There are, of course, obvious drawbacks to such an approach. One, as mentioned earlier, is a problem that Kinneavy himself raises, the inexactitude of applying abstract classifications to practical, real-world events; real discourse events are more complicated than an orderly theory can readily address; theories represent abstractions and idealized conditions. This drawback, though, would be true for any set of discourse or textual classifications we might apply to comics. Another objection, which I will touch on briefly at the end of this chapter, is that this approach treats texts as fixed, completed objects. The comics text becomes examined strictly as a product rather than as a process. These limitations must be taken seriously when evaluating the current discussion of comics as texts; however, I hope that the rather forced abstractions of theory presented herein will be useful to later scholars engaged in examinations of individual comics and comics reading events.

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I begin this discussion of comics as discourse, then, with a quick look at the traditional communications triangle and Kinneavy's classifications of media, modes and aims of discourse. Though the traditional communications triangle, comprised of an encoder (author), decoder (reader), signal (text), and referent (external reality or conceptual construct), is only one of several approaches to the classification of discourse, its ability to treat static, finished texts makes it more readily useful in textual classification than a process-oriented approach to discourse such as Moffett's (1968). Additionally, Kinneavy's highly structured, abstract classifications offer more explicit, measurable criteria than do the more complex and malleable criteria offered by DeBeaugrande and Dressler, like informativity.

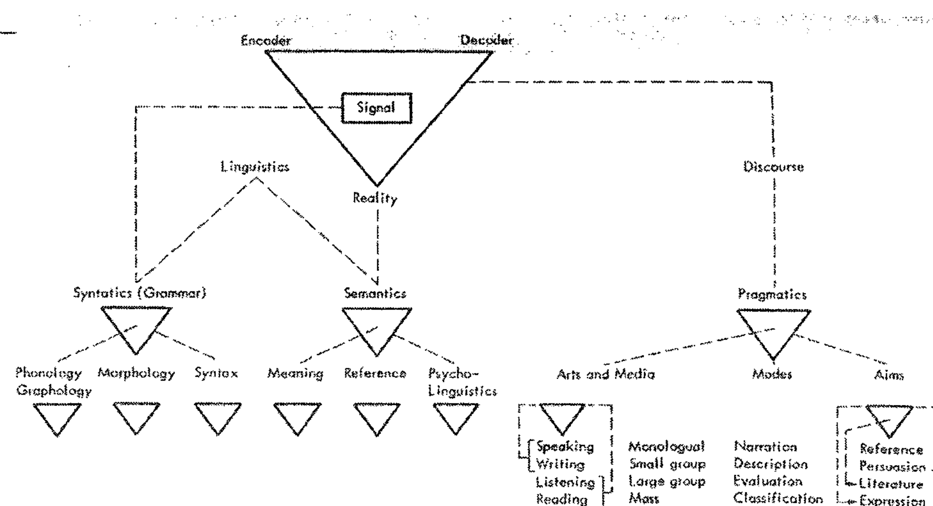

Figure 16. Kinneavy's discourse triangle. Notice the classification of media, modes and aims as features of discourse (Kinneavy, 1971, p. 31).

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For Kinneavy, the communications triangle presents a number of potential relationships between the four elements of the triangle, various relationships presenting an area of investigation into the broader communicative act. Syntactical studies are linked to the signal or text; semantics is linked to the manner in which or process by which the signal suggests or manifests reality. The study of discourse is, according to Kinneavy, "the study of the situational uses of the potentials of the language" (p. 22), and is primarily concerned with how the "meaningful or interpreted signals can be used by the... decoder in actual... situations" (p. 23). Subsequently, he concerns himself with three distinct aspects of these "situational uses": media, modes and aims. The term media, like many terms in this discussion, is problematic, but in general we can infer that in situational uses the term implies the manner and vehicle by which the decoder is receiving the meaningful signals. For this study, I am interested in establishing what modes and aims are possible or meaningful when the medium is comics. The modes of discourse, for Kinneavy, are representative of the organizational structures of the text and the logical processes suggested by the text. These are the ways in which or manners by which the text develops and arranges the topic it communicates. The aims of discourse are more concerned with the "why" of a text rather than with the "what" or "how." On the surface, it can be argued that the why is a practical concern of the encoder and can only be guessed at by a reader. Our concern with discourse, however, helps us to re-shape this consideration. If discourse study is concerned with the situation of a communication event, it is clear that a reader approaches a text and reads it with a schema

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that is informed by a presumption of the goals and purposes of the text and by intertextual experience with other texts that were written with similar goals and purposes. The notion that a reader can extrapolate aim from a text is thereby somewhat less onerous than it might initially appear.

Comics, however, do present a slight complication with any application of the traditional communication triangle. A traditional approach to communication envisions a single encoder, one author. With comics a reader is often confronted with more than one author, most commonly, with a writer of the linguistic text and an artist creating the panels and panel-layout. Not all comics are written by two 'authors' in this manner; some comics creators present both word and image as part of a unified writing event. However, many mainstream comic books incorporate an assembly-line approach using a large team for the creation of a comics text. The writer creates the plot or story outline from which the artist creates a panel layout and the artwork found in the panels. Then, after the artwork has been drawn, the writer will create the actual words to appear in the dialogue boxes and captions. Afterwards, the artist (or often, a second artist) will trace the drawings and words in ink (if it is not a comic that uses oils, watercolor, or some other artistic medium by which to present the visual content). Many comics will then have an additional person or committee select which colors the printer will add (Lee and Buscema, 1984).

Inkers and colorists aside, primary written and image content is typically being prepared and presented by two different people. Most important for a discussion of

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comics discourse, however, is the notion that each of these comics creators may be presenting the reader with a different vision of mode or aim, i.e., the reader may be presented with related but slightly differing discourses. Even if we proceed under the notion that the writer and artist work collaboratively to produce a single, shared vision of the comics text, Leech and Short (1981) suggest that a discourse event is not constrained merely by the actual author and actual reader but also by idealized concepts of addresser and addressee. The discourse event requires the reader to fashion a conceptualization of the authorial 'voice,' usually in terms of a narrative persona. By virtue of the separation of textual producer and receiver that is inherent in written texts, the reader, Leech and Short argue, is not so much engaged in communication with the physical producers of the text as with a conceptualized authorial figure constructed from textual clues. In a similar manner, it is possible, particularly in fictional writing or in narrative, that the narrative persona is conceptualized by the reader as engaging in communication with an implied addressee, an idealized reader who may or may not represent the decoder of the text.

A successful reader, then, is one who can successfully manage notions of author and reader, of implied addresser and addressee, and can place these notions in a context not only with the text but with the referenced reality or ideation implied by the text.

Dealing with Multiple Strands of Discourse

The current investigation of the discourse in comics begins with an exploration of the multiple levels of implied addressers and addressees. In comics, there are frequently two authors at work; therefore, we can consider the comic to be a composite text, a

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graphic text (artwork) and a written text. To participate in the discourse of a comic, a reader must be able and willing to reconcile these sometimes disparate layers of text. The embedded layers of text can create interesting juxtapositions between the implied addresser of the written text and the implied addresser of the graphic text, likewise with the implied addressees.

In struggling with the discourse situations presented in the comic, the reader must not only perceive and interpret the signs of the visual surface of the comics text, but must be able to perceive and interpret, or more exactly, to reconcile, the two lines of discourse in relation to each other.

One of the primary functions of the caption in narrative comics is to allow the author of the written text a narrative voice. It is through captions that the implied author of the text is manifested. The text in the captions performs a number of different roles in its interaction with associated panels of the graphic text. In the previous chapter, the cohesive relationships between caption and image were presented as correlating to conjunctive cohesion and to conceptual repetition. The cohesive connections can be classified as sequential, causal, additive, adversative, and repetitive or collocative. But textuality is more than just cohesion and coherence. The reading of a comics text requires a reader to situate herself in a reading event, wherein the entirety of the text is considered as a communicative act occurring in a given situation and interpreted according to rules of prediction garnered from other reading events. The dual reading of word and image in the comic requires, therefore, that the reader not only be able to tie

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word to image in order to create a coherent surface text but that the reader be able to tie the written discourse to the graphic discourse. The communicative situation, the author-to-audience interaction, presented by the captions (the primary repository of narrative persona) must mesh with the communicative situation presented by the sequential panels of artwork.

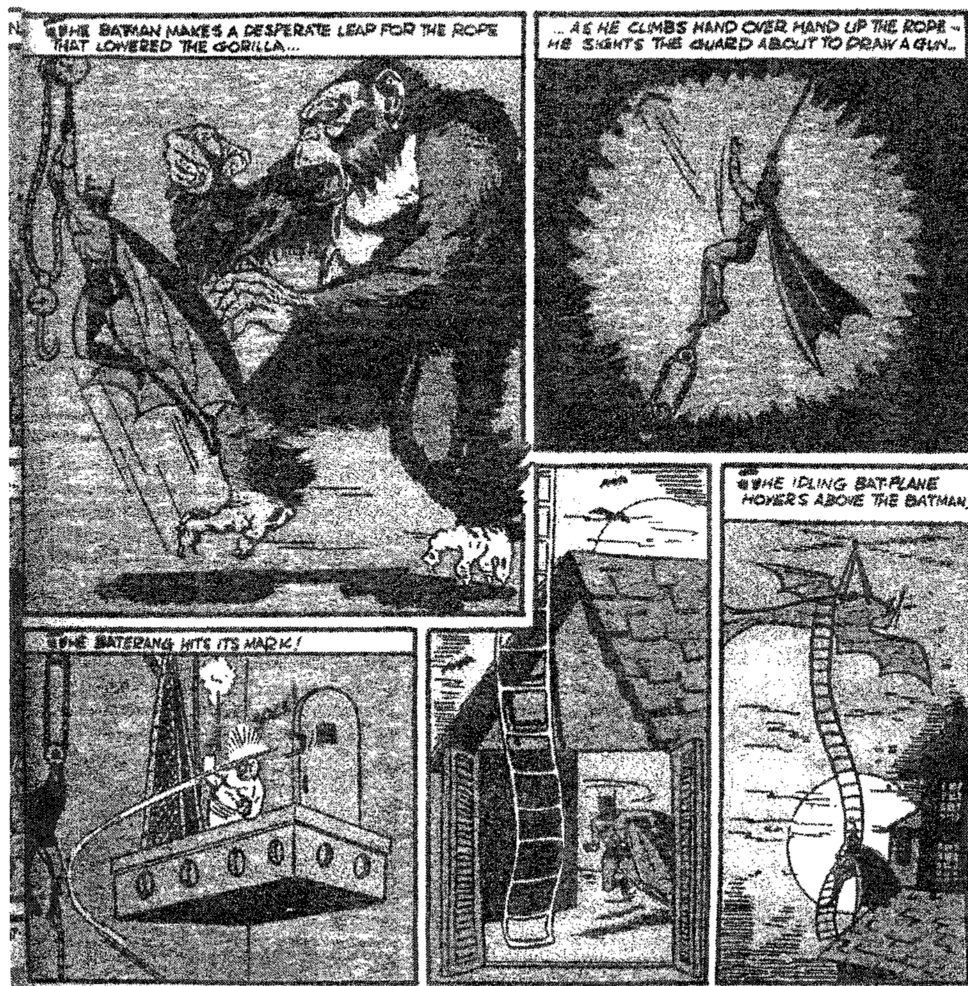

Figure 17. A panel sequence from Detective Comics. This sequence shows interdependent captions and images (Fox and Kane, 1939/1988, p. 25).

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Traditionally, the implied author is usually a third-person omniscient narrator whose function is to establish, describe or comment on the scenes depicted or the actions implied in the corresponding panels of the visual text. For example, a three-panel sequence in "Batman Versus the Vampire" (Fox and Kane, 1939/1988), originally appearing in Detective Comics, relates a sequence of actions in which Batman escapes from a trap in a castle. The first panel depicts Batman grabbing hold of a rope suspended from an unseen support. Behind him, a gigantic and grotesquely exaggerated gorilla is poised menacingly. The caption accompanying the picture reads, "The Batman makes a desperate leap for the rope that lowered the gorilla..." Here the narrator is describing the action implied by the picture as well as explaining the presence of the rope in the panel. Also, the qualifying word "desperate" relates something of the character's mental state and his purpose. The second panel shows Batman suspended from a higher point on the rope, with one arm extended and a 'baterang' in mid-air facing away from Batman. The caption accompanying this panel, "...As he climbs hand over hand up the rope – he sights the guard about to draw a gun...," does not describe the visual text, but instead attempts to weave a narrative flow between the scene in the previous panel and the scene in its own panel (hence it establishes causality). The action described has apparently already taken place before the point of action captured in the art. The caption explains how Batman had moved up the rope to his 'current' position and the reason for the perceived action of Batman throwing his baterang. The assumption, directly expressed by neither the written nor visual text, is that the batarang has been thrown at the guard in a defensive action.

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The next panel clarifies this with the caption, "The baterang hits its mark!" accompanying a panel that depicts an armed character on a balcony firing a gun into the air and the baterang poised in the air behind that character's head. Lines trailing from the baterang past the head of the character indicate an assumed action sequence (specifically, that the baterang traveled through the air, struck the guard in the head causing him to misfire his gun, and continued on) (Fox and Kane, 1939/1988, p. 25).

In this three-paneled action sequence, it can be seen that the individual lines of discourse (the captions) would not by themselves constitute any clear or 'smooth' narrative flow. Instead, the captions interact with the visual text to create a coherent story-line, a single line of discourse. The two 'texts' are interdependent. Without the visual text, the second and third captions ("he sights a guard about to draw a gun..." and "The baterang hits its mark!") are incoherent. Likewise, without the first and second captions, the cognitive link between the two panels of visual text would be suspect at best. The reader is presented with a single story presented in narrative order from a common third-person authorial perspective.

This close interdependency of objective narrator and artist is common in comics texts and demonstrates how word and image can not only cohere but can present a single, consistent line of discourse, but it does not account for the full range of discursive interaction between word and image. The discourses of word and image in the comics text are more complementary than intertwined in <u>The Sandman Special</u>, number 1 (Gaiman & Talbot, 1991). Chapter three of this story begins with a five panel sequence

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relating the character Orpheus' journey from Thrace to Taenarum to find a path to Hades' underworld. There are two captions associated with each of the first four panels and one caption with the fifth. The first two captions read as follows: "There were no songs sung nor tales told of Orpheus' journey to Taenarum; or if there were they are lost to us today," and "A hard time he had of it. He traveled, on foot, by land through the wild country and the few sparse towns of the older days." The accompanying visual text shows a narrow land bridge extending across a choppy sea toward a distant line of cliffs. A small distant figure is crossing a land bridge, facing toward the foreground of the panel. The second panel depicts the same scene with the figure now much closer to the foreground. The accompanying pair of captions read:

> From Thrace to Macedonia, to Thessaly (where the witches gnaw the flesh from men's faces for their spells, and pull down the moon for their own purposes); from these to Delphi (where he spoke to the Pythia, although the oracle she gave him is no longer recorded; and he received a gift).

and "He passed through Thebes, and through Corinth. He escaped the darkness that waited for him in the heart of Corinth, fleeing through Arcadia" (Gaiman & Talbot, 1991, p. 25).

These captions have little to do with the immediate subject matter of the visual text. Although the pictures may imply travel, distance, and hard conditions, they show the reader nothing of Orpheus' journey. The road "from Thrace to Macedonia" is not shown nor are the "few sparse towns." The written text speaks of witches in Thessaly,

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whom Orpheus may not have even encountered on his trek. Hidden narratives are hinted at (Orpheus' audience with the Delphian oracle and "the darkness that waited for him in the heart of Corinth") but are not manifested in any way in the panels of the visual text.

Figure 18. An excerpt from The Sandman Special 1. Note the lack of interdependency between word and image in this sequence (Gaiman & Talbot, 1991, p. 25).

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Conversely, the panels are drawn such that the flow of action from one panel to the next is clear. No written interpretation of the visual narrative is needed. And none is offered. The lines of written text refer neither to the choppy sea, to the land bridge, nor to Orpheus' purpose in crossing it. The two lines of text share only a character and a thematic link: Orpheus journeying. Both texts indicate the wildness or chaos of the implied environment; the trek is unfriendly to the lonely traveler and inflicts some hardships. The texts have a parallel relationship. They move in the same direction along roughly the same path but do not at this point intersect.

It is not until the fifth panel that the two narratives seem to converge. The visual text depicts Orpheus standing before a cave entrance from which issues a mist. The caption says, "On this promontory was a deep cavern, from which foul and noisome vapors rose; and it was this cavern that was supposed to be the gateway to the underworld." The references in the written text to "a deep cavern" and "vapors" are the first instances of explicit interaction (conceptual repetition) between the visual and written texts in this entire sequence, assuring the reader that a singular narrative event is occurring despite the apparent distance between the written and visual clues (p. 25).

The implied narrator of the written text of this Sandman comic is not commenting on, nor describing, the panels of the visual text. The narrator, instead, appears to be weaving a narrative tale complete unto and within itself. When the captions are read together, they form a smooth and coherent narrative, quite capable of standing on its own without visual interpretation.

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That the panels of the visual text form a coherent narrative line is made clear over the two pages following the sequence described above. On these two pages, a sequence of panels appears showing Orpheus's descent into the mouth of the cavern and his passage through it to the River Styx – a sequence to which no written text is given. And yet the artist has made it stand as a coherent, meaningful narrative, unlike the isolated visual sequence from the Batman story described above. Yet the comic is meaningful to a reader precisely because the two lines of apparently independent text can be read or understood as a single, conceptual event. The passage described above represents only a segment of the overall surface text; there are other places in the text where word and image become briefly inter-dependent. The comic works as a single, not dual, discourse when taken as a whole.

Both of the preceding sequences utilized a third-person narrative in the written text as well as an objective visual narrator. The consistency of narrator and narrative perspective help to establish the singularity of the comics reading event. Yet, in the graphic novel Moonshadow (DeMatteis, et al, 1989), the author chooses a first-person narrator for the written text.

On a sample page, the visual text presents three panels across the top of the page. Each panel depicts a close-up of an eye of a character. Below the three eyes are corresponding captions: "I looked into Lady Shady's eyes and saw blamelessness," "I looked into Jobidiah's eyes – and saw servility," and "I looked into HIS EMINENCE'S eyes – and saw blind, spiteful HATE" (p. 227).

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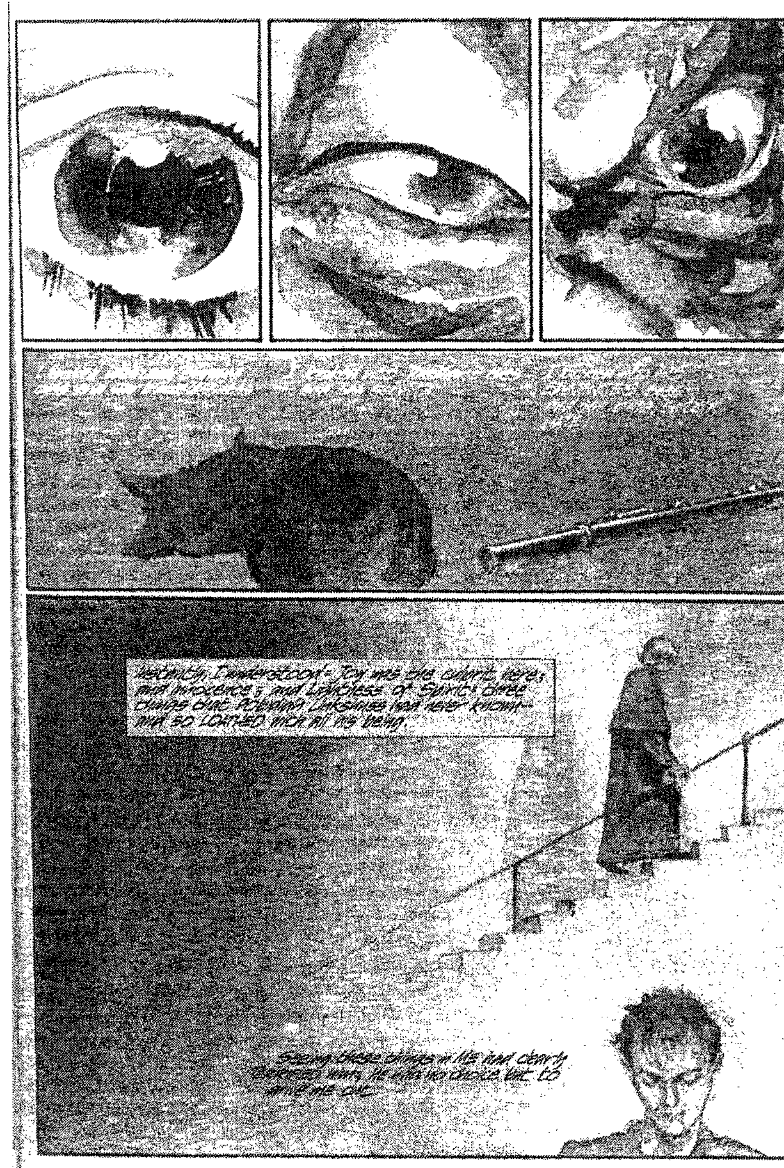

Figure 19. A page from the Moonshadow graphic novel. Note the changing visual perspectives and the psychological sequencing necessary to 'read' the third panel as part of the overall sequence (DeMatteis, et al, 1989, p. 227).

By assuming a first-person persona, the author is moving away from a textual line which (at least, somewhat) objectively describes the visual text and toward a textual line that offers psychological comments and judgements on the line of the visual text. Even

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the graphic narration hints here at a first-person persona. The artwork does not show Moonshadow, the implied narrator of the written text, looking into the eyes of three other characters, but instead only shows what he would see: their eyes. For these three panels, the two authors of the word and image have combined to create a single implied author. The two lines of text become temporarily unified in a single, discrete discourse situation.

The next panel depicts Moonshadow's flute and his cat, Frodo. Neither of these two things are present in the scene with Moonshadow nor take any part in the action of the narrative in this sequence of the story. The graphic text in this panel at first appears to be an anomaly. The next caption, however, provides the clues necessary to link this piece of the visual text with the rest of the narrative: "Instantly, I understood: Joy was the culprit here; and Innocence; and Lightness of Spirit: three things that Pobidiah Unkshuss had never known – and so LOATHED with all his being" (p. 227).

With a first-person narrative in the captions, the psychological clues in the text become more important and pronounced. The rhetoric of the text of the narrative becomes less reliant on chronological sequencing and more reliant on psychological sequencing. The link between the panel with the flute and the cat and the preceding panels is psychological in nature. The exact psychological relationship is hinted at in the written text in the caption. The images of the cat and of the flute visually represent the psychological ideas of Joy, Innocence, and Lightness of Spirit to the narrator, Moonshadow. The visual text, then, is of an image that exists solely in the narrator's

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mind. This idea further strengthens the unity of the narrator as a narrator of both the visual and written texts.

Yet, lest the reader forget that there are two authors and two 'texts' present in the narrative, the final panel of the page breaks the unity between the implied addresser of the visual text and the implied addresser of the written text. Moonshadow, the narrator of the written text, is revealed as an object of the visual text. Comics, therefore, complicate the idea of narrator or narrative perspective in a way not replicable in standard written texts. Multiple narrative perspectives are being presented to the comics reader within the same unit of surface text, even within a single panel.

To complicate the discourse situations further, some graphic novels make use of multiple narrators in the captions of written text. In Marshal Law, by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill (1990), several narrators appear, commenting on the same page, even on the same panel. Thus, the reader must be versatile enough to adjust to the radical leaps in the levels of narrative found in the graphic novel.

For example, in one sequence in which a costumed villain is pursuing a female stripper-gram with the intent of killing her, the written texts of the captions relate the points-of-view of two distinct implied narrators. The written narratives of the captions alternate between the narrative lines of the two characters. Neither narration directly interacts with the visual sequences, but instead they offer the reader a psychological window into the personas of the characters. The chronological sequencing of the visual

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narrative thus contradicts, or at least juxtaposes, the psychological sequencing of the two lines of written narrative.

Also the visual text does not clearly correspond, in terms of character perspective, to the associated captions. Two panels are offered in this sequence that apparently denote the visual perspective of the stripper-gram. However, in the first of these, the caption offers a psychological narration from the point-of-view of her antagonist, the character Sleepman. In the second of these panels, though, the narrative in the caption is from her perspective. And thus, for one panel, the implied addressers of both the visual and written texts, as they did in Moonshadow, merge in a single implied addresser (but only for that panel).

Adding a further level of discourse to the sequence mentioned above, the author of the written text has added a third narrative line at the bottom of the multi-paneled pages of that sequence. This narrative caption is written across the width of the page, apparently indicating that it is meant to interact with the entire sequence as a whole, and not merely with one panel of art. This third narrative line, offered in the form of a quote from a nineteenth century source critical of urban crime and violence, seems to be a parallel caption, commenting closely on the theme of violent crime, as depicted in the associated pages of the graphic novel. Such a caption runs not only parallel to the text of the visual narrative of those pages but parallel to the combined narrative of those pages (to the combined narrative of both the written and visual texts). Here then, the author of the written text, Pat Mills, is creating a discursive relationship and interdependency not

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only between words and art, but between two lines of written text. The ability of comics to present complex, multiple discursive strands apparently simultaneously is not easily or often replicated in standard written texts, wherein unity of voice is stressed much more heavily in a single, progressive line of surface text. It is because comics offer surface text that is multiple, and not strictly linear, that comics have the potential to offer denser and in some ways more layered discourse events, though judging from the prevalence of comics, not necessarily more difficult to manage cognitively.

As with panels and captions, exceptions and experimentations may occur in the presentation of comics discourse situations. These exceptions may challenge any system of abstraction we might present to classify the kinds of discursive relationships between image and word or between multiple strands of written text in comics. This current investigation does not attempt to deal with every possible permutation or experimental outlier, but rather to establish an understanding of comics discourse events in general and to present a coherent set of abstractions that can be usefully applied to further, more specific investigations of comics.

Of key importance here is that the reader of a comics text may be called upon to take these often disparate, even contradictory, authors and lines of text and fashion from them a single, and sensible, discourse event. None of this is to suggest that the reading of a comics text is somehow a plural activity. If the reading of a comic were in fact two readings, one of text and another of images, a reader would be presented with two separate communicative events in a single act of reading. The comic text still presents a

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unified reading event; we have already seen how word and image can and generally do cohere into a single comics text. However, the reader's apparent ability to negotiate multiple levels of narrative with ease suggests rich potential not only for the usefulness of comics in the offering of densely layered development of a topic (whether narrative or otherwise) but for future investigation into how narrator, voice, and discourse are perceived and processed in all media.

Mode in Comics Discourse

Even if we consider the reading of a comic to be a single discourse event, we are still left to consider the features of that discourse event. Accepting Kinneavy's theorem, we would need to consider both the modes and the aims of comics, that is, both how comics support and develop their subject and to what ends the comics' subjects are being developed. Each of these elements must be considered from the perspective of a reader in a situational context and must treat the entirety of the text, not merely selected passages. One difficulty to this approach has already been mentioned, though it bears repeating: the pragmatics of individual reading events lie outside the scope of this study. Instead, this dissertation can only deal with generalities and categories relating to modes and aims, though we can discuss those modes and aims in relation to specific comics texts.

Modality is particularly problematic in any approach to reading theory. Much of the history of rhetoric and composition has been a history of classifying and reclassifying the modes by which or through which writers organize and express their ideas. Kinneavy himself mentions four, narrative, description, evaluation, and classification, but he does

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not suggest that these four account for all modes of development. In fact, he suggests them as examples of modes and in a somewhat dismissive manner comments on definition being a mode prominently taught and practiced in the Middle Ages (1971). Corbett (1990) instead offers argument, exposition, description and narration as the basic modes of development, though he is concerned chiefly with argument. In my own classroom I talk about description, narration, example, process, comparison, classification, causality, definition, and argument as modes of development. Some theories of modality will posit certain modes as kinds or varieties of other modes. Moreover, we frequently find combinations of these modes working together in a text to support or develop its theme, thereby creating the awkward task of deciding which of these modes is the dominant or primary mode in that text.

Establishing a definitive set of modal classifications for comics would probably be misleading, perhaps even dangerous. Smith (1994) suggests that any attempt to define categories of reading, modality and aim is always less useful than describing the features of categories. However, there are several key points to discuss regarding comics modality that will be important to a full understanding of comics textuality. Comics are almost ubiquitously associated with narrative. In fact, one of the more commonly used terms for comics in scholarly fields is Narrative Sequential Art. Such terminology is not surprising given that a disproportionate amount of comics texts are action-adventure comic books. Even those comic books and comic strips that do not present action-adventure stories are likely to use story-telling techniques to communicate tales of romance, drama or humor.

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Many people may not even be aware that non-narrative comics exist. Eisner (1985) and other comics scholars generally ignore non-narrative comics so much so that they have attempted to define comics as strictly a narrative communication form. But what we know of other communication media tells us that narrative is only one modal tool that authors and readers can use to communicate meaning. Beyond narrative, comics can present a wide range of organization and method in the development of an idea.

For example, some comics use classification as a primary mode of developing the theme or idea of a comic. Jack Kirby (1974) would sometimes create non-narrative comics texts as supplements to the featured narrative in his war comics. In Our Fighting Forces, volume twenty-one, issue 152, for example, Kirby presents a comics text entitled "Sub-machine Guns of World War II." The entire text is of panels showing various sub-machine guns used during World War Two by both Axis and Allied forces. Each panel depicts a different gun, drawn to detail and accompanied by background images of war. The text associated with each panel describes the caliber, length, weight, action, and number of shots for each of the guns. There is no story. There is no implied narrative voice. The panels are not ordered in any kind of temporal sequence. The entire comic is a sequence of panels showing different types of guns. Yet, there is textual unity; there is a single, identifiable theme developed and organized in an understandable manner. The principles that connect each panel and that connect the written text to the pictures are clear. Most importantly, though, the text is still identifiable as a comics text, despite its non-traditional modality. Enough intertextual clues exist for the reader to perceive that

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the text is a comic. There are comics panels and caption boxes; the images are given priority over the words; even the font style is characteristic of most comics. Moreover, the panels can still be connected using the same principles of cohesion used in more traditional, narrative comics.

Because comics may be a composite of words and image, it is possible to craft comics using any of the modes one could use in standard written texts. However, some modes will be easier or more natural to use in comics. Consider again that comics texts do not always require the presence of written words. Without words to express complex or abstract logic (and logic is the key to many of the modes of textual development), a comics text is severely restricted as to the kinds of arrangement or development it can present through images alone. Recall that comics depend on panels juxtaposed in a sequence. Therefore, sequential methods of arrangement ought to be readily applicable to comics. Typical varieties of sequential arrangement include temporal, spatial, numerical and logical sequencing. And in fact, we can have comics whose panels are arranged in any of these fashions, though examples are under-represented.

Other means of developing the discourse of comics without reliance on words include causality (or cause-and-effect) and process. Because comics panels can depict actions and not merely moments in time, they can be used in sequence to establish causality. In fact, causality is one of the varieties of panel-to-panel cohesion discussed in Chapter Four. Process, sometimes discussed as an independent mode and other times perceived as a sub-category of classification, is also readily apparent in an entire class of

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instructional comics. My latest computer came shipped with a large process comic lying on top of the styrofoam that held the computer. In it, a series of images, along with common comics iconography, showed me how to go about setting up my new system and connecting the cables. The use of a sequence of images to explain the process is particularly beneficial in commercial ventures like the sale and consumer-end assembly of computer equipment; the information is neither dependent on language nor on a lexicon of specialized computer terminology.

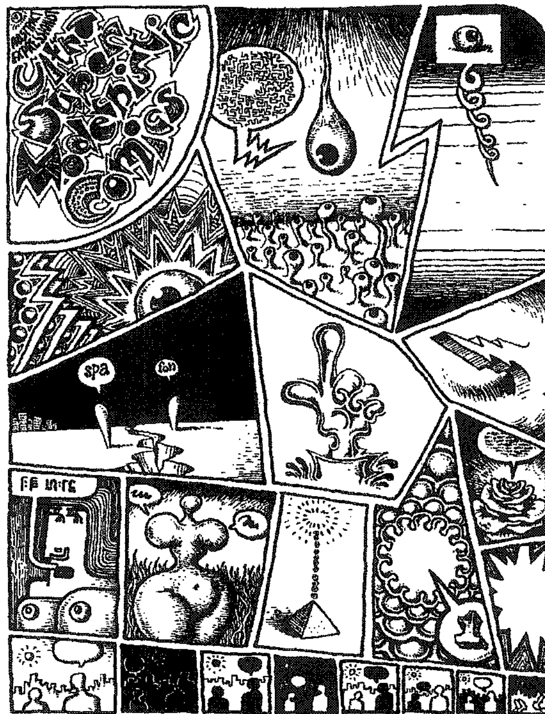

Figure 20. An example of free-associative development of a comics text (Crumb, 1988, p. 18).

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Of final note with regards to the modality of a comics text is the idea that a comics creator may choose to develop a comics text using free-association. This modality is difficult to reconcile with other means of comics development and arrangement. We find this kind of comics progression in some of the more experimental works of comics creators like Robert Crumb. His "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics," printed in R. Crumb's Head Comix (1988), features a series of mostly unrelated, abstract images. Occasionally, some aspect of an image in one panel may suggest the central shape or image in the next, but that characterization is inadequate to describe either the development or the arrangement of the panels.

This example is a useful reminder that some modes of development work more naturally with certain of the aims of discourse. Just as free-association may be a proper method of developing a poem or an entry in a diary, it is generally non-communicative as a method of development in argument or in scientific writing. The free-associative arrangement of panels in Crumb's comic works in part because the text is internally consistent and because the author and reader can share an understanding of the situationality of the text. Just as a standard written text with a specific literary aim can be successfully developed via free-association, so too can comics be developed with the same aim or purpose.

Aim in Comics Discourse

The final important concept related to the discourse of comics that this dissertation will address is aim or purpose in comics texts. Just as important as the what

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or how of comics discourse is the why of comics discourse. Why was the comics text created? What is the goal of a particular comics discourse event? Though a comics text, like any other text, is simply an object or artifact, without cause or purpose, the act of reading a comic initiates a specific discourse event; the comics creators are communicating something to the reader, and there is purpose or objective at the heart of this or any communicative event. This purpose or objective is the *aim* of the discourse (Kinneavy, 1971).

Kinneavy uses the communications triangle as the theoretical apparatus for the construction of his aims of discourse, each of the four aims associated with one of the four elements of the communications triangle. He characterizes text whose aim is directed at or concerned with the encoder as expressive text; its purpose is to allow the encoder to express personal ideas, e.g., confessional writing or writing in a personal diary. Text whose aim is directed at or concerned with the decoder, Kinneavy classifies as persuasive writing. Text whose aim is to emphasize or reflect an external reality is classified as referential. And, finally, text whose aim is to reflect or otherwise highlight the signal itself is classified as having literary aim (not to be confused with aesthetic or critical notions that are used to judge certain texts as literature).

As with Kinneavy's modes, there are problems with his aims, though for the purposes of this study the problems are negligible. Just as modes often overlap each other within a single text, aims frequently overlap as well. Though Kinneavy points out that this is a problem with abstraction in general, it does create some problems with

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classification. Moreover, the names of his aims are inherently constraining. Text that is reader-centered, for instance, does not need to be persuasive per se. Text whose goal is to instruct the reader or to teach the reader how to accomplish a given task is surely centered on the reader as much as persuasive writing is. Yet its goal is not to persuade the reader to accomplish a task, only to instruct him how to do so. In addition, if we conceive of persuasive discourse as text whose aim is directed at the reader, should we not by analogy conceive of referential discourse as text whose aim is directed at the referent? And are not all discourse events directed at or toward a reader, with the aim of fashioning some change in the reader, even if it is only a change in what the reader has experienced or understood?

Still, these issues with Kinneavy's classifications are largely semantic. We can suffice to say that a discourse event in both oral and standard written texts has some goal or purpose as its end, and that we can describe certain varieties or categories of aim in those discourse events. An understanding of comics as texts, and as elements in discourse events between writer/artist and reader, benefits from an understanding of the goals and purposes of comics when read as discourse.

A comics discourse event would, like discourse involving standard written texts, feature each of the elements of the traditional communication triangle, encoder, decoder, signal and referent. Accordingly, the four aims proposed by Kinneavy, the difficulties with abstraction aside, ought also to be potential goals behind comics discourse. However, there is an immediately obvious question in regards to the application of the

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communications triangle to comics. As described earlier, the comics text is a composite text and often has two different encoders. We might raise the same issue regarding instances of multiple authors in standard written texts; however, those questions can usually be dismissed with ease. The standard written text generally remains single and unified even in the instance of corporate or group authors of written texts. With comics, though, if there is a separate writer and artist, they are producing separate encoding systems, one encoding information in language, the other encoding information in image.

Despite the potential for opposing aims, the concern is more theoretical than practical. Even with the dual-encoding in comics, successful readers perceive comics as single texts, and it is unlikely creative teams would want to confuse or disrupt the discourse of comics by purposefully providing contradictory aims. The process by which dual creative teams draft comics typically prevents situations in which the discourse strand of the written text would be at odds with the discourse strand of the graphic text. Most comics with writer/artist teams also have editors whose job would include preventing the development of confusing or conflicting aims in the comics text.

Still, if we allow our understanding of aims of discourse to be informed by Kinneavy, there is potential in our theory for multiple or conflicting aims. In fact, rare examples of purposely conflicting aims in comics do exist; though, ironically, the disconnection between the aim of the written element and the aim of the graphic element actually serves to draw attention to the text itself, making the work literary, despite whatever the apparent goal or aim of the writing and artwork individually.

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Figure 21. A rare example of words and images presenting contrasting aims (Ware, 2003, p. 41).

For example, Charles Ware's (2003) "Thrilling Adventure Stories" presents artwork suggesting a traditional super-hero action narrative. The aim of this kind of fictive narrative is traditionally viewed as literary; its goal is more akin to entertainment than to informativity. However, the discourse of the written text is disconnected from the discourse described by the artwork. The written text (including graphic and framed text) presents a coherent expressive discourse reflecting on memories of the author's father while the author was growing up. There are moments when the written text and the

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images seem to cohere; for example, in the final panel of the comic, the narrator of the text talks about how happy he is to be with his mother while the artwork depicts the hero holding close the woman he has rescued. Such instances are the exception, however, and seem to make the distance between word and image in other places all the more pronounced. This disconnection between the aims of the two otherwise independently coherent lines of discourse serves to purposefully draw attention to the signal. The aim or purpose then becomes strictly literary.

Applying the Aims in Comics

The most obvious of the aims of comics discourse is the literary aim. Following Smith, who prefers not to define such aims but rather to describe them, this study will look first at some of the features distinctive of literary discourse in comics. What little amount of comics scholarship exists tends to take a view of comics meaning that is based largely if not wholly around ideas of literary discourse. However, other major communications media form and express ideas in non-literary fashion; that is to say, they communicate in expressive and transactional manners. Some texts appear to have as their purpose only the expression of the author's thoughts or experiences, like the text that appears in diaries. There are texts in standard written English that are primarily persuasive in their goals and in their 'voice.' Other texts are referential, designed to instruct or to inform the audience regarding a variety of topics. Communicative written texts are not confined to literature. Likewise, comics, if they are a fully realized medium, should be able to express a range of expressive, persuasive and transactional meaning.

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Most mainstream comics, super-hero adventures, westerns, science-fiction, horror, romance, humor, etc., have at their basis a reference to a fictive reality. The goal or aim of most fiction would seem to be the pleasure or entertainment of the reader. The reader typically approaches literature seeking an emotional or aesthetic experience. However, largely on the virtue of the texts' non-referential purpose, Kinneavy would classify these and similar works as literary; i.e., they highlight their own lack of reliance on objective reference. Any discussion of what constitutes 'literary' is filled with peril. While a poem may obviously fulfill Kinneavy's necessary quality of emphasis on the signal of discourse, the inclusion of fictional story-telling is a less clear application of that quality. However, for purposes of the current discussion, the problems with exact classification can be overlooked. Of course, it is important that we not confuse a literary aim with political or aesthetic definitions of literature that are often meant to determine or describe the special significance of some texts over others. The quality of the aesthetic is moot in this consideration; we are only concerned with the general class of texts that intends to emphasize either the sign itself or a fictive reality.

Literary comics are often intrinsically tied to the concept of narrative voice and even schematic notions of actors and events. When a reader picks up a typical comic to read, he or she is generally seeking to get lost in a good or fun story, to experience the world and the events revealed in the text. When I read a Spider-Man comic, for example, my goal is engage in the world of Spider-Man, to immerse myself in the world conceptualized by a reading of the text. This focus on a textual world is the key feature

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that places such comics in a literary classification. (Any such classification is always dependent upon the reader and the situation in which the reader is reading the text. It is possible that, as a comics scholar, my purpose or goal would be treat the Spider-Man comic as a referential object which I study, dissect, classify. Such a purpose might very well be at variance with the authorial intention of the comics' creators.) It is important to note, however, that not all literary comics are developed through narrative. In our classification system, the modes and aims of comics discourse are separate discursive features. Just as there is non-narrative literature in standard written texts, there are literary comics that are non-narrative. Our earlier discussion of modes describes such an example. Crumb's (1988) "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics," for example, is not organized or developed via narrative; its structure is free-associative. Yet, its purpose or aim is focused on the signs of the comic itself.

Referential discourse, decoder-based discourse, and expressive discourse are far less common in comics. The marketability of literary comics likely accounts for the preponderance of the literary aim. However, the other aims do occur in a variety of comics. Keeping in mind the separation of modes and aims, and the idea that the literary aim and the narrative mode are not one and the same, we find that a number of narrative comics are referential rather than literary. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Group, for example, commissioned a comic by Quinones and Butler (1995) to teach readers about the important historical events that shaped southwestern Pennsylvania in the eighteen-hundreds. The comic is narrative in structure; there is a

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story-teller persona presented and each historical event is told following a temporal sequence, invoking such narrative notions as character and conflict. But the goal of the text is specifically educational and informative. Similar narrative comics have been used for referential goals by health organizations, public service organizations, and even commercial corporations. Comics narratives have also been used as journalism, as by Joe Sacco (2000) in Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992-1995. Elsewhere in this dissertation, non-narrative comics displaying semaphore code (Zeek, 2001) and sub-machine guns (Kirby, 1974) are discussed. These kinds of referential comics are more common than most readers might suspect, though they are often not found published in comic books or comic strips, the two most widely acknowledged manifestations of comics discourse. Comics should not be thought of as a publishing category. Not all comics texts are newspaper comic strips or newsstand comic books. Comics are image-based discourses, and, as such, they occur in a variety of common locations and publishing formats, even though these image-based discourses are not always recognized as being comics.

When I visit my doctor's office, I find myself reading the comics hanging on his office wall. The comics on the wall of a doctor's office may detail a variety of bodily ailments for patients to avoid: coherent rows of pictures showing the most common diseases of the heart, or showing the various symptoms of a systemic disorder of the body. The fact that these comics appear on posters and not in books does not disqualify them as comics any more than a short story in standard written text printed on a poster

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would be disqualified as a short story. Imagine a poster whose primary goal was to display the flags of each of the fifty states. This text is not literary and is not narrative, but it is still a comic. Referential meaning is communicated primarily through images; these images are presented in deliberate sequence; they cohere to each other in logical fashion; they develop an idea via a consistent principle of organization; and, most importantly, they are understandable and interpretable as part of a unified, coherent, and meaningful communicative event.

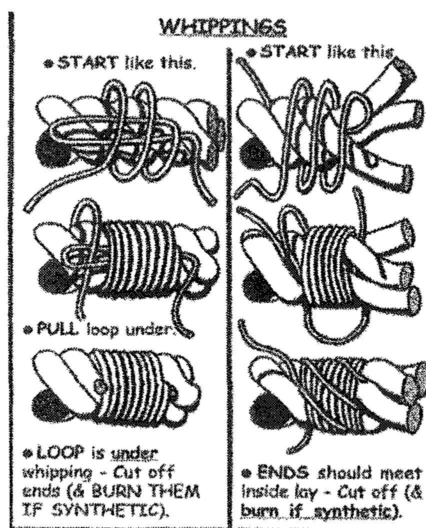

Figure 22. A comic with decoder-based aim. Primary instructional content is carried by the images and supplemented by the written text (Zeek, 2001, p. 187).

A wide-variety of decoder-based comics exist as well; Kinneavy labels this category of aims as persuasive. However, his label is arbitrary and somewhat misleading. As Smith (1994) points out, reader-based texts can be instructional as well as persuasive. In instructional writing, authors instruct their readers on how to accomplish some task. If

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comics are indeed a full-fledged medium, we might expect to find instructional comics that perform the same or similar goals via comics' composite word-image text. And, in fact, we find many examples of comics that communicate instructions to a reader. Zeek (2001), for example, in his The Art of Shen Ku provides a number of useful instructional comics for readers. Through progressions of drawings, diagrams and illustrations, accompanied by captions and elements of comics iconography (panel borders, directional arrows, etc.), Zeek instructs his reader on how to tie a variety of knots, how to set the rigging on a sail boat, how to perform basic judo, and how to perform many other tasks.

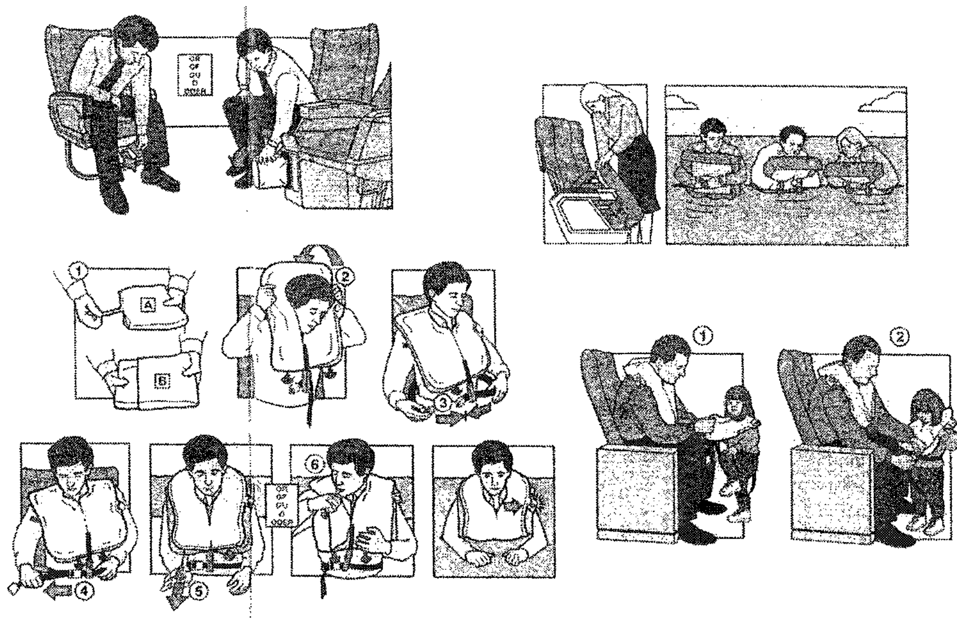

Figure 23. An instructional comic from the airline industry (USAirways, 2001, n.p.).

But, of course, decoder-centered text is still most closely associated with persuasive discourse; discourse aimed at having a direct impact on the thought or action of the reader. Religious tracts, for example, are sometimes presented in the form of

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narrative comics. Characters living lives of sin learn that through repentance they can be saved, and so can the reader (e.g., Chick, 1999).

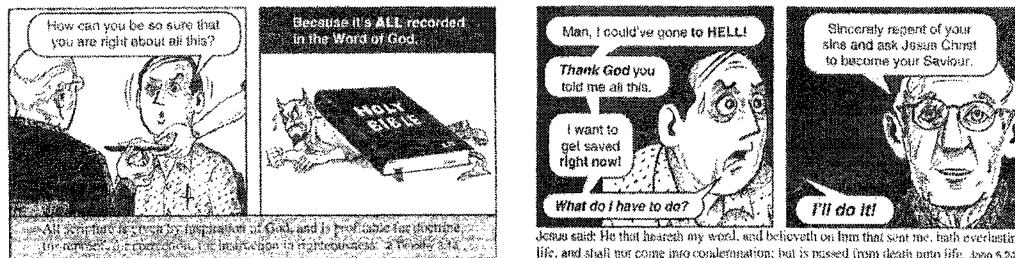

Figure 24. An excerpt from a persuasive comics religious tract (Chick, 1999, p. 19-20).

Persuasive comics can also be seen in advertising. In fact, many of the advertisements found in mainstream comics, particularly during the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties, are presented as comics themselves. The Kenner toy company, for example, used comics to advertise its canine action-figure, Duke, the Super Action Dog, in the DC comic Our Fighting Forces in December, 1974. In their one-page comic advertisement, the Kenner text presents five panels of artwork, the first showing a strongly built dog standing on the edge of a cliff and framed by a glowing sun. Accompanying this image is a direct appeal to the reader, “He wants *you* to be his master!” The next three panels show Duke in action, highlighting the action accessories you can purchase to go along with your action figure: his rope slide, his secret headquarters “with real periscope for Duke and you,” and his sled-like rescue unit. After the three panels showing Duke in action, the last panel of artwork shows a boy happily playing with his Duke action figure. At the bottom of the page is a final caption, an

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appeal to the audience, "Be the master of your own super action dog!" The aim of this discourse event is clear; the text is intended to persuade the audience (perhaps a young boy like the one in the fifth panel) to go out and buy his very own Duke toy. And, particularly as it is found within a comic book, the comic advertisement is well situated to be persuasive to its audience.

The final aim of discourse derived from the communications triangle is expressive discourse; typically discourse whose function is to allow the textual producer to 'vent,' expound, testify, confess on a matter of personal interest or significance. The work is still read by an audience, a decoder, but the primary intent of the text is to allow the writer an opportunity for self-expression. Expressions can be corporate as well, though, and can include declarations, manifestos, or statements of intent. The content of many of these texts is full of abstractions and articulations of ideas, values and beliefs; ideations that are difficult to manifest in isolated images or in sequential images. Still, expressive comics are possible, and do exist, particularly in 'underground' comics. Carel Moiseiwitsch (1991b), for example, in "We Hold These Truths to Be Self Evident," expresses her political feelings by matching the words of the opening paragraph of the Declaration of Independence with a series of dark images of the homeless, of the poor, of the invalid, of factories filling the sky with thick, polluted smoke, and in the last panel, of protestors and rioters. The text makes no appeal to the audience to take any form of action; the text is not presenting a factual study on American economics or socio-politics. The comic expresses to the reader Moiseiwitsch's fears and anxieties, her dissatisfaction with

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American welfare, without further explanation or appeal; in essence, its function allows her to express her feelings to the audience without seeking any specific response. More importantly, for the present discussion, her comics text represents a single, coherent expression, understandable as such by the reader.

Discussion

Literature, reference, persuasion, expression: each of the aims of discourse can be expressed via comics. These discursive aims may be manifest via narrative, classification, process, and various other modes attributable to written discourse. The static categories ascribed by Kinneavy to written discourse all can be ascribed to comics discourse as well. The dual nature of comics' surface text does add some interesting variations, though: a reader must navigate multiple, often conflicting, narrative lines; the writing and artwork can potentially offer competing modes or aims (though such comics are not necessarily successful, or else must be accepted by the reader as experimental literature); the sequential nature of comics artwork makes some varieties of mode more 'natural' for comics discourse, etc. Moreover, many of the texts we encounter in businesses, in the workplace, and in marketing are comics texts, even though we may have been trained not to think of them or identify them as comics, or even as texts. If nothing else, the notion that comics is strictly a narrative form must be discarded, and any attempt to define comics as strictly narrative must be challenged.

Of equal importance for our investigation of the reading of comics, the notions of mode and aim discussed in this chapter ought to help us to classify types or varieties of

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informativity and situationality in comics texts. A successful reading of a comics text demands that the reader extract meaningful information from the text in meaningful ways for meaningful purposes. The comic must be perceived by the reader as part of a communicative event between the comics' creator(s) and the comics' reader. Yes, the surface text must cohere, but the ideas signified by the text must also contain appropriate information that the reader can extract, information that is organized and developed in predictable, manageable ways. Any reading of a comics text requires that the reader approach the text with a purpose and that the reader can posit a purpose for which the text was fashioned. Comics can only be understood when they are read as belonging to a broad and inter-connected universe of discourse.

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VI. CONCLUSION: READING COMICS TEXTS

Marshall McLuhan (1964) first described media as extensions of our senses. Through media we connect with the world. Through media the world is connected to us. It is through media that we communicate with each other and experience the universe around us. McLuhan named comics as one of those media. Comics can help us connect and communicate in many of the same ways other textual media can. But little has been said about comics by scholars. Because they are relegated to a child's side-show, we are often unaware of the full potential of comics as media, as vehicles of experiencing the world. Comics help to shape our popular culture, our heroes, our modern mythologies. Comics surround us in the workplace, in commerce, in technical fields. Yet scholarship has tended to overlook comics. McLuhan felt that comics were a hot media, vital and full of transforming power, but we really understand so little about how comics work, about how comics transmit experience and information. More essentially, we have so little understanding of what comics are. We certainly recognize comic strips and comic books, and most of us have probably enjoyed reading Peanuts or Garfield now and then. But comics are much more than funny animals and super-heroes. Comics can be found in our training guides, our safety manuals, our advertising, our journalism, our deeply personal expressions of experience and emotion. Comics can provide great fun and joyful escapism for millions of comic book readers, but comics can be more than story-telling, more than narrative. Yet most people are unlikely to think of comics beyond a narrow stereotype. In some measure, academia bears some of the responsibility for this

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stereotyping. Comics have long escaped serious criticism and comics have long been shut out of academic classrooms. Recent application of literary scholarship to certain graphic novels is at last turning an academic eye toward the sequential drawings and words of comics texts. But the focus is still squarely on the comics narrative, as literature this time instead of simply a child's amusement. Comics as a broad medium of discourse remains untapped, untouched, and unexamined by academic scholarship. The matter is not even settled as to what defines or constitutes a comics text.

Kinneavy (1980) offers some insight into discourse and discourse events, by which we can approach comics as a medium of communication. Like McLuhan, Kinneavy has some interest in how media help us to approach the world, how they help us communicate with each other. Kinneavy lays out descriptive categories for the ways in which media are received and perceived by a reader, for the ways in which a reader interacts with media and draws meaning from those media. Media, he proposes, are one of three essential elements that shape the pragmatic event of meaning-making in any discourse. In addition to media, he posits modes (the manner in which the content of the media is given shape, development, and ultimately, meaning), and aims (the rationale behind each communicative event). Along with media, the vehicle by which or means through which we receive the communication, the modes and the aims of discourse help us to classify our communicative interactions with others and with the world. Though any such set of classifications is static and stilted, and therefore falls short of reality and of communication as it is experienced, these and other classifications allow us a

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framework by which to analyze, describe, compare and reason our way to a scholarly understanding of communication and communications media.

For Kinneavy, the medium of particular focus is writing, taken as a single and coherent class of communicative vehicle. He leaves the room open, however, for discussions of discourse in other media, noting that our understanding of discourse may grow or change as we understand it in the context of media other than the written text. As a potent and unexplored media, comics, like written text, can give scholars fruitful insight into the communicative act, into how and why we understand each other and the world. If comics truly are a media of discourse, in a world shaped largely by our discourses, it is important that we endeavor to understand the potentials of comics to shape and transmit meaning, to develop themes and ideas, and to have transforming impact on readers.

An investigation into the nature of comics, into its features, its forms, its vitalities, varieties and limitations has begun. McCloud (1993) and Eisner (1985), among others, have asked the initial questions in this enquiry. Guided by their own experience and knowledge as creators of comics themselves, these writers have raised questions about what comics are, looking into the past to find historical examples of comics, exploring the changes and evolutions that have taken place within the form. They give us insight into how comics are drawn, into the importance of line quality, into how artistic detail or the lack thereof can influence the reader, into how perspective in drawing can influence the attitudes and emotions of the reader.

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McCloud, in particular, shows us how an image can become a vehicle for meaning. He explores several ways by which comics panels may be linked together in the mind of the reader. He suggests the influence of the art and the artistic style on the meaningfulness of the comic. And in the end, he invites others to continue the work he has started. Particularly, he calls for scholars, not only comics creators, to begin to take into consideration the potential and power of comics as a full-fledged and vital literary form.

Even with Eisner and McCloud's work, there remains a focus on literature, and there remain question and debate regarding the shape and scope and purpose of comics. McCloud challenges the popular vision of comics as simply comic books and comic strips in his Reinventing Comics (2000), but we find the discussion still framed in terms of narrative and also, usually, with literary aims. I have argued here, in contrast, that comics are much more than a narrative form, much more than simply literary (referring to Kinneavy's classification of literary aim, not to the aesthetic or critical appraisal of some texts as literature). If comics are a genuine medium of discourse, a true carrier of meaning and an extension of our senses, then we have a need to understand comics in their fullness.

Eisner and McCloud each examine comics largely from the perspective of an artist presenting sequential art. And in fact, the sequence of panels is the heart of comics, the necessary condition for comics to exist. The sequence of panels can also be sufficient for us to fashion comics text; but it is not always. A sequence of panels can often be

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insufficient. Something else is at work beyond a sequencing of panels, a cognitive act that binds the panels together to form a text. Additionally, the sequence of panels in comics is frequently, and almost universally, found to contain or to be married to words. The use and presence of words should not be viewed as an aberration in comics. For words are as native to the comics form as its other features. What then is the key that holds word and image together in comics?

Cognitive studies tell us that word and image are different; they do not 'mean' their referent in the same way. They may not even be processed similarly in the brain. How then are comics read so easily as unified, coherent texts? What bonds words to image?

Word-image scholarship tells us that word and image are in tension, at war, that they remain always apart cognitively (Hatfield, 2000; Vos, 1998). Yet our young children can reconcile word and image with ease as they build a single discourse event from a comics text. The simple solution, though perhaps over-simplified here, is provided by Mitchell (1986) and Smith (1994). Mitchell proposes that both the image and the word are graphic representations of the idea. The understanding of the meaning of the disparate signs does not occur at the level of word or of image. Word and image are merely signals of a deeper conceptualization. The attempt to merge image and word or to treat them as objects that contain meaning is misguided. The meaning of the text lies behind or beyond the surface signs, regardless of their system of visual manifestation or articulation. It is at the level of ideation, not at the level of image and word, that the

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meaning of comics is crafted by the reader. And Smith tells us that reading is not about letters or even words, but about story and schema, about understanding actors and events, causes and functions. Understanding comics as meaningful texts is about understanding the modes of arrangement and development that tell the reader how to organize and structure the concepts suggested by word and image. It is about understanding the situation of a comics text, its purpose and goals.

Research Questions Revisited

This dissertation began with a pair of research questions: How are writing and other sign systems in comics read/processed in the creation of comics textuality? And, what discourse situations, incorporating meaning, purpose and context, do comics create and present to the reader? The answers are perhaps not definitive, but I hope they represent a step forward in the academic understanding of comics as media, as text, as carriers of discourse and meaning.

The first question had as its goal an articulation of how the surface signs in comics work together to create a unified text. Corollary questions asked: How is text visually presented in comics? How do the lines of linguistic text interact with the representational and iconographic text of the comic? How do the various textual elements work together to help create an overall sense of textuality?

This study discovered that the text is manifested through graphic images, through comics iconography and through several varieties of written utterance: caption text, dialogue balloons, graphic text and framed text. This study also found that though text-to-

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text connectivity functions in comics as it functions in standard written texts, text-to-image connectivity was limited by the image's lack of syntactic articulation. Images, it turns out, can be cognitively linked via a number of connective principles we have generally ascribed to language. The ability to link image to image and image to word is of immeasurable importance to an understanding of how words and images can together 'mean' in a unified and coherent fashion.

The second question sought to discover how comics satisfied standards of discourse beyond the level of surface features. Corollary questions sought an understanding of what modes and aims were present in comics discourse and whether those modes and aims manifested in ways similar to their manifestation in standard written texts. With modes and aims used as concrete and describable criteria for measuring the higher order concerns of informativity, situationality and intertextuality suggested by DeBeaugrande and Dressler, this study demonstrates that comics can successfully present meaningful discourse situations with the same modes of development found in written texts (though it seems that certain modes, particularly sequential modes, are a more natural or native pattern of textual development for comics) and with the same aims of literature, reference, persuasion and expression that inform written texts. However, the prominence of narrative as a mode of development often clouds our understanding of how comics shape their discourse. Likewise, a heavy reliance on the literary aim in comics tends to obscure the rich potential of comics for a full array of communication events and situations.

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Limitations

Theory-building is in large part an attempt at classification (Moffett, 1968) and classifications are always problematic because they remove the object of study from its natural, dynamic state and attempt to view it as independent and permanent, unmoving and unchanging. The truth of most systems, however, is that categories are always in flux and there is constant overlap. For the advantage gained (in this case, an ability to isolate and describe, to measure and articulate) there is a disadvantage or loss (the inability to craft statements of absolute applicability of current conclusions to other instances of comics text).

In the discussion of comics cohesion, the classifications used are pre-existing abstractions, prior attempts to remove a textual connection from its larger discourse environment, from the situation of the text, and from the purposes of the writer or reader, in order to describe its features in an objective manner. By applying these same abstractions to comics, the conclusions reached herein apply clearly to isolated connections in the text; however, the application of those conclusions to a 'living' text, with all of its messy intentions, contexts, etc., is less clear. The same limitation is likewise true for the classifications of modality and aims, and I have tried to note certain of those limitations at the appropriate points in my discussion of comics discourse.

One more problem associated with comics texts is that they are, of course, not static at all; and by this I do not mean merely that comics discourse can change when read in different situations by different readers. The discussion of comics to this point has

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been about finished comics, comics as product. The decision to focus on completed comics is practical, and for purposes of classification, the most useful decision. However, this study does not therefore offer any insight into the drafting process of comics.

Yet another limitation derives from the politics of a study such as this one. By making a conscious choice to favor reading theory and discourse theory over film theory, I have confined myself to a certain view of where comics lie in relation to other media, particularly in relation to written texts. Some critics, like Hatfield (2000), are uneasy with any attempt to discuss comics in terms of textual theories that may link comics more closely to writing or may cause comics to be discussed only in terms of standard written texts. Centuries of scholarship that favored word over image have helped to push comics to the academic sideline. My theory of comics reading links comics primarily to reading and to discourse theories, potentially exacerbating the view that comics are somehow subordinate to other written texts; though perhaps my argument for the separation of reading theory from language may appease these political detractors.

Benefits

Comics have so long been disregarded or dismissed by serious scholars and scholarship that many scholars will continue to question the benefits of this study without due consideration. It is perhaps to those same scholars that this dissertation is particularly addressed. One of the foremost benefits of a scholarly investigation of comics textuality and of comics as discourse media is that this study may open the door to future, more exhaustive studies. Comics will not be considered objectively as a rich and layered

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vehicle of communication by most scholars until more research is done and a critical mass of knowledge regarding comics is gained.

We find comics all around us, all the time, whether they fit our stereotypes of comics or not. Comics fill our manuals and instructional guides. We find comics on the sides of food packaging, showing us how to mix or add the ingredients inside. Yet we rarely consider the nature of these texts, their implications, their demands. Comics make visual information readily and quickly accessible and assessable; we understand a comic showing how to attach our computer cables more quickly and easily than we do an instructional essay on the matter. It benefits an increasingly visual society to know something of how images can link with each other and with words to create meaning. As our society grows more multi-lingual, comics present a communicative bridge that is not dependent on written language. Understanding that bridge can only be helpful to people engaged in discourse across languages and across cultures. Perhaps we can learn to be more effective or more efficient with instructional comics if we understand the forms and potentials of comics.

We increasingly find comics as objects of literary criticism. Scholars are now investigating, analyzing, and praising comics from Maus to The Sandman. Yet the overlooked truth is that we understand very little about what comics are, about what they can be. A deeper understanding and more exacting articulation of the parts and features of comics and the role of comics in discourse can only heighten our literary awareness and appreciation of comics as literature or as art.

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An increased understanding of how readers fashion meaning from comics can benefit advertisers, social and political organizations, anyone who seeks to reach out to people through media to share their ideas, to motivate, to inform. Comic books are now sometimes appearing in classrooms. Giving teachers an articulate and describable set of qualities and classifications for discussing comics benefits them by increasing their own understanding of what they are teaching and how to use comics more effectively in their classrooms.

However, the immediate benefits of this investigation into the reading of comics texts will apply most directly to comics scholars who follow and to scholars of reading and reading theory in general. For comics scholars, the current study attempts to provide a variety of insights into how comics images and words can be linked, arranged, managed, into how readers can manage to effectively draw unified meaning from two seemingly irreconcilable sign systems. An articulation of the various modes and aims possible in comics ought to provide future scholars with a conceptual framework and a set of classifications by which to evaluate, compare, and critique comics texts in ways more complete than attempted here. Also, the previous articulation of comics cohesion, as offered by McCloud, faced the limitation of applying only to the images in comics. What is needed is an articulation of comics cohesion that can be applied to both word and image, and this dissertation attempts to begin the process of that articulation.

Weber's (1989) articulation of connexity in comics, as insightful as it is, grounds itself in film theory, whereas the current study takes the admitted bias of seeking to

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ground a theory of reading comics in reading theory itself. It is this attempt to ground comics in reading theory that has ultimately provided the most powerful and intriguing insight gained by this study. This investigation reveals that many of the features of reading that are applied to written texts are as equally applicable to the reading of comics texts, and in particular, to a reading of images in comics texts. Lexical cohesion, this theory of comics reading proposes, should no longer be considered *lexical* cohesion at all but should be considered conceptual cohesion, since it functions as readily with the non-lexical items (i.e., images) in a comics text. Likewise, conjunctive connections occur and are interpretable between images, just as they are between phrases and clauses in written utterances. In fact, entire phrases or clauses in a sentence, not just nouns, can be replaced by comics images and the resulting word-image "utterance" can be read as easily carrying the same meaning or value. We also find that syntactic substitution can substitute for an image, and syntactic reference can refer to an image, while maintaining clarity and unity of meaning. These insights give added credence to the notion that reading is not governed by signal but by schema; reading must be an event defined on the level of ideation, not the level of surface text. This observation frees reading from language. This theory of the reading of comics suggests that reading, as a cognitive act, is not dependent on language and therefore should not be conceived exclusively in terms of language. If this observation proves true, it dramatically challenges the way we approach reading and the way we teach it in our classrooms. Classroom instruction that focuses on surface features of verbal expressions (e.g., phonics instruction) cannot be synonymous

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with reading instruction if we understand that reading is possible in comics, where there may be no words at all. Reading becomes a series of cognitive schemas that can be taught, practiced, studied, evaluated apart from words or language. And if conceptual cohesion and conjunctive associations are properly elements of reading and not of language, to what other media can they also be applied?

Questions for Future Investigation

If this dissertation accomplishes nothing else, I hope to excite interest in comics in academic fields, to spark an array of scholarly responses that will consider the position of comics as discourse. And the subject is wide and varied, with potential topics for research and investigation in numerous areas and aspects of discourse theory, reading theory, cognitive theory, critical theory, advertising, linguistics, education and popular culture studies.

The boldest claims supported by this dissertation call for a reassessment of reading theory and of what we mean by 'reading.' Some of the claims here simply echo Smith's (1994) call to move the focus of reading theory away from the signification of the surface text and into an area of conceptualization and cognition. By applying this same notion to the reading of comics texts, text that are generally held to be read, the question can be raised as to the relationship of reading (as a conceptual and not linguistic activity) to other media, including film and non-visual media like radio. Do we read film? Do we read television? Or is reading still strictly the province of print media?

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Future inquiry also ought to explore more deeply the relationship between comics and written texts. Such a study would be largely an exercise in description and definition of the form. There exists a continuum of sorts between text and image as signifiers of the idea (Mitchell, 1986). Where, for instance, do children's picture books lie between comics and written texts? These have generally been classified with standard texts and not discussed as forms of comics, yet the meaning-making strategies and the surface features of picture books mesh much more closely with comics than with standard written texts, especially if we consider the linguistic sign to be one of the defining features of written text. And there may be things this dissertation can tell us about how pictures are understood or processed in illustrated books. There is a progression of sorts from the reading of picture books by very young children to reading illustrated books to reading books with few or no pictures as the written word gains ascendency. Are the reading skills that enable a comics reader to process image-to-image connections the same skills that enable a toddler to read a picture book? If so, are these reading skills learned or are they cognitively hard-wired? Related studies could investigate the relationship of image to word in technical books and in scientific writing, where images are often of great prominence and hold central positions in the development of argument or exposition.

Chapter Two referred to studies that mapped brain activity during the processing of words and pictures. Those tests posed artificial situations wherein the reader is not bringing inter-textual awareness nor situationality to the readings. Perhaps future electrophysiological mapping studies could more authentically examine the processing of

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pictures and words by designing tests around actual comics texts, granting us a better understanding of how images and words are processed as ideas.

Another necessary investigation which ought to follow from this study is an exploration of comics as process rather than as product. The current study opts to approach comics as static, fixed and finished. But no text is born complete. It grows from an idea and is drafted, redrafted and re-conceived. An exploration into this process would help scholars to understand better the other side of the comics communications event. This study has focused on the readers of comics, but there is much left to say about the creators of comics and about the acts of creating comics.

Of course, the most natural follow up to this study would be direct application of the ideas proposed herein to specific comics texts as part of an investigation into those texts or into comics media in general. No theory is created simply to exist; it is intended to be applied, to be tested. Instead of the question "How are comics read/processed?" the question now becomes, "How is The Sandman, issue one read/processed?" or "How is a particular Calvin & Hobbes Sunday comic strip read/processed?" Individual treatments like these are necessary if we are to build a scholarly understanding of comics as a vital medium that shapes our perceptions of the world. These individual treatments ought to challenge, test, improve, refute and reshape the claims I have made here, claims which I hope are only the start of developing a comics theory and not the end of it.

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Returning to the Beginning...

I think I was four when I read my first comic book. My mother came home from a nearby garage sale and handed me a tattered and coverless copy of a Fantastic Four story entitled "The Long Journey Home" (Lee and Kirby, 1970). At least, that is the earliest experience with a comic book that I can recall. As battered as it was, it was a prized possession. It was my own comic book, and I took to reading it and re-reading it eagerly.

I find it strange in some regard that I still recall with a certain amount of distinction (not enough distinction though; time has a way of obscuring the true sensory input from an event and leaving only the impression) my first reaction to the comic, features of my very first comics 'reading.' I remember the boldness of the letters in the title, and the image of Reed and Sue Richards, the Thing, and Crystal in mid-air, falling toward the earth, with a flaming Human Torch circling around them. It was my first image of the Fantastic Four. I had no idea who they were, but I began to make predictions.

One of the very first predictions I made, looking at the first page (a single, large panel) of my first comic book, was that the Thing was obviously a monster who had attacked the Fantastic Four. Reed and Sue Richards and Crystal of the Inhumans (I did not know their names yet) were dressed in the same blue uniforms with big "4"s on their chests. These were clearly the members of the Fantastic Four. The hideous rock monster falling above them was just as clearly the enemy; after all, he looked like all the monsters

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I had heard of before: giant, misshapen, ugly. And I thought, before I even turned to read the second panel, "I hope they get away and beat that monster," or some idea to that effect.

Figure 25. The splash-page of Fantastic Four, issue 100 (Lee and Kirby, 1970, p. 1).

I confess it took several pages of reading before I was convinced that the Thing was not a monster who had attacked the Fantastic Four. It was clear by the third or fourth

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panel that he was working with the others, but still I had my suspicions. Until about half way through the comic, I still kept expecting to see him turn on the others; he must be really working in collusion with the enemy. How could I have thought anything else? I was reading the text with an intertextual awareness of monsters, what they looked like, how they acted. I was trying to apply story schema and strategies, already predicting where I thought this story would go. Of course, my initial assessment was wrong, but the textual clues were sufficient to allow me to re-organize my predictions.

I had trouble in a few places trying to follow the panel layout. The panels were not always arranged in neat, clear rows. I did not yet know how to order these odd sequences. Several read- throughs of certain pages were necessary before I figured out how I was supposed to read those panels; I eventually figured out which ordering made the most sense.

But the story itself flowed readily. I recall so many other things about that first reading, but I do not recall any difficulty understanding how the panels linked together to tell a story, nor any difficulty understanding that they told a story. I was not aware of why or how the images connected; they just did. I already knew basic reading skills from the many times spent reading children's books with my mother; I understood the surface signs of written text (though not necessarily the meaning of all the words) and I grasped the idea of chunking text into paragraphs. This comic was a little different, but I adapted my skills and expectations and learned how to read it as I went.

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There were still parts that I got wrong in the reading. When I read the same comic book later, the story seemed to have changed slightly in places, mostly due to a different and better understanding of the dialogue and the external references the characters were making. Characters referred to each other and to previous encounters, hinting at their motivations and relationships. Without the context of having read any other Fantastic Four comic books (or any super-hero comics for that matter), I made predictions about these backstories or subtexts that did not prove true in later readings. But I loved the story I invented in my mind from the comics text. It excited me, charged me. I couldn't wait to read my next comic.

I still can't.

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