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Metaphorical Underpinnings of Panels in Comics

Abstract

In the field of comics studies, which evolved from a mere topic area into a burgeoning field of inquiry at the turn of 1980s and 1990s, the dialogue about meaning in comics was initiated by practicing cartoonists, who proposed new lines of research and introduced serviceable terminology which remains in use even today. These early contributions may have provided a solid basis for the investigation of meaning in comics, but they were repeatedly criticized for their lack of an academic orientation prerequisite for serious-minded comics scholarship. With the onset of the new millennium, it was linguistic theory that came to be called upon with increasing frequency to provide the missing orientation. Recent observers point out that for over a decade linguistics in general, and cognitive linguistics in particular, has informed much of the most insightful comics research. This paper is an attempt to contribute to the intersection of cognitive linguistics and comics scholarship by demonstrating that a number of conceptual metaphors whose linguistic manifestations have been studied in considerable detail facilitate, either separately or jointly, the conceptualization of the main formal unit of comics: the so-called panel. It appears that depending on what individual panels are taken to refer to (events, states, periods of time, visual fields, portions of the world of the story), they are metaphorized in different ways (as objects, containers, windows onto the world of the story), in accordance with a central tenet of conceptual metaphor theory whereby metaphors highlight some aspects of the metaphorized concept and simultaneously hide others. On the one hand, this paper adds to the growing body of research demonstrating that metaphor is a conceptual mechanism which transcends language; on the other, it adds to the dialogue about how comics achieve meaning by discussing the metaphorical underpinnings of the panel, and by framing this discussion in terms of cognitive linguistics, a scholarly tradition with which comics studies have successfully intersected.

Keywords: metaphor, comics, events, summary scanning, nominalization, image schemas.

In this paper, situated at the intersection of conceptual metaphor theory and contemporary comics¹ scholarship, I attempt to demonstrate that the main formal unit of sequential narratives collectively referred to as comics – the so-called panel – is “readily interpretable” (Potsch & Williams 2012: 14) despite its conventional form because it is conceptualized with recourse to several metaphors underlying a host of conventional linguistic units of English. This demonstration is intended as a modest contribution to conceptual metaphor theory as well as contemporary comics scholarship. As regards the former field of academic endeavor, my findings add to the growing body of research which aims to corroborate a central tenet of conceptual metaphor theory whereby metaphor is a conceptual mechanism which transcends language. As indicated by Charles Forceville (2009), this body of research focuses on metaphors underlying signs belonging to such non-linguistic representational systems, or “modes” (Forceville 2009: 22), as the pictorial mode, the gestural mode, the sonic mode, the musical mode, *etc.*, which may combine with each other and with the linguistic modes (writing and speech) to yield multimodal representations characteristic of such “genres” (Forceville 2009: 34) as advertising, cartoons, design, films, videoclips, *etc.* (for an overview, see Forceville 2009). As concerns the latter field of study, this paper contributes to the dialogue about a problem that is pivotal to comics studies – the problem of how “comics achieve meaning” (Heer & Worcester 2009: xiii) – by discussing the metaphorical underpinnings of panels in comics, and by framing this discussion in cognitive-linguistic terms, with an emphasis on conceptual metaphor theory, a scholarly tradition with which comics studies have been repeatedly shown to successfully intersect, as evidenced by a host of papers by, among others, Michael Abbott and Forceville (2011), Neil Cohn (2010), Forceville (2005, 2011), Forceville, Tony Veale, and Kurt Feyaerts (2010), Elizabeth Potsch and Robert F. Williams (2012), Kazuko Shinohara and Yoshihiro Matsunaka (2009), and Bart Eerden (2009) (for a comprehensive overview, see Cohn 2012).

Before I delve into the metaphors facilitating the conceptualization of panels in comics, let me provide some background for the ensuing discussion by offering a handful of suggestions on (1) what comics are, (2) what kinds of representation they comprise, and (3) why metaphor should be involved in the way readers make sense of these representations, but also in the way these representations are conceived by creators of comics.

Viewed as cultural commodities in the sense of Bob White (2000), comics are best regarded as a natural category comprising an array of subordinate categories exemplified by such publication formats as daily comic strips, Sunday comic strips, comic books, comic albums, comic magazines, graphic novels, manga magazines, and webcomics. Pascal Lefèvre (2000: 100) captured the differences among the major comics formats in terms of such multivalued attributes as the number of pages per publication, the number of panel tiers per page, the size of the page, the quality of the paper, color, the type of binding used, publication rhythm, the number of artists involved in the creative process, the speed of reading, and the direction of reading. Characterized in this way, reminiscent of a frame-theoretic description, individual comics formats appear as combinations of values along some or all of Lefèvre’s (2000: 100) attributes: while only some of them apply to single-tiered monochrome comic strips printed in most

1 In this paper, I follow Scott McCloud’s ([1993] 1994) usage of the English noun *comics*, which has become standard in comics scholarship. In accordance with this usage, the plural form *comics* combined with a singular verb refers to “the medium itself” (McCloud [1993] 1994: 4), the singular form *comic* combined with a singular verb refers to an individual publication – “a specific object” (McCloud [1993] 1994: 4), and the plural form *comics* combined with a plural verb refers to a set of such objects.

American newspapers on weekdays, all of them apply to American comic books and Japanese manga magazines. As I pointed out in a recent publication (Szawerna 2013a: 132–133), these latter formats differ in the values selected along several of their shared attributes: a typical comic book is a monthly soft-cover pamphlet of medium size, printed on paper of moderate quality, comprising about 30 pages divided into three tiers of colored panels, created by a team of artists, read from left to right, and intended for fast reading, while a typical manga magazine is a weekly large-sized soft-cover book of several hundred three-tiered pages, printed in black and white on low-quality newsprint, developed by a creative team, read from right to left, and intended for very fast reading.

As Lefèvre's (2000: 100) list of attributes could be easily expanded,² many more differences between comics formats could certainly be discerned. This, however, is not my purpose here. Instead of focusing on the differences obtaining between comics formats, I propose to focus on their commonalities, as it is the meaningful elements found in all comics – panels arranged in narrative sequences, visual representations of events and states – that come under scrutiny in the analytical portion of this paper.

Most comics scholars explicitly characterize comics as narratives.³ They often do so intuitively, without considering the elusive notion of narrativity, and support their assertion by invoking what they regard as the principal function of comics: to “basically tell stories” (Sabin 1993: 6). This definite intuition whereby comics are narratives ties in very well with a cognitively flavored post-structuralist strand of narrative theory dubbed “transmedial narratology” (Herman 2004: 47). Its proponents, most notably Marie-Laure Ryan, view any narrative as a bipolar structure, pairing a text, which may consist of signs of any kind, with a story, or “narrative meaning” (Ryan 2004: 8), understood as “a cognitive construct” (Ryan 2004: 8) of spatio-temporal nature: a diegetic world⁴ composed of a number of elements (specifically, characters, objects, and their properties) which undergoes changes of state in a series of interconnected events involving these elements. With relation to Ryan's bipolar model, the textual pole of a comics narrative, made up of static visual signs (pictorial as well as linguistic) combined in a unique way,⁵ is embodied in its material support: a specific publication exemplifying one of the comics formats referred to above (a comic strip, a comic book, a graphic novel, *etc.*). This textual pole pairs with a corresponding semantic pole: the conceptual diegetic world constructed by the reader of the comic “in response to the text” (Ryan 2004: 8) comprised of the signs this comic embodies.

But the narrative meaning of a comic, like any diegetic world, may be hypothesized to reside not only in the mind of the interpreter, but also in the mind of the creator. Comics scholars Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009: 7–13), who look at comics from the perspective of communication studies,

2 In an earlier paper (Szawerna 2012), I anatomized a dozen definitions of comics and compiled a list of 22 attributes grouped in clusters pertaining not only to the form of comics, their production, and the way they are interpreted by readers, but also to the artistic aspects of comics, their narrativity, their functions, the themes they address, and their status as market commodities.

3 Of the 13 researchers whose definitions of comics were examined in Szawerna (2012), 10 – David Carrier (2000: 50–51, 74), Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009: 4), Will Eisner ([1985] 2008: 53, 61), Thierry Groensteen ([1999] 2007: 4, 21, 105, 128), Robert C. Harvey (1994: 8–9, 1996: 3), M. Thomas Inge (1990: xi), David Kunzle (1973: 2–3), Roger Sabin (1993: 5), and Mario Saraceni (2003: 7) – refer to comics as narratives.

4 This term is borrowed from film theory, where, according to Frank E. Beaver ([2006] 2009: 77), it is used to refer to a cinematically encoded story.

5 In the words of Saraceni (2003: 5), “[a]lthough the use of both words and pictures together, as such, is not a unique characteristic of comics, the way in which linguistic and pictorial elements interact with each other certainly is.”

explain that it is creators of comics who, by deploying various representational conventions they have at their disposal, encode diegetic worlds in textual form, which is subsequently decoded by comics readers. According to Duncan and Smith (2009: 155), these representational conventions include three major types of static visual signs, or images: sensory diegetic images, which represent “the characters, objects, and sensory environment” (Duncan & Smith 2009: 155) of the diegetic world; non-sensory diegetic images, representing “specific memories, emotions, or sensations” (Duncan & Smith 2009: 155) experienced by characters inside their diegetic world that are sensorically undetectable to them and their fellow characters; and hermeneutic images, which do not, strictly speaking, belong to the diegetic world, but influence the way in which it is constructed in the mind of the reader.

To the extent that these images, either drawn or written,⁶ are recognizable as pertaining to comics narratives, they are symbols, *i.e.* signs “agreed upon to be used as signs for given purposes (...) with a referentiality and a meaning that are determined by conventional usage” (Johansen & Larsen [1994] 2002: 43). Additionally, some of them may be regarded as images in the narrow semiotic sense of Charles Sanders Peirce, *i.e.* realistic, or mimetic, signs that have “simple qualities” (Peirce § 2.277,⁷ quoted in Nöth [1990] 1995: 123) – color, shape, size, *etc.* – in common with their referents. These partially symbolic and partially imagic signs belong to the category of sensory diegetic images and represent objects that are visible to characters in their diegetic worlds (people, animals, buildings, vehicles, *etc.*). The remaining diegetic images are non-mimetic as they do not share simple qualities with their referents due to an insurmountable discrepancy between their concrete form (marks on paper) and the more elusive (temporal, non-visual, conceptual) nature of their referents. This is the case of sensory diegetic images representing the property of being in motion ascribed to physical objects, henceforth referred to as motion signs, which pair static visual forms with referents perceivable by characters over stretches of time elapsing in the diegetic world. This is also the case of sensory diegetic images representing sounds audible in the diegetic world, henceforth referred to as sound signs, which pair static visual forms with non-visual referents transpiring over stretches of diegetic time. As regards non-sensory diegetic images, which visualize the psychological experience of comics characters, all of them are non-mimetic to the degree that they pair concrete forms (static visual representations) with abstract referents (dreams, emotions, memories, *etc.*). Last but not least, hermeneutic images are necessarily non-mimetic inasmuch as their referents do not belong to the diegetic world.

It seems that in spite of their conventionality and non-realistic form, non-mimetic images found in comics are interpreted more or less effortlessly by comics readers, even “on first encounter” (Miodrag 2013: 196). Let me suggest that the apparent ease with which many of these signs are interpreted may in large measure stem from their metaphoricality, from the fact that they instantiate conceptual metaphors that are familiar, albeit at an unconscious level, to creators as well as readers of comics. Viewed from the communicative perspective adopted by Duncan and Smith (2009), metaphoricality of non-mimetic images in comics comes as no surprise. It stands to reason that creators of comics, motivated by a desire to ensure effective communication with comics readers by overcoming the formal limitations of comics

6 With the proviso that in comics pictures and writing make up a continuum. Prominent researchers, such as Eisner ([1985] 2008: 1–5), McCloud ([1993] 1994: 49), and Saraceni (2003: 20–27), point out that in comics pictures may take on the symbolic characteristics of writing, and writing may take on the iconic characteristics of pictures, with many images simultaneously exhibiting iconicity and symbolicity in roughly equal proportions.

7 This reference indicates volume 2, paragraph 277 in Peirce’s *Collected Papers* (1931–1958).

(the static, purely visual nature of comics dictated by the physical constitution of their material support), intuitively tapped into the pool of conceptual metaphors they shared with comics readers and developed a range of images which successfully cue and guide the readers' construction of the more elusive components of the diegetic worlds of comics (motion, sound, psychological experience) because the form of these images activates a host of well-entrenched conceptual metaphors which greatly facilitate this constructive effort.

While all of the previously referenced cognitive studies of comics comment on the metaphorical basis of an array of non-mimetic images typically found inside panels – specifically, signs of emotion (Abbott & Forceville 2011; Cohn 2010; Eerden 2009; Forceville 2005, 2011; Forceville, Veale & Feyaerts 2010; Shinohara & Matsunaka 2009), sound signs (Forceville, Veale & Feyaerts 2010), and motion signs (Potsch & Williams 2012) – none of them discusses the metaphorical underpinnings of the panel itself. The remainder of this paper is an attempt at filling this gap.

As I explained above, in comics interconnected events making up narrative meaning are visualized in the form of static images printed on paper. Principal among them is the panel, a type of sensory diegetic image typically representing an individual story event – an occurrence characterized by “clear temporal boundaries” (Casati & Varzi 2006) which belongs to the diegetic world of a comic. Since panels capture the unfolding of story events in spatial form, they may be regarded as spatial concretization – or reifications – of the passage of time. It is arguable that visualization of events in the form of panels is in many ways analogous to the kind of reification underlying the grammatical process of making nouns out of verbs, or deverbal nominalization, as characterized in terms of cognitive grammar by Ronald W. Langacker (1987a, 1987b: 207–208, 1991: 22–50, 2012).

As Langacker's account of nominalization is part and parcel of his semantic treatment of nouns and verbs (Langacker 1987a, 1991: 59–100), let me briefly outline the way in which these word classes are approached in cognitive grammar before I discuss nominalization itself and move on to the analogies between the kind of conceptual reification it involves and the spatial reification of events as panels in comics.

To Langacker, nouns designate things, conceived of as regions comprising interconnected entities of varying abstractness which are construed holistically, or “roughly in parallel” (Langacker 1987b: 248). This cumulative (or: additive) mode of cognitive processing is referred to as “summary scanning” (Langacker 1987b: 248). In contrast, Langacker characterizes verbs as designating processes. A process consists of a configuration of entities making up its component states, which are “processed in series rather than in parallel” (Langacker 1987b: 248). This serial mode of cognitive processing, whereby the evolution of a process is followed through time, is referred to by Langacker as “sequential scanning” (Langacker 1987b: 248). Importantly for my considerations, Langacker (1987b: 258–262) draws a parallel between count nouns, which are said to designate bounded regions (regions featuring boundaries in their makeup) and perfective verbs, which are said to designate bounded episodes (bounded temporally by virtue of containing an initial and a final state as parts of their makeup).

As I indicated previously, nouns are derived from verbs in the course of the grammatical process referred to as deverbal nominalization. At the semantic level, deverbal nominalization transforms a process (the semantic structure of a verb) into a thing (the semantic structure of a noun). Viewed from the perspective of cognitive grammar, this transformation, referred to by Langacker as “conceptual reification” (1991: 22), involves a switch from sequential to summary scanning which often results in

the recognition of the component states of the process undergoing nominalization as interconnected entities making up a region and, consequently, a thing designated by the derived noun. According to Langacker (1987b: 207–208, 1991: 24–25), this is what happens when an individual episode of a perfective process designated by a verb like *jump*, *throw*, or *yell* undergoes conceptual reification and is transformed into the semantic structure of the corresponding “episodic noun” (Langacker 1991: 25), as in *His first jump was impressive*, *He made a good throw*, and *She gave out a yell*.⁸ Langacker (1987b: 207–208, 1991: 25) explains that his characterization of the semantic structure of an episodic noun as designating “a region whose constitutive entities are the component states of a process” (Langacker 1991: 25) accounts for the invariable countability of episodic nouns: because a perfective process undergoing conceptual reification is inherently bounded, the region designated by the corresponding episodic noun, which is comprised of the constitutive states of this process, must also be bounded.

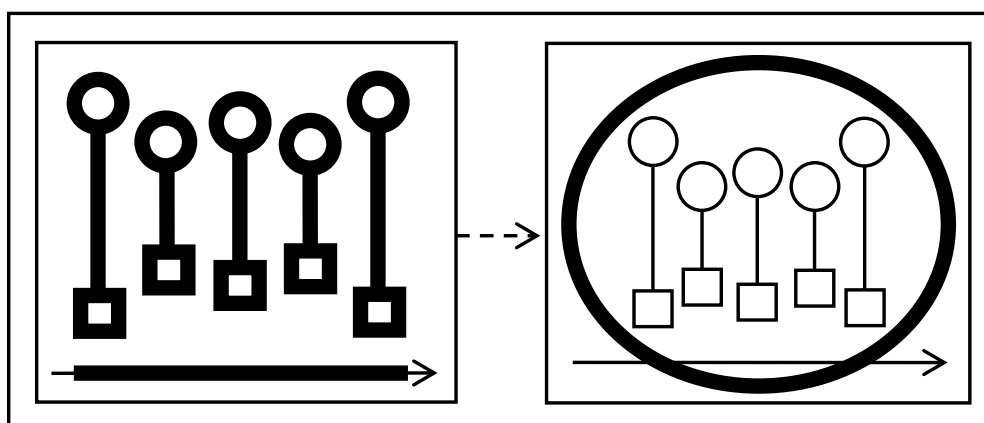


Figure 1. The semantic structure of episodic nominalization

A schematic representation of the semantic structure of episodic nominalization is diagrammed in Figure 1, in accordance with metalinguistic conventions of cognitive grammar. This semantic structure (symbolized by the outer box) comprises two cognitive substructures: a temporally bounded process as its standard of comparison (diagrammed as the inner box on the left) and a bounded region as its target of comparison (diagrammed as the inner box on the right). The conceptual reification which transforms the processual standard of comparison into the nominal target (symbolized by the broken arrow linking the inner boxes) can be thought of as “a function that maps” (Langacker 1987b: 352) a perfective process onto a bounded region. Observe that characterized in this way, this type of reification is a matter of construal because the standard and target of comparison differ solely in the mode of scanning they employ (sequential scanning of the processual standard vs. summary scanning of the nominal target), not in the content they presuppose (the constitutive states of a perfective process), which remains the same.

As the standard and target of the comparison shown in Figure 1 have conflicting specifications (processual and nominal, respectively), the conceptual reification involved in episodic nominalization – the mapping of a perfective process onto a bounded region – qualifies as a semantic extension

⁸ These examples come from Langacker (1987b: 207).

(cf. Langacker 1987b: 69–70). According to Günter Radden and René Dirven (2007: 78), the nature of this extension is metaphorical – Radden and Dirven explicitly refer to reification, which they regard as the conceptual gist of any nominalization, as “ontological metaphor” (2007: 78) and subsequently capture the conceptual reification involved in episodic nominalization as EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS (Radden & Dirven 2007: 82), using the familiar format established by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson ([1980] 2003). It is my contention that this ontological metaphor, underlying countless episodic nominalizations, greatly facilitates the interpretation of panels as representations of events making up the narrative meaning of comics.

At this juncture, let me discuss several analogies observable between the semantic structures designated by episodic nouns and the visual structures typical of panels in mainstream comics, with a view to demonstrating that both types of structure may be viewed as instantiations in different modes (linguistic vs. visual) of the ontological metaphor EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS.

Firstly, all episodic nouns and most panels are representations of events. As I showed above, episodic nouns designate reified events by definition. As regards panels, the results of a small-scale study reported by Scott McCloud ([1993] 1994: 74–80) demonstrate that panels representing individual events are by far the most common panel type in mainstream American, European, and Japanese comics, with the proviso that panels may also be used to represent portions of events (McCloud [1993] 1994: 70) as well as entire event sequences (McCloud [1993] 1994: 95–97). Secondly, like the semantic structure of an episodic noun, diagrammed in Figure 1 as the inner box on the right, a panel constitutes a bounded region. It is bounded inasmuch as its spatial extension is necessarily limited, “irrespective of whether or not there are actual panel borders” (Duncan & Smith 2009: 131). Additionally, just as the boundedness of the region designated by an episodic noun makes this region replicable and determines the noun’s countability (cf. Langacker 1987b: 204), the boundedness of a panel makes it replicable too: in a typical comic, multiple panels coexist on every page and are simultaneously available to the perception of the reader. Last but not least, the semantic structure of an episodic noun resembles the visual structure of many a panel in terms of its content. As shown in the inner right-hand box of Figure 1, the bounded region in the semantic structure of an episodic noun contains all of the constitutive states making up the nominalized perfective process. Similarly, many comics panels contain cumulative visualizations of the entire event they represent: from start to finish.⁹

Let me now turn to specific techniques used by creators of comics to visualize story events in a cumulative fashion. These techniques are deployed with varying frequency in panels representing events of different kinds, including motion events, acoustic events (linguistic and non-linguistic alike), events which consist in physical transformation of a physical object, and events which consist in transfer of abstract, non-physical entities.

9 In other panels, the constitutive states of a reified event are referred to metonymically: Eisner ([1985] 2008: 107–110) explains that in a typical panel an individual component state representative of the reified event is visualized, or “frozen into the panel in a block of time” (Eisner [1985] 2008: 107). This individual state is understood to stand for all of the constitutive states of the reified event, instantiating the conceptual metonymy PART FOR THE WHOLE, which has countless linguistic manifestations, including the following expressions, listed by Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green (2006: 313–314): *My wheels are parked out the back, Lend me a hand, She’s not just a pretty face.*

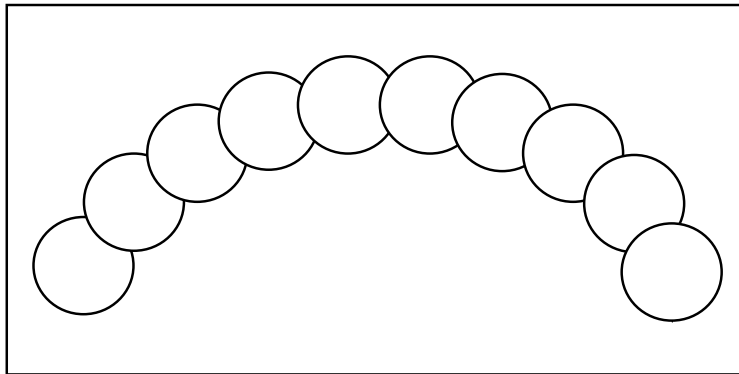


Figure 2. Multiple drawings of a moving object

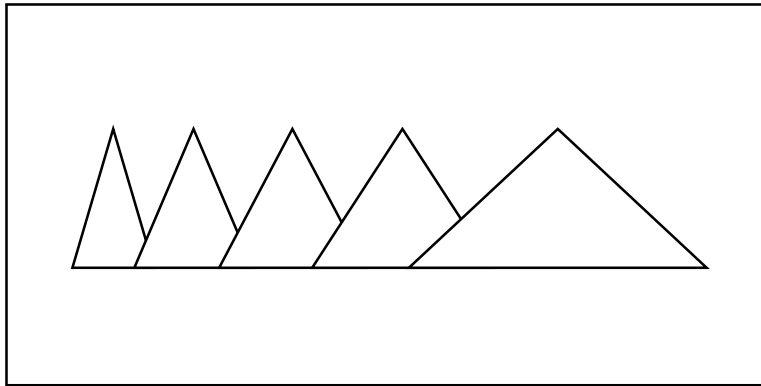


Figure 3. Multiple drawings of a shape-shifting object

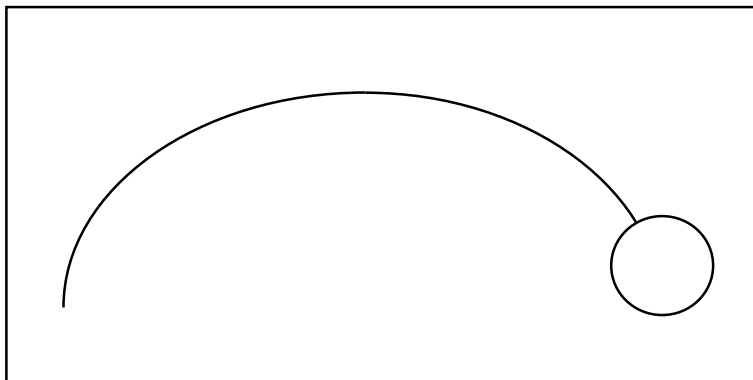


Figure 4. A drawing of a moving object and its trajectory

The diagram of Figure 2 is a schematic rendition of one visual technique employed by creators of comics to produce panels representing motion events in a cumulative fashion. This technique consists in deploying multiple, often partially overlapping drawings of a moving object. To anyone familiar with this technique (or with multiple-exposure photography, which produces a similar effect), the diagram of Figure 2 is readily interpretable as a representation of a motion event in which a circular object traverses

an arc-shaped trajectory from a starting point in the lower left-hand corner of the diagram to an endpoint in the lower right-hand corner of the diagram. Panels exemplifying this technique are found easily enough in mainstream comics. Nevertheless, let me discuss a couple of pertinent examples in some detail. In an American comic titled *The Tomb of Dracula* (serialized by Marvel Comics in the years 1972–1979), panel 1.35.23.4¹⁰ shows one of the characters – a Mr. Bolt – perform an acrobatic exercise. Mr. Bolt’s somersault is visualized in the form of multiple, partially overlapping silhouettes of the character performing the exercise, with only small differences in the position of the silhouettes observable between the adjacent drawings. Similarly, in a manga titled *Buddha* (originally serialized in a manga magazine *Kibou no Tomo* in the years 1972–1983), panel 1.78.4¹¹ shows one of the characters – a boy named Chapra – throw a stone at his opponent. The fling of Chapra’s arm is visualized in the form of multiple, partially overlapping drawings of the boy performing this action, with minor differences in his position observable between the successive drawings. What makes these panels, and many others like them, unique is that their visual structure exemplifies the schema of Figure 2, which closely resembles the semantic structure of an episodic noun, diagrammed in Figure 1 as the inner box on the right. In both cases the representations are of cumulative nature, with the constitutive states of the reified event processed in parallel, or, in the parlance of cognitive grammar, scanned in a summary fashion.

In comics, the use of multiple, partially overlapping drawings is by no means limited to representations of motion events. The diagram of Figure 3 is a schematic rendering of a visual technique used by comics artists to produce panels representing a shape-shifting object. To a reader of comics, the diagram of Figure 3 is effortlessly interpreted as a representation of a metamorphosis whereby a triangular object changes shape, from the acute triangle on the left-hand side of the diagram into the obtuse-angled triangle on the right-hand side of the diagram. This technique is characteristic of comics in the genres of horror, fantasy, and science-fiction, in which certain characters (shape-shifters, metamorphs, transformers, *etc.*) are able to change shape and do so on a regular basis. Let me discuss a couple of pertinent examples in some detail. In Marvel Comics’ *The Tomb of Dracula*, panel 1.10.27.6 depicts the vampire Count Dracula’s transformation into a bat. Dracula’s metamorphosis is visualized in the form of a series of four partially overlapping drawings of the character’s head changing shape. Each successive drawing corresponds to a separate stage in Dracula’s metamorphosis, with the leftmost image representing the initial state of the event, the rightmost image representing the final state of the event, and the remaining images representing the event’s intermediate states. Similarly, in DC Comics’ *Warlord* (1976–ongoing), panel 1.22.16.3 shows a werewolf turn into a woman, with the metamorphosis visualized in the form of a series of four partially overlapping drawings of the character’s head changing shape. In this panel, each successive drawing corresponds to an individual stage of the transformation, with the rightmost image representing the event’s initial state, the leftmost image representing its final state, and the images in between representing the intermediate stages of the event. Like the previously referenced panels containing multiple drawings of moving objects, these visualizations of shape-shifting characters in *The Tomb of Dracula* and *Warlord*, both of which exemplify the schema of Figure 3, qualify

10 In this paper, references to panels in American comic books consist of a series number, a pamphlet number, a page number, and a panel number. The reference 1.35.23.4 thus signifies the fourth panel on page 23 in the 35th pamphlet of the first series of Marvel Comics’ *The Tomb of Dracula*.

11 In this paper, references to panels in Japanese comics apply to their English-language editions and consist of a volume number, a page number, and a panel number. The reference 1.78.4 thus signifies the second panel on page 165 in the first volume of the English-language edition of *Buddha* (serialized by Vertical in the years 2004–2006).

as cumulative event representations, analogous to the semantic structure of an episodic noun, with the constitutive states of the reified events simultaneously available for cognitive processing.

After a brief detour, let me turn back to the discussion of the conventions followed by comics artists in the course of creating cumulative representations of motion events. Figure 4 diagrams another technique deployed by creators of comics to execute panels representing motion events in a cumulative way. This technique consists in drawing a moving object only once and situating it at the end of one or more lines representing the object's path of motion (or: trajectory). To comics readers, the diagram of Figure 4 is easily interpretable as a representation of a motion event in which a circular object traverses an arc-shaped trajectory from a starting point in the lower left-hand corner of the diagram to an end-point in the lower right-hand corner of the diagram. Inasmuch as exemplifications of this technique are particularly numerous in comics of any kind, I will at this point narrow my discussion to a single pertinent example. In *Buddha*, panel 1.165.2 shows the character of Chapra being attacked by his fencing master. The skilled swordsman takes a powerful swing at Chapra, who barely escapes unscathed. In this panel, the moving object – the fencing master's sword – is drawn only once, and the states making up the entire motion event are represented cumulatively in the form of parallel curved “motion lines” (McCloud [1993] 1994: 111), signifying the sword's trajectory. This representation, and many others like it, may be considered image-schematic in the sense of Mark Johnson (1987). Specifically, it may be argued to exemplify the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, with the source (starting point) marked by the beginning of the motion lines in the center of panel 1.165.2, the path (trajectory) delineated by the motion lines, and the goal (end-point) specified by the position of the sword in the upper right-hand corner of the panel.

In addition to its many uses in cumulative representations of motion events, the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema may also be used to visually represent transfers of abstract, non-physical entities. In *Buddha*, panel 1.128.1 shows a character named Tatta, endowed with the ability to possess animals, transfer his consciousness into the body of a horse. In this example, the source (starting point) of the transfer is Tatta's head, enclosed in a white halo which looks like a ball of light, the goal (end-point) is the horse's head, enclosed in a similar halo, and the path rendered as a white streak connecting the halos, reminiscent of a lightning bolt. In this example, the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema is integrated with the CONTAINER schema in a cumulative representation of a transfer of consciousness: Tatta's consciousness, visualized as bright light filling his head, travels along a bright streaky path to the head of the horse and fills it.

In mainstream comics, a combination of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema and the CONTAINER schema is frequently used in panels reifying linguistic events (or: utterances). The sensory diegetic image representing a character's utterance is referred to in comics scholarship as the speech balloon. It consists of the main body, a circular outline enclosing a written representation of a character's direct speech, and a projection, or tail, which “indicates the character who is speaking” (Saraceni 2003: 9). This visual representation simultaneously instantiates the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema and the CONTAINER schema inasmuch as it visualizes a character's utterance in the form of a pictorial container (the main body of the balloon) travelling along a path (partially visualized by the balloon's tail) from a source (the speaking character) to a goal (the addressee of the utterance, who may remain implicit), in accordance with Michael Reddy's ([1979] 1993) CONDUIT metaphor, which models the naïve (or: folk) understanding of linguistic communication.¹²

12 Forceville, Veale and Feyaerts (2010: 67) were the first to consider comics balloons as a visualization of Reddy's ([1979] 1993) CONDUIT metaphor.

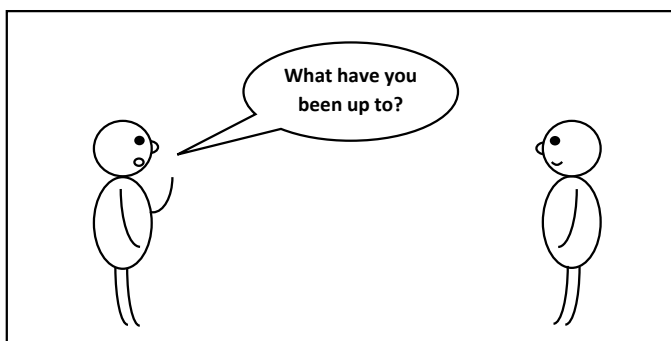


Figure 5. A visual reification of a linguistic event

A panel reifying a linguistic event is shown in Figure 5. In this panel, the character on the left addresses the character on the right. A reification of the speaking character's utterance in the form of a speech balloon is situated half-way between the figure of the speaker and the figure of the addressee, along a trajectory that is partially visualized as the balloon's tail, connecting the figure of the speaker with the balloon's main body. Importantly for my considerations, the kind of reified utterance shown in the panel of Figure 5 constitutes a cumulative representation of a linguistic event analogous to the semantic structure of an episodic noun because the temporal progression of the sounds making up a character's utterance corresponds to the spatial left-to-right and top-to-bottom arrangement of letters in the written representation of the utterance (*cf.* Szawerna 2013b: 64), and the letters are simultaneously available to the reader's perception. Unlike the actual utterance, which is characterized by rapid fading (the property of spoken signals whereby they "vanish quickly, leaving the channel free for further messages" Nöth [1990] 1995: 235), its written representation is a permanent recording of the constitutive sounds of the utterance stored cumulatively by means of letters.

Like visualizations of characters' utterances, onomatopoeic visualizations of non-linguistic sounds¹³ encountered in comics constitute cumulative sound event representations for the reason that they are permanent recordings of rapidly fading sound events stored cumulatively in written form. An example of this kind of sensory diegetic image is shown in the panel of Figure 6.

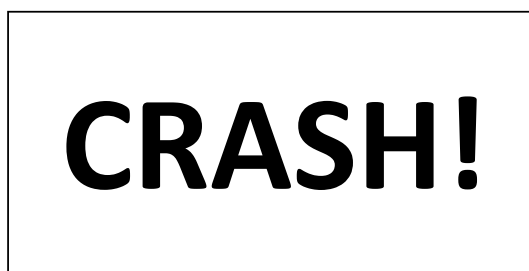


Figure 6. An onomatopoeic visualization of a non-linguistic sound

13 In a recent paper (Szawerna 2013b: 63), I observed that in comics the category of non-linguistic sounds comprises non-speech vocalizations produced by characters as well as sounds collectively referred to as the sonic environment, including biological sounds produced by animals, non-biological sounds originating with characters and the devices they operate, non-biological sounds originating with non-human organisms (both plants and animals) and inanimate objects, sounds associated with natural phenomena, and a broad range of mechanical sounds.

So far I have explored the analogies observable between two kinds of cumulative representations of events: (1) semantic structures of episodic nouns, which, according to Radden and Dirven (2007: 82), invariably instantiate the metaphor EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS, and (2) comics panels, which typically represent individual events in stories encoded in comics. Sketchy though it was, my discussion of the visual techniques used by comics artists to create panels goes some way toward demonstrating that panels representing individual events in mainstream comics constitute visual instantiations of Radden and Dirven's "ontological metaphor" (2007: 78) EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS, analogous in more ways than one to their linguistic counterparts: semantic structures of episodic nouns. In the remainder of this paper, I will try to show that the interpretation of typical panels is further motivated by additional conceptual metaphors, of which some are compatible with the previously discussed metaphor EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS, while others invite the construal of panels that is incongruous with this metaphor. These alternate metaphorical construals of panels are determined by what a panel is taken to refer to: a stretch of time, the visual field, or a point of access to the diegetic world encoded in a comic.

The interpretation of a panel as representing a stretch of time is most likely facilitated by the conceptual metaphor PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS, which is instantiated linguistically by such expressions as *He did it in three minutes* and *It happened in 1968*. In these expressions, the use of the preposition *in*, which prototypically designates a spatial relation between a container and its contents (Tyler & Evans 2003: 183–184), in combination with clauses describing events (*He did it*, *It happened*) and nominals referring to periods of time (*three minutes*, *1968*) invites the metaphorical construal of these periods as temporal containers for events (*cf.* Freeman 2000: 266), in accordance with a presumably universal tendency whereby temporal concepts are metaphorized in spatial terms for purposes of linguistic expression (Yu 1998: 86).

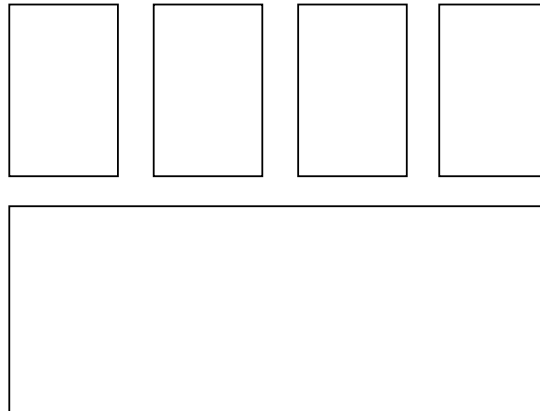


Figure 7. Duration of stretches of story time metaphorized as width of panels

In comics, the metaphor PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS finds a non-linguistic manifestation. In accordance with this metaphor, a panel visualizes a bounded stretch of time in the form of a pictorial container¹⁴ whose boundary, typically marked by the frame of the panel, encloses a visual representation of a story event. With relation to panels, the metaphor PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS is compatible with

¹⁴ A comics panel qualifies as a container, albeit a pictorial one, because it consists of a boundary (the panel's frame) which distinguishes an interior from an exterior (*cf.* Lakoff 1987: 271).

the metaphor EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS in the sense that both metaphors give rise to a metaphorical entailment whereby the spatial extension of a comics panel corresponds to the temporal extension of the visualized event or time period: the wider the panel, the longer the stretch of time that has lapsed in the diegetic world of a comic (Saraceni 2003: 7–8). Figure 7 is a schematic representation of panel sequences found in many comics, including *Buddha* (panels 1.18.1–4) and *The Spirit* (panels 1–6 in Eisner [1985] 2008: 34). In such sequences, the panels making up the upper tier are readily understood as representing brief events and the panel below is understood to represent a longer stretch of time, in accordance with the entailment which metaphorically relates the width of the panel to the amount of the visualized time. Observe that this entailment has its linguistic analogues in expressions like *a short time/event* and *a long time/event*, which capture the amount of a time period as length.

Another metaphor which takes the image-schematic concept of container as its source domain and is arguably invoked in the interpretation of panels in mainstream comics is referred to as VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS. This metaphor, initially discussed over three decades ago by Lakoff and Johnson ([1980] 2003: 30), is linguistically instantiated by such expressions as *It was well within my field of vision*, *My field of vision was entirely filled by the huge crowd*, *He came into view*, *It was outside of my field of vision*, and *He went out of view*. In these examples, the use of linguistic expressions which prototypically refer to spatial configurations, such as *be within*, *be filled by*, *come into*, *be outside of*, and *go out of*, with reference to the visual field invites the construal of the visual field in terms of containment. According to Lakoff and Johnson, this metaphor has an experiential basis:

[t]he metaphor is a natural one that emerges from the fact that, when you look at some territory (land, floor, space, etc.), your field of vision defines a boundary of the territory, namely, the part that you can see. Given that a bounded physical space is a CONTAINER and that our field of vision correlates with that bounded physical space, the metaphorical concept VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS emerges naturally. (Lakoff & Johnson [1980] 2003: 30)

In comics, this metaphor is visually instantiated by a panel as long as it is interpreted as a representation of the visual field of the virtual observer of the story events included in the plot of a comic. This virtual observer may be situated either outside or inside the comic's diegetic world. In an article on narration, focalization, and ocularization in comics, Derik A. Badman (2010: 98) refers to these two eventualities as, respectively, "external ocularization" and "internal ocularization." According to Badman (2010: 98), "[m]ost comics are predominantly in external ocularization." In either case, however, the panel is a pictorial container with clearly delimited boundaries, which usually take the form of a pictorial frame in the shape of a rectangle.

The metaphorical construal of panels as containers, motivated by the previously invoked metaphor VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS, is sometimes creatively utilized in representations which achieve their dramatic effect "through transgression of the boundaries of the diegesis (metalepsis)" (Miller 2007: 130). In *Buddha*, panel 1.86.3 depicts the character of Tatta running to the rescue of his mother and sister, whose lives are at stake. In this cumulative visualization of a motion event, made up of multiple images of the character and motion lines, Tatta is running so fast that he keeps bumping into the walls of the panel, bouncing off them, and, as a result, tilts the panel off its vertical axis. What is more, in the lower portion of panel 1.86.3 Tatta breaks through the rear wall of the panel, disappears behind it, and then reemerges inside the panel by breaking through its rear wall once again. It is quite apparent that this metaleptic

representation turns the frame of the panel into the walls of a three-dimensional container a character can interact with inside the diegetic world he inhabits.

Of the conceptual metaphors which are arguably invoked in the interpretation of panels in mainstream comics, the last one I wish to discuss is the metaphor whereby the panel is construed as a window to the diegetic world of the comic. The construal of comics panels as windows is an instantiation of a conceptual metaphor, pervasive in our culture, which prompts us to construe any representation (linguistic, pictorial, photographic, filmic, *etc.*) of any kind of world (real or imaginary) as a window providing access to this world. This metaphor is particularly prominent in the artistic domain of painting. As Lisa Siraganian puts it, “[t]he history of western art is also a history of picture frames (...) understood as windows onto another world” (2012: 83). This metaphor, which may be phrased as REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD is linguistically instantiated by such expressions as *Television provides us with a useful window on the world* (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 5th edition), *It gave me an intriguing window into the way people live* (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 8th edition), and *The film provides a window on the immigrant experience* (*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 3rd edition).

In comics, this conceptual metaphor is sometimes playfully exploited in panels transgressing the boundaries of the diegetic world. In his seminal book, Eisner ([1985] 2008: 51) provides examples of images of windows and doorways serving as panels. In *Buddha*, panel 5.54.2 shows the character of Tatta running from an enraged rogue elephant. In this panel both the elephant and Tatta are drawn in linear perspective, with their outlines partially overlapping the frame of the panel, as if they were crossing over from the diegetic world of the comic to the reality of the reader through the window of the panel. In the series *Dororo* (originally published in a manga magazine *Shūkan Shōnen Sandē* in the years 1967–1968), panel 1.86.5 shows the eponymous character, who, having heard an unidentified speaker utter some words in the immediately preceding panel, addresses the reader. This panel is readily interpretable as a visualization of the entailment of the metaphor REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD whereby the people situated on the opposite sides of a window may see each other and communicate through the window’s opening. Last but not least, in an episode from a classic American comic strip *Little Sammy Sneeze* (1904–1906), reproduced below in Figure 8, the character of Sammy sneezes so hard that the window of the panel (the frame as well as the pane) shatters into pieces. This image which may be taken to visualize the entailment of the metaphor REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD whereby a panel may be broken up into pieces just like a window.

The foregoing discussion of a range of visual techniques employed by artists who create pictorial-linguistic narratives subsumed under the umbrella term of comics demonstrates that panels, the basic building-blocks of any comic, may be construed in multiple ways, as representing individual events, stretches of time, visual fields, and points of access to the diegetic worlds encoded in comics. The gist of this discussion is that these multiple construals of panels are licensed by conceptual metaphors which are linguistically exemplified by an array of conventional expressions – metaphors like EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS, PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS, VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS, and REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD. Viewed in this way, panels found in mainstream comics appear as visual signs which transcend their otherwise undeniable symbolicity inasmuch as their creation and interpretation is facilitated by a number of metaphorical mappings residing in the minds of creators as well as readers of comics.

It is by no means clear, however, to what extent the relationship between the form of panels and their meaning in comics representing distinct, albeit related, traditions of creating these sequential narratives can be considered arbitrary and to what degree it can be regarded as motivated by the metaphors discussed in the main body of this paper. All of the linguistic data invoked in this discussion come from English, and all of the metaphors licensing this data were originally investigated in the context of and with reference to this language. It is therefore an empirical question whether or not the previously examined metaphors, which have been argued to facilitate interpretation of panels, are linguistically exemplified in languages like French or Japanese – a question that needs answering before metaphoricity of panels can be postulated for Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* and Japanese mangas, which share all of the visual conventions discussed in this paper with their American counterparts: comic strips and books. At this point let me observe that Polish creators of comics make use of all of the visual techniques described in this paper, and the Polish language abounds with expressions licensed by the metaphors EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS, PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS, VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS, and REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD, which goes at least some way toward corroborating my working hypothesis whereby panels are similarly metaphorized in English as well as non-English speaking cultures. The ready availability in Polish of linguistic expressions licensed by the metaphors in question may in turn result from the fact that these metaphors feature no culture-bound notions and instead consist of concepts that appear to be fairly universal: EVENT, PERIOD OF TIME, VISUAL FIELD, WORLD, OBJECT, CONTAINER, and WINDOW.



Figure 8. *Little Sammy Sneeze*, 1905.09.24.1–6¹⁵

15 In this paper, references to panels in American comic strips consist of the year, the month, and the day of publication followed by panel numbers. The reference 1905.09.24.1–6 thus signifies panels one to six making up the strip published on September 24th, 1905.

This paper also shows that metaphors licensing semantic structures of linguistic expressions situated at any point along the lexicogrammatical continuum may be invoked to motivate the visual structures of panels in comics. While EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS qualifies as a grammatical metaphor in the sense of Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda L. Thornburg (2009), whereby grammatical metaphors “motivate distributional properties of function words, grammatical morphemes, and word classes” (Panther & Thornburg 2009: 16), and REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD qualifies as a lexical metaphor (motivating the distributional properties of the noun *window*), PERIODS OF TIME ARE CONTAINERS and VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS may be argued to combine features of lexical as well as grammatical metaphors. Interestingly, it is panels licensed by what is perhaps the most lexical of the metaphors discussed in this paper, REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD, rather than panels licensed by the uncontroversially grammatical metaphor EPISODIC EVENTS ARE OBJECTS or any of the two remaining lexicogrammatical metaphors, that come to acquire innovative, unanticipated, experimental forms in representations transcending the boundaries of diegetic worlds encoded in comics. The propensity of panels licensed by the metaphor REPRESENTATIONS OF A WORLD ARE WINDOWS ONTO THIS WORLD for pushing the envelope of comics form, demonstrated in the preceding discussion, seems to tie rather well with the tendency observable in language whereby the most striking manifestations of metaphor are found in poetic texts, less conspicuous manifestations of it are found in metaphorical senses of lexical items that have been conventionalized in fixed linguistic expressions used on an everyday basis, and the least noticeable manifestations of metaphor appear to be encoded in grammatical elements.

On the whole then, this paper does add to the body of research aiming to corroborate a central tenet of conceptual metaphor theory whereby metaphor is a conceptual mechanism which transcends language. It seems that in spite of the previously formulated reservations, which have prevented me from formulating unwarranted generalizations concerning the metaphorical underpinnings of panels in Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* and Japanese mangas, the discussion presented in this paper’s main body demonstrates quite clearly that the creation as well interpretation of panels in comics created and read in English speaking countries may be argued to involve a considerable amount of metaphorical construal facilitated by metaphors licensing a broad array of linguistic expressions situated along the entire lexicogrammatical continuum. Additionally, this paper adds to the discussion initiated in the area of contemporary comics scholarship of the ways in which comics achieve meaning by considering the metaphorical aspects of creating and interpreting panels and framing this discussion in cognitive-linguistic terms. While the discussion presented here is far from exhaustive – undoubtedly, there are many other metaphors, as well as metonymies, underlying panels, but also other signs used in comics – it does provide a useful point of departure for a more comprehensive study of visual figuration in comics and other narrative media.

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