

Draw a Thousand Words: Signification and Narration in Comics Images

Barbara Postema

**John A. Lent Scholarship Lecture
The 11th ICAF Conference
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
October 12-14, 2006**

It is an honor and a pleasure to be this year's John A. Lent Scholarship winner. This award has already motivated me in getting started on my project, and it will remain an encouragement as I work to complete my dissertation.

In my dissertation I theorize how comics, specifically graphic novels, create meaning. As a form that combines multiple modes of communication, comics signify on several levels. Meaning is created in text, images, and sequences of images. I attempt to isolate the levels of signification, in order to study them -- initially by analogy to other forms such as film and literature -- but ultimately to theorize the form of graphic novels itself. In my dissertation I plan to begin to formulate a theory of how graphic novels signify, and in today's lecture I will give you some of my early findings, concerning the level of the image.

Introduction

Comics communicate through images. Of course text plays a role too, but I want to leave that out of the picture for now and concentrate on the images. I will discuss several ways in which images signify and thus several ways in which we create meaning when we read images. In visual culture studies a number of ways have been developed to analyze images, including content analysis, ethnomethodological and social semiotic approaches (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001), but two approaches that seem most fruitful to me in the context of interpreting comics are semiotics and iconography. Visual semiotics are mostly based on Roland Barthes readings in *Image-Music-Text* (1977) and *Mythologies* (1989), where he models semiotic readings of a number of photographs. Iconography is explained by Erwin Panofsky as a means to analyze and interpret Renaissance paintings. Neither of these approaches is tailor-made for comics, but both have their applicability, as I hope to illustrate.

Comics images rarely stand alone. It is fundamental to the form of comics

that images are joined together in sequences to produce narration. Barthes and Panofsky both are concerned first of all with what is represented in the single image, which I will attempt to use as my starting point; but, since in comics, each individual image is tied to others in a number of ways, I will inevitably make connections between my initial image and others in the texts I read. Reading comics is to a very large degree about reading narratives. Thus, I will also discuss how images create narrative and look for ways in which a single image by itself already creates the basic elements of a narrative. Referring to Schapiro (1996), Gombrich (1960), and Wolf (2003), I will argue that images (almost) always contain the seeds of narrative. Those seeds come to full fruition in the comics, and it is because of those seeds that it is so hard to discuss comics images by themselves.

Looking for Signs

Semiotics or semiology is the science of signs, based on the works of de Saussure and Peirce, though I will use it mainly as found in works by Barthes, who laid down a strict framework in *Elements of Semiology* (1967) and *S/z* (1990 [1970]), but loosened this up in later works. According to his semiotics, meaning is transferred through signs, using codes. Signs thus form an arbitrary code which users learn to apply and interpret by convention. In Barthes' early works, he concentrates on linguistic codes. He becomes much less strict in his discussion of signs and codes when he starts discussing non-linguistic systems (such as photographs), perhaps because it is hard to say that pictorial images form a coded system, since there can be as many variations of a representation of, for example, a cat as there are artists depicting cats. Furthermore, their representations of a cat are not arbitrary, as semiotic signs are assumed to be, since they usually show some resemblance to actual cats. Pictures of cats are not arbitrary signs that we recognize as a cat by convention; they are mimetic, referring to a real shape and form. In this regard pictorial images generally fit the description Barthes gives of the photographs, when he claims "it is a message without a code" (1977:17).

However, where in the photograph reality left its mark on paper -- through a process involving light and chemicals, creating an indexical sign of its referent (what is shown was once really there), the pictorial image is more mediated. In comics, where characters and events are represented pictorially, all these elements are completely in the control of the artist, as are their surroundings. Thus, various forms of coding do enter the image, at three levels, according to Barthes: "Firstly, to reproduce an object or a scene in a drawing requires a set of rule-governed transpositions; there is no essential nature of the pictorial copy and the codes of transposition are historical" (1977:43). Barthes' example of this is the rules of perspective that an artist must learn. Secondly, he points

out that an artist makes choices in what he or she reproduces in a drawing. Many details automatically captured in a photograph are left out in a drawing. As a result, “the denotation of the drawing is less pure than that of the photograph, for there is no drawing without style” (1977:43). Barthes’ last level of coding in the pictorial image is that, “like all codes, the drawing requires an apprenticeship”(1977:43). Due to these codings, while the pictorial image may be less denotative than the photograph, it is probably more connotative, or at least in different ways, and is thus appropriate material for semiotic analysis.

As mentioned above, it is hard to pin pictorial representation, such as a comics image, down to a specific system of signs. However, the form of comics as a whole can be viewed as a system that utilizes a number of codes that are based on convention and that the reader must learn, to understand comics fully. Examples of such conventions are the use of panels and different kinds of word balloons in comics, as well as the various symbols that are often used to indicate emotions in characters, such as the light bulb for an idea, stars for pain, and floating droplets around the head for anxiety. These signs are symbols that are more or less arbitrary and signify by convention. A different code that is very commonly found in comics is that of facial expressions and body language. Will Eisner illustrates these codes in some detail in *Comics and Sequential Art* (2001 [1985]), and also shows that the denotation of various positions (kneeling for example) may signify differently according to the context. Thus, one position or expression may have various connotations. These examples of codes only make up a small part of the signification that goes on in a comics image however, as I will show in the following example.

I use a panel from Julie Doucet’s *My New York Diary* (1999) to do an analysis based on semiotics (**Fig. 1**). At the level of the denotation, we see a room with shelves full of books, a short shelf in the middle of the room with records on it and a record player and radio on top, a stove in one corner, etc. The floor of the apartment is covered with empty beer cans and boxes with more beer, as well as cockroaches. The cockroaches are interesting in that they are not only an iconic sign, showing there are cockroaches in the apartment; they are also an indexical sign: a sign that shows a causality. In this case they signify that the apartment is dirty and therefore attracts cockroaches. Adding to the clutter in the room is a large number of toys, sitting on the shelves and floor, while one may observe that the table is covered with paper, ink, brushes, and pens. To say the apartment is cluttered is already interpreting the denoted objects, and, in fact, it is hard to describe an image without already beginning to interpret it. But the connotations of the setting in this panel are that the apartment is small and its inhabitant is a juvenile slob (toys and mess), who works as an artist (pens, etc.). Julie, the woman in the middle of the room, appears happy to be there, though, as the smile on her face indicates, but the relationship trouble ahead may already be

read in the missing head of her boyfriend, which is cut off by the panel. This may connote his ultimate insignificance to Julie, or even an urge to erase him.



Fig. 1. Julie Doucet, page 5.

I will now give some context for this panel. In *My New York Diary* by Montreal-based comics artist Julie Doucet, the narrator Julie moves in (rather hurriedly) with a new boyfriend in New York. From the pictures, it is clear from the start that the place is a dump, but Julie doesn't even seem to notice this. Waste and squalor fill the pages of this story, making them dark, hard to decipher, and creating an oppressive atmosphere. This fits with Julie's life at that time, since she's living with a dead-beat boyfriend, not doing much of anything except drugs. She is in fact wasting her time in this apartment, with this boyfriend, and she knows it, but doesn't act. This becomes visible in the images that are crammed with litter, rubbish, and her boyfriend's gadgets. The abundance of these objects may go to support a reading that her boyfriend is immature, which comes out when he becomes annoyingly needy and clingy towards the end of the story. But the almost obsessive compulsive representation of *stuff* in the panel under discussion and the pages generally, also point to another reading: the excessive representation of garbage and knickknacks on the pages may seem a waste of time in itself. The excess is especially clear in a representation in **Fig. 1** that shows the shadow of a toy, but a shadow that doesn't actually match its object: the shadow is wearing a hat and waving the wrong arm. This representational excess comes to signify the pointlessness of Julie's situation. The hyper-activity of representing after the fact is overcompensating for the "idleness" at the time, when she was spinning her wheels. The last pages of the story are in striking contrast with what went before. As Julie records in her diary that she is preparing to move out, leaving her boyfriend, and generally sorting out her life, both privately and as a comics artist, the pages become clearer, brighter, with less clutter. In

the last chapter, “Winter,” the pages actually become bare, as her apartment has become an empty space. She is preparing to leave New York and start with a blank slate, in Seattle, where she is resolved not to waste her potential and talent.

Iconography

Panofsky’s iconographical approach (1982) involves readings at several levels, which is somewhat similar to semiotics. Barthes’ denotation parallels Panofsky’s representational meaning, while connotation has points in common with the level of iconographic symbolism. However, in iconography, the symbolism is foregrounded, and often specialized knowledge is needed to read these symbols, which may be portrayed as *open symbols*, drawing attention to themselves as symbols, or which may be *disguised symbols* (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001:109). An example of an open symbol may be the network of roads shaped like a Swastika that Anya and Vladek face in Spiegelman’s *Maus I* (1986:125): any road they choose is dangerous because of the growing Nazi presence. Disguised symbols are harder to pinpoint, partly because it is easier to deny they were meant to be symbolic. In the case of Panofsky’s materials (Renaissance paintings), specific knowledge is often required in order to understand the iconographic symbology displayed in paintings, since meanings have changed over the centuries. In dealing with contemporary texts, it becomes harder to distinguish between an iconographical reading based on symbols and a semiotic understanding of the connotations of signs based on experience with the conventions of a particular culture. One difference may be that the iconographic meaning tends to be more set, while connotations change more with context.

Let’s turn to **Fig. 2** as an example. Here we see three people in a car, a young man and woman and an older man. Their hair is flying in the wind and they have little bubbles around their heads which here denote the trio is drunk. The bubbles help make this clear because one can’t tell from the three people’s facial expressions, which are blank. In fact, their facial expressions, even the angle at which their faces appear, do not change throughout the story.

The story of Jason Little’s one-off comic book *Jack’s Luck Runs Out* (1998) is a simple one: Young Jack is trying to make ends meet in Las Vegas by playing cards, but isn’t doing too well. He and his show-girl girlfriend Gina get involved with a successful club owner named Rex who offers Jack a job. When an acquaintance warns Jack that Rex is hitting on Gina, Jack does some snooping and finds out Rex is using him as a drug runner. He decides to make one last killing before leaving town: using Rex’s money, he makes a huge amount of money by gambling, but when he goes to pick up Gina, he finds

she's been beaten up by Rex. When he tries to strangle Rex, he is shot (dead presumably) and Gina leaves town, discovering a fortune in Jack's suitcase. This is the narrative as one gets it at the level of representational meaning or denotation; it is easy to identify the particular people, places, and objects.



Fig. 2. Jason Little, page 6.

However, this comic immediately draws attention to itself with its formal qualities, especially due to connotations of the representation, or rather the iconographical symbolism they display. Instead of recognizing characters as representing Salome or St. Bartholomew, as one would in Panofsky's examples, the reader of *Jack's Luck Runs Out* will recognize the symbolic reference of the characters to the royals in a common design of playing cards (Fig. 3).

This comic shows a strict restraint in the representation of its world, most notably the characters, as pointed out earlier. All the characters have the faces of the face cards in a deck of cards. Upon closer inspection, it turns out Jack has the face of the jack of diamonds, Gina the queen of diamonds, and Rex the king of spades. Now the names of these characters symbolically come into play as well. Jack is obviously a jack, Gina is short for Regina, meaning queen, and Rex means king. The representation of the characters as playing cards becomes formalized in the visuals, in that their faces are always shown in three-quarter view (never full frontal or from the side). The one exception is when they're shown squarely from the back, in which case the face isn't visible, only the hair. The formal qualities of the playing cards are carried through in the representation of the setting: it is represented in a flat way, without shadows and with only minimal indication of perspective. In addition, the use of color is limited to red, yellow, blue, and black, again the same colors as used in the playing cards. While these elements of the image do not affect the representational meaning, they do affect interpretation at the iconographic level. Jack, Gina, and Rex come to represent roles, values in a deck of cards. In

the deck, and in the playing of card games, the use of face cards is regulated by conventions, rules which cannot be broken. This meaning of the cards is underlined by the strict adherence in the representation of the comic, to the color scheme and the point of view from which the faces of characters are shown. This world is ruled by the rules of the cards.



Fig. 3. *Bicycle* Playing Cards.

With that symbolic reading on the iconographic level, in which the reader must have knowledge of imagery on card decks and of card games, the reader is forced into a kind of fatalism: Jack's fate becomes sealed. While at the end of the comic there is no visual representation of the shot being fired, and we don't see his dead body, the world of the comic is determined by the rules of the card game, where a king is always higher than a jack. When king and jack cancel each other out, the queen gets away with the money.

As you can tell, I am already having trouble restricting myself to reading only a single image for meaning. I found this problem even greater when trying to do a reading of R. Kikuo Johnson's *Night Fisher* (2005).

One of the reasons I chose this text was the variety of sources of imagery that is evoked in this book. The images quote imagery from geology and math

textbooks, criminal records, do-it-yourself guides, photographs, and so on, creating an intertextuality that evokes very disparate registers in which images are used. In my example (Fig. 4), two panels are set side by side that come from very different representational backgrounds, and share little in common apart from the fruit incorporated in both. The image on the right appeared earlier in the book (82), when Loren was in a class about some of the staple crops on Hawaii. He is distracted then, but the illustrations on slides from his biology or geography class come back as he visits a local market some days later. The image on the left shows the same crop being sold at the market, where local (presumably mostly native) Hawaiians shop for food. The mixing of pictorial registers, the objective, scientific depiction of the Kalo plant, with more informal observations, presumably from Loren's point of view at the market, work together to give a sense of Loren's emotions as he wanders around the market. Loren is not a native of Hawaii and it seems that many of the plants he sees at the market are unfamiliar to him: he recognizes them from the class, not from having eaten them or seeing them growing. Thus, this pairing of images illustrates in a symbolic way Loren's sense of alienation on the island, as well as the pressure he feels as a high school senior who is expected to do well in school: even a ramble to clear his head becomes a learning experience in which knowledge is reviewed and stored. An awareness of the various iconographical traditions evoked in this text, and a knowledge of how they are used in society, helps create a deeper understanding of the main character.



Fig. 4. R. Kikuo Johnson, page 126.

The Illusion of Time

I now turn to a discussion of how narrative is evoked in comics images. The examples above hopefully showed that single panels from a graphic novel are deceptively simple in terms of what they signify. The denotation or

representational meaning may only be “a woman standing in a room,” or “three people driving in a car,” but it seems to me one is inevitably pulled to surrounding images in order to fulfill the narrative potential of the single comics image.

In the discussion that follows, I backtrack quite a bit, looking at some historical images and the perception of narrative in them. I will talk about single images, but also about the consequences of putting images (or panels) into a sequence.

In discussing this brief history of narrative in pictures, I will try to show how elements of space, time, and juxtaposition work, separate or together, to create the narrativity of the image. In sequential images more than in the other two categories, juxtaposition is central. It exists there as a continuous presence and in several different forms; between individual images, in the relation between time and space, and (in the comics image) between image and text. The construction based on juxtaposition makes the sequential form of the comic into the narrative form of images *par excellence*.

I will now discuss some readings of pictures that increasingly move away from the image as only an illustration of text, and hopefully demonstrate that images cannot help but be more than just illustration, and indeed, that with very little effort, they gain the ability to create narrative in themselves.

The tradition of illustrating text with images is an old one, and in this tradition, the illustrated bible may be the most constant form. In his book *Words, Script and Pictures*, Meyer Schapiro discusses the conventions of illustrated texts, and some of the complications of combining text, especially sacred text, with images. He points out first of all, that the images will inevitably remind the reader of the story to be read even before he or she reads the words. The picture brings the story to mind, supports it, illustrates it. But the pictures do more than that, and here Schapiro appears to contradict himself. He writes:

The text is often so much fuller than the illustration that the latter seems a mere token, like a pictorial title: one or two figures and some attribute or accessory object, seen together, will evoke for the instructed viewer the whole chain of actions linked in that text with the few pictured elements (1996:12).

Schapiro mentions how the text in medieval bibles is much more detailed, much “fuller” than the images. However, he also acknowledges that from the single image the whole narrative may be brought to mind, which shows that the potential of narrativity, even in a single image, can be immense. Schapiro writes: “But the meaning of such reductive imagery may be rich in connotations and symbolized values not evident from the basic text itself” (1996:12). Is the picture reductive or rich? Schapiro seems to want to privilege the written word in these bibles, making the illustrations only secondary, but as his subsequent

argument shows, the imagery of the pictures has ways of adding to the narrative of the text. He gives the example of the story of Cain and Abel. The biblical text doesn't mention the weapon with which Cain killed his brother, but illustrations often showed a weapon (a stone, branch, or club) giving specificity where the biblical text was open (1996:14). In such cases one could say the illustrations only add in a descriptive, not in a narrative way, but Schapiro also notes the symbolic meaning the pictures often had. Especially if one was sensible to these symbolic meanings, "an artist could add a detail or two suggesting ideas that were not part of traditional exegesis and even at times in flagrant deviation from the text," (1996:22), for example, by making stories in the Old Testament foreshadow those in the New. In this way, even mere illustrations were able to add meanings to the narrative (which become clear especially in an iconographical reading).

Up to this point, Schapiro discussed images added within the text. He also deals with images that themselves incorporate text. He mentions the practice of representing figures holding scrolls, as in a depiction of the last temptation of Christ. Both Christ and the Devil hold and cross rolls in a series of images. Narrativity enters here not only in the seriality, but also in the scrolls themselves. These rolls are inscribed with the words Christ and the Devil exchange in the debate. The words of both speakers are visible simultaneously, but since the two figures presumably are not talking over each other, the rolls give the image a certain duration. Schapiro notes that these scrolls are "a purely artistic device to express an ongoing dialogue of opposed wills without defining a more particular content" (1996:159, 163). He points out that the words on the scrolls are not legible from the point of view of the figures within the images; they are oriented towards the reader and thus "[i]t is the sign for speech recognized as such rather than the internal viewer's reading of the written word that matters. Word and figure are juxtaposed here" (1996:163). I would also add that these images portray an action over time. Time is symbolically represented in the length of the rolls, which, in the words they bear, iconically represent a speaking over time.

Even more striking, then, are examples Schapiro gives of images with rolls that are blank: in one case the scroll is a long strip held by a king, a bishop, and an abbot, then continuing in the hands of a monk below them (1996:167). This time the actual words of the conversation are not represented, but the length of the roll indicates a duration of this conversation that connects the three prominent figures and is witnessed by the monk. Schapiro observes that the monk "seems to see and hear what is going on above" (1996:165). The use of the progressive form "is going on," indicating the duration, illustrates how narrativity enters this image. In his investigation of visual language, Schapiro mostly restricts himself to images from the Middle Ages. Narrativity is not his concern and he does not refer to it, but I hope I have shown how in these images, the potential to *tell* stories, and not just to illustrate them, is

already present. To Gombrich, however, the Middle Ages were a time when art was expressly *not* narrative.

In *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich tracks how Western art has become increasingly realistic until into the 19th Century. He complicates the idea of realism though, by explaining how Renaissance perspectivalism is really as much a convention as the earlier, more schematic, styles in art. In fact, if we see Renaissance and later art as “realistic,” this is mainly because these styles have been able to convey an *illusion* of realism that we have learned to accept. Gombrich traces the rise of the realist style to what he calls the Greek revolution (during the 6th Century B.C.), when representation went from stiff and mask-like to what we consider life-like. He writes: “In the whole history of Western art we have this constant interaction between narrative intent and pictorial realism” (1960:113). The two go together, he says, although Gombrich points out that it is impossible to tell which came first: did art become realistic to tell stories, or did it begin to tell stories because it was now realistic. In any case, the change of the Greek Revolution was not permanent. In the early Byzantine period “the achievements of Greek illusionism were gradually discarded” and did not resurface until the Italian Renaissance.

The “illusionistic” style of painting, whether Ancient Greek or Renaissance, achieved in adding time and space to the image. Before the Greek Revolution and during the Middle Ages, the “image was [not] asked the questions of how and when: it was reduced to the what of impersonal recital” (1960:124). Gombrich points out that older Greek paintings and sculptures, and Medieval icons and illuminations, have a timeless quality and a flatness to them. Byzantine art “somehow partakes of the nature of a Platonic truth”; (1960:125) it cannot be “conceived as free ‘fiction’” as Renaissance art can. With that, the notion of narrative enters the scene once more. The functioning of pictorial realism in art gives the image a specificity in time and space, so that we can “see it as a sign referring to an outer, imagined reality” (1960:119), which cuts the spectator off from the timelessness and universality of earlier art. Gombrich refers to Renaissance and post-Renaissance art as narrative art: it sets a scene which implies a narrative, with a pre-history and some kind of continuation, but I think one could argue that most of such paintings are actually more of an illustration than a narration of a story. This may be supported by the fact that so much (post)Renaissance art depicts scenes from stories, be they biblical or mythical. Like Schapiro’s biblical icons, these paintings bring the complete story to mind with a single scene, but besides visual detail, they do not add to or develop the narrative. In many cases, since they represent such a specific moment in a story, they don’t even have duration, so one could argue that although these paintings possess narrativity, it is no stronger or weaker than that of Medieval art as I demonstrated earlier.

In an essay called “Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and its Applicability to the Visual Arts,” Werner Wolf

evaluates the various degrees to which images may be narrative. He posits:

What most scholars have in mind when using the terms 'narrative' or 'narrativity' in discussions of pictures is still either the reference by means of a visual representation to some literary narrative, or the representation of any kind of action in a picture, as opposed to static, descriptive images, but hardly ever the representation of a story proper (2003:180).

In this article, Wolf distinguishes three different ways in which images may be narrative. He claims that in order for a painting to be narrative or to induce the viewer to "narrative activity," "the representation of some experiential agent and at least the suggestion of, or reference to, a temporal dimension in the represented world are minimal requirements" (2003:192).

The lowest level of narrativity is assigned to pictures that have a "narrative reference" (2003:193). Most of what Gombrich calls "narrative art" falls into this category, since this is art representing an agent in the form of "anthropomorphic beings" and a reference to a script (an existing narrative), but which lacks duration or "temporal experience." The second level is compounded of "monophase" pictures (2003:190). These are paintings which show a single, "frozen" moment, but because the action that is represented in the picture is paused at a crucial moment in the narrative that is implied in the picture itself, it evokes a "tendential or quasi-narrative" (2003:193). Wolf argues that in such a case, it is left to the viewer to form the narrative that frames the moment shown in the picture. He uses Jan Steen's *Het Sint Nicolaasfeest* as an illustration of a monophase narrative painting, since this work does not depict an existing story but it contains enough varied elements (a crying boy, a laughing child and a man waving to something outside of the picture frame) that it implies a story.

Wolf's third level of narrative includes the "multiphase picture," (2003:190) in which a single painting includes several distinct scenes from a single story, thus showing more than one moment in time within its space. This practice, common in the Middle Ages, results in a "strong" narrative (as opposed to the "weak" narrative of monophase painting) even if it necessarily loses pictorial realism.

I will turn to two examples from Craig Thompson's *Goodbye, Chunky Rice* (1999) to show how multiphase pictures work. In **Fig. 5**, you can literally see three moments in time as Solomon is represented coming through the door, walking down the steps, and putting the cardboard box on the ground. The pillars of the porch more or less separate each point in the action, giving the illusion of separate frames, which heightens the illusion of time passing in this panel. The next illustration (**Fig. 6**) shows an even greater expanse of time spanned in a single multiphase panel. This panel shows adult Solomon as he is talking to Chunky Rice, but he is holding the dog he had as a child, and he

is surrounded by the setting of the past, where his father is just walking into the garage to tell young Solomon that they will have to drown the dog's puppies. Solomon still suffers from the memory of that event, and the fusing of the present and the past into the one panel shows the immediacy of the memory to him. These are two examples of the multiphase picture that Werner Wolf discusses.

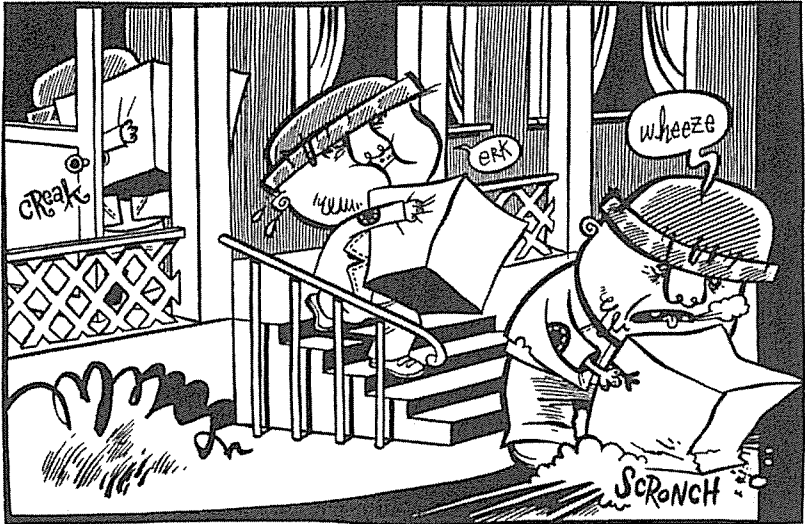


Fig. 5. Craig Thompson, no pagination.

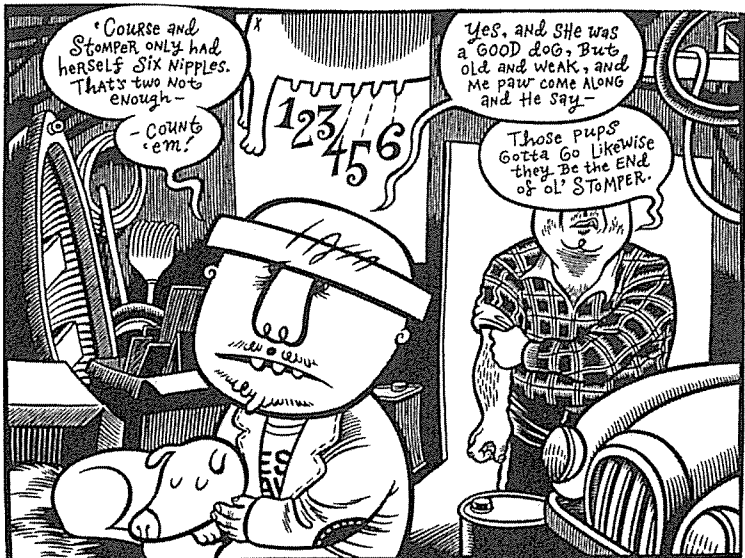


Fig. 6. Craig Thompson, no pagination.

Wolf reserves the strongest form of narrativity for the series of representations, “provided they depict at least two temporally and causally connected phases of a specific, non-iterative action and contain some uncertain, suspenseful telos centred on anthropomorphic beings” (2003:192). Thus we get to the sequential image. Wolf introduced this category of images as the only real representative of “narrative,” plain and simple, in his subdivision, and I will go along with that, based on the presence of time, space, and juxtaposition that the “meaningful *series* of representations” allows (Wolf, 2003:92). However, it may now be clear that also the single, static image contains intrinsic narrativity in a number of ways and that this narrativity has been recognized by various theorists with more or less emphasis.

Conclusion

I like the way David Carrier talks about how images create the sense of time, how they narrate. He says that in order to make sense of a pictorial narrative, the reader or viewer must be able to “move” the images. He writes: “To understand a picture, we must move the depicted scene. My idiosyncratic use of the verb ‘move’ alludes elliptically to the way that we must know what has just happened or what will happen next” (1997:327). It is possible to *move* a single picture like *Het Sint Nicolaasfeest*. Applying the practice of *moving* to images in comics illustrates that “[i]t is natural to relate comics to the history of narrative pictures, for their image sequences permit moving scenes which otherwise would be as indecipherable as modernist masterpieces” (1997:327). Carrier points out that even without the use of text, comics imagery “develops a lucid visual narrative. Two images already constitute a narrative for their meaning is inscribed in the succession” (1997:327). The spatial juxtaposition of two images portraying different moments in time is enough to make comics tell a story. This impulse that even individual images create, the impulse to be *moved*, is one more way in which comics images signify.

References

- Barthes, Roland. 1967. *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, Roland. 1989. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1990 [1970]. *S/z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carrier, David. 1997. “Comics and the Art of Moving Pictures: Piero della

- Francesca, Hergé and George Herriman." *Word and Image*. 13 (4): 317-332.
- Doucet, Julie. 1999. *My New York Diary*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly.
- Eisner, Will. 2001 [1985]. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Tamarac, FL.: Poorhouse Press.
- Gombrich, Ernst. 1960. *Art and Illusion*. Oxford: Phaidon.
- Johnson, R Kikuo. 2005. *Night Fisher*. Seattle: Fantagraphics.
- Little, Jason. 1998. *Jack's Luck Runs Out*. Brooklyn: Beekeeper Cartoon Amusements.
- Panofsky, Erwin. 1982 [1955]. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schapiro, Meyer. 1996. *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language*. New York: George Braziller.
- Spiegelman, Art. 1986. *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon.
- Thompson, Craig. 1999. *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*. Marietta: Top Shelf.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt. 2001. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wolf, Werner. 2003. "Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and Its Applicability to the Visual Arts." *Word and Image*. 19 (3): 180-197.

Barbara Postema is working on her dissertation, entitled "Image, Word, Narrative: A Study of Signification in Graphic Novels" in the Department of English at Michigan State University. She has an M.A. in English and Comparative Literature from Warwick University (U.K.) and a B.A. from the University of Amsterdam. She has presented on comics at various conferences, including the MPCA/ACA and ICAF and has published in the *International Journal of Comic Art*.