

**Some Key Conceptual Points for reading Graphic Works Drawn from *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud (1994)**

- Cartooning can be a form of **Amplification through Simplification**: "When we abstract an image through cartooning we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details."
- **Comics can intensify a scene by stripping away all but the most significant parts**, which allow them to focus on representing an idea rather than reality. This is part of the power of icons. That which has little distracting realistic detail can more easily be experienced as a concept.
- **Cartoon faces facilitate identification** in the broadest manner: "When you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon you see yourself. ... The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled...an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it."
- In emphasizing the concepts of objects over their physical appearance much has to be omitted.

**Often artists mix more realistic art, which involves the readers' senses, with simpler drawings which emphasize ideas.**

- **Comics bring the worlds of picture and word closer together**: "Pictures are received information... The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language. When pictures are more abstracted from 'reality,' they require greater levels of perception, more like words. When words are bolder, more direct, they require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures."
- **Comics rely on our ability, our propensity to extrapolate a whole from parts**. Our imaginations fill in between and around frames, drawing conclusions about relations of causality, time, etc. between frames. **"The phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It's called closure."** The audience becomes a participant in creating the scene by necessity. Its imagination is called into play by the very incomplete and fragmented nature of comics—the sequences of frames or panels with blank spaces – the gutters – between them.
- **The space between panels is "the gutter." It can and does divide not only space, but time, and perspective**. As a pause between statements it relies on the reader to draw conclusions as to the relations between frames. Elongating it may imply a longer time span. Changing its shape or eliminating it comments on the relation between the parts of the panel.
- **The gutter facilitates closure by engaging the reader as a co-creator of the scene**. Comics "is an exclusively visual presentation. Within these panels we can only convey information visually. But between panels, **none of our senses are required at all. Which is why all our senses are engaged.**"
- **"Backgrounds can be another valuable tool for indicating invisible ideas ... particularly the world of emotion."** Impressionism, expressionism and realism influence our interpretation of a scene and create parallels, contrasts and connections between different parts of a comic. "Even when there is little or no distortion of the characters in a given scene, a distorted or expressionistic background will usually affect our 'reading' of characters' inner states."

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