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QUIS EVALUATES IPSOS *WATCHMEN*?
WATCHMEN AND NARRATIVE THEORY

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QUIS EVALUATES IPSOS *WATCHMEN*?
***WATCHMEN* AND NARRATIVE THEORY**

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RESUMO

Uma das três obras que influenciaram profundamente gerações de escritores e leitores de quadrinhos no ano de 1986, junto a *O Cavaleiro das Trevas*, de Frank Miller e *Maus*, de Art Spiegelman, *Watchmen*, de Alan Moore e Dave Gibbons, é o mais próximo que se pode chegar de um cânone dos quadrinhos. A obra venceu o Prêmio Hugo de Ficção Científica de 1988, na categoria Outras Formas, e é considerada um dos melhores romances de todos os tempos pela revista *Time*. Um dos primeiros quadrinhos a sair da esfera das publicações especializadas e receber atenção de outras mídias, *Watchmen* é menção obrigatória para se entender a história do meio. Ainda assim, só começou a ser estudado com profundidade recentemente. A maior parte dos trabalhos sobre o quadrinho é centrada em suas propriedades históricas, a psicologia das personagens ou de que maneira estes se relacionam com a Filosofia – diferentes aspectos de uma obra meritória, que ao longo de muitos anos atingiu um grande público. O que esses estudos têm em comum é que, ao focar sua atenção nos detalhes, esquecem da narrativa – a história que a obra conta. Esta dissertação enfoca o quadrinho como um todo; sua história e a maneira como é construída, através da teoria narrativa, considerada apropriada para este fim. A teoria narrativa é o foco da primeira parte do trabalho, junto à introdução por razões de espaço. Os trabalhos mais significativos na área são revisados e comentados. A linguagem dos quadrinhos e suas especificidades são o tema da segunda parte, também apresentando uma leitura das principais obras sobre o assunto. A terceira parte é dedicada às poucas tentativas realizadas com o intuito de conciliar ambas as linhas teóricas. A análise de *Watchmen* acontece na quarta seção. Além de listar os diferentes componentes narrativos, como eventos, cenário, tempo (dividido em ordem, duração e frequência), narrativa e focalização, também há uma extensa análise do estilo e das cores do traço, apresentada como um passo necessário na compreensão do tom e visão do narrador, dividido aqui entre meganarrador, monstrador e recitador. Na última parte, dedicada às considerações finais sobre o trabalho e que fins atingiu, se apresenta também uma interpretação do quadrinho, baseada em uma leitura pessoal.

Palavras-chave: Quadrinhos, Literatura, *Watchmen*, Alan Moore, Teoria Narrativa.

ABSTRACT

One of three books that deeply influenced generations of comics writers and readers in 1986, together with Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, is as close to a canonic work as one could get, regarding comics. It won the 1988 Hugo Award, for science fiction books, in the Other Forms category, and was mentioned as one of the hundred best novels by *Time* magazine. One of the first comics to break out of the sphere of specialized reviews and receive acknowledgement from other media, it is an obligatory mention whenever one attempts to understand the History of the medium. And yet, it has not been thoroughly studied until recently. Most works dealing with the comic focus on its historical properties, the psychology of its characters or how they relate to Philosophy – different aspects of a merited novel which has achieved a large public throughout the years. But what these studies have in common is that, focusing on the detail, they overlook the narrative – the story presented in the work. This work focuses on the comic as a whole, its story and the way it is construed, through narrative theory – a theory based on the understanding of narratives and their constitutive parts, and, as such, clearly appropriate for the task. Narrative theory is the focus of the first part of the work, put together with the introduction for economy reasons. The most prominent works on the subject are reviewed and commented. The language of comics and its specificities are the theme of the second part of the work, also with reviews of its most significant works. The third part is dedicated to a few attempts of conciliation between both theoretical frameworks already developed. The analysis of *Watchmen* takes place in the fourth chapter. Besides listing the comic's different narrative components, such as events, setting, time (divided in order, duration and frequency), narrative and focalization; there is also an extensive analysis of style and colors, presented as a necessary step in understanding the tone and views of the narrator, here divided into meganarrator, monstrator and reciter. In the final part, dedicated to considerations about the research and what it may have achieved, an interpretation of the novel is also presented, based on a personal reading.

Keywords: Comics, Literature, Watchmen, Alan Moore, Narrative Theory.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear --
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'*

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias")

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1 GETTING STARTED

A good friend of mine, who I've known for more than twenty years, hearing the subject of my thesis and the theoretical background I had chosen to apply to the object, stated simply that it didn't agree with me. The point in question was not about the nature of the object of the research – that I would work with comics was logic at work, since I've been concerned with the subject practically since I learned how to read, and the choice of *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, was also logical, being one of the most prominent works of the genre. *Watchmen* was first published in 1986 by DC Comics, and it became rapidly recognized as one of the most precious works involving comics and superheroes. It deals with a group of masked vigilantes in a dystopic future threatened by nuclear holocaust, where they try to solve the murder of one of them and end up uncovering a global conspiracy to stop the impending war. Its realistic presentation of people and sceneries, its regular nine-panel grid and its radically distinct color palletes had already marked the comic as an old acquaintance of both of us. The choice of the work was not the problem: what my friend objected to was the theoretical background. In his opinion, structuralism presented a very limited view of literary works, being considerably reductive at times – though he was not, at the time, aware of the field of narratology, the particular development of structuralism I had chosen for the research.

“Why choose to be bound by this strict theory?”, he asked, “I always thought that you would rather do something more creative and imaginative with your thesis.” He then paused for an instant, for dramatic effect, and completed: “besides, you are too young to engage in structuralism.”

Of course, that mixture of prejudice and ignorance was meant as a joke – and not a bad one, come to think of it. But it got me thinking about the matter: why narratology? I certainly had my reasons: it was the field that, in my opinion, provided the most comprehensive view of the object studied, without necessarily committing to a single aspect of the text. But, up to that moment, I had never had the need to structure these thoughts. And, perhaps, the phrasing of the last sentence is already an answer in itself. In any case, it was the joke that started questioning my assumptions, and that is one of the

reasons why I decided to start this work with it. Another reason would be a matter of aesthetics – this way, both *Watchmen*, the work studied in this thesis, and the thesis itself, can have a joke as part of its structure. But that is best saved for later.

1.1 A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Setting aside the joke (hopefully for good), this work also starts with an investigation of the reasons for the theoretical background chosen to conduct the research, namely the structuralistic branch known as narratology, and a necessarily brief (that is, as brief as possible without being reductive) presentation of the theoretical background itself, through a bibliographic review of some important works on the field, indicated in Herman & Vervaeck's *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005). Namely, Gerard Genette's *Narrative Theory: An Introduction* (1983); Slomith Rimmon-Kennan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2005) and Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997). Following the presentation of the different theories, a comparison between them will be made.

There is a clear and intentional *economy* component in this dynamics: for reasons that will be developed further ahead – mainly the need for serious studies of comics (or Graphic Novels) as literary works and the extensive bibliography and theoretical background that must be addressed –, a lengthy introduction of the work was discarded in order to favor both the time and space available with the research itself. Useful as they may be in understanding the structure of complex works, extensive introductions often show a tendency to become redundant, a luxury that has its didactic purposes but would not – I think – be appropriate when the (extensive) research needs both time and space to be properly presented. The matter of personal investment can, as well, be presented briefly – or even understood as implicit. It might suffice to say that I have (as stressed before) learned to read with comics, have worked with them (both as a researcher and as a producer) for quite some time now, and am an enthusiast of the medium.

Following the presentation and discussion of narrative theory, the second chapter of this work is dedicated to comics' theory. It starts with a brief account of the medium, its characteristics and its conventions. A quick, summarized view of the language based on works such as *Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* (2011), by Robert S. Petersen, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1994), *Making Comics* (2006) and *Reinventing Comics* (2000); Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (2001) and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*¹ (2013); Antônio Luiz Cagnin's *Comics*² (1975) and Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (2007), Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What they Mean* (2007), all these help shed light onto the characteristics of the medium.

The following chapter concerns the application of narrative theory to the language of comics, and, to that end, scholars such as Genette, Bal and Rimmon-Kennan are briefly revisited in the works that deal directly with the matter of comics – such as *Reading Bande Desinée* (2007), by Ann Miller; *Narrative in Comics* (2009), by Henry John Pratt, *Graphic Storytelling* by Eisner, again, Kai Mikkonen's *Focalisation (sic) in Comics. From the Specificities of the Medium to Conceptual Reformulation* (2012); *Focalization in Graphic Narrative* (2011), by Horstkotte and Pedri, among others. Some modification of the existing theories on comics seems to be necessary to fully understand the narrative of the medium (such as an inadequacy of the opposition proposed by McCloud's between cartoon and realistic depiction).

The fourth chapter deals solely with *Watchmen*, as seen through the lenses of narrative theory, with an eye on the critical fortune on the work. This chapter uses references – such as *Writing For Comics* (2003), by Alan Moore, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as a Scalpel* (2009), by Annalisa Di Liddo; *Superheroes: An Analysis of Modern Culture's Popular Myths* (2011), by David Reynolds; *How to Make Comics the Marvel Way* (1975), by Lee & Buscema – for the basis of the understanding of the genre and of Moore's writing, while the work itself is read narratologically with the help of works such as *Watchmen and Literature* (2010), by Sara J. Van Ness; *Minutes to Midnight: Twelve Essays on Watchmen* (2011), by Peter Sanderson (org.); The Annotated

¹ I have the Portuguese edition, *Narrativas Gráficas: Princípios e Práticas da Lenda dos Quadrinhos* (Will Eisner - 2013).

² In the original, *Os Quadrinhos*.

Watchmen, by Doug Atkinson (2005); *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach's Test* (2009), by Mark D. White (ed.), and others.

Finally, a very short fifth chapter is reserved for the final considerations and conclusions derived from the research. Despite every (manifest) effort to make this work as 'short', 'brief' or filled with 'summaries', it turned out quite bulgy. That is due to the reason that even a very short account of a very extensive subject is, sometimes, lengthy. And, additionally, due to the danger of being superficial in a field that requires depth. But there are still other subjects to be addressed, even in a short introduction, which only comes to prove the point just made.

One important observation has to be made in regard to references. Unfortunately, the march of technology is not closely followed by the march of rules for theoretical references, and the current system does not yet address the problem of e-books or, case in question, e-readers, and their methods of keeping track of the reading progress (though the latest version of the e-reader Kobo has an application that allows the correspondence between the page number and the page in the actual book, the Kindle e-reader, for instance, displays the reading through location³ rather than page). In that case, the information will be presented as complete as possible.

The answer above, though, does not solve the case of making quotations out of images. There are rules for inserting images inside academic texts, but they usually treat images as illustrations, tables or graphic examples, suggesting separated indexes for figures and tables, numbered in order to be properly indicated in the text and with titles of what they indicate. Those are not the only uses in this work. At times, an image will be treated as a text rather than as an illustration or example, and its contents will be part of the logical development of the argument in the text. By convention, such an insertion should be indicated through the last name of the author (assuming there is only one), year of publication and page(s). With that in mind, a degree of adaptation is required. The answer to this dilemma is a mixed form, that presents both the indexing of the image as a figure and the author, year and page's data. Since this is a work about a Graphic Novel – or, as

³ That is, since the size of the letters is manageable by the reader, the book does not have a fixed number of pages to be displayed, but rather a number of marked locations.

Moore himself refers to it, a comic book – and other references to comics are bound to be present, it should be noted that references to comic books do not always conform to the academic rules, as well. Since many series of comics present the same data (title, authors, editor, etc.), they are usually indicated by the data that is common to all the texts in question, the number of the edition (preceded by a number sign – or ‘#’). If that were not the case, a choice would have to be made between indicating the twelve editions of *Watchmen* as a whole, the collected edition (with the page numbers going back and forward twelve times, which is confusing) or presenting each edition once in the references, twelve entries for one work. I understand that using the comic book form for references is simpler. Sometimes, following an image, as additional information, a panel number may be inserted. Redundant as it may seem (after all, the number of the paragraph in the page is not indicated in texts), the resource will prove itself valuable during the analysis of the work, where a higher degree of specificity will be required in some cases.

A thesis is the narrative of a study, in which the researcher narrates the process of understanding its object, explicating the theories that orient its⁴ view and applying them in order to solve a problem, achieving (or not) the objective by the end of the study. As in every narrative, there are choices made in order to fulfill certain objectives. In particular, in this work, the choice of voice (or, more accurately, of separation of voices) is peculiar. The use of the first person singular, and also the choice of referring to the work as an independent entity were made. This is to stress the difference between the researcher (who admittedly can be playful at times) and the research (which, as a conjoint construction of a scientific work written by the researcher, under the guidance of the advisor, cannot). This aims at readability – separating the voices in the text allows for the occasional pun (thus making it more palatable to the reader) without compromising the research: when in doubt, the researcher is the one who said the preposterous thing. Conversely, for the purpose of increasing the reader’s investment and interest in the text, the second person singular can be used to figuratively involve the reader by making it a part of the text. Or, in other words, I am inviting you to look at this research, and the reason I am doing so is to interest

⁴ In this research, the pronoun ‘it’ will be used whenever a term designates an individual of undetermined gender. This is a choice that was made (though not maintained consistently) by Mieke Bal in her book *Narratology – An Introduction* (1983, originally, with further editions in 1997 and 2009), among others. It is only logical – this avoids the constant use of both gender pronouns, use that can maim the readability of a text, and the privilege that is implicit in choosing one of the two (Bal sometimes lapses into using ‘she’).

you in reading further. This resource, though unusual in the circumstances, may be interesting and profitable, if not overdone.

1.2 THE CHOICE OF THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the conclusion of his book *Literary Theory – An introduction*, Terry Eagleton argues that the choice of a theoretical background:

(...) is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do*, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends. (EAGLETON, 1996, p. 183)

Eagleton's suggested approach to theory bears close similarities to *instrumentalism*, term coined by John Dewey and defined by Kyle Sanford as a "broad pragmatic attitude towards ideas and concepts in general"⁵ that advocates the use of scientific theories to the completion of the researcher's goals without necessarily accepting the world view suggested by these theories. That is, using the theory as an instrument to achieve your goal without being bound by it in any way.

In language classes, instrumental reading is used to understand the texts as a whole, focusing on what the text is saying rather than on the translation of the sentences that compose it. This is essentially the path I had, unknowingly, taken from the start.

During the realization of the final paper of my graduation in English, *Cerveisner's Quixote* (2010), I became aware of the problematic lack of studies regarding Graphic Novels as literary texts. Most theoretical articles I could find at the time dealt with comics as a language, usually with a semiotic approach, as a way of getting students to read in

⁵ SANFORD, Kyle. "Instrumentalism" In: SARKAR & PFEIFER (ed.). *The Philosophy of Science – An Encyclopedia*. Vol. I: A-M. New York: Routledge, 2006. The specific entry can be found in .PDF form available at the address <<http://libgen.org/get?nametype=orig&md5=E5D2FF6FE85BED3D6868204AEA7869BF>>, last access in jun/09/2013.

Literature or language classes, usually seen as first steps on the way to ‘serious reading’, or in their relation to historical or cultural facts, usually as illustration. And the reason I found that problematic is that when one looks at a text as language, as a means to an end or as an example of some other thing that was going on, the idea of the text as a text is lost.

Though it poses no demeanor to other studies, one could not help but think that a lot about comics was left unsaid. The problem was similar to the story of the five blind men and the elephant.

An Indian sultan once decided to make an experiment and gathered five men who were born blind and, as such, had never had the opportunity to see an elephant. He put the five blind men into a room with an elephant and asked them to describe the animal. The first blind man touched one leg of the elephant, and so said the animal was like a tree trunk. The second blind man felt one ear and described the elephant as similar to a leaf or a piece of paper. The third man felt the elephant’s trunk and said the animal was similar to a snake. The fourth touched the elephant’s body and said the elephant was similar to a wall. The fifth felt the elephant’s hairy tail and said the animal was similar to a tuft of grass. In a nutshell: by focusing their inspection on one sole aspect of the animal and not working together, none of the blind men could get an idea of the whole elephant.

Similarly, the vast majority of the studies I found seemed to do many things with comics – dissect their construction, use them for educational purposes and use them as illustrations – everything except read them. The content of the stories seemed to spill to the gutter while people looked at the pretty drawings and the intricate structures.

Maybe the lack of serious studies with an eye on the stories told through comics is a reflection of the *gutter* quality of the medium – as Sara van Ness suggests, in the first chapter of her book *Watchmen as Literature* (2010) by naming her first chapter *Invading the Ivory Tower*, the only way for comics to get to the attention of scholars was to invade the ivory tower of high literature. Probably from the outside, climbing the walls with a rope, as in the old Batman TV series.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains. To this date only few rare publications⁶ have dared to look into the universe of comics with a concern for what was being said there. The history of the medium or the structure of its language, those are among the subjects worthy of a detained, educated look. But the same doesn't seem to apply to the stories that are being told – that is, to what has been said: the form is valid, the relations with other texts are valid, but not the content of the stories.

Therefore, my objective in this study is to get a glimpse of the whole elephant, to perform an *instrumental* reading of a Graphic Novel – in the sense of looking at the work as a whole, understanding what is said and how. Which is precisely what I sought for during the realization of the thesis and was unable to find, at least as the main point of the articles. For it is a given – in order to interpret a text, or to talk about its significance or even present it as an example or illustration, one should at least talk about it a little: what the story is about, who the characters are, what happens. Thus, in a sense, this work represents nothing new – just a different view of the object. A different take. This thesis will regard its object as a text, and, more specifically, as a narrative. In doing so, it will hopefully be able to step further into the path of a visual narratology, but also to step further into the study of the work, and demonstrate, through a glimpse of *Watchmen's* narrative characteristics (again, the 'whole elephant'), that the work constitutes a deconstruction of the genre itself, besides being an example of polyphony. The instrument chosen for that purpose is, understandably, narrative theory.

As Jonathan Culler points out in the foreword to Genette's book *Narrative Discourse: An essay on method* (1983),

Anyone who has begun the study of fiction has encountered terms like *point of view*, *flashback*, *omniscient narrator*, *third-person narrative*. One can't describe techniques of a novel without such terms, any more than one can describe the

⁶ Not all is lost. The numbers have been increasing. Examples of this tendency are the mentioned *Watchmen as Literature* (2011), by Sara Von Ness, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as a Scalpel*, by Annalisa Di Liddo (2009), Geoff Klock's *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002), Richard Bensam's (ed.) *Minutes to Midnight: Twelve Essays on Watchmen* (2011), Jet Jeer's (org.) *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (2005), Charles Hatfield's *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005) and others. That, however, only serves to make that take on the medium a little less understudied.

workings of a car without the appropriate technical vocabulary. (CULLER, 1983)

The problem of narrative theory, however, is not necessarily the issue of interpretation, but rather one of understanding the text's strategies, for "the structuralist study of literature (...) sought not to interpret literature but to investigate its structures and devices." (CULLER, 1983, p. 8)

So, what I would say to my good friend (provided he were still listening) is that the structuralist analysis of the narrative does not hinder any further interpretation of a work, but rather allows it. By its focus on the structure of the text, it provides a broad understanding of the object to be interpreted. And this is precisely the sort of theory that helps one develop a comprehensive view of the work analyzed and allows the scholar to dig further into the interpretation (or, as my friend said, "get creative"). The narrative structure is, so to say, the spine of the text. But not only that, it is a necessary step in the interpretation – a step that must be climbed in order for one to go further in the reading of a text.

Merely pointing out the choice of narrative theory (even going as far as 'structuralist narrative theory') does not really narrow the options down to one sole method and concept, though. As Herman & Vervaeck point out in *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005), structuralist narrative analysis is rooted in (and deeply influenced by) several works, by several authors, such as Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Umberto Eco, Tzvetan Todorov, among others. If there is some common ground to these theories, according to the authors, it is the division of the text into different levels by differentiating between the story as it is present in the text, the chronological sequence of events and the choices made in telling (narrating) this story.

Some scholars, such as Barthes and Greimas, have also worried about the "deep structure" of a text by creating simple models that might, generally by opposition and analogy of key concepts, resume the structure of any narrative. However, as Herman & Vervaeck point out, there are problems in assuming models as the basis of textual analysis. Not only is there the possibility of the model taking precedence over the text (that is, the theory becoming more important than the text in the process of analysis, and guiding the reading), but also, by differentiating between narrative levels in order to emphasize the

different possibilities in a narrative, theoreticians are frequently limited in the sense that pointing out the most predominant uses in a given text does not necessarily do the chaotic process of reading justice, nor do they (theoreticians) take into consideration the possible gradations and gradual transitions in narrative levels, since their analysis focuses on the difference between those levels rather than their shifts: their concern is to identify the categories, not the subtle transitions between them. Despite that fact, the authors point out that:

Structuralist narratology is the first large-scale attempt to combine all aspects of narrative analysis in a convenient system. The model resulting from the combination of the three levels allows a reader to link all the central aspects of a narrative text (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 1995, p.45)

Despite the fact that much has changed since the beginning of narrative theory as a science, the authors complement, “this particular brand of narratology continues to provide an indispensable legacy even to readers whose main interest lies in later approaches” (p.45).

Herman & Vervaeck follow these considerations by providing examples of the three narrative levels according to Mieke Bal, Jean Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and present the key concepts within each of these levels, in order to get the reader acquainted with the many ways narrative was understood by the structuralist scholars. This summary and comparison of concepts will be precious afterwards in this thesis, but before leaping forward – and thinking towards a better understanding of these concepts, elementary for a scholar but sometimes quite abstract in the mind of a comics enthusiast that dared walk through the doors of the Academy, trying to climb his way inside the Ivory Tower in pretty much the same way comics are – a deeper reading of the works of these scholars may be advisable, if only to get a clear understanding of the concepts when they show up. Since the following sections are specific to the discussion of one work, quotations in the paragraphs are made solely through the indication of the page – one can assume the book is the one the section is about. Quotes with more than four lines are separated from the rest of the text, and present the normal reference form.

1.2.1 Genette's Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method

Genette's take on narrative theory starts by making a distinction between three different notions: *story*, *narrative* and *narrating*. *Story* is the signified, or narrative content. *Narrative* is related to the signifier, the narrative text itself, while *narrating* is the word he uses from then on to designate the action of producing the narrative. The relationship between these aspects is the object of his study, which focuses, quite obviously, on *narrative*.

His starting point is Todorov's division of narratives in *tense* (relationship between the time of the story and the time of the discourse), *aspect* (perception of the story by the narrator), and *mood* (type of discourse used by the narrator) (TODOROV, 1966, *apud* GENETTE, 1983, p.29). His working division, however, is slightly different from Todorov's: Genette thinks narrative in terms of *tense* (which focuses on time), *mood* (which focuses on the narrative representation) and *voice* (centered on the narrating itself, a relation with the subject).

The idea of time, as associated with narratives, is an awkward one, and is a result of the linearity of the linguistic sign:

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for "consuming" it is the time needed for *crossing* or *traversing* it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading. (GENETTE, 1983, p. 34)

When developing these notions in separate chapters of the book, Genette decomposes *tense* into *order* (the succession of events in the story and in the narrative), *duration* (how long the events take in the story and in the narrative) and *frequency* (repetition in the story and in the narrative).

1.2.1.1. Order

The study of the temporal *order* is devoted to the comparison between the chronological order of the events in the narrative with their appearance in the narrative. Since the narrative is not necessarily linear, sections in which time is displaced are common. Genette calls them *anachronies*, such as *prolepsis* (narrating in advance an event that takes place later in the story) and *analepsis* (the narration of an event after this event takes place in the story). The *reach* of anachronies is the temporal distance in the leap to the past or future, and the duration in the story of the anachronies is deemed *extent*.

Analepses can be either *external* (or analepses that take place in time before the first narrative), *internal* (analepses that are part of the first narrative) or *mixed* (analepses that start in a point previous to the first narrative and end after its beginning). According to the author (my italics):

External analepses, by the very fact that they are external, never at any moment risk interfering with the first narrative, for *their only function is to fill out the rest of the first narrative by enlightening the reader on one or another "antecedent"*. (...) The case is otherwise with internal analepses: since their temporal field is contained within the temporal field of the first narrative, they present an obvious risk of redundancy or collision. (GENETTE, 1983, p.49-50)

In order to study these problems of interference, Genette sets aside *heterodiegetic* analepses (that is, internal analepses that do not interfere with the story line of the first narrative, such as explanations about characters or topics that appear in the main narrative for the first time or that have been out of sight for some time) and focuses on *homodiegetic* analepses (internal analepses that deal with the same time and story presented in the first narrative), for they are the ones that are likely to present interference or redundancy.

Even these have different proprieties, and can be divided into *completing* analepses (after the narrated event, they go back to fill gaps in the narrative – those gaps are themselves divided into *ellipses*, temporal skips, and *paralipsis*, that is, when the narrative does not omit but rather sidesteps a moment in the narrative, focusing on another action) and *repeating* analepses, which consist mainly of the narrative retracing its own path.

Logically, this division also allows for *partial analepses*, that begin before or at the stopping point of the narrative to delve further, mixing both the complementary and the repeating information. Analepses can also be *open*, that is, when the conclusion cannot be identified.

Prolepses (or anticipations) are, in their turn, rarer appearances in narratives, and can also be divided in *external* (which function often as epilogues) and *internal* (which present the same problem of internal analepses – the possibility of interference). And, once again, Genette forfeits the analysis of *heterodiegetic* prolepses in order to watch the *homodiegetic* ones more accurately. Prolepses can also be divided into *completing* and *repeating*, depending on whether they overlap with the narrative (repeating) or are just used to provide additional information (completing). Genette considers the prolepses *complete* when the anticipation is fulfilled up to the ‘denouncement’, for internal prolepses, or up to the narrating moment, for external or mixed ones. That is, when the anticipation is extended to the moment anticipated. Most of them, however, are *partial*, “interrupted in as abrupt a way as they were begun” (GENETTE, 1983, p.77-78).

Prolepses and analepses can interact in many complex ways:

In fact, the very frequency of interpolations and their reciprocal entanglement often embroil matters in such a way as to leave the “simple” reader, and even the most determined analyst, sometimes with no way out (GENETTE, 1983, p.79)

This demonstrates the psychological component in the very ideas of retrospection and anticipation, for they presuppose a “perfectly clear temporal consciousness and unambiguous relationships among present, past, and future” (p.79) in the narratives, which is not always the case, for there are also *achronies* in narratives, events without any temporal reference attached to them, usually part of “the (atemporal) commentarial discourse that accompanies them” (p.83). Achronies are dateless and ageless, events with no place in the chronology of the narrative. All this serves to demonstrate the narrative’s capacity to subvert the chronological possibilities, its capacity for *temporal autonomy* (p.85). At the same time, Genette develops his conceptual tools to analyze his subject and warns the reader about the narrative’s ultimate independence from the mental structures presupposed by them.

1.2.1.2. Duration

The study of the *duration* of events in a narrative is only possible by establishing a relationship between the temporal and the spatial dimensions of this narrative, since there is no other way of determining a speed for the execution of the narrative. An *isochronous* narrative, thus, would be a narrative that showed unchanging speed, a constant relationship between its pages and the time shifts in said pages. The changes in pace, or rhythm, would be *anisochronies*. Genette points out that this sort of analysis is only relevant at the macroscopic level, for a detailed study would probably be both imprecise and wearisome, due to the elusive nature of diegetic time. The object of such an analysis could be the range of variations in the narrative, or its evolution, always taking into consideration the deviation from the “norm” – the isochronic narrative.

Genette suggests that, for the study of the duration of sections of the narrative, some equivalent to the idea of the musical movements (such as *allegro* and *andante*) that are used to indicate speed of execution: the four narrative movements would be the extremes *ellipsis*⁷ (the narrative omits a period of time) and descriptive *pause* (no diegetic time passes), plus *scene*⁸ (where a rough equivalency is maintained between narrative and story – such as in dialogue) and *summary*, a movement which “with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis.” (p.94)

⁷ Ellipsis can be *definite* or *indefinite*, depending whether the duration of the time elided is indicated or not. Genette marks three different forms of ellipsis: *explicit* (there is an indication of their presence in the narrative or an elision, usually followed by an indication of the time elapsed), *implicit* (their presence is not announced in the text but the reader can infer it from some gap in the narrative) and *hypothetical* (impossible to localize, impossible to place, but which is revealed by an analepsis after it takes place).

⁸ Apropos of scenes, Genette argues that Proust uses the scene in a rather different way: “contrary to the earlier tradition, which made scene into a place or dramatic concentration almost entirely free of descriptive or discursive impedimenta, and free even more of anachronic interferences, the Proustian scene (...) plays the role of ‘temporal hearth’ or magnetic pole for all sorts of supplementary information and incidents.” (GENETTE, 1983, p.111)

1.2.1.3. Frequency

Frequency studies the relations of repetition between the narrative and the diegesis. The idea of repetition is another rather awkward one, and is due to the mind's way of organizing information in patterns, where the specific details of each event are not taken into consideration in order to enhance the resemblance of the situation remembered. There are no repetitions in the real world – they belong in fiction. Since a repetition can happen once or more times, and can happen either in the story or the narrative, there are four ways this repetition can happen:

Narrating once what happened once (1N/1S) and *narrating n times what happens n times* (nN/nS). Those Genette calls *singulative* narratives (determined by the equality of the number of happenings and narrations).

Narrating n times what happens once (nN/1S) is another possibility. That may seem redundant, but a same event can be narrated not only in different styles, but also through another “point of view”.

Narrating one time what happened n times (1N/nS). These structures, where one narration (usually with a formulation such as “every day” or “that week”) is used for several events repeated, Genette calls *iterative*.

Iterations can be, themselves, *external* (*generalizing*) or *internal* (*synthesizing*). *External* iterations deal with longer periods of time, surpassing the scene they are inserted into, while *internal* iterations deal with the period of time of the scene itself. Of course, that does not limit a scene to one sort of iteration exclusively. There is also the *pseudo-iterative* scenes, which are the “scenes presented, particularly by their wording in the imperfect, as iterative, whereas their richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur in that manner, several times, without any variation” (p.121). This last one is a *narrative license* (Genette's version of a poetic license) that requires from the reader Coleridge's “willing suspension of disbelief”.

For Genette, diachrony can be *internal* or *external*. That is, diachrony as it appears in the narrative (the diegesis, the synthetic unit) or in the story (the series of events). The relationships between these two aspects of the chronological development may also denounce or even create the interactive repetition. In fact, the very idea of repetition is to establish an identity between two distinct moments.

In his analysis of frequency in Proust's *Recherche due Temp Perdue*, Genette identifies yet another sort of repetition that helps consolidate the rhythm of proustian narrative, which is the *alternation*. Genette argues that, by alternating between singulative and interactive units, Proust creates oscillations in the narrative that help mark its pace. The *transitions* between these moments may be either abrupt or interactive themselves, through the establishment of connections between the moments allowing one scene to blend organically into the next.

However, as Genette himself points out, "we can characterize the temporal stance of a narrative only by considering at the same time all the relationships it establishes between its own temporality and that of the story it tells" (p.155). Therefore, none of these aspects, alone, suffices for the study of the temporal relationships in a narrative. Genette also hints at another sort of temporality, the temporality "of the narrating itself" (p.157). He gets to the conclusion that, in the *Recherche*, the techniques used by Proust (temporal interpolations, distortions and condensations) are linked to an attempt (successful or not) to capture the inconsistencies of memory and that, through these inconsistencies, the narrative itself becomes an intricate game in which time is indeed lost and found again, but is ultimately *perverted* (p.160).

1.2.1.4. Mood

The narrative *mood* consists of a "regulation of narrative information" (p.162), and its two most known modalities are *distance* (related to the level of details and the straightforwardness of the information presented) and *perspective* (related to the form of the information presented, sometimes regulated to match a character's view).

Under *distance* Genette distinguishes the *narrative of events* and the *narrative of words*. The former (narrative of events) is divided by two main factors: the presence of the informer and the amount of information in the narrative. These factors are linked and appear as inversely proportional in the narratives – *mimesis* (showing) would be defined by the maximum amount of information with the minimal amount of the presence of the informer, and *diegesis* (telling) by the opposite relationship of these factors. The latter (narrative of words) concerns the *representation of speech* in the narrative, and can be divided in *reported* (direct, the most mimetic form) and *narratized* (indirect) speech. Narratized speech happens when the speech is treated as part of the narrative, an event in a succession of events narrated, and can be divided into three distinct forms: *narratized*⁹ or *narrated speech* (the most distant and usually more concise), *transposed speech in indirect style* (retelling what was said indirectly) and *transposed speech in direct style* (the most mimetic of them, the direct retelling, or repeating, of what was said). Again, Genette warns the reader that “the different forms we have just distinguished in theory will not be so clearly separated in the practice of texts” (p. 175).

The *perspective* refers to the *point of view* through which a story is told, a way of regulating the information presented in the narrative by “filtering” it through a character or a narrator’s view. For Genette, though the subject has been exhaustively studied, most authors tend to mix the mood and voice of the narrative, that is, present:

(...) a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* And the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (GENETTE, 1983, p. 186)

Instead of adhering to a specific classification of the types of narrator, and since this confusion has somewhat compromised the distinctions made up to this point, Genette sets on to clarify the distinction between the agents of the narrative by proposing a three-term typology that illustrates the possible relations between the narration and the focalization (where the narrator is either more knowledgeable than the characters, coincides with one or more characters or is less knowledgeable than they are). The first

⁹ It is a little confusing that the term for the speech type is the same for the subdivision, but it is what it is (GENETTE, 1983, p.171).

one, the *nonfocalized* narrative or narrative with *zero focalization*, corresponds to the classical narrative with the omniscient narrator. The second one is the narrative with *internal* focalization, which can be *fixed* (seen consistently through the impressions of a character), *variable* (where there are changes in the focal characters) or *multiple* (in which the same event may be shown several times according to several characters). The third type of focalization is the *external* one, which does not meddle into the feelings and thoughts of a character.

Finally, there is the possibility of *polymodality*, which is the case when more than one mode of focalization applies (or doesn't). This is the case when the focalization is not clear, or when the perspectives of the narrator and the hero coincide. It also happens when there are sudden and brief shifts of focalization in the narrative, and especially when the narrative presents more than one possibility of interpretation of a fact, of which the narrator is also unsure, where "the multiplicity of contradictory hypothesis suggest much more the insolubility of the problem, and at the least the incapacity of the narrator to resolve it" (p.204).

1.2.1.5. Voice

Voice concerns the problem of the *narrating instance*, which Genette defines as a shift "from analysis of statements to analysis of relations between these statements and their generating instance [enunciation]" (p.213). As with the other elements of a narrative, a narrating situation cannot be understood as an isolated factor, but as something to be taken into consideration together with the protagonists, the narrative's space and time, etc. Three elements of the *narrating instance* worry Genette: the *time of the narrating*, the *narrative level* and the *person*. That is, "relations between the narrator – plus, should the occasion arise, his or their narrate(s) – and the story he tells" (p.215).

Time of the narrating, defined as the "chief temporal determination of the narrating instance" (p.216), deals with the position of the narrator in relation to the story. There are four different times of narrating: *subsequent* (the narration of something in the past), *prior*

(narration of something in the future, a prediction – which can appear even in the present tense), *simultaneous* (narration contemporary with the action) and *interpolated* (between moments of the action – as happens in epistolary novels with several correspondents, the letter being both the medium of the narrative and a plot element).

The idea of *narrative levels* is based on the notion that “any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed” (p. 228). That is, there is another layer of narrative added whenever a story is told inside a story (that, perhaps, is also being told, and so on). The first narrative’s narrating instance is called *extradiegetic*, and the narratives inside it are diegetic or intradiegetic, for they belong in the diegetic universe. These narratives inside narratives are also deemed *metadiegetic*. Second (or more) level narratives are not necessarily oral – they can appear as works within the work.

Metadiegetic narratives can bear three different sorts of relationship with the first narrative level: the *direct causality* (where the second level narrative has an explanatory function to perform, in connection to the first level), the *purely thematic* relationship (not necessarily bearing a continuity between metadiegesis and diegesis, but bearing a relationship of contrast, example or resemblance) and the sort in which diegesis and metadiegesis bear *no explicit relationship* and the act of narrating itself fulfills its diegetic function (which can be of distraction).

Genette poses the idea of *person* rather awkwardly in relation to the narrator, since the person of the narrator can be in the narrative only in first person singular (except if using the royal ‘we’). The real question, he argues, is “whether or not the narrator can use the first person to designate *one of his characters*” (p. 244). That aside, there can be two different types of narrator: the *homodiegetic* (narrator present as a character) and the *heterodiegetic* (narrator absent from the story). And, since “absence is absolute but presence has degrees”¹⁰ (p.245), the *homodiegetic* narrator can be *autodiegetic* (the narrator as the hero of his own narrative). Therefore, one can simply identify the narrator as *homo* or *heterodiegetic*, while the narrative is divided in *intra* and *extradiegetic*, composing four different basic possible narrator stances.

¹⁰ I don’t want this comment to make the final cut, but I like to share nice things. I LOVED this sentence.

The narrator may perform five different functions: the *narrative function*, which is basically the one performed when narrating; the *directing function*, the one performed when calling attention to the narrative itself (metanarrative), the narrating situation or the narrator's addressing the problem of the narratee; the *function of communication*, when the narrator addresses the public. When the narrator turns inwards, in what Jakobson called the emotive function, Genette finds the *testimonial function*, where the narrator presents information from a certain source and the *ideological function*, where the narrator comments the action. As he points out, "none of the[se] categories is completely unadulterated and free of complicity, and at the same time none, however careful an author tries, can be completely avoided" (p.257).

The *narratee*, the receiver of the narrative, is not a passive figure in the process of reading. Narratee and narrator are necessarily situated at the same diegetic level. The part of the narratee is significant not only because no discourse is addressed to no one, but also through the fact that, *when presented intradiegetically, the effect is to keep the reader at a certain distance* (after all, the discourse is aimed at someone else), whereas *an extradiegetic narratee might as well be the reader*.

Genette closes his book by refusing to summarize the approaches taken in relation to his object (the *Recherche*) and avoiding a conclusion: for him, the sense of unfulfillment should be preserved, rather than force the impression of unity in the work. In a way, that is also his approach towards narrative theory: there are these possibilities, and they are mere theoretical certainties among the myriad of different (and sometimes contradictory) possibilities. His attitude towards the narrative is the attitude of someone who would rather not tame the wild horse, but rather let it run free and appreciate its beauty. And he finishes reminding the reader, in an act of ultimate rebellion against his own arguments, that the act of saying something is also the act of not saying everything else. And, by silencing his conclusion, perhaps Genette ends up saying too much.

1.2.2 Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan's *Narrative Fiction*

A preliminary note is required in order to examine thoroughly Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan's *Narrative Fiction*. And this is due to the nature of the work. As Shlomith herself warns in the introduction of the book, though she often comments and even proposes modifications to existing theories of narratives:

[Yet] this book does not offer an original theory. Indeed the tension between an integration of existing theories and a presentation of a personal view is one of the inevitable frustrations of any attempt at a synthesis. Similarly, it was necessary to extract the relevant points from each theory without presenting the theory as a whole or following all of its implications. (1983, p.5)

It is, therefore, reasonable to state that a sense of incompleteness comes from the reading of the work, since some of the theories that are presented are done so without comments of any sort, and at times irreconcilable views of the object matter are mentioned together without confrontation. The work is more a compilation of the works on narrative theory and the way they deal with the several characteristics and possibilities of narratives than it is a theory in itself. This is something one must accept in the reading of the work, knowing that the opinion of the author will not be present in many points where it would be precious, but that it is there at times (as, for instance in the chapter about characters, where Rimmon-Kennan proposes three steps for the conciliation of the ideas of characters and actants). It is as if the author only manifests her opinion when she feels she has a contribution to make to the subject, otherwise excuses herself from developing the notions presented or even from trying to solve inconsistencies she herself points out. Throughout *History*, there have been dumber ways of dealing with uncertainty than making your silence eloquent.

In the introduction of her book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Rimmon-Kenan defines her object of study as *the Poetics (systematic study of literature) of the narration of a succession of fictional events*. To that end (that is, the study) she employs Genette's notion of the different levels of narrative, *story*, *narrative* and *narration*, but rechristens them *story* (the events, in chronological order), *text* (the verbal representation of these events, usually not chronological – or logical, for that matter – and usually presented under focalization) and *narration* (the act of narrating these events, necessarily dealing with the problem of the fictional narrator – and of the fictional narratee). Her aim is to present both a general theory of narrative and a theory capable of dealing with each

narrative in particular. To that end, Rimmon-Kenan deals with a broad range of theories, presenting the points of interest in each one but not, as a result of the very broadness of the study, developing their implications.

The book is structured in these three concepts, different aspects of which are analyzed in different chapters. *Story* is taken into consideration both in regards to the structure of *events* (where some subjects, such as the possibility of the existence of a narrative grammar and the ideas of deep and surface structures, are discussed) and in regards to *characters* (the types of character, how the character is reconstructed from the text, what the existence of a character entails). The problem of *text* is divided in *time* (which is, similarly to Genette's view, divided in order, duration and frequency), *characterization* (how things are presented inside the text, which can be divided in direct and indirect presentation and reinforcement by analogy) and *focalization* (where she presents an illustrative example of the relation focalizer/narrator and then attempts to establish a typology, facets and verbal indicators that may characterize the focalization of a narrative). The *narration* is dealt with in terms of its *levels and voices* (the participants, the relations between narration and story, the problem of the narratee and an attempt of a typology of narrators), its *speech representation* (mimesis and diegesis, types of representation and the idea of the free indirect discourse) and the *text and its reading* (concerned with the dynamics of reading a text, such as the role of the reader and the paradoxes involved in the act of reading).

1.2.2.1. *Story*

The study of the temporal organization of *events* inside the story takes into consideration that the text, being the only thing available to the reader, should be the starting point of an investigation. Based on the ideas of translation and adaptation of stories to several media, Rimmon-Kenan playfully¹¹ argues the theoretical possibility of a

¹¹ That is, she does not openly disagree with the idea that a narrative is "in some subtle ways style, language and medium dependant" (p.9). She is just following other possibilities for her investigative purpose.

“narrativity”: a story structure, or grammar, that could be inferred from the recognition of the identity of the story between, say, a movie adaptation of a novel and the novel itself. That would suggest that, beyond the surface level of the narrative (the text, in the case of the novel, and the movie in projection in the case of the film), another structure remains that created that identity, a deeper narrative level that could be transferred to other mediums and languages and remain unaltered, despite the changes those changes entail. The idea of a narrative grammar thus arises, for “although story is transverbal, it is often claimed to be homologous (i.e. parallel in structure) to natural language and hence amenable to the type of analysis practised (sic) in linguistics” (p.10). If generative grammar brings out the idea of a deep and a surface linguistic structures, one can as well apply the idea of a deep and a surface narrative structures in a story. Rimmon-Kennan takes the examples of Greimas and Lévi-Strauss models of deep structures for analysis. Greimas’ implies the correlation of two pairs of opposite semes (‘seme’ being the minimal unity of sense), while Lévi-Strauss structures his ‘semiotic rectangle’ in contradictory and contrary semes. In practice, that means that, while Lévi-Strauss works with the correlation of two ideas that are preponderant within the myth (and their respective opposites), or, in mathematical terms, A:B::C:D, where A is opposite to B and C opposite to D, Greimas reduces this to one single idea, its opposite and the negation of both:

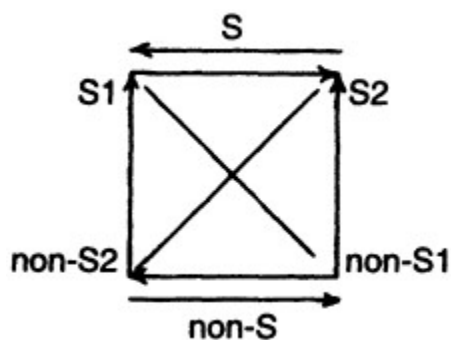


Figure 1 - Greimas' Semiotic Square (1970, *apud* RIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p.14)

The idea of the *surface structure of the narrative*, on its turn, can only be presented as paraphrase, since it is “an abstraction from the set of observable signifiers which is the text” (p.14). This presents some problems, since the data recovered from the process of paraphrase is not uniform and depends largely on the reader. However, one thing that should remain constant is the temporal organization:

Whether consisting of labels or of narrative propositions, a story-paraphrase arranges events according to a chronological principle. If the content-paraphrase

abstracted from a text is organized according to principles other than chronological then it is not a story-paraphrase and the text in question is not a narrative. (RIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p.16)

If events (chronologically organized) are the constituents of a story-paraphrase, one must assume that the constituent units of the story are also events (described as changes between estates of affairs inside the narrative). There are two different discernable sorts of event inside a story: *kernels*, which advance the actions by presenting alternatives, and *catalysts*, which expand, amplify, maintain or delay the action. *Events* can be combined to create *micro-sequences*, creating *macro-sequences* that, in turn, combine to create the *story*. Between those levels, the *story-lines* (sections that are structured as the whole story, but are restricted to specific individuals) can be taken for analytic purposes. The *main story-line* is the predominant story element of a text, while others can be considered *subsidiary story-lines*. The combination of events into stories can follow different principles, *time* (which is not necessarily chronological or linear) and *causality* being the predominant ones. When causality gets into play, the story element of a text can be distinguished as *plot* (concept Rimmon-Kennan borrows from Forster). That, however, is an awkward concept, for causality is hardly a precise notion and can, as Barthes proved, be misleading. Still on the topic of story, Rimmon-Kennan argues that, concerning the minimum requirement for a group of events to form a story, while “causality and closure (i.e. a sense of completion) may be the most interesting features of stories (...) temporal succession is sufficient as a *minimal* requirement for a group of events to form a story” (p.20). In fact, two events organized in chronological order would suffice to form a story – and since narratives can display any organization of time, one can infer that a narrative only takes two events in order to exist. Very minimalist indeed.

Shlomith then mentions two different descriptive models: Vladimir Propp’s and Claude Bremond’s. Propp’s model is based on *functions*, constant elements found repeatedly in narratives (Russian fairy tales, in this case). A function can be defined as an act of a character, and should be viewed in regard to its significance to the course of the action in the story. The number of possible functions is limited (Propp identifies 31 functions) and they appear generally in the same sequence. Propp’s conclusion is that all the studied narratives have the same structure. Propp’s findings seem a little deterministic (perhaps due to the limited corpus chosen for the research) for appliance in a general

theory of narrative, though, leading Rimmon-Kennan to Bremont's theory, which tries to account for possible bifurcations inside the story structure, building a logically oriented model, instead of a temporally oriented one. Bremont's take on surface structure is, like Propp's, based on functions as units. Every three functions form a sequence in which there are three logical estates: possibility, process and outcome. Instead of each function leading to the next (which is what happens in Propp), each function opens two possibilities, allowing for the comparison between similar (but not equal) story patterns. Elementary sequences combine into more complex ones through three different processes: *enchainment* (where the outcome of one event is the potential stage – beginning – of the next one), *embedding* (where one sequence provides information about another) and *joining* (when the same sequence has double – or triple – narrative relevance, and should be analyzed in relation to more than one character). The macro-sequences are all either of improvement (moves toward equilibrium) or of deterioration (moves towards disequilibrium). The problem with these models of surface and deep structures, according to Rimmon-Kennan, is that there is no model that accounts for the transformation between levels, which leads to the conclusion that no clear method to go from concrete text to abstract narrative structures, in fact, exists.

The study of characters in the story level is also troublesome: since there is no actual concrete existence to them, characters are largely regarded by structuralists as mere agents of action or transformations inside narratives, functions that can be also undertaken by objects or changes (in the case of Greimas' theory). The idea of a character inside a narrative is related to the concepts of *mimesis* and *diegesis*: if one thinks of the narrative in its mimetic qualities, then the characters should as well have these qualities, and should be thought of as people, for the sake of the studies. If one considers the narrative as a diegesis, an universe closed in itself, the text being its only vehicle, then the characters are no more than instruments to forward the plot. Vladimir Propp classifies characters in seven different possible roles: *villain*, *donor*, *helper*, *sought-for-person* (or the *sought-for-person's father*), *dispatcher*, *hero* and *false hero*. Greimas, similarly, divides characters between *acteurs* (which have specific qualities in different narratives) and the general *actants* (categories of characters present in all narratives). These actants, different from the *acteurs*, that are narrative-specific, are classified in six different qualities (therefore, one less than in Propp's theory): *sender*, *receiver*, *helper*, *opponent*, and *subject* and *object*. Barthes had a

similar take on characters, considering them as subordinated to the action of the narrative, while Ferrara considered them as the structuring point of the narrative itself.

Rimmon-Kennan defends a reconciliation between these opposite views, and, to that end, makes three propositions: change the dynamic of subordination between characters and action by considering them as interdependent, take the idea of subordination as related to the types of narratives, instead of as absolute hierarchies (since in some narratives characters are preponderant, while in others the action is the main point) and consider the relativity of the kind of reading being done (that is, a reader can focus either the action or the characters, depending on the object or the view).

If a character can be considered as such (which was disputable until then), there must be a way in which the particularities of a character can be apprehended by the reader. Barthes (1974) considers that this apprehension is a 'nomination' process, where the idea of the character is built by the reader throughout the act of reading. Chatman (1978) sees this process as the attribution of *traits* (that is, in the case of characters, their most distinct qualities and characteristics). Garvey (1978) believes this construction of character is determined by the recognition of an *attributive proposition* composed by the character's *name*, a *predicate* and a *modalizer*, indicator of the intensity or quality of the predicate. Rimmon-Kennan defends the idea that a character can be abstracted from the text "as a tree-like hierarchical structure in which elements are assembled in categories of increasing integrative power" (p. 39). A character trait (explicit or implicit in the text) can be understood in more than one way, depending on the context and the reading performed, and can change in intensity and significance in the process of this reading – it can also be reinforced or undermined by the text on different occasions. The character is, then, read as the union of these traits under a *proper name*, as in the corporification under a name of the read qualities in the read intensities. The elements of the text related to characters are combined in the schemata into unifying categories through the processes of *repetition*, *similarity*, *contrast* and *implication*.

Noting the difference of depth in character abstractions, Rimmon-Kennan cites the theory of Forster (1927), who classified characters as *flat* and *round*. Flat characters can be described in a single sentence, for they are uncomplicated, non-developing. Round characters are more complex, and change throughout the stories. Rimmon-Kennan

recognizes the importance of Forster's definitions (for considering the subject), but does not completely subscribe to them, due to finding them reductive and limited when dealing with the complexities of characters. Ewen (1971 and 1980) solves this problem by classifying characters through three different axes: *complexity*, *development*, and *penetration into inner life*. Along the axis of *complexity* Ewen locates characters constructed based on a single trait or on one dominant trait with a few secondary ones, such as *allegorical figures*, *caricatures*, and *types*. Opposed to them are complex characters such as Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. The axis of *development* can also encompass allegorical figures, caricatures and types, together with *portraits*, as classes of characters that are static, do not present development. Opposed to this axis are characters that present development, such as Joyce's Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (the whole tradition of bildungsroman is based on the development of the main characters). The *axis of penetration into inner life* is dedicated to how much of the character's feelings and impressions are shown in the narrative. Rimmon-Kennan finishes the chapter by pointing out that the presence of concepts so diverse as actants and characters in the same chapter does not constitute an inconsistency, but – on the contrary – points out to the necessity of a reconciliation between such different views.

Time is defined as the "relations of chronology between story and text" (p.46). The idea of time in relation to a narrative is a useful notion for narratological purposes, even if it applies to narratives only in the loosest of senses (that is, even if only the time of the reading would exist as such, notions of spatiality and linearity can be used to provide a better understanding of the organization of time and text in the narrative). As Rimmon-Kennan specifies herself:

To my knowledge, the most exhaustive discussion of the discrepancies between story-time and text-time is Genette's (1972, pp.77-182), and the following account will rely heavily on his, with some reservations, modifications and examples. (RIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p.47-48)

The main point of her discussion of time, therefore, is the review of Genette's take on narrative, composed of *order*, *duration* and *frequency*.

Order encompasses the relations between the order of events in the story and the chronology of these events, including Genette's concepts of *prolepsis* and *analepsis* – the

narration of an event in the past and future of the narrative, respectively –, terms which can be labeled *homodiegetic* or *heterodiegetic*.

Duration can only be measured by finding a correspondence between the story and the text (that is, between time in the story/space in the text), in order to determine a narrative's pace. With that in mind, four different diversions from the pace can be identified: the extremes *ellipsis* (omission) and the *narrative pause*, and the intermediary processes *summary* and *scene* (where summary is the acceleration of events and scene the deceleration).

Frequency deals with the relation between the number of time an event happens in the story and the number of time it is narrated. Events can be present in a narrative in three different manners: *singulative* (narrating once what happens once), *repetitive* (narrating *n* times what happens once) and *iterative* (narrating once what happens *n* times).

1.2.2.2 Text

In the chapter dedicated to *characterization* the character is understood as a network of traits that can be apprehended by the reader through their textual indicators. These appear in the text in two different forms: the *direct definition* (comes from the most authoritative voice in the text and is akin to characterization and conceptualization) and the *indirect presentation* (the character traits are suggested to the reader through several ways). The indirect presentation of a character trait can be suggested through the character's *actions* (which can be habitual – case in which they denote the unchanging aspect of a character – or happen one time in the story – denoting the dynamic aspects of a character, usually appearing in turning points of the story). The actions can also be symbolic. Another way of indirect presentation of a character's trait is through *speech*, indicated through its *content* or *form*: “the form or style of speech is a common means of characterization in texts where the character's language is individuated and distinguished from the narrator's” (p.66). *External appearance* can also be an indicator of personality (though this has been scientifically disproven in real life, in fiction this tendency remains strong), case in which

features beyond the character's control (such as height) should be distinguished from optional ones (clothes and hygiene, for instance). A character's appearance can be presented directly or indirectly. The *environment* is another possibility, for "a char's surrounding (...) as well as human environment (...) are also often used as trait-connoting metonymes" (p.68).

That aside, character traits can also be reinforced through analogies in the text (provided they have been presented to the reader before). Analyses differ from presentation by being purely textual links and not relying predominantly in contiguity. There are three main types of reinforcement in narratives: *analogous names* in characters (which can reinforce visual, acoustic, articulatory or morphological characteristics by their form, or represent literary or mythological allusions – and reinforce traits both through similarity and opposition), *analogous landscapes* (landscapes are not controllable, and therefore their relation to the characters ceases to be casual, though it can continue being understood in terms of analogies as symbolic) and *analogy between characters* (for the presentation of different characters in a similar situation can be used to mark the likeness or contrast of character's traits). Of course, both presentation and reinforcement need not to present themselves isolately, they can be cumulative and non-exclusive.

Focalization is also understood in Genette's terms (Rimmon-Kennan disagrees on the terminology, understanding that Genette's term was a poor choice in its objective of avoiding visual implications, but uses the term nonetheless, for a different reason – it prevents the confusion between perspective and narration). So, the adoption of the term stresses the difference between the two questions "who sees" and "who speaks", and like Genette takes the opportunity to mark the difference between a first-person narrator and an internal focalizer. However, after Bal (1977), Rimmon-Kennan notes the difference between focalizer and focalized. Focalization presents different *types*, *facets* and *verbal indicators*. *Types of focalization* are determined through two criteria: *position in relation to the story* (which can be *internal* or *external*) and *degree of persistence* (if a narrative is focalized mainly through one character or if there is more than one focalization consistently presented). *Facets of focalization* can be *perceptual*, *psychological* or *ideological*. *Perceptual* involves (quite obviously, one might add) the perceptions and are oriented mainly through *time* and *space*. In both orientations the external focalizer has the privilege of the panoramic and the simultaneous view, can see in the future and in the past

whereas an internal focalizer is limited to the moment and place of the developments of the story. The *psychological* aspects of focalization also dwell in this distinction between internal and external and are divided in *cognitive* (internal focalization is limited to the knowledge, conjectures, beliefs, memories, in short, the cognitive capacities of a character, while external focalization maintains the advantage of omniscience), *emotive* (the external focalizer is sometimes presented as neutral, while the internal focalizer cannot be devoid from the idea of personal views, involvement and emotions) and *ideological* (the narrator-focalizer is the authoritative voice of the text, whereas a character's focalizer views can be argued as untrustworthy). All these components can concur and clash in several ways inside a text. Though focalization is, *a priori*, nonverbal, it is still given through language and, as such, presents *verbal indicators*. The language of a text is the narrator's, but shifts in focalization can make the text quite colorful in transposing the narrative to the view (and therefore perceptions, psychology and ideology) of a separate agent. Features such as naming (what the characters call each other), the distinction between the language of the narrator and of the focalizer, the possibilities of ambiguous readings of a given sentence (in regards to 'who speaks'), are matters of interest that have not been fully understood or studied.

1.2.2.3. Narration

Rimmon-Kennan starts addressing the problem of narration (which she develops in two major segments, *levels and voices* and *speech representation*) by quoting Chatman's (1978) model of the voices involved in a narrative:

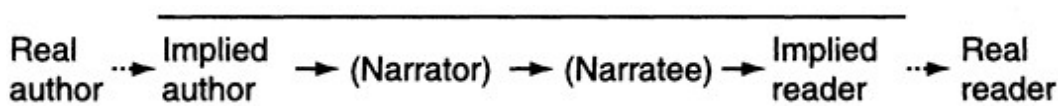


Figure 2- Chatman's model, *apud* Rimmon-Kennan

In Chatman's understanding, both extremes of the diagram (real author and real reader) pertain only to real life, where the middle ones (narrator and narratee) are not necessarily existent: to the author, there are situations, such as transcription of dialogue,

when a text has no narrator or narratee (and that is the reason for them being in parenthesis), while the implied reader and the implied author have no voice or direct means of communication, and can only be understood as an idea, a “voice” that can be felt in the reading of a text and that differs from the narrator, mainly in terms of reliability. Rimmon-Kennan refutes the idea of a text without a narrator or narratee, and (as Chatman appears to be uncertain about this structure herself) proposes that the implied author and reader be considered a set of implicit norms inside a narrative, not a persona. To Rimmon-Kennan, the narrator is always present in a text, being “the agent which at the very least narrates or engages in some activity serving the needs of narration” (p.91), while the narratee is “the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed by the narrator” (p.92). That is, neither needs to be explicitly present in a narrative (as is Chatman’s view).

There are several possible relations between narrator and story. *Temporal relations* can be explicated (in Genette’s terms) in four different ways: the narration of something that happened in the past (analepsis), the narration of something that will happen (prolepsis) the narration of what is happening at the time and the intercalated narration, the one that is mixed. Features like the duration of the narration or the place in which it occurs are not usually of significance, except for unusual situations, such as narratives inside narratives. The idea of *narrative levels* considers the problem of subordination inside a narrative (due to the possibility of a narrative inside a narrative – which is called *hypodiegetic* in relation to the one in the upper level). Genette calls *extradiegetic* the first level of a narrative, and *diegetic* the narrative accessible to the reader (Genette’s *diegesis* is similar to Rimmon-Kennan’s *story*). Hypodiegetic narratives can serve several functions: they can be *actional* (advances the action), *explicative* or *thematic* (which refers to the diegetic level through analogy – when it is a mirror of the diegetic level it is called *mise en abyme*). Sometimes the transition between narrative levels is not marked. Establishing the *type* of narrator is important to the reader’s understanding of the story. Important for that purpose are the narrator’s *level* (if the narrator is *extradiegetic* or *intradiegetic* – that is, if the narrator is out of the story or in it), the narrator’s *participation in the story* (*homodiegetic* if the narrator is a character or *heterodiegetic* if not – *autodiegetic* if the narration is an autobiography), the *degree of the narrator’s perceptibility of the role* (ranges from a maximum of *covertness* – that is, the narrator does not alert the reader to its presence – to a maximum of *overtness* – that is, the narrator intervenes in every part of the

narrative). Signs of *overtness* are the narrator's interventions in the narrative that deviate from the story in order to present opinions or information in an edited way. In sum, anything that denotes the narrator's presence: descriptions, identification of characters, temporal summaries, definitions of characters, reports of what characters did not think or say, commentaries (such as judgments, interpretations, generalizations). The reliability of the narrator is also important, the *extradiegetic* narrator being the most reliable (as the most authoritative voices in the texts) and *intradiegetic* tending towards being presented as unreliable, especially when they present limited knowledge in the diegetic universe, personal involvement or problematic moral values (that is, presented as problematic due to a difference of values between the implied author and the narrator).

Logically, *narratees* should be classified in the same way the narrators are, in *extra* and *intradiegetic* (above or in the narrative), *homo* or *heterodiegetic* (character or not), *overt* or *covert*, *reliable* or *unreliable* – a narratee is unreliable when “the values of the implied reader evoked by the implied author are at odds with those of the narratee evoked by the narrator” (*apud* Chatman, p.107). That is, again the opposition between the implied author's values and the reader character of the narrative (narratee).

Under *speech representation* (the second branch of problems related to narration according to the author), Rimmon-Kennan makes a brief historical account of the words *mimesis* and *diegesis*. Plato considered *mimesis* the direct and *diegesis* the indirect rendering of speech, in opposition to Aristotle, who considered it to be an imitation of an action – encompassing *diegesis* as one of its types. This duality between the ideas of direct and indirect representation of reality was inherited by the later theories under several denominations (such as ‘telling’ and ‘showing’, or ‘summary’ and ‘scene’). However, to Rimmon-Kennan, their difference is irrelevant and should be considered only in relation to the functionality in the given work. The problematic idea of *mimesis* (the possibility of representation of action through language) is briefly discussed. Rimmon-Kennan understands *mimesis* as an illusion conveyed by some narrative texts through the amount of information provided and the degree of presence of the narrator (or lack of), since even in the direct representation of speech “there is a narrator who ‘quotes’ the character's speech, thus reducing the directness of ‘showing’” (p.111).

Rimmon-Kennan presents McHale's (1938) typology of speech presentation: *diegetic summary* (the report of a speech situation with no insight on what or how was uttered), *summary, less 'purely' diegetic* (there is some degree of representation, such as topics of conversation), *indirect content paraphrase* – or *indirect discourse* (paraphrase totally controlled by the narrator), *indirect discourse, mimetic to some degree* (creates the illusion of preserving/reproducing some aspects of the utterance), *free indirect discourse* – considered “grammatically and mimetically intermediate between indirect and direct discourse” (p.113), *direct discourse* (direct quotation of discourse, though usually with some degree of presence of the narrator – in naming the voices, for instance), and *free direct discourse* – such as free internal monologue, this discourse is “shorn of its conventional orthographic cues” (p. 113).

Free indirect discourse (FID) receives more attention, due to the profusion of studies regarding it, its particularities (such as the possibility of a speech with two voices, or even of separate narrative frames in it) and its significance in modern fiction. It is considered in its *linguistic features* (provides the illusion of combining direct and indirect discourse by reporting events and thoughts directly with quotation marks, but presents differences that separate the narrated from the narrator in verb tenses, personal and possessive pronouns and deitics – demonstrative expressions), its *functions* (or for what purposes they are used inside a narration, such as identification and separation of voices inside a narrative, allowing the use of different languages, beliefs and attitudes inside a narrative; they help the plurality and polyvocality, and may also, help to enlighten the reader in relation to the attitude of the implied author towards a character, or create a distance between the character and the reader) and its *status within poetics* (understood as a reflection of the duality between mimesis and diegesis – though only significant within mimesis – the FID is also a characteristic use in literary narratives, and, as such, a marker of ‘literariness’ and enabler of polyphony, though not exclusively literary).

Finally, Rimmon-Kennan examines the role of the reader (be it the Ideal, Actual, Informed or Implied reader) in the reading of a text, which is a two-way relationship (meaning the text only comes to life when being read, but it also changes the reader's expectations and understanding as it is read). Considered a construct encoded in the text, much like the idea of character, the reader already starts with a set of expectations and previous experience of a text, changing these preconceptions and understanding as

progressing through the necessarily linear process of reading. In order to ensure the reading of a text, narrative techniques such as displacements, analepsis and prolepsis, information gaps or delays and misleading sections of the action are used to play with the expectations of the reader, who tries to integrate the text's elements during the process. Therefore, the process is seen as utterly dynamic, the building of a system of hypothesis according to preconceived notions based on elements such as genre, the writer's style and literariness, hypotheses that are constantly changing as the reading proceeds.

In the end of the book, Rimmon-Kennan confesses uncertainty as to whether her book is an introduction or an obituary to the poetics of narrative fiction, due to the rise of deconstruction (which no longer worries about the differences that make a text narrative and fictional, but rather about the common elements between several sorts and genres) as a more fashionable theory of literary analysis, but trusts that, in order to respond to the challenge brought by the new perspective, the poetics of narrative fiction will advance its understanding of the matter by proving the importance of literary structures and their decoding in the organization of experience.

1.2.3. Mieke Bal's Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative

Mieke Bal starts her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997 – 2nd edition, originally published in 1985) with a series of definitions and concepts that will be the basis of the argument developed throughout the book:

A narrative text is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. *A story* is the content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and 'colouring' of a fabula; the fabula is presented in a certain manner. *A fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. These three definitions together constitute the theory this book elaborates. (BAL, 1997, p.05)

Events, in their turn, are transitions of estates of affairs, and *actors* the agents that perform actions – not necessarily human. Actions take *time*, and must forcefully happen in some place, or *location*. Therefore, “events, actors, time, and location together constitute the material of a fabula” (p.07). These are the constitutive *elements* of the fabula.

The *story* is the presentation of the fabula in a determinate way designed to attain a specific effect. This is done through several processes. Bal distinguishes six of them: the fact that the sequence of events may differ from the chronological development; the direct relationship between the amount of time events take in the fabula and in the story; the individualization of actors through the dispelling of traits, rendering them into *characters*; similarly, the locations of events are given specific characteristics, which turns them into *places*; the possibilities of symbolic, allusive or traditional relations, among others, is present; the events are presented through a certain perspective, point of view, or *focalization*.

The *text* is the medium conveying the signs that form the narrative¹². It is mediated by the figure of the narrator, and its action is not limited to narrative, but can also be argumentative or descriptive. Whenever a narrative presents direct speech, the narrator is transferring its function to one of the actors. In order to make a distinction between the three aspects of a narrative, Bal gives different names to the anthropomorphic figures: *actors* pertain to the *events*, *characters* to the *fabula*, and *voices* to the *text*.

A narrative, therefore, has three characteristics: it conveys a sequence of events, it has two types of voices in it (actants and narrator) and it presents three different layers – story, fabula and text. And such concepts, developed into chapters, form the structure of Bal’s book.

1.2.3.1. Narrative Text

¹² It is not, as such, necessarily verbal – a text can be anything that narrates a sequence of events.

If the narrative text is the text “in which a narrative agent tells a story” (p.16), the first question to present itself concerns the identity of this narrative agent. This agent is not the author, nor is the ‘implied author’, but the one who utters the linguistic signs of the text. Traditionally, the figure of the *narrator* has been mixed with the one of the *focalizer*, but the latter is a component that acts in the fabula rather than in the text, ‘colouring’ it with the perceptions of a specific agent. The narrator itself is not personified, but a voice. As such, it can be either external or internal (depending of whether it is or not inserted in the narrative), but not a ‘third person’ narrator. The narrator is always the first person – even if it narrates things that happen to someone else.

Narrating an event presupposes a narrating agent, a point of view about the event narrated and the event itself. Other than that, the presence of the narrator can be understood in any of four situations: the narrator can be a character or not, the narrator can be present in the narrative (internal) or not (external). Not every utterance of the narrator needs to be a narrative act: a narrator can argue a point or describe something, as seen above, without forfeiting its position. The argumentative parts of a narrative can provide the reader with insight into a text’s ideology, but are hardly the only ones in which opinions are possibly expressed: the choice of words such as adjectives and the use of irony can similarly be used to that purpose. Therefore, a reader must understand the relationships between these textual forms in order to understand the ideological stance of a text.

Descriptions communicate a view of the object, and are as such understood by Bal as a “privileged site of focalization” (p. 36), and may be mixed with the narration. Bal works with the premise that descriptions interrupt the fabula and their use characterizes the rhetorical strategies of the narrator. If a fabula can be interrupted, and frequently is, then the reader must have *motivation* to continue reading the text – Bal distinguishes three different forms of motivation, which is a function of focalization that helps the reader’s immersion in the narrative universe: motivation brought on by *speaking*, *looking* or *acting*. Of the three, looking is the most effective – the description of what is seen. If the character describes what is seen, however, there is a shift in motivation – for every speaking demands a listener. The third form of motivation is when the description is fully narrative. That can happen at the levels of text, fabula and story.

Motivation occurs at the level of text when the character itself describes an object, as a CN; at the level of story when the glance or vision of the character supplies the motivation; and at the level of fabula when the actor carries out an action with an object. (BAL, 1997, p.39)

Motivation, in a text, is making the relationships between the text's elements explicit – these relationships are arbitrary and, since they are not self-evident, need to be pointed out. Bal elaborates a *rhetoric of descriptions*, consisting of a theme that is segmented in sub-themes (the theme's components), accompanied or not by predicates that may themselves be qualifying (indicating a characteristic of the theme) or functional (indicate a function, action, or possible use), and metaphors and comparisons can occur at any level – a metaphor can accompany or even replace the theme. There are six possible types of descriptions: the *referential*, *encyclopedical* (its objective is to convey knowledge, in principle without figures of speech); the *referential-rhetorical* (its objective is both to convey knowledge and to persuade); the *metaphoric metonymy* (its objective is to build a comparison through contiguity); the *systematized metaphor* (the elements of the comparison and of the compared object are systematically related); the *metonymic metaphor* (a large metaphor – elements contiguously related) and the *series of metaphors* (a metaphor expanded without referring continually to the compared element).

The possible presence of multiple voices in a narrative leads to the existence of different narrative levels. Bal names CN2 (character narrator of the second level) a character quoted by the narrator of the first level (be it an external narrator or a CN1). Changes in narrative levels occur when other speakers enter the scene. A character's voice may appear directly or indirectly, the narrator may make its presence explicit or not. When the utterance at the second level is not perceptible (i.e. is in the mind of a character quoted by the narrator), it is less trustworthy and likely to be taken as false: the thoughts and views of the narrator are the prevalent ones, not the characters. There are intermediate forms of speech that stand between the character and the narrator – *free indirect speech* and *indirect speech*. The difference between the two is that of involvement between speaker and hearer: Bal distinguishes the language used to this contact (personal) and language about others (which is impersonal). Signs of emotion in a text are also signs of self-reference – when in

an utterance the feelings of the speaker are expressed, the utterance is about the speaker (p.46-47). The textual differences between these narrative situations are¹³:

	Personal (Free Indirect Speech)	Impersonal (Indirect Speech)
Personal Pronouns	I/You	He/She
Grammatical Person	First and second person	Third person
Tense	Not all past tenses possible	All past tenses
Deixis: indicative pronouns, adverbs of place, adverbs of time	Presence of the utterer in the scene: this, these, here, there, today, tomorrow	Absence of utterer in the scene: that, those, that place, that day, the day after
Emotive words and aspects	Present	Absent
Conative words and aspects: address, command, question	Present	Absent
Modal verbs and adverbs indicating uncertainty in the speaker	Present	Absent

Table 1 - Personal and Impersonal (*apud* BAL, 1997, p.47-48)

Though the voices are sometimes problematic to tell apart, three main characteristics distinguish these forms: indirect discourse is narrated at a higher level than the one where the words were uttered (distinguishes indirect discourse from direct discourse); the narrator's text indicates explicitly the voices of the characters (distinguishes indirect discourse from free indirect discourse); the words of the actor are rendered precisely (distinguishes free indirect discourse from the narrator's text).

There are several possible relations between primary and embedded texts, that is, texts presented inside the fabula (which may or not be narratives as well). A complete fabula inside the primary fabula, for instance, may compete with the higher narrative level or bear some sort of relationship with it – either it explains the primary story or resembles it. When the embedded narrative presents not only an explanation, but a resemblance of the primary one, it becomes part of the primary narrative's poetics (practically a sign of the primary narrative inside the fabula), and its understanding becomes fundamental to the interpretation. This phenomenon is comparable to *mise en abyme*, a term used in heraldry to designate an image with a copy of itself inside it (which also shows another copy, and so – theoretically – *ad infinitum*). This relation of the embedded text as a sign of the primary one may function as an indication to the reader, where the similarity may be veiled or not, guiding the interpretation or signaling a hidden or explicit pattern. The actors may as well interpret these embedded texts. Mostly, embedded texts are non-narrative, ranging from

¹³ Here quoted without the references to other texts in the book.

descriptions to dialogue (its most common use). The narrator's interventions explicit the relationship between the narrative levels, though they may also distance the reader from the immersion in the diegetic universe.

When the embedded text is not another narrative or discussed in detail, the relationship to the primary one tends to be determined by explicit commentary (on the embedded text) or the relationship between the texts (primary and embedded). This happens when the contents of the embedded text link with the contents of the primary one – but the embedded text may also contradict or contravene the primary one, and that changes their relationship. What is important to bear in mind is that the embedded text carries the possibility of radically changing the meaning of the primary one. It may, for instance, make references to other texts, which have their own meanings and interpretations and may themselves carry some sort of relationship with the primary narrative. That is to say that the problem is a complex one, especially if one is to consider intertextuality in Bakhtinian terms, where every text is a patchwork of other texts (and not necessarily verbal ones).

In order to exemplify the reading of a text with different levels, Bal presents a painting by Ken Aptekar, entitled *I'm Six Years Old and Hiding Behind my Hands*, where the superposition of a copy of François Boucher's *Allegory Of Painting* and the narrative of a familiar scene, seen through a child's perspective and closely related to the painting, help create a narrative with several levels: that of the painting, through the intertextuality, that of the narrative, that of the narration, with a mature artist. The work is divided into sixteen screens and slightly out of frame – meaning the top and left are omitted and the wall beyond Boucher's painting is shown on the right and bottom of the copy. The symbolic use of shadows and the color blue, plus the trajectory of the artist, which contradicts his family's wishes, are also implied in the work.

1.2.3.2. *Story*

According to Bal, “if one regards the text primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering” (p.78). *Story* is, then, the treatment of the fabula in order to manipulate the reading of the text. These means of manipulation include the order of the events, which may or may not correspond to the chronological developments, the point of view through which the story is told, and so on.

Sequential ordering concerns the relations between the fabula (which is chronological by definition) and the story. In order to understand the sequence of a story the reader must look for data inside the story, like the tenses of the verbs, what would be a logical development, what is implied. Though it is not always possible to understand the chronological sequence of a story, the failure to do so also provides valuable data in understanding the story. Since the text is linear by nature (the process of reading is linear), the reading involves a *double linearity* (the reading and the story), which is vulnerable to subversion. According to Bal:

In order not to lose the thread it is necessary to keep an eye on the sequential ordering, and the very effort forces one to reflect also on other elements and aspects. Playing with sequential ordering is not only a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides. (BAL, 1997, p.82)

Differences between the temporality of story and fabula are called *chronological deviations* or *anachronies*, and tend to be more drastic the more complex a fabula is. Anachronies can be used to create specific literary effects, and have their own characteristics, three of which are discussed: *direction*, *distance* and *span*¹⁴. *Direction* indicates the portion of the text that deviates from the chronology in relation to the present

¹⁴ In the original, *range*. Bal used this term in this part of the book but kept referring to the feature as span. This was corrected in the third edition of the book, published in 2009. The revised version is not the one used in this work due mainly to two considerations: first, due to being a somewhat recent edition it is also a little harder to find, for the purpose of conference; second, the third edition was only available during this research as an ebook – and that requires additional knowledge of settings and locations to make the references properly – things that are yet to be taken into consideration by ABNT and APA, and not completely mastered by the researcher. This is not to say that feature won’t be used in this work, but rather that it will be avoided, whenever a reasonable alternative presents itself.

moment: a *retroversion* is a deviation that takes place in the past (*flashback*), an *anticipation* a deviation that takes place in the future of the main narrative (*flash-forward*). Four solvable problems may trouble this view of anachronies: first, they can be *subjective* (that is, thought of by a character inside the fabula or presented through stream of consciousness). Second, direct discourse inside a fabula telling about a moment in the past or future presents a similar problem: the moment is not actually in the past or future, but the time of enunciation. Third, due to this sort of inconsistency (or to other problems, such as excessive complexity of the fabula), it is not always possible to determine the primary story-time. Fourth, sometimes embedded anachronies relate in such a complex way that it is very difficult to tell them apart. These problems are solvable, with enough care and study of the text. There is another problem with anachronies, however, that has no possible solution: the ambiguity of sentences that may render the placement impossible – the narrated event can happen in either the primary narrative time or in other tempi. That is called *chronological homonymy*.

Distance deals with the interval of time separating the past or future and the present, the first narrative. Both retroversion and anticipation can be set outside the time span of the fabula (in which case they are considered *external*) or inside it, case in which they are *internal*. If the anachrony starts (or ends) outside the span of the fabula but ends (or starts) within it, it is *mixed*. External retroversions can function as a source of information about what came before the primary narrative, acting as an explanation about it. Internal retroversions can overlap with the primary narrative and even compete with it – though not when the information communicated in them is new, case in which they are a sidetrack of the fabula. They are often used to compensate for a gap in the story. When the information presented in them is not new then they are a repetition, and function as an emphasis to the event.

The *span* is the stretch of time an anachrony covers. The anachrony (be it retroversion or anticipation) can be *complete* or *incomplete*. It is complete when it stretches to the point of the primary narrative. The span of an anachrony can be harder to measure than the distance, and it is not always relevant to try to do so. Punctual retroversions can be used to strengthen the impression of causality in the narrative, while anticipations (which occur much less frequently than retroversions) can be used to enhance the idea of fatalism, or predestination. When that happens, there is a shift in the reader's need for closure:

instead of wanting to know what happens next, the reader wants to know *how* that which was shown comes to pass. Internal anticipations usually complement a future *ellipsis* or *paralipsis*. The *interactive anticipation* (an event presented as the first in a series) is also common. Some anticipations are explicit in the text (*announcements*), while others are only hinted at (*hints*). When the direction, distance and span of a deviation in the chronology cannot be determined, the deviation is deemed an *achrony*.

Rhythm, for Bal, is a troublesome notion, but a fair sense of the rhythm of a text can be achieved by an estimate of the speed of the presentation of events (the ‘norm’ for the text regarding the space in which events are described and the time of such events). This sort of study can lead to worthless line-counting, but may also be relevant in some cases. Even if the rhythm of a text is regular, there will be alternations between extensive presentations and summaries. Bal distinguishes several different sorts of narrative time, always thought through the relation story/fabula. The *ellipsis* is an “omission in the story of a section of the fabula” (p.102). Ellipses are sometimes difficult to notice due to absence being their main characteristic, but sometimes are explicitly indicated in texts. The difference between ellipsis and a minimal summary, a mere mention of the time passed, is blurred. *Summary* happens when an event that takes a certain time in the story takes considerably less space than its due in the fabula (given the narrative’s ‘normal’ rhythm). The summary is frequently used for presenting background information and for connecting scenes. A *scene* would be the hypothetical case when the time of the fabula and the time of the story coincide. A dialogue is an example of pretense *isochrony*. The *slow-down* takes more time in the fabula than its due (the opposite of summary, then). Slow-downs can be used to intensify narrative suspense or emotions, working as a magnifying glass. Finally, the *pause* happens when an element that takes no time in the story is presented in detail in the fabula.

Frequency concerns the use of repetition in a narrative. Like Genette, Bal points to the difference between the several sorts of repetition possible in the story¹⁵, concerning the repetition of events in the story or of the narration of the events in the fabula. That leads to five different types of frequency: *singular* (one event and one presentation), *plurisingular*

¹⁵ Bal elaborates over Genette’s view, turning his view of possibilities of frequency as singulative, repetitive and interactive into five categories (adding the possibility of multiple occurrences of the singulative and a discrepancy between the number of events and their presentations).

(that is, more than one singular; various events, various presentations), *varisingular* (various events; various presentations, but different numbers of presentations and events), *repetitive* (one event, various presentations) and *interactive* (various events, one presentation).

Characters are the anthropomorphic figures in a text. As Bal puts it, “a character is the effect that occurs when an actor is endowed with distinctive human characteristics” (p.115). That is to say, aside from performing the role of an actor, the conductor of the actions, other human traits are given to the character, explicitly or implied, in the narrative. Due to the fact that they resemble people, characters are frequently mistaken by real people, instead of mere constructs, and that, according to Bal, leads to mistakes, such as trying to understand a character’s behavior through psychology. That psychological attempt tends to end in a portrait of the character that has more bearing in the reader than in the character itself. Distinctions of characters as *flat* and *round* have been attempted, based on psychological criteria (flat characters are stable, undeveloping and frequently stereotypical, while round characters are complex, developing and remain capable of surprising the reader), but even if this sort of distinction could be developed into a coherent theory, the point is that it would be limited to a limited corpus, such as the psychological narrative, whereas other genres, such as fairy tales, detective and fantastic fiction, and post-modern novels, would not be favorable to these concepts. A way to understand the formation of characters inside a narrative would be to understand the “kinds of information the readers have at their disposal in order to construct an image of a character” (p.118), together with the information readers actually use in building that image and consideration for the extra-textual relations (with the real world).

Characters are *predictable* to a certain degree, based on what a reader expects from their gender, age, social position, education level, surroundings, and so on. They can also be related to History or myths (and, as such, can become symbolic). Every piece of information on a character helps to make the character predictable. Descriptions (portraits) are relevant in this way. The genre of the work the character is part of also plays a part in this predictability, for it may work with specific rules, applying to it a specific role (a detective must solve the case). That is not to say characters cannot contradict these expectations, or that predictability is opposed to suspense (in fact it can be a helpful partner of suspense). A character is also determined by the *repetition* of its characteristics

throughout the narrative (it works as a reinforcement of that character's trait), *the piling up of data* (the more data on a character, the more thoroughly it is built), by the character's *relation to other characters* and even through a *change* undergone by it (which sometimes changes its configuration inside the narrative). Since these determinants may lead to relatively complex characters, it is important to understand what is presented as the *character's main characteristics*, as opposed to secondary ones. A way of doing so is to select a relevant semantic axe in the narrative in order to understand its dynamics. These axes (pairs of contraries) should involve as many characters as possible, positively or negatively. Although this selection deals with the ideological position of the reader, it also "points at ideological stands represented in the story, and can therefore be a powerful tool for critique" (p.126). It goes without saying that this course of action reduces the center roles of the story to polar opposites, and presents a hierarchization of these roles into positive and negative. The polarization can be dealt with through gradation of the strength of the characteristic of a character, and the measurement of the connections existing between the characteristics. Characters can also be synonymous, and have the same content. The *sources of information* about characters can be either explicit in the text or implicit in the character's actions or other characteristics. Whenever an explicit piece of information is provided about a character it can be reliable or unreliable. The informer may be another character or the narrator. The *hero* of the narrative can be indicated through several ways, not the most uncommon being the name in the title, but can also be deduced through its *qualification* (the amount of information on appearance, psychology, motivation, past), *distribution* (occurrence in the fabula, presence), *independence* (passages with the hero alone or the appearance of its internal monologues), function (actions reserved for the hero) and its *relations* (relations with the largest number of characters). It can be a hero-victim (fails to vanquish the opponents), the successful hero, the anti-hero (passive).

Space is for the story what place is for fabula: the intentional disposition of place in order to convey meaning. Space is what the characters exist in. Bal divides space in its possibilities of spatial aspects and perception, content and function, relation to other elements and information. *Spatial aspects and perception* relates to the way characters use their senses to bear on space. Three senses are most commonly used: sight, hearing and touch. The space can be considered as a frame (space where the character moves in) or the

‘filling of this frame’ (what the space is filled with, the environs – objects also have spatial status and help determine space). Boundaries also can be invested with meaning. *Content and function* dictates that “the semantic content of spatial aspects can be constructed in the same way as the semantic content of a character. Here, too, we find a preliminary combination of determination, repetition, accumulation, transformation and relations between various spaces” (p.136-137). That is to say that space is determined roughly the same way the characters are, through the presentation, reinforcement and relations of its several characteristics. Space can be merely a place in which action happens, but it can also be thematized and become part of the presentation of the fabula, be steady or dynamic (a place that merely allows for the movement of characters, that may vary greatly and even work as an allegory of the narrative itself, as a travel of sorts). The movement of characters can work as a transition between spaces. In Epic narratives and postcolonial studies, space may work as a site of memory itself. *Relations to other elements* concern the interrelation of space with other parts of the fabula. In this regard, space can be connected to the characters not only by providing them with a setting, but a context for being or even influence the character’s mood. The relation between time and space is fundamental to the narrative’s rhythm. Since space is necessarily present in every action of a character, *information* about it can be indicated in various degrees of detail; sometimes through a minimal indication, sometimes implicitly. The presentation of space may be linked to the perception of a character or of an agent outside the fabula. It may be also presented explicitly, as an independent element. In realistic novels, space must resemble reality, which lends the events that happen in it plausibility.

Focalization is the relation between the vision and that which is seen – what is there and who is looking. As Bal points out, “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle” (p. 142). The difference between these aspects is necessary for the interpretation of the story and particularly useful in the case of an unreliable narrator, or in the understanding of memory itself (understood as a narrative, memory has been proven to be biased and utterly unreliable). The *focalizer*, subject of focalization, is the character or an agent outside the fabula that orients the vision of the elements. Focalization is not fixed, and can vary inside a narrative. It can be *internal* (lies with one actor in the fabula) or *external* (an anonymous agent, outside the fabula). *The focalized*

object is, therefore, always presented under the point of view of a focalizer, case in which is useful to ask the questions of ‘what is it aimed at?’, ‘with what attitude is it seen?’ and ‘who focalizes it?’. The way an object is presented carries information about both the focalized object and the focalizer. Focalization also presents a strongly manipulative effect: readers tend to agree with the perceptions that are presented by a character, unless they are shown as unreliable. Through focalization, also, readers can be given information that other characters are not aware of (that is, were not vocalized in the story). Focalization may also present levels of occurrence, where multiple focalizers can interact. An external focalizer (first level), for instance, may focus through one character (second level) a second character ranting about his view on an object (third level). There may also be double focalization in fragments where two different focalizers converge, and ambiguous focalization, case in which it is hard to distinguish who the focalizer of the action is. *Suspense*, if taken as a narrative process through which the reader is led to ask questions which have answers only later in the story, is also an element in which focalization may play an important part. That can happen in four different ways: neither the reader nor the character know the answer to the question, the reader knows, but the character doesn’t (in that case there is a shift of suspense, from ‘what happens’ to ‘will the character find out’), the reader does not know the answer but the character does (Sherlock Holmes used to torture his readers in such a way) or both character and reader know the answer (in which case there is no suspense).

Narratology need not to limit itself to verbal texts: *visual stories*, such as narrative paintings and films may also be analyzed. Considering the concept of a visual narratology, Bal states:

Although focalization is not by definition vision-based, it seems the obvious place to begin easing in some elements of a ‘visual narratology.’ What has been said about any narrative holds for images as well: the concept of focalization refers to the story presented and the concept of narrator to its representation, by acting as the steering perspective on the events (or fabula). (BAL, 1999, p. 161-162)

A visual narratology could be embraced in several areas: film narratology, the analysis of visual images as a narrative in and of themselves, comparison of literary narratives and films and in developing attention to visuality, which would be extremely

enriching for the study of narratives. In order to adapt narratology to visual arts, however, some things should be kept in mind. First, focalization would be the result of visual signifiers as lines and dots, light and dark, composition, and should be seen as an interpretation of the events. Second, the distinction between external and internal focalizer is kept also, just as in narrative discourse, though it is not usually easy to point out. Third, the event represented “has the status of the focalized object produced by focalizers” (p.163): the image is already seen from the start through a point of view that should be considered as such. Fourth, “the same object or event can be interpreted differently according to different focalizers. The way in which these different interpretations are suggested to the reader is medium-bound, but the principle of meaning-production is the same for verbal and visual art” (p. 164). Fifth, identification of external and internal focalizer in visual images can also produce free indirect discourse.

The development of a theory for *visual stories* may be relevant also for the comparative analysis of novels and their film adaptations, a task which would require from the critic both narratological analysis and understanding of the visual medium. The comparison should not, however, be based on faithfulness to the original, but in understanding that each piece has to say to their respective audiences. Attention to the aspects of *vision in language* may help to shed light in modern narratives that use images and focalization as a motto, for “the dynamics of focalization is at play in every visual text that contains traces of the representational work, as seen and interpreted by the viewer, since it is precisely in those traces that the text becomes narrativized” (p.170).

1.2.3.3. *Fabula*

In order to understand the *fabula*, the structure of events in a narrative, it is necessary to think about how one organizes these events to form such structure in the first place. Frequent assumptions involve the existence of a homology (correspondence), between the narrative and the real world, or between the sentence and the *fabula* (case in which the structure of the text is also based on the structure of the sentence). That is not to say that narratives are necessarily realistic, or that they are reducible to a mere story-line,

only that they generally work according to logical principles that may or not occur in a narrative in particular – however, no matter how chaotic the structure of a narrative, there is a realistic component involved, if only in the mind of the readers that attempt to make sense out of it with the tools they have: logic and common sense. On that basis, narratology (and fabula analysis) can be proven relevant in other sorts of analysis, not necessarily literary ones. One can start thinking of the fabula as presenting two different constitutive units, those that are fixed (*elements*) and those that are changeable (*processes*). The category of elements encompasses the actors, locations and things, while the category of processes deals with the changes that may occur and changes the relations between these elements or the elements themselves¹⁶.

Understood as the transition between states experienced by actors, *events* can be delimited (in order to limit their number in relation with elements) through three criteria: *change* (events are agents of change), *choice* (events can be functional – the sort that opens a choice between two possibilities that may alter the fabula – or non-functional) and *confrontation* (the confrontation is a development that involves two different actors, explicit or implicitly, changing the relation between them).

Relationships connecting events are understood as universal models of narrative, determined by human standards of thought and action, subject to logical and conventional restrictions. Events succeed each other, and can be structured in what is called a *narrative cycle* – that is, the organization of the events in causal and conventional relations to each other, determining processes of improvement and deterioration. For that purpose, three phases are distinguishable in every fabula: *possibility* (or virtuality), *event* (or realization) and *result* (or conclusion). None of these phases are indispensable. Through the organization of events into elementary series that can be related or combined, the series of events may assume complex forms (an event may also present developments, with the result of one process being the possibility of the following). The developments may point

¹⁶ These terms are not consistently used during the last paragraph of the preliminary remarks: first, the fabula is divided into “fixed and changeable elements – objects and processes”, which are rechristened ‘elements’ and ‘processes’ (thus changing from ‘objects’ to ‘elements’ one of the changeable ‘elements’). A few sentences later the names are ‘object’ and ‘process’ again, only to go back to ‘actors’ and ‘location’ (and ‘thing’, supposedly), ‘events’ and ‘time’ for the rest of the chapter (BAL, 1997, p.182 or, in the third edition, 2009, p.194). Even if it is a matter of ‘same thing, different name’, and it helps with the understanding of the difference between events and elements that is made in the next paragraph, it tends to get a little confusing.

to both an improvement or a deterioration of the initial situation. The succession and embedding of events can be used to create the impression of determinism (important events continually embedded in banal events) or importance (important events unstated but minimal events detailed). The idea of improvement and deterioration can also be used to grant the narrative human interest, and, grouped, constitute the narrative cycle. Several processes of improvement may be distinguished, such as fulfillment of the task, intervention of allies, elimination of the opponent, negotiation, attachment, satisfaction; as well as several processes of deterioration, such as misstep, creation of an obligation, sacrifice, endured task and endured punishment.

There are other possible principles of structure that may be used to connect events, such as the identity of the actors (who is involved), the nature of the confrontation (mental, verbal, physical), the time lapse (events in succession, linked or simultaneous) or the locations in which these events take place. Bal does not suggest the adoption of one method of organization of events over the other: on the contrary, the intuition of the researcher must play a part in choosing the method: “this carries with it the advantage of allowing us to pursue our own interests to a great extent while keeping to the same intersubjectively understandable model of analysis” (p.195)

In order to study the role played by *actors* in a narrative, one must first realize a selection, to determine which actors should be taken into consideration, since in some fabulas there are actors with no functional part, that is, don't cause – or undergo – functional events (that doesn't mean they are meaningless in the narrative, though – only that in order to understand the relations between events it is necessary to look only at the functional actors). Bal draws from Greimas' actantial model to establish different *classes of actors*. Greimas' model is based on an analogy between the fabula and a sentence, and begins at a teleological relation between elements of the story. The actors in Greimas' model share a characteristic quality and are called 'actants'. Therefore, 'actants' are actors that perform certain predetermined *functions* inside a fabula. The most important of those relations is between the actor who has an aim (*subject*) and that aim itself (*object*, relatable to the direct object in a sentence, is not always a person). *Power* is the means for the subject to achieve the object or that prevent it from doing so. That can distinguish a class of characters that perform either of these roles in the fabula. *Receiver* is the actant to whom the object is given. The *helper* and the *opponent* play the parts of adverbial adjuncts in the

‘sentence’ structure of the fabula: the helper provides the subject with assistance with its objective, while the opponent places a resistance. Since power and helper have similar roles, it is interesting to make a distinction between the two. Bal solves the problem with a table of the two structures’ differences:

<i>Power</i>	<i>Helper</i>
Has power over the whole enterprise	Can give only incidental aid
Is often abstract	Is mostly concrete
Often remains in the background	Often comes to the fore
Usually only one	Usually multiple

Table 2 - Power and Helper (BAL, 1997, p.201)

The assistance provided by the helper is necessary but insufficient for the subject to achieve its goal. Opponents must be overcome, but the overcoming of one opponent is not enough for a favorable end: another opponent might rise. This model leads to an inequality between the number of actors and actants. Mergings can occur as well. Usually, the greater the link between the fabula and the real ‘outside’ world, the greater the number of actors, and vice-versa – the most subjective the fabula, the lesser the number of actors. A fabula may also present different subjects. When two subjects are in opposition, they may be a subject and an anti-subject (not an opponent, but another subject with its own object whose purpose intercrosses with the other subject). When an actant has its own aim, and acts upon it, it is an autonomous subject. If the other subject does not come into opposition with the first subject, that may indicate the existence of a sub-fabula. Power may also consist of two actants, a positive and a negative. There is still a matter of *competence* involved in the organization of the actions. Greimas uses three subdivisions for competence: determination (or will to proceed into action), power of possibility and differentiation. Truth value regards whether the actants are truthful or not: sometimes actants’ appearances are deceitful. Bal uses a diagram to indicate the possibilities:

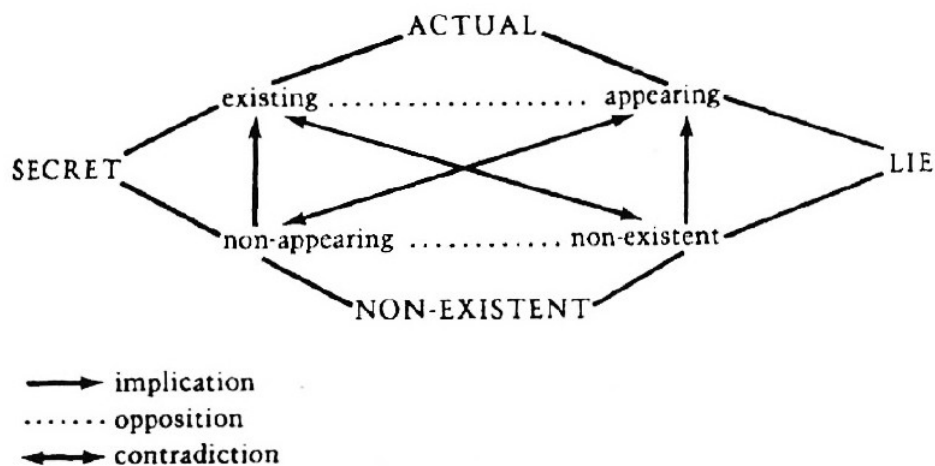


Figure 3 - Truth and Trust (BAL, 1997, p.206)

Complete schemes can be qualified as ‘true’ or ‘false’. A secret or a lie may be important in a fabula, and there are many other possible ways of classifying actants: psychological, ideological, where lie the oppositions in the fabula. Again, the most fit approach for the study must be considered.

If an event is a process, a process implies a development, and developments occur in time, a *chronology* must exist in the fabula. One of the aspects of time in the fabula is the duration, which is divided into two kinds: crisis and development. Crisis is a compressed set of events, while in development events occur in a longer period. Some critics think that development would be akin to real life experience, but that is doubtful, since real life also contains, unfortunately, its crisis. Certain types of fabula are determined by their use of time (in biographies and frame narratives, for instance, development is a common use). Elusive as the distinction between these types of duration may be, once present in the fabula, they present some characteristics: developments may present as much material as needed, while crisis have the restriction of brief periods; developments can build slowly the global significance, while crisis is representative of the actors and their relationships, the significance is central to it; development, like crisis, implicates in a selection – there will be parts skipped, abbreviated and summarized, while in crisis, too, certain parts will be extended. These possibilities are related to the aspect of chronology. Though a sequence is chronological, there can be interruptions and parallelisms that disturb the time sequence, as crisis and developments do. Elimination of events may cause gaps of information, and parallel fabulas make difficult for the reader to understand the

chronology – often achronicity, the impossibility to distinguish a chronology, is the result. Though sequence is a *logical* concept, ideas like cause and effect, and logical development may prove illusory in fabulas – mainly due to the fact that, though fiction may generally be based on reality and logic, it is not always so. The time span of a fabula can be contrasted or compared with the chronology – the way time and events are related in a narrative can be a powerful tool to understand it.

Location plays a part in the fabula as a place in which events happen. As seen before, locations may have symbolic uses in the narrative. Whenever a location is not indicated, the readers will supply one. The location is sometimes the structural centre of a fabula – be it an opposition, a symbolic place or even the boundary between places. Locations in motion are also used as a way to indicate transition and isolation of the ‘fixed’ outside world. However, simple constructions as binary oppositions can frequently be more significant to the critic than they are to the fabula. It is important to bear in mind that criticism is always a stance in which a person, the critic, stands.

1.2.4 Herman & Vervaeck’s *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*

As seen above, there are similarities and connections between the works investigated. Herman & Vervaeck try to summarize, in the chapter of their book reserved for structuralistic narratology, the progresses made by several authors in their respective theories, a compilation that reminds of the efforts of Rimmon-Kennan, but is structured differently – and, if I may say so, in a more didactic manner.

They begin by tracing a parallel between the works studied above, stressing the common division of the narrative text in three parts, referring to the characteristics of the narrative text, the events described in this text and the organization of these events. The different terms are organized in a table, as they propose their own:

	Genette	Rimmon-Kennan	Bal
Story	Histoire	Story	Fabula
Narrative	Récit	Text	Story

Narration	Narration	Narration	Text
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Table 3 – Narrative Terms (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.45)

Herman & Vervaeck structure their summary in tables of contents carrying the main structures of the narrative, according to their understanding. Since most of the concepts presented by the authors have already been displayed before in this work, a (really) brief explanation of the main terms (whenever the names are not indicative of their characteristics) should suffice, and work as a reminder – and illustration as well. This exercise may seem redundant, but it is not: certain minds are visually oriented (that is my case), and a clear table may be as profitable as reading a lengthy text. Besides, the tables help to understand also Herman & Vervaeck’s take on structuralist narratology as well. The first table is related to *story*:

Actions/Events	– functions	<input type="checkbox"/> cardinal	
		<input type="checkbox"/> catalyzer	
	– indexes	<input type="checkbox"/> pure	
		<input type="checkbox"/> informative	
	– combinations	<input type="checkbox"/> arbitrary = pure + informative	
		<input type="checkbox"/> implication = catalyzer + cardinal	
		<input type="checkbox"/> mutual implication = cardinal + cardinal	
			↘ sequence
			↘ embedding, . . .
Actants	– subject/object		
	– sender/receiver		
	– helper/opponent		
Setting	– bipolar scales and boundaries		
	– as an index connected to actant and action		

Table 4 - Story (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 1995, p.46)

Story is divided in three sections: *events*, *actants* and *setting*. Events are developments of the fabula, and must be linked to each other in order to form a sequence. Events that are related are called bound motifs (as opposed to unbound motifs), and are essential for the narrative. Bound motifs can be either static or dynamic (static motifs do not cause change, while dynamic motifs do). The authors use Roland Barthes’ idea of *functions*, elements that are responsible for the horizontal progress of events, advancing the narrative through links of causality, opposition, temporality, etc. *Indexes* do not advance the narrative, but they bring forth meaning, instead, and indicate qualities. *Cardinal functions* open possibilities, while *catalyzers* present the development of these possibilities.

Indexes can be *pure* (must be interpreted by the reader) or *informative* (does not require interpretation). These structures may combine in complex ways. The authors mention also Bremond and Propp's models as examples of alternative systematizations of events in narratives (Propp identifies a large number of functions, Bremond proposes a model also consisting of functions, but divided in possibility, realization and completion). Actants are classified according to the role played by the characters in the story, and can be active or passive, in Bremond's classification. The authors also mention Greimas's actantial model (as seen above, it is consisted of six different classes, *sender* and *helper*, *object* and *subject*, *receiver* and *opponent*) as a better known alternative. They also mention that this dynamics leads the readers to expect certain actions from certain actants, and this may serve as a tool for achieving different goals in a text (such as suspense). Actants with depth beyond the mere actions are characters (Forster's theory of round and flat characters is mentioned, as well as Rimmon-Kennan's three scales – complexity, change and penetration in the inner life). Setting is related to the space where the events happen. While events are dynamic elements of the story, other structures are fixed points. The setting can be used as an index for the action, being related to it through symbolic use of opposites and/or boundaries.

Time	– Duration	<input type="checkbox"/> ellipsis		
		<input type="checkbox"/> acceleration/ summary		
		<input type="checkbox"/> scene		
		<input type="checkbox"/> deceleration		
	– Order	<input type="checkbox"/> pause		
		<input type="checkbox"/> direction = anachrony (versus achrony)		
				* analepsis
				* prolepsis
		<input type="checkbox"/> distance		* internal
				* external
– Frequency	<input type="checkbox"/> reach		* mixed	
			* punctual	
			* durative	
	<input type="checkbox"/> singulative		* simple	
			* plural	
	<input type="checkbox"/> iterative		* external vs. singulative	
	<input type="checkbox"/> repetitive		* internal vs. singulative	
Characterization				
	– Direct			
	– Indirect: metonymy			
	– Analogy: metaphor			
Focalization				
	– Types	<input type="checkbox"/> external/ internal		
		<input type="checkbox"/> fixed/ variable (2)/ multiple (> 2)		
	– Properties	<input type="checkbox"/> space: panoramic/ simultaneous/ limited		
		<input type="checkbox"/> time: panchronic/ retrospective/ synchronic		
		<input type="checkbox"/> cognition: omniscient / limited		
		<input type="checkbox"/> emotion: objective / subjective		
		<input type="checkbox"/> ideology	* explicit / implicit	
			* unequivocal / polyphonic	

Table 5 - Narrative (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 1995, p.60)

Narrative deals with *time*, *characterization* and *focalization*. As in Genette's theory, time is divided in *duration*, *order* and *frequency*. Events may be presented in several ways: *ellipsis* (that is, the event is not presented at all), *accelerated presentation* (summary), *scene* (correspondence between event and narration), *deceleration*, until the *pause* (where no action happens). *Order* makes the relation between the events and the succession in which they are presented to the reader: *analepsis* (flash-forward), *prolepsis* (flashback), both divided in *internal* (are contained in the narrative), *external* (outside the narrative) or *mixed* (end or begin in the narrative). Temporal dislocations have a certain *reach* (length), and go a certain *distance* from the present (first narrative). They can be *punctual* or *durative*. *Frequency* deals with repetition, and can be *singulative* (one event, one narration), *repetitive* (one event, more narrations) or *iterative* (one narration, more events). *Characterization* happens when a character receives qualities. That can happen

through *direct presentation*, through *indirect presentation* (metonymy) or through *analogy* with other characters or elements (metaphor). *Focalization* is concerned with the relationship between “the object and the subject of perception” (p. 70). It can be *internal* (character focalizer) or *external*, *fixed* (one focalizer), *variable* (two focalizers) and *multiple* (more than two focalizers). The focalizer can relate with the space of the narrative in different ways, it can control the space of a narrative (*panoramic*), can perceive several places at the same time (*simultaneous*) or can be restricted to the place where the focalizer is (*limited*). In regards to time, the focalizer can be *panchronic* (move freely through time) *retrospective* (looks only to the past) or *synchronic* (perception happens at the time the event is happening). The focalizer can be omniscient or have its perceptions limited to that of a character. It may be emotionally involved with the narrative (*subjective*) or not dwell into emotions (*objective*). Finally, the focalizer may present its ideology *implicitly* or *explicitly* in the text. When there are several ideologies coexisting in the narrative, it is called ‘*polyphonic*’.

Narrating	– Narrator types	<input type="checkbox"/> level: extradiegetic/ intradiegetic
		<input type="checkbox"/> involvement: heterodiegetic/ homodiegetic
		↓
		*autodiegetic
		*allodiegetic
	– Properties	<input type="checkbox"/> temporal : subsequent/ prior/ simultaneous/ interpolated
		<input type="checkbox"/> visibility : covert/ overt
		<input type="checkbox"/> reliability : high/ low
		<input type="checkbox"/> status : authority * diegetic
		* mimetic
Representation of consciousness		
	– Diegesis/ mimesis	
	– Indirect speech/ free indirect speech/ direct speech	
	– Diegetic summary/ summary, less purely diegetic/ indirect content paraphrase/ indirect discourse, mimetic to some degree/ free indirect discourse/ direct discourse/ free direct discourse	

Table 6 - Story (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 1995, p.80)

Narration is divided in *narrating* and *consciousness representation*. The narrator can be a part of the narrative (*intradiegetic*) or not (*extradiegetic*). Regarding its level of involvement, the narrator is *homodiegetic* when it has experienced what it narrates, and *heterodiegetic* when it hasn't. If the narrator is also the protagonist of the story, it is an *autodiegetic* narrator. If the narrator is only a witness of what is narrated, it is *allodiegetic*.

As for the temporal properties of the narration, it can be *subsequent* (things that already happened), *prior* (things that will happen), *simultaneous* (things that are happening) and *interpolated* (mixed). The narrator may be *overt* (present in the narration) or *covert* (does not appear much), *reliable* (high reliability) or *unreliable* (low reliability). The *authority* of the narrator may be derived from its personality (*diegetic* – social identity) or from its style (*mimetic* – honesty, reliability and competence). The representation of consciousness in the narrative can happen through indirect speech (or quoted speech), free indirect speech (stream of consciousness) or direct speech. The less intervention from the narrator, the more mimetic a text.

1.3 CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT NARRATIVE THEORY

Despite the considerable amount of terms (sometimes four terms for the same thing in as many books), the general shape of the theory doesn't seem to change significantly between authors. When different scholars, postulating a problem (that is, the shape and structure of narrative theory), come up with similar answers, chances are these answers are not far from the truth – if there is any.

During the readings it became clear that some subjects are only loosely tied, while others seem to be structured enough to have achieved a relative stability. That is the case of Genette's take on tense (or time) and its division in order, duration and frequency, which was adopted by most of the authors reviewed without modification. Greimas's semiotic square seems popular as a model of deep structure. So does Bremond's actantial model, in relation to Propp's. The idea of focalization, proposed by Genette and developed further by Bal seems to be a consensus as well, as Herman & Vervaeck point it as one of "the crucial insights narrative theory owes to structuralism" (2005, p. 70)

However, the subject I would like to address in these considerations is one among those that I could not help but consider loosely tied – and that is the subject of character. Apropos, in the very same page mentioned above, Herman & Vervaeck address the matter as well:

The treatment of literary character as a set of traits may lead to static enumeration. Barthes famously considers a character a set of minimal semantic elements or semes. In this approach, character development is reduced to a change in the set, and dynamics come down to a sequence of two or more different stages of the set. Obviously, it is not at the level of character analysis that structuralist narratology has made its most significant contribution. (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.70)

That impression was also in my mind, as I read the different texts. So, even if only to get it off my chest, I would like to rant a little about the idea of characters and actants. While the work of Genette pays little attention to the role of characters and/or actants in the analysis of the narrative, Rimmon-Kennan's claim for reconciliation of the two preponderant (and opposite) views on the matter seems justified: considering the radically different takes of characters as either merely an agent of narration or a mimetic person – up to the point of having an 'inner life' (as proposed by Ewen in 1971 and 1980, and cited by KIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p. 44) –, she hints at the need for a theory that encompasses both possibilities.

Mieke Bal's unique insight could have well supplied such a reconciliation: the division of story and fabula in two different but analogous parts of the narrative, each with its own symmetric units (actants opposed to characters, place opposed to space, ordering opposed to time – that is, story opposed to fabula) certainly opens room for the understanding of the characters in a broader context. That is not what happens, though: Bal considers characters (in relation to actors) as “the anthropomorphic figures the narrator tells us about. By this, I mean the actor provided with distinctive characteristics which together create the effect of a character” (BAL, 2007, p.114). Characters are, in a nutshell, paper people; do not have a concrete existence outside the text, and perhaps the reason for no consistent theory of character being available is precisely because of their human aspect, that tends to mislead readers into thinking they are dealing with more than mere constructs. To prove her point, Bal shows how a psychological analysis of the Proustian character Albertine would fail miserably, understanding the character as irritating and antipathetic while Marcel would appear as a “selfish monster” (p. 116). That aside, any distinct classification of characters based on psychological characteristics would only be applicable to a limited corpus: that of the psychological narrative. Other corpuses, such as the modern novels “that mock precisely such categories thus remain excluded from

observation because all their characters are ‘flat’” (p.117) Due to this reason, and to avoid anthropomorphisms, a distinction between character categories should be based on the actantial model.

Bal then goes on to determine the process of construction of the characters based on predictability – mentioning the myth of Narcissus and suggesting that the man who falls in love with a mirror could be taken as an allegory of the reader who conflates character and person, plus its role, repetition, piling up of data, relations with others and changes, plus their basic characteristics structured in semantic axes.

I have some problems with this view – not only because I intend to mention the psychological characteristics of some of the characters in *Watchmen*, but because the judgement for the inadequacy of the psychological classification was deemed a failure due to the impossibility of analyzing adequately a character in a novel that explicitly (in Bal’s own words) mocks the sort of analysis attempted. More, if such an analysis of the character would render the character irritating and antipathetic, and Marcel a selfish monster, the probable conclusion of the analysis is that the characters are not well built, psychologically. This is an accurate result, given that the characters are purposefully ‘flat’ – and isn’t the fact that the characters in the novels that mock psychological analysis are all ‘flat’ interesting and useful, to begin with? - and it helps to build the basis for the argument that the post modern novel builds its characters intentionally flawed to mock psychological analysis - but not to the argument that psychological analysis is not valuable even in such a case. It quite disproves it, instead.

My objection goes a bit further than that, especially because, in the two readings of images performed by Bal in the book and which will be developed more extensively further in the next chapter, Bal uses precisely the approach that she claims should be avoided – dwelves into the mind of the characters, extrapolating their actions through anthropomorphism.

First, in the analysis of Aptekar’s painting (BAL, 1997, pp. 66-75), the capitalizing in the narrative that revealed that the child’s mother in the narrative ‘used to be an arts teacher’ “fills the mother’s worried eye with a double past. The confrontation that is so subtly building up is not just one between dominating parent and powerless child, but feeds

on the mother's own sacrifice of a career similar to and continuous with what she rejects for her child" (p.71). I understand that, without anthropomorphism, this analysis should be reduced to a mother who was an arts teacher and wanted her son to be a surgeon. The sacrifice of the career and the idea of the dominating parent and powerless child are extrapolations that are not justified without ideological, psychological and anthropomorphic component – the mother might as well be contented with the opportunity to be close to her children, or even dislike her career despite being engaged in an artistic activity in that narrative's specific moment. According to Bal's view, that would be a misreading that has more bearings in Bal's idea of a woman and a teacher (she's both, incidentally – that does not disprove my point) than in the character's information presented by the narrative.

Second, in the reading of the bas-relief *Arjuna's Penance*, seeing the drawing with Arjuna in yoga position, with a cat also in yoga position, surrounded by mice laughing, Bal affirms that the cat is imitation Arjuna because it is impressed by Arjuna's calm and poise, and that the mice that surround the cat laughing are doing so because they realize they are safe from the danger represented by the cat. According to her, without such interpretation the parts of the relief could not form a meaningful narrative (p.144).

This interpretation may form a meaningful narrative, but also lends the cat the aspiration of sanctity and appreciation of beauty and calm. The fact that the cat's anthropomorphism was implied by its position and by the rats' laughter does not provide them (or the cat) with a reason to act that in that particular way. The specific form of that motive that is given to the cat has only one possible source – the reader, trying to make the connections necessary to solve the narrative problem, fills the gaps of the narrative with her own assumptions and thus creates an interpretation. Pretty much like Narcissus, looking at the mirror, one might add.

There is no question about whether the characters have any life save the one given by the reader; the problem is that, even to pose such a sentence as "characters resemble people" is problematic without a certain degree of anthropomorphism. And, if Bal herself is unable to evade the trap she endeavored to build arguing against the character's anthropomorphic qualities, one might arrive in the conclusion that it is useless to try.

Moreover, the idea of applying psychological analysis to fictional characters only stops making sense if one understands psychological theories as something other than patterns of behavior and deviation that are used to test for discrepancies in the psyche of humans. That is, a pattern of psychological and cognitive development in the ‘general, healthy human’ and the deviations in that pattern that were recognized and classified as psychological problems. I see no problem in applying a pattern to understand if the behavior of a character is consistent – that will tell me if the character is constructed to look like a normal person or if it presents a conflicted behavior. Ultimately, what is being done is confronting one behavioral pattern with a behavior. Of course, there is a time and place for everything. And *Watchmen*, with the deranged heroes, the psychiatric evaluation, the different attitudes towards the role of a hero and life itself, is such a place.

With that out of the way, it is necessary to stress once more the instrumental use of these concepts – that is, the use of the concepts and classifications applied to the study of the text in question, and that is radically different from the presentation of a theory that aims to account for every narrative situation, as is the case of the books reviewed. Though they are presented as introductions or essays, their goal is to establish solid foundations for further research. This is one of such researches, and, therefore, does not need to account for every possibility in the narrative: its aim is to understand the text in terms of the narrative theory and apply it to the study of the graphic novel. Therefore, only the elements considered relevant for the analysis will be stressed.

2. THE PROBLEM OF COMICS

When Scott McCloud gave his book *Understanding Comics* (1994) the subtitle *The Invisible Art*, he was referring to the medium's dynamic quality, its fluidity. Or, as one might say jokingly, its lack of commitment to the narrative necessities – for it is the reader who performs the most difficult part, that of turning into a narrative story, imbued with sound and movement (and sequence) what is, at first sight, a static juxtaposition of images, mere unconnected pictures. It is through a series of conventions that the miracle happens: graphic conventional representations such as word balloons and onomatopoeias suggest the audible qualities of words in the panels, while notions such as logic, movement indicators and panels presented in what could be understood, when read in the right order, as a sequence, suggests the development of the action. Suddenly, through the miracle of closure (MCCLOUD, 1994, p.63), a story is happening, the reader only dimly aware of the sophisticated resources employed in representing that which doesn't have a body: spoken language appearing markedly different from music and ambient sounds, narrative stances set apart through different narrative devices, visual keys that help unfold the possibilities of intonation marked inside text bubbles (or word balloons), etc. Therefore, the 'invisible' in the title: Comics is the art that found ways to represent graphically what is not visual in the reader's experience: sound, distance, time, movement. It is that simple.

Yet, this simplicity is quite elusive, sometimes – maybe due to the same idea of fluidity, maybe due to the sophistication of the representational conventions that evolved with time. What I mean by that is that Comics are easy enough to read, but quite hard to think about. All of a sudden, finding a way to explain the interaction of all those obvious resources used in a certain page seems like an unpredictably difficult challenge. Without the right references, it is not so simple to explain the idea of depth or the way a style work. In short: the greatest problem of the Invisible Art is that, as any other things invisible, it is quite hard to describe.

As a result, many have attempted to develop the subject of Comics, with many and varied assessments of the same object. Some consider Comics as a historical process, some

as Art, some as a linguistic system. Some as Literature. I too choose to see Comics in a definite manner: I see them as stories. Narratives.

It is a start. That means that I could forfeit the hard task of coming up with a definition of Comics – for it should suffice to consider my object a narrative. It means that my focus on this research will not be psychology or History (though it may encompass them) – it will be the narrative structure of the work. I mean that, by choosing to work with narratives, I can think about Comics in different terms, and discuss problems such as tense, aspect and mood (Genette's terms), for instance. That is, think about my object in its relation to narrative theory, not necessarily focusing on other approaches. By choosing Comics as narratives, I don't have to follow any other established views.

That doesn't mean I can ignore them, either. Not when other theories can help me approach my subject or support or contradict my opinion somehow. What I mean by that is, no matter what theories I choose to employ, I should acknowledge what came before me, and use it whenever pertinent. So, if this work is to be considered serious (and there have been enough cases of works on Comics that were considered less than able because they were less than adequate for the scholarly form (see comments on Eisner and McCloud's works below), a review of the theory on Comics up to date, brief as it may be (for a complete account would largely surpass the time and author available at the time), is necessary.

I will, then, in this chapter, commit (due to the space and time available, no other word is appropriate) a very brief account of the main approaches to Comics' theory (mainly the views of Will Eisner, Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen and Antonio Luiz Cagnin) and, thus, provide an account of how hard Comics can be. After that, I'll pick up the aspects I consider relevant for Comics theory, and, finally, think how these concepts fit into the frame of Narratology, and, in this context, what to do with such aberrant notions as panels and images.

2.1 COMIC CREATORS IN ACTION: EISNER AND MCLOUD

Perhaps the two best known authors on Comics are the Americans Will Eisner and Scott McCloud. Their theories present several points in common, such as seeing language as an evolution from pictorial to abstract codices, presenting a broad view on the subject, centered on the creative processes of the creation of Comics and, as Comics creators, speaking from creator to creator, without the rigidity of form and necessary references usually found in academic works. Their production, thus, lacks the formal structure of theoretical constructions and, sometimes, suffers from it.

In the introduction of the book *The System of Comics* (2007), by Thierry Groensteen, Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen comment:

Questions of comics form have received relatively little attention in English-language scholarship, which has tended to view the medium through historical, sociological, aesthetic (literary) and thematic lenses. Notable exceptions to these dominant approaches include Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), two books authored by practicing cartoonists. Both of these works have offered a significant contribution to the dialogue about the comics form, suggesting new avenues for investigation and providing a tool box of terminology that continues to be used to this day. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that both of these contributions have been criticized for their lack of theoretical sophistication. Moreover, each work exists *sui generis*, removed from the scholarly traditions with which it might best intersect (GROENSTEEN, 2007, locations 10-18)

Perhaps, then, the fact that the works are largely unconnected with the 'scholarly traditions' is their greatest flaw, but I believe that Beaty and Nguyen mean something else by that: the lack of rigidity that makes the authors sometimes take larger chances than it would be advisable in an academic context, and, as a result, suffer from severe drawbacks in their methods and theories. Since any serious theoretical review of the universe of Comics should not ignore the production of these two authors in particular, that seems a fairly good place to start.

2.1.1. The Works of Will Eisner

A very gifted comic creator, best known for his imaginative page layouts and composition, where titles and texts frequently merged with the story, Will Eisner authored *The Spirit* series, as well as several Graphic Novels during his life, such as the autobiographical *To the Heart of the Storm* (1991), *Dropsie Avenue* (1995) or *Fagin, the Jew* (2003). Eisner is also internationally recognized as the creator of the Graphic Novel, due to the publication, in 1978, of *A Contract With God* – but that’s actually a mistake, there are other authors with earlier claims, such as Rodolphe Töpffer (1840s) for the form, or Richard Kyle (1964) for the use of the term. Eisner also taught art at the School of Visual Arts, NY, where his life-long battle for legitimization of the Comics form was well known. There are two significant particularly useful works by Will Eisner that should be mentioned here: *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (1996).

2.1.1.1 *Comics and Sequential Art*

Comics and Sequential Art came out in 1985. It collected the essays on Comics published by Eisner in *The Spirit* magazine, and were based on Eisner’s experience at School of Visual Arts, in New York. Intended as a statement that ‘Sequential Art’ (as deemed by Eisner) was a literary and artistic subject, worthy of academic attention and general consideration, it was a revolution in its simple, densely illustrated form, allowing the reader a peek into the inner works of the medium by showing how it built its contents in the Comics page. Eisner’s book is up to now one of the best well-known works in the theory of comics, paired only by Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*.

It is structured in eight chapters: *Comics as a Form of Reading*, *Imagery*, *Timing*, *The Frame*, *Expressive Anatomy*, *Writing & Sequential Art*, *Application of Sequential Art* and *Teaching/Learning – Sequential Art for Comics in the Print and Computer Era*.

The chapter *Comics as a Form of Reading* starts by quoting Tom Wolf’s premise that “[...] the reading of words is but a subset of a much more general human activity which includes symbol decoding, information integration and organization.” (WOLF *apud*

EISNER, p. 08). So, the interweaving of words and images in Sequential Art is a language, which has its own grammar, created by the repetitive use of symbols and images. The reader must follow the narrative in a certain order, to make sense of it – not necessarily the conventional reading order, but the one that makes *sense*. The letters can work as images in order to acquire new meanings – they can be shown melting or with a rocky texture, for instance, and thus blend into the image, or express a quality of the sound.

Imagery takes into consideration that the mixing of letters and images has been done in many forms before. In fact, letters and images have a common origin, since the letters “are symbols that are devised out of images which originate out of familiar forms, objects, postures and other recognizable phenomena.” (EISNER, 1985, p.13). As they evolved, the forms of letters became increasingly abstract. Eisner illustrated that with the Chinese and Egyptian symbols of piety:

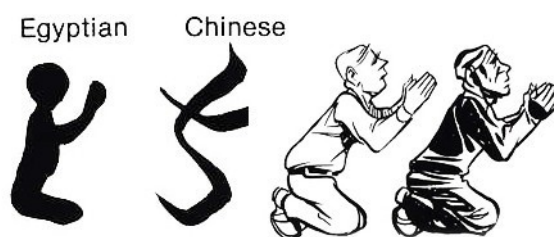


Figure 4 - Piety in Words and Images (EISNER, 1985, p. 15)

Familiar objects and symbols (such as the one in the image, based on an imploring bodily attitude) are used in Sequential Art to communicate without words – even whole stories can be told without words, but they demand a certain sophistication of the reader, who must be able to understand these signs. Such sophistication is acquired with experience.

Timing is also present in the Sequential Art. As Eisner (beautifully) puts it:

In the universe of human consciousness, time combines with space and sound in a setting of interdependence, wherein conceptions, motions, actions and movement have a meaning and are measured by our perception of their relationships to each other. (EISNER, 1985, p. 25)

As a consequence, time is not only dependent on the notion of space, but it is also the result of human experience, and therefore has a strong psychological component. That component can be emulated in Sequential Art. Eisner uses an example of two different

representations of a scene: one as it would occur in time, and the other where the action is divided in several frames in order to enhance the psychological effect (similar to the impression that time seems to slow down in moments of great psychological stress):

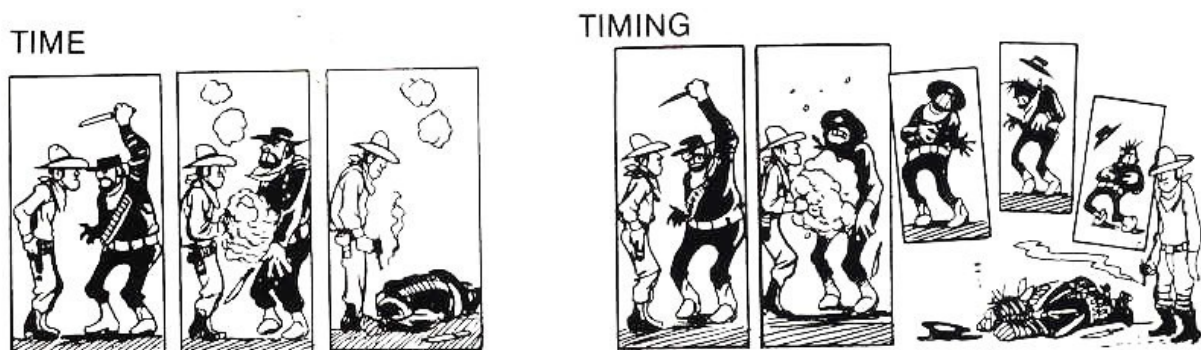


Figure 5 - Time and Psychological Time (EISNER, 1985, p.25)

Since letters are graphic representations of sounds, they are used for that purpose in comics, where the word balloon was created to designate speech. Eisner calls the word balloon a “desperation device”, due to its attempt to depict what is invisible (though it is my assumption that he should address letters, not word balloons as desperation devices, since the word balloon is shown in the text as having evolved from a visual component: the way hot steam is exhaled when one speaks¹⁷). Word balloons have developed in several ways:

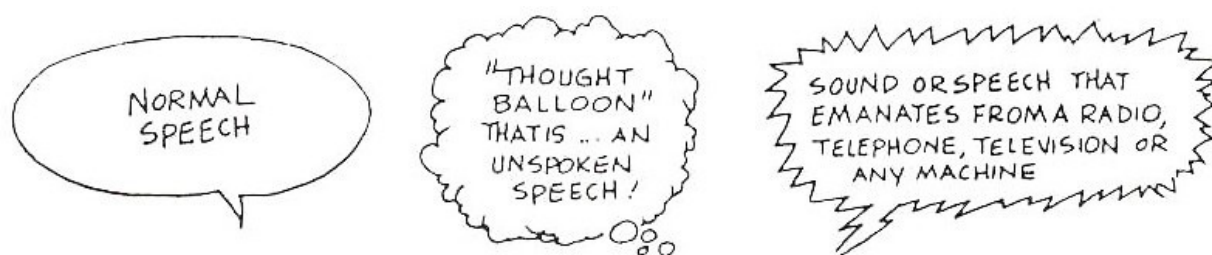


Figure 6 - Word Balloons Repertoire (EISNER, 1985, p.27)

Other factors, such as size and shape of panels (many panels require a slower reading, and an action depicted in a way that may seem either important, as shown above, or fragmented), the time of reading of the words in the panel (Eisner makes an analogy with the Morse code and sheet music as other sorts of graphic representation of time) and the experience of the reader (how long the transition between actions would take to happen), all that collaborates to create the rhythm of the narrative.

¹⁷ Granted, that is only visible in a cold environment. That is, according to Eisner, the origin of the word ‘fumetti’, that is used for Comics in Italian (p.26).

The Frame concerns the panelling. Action unfolds in time and space (that is, in the diegesis), but the art itself is static. Therefore, the encapsulation of certain key moments is used to suggest this unfolding – but, since they are juxtaposed, a certain order is required for the action to make sense. That part is up to the reader, who must be both willing to read the story and knowledgeable enough to understand it. The idea of encapsulation of different moments brings two different problems: the amount of information in the panel and how to separate one image from the other. Both of them point to the idea of the borders of the panels, and what is inside it: the less there is, the more is demanded from the reader. Since the borders are also images (graphic representations of limits), they can also be used *as* images in the narrative, in the same way the word balloons are. Frames can give the idea of enclosed (if they are similar to walls, for instance) or unlimited (no borders) spaces, they can be of various shapes that can carry different meanings, they can be used for unbalancing the reader (if they are twisted on the page). Eisner deems the first page of the story the ‘splash’ page, the introduction to the story. A whole page can function as a ‘meta panel’, if the (regular) panels work together to form a whole. And, of course, the *mise en abyme*: pages can be depicted inside pages.

There are other choices involved in a panel, such as its composition (the form center of interest, that should attract the eye of the reader), the perspective and the main and secondary elements (such as, respectively, the action and the scenery). As Eisner says (and illustrates): “[...] the panel controls the viewpoint of the reader; the panel’s outlines become the perimeter of the reader’s vision [...], orient[ing] the reader and stimulat[ing] emotion” (EISNER, 1985, p.88). Perspective can manipulate the reader’s emotional states and provide details or a general view of the action:



In this panel a flat eye-level view informs the reader of details such as the commanding action of the soldier's hand.

In this panel an over-head view is necessary to give the reader a clear uninvolved view of the setting and the events to follow.

In this panel the reader is placed on ground level so that the impact of the explosion can be 'felt.'

In this view the reader's perspective is lowered to a worm's eye-view for involvement in the action.

Figure 7 - Perspective and its Effects (EISNER, 1985, p.89)

Scenes shown from above make the reader feel uninvolved, as if floating above the action. Scenes shown from below carry more significance and the testimonial view is used to put the reader in the scene, giving the scene more realism.

Expressive Anatomy concerns the human form and its expressions. Body language is, after all, another sort of language, and it is used a lot in Sequential Art. Eisner, using images in which what a character says is contradicted by its body language, suggests that the body language has primacy over the text, but I'd rather say images have primacy over text – since one is *showing*, the other is *telling*. Body and face convey crucial expressions:

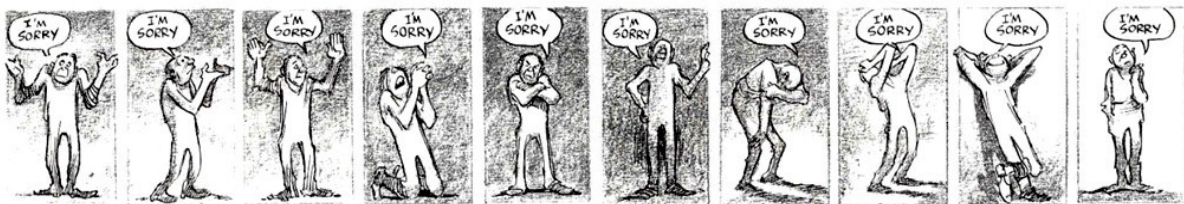


Figure 8 - I'm Sorry. (EISNER, 1985, p.103)

Writing & Sequential Art is, quite obviously, about writing a story for comics. One thing that the writer must bear in mind is that words and images interweave in comics, and as such may present different degrees of cooperation. Comics are predominantly a visual medium (as Eisner points out, there are several beautifully drawn titles with barely any story at all), but the text and its style can completely change the tone of the story. The size of the letters is also important to give clues of the marked intonation of certain words in a

sentence. Some stories can depend on the words to be understood, and the collaboration between words and images is to be desired, but the redundancy (when text and image state the same fact) should be avoided – Eisner calls ‘visual’ the collaboration between words and images, and ‘illustration’ the image that reinforces or decorates a text¹⁸.

Application of Sequential Art has to do with what Eisner calls *function* of Comics, divided into two broad fields: *instruction* and *entertainment*. These blend to a degree, since instructional comics tend to be entertaining in order to get the reader’s attention, and can be either technical or attitudinal (self-help comics). Entertainment comics must deal with the problem of little space to develop graphically abstractions such as love and the fact that traditional prose works are far more involving to the reader. Graphic Novels, shown as a new horizon, should rely on being worthy and innovative in order to become significant. There are also story boards (sic), drawings to test the flow and guide the shooting of a movie.

Teaching/Learning Sequential Art for Comics in the Computer Era is sort of a summary of the techniques commented up to the point: how to apply the principles studied. There is a large gamma of experiences and techniques involved in drawing a comic, but one of the most important is undoubtedly *how to look at things*: a working grasp on human anatomy (to understand how the body moves and what its limits are), on perspective (to represent objects and persons), on lighting (to put the shades in the right points), on objects, such as machines and drapery, on gravity, all that is required of an artist, together with the notions of cartooning (exaggeration and simplification in the artist’s style), composition (points that focus the attention of the reader in each panel) and knowledge about how to place and depict word balloons and about the interaction of words and images. Knowledge about the modern technologies of printing is also a good thing. The end of the book is dedicated to that¹⁹.

¹⁸ Though Eisner says a lot more about writing for Comics in this chapter, a lot of what he says does not conform to the modern Comics market (Eisner’s writer has the conjoined functions of the modern writer *and* letterer) and, so, will not be commented here.

¹⁹ This part of the book is also oversummarized here because it is largely outdated.

2.1.1.2 Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative

In *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*, originally published in 1996²⁰, Eisner seeks to establish a base on how to apply the principles of Comics language developed in *Comics and Sequential Art* in the creation of narratives. Seeing Comics as a language bound to become increasingly popular due to its characteristics, he felt the understanding of its narrative characteristics and possibilities was needed. In order to do that, he starts by presenting four terms to be used consistently throughout the book: *graphic narrative* (a narration that uses images to ‘transmit’ [sic.] ideas), *comics* (the modern form, with word balloons and art in sequence, as is done in regular comic books), *narrator* (the author or person controlling the narrative) and *sequential art* (images in sequence). (EISNER, 2013, p.10)

Graphic Storytelling is a book on very basic principles. The first chapter attempts a “history of narratives” (which Eisner sees as the basis for the social behavior of human beings, in its educational – thus civilizing – capabilities). Other than say that narratives were originated in the caves, however, no further developments are added to the ‘history’. After that, in the second chapter, the author tries to answer the question ‘what is a story?’, with relatively more success. A story for Eisner is “the narration of a sequence of a deliberately arranged sequence of events” (p.13), and follows certain rules. A schematics of a story, according to Eisner, would be:

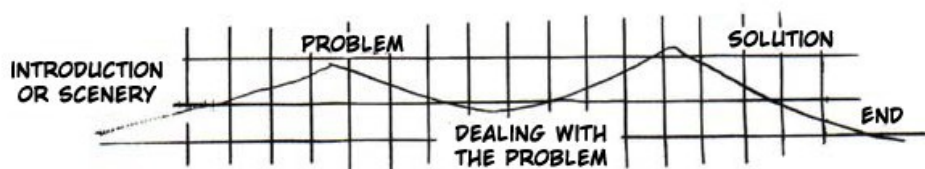


Figure 9 – Story Dynamics (EISNER, 2013, p.13)

²⁰ The version used in this work is the translation to Portuguese, published by Devir Livraria in 2013. All the quotations, therefore, are free translations created specifically for this work. As it is a translation of a translation, a direct quotation might bear little resemblance to the original text – so they will be avoided as much as possible.

A story's function, according to the author, is educational: stories have the purpose of transmitting information in an easy way. That can be done in several manners, such as telling a funny story or a scary one. These possibilities are the object of chapter 3, dedicated to the telling of a story.

For Eisner, there are three fundamental ways of telling stories: words, images and both. A story told through images as well as words is more easily and rapidly understood. The images in Comics are usually impressionistic, represented in a simplistic manner, a way of heightening its function as a language (through being more readily understood, one assumes). Since images relate to the experience of the reader and "experience precedes analysis" (p.19), the understanding of the situation is accelerated by the images. Of course, images do not present only advantages: they have limitations as well – such as having a hard time expressing abstractions or complex thoughts. Images are specific, they put things in absolute terms, with the speed of sight.

Images as Narrative Tools, theme of chapter 4, make two different points about images: first, the idea of stereotype is important for Comics, where a simple, recognizable character or element becomes iconic, generic – thus more readily readable. Eisner suggests that techniques such as choosing people's appearance based on animals that represent their distinctive features is a commonly applied resource, since the creators of graphic narratives usually deal with a lack of space for character development. Second, the symbolic nature of objects and clothes can be brought forth in the lines. It is hard to tell how that category differs from the previous, however. Based on Eisner's examples, one can muster the notion that objects and persons seen as 'good' have round lines, whereas angled or pointy objects or characters (drawn with angled lines, that is) tend to be seen as 'bad', and an idealized notion of the human form (or its avoidance) can be symbolic and, therefore, serve narrative purposes – as well as objects, their manipulation, placing or presentation:

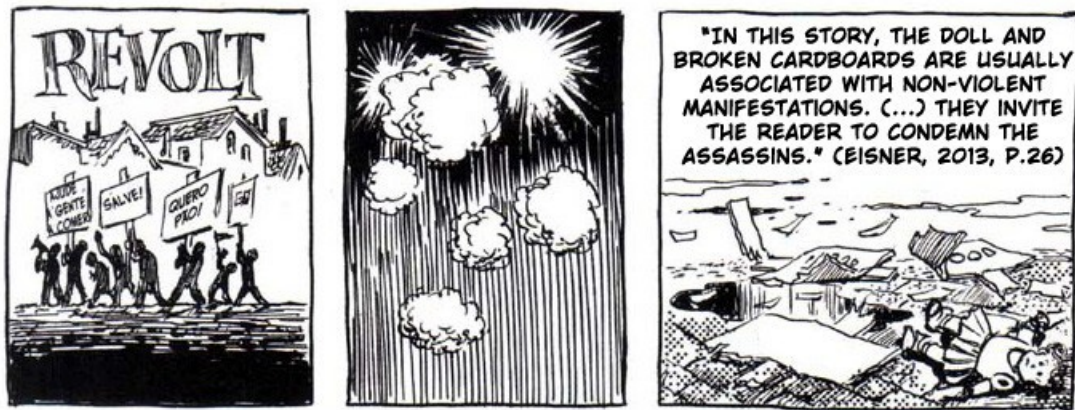


Figure 10 – Innocent Manifestation (EISNER, 2013, p.26)

Chapter 5 attempts a typology of stories, on the premise that the way of telling a story is related to the message to be conveyed: *instructive stories* present elements in order and concentrate on the process or technique to be taught, rather than on the action. Accidents and deviations of the plot can be made to enhance interest. There are *stories without plot*, or (as in the example provided) with very reductive plots, that focus on action, angles or what Eisner calls “visual pyrotechnics” – that is, images dynamically presented to convey the impression of action and power, which usually become confusing with overdeveloped plots. The *illustrated stories* present no direct speech and, thus, provide the reader with time to look at the art and gather more details – the sense of urgency is lost, for the relation actions/images is different, and an illustration may represent a much greater length of time than a panel usually does in Comics. The *symbolist story*, quite obviously, focuses on symbols and must be interpreted in ways other than those that the action directly shows in order to make sense. *Pieces of life* are stories that deal with the life experiences of the reader and thus need empathy and involvement in order to work. Sophisticated lay-outs and unusual choices may be harmful to the development, for the reader must focus on the emotions and subtle nuances in order to be involved. A *life story*, as Eisner calls it, is a story that focuses on one event to define the entire life of an individual.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the reader. A story must take the reader into consideration. That is obvious: nuances that surpass the reader’s capacity will be lost, or the story could be considered simplistic, if the reader were more sophisticated. One of the most basic human characteristics is empathy. The capacity of putting oneself in the place of another is arguably what allows human beings to tell stories in the first place, and so it is a useful tool

when making stories work. Empathy leads the reader in the understanding of features such as body and facial expressions:



Figure 11 - Empathy (EISNER, 2013, p.52)

In Comics, the reader is supposed to understand things like narrative time flowing from one panel to the next, the order of reading, space, movement and emotions. In turn, the story must be comprehensible. Eisner calls this the “contract” (p. 53). There are some themes that can be called universal, for they are enticing to a vast gamma of readers. These satisfy a reader’s curiosity about something, are funny or surprising, or present a view of humanity little known. But, for a story to be fully read, the reader must be retained to the end. This is achieved by a logical and intelligible organization (p. 55), while other elements such as surprise and impact can be worked into unexpected turns in the narrative – which demand a linear reading to be understood. Such turns also add interest to the story. Although the reader must supply a reasonable amount of information in comics (sound, movement, time, even dialogue), there are conventions and resources that can be employed to suggest this information (onomatopoeias, movement lines, changes and suggested duration, bodily and facial expression). If too much is expected from a reader, the story may become confusing. So when dialogue is shown through images, the reader must understand what is being said. When a scene has a dialogue, it is nice for the storyteller to remember that images are processed more quickly than the dialogue and bear that in mind while creating the story. The dialogue in a panel helps to determine the amount of time spent in diegetic time. Changes in the form of the text (rather than content), such as the size of the letters, textures, form of word balloons, etc. may help to suggest different qualities to the voice or sound. Not every action needs to be accompanied by text, it is up to the storyteller to decide the flow of the narrative.

In chapter 7, the influences of the reader are brought to light. The reader does not get to a comic without preconceptions and influences determined by genre, form and other texts. That means the reader is influenced by its experience with the written form, such as novels and short stories, the way image and sound are displayed in movies and the experience in reading other comics, to quote a few. The written form has a slower acquisition, but can get to lengths of introspection and complexity that a regular comic cannot easily achieve. The movies can influence not only the reading of comics, but also the narration of the comic. Cinematic techniques, such as close-ups of sections of the action and panoramic views, have been coopted by comics, and the idea of stereotypes, in its turn, incorporated into movies. Problem is, the frequent use of connected close-ups in comics may fragment the reading – the action needs to be linear so that the reader can understand what is going on. Comics are also influenced by the tradition not only of Comics as a language, but the local production as well²¹, specifically in the interplay of tradition, Literature, space and themes that are particular to each culture.

In chapter 8, there is the discussion of ideas. In Eisner's conception, anyone who wants to tell a story may be faced with decisions:

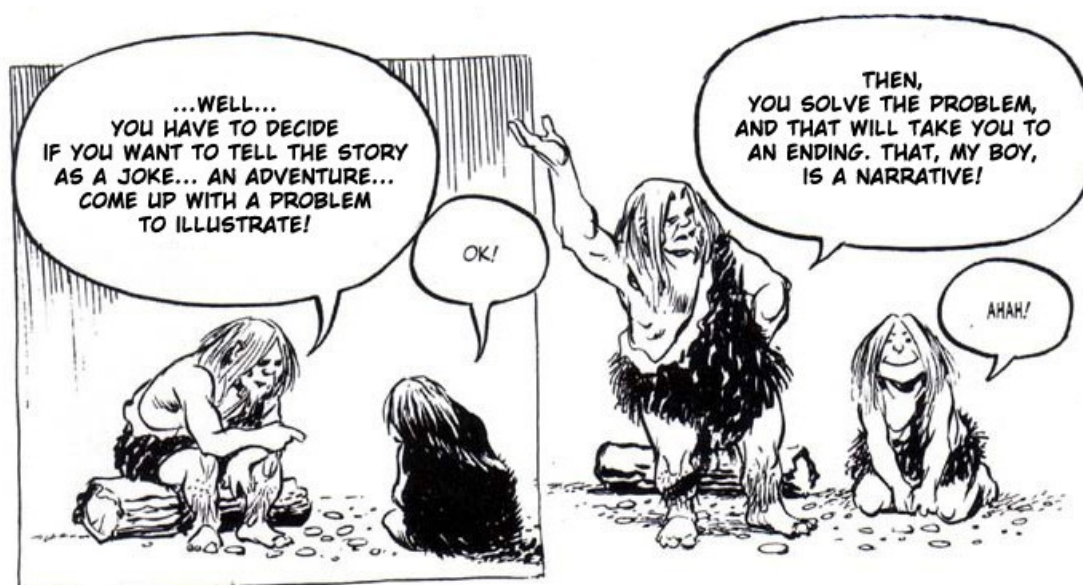


Figure 12 - Narrative Structure (EISNER, 2013, p.79)

²¹ That specific influence of Comics' tradition, which has Eisner talking about how superheroes, patriotic characters reminiscent of the 'strong men' of circus, are specific to American comics, has been attenuated by now, by the internationalization and new technologies of printing and communication in general, that allowed American Comics, Manga and, to a lesser extent, Bande Desinée, among others to be available worldwide.

Most stories come from a premise, some question or thing to be shown or discussed that is the base of the contract with the reader. Eisner lists some popular concepts, such as “*What would happen if...?*” (an element of the narrative is based on reality while other major parts focus on the creation and solution of a problem), “*Let me tell you about what happened...*” (in that sort of narrative, there is a sharing of an experience narrated – therefore, the characters need to be credible), “*So, my hero is launched into the following adventure...*” (similar to Campbell’s monomyth, the hero sets out on an stimulating adventure – and the reader with him/her) and “*Have you ever heard the one where... ?*” (a narrative that is based on a joke, or pun – there is a turn where the joke becomes explicit, and for that to happen the reader must be misled into believing the story).

Chapter 9 deals with the problem of writing for a graphic narrative, where one needs to concern oneself with the placing of the images as well, Not only that, images and words must support each other in the effort of advancing the action. In the graphic narrative, the text also can acquire imagetic properties. The ideal form of Comics is the one where the writer is also the artist, having more control about the story. When artist and writer are different persons, the interaction between them will be a determinant factor in the outcome of the story.

Chapter 10 is about narrators, but it deals mainly with narrative styles and provides examples through the work of well-known authors in the History of Comics – particularly the ones still in newspapers. Most prominent is Milton Caniff, author of *Terry and the Pirates* (1934-35), who helped redefine the comic strips with his realistic style and adventurous themes. Eisner points out that the author’s narrative evolved through time, and presents a later title (*Steve Canyon*, 1957) as a significantly developed narrative. Though Eisner does not explain his thoughts on the matter, it is interesting, so I will attempt to understand the changes.



Figure 13 - Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* (EISNER, 2013, p.130)

What makes this matter interesting is that the style does not change significantly – the amount of shading (black) has increased a little, becoming more detailed and consistent with the ambience; to that end, the author uses large and more daring brush strokes, which also denotes an evolution in the technique; there is a slight turn towards realism in the human figure, which is less stereotypical, and also the use of hatches²² to give the lighting more nuances – the main changes are in the narrative itself: the use of close-ups and different angles helps to make the story more dynamic, and there are a lot more scenes where the images speak for themselves. Maybe even more important, body language of the characters has evolved. Now, instead of people in testimonial shots talking to each other or waiting for their turn, there is a dynamic world that does not stop to wait for the written dialogue.

Eisner also points out Caniff's narrative rhythm, adapted to the reality of the comic strip – where the daily strip gradually becomes part of a reader's daily life and there's no definite end. The action is just advanced a little further from one strip to the next.

²² Close thin lines used to create a gradation between the white of the page and the black blotted shadow of pure ink. The closer the lines, the darker the hatched space. This is a resource used in black-and-white drawings.



Figure 14 - Caniff's *Steve Canyon* (EISNER, 2013, p.134)

Eisner also points out the possibility of very short stories, in which the power of the story resides in the artist's capacity of focusing on the precise scene. There's no dramatization of the action in this model, only the essence of the story – the reader's mind must provide the drama. He also points out the innovation of one-page stories (Herriman's *Krazy+Ignat*) and the story where the narrative (in text form) is complemented by detailed art, as happens in illustrated books (Forster's *Prince Valiant*). In that form, there's little need for descriptions, since the art fulfills this task. Frans Masereel's *Die Sonne* (1927), Otto Nückel's *Destiny* (1930) and Lynd Ward's *Vertigo* (1937) are commented then, all graphic stories without words, in which the dialogue and much of the action must be inferred by the reader.

Chapter 11 deals with the differences between Comics and electronic transmission (TV), where the images are not juxtaposed, but fed to the reader gradually. This form reduces the intellectual participation of the reader in the story and eliminates several connectors that are present in the Comics, such as variation of panel sizes, images extrapolating the limits of the panel, and others.

Chapter 12 is perhaps the most useful in the book for the elaboration of this study, despite having only 5 pages. It deals with the style and narrative of Comics, and starts by making a difference between style – the visual and feel of the art, that sets the atmosphere and works as a language does (p.159) – and technique, that is, the tools and their uses, employed in order to create the art. Implicit in the style are several choices that also tell a story. As example, Eisner uses Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986) and Crumb's *Introduction to Kafka* (1993). Despite the helpful notion, Eisner only says that in these works the style "functions as a narrative" and that *Maus*'s visual made the reader think that the art was

created in a concentration camp (both references in p.160). The narration, together with style, transmits a certain “feel” to the narrative, which Eisner deems as a sort of ‘psychic transmission’ (sic, p. 161). Eisner sees the figure of the narrator unmasked, to a degree, by its choices, such as style, selection of stereotypes, depiction of violence and gender, resolution of the conflict, etc. (p. 162) In writing a story, the narrator can choose the emotional tone as well. Eisner numbers four different possibilities: sentimentalism (in which emotions, idealism, nostalgia, feelings in general are prevalent), schmaltz (exaggerated exploration of emotion or compassion), violence and pornography (excessive exploration of sexual stimuli). The narrator must also understand the market and the media in order to choose his themes.

Chapter 13 deals with the Internet. Bearing in mind that this is a book originally published in 1996, it is fairly interesting. Talks about the different formats of comics in order to fit a computer screen, file types, how to scan a page and the notion of scrolling as a way of allowing the creation of an infinite canvas. Eisner closes the book with some observations on stories in general, summarizing a couple of works that deal with the subject, namely Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (the notion of monomyth), Roger D. Abrahams’ *African Folktales* (folktales as a way of universalization of the way of life), Ladislav Segy’s *African Sculpture Speaks* (art as primordial writing, then the only available way of representation) and E. H. Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion* (artistic representation as personal impressions).

2.1.1.3 Thoughts on Eisner’s Works

Will Eisner was everything he wanted Graphic Novels to be: innovative and significant. He also was highly self-referential, and, to a large degree, dated. None of that takes away his merit in being a pioneer in the study of the medium, but some of his attempts of classification of the types of stories in *Graphic Storytelling* or of applications of Comics in *Comics and Sequential Art* are, at best, insubstantial, probably deriving from Eisner’s life experience (the heavy references to instructional Comics – Eisner’s function during the war – seems to indicate so). The references to the Internet and computers are

also outdated and have only value as a curiosity. Things change, and it is important to bear that in mind when dealing with Eisner.

Another important observation to be made is that, despite the vast gamma of subjects Eisner brings to the attention of the reader, most of them are set aside with little more than a brief comment (for instance, the idea of cartooning, defined by Eisner as a matter of exaggeration and simplification, as if that actually meant something). Eisner is more of a ‘show’ than a ‘tell’ author – he exemplifies with images and other parts of his own work, but falls a little short on the elaboration of the concepts. Again, this doesn’t take away any of his merits, but his shortcomings are also many.

2.2 SCOTT MCCLOUD’S WORKS

Scott McCloud authored three books on Comics: *Understanding Comics* (1994), *Reinventing Comics* (2000) and *Making Comics* (2006). As Eisner, McCloud was a comics creator, who worked in the industry and eventually published his own comic book series, *Zot!* (published by Eclipse Comics from 1984 to 1990).

Though McCloud follows Eisner’s steps (not only is *Understanding Comics* dedicated to him, but McCloud’s definition of Comics is based on Eisner’s, and there are multiple references to his production in the books), he endeavors to take his findings further, in a conscious effort to build his theory. He constantly references other authors, such as Jung and Kandinsky, and strives to make his findings and views coherent. This study will merely summarize his main findings, paying less attention to *Reinventing Comics*, for reasons that will be explained further ahead.

2.2.1 Understanding Comics

Understanding Comics, a book dedicated to Will Eisner, was published in 1993. That means that, between *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and *Graphic Storytelling* (1996), Eisner probably read *Understanding Comics* and, in fact, mentions McCloud in the acknowledgements section of his second book and cites McCloud in a paragraph of *Comics as a Medium*, a preliminary note with a few useful concepts in *Graphic Storytelling* (EISNER, 2013, p.4 and 9, respectively). Interestingly enough, however, Eisner does not acknowledge McCloud's definition of comics (which is based on his idea of 'sequential art'), sticking to his own idea of comics as a medium with balloons and images, strongly determined by the form. This factoid serves to illustrate at least two things: first, the way in which the publication of the two authors interweave; second, how hard an agreement in a definition of the subject can be. *Understanding Comics* is also revolutionary in its form: differently from Eisner's production (which consists of very richly illustrated essays in text form), this work is a large comic book, with McCloud's cartoony character/avatar presenting his findings, speaking directly to the reader and pointing out examples in the pages.

As per in the introduction of *Understanding Comics*, the book is intended as an "examination of the art form, what it's capable of and how it works" (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.i). Listing his purposes, McCloud establishes that the work discusses a *definition* of Comics, its *basic elements*, presents a chapter on *closure*, which is *what happens between the panels*, a chapter on *time*, another on the *interaction of words and pictures* and one in *storytelling*. He claims to have put together "a new *comprehensive theory* of the *creative process* and its implications for comics and for *art in general*" (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.i).

Chapter 1 is dedicated to *Setting the Record Straight* – that is, finding a definition of Comics. The starting point is Eisner's 'Sequential Art', which, due to several possible problems, is expanded into the awkward "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.9). With a definition in hands, one can revisit the history of the medium to see some old examples under this new light – and that is the next step of McCloud. As Eisner before him, McCloud revisits early forms, such as Egyptian paintings (1300 B.C.), a pre-Columbian manuscript discovered by Cortez (1049) and the Bayeux tapestry (1066). McCloud does not consider early pictorial writing as an ancestor of Comics, since they evolved into written language. The invention of printing was very

important for the development of the medium, since it allowed it to become popular. The Tortures of St. Erasmus (1460), A Harlot's Progress (1731), and the works of Rodolphe Töpffer (1800s), are mentioned as examples – Töpffer is considered “the father of *modern comic*” (MCCLLOUD, 1994. P.17). McCloud then mentions modern works which were never considered as Comics (except by Eisner), as Lynd Ward's and Frank Masereel's woodcut novels and Max Ernst's 'collage novel' *A Week of Kindness* (1934), and even photo-comics and stained glass windows with biblical scenes. Cartoons, however, due to the fact that they present only one image, are not considered Comics. For McCloud, they may have similarities...:



Figure 15 - Cartoons & Comics (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.21)

Chapter 2 is about *The Vocabulary of Comics*, where McCloud invites the reader to the ‘strange and wonderful’ idea of *icon*. Base of this chapter, *icon* is “any image to represent a person, place, thing or idea” (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p. 27). The icon varies in respect to the degree of similarity it has with its object: letters and symbols (which represent concepts and ideas) are abstract icons, because they don’t resemble in any ways the sounds they represent; pictures, however, bear a degree of resemblance – which can vary, depending on the level of abstraction involved in the representation. As seen in the image above, McCloud considers cartoon ‘an approach to picture-making’. That means the high degree of simplification and the marking of the outlines of the forms represented – technique known as *drawing*²³. The idea of simplification is, for McCloud, the key to understand the high degree of involvement brought forth by the technique of cartooning,

²³ McCloud does not present the concept, however. It is implied.

since it connects with a simplified scheme of a person's body that is constantly in the person's mind, as a tool for policing our body and facial expression:

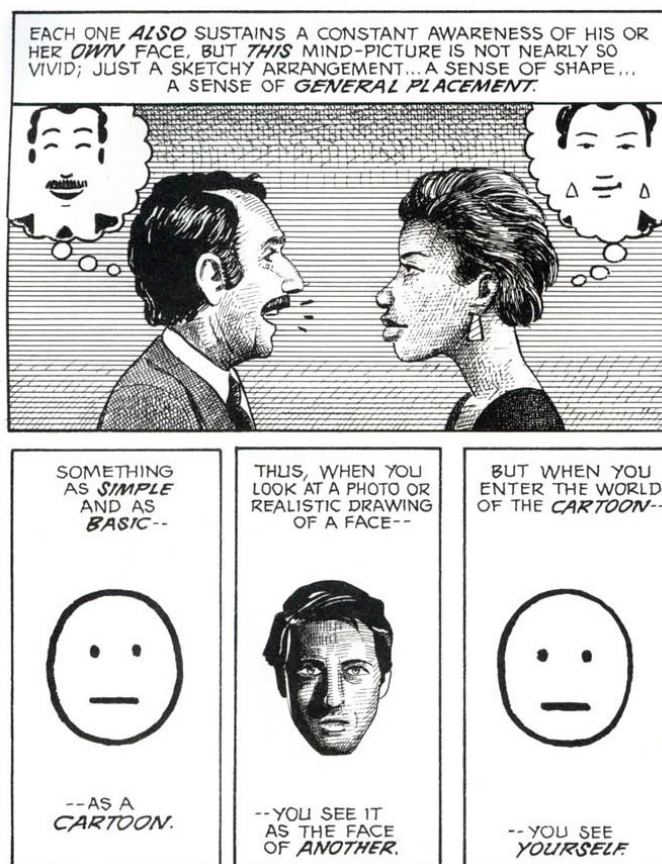


Figure 16 - Inner Cartoon (MCCLOUD, 1994, p.36)

In this way, simplified characters are seen as more relatable, while realistic ones are more distant from the reader. This sense of personal identity is also extended to surrounding objects – a bike becomes part of the rider, for instance. This allows a series of effects when mixing these styles – a villain depicted more realistically than a hero, for instance, will become even less relatable in the mind of the reader. Also, presenting realistically an exotic scenery gives the impression of looking at an exterior thing – that is, the more realistically a scenery is, the more it is perceived as such. Obvious as the sentence may be, its effect is not: a realistic scenery can be as visually stimulating as seeing an actual new place. The same for objects: when depicted realistically, they gain weight and texture. A comic mixing these two styles of representation can combine their benefits. Realism is akin to complexity, objectiveness and specificity, images *received* by the reader, while iconicity (which McCloud opposes to realism) is akin to simplicity, subjectivity, universality, images that are *perceived*.

Of course, there is a degree of realism in every representation, and for McCloud that includes verbal representations: since Comics involve the graphic representation of both images and words, there's no reason why verbal language should be excluded from this equation. Words, for McCloud, are "the ultimate abstraction" (p.47), the most simplified way of graphic representation, where any similarity with the object is lost and there is only a conventional link between the image (letter) and what it represents (sound). That gradation is completed by another form of non-iconic abstraction, called by McCloud the *picture plane*, where shapes, colors and lines are in its 'pure' form. With that, McCloud builds his famous triangle²⁴:

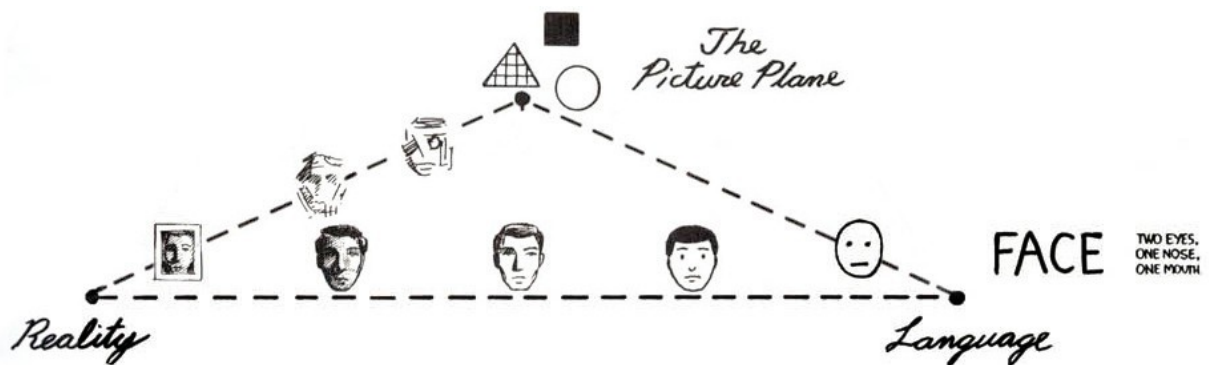


Figure 17 - McCloud's Style Triangle (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.51)

Chapter 3 is called *Blood in the Gutter*. In it, McCloud develops the idea of *closure* – the idea that our mind works to, through our world experience, complete into a coherent whole what is only partly perceived:



Figure 18 - Closure Examples (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.64)

Closure, then, is what allows the reader to make connections, necessary not only in order to understand the resemblance between a drawing and the object it represents (that is,

²⁴ Slightly edited here in order to fit nicely with the text.

make the 'link' between the two) and to read two juxtaposed images that have common elements or represent a logical development as a sequence. From that point on, having established that in Comics images are connected, one can think about these connections. McCloud identifies six possibilities: transitions of *moment* (different time frames in the same action), *action* (different action), *subject* (shift in the content, which remains connected to the scene or idea of the sequence), *scene* (shifts of distance, time or space), *aspect* (shift to a different part of the same scene) and *non-sequitur* (no relation between panels – McCloud does not actually believe in the existence of this transition, but adds it just in case). Comparing western to eastern comics, McCloud realizes that, while eastern style is more driven towards action, western style takes the time to build the mood and sense of place in their production.

Since it is up to the reader to ultimately make the connection between the panels, both the experience of the reader and the information in the panel are determinant factors in this connection. The information may be intentionally vague in order to require more effort – and, as such, demand more attention from the reader. *Style* can also affect closure: since a realistic depiction is more detailed, it takes more time to be absorbed, and that tends to disconnect the panels. When the style is also too focused on design, being closer to the Picture Plane, it can become hard to read as image, and, so, also take long and disconnect the panels. Cartoony styles present smoother transitions.

Chapter 4 is about *Time Frames*. In Comics, time passes not only from one panel to another, but also in the action inside the panel itself. Similarly to Eisner, McCloud considers the time for the action depicted to occur, the time of the reading and of enunciation in the panels, which are necessarily organized in space:



Figure 19 - Time in a Panel (McCloud, 1994, p.96)

The idea of passing time can also be conveyed by the repetition and dimension of panels (the larger the panel, the longer the reader looks at it to see if there's significant information, and, therefore, the greater its significance and reading time. Eisner discusses the panel shape and size as they interfere in the sense of passing time in the chapter *Framing Time*, as seen, and is here quoted by McCloud. Panel borders can also influence the reader's idea of time through the *bleeds*, that is, images that escape the limits of the panel, leaving the impression of limitless space (and extending time).

Since time and movement are interconnected notions, the depiction of movement can also interfere with the reader's notion of time in a panel. In a static medium, movement can be only signaled at, and the conventional way found for this idea is through motion lines. That derives from a personal impression of movement in the experience of the reader: whenever a movement is too fast to be processed by the brain, what we have is a blur, a trail left by the object, result of the brain trying to interpret several locations at once. The graphic solution for that is the lines that connect the object in movement to the location it occupied before. Transitions between panels and words, as seen, also extend that notion:

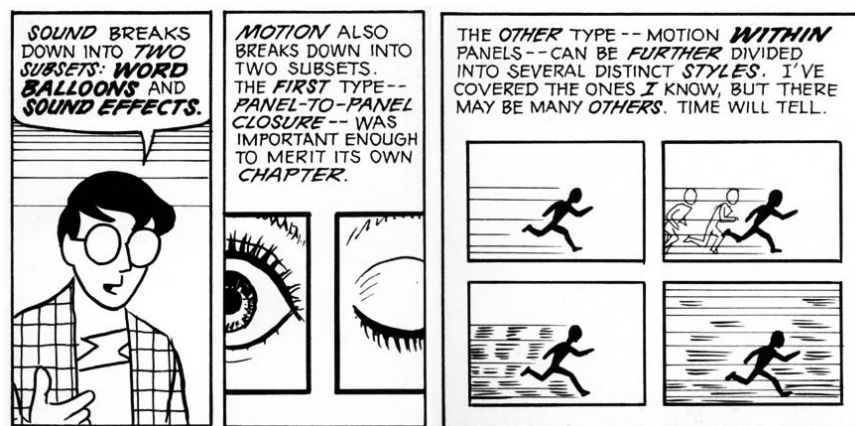


Figure 20 - Graphic Sound and Movement (MCCLOUD, 1994, p.116)

Chapter 5, entitled *Living in Line*, is perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of style in Comics made to the moment (if considered together with the notion of simplification, realism and design presented above). The basic idea is that the style can evoke an emotional or sensual response in the reader, and for that purpose both the lines in the images are full of potential meanings. McCloud turns to the shift from impressionism to expressionism to present this proposition – McCloud himself does not explain the use of this apropos in the book, but I feel it deserves a few lines: impressionism had broken the

rules of classical and realistic painting basically by detaching from the idea of the drawing as the base of the painting. Convinced that a realistic notion of the world shouldn't be, as the world is not, bound by outlines but rather be expressed only through colors, impressionists abdicated from the use of absolute black in their paintings and concentrated on the light and shades of colors. But, since art usually evolves dialectically, the Expressionism that followed broke their rules significantly by its radically subjective approach. It's a total change of direction: while impressionists looked to the world for inspiration, expressionists looked inside and portrayed the world through the filter of their consciousness. McCloud cites Kandinsky and other expressionists as searching for different forms of art, capable of uniting the senses, in what was called *synaesthetics*. Gathering a little of this vocabulary, McCloud sees expressive potential even in single lines even by simple single factors such as orientation, shape or character:










		LINES		
DIRECTION				
	Horizontal lines are passive and timeless.	Vertical lines are proud and strong.	Diagonal lines are dynamic and changing.	
SHAPE (and width)				
	Broken lines, with acute angles, are unwelcome and severe.	Round, variable lines are warm and gentle.	Geometrical, regular lines are rational and conservative.	
CHARACTER (that is, form of the line itself)				
	Strongly variable lines with acute direction strokes are savage and deadly.	Variable lines are insecure and unstable.	Regular, round-angled lines are honest and direct.	

Table 7 - Types of Lines (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.125)

Following that considerations, McCloud analyzes ten different drawing styles in a remarkable page:



Figure 21 - DiiTerent Styles (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.126)

McCloud's theme, as far as lines go, then, is concerned with thickness (specifically in the first analysis, only one that mentions it by deeming the lines 'bold' – bold lines are thicker lines), the technique (what he calls 'character' actually is a result of the application

of different techniques), the angles (round angles are welcoming and childish, acute angles are hostile and adult) and the traces (uneven, neurotic – that is, not firm – gentle curves and open lines). It is interesting to bear in mind that McCloud is not actually completely analyzing an artist’s style in these examples – only the lines in them. What else he had to say regarding style – cartooning, realism and design – was not taken into consideration in these.

With the evolution of the medium, Comics gradually gained a large vocabulary of graphic conventions, used to represent invisible things, such as moods and emotions. These symbols, while based on a graphic component, have become more abstract in their use. The following image is a compilation of the symbols used by McCloud as an example:

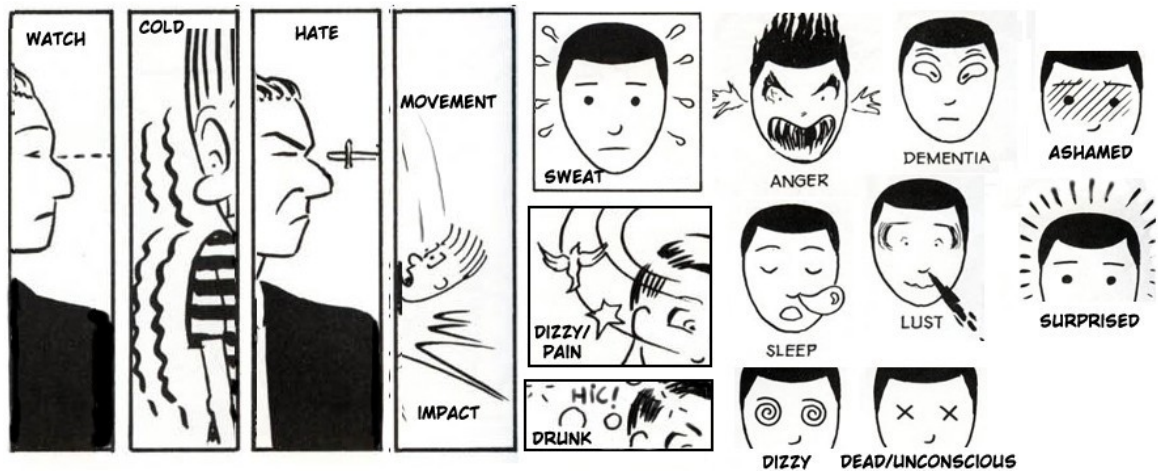


Figure 22 - Symbols (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.129-131)

Backgrounds can also have a symbolic effect, particularly in transmitting emotions. They are not limited to real or cartoony displays of reality, they can also show what’s going on in the minds of the characters. Distorted backgrounds, darkness falling or fading, spirals to show drowsiness, fire to indicate strong emotion or diabolic qualities, all that is obviously not restricted to the foreground. When a character is over a distorted background, it is inferred that the reader is experiencing a view or sensation associated with it, unless it is specified differently.

Word balloons are also resources used to try and convey the invisible (McCloud mentions Eisner’s ‘desperation device’): in the case, the qualities of sounds. When inside the balloons, the words can also work as images. McCloud doesn’t even attempt a

sequence), *duo-specific* (words and pictures convey essentially the same message), *additive* (one language amplifies the effect of the other), *parallel* (words and images follow different courses, without intersections), *montage* (words are treated as integral parts of the pictures) and, the most common, *interdependent* (where both images and words work together to convey an idea). The fact that a sequence is interdependent doesn't mean words and images have the same importance, however – any one can be predominant. When one of the languages is dominant in presenting the idea, the other is 'set free' to diversify and search other means of expression. But that's up to the imagination of the creators.

Chapter 7, *The Six Steps*, is about art, Comics, and the steps a Comics creator must necessarily take to be a true master of the craft. That is one of the things McCloud and Eisner share, to a large degree: since both are not scholars, but rather comics' creators, their works on Comics have frequent and sometimes deep considerations about the craft, advices for beginners, insights about the market, etc. In Eisner's case, both his books are not merely analysis of the Comics medium, but actually lessons about the possibilities of the medium and tips about ways of scanning images and printing and digital technologies. In this chapter, McCloud's thoughts on the ideal form of his craft and, incidentally, of his peers, is exposed. For McCloud, the true artist of Comics is the one that follows an important short path, consisting of six steps: *idea/purpose* (ideas, emotions, philosophy, whatever drives the author to create the work), *form* (the best medium to convey the idea, in the case obviously a comic book, but even then there are options involved, such as materials and techniques), *idiom* (genre, style, vocabulary... the choice of the best way for the presentation of the work), *structure* (composition of the work – what gets in, what is left behind), *craft* (the application of the skills and techniques, problem-solving, getting the job done) and *surface* (finishing and presentation, exposure of the public to the work).

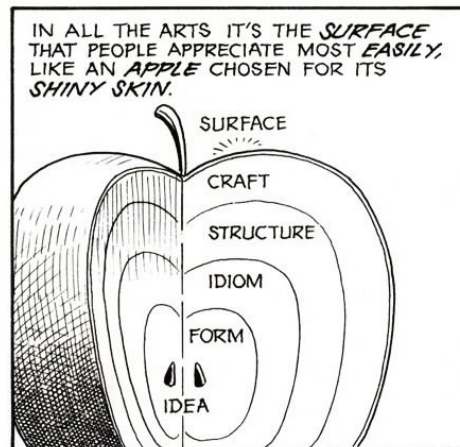


Figure 24 - Six Steps Into Art (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.171)

McCloud takes his time to show how many creators fail in the run to complete the six steps, how much effort is necessary. Failure does not necessarily mean professional incompetence or lack of fulfillment, though.

Chapter 8 is *A Word About Color*. McCloud starts by presenting the reader with two different color systems: the additive and subtractive primaries. Additive primaries were discovered by Sir James Clerk-Maxwell in 1861, and consisted of three different colors (red, blue and green) that, when added, produced white light. Subtractive primaries are called so because, when you subtract all of them, you get white. This system was invented in 1869 by Louis Ducos Du Hauron, and also consists of three primaries (cyan, magenta and yellow). Differently from the first system, this latter was applicable in the printing industry, and was very successful from the start. With the adding of black for outlines, and three possible degrees of saturation of each ink (100%, 50% and 20%) for economic reasons, the so-called ‘four color’ printing became very popular particularly in superhero comics, where strong, contrasting colors were used from the start to counteract the dulling effect of newsprint. McCloud argues that, due to the strong contrasts, the panels and pages established an equilibrium (where no color dominated) and, so, lost the emotional impact of single-color saturation, establishing an equilibrium where one color cancelled the other, resulting in what he calls an “emotional grey” (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.188). Certain characters, though, were defined to a degree by the colors used in them. For instance, everybody knows that The Hulk is emerald green, Batman is dressed in black (or grey and dark blue) and Superman is red and blue with a drop of yellow.

However, that is not the only effect of colors. They help adding weight and dimension to drawings better than simple shading can. As a result, a colored image seems more alive than a black and white one, even if the latter has more definition of shadows. The development of the printing technologies opened new possibilities for colors – now artists (or colorists) could experiment with different, subjective palettes or use a wide range of monochromatic tones to compose a scene dominated by a color’s particular emotion. Of course, the possibility of color does not invalidate the efforts of black-and-white producers – and color became available for large printings so recently that the monochromatic had centuries more to develop its techniques and possibilities. So, the mere fact that an image is colored does not mean it is more visually attractive than a monochromatic one. It should suffice to say that it is a possibility.

Chapter 9 is about Putting it all Together. Basically, a summary of the book and a defense of the medium. McCloud’s starting question is precisely: “Why is it important? Why should we try so hard to understand Comics?” And his answer is that, as individuals in an individualizing world, the possibility of understanding is one of the only things that can bring us together. And the expression of mind through the medium of Comics, complicated as it may be, only needs a pen and an idea, to start with.

2.2.2. Reinventing Comics

Reinventing Comics was originally published in 2000. Six years after *Understanding Comics* and four after Eisner’s *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (by the by, the book also has Eisner in its acknowledgements page). The main subject of the book is not only the new paradigms in the production of significant works (such as changes brought on by technology and market practices), but also the problems faced by creators, both beginners and professionals.

In my opinion, it is the poorest book in the trilogy. This is mainly for two reasons: firstly, its target market – the book is oriented towards the production, and not the language or the medium in general, and therefore directed to a more segmented public, interested in the market – and, secondly, because its sequential language suffers in comparison with the

one presented in the previous work (and incidentally, the next one as well). It is an illustrated theory of the market of Comics, rather than a Comic about this market – I recall no page in which the text wouldn't have sufficed to make the point, and where the images worked as anything more than illustrations. Then again, maybe I was not the target market.

This brief summary is here to explain the reason for the absence of a more detailed summary in this study: to show that, despite being familiar with McCloud's production, I have chosen not to detail this work, except in one particular, that is apropos of the analysis to be made – and that is precisely a comment about the superhero genre. But first things first.

The book reads as Eisner's word balloons: a desperation device. Written in the 1990's, a period of depression for the Comics' market, it raises twelve points for the reader's consideration, based on hopes and expectancies for the medium: 1) Comics are worthy of study and represent life, times and views of its author; that is, they are akin to Literature; 2) Comics are Art, and should be recognized as such; 3) Comics creators could fight for the control of their creations and for a financial compensation for them; 4) the business of comics could be reinvented, with benefits for both consumer and producer; 5) the medium's image could be improved if people recognized its potential and the progress made; 6) the Academy and the Law could help overcome popular prejudice and treat comics fairly; 7) Comics should be less gender-specific – both in target market and in production; 8) Comics should portray and appeal also to minorities, not only straight male upper middle-class young adults; 9) Comics should offer a whole variety of genres, not merely superhero stories; 10) Comics should embrace the new technologies of production (digitals); 11) Comics should find new ways to its public (delivery); 12) as well as new mediums (digital, as well).

Now, I'm not saying the book is not interesting. It is: McCloud goes beyond the theoretical path he chose to maintain in *Understanding Comics* and went down a road that rarely sees academic discussion: the market, its practices and its public, and the production of the works. The fact that this is not of particular interest in this work is incidental, and has little to say about the very relevant discussions inside. However, on page 114, amidst an interesting review about genres (and lack of diversity) in Comics, McCloud poses some comments about the superhero genre that may come in handy for this work.

Although the idea of a superpowered individual was popular from the start, in early comics its form was not yet definite. When Batman appeared, in 1939, he was a detective in very extravagant dressing. The genre took decades to mature into its current form. A mark in that evolution was the work of Jack Kirby, in the 60's and 70's, who seized the main theme of the superhero stories and turned it into the greater motif of his art: power. Up to the present, some characteristics remain unchanged: the musclebound anatomy, making the characters surpass professional gymnasts by far, exaggerated fields of depth (or exaggerated perspective fields) and what he deems "ever-escalating stakes" (p.114), or increasingly grand plots.

The book ends quite bitterly with the argument that "Comics is a *powerful idea*, but an idea that's been *squandered*, ignored and *misunderstood* for generations. Today, for all the *hopes* of those who *value* it, this form seems increasingly *obscure*, *isolated* and *obsolete*. So *small* as to almost drop *out of sight*. Small like an atom waiting to be *split*" (p.238-240).

2.2.3. Making Comics

Last book of the trilogy up to the moment, *Making Comics* (2006) presents seven chapters: *Writing With Pictures*, *Stories for Humans*, *The Power of Words*, *World Building*, *Tools, Techniques and Technology*, *Your Place in Comics* and, finally, *Making Comics*. The book is directed specifically to those intending to... well... make comics. That means it tries to unveil the methods of the craft, choices, techniques and their uses. As McCloud himself says, the books also worked as training in his intentions to create a following graphic novel – so one might expect an orientation towards his particular weaknesses. Nevertheless, it is still a ponderous exercise about the capabilities of the medium, and that is valuable in its reading.

Chapter 1, *Writing with Pictures*, has three touchstones that guide its reading and work as subtitles: *clarity*, *persuasion* and *intensity*. McCloud actually considers clarity and intensity as opposed qualities of a comic that must be balanced into what the artist wants. Clarity is necessary to achieving the story's goal, intensity makes the story more dynamic.

In between that, persuasion is related to the control and understanding of the reader, through principles such as composition and flow of the story. There are five choices involved in making each panel:

CHOICE OF MOMENT	CHOICE OF FRAME	CHOICE OF IMAGE	CHOICE OF WORD	CHOICE OF FLOW
<p>GOALS:</p> <p>"CONNECTING THE DOTS," SHOWING THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER AND CUTTING THOSE THAT DON'T.</p> <p>TOOLS:</p> <p>THE SIX TRANSITIONS: 1. MOMENT TO MOMENT 2. ACTION TO ACTION 3. SUBJECT TO SUBJECT 3. SCENE TO SCENE 4. ASPECT TO ASPECT 5. NON SEQUITUR</p> <p>MINIMIZING PANEL COUNT FOR EFFICIENCY, OR ADDING PANELS FOR EMPHASIS. CHARACTER OF MOMENT, MOOD AND IDEA.</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <p>SHOWING READERS WHAT THEY NEED TO SEE. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE, POSITION AND FOCUS.</p> <p>TOOLS:</p> <p>FRAME SIZE AND SHAPE.</p> <p>CHOICE OF "CAMERA" ANGLES, DISTANCE, HEIGHT, BALANCE AND CENTERING.</p> <p>THE "ESTABLISHING SHOT." REVEALING AND WITHHOLDING INFORMATION. DIRECTING READER FOCUS.</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <p>CLEARLY AND QUICKLY EVOKING THE APPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS, OBJECTS, ENVIRONMENTS AND SYMBOLS.</p> <p>TOOLS:</p> <p>EVERY ARTISTIC/ GRAPHIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.</p> <p>RESEMBLANCE, SPECIFICITY, EXPRESSION, BODY LANGUAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.</p> <p>STYLISTIC AND EXPRESSIONISTIC DEVICES TO AFFECT MOOD AND EMOTION.</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <p>CLEARLY AND PERSUASIVELY COMMUNICATING IDEAS, VOICES AND SOUNDS IN SEAMLESS COMBINATION WITH IMAGES.</p> <p>TOOLS:</p> <p>EVERY LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC DEVICE EVER INVENTED.</p> <p>RANGE, SPECIFICITY, THE HUMAN VOICE, ABSTRACT CONCEPTS, THE EVOCATION OF OTHER SENSES.</p> <p>BALLOONS, SOUND EFFECTS AND WORD / PICTURE INTEGRATION*</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <p>GUIDING READERS BETWEEN AND WITHIN PANELS. AND CREATING A TRANSPARENT AND INTUITIVE READING EXPERIENCE.</p> <p>TOOLS:</p> <p>THE ARRANGEMENT OF PANELS ON A PAGE OR SCREEN, AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS WITHIN A PANEL.</p> <p>DIRECTING THE EYE THROUGH READER EXPECTATIONS AND CONTENT.</p> <p>USING MOMENT, FRAME, IMAGE AND WORD IN TANDEM.</p>

Figure 25 - Five Choices in Each Panel (McCloud, 2006, p. 37)

The notions of clarity and intensity, despite being presented as opposites (clarity is essential to the flow of the story, so that the reader can understand the actions and the sequence, while intensity acts as a distraction in the story: by making the art more expressionistic, and as such more sensual and intense, it distracts from the story), are not irreconcilable. Intensity may be used in key moments of the story to amplify the emotional effect while clarity makes the story interesting, so that one characteristic may actually reinforce the other.

Intensity, in Comics, is based on the idea of exaggeration – effects that are taken so extremely in the panel or page that they cannot help creating, by contrast, a strong emotional response in the reader. As a result, it is an effective way of heightening the reader's emotional response to a scene or situation. On the other hand, it is to be used with measure, since in a story where everything is heightened, nothing is, and the effect just serves to confuse the reader. Some of the techniques to create the feeling of intensity are:



Figure 26 - Some Intensity Techniques (MCCLOUD, 2006, p.46)

So, though clarity is necessary for the reader to be able to follow the story, there are two ways for the reader to *care* about it: one is the strength of the story itself (the characters, ideas and sensual qualities of the world presented in it), the other is intensity of presentation.

Chapter 2 is entitled *Stories for Humans*, and it is about *character design*, *facial expressions* and *body language*. Human beings cannot help but see the world consistently with their experience, thus projecting themselves, their reasoning, experience and thoughts into the things they perceive. That is a key point of McCloud's theory of the effect of simplification – that is, the involvement of the reader – and it is also the reason which makes Comics possible: the capacity of the reader to 'jump through the gutter', so to say, and organize into a coherent whole that is nothing but juxtaposed static images. A good character should have an inner life, with its own drives and motivations, be visually distinct from others and display its own 'colors' of expression, that is, have a vocabulary and behavior coherent with its construction. Since Comics is a visual medium, the capacity of the artist to vary the faces and body shapes is also important in order to allow the reader to tell one character from the other:

CARTOONY STYLES ACCOMMODATE MORE DRAMATIC VARIATIONS IN BODY TYPES, SO SUCH EXTREME DIFFERENCES HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH ALL-AGES TITLES.



AS WITH INNER DRIVES, SOMETIMES A CHARACTER'S OUTER APPEARANCE CAN BE BUILT AROUND A SINGLE IDEA.

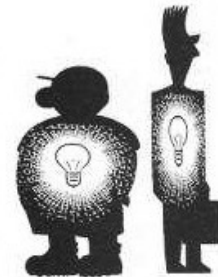


Figure 27 - Cartoony and Realistic Characters (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p. 72)

Stereotypes, archetypes, animals, any frame of reference can be used in order to create distinct characters. Once they are created, they must act. And, to do so in a believable manner, the artist must have a basic understanding of facial expressions and body language (which imply a necessary basic knowledge of human anatomy and the muscles of the face in particular). Humans have an extensive repertoire of expressions, as McCloud shows with amazing mastery (no less than 42 different facial expressions, obtained by gradation and mixing two or three different ones), derived from six basic ones: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness and surprise. It is when commenting on how to depict those expressions, though, that McCloud makes an interesting distinction, found nowhere else in his books: exaggeration.



Figure 28 - Realism, Simplification, Exaggeration, Symbolism (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p.94)

For McCloud, simplification “is most effective when it captures the key features of an expression”, while “exaggeration seizes on the same key features and simply ramps up their geometric extremes” (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p. 95). The symbolic uses, as seen before in *Understanding Comics*, are more abstract than regular images (and, so, more akin to the

written word in its highly conventional relationship with its object). Similarly to facial expressions, the depiction of body language depends on a series of different subjects (such as knowledge of the vast repertoire of body signals to start with, of anatomy, of techniques of drawing and how body language works in Comics). If a general rule can be made, however, it is about posture: a straight posture communicates strength and confidence, while a lowered posture communicates weakness and insecurities, being frequently used in underground comics. The use of the several sorts of signals that accompany body posture, such as hand gestures, personal space and imbalance (that is, when a person seems to be falling due to the dislocation of the body's gravity center) can further the idea of communicating with the body.

Chapter 3 is *The Power of Words*, and it focuses on *Seamless Integration* and Eisner's "*Desperation Device*", that is, word balloons. In it, the integration between images and words is considered. The chapter relies largely on what McCloud had to say about the matter in *Understanding Comics*, in specific the seven ways in which this interaction can happen (word-specific, picture-specific, duo-specific, intersecting, interdependent, parallel and montage). Following that, McCloud mentions the idea of word balloons by quoting Eisner (originally related to the hot steam exhaled through speech) and mentioning that, similarly to the shapes of the balloons, the words inside tend to acquire graphic properties to communicate the qualities of the sound (such as size, textures, etc.). There is a balance between images and words in Comics, so that a story full of oversized texts starts to feel like an illustrated story and impedes the involvement of the reader. McCloud numbers four different characteristics that words can acquire through graphic treatment:

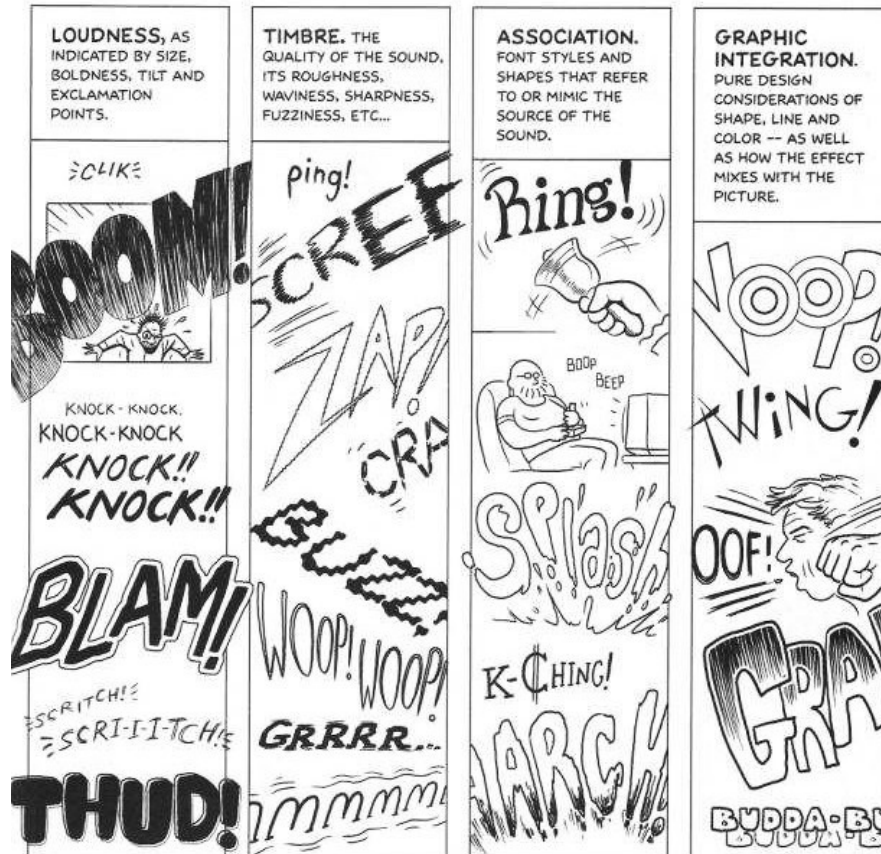


Figure 29 - Loudness, Timbre, Association, Graphic Integration (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p.147)

Chapter 4, *World Building*, deals with *perspective*, *places* and *research*. The basics of his argument is that the scenery is a strong component in the reading of a comic, helping determine the level of involvement of the reader. As argued before, in *Understanding Comics*, the scenery can be a sensual experience that accompanies the story. Once the reader is placed in a comic, though, mere hints are enough to complete the scene in its mind: closure does the rest. A high level of detail can stimulate the reader's sensory memory and heighten the feeling of involvement in the universe of the story. Silent, detailed panels, with no specific duration, are an invite for the reader to linger and absorb the atmosphere. Composition and perspective, they all can play their part in making a placement panel (that is, a panel with the intention of presenting a certain context to the reader) more involving. Perspective is a great ally in making realistic sceneries with a strong impression of placement, as long as the reader knows the techniques. The idea of perspective is the idea of representation of a 3-D environment in a 2-D medium – where the impression of depth in the page can be created through the use of several techniques, such as overlapping characters or objects (which would mean one of them is in front of another), the size of things (because things seem to be smaller at a distance), fading of

things in the distance (because in the real world air is not exactly transparent, and so things that have large masses of air between them and our eyes – that is, they are more distant – seem to be involved in a light blue mist) and the position of the objects in relation to the viewer. A strong sense of placement helps a complex and sensual reading experience.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to *Tools, Techniques and Technology*. McCloud starts the chapter suggesting that, aside the mind of the artist and the artist’s hand, there are no right tools for the job, but before the reader has time to ask what the chapter is about, then, he starts presenting some of the basic instruments, such as the t-square, the triangle, the drawing table and such. In this study, it is interesting to have a limited knowledge about some of the tools used in creating the different lines possible in Comics – if only to be able to address their effects with precision. So, presenting the three most used tools when inking Comics:

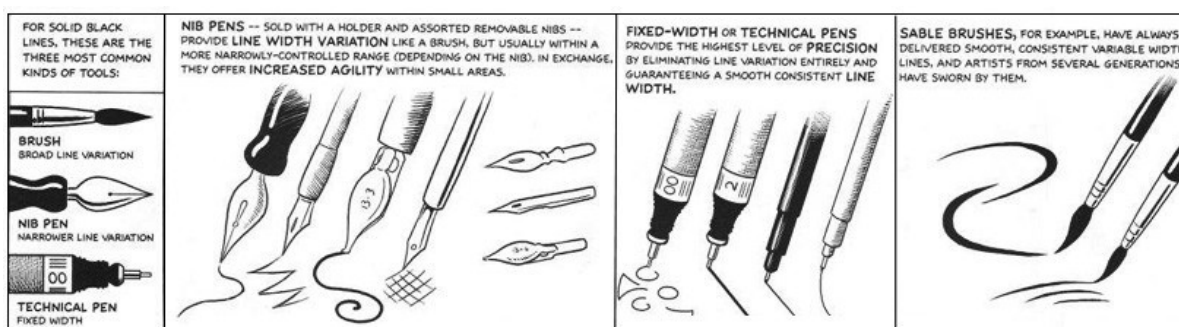


Figure 30 - Sable Brush, Nib Pen, Technical Pen (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p. 191-193)

Despite presenting all these tools, McCloud reveals that he hasn’t used one of them in ten years, making his comics on a special touchscreen, in Photoshop. Well, the principles still apply, since Photoshop brushes were developed to imitate real brushes. And, in any case, it is useful to know the different sorts of lines when describing a style.

Chapter 6 is entitled *Your Place in Comics*, and presents three different essays about style. The first essay is entitled *Understanding Manga*. It is actually a joke with the title of McCloud’s first book, since the word Manga, which can be translated as ‘extravagant drawings’, also means ‘comics’. In it, McCloud talks about how he discovered Manga in 1982, and how fascinated he was with the form. Manga presents highly iconic characters with simple, emotive faces, and at same the time presents a strong sense of placement of the reader, with detailed backgrounds and attention to small details. There was frequent use of wordless panels, showing different aspects of a scene, subjective

motion (where the background, and not the character, is full of movement lines, giving the impression that the reader is following the progress of the character rather), a broad variety of character designs and of emotionally expressive effects such as the use of symbols and expressionistic backgrounds. The genre seemed mature, up to pace with the storytelling challenges of a multiplicity of genres and titles. Manga market grew in techniques and in coverage, since then, deeply influencing American readers to write their own stories.

The second essay is entitled *Understanding Genres*, and the main point can be made quite briefly: whenever enough people make a similar type of comic in the same way, a genre is created. Genres have life cycles; from time to time, they need a revitalization, and can also take decades to evolve. When the matter is creating genres, one single person can inspire a generation of creators. The new technologies and the possibility of creating independent comics on the Web have radically changed the idea of genre. Whether that would help or hurt Comics it is unsure, since, for some critics, no genre comic would be a loss to begin with. Anyway, what is important in that revolution is to experience new things, for, if genres can ripen they can also rot – and a reader stuck in a single genre may not notice the difference.

The third essay is *Understanding Comics Culture*, and is about what Comics aficionados expect from the form. McCloud identifies four different tendencies:

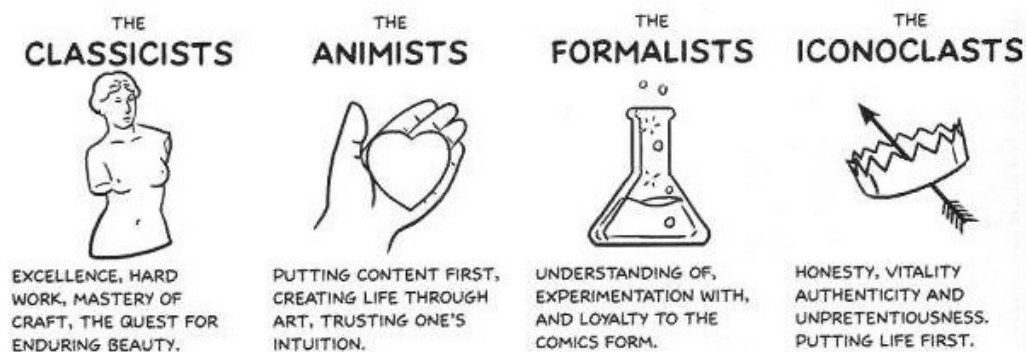


Figure 31 - Types of Comics Ideals (McCloud, 2006, p.232)

These tendencies, that divide readers, have their limitations and problems; while classicism and animism represent a tradition of beauty and storytelling, formalists and iconoclasts are more likely to promote a revolution in the medium. Formalists and classicists worry about the form, while animists and iconoclasts about the stories. And so on. According to McCloud, classicists have been the backbone of Comics, animists have created more readers than the others, formalists keep renewing the medium and iconoclasts

are a sort of Comics' conscience – and also the source of some of the medium's most profound works (p. 237).

Chapter 7, *Making Comics*, is little more than McCloud addressing the reader, summarizing the main points made up to that point and stimulating the reader (supposedly a Comics creator) into making comics.

2.2.4. Thoughts on McCloud's Production

McCloud goes much further than Eisner in systematizing his views on Comics. It is, quite obviously, not enough. As Beaty and Nguyen mentioned, their lack of connection with scholarship on the subject makes their works suffer, to a high degree. A good example of that statement would be McCloud's definition of comics.

For him (or, at least, for his cartoony alter ego), comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”. This definition is actually a development of Will Eisner's, comics as “Sequential Art”, a form virtually ignored by scholars (EISNER, 1985, p.5). However, it is fortunate that, as McCloud points out, his specific definition “is not something that comes up a lot in casual conversation” (MCCLOUD, 1993, p.9), for it ends up defining every single piece of writing, drawing and even scribbling ever made, as well as those to come – that is, since the expression “pictorial and other images” encompasses practically every image ever created. Not only that, the idea of “deliberate sequence” does not really help narrowing the vast gamma of possibilities down, since any arrangement of two images in a work, newspaper, wall, etc., unless explicitly and pointedly alleatory, can be considered deliberate. If one considers that letters are images that conventionally represent sounds (as one might), the definition can be thought to encompass whatever has writing or imagery. If one considers that landscapes (in real life) are fair game for McCloud's “other images”, architecture and engineering are also part of the universe of comics, both the schematics and the physical counterparts. The idea of something that is “intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” is

also not helpful in narrowing the idea, either. So, the only word that might be of any help in the definition would be “juxtaposed”. But, as John Holbo soberly points out in the first part of the book *The Art of Comics* (MESKIN & Cook [ed.], 2012):



Figure 32 – ‘Why Ain’t I Juxtaposed?’ ‘You Are!’ (MESKIN & COOK, 2012, *apud* HOLBO, 2009)

That is to say, one image with two different elements and two juxtaposed images creating a whole, larger image, which can be read on a different level, are one and the same – the organization and juxtaposition of these elements being what is called the *composition* of the larger, more complex, image. Holbo goes further in his criticism of McCloud’s definition by pointing out situations in which the distinction between words and images are blurred, such as written works illustrated by the authors (such as William Blake) or the ones whose illustrations were oriented and supervised by the author (Charles Dickens’ novels), or how typography influences the reading of a book, getting to the conclusion that the inventors of comics were actually the Irish monks who started using spaces between written words (therefore demonstrating a purposeful use of space). One does not need to go that far, though.

So, it is not exactly that McCloud’s work does not connect with the critical fortune written about his subject or to scholarly tradition – in fact, it does: it connects to Eisner, the only other creator to endeavor to make a theory pertaining to Comics – it is that McCloud’s definition lacks rigidity. At least, rigidity enough not to fall apart in mere ten years.

More than that, McCloud’s production, as Eisner’s before him, addresses their peers – Comics creators. That is nothing to be sneering at, merely a market choice, or an opportunity to speak to people you know are interested in the same things as you are. But,

if Comics indeed suffers from the lack of attention of critics as they claim, perhaps a more oriented effort into that mysterious place should have been advisable.

But, it is said, you can't have everything. Both authors are visionaries, to a large degree. So much so that their theories constitute the basis for this study's attempt, as I believe was the intention of Eisner's second work, to bond the rules of Comics with the rules of narratives. Only with a definite methodology in mind, this time. And, incidentally, also by a creator (which I am, only not a prolific one).

2.2.3 Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (1997)

The System of Comics (2007), by Thierry Groensteen, is divided into four different chapters (*introduction, restrained arthrology, general arthrology and conclusions*). In the introduction, Groensteen defends the idea that a theory of comics must renounce two widespread ideas that appear frequently related to the subject: the idea that the study of comics must pass a decomposition into constitutive elementary units and the idea that comics are a mixture of text and images (Groensteen defends the primacy of images over text). To that purpose he compares the approaches of scholars such as Guy Gautier (who defends lines and spots as the constitutive units of images), Ulrich Kraft (who decomposes images in characters and their position in the foreground or background of a given panel and understands that even the characters may be decomposed into smaller units). Groensteen argues (after Benveniste) that it is impossible to decompose images without losing sight of the whole composition: that each piece (of art) is a unity, demanding its own code in order to be understood. In short, as a unique combination of two different codes (visual and verbal), comics can only be called a system: a "semiotic system devoid of signs" (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc.86-91/2574). Groensteen attributes the view of scholars such as Rodolphe Töpffer, in which image and text are equal components of comics, to the preconception of writing as the vehicle of storytelling in general, idea that has been rendered obsolete by the multiplicity of narrative forms. Other definitions are unnecessarily bound by a historical take that limits their subject, leaving out of their scope earlier manifestations of the form (such as narrative tapestries). Among those are the

definitions of David Kunzle (who establishes four conditions for a comic strip to be considered a comic book – a sequence of separated images, a preponderance of image over text, a story that is both moral and topic and, finally, to be in a reproductive medium, that is, a mass printed medium) and Bill Blackbeard (who includes ‘serially published’ in his definition of comics, together with recurrent identifiable characters, successive drawings and ballooned dialogue or an equivalent).

Instead, and in order to get to a non-restrictive definition, Groensteen suggests that comics form a (narrative) system in which the image is prevalent over the text, the panel is the elementary unit to be considered and that it is oriented through two distinctive principles: that of *iconic solidarity* and that of *arthrology* (from the greek *arthron* – articulation). This view is oriented by two principles: first, Comics are composed of interdependent images and, second, these images’ first form of organization is space. *Iconic solidarity* concerns the relationships between interdependent images, which can be read at various levels and combines several operations. This system is *spatio-topical*, that is, its reading is necessarily oriented by the measure of space, only dimension allowed in the medium. *Arthrology* is the study of these particular operations – that is, how these relationships are displayed in space, and their nature. Groensteen understands that arthrology works at two levels: *restricted arthrology* is linear, governed by the principle of *breaking down* the narrative and concerns the sequential syntagms – that is, it focuses the linear aspect of the succession of the panels. *General arthrology*, governed by the principle of *braiding*, is concerned with the non-linear links (loc.333-348/2574).

The first part of the book is dedicated to understanding the *spatio-topical system* and its principles of organization. Since the frame is what delimits the panel, it is interesting to think the entire page as another organizational level, where the frames interact – besides the idea of the frame that contains each panel, Groensteen considers the layout of the entire page a *hyperframe*, while the narrative that contains all the panels of the narrative is the *multiframe* (loc.474). To understand the panel in relation to its frame (without regard for its contents), one can use three different parameters: the panel’s *area*, *form* and *site* – which is the location in the page and/or in the work (loc.442/2574). Area may influence the reading through the dimension of the panel; form through the shape – which can conform to the hyperframe (by not being distinct) or oppose it (whence it is more noticeable). Site may orient the reading order, and also have other functions such as

in a panel in a privileged place in the page. The margins of the hyperframe can also carry significance and influence the reader, not only in the length and distance of the separation of the panels, but also by displaying elements like colors and/or other graphic information. Double pages can also work together to create different effects.

There are six functions a frame might perform: *closure* (encapsulating the image inside a panel, giving it shape and choosing its contents – and that means also what is left for the reader to imagine, as in McCloud’s idea of closure), *separative* (makes panels separated from each other, so that they can be related in a sequence, similar to the punctuation in written language), *rhythmic* (similarly to Eisner, Groensteen explains the narrative rhythm of Comics through the framing), *structural* (as it occupies, and by doing so, organizes space), *expressive* (the frame itself carries a significance to the narrative, whether addressing the content of a panel, suggesting a reading order or through other means), and *readerly* (the frame is understood as a step into the reading of the narrative). Groensteen understands the *strip* (a line of panels) as an intermediary between the panel and the page (considering that strips unite panels, and pages unite strips), which can also be used, as the panels, to grant meanings to the images – such as detaching the contents of one particular strip in the page through dimensions, thickness of lines, location of word balloons, number of panels or color schemes. Word balloons are also significant, due to their influence in the sequence of the reading of a page. Like panels, word balloons are closed spaces inside the narrative, and so can work, with strips, pages (hyperframes) and panels, to convey meaning. Balloons are subordinated to the panels (for they necessarily imply the existence of a panel – loc.945) and can relate to their host (panel) in different manners: *depth* (establishes an opposition between image and text ‘zones’ – and texts are flat, while images can convey the impression of depth, overlaps being also a possibility), *form* (the balloon is also a form, that is, an image), *area* (the balance between words and images influences the reading) and *positioning* (though images are prevalent in the reading, the balloon’s position indicates the order of the utterances and points to the utterer). A balloon may also interact differently with the frame in several ways, overlapping it (which means the cartoonist has more space for the drawings, and the text may extend to outer zones), touching it (reinforcing the separation from other moments), being interrupted by it (seemingly creating a separation between the text and image layers) or being detached from it, internal to the panel (working as an ‘interior frame’). Some *pragmatic* authors use

a wide range of word balloons to better fit the panels, while more *systematic* ones tend to stick to a formula that fits their style. But, apart from their position inside the panels, the balloons inside the hypertext must also be considered, for they help orient the verbal reading order, though not necessarily the reading of the page itself:

Evidently, a thousand detours are possible on the trajectory that leads from one balloon to the next; the position of the balloons does not so much indicate a road to be followed as the stages to be respected, between which each reader is free to wander around in their own way, obeying the solicitations of other stimuli. (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc. 1124)

Word balloons, working similarly to panels, can also display the six characteristics of the panels, being considered not only in relation to other panels, but also within the panel they are in. They can relate to the images of the panel in different ways, reinforcing, denying or complementing them. The expressive forms balloons can assume are particularly significant because the balloon itself becomes iconic, that is, able to display an entire gamma of meanings in establishing the characteristics of the text in it.

Inset (or *incrustation*) is the insertion of panels within panels. This incrustation can be either a *superimposition* (it magnifies the background, for instance, making visible characters too small to see in the original) or an *interaction* (it contextualizes the inset panel and maintains a relationship between the two, such as part and whole of an image). The inset is a supporter of arthrology and of the breakdown, since it builds or heightens the relationship between two discursive units, fully participating in the page layout. Groensteen uses Christian Metz and Roger Odin's understanding of inset in Cinema to propose four different uses for the form: *non-diegetic* (without a direct relationship with the action, but with symbolic value), *subjective* (dreams, impressions, memories), *displaced diegetic* (part of the action, but shows an angle contrary to the one that is predominant in the scene) and the *explicative* (explains part of the plot). The inset, however, is part of the bigger panel, and not a parallel development related to the multiframe, for it is seen simultaneously with the bigger panel and is located inside it, having the same duration.

Page layouts, then, organize these principles into the hyperframes, not only through proportional and positional relations between panels, but also through perceptive and

pertinent relations of space and the grid formed by the balloons, determining the borders and form of the hyperframe, either relating to a single or a double page. Page layouts have a difficult relation with the breakdown: they are not determined by it, nor determine it. Their relation (that is, between the panels and the layout) is mutually constructive. Groensteen tries to get a grip on their interaction through three principles: *compatibility* (limited space on the page, so the panels cannot take the same place at the same time), *orientation* (the panels offer the reader a route to the reading) and *global composition* (principle that submits the panels to a general order, to be perceived in the page), though these principles, especially the former, are not absolute.

Benoit Peeters' model of organization, divided between *conventional* (follow a fixed form), *decorative* (aesthetic principle guides the layout), *rhetorical* (the action guides the layout) and *productive* (the organization of the page guides the story) page layouts, does not seem to be fit for the task, since these categories frequently overlap and get confused in practice. Peeters's model, being the work of a creator, does not account for the perceptive and cognitive contribution provided by the reader, and also does not measure up to the promise of not setting the organization and the signifiers of the panels apart. The model is at once too restrictive and too vague. Groensteen's major criticism, however, is that Peeters' model does not account for the structures he proposed, such as autonomy of the strip, the balloons and the inset. Instead, arguing that rhetorical layouts can become automatic and predictable, Groensteen proposes a system that can be marked by either following the model of a *regular* page or *deviating* from it. The regular page layout is interesting because it organizes the information in an easily recognizable way, the fixed size of the panels does not privilege them, and therefore the actions depicted gain significance – and that allows also for the heightened significance of any deviation of the norm.

If one seeks to analyze a page layout, a fair start would be to ask if the page is *regular* or *irregular*, *discrete* or *ostentatious* ('regular' is the page that follows the regular layout, 'discrete' is the page that is oriented by the story, not being visually exceptional in any perceptible way). Finally, the analyst must ask about the *motivation* that leads these choices, without being necessarily restricted by excluding categories. Groensteen also disregards the idea of *editing (montage)*, a compromise of sorts between the ideas of layout and breakdown (that is, adds both concepts into one), deeming it more fit to film analysis,

which is necessarily more oriented by the sequence, than to Comics, in which the frames are juxtaposed.

The second part of the book concerns *restrained arthrology* – that is, the linear component of arthrology, or sequence. Roughly, that means the understanding of the elementary units (*panels*) that form the *pages* which, added, form the *story*. Groensteen's starts the chapter by trying to understand the threshold of narrativity – the minimum element that constitutes a narrative – and if a single image can be narrative. To that end, he starts by analyzing the ideas of film theorists, who have made efforts in that direction. Christian Metz considers that the move from one image to another is a shift from image to language (loc. 1426). Michel Colin considers that a single image is also read orderly, from left to right. André Gaudreault uses Todorov's principles of *succession* and *transformation* to ponder that the necessary condition of narrativity resides in the idea of movement, and as such not particular to a single image, though an image can have an *intrinsic* narrativity, as opposed to the narrativity of its arrangement within the whole of the work, or its *extrinsic* narrativity. Odin considers that there is narrative in the panel itself, since its composition is a vectorization of sorts, in the sense that it orients the order of the reading. With that theoretical background at hand, Groensteen argues that, since the notion of movement is not important in comics (since there is none to speak of, out of the reader's mind), the notion of vectorization does not easily apply to its reading. He believes comics lean toward a *narrative drawing*, different from illustration or pictures, though the majority of images inside a comic are not vectorized (that is, have no distinct internal reading order), and the narrativity works both through this technique and the organization of panels within the multiframe. It is his view that²⁵:

if we do not dismiss the hypothesis that an isolated image can be intrinsically narrative (...) we can, correlatively, be certain that the juxtaposition of two images, taken in a rapport of transformation, does not necessarily produce narration. (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc.1456)

²⁵ Groensteen apparently dismisses (or ignores) the idea of a narrative *pause*, as proposed by Genette (1983, p.99), linking the idea of narrative to movement instead. The basis of the argument is that an object can be shown in more than one style in different panels, or different objects used as motifs, and, so, there's no development to the story. This makes a lot of sense in film theory, which is his basis, but fails when considering the written narrative, where a description (pause) of a scenery necessarily, given its linearity, focuses on details of the scenery in order to compose a larger whole – and yet is part of the narrative.

Groensteen takes Gilles Deleuze's idea of movement-image (the shots) in their aspects of *differentiation* and *specification*: that is, regarding their narrative function. Since they are not pure language, they do not follow its rules. They do not constitute enunciations, and are not utterances, but rather *utterables*, things that can motivate utterances (the image alone, isolated from context – that is, other images). Groensteen argues that images in comics are also *descriptable* (so they can be described), *interpretable* (in their relations to neighboring images) and *appreciable* (for their aesthetic qualities – governed by composition, form, anatomy, etc.). Whether images are based on or outside the mediation of language is, however, only incidental: it is between panels that the pertinent contextual rapports are established within the form.

However the vectorization of the reading of the panels may be, the construction of meaning in comics is not unidirectional: a panel can be explained, so as to fit the narrative, in a further passage or panel. Groensteen numbers three different planes of reading for the images: the image in itself, the image in relation to the one that precedes and the one that succeeds it (interestingly, this triad is, as in Lacan's understanding of verbal language, a process, in which sliding signifiers only acquire meaning in succession), and the image in relation to the sequence (not restrained to the adjacent panels, but to the story as a whole). A panel can also relate to distant semantic determinations, such as references to other works or distant panels in the same narrative.

The *gutter*, intericonic space dividing the panels, is, for Groensteen, the symbol of an absence, something that is not represented and that the reader must infer in order to be able to understand the narrative, a step taken in every transition from panel to panel. Contrary to the view of Benoit Peeters, who presumes the existence of 'ghost panel(s)', or *cases fantôme* (loc.1543), between two given ones, Groensteen believes that the construction of the narrative derives from the assumption of the sequence by the reader, who then struggles for coherence and meaning and ultimately forms the narrative:

The "gutter" between the two panels is therefore not the seat of a virtual image; it is the site of a semantic articulation, a logical conversion, that of a series of utterables (panels) in a statement that is unique and coherent (the story). (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc. 1552-60)

The sequence, then, is the determinant of the narrative. The gutter, in its turn, not being a sign itself, separates and unites the panels.

The idea of *redundancy* is also necessary to understanding the images as a sequence: repetition and differentiation are both imperative to the notion. While repetition links one part of the narrative to another (for instance, in the reoccurrence of the main character throughout the story), differentiation accounts for the developments (passing of time, changing space and the development of actions and their results). Since a repeated information is already established in the narrative (that is, information that the reader already has), the sequence focus on the new information, changes or developments – that focus is acquired by techniques that remain unmentioned in Groensteen's book, but which one can assume to be composition, fields of depth, the use of bold lines and other resources that can be used to enhance a certain part of the image to the eyes of the reader. According to Groensteen:

Redundancy is far from being an obligatory bridge between two consecutive panels of a narrative sequence. In a comic, narrative *continuity* is assured by the *contiguity* of images, but this side-by-side is not necessarily an end-to-end of narrative instances structured according to a univocal and mechanical logic of repetition and difference. (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc. 1606)

Since the narrative is determined by the sequence, two aspects are important in its reading: the *breakdown* and the *mise-en-scene*. The breakdown is literal, understood as the dividing of the sequence into fragments (panels) which are also partial, selective views of the actions. Images are never absolute statements due to their nature: a panel does not merely show a person performing an action, but also usually provides a context to that action – that could be counterproductive if distracting, were not the reader prompt to focus on the narrative developments rather than on context. The intrinsic organization of the information in the images is thus organized (given the reader's narrative drive) in the form of the theatrical *mise-en-scene*. While the breakdown organizes the moment depicted, the *mise-en-scene* has to do with the choices of depiction (framing, view, composition, action, lighting, etc.).

Images, as said, are *describable* and *interpretable*. Of course, that is up to the reader – and the reader's impressions come into play. Since panels do not constitute

utterances, they do not perform descriptions – that is, they show instead of describing. Since the contents are cumulative, it is for the reader to gather an inventory of information contained in the images, where the detail may become significant further on the reading. At this level, the style of the drawing is also important to give clues about the general tone of the work or capture the attention of the reader. Images are interpretable due to being, in comics, always close to other images. In order to be able to interpret an image, the reader must rely on a former knowledge of the form, or experience with previous readings. Groensteen cites *Watchmen* as an example, a work that the reader is incapable of fully appreciating without a familiarity with superheroes (and to that I should add the history of superhero comics as well).

The verbal performs seven different functions in restrained arthrology: the first two are *dramatization* (where the exchanges work to enhance the pathos of the action) and *realism* (where the exchanges mimic real life and its frequently meaningless utterances – the mere fact that there are verbal exchanges in a story is realistic, up to a point). Groensteen considers the speech in comics more akin to cinema than to Literature (hence ‘verbal’ instead of ‘written’). The caption, then, would be equivalent to a voiceover. Speech is at the same time part of the image (due to the graphic quality of word balloons) and distinct from it. Hence there are three distinct levels of articulation: that of the sequence of images, that of the sequence of the verbal content and that of their interaction. Some authors (such as Jean-Michel Charlier in *Blueberry*) strive for an effect of ‘natural speech’, utilizing elisions, grammatically incorrect sentences, colloquial expressions, etc., while others use the register of writing (with parenthesis, hyphens and other non-audible resources). Other functions are *anchorage* (a process through which some signifiers in each image are chosen as more relevant than others) and *relay* (a process that takes to the understanding of the image as a moment in a sequence of moments, part of a larger story). To that, Groensteen adds (*apud* Benoît Peeters) the function of *suture*, where the text seeks to establish a link between two apparently unrelated panels. Groensteen also highlights the *controlling function*, which is related to the management of the narrative time (as in “an hour later...”). Comics work mainly through ellipsis, since their language is discontinuous. There is also the possibility of flash-forwards (prolepsis) or flash-backs (analepsis), but ellipsis is their main medium (considering the idea of time spent between panels) and can also be conveyed through images, as in the change of lighting to indicate the hour of day

(or in the growing beard of a character, the fading of a flower or a change in the level of sand of a hourglass). The final function of the verbal in comics is the *rhythmic function*, used when the text is inserted in the panel in order to slow down the reading of the panel and force the reader to last longer in it. According to Groensteen:

The presence or absence of a text, the eventual division of a verbal statement into several balloons, the distribution of these balloons in an equivalent or lesser number of panels (according to whether or not they are reunited in groups within the same frame), the alternation of the dialogue and the captions: so many elements contribute to imparting a rhythm to the narrative sequence – and a duration. (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc.1829)

Of these seven functions, realism, drama and rhythm are related to the referential illusion of the diegetic world and the production of the story. The other four (control, anchorage, relay and suture) are informative and complete the information provided by the images. To put this view to the test, Groensteen quickly describes (in order to analyze the describable quality of the images and the interaction between the verbal and the iconic) a page of *Jojo #05*, by Geert. In this quick take, Groensteen notices that there are several possible levels of reading (he limits himself to the most basic one, merely following the story without delving into details such as style and coloring choices). In most of the page, the verbal exchanges are not important to the narrative, but are added to enhance the narrative's realism. On the other hand, the character's verbalization of surprise by the use of hair gel indicates that this is not a regular behavior, and so the verbal, though dismissable as redundant in the reading of the page, carries meaning important to the narrative, even if not meaningful in the page itself. Some features, such as humor and irony, may require further understanding of the context to be properly read.

It is in the breakdown of the narrative and in selections of page layout that the role of the illustrator is more markedly present as the conductor of the narrative. The choice of moments in the panels and the choice of the format of these panels are important when determining the order and importance of the moments, so layout and breakdown mutually interfere with one another: when the layout is arbitrary (that is, does not conform to the rule), the actions in the panels (breakdown) call less attention, and vice-versa. Those notions always work together, since “the reading protocol required by a page is always the

result of an action conjugated by the breakdown and the page layout, the product of at least two determinations” (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc.1970).

The third part of the book is dedicated to *general arthrology* and deals with the network, that is, the non-linear relations that pertain to the work. In order to understand these relations, there are two different key concepts to be understood: the process of *gridding* and the idea of *braiding*. Gridding takes place when the artist is planning the comic, and consists of dividing the action in the panels, taking possession of the space of the page – the first configuration of the multiframe. When the gridding is regular, the narrative tends to establish an also regular rhythm. Braiding is a relatively more complex notion, and deals with the relationships between panels, which can be other than sequential.

Between the panels, a series of relationships can exist. *Series* is defined as additional and remarkable structurations that work inside the breakdown and page layout; *suite* is a collection of disparate uncorrelated images, and *sequence* is a succession of images determined by the narrative. Groensteen proposes to complement these relationships with the idea of braiding, relationships between images that, while not indispensable to the reading of the story, can add to the interpretation. Braiding works both synchronically (through the co-presence of the images in the page) or diachronically (through the reading of the work). The vectorization of the discourse (that is, the reading order established) allows for the use of such resources, especially when considering that, outside the diegetic universe, the work exists in a dechronological mode, a superposition of pages with juxtaposed images. Braiding can work both through the coherent use of privileged sites in the page or story (such as the beginning and end, or a fixed panel in a page) to create links between images, and can also work through *repetition* of panels (bearing in mind that the repetition does not mean equivalency – that is, due to the preexistence of the same panel, the repetition forcibly presents a different meaning), structures or motifs. Of course, a repetition can only change the reading of a story as long as is understood as meaningful. Groensteen presents a series of repetitions and motifs (such as the smiley face in *Watchmen*) to exemplify the many possible uses in order to propose that:

Braiding thus manifests into consciousness the notion that the panels of a comic constitute a network, and even a system. To the syntagmatic logic of the sequence, it imposes another logic, the associative. Through the bias of a *telearthrology*, images that the breakdown holds at a distance, physically and contextually independent, are suddenly revealed as communicating closely, in debt to one another (GROENSTEEN, 1997, loc.2132)

In his conclusion, Groensteen recalls some of his choices when approaching his subject, namely the idea of comics as a *system*, the notion of *iconic solidarity* determined by three different processes (breakdown, page layout and braiding) and the purposeful silence about the artistic qualities of comics. For him, despite the lack of formal studies about the medium (he cites narratology as an area that could have extended its theoretical foundations towards this direction), comics merit much more critical attention. However, while describing comics images as utterables, descriptibles, interpretables and *appreciables*, some words are due regarding the comics art. Groensteen addresses the narrative drawing as bearer of five distinct qualities: *anthropocentrism* (focus on the character), *synedochic simplification* (privileges elements with an immediate informative character), *typification* (simplification applied to characters), *expressivity* (the expressions and interactions of the characters are fundamental to the understanding of the narrative) and *rhetorical convergence* (different parameters of the image – composition, color, placement, etc. – are used to produce unique meanings). The narrative drawing is, therefore, focused on the development of the story, and must be understood as opposite to the *illustrative drawing*, which would require a more contemplative reading. Groensteen ends the book with the conclusion that the latest developments in comics, which have proved the medium's merit in literary, poetic, sensual and introspective arenas, have certainly demonstrated its plasticity.

2.4 COMICS THEORY IN BRAZIL

On the Brazilian front, there are several scholars dealing with comics. Most of these studies spring from Communication studies, and have had a strong influence from Marxism, especially from the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory. In practice, this means

they struggle for a critical reading of the form, where the ideological features are exposed. The direct result of this approach in the theoretical production were articles directed to the communication's features of the form as they appeared in newspapers, such as Joaquim da Fonseca's *Caricature: The Graphic Image of Humor* (1999)²⁶, Onici Flores' *The Reading of the Political Cartoon* (2002)²⁷, Jorge Mtanios Iskandar Arbach's *The Graphic Fact: Graphic Humor as a Journalistic Genre* (2007)²⁸ and others. The production specifically related to comics, in its turn, was contemplated either historically or critically, in texts that considered the evolution of the form or denounced the ideological content in the works – and the meagre situation of the national comics market. Some examples of this are Gonçalo Junior's *The War of Comics: Formation of the Brazilian Editorial Market and the Censoring of Comics* (2004)²⁹ or Alvaro de Moya's excellent book *The History of Comics' Stories* (1986)³⁰, which presents selections of authors and productions in order to illustrate the history of the medium, from Rodolphe Töpffer to Brazilian authors, with a strong focus on the national production, and the collection of essays *Shazam!* (1970), also organized by Moya. Sônia Bibe Luyten's *Manga: the Power of Japanese Comics* (2000)³¹ – in which the author studies the evolution of the form, from the Middle Ages to the post- World War II reconstruction effort, up to the modern tendencies and the Brazilian market – and the collection of essays organized by her, *Comics : Critical Reading* (1985) can also be cited, as well as Moacy Cirne's *The Language of Comics* (1975)³², in which the author reviews the cultural, mythical and historical implications of the work of Brazilian author Ziraldo and the metalinguistic and absurd content in the comics produced by Maurício de Sousa (or, rather, under the supervision of Maurício de Sousa, one of Brazil's uniquely successful author, who has become the head of a franchise owning several original characters, much like a Brazilian Walt Disney – this observation was necessary due to the fact that Maurício de Sousa does not personally create his comics anymore).

²⁶ Originally, *Caricatura: a Imagem Gráfica do Humor*. The titles of the works are here translated into English for the sake of readability, with footnotes showing their original designation to easy further researches – for, quite obviously, in the Bibliography section their original titles are listed.

²⁷ *A Leitura da Charge*.

²⁸ *O Fato Gráfico: Humor Gráfico Como Gênero Jornalístico*.

²⁹ *A Guerra dos Gibis: Formação do Mercado Editorial Brasileiro e a Censura aos Quadrinhos*.

³⁰ *História da História em Quadrinhos*.

³¹ *Mangá, o Poder dos Quadrinhos Japoneses*.

³² *A Linguagem dos Quadrinhos*

Despite the existence of multiple efforts to further the study of comics in Brazil, this work will deal solely with the works related to the specificities of the form and its structural contents, and therefore will not take into consideration historical or critical approaches. Also, it is hardly necessary to highlight the obvious limits of the research – that is, not all production will be represented, only the production accessible at the time of the research through the libraries available, both physically and online, and specialized shopping sites such as Amazon and Estante Virtual.

2.4.1 Antonio Luiz Cagnin's *The Comics* (1975)

One of the most structured and complete accounts of the language produced in Brazil is Antonio Luiz Cagnin's *The Comics* (1975)³³. Perhaps the most promising of starts, the author eludes a formal definition of comics, presenting them simply as a narrative with images and drawings, a natural development of humanity's natural drive for communication and narrative. Furthermore, he lists several possible ways of looking into the form (literary, historical, psychological, sociological, didactic, aesthetic-psychological, of values, publicitary) and lists the different names for the form, as it evolved in different countries (*comics* in the EUA, *bandes-desinées* in France, *fumetti* in Italy, *tebeo* in Spain, *historieta* in Latin-America, *história aos quadrinhos*³⁴ in Portugal and *histórias em quadrinhos* in Brazil – Cagnin does not mention *manga*, the Japanese name). With this general approach, despite a little dated (the book is almost 40 years old, after all), Cagnin sets to build a comprehensive theory of comics that in many ways complements Eisner's and McCloud's view (or, rather, it is complemented by them, since Cagnin predates Eisner by more than a decade): if Cagnin did not develop certain features, such as facial expressions and body language, to the length that Eisner and McCloud did, his work is solidly backed by theory – a feature that is lacking in both Eisner and McCloud's works.

³³ *Os Quadrinhos*.

³⁴ Actually, that is a little dated. Nowadays, comics are called *banda desenhada* in Portugal, due to the influence of the French production.

The book starts with a review of the signic systems (p.25-29), From Saussure's idea of sign to the triadic system proposed by Verón, in order to choose the most appropriate semiotic approach for his research, namely Charles Sanders Peirce's division of signs into *indices* (based on natural relations such as cause/effect – for instance, a footprint indicates the presence of a foot), *icons* (imitative signs that represent/reproduce reality, bearing a resemblance to its object) and *symbols* (conventional relation to reality). In comics, there is the opposition between *verbal* (written code, digital and discrete – that is, formed by a limited number of signs) and *visual* (representational, imagetic, analogic and continuous – that is, analogous to what it represents and continuous because it only makes complete sense when the several elements of the image are perceived as a whole image) languages. So, Cagnin analyses both images and text separately before addressing their interaction.

The analysis of images is divided into *visual perception, contexts, reading images, mediums of graphic expression* and *iconic typology of comics*. The *visual perception* of images, for Cagnin, is based on the theory of Gestalt (the German word for *whole, configuration, form* – the theory of Gestalt states that discrete elements, such as parts of an image, are perceived as a whole in their relation to one another) and determined by factors such as *area* (the smaller a closed region is, the greater the tendency for it to be perceived as a figure), *proximity* (objects and points that are close to each other have a greater tendency to be perceived as a figure), *contiguity* (areas with closed contours look more like figures than the ones with open/partial contours), *symmetry* (the more symmetrical the closed region, the greater the tendency for its perception as a figure) and *good continuation* (the less altercations or interruptions in the lines of the contour, the better the perception of the figure) of the lines and points that form the figure (p.36-38). The *depth* of images would be an effect of *linear and dimensional perspective* (the size of the images vary proportionally to their distance to the reader), *relative dimensions* (size is determined by the distance from the observer), *familiar dimensions* (proportions such as a child being shorter than an adult), *interposition* (objects in the front cover the ones in the back), *degree of density of the contexture* (parallel lines get closer to each other as they fade into the background) and the *distribution of shadows and lighting* (which helps to perceive these changes by adding volume to the images).

However, the simple fact that an image bears a relation of resemblance with what is represented is no guarantee of its reading: images can be ambiguous or understood in

different ways. The human mind tends to organize the perceptions according to the “principle of minimum”, that is, choosing the simplest familiar alternative to understand the image – usually the first one to come to mind. According to Cagnin:

The conclusion that one can come to from those initial observations about the visual perception of an object is that, when receiving a visual stimulus from an object or a graphic image, we can perceive the real object and receive other accessory information, as long as we have the capacity to organize the sensations received and relate them to data that involve and precede the visual communication; this data constitutes what we call *contexts*. (CAGNIN, 1975, p.46)

A *context* can be classified as *intra-iconic* (that considers relationships between internal elements of the image), *intericonic* (considers the relationship between different associated images) and *extra-iconic* (relationships between an image and other elements, which can be *situational* – common to artist and reader – and *global* – with socio-cultural or spatio-temporal implications).

The reading of images is also understood through the theory of Gestalt, in special the perception of points, lines and masses as a significant whole, an image – drawn in a particular style (p.51). However, it is important to bear in mind that, differently from a photo, a drawn image presupposes a selection, a simplification, guided by the intention of the artist and the limitation of the reader. The drawing rests not only on the similarity with the object of representation, but also on previous knowledge, both by the reader and the artist, of the techniques and forms of representation. There are several forms of reading the multiple levels and forms of information contained in the narrative: the image may be read as a whole as the eye wanders in order to understand the dominant information for the purpose of the form (in the case of comics, narrative purpose – the main point of the image is the narrative continuity), the reading of the text obeys the order of the balloons and captions, the reading order (top to bottom and left to right – that is, in western comics; right to left in mangas), while the page itself obeys the same criteria (with variants, such as allowing for differently-shaped frames and compositions). The processing of images would work at two different levels: that of the *perception* (divided into *identification* and *configuration*, denoting the perception of traces and lines as figures, and *representation*, the identification of the object represented in the figure) and that of the *signification* (the

level of the connotative message, divided into *signification*, the normal figurative representation, and *symbolization*, in which the figure represents also a second referent). Another constitutive element of the perception of images mentioned by Cagnin is *time*. Time is divided into sequence of before-and-after (every new frame is a different moment), historical context, astronomic time (such as in night and day), weather, time of the narration (that of the panel that is being read) and time of the reading (the reading that also takes time – so the panel also has a past, present and future, or unread, in reading, and read).

Graphic expression deals with the constitutive parts of the drawings: lines, points, masses (large surfaces, dark or hatched, used to give the impression of volume), and the forms as perceived (still) by the theory of Gestalt – creating meanings through similarity with the signified or through contiguity by being part of the image (pp.60-61). Those relations utilize all the previously seen resources of the reading of images to create infinite variations of signification and representation. Cagnin highlights the use of planes and expressive elements of the human figure as means of representation of corporal language and other forms of expression (that is, the image absorbs other languages besides the iconic, symbolic and verbal into its contents). The meaning of an image obeys three distinct phases: *identification* (where the elements of the image are recognized as representations of reality), *qualificative attribution* (where the signifiers are understood and organized mentally) and *dynamic attribution* (where the image is understood internally as a narrative). When the images are juxtaposed, they can also be read in relation to one another. The process of the reading is also divided into three different moments: *liberation* (the image is liberated from its iconic content – that is, understood not only as a representation of reality, but also as part of a process, usually narrative), *fixation* (the whole page is perceived as such, and the images are organized into a theme) and *ligation* (where the images are understood as a narrative process). In their attempt to imitate real life, comics have developed an extensive *repertoire* of contentions for the representation of sounds, movements and indicators of order and quality in the reading of the text (word balloons, text boxes, the frame itself, etc.). So, there are two different classes of figures: *analogues*, “mimetic, figurative representation” (p.83) and *conventional*, figures representing *actions* (including feelings and lighting and actions with symbolic use, such as stars indicating pain or stylized hearts indicating love), *sounds* (onomatopoeias and

verbal signs) and *indicators of reading order* (narrative devices such as balloons and the frame itself). Form, function, plane, scene, angle, sounds, noises, space, distance, proportion, volume are some of the other qualities incorporated through iconographic means. The frames themselves can vary in forms and functions, altering the composition of the page and even giving new meanings to the images (a frame with a cloudy shape, for instance, may indicate a dream or a thought).

The internal organization of the images form the *contextual expressive means*, different narrative options adopted in each image in order to convey meanings – different representations of space, proportion, volume can radically change the reading of an image. The composition of the image, then, is a result of several choices, given by the representation of an object (*denotation*) in a certain temporal, spatial, circumstance viewed in a certain angle and distance (*connotation*). This image can also carry other associations (virtuemas) through the relation of the image with other external contexts (that are related to the world experience of the reader). The point of view of the representation can vary in several ways. An object can be represented from either the *front* (the most common, which detaches the importance of the portrayed figure) or the *back* (to hide the identity of a person in order to obtain narrative suspense, to distribute aesthetically a group of characters or to assume the look of the character on the foreground and pay attention to what the character is looking at); either from *upside down* (to diminish the importance and power of the figure) or *downside up* (to enhance the figure's importance and power). Also, there is a variety of possible planes: the *plane in great detail* (intensifying the expression or detail and allows for a greater identification with a character), the *first plane* (focusing the head and shoulders of the character), the *medium plane* (from the waist up), the *American plane* (showing the full figure up to the knees), the *group plane* (capturing the full figures of the characters, but leaving little space for the surroundings – usually portraying large groups), the *panoramic plane* (focusing the scenery, and taken from a distance), the *perspective plane* (shows several planes, in the background and foreground), the plane *plongé* (or bird view, seen from above) and *contre-plongé* (or worms' view, seen from below). Linear perspective gives the impression of volume and distance and sometimes are used for compositional purposes; horizontal lines provide the idea of calm and quietude, and dark masses can use the contrast to suggest light and shadow, day and night. In fact effects of contrast can be used to direct the eye of the reader either to the

darkest or lightest spot in an image. The compositions of the frames are effects of the disposition of the images: an image in the centre of the frame, though perfectly symmetrically disposed, is visually tiresome, while an object slightly dislocated from this spot – which Cagnin calls “*compensated disequilibrium*” (p.99) – renders the image less monotonous, tiring and uninteresting. The superposition of objects is also indicated, to make the separation of the planes more clear to the reader – and thus more pleasant. Since characters are defined through their appearance, everything in a character may be of significance: the character’s expressions are doors to their feelings, just as their external appearance may be a clue to their personality. Cagnin analyses some characters by Mauricio de Sousa to get to general conclusions about the character’s expressions (eyebrows positions, expression of the mouth, etc.), namely that with a combination of several easy choices one can build an extensive repertoire of expressions. As to the gestural of the characters, the solution found to convey the expression of the characters in Mauricio de Sousa’s comics was to exaggerate their bodily expression to increase the narrative function of the images.

The *iconic typology* of comics, in its turn, refers to the style of drawing, which can either be *realistic*, *stylized* or *caricature*, according to the classification (p.111-118). Cagnin does not define the concepts, though the book is richly illustrated with examples. Rather than that, the author does not attempt a definition of style, since “to define or describe the styles and forms is rather difficult. It is the same as defining a taste or colors” (p.111). Nevertheless, one can make assumptions about his take on style based on his examples: realistic drawing would be the proportional, anatomically correct drawing, with consistent use of perspective, highly influenced by reality and keeping a strict relationship with it. The stylized drawing would sacrifice this relationship and admit the distortion of proportions in order to gain in expression, through exaggeration. The caricature would be the less realistic of the three, with highly simplified human figures or anthropomorphic animals, style usually strongly marked by the author’s lines.

The *text*, for Cagnin, fortunately, is a simpler subject (if only because some forms of interaction have already been made known when dealing with images). In comics, text is perceived in two phases: *fixation* (in which words help the interpretation of the image, fusing with it) and *linking* (in which word and image are complementarily linked, both serving the narrative). The text may be presented in several forms inside the images. The

most common and known of these are certainly the word balloon, the text box and the onomatopoeia. Word balloons are divided in the *speech balloon* (the normal, round-shaped), the *thought-balloon* (shaped as a cloud), the *whisper-balloon* (with the dotted/segmented contour), the *shout-balloon* (the contour is similar to an explosion), the *trembling-balloon* (with tortuous contour lines), the *broken-lines-balloon* (similar to an electric spark³⁵), the *vibrating-balloon* (multiple trembled contours to indicate a trembling voice), the *glacial-balloon* (with icicles melting from the underside), the *unison-balloon* (more than one pointer, indicating several characters speaking at the same time). Some authors do not use balloons. There are also multiple balloons linked to each other by segments, indicating more than one stances of enunciation and disposed in several ways, even intercalating the voices of more than one character. The order of the reading inside the image is given by the position of the balloons, roughly the same way the panels or text are read: left to right (again, in the western world) and from top to bottom. Different styles and sizes of letters can also suggest different qualities of sounds. The *legend*, understood as the voice of the narrator, can also appear in many forms. Since it is usually a source of information or linkage between different panels, is usually well distributed in the space. *Onomatopoeias*, graphic representation of sounds, work in both registers, whether analogic or linguistic. Cagnin also lists the *story's title* (stylized as a logotype and present in several stories) and the *text-figure* (the text that blends into the image, as part of the scenery) as possible ways of presentating text in comics.

Images and text can interact in several ways in a given narrative. For Cagnin, Literature is a narrative system that uses exclusively linguistic signs, while certain wordless comics use exclusively images. The interaction between the several narrative possibilities can be seen in the table below:

NARRATIVE SYSTEM	PROPORTIONS	
	IMAGE	TEXT
Text without image: novels, short stories, etc.	0	4
Text with image: illustrated stories.	1	3
Text and image: narrative function equally distributed.	2	2
Predominantly image. The text is complementary.	3	1
Image without text: "mute" stories.	4	0

Table 8 - Text and Image in Narratives (CAGNIN, 1975, p.140)

³⁵ Supposedly to indicate an artificial voice, it has been replaced largely by the lightning bolt or the square balloon with a typed font (or both). Point is, it is rarely used as such nowadays.

Comics and Literature are essentially the same thing: attempts to build complex, coherent worlds inside their diegesis and for that purpose developed reasonably sophisticated systems of representation, such as descriptions and drawings, punctuation to separate the voices and allow for stylistic pauses and balloons, boxes and gutters for equal purposes. Text and images can work together or separately. When both convey the same information the result is redundancy in the comic.

Studying the narrative of comics, Cagnin starts with the model proposed by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Russian Folktale* (1928). Propp's model is based on functions, understood as the actions of the characters pertaining to the development of the plot. Propp identified 31 different functions, which could be organized in their temporal succession or through the characters' actions. Claude Levi-Strauss suggested a similar structure when analyzing the structure of myths – which could be divided into atemporal basic units called *mythemes* and organized in three different ways: *sintagmatically* (a line thus organized would produce the narrative temporality), *paradigmatically* (such a line would produce the myth's structure and narrative significance of the myth) or *in profundity* (thus establishing a parallel between other regions where the myth is common). Greimas compared the approaches and created the *actantial model*, reducing the number of Propp's functions to 20. Greimas' model is based on the assumption that the functions work as semic categories, articulated around two opposite *semes*, positive and negative, where the apparition of the positive invites the negative into play. In Greimas' model, the characters are called *acteurs* and, when related to their actantial role in the narrative, *actants* (their opposite roles being sender and receiver, helper and opponent, subject and object). Barthes, drawing from Propp's model, created a new model of functions. *Distributive* functions are prone to the development of the action; of these, one type opens possibilities (*cardinal functions*) and another develops them (*catalyzers*). *Indexes* do not advance the action or the narrative, but may complement it. *Indexes* (pure) need the reader's interpretation, while *informatives* do not require it (p.148). Cagnin also quotes Bremont's model of functions, according to which each function is formed of three simple steps (possibility, process and outcome), which can be linked to each other, forming larger units through enchainment and embedding. These theories are not novelty in this work, but must be repeated here not only to follow Cagnin's process, but also because they are relevant to the development of

his take on the narrative of comics (and, since the narrative of comics is the point of interest in this work, this take is significant enough).

In these theories, the narrative is a product of the articulation of narrative units, according to certain principles. In comics, for Cagnin, the *panel* should be understood as the narrative unit, and whenever two or more panels are united, two different forms of aggregation are possible: the *series* (in which every panel remains independent) or the *sequence* (a superior signifying unit). In this second case, a *comparison* between the images is made (with identification, qualification, function), while the very reading order of the images generates the idea of *time*, or succession, and the logic relation of *cause* and *effect*. A sequence of images requires two different things: identity (the images must have something in common) and difference (the images must be distinct)³⁶. The narrative syntagm, in comics, is linear, determining a relationship between the articulated units (which, in its turn, adds another articulation to the process of reading). Since the images are fixated and juxtaposed, the comparison is easier and the succession of images is subjected to a re-reading of past and glimpses of future images. There is an articulation of both the figures in their internal space and the comparison between the figures in series. This comparison is determined by redundancy of certain elements (invariants) while others change (variants). Changes in the variants bring the suggestion of movement, and promote the development of the action. An example of that relation would be a character running through the scenery: even if the image of the character remains in the same position, the change in the scenery would give the impression of spatial movement. The articulation of images into a narrative lends it time and movement, it is a step from representation to discourse.

Both the illusion of action and the illusion of time are given by the presentation of different moments, so narrative time can be worked in different ways: the *reduction* of time happens when several actions are portrayed in the same panel, the *expansion* of time, on the contrary, requires several panels with slight changes, mimicking the slow motion in movies. In some cases, the multiplication of moments may lend a dynamic quality to the sequence, an impression of velocity. Time can also be elided from the narrative. The

³⁶ One cannot help but wonder whether, as in Groensteen, the different location of the images is enough to make them distinct.

ellipsis happens when an action is hidden or replaced by a onomatopoeia (such as the ‘boom’ of an explosion), and is fairly commonly used for humorous effect.

The basic forms of image grouping are *coordination* and *subordination*. *Coordination* is the result of a juxtaposition of panel units, where the group results in a larger significant unit, a wholesome signifier. *Subordination* is when a unit or group is linked to another unit or group due to natural reasons (such as cause and effect). The result of this grouping can be either dynamic (the set of images produces an action, every panel a moment in it) or descriptive (every panel works as a constitutive part of a larger image). These groups would form narrative *nodes*, each node an action unity: a *function*, which, according to Propp, could be translated into a noun. Cagnin is then able to apply Propp’s model to the analysis of comics, considering that the trees formed by narrative nodes form a number of possible units: a *sequence of coordinated dynamic units* (each panel shows a moment in the action, where the space is repeated), a *sequence of dynamic units both coordinated and subordinated* (both natural relations and juxtaposition of actions in the panels); a *series of descriptive, coordinated units* (the panels as part of an image, either through the fractioning of an image into different panels, through amplification or reduction of the image, through alternating figures in the same scene – adding or not new elements – or through horizontal dislocation of the camera); a *series of descriptive units coordinated and subordinated by fragmentation* (it can be either *projective*, where a general panel focuses on a detail, or *retrojective*, where the detail is expanded into the full panel) and *sequence of dynamic and descriptive units* (either coordinated or coordinated and subordinated at the same time).

Whatever the case may be, Cagnin gets to the conclusion that most comics are character-driven, guided by the presence of the main character, or the hero. And, according to Propp’s model, the actions follow a given pattern, either according to Propp’s model (an initial equilibrium is disturbed by something, the hero tries to restore the equilibrium and the equilibrium is restored in the end), or to Bremond’s (an initial estate of degradation improves) or Greimas’ (a negative sequence of action and attempt is followed by a positive sequence of realization and result). Only the development of the action and the end of the narrative is never absolute, due to the periodical nature of most comics. This generates a curious state of things, where the variable and invariable elements are inverted: instead of different characters performing the same function inside several narratives, the same

characters are given different functions in different narratives (that is, the hero is constantly qualified), contrary to Propp's model. Cagnin then analyses comic strips in order to come up with a classification of the interaction of functions, and eventually comes up with 25 different types of anecdote, or story.

Since we have no intention to cling to this classification, these analyses will not be reproduced or commented here. What is important to note, however, is that, while authors like Mieke Bal, Jean Genette and Rimmon-Kennan advocate the possibility of the application of narrative theory to the universe of comics, Cagnin had already proposed a model to fit the form. Unfortunately, still obscure and not translated into English up to this day (in fact, due to its last publication being the one in 1975, the book is a rarity even in Brazil).

2.4.2 The Production of Moacy Cirne

Another Brazilian author that deserves a look, having dealt with the particularities of the language of comics, is Moacy Cirne. With at least four books on the subject – the already briefly commented *The Language of Comics* (1971) and others that will be briefly commented now, namely *Boom! The Creative Explosion of Comics* (1970), *For Reading Comics* (1972) and *Comics, Seduction and Passion* (2001)³⁷. The reason for the brevity in the comments is that Moacy Cirne does not only dabble in comics criticism and form, but also culture, the history of comics and other features, aspects that will not be commented here. Cirne's take on comics is derived from the theory of cinema, to the point that he talks of the transition between panels while reading a comic as *cuts*, elided moments between different scenes of the narrative.

Boom! The Creative Explosion of Comics (1970) is structured in ten chapters, in which Cirne advocates the importance of the medium, tries to define its aesthetic principles, comments on the tradition and production of comics and analyses features of

³⁷ In the original, respectively: *Bum! A Explosão Criativa dos Quadrinhos* (1970), *Para Ler os Quadrinhos* (1972) and *Quadrinhos, Sedução e Paixão* (2001).

popular productions, such as *Flash Gordon*, *Tarzan* and *Mandrake*. Finally, he talks about the vanguard (that is, the vanguard of 1970 – Guido Crepax’s *Valentina* is one of the comics commented as innovative), the use of metalanguage (providing examples of the use of the comics language to comment on the same language – such as *Felix the Cat* using a musical note as a solid object) and the poem/process (which uses graphic resources to innovate and break with the tradition). What is of interest in this book is Cirne’s initial take on comics. For him, “the *balloon*, the *onomatopoeic noise* and the *visual rhythm* constitute the fundamental elements of a possible aesthetics of comics” (CIRNE, 1970, p.15 – my italics and translation).

The *word balloon* is, for him, a part of the metalinguistic content of comics, a new graphic space. Pointing out that there are at least 72 different types of word balloons (Benayoun, 1967, *apud* CIRNE, 1970), Cirne proceeds to some examples, and comments that, since the language is relatively new, the possibilities remain vastly unexplored. *Onomatopoeias* are demonstrated and quantified (one might think that maybe that’s the reason for the title of the book – only ‘boom’ is not one of those). For Cirne, the onomatopoeia is thematically, graphically and plastically linked to the idea of sound:

Its semantic area is subordinated to the graphic space of the page, creating iconic and indexical zones of prompt and easy consumption. If a joycean innovation (as in *Finnegan’s Wake*) was not yet achieved in the concretion of new onomatopoeic sounds, an intense sonorous communication has been formed, both in colors and shapes” (CIRNE, 1970, p. 23-24).

The *visual rhythm* is a property of the dynamic structuration of the narrative, given by elements such as the change between panels and the page’s layout. Drawing, plane, framing are dynamic components that give the narrative rhythm. In the comic strip, the dynamic quality is obtained through cuts and ellipses, while in the comic book there is also the global view of the page, which lends the narrative the page composition and reading order. Cirne considers comics akin to cinema, a new kind of art, and considers the market as one of its driving forces:

In dialectic contradiction, comics (and cinema) would rush the end of the novel, creating a new form of art – or a new form of Literature (...) the demand for its consumption being the determinant factor in its temporal permanence. (CIRNE, 1970, p.28-29)

As for comics analysis, Cirne considers *Flash Gordon* and *Tarzan*, both understood as baroque due to their fantasy and the moral content of the narratives, strongly character-driven and prone to poetic delirium and unpredictable situations, as well as due to the techniques utilized in the depiction of the scenes: grandiloquent first planes, the perspective use in order to diminish the secondary planes (p.34). *Mandrake*, in its turn, is considered in terms of its spatio-temporal cuts. Similarly to McCloud, Cirne analyzes the transitions in comics and organizes the story structure according to the development of scenes and sequences. His conclusions are that *Mandrake* has a linear narrative, whose rhythm is determined by the suspense and the reader's expectations, which are fulfilled in the end. The intercalation of time and space in the narrative (that is, Earth and space) is constant, and despite the pacifist background, the thematic is reactionary (pp.43-44). Cirne considers comics as art, and, as a result, it must be acknowledged that comics are in constant transformation, not only due to their relative youth as a medium, but also in terms of artistic tendencies.

For Reading Comics (1972) is, according to Cirne himself, his most relevant contribution to the study of comics, along with Cagnin and two or three others (2001, p.173). From the subtitle of the book (*From the Cinematographic Narrative to the Panelled Narrative*³⁸) it is easily understood that he comes from a slightly different theoretical background – which can be enriching. The book, introduction aside, is made up of two large segments, the first about form, narrative and aesthetics; the second containing the analysis of specific comics with comments related to their production and contents. The second part, small as it may be (little more than 20 pages) has little interest for the purposes of this work, though it may be valuable as illustration of the application of the principles defended in the book.

Cirne starts with an attempt to understand the aesthetics of comics through its component parts, images and text. No rule applies: a person used to dealing with written texts will find comics superficial, being used to a highly symbolic reading, whereas a person used to visual arts will see the form as severely limited, being used to sophisticated and complex uses of images and judging the form only structurally. The only possible way of reading comics is as narratives, through the reading of the articulation of planes – of

³⁸ In the original: *Da Narrativa Cinematográfica à Narrativa Quadrinizada*.

course, the reading of both images and text are part of this process. Cirne argues that the language of comics is very close to the language of cinema – both forms were determined by technological developments (cinema by photography, comics by the printing press), both forms rely heavily on the image and the verbal language (only in comics it is the written language). Only, while the process ruling cinema would be the montage, in comics the decoupage would be the motor of the narrative. In fact, both languages have several common structures, such as lighting, slow motion, etc. As Cirne points out (*apud* Umberto Eco), comics rely heavily on cinema, particularly in the composition and framing of the images: *plongé* and *contre-plongé*, close-ups, were inspired by the movies. Of course, the forms are hardly identical: the verbal language used in comics is not necessarily that of the cinema, suffering the influence of the stylistic of the written language. But both languages have largely influenced each other through the years.

The most prominent difference between the two relies on the nature of the images: while in cinema the images are photographic and in movement, one at a time at a velocity of 24 images a second, in comics they are juxtaposed drawings. This has several implications: being a drawing, the image in comics will forcibly be simplified and present a different style. This does not mean a loss of information however: though the image in cinema is richer in detail, the drawing implies compositional, stylistic *choices* that must be taken into consideration. Comics also allow for the contemplation of the detail of the image, enriching the narrative experience. The image in comics also presents the linguistic characteristics of word balloons and onomatopoeias; the notion of narrative time is reinforced by the presence of the balloons, as well as the linguistic features of the characters (p.33). Both balloons and onomatopoeias are reinforced iconically (that is, assume characteristics of images) in order to convey meaning, mixing the two codes. Angles are also important both in comics and in cinema (Orson Welles' use of inclined planes influenced Eisner and Chies). The image must be inquired in its structure: "photographed or drawn, moving or fixated, realistic or caricature" (p.35); every choice of angle means a different view of the world.

Cirne approaches the problem of the narrative of comics through the work of Roland Barthes (who also reviewed ideas of Propp, Bremond, Greimas and Todorov, as seen above) and proposes three different levels of the narrative discourse: *functions*, *actions* and *narration*. The narration is the structural consequence of the actions (itself the

result of functions). In comics, each panel corresponds to a plane, and the shifts between planes are called *cuts*. Cirne enumerates several plane shifts, based on three different types of cut. *Spatial cuts* encompass several possibilities: alternated montage between simultaneous planes, shift of plane but not of time (usually with a caption such as ‘meanwhile...’), plane with detail of the scene inserted into an image or sequence, image that is completed by the preceding plane (usually united by the balloon) and two or more planes focusing a same situation through two or more different angles. *Temporal cuts* may indicate either a plane that reveals a new image and is linked in time with a caption such as ‘later...’ or ‘a week later...’ or planes of a same sequence where fictional time does not correspond to real time (hence the ‘cut’, one assumes, but it is hard to understand what Cirne means by ‘real time’ in comics). *Spatio-temporal cuts* may be: the plane that indicates a change in time and space, the plane that present a parallel action to the main narrative and the plane that shows the change from a concrete reality (diegetic) to an abstract reality (such as a dream or a memory).

Graphic and spatial discontinuity are the foundation of comics, and, so, the *ellipsis* is the element that structures the narrative. There are two different types of ellipsis in comics: small ones (marked by the graphic necessity of the cut, in order to further the narrative, supposing a temporal continuity) and big ones (spatio-temporal discontinuity, indicating a larger temporal and spatial lapse). There is also the possibility of the neutralization of the ellipsis, which happens when an image is divided into more than one panel. Cinematic structures such as the *zoom* are also possible in comics, but not the long take shot: only a sole image containing the action of a series would be able to be called so – then again, it would always lack the temporal quality of the cinema. On the other hand, the composition of the page and the reading order unfold other reading possibilities that are not present in movies. While in cinema there are the reading time (which equals narrative time) and the fictional time, comics will have the time of the narration, the time of the fiction and the time of the reading (that is, contrary to the cinema, where the projection and the reading share the same time, comics allows for pauses, especially in the reading of the textual contents). Comics also are not restricted to the format of the screen and the sequentiality of cinema: a panel may vary in shape and be supported by other panels, adjacent or not.

Different panels can also be grouped into *significational blocks* inside a narrative – that is, the grouping of panels that are intimately related in any of three ways: through the articulation of the panels on the page, through the visual aspect of the page, when it is not defined through the articulation of its panels and through the change of thematic situation (or spatio-temporal cut) when the visual elements are insufficient. These blocks are the visual axis of the pages – Cirne calls them *significant axes*. In practice, what this means is that in some narratives, a group of different panels will be used to develop a single action or plane, and the reading of them as a block simplifies the reading – in some cases (the example given is a page of *Valentina*, where a series of segmented close-ups of parts of the faces and the bodies is used to suggest sexual contact) the pages can become quite hard to read linearly.

In a nutshell, Cirne's take on comics is basically a large comparison between the form and cinema, with a clear bias towards the application of the other medium's resources and structures into the universe of comics. The fact that sometimes they fit together as well as hammer and screw does not seem to bother him, occasions treated merely as the rare points of difference in systems that are very much alike. The analysis also relies heavily on angles used by cinema directors (particularly in the last comic analysis, an adaptation by Bunker and Chies of Kafka's *The Process*, analyzed by Cirne as relying heavily on Welles' cinematographic adaptation). However, ideas such as significant axes are interesting.

Cirne's last book, *Comics, Seduction and Passion* (2001) is a collection of reflections on several themes, divided in chapters, from cultural and artistic qualities of comics to the necessity of an independent national market and the critical reading of the form. So, not every chapter is of interest for this work, and most of them could pass without mentioning. However, in this book Cirne formalizes and reinforces some of his definitions, so it is an interesting exercise to go through it quickly, mentioning the parts that are related to this work.

In the first chapter Cirne laments the poor use of the form by the world's industry, opening such a limited gamma of works for a medium which has great possibilities. In this chapter Cirne presents for the first time a formal definition of the form:

Comics are a graphic-visual narrative, driven by successive cuts, which manage drawn, sketched and/or painted images. The significant place of the cut – which

we will call graphic cut – will always be the place of a spatio-temporal cut, to be filled by the imagination of the reader. (CIRNE, 2001, p.23)

In this visual narrative the ellipsis between images is the basic component, allowing for the relational linking of planes into the sequence. The semantic element of the text, contained in balloons or captions, is trespassed by the iconic qualities, assuming some of their qualities. Cirne advocates the necessity of the elaboration of a semiotics of comics, based on critical and engaged readings.

The second chapter denounces the necessity of political consciousness in the production of comics. In order to do that, Cirne mentions three key moments in the history of the form (namely, the creative explosion in the beginning of comics with the modern printing process and the adaptation of the pulps into the form, starting in 1934; the post-World War II period and the great depression, that brought discussions about art, culture and politics and developed several new tendencies and the counterculture period from 1961 on, the second great creative period in comics) in order to bring up the ramifications of this last period in Brazil, specifically the fight of artists and journalists against the dictatorship in the 70's and 80's. Cirne then mentions Henfil and his socially engaged production in order to advocate for the social responsibility of the artist and the necessity of political awareness. In the third chapter Cirne analyses the role of the hero in modern comics, which is basically the perpetuation of the mythical hero, fighting for the maintenance of the *status quo* in society. His point is that comics should grow up and assume its place as a legitimate medium, capable of poetry and interest, and be developed further, proposing, by the by, a possible homosexual development of the relationship Joker/Batman. The fourth chapter is about the relationship between machine and technology and the modern artist, concluding that the artist should use the machine, and not the contrary (as Cirne understands the modern Industry of comics' production). The fifth chapter is about eroticism and pornography in comics. The basic difference is that eroticism is poetic, whereas pornography is only fueled by a drive towards a biological imperative, devoid of thought and beauty.

The sixth chapter is again about comics and cinema. If this chapter is relevant for this research it is largely redundant, for, except for insisting more on a critical, politicized reading and production of comics, the author presents the same concepts of a language

driven by the ellipsis, signification blocks and the approximation of the two languages, even the same works analyzed. However, there is a significant difference: a comparison between the actor and the character. These have, in cinema and comics respectively, opposite parts: while the actor is a human presence interpreting a character, the character in comics is a drawing mimicking a human being. Due to its nature, the reading of facial and bodily expressions is crucial in order to read the comics character – its emotions must be thematically and graphically consistent. That's where Cirne believes Eisner made a grave mistake in *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), in the story *Hamlet on a Rooftop* (p.112-121): due to the exaggeration of the gestures, a clear attempt to prompt the understanding of the dramatic quality of the character, Eisner created a character that overacts – essentially, a bad actor. For Cirne, comics need characters, not actors. For him, there were three crucial moments in the development of the graphic qualities of comics: the first was the publication in the 1940s of Eisner's *The Spirit*, an innovative series, both in the thematic development of the episodes, the presentation of the stories (which Eisner called a *splash page*), the expressionistic use of black and white in the images and the angles of the scenes, which were influenced by Orson Welles' movies. The second crucial moment would come in the 60's with Guido Crepax's *Valentina*, marked by the multiple articulation of panels in the pages and the themes politically relevant, and which used a different approach to lighting – what Cirne calls “*graphic illumination* with predominant white” (CIRNE, 2001, p.163). Guido Crepax presented a ‘clean’ style, not marked by extensive black blots, with no exaggeration of hatches – so, a style dominated by the pure lines and forms that Cirne deems “*voluptuous*” (p.163). This clarity of style went against the underground movement of the 60's, which were predominantly hatched, blotted and stylized. The third significant moment in the history of black and white comics would be the 90's, more specifically the publication of Frank Miller's *Sin City*, a work with absolute blacks and whites, no concessions for midtones (when yellow appears, it is only as a thematic resource), a contrast that accentuated the hardship of the plot, strongly based on pulp fiction and detective stories. With an appropriately *daring* style (a little obscure joke of mine, since Frank Miller rose as an author in the comics market with his run on Marvel Comic's *Daredevil*), Miller's work is, in Cirne's view, eminently cinematographic. For Cirne, the daring artists are precisely the ones that mark their names in the history of the form.

The seventh chapter marks the relationship between comics and poetry. While Cirne denies any paraliterary (and literary, by the by) characteristic in comics, he admits the possibility of the poetry in the form, mainly due to the use of space and breaks to convey and invite meaning. It is a problem, however, that most comics do not rely on their semiotic possibilities even when intending to approach the poetic form. Following that, Cirne proposes a form for the comic adaptation of the Guimarães Rosa's highly poetic novel *Great Wilderness: Paths*³⁹(1956) and what graphic resources he thinks that adaptation should employ – a somewhat bewildering activity, in my humble opinion, the criticism of a work that yet does not exist. As an example of comic that seeks to approach the literary form, Cirne makes a quick analysis of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*. The work is filled with literary and graphic references, and relies on a strong script, usually clever. Despite these qualities, Cirne does not think *Sandman* would stand up to a more directed criticism, and gets to the conclusion that “Gaiman is a good writer *for comics*. Without the armor of the form, his style could as well turn into bad literature” (p.187). Cirne's point is that the literary and comics are different forms, that do not particularly mix – relying on different mediums, the techniques and resources are also necessarily different. Poetry may be a more fair approach, though. Cirne mentions the idea of the experimental form of the modernist poems, which were displayed graphically and spatially on the page (stanzas themselves are the spatial breakdown of language in order to call the attention to the form of the language, after all), mentioning Mallarmé and other modern poets from the vanguards of the form – namely, Dadaism, surrealism, abstractionism, modernism, concrete poetry, neoconcretism, instauration/praxis, poem/process (p.188). For Cirne, there are no experimental comics to date (that is, up to 2001), but the possibility is open – the only thing lacking is the experimentation.

The eighth chapter is about science fiction, seen by Cirne as a worn-out medium, taken by the re-reading of mythic heroes and the not-too-well-disguised advertisement of new technological tendencies and the capitalist system. Finally, the ninth chapter is about the existence of a canon in comics, criticizes the biased view of Harold Bloom's take on the canon and invites three specialists to propose a Brazilian canon of comics.

³⁹ Quick and improper translation of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956). But since Guimarães Rosa was very meticulous about his language, its vocabulary, sounds and rhythm, a proper translation is particularly difficult.

2.5 WOLK AND PETERSEN'S TAKE ON COMICS

Unfortunately, space and time are limitations one has to deal with. It is impossible to review most of the production related to comics and expect time for such luxuries as breathing, meals, sleep and, say, making deadlines for a thesis. But the production reviewed thus far certainly allows for a general comprehension of the diverse takes on the language and form of comics, especially considering most of the authors (McCloud and Eisner's excluded) come from a theoretical background that orients their considerations, and so every work is already a review of theory and tradition, of sorts. There are, however, some works that demand mention, nevertheless, for their relevance to this work.

The first of these is Robert S. Petersen's *Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* (2011), an extensive and complete history of the medium. Petersen's take is oriented by a very broad view of its object, defined after David Kunzle⁴⁰ as *graphic narrative*: “*graphic*, a composed and nonanimated visual form, and *narrative*, a crafted story” (PETERSEN, 2011, p.xv). This denomination allows an analysis of pretty much every image produced with narrative content (Petersen, similarly to Eisner and McCloud, considers narrative art as a precursor of writing, and engages the analysis of not only cave paintings, but also Greek amphoras and Trajano's Column as examples of narrative). Petersen considers that an isolated image can be narrative, as long as it represents a story. In fact, in early manifestations of the form there was not the division of images into different frames. Since art is perceived synchronically, whereas stories are perceived diachronically, graphic narratives are necessarily derivative – that is, common ground between the reader and the artist is needed for the story to be recognized as such. In graphic narrative, the human element is used as “a vehicle for emotional empathy” (p.xvii) to engage the reader, while events are polarized into a logical sequence. His book follows three developments that he considers as crucial for the rendering of the sequential form: *literacy* (the idea that signs can be ordered deliberately into a sequence, which allowed for the evolution of storytelling

⁴⁰ According to Petersen, David Kunzle mentions the term in the second volume of *History of the Comic Strip* (1990), but does not provide a definition.

and its resources), *caricature* (rather than naturalist representation, caricature apply selective distortions in order to increase the expressiveness and dynamicity of the image) and *sequential action* (a result of the two earlier developments, the employment of images in a meaningful sequence – which evolved, adapted and developed new means of representation such as words and the graphic elements of sound in comics, such as word balloons and onomatopoeias).

Other work worthy of mention is Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (2007), in which the author talks a little about the medium and engages in several reviews of modern and classic works, in a very intuitive and perspicacious comprehension of the form. Personal as his views may be (as sharp as his insights), there are three significant breakthroughs that will be addressed: his approach to the necessity of a definition of comics, the part metaphors play inside comics and, finally, his idea of the importance of the artist's style.

Regarding a definition of comics, Wolk's approach is one of the most sensible, in my opinion: he doesn't even try. According to him:

If you try to draw a boundary that includes everything that counts as comics and excludes everything that doesn't, two things happen: first, the medium always wriggles across that boundary, and second, whatever politics are implicit in that definition always boomerang on the definer. (WOLK, 2007, p.17)

What is sensible about this seemingly nonchalant approach is that it considers both the creative and artistic qualities of comics, and, with that, the dialectic process of evolution implicit in any art form, necessarily rebelling against the tendencies established in order to break through. Moreover, the idea that every definition implies not a policy, but a politics, is a breakthrough itself – every production and action, theoretical including, is politic, and that should be considered when reading a definition. It is not by accident that Groensteen is concerned eminently with the French production, nor is it by chance that Petersen favors American ones; McCloud did not decide to attempt a formal definition of comics on a whim, but rather felt an opportunity to give his work the feeling of a methodical approach and, should he succeed in creating a successful definition, have his name deeply carved in the history of comics – and maybe that's why he decided to elaborate on Eisner's concept. So, politics.

Metaphors are, for Wolk, a natural occurrence in comics. In a visual medium where reality is brought forth by drawing and painting techniques, the representational qualities of comics always imply the artist's view:

When you look at a comic book, you're not seeing either the world or a direct representation of the world; what you are seeing is an interpretation or transformation of the world, with aspects that are exaggerated, adapted, or invented. It's not just unreal, it's deliberately constructed by a specific person or people. (...) I don't think comics *require* metaphors to be built into their structure, other than one very basic one: cartooning is, inescapably, a metaphor for the subjectivity of perception. No two people experience the world the same way; no two cartoonists draw it the same way, and the way they draw it is the closest a reader can come to experiencing it through their eyes. (WOLK, 2011, p. 20-21).

So, Wolk sees the style as a metaphor of the world as filtered through the view of an artist's impressions. This makes a lot of sense, since there are a lot of choices implicated in each image (angle and framing, style, light, etc.), and each choice, however great the influence of the needs of the narrative, is a personal one.

Which leads to Wolk's third and last breakthrough, which is his take on style, rather than on metaphor. He develops this concept in two different chapters of this book. In chapter 2: *Auteurs, the History of Art Comics and How to Look at Ugly Drawings*, Wolk uses the Kantian aesthetic notions of *agreeable* (gratify desires and specific tastes), *good* (refer to valuable or laudable things) and *beautiful* (provides pleasure by the consideration of the thing itself) to argue that the underground movement of comics in the 60's, in the United States, promoted a reverse aesthetics in which, contrary to the mainstream, the style deviated from the agreeable, beautiful and good in order to call the attention to the storytelling and the narrative voice: through a style purposefully dirty and deviant, the intentionality of the cartoonist tends to shine (p.55-59). In chapter 5: *Pictures, Words and the Space Between Them*, Wolk calls attention to the fact that, due to being drawn, the idea of intentionality actually plays a larger part in comics than most people are ready to acknowledge. For him, one of the most significant tools of the artist is the notion of *cartooning*. An approach to representation guided by distortion and symbolic abstraction, cartooning is, like any drawing, driven by contour and outline – but maybe its key element is the *symbolic* one. The representation of a cartoony mouth, for instance, is not as much a

representation as an universally accepted symbol that stands for what a mouth looks like. Not accepting McCloud's notion of cartooning as a simplification (Wolk prefers to make generalizations and excuses rather than categories), cartooning is opposite to drawing in an important way: the portrayal of fictional people and settings, supposed to be understood as such (that is, fictional). While realistic portraits tend to be off-putting and leave little to the imagination, in cartooning and drawing:

The cartoonist's line defines the shape of the comics image, but it's never *just* a border: it's a signature, or rather a marking of territory as the artist's. (...) The line itself is an interpolation, something the cartoonist adds to his or her idea of the shape of bodies in space. In a cartoon, every object is subject to interpretive distortion, even when what's being distorted isn't a real image but a distant cousin of something real (WOLK, 2011, p.123).

Style is not only the most immediate aspect of comics (being the first one actually sees when looking at a comics page): it is also an insight into the artist's *vision* – the world already interpreted. That interpretation is something that very few authors have dared to touch.

A last aspect of comics that is interesting enough for a brief mention is the relationship some authors find between comics and poetry. There are very few texts on the matter. I'd like to address briefly Brian McHale's article *Narrativity and Segmentivity, or Poetry in the Gutter* (2010) and Rafael Soares Duarte's *Comics and Poetry* (2012)⁴¹. Both authors anchor their arguments on the purposeful use of space in both comics and poetry, in which breaks (stanzas, verses and gutters) are inserted in order to invite the process of signification. That is, the meaningful nothing, the break that makes the language unusual and, therefore, invites the reader's reason to decipher the break. McHale is concerned with the distinction between the ideas of narrative (which is action oriented and, therefore, must flow) and of poetry (which is distinguished by breakdowns and calls attention to the language rather than what is being told). Duarte considers the processes of breakdown in comics, both in the hybridization of the language and inside the word balloons, where the sentences are fragmented inside space, much like poetry. If one adds to that the idea of the metaphoric contents of style, as proposed by Petersen, and consider that poetry is marked

⁴¹ In the original, *Histórias em Quadrinhos e Poesia* (2012).

by a constant defiance of the forms, approaching images in several fronts (caligrams, Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*, concrete poetry, etc.), it is hard to say where a form begins and the other ends.

2.6 JOINING STRENGTHS

With this unfortunately limited gamma of theories and authors that worried about the language and resources and narrative of comics, it is possible to gather a reasonably complete view of the object: the lack of theoretical background one finds in McCloud and Eisner can easily be filled with Cagnin's use of the Peircean semiotics' sign model and the notions of icon, symbol and index. If Groensteen's notion of a semiotics devoid of signs seems a bit far-fetched (it does), his ideas of gridding and arthrology (both restricted and general, but especially the former) are precious in order to understand the general structure of the work. McCloud's idea of cartooning may have been developed and, to a degree, expanded, by Wolk, but his notion of the intimate quality of the icon and the strangeness of the realistic image remain valuable for the understanding of the medium. No one has developed facial and corporal expressions (and, in the process, the image-text interaction in comics) more than McCloud's faces and Eisner's bodies. McCloud and Cagnin have made significant work in the analysis of lines and resources such as perspective and framing. Eisner's idea of a splash page is universally recognized, less due to the idea than due to the precious use of the form – no one has done it better. Groensteen's idea of restricted arthrology, useful as it may be, is not perfect: while gridding is a useful concept, the idea of the *strip* seems to us limited and defined by a historical development (the comic strips in the newspapers). The idea of *significational blocks* or *significant axis* proposed by Cirne seems more adequate – and may account for different page lay-outs, whether they remind a whole part of the narrative or a collection of strips.

Yet, there is more that must be said in order to get a fairly complete view of the subject. Mainly about style, shadows and color. And one might add perspective to that list, particularly in the case of the horizon line, or the eye of the observer (the 'eye of the beholder', to put it more poetically). However, since these will be contemplated in the

following analysis only in regard to narrative theory, they will be developed in the next section, devoted precisely to joining the two theoretical backgrounds into a comprehensive theory able to account for the narrative possibilities of comics.

3 TOWARDS A VISUAL NARRATOLOGY

Having a comprehensive view of both fields this work intends to investigate in relation to *Watchmen*, it is interesting to comment on how both mediums could be put to work together. That is, how the language of comics fits the theoretical background of narrative theory. Now, interestingly enough, the three main narrative theory scholars discussed in this work (Genette, Rimmon-Kennan and Mieke Bal) suggest the possibility of a theory about the narrative of comics (or at least, in Bal's phrasing, visual narratology). Rimmon-Kennan suggests the possibility in the very beginning of her book (subsequently dismissing the effort in favor of narrative fiction):

Newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives. One species of narrative will be the subject of this book: the species called 'narrative fiction', whether in the form of novel, short story or narrative poem. (RIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p. 1)

Genette, in his turn, is concerned about the temporal quality of comic strips:

[the temporal duality] is less relevant, perhaps, in other forms of narrative expression, such as the *roman-photo* or the comic strip (or a pictorial strip, like the predella of Urbino, or an embroidered strip, like the "tapestry" of Queen Matilda), which, while making up sequences of images and thus requiring a successive or diachronic reading, also lend themselves to, and even invite, a kind of global and synchronic look – or at least a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images (GENETTE, 1983, p. 34)

As for Mieke Bal's take, the possibility of a narratology dealing with the visual elements is developed in greater detail. After offering a few thoughts on suspense and how it works in narratives⁴², Bal points towards the possibility of a visual narratology, since there would be no reason to limit narratology to texts only. Though the narratology of films is pretty much established by now, Bal comments that, due to the frequent subordination of

⁴² Basically, the focalizer doesn't have all the information that is important for the understanding of the Fabula, and is left 'hanging' – and, therefore, so is the reader, who, having been led to ask questions, must then wait for the answers (p. 159-160).

visual narratives to the narratives the visual supposedly illustrates, the study has not become popular in art History. Considering the concept of a visual narratology, Bal states:

Although focalization is not by definition vision-based, it seems the obvious place to begin easing in some elements of a 'visual narratology.' What has been said about any narrative holds for images as well: the concept of focalization refers to the story presented and the concept of narrator to its representation, by acting as the steering perspective on the events (or fabula). (BAL, 1999, p. 161-162)

Bal sees four areas in which a visual narratology could be embraced: film narratology, the analysis of visual images as a narrative in and of themselves, comparison of literary narratives and films and in developing attention to visuality, which would be extremely enriching for the study of narratives (p. 162). In order to adapt narratology for visual arts, however, some things (actually, five things) should be kept in mind:

First, focalization would be the result of visual signifiers as lines and dots, light and dark, composition. Also, as in narrative discourse, focalization is already an interpretation of the events. According to Bal, "this makes room for a reading of the complex structure of focalization, whose most conspicuous feature is the perspectival slant of the copied painting's frame" (BAL, 1999, p.163).

Second, the distinction between external and internal focalizer is kept also, just as in narrative discourse, though it is not usually easy to point out.

Third, the event represented "has the status of the focalized object produced by focalizers" (p.163). Which means, basically, that the image, just like textual narratives, is already seen from the start through a point of view that should be considered as such.

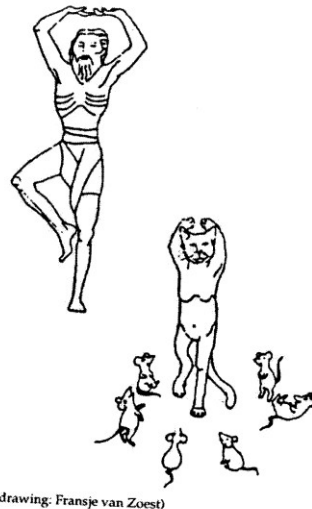
Fourth, "the same object or event can be differently interpreted according to different focalizers. The way in which these different interpretations are suggested to the reader is medium-bound, but the principle of meaning-production is the same for verbal and visual art". (p. 164) As an example, she mentions the eyes of *Madame Bovary*, which change color according to the focalizer. I could point also the laugh of the rats in Arjuna's revenge as an example fit for this text.

Fifth, identification of external and internal focalizer in visual images can also produce free indirect discourse. She exemplifies that with a mention to an Aptekar's Boucher copy, but I find it more easily understandable if one thinks of a scene in *The Simpsons* where Bart is talking to Santa's Helper (the dog): he (Bart) appears in forced, distorted perspective, in black-and-white, and his speech is distorted, composed only by "blah, blah, blah" and words the pet would recognize, such as its name and simple words such as "no". A focalizer shows the world as the dog sees it.

And, after analyzing the movie *The Color Purple*, an excerpt from Proust (where she shows one possible use of the defamiliarizing effect of the photographic view), concludes that:

The dynamic of focalization is at play in every visual text that contains traces of the representational work, as seen by the viewer, since it is precisely in those traces that the text becomes narrativized. In principle all texts contain such traces, but some display them more openly than others. (BAL, 1999, p. 170)

In her book, Bal analyses part of a seventh-century Indian bass-relief (which is said to be maybe the largest one in the world), *Arjuna's Penance*. That analysis is one of the two comments on images in the book (the other one is commented further by Horstkotte and Pedri) and, for that reason, is of interest here. Bal mentions the wise man Arjuna in a yoga position, at the upper left, and a cat in a similar position, surrounded by laughing rats, in the bottom right. To that, she adds the drawing by Fransje van Zoest that is reproduced below:



(drawing: Fransje van Zoest)

Figure 33 - Arjuna and the Cat

According to Bal (in the already mentioned reading of the relief):

Interpretation runs as follows. Arjuna is in a yoga position and is meditating to win Lord Siva's favour. The cat, impressed by the beauty of absolute calm, imitates Arjuna. Now the mice realize they are safe. They laugh. Without this interpretation, there is no relation between the parts of the relief. Within this interpretation, the parts form a meaningful narrative. (BAL, 1999, p. 144)

Afterwards, she mentions that another possible interpretation for the story "is that the cat is simulating. This doesn't weaken my statements but only adds an element of suspense to the fabula" (p.145). To her, the linking of the elements of the narrative (the being able to put both images in a coherent story) is a clear illustration of Focalization, where the 'view' of the events mediates the relation between the relief and its meaning. And, there it is – the Focalizer, a component part of every story: "A says that B sees what C is doing" (p.146). Or, in other words, the narrator (A) uses a focalizer (B) to comment on a subject (C). Or, still according to Bal:

The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character (i.e. an element of the fabula) or outside it. If the focalizer coincides with a character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the characters's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. (BAL, 1999, p. 146)

That narrative element, the focalizer, would account for the cases in which the view of things presented in a narrative is not trustworthy, as is the case of memory (a personal recollection of facts deeply influenced by a person's views and experiences, conscious or otherwise). Focalization may be internal, or character-bound (CF – when a character is the focalizer) or external (EF – when an anonymous agent is the focalizer).

That concept, however, only brings more questions to the table: if there is a focalizer, there must also be a focalized. What is focalized, how is it focalized (what attitude the focalizer has in relation to the focalized) and who is this focalizer? Whenever an object is presented, the way of its presentation provides information both about the object and the focalizer. This is a powerful device for manipulation of the reader's take on the story, since, unless the focalizer is shown as unreliable, the tendency is that the reader accepts the point of view given to things naturally, as part of the narrative.

Now, I am, too, sort of a curious cat, and, reading Bal's two possible interpretations of the bass-relief, I started to wonder about other possibilities. Having at my disposal the seemingly all-powerful aid of the Internet, I decided to take a look at it myself.

It is easy to see that the bass-relief could be one of the biggest in the world: it depicts more than a hundred figures of gods and animals (which include giant-sized elephants) in an 43-feet-tall, 93-feet-long rock wall. In the middle of the wall there is a cleft, which most animals and gods face, in which are sculpted two nagas, and there's a four-armed figure (probably Shiva) to the left of Arjuna. There is a dispute between experts about the actual subject of the bass-relief: some say it is an illustration of the *Mahabharata* story of Arjuna, who performed rigorous austerities in order to get Shiva's weapon and destroy his enemies; others say it shows King Bhagiratha of India doing penance in order to bring the River Ganges down from heaven, to purify the souls of his ancestors⁴³. Shiva allowed this to happen, and let the river slide through His hair not to fall too abruptly to Earth. Animals and gods looked curiously at the damp god. This version seems to be more viable, since the cleft also holds an artificial waterfall, that recalls the river descending. The cat might also be a reference to the *Panchatantra* story *The Cunning*

⁴³ Information taken from the site <<http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-monuments/arjunas-penance.html>>, available in HTML format. Last access in 06/02/12.

Mediator, where a cat assumes a religious position, pretending to be deeply religious and, assuring a rabbit and a sparrow that he's given up hunting long ago, accepts to mediate a dispute for a nest... provided they get a little closer. Of course, the cat eats both and rests in the nest afterwards⁴⁴.

It is also easy to see the links between the two drawings presented: both Arjuna (or Bhagiratha, but let us stick with Arjuna and dismiss the polemic for the sake of readability) and the cat stand in the penance position (and that, as far as I know, is fairly difficult to see in a cat – then again, as far as my experience goes, in a human being as well), and the obvious mimicking by the cat (as one can assume from the disposition of the figures, Arjuna in the center, just beside Lord Shiva, and also by the general religious behavior of cats) creates a continuity between both images. The fact that the mice are laughing at the cat (which is another layer of anthropomorphic personification, since usual rodents do not laugh) only adds spice to the 'story'.

What strikes me as odd is the fact that, from the entire hundred and some figures depicted in the bass-relief, only the two are commented. Even understanding the rest of the sculptures as the background for the story of Arjuna and the cat, a detained look might have proven enlightening, maybe even changing the perception of the story – making the second possible reading presented by the author as the most probable one, for instance. That leads to the conclusion that either Bal's comments on the story of Arjuna refer to the drawing by Fransje van Zoest, or she decided that, for the purposes intended, the comment on the two figures was enough.

If that conclusion only comes to emphasize Bal's views on a perceiving subject looking at the perceived object, by exposing Bal's perception of the images, so much the better. But I thought it was worth mentioning. Conversely, one could also interpret both images as a cat making fun of Arjuna, with mice laughing out of fear of the cat or out of disdain for Arjuna's efforts – or the cat's efforts, now I come to think of it. And both attitudes of cat and mice may be understood as a test of Arjuna's resolve. So, multiple

⁴⁴ As seen online in HTML format, in the site <<http://panchatantra.org/of-crows-and-owls/the-cunning-mediator-1.html>>, last accessed in 06/02/12.

interpretations possible, leaving still more clearly put the emphasis of Bal in the necessity of studying the agent that ‘sees’, namely, the focalizer.

Unfortunately, Bal doesn’t mention comics directly in her proposition of a visual narratology. And, like the other scholars, the possibility is not developed, but merely stated – an attitude that can be referred to as “I have a great idea for someone else to deal with”. To that, the best thing that can be said is: others do.

3.1. ANN MILLER’S *READING BANDE DESSINÉE* (2007)

Ann Miller dedicates the whole chapters 5 and 6 of her excellent book on comics *Reading Bande Dessinée* (2007) to formal resources of the medium, chapter 6 being focused solely on narrative theory. In chapter 5, Miller investigates *The Codes and Formal Resources of Bande Dessinée*. Starting with a definition of the form as a visual narrative art, which produces meaning through images in a sequential relationship, spatially juxtaposed, with or without text (MILLER, 2007, p. 75). In order to start investigating its characteristics, Miller goes back to the ideas of Saussure’s linguistics and Peirce’s semiotics in order to establish the idea of signs, icons and indexes (not symbols, since they do not bear a relationship of similarity between signifier and signified). She then draws on Barthes’ idea of the difference between a drawing and a photo, where the drawing is perceived as encoded due to the transposition of the model through a series of options, following a certain code of representation. So, choices such as framing, angle, composition, all affect the perception of the images. Miller also draws on McCloud⁴⁵ in order to comment the different styles, indicating that styles can vary “within a single artist’s work, within a single comic, and, indeed, within a single panel” (MILLER, 2007, p.78).

⁴⁵ Actually, McCloud’s take on style on the cited pages is more between the use of realistic and cartoony style, used selectively in order to create effects of strangeness and empathy in the reading of the story (MCCLOUD, 1993, p.42-43). Miller takes the idea further – much as this work intends to do.

Following that observation, the uses of metonym (figure of speech based on association – visually, according to Miller, the metonym works through the depiction of details from which a larger whole can be constructed) and metaphor (works by substitution – visually, metaphors can work much as the use of symbolic features in McCloud’s *Making Comics* [p.94-96], by adding to a depicted scene symbolic elements to convey meanings that are not easily shown) are employed to explain the resources of comics, in which the metonym is seen as a central feature (McCloud’s *closure*). Miller also mentions Greimas’ ideas of functions as relevant for the narrative, since they are helpful due to enabling “the separation of the complexities of character psychology from the narrative roles that characters take up” (MILLER, 2007, p.82). The subject of narrative theory is discussed further in the following chapter of Miller’s work. What is of concern in this chapter, however, is two different views of comics: comics as a sequential art oriented by articulation and comics as an art that joins text and image together. Therefore, she devotes sections to articulation and to text and images.

Articulation works through three different ways: the layout of panels on a page (Groensteen’s *mise en page*, or spatio-topical system), the sequential (linear) relationships between panels (Groensteen’s *restricted arthrology*) and the way non-sequential panels can be linked to each other (Groensteen’s *general arthrology*). As one can see, Miller relies heavily on Groensteen’s theory, which has already been presented. So, the concepts will only be mentioned briefly. The *mise en page* works in several ways: through the size, shape and position of panels, through incrustation (superposition) of panels, through patterns of panels (Peeters sees panels as *narrative*, either *conventional* or *rethorical*; or *tabular*, either *decorative* or *productive*, and Groensteen divides the patterns in *regular* or *irregular*, *discrete* or *ostentatious*) and through the use of the gutter as a visual element, in which other elements may or not be present. The *sequential links* are determined by the change from one panel to another, which implicates a *spatio-temporal relation* between both, and by the *stylistic variations*, such as framing, angle composition and color. The use of ellipsis is seen as a defining form in comics. *Tressage*, or *general arthrology* concerns relations other than sequential to the linking of panels; these can manifest themselves through the *repetition of panels or elements*.

Text and image considers the relation between the two different elements in the language of comics. Text can appear in comics in any of five ways: *peritext* (text on the

cover and fly leaves), *récitatif* (or narrative voice-over, usually in text boxes), *dialogue*, *sound effects* (or onomatopoeias) and *texts inside the fictional world*. These can be integrated with the images in many ways, and on that integration depends their status inside the narrative. The texts can also acquire *iconic properties*, becoming a mixed form. Texts can work as ‘soundtracks’, providing the narrative with sounds and dialogue, or as *anchoring* elements, to orient the reading order or to specify a possible polysemy of the image. Other possible functions of the text in comics are that of the *relaying*, making the narrative more authentic by representing real world speech, or more surreal, counterpointing that which is presented in the images. The reading of the text also helps to give a narrative *temporality* and *rhythm*.

Chapter 6 is dedicated entirely to *Narrative Theory and Bande Dessinée*. Its basic aim is to consider each of Genette’s division of narratives in *tense* (that is, narrative time) *mood* (presentation of the narrative information) and *voice* (narrative stance) regarding the comics form. As in Genette, Miller understands time under the different aspects of *order*, *duration* and *frequency*. Order and frequency are related to the relation between the time of recounting and the time of the events recounted. Duration is a rather more complicated case, which can be understood in terms of rhythm. *Ellipsis*, *summary*, *scene* and *pause* are the four categories that can alter the rhythm of a text. *Paralipsis* is the omission of aspects of a situation. The narrative perspective is discussed under *mode* (where issues like *focalization* – zero, internal and external – and subjective investment are dealt with), while *voice* addresses the question of the narrator and its classifications (homodiegetic, heterodiegetic).

In an attempt to make a bridge between the two different frameworks, Miller deals with the categories of *mode* and *voice* as related to film theory. *Time* is not addressed because it is not significant considering comics. In these comments, Miller uses concepts of André Gaudreault and Francis Iost. In the analysis of novels, the ideas of *seeing* and *knowing* are mixed. In film, however, it is useful to separate these ideas. So, it is interesting to use the idea of *focalization* to deal with the idea of knowledge and the new term *ocularization* to treat the perspective of a character inside the diegesis. Thus, the ocularized shot would be the scene where the action is shown as if through the eyes of a character. There are two different types of ocularized shots: the point-of-view and the subjective. Subjective shots are those that are either mental processes, such as daydreams

and recollections; shots that are deformed (as in blurred view or hallucinogenic effects) or masked (that is, have something impeding the vision). There is the possibility of a narrative voice-over, considered another narrative stance – different from the idea of the *meganarrator*, the implicit narrating stance responsible for choosing the shots, angles, and even the orchestration of the dialogues and voice-over. It is not uncommon in films to find inconsistencies in a given narrative voice (the knowledge of the character is impossible, a first-person narrative sees the narrator from the outside, etc.). Such inconsistencies work as a reminder of the superior narrative stance, the *meganarrator*. Of course, it is not always easy to find markers of enunciation in film, where continuity editing strives to hide the presence of the *meganarrator*, naturalizing the narrative. It is only when the image detaches itself from the flow of the narrative (or the ‘mimetic illusion’) that such markers can be perceived. Film narrations can display degrees of knowledge, communicativeness and self-consciousness. A *self-conscious* narration draws attention to itself. A narration can also be judgemental towards the story or the characters by devices such as sympathetic or ironic music, the angles of the camera (high angles indicate detachment, close-ups attachment), for instance.

In comics, there is more than one enunciation at play: even when taking the panels as units, panels work through monstration, while the narration arises from the sequence. There are words and there are images – and the narration will be determined by their play. A single panel can be said to narrate if it displays causal relations or a sequence. Still in Genette’s terms, Miller points out narrative time, mode and voice.

Narrative *time* can be given through duration, frequency or order. The idea of *duration* depends on determining a general pace to the work, and, based on that, determine the points where this ratio of action developing in time/space is accelerated (*summary*) or slowed down (*scene*). There is also the possibility of *pause* and *ellipsis*, which would be a jump in the action. Miller ponders that the fact that the panels are juxtaposed, that is, visible, makes the idea of rhythm more salient in comics. While the ellipsis is a basic form in comics, due to the jump from one panel to the other, the idea of a narrative pause can be conveyed through what McCloud called aspect-to-aspect transitions between panels. There is also the possibility of spatial transitions rather than temporal ones. In this case, also, no narrative time has been spent. *Frequency* is concerned with repetition. Though Genette has come up with several classes and examples of possibilities in repetition, Miller just

comments that the repetition of an event amplifies its visual impact, and that multiple occurrences of the same event demand the use of a *récitatif*, such as ‘every time’, or similar. *Order* in comics works pretty much as in film: there is the possibility of explanatory flashbacks and flashforwards. That allows for the completion of elided elements in the narrative after their original telling, as a way to increase narrative suspense, for instance. Miller comments that the parallel action is something that particularly suits the universe of comics – actually, the indexical function of the speech balloon is a parallel action of sorts; two different narrative forms, one immediate (images) and the other a process (text) occurring at the same time in a ‘time bubble’ (panel). Incidentally, the word balloons and the scene do not necessarily have to be related.

Mode is concerned with the narrator. As in Genette, the narrator can be *homodiegetic* or *heterodiegetic*. If the narrator is a character (homodiegetic), images and text will be restricted to the narrator’s knowledge, though, as Miller puts it, “it is rare that images are restricted to the ocular viewpoint of that character” (MILLER, 2006, p.109). In the case of a heterodiegetic narrator, focalization can be *zero* (omniscient), *internal* (through a character) or *external* (from the outside). In comics that means all characters are seen from the outside, without the presence of thought balloons, ocularized panels or subjective images. An omniscient narrator would have access to all character’s thoughts and perspectives. Internal focalization could not display knowledge or the internal universe of more than one character. Miller makes it clear once more that the character should be shown at all times, either in the panel or through an ocularized view. Again, ocularization may be suggested through deformations or distortions particular to that character. Thus, if a character, for instance, imagines that all people around are demons, such a portrayal of the people (that is, as demons) will suggest ocularization. When there is a consistent change in the narrative’s style (a particular character or object shown in a diverse way, such as the colored motifs in Frank Miller’s otherwise black and white *Sin City*), there is a subjectivization of these objects. This can be considered the intervention of the narrating instance, or meganarrator. But this comment should be in the section below.

Voice is concerned with markers of enunciation and the ‘meganarration’. In comics there is the possibility of dissonance between the verbal and visual narrating instances, a judgemental approach to a character or situation (shown through style or any resource consistently used), transitions between panels that call attention to themselves rather than

further the narrative for being conspicuous or due to a radical difference in the size and/or position of panels, the style, all these can be considered signs of the presence and characteristics of a meganarrator. According to Miller, Comics share:

the verbal resource of the *recitative* and can use the modalization systems of language, but it is unique as a narrative art form in having an extensive range of visual resources to express degrees of certainty and nuances of attitude in relation to what is being recounted. (MILLER, 2006, p.123)

In this case, the style itself can be impersonal or personal, and irony or skepticism can be implied through the dissonance between the verbal and visual enunciating stances. As seen in McCloud, even the line itself may carry an attitude towards what is being shown.

3.2 HORSTKOTTE AND PEDRI'S *FOCALIZATION IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVE* (2011)

Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri address the problem of focalization in comics in the excellent article *Focalization in Graphic Narrative* (2011). For them, there are inherent inconsistencies in the structure, as is presented by both Genette and Bal: it is uncertain whether cognition should or not be included in focalization, the difference between *seeing* and *perceiving* is sometimes blurred and, despite the fact that Bal proposes a visual narratology, little research has been made. In an attempt to answer the ways through which visual narrative separates narration and focalization, the authors examine perspective-marking resources and, at the same time, advocate the idea that perspective is but one of the many resources (such as cognition, ideology and judgement) that can be used to determine the mental processing of a story or action. Horstkotte and Pedri propose view focalization as “a cognitive operation related to aspectuality that subsumes the narrower optical view of focalization” (HORSTKOTTE & PEDRI, 2011, p.332).

According to them, in *Narrative Discourse*, Genette proposes different (and conflicting) views of what focalization is, in terms of both vision and restriction of access

to information. Important as the structure may be, Genette's main concern is with the narrator, rather than the focalizer. Mieke Bal's views, in her turn, rest on a distinction between three different narrative layers – the *story*, the *fabula* and the *text*. The focalizer would then be responsible for the 'colouring' of the narrative. Despite Bal's advocating of the centrality of the concept for a visual narratology, her approach is reductive and too closely tied to literature. Moreover, in her analysis of focalization in Ken Apter's piece *I'm Six Years Old and Hiding Behind my Hands*, Bal's approach is to merely identify spatial and perspectival acts of perception, not even explaining why these gazes should be understood as instances of focalization rather than narratorial statements.

Horstkotte and Pedri propose instead a model of 'windows of focalization', with the text containing cues that allow the reader to transfer imaginatively into the storyworld – that is, windows through which objects and actions “are seen, perceived or conceptualized from a specific deitic center or focal character” (HORSTKOTTE & PEDRI, 2011, p.334). For them, there are two possible vantage points embedded in a narrative: that of a character and that of a narrator; even when the narrative is character-bound, there needs to be a neutral background that allows the readers to identify the subjective inflection. Thus, focalization does not presuppose the existence of a character in order to filter the narrative's discourse – it may be focused on the narrator. For the authors, focalization includes matters of voice and style, and can be signaled through three different ways in graphic narratives: through *shifts in visual vocabulary*, through *repetition and shading* and through *multi-stage braiding of identical visual material*.

Following that line of thought, Horstkotte and Pedri analyze three different graphic novels: *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi, *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, and *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore (writer), Dave Gibbons (artist) and John Higgins (colorist). In order to make these analyses, though, they determine some semiotic features necessary to understand the particularities of comics, and help to provide clues as to what sort of consciousness is filtering the story: besides the need to bear in mind the *multimodality* of the comics language (text and images working in a same medium), the *encoding of time in space* is a necessary factor in the understanding of comics, as well as the perspective of a language marked by *ellipsis* between frames (gutters are, after all, gaps); finally, the idea of *braiding* is also considered fundamental for the understanding of the process or the narrative, where each panel is put in potential relationship to all the others.

Persepolis' analysis starts with two acute observations: first, that the style, with black and white cartoony stylization and very little concern with perspective and realistic representation, contrasts with the politically charged theme of the work, and, as a result, the narrating-I (that is, a more experienced narrative stance capable of filtering – and therefore focusing, process – a higher degree of political and environmental information) is a separate stance from the young experiencing-I in the work. Moreover, an unusual (for it doesn't happen anywhere else in the work) employment of symbolic content (a snake-shaped devil takes the place of the frame, enveloping the family that is happy because the devil has left) calls the attention of the authors, also seen as an indication of a possible different level of focalization. To that, one might add that what the authors read as a “tense facial expression” (p.338) in the experiencing-I, which seems to indicate an advantage point of the character is not merely that, it is also a corporal expression (the fists resting on the hips are a recognized heroic stance, after all – which tends to make the chest look broader and the person, stronger – and so are frequently used to indicate power and defiance) directed to the reader (the character seems to be looking at the reader directly in the eyes – that is, at the ‘camera’, breaking the mimetic illusion), calling attention to the narration and, thus, ensuring that a narrating-I focalization comes across – also inviting the reader to understand the critical implications of that choice, or, in other words, to accept the idea of the lingering presence of the devil as a reliable piece of information, from a narrator with an advantage point.

The analysis of repetition in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* brings forth the presence of different narrative voices: that of Vladek (the autodiegetic verbal narrator of his own previous experience) and that of Artie (the imagetic narrator in both narratives and verbal narrator of the interaction between himself and Vladek). Artie is responsible for the employment of the animal metaphors and also a denouncer of their inconsistency (when it is uncertain how to depict a character that claimed to be German while treated as a Jew, and so might be represented as any of the two different animals). This uncertainty is depicted graphically through a fading image on an alternative version of the character lingering over the figure of Artie. When the action is focalized through Vladek, the character is certain of the narrative choices; when Artie is the focalizer, there is also an element of uncertainty that puts Vladek's authority into question. Again, one might add that there are two more possible levels to that dynamic – separating Artie, the character,

and Artie as the narrator that has the doubts about the representation and appears in the beginning of the second book not as a mouse, but rather as a character that employs the mask of a mouse in order to discuss his feelings about the work and the possibility of representing the Holocaust. That also brings the ‘meganarrator’ (in Miller’s term) that depicted the masked version, as well. In a nutshell: it’s complicated.

Finally, Horstkotte and Pedri analyze the possibilities of repetition in graphic narratives through the idea of braiding applied to the Comedian’s murder scene in *Watchmen*, which is repeated three times. Their argument is that, despite the repetition of a large part of the scene (five panels are integrally repeated the three times, one of them presenting one reduced version), their different locations and changes in the depicted scenes indicate character-bound focalization, different perceptions of the scene. While I disagree with that idea, this topic will be developed later in this work. For Horstkotte and Pedri, not only are the different repetitions understood as different instances of focalization, filtered by different characters’ views of the assassination, but also the interaction between words and images (in the first instance dominated by a discussion of the crime by two detectives; in the second by a fragment of Rorschach’s journal, with considerations about their violent lives, Blake’s understanding of their existence and, interestingly, ending with a joke; in the third instance with Veidt’s confession of the assassination), which sometimes is strange, unfitting or ironic, indicates the presence of the covert narrator – but can also be understood as linking the sequence to the views of respectively the detectives, Rorschach and Veidt’s perception. Their reading of the sequence shows iconic ambivalence and different possible readings, but without considering the idea of focalization features of reliability possibly being lost in the reading of the narrative. Of course, other resources such as coloring and composition may influence the reading.

As a conclusion, Horstkotte and Pedri understand that:

Just like literary prose fiction, graphic narrative relies on a narrator as well as one or several focalizers who together produce the text that we read and look at. However, due to its multimodality, both the narrative mediation and the focal filtering of the story tend to be more complexly structured than is the case in the monomodal, literary prose narratives for which narratological tools and concepts were first designed. (HORSTKOTTE & PEDRI, 2011, p.350)

The lack of linguistic pointers such as grammatical pronouns makes the narrative structures harder to determine with any degree of certainty, and, so, a visual narratology would require the adaptation of central concepts such as narration and focalization in order to account for the language's particularities. The authors suggest three fields in which further research in focalization is called for, due to the ambiguous or undeveloped presentation of the concept in the literature: graphic narrative, film focalization and literary prose.

3.2 KAI MIKKONEN'S *FOCALISATION (SIC.) IN COMICS* (2012)

In the article *Focalisation in Comics: From the Specificities of the Medium to Conceptual Reformulation* (2012), Kai Mikkonen ponders that the processing of narrative information in graphic storytelling involves not only the distinction between narrator and focalizer, but also the consideration of factors such as narrative voice, verbal focaliser (sic.), centre of visual perception, centre of attention, picture frame and many other elements such as color, tone, hue, texture, style of the graphic line, caricature and form of speech and thought balloons (p.71).

Differently from Horstkotte and Pedri, who focused their investigation on cognition, Mikkonen chose to investigate visual perspectives in graphic narratives, mainly through three different strategies: the determination of a spatially explicit point of perception, the possible simultaneity of visual focalizers and the complex scale of possibilities between internal and non-character bound focalization. In order to establish the difference between narrator and focalizer, Mikkonen uses the theories of Monika Fludernick and Katherine Thompson-Jones to argue that focalization in graphic narratives is not always clear – or even relevant. Nevertheless, it is possible to be construed through the reading of verbal and visual clues, markers for the point of perception that filters the narrative. To that end, he proposes to view the structure of focalization through film theory in order to establish the common uses, for:

In graphic storytelling, as in film, the one who sees can always remain temporarily ambiguous, and sometimes even permanently so, but the image necessarily reveals a spatial point from which something (the focalized) is perceived. (MIKKONEN, 2012, p.74)

To the idea that images are always shown from a certain viewpoint, Mikkonen opposes the idea of non-perspectival and multi-perspectival images, such as maps, panels filled with text or pure textures, blank panels, etc. But these are exceptions to the rule, and panels usually follow the action or character from one panel to another (a fact that can be considered in itself an act of focalization) through a certain perspective that can be impersonal or linked to the perception of a character – or even show a character looking straight at the reader, heightening the level of involvement or adding a different narrative layer. Of course, the process of focusing on a development does not imply necessarily a character – the focalized may be a landscape or a building. The persistence of the narrative on a certain character or showing things through a certain consciousness is considered a strong cohesion device in the narrative.

Focalizers frequently coexist in the images – in fact, graphic narratives, due to their multimodality and the several possibilities of interaction between images and text, are particularly prone to the simultaneity of focalizers. Such particularities allow for the convergence or divergence of visual and verbal perspectives, which can relate to each other in several ways. Mikkonen investigates the role of photographs in graphic narratives in three different works, getting to the conclusion that the resource can be used to draw attention to a character or emotional intensity (*The Arrival*), multiply perspectives through the incorporation and assimilation of a varied representational medium (*Taxi Van Goghim Korvaan*) and call attention to the form and heighten the sense of placing (*Le Photographie*).

As for determining the difference between the representation of internal focalization and non-character bound focalization, Mikkonen leans toward the existence of

(...) varying degrees of congruence and divergence between a character's point-of-view and the reference world of the narrative, as well as the fact that graphic storytelling can use internal and external viewpoints at the same time. (MIKKONEN, 2012, p.84)

The author identifies several possible structures related to an advantage point in the narrative: the *point of view* shot (seen through the eyes of a character), the *gaze* shot (shows a character looking at something), the *eyeline shot/match cut* (joins both previous structures, first showing the character looking, then what the character sees), the *over-the-shoulder* shot (the camera gets close but does not match the character's position – or follows closely the character's movements), the *reaction* shot (shows a character's reaction to something that is seen), the *perception* shot (reveals the mental condition of someone looking at something – usually a distorted view, or hallucinations). Conversely, the placement of the character and the character's gaze can influence the reading – for instance, when a character is looking straight at the reader an effect of shared subjective perspective may be created. The tone of a narrative can also be influenced by factors such as lighting, frames shape and size, graphic line, etc. All those techniques interact and form an immensely complex gamma of possibilities.

Focalization in comics, thus, is majorly doubled and/or ambiguous. The dynamic interaction of words and images can “enable graphic storytelling to fully exploit the distance between a self who speaks, a self who sees and a self who is seen, or the split between a narrating and an experiencing self” (MIKKONEN, 2012, p.88). Mikkonen finally develops the idea of *ambient focalization* (sic), that is, something perceived from more than one side, a sort of empty deitic centre. And stresses the fact that pure examples of external, internal and zero focalization are hard to find, especially in mixed media narratives, which show so many more possibilities of interaction.

3.3 THIERRY GROENSTEEN'S *COMICS AND NARRATION* (2013)

Comics and Narration (2013) is the second book in which Thierry Groensteen develops his theory of comics regarding the language of the medium. In a presentation entitled *A Few Words about The System of Comics and More...* in 2007, at the conference of the International Bande Dessinée Society at the French Institute in London, the author said he considered the previous book, *The System of Comics* (2007), the first in a trilogy, basically a semiotic approach to be complemented by a historical approach in *Astérix*,

Barbarella & Co. (2000) and a cultural overview of the form in *Un Object Culturel Non Identifié* (An Unidentified Cultural Object, 2006). (GROENSTEEN, 2007, p.91).

The System of Comics (2007) itself was defined as a macrosemiotic approach considering not only the images, but also their articulation in the space of both the page and the work as a whole. The book is based on the principle of *iconic solidarity*, the establishment of a relationship between images, a process that in comics is governed by the *breakdown* (of the narrative into signifying units and their sequential organization), *page layout* (disposition of panels in the page) and *braiding* (related to the non-linear links between images). Of these processes, breakdown and page layout are related to *restricted arthrology* (the sequential quality of comics) and braiding to *general arthrology* (the non-sequential relations). Groensteen considers that the medium is dominated by the images, understood as utterables, describables, interpretables and appreciables at the same time (that is, while images themselves are not utterances, they can be described, interpreted and appreciated).

Comics and Narration presents a development of the theories already present in *The System of Comics*, and also a more cosmopolitan view than that of its predecessor – which is extremely partial to Francophile comics. In this book, Groensteen seeks to widen this scope with several references to American comics and Manga. Moreover, as the title indicates, the book is concerned not only with semiotics, but also with *narratology* and aesthetics. The classic comics industry is itself presented in the book as a field largely dominated by outdated heroic plots, but with a large potential gradually being fulfilled by the vanguard of *auteuristic comics*, ready to experiment with concepts such as abstractionism, confessional narratives, the increase of the feminine presence in the medium, an imaginative use of pauses and silences and the abandonment of the imperative of the uniformity of style – to the point of sacrificing optimum transparency and immediate reading.

The *first chapter* is dedicated to *abstractionism* as a trend that defies most of the established ideas about the medium – the idea of narrative, to begin with. Identifying two different possibilities in abstractionism in comics (*infranarrative*, that is, without a coherent sequence, and *abstract*, sequences of abstract drawings), Groensteen gets to the conclusion that the visual contents of abstract comics are organized in a sequence through

color, contiguity, repetition, etc. Not necessarily a narrative, but a series. That connections are established due to the *comics apparatus*, the rhetorics of the medium that makes it recognizable (panels, balloons, etc.). In his view, the reader is an important part of the puzzle, since it assumes that, familiarized with the comics' apparatus, the reader will formulate hypothesis whenever the sequence fails to offer immediate coherence (loc.331-338).

Chapter two is concerned with *sequentiality*, and starts by investigating the threshold of narrativity through understanding whether a single image can be considered a narrative. In a nutshell, no, it can't: even if an image is capable of evoking a previous situation and a development, it does not concretize these possibilities; rather, viewed as interpretable as well as utterable, images are possible of non fixed interpretations – they remain open possibilities. Thus, there's no effective change in the situation presented, and therefore there's no narration. An exception can be made to a single image in which several scenes are depicted, such as the ones present in medieval iconography.

It is, therefore, the iconic solidarity that turns isolated images into a coherent narrative. In that process, however, there may be space for interpretation and uncertainty. While silent images can either be unequivocal or require verbal elements to indicate their reading, some images (accompanied or not by text) present an intrinsic meaning. Ellipses, too, can be *unequivocal* or open to interpretation (*undetermined*). While classic comics tend toward clarity, contemporary comics have strived to explore poetic elements such as ambiguity, reticence, indeterminacy, doubt. The search for new relationships between images, in its turn, enhances the idea of iconic solidarity. While narrative comics are concerned with determined and clear relationships, poetic comics operate at the level of the series. Groensteen identifies four modalities of coexistence of images: spatial complementarity (that is, filling the space of the page), perpetuation (of the reading), rhythm (musical quality) and configuration (visual organization of the page and the interactions between images).

An image can be understood through three different processes that orient meaning-production: the shown (that is, what is displayed by the monstrator), the intervened (that passes from one image to another) and the signified (which accounts for cases in which

there is subjectivity of the monstration and/or stylistic figures such as metaphor, analogy, metonymy, allegory).

Chapter three develops some of Groensteen's theories on the *layout* of the pages. In *System*, Groensteen identifies two possibilities for a page's layout: it either is *regular* or *rethorical* (in which the panels' size and shapes are determined by their contents). There are different degrees of regularity of the layout: the first degree is that of the *album as a whole*, when there is a fixed preset number of strips on each page; the second degree happens when the strips share the same *height* and the third when they present the same *width*. A page's *density* is given by the number of panels. Modern comics tend toward a pattern, but use it inconsistently, with a tendency of the presentation of full-width pages to provide visual surprise and increase the reading pleasure. As Groensteen observes, the sudden variation of a panel's size disturbs reading and calls attention to the layout.

There are three main schools of production as far as layouts are involved: the *classical school* favours simple layouts, with rethorical use and second-degree regularity (that is, a layout that is discreet instead of ostentatious); the *school of elaborated rethorics*, which present panels of varying height and vertical stacks, disturbing the vectorization of the panels, and the neo-baroque school, which is concerned with new concepts of the page. Deeply influenced by manga, the neo-baroque school breaks with classical tradition presenting the interpenetration of images, non-rectangular panels, tabular effect (non-linear) of panels, double-page compositions and the magnification of *décor* (decorative images non-related to the story). Groensteen makes an analysis of page layout in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: Smartest Kid on Earth*, identifying features such as the employment of multiples in the frame sizes, the geometrical regularity, the isometric perspective, high density ratio of panels per page, the thick panel borders and the oppositions in mirroring connected images as central features of his layouts, which Groensteen considers one of the areas in which Ware has been particularly innovative (loc. 793).

Chapter four elaborates on some of Groensteen's theoretical propositions, mainly through the investigation of three different sorts of production: children's illustrated books, mangas (specifically shōjo mangas) and digital comics. These analysis are based on the

idea of the spatio-topical system, that is, interactions between basic units of comics language, such as balloons, panels, strips and pages.

Children's books are based on the originality in the layout, which has to be attractive, frequently presenting images that bleed into the edges of the pages, the use of panoramic angles and an elaborate interaction of words and images, which can be or not in the form of the balloons or as illustrated stories. The images seek the pictorial excitement of the reader, and can be either *isolated* (not dependent of others), *sequential* (juxtaposed to others) or *associated* (a mixture of both). In children's books, images and text together are indicators of time (in comics those are actions and images). The roles of text and images are variable, which brings to the table the problem of the "subordination of the images to the authority of the text" (loc.940). Modern authors give the image priority as a driver of the narrative, while 'classic' authors advocate the submission of the image to the story's needs. Poetic comics in their turn, are more preoccupied with effects such as epiphany, graphic events and affection than with the narrative or chronological developments.

The analysis of *mangas* is specific to *shōjo* (teenage girl's mangas), where Groensteen detects a large gamma or resources employed in very inventive layouts. Some of the resources identified by Groensteen are the *catwalk effect* (a character floating above the action of the page, usually as a way of displaying a figurine), the *elongated panels* (in length or width, help to disturb the narrative flow and call attention to a different dimension), the presence of *unframed drawings* (either unframed or bleeding out of the page), *inset panels* (superimposition of panels or rows of panels – which form stanzas), the *polarization between drawn and blank zones* (therefore using white space) and *decorative elements*, such as hearts and stars, which are considered romantic.

The narrative of *shōjo* shows a predilection for close-ups of eyes and faces, frequently showing lack of detail in décor (sceneries): less interested in the action than in the emotion. The *large eyes* of the characters and emphasis on their *hair* helps differentiate them. All these characteristics are also present in boy's mangas, only their emphasis is on action, drama or violence rather than emotion, and their use is usually more sparing.

Digital comics are, for Groensteen, alienating, to a point. Not only isn't the computer screen analogous to the page, but the lack of the physical presence of the book also implies a loss of spatial memory related to the narrative, and so a loss of the conscience of the structure of the work (not a complete loss, though). Features such as *interactivity* (scrolling, zooming, clicking, interactive options, multipath storytelling, the 'infinite canvas' and the bifurcation of choices) and *multimedia* (sound and animation) are not exactly appropriate: comics has been a *monossensory* medium from the beginning, and any eccentric display may take the attention away from the story. Groensteen is nostalgic about those changes – he understands the pace of technology and the potential of the medium, but is not excited by it.

Chapter five is about the question of the *narrator*. For Groensteen, there are two different approaches to the presence of the narrator in texts: either the narrator is seen as *omnipresent*, a structure in every text, or the presence of the narrator is identifiable through *markers* in the text that denounce its presence as a deitic center.

Comics are *polysemiotic* by nature, and from there comes the difficulty in coming up with an adequate narratology to the form of comics. Text and images cannot be considered separately – in comics, *mimesis* and *diegesis* work together to create the narrative effects and can interact in several ways. Images cannot erase the idea of a narrator, since the viewpoint is a component in every image.

Groensteen adopts the term *monstrator* for the narrative stance responsible for the visible part of the narrative. The stance encompasses both the *action* and the *style* of the drawings. Everything that is being shown. Despite the several manners of representing time, the reading of a comic feels as if belonging in the past, mainly due to the *juxtaposition* of past, present and future on the page (cinema, on the contrary, belongs in the present) and the possibility of flipping forward. Groensteen underlines that this feeling is not so present in mangas.

The reciter is the narrative stance responsible for the verbal enunciation, which can appear as a *voiceover* (narrative voice) or a *voice off* (a speaker not shown in the panel). The reciter may be present in the narrative or not, and may help orient the time, the reading order or even reference other texts, adding another stance to the narration. A *personalized*

reciter can feign surprise or another reaction to the story's content ('feign' because, as reciter, the story is already known) and be either *in the background* or *interventionist* (shows its presence and is the narrator of a sequence). It can be *neutral* or *involved*, *reliable* or *deceptive*. The reciter fills the characters with voices and thoughts. Contrary to the reciter, the monstrator cannot remain in the background without disrupting the visual flow of the narrative, but ideas such as neutrality or involvement can be displayed through the *graphic style* – a *neutral* graphic style would be consistent, unchanging, while *involvement* with the story would imply a *variation in the lines and style* of the monstration.

To rule over the interaction of monstrator and reciter, Groensteen suggests the *fundamental narrator*, a stance not dissimilar to the meganarrator suggested by Miller. The fundamental narrator never appears in the narrative, and is responsible for the distribution of information throughout the narrative and all the choices in arthrology (breakdown, page layout, braiding). The superior stance, the fundamental narrator always has the last word.

Actorialized narrators appear in the story. They may be *autobiographical* (in which the narrative is supposedly connected with reality). The notion is tricky, though, because the act of representing oneself also implies *distancing*, and the graphic self would thus become just another character or actor (loc.1773). An *internal monstrator*, by definition, could not represent itself, just an ocularization shot with its point of view. An autobiographical narrative would, according to Groensteen, be possible at two different levels: the level of *structuring* (the narrator organizes the information) and the level of *enunciation* (autodiegetic). Other possibilities for actorialized narrators are: the one that *sets the story in motion*, the *extradiegetic actorialized narrator* (is not a character but displays personality), the narrator who is a *projection of the author* (and appears as such in the story) and the *improbable narrator* (such as in Machado de Assis' *Posthumous Memories of Bras Cubas*, in which the narrator starts the narrative after death).

Groensteen calls *modalization* the act of coloring, qualifying, particularizing the narrator's discourse (a notion similar to *focalization*). The stance of *enunciation* can be denoted through *verbal* or *graphic* means: in verbal enunciation the presence of *verb tenses* both places the reader and emphasizes the succession of events in the narrative. The graphic enunciation would entail the use of *realism* or *cartooning* (both are acceptable in

the diegesis, but a sudden change in style may break the mimetic illusion of the story and call attention to the style). Modern comics are breaking with the dogma of style homogeneity. Speech balloons have an *immediacy* to them, while captions show *coolness* and *narrative control*.

Chapter six investigates the means of presentation of a *character's subjectivity* in comics. As a mimetic art, comics' language favors prominently direct speech in order to facilitate the reader's immersion in the narrative. Graphically, this can be represented by *thought balloons*, in the case of a character's inner world. However, *free indirect speech* can be used by the reciter for the same purpose. It is interesting to point out that a character's body language and words are already a means of accessing the character's subjectivity. Through the display of thought balloons, according to Groensteen, "the narrator explicitly positions itself as omniscient, and capable of penetrating the inner mind of its marionettes" (GROENSTEEN, 2013, loc. 2164). This is not completely true – it may indicate *focalization* of the narrative through a character's mind. A character's feelings and/or state of mind can also be suggested through images, such as *emanata*, iconic symbols used to suggest emotions and which emanate from the characters (hence the name). Other pictograms (or '*simbolia*') can be used to convey other significances, such as a freezing graphic effect in a word balloon to indicate a cold disposition towards a character – these do not emanate from characters, but have roughly the same effect. Pictograms work as indicators, however, and need to be interpreted by the reader. What a character feels and what he says, conversely, need not be the same – diversion between what is said and what is thought is an efficacious way of portraying a character's ironic stance. Other effects such as color coding can be used to convey a character's subjectivity.

Chapter seven is about *rhythm*. According to Groensteen, "everything that has duration contains music, just as everything that is visible contains graphic design and everything that moves contains dance" (GROENSTEEN, 2013, loc.2361). Since comics is a graphic medium its rhythm must also be conveyed through space.

The succession of panels confers rhythm to a comics page. Their *number*, *size* and *shape* help in that effect – therefore, a *change* in one of these choices also slows down or speeds up the narration. The idea of the *multiframe* (that is, the disposition of panels on a page) is expedient for determining a text's density, and, with it, its *pace*. Classic comics

tend to follow a fixed pattern; that helps to maintain the fluidity of the narrative (*smooth* rhythm). However, other rhythmic effects can be used to *accentuate* the narration.

There are two factors that determine a page's rhythm: the *time of the reading* (the reader judges how much time each panel demands) and the *beat* (that is, the underlying rhythm of the page, derived from the multiframe – the gridding,). When a page layout is regular, repeating itself throughout the narrative (Groensteen calls that the 'waffle-iron'), the rhythm, the cadence, is constant. In such a situation, any deviation from the norm is acutely felt by the reader. The diegetic time is another matter entirely: it will need to be inferred by the reader, based on the transformations in the narrative, or presented through verbal cues. A regular beat to the narrative mimics existence, and as such can either imbue events with significance, by marking each step to the end, or denounce the futility of all the interactions. Groensteen lists three ways of reinforcing the narrative rhythm: *repetition* (by extending a key moment), *alternation* (in itself a rhythmic element – it can be of a panel or of a group of panels) and *progressivity* (either the cinematic progression of a scene or the effect of closing in or away from an image).

The *rhetorical* layout (where size and/or shape of panel is determined by its content) is the most common one in comics. If a narrative presents consistently *ostentatious* (irregular) layouts, whenever a regular sentence is presented, its regularity is marked by contrast. Panels may be grouped in *stanzas*, united on the page by their contents, shapes or relations to each other. The reader's involvement, preferences (aesthetic and/or emotional – which can modify the focus and the lingering eye) and reading speed are also determinant factors in a narrative's rhythm. Other factors, such as order and numbers of speech balloons, colors, breaks in scale of images, continuity of the narrative or the amount of information in the panels, all these can influence the rhythm. In silent (wordless) comics these effects are more acutely felt, since the stories generally rely more heavily in the reader's interpretation.

The *eighth chapter* is a reflection on whether comics are or not a branch of contemporary art. Groensteen draws on both the theories of historians, art critics, the views and works of modern artists and thematic events and expositions related to both art and comics in order to build his views on the matter. He investigates the production of the journal *L'Éprouvette* (*The Test Tube*), which sought to apply artistic principles of the

avant-gardé trends of the 20th century (such as surrealism or abstractionism) and literary techniques to comics, advocating the transposition of comics to non-paper formats through the absorption of other medium's techniques – an attitude that places the publication as postmodernist. Groensteen then explores the Pop Art of Roy Lichtenstein, who famously redeemed comics in the eyes of the artistic community (and who in reality seemed to have a quite cynical approach to the medium, more interested in the appropriation of the production following his own interests) and the *High & Low* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990), which, despite its proclaimed egalitarian treatment of the art forms (and probable best intentions from the organizers), reinforced the notion of hierarchy between them.

It is undeniable that in the last fifteen years comics have begun to approach contemporary art, both in expression (through experimentation and hybridization) and through expositions in art galleries. Despite the obvious interest of both curators and artists for the approach of both worlds, though, there hasn't been an exposition that put comics on equal ground with other art forms – either berating the medium as genre literature, assuming that it sought *redemption* or, on the other hand, giving comics a comparative advantage through an overly broad selection of the works exposed. Considering also the separation of the subject in art schools, where comics and art cohabit, but not merge, the picture of the acceptability of the medium in the world of art is dim, at best.

That is probably due to the specificities of the medium: comics are heirs of a tradition of cartoons and caricature, brought forth by the evolution of printing techniques and as a predominantly narrative mass medium – historically and conceptually, have very little to do with art. That is also the reason why the claim for abandonment of the narrative content that has been manifested in new ateuristic comics should not guide the medium (though Groensteen emphasizes that experimentation is always welcome): it would be denying the nature and evolution of the medium so far.

3.4 THOUGHTS ON VISUAL NARRATOLOGY

Perhaps it is an obvious statement for one to make, but it must be made nonetheless: this work does not intend to be the final word in terms of a visual narratology nor does it aspire to build a complete theoretical framework. What has been done up to the moment was to review existent theories in order to gather a comprehensive view of the subject matter, if only to understand and recognize the structures to be found in the object of the analysis.

There's no denying, however, that universally accepted concepts, such as Genette's division of narrative time in *frequency*, *duration* and *order*, can be applied in the study of comics. To that, one might add that the idea of *rhythm* in graphic narratives is probably closely associated to Groensteen's idea of *gridding*. Furthermore, if Mieke Bal's idea that *focalization* is to play a central aspect in a visually oriented narratology, there's no denying that it should take into account not only visual, but also cognitive and structural aspects of both images and words in order to be determined. Also, if the studies reviewed so far have any grain of truth in them, it is to be expected that the differentiation between focalizer and narrator is to be elusive at best, and impossible at times. In fact, there are, as seen, many more possibilities of interaction between narrators and focalizers due to the multimodality of the medium.

In order to perform a reasonably accurate analysis of a comic, one must necessarily be acquainted with and take into consideration factors such as perspective, angle, point of view, panel size, composition both of the pages and of the panels, and many other features that may influence the reading of an image. And yet, large as the review of the theories has been up to the point, there are still things that remain unsaid, and must be considered. It is good that it is so, incidentally – it shows that this work not only strives to present a reasonably comprehensive view of its object but also advances the subject, little as it may be. The following observations are intended to advance the theoretical background on the subject and fill gaps in the existing frameworks. They were made specifically regarding the reading of the style and lines of a comics' image, the possibility of exaggerated perspective (which is mentioned by McCloud, but never developed) and the possible meanings of intensity and direction of shadows in the comics' style.

3.4.1. Style

According to Wolk, “the most significant fact about comics is so obvious it’s easy to overlook: they are *drawn*” (WOLK, 2007, p.118). Drawing is a representation technique concerned with forms and contours, different from painting, which is about contrasts between colors and light and shadows. Perhaps the use of drawings in comics is due to the simplicity of the technique, which can or not concern itself with dark masses and volume, but has in its basics the pure idea of form, of separating objects. However, enticing as it may be, Wolk’s idea of style as a filter of the artist’s consciousness is unacceptable in the ambit of this work. It would mean mistaking author for narrator, a crass error in a work that is supposed to be concerned with the narrative of the medium. Here style is considered a narrative choice – a narrative stance, much like the presence of a narrator filtering the narrative through a certain point of view. That would account for artists such as Moebius, who varied his style wildly in order to fit the narrative. As Ann Miller states:

Graphic Style is to be attributed to the extra-fictional artist rather than to a narrator, but this assumption would be challenged by the example of Giraud/Moebius, whose drawing techniques varies radically according to genre (MILLER, 2007, p. 123)

However, if a certain style does show an opinion or a view of the world or of the human figure, it is supposed that this style can be read. There were not many scholars that looked deeply into the different possibilities of style. And, as seen before, perhaps the most comprehensive and extensively treated theory is Scott McCloud’s (not the semiotic triangle between realistic art, abstract and simplification and what McCloud called the ‘picture plane’ developed in *Understanding Comics*, but rather the theory McCloud develops in *Making Comics*, in which he classifies *realism*, *simplification*, *exaggeration* and *symbolism* as different approaches to style – more specifically faces). To that one might add the possibility of the use of more than one of these resources in a single image – for instance, a realistic approach to the human figure may signify either realistic proportions in a detailed drawing or in a simplified drawing. That approach is original and understands the idea of realism as pertaining to the forms in an image, while simplification occurs in degrees. Exaggeration is the purposeful distortion of the form in order to accentuate an expressive feature – be it emotional or expedient to the narrative – and can also be concatenated with

the previous ones (say, an exaggerated mouth in an otherwise proportional character to enhance the expression or make the character ridiculous by the exaggeration). Symbolism could be added to all these options or considered implicit in the very depiction (as in Wolk's understanding of style).

Other interesting possibility of style is the selective application of these features for diverse purposes. McCloud already suggested that in the mixing of realism and cartooning selectively in the same image (in the case, cartoony, relatable characters, in a realistic and sensual world, interesting because perceived as external). However, one might take the notion farther, for McCloud's most known take on style doesn't really account for the mixture that occurs in some authors such as Albert Uderzo, known by his work in *Asterix the Gaul*, whose style employs cartoony characters, like Asterix and Obelix, mixed together with caricatures of real-life persons, such as actors, friends and even politicians or historic figures, such as Mussolini. Despite the cartoonization of the body shapes and faces (with sizeable noses and moustaches) contrasting with the somewhat more realistic depiction of the hands and arm muscle structure, the exaggeration plays both in the movements of the characters and their facial and bodily expressions and in their proportions and the symbolic use is evident both in onomatopoeias (symbols for sounds) and other signifying places, in special Asterix's winged helm, which is prone to become an extension of the character in his expressions.

Edgar Vasquez also presents a highly original style with his character Rango, which presents a cartoony, simplified style in characters and scenery with more realistically depicted hands, in an exquisite mixture that enhances the dramatic gestures and imbues the character with solidity and humanity, making his emotions more 'real' to the reader (if not relatable). In the example below, this is used for comic purposes, for the dramatic stance assumed by the character is countered by the 'matter-of-fact' attitude of the character inside the trashcan towards his appeal to the gods⁴⁶:

⁴⁶ In the first panel, Rango asks the gods why poor people have to pay for the world's sins, and what the difference between the miserable and the rest of humanity is. In the second panel, the answer to his question: "the same difference between having a cold one and being out in the cold" (free translation).



Figure 34 - Rango being a 'Drama Queen'

In fact, this particular mixture has a very special effect: while the character itself is a cartoon, and therefore relatable, his hands are expressively dramatic and realistic, and, therefore, 'real', thus the reader is lead into an empathic estate - for relating to the character is also relating to its dramatic stance and 'real' emotions. The scenery is little more than that: not realistic at all, just a couple of traces and flies suggesting a junkyard. The only reality, the only thing that bears weight – and, so, the thing to pay attention to, the strange element, is in the character's hands. In Rango, the characters are more important than the scenery, their emotions and reactions are hard and real and inaccessible to some degree. In fact, the expression in the hands is somewhat amplified by their contrast with the easy, round traces of the rest of the character. But not only by that: the hands, themselves, are amplified, not only in size (but also in size; the nose of the character is not exactly proportional, having been said in the strip to resemble a ripe melon), but also in the size of the articulations and shape of the fingers, and the detail of the shadows giving the impression of volume in the back of the left hand of the character, in the first panel.

As one can see, this approach to style is relatively more complete than McCloud's, allowing for several features that would not be taken into consideration otherwise. That approach opens for selective consideration of the features of the characters. Thus, symbolic anatomical features can be understood in each artist's style. It is my opinion that some of those symbolic uses are derived from the reader's experience – some of them from developmental impressions of the human body. For instance, big chest and arms muscles can be understood as strength (due to obvious reasons), big hands with power and reach (since the grasping of objects is one of the first things that allow a baby to interact with its surroundings), while lean fingers are associated with dexterity (since one gets more aware of fingers when the need for using them in different manners arises); a strong jaw is

masculine, a tall person is perceived as awkward and, up to a point, external to the world (a tall person does not relate to the child's universe completely, as the *Peanuts* cartoons and strips suggest – they belong in a higher universe); big feet are also awkward, but long legs are seen as elegant and can also help to convey the impression of a long stride and speed – and so on. Of course, all that regarding only the forms of the figures; but, as seen before, the very shape and characteristics of the lines of those figures may carry significance and are also to be taken into consideration when analyzing a narrative's style (see table 7).

In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud shows several possibilities of the line and its effect on the reader, divided into three different aspects: *direction* (incidentally, not commented in his analysis), *shape* (that is, the angles) and *character* (mostly related to technique and form of the line), to which, after a detained look on his comments, *width* was added. This last aspect demands an explanation: the thicker line is the line that calls the most attention in the perception of the image. That is, the line can, in some cases, be understood as a statement, a reinforcement. If a character is surrounded by a thick line, he tends to become more prominent in the image. That feature can be used to highlight parts of an image or to make the style more difficult and demand more attention from the reader (for instance, when all the lines in an image are of similar width, it is harder to read the forms inside it – some artists such as Crumb have used the resource to create demanding panels, filled with hatchings and shapes that were roughly the same width). Hatches to create the midtones can also become confusing when there's not a significant difference between lines.

Finally, the shadows in an image can increase or decrease the emotional tone of the story. It was Leonardo da Vinci who developed the concept of 'Chiaroscuro'. Literally, it means "light and shadows". The principle is quite simple: the brighter the light over an object, the darker the shadow it will cast. One look at Leonardo's paintings would easily show the use of that principle (at least, the finished paintings... Leonardo wasn't keen on completing commissions)... and maybe it wasn't merely his knowledge of anatomy or his use of the Golden Proportion that made him one of the most famous artists of his time.

3.4.2. Lighting

When light falls on an object, it casts a shadow. When hard light falls on an object, it casts a deep shadow. That much was said above. The consequence is merely implied. Light and shadows are natural everyday phenomena, and the shadow cast by the light helps one perceive an object's surface and texture. Therefore, the use of shadows to mimic reality has the same effect as the use of a realistic style in the lines: it marks the weight, surface, texture of the body showered by the light, and makes it more real. In fact, light effects and perspective are used in comics to give a 3D effect to 2D art, to allow the illusion of profundity in what would otherwise be as strange and inaccessible as Flatland⁴⁷.

The deeper the shadow, the more intense the light. Also, the deeper the shadow the more marked the surface of the body; the more marked the surface, the more real it will look. Below is our friend Jack Doe, besides himself, several times. The image is repeated without a difference, including the shape of the shadow. The only thing that is different is the intensity of the shadow.



Figure 35 - Chiaroscuro

Deep shadows enhance the idea of profundity, and provide the character's expression with a marked intensity, whereas the image on the right side of the figure seems unemotional and detached. One could make anything of the character on the right's expression... which was my original idea. The only reason the one on the left seems more intense is the shadow. Apart from that, it's the same figure.

⁴⁷ *Flatland: a Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) is a satirical novel by Edwin Abbott Abbott, published in 1884. Using the pseudonym of "a Square", Abbott describes a world that exists in two dimensions (no profundity) only, in order to criticize the social hierarchy of Victorian culture.

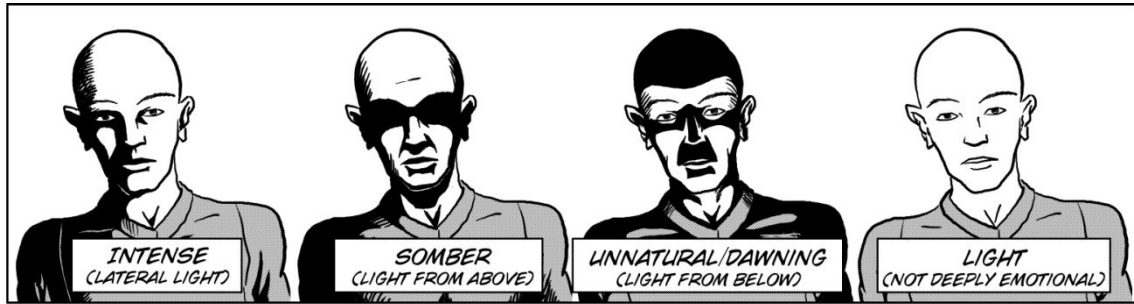


Figure 36 - Light Direction

Maybe it's all in the eyes, but the direction of light also seems to influence the reader. Perhaps the reason for this is related to the way we see things in everyday life and have seen for ages. Our main source of light is the sun, and whenever the sun was up, Mankind knew it could relax. Most of the predators that could make a man's life difficult were nocturnal, so the time for worries tended to be at night. In the light of day, even when the light of the sun comes directly at something, there is usually so much light reflected on everything that no area is hidden from view.

So, following that logic, lateral light is common. It's the light that happens when night is falling. It is a lighting that tends to take a direction, and which projects a shadow that hides things from our sight. So we pay attention. Now, light from above is another matter entirely. This is not usual in nature. Or, rather, shadows aren't usual in this lighting situation – if it is noon, the light reflected on the ground and surroundings dims the intensity of the shadow. So an intense shadow with light from above is both unnatural and mysterious. Especially when it hides the eyes of a person – or the “Sandman effect” to pay homage to Neil Gaiman's character, who is presented with a particular shadow, seemingly under a spotlight, most of the time.

Light from below is spooky. It is also unnatural, like the intense shadows with light from above, only more so. Because it is even rarer. People would seldom place a light source directly under their face – it tends to blind people for their surroundings, instead of lighting them – we have no brows below the eyes, to shield them. It is the kind of light we only see in old horror movies and when telling horror stories at camp, when someone has the bright idea of placing a flashlight directly under their chin. In symbolic use, it can also mean a realization. A light, dawning in the face of a character. Maybe the character is having an idea, or understanding something.

Of course, there are other uses of light, such as silhouettes, where the person becomes an outline, iconic black shape with no depth or detail, or when something is seen against the light, situation in which the object is perceived by the contrast between light and shadows, directing the attention of the reader, as Eisner himself shows:



Here the use of 'atmospheric' lighting subtly alters the emotional nuance of the 'worship symbol' in each panel.

Figure 37 - EISNER, 2001, p.15

3.4.4. Exaggerated Perspective

Generally used as a synonym of 'point of view', perspective in comics may refer to something rather different: the graphic representation of distance, in a realistic way. Things at a distance seem smaller – and that has led to the development of a whole discipline of realistic representation. There are ways in which perspective may be used in order to communicate meaning or ideas about what is represented: forced perspective or even disregard for perspective.

If all perspective is an attempt to realistically portray distance, an exaggeration of perspective may exaggerate distance. And, therefore, the perspective of a scene may be exaggerated in order to make a character look more menacing or pathetic, for instance, or increase the distance between two characters in a scene with several planes – or maybe shorten the distance between them. Warren Ellis plays with that notion in a hilarious way in *Transmetropolitan*, when the character Spider Jerusalem describes a conversation with a parent about the death of his grandfather:



Figure 38 - Transmetropolitan, n° 25, p. 05

When he is impersonating the adult he is empowered by the wormview, and when he is impersonating himself as a child, he is diminished by the bird view.

With those observations in place, added to the theoretical background acquired throughout the realization of this study up to this moment, perhaps it is time to approach the research object.

4 ANALYSIS OF WATCHMEN

In their attempt to unify the several different approaches to narrative theory, as seen before, Herman & Vervaeck get to three distinct tables with the main structures of every narrative. These structures are situated at the level of the *Story* (divided into *actions*, *actants* and *setting*), at the level of *narrative* (divided in *time*, *characterization* and *focalization*) and at the level of *narration* (pertaining to the *narrator* and *representation of consciousness*).

Any attempt to conciliate the comics form with narrative theory should, I believe, take these structures into consideration. However, this work will mix things up a little and deal with some of those features thematically. By this, I mean that, in order to enforce the point, already made, characters deserve further attention from narrative theory, I have chosen to place the study of the characters together with the structure of the actants. Furthermore, the notion of focalization, which was originally supposed to play a major role in this work, was reduced due to the impossibility of a detailed analysis of the whole work – which would require time and space that are not available, and done only through sampling examples from the work. It is always good to remember that this work is not theoretical, but rather an analysis, and as such there will be no preoccupation of fitting each category to an example, only with detaching and examining aspects of the work that seem relevant for its reading and narrative.

That said, it is also important to stress that *Watchmen* is as close as one gets to a comics' canon, has been analyzed under several theories, and in different aspects. Since the purpose of this work is, rather than citing the existent critical fortune, adding to it, it is better to focus on the contributions that can be made to this fortune – that is, the critical points that haven't been made before, or that could be improved, in the hope that, as every provocative work should, this one will raise more questions than it answers and allow the critical fortune of the work to be developed further.

4.1 ACTIONS AND EVENTS

This study will not linger on the analysis of events in sequence forming the action of the work, since that would be absurd. Depending on the level of detail in the analysis, the organization of events into actions and the analysis of functions, indexes and the many combinations between them could well result in an analysis much bigger than the work itself – and, while such an analysis might be interesting, it would also be rather useless in a work that has presented the proposition of studying a comic through the lenses of narrative theory. A more general approach is required if one is to analyze the work as a whole. Thus, there is no detailed attention to the actions and events in *Watchmen*.

And yet, there are observations that can be made about the links between the events presented in the work, even considering the general outline of the novel. The most significant of these is the idea of synchronicity, extenuously built throughout the novel through the presentation of seemingly unrelated events that converge into a larger scene. The most emblematic scene in which this effect is used is the one that precedes the end of the eleventh issue: in New York City, a fight between two lovers, Joey and Aline, gathers practically every other character in the neighborhood into the story, precisely at the time of the arrival of the fake alien: Dr. Malcom and Diana, the detectives, the knot tops, both Bernards, the watch salesman, Joey's co-worker, Milo, of the Promethean Cab Co., his brother, the locksmith who changes Daniel's lock, all of them unite at the end of the chapter and are present in the end, to die together.

Another interesting example of a similar use would be creating connections between different actions by their disposition on the page. In the beginning of the third issue, pages 6 and 7, while Laurie leaves Dr. Manhattan and is moving to Dan's place, Janey Slater is giving an interview to Doug Roth, the *Nova Express* reporter. Her voice lingers over Laurie's actions, even if they are not directly related. Both pages can be read in the usual order, in which case there is an alternation of settings, or vertically, due to the panel's contents. However, the disposition of the events invites the reader to assume not only a parallelism, but also a connection of a superior order to these actions. And, since the human mind is a powerful system of establishing connections, one can be easily found:

both women are Dr. Manhattan's ex-lovers. One is leaving him and the other holds a grudge for having been left by him. The resource of juxtaposing not only different actions, but panels used in other scenes as a way of evoking the entire previous scene and weaving them into a mosaic that, finally, finds coherence, helps the impression of the complex structure the work causes on the reader. That is the case in Rorschach's final account of the Comedian's life, on pages 26 to 28 of issue two; Dr. Manhattan's origin in the fourth chapter, which becomes increasingly disrupted by future and past panels, together with the captions that strive to mix the temporal instances of the chapter, already confused because the verb tenses are always stated in the present; and, finally, in Laurie's cathartic moment in which she 'joins the dots' and finds out about Blake being her father. In all those cases there is a weaving of actions in order to form a coherent whole, and that technique, used in various degrees throughout the work, helps to provide the impression of both synchronicity (due to the weaving of actions together) and complexity (for constantly evoking previous images helps to entice the spatial memory of the work and invites the reader to think about the work as a whole, suspended in time, much as Dr. Manhattan's experience of time).

Even without space to build a more detailed account of the relationships between events in the work, it is handy to understand and summarize the main events and features, in order to get a more complete scheme of the whole novel and the events within it. The following table will provide an account of *Watchmen's* basic events in the order they appear in the novel. Some observations must be made, however. First, *Tales of the Black Freighter* (the *mise en abyme*, the comic inside the comic) is not an event nor an action, but an intradiegetic text. This was mentioned on occasion, but, quite frankly, since it appears sometimes only as a voice-over, and as a complete comic at other times, not part of the action and at the same time relevant (in special for Veidt's character, as is to be seen), I did not know exactly what to make of it. Second, every summary is an interpretation, and this is not an exception. Therefore, these summaries imply a selection of the material considered relevant for a full understanding of the work. Third, since there is a symmetry to the presentation of the work, it is useful to comment that the covers act as a first panel in the stories, always a close-up of a motif or element that is significant and appears immediately (with the exception of the bottle of Nostalgia in the cover of chapter nine, which does appear immediately, but in non-sequitur fashion – that is, unrelated to the action happening at the moment), and the back covers are a countdown to midnight,

starting at 12 to midnight and progressively advancing with each edition, as a veil of blood descends (also progressively). The titles of the stories are similarly related to the final quotations (which obviously relate to the story) and the special materials at the end of each edition (not the last one) appear in the story and are related to it.

Chapter	Cover	Title	Story	Final Quote	Special Materials
# 01	Close-up on blood-smearred Smiley button, over flowing blood	<i>At Midnight, all the agents ...</i>	Edward Blake's assassination (presented by two investigating detectives), sets Rorschach on a quest to find the murderer. After invading the apartment and finding out about Blake being the Comedian, he contacts Dan Dreiberg (Nite Owl), breaks fingers uselessly at a bar, then goes on to warn Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias) and Dr. Manhattan and Laurie Juspezik (Silk Spectre) about the death, possibly targeting former superheroes. Laurie invites Dan to dinner and both recollect about their former lives.	Bob Dylan: At midnight, all the agents and superhuman crew, go out and round up everyone who knows more than they do.	Pages with excerpts of the beginning of <i>Under the Hood</i> , by Hollis Mason, "reprinted with permission of the author". Pages 01-06
# 02	Close-up on angel statue in the rain, a raindrop makes the statue seem to cry.	<i>Absent Friends</i>	Laurie visits her mother, Sally, in California, while Eddie Blake's funeral takes place in New York. Sally recalls a instance in which Blake tried to rape her, still in the Minutemen. Then there is a series of recollections about Blake: Veidt recalls a meeting of a superhero group (The Crimebusters), where Blake left, defending the need of a different approach to the world's problems; Dr. Manhattan recalls the end of the Vietnam war, when Blake shot his pregnant ex-lover for slashing his face with a broken bottle and called Manhattan's attention to his drifting away from humanity, and Dreiberg remembers the riots during the police strike, before the Keene act; there the Comedian makes a remark about the American Dream. Seeing that Blake's grave was visited by a former enemy, Moloch, Rorschach assaults him to find out about a previous <i>last performance</i> in which a drunken Comedian babbles about a big joke. Rorschach then goes back to the graveyard and thinks about the Comedian's life, tells a disturbing joke, and leaves.	Elvis Costello: And I'm up while the dawn is breaking, even though my heart is aching. I should be drinking a toast to absent friends instead of these comedians.	<i>Under the Hood</i> excerpts, pages 7-10.
# 03	Close-up	<i>The</i>	The narration of <i>Tales of the Black</i>	GENESIS,	<i>Under the</i>

	on radiation shelter sign, a steam of smoke covers the words and forms “all hel”.	<i>Judge of All the Earth</i>	<i>Freighter</i> starts the issue, as war linger in the air in New York, close to Bernie’s newsstand. Laurie leaves Dr. Manhattan and goes to Dreiberg’s house, while an interview is being conducted with Jane Slater, a former lover of Jon Osterman. Laurie and Dreiberg leave together to Hollis Mason’s place. Dr. Manhattan goes to an interview. As he is cornered by a reporter with evidence of him causing people cancer, Dan and Laurie are attacked by a gang of knot-tops, defeating them. Dr. Manhattan, after teleporting everyone from the studio (as Laurie decides to go back to Dan’s place and Dan, getting at Hollis’ finds out about Dr. Manhattan’s “meltdown”) goes back to his base, but finds out that he is considered radioactive and decides to leave. Earth. He stops in Arizona to pick up his photo with Jane Slater from an abandoned bar, and then goes to Mars. In the next morning, <i>Tales of the Black Freighter</i> resumes as the scene shifts again to Bernie’s stand and impending war. Laurie finds out that she is not welcome at the base anymore, and Rorshach visits Dreiberg. Russia invades Afghanistan and, as Dr. Manhattan walks on the surface of Mars, the government of the USA discusses the repercussions of all-out nuclear war.	ch.18, verse 25: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?	<i>Hood</i> excerpts, page 11-24.
# 04	Old photograph on the surface of Mars, next to a footprint.	<i>Watchmaker</i>	Dr. Manhattan, on Mar’s surface, looks at a photo, builds a giant glass structure and looks at a meteorite shower. While doing so, he thinks about his life and revisits the key moments of his existence. He was learning his father’s trade as a watchmaker, but the news of the bombing of Hiroshima leads his father to force him into a new direction – atomic physics. Accepted at an institute, he meets Janey Slater. They fall in love, go to an amusement park where they take the picture and, after a fat man steps in Janey’s watch, end up making love in a hotel room. Later Dr. Manhattan, having fixed the watch, goes to pick it up in the intrinsic field chamber. Once	Albert Einstein: The release of atom power has changed everything except our way of thinking... The solution to this problem lies in the heart of mankind. If only I had known, I should have become a watchmaker.	3-page introduction to <i>Dr. Manhattan: Super-powers and the Superpowers</i> , essay by Professor Milton Glass

			there, the lock is activated and he is disintegrated. Gradually, he is able to rebuild himself into a totally new being, capable of altering matter. The government makes strategic use of him and he fights crime with other vigilantes, getting to know Laurie in the Crimebuster's meeting. Janey leaves him after learning of his affair, and he is asked to intervene in the Vietnam war, where he meets Blake. After winning the war, he visits Veidt and helps control the riots in the wake of the Keene act. Once the superheroes are made illegal (Laurie and Dreiberg retire, he and the Comedian are government-sponsored and Rorschach refuses to give up), he starts living at the base with Laurie, and eventually learns of Blake's murder, recalling the action of the Graphic novel up to that moment. Time is scrambled in this issue, due to the peculiar character's perception of time.		
# 05	Close-up of the reflection of the stylized skull, sign of the bar, on a puddle.	<i>Fearful Symmetry</i>	This symmetrical edition starts with Rorschach invading Moloch's house and questioning him about Dr. Manhattan's disappearance. Things are tense in New York; crime spikes at the verge of war (<i>Tales</i> start up again, in the New York street scenes). Laurie and Dan meet and there is a failed attempt of Veidt's assassination. Rorschach receives a message asking for a meeting in Moloch's house. Entering the house, he finds Moloch assassinated and the police, tipped about his location, is able to apprehend him.	William Blake: Tyger, tyger Burning bright, In the forests Of the night, What immortal hand or eye Could frame thy fearful symmetry?	Chapter five of Treasure Island Treasure of Comics (Flint Editions, New York, 1984). Also "reprinted with permission".
# 06	Close-up on a Rorschach's test pattern carton, by the light of a window.	<i>The Abyss Gazes Also</i>	The issue focuses on the psychiatric sessions between Rorschach and Dr. Malcom. At first, Rorschach lies about what he sees in the cartons, while remembering his origin, apropos of the blots. An unwanted child of an abusive prostitute, the child Kovacs was institutionalized when he attacked two bigger boys at age ten. In the second session, he decides to tell Dr. Malcom his origin, and narrates his story – how he went to work in the garment industry. When a model he knew was raped and murdered,	Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster. and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.	Rorschach's files, both from the New York Police Department (report sheet of the case file), the New York Psychiatric Hospital (early history) and "Charlton Home" (description of dream and drawing, as

			<p>Kovacs made Rorschach's mask. Leaving the session, he is attacked by an inmate and burns him with hot fat. His actions start to affect Dr. Malcom's life. In the third session Rorschach tells him how he fought crime beside Nite Owl, compelled not to look the other way. In the fourth session the cards are again presented to Rorschach, who decides to tell the truth – how Kovacs found out about the horrid murder of Claire Roche, kidnapped by mistake and then killed and fed to two German shepherds. Kovacs then kills the dogs and ties up the murderer, setting the building on fire. Looking at the smoke, he realizes that there is no sense or order to the world and is reborn as Rorschach. The revelations affect Dr. Malcom's personal life. He is contaminated by Rorschach's grim world.</p>		<p>well as Dr. Malcom's notes).</p>
# 07	<p>Close-up on Nite Owl's goggles. The reflection of Artie and a smear that cleaned the dust make it seem a clock and a smiley face at the same time.</p>	<p><i>A Brother to Dragons</i></p>	<p>Laurie is looking around in Dan's basement and accidentally sets fire to the place. She and Dan extinguish the flames and talk about his gear for a while – Dan has all-terrain uniforms, missiles, flamethrowers, an exoskeleton, and a number of other things, including see-in-the-dark goggles. Then they drink coffee and watch TV. They end up having a sexual encounter, but Dan is unable to perform, and they go to sleep. After a disturbing dream, Dan goes downstairs and confesses to Laurie that the situation makes him feel impotent. She then suggests they take action as masked adventurers once again, which they do, helping people trapped by a fire in a building. That seems to fix Dan's plumbing, and they have sex in the sky. Dan then reveals he is planning to release Rorschach.</p>	<p>JOB, ch.30, verses 29-30: I am a brother to dragons and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat.</p>	<p>Article by Daniel Dreierberg, <i>Blood From the Shoulder of Pallas</i> (Journal of the Ornithological Society, Fall 1983 – "reprinted").</p>
# 08	<p>Close-up on Hollis Mason's Nite Owl statue, with pictures and newspaper article</p>	<p><i>Old Ghosts</i></p>	<p>Hollis phones Sally to chat about their lives. It's Halloween. The climate on the streets is similar to when the Keene act occurred (Tales narration continues as Bernard reads the story). Dan and Laurie are planning Rorschach's escape, while in prison an old enemy (Big Figure) is threatening him. Detective Fine visits Dan,</p>	<p><i>Hallowe'en</i>, Eleanor Farjeon: On Hallowe'en the old ghosts come about us, and they speak to some;</p>	<p>A rough copy of the <i>New Frontiersman</i> of 10/31/1985 (issue IVII, n°21). There is an article about masked adventures, a political</p>

	in the back.		wary of his plans and having seen him at Blake’s funeral, asking about the fire from the other day and making clear he suspects Dan of being the Nite Owl. As they prepare Rorschach’s rescue, Max Shea and Ira Manish are shown boarding a boat. Hollis makes a Jack-o-lantern, as a newspaper that gets in Bernie’s newsstand tells of a riot in Sing-Sing. Big Figure and other inmates are trying to kill Rorschach, who gives them a hard bargain, killing three as they try to enter his cell. Meanwhile, Nite Owl and Silk Spectre invade the prison and search for him. Upon meeting them, Rorschach bides his time to finish Big Figure off, and then the three leave. When they get to Dan’s place, Manhattan is waiting there to take Laurie to Mars. Dan and Rorschach then leave the building, as the police gets there. Hearing of the episode at the prison at Bernie’s stand, the knot-tops decide to pick on one of the costumed clowns that think they are above the law and find Hollis Mason’s place, where they beat him to death.	to others they are dumb.	cartoon related to the same theme and another one about the disappearance of Max Shea. The copy is not ready for print.
# 09	Close-up on the bottle of Nostalgia perfume, swirling through space.	<i>The Darknes of Mere Being</i>	Manhattan takes Laurie to Mars, where they go inside the glass structure to talk. Manhattan’s perception of time frustrates Laurie, and he tries to make her understand by experiencing time the way he does. Laurie remembers dropping the glass castle while her parents discussed. As Laura argues for the sake of humanity, Manhattan questions the purpose, which makes Laura remember another situation in which Hollis accidentally mentioned his autobiography to Laurie. As they stroll over the landscape, Manhattan considers the beauty of Mars, while Laurie points out that life is also chaotic. She remembers the Crimebusters meeting and the Comedian’s attempt to get to know her afterwards. Manhattan comments the abyss in the landscape, Laurie points out her depression when drinking, which leads her to remember the dinner in the Comedian’s honor. Laurie gets	<i>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</i> C. G. Jung: As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being.	4 pages of Sally Jupiter’s scrapbook (newspaper articles about her, an invitation from Captain Metropolis, a note from her agent/husband, a screen review of a movie and a page of a magazine interview).

			nervous and gives up on convincing Manhattan to save the world, starting to argue. He comments that she is avoiding something. Finally, Laurie realizes that the Comedian is her father and throws the bottle of Nostalgia on the glass structure, demolishing it. Manhattan is convinced of the importance of human life, and they teleport to Earth.		
# 10	Close-up on an airport's radar (two signs of incoming aircrafts and the light in the bottom make it a smiley face).	<i>Two Riders Were Approaching...</i>	President Nixon arrives at the shelter to wait for the beginning of the war. Rorschach and Dan go to Rorschach's apartment to get his uniform, discussing the possible end of the world. Veidt arrives at Karnak and makes business predictions based on his screens. Rorschach is getting impatient to act, in the bottom of the river. They decide to act. In <i>Tales</i> , the mariner approaches and kills the couple, thinking they are pirate allies, and goes to the village. Rorschach and Dan go to Happy Harry's bar again, and Rorschach finds out about the assassinations, while Dan finds out about Hollis' death. The explosion of the boat kills every witness involved with the making of the giant squid. Dan and Rorschach investigate Adrian's office and then leave. Before they go to Karnak, Rorschach posts his diary. In <i>Tales</i> , the mariner approaches the village in disguise, while Bernie blabbers about war and the postman collects Rorschach's journal. The journal arrives at the <i>New Frontiersman</i> office and is discarded as junk mail. Dan and Rorschach crash in Antarctic, and have to go by bike the rest of the way. Veidt notes their presence.	Bob Dylan: Outside in the distance a wild cat did growl, two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.	Veidt Enterprises' material and documents, annotated by Adrian Veidt, in which he denies the adding of villains to his toy line, a letter with comments about the marketing of the Nostalgia perfume and a reviewed page for the Veidt Method.
# 11	A totally white cover, except for a smear of color, where a butterfly can be seen in front of a colorful	<i>Look on My Works, Ye Mighty ...</i>	Veidt comments on his multiple screen method as Dan and Rorschach approach Karnak. He then sends the giant squid to New York and calls his assistants to 'celebrate'. <i>Tales</i> and NY life resume, and the mariner, trying to avenge his family, finds out that he is attacking them instead. Veidt starts telling the story of his life, how he sought adventure giving away his parents' money and travelling the world following the	<i>Ozymandias</i> , Percy Bysshe Shelley: My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!	<i>After the Masquerade</i> , a 4-page interview with Adrian Veidt for the magazine Nova Express, 07/12/1975.

	background. The shape of the smear reminds us of the blood on the first cover.		steps of Alexander the Great. In NY, Joey and Aline start to fight. Adrian completes his journey realizing his hero did nothing that lasted and is inspired by the pharaohs, instead. On finishing his tale, his assistants are dead, poisoned. In NY, as the mariner in <i>Tales</i> realizes what he's done and swims towards the black freighter, Diana looks for Malcom. Dan and Rorschach arrive at Karnak and attack Veidt, but are quickly subdued. Veidt then starts telling how he was inspired by the Comedian into stopping his activities as a vigilante and facing the real big problems. In NY, Joey starts beating Aline. Veidt explains his reasoning about the path he had to take in order to stop war. In NY, several characters note the fight between Joey and Aline. Veidt then confesses to the Comedian's murder and his plan of killing half of NY, as characters approach the fighting lovers to stop their brawl. Then Veidt reveals that he'd already sent the squid, and it appears in NY, covering the last page of the issue in white.		
# 12	Close-up of bloody watch, at midnight.	<i>A Stronger Loving World</i>	The issue starts with scenes from the destruction that took place in New York as a result of Veidt's plan. Dr. Manhattan and Laurie are in New York, and track the source of what is confusing him to Veidt's Antarctic base. They teleport there. Meanwhile, Nite Owl and Rorschach are still trying to believe in Veidt's plan, which is explained in detail: the death of the creature would cause sort of a psychic outburst capable of killing or driving mad half the population of the city. When Manhattan and Laurie get there, Veidt must escape. Following him, Manhattan inadvertently enters another intrinsic field subtractor and is disintegrated again, with Bubastis. Laurie shoots Veidt, who is able to catch the bullet (seriously) and subdues them. But Manhattan is not dead, and comes back to the scene. Veidt turns up the volume of his screens, which show that his plan worked – the world is united for the greater good, war is no	John Cale: It would be a stranger, loving world, a stronger loving world, to die in.	No materials.

			<p>longer impending. Then the heroes decide to compromise and keep Veidt's secret. Rorschach refuses, though. Broken by the enormity of what happened, Dan and Laurie make love out of the sheer need to feel alive. Rorschach is killed by Dr. Manhattan, who then goes on to look at Dan and Laurie and talk briefly to Veidt before teleporting away. After some time, Dan and Laurie, with new appearances, visit Sally to tell her they are fine and comment that Laurie now knows who her father was. The last scene of the novel is that of Seymour, of the <i>New Frontiersman</i>, charged with choosing something to print instead of an article rejected due to being considered insulting in the new world order, has his hand hovering over Rorschach's diary, which, if chosen, could reveal the whole story.</p>		
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Table 9 - Actions and Chapters

4.2 ACTANTS AND CHARACTERS

As seen before, narrative theory has historically paid a very limited span of attention to the roles of the characters inside the stories, most of them centering on the idea of actants or acteurs – that is, narrative structures that perform the actions that further the plot. Vladimir Propp presents seven possible roles: *villain*, *donor*, *helper*, *sought-for-person* (or the *sought-for-person's father*), *dispatcher*, *hero* and *false hero*. Greimas divides characters between *acteurs* (specific characters, presenting different qualities in different narratives) and the general *actants* (categories of characters present in all narratives). Actants are classified in six different qualities: *sender*, *receiver*, *helper*, *opponent*, *subject* and *object*. Barthes had a similar take on characters, considering them as subordinated to the action of the narrative. This view of the characters derived from the necessity of understanding what has been called the *deep structure* of the narrative, its basics, and thus reaching a broader understanding of narratives as a whole.

When actants acquire qualities, they are called characters – and that is pretty much all narrative theory has to say about characters. This is a reasonable way to promote a degree of objectivity in dealing with the narrative structure and avoiding the fallacy of delving into the ‘inner life’ of a character, a mere narrative structure that should not be read beyond what the narrative allows it to be. However, as it has also been argued here, even diegesis have mimetic qualities – they work based on the reader’s understanding and interpretation of the world. If the real world has people, and people behave in behavioral patterns (an assumption that is the basis of sciences such as Psychology and Psychiatry), it is also admissible to think about characters as possibly being built on one or more of these patterns. It is also outside questioning that some genres, such as the Psychological Novel, to point out the most obvious, have mimetic qualities that take the inner life of the characters into account to build their actions – especially after Freud, Lacan, Jung and the rest of the psychiatrists shed light onto the human unconscious.

Watchmen is one of such works. This facet was in Moore and Gibbons’s mind when conceiving the novel, as can be understood by Moore’s words in an interview in 1988, conducted by Christopher Sharrett (collected in 2012 in the book *Conversations With Alan Moore*, edited by Erick Berlatsky):

What we were trying to do with *Watchmen* was primarily to avoid a sort of baby-bird school of moralizing where the readers sit with their beaks open as they are force-fed certain predigested morals by the writer. We wanted to avoid the type of adventure fiction where the character who wins all the fights ends up with the white hat and is seen as the hero. Instead, we invented six characters, each of whom has a radically different view of the world. Rorschach has a view which is very black but essentially moral. The Comedian has a view which is also black but essentially amoral. Dr. Manhattan has his own peculiar view of the world, which could also be seen as valid. Indeed, according to some readings of *Watchmen*, it might be possible to construe Adrian Veidt as the hero. What I wanted to do was to give each of the characters, including the ones I politically disagree with – perhaps *especially* the ones I politically disagree with – a depth that would make it feasible that these were real, plausible individuals. (MOORE, 2012, loc. 1258)

Were it not for declarations such as the above, the character-driven nature of the work could be either deduced from the medium (which is also character-driven). Or the

need for a deeper investigation into the inner lives of the silly paper people could be argued based on the presence of a psychiatric evaluation inside the work, in chapter six, *The Abyss Gazes Also*. What this section intends to do, then, besides following the actions of the characters as a look directed by narrative theory should, is also to focus the characters themselves in brief analysis, in order to prove the utility of such views in the reading of some narratives and, hopefully, make a point for the inclusion of the possibility of such an analysis in certain works in other narratological studies. Arguably, that would be mixing two different narrative levels and mixing actants and characters – but the contrast between the two approaches can be useful in order to understand not the difference between the concepts, but the way in which they complete each other in the narrative. Therefore, this work will present characters in an actantial stance, and then as actants with characteristics, human features, and other mimetic properties.

4.2.1 The Actants of *Watchmen*

In the sixth chapter of *Watchmen as Literature* (2010), entitled *Hooded Honor*, Ness discusses the part of the heroes in *Watchmen* through the concept of natural and conventional laws, forming natural and conventional heroes. These ideas were taken from Richard Hooker's *Greek Philosophy: Pre-Socratic Philosophy* (2007), and based on the Greek concepts of *nomos* and *physis*. According to Ness:

A natural hero is one who would be affected only by natural law and not the social or political conventions established by the society, whereas a conventional hero abides by the laws of society and the government. (NESS, 2010, p.102)

Due to the insertion of a conventional law prohibiting the activities of some of the heroes in question (the Keene Act of 1977), both conventional and natural law conflict, allowing for the presence and discussion of both types of heroes in the work. According to Ness, since natural heroes are not bound by law, they perceive conventional heroes as weak or unresolved. At the same time, not bound by law, they can be considered outlaws (depending on whether they disrespect the law or not): in *Watchmen*, heroism and villainy are matters of perspective.

In order to build her view on the heroic activities of the different characters – according to her, the “four main characters” (p.105) – Ness draws on Jameson’s semiotic rectangle, which is an adaptation of Greimas’ semiotic square already commented in this work (Figure 1). Ness’ investigation considers the opposite terms *natural hero* and *conventional hero*, since all the main characters are heroes of former heroes before the Keene Act, including Veidt, the one who in the end is revealed as being in opposition to the heroes, and, as such, occupies the traditional place of the villain. Following the model and opposing these categories of the “not natural” and “not conventional”, Ness builds the following model, hoping to account for the changes suffered by the characters during the novel:

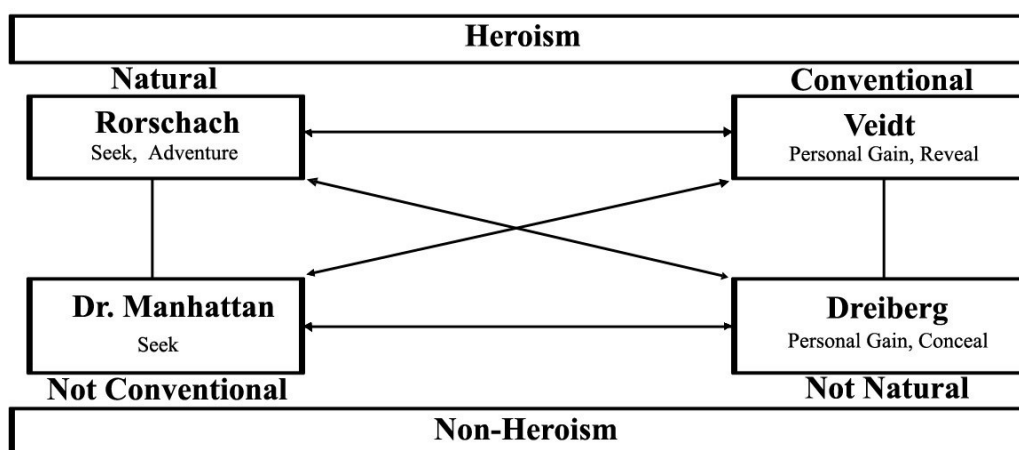


Figure 39 - Semiotic Rectangle (NESS, 2010, p.106).

The model also considers features such as “reveal” and “seek” that are related to the character’s motivations and demand further explanation: Ness evaluates both words of the term ‘masked adventurer’ to conclude that, while a mask can both conceal the identity and reveal a true aspect of a character, an ‘adventure’ can also mean a hazardous enterprise and an opportunity (for personal advancement). Therefore, a character’s motivations can be gathered from the reasons for its adventuring as well as for using a mask: the character may seek adventure of personal gain, use the mask to conceal or reveal their identities. According to Ness:

This diagram represents where the characters are at the beginning of the novel. Dr. Manhattan and Dreiberg’s position as heroes change in concordance with their positions as particular types of masked adventurers, and each becomes more like the respective contradictory character (NESS, 2010, p.108)

Following that logic, Dreiberg would not be a natural hero, having complied with the Keene act and retired from the profession. He associated with heroes for companionship and to fulfill his fantasies (personal gain) and uses a mask to conceal his identity. Throughout the narrative, though, “readers witness his slow change toward natural heroism, beginning with a period of denial” (p. 110). Receiving help from Laurie Juspezyk, as will be seen, Dan makes the hero’s journey during the novel, fulfilling thus his heroic potential. Rorschach is the natural hero, not respecting conventional law. Despite his traumatic childhood, his becoming a natural hero did not occur until the assassination of Blaire Roche, when Kovacs realizes the limits of conventional law and shifts to enforcing natural law instead (that is, he is free to disrespect the conventional law, though uncompromising in his upholding of the natural law that dictates his morals and convictions). His mask reveals his identity, and he seeks adventure rather than personal gain. Or, rather, is compelled to act. Adrian Veidt, on his turn, pretends to uphold conventional law while seeking for personal gain, be it material (since he becomes a successful entrepreneur) or not (he wants access to the “hall of legends”). For Ness, though both Veidt and Dreiberg have the potential to become natural heroes, Veidt’s lack of humility does not allow him to do so. Veidt is not masked, but has revealed his identity. Dr. Manhattan, on his turn, did not make a choice to become a hero, but on becoming seemingly omnipotent, he is not bound by conventional law. At first, the ‘mask’ of Dr. Manhattan hides his Jon Osterman identity, but he gradually assumes the persona, only becoming interested in human affairs and conventional law through Laurie’s influence in chapter 9. Dr. Manhattan should be considered a “non-hero”, though – his abandoning of human affairs in the end does not allow for his consistent classification as a hero.

The shifts in the dispositions of the characters and their heroic identities help the reader to progressively question itself in terms of the identity and role of the hero in the novel, as well as where morality stands. The dynamic of the action, in which different scenes are presented from different – sometimes conflicting – structured points of view, also invites these considerations. As Ness points out, “in the beginning, the readers perceive the characters based on their outward conformity to conventional law (...) By the end, the reader is able to see the characters from the perspective of natural law” (NESS, 2010, p.119).

Ness also considers Campbell's monomyth in the work, by analyzing the hero's journey in each character's journey. In the case of Dan and Laurie, this entails an interpretation of most of the characters' functions throughout the narrative, and thus an interesting thing to mention here. For Ness, Dan and Laurie both are summoned to the adventure for Rorschach, who is, in this case, responsible for the call to adventure. After some time of denial in which one helps the other in assuming the role of the hero (supernatural or natural helpers). They then need to pass through the guardian of the portal, played by detective Fine. After that, they enter the Underworld and the realm of chaos (prison). After freeing Rorschach, they are separated. Dan visits the underworld with Rorschach (helper) and confronts his father figure, by symbolically avenging Hollis' death. They then travel to Antarctica. While on it, Laurie confronts both her father figures (by finding out about the Comedian being her father and setting things with her surrogate father figure, Manhattan, who is also her supernatural helper), and also goes to Antarctica. When they get there, they face their 'road of trials', in the person of Veidt, get to the conclusion that they cannot do anything about it (it's done) and have sex (communion with the goddess). After that, they return to the world (according to Ness, without a boon). In that universe, there is more than one monomyth journey possible, but Rorschach's journey fails because he is not capable of returning; Dr. Manhattan's journey is interrupted by his lack of commitment to continuing, and Veidt's journey is a false journey, an illusion created by himself to grant him the illusion of being a hero.

4.2.2 The Characters in *Watchmen*

The following analysis will complete these actantial models and, hopefully, provide a more wholesome view of the narrative. If that is proven to be true, then it is my opinion that narrative theory should open to the possibility of investigating further the role of the characters in the development of narratives, especially in narratives that hint to that possibility.

4.2.2.1 *The Comedian*

The Comedian (Edward Blake) is a fundamentally idiosyncratic character – a militarized government-funded goon who takes a smiley as his symbol and names himself after professionals of laughter. The Comedian’s assassination is the fact that sets the story in motion, by getting Rorschach involved in the investigation, and Rorschach subsequently bringing the other former superheroes into play. The character is central not only to the plot, but also to the interpretation of the story (as will be seen further when this work deals with the idea that ‘it’s all a joke’).

Funny thing is, we don’t see the Comedian in *Watchmen*. Not *really*. The character starts the book dead (presumably – with superheroes, one never knows), so all we have to go on about him and his history is what people remember. Incidental as it seems, this small detail may radically change the perspective about the character, for the same reason Mieke Bal decided to come up with the structure of the focalizer: characters are not necessarily reliable – they might be biased, untrustworthy, unconsciously or purposefully changing the story. Even if there is no indication of deceit in the text, there *is* a very good reason for being open to the possibility: as “paper people”, characters mimic the human experience – and in real life memory is unreliable. So, who is to say that the recollections presented in *Watchmen* should be taken literally (that is, accepted in their entirety) rather than being distorted by their agents’ perceptions or beliefs?

This is easy to overlook in a comic book, since the recollections are shown rather than told, and it is hard to keep perspective when seeing the action happening (not unusually through a testimonial point of view, which the character remembering could not possibly recall, due to the impossibility of having witnessed itself from the outside – only that is *also* how memory works, and some of our childhood recollections are, in fact, in third-person view). For instance, in the sequence where the rape scene takes place, in special the interaction between Hooded Justice and the Comedian: first the Comedian refuses to believe that Silk Spectre is indeed refusing his advances and, when interrupted, does not admit the rape.



Figure 40 - *Watchmen* #02, p.06, pan. 2-3; p.07, pan.3

Weak as the point may be (after all, the rapist refusing to admit the crime is hardly a novelty, nor is the argument that a woman that dresses in a revealing outfit is taking active part in her own rape and probably wants it), the character's expression looks genuinely surprised – which is not to be snared at in a medium where the monstrator has absolute control over what is being shown, and could easily make any sly intentions explicit. What the scene seems to establish is not the previous intent of rape, but rather a mistaken signal that turns into a complete mess when the Comedian loses his temper after being scratched in the face by Sally. Allied to the fact that both Blake and Sally eventually have a romantic encounter, during which Laurie is conceived, opens the possibility of a spark between the two even then, and that Sally herself understood how their flirtation could be taken so inexcusably wrong. Maybe.

John Loyd, in the article *The Last Laugh: Understanding Watchmen's Big Joke* in the book *Minutes to Midnight: Twelve Essays on Watchmen* (2011), by Richard Benscham (ed.), sees the dialogue between Blake and Sally as characteristic of the inquisitive nature of Blake, who “verbalizes his justification as a response to an unasked question” when he argues that a woman who dresses as Sally does must have ‘some reason’. “Even in his darkest moments, the Comedian tries to understand” (loc.1363). Though the scene is incredibly violent, even more so to have appeared in a medium where the sexuality of the characters is treated as taboo, Sally comes to forgive Blake: the last appearance of the character is in the photo of the Minutemen in Sally's room, his face covered by her symbolic kiss (that is, the lipstick mark of her lips) while she is crying in the background – grieving. So their relationship is very probably marked by more than meets the eye, and,

since this does not appear in the narrative, must remain a mystery, just an elusive possibility. All this is to say that the recollections that form the character's trajectory and history as seen in the book are but mediations, focalized recollections that are marked by different points of view, and should be regarded as such.

The character, as most of those in *Watchmen*, was based on a Charlton Comics' character. DC acquired the rights to these characters and Moore and Gibbons planned *Watchmen* with them as basis, but DC Comics forbade the use, given the explicit and violent nature of the work. So, they were adapted into new superheroes. In the case of the Comedian, his basis is the character denominated Peacemaker (really) also a contradiction in combat boots: Christopher Smith, a United Nations diplomat who loved peace so much "he was willing to fight for it". With an oddly-shaped helmet that might have made "Pacifier" a more appropriate name for the character, he wore a shirt with a dove in it, and, armed to the teeth with revolvers (probably the inspiration for the character's name – there is a revolver called 'peacemaker') and jet backpack, fought warlords, criminals henchmen and heads of state, ensuring that diplomacy continued in a less rethorical, albeit equally savage, fashion. A character determined to bring peace to backward countries even if he had to kill the entire population of every one of them. According to Walter Hudsick, in the article *Reassembling the Components in the Correct Sequence: Why You Shouldn't Read Watchmen First*, in *Minutes to Midnight* (2011), the character ran for five issues and was created by Joe Gill and Pat Boyete (loc.194-202). The whole conception of the character seems like a joke, so perhaps the reader who was familiar with it may recognize a tongue-in-cheek approach to its adaptation in *Watchmen*.

Edward Blake is indeed a contradictory character – while a comedian should elicit laughter, Blake's name derives from his essentially pessimist, nihilistic view of the world, where nothing makes sense and everything is but a sad joke. He is a hero, yet is presented very explicitly raping a woman, killing a woman that was pregnant with his child, needlessly shooting a protestor, drunk, among other things. Laurie sees him as a rapist, Veidt as a nazi. Dr. Manhattan as a puzzle, a man that was beyond the limits of morality. Rorschach as a patriotic hero with occasional moral lapses.

However different those approaches may be, there's something that is consistent in every approach to the character: Edward Blake is a man of vision: intelligent, lucid, with

an acute grasp on reality and an utterly amoral approach to it. It is Blake who opens Veidt's eyes to the big picture, the significant problems of the world, and the futility of their crime-busting approach, calling him the "smartest man on the cinder". In Dr. Manhattan's experience, Blake is a curious man with strange approaches to life and war. Yet, he is not only the one to understand what was at stake in the Vietnam War, but also able to follow the political developments with a cynical eye. Blake is also the first to notice Dr. Manhattan's detachment from reality. Dreiberg's memories of the riot (*Watchmen*, #02, p.16-18) are basically an update on current events, Blake having previous information about the Keene act from his government sources, and the instability of the superhero community (Rorschach lost his sanity in the kidnapping case, Byron Lewis, the mothman, and "Jon goddam walking H-bomb Osterman... all nuts."). The Comedian also sees Dreiberg's awkwardness (not comfortable unless up against "someone in a Halloween suit"). If that weren't enough, he also proclaims to see the "funny side" of things and keeps things in proportion, and complements that claim with an utterly cynical uptake on events – the riots, the chaos, are nothing but a reflection of the American dream, which liberty and freedom eventually lead to. Later on, Veidt places Blake as his intellectual peer when confessing to his murder: "as intelligent men facing lunatic times, we were very alike" (*Watchmen*, #11, p.18, panel 5). On the next page, he comments that Blake "discussed nuclear war's inevitability; described my future role as 'smartest guy on the cinder'... and opened my eyes. Only the best comedians accomplish that."

One might even go farther and throw Moore himself in the pile: in a discussion entitled *Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie*, mediated by Matt Green at Nottingham Contemporary on May 29th, 2012, Moore says a few interesting words about comedians in general and their role in society:

I heard someone talking about stand-up comedy, and they were saying stand-up comedians were the secret legislators of our time. Which probably could have come up with better legislation, that being the case. But, as a general idea, I think there's a lot of truth in that. And I think that it doesn't just apply to stand-up comedy, I think that it applies to art in general. And indeed that might be what art is for. Well, art is for many things, but it may be that we need art to constantly keep commenting upon our own cultural progress, upon our own emotional or intellectual progress, we need art as a way of talking about where

we are – even spiritually, if you like. Where we are in terms of our world and our place in it. (MOORE, 2012).

So, not only the Comedian, character, but the comedian in general, is a judge of sorts. Comedic techniques involve a degree of assimilation and distortion in order to create the comic effect – that is, by blowing something entirely out of proportion or distorting the logic of an argument, the comedian exposes its flaws, thus becoming, effectively, a distorted reflex of society. Much like the image of the character presented in *Watchmen*.

In the last three panelled pages of the second edition (*Watchmen*, #02, p.26-28), scenes from all the recollections are intermingled with the scene of the murder and make for successive analepses during Rorschach's visit to Blake's grave, as if summing it all up. The reader is then invited to acknowledge Blake's existence and consider it as presented – a mosaic of disconnected scenes of a violent life. The scenes are structured in a chessboard dynamics, intercalated panels – which, given the basic layout of the pages, end up forming an 'X' on the page, with the murder scene depicted in tones of red and magenta; the scenes from other character's memories in yellow and orange tones, predominantly. Rorschach's diary fragment is a narrative voice that frames the scenes, usually apropos of a scene in the panels. More than that, the text works as an epitaph of sorts. It starts with Blake's dates of birth and death, as if quoting the tombstone, and then seeks to make sense of the life of the departed: how their violent lives end in violence (the door being kicked in by the assassin who will end his life in violence, Blake watching TV in the second plane), perhaps their actions are a reflection of their inner animalistic drives (a detail from the scene of the rape, Blake's hand holding Sally's arm against the ground – on the first plane 'King Mob's ape mask' in a glass display mirrors the inhuman behavior), but are important nevertheless; they do not hide their heads in the bosom of indulgence (Blake, punched in the face, hits the wall behind him, his head over the bosom of a woman in a painting), but rather choose to see the imminent threat of the future (close-up of Blake's hand burning the graphic with the problems the Crimebusters would fight). Blake understood the cracks (Blake is being pushed against a mirror, shattering it) in society, though he treats it like a joke; he saw the true face (the Vietnamese woman slashing Blake's face with a broken bottle, in the mirror of the bar) of the 20th century and became a reflection and parody of it. At this point, Rorschach starts telling a joke about a man who goes to a doctor depressed with the cruelty (Blake is on the ground spitting blood, being kicked in the ribs by the assassin) of the

world, he sees no sense in the world and “what lies ahead” is uncertain (the Comedian, in uniform and looking straight at the reader, is pointing to a background full of smoke and gas). The doctor says that the man should see Pagliacci, a comedian, and that should “pick him up” (Blake is being held up by the collar, bloody and defeated and looking at the reader), but the man starts crying (Blake crying holding the image of the saint, in Moloch’s room. The last line of the joke, “I am Pagliacci” (Blake is being thrown through the window, the glass shattering), has the effect of making the reader mentally review the story of the joke. So Pagliacci (which means ‘clown’ in Italian) is the one who is depressed because the world is senseless and violent and the future, uncertain. The unexpected turn leading to a revaluation of the story has the effect of taking the ground from under the reader’s feet: suddenly, the narrative is changed from the beginning, and the story must be reaccessed from the start – that shattering moment and the impending fall are akin to the scene depicted. Then comes the fall. Two consecutive panels with a worm’s view of Blake’s fall. First at a distance, then much closer, his expression of horror and the scream on his face, visible in detail. Then a red panel, an ellipsis. “Curtains”. The red panel can be considered a reference to Blake’s blood on the sidewalk or a close-up of the roses Moloch leaves at his grave. Rorschach picks one of the roses, puts it on his lapelle and leaves. The last panel is, as is the rule in the comic, a reference to a text. In this case, a song by Elvis Costello, that talks about comedians and absent friends: “And I’m up while the dawn is breaking, even though my heart is aching. I should be drinking a toast to absent friends instead of these comedians.”

In these three pages the reciter acts as a “voice-over” while the different images are displayed, and the reader is invited to unite the information from the several sources presented into a coherent whole, in light of the narration (which itself presents a judgement of the character’s life) and of the joke (which presents a new dimension to the character, until that moment depicted as not caring about the world). We have, then, not only the Comedian as a violent man, with destructive sexual drives, the clear view of the world and the strange sense of humor that reorganizes everything around him into a distorted practical joke, but also the Pagliacci, the man that jokes on the outside, while suffering internally – not the most original of treatments, since the crying clown, *pierrrot*, is a known stereotype. While the monstration is a separate narrative stance and, in this specific case, denounces the presence of the narrator by breaking the sequence of the story with the

insertion of the analepses, the reciter and the monstrator both work together (that is, the *meganarrator*, or *fundamental narrator* endorses that view).

Another interesting characteristic of Blake is his scar, and his covering it with a highly specific type of mask. A result of having his face slashed with a broken bottle by his Vietnamese pregnant mistress, instants before shooting her, Blake's scar joins the junction of his lips on the right side of his face, looking like a giant perpetual smirk, a character that is constantly sneering at the world (the scar is part of what makes Laurie throw the glass of whisky on his face, at the dinner in his honor). From then on his uniform changes and a leather mask is added. Personally, I always thought the appearance of the mask grotesque, but had no idea what is represented until a series of discussions about the *Watchmen* movie and the lack of appearance of the mask started on the Internet.

Apparently, the problem was that the Comedian's gimp mask was not to appear in the movie, and the character would be wearing his scar proudly. I have no say in matters of the movie, though, and did not overly mind the change – I watched the movie, missed the giant squid and found displeasing how the heroes wisely open fire in a highly populated area in order to fight a fire, and that was it. But I realized I had no idea what a gimp mask was. I always knew it was related to sadomasochism and enhanced the idea of the sexual and violent nature of the character, maybe even suggested a different nature to the dynamics between Blake and Sally –judge not, lest you be judged. But, on taking a closer look, I soon found out that a gimp mask happens to have a very specific meaning.

The gimp's role in sadomasochistic sex is not that of the dominator, but rather that of a slave, at the mercy of the domineering partner. The gimp is the guy that gets a kick out of feeling pain, being humiliated and dominated. That suggests yet another dimension to the Comedian – that of the guy who suffers the pain. It is not that he is not able to feel pain for the state of the world, but that he chooses to reflect on it in a comedic style, becoming this increasingly bizarre reflection. Not the world's master, but its gimp. Arguably, all comedians play that part, but, as a reflection of the century, the particular transformation that the Comedian undergoes is another note of pessimism and nihilism in an already dystopic story.

According to Dave Gibbons, in the book *Watching the Watchmen* (2009), the Comedian's appearance was hard to get to. Since the carnival visual had already been taken by the Joker (and probably due to the idiosyncratic role of the Pacifier, character that served as the basis for the Comedian), the authors decided for a military visual, initially olive, then black leather (which looked a lot better in drawing, due to the possibility of using absolute black – always a bonus when dealing with inked drawings. To soften the character's appearance, Gibbons added the smiley face, which, given time and a blood spatter, became a motif and symbol of the work. Also, the character was based on the facial appearance of Groucho Marx – and that detail had eluded me in two decades of experience in reading the text. I'm personally a Groucho Marx fan, have listened to recordings of his radio shows and am familiar with his appearance, so maybe the incorporation of Groucho's features in the character was somewhat less than skilled – but I must confess that the instances in which the character wields a cigar have changed completely in my mind, both in meaning and in my mental construction of the character's voice, attitude, gestures and facial and bodily expression, since I have learned of this; through acknowledgement of the similarities with Groucho, the character's building seems a lot more complete than before (at least resembling a comedian, not merely a masochistic military patriot). And, so, this detail was worthy of mention: the use of caricature in the work may be subtle, but it incorporates much of the caricatured object in the work – provided the reader can make the connection, which I couldn't.

In the case of Groucho Marx, we have an incorrigible womanizer, with a mouthy disposition and a quick retort always ready (probably because of him writing the scripts previously, but anyway) to come out in fast outbursts, adding an element of surprise to what starts as a common dialogue. Groucho's routines relied heavily on the attitudes and building of a character, utterly self-centered and utilitarian, with a cynical (although also usually supportive) view of politics and patriotism. I'd venture to say that more than one of these characteristics were incorporated in the Comedian.

And yet, there is Blake's attempt of contact with Laurie at the end of the Crimebuster's fiasco, that leaves him looking sad (*Watchmen*, #09, p.16). It is not clear if Sally thinks he is really flirting with Laurie (as he seems to assume) or if she is afraid that he is approaching his daughter out of a will to bond with her: none of those prospects would please her, since she has kept their involvement as a secret to the end of the novel,

and was ashamed of it (*Watchmen*, #12, p.29). There is the pained facial expression at the dinner in his honor, maybe ready to explain to Laurie the progression of his relationship with Sally, just before getting hit in the face with a glass of whisky. There's his concern with Manhattan's alienation and his relationship with "Sally Jupiter's little gal" (*Watchmen* #02, p.15). All this might come to suggest loneliness, perhaps even a wish for contact with Sally and Laurie, were it not for his past mistakes. Of course, those are just suggestions that find no concrete form inside the narrative. Those that would add that all that does not begin to scratch the surface of the Comedian should bear in mind that the Comedian is precisely as deep as the scenes in which he is present direct or indirectly, and any further inference is just the reader looking into Mieke Bal's mirror. That being the case, the most prudent approach to the many-faceted character that is Edward Blake, the Comedian, would probably be to understand the essential characteristic about him, which is also one of the first things mentioned here: the character is a mosaic of different – and sometimes conflicting – points of view, that the reader must form for itself. There are some guidelines laid by the narrator that seem to work independent of the focalization of the characters (and therefore their personal opinions). Even so, much is just hinted at. Best, then, to leave the last word about him to the narrative itself – a big, sloppy 'lipsticky' kiss of goodbye.

4.2.2.2 *The Nite Owl*

Daniel Dreiberg is the only character without an origin story in *Watchmen*. Actually, this is not exactly true – there are several accounts of Dan's becoming a superhero, it is just never *shown* to us, readers, as the other heroes' origins. In Hollis Mason's biography, for instance, the final comments about his decision to retire include Dan:

(...) there may have been some overall consequence of my twenty-three years behind the mask. This knowledge came to me in the shape of a letter from a young man whose name I'm not at liberty to reveal. He told me of his great admiration for my efforts as Nite Owl and proposed that since I'd retired and would no longer be using the name, perhaps he could borrow it since he intended to follow my example and become a crime-fighter. I've visited his home since

then and seen some of the fabulous technology he intends to bring to bear on his war against crime. I was certainly far too impressed to refuse him the use of what I'd always thought was dumb name to begin with, so by the time this sees print there may be a new Nite Owl patrolling the streets of New York. (*Watchmen*, #03, p.32)

Thus, we know a little about what happened between the two. In chapter seven, there is a conversation between Laurie and Dan in which, after accidentally setting fire to Dan's hideout with Archie's flamethrower while looking for a lighter (and having the fire extinguished with his help), Laurie says she is impressed with his equipment, since it must have cost a fortune. Dan answers that his father, who worked in banking, left him a lot of money, despite being disappointed with his son's choices:



Figure 41 - Dan's Origin (*Watchmen* #07, p.05 pan.2-3; p.07 pan.6)

During the same conversation, Dan gives some insight into his reasons for becoming a superhero. This was mainly due to him being “rich, bored” and, since there were already people doing it, the possibility didn't seem too ridiculous for him. But there is more than that to the story – again, this analysis has to rely on the assumption that Dan, despite being a character, was created to resemble a human being, and that his motivations, whenever suggested, could be inferred by the reader. The thing is that Daniel probably had difficulties in connecting to his father, who was disappointed in him for not following his career in banking – to the point of being surprised when he inherited his money. His interests were others: mythology and ornithology. In a way, Dreiberg's searching Hollis

and contacting him in order to use his name in his endeavors as a vigilante is a search for a surrogate father figure, one that had already caught his interest and which shared a common background and – maybe – other interests as well (not ornithology or mythology, though, since Hollis’ name and inspiration for fighting crime were, according to his biography, due to a nickname and a Superman comic book, respectively – he liked Superman in *Action Comics #1*). In the end of the conversation Dreiberg discards vigilantism as being “crap dressed up with a lot of flash and thunder”, though his following actions in the same chapter (going out in his ship dressed up in his owl uniform) show that this is not what he actually thinks:



Figure 42 - Dan's Origin (*Watchmen* #07, p.08 pan.1, 3 and 5)

Besides that ‘origin story’, there is also an account of a childhood’s potentially traumatizing moment, which is recalled years later, when, visiting a friend, at a hospital’s parking lot, he hears an owl’s cry:

In my instant of paralysis there on the glistening macadam, between the sleeping automobiles, I understood the purpose behind the cry with a biting clarity, the way I’d understood it as a boy, belly flat against the warm summer earth. In that extended and timeless moment, I felt the kinship of simple animal fear along with all those other creatures much smaller and more vulnerable than I who had heard the screams as I had heard it, were struck motionless as I was. The owl was not attempting to frighten his food into revealing itself. Perched with disconcerting stillness upon its branch for hours, drinking in the darkness through dilated and thirsty pupils, the owl had already spotted its dinner. The

screech served merely to transfix the chosen morsel, pinning it to the ground with a shrill nail of blind, helpless terror. Not knowing which of us had been selected, I stood frozen along with the rodents of the field, my heart hammering as it waited for the sudden clutch of sharpened steel fingers that would provide my first and only indication that I was the predetermined victim. (*Watchmen* #7, p.31)

That account is similar to part of the Batman origin published roughly at the same time as *Watchmen* (the specific issue coming out about two months earlier, in February 1987 – and, considering that Moore and Gibbons, working for DC Comics, had access to that sort of content, likely to be read), in *Batman: Year One #1*, by Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli. The work is a retelling of Batman’s first attempts at vigilantism and based on the works of Bob Kane, Bill Finger and Jerry Robinson with the character:



Figure 43 - *Batman: Year One* (MILLER & MAZZUCHELLI, 1987, p.22)

The content of the recordatories (supposedly in a fragment of Bruce Wayne’s diary) is as follows – plus a small fragment from the previous panel, and less the multitude of suspension points, indicators of Bruce Wayne’s tired and wounded estate: “Without warning, it comes. Crashing through the window of your study... and mine. I have seen it before, somewhere. It frightened me as a boy. Frightened me. Yes, father. I shall become a bat” (MILLER & MAZZUCHELLI, 1987, p.22). In the fragment, Wayne is imagining a conversation with his dead father’s (Thomas Wayne’s) bust, when suddenly a bat crashes through the window and lands on the sculpture’s head.

The story described by Dreiberg is similar enough for the reader to understand the connections between the characters: a bored, rich young male seeking for a way of connecting or somehow honoring a father figure. Incidentally, Bruce Wayne had the batcave; Dreiberg the basement of his building. The Charlton character that originally

based the Nite Owl, Blue Beetle, also had a precursor in the crime-fighting business: Ted Kord, a genius-level athlete and inventor, was a student of the previous incarnation of Blue Beetle, Dan Garret. Of course, given the editorial market and the constant revising of characters, the origin of the character is actually a little more complicated. As Walter Hudsick wrote, in the article *Reassembling the Components in the Correct Sequence: Why You Shouldn't Read Watchmen First*, in the collection *Minutes to Midnight*, by Richard Bensam (ed.):

A rookie police patrolman turned shadow-like detective, courtesy of a bulletproof business suit and some super-strength vitamins. He was first revised in the fifties as a more straight-forward costumes super-hero, with superpowers granted by a magic scarab he had discovered in his civilian identity as an archaeologist. In 1966, the pages of *Captain Atom* introduced still another hero called Blue Beetle, this one created by Steve Ditko (...). The new Blue Beetle had a more modern custom and methods, but readers soon learned that the previous Blue Beetle had passed on his name and tradition to his former student. Unfortunately, the brash young inventor lost the scarab in a mishap and had to make do with scientific apparatus of his own devising. In addition to a flash gun and grappling wires, this new Blue Beetle had his own personal transport – a spheroid flying craft named the Bug – which could hover and from which Beetle would swing, on cables. (HUDSICK, loc.177-86)

To make a long story short, Nite Owl seems to share a lot with both superheroes, almost forming what can be described as a superhero 'type' – the non-powered vigilante with an aberrant uniform, using futuristic gadgets to fight crime. Dan's garments also seem to be a mixture of both Batman and Blue Beetle, with a utility belt, cowl and cape reminding us of Batman, while the goggles and the rest of the uniform similar to Blue Beetle (including Archie, a replication of Blue Beetle's Bug ship):

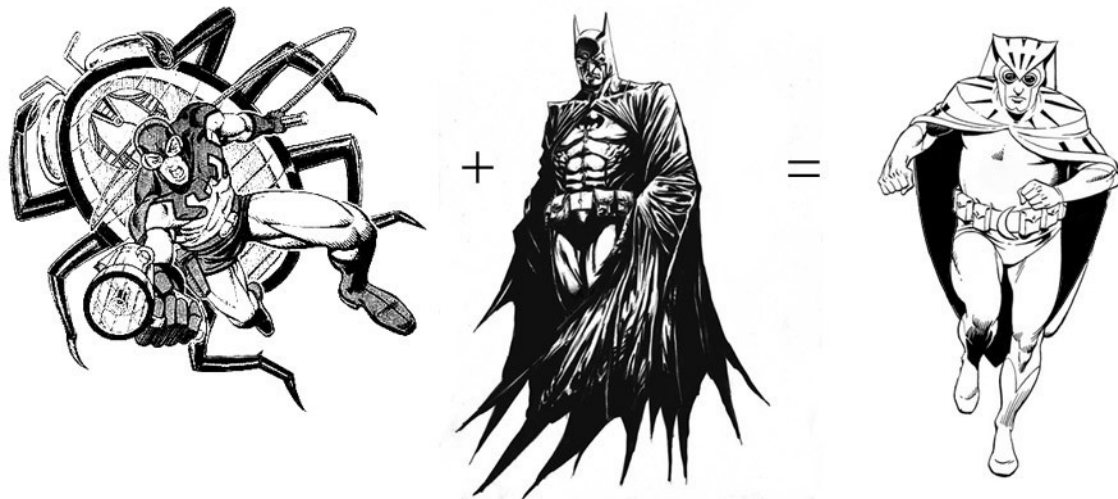


Figure 44 - Batman and Blue Beetle Elements in Nite Owl

Dan Dreiberg is a conflicted character at the beginning of the narrative. He is out of shape, doesn't have a job (and arguably doesn't need one). His only activity would be writing articles for ornithological magazines, but, according to his conversation with Laurie, spends months without doing anything (at least six months, from April to the end of October) due to the sheer monotony of the work. His only regular activity would be visiting Hollis Mason once a week for beers and memories of the adventuring times. Incapable of action upon his true passions, Dan has become completely redundant, a person with no place in the world, not needed in any way, by anyone. He has no *function* nor can he interfere in the world in any way, to the point of being unable to perform sexually – no longer a virile male, he clings to his childhood's passions, and is an infantilized character, denied of his place in adulthood and society.

Perhaps the limbo in which Dreiberg finds himself is not only due to the Keene Act and the fact that ornithology is not exactly a great conversation starter, but the fact that he is, at the beginning denied of his function in the narrative. According to Ness (2010), Dreiberg transitions from conventional to natural hero throughout the narrative by enacting the *monomyth*, the hero's journey as proposed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (2004). This analysis is based on Richard Reynolds' *Superheroes: a Modern Mythology* (1992), in which, on performing an evaluation of the basic qualities of superheroes, the author arrives at seven basic conclusions (my italics):

- 1) The hero is marked out from society. He often reaches maturity *without having a relationship with his parents*.
- 2) At least some of the superheroes will be like earthbound gods in their level of powers. Other superheroes of lesser

powers will *consort easily with these earthbound deities*. 3) *The hero's devotion to justice overrides even his devotion to the law*. 4) The extraordinary nature of the superhero will be contrasted with the ordinariness of his surroundings. 5) Likewise, the extraordinary nature of the hero will be contrasted with the *mundane nature of his alter-ego*. Certain taboos will govern the actions of these alter-egos. 6) Although ultimately above the law, superheroes can be capable of considerable *patriotism* and moral loyalty to the state, though not necessarily to the letter of its laws. 7) The stories are mythical and use *science and magic indiscriminately to create a sense of wonder*. (REYNOLDS, 1992, p.16)

Ness' point lies precisely with the third rule: Dan Dreiberg's devotion to justice does not override the law, since he has retired following the Keene Act, resigning himself to Limbo (since we're talking mythology here) from then on, until adventure comes knocking at his door in the form of Rorschach and a theory about a masked killer. Interestingly, Dan fulfills almost every other characteristic of the genre: he does not have a relationship with his parents (his father was disappointed in him and his mother is not mentioned), he consorts easily with Dr. Manhattan (earthbound deity), he has an aberrant uniform (a contrast with his ordinary surroundings), his alter-ego is mundane, he is patriotic and there is a lot of science and wondrous technology in the story. What Dreiberg lacks in order to be a hero, according to Ness, is the devotion to Justice (with a capital 'J') instead of the law.

At the beginning of the journey, Dreiberg is visited by Rorschach, the "call to adventure" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.45). Neither he nor Laurie accept the call without hesitation; Laurie is seeking protection and Dan has lost all confidence in himself. In that sense, they act as each other's helpers and each usher the other further in the quest (Laurie helps Dan return to the superhero garments and Dan helps Laurie to take action by releasing Rorschach – living arrangements and sexual activities not included here as 'help'). With each other's aid, they cross "the first threshold" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.71), which, according to Campbell, means that, once the hero accepted his quest and is set in motion with the supernatural help, he gets to the "threshold Guardian at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.77). For Ness, this means the threshold of law and order, which is crossed when the couple releases Rorschach.

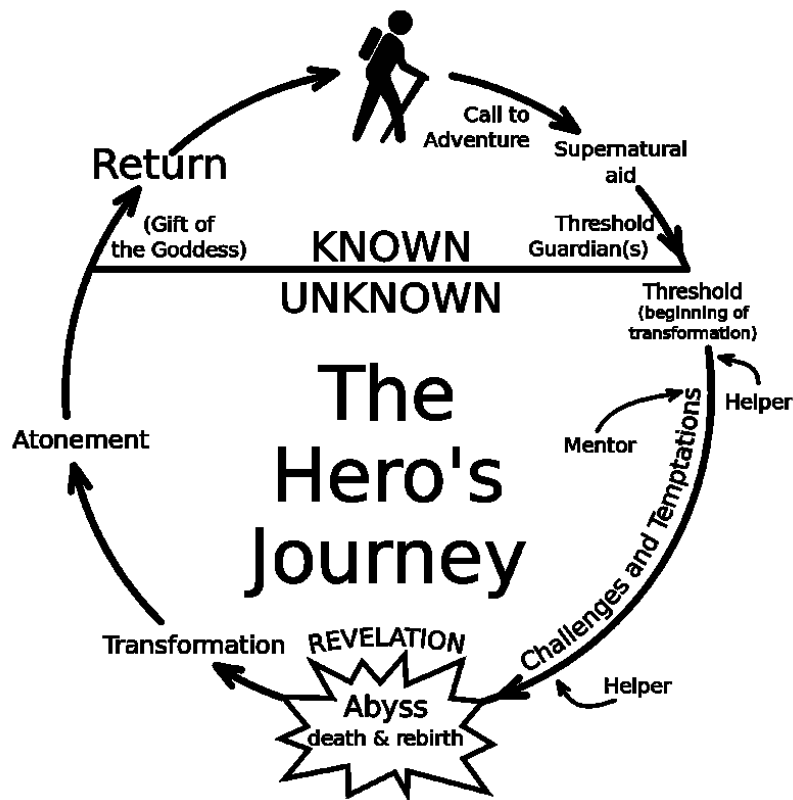


Figure 45 - Scheme of Campbell's Monomyth

In that case, the 'threshold guardian' could be considered to be detective Fine, who visits Dreiberg and pretty much leaves it clear that he knows about his activities as a vigilante and will not tolerate them. After crossing the threshold, they descend into the world of chaos (the riot in Sing-sing). Releasing Rorschach, they go on separate journeys, each going to a different world (Laurie to Mars, Dreiberg to the 'Underworld' of crime – including the crossing of a river, which brings to mind the Styx of mythology) and face their respective "roads of trials" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.89) aided by their former partners (Dreiberg by Rorschach, Laurie by Manhattan). They both perform the rite of "atonement with the father" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p. 116), in which Laurie meets both the surrogate father figure that is Manhattan and finds out about Blake being her father; and Dreiberg symbolically conquers and avenges his father figure's death by learning about Mason's assassination and losing his marbles at the bar. After that, Dreiberg takes action with his newfound power as the initiator and finds out about Veidt's involvement in the plot. They go to Karnac, passing the 'sun door' to their 'long journey'. After their ultimate trial (the conflict with Veidt), the couple meets sexually in what can be understood as the "consorting with the goddess" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.100), a final test to the hero (which both seem to accomplish nicely, for they fall straight asleep afterwards), though the test

should be different if the hero is female –mere beauty would suffice for the sacred marriage. Then they are both symbolically reborn, new identities and all, in the end of the book. Ness argues that the heroes do not bring any boon to society and, thus, “readers cannot know for sure if they complete their monomythic transformations into heroes” (NESS, 2010, p.161), but to that I would answer that, while they left a society taken by Nostalgia (Veidt’s perfume line), they come back to a new Millennium (new line), and they had something to do with it by deciding not to expose the scheme. If averting impending nuclear war is not a boon to society or a ‘rune of wisdom’ – they know what happened, and in this case the wisdom is better left unsaid – then I am not sure what would be.

The fact is that Dreiberg and Laurie are the only ones that go through the plot intact and remain in their parts as heroes: Veidt is consumed by guilt and in charge of the future of the world (at least so he seems to think), Manhattan leaves the planet, Sally is retired, Rorschach and Hollis are dead. They are the only superheroes remaining, go through the hero’s journey, as seen, and regain their status as such. In fact, Dan even gets the girl in the end – a dream that every comic book reader entertains. Arguably, seeing that, as some of the texts studied pointed out, superhero stories are character-driven and characteristic for the unchanging nature of their plots.

In his article *The Myth of Superman* (apud HEER & WORCESTER, 2004, p.164), Umberto Eco suggests that, due to the immutable quality of the myth (that is, the fact that the mythical hero embodies some qualities or values that are a constituent part of a given society), no significant development is possible for the character of Superman – the hero is, in fact stuck in a moment, a loop where every adventure’s completion takes him to a state similar to the beginning, and no evolution in the plot can be perceived.

By that account (and considering extrapolating the pattern to other books of the same genre), since both are the characters that remain acting in the end of the adventure and planning on continuing adventures, it can be argued that Dan and Laurie are the main characters of the book – curiously, none of them gains an origin chapter: Laurie’s story is shown in relation to her father, much as her father’s story is shown in relation to his murder. Dan’s origin is only hinted at.

4.2.2.3 *The Silk Spectre*

Laurie Juspezyk, the Silk Spectre, is an exception. As seen before, the large majority of the superheroes in the work is of white males. Of the arguably six important heroes in this narrative (Dr. Manhattan, Comedian, Rorschach, Ozymandias, Nite Owl and Silk Spectre) she is the only female. That is not by accident, nor is the character's linkage with her mother's profession – a woman who earned her life by the oversexualization of her vigilante profession as a way of getting into show business – which worked, if Sally's scrapbook is any indication, with very relative success. Silk Spectre is a sexist character, meant to call the reader's attention to a woman's role in comic books.

The daughter of a controlling mother, who set her career and life from start, based on her own desires and persona, Laurie Juspezyk got into the superhero business without a desire to do so, having trained for it most of her life due to her mother's guidance. She is, in this sense, a mere extension of her mother. Arguably, her step into adult life – that of being separated from her mother and constituting a family for herself – was little more than a childish rebellion, since she found a companion who was not only not approved of by her mother, but also not a real man (or person, to start with) and with whom the character loses contact during their relationship. In spite of Dr. Manhattan's role as a companion and a surrogate father, the truth is that the father's role in Laurie's life was kept a mystery, until she later connected the dots and realized that the Comedian was her real father.

Laurie is a mess. Unsure of who she really is, she needs the assurance of someone else to cling to, and, upon losing Dr. Manhattan's protection, needs Dan's. Her rebellion against her mother is not enough to stop her from becoming a superhero, something that she manifestly hates. That doesn't seem to bother her, though, when her newfound lover seems to need a little help to be active in bed. After taking action and realizing the empowering nature of her costume, though, Laurie suffers the entire journey of the hero, along with Dreiberg, and becomes a natural hero, no longer ashamed of her role, but even willing to actively participate in it (suggesting a leather armor, for instance) at the end of the narrative. Similar to Dan, her herald (call to adventure) was Rorschach. She then

hesitates to cross the first gate. She gets close to Dreiberg, and has to face the guardian of the gate. While Ness (2010, p. 154) suggests that Laurie's guardian would also be Detective Fine, it is (I think) more probably the sexual barrier that must be transposed into intimacy with Dreiberg, which itself would be a confrontation of sorts with a father figure. Surpassing that gate, and helping Dreiberg through his, in a way, Silk Spectre and Nite Owl are ready to rescue Rorschach from Sing-sing. That is their descending unto the Underworld, a place of chaos and where a succession of trials awaits. After they release Rorschach, Laurie is taken to Mars, where her former father figure (Jon) is waiting to have a chat with her. There she argues with him until their conversation leads her into remembering several key moments in her life, which lead to the repressed memory that the Comedian, a man who her mother was by every account entitled to hate, was her real father. That leads to Dr. Manhattan's renewed interest in human life, and sends them back into the story, as Manhattan teleports the couple to New York. Arriving there, and seeing all the death, they follow the clues into Antarctica, in Karnak, Veidt's hide-out. After confronting the father figure (which Laurie does both by confronting Manhattan in Mars and the idea of the Comedian as her father), Laurie goes on to her ultimate confrontation, with Veidt (turns out he is able to catch the bullet), and then meets Dan again, in the Meeting with the Goddess. After that, she and Dan get back to the real world bringing the boon (or the withheld knowledge that it was all a sham).

Laurie is a mess. She is also a sexual stereotype. If one considers that Alan Moore understood about the story of the superhero genre and decided to make *Watchmen* a reflection of it, the role of superheroines was bound to be quite a limited one. In a universe marked by realistic heroes, what better way of building questions about nondeveloped feminine concepts in superhero stories than creating underdeveloped characters to represent women?

That is the theory sustained in this work – which doesn't mean it's right. But I find it more likely, in such a detailed work, that a weak feminine character be a purposeful development of the plot than an error of the author. The consistency in the female hero's presentation – as inconsistent – may help to defend this point of view: Sally and Laurie had a uniform that enhanced their sexual qualities, both had a life in which sex played an important part – Sally turned her sexuality into a career, while Laurie ended up as the sexual companion of the 'H-Bomb', in Sally's own words (*Watchmen*, #02, p.08, pan.5-7).

In the book *Watchmen and Philosophy: a Rorschach Test* (2009), edited by Mark D. White, Sarah Donovan and Nick Richardson made a study very interestingly titled – *Watchwomen* – in which they investigate both Sally’s and Laurie’s behavior regarding the many branches of feminist philosophies, and conclude that, while Sally could be considered an “existential feminist” (p.182), Laurie allows herself to be defined by others, first her mother, then Dr. Manhattan, her lover, and finally Daniel Dreiberg, always looking for someone’s protection and never realizing her existential freedom and becoming independent. Maybe. But one must also not forget that Laurie is empowered somehow during the narrative (as per her monomythic journey, perhaps, in which she finally finds atonement with her father figures), and, by the end, is not only assimilating more of her father’s persona and, symbolically, weighing the sexual power balance towards her (in what Donovan and Richardson call “androgynous fashion” – p.175), but she also refuses to stay at home caring for children as Dan seeks adventure (*Watchmen*, #12, p.30, pan.2).

Besides, if the character is to be read in terms of feminine roles in superhero stories, she is utterly consistent: in other comics of the genre, the female figure is little more than that – oversexualized beings, with anatomically impossible tiny waists, big boobs and usually making sexy poses for no particular diegetic reason, females written largely by males, and in a market directed primarily to young males. In that sense, both Laurie and (especially) her mother, Sally, work as caricatures of women in superhero comics, defined by their sexuality and submissive to their partner’s desires, a cycle that is broken at the end of the narrative, when, according to Veidt, the concept of the hero must be reworked (*Watchmen*, #12, p.17, pan.1). Sally even goes to the length of forgiving and having sex with the man who attempted to rape her, just because he was gentle – she cannot imagine having a grudge against him because of a mere rape attempt (*Watchmen*, #09, p.07, pan.1-6). Sally’s attitude, arguably, was supposed to be hard to understand – that serves the narrative end of keeping the role of the Comedian as Laurie’s father a secret. Even so, it is a hard pill to swallow outside the possibility of exaggeration in the caricaturization of a type.

Thus, the reason the few women in the book are shown as sexually stereotyped, weak characters, is that they long played that sole role in other superhero comics, and Laurie’s breaking of that pattern in the end of the narrative is a redemption of sorts. And perhaps a point made by the creators, that a real woman – after all, *Watchmen*’s strong

point, until the part with the sensitive brain-squid alien from another dimension, was realism – should not conform to the sexist stereotype perpetuated by comics, and suggest a different character instead. A heroin becoming truly a feminist, in equal terms with her partner and fellow adventurer, refusing any sort of submissive role, Laurie does more than survive as a hero in the end of the story – she is a better character.

4.2.2.4 Rorschach

Perhaps the most notorious character of the series, Rorschach comes from a large lineage of masked detectives inspired by pulp fiction, usually dressed in a trenchcoat or a suit, in a fedora hat and wielding a gun of some sort. Some examples of this superhero type are the Sandman (not Neil Gaiman's, but the original detective with a sleeping gas gun), the Shadow's comics adaptation, Green Hornet and The Spirit. There are more examples, but these are what came to mind.

His direct inspiration are the Comics' characters The Question and Mr. A. According to Hudsick, in *Minutes to Midnight*:

Prosaically clad in a business suit, overcoat, and fedora hat, with a mask of "pseudoderm" giving him completely faceless appearance, [The Question] was an uncompromising vigilante with no soft spot for criminals, whether in costume or in his real identity as a firebrand television newsman. He was perfectly willing to use physical force to achieve his ends, insisted on personal responsibility and the acceptance of consequences for one's actions, and was not adverse to letting criminals die as a result of their own bad choices. (HUDSICK, 2011, loc.186-203).

The similarities between Rorschach and The Question are screaming. Gene Phillips, however, in his article in the same book (*Blotting out Reality: Questioning Rorschach*), draws further on the pool of references that is comics' history, and comes with a different source of inspiration for the character: not one, but two different masked detectives, created by Spiderman's co-creator, Steve Ditko – a question and an answer. According to Phillips, Mr. A, a masked adventurer dressed in a white suit and wearing an expressionless

human mask over his face, presented the other piece of the puzzle that is Rorschach: while *The Question* denounced the hypocrisy of the man in the streets, who was condescending with crime, Mr. A was an advocator of a black and white, unyielding idea of the world (PHILLIPS, 2011, loc.1152-1178). Both features are presented very clearly by the character.

However, Rorschach is not limited to that. He is also one of the two characters whose existence as a superhero is determined through trauma. Daniel Dreiberg enters the world of superheroes due to a necessity to connect with people who he admired and with whom he shared interest – probably due to the loss of his father. This is a logical conclusion derived mainly from the fact that Daniel found another father figure in Hollis Mason when starting his career, and was so hungry for his approval that he contacted Mason before starting adventuring, and that, at the time, Daniel already had the tools and inventions for that end (Hollis mentions that in his book). The money was inherited, so one can assume that Daniel's loss of his father had already taken place. Hollis Mason decided to become a superhero seeking adventure, justice and because he admired the world view presented in *Superman* – besides, there were already other people doing it. Sally had professional reasons for adventuring, and so did Dollar Bill, who was hired by a bank as a mascot of sorts in the wake of the superhero trend. Mothman reputedly had psychological problems, maybe derived from addiction, but not much is revealed about this in the narrative. The Comedian, Hooded Justice and Captain Metropolis seem to have entered the trade due to the need to fulfill their sense of justice, but this is not clear. Laurie was ushered into it by her mother – kicking and screaming all the way into finally finding her identity. A sexual component is hinted at in the cases of Daniel, Silhouette, Twilight Lady and Captain Carnage (this last was a villain, though). But trauma is suffered only by Rorschach and Jon Osterman.

Since Rorschach is a character that is psychoanalyzed in the novel, this aspect is worth looking into. Borrowing a definition of the characteristics of the traumatic moment from the article *Watchmen: The Graphic Novel as Trauma Fiction*, by Brandy Ball Blake (which in its turn was taken from Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*):

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after ... Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. (BLAKE, s/d, par.6, *apud* LAUB, 1992, p.69)

The traumatic moment, then, is open, has no end, is not registered as having taken place in time, but lingers in the present. Both Walter Kovacs and Jon Osterman suffer such moments in their stories, and are forever changed by them, abandoning their previous identities and adopting the respective identities of Rorschach and Dr. Manhattan afterwards.

In the case of Walter Kovacs, his entire existence is traumatic. The son of an abusive prostitute, institutionalized (in 'Charlton Home', a reference of the comics' editor that created the characters) at age ten after becoming violent and attacking two bigger boys, the only thing he knows about his father is that he liked president Truman (as per the composition *My Parents*, in Rorschach's prison file), while his mother did not. This simple piece of information is enough for the child to come up with a background story where his father was an aide to Truman, then went abroad as a soldier and died fighting the Nazis, never having learned of Kovacs' existence (this being the reason for never having gotten in contact with him). Kovacs then adheres to a conservative political stance as a way of connecting with his father. Having witnessed his mother having sex with clients, he was deeply impressed by it, as his dream, reported in 1963, indicates (*Watchmen*, #06, p.31-32).

After leaving the institution, Kovacs goes on to work in the textile industry. Hating his mother (to the point of finding it 'good' when he learned about her assassination at age sixteen), he is uncomfortable working with woman's clothes. When he learns about the rape and assassination of Kitty Genovese, while neighbors watched from their windows, Kovacs, repulsed by human depravity, creates a mask that allowed him to distance himself from it, a face that he "could bear looking in the mirror" (*Watchmen*, #06, p.10, pan.9). Despite starting his adventures as a superhero at the time, Rorschach makes it clear that he was still Kovacs by then.

Kovacs' metamorphosis unto Rorschach happens in 1975, with the kidnapping of Blaire Roche, mistakenly taken as a member of a rich family. Finding that Gerald Grice had killed her and fed her to his German shepherds (the moment of the realization is totally black and red), Rorschach kills the dogs and attacks Grice with their corpses, cuffing him to a boiler and setting the building on fire. Looking at the smoke in the sky, Rorschach has an epiphany: the world is impersonal and meaningless. As such, the only sense and limits are the ones one chooses to live by – and that is precisely what makes it important. One's actions are the only things that give meaning to existence. Rorschach then chooses to never compromise, to live his life within the limits of a rigid moral code. Once he has seen the truth, he is no longer capable of turning his back to injustice. He is stuck in the moment of his trauma, incapable of continuing his existence.

From that point on he is no longer Kovacs, but Rorschach – increasingly violent, with a broken pattern of speech that was chosen by Moore (according to the interview with the author made by Christopher Sharret in the book *Alan Moore: Conversations*, edited in 2012 by Eric Berlatsky) to remember the voice of Son of Sam, a serial killer⁴⁸: “it's a kind of black lyricism (...). Of course, my main inspiration for that character's voice was the notes Son of Sam left to the police” (MOORE, 1988, loc.1314-32).

Rorschach's personality is different from Kovacs' in the speech pattern and, apparently, in the possibility of a somewhat normal life: Kovacs is able to maintain a job, while Rorschach has no other activity than his roles as vigilante and prophet of the end of the world. His clothes are stained and dirty, and so is his apartment. He eats whatever is at hand (cold beans in Dan's house in issue one (p.10-11), raw egg in Moloch's place in issue five (p.5), six pages later he is at Gunga Diner, watching his drop box) – his main source of food seems to be the sugar cubes he grabs from Daniel's house mentioned throughout the narrative. The part of his face that appears while he is feeding is unshaven. His landlady is shown complaining twice about his hygiene: first about the smell (*Watchmen* #01, p.14, pan.1), then about rent and hygiene (*Watchmen*, #05, p.11, pan.4). Dan mentions Rorschach 'lives off people' (*Watchmen*, #10, p.10, pan.5).

⁴⁸ According to Wikipedia, Son of Sam, David Richard Berkowitz, started a series of shootings in 1976, in New York, leaving six dead and seven wounded. Sam wrote letters promising other murders. When captured, Berkowitz claimed he had been ordered to kill by a demon that possessed his neighbor's dog.

Rorschach's life is a mess. He is totally dedicated to his vigilante activities – his life stops in the moment of the trauma and only that part of his personality exists now. Maybe that's the reason why he did not stop his activities when the Keene Act was approved, in 1977: it is simply not an option for him. As the character says,

Once a man has seen, he can never turn his back on it. Never pretend it doesn't exist. No matter who orders him to look the other way. We do not do this thing because it is permitted. We do it because we have to. We do it because we are compelled. (*Watchmen* #06, p.15, pan.5-6).

I used to think that the 'the end is nigh' sign is more than symbolic of the narrative's mood and a reference to the impending nuclear holocaust, but also prophetic of Rorschach's destiny, since he finds death at the end of the adventure. And that is certainly true. But another way to think about the character is that there was not much life in him to begin with. In a sense Rorschach, much as the Comedian, is dead from the beginning of the narrative. In his quest, he denies himself even small things, such as hot beans, taking an elevator or wearing an overcoat in the Antarctic circle – wait, that is not a small thing. On a personal note, I always thought that in any coherent narrative the character should have died there, a victim of his own folly, at least being spared of the final beating. The idea that a character can use a latex mask (made to hold fluids and which had to be cut with heated instruments not to leak) and be called anything other than 'dead' is also ludicrous. But yet, in a diegetic universe one must be prepared to accept a situation in which reason is bent to the service of the narrative. One must be, in that attitude, quite the opposite of Rorschach. That hard, unyielding self he built for himself as a way to cope with the hardship of the world itself is, in the end, the cause of his demise. Even when everything is at stake, he does not compromise. Ness's account of Rorschach's monomythic journey is that he completed his journey and became the natural hero by rebelling against conventional law in Blaire Roche's case, and remains a natural hero throughout the narrative (NESS, 2010, p.111-12), though she does not comment how Rorschach's atonement with the father goes. I believe Rorschach is a supernatural helper to Daniel and helps him to complete his journey, as Ness argued. But I think Rorschach never came back from the underworld as a hero. Or at all.

On another personal note, Rorschach is in a tight spot, sexually speaking: too damaged to love women, due to his problems with his abusive mother; too conservative to

be homosexual – to the point of thinking he had to ‘investigate further’ Veidt’s possible homosexuality, as if it were a crime (*Watchmen*, #01, p.19, pan.2). However, a few pages later in the same edition (p.21, pan.8), he says he considers the Comedian’s rape attempt against Sally Jupiter an example of “moral lapses of men who died in their country’s service”. Maybe that double standard – an utterly inconsistent behavior in an uncompromising character such as Rorschach – has to do with his admiration for his father and the fact of him having intercourse with his prostitute mother, in which case there is a possibility of Rorschach seeing the Comedian as a father figure. Rorschach is seen complaining, essentially, that people are concerned about sex and do not worry about other things – ‘American love’ (#02, p.25) and the death of the Comedian (#01, p.24). He is shown repulsed even by women’s clothing (#06, p.10). There is no indication that Rorschach handles sex in any way other than denying it. Save for one:



Figure 46 - Innuendo 01 (*Watchmen*, #07, p.6)

When Daniel and Laurie are at Dan’s basement, after dealing with the fire, there is a sexual innuendo between the two, showing that Daniel was seeking contact with Laurie by not letting go of her hand – a situation shown in the three panels of the figure above. Now, if that is a sign of sexual interest, as it is logical to infer, since the couple ends together, what to think of the scene that goes on between Rorschach and Daniel, in chapter ten?



Figure 47 - Innuendo 02? (*Watchmen*, #10, p.10-11)

Perhaps nothing, of course. But it was fun to make the connection. Actually, in *The Annotated Watchmen*, Doug Atkinson sees in this edition a humanization of Rorschach, in which the character seems to be polite to Dan and lament Laurie's absence (p.04, pan.3) and then spares his former landlady (p.06), perhaps by seeing the similarities between himself and the kid holding onto her – once he commented that she reminded him of his mother (*Watchmen* #05, p.11, pan.4). But he doesn't follow this line of thinking to the specific interaction in the panels above. Perhaps Atkinson is right and this is Rorschach's way of seeking human contact, after all.

4.2.2.5 Dr. Manhattan

The character of Dr. Manhattan was inspired by Captain Atom, a Charlton Comics character who was, according to Hudsick:

A military scientist trapped in a newly-designed rocket on a test flight and completely disintegrated; he somehow manages to pull himself together and re-integrate his atomized form, complete with astonishing powers. (...) Continuing his service to the government, the Captain fought typical Cold War villains, aliens, and mad scientists. (HUDSICK, 2011, loc.170-76)

The similarities are quite impressive. When his father heard about the atomic bomb released on Hiroshima, Jon Osterman was ushered into a journey he hadn't intended to undertake. Thinking the future would be in atomic physics, his father endeavored to guide him through that path. After getting his PhD in atomic physics, Osterman goes to work at the Gila Flat compound, where he meets Janey Slater, who becomes his lover. Then he suffers an accident, locking himself in the intrinsic field chamber and being disintegrated. For a while, anyway. After some time, he is able to rebuild his body with pure energy, becoming a god-like being, capable of commanding matter with his mind. Marketed as the ultimate defense by the government and acting as both as a superhero and a scientist, Dr. Manhattan (named so to inspire fear in the enemy) eventually meets other superheroes, intervenes in the Vietnam War and meets Laurie. Falling in love with Laurie, he leaves Janey. In 1977, with the signing of the Keene act, he is one of the few heroes allowed to continue in activity – which he sort of doesn't. He continues to act as a line of defense, but mostly keeps his research at the Rockefeller Military Research Center, with Laurie by his side. When Laurie leaves him and a rumor that he is causing cancer in other people is spread, he leaves Earth to live in Mars. After that, with nuclear war approaching, he picks up Laurie on Earth so that she can convince him to save the world – a task in which she succeeds. They go to Earth to find New York devastated, then track a sign of neutrinos to Veidt's Antarctic lair, where, after a quick brawl in which Dr. Manhattan is destroyed, then 'retroyed', they eventually agree to not enact any sort of action. At all. Turns out Veidt's plan may have worked. Dr. Manhattan then kills Rorschach, who refused to protect Veidt's plan, and leaves Earth.

Drawing once again from Sara Van Ness and focusing her take on Dr Manhattan's monomythic journey (p.115-118) towards the narrative, the character does not properly receive a 'call to adventure', and does not choose to go anywhere – what happens to him is an accident. Manhattan's stance in relation to the action is not active *per se*, but impassive. As he points out to Laurie, in Mars, he is merely a puppet who sees the strings. Granted, this is more than do the other puppets in the narrative. But in fact they are the ones who are free to take action. Ness sees Dr. Manhattan bending towards the conventional law, convinced by Laurie. But, still, his journey is uninvolved, to a large degree. He kills Rorschach, and that signals again his disposition to protect society and conventional law (in opposition to Rorschach's unbending defense of natural law, as the hero he is, still

according to Ness). But he leaves Earth in the end, and so his interest seems limited. Dr. Manhattan is a “non-hero”, a class all by himself, which she christens “supernatural hero”.

I believe that means that Dr. Manhattan’s monomythic journey does not exist as such inside the diegesis. Perhaps it could be argued that the character took it beforehand – he had his physical existence taken from him (call to adventure), crossing the first gate (by entering the intrinsic field chamber) and descending into the Underworld, where he had to fight to recreate himself, becoming (literally) a self-made man and reaching atonement with the father through becoming his own father, in a sense. He comes back from this journey with his boon to humanity – that is, his powers. In his second journey he does not accept a call to adventure until he is convinced to intervene by Laurie (maybe that is the call), and seems to do so quite half-heartedly. Yet, he teleports (gate) to the Underworld (New York, a city of dead people) and faces the road of trials (fights Veidt, is disintegrated again and prevails in the end). Having won the fight, he realizes Veidt’s plan worked and withholds it by killing Rorschach, in what one can think of as atonement with the father (humanity, in this case) and coming back with the boon, the avoidance of war.

Those are two options. There are probably more ways in which the idea of the monomythic journey could be applied to the character without the need to come up with a separated class for him, as Ness did. The problem with Campbell’s journey of the hero is that it is just too easy to read into other texts. Yet the character’s stance, uninvolved, inhuman, is what, to a great degree, defines it. Dr. Manhattan is not a monomythic hero because he would see no sense in undertaking the journey in the first place. It is like he was granted his boon by accident, merely surviving his predicament, without ever accepting the trial. His role in the narrative, to me, is as Laurie’s helper. Laurie and Daniel are the ones to undertake the mythic adventure and realize their potentials as heroes. Rorschach, Dan’s helper, is also a shadow in the Underworld, and Veidt is both the false hero and the villain. Otherwise, Dr. Manhattan’s journey is his own – beyond the reader’s understanding and empathy. As should be.

The problem with the character is that he is no longer human – the only one in the narrative in a genre that until the moment had been concerned with little more than displays of superhuman powers and fights between characters. How would a superhuman

behave in real life? What would a superhuman be like? ‘Uncanny’ is the word I find best describes the result, due to its Freudian implications. Familiar, yet strange.

There are multiple references to a watchmaker in Dr. Manhattan’s origin chapter, to start with: his father was a watchmaker, which he was himself training to be. The title of the piece is *Watchmaker* and the quotation at the end makes reference to it as well. An image is repeated again and again during the part of his history that precedes his accident: cogs and gears, either black on a white background or white over a black background. Jon Osterman fixes Janey Slater’s watch, broken when a fat man steps on it in the amusement park, and which appears again at the chamber and by Jon’s bed at the hotel. A broken watch is on the cover of Time Magazine. All references to time, all references to God, all references to watches. The term became popular in the scientific community as a teleological argument for intelligent design, that is, a logical proof of the existence of a God. The point was made by William Paley in the book *Natural Theology* (1802). The term became popular again in the 1980 when Richard Dawkins published his interpretation of the theory of evolution, *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986). Basically, the argument is as follows: if one looks at a watch, the complexity and purpose of the design suggest a watchmaker, not the possibility of the watch having appeared there by natural causes; similarly, the complexity of the world and the universe would suggest a conscience behind it. Complex events, coming together at the end, in a complex form, a dynamic that equals intent, conscience. Get it? This is the place where the narrative becomes the most self-referential.

That effect is heightened because of the character’s peculiar relationship with time. Instead of travelling through time from past to future, a second at a time, as human beings do, Dr. Manhattan’s idea of time is totally different: he exists in a hypermoment, out of time, standing still. He sees both past and future (and, utterly confusing to the reader but at the same time madly funny, does not know things that he hasn’t learned about yet, but may have informed other people about them – as in Mars, when he mentions Laurie and Daniel’s relationship and then is surprised by it afterwards), simultaneously. That is reflected in the narrative, which presents the insertion of panels from other sections of his own narrative, not in linear order; the voice-over (the only example of internal monologue in the novel is in that chapter – though there is a lot of it) measures time with inhuman precision, as a watch would, but refers to every moment of the narrative in the present

tense and uses abundant prolepses and analepses, mixing it all together. The words are always apropos of the images, of presenting an ironic comment to them. According to Jon Cormier, in his article *Nothing Ever Ends: Structural Symmetries in Watchmen*, in the book *Minutes to Midnight*:

The nonlinear presentation of “Watchmaker” (...) embodies how the creators manipulate the reader’s point of view throughout the text, particularly at the climax. The comic-book form is limited to showing individual moments within each panel; however, these representative events don’t need to be in chronological order. This non-chronological ordering not only presents Dr. Manhattan to the reader but allows the reader to experience the events of Dr. Manhattan’s existence as near as possible to the character himself. (CORMIER, 2011, loc.1568-84)

The effect of the multiple presentation of the images of gears and cogs, and the hand putting them together, culminates in Manhattan himself creating his new indestructible blue body, “reassembling the components in the correct sequence” (*Watchmen*, #04, p.9, pan.7), after three failed attempts in which he was able to create only ‘components’: a nervous system in the bathroom, a circulatory system in the kitchen, and a partially muscled skeleton by the perimeter fence – parts of a whole. The motifs presented throughout the narrative encompass not only the various watches, but also the picture and the hands touching over a pitcher of beer. It all appears now and then, woven into the narrative by the coherent reciter, helping with the impression that the narrative is ticking like a watch, and that it all will come together at the end. And it does. Dr. Manhattan builds... a glass watch. Or something that looks a lot like one. While doing so, he is wondering how it all came together in the end – who is responsible for his accident? Who makes the world? There’s the reference to God once again, to the watchmaker: “who makes the world?”, the character asks himself, considering his journey, who could be considered responsible for his accident? Perhaps the world is like a “clock without a craftsman” (p.28, pan.1), and no one is responsible – it’s always been there. Moore and Gibbons also draw from another source – Christian iconography – in order to make that point and turn Dr. Manhattan into a sort of blue Jesus. When he recreates himself, the position of his body reminds us of Jesus in the iconography, showing his wounds with his palms turned to the viewer (also Cristo Redentor, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). In the last issue, he walks on water:

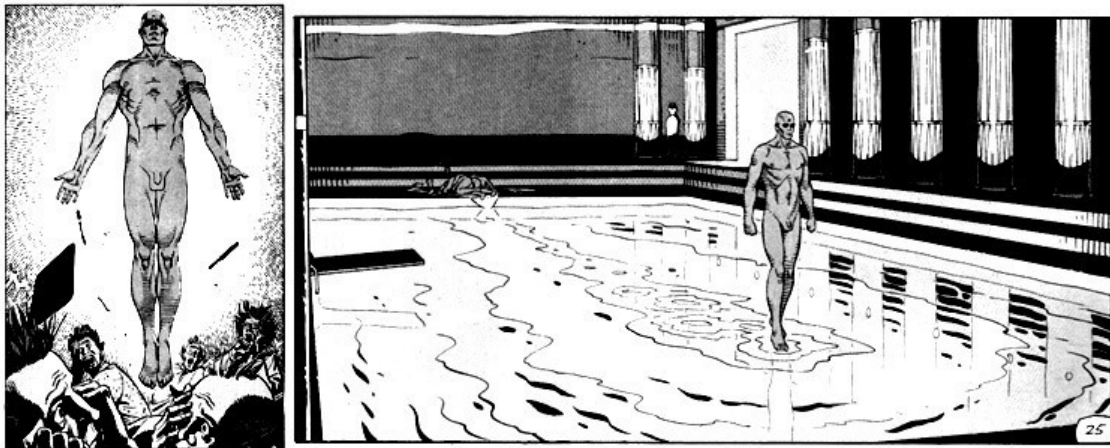


Figure 48 - Blue Jesus (*Watchmen*, #04, p.10; #12, p.25)

Though the character denies the possibility, all those references to God and a Watchmaker (from a guy who actually makes a watch in Mars) cannot remain unseen: perhaps, then, Dr. Manhattan is a god, as Janey Slater suggests on page eleven of the same chapter. In Dr. Milton Glass' *Super-powers and the Superpowers*, the character writes, commenting Dr. Manhattan's emergence:

What I said was 'God exists and he's American'. If that statement starts to chill you after a couple of moments' consideration, then don't be alarmed. A feeling of intense and crushing religious terror at the concept indicates only that you are still sane. (*Watchmen*, #04, p.31)

In chapter seven (p.23, pan.3), Laurie comments that "I need to see you, you appear... I mean, it's all so *Deus ex machina*...", to which he answers "the god out of the machine. Yes. I suppose it is...", practically acknowledging the comparison – and, incidentally, while they are on Mars, they talk near Olympus (the volcano, not the mount). All that to say that there is in *Watchmen* more than an insinuation of the incredible power of Dr. Manhattan throughout the narrative, and that he is consistently presented as akin to a god, though he never admits it. A situation that practically implores the pun "perhaps he doesn't believe in himself".

He's not only god, though: in the article *Bringing Light to the World: Watchmen from Hiroshima to Manhattan*, and also in the book *Minutes to Midnight*, Peter Sanderson makes a detailed account of the multiple references to Hiroshima and the atomic bomb (which were to a large degree accounted for here in the section dedicated to the setting of the novel) to argue that the strange glowing character is in fact a human representation of

atomic power. Or, as (Sally puts it in chapter two), an ‘H-bomb’, due to the hydrogen symbol on his forehead. It also makes sense when one thinks that he was accused of causing cancer – a residual effect of radiation exposure – and, similarly to the real world nuclear bomb, his presence triggered a reaction from other nations not dissimilar to the armaments run of the Cold War.

In the article *Watchmen: The Graphic Novel as Trauma Fiction*, already mentioned here, Brandy Ball Blake makes a different point: Dr. Manhattan is the embodiment of the idea of trauma. If one considers the traumatic moment as an event that has no closure, continuing to be experienced by the victim, as seen before, it makes a lot of sense. From the moment of his disintegration on (let us agree that this could have been perceived as traumatic by the disintegrated), Jon Osterman is not the same. He is changed, stuck in time, in an everlasting moment. He becomes progressively isolated from others (which is another possible effect of trauma, according to Blake – par.5), unable to have a fulfilling relation and ends up completely alienated. Jon is the other character to not hide behind a mask, but adopt another identity after a traumatic moment – when facing Veidt for the second time, Dr. Manhattan comments:



Figure 49 - Osterman and 'Me' (*Watchmen*, #12, p.18, pan.2-4)

So, there is a clear fence in his mind between Osterman, who he seems to suggest has survived the accident, though ‘he’ is incredibly superior to, up to the point of Veidt, the ‘world’s smartest man’, not being more threatening than a termite. This is another example of his utter isolation: men are like termites to him. Not only is his behavior consistent with

that of a traumatized person, but Dr. Manhattan himself is eligible as a representation of trauma, God or atomic power.

On a lighter note, Dr. Manhattan is naked. That could have been pointed out as a symptom of his isolation as well, and his inhuman nature (though his body shows his human anatomy, his nudity is totally out of conventions and mores, marking him as an outsider). This feature was treated with utter discretion throughout the comic: it is, to date, something quite unusual in superhero comics, directed to the mainstream market (a distinction made because there are comic books that have one or two panels of plot and frontal nudity throughout, though in the superhero genre, nudity was highly uncommon). So... unusual, and treated with discretion, since no one really knew how the public would receive the novelty. Except at the end of the narrative, where Dr. Manhattan, questioned by Adrian Veidt, enters a model of the solar system to disappear, denying him any closure or consolation:

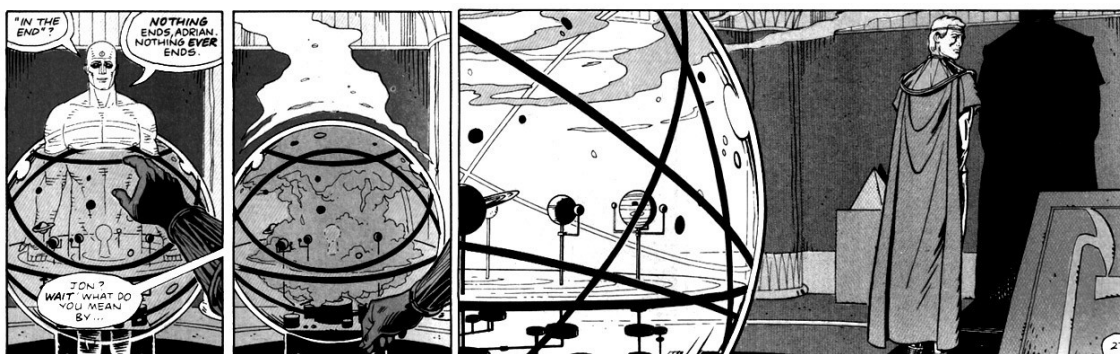


Figure 50 - Atomic Goodbye (Watchmen, #12, p.27, pan.5-7)

Note that Dr. Manhattan's genitalia is directly over the image of the sun, that shines through him, just after he comments that perhaps he will create human life somewhere and disappears, causing what looks like an atomic cloud caused by the explosion of the sun. Some may see in that an allusion to fertility (Manhattan will inseminate another planet with human life), others may see it as yet another eschatological reference to the eventual end of the solar system. Personally, I found it amusing to follow the line of thought suggesting that what Veidt really has in mind while looking at the model with the haunting shadow in front of him is that he would definitely have to buy another model of the solar system, now that Dr. Manhattan has touched it with his penis. And, with that lighter note, there is the opportunity to consider Manhattan in every aspect, following his own idea of time: not only through the goggles of eschatological images, references to deities or

trauma, but, in his own words, “simultaneous, an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time” (*Watchmen*, p.6, pan.6).

4.2.2.6 *Ozymandias*

A friend of mine (not the same as before) once told me he did not like the Adrian Veidt character. I answered that it was logical not to like Veidt, since he sacrificed half of New York in his attempt to stop the war, and the very attempt made Veidt more equitable to a comic book villain than to a hero. To which my friend answered “no, it’s because he’s a yuppie”⁴⁹. I had never thought of that.

Veidt was based on a Charlton character named *Peter Cannon... Thunderbolt*. According to Hudsick:

When the child of American medical workers in central Asia is orphaned by an epidemic, the boy is taken in by a Tibetan lamasery and trained with the aid of secret scrolls to achieve human perfection. He returns to America to live a life of contemplation and grace – whenever he isn’t fighting crime. (HUDSICK, 2011, loc.194-202)

The Charlton character had short blonde hair that stuck out of the mask, resembling Veidt to a degree, especially considering the idea of “human perfection” – since that is basically Veidt’s philosophy, unveil human’s ‘full potential’. According to the leaflet with Veidt’s Method presented in the special materials, the technique is based on biofeedback, Zen meditation and intellectual and physical exercises. After presenting chapters about mental and bodily exercises, the Veidt Method significantly assures the reader:

Our final chapter will help you to understand the organism that is the world, and your part in it. You will learn that one can either surrender responsibility for one’s actions to the rest of the social organism, to be pulled this way and that by

⁴⁹ According to Wikipedia, the yuppie culture, popular in the 80s, was defined by self-absorption, consumerism and hunger for social status. The word is derived from ‘young urban professional’, and referred to upper middle class or upper class workers, in their 20s or 30s.

society's predominating tensions, or that one can take control by flexing the muscles of the will common to us all, affecting our environment and responsibility. (*Watchmen*, #10, p.32)

While essentially a self-help book, another trend that started in the 1980s, the Veidt Method exposes some of the rational thinking that Veidt used to justify his actions – he was “taking control”. The relation with oriental religion is clear by the employment of Zen meditation in the method. Veidt does not profess to have achieved ‘human perfection’, as Thunderbolt had, but has enough physical prowess to catch a bullet in the air (which one might consider as a little far-fetched element of the plot) and overpower two experienced vigilantes armed with a laser in a matter of a few seconds and is also “the smartest guy in the world” (idea first presented by the comedian in *Watchmen* #02, p.10, pan.6, and reinforced by throughout the narrative), capable to divine the future simply by making connections between the images of multiple TC screens (a process that is not significantly different from the reading of the comic itself, put precisely in a turning point, with an upcoming conflict, when the reader is imagining what will happen next). Veidt does not have superpowers.

The image of the self-made man, Veidt is a self-made hero by his own account. According to Ness (2010, p.113-115), that means Veidt is not actually a hero in the mythical sense of the word, never having faced a real road of trials or, on that account, had a call for adventure: his monomythic journey is self-imposed, a construction and devise of his own mind. As a result, Veidt is only a hero in his own mind. Belittling his gift of dexterity and intellect, he even puts it for sale in the form of the Veidt Method – anyone can be a hero, *ergo* no one is. Veidt's resolution is also far from selfless: Adrian, similarly to Dreiberg, seeks contact with a father figure and to be in the “hall of legends”, but, whereas Dreiberg is only looking for a place to belong to, Veidt wants to be remembered as a legend, succeeding where even his hero failed (the reason why he assumed Rameses' aspect is precisely his disappointment with the staying power of Alexander's peace (*Watchmen*, #11, p.10, pan.7).

Dressed in regal colors, Ozymandias (or Veidt, since he is no longer a masked hero, but rather an exposed one) wears a crown; assumedly in his ‘king Rameses’ aspect, Veidt's purpose is not only to save the world, but also to guide it “towards utopia” (*Watchmen*,

#12, p.20, pan.1). Adrian's plan is to rule 'his' new world, that would be utopic and require a less obvious concept of heroism (*Watchmen*, #12, p.17, pan.1). In chapter seven of her book *Watchmen as Literature* (2010), entitled *Not so Black and White* (p.120-144), Ness makes a point of comparing Rorschach and Veidt as opposite characters, where she points out a very significant 'detail': Veidt's reaction to his victory, the moment he realizes his plan worked, does not take into account the millions of deaths he caused (though there is a moment in which he shows concern for the fact – later), but is rather a cry of victory, during which the hero is involved in a bright aura, similar to a theatrical spotlight: "I did it!" (*Watchmen*, #12, p.19, pan.7). According to Ness:

The rethorical presentation of Veidt and Rorschach's public personas ironically disguise their true motives, but only one of them has something to hide. Veidt's perfected appearance, planned early retirement, his obsessive hero-worship, and even his strategies for future business ventures are all tied to his world-uniting plan. Even if his intentions are good and he truly believes that his plan will bring lasting world peace, one cannot help thinking that his goal is self-servicing, and the means by which he achieves his goal – "on the backs of murdered innocents" are not justified (12.27). While one character's lies allow him to benefit from "history's greatest practical joke" (11.24), the other's strict adherence to transparency and truth brands him with a negative public perception, and ultimately leads to his demise. (NESS, 2010, p.143-144)

Fact is, Ness is bothered with the fact that Veidt seems to consider matters in terms of personal gain, and his journey as a hero is largely a creation of his own mind, working as an ego-boost that legitimizes his megalomania. He sees himself as a superior being, dresses like a king, is sexually ambiguous, spends a fortune in excentricities such as an Antarctic dome (which was not needed for any purpose other than reminding us of Superman's Fortress of Solitude, apparently, for Veidt already had an island and didn't need an extra place to keep his stuff) and plays with the fate of the world and the lives of millions while striving for personal gain (his perpetual little smile, sad eyes and calm expression, in view of what he eventually does, will always resemble the Comedian's button). A yuppie. My friend was right.

Since the historical character Ozymandias is best known by Shelley's poem that is quoted in the comic, and since the lines that follow the ones quoted in the poem are "Nothing beside remains. Round the decay./ Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare./

The lone and level sands stretch far away.”⁵⁰, this is usually interpreted as a sign that Veidt’s plane, scaring the world into peace through the teleportation of a paranormal alien squid from another dimension into the heart of New York, is doomed to fail in the end and that, as Alexander, all Veidt does is to achieve a temporary peace.

However, there is another dimension to the character that is important to mention, and it has to do with the until now belittled (that is, belittled in this work) pirate story, *Tales of the Black Freighter*. Actually, the title of the story is *Marooned – Tales* is the comics’ name. In it, a mariner (called "The Sea Captain"), having survived an attack of the Black Freighter, a pirate ship, has to find his way to his home town to warn his people of the pirate’s threat. To that end, he uses his dead shipmates as part of a raft, hoping that their bloated bodies full of gas would help to keep the raft afloat. Unfortunately, it is a stupid idea, and he is attacked by sharks, managing to kill one of them – the shark actually helps him to stay alive. Eventually, he cannot take the journey anymore, and decides to commit suicide: in an uncharacteristically comedic moment, the character jumps into the sea only to find himself ashore. Apparently he hadn’t bothered to look ahead and missed the wide beach right in front of him. Assuming that he is too late, and his village has already been pillaged by the pirates (without any evidence), he kills a young couple he assumes to have betrayed the villagers in exchange for the pirates’ protection and, under the guise of the moneylender he had just killed, he enters the village, bringing the cadaver of the young woman mounted on the other horse in order to avoid suspicion. Getting to his house, he immediately attacks the inhabitants as a revenge for his family, for, clearly, anyone living there would have murdered them. The not quite unexpected end to his enterprise is that the pirates had not arrived there – and he was beating up his wife in front of their children. Realizing his mistake, and the enormity of what he had done, he decides that society no longer had a place for him, and goes to the shore once again. There, he sees the Black Freighter: it has come for him. Swimming towards the ship, he leaves his former life behind, having become a monster.

The journey of the mariner, from his starting point, marooned at an unknown location, to his village, is marked by a series of violent and disgusting attitudes, necessary for the survival of the character and for him to achieve his goal, which was ultimately that

⁵⁰ Available at <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ozymandias/>>, access in 02/19/2014.

of protecting his family. To that end, he does whatever is needed, including eating a raw seagull (which he cannot keep down) and killing a shark *and* a couple. As the mariner points out in chapter five: “my raft grew increasingly grotesque, reflecting my own gradual transformation” (*Watchmen*, #05, p.21, pan.8). He grows increasingly mad, hallucinating conversations with his ‘rotten fellows’ and losing his mind. Finally, arriving at his village, he lashes against his own people, incapable of seeing what was right in front of him.

In a sense, both the mariner and Veidt’s trajectories are very aptly linked with Veidt’s words, talking to Dr. Manhattan in the last edition, after the confrontation with the heroes:

(...) I know people think me callous, but I’ve made myself feel every death. By day I imagine endless faces. By night... well, I dream about swimming towards a hideous... no. Never mine. It isn’t significant.” (*Watchmen*, #12, p.27, pan.1).

Veidt’s dream is very similar to the ending of the *Marooned* story in *Tales of the Black Freighter*: a character, with the conscience of his horrible actions weighing heavily on his mind, swimming towards a dreadful place, devoid of all hope of contact with society for having grown too grotesque during his trials:

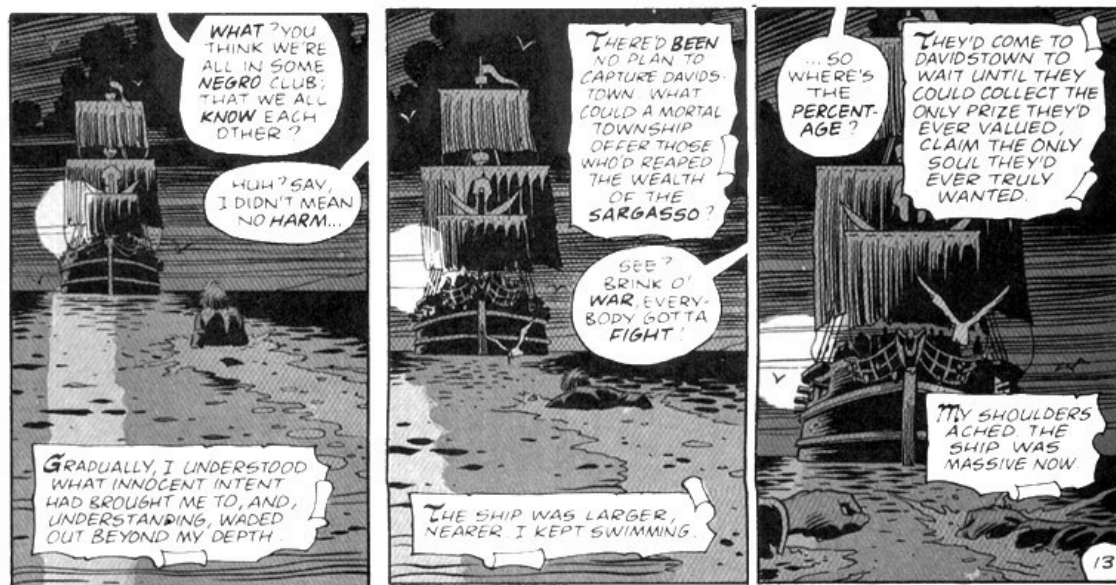


Figure 51 - The Mariner's Fate (*Watchmen*, #11, p.13, pan.5, 7 and 9)

That link bonds the fates of both characters, suggesting that Veidt’s decision to take action and enact his plan had him marooned, in a way – no longer capable of contact with Humanity. In that sense, I disagree with Ness in that the character acted uniquely for

personal gain: this view is not supported by the narrative. What the narrative suggests is that the weight of the many deaths is a heavy burden for Veidt. That can be understood by his pained face when Dr. Manhattan refuses to give him solace, disregarding his question about the morality of his actions (*Watchmen*, #12, p.27): that is something that he will have to live with. In fact, he seems to be diving into the large, dark shadow projected by his body.

This view is supported by the ‘writing on the wall’ in the scene where the giant squid towers over the bodies of Bernard and Bernie: an intrusion of the narrative voice that seems an awful lot like an attempt to justify Veidt’s actions (or to propose an alternative reading to the plot, since the interpretation is ultimately ‘entirely in the hands’ of the reader – that being the last sentence uttered in the narrative, just as Seymour’s hand is about to pick a letter from the discard box, maybe Rorschach’s journal). Among flying leaves that spell ‘war’, both in the newspaper and in the initials of ‘women against rape’; among the electric charger’s connector that resembles the smiley face in the beginning of the narrative; among an advertisement of the Veidt Method, which “will give you bodies beyond your wildest imaginings”, there is the phrase (a central element in the page, detached by the contrast with the dark blood of the creature): “or all die”.



Figure 52 - "Or All Die" (*Watchmen*, #12, p.6)

The last ‘L’ in ‘all’ is part of a leaf, flying on the air but ‘accidentally’ in the right place, at the right time. Of course, there are several alternatives for that resource: the wall could have cracked in the shape of an ‘L’ – there’s a monster sticking out of it. Or a piece of metal of the building’s structure. Or part of a graffiti previously inserted. But no, it is a piece of paper that happens to be exactly at the right place, at the right time, and with the right shape. That enhances the reader’s awareness of the intentionality of the paper’s

trajectory – it marks the narrative voice behind that sentence. Ness' interpretation of Veidt's attitudes is that, in the end:

The emotional shock of the event will eventually subside. In time, people will become less fearful of another alien attack, reopening the potential for human conflict, aggression, and war. Veidt's false monomyth and "ultimate boon" have not accomplished anything more than temporary peace (NESS, 2010, p.165).

But, as seen in the analysis of the novel's settings, things are changing. True, Rorschach's journal still has the potential to expose the farce and revert the peace achieved, but the idea in the last pages of the novel is of a new order, a new millennium. A more optimistic attitude towards the future. Maybe it is not so much about what could happen in the future, when fear dissipates, but what happens in the meantime, as nations grow closer to each other. Then again, this notions are mere possibilities suggested by the changes in the setting. Let us not delve into 'maybes'.

4.3 SETTING

Though the majority of the events of *Watchmen* are set in New York, the novel extends from Mars to the Antarctic Circle, from Vietnam to the bottom of the Hudson River, from Gila Flats base in an Arizona desert to Nepenthe Garden Retirement Home, in California. And, though the action takes place during a relatively short span of time (from October 12th to November 2nd of 1985), there are elements taking the story from 1928 (the point Hollis Mason's father started working at Moe Vernon's auto repair shop) to 1985's Christmas day. And even hundreds of years into the past, if one gets into the *mise en abyme* and thinks of the intradiegetic time of *Tales of the Black Freighter* as part of the *Watchmen* narrative (which is not the case in this work).

It makes sense to think about the events of the narrative, though, since a character's memories and recollections, though they may be presented in the text, do not necessarily take part in the narrative's action. So, the action is mainly set in New York City. The Mars settings are various. Dr. Manhattan takes the glass structure for a stroll, starting near the

South pole of the planet, passing through some box canyons and then near the Olympus Mons, Valles Marineris and land inside a crater in Argyre Planitia, where the smiley face is, the shattered glass of the structure after it is destroyed making it similar to the smear of blood on the Comedian's badge – though there is a suggestion in *Watching the Watchmen*, by Gibbons, in which he reports having seen a maze of valleys called Nodus Gordii, Gordian Knots, but it is uncertain if those are the ones described in the narrative. Other settings are the governmental fallout shelter (which remains unnamed and at an undisclosed location), Sally Jupiter's retirement home in California (the name of the home, according to Doug Atkinson in the companion *The Annotated Watchmen*, is a reference of a drug used by the ancients as a way to drown pain and sorrow, that is, to cause oblivion), the New York location near Bernie's newsstand, which became iconic and pretty much as important as some of the reoccurring characters of the novel. The Rockefeller Military Research Center, the base in which Dr. Manhattan and Laurie live in the beginning of the story, is also at an unknown location. Furthermore, in the narrative appear also the bottom of the Hudson River, Sing-Sing prison, Dan Dreiberg's home and base of operations, Karnak, Veidt's refuge in Antarctic, Gila Flats Arizona base (in which Jon Osterman suffered the accident), the *New Frontiersman* office (supposedly not near the newsstand, for the journalists survived the giant squid incident – and the delivery of Rorschach's journal went through two postmen and a distribution center), and so on. Merely listing the locations does not do much for understanding a narrative's setting. The setting becomes important when it influences and is influenced by the narrative, so determining the places is not as important as determining these influences.

Setting is important in *Watchmen* in three different ways: first, the mad *level of details* and elements in the scenes presented helps influence the reading of the work; second, the *world of Watchmen* is purposefully different from the real world in some aspects; third, the setting is recognizable, to a comics reader, by its *similarities* with another dimension of comics, which is its history as a medium. These characteristics will now be addressed. However, since the objective of any scientific work is to further the knowledge in relation to the subject, and not merely restate what has already been said, this work will not linger into the similarities between the real world and *Watchmen's*. not because it is not relevant, but because it has been done before, and with a very comprehensive level of detail (just like the settings, one might add). This analysis is

present in Doug Atkinson's *The Annotated Watchmen*⁵¹ and is freely accessible and downloadable by anyone interested. The analysis made hereafter is not as complete in its details, but it is more deep into some of their meanings.

The level of details in the settings, to be mentioned again in the analysis of the work's drawing style, is very high. Things like street signs, buildings positions and forms, are coherent and shown from several angles throughout the narrative. That helps to give the impression of a consistent, coherent world and increase the realistic sensation the work provides. In *Watching the Watchmen* (2009, p.109), among other sketches, schemes and maps made for the production of the Graphic Novel (including a large version of the Comedian's button and the Nostalgia bottle swirling in mid-air, drawn separately in order to orient the artist in maintaining their proportions throughout the narrative), Gibbons included a sketch of the area near Bernie's newsstand, which appears several times, as said, in several angles and with an intricate level of detail.

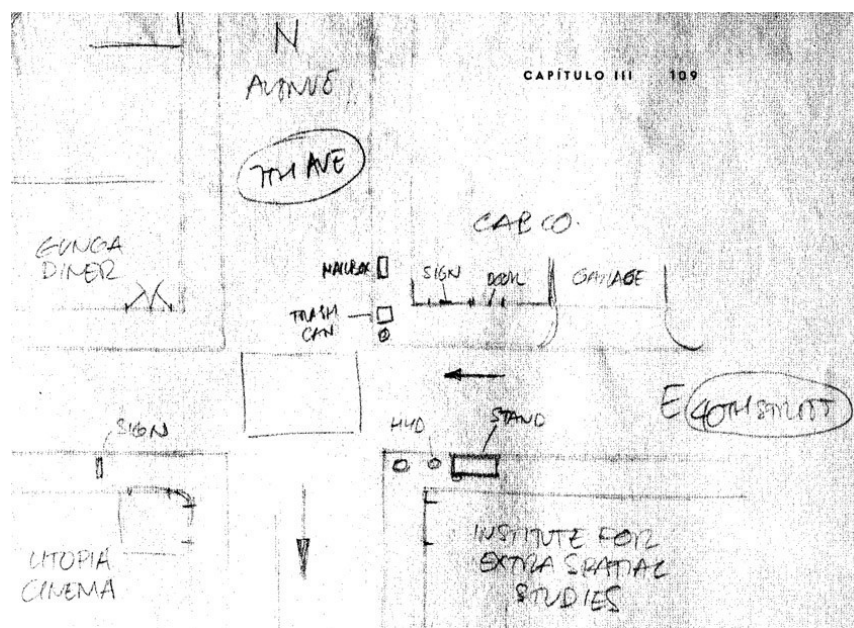


Figure 53 - Gibbon's Scheme for the Newsstand Setting (GIBBONS, 2009, p.109)

Even features such as cardinal points and the placement of signs and trash cans are annotated in the scheme, which is later developed in more detail, each building complete with its architecture already in perspective. Such detailed work was never seen before in the world of comics. If the style helped create a credible universe, the consistency of

⁵¹ The references can be found in HTML format (with an option of downloading freely a .PDF made version) at <<http://www.capnwacky.com/rj/Watchmen/world.html>>, last access at 02/23/2014.

elements, such as time and the surroundings of the characters, was what gave the sensation of, in McCloud's words, "a sensually, stimulating world" (MCCLOUD, 1994, p.43). Not a safe world, or a colorful world, though: a world of strong, powerful colors (used in a way to heighten the emotional content of the images) and grim, violent characters. Moreover, the multiple suggestions of impending war and references to a nuclear threat are pervasive in the work, and appear not only in the titles of newspapers and magazines or in TV shows, but also in the sceneries. The interesting point is that, though the (main) characters are not directly invested in this problem, the whole story of the war is told in the background.

The narrative starts with a gutter full of blood crossed by a man with a sign saying "the end is nigh", while the narration talks of a dog with a burst stomach. That alone should suffice to make the argument, of a grim world, with impending doom, but it doesn't hurt to develop it a bit. The two detectives discussing the murder, say that in such a big city a lot of 'crazy things' happen, to the point of a murder not needing a reason (*Watchmen*, p.04, pan.2). In a newspaper on page 09, panel 1, "Russia protests U.S. advances in Afghanistan". On page 18, panel 4, the newspaper on Veidt's table alerts the reader that "Nuclear Doomsday Clock Stands at Five to Twelve, Warn Experts". In the second chapter, the Comedian warns the people about the danger of war in Veidt's recollection (p.9-11), while Manhattan's memories bring the reader to Vietnam and the assassination of the pregnant woman, and Dreiberg's thoughts point to riots. All this happens during a funeral. On page 20, panel 2, a newspaper carried by the wind says that "soviets will not tolerate US adventurism in Afghanistan". On page 25, panel 1, a sign announces a sex show with Enola Gay and the Little Boys (a reference to Enola Gay and Big Boy, respectively the plane and the bomb that were used in Hiroshima). The chapter ends with collected moments of the Comedian's life, intertwined with images of the murder. The third chapter starts with a radiation sign indicating a fallout shelter being put on the street, in the Promethean Cab Co. building, and Bernie talking about seeing 'the signs'. Then Bernie talks to Rorschach in his Walter Kovacs disguise, while he carries the sign. After Dr. Manhattan's fatidic interview on the TV show, the motif of the radiation sign is used again, this time in Dr. Manhattan's door. The issue ends with the newspaper saying that "Russians invade Afghanistan" and the president and specialists discussing the probable outcomes of a nuclear war, while Dr. Manhattan walks peacefully on Mars' surface. The expectancy is that nuclear war might happen within a week (*Watchmen*, #03, p.28, pan.2).

War takes a holyday (well... nuclear war, at least) in chapter four, as the origin of Dr. Manhattan is presented, but there is the reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki that motivated Jon Osterman's father to direct his son's career toward atomic physics, and the reference to an H bomb on Manhattan's forehead – besides Manhattan's name (from the same project that generated the atom bomb). Also, if more was needed, Einstein's quotation with his regret for what had been done with his findings. In the next chapter, there is the murder of two children by their father, who wanted to spare them from the horrors of nuclear war, followed by a conversation near Bernie's newsstand, about the war consuming the world, with a newspaper suggesting that "Afghanistan's fighting spreads" (*Watchmen*, #03, p.8, pan.4). On page eleven, a group of knot tops are shown painting silhouettes of lovers on walls, reminding us of Hiroshima's shadows, in which the light of the bomb actually marked walls with the silhouettes of vaporized people. The next page brings yet another news line: "Afghanistan: is Pakistan next?". On page 18, panel 2, a youth is arrested, screaming about president Nixon and bombs. The poster shown on page 21 (pan.7-9), "Gay Women Against Rape", spells 'war' a little too easily for the reader to think that there is any attempt from the narrator to be discrete about it, in my opinion. Also, there are silhouetted lovers in front of Moloch's building (*Watchmen*, #05, p.23, pan.4 and p.25, pan.1). These multiple images of silhouettes are reinforced by the silhouettes of Rorschach's mother and her client the next issue (*Watchmen*, #06, p.03, pan.2). In Dr. Malcom final stroll, on page 27, he comments a newspaper article that says: "Russians claim that fighting spilling into Pakistan was accidental. Nixon says U.S. will meet continued soviet aggression with 'maximum force'. Inside article on nuclear alert procedure. It says that any dead family members should be wrapped in plastic garbage sacks and placed outside for collection. On 7th Avenue, the Hiroshima lovers were still trying inadequately to console one another" (*Watchmen*, #06, p.27, pan. 2-3). This same newspaper is shown open on the next page, as the character considers how fragile life is (pan.3).



Figure 54 - Hiroshima Lovers' Motif

In the next chapter, Dan and Laurie watch TV and learn that Nixon said that America would ‘consider her options’ due to the Russian advance toward the borders of Pakistan. While Russia assures everyone to be only securing their borders, specialists “see only opportunistic hostility in the wake of Dr. Manhattan’s departure” (*Watchmen*, #07. P.12). Dan remembers Hiroshima week and burned bodies on the same page. Red D’Eath, lead singer of the Pale Horses, says goodnight on page 15 (pan.4), and the next two pages bring Dan’s erotic dream that finishes with a literal ‘bang’, a nuclear explosion. On page 20 he admits to feeling vulnerable and impotent, due to both the masked killer and the war. In chapter eight, Bernie refers to the movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still* as: “this space guy comes to warn everybody about nuclear war...” (p.13, pan.2). In chapter nine, Laurie convinces Dr. Manhattan to help and save the world. Chapter ten starts in Defcon 2, as the president arrives at a fallout shelter and waits for the inevitable. On page 5, Dan mentions that nuclear war will rise within the week and there is nothing to do about it. On page 13, Bernie is talking about doomsday while reading a paper that says “eastern Europe: tanks mass as conflict escalates” (pan.9). On page 23, Bernie is again complaining about war and talking about atomic weapons. The next page shows the delivery of Rorschach’s journal in the *New Frontiersman* office, where the editor is worried with the edition at hand and the impending war. According to him, “the birds could be flying right now” (p.24, pan.9). In chapter eleven, Bernie talks about dropping bombs, though there is no relation to the war, as Aline walks by a lover’s silhouette. The fallout shelter sign also appears on that page. Following that development, Aline and Joey start a fight in front of the sign, which will eventually attract several characters. The fight (and consequently the sign) appears more clearly on pages 20, 23 and the final one, 28, which gradually dissolves in white light as

Veidt's fake alien is teleported to the Institute for Spacial Studies, killing half of New York.

There may have been more unrelated appearances of the fallout shelter sign or the silhouetted lovers (or Hiroshima lovers). It is not as important to catch them all as it is to understand that these images, pervasive in the narrative, help to build the graphic novel's mood. Though the main characters are not directly involved in the war, the war is omnipresent, involving them, framing every turn of the plot. There is an important shift from that paradigm in the last pages of the work, most significantly on page 31 of the twelfth edition, where the same location (that is, the place near Bernie's newsstand) is shown.

In panel 1 the reader realizes Bernie's newsstand is no longer there, nor is the Institute for Spatial Studies (in its place is a Pyramid construction site, a 'new deal' folder pasted to its wall). The shape of the street car charger has changed to a more futuristic form, and the city workers are taking off the fallout shelter signs. Instead of the Gunga Diner, there is a 'Burger and Borscht'. The sign in front of the former Utopia cinema shows "new utopia", in a session of 'The Sacrifice' and 'Nostalgia'. In panel 2, a news machine (perhaps an ironic comment on Bernie's business or Bernie himself) shows that 'RR' (Ronald Reagan) may run in the next elections. In panel 3 a poster with US and Russia's flags announcing "new world: one accord" is being pasted on the wall of Promethean Cabs and Limo (now 'under new management'), and, in panel 4, Veidt's new line of perfume is announced: Millenium. "This is the time, these are the feelings". Everything is new or under construction, the danger of nuclear war seems to have dissipated, and even the graffiti on the wall is optimistic ("quantum jump" and "new deal" appear in panel 4). The shift from a place of darkness and desperation to a place of hope and forward-looking is made uniquely with shifts in the setting of the narrative, which can also be seen as mainly responsible for the narrative's mood and feeling of impending doom.

Another interesting point is that the world of *Watchmen* is not exactly the real world. In the article entitled *58 Varieties: Watchmen and Revisionism*, Julian Darius creates an interesting analogy between the can of beans Rorschach is slurping down in Dan's kitchen in the first issue (p.10, pan.8) and the whole revisionist approach to the

diegetic world of *Watchmen*. His point is that the can is a reference to real-life Heinz company, who announced ‘57 varieties’ on their cans – not 58, as in the narrative. According to Darius, “we have 57; they have 58 – close enough to be “realistic” from our point of view but with one notable addition: the super-hero.” (DARIUS, 2011, loc.1729-37)

And so it is: there are slight differences between the real world and *Watchmen*’s reality, only nothing exceedingly strange. Cigarettes have changed into a strange glass device, but are still recognizable as such. Cars are electric, but happen to continue being cars. Some technological advances can be inferred from the narrative – quite significant ones, at that. It is suggested that this is because Dr. Manhattan’s powers and influence in History allowed for different branches of technology to be developed, electric cars and genetic mutations (in the four-legged chicken being served at the restaurant where Dan and Laurie dine, in Bubastis and in the giant squid itself) being the most conspicuous in the novel. The zeppelins are also significant, for they are sort of a recurring motif in science fiction and comics, and are usually present in alternate realities. It makes sense. Zeppelins started being developed in this reality, but quickly became obsolete as more agile devices, such as jets and helicopters, became available. An alternate reality might as well have decided to keep them around. *Watchmen*’s world has Gunga Diner, a chain of Indian restaurants, in place of McDonald’s or other burger franchises. Perhaps the most significant of changes, though, is indeed the superhero.

According to Hollis Mason’s account of his own story (*Under the Hood*), after seeing the first edition of Action Comics, in 1938, and reading a story of Superman for the first time, he was inspired by the colors and the lights, and the pure nature of the comics, which didn’t remind him of the dark detective pulps of the time. Learning about Hooded Justice’s first appearance, Mason decided to become Nite Owl – a superhero in real life. Soon there were several of them, enough to create the first superteam, the Minutemen in 1939, with the Comedian, Dollar Bill, Mothman, Silhouette, Hooded Justice, Silk Spectre and Captain Metropolis (and Nite Owl, of course). The Comedian’s rape attempt on Sally got him thrown out of the group. In 1946, Silhouette was revealed as homosexual, and Dollar Bill was shot in 1947, after getting his cape stuck in a revolving door. Sally Jupiter (Silk Spectre) quit the group in 1947, to get married. The group dissolved in 1949, not without inspiring a young generation.

This young generation was composed of Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan, Ozymandias, The Comedian, and Captain Metropolis (both still in action), and new versions of Nite Owl (Dan Dreiberger) and Silk Spectre (Laurie Juspezyk). They come together in 1966 in order to form a new group, The Crimebusters, an effort that was shunned by the Comedian, who called their attention to more pressing matters, such as politics and war. The heroes kept on with their adventures for some years, and in 1977, with popular opinion against the vigilantes and a police strike in protest, the Keene Act was signed and most of the superheroes were considered illegal. Rorschach kept on as a vigilante, and so did the Comedian and Dr. Manhattan, both with government sanction. The assassination of the Comedian, in 1985, is the key factor that eventually unites the characters into a single adventure (though their main action is to fail to stop Veidt's plan). That is the setting in the beginning of *Watchmen*.

The setting is also familiar for other reasons.

In the article *Reassembling the Components in the Right Order: Why you Shouldn't Read Watchmen First* (2011), Walter Hudsick presents a history of the superhero genre. The first appearance of Superman in *Action Comics #1*, in 1938 (as it was in *Watchmen's* narrative) is generally considered the beginning of the so-called Golden Age of Comics. A commercial success, the title inspired several other editors into adventuring in the genre. Batman was created in *Detective Comics #27*, in the following year. Other superheroes, such as The Flash, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, were created during the span of this success, until the end of the World War II.

According to Hudsick, "all of a sudden, there were masked, caped, winged, hooded and helmeted characters everywhere; every beast, bird or bug became an inspiration" (HUDSICK, 2011, loc.310-18). With the beginning of World War II in 1939, the superheroes proliferated with renewed vigor, now with a patriotic duty to perform. Of course, things could not continue this way:

What follows most golden ages is a dark period, and the post-war years were just that for comics. (...) The comics began to coast, bereft of the external force that had driven their rapid growth. Super-heroes began to wane in popularity, while lurid horror and crime comics stepped up to fill the void. (HUDSICK, 2011, loc.318-25)

Added to that low tide, there was a lot of negative publicity against comics, mostly due to the efforts of psychiatrist Frederic Wertham. In 1948 Wertham published two articles condemning the medium, and in 1954, after years of denouncing the medium as prone to cause antisocial behavior in readers, due to its violent and covertly sexual contents, published the book *Seduction of the Innocent*. He appeared before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency to testify against the medium, leading to the creation of the CCA – the Comics Code Authority, a self-censorship board that worked to conform the comics to the standards determined by the Subcommittee. The comics that regulated their content would appear with a stamp on their covers, deeming them “approved by the CCA”. According to Hudsick:

So complete was the devaluation of the super-hero that when DC Comics successfully introduced a new hero in the summer of 1956, the event would come to be regarded as the start of an era not called the Silver Age of Comics. Appearing first as a one-issue tryout in *Showcase #4*, the Flash took his name and super-speed powers from an earlier character who hadn’t been seen in the newsstands in nearly a decade. The writers who created this new version had also worked on the earlier Flash, and the new Flash was even shown as a fan of those wartime comics, taking his heroic name in tribute to his “fictional” predecessor (HUDSICK, 2011, loc. 334-42).

This ‘Silver Age’ marks another moment when the heroes multiplied in the stands, many of them modern reworkings of previous incarnations, although this *renaissance* also introduced some thematic novelties, such as more realistic renderings of the characters and more adult themes – comics that dealt with serious issues, such as race and drugs proliferated in the 1960s. In his thesis *Superheroes: An Analysis of Popular Culture’s Modern Myths* (2011), Ryan Reynolds makes a very able summary of the history of the genre – and then poses his own ideas about the classification of the ages in which this history is divided. He has a different view of the story of the medium, mainly due to a very compelling reason: the distinction between Golden and Silver Ages is based on sales and creation of characters, not on any thematic evolution, of the form – and, so, to a large degree arbitrary. Therefore, according to him, the publication of *Fantastic Four #1*, with characters that were imbued not only with superhuman qualities, but also human defects (and so thematically new), should mark the beginning of the Silver Age. While I agree with Reynolds’ view, the version adopted here is the official one, if only to mark the

different heroes and the re-imagining of those heroes in a more modern context as two different phases and avoid confusion. The influence of the CCA lasted for decades, until the mid-80s, where comics started to diversify and seek to treat more adult content.

We have, then, amazing similarities between the history of comics and the history of the superheroes in *Watchmen*. The only difference is that, while superhero comics are popular to this day in the real world, in *Watchmen*, where real people assumed the role, the public seemed to lose interest (and even revolt against the heroes) and turn to other genres (notably pirate comics, which is as random a concept as superhero comics). Other than that, we have large groups of heroes spurting in the wake of World War II, carrying on their business for some time and then becoming stagnated (Minutemen). Then came a new generation, composed partly of re-imaginings of the previous heroes, which was shunned and submitted to regulation (Crimebusters – the regulation being the Keene Act, instead of the CCA). The real heroes in *Watchmen* (considering Ness's assessment of the monomythic journey of the characters in the book), Dan Dreibern and Laurie, are stuck, incapable of development, until they dare to go against the law – which is part of the process of becoming natural heroes.

More than that, if this approach is considered, the whole work becomes at the same time self-referential and metalinguistic – a comment on the history of comic books inside a comic book (which has a comic book inside, by the way).

4.4 TIME

Presenting a complete analysis of how time works in *Watchmen* would be an enterprise not dissimilar to unscrambling an egg. Time is so (purposefully) mixed up that it is an effort to understand what happened when, let alone organizing every panel into the chronological order. That couldn't be done anyway, because there are occasions in which a same situation is presented more than once, from different perspectives (a good example of that would be the Crimebuster's meeting of 1966, recounted several times, particularly the scene where the Comedian burns the graphic).

All the events in the plot happen in little more than three weeks, from the assassination of the Comedian (which takes place on Friday, October 11th) to the day half of New York died (November 2nd of 1985). Then there is an epilogue of sorts on December 25th, at Sally's retirement home, and a scene of New York which is not placed in the chronology. Considering that in less than a month in diegetic time there is an assassination, a funeral, a psychiatric analysis in four sessions, a couple falling in love, the unveiling of a secret plot to destroy half of a city and a confrontation in the Antarctic circle, one can consider the narrative reasonably fast paced. If one thinks about the amount of time covered by the special materials and the metadiegetic stories and the internal and external analepsis (all the prolepsis inside the story take place during the events, being internal), the timeline of the story is a lot more ample: it goes from Hollis Mason's infancy, previous to his moving to the city in 1928, to the epilogue on Christmas 1985.

4.4.1 Order

In *The Annotated Watchmen*, Doug Atkinson includes Hollis Mason's birthday date (1916), but there are no events related to it. Even so, his timeline takes into consideration historical events as well as events in other original franchises in Watchmen's diegetic world, such as the RPG game plot, partially written by Moore. His timeline, therefore, is more complete and comprehensive, and takes into account other time indications not particular to the main storyline, such as character's origins and recollections⁵². The table below, made with real models from a 1985 calendar, refers to the dates and references found in the diegesis (dates mentioned or marked in calendars or newspapers and logical conclusions about mentions of weekdays) as related to the main events of the plot (not taking into consideration characters' recollections or metadiegetic stories). The black square is to mark the day Veidt's plan comes to completion, killing half of New York:

⁵² Atkinson's table is too extensive to be fully quoted here, but can be checked at <<http://www.capnwacky.com/rj/watchmen/timeline.html>>, last access at 02/22/2014.

October 1985

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					Comedian's assassination (night). 11	Rorschach investigates, then warns Dreiberg. 12
Rorschach talks with Veidt and Manhattan. Dan and Laurie have dinner. 13			Blake's funeral. Laurie visits Sally. Rorschach checks Moloch and hears about the 'Joke'. 16			Manhattan's interview and departure. Dan and Laurie are mugged. 19
Laurie is 'fired'. Rorschach delivers Dan's newspaper. Rus. invades Afghan. Gov. preps for war. 20	Rorschach 'visits' Moloch. (2am) Veidt ass. attempt Rorschach is arrested (11:30pm) 21				Rorschach's first psychiatric inf. with Dr. Malcom. Rorschach attacks inmate. 25	Rorschach's second psych interview with Dr. Malcom. 26
	3dr psych int. Dr. Malcom ruins dinner with Randy and Diana. 28			Halloween. Det. Fine visits Dan. Riot at Sing-sing. D&L free Rorsch. Dr. Manh. takes 31	Laurie to Mars. Hollis is killed. US president arrives in the shelter.	

November 1985

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					Veidt leaves to Karnak (4:30am) Rorschach leaves journal behind. 1	Dan&Rosch. get to Karnak. Half of NY dies. Dr. M. and L. reappear in NY, and go to Karnak.

After that, there is the meetin between Sally and 'Sam and Sandra Hollis' at Christmas.

Table 10 - Main Storyline's Time Table

These are the main events in the story that are placeable in time, but not all the events in the story. As seen, *Watchmen* plays with parallelism throughout the narrative, not only in alternating panel color schemes (such as in Moloch's place) but also in actions that run parallel to each other, following or not the regular lay-out of the pages. Similarly, recollections of the past are used in several instances (as Ness pointed out, *Watchmen* is a 'story of storytellers'), analepses fending the action and the flow of the narrative in the present. It is important to point out, though, that the fact that panels do not alternate actions inside a single page does not mean that the action does not run parallel to others – in fact, one thing that makes the narrative in *Watchmen* so complex is the fact that sometimes this parallelism is elusive. The narration is based on the alternation of scenes from several different scenarios (as seen in the section about settings) that eventually merge together, giving an impression of synchronicity. The metadiegetic narrative and/or narration, *Tales of the Black Freighter*, appearing consistently only in the scenes with Bernard newsstand, can be understood as the reading of Bernie superposed to the panels, and as such part of the diachronic flow of time.

There are numerous instances of anachrony in the text. In the first chapter the detective's investigation is interposed with scenes from the Comedian's assassination,

which appears again in the next chapter and finally in chapter eleven. Always presented intercalated with the narrative, the scenes from the crime are red and commented by the narration of the characters in the main storyline, sometimes ironically. In the second chapter (p.01-03), the conversation between Laurie and Sally is marked by the alternating parallel action of the Comedian's funeral. In chapter three (p.06-07), while Laurie is leaving Dr. Manhattan there is the parallel interview with Janey Slater, and the physical disposition of the panels reinforces this parallelism (the big internal panels are dedicated to Laurie, the small external ones to Janey). Another instance of parallel action starts on page 9, when Dr. Manhattan's preparation and interview is interposed with Dan and Laurie's mugging. The action maintains the chessboard disposition of nine panels with alternated settings for two pages, then changes into a lay-out that is maintained for six pages (p.11-16), with larger panels alternating between the different contents.

Chapter four tries to present its main character's story through the character's point of view, including the peculiar perception of time that the character has – as seen, Dr. Manhattan lives in a hypermoment, a timeless instant ripped out of time. As a result, the panels do not always display a chronological action (though a chronological approach is sometimes necessary to establish different events in the character's past), but time is mixed up, united only by the character's narration of his own story (what would that be – metaautodiegesis?). That narration, however, presents a problem: despite the fact that time is measured with surgical precision during the whole issue (the action's duration is two hours, twelve seconds⁵³), the only verb tense used to refer to the panels containing the action, present as well as future and past, is the present, which helps the effect of scrambling the time. The action that takes place in the diegetic time of the issue is Dr. Manhattan dropping the photo and building the clock-like structure in the surface of Mars. But those actions are shown simultaneously with several others (though they are emphasized by repetition, and seem prominent in the narration because of that).

⁵³ That is, the edition starts with Manhattan's announcement of his dropping the picture in twelve seconds and ends with the meteorite shower, shown as two hours distant in the same panel the picture is dropped.

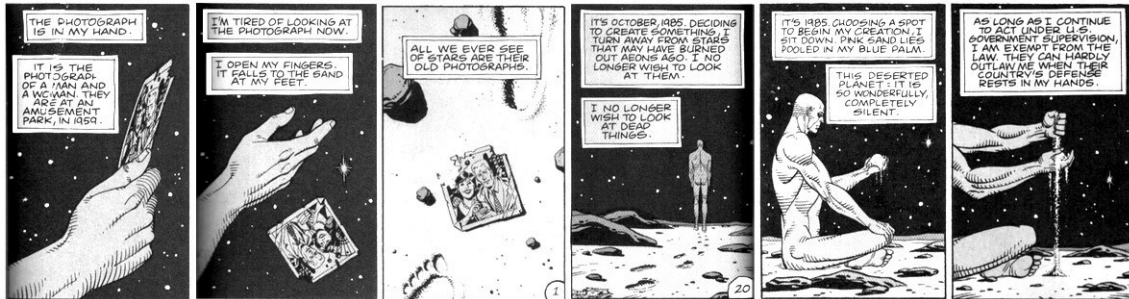


Figure 55 - Diegetic Actions of Chapter 04 (*Watchmen*, #04)

Chapter five seems to abandon parallel action for the sequence of sceneries that succeed each other until the middle of the issue – and then are repeated in inverted order (including panel lay-outs) up to the end, creating a symmetrical edition. Chapter six is marked by Rorschach’s recollections of his story, and therefore by analepsis. There are four “journeys to the past” in this chapter, triggered by the character’s narration or by a carton of the Rorschach test (cause of the first analepsis). In the first journey (Kovacs and his abusive mother), the memory is not commented and presents no alternation with the present: no panels in the present are inserted in its midst. The second memory is that of Kovacs attacking two bullies, and also presents no parallel action (unless one considers the memory as a parallel action – which one doesn’t). The third memory (Kovacs’ work with feminine clothes and the assassination of Kitty Genovese) is sectioned by a panel in the diegetic present, right in the middle of the page. The fourth (early adventure years) and fifth (murder of Claire Roche) memories are narrated by Kovacs. The fourth analepsis is similar to the previous cases, in which the narration of Dr. Manhattan’s story or Janey Slater’s interview is superposed to the images in the panels, and the images show parallel situations, present and recollections. They are alternated with a rhetorical lay-out, where the size of the panels indicates that the past becomes larger than the present. The last memory, though, is not sectioned by the present, as if more immersive, showing how much influence Rorschach’s memories are having on Dr. Malcom’s psyche, perhaps.

If one understands that Daniel’s dream takes place in time (and one does understand so) and the images on TV do not consist of a parallel action (they are rather part of the scene with the dialogue between Dan and Laurie), then chapter seven presents no parallel action nor analepsis or prolepsis, despite Dan’s narration of his story and the brief comment about Twilight Lady (they are not directly presented). In chapter eight, though, there is an interesting use of the lay-out (p.10-15): while the action unfolds in six panels on the top of the page (the *New Frontiersman* composition, a scene from Veidt’s

island and the prisoners trying to reach Rorschach's cell during the riot at Sing-Sing, respectively), Dan and Laurie's preparation for Rorschach's rescue lays parallel to that action and in silent panels, on the bottom of the pages – until they arrive at Sing-Sing, where the composition is abruptly inverted and the silent panel with the impressive scene of Archie's arrival occupies most of the page. The action then runs diachronically until page 27, where the attack on Hollis makes him dizzy and he hallucinates a fight with old enemies. This is also a dream of sorts, and takes no time in the events of the plot, but it is interesting to note that these events happen in the checkboard-like lay-out, mixing both imaginary and diegetic time.

In chapter nine, time is scrambled again. The issue starts with a prolepsis of a bottle of Nostalgia swirling through space and then goes on to a metalepsis of Dr. Manhattan teleporting Laurie to Mars, from Laurie's point of view. Prompted by Dr. Manhattan, Laurie starts to have her own recollections, which by the end of the narrative will merge together into an instant of epiphany. Usually starting in the last panel of the page, the recollections (or metalepses) direct her, respectively, to: a day in her infancy where she broke a glass toy while overhearing her parent's conversation; a day in her teen years when old friends were visiting her home and Hollis mentions his biography; the 1966 reunion of the Crimebusters, where she meets the Comedian afterwards; a banquet in 1973 where she gets drunk and throws a glass of bourbon onto Blake's face. Throughout the narrative, though, there is the insertion of mysterious panels with the bottle of perfume flying on the air (as seen, those are prolepses of a future moment). Then there is an effect similar to that shown in Rorschach's account of the Comedian's life: as she achieves her moment of realization, images that have used in these metalepses are called forth again, each one evoking the full scene in the mind of the reader, as if the mere juxtaposition of two panels used on other narratives invited a larger understanding of the panels, where both previous narratives ought to be taken into consideration.



Figure 56 - Repeated Images (*Watchmen* #09)

As that happens, Laurie's voice becomes incoherent and stuttering, as she is finally driven to the final words, representing her breakthrough in learning that Blake was in fact her father. While that happens, she throws the bottle of Nostalgia against a wall, breaking their glass castle (a symbolic image of abandoning her childish perspective and facing reality). The bottle is shown in the sequence only in the last three panels of page 24, but is present throughout the narrative:

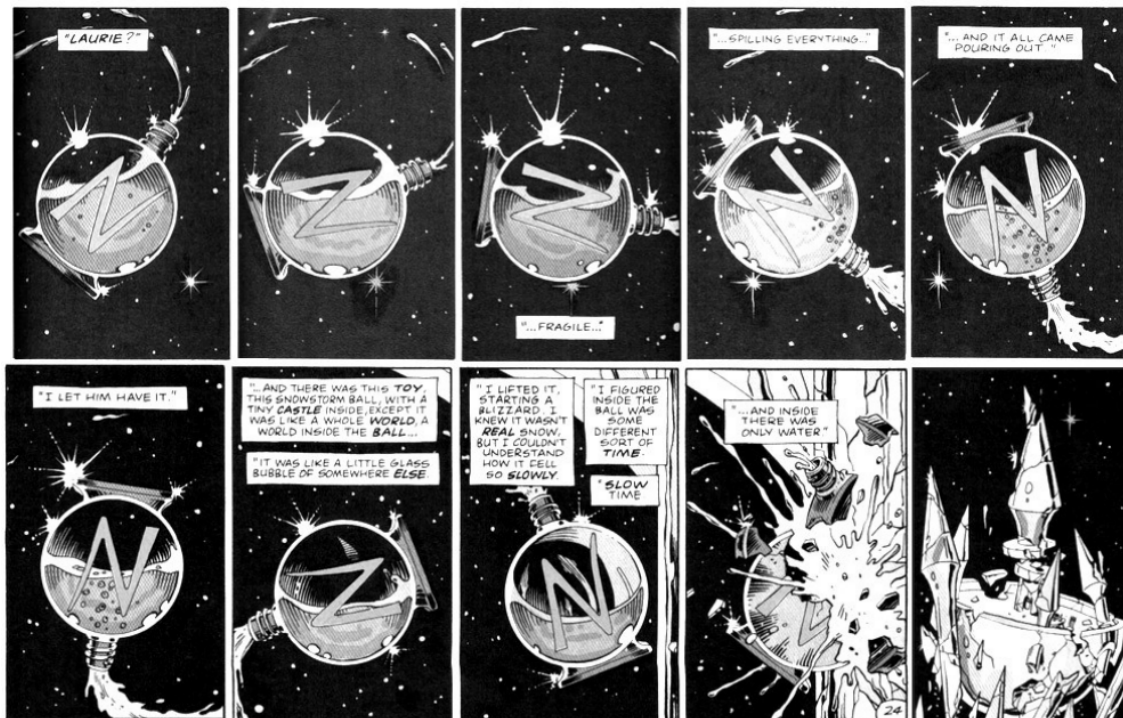


Figure 57 - The Complete Bottle Sequence (*Watchmen* #09)

The use of images to represent whole narratives helps bringing all the stories together in the end. The castle in the toy glass can be seen as a parallel with the castle in

the story, and more symbolic even than that: though the watch-like structure is made of glass, the glass is made from the sand of Mars, relating the whole structure with the fall of a sandcastle, or (since the castle indeed flies) “building a castle in the air”, that is a naive dream or plan for the future.

Chapter ten presents no anachronies, and in chapter eleven Veidt tells his story, first to his servants (who are poisoned during the process) and then to Rorschach and Daniel. During these narrations, the action in the analepses is presented together with the telling of the story, similarly to instances already commented before. On page 24, though, a new layer is added to that parallelism just as Veidt’s story gets to the point of the Comedian’s assassination: there is an arrangement of panels similar to the one preceding Rorschach’s rescue from Sing-Sing, where the bottom of the page links the three panels in order to tell a parallel story. In this case, though, there is the story told by Veidt, the analepses into the story that is being told (the Comedian’s assassination is not focalized by Veidt, though, in my opinion – more on that later) *and* this additional layer in the bottom of the page, showing a brawl between Aline and Joey near Bernard’s newsstand. The next edition does not present anachronies, either. Even so, one might say, given the story above, that the purposefully complicated order of events and juxtaposition of times and frames is employed to create not only a feeling of synchronicity, all action eventually converging to a point in the narrative, but also of anachrony, an absence of time – having to deal with such difficult interactions and lingering more on each page, the reader is essentially becoming more conscious of the structure of the work, and also achieving that simultaneity that is proper of Dr. Manhattan – perhaps himself a reference to the reader.

4.4.2 Duration

According to Genette, the idea of studying duration in a narrative only makes sense in relation to a rhythm – without discerning a story’s rhythm it is impossible to analyze things such as ellipsis, summary, scene, deceleration or pause if one does not know how the narrative time flows to begin with. In *Watchmen*, the nine-panel grid is the foundation of the narrative’s rhythm. According to Wolk:

The entire book is construed on an even nine-panel grid or, occasionally, combinations of those panel areas. A few scenes alternate one kind of image with another for a sort of “tick-tock” effect. (...) The occasional double – or triple panel doesn’t have just more visual information than a panel that takes up a ninth of the page: it has a proportionately greater emotional impact. The twelfth and final chapter opens up with six consecutive unexpected gongs of a clock. (WOLK, 2007, p.239)

As Wolk points out, the nine-panel grid is used sometimes in combinations of panels in several ways, not deviating from the idea of the grid, except in the twelfth chapter. That is: the reader has a perception of the grid, even if the page does not conform to it. That is a resource more powerful than one can at first imagine. Page after page, the fixed structure (often “ticking”, as mentioned by Wolk, with change of color or setting every other panel) lends the work a very precise rhythm and helps to call attention to any deviation from the norm.

Ellipses are hard to identify in comics. As mentioned, the medium is basically formed by them – so unless there is a significant jump in time, one could say that every panel transition is an ellipsis of sorts. Yet there *is* a significant lapse of time in *Watchmen*, from November 2nd to December the 25th. Nothing is known about what happened during that time, except for Daniel and Laurie changing their hairstyle and assuming Sam and Sandra Hollis’ identity. There is, as commented before, some significant changes between the mood in the streets, and obviously enough time transposed for the reconstruction to begin, and for the threatened cultures to merge to a point where the Gunga Din is substituted by Burger’n Borscht and for an accord to be firmed between Russia and the US. So, a leap in time that essentially marks a transition from one paradigm to another – the eschatological context changing into a more optimistic one, where at least a future is foreseeable.

Ness argues that (joining Wolk in the argument) the size of the panels is important not only for calling attention to the scene due to the deviation from the norm, but also changes the time of the reading by adding emotional content:

The uniformity of the nine-page layout may give the reader a sense of quantifiable time, but panel size is also a manipulation of qualitative time. Qualitative times is how one experiences time, which is not necessarily

analogous to an amount of time as measured by the clock. (...) Therefore, the placement of the panel on the page and deviations in panel size are critical to the narrator's manipulation of the reader's understanding. (NESS, 2010, p.81-82)

While larger panels are reserved for more important actions (and, therefore, more intense), smaller panels can be used to fragment time or give the impression of a fast-paced action (depending on their use). In this lay-out, there is the possibility of double panels in each of the three "lines" (or "strips", as Groensteen calls them; I prefer to use 'lines' and 'columns' when the lay-out is regular – it is easily understandable and has no historical or medium-related connotations, as 'strip' does). Joining three panels would mean occupying an entire section of the page, both in height and in length. This is useful when presenting a scene, or when there is need to give the images a sense of height and power, but in a nine-panel grid it confuses the reading order of the panels – there's no occurrence of this type of lay-out in *Watchmen*. Four panels are a rarer occurrence because they 'break' the lay-out into the large panel and two other signifying zones, up or down the panel and the side, which may confuse the reading. That effect is used to detach the panel with the emergence of Dr. Manhattan (as he restructures his body) from the narrative, giving him an otherworldly feel. This type of lay-out is used only five times in the narrative (#4 p.10, #9 p.05, #11 p.4, #12 p.14 and p.17), while the panel that unites six panels of the regular grid is used 23 times (in important scenes and in the presentation of the main characters – but not of Laurie). Inversely, there are situations in which the action is fragmented by dividing the panels in two.

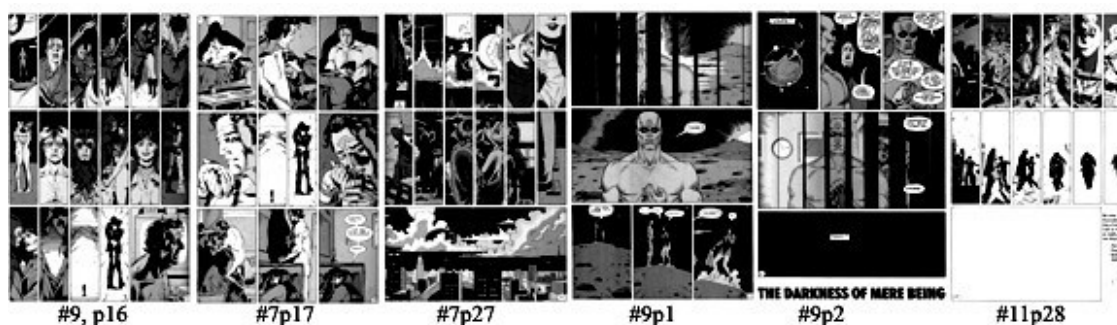


Figure 58 - Fragmented Time in Watchmen

There are several instances of time slowing down in the narrative, the most notorious of them is spread through the whole of chapter nine: the trajectory of the flask of Nostalgia through space until it hits the wall. In a way, the entire chapter, up to the moment of the falling of the glass structure, can be interpreted as Laurie's recollections as she puts

all the story of her life together in a different perspective *as the flask travels toward the wall*. The flask as the first panel of the narrative opens that possibility. Being that the case, the action is slowed down practically to a halt during most of the chapter, opening space for Laurie's memories to take place. That is possible also because of the phenomenon of qualitative time – only referable to Laurie's perception of extended time in an intensely emotional situation. As an added note, the technique of merging images representing the narratives accelerates time immensely, and the whole of Laurie's story seems to converge to her moment of epiphany. The alternative reading would be that she is able to reach Dr. Manhattan's level of consciousness briefly and connect not only with her past, but also with her future.

Another situation is the parallel scene in New York that takes place at the bottom of the pages (*Watchmen* #11, p.24-27), while Veidt confesses to the Comedian's murder and reveals that his plan has already taken place. There is a lot of angles shifting in the scene, but the action actually progresses very little. The last panel on page 27 shows the Institute for Spacial Studies starting to crumble and illuminated with a bluish light. The next page is also an utter deceleration: time is fragmented in multiple panels as the flash of the teleport advances (light is quite fast, if one is to believe physics) until all is white light. The beginning of the next chapter is a pause that lasts for six pages. Shown in whole pages with diverse aspects of the destruction in New York in detailed scenes, they make the reading pause as well, as the eyes skim and scan for details, trying to make sense of it. The scenes, presenting fragments of a same scene, do not form a single image when put together.

Another example of deceleration of time can be found in Dreiberg's dream in issue seven (p.16), where the seemingly fast pace of the action reminds us of a dream sequence that is slowed down as the flash of the light hits the lovers. The ever-changing aspects of the panels (shifting identities) help to convey the impression of a fast pace, and the large panel in the end, the waking moment, stops action completely, representing the time in which, on waking up, Daniel contemplates the dream he just had.

These are just some examples of techniques that are used consistently in the narrative. What should stick to mind is that the idea of the grid is instrumental in a feature that poses quite some trouble to classical narratology: the rhythm of the text. While hard to determine in a written narrative, it is a lot easier to get a feeling of the action in comics due

to their disposition in panels – that is, when the stories follow a basic lay-out. The grid is precisely what makes *Watchmen* “tick”, in Wolk’s words. And what gives the narrator so much control over the rhythm of the narrative.

4.4.3 Frequency

As seen before, there are several instances and different uses of repetition in *Watchmen*. For one, the book is quite famous. I’m talking about the smiley badge with a smear of blood. But, before going any further with that line of thought, it is perhaps interesting to note that *motifs*, images or elements that are repeated in a given narrative, are different from events that are narrated more than once. These last are the focus of this analysis – the former were dealt with in the section dedicated to the narration.

In the part dedicated to order we saw some of the employments of repetition in *Watchmen*. Mostly, it is in an instance where a character remembers something and moves on, though one image of that memory will appear again in order to evoke it. As seen, there are three such moments in the work.

Rorschach’s recollections of the Comedian’s life are a mix-up of panels taken from Dan Dreiberg’s, Adrian Veidt’s and Dr. Manhattan’s memories, mixed with scenes from the character’s assassination and the narration of a joke by Rorschach:

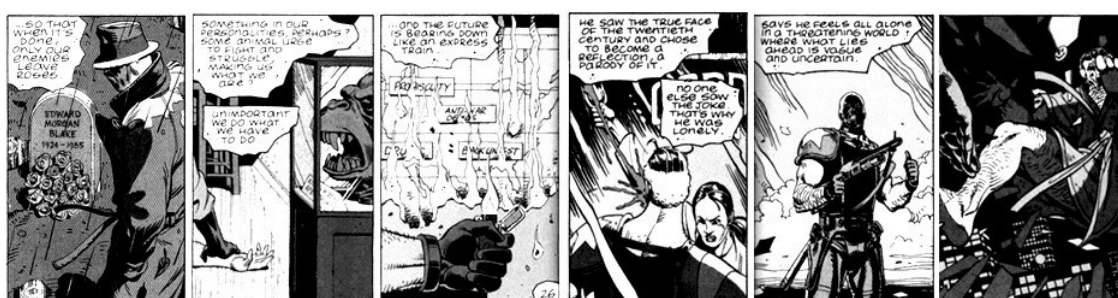


Figure 59 - Comedian's Story

The repetition does not only bring up the old stories again, but it invites the reader to reinterpret them with the new information he has acquired and the story (joke) he is reading and make a whole, different story.

In Dr. Manhattan's story, the memories of his life that occur again and again are references to watch mechanisms, references to the photo taken with Janey Slater and their first touch, when they met (the last image in the sequence below is also repeated, but in a different way – it is used to show the structure growing with Dr. Manhattan on the foreground, so that the reader understands that he is the mind behind the action and that not much time passes):



Figure 60 - Repeated Moments in Dr. Manhattan's Story

In the case of Dr. Manhattan, the images are a recollection of the key moments of his life, up to the moment he becomes Dr. Manhattan. From that point on, there is no repetition, suggesting that the moments that marked the character were the ones in which he was still human in the biological sense of the word – perhaps he was not able to recreate himself, after all, perhaps all he was able to build was a watch, a complex structure that moves and acts, but with something lacking.

Laurie's story is similar to Manhattan's, to the point where repetition of memories is concerned. That instance is commented above. Other sorts of repetitions are also present in *Watchmen*, as pointed out by Ness (2010, p.89): similar panel compositions are used to soften the transitions between panels, the grid helps to give rhythm to the story and the repetition of elements in the sceneries is fundamental to the building not only of the mood, but also of the subtext that accompanies the story. And there's the death of the Comedian.

Seen in chapter one, two and eleven, the death of the Comedian is a special case: not quite a repetition, but a restatement, in which something changes every time it is retold. In the last 'utterance' of the murder scene, the reader finally learns the identity of the assassin – then again, the crime is only solved by the assassin's spontaneous confession.

This instance will be analyzed further in the section dedicated to focalization. In chapter four, Rorschach's memory of a dog with its head cut open is reoccurring:



Figure 61 - A Pretty Butterfly (*Watchmen* #06, p.01)

The same image appears when the character sees the carton again, but not when he is remembering (and narrating) the story. It is for the reader to understand in which point of the recollection Rorschach may have seen that shocking image. In chapter seven, hearing Laurie scream, Daniel recalls a previous conversation with Rorschach:



Figure 62 - Another Memory (*Watchmen*, #07)

Interestingly enough, the memory is a repetition of the dialogue, but the sequence is not. This will be developed further as well. There is a large quantity of repetitions inside *Watchmen*. Some are due to formal elements, some are due to motifs, and some are memories that appear again in the narrative. Memories are evoked in other contexts and, by doing so, are references to their previous appearances. Events, in their turn, are retold mainly through different points of view – the most notorious being the meeting of the

Crimebusters in 1966, which is retold in the memories of Veidt (first in #2 p.9-11, then again in #11 p.19), Dr. Manhattan (#04, p.17), Laurie (#9 p.15), Rorschach (#6 p.15), totalizing four repetitions (and one telling). Those could count as external analepses, since they start and finish before the narrative, by the by. The point is: the past is largely a game of joining the dots in order to form a coherent image, much like the language of comics consists of joining the dots and linking images in a coherent whole. And in *Watchmen*, repetition is the key to invite the reader to rebuild those ideas with each repetition, being practically obligated to remember the previous occasions every time the events are retold – another tool for making the reader develop a more complete and solid mental scheme of the work.

4.5 NARRATION

There is nothing complicated about the narrator in comic books, as long as one maintains the perspective. That was a pun, by the way, and not a very good one, at that. But it also has meaning and truth to it: comics' narration usually isn't too difficult to determine, but in some cases it can become quite troublesome, especially in the case of a multitude of internal voices, when the narrative plays with perspective. And that is pretty much a description of *Watchmen*, to start with: a play with perspective. In fact, the whole narrative can be read as a play in perspective from beginning to end, as will be seen in the section dedicated to final considerations.

The narrator in *Watchmen* is elusive and provocative. It never names itself (and, therefore, should be considered extradiegetic), but opens the possibility of reading one clue in the narrative as an enunciative 'we' in one of the notes that present the special materials (and therefore this 'we' would pertain to the universe of the narrative, and the narrator would be intradiegetic). Once this possibility is opened, one can make all sorts of guesses of who could this 'we' narrator be – but in truth it is not possible to go any farther than that starting point with any substantial view. That's the reason why it's an elusive narrator.

The narrator is provocative because it gives itself away over and over again, in the course of the narrative; it is overt through the disposition of the elements in the panels, through the superposition of voices, over the action, sewn into each other in a way that only a conscience would be capable of. Through the transitions between panels, too, the narrator waves at the reader: when every transition from one scene to another is guided by the presentation of a common element, the mind orienting this transition, the element that creates this connection, is not only present, but bringing itself forth, disrupting the flow and constantly calling attention to the interweaving. It is not, however, classifiable as overt: it doesn't identify itself openly – a covert narrator with a very overt manner, so to say.

At the same time, one cannot ignore that the voices and recordatories alone do not make a narration in a comic book; there is also the matter of the image, the panels, and the way the action flows in them. In truth, even the image itself carries within it an impression of the world represented. With a view, a conscience – therefore, a narrator. And here one needs not only be addressing the angle, composition and scenes depicted, even the style of the drawings have a say in how the narrative is organized. The choices of voices inside the narrative are also affected by their representation in the graphic universe, and so on and so forth.

All that to say: narrators in comics are not usually hard to understand – except when they are hard to understand. And, since this is the case, one must take all these factors into consideration. I believe that the best way to do that is to adopt Groensteen's view of the narration in comics: the reciter (responsible for handling the text) and the monstrator (responsible for the images). That is, to a degree, painful, because it means sectioning in two, for analytic purposes, a medium which has a way of expression that only makes complete sense when both languages – verbal and iconic – work together. That can become quite tricky sometimes, because image and words can not only reinforce each other, but contradict each other as well, or be presented as non related parts of a narrative – and still be working together. With that in mind (images and words as a whole) the fundamental narrator, also proposed by Groensteen will be the first one developed (as the 'meganarrator', commented by Miller). Firstly, there will be a comment on the representation of consciousness pervading the narrative as a whole. Then the analysis will pass to the elements that compose this pervasive voice.

Categories such as these are sensible for a couple of reasons, mainly because they indicate the need for two different views when analyzing comics: an eye on the images, an eye on the words. And, preferably, the understanding that the center of the consciousness is not in each of them, but rather a few inches behind – deeper than at first sight. Separating images and words also makes a lot of sense in the universe of comics, where usually (and in this case) an artist and a writer work together on a same book, producing a unique and wholesome result. Though the narrator ultimately will always be an independent entity, this approach allows the understanding of how each one's strengths played in the narrative, even if they are not to be confused with the narrative structures of the monstrator and the reciter, and especially not with the one of the narrator, or meganarrator. One could ask, considering the problem of the narrator and author as has been approached by narrative theory, if the welcoming of these structures would not cause someone to come up with a *monstratee* and a *recitee* as well. And when the puns get that bad, it is usually time to stop with the considerations and move the subject further.

This work will briefly review the very relevant study of the narrator of *Watchmen* realized by Sara Van Ness, in *Watchmen as Literature* (2010), then develop some of the characteristics presented by the structure. This will be done as a search for the narrator itself, here to be considered as the meganarrator or the fundamental narrator. Essentially, they are the same thing, with a lot of different names.

4.5.1 Meganarrator

Ness' quest for *Watchmen*'s narrator starts with a 'we' inserted in the special text of the first edition of the work, in which the narrator(s) announce the printing of excerpts of *Under the Hood*:

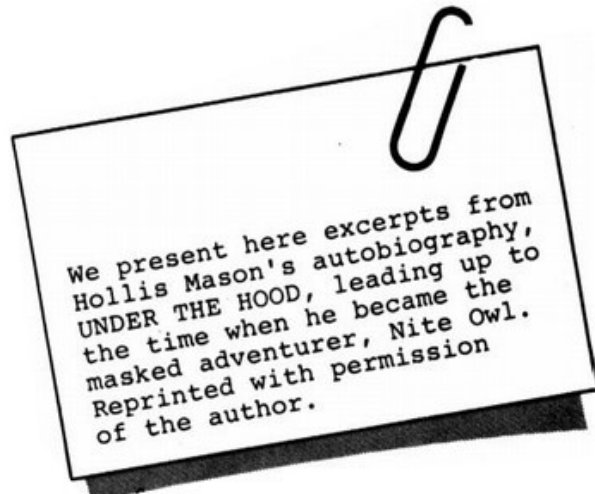


Figure 63 - We (*Watchmen* #01, p.27)

For Ness, that verbal cue means that either there is more than one narrator or that the narrator is referring to itself through the royal 'we' – either way, the narrator seems to be subjected to copyright laws. According to Ness:

Based on this one note, the reader knows that regardless of the narrator's identity (or plurality), this figure is responsible for the entire presentation of the narrative, and is ultimately in control of what the reader sees, when he or she sees it, and how it is presented. If the narrator is the agent of control over the presentation of some of these documents (suggested by the paper-clipped notes), then one can assume that he or she is also presenting the information contained within the panels and the other private expository materials, such as the contents of Sally Jupiter's scrapbook of the paperwork that Rorschach and Dreiberg find in Veidt's desk. (NESS, 2010, p.62)

Ness stresses the narrator's role as the master of the narrative in order to make the point that the *pluralis majestatis* is a possibility indeed: all the readers are its subjects. Or perhaps there is more than one narrator. That is a possibility that is not discarded by the 'we', and throughout the narrative some events are shown as remembered by the characters. As Ness points out, "these glimpses at the world are mediated by the narrator's representation of a character's first-person point-of-view" (NESS, 2010, p.62). The narrator can position itself in any role in the narrative, which can be seen as a superhuman perspective on events. It has ultimate control, and in a narrative nothing is accidental.

Watchmen is a story in which each character has its own story to tell. That opens the possibility for different narrative frames – stories inside the story. In fact, Ness

considers each panel or sequence as a ‘micro-story’, interpreted by the reader and eventually developing into a larger one. These are not very clearly separated, but rather mingle into each other. Other dispositions inside the narrative increase the uncertainty related to the narrator, such as the chapter titles (floating in the gutter, outside the frames), the expository materials (which appear in the diegetic universe), the close-ups in the covers and the clocks in the back – with the lack of a clear narrative voice, it is uncertain for the reader how to consider these elements in their relation to the narrative. Ness then presents some terms regarding narrative frames, such as *diegesis*, *diegetic narrative*, *metadiegetic narrative* and *extradiegetic narrative* in order to be able to classify different levels of narration – only she understands them as ways of reading the work. She then dedicates the rest of the chapter to examining some of the potential identities of “the elusive extradiegetic narrative voice in *Watchmen*” (p.66). Some of the potential narrators inside the story are Rorschach (going as far as to consider the dates preceding his journal’s entries as metalepses, interferences of a narrative voice, instead of dates on the journal), Seymour of *New Frontiersman* (if he picked up Rorschach’s journal) and Sam and Sandra Hollis (a.k.a. Dan and Laurie).

Persuasive as her arguments may be, I don’t believe it is worth digging into these possibilities further than the expression above: if the “elusive extradiegetic narrative voice” were recognizable in the text of *Watchmen*, it would neither be elusive nor extradiegetic. The narrative does not invite any such interpretations about the narrator. On the contrary: it leaves the possibility open. And so it should remain.

But other things besides that remain. One of the best sentences insights in Ness’ book is: “*Watchmen* is a story of storytellers” (p.63). That opens a whole full dimension to look into the narrator of the story. The story of the Comedian is told basically through other characters’ memories (Dreiberg, Dr. Manhattan, Veidt, Sally, Laurie and Rorschach, each remembers things about the Comedian) and through his assassination sequence, which appears unanchored in the narrative, as if watched *or* perpetrated by the reader (more on that later). So, the narrator has free passage into the character’s minds and memories. An omniscient narrator. But if so, then one must ponder that there are no thought balloons anywhere in the story, and the representation of internal consciousness is limited to Dr. Manhattan’s internal monologue while remembering (or reliving) his own past in Mars. Can that be considered limited omniscience? The fact is that this effect is also

used to enhance the mimetic impression of the work: real life sounds and thoughts do not have a visual physical presence, and so the narration seems more realistic with the memories represented physically (through images, as they happen in the inside of our minds).

On that note, the presence of the internal texts is also of significance. The *Tales of The Black Freighter* is an example of *mise en abyme*, not a story within a story, but a comic within a comic. There is Rorschach's journal as well, with the grim style and violent images, and Dr. Malcom's notes. They do not merge with the diegesis, exactly, but float over it, acting as comments and linking parallel actions and parts of the narrative. The dialogues also perform this function of weaving the fragmented action together into a coherent whole. That intentionality, and that presentation of the action, the purposeful disposition of not only the weaving, but also of ironic comments on the action (as will be seen in the section about the reciter), those are the moments in which the narrator of *Watchmen* shows its presence to the reader.

This is in conflict with Moore's own views on the matter. In *Writing for Comics* (2003) he talks about transitions, such as the ones made in *Watchmen*, and, though the quotation is a little extensive, it is very important when dealing with this work, because it says so much about it:

(...) the reader should not wake up until you want them to, and the transitions between scenes are the weak points in the spell that you are attempting to cast over them. One way or another, as a writer, you'll have to come up with your own repertoire of tricks and devices with which to bridge the credibility gap that a change in scene represents, borrowing some devices from other writers and hopefully coming up with a few of your own. The one which I've used to excess, judging from a few of the comments I pick up in reviews or letter columns now and then, is the use of overlapping or coincidental dialogue. That said, it's a better trick to fall back on than the use of "Meanwhile, back at the ranch..." (...) One thing I tend to do which eases the transition and is sometimes all that is needed to accomplish a good transition is to write in basic units of a single page, so that the reader's action in turning the page becomes the beat in which I change scene without disturbing the rhythm of the story. Another approach to vary the "overlapping dialogue" technique and use a synchronicity of image rather than words, or even just a coincidental linkage of vague abstract ideas. It's possible to use color to change scene: the end of a scene which has a lot of gunplay and

bloodshed might end up with a close-up of the bright red blood all over the white floor. The next panel might suddenly cut to a marketplace in Italy and present a close-up of a flower trader's stall with a vast profusion of red blossoms taking up most of the panel. In that instance, the simple continuity of the color red could probably be enough to carry the reader successfully over the transition. The transition doesn't always have to be smooth. If you're skillful enough you can sometimes manage a very abrupt transition with such style that no one will notice any break in flow until the moment has passed and they are safely absorbed in the text scene within the story. (MOORE, 2003, p.17)

As can be easily seen, the quotation is extensive – and important as well. Moore's point is that such transitions tend to ease the process of skipping from different scenes in the comic. That may be. However, when that is done in such a consistent way as it is in *Watchmen*, sometimes linking different situations that run parallel for several pages, it becomes not only perceptible, but striking. And, instead of easing the transition, it is in fact calling attention to the narrative technique that weaves all these seemingly unrelated images, or situations.

In such case, one can consider the narrator as covert, despite the fact that the 'we' is the only recognizable reference to it; it is the idea that separates *mimesis* and *diegesis*: whenever the flow of the narrative is disrupted it loses its mimetic qualities and calls attention to the narration. And *Watchmen* demands many pauses and acknowledgements from its readers – perhaps that's why it has been so acclaimed; the narration constantly calls the attention of the reader to itself. The narrator seems to be reliable – to the point of presenting 'real' documents that give the story a more realistic feel. Yet, as one can see through the slow development of the solution to the Comedian's murder, in which some new panels are presented each time the crime is depicted until the reader learns the identity of the murderer, the narrator does not forfeit control of the narrative, it rather keeps it very tightly, to the point of becoming a very perceptible presence indeed.

There is also the presence of *motifs* in the narrative, scenes and elements that are evoked over and over again, calling the attention of the reader and referencing other parts of the narrative or other texts. The most notorious motif in *Watchmen* is undoubtedly the smiley face with a blood smear. It has become the symbol of the work. The badge started being used by the Comedian when he began wearing the mask. In the diegesis, the story of

the badge is fairly short. Rorschach finds it in the gutter, gives it to Daniel and Daniel throws it over Blake's coffin as it is buried:



Figure 64 - Diegetic Role of the Badge in *Watchmen* (in #01 and #02)

But of course it does not stop there: the badge appears again and again throughout the narrative, a pervasive image that not only calls the attention to the act of narration, but also helps imbue the work with a sense of unity, where every point of the story seems connected to the others by a governing theme and perspective. The badge is a simple smiley face, perhaps as simple as the cartoonization can go. The smear of blood indicates the use of this medium that is marked by simplicity and infantility (hence the smile, hence the iconic face) in a more real, grim context. In a way, the badge is a symbol of the work itself. The badge is also connected to the clock in the narrative (the clock is a yellow circle with black letters, covered by blood in the end of the narrative, so it is a reference of sorts). The smear of blood also marks the beginning of the narrative in the clock (twelve to midnight). Some of the appearances of the smiley and clock in the work:

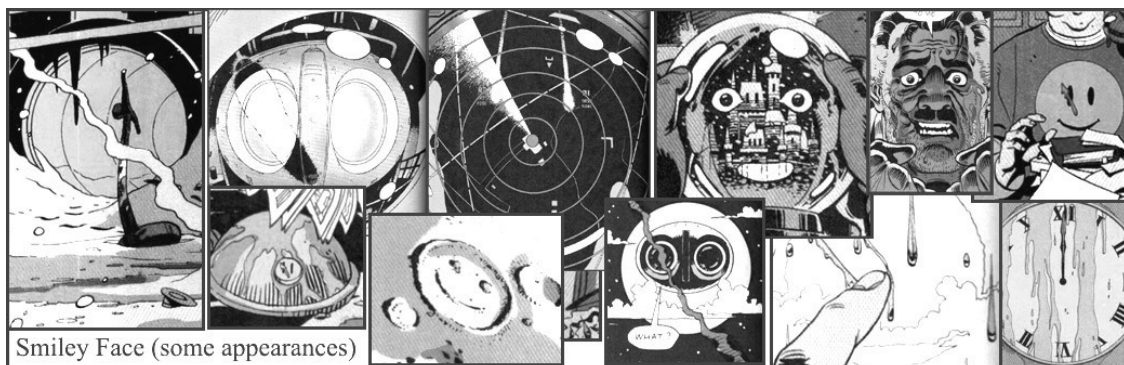


Figure 65 - Smiley Associations in *Watchmen*

Other motifs in the work is, as seen in the part dedicated to settings, the Hiroshima lovers, a constant reference to the Cold War, Hiroshima and the dangers of nuclear holocaust. Also, the title of the work is *Watchmen*, in what is (considering the epigraph) a reference to Juvenal's *Satires* that was quoted as yet another epigraph – to the Towers Commission Report in 1987: “Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?” The translation would be the phrase that is reoccurring in the work, ‘Who watches the watchmen?’ This cannot be a direct reference to any of the groups of heroes (superhero comic books’ titles are usually the name of the group or the main character featuring in the stories, so that association naturally is the first place one goes to for an answer) in the story, because their names are The Minutemen and The Crimebusters. The last group does not even start working. So, who are The Watchmen? The presence of the question through the narrative seems to suggest that the answer is important, and of significance to the work. I have an opinion on that, but will add it as an interpretation in the end of this study, section dedicated to final considerations (for it doesn't belong in the narrative, being rather an extrapolation). What one can take from that is the presence of the narrator constantly showing in the narrative, calling attention to itself and lending the work a highly sophisticated feel.

4.5.2 Reciter

The figure of the reciter is, for Groensteen, the agent of the narrative responsible for the narrative stances related to the text in the comic. It is very easy to think of *Watchmen*'s reciter as a projection of Alan Moore, the writer. That would be also an incorrect notion – in *Watching the Watchmen* (2009), Dave Gibbons points out that, though the group had little direction from DC Comics when doing the Graphic Novel, due to their relative proximity (and distance from the editor), Moore indeed took care of most of the writing. Though not before discussing each edition with Gibbons and laying the whole thing out on the phone.

The reason for pointing that out is to make the argument even the notion that Alan Moore is solely the writer and Dave Gibbons the artist is not perfectly correct, and that these notions, autor, writer and artist, are only valid as theoretical devices in order to be

excluded from the study of the narrative itself – one can talk of an *implied author* that can be understood inside the narrative, but not of the author, real person. Entering the gates of narratology means leaving reality behind – and closing the door shut.

As a result, the structure of the reciter is not any more than the narrative voice that is charged with the verbal content of the comic book in question – not a projection of Moore, but of the narrator. The distinction between reciter and monstrator is a very important one to understand *Watchmen*, mainly because of the dynamics of the work. Since in *Watchmen* the character's narratives are extensive (there is a lot of verbal content and, as seen practically every character receives enough attention to have its story told) and there is little direct representation of consciousness, fragments of intradiegetic texts, such as journals, notebooks, comic books and scrapbooks or posters and folders are charged with doing the extra work and the occasional ironic comment to a situation shown in the panel.

Now, the reason that makes the reciter a hard-working idea in *Watchmen* is that, as a stylistic device, the intradiegetic texts appear as a voice-over in different scenes that do not necessarily bear a direct relation to their original context. In practice, that means that, for instance, when the narrative starts with Rorschach's journal and we see the Comedian badge on the gutter and the blood flowing and the 'camera eye' pulled back from the scene, Rorschach is nowhere to be seen (that is, until the reader realizes the man with the sign is actually him). So there is a relative independence between the reciter and the monstrator in the work, but only a relative one – not for one minute does the reader believe that the narration from Rorschach's journal and the scenes in the panels are not related. The connection just hasn't been presented yet.

This resource has the effect of focusing even more the attention of the reader, obligating it to follow the story closely in order to not get lost in the several narrative voices presented in the work. If you opened *Watchmen* at a random page, without knowledge of the story and the different voices you'd most likely get lost: a scroll-like narration about a marooned man in the middle of New York, bearing no apparent relation to the verbal discussion taking place in the panels, very probably with a parallel action at some point of the page, then going to a dialogue superposed by a journal or something equally eccentric. That and the verbose quality of the comic practically force the reader to

stop at every panel, in order to be able to follow the narrative. In time, the extensive details in the panels begin to become apparent, and then it becomes evident how the two apparently competing voices, monstrator and reciter, are in fact working together in the text – they are not fighting each other, merely demanding a different level of involvement and attention from the reader. For *Watchmen* is also a narrative that gradually educates the reader:

Throughout the narrative the reader is shown how to tell the ‘voices’ apart by their gradual presentation: first he is introduced to the grim tone of Rorschach’s journal in the first issue, and gets acquainted with the notion of parallelism between the action and voice-off dialogue (first seen in the Comedian’s assassination). Those are already relatively sophisticated devices in comics, not widely used.

The second edition already starts with the parallelism and voice-off (Laurie and Sally’s conversation over scenes from the Comedian’s funeral). From there, to analepsis: Sally remembers the rape attempt and the narrative goes back to ‘normal’. Well... not quite. Established the possibility of an analepsis, Daniel, Veidt and Dr. Manhattan remember a scene from the Comedian’s life and go back to the present. In the end, their actions are superposed by a voice-off with the service, and the prayers. Rorschach visits Moloch for yet another analepsis, and then the narrative resumes his journal – making it a motif, a device that is to be repeated throughout the narrative.

Issue three already starts with a different voice-over: *Tales of the Black Freighter*, the story within the story. All these different texts have iconically distinct presentations inside the work, as will be seen later. The edition has *Tales’* narration, Bernard’s characteristic voice telling something about nuking Russia and a close-up of a radiation sign on the very first panel. To the reader following the narrative, that bears precisely zero relation with anything it has seen before, so the reader must get acquainted with yet another narrative stance – Bernard’s newsstand, which has a youngster reading a comic that also appears in the story, though not all the time. *Tale’s* narration actually extends beyond the shift of the panels, as a voice-over in Laurie and Manhattan’s fight. Then the narrative actually has twelve pages with parallel actions dominated by one stance of dialogue: first the interview with Janey Slater extending over Laurie’s departure, then (after a page with a conversation between Dan and Laurie) their dialogue extends over Dr.

Manhattan's preparation for the TV show. When he gets there, the dialogue shifts to the TV studio, the preparation and actual interview going over the mugging attempt suffered by Daniel and Laurie. Then there is a page with transition, where both stances have a say (that is, there is dialogue in both parallel contexts, even though Dan and Laurie only catch their breaths), and the voice-off suddenly shifts to Daniel and Laurie's verbal stance. *Tales of the Black Freighter* begins again, with Bernard's verbal comments on the situation, there is a scene at the military base, with Dr. Manhattan going to Arizona and then to Mars (superposed by the *Tale's* scrolls), then back to the street and *Tales*, back to the military base, this time with Laurie, Dan's house and the newsstand once again. The issue finishes with parallel action between Dr. Manhattan walking on Mars and a presidential emergency meeting to discuss the possibility of nuclear war. The action is dominated by the meeting's voice-off (on and off, in the case). The next edition will scramble time.

The brief analysis above is supposed to work solely as illustration of the interactions of the voices in the narrative – so it will not be developed further. One important thing to say is that, with so many voices interposed in a narrative that is mainly parallel and not always linear, a clear distinction had to be made between the different stances, entailing the speech patterns and their presentation, as well as their context. Otherwise the reader is lost from the beginning. The reciter in these cases does not only help the reader to 'connect the dots', or create connections, but more frequently than not there are indirect relations between what is being said and what is being shown. These can be just a similar position of a character, an image that has a similar composition or an ironic commentary:



Figure 66 - Ironic Reciter (*Watchmen*, #03 p.10; #01 p.03; #07 p.15; #08 p.13)

The above are examples of an ironic commentary on the image (the second panel was edited): Dr. Manhattan appears “outta the blue”, scaring everybody; the fall of the Comedian is commented with “ground floor comin’ up”; Dan’s incapacity to perform sexually is greeted with applause in the TV set and the conversation between the people at the newsstand is the “conversation of the dead: dreary, bitter, endlessly sad...”. These links are pervasive in the narrative, especially in the parallel scenes. This help to ‘sew’ the narrative together and to give a sense of unity, as if everything is connected.

There are several different types of recordatories (or ‘text boxes’, opposed to the verbal register of enunciation present in ‘speech balloons’, or ‘word balloons’) discernible in *Watchmen*:

Recordatories and Context	Presentation	Characteristics
<p>Rorschach’s journal and word balloons</p> <p>(Usually presented with Rorschach’s adventures in the streets of New York.)</p>	<p>Yellowish recordatories, with irregular edges and small stains, as if torn up from old pages. The letters are irregular and do not follow the regular presentation of comic book text, using manuscript register in the ‘e’, ‘a’, and ‘n’. That makes the narration seem fragmented and perturbed. The word balloons have similar ripped edges (no color, though), an effect that seems to be caused by his mask, once his speech seems normal whenever he is not using it.</p>	<p>Broken speech pattern, reputedly inspired by the notes of the serial killer Son of Sam. Lack of connectives and proliferation of violent images and nihilistic pessimism.</p>
<p>Tales of the Black Freighter</p> <p>(The story accompanies the newsstand scenes, contrasting with Bernard’s register. Supposedly, this voice is a result of Bernie’s reading.)</p>	<p>Dark yellow recordatories in the form of scrolls, with bending edges that detach them physically. They are also colored with large spots rather than the regular coloring, which gives them a distinct appearance and makes reference to a old comic book coloring process. The text starts with a drop cap, creating a visual identity with old texts.</p>	<p>Sophisticated and antique vocabulary, with frequent use of metaphors and religious expressions. Poetic register, with a grim lyrical quality that calls attention to itself through the contrast with Bernard’s simplistic register.</p>
<p>Dr. Malcom’s notes</p> <p>(The notes follow Dr. Malcom’s progress from an optimistic point of view to his ‘contamination’ by Rorschach in chapter six.)</p>	<p>White, regular lines, with black, regular words. Dr. Malcom’s notes do not have a distinct presentation.</p>	<p>Very optimistic at first and then progressively grim, Dr. Malcom’s notes do not present a specialized jargon or deep insights into Rorschach’s personality, which suggests a naïve and impressionable character, not the usual idea of a psychiatrist.</p>
<p>Dr. Manhattan’s recordatories and word balloons</p> <p>(The recordatories</p>	<p>Blue, with a regular white squared frame, normal black letters. The blue speech pattern framed in white gives the impression of a different quality for the voice – consistent with the speech balloons.</p>	<p>Pondered and precise, supposedly uninvolved. Manhattan is able to describe objects and situations, though never mentions personal</p>

only appear in chapter four, in Mars. The speech balloons, of course, are not restrained to that chapter.)		feelings, seemingly capable of feeling cold, but never sadness or happiness. Has an extensive vocabulary and frequently uses physics and astronomic terms.
Veidt's comments on divination (Only on one page in the whole narrative.)	White, round balloons floating on the air, without pointing to any specific source. Regular black letters. No quotation marks.	This employment is unique in the narrative (<i>Watchmen</i> , #11, p.1), and used to give the impression of an unknown voice, floating without context in an unknown location – gradually exposed. The reader is lost, then able to connect with the narrative again.
Notes from the Narrator (In the presentation of some of the special materials at the end of the chapters.)	These usually appear 'clipped' (that is, are drawn under the image of a paper clip to look like they are attached to the page) to the materials, as if they were notes from a publisher or editor. Written with a font that reminds a typewriter's.	The notes usually indicate the origin of the materials and that they are "reprinted with permission". They work to give the impression of another narrative frame, where the publication of the texts in the comic should require the permission of the authors. They work to give the comic an impression of authenticity, and also as a joke for those who like it.

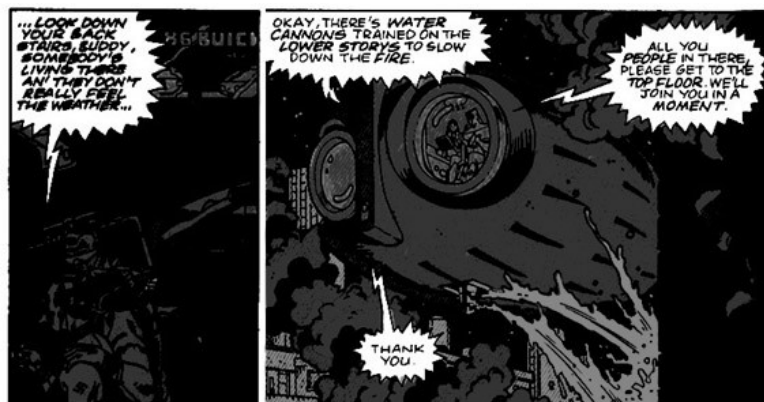
Table 11 - Different Verbal Voices

Some of the characters present a difference in speech pattern. Bernard's is colloquial and abbreviated in odd places, indicating places where he talks fast or does not complete words. He is the veritable 'man on the streets'; presented as concerned with the political developments, his simplistic approach to the themes he insists on blabbering about (for instance, 'nuking Russia and relying on God to sort it out') and his constant linking the themes with his own life with his wife, Rose, is sometimes elusive: Bernard is the vehicle for important clues and messages throughout the narrative, such as calling the reader's attention to details because "there's all kinda stuff we never notice", in the symmetric chapter five (p.17, pan.8). In a way, Bernard is the reader's thermometer of the situation in the streets, as well as the posters, newspapers and magazines in his stand (and throughout the narrative as well, as already seen in the section about setting).

The Comedian's speech pattern is also colloquial, with lots of abbreviations (though not as many joined words as Bernard's) and referring to the world around him in a reductive way, totally out of proportion. For the Comedian, superheroes are just 'schmucks in Halloween suits', Dr. Manhattan, Mothman and Rorschach are simply 'nuts' (both

examples in chapter two, p.18), and so on. This is actually a comedy strategy, to enhance the idiosyncrasies of the target in order to make their flaws more apparent and funny. Adrian Veidt is arrogant and presumptuous – he understands things perfectly, though the other side maybe needs things to be dumbed down for them. As a result, he is constantly ‘dumbing things down’ and never proving his superior line of thought. Veidt treats those around him with condescendence, always explaining what he means, demeaning their efforts of contradicting them. His vocabulary is also extensive, like Manhattan’s, though he does not employ a scientific vocabulary – he rather uses a mystical one, instead.

Those are not the only verbal cues in the narrative, obviously, but they may offer some insight into the differences between the many characters in the narrative. Of course, there are also word balloons. These are not very diverse. Besides the above commented Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach balloons, which are different from other characters, there is not a wide range of styles. They appear in the TV’s balloons, usually with a suggestion of a stylized lightning bolt in the pointer, in the case of Dan’s TV set; and a jagged localized effect in Veidt’s monitors at Karnak. This effect, which supposedly denotes a mechanical or artificial quality to the voice depicted, is heightened in minisystems playing music in the street, police megaphones and Archie’s sound system:



The dialogue also has its rules of presentation in *Watchmen*: there is the voice of a character, which may or may not have a regularly-shaped word balloon, with the ‘tail’, or ‘pointer’ indicating the origin inside the panel – usually the enunciator character’s mouth. However, as can be seen in the figure above, sometimes the enunciator is not in the scene, but nearby. In that case the pointers simply go out of the page, merging with the gutter. If there is a transition of scene, though, and the dialogue continues, quotation marks are employed and the round form abandoned. Recordatories are used, with regular, squared shapes and white backgrounds.

That said, there is a point I would like to make: *Watchmen* is a polyphonic novel. That is a bold statement, since Dostoevski is the only example of polyphonic novel provided by Bakhtin and, recognizedly, a tough act to follow:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.
(BAKHTIN, 1999, p.6-7)

I believe *Watchmen* does fill these requirements: not only do the characters present their particular distinct voices, but they also present a distinct approach to the world around them, and expose their views in consistent manners. Annalisa Di Liddo, in her book *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as a Scalpel* (2009) makes a similar claim, though not specifically about *Watchmen*, but about Alan Moore’s production, and specifically in relation to other comics and the historiographic view of the subject (as presented in the settings’ section):

I would argue that Moore’s intertextuality is less definable as pastiche than as Bakhtinian heteroglossia (or plurivocality) and dialogism (Bakhtin 55) or even as historiographic metafiction. (LIDDO, 2009, p.62)

4.2.3 Monstrator

The idea of the *monstrator* is expedient in order to investigate the style of *Watchmen*, as it is for understanding most of the workings of the current comics industry. The production process of the most prominent and widespread titles is that of the assemblage line – where the big editor has the rights to the characters and issues the guidelines for the action, the writer is responsible for the script, which is then drawn by the penciler, inked by the inker, colored by the colorist and then lettered and edited. While this is not a rule, and some titles are author-bound (in fact, some of the best titles seem to be author-bound), it is the logic of the majority of the production. And it is not as fragmented as it could be, if one takes the example of manga, where one mangaka (author), sometimes a partnership of writer and artist under a pen name (as shown by the very illustrative manga *Bakuman*), also has a team of artists that ink the outlines, draw the landscapes, the details, the letters... etc.

In *Watchmen*'s case, though, as shown in Dave Gibbon's *Watching the Watchmen*, the whole team involved in the production became involved in practically every other aspect of the production, it can be roughly assumed that the drawing style is that of Dave Gibbons, making the concession that Alan Moore, the script writer, may have taken Gibbon's strengths and characteristics into consideration when writing the story. This assumption has more validity if one considers that Gibbon's style is not peculiar to this work, but remained largely unchanged in the artist's later production, such as *Martha Stewart: Give Me Liberty*, by Frank Miller and Gibbons. And so the colors, which also are among the responsibilities of the monstrator, are by John Higgins, and the words and plot by the reciter Alan Moore, though it must also be understood that the meganarrator, or fundamental narrator, must be seen as a separate, unique stance.

All that to say that this work will refer separately to Dave Gibbons as the artist at times, to John Higgins as the colorist and, at times, to the *monstrator*, narrating stance that encompasses both artists' work. It makes it easier to make a distinction between art and color and is also fair to the authors that collaborated in the work. To each his own, even if their 'owns' entwine at times.

4.2.3.1 Style in Watchmen

According to Sara J. Van Ness, in the second chapter of *Watchmen as Literature* (2010), dedicated to *Image & Word* (sic.), “there may not be conceptions or fixed ‘rules’ on how to read images, but there are certainly elements that affect the way the reader interprets them” (NESS, 2010, p.35). The author argues that most of *Watchmen*’s panels present settings “as descriptive and expressive as the characters that inhabit them”, reinforcing the meaning-building qualities of elements in the panels and pages such as panel composition, the use of the reader’s point of view or perspective, colors and the character’s facial and bodily expressions. She analyses these features and their uses regarding *Watchmen*’s images.

Composition is, for Ness, the placing of the elements in an image⁵⁴. That entails the angle through which the image is shown (from above, from below or at eye level, the distance, etc.) and the disposition of the image’s elements, the center of the image being also the center of attention. Ness call attention to the proliferation of panels with a character posed in the centre of the panel, looking straight at the reader, seemingly speaking to it. That use can also place the reader in a character’s perspective. Whenever the image is slightly dislocated from the center the reader’s eye receives sort of a ‘license to wander’, resource that is fully taken advantage of in *Watchmen*, due to the profusion of details in the settings. This resource can also be used to suggest distance between characters or a space with narrative significance, to emphasize a character’s gesture instead of the character itself, etc.

Her next theme is *Depth and Dimension* – that is, the illusion of depth in a panel, which is related to the representation of distance and read with the division of a panel in foreground, midground and background areas. Ness very ingenuously calls attention to the interplay of depth levels in the text, where sometimes actions take place simultaneously in

⁵⁴ Ness’s words are “within the picture plane” (p.35), but, since that may cause confusion with McCloud’s idea of Picture Plane, it is best to leave it paraphrased.

foreground and background, sometimes in the foreground and midground. These interactions also appear with inverted perspectives in the text, sometimes from an angle, sometimes a similar action seen from the opposite one. Due to their parallelism, the images can be confusing at times (they seemingly repeat a moment). According to the author:

Detailed foregrounds, midgrounds and backgrounds encourage the reader to look beyond what is represented directly; all of the characters, even if by mere proximity, are in some way connected with one another. (NESS, 2010, p.37)

The *point-of-view* can be either the worm's, the bird's or the eye level view. Ness quotes McCloud in order to account for the effects of the angles (the bird's eye puts the reader above the image, estranged, the worm's eye makes the image acquire weight and grandeur, the eye level view places the reader in the scene. As examples of the uses, Ness cites the distancing scene at the beginning of the narrative, where the "camera eye" rises from the gutter, making the setting seem more insignificant, as example of the bird's eye view and the scene where the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese takes place to show the worm's eye view, where the buildings around are shown, with the neighbors looking at the scene from their windows.

Ness's ideas on color will be reviewed later, following the analysis on style made here. *Facial Expressions and Body Language Cues* deals with the natural reading of the inner world of other human beings. It comes naturally to most, as an evolutionary trait and part of our natural lives, so it works in the same way for representations. Again, McCloud's *Making Comics* is used as a (good) example of the power of facial and bodily expression, a useful tool to be used in the interpretation of characters' inner worlds and their interactions in scenes.

We have, then, the composition of the images, the different fields of depth, and features such as point of view (which can be an indicator of focalization) and colors and facial and bodily expressions as potentially significant in the narrative. With all respect to Ness' work, though, I'd like to suggest a more complete approach to the contents of the panels in the narrative – specifically, the narrative's *style*. This by no means dismisses the analysis made by Ness until this point; it merely completes it. Yet, it is interesting to stress that I have no knowledge of a more complete analysis of *Watchmen's* style up to date, and

of a more complete view of how to approach a comic's graphic features than the one presented in this work.

A fair point to start with would be the image's lines. As proposed by McCloud (MCLOUD, 1994, p.125), these may carry significance by their mere presence in the work. In the case of *Watchmen's* lines, they are adequate. They do not call enough attention to detach an image from the background, as some comics do, nor are they diversified enough to call the reader's attention. The result of this technique, where there is no significant variation of the width of the lines, is that the images that are supposed to be more important in the panel are not visually marked as distinct from the background, having roughly the same importance and thus requiring interpretation from the reader in order to determine the most important zones in each one of them. That stresses the importance of the varied depth levels, pointed out by Ness, and helps to call the reader's attention to the differences in each image. This helps the effectiveness of the high level of details both in the backgrounds and in the foregrounds (and midgrounds) of *Watchmen*, which is known by its realistic approach.



Figure 69 - Thickness of Lines and Depth (*Battle Pope* #12, p. 21)

The lack of variation in the comic's base lines (the width of the line is comparable to the stressing of a statement: the more an image's contours are marked, that is the bolder they are, the more they contrast with their surroundings, and the more they come forth closer to the reader – as can be seen in the figure above: Santa, in the first plane, is marked by an extremely thick line; the pope, in the midground, is less marked and Jesus' contour, in the background, is the least marked in the panel) makes the images hard to tell apart in relation to their background, requiring the reader's interpretation. This calling for the reader's attention is industrious in the case of *Watchmen*, where, as seen, there are multiple

levels to the reading of most images. The profusion of details in the background and, sometimes, in the foreground (as opposed to the ‘midground’, the usual distance to the focal point of the image) are part of the narrative’s resources and could not be left without consideration. The careful approach to detail by Gibbons (who planned not only the sceneries’ compositions, but also made building models with the camera angles in some pages and, in the case of a repeated image or a motif, such as the smiley face and the bottle of perfume, made models so that there would be no variation in representation) helped build an intensely realistic atmosphere, heightened by the use of deep shadows (black blots that helped to convey a markedly emotional intensity to the narrative, at times – especially against the light). The notoriously well-behaved sense of proportion and perspective is industrious in building realistic sceneries. Yet, in comparison with other superhero comics, there is a sense of proportion that is not kept: there is no exaggeration in the images. As obvious as this observation may seem to be – a realistic image leaves no space for exaggeration, after all – there is method in this madness: realistic images are often (and practically as a rule in superhero comics, especially at the time) tempered with exaggeration in order to convey character’s expressions and feelings more easily. In *Watchmen*, on the contrary, the proportions are maintained to the point of exaggeration in their perfection, to the point of the caricature. According to Bensam:

Everything is very real in *Watchmen*. According to John Higgins, the creative team even debated how far away from Dr. Manhattan the color scheme should be affected by his pale blue aura and how the scene’s lighting should color the wrappers of the sugar cubes to which Rorschach keeps helping himself. This is a high-definition, highly detailed, world. Considering this detail through McCloud’s eyes, we might find the work as such: a high definition world tells us “this is the real world we are entering”. Additionally, we find highly-detailed characters. If highly-detailed characters stand off from us, representing ideas rather than characters we can empathize with, it becomes apparent these characters are *indeed* caricatures (BENSAM, 2011, loc.1334)

This highly unusual approach to caricature rests, then, in the assumption that *Watchmen*’s characters are less relatable for being realistic. The idea makes sense – the approach to the style does not. The fact that a realistic image is less relatable does not make it a caricature; the idea of caricature lies in the exaggeration of the features in order to evoke reality. Exaggeration is the key to caricature, then. And, with all the respect,

Gibbons' rigid lines and proportions are not open to the possibility of exaggeration. In fact, the comic may even suffer for this. According to Douglas Wolk, commenting the art of Dave Gibbons, "his art is understated, even muted, with no sense of motion and very little cartoony distortion" (WOLK, 2007, p.239).

There is a significant use of the angles and panel size in order to conform to the contents of the panels (a use that Groensteen would call *rethorical*). A good example of this use is the panel in chapter #04, page 20, with Dr. Manhattan killing vietcongues, which occupies the full height of the page in order to heighten the feeling of Manhattan's dimension (who is also seen from a worm's eye view, and so seems even more grandious). So, a shift of both panel size (that feature has already been discussed in this work) and the angle of the caption are used in order to convey a certain feeling or effect. The lay-outs of the pages are regular, a use which Groensteen would call discrete. However, they are also organized in ways that call attention to the form. The most renowned example of this feature in *Watchmen* is Chapter V, *Fearful Symmetry*, in which the lay-outs of the pages coincide: the first and the last pages have the same lay-out, and so do the second and the penultimate, and so on. So, regarding style, up to now we have a severely realistic approach to proportions, perspective (fundamental in the representation of reality), and a variation of panel sizes and angles in order to fulfill the narrative's needs. Added to that, there is a clear predominance of testimonial panels, eye level views, which put the reader in the midst of the action and act as an enhancer of the feeling of realism conveyed by the art. This is the rule in the work – but not a rule without exceptions. The play with the perspective in fact is crucial to the understanding of the plot and the narrative stance. The work does not make significant use of features such as hatches (except in occasional textures and in Dr. Manhattan's body), which may on occasion – specifically when used for lighting and gradation – be confused with the reading of the drawings, demanding more attention from the reader. In *Watchmen*, hatches are used mainly to indicate volume (black ink blots take care of the intense shadows, and the colors help take care of the rest). The result is a "clean cut" comic, in which black shadows are put to quite a good and economic use and the little variation in lines makes for a distinct and clear, if somewhat rigid, appearance.

Since this work has presented a proposition of reading style that is not solely concerned with the elements of the image, but also with their interaction and mingling,

some more observations can be made. The first one is in regard to the bodily and facial expressions of the characters. As seen in Scott McCloud, the facial expression of a character can present varied degrees of stylization, exaggeration and symbolism in order to convey their feelings. Groensteen also separated the categories of *emanata* and other pictograms (*simbolia*) related to character's emotions – both categories would be considered symbolic by McCloud. What one can say about the expression of the characters in *Watchmen* is that they don't seem to have a wide range of expressivity.

Gibbons' well-behaved approach to the character's proportions and types does not allow for a wide range of elasticity or freedom in the images. This is used to the narrative's advantage at times – in the obsessive amount of details in the scenes, for instance, and in the perspectival representation of backgrounds that helps to anchor the comic's feeling of realistic content – even despite the obvious incongruencies between reality and the representational universe in *Watchmen* (dirigibles, genetically altered animals, the hovering Artie and Dr. Manhattan himself) – but also hinders the character's expressions: a facial expression conveying a feeling that is not strong enough to deform the face is not a strong expression and, therefore, does not convey a strong feeling. As a result, the characters seem 'off tone' at times in terms of facial and bodily expression, even when crying and having doubts. Of course, that lack of exaggeration that hinders some of the image's expressivity works wonders in characters that are supposed to have an odd feeling to them, like Rorschach, an obviously perturbed individual, and Dr. Manhattan, who is both a not-so-obviously perturbed individual and no longer fully human. They look exactly as emotionally off-putting as they should.

Of course, that is not to say that Dave Gibbons does not succeed in conveying a "regular" character's emotion – just that there is a slight lack of exaggeration in the comics' style, and, as a result of that, a slight lack of expressivity. That makes the characters' emotions odd at times, like marionettes mimicking awkwardly human expressions. Then again, maybe that effect is due to the contrast between other superhero comics, which do not hesitate in employing exaggeration, and *Watchmen*, which attains to a realistic approach to style.

In that regard (that is, regarding also the typical style and character presentation in the regular superhero comics), it is also of interest to investigate the characters' proportions

in *Watchmen*, which also seem slightly different. It is important to stress that this investigation is due to a very personal impression that has accompanied me since my first reading of the work, more than two decades ago – and, as such, may be biased or wrong. But I feel the matter is worthy of pursuit and so I will develop it further. Since the human experience of the world is necessarily anthropocentric, we look for connections and meaning everywhere. Now, we have learned – as has been abundantly shown by Eisner’s and McCloud’s works revised here, and in another dozen significant works also mentioned in this analysis – to identify a large range of bodily and facial expressions. That means that, when looking at a human figure, we analyze this information while concentrating on distinct features: the *face* (the head) and the general body *posture* and *gestures*. Considering the gestures (what is being made with the arms and legs), the hands are highly dexterous and expressive parts of our anatomy, and are very important in determining the corporal expression of a character – the feet are to a large scale bound to the ground, and so not as expressive as the hands, though the knowledgeable use of anatomy and focus can make wondrous expressive feet in drawings.

There’s symbolic significance attached to the human body. The head is the center of our perception, the way we interact with the world and perceive it; the hands are the first tool humans learn to use to interfere with the world, the thing that makes them into actors rather than spectators of the world. The use of feet, rather hard to master, at least in the first year or so of existence, are the door to a whole new level of mobility. As a result, the head has come to symbolize our awareness of the world (effect that can be divided functionally – eyes are related to vision, noses to the sense of smell, ears with audition, hands to tactile sensitivities, etc.), the hands our power and/or dexterity (since using fingers is complicated, long, elongated fingers need more dexterity to use and so their owner is seen as more dexterous); our feet, our mobility and also dexterity (large feet, such as a clown’s, are awkward). The regular style of superhero comic books slightly enhances those features (expressive heads with large faces, big and powerful hands and feet) that are centers of our perception of expression, thus conveying the exaggeration that renders their actions more recognizable – and so more intense.

Watchmen’s heads, hands and feet seem very slightly out of scale in relation to their bodies, slightly small. Again, this is a very sensible feature, almost insignificant – and perhaps it is only felt by the contrast with the somewhat exaggerated proportions found in

other superhero comics. But, even so, it tells something about the characters that is not usually shown in superhero stories – it tells of characters that are not as powerful, mobile or perceptive as the ones in the other comics. The small hands of *Watchmen*'s characters may symbolize – and heighten – the pervasive feeling of impotence against the impending holocaust presented in the narrative. Their small heads symbolize both the incapacity to apprehend the world (even Veidt needed Blake's help for that) and their place in it, and the feeling of pressure, of being smashed by the grandeur of reality. The small feet may render the characters unable to move, incapable of transformation, stuck in a unscapable situation, made the more real through the mercilessly realistic detail and proportions and perspective of the background they are set against. In fact, to a degree, the lack of expressivity in the characters is heightened by the diminishing of their expressive features, and makes them seem insecure, unsure of themselves and their emotions – in short, more human than most of the characters in superhero comics, now and then. In a sense, the realism of the style constrains the character's emotions and expressions and helps to build the tone of the narrative, in which the heroes are supposed to be diminished under the importance of the developments in the world around them. My problem with that is that when the characters display their emotions, those are unconvincing.

The characters' features and body types present a wide range of differentiation, to the point of reflecting the notoriously diversified ethnic make-up of New York (Dan Dreiberg is arguably Jewish, and also quite chubby for a superhero; Walter Kovacs, with an unknown father and a notorious Hungarian surname, is red-headed, short and freckled, perhaps indicating an Irish or Scottish father; Laurie is of Polish descent; Veidt probably German; Doctor Malcom Long is a chubby African-American, his wife, Gloria, is thin, and so on). Superhero comics usually present little variation to the human figure. That includes both the superheroes themselves and regular people – the large majority has a perfectly proportioned human figure. Even characters that are supposed to be deviant in appearance, such as Spiderman and Bruce Banner (the human counterpart of the Hulk), supposedly skinny, become muscled models in most of the production. Only villains are allowed to be aesthetically unpleasant, such as the fugly Otto Octavius, Doctor Octopus, or the bold/bald Lex Luthor, Superman's nemesis. *Watchmen* is a highly unusual comic in this sense, another feature that helps increase the sensation of realism. A character such as Bernie, from the newsstand, fat and bald, or Kovacs himself a plain ugly superhero – and described

as such (*Watchmen*, #05, p.28) – are another mark of the enormous difference of approach between the work and other comics of the genre (so much so that *Watchmen* is not considered as belonging to the genre of superhero comics – it won a Hugo Award, as a science fiction novel).

Another point of distinction between *Watchmen* and other comics is the lack of elements such as *emanata* (as mentioned), to suggest the characters' emotions, but also other narrative devices such as onomatopoeias for sounds and indicatives of movement, such as movement lines and ghost-images in moving objects. Walter Hudsick very aptly summarized the reading effects of these stylistic choice in his article *Reassembling the Components in the Correct Order* :

Without sound effects and emanata, the images alone have to convey all the movement and action. Is someone standing, walking or running? Only their positioning, the reactions of other characters in the scene, and, our own knowledge of body mechanics clue us in it. Is a bottle floating or falling? We have to look closely at the fluid inside and trust our innate sense of physics – there were no other markers to let us know. We were off the map, and this disorientation subtly added to the sense of differentness that pervaded the book. (HUDSICK, 2011, loc. 384-92)

If anything, the lack of elements indicating the acoustic and kinetic qualities of the comic enhanced the idea of mimesis in *Watchmen*, purposefully hiding elements that have no visual place in real life. The narrative also provides a distinct visual quality for some voice-overs: Rorschach's diary is depicted as a series of yellowish and stained pieces of paper torn out of a notebook, giving the impression that the reader is actually peeking into the diary, something with a physical existence. The same goes for the notes of Dr. Malcom Long, though these are not shown as distinct in any way, they also lend a sense of purpose and reality to the voice-overs (that is, they are fragments of a diary connected to the narrative). The *mise en abyme* of the story inside the story, *Tales of the Black Freighter*, presents scroll-like papers, as if every caption were a treasure map, besides the fact that it is a intradiegetic text. When dialogue appears as a voice-off (that is, the speaker is not in the scene) in parallelism (the speaker is not in the same setting), the captions are between parenthesis, to indicate a quotation of a voice. While that denounces a narrator, up to some point also helps to anchor the voice-off with the diegetic reality presented. Dr. Manhattan's

interior monologue on chapter four also presents the characteristic visual elements of his ‘voice’ (light blue color in the caption, with a white border, marking some strange quality in the sound of his voice). All these choices are part of *Watchmen*’s style.

4.2.3.2 Colors in *Watchmen*⁵⁵

Sara Von Ness draws from McCloud (*Understanding Comics*) when analyzing the use of the color palette in comics, which is traditionally rich in primary colors (red, blue and yellow), which were picked for features such as strength and contrast. The author also relies on Gibbons’ *Watching the Watchmen* to analyze some of the specific choices made in *Watchmen*. For Ness:

Watchmen’s color palette consists mostly of secondary colors. These colors – orange, green and violet – are achieved by mixing the primaries with one another, and contribute an entirely different tone to the narrative than do their primary-color companions (NESS, 2010, p.40).

The author comments that colors are most effective when there is a perceptible change in its use during the narrative; when all the colors are saturated and bright and do not contrast significantly with one another, any impact they might have in the narrative is lost. Ness cites the bright neon sign near Moloch’s apartment to create mood with color (the blinking light of the neon sign is suggested through a difference between tones, alternating warm and cold schemes in consecutive panels). This alternation effect is also used in the telephone conversation between Hollis and Sally, prior to Hollis’ murder, where differences of time and ambience determine the character’s locations and lifestyles: Sally’s color scheme is made of light primaries (pink and yellow), while Hollis’ is governed by dark violets and oranges.

⁵⁵ Those can be better checked on Annex 01, in the end of the document. Since there were many images to put in this section, I thought it would be better not to ruin the work’s formatting and use them separately.

Ness quotes Higgins' mention that the colors were made to work with the art, but also to "enhance the mood and drama of the story" (GIBBONS, 2009, p.171), and mentions the colorist's account and work in chapter six, where the colors grow increasingly dark throughout the story, as the psychiatrist is infected by Rorschach's pessimism. Ness also mentions the limitations of the coloring process of the time, which did not allow for the colors that Higgins wanted for the piece – problem solved only with the publication of *Absolute Watchmen* (2005), digitally recolored by Higgins (the most flagrant differences being the gradient fill of the sky behind Dr. Manhattan in the impressive page-height scene of his gigantic self, in worm's view, while killing vietcongs (*Watchmen* #04 p.20), and the coloring of *Tales of the Black Freighter*, the story inside the story, to which a vintage coloring effect was added (impossible to do when all the coloring of the book is vintage, as before).

There are some things that need to be mentioned about this. These observations are a bit technical, and do not make a huge difference – the most known theory of colors is that the primaries are red, green and blue, so we might as well stick to that idea, which is not wrong, as long as it is mentioned that they are *addictive* primaries. Even so, there are some inconsistencies with Ness' approach that need to be mentioned, considering that a theoretical analysis should not allow for misunderstandings: according to McCloud's assessment of the theory of colors, the basic primary additive colors are not red, blue and yellow, but red, blue and *green* (MCCLOUD, 1994, p. 186). Also, if you take red, green and blue as primaries, then, according to Fraser and Banks' *Complete Guide to Color* (2nd ed., 2007, p.27) – who, by the way endorse green as the third additive primary (p.26) –, the secondary colors resulting are not orange, green and violet, but yellow, cyan and magenta. Third, the dominant palette in *Watchmen* is *not* made of secondary colors (and especially not of orange, green and violet), but of *subtractive primaries*, a concept invented in 1869 by Louis Ducos Du Hauron. That is because *Watchmen* is a printed edition, and therefore does not use the register of primaries used in screens: red, blue and green are primaries of *light*.

Addictive or subtractive, the way to think about primary colors is in terms of what you need to do in order to get white. Addictive colors only work on computer screens and the visual world: if you add blue, green and red light, you get white light, but if you add blue, green and red inks, you get a sickening brown. So you need subtractive colors, made

for printing – you subtract every one of them, you get the absence of color, and in printing that means white, the usual color of the paper. Those colors are yellow, magenta and cyan. Since these colors put together also do not make black, the black ink was added as a complement – and therefore we have the colors people use in their printers, CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and black).

Those, as mentioned, are the base colors for *Watchmen*. That means two different things: first, the record is significantly different from the regular, additive primary record kept as a constant in superhero comics (as mentioned by both McCloud and Ness). Second, the colorist has an equally precise control about the purity and saturation of the colors in the work. Those two features put together sum up *Watchmen*'s difference regarding its use of colors: subtractive instead of additive, highly precise colors. Similarly to the saturation in regular superhero comics (mixtures of subtractive primaries), the colors could be mixed in 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% saturation. Their absence meant pure white.

Now, there are different ways of mixing colors: one can use the contrast between tones, the symbolic value of colors and/or the simple theory of primaries, secondaries and tertiaries to use a palette. In *Watchmen*, a symbolic register was frequently adopted in order to convey emotional tone. Throughout the narrative, the color red was employed in creating emotional context, while the cyan at 20% saturation was used to signify an emotionally neutral context. That would be Dr. Manhattan's light blue.

Dr. Manhattan, shown in the plot as becoming increasingly emotionally distant from humanity, is colored in a light cyan, which does not vary with the lighting and shades in the ambience he is inserted in; the use of a blue tone on a human figure (a nude one, no less) and that unchanging characteristic help the character's unearthly appearance. As a result, the specific shade of cyan becomes an indicator, a symbol of an emotionally neutral disposition or situation. This effect is used in several scenes, right up from the beginning of the narrative. In the last panel of the first page of the story (*Watchmen* #01, p.01), the effect of the distancing "camera" culminates in a look above the character of the detective looking below, sharing the view to a point, but also hovering above the scene. The comment of the character is not about the horrid scene in the gutter, but about the drop. The detective is surrounded by blue glass, an indicator of detachment that has its presence increased (from panel 03 on) as the eye of the reader is pulled back from the reddish

violent color of the blood in the gutter. Following that, the tones of green, yellow and blue are used in the scenes of investigation, in contrast with the panels showing the reddish scene of the murder. The detective's uninvolved assessment of the situation is a counterpoint to the violence of the crime. In the last panels of page 04, the detective shivers as they pass Rorschach, in 'civilian' clothes, the red of his hair as a lingering memory of the murder's violence. The red-headed Rorschach, by the by, is the emotional opposite of Dr. Manhattan: violent and disturbed.

This is an example taken from the beginning of the narrative in order to make a point, but is hardly the most notorious use of the emotionally neutral qualities of the light cyan in *Watchmen*. Other examples one might point out are the scene with the materialization of Dr. Manhattan for the first time since his intrinsic field was dissipated (*Watchmen* #04, p. 10, pan.04), in which his blue presence dominates the scene, shedding bluish light over all of it. In the following panel, shocked and irresponsive, in bluish tones that are a reflection of his presence, all look, astounded, not yet ready for an emotional response. Manhattan's presence is an emotionally null point on the surface of the red (actually, magenta) planet, and it contrasts with pretty much every other character and scenery that share the space with him. Except, maybe, in the scene where the character teleports the reporters that surround them out of the TV studio (*Watchmen*, #03, p.16), the blue, black and white Manhattan now involved by a quiet, peacefully empty, light cyan studio.

Another scene that works by contrast between cyan and red and presents a highly sophisticated color usage is the end of issue eleven, with the "regretting" of the Comedian's murder by Veidt (*Watchmen* #11, p.24-28) and the parallel action going on in the lower third of the page showing a fight between Joey and her lover, Aline, which sets out of hand and ends up involving pretty much all the 'civilian' characters shown in the comic (except for Seymour and Hector, from the *New Frontiersman*, who survive the destruction). The scene alternated between a blue register, illuminated by the blue light of Veidt's multiple screens, where he confesses (let us call it that, even if the character makes it clear that confession implies penitence, which is not the case) to the Comedian's assassination in an uninvolved manner. Alternated with the blue panels are scenes from the crime. As mentioned before, the scene with the comedian's assassination (all 14 panels of it) are colored with red and magenta, contrasting with the neighboring panels due to that

strong and violent color record. The scene from New York, that is seen as a parallel action taking place in the lower panels, is colored with brown, purples, yellows and greens, in a totally different palette. As Veidt reveals that he already put his plan into action, the scheme changes: there are two panels in which the astonished heroes cannot express anything but surprise, a pause in the action that is, supposedly prior to an emotional outburst (therefore, blue) and the scene is changed to New York, where the panel fragmentation gives the impression of a slow-motion as the scene, which starts with also astonished blue tones, becomes dominated by the presence of white, as if the light had erased the images from the page.

But a scene that I find particularly imaginative (with the blue record also coming from a TV screen) is that of Dan Dreiberg and Laurie Juspezyk's failed sexual encounter (*Watchmen* #07, p.12-19). When the couple sits in front of the television, watching the news and drinking coffee, there is another polarization of alternating panels, in which the blue light from the TV showing the dialogue between the couple and the screen of the TV itself, with a more diverse and saturated palette, at first dominated by greens, yellows and oranges, but which changes to a magenta/yellow/orange palette afterwards. Dan and Laurie watch the news, which is about Rorschach's prison, and the invasion of Afghanistan by Russia (and a peace demonstration that was subdued by the police in England). Up to this point, the conversation between Dan and Laurie is apropos of what is being shown on TV. When the news show the disappearance of the writer Max Shea, the conversation becomes separated from the TV contents, and quickly flirtatious, as a research of extra-dimensional energy sources by the Institute for Extraspacial Studies is presented. They are embracing as an advertisement starts (of Veidt's perfume line, Nostalgia, in which a romantic nightly scene by the sea, with the song *Unforgettable* as its theme), colored in the same tones of the neighboring panels, forming a whole with them: a couple kissing over a romantic scene. Then Veidt appears on the TV, the screen suddenly is dominated by yellow and orange and contrasts more vividly with the blue/magenta of the alternating panels. With Veidt's performance comes Dan's incapacity to perform, greeted with ironic applause from the TV. As the screen goes back to the green and yellow tones, the couple sleeps, the screen turns black and white, and Dan's dream occurs. In the segmented time of the dream (which lends dimension to each detailed action, a slow-motion), the color palette is more realistic, the characters present skin tones and the climax, the kissing moment is in an

emotional red, an explosion so intense that it turns white, engulfing the couple. When Dan wakes up he is in the blue unemotional record in front of the TV. Now there isn't a contrast between the TV and the room, the TV is only a white source of blue light. Dan leaves the room to a dominating desaturated brown and yellow scene and goes to his basement, where he puts on the goggles and sees everything in pink and magenta. As Laurie gets there too, she is also seen in those colors. Out of Dan's ocularization, the colors of the narrative are back to normal, not overly dominated by a tone nor desaturated.

Dan's account of his reason for being naked in the basement at three fifteen in the morning (that is, his concerns about the seeming inevitability of the war and his impotence to do anything about it) are reinforced by the color scheme shown: the account of the world on the TV shedding the crushing unemotional light over the couple, under which they are unable to act, to perform, even to love. In that sense, Dan's dream is symbolic of the situation, in which he is only capable of regaining his masculinity by being able to act upon the world around him – in tights, no less. The color scheme is as revealing as the dream.

The use of red for emotional scenes is pervasive in *Watchmen*, so the mention should suffice. But it is interesting to make a quick account of red and its uses. First, no scene is redder than the Comedian's murder. It is funny to think that a degree can be given to how red can a red scene be, but the fact that the deviations from the red in the scene are all towards the saturated magenta do make a difference – see, red is the mixture of magenta and yellow, and the use of little yellow and more magenta makes for the impression of a red diving even more deeply into the red register. That makes a difference, for instance, in the scenes with the account of the Comedian's life made by Rorschach at the end of chapter 2, where the murder scene is purely red and magenta (with darker tones), the scenes from life are red and yellow (that is, the scenes of the murder do not get past a minimal degree of yellow saturation, while the other scenes are more variable in relation to that). Other red scenes worthy of mention are the scene (*Watchmen*, #02, p.14-15) where the Comedian has his face slashed and kills the Vietnamese woman (in which Dr. Manhattan plays a blue, somewhat uninvolved, counterpart), Dan and Laurie's encounter with the thugs, (*Watchmen*, #03, p.13-14), Dr. Manhattan's memories of Vietnam, where he is a blue giant hovering above the red scene of violence and despair (*Watchmen*, #04, p.20) and, on the following page, "a city is shouting" (same edition, p.22). On page 25, an emotional Laurie

storms out while the pale Blue Manhattan is in the foreground. The *Tales of the Black Freighter's* stranded sailor making the boat with his crew's corpses and eating a raw seagull are also depicted in red (*Watchmen*, #05, p.09), and again in the two panels in which he is killing the shark (p.20). Moloch's house presents the alternation of reds and the impressive face close-up with a bullet wound in his forehead (p.24). In chapter 6, Rorschach's aggression (2 panels on page 4), the shank in the prison (p.12), Rorschach's realization that the girl was eaten by the dogs and the conclusion of the case (p.20-25). In chapter 7, the scenes of the fire. Chapter 8 has the pirates assassinating the crew (p.3), the prison break (in which Rorschach kills Big Figure), the mariner's resolution to take revenge (p.26) and Hollis Mason's assassination (p.27-28) – all with dominant red tones. Chapter 9 has the big scenes on Mars (p.09-10, also p.22). Chapter 10 presents the assassination of the moneylender (p.12) by the mariner, Dan's emotional reaction to finding out about Mason's death (p. 14-16) – if the somewhat yellowish scenes inside the radiation shelter of page 3 are not considered. In chapter 11 there are not many red scenes; the light of Dan's laser is magenta, and the most notorious use of red (not taking into consideration the scenes from the Comedian's assassination which were already accounted for) is the brief fight between Veidt and Rorschach (p.19); in it, both characters are involved by red, though not colored red themselves. That enhances the violence of their actions and its contrast with the long explanation that Veidt starts, about his career and plans. This contrast may be understood as intentionally nonsensical. Chapter 12 starts with a reddish palette, in the first page of the destruction scene. This palette is attenuated in the following pages until it becomes dominantly green, magenta and yellow. Since this is the page with the inscription "or all die" (p.6) on the wall, the colors seem to diminish the effect of the corpses and, to a point, ponder that the sacrifice was necessary, and at the same time enhance the idea of the alien nature of the creature (green blood) while, at the same time, making a cynical commentary on the charred bodies of the embraced 'bernies' in the ground before the creature – the adult heroically trying to protect the young. Other occurrences of red, such as Laurie's accidental fire and Rorschach's purposeful one, were not taken into account here, though they usually present a reddish glow. This is not supposed to be a complete account of the use of red, just a list of the most reddish scenes made in order to show their violent and emotional content, proving the symbolic use of the color in the work.

Colors can also help a narrative by giving a certain ‘feel’ to the settings. The surface of Mars is magenta, red, orange and yellow, at times, and in this sense is used to indicate a sensually vivid visual experience. On the other side of the color table, Antarctica is white and neutral, dominated by bluish and cold tones. Sally’s home in California is full of yellows and sunny tones, and presents a reasonably saturated and diverse color palette, while Moloch’s house, illuminated by the street sign, alternated between a reddish light from the outside and the darker, bluish tones when the sign light is off – incidentally, when the refrigerator door is open, the scene turns green, increasing the idea that Moloch is sick. As was already pointed out in this work, colors help to make solids apart, giving an impression of dimension to the images. *Watchmen*’s radically different approach to color is certainly responsible for the immediate impression the reader has when opening its pages for the first time – that he has something different in hands. After all, the high level of detail, consistent presentation of settings, motifs and even character proportion, well-behaved, consistent non-differentiated lines and the lack of exaggeration in perspective (allied to the lack of other narrative resources, such as graphic representation of sounds and movement) are things that are gradually perceived and absorbed, as is the pace of the verbal narrative (despite its strong beginning). But the colors jump to the eye at the first flip of the pages.

4.6 FOCALIZATION

Focalization in comics is a tricky notion, to say the least: it is very difficult to be sure whether a scene is mediated by the view of a character or if it is merely a testimonial angle, so common in our world’s experience. Perhaps the best account of focalization in comics was made by Kai Mikkonen, with the mention that graphic storytelling can use external and internal focal points at the same time, that a character’s point of view can also be indicated by a sequence of character reaction to a scene followed by the scene that the character reacted to, and that the shot *over-the-shoulder* is also an indicator of internal focalization (that is, not necessarily through the character’s eyes, but close enough). Were it not for these considerations, the only way of being sure about internal focalization would

be what she calls *perception shot*, that is, the distorted perception of the action: there is no significant difference between a character's ocular view and the ocular view from a point three centimeters in front of the character. That is an exaggeration, obviously, but serves to illustrate the problem of separating the ocular angle from the testimonial one – perhaps irrelevant when considering the scene itself, but important when trying to identify its focalization.

Mikkonen's breakthrough is precisely that: internal focalization is not marked solely by the ocularization shot, but also by several other elements that may support or even contradict themselves inside a same narrative. In *Watchmen*, a story of storytellers, it is fair to assume that all the memories are mediated by the consciousness of those who are remembering, and that the several intradiegetic narratives can influence the reading of the panels to which they are superposed (and which they may or may not contradict, an ironic use that serves to make the narration explicit – indicating another focalization, that of the narrator, or meganarrator).

However, it is interesting to go a little deeper into the novel and gather some examples of focalization. In the intradiegetic texts it works in quite an obvious way: the focalization is mediated by the character responsible for the text. Rorschach's journal starts the narrative, so the point of view offered to the reader as the framing distances the reader from the sidewalk, in the first page, is filtered by Rorschach's consciousness and comments – though the images are not Rorschach's memories nor mediated by him. That is one of the instances where the idea of a monstrator proves helpful: Rorschach and the narrator are different focalizers in the same panels. Similarly, the chapter in which Dr. Manhattan narrates his own story (the only example of internal verbal focalization in the story, which has no thought balloons or other direct representation of consciousness) is mediated by his strange approach to time, to the point of confusing the reader with both utterances and the sequence of panels mixing time up. Rorschach's psychotherapy sessions are mediated by the consciousness of Dr. Malcom (through extracts from his notes), which is alternated with Rorschach's perspective and narration whenever he remembers things (to which Dr. Malcom could not be privy). An indication that Rorschach is the focalizer of the images is that the violent moments are colored with emotional red, an indication the strong feelings involved in the scene. While Dr. Malcom could present such feelings while listening to the story, Rorschach was the one damaged by them, and so it is fair to assume

that those are his recollections, not Dr. Malcom's imagination – besides, Rorschach's memories start before his narration to Dr. Malcom. Laurie's memories in chapter nine are internally focalized, while her stroll on Mars' surface with Dr. Manhattan is not. And so on. A detailed study of the focalization in the narrative would be both extensive and obvious, to a large degree. But there are interesting uses in *Watchmen*, and those deserve mention.

First, the idea of distorted perception is used in different ways. The use of the colors to enhance and portray emotions can be understood as a distorted perception of violently emotional moments, more specifically in the case of memories. But, since this resource is consistently used in violent scenes, internally or externally focalized, it appears not to be the case. Other instances of possible distorted perceptions in ocularization shots are the flash from the camera in Sally's memory of the Minutemen's reunion (#02, p.04, pan.7), Laurie's teleportation to Mars (#09, p.01-02), Laurie's face reflected both in the toy (#09, p.07, pan.9) and in the mug of coffee (#03, p.10, pan.1), in Daniel's memories, and so on:

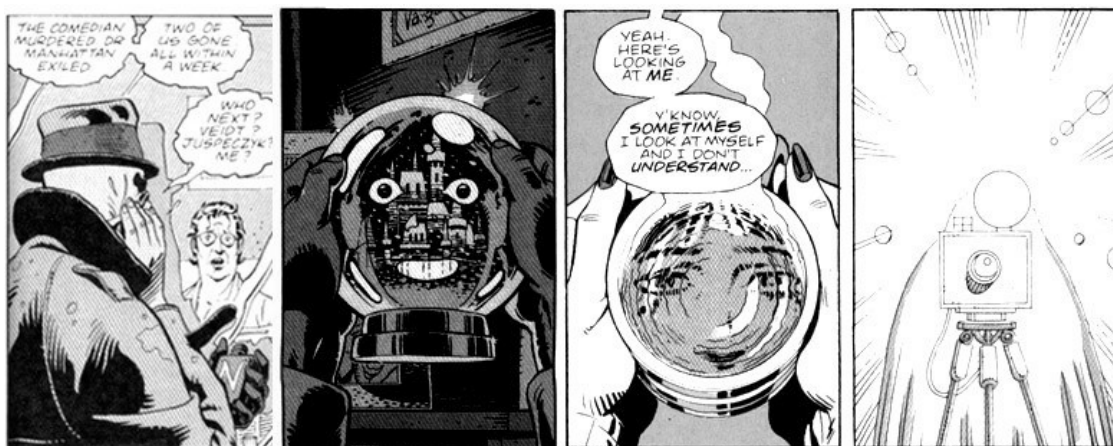


Figure 70 - Examples of Internal Focalization

It is quite easy to determine why those specific panels are internal focalization through the character's point of view rather than testimonial shots approaching that point: whenever there is a character's direct reflection in the panel, there is nothing interposed between the reflection and the character – and therefore, through the elimination of the possibility of a different narrator, it is indicated that it is the character who is looking. The flash is another thing, completely: when the flash of a camera is activated, it does not make the world white. That is merely the impression of a person looking at the camera, since the sudden increase of light is too much and too sudden for the retina to deal with. If the light

of the flash turned everything white, the only possible picture would be a white frame. Another interesting example is Laurie's trip to Mars with Dr. Manhattan:



Figure 71 - Trip to Mars (*Watchmen*, #09, p.1-2)

The scenery gradually disappears, being substituted by black, then reappears in a different setting. This, plus the fact that there is a character's hand being held by Dr. Manhattan, and that he is looking straight at the owner of the hand, suggests internal focalization and the distorted spatial perception of the teleportation as a series of black gaps. Those are, beyond doubt, ocularization shots, as seen by the characters. However, as is seen in most of the memories, more often than not the characters are seen in third person view, even if they are the ones remembering. Leaving aside the fact that this occurs also in real life (memory is largely a reconstruction, and it is not unusual a third-person recollection), this is a narrative necessity: otherwise the focalizer of an image could not be seen outside reflections, and as a result most stories in first-person view would not have the focalizer, or the main character, depicted in them – unless it is a monologue in front of a mirror. The death of the Comedian is a good example of focalization over-the-shoulder: the point of view is not consistently that of the assassin, but it follows the assassin's movements closely, even to the point of giving the reader the impression of being the one holding the Comedian. So, in a sense, the reader is the culprit.

In the article *Focalization in Graphic Narrative*, as seen, Horstkotte and Pedri analyze the idea of braiding in the Comedian's murder scene, in *Watchmen*. Their objective is to study “the function of higher-level repetition and repetition-with-a-difference for signaling (shifts in) focalization (p.343). They analyze each of the sequence's imperfect repetitions to finally arrive in the conclusion that in each instance of the representation of the murder a different conscience is displayed. In their assessment of the sequence, the first instance, where the detectives are presenting their view of what might have happened in the scene during the murder, is that:

Either the red panels constitute straightforward flashbacks in which *Watchmen's* covert narrator communicates to his readers what really happened – unbeknownst to the detectives in the first narrative. Or the red panels indicate the filtering mind of the two detectives who are teasing out the murder details (HORSTKOTTE & Pedri, 2011, p.345).

The fact that the red panels correspond to a comment or supposition from one of the detectives is an indicator that this sequence is influenced by their conjoined consciousness – though there is an ironic tension in the panel where the Comedian is thrown through the window and the sentence “groundfloor coming up” is uttered over it. This use of irony indicates yet another conscience judging the detective’s behavior, making this a scene with double focalization, that of the detectives and that of the ironic voice of the covert omniscient narrator. Since the detectives were not present during the assassination, their view of the scene is but a hypothesis (the red color being a focalization-marking device indicating the scenes are derived from their mental processes). The irony points to the uncertainty of that view, indicating a higher level of consciousness. Below, the full sequence, which appears fragmented in its three different appearances inside the book. The numbers in the circles below each panel indicate where they appear: if in the first sequence, the second or the third. Panels with more than one number in the bottom appear more than once, and the panel with the Comedian being thrown through the window is presented with a different framing in the last appearance – a double panel instead of a triple one. Due to that, a thin white framing was inserted over the panel and numbered accordingly, so that the reader could appreciate the angle and framing appropriately. More, the last panel, the same size of the others but totally red, constituting an ellipsis in the narration, was omitted and only presented as a frame with the word ‘ellipsis’ in it. That was due to the format of the panels and their distribution on the page – so, the last panel is the same size as the others:



Figure 72 - All the Comedian Deaths (Watchmen, #1 p.2-4, #2 p.26-28 and #11 p.24-26)

The second presentation of the murder is marked by Rorschach's diary entries. Also, the sequence is presented amidst scenes from the cemetery and images from the Comedian's life. As Groensteen pointed out (2007, loc.2021-2042), the repetition of an image is never complete, because of the very fact that it is a repetition: the images, in another context, take other characteristics, related to Rorschach's world view. That shift in the verbal track (with the narration of the journal) and not in the iconic content of the panels indicates a shift in the focalization of the scene: it is no longer the detectives' consciousness assessing the scene, but Rorschach's. The surrounding panels (scenes from the Comedian's life), according to Horstkotte and Pedri, are also filtered by Rorschach's consciousness – and an indication of that focalization is the fact that the memories use a shade of red similar to that used in the murder scene, another indication of focalization:

Both the sequence's repetition and its blending with the surrounding co-text, then, serve to express Rorschach's pessimistic view of the world and human nature as unchanging and unchangeable (HORSTKOTTE & PEDRI, 2011, p.347)

Not only that, the content of the panels is not the same. Looking at the figures above, one can see that a panel was omitted in the murder sequence (the comedian being carried) and the last three panels changed, now focusing the final instants of the Comedian's fall from street view, and ending in an ellipsis (a totally red panel). Horstkotte and Pedri suggest that this shift may be due to Rorschach's witnessing Blake's fall (though they could not be an ocularization shot or the focalizer would be dead, crushed by Blake's falling body).

The third appearance of the sequence is in chapter eleven, during Veidt's confession. The five initial panels are shown, and, instead of the Comedian's body being carried, Veidt's face carrying the comedian is shown, before the panel with Blake's body smashing the window (which is reduced in size, as commented). There is again a complex weaving between the verbal and iconic tracks, where the utterances are sometimes in ironic conflict with the images (for instance, the use of "a terrible blow" for Blake's discovery of Veidt's plan superposed to Blake being hit on the face). For Horstkotte and Pedri:

Veidt, then, is the character focalizer within the context of this third murder sequence, but his focalization is once more embedded within that of a covert narrator whose subjective processing of information taints the lags and tensions between the visual and the verbal track. (HORSTKOTTE & PEDRI, 2011, p.348)

The reduced size of the panel in this third sequence indicates Veidt's emotional alienation from the murder. The authors also comment (but do not explain) that "although the optical perspective in all three sequences is that of the murderer – Veidt – it is only in the third and final sequence that Veidt is the character focalizer" (p.349). The authors consider that the idea of the focalizer is a key element in understanding the work, and that several other parameters (such as color, style and contrast with other panels) also add to the meaning of the sequences and are also important:

However, if readers fail to ask who focalizes each of the repetitions, then a crucial dimension of the story is lost on them. Focalization is the narrative tool that makes it possible for readers to experience what the storyworld is and feels like, thus ensuring their engagement with it. In fact, it is not by chance that the murder sequence, and not another event, is repeated in a different context throughout *Watchmen*. (Horstkotte & Pedri, 2011, p.350)

Ingenuous as their analysis may be, Horstkotte and Pedri seem to have overlooked an important aspect of the process, which is taking the rest of the diegesis into account while doing their analysis of the focalization in the murder sequence (or scene). For instance, there are, in fact, several events that are repeated in different contexts in *Watchmen* – as seen in the section of this work dedicated to frequency. They are just shown through other angles, as if seen through different minds, and not repeated in full – then again, neither is the murder sequence, it always changes. A great example of that effect is the meeting of the CrimeBusters which, as it was already pointed out, appears five times in the narrative and is usually shown through different angles.

The first time the meeting appears in the narrative is through Veidt's perspective, as he remembers the meeting during the Comedian's funeral. This instance is the longest of the appearances of the events, with almost three full pages that tell the whole story of the meeting up to the point where the Comedian left (*Watchmen* #02, p.09-11). In this sequence there is no indication of ocularization or internal focalization – and yet, they are Veidt's memories because of the transitions between the panels that start and finish the sequence, where there is a shift in the character's clothes and context, but not in the character's position in the panel. This resource is used three times during the funeral, for the perspectives of Veidt, Dr.Manhattan and Dreiberg. So, as memories, it is fair to say that they are focalized through the characters that are remembering. Yet, these panels are not red. The image below shows the panel arrangement in Veidt's first account of the Crimebuster's meeting of 1966 (the images are small, but were reduced to preserve the readability of this study – it would take too much space to quote them in a bigger size). The seventh panel in the third page of the sequence deserves attention:



Figure 73 - Crimebuster's Meeting According to Veidt

The meeting of the Crimebusters is also remembered by Dr. Manhattan, in chapter four. The characters sees the events mainly as a couple's discussion between him and Janey Slater, uninvolved with the subject of the meeting itself. Notice the fourth panel, the very same pointed out in the image above:



Figure 74 - Crimebuster's Meeting According to Dr. Manhattan

In chapter nine (p.15), however, Laurie has a different view of the events, but the panel with Janey leading Dr. Manhattan out is constant:



Figure 75 - Crimebuster's Meeting According to Laurie

Rorschach's memory of the event in chapter six (below) is also shown in the figure above and in Veidt's memories, only through a different perspective (same moment as the middle panel in the figure above and the third panel of the third page in the previous one):



Figure 76 - Crimebuster's Meeting According to Rorschach

Despite being memories, and, as such, understood as internally focalized, these scenes do not present a red register in the colors. The reason I am pointing that out is that Horstkotte and Pedri see in that characteristic of the images a sign of internal focalization, whereas it has been extensively argued in this work that it is more consistently used to enhance the emotional tone of the scenes, mainly related to the violent ones, while the light blue is the mechanical, astonished or unemotional register. Another use of memories in the work was pointed out by Ness (2010, p.84) to indicate a shift in narrative perspective, and it refers to the scene of the beginning of chapter seven when, hearing Laurie's scream after she accidentally set fire to his hideout, Daniel remembers Rorschach's words in two different previous instances, related to the masked killer, and runs down the stairs, thinking

that Laurie is under attack. The shift from the diegetic reality to his memories is what Ness pointed out as a shift in perspective, but there is another interesting thing to be observed in the scenes:



Figure 77 - Reality (Watchmen #01 p.12, #03 p.24)

The figure above presents the panels that correspond to Daniel's memories of the fact in chapter seven. The figure below is his accessing of the situation through his memories:



Figure 78 - Memory (Watchmen #07 p.03)

What do all these memories have in common? Different angles to identify different perspectives of the events. There is a hint of the narrator's intrusive voice in the repetition of the panel with Janey Slater and Manhattan leaving the Crimebuster's meeting, but other than that, even when the same event is presented, there is a shift in perspective to indicate clearly that another consciousness is filtering the action. This feature is lacking in the murder sequence, where the large majority of the images is repeated.

For me that means that the structures of monstrator and reciter are indeed very instrumental in understanding not only levels of narration, but also of focalization: while it is clear that the voices that narrate, comment and make assumptions about the crime sequence are relevant to the understanding of the sequence, they do not necessarily dominate the sequence. That is, focalization may be different in the images and in the recordatories. That means the reader is invited to consider the images under the light of the discourse present in the recordatories (which end up functioning as a guiding voice in the reading of the panels, a focalizer), without the images being necessarily constrained by that focalization, or limited by it. On the contrary, though the focalization during the repetition of these accounts is indeed oriented through a consciousness that is commenting it (the detectives, Rorschach and Veidt, respectively), the repetition of the images makes it clear that their insertion in the narrative in that particular manner is an intervention of the narrative voice. It is the narrator's account of the murder – a feature made clearer due to the external representation of Veidt carrying the Comedian in the last repetition, abnormal in a scene consistently following close the actions and view of the murderer (though looking for an indication that the scene is a reflection of the character in the window's glass, which would make the image consistent with the other representations, there is none – no 'noise' in the image that indicates it, and the interference of the medium would be necessary in the reflection and was established as the norm by other reflections in the work).

Horstkotte and Pedri see the covert omniscient narrator's voice in two of the three repetitions of the sequence. I believe the narrator is present in all three of them. Though the interpretation of the second scene is indeed mediated by Rorschach's consciousness (as already pointed out), the perfect repetition of the majority of the sequence does not invite the reader to the conclusion that the character responsible for the narration or voice-over is also the focalizer of the action in the scenes: due to the regular use in the novel, a scene

shown under two different characters' point of view will present differences in perspective. The omission of panels or a new part of the sequence does not account for that. It is my opinion that the sequence is yet another story-within-the-story (*mise en abyme*): a detective story following the classical model. The unfolding of a crime's investigation is carefully mediated by the narrator, who presents the clues to the reader, while purposefully omitting any that could lead to the identity of the perpetrator (or murderer), in order to increase the narrative suspense by playing with the reader's need for closure. In the end of the narrative, the criminal is revealed. Turns out it was not the reader.

Another interesting and consistent example of internal focalization is the Comedian's visit to Moloch. In two full pages (*Watchmen*, #02, p.22-23), a use that is seen nowhere else in the work, the narrative assumes consistently and without any ambiguity the viewpoint of a character, including the change of lighting in the setting (caused by a bar sign outside the window). The scene ends with the Comedian practically grabbing the reader by the collar and asking for somebody to explain the joke to him, with an utterly perturbed face, made even more grotesque by the tears and the horrible scar. This scene is very interesting and – also in my opinion – important to the interpretation of the work as a whole.



Figure 79 - Consistent Internal Focalization

There are other options of focalization in comics, of course. External focalization is the rule, and even when the action is following one character from the outside, it is still mixed or undetermined. However, in *Watchmen* there is also a recognizable use of testimonial shots, that is, angles of the action where the observer is at eye level with other characters, giving the impression that the images could be pictures taken from someone walking on the streets with a camera. That is used to give a sense of reality to the action, and is also a very well established convention, since it is not only the perspective of a

normal person (and, as such, common to all), but also used consistently by the arts – paintings, portraits, photography and most films use this resource, conscious or unconsciously. Thus, it is very common also in *Watchmen* – the choice of the angles is used with the precise approach to details and perspective in order to increase the impression of realism that is pervasive in the story and carefully cultivated by the narration.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This is the part of the work where the conscience comes to knock: was it worth it? What did this work do? Has it advanced the study of the field? Has it achieved its objectives?

While I intend to answer these questions, there is an aspect of the work that is still left unmentioned, and which no deeper study of its narrative components can help elucidate: what is *Watchmen* about, after all? Who watches the Watchmen? By the way, who are the Watchmen? I believe these considerations belong here, at the end of the journey. I'd like to make a final point, related to these questions. This point is structured in four elements: the first page of the work, here used as an example of a certain pattern; the Comedian's assault on Moloch, the only scene consistently shown through internal, ocularization view; the pervasive message "who watches the watchmen?"; and, finally, the big plan which eventually changes the world.

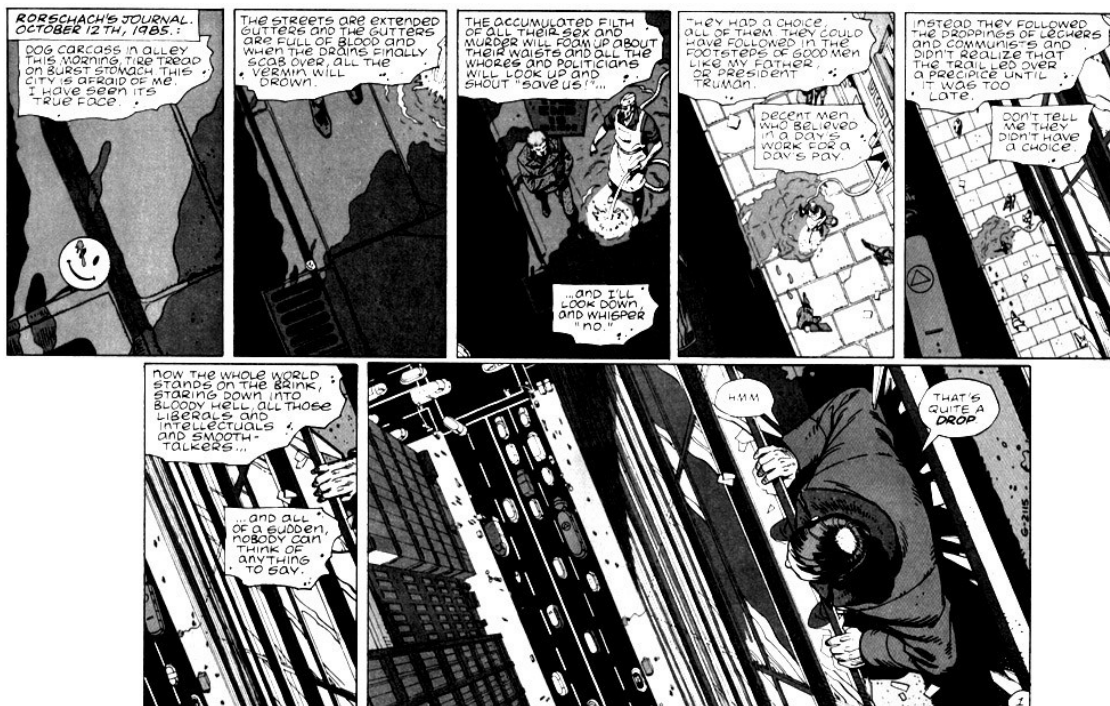


Figure 80 - Perspective (*Watchmen*, #01, p.01)

Considering the first sequence of the work, as seen, there are several elements that are different from the usual superhero comic book: the colors, the narration (itself colorful and extremely violent, with an unusual speech pattern), and the lack of thought balloons, movement lines, emanatas and onomatopoeias. The first page is also a symbol of

something that is going to happen again and again throughout the work. Instead of allowing the reader's immersion in the story, the comic keeps distancing the reader again and again, calling attention to the narration, particularly to perspective. Not the perspective of the scene, though it is also quite nicely represented on the page, but also the perspective with which the reader watches the action. On the page, the 'camera' does not only move to match the character's point of view: it also rises high enough to show the character's fairly ridiculous bald spot⁵⁶. The reader is invited to look at the comic from a distance, paying attention to all these details that the characters, silly paper people, are not privy to. That is, the reader is put in a privileged point from the beginning and told that this higher perception is the attitude to assume when approaching the comic (of course, that impression is reaffirmed with each narratorial voice's intrusion, and, as seen, they are legion).

Then, at a certain point of the work, the reader is put to bed. In a sequence of two pages, only one consisting only of ocularization shots, the reader watches a character, shown again and again throughout the narrative as possessing a very acute mind and understanding the state of the world, crumble and cry, drunk, saying that everything is a joke and asking the reader to explain it to him.



Figure 81 - All a Joke (*Watchmen*, #02, p.22-23)

Throughout the work, a question is repeated again and again: who watches the watchmen? We understand that this is due to the rebellion against the vigilantes that culminated in the Keene act in 1977, but even so, the title of the work invites the reader's

⁵⁶ Professor Dr. William Kuskin, from University of Colorado, has a similar view of the sequence, to the point of understanding it as a "poem on perspective", as presented in one of the materials for the course Comic Books and Graphic Novels, available at <<https://www.coursera.org/course/comics>>, last accessed in 06/16/2014.

attention to the sentence. After all, who are the Watchmen? The Minutemen? The Crimebusters? This new incarnation of the superhero team? This last assumption is the most probable. But then... who watches?

Finally, there is the story. After the assassination of the character sets the action in motion, we see a chain of events that makes all these superheroes come together. Save for trying to solve a murder, there is apparently no aim to their actions. They manage to find out about a plan to stop the war, involving killing half of New York, only by the time they find out about it it's already too late to stop the massacre. And, in the end, they decide to shut up about it. Rorschach, Daniel, Laurie and Dr. Manhattan do not make any difference to the world whatsoever. The reader follows their adventures just to find out that the narrative, which constantly called attention due to its realism and strong scenes, has become redundant, and that a character that smells an awful lot as a super-villain from an old TV series outwitted all of them, creating a good chance to save the world in the process. His plan: teleport a psychic genetically engendered monster to the city, where it would mentally kill half of the city with information, recorded on its mind by several uniquely talented artists. His plan: through a common enemy, to unite Mankind.

It is not by accident that the giant squid is teleported to a square with a science fiction movie (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*) – this plan was taken directly from *War of the Worlds*, by H. G. Wells. The squid even looks like Wells' aliens (except for having only one eye): a giant brain, with a beak, full of tentacles. And that is *Watchmen*'s big joke: that the 'heroes' in the end prove irrelevant to the end of the plot, that the 'smartest man on Earth' cannot think of a better way than an insanely complicated plan with psychics and monsters and teleportation to his ends. In the end of the day, *Watchmen* starts as a realistic, dark story, and ends as an *Opera buffa*, a joke on the reader. Who, then, watches the watchmen? Well, you. And me. That is, the reader does. And the reader is the target of this three-hundred-page practical joke, in which the reader is invited to ask itself about the role of the hero not only in the narrative, but also in modern society. As Campbell puts it:

The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. "Live," Nietzsche says,

"as though the day were here." It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal —carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair. (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.362)

Or, as Veidt puts it, a 'less obvious heroism', no more 'schoolboy heroics'. *Watchmen*, in a derridean gambit, assumes the reasoning and logic of the superhero genre in order to break it from the inside, exposing its simplistic entrails to the reader.

In that sense, *Watchmen* is a deconstruction of the medium: it uses the specificities of the language and usual plots in order to build an anti-plot, the opposite of a superhero comics – and tease the reader with the possibilities of the medium, in an overcomplicated narration that is all the time calling attention to itself and its literary and poetic qualities (its symmetry and particular use of narrative time) only to pull the carpet from under its feet in the end. And it is well-deserved, because they warn the reader perfectly well: it's all a joke. That, I believe, is where both the readings of those who love the work and those who hate it fail – they either don't see the joke, or take it seriously. And that is a terrible thing to do with one of those.

Other than for allowing that reading of the text, the work has accomplished, also in my opinion, some things that were more than necessary. To start with, I do not believe anyone has gotten this far in the proposition of a way of studying a comic's style. At least not in a single work – the techniques and resources employed were scattered in half a dozen books, as seen. This is also one of the most extensive analysis of a comic's style that I know of – which does not mean a great deal, but even so. That this technique was employed in the study of one of the most relevant comics is a very welcomed bonus.

The adoption of narrative theory was industrious in the study of time in the narrative, mainly due to the breakthrough of making the analysis of order, duration and frequency separately, which helped to understand the especially complex structure of time in this work. The theory was also very helpful in understanding the narrative voice present in the work. On the opposite side, the adoption of comics' theory and other authors that had previously dealt with narratology and comics helped to understand the various effects of focalization identified in the graphic novel. Despite the fact that there were already

studies related to focalization in comics and how it was manifested in *Watchmen*'s murder case, these analyses seem to have been deepened by this work, which also offered a reinterpretation of some of their features taking the whole of the piece into consideration.

The study of the characters, which presented also psychological features, endeavored to show a significant advance in relation to the study of the actants, but that was only to be expected – if actants are characters without qualities, characters are necessarily richer than actants. Be it as it may, the idea that narrative theory can delve into the psychology of the characters without losing itself in a game of mirrors and in the investigation of the inner lives of structures that by definition have none is not only necessary, but also useful and liberating in narrative theory. Characters are paper people, mere narrative structures – granted. But paper people faking human qualities, nonetheless – and, as such, passible of analysis and comparison within the behavioral patterns that are the basis of psychology and psychiatry: they do not have an inner life, but when the narrative suggests that the analysis of such patterns may help to understand their fake motivations and psyches, it surely deserves a look. This work intended to make a point of it, and that has been achieved. But even if one chose to leave that aside, this is one of the most extensive narrative analysis of a work that I know of – and certainly the most extensive narrative analysis of a comic book.

Perhaps it is interesting to mention that the works of Luiz Antonio Cagnin and Moacy Cirne had not, up to the present, had extensive reviews in the English language. That is a great loss, the fact that the first scholar (that I know of) to apply narrative theory to comics has left the field seemingly unscathed by his presence and accomplishment. I am referring to Cagnin. I hope this work can at least shed some light in this situation – for it is far too late to remedy it. But I digress, and, since I was not intent on ending this work on such a grim note, better go back to the subject.

If, on the one hand, narrative theory can be enriched by some of the methodology and concepts related to comics which were applied in this work, on the other hand its organizing structuralism can also be of very profitable use in the study of comics. This strange multifaceted language is prone to interdisciplinarity: so dynamic as to be able to hold every theory and approach imaginable. But, in any flight of imagination, one is wise to keep an eye on the ground, if only to be sure not to fall from a great distance, in case of

mishap. An eye on the structure. And I believe this work has proven – to the extent that anything relying on interpretation can be ultimately proven – that the spinal chord of the narrative theory can be very useful in understanding the text as a whole, in practicing an instrumental reading. Without which one could look at various aspects of a text without ever considering the whole of the story – and, as seen in the discussion about the focalization of the Comedian’s assassination scene, the whole of the story sometimes influences the reading of the parts.

If it is true what Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen wrote in the very interesting book *The Science of Discworld II: The Globe* (2002), and stories are in the core of our being and of our being humans – they believe that the ability to tell stories was determinant in the evolution of mankind, to the point of suggesting that we should not have called ourselves *homo sapiens sapiens* (very wise man), but rather *pans narrans* (storytelling chimpanzee) – then there is no higher call than to strive for understanding properly these structures that ultimately form our consciousnesses. One might do a lot worse than starting with a working understanding of their structures.

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The discussion entitled **Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie**, mediated by Matt Green, took place at Nottingham Contemporary on May 29th, 2012, and can be found online at the site <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93sV5XGLmgQ>>, last accessed 03/05/2014.

The material from the course **Comic Books and Graphic Novels**, taught by Dr. William Kuskin, is available in diverse formats through the free courses website Coursera (log in required) at the address <<https://www.coursera.org/course/comics>>, last accessed in 06/16/2014.



Annex 01 Colors

Blue Jesus and other Dr. Manhattan memories.



Dan and Laurie's love attempt on #07..

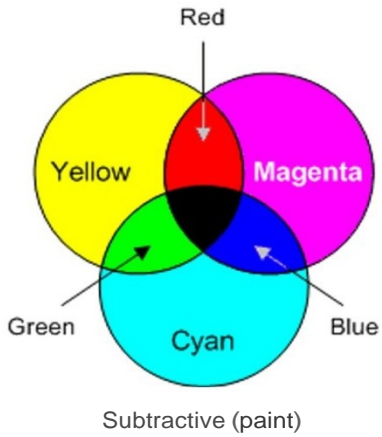
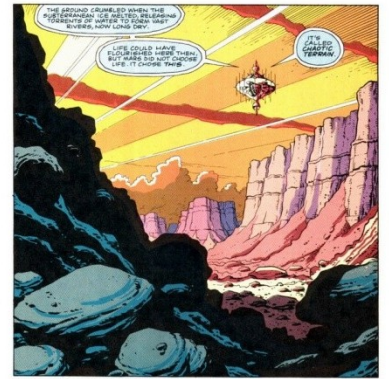
Neutral Blue (cyan)

Use of colors in 'Regular' Superhero Comic Book

Contrast of red and blue



Contrast between red and cyan: #4, #9 and #12.



Shift of Character's dispositions on #12.



The death of Big Figura on #8

Emotional Red



Rorschach's epiphany and violent moment in #6.