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Stylistics and comics
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INTRODUCTION

Most scholars agree that comics should be considered a medium, not a genre (Chute 2008; Fingeroth 2007). McCloud, who used the comics format to show how comics create meaning, insists on a clear separation of form and content: "The artform – the *medium* – known as comics is a *vessel* which can hold any *number* of *ideas* and *images*" (1993: 6). Over the years, the comics medium has been used to tell a whole range of different stories, including horror, science fiction, and children's tales of "funny animals," superheroes, and adventurers. Since the early 1970s an ever-increasing number of comics creators has also been exploring the potential of the medium for more serious genres, such as history, reportage, memoir, and biography.

Ryan suggests that what counts as a medium "is a category that truly makes a difference about what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented, why they are communicated, and how they are experienced" (2004: 18). In this chapter we explore the unique and less unique ways of presenting and evoking information and stories offered by the comics medium; in other words, its stylistics.

An August 2012 Google search for "stylistics and comics" in various permutations yielded not a single hit, which supports our intuition that the burden for deciding what might qualify as a stylistics of comics is really on us. The fact that "style in comics," however, yielded close to 30,000 hits makes clear that we are by no means in uncharted territory. In relation to comics, "style" is typically used to refer to the specific visual dimensions of the artwork, including choices such as drawing versus painting techniques, colour versus black and white, and realism versus abstraction. Comics style may also refer more broadly to such formal features as the layout of the page and the shape and arrangement of panels and speech or thought balloons. Examples of particular comics styles include Hergé's *ligne claire* ("clear line"), American underground "commix," and Japanese manga. In these stylistic features the reader may find evidence of "graphiation," the idiosyncratic gesture that produced a particular work (Marion 1993, discussed in Baetens 2001) and that offers "a constant visual reminder of the hand of the illustration artist, much more so than the writer's traces" (Carney 2008: 195). Variations in style are also sometimes used within one album or even within the same panel to indicate "degrees of certainty and nuances of attitude in relation to what is being recounted" (Miller 2007: 123), to add meaning by referring to other visual art, including other comics (Meesters 2010), or to distinguish between real life and fantasy (El Refaie 2010a).

Apart from such visual features, a consideration of stylistics in comics may also comprise the specific use of language in this medium. Comics can use words in the form of verbal narration in text boxes, as part of the landscape of the story world, to indicate sounds, and in speech and thought balloons. Here we will focus on those aspects of the verbal

modality in comics that differ substantially from the use of language in other art media (e.g., prose fiction, film, theatre). For example, the use of speech balloons gives some of the written language of comics a distinctly "oral" quality, as it is meant to be "heard" rather than simply read (Barker 1989: 11; Khordoc 2001). What is also distinctive about the language of comics is that the boundaries between words and images are often blurred, with words assuming pictorial qualities and pictures often being characterized by a high level of abstraction (Beronä 2001). Onomatopoeic words, for instance, are visually integrated into the depicted world of the story. Titles are also sometimes used as an integral part of the pictorial landscape (Harvey 1996: 80-85).

Our main goal is thus to provide a survey of the various categories of stylistic devices – be they verbal, visual, or multimodal – that are available to the medium of comics for communicating information and telling stories. This should help comics and multimodality scholars to detect stylistic patterns and idiosyncrasies.

We use "comics" in a very broad sense. The typical comic consists of a sequence of at least two panels. A comic strip in a newspaper may comprise two to six panels, while an installment in a magazine perhaps has a few dozen, and an album a few hundred. Multi-volume series may run into the thousands. All of these are, for present purposes, regarded as "comics." We also consider the term to cover serious book-length comics for adults, which are nowadays often discussed and marketed under the label of "graphic novels." Although many regions of the world have thriving comics cultures, we focus here on European comics, with some attention being paid to North American comics and Japanese manga. Scholars are invited to test our insights and generalizations against other traditions, and where appropriate refine or adapt them. In our discussions, we primarily have comics on paper in mind, but we are aware that there is a fast-growing volume of webcomics. Finally, some of what we say here also applies to single-panel "cartoons."

Our general perspective is informed by the commonsense idea, rooted in Sperber and Wilson's (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson and Sperber 2012) "Relevance Theory," that comics makers are artistic communicators intent on conveying more or less specific narrative meaning to a mass audience. This means that most readers/viewers are expected to agree on the interpretation of most of the information provided, although there is always scope for individuals to "read against the grain" or discover alternative meanings supported by inadvertently conveyed information – what Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 63) call "symptomatic" meaning.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Most scholars agree with Groensteen (2009: 15-16) that the ninth art started with Rodolphe Töpffer's *Histoire de M. Jabot* (1835), although American scholars sometimes see the beginning of comic strips in newspapers, specifically Richard Outcault's Yellow Kid series (1896), as a more important milestone. In Britain, modern comics developed out of the tradition of satirical monthlies such as *Punch* (from 1841). In any case, the second half of the 19th century saw the development of the art form, mostly in periodicals, more or less simultaneously in several parts of the world (Dierick and Lefèvre 1998). The 20th century witnessed a growing popularity of the medium with the arrival of comic books in the US and albums in Western Europe. Comics in many countries started to target a young audience more specifically. Since the late 1960s, the medium rediscovered the adult audience it had served well early in its history. The increasing availability of the graphic novel in regular bookshops testifies to this development.

Comics stylistics as a scholarly discipline is still in its infancy, but some trail-blazers deserve to be mentioned. The first major publications in Europe were written by scholars interested in semiotics, such as Eco (1964) and Fresnault-Deruelle (1972). In English, comics artists gave an impetus to stylistic research by analysing their own medium. Eisner (1985) and McCloud (1993) were landmark publications in this respect. Recently scholars from diverse disciplines, including literary criticism, cognitive linguistics and communication science, have intensified the interest in comics' stylistic repertoire. More generally speaking, there is a quickly expanding number of journals dedicated to comics, such as *Comics Journal, International Journal of Comic Art, Journal of Comics and Graphic Novels, European Comic Art* and *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art.* Of interest is also *Comics Forum* (2009– http://comicsforum.org/).

KEY ASPECTS OF STYLE IN COMICS

In this section, we discuss the stylistic devices that artists have at their disposal to create narratively salient information. Inevitably, there is overlap in the list, and we make no claim to exhaustiveness.

Pages, panel arrangements and the gutter

In a mainstream comics' album, the reader/viewer is expected to access the panels in a specific order, although in exceptional cases there may be some freedom. In the typical comic, panels are arranged in a regular grid pattern. They are normally read from left to right and from top to bottom, although, following Japanese reading conventions, manga pages and panels are read and viewed from right to left. The grid pattern format is frequently not followed by American superhero comics. Here a less strict reading direction applies, because panels may overlap, or be embedded

in, one another. Freedom with respect to the reading path is sometimes also exploited in art comics, such as those by Chris Ware (see Sczepaniak 2010) and in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004).

Comics panels typically have straight, black borders, but they can vary to suggest alternative interpretations. For instance, a cloud-like wavy line might suggest a dream scene or a flash-back (cf. Eisner 1985: 44-50). The panels themselves usually vary between squares and rectangles. Sometimes a panel is bigger, taking up the space of two or more rows, or even an entire page, called a "splash page." Many artists occasionally or often deviate from the conventional panel form: panels can be round, oval or polygonal, forms that – much like balloon contours – may carry specific meaning. The choice of background colours in panels may be meaningful, too.

The fact that, as Eisner emphasized, comics "deals with the arrangement of pictures or images" (1985: 5) makes the space between panels, the "gutter," extremely important. In comics, unlike in film or prose fiction, a scene (i.e., an event unified by space, time, and the characters that are present) can only be conveyed by selected moments depicted in panels, often supported by verbal information. Movements and any other actions or events that are not represented in the panels "happen" in the gutter. The relations between adjacent panels can be of different kinds (see McCloud 1993: 70-72 and Cohn 2007 for two proposals). The gutter thus always requires the reader to *infer* some information. In mainstream comics this inferencing process is so unproblematic as to be, or seem, completely automatic. On the basis of everything we know and believe as human beings, members of a culture, genre experts, and readers/viewers of the story at hand (together constituting our "cognitive environment," Sperber and Wilson 1995: 38), we usually have little difficulty supplying the intended inferences. But of course an artist may deliberately de-automize this inferencing process; or as idiosyncratic readers we may recruit presuppositions not envisaged by the artist nor necessarily shared with fellow readers (for more on inferencing applying the Relevance Theory model to comics, see Yus 2008).

In many comics, the page or the two-page spread is an important unit of meaning. Especially in European comics, the composition of a page can resemble that of a paragraph or a sentence in prose. Since all panels on a page or two-page spread are visible at the same time, their interrelations allow for additional stylistic play. Peeters (1998: 39-64) distinguishes between different types of page compositions; in one of them, the productive page, the composition appears to dictate the story instead of vice versa. Also, the final panel on a page can be used to end a scene or insert a pause. This happens most obviously with cliff-hangers in serial narratives, but can also be a way of pacing the story (Groensteen 2007: 29).

Several artists and scholars have noted the close association between time and space in the comics medium (Chute 2010; McCloud 1993; Miller 2003; Vice 2001), which chimes with the claim by conceptual metaphor theorists that there is a universal tendency to think and talk about time passing in terms of movement through space, with the future in front of us, the present right by us, and the past behind (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 41-44; Lakoff 1993). Eisner (1985) has discussed the pace or "rhythm" of comic book narratives by comparing the number of panels dedicated to particular actions. The reader's perception of temporality may also be influenced by the arrangement, size, directionality and shape of panels on a page and by the space between panels, or by reiteration, overlap, and changes in perspective (Dittmar 2008; Groensteen 2007; Schneider 2010; Wolk 2007: 181-202).

Comics also allow for every panel to enter into a relationship with any other panel in the book, forming complex strands of correspondences through "braiding" (Groensteen 2001). These links can be established through visual or semantic similarities. Contrasting or merging different moments in time can also be achieved by inserting visual representations of these moments within the same panel, by juxtaposing them on the same or on facing pages (for a discussion of more sophisticated variations, see El Refaie 2010b).

Body types, postures, and facial expressions

Body shapes and postures tell us a lot about the depicted characters. There are typical ways in which a beautiful girl, a mean old man, an arrogant boss, and numerous other "stock" types are depicted, even though a viewer may have to "learn" the idiosyncratic manner in which a specific artist draws them. Moreover, artists need to ensure that their heroes and heroines and other recurring characters are immediately recognizable. Often this involves specific clothes and other props: Obelix sports blue-and-white striped pants, Tintin is accompanied by Milou, Lucky Luke wears a white cowboy hat and has a cigarette (nowadays: a blade of grass) dangling from his mouth. In the case of autobiographical works, the medium offers artists the opportunity to represent their physical identities in ways that reflect their innermost sense of self by using a range of symbolic elements and rhetorical tropes to add layers of meaning to their self-portraits (El Refaie 2012a, 2012b, Mitchell 2010).

Physical activities (walking, throwing, fighting, giving, kissing etc.) are often depicted in highly stereotypical ways, although there is considerable freedom for individual artists to digress from these stereotypes. Since plot development depends on action, it is crucial that viewers correctly judge the nature of any physical activity. As movement can only be *suggested* in comics, the key moment of a movement needs to be chosen to convey the entire action – even more so in minimal "stick-figure" comics. Finally, body postures often help signal emotions and

mental states. Arm and hand positions are particularly revealing (Baetens 2004), because we can gesture and simulate much more accurately with our hands and arms than with other body parts. The manga album *Azumanga Daioh* exploits this in an unusual way: characters affected by emotion are sometimes depicted without hands, suggesting that their mental state makes them incapable of controlling their behaviour (Abbott and Forceville 2011).

For the correct assessment of mental states, facial expressions are possibly even more crucial (see figure 1). The depiction of eyes and mouths is especially informative. Based on the work of the psychologist Paul Ekman (2003) and the practitioner Gary Faigan (1990), McCloud (2006) demonstrates how the basic emotions of anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise can be visualized in comics as well as how they can be adapted to show various degrees of intensity, and combined to create other emotions and moods (see also Groensteen 2003, Eisner 1985). Tan (2001) suggests that conventional comics tend to use simple and highly exaggerated facial expressions to convey the universally recognizable basic emotions, which makes them transparent to readers of all ages and levels of literacy. The faces of characters in more complex graphic novels, he argues, typically reflect more complex and ambiguous feelings, which require a higher level of interpretative work by the reader. Much manga is characterized by the so-called "super-deformed" (SD, see figure 2) style, which means not only that certain body parts (heads, eyes) may be depicted out of proportion, or not at all (noses), but also that characters affected by emotion can suddenly have square eyes and mouths, looking like monsters (see Cohn 2010).

Fig. 1. Pertinent points: Facial expressions, droplet rune, twirl rune, creative balloon contour exceeding panel frame, standalone coloured punctuation mark, non-aligned bold face, onomatopoeia. Hergé, *Tintin et les Picaros* (Tournai: Casterman 1976).	Fig. 2. Pertinent points: Super-deformed style, popped-up vein rune above left girl's head, hand loss, movement lines, overlapping arms to indicate movement, spiky contour balloon. Kiyohiko Azuma, *Azumanga Daioh: The Omnibus* (Houston, TX: AD Vision 2007).	Fig. 3. Pertinent points: Creative balloon tails suggest intimacy. *All* characters in this album have their own balloon contour *and* their own letter font. David Mazzucchelli, *Asterios Polyp* (New York: Pantheon 2009).	Fig. 4. Pertinent points: Music note and star pictograms, droplets and twirl runes, movement lines. François Avril and Philippe Petit-Roulet, *Soirs de Paris* (Paris: Les Humanoïdes Associés 1989).

Most of this information is presented in a way that we are familiar with from real life. However, in many comics we see it in exaggerated, hyperbolic form. A face is not just red, it is lobster red; eyes do not just bulge, they almost pop out; bodies do not just shake, they seem to float

above the ground or are depicted in overlapping images. Shinohara and Matsunaka (2009) note that angry characters in manga often have a "popped-up vein." That this should be taken as a hyperbole that has acquired symbolic status transpires from the fact that such veins do not only occur in, say temples or foreheads, but also in unrealistic places (cheeks, hair, text balloons, or in mid-air, as in figure 2).

Framing and angles in panels.

Comics artists have various visual means at their disposal to suggest to their readers who is the most important character in the narrative and with whom they should identify or empathize. A simple but effective strategy for encouraging the reader to align with one character's perspective rather than another's is what film scholar Murray Smith has termed "spatial attachment," "the way a narration may follow the spatio-temporal path of a particular character throughout the narrative, or divide its attention among many characters each tracing distinct spatio-temporal paths" (1995: 142). Social semioticians believe that there are several ways of establishing contact between the viewer of an image and the depicted persons (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: Chapter 4). These authors claim that in pictures, as in real life, distance reflects the quality of the relationship. A close-up thus suggests an intimate relation, while a medium shot implies a certain distancing. A long shot may suggest either an impersonal or a completely distant relationship. Where there is "eye-contact" between a depicted character and the viewer, the former seems to be "demanding" something of the latter, whereas lack of eye contact invites detached scrutiny of a person being on "offer." Looking at people from above gives the viewer symbolic power over them, an eye-level view suggests an equal relationship, and a low angle makes the depicted person appear more powerful. A full frontal view, finally, is thought to indicate a maximum degree of involvement and a profile view to suggest a sense of detachment.

Making a similar point with regard to self-portraits, Cumming argues that a fully frontal view of someone looking out at the viewer is the visual equivalent of direct address in written language, inviting "the purest form of reciprocity" (2009: 26). The profile, by contrast, puts the self-portrait "straight into the third person" (2009: 38). Historically, comics have generally evolved from mostly long shots in profile view to more varied and dynamic ways of depicting characters.

The equivalent of a first-person point of view can be achieved by showing a character from behind or over the shoulder, which seems to offer readers the opportunity to see the world through their eyes (Saraceni 2003). Comics artists can also make use of what in the cinema is called an "eyeline match," where "shot A presents someone looking at something offscreen; shot B shows us what is being looked at. In neither shot are both looker and object present" (Bordwell and Thompson 2008:

240-241). In comics, the shots are replaced by consecutive panels. In some comics, long sequences of events, dreams, fantasies, or memories are shown from a point of view that coincides completely with that of a single character, thus creating a particularly strong affiliation with him/her. Sometimes the character through whose eyes we see the events of a story remains completely absent visually and the reader only sees what he or she does, as in Daniel Clowes's famous short story "The Stroll" (1990).

Speech and thought balloons

What comics characters say or think is usually represented in text balloons, although this text may also appear in blocks at the top or bottom of a panel, or underneath a row of panels. More often, however, this space is reserved for narratorial text that emanates from a non-character narrator or from a character-bound narrator looking back on events that are depicted in the panels in which s/he may him/herself appear (for more on this terminology see Bal 2009).

Balloons can vary on a number of dimensions that potentially carry narrative significance. In Forceville et al. (2010), a corpus of some 4,500 balloons in six different comics albums was investigated, yielding the following variables: form; colour; tail-use; occurrence of deviant fonts; and inclusion of non-verbal material. The list below is largely based on the findings in that chapter.

Form. Normally, an album or artist has a standard balloon form. The oval, with a tail linked to the speaking character is probably the most standardly standard form, but the *Tintin* albums, for instance, have rectangles with bites-taken-out-of-their-corners. What happens to be the standard balloon in an album is of no great import; what matters is that any deviations from a given standard may be meaningful within an album or artistic oeuvre. A *conventional* deviation is the thought balloon, which instead of a tail has "thought bubbles" linking the balloon – often featuring a cloud-like form – to the speaker. Another common deviation that is narratively salient is a balloon with spiky edges and often a sharp zigzag tail, which is associated with anger. Furthermore, electronically conveyed or amplified text (via a television, loudspeaker, mobile phone ...) is often indicated in a (yellow) balloon with a serrated contour.

Colour. The standard colour of a balloon is white, and the letters within it are black, in a standard font. But the balloon or elements in it (pictograms, letters) may be coloured. In European comics, red is often a signal for anger. However, the colour of a balloon, like any of its other variables, sometimes has a "local" significance only, for instance being associated with a specific character, or with a mental state. For example, in the Asterix album *The Roman Agent* (1972) anger is partly conveyed by green text balloons.

Deviant fonts and non-aligned letters. If one or more words in a balloon are rendered in a non-standard font, this is always meaningful. A word in bigger font, capitals, or bold face may indicate that it is emphatically pronounced, or shouted. By contrast, a smaller font perhaps suggests whispering, or fear. A "dancing letter" text could be an indication that its source is drunk, or confused, or that the lines are sung.

Standalone non-letter marks. Particularly mainstream comics often feature text balloons with a standalone question mark or exclamation mark, conveying surprise or confusion (Meesters 2011). Other punctuation marks, mathematical symbols, or yet other signs one can find on a computer keyboard sometimes appear in a balloon. This is an interesting stylistic phenomenon, since these are marks that, while not really verbal, are nonetheless symbols with a coded meaning. An artist may decide not to use language in balloons, but still employ such symbols (e.g. in Lewis Trondheim's *Mr I*, 2007).

Tails. Typically, tails point to the speaker of the text in the balloons, who is him/herself visible in the panel. But a tail may also point to a speaker who is not (yet) visible. This is often exploited as a source of surprise; not until the next panel, for instance, is the source of the spoken text revealed – a trick that works longer if that panel is on the next page, or in next week's comics magazine installment. A tail may also *straddle* two adjacent panels.

Of course, many of these variables co-occur, and often their precise meaning depends on this co-occurrence, combined with other stylistic features. Furthermore, it is to be realized that what has been sketched here are the norms and some common deviations from these norms. If and when a norm is clear, an artist may modify or depart from it. In American superhero comics, for instance, there is much more creative play with balloon form and colours than in European ones. The character that, in Dave Gibbon & Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1987), is after an accident transformed into Dr. Manhattan, for instance, has a blue rim along the inner borders of his balloons: this type of balloon is uniquely associated with him. Albums that feature creative use of balloon variables are David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp* (2009; see figure 3) and Brecht Evens' *The Wrong Place* (2009) (for more examples see Forceville forthc.).

Onomatopoeia and written words in the story world

Onomatopoeia is "the lexical process of creating words which actually sound like their referent" (Wales 2001: 277). It is thus one of those relatively rare linguistic phenomena where the form of a word is not arbitrary but motivated. That said, the match is partial at best: the English cock crows "cock-a-doodle-doo," the French one "cocorico," and the Dutch one "kukeleku." Onomatopoeia is comics' device par excellence to suggest sound. The cross-cultural similarity in onomatopoeia is

unsurprising, simply because English and French cocks – or Japanese ones, for that matter – presumably make the same noise, as do heavy doors being slammed, or objects being hit. Other sounds, such as sirens, trains, doorbells, or telephones, have stronger culture-specific dimensions. But even with identical sounds, onomatopoeias can differ greatly between languages. This does not necessarily imply differences in perception. A large number of sound effects are creative in the sense that they are rarely present outside of comics and their form thus allows for a great deal of variation. Pollman (2001) describes the process of creating such onomatopoeias as "inventing phonetics." Frequently used onomatopoeias are conventionalized and thus become words in a language. This process fixes their form and prevents the variation caused by imperfect imitation of real word sounds with phonemes from a specific human language. Sometimes translated comics introduce new onomatopoeias in other languages. Since sound effects are often inscribed in the image, they are technically more difficult to change in a translated version than balloon text. Belgian publishers, often dealing with original comics in French that are subsequently translated into Dutch, sometimes gave their artists lists of onomatopoeias that would translate well into the target language. Despite such regulating translation policies by big publishers, some onomatopoeias from foreign comics have become absorbed in other languages. E.g., *paw*, used for gunshots in English, is also used in French and Dutch comics, thereby partially replacing local onomatopoeias such as *pan* or *pang* respectively.

Onomatopoetic words in comics are often rendered in a font that at the very least deviates from standard fonts, but may also draw on visual qualities such as colour, non-aligned letters, and play on sizes. Lettering in languages like Japanese can be integrated more easily into the image because of the pictorial quality of Japanese orthography. Possibly this feature of the Japanese writing system has contributed to the extension of onomatopoetic effects to cue even inaudible phenomena, such as "silence" or "blushing" (Pollman 2001). Written words, such as road signs, posters, and shop fronts, may also tell a lot about the story world. Some comics artists also use textual artifacts such as extracts from letters, maps, and diaries in their work. In the case of non-fiction comics such documents are sometimes rendered in their original form, but more commonly they are reinterpreted through the artist's hand.

As Frahm (2003: s.n.) points out, in comics words and images exist "side by side on the same surface of the paper of the page," and are thus typically closely intertwined. For this reason word-image relations in comics are perhaps best understood in terms of a tension between sign systems that, for reasons of convention and expectation, are likely to be interpreted in distinct ways (Hatfield 2005: 37).

Pictograms and pictorial runes

We define "pictograms" as stylized depictions of phenomena that are familiar from real-life phenomena or from other visual genres, but that often have acquired a more or less conventional meaning within the realm of comics. An isolated pictogram would thus have some basic meaning of its own when encountered outside of comics – a characteristic that distinguishes it from the pictorial runes to be discussed later. Examples of pictograms are $ 🎵 💡 (see figure 4; for many more examples see Gasca and Gubern 2001: 312-411). Individual artists are likely to have developed their own style of depicting any specific pictogram. Moreover, artists may vary the standard depiction of a given pictogram creatively. Thus, the "light bulb" pictogram for a sudden, bright idea can sometimes suggest a torch, or a spotlight, or a campfire instead. However, normally pictograms are used to depict protagonists' mental states: they can occur on their own as well as in multiples (either of the same or in combinations of different sorts), and they can appear both within and outside of text balloons.

"Pictorial runes" is the name Kennedy (1982) suggested for "non-mimetic graphic elements that contribute narratively salient information" (Forceville 2011: 875; see also Forceville 2005). Walker calls them "indicia" (Walker 2000: 27). Pictorial runes are another device that helps comic artists visualize states and events that, in real life, would be inferred from other sources of information. We believe that runes comprise a limited number of items, with a fairly specific appearance and a more or less fixed meaning. Forceville (2011) made an inventory and counted the appearances of all the runes in a single *Tintin* album, paying attention to three dimensions: appearance (see table 1), location, and orientation. This inventory can serve as a starting point for further systematic analysis of runes in the work of other artists, cultures, or periods.

Speed lines		Three types of movement lines		Droplets		Spikes		Spiral		Twirl	Popped-up vein

Table 1. Stylized examples of pictorial runes used in *Tintin and the Picaros* (from: Forceville 2011: 877); the popped-up vein was identified in manga by Shinohara and Matsunaka (2009).

Most importantly, pictorial runes are used to convey movement in a medium that can only portray the static. Movements can by and large be subdivided into movements of an animate agent or object through space ("speed lines") and movements of body parts (of animate agents) or elements (of objects) relative to those agents and objects ("movement lines"). The second major role of pictorial runes is to help convey characters' emotions and mental states. In this capacity, the runes appear

around human (or anthropomorphized) characters' heads. The "twirl," "spiral," "droplet," and "spike" all fulfill this goal, which thus comprises emotional affect, dizziness, drunkenness, and confusion. Interestingly, the twirl is used both for motion and emotion, and this may well suggest a pictorial equivalent for the verbal similarity between the accompanying words, which both have the Latin root *movere* – to move (for more discussion of this idea see Forceville (2005, 2011). Other types of event whose interpretation by a comics reader is aided by pictorial runes are "pain," "sound," and "smell." The "spikes" rune is also used as a generic "attention-drawing" device: a halo-like circle of spikes around a person or object emphasizes a person or object that might otherwise escape the attention of the comics reader.

We dare claim no exhaustiveness for either the types of runes identified or their functions, but we feel confident that the list presented above provides a good starting point for further analysis. Various problems beset attempts at systematic runic analysis, including the distinguishability of runes, the range of runes used, their combinability both with each other and with other stylistic devices, as well as the degree of precision with which a certain rune is used – problems that pertain to a specific artist's oeuvre no less than to comics styles and traditions generally.

Future directions

While we hope to have grouped phenomena in intuitively plausible categories, we are aware that sometimes different choices could have been made. The borderline between pictograms and pictorial runes, for instance, may be a fuzzy one. But as long as we accept that categorization is done according to prototypes, this should not overly worry us.

Furthermore, it is clear that if a reader/viewer arrives at an interpretation that is somehow narratively relevant – whether pertaining to a character's emotions, motivations, or a state of affairs in the story-world – this is most often as a result of *combining* signals from categories: an angry character's emotional state may well be cued as such by, say, her facial expression *and* bodily posture *and* runes *and* pictograms *and* balloon variables *and* panel forms *and* font sizes *and* onomatopoeia *and* the balloon text, "I am mad as hell!"

Studies of onomatopoeia could pave the way for other cross-cultural studies of the use of language. After all, mainstream European comics have been translated into many languages, offering great opportunities for comparison (e.g., Khordoc 2001, Kaindl 2004). Other interesting avenues for research are the ways in which sentences are divided over different balloons emanating from the same speaker, or even different parts of a non-symmetrical balloon. Probably most such divisions respect clausal units, but enjambment-like divisions can be exploited for surprise effect.

We have shown that comics have a wide range of medium-specific stylistic devices to convey meaning. This meaning is predominantly recruited to tell a story, and thus our proposals are primarily informed by narratological concerns. But meaning-creation may also serve argumentative or didactic purposes. Comics are increasingly seen as a medium that can relay "factual" or "documentary" information (e.g. *Logicomix*, Doxiadis 2007; *MetroBasel*, Herzog et al. 2009; see also In 't Veld 2012). Comics elements such as balloons and runes are also used in educational books, brochures, and advertising.

We trust that the catalogue of comics stylistic elements presented here will function as a help for studies in different areas of research and teaching. First of all, of course, our proposals feed into the study of the history and theory of comics. All of the categories proffered invite questions as to when, where, and how the phenomena identified appear in specific strips or albums, movements, periods, genres, and cultures. And clearly there is always the possibility that some stylistic choices are symptoms of ideological ones. Studying specific corpora as well as conducting experimental research to test any theoretical findings are a logical next step (see Ojha et al, submitted). Moreover, because several of the categories (notably balloons, pictograms, and runes) have a standard repertoire of a fairly limited number of items and, perhaps, a rudimentary "grammar" governing how these can be related to form patterned structures, we believe that the stylistics of comics are of interest to students of visual culture and multimodal discourse more generally.

"Narration" and "focalization" and the multiple relations in which they can be hierarchically embedded are among the most complex and fascinating issues in narratology, and the ways in which the stylistic devices identified in this chapter can be deployed in their service deserves sustained study. And finally, as with all systematic research of culturally meaningful discourses and structures, the analysis of comics will also be of interest to cognition studies (see Kukkonen in prep.).

In this chapter we have mainly concentrated on elements of visual style that are typical of the medium of comics. But clearly there are other angles that can be brought to bear on the topic. We will very briefly mention two of these. The first is a body of work associated with *Gestalt* theory (see Arnheim 1969, Smith 1996). The basic idea of *Gestalt* theory is that human beings are biologically inclined to favour certain spatial constellations above others. Other things being equal, we prefer symmetry, continuity, and centrality over asymmetry, discontinuity, and marginality. Bordwell and Thompson (2008: chapter 4) draw on such insights in arguing how a filmmaker can direct the viewer's attention by skillfully setting up the profilmic reality (*mise-en-scene*) and making it interact with camera positions, angles, and movements. Comics artists, too, can draw on these hard-wired perceptive mechanisms – or subvert them.

Another pertinent field is the budding one of visual and multimodal rhetoric. Increasingly, the idea gains ground that many classical tropes and schemes, such as metaphor, metonymy, irony, hyperbole, antithesis, rhyme etc. have pictorial and multimodal equivalents. However, while there is now a growing body of studies on metaphor, some of them specifically focusing on comics and cartoons (Eerden 2009, El Refaie 2009, Schilperoord and Maes 2009, Bounegru and Forceville 2011), work on other tropes is only just beginning (e.g., Teng 2009; see Forceville 2006 for some discussion and references; see Wells 1998 for a list of tropes in animation film). The work on non-verbal rhetoric and on the stylistics of comics will undoubtedly be mutually beneficial.

Related topics
Relevance theory, narrative fiction, metaphor and metonymy, cognitive poetics, corpus stylistics, literary pragmatics, translation, film, multimodality, emotion & cognition

Five Key References
Groensteen, Thierry (2007) *The System of Comics*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. The best analysis of the mechanics of comics storytelling so far. This book deals extensively with panel and page composition and introduces the concept of braiding.

Heer, Jeet, and Kent Worcester (eds) (2009) *A Comics Studies Reader*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. A lively collection of scholarly essays on a wide variety of different comics forms, which introduces readers to the major debates and points of reference that shape the field.

Magnussen, Anne and Hans Christian Christiansen (eds) (2000) *Comics & Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press. This collection draws together comics research by scholars from Europe and the USA. The main foci of the contributions are on the aesthetics of comics and their relation to other media, the analysis of specific works and genres, and discussions of the cultural status of comics in society.

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