

Redefining Comics

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When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation. When we look at a painting we do not have to move our eyes in a special way even if, as in a book, the picture contains elements of depth and development. The element of time does not really enter in a first contact with a painting. In reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting. – Vladimir Nabokov¹

Oh, that's not *drawing*—that's typography. – Chris Ware²

McCloud's Definition

We all know McCloud's definition: "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer."³ But do we *like* it?

A good definition, McCloud says, should include the sorts of things we consider comics, while excluding things that are "clearly not" (4). His, however, lets in not just the likes of early 20th Century woodcut novels by Masereel and Ward, whose authors had no notion they were 'making comics', but also the Bayeux tapestry and the Codex Nuttall.

A little revisionism is always welcome, but this looks to be *a lot*. What is worse, it looks *ad hoc*. McCloud doesn't want all illustrated books—most children's books—to turn out to be comics; but they satisfy the letter of his definition. On the other hand, McCloud holds the line at *The Family Circus* (one panel, hence not 'juxtaposed'). Can it be easier for the Bayeux tapestry to pass through the eye of the needle of comics-hood than a one-panel gag strip?

What's the alternative? If not formalism, historicism. Aaron Meskin provides the paradigm:

The art of comics, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century and developed largely out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British humor magazines such as *Punch*, can and should be understood in its own terms and by reference to its own history.⁴

Adding another twist: even if this line is sound, does it follow that it's a good idea to *define* 'comics' at all? Meskin himself is skeptical. The most he would commit to would be

that *if* there is to be a definition, it should be historicist, on pain of being open to obvious counter-examples.

Let's start by ignoring this 'if'. Suppose we have done our diligent, historicist best to articulate a necessary (not sufficient) genealogical condition on comics-hood (as post-*Punch*-hood, say). That should keep out the Bayeux tapestry. Will it exclude anything it should let in? Apparently, yes: *manga*.⁵ But the *manga* point points both ways. If, following Meskin, we use 'comics' in a manner analogous to '*manga*'—i.e. to name a genealogically/historically/institutionally/geographically-defined tradition—where's the nonsense in that? 'Manga' is a fine and functional word.

What *is* the point of defining 'comics'? McCloud suggests we need a proper definition to "give the lie to the stereotypes," to "show that the potential of comics is limitless and exciting" (3). McCloud wants 'but shouldn't it have Batman in it?' (9) exposed for the sorry fallacy it is. But is a *definition* the tool for the job? Meskin is skeptical about definitions not just because he thinks none is forthcoming, but because he sees them as unlikely to provide what McCloud apparently thinks they are most apt to provide: real insight. Who's right?

Let me see if I can split the difference in two ways. First, let 'comics' be ambiguous between *genus* (McCloud's medium) and *species* (Meskin's history). There is even a grammatical marker if we follow McCloud in letting 'comics', in his sense, take a singular verb. (Comics *is* the medium.) History is important, so you have to have words to write it. But something like McCloud's historically revisionistic, formalistic definition seems to me necessary as well.

How so, and why? Because any historicist definition will be *ironic*. A definition should not afflict us with a sense that, even if it *was* so, it could have been different. One of the most distinctive features of this subject—comics—is: narrowness by birth, breadth by

nature. The problem with understanding the tradition in ‘its own terms’ is that those terms have a tradition of being, not to put too fine a point on it, *wrong*: too narrow. To a first approximation, comics are footnotes to *Punch*; yet most visual and much literary art is just footnotes to comics—in McCloud’s sense. So I will argue.

Putting the point another way: while terms like ‘*manga*’—hence ‘comics’, on Meskin’s usage—are usable, they are *odd*.⁶ ‘*Manga*’ means—has meant—1) works of a particular sort; 2) published in Japan. It’s 2) that nags, though 1) would be hard enough to nail down. ‘Comics’ has similar problems. You *can* create a social register of any comic that can trace its pedigree to *Punch*. But, supposing this keeps out *manga*, isn’t it perverse to define apart two things that have, in the event, hybridized to the point where they are often hard to distinguish? And that have done so because, at a basic level, they *work the same*? Don’t we need a term for *that*?

But here is a strong reply: yes, any good historicist account must allow for this sort of thing, but *going forward*. Admitting the city of post-*Punch* comics can form a megalopolis by sprawling to Japan does not commit one to insisting that, therefore, this has necessarily always already happened, by definition.

And here is an even stronger reply: the alternative is to take McCloud’s definition seriously, not allowing *ad hoc* stops, and then we just slide and slide. Realizing a few things that weren’t classed as ‘comics’ *work like* comics is eye opening. Finding out *everything* works like comics—hence *is* comics, by definition—probably means we made a stupid mistake somewhere and should go back to the drawing board. But not necessarily.

Which brings me to my second way of splitting the difference. What is a definition of ‘comics’ *for*? You would need one for certain sorts of quantitative research. If you are counting comics, you must say what you count. But McCloud is not primarily concerned with

quantitative research. Does that mean McCloud's definition isn't performing any proper function *for him*?

That goes too far: a definition makes a circle, in/out, center/perimeter. Our responses to works are informed by knowing where this circle—comics—is. Yes, but *do* we? Or do we just act as if we know, thereby pushing preferences and biases under cover of what appears to be a neutrally descriptive formula? A fair concern, but at worst a definition like McCloud's is an economical way of encoding *a lot* of attitude.

But why is *that* good? Robert Venturi makes a shrewd observation about how this goes: "Louis Kahn has referred to 'what a thing wants to be,' but implicit in this statement is its opposite: what the architect wants the thing to be. In the tension and balance between these two lie many of the architect's decisions."⁷ Mistaking what *you* want for what *it* wants may seem a silly error—even a lie—but it can bring out that tension and balance. So the point of this essay will be to articulate how a definition of 'comics' that seems doomed to die the death of a thousand flyspecks—counter-examples, that is—can be a source of essential insight.

Pictures and Comics

I am looking at panels, separated by gutters, populated by active, attractive, albeit implausibly well-muscled, precariously clad persons of human and superhuman nature. The eye is invited to take in the whole page while the panels, in sequence, are read as narrating an origin story. I am gazing at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Oh, gerrymander around Michelangelo, if you must. Insist on paper, rule out religious material.⁸ At the end of the day, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and a page from a superhero comic have a lot in common. This isn't to say they must be worth the same, but at a basic level they *work* the same.

Attempts to say what comics *is* by formal-functional analysis are going to have a natural tendency to expansive revisionism. Let me illustrate further. McCloud wants to keep out the bulk of children's picture books and illustrated books, nominally on the grounds that we don't call that sort of thing 'comics'. But we don't call the Bayeux tapestry 'comics' either. But McCloud does. So into the McCloudian comics longbox—with the Bayeux Tapestry and Codex Nuttall—go children's books, illustrated books, and (why not?) the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Next case: *The Family Circus*. Can we keep it out? It is almost sufficient to note the absurdity of supposing the funnies page, with its traditional mix of single and multi-panel strips, is working in two distinct *media*. McCloud tries various angles: you *can't* have single-panel sequential art because there's no such thing as a sequence of *one*. But no. Mathematically, you can have a sequence of *none*, the so-called 'null sequence'. Resting an account of the nature of comics on the semantics of 'sequence' simply doesn't satisfy.

It also won't do to suggest the single-panel items are cartoons—a style term for McCloud. Using one panel isn't a drawing style, it's a *narrative* style. Unpacking this point: a panel typically depicts only a single moment, but this need not be so. Or rather: it need be so only in a narrow sense we shouldn't get exclusively attached to. McCloud himself provides a quite brilliant illustration of how a single panel can have, as it were, an implied timeline, hence implied internal gutters (95).

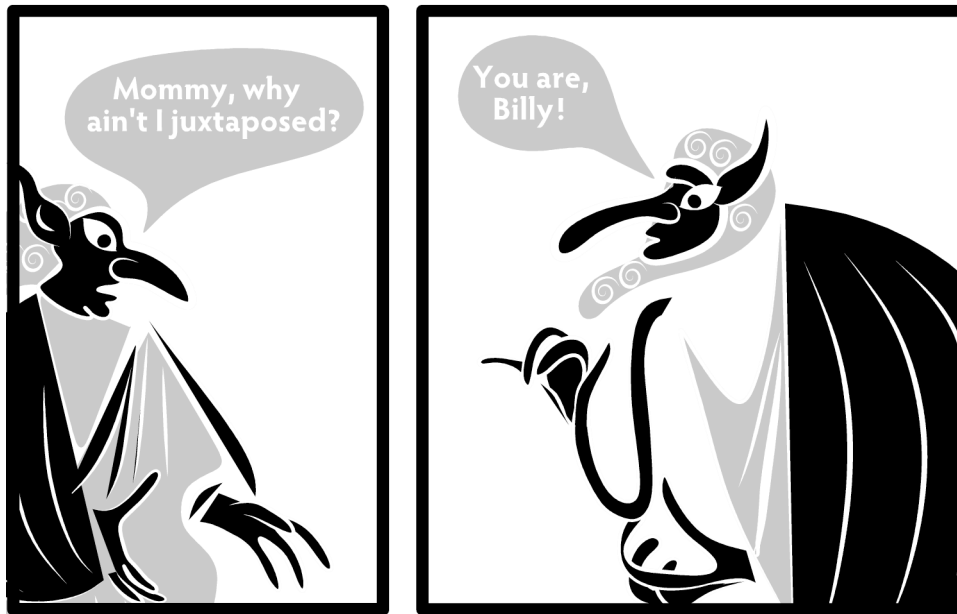
Let me make McCloud's timeline point less elaborately, because it is important to see how truly simple a case can illustrate it. Here are two gentlemen from my own book, *Squid and Owl*. I have long felt they should have something to say for themselves. Now they do.

FIGURE 1.1



In a left-right reading culture this might as well be:

FIGURE 1.2



Why not admit, as well, that a single panel can have implied gutters, side to side?

But don't we have to *see* things in implied panels for there to be implied gutters? That is, isn't it a leap from implied gutters, dividing a picture you can see into more pictures you can see, to *pictures you can't see*?

A fair point. But even if a panel depicts only an instant, it invites 'seeing-in' of more than that instant. A panel is a work of narrative art if its function is to tell/imply a story (represent an event, or events.) Bence Nanay puts forward a plausible framework for talking about how this goes.⁹ But McCloud's own vocabulary of 'closure' already commits him to conceding the point. He writes about 'blood in the gutters'. One panel of an axe murderer, closing in on his victim; in the next, we hear a scream. (Well, we don't *hear*. We *see*. As Shakespeare says, "to hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.") We 'fill in' the gutters with what we know must be there.

FIGURE 1.3

[Image from McCloud: One panel of axe murder and victim. “Now you die!” “No, No!”
Next panel: a scream tears through the night sky of the city.]

Compare McCloud’s two-panel axe-murder to a one-panel *New Yorker* cartoon. Businessman at desk, axe-wielding executioner at door, ushered in by secretary: “Your four-o’-clock is here.” Do the two cases work in completely different ways, due to the one-panel/two-panel difference? No. The function of depicting a single time-slice—in the *New Yorker*, even time-stamped—is to imply a sequential order of events. The not invariable but highly typical mechanism of the gag strip is to imply at least one unseen action or event: what happens next, or before.¹⁰

Here is a more mild-mannered illustration of the same point, again McCloud’s own.
What do you see?

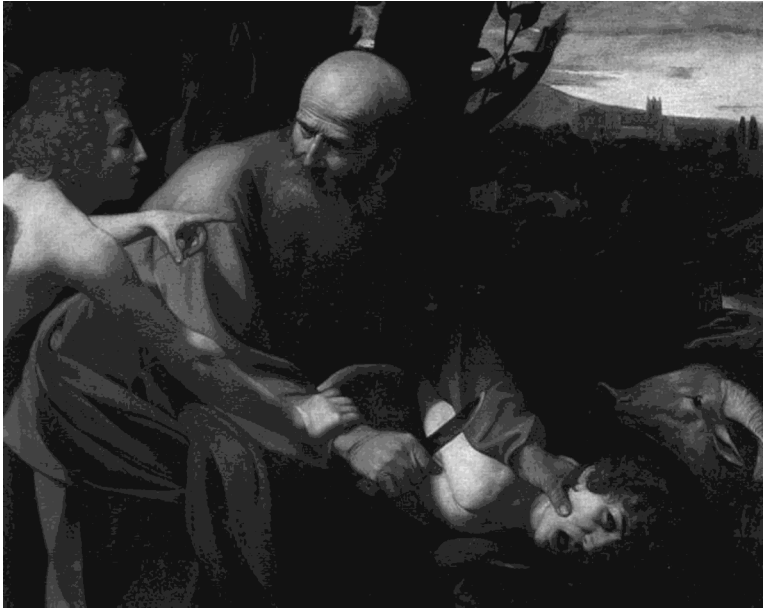
FIGURE 1.4

[McCloud. First panel. Cartoon man in a top hat. Second panel. Man tips his hat.]

Suppose it were only one panel (take your pick). *Still* a man tipping his hat, isn’t it? Place both in a line-up with the Bayeux tapestry. The Bayeux tapestry and the two panel hat-tip are like each other and unlike the single panel hat-tip? Hardly. So we have to let the *Family Circus* into the family of comics, if we are going to let even the Bayeux tapestry in.

But once we do *that*, there is so much more we cannot keep out. Consider a less comic family circle:

FIGURE 1.5



If a single panel can be comics, can we deny *this* is? Is a caption under a single panel in the *New Yorker* so formally or functionally different than “The Sacrifice of Isaac” on a plaque under a museum frame? (‘But shouldn’t it have a joke in it?’ We cannot secure a fundamental difference by insisting on anything so incidental.¹¹)

Caravaggio’s work does not work differently, blood in the gutters-wise, than a gag strip, or McCloud’s axe murderer panels. But now, since we aren’t going to enforce French Academy-grade snobbery about acceptable subjects, *any* image in which it can be seen what is happening is narrative art, ergo ... comics?

Panels, Panels Everywhere

Let’s step back and try to resist the slide in a different way. McCloud toys with the possibility that *The Family Circus* can be admitted on the grounds that, even with only one panel, there *is* image juxtaposition—of picture and caption. (Words—letterforms—are non-pictorial images.) This is just a *different way* to let in too many things, however. So many museum pieces have titles, even the ones just titled “Untitled”. We *could* take down all the

little plaques. But here's the real sticking point: if you think different *parts* of an overall composition can be deemed distinct images (picture/text), ergo the composition counts as comics, how can you avoid conceding that *any* image that has spatially well-delineated elements is, in effect, a juxtaposition of images? A picture of two people, side by side, is, in effect, two pictures. Nearly *everything* is coming up comics.

But without word balloons to imply a timeline and reading order, are two people standing side by side a *sequence*? A picture of two people is not *read*, left to right (right to left, if the style looks Japanese.) But consider: is there perhaps a prominent, central figure or object seen *first*, whence the eye is drawn away, along a line?¹² Consider a Poussin painting, *Landscape with Saint John on Patmos*:

FIGURE 1.6



Do you think the eye is supposed to start with the saint, then zig-zag up and back, eventually around? It seems to me so. In many landscapes, a river running through it functions as a

gutter, not just in the sense that rivers, like gutters, are for carrying away excess fluid; rather, in the sense that they direct the eye's passage through the field. If we say things that *work this way* are comics, Poussin is comics. More weakly: if you want to insist it isn't, you can't just say it *obviously* isn't, because it's Poussin. You have to argue that the eye in fact *isn't* supposed to trace a path through the canvas.

Seeing-in and Closure

To sum up our slide so far: a one-panel gag strip is a multi-panel comic, merely minus the multi. And the museums are full of one-panel gag strips, merely minus the gag.¹³

My point is, despite appearances, serious: McCloud defines 'comics' formally, but his account is functional. He wants to show how "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" *work*. And the answer is: like pictures.

To drive this point home, let's turn back to that Poussin canvas, concerning which, it so happens, Richard Wollheim has posed a series of yes-or-no questions, and provided what he takes to be reasonable answers:

Can you see those columns as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago?

Yes. Can you see those columns as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago by barbarians? (with some difficulty) Yes. Can you see those columns as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago by barbarians wearing wild asses' skins? (with little difficulty) No.¹⁴

On the other hand, you *could* make this painting a comics panel. If an earlier page featured a glorious splash of barbarians in skins of wild asses, throwing down those columns,

you might see that *in* the later panel, at least to the same extent that you can ‘see’ these other things Wollheim claims to.

Wollheim’s quiz is meant to highlight a dilemma. If we get too fastidious about ‘seeing’, we are driven to a view on which we never ‘see’ anything but paint when we look at paintings (never anything but our own sense-data, if this retreat turns into a route.) On the other hand, if we loosen up, we start ‘seeing’ barbarians where they are not.

Wollheim’s solution is to throw himself—but lightly—on both horns. ‘Seeing-in’ is the Wollheimian duck-rabbit seen as duck *and* rabbit: paint *and* saint (no sense-data, no barbarians). Intuitively, it’s plausible that when you appreciate a painting, appreciation *is* a function of simultaneous awareness of properties of the canvas *and* of what it is *of* (if anything). Whether you think you can ‘see’ the ruins fell, or were pushed, you *do* see *ruins*. In general, if you are seeing-in *at all*, with regard to this picture, you are seeing-in space *and* time.¹⁵ This is ‘closure’. So if “in a very real sense” “comics *is* closure” (67), this picture *is* comics. Probably *all* pictures are.

Pictureless Comics?

That’s not the worst of it, however. If you can have comics without words, why not comics without pictures?

McCloud’s definition would seem to rule this out: “juxtaposed pictorial *and* other images in deliberate sequence.” But he makes clear his ‘and’ is more an *or* at heart. Wordless comics are ok. Why *not* pictureless ones?

Because then you have a novel. Precisely! Novels (and other pure word products) are one *kind* of comics.¹⁶ Just as Frans Masereel’s *Passionate Journey* is a wordless comic, so—oh, for example, Nabokov’s *King, Queen, Knave* is a pictureless comic. These works should be seen as standing at opposite ends of the McCloudian sequentially juxtaposed image

spectrum. They are the formal limit cases in which the quantity of one or the other of the two standard ingredients (pictorial and non-pictorial images) is reduced to zero. We should let McCloudian ‘comics’ slide past all *ad hoc* stops until the term is basically synonymous with ‘graphic design’. And isn’t this the soul of reasonableness?

No, because—plucking but one counter-example from the vast sea—writing a novel, of the traditional sort, is not traditionally conceived of as an exercise in graphic design. But this just pushes the point back. Why not? Well, why *should* it be? Consider the so-called ‘emblem poem’, combining one picture (traditionally a woodcut) and a short verse. Here is one such, from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Moral Emblems and other Poems*:

Unlike the common run of men,
I wield a double power to please,
And use the GRAVER and the PEN
With equal aptitude and ease.¹⁷

Why *don’t* more novelists cultivate this power, coming to move with those Stevenson acclaims as “that illustrious crew/ The ambidextrous Kings of Art.” Everyone says novelists should *show* not *say*. Anyway, as another Stevenson poem makes clear, it’s not as though you can *cut* the cut, thereby casting off the burden of producing a handsome graphical product:

They burned the nightly taper;
But now the work is ripe –
Observe the costly paper,
Remark the perfect type!

Typography *is* graphic design. Novels, being typed, are *graphic* novels. If you think you can get around this by adopting, as authors and publishers do, a restrained and more or less self-effacing graphic design formula, you are making a mistake like that made by certain ladies (was it Wilde who mocked them?) In order to be perfectly spiritual, they try to become thin. (Descartes fell into a similar error with regard to the pineal gland.) We don't want to repeat the mistake with comics. It's not as though the perfect novel is *unpublished*, i.e. is *not* a graphic product. (Anyway, a hand-written ms. is still a *calli-graphic novel*.)

Letterforms *are* images. They just aren't *pictures*.

Wordless Prints, Unprinted Words

Let's start again at the opposite end of the comics spectrum—with wordless, as opposed to pictureless graphic novels. Milt Gross' 'cartoon novel', *He Done Her Wrong* (1930) aims to puncture the self-seriousness of wordless works of the early 20th Century, such as Lynd Ward's woodcut novels. Gross' subtitle: *The Great American Novel and Not a Word in It—No music, Too*. David Beronā suggests this is a reference to musical theater, which it may be.¹⁸ It also seems like a send-up of the modernist dictum that purism to one's medium is presumptive virtue. Where's the sense in bragging about the perfectly nice things you could be doing, but aren't?

But the reference to music may bring us to our senses—one more, at least. A sound case can be made that the printed word should be regarded, not as a natively graphical product, but as a prosthetic extension of, or strayed expression of, *speech*.¹⁹ Even if all juxtaposed imagery is, essentially, comics, the *written* word isn't, essentially, image. The only thing it is, essentially, is *word*; heir to an ancient, ear-oriented line.

This suggestion invites the further thought that words are more *properly* heard, not seen; which drags in its train suspicion that there is something wrong with writing, bad child.

Plato has thoughts on the subject, you may recall. But let me quote James Hoggs' mother, complaining to Sir Walter Scott that he ruined everything.

There ware never ane o' my sangs prentit til ye prentit them yoursel', an' ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singin' an no for readin'; but ye hae broken the charm noo, an' they'll never sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouthar richt spell'd nor rich't setten down.²⁰

This complaint (minus that last line) is quoted in E.A. Levenston, *The Stuff of Literature*; an instructive book which, its author says, would have been subtitled (had it been a Ph.D. thesis), 'a study of the contribution made to the meaning and value of a work of literature at the level of graphic form, with particular reference to spelling, punctuation, typography, and layout.' As this non-actual subtitle shows, the book has the wrong title. It should be: *The Stuff of Comics*. Then Levenston might have been moved to redress the odd omission of pictures from his list of likely graphical contributors. To be fair, he *does* discuss pictures, and argues—correctly—that Hoggs' mother is not right; but it takes a bit of showing.

'Literature' signals essential membership in two media with divergent essences, inducing us to apply schizophrenic value scales, possibly. 'Oral literature' is an oxymoron—one that we nevertheless need, for more or less the same reason we employ the redundant 'acoustic guitar'. In both cases an original case has declined into a special case. Our choice of labels shows we are unsure what to regard as central, hence peripheral.

It is certainly possible to valorize sound/voice, especially if we value poetry. Even in this day and age, some still deem poetry the highest form of literature, although these new-fangled *graphic novels*—from up-and-comers like Richardson, Defoe, Swift, Spiegelman and Ware—have their partisans. And yet: despite the high status of poetry, there is a tendency to

regard audiobooks (another of those funny words) as marginal denizens—resident aliens, not true citizens—of the republic of letters. No *letters*. Levenston remarks that “a secondary mode of existence for a novel would be a complete oral performance available on tape for the blind” (10). Why *even* secondary? Most consumers of audiobooks aren’t blind.

Someone could resist my argument that all novels are, in effect, graphic novels, by asserting there is in fact *nothing* secondary about audiobooks. A novel or short story may be stripped of all graphic design elements and remain what it *is*. Not so for comics. *That’s* the difference. But this is a mistake. Any attempt to draw a line between, say, novels and comics, on the grounds that the latter is an affair of the eye, the former of the ear, will fall foul of the consideration that there *is* a fairly bright line to be drawn, but novels and comics are on the same side of it.

Spaces Between Words

Let me tell you who *really* invented *comics*, by pioneering standard use of what McCloud identifies as “comics’ most important icon”—which, he adds, is also its most overlooked: the panel. No, not Rudolph Töpffer. Irish monks. As Thierry Groensteen writes, in *The System of Comics*, laying out what he takes to be the distinctive characteristics that make comics “well and truly a language”:

What is put on view is always a space that has been divided up, compartmentalized, a collection of juxtaposed frames, where, to cite the fine formula of Henry Van Lier, a “multi-framed aircraft” sails in suspension, “in the white nothingness of the printed page.” A page of comics is offered at first to a synthetic global vision, but that cannot be satisfactory. It demands to be traversed, crossed, glanced at, and analytically deciphered. This moment-to-moment reading

does not take a lesser account of the totality of the panoptic field that constitutes the page (or the double-page), since the focal vision never ceases to be enriched by peripheral vision. (19)

Irish monks were first (at least in Europe) to add spaces between words, thereby launching the great, multi-framed flying fortress of comics. When you put space between words, the page becomes, for the first time, essentially an affair of panels.

It is almost incomprehensible to us today, looking back, that it took so long. Putting spaces between words is a small step, for a graphic designer, a huge leap for mankind. It is objectively harder—much harder—to read *scriptura continua* [unseparated text]. Yet it was employed for centuries, despite awareness of the alternative and its advantages, in terms of visual affordances. As Paul Saenger writes in his landmark study: “stated summarily, the ancient world did not possess the desire, characteristic of the modern age, to make reading easier and swifter because the advantages that modern readers perceive as accruing from ease of reading were seldom viewed as advantages by the ancients.”²¹ You aren’t *supposed* to be able to engage in skidding ocular saccades, peripherally and over page spreads. The thing is supposed to be *read*, not ‘looked at’ (or whatever you call it, after you’ve changed proper reading material into a graphic design project.)²²

There was a time when *all* books were, in effect, *audiobooks*—composed orally; recorded (by a scribe: state of the art recording equipment; not as expensive as you think, providing reasonable fidelity); to be audibly replayed later; unreplayable without a speaker. Hence Augustine’s oft-wondered-at wonderment at the spectacle of Ambrose, reading silently. As Saenger notes: it is virtually impossible that Ambrose really was reading in the swift and silent modern, visual mode. He would have been reading *scriptura continua*, an audiobook format. What impressed Augustine was Ambrose’s invention of headphones.²³

As Ellen Lupton writes in *Thinking With Type*: “Although many books define the purpose of typography as enhancing the readability of the written word, one of design’s must humane functions is, in actuality, to help readers *avoid* reading.”²⁴ By ‘design’ she means, of course, *graphic* design. And so, once the Irish invented comics to do what comics have always been so justly charged with doing—teaching young people how *not* to read—it was possible, for the first time, to enjoy what has come to be known as ‘the reading experience’. And pictures were added, as naturally they would be. Any work that exists to suit the eye will attract such things as suit eyes. Saenger writes:

A miniature [illustration] containing a banderole, an unfurled banner that bears text, exemplifies an important new development brought about by the spread of word separation. This is the mixture of script and image.

The ancients did not illustrate texts that were, after all, aimed at the ear,

the spread of separated writing broke down the perceptual barriers that had isolated the two activities. The first banderoles appeared in the ninth and tenth centuries, in the illuminations for codices, and beginning in northern France during the eleventh centuries, banderoles bearing text narrating the scenes depicted in miniature manuscripts illustrations, mural paintings, stained glass windows, sculpture, and tapestry became the hallmark of medieval art. (187)

The Air of Non-Pictures

I could have made the point ahistorically, citing not Saenger but, for example, Dominic Lopes’ *Sight and Sensibility*. He has a chapter, “The Air of Pictures”, concerned

with ‘expression’. Lopes distinguishes *figure* from *scene* expression (happy figure/sad figure; happy scene/sad scene); both are distinguished from *design* expression: “an expression [not necessarily emotional, but some ‘air’] that is wholly attributable to a picture’s design or surface, and not to any figure or scene it depicts.”²⁵ It is immediately noteworthy that design expression will not be a feature of *pictures* but of graphic design generally. (Lopes’ epigraph is from Neil Young: “there’s more to the picture than meets the eye”. Also: there’s more to what meets the eye than pictures.)

I could have made the point a third way by quoting from writings just on typography. Robert Bringhurst’s classic *Elements of Typographic Style* is eloquent on the subject of design expression:

In a badly designed book the letters mill and stand like starved horses in a field. In a book designed by rote, they sit like stale bread and mutton on the page. In a well-made book ... the letters are alive. They dance in their seats. Sometimes they rise and dance in the margins and aisles.²⁶

Bringhurst says good typography is like ‘transparent statuary’, affording a special ‘seeing-in’—*of* a beautiful surface and *through* that surface to what it is *of*. This is a recurrent paradox in writings on the subject of beautiful writing. It must be seen, to be beautiful, but can only be beautiful if seen *through*.

In short, typography works the way Wollheim says *paintings* work. And paintings, as we now know, are just comics.

Let me quote Edward Burne-Jones on how satisfactory he found it to have his illustrations ensconced in William Morris’ “pocket cathedral”—a.k.a. the Kelmscott Chaucer.

Burne-Jones sounds like Bringhurst, only the images with whose sequential juxtaposition he is concerned happen to be pictures; but without, he insists, ceasing to be typography:

I love to be snugly cased in the borders and buttressed up by the vast initials—and once or twice when I have no letter under me I feel tottery and weak; if you drag me out of my encasings it will be like tearing a statue out of its niche and putting it in a museum.²⁷

As William Morris himself writes, in the oft-quoted final paragraph of his essay on “The Ideal Book”:

The picture-book is not, perhaps, absolutely necessary to man’s life, but it gives us such endless pleasure, and is so intimately connected with the other absolutely necessary art of imaginative literature that it must remain one of the very worthiest things toward the production of which reasonable men should strive.²⁸

A Continuum of Cases

I have proceeded on two fronts. On the picture front I see no prospects for stopping a slippery slide. McCloud’s account accounts for sequences of n juxtaposed images; 1 is a valid value for n . Pictures *are* comics. (As are print ads, magazines, newspapers, movie posters and album covers.) But on the word front, my claim that the ‘and’ in McCloud’s definition—“juxtaposed pictorial *and* other images”—is an *or* at heart can be resisted. McCloud thinks you can have wordless comics. That needs an ‘or’. But you *can* set this Boolean hinge to swing only one way. Pictures necessary. Words not. So if we think it’s silly to have traditional novels turn out comics, we needn’t let them.

But do we think this is silly for any reason to do with *comics* and *novels*—as opposed to ‘comics’ and ‘novels’? Is there a problem with what I am thinking, which is pretty much that we confront a continuum, with novels at one end of the comics spectrum? Or is it just odd to say it this way?

What is clouding my McCloudian message may be his medium. What *is* an artistic medium? Something like the Platonic Form of the material basis. (A ideal tendency to the Good—higher function of the force vectors of what it and I want it to be?) Put it that way, its existence is less than self-evident. But let’s *suppose*. If there *is* such a thing as an artistic medium, presumably graphic design has one. Something like: arranged imagery in two dimensions. But if graphic design has a medium, can anything *else* that is, basically, arrangement of imagery in two dimensions? Comics and easel painting? Won’t these turn out to be *modes* of the medium—graphic design *genres*?

Perhaps we should simply drop the whole concept of a ‘medium’, if it is what is putting us on a slippery slope to pictureless comics. But if we step off, I think we still find ourselves on a slippery slope.

Pictureless comics: McCloud doesn’t lay out any case against them in *Understanding Comics*. But he comes closer to saying what he thinks really matters in an interview with Robert Harvey:

Harvey: Do you think that your definition also includes children’s literature—books in which there is a picture on every page and prose beneath each picture?

McCloud: not if the prose is independent of the pictures. Not if the written story could exist without any pictures and still be a continuous whole. That’s how it’s usually done, whereas the pictures are usually discontinuous ...

Harvey: [That is] the narrative is continuous and independent of the pictures. And the pictures really are illustrating some moment in the prose narrative. There's no necessary narrative strand in the pictures themselves.

McCloud: If you turn that on its head, you have comics. If the pictures, independent of the words, are telling the whole story and the words are supplementing that, then that is comics.²⁹

I'm not going to pick on McCloud's words, which are off-the-cuff, but will address the spirit, which is intuitive yet, I think, unworkable.

Consider a range of cases in which pictures (images) might be inessential to an 'independent' text.

- 1) Windsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* without the pictures.
- 2) Dickens without illustrations by "Phiz", Cruikshank, et. al.
- 3) Lewis Carroll without illustrations by John Tenniel.
- 4) Jane Austen without illustrations by Hugh Thomson.
- 5) William Blake's illuminated works, without the illuminations.
- 6) William Morris' Kelmscott Chaucer without the illustrations, illuminations and Morris-designed typefaces.
- 7) Lewis Carroll's "The Mouse's Tale", minus the tail-shape.
- 8) Any classic German text set using roman type rather than fraktur (blackletter).
- 9) *Where the Wild Things Are* without Maurice Sendak's illustrations.

If McCloud is right, in case 1 we are losing something essential, hence we have comics; in 2-9, something inessential, hence we do not. I do not think it is so clear.

1. Winsor McCay often captions *Nemo* in ways that redundantly redescribe what the eye can see in the picture. So if we take seriously McCloud's suggestion that a verbal narrative that is whole, intact, apart from any pictures, indicates non-comics-hood, *Little Nemo* often isn't comics—which is absurd. The source of this odd result is significant: McCloud knows better than to define 'comics', narrowly, as story-telling instruments. But once you admit that there might be other functions for juxtaposed images than carrying the story, it's hard to say *not* carrying the story proves some set of continuous pictures *can't* be comics.

2. Dickens collaborated closely with his illustrators, even dictating placement of wood engravings in page layouts.³⁰ Sometimes Dickens suited words to pictures.³¹ Dickens' novels were, famously, serialized. Monthly installments were unified by their wrappers (rich 'visual confections', to employ Tufte's term.)³² Each opened with two plates.³³ Indeed, each contained as many pictures as could be produced under deadline constraint.³⁴ Jane Cohen writes:

The illustrations were invaluable even to Dickens' sophisticated readers for other reasons [than those applying to illiterate or semi-literate audiences]. Few could wait to read the novels until they were complete, yet the part-issues protracted the story beyond ready recall. The illustrations provide continuity between the numbers. By internal structure, symbolic detail, parallels, and contrasts, the plates helped to establish the identity and mark the development of Dickens's characters, the sequence of his plots, and the nature of his themes. No wonder these

illustrations were studied, as du Maurier has put it, “with passionate interest before reading the story, and after, and between.” (9)

If Hogarth is pre-comics, as McCloud allows (16), post-Hogarthian Dickens is para-comics, perhaps. In general, to change the form is to change the function; to change the process is to change the product. For Dickens, pictures were part of the process, and integral to the form.³⁵

3-4. Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel go together to such a beloved degree that one contributor to the present volume, Thomas Wartenberg, suggests Tenniel’s illustrations are semi-constitutive of these works that bear Carroll’s name as author. This is plausible but problematic. I do not consider my Mervyn Peake and Tove Jansson-illustrated *Alice* editions ‘abridged’—a point McCloud would no doubt seize upon as evidence these are not comics. But consider a less canonical case: an edition of an Austen novel that lacks Hugh Thomson’s illustrations lacks nothing essential—unless, of course, the thing you are trying to lay hands on is *that*: a Thomson-illustrated Austen. Some readers want a particular *novel*. Some a particular *book* (or edition.) If it is the latter that is wanted, not the former, then the pictures are essential. Are all illustrated book collectors *comics* collectors, by McCloud’s definition? All book collectors?

5-6. The case for publishing facsimiles of William Blake’s illuminated works is obvious. Blake is not just a poet but a consummate book artist. All the same, one *can* cleanly separate the text. It ‘stands alone’. So it isn’t comics? But we would hardly conclude that, say, The Grand Inquisitor scene is not ‘really’ a section of a novel, just because it happens to be a section of a novel written in such a way that it is amenable to being anthologized as stand-alone existentialist allegory. That an artistic element is discrete, hence extractable, does not

prove that the larger work bears no ‘essential’ relation to it. But why stop with pictures? William Morris’ Kelmscott edition of Chaucer is another paradigm of *book art*, such that alteration of the least design element—say, substitution of alternative letterforms for Morris’ custom type—would be as aesthetically unacceptable as a moustache on Mona Lisa. Should one regard the Kelmscott Chaucer as comics, in McCloud’s sense?

7-8. Regarding Carroll’s “The Mouse’s Tale”, minus the tail-shape: there is no point publishing unshaped ‘shape poetry’. But, again, we are on a slippery slope. Epistolary novels are, in effect ‘shape prose’: laid out, typographically, so as to contain visual ‘pictures’ of letters. Are all epistolary novels ‘graphic’ novels? Shifting to a different sense of ‘letter’: letterforms are an odd case because they are images independent of text (we can change them without altering text) without being non-text (an ‘e’ on the page is not a *picture* of an *e*). Georg Lichtenberg: “When I read a German book printed in roman type, I feel as if I should first translate it.”³⁶ Edgar Allen Poe lamented that he had ‘never written a book,’ because he felt his handwriting was essential to his works.³⁷ Readers, too, have been particular. In the late 15th Century, the Duke of Urbino took pride in the fact that in all his magnificent library there was not a single printed book to be found.³⁸

‘Text reads as image’, as Will Eisner says. The history of the book is really a footnote to the issues Eisner discusses in *his* book. A traditional novel will not go much better, in virtue of good typography, than it can go in virtue of mediocre typography. But any novel, however well-written, can be made to go badly through bad graphic design—a consideration. Any *printed* novel has become, by nurture, if it wasn’t by nature, a *graphic* novel.

FIGURE 1.7

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man
in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

Building on this, McCloud might try to re-articulate his intuition about ‘continuous’ pictures, as the mark of comics. Isn’t it remarkable that so many of Wally Wood’s famous “22 Panels That Always Work!!”⁴¹ didn’t work before the first decades of the 20th Century, and still don’t work in children’s books, because so few illustrators offer them employment? The reason they work in comics is that panels are page elements. Even though he is producing a continuous series of pictures, Sendak is seeing like an easel painter, not like a comics artist.

All the same, as Nodelman’s comment makes clear, it would be hard for comics to pull clear of ‘picture books’ without backing into film (or a ‘snapshot’ aesthetic.) Formerly, sequential juxtaposed ‘visual confections’ (e.g. emblematic book covers with numerous panels) took design inspiration from architecture (every panel a faux niche). Now they tend to emulate operations of the camera eye. Which does not reassure us that we have *one* thing—comics—first looking to buildings, then going to the movies; rather than two things—illustration and comics; or one thing that is neither of the two—graphic design—which can look in many different directions.

Comic Books and Ideal Books

Most authors have not been ‘book artists’—not in the sense that Blake and Morris were: authors whose intentions extended to every aspect of an envisioned, idealized, graphic design product. Why not? No doubt the likes of Jane Austen have preferred nice paper and readable type. But the general run of authors has soon enough run against the dull but heavy consideration that you cannot intend what you cannot expect to *do*. Authoring and typesetting, layout (rubrication/illumination/illustration) have been separate practical spheres. You can make a virtue of necessity, retrenching intentions to the citadel of such aspects of the work as you *can* control. But this is not the same as ‘being true to the medium’. If there is to be a page, there is something arbitrary about *not* treating it as a canvas. Admitting as much

does not oblige artists to achieve *auteur*-ish mastery of all elements of book-making. The book artist-as-auteur is an admirable figure (Blake). So is the author who can't draw but can instruct those who can (Dickens).

Let me make a modest proposal. *Understanding Comics* is not about comics—not as traditionally understood. McCloud has, in effect, written an eloquent, insightful treatise on ‘the graphical work’, presumptively consisting of a mix of image types; intended for visual ‘reading’. Furthermore, McCloud has produced his treatise in a period in which the impulse to produce such works is widely and deeply felt; and in which this impulse is predominantly (though by no means exclusively) fueled by *love of comics* in Meskin’s sense; by sensitivity to the history of, by appreciation of—by nostalgia for; attraction/repulsion to/from standard forms and contents of comics.

Understanding Comics is to comics as William Morris’ “The Ideal Book” is to medieval literature.

If we imagine an argument about whether Morris is ‘really’ a modern graphic designer or a medievalist—and why that argument must result in some degree of conceptual stalemate—we see why approaches like Meskin’s and definitions like McCloud’s should be regarded as complementary. We also see why the latter may be deemed to enjoy an insightful edge, despite the fact that it is productive of more counter-examples than confirmatory instances. If you want to *understand comics*, it is quite crucial to see that ‘comics’ has expanded to the point of being a veritable synecdoche for graphic design *and* at the same time become more deeply interested in its own historic, generic roots.

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¹ Nabokov, 3.

² Quoted secondhand by Dylan Horrocks:

<http://www.hicksville.co.nz/Inventing%20Comics%206.htm>.

Ware has said similar things about drawing-as-typography in interviews. See, for example, Andrea Juno (1997, 53). See also: Gene Kannenberg Jr. (2001), Daniel Raeburn, (2004), and several contributions to David M. Ball and Martha B. Kuhlman (2010).

³ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Harper Paperbacks, 1994), 9.

⁴ Aaron Meskin, “Defining Comics?”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:1 (2007), 377.

⁵ It is commonly argued that *manga* derives from the American comics tradition, emerging only in the post-W.W. II period. If we see it this way, *manga* will not be a counter-example to the historicist definition. I myself find *One Thousand Years of Manga* (Flammarion, 2008), by Brigitte Koyama-Richard, as plausible a periodization as *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics* (Collins, 2004), by Paul Gravett. But a weaker point will do: the mere *possibility* that the longer view could make sense—the world *could* contain two genealogically distinct comics traditions—shows the strain on the historicist approach.

⁶ Philosophers will understand if I say these terms are grue-like. ‘Grue’: *green before time t, otherwise blue*. The example is due to Nelson Goodman. Let ‘grue-like’ mean: any definition that stipulates the (apparently) inessential to be essential.

⁷ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: MOMA, 2002), 13.

⁸ David Kunzle does so in *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825* (University of California Press, 1973), 2. I don’t mean to dismiss this approach as absurd, although I do not favor it. My point, rather, is that if one takes this path, one cannot also propose anything so appealingly simple as: it’s comics if it works like comics.

⁹ Bence Nanay, “Narrative pictures”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67:1 (2009), 119-129.

¹⁰ This is related to points made in Robert C. Harvey’s essay, “How Comics Came To Be: Through the Juncture of Word and Image from Magazine Gag Cartoons to Newspaper Strips, Tools for Critical Appreciation plus Rare Seldom Witnessed Historical Facts,” in Heer and Worcester (eds.) *A Comics Studies Reader* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 25-45.

¹¹ This point should not be misunderstood. If we went through the museum, replacing title plaques with gag-strip punch-lines, that would have a ‘fundamental’ effect on the museum-going experience. Suppose Caravaggio’s plaque now reads, simply, “Psych!” It goes from

being serious to silly. But not from being non-narrative to narrative, or vice versa, or even from being narrative in one way to narrative in a different way. Serious or silly, the viewer sees not just what is happening but what happened/will happen.

¹² It is not common to juxtapose comics panels by *nesting* them, but at least one famous comics artist—Filippo Lippi—employed this technique in his *tondo*, “Madonna & Child with Stories from the Life of St. Anne”. I borrow the example from Dominic Lopes.

¹³ As William Empson might say, “the sort of joke you find in hymns.” But minus the joke.

¹⁴ Richard Wollheim, “In Defense of Seeing In,” in Heiko Hecht, Robert Schwartz, and Margaret Atherton, *Looking into Pictures: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Pictorial Space*, illustrated edition. (The MIT Press, 2003), 10.

¹⁵ When you gaze at Laocoön, do you see a man struggling with writhing snakes? If so, you should agree with Wollheim. Because struggling and writhing are actions and events in time. If, on the hand, you see a frozen, purely spatial form, you may be more of Lessing’s school. But even Lessing was not strict about it. You see *both*. That seems reasonable.

¹⁶ Apparently Dylan Horrocks has been playing this as a party trick for years. <http://www.hicksville.co.nz/Inventing%20Comics%205.htm>

Also, one of his characters makes the point in his book, *Hicksville* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2010).

¹⁷ Strictly, this is one of the ‘other poems’. It has no accompanying picture. The point stands.

¹⁸ David Beronă, *Wordless Books: The Original Graphic Novels* (Abrams, 2008), 158.

¹⁹ In fact, there is no doubt whatsoever that writing *is* an extension of speech, hence reading must be, and remain, semi-parasitic on the human capacity for speech, even on the human organs of speech. See A. M. Liberman, “The Reading Researcher and the Reading Teacher Need the Right Theory of Speech,” *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 3:2, April 1999, 95-111. What I argue in this essay is consistent with Liberman’s results, because I do not claim that ‘visual reading’ can ever be visually *pure*. I need only claim that it affords, in certain respects, a distinctive mode of linguistic engagement.

²⁰ Edward A. Levenston, *The Stuff of Literature: Physical Aspects of Texts and Their Relation to Literacy Meaning* (State University of New York Press, 1992), 18-9. Quoted from William Beattie’s introduction, *Border Ballads* (Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1954), 16.

²¹ Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2000), 11. Historical details and debates exceed the scope of the present paper. In the 6th Century, separated script was approximately nowhere (in Europe). By the 12th Century, approximately everywhere. It appears earliest in Irish (Hyberno-Saxon) manuscripts, whence it spreads. There are complications: the Byzantine tradition of book illumination, older than the Irish; the distinction between illustration (of texts) and decoration (of artifacts, including books); the consideration that word separation has always been mandatory in Semitic language writings (such as Hebrew and Arabic). It was only the Greek addition of vowels to the borrowed Phoenician alphabet that allowed dropping of word space in what came to be known as the Roman alphabet. It is plausible the Irish monks I say ‘invented’ comics had the great good fortune of access to Byzantine books and Semitic

writings. Perhaps, then, books like Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey: How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Barricade, 2009) should start the story a bit earlier.

²² Saenger makes a compelling case. He points out, for example, that Irish monks used *videre—to see—to mean to read*. Continental readers of *scriptura continua* did not (39).

²³ Cut & paste a stretch of text into your word processor. Globally find & delete all spaces and punctuation. Read silently, like Ambrose. You will find yourself pronouncing, inwardly, to determine where words end and begin—intelligence your eyes would normally provide, via saccadic glances ahead. You can actively suppress movement of your lips, but doing so does not speed the process, or make it less an affair of inner voice and ear.

²⁴ Ellen Lupton, *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 53.

²⁵ Dominic Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility: Evaluating Pictures*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), 57.

²⁶ Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style*, 3rd ed. (Hartley and Marks, 2004), 19.

²⁷ Quoted in Martin Harrison and Bill Waters, *Edward Burns* (London, 1973), 164. I take the quote from Susan Ashbrook, “William Morris and the Ideal Book”, in Liana De Girolami

Cheney, ed. *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts* (New York: Edwin Mellon, 1992), 291.

²⁸ William Morris, William S. Peterson, ed., *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Art of the Book* (University of California, Berkeley Press, 1982), 293.

²⁹ From *The Comics Journal*, 179. I get the quote from Dylan Horrocks:

<http://www.hicksville.co.nz/Inventing%20Comics%205.htm>.

³⁰ See Joan Stevens, “Woodcuts Dropped Into the Text: The Illustrations in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*,” *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 113-123. After launching *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, as a graphic magazine of sorts, and shifting from etched steel plates to wood engravings, whose blocks could be set alongside type, Dickens seized on new page design possibilities. I take the reference from Jane Cohen, *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators* (Ohio State University, 1970), 73-4.

³¹ Dickens’ first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, was a commission to provide text to accompany illustrations by Robert Seymour, who committed suicide before the work took shape, whose widow sued Dickens on the grounds that it was originally her husband’s work; which seems not to have been a just charge, but it says something that there has been a lawsuit, alleging that *Pickwick* is comics, by McCloudian standards: text ‘writing up to’ pictures.

³² Edward Tufte, *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative* (Graphics Press, 1997), 122-139. Dickens’ wrappers had to juxtapose text and sufficient

pictorial matter to emblemize episodes and still-unfolding story arc. Various devices characteristic of comics (panel dividers; text that ‘reads as image’) are employed to these ends. Tufte discusses (among other confections: from mnemonic devices to Cornell boxes) how this is an old tradition. See Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbrown, *The Comely Frontispiece: the Emblematic Title-Page in England 1550-1660* (London, 1979).

³³ For discussion of the potentialities of two-plate juxtapositions, see Michael Steig, “The Critic and the Illustrated Novel: Mr. Turveydrop from Gillroy to *Bleak House*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36.1 (1972) 55-67.

³⁴ “O woodman, spare that block/ O gash not anyhow./ It took ten days by clock/ I’d fain protect it now. CHORUS: *Wild laughter from Dalziel’s workshop*.” This mock-George Pope Morris-esque lament is due to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but the sentiment was shared by Dickens’ hard-pressed illustrators (I take the quote from Jane Cohen). Dickens would never have permitted pictures to proliferate to the point of dominating Dickensian prose. He had his moments of doubt about the appropriateness of illustration at all, as did many of his critics and reviewers. But on the whole his tendency was to press for as much as he could get, which argues against reprinting his works in ways that omit what he got.

³⁵ The only comics artist I have seen make the case for Dickens, as para-comics artist, is Gene Deitch, in passing, in his “word about the format of this book”—i.e. the ‘pictofictional’ form of *Pictorama* (Fantagraphics, 2008). The book consists of heavily illustrated stories, by Deitch and his brothers, some hand-lettered, some not. Historians of the illustrated Victorian novel have tended to have a curious blind-spot for comics. Here is Jane Cohen, on why the illustrated novel has no clear future: “Illustrations may appear on dust jackets or paperback

covers to attract buyers, as illustrations posted in booksellers' windows used to do, but they rarely appear in the text itself, exceptions, of course, are comic strips for the near illiterate, which Gabriel Garcia Márquez, for example, has termed 'the apotheosis of the novel' (the illustrated novel, one might add)" (228). It is a hard to see why *only* illiterates would be interested in the spectacle of an illustrated novel, raised to a divine or semi-divine plane. But there will always be mysteries. John Harvey's excellent *Victorian Novelists And Their Illustrators* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970) concludes on a similar note. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that one key to Dickens' success is his post-Hogarthian, Gillray-esque, graphic-satiric sensibility, which suits his prose to illustration. But it is regarded as a mystery where one might find such stuff today. "In respect of illustration, the modern novel has a withered limb, and while with many novelists it may just as well be withered, since they have no need of it, one cannot say who might have used it with the strength, suppleness and sensitivity of a hand" (181). Yet Cohen and Harvey make all the arguments partisans of comics tend to make. They do so on behalf of the likes of Cruikshank and "Phiz"—who, of course, were denounced as fit only for illiterates in their day.

³⁶ Quoted in Paul Shaw and Peter Bain, ed. *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 18. Germany has a history of *Kulturkampf* over fraktur (blackletter) versus roman, hence Lichtenberg's sensitivity.

³⁷ See Leon Jackson, "'The Italics Are Mine': Edgar Allen Poe and the Semiotics of Print," in Gutjahr and Benton. Poe was a fervent champion of anastatic printing (hand-printed sheets washed with acid, then pressed against copper plates) over and against 'comparatively frivolous' lithography. He envisioned a utopian future in which every author could be his or

her own self-publishing William Blake, producing hand-lettered, hand-designed plates, for a ‘print on demand’ publishing industry (to apply, very aptly, our contemporary term.)

³⁸ The Duke’s agent proclaimed: “In that library the books are all beautiful in a superlative degree, and all written by the pen. There is not a single one of them printed, for it would have been a shame to have one of that sort.” Quoted in William Dana Orcutt, *In Question of the Perfect Book* (Little, Brown & Company, 1926), 12.

³⁹ David Carson set a *Ray Gun* interview with Brian Ferry in Zapf Dingbats because he found the interview ‘boring’ (anecdote from *Helvetica* (2007), the Gary Hustwit film). Also, the Introduction to Andrei Molotu, ed., *Abstract Comics* (Fantagraphics, 2009) is set in some abstract, symbol font.

⁴⁰ Perry Nodelman, *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children’s Picture Books* (University of Georgia Press, 1990), 183.

⁴¹ See the famous page here, courtesy of its current owner:

http://joeljohnson.com/archives/2006/08/wally_woods_22.html.