RESEARCH

Aladdin Sane and Close-Up Eye Asymmetry: David Bowie's Contribution to Comic Book Visual Language

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In April 1973 David Bowie released *Aladdin Sane*. The cover of *Aladdin Sane* features an iconic image of David Bowie, a close-up shot of the artist with brightly colored orange hair and asymmetrical lightning bolt make-up on the right side of his face. This article argues that the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* uses the Close-Up Eye Asymmetry (CUE-A) pictorial device (i.e., close-up view of David Bowie, asymmetrical make-up around his eye) and that CUE-A was adopted into Comic Book Visual Language by first providing evidence that CUE-A is used in comic book art. A link is then established between comic book art and music album art by showing that: (1) David Bowie was familiar with Comic Book Visual Language and could make a contribution to the language, and (2) comic book artists are influenced by music album art. I then make a case that the adoption of CUE-A into Comic Book Visual Language was specifically due to the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* by analyzing: (1) the use of CUE-A by influential artists in the 1990s and (2) the different rates of adoption of CUE-A for the depiction of established versus newer comic book characters.

Keywords: David Bowie; drawing development; graphic schemas; metaphorical pictures; visual language

'Who will love Aladdin Sane? Millions weep a fountain, just in case of sunrise. Who will love Aladdin Sane?'

—David Bowie, 'Aladdin Sane' (1973).

In April 1973 David Bowie released *Aladdin Sane*, his sixth album and follow-up to his breakthrough effort, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (davidbowie.com n.d.b). The cover of *Aladdin Sane* features an iconic image of David Bowie, a close-up shot of the artist with brightly colored orange hair and make-up (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Cover image for Aladdin Sane (Duffy 1973). © RCA Records.

One of the most noticeable features is the lightning bolt make-up on the right side of David Bowie's face. This image has become one of the most iconic in music history. Billboard magazine, for example, ranked it #23 on their list of 'The 50 Greatest Album Covers of All Time' (Billboard Staff 2015), while Rolling Stone magazine ranked it #48 on their list of '100 Greatest Album Covers' (Discogs.com 2016).

The cover of *Aladdin Sane* used a combination of *pictorial devices* I will refer to as *Close-Up Eye Asymmetry* (CUE-A). A pictorial device is 'a visual strategy . . . used for a particular picture-making purpose' (Arts Online, n.d.). Examples of pictorial devices include linear perspective, shading, inclined body orientation, and action lines

(Carello, Rosenblum, & Grosofsky 1986: 43). Pictorial devices can be literal or metaphorical (Forceville 2016: 91). Literal pictorial devices represent features that are present in the real world, while metaphorical pictorial devices represent features that are not present in the real world (Kennedy, Green, & Vervaeke 1993: 244–250). For example, in a picture depicting a person running, inclined body orientation (which occurs in the real world when a person runs) would be a literal pictorial device, whereas action lines (which do not occur in the real world regardless of how fast a person runs) would be a metaphorical pictorial device (Carello et al. 1986: 43). A key feature of metaphorical pictorial devices is that the viewer experiences 'one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). In the running example, the action lines (which would literally depict strings trailing in the wind) are experienced in terms of another thing (metaphorically as path-of-movement indicators, Carello et al. 1986: 41).

Among the various pictorial devices used for the cover of *Aladdin Sane* is the CUE-A combination of pictorial devices. Specifically, David Bowie is photographed in close-up (the Close-Up part of the CUE-A pictorial device) with asymmetrical lightning bolt make-up around his right eye (the Eye Asymmetry part of the CUE-A pictorial device). Here I will provide preliminary evidence in support of the claims that the CUE-A pictorial device: (1) is a metaphorical device that uses a variety of features, most notably asymmetry, to simultaneously communicate the disparate concepts of 'ALIEN' and 'HUMAN', (2) is a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language, and (3) became a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language due to the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*.

The Genesis of *Aladdin Sane*

'I'm terribly intuitive – I always thought I was intellectual about what I do, but I've come to the realization that I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing half the time, that the majority of the stuff that I do is totally intuitive, totally about where I am physically and mentally at any moment in time . . .'

—David Bowie (Murray 1984).

Before beginning our analysis of the CUE-A pictorial device and the impact of the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* on Comic Book Visual Language, it may be instructive to investigate the context that led to the creation of the iconic image. Most of the songs on *Aladdin Sane* were written during David Bowie's 1972 US tour (Carr & Murray 1981: 52–56). The album itself has been described by Bowie as 'Ziggy goes to America' (Carr & Murray 1981: 52–56). During this tour, David Bowie experienced mixed emotions stemming from 'wanting to be up on the stage performing my songs, but on the other hand not really wanting to be on those buses with all those strange people... So Aladdin Sane was split down the middle.' (Pegg 2006: 281–283).

Metaphoric Structure of CUE-A in *Aladdin Sane*

'Sits like a man but he smiles like a reptile.'

—David Bowie, 'The Jean Genie' (1973).

The duality of emotions that David Bowie was experiencing, that of wanting to be on stage playing a character but not wanting to be a part of society, was metaphorically represented on the album cover for *Aladdin Sane*. An analysis of the structure of the cover image using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT; Forceville 2016: 91) and Visual Grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) reveals the metaphoric nature of the image.

First, let us consider CMT. According to CMT, a pictorial device can be metaphorical if the viewer experiences 'one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5), such as experiencing action lines as path-of-movement indicators (Carello et al. 1986: 43). This experience often involves understanding abstract and/or complex phenomena in terms of concrete phenomena (Forceville 2016: 92). Applying CMT to the cover of *Aladdin Sane* indicates that we experience the concrete phenomenon of ASYMMETRY to understand the abstract concept of ALIEN. Specifically, the literally represented ASYMMETRY of the lightning bolt make-up (the Eye Asymmetry part of the CUE-A pictorial device) is used metaphorically to communicate that the character Aladdin Sane (and, by extension, David Bowie) is ALIEN (i.e., apart from human society, somehow not like the rest us). This metaphor is understood by the viewer partly because our 'embodied minds' (Johnson 1987) have experienced, while living

on Earth, that the majority of animals, human beings included, exhibit bilateral symmetry (Finnerty 2005: 1174). Therefore, according to CMT, the abstract concept of ALIEN could be metaphorized in terms of the concrete concept of ASYMMETRY. The cover image for *Aladdin Sane* uses the asymmetrical lightning bolt metaphorically to symbolize the alienation David Bowie felt at the time.

An analysis of the Visual Grammar used in the cover of *Aladdin Sane* leads to additional metaphorical interpretations (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). To begin with, the perspective of the image is *subjective*, using both a *straight on* vertical and horizontal angle. This indicates that the character Aladdin Sane is inviting involvement from the viewer, that he is equal in power to the viewer, and a part of their world (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). This *oneness* with the viewer is further communicated by presenting the character Aladdin Sane at a *close personal distance* (the Close-Up part of the CUE-A pictorial device), indicating that Aladdin Sane is like the viewer, HUMAN rather than ALIEN (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Further, the positioning of the lightning bolt, centered near the upper, left half of the image (the Eye Asymmetry part of the CUE-A pictorial device), indicates that the lightning bolt is communicating essential information, specifically that Aladdin Sane is *ideal* (i.e., like a dream and not HUMAN) and that this information is *given* (i.e., understood by the viewer; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). In sum, according to a Visual Grammar analysis, the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* presents a character that is at once like the viewer and also unlike the viewer, reflecting a duality in the nature of the character. This duality is metaphorically communicated to the viewer by the simultaneous use of close-up and the asymmetrical placement of the lightning bolt over David Bowie's right eye (i.e., the CUE-A pictorial device).

Aladdin Sane Influenced the Adoption of CUE-A in Comic Book Visual Language

'. . . I always had a repulsive sort of need to be something more than human. I felt very very puny as a human. I thought. "Fuck that. I want to be a Superman."'

—David Bowie (Crowe 1976).

Comic books, as an expressive capacity, can be thought of as a 'visual language' (Cohn 2013: 3–4; Cohn 2016: 2–3). Like any language, new terms or *lexical items* can be added to Comic Book Visual Language (Cohn 2013: 23–24). Here I will first present evidence that the CUE-A pictorial device (from here on, simply referred to as 'CUE-A') used in the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* has been incorporated as a lexical item into Comic Book Visual Language. That is, CUE-A has become a part of the language of comic book art. Next, I will present evidence for a link between Comic Book Visual Language and music album art by showing that: (1) David Bowie was familiar with Comic Book Visual Language and could possibly make a contribution to the language, and (2) comic book artists are influenced by art from music album covers. Finally, I will report two lines of preliminary evidence that the incorporation of CUE-A into Comic Book Visual Language is due to the influence of the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*.

Is CUE-A Used in Comic Book Art?

> 'Oh, we can beat them, forever and ever. Then we could be heroes, just for one day.'
>
> —David Bowie, 'Heroes' (1977).

The simplest way to demonstrate that CUE-A has become a part of Comic Book Visual Language is by an existence proof, providing examples from comic book art that use this lexical item. **Figure 2** provides nine examples of a character being portrayed using CUE-A.

Interestingly, these examples also demonstrate three distinct ways in which CUE-A can be put into practice. In row 1, CUE-A is implemented by the asymmetrical depiction of a superpower (from left to right: weather manipulation, magnetism manipulation, and psychic abilities, see **Figure 2**). These three examples are particularly deliberate uses of CUE-A since none of the characters' superpowers are asymmetrical in nature nor are they typically depicted asymmetrically. In row 2, CUE-A is implemented by asymmetrical composition (from left to right: light and shading, occlusion by a camera, occlusion by a skull, see **Figure 2**). Once again, the use of

Figure 2: Examples of the use of CUE-A in comic book covers. Left to right, from top to bottom, the images are: Hans, S (a). Untitled. Storm v3 #11 May 2015 Marvel Worldwide Inc. © Marvel Comics; Land, G (p,i). Nation X, Chapter 2. Uncanny X-men v1 #516 Oct. 2009 Marvel Worldwide Inc. © Marvel Comics; Fabry, G (a). Chapter I: Invisible Men. Harbinger: Omegas #1 Jul. 2014 Valiant Entertainment, Inc. © Valiant Comics; White, J (p,i). In the Soup. The Rocketeer: Hollywood Horror #3 Apr. 2013 IDW Publishing. © IDW Comics; Bolland, B (p,i). The Killing Joke. Batman: The Killing Joke #1 Jun. 1988 National Comics Publications © DC Comics; Wood, A (p,i). Untitled. Mystery Society #3 May 2010 IDW Publishing. © IDW Comics; Fabry, G (a). Book Four. Preacher #4 Jun. 2011 National Comics Publications © Vertigo Comics. Cifuentes, V (a). Volume 5: A Death in the Family. 10th Muse: Goddess of War #1 May 2013 Arcana Studio © Arcana Comics; Silvestri, M (p), and Weems, J (i). Untitled. Witchblade/Tomb Raider Special #1 Dec. 1998 Image Comics, Inc. © Image Comics, © Top Cow Comics.

CUE-A seems to be deliberate, as there was no need to compose the images in row 2 so that they were asymmetrical around the eyes (even the camera, whose operation requires placement in front of an eye, was depicted vertically so that only one eye was occluded). Lastly, in row 3, CUE-A is implemented by *nondiegetic* asymmetrical composition. That is, unlike in rows 1 and 2 where the asymmetry was diegetic (in that the asymmetry represented an actual asymmetrical event/object occurring in the depicted world), the images in row 3 implement CUE-A by an asymmetrical composi-tion that is not depicting an actual occurrence in the context of the image (from right to left: soldier carrying woman, lightning bolt, and Witchblade, see **Figure 2**). These nondiegetic images are perhaps the strongest examples of the use of CUE-A. That is, in the images in rows 1 and 2, one could argue that the use of CUE-A may have been due to a coincidental combination of elements dictated by the needs of narrative and perspective (e.g., how many ways can you show the Joker holding a camera on the cover of *The Killing Joke*?). However, the images in row 3 had no such restrictions placed on them (i.e., perspective is not dictating the use of occlusion in these images).

Another way to demonstrate that CUE-A has become a part of Comic Book Visual Language is by showing that comic book artists are aware of the use of CUE-A in comic book art. For example, when discussing his dislike for the design of the Marvel Comics character Cable, Alex Ross stated, '. . . the design of Cable. I hated it. I felt like it looked like they just threw up everything on the character – the scars, **the thing going on with his eye** (emphasis added), the arm, and what's with all the guns?' (CBR Staff 2006). That 'thing going on with his eye' is the Eye-Asymmetry part of the CUE-A pictorial device.

In conclusion, these nine images, along with Alex Ross' quote, demonstrate that CUE-A is used in comic book art and is therefore a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language.

Was David Bowie Familiar with Comic Book Visual Language?

'Perhaps the strange ones in the dome can lend us a book we can read up alone.'

—David Bowie, 'Drive-In Saturday' (1973).

Like any language, Comic Book Visual Language has its own modality (images and words) that express meaning using systematic forms (a vocabulary of lexical items) ordered with a grammar (Cohn 2016: 3). Due to the complexities inherent in any language, it seems unlikely that anyone completely unfamiliar with Comic Book Visual Language could produce a lexical item that was then incorporated into Comic Book Visual Language. Some familiarity with a language seems to be a reasonable prerequisite for making contributions to that language. It seems logical to assume that knowing the structure and rules of a particular language is a prerequisite for making a novel contribution that would be understood and adopted by others. For example, it seems impossible that Shakespeare could have made the contributions he did to the English language (e.g., Shakespeare is credited with inventing 53 English words that are still commonly used, No Sweat Shakespeare n.d.) had he been unfamiliar with the English language. Similarly, it would be more likely that the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* was responsible for the adoption of CUE-A in Comic Book Visual Language if David Bowie (as one of the producers of the image) was familiar with the grammar and vocabulary of this visual language. Is there evidence that David Bowie was familiar with Comic Book Visual Language?

To answer this, we can survey the literature that David Bowie read for the presence of comic books. Specifically, we would be interested in any comic books that David Bowie read that were published prior to the release of *Aladdin Sane*. These would be the comic books that could have taught Comic Book Visual Language to David Bowie prior to the creation of the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*. The curators of the exhibit *David Bowie Is* released a list of David Bowie's favorite reads (Grace 2013). The books listed that were published before the release of *Aladdin Sane* included:

1) *The Beano*, a British children's comic book first published in July 1938 and currently still in publication (Wikipedia 2016a).
2) *Octobriana and the Russian Underground*, a Russia superheroine comic first published in the United Kingdom in 1971 (Wikipedia 2016b).
3) *Private Eye*, a British satirical and current affairs magazine first published in 1961 and currently still in publication (Wikipedia 2017a). Even though

Private Eye is technically a magazine, and not a comic book, it did employ
many aspects of Comic Book Visual Language, such as the use of word
balloons.

It is important to stress that these three sources represent the *minimum* exposure
that David Bowie would have had to Comic Book Visual Language. David Bowie
was described as 'a voracious reader' who read as much as 'a book a day' (Grace
2013). If we take David Bowie's favorite reads as a representative sample of his
reading habits, and only consider titles published prior to the release of *Aladdin
Sane*, we can conclude that 5% of the titles he read were comic books. As such, it
is highly likely that David Bowie was familiar with the grammar and vocabulary
of Comic Book Visual Language. This, in turn, makes it more plausible that David
Bowie could produce a lexical item (CUE-A) that was incorporated into Comic Book
Visual Language.

Are Comic Book Artists Influenced by Music Album Art?

If a pictorial device from music album art was to be incorporated into Comic Book
Visual Language, it would first need to influence a comic book artist (i.e., the peo-
ple that fashion Comic Book Visual Language). Similar to the demonstration that
CUE-A is used in Comic Book Visual Language, the simplest way to demonstrate that
comic book artists are influenced by music album art is to provide examples from
comic book art that pay homage to music album art. **Figure 3** provides three such
examples (top row) and the album art that they are directly based on (bottom row).
Importantly, these three examples cover a wide range of periods in comic book art
(from 1978 to 2009), indicating a longstanding influence of music album art on
comic book art.

Is the Use of CUE-A Due to *Aladdin Sane*?

'One day, though it might as well be someday. You and I will rise up all the
way. All because of what you are, the prettiest star.'

—David Bowie, 'The Prettiest Star' (1973).
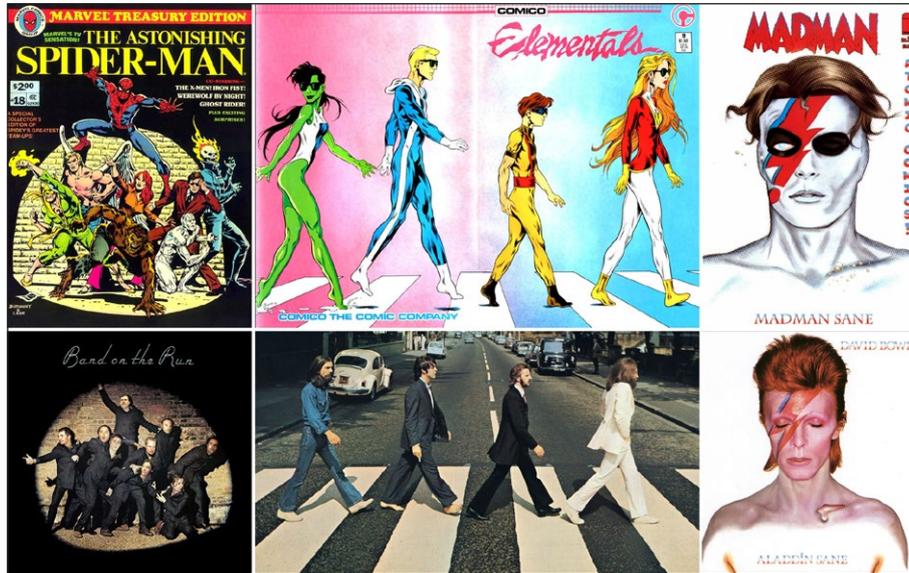
Figure 3: Examples of comic book art **(top row)** and the music album art they were influenced by **(directly beneath)**. Top row, from left to right, the comic book images are: Budiansky, B (p), and Chan, E (i). The Astonishing Spider-Man. Marvel Treasury Edition #18 Jan. 1978 Marvel Worldwide Inc. © Marvel Comics. Willingham, B (p), and Rankin, R (i). Fame. Elementals #9 Aug. 1986 COMICO the Comic Company. © Comico C. Allred, M (p,i). Madman Sane. Madman Atomic Comics #15 Apr. 2009 Image Comics, Inc. © Mike Allred. Bottom row, from left to right, the music album images are: Arrowsmith, C (a). Band on the Run. 1973 MPL Communications, Ltd. © MPL Communications; Macmillan, I (a) Abbey Road. 1969 Apple Corps Ltd. © Apple Records; Duffy, B (a) Aladdin Sane. 1973 Sony Music Entertainment. © RCA Records.

Up to this point, I have shown: (1) that CUE-A is a part of Comic Book Visual Language, (2) that David Bowie was familiar with, and could have possibly contributed to, Comic Book Visual Language, and (3) that comic book artists are influenced by music album art. Now I provide two lines of preliminary evidence that the use of CUE-A in comic book art is due specifically to the influence of the cover for *Aladdin Sane*. While much more research would be required for definitive proof, this preliminary evidence represents the first steps in support of this claim.

First Line of Evidence: Influential Artists From the 1990s Often Used CUE-A

The first line of evidence depends upon four factors: (1) the release date of *Aladdin Sane*, (2) the extent to which David Bowie's work was part of American popular culture at that time, (3) the stages of artistic development, and (4) the ages at which artists typically experience their peak creativity. The argument is that, if the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* is responsible for the adoption of CUE-A into Comic Book Visual Language, then artists that were in a critical stage of artistic development when *Aladdin Sane* was released should show the use of CUE-A during their peak creative output.

First, as previously mentioned, *Aladdin Sane* was released in April 1973 (david-bowie.com, n.d.b). Next, we must address to what extent David Bowie's work was part of American popular culture around the time *Aladdin Sane* was released. In order for David Bowie's work to influence developing artists, they must first encounter his work. The likelihood of encountering David Bowie's work increases the more entrenched he was in American popular culture. Evidence that David Bowie was firmly entrenched in American popular culture includes: (1) *Aladdin Sane* was David Bowie's sixth studio album, with three of these albums peaking in the Billboard Top 40 (Billboard Staff 2017), and (2) *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, a 1973 documentary and concert film by D. A. Pennebaker, had a 60-minute version broadcast on ABC-TV in October 1974 (Wikipedia 2017b).

The third question to ask is, given this release date, which developing artists would be most influenced by the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*? There are many different stages of artistic development that children go through (e.g., Edwards 2012; Lowenfeld 1947; Luquet 1927/2001; Willats 1997). Around the ages of 9–13 years, realism becomes an important goal to developing artists as they begin to try to make their pictures look as accurate as possible (Edwards 2012; Lowenfeld 1947; Luquet 1927/2001). Importantly for our analysis, it is at this stage that these developing artists are most open to influences from outside sources (Chan & Zhao, 2010; Edwards 2012). Often at this age a single moment, referred to as a *crystallizing experience*, will

set the developmental course for a young artist (Feldman 1999: 172). All this suggests that children who are approximately 9–13 years old, and who later develop into artists, would be particularly susceptible to influences, such as the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*. One such example is comic book artist Marc Silvestri, 14 years old when *Aladdin Sane* was released, who lists David Bowie as one of his creative influences, 'I have always been really sensitive to my creative moods and music really drives me, I am all over the map. From The Cure, David Bowie . . .' (Jarkiewicz 2012). Therefore, children who were approximately 9–13 years old in April 1973 would have been the artists most likely to be influenced by the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*.

Next we consider when these 9–13 year old artists would produce their most influential comic book art. That is, when did these 9–13 year old artists produce comic book art that would have the greatest impact on Comic Book Visual Language? Because comic book artists attempt to communicate a narrative with their art, they can be classified as *conceptual artists*. Conceptual artists are those 'who have made conceptual innovations . . . motivated by the desire to **communicate specific ideas** (emphasis added) or emotions.' (Galvenson 2003: 5). Galvenson's (2003) survey of a variety of conceptual artists from the United States and Europe revealed that they reach their peak creative output at approximately 29.1 years of age (range 24–37 years). For example, the highest priced paintings from a conceptual artist's body of work are produced at an average age of 29.0 years (range 24–35 years); the highest number of their illustrations reproduced in art texts are produced at an average age of 30.0 years (range 23–40 years); and their first One-Man New York Gallery exhibitions occur at an average age of 28.3 years (range 24–37 years, Galvenson 2003). A child that was between 9–13 years old when *Aladdin Sane* was released would reach their peak creative output around 15–19 years later (when they were approximately 29 years old). In other words, their creative peak would be expected to occur in the 1990s.

Figure 4 shows a sample of comic book art from some of the most influential artists of the 1990s. An analysis of their birthdates reveals that: (1) they were approximately 9–13 years old when *Aladdin Sane* was released (average age 10.4 years, range

6–16 years), and (2) they were approximately 32.2 years old (range 24–37 years) during the 1990s (average age 27.1 years on January 1st, 1990 and 37.2 years on December 31st, 1999). As can be seen in **Figure 4**, these artists made use of the CUE-A lexical item.

So, artists who were in a critical stage of artistic development when *Aladdin Sane* was released (ages 9–13 years) did use CUE-A during their peak creative output (during the 1990s). This is the first line of evidence in support of the claim that the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* is responsible for the incorporation of the CUE-A lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language.

Second Line of Evidence: Adoption of CUE-A Delayed for Established Graphic Schemas

The second line of evidence depends upon two factors: (1) the release date of *Aladdin Sane* and (2) the use of conventionalized schematic representations by comic book artists (Cohn 2013: 25–26).

Graphic schemas are conventionalized patterns that are used to create drawings (Cohn 2013: 24–25). When creating an image, artists will combine many graphic schemas together (Cohn 2013: 25). For example, when drawing a person running, an artist will combine their graphic schemas for running, legs, arms, heads, ground, etc., to produce the image. Graphic schemas are particularly apparent in drawings by comic book artists (Cohn 2013: 25). For example, many comic book artists use the graphic schemas developed by Jack Kirby when depicting hands in various poses (Cohn 2013: 25). This is true for both American and Japanese comic book artists (Cohn, 2010; Gravett, 2004; Schodt, 1983).

Artists often develop their own graphic schemas, and they typically remain internally consistent with these schemas (Cohn 2013: 26). These graphic schemas can then influence other artists' graphic schemas which, in turn, contribute to the overall visual vocabulary of Comic Book Visual Language (Cohn 2013: 27). Because of this progression, if a character has established graphic schemas for depiction, then these schemas would be resistant to the introduction of new lexical items. Alternatively, for characters that were newer and, thus, did not have established graphic schemas, their schemas would be less resistant to the introduction of new lexical items.
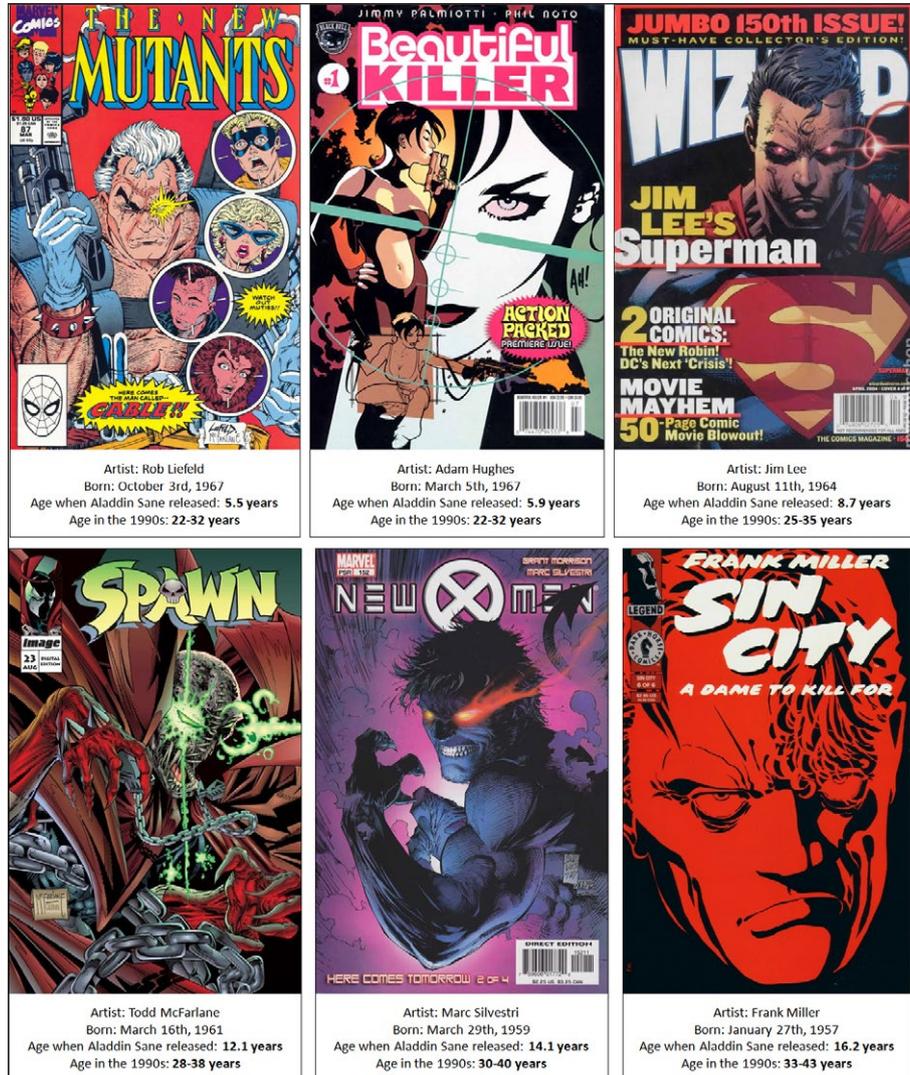
Figure 4: Sample images from influential artists of the 1990s demonstrating the use of CUE-A. Birthdates, age when Aladdin Sane was released, and age ranges during the 1990s are listed for each artist. Left to right, from top to bottom, the images are: Liefeld, R (p) and McFarlane, T (i). A Show of Power! The New Mutants v1 #87 Mar. 1990 Marvel Worldwide Inc. © Marvel Comics; Hughes, A (p,i). Untitled. Beautiful Killer #1 Sept. 2002 Black Bull Entertainment, L.L.C. © Black Bull Comics; Lee, J (p,i). Jumbo 150th Issue. Wizard: The Comics Magazine #150 Apr. 2004 Wizard Press. © Wizard Comics Magazine; McFarlane, T (p,i). The Hunt (Part Three). Spawn #23 Aug. 1994 Image Comics, Inc. © Todd McFarlane; Silvestri, M (a). Here Comes Tomorrow (Part 2): Surrender the Starlit City. New Mutants v1 #152 Mar. 2004 Marvel Worldwide Inc. © Marvel Comics; Miller, F (p,i). Untitled. Sin City: A Dame to Kill For #6 May. 1994 Dark Horse Comics Inc. © Dark Horse Comics.

The argument presented here is that, if the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* is responsible for the adoption of CUE-A into Comic Book Visual Language, then characters that had long established graphic schemas when *Aladdin Sane* was released would be more resistant to the adoption of CUE-A than characters with newer graphic schemas.

Once more, *Aladdin Sane* was released in April 1973 (davidbowie.com, n.d.b). Next we consider the influence of CUE-A on characters with established graphic schemas versus characters with newer graphic schemas. If the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* influenced the adoption of CUE-A into Comic Book Visual Language, then a character with established graphic schemas prior to 1973 would be more resistant to incorporating CUE-A into their depictions. In other words, the frequency with which CUE-A was used to depict this character would be both low and delayed. On the other hand, a character that did not have established graphic schemas prior to 1973 would be less resistant to incorporating CUE-A into their depictions. That is, the use of CUE-A to depict this character would be more frequent and occur sooner.

To test this, I analyzed the use of CUE-A in the depiction of six long running comic book characters; three with debuts during the Golden Age of Comics (Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) and three with debuts during the Bronze Age of Comics (Golgo 13, Wolverine, and the Punisher, Frankenhoff & Thompson 2012). For purposes of brevity, we will refer to Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman as Golden Age characters and Golgo 13, Wolverine, and the Punisher as Bronze Age characters. Superman's first appearance occurred in *Action Comics #1*, June 1938 (Wikipedia 2017c); Batman's first appearance occurred in *Detective Comics #27*, March 1939 (Wikipedia 2017d); and Wonder Woman's first appearance occurred in *All Star Comics #8,* December 1941 (Wikipedia 2017e). Each debut occurred over 30 years prior to the release of *Aladdin Sane.* As such, each Golden Age character had over three decades worth of developed graphic schemas prior to the cover image for *Aladdin Sane.* In contrast, Golgo 13's first appearance was in the October 1968 issue of *Big Comic* (Wikipedia 2016c); the Punisher's first appearance occurred in *The Amazing Spider-Man #290,* February 1974 (Wikipedia 2017f);

and Wolverine's first appearance occurred in *The Incredible Hulk # 180,* October 1974 (Wikipedia 2017g). The Punisher's and Wolverine's debuts occurred after the release of *Aladdin Sane,* while Golgo 13 debuted a mere 4.5 years prior to the release of *Aladdin Sane.* Therefore, each Bronze Age character had far less time to establish any sort of conventional graphic schemas. If the release of *Aladdin Sane* in 1973 influenced the adoption of CUE-A, then we should see an earlier and more frequent use of CUE-A for depictions of Bronze Age characters compared to depictions of Golden Age characters.

Figure 5 shows the timeline for the use of CUE-A in the depiction of Golden Age characters (i.e., Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) and Bronze Age characters (Golgo 13, Wolverine, and the Punisher; see **Table 1** for a list of covers analyzed).
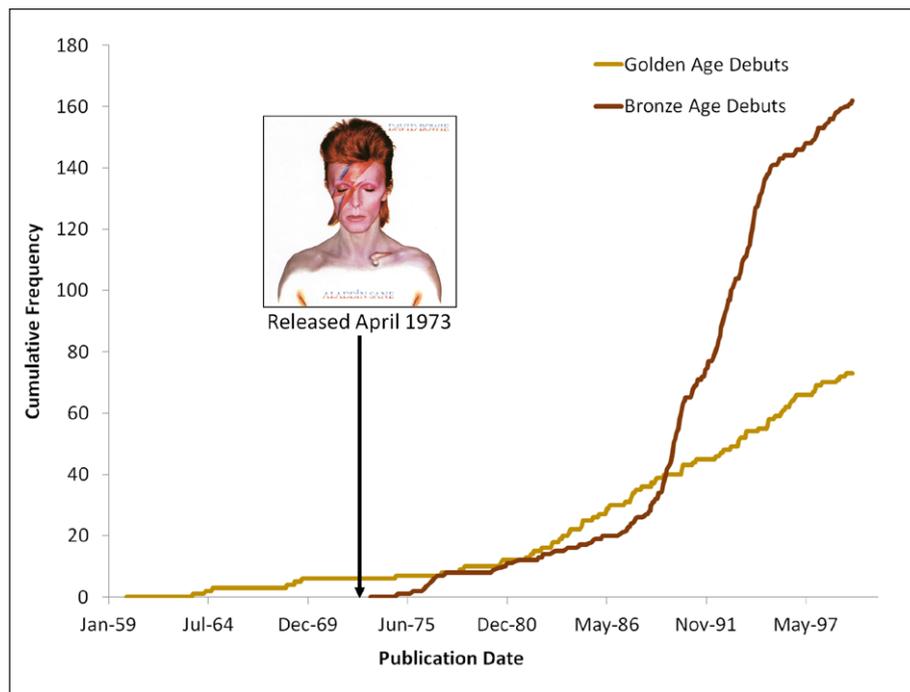

Figure 5: Cumulative frequencies as a function of publication date for depictions of Golden Age characters (Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) and Bronze Age characters (Golgo 13, Wolverine, and the Punisher). Duffy, B (a) Aladdin Sane. 1973 Sony Music Entertainment. © RCA Records.

Character	Title	Issues	Dates
Superman	*Action Comics*	#260–760	Jan. 1960 to Dec. 1999
Batman	*Detective Comics*	#275–739	Jan. 1960 to Dec. 1999
Wonder Woman	*Wonder Woman (1942)*	(1942) #111–329	Jan. 1960 to Dec. 1999
	Wonder Woman (1987)	(1987) #1–151	
Golgo 13	*Golgo 13*	#1–114	June 1973 to Oct. 1999
Wolverine	various solo titles		Sept. 1982 to Dec. 1999
The Punisher	various solo titles		Jan. 1986 to Sept. 1999

Table 1: Comic book Covers Used for Analysis.

First, notice that there is very little use of CUE-A when depicting Golden Age characters prior to the release of *Aladdin Sane* (only 6 instances in 417 issues = once per 69.5 issues, see **Figure 5**). This indicates that CUE-A was not part of the graphic schemas used to depict these characters. Second, after the release of *Aladdin Sane* the use of CUE-A was almost three times more frequent for Bronze Age characters (162 instances) than for Golden Age characters (57 instances, see **Figure 5**).

To control for differing publication rates for different characters, and the fact that Wolverine's and the Punisher's solo titles did not debut until the 1980s, the percentage of appearances that used CUE-A for each character was also analyzed (see **Figure 6**). First, notice that the percentage of appearances that use CUE-A for Golden Age characters prior to the release of *Aladdin Sane* are all below 3% (Superman = 1.2%, Batman = 2.5%, Wonder Woman = 0.0%, Golden Age Average = 1.2%, see **Figure 6**). No similar analysis is possible for Bronze Age characters as their first issues were released after *Aladdin Sane*. This indicates that CUE-A was not part of the graphic schemas used to depict Golden Age characters. Second, in the first 13 years after the release of *Aladdin Sane* the use of CUE-A per character appearance was four times higher for Bronze Age characters (Golgo 13 = 28.3%, Wolverine = 22.2%, the Punisher = 20.0%, Bronze Age Average = 23.5%) than for Golden Age characters (Superman = 4.4%, Batman = 8.7%, Wonder Woman = 4.8%, Golden Age Average = 6.0%, see **Figure 6**).
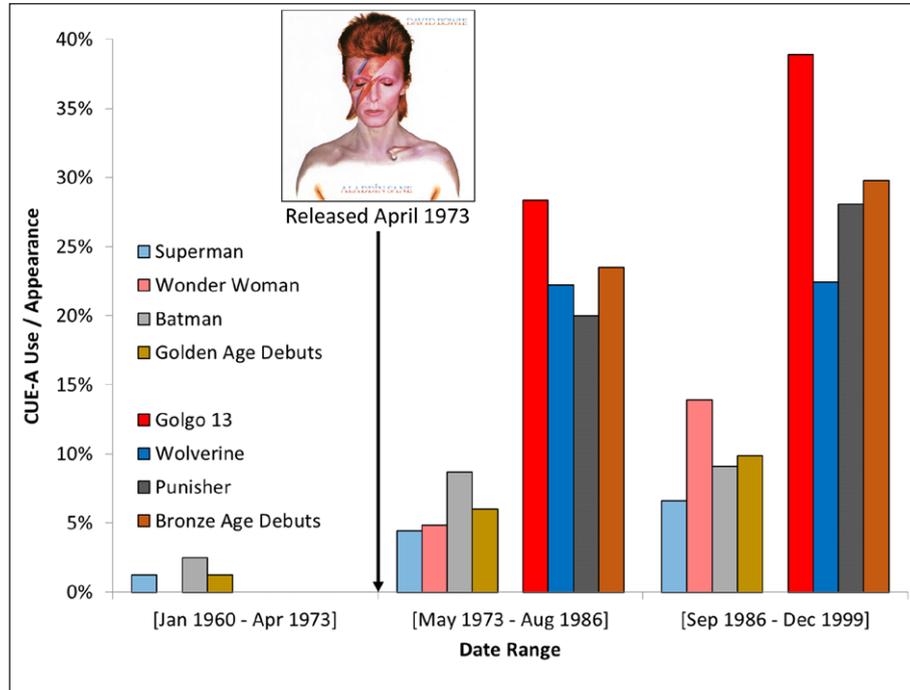
Figure 6: Percent of appearances that used CUE-A by publication date range for depictions of Golden Age characters (Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) and Bronze Age characters (Golgo 13, Wolverine, and the Punisher). Duffy, B (a) Aladdin Sane. 1973 Sony Music Entertainment. © RCA Records.

This indicates the earlier and more frequent use of CUE-A for depictions of Bronze Age characters compared to depictions of Golden Age characters. Finally, 13 years after the release of *Aladdin Sane* even though the use of CUE-A had increased for Golden Age characters (Superman = 6.6%, Batman = 9.1%, Wonder Woman = 13.9%, Golden Age Average = 9.9%) it was still three times higher for Bronze Age characters (Golgo 13 = 38.9%, Wolverine = 22.4%, the Punisher = 28.1%, Bronze Age Average = 29.8%). This shows that, as CUE-A became a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language, it was slowly incorporated into the graphic schemas of established Golden Age characters (increases in CUE-A use from 6.0% to 9.9%). However, this was nowhere near the rate of CUE-A use in the graphic schemas of newly introduced Bronze Age characters.

Taken together, this provides strong evidence supporting the earlier and more frequent use of CUE-A for depictions of characters with Bronze Age debuts (less established graphic schemas in 1973) compared to depictions of characters with Golden Age debuts (highly established graphic schemas in 1973). This is the second line of evidence in support of the claim that the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* is responsible for the incorporation of CUE-A in Comic Book Visual Language.

Conclusions

'I suppose for me as an artist it wasn't always just about expressing my work;
I really wanted, more than anything else, to contribute in some way to the
culture I was living in.'

—David Bowie (Jones 2016).

Here I have presented evidence that: (1) CUE-A is a metaphorical device that uses close-up and eye asymmetry to simultaneously communicate the disparate concepts of ALIEN and HUMAN, (2) CUE-A is a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language, and (3) CUE-A became a lexical item in Comic Book Visual Language specifically due to the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*.

While it may be impossible to definitively prove that the adoption of CUE-A in Comic Book Visual Language is due to the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*, I have presented multiple lines of converging evidence that support this claim. Specifically, I have shown that: (1) David Bowie was familiar with Comic Book Visual Language and so could plausibly make a meaningful contribution, (2) comic book artists are influenced by images from music album covers, (3) the use of CUE-A by the most influential artists of the 1990s corresponds to the influence of the cover image for *Aladdin Sane* on developing child artists in the mid-1970s, and (4) the adoption of CUE-A after the release of *Aladdin Sane* occurred faster and to a greater extent for characters without established graphic schemas.

While much more research is required to make a definitive case that the use of CUE-A in Comic Book Visual Language is a result of the cover image for *Aladdin Sane*, the work reported here lays down some of the initial evidence in support of

this claim. Hopefully, this analysis will prompt future research to more fully test this claim. To paraphrase David Bowie himself (CNN.com, 1998), I don't know where this future research will go from here but I promise it won't be boring.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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