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RESEARCH

Beyond Linearity: Holistic, Multidirectional, Multilinear and Translinear Reading in Comics

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This article presents a discussion about some of the main theoretical approaches of the assemblage of panels on the page and the double page, arguing that the correspondences between the images on the page are not fundamentally linear. On the contrary, comics foster readings that can be holistic, multidirectional and multilinear. Moreover, the correspondences between images through the pages of the whole book are also relevant. The book form, often disregarded by the critics, actually plays a very important role in the way comics are read and favour a reading that is translinear. Finally, some works are even breaking with the codex as a format, suggesting new ways of reading and engaging with the comics form. In order to illustrate how all these reading protocols work, this article offers a selection of examples of graphic narratives from different periods, from Winsor McCay to Richard McGuire.

Keywords: book; comics; materiality; page layout; reading

There are numerous processes which take place during the conception and creation of a comic, but two are key in terms of the space of the page. The breakdown deals with the distribution of the fragments of the story in a series of fixed images and the page layout is concerned with the association and classification of those images on the page. Thus, the process of distributing panels on the page might produce different types of layouts. Benoît Peeters, who proposed one of the first categorizations of layout, identified four types: conventional (same distribution of the panels through all the work, which favours a traditional and lineal reading order), rhetoric (the layout changes depending on what is being depicted in the panels), decorative (the layout focuses on visual disposition and is dependent on aesthetic effect) and

productive (the story and the layout are interdependent and work together, often destabilizing the conventional reading order) (2003: 51–75). However, some critics have questioned this classification. Thierry Groensteen, for instance, has re-evaluated the conventional use of the layout and has suggested another typology focused on the general opposition of discrete units (predominantly sequential, dominated by the story) (2007: 97–102) and, in a later work, has extended the typology to levels of regularity and expanded the rhetoric uses (2013: 43–47). This article tries to expand on these typologies by focusing, not only on the page, but on the book's form.

While it is easy to assume that comics that use more regular page layouts also tend to make use of a more lineal and conventional reading, this is not always the case, as this analysis will show. There are, however, clear connections between the page layouts and the way readers process them when they read a comic. The traditional Z-pattern, which follows a left-right, top-bottom way of reading,¹ has been clearly inherited from the process of reading text in book format and has been highly influential when reading comics. However, this pattern is frequently altered, mainly when the grid is broken in page layouts, a technique that Neil Cohn calls blockage (a column with two equal frames followed by a column with a frame occupying the same vertical space of the previous two) and overlap (overlapping frames) (Cohn 2013: 93–95). Cohn affirms that there is a principle of assemblage, according to which the reader tries to create units based on the distance and coherence of forms to generate a reading order. The reader, in this order, tends to show preference for grouped panels over non-grouped areas, smooth paths over broken paths, not jumping over units and not leaving spaces without reading (2013: 95). Regarding the first panel to be read, as in most visual media, the preferred entry area is situated on the left upper corner of the page, the most upper one, or, if not, the one situated more to the left. Most readers also leave the panel through its exterior border and

¹ In manga, as it is known, the right to left reading direction still dominates. The adaptation to the western reading direction creates some problems (see de la Iglesia 2016) and nowadays, also due to cheaper editorial costs, most manga are published in their original reading direction and orientation, usually including reading instructions for readers not familiar with the convention.

advance in the reading towards the right. The experiment showed that the Z-pattern of reading is not always the only option; panel groupings prove extremely relevant, in a similar way as the processing of images is affected by visual patterns, as pointed out previously by the Gestalt perception theory. However, other categories have been proposed apart from Peeters's, Groensteen's and Cohn's, namely the ones put forward by Chavanne (2010). In his *Composition de la bande dessinée*, besides regular and rhetorical, he adds semiregular compositions and the concept of fragmentation (where tiers are the fundamental unit, not the page).

Linear and holistic reading

The relationship between panels (and images in general) and the page is essential to comics as a medium. Two apparently opposite activities join within the physical space of the page: seeing and reading. Numerous critics have pointed out this foundational tension of comics: linear against tabular (Fresnault-Deruelle 1976), story (*récit*) against scene (*tableau*) (Peeters 2003: 48), lineal against holistic or sequence against surface (Hatfield, 2009: 139), and macroreading (*macrolectura*) against microreading (*microlectura*) (Arredondo 2015: 196). Whatever name is given to these two elements, they refer to a contrast between time and space. The reader processes the images and can stop briefly or for a long time in one or a series of them, as when contemplating a painting. Moreover, in the case of a panel containing text, the reader will normally perceive the image first and then complement it with the reading of the text (unless the text is printed in a large font or highlighted in some way). Readers are aware that they must then continue and leave that panel behind in order to face another panel. The temporality of reading a panel is obviously variable and it does not only depend on the quantity of text or what is depicted on the image, but also on the location of the image itself on the page, the reading order or more subjective factors (each reader might stop more or less time on a particular panel). The same could be applied, *mutatis mutandi*, to the reading of the whole page.

However, it is quite difficult for readers to control the gaze and avoid seeing other adjacent panels to the panel they are looking at. This peripheral and complementary vision has been called *peri-champ* by Peeters (2003: 18) and

panoptisme by Samson (2012). If we compare this reading with the reading of a word-only text, we soon realize that, even if we are aware of the words that follow or surround the one we are processing, we hardly ever read a whole sentence or a paragraph accidentally: a certain conscious effort is needed for this to occur unless the words are highlighted in some way (colour, size, etc.). This situation contrasts with the processing of comics, where the eye tends to wander by nature, finding meaningful units. As Cohn, Foulsham and Wybrow point out with regards to the results of one of their experiments, 'when presented with multiple panels, participants might not inspect the images in a strict order. They might skip ahead, flip regularly between earlier and later images, or build up an overall idea of the narrative before inspecting more closely' (2016: 568).

Images are thus normally located with more ease than words in a text (again, unless words are highlighted in some way). In this sense, comics seem to be less inclined by nature to maintain an exclusively linear reading due to peripheral vision and the possibilities of the holistic reading of the page. It seems, though, that writing in a succession of lines read left to right, top-to-bottom has turned out to be the preferential vehicle of the production of meaning and knowledge throughout history. Nick Sousanis's *Unflattening* (2015) precisely uses the medium of comics as a way to explore the relationship between words and images, questioning the flatness and unidimensionality of verbal thinking by comparing it to the great potential of visual and holistic thinking. His work, which uses a different layout for every page, makes use of various visual metaphors to express this contrast. An example of such contrast can be found when text-based thinking is represented by dominoes advancing in a single direction and visual thinking is depicted by the simultaneous relationship of planets in space (2015; **Figure 1**).

The holistic potential of the page was very relevant from the very early stages of comics. In this sense, it is important to remember that comics such as *The Yellow Kid* (first published in 1895) used different formats throughout its lifespan. Such formats included the strip, but it could be said that the predominant form in the beginning was a single image in the page, without divisions, a sort of superpanel populated

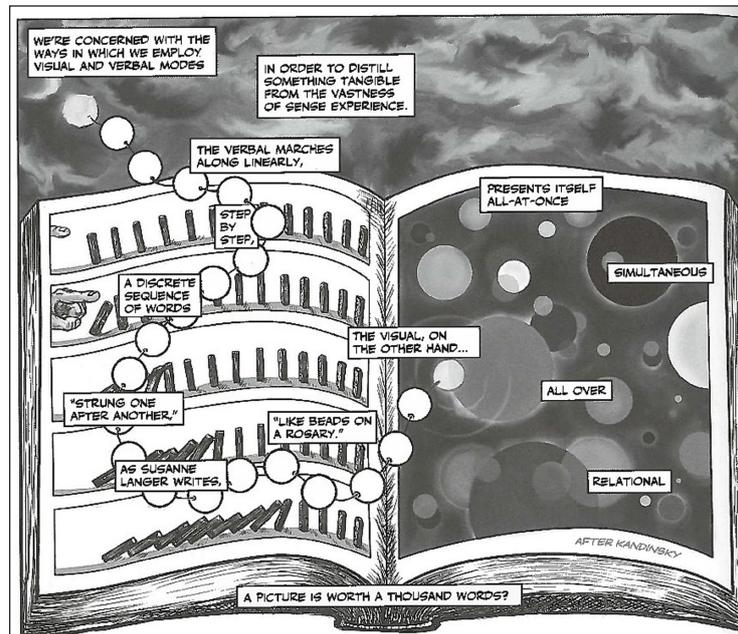


Figure 1: Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening*, 2015: 58 (page detail). © Harvard University Press.

by Mickey Dugan (the 'Yellow Kid') and many other characters. Although one of the most famous instalments is the one published on the 25th October 1896, in which a hidden parrot talks through a phonograph, the series did not often include text through balloons, but rather through posters, signs and banners. Thus, the reader processed the image in a holistic fashion, focusing on the accumulation of various peripheral details and characters in a non-linear and anti-sequential reading.

Furthermore, even when using panels, some authors look for a pictorial effect through the so-called super panels, polyptychs or multi-panel pan sequence. These sequences make use of the same continuous background, thus mitigating the separation between the panels. The artist Joe Linton, who has compiled many examples of this technique on his website (2015), situates its first use in 1906 in the series *The Kind-der-Kids*, by Lyonel Feininger. Around the same period, Windsor McCay also started to make use of the super panels in his famous *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (first published in 1905). However, some of the most famous examples

of this resource were the pages created by Frank King for his *Gasoline Alley* (first published in 1918), as he was among the first artists to make use of the polyptychs in the space of the whole page. King, in addition, used the polyptych in more than one way, as we will show now.

On the page published on 24 August 1930 (**Figure 2a**), Walt and Skeezi walk around the beach while the first one continuously tumbles, following the slapstick tradition. Throughout the 12 panels, the background is continuous and creates a sort of scene (a beach with bathers). The only characters who appear more than once are Walt and Skeezi (except one of the bathers whom Walt bumps into, who appears twice). Although the conventional reading direction (left to right, top to bottom) is still maintained, it is somehow mitigated by the use of the continuous background, which favours a holistic reading. However, each panel represents a different moment of the sequence and the left to right approach is still followed line after line. On the other hand, on the page from 24 May 1931 (**Figure 2b**) the space created by the continuous background is truly uninterrupted. In this case, instead of a single sequence, no character is repeated: there are several small sequences between multiple characters, united through the common background. Although there might be some diagonals that guide the reader's eye, it could be argued that there is some freedom in the reading order of the sequence. In this sense, without the panel borders, this

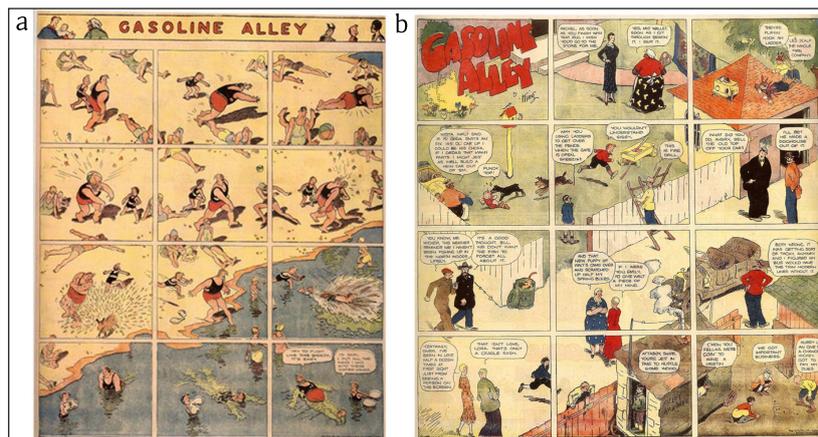


Figure 2: Two installments from Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*, 24 August 1930 (left) and 24 May 1931 (right), 2015. © Estate of Frank King.

page could work as a single image, in a similar way to many of the early instalments of *The Yellow Kid* (King himself had published earlier strips where he only used one superpanel).

The use of polyptychs started to be more frequent in superhero comics during the 1960s and 70s (on the pages of authors such as Neal Adams and Jim Steranko) and, according to Linton (2015), arguably overused in the mid-1980s. Some of the most famous comics artists and graphic novelists (such as Alan Moore and Frank Miller) have also experimented with them, and today they are just another visual technique in the language of comics, which can be used discreetly to link a few panels or more noticeably on the page or the double page spread.

Multidirectional and multilinear reading

We have seen, therefore, how the holistic reading process in comics differs from the conventional reading of text. As Chute argues,

One of the centrally interesting aspects of comics' narrative composition within the space parameters of the printed page is its ability to use that space to suggest different kinds of reading-models that aren't necessarily linear, or that do not actually embed a "right" way to read and to look, but rather offer a density—which is often a layering of temporalities that the reader then decodes (2012: 413).

The examples that we have provided above suggest that the density Chute refers to was present in the comics medium from a very early stage. Moreover, the linear reading was not so clearly established at this time. Some critics have pointed out the numbering of panels (see Witek 2009) in many early comics, as well as the different reading directions of early strips, which could be read vertically or horizontally according to the space available on the page (as shown by Lefèvre 2009). There was also a very playful mindset in some of these comics, which already experimented with the conventions of the language in a metafictional way and broke the fourth wall (in a sort of early postmodernity). McCay's characters, for instance, often break the panel borders (as in the famous page of *Little Sammy Sneeze* published on 24

September 1905) and even invade other panels. This happens on the page of *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* published on 28 May 1908. The protagonist is split into two characters, who interact with each other by crossing the border of the panel; thus, contiguous panels work as mirrors and the reader is forced to read the panels first from left to right, then from right to left, and finally horizontally but in two parallel rows of panels that occur simultaneously. This technique has been called 'overlap' (*solapamiento*) by Gasca and Gubern (1994: 638) and creates a kind of visual and narrative paradox which was also used later by authors such as George McManus and many others afterwards.

There were several other radical experiments in comics narration in the first years of the 20th century. One of the most surprising is perhaps *Crazy Quilt*, a Sunday strip that only lasted for a few months (from 12 April to 7 June 1914) and not well-known until recently (its complete run was republished in its original format by Sunday Press as *Crazy Quilt by Frank King: Scraps & Panels on the Way to Gasoline Alley* in 2017). This series shows the frequent cooperation between artists during those years, as each page was drawn collaboratively by a team of authors (namely, Frank King, Everett Lowry, Dean Cornwell, Quin Hall, Charles Lederer and Lester J. Ambrose). They all shared the same space in the page, dividing it to develop various stories. The novelty was the way in which these stories coexisted: reflecting the spirit alluded to in the title of the strip, most stories overlapped each other in great interaction and were conscious of their common presence. As we see in the following example (1914; **Figure 3**), they also made use of all reading directions and the overlapping is continuous, providing the possibility of re-reading some panels that are part of two stories at the same time.

The page also makes use of numbers to indicate the order of the panels, which clarifies this complex set of reading directions (although the numbering of panel ended up being just another element of the medium, even in linear stories). In a similar way to the aforementioned examples of McCay, the characters in the story are often self-aware of their fictional qualities and thus point to the formal apparatus of comics (panel borders, etc.), which end up fragmented. Not a single millimetre of



Figure 3: Frank King and other authors, *Crazy Quilt*, Chicago Tribune, 3 May 1914.

the page is wasted: the various strips are complemented with humoristic drawings or gags that are often turned 90 or 180 degrees, forcing the reader to manipulate the page in order to read it properly. *Crazy Quilt*, thus, stands as an early example of reader involvement, as well as of the use of reading in multiple directions (multidirectional) and with several parallel narrative lines on the space of the page

(multilinear). Although today it might seem to be a one-off example, it is important to remember that almost a decade earlier another comic had already captured attention for its graphic and reading experimentation: *The Upside Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo*, created by Gustave Verbeek and published from 11 October 1903 to 14 January 1905. The series made use of reversible reading: after a first, lineal processing of the panels, the reader needs to turn the newspaper 180 degrees to be able to read the second part of the story. Furthermore, as Groensteen recalls (2002: 29), the reversibility is double, both iconic (each image) and sequential (the succession of panels).

There seems to be a direct connection between this kind of early experiments and comics collectives such as Oubapo (*Ouvroir de bande dessinée potentielle*, which roughly translates as 'workshop of potential comic art'). Inspired by the experimental literary movement Oulipo, it was founded in 1992 and operates by self-imposing formal constraints in order to push the boundaries of the medium. These constraints were originally divided into the generative (applied to new works) and the transformative (applied to pre-existing works). (Groensteen 2002) Within the first category, certain constraints concerning reading direction included reversibility, multi-readability and palindrome.² One of Oubapo's most active members, Étienne Lécroart, has made use of these and other constraints in works such as *Cercle Vicieux* (Lécroart 2000; a palindrome comic) and 'Blat & Moustiker! dans soixante-dix strips en quatre' (*Blat & Moustiker in 70 strips in four*, published in Oubapo's second anthology *Oupus 2* (Oubapo 2003) and consisting of 4 strips in which the reader can always choose to swap to the contiguous strip, leading to a potential number of 64 different stories in a single page).

The French association also has various authors who sympathize with the movement, such as Matt Madden in the US and Sergio García Sánchez in Spain. The latter is the creator, together with his fellow Oubapian Lewis Trondheim, of books such as *Les Trois Chemins* (2000) and its continuation *Les Trois Chemins sous les mers* (2011). These works do not use panels; instead, three sets of

² Although, as Meesters points out, palindromes can be seen in fact as a special case of multi-readability (2013: 279).

characters are continuously depicted along horizontal lines that they traverse and that represent their paths (*chemins*, in French), which occupy the double page spread and continue throughout the whole book (2000; **Figure 4**). These paths run in parallel, overlapping each other in some sections and offering multiples ways of reading (changing the path, reading them simultaneously or one after the other, etc.), in a similar fashion as the *Crazy Quilt* series discussed earlier. García Sánchez, in his own theoretical work (García Sánchez 2000), calls this multilinear structure 'band comics' (*cómic de bandas*). In the case of *Les Trois Chemins* it might be noticed as well that the multilinearity is produced not on the page, but in the space created on the double page.

Translinear reading and the book form

The possibility of easily locating images in various directions is perhaps one of the great differences between reading a conventional text and reading comics. It is important to remark that peripheral vision plays a role not only within experimental or avant-garde work, but in all comics. Images, in spite of their individuality and separation from the rest, are 'conscious' of their common existence, as stated by the

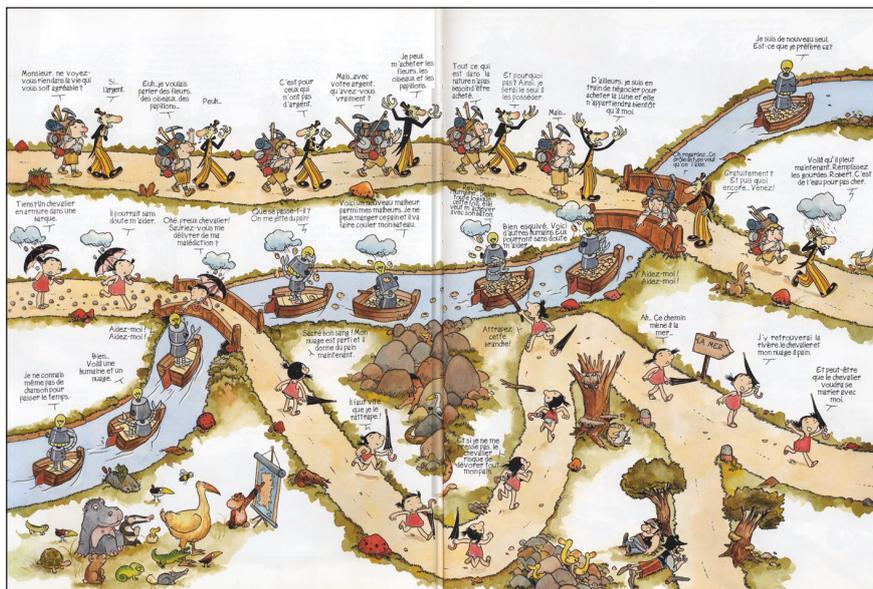


Figure 4: Sergio García Sánchez (art) and Lewis Trondheim (script), *Les Trois Chemins*, 2000. © L'école de loisirs.

famous principle of iconic solidarity described by Groensteen (2007: 18–20). This coexistence is, in fact, one of the main characteristics of the medium:

Images in print do not chase each other in the same way as scrolling on-screen images: they stay put, remain available, can be checked, compared and returned to multiple times. This is one of the greatest riches of comics: the almost instant accessibility of each of the moments that make them up (Groensteen 2008: 50).³

This foundational characteristic of the medium is often used by authors, who employ various images created to be compared. These correspondences or 'visual rhymes' can be of a different nature (graphic, chromatic, stylistic, etc.), both based on repetition and contrast of the elements portrayed (panels, sequences, characters, objects, etc.). This process of establishing correspondences, which is non-linear and goes beyond the simple relationship of cause and effect, is denominated 'braiding' (*tressage* in the original French) by Groensteen (2008: 50). These connections can appear both at the level of the page or the double page spread. Some authors might create some sort of cohesion on the spread (the same scene or temporality, for instance), while others do not give importance to this unit and focus instead on the single page (or even smaller units, such as the strip).

In any case, when dealing with the codex format, the reader always faces (except for the first page) the double page spread. As Spencer Millidge reminds us,

The eye immediately takes in the whole page—or the whole spread—at once, so it should always be designed with that in mind. There is no way that the artist can physically prevent the reader from looking or glancing at the last panel before the first; but the reader has a tacit agreement with the creator to read the page in order. Even so, any big change of scene, new chapter,

³ 'Les images imprimées ne se chassent pas les unes les autres comme le font celles qui défilent sur un écran: elles demeurent là, disponibles, vérifiables, comparables, offertes à des aller-retours multiples. Cette accessibilité quasi instantanée de tous les moments qui la constituent est l'une des grandes richesses de la bande dessinée.' Translation is mine.

surprise panel, or dramatic moment is usually placed after the turn of the page (Spencer Millidge 2009: 35).

We see again the key role that peripheral vision plays in processing comics. There is no doubt that a tacit agreement between the author and the reader exists. However, as previously mentioned, the eye tends to wander, which can be very challenging for the reader. In strips or one-page stories, for instance, the reader might involuntarily see visual information from the last image, which could spoil a dramatic end or a final gag. That is probably why there is a certain convention in comics to build tension before the turn of the page (that is, in the recto page), a mechanism frequently used by authors such as Hergé in his *Tintin* series. For instance, in *Le Lotus bleu* (1946: 57–58), Tintin and his companions are about to be beheaded by Wang in the last tier of the recto of the page, but the tension is resolved with Tchang's intervention in extremis when the reader turns the page. The book as a vehicle has tended to be the container for a discourse where the story progresses linearly parallel to the succession of pages that inevitably move forward towards the last page. This conception of the codex format has been described as 'teleological narrative' by Masten *et al.* (1997: 2): 'the book, as a technological form, is organized to be read from page 1 to page 2, from page 2 to page 3, and so on to the end of the book. This is of course a possible way of reading a book, and one that was encouraged by the development of narrative fiction in the eighteenth century.' In this sense, the adaptation of the comics discourse to the book form is an essential step that is not often taken into account by critics. Indeed, the codex format provokes, as Baetens points out, 'an undeniable vectorization of discourse; the book consecrates a linear, or more exactly monovectorized, reading, that distinguishes (and sometimes discriminates) a start and an end' (Groensteen 2007: 147). Notwithstanding this undeniable influence of the codex in the linear discourse of comics, the codex can obviously generate other forms of reading.

Not only can comics readers examine images within a page before 'reading' it (strictly speaking), as we have seen, but they can also extend this mechanism to the whole work. This is another essential difference from purely textual reading. A

comic contained in a book is easy to glance through; when allowed, readers often do this to get an impression of what they will find (art style, page layout, etc.) before buying it.

As other critics have shown, readers always have a holistic vision at their disposal: they have the ability of seeing past, present and future simultaneously on the page. Bartual (2010: 15) compares this vision mode to the one attributed to God, a sort of 'eternal present,' in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (written around 524). Likewise, we could add another facet of this 'divine vision,' available to the reader of comics thanks to the manipulation of time through the handling of the codex. Captain Atom, a character from *Pax Americana* (one of the self-conclusive issues of the series *The Multiversity*, published in 2015), makes use of a comic book to show this ability. In a metafictional fashion, Captain Atom is not only using another comic book of the same series he belongs to, but also paying tribute to *Watchmen*'s Dr. Manhattan, with whom he shares his simultaneous vision of present, past and future (Figure 5).

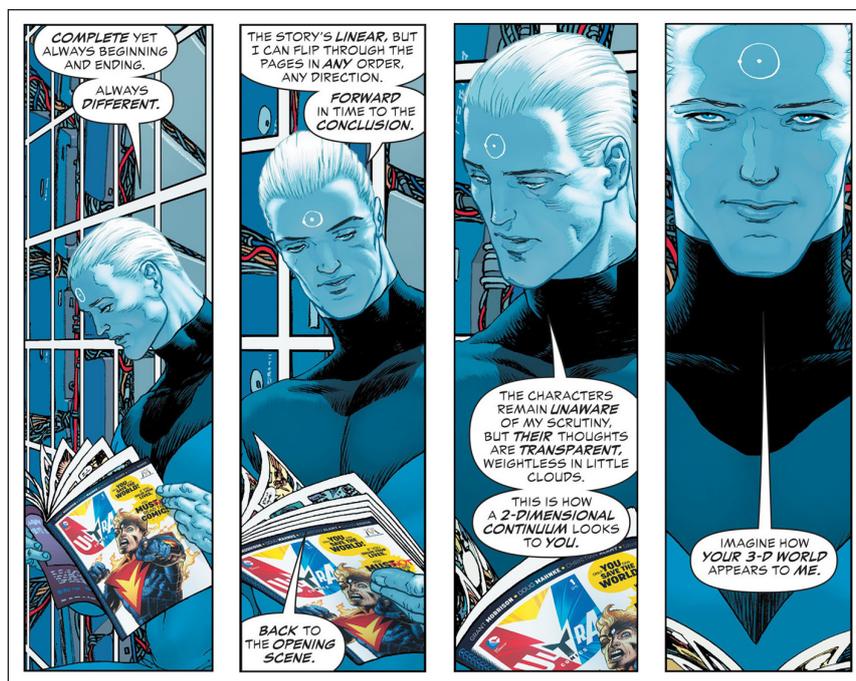


Figure 5: Frank Quitely (art) and Grant Morrison (script), *The Multiversity. Pax Americana*, 2015, page detail. © DC Comics.

Captain Atom is both looking directly at the characters of the story and at the readers, who are handling the comic book itself. The character is also reflecting on the reading of the work itself: the time of discourse is altered and does not follow a chronological order, so the reader is forced to go back and forth to understand the events that take place. This is all reflected in the book format; the page, far from being a linear form, as it is traditionally considered, 'looks both forward and backward, toward the preceding page and the following, toward the front of the codex and the back, toward past discourse and future discourse' (Dagenais 2004: 62).

Therefore, the visual rhymes we mentioned before do not have to be limited to the level of the page or the double page. Indeed, some authors seek to establish connections between different pages; these visual correspondences can appear both on the same site of the page or on a different one. Braiding can then be applied to all the codex and generates a reading that moves further from conventional linearity: a translinear reading. We find an example of this kind of reading in the graphic novel *Asterios Polyp* (2009). David Mazzucchelli's work uses certain global motives: the story, for instance, reflects on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and continuously portray the visual motif of stairs going up and down. But the translinear reading is even more obvious in the portrayal of Asterios's apartment. Images representing this space from the same perspective are repeated several times throughout the work and act as a symbolic frame of important moments of the storyline. Thus, the first of these images shows the disorder and neglect of the apartment, a reflection of the traumatic separation of Asterios and Hana. The same space is shown four more times during different moments of the storyline, creating a sort of internal sequence within the graphic novel. In this manner, Mazzucchelli invites us to compare the panels, to find similarities and differences in a non-juxtaposed, translinear sequence.

This non-linear way of using the form of the codex is appearing more frequently in works published within the last ten years. For instance, Richard McGuire's graphic novel *Here* (2014) expanded the device of a six-page comic published in the magazine *Raw* in 1989 and made use of superposing panels in the double-page spread to represent past, present, and future in the same space. The several recurring characters, narrative lines and visual correspondences that are present in the graphic novel

do favour a reading of the codex in a non-linear way, flipping through the pages. *One Soul* (2011), by Ray Fawkes, uses an apparently simple nine-panel grid, but also deviates from linearity. This graphic novel employs the double page to create a macrospace of 18 identical panels recreating the lives of 18 characters in different historical periods. Each panel follows the story of a single character, turning black for the remaining pages of the book when he or she dies and being occupied only by text, a sort of monologue of the soul. Therefore, the reader of *One Soul* can complete one story through the pages or process them all at the same time (or any combination of these two options); in any case, it is probable that the reader will flip forwards or backwards through the book to connect these stories.

Beyond the page and the book

Finally, it should be remarked that the codex itself as a format is being questioned as a narrative vehicle for comics, with clear repercussions for the way in which it is read or engaged with. Various authors have created works that call attention to the comic as an object, linking it to other practices such as the artist's book (Drucker 2008). Chris Ware's celebrated *Building Stories* (2012), a box containing fourteen different printed works with no indication of reading order, is one of the latest examples of a list that includes leporellos such as Joe Sacco's *The Great War* (2013) and Pascal Rabaté's *Street View* (2014), as well as more extreme Oubapian experiments such as *Coquetèle* (three giant dice with images that create random comics when thrown), created by Anne Baraou and Vincent Sardon (Baraou and Sardon 2002), and *Scrouabble* (a comics version of the board game Scrabble), created by Jean-Christophe Menu, Jochen Gerner, François Ayroles and Killofer (Menu, Gerner, Ayroles and Killofer 2005). It is interesting to point out here that the codex is also being adapted into new reading devices, such as Jason Shiga's *Meanwhile* (2010), a choose-your-own-adventure book in which pipes coming out of the pages function as arrows and continuously make the reader jump to a different part of the book. These and many other works emphasize the materiality of comics and push the medium to its limits. Marc-Antoine Mathieu has often played with the format and the integrity of the page in various ways in his series *Julius Corentin Acquefaques*, *prisonnier des rêves* (the first album, *L'Origine*, was published in 1990) and recently

some small publishing houses such as Éditions Polystyrène and Éditions Rutabaga have been created with the specific target of promoting works that take into account their nature as objects and require to be manipulated differently from a normal book. Furthermore, comics seem to have departed from the two-dimensional page towards the three-dimensional world of exhibitions, where the physical space of the gallery serves as a narrative space, as shown in exhibitions such as PoCom (2003, at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts) and Hypercomics: The Shape of Comics to Come (2010, at London's Pumphouse Gallery).

The new emphasis on materiality curiously coincides with the rise of digital comics and webcomics.⁴ If McCloud's famous concept of the infinite canvas subverted the page in favour of a limitless space where comics could progress in any direction, various authors are also exploring the potential of interactivity and multimodality in the medium. This is the case of Daniel Goodbrey, who has coined the term hypercomics (2013: 291) for works in which the reader makes choices that influence the sequence of events, such as in his own *Icarus Needs* (2013) and *A Duck Has an Adventure* (2012) or Anthony Rageul's *Prise de Tête* (2009). It is still difficult to predict the ways in which digital comics will engage with print comics, especially as many of the issues are being discussed today by critics (see 'Poetics of Digital Comics,' a special issue of this journal that from 2017 follows up on the transdisciplinary conference Poetics of the Algorithm held at the University of Liège (Belgium) in June 2016).

This article has explored how comics, despite inheriting a linear discourse from the codex, offer other types of readings. First, the page or the double page allows for a holistic reading that takes the space as a whole, even in more traditional grids. Second, the panels can be read in various directions (multidirectional reading) and can also generate more than one story line taking place simultaneously on the page (multilinear reading). It should not be forgotten, then, that both the page and the book as a form in the medium of comics do not necessarily foster a linear and conventional reading, as images in comics can be easily connected throughout the pages (translinear reading). Finally, some comics have proposed other formats (including

⁴ Comics scholars, such as Hague (2014) and Kashtan (2018), are also increasingly paying attention to mediality and materiality when analysing comics.

digital) beyond the page and the book, both undermining the traditional book format and, paradoxically, connecting somehow to a lost attention to its materiality. In any case, it could be said that the materiality of the codex in the discourse of comics, both in conjunction with and opposed to digital technology and new media, still proves to be surprisingly relevant for comics studies.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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