

The Significance of the Gutter in Graphic Narrative

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Abstract

This thesis is about the significance of the gutter in graphic narrative. I will look at this empty space between the panels and how it works, and relates to the narrative. First I will delve into the surface of the physical appearance of the gutter, its function as a frame and a passe-partout, and inevitably how this affects the way we look at the gutter through the image and sequential art. Further I will see the gutter in a more traditional way – exploring and discussing the missing panels and how the gutter influences the different styles of storytelling. This will be from a more virtual perspective looking at that which apparently is not there, but recreated by the reader through a model of interpretation. As a concluding part of the thesis, these two aspects of the surface/depth, or real/virtual, will be combined to see how it affects the narratives, and how this might fit into an extended argument of the gutter and its role in graphic narrative.

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Stavanger, May 2013.

Stig Tornes

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Introduction

The picture story, which the critics disregard and scholars scarcely notice, had great influence at all times, perhaps even more than written literature.

—Rodolphe Töpffer, *ESSAY ON PHYSIOGNOMY*, 1845

I believe there is an extended argument to be made concerning the gutter and the role it plays in graphic narrative. Some things have been said of the gutter in defining what it is, but I think it can, and should be taken further, in a discussion and analysis that venture beyond the standard point of view. There is a substantial part the gutter has in being a unifier of missing parts, but it also extends further. It can be a frame that surrounds a single image that in it self contains meaning. The gutter can be ideas and themes hidden within its white space projected to us by an internal play of the gutter and the images. The reader also has a part in this, because the gutter reflects meaning and narrative order. This is reflected back upon the gutter by the experience of the reader to produce ideas and coherent knowledge, both in the narrative of the story, but also in other narratives in the gutter – of themes, ideas and self-reflections.

The gutter can be defined as the space that we find between the panels (fig. 1). The most interesting thing with the gutter is that it depends on two key aspects within the graphic narrative – iconography and closure. The icon is a representation of something in which we can identify, while a photo, or a realistic drawing, is a representation of someone else. Within the graphic narrative's world you see yourself. Simplicity, or iconic representation, infers more reader projections to identify and even self-represent oneself, in one or several of the characters. When it comes to closure, this is the process of, literally observing the parts of a graphic narrative and perceiving something whole and unanimous. Closure is not just bound within the gutter, but can also happen within an image, but the strange thing here is that the closure you commit

to something you see within an image, always relates to the reader, but also the story in which you are engaged. We could call this a narrative closure. A classic example of visual

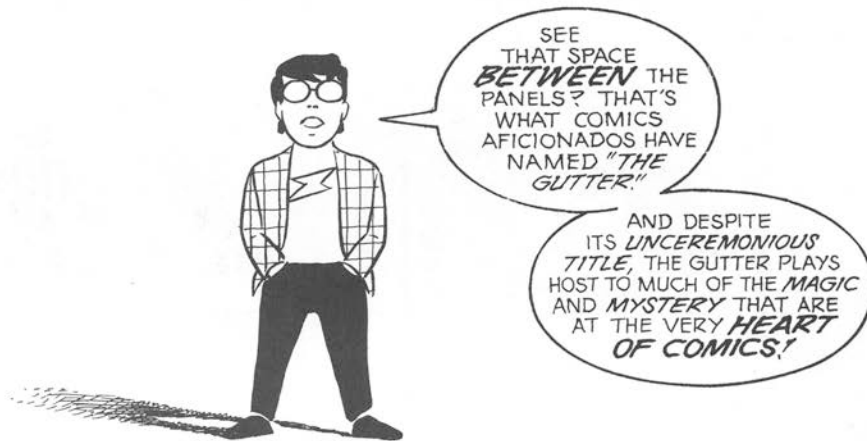


Fig. 1: McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 66.

closure is when the image doesn't show everything and the reader is left to recreate by closure, in the gutter, that which is missing (fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Ternes, McCloud.¹

As the gutter is heavily dependent on closure and both of them are entwined in the narrative, then the narrative is also an important factor within the whole. Narrative in its basic concept is telling a story. It can be a single event or several events. There are two main parts in which we can divide narratives: the story and the narrative discourse (Abott: 238). A narrative discourse is the story narrated, or how it is narrated in its particular way.

The graphic narrative has its own particular way of narrating. This is built on the constituent parts that govern the whole – that of iconography, closure, and the gutter. These are idiomatic as a whole to the comics' medium. There is a certain way in which these concepts work when engaged with each other.

In 1969 Tzvetan Todorov coined the term narratology, which is devoted to the systematic study of narrative. More aptly referred to as narrative theory today, and

¹ This drawing is based on McCloud's drawing of himself and the text above the image is taken from *Understanding Comics*, 63.

constitutes a considerable field within the study of literature. Narrative theory on the graphic narrative has been written about, although not extensively. The comic book as a “novel” and righteous to a throne of intellectual scrutiny is ferly new. Some of the aspects of narrative theory and its terminology are well suited to discuss the narrative of the graphic narrative, but others are not, and fall short to some of the intricate systems and effects of narrative that often unfold in these books. One could say that there is a need for a new set of descriptive terms and structural study of the graphic narrative, but then again this would perhaps put at risk the infinite and limitless instability of this language. The medium of comics is at an interesting point in history, as it seems to be challenging some of the conventions of narrative theory.

The most fascinating aspect within the apparatus of the graphic narrative is the gutter. It is an instance of the balance between what to show and what to tell, and what to leave out.

Where do I come from?

“(…) the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reader of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit” (Eisner: 2).

In this thesis I will be dealing with aspects of the image, both as units, but also as a unit. What kind of images are we looking at when we are dealing with the graphic narrative? In *Iconology Image, Text, Ideology* we can find a branch of divisions putting the image into categories that in one way or the other “designates a type of imagery central to the discourse of some intellectual discipline” (Mitchell: 10). These are graphic, optical, perceptual, mental and verbal images. Not all of them affect our concerns of the gutter, but I would argue that the first four are more then adequate in the endeavour at hand.

In part, the story of the gutter is also the story of the passe-partout and the frame. The first is an expression commonly used in frame-shops and holds no other meaning than a framing tool. What separates it from the frame is that it means something

different. Here I have borrowed the expression from Derrida, but also delved into its etymology. The *passe-partout* wanders between both the physical and the psychological because it is much as the gutter a white border that comes to its right in context of the image.

The frame is also important in the context of my analysis of Anoosh in chapter one, an image taken from Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. The frame plays a part in a way that can give a single image power and narrative. To look at this from a traditional point of view will give the single image an effect that again can give meaning to its context. In history the frame has been looked on as a container. The image is limitless, but only within its framed context.

Frames can also be many other things. Here it will be synonymous with the gutter, but also it can be an action – to frame. Here again the verb can mean to frame a picture or it can mean to scam someone – trick them into believing something, which might not be correct. Still another term, taken from psychology and sociology, is framing. This is interesting because it can influence the outcome of the message you are sending. It can be voluntary or involuntary. This again has to do with context. How do you frame your argument, idea, object, etc. The Icon painting tradition, which is mentioned together with the analysis of Anoosh, has its own framing tools as does the idea of success. The painting is framed by its pictorial theory of language, and success is framed by a cultural norm that dictates at different times in history what constitutes this success.

It is also important to consider the “narrative frame”. This is within narrative theory an illusive concept because it refers to many ideas. “Internal narrators and narratives, paratexts, advertisement, burbs, the cover of a book: all of these have been referred to as “frames,” in addition to more metaphorical applications” (Berlatsky: 162). What is meant by the metaphorical application is that internal things, like object within the narrative frame can take on its own story. This is exemplified through the single image of Anoosh. The frame that surrounds Anoosh becomes a narrative frame through the discoveries of its internal parts. All of these parts culminate in a narrative that plays itself into the frame, which is the gutter, and connects with other images in the narrative. This again gives rise to central themes in the Narrative contained within the narrative frame of the book.

A final aspect here is the combination of all these factors. As in the quote above from Eisner: the act of reading a graphic narrative is both an aesthetic and intellectual pursuit. So, it is a combination of the image and the serial panels, a series of images, placed in an ordered alignment to portray a narrative, but the aesthetics of the graphic narrative, that of the perspective, symmetry and lines, and the recreation of missing panels, happens outside the text and the images. It happens in the gutter. The gutter has a major role to play in the graphic narrative and on most aspects of its apparatus.

I will be dealing with graphic images throughout the thesis and how these can work on their own, but also how they can relate to other images, and further still, there are ideas contained in image projections and mirroring. This in turn relates to Jacques Lacan's theories of "the four stages". The perceptual image "occupy a kind of border region where psychologists, neurologists, psychologists, art historians, and students of optics find themselves collaborating with philosophers and literary critics" (Mitchell: 10). Images play on sense data and balances between a physical and a psychological account of imagery. What does emanate from objects or images in a graphic narrative, and how do they appear in our senses? You perceive or revive, in the gutter, the absence of information, into mental images, and this is done, according to Lacan, by "the four stages". Within these stages we also find what he called "the mirror stage".

The theory of the mirror stage can be adopted into the theory of the viewer. For me, this idea began with a sketch made a while back (fig. 3) that represents some of these aspects of the different stages in the viewer as he relates to the surface, the interpretation, and the depth, or virtual of the introverted self reflections. The idea here is that the viewer sees what is real, and that is the page and its construction or composition. This is in turn is interpreted internally and reproduced as a coherent story, but the twist is that this opens up a virtual space that lies beyond the page. This happens in the gutter, and in this illustration, this is a communication between the internal and mirrored self and the gutters empty space. This figure is discussed more thoroughly in chapter two.

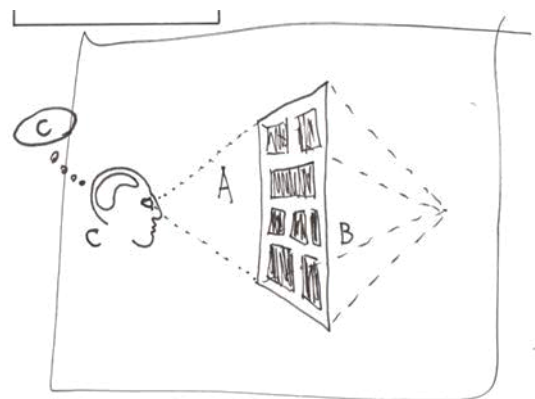


Fig. 3: Tornes

The graphic narrative is as incoherent in its meanings as other languages can be. The search for grounds in certainty and truth should be approached with scepticism.

“Derrida’s claim is that the dominant Western tradition of thought has attempted to establish grounds of certainty and truth by repressing the limitless instability of language. This “logocentric” tradition sought some absolute source or guarantee of meaning (a “transcendental signified”) which could centre or stabilize the uncertainties of signification through a set of “violent hierarchies” privileging a central term over a marginal one: nature over culture, male over female, and most importantly speech over writing” (*Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1996)

It is an important statement to acknowledge the limitless instability of language, and I think this is also something that involves the task of defining and redefining the graphic narrative. So, when we are talking of the gutter what are we talking about? It shouldn’t be based on a logocentric tradition of absolute meaning – that there is a “transcendental signifier” that stabilizes signification, and places one term over the other.

The gutter is a term that warrants some sort of depth and weight, but it does not govern and rule over the other aspects of the graphic narrative – as a sort of guttural autocracy. When we are talking of the gutter we are also talking of the other parts that constitutes and glue together the whole of the comic book. I think the gutter has an extremely important position in the comic book, but that still doesn’t mean that it can work on its own. After all, the gutter isn’t anything but a white space and would probably not be able to distribute much meaning if it was on its own. The gutter is an interdependent faculty attached to all of the other parts.

Scott McCloud calls what happens in the gutter closure, which will be discussed further in chapter two, and he puts this in context with a standard theory of language in the following way: “If visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar” (McCloud: 67). This can take us into the theories of Gérard Genette, who again harkens back to ideas spawned in Ferdinand de Saussure². This is where aspects of linguistics, its vocabulary, and how the grammar influences meaning, enter into the realm of narrative theory. Genette adopts a host of expressions to explain different facets within narrative, and particularly he does this through Proust’s *A la recherche du*

² Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*.

temps perdu. Proust's work is especially interesting in regard to narrative cycles, and therefore becomes appropriate to a host of Genette's terms.

In his book, *Narrative Discourse an Essay in Method*, he uses ideas of order, duration, frequency, mood and voice to talk of literary narrative. All of these expressions are not relevant to the graphic narrative, and I shall be concentrating my efforts on a few of them. The most alluring, being that of time and speed, which Genette calls duration. Time and speed is an interesting concept especially within the graphic narrative because of the gutter. Other people who have written in parts about this are, as mentioned, Scott McCloud, but also Will Eisner. There isn't a very extensive corpus of literature on the subject of the gutter in graphic narrative, and I think this has in many ways to do with that of the quote from Derrida and the difficultness of defining it within a structure. The appearance of the gutter seems straight forward enough, and the literature available seems to cover most of its aspects, but there is still more to be said about the gutter, in context of its surface effect and its deep influence on narrative discourse. The literature of McCloud, Groensteen and Eisner seems to be somewhere in between these two, and I think, to give the gutter a more leading role in the analysis of the graphic narrative, will perhaps lead to a more interesting way of looking at this literature.

The gutter

I have chosen to split the gutter into two distinctions – one of truth, and one of theory. Within this bidirectional distinction, the gutter falls into three sub-sections: [1] the *passe-partout*; [2] the frame and, by lack of a better term, [3] the abyss. The abyss as an expression will not be used in the thesis, but rather refers to the infinite and daunting effect the gutter can have of being an endless space, but we will see that the reader is almost always rescued from this abyss by the next panel. The two first sections belong to the "truth" and are discussed in chapter one. The third section runs as an underlying aspect of the gutter throughout the thesis.

Although *passe-partout* epitomizes in many ways traits of the frame it is an expression that can touch upon the theory section. The frame and the *passe-partout* will lay a foundation for further analysis in chapter two, where the idea of the abyss, or

sphere of the gutter will be discussed. Chapter three will be a culmination of the two previous chapters in their distinctions and sections and how this plays out on the narrative forces governing the graphic narrative. Although a structure has been laid out, there will naturally be some categorical spillage from the different chapters into the others. This is most prominent in chapter one when analysing some images. This I think is a reflection of the instability of the gutter and its structure. This spillage isn't a result of un-reflected thought, but rather a result of natural discourse, where one argument leads to next.

Corpus Graphicus

When dealing with the gutter, a large corpus of comics opens up, but there are certainly comic books that are more interesting than others. The aim is to choose that which is relevant to the argument. Therefore there are different books chosen, but also included are diagrams, and drawings and sketches made by myself. It is an interesting thing to pass theory through diagrams and drawings and see information take on a different appearance than what you initially thought.

The comics of Alison Bechdel shouldn't be unknown to the graphic narratives aficionado. Her book *Fun Home* is a strikingly engaging book, but also a complex narrative. It trails the relationship between Alison and her closeted homosexual dad, and Alison's journey into the discovery that she is a lesbian. The book has accumulated a considerable amount of attention – both in sales and in academia. It has a host of topics to engage one's thoughts in – autobiography, sexuality, alienation etc. *Fun Home* is very well drawn and consists of a one tonal green colour and greys and black. All balanced by the white. It also inhabits artistry in the way of utilizing the frame and the gutter. Bechdel is very good at this and that is at the heart, the very drive of the narrative – how the story evolves to produce contemplation, speed, mood and voice. Bechdel's narrative is a narrative of hidden and closeted feelings. There is a narrative of the image, but also a narrative of the gutter. The book is interesting because of this, and has a host of images that tell and show something, but under the surface, or in the gutter, there is something completely different going on.

An added value in Bechdel is also her text. Since the graphic narrative doesn't necessarily depend on text, *Fun Home* could not exist without it. This is exemplified in her other book *Are You My Mother* where she reveals that she always writes the story first, before making any drawings. If you remove the images in Bechdel's books it does work, but what happens when you remove the text. In her books the images seem more dependent on the text than the other way around. This is also interesting in regard to the gutter and its relation to both image and text, and how this works as a unity.

Since this is inevitably an analysis that is governed by theory of the gutter the comic books by Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics*, and Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* have been extremely valuable. McCloud is used extensively throughout chapter two because of his clear-cut examples of the gutter. A fascinating aspect with these two authors is that they also represent the artist of the genre as well as the theorist. This creates books with examples drawn exclusively, but also from past works, to highlight and give weight to the arguments being made.

I have also made some drawings and figures to fortify my arguments. I think that there is tremendous power in the sketch (fig. 3), which is often made very quickly on an idea that is new and fresh. Someone said that a picture says more than a thousand words, and I think I agree. The image is loaded with a host of connotations that manifests through the imagination of the reader – the drawing even more so, because of its ability to represent something between the real and the imagined.

In the first chapter I will look at the gutter as a framing tool, and by this I mean the physical frame the gutter is. How it works to structure the overall composition of the artwork – the geometrics. It is what holds it together. There are several aspects here to consider and I have chosen an artistic approach – to see the gutter as a frame – much as in the same way as it does in fine art – paintings, prints, etc. Although I think the printing has more in common with the artwork of the graphic novel. I will look at single images to see how the gutter works on the artwork itself, but also touch upon the further implications that naturally follow the gutter – the constant wandering between panels. This again has implications of further analysis into the themes and narratives of the gutter, which will be dealt with more extensively in chapters two and three.

Through these chapters I would argue that all of these “steps” to understanding the gutter are valuable, and shows these tools their complexity and uniqueness within graphic narrative. It is linked to the world of art (chapter 1) and literature (chapter 3), but also has its own distinctive language (chapter 2).

So, when we have looked and prodded the theories of the gutter and see it linked to art and literature, but also containing within itself something unique, then what is the idiom of the gutter?

Notes

Throughout the thesis I have chosen to use the expression graphic narrative instead of graphic novel. This is because novel is a term in it self that is very ambiguous and defining which has little or no function in this context. Graphic narrative is more in line with the concepts discussed. Other expressions that I use, but initially mean the same are sequential art and comics.

Also, there should be no confusion by the terms passe-partout and frame. They are both other identities to give different perspectives to the gutter – they are the gutter.

The images and panels taken from Chris Ware's book *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth* has no page references because the book has no page numbers.

In the thesis I use drawings, sketches and graphic narrative that have been made by me. These examples will be marked accordingly with my name – Tornes.

All of the internet-references cited were checked and accessed on May 13th.

Chapter 1: Framed by the gutter

When discussing features or functions of the gutter, it is important to see the gutter not as something that only transports you as a reader to some sort of greater understanding – filling the gaps between the images and making sense of the story. First we need to look at the physical features of the gutter – that which lies on the surface. By surface we mean the physical surface – the paper on which the narrative unfolds, by means of the empty space of the gutter. The physical presence of the gutter will be discussed in this light – of its framing effect and geometric features of composition, which again gives the outline a sense of order and structure.

To understand the gutter from this perspective will also help to understand how it works beyond the surface, for there is a balance between the real and the virtual world of the gutter. In this first chapter I will look at the real or what can be perceived as the truth in the gutter. A Bultmannian way of regarding the content if you like, with a demythological approach¹. This is to see it from a non-virtual perspective and I believe this will give an added value when discussing the gutter from other and perhaps more traditional angles.

While doing this I will in the first part of this chapter be referring to the gutter as the passe-partout. This expression has several meanings, which will be explained, but it also has a direct link or relation to art and the visual. We will also see that the passe-partout is a frame and I will discuss functions of the frame with a bit of history and look and compare the gutter to the visual arts, and particularly Hogarth.

I will show that through the realness of the gutter there is a door opener into a greater understanding of the physical effect of framing, composition and geometrics. This will be shown by the etymology of the expression passe-partout, an explanation of its artistic function and through analysis of panels taken from a selection of graphic narratives.

¹ Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884 – 1976) was a German Lutheran theologian and New Testament scholar. He is most well known for his concept of demythology, which called for theologians to interpret the mythological elements in the New Testament existentially (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Bultmann). That means that myth is removed from interpretation to uncover real truth.

What I will hope to find is that the appearance of the gutter does have greater meaning towards an understanding of how it works – looking at its significance as first and foremost a visual tool to create style and order, and to give greater emphasis to the overall meaning and narrative force. The latter is discussed more thoroughly in chapter three.

By narrative, in chapter one, I mean narrative of the gutter, and not necessarily the overall story. How does the gutter, by way of being a passe-partout, a frame, and eventually a gutter, relate across panels, images, the overall composition, and how are they linked together in a narrative of the gutter? This physical link will be exemplified by an analysis of the image of uncle Anoosh from the book *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. I will first and foremost look at this image as a single image within a passe-partout/frame and how it relates to this. Then I will look at its compositional traits and then see this in context of the gutter and the relation it has to other images, and also ideas and themes.

The Gutter as a Passe-Partout

The passe-partout has several meanings through its etymology and artistic context explained below, and it has in these cases been chosen for all of them. If we look at the concept through a thorough presentation of its etymological origin and meaning, it will serve very well the purpose of explaining some aspects of the gutter. Here we will see that the passe-partout leads to two vistas of knowledge. The effect of framing in relation to space, and the adhesive unification effect it has on the whole – meaning everything else. The concept of the passe-partout has also been used in Derrida's book *The Truth In Painting*.

In Derrida's use of this expression of the passe-partout it is linked with the idea of that which surrounds art. Everything that is within the sphere of the artwork will influence it, and with the passe-partout the most ardent influences are the external. So art is not real just within itself, but relates to everything all of the time, and is beautifully exemplified by the passe-partout. This will also suit the content here when talking about the graphic narrative and more precisely the gutter, but then there is the question of truth.

What Derrida means by truth in his book *The Truth in Painting*, is that there isn't any real truth inside the artwork, but only outside. This means that the truth of the work lies in all that which surrounds the work. For the artist it is the process of making the artwork, and for the reader it is the interpretation of it. Let us not forget that the reader is not alone, and that there are usually many readers, each participating in interpretation, and producing difference in truth.

So the truth that we are presented with, and indeed the truth that I am talking about, is a very unstable truth at best. There isn't any universal truth to interpretation and its traits. For every aspect of theory and statement, there is a counter statement. I think to acknowledge this is to be aware that one is part of an on-going discussion about certain subjects in a certain part of time and history.

When I use the concept of truth in the gutter I am merely referring to the white surface that surrounds the image. That is probably the only thing we can agree on before we delve into the functions of the white frame we can call the *passe-partout*. After all, image warrants imagination and interpretation.

As in Derrida's use of the *passe-partout*, so will I use it and ask, but slightly altered – changing the words *passe-partout* with the gutter; what is the idiom of the gutter? What is meant here? Are we interested in the idiom “the gutter”, in the idiom itself, for its individual interest, “the gutter” – a strongly idiomatic expression. What is an idiom? That we are interested in the idiomatic expression itself, in the words “the gutter”? Interested in words in the gutter or in the words “the gutter”? Or in the words “the gutter”? That we are interested in the idiom the gutter, i.e., in what pertains to the idiom, the idiomatic traits or style (...) in the domain of the gutter, and perhaps another possible translation – in the singularity or the irreducible specificity of pictorial art, of that “language” which the gutter is supposed to be, etc.? (Derrida:1-2).

To understand that “language” of the gutter, or the specificity of the gutter, the expression if the idiom is a good artistic expression to use². When we are discussing the idiom here we are thinking about the style, use or trait of the gutter that is typical of the graphic narrative. Although the quote above can lead to a host of different approaches, this is the one that pertains to the definition of the idiom. We should be interested in all

² See <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/idiom> under meaning no. 3.

of the above suggestions, but will be looking at the gutter as a truth in comics – being first and foremost a visual and surface tool to structure the style or form of it. That means we are interested in the idiomatic traits or style of the gutter and not the idiomatic expression and the words “the gutter”. The function of the quote is to acknowledge the seemingly infinite variety of approaches that can be inflicted upon the subject of the gutter producing all kinds of different results and “truths”.

The quote above from Derrida helps us and gives us a starting point to which the importance of both the physical presence and visual style of the gutter, and the words *passe-partout* and *frame*, are entwined in an idea of some sort of truth and certain knowledge, and that this is linked to the visual aesthetics. Therefore it is appropriate to start with the etymology of the expression *passe-partout* and work towards a “truth” of the gutter.

Its etymology³ states that it is French and means “pass everywhere”, which comes from *passer* “to pass”, *partout* “everywhere”, *par* “through” and *tout* “all”. We are then left with something like *pass through all and everywhere*, or as mentioned, and better still - pass everywhere. From the 1670s the meaning was more like a master key

We begin already at this point to see a connection with the concept of *passe-partout* and the gutter. Even though we will deal with the more physical concept of the *passe-partout* in this chapter, we can see the alignment with ideas of virtual spheres, of ideas and knowledge and the understanding that the *passe-partout* enables us to pass through the surface or the physical presence of the image. It also implies that you may pass everywhere and therefore move unstrained and with ease. In our context this is the movement between images bordered by the *passe-partout* – a strictly, most often white, geometrically ordered space.

Within the world of art, *passe-partout* is separated into two different objects, but with a similar purpose. (1) A border that is used to frame or mount a picture - most often in a combination of both and (2) an adhesive tape or a gummed paper used for a similar purpose (fig. 1)

³http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=passe+partout&searchmode=none

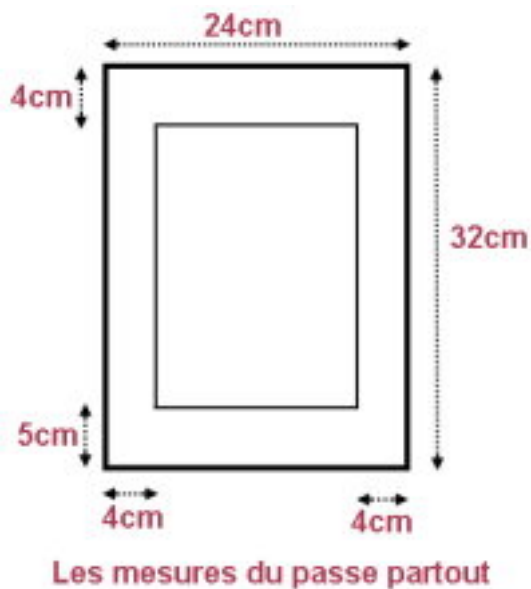


Fig. 1: http://www.art-georges.fr/SITE_FR/ENCADREMENT_GLOBAL/images_encadrement/cadre_fenetre2_img/small_plan_passepartout.jpg

The border is usually a whitish piece of cardboard and is mounted so that the picture's borders run underneath the cardboard. The cardboard runs out towards and underneath the master frame – creating a closed environment for the picture. The effect is similar to the gutter in creating contained visual representation of an artwork. How can a piece of art, framed by a passe-partout be similar to a sequence of panels constituting a storyline?

Well, we can also find sequence in art. Panels by Hogarth, but also serialized paintings by Monet showing subtle changes of the same motif by the passing of seasons – as we will also see in

Bechdel's panels later. Much of art by artists have a similar style and when the artwork is presented in a gallery it creates a guttural effect also through sequence. Hogarth's prints are of great interest here because they do represent similar features to the passe-partout (fig. 2 and 3). His images were often sequences telling a story, and we can clearly see how he tells the story or gets the message across by leaving something out. But to stick with the theme of the passe-partout as a strictly compositional tool we see that these images were meant to be presented next to each other in a sequence, and therefore create a passe-partout effect in the white borders that surrounded them. We clearly see that it has a framing result. These prints were also presented in a printed folio where they could be viewed together. Today these prints are shown in galleries that have, most often, white walls. There is a geometrical white grid surrounding the works and it has the effect of the passe-partout. Even though the gallery is not a comic book there are similarities, and we might even call the gallery a graphic narrative. In the graphic narrative it is the gaze that wanders between the panels and make the connections, while in the gallery it is the whole body that moves in order to view the artworks. The common denominator here is the freedom of movement and engagement with the work at hand. The body and the mind move in the gutter. We become a

psychological and physical presence in the gutter. This freedom is contained in the passe-partout and represents an ability for movement everywhere – it is an all access area if you like. This does harmonise with the etymological description earlier – that the passe-partout is a key to pass everywhere. This means that contained in this space, the passe-partout, initially an empty space of geometrical borders, is a greater knowledge of what lies within the image.



Fig. 2 and 3: Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 303.

To understand the content of the internal you must have some prior knowledge of the external. Someone would call this experience, but also knowledge that is not necessarily experienced, but taught through a collective or through a studying engagement. One could argue that through an initial idea to write a thesis, one is condemned, or auspiciously absolved, to spend time in the gutter of an initial idea or ideas and through collective discussions and self study, the gutter gives rise to a production of arguments and meanings that scaffolds into a coherent thesis.

Like ideas, images in a graphic novel are scattered images that manifest in a function of the gutter as a facilitator. First and foremost as a structural tool, then as a frame, and then as a transportation platform to connecting the narrative – filling the gaps. Finally, its most intriguing feature – that of being “a thousand plateaus”⁴ – having

⁴ “A thousand plateaus” refers to the book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (French: *Mille plateaux*) from 1980 written by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. It is the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and the successor to *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). *ATP* is a sustained, constructive experiment in schizophrenic, or 'nomad' thought and it is written in a non-linear

the aptitude of giving the reader the ability to be everywhere all of the time. When reading a page in a graphic narrative you can be on any “plateau” that you choose and in which order you choose. You can read the text, view the images, and do this in what order you like without losing the content. There is little resistance in the graphic narrative for movement between panels and pages – after all it is a visual medium.

When we are discussing the passe-partout it is important to talk of the frame and the functions it has, and what part it has had in history. There are similarities here between the ideas of the frame and the gutter as the passe-partout. This is to show that the gutter is not just linked to graphic narrative in comic books, but has a tradition that can be traced from other artworks.

The frame that we know, as that which surrounds the image, was developed in the Renaissance. It was an errant departure from the deep vistas of Alter pieces that were encapsulated by pillars and decorative architectural elements, to the canvas, that in its own right developed a contained sphere. It was no longer so dependent on the exterior space of the Alter – the physical room, but more contained as a world of its own. In many ways this space was boundless “ - not only in depth, but also laterally – so that the edges of the picture designated the end of the composition, but not the end of the represented space.” (Arnheim: 239). What Arnheim is talking about here is that composition tended to continue into or under the frame. So a body or a building, or anything else for that matter, could “disappear” into the frame.

We can see examples of this in almost any graphic narrative as its used all the time. In the example included here we can see the urban image of New York (fig. 4). It does have a contained sphere and the composition of the image does not stop at the edge of the frame, but continues into the frame. Along every line and every angle we find examples. The buildings stretch out beyond the physical representation of the image. As does the lightpost and the roads. Along the left line we have signs that spell words into the frame – like the subway sign. There is also a figure along this line that has been completely cut off, and we can only see his left arm, a little bit of his side and backside. But we still know and make out the rest by continuing the image into the frame.

fashion, and the reader is invited to move among plateaus in any order.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Thousand_Plateaus).

Another important feature here is the text above the image. It is placed in the frame, and you almost get a sense of being lead to the text by way of the image spurring us towards it. The text is undeniably linked to the image by its descriptions. “Roy took us for a walk while dad went up to the apartment. In the hot August afternoon, the city was reduced, like a long-simmering demiglace, to a fragrance of stunning richness and complexity” (Bechdel: 103).



Fig. 4: Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 103.

By placing the text in the frame or the passe-partout you get a sense of order and logic to the mix. Also the image is left alone. The text adds atmosphere to the image, just like the passe-partout. The text creates more realness and an engagement with our experiences and feelings - in the hot afternoon, the city was reduced, long-simmering demiglace, and

fragrances of stunning complexity. These sentences are further strengthened by the explanatory word-squares within the image. With words like menthol (cigarette), diesel, shit, putrefaction, Brut, and urine, the stage is set for an image that together with all of these elements portrays the city in a stunning and atmospheric way. A perusal of this image reveals a number of complex features working together to present the image in the context of the experience of the author. The author narrates a complete story within the image. It is not a very pleasant one. All of the smells that are described are bad ones – of men's cologne⁵, bodily fluids and of decay. Together with the heat of the summer the smells are asphyxiating. If we look closer at some of the words incorporated in the image, more specifically the menthol cigarette and the Brut cologne, there is a balancing point to be made here that incorporates the image into some of the main themes of Bechdel's book: masculinity and femininity. The male figure that is wearing the Brut cologne is on his way out of the picture – representing traditional masculine strength of character. The other male figure here is the man with the menthol cigarette, the slightly long hair and sideburns, and a sophisticated and trendy look – with the rolled up shirt and undone buttons. Menthol cigarettes represent a more feminine slant and most importantly he is on his way into the picture. It looks as if he is going to bump into Roy.

What has this got to do with the gutter? Well, it is a balance between the text (in the gutter) the word-boxes and other images. This can be seen if we wander a page back in *Fun Home*. On page 102 there is a representation of a murky Roy on the bed. He is the Bechdel's yard-work assistant and babysitter. If we go even further back to pages 100 to 101 there is a huge drawn reproduction of this image (fig. 5). This opens up a complex vista of Bechdel's relation to her father's closeted homosexuality.

All this is only possible by way of the gutter - to be able and so freely, to wander between the panels by association and memory. It is made easier because in the graphic medium it is more effortless to move back and forth. The gutter invites us to do so. Although this analysis of Bechdel's image can be linked with what will be dealt with in chapters 2 and 3, we need to take a step back and look at what just happened. First of all, this single image, by way of the gutter, makes itself deserving of time spent looking and

⁵ The cologne in question is called Brut and is an American brand. Called "The Essence of Man" in its advertising, Brut is marketed in the United States as representing traditional masculine strength of character. Sponsorship of the NHRA and of driver Ron Capps highlights fatherhood, teamwork, and courage as hallmarks of the user (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brut_Revolution).

analysing it. Taking in all it has to offer. This happens first and foremost by the passe-partout and the frame, which is the gutter. Another trait of the image is the composition that extends into the gutter. We are literally transported and almost forced into the gutter. And therefore we can see that by way of these physical traits – of that which is there and of which we can see – we are transported into the imagination of the gutter.

The most interesting use of the frame in this context is that the frame becomes a part of the composition. Although you are drawn into the space of the image by the function of the frame you are also drawn back out and the frame acts as an overlapping border for where the image or the surface continues, but not physically, but rather physiologically. This was brought to a sort of climax in the nineteenth century with Degas and his use of the frame to cut across objects and bodies, and this highlighted the character of the frame and its ability to take on a personification of what ever the viewer needs it to be – here parts of an object or a body (Arnheim: 240).

In relation to this Scott McCloud talks of the sensory-aspect in *Understanding Comics*. Comics are a mono-sensory medium and through the gaze we convey the world of experience and within the panel we transmit information visually (McCloud: 89). So, between the text in the gutter and the word-squares within the image we engage our other senses through experience. This strengthens the narrative experience of the story and employs our apprehensions of the city.

All this, in essence, is made possible by the constant expansion and retraction of the ever-unravelling image that still moves further than the constraints of the frame. It takes you out to the gutter and back in again and out again etc., balancing between the gutter, the text and the image. “Several times on every page the reader is released--like a trapeze artist—into the open air of imagination... then caught by the outstretched arms of the ever-present next panel” (McCloud: 90).

As mentioned there is an ever-expanding image that goes beyond the framed square of the panel, and this is abundantly present in the graphic narrative. It is possible to pull out an image from almost any graphic narrative to show that the frame, and inevitably the gutter, becomes a part of the composition. The effect of this can be traced back to the world of art and Arnheim’s quote above. As the image is supposed to represent something that the viewer views as a physical representation of the real, we

are guided by the image towards the edge and into the gutter to finish our interpretation of it. We recreate that which is missing, and so the image becomes part of our involvement through virtual representation of us. We become the story and in many instances we become that which is represented. We can see, or experience this in Bechdel's *Fun Home* (fig. 5), where what is presumably Bechdel's hand is holding a photograph. Her hand extends out and into the gutter. This is, or becomes in a way, our hand holding the photograph and experiencing memories of childhood, good or bad. In context of the hand pushing itself unto us through the gutter and making us hold the photo, and the memories of it, it makes it extremely, or at least much more easy to relate to and involving. Our experience makes it "real", because it is "our" hand.

If the gutter is "us", then we become the person in the story. So, from a physical representation the image wanders into the virtual psychological interpretation of the viewer/reader. This in turn makes the image, the text and the narrative all together more compelling and involving.

The gutter's physical presence is intentionally manipulated to take you into it, and this has been, and probably will be a voluntary and involuntary tool for this relationship of physical presence and virtual representation. The gutter is a medium that has a physical objective – of being structure, frame and passe-partout, and because of this it is such a good manipulator of reality and brings the reader into an esthetical visual art and story.

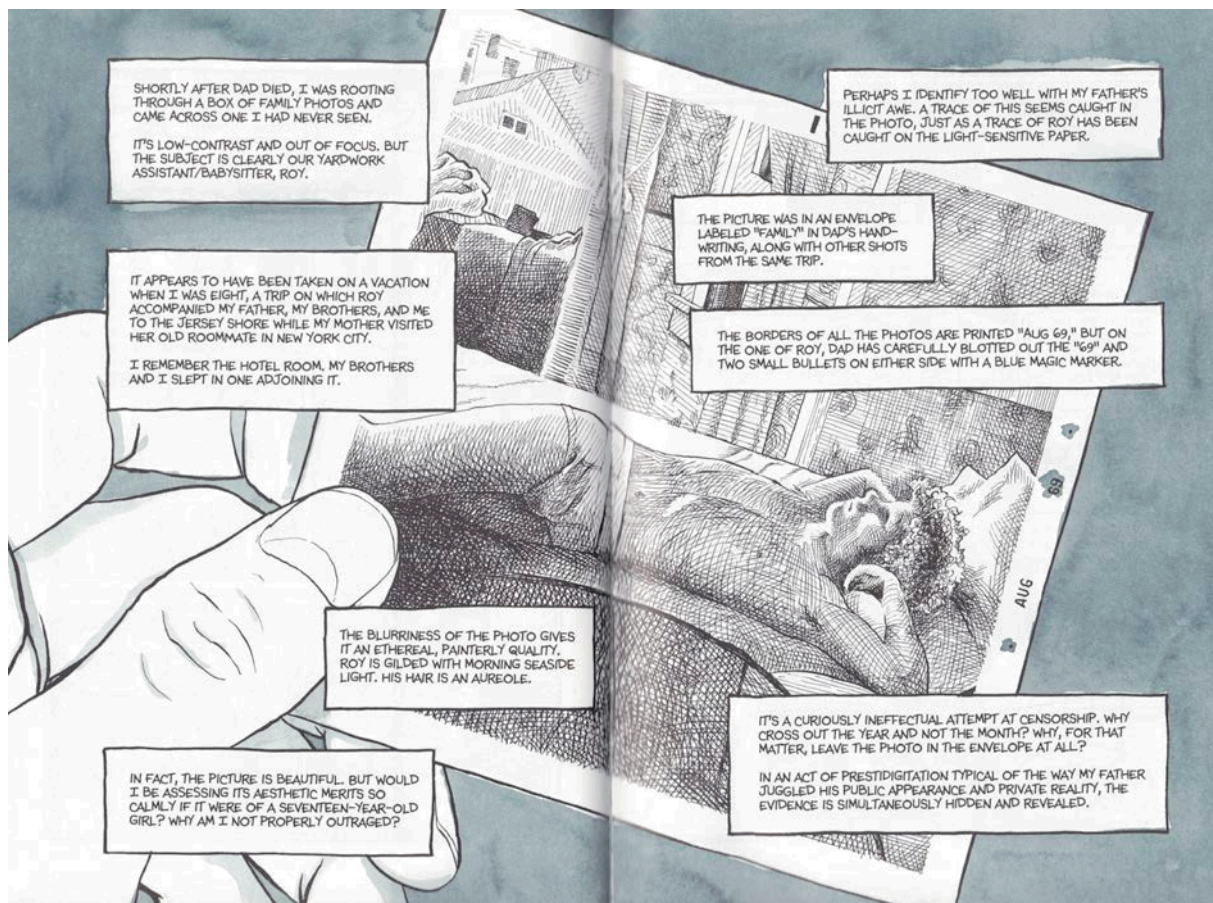


Fig. 5: Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 100-101.

This use of the gutter in creating composition becomes even more interesting when it is used in a cross panel function. This means that panels relate to each other directly by composition even though the gutter separates them. This can be seen in an image from *Are You My Mother*, by Bechdel (fig. 6). The image is taken from a series of panels describing a very intimate moment between Bechdel and her girlfriend, named Eloise. The panel in question shows the face of Eloise gazing at Bechdel, as Bechdel says: "I love you". The image is divided into two parts by a gutter cutting across the middle of the face in a horizontal line. Why this has been done can be for several reasons. The overall layout of the panels seem to dictate that the panels should be the way they are and therefore the reason could be just that – to be able to show the intimacy of the face it needed to be big, but the author did not want to break the flow of the identical shaped panels surrounding it. This would be an argument for the aesthetics of composition and form, but that reason alone is not very likely, although there is much to be said for this simple reason. If we look at the page as a whole, the image of Eloise needs to be big to

make a point of perhaps the importance of the episode, but to be able to create or keep the compositional flow of the panel structure the head has been divided between two panels.

Another reason could be that the gutter plays the part of emotional binder between the expressions of the eyes and the mouth. What we are seeing is one face, but in time separated reactions. The top panel is the instance and uncertainty of the “what”. The moment when her eyes express expectations of what she thinks she heard, but she is not certain. The next panel expresses the confirmation of the “I love you” and the approving smile of Eloise. The panels look like they are meant to be together without the gutter dividing them, but when the panels are vicariously looked at they seem like two different moments. It is the same face, but the top panel does not fit the bottom panel perfectly.



Fig. 6: Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?*, 221.

There is also something else going on here, and this might be treading a bit far from the gutter, but it is out there, and that is the fact that we the readers are brought into the

story by taking the place of Bechdel. This is done with an elegant transition in the panel before the two of Eloise. In this panel we enter into Bechdel's eyes and we see what she sees. Another feature here is that we are up side down because she is lying on the ground. As she/we turn our head back we are in fact looking at Eloise. Eloise is looking at us, and we are saying I love you. Even the speech-bubble in the bottom panel is going into the gutter. So we are in the infinite gutter gazing down at Eloise and her reactions.

There is also a similar image in Bechdel's *Fun Home* (fig. 7). Here Bechdel is attending her father's open casket ceremony. The image is divided straight through Bechdel's body vertically – creating a feeling of division, but also unity. The text is important in explaining how the dividing and unity works. In the first image the text reads: "His wiry hair, which he had daily taken great pains to style, was brushed straight up on end and revealed a surprisingly receded hairline", and in the second it reads: "I wasn't even sure it was him until I found the tiny blue tattoo on his knuckle where he'd once been accidentally stabbed with a pencil".

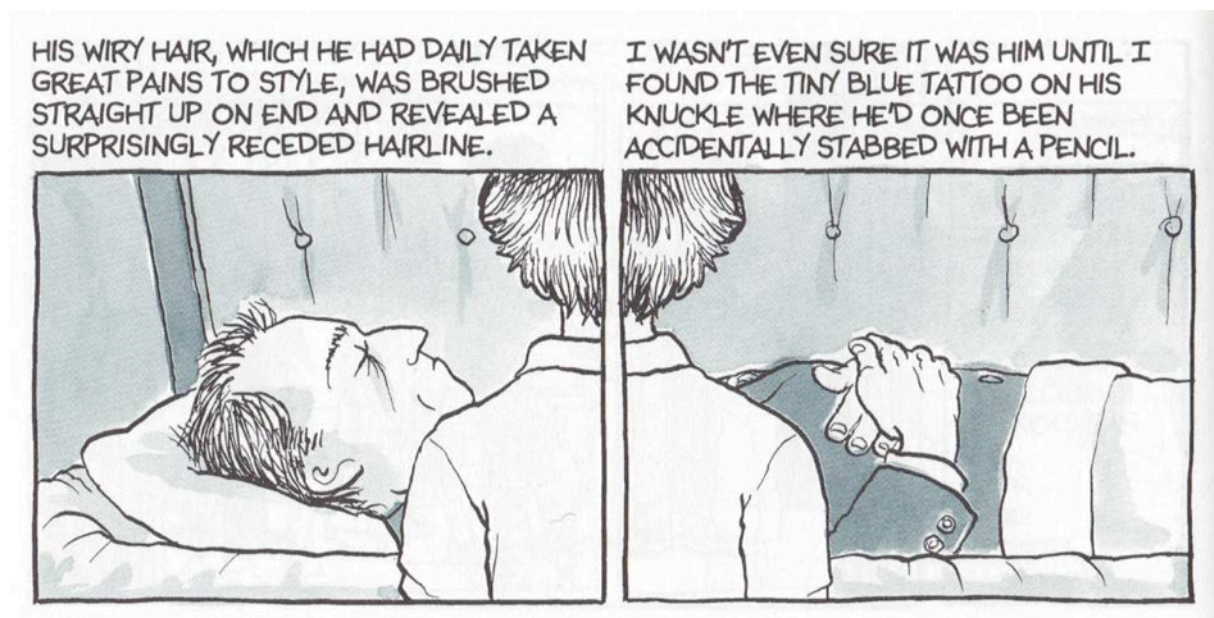


Fig. 7: Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 52.

Since Bechdel has one half of herself in each panel we are dealing with two different episodes divided by time. In the first panel she is looking down and observing her dad's head and face. In the second image she has moved further down and looks at her father and wonders if it his him. The gutter facilitates the movement in that we are the ones

creating the movement of Bechdel's gaze moving from left to right – which conveniently is, the order we read. Together with the movement of her gaze and the following panels, there is a narrative of observed details and emotional impact through stillness. “Where narrative art seeks to go beyond simple decoration, where it presumes to imitate reality in a meaningful chain of events and consequences and thereby evoke empathy, the dimension of time is an inescapable ingredient” (Eisner: 30). Since the art of sequence in graphic novels is based on fixed frames in time, the reader puts in the movement. The movement and feeling of time is recreated in the gutter, and if the imitation of the artist is presented by not showing too much, but not too little either, the sympathy and emotions will follow.

The narrative succession here is created by an image broken into two panels, which again has been manipulated by time and space. This is at the heart of the comic book and one of the unique traits of the gutter. We can see that the narrative is driven by the progression of the panels and the gutter lets us freely “examine how one illustration leads to the next” (Versaci: 14).

Returning to Derrida and the idiom of the *passe-partout*, or as the gutter, we are left with an idea that the gutter on the surface of things amounts to three distinct substances; a structure, a frame, and a *passe-partout*. The latter also pertaining to some meaning beyond the physical presence. The *passe-partout* is a key here because it encapsulates through its definition all of the other traits, including the gutter. It is the frame that is mounted around an image, but it is also a master key that lets you pass everywhere, and therefore gives you a special kind of control over the subject-matter. By this control we mean the ability to move between images without losing any substance. Everything is neatly organized within the framework of the *passe-partout*. It is easier to lose your way in a narrative of a novel if you are looking for a certain passage. It is also more time consuming. When reading a graphic narrative such problems seem irrelevant because of the ability to move everywhere whenever it suits the reader. The structure and composition invites us to, visually.

The gutter is first and foremost a structure for composition. That is always what meets the eye at first glance when viewing a page in a comic book. The white of the gutter has a direct contact with the physical world through the paper and the pages that make up the framework, that is the book. It surrounds all elements of it and it is in direct

contact with the hands that are holding it. To realize this, gives a greater understanding of how the gutter works beyond the physical constraints and into the interpretation and meaning of its virtual aspects, as we have discussed or touched upon with Bechdel's images.

The gutter as the passe-partout can be summed up into a sort of "mounting for a picture in which strips of strong gummed paper are used to bind together the glass, picture, and backing" (Collins Dictionary⁶). The gutter is physically holding it all together as a "gummed paper" and further we can say that it also holds the image and the narrative together – the narrative being the glass, veneering both the image and the gutter together, and then reflecting the reader upon itself.

This still leaves more to be said of the gutter as a frame and its relations to the image and how this can play out within the constraints described above. Therefore the image of Anoosh, the uncle of Satrapi in *Persepolis*, will be looked at in details. First and foremost as a description of artistic expression, but also how the gutter and the frame play on these factors. The argument falls into three steps: the frame, the image and the gutter.

The three Anooshes

First of all I will begin by using two definitions taken from two different sources and from two different fields of study. The first has a standard definition of the frame, but also presents the frame as a verb, to frame, and that will give food for thought as we get into the other definition of the frame as an action. I will show within this physical frame that there lies a deeper understanding, as we move the frame into the world of the gutter, within these two definitions.

All of these functions employed upon the image of Anoosh are different aspects of closure. This will be shown both from an internal point of view – the image itself, but also through its relation to the exterior.

⁶ <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/passe-partout?showCookiePolicy=true>

A frame can be a border or a structure. It is a noun, but can also be a verb. As a verb it means to make a border, produce false evidence, develop a plan/system and to express something.¹

Within the social sciences framing means or “refers to a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate about reality”².

If we think of the frame and the aspects that have been mentioned it would be interesting to argue the frames function in relation to the panel and the gutter. The frame is in many ways the gutter. To exemplify this we will look at the image of uncle Anoosh. I will look first at form before delving into how this works with the frame and plays into the gutter and narrative. By form I mean the image’s composition and content thereof. This is influenced by the gutter and therefore the form influences the gutter and narrative.

There is the effect of the singular white frame and the visual effect it has upon the viewer to give the art order. It is a structure with a physical presence, and at its best makes the artwork/panel look better. The frame has the ability to contain the image. In Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, Marjane presents her uncle as an Icon (fig. 8). What is most striking here is the border around the panel, the gutter, which frames, apparently purely physically, and creates a powerful aura of the importance of this figure. The halo around uncle Annosh’s head even works as a framing tool. The whiteness of the external gutter/frame interacts with the white circle around the figure’s head. The frame creates a locked and contained image, while the circle emphasizes

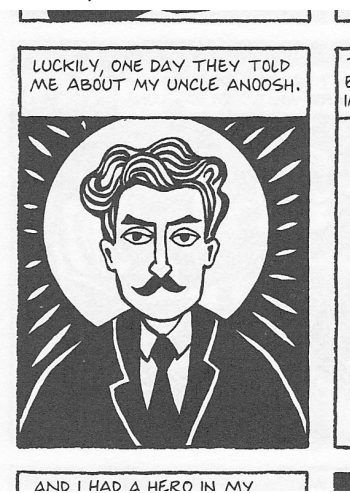


Fig. 8: Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 54.

the head of the figure. In addition there are sunbeam like white lines that radiate a sort of glowing effect. In the western tradition in both religious painting and in the eastern tradition of icon painting, important people where

¹ <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/frame> 2

<http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/frame>

² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_\(social_sciences\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_(social_sciences))

given a gloria around their heads. In the image of Uncle Anoosh there is a play of balance between black and whites.

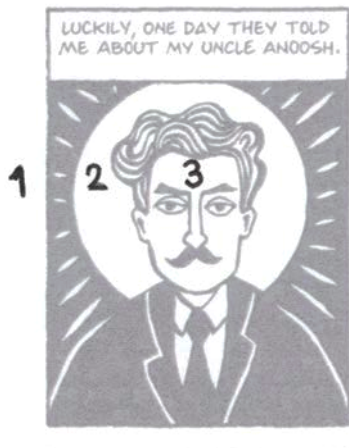


Fig. 9: Ibid

We can separate the whites into three: (1) the outer, (2) the middle and (3) the inner (fig. 9). The outer is the gutter and is what holds it all together. This means the containment of the image - to close it in and emphasize that which is within. The middle is the white of the halo around the head and the inner part is the head of the figure. The most interesting thing about this image in context of the three divisions above is the layering of black and white and how they relate to each other, and in this

way emphasize and strengthen the over all purpose of the image. The inner part, the face, is contained within a black and white composition that is balanced to be able to depict a face. The face is mostly white, but bordered by the outer facial line and the hair. This is placed within a white circle, the middle, clearly defined as being behind him, because the circle is only partly defined. This white circle is bound again to the outer part, the frame, because they are both white. Also worth mentioning are the white stripes covering the plane between the white circle and the frame. This has the effect of strengthening the bond between these two white areas. It also creates a movement between the inner and outer plane of the image. As the presence of the figure is projected outwards, there is also a movement inwards. The effect of this double movement is an illusion that strengthens the myth of the figure and the author's representation of him in the story. All of these are firmly held in place and strengthened by the frame - the gutter.

Another way of looking at this image (fig. 10) is to divide it into two distinct sections that interact with each other: (A) The white of the frame and the white

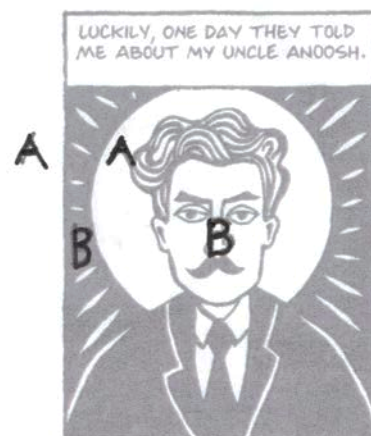


Fig. 10: Ibid

of the circle and (B) the white rays around the circle breaking up the black, and the face. Why this relation can be is because of the mass of

the areas. The white of the gutter relates to the white of the circle because of its radiance, which it gets by its surrounding darkness. The white rays and the face connect to each other by their more linear feature. Although the most important component is how the rays pull our attention inward to the face of Anoosh.

There is a double effect or an overlapping feature in (A) and (B). The fact is that the gutter's whiteness relates to the white of the circle, but in between these two there are the rays. The effect of this becomes apparent when we acknowledge the denouement of this situation. The rays have a dual effect. Rays project out, but in this instance they also draw inwards towards the figure. This gives the following result: attention is drawn to the figure by the rays and the fact that the head is placed in a white circular space further heightens the face. The rays also project your attention outwards and into the gutter, and here we are left with the leap of interpretation and imagination helped by what we have to bring from the image, the story, and our selves.

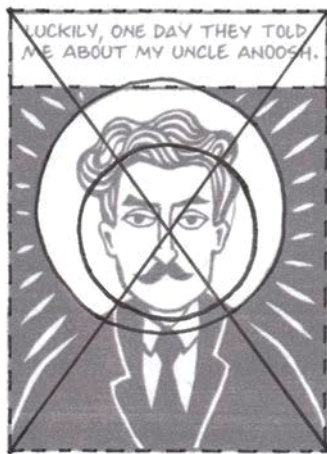


Fig. 11: Ibid

A final analysis of this image draws upon the geometrics of the composition (fig. 11). The frame again facilitates and strengthens the geometrics and again the overall intent of the image. The whole image is built up with geometrical figures, as is most images. Good composition is often how the geometrics are played out. It is in many ways the grammar of the image. The image of Anoosh is no exception in the way it has been built around key compositional concepts of circles, triangles and rectangles. The way these are placed, how they interact with each other is crucial to the finished product and to how the image is perceived. This can influence the reception of the image, the themes of the book and the narrative of the story.

Looking at figure 11, we can see that the image is built within a rectangle. There are two circular shapes – one being oval with its pointiest side down. The most important shape is the triangular figure that can be made from the upper body. To be precise this type of triangle is called an isosceles triangle and that is because it has two angles of the same measure, which lie opposite to each other. This triangle is a very stable and good shape to use in composition as it has almost the shape of an arrows

point. It is very apparent that the point of the triangle point to the head. Also, the oval shape of the head receives the point from its pointiest side and draws the attention upwards to the oval's axis of symmetry – where the eyes are.



Fig. 12: Ramos-Poqui, *The Technique of Icon Painting*, 13.

There are more similarities here to the Icon painting than just the appearance of the image – the fact that it looks like an Icon. It has to do with the composition and the geometrics of this. Behind any composition of an icon there lies a harmonious unity of geometrical shapes – circles, squares and triangles (fig. 12). There are also outer borders or margins, or as we call it; the gutter. They are usually the same in size and are not meant as a standard border, but are supposed to be a separating area between the real world and that which

is holy. It is not supposed to resemble the real world and uses a form of visual theology to interpret the Holy Scripture. The process of Icon painting resembles a strict system of writing calligraphy, and therefore it is said that the Icon is not painted, but written. The picture is translated into lines and these lines give form and subtle details as well as geometrical patterns. The drawing behind the painting is completely linear without shadow and tone.

The overall geometric construction of the image guides us in, ever further into the complexity of Anoosh. Attention is by the help of a triangle shape making our gaze meet the eyes of uncle Anoosh.

All the attention is drawn towards the face and particularly the eyes, but the strength of the image is the way you also are led out and into the gutter. Here the gutter plays the role of the frame both physically and virtually. Now that we are in the gutter and we bounce back and forth between it and the image, we notice that the physical frame creates a contained space that again, with all of the instruments of black/white, rays and geometrics, gives uncle Anoosh content.

“The comics image, whose meaning often remains open when it is presented as isolated (and without verbal anchorage), finds its truth in the sequence. Inversely, the gutter, insignificant in itself, is invested with an arthologic

function that can only be deciphered in light of the singular images that separates and unites” (Groensteen: 114).

Putting the image of Anoosh into context with this quote creates a series of images that separates, by structure, and unite, by content. This means that to render the image of Anoosh any content within the story clues are left within the image to give clues to how it relates to the story and there are two ways it can do this. There is the so-called standard way, where the image is a part of the page narrative and relates to the chronology of the story with straightforward panel-to-panel reading. This will of course put Anoosh into the story as one of a host of characters. The other way is to see this single panel as something more. It demands this just by its design, and how that dominates the other images on the page. This is a result of the design, which we have discussed. Seeing this image in this way leads to a greater narrative of panels based on one of the major themes of this book – the communication of east/west values and intellectualism. The use of Icon painting discourse in the content of Anoosh put it in direct communication with other panels. These panels also promulgate their content in a similar way, by displaying a simple cartoonist image guised in an east/west dichotomy. We can find links to religion, art, philosophy and technology in these images. This is as mentioned a strong theme throughout the book and something Satrapi seems to struggle with – finding a balance of retaining tradition while embracing the new. It almost seems that this struggle is also the major problem and the result of much of Iran’s problems.

In the gutter we perceive all of these traits and create the myth of Uncle Anoosh, which is the myth of a young Satrapi and her remembrance of him. The myth is strengthened by the image being based on the tradition of the Icon. Icons are religious paintings often showing the Virgin Mary or other Saints. Religion is a myth and therefore the representation of Anoosh is also a myth. We know through the story that Satrapi’s uncle died when she was young and disappeared from her life at an age where she only had admiration for him. This helps to build a mythological picture of the character.

Another aspect here is the fact that Icon paintings were used for contemplation and prayer. These are also aspects of how we experience it. The intense radiance from the picture tells us of the importance of this person, but there is also a contained and contemplative atmosphere. The picture seems to have a narrative of its own, but it is only with the extra information we find in the panels before and after that we begin to

grasp the real intensions with this image. Therefore as the story progresses it is with ease that the gutter helps us to wander back to this image as it slowly grows in our consciousness.

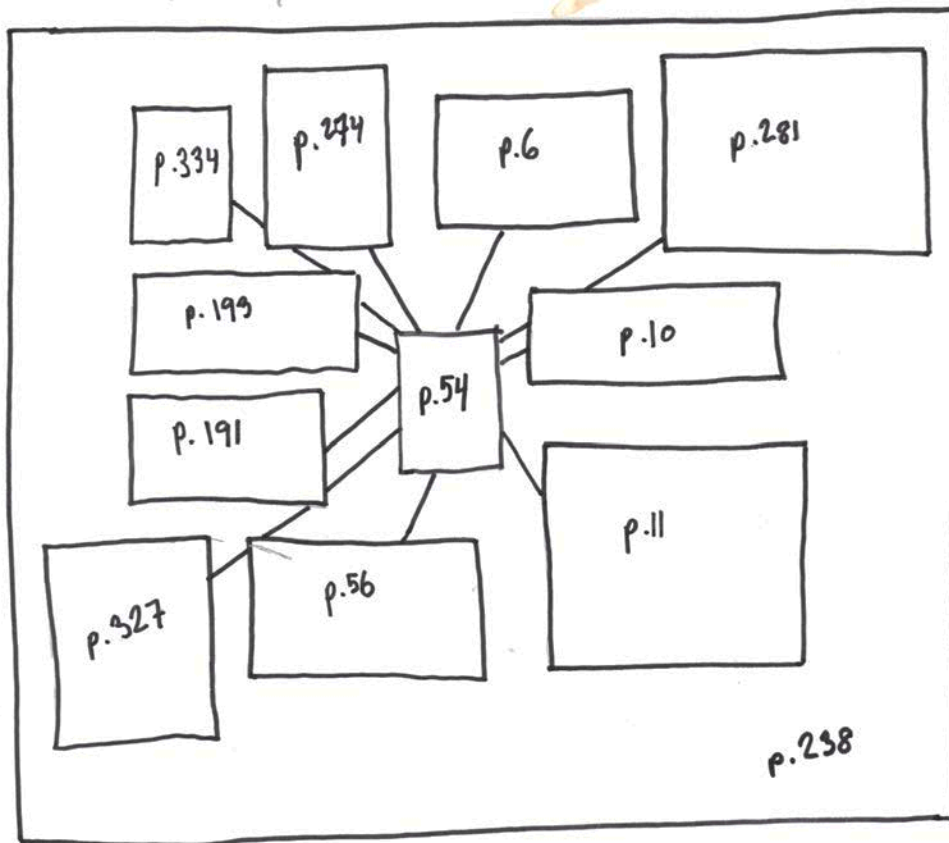


Fig. 13: Tornes.

Here is the presentation of Uncle Anoosh within the context of the eastern tradition of the Icon painting. Underneath this image there lies a theme of east meets west, which Satrapi seems to be particularly concerned with. This can be seen in many of the panels throughout the book. Here we are back to the idea of the gutter as an all access area. If we wander around the book and look for other images that might contain ideas being communicated through this east/western osmosis, we end up with a host of images, and this is one of the main themes of Satrapi's book. In figures 13 and 14 we can see this. The first one is an initial sketch done to be able to contain the images I thought contained these themes. The image shows a representation of the panels with their page number written inside. The other image is a reproduction made with some of the images presented with a back-panel that again epitomizes and brings the ideas of the images



Fig. 14: Satrapi, mixed images, *Persepolis*, Tornes.

together. As Satrapi represents the chaos of educated travel, or existential travel on page 238, this also contains the idea of the gutter. The ability to be led, seemingly, almost at random, around, looking at images, or text, bringing it all together into a coherent meaning, or even a new set of ideas.

If we consider the three Anooosh-analyses together the analysis becomes more complete and thorough. In a unity of the three, all of the elements are covered and give a greater understanding of the image and its composition. So the three Anoooshes combined, represents an image ready for further analysis – a way of understanding its contents.

Quite frankly, although he is not a religious person, he is presented as an icon to underlay his almost mythic importance in Satrapi's life. This works better with the gutter because it holds the motif in place, orders it and gives it the calm respect and importance the author wants it to. Then the gutter gives the image content and context.

Framing is both a physical presence with its traits (truth), but it is also a psychological presence with its effect on virtual transcendence (fiction).

The Passe-Partout, the Frame and Other Frames

The passe-partout is, as we have discussed, a frame that encapsulates the image and gives it presence. Also the passe-partout is a continuous field of white running around all of the images contained within the page. But what happens when the line that closes the image in opens up and links itself with the passe-partout? And what of the places where there is no square box at all?

The line and its effect of closing the image in are only possible if this line travels completely around. It needs to return to the starting point and make contact. If we compare the two rectangles in figure X1, we can see that in rectangle A there is the completeness of closure around the image, but if we look at rectangle B on its own, X2, there is an opening because the line has stopped. This creates an effect of almost imbalance and disorder. The mind almost wants to make the line continue and end by contact with the starting point. Because of this drive in wanting to see this rectangle complete there is a sense of disproportionate weight to the rectangle. It really looks incomplete.

If we place these rectangles next to each other the story becomes different. They seem to belong together and rectangle A seems to balance B. Also, we can begin to see that the incomplete rectangle has an opening that flushes its content directly into the passe-partout. This effect combines the two even more. If we think of these rectangles as panels in a graphic narrative, the second panel, with its opening, leads us in a backwards direction – as if we want to go back to the first panel. And maybe this is to reread or visually pick up on more information.

Another feature here is when there are three panels next to each other, X3, and the panel in the centre does not have closing line at all. The image is in a way placed in the passe-partout.

Figure X1

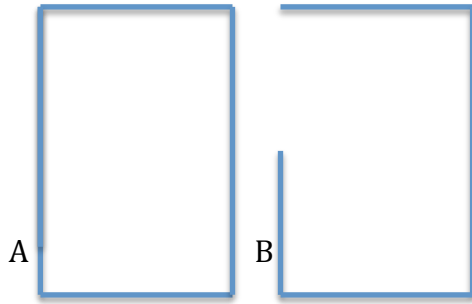


Figure X2

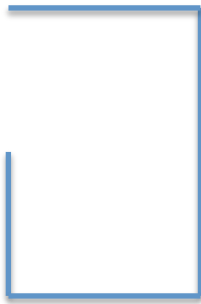
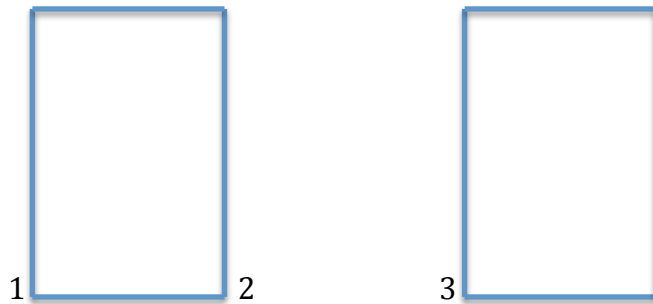


Figure X3



The effect becomes even more efficacious if we present the panel surrounded by framed panels. This has an inward focusing effect and if we look at Scott McCloud's version of this (fig. 15), we can see how this helps to consolidate our attention to the image that is in the gutter. This shows that the image and the text can be placed into the gutter – all in a balancing act to engage you to participate in the narrative. See text in figure 15. The requirement of the other senses will be dealt with in chapter two.



Fig. 15: McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 89.

The gutter, which we have established as a special frame or passe-partout, works as a concept of both “truth” and fiction. It is a physical presence, but it is also a theoretical perspective on virtual perception, and how it communicates, that which is not present, but the reader infers anyway. Even when presented with a white piece of paper the subject starts to infer meaning upon it.

The gutter is the passe-partout, which is the space created around a piece of art to let it breathe and be interpreted by the passer by - to cancel the static noise of other visual stimuli. The passe-partout like the gutter does nothing on its own, because it is nothing. That space, the gutter, and the frame, needs the image, although the gutter more than the frame. Sometimes frames are ornate and can almost become works of art. Groensteen describes the gutter as an empty space that “does not merit fetishization” (Groensteen: 112). What he is referring to is when there is no gutter between the images, but only a separating line, “there is no point to postulate an implicit void when the illustrator did not make use of one” (Groensteen: 112). Even though there might not always be a conventional gutter separating the images in a graphic narrative, most of the gutters are not just conventional in the sense of white space between panels, they are also conventional in the sense that there is no reason to postulate an implicit void warrant of greatness. It is just a transition between panels that carries nothing more with it than connections between time frames. One could argue that this is the most common transition within the graphic narrative, but that doesn’t mean the gutter isn’t there and that it doesn’t carry with it some function or meaning. Even in its most simple transaction we still have to deal with two separate images frozen in a moment, and make the connection between the two. That is also the case where there is no apparent gutter and just a drawn line between the panels. While the black line does not have the white space of the gutter it can still act as one, but in the context of this chapter, we can see that it also has a framing effect. If the gutter functions as a frame, so does the black line that seems to separate images in some comics.

This is where the passe-partout comes to mind. It is, as mentioned, a white framing tool that gives a border to an image. It is strictly geometrical and relays a certain sense of order to the artwork, or several artworks. This is the same within the graphic narrative. The page and the panels with their frames (gutters) are strictly geometrical and add order and system to the page and the individual panel. Most often there is an

outer gutter and a gutter within the page, but stringently connected to each other. This connection creates a an important effect – that you can move freely over the page – – back and forth studying the images, rereading the text etc. This is a unique trait of the graphic narrative and the only other location inhabiting such a trait would be the gallery with its white walls acting as a gutter between the artworks lined up along the walls.

Claude Monet’s haystacks painted in different light and throughout the seasons and Alison Bechdel’s striking four and a half pages of panels summing up a year in therapy are great examples of how the framing effect works next to each other⁹. There is a sense of reduction of something on a grand scale, down to the bare and essential meanings, like that of the implied simplicity of Anoosh.

If we speak of truth in the gutter, as apposed to the virtual panels that the gutter creates, we can only talk of the gutter as a passe-partout. It is there, right in front of us, and gives the page aesthetics, order, and a sense of system or structure. Although when discussing the physical traits it seems impossible to not tread upon the aspects of virtual representation, and then ambulating between the two. So, to understand the truth of the gutter, or as we have called it here, the passe-partout and the frame, is to recognize its physical presence and abilities, which then amplifies the virtual traits of the comic book image and panel. This is an important feature because it influences the media of graphic narratives in a way that engages the senses. One is more drawn to the story because of something as simple as a frame or border placed within a geometrical composition. It locks in the panels, creating atmosphere and an inward concentration, but again releases the eye to wander freely between the pictures and to infer what ever the senses require to make cense of the narrative. To understand its physical presences and functions of the gutter is useful in grasping its virtual traits, which is the debacle of chapter two.

To sum up the endeavour of analysing the image of Uncle Anoosh, the greatest instrument used is closure. “The function of closure and the separative function are, in truth, nothing but the same function, successively envisaged as it exerts itself on the interior space of the frame and toward the exterior field” (Groensteen: 45).

⁹ The Bechdel images are further discussed in chapter three, p. 69-73.

So in truth, and returning to Derrida and his “truth”, there can also be a truth of the function of the gutter and closure. The result may vary to the individual, but the fundamental truth is that everybody engrossed in the narrative frame is utilizing the gutter and committing closure.

After exploring the gutter from the angle of the passe-partout and the frame, then what is the idiom of the gutter? Within these two distinct features there is a clear message of the importance of the gutter and not just from a gap-filling point of view. The restructured text from Derrida teaches us that there is meaning outside the finished art, and that that is the “truth”. The closest we can get to truth is to acknowledge that there is a certain physical language of the gutter, and if you see it as a physical presence, it can open up new vistas of knowledge.

One cannot look at visual art, and specifically graphic narrative, and only think of literature. You need to take the image and see it as a single unit and then as a succession of panels before seeing the presentation of a visual and non-visual narrative. The gutter structures these elements and holds it together.

In the definition of the passe-partout and even in its etymology, we see the gutter with several functions. It is a white border around the image and it gives an unlimited access across the images. The physical frame of the gutter creates a border for the image to recreate itself into infinite possibilities. As we were discussing the physical traits of the gutter it is almost impossible to not enter into this realm of imagination. The idea of this frame comes to us from art and shows a distinction between the physical and the virtual world of art and how these two communicate with each other.

The gutter’s function as a frame can lead us to insight about a single image and at times its importance – like that of Anoush, and further take us out into other images that again can lead us to important themes within the narrative. Both the passe-partout and the frame as ideas of the gutter can be tools to further our understanding of the physical traits of it. This gives a better starting point for a more traditional approach to the gutter. As a final thought on the gutter here – it, the gutter, is the gummed paper that holds the image, and the glass is the narrative combining it with the gutter. This combination is unique to the graphic narrative, but it is also important to look at these constituent parts

individually. The glass, or the narrative also implies the reader in its reflection combining all of the above part.

The example made with Scott McCloud's in figure 15 gives us a good transition for entering the discussion around the gutter as a gap for missing frames, or panels, and what this implies for the function of the gutter.

Chapter 2: Gutting the Gutter

In Thierry Groensteen's book *The System of Comics* we can read:

"Maybe, you will say to me, but the term gutter (*blanc*) lends itself metaphorically. We use it to designate "that-which-is-not-represented-but-which-the-reader-cannot-help-but-to-infer." It is therefore a virtual, and take note that this virtual is not abandoned to the fantasy of each reader: it is a forced virtual, an identifiable absence. The gutter is simply the symbolic site of this absence. More a zone on the paper, it is the interior screen which every reader projects the missing image (or images)." (Groensteen: 113).

We find this symbolic site of absence abundantly in the graphic novel. This has often to do with the fact that each panel represents a frozen timeframe, and when these timeframes are brought together in a sequence there will have to be missing images that the reader will project internally.

"If the basic convention governing the novel is the expectation that readers will, through their contract with the text, be able to recognize a world which it produces or to which it refers, it ought to be possible to identify at least some element of the text whose function it is to confirm this expectation and to assert the representational or mimetic orientation of fiction" (Culler: 192).

The narrative's effect on this contract in regards to the gutter is substantial. This is because the graphic narrative is by means of its image and iconography more engaging in its accounts, as opposed to the written narratives. Also there is the effect of the gutter and the missing frames and the reproduction of virtual images in the reader, which adds to the engagement. Wittgenstein wrote that "to understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique".¹ In regards to texts there is a far more complex process of understanding at work. We need to master the technique of language through text, which is a fairly complex task. The graphic narrative, which is predominantly visual, plays on a totally different language that is more open and instantaneous. This is because we are visual in our perceptions of the world around us and this makes the image and iconography more engaging.

Because of the gutter's direct involvement with interpretation and the logic of the narrative, it is important to look at some aspects of what lies behind this logic. I will

¹ Wittgenstein, *Filosofiske Undersøkelser*, § 199, p. 111. The English translation is taken from Tompkins, p. 101.

argue that there are similarities to the process of the gutter and how it works through the narrative and the reader, and that these similarities are based on a system that both the gutter and the reader are apart of when making sense of the narrative. The gutter might conceal “hidden“ images between panels, but there is much more going on here. Behind each interpretation of the gutter there is also the creation of emotions and feelings, and these are triggered by the gutter in a complex communication between the narrative, the gutter, and the reader. It is difficult to say something about the individual reader, but we can say something about the process of interpretation, by the reader, through the narrative.

I will look at the gutter through the undrawn panel and how this moves the gutter into undrawn narratives, and how this further influences the imaginary and internal gutter. The undrawn panel is the missing image that we find between the visual panels to convey the logic of the story, and the undrawn narrative is what can come as a result of a further exploration of these undrawn panels. To do this, I will show a couple of panels by Bechdel, that really exemplifies the hidden aspects of the gutter, and a short story by Robert Crumb, to highlight the immediate effect the gutter can have. These two examples are different, but also very alike in their functions of the gutter.

The added argument here is to show that the gutter constitutes a “hidden” plane that together with a host of other aspects produces meaning. This will bring me into the theory of RSI – Real, Symbolic, Imaginary -- developed by Jacques Lacan, and even further mentioning the Mirror Stage that is contained within the RSI. This model from Lacan is relevant because it deals with the symbolic and the imaginary and how this is transformed into what is, or can be perceived as real. I will give an example of the RSI model, and mention it in relation to the reader, but also how it can work within the narrative, in producing meaning that goes beyond the hidden panels.

The Gutter as the Undrawn Panel

In the gutter we find the hidden panels that connect the missing images with the visible images. Our senses create meaning from experience and through this create a story. We take the small parts, put them together and perceive something whole. “This phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It’s called closure” (McCloud: 63).

In the activity of closure, there is a high element of involvement and participation in the story. In essence, closure is when the reader fills in something that the image doesn’t show in order to make the narrative meaningful, but it can also be more abstract in the way it works. Closure can encapsulate more complex ideas of character content, or the story behind objects. This means that many of the aspects of closure are up to the reader. Some closures happen instantly, like figure 2 in the introduction, but even this is based on experience. The level of complexity in a graphic narrative influences the way in which closure works. McCloud has an example in *Understanding Comics* where he presents three different ways of distributing closure (Ibid: 90). McCloud uses the same three panels throughout the examples. In the first one there is a standard narrative distribution of the panels, and the ideas flow seamlessly into each other. In the second one, the images are more realistic and give the appearance of still pictures. Closure becomes bound to the individual images and what their contents and meanings might be. In the third and last example the images focus more on the picture plane. Closure within these images might be more difficult and the focus shifts to the unifying properties of design instead (Ibid: 91).

These three examples represent three different ways for the artist making the narrative to influence the reader in the act of closure. The first example is the most common one, and the second one is interesting because if the narrative wants an image of focus, then a realistic image can be included into it. There are even examples of photographs used in the graphics medium. In Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and David Small’s *Stiches* there are photos of their parents, which has a real impact to the story, because of their haunting presence. They stand out on their own and the focus is in the single image. The narrative becomes more real because these images are “real”.

Scott McCloud talks of experiencing the world through our senses, yet this apparatus reveals a fragmented and incomplete world. He goes on to make the assumption that “our reception of “reality” is an act of faith, based on mere fragments” (Ibid: 62). Closure is a phenomenon and a deeply psychological action to infer meaning upon something. As the world is too big and incomplete to us we must commit closure to make sense of it all. In comics closure is produced when we take in the fragments and put them together and translate it into “reality”. This happens in every aspect of the graphic narrative. In the image of what we see and how we interpret it, the idea of experience comes into account, and closure happens, and has made some sense of the image by inferring meaning. This is also going on in the gutter and here we have to imagine what is going on between the panels. It is put together and transformed into meaning. Nothing what so ever is seen between the panels, “but experience tells you something must be there” (Ibid: 67). McCloud also argues that these elements, called panels, are inevitably affiliated to the comics definition, and therefore graphic narrative “is” closure. Without the ability to commit closure the narrative would make less sense. In the power of closure lies the capability of the images and the gutter to emanate subtle, but considerable ideas, imprinting themselves on our senses.

Scott McCloud talks of the gutter as a place where all our senses are engaged and that we are released into this open air, but always caught by the next panel. In this view of the gutter there seems to be a suggestion that we always need to be caught by the next panel, or else perish in confusion and boredom of our solitary imagination.

The gutter is more than this. It stretches further, because it isn't just a space between panels helping to trapeze from one panel to the next, there is also the gutter as the combined meanings of the overall content of the page, and also the whole of the narrative. As the gutter is heavily dependent on our imagination it is natural to assume that it can go beyond just the page in front of it. The imagination should have the ability to go further and to seek connections from outside the single image, the strip, the page and even the book itself. The gutter and closure invites us to participate, and in this play of the gutter and closure, the imagination will look for extended connections in the narrative and not just in the standard panel to panel transitions.

Behind the idea of closure there is the importance of the reader. After all it is the reader who commits the closure, and one of the most fascinating features here is that

each reader is unique in the act of closure. Some closures are very apparent and straight forward (fig: the *fuck you* one from the introduction, again), but others are more suggestive in the way the gutter has been used and left for the reader to interpret (fig. 2).

The Gutter as the Undrawn Narrative

The gutter is an illusion – you have to imagine it -- like the perspective on a two-dimensional surface, where one is forced or tricked to look beyond the initial surface. That power of illusion forces the onlooker to push beyond the work itself. If you look at the illustration (fig. 1) you can see this represented with the subject, which is you gazing at the image, which again is on a surface, but the focus point is, as in perspective illusions, beyond the surface. I would call this the quality of the artwork. Between the surface and the focus point is where the interpretation takes place, or what you might call closure. This is also the way the gutter works. It's the power of what isn't and is there, by not being visually represented. The focus point in the figure isn't really there, so one would say that the space between the surface/image to the focus point is within the realm of the virtual.

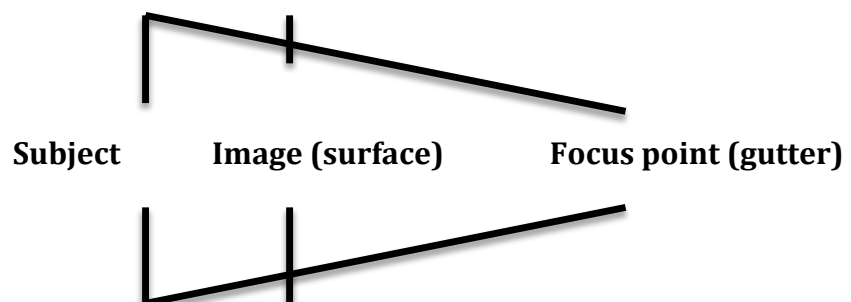


Fig. 1: Tornes

Taking this forced virtual or identifiable absence to a more complex level, and perhaps more intentionally to create striking internal inferences, we can look at the images from Bechdel's *Fun Home* (fig. 2), and see if there are any undrawn narratives.

There are three immediate levels of communications going on here in these panels. (1) There is a literary storyline presented by text over the panels – some would

argue that the text is in the gutter. (2) The dialogue and (3) the image of the student and the teacher exchanging books. There is also more here, and to access this you need to take the gutter into account. There is an intricate play between the three constituent parts mentioned. If we also include the titles and contents of the books being exchanged/read the complexity is even more apparent. Another account to consider is that to understand the panels and to make the gutter work for you it is an advantage to have read the story up until that point. This is because the gutter reaches into other panels and texts of the story that preceded it.



Fig. 2: Bechdel, *Are You My Mother*,

The most striking in Bechdel's images is the not just the gutter, but how it all interacts. There is text, speech and image here, all interacting and engaging one another. In these panels there is conventional literature with dialogue and two straightforward and not so different images. Since we are talking about the gutter working in between text, dialogue and image, let us separate them and see how they work on their own before putting them together again. There is quite a bit of text working on these images and therefore the text does work on its own (fig. 3):

PART OF DAD'S COUNTRY SQUIRE ROUTINE INVOLVED EDIFYING THE VILLAGERS--HIS MORE PROMISING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

THE PROMISE WAS VERY LIKELY SEXUAL IN SOME CASES, BUT WHATEVER ELSE MIGHT HAVE BEEN GOING ON, BOOKS WERE BEING READ.

Fig. 3: Bechdel, *Are You My Mother*,

The text works very well on its own, not really devoid of any meaning, in fact very clear in the supposedly hidden sexual content between teacher and student. On the surface of the text, dialogue and image, that is the apparent and controversial message, and the text does convey this on its own.

If we look at the dialogue, it doesn't give any meaning on its own, but the images do convey an exchanging of books between a young (student) man and an older (teacher) man. It does work, but on its own it doesn't necessarily say anything about sexuality. It can, but then we would have to look outside the panels and conclude that the torn t-shirt of the young student represents the gay-ish representation of Bechdel's dad on page 7 and 9 in *Fun Home*. Here he is shown wearing nothing else but a pair of torn shorts. It is the way he is presented visually and textually within these pages that lead us on the path towards his sexual tendencies. In this posture – carrying heavy objects, refurbishing surfaces and decorating the house down to the smallest details we are given hints through images. This would have to be based though, on the bias that tight torn cloths are gay, which of course isn't necessarily so. Returning to the panels at hand we see that we do need more context to make out some of the same meaning that the text gives.

There is something these panels show that the text is lacking - the exchanging of books. If we look more closely they are *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. If we suppose that these two characters are exchanging books, they are also exchanging ideas, and in fact, the reader is also participating in this exchange. These two books are considered two of the great American novels and there you have a starting point of departure for an analysis of their content, to see if the panels give more meaning. This does not work that well with just

the images. You need the text to give a context, but you also need the context of the story to give this meaning – content of books with content of graphic narrative.

The first link into the universe of these books comes from Bechdel herself. Fitzgerald and his book *The Great Gatsby* infatuate her father. There are references to this in *Fun Home*:

“Gatsby’s self-willed metamorphosis from farm boy to prince is in many ways identical to my father’s” (Bechdel: 63).

“Like Gatsby my father fuelled this transformation with “with the colossal vitality of his illusion.” Unlike Gatsby, he did it on a schoolteacher’s salary” (Ibid: 64).

“I think what was so alluring to my father about Fitzgerald’s stories was their inextricability from Fitzgerald’s life” (Ibid: 65).

“Such a suspension of the imaginary in the real was, after all, my father’s stock in trade” (Ibid: 65).

What is fascinating here is that Bechdel is dealing with her father’s suppressions through showing how he creates a sense of longing after something that is nothing but an illusion. In an infinite void of emptiness we fill it with illusions of lives we would like to have lived and these illusions are built around objects that serenade grandeur upon, in this instance, Bechdel’s father.

In *The Sun Also Rises* the main themes can be found in its two epigraphs. The first one refers to the term “the lost generation”, coined by Gertrude Stein. This term alludes to the post war generation. The other epigraph is taken from the *Bible*:

“What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose” (Eccles: 1, 3-7)

These two epigraphs seem to cast a pessimistic outlook on ideas of life and work. It asks the question; what is the point? At least it does seem to ask this taken out of context of their original texts and put into the narrative of *Fun Home*. Bechdel’s father is lost in his

closeted homosexuality, and what profit has his labours when he can't express this. His labour is after all closely linked to his sexuality. It seems that in the endless cycle of life, symbolized in the sun that comes and goes, he had had enough, and ended his life.

A connection can also be made by way of style and form. The way Hemingway writes is static, creating short declarative sentences resulting in quick transitions between scenes – almost like a movie. This creates gaps and these are filled by the reader, much as the gutter does in graphic narrative.

Putting these two novels together seems to be of no coincidence. There is a message in them that relates back to Bechdel's father – that says something fundamental about him, and human behaviour. We can view *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises* as bearers of the prophecy of narrative hindsight. This means that Bechdel has placed these books, in this context, to give the reader the opportunity to delve into these themes, and when this feeds back into *Fun Home*, it creates more depth and complexity to the narrative. To make these connections you need the gutter.

In the gutter is where the story in many ways takes place – where it moves and lives. A graphic story consists of a series of frozen moments, represented by the panels, and the gutter functions as a binder between them. It is here the story lies – where the reader creates the virtual parts of the story. This is where movement takes place and the sense-apparatus plays its crucial role. . It is what you see and what you don't see. "Whatever the mysteries within each panel, it's the power of closure between panels that I find the most interesting. There is something strange and wonderful that happens in this blank ribbon of paper" (McCloud: 88). To further develop his ideas McCloud talks of the classic kitchen scene with the representation of chopping sounds and the clock ticking (Ibid: 88). When looking at these panels your mind creates a complete scene. The target point here is the sounds that these panels make when you look at them. Most of us know what these sounds sound like, and the mind creates. So if comics are a mono-sensory medium there is also the space between the panels where "none of our senses are required at all. Which is why all of our senses are engaged" (Ibid: 89).

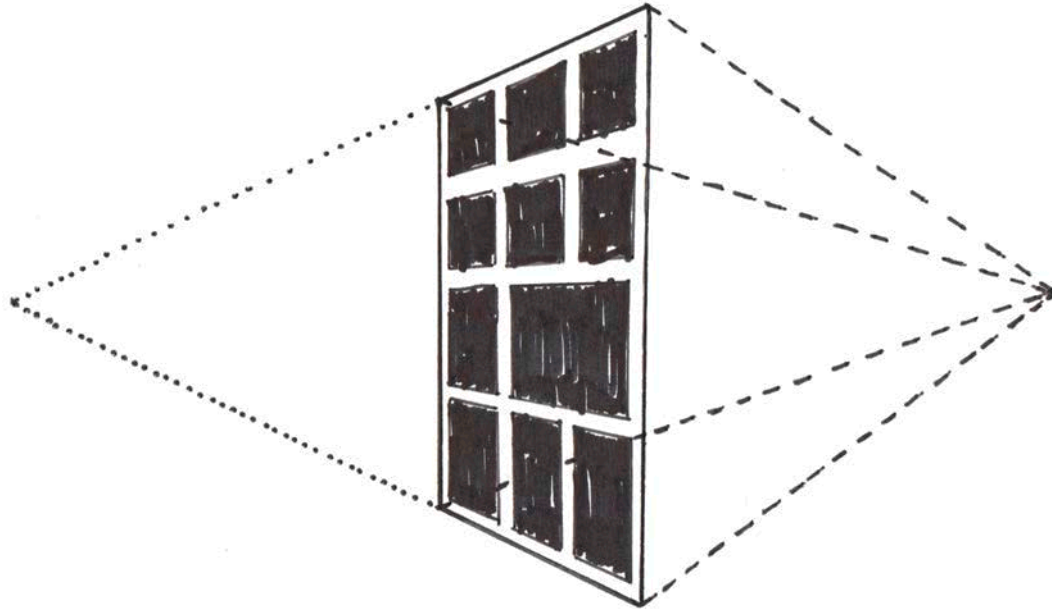


Fig. 4: Tornes

The narrative's effect on the contract with the reader, in regards to the gutter, is substantial. This is because the graphic narrative is by means of its image and iconography more engaging in its accounts. Also there is the effect of the gutter and the missing frame and the reproduction of virtual images in the reader, which adds to the engagement.

The image is in itself an engaging factor, but the icon even more so. While the gutter might give us access to interesting aspects of a narrative, the icon helps in the engagement because it is by appearance more forthcoming in its reader identification. The more life-like the figures are in a story the less we identify with them. The smiley is the most used icon for self-representation, but in comics there seems to be a balance somewhere in-between. An exception could be 😊². Image, through icon and identity, strengthened by the gutter and closure to reveal the missing parts, are key in the graphic narrative's production of meaning and knowledge.

In this process of reproducing or articulating meaning and coherence in a graphic narrative there is an extremely important process of reader participation going on. In fig.

² Charles M. Schultz's Charlie Brown does resemble the smiley, and his reflections and problems are very identifiable, and therefore it is easy to become Charlie Brown, <http://www.thbnews.com/category/whats-beef/page/2>.

4 this has been symbolized by the creation of a sub-space that moves beyond the surface of the book. The gutter creates this sub-space, as the reader creates the coherency needed to perceive this as a narrative.

Fig. 4 is a further discussion of fig. 1 where the separations are subject, surface and focus point. In fig. 4 this is initially the same, but further elaborated by the dotted line. First there is the obvious area of the reader and the surface of the page. The reader is the subject and the page is the surface. As the different aspects of the narrative are deciphered through the readers engagement with the surface and the gutter, and the use of closure, there will have opened up a new virtual plane, which gets us into the last section – the focus point.

The transparency of the gutter is what transports us to a new point of focus, which is the place of meaning. Through the interaction of the page and its narrative, there is production of a second narrative – that of a dialectic synergy of the constituent part of the gutter.

On the side of the reader, or in front of the page, there are only two continuous dotted lines. These symbolize the reader's gaze on the page. Beneath the page, or behind the panels, there are four continuous lines that conjoin in a single point. It is a movement in and "out", although "out" has a more of a "further in" meaning. To symbolize the construction of narrative fluency and meaning the two dotted lines are a representation of a two-dimensional surface, which is represented by the exterior of the page. As the reader coerces the narrative through the image and the panels, and the relationship between these are established, the reader is transported into a deeper knowledge – symbolized by the four continuous dotted lines – a "fourth dimension". This process is then turned back on itself, and the meaning that has been constructed, comes back to the page before it returns to the reader as knowledge. This knowledge informs the reality in which the reader inhabits – a third dimension.

All of the factors in fig. 1 and 4 have been put forth in my reading of the Bechdel panel's in fig. 2, but I will also look at Crumb's one page narrative *A Short History of America* (fig. 5)³ in this context.

³ This short story is reproduced from Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*, p. 46.

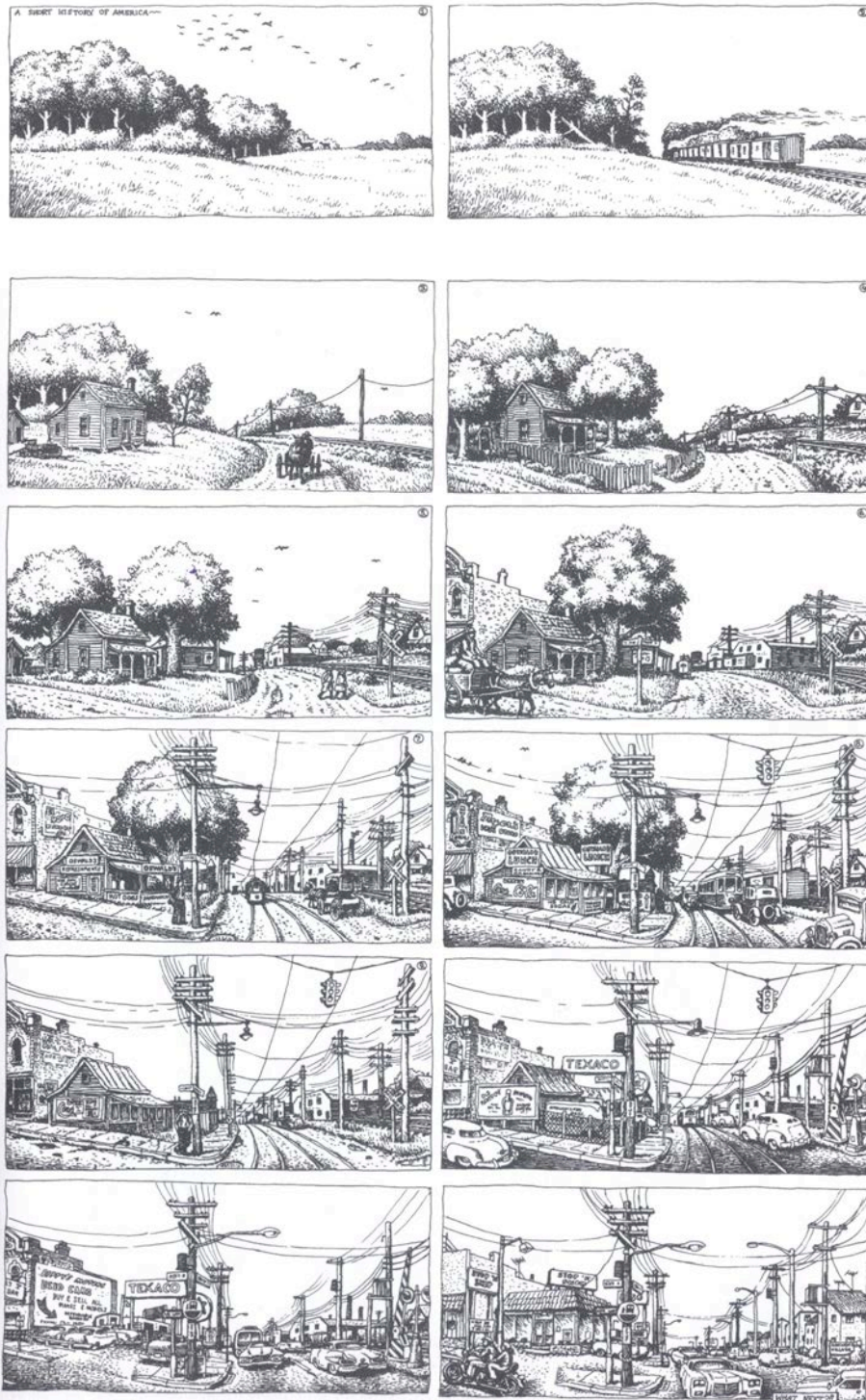


Fig. 5: Crumb, *A Short History of America*.

The ways, in which this story is told, through the use of the panels, creates an engaging interpretation in recreating, that which is missing. If we are engaged in the unfolding story of these panels, we are in fact being forced to make judgements on interpretations. Let's not forget that this is called closure, and that in this act we engage in the

occupation of making sense of this narrative. This is a classical graphic narrative that presents a step by step unfolding of events. Each image overlaps the next by adding something new, while retaining something from the previous. This system retains itself throughout the narrative. When the last image is viewed in context of the first there is a lot that has happened and the scenes don't look so very similar.

I suppose we could impose a two-panel narrative (fig. 6) only showing a pastoral scene, and an image of what's there a couple of hundred years later. It works to a certain extent, but probably so because of the initial presentation of Crumb's narrative having been presented first. It works better in Crumb's because of the amount of distribution and time.⁴

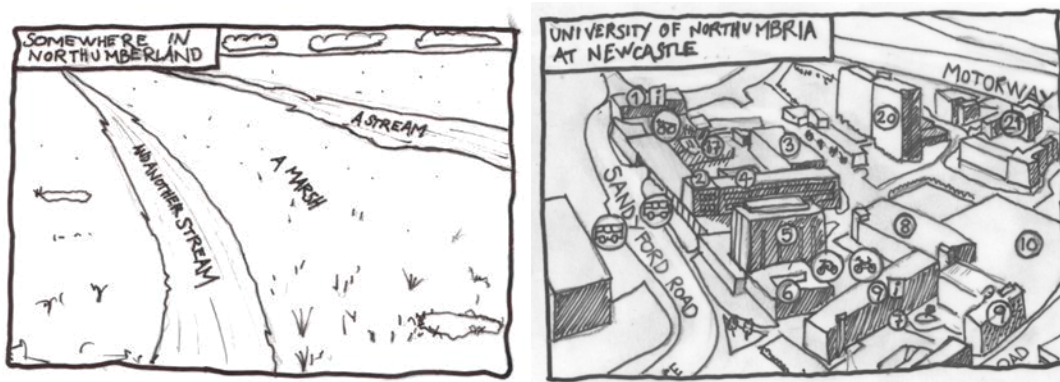


Fig. 6: Tornos

Even if there is a gradual increase of substance from panel to panel, there are no representations of anybody making these changes – builders, machines etc. We need to imagine these things happening by experience. This happens between the images and we know that to make these progressions there needs to be people to make them.

That is the apparent resolution we can draw from this narrative, but to get further, and into the focus point and back again (fig. 6), we need to look again. At the end of the narrative there is a text box that asks “what next?!!” This suggests that this man made evolution is negative, and by looking and comparing the last panel with the first, we can argue this case. The last panel is filled up with houses, suspended wiring, cars, shops etc. We might even produce from experience the noise of this urban setting. The

⁴ Time and distribution is discussed more chapter three.

first panel is the same place, but in its natural form. This image is filled with grass, trees, deer, endless skies and birds. Perhaps the sounds of this panel also come across. This is at the heart, or focus point, of the image and, what comes back to us from this is then twofold.

The image is dependent on narrative balance, which is the balance of distribution of content. How much do you show and tell, and what should the reader be left with to recreate? Trying this balanced distribution with only two panels, as seen in fig. 6, doesn't work as well. Crumb's panels are more effective because of their balanced distribution. It has an almost natural flow and it is easy to understand, because our experience tells us what is going on between the panels. The things that are missing are what make this narrative so compelling. It doesn't show any of the actual work or change taking place – it's just there as you move from panel to panel.

First there is the experience of inferring the events between the panels to make up a coherent narrative, and second is the message, and a moral one perhaps, that by way of development we have sacrificed something pure. All of the factors mentioned in the description of this narrative, play on the gutter and closure. It is a governing factor in understanding the tactics of how the graphic narrative works.

The Gutter as the Imaginary

The gutter has been established as a space in which the missing pieces are assembled. These are the missing panels that McCloud talks about and the hidden narratives that we can find in the gutter. Since there is such a strong bond between the elements of the narrative and the creative reader, it is important to discuss some of the traits we might find in the re-creation of images into imagination and narratives. The gutter depends on closure to render meaning, but when the gutter is also hiding narratives of ideas and themes, closure takes on a much more psychological function.

The process of the gutter that has been described, particularly on the undrawn narratives, is in part based on a system of interpretation found in Lacan's theory of the unconscious. This is relevant because it can say something about the process of the gutter. It is after all a function of the reader and therefore should hold within itself some

common traits that all readers experience in the act of reading and interpreting a graphic narrative. Lacanian theory has indirectly been mentioned already with the discussions of figures 1 and 4, but is more directly discussed below.

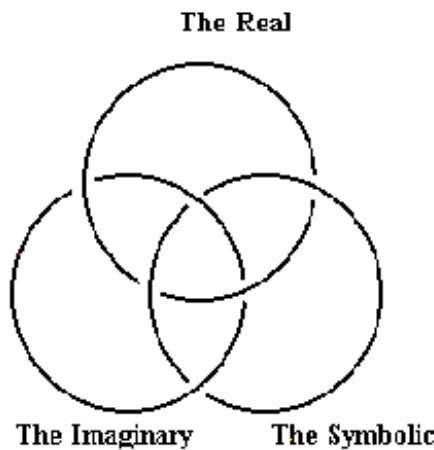


Fig. 7: <http://septemberschilds3.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/lacan-1.gif>

In fig. 7 above, are Lacan's three entities, The Real, The Symbolic, and The Imaginary, RSI. At a later stage in its development it came with a fourth element – that of the overlapping center where all the circles make up a sphere, or area. This area is called the symptom, or in Lacan's term, the *sinthome*⁵. These entries are presented in a *Borromean Knot*.⁶

According to Lacan, the real is an unperceivable world. This is because the real is perceived through the symbolic, which means that the real is outside of the symbolic order. Because of this we cannot completely know the real and there will always be a sense of lack, and this compels, or drives us towards seeking completion (Lacan: 29).

⁵ This is an old French spelling for symptom. Lacan used this to differentiate between the symptoms as a part of the self and the *sinthome* as a structural aspect of symptoms (see Bailly: 104).

⁶ In mathematics, the Borromean rings[a] consist of three topological circles which are linked and form a Brunnian link (*i.e.*, removing any ring results in two unlinked rings). In other words, no two of the three rings are linked with each other as a Hopf link, but nonetheless all three are linked (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borromean_rings).

The imaginary or mirror stage is based on a speculative register. From here is where we form our ideal ego. This is based on the image as an object feeding our imaginary self. The imaginary is also sumptuous with the mirror-stage. The mirror acts as the other self that reflects back on the internal self, but it does so by a misrecognized ideal, created by the ego staring at the image.

The symbolic is where the identity is created, which is dependent on the image, which again is a misrecognized ideal. With this symbolic identity we can communicate with others and find belonging within a social sphere.

These ideas can play on several levels within *Fun Home*. First there is Bechdel's father, who seems to have a sense of lack, which produces this symbolic representation, presented through his study. He makes, and tries to control a myth about himself created through literature – a fiction that strangely recreates his life to fiction. He is constantly living internally and feeding his ego by the misrecognized ideal, which alienates his identity. This production of meaning is strengthened by his suppression concerning his true identity as a homosexual. He tries to communicate through a symbolic register that is fed by the need for identity. According to Bechdel, telling the story retrospectively, he is a disaster waiting to happen.

Secondly, this process can be directed on the process of the reader and interpretation. Every reader goes through this process where The Real, The Imaginary and The Symbolic play on the outcomes of interpretation. Although this functions on a deep level in the reader, the production is often the same, initially producing meanings through missing panels and getting the narrative straight. It is when the process delves further that the aspects of individual interpretation come into mind. Each reader has his or her sense of lack and need for completion. This is fed by the misrecognized ideal, which ever that may be, and together with these categories in fig. 7 gives you a supposedly individual symptom.

The RSI model is one of the more accessible theories from Lacan, and also a practical one. It can be utilized within many aspects to understand things concerning our behaviour and decisions. Within the graphic narrative it can also be used, as already touched upon with the Bechdel panels in fig. 2, and putting it to work can say a lot about

the narrative, and give extra information. What has this to do with the gutter? It has everything to do with it, as I will explain after this example.

If we move to the series of panels included in chapter three, taken from Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?* (Fig. 1-6, page 69-73), and use the RSI model, we can get other aspects from it. In the Imaginary we use our senses, and through the representations of Bechdel's figures and interior, we can get a sense of atmosphere, and feelings and emotions. Bechdel her self is pandering to the Imaginary through her concepts of past and present self. The Symbol is represented by the ideas the narrative evokes. What can be said of it and what ideas can come of it (Bailly: 102). In the realm of the gutter this has a far-reaching aspect to it. We can talk of the ideas of Bechdel, but we can also talk of the ideas within the narrative. There seems to be some sort of symbolic representation here of cyclic continuity through the seasonal changes and the on-going therapy⁷.

Bechdel is in search of answers, which sits in the realm of the Borromean Knot. She imagines that in therapy she will cure some sort of unconscious confusion relating to the past. The Imaginary creates a fantasy of understanding through reading psychology books and through the Symbolic this is transformed into words and image in her work, which piles up to become a misrepresentation of her self. Bechdel is caught up in a representation of symptoms.

The Real is the drive towards a perfect state, where meaning and understanding are achieved, but through Bechdel's cyclic representation in these panels, there seems to be recognition that this is a frustrating process and that it is on going.

There is also an element of recognition in Bechdel, that these *sinthomes* are relationships of dependency and cooperation, symbolised in the cyclic manner mentioned. Bechdel needs the dysfunctional ingredients to make up the literary corpus of her graphic narratives. This is what Bechdel has discovered and shows in this narrative with the symbolic representation of the on-going seasonal changes within the therapy and communication with her past. Lacan argued that some symptoms were "good", because they are such an integral part of the individual person. That means that the author, the characters, and the readers inhabit these symptoms, and it is within all of

⁷ See chapter three for a more in-depth discussion on this.

these “dysfunctions” a common creative ground in narrative experiences and interpretations are produced.

This process is in its entirety happening in the gutter. All meaning is to an extent produced in the gutter. In the conventional literary criticism this is called the gap, but in many way it is the same – it pertains to the elements that are missing and which needs to be inferred by a reader.

The gutter is virtual. It depends on the imaginary and there is an argument to be made about the process of recreating missing pieces in the narrative. Lacan lends us a model of further understanding and can explain some of the structures behind the gutter’s effect. In the model of RSI there are elements that affect the reader, but also shed light on the process of the narrative through the characters, and in understanding some of their hidden aspects. Special traits in characters can be described as symptoms, and these are structures, which can feed our knowledge of the story. It also helps to identify with the “realness” of the story – that they are more human and like us. If we view the RSI as a model that incorporates the aspects of the author, the narrative, and how the reader works the gutter, then that might explain why there is such an engagement in the graphic narrative.

The Gutter as an Internal Gutter

Where do we fall when we fall into the gutter?⁸ An interesting question, but perhaps not a correct one if we view it in context of McCloud’s trapeze artist analogy. Even so, he talks of the gutter as a facilitator in putting the story together and making sense of the panel transitions, but the greater argument here is that the gutter also pertains to something more constant in its production of meaning and knowledge.

The process of reading a graphic narrative depends on the gutter. In fig. 8⁹ we can see a schematic representation of this process. It is important to note that *narrative(s)*

⁸ Based on the title *Where do We Fall when We Fall in Love?* by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl. See bibliography for information.

⁹ Loosely based on Slavoj Žižek’s figure found in *Enjoy Your Symptom* p. 81.

could also be substituted with *panel(s)* and the abbreviation in point C, *FB*, is *Focus Point*. Point F, which is named *nostalgia*, can also be substituted with *lack* and *desire*.

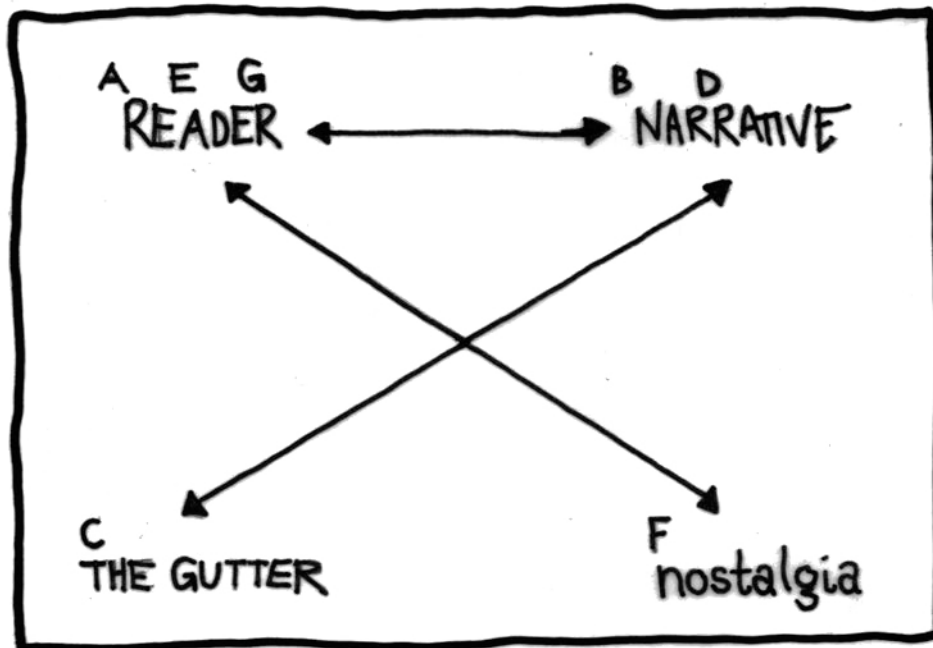


Fig. 8: Tornos

The process starts with A and follows in the way of B, C, D, E, F and G. when this process is fulfilled the gutter and the process of interpretation takes on a new character, and it is within this sphere I argue that the gutter is something more than just a space between panels combining it. It also has a role in the reader, but also a role of unifying a grander narrative that lies, most often, outside the apparent narrative.

If we, in the schematic presentation, wander from A to B, to C and D, the narrative has been fed by two distinct entities – the reader and the gutter. The reader is then exposed to how the gutter informs the narrative through E. The reader infers the imagination through repetition and experience, and produce F, and F returns as G, and the reader has engaged a system of production that can produce meaning to the narrative, but can also give a deeper meaning if the process is revisited on the same initial plane. So, by redistributing this process through the same panels we can produce a deeper meaning – something that can inform the narrative across these initial panels and into a broader theme of the narrative.

This broader theme can be seen in the narrative in Crumb's panels and in how they, through the gutter, move through the surface and into a new point of focus. It is the gutter that leads us there, but not without the active participation of all the other factors mentioned. And the theme is that of relentless development at the expense of nature. This view is induced by the idea of F, nostalgia, where we can almost feel sadness for the loss of this "virgin country". This feeling of lack is a key in the engagement and understanding of this narrative, and it is the gutter that binds the process together.

"The gutter can be qualified as "polysyntactic," (...) "pictorial emptiness" (that which separates the figures in the interior of an image, in the space of the picture" (Groensteen: 114).

This emptiness as described in the individual analyses of Anoosh, are functions of this pictorial emptiness that communicate with the gutter to produce narrative.

"The clear and immediate designation of the roles of the represented figures does not raise the space that mutually isolates them from each other but the codes that are individually charged, codes of dress, gestural codes especially (...) If the emptiness is necessary to constitute a *storia* between painted figures (...) it is because it is foremost a mark of intelligibility, the clue to a co-presence" (Groensteen: 114, quote within quote?).

This implies an internal gutter that works on the single image in portraying its gestures, meaning in Anoosh's case, the aspect of presentation as an Icon painting. All of these aspects discussed in this image do render the gutter as polysyntactic. The gutter has a host of functions in this image, ranging beyond the standard function of just putting the missing panels together in a secession of panels, to give drive to the unfolding narrative.

Pictorial emptiness is a key here, and is where the initial deciphering of the image takes place. This is further linked with the "standard" gutter and the codes of these systems, to reveal a narrative that goes beyond the page.

"The intericonic gutter also marks the semantic solidarity of contagious panels above all, both working through the codes of narrative and sequential drawings. Between the polysemic images, the polysyntactic gutter is the site of a reciprocal determination, and it is in this dialectic interaction that

meaning is constructed, not without the active participation of the reader”
(Groensteen: 14).

Within the intericonic gutter, the polysemic images and the polysyntactic gutter, there is a sequence of reader participation going on. Within the single image, there is an intericonic gutter projecting, voluntary or involuntary, codes of appearance, which produces closure. This image has a co-presence of other images, which constitutes a semantic solidarity, creating the polysemic images that together with the polysyntactic gutter produces meaning. In this wandering from the internal intericonic gutter, to the outer polysyntactic gutter, we bring with us the initial codes we deciphered in the single image. When there is a unity of the polysemic images including the single image, there can be more production of meaning that again can start the same process. This can become an expanding and retraction process, where we read the image, infer meaning, return to it and induce further meaning.

Some of these aspects discussed can also be used on the image of Bechdel (fig:). If we put this image under the loop of these terms we begin to see the scope of its inbuilt complexity.

The gutter that has been recognized as the space where there are missing panels is not a place reproducing mental images, but “of a semantic articulation” (Groensteen: 114). It should be a logical conversation that produces images in panels, which produce coherency.

The gutter is where the reader mobilizes emotions and feeling. The gutter gives the narrative more strength. If the panels and images have been laid out in a certain way (fig. 5) and filled with interesting information (fig. 2) the meaning that is produced can be substantial. The gutter starts by making suggestions of what is missing between the panels, but moves on to suggest something more or greater than the initial outset. A *Short History of America* gave an example of this wandering from simplicity to complex ideas of past, present, and future – “what next?”

Through Lacan the RSI model can say something about the way the gutter works. The reader plays on the content with his own experience and RSI, and this mixes with the narrative and produces meaning. Bechdel’s father lived within his own Borrowmean Knot surrounded by misrepresentations of himself. He was a Gatsby in disguise, but on a

high-school teacher salary. All of this information about Bechdel's father is put together in the gutter, and because the gutter doesn't show anything it becomes a symbolic and imaginary process that is fed by the mirrored other – by the person you think you are and need to feed. We are all doing this, and therefore we are on common ground, and the graphic narrative does this very effectively through its images, and its non-visual representation – the gutter.

Chapter 3: The Narrative Gutter

Narrative is a word often used in many different ways, but usually in relation to literary texts and film. What is a narrative discourse in relation to a graphic narrative? In Genette the definition of narrative is centred around three past definitions and the alterations he makes or adds to them.¹ Genette's additions to the theory of narrative discourse is a systemization and is concerned with "the relationship between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating" (Genette: 29).

In this chapter I will argue that the graphic narrative is closely linked to the gutter. The narrative discourse is particularly linked to aspects of time, because of the time spent in the gutter to commit closure and other forms of links, as discussed with the Anoosh panel in chapter one and the Bechdel panels in chapter two. Also the gutter creates an open plane of panel reading. This means that the panels are available at any time, and the reader can move back and forth effortlessly. Time is also linked to ideas of making pauses, and these can be created within the narrative. These are important in emphasizing narrative content, and I will show this through the gutter. Within the aspects of time and pause, and in recreating the narrative in the gutter there is a strong element of narrative cycles. I will exemplify this by looking at two panels by Jason and comparing its narrative with Marcel Proust, to show the effective narrative cycle that is deployed in these panels by the effect of the gutter.

Genette's extensive theory of narrative gives a good starting point and I have chosen to focus on time and how this is further linked to duration, and here my main focus will be on the pause. The pause in this context is taken from Genette, and will be explained and discussed in relation to the graphic narrative and the importance of the gutter – how the gutter has a role to play in aspects of the pause. My initiative is to show that the gutter in relation to the graphic narrative is an important relation and that there is an extensive argument to be made for the gutter within this framework. The gutter works between the different narratives binding them together and this is what makes the graphic narrative different. The gutter is the weave of the narrative because it gives room for thought and reflection – a pause.

¹ See Genette's *Narrative Discourse An Essay in Method*: 25n for these definitions.

To build upon my arguments I have chosen a narrative sequence taken from Bechdel's *Are You My Mother*, but will also include some examples by other authors. Bechdel's narrative shows several narratives that should help to highlight the gutter and its influential parts in weaving together the narrative.

In regards to the gutter and narrative cycles, I will look at the ideas of being everywhere in the graphic narrative, but in this instance with an extended idea of how this works, and how this leads us into a discussion around narrative cycles and the gutter.

The Narrative Discourse of the Gutter

If the discourse of the gutter is not oral, written and definitely not graphic – after all there isn't anything there, then what kind of discourse is it? To try and understand this I will look at different aspects of narrative discourse within the conventional literary criticism, by looking at aspects of time or frequency. Other important features in this context would be duration, and text. All of these have a role to play in their engagement with the gutter and the narrative. There are several ways in which time is linked or relates to the narrative. There is the time of the narrative discourse and the relation to the time of the story. This is called the temporal structure of the narrative and will be interesting in regards to the Bechdel panels included here in chapter three.

The graphic image has a lot in common with the photographic image. In many respects it is a representation of "reality" and is easy to engage with. As "a photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened, the picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is what's like in the picture" (Sontag: 5). Where the image in the graphic narrative might lack the incontrovertible proof that something is real or happened, it gains momentum in the gutter. The gutter facilitates the senses and conjures presumption that something is real because of the engagement involved with the gutter. Sontag further states, "A painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrow selective interpretation. A photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency" (Sontag: 6). The idea of transparency would also hold up as an argument in the world of the graphic narrative.

This is because its transparency lies in the gutter and the recreation of the “realness” of the story – through missing panels and the ever-present possibility to “wander” between panels and pages.

Unlike the photograph and the painting “comics use multiple images in succession to create narrative” (Versaci: 14). The transition between panels has the ability to manipulate time and space. As movies are watched, comics are read – much like photographs and paintings. So, if the movie and the photograph, and the painting have their traits, the image of the graphic narrative share something with all of them, but what it has that the others don’t, is the still images, or time-frames, laid in front of us, and these can be examined freely – moving back and forth.

“Part of comics’ graphic language is the alteration of panel size and shape to influence, for various purpose, the pace of reading. But because these panels form page-length and sometimes multiple-page-length layouts, reading a comic is not always linear (...) comics creators can play with the design of an entire page by manipulating the visuals within panels and the panels themselves within the page to create additional layers of meaning. Thus, a comic, in addition to unfolding temporally, also exists “all at once,” and this existence is a feature unique to this medium” (Versaci: 15).

In Alison Bechdel’s *Are You My Mother*, there is an interesting sequence of panels that show Alison’s year in therapy (fig. 1-5). This sequence, covering 4 2/3 pages, sums into account a full year of life, maturity and cognitive insight through conversations with a therapist. Most strikingly present here is the aspect of time, symbolized by the passing of seasons visible through the window between the two characters. This is again more striking in the two pages one can view next to each other. There is a timeframe here that you intuitively understand by the changing of the seasons visible through the window. This passage is a discourse in itself. It represents what Genette calls pure narrative or diegesis². The purity of the narrative in Bechdel is that which is happening through the window. There is something strikingly beautiful and poetic about this visual narrative of time shown through the window.

This type of narrative is a strong feature of the graphic narrative and seems to bear more in common with the film than the novel. A novel has to describe through

² See Genette’s *Narrative Discourse An Essay in Method*: 27n.

linguistics the year passing and therefore invoke much more strain upon the reader to render that, which is being described. In this graphic narrative, it is less strenuous and more direct. Everyone can engage in this visual rendering of something, that after all, happens around us all of the time – the changing of seasons. Bechdel's compression of these panels to render the time of a year seems to have more in common with the economy of poetry and the metaphor. The poet uses the metaphor to evoke feeling and engagement. The difference here though, is that the narrative of Bechdel is much more simple to comprehend, but not the least as complex in its beauty and directness. This aspect of showing and not telling is what makes the narrative so pure. The meaning of purity and diegesis is linked to the special element that is created in the gutter to render meanings to these visual representations. It is the sphere, or fourth dimension that is mentioned in figure ? in chapter two.

There seems to be an inclination of several narratives within these panels. These narratives are separate, but linked by the central story of Bechdel's therapy. These other narratives are digressional and can be divided into three: [1] Narrative of therapy: between Bechdel and her therapist. [2] Seasonal narrative: the changing of seasons shown through the window. [3] The written and [4] the self-reflections of Bechdel, which appears as we are approaching the end of this narrative, and reflects more knowledge and insight, but also frustration.

These narratives can be described as frames of narrative and the way this has been done is to make up individual parts that are again put together to produce a coherent narrative. An interesting aspect within Bechdel, and a revealing one at that, is that the consecutive parts also seem to function on their own –reading the text-frames on their own, and also the narrative of the window. The other ones, the dialogue and the quote she uses, functions better in collaboration. These could be called embedded narratives, and I would also include the seasonal narrative through the window, or stories within a story (Abbott: 232). Another interesting aspect of framing is the template on which the narrative is made. This has definitely something to say about time. The panels are horizontal and stretch across the page, and this creates a time-drag that extends time as you read instead of hopping from panel to panel. The gaze wanders from left to right, taking in the information both written and visually. Bechdel builds upon this by introducing more text as we read. The effect is that the experience of therapy also

creates more complexity in reflections, and not just a feeling of lightness. The reader is entwined in this web of complexity as the panels become more dense and complex with reflections and ideas.

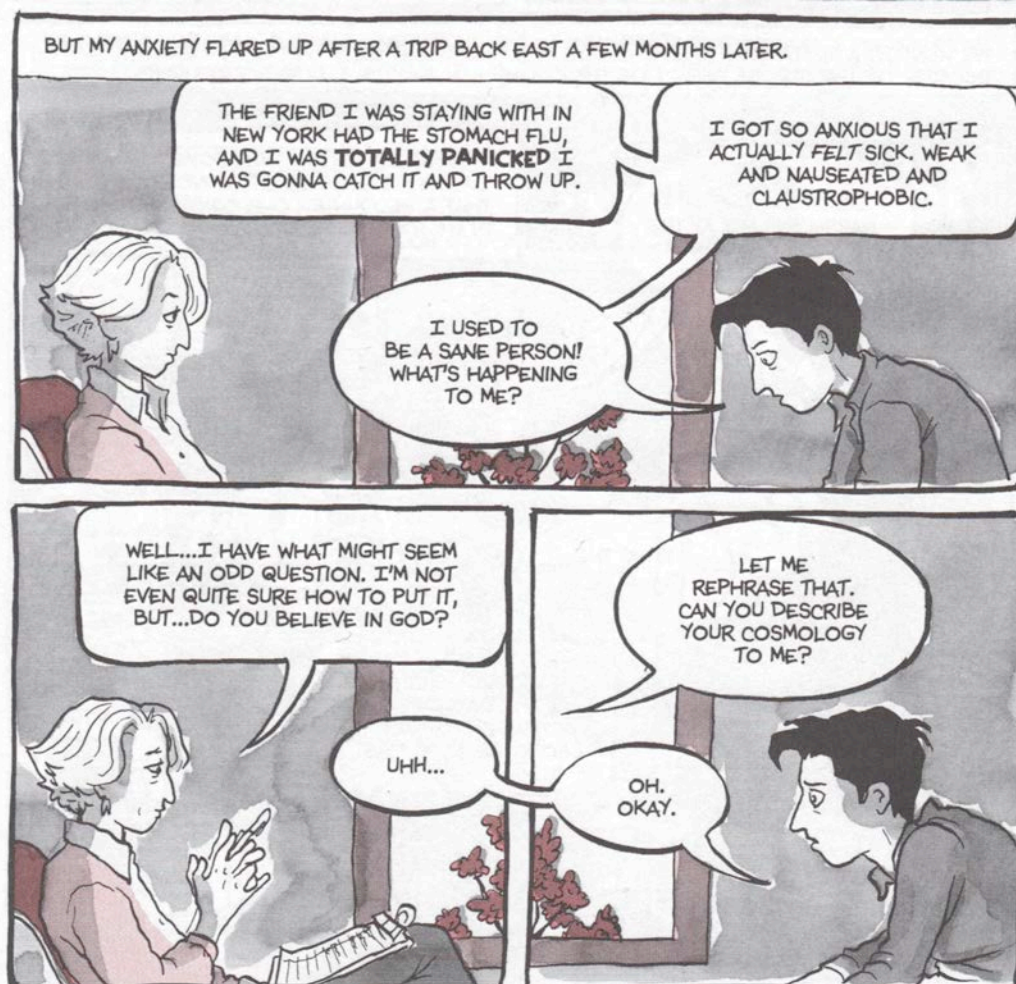


Fig. 1: Bechdel, *Are You My Mother*, 102.

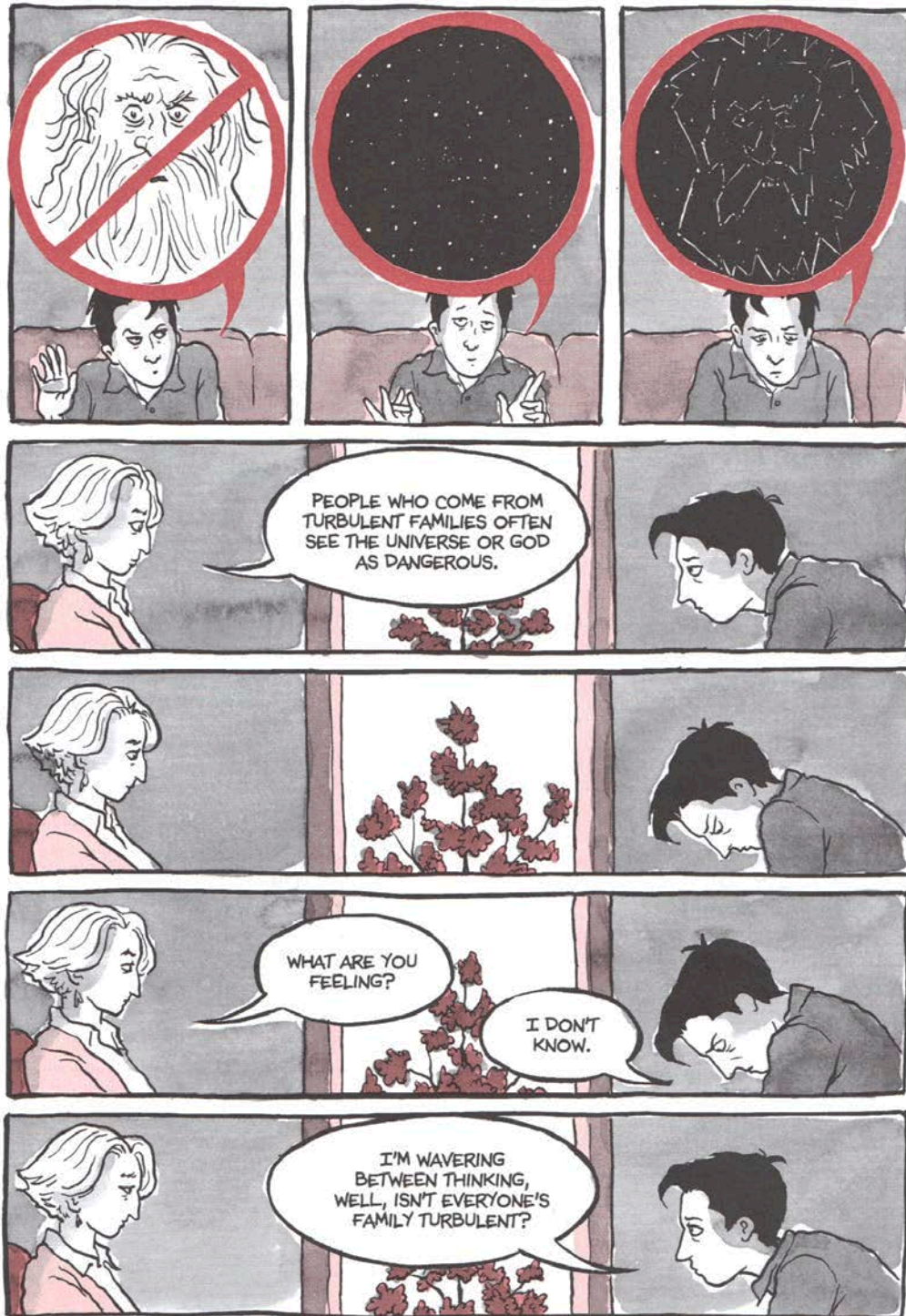


Fig. 2: Ibid, 103.

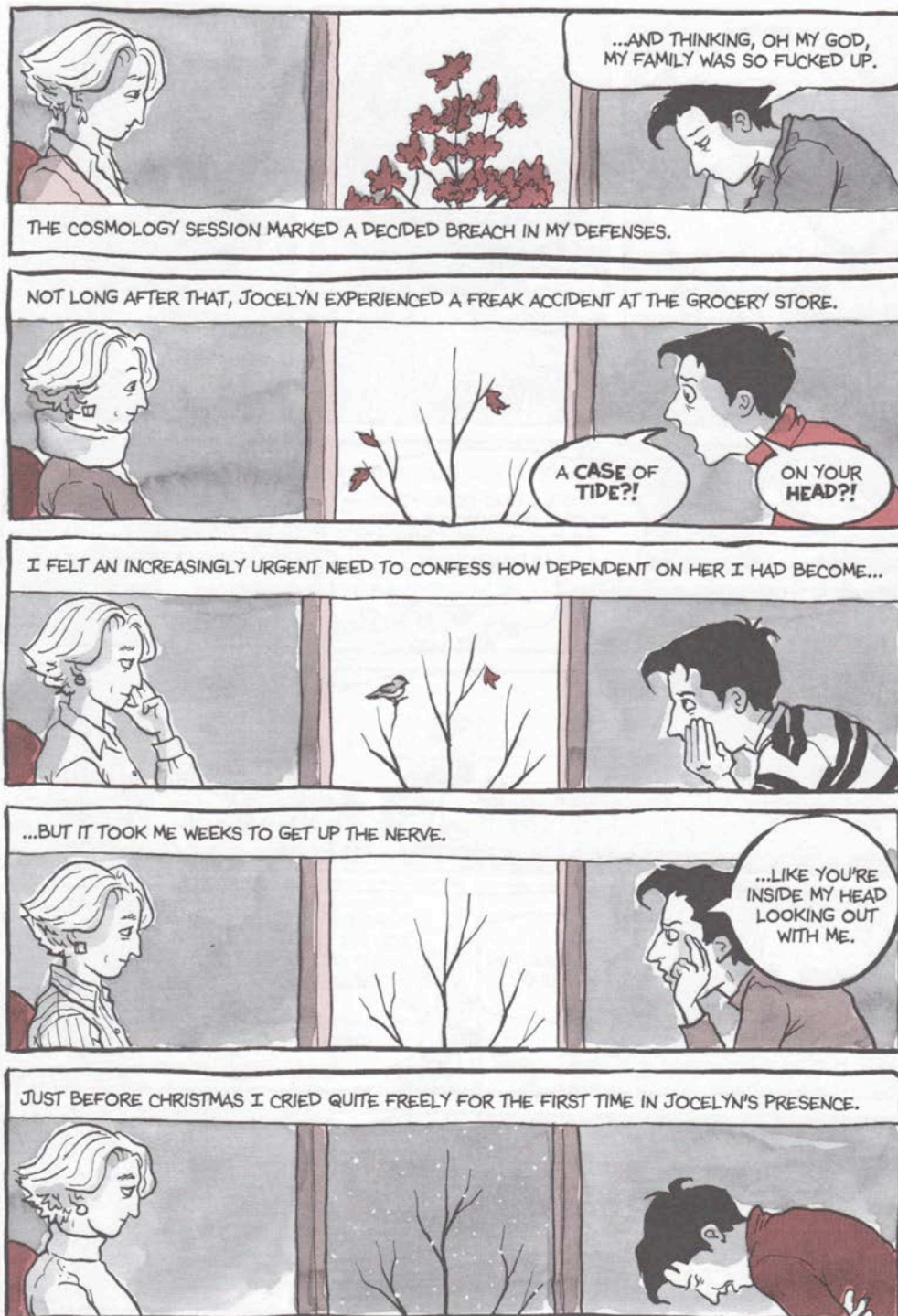


Fig. 3: Ibid, 104.

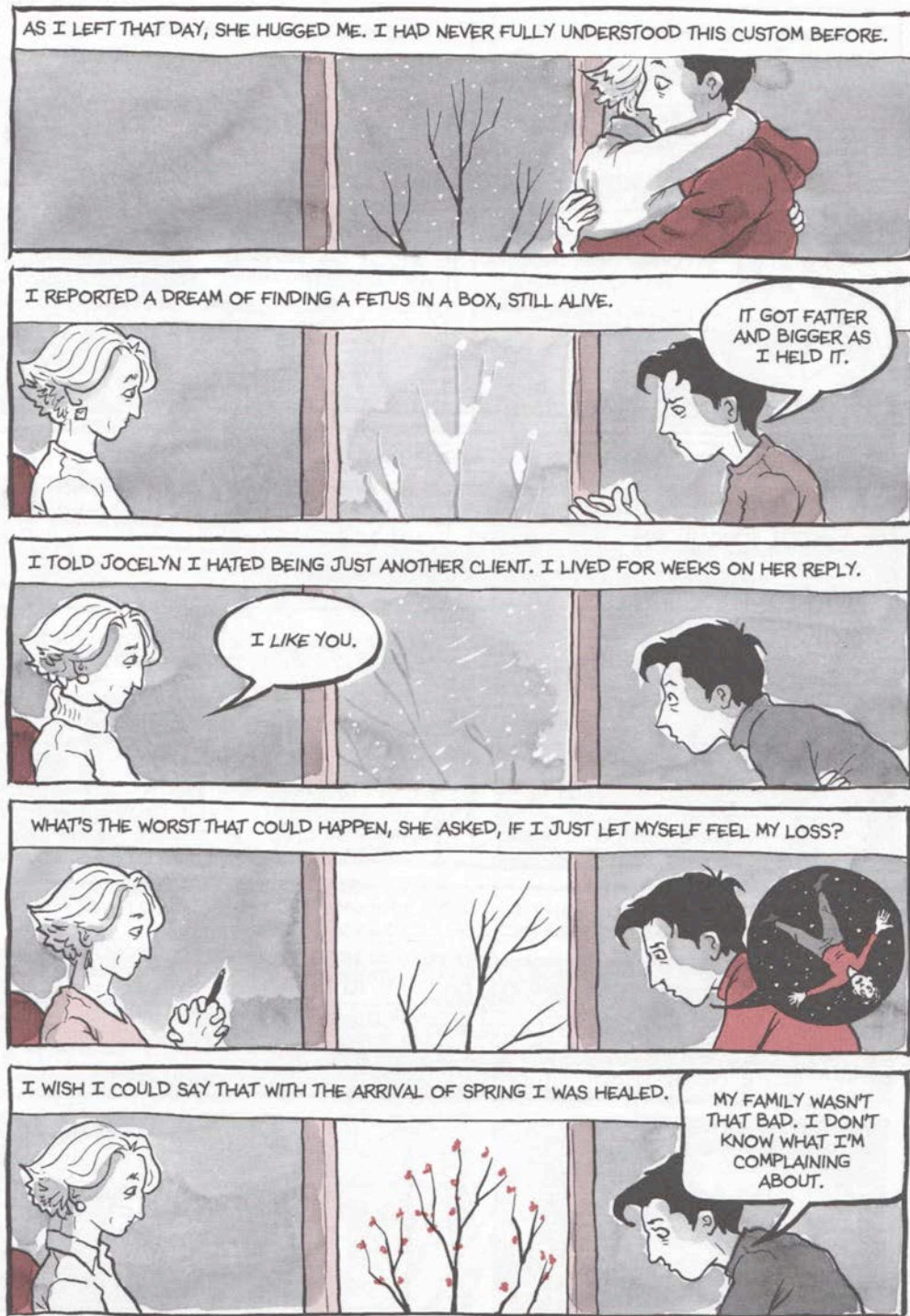


Fig. 4: ibid, 105.

BUT BEHIND EACH DISMANTLED FORTIFICATION LAY ANOTHER PERFECTLY INTACT ONE.
working with the patient on the basis of ego-defence mechanisms.
The patient's False Self can collaborate indefinitely with the analyst in the analysis of defences, being so to speak on the analyst's side in the game. This unrewarding work is only cut



THE FALSE SELF, WINNICOTT SAYS, IS ALSO A PRODIGIOUS CONTORTIONIST.
living through imitation, and it may even be possible for the child to act a special role, that of the True Self as it would be if it had had existence.



AND WOE BETIDE THE PERSON WITH THE "DOUBLE ABNORMALITY" OF A FALSE SELF AND "A FINE INTELLECT" THAT THEY FIND THEY CAN USE TO ESCAPE THEIR PAIN.
...to the most clinical picture results which is peculiar in that it very easily deceives. The world may observe academic success of a high degree, and may find it hard to believe in the very real distress of the individual concerned, who feels 'phoney' the more he or she is successful. When such individuals destroy



Fig. 5: Ibid, 106.

“In the limbo of the gutter human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (McCloud: 66). Between the panels, in the blank space, experience tells you what, or what you think, is there. The visual sequence creates a more powerful process and result, because of its fracture of time and space. The rhythm of the panels is more jagged and staccato, and because of this our senses are more engaged. Through this process the digressional narratives deploy and engage in a guttural play of narratives combined – like the *Borromean Knot* from Lacan, that are separate, but functioning together as they intersect. Within this unification of the main narrative and the digressional narratives, as mentioned in Bechdel, a greater meaning is produced, and influences the power of the story. With the discovery of these digressional narratives, comes the task of reconstructing them into a coherency.

Weaving the Narrative/Reconstructing the Narrative.

The act of creating comics is artistic, but the rest is an aesthetic endeavour. To make comics is first and foremost work for an artist. We have examples of artists working for many years to produce a novel size book. In Craig Thomson’s book *Blankets* there are just over 500 pages and an average of 4,5 images per page, and that equals 2250 individual panels. There are probably a vast amount of sketches and rejected drawings too, leaving the total much higher. Thomson has to place all of these images in a logical successive order, so that the story has a certain narrative drive. It has to be a balance of food for thought, meaning, not too difficult, but not too easy either. It has to challenge the reader in some way, but the narrative has to present itself with the possibility of imaginative construct – the ability to reconstruct the missing frames in the story – – to reconstruct the all-familiar realism of experience. The reader sees the story based on experiences of both the physical world and the world of the psychological or emotional. This recreation of the narrative with all its aspects of missing panels, themes, ideas, and feelings is the aesthetics of the graphic narrative.

For the reader to experience an interaction of imagination and creativity there are several factors that need to be laid out. Will Eisner lists these factors as imagery, timing, expressive anatomy, and writing. All of these elements have to be laid out in a

balanced way to keep the reader engaged in the story. In connection with imagery Eisner writes:

“An interaction has to develop because the artist is evoking images stored in the mind of both parties. The success or failure of this method of communication depends upon the ease with which the reader recognizes the meaning and emotional impact of the image” (Eisner: 8).

To render a familiarity with the image and to put several of them together in a meaningful narrative is a process that happens in the gutter. So, the technique and the style of the presentation become very important. There would also be the question of talent and skills of the artist – ability to draw, make a story and panel layout. In Bechdel’s panels the construction of narrative time through the gutter takes these aspects into account. Familiarity is an important factor here. This is created by the links made by the reoccurring panel of Bechdel and her therapist. There is never confusion in what is taking place. Another aspect is the positioning of the figures. They are opposite each other and create a mutual gaze wandering effortlessly between the two. The last piece is again the window between the two, signalling the time-span of the therapy. The gutter separates all of these factors. The gutter’s collaborative abilities, with the contents of the narratives and the reader, is to construct a narrative time within such a short span of pages, and to not lose the content. This is largely because of the engagement of the reader’s participation in filling the gaps. The gutter’s special place within narrative time, here, is of emotion. There is an element of feeling involved in unfolding the story. We identify with several elements within these panels that are shown and not told, and these play upon our relations with them: The seasons – beauty of nature, rain, wind, snow, and on and on, and the way Bechdel is sitting while in therapy – never relaxed, always tense, and her hands holding around her stomach as to relieve an ache. These factors play on our consciousness whether we notice it or not and recreates a feeling of content and time, rather than the actual span of the few pages where the narrative unfolds.

Graphic narrative may seem primitive, but on the more sophisticated side of things, it is dependent on the skill of the reader. To be able to relate to the inner feelings of the characters you need a certain common experience and a life of cognizance. “Sequential art as practised in comics presents a technical hurdle that can only be

negotiated with some acquired skill. The number of images allowed is limited” (Eisner: 20). This leaves the reader in the gutter to reconstruct, with his skills, the complete narrative. By the effort of the reader the story rests in the ability of the use of the gutter. Here the graphic narrative has an advantage: “...it enables comics’ singular ability to allow a reader to consider many images at the same time, or from different directions...” (Ibid: 20).

To help the reader in the process of reconstructing the narrative weave, the gutter facilitates by giving the reader the possibility to wander between images. An example of this could be a chronological reading of a comic page of panels, where the reader constructs in the gutter the hidden panels and meanings. If there is by any means a lack of understanding or the reader misses a part, or the whole thing seems illogical, the possibility to retract one’s steps is readily available by the opportunity of multiple panel viewing – to move back and forth at your own inclination. Now read the narrative in figure 6.

Now that you have read the example of the banana, you have in fact been a part of the experiment. There are a host of things going on within this narrative, and let us focus on the following: The narrative distribution of panels, the story itself, the narrative of the two images – first and last, and how this is facilitated by the gutter and closure.

The distributions of the panels are done in a simple way, but the most striking feature is that some of the panels have transitioned into just text-panels. This is broken again by the emergence of the image in the last panel. In addition to this, there are speech simulations to give some of the panels features of the balloon, but also to give a sense of direction for the reader.

This distribution creates a straightforward narrative of panels and text. The story itself needs to be divided into that of the text and that of the images. The images are a key in regards to the gutter and the narrative. These images have been designed to engage the gutter. In the first image the narrator wants to discuss an example, but says he’ll make a cup of coffee while he does so. In the last image the narrator is “back” at his seat with a hot cup of coffee. So, in the gutter of the imagination and interpretation the reader makes that cup of coffee in their unconscious.

THE GUTTER IS AN INTERESTING CONCEPT. IT SEEMS TO FUNCTION ON SO MANY LEVELS, BUT NEVER AS A SINGLE ENTITY. ALWAYS DEPENDENT ON EVERY OTHER ASPECT WITHIN THE GRAPHIC NARRATIVE. THIS TEXT IS IN THE GUTTER. HOW DOES THE GUTTER WORK? HERES AN EXAMPLE...



IF YOU PRESENT AN IMAGE OF A PLATE OF FRUIT ON A TABLE WITH TWO BANANAS AND AN ORANGE, AND THEN PRESENT A FOLLOWING IMAGE OF THE SAME, BUT WITH ONE BANANA MISSING, YOU WILL SURELY THINK THAT SOMEONE HAS EATEN IT. WE COULD ALSO DO THE SAME BY PRESENTING TWO IMAGES AGAIN, BUT OF A SINGLE BANANA, AND IN THE SECOND IMAGE THE BANANA HAS BEEN EATEN. ONLY THE PEEL OF IT IS LEFT. NOW YOU HAVE PROBABLY IMAGINED THE SAME - SOMEONE HAS EATEN IT. DID YOU IMAGINE THAT IN THE SECOND EXAMPLE THAT THE BANANA WAS LYING ON A TABLE, AND THAT THE PEEL OF IT WOULD BE IN THE SAME PLACE AFTERWARDS? I KNOW I DID. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF THE POWER IN THE GUTTER-



... TO MAKE YOU IMAGINE THAT WHICH IS MISSING!

ALTHOUGH BY WAY OF THESE EXAMPLES...

... YOU ARE IN FACT DOING IT BY READING, BUT NEVER FEAR, THE GUTTER HAS SOMETHING THAT THE WRITTEN NARRATIVE DOESN'T!



... AND THAT WILL BE REVEALED AFTER YOU HAVE READ THIS NARRATIVE!

CONSIDER THIS EXAMPLE AT AN END, AND WHILE I FINISH MY COFFEE, YOU CAN RETURN TO THE TEXT YOU WERE CURRENTLY READING. THANKS FOR LISTENING, AND I DONT BLAME YOU IF YOU HAVE A BANANA



Fig. 6: Tornos.

The narrative of this example can be divided into two. The first is the narrative of the example and the second is the narrative of making a cup of coffee. In both of these the gutter is triggered by the imagination. In the first one, images of perhaps a kitchen, a table with fruit etc. is imagined, and in the second, which is the main one, is the link between the first and the last image. From the suggestion of making a cup of coffee to the appearing of a cup of coffee there must have been happening something while the narrative of the example unfolded. To facilitate this there is also an interruptive image of a kitchen interior and this is probably where the coffee was made. The fascinating feature here is that we imagine the coffee being made, but never in the same way. Was it made on a machine? Was it instant coffee? We can also imagine the return to wherever this narrative is being made and what desk it sits on, because of the coffee-cup stain just before the last image.

The narrative of the gutter is individual in its distribution of internal images and information. The way the images have been laid out in figure 6 can say something about how the narrative has been put together, and how this affects the result. To reconstruct this narrative into meaning we don't need to reflect upon the gutter, but it adds a more interesting argument and understanding of how the narrative works there. The coffee making, which is hidden from the actual narrative – in the gutter, gives the overall narrating a sense of time – that behind the images and the text there is some substance – an imaginary room where there is a feeling of “actual” movement.

Timing is a crucial element in comics. It is perceived through the memory of experience. Time is an illusory concept that is strictly defined. We have days and nights defined by sleep, work, leisure, lunch etc. The time-span of the lecture is defined by time – forty-five minutes. That again is based on experience, and later research defining the span of time the brain is working at top notch. In between lectures you are given a break and here the brain resets itself while processing the received information. This is also what happens in the graphic narrative, where the panels represent information given and the gutter is the processing area. Here we add visual information and our apprehension of time. This is also represented in Bechdel's panel. The seasonal narrative gives these panels a time-span, which far out-reaches the few deployed panels. The rhythm of the panels showing slight changes to the tree does give the panel-transition

slowness. This is also heightened by the horizontal panels stretched the entire width of the page.

As the successions of panels are presented it is the gutter that holds it together. We must not forget that while the individual frames are detached, they are bound together by the gutter, which is a coherent space endlessly running through the graphic narrative.

In contrast to the written narrative the graphic narrative can employ multiple sequences at the same time. If we talk of narrative time and look at the concept of duration in Genette we can see that time plays many of the same parts, but in a different way. Time in narrative is, as Genette mentions, anisochronous. This means that the duration in the narrative doesn't necessarily arrive in the same order as they were transmitted. This in turn can alter the reception of the narrative duration, but through efforts of restorations through engagement and participation the narrative will have, or could have, an added latency to it. This also helps to strengthen the narrative because latency has an element of, or anticipation of, further development. The deployment of time and duration in Bechdel's panels are anisochronous. If we think of duration as the seasons changing, and time, the reading of the story, we will have arrived at two different places. The reading of these panels doesn't take a year to read. The aspects of time and duration are brought together by way of the tree, changing its appearance as the narratives unfold. This natural process is set in the middle to generate a feeling of that year based on our experience and knowledge. Without the tree it would not have been effective.

In addition to the factor of duration in time we can talk of speed:

“By”speed” we mean the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension (so many meters per second, so many seconds per meter): the speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of text, measured in lines and in pages)” (Genette: 88).

An interesting aspect here is that literature seems to be measured in relation to duration, as mentioned here in the quote by Genette, but the graphic narrative also has an element of a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension. This is because it is an imagistic media

and conveys more strongly the “real” world within the space of the frame and the imagination and experience of that space – so many meters and so many seconds.

If we look at Genette’s idea of narrative speed, which is linked to duration and length, we can look at the sequence from Bechdel again. The therapy session looks like a single session, but is in fact divided into many. The duration is defined through the window. Length, as mentioned, is measured in pages, but also in lines and there is in fact quite a lot of text running through this section, and thus it can be divided into two sections – the text of the narrator and the dialogue. These two seem to run on two separate timelines – the dialogue, or what Genette refers to as scene, “realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story” (Genette: 94). The scene can be distributed with variable tempo, but this distribution will be equal, as the dialogue will follow the narrative and the story.

If we look at time from the viewpoint of Scott McCloud he talks of the frame being a tool or “a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided” (McCloud: 99). It is within the frame and subsequently within several frames that time is being defined. This brings about the strange relation of depicted time in the comics and time perceived by the reader. In comics we move spatially through the narrative with a vague notion of time. As we are moving through space we are also moving through time, and often with only a dubious notion of time.

In comics though, where time and space merge so easily, it is the border that guides us, and sometimes we have frames with no border. These can again take on a character of timelessness because of their lack of clues to the duration. This creates a lingering effect, and these frames can abide in the panels, which follow it (McCloud: 102).

The weaving of the narrative is an artistic endeavour and the reconstructing is an aesthetic one. How these two interact is the way the narrative has been laid out. The importance of imagery, timing, expressive anatomy, and writing is very important, and how well this has been done is reflected by the reader’s engagement in the story. All of these important factors within the narrative are brought into the gutter to become a coherent body of meaning and knowledge. Although all of them are important, the most influential of them, at least on the gutter, is time, and therefore it is important to look at some more aspects of this within the graphic narrative and how it influences the gutter.

An Aspect of Duration; The Pause

When discussing aspects of duration the idea of pause is an important feature in regards to the gutter. This is because the gutter needs the pause to breath and to give the narrative extra meanings and links. This can be achieved in several ways, and I will look at the pause in relation to details and descriptions in the image, the pause in emulating sound and movement, the pause in structures of panels, lingering pauses and pauses by repetition. The pause is in all of these instances involved with the gutter.

Pause encapsulates the idea of descriptions. The story is in a way slowed down or put on hold. The graphic novel can also do this, but in a different way and often without slowing down. The graphic novel doesn't need to slow down because it has no real need for long written descriptions. It can just show it. It is up to the reader to slow down. A great example of this we can find in Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (fig: 7). Here, in a story that evolves around the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, we see Lord Balfour making a huge decision that would affect thousands of people, and this he does over a cup of tea. The amount of detail given to this image warrants the definition of a pause. When we do take the time to study this image the irony of its message becomes apparent. Here we have a man with a title, sitting in his study in England with a cup of tea, making a decision on something he seems to know very little about. A further pause can be described as we wander the adjoining panels and see how out of place this Balfour image is – him in his Victorian world, and the Palestinian people ravaged by conflict and living in refugee camps. This image is, in all its "misplacement", a constant reminder through out the book of this contrast. It's easy to wander back to the image, as the story gets more and more frustrating and desperate for the Palestinians. Therefore by way of the gutter we can say that also the gutter plays a role in the pause. This constant return or reminder of the hopeless situation for the Palestinians is carried through the book as a constant footnote to our interpretations and understandings of the conflict. This image creates a pause in its contrast and otherness. It is noticeable and comic in its descriptions. The position of Lord Balfour, how he sits and holds his cup, might be the way he takes his tea, but it's out of place, and in this one striking image Sacco has summed up hopelessness and ignorance. This interpretation only works

within the constraints of the narrative that unfolds, and when returning to the image. If returning again and again as the conflict gets more and more frustrating the image also strengthens its position in the narrative. It's as if this is where it all began. The gutter is what gives us this access and helps to strengthen this image, as all the ideas of the narrative culminate in the gutter and mixes with it.

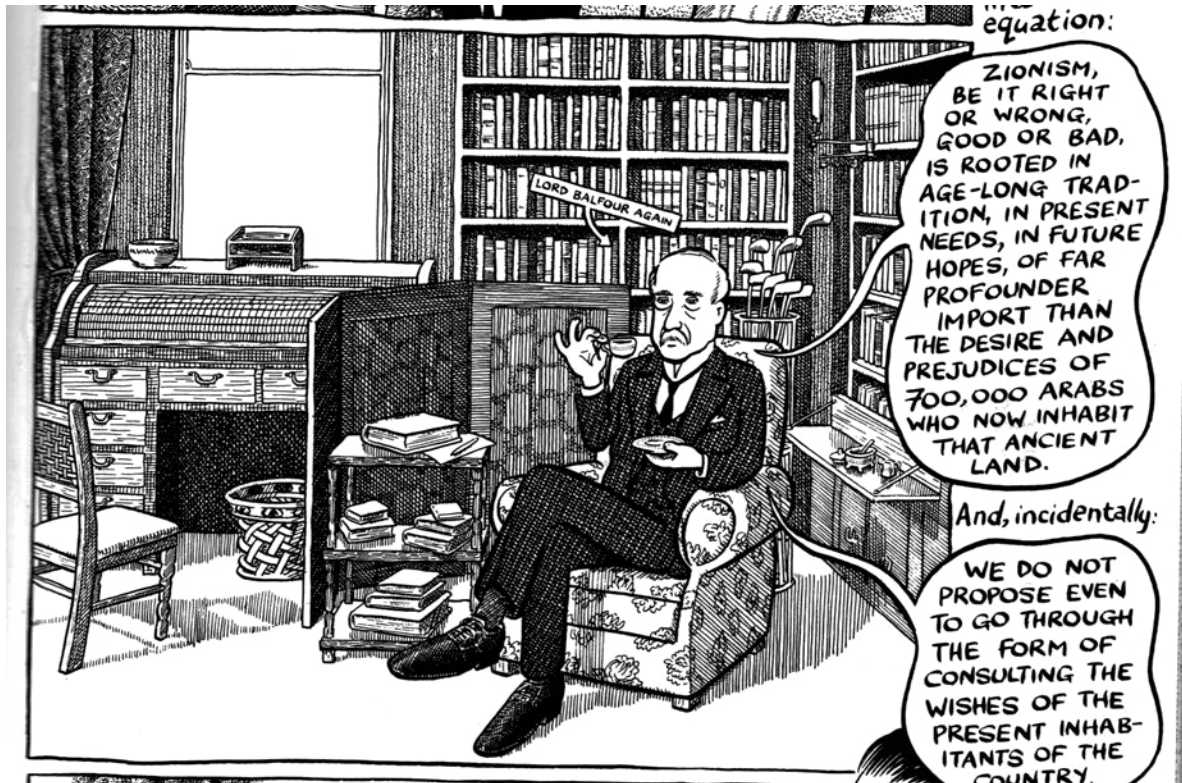


Fig. 7: Sacco, *Palestine*, 13.

We can also find a pause, but a very different one, in *Athos in America* by Jason (fig: 8). In this sequence of three panels the apparent actuation comes in the guise of the layout of time distribution. The first and the last panel are dichotomized by the insertion of a third panel. This panel affects the whole time narrative of the story because it makes a pause. We participate in this pause, to hear if the sound is still there, and then we move on. Another interesting factor with this panel is the time spent in with it. Even though there is no text, it lasts longer than the others. This has to do with experience. We intuitively know this pause, and recreate it in our heads. Also the panel infers the reader's involvement by creating the illusion of movement outside the frame – you



Fig. 8: Jason, *Athos in America*, 13.

probably see someone moving outside the apartment – just walking by. Further the illusion of sound enters the equation. The sound coming from outside the panels, in the gutter, which is where you think it is – is the sound of something, which again isn't defined. All of these aspects are created by the pause and brought into "existence" in the gutter.

McCloud also suggests that this pause can be lengthen by making the pause-frame wider, so that it physically takes the eyes longer to move across the image. The idea here being that the shape of the panel can

influence our perception of time. The "long panel has the same basic "meaning" as its shorter versions, still it has the feeling of greater length" (McCloud: 101). This is applicable to the Beedel panels by their wide shape, strengthened again by the opposite positioning of the figures, creating a back and forth effect, elongating, in a more guttural sense, the perception of time. In the images there is a sense of time by the physical appearance of the panels, but there is also a psychological emergence of time in the positioning of the figures – strengthened by the gaze passing the window.

To talk of narrative in comics is also to say something about the single panel, the panel's relationship with the neighbouring panels, and the layout of the page and beyond. There is something to be said of what Groensteen calls the strip.

"Thus, while the panel and the page are two closed and structured spaces that the eye is pleased to survey and whose contents lend themselves easily to a totalization, the strip, itself, appears like a transit zone, insufficiently homogeneous or isolated to be able to claim a true identity" (Groensteen: 58).

Although this unit belongs to the totality of the page it inhabits a function of structure and of narrative influence. If the page is a structure that can be further divided into sections of strips, we can envision this page as a building where each strip is a separate

floor. Each floor is an entity and represents divisions of series, which again can influence the rhythm or flow of the narrative. Let's not forget that the division of "floors" in the structure of comics is also to do with the publishing format. All of these panels have to fit within the template of the book. Even so, there is a definitive role of the strip in the graphic narrative in the way of unity and separation that can influence the time of the narrative. When you finish a strip you hit the edge of the book and like writing you move to the next line. The strips "unique function is of the readerly order: indeed, the strip indicates, within the compartmentalized space of the multiframe, a reading route, a vectorized trajectory" (Groensteen: 59).

These transitions, of the routes of reading, are separated by the gutter, and as mentioned the gutter has a role to play in this structure. After all it isn't the panels or the sequence of panels that hold the structure of the building and the floors together. It is the outline of the gutter and the edges of the book. The gutter becomes a skeleton, or scaffolding, holding the internal parts together so that they might function in sequence at a certain rate in time of the image, the strip and the page.

On the topic of time and the gutter it can be viewed as a route and that this route is governed by intervals. The transitions between panels is represented in Groensteen as different types of gutters. As there has been shown a distinction between the transitions of panel to panel and to strip, there is also the transition between pages. These distinctions have been taken from the vocabulary of music and suit the purpose very well, as music often is all about timing. Groensteen separates these differentials into [A] the sigh, [B] the semi-pause and [C] the pause.³ [A] is the between images, [B] is the between strips and [C] is the between pages.

Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth* has an interesting distribution of time and duration through its use of panels, strips and pages, and how these transitions work. When reading his narrative we come across a few pages consisting of one panel, which again contain cut-outs of different objects. These pages definitely constitute a pause as meant in [C], between pages. There is great detail in these cut-out pages and they seem to be fully functional if you were to try and cut them out and glue them together.

³ For a full account and discussion on elements of structure in comics see Groensteen's chapter *The Spatio-Topical System* in *The System of Comics* p. 24.

There is also something to be said of these cut-outs in way of the temporal aspect of the story (fig: 9). They are presented on a strictly spatial and aesthetical two-dimensional surface, but they are presumptuous in their inbuilt expectation of their three-dimensional creation.

This creates an interesting aspect. The pause of these cut-outs lie in their alluring detail and that the reader imagines them into existence. The time and space of the narrative is extended by this stop, because it warrants this activity, and by this pause it also makes you consider other aspects of the story, both temporally and spatially.

If we consider these cut-outs together, something that they should, we can see that they are bound by design and theme. They are spatially a design on the page creating a pause by the sheer aesthetic design, but temporally they are contemplations of themes found in the narrative. The main character of the story, Jimmy Corrigan, is bound to the cut-outs by longing or a sense of lack. This longing is bound by a longing for closure in his past, much as Bechdel seems to be, but from a therapist's chair.

As mentioned in chapter two, lack is a powerful trait in aesthetic creation. "(...) as the structuring function of lack, and by an audacious arch he linked this up with what, speaking of the function of desire, I have designated as *manqué-a-etre*, a 'want-to-be'" (Lacan: 29). What Lacan is talking about here is the structure of the gap, or, as mentioned in the introduction, the abyss, and how this is related to desire, and the nature of existence – ontology.

When speaking of the gap we are dealing with the functions of ontology. This aspect is crucial and the most essential to the faculty of the unconscious. These cut-outs are made to bring the world of the unconscious narrative into the real world of the interpreter. We are encouraged by these cut-outs to participate and recreate the stories within them. The gutter takes the position of mediator between here, between the space and the narrative, combining the cut-outs and the imagination, which is taking place in the reader of the story.

ACME.

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VOL. VI, NUMBER 7. AUTUMN, 1999.

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BACKGROUND. - From the years 1934 to 1993 the manufacture and distribution of comic booklets was widely ridiculed, as the lean and comparably poor profiles the business promised were alluring to none but the most hapless and imbecilic of entrepreneurs. However, with the introduction of the "Novelty Library" model - pioneered by the ACME Concern of Chicago - the industry veritably burst its seams, maturing into the robust proportions it now enjoys. To-day, these "ACME" pamphlets and tracts are commonplace in homes of refinery and distinction, and the society of those who traffick in their cause is eagerly sought.



ABOVE. - Supplied with this issue is a handy virtual reference guide to the psychological setting rendered within the pages of the offered chapter. Though too small to be constructed with any degree of satisfaction, a panoramic reproduction of the primary shapes and careful study of the construction principles will reward the concerted craftsman with a model of relative uselessness. An outfit of water-color paints, a sharp knife, and limited background in human romantic contact are, of course, key.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO. - Our colour-separator, Miss Rhea Patton, whose attention to redolouring the first 32 pages of this cumbersome and unjustifiably expensive chapter made its timely introduction "sensible to ladies" tea-tables nationwide; Mr. Eric Wilson, for his Italian transpositional talents; Mr. Chas. Kidd, as ever our primary patron and advisor of embellishment; and Mr. Gary Paster and Mr. Kim Dweich, for their philosophic examples, mainly words of counsel, and use of their respective sanitary facilities.

OUR STORY THUS FAR. - Jimmy Corrigan, the "smartest kid on earth," visits his estranged father in a small midwestern town and many uncomfortable and fundamentally boring moments are already chronicled. Ninety or so years earlier, Mr. Corrigan's grandfather has some childhood experiences.

NEXT NUMBERS. - Our story concludes, sporting one stirring sunrise, one car crash, and one explosion. Following, in our 15th number, we present the companion volume to our first "Joke Book," with more amusing and nearly-understood vignettes of life's little ironies, featuring Rusty Brown, Chalky White, and other aesthetes and art historians. Reserve your copy now.

No. XIII.

A MINIATURE PAPER CONSTRUCTION OFFERED AS AN ACTIVITY TO THOSE FOR WHOM EXPERIENCE IN MATTERS OF THE FLESH IS NOT NECESSARILY A DEFINING PERSONAL CHARACTERISTIC.

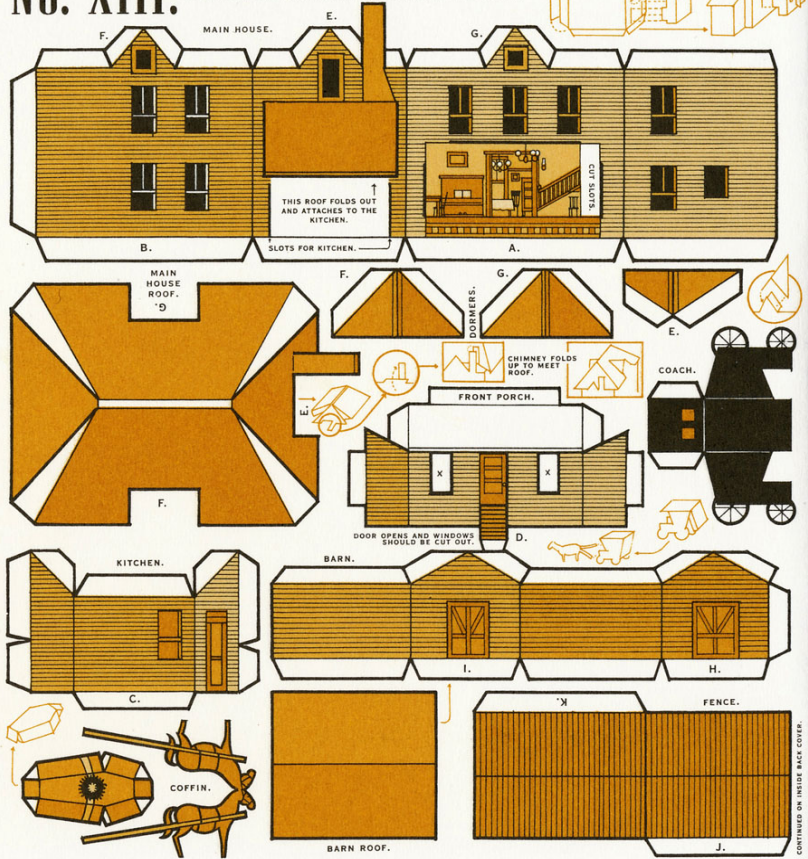


Fig. 9: Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth*.

In the cut-outs there is a longing for these objects of desire and in making them real. The only way this is possible is to construct them from imagination into objects of paper. These objects represent stable symbols of family and happiness and are manifestations of the unconscious desire for their existence. The memory of them is not enough and these objects are made to bring a sense of realness to the distant memories.

In regard to the ideas of distribution of panels, the strip and the page, it is my intention not to reinforce a definite system, but to emphasize its potential and diverse usage.

"It belongs to each author to decide, in the function of a narrative strategy and global aesthetic, if and at what moment the strip, this intermediary space, too often ignored in its functional specificity, deserve to be reinforced" (Groensteen: 67).

In relation of time and especially duration of narrative there are some interesting images in *Jimmy Corrigan*. The first is the image of the super-hero that stands atop a tall building, making him self ready to fly. When he does this he doesn't fly, but fall to the ground (fig: 11). All of this is observed by Jimmy from the window in his office. There is a tragi-comic feel to the narrative because of the repetition of the image of the super-hero lying on the ground as people pass by. It even begins to rain, and it's even dark outside by the time he is picked up by an ambulance.

In the narrative we further learn of Jimmy in the past, and how his mother takes him to comics convention so he can meet his hero. Later he discovers that he is just a "normal" man that has slept with his mother. At the end of the book the theme of the super-hero reemerges, but in the guise of Jimmy himself. He imagines himself standing on the roof of a building, and in the next panel he has a cape. We imagine him leap as he bends his knees to jump. This is all in the wake of his mother's absence. The atmosphere is dense and melancholy.

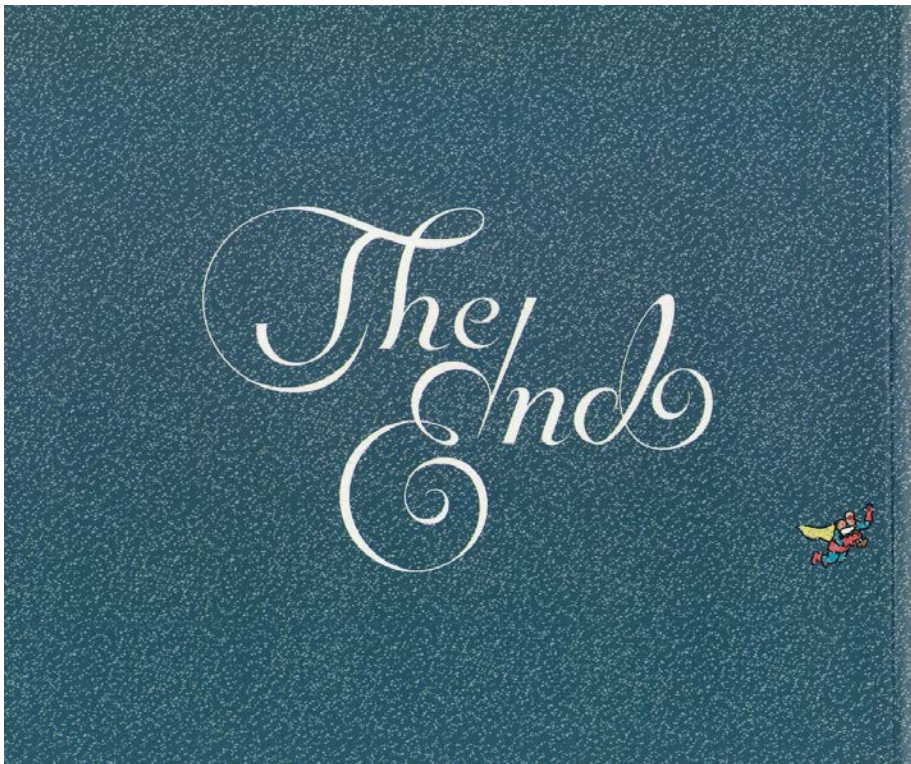
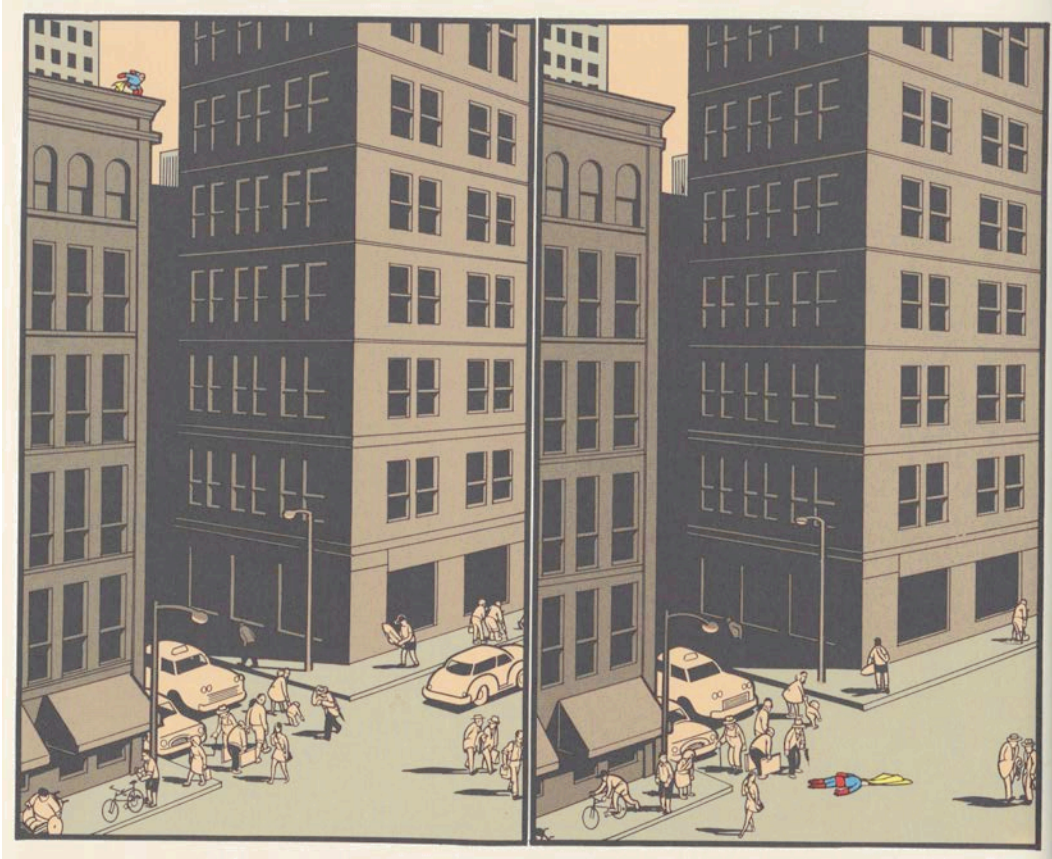


Fig. 10: Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth*.

This image also appears just before the end, where Jimmy is standing in the street below it. There is a moment of contemplation where two panels only differ in the gaze of Jimmy. In the first he gazes straight, but in the next he gazes up, and followed by two panels where we see through Jimmy's eyes a tall building. This image is repeated twice. Time here plays a factor. The idea of presenting an image within two identical panels has the effect of a semi-pause. The image of the building is significant and matters to the narrative. Therefore the image is included twice to accommodate this. Within this gutter that separates these two images, which is a sigh, we aren't looking at buildings, but experiencing feelings. In this sigh the reader moves through the eyes of Jimmy. With the help of the other images and how the story has developed through atmosphere, there is a sense of feeling in this sigh. This comes to us intuitively through the images working together with all of the other parts of the narrative and what holds it together is the gutter.

When we return to the leaping Jimmy, we see this as an imagined episode. The last image that belongs to this narrative is the one in the book. On the page there is written the words the end, but at the lower right corner there is an image of the superhero holding Jimmy Corrigan safely in his arms and flying off (fig: 10).

Time and duration distribution in this narrative segment, are portrayed within larger frames than in other parts of the story. This slows the pace down and gives the reader more time for contemplation and interpretation. It is these larger frames that constitute a cohesive narrative frame for the overall atmosphere and themes of the book. Almost each page has a larger panel surrounded by smaller ones. The orders of them are sometimes illogical and therefore also demand more of a sorting from the reader. The strength of this is that the reader engages more with the narrative and the gutter, constantly sighing, semi-pausing and pausing, to make sense of the overall story, and making sense of this story is not just paying attention to the system of space and its aesthetics. It is also to give strength to the temporal aspects of the narrative – that which lies outside in the gutter and interpretation. This creation of pace in *Jimmy Corrigan* is sometimes the confusion of the panel order and this directs the reader in all directions at first, before more meaning is put into the gutter by filling the gaps and reinterpreting the content.



Figur 11: Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth*.

As the panels in a film unspool at a predetermined pace...

“...comics creators can play with the design of an entire page by manipulating the visuals within panels and the panels themselves with the page to create additional layers of meaning. Thus, a comic, in addition to unfolding temporally, also exists ‘all at once,’ and this existence is a feature unique to this medium” (Vesaci: 16).

Another point to make here is that the unfolding of images in a film is to the viewer uncontrollable, while in the comics it’s not. Also, there is the difference of viewing vs. reading. In a comic book we read the images and this is of course linked to the narrative.

Here again it is the gutter that facilitates the ability to read the images. The most important factor is the ability to reread the images – going back and forth. Being able to observe slight changes in details or reflect upon the time-span between the panels gives the gutter a central role in all of the aspects of the graphic narrative. The gutter is the

sigh, the semi-pause and the pause because of its blank zone creating space, order and time for interpretation.

The pause, we could say, is the gutter. When an apparent pause is evident, like that of Jason's in figure 8, the gutter is given hints of sound and movement and these are recreated in this pause. The image is clearly put there to give this effect, and it functions so, very effectively. The pause is a feature very closely linked to the gutter, and sometimes through structure, the pause even functions as the gutter – as described by Groensteen as the sigh, the semi-pause and the pause. These transitions are both gutters and pauses, and facilitates reflections and interpretations.

The pause can be summed up into a body of functions that incorporate the creations of narrative effects like sound, movement, and lingering through image details and repetitions – like Chris Ware's super hero and images of buildings. If the graphic narrative wants to be successful it must utilize the pause in a manner that gives the gutter room to act.

The Gutter and Narrative Cycles

Because the gutter allows the reader to be everywhere all of the time there is a sense of a circular movement. That means there is always the possibility to move away from the place where you are reading, to visit the past – the pages and images already read, or look at the images in the future – the images to be read (fig: 12). This creates a circular movement within the narrative, and the gutter is where it is happening. By explaining these principles of past, present and future, and utilizing them on a couple of panels made by Jason, and also mentioning Bechdel again, we will see that the graphic narrative and the gutter work in narrative cycles.

“When a speaker of a language hears a phonetic sequence, he is able to give it meaning because he brings to the act of communication an amazing repertoire of conscious and unconscious knowledge. Mastery of the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of language enables him to convert the sounds into discrete units, to recognize words, and to assign a structural description and interpretation to the resulting sentence, even though it be quite new to him. Without this implicit knowledge, this internalized grammar, the sequence of sounds does not speak to him” (Culler: 101).

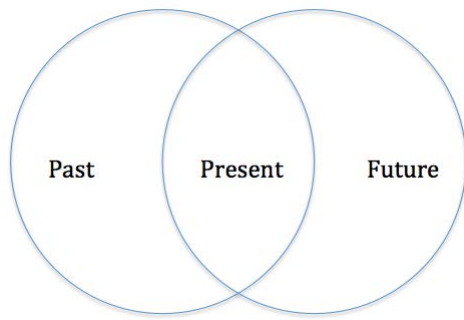


Fig. 12: Tornes

In the context of graphic narrative this quote is meaningful. The system of events described by Culler is based on an internal grammar. This also works on the sequences of images because we have an implicit knowledge, or an internalized grammar of images. Every reader brings a repertoire of conscious and unconscious knowledge and the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of language are also pertinent towards the image. The gutter also has a system or a language, which the reader recognizes and converts into sounds, units of images, and an overall structure and interpretation. This implicit knowledge together with an internalized grammar gives the image and the graphic narrative a greater advantage, because of its ability to give access to both past and future.

In the story *A Cat From Heaven* by Jason we are introduced to the cartoonist Jason sitting at his work-desk in the first panel. After this the story evolves in an elliptic

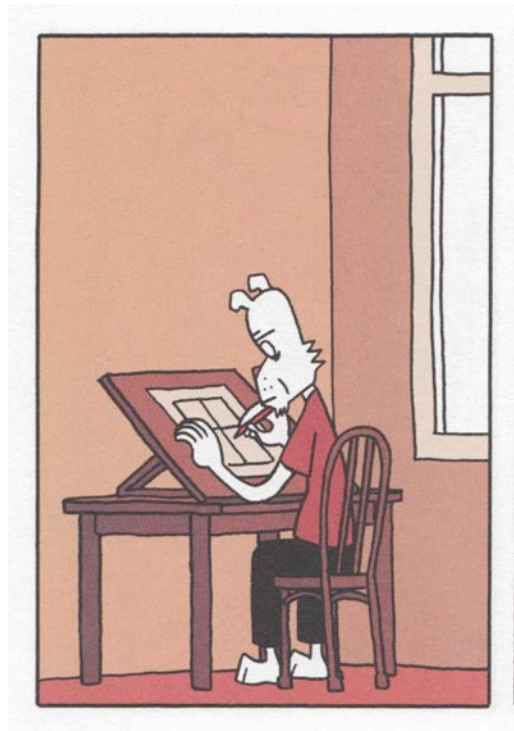


Fig. 13: Jason, *Athos in America*, 33.

pattern and time moves forwards, but also backwards. If we view the first panel (fig: 13) and the last panel (fig: 14) together we see that they are not very different in nature. The topic is the same – Jason at his desk drawing. The interesting aspect here is that in the last drawing we see Jason’s hand making a drawing of Jason sitting at his desk drawing. He is engaging the story we just read. The end of the story is the beginning of the story. This cycle works on many levels and a thorough description, in relation to Genette’s idea of duration will, be given. The tactics of the gutter, and the level of engagement that this offers to the reader make all of these functions possible.

In this cycle there is a connection to be made with Proust's work, which also is a cycle, released by the Madelaine cookie in the opening book. In Proust, as in Jason, there is a sense of past being present and present being the past. While reading these two stories there is also a comprehension of the past being in the future. The story that is told has happened, but the reader experiences it happening now, and this creates a powerful effect in Jason's last panel. You are thrown into the gutter and almost immediately go back and revisit the first panels of the story and even the whole story itself. The immediate recognition of the image at the end to the image at the beginning makes this story revisit the beginning.

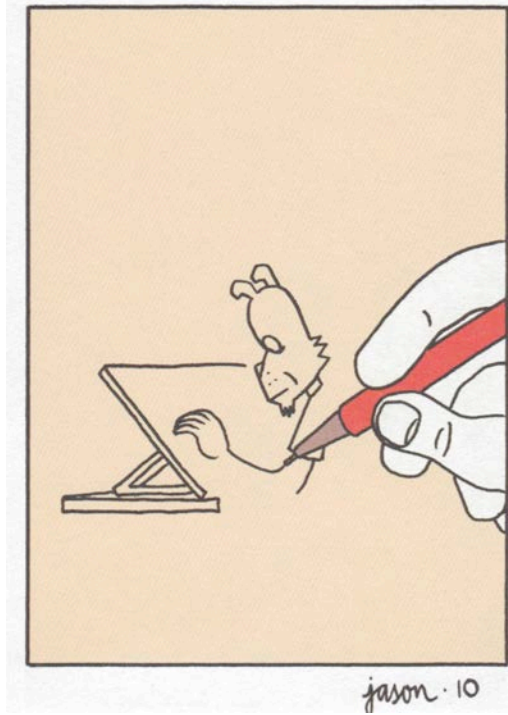


Fig. 14: Jason, *Athos in America*, 33.

An important feature of Proust in his reinvention of the constraint of the novel is the transformation of feeling and thought into form and “the recognition of aesthetic truth through an epiphanic vision” (Unwin: 111). Proust is, as Jason, questioning the status of his life and work, and doing so through an orchestrated narrated reflection on a host of subjects, but in this context the argument is centred on concepts of memory, time and space. Proust seems to have been inspired by John Ruskin⁴ and his seemingly unordered arguments to produce a text that follows another schematic order that is hidden, but revealed at the end of the work. This was done with linking the end with the beginning, which makes the beginning belong to the end.

This way of structuring a body of work seems to have more in common with the endeavours of the aesthetics than the temporal. It doesn't necessarily matter in which order the arguments are structured within the body as long as the frame is solid. Both Proust's monumental novel and Jason's short narrative encapsulate this idea. For Proust it is a framework for the entire cycle of the novel, and for Jason it is much the same, but the images of the end and the beginning are framed, or bound in the gutter.

⁴ Art critic and essayist d. 1900.

So, there is an element of Proustian narrative in Jason's story. The last image harkens "back" to the first because the main character sits down to narrate the story we just read. This makes the story leap into the gutter because the last panel makes us recap it. The whole idea of space, time and duration become fascinating in the context of this story. The end is in fact the beginning.

Jason's narrative is essentially, like that of Proust's, a narrative concerned with insight into the formation of vistas, leading to knowledge or aspects of reality through feelings and experience. It is after all this experience and knowledge that enables the protagonist, or Jason, to sit down and draw the story. So, the end is the beginning, and this constitutes a cycle facilitated by the gutter and there are within Jason's narrative a couple of factors influencing this cycle. If the narrative of the story unfolds from beginning [A] to end [B], and this constitutes the main narrative, the end images raise the aspects of memory. If the end [B] is the beginning [A], then the narrative is a narrative of the memory and of what has happened – from [B] to [A]. The reader joins in this narrative of memory, after finishing the story, and then reflecting upon its beginning and content through memory, because this is the natural act in context of the last image.

Memory also plays a leading role in Proust's novel and acts, like the gutter, as a framework for the distribution of the narrative. In Proust this is introduced by the madeleine episode, which occurs in the beginning and the end of the novel. This is a central aspect to the content of the narrative in both Proust and Jason. The madeleine episode triggers an involuntary memory, and this is also what the gutter does, but there we call in experience, and it is triggered by smells, sounds and sight. Although, in a graphic narrative none of these are real – they are recreated as such in the human mind, because we know them. The graphic narrative has an advantage here because it can do this visually.

"Gilles Deleuze believed that the focus of Proust was not memory and the past but the narrator's learning the use of "signs" to understand and communicate ultimate reality, thereby becoming an artist".⁵

The use of the ideas of signs to render a narrative is also interesting in relation to the graphic novel's technical toolbox apparatus. These signs are used to evoke or stir, in the

⁵ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, p. 36 See also Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p.122

reader, feelings and recognition. This strengthens the story and makes it more powerful. These signs though, are interesting because they play their part hidden outside the written and the shown. Only hints are given in the narrative, like that of Bechdel's sitting positions in therapy (fig. 1-5), showing a tremendous amount of hidden body-language on which the reader can infer meaning. The text and the image can only together give hint and ideas, and from there it is up to the ardent and diligent reader to fill in the gaps.

Through these signs lies the heart of the graphic narrative to produce an ultimate reality without being real. The graphic narrative's ability to be an aesthetic entity constructed on these signs is crucial to its impact and existence in the readers.

The narrative discourse of the gutter is the reader's ability to apply closure to produce meaning. In an extension of this, we can also see meaning outside the standard panel to panel closure. The reader can wander between pages and images that are even further apart in a more effortless way than in a written narrative. This can produce other meanings outside the main narrative that again can give the graphic narrative added substance. The ability to do this is dependent on how the narrative is made through its artistry and the reader's ability to produce these links, which is the aesthetics of the narrative. The aesthetic quality is how the gutter communicates sounds and feelings, and experiences that need to be imagined.

The pause facilitates the gutter by giving room to breathe and reflect on the hidden panels and other elements that can bring meaning to the narrative. The pause can be in the image and details, and in the construction of the frames, but it is the gutter that gives the pause its content.

The gutter can also make the reader return to the beginning of a story and create a narrative cycle. The reader can choose to revisit the story, or he can use memory to do it, and in this way become an important part of the story, as seen in Jason's panels (fig. 13 and 14) where the end becomes the beginning.

Conclusion

The main goal was to argue that the gutter has a more central role in the graphic narrative and in the way this works. The gutter is difficult to pin down, because it is a white space, but because of its dependence on the images that surround it, something can be said of its functions, and then I ask again: what is the idiom of the gutter?

The gutter has been divided into three consecutive parts. The first dealt with features of the surface, and particularly with ideas of the *passe-partout* and the frame. The second was a more standard approach with a run-through of some of the current ideas of the gutter. There was also a suggestion and presentation of a different gutter in this part that it could possibly do something more than just connect panels and story. The third was the gutter in connection with narrative – how the gutter influences the narrative through the comics' way of being both in context of presentation and interpretation.

As a way of process, the way of the gutter begins at the surface with an analysis of the gutter itself, through the *passe-partout* and the frame. Both of which contains the image and gives it substance, and that substance can be linked to the concept “polysyntactic”. This means an inter-iconic gutter described as the space which separates the image and its surrounding “emptiness”, and the emptiness here being the gutter that projects codes of meaning on the image. This again can lead us out of the image with a set of codes and meanings that can take us into further vistas of knowledge. Annosh was an image that through its inter - iconic gutter spoke of ideas from traditional Icon painting, with all of its traits, and that took us out into the gutter of the narrative to unveil its themes of an east/west dichotomy. Annosh is presented as a myth, but behind it there is another meaning.

This is also in contact with the *passe-partout* and its etymological meanings as a master key, and that we can pass everywhere. This is essentially how the gutter is. Within art the *passe-partout* is gummed paper that holds the image and the *passe-partout* in place. The glass also implies the reader in its reflections and become a great symbol of the process of the gutter.

The gutter holds the image and panels together and portrays complex narratives, like that of the Bechdel panels in chapter one. The point of these panels is to show that the gutter is a frame, a passe-partout, a structuring tool and a compassionate participatory tool in the creation of narrative.

Although there has been written on some of the aspects of the gutter the majority of this literature deals with the so-called hidden image. Although Groensteen's writing on the subject is more extensive, but moderate in the gutters significance. A lot of the aspects that have been discussed both in the literature used, can to my opinion be linked to elements of the gutter. We even need to start with the gutter because it is the single most noticeable feature within the comic book as a tool for structure and order.

The gutter is a highly engaging feature and profoundly dependent on the bond with the reader. In this process The gutter plays the role of the Lacanian mirror in its ability to project a sense of realness through experience. In order to reconstruct the hidden images there is an individual process that the reader is engaged in. Although it is difficult to say something about these individual interpretive results, we can say something of its process. This formation that is taking place is going through a mirroring stage and consist of the four elements of the real, the imaginary, the symbolic and the symptom. This process is important to the gutter and says something about how we relate to the gutter and interpretation.

The narrative aspects of the gutter is a highly complex culmination of all the aspects discussed in this thesis, and there are still others – like that of the balloon. I think this shows the scope of the gutter and that it can be, and should be, dealt with from more than one angle. To simply treat it as a place of imagining the missing images is to pilfer it from its deserving place within the graphic's narrative toolbox. I would argue that the gutter has shown itself to be the governing tool in most aspects of the graphic narrative. At first its just there on the surface, but as you engage in the narrative you penetrate this surface, and the gutter takes on a different function. When this returns to the reader, the act of interpretation to make sense of the story takes place, and as mentioned, when this process is repeated, it takes yet another turn and becomes a narrative of interpreted results – that of themes and codes.

This in turn informs the narrative by extending it beyond further meaning.

Compared to conventional literature, that of novels, poems, play etc., the gutter and graphic narrative contain the ability to combine much of literary traits. The narratives of Beedel, shows this, by presenting a grand narrative in only a handful of panels. This ability to show something grand in a miniscule way seems to resemble poetry, and again this plays on the level of engagement and ability to understand and empathize, which again can help to reveal other aspects of the story.

A key factor in the graphic narrative is that we enter it visually and not linguistically. The visual invites us to participate in a play of images that can, in the gutter, form a coherent narrative. In the gutter we interpret, structure and restructure the narrative into our own particular ideas. The main story and message, might between readers, be the same, but the images that form in the gutter are individual and unique to the reader. Therefore the gutter engages more in its communication with the narrative through the reader. All of the aspects mentioned in this thesis influences the gutter – the frame, the passe-partout, and other images, the conscious and the unconscious, and the real and the virtual.

There is no doubt in the functions of the gutter, but there might be doubts in the significance of it. I believe that the argument that has been put forth here shows the gutters importance in some of the graphic narrative's key aspects. The gutter structures, guides you from panel to panel, and inevitably takes you in the direction of meaning and knowledge about the narratives. These narratives of the gutter, the story, and narrative of the reader, are all dependent on that immaculate white space we call the gutter.

The gutter is a narrative by way of all the other narratives contained in the graphic narrative. It works when all the narratives contained, expands and amalgamates into a narrative of the gutter, and within this structure, as discussed, we find the idiom of the gutter.

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