**Some notes on The stylistics of comics**

Different possible definitions (varieties) for this genre: comic books, comics, cartoons, graphic novels, graphic stories, graphic narratives, visual language, manga …

A new genre? Examples: the combinations of images and hieroglyphics in ancient Egypt, the Lascaux cave, the Bayeux tapestry; first strips in the late 1800s.

Famous example of comics: Mickey Mouse, Spiderman, the Fantastic Four, Hugo Pratt’s Corto Maltese, Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God*, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1985-92).

Employment of words and pictures:

- Texts organised into sequential units, graphically separated from each other

- Unlike what happens with cartoons, which are typically composed by one picture only, comics rely on the arrangement into sequences of panels.

Four elements:

1. The panel*:* each page is normally composed by six to nine rectangular frames called panels. Panels show single instants of actions (stills) and, although they superficially look like frozen moments, they represent a portion of the narrative and convey the idea of something happening
2. The gutter: the blank space that separates each panel. It is the space containing what happens between panels and readers have to guess from the context
3. The balloon: the space that contains the verbal text. Two types: speech balloon and thought balloon. Different types of shapes (oval, cloud-like, squared…)
4. The caption: the other element that features linguistic information. It is not positioned within the panel, but it is typically a separate

But you may also take into account kinaesthetic lines: used to provide static images with a sense of dynamism, e.g. the trajectory of an object in motion

**Semiotics** and the idea of signs:

A sign is something that stands for something else:

1. -An icon: it represents what it means
2. -An index: indicates the presence of something else, smoke: an index of fire
3. -A symbol: is associated to its meaning by virtue of a shared convention (arbitrary meaning)

Indexicality is the property of the context-dependency of signs, especially language, hence the study of those aspects of meaning which depend on the placement of the signs in the material world. Maybe the most common sort of index is the arrow.

In making sense of the strips of comics, readers rely both on explicit indications of links (cohesion), mainly in the form of repetition, and on their capacity to find other, more implicit connections, and infer whatever is missing from the narrative.

The gutter is important because it represents the space that the reader needs to fill in order to reconstruct the story.

Comics as ‘invisible art’ (McCloud 1993)

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