Four Conceptions of the Page


By Benoît Peeters, translated by Jesse Cohn  

A simple combinatory chart, taking account of the two components of the comic strip previously discussed and of the various types of relation which can be established between them, will make it possible to distinguish between four general modes of page and panel utilization (figure 1).

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<th>NARRATIVE-COMPOSITION AUTONOMY</th>
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<td>NARRATIVE DOMINANT</td>
<td>Conventional Use</td>
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<td>COMPOSITION DOMINANT</td>
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<td>Rhetorical Use</td>
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Figure 1.

A more detailed diagram will undoubtedly make it possible to have a first idea of these four conceptions (figure 2).

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<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<td></td>
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Figure 2.

Let me emphasize, right from the start: the classification suggested here is not of an historical nature. It does not correspond to periods or trends, nor even to authors or works, but simply to operations. The borders between the categories, thus, have nothing of the intangible about them. They are caught up in a play of perpetual redefinition. Certain page layouts of Hergé or Jacobs are typically productive; many pages of McCay or Régis Franc are rather decorative. In each case, it is advisable to judge according to the particular work.

Conventional utilization

Certainly, the first category – that that I described as conventional and that some prefer to call regular – corresponds partially to a period when the concern of the page as an organized unit hardly existed, since all was conceived according to the requirements of publication in the daily newspapers. Jean-Michel Charlier explained it extremely well:
At the beginning of my career, they imposed a format on you so that the page could be divided and arranged in various ways. That is to say, the page, which was ideally made up of four tiers of three panels, was to be capable of being recomposed into daily strips or even into columns. This was particularly the case for *Buck Danny*, in *Spirou*; that arrangement was supposed to allow multiple resales of a story.[1]

Each day, a tier of three or four images, of a strictly constant format, thus came to be added to all those which preceded it. When the strip got edited into a volume – which was not seldom the case – the strips were placed one below the other on a page which was nothing other than a random space, not thought of during their development.

*Krazy Kat*, Herriman's masterpiece, was subjected to a constraint of the same type by the syndicates between 1925 and 1929. A cartoonist such as Hugo Pratt, who worked a long time within a framework of this kind, preserved the practice of it to draw by strips, so as to be able to assemble and reassemble his pages according to the context of publication.[2]

The conventional use of the box and the page is however far from being limited to this period of the history of the comic strip. One encounters it in the work of many authors who never were subjected to the requirements of daily publication by strips but in which, nonetheless, the page is divided into a certain number of lines of the same height (often four), themselves divided into a certain number of panels (from two to five). The overall arrangement of the page thus creates the conditions for a regular reading (from left to right and from top to bottom), very close to that of a page of writing (figures 3 and 4). This is what André Franquin has aptly named "the waffle iron."

The conventional character by which this mode of organization is defined must be understood in its own sense and not as a value judgment. It is about a strongly codified system in which the arrangement of the panels on the page, by repeating itself, tends to become transparent.[3]

The most interesting uses of this principle are in any case those which, far from minimizing it, push this constancy of the framework to its limits, until a kind of fixed plane unfolds on the page. Cartoonists like Schulz, Feiffer, Brétécher, Wolinski or Copi gave remarkable examples of sequences in which the least modification in the gestures or facial expressions takes on a considerable significance because of the regularity of the units.

Even such a cartoonist of "realistic" adventures as Hugo Pratt himself often used devices of this kind, as in this remarkable page of *Tango* [figure 6] in which the characters barely move within an unchanging framework, in a kind of sequence shot. Instead of
trying to show off his dialogue by artificially varying the angles of sight, Pratt reinforces the effect of the scene by concentrating the reader's attention on some tiny changes in action and poses.

Figure 5. A rare occasion in the comic book: the play of the mise en page spills over onto the cover. © Casterman.

It is also striking to note that several modern comic strips – Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen*, Tardi's *It Was the War of the Trenches*, Trondheim's *Lapinot et les carottes de Patagonie* or Mazzuchelli [and Karasik]'s *Paul Auster's City of Glass*[^4] – intensify this constraint by pushing it to its limits. In the process of producing the graphic novel *Demi-tour* with Frédéric Boilet, I myself had occasion to discover the point at which the "waffle iron" could prove to be stimulating. But it is probable that these uses of a regular page layout, as soon as they are radicalized, become a matter of what I will describe later on as the "productive." Far from being subordinate, the grid layout becomes determining there.[^5]

**Decorative utilization**

At the opposite extreme from this first conception, one encounters the use of the page and the panel which I have called decorative. If the first system privileged the narrative aspect of the comic strip, here it is the tabular dimension which quite clearly dominates.

In works by the principal representatives of this tendency – which developed primarily among the European cartoonists of the post-'68 period and in the comics of the Eighties, but which one already finds among traditional cartoonists like Burne Hogarth and Edgar P. Jacobs – the page is considered as an independent unit, whose aesthetic organization trumps any other concern.
The first system was haunted by the model of writing; this one is fascinated by painting. One knows, moreover, the degree to which a cartoonist such as Hogarth was concerned with placing himself in [s’inscrire dans] the great tradition of Western art. The lianas [lianes] that embrace Tarzan seem to be above all, for him, a means of making links [liens] between the panels – running across the double page, their lines describe a vast circular motion – but this functions especially as a decorative supplement almost independent of the narration.

Two examples, though seemingly near-opposites, should allow us to better understand the operation of this tendency (figures 8 and 9). No more is there a question of “typical” pages here: each page must be different from all the others, the will to surprise being one of the characteristics of this conception.[6]

In both cases, it appears clearly that the mise en page was designed in advance. The relations of lines, the symmetrical balances, are too perfect to have been obtained by accident. Obviously, the page was designed as a concrete object which was to be made as harmonious as possible. In both cases, too, as soon as one observes the real page and not just its geometrical configuration, one notices that the effect concerned is of a simply aesthetic nature.
The narrative hardly arises as a consequence of this particular arrangement; it is inscribed within a more or less predefined framework.\[7\]

Many spectacular effects, such as inset panels and violations of panel borders, obey a logic of this kind: far from corresponding to a true invention, they often function as simple degradations of sequential continuity, even as compensations for its poverty. It is not certain, thus, that the prodigious graphic upheavals of many comics of the Eighties and Nineties profoundly renewed the relation to narration.\[8\]

Thus, one should not rush to judge this organization of the page an advance in relation to conventional \textit{mise en page} (an error that the traditional semiologists, because of the "formalism" spoken of in the introduction, could not help making).

It is never in itself that a page can be described as modern, it is according to the relations that it maintains with the entire comic. It is not thus a question of wondering whether a page layout is extravagant or banal, it is a question of examining the way in which a work benefits from the apparatus that it sets up.

\textbf{Rhetorical utilization}

\textbf{Hergé: at Nestor’s service}

The third system is most widespread. It dominates in the traditional comic strip, and in particular in the albums of Hergé. Here, the panel and the page are no longer autonomous elements; they are subordinated to a narrative which their primary function is to serve. The size of the images, their distribution, the general pace of the page, all must come to support the narration.

A short example will clarify [figure 10]. I will take it from page 11 of \textit{The Castafiore Emerald}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{Hergé, \textit{The Castafiore Emerald}. © Casterman.}
\end{figure}

Looking at these three boxes, one can clearly see the principle which governs their respective dimensions. The first image (25 mm wide by 59 mm high) supports, through its clear verticality, the body of Nestor descending the staircase. As for the second image (44 X 59 mm), the framework widens so as to be able to accommodate in its entirety a Nestor who has begun to slant because of his imbalance. The third panel is perfectly square (59 X 59 mm), the horizontal distance separating the servant's left foot from his right hand being about equal to that which, vertically, separates his right foot from his left hand.

Such an operation is typically rhetorical: the dimensions of the panel conform to the action being described, the whole page layout is placed at the service of a pre-existing narrative for which it serves to accentuate the effects. Such principles are hardly adapted to the overall graphic effects – unless those do not appear likely to effectively underline the contents of a sequence. Thus Sokal, for example, resorts readily to successions of horizontal panels, "which slow down the pace and allow for wonder at moments of great psychological intensity", or
vertical panels, “ideal for a nervous dialogue, composed of sharp repartee.”

23 Observing the way in which Hergé distributes the large panels (often of a half-page) with which his albums are strewn, one will see that he obeys a logic of the same order. Images of grand dimensions appear, whether at a particularly powerful moment which it is important to emphasize (for instance, the irruption of the heroes into the Temple of the Sun on page 47 of the album of the same name[6]), or in a scene of a great complexity where many characters are gathered (for instance, the car race at the end of *The Red Sea Sharks*). In both cases, there is an expressivity of the panel or the page in relation to the narrated action.

24 An element quite as decisive as the size of the panel is its placement. Depending on whether it is on the top or bottom, on a left-hand page or a right-hand page, its narrative effectiveness can prove very different. Thus in François Schuiten’s *The Tower*, the corner of the tableau revealing a tiny portion of color, almost like a slip of the tongue, could be located only in the corner lower right of a right-hand page, in order to spare a true revelation on the double following page.

25 This concern for organization rhetoric thus leads to a tendential coincidence of the sequences and pages (and even of the double pages) – an effect which appears as advantageous to me narratively as aesthetically, since it supports the unity of action as much as that of atmosphere and colors. But this logic enters sometimes in conflict with requirements of another kind, e.g., rhythmic.

26 It is interesting to observe from this point of view the difference between the black and white versions of the first Adventures of Tintin and their remontage in colors, within the strict framework of an album of 62 pages. The quasi-organic unity of the original pages of *The Blue Lotus* or *The Broken Ear* – finely analyzed by Pierre Sterckx in the catalogue *Hergé dessinateur* – was irremediably broken by the needs of the remontage, the least shift having incalculable consequences on the whole.

**Eisner and the virtual frame**

27 Privileged by the majority of the traditional narrators, the rhetorical use of the page can take surprising forms.

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**Figure 11.** Will Eisner, *A Sunset in Sunshine City*. Behind an apparent casualness, an extraordinary mastery of the stylistic possibilities of comics. Comics USA.
Thus at the beginning of his beautiful album *A Sunset in Sunshine City*,[iii] Will Eisner does without any borders between the panels for several pages [figure 11]. The principal character of the history is an old man who has just resolved to sell the cafeteria he had run since his youth. But he continues to walk around the district, unable to tear himself away from these places charged with memories. The absence of a precise boundary between the images, the undulating lines which connect them and gather the words, the suppression of caption boxes: everything here helps to suggest the blur of memory and the play of associations. But the clarity of the narrative is never damaged: the character who remembers, larger and darker than the silhouettes of the past, effortlessly draws our gaze from one image to the next, across the passing years.

In spite of an appearance of great freedom, all the visual effects here are at the service of the narration, as evidently and necessarily as in the strictly geometrical boxes of *The Castafiore Emerald*. Thus, one need neither overvalue a phenomenon like this absence of contours by regarding it as an automatic pledge of modernism, nor take it as particularly problematic. It is a matter of a specific code, skillfully used by an author who has perfectly mastered the multiple possibilities of the language of the comic strip.

**Productive utilization**

*Little Nemo*, or the narrative as consequence

With the fourth and last principle, it is the organization of the page which seems to dictate the narrative. A particular arrangement generates a piece of narration. Thus to Winsor McCay, the brilliant creator of *Little Nemo*, it happens that a characteristic page layout gives rise to a fragment of narrative which is thus nothing but its consequence.

![Figure 12. Winsor McCay, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, February 2, 1908.](image)

The page of February 2, 1908 [figure 12] furnishes an admirable example of this: it is in order to match the construction of the page that the characters grow and shrink; much more than by deforming mirrors, their own morphology is dominated by the format of the boxes in which they fit. Whereas with Hergé, one had seen the panels adapting to the dimensions of the characters, here it is the heroes who are made elastic by the apparatus of the page.[11]

Actually, it is as of the second page of *Little Nemo*, published Sunday, October 22, 1905, that McCay began to use a particular page layout. Perhaps it is the bed which is inserted throughout the first strip which suggested the effect of the staircase to him. Always it is this principle which determines the progression of the sequence: the height of mushrooms appears as the little boy is inserted in the forest, then the boxes narrow at the same time as the pieces fall. The narrative yields to the dimensions of the page.
But McCay's true genius only emerges in the following week. Drawing the conclusions from the previous page layout, McCay discovers that he is far from having exploited all its resources and sets out in search of an alternative. The device of the staircase, which appeared so miraculously suited to the mushroom episode, proves capable of generating a new episode despite the relatively minor variation it represents: whereas the mushrooms, inopportune run up against, crashed down on Nemo, it is now the little boy, standing on vertiginous stilts, who tumbles between the cacti.

A few weeks later, McCay will use in a comparable way, twice of continuation, a page layout organized around a large round panel. A remarkable fact: the second use is stronger than the first. McCay had just understood what would be one of the most constant resources of his art: beyond its aesthetic value or its spectacular effect, a figure can generate a piece of narration.

Like many of his precursors, the author of Little Nemo goes right to the heart of the specificity of the medium which he practices. The invention is overtaken, in his work, by a veritable inventory: not ceasing to be astonished by the figures which he creates, he explores, in a quasi-encyclopedic manner, the possibilities of the comic strip.

The vast rectangle of the Sunday page of the New York Herald (approximately forty centimeters wide and fifty-six high) was to obey a double constraint, being offered to a total discovery as much as gradual. Spectacular enough to catch the eye of anyone who turned the pages of the newspaper with a distracted hand, it was to prove enthralling enough to retain it as soon as it started to read.

Contrary to almost all the authors who would follow him, McCay regards the page as a place of adjacencies more still than of continuity. Instead of being a vector directed towards its end (this is known to us), the page is a surface of which all the parts are invested, a privileged space of relations which the glance can traverse in all directions.

In the great years of Little Nemo, McCay explores a considerable variety of logics of the page: a barely modified repetition of the same panel (August 25, 1907, and January 5, 1908); the gradual transformation of an image according to a kind of animation avant la lettre (October 4, 1908, and January 3, 1909); the construction of a total image (September 23, 1906); the continuity of a movement through successive decorations (September 15, 1907); “parallel montage” separating the left- and right-hand sides of the page (April 26, 1908), etc. McCay’s imagination is nourished by an obvious enjoyment of these ever-renewed devices.[12]

Fred, or panicked reading

In the rhetorical mode of operation, all was made to reabsorb the contradiction between narrative breakdown [découpage] and mise en page [page composition]. In the productive mode, on the contrary, this tension is exacerbated, the two aspects of the comic strip being put into operation simultaneously. One thus ends in a perpetually mobile result, which has for its primary effect the destabilization of reading.

Fred is undoubtedly one of the authors who have pushed the implementation of these problems the farthest. Beginning with a play of a linguistic nature (the character travels on the letters of the words ATLANTIC OCEAN), the Aventures de Philémon series went on little by little to draw all the conclusions from the project, i.e. to take the comic strip and its operations literally.
If one looks at, for example, page 25 of the album *Simbabbad de Batbad* [figure 13], one sees from the start that it presents a game of tableau and narrative. From the first glance, the page seems to offer itself up as a homogeneous and simultaneous space (recomposing the image of a gigantic dog). On closer inspections, it turns out that the page indeed obeys a model of a sequential nature (reproducing Philémon’s displacements).

More attentive still, the reading is not long in flushing out new strangenesses. The narrative continuity induced by the dialogue only coincides very partially with the continuation of movements described by the images: if the passage of box 1 with box 2 is hardly problematic from this point of view, the way of box 2 with box 3 seems at the very least difficult; if the slip of box 5 with box 7, or of box 6 with box 8, appears rather obvious, the succession 5-6-7-8 is, for its part, almost impossible (figure 14).

The gigantic dog is made the perfect emblem of this paradoxical space that the page has become; on the following page of the album, after the hero, against any realistic logic, has ended up returning to him, he does not hesitate to declare: “I am nothing, little head. I am nothing and I am everything, and everything always falls upon my back.”

And it certainly isn’t any comfort that Philémon reappears on Simbabbad on the next page: the reader is also obliged, after having arrived at the bottom of one page, to refer to the top of the following one; like Fred’s heroic protagonist, he always ends up landing on his feet.[13]

**Régis Franc and the crossed readings**

Less spectacular but perhaps even more astonishing is the use of the page proposed by some of the first comics of Régis Franc. In many of his *Histoires immobiles et récits inachevés* [*Immobile Stories and Unfinished Narratives*] and *Nouvelles Histoires* [*New Stories*] (albums the republication of which one cannot wish for more strongly), the action proceeds on several levels which are prolonged from panel to panel, thanks to an obstinately repeated page layout.
The various shots, like so many narrative lures, parade in parallel throughout the strip, leading more than once to delicious telescopings.

Figure 15. Régis Franc, “Hong Kong, Land of Contrasts,” Histoires immobiles et récits inachevés • Casterman.

A story like “Hong Kong, terre de contrastes” [Hong Kong, Land of Contrasts] pushes this type of organization to the extreme [figure 15]. Despite the apparent classicism of the arrangement, the comic page is here in all of its states. These large vertical panels, in which the narrative develops simultaneously on three planes, indeed leave the reader distraught, hesitating between two types of trajectories, each as unsatisfying as the other.

If one labels each of these levels of the panel A, B, and C, respectively, and numbers the different occurrences of each of these planes, and if one represents the direction of reading by an arrow, one can pose the dilemma in the following manner:

If (figure 16) I read the strip one panel after another, and I perceive the relations between the levels (relations stemming from Régis Franc’s particular sense of humor), I risk losing the continuity of each of the segments of the narrative.

If (figure 17) I traverse each of the planes in a linear fashion and I violate the real frames of the strip in favor of the imaginary frames, then the flavor of the story escapes me at the same time that I transgress one of the most fundamental rules of the implicit grammar of the comic: that which specifies that the images will be read one after the other, in the order in which they present themselves on the page.
The real reading, towards which Régis Franc wishes to lead us, oscillates ceaselessly between these two trajectories. To complete its path, it is obliged, at each instant, to turn back on its own tracks. One understands better why such stories are called ‘immobile’: one has scarcely taken a step in the reading when it is already necessary, in order to progress, to take a step back. To read and to reread are only the same thing.

This game of constant back-and-forth, which disturbs the left-right order, is complicated by a calling into question of the habitual itinerary carried out from top to bottom. By an amusing paradox, the sequence A which, graphically, is located in the foreground (and thus which one has the tendency to consider as the teacher-story) is also that which intervenes at the bottom of the page (and thus which Western reading habits force us to read last). Everything is topsy-turvy, and, if one finally resolves to read from bottom to top, it is however the reading from top to bottom which produces, ironically, the incident which provides the narrative with its downfall.

More than Hong Kong, which is nothing but a metaphor for it, the "land of contrasts" designated by the title is this comics page, used in all its dimensions simultaneously. The play of colors also confirms this. Between one panel and the next – and without giving any realistic pretext – the chromatic relations are completely transformed: the sky is blue, then red, then yellow; the trees red, orange, and finally blue. The comic is seen in all its colors.

The line of the narrative

Perhaps one will be astonished at the paucity of narratives which establish a productive relation to the page – and, notably, at the relative rarity of such pages in comics or photo-novel albums co-created by the author of this passage. This doesn't seem so surprising to me.

The productive conception of the page is infinitely easier to use on a small scale (one page seems to be the ideal size) than on a grand scale (I do not know a single comic album which functions purely in that mode). As it is extended – regardless of its initial mode of obtaining – an account tends to install stable codes in order to found its bases more solidly and thus to drive out the foreign bodies which, at every moment, threaten to make it deviate from its course. From this point of view, the rhetorical use of the panel and page is certainly that which ensures a fiction the best chances of continuity.

The system which one could wish to see developed would thus, to be viable beyond a few pages, have to stay productive and rhetorical at the same time. A particular organization of the page would suggest a piece of narrative which then would be amplified before once again opening onto another device. In this way, little by little, a mode of fiction specifically adapted to the comic strip would emerge, a fiction which, far from being only the illustration of a pre-existing narrative, would benefit from all its dimensions . . .

From the page to the book

The four categories of page layout which I have endeavored to describe, it seems to me, can be applied without too much difficulty at the level of the entire book.

In this respect, the immense majority of the comics albums of the French-speaking world rely on a *conventional* mode. In a format close to an A4 sheet of paper, hard-bound and in color, most albums have a length of 48 pages (3 books of 16 pages each), this standard having been imposed since *Astérix*, against that of the 64 pages (4 books) popularized by the *Adventures of Tintin*. Imposed rather than chosen, very seldom questioned, indefinitely repeated, this mold weighed more heavily than one would believe on the conception of narrative in the comics,
supporting the lasting development of serials extended over several years whose various volumes are only so many chapters.

Decorative albums would be those whose unusual, sometimes luxurious and often garish presentation seeks to distinguish itself from the bulk of comics production. Many first printings and oversized editions are satisfied with a facile aestheticism, without taking advantage of these particularities of the medium to develop new experiments.

One can call the functioning of a book rhetorical when its dimensions are precisely adapted to its project. Such was the case with the Adventures of Tintin when they appeared in black and white: the number of pages varied according to the needs of each story. Such is still the case with a collection like the "Romans (à suivre)"; and more still with a book like Spiegelman’s Maus, which chose to bring its presentation closer to that of a literary work. Many recent publications, like those of L’Association, Autrement’s "Histoires graphiques" or éditions du Seuil’s small albums, partake of the same will to adapt their editorial goals to the projects of their authors.

Watchmen, or the comic book and its margins

The productive use of the album, if it remains the exception, can issue in some completely enthralling results.

Behind a rather conventional appearance (since the work respects the essential codes of the comic book), Watchmen, by Moore and Gibbons, paid an exceptional attention to the overall design of the book [figure 18]. The cover of the book – at first presenting a nearly abstract character, since it presents a uniformly yellow mass marked with a red splotch and a black oval shape – is illuminated by the title page of chapter I, then the first page of the story. In a slow zoom out, one discovers that the yellow mass corresponds to a badge stained with blood, a circular motif which recurs rhythmically throughout the narrative. Symmetries of the same order develop throughout the volume, linking the pages of the comic themselves to other pages in the book. One of the most remarkable rhymes is that which links the first and the last title page: also yellow, also stained with blood, it is a “watch” that one discovers at the head of chapter XII . . . [14]

![Figure 18. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, Watchmen: On the covers and title pages of each chapter, one finds the same design. These elements, often treated in an academic manner, form an integral part of the project here. © Titan Books.](image)

It is most regrettable that the French editors of Watchmen wanted to filter this book, so carefully designed, through the standards of European publishing. Divided into six albums definitely larger than the original comic books, Les Gardiens lost its graphic scale and its narrative coherence. Equipped with covers more traditional than those of the English edition, this French version – otherwise well translated by Jean-Patrick Manchette – smashed to
Chris Ware or the triumph of the book-object

One of the strengths of *Watchmen* is to have accepted a traditional framework of pacing by exploding it from within: to the current rules of the comic book, Moore and Gibbons added their own requirements. The project which currently Chris Ware develops, with his Acme Novelty Library (figure 19), is much more radical: for this young American author, it is a question of inventing, little by little, an ensemble of objects which are inseparable from their contents.

The nine booklets published to date use five different formats: the smallest are 15.5 × 18.5 cm (6” × 7.2”); the largest are 27.5 × 46 cm (10.7” × 17.9”). Far from being a simple device, this change of dimensions constitutes an essential element, making it possible to define a series of subsets within the Acme Novelty Library. As Chris Ware explains:

> If I change the format of the magazine from one issue to the next, it is not in order to be original at any cost, as some critics have implied. I just think that each issue should have a specific flavor and be adapted to its particular contents. Besides, the standard format of the American comic books seems fundamentally inept to me; I can’t understand why so many cartoonists remain faithful to it. The format of a book is a parameter as significant as the way in which the food is presented or the body is clothed.\[^{16}\]

One of the most immediately remarkable traits of Chris Ware’s works is the attention paid to the most negligible details of these slim volumes. Strictly speaking, there is not the slightest negligible detail in the books published to date. The covers, the titles, the games, the pseudo-mail from readers, the simulacra of advertisements or do-it-yourself projects, everything participates in the same logic, all is treated with the same perfectionism as the pages of the comics themselves.

In taking advantage of the new capabilities of computers to manipulate lettering, coloring, and mock-up, Chris Ware manages to control a number of parameters hitherto difficult for comics authors to access. The traditional separation between the work of the artist and that of the editor is no longer in place here: Ware dominates his albums from beginning to end, from their design to their manufacture. In this respect, as in many others, he opens up enthralling prospects for the comics.\[^{17}\]

Notes


This type of operation enjoyed a revival for a few years due to the reassembly of a series of comic books for editions in pocket format. The devastation caused by such a destructuring of the page is obvious, except, precisely, in the case of the conventional page.

[3] In one sense, moreover, all *mise en page* is conventional, from the moment that it follows a constant page format. The creative virtue of this “hyperframe” must be emphasized, at any rate: it is what, in transforming a pure undifferentiated surface into an inductive space of fiction, allows the imagination to take flight.

It is certainly possible to design a comic book that would be able to redefine the format of its pages at any moment. To avoid mere aestheticism, it would then be necessary for it to have a system of rules that would give these ceaseless variations a meaning. In this respect as well as others, Martin Vaughn-James's album *La Cage* remains completely exemplary.

[4] The French translation of *City of Glass* [*Cité de verre*] published by Actes Sud, inordinately flaunting the name of Paul Auster, minimizes the virtues of the exceptional work of adaptation realized by David Mazzucchelli. Far from having been — as has been the case with so many novels — the object of a mere illustration, Paul Auster's text was really reinvented at the time of its transformation into a comic book.

[5] I will readily acknowledge that this point is one of those on which my conceptions have developed a great deal since the first edition of this work, and particularly since the initial version of this chapter was published in 1983, in the first issue of the journal *Conséquences*. Thierry Groensteen's critiques — formulated in particular in "Un premier bouquet de contraintes" in *Oubapo 1*, l’Association, 1997, pp. 35-38 — but also my own experiences as a scenarist made me reconsider what had been an exaggeratedly dogmatic point of departure. It must be repeated: the four uses of the page described here do not have any absolute value; they are merely analytical tools that must be modified in light of each new example.

[6] Tardi's album *Le démon des glaces* [*The Demon of the Ice*] (1974) systematized this effect. As Groensteen has aptly demonstrated, the 52 pages of this book "are all symmetrically organized, according to as many different models" (*Oubapo 1*, op cit., p. 37).

[7] One must qualify one's terms once again in the case of Edgar P. Jacobs. Subjected to a narrative principle that is constraining in a different manner from that of Druillet's intergalactic epics, the creator of "Blake et Mortimer" often discovered clever solutions of framing or breakdown to make the narrative coincide with its aesthetic concerns. While decorative utilization seems predominant in his work to me, it is also frequently coupled with rhetorical or productive effects.

[8] The same remark could apply to a great number of video special effects: as soon as the first moment of surprise passes, it is their vanity that strikes the viewer. The flashy and eye-catching is not long in wearying. Nothing gets old more quickly than techniques of this kind.


[11] It is not always easy, short of an ideological *coup de force*, to establish a rigorous distinction between the rhetorical and the productive conceptions. Is it a dominant *mise en page* that suggested the idea of the deforming mirrors, or was it a story about the ice palace that led to this arrangement? Only the recurrence of these arrangements makes it possible for us to distinguish which conception is in play, as long as we do not forget that the same album can, from one page to the next, pass from a productive operation to a rhetorical operation. It would be appropriate to study this subtle dialectic, by which a page may shift from one device to another in an instant, in more detail at another time.

[12] Moreover, the series will not cease to pursue this mode until, towards the end of 1910, the virtualities of the animated drawing begin to excite its author more. Let us not be mistaken: even if he begins by adapting *Little Nemo*, McCay is at the heart of animation from the start. A true champion of specificities, he has a presentiment, from this first attempt, of the many potentialities of the genre, making the transformation of images before the viewer’s eyes very the subject of his little fiction. In his two subsequent films — *How a Mosquito Operates* and
detail four conceptions of social pathology with the help of these questions in Laitinen & Särkelä (2018) and in Honneth's work in particular here is to map some of the central issues as stake in the philosophical discourse on social pathology. We discuss and compare in more

The four conceptions are compared along six criteria: (1) is the view plausible?; (2) is it informative (if true)?; (3) does it help define the task of social philosophy?

In Särkelä and Laitinen (2018). The four causes are elements of an influential principle in Aristotelian thought whereby explanations of

Nonetheless, I have translated the term

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Chris Ware comes

prodigieux travail de Chris Ware,” in


The same remark can apply to the translation of a considerable number of manga, beginning with Akira. In modifying the format of the volumes and splitting them up excessively, the French and American editors profoundly denatured Otomo's work. Fortunately, the current tendency in the translation of manga seems to be to pay greater respect to the original edition. It can never be repeated sufficiently: a comic strip is a total object, all the parameters of which (dimensions, pagination, subdivision into chapters, choice of black-and-white or color, cover image . . .) should be taken into account when a foreign edition is prepared.


For an overall presentation of the Acme Novelty Library, see Jean-Christophe Menu, "Le prodigieux travail de Chris Ware," in 9° Art no. 2. It is no small matter that the first article on Chris Ware comes from the hand of Menu, a talented comics author but also the principal organizer of "L'Association." This small Parisian publishing house is indeed characterized by its constant will to connect the work of authors to the technical constraints of production, and even of the marketing of the works. "Fricgo", "La cinquième couche," and other groups of young authors testify to the same preoccupations in this respect. There is no doubt that this new form of craft industry, based on the most contemporary technologies, constitutes one of the best chances for the renewal of the comics.

Translation Notes

To be precise, "four conceptions of the planche." The French term "planche," which can be more literally translated as "plate," has no real equivalent in English; as Charles Hattfield notes, it names "the total design unit rather than the physical page on which it is printed" (Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature [Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005] 48). Nonetheless, I have translated the term as "page" throughout – Trans.


The English version of "A Sunset in Sunshine City" was originally published in the Will Eisner Quarterly and then reprinted in the book The Will Eisner Reader; Seven Graphic Stories by a Comics Master, DC Comics, 2000. – Ed.

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change or movement are classified into four fundamental types of answer to the question "why?". Aristotle wrote that "we do not have knowledge of a thing until we have grasped its why, that is to say, its cause." While there are cases in which classifying a "cause" is difficult, or in which "causes" might merge, Aristotle held that his four "causes" provided an analytical scheme of general highlighting variation in understanding of a conception and giving feedback on what dimensions are useful and what are not may provide a foundation for the deeper study. For example, Pang and Marton (2003) distinguish various conceptions of price held by students in terms of what is related to the inherent value of the commodity concerned, the demand conditions, the supply conditions, and the demand and supply conditions. This is concerned with developing an understanding of the way models are used in the discipline; why we set up models as we do. Given the complexity of the relationships in the economy, economists use economic models to understand the important interrelationships in the economy.