

Comics & Culture Overview & Student Projects F2018

Nick Sousanis

San Francisco State University

sousanis@sfsu.edu

<http://spinweaveandcut.com/education-home/>

Comics Studies @SFSU

<https://humanitiesliberalstudies.sfsu.edu/minor-comics-studies>

Midterm

HUM325 Comics & Culture Midterm: DO Parts 1, 2, and 3 below

Short Essay: Answer one of the following prompts (minimum 300 words)

- Write a letter to an authority figure (your parents, principal, teacher, or ...) explaining why comics are appropriate for the classroom or worthy of study at the university level.
- Describe some essential ways in which comics are unique and distinct from other art forms such as literature, film, and poetry in terms of conveying narrative.
- Focus on a single aspect of one of our readings thus far (The Arrival, March, Persepolis, Watchmen, or the shorter readings Mr. Wonderful, ...), and discuss how it contributed to how meaning was made in the comic.

Visual Analysis/Annotation

Choose a single page to visually annotate and analyze (either from the sample I provide, our readings, or that you find on your own). As with our earlier analysis exercise, annotate the page with notes and diagrammatic elements. Draw directly on the page, and explain the effect of the various stylistic and other creative elements. Offer analytical commentary in regards to the creative decisions being made, and what they do to your understanding of the comic. We want to emphasize observation and what you can deduce from everything you have observed. This should help you think about the construction of the comic—how is it made, why is it made in this way, and what is the effect of it being made this way?

Comic as Demonstration

Draw a one-page comic that incorporates at least 8 of the following 12 terms. Then, annotate your own comic briefly, simply pointing out where and why you incorporated the terms. The comic does not have to demonstrate strong artistic skill*, but it should be cohesive and well-planned, and should demonstrate an advanced understanding of the form.

- Iconic variation (within McCloud's triangle)
- Action-to-action transition
- Aspect-to-aspect transition
- Scene-to-scene transition
- Interdependent word/picture combination
- Wordlessness across at least three panels
- Visual sound effects
- Emanata
- Negative space
- Overlapping panels
- Simultaneity (images that continue across multiple panels)
- Wildcard of your choice (please note this in your comments)

* If you need a little help drawing not-so-stick figures, remember the geometric body exercises we did in class – ala Ivan Brunetti (<http://www.tcj.com/“nothing-good-can-come-out-of-dishonesty”-an-interview-about-teaching-with-ivan-brunetti/>)

Also – for support on terms, theories, etc., look back at the PDFs I've compiled for you to assist in the earlier visual analysis exercise.

Dear Dad,

The year is 1970. You are nine years old. You spend most of the long, Jersey summers outside, in the mud, with the neighborhood boys. Once in a while, when your Mother gives you a few dollars, you go into Philly and find the corner store where the owner rolls his eyes when he notices you walk in. You buy a pack of bubble gum and a Batman comic.

In 1970, comics were your pre-teen vice; like an unfathomable treasure, your comics were sacred. You hide them in a dilapidated shoe box under the bed in the room you shared with your three other brothers.

You reminisce about your past comic, dog days to me. In 2003, you noticed the pure gratification I got from just doodling and drawing.

In 2005 you told me I should draw my own comic and create a “badass girl hero.”

In 2013 you told me that I shouldn’t spend my “free days” just drawing girls.

In 2018 you scoffed when I decided to take a college course devoted to comics.

I write to pose the question: why? Why, as you engaged in reading comics, practicing them like a religion, have you stopped acknowledging their importance and validity in society? In your own life?

I can hear your answer to these questions now, “Gina, comics are just for fun, just for kids.” Well, yes comics are fun and are for kids. But comics are also terrifying, sad, angry, disturbing, and possibly encompass every emotion that a person can feel. Comics, like no other form, have the ability to pave across multiple spaces and topics. Comics are a form of communication which include text, while superseding text in the same moment. Time is constructed and deconstructed; space is defined and confused, boundaries are crossed.

Comics are for millennials like me, and for fifty eight year-olds like yourself.

Comics are an expression of human culture and identity. Academic institutions have long studied expressions of culture to understand human nature and the society in which they reside in. Literature, art, film, and music are considered valid texts to study, yet comics are left out of the conversation. Even you, once a comics reader, have accepted this separation.

Comics are worthy for discussion at a level higher, as they relate concepts together that are meant to be questioned. Space: how people, things, places relate to one another in a dictated plot

is literally shown within a comics page. Time: linear and uncontained, time is expressed through the marriage of text and image.

I know you were a Batman fanboy, but comics can represent more than a heroic narrative. And even studying that Batman comic reveals much about its moment in time, as well as the society that created it.

I’ll leave you with this: if you consider Picasso worthy of analysis within an academic setting (and I know you would) consider comics in the same way, as both forms explore space, time, and identity.

Think outside, and within the panel.

Gina

To: Mr. McCown,
Principle, Pinewood Elementary
Pollock Pine, California

Dear Mr. McCown,

In 1975 you banned comic books at our school. The reasons given were “they were inappropriate for kids and too graphic.” What you failed to understand was the power of the format of comic books and how several students found a way to express themselves. The students who weren’t good at sports and weren’t welcome on your wrestling, basketball, baseball and flag football team. The students who were good at art and drawing but got beat up by your athletes for doing it. The students who were beaten at home by their fathers for not being manly enough in this mountain community. Ronnie Gilagan came to school bruised all year and you did nothing. When he was sent to your office for having comic books, and you called his parents, he almost didn’t survive that beating from his father. Ronnie drew the most amazing comics about war. He would tell whole stories to us on the playground. Always about his brother, who was in the army. The Captain America comics that you confiscated from him were the only comfort he had while his brother was away.

I am currently in a Comics and Culture class at the University of San Francisco. Every class and comic reminds me of Ronnie. He would have loved this class and program. He would have been able to expand his skills as an artist and study some of the most complex comics ever created. His love of science would have been fed with the complexity of time and space. He would have found like-minded people who are as skilled as he was and would talk comic books for days. He could have been a part of a growing program, here in San Francisco, that teaches the skills and amazing range of comics from the very beginning.

Ronnie always said he was just waiting for his super powers to kick in; then he would be free. He knew one day he would fly like Superman, beat the bad guys like Captain America and have a great car like Batman. But it was Snoopy on his doghouse that brought him comfort at night when the nightmares came. He said when he saw Snoopy everything would be alright.

I use to keep Ronnie’s drawings so his dad wouldn’t see them. His drawings got better and better as he got older. I would love to have seen his work if he had seen his eighteenth birthday. A person can only take so much abuse.

As a future teacher, myself, I can only imagine a time when comics are incorporated into the curriculum of grade school and validated as another great form of art and expression. Imagine the students who will be encouraged to draw and explore the unlimited aspects of comics. I now can see that day.

As a principle you did a lot of good things but this decision was not one of them. In honor of Ronnie I hope to one day bring about a more encompassing curriculum for my students so that they may truly know no bounds.

Sincerely,

Shari Garrett

Wordless
Across
Panels

Cartooning

Aspect-to-Aspect
transition

Iconic
variation

Overlapping
Panels

Simultaneity

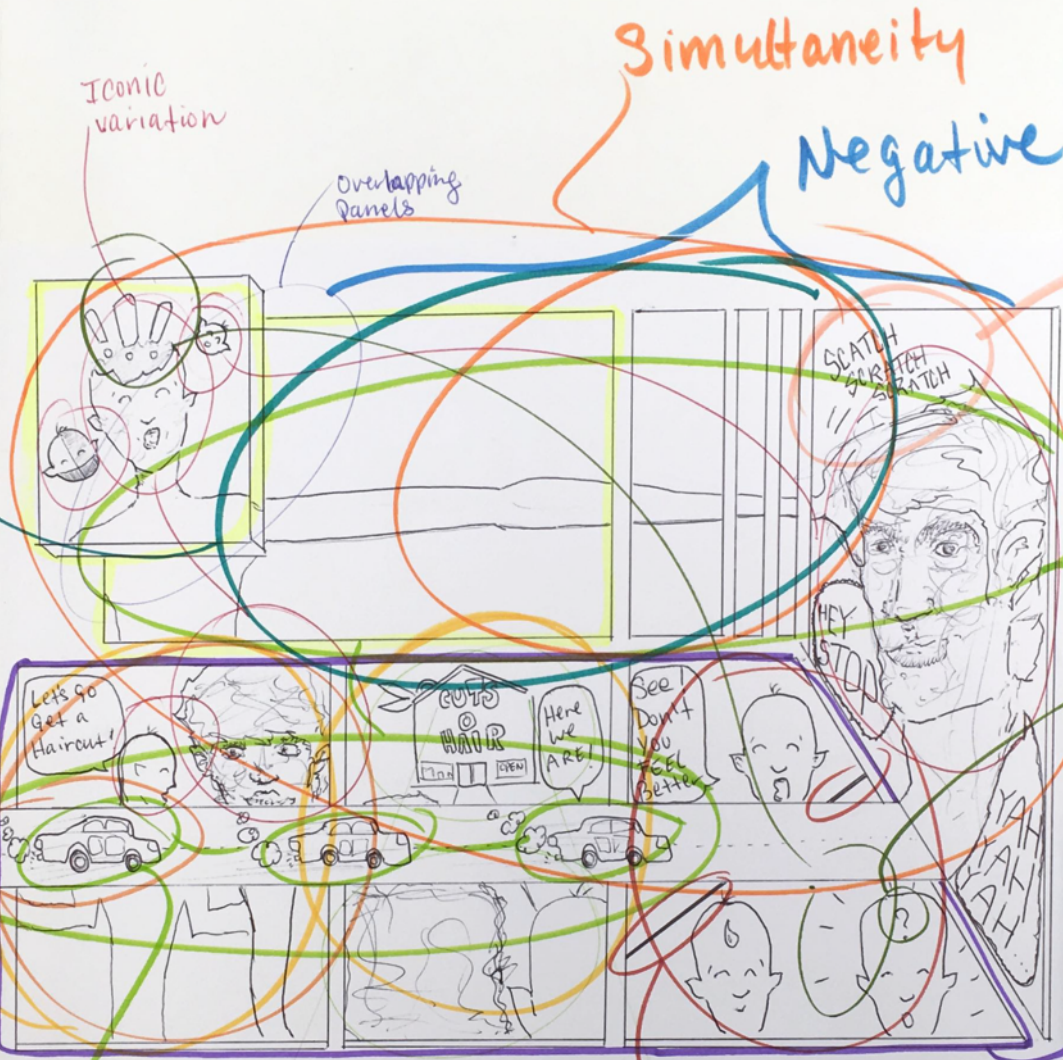
Negative space

Visual
Sound effects

Emanata

Action-to-Action
transition

Scene-to-Scene
transition /
transition



Car is
going to
and coming
from
"cuts O Hair"
transcending

Change in
perspective

Frame division within
a Frame/Panel

SPACE + TIME; Simultaneity

Text is mixed with relatable, everyday things along side larger concepts of time, formation, & motion

entire rest of page is almost one large panel

almost all text and images are interdependent

very similar to watchmen

in but also out between direction plus growing

stream = life

flow of life is how does it relate to the flow of comics?

YET, LIFE

Legend:
 ■ Movement (red)
 ■ Image (blue)
 ■ Text (green)
 ■ Panels (orange)
 ■ Content (purple)

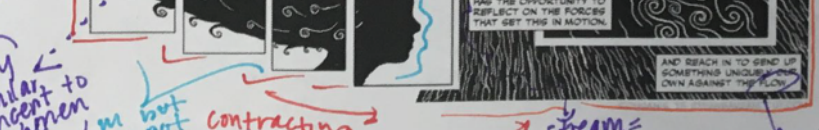
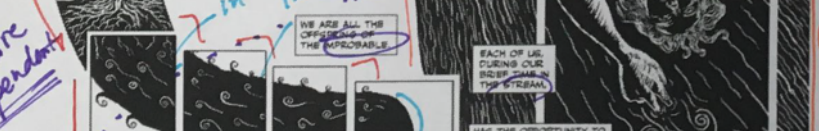
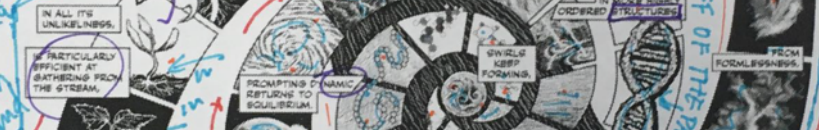
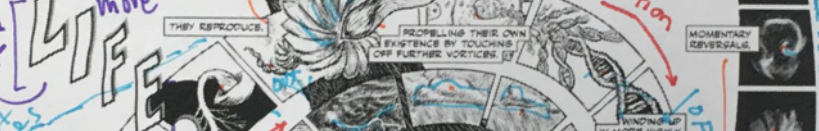
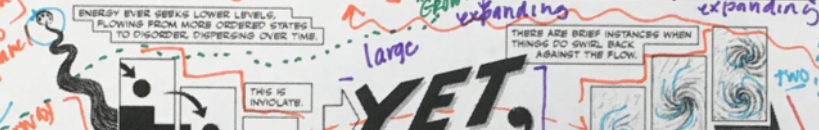
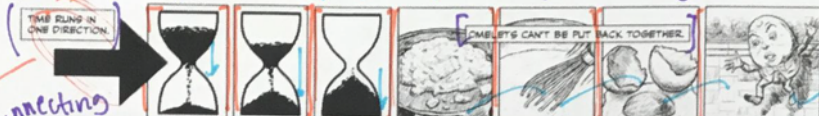
Annotations:
 - Time gradually going X passing
 - Movement
 - Image
 - Text
 - Panels
 - Content
 - almost backwards
 - odd number of panels
 - stacked upwards
 - also 7 panels here yet this! panel is double
 - large juxtaposition between flat, "clip-art" style drawings and realistic
 - circular
 - starts out flat EVOLVES INTO DIMENSION coming off of the page
 - going inwards...
 - Fast
 - The creation of the universe
 - movement is anything but linear, all directions and somewhat 8D... this can be read different
 - show
 - flow of life is how does it relate to the flow of comics?
 - stream = life
 - contracting
 - growing
 - reference again coffee
 - in but also out between direction plus growing
 - very similar to watchmen
 - almost all text and images are interdependent
 - entire rest of page is almost one large panel
 - Text is mixed with relatable, everyday things along side larger concepts of time, formation, & motion

A Dream?
Is this a panel?
more open... leading in to a panel

Texts are within boxes

Time gradually going X passing

lays over 7 other panels: expanding X connecting



General specifics: This is a 5 panel comic that tells the story of Nemo going bra shopping and being overwhelmed, portrayed in a dream adventure. I've numbered the panels for easy reference.

This comic is done in a semi iconic style, not extremely realistic. The characters - half animal, half human, fish with legs, an alien, and an ostrich all add to the surrealistic, dreamlike narrative. Maybe all the unfamiliar characters and confused/question filled dialogue help add to the foreign nature of this adventure, since Nemo is male and hasn't had the life experience of bra shopping.

Action:

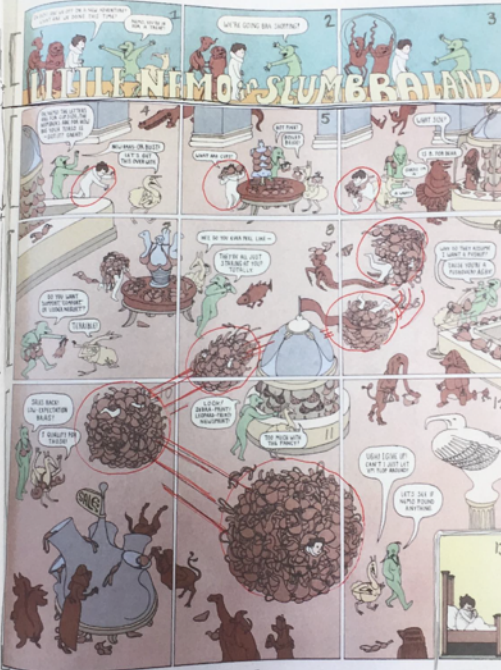
Nemo - shown through movements in positioning across the simultaneous scene set in panels 4-12. As Nemo builds momentum he rolls quickly (seen in the movement lines)

Alien + Ostrich - they appear in every panel 4-12, but always start on the left side a travel right. their trajectory is marked in blue.



Reading flow: dictated by word balloons that read right to left, but the non-linear use of nemo happens in the background, this may affect the reading flow + if you look at the image before reading the text it's up to the reader.

panels 1-3 act as an establishing sequence, shown with a blue background (as opposed to the rest of the comic) and moment to moment conversation



panel 2 to 3 are very similar, the only difference is the word balloon in 2 and the wiggly arm in 3, Nemo's exposed, or desire change play on slumberland, "BRA" the main event of the comic. Text is yellow, the same as the very last panel #13.

Composition: Each row of the comic has larger and larger sized panels which get bigger as the action and nemo/bra/ball get larger as well. The layout of panels 4-12 remind me of a pinball machine. Nemo is the ball.

panels 1-3 are sequential, panels 4-12 create a simultaneous image. The final panel reveals that this adventure was just a dream (if you didn't already guess that from the title). A little doomier back to reality.

Word balloons / Dialogue: pretty standard shape and uniform text. Nemo only has two ones, in panel 1 - establishing the beginning of the adventure, and in panel 5 - "what are cups" that establishes the confusion spiral and overwhelming amount of unfamiliar and new information he gets rolled up in. In terms of the alien and ostrichs, their dialogue functions as word play humor and help support the many options and features of bras that I'm sure Nemo is confused about. Maybe they are used as a representation of Nemo's subconscious? he is dreaming after all...

Writing and Dying" - Adrian Tomine

20 Panels / equal, clean, soft colors, architectural lines and shapes...
 #panels 3-7: intimate moment between Jesse and Mom. Dad watches from outside, helpless. Wordless. Shift in color - nighttime / bright room. They are bisected by the window pane. Isolation -> must break! Walk across these lines to hug her.

lots of right angles
 other objects/characters "hinded" at - almost the main extras
 "Faded" look to background, makes character stand out against the grey

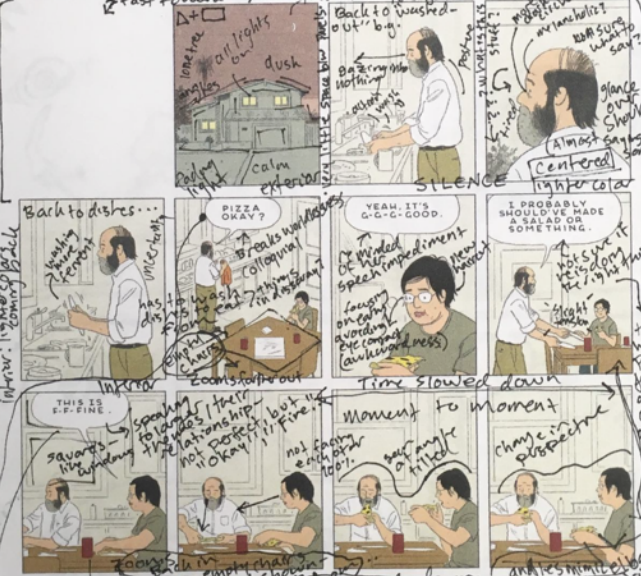


the manner in which Dad + Jesse are walking are shown by his stature presence:
 Dad: Foot slightly off floor, slightly hunched, wobble in pants: slower, Pace = dejected feeling

White out: Blank panel / no border breaks sequence: Mom is gone jumps forward in time. This is the way we find out = Present blank space time + absence - hits hard unknown - hits hard

Tomine juxtaposes the blank panel w/ the "house panel" to fast forward in time - blank white space (borderless) denotes a period of time where the characters are struggling and characters in a "blur" of grief / verisimilitude of this period of "blankness".

"Pizza okay?" - Breaks wordlessness in larger portion of page attempt to connect through small talk - more about what is not being said
 Silence / sound so many things being unsaid (Mom's cancer, Jesse's speech impediment) that the experience through the phagony
 Dad unsure if he is doing / saying the right things -> forced to engage with Jesse



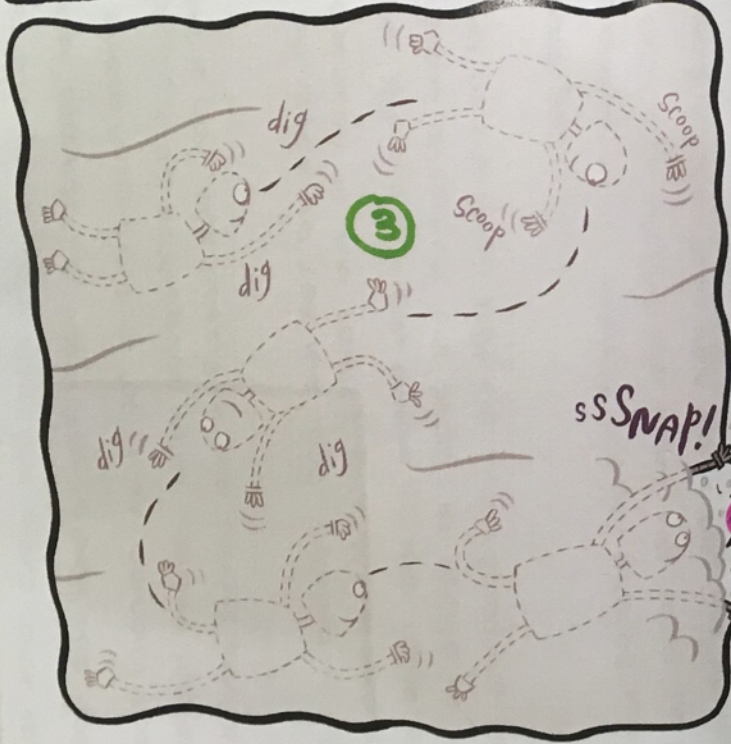
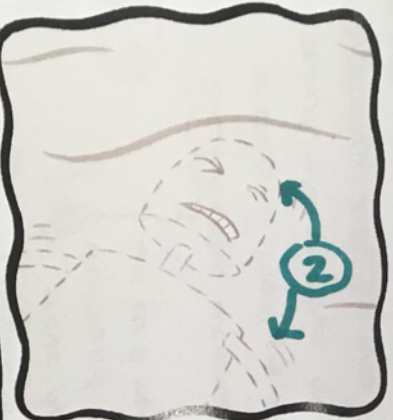
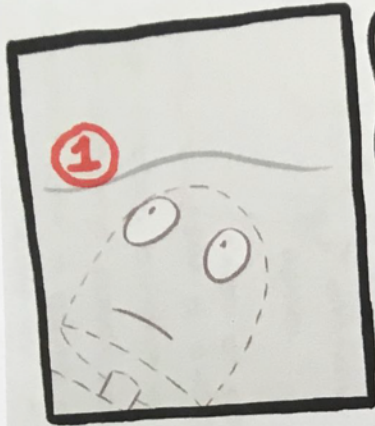
Dialogue: Mundane, every-day - but shows how their relationship dynamic has changed -
 "quiet" - we can almost hear the sound of them chewing things at different, Mom gone - but they are carrying on - the simplicity of these last panels provide at once hope and uncertainty - but that it's okay - an exchange, an understanding

Also, background and Dad's clothing speak to his "buttoned-up" personality
 #note: only in the page before this one do we know that Mom is sick for certain - her appearance slowly changes (hair, face, posture) over the course of the narrative but never explicitly mentions her illness until after she's gone. so that Jesse's parents' motives only make sense retrospectively -> awesome thing comics can do: show / enact a larger / deeper meaning without needing to explicitly state it - the subtle changes in the way Mom is drawn, allow's to experience it along with Jesse + Dad -> Distorts / Manipulates time: now and retrospect.

#5-7: We read "Right to Left" - but movement / action in this panel most seems as though it could move left to right (Jesse moves across panels to hug Mom)
 #8: In this moment we can feel Dad's realization: that Mom is dying and he will need to learn how to be a better parent to Jesse. He is scared and doesn't know how to deal with it: Tomine illustrates this w/ str. planes color, posture, the windows...

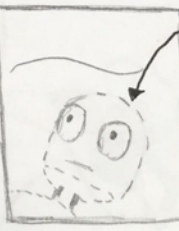
First time they are together, facing each other, but not completely - Tomine's positioning of the characters - their uncertainty with each other but want to talk

ANALYSIS BY E!



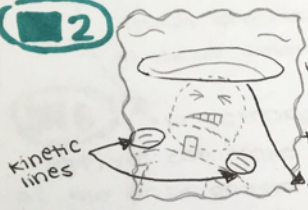
and Zahner.

1



- The dotted lines outlining the robot's body indicate to us, wordlessly, that the robot is not quite himself. It's not his full corporeal form because he's trapped inside of something. Based off the color, it is probably dirt or sand.
- This is the only panel that has a straight edged panel border. I hypothesize that maybe it's because it's the only panel where the character's not moving. In contrast to the succeeding panels which have the squiggly borders which also have some sort of action taking place in them

2

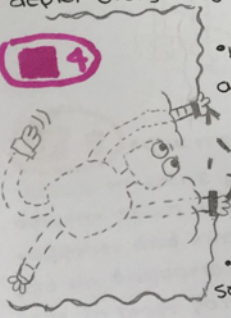


- The kinetic lines above the character's arms paired with the facial expression are enough to convey that the robot is moving (the kinetic lines) and that it's difficult for the robot to extricate itself (from the strained expression)
- Compared to the last panel, there are also more wave-like lines which could also be suggesting movement by looking at the change in environment. When you're lodged somewhere and then shift around, things around you will too

3

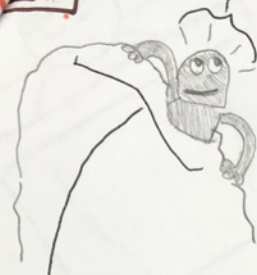
This panel is an interesting portrayal of time — something that I feel is unique to comics. The reader knows that there aren't 5 different robots in this one scene. It's the same robot who's now digging his way out of his predicament. The sound effects tell us what he's doing and the dotted line connecting the robots not only help indicate the order we read the progression but it is also a way of representing time passing without making the comic depict every single moment like stop motion

4



- In this snippet of the panel that I've highlighted, we see the robot actually literally breaking the panel to escape its confinement from before. The sound effect shows us that while meta and drawing attention to the comic's format, it is also a literal breaking out since we see the robot escaping in the next panel.
- Also of note, if you look closely at the robot's hands you can see a difference in its appearance. When trapped and submerged, the robot's outline is dotted (showing that we aren't actually directly seeing it) but once the robot breaks through the panel and is free, the dotted outline is replaced with a more realistic border that also has more color to it. This distinction is clearer to us since we see the change in progress as the robot is in the process of escaping the confinements of the border/mountain.

5

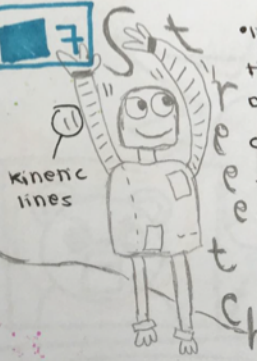


- Lines like this above the character's head are called "emanata" and are used to wordlessly convey emotion. It's a technique mostly unique to comics though cartoons employ similar techniques. In this panel, the emanata can instill a feeling of relief or satisfaction after having finally escaped. The size and "duration" of the previous panel (something I forgot to mention before) makes it seem like a significant amount of time has passed so the culmination of those efforts have a source of catharsis in the character that's revealed in these emanata lines rather than in words.

6

- In retrospect, looking at this panel and comparing it to the previous one, we can make an inference about the panel shape. The squiggly lines of the prior panels mirror the shape of the mountain the robot's escaping from. While this doesn't explain the first panel's shape or why the panels after this one are still squiggly, it is at least an interesting visual note/artistic choice.

7



- In this panel, there's a very complementary interplay of the image and the text. Adding in the word "stretch" not only clears up what the robot's doing, if it already wasn't clear, but also is able to convey how stretching feels like through text. Many of us pronounce the word "stretch" the way it's written when we perform the physical act of it. Additionally, by spatially stretching out the word and having it take up more space, it can also convey the passage of time and how long the act of stretching took place since the letter spacing makes us take in the panel more slowly.

8

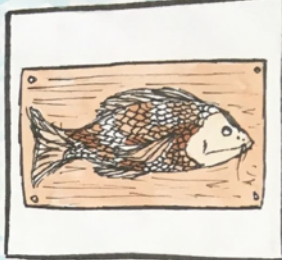
- The transition between these two panels is an example of McCloud's scene to scene panel transitions. This means that while we don't see the robot's descent down the mountain or when he picked up a stick, this is something we piece together and infer as readers. Connections like this show active reader participation and an engagement and understanding of the story. Scene to scene transitions are used in other parts of the comic too such as the panels when the robot breaks the border and then the next scene is it climbing out. By using transitions like this, the creators can condense the number of panels used while still giving enough information for story comprehension. The way "showcuts" like these are used is a technique unique to comics.



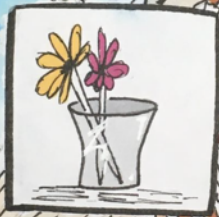
THE CARP IS PROBABLY THE UGLIEST FISH IN THE SPECIES.



BROWN, FAT, BLACK EYES, FISHY.



THE CARP IS A STEREOTYPICAL FISH.



CARP STANDS FOR THE CAMPUS ACADEMIC RESOURCE PROGRAM.

WE PROVIDE WHAT PROFESSORS CANNOT.

THE BACKBONE OF THE UNIVERSITY



I WORK AS A WRITING, READING, AND STUDY SKILLS TUTOR THERE.

WE ARE SUBTLE, BUT ESSENTIAL.

THESIS: -why does it matter? -what -why

1. Scene to Scene: Scene to scene can be seen throughout the comic page, yet most accurately in the bottom and middle panels, where the scene changes. In the middle four panels, each scene is different and can stand alone without other panels to provide too much context.

2. Aspect to Aspect: The aspect to aspect can be seen in the 3 panels at the top of the page. All the same image, the panels just depict the carp (fish) sequentially zoomed-out angle. The first panel is a close up (ina) of the eye, the second is a little zoomed out, the face is visible, and the third is a total zoom out, and the entire fish can be seen.

3. Overlapping Panels: There are two pairs of overlapping panels both at the bottom of the page. The overlapping panels help connect the two thematically and to show that they are in conversation with one another.

4. Wordless 3 Panels: There are four wordless panels within the comic, and they take up the center of the page. The wordless panels all have contrasting images, yet relate to the space of CARP as a whole; the door, the flower pens, chalk, and SFSU emblem are symbols of CARP.

5. Negative Space: The negative space within this comic is the blue "water" that sits behind the panels, serving as a background to the narrative. This negative space "spaces" out the panels, but in this comic, I think it also allows the eyes to rest and not focus on the black, thick panels.

6. Visual Sound Effect: The visual sound effect aspect can be seen in the lower left panel: "RING" the visual sound effect in very literal, yet the shakiness of the word shows how it would sound in real life. This informs the reader to read the "ring" as an actual sound - instead of the verbal word.

7. Emanata Symbols: the emanata symbols appear in the lower left panel, where the hand holds the phone. The symbols come from the phone to express the aspect of communication.

8. Wildcard: I used two main "wildcards". One being the word bubble is outside the panels and coming from an unknown location. And two, the mixture of materials I used to create the comic. The negative blue space is made with water color, which is juxtaposed with the rest of the pen & ink drawings. Also (I just remembered) the fish in the middle of the page can be considered "wildcard" too, as it is not a panel nor is it in one.

9. Action to Action: The action to action panel can be seen in the bottom left corner, where the phone is ringing and into the next panel, where the phone is answered.



1. Simultaneity

↳ This can be seen in the two panels on the top left side of the page. It splits the room between the character in the forefront from the character behind, separating their dialogue for a further dynamic. It also adds a greater illusion to the Captain looking out the window.

2. Overlapping Panels

↳ Overlapping panels are put throughout this page to create a more packed and jumbled story structure due to the case that is seemingly confusing and messy given to Det. Carson.

3. Negative Space

↳ The backgrounds are filled with background details to capture the dark grittiness of this environment.

4. Emanata

↳ The last panel showcases Carson cursing to himself in his head because of the situation that he is in.

5. Wordless across at least 3 panels

↳ The top three middle panels that showcase the contents and insight of the "Scarlet Painter" File. While not completely wordless, there is no dialogue. The three panels convey the gruesome murders made by the killer.

6. Interdependent

↳ The bottom left panel states a time period that would not be known otherwise.

7. Scene - to - Scene

↳ Scene to scene is made throughout the page from the first two panels to the last three panels.

8. Aspect to Aspect.

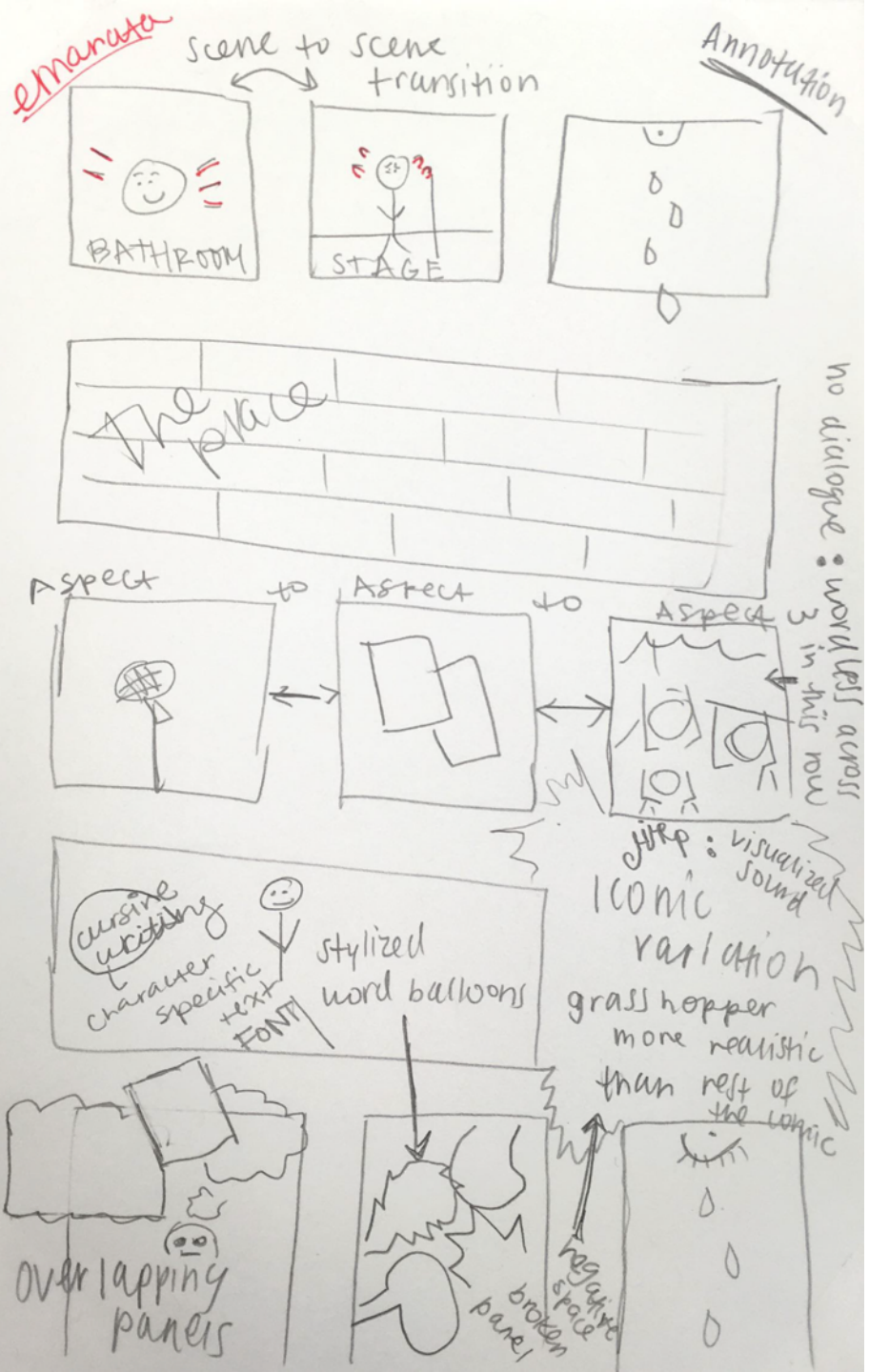
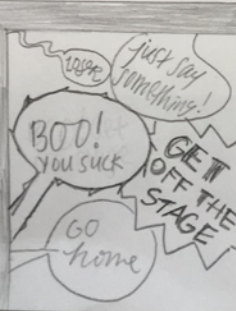
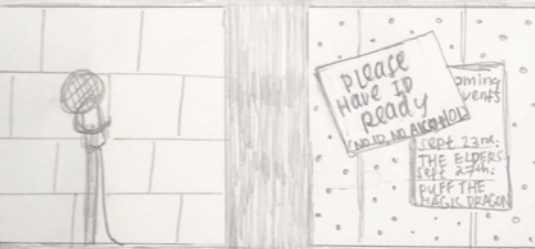
↳ The last two panels are the same scene but different angles

comedians in clubs crying

by: Daylan Buchanan

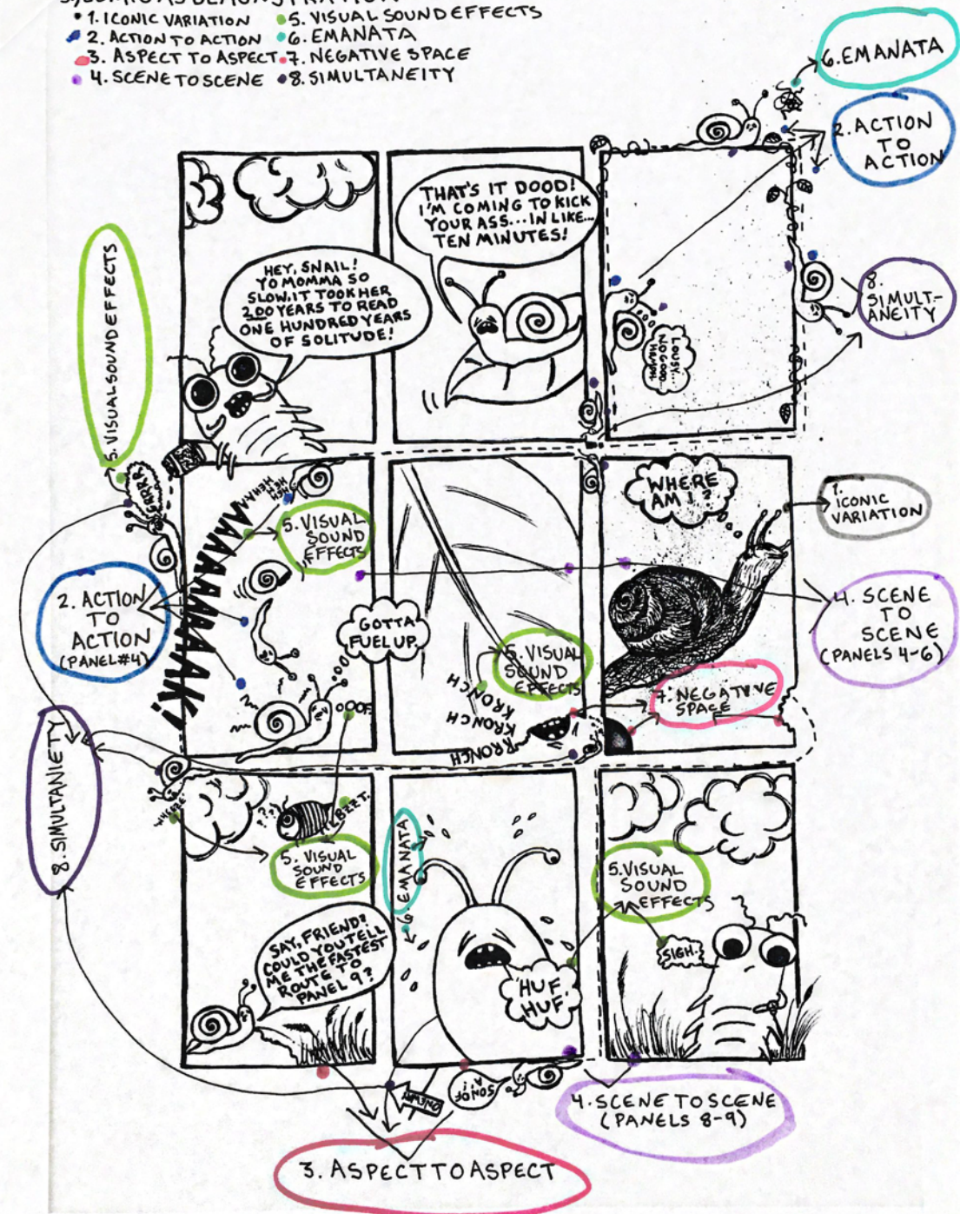
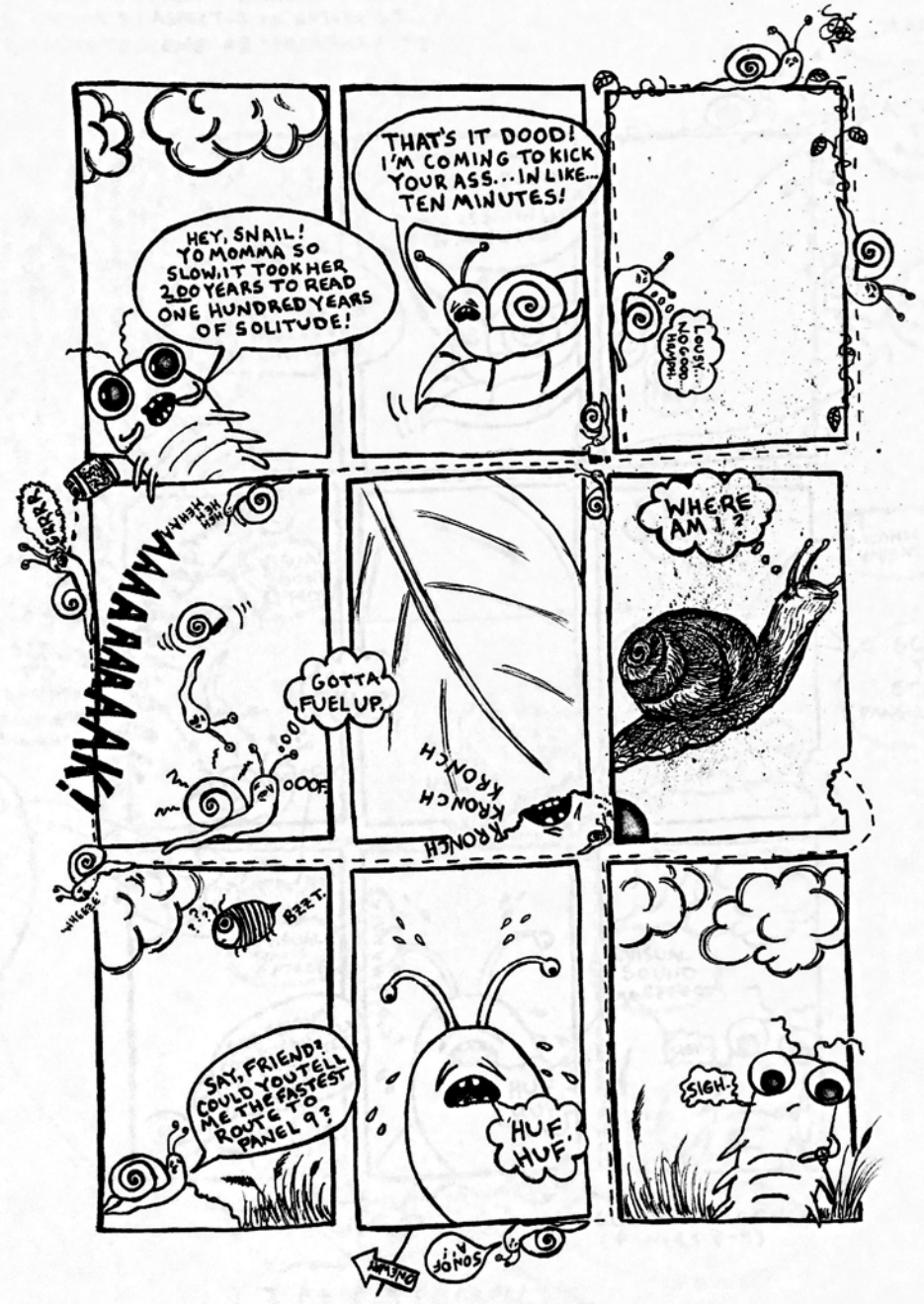
THE PLACE

stand up tonight



3.) COMIC AS DEMONSTRATION :

- 1. ICONIC VARIATION
- 2. ACTION TO ACTION
- 3. ASPECT TO ASPECT
- 4. SCENE TO SCENE
- 5. VISUAL SOUND EFFECTS
- 6. EMANATA
- 7. NEGATIVE SPACE
- 8. SIMULTANEITY



ZOOM'N

lets look at that plot!

