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Psychologies of perception: Stories of Depiction

Abstract

“Psychologies of perception” refers in this chapter to a strand of art historical debate that recruits empirically-derived observations about the nature of the human perceptual system to the exploration of philosophical problems regarding the interpretation of pictorial images. The first half presents an overview of this tradition beginning with Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich’s work on caricature and taking in contributions from Rudolf Arnheim, Richard Wollheim and Kendall Walton. Each of these writers is characterised as engaged in a balancing act between the competing aims of making falsifiable claims about perceptual processes and evoking the pleasures of engaging with artworks.

The relevance of these debates to comics studies is framed primarily with respect to the attention they pay to the effects of drawing style on the recognition of pictorial images. This argument is developed in the second half, which introduces recent developments including the influence of Arnheim’s work on contemporary metaphor theory and Simon Grennan’s recent theorisation of narrative drawing, both of which inform the author’s autobiographical comics presented in this section. The chapter concludes by suggesting that comics scholarship’s focus on the narrative effects of depiction offers to art historians a novel way of exploring artists’ representational choices.

Keywords

Psychology, Drawing style, Caricature, Depiction, Seeing-in

Introduction

This chapter summarises a range of work from the past hundred years that examines the psychological processes involved in viewing depictions, with a focus on the tension between applying empirical methods to the study of pictures and responding to them as works of art. In the second half I describe how this strand of art history informed the stylistic and narrative choices I made in producing a comic about my experience of living with multiple sclerosis.

Methodological framework, key contributors and debates

If “psychologies of perception” had a single visual motif, it would be the duck-rabbit illusion originally published in the humorous weekly *Die Fliegenden Blätter* (figure 1), adopted by

the psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1899) to make the point that perception involves mental activity as well as optical stimulus, and schematised by Wittgenstein (figure 2), who gave the name “seeing-as” to our act of perceiving either animal (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 207).

<INSERT FIG. 1 HERE>

Figure 1: Rabbit or Duck? Anon (1892), *Die Fliegenden Blätter*, October 23

Its significance for the methodological field introduced in this chapter is due to its use as an example in the opening pages of Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion*. Gombrich introduces it as a counter to the claim that illusion, having been rendered “artistically irrelevant” by modern art’s abandonment of representational accuracy as a criterion of aesthetic value, “must also be psychologically very simple” (2002, p. 4). In his account, switching our reading between “rabbit” and “duck” results in transformations of the shape, as different aspects of the drawing become more or less prominent depending on the interpretation we apply. But in order to understand how different features of this graphic array affect our experience as we make these shifts, “we are compelled to look for what is ‘really there’, to see the shape apart from its interpretation, and this, we soon discover, is not really possible.” (2002, p. 5). While looking at the shape as a rabbit, we remain aware of the possibility of seeing it as a duck, but we cannot perceptually “experience alternative readings at the same time” (ibid).

<INSERT FIG. 2 HERE>

Figure 2: The Duck-Rabbit, from Wittgenstein (2009, p.165)

The question at the core of this discussion has been central to aesthetic philosophy since antiquity: how are we able to gaze upon an arrangement of marks on a flat surface and take it to be an image of something else? But rather than appeal to the idea that the picture signifies through mimesis, Gombrich instead directs us towards the examination of our processes of perception and categorisation. In short, “psychologies of perception” applies findings from the science of psychology to the philosophical problem of depiction.

Although the visual examples most frequently referred to by Gombrich, his contemporary Rudolf Arnheim and later contributors to this field including Richard Wollheim and Kendall Walton come from the established canon of fine art, non-art examples such as the duck-rabbit prove useful because they allow the critic to isolate specific visual effects, and the reader to reflect directly on the critic's discussion thereof. While reading these remarks you have been able to engage in the perceptual games under discussion, and to form an assessment of the nature of your perceptual experience without needing to subscribe to or reject any philosophical assertions about the nature of reality. Such examples do not even need to qualify as depictions: a key phenomenon discussed in work in this field is "the face in the clouds", our ability to "see" imagined subjects in natural formations that were not produced with any representational intent, to which Cutting and Massironi (1998) have given the name "fortuitous pictures".

Examples like these, where our ability to hold an imagined subject in mind is not impeded by our awareness that the optical array supporting those imaginings is profoundly unlike the thing imagined, lead naturally onto consideration of the "riddle of style", to borrow from the title of Gombrich's introduction to *Art and Illusion*. Artists may employ any number of strategies for the arrangement of graphic marks in representing any subject, and while the observable differences between those strategies might characterise that subject in different ways, they do not usually provide any barrier to the act of recognition itself. Here we begin to see one of the uses this methodology has for the comics scholar who is interested in the visual achievements of cartoonists. Deliberate manipulation of graphic style is a key implement in the cartoonist's toolkit, frequently employed within a single comics text to achieve specific narrative effects, and more broadly the effect of graphic style on the reader's experience is a central concern for comics narratologists¹. The distortions of caricature, in which the exaggeration of the features of a face is taken to signify character traits or heightened emotion rather than physical deformation is an obvious example of such manipulation, and in this light it is no surprise that Gombrich was one of the first art historians to study this type of drawing.

A comparison of "The Principles of Caricature" (Kris and Gombrich, 1938)², with Gillian Rhodes's *Superportraits* (1997) on the same theme will serve to elaborate the main

characteristics of this methodology, as well as the different disciplinary emphases that have been made in such work, and the general direction of travel in how this field has formed and refined itself.

Caricature is useful to perceptual psychologists because it allows for fairly precise framing of a problem of depiction. As viewers we judge a successful caricature on grounds of identification: whatever mockery the drawing may make of its subject, it must first be recognisable as a portrait of that subject. And while we expect this identification to be instantaneous and unambiguous, we are not only aware of, but draw pleasure from, the caricaturist's distortions. Thus reflection on the experience of viewing a caricature allows us to examine "from inside" our appreciation of that drawing. We are simultaneously aware of our perception of a likeness to a specific individual and of the ways in which the image deviates from the appearance of that individual.

Kris and Gombrich highlight caricature as a type of picture that supports a close examination of how the artist "plays with and reshapes sensory experience under the influence of internal and affective states" (1938, p. 319). The psychological framework they apply is psychoanalysis, specifically Freud's work on the interpretation of dreams (1913). They argue that Freud's work marks "a turning point in the history of aesthetics just as it does in psychiatry", and that the work of psychoanalysts in establishing that there are "laws of dream construction" entails that there must also be "psychological laws of art construction" (Kris and Gombrich 1938, p. 319). But they do not see their work as a one-directional process of using developments in psychology to buttress art-historical narratives; they also suggest that "a study such as this which starts out as a survey of pictures of a bygone time may throw some light on the problems of the clinician today" (ibid, p.319).

Kris and Gombrich credit the brothers Annibale and Agostino Carracci with the invention of caricature in the late sixteenth century. The story they tell of its development is that this was a period in which artists' understanding of their work had shifted from the Aristotelian conception of producing an "imitation of nature" to attempting "penetration of the innermost essence of reality" (1938, p. 321). Caricature may distort the features of an individual's face, but in doing so it "penetrates through the mere outward appearance to

the inner being in all its littleness or ugliness.” (ibid, p.321). The ability to produce representations of the inner self rests on the same principles of dreamwork identified by Freud, in which “a single feature often stands for the whole, and a person is represented by one salient characteristic only” (1938, p. 323).

Thus underlying features of cognition are applied to problems of pictorial representation, and in pursuing this programme art historians may also arrive at findings that are useful to the psychologist from whom they take inspiration.

Superportraits also departs from the observation that caricatures can seem more true than naturalistic portraits. However rather than drawing on Freud, Rhodes takes her cue from cognitive psychology, and applies a wider range of cognitive functions, and a greater concern with empirical evidence. Her approach is based in norm theory: she argues that we construct normative mental representations of commonly-encountered objects, and that it is cognitively efficient to store mental representations of members of an object class by coding the ways in which they deviate from stored norms. For example, an individual with a large nose will be recognisable because that nose contrasts to our norm for the size of noses. Therefore a drawing that exaggerates the size of that nose will be easy to recognise because it makes easier the process of comparison we would typically use to recognise that individual.

Both texts focus on a type of depiction that enables the examination of psychological processes, but the shift towards a greater appeal to empirical verification in Rhodes is characteristic of the type of engagement with psychology that has become more common since Kris and Gombrich’s essay³. The source of Rhodes’s empirical evidence reveals a difference between these two texts that points to diverging analytical aims rather than simply a linear process of development in methodological exactitude. Kris and Gombrich invoke Plato, Nicholas Poussin and Annibale Caracci in a sweeping art historical contextualization of caricature that takes in its stride the decorations of Mannerism and the distortions of form and space that were prevalent in then-contemporary art. In contrast, Rhodes’s examples of caricatures are not produced by artists seeking to reveal their sitters’ innermost nature by creating “the perfect deformity”, but instead by a computer: the

examples she discusses are produced by Susan Brennan's caricature generator, which "is used to create caricatures by amplifying the differences between the face to be caricatured and a comparison face" in a process which "simulates the visualisation process in the imagination of the caricaturist" (Brennan, 1985, p. 170).

For scholars whose interest in pictures is primarily as a set of visual stimuli that support psychological conclusions, Rhodes's choice of corpus is an "additional strength" because it allows the operationalisation of caricature through the "construction of scaled caricatures, controlled experimentation, and replication of studies." (Cabe, 1999, p. 152). From this perspective, Kris and Gombrich's psychoanalytic account and invocation of beliefs in the ability of pictures to uncover truths about reality might look over-reliant on an old-fashioned critical model of discerning connoisseurship in method, and credulously tolerant of a naive reliance on the notion of mimesis in argumentation. Gombrich and Kris emphasise that caricature should be engaged with as an art, and for scholars who take this view, by removing the subjectivity of the artist's interpretive play, Rhodes has bled her subject dry of the very thing that makes it worthy of study in the first place. Kris and Gombrich argue in their opening paragraph that it is precisely because academic psychology "deals in the main with the cognitive functions and with stimuli from without" rather than internal and affective states that it has "added comparatively little to our understanding of art" (1938, p. 319).

While these counter criticisms themselves have an element of caricature, they do highlight a tension that runs through much psychologically oriented aesthetic philosophy: on the one hand, not letting an interest in the demonstrable phenomena of perception blind the analyst to the experience of engaging with art as art, while on the other preventing the examination of subjective experience from becoming a trapdoor into sloppy thinking. This tension is evident throughout Rudolf Arnheim's "Agenda for the Psychology of Art" (1952), which sets out a number of questions that remain salient for theorists of pictures, including the overarching question of "the concrete conditions which make a beholder accept a pattern as an image of something else, say, a human figure" (p. 313), and concerns with foreshortening and overlapping, distortion, and depth perception. Arnheim's agenda is at root an exhortation to greater cross-disciplinary fertilisation: "more intimate contact

between art and psychology is the first pre-requisite for progress” (p. 310). He begins by attributing what he sees as the failure of psychology to respond adequately to the examination of works of art and artistic processes to psychologists’ lack of first-hand experience of artistic activities. Psychologists are likely to waste time on “side issues, bad taste in the choice of examples, and the clinging to conventional notions about art” (p. 311) unless they learn “to handle the brush or the chisel [...] to a degree which will keep the feeling of genuine artistic experience alive” (p. 310). Artists, for their part, need to overcome their “suspicion against the undertakings of the psychologists” and “remnants of the romantic prejudice that art excludes reason” in order to “obtain from psychology a more solid foundation for the generalisations that play such an important role in all studio practice” (p. 311). His agenda is also an indication of the methodological shift away from the psychoanalysis that interested Kris and Gombrich and towards the cognitive psychology on which Rhodes and contemporary scholars in this field draw. He claims that part of the reason artists and art educators are unconvinced of the value of psychology is that they have been put off by the “orgy on a bare mountain which the psychoanalysts have been celebrating in recent years” (p. 310).

But, he maintains, building a solid analytical foundation must leave room for intuitive judgement: for Arnheim, the tendency towards excessive quantification is as much of a stumbling block as suspicion and ignorance, and limiting our results to “what can be measured and counted” will mean that “we are likely to miss the vital core of our problems” (p. 312). Among the misguided analyses at which he takes aim are “attempts to derive a formula of beauty from mathematical proportions” and the treatment of compositional structure “as though it consisted of rigid geometrical patterns” (p. 312).

Gombrich conducts a similar balancing act throughout *Art and Illusion*, although the formalism he avoids is not an insistence on quantifiable measurements but the overstatement of equivalences between pictorial and linguistic signification. His earlier work on caricature with Kris hinted at the idea that artistic production involved creating something like a lexicon of visual devices that could reliably produce certain types of illusion: in the same breath as praising the “sublime freedom” of the pen strokes in a caricature by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, they observe that the face depicted is “distilled down to

a few lines as if it were restricted to a formula” (2002, p. 323). Gombrich develops this in greater detail, with a wider historical and stylistic scope, in the elaboration of *Art and Illusion*’s core principle of “making and matching”, in which, as Patrick Maynard puts it, “depiction is largely a matter of building a toolbox of effective devices – dodges – passed on, studied, borrowed, stolen, or invented, though occasionally systematised” (2005, p. 98). Seeing the development of styles of pictorial representation as a process of building language-like formulae allowed art historians to comprehensively reject the idea that representational accuracy “had progressed from rude beginnings to the perfection of illusion” (Gombrich, 2002, p. 4), which for Gombrich had ethical as well as analytical value: seeing historical styles as indications of the sophistication “of collectives, of “mankind”, “races”, or “ages” [...] weakens resistance to totalitarian habits of mind” (p.17). Such was the influence of Gombrich’s approach that WJT Mitchell (1987, pp. 75–94) would later credit him as the initiator of the “conventionalist turn” of the second half of the 20th century, although for Gombrich the comparison of the visual arts to verbal language functioned more as a metaphor than an explicit endorsement of a programme of study. Mitchell argues that Gombrich never abandoned the idea of the pictorial image as being in some regards “natural”, and in the later decades of his career “his argument [was] no longer with the naïve “copy theory” of representation but with what he [tended] to regard as the oversophisticated relativism and conventionalism of semioticians and symbol theorists” (1987, p. 81).

The idea is that there is something natural in pictures that escapes quantification is invoked at the beginning of a passage in which Gombrich describes art historian Kenneth Clark’s attempt to “‘stalk’ an illusion”: “works of art are not mirrors, but they share with mirrors that elusive magic of transformation which is so hard to put into words” (2002, p. 5). Clark stepped forwards and backwards in front of a Diego Velázquez painting hoping to observe the moment at which globs of paint “transformed themselves into a vision of transfigured reality” (ibid), but found himself unable to hold the visions of paint as paint, and paint as image, in his mind at once. This account, which suggests that attention to the depicted subject replaces attention to the depiction’s surface, is one of the few central arguments in *Art and Illusion* that has been rejected in subsequent scholarship. The theories of depiction proposed by philosophers Richard Wollheim (2015 [1968]) and Kendall Walton (1990, pp.

293–352) both rest on the idea that viewing pictorial representations involves simultaneous attention to marked surface and depicted subject.

Wollheim elaborates his core concept of “seeing-in” by contrasting it to Wittgenstein’s “seeing-as”, and his argument departs directly from the Gombrich passages discussed above. Gombrich’s error, according to Wollheim, is in conflating the duck-rabbit with Clark’s anecdote. “Everyone would recognise [...] that we cannot simultaneously see the duck and the rabbit” (Wollheim, 2015, pp. 157–8), but this holds for special cases such as bistable images and not for representational seeing in general. The “seeing-as” approach fails “to assign to the seeing appropriate to representations a distinctive phenomenology” (2015, p. 158). When looking at a Velázquez we may see the brushstrokes *as* Venus, or Pope Innocent X, but we also see those figures *in* the painted surface, and we attend to both at once. Seeing-in has a twofold phenomenology that “permits unlimited simultaneous attention to what is seen and to the features of the medium” (2015, p. 156). In keeping with Arnheim’s desire to bring the analytical precision of specific psychological effects to bear on questions of depiction on while retaining an emphasis on the pleasures of aesthetic appreciation, Wollheim offers two arguments that emphasise each of these methodological foci in turn. The psychological argument proceeds from the principle of object constancy: if we change position while looking at a picture, the picture does not undergo perspectival distortion. That is to say, if we were standing in front of a painting consisting of parallel horizontal lines, and then moved to view it from an oblique angle so that the lines converged in our field of vision, we would still understand the lines to be horizontal and parallel in the image itself. This is possible because “the spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation” (2015, p. 159). The aesthetic argument holds that we would be unable to “marvel endlessly at the way in which line or brushstroke or expanse of colour is exploited to render effects or establish analogies” (ibid, p.159) if we were unable to observe those features and their effects simultaneously. It is difficult to see how Gombrich could square his enjoyment of the virtuosity of the caricaturist’s pen with this challenge.

Kendall Walton’s theory of depiction (1990, pp. 293–352) is close enough to Wollheim’s to have motivated him to publish clarifications of the distinctions between the two (Walton,

1991), but his theory of “mimesis as make-believe” places greater emphasis on the role of the imagination, and in the case of depiction on the inseparability of perceptual and cognitive activity. Walton regards Wollheim’s theory as “not so much mistaken as incomplete” (1991, p. 423), in that he does not offer an explanation of what the experience of seeing a figure in a picture actually is, instead brushing away the need for such clarification by claiming that seeing-in is such an everyday experience that he only needs to gesture towards it for a reader to follow his meaning (Walton, 1991, p. 424). Without an explanation of how a spectator sees a depicted subject in a marked surface, the account of the phenomenology of looking at pictures is incomplete. Walton’s solution is to argue that representational seeing is “participating in a visual game of make-believe” (1991, p. 425) in which we imagine, not that Velázquez’s canvas is Pope Innocent X, but that our seeing of the canvas is the seeing of the Pope. In other words, we do not imagine the painting to be anything other than what it is – a painting – but we do imagine our own perceptual activity to be something other than what it is. All of the work discussed thus far has to some degree argued that perception and cognition are intertwined, but Walton’s argument rests on a particularly strong version of this position: “I do not mean just that thoughts have causal effects on one’s experiences, but that the experiences *contain* thoughts” (1990, p. 295).

The comics research project: I preferred it when this stuff was just theoretical

The project I outline here is an ongoing series of autobiographical comic strips, but that artistic production is so closely intertwined with the theoretical work undertaken in my doctoral research project that some exploration of that will be required as an introduction.

My thesis, *Visual Metaphor and Drawn Narratives* (Miers, 2017), took as its starting point an exploration of visual metaphor in narrative drawing, with a focus on cognitively-oriented theories of metaphor, amongst which the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003) is the most influential. I argued that, despite the still-growing body of work that applies CMT to comics and cartoons, the field lacked a substantial account of depiction and was thus unable to account for the perceptual nature of visual as opposed to verbal metaphor. Following this

intuition, I sought to integrate the methodological field outlined above with contemporary metaphor theory. Walton's work was key to achieving this synthesis: his arguments about the inseparability of perception and cognition are echoed in the "embodied cognition" framework that underpins CMT, which holds that having a physical or sensory experience and simultaneously forming an evaluative judgement of that experience, as we do when engaging in visual games of make-believe, forms a phenomenological whole: "It can be misleading [...] to speak of direct physical experience as though there was some core of immediate experience which we then 'interpret' in terms of our conceptual system" (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 56).

There are genealogical as well as thematic links between these frameworks. Johnson (1987, pp. 74–100) begins his discussion of metaphorical extensions of the concept of balance by discussing Arnheim's (1974, pp. 10–41) use of Gestalt psychology in a discussion of the notion of visual balance. Arnheim asks how it is that, when looking at a circle placed in a square frame, we can instantly and without the use of measuring instruments tell that it is slightly off-centre. He proposes that this intuition can be explained by the existence of "perceptual forces", which are "assumed to be real in both realms of existence – that is, as both psychological and physical forces" (1974, p. 16). Johnson extends this proposal into an account of how the polysemic extensions of the word "balance" develop from embodied knowledge we begin accumulating in infancy. As children we experience physical balance, in the straightforward sense of weights being distributed evenly around a fulcrum, when learning to walk, and we experience the ability to maintain this balance as a positive one. The more abstract uses of the concept of balance, such as legal or moral balance, or the balance of rational argument, are extensions of the schematic structure of embodied experience mapped from concrete domains of experience to more abstract ones. This, in abrupt summary, is the core of Lakoff and Johnson's claim that "metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and only derivatively a matter of language" (2003, p. 153). Any metaphorical expression that uses the concept of balance, be it a linguistic one such as my earlier reference to Gombrich's analytical balancing act, or a visual one such as the image of the scales of justice, works by fleshing out the schematic cognitive structure described above.

A significant recent contribution to the examination of comics as drawn texts, Simon Grennan's *A Theory of Narrative Drawing* (2017), makes extensive use of some of the work discussed here. Wollheim's seeing-in is key to a number of its arguments, and the notion of "image schema", the name Johnson gives to the kind of minimally elaborated cognitive structure described in the previous paragraph, is a fundamental part of Grennan's elaboration of his aetiological account of drawing. Grennan's theory is primarily concerned with the ways in which drawings mediate embodied social behaviour rather than the perceptual effects of aspects of graphic arrays, but an entailment of his arguments is that different forms of representation produce different narrative meanings. For example, in one of the "drawing demonstrations" that conclude the book, Grennan adopts Mike Mignola's form of representation in drawing pages based on a script extrapolated from two pages of Jim Medway's *Teen Witch* (Medway, 2007). Although the plots of the two sets of pages remain the same, moving the events from Medway's gentle north of England populated by anthropomorphic cats to the world of Mignola's *Hellboy* (specifically Mignola, 1998) produced new readings of specific events within the plot, to say nothing of the different inferences of mood and intention produced by the new drawing. A spell cast by Medway's protagonist to humorous effect now carries the possibility of lasting harm, and the word "princess" becomes a literal title rather than a term of familial endearment (Grennan, 2017, pp. 192–193). My own work presented in this section draws on the core idea of creating a new narrative by adopting the representational forms of another, but does not fully attempt to make new drawings that could pass as the work of another cartoonist.

So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now (Miers, 2019) emerged from an unusual coincidence of research interests and personal circumstances, as summarised on its opening page (figure 3). Soon after settling on visual metaphor as the main topic of my thesis, I decided that David B.'s graphic memoir *Epileptic* (2006) would make an excellent case study for my final chapter. The visual metaphors B. develops throughout the book as he depicts the trauma that his brother Jean-Christophe's epilepsy visits upon his family would allow me ample opportunity to apply the theoretical framework developed in the preceding chapters, and my admiration for the book would make writing the chapter an enjoyable end to the project. I could not have known that when I began writing the chapter, in January 2017, I would be reeling from a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis I had received the previous month.

<INSERT FIG. 3 HERE>

Figure 3. Miers, J (2019) *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now* p.1

Questions of how a cartoonist could use their practice to work through trauma caused by chronic neurological disease took on a new and acute salience. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to begin exploring how they could be answered through drawing during a “Researcher in the Archives” residency in University of the Arts London’s Archives and Special Collections Centre at London College of Communication. Working primarily with the Les Coleman collection, a vast and rich bequest of mostly European and American underground and alternative comic books given by the late British artist, poet, and curator, my intention was to adapt for my own purposes the visual metaphors for illness and disability I found in the comics it contained⁴. This ran aground when a survey of the collection uncovered few depictions of physical illnesses, certainly not enough to begin identifying any common themes or patterns. There were, however, frequent occurrences of visual metaphors in which physical injuries or disabilities were used as metaphors for psychological or emotional distress. Perhaps I should not have been surprised. This observation was entirely consistent with CMT, which holds that concrete physical and sensory experiences are typically used as metaphors for more abstract experiences, and not the other way around.

I was struck by a sequence in Ivan Brunetti’s *Schizo #1* (Brunetti, 1994) depicting a dream in which Brunetti imagines himself returned to high school. He confesses to the reader, “I get so nervous around people that I inevitably lose control of my excretory f-f-functions!” (1994, p. 3). Immediately after that, a group of jocks and bullies mock his loss of bodily control (figure 4). This seemed an exact inversion of my own experience. In general, I am fortunate not to experience the kind of social anxiety depicted in this sequence. On the other hand, the incontinence Brunetti’s dream-image suffers from is a common symptom of multiple sclerosis. An aspect of the experiences I was hoping to confront through metaphor was itself being used as a metaphor for another type of affliction.

<INSERT FIG. 4 HERE>

Figure 4: Brunetti, I. (1994). *Schizo #1*, p.4, panels 1-3. Fantagraphics

Metaphor analysis in CMT usually begins by identifying the two concepts that are brought together by a metaphorical expression. In this case, a depiction of loss of control of bodily functions supports an account of loss of control of social function. In this methodology, understanding Brunetti's visual metaphor involves first recognising what is depicted, and then ascribing metaphorical meaning to that subject. But scholars interested in psychologies of perception also argue that metaphorical thinking is present in the process of seeing-in itself. Gombrich likens the artist's ability to apply new denotations to visual stimuli to the creation of metaphor (2002, p. 264). Walton perceives a "kinship" between metaphor and the games of make-believe we play with representational art (1973, p. 292). Flint Schier (1986), Virgil Aldrich (1971), and Jon Green (1985) have given accounts of representational seeing that align the twofold phenomenology described by Wollheim to the way in which metaphor makes two concepts active in the mind at once. Wollheim explores this connection in more detail, and proposes a distinction between "pictures that are metaphors" and "pictures that have metaphors as their textual content" (1987). Observing that Brunetti's loss of continence metaphorises his social anxiety is to identify a metaphor of the second type. The first type refers to the way in which the properties of the marked surface imbue the depicted subject with metaphorical meaning. Philip Rawson took a similar position two decades earlier when he observed that in any drawing "the main bulk of the marks will not just refer directly to everyday objects but will "qualify" them by investing them with analogous forms [...] endowed with a kind of metaphorical radiance" (1969, p. 26). If drawing style operates as a metaphor for the qualities of represented objects, then "implicit in every drawing style is a visual ontology, i.e. a definition of the real in visual terms" (1969, p. 20). Grennan invokes this comment as part of his account of how his drawing demonstrations change not only the appearance but the story of the comics pages he takes as source material (2017, p. 177). In more general terms, Douglas Wolk has suggested that "cartooning is inescapably a metaphor for the subjectivity of perception" (2007, p. 21).

Brunetti's drawing style in figure 4 conforms to conventions of underground cartooning. It mimics the rounded and elastic forms popularised by the work of Walt Disney and an array of graphic storytelling aimed at children, but renders these forms with a dense and enervated facture that suggests transgressive intent. In Brunetti's metaphor, incontinence serves a cognitive role that contradicts the relationship I had to it: for him, it was a means of addressing another trauma. For me, it was part of the trauma I wanted to address. CMT did not seem to offer a way out of this conundrum, but drawing on my engagement with psychologies of perception I decided to confront Brunetti on the comics page, and to adopt his visual ontology in doing so (figure 5). Following Grennan's arguments about the inseparability of visual and narrative expressions of subjectivity, in order to realise this confrontation as a coherent story my autobiographical self, needed to not only look like one of Brunetti's characters, but behave like one, and this meant being misanthropic, foulmouthed, and scatological. Grennan reports feeling dishabituated when looking at the results of his drawing demonstration (2017, pp. 212–214), and that was my experience here too. The page did not look like drawings I had previously completed, and despite being its creator, I was shocked by the result. Nevertheless, it felt like a breakthrough. Emboldened by what I saw as the success of this drawing, on subsequent pages I continued with a similar style to retell an incident in which, as I put it in figure 5, I "shat myself in public", reframing an episode of intense disgust and humiliation as a slapstick tale of gross-out humour. The process was empowering, and contributed to my ability to retain a sense of agency and resilience in the face of illness.

<INSERT FIG. 5 HERE>

Figure 5. Miers, J (2019) *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now* p.15

Proceeding along the same methodological lines, the second story in *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now* (figure 6) adopted the graphic expression of Mark Beyer⁵. The bulk of Beyer's output depicts the misadventures of his characters Amy and Jordan, who suffer a procession of physical injury and psychological torment. His graphic style is characterised by distorted figures, obsessive hand-drawn patterns, and exaggerated incoherent perspectives. As Chris Mautner puts it, "There's no plot, per se, [...] just a series

of hazardous events that eventually stop” (2016, n.p.). The impression of a nonsensically cruel universe created by Beyer’s work felt appropriate for a story that begins with the moment of my diagnosis and the response that life-changing news provoked: why me?

Producing these drawings required engagement with both poles of the methodological range mapped by the work of Kris and Gombrich, and Rhodes: mimicking the material properties of the graphic languages of other cartoonists required minute observation of their habits of composition, mark-making and spatial construction, while the psychoanalyst’s focus on internal and affective states provided the motivation for completing these confessional works.

<INSERT FIG. 6 HERE>

Figure 6. Miers, J (2019) *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now* p.3

Benefits and Challenges for Comics Studies

Some of the applications of this methodological field to comic studies have been discussed already, most prominently in the analysis of caricature. Not all drawing in comics is caricature, of course, but its characteristic features of exaggeration, distortion, and simplification are present to some degree in the work of most cartoonists. The work of Kris and Gombrich, and Rhodes, analysed how recognition of characters is achieved and sustained through caricature, and of how this approach to drawing can create character. But the value of this methodology is not limited to one set of graphic languages already covered in canonical texts. A key concern for psychologies of perception is the examination of the material features characteristic of any given style, and the psychological processes by which those features support seeing-in. For example, the work of John Kennedy (1993) has analysed the psychological processes by which outline drawings provide information about the scenes they depict. Lefèvre and Meesters (2018) recently provided a productive example of how empirical studies of this type of drawing might be applied to comics scholarship. They showed viewers a video of a line drawing being produced, as well as stills from that video, and recorded their interpretations of what was depicted at each stage.

Although their experiment was not intended to specifically examine “the clear line style and other minimalistic styles [...] often used in [...] comics”, they draw on previous research demonstrating that “a line drawing does part of the pre-processing that our brain has to do to make sense of visual stimuli” in suggesting that “our experiment may help to understand why simplicity is very important in these styles” (2018, p. 214). Kennedy’s work places greater emphasis on the way in which outline drawings support the construction of mental representations of the three-dimensional form of objects, which has value for analysts seeking to understand how sequential drawings support imaginings of continuous physical spaces.

It is difficult to think of any material feature of graphic style that has not been examined in this field. Walton has paid attention to the effects of specific types of facture in the development of his notion of the “apparent artist” (1987), a figure that bears a family resemblance to Philippe Marion’s “graphiateur” (Baetens, 2001) in its concern with the narrative effects of how drawn marks appear to have been made. All of the key figures discussed in this chapter have given attention to the effects of different approaches to perspective and the construction of pictorial space, a necessary part of understanding the visual creation of fictional worlds in an art form which, as Hillary Chute has put it, has “an intense concern with locating bodies in space” (2011, p. 107). If, as Lefèvre (2016) has argued, graphic style serves as the “primary entrance to a story”, it behoves the researcher interested in cartooning as a visual art to attend to the ways in which graphic style mediates access to the fictional worlds it constructs.

Comics scholarship that draws on CMT would also benefit from closer attention to graphic style. Applications of this theory to comics tend to focus on what Wollheim called “pictures that have metaphors as their textual content”; the analyses often take representational seeing for granted and give little attention to the processes by which seeing-in is achieved, meaning that the effect of stylistic variation on the use of visual metaphor is frequently elided. Elisabeth El Refaie (2019) makes a valuable intervention by developing a tripartite classification system for visual metaphors that includes pictorial metaphors, spatial metaphors, and most pertinently to this discussion, stylistic metaphors, which “use features such as brightness, colour, form, level of detail, and quality of line, as well as actual or

implied material qualities of the page or the whole book, to indicate an abstract concept or a non-visual sense perception” (2019, pp. 85–6). Charles Forceville, whose *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising* (1996) was the first substantial application of CMT to visual metaphor, notes in a review of El Refaie’s work that this framework proposes promising refinements to both metaphor and comics studies (Forceville, 2020).

Finally, Walton’s account of depiction as a self-conscious fusion of imaginative and perceptual activity, and its subsequent development by Grennan, raise the possibility of a closer integration of visual and narratological approaches to comics by describing the ways in which narrative drawings do not just illustrate but create fictional worlds. Gombrich hints at this idea when he introduces the duck-rabbit as “the simple trick drawing which has reached the philosophical seminar” (2002, p. 4). He does not take up the riddle of why Wittgenstein felt it necessary to reduce Jastrow’s drawing to a diagrammatic form before inviting it to the seminar, but alludes to an answer when he observes that Jean de Brunhoff’s rendering of the face of Babar⁶ with “a few hooks and dots” (ibid, p. 283) succeeds “partly because its lack of elaboration guarantees the absence of contradictory clues” (ibid, p. 284). Grennan argues that “every story has a story, in the sense that everything that is told also affords the story of its telling/showing” (2017, p. 174), and if we take the story of Wittgenstein’s showing of the duck-rabbit to be the presentation of a precise argument about linguistic categorisation of sensory stimuli, it makes narrative as well as theoretical sense that he would not want his audience distracted by contradictory clues. Equally, Gombrich’s concern with the material aspects of pictures meant that he needed richer stimuli to work with, so he reinstated the more heavily textured version from *Die Fliegenden Blätter*. The art historians discussed in this chapter frequently treat the visual and narrative properties of depictions separately. Such questions are more likely to be intertwined in comics scholarship, thus the field offers novel ways of apprehending the stories that produce and are presented in depictions, even when they are employed purely in the service of elaborating theoretical arguments. Figure 7 asks what use characters in Mark Beyer’s world might make of the duck-rabbit. Their stories do not permit them the intellectual repose of philosophical argumentation, and so the drawing’s competing interpretations are instead recruited into the unending struggle to comprehend the torment of existence.

<INSERT FIG. 7 HERE>

Figure 7. Miers, J (2020) *Mark Beyer's Duck-Rabbit*

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¹ Narratological analyses of style in comics include Pascal Lefèvre's (2011b, 2011a, 2016) emphasis on graphic style's ability to create fictive worlds; Simon Grennan's (Grennan, 2012, 2017) conceptualisation of graphic style as the realisation of intersubjective relationships; Eszter Szép's (2020, pp. 109–134) analysis of the ethics of style as an element of interpersonal engagement; and Elisabeth El Refaie's theorisation of "stylistic metaphors" (2019, pp. 109-117)

² Gombrich returns to the analysis of caricature later in *Art and Illusion* (2002, pp. 279–303); also of interest to comics scholars is his argument that visual metaphor is the primary weapon in "the cartoonist's armoury" (1963).

³ Gombrich himself provides evidence of this shift in his discussion of Rodolphe Töpffer's *Essai de Physiognomonie* (1845), which he frames as a systematic investigation of the psychological principles of "minimum clues" and "release mechanisms" (Gombrich, 2002, pp. 283–289)

⁴ The collection can be browsed at <http://bit.ly/lescolemanlcc>

⁵ Beyer began self-publishing in 1975, and is best known for comic strips starring his luckless characters Amy and Jordan. During the 1980s and 90s his work appeared in a variety of underground and alternative periodicals including the influential anthology RAW, and has been reprinted in *Amy and Jordan* (Beyer, 2004) and *Agony* (Beyer, 2016).

⁶ An anthropomorphic elephant who starred in seven children's books authored by Brunhoff between 1931 and 1937.