Tripping over the Defining Line: An Analysis of Form in Psychedelic Underground Comix

Ian Stuart Garlington

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I. Introduction

In *Alternative Comics* (2006), Charles Hatfield argues that comics critics and historians have failed to adequately explain the continuing success of alternative comics in the U.S. because they have ignored the connection to the underground comix ("x" is used for the undergrounds) of the 1960s, which he views as no less than "the catalyst for a radically new understanding of the art form" (7). Hatfield identifies four points about underground comix which he claims set the comics medium free from its previously inflexible format: self-publication; erratic publication schedules (many one-shots); autonomous artists (as opposed to the dominant assembly-line style); and an extensive parodying of prior styles, genres, and characters (16-17). While this emphasis on the role of publishing conditions in the development of new forms of expression in the comics medium is insightful and accurate, Hatfield ends up positioning the underground comix in his study as only a means to an end; they become the raw energy that still required an art-school reworking before the celebratory forms of art comics could be properly synthesized.

But what of the forms found in the underground comix themselves? Could it really be that the undergrounds, which Hatfield describes as "punk" or "a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (paradoxically) unchecked artistic freedom" (xi-xii), offered both radical content and new independent publishing models, while at the same time adhering to the bland narrative forms of the mainstream comics industry? In most cases that was precisely the case. This pa-

per has no intention of trying to call forth the missing Chris Ware or Chester Brown of the undergrounds and show that the long-lost schizophrenic parent actually trumps their famed offspring. Rather, it is the case that most comics theorists have not identified the experimental narrative forms that appeared in comix because they simply do not correspond with ones that are currently valued. Therefore, the following pages will identify the experimental styles found most often in "psychedelic" underground comix and discuss how these forms could potentially make a contribution to one of the fundamental challenges facing experimental literature. Here, "psychedelic" refers to comics with a style or material that is similar to, or representative of, psychedelic drug experiences. The reason for selecting this subgenre of the underground comix is that it contains the vast majority of comix's experimental forms specific to the comics medium (as opposed to forms shared with psychedelic paintings or sculpture).

II. Psychedelics, Creativity, and the Form of Comix

The underground comix were self-published or independently published black and white comic books of the 1960s and early 1970s, well known for their comically extreme portrayals of sex, violence and drug use. A combination of several factors produced the underground comix movement. Some of the comix artists and editors (*e.g.,* Arlington, Kitchen, and Williamson) had been infatuated with E.C. horror and crime comics that were popular in the post-war years and wanted revenge against the censorship system that had banned these genres (Duncan and Smith 53). Others (*e.g.,* Thompson, Rodriguez, and Deitch) first had their material published in the alternative press (Rosenkranz 39). There were also artists (*e.g.*, Griffin, Irons, Moscoso, and Williams) who got started drawing psychedelic posters for the San Francisco music scene (Estren 75-80, Rosenkranz 82, 83, 144). In the interviews conducted by comix historian Patrick Rosenkranz, several of the big names of the comix movement describe the influence of psychedelic drugs in their work, with comix representative Robert Crumb going so far as to claim, "my comic thing flowered in this fertile environment [San Francisco, 1967]. I figured it out somehow—the way to put the stoned [LSD] experience into a series of cartoon panels" (qtd. in Rosenkranz 67).

Regarding this kind of ambition, psychedelic art critic Robert C. Morgan

says, "the kind of art that has emerged from white middle-class psychedelic drug use may represent, but not be equal to the actual experience" (43). Indeed, the relationship between altered states of consciousness and artic expression is still an ambiguous one. On the one hand, in the documentary, *Jodorowsky's Dune* (2013), the Chilean director expressed similar aspirations for his unfinished project: "a film that gives LSD hallucinations without taking LSD." On the other, Morgan is more prudent in thinking that "the forms of optical and visionary art [...] are not intended to reproduce a psychedelic experience; rather, they are focused on the ability of art to incite and expand awareness of the interior world of perception" (43-44). Even partially achieving either of these two aims is an impressive task. To understand what the former would entail in the form of comics the nature of the psychedelic experience should first be clarified.

In the mid-twentieth century there were a number of studies that examined the impact of LSD and other psychedelic drugs on creativity. For example, as part of a larger ongoing study on the general effects of LSD during the 1950s, psychologist Oscar Janiger had seventy-two artists paint pictures of a Native American kachina doll before, and again after ingesting the drug. Professional art critics then analyzed the paintings. They concluded that LSD primarily produces eleven types of alteration in an artist's work. These include: (1) Relative size, expansion (2) Involution (3) Alteration of figure/ground (4) Alteration in boundaries (5) Movement (6) Greater intensity of color and light (7) Oversimplification (8) Objects may be depicted symbolically or as essences (9) Objects may be depicted as abstractions (10) Fragmentation and disorganization (11) Distortion (De Rios and Janiger 87). Based on the results of Janiger's creativity study, Jones's 2007 study of Robert Crumb's comix artwork looks at the change in the rate of appearance of the characteristics identified by Janiger at different key points in Crumb's career (286). Jones demonstrates a clearly observable increase in the perceptual alterations described by Janiger after Crumb began to use LSD and then argues that these changes fit with definitions of artistic creativity: "the capacity to take existing materials and combine them in unusual ways to unique ends," "the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate," or "goal directed novelty" (284). The point that Jones's study does not adequately address, however, is how LSD specifically affects creativity, not within a drawing or painting, but in terms of the semantic systems inherent to the comics medium.

Scott McCloud has developed the most widely used method for analyzing comics. He identifies six possible panel-to-panel transition types, which can be tallied and graphed to visually represent the distribution of different kinds of juxtaposition between images (see Fig.1). McCloud demonstrates that virtually all comics of the western world feature primarily type-2 transitions while the remaining small percentage is composed entirely of types 3 and 4 (76). He attributes this fixed pattern to publishing restrictions which limited the page count and supports his claim by showing that Japanese manga, whose length is usually several times longer (adequate room to stretch), have greater percentages of types 1 and 5 (80).

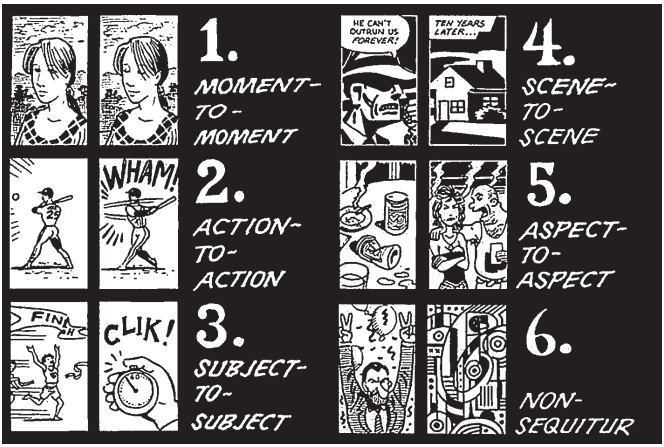

Fig.1. Six panel-to-panel transition types. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 1993, p. 74.

An informal preliminary study was conducted using McCloud's method to tally, average and graph (see Fig. 2) the rate of occurrence of these transitions in thirty experimental psychedelic comix stories. While the two most common transition types were still type-2 and type-3, we can also see the presence of type-1, type-5 and type-6 transitions. Note that type-6 (non sequitur) transitions, which virtually never appear in any other genre of comics (including most comix), appeared at an average rate of 19%. One thing that should be noted, however, is that in underground comix, the stories are often only one or two pages in length (also

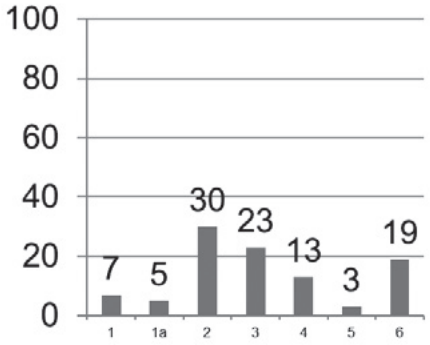

Fig. 2. Type averages (%) in a small survey of thirty psychedelic comix stories.

many single pages) as opposed to the thirty-two page mainstream comic, or art comics that sometimes span hundreds of pages. This means that experimental comix stories featuring repeated occurrences of only one or two types of uncommon panel transition (typically 100% type-6) skewed the overall figures, making it appear as though there was greater overall variation.

In addition to the six transition types defined by McCloud, it was necessary to create a subcategory, type-1a, as there were a substantial number of transitions showing gradual, constant metamorphosis. For example, In Greg Irons's "Revolution," full-page panels show the transformation of the hippy as he sheds his cloths, skin and body while the activist and policeman on either side remain frozen in comically aggressive poses. Other examples of this hallucinatory style include Irons's "The Rape of Mother Earth" (18); Tom Veitch's "Spaceship Comix" in *Deviant Slice Funnies* #1; or Rick Griffin's work in *Zap* issues #2, #3, and #4. It is not these pages' resemblance to sequenced animation cells that makes them interesting; rather it is the continued metamorphoses of the subject that align them with characteristic LSD user artwork. Czech psychologist Stanislav Grof, who conducted over 2500 LSD therapy sessions, personally produced a sequence of eight drawings depicting his LSD vision of the metamorphosis of a clock tower into an owl, which he says is representative of the sequenced transformations depicted in the artwork of LSD users (38-39). Based on this similarity between Grof's drawings and these metamorphoses found almost exclusively in the psychedelic comix, these transitions were graphed separately of other

Fig. 3. Four separate pages depicting type-1a transitions. Claude Bawls, "Office Daze" *Yellow Dog Comics #19*. 1970, pp. 18-21.

type-1 (moment-to-moment) transitions.

These type-1a transitions imply a passage of time although the narrative's subject performs no action. In the case of psychedelics as well, rather than actively affecting the external environment, the user is overwhelmed by the experience of endless, fluid change. In "Office Daze" (Fig. 3), the observing subject becomes increasingly distorted in the same manner as the visions that are shown

to be bubbling out of her head. This image is similar to the works found in former comix artist and LSD enthusiast Robert Williams's oil painting collection *Conceptual Realism* (2009), where Williams offers a sustained exploration of the shared physical canvas space of an imagining subject and his or her fantasy content—a space where "simultaneous potential universes of psychological extrapolation are all given equal weight and presence" (Hardy 6). When confronted with the fourth page (lower-right) of "Office Daze," the reader can see how hallucination might infect one's self-image as the subject dissolves into the same semantic plane as the images that she produces. Here the comics reader is so conditioned to search for narrative cues such as panel borders, repetition of objects, or speech balloons—anything that suggests temporal progression—that there is a feeling of uneasiness or disappointment when the twisting fantasy objects fail to yield meaningful panels. While these visions contain some clearly identifiable objects they are interwoven in a way that prevents them from implying any narrative structure or linear cause-and-effect relationship.

Several similar psychedelic comix stories were discovered, usually only one or two pages in length, which proved impossible to analyze with McCloud's method due to their lack of identifiable panels, subjects, or word balloons (see Fig. 4). These pages actually appear to be drawings *of* comics pages that suggest

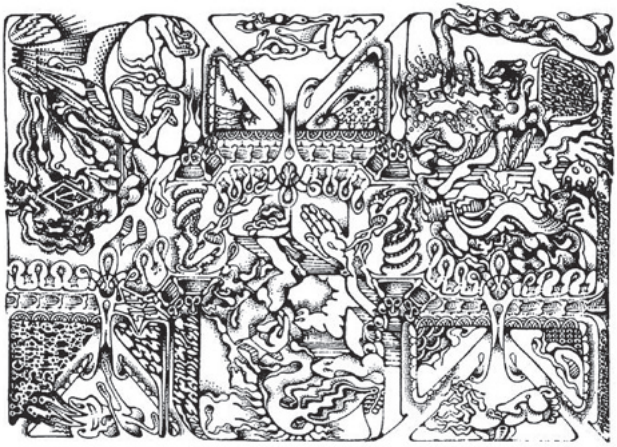

Fig. 4. A chaotic non-narrative psychedelic comix page. Gill Smitherman, "Untitled" *Yellow Dog #19*. 1970, p. 17.

the presence of frames and subjects or speech balloons, although they do not actually function as such. Other examples of this type of page include: Buckwheat Florida Jr.'s "Poly-Wog Doodle" in *Yellow Dog* #11 (1969); Gill Smitherman's "Joe Recreates" in *Yellow Dog* #17 (1969); as well as Daw's "Well,Why Not?" and "R.Sharp's "AUM" in *Guano Comix* #4 (1973).

There are different ways that one can interpret these pages beyond merely noting their similarity to psychedelic users' descriptions of their experiences. To start, comics theorist Thierry Groensteen explains that:

> Since Lessing, western thought has in effect clung to these two categories, "the story" and "the image," taken as antinomic, beginning from the distinction between time and space[...]. Now, the apparent irreducibility of the image and the story is dialectically resolved through the play of successive images and through their coexistence, through their diegetic connections, and through their panoptic display, in which we have recognized the foundation of the medium. (8-9)

As psychedelic experiences are often characterized by a radically distorted perception of space and time (Grof 10-11), it would be easy to view these apparently melted comics pages as a further blurring of the text/image distinction to a point that it ceases to have narrative function. This view, however, depends on seeing the chaos of these pages as highly entropic (the ice cream has already melted) and therefore having low potential for producing something new rather than as the volatile preconditions necessary for new forms to emerge within. This idea of chaos or noise as the unformed matter that is then transformed into things through the process of becoming, has long since been adopted by various New Age psychedelic gurus. Terence McKenna states, "Chaos is not something that degrades information and is somehow the enemy of order, but rather it is something that is the birthplace of order." (Sheldrake 7). This is then frequently related to the idea that psychedelics allow one to experience this hidden pre-formed chaos. For example, in Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus!* Trilogy (1975): "Listen: the chaos you experience under LSD is not an illusion. The orderly world you imagine you experience, under the artificial and poisonous diet which the Illuminati have forced on all civilized nations, is the real illusion"

(280).

The atomization of all structures, characteristic of the psychedelic experience, is often understood as a dismantling process that removes meaning and form from the world. This is what Gene Youngblood in *Expanded Cinema* (1970) calls "de-signing" or "to remove the symbol of." He also describes this as an aim of the artist, saying:

> In this context "symbol" signifies ideas distinct from experiences. As design scientist the artist discovers and perfects language that corresponds more directly to experience; he develops hardware that embodies its own software as a conceptual tool for coping with reality. He separates the image from its official symbolic meaning and reveals its hidden potential, its process, its actual reality, the experience of the thing. (70)

The de-signing process also corresponds to Sadie Plant's Deleuzian description of the psychedelic experience: "the body loses its own categories, the boundaries that normally present it as an organized structure, each of whose organs has its proper function and place" (204-05). Deleuze and Guattari suggest, however, that a person exercise extreme caution when attempting to become "the Body without Organs":

> Tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from significance and interpretation in order to make it a veritable production: this is assuredly no more or less difficult than tearing the body away from the organism. (160)

Tony Tanner observes that Wilhelm Reich also saw this kind of temporary dissolution of the subject as essential to the formation of a healthy personality, yet he explains that Reich also recognized the concern that "the self might simply be washed away in the ensuing flow, with no certainty of ever re-achieving any viable identity" (431). From these statements we can see how these pages, too, are crucial for novelty but at the same time represent a limit that should not be reached.

III. The Styles of Psychedelic Literature

The designified, chaotic fields depicted on these pages represent one unattainable extreme on the spectrum between "fixity/fluidity," which Tanner views as the primary concern unifying a number of mid-twentieth century American writers (17-19). While the preoccupation with finding an "optimal balance between autonomy from id and autonomy from environment" may increasingly occupy the minds of the contemporary American authors he examines, Tanner recognizes that "the desire or compulsion to project the shape of one's own unique consciousness against the imprisoning shapes of the external world is a crucial component of Romanticism" (17). Indeed, the re-patterning or re-appropriation of language, which Tanner identifies as a method for evading rigidified "old formulations," implies the same continuum as that found in M.H. Abrams's consideration of the poetic imagination: the creative ability to "make a selection of qualities and of circumstances, from a variety of different objects and by combining and imposing these to form a new creation of its own" (Dugald Stewart qtd. in Abrams 162). By viewing this in conjunction with the German romantics' notion of the organic or vegetable model of artistic creation as "primarily an unwilled and unconscious process of mind" (173), we can see the emergence of a modern view in which creative expression is manifested as language that had been reworked in some way through its encounter with the unconscious.

Randy Malamud argues that modernist writers were also well aware of this need for balance: "the old language was eminently 'integrating,' yet their own language is under the constant threat of becoming self-annulling. Their language must be difficult, but not too difficult; idiosyncratic, but not too idiosyncratic; fresh, but not too fresh" (19). Yet modernism is often characterized as a shift toward a non-narrative, inner language—what Amélie Oksenberg Rorty calls "the pressure of differentiation in consciousness," where "what is seen drops out and the passion for being the seer, eventually the passion for being *this* seer takes over" (548). Rorty sees this course as leading to one of two possible incommunicable extremes of narrative scale (the infinitesimally detailed or the historically immense), yet, in *Transparent Minds* (1978), Dorrit Cohn is optimistic about the innovations that this inward turn of language might produce:

> In inner speech words don't just stand for the common (dictionary) meaning they have in spoken language, but they siphon up additional meanings [...] from the thought context in which they stand. Consequently words mix and match far more freely and creatively than in ordinary speech, forming heterodox clusters, neologisms, and agglutinations. (87)

Finnegans Wake is the obvious poster child of this kind of free-associative wordplay in fiction, but even in the rational world of psychology, Freud recognized this punning, word association, wit, and, (often) obscene humor, as characteristic of this language of the unconscious and psychedelics were viewed as the way to stimulate these.

At the height of LSD psychotherapy in the U.S. in the fifties and sixties LSD was seen as tool capable of providing direct access to the unconscious—a kind of lucid dreaming while awake. Looking at Constantine Newland's *My Self and I* (1962), a detailed account of several LSD therapy sessions that she underwent in order to overcome her frigidity, we see examples where this kind of perverse word play frustrates her potential insights into the nature of her condition. For example, Newland finds herself confronted with the vision of a clam but suddenly discovers that she is now completely unable to speak to the therapist. Later she realizes that she had "clammed up," while the image of the closed clam is also an obvious image of inaccessible female genitalia (20). The association of Joyce in particular with this stylistic toolset for transcribing (or reproducing) inner language is observable in many cases, but for Newland this was so pertinent that during an LSD therapy session she even experienced a scene from early on in Joyce's *Ulysses* "in which Mr. Bloom goes out one morning to buy a kidney for his breakfast, which he cooks and eats with enjoyment, after which he goes to have his morning bowel movement, with equal enjoyment." Newland interprets this hallucination of the kidney scene as signifying a full bladder; one of the symptoms complicating her frigidity (116). Newland's accounts of the therapy sessions are composed in straightforward prose, but in some cases her descriptions are necessarily reduced to lists: "A purplish poisonous peapod to hard-boiled eggs in a desert to a baby shaken into a rag doll to a red rose being fertilized by a bee to Oedipus with eyes gouged out to a nightmare of [...]" (107). In

short, Joyce popularized various narrative styles that psychedelic users in various fields would later find most appropriate for translating their experiences to words.

New Wave science fiction novels that narrate psychedelic experiences, such as Thomas M. Disch's *Camp Concentration* (1968) or Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* (1969), repeatedly make reference to Joyce. In *Barefoot in the Head*, which is set in a post-apocalyptic England where the entire population is permanently hallucinating, Aldiss utilizes Joycean puns, portmanteau words, lists, and so on, in order to texturize the psychedelic experience.

> Koninkrijk hated himself for this greedimaginative vampactof his highflown. Already the cathartos were barking beyond the ditched town, the PILE WONDER sign, the pasty dungheap at the Voeynants house shuttered, and beyond the road-widening the crash-fences started on either side, cambered outwards and curved at the top to catch escaping metal. Fast shallow breathing. The acute angle subtended by impacted heartbeats on mobility. (111)

This passage, which is clearly imitative of Joyce's style of wordplay throughout the *Wake*, offers a good example of how inner speech produces paradoxical meanings. Here, "Vampactof" can be read as "impact of" but with the association of a vampire echoing off "greedi," giving the impression of a desperate thirst. At the same time "vampactof" could be read as "vamp[iric] act of" thereby shifting the emphasis to "highflown." Yet, casual SF readers will find these books to be tedious at times in the same way that many of William Burroughs's earlier critics described his writing as "incomprehensible boring texts" (Schniederman and Walsh xi).

It is interesting that although Burroughs adopted his cut-up style from Tzara rather than Joyce and does not make use of puns or portmanteau words in the same way as Joyce's other successors, critics have still proclaimed Burroughs's work to be the direct descendant of *Finnegans Wake* (McLuhan 72). Burroughs and Joyce are related, then, through the anti-temporal, anti-narrative effects their styles produce. Yet in an interview Burroughs says, "I think *Finnegans Wake* rather represents a trap into which experimental writing can fall when it

becomes purely experimental" (Burroughs 46). One practical application of Burroughs's political objectives, as opposed to the "purely experimental," involved mutilating the language of the control-society by remixing tape loops (cliché) into forms that subvert basic logical and grammatical expectations. This is, of course, the function of anti-art, of which Adorno, in an essay on John Cage and New Music, cautiously approves:

> This is why to dismiss anti-art as pretentious cabaret and humour would be as great an error as to celebrate it. [...] As a joke they hurl culture into people's faces, a fate which both culture and people richly deserve. They do this not as a barbaric gesture, but to demonstrate what they have made of each other. The joke only turns sour when it appeals to an exotic, arty-crafty metaphysics and ends up with an exaggerated version of the very positivism which it set out to denounce. (314)

In other words, Adorno is saying that the political function of anti-art (in various media) is potentially good, but it should be evaluated for its subversive function only; it is not to be raised to the level of a new genre that embodies a novel transcendental significance. Nonetheless, it is precisely an "exotic, arty-crafty metaphysic" that is being proposed here. The psychedelic comix perform a function in the comics medium similar to that of Burroughs's texts as they subvert cliché and frustrate reader expectations. Yet on the other hand, they perform this function as a natural consequence of appropriating language and image to interpret the expanded perceptions associated with the waking mind's experience of the unconscious while on psychedelics. In the remaining pages, one possibility will be considered for how these two objectives might be more easily achieved in comics rather than in written prose.

Already in Fig. 2 it was observed that type-6 (non sequitur) transitions made up 19% of the tallied psychedelic comix panel transitions. Although there are several isolated occurrences in the history of the comics medium where non sequitur is employed in line with the overall plot, the psychedelic comix are the only genre that featured so many extended non sequitur experiments. Earlier it was argued that the chaos of the "melted" pages (Fig. 4) was not a breakdown of the comics system but rather a representation of preconditions of the comics

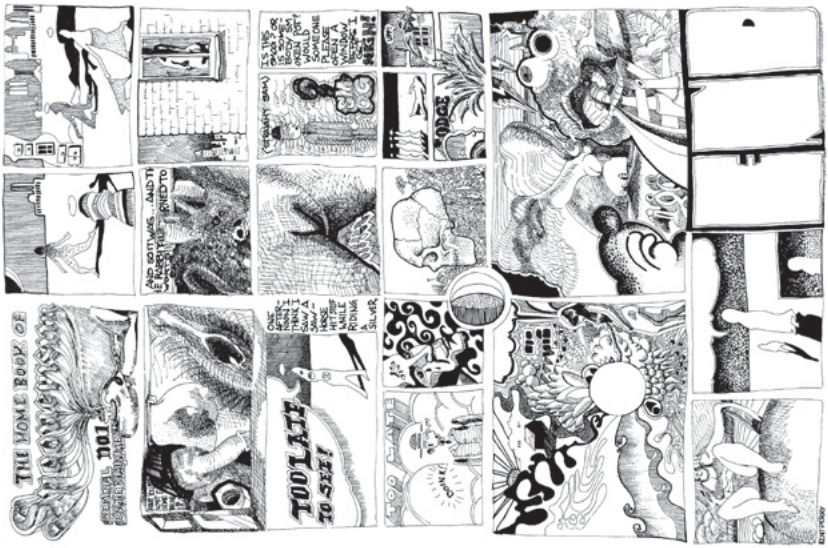

Fig. 5. Kent Perry, "The Home Book of Spoonerism" *Yellow Dog #9*. 1969, p. 14.

page before a structuring narrative has divided it into functional semantic units. It was then suggested that this is analogous to the "de-signing" or the perceived absence of internal and external categories associated with the psychedelic experience. Here this suggests that these non sequitur strips, too, should be seen, not as a random jumble of images, but instead as representations of the basic outlines of the comics form, now lying just below the threshold of functioning as a narrative. Various examples of non sequitur in psychedelic comix (*e.g.* John Thompsons's "Rebelution" in *Kingdom of Heaven Within You* [1969], Skip Williams's "Black Icarus" in *Radical American Komiks Vol.3* #1 [1969] and Jack Jackson's "Cause and Effect Comics" in *San Francisco Comic Book* #1 [1970]) represent different artists' experiments in subverting the formal clichés of the comics' dominant forms and so in that way they act as anti-art, but, and this is the final assertion, these strips are also indicative of the potential to achieve the long-sought balance between inner and outer language through the added complexity of the interactions between word and image tracks.

"The Home Book of Spoonerism" by Kent Perry (Fig. 5) consists mainly of (apparently) non sequitur panel transitions. The drawings are of varying levels of

abstraction and within the panels there are word balloons, some of which are legible, while others are cut off, covered over, or simply empty. Upon closer examination it can be seen that there is a punning and play that takes place, just as in Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head*. For example, the short rhyme in the narrow panel in the center cuts off, leaving the reader searching for something that rhymes with "stuf[sic]." This is adjacent to a close up of female genitalia or a "muff," which in turn is repeating the connection with the voyeur who was "too late to see." "Too late" is then repeated by Straight Sam in the panel below, for he was too late to get the window open and ended up getting high on secondhand "pot" smoke. The reference to the window also connects back to the voyeur, who may be Straight Sam himself, as his waking sexual desires are mirrored in the psychedelic visions on the lower half of the page.

This becomes more apparent if we view the ball in the center as indicative of a slightly off-center rotational symmetry in which the panels have some degree of corresponding content, working inward from the first and last panels. By comparing the fourth panel from the beginning and the fourth panel from the end, a mirroring can be observed in which the earlier sex organs have retained their basic positions and shape but have now become grotesque creatures. This rotational mirroring can be seen in other frames as well. In the next two panels to the right and their corresponding larger panel on the lower left, two different versions of the woman and the window are shown, yet while the more realistic image above conveys a sense of modern human isolation and society's sexual deprivation, the lower panel has placed the window behind the woman and surrounded her with wondrous flows of organic shapes. Whereas this particular page may not contain profound existential truths, it shows how in an "open" comic—where the reader is required to continually employ more intensive revision—the added visual dimension encourages the identification of various nonlinear associations.

These interactions between comics' visual and verbal tracks can keep things moving in a general sense while maintaining a fragmented juxtaposition of images that produces the anti-narrative tendencies associated with the images of the unconscious. By doing this in comics a new possibility becomes visible for texts that attain balance not only between inner and outer language but between changing relations of image to image word to word and image to word.

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(Graduate Student)

SUMMARY

Tripping over the Defining Line: An Analysis of Form in Psychedelic Underground Comix

Ian Stuart Garlington

In *Alternative Comics* (2006), Charles Hatfield argues that comics critics and historians have failed to adequately explain the continuing success of alternative comics in the U.S. because they have ignored the connection to the underground comix ("x" is used when discussing undergrounds) of the 1960s, which he views as no less than "the catalyst for a radically new understanding of the art form."

The problem is that Hatfield ends up positioning the underground comix only as a means to an end; they become the raw energy that still required an art-school reworking before the celebratory forms of art comics could be properly synthesized. What of the forms found in the underground comix themselves? Could it really be that the undergrounds, which Hatfield describes as "punk" or "a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (paradoxically) unchecked artistic freedom," offered both radical content and new independent publishing models, while at the same time adhering to the bland narrative forms of the mainstream comics industry? In most cases that was precisely the case.

Yet there were significant experimental narrative forms that first appeared in underground comix which have gone unrecognized by comics theorists simply because they do not correspond with ones that are currently valued. This paper identifies the experimental styles found most often in "psychedelic" underground comix and discusses how these forms could potentially make a contribution to one of the fundamental challenges facing experimental literature. Here, "psychedelic" refers to comics with a style or material that is similar to, or representative of, psychedelic drug experiences. The reason for selecting this subgenre of the underground comix is that it contains the vast majority of comix's experimental forms specific to the comics medium (as opposed to forms shared with psychedelic paintings or sculpture).