

Multimodal Authoring and Authority in Educational Comics: Introducing Derrida and Foucault for Beginners

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Abstract

Academic writing has generally been understood as operating primarily within the linguistic modality, with writing remediating the "voice" of an educator or lecturer. Comics, by contrast, are more explicitly multimodal and derive much of their meaning from visual, spatial and linguistic modalities. Because of their multimodality, educational comics challenge the conception of an authoritative author's "voice," as is typically found in traditional educational and academic writing.

To examine how authorship and authority function in multimodal educational texts, this paper examines several books in the popular "For Beginners" and "Introducing" series of "graphic guides," which use images, text, and comics to summarise the work of major philosophers – in this case Derrida and Foucault. The books chosen for this study are all collaborative efforts between writers, illustrators, and designers. In each book, the collaborations function differently, engendering different divisions of authorial labor and forging different constructions of multimodal relationships between image, text, and design.

In order to more fully interrogate the ways that these educational comics combine multimodal modes of meaning, this paper itself takes the form of a comic, mimicking at times the books that it is examining. In this way, it serves as a self-reflexive critique of the idea that authorial voice is central to academic writing, and as an example of the challenges and opportunities presented by composing multimodal scholarship which eschews this conception of linguistic authorship.

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M U L T I M O D A L

AUTHORSHIP
and

AUTHORITY

in Educational Comics:

Introducing Foucault & Derrida
For Beginners



Aaron Humphrey

Michele Foucault and Jacques Derrida are legendary figures in the humanities and are among the field's most-cited authors.¹

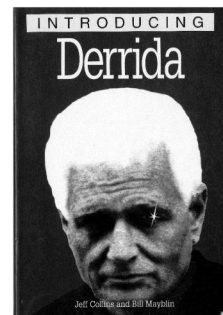
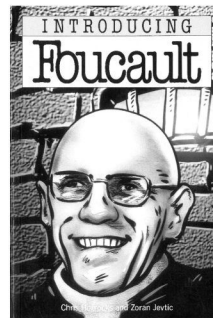
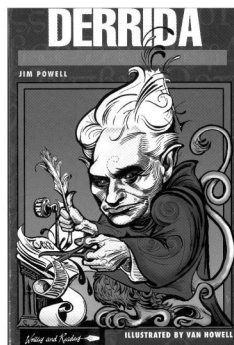
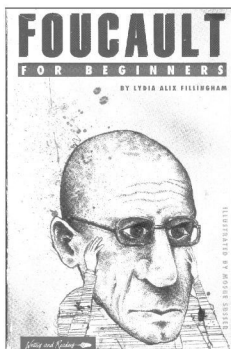
Along with fellow Frenchman Pierre Bourdieu! (who will not be discussed in this paper...)



With cultural capital like this, was there any doubt that they would eventually become the subjects of COMIC BOOKS?



Namely, these comic books:

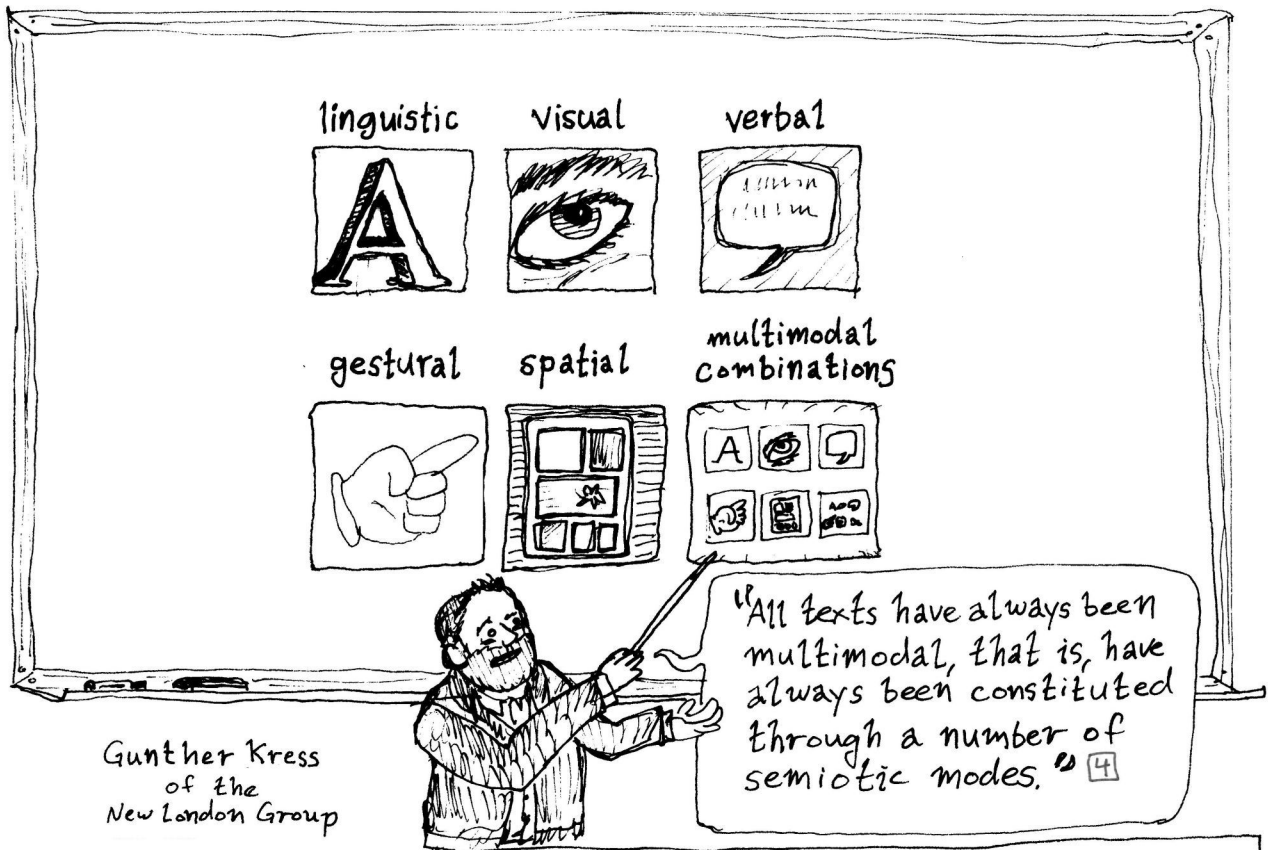


These comics discuss the theoretical work of Foucault and Derrida visually and spatially, as well as by using conventional 'alphabetic' text.²

The arguments they make are MULTIMODAL



The concept of multimodal literacies was developed by the New London Group, who suggested that six design elements contribute to the process of creating meaning.³



Comics in particular make very apparent the ways these modalities co-exist and interact with each other. For this reason, this paper will also take the form of a comic.

We are accustomed to disregarding the visual and spatial modalities of writing, along with the verbal and gestural modalities of oral presentations, in preference of the "true" linguistic modality...



...and in the process have elevated the myth of authorial voice, agency and authority —

— while subjugating or ignoring the roles of other actors in the production of texts and meanings.

"Formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power"

FRANCO MORETTI⁵

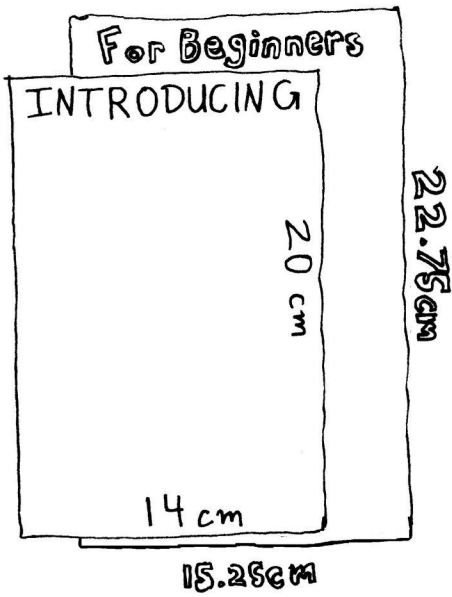


Examining a text's multimodal forms can uncover the powers of other actors to affect how meaning is conveyed — the writer's voice is often not the loudest.

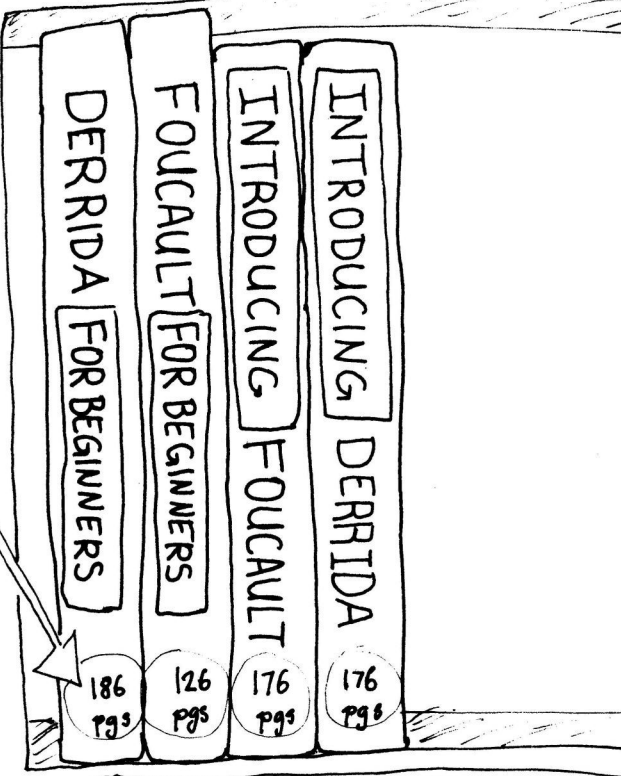
This paper will investigate these comics, focusing on how they work as multimodal texts.



These four books are all roughly the same size

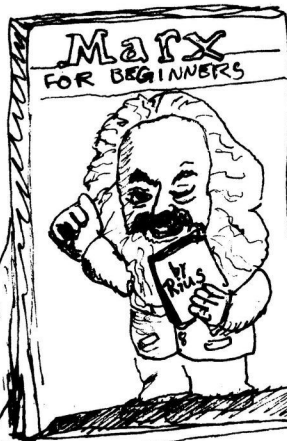
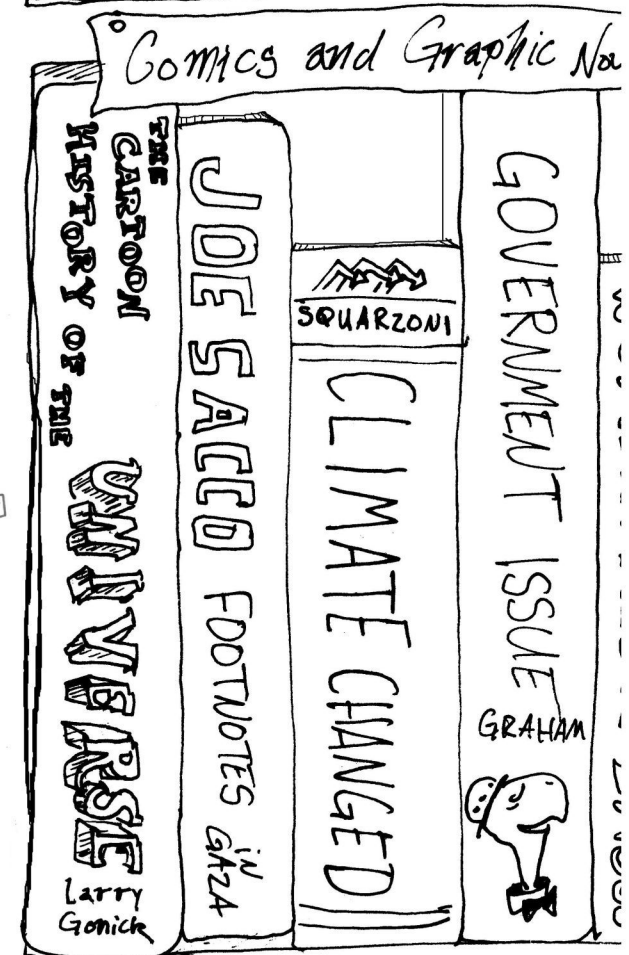


... and roughly the same length



Found commonly in university book stores, each has been reprinted several times since the mid-1990s. ⁶

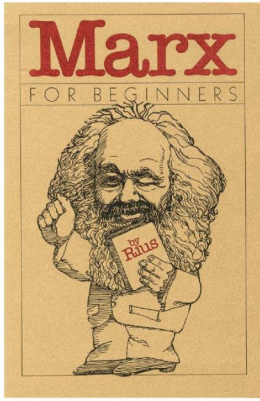
Although coinciding with the literary ascendance of graphic novels, and prefiguring more recent comics that have entered into academic discourse, the books in the Introducing and For Beginners series follow a template established by a small press sensation from the 1970s: ⁷



THE Granddaddy OF THEM ALL!

THE INTERNATIONAL BEST-SELLER!





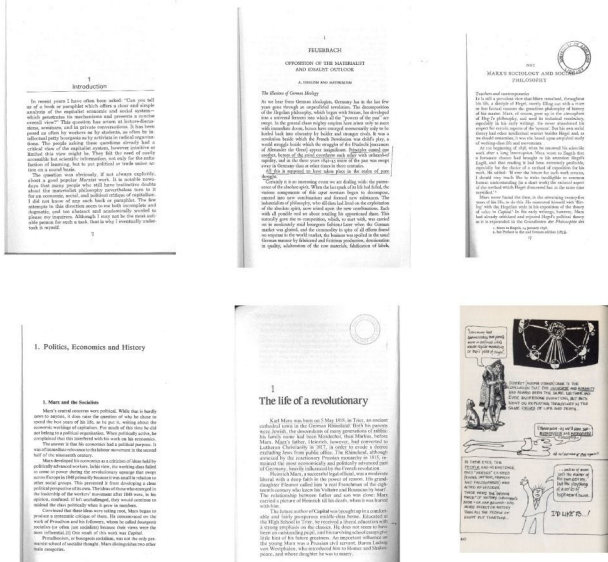
Marx for Beginners (1976) was the second book by the Mexican cartoonist **Rius** to be published in English, following *Cuba for Beginners* (1971).

An incredibly prolific and popular cartoonist in Mexico, Rius is now in his eighties and has published more than 50 books, the most recent in 2014.^[8]



Very few are available in English.

Rius' use of cartoons and hand-written text makes his work stand out compared to other paperback books about Marx from the 1970s.^[9]



Today, his approach remains iconoclastic...

"I don't like using the computer to design the page layout because it homogenises everything. It's a globalising format."

-interview, 2002^[10]


Aaron Humphrey @aaron_humphrey · now
@dhjunkie Rius challenges us to reconsider the norms that comprise our writing and publishing practices (1/2)

Digital Humanist @dhjunkie
No computers! What a luddite!
#DigitalHumanities

Aaron Humphrey @aaron_humphrey · now
@dhjunkie as well as the visual and spatial modalities of writing that we take for granted... (2/2)

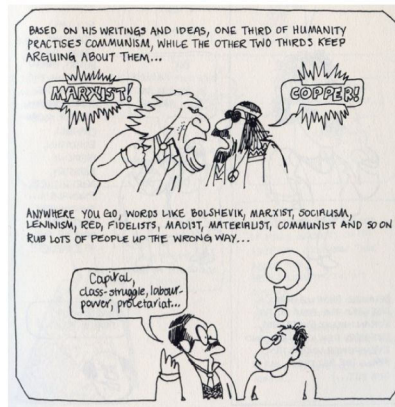


I've found that composing this article with just pen and paper has required a different kind of thinking than writing with a word processor and citation software.

Throughout *Marx for Beginners*, Rius uses his own handwriting instead of typesetting... - 

... that is, except for when quoting passages directly from Marx or other sources. As a result, the experience of reading these quotes is distinct from that of reading Rius' own words. This is fundamentally different from most academic and educational texts, where quoted material is visually identical to the surrounding text, almost as if these sources had been completely absorbed into the voice of the author.

Other voices come from his little cartoons, which do not represent distinct or recurring characters, but still manage to argue with each other.



The result is that the book

has a lot of voices

for the reader to navigate.

There appear to be two distinct levels of authority - that which comes from the typeset text of Rius' sources, and that which comes from his own pen.*

The books about Foucault and Derrida, which are the work of multiple people, complicate this issue even further.

Where can we find authority in a book with multiple authors working in different modalities?

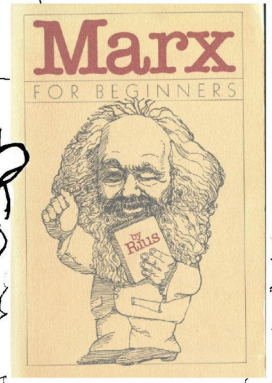


*The fact that the hand-written English translation comes written by a different hand than Rius' emphasises that all "authorial authority" is a construct.

The book was first published in English by the Writers & Readers publishing collective.

"It was an instant hit! Rius' brilliant primer was to sell over a million copies in twelve languages." [1]

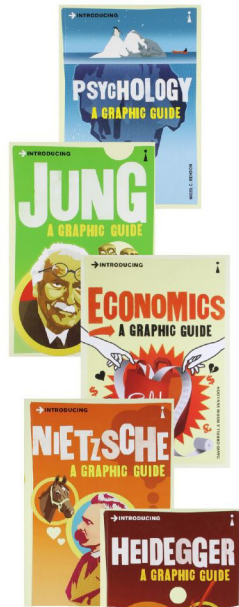
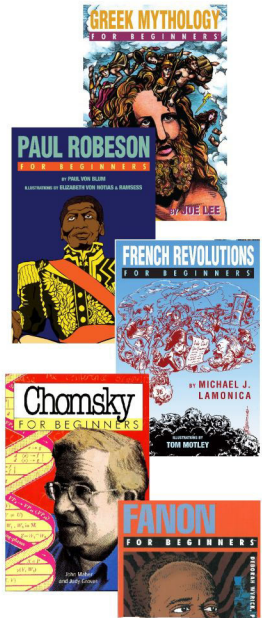
Co-publisher & Translator
Richard Appignanesi



The cooperative turned the 'For Beginners' format into a franchise of more than 100 titles, but the collective eventually fractured, resulting in two lines of books, often covering the same topics.

For Beginners 
Writers and Readers, Inc
Founding Editor: Glenn Thompson

Introducing... 
Totem Books / Icon Books
Founding Editor: Appignanesi



While most of these books follow the formal template established by Rius, they are different from his work in that the duties Rius performed as cartoonist have been separated into multiple roles for multiple people.

How have these books been used? An anecdotal account:

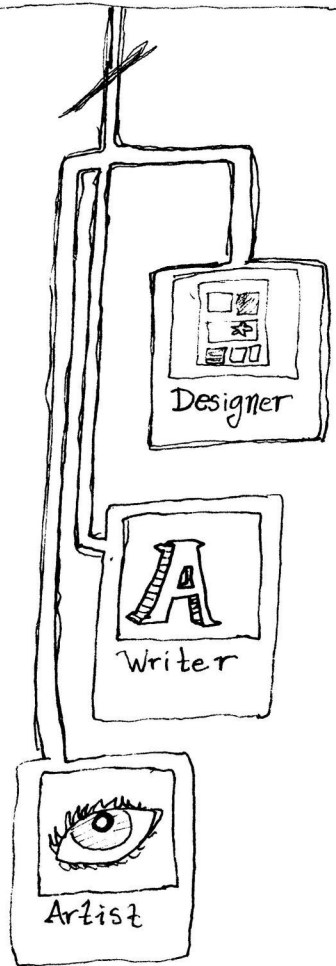
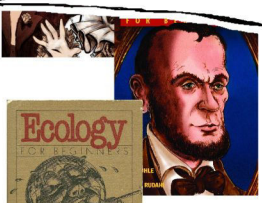
I had already read *Introducing Foucault* a while back, when I was first reading *Archaeology of Knowledge*...

Krista A. Kennedy, circa 2003



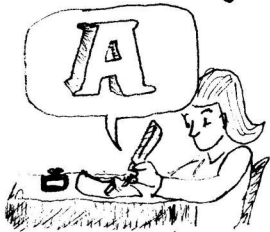
FOUCAULT READING SEMINAR! today!

Even though I've read more Foucault since then, I went ahead and picked up *Foucault for Beginners*, since that seemed to be what everyone else in the class was reading in preparation. [2]

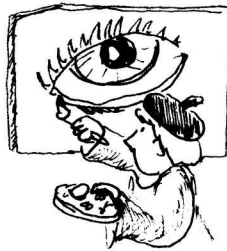


Our understanding of the division of labour in books is often related to the divisions between modalities...

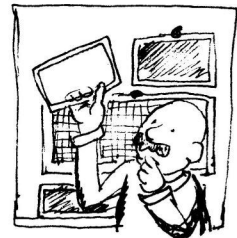
Writer / linguistic



Artist / visual



Designer / spatial



However, in the books themselves, these modalities are merged together, creating meanings which are multimodal and often cannot be separated cleanly as the work of "just" the writer, "just" the artist or "just" the designer.



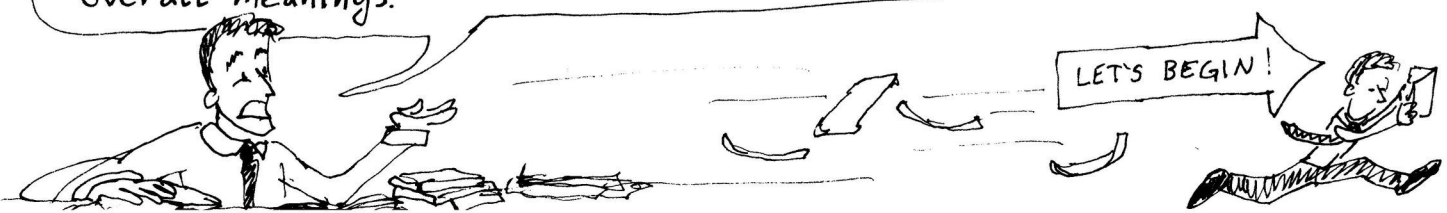
Meaning arises from the relationships between these modalities!

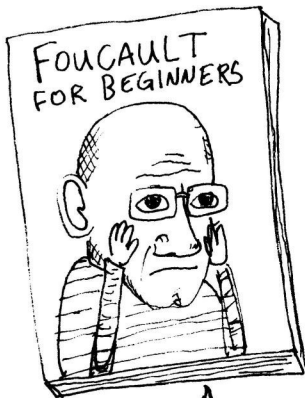
Each of these books constructs the relationships between modalities differently, as well as constructing different models of collaboration between writer, artist & designer

This paper will examine these books in order of a decreasing number of authorial collaborators, and an increasing complexity in the multimodal collaborations between modalities.

credited collaborators:	1 WRITER 2 ARTISTS 2 DESIGNERS	1 WRITER 1 ARTIST 1 DESIGNER	1 WRITER 1 ARTIST	1 WRITER 1 ARTIST
Linguistic/ visual relationship	 ARBITRARY	 PARALLEL	 TANDEM	 FUSED

This investigation will be focused on the different types of relationships that are constructed, and on the ways these multimodal relationships themselves relate to the books' overall meanings.





FOUCAULT for BEGINNERS

Writers & Readers Inc, 1993

WORDS: Lydia Alix Fillingham

DESIGN: Daryl Long and Terrie Dunkelberger

PICTURES: Moshe "Mosh" Süsser and George

Inside my pages: a huge array of **VISUAL styles** and **TYPOGRAPHY!** (which often seem to be somewhat arbitrary)

The images, text and design sometimes work in concert —

such as when this collage about the primal connections between power, emotion and violence...

... is followed by this sedate family scene illustrating the ways power is subtly deployed through language

Turning the page, the inverted **white-on-black** reverts to normal **black-on-white** ... this helps convey the idea of two co-existent realms — the traumatic mechanisms of power underlying everyday existence, and that experience of the everyday which normalises and obscures those mechanisms.

However, at other points, the images and the text seem to be at cross purposes. On this page, Fillingham quotes a section from Foucault's 'This is not a Pipe', while Mosh & George seem to illustrate a different, contradictory passage.

"I am no more than the words you are now reading" p. 25

Foucault wrote about such ideas most directly in his short, playful book on the painter Rene Magritte, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is Not a Pipe).

A GEORGE

"The picture of the pipe is saying, 'You see me so clearly that it would be ridiculous for me to arrange myself so as to write: This is a pipe. To be sure, words would draw me less adequately than I represent myself.' The text in turn prescribes, 'Take me for what I manifestly am—letters placed beside one another, arranged and shaped so as to facilitate reading, assure recognition, and open themselves to even the most stammering schoolboy. I am no more than the words you are now reading.'"

B

... while the cartoons argue that images impose their reality on the viewer. 13

"The easel has but to tilt, the frame to loosen, the painting to tumble down, the words to be scattered. The "pipe" can "break" p. 31

The text asserts the plain-faced authority of writing...

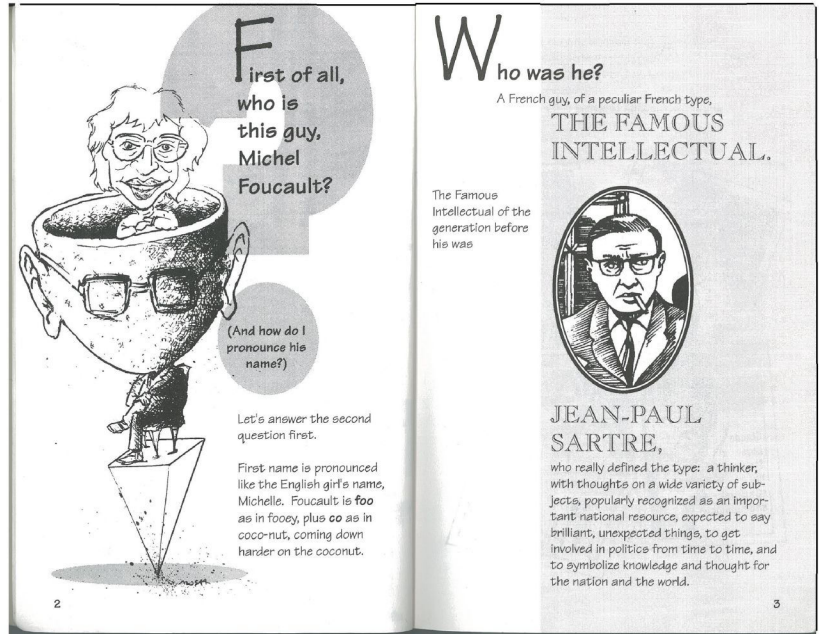
Other battles for control over the meaning of the book can be found in the representations of Fillingham, who seems to have asked her collaborators to draw her into certain passages, as if to assert her authority over the book's VISUAL DOMAIN as well as its TEXT

She appears on this first page, emerging from Foucault's head like Athena from Zeus! but her authority over her own words is undermined by Long and Dunkelberger's design

Reading just the largest words, an unintended message emerges:

First of all, who is this guy, Michel Foucault?

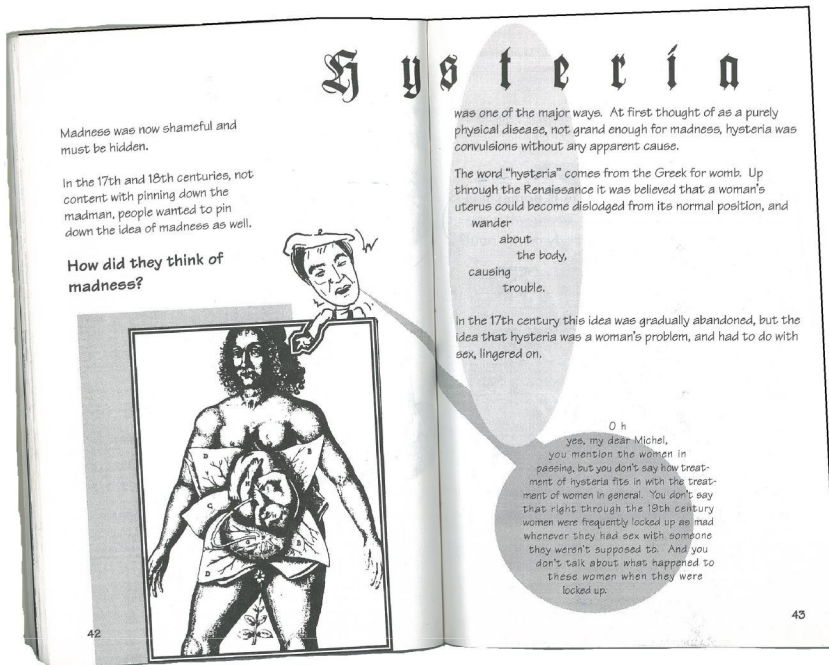
Who was he? THE FAMOUS INTELLECTUAL JEAN-PAUL SARTRE



In a later passage, she appears on one page while



her words are printed across the page divide, seeming to flee from their own word balloon



And how are we meant to take the fact that Mosh & George draw the writer so inconsistently?

The pages themselves are the site of a power struggle where meanings are contested.

The authorship of the pages themselves is unclear..

Fillingham's 'VOICE' is at times drowned out by the 'NOISE' of her fellow collaborators.



DERRIDA for BEGINNERS

Writers & Readers Inc, 1997

WORDS:

Jim Powell

PICTURES:

Van Howell

DESIGN

Terrie Dunkelberger

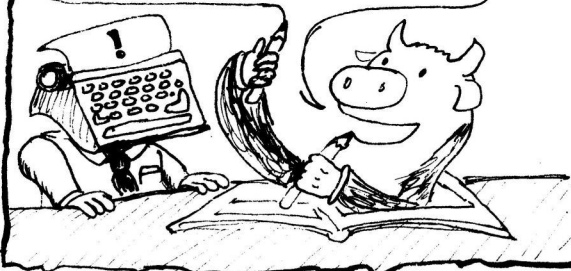
Q: How does the design of THIS book work?

A: It's less obtrusive than in Foucault for Beginners, and facilitates the feel of a double act between Powell and Howell.

Q: A double act? How do you mean?

A: The writing and art run in parallel, not always directly referring to each other, but providing different perspectives on the same subjects.

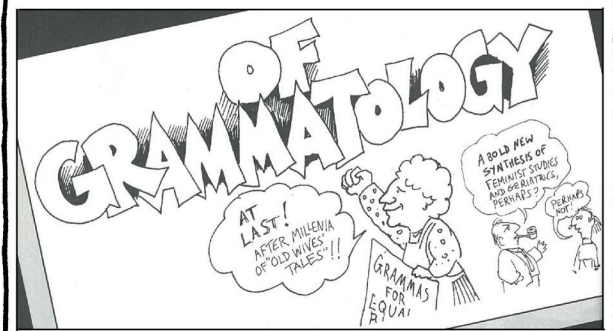
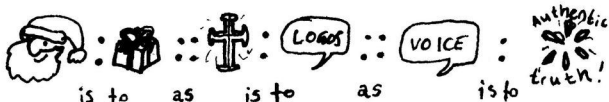
Meanwhile, Howell's drawings are wordy and full of double meanings!



Howell's cartoons frequently combine both visual and verbal puns to create what Derrida might call an 'undecidable' argument.



Here, Howell compares Derrida's concept of the metaphysics of 'presence' to yearning for presents at Christmas, and parallels this pun with another: John's or gospel identifies Jesus as 'Logos' - 'The Word' of God, so Howell turns Derrida's 'logocentrism' to 'logos-enterism', or the coming of Christ.



In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explored 'logocentrism,' the bias for the spoken word over the written word. Howell plays with this by drawing a sound-based pun: a 'Gramma' (Grandma) protesting oral traditions ('Old Wives Tales') with a written sign.

but she's also protesting with her 'voice' ... and the joke requires both visual AND verbal literacies

The jokes and meanings of Howell's cartoons can only be understood multimodally, and rely on the space of play between speech and text that Derrida was interested in.



Introducing Foucault

Totem Books, 1997

WORDS: Chris Horrocks

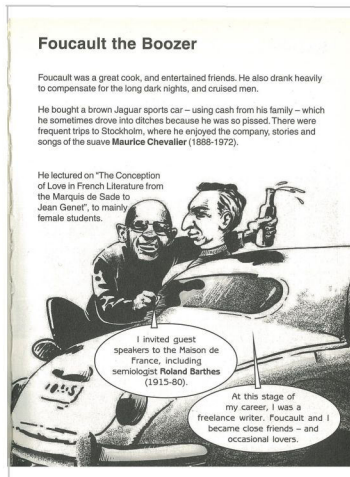
PICTURES: Zoran Jevtic

Interested in the order of things in Foucault's life and work? You'll find it here, organised (mostly) chronologically, and within a (mostly) consistent visual structure! — OBSERVE!

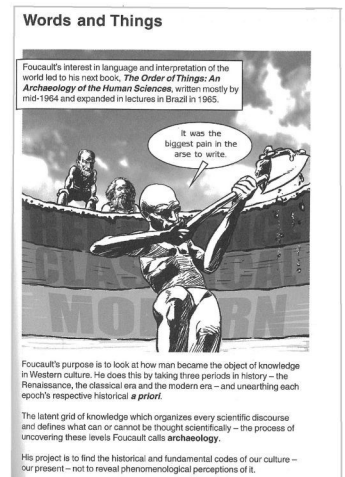


Jevtic draws Foucault as the focal point of most pages, sometimes moving surreally through his intellectual life, sometimes in mundane scenes from his personal life (plenty of lovers show up).

The result is that even passages describing Foucault's theories have a biographical feel. Foucault appears as an actor in both mind and body.

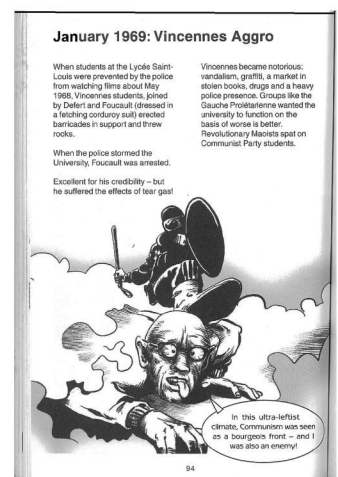
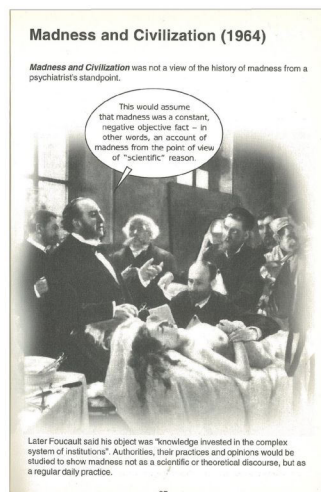
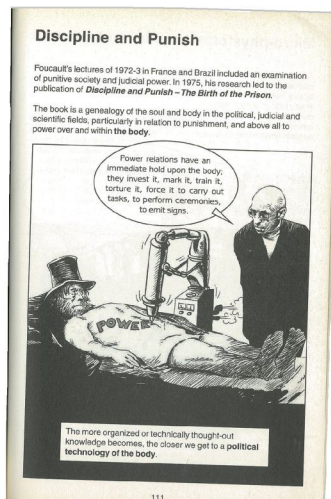
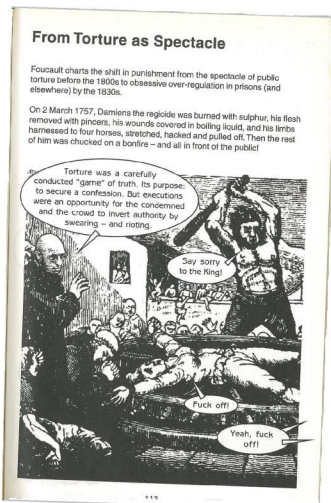


Foucault palling around with Barthes c. 1955



Foucault's archaeology as a seaside excavation overseen by Marx & Freud c. 1965

Just as representations of Foucault's body are braided throughout the book, so is the repeated motif of bodies under surveillance, analysis and/or investigation.

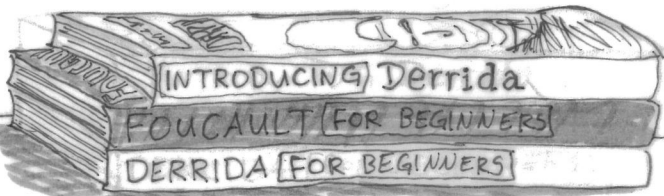


the gaze is omnipresent

Under Investigation

This motif is echoed in the visual structure of the pages themselves, where images presented before us are discussed by the text.

Unlike in the other three books, there isn't much intermingling between WORDS and PICTURES



In some ways, this mirrors how Foucault's 'This is Not a Pipe' describes Magritte's paintings, but barely ventures into their visual realm.



"...dividing the pipe floating in its imagistic heaven from the mundane tramp of words marching in their successive line."

14



But even as this division is mostly maintained, the distinction between speech and text is made ambiguous, along with the division between quote and paraphrase...

This is Not a Pipe

Belgian Surrealist artist René Magritte (1898-1967) wrote a letter to Foucault, attempting to explain the difference between similitude (of things, like the colour of peas) and resemblance (of thought, which "resembles" the world it sees).

Foucault in his reply and text of 1973 took as an example and title Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe* (1926) and *The Two Mysteries* (1966). The problem of resemblance – the relation between words and things – is studied in these paintings.

Let's look at their heterotopic approach – meaning one or other – where the traditional bonds between language and image are disturbed, made different and in tension.



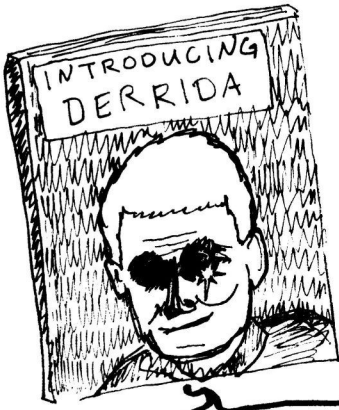
Foucault traces two relevant principles in Western painting which lead from the 15th century to Magritte's work.

Word balloons are meant to signify a closeness between a 'speaker' and their words... but this is not a quote.

Foucault never wrote anything like that in regards to Magritte's work.

Yet in other places, the text in word balloons DOES come from direct quotes.

This book has no system of separation for these different kinds of 'speech.'



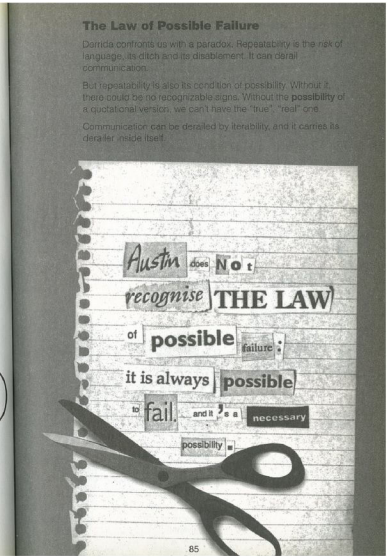
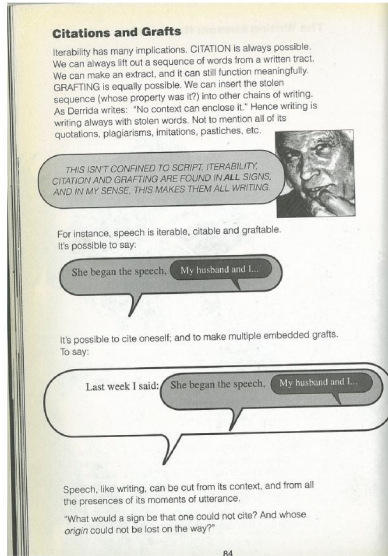
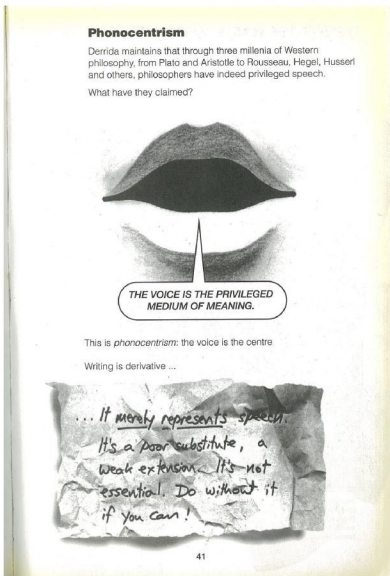
Introducing Derrida

Totem Books, 1996

WORDS:
Jeff Collins

PICTURES:
Bill Mayblin

The roles of writer, illustrator and designer are fused in this book more than in any of the others



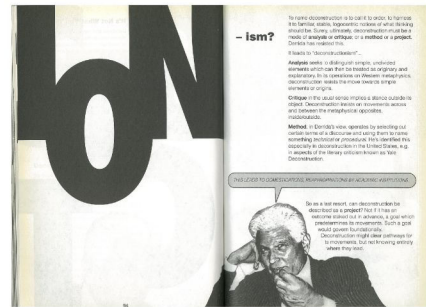
On pages like these, the various visual forms of the words carry as much meaning as the words themselves, calling into question the roles of writer and illustrator.

Did Mayblin the illustrator hand-write that note?

Did Collins the writer establish the visual way those balloons are nested?

Who is responsible for the words in this ransom note?

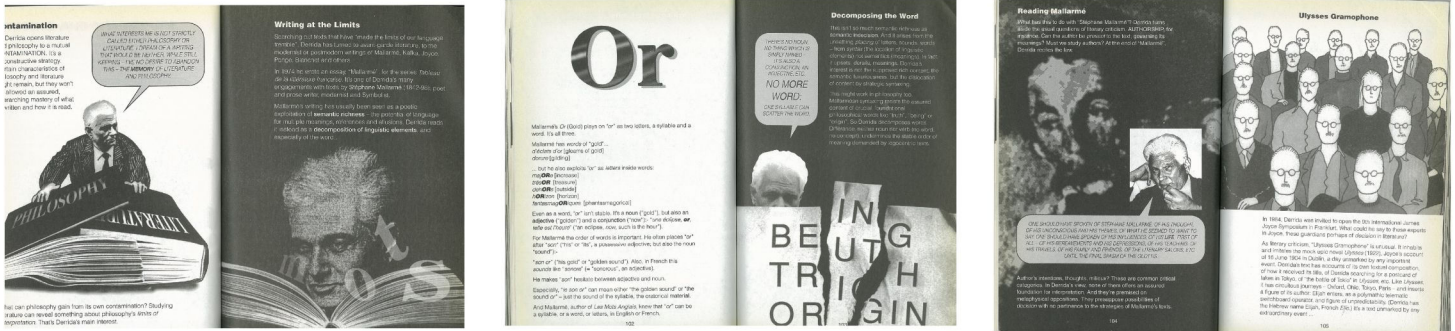
As in *GLAs*, the book's physical codex form is used as part of its argument — In this section, a word with larger-than-life status in Derrida's oeuvre is spread over six pages!



The term cannot even be read without physical effort — and it might not even be a single term, does the last page's tiny '-ism?' count?

The complexity of the design is at times ^{dazzling}, but in places falls into the same trap as Foucault for Beginners, where

The design 'speaks' LOUDER than anything else on the page!



Linguistically, these pages are about Derrida's critique of binary systems of thought, a reversal of the idea that meanings are **either/or**.

Yet the visual form of these pages, shifts constantly from black on white to white on black, subtly reinforcing the idea of **binary opposites**.



The meanings of these two modalities are not aligned.



FINE, LET'S LOOK AT THESE TWO CONCEPTS - THE SIGN AND DIFFERENCE.

The "sign" has two aspects:-

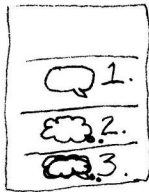
A **signifier**: for Saussure, this is a sensory perception (a spoken word has an aspect we can hear; a written word, an aspect we can see).

A **signified**: a concept or meaning associated with that sensory perception.

A sign, to be a sign, needs both aspects: something we sense and something we think. It's a relationship ...

63

Similarly, this page misrepresents Saussure's classic construction of signifier and signified:



Introducing each element individually, like steps in a process, undermines Saussure's central premise that in a sign, signifier and signified cannot exist independently of each other - they are two sides of the



Furthermore, representing the 'signified' with a close-up photograph implies that it has an external, sensory quality; Saussure's idea was that the signified was entirely mental and internal.



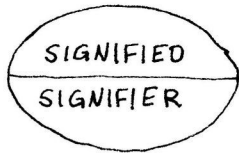
As a result, instead of showing Saussure's theory of signs made of signifying sensory experiences (sound images) linked to signified mental conceptions...

the page shows how images and words can be combined to form multimodal signifiers.

Two of the other books also try to explain Saussure's sign, and it's interesting to note that the different approaches they take generally align with the way each book depicts the relationship between image and text.

before we look at those other books, it might be helpful to examine Saussure's theory.

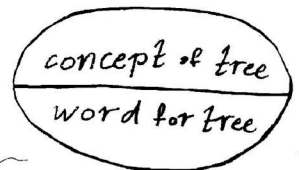
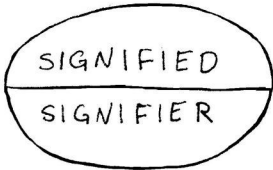
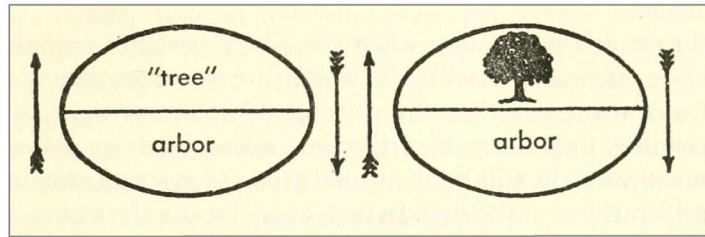
Saussure's sign is often visually represented as:








It's a way of theorizing the relationship between:



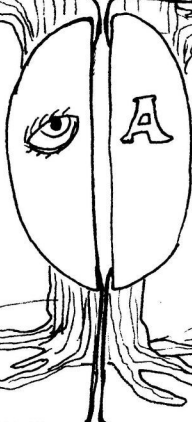
Here's an example of how it appears in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*



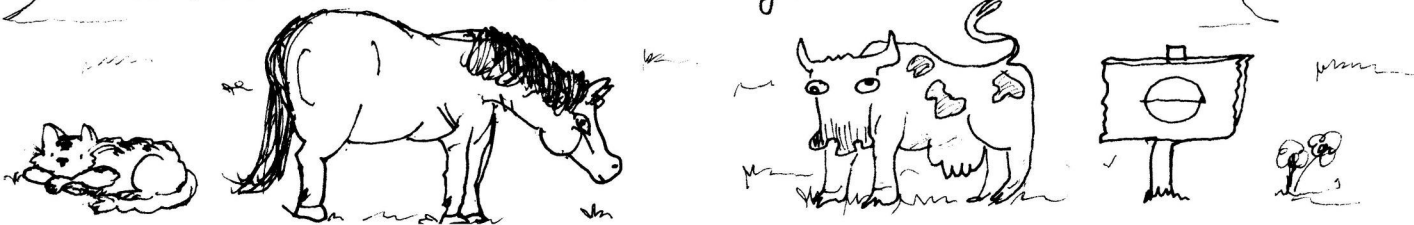
The SIGNIFIED is represented alternatingly as
 an image-
 and a word- "tree"
 but it is both-and
 neither.

Both modalities
 "tree"
 and 
 can only depict
 SIGNIFIERS

The unpictureable, unpronounceable SIGNIFIED lies somewhere in the gap between modalities.



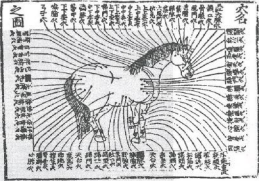
And so, these gaps, or relationships, between modalities are fertile ground for the creation and construction of meanings.



For example ~

They started by resurrecting the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a theorist in the emerging field of linguistics, who had been largely ignored until the 50's and 60's.

In any language, the relationship of signifier to signified is arbitrary.



The collection of sounds and letters that make up the word "horse" (the signifier) do not in themselves have any connection to the animal we see cantering about a field (the signified). A "horse" is called, around the world, "cheval" in French, "pferd" in German, "farasi" in Swahili, "hest" in Norwegian, "konj" in Serbo-Croatian, "ceffy" in Welsh, "at" in Turkish, "caballo" in Spanish, and could just as easily be called a "glymph" in any of these languages (and it still would smell as sweet). The answers to how meaning works lies not in these sounds and letters, but in the whole system of language.

Saussure looked at language as a whole, to see how it worked, rather than focusing on the details of individual languages.

92


Foucault for Beginners explains the arbitrary nature of the relationship between words and their meanings in a passage accompanied by a picture of dozens of Chinese words pointing to a horse, as if to illustrate that any of those words could have an equal (and equally arbitrary) claim to signify the animal.

But the reappropriated horse acupuncture chart is not referred to in the text. It is unclear who drew the picture, or who decided to include it in the book. Like many other images in the book, it has an arbitrary relationship to the text.

Although the two modalities are not clearly linked by authorship or subject matter, meaning can be constructed from their spatial order & proximity.

In Derrida for Beginners, the discussion of

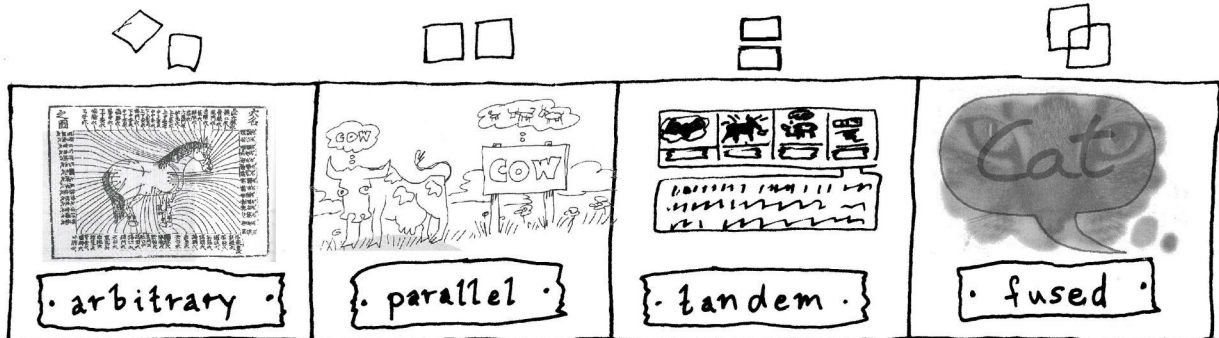
signifier / signified is illustrated with several cartoons, of which this is the most simple and direct →

The abstracted cartoon drawings combine Saussure's  and "tree" onto a unified canvas while still holding the visual and linguistic modalities at a distance to each other.



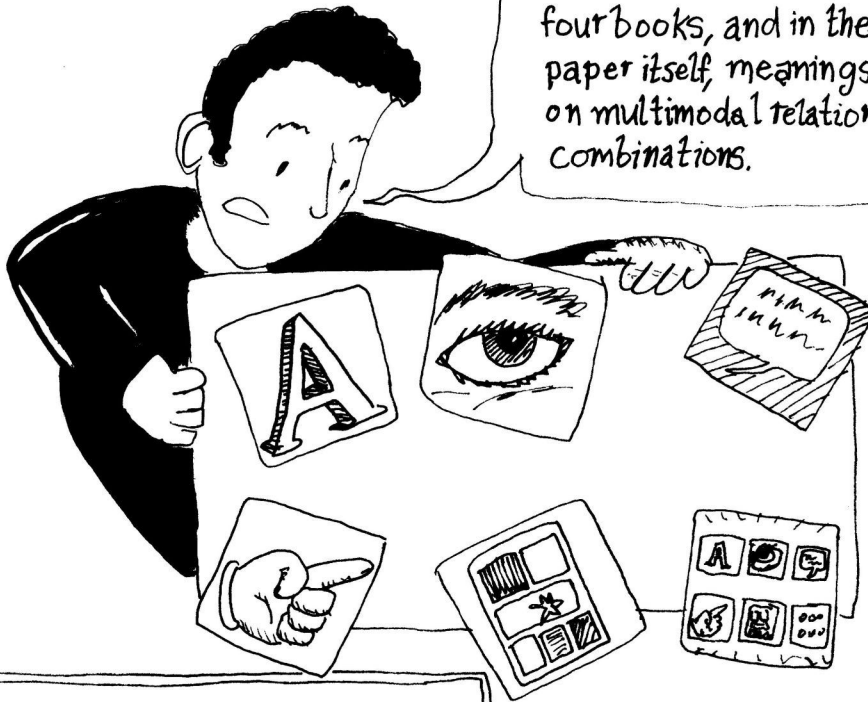
In the same way, throughout the book, words and images inter-relate and refer to each other without interacting directly.

These books represent the same material by constructing different multimodal relationships.



(Introducing Foucault does not discuss Saussure, but its conventional pairing of image and text in an expository and hierarchical way is echoed in the way this text relates to the chart above it.)

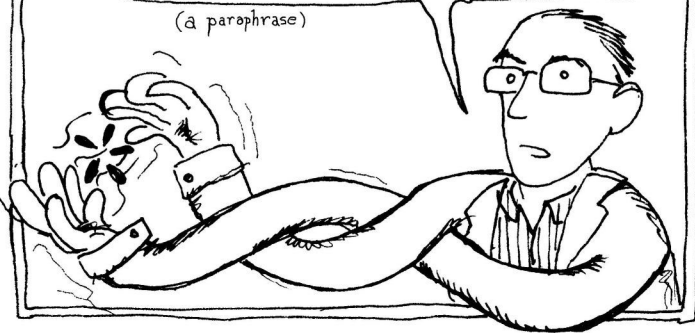
As I've tried to show in this analysis of all four books, and in the construction of this paper itself, meanings in a text are reliant on multimodal relationships and combinations.



Comics theorist Thierry Groensteen calls the visual/spatial mesh that contains these relationships the SPATIO-TOPIA, and explains:

Meaning is braided throughout the network of a comic. 16

(a paraphrase)

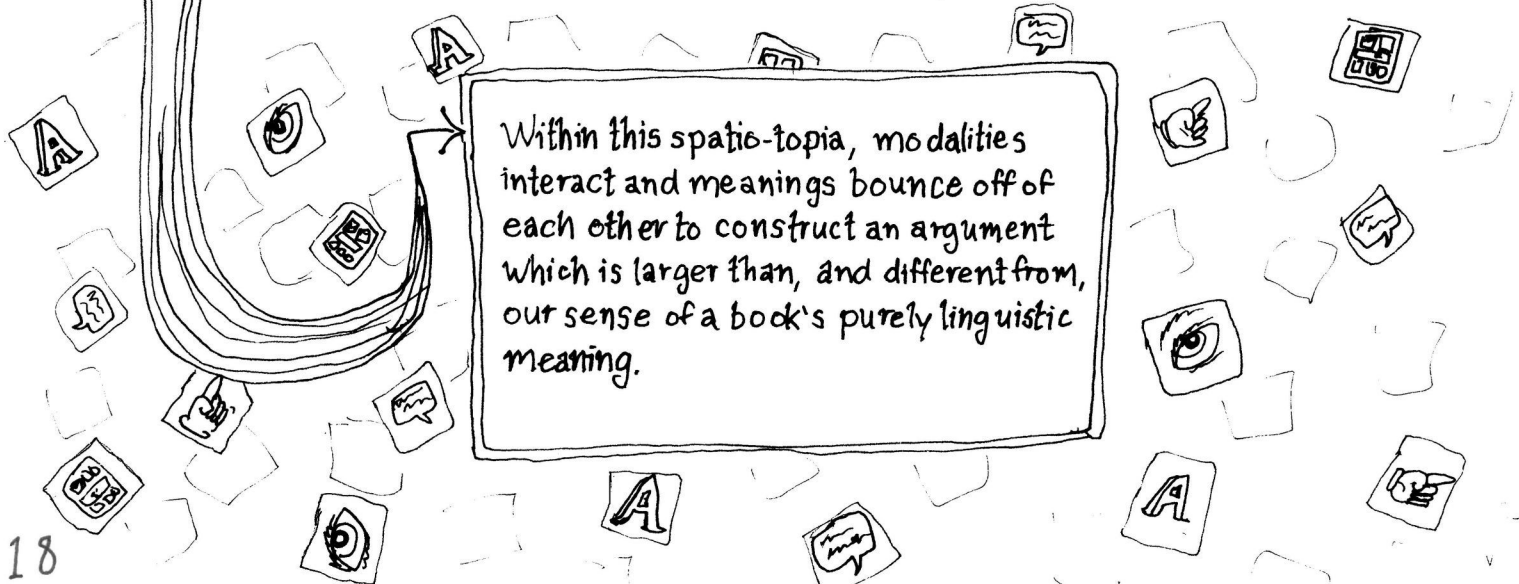


The boundaries between modalities and the categorisations I've used here to describe relationships are not solid, but shifting



Nevertheless, observing and thinking about the ways modalities combine and relate to each other can be illuminating ...

Within this spatio-topia, modalities interact and meanings bounce off of each other to construct an argument which is larger than, and different from, our sense of a book's purely linguistic meaning.



Even arbitrary images or questionable design choices contribute to this multimodal argument.



And even texts without pictures construct multimodal arguments.

Most academic publications assume a fairly uniform multimodal structure ... and this is part of their argument —



I belong to, act like, and look like other academic discourse.

But as Rius and the books he inspired have shown...

... a globalising format...?

There are other ways of making, and of thinking about, theoretical arguments.

esses) de l'amitié et un acte religieux, et en raison de ce frottement, il est difficile de caractériser distinctement son esprit.

Que fait alors Jésus quand il dit en rompant le pain : prenez ceci, c'est mon corps qui est donné pour vous, faites-le en mémoire de moi? Pourquoi déjà la structure dans le sentiment présent? Pourquoi se présente-t-il, au présent, avant l'heure, comme retranché de son propre corps et suivant son obédience? Que fait-il quand il dit en prenant la coupe : buvez tous, ceci est mon sang, le sang du Nouveau Testament, du nouveau contrat passé avec la pompe religieuse, répandu pour vous et pour beaucoup d'autres en rémission de leurs péchés, faites-le en mémoire de moi? Mémoire, c'est ici *Gedächtnis*, Hegel a souvent insisté sur la parenté entre mémoire et pensée (*Denken*). Pensez-moi, dit Jésus à ses amis en leur rictus sur les bras, d'avance, un cadavre sanglant. Préparez les linéaires, les bandolères, la substance onctueuse.

Que fait-il, l'heure du Seigneur? Use-t-il d'un signifiant? d'un symbole? d'une image? Qu'en est-il du *moi* quand il tend le pain et le vin? Quand il parle de mangaille et de fangeaille au lieu de son corps, de son individualité, de sa finité?

Il ne s'agit là ni d'un signe, ni d'une comparaison, ni d'une allégorie. Dans le signe, le rapport entre le signifiant et le signifié, entre le signe (*Zeichen*) et le désigné (*Bezeichnetes*) reste un rapport d'extranéité conventionnelle. Ce qui rattache l'un à l'autre les membres de la signification reste encore un lienage (*Verbindung, Band*) objectif. Par exemple, quand un Arabe boit une tasse de café avec un étranger, il passe avec lui un contrat d'amitié. Cette action commune « lie » l'Arabe et ce lien l'engage à se montrer fidèle et secourable. « L'opération de boire et de manger en commun n'est pas ici ce qu'on nomme un signe; le lienage (*Verbindung*) entre le signe et le désigné n'est pas en lui-même spirituel, n'est pas la vie, c'est un lienage objectif (*ein objektives Band*) : le signe et le

Enfin presque.

(Ahl) tu es imprenable (eh bien) reste.

Entrave, donc, deux fois.

Car si mon texte est (était) imprenable, il ne sent(it) pas pris, ni retenu. Qui serait puni, dans cette économie de l'indécidable? Mais si je linéarise, si je me mets en ligne et crois — naïvement — n'écrire qu'un texte à la fois, cela revient au même et il faut encore compter avec le coût de la marge. Je gagne et perds à tous les cas mon dard.

A l'enseignement de Platon, la pharmacie avait distillé cet effet, sous l'étiquette du glyphe ou du coup de glyphe. Cette remarque à l'entaille d'écriture, détachant la pièce des deux côtés, restait tout à fait tautologique, puisque glyphe veut dire *coup*. Et scalpe.

Derrida's *Glas* is an obvious example of a book that makes its visual and spatial

modalities explicitly part of its argument. {... an analysis of its spatiotopia would be revealing... }

And Foucault's *This is Not a Pipe* must be understood in terms of its multimodal forms, as a 'mundane tramp of words'...

... that is presented entirely separate from representative images of Magritte's work...

1
Two Pipes

The first version, that of 1926 I believe, is a carefully drawn pipe, and underneath it, handwritten in a steady, painstaking, artificial script, a script from the convent. Like that found heading the notebooks of schoolboys, or on a blackboard after an object lesson, this note: "This is not a pipe."

The other version—the last, I assume—can be found in *Aube à l'Amispol*.² The same pipe, same statement, same handwriting. But instead of being juxtaposed in a neutral, limitless, unspecified space, the text and the figure are set within a frame. The frame itself is placed upon an easel, and the latter in turn upon the clearly visible slats of the floor. Above everything, a pipe exactly like the one in the picture, but much larger.

The first version disconcerts us by its very simplicity. The second multiplies intentional ambiguities before our eyes. Standing upright against the ead and resting on wooden legs, the frame indicates that this is an artist's painting: a finished work, exhibited and bearing for an eventual viewer the statement that comments upon or explains it. And yet this naive

Ceci n'est pas une pipe.

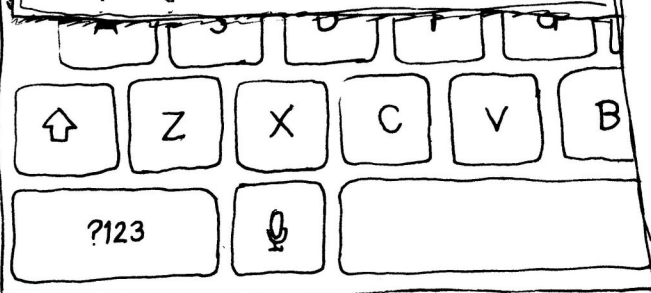
In an expanding digital media world, we are increasingly relying on literacies which are multiple and multimodal.

Digital humanities as a discipline has shown an interest in producing scholarship which crosses and combines modalities in inventive and unexpected ways |

MANY YEARS BEFORE
DIGITAL HUMANITIES,
CARTOONIST-SCHOLARS LIKE
Riis WERE DOING
THE SAME THING!

Looking at the spatio-topical multimodal relationships in educational comics like the "Introducing" and "For Beginners" books can help us to challenge & re-evaluate normative academic discourses and hegemonic textual practices, including those which are reinforced and perpetuated by digital technologies.

or in other words...
COMICS CAN SHOW US NEW
WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT
LANGUAGE & POWER



Creator's Statement

Within the humanities, a lot of discourse traditionally has taken the form of writing which discusses other pieces of writing, even when the object of study is something that can't easily be expressed in prose writing, like a comic book or a computer program. One of the many things scholars in the digital humanities have attempted to do is to expand the discipline's acceptable research outputs to include things like pieces of code, web applications and other forms of digital discourse which can work in ways that prose cannot.

Although this paper only marginally engages with conversations around digital technologies, it is similarly concerned with pushing at the boundaries of what published research can be, and how it can work. To discuss the subjects of the paper, two pairs of comic books about Foucault and Derrida, I adopted the form and register of those subjects. This is a comic which analyses other comics, using the tools and techniques of comics.

On a broader level, though, it's about how all discourse uses multiple modalities. There are arguments in this paper which are composed mostly through visual and spatial modalities, but I would argue that all printed texts do this, even (or especially) when we have come to accept their multimodal forms as essentially invisible, as we tend to do with most academic writing.

One of my goals with this paper was to denaturalise the visual and spatial forms that research papers usually take. I wrote the text by hand, and composed the pages as integrated units which cannot easily be pulled apart or rearranged without losing some of their meanings. 'Writing' in this way was a challenge. It took more time and physical effort to write and edit each sentence using a pen and paper than it would have using a word processor. I am used to editing my writing by 'talking' through it – reading it out loud in my head to check for flow and coherency, but this paper's visual qualities and modular construction required a different approach. Each page had to work on its own, while having a reasonably clear function within the larger paper.

The process of composing this paper was iterative and multimodal. I wrote a 10,000 word thesis chapter on the books about Foucault and Derrida, and discussed them as part of a seminar presentation before starting on the comic version of the paper, so I was familiar with different ways of presenting the material. The comics form allowed me to show visual 'quotes' from the comics that I could engage with directly, which cut down the number of words I had to use dramatically. I was able to ask questions verbally and answer them visually, or vice versa.

Composing and editing the paper was largely done by sketching up drafts of pages, and gradually revising the writing, drawings and layout of each page, often simultaneously. To integrate pages from the books with my sketches, I would scan both into my computer and quickly assemble them onto a page in Microsoft Paint, an infamously straightforward drawing program which suited my purposes. Each page was then printed out and slid underneath a piece of tracing paper to allow me to draw a new version based on the mock-up. My final inked-in pieces of tracing paper were then scanned back into the computer and the images of the books were pasted onto them with Paint. I also took the opportunity to do small fixes and clean-ups using the software. This system was very iterative and more time-consuming than I would have liked, as it involved a lot of scanning and going back and forth between computer and paper.

Using the style of the books that I was examining helped to reveal aspects of those books that I would not have otherwise noticed, and gave me a different perspective on other aspects of the material as well. For example, while drawing caricatures of the people I was quoting, I was confronted with questions about the shapes and ages of their bodies, things that I would not have considered if I didn't have to draw them. I had to ask whether it mattered if I depicted my sources as they looked when their words were first published, or as they looked when my paper was published. It was only when I noticed that I was drawing a lot of facial hair and receding hairlines that I realised how few women appear in this paper.

The other major benefit of using the comics form was that it allowed me to argue more directly for the validity of comics as a form of scholarship, and to ask readers to reflect on the 'invisible' multimodal properties of academic publishing. This was, in a sense, putting my money where my mouth was.

Digital, networked technologies are enabling scholarship in the humanities to take on increasingly complex multimodal forms, but educational comics make it clear that multimodal scholarship itself is not a new phenomenon. Looking at earlier forms like this can help us to reconsider the histories and traditions of academic writing in the humanities, and suggest ways of approaching the creation of multimodal texts outside the context of networked computer ecologies.

Acknowledgements:

I am indebted to Michael Wilmore, Sal Humphreys and Chad Habel for their encouragement and assistance, to the reviewers of this article for their insights and probing questions, and to this issue's editors, Anastasia Salter and Roger Whitson, for initiating and guiding this collection of comics as scholarship.

The field of cartoonist-scholars is small, but growing. I am encouraged by the recent and ongoing work being done by Muna Al-Jawad, Marek Bennett, Jared Rosello, Nick Sousanis and other cartoonists who are using comics to reflect on the processes of learning and thinking.

The citation style used in this article was inspired by Muna Al-Jawad's 2013 article, 'Comics are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice', with added frames around the numbers to make things clearer.

The comics of Scott McCloud, Lynda Barry and Kevin Huizenga are showcases of wonderfully unique ways of explaining abstract ideas with words and pictures, and are heartily recommended to readers who remain unconvinced after reading this humble attempt.

Thanks are also due to Kimberly Humphrey for always cheering me on, reading innumerable drafts, and keeping the tea and biscuits well-stocked.

Dedication:

To Mrs. LaFountaine, who chewed me out for doodling pictures on the back of my assignments, and tried her noble best to teach a bunch of seven year olds how to keep their handwriting slanted at a consistent angle, a task that I clearly have not mastered over twenty years later.

Aaron Humphrey, 2014

Adelaide, South Australia

Notes

1. [Times Higher Education 2009]
2. The term "alphabetic text" comes from [Jacobs 2013]
3. [New London Group 1996]
4. [Kress 1996]
5. [Moretti 2000]
6. A decent chronology of the various printings and editions of these books can be found on their GoodReads pages: <http://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/170812-introducing-foucault> <http://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/590245-introducing-derrida-beginners> <http://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/3494271-derrida-for-beginners> <http://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/170811-foucault-for-beginners-writers-and-readers-documentary-comic-books-62>
7. [Humphrey 2014]
8. [Díaz 2014]
9. The books pictured here reside on the same shelf at the University of Adelaide's Barr Smith Library. From left to right, top row followed by bottom row, they are: [Jalée 1977], [Marx and Engels 1970], [Marx 1963], [Harrison 1978], [Callinicos 1983], [Rius 1976]
10. [Priego 2002]
11. [Appiganesi]
12. [Kennedy 2003]
13. [Foucault 1982]
14. [Foucault 1982]
15. [Saussure 1959]
16. [Groensteen 2007]
17. [Derrida 1981]

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