



day off n. (in Academia)

A day spent doing something related to your project that can still be considered productive but which requires no mental effort.

e.g. "I took the day off and sorted my references."



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

Comics, Cartoons, and Icons

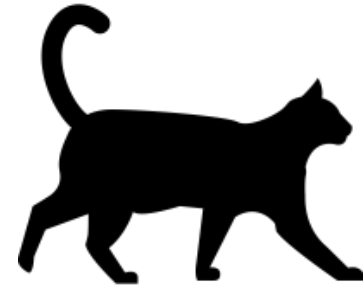
PSYC 579: Visual Display Design
Mikayla Preete

Overview

- Semiotics
 - Signs, abstraction
- Comics, Cartoons
 - Definitions, Connections to perception
- Icons in GUIs
 - Connections to perception, Techniques for design
- Conclusion

Semiotics

- The general theory and practice of signs
- **Sign**: something that stands for someone or something
- Sign = **representamen** x **object** x **interpretant**
- Signs can be characterized by their level of **abstraction**
- Types of signs from lowest to highest abstraction: Icon, Index, and Symbol



Icon



Index

CAT

Symbol

The realm of the CONCEPT

The realm of the SENSES



The realm of the CONCEPT



The realm of the SENSES





The realm of the CONCEPT



The realm of the SENSES



But how much??

What is comics ?

- Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer
- A medium
- A language on its own

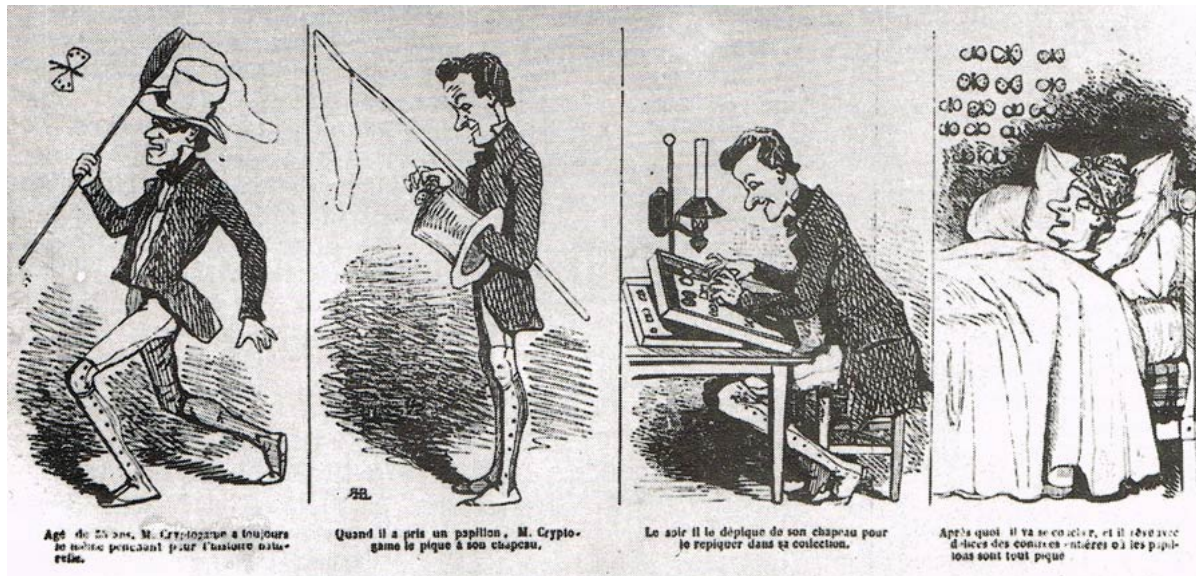


History of Comics

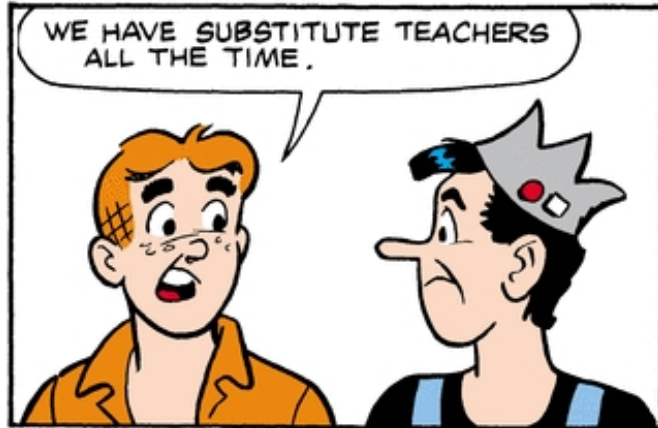
- By that definition, comics have been around for ages
 - “The Ocelot’s Claw” → 1519, pre-Colombian manuscript
 - The Tomb of Menna → Ancient Egypt
 - Trajan’s Column, Greek painting, Japanese scrolls...
- Discovery of printing = art form could be enjoyed by everyone
- Rodolphe Töpffer: the father of the modern comic
 - mid-1800s
 - panel-borders, light and satirical



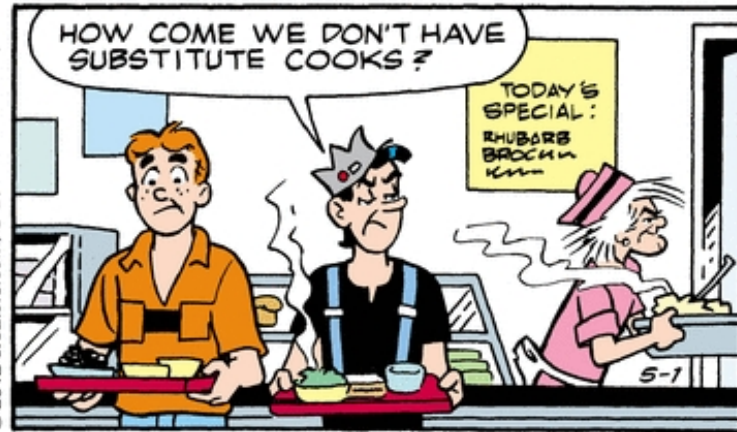
Tomb of Menna, Egypt



Rodolphe Töpffer



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What about single-panel comics?



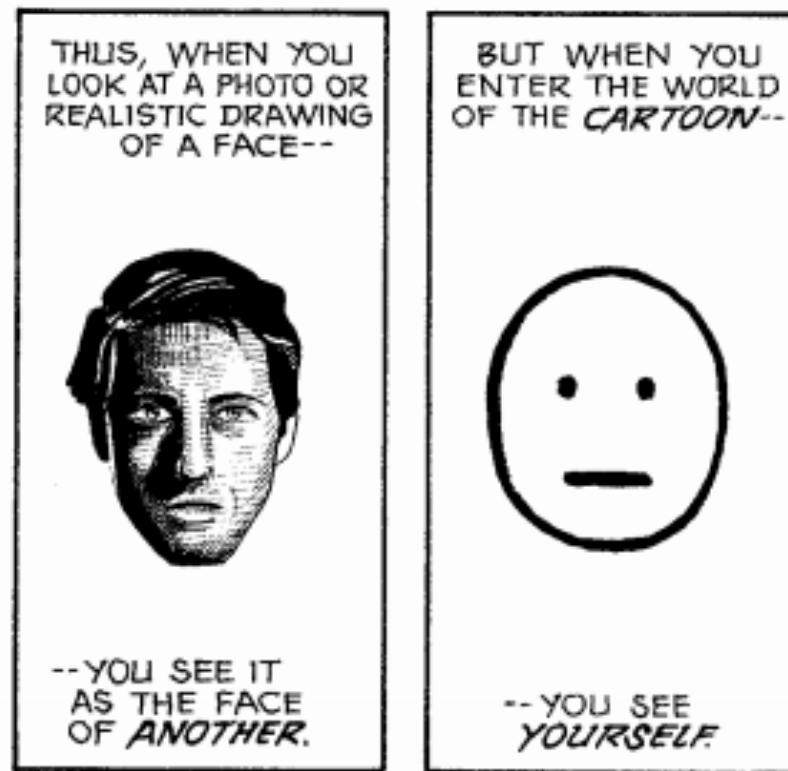
Cartoons

- Not the same thing as comics
- An approach to picture-making (a style)
- “Amplification through simplification”



Non-visual self-awareness (McCloud, 1993)

- Experienced due to abstraction in cartoon characters
- More abstracted → more likely to “see ourselves” in them
- Part of our tendency to see ourselves in everything (humans “are self-centered”)





**More abstraction = more
relatable protagonists**



**Less abstraction =
emphasized “otherness”
in villains**



FACE →

TWO EYES,
ONE NOSE,
ONE MOUTH.

*The youth's
prob. liveness
is gazed
on now...*

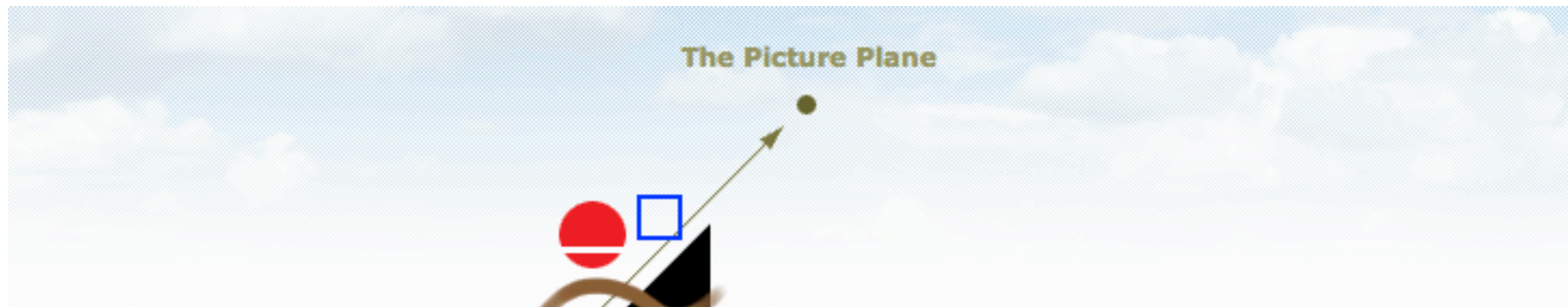
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PERCEIVED

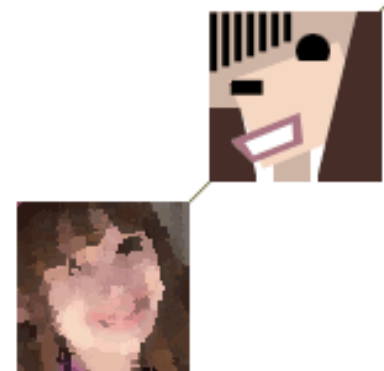
WHEN PICTURES
ARE MORE ABSTRACTED
FROM "REALITY," THEY
REQUIRE GREATER LEVELS
OF *PERCEPTION*,
**MORE LIKE
WORDS.**



WHEN WORDS
ARE BOLDER, MORE DIRECT,
THEY REQUIRE *LOWER* LEVELS
OF PERCEPTION AND ARE
RECEIVED *FASTER*,
**MORE LIKE
PICTURES.**



The Picture Plane



Pure abstraction, on the other hand, departs from both the resemblance **and** meaning of the source image.

Taken all the way, it leads only to **the picture plane**; the realm of pure shape, color, and line.



FACE

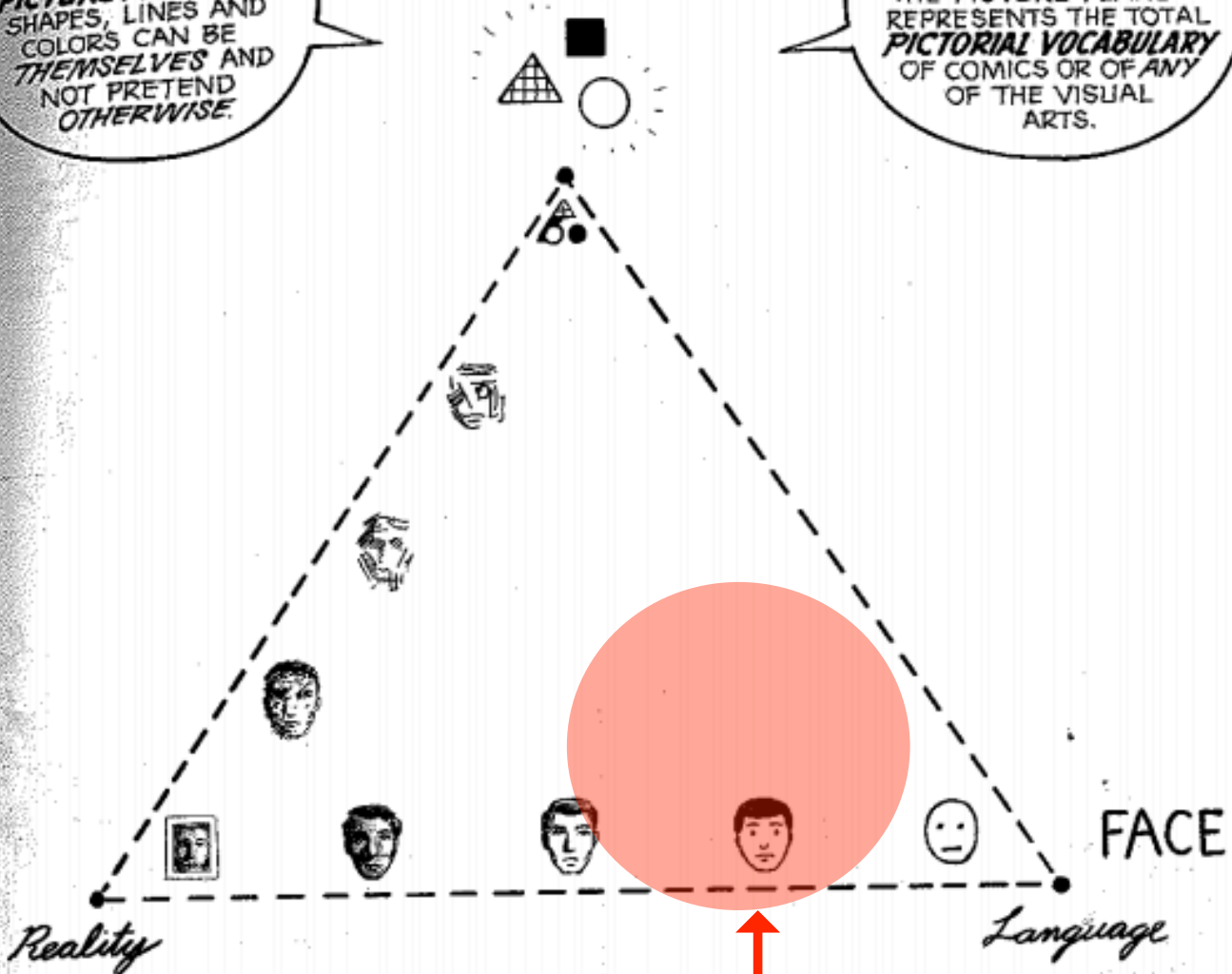
Resemblance

Meaning

THIS IS THE REALM OF THE ART **OBJECT**, THE **PICTURE PLANE**, WHERE SHAPES, LINES AND COLORS CAN BE **THEMSELVES** AND NOT PRETEND OTHERWISE.

The Picture Plane

BELOW ME, THE AREA DESCRIBED BY THESE 3 VERTICES-- "REALITY," LANGUAGE AND THE PICTURE PLANE-- REPRESENTS THE TOTAL **PICTORIAL VOCABULARY** OF COMICS OR OF ANY OF THE VISUAL ARTS.

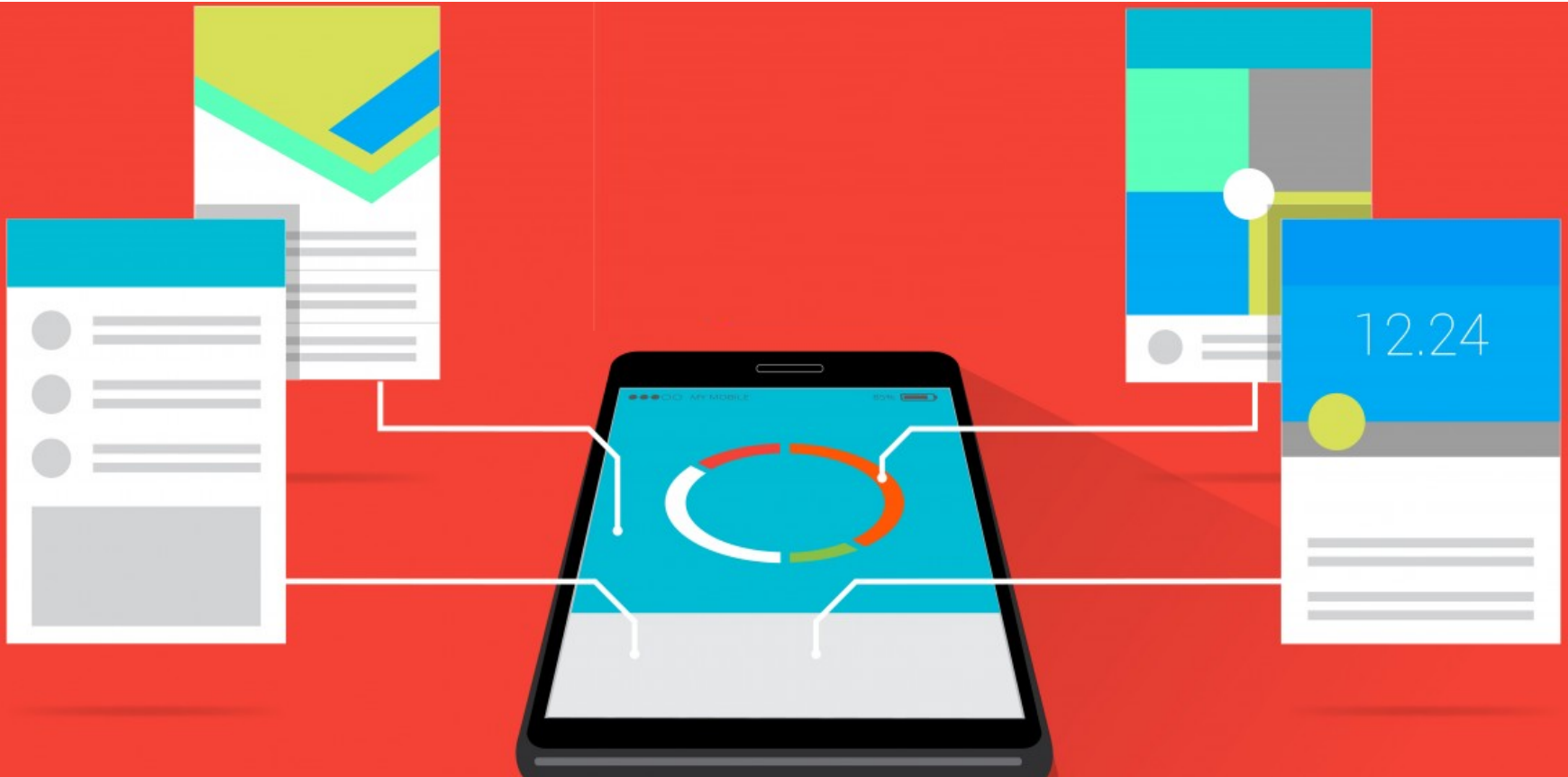


FACE

TWO EYES,
ONE NOSE,
ONE MOUTH

Comics

Icons in GUIs



Application to GUIs

- A graphical user interface (GUI) is a sign system
- Need to have signs to represent tools, processes
- Have to take **perceptual principles** into account when making design decisions



Immediacy

- A representation is effective if it can be perceived effortlessly and involuntarily
- Can extract information from a “snapshot” of the overall display
- Manipulating weight, balance, and symmetry of the sign



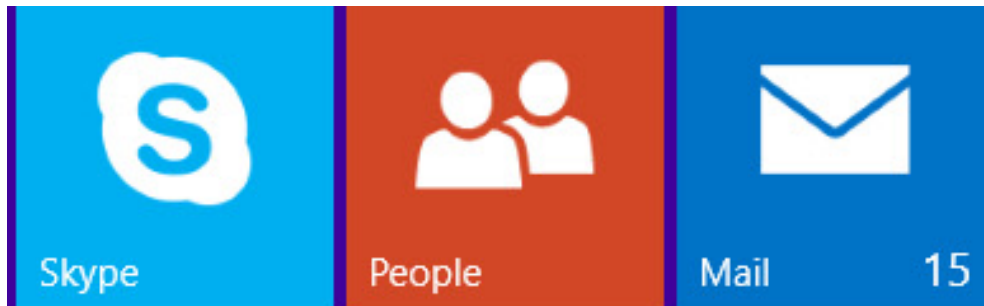
Generality

- The ability of a sign to represent higher-level classes (rather than a specific instance)
- Achieved through greater abstraction



Cohesiveness

- Including shared formal qualities of multiple images
- Allows images to be recognized effortlessly in early visual perception



Characterization

- Focusing on the distinctive features of an object
- Point of view is important
- Ex. emphasizing material properties of an object, caricatures



Communicability

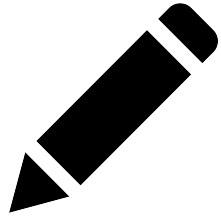
- Shared context between message sender and receiver
- Not using obscure metaphors
 - Fuel gauge = memory storage?
 - Mailbox flag is actually up when there is *outgoing* mail!



Techniques for effective images

1. Selecting the Right Vehicle
2. Refinement through progressive abstraction
3. Coordination to ensure visual consistency

Selecting the right vehicle



Concrete, familiar object → use **icon**



Concept repeated lots throughout app → establish conventional **symbol or index**

Save

Save As...

Abstract process or subtle transition between states → use **text label**

Refinement through abstraction

- Continuous simplification
 - Highly refined images = enhanced perceptual immediacy
- Trace-overlay technique – remove unneeded contours, use regular geometric forms where possible



Coordination to Ensure Consistency

- Standardizing formal qualities of images
- Most important parameters to standardize: size and value (visual “weight”)
- Helps distinguish members from images outside the set, makes individual members more identifiable, adding new elements is easier



Conclusions

- Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation, and is closely related to the concept of abstraction
- Level of abstraction desired **depends** on what you are trying to represent, and what you are trying to achieve
- Cartoons, Comics → higher abstraction = higher tendency to relate to characters
- Icons in GUIs → higher abstraction for more “abstract” concepts, lower abstraction for concrete objects

Thank you!