***Dispossession*: time, motion and depictive regimes**

John Miers in conversation with Simon Grennan, conducted by email, July and August 2014

John Miers: The research aims of *Dispossession* create unusual, highly specific constraints on both the selection and rendering of depicted scenes, so I thought we could start this discussion by considering, within the context of both general and comics-specific theories of drawing, the effect of these rules on its production.[1]

Patrick Maynard offers the term 'frameworks' to describe techniques for organising depictions "that can precede the drawing of any individual objects".[2] With regard specifically to drawing in the comics register, Groensteen identified 'quadrillage' (gridding) as "an operation (or at least a stage of reflection that is not always incarnated) that intervenes very early in the process of elaboration in comics", which "operates as a primary repartition of the narrative material."[3]

Simon Grennan: Part of the process of creating *Dispossession* was the development of a number of rules to govern the graphic novel's storyboard, that is, the ways in which the reader relates to the action in each panel and the way in which panels relate to each other. As we begin our conversation, it might be useful to repeat these rules: a limited range of distances between viewer and scene; views of discrete actions, not divisions of actions; rhythmic changes of scene and episode on the page; consistent rhythmic changes of point of view in a visible 1-2-3 rhythm; no extradiegetic narrative; as small an amount of verbalisation in the plot as possible; generalisation: this treatment applied in all circumstances. I am sure that we will be discussing these rules further.

JM: The rule that individual cells should present 'views of discrete actions, not

divisions of actions' carries significant implications for the depiction of diegetic time before a single mark has been made. The simple phrasing of this rule belies what must have been a complex decision-making process at this level of primary repartitioning: how did you decide that the actions presented in a given cell constituted a discrete action rather than a division of one?

SG: The rules governing the storyboard were developed as part of the strategy for making the graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's 1879 novel *John Caldigate* that became *Dispossession*. I set myself the challenge of replacing Trollope's literary voice, his *John Caldigate* style of writing, with a visual style, along with the further task of being able to theorise this replacement. More than his plots, Trollope's writing style, his techniques of understatement, create the overwhelming sense of the world in which he lived, his novels being set in the very recent past of the mid- and late-19th century. Virginia Woolf said of Trollope's style that the reader believes in it "as we believe in the reality of our own weekly bills."[4] However, although written at great speed, scrutiny of *John Caldigate* reveals that this effect is as much to do with the careful structuring of juxtapositions and omissions as with description. Trollope is both accurate and equivocal. 'Perhaps', he says, or 'it was said of'. Producing this sense of equivocation through the visual style of the graphic novel became one of the central challenges of showing, rather than telling, the plot: how does one draw 'perhaps'?

I made a distinction between storyboarding and mark making. It is useful to maintain this distinction at this point, because it allows us to talk about the partitioning of plot in terms of the structuring of reader points of view, relative to the panel, the page, the spread and the book. However, there are other ways in

which the mark itself positions the reader relative to each scenario, to which I'm sure we will return. The rules governing the storyboard were intended to replace Trollope's equivocation with a set of consistent visual effects. As a result of the rules, the reader never views the main characters from a distance closer than 15 or 20 feet. There are single encompassing, locating panels, but there are no close-ups and no middling views. The major characters in each panel are always seen full figure and the reader invariably keeps his or her own feet on the diegetic ground. Rather, the reader moves around the action from panel to panel, even as the characters move in diegetic space, in a regular, repetitive round between three points of view: a sort of reader waltz with the diegesis.

The visual effect that is produced by the rules is part of the replacement of literary style with visual style. The visual world of *Dispossession* is not vague. It is vivid and distinct, but readers can only experience it from beyond the threshold of a small distance that they can never cross, that renders certain details unimportant. Keeping their feet on the ground, the reader is moved in a consistent rhythmic round of changes of point of view. Together, these effects both allow the visual world of *Dispossession* to appear materially robust and historically verisimilar and, at the same time, to deny the reader any single conclusive adjudication of views. This rationale prompted my approach to the partitioning of action in each scenario, in the sense that entire types of partitioning became unavailable, if the storyboard was to maintain its rhythm and distance. For example, the type of close scrutiny of the perfume bottle thrown by Laurie on page 195 of Moore and Gibbon's *Watchmen* was both impossible and undesirable within the regime of *Dispossession*.[5] The short trajectory of the bottle takes place over three panels according to the time it

takes to read the overlying text, that is, 'in slow motion'. The way in which the action is fragmented and delayed by voiceover, and the close proximity to the reader that it creates, renders it privileged and unequivocal, exactly the kind of effect that the rules of *Dispossession* were established to avoid.

Rather, the divisions of action in *Dispossession* were pushed by the regime into tableaux, with historic theatrical roots. The distance and invariable mobility of the reader suggested gesture rather than facial expression as a meaningful expressive instance, for example. Similarly, I approached the actions comprising the plot as iconic rather than sensational. Hence, we can see on page two of *Dispossession* that distance and regular mobility tend to produce a series of divisions of action along the lines: 'John climbs a tree', 'John fights his father', rather than 'John feels the bark beneath his hand', 'Sweat beads John's brow'. In theatrical terms, this distinction might be described as the distinction between different performance practices: 19th century melodrama, represented by the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold for example, and 20th-century psychological realism, represented by the work of, say, Constantin Stanislavski.[6] Although contemporary use of the word 'melodrama' has taken on the sense 'empty exaggeration', the practice of melodrama in the 19th century constituted a sophisticated system of gestures and groups of gestures recognised by contemporaneous audiences as communicating a comprehensive range of physical conditions and emotions. Both practices are codified regimes that utilise expressive resources and audience expectations in very different ways and, I suspect, the compelling strength of those expectations tends to universalise one regime at the expense of the other. I was aware that the storyboard rules in *Dispossession*, including this partitioning of action, would generate a book that

21st century readers might find unusual to read. However, the adoption of an older theatrical tradition of action grouping and partitioning in the storyboarding of *Dispossession* also acts to place the plot in the 19th century. It is a cue for 21st century readers. The visual style underwrites the relationships that *Dispossession* establishes with Trollope's text and with ideas of the 19th century that contemporary readers bring to the novel.

JM: *John Caldigate* was published in the year before Eadweard Muybridge used a series of cameras to record the successive moments in a horse's gallop, thereby creating the first set of depictions of precise divisions of actions, and indicating the shift in the visual apprehension of motion that the camera would enable. This ability to see motion through time as fragmentary, causally connected time-slices frequently informs accounts given by cartoonists of what constitutes effective communication of narrative. McCloud, in a page that opens with the text "When clarity is your *sole purpose...*" describes the depiction of successive moments as a "dot-to-dot puzzle".[7] While he asserts that "each panel shows a complete *action*", the interpolation of extra cells at the bottom of the page to extend the depicted action demonstrates that the division of time described here is precisely that excluded by the frameworks that structure *Dispossession*. Jeff Smith, discussing his response to Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*, highlights the link between the camera and the division of motion: "It was the first time I had seen you could do visual, cinematic storytelling in comics. You can *really* manipulate timing."[8]

A significant effect of this divided-action approach to narrative drawing, and one well exemplified in Smith's own work, is the cartoonist's focus on the reader's ability to infer specific trajectories of bodies in space during sequences that

depict physical action. I would suggest that the reader is largely denied this ability in *Dispossession*. For example, the last three panels of page fourteen, or page two (Fig 1).

INSERT Fig 3 HERE

Fig. 3. Grennan, S. (2015) *Dispossession*, page 2. London: Jonathan Cape

In page two, there is no definite succession of movements that would fill the gaps between panels three and four, or four and five. Panel five in particular strongly suggests an action whose depiction has not been distributed across the preceding or following panels. The young John's leap towards his father in the fifth panel must, given his trajectory, have taken place after John has been placed on the ground, and the complex movements that must have taken place between panels four and five cannot be inferred from their contents. The depictions of John in the fifth and sixth panels, if considered in isolation, easily yield a reading in which he hits the ground running and continues in the direction he was already facing, but this reading – suggested by the visual redundancy of the two appearances of John on the page's surface - is denied by the rotation of viewpoint between the two panels.

SG: I mentioned that I think that audience expectations tend to universalise one visual story-telling regime at the expense of others. Jeff Smith's term 'manipulation' suggests to me both that his insight into the temporal structure of *Dark Knight Returns* delights in finding movie conventions in the storyboarding of the comic, and that these conventions are an apotheosis of the craft of visual story-telling, for him. But the import of conventional movie divisions of time into

a graphic storyboard is only one type of possible 'manipulation'. All images and sequences of images produce a temporal order of some sort. The association of 'divided motion' with movie storyboarding conventions is only one type of many possible temporal orders. I am really talking about the storyboarding and editing conventions of movie, but these conventions rely, to a great extent, both upon the type of images produced by a lens as an ordering principle and upon the idea of visual illusion and the possibility of the occasional deployment of visual illusions.

Because, in general, each panel In *Dispossession* presents an icon of action rather than the sensation of action, the anaphoras of the plot are categorically different from the anaphoras in a graphic novel structured by a movie-type regime. Anaphoras constitute what the reader can know about the diegesis that is not shown in the plot. I am using the term 'anaphora' in its linguistic sense, to refer to types of knowledge that are indexed by a text, but which do not appear in a text. Anaphoristic knowledge has a causal relationships to the events of the plot. For example, if a plot shows a mature oak tree, then we also understand that there has been an acorn, in the past, and that, at some future time, the tree will disappear. Neither of these anaphoristic facts are shown explicitly in the depiction of the mature tree. With a movie-type comics storyboard, knowledge of the trajectory of a body moving in space might form a crucial aspect of the anaphora, as a present-time sensation for the reader. The storyboard rules in *Dispossession* make this type of knowledge largely unimportant.

So what types of dramatic effect are produced by what I might call the non-*Dark Knight Returns* storyboard regime developed for *Dispossession*? I have touched on the visual production of narrator equivocation relative to the writing style of Trollope through *Dispossession*'s storyboard regime, or the unambiguous

presentation of ambiguity. I also thought of this as a part of my technique for representing the 19th century for 21st century readers. The 1870s are represented through the carefully researched use of verisimilar visual appearances, such as historically accurate styles of dress, locations and technologies. Further, a small number of visual cues as to character and the meaning of specific situations are overdrawn, to give 21st century readers a hint of the significance that they would have had in the past. Mrs Smith's straw hat alone is a cue to a world of social associations that underwrite her character. For a modern reader, it is an icon for significance, even if the reader doesn't necessarily understand the nature of this significance (Fig. 4).

INSERT FIG. 4 HERE

Fig. 4. Grennan, S. (2015) *Dispossession*, page 21. London: Jonathan Cape

However, the storyboard regime was by far the most important way in which I represented what I consider to be the fundamental strangeness of the 19th century world: its near/far proximity to our own world. As well as replacing Trollope's literary voice, my rules also replaced many of the rules of western comics storyboarding expected by contemporary comics readers. I intended the strangeness of the experience of reading *Dispossession*, compared with habitual expectations of reading a new graphic novel in English or French, to inculcate the strangeness of the diegetic world of the 1870s. In a sense, this 'displacement', as you call it, aims to place the reader in an affecting relationship with a vision of the period that is both coherent and comprehensively dis-habituating. *Dispossession* is meant to be dis-habituating to read, in the way that reading some comics of the mid- and late 19th century is dis-habituating. I'm thinking particularly of Marie Duval's Ally Sloper pages from the 1870s, the period in

which the plot of *Dispossession* takes place. *Dispossession* purposefully shares some of its storyboard regime with these comics in order to create a specific sense of proximity to the past for the reader.

JM: To develop the comparisons between *Dispossession* and comics contemporary to Trollope's novel a little further, I wanted to ask whether you see the iconic rather than sensational status of the depicted actions in *Dispossession* as something also present in 19th-century narrative drawing? George Cruikshank's *The Progress of Mr. Lambkin*, produced in 1844 but republished in 1865 and 1883, differs from *Dispossession* and Duval's work on *Ally Sloper* by presenting a single image per page, but shares their dense use of line work and presentation of discrete rather than fragmented actions.[9] The selection of depicted moments in *Lambkin* might even be closer to *Dispossession*'s rules than those made in Duval's *Ally Sloper* pages, which often present to the reader purely informative drawings of objects that play a role in the diegesis. Page nine of *Lambkin* captions its single image of Mr. Lambkin being introduced to a lady at what appears to be a society ball with text beginning, "Mr Lambkin of course visits *all* the theatres and *all* the saloons", attaching to the image a weight of narrative information similar to your suggestion that what is communicated by the tableau in *Dispossession* page 2 panel 5 could be stated as 'John fights his father'. Without wishing to take our attention away from depictive regimes, an obvious contrast between these two 19th century drawn narratives and *Dispossession* is the prevalence of text: both *Lambkin*'s and *Sloper*'s illustrations are accompanied by substantial anchoring text, whereas *Dispossession*'s rules include 'no extradiegetic narrative' and 'as little verbalisation in the text as possible.' Would you say that deliberate avoidance of text with an anchoring

function and the frequent appearance of 'silent' panels and sequences of panels are features of *Dispossession* that rely on the reader's familiarity with contemporary comics-reading protocols, or are these features more closely linked to the theatrical roots of its depictive regime?[10]

SG: Rather than extradiegetic text anchoring the image, I suggest that the image anchors the text in these examples. There is a long history of theorising images as accumulating meanings, an aspect of which is the idea that images, unlike text, are beyond the bounds of law or literally 'unruly'. Joe Sutliffe Sanders has recently interrogated this idea, arguing that reading practices generate media forms, with radical consequences for the idea that text 'rules' image.[11] I think that the image makes the text epistemologically immanent. Habitually, we see images unequivocally, in that what we recognise is what they show, whereas text founders on its processes of agreed semiosis, and meaning only emerges in the diexical relationship between sign and signifier. In this sense, I think one could argue that the image shows precisely what is meant by the text.

JM: Modern cartoonists do not, of course, universally share the cinema-influenced conception of narrative drawing. Chris Ware has frequently lamented what he sees as cinema's overbearing influence on comics production and reception.[12] The high level of visual redundancy that emerges from the focus on networked co-presence of serial depictions of characters and locations in his work is also denied the reader of *Dispossession* by the constant rotation around diegetic space.

While the consistent framing and the circling around the diegetic space solidify

our sense of the world in which these actions are taking place, the latter combines with the treatment of motion to reduce our certainty about the precise events taking place within that space. Gridding as well as facture participates in the adaptation of Trollope's equivocation: could we say that this uncertainty operates as a microcosm of the central uncertainty regarding Caldigate's marriage to Mrs Smith?

SG: Trollope never tells us if Caldigate and Mrs Smith were married or not. The relevant parts of his plot, describing a period of 3 years in which he consolidates a gold strike by going into partnership with Mrs Smith in a mine and returning home a wealthy man, are told very briefly, in retrospect, by Caldigate, his father and members of the Bolton, Shand and Babbington families in Cambridgeshire. This presented a challenge in a medium that shows events. However, the storyboarding regime in *Dispossession* suggested that a scene could clearly show a course of events that distance renders ambiguous. On page 42 of *Dispossession*, Caldigate and Mrs Smith seem to be getting married in a scenario that takes place across four panels, but they could as plausibly be playing at getting married. What ARE they doing, laughing uproariously, drinking and reciting vows with (is that...) a priest outside that tent at the gold fields? If it were a marriage, would Anna Young laugh out loud at one of the most solemn moments in the ceremony? Is it a joke or an actual marriage? The reader is never close enough to be able to decide.

In similar vein, the continual waltz that the reader makes with the diegesis offered opportunities to depict and indicate the significance of the complete separation of the Wiradjuri and European characters in New South Wales. The 2

groups of people pass within feet of each other, both in the New South Wales countryside, the mining town of Nobble (Grenfell) and in Sydney. Their activities parallel and cross each other, but they never meet and don't exchange a word. This separation was facilitated to a great degree by the imperative to rotate continually around the action: sometimes, it is the Europeans in the foreground, sometimes the Wiradjuri, as the reader moves round and round.

JM: The cinema-influenced conception of the visual presentation of time expressed by Jeff Smith is also embedded in some of the best-known attempts by cartoonists to describe the operation of narrative drawing, as in McCloud's suggestion that "*before* it's projected, film is just a very very very very *slow* comic" and Eisner's conception of individual depictions within a comic as "postures" from which the preceding and succeeding movements are readily extrapolated by the reader.[13] Although the approach to breakdown in *Dispossession* contradicts such accounts by obscuring the precise nature of preceding and succeeding moments, expectations regarding the ability of a single image to imply temporal continuity remain an important point of comparison between the behaviour towards narrative pictures exhibited by nineteenth- and twenty-first century audiences.

SG: Although I can't think of any theorist who has said this explicitly, there might be a narratological argument to be made for the plotlessness of single images, in which the image is only meaningful as an anchor for its anaphora. I think that a change in the relative importance accorded to different categories of anaphora by viewers took place with the advent of movie and photography. If we compare two paintings form the period in which modern photography then movie appeared, *La Place de l'Europe, temps de pluie* of 1877, a painting by Gustave

Caillebotte with *The Children's Holiday* of 1864, a painting by William Holman

Hunt, we can see the differences between these categories of 'unshown'

knowledge, in which the images become meaningful. In Caillebotte's painting, it

is the sense that we know that the image depicts a moment almost identical to

the preceding and successive ones that is significant. In Holman Hunt's painting,

the identification of the moment of depiction, relative to surrounding moments,

is unimportant. Rather, it is knowledge of the histories of each element in the

image, and the juxtaposition of these histories, that is significant. To 21st century

viewers immersed in lens-based media, Holman Hunt's image highlights the loss

of the habit of significantly relating the histories of elements to each other,

whereas Caillebotte's extraction of a moment from a continuity of moments

exploits the now-expected significance of a type of knowledge of before and

after similar to that which makes the 'snapshot', the phone movie or the 'selfie'

comprehensible.

JM: According to Donald H. Ericksen's discussion of Victorian and art and

illustration, viewers of images in the late 19th century would have been familiar

with the types of viewing habits assumed by both Caillebotte's and Holman

Hunt's paintings.[14] He emphasises the status of Victorian narrative paintings as

tableaux of carefully arranged details, as in Hunt's *The Children's Holiday*, but

also claims that their primary distinguishing feature is their emphasis on 'story

telling', in the specific sense of allowing the reader to infer moments that directly

precede and follow the depicted scene, as in Caillebotte's *La Place de L'Europe*.

The low critical status of narrative painting in the first half of the 20th century is

often ascribed to a rejection of the sentimentality expressed in much Victorian

painting.[15] However, analysing different depictive regimes by means of the

anaphora they create opens another reading: the tableau-style, with its sense of distilled rather than passing time, is unsuited to the expectations of audiences whose visual culture is being transformed by lens-based media. Caillebotte's work, and that of the Impressionists more generally, expresses a conception of image-as-moment that is at odds with the image-as-tableau that characterised British painting of the same period. The shift between these two regimes that took hold with the advent of photography can be clearly seen by comparing two commentaries, each about a century distant from the publication of *John Caldigate*. Gotthold Lessing famously argued that the representation of time was the domain of the literary rather than visual arts, as a picture can only ever express a single moment. That single moment, in his work, should not aim to allow the viewer to infer specific moments occurring immediately before and after the depicted scene. Rather, what he called the 'pregnant moment' was the one "which allowed the freest scope to the imagination of the spectator, who the more he looked at what was represented, the more he ought to exercise thought".[16] Lessing's principle that "plastic art ought not to exhibit the last and extremest thing" is directly at odds with Stan Lee's instruction to the aspiring illustrator of superhero comics to "notice how the first drawing and the last one in that particular sequence seem to have the most impact ... in a Marvel story, the artist would use either of those shots rather than the tamer ones in between."[17]

SG: Of course, Lessing never describes how the decisive moment of depiction is suggestive, or what it might be suggestive of. For him, it seems that the most successful depictions offer a summary of some type or types of anaphoristic knowledge, but he remains vague as to what types of knowledge these might be.

Because he was theorising in the 18th century, I think it is safe to conjecture that Lessing accords significance to the type of accumulated histories of elements piled up in Holman Hunt's painting, rather than to the 'moment out of time' approach made commonplace by photography. This approach to the relative significance of the histories of depicted elements need not diminish with single depictions of dramatic actions. George Stubbs' painting *Horse Frightened by a Lion*, painted within Lessing's lifetime (in 1763) depicts such a moment of action, and the significance of the moment of arrest derives from knowledge of the longer histories of the rocks, lion, horse and clouds rather than from understanding that these elements are significant as knowledge of an entire concatenation of anaphoristic before and after moments.

JM: The position of the viewer relative to the depicted action, the movement of which emphasises both the grid and the regular compartmentalising of time, strongly emphasises what Philip Rawson calls the 'floor' of a drawing, "the ground surface which, the drawing suggests, rises into the format from under the spectator's own feet", and which he argues begins to disappear from Modernist art, starting with Cezanne's late paintings.[18] The floor is certainly prominent in much popular narrative art of the mid-Victorian period, such as William Powell Frith's *Derby Day* of 1858, whose dense agglomeration of figures provides an example of both the depictive regime discussed in relation to Holman Hunt above, and realism's focus on the details of the social milieu of its middle-class audience.

SG: In *Dispossession,* I thought of this 'floor' as a theatre stage and, on reflection, the floor of the stage is quite unlike Rawson's 'floor' of a drawing. Rawson's 'floor' is fixed by a geometric projection that locates points precisely in

a closed, systematic representation of space, of which the position of a single eye is absolute arbiter. The floor of the stage, on the other hand, is a generalised ground that continually shifts in relation to both viewers and actors. A close visual analogy exists in the regimes for representing space in the Chinese painting tradition.[19] In these regimes, either the top or right of a hand-held of hanging scroll forms a nominal 'most distant' area and the bottom or left forms a nominal 'least distant' area or, elements that are darkest are 'least distant' and elements that are lightest are 'most distant'. In proscenium theatre, stage scenery, flats and drops, stage left/stage right and front can all occupy 'most distant ' or 'least distant' positions. Even 'up' and 'down' are mobile concepts, relative to both spectator and action.

JM: Despite the emphasis above on the ways in which *Dispossession*'s frameworks act to create an inference of time and motion into pictures that is distinct from that enabled by photography and later, movie, the creation of photo-collages as the basis for the drawings in *Dispossession* is a notable aspect of the process of its creation. This is not an unusual technique – apart from the reliance on photo-reference by artists such as Neal Adams and Bryan Hitch, Rutu Modan's *The Property* (of 2013) makes very similar use of actors to stage scenes, the documentation of which is then drawn over.

SG: In *Dispossession*, the diegetic 'floor' is certainly depicted as something on which the reader might stand, because the reader's eye level most often lies at a similar level to those of the characters. However, this 'floor' is geometrically incoherent, due to the accumulation of depicted elements that bring vestiges of their own, diverse spacial regimes with them into each panel. In particular, rather than utilising geometric projection to unify the view in each panel, I often made characters, props and locations spacially distinct, in order to refer the

reader to the idea of 'the stage'. Paradoxically, this process was much aided by the use of collaged photographic elements in constructing each diegetic location and the action taking place within it. These elements finally succumbed to the specific motivation of the drawings, and were erased. But they contributed some of the local details and internal proximities that produce the historic verisimilitude in the drawings and left a residue of contrasting special regimes deriving from the process of collage itself. This is most obvious in panels where I have used the extreme changes of scale in close proximity, such as pages 35 and 37, or a type of 'discordia concors' (union of opposites) associated with both Mannerism and, in theatrical terms, the early performance traditions of the Commedia dell'Arte.[20]

JM: By placing the viewer consistently within what Cutting and Vishton call 'action space', an imagined physical relationship with the characters is emphasised throughout *Dispossession*, one in which, as the characters never enter 'personal space', leads to the reading of expression and intention through gesture and pose rather than the scrutiny of facial expressions.[21] This, combined with the constancy of layout, provides an experience of the story-world that has more in common with theatre than cinema.

 SG: This seems like a good place to turn to the facture of the drawings themselves, because I suspect that there is a link between aspects of drawing technology in particular and the way in which I've tried to produce the sense of relative historic position and diegetic time that contributes to this sense of a theatre tradition rather than a movie tradition. I'm in the process of imagining a drawing equivalent to Jean Louis Baudry's and Christian Metz's 'apparatus' theory, in which the social, formal and technological terms of depictive drawing are ideological in themselves.[22] Unlike movie, the traces that constitute depictive

drawings are attenuated directly to the body and the physical resources of the body embed them. In a sense, depictive drawing belongs to a category of intersubjective processes that directly transform the body and directly utilise the body to transform the world. Such direct transformations arise out of crises of representation (for instance, the perennial 'problem' of depiction) of a type unknown to movie, but which are commonplace in theatre.

In direct co-present communication with others, the body reforms itself according to what are known as 'image schema', which stand for a physically felt but abstract sense.[23] These schema can represent our experience of others, of physical activities, of the apprehension of movement and time, of our use of objects and our understanding of space.[24] Although they arise afresh according to the needs of each situation, across both theatrical and depictive traditions, body schema form the basis for the lexica, although not necessarily the syntaces, of an actor's or artist's craft, unmediated by the lens. They also underpin the culturally habituated processes by which we recognise depictive drawings as the situations that they depict, as we struggle to achieve depictive recognition of the mark. In the case of the 'problem' of depiction, or how we come to recognise other visual situations in groups of marks that are entirely unlike them, image schema spontaneously generate solutions that constitute successful depictions, through a process of catechresis. I'm conjecturing that the totality of this schematic catechresis in drawing is equivalent to movie's apparatus. Rhetorically, catechresis is the use of an existing word in a new way to describe something for which no other word exists. Catechresis uses words to break lexical rules so as to communicate something beyond the lexicon.[25] Visually, this is exactly how a depictive drawing functions to elicit recognition

successfully. Every drawing transforms the situation of both drawing and viewing by 'solving' the problem of depiction afresh in each new situation using the tools at hand to substitute others, as the body makes its marks.

JM: The movie-like approach to narrative drawing can be very frequently observed in contemporary comics, and cinematic vocabulary operates as something of a default lexicon for (non-scholarly) discussions of the register's affordances. However, the well-known practitioner treatises I've mentioned earlier do bear traces of something like a theatrical gestural lexicon even as they operate from a standpoint that sees 'divided time' as inherent to depiction in comics. For example, Eisner precedes his discussion of 'postures' as "movement[s] selected out of a sequence of related moments in a single action" with the notion of 'gestures', which are much closer to the system you describe in 19th-century melodrama, being "generally almost idiomatic to a region or culture".[26] To take a more recent example of comics scholarship, Forceville et al acknowledge that, in comics, "Physical activities (walking, throwing, fighting, giving, kissing etc.) are often depicted in highly stereotypical ways," a statement that seems more compatible with a theatrical than a cinematic regime.[27] Invoking a much more cinematic conception of time, they also insist that "it is crucial that viewers correctly judge the nature of any physical activity," and "the key moment of a movement needs to be chosen to convey the entire action".[28] Your characterisation of the nature of narrative drawing as an intersubjective process that uses the body to transform the world implies that the viewer's experience of reading a comic will always include an awareness of drawn marks as the trace of a body moving in space, and the differing conceptions of depicted action expressed in both of these texts would seem to support this idea:

However strong the influence of lens-based media may be on these accounts of storytelling in comics, the foregrounding of the importance of gestures and stereotypes also emphasises the potential of the body as a carrier of meaning.

SG. It seems to me that Forceville makes the 'key moment' a characteristic of comics' 'stereotypical' depiction of action, so that, unlike movie, recognisable and expected still postures underwrite the communication of action itself in comics. Other than this, his commentary could as easily be describing a movie regime. However, In terms of melodrama as practice, for example, the still moment is not 'inactive', but rather indicates a moment of crisis in the plot, in which the action is at its most intense and at which points the audience becomes fully sensate. Simon Shepherd calls these still moments 'pauses of mutual agitation', which present "a foregrounding of the moments of coming to knowledge, of 'apprehension'".[29] This is one of the reasons that I think that consideration of different categories of anaphora relative to lens, performance and visual depictive regimes is important. Readers and viewers understand if they are meant to pay attention to a still image as immanent (or coming to knowledge), as isolating a moment (as Caillbotte's painting) or as an a-temporal accumulation of icons. Hence, different types of still image anchor different types of anaphora and are schematically inscribed by the body in different ways.

JM: The concept of image-schema is one that only a few writers have applied to the analysis of comics. One example that may be particularly relevant to the distinctions we've been proposing between 19th and 21st century depictive schema is Potsch and Williams' discussion of superhero comics.[30] Their opening statement that "comics is cinema without motion or sound" is controversial

within the context of most contemporary theoretical discussions of comics, but might appear slightly less problematic when applied exclusively to superhero comics.[31] It supports the observation derived from Jeff Smith's response to *The Dark Knight Returns,* that a reader of a contemporary superhero comic is likely to expect from the comic an experience that is, in ways outlined earlier, comparable to cinema. With the connection Baudry draws between cinematic apparatus and the tradition of linear perspective in post-Renaissance Western art in mind, the idea that the expectation of a cinema-like experience is created and to some degree fulfilled by many superhero comics is supported by the fact that while *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* devotes two chapters to drawing in perspective, the technique is discussed over just four pages in McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and receives a single paragraph in Abel and Madden's *Drawing Words & Writing Pictures*.[32]

According to Potsch and Williams, comics' lack of movement means "the comics reader must add motion and dynamics to the story conceptually, mentally animating the narrated events."[33] 'Must' here needs to be qualified: according to the present discussion it might be more appropriate to say that the reader of superhero comics expects that they will provide access to anaphora that include relatively specific information about the positions of bodies in space at successive moments. This information, at least in this genre, is provided in large part by depictive devices that utilise the 'Source-path-goal' schema identified by Talmy.[34] In keeping with the fundamental tenet of cognitive linguistics, he states that we understand abstract concepts by structuring our conception of them around our knowledge of physical experiences, arguing that we understand the abstract notions of cause and effect by applying force-dynamic image schema.[35]

The use of a complex pattern of ribbon paths and impact flashes to depict a large and complex battle between two groups of super-powered characters at the opening of Kurt Busiek and George Perez's *JLA/Avengers #2* invokes, through image schema, the reader's experience of gestures and sensations similar to those depicted in the panel.[36] Although broad equivalents to these specific depictive devices can be found in lens-based images, the total network presented across the panels is not something that lens-based media could capture. Such devices would appear at least in part to emerge, as you say, unmediated by the lens, at least in comparison to more recent developments in the depiction of motion in comics that have been influenced by the development of digital drawing technologies. For example, the explicit invocation of lens-based motion blur in Bryan Hitch's work on Marvel Comics' *Ultimates* series.[37] The influence of cinema on comics may be more to do with the expectations of knowledge about spatial, temporal and causal relations within the narrative that readers bring to comics texts than any specific, identifiable drawing conventions. Comparing the *JLA/Avengers* sequence - what we might call a typical action scene - with a highly kinetic sequence by Jeff Smith such as *The Great Cow Race* from his long-running series *Bone,* reveals that Smith makes relatively infrequent use of the sort of conventionalised devices discussed by Potsch and Williams.[38] His interest in the cartoonist's ability to 'manipulate time' seems to be more focused on presenting depictions that will create anaphora that include specific physical trajectories than showing those trajectories in the plot, as ribbon paths do.

If Talmy is correct in saying that our understanding of cause and effect is

grounded in force-dynamic schemas, then depictive regimes that make use of ribbon paths, motion lines, or that display Smith's concern with creating specifically physical anaphora may also be interpreted as providing an unambiguous representation of the causes, nature and results of events taking place within the diegesis. This seems particularly appropriate for superhero comics in which, to make a sweeping generalisation, characters' motivations tend to be simply stated and the influences on and outcomes of a given event are generally made explicit in the plot. The absence of such devices in *Dispossession*, as well as being commensurate with 19th-century comics, supports the adaptation's aims of visually presenting the equivocation that we've been discussing as central to the plot of *John Caldigate* and Trollope's style more generally. In an image-schematic interpretation, the adoption of a depictive regime that placed emphasis on the communication of force-dynamic events, whether through Smith's 'manipulated time' or the sort of non-pictorial drawing conventions described above, would metaphorically be interpreted by the reader as also providing an unambiguous account of more abstract causes and effects. Conversely, are there any image schemas already identified (for example, those listed in Johnson that you see as strongly invoked by *Dispossession*'s depictive regime)?[39]

SG: The question is made complex by the fact that facture itself, the act of drawing, can be discussed as belonging to the resources of the enunciator's body or bodies and hence as appearing under the expressive aegis of the body's image schemas. In this sense, depictions always produce an image-schematic 'observer viewpoint'. McNeill describes body transformations that place us at the centre of the gestural images we create as showing 'character viewpoint'. He

describes transformations that place us at the periphery of the image as showing 'observer viewpoint'. The actions of our transforming bodies are located in different places depending on the image made with the body.[40] A character viewpoint image includes our bodies in the substance of the image, whereas in an observer viewpoint image, our body is excluded. When our gestures display 'observer viewpoint' we are joining the social sphere to perceive our own communication from the positions of other people. This is an emic position. On the other hand, when we display 'character viewpoint' in our gestures, we establish social distance from other people, creating a single position that we inhabit and from which we view others. This is an etic position.[41]

However, I think that you are referring to the particular appearance of diegetic image schema in *DIspossession*, ranging from the depicted gestures of characters through to changes in reader point of view. Because I depict action in the book as both iconic and immanent, in the sense of Shepherd's melodrama practice of performing 'coming to knowledge' pauses, I think that Johnson's 'Centre-Periphery' and 'Cyclical Climax' schema effect the reader whilst being specifically rooted in the gestures, movements and postures of the protagonists, particularly in ensemble, whilst the movement of the reader around the action is continually confirmed by these diegetic schemas. Together, the effects of these visual schema conspire to create a fundamental rhythm of the book.

JM: Lakoff makes some brief comments on the image-schematic structure of Caillebotte's *Le Pont de l'Europe*, 1876, that support your description of the importance his painting places on successive moments. Describing the largest three figures in the painting, he observes that "the man and the woman are in

the middle phase of walking, with one foot outstretched" and that the man leaning on the railing is in a posture that communicates specific detail about his shifting of his weight from moment to moment.[42] Lakoff describes the painting as a whole as being structured by the 'parallel lines' schema. None of the lines he identifies are parallel on the picture plane, but instead are read as depicting parallel objects in pictorial space due to the painting's emphatic use of linear perspective, which, as Baudry claims, serves as the original model for cinematic apparatus.[43] In these pictures, the precise location of points (and therefore of the observer) in continuous space and the precise occurrence of instances in continuous time are irrevocably bound together.

SG: When I was drawing *Dispossession*, I had in mind depictive lexica visible in the drawings of a small number of artists in whose drawings I recognised shared solutions to the problem of depiction and hence whose works generate, for me, related visions of the world, such as Cham, Honoré Daumier, John Piper and Edward Ardizzone. It was in part my sense of the meteorology of the worlds depicted that caused me to link them, by which I mean the ways in which their visual worlds share similar light and air. It was also my sense that recognition of this particular weather system would contribute to produce the effect of the strangeness of the historic period upon the reader. On one level, I made associations between idea, period and depictive lexica that were not strictly historical but, rather, derived from shared aspects of the lexica themselves, which I sought to emulate.

JM: I briefly mentioned Rutu Modan's *The Property* earlier as a recent example of a graphic novel that shares *Dispossession*'s use of photo-collage as a preliminary

stage of the drawing process. While Modan distils her source imagery with 'ligne claire' rendering, *Dispossession* instead blankets the story-world with a web of lines both dense and insubstantial. Although the opposing styles of facture in these two comics denies the idea that this use of photography implies any specific use of line, could we say that the presence of the photo-collaged 'underdrawing' contributed to enabling an approach to facture that communicates equivocation? With forms already placed, the role of mark-making in creating enclosures and dividing space is diminished in favour of a use of drawing that fills surfaces, creating a flickering pattern of tone across the pages. Just as Trollope avoids privileging any of the opinions on the events of *John Caldigate* presented in the novel, neither does this visual fug highlight specific areas of *Dispossession*'s pages, an effect bolstered by the consistent use of a single digital brush of fixed width.

SG: I wouldn't agree that the type of mark making in *Dispossession* is itself equivocal, as this establishes a false distinction between its 'flickering patterns of tone' and 'the forms' that it depicts. Drawing does not dress form. It is form. It seems to me that depictions are always absolutely unequivocal, even if diegetic ambiguity pushes us to fail in recognising what is depicted, or the atmosphere is so thick that we recognise that little can be seen, or when a depiction unambiguously presents ambiguity. So we return to the central problem of attempting to replace an equivocal text with unequivocal drawing, as we first discussed. However, making a distinction between 'flickering patterns' and 'forms' has relevant historic precedents, particularly in Italian Renaissance 'paragone' or 'comparisons' between the depictive styles of paintings.[44] On one hand, 'colore' described the depiction of the diegetic light by which means an image exists, with 'colorito' describing the technical methods for producing a depiction of this type.[45] On the other hand, 'disegno' described the identification

of divisions and contours as a method for depicting encompassed volumes and the boundaries between one object and another.[46] The distinction can still prove useful and I had it in mind when drawing *Dispossession*. The book adopts a 'colore' depictive regime inspired by the image schema of the artists I have mentioned, in which light and air are themselves being depicted. In cuing the reader to an idea of a strange 19th century past, this approach also acts to equalise the status of people, objects and locations, unifying them across the whole book. Everything in the diegesis is seen as having the same light and air, from the most significant gesture by a major character to the least significant book tucked away in an office. According to this approach, the light encompasses changes of season, time of day and continent. Everything can be either illuminated to centre-stage brightness or made invisible by a cloaking gloom. No hierarchy exists in the palette used to achieve this pervasive light that would render a cloud less important than an eyebrow. This equality of treatment extends to every drawn line in *Dispossession*. It is often the matter of the slightest inflection or shift in context that makes a white line the tail of a speech balloon rather than a depiction of the light reflected on an old oak floor. Hence, according to 'colorito' it is in the 'flickering' of *Dispossessions* drawings that we recognise both what is depicted and the ultimate subservience of every visual element of the plot to a profound fiction of the past.

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