

CREATING THE ILLUSION OF MOVEMENT

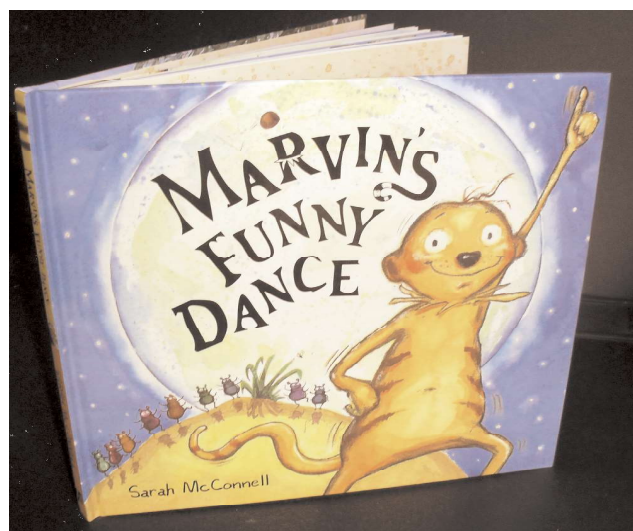
How Do Children's Illustrated Books Embody Visual Sequential Movement?

Sarah McConnell

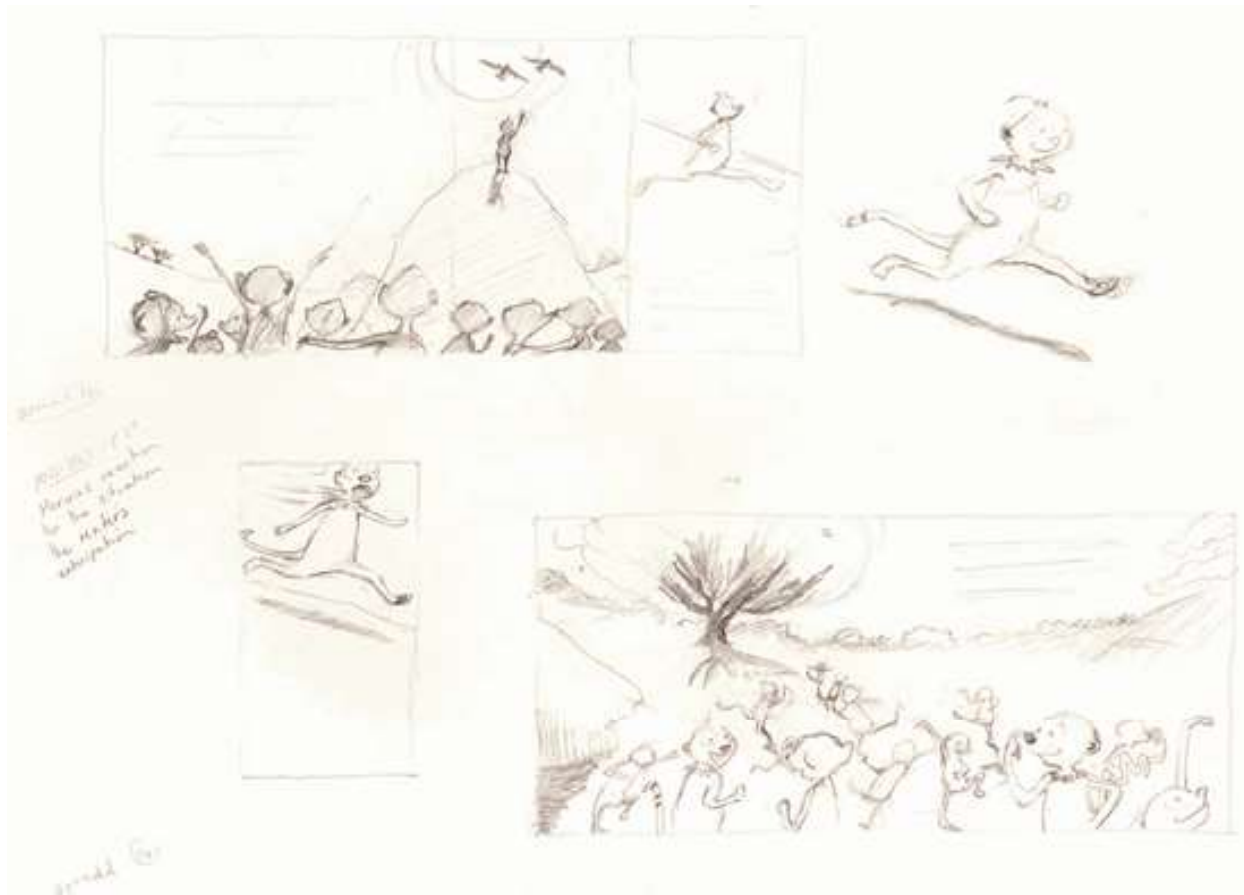
One might assume that expressing a continuous narrative, through what has been referred to as a “discontinuous medium” (Nikolajeva and Scott 139), could be an inhibiting experience for a picturebook maker. However, expressing a moving visual story through a static medium such as a picture book demands a focus of conceptual direction by the author/illustrator. It challenges the practitioner to identify the very essence of an idea and then to express that idea using a multiplicity of graphic codes, which iterate and reiterate the notion in conjunction with eloquent and economic text. This article examines this very process, looking at how the author/illustrator makes use of the picturebook to express narrative ideas, which in the process of comprehension are transformed into motion.

The following discussion explores the particular perspective of the practitioner and has been written by a practicing author/illustrator. In this

way, it explores the inner workings of the picture book and discusses some of the multiple layers of intentions and considerations that revolve around the idea of creating the illusion of movement in children's illustrated books. The depiction of sequential momentum in children's book illustration is a form of visual communication where the artist takes a positive role in expressing narrative ideas; a role which has many similarities to the role of writer/director.



Ill. 1: *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008).



Ill. 2: Sketchbook page for *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008)

To ensure that the observations made here are as authentic as possible, the discussion will make reference to a picturebook which the author wrote and illustrated specifically to analyse creative intentions for research purposes. *Marvin's Funny Dance* was published in 2008 by Hodder Children's books.¹ The discussion will refer to reflections and notes collected during the production and postproduction of the book. It will combine this with examples from the wider discipline of children's books and refer to a theoretical framework which is applied to comics.² This approach has enabled a balance to

be struck between theory, practice and artistic intentions, each supplementing the others. The theoretical reflective process carried out in relation to *Marvin's Funny Dance* has fed into subsequent practical work in the form of a more structured approach to writing and illustrating and a deeper understanding of strengths and areas for improvement in the practice.

Sequential Momentum: A Definition

In its most distilled form, sequential momentum describes the visual movement represented in the image,

which is created using various graphic codes. The word 'sequential' is used in the term to denote an implicit understanding of the image that relies on the reader to envisage the scene as part of a series of connected fragments. Sequential momentum, as it is referred to here, is an expressive visual device that animates the narrative; it is primarily a visual tool, which is effective in depicting movement, drama and time in a static medium. The central assertion of this discussion is that the picture book is a continuous medium during its production when it is envisioned as a moving narrative and when it is read and comprehended by the audience.

There is an existing discourse in the areas of picturebook and sequential art which explores ideas related to sequential momentum. Scott McCloud, the comic book theorist, discusses similar issues using phrases such as "the composition of change, the composition of drama" (1993, 115); while children's literature scholars Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott refer to "Time and Movement" in picturebooks (139). All of these descriptive terms are relevant to the discussion, but this paper requires a label that is both encompassing and expandable; a term that exists as an umbrella for the three components

mentioned above and is malleable enough to allow for a mixing and overlapping of these elements.

In order to analyse the complexities of this, the discussion will break down the notion of sequential momentum into three components and discuss how these components feature in the work of several published author/illustrators as well as the author's own book. The first of these components is **action**: the momentum of the image and the expression of frozen kinetic energy on the page. The second is **time**: how the image depicts a single moment or multiple moments in time. Lastly, the discussion turns to **drama**: showing the intensity of the moment and the theatre of imagery that exists on the page.

This article will focus on the visual, however this cannot be discussed without making reference to the picture book text. The words are, of course, an integral part of the narrative concept. Text and image work symbiotically in a picture book and they can both support and contribute to sequential momentum. The author/illustrator is in the privileged position of using two different media to relay narrative ideas. They can overlap and contrast the words and images in various ways to describe the narrative thread. Great care is taken to consider

the text and image in terms of page design, with words often undulating across the page or sitting in a balanced composition with the image. The finished artwork can often feel incomplete until the text is dropped in by the designer, which balances up the composition and makes it complete. As the discourse unfolds it will touch on the function of the words and how they aid sequential momentum, but the primary focus will be on the images.

Sequential Momentum in Context

One of the earliest exponents of sequential momentum, through the medium of picturebook art, was the artist Randolph Caldecott. Caldecott has provided the world with a wealth of images that shimmer and sway with movement. Writing for *The Horn Book Magazine* in 1946, the artist Hilda van Stockum discusses the “ebb and flow of perpetual motion” which permeates his work and goes on to conclude that “it is this vigorous action which endears Caldecott to children, who don’t look at pictures to admire, but to participate” (38).

Perhaps one of the most compelling properties offered by illustration is the capacity to portray a frozen moment in time. Obviously, this phenomenon is not exclusive to illustration: The camera



Ill. 3: From *The House that Jack Built* by Randolph Caldecott (1878)

can capture motion, and film directors can use a freeze frame shot to add impact to a particular scene; but in no other medium is the frozen moment more readily used than in illustration and sequential art.

The illustrator and theorist Brad Holland has commented that “[t]he unique value of illustration is its ability to flatten time and compress different states of consciousness into a frozen moment” (2005, 4). As a consequence, creating the illusion of motion in an image can be an exciting challenge for the author/illustrator who ultimately relies on the audience to reconstruct a moving story in their reading.

In the use of the frozen moment, the author/illustrator has one significant

advantage over other media: He/she can push the idea further than the boundaries of reality will allow. He/she can portray a frozen moment and heighten the level of dramatic effect by exaggerating elements. The image is stretched, the lighting is altered, every tool available to the artist is utilised in an effort to communicate the essence of the idea.

Quentin Blake demonstrates this notion beautifully in his drawing from *Matilda* by Roald Dahl (111). A small boy has been thrown out of the window. The boy flies through the air, his body is straight and protracted, his hair flies behind him and a trail of sweets are left in his wake. This is a moment charged with sequential momentum. In real time, it would be extremely difficult for the eye to absorb the details of a fast-moving object such as this, but in the illustrated image, this information is deliciously visible. In *Words and Pictures*, Blake discusses how he used the trajectory of the sweets to emphasise the power with which the boy soars through the air (2000, 61).

The artist reveals how this moment was not essential to the “advancement” of the story when it appeared in the text but it “benefits from visual treatment, so that you can relish it at leisure” (ibid.); which indicates how

Blake delights in this challenge and understands how his audience appreciate this quality, too.

Comprehension of the Image and Closure

In their book *Talking Pictures*, editors Victor Watson and Morag Styles discuss the readerly gap or imaginative space that lies somewhere between the words and pictures in a picture book. It is in this place that the reader/viewer transforms the visual and textual information into an uninterrupted narrative with living characters and dynamic scenes. This is the place where sequential momentum resides.

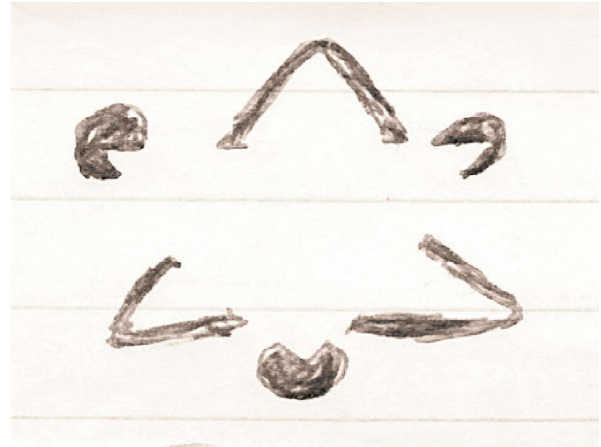
Without doubt, the audience’s comprehension is the key to the portrayal of sequential momentum in picturebooks and indeed any form of sequential art. Without their willingness to understand and make meaning from the image, Quentin Blake’s boy from *Matilda* could quite possibly be seen as suspended in mid-air. As it is, the reader’s brain takes in all the information and makes an assessment of what is being communicated to them and so the boy is understood to be flying through the air. We understand the image because we can imagine what happened just prior to this moment. In effect we are filling in the gaps and in the process creating a

continuum within the image. This form of comprehension requires a particular mental process called closure³, as referred to in gestalt psychology (cf. Schwarcz).

According to gestalt psychology, closure occurs when a collection of shapes are grouped together, which we then perceive as a whole. The picture book theorist Joseph H. Schwarcz refers to gestalt closure in *The Ways of the Illustrator* (1982, 30). He notes how the perceiver shows a tendency to join together objects and elements found in the visual world and combine them into patterns and configurations, particularly if these elements are situated in close proximity.

Closure can be observed in ill. 4: We are compelled to ignore the gaps and see complete shapes in the image. In fact, there are no triangles or circles, but our brains fill in the missing information and creates the familiar shapes. It is interesting to note that this compulsion is so strong that it is almost impossible to look at the diagram and just see a collection of odd black shapes. The white triangle is insistent on making itself known.

Closure enables us to make sense of the visual world. The human brain does not perceive every single detail of a given environment, but instead relies on a bank of existing knowledge.



Ill. 4: Closure Diagram

According to Scott McCloud, “[o]ur perception of reality is an act of faith, based on mere fragments” (1993, 62). In *The Psychology of Human Thought* by Robert J. Sternberg and Edward E. Smith, the authors discuss how the information that we memorise is not stored as isolated facts (1988, 32). Instead, the brain organises the information into “meaningful functional units” (Brewer/Treyens, as quoted by Smith/Sternberg 32). If we are faced with incomplete information, as in the case of closure, we can use our bank of existing knowledge to fill in the gaps and make meaning.

The author/illustrator attempts to harness this built-in capacity to fill in information. In reality, however, we have no way of knowing that the audience comprehends the image and text the way it is intended. This is why practitioners use multiple visual codes to deliver their message. Creating a convincing visual language that



OOPS!

Ill. 5: Image from *Me and My Cat?* by Satoshi Kitamura (1999)

communicates effectively with the reader is central to producing an accomplished book.

In ill. 5 by Satoshi Kitamura from *Me and My Cat?* (1999, 14), the artist depicts the tumbling cat and the falling cupboard just before the contents crash to the floor. The reader comprehends motion as the contents spill onto the floor by imagining the linear continuity in the image. The artist tries to manage the reader's interpretation of the gap between fragments of the image by encouraging and coercing the reader to make assumptions about what happens next, and sequential momentum is an aid to achieving this.

It is worth pointing out at this early stage in the discussion that sequential momentum, as an illustrative approach, probably features in the majority of picturebooks to some degree because it is an invaluable method for communicating narrative ideas visually. However, the strength of its presence varies. In some picturebooks where the mood of the narrative is perhaps more contemplative, it is something which is merely evident as a tool to propel the plot forward; while in others it is more explicitly pursued by the artist as an objective, and is a central theme in the visual and textual narrative.

The First Component of Sequential Momentum: Action

The context of sequential momentum, as a tool of visual narration, is rooted in sequential art. As a consequence, its contextual origins lie mostly in the area of picturebooks, comics and graphic novels. It is worth noting, however, that sequential momentum also borrows from continuous disciplines as diverse as mime, animation, film and theatre.

An enduring influence on my practice in the area of sequential momentum is the American author/illustrator Bill Peet, who in 1967 wrote and illustrated the picturebook *Jennifer and*

Josephine. It is a book filled with an unmistakable kinetic energy and for the purposes of this paper, I will discuss it as an exemplar of the depiction of “action”.

Almost every spread in *Jennifer and Josephine* resonates with movement and drama. The story tells of a “frantic fellow” (7), called Mr Frenzy, who buys Jennifer, a battered old car, and drives her at alarming speeds in a fractious journey across the American Midwest. Fortunately, the car is inhabited by a resourceful and loyal cat called Josephine, who ultimately saves Jennifer from a rusty demise.

The book has a wild momentum running throughout, and Peet achieves this sense of motion using a variety of graphic indicators. The little car careers from one page to the next. More than just a character, the car acts as a narrative tool in itself, its journey compelling the reader to continue. An initial cursory examination of the illustrations reveals an unexpected absence of movement lines depicting this kinetic energy. Instead, rather like Caldecott, Peet uses the visual props which are available to him within the narrative visual world that he has created. Most obviously he uses the red dirt road whose trajectory winds its way across nearly every spread. The road is indented with two deep tyre

tracks, which he uses repeatedly to show the relentless path of action. The tracks are compelling because they are such a definite graphic indicator, the reader can experience a sense of the car’s wheels slotting into these groves, coupled with an idea of the speed and power required to make such deep tracks. The tracks are perhaps the most indicative visual metaphor for the momentum which powers through this book as they slice through wheat fields, grassy meadows and muddy embankments to their final conclusion.

More signifiers are employed as the narrative unfolds. Dust rises in clouds from the road as the canvas flaps on passing trucks, and steam billows from a speeding train. The wheels of the car are drawn so that they hover above the ground.

Beyond this there is another level of communication; this exists within the application of the marks that make up these images. If one observes closely how the road has been rendered in the book, it is possible to see indicative diagonal, sweeping stripes of colour and tone. This is echoed in the short spiky pen strokes used to render the trees and grasses of the American mid west landscape. The marks collude to indicate the perpetual motion of a particular frozen scene.

It is of interest to note that Peet spent years working as a respected animator for the Disney Studios where he developed a tacit understanding of movement, and the use of visual language in storytelling. He writes: “My Disney storytelling had been a series of sketches, hundreds of them to describe every phase of action and the attitudes of the characters” (138). Peet’s statement is an indicator of how he achieves such a sophisticated level of visual communication. In his picturebooks, he condenses these hundreds of images into 32 pages of action.

The Second Component of Sequential Momentum: Time

Sequential images in children’s picturebooks have the ability to communicate the passing of time. Indeed, this relationship with time is one aspect that defines the art form. Within the picturebook image, time is perceived spatially; as with all sequential art, “time and space are one and the same” (McCloud 1993, 100). In comics, the skilful graphic communication of time has been turned into an art form.

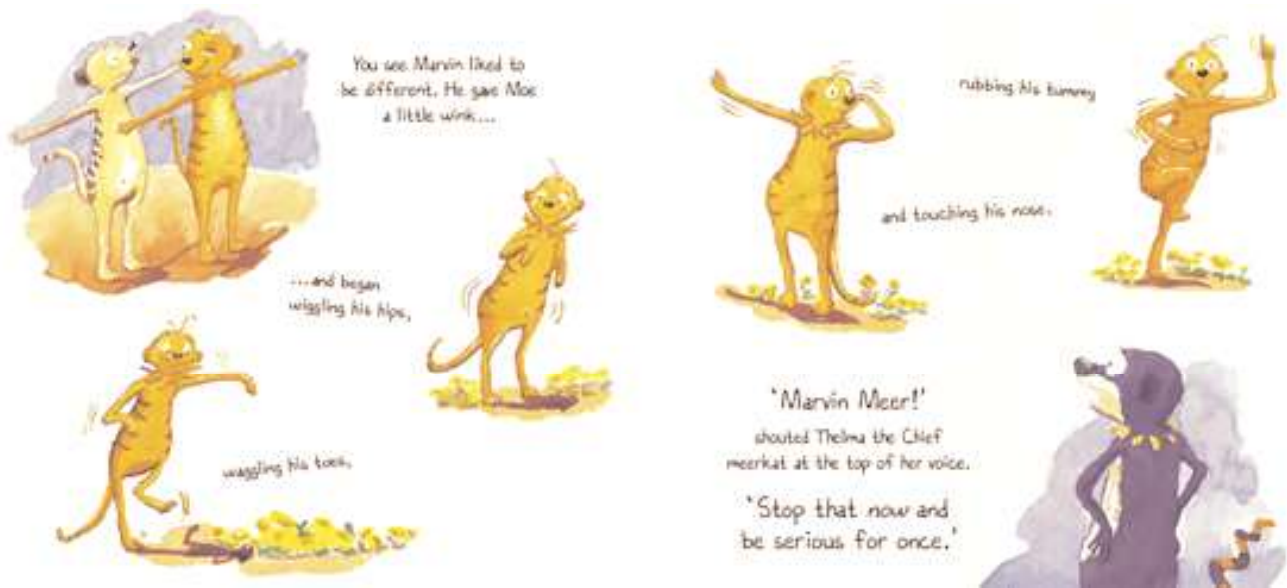
In order to understand the many different ways of communicating time in the images found in children’s illustrated books, it is worth briefly considering Scott McCloud’s comprehensive categories of closure (70). These six

categories describe temporal changes in a sequence of images. I have specifically chosen to discuss the transference of meaning in picturebooks using McCloud’s⁴ paradigm for the vocabulary of sequential art, rather than adopting a semiotic framework. This is due to McCloud’s status as both a comics artist *and* a theorist. This research represents the practitioner’s perspective and it is appropriate, therefore, to adopt a line of discourse that was begun by a sequential artist. McCloud’s framing of this dialogue still adheres to semiotic principals but provides a subject-specific viewpoint.

The first category is called “moment-to-moment transition”. Moment-to-moment describes time in terms of seconds passing, showing tiny progressions in the visual action. This can be described using frames or vignettes. An example of this could be a character cartwheeling.

The second category of closure that McCloud identifies involves a single subject in a distinct “action-to-action progression”. This type of progression is also most commonly described using vignettes as depicted by Marvin’s different dance moves in my book *Marvin’s Funny Dance* (2008) (see ill. 6).

The reason for the use of vignettes is simply to do with economy of space,



Ill. 6: Pages 6/7 *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008)

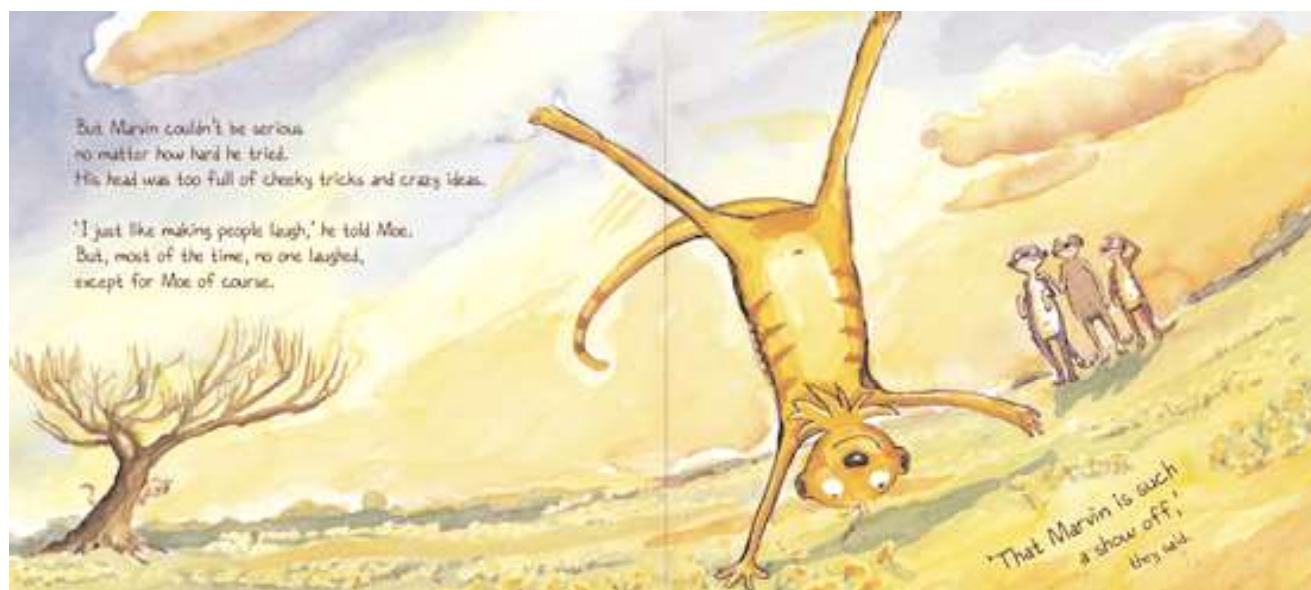
and in the context of narrative progression, time. The dance moves don't move the story along a great deal, in terms of the narrative world of the book they don't actually take very long to execute, perhaps less than a minute. The dance is depicted in this way because of its significance in the story.

Nikolajeva and Scott refer to this particular order of temporal events as "simultaneous succession" (140). Joseph H. Schwarcz (24) and Perry Nodelman (166) use the alternative phrase "continuous narrative" but I prefer McCloud's term "action-to-action" (70) because it refers directly to the contents of the image and the transition itself.

This page is also a good example of how the written text contributes to sequential momentum. Written to be

read aloud, the words act as rhythmical accompaniment to the dance. The words do this using simple rhyme but I have also considered the way that the words are formed in the mouth as they are read aloud. Words such as 'wiggling' and 'wagging' are chosen specifically because of how they roll around the mouth. The text also describes the action so that the images can concentrate on not only portraying the dance but also conveying Marvin's cheeky personality. If the words were not there the image would focus much more on describing the activity to the readers e.g. by zooming in on the toes wiggling, for instance, in order to convey the narrative clearly.

Temporarily passing over the third category, McCloud's fourth category of transition appears in *Marvin's Funny Dance* in the progression from



Ill. 7: Pages 8/9 *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008)

pages 6/7 showing the actual dance, to pages 8/9 where Marvin is showing off by performing a cartwheel. McCloud calls this “scene-to-scene transition” and notes how it can transport the reader over considerable distances of time and space. In the example shown above, the narrative action goes from the present moment, the dance, to what I intended to be a kind of anecdotal reference describing Marvin’s character.

The fifth category, called “aspect-to-aspect”, is much less common in picturebooks and focuses on communicating a mood, idea or place by showing different aspects. Used in Japanese graphic literature, it also appears in film (see McCloud 1993, 79). It involves showing different, sometimes unconnected aspects of a scene with a view to creating a mood.

Finally, there is what McCloud calls the “non-sequitur”, the sixth category, where two sequential images have no relation at all. Again a category that is extremely rare in picturebooks, it appears more often in board books for babies, which introduce unconnected objects by naming them.

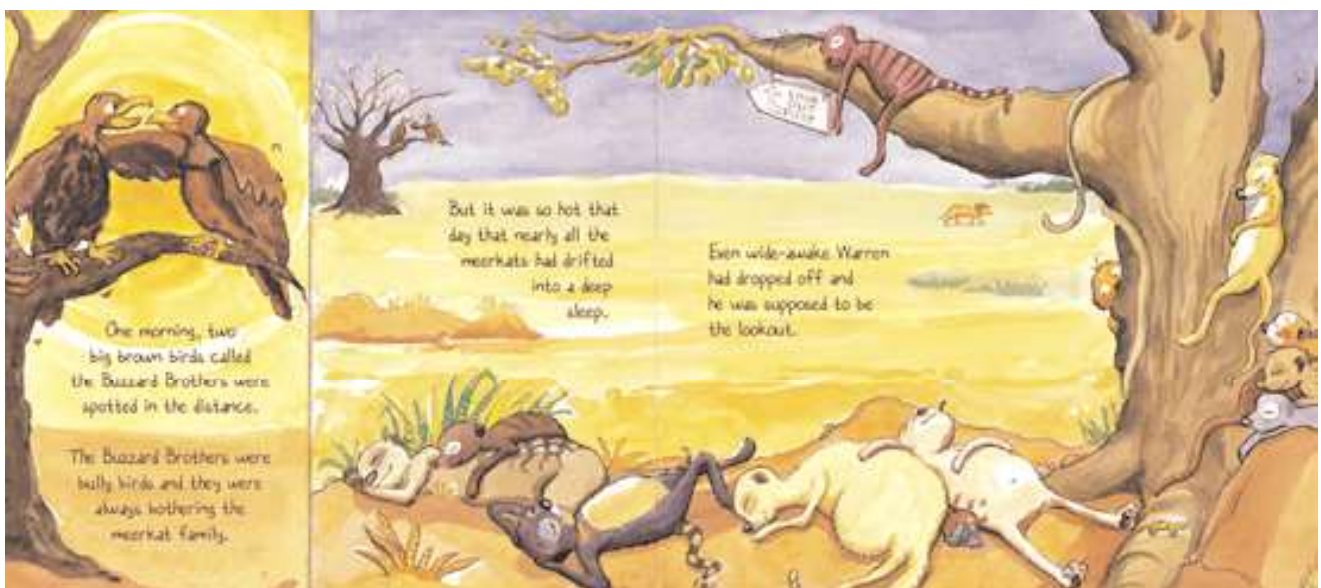
In my own picturebook *Marvin's Funny Dance*, one particular sequence relies heavily on the depiction of an unbroken period of time for its success.⁵ The sequence, if played out in real time, would probably only last a matter of minutes and yet I have devoted three spreads to it. This is because this particular chain of events is critical to the story. By treating it in this way I am hoping to focus the audience’s attention and create suspense. The three pages in question fall mostly within McCloud’s third category of

transition 'subject-to subject', which involves staying within the scene or idea as the images progress. It requires a substantial amount of reader involvement in the form of closure. Closure in picturebooks is normally at its most potent, in terms of suspense, when it occurs as the reader turns the page, and I have employed the 'page-turner' in this sequence.

The first page in the sequence uses two panels. I introduces the buzzard brothers with a necessary close-up in the first, then in the adjacent panel leaps forward in time, zooming out to show the slumbering meerkats with the scheming buzzards in the distance. We know there has been a temporal transition because of the different colours chosen to depict the sky, although there is some indication that the period isn't too long, because the

brothers are in a similar position in their tree. The text tells us that the gap between frames was long enough for the meerkats to spot their enemy, then later drift into "a deep sleep."

At this point in the second, larger panel, an uninterrupted period of time within the narrative begins. My intention is for the audience to commence reading the iconotext with the image of the distant buzzard brothers. Two indicators are employed to achieve this; firstly the image of the buzzards mimics the previous frame, secondly they are positioned in the top left-hand corner of the frame; the 'natural' place to begin reading; the gaze is then directed toward the text. My intention is for this gaze to then proceed in a measured way across the page, taking in the bodies of the sleeping meerkats, so the progression of the eye reflects



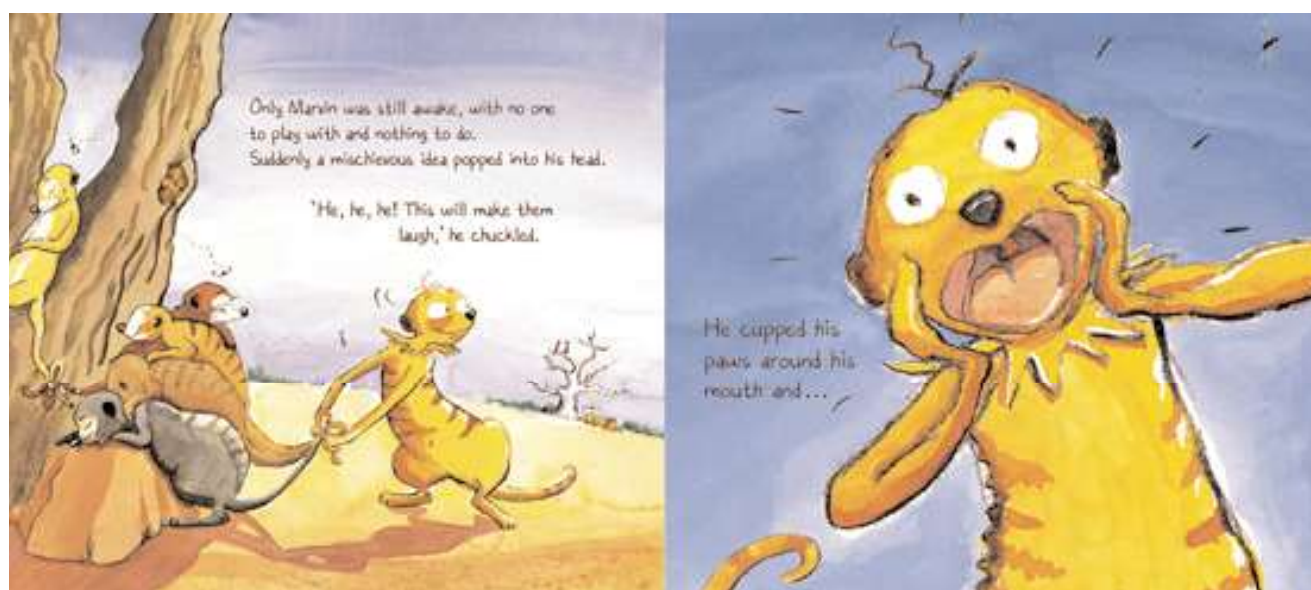
Ill. 8: Pages 10/11 *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008)

the tranquil repose of the meerkats. In order to achieve this I have added various details, such as dung beetles and lizards, to the foreground with the intention of capturing the audience's interest and slowing down their reading progression.

The eye is then met with more text, which directs it to the lookout post; or, if this is the gaze of the child reader/viewer, then they might notice Marvin's half-hidden face at this point. The continuing narrative momentum is then communicated solely through the image. The audience's realisation that Marvin is still wide-awake, even though the omnipresent narrator suggests otherwise, is intended to give them a sense of empowerment, they have prior knowledge that something is about to happen. This anticipation is enhanced

because they should be familiar with Marvin's character; (e.g. they are aware that he is "full of cheeky tricks") and this is further indicated in the hero's half-hidden face – to suggest mischief. This device for empowering the audience is specifically directed toward the child reader/viewer, who can engage more fully in the process of decoding the iconotext at this point in the narrative.

Also at this juncture, the book takes full advantage of the mental process of closure. The reader is treated to a glimpse of the sleeping meerkats who are piled on top of one another in the right-hand corner of the page. As we turn the page, the whole scene shifts to the right of the tree, the gaze moves around the tree trunk and simultaneously the hero moves with us. The wordless



Ill. 9: Pages 12/13 *Marvin's Funny Dance* by Sarah McConnell (2008)

appearance of Marvin on the previous page is intended to create anticipation in the reader/viewer as they turn the page, which is rewarded by a visual confirmation of their suspicions, with the image depicting Marvin getting up to mischief.

Marvin's partially obscured face from the previous spread acts as a visual page-turner. The page-turner is a classic device for creating anticipation in the plot. It can be either visual or textual as shown in the next page where the text reads "He cupped his paws around his mouth and...": The audience is urged by the text to read on. The page-turner induces closure in a similar way to that of the frame-to-frame transition where the audience fills in the action between panels. The action of turning the page in a picturebook, however, has some useful differences. Firstly, there is a short lapse of time as the page is turned; a helpful pause that could act as an intake of breath for the narrator or the character, as in the case described above. Even more useful to the author/illustrator perhaps is that, unlike frame-to-frame closure, turning the page in picturebooks reveals something unknown to the audience. This introduces uncertainty during the mental process of closure e.g. when the page is turned it reveals the answer to a question or the

punch line to a visual joke. It allows the reader to anticipate what the answer might be, and in effect, engages the imagination. Each page urges the reader to continue on this particular narrative path. As identified by Barbara Bader, a picture book "as an art form [...] hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page" (1). Perry Nodelman also identifies the page turn as one of the qualities that sets picturebooks apart from other art forms: "Picturebook pictures, are different from works of art in their composition, since every picture in a picturebook (except the last one) is supposed to encourage the reader to go on reading" (Nodelman cited by Nikolajeva and Scott 126). This key feature means that the large majority of picturebooks are inherently sequential. It allows for a sense of anticipation comparable to that delivered in a continuous visual medium such as film.

The continuous flow of the action is maintained as Marvin looks to his right. Again, the viewers' gaze goes from left to right as we follow the hero's viewpoint to the next page. This creates what Nikolajeva and Scott refer to as "tension between the verso and recto to imply movement as well as temporal and causal relations"

(151). The transition from one moment to another is implied as the viewpoint zooms in on the character, and Marvin opens his mouth. This moment is part of the continuum, which depicts the mischievous idea within these three spreads, but with an interesting difference. In terms of narrative time, the effect of the zoom, along with the textual description of the action, serves to speed up the moment if compared to the previous two pages in the sequence. The illusion of a shortened moment is due to this focus on one character, there is literally less visual information for the audience to interpret. Movement and temporality are displayed in the transition from one page to the next, again using closure.

On the right-hand page, the symbiosis between text and the image is designed to encourage the audience to read on. Suspense is created and the noise that comes out of Marvin's mouth is first of all manifested through closure in the reader's mind. The "Squawk! Squawk!" sound is then literally represented by the text on the following double-page spread. This spread has been composed so that it provides an instant visual contrast to the previous page. The ensuing mayhem represents a satisfying culmination to the build-up provided by the escalating progression of time and

activity, communicated through image and text, across this sequence of three pages as the meerkats jump around in complete panic.

The Third Component of Sequential Momentum: Drama

Finally, we arrive at the last of the three components that function within sequential momentum, that of drama. In this context, I use the word drama to refer specifically to how dramatic effect injects movement into the narrative.

Author/illustrator Quentin Blake could arguably be described as a master of the dramatic moment in picture-book art. It is illuminating to explore the inner workings of Blake's art, and how he achieves this succinct and dynamic form of visual communication. His attention to timing and the skill of selecting a specific moment in the ensuing narrative action, which communicates his essential idea, is a major factor in the success of these images.

The selection of these moments has a great deal to do with closure, in that they often portray the exact moment where the action has gone past a midway point and is milliseconds away from an often humorous and deeply satisfying conclusion. The reader is left with the wonderful task of completing the action. In this way, Blake's illustrations contain a type of locked-in potential.

In his picturebook *All Join In*, Blake shows a fainting Grandma, the text reads “And when Granny’s going to faint WE ALL JOIN IN” (28). Three children attempt to catch this large lady as she dramatically topples towards the floor. A woman runs in from the left of the picture-frame carrying a delicate looking chair. The particular moment selected to illustrate is bursting with kinetic potential and urges us to ask questions: Does Grandma collapse on top of the three small children, or does the chair arrive just in time; and if the chair does come to rest under this extremely large lady, does *it* then collapse under her weight? It is left to the audience to conclude the outcome. Every element in the image is infused with action and drama. Physically (indicated primarily through kinesics) and emotionally (indicated primarily by facial expression), the characters are wholeheartedly involved in the melodrama of the moment.

The notion of drama is perhaps most evident in the figure of Grandma herself, specifically the particular angle of her toppling body: It would be impossible for her to right herself from this position. Her body mass is exaggerated, its rectangular form resembles a large brick. If we compare her size to the female character

running in from the left there is a marked difference. The inevitability of her fall is reemphasized by the angle of her feet, which appear to be ankleless as they scoop upwards in the direction of the fall. Her weight and physicality are again dramatically indicated in the way that the three supporting children’s heads disappear into her spongy body. By observing the visual language and graphic codes that reside within the image the dramatic intensity of the action is revealed. The paradox of this analysis is that because the artist has expressed his idea in multiple different modes using dramatic effect, the essential idea can pass smoothly from the image to the viewer without any need for analysis at all.

In *Words and Pictures*, Blake discusses how he concentrates the eye of the beholder on this activity. He fills the audience’s perception with the intensity of his idea by omitting unnecessary background information and drawing only those ‘props’ that are necessary. “The scenery was not as important to me as the characters in front of it. That is nearly always so” (50), he notes. In the image of Grandma, the props that surround her – the splayed fingers of the gloves, the tumbling shopping, every element in the composition – is actively communicating

the notion of dramatic activity. Blake continues: "To small children, many adults are large and strange and inconvenient; and that is one of things that the drawing is about" (50). The artist uses what can only be described as visual rhetoric in his depiction of the inconvenience of adults, and this is captured eloquently in the figure of the small girl who is crumpling under Grandma. Her body appears to be less human and more rag doll-like as it bends in improbable ways, the limbs are floppy and bending in an exaggerated fashion. Her anatomy is subverted as it becomes subordinate to the author/illustrator's objective.

To conclude, the drama component of sequential momentum appears to be about distilling the essential idea into a physical gesture through the use of expressive anatomy, exaggeration, the selection of a dramatic moment and the presence or indeed absence of all other props and visual indicators in the image.

The author/illustrator attempts to harness this built-in capacity to fill in information and interpret visual language. In reality however, we have no way of knowing categorically that the audience comprehends the image and text the way it is intended. This is why practitioners use multiple visual codes to deliver their message as Blake

demonstrates. Creating a convincing visual language that communicates effectively with the reader is central to producing an accomplished picture book.

Discontinuous Medium or Continuous Unified Reality in the Process of Comprehension?

It is the assertion of this paper that the picturebook *is* a continuous medium within the process of its comprehension. The phenomenon of closure is evidence that the reader/viewer is not a passive observer when engaging with the picturebook; we are comprehending the path of time and motion and merging content to produce meaning; we are filling in the gaps between frames and pages; we are actualizing fractional illustrated moments and facilitating the continuum of the narrative. Picturebook maker Satoshi Kitamura stated, when discussing children's books in an interview with the author:

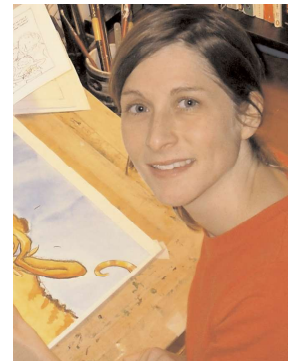
It is not a static medium, the picturebook is a series of pictures bound together as a book, telling a story with pictures and words. In the same way as comics, they are very much like film.

It is perhaps worth returning to Hilda van Stockum's sentiment in reference

to Randolph Caldecott where she states that “it is this vigorous action which endears Caldecott to children, who don’t look at pictures to admire, but to participate” (38).

Closure makes possible the transmission of the author/illustrator’s conceptual vision of the narrative as a continuous entity and the audience’s subjective reconstruction of this narrative. This results in the perception of the picturebook narrative as a continuous unified reality by both author/illustrator and audience even though these realities may be different. The more accomplished picture books will do this most skilfully. Thus, the fictional world of the picturebook provides temporality and causality. The audience can engage in expectations and an imaginative journey, which, in the process of comprehension, is transformed into motion.

*Sarah McConnell (*1972) has completed her doctoral research in the area of children’s book illustration. She is a published author and illustrator*



of 14 years. Her clients include Hodder Children’s Books, Harper Collins US, Orchard Books, Gullane, Oxford University Press and Scholastic. She has written and illustrated books that have been published in ten languages. She currently teaches Graphic design and Illustration at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels at Nottingham Trent University. Sarah is a founder member of The School of Story and Art.

NOTES

¹ Hodder is an imprint of Hachette who at the time were the UK's largest publisher. The book was later selected for the *Boys into Books* UK government initiative, which encourage boys to engage in reading.

² The discussion makes reference to comics at various intervals. Both picture books and comics are examples of sequential art and therefore the theoretical frameworks that have been applied to comics can often be successfully imposed on picture book art.

³ Randolph Caldecott is the artist after whom the Caldecott medal was named. The medal is awarded yearly by the *Association for Library Services to Children*, for the most distinguished Picturebook published during that year.

⁴ It should be noted that this type of closure is distinct from 'narrative closure' which defines a closed narrative form: as opposed to the structural openness of a soap opera, for instance (cf. Oxford Index). Closure, as it is referred to here, relates to the brain capacity to fill in visual information from memory and experience in order to understand an image.

⁵ Parallels can be drawn between the 'gaps' in gestalt closure and the textural 'gaps' in reader-response criticism. Like reader-response, this discussion is concerned with the readers contribution to a work's meaning, but the specific approach taken references the psychological perspective because this relates more directly to visual issues.

⁶ Scott McCloud discusses closure extensively in *Understanding Comics*. He describes this mental process as the "phenomena of observing the parts and as a consequence perceiving a whole" (63). Whilst Schwarcz concentrates on closure in relation to the vignette, McCloud's focus is directed toward the multiple panels in comics and the power of closure to complete the action between the panels. In a sense he is more interested in the gaps *between* images. As this article is discussing the picturebook, which has a different format from that of comics, its focus is distinct from McCloud's. Even though this discussion will look at the gaps between images such as the use of panels and the turn of a page, the focus here will be directed to the role of closure in generating motion *within* the image where motion is quite often played out in a single image. In this instance closure is more easily understood as the act of comprehension rather than the filling in of gaps.

⁷ This is how I intend the sequence to be read but this is not necessarily how it would be read.

⁸ 'Pageturner' as used by Nikolajeva and Scott (2001, 57).

⁹ Iconotext refers to the integration of text and image which cooperate to deliver a message, the term was coined by Kristin Hallberg (1983) as stated by Nikolajeva and Scott (2001, 6).

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