

The Relationship Between Gestalt Theory and Comic Book Storytelling Techniques

A Relação entre a Teoria da Gestalt e as Técnicas de Narrativa dos Quadrinhos
La relación entre la teoría de la Gestalt y las técnicas de narración de cómics

Roberto kiyoshi Yonamini¹

roberto.yonamini@fatec.sp.gov.br

João Almeida Santos¹

joao.santos256@fatec.sp.gov.br

1 – Fatec Victor Civita – Tatuapé

Recebido
Received
Recibido
24 out. 2023

Aceito
Accepted
Aceptado
20 mai. 2024

Publicado
Published
Publicado
28 jun. 2024

<https://git.fateczl.edu.br>

e_ISSN
2965-3339

DOI
10.29327/2384439.2.3-1

São Paulo
v. 2 | n. 3
v. 2 | i. 3
v. 2 | n. 3
Junho
June
Junio
2024



Abstract: Comic books, a vital part of our popular culture, not only promote reading but also foster creativity, especially in children during their growth and learning process. Despite being closely associated with children's literature due to their playful values, comic books exhibit significant complexity in their narrative techniques, which are often underestimated and subject to certain biases. There are numerous narrative techniques that an author can utilize in constructing their work to make it more enjoyable and appealing, including the organization of shapes and silhouettes of characters and panels. This article explores the relationship between Gestalt Theory and comic book construction techniques, highlighting how visual elements and spatial organization in comics are connected to the principles of the psychology of forms. Through a detailed analysis grounded in specialized literature, derived from bibliographical research, we will demonstrate how comics can leverage Gestalt principles to create a unique and coherent visual experience for readers.

Keywords: *Psychology of forms; Comic books; Gestalt; Pregnancy.*

Resumo: As histórias em quadrinhos fazem parte de nossa cultura popular e muitas vezes auxiliam no incentivo à leitura e ao exercício da criatividade, especialmente para as crianças durante o seu processo de crescimento e evolução de aprendizagem. Considerando o seu forte relacionamento com a categoria de literatura infantil, especialmente pelos seus valores lúdicos, as histórias em quadrinhos possuem grandes complexidades em suas técnicas narrativas que muitas vezes são subestimadas e até mesmo acabam sofrendo certos preconceitos. Há inúmeras técnicas narrativas que um autor pode se apoiar para a construção de sua obra com o objetivo de tornar a leitura mais agradável e envolvente, sendo uma parte delas através da organização das formas e silhuetas das figuras e dos quadros. Este artigo explora a relação entre a Teoria da Gestalt e as técnicas de construção dos quadrinhos, destacando como os elementos visuais e a organização espacial nos quadrinhos se relacionam com os princípios da psicologia das formas. Através de uma análise detalhada e fundamentada em literatura especializada proveniente da pesquisa bibliográfica, essa pesquisa demonstra como os quadrinhos podem explorar os princípios da Gestalt para criar uma experiência visual única e coerente para os leitores.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia das formas; Histórias em quadrinhos; Gestalt; Gravidez.

Resumen: Los cómics forman parte de nuestra cultura popular y a menudo ayudan a fomentar la lectura y el ejercicio de la creatividad, especialmente para los niños durante su

proceso de crecimiento y aprendizaje. Teniendo en cuenta su fuerte relación con la categoría de literatura infantil, especialmente por sus valores lúdicos, los cómics tienen grandes complejidades en sus técnicas narrativas que muchas veces son subestimadas e incluso terminan sufriendo ciertos prejuicios. Existen numerosas técnicas narrativas en las que un autor puede confiar para construir su obra con el fin de hacer que la lectura sea más agradable y atractiva, una parte de las cuales es a través de la organización de las formas y siluetas de figuras y pinturas. Este artículo explora la relación entre la Teoría de la Gestalt y las técnicas de construcción de los cómics, destacando cómo los elementos visuales y la organización espacial en los cómics se relacionan con los principios de la psicología de las formas. A través de un análisis detallado basado en la literatura especializada de la búsqueda bibliográfica, esta investigación demuestra cómo los cómics pueden explorar los principios de la Gestalt para crear una experiencia visual única y coherente para los lectores.

Palabras clave: Psicología de las Formas; Historietas; Gestalt; Impregnación.

1. INTRODUÇÃO

Expressing, communicating, and/or portraying an event is one of human beings' natural characteristics. This characteristic can be achieved in several ways, whether through writing, speech, gestures, or illustrations (PESSOA, 2016).

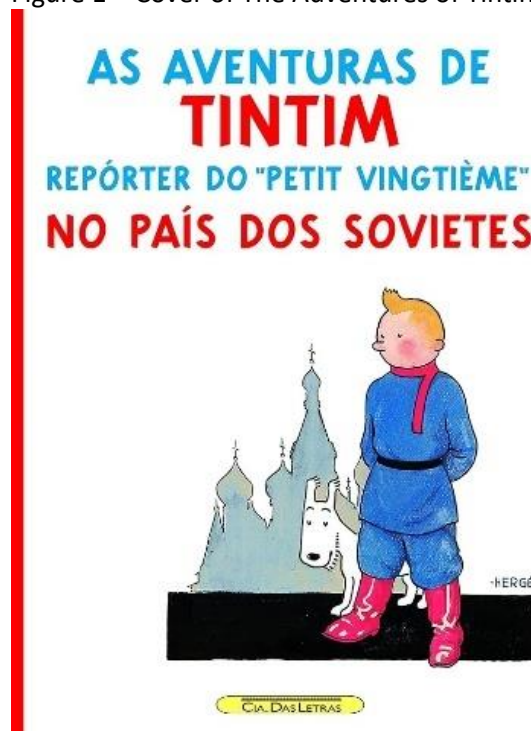
Since the beginning of human civilization, we can observe this characteristic through cave paintings, where man tries to express himself, communicate, and portray an event through drawings recorded on the walls. (OLIVEIRA, 2008).

This researcher underscores the unique role of comic books among the means of visual expression. In comic books, both verbal and non-verbal language are utilized, with the latter being represented through images.

At first glance, comic books present drawings representing characters interacting with the scenarios and expressing themselves through verbal language through speech bubbles, where the illustration conveys the author's thoughts. This concept leads us to believe that, in a very simplistic way, the greater the artist's ability to faithfully and realistically portray the environment and the characters, the better the comic book will be.

However, when we think this way, it becomes difficult to understand why comic books like Hérge's "The Adventures of Tintin" are considered iconic, even though their characters have simple lines closer to the cartoon style. (MCCLLOUD, 1995).

Figure 1 – Cover of The Adventures of Tintin.



Source: AMAZON (2023)

We could then consider that narrative becomes an essential factor in comic books, which would explain why characters with simple features are transformed into iconic symbols. However, in a comic book, this occurs through graphic or

visual narratives, made through the arrangement of figures or images and aided by words to dramatize an event. (GOULART, 2018).

Although a comic book's narrative is composed of verbal and graphic language, it is largely formed by frames, panels, or comics with illustrations (MEIRELES, 2008). Thus, we once again return to the principle that the ability to faithfully portray the image would make the story better, as it would portray the scenes and expressions in a more realistic way.

The reality is that the use of simpler and more caricatured features in comic book characters is not a limitation, but a powerful tool. It helps in the creation of a character that the reader can identify with and encourages them to actively engage their imagination (MCCLLOUD, 1995).

As Scott McCloud beautifully describes, the more cartoonish the character, the more we identify with it. When we leaf through the pages of a comic, we don't just read it, we become part of it, immersed in its world.

While our mind visualizes realistic drawings as representations of the external world around us or reality, cartoons allow access to our internal world or our imagination.

In Figure 2, we can experience this effect where, from a photo, a caricature of a specific person is drawn to a generic one, which could represent any person or even ourselves.

Figure 2 – Transformation of a photo into a cartoon to a generic caricature.



Fonte: MCCLLOUD (1995)

According to the author, drawings are icons that represent something, such as a place, a person, or an idea. This representation is influenced by cultural or religious attribution, or by defining a pattern or similarity.

The perception that a figure resembles something depends on an individual's experiences, which shapes how they see an icon. Therefore, our interpretation of a drawing and our attraction to it, our ability to identify with it, and our experience of accessing our inner world through it are influenced by how our mind interprets it.

Gestalt, a school of experimental psychology, has developed theories through rigorous testing to understand how our minds interpret certain shapes and how they impact us (GOMES FILHO, 2008).

In his book "Gestalt dos Objetos", Professor João Gomes Filho used the core concepts of Gestalt psychology to describe how our minds interpret objects and images. Additionally, the works of Scott McCloud help us gain a deeper understanding of how narrative techniques in comic books function and their relationship with the psychology of forms.

Figure 3: Some characters attract through their shapes.



Source: MCLOUD (1995)

In this way, this work seeks to understand how our mind interprets comic book images through Gestalt and, thus, how the most diverse works, even with uncomplicated stories and characters with simple characteristics, became iconic symbols.

2. FUNDAMENTAÇÃO TEÓRICA

2.1. FUNDAMENTAÇÃO TEÓRICA

Drawings are artistic expressions constructed by lines and dots that generate shapes that our mind associates with experiences and refer us to meaning. (GOMES FILHO, 2008)

When we create a drawing, we encourage those who observe it to understand the message as a form of communication. For this, the artist transforms the drawn shapes into icons; they gain the value of representing something. This value can be due to the similarity of the actual figure with the image or by attributions, as certain symbols have (SOUZA, 2011).

In the field of Perceptual Psychology of Forms, the Gestalt school devised a system for visually reading the shapes of objects that allows us to understand how the human mind interprets the silhouette of an image within a set.

According to this reading system, we interpret an image by observing specific patterns of shapes to organize them and make reading easier. (GOMES FILHO, 2008)

For Gestalt, the human need for the pregnancy of shapes, the clarity, balance, and visual harmony contained in an image is indispensable because it is part of our nature. Without understanding this human characteristic, it is impossible to understand the "grammar" of images.

First, we must understand that the brain does not interpret what is projected on the retina of our eyes in the same way. According to Gestalt, when we observe something, our mind interprets the set as a whole, so the sensation generated is unique for each figure and individual.

This occurs because our brain does not interpret in detail all the shapes received by the retina of our eyes, but rather some key points and, through some associations, memories, and experiences, the image is generated in our mind.

According to Gestalt, the mind's interpretation of the image is an internal force of organization that governs the perception of shapes. This organization occurs spontaneously, independently of our will or any learning.

Therefore, as the author commented, the reading of an image follows this force-generating unit, that is, figures that form an item within the set. These units are separated from the others by similarity or proximity and completed as an item by closure or unification or segregated by standing out within the environment.

In Figure 4, we can observe the units in several aspects. Each silhouette of an individual is a unit, as is each group where there is proximity between silhouettes of the same colors, or even the set as a whole, generates a crowd. In this same example, we see the segregation or the highlighting of the central figure. Each of them can be considered a unit, depending on the observer.

Understanding these forms is difficult, causing low pregnancy and a particular disturbance in the balance of our senses. Therefore, we must evaluate the clarity in which the units are formed in the first point of an image.

After identifying the units, the harmony, contrast, And the way we organize them visually provide the set that forms the figure with increased pregnancy.

In Figures 5 and 6, it is possible to perceive the units between the images, whereas in Figure 6, it needs to be clarified even though the silhouette of each house is well-defined.

We can notice the harmonious organization of Figure 5, where the lines become more defined and increase the pregnancy of the forms. In Figure 6, the dispersion of the lines and the lack of contrast between the buildings reduce the impact of the image and make it more challenging to understand each unit and, consequently, the pregnancy of its forms.

It's not just the silhouette of the figure within the image that's important. Equally crucial is the arrangement within the set, as this truly enhances the image's impact on our eyes.

Figure 4 – Formation of units in various aspects.



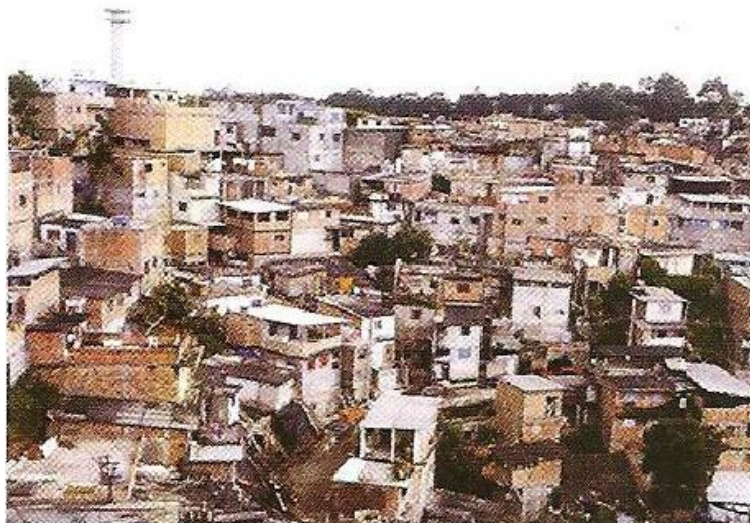
Source: Gomes Filho (2008)

Figure 5 – Comparison between the organization of shapes.



Source: Gomes Filho (2008)

Figure 6 – Comparison between the organization of shapes.



Source: Gomes Filho (2008)

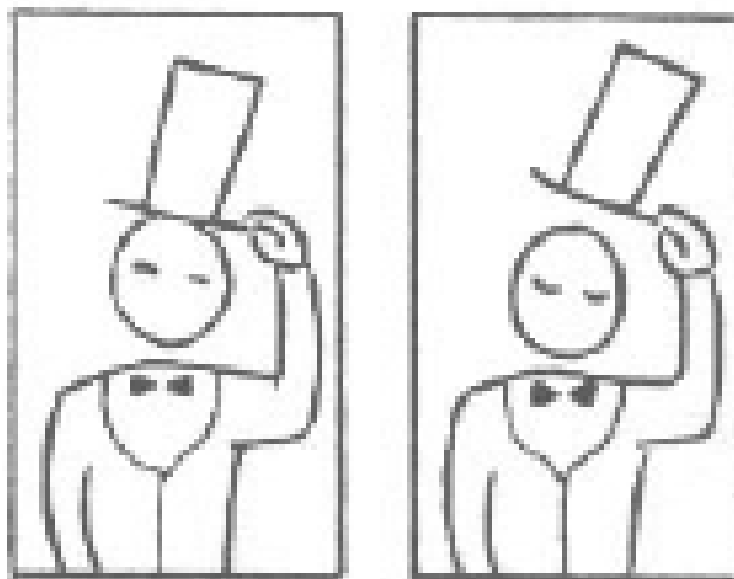
2.2. GESTALT E OS QUADRINHOS

Comics are graphic representations that follow a sequence. When combined with text and speech bubbles, they allow the author to manipulate a narrative so that the playful character can attract the reader (PESSOA, 2016).

Comics, in their essence, are about the reader's interpretation of a sequence of frames. Each frame, positioned one after another, illustrates the passage of time, but it's the reader's engagement that brings the story to life.

When we position two frames in sequence, we make each frame and the items within it a unit and the space between the frames a third blank unit, as described by the Gestalt school.

Figure 7 – Frame sequencing.



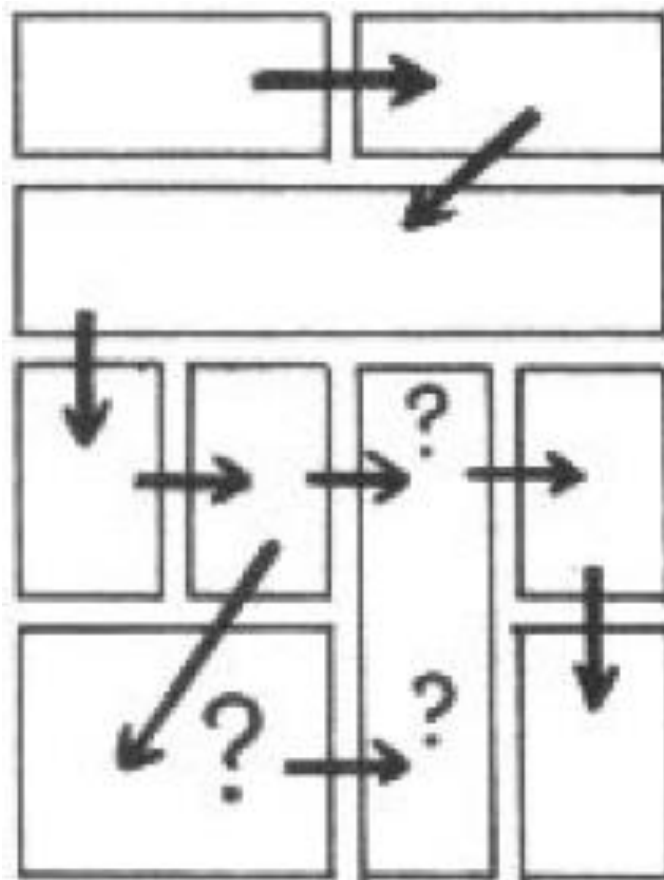
Source: McCloud (1995)

It is important to note that reading the sequence of the panels in a comic is akin to reading a text, a convention we learn to use (MCCLLOUD, 1998). This comparison helps us understand the concept of panel sequencing.

However, unlike writing, the construction of comics does not have a single form of sequencing, as we can see in Figure 7. Therefore, the arrangement becomes more complex despite allowing greater possibilities for creation. However, their incorrect use can cause inevitable confusion, making it difficult for the reader to understand.

Moreover, since there are no fixed rules, such as reading and writing, how the author should follow the panels can help or hinder the story's construction.

Figure 8 – Sequencing of panels.



Source: McCloud (1995)

Space and time are essential for the sequencing of comics, and controlling them ensures the construction of the narrative of facts (OLIVEIRA, 2008).

Through the proportion, regularity, rhythm, and balance of the frames and their content, we can create different sensations of the passage of time in a narrative. Thus, the shape of the frames, the repetition, and the size of the spaces between the frames can control our perception of time.

In Figure 8, we can see this manipulation of the duration of time in a scene using horizontal contrast in the frames.

Figure 9 – Balance and weight helping to control time.



Source: McCloud (1995)

Each frame is like the moment we experience in front of us, and we are aware of what is happening, like the reality we observe. However, beyond what we see, there is a world around us in which we have no idea of what is happening; we can only deduce. The transition between frames, this third blank unit, is where we deduce the events between frames. (MCCLLOUD, 1995)

According to the author, during the transition between frames, the reader will be required to imagine whether this sequence generates logic. In Figure 9, even though the frames are not immediate sequences, our mind actively correlates the events and deduces the facts that occurred between scenes.

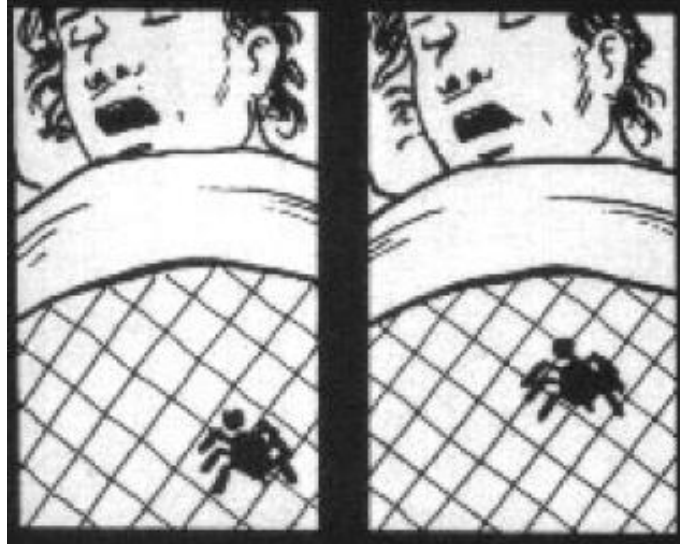
Figure 10 – Transition from action to action.



Source: McCloud (1995)

In the same way, we can deduce, even without seeing the result, what will happen in the following tables.

Figure 11 – Frame-by-frame transition.



Source: McCloud (1995)

Nevertheless, this result only clarifies how our mind receives the images. In the last frame of Figure 10, the silhouette allows us to understand the objects by separating the units, and the lines help with movement and rhythm through proportion. In this way, after understanding the frames, the narrative leads us to deduce the empty spaces and assume a result without seeing the illustration.

That is why clearly visualizing the units, especially between the frames, is essential for better perception of the items, facilitating the narrative's telling and guiding the reader's imagination towards the desired result.

Figure 12 – Lack of clarity in the silhouettes makes it difficult to segregate the frames.



Source: McCloud (1995)

The shapes' lack of clarity prevents the reader from understanding the units of the frames. Thus, the reader will have no difficulty understanding the events but

will not be able to deduce what is happening inside and outside them.

The use of balance and weight in the frames also allows the control of the intensity of the events. Condensing the information into an image creates a focal point, which helps intensify the narrative.

Figure 13 – Balance and weight are instrumental in creating the harmony of the event, a key aspect of visual storytelling.



Source: McCloud (1995)

The weight of the events in Figure 12's lateral units allows for a sense of balance and harmony, generating the understanding that the character is experiencing the same state of tranquility.

Thus, the use of balance and harmony in the content of the frames allows for manipulating our sensation of the situation and, thus, greater control of the narrative of the story.

Figure 14 – Balance and weight aiding in the impact of the scene.



Source: McCloud (1995)

The imbalance of a scene, as shown in Figure 13, can create a focal point to intensify the climax of a narrative. But it's the manipulation of shapes that truly intrigues and piques the curiosity of the audience. By altering the figures, a scene or an item within it can stand out, increasing the emphasis on the climax of a story.

Figure 15 – Balance and weight help to increase the scene's impact.

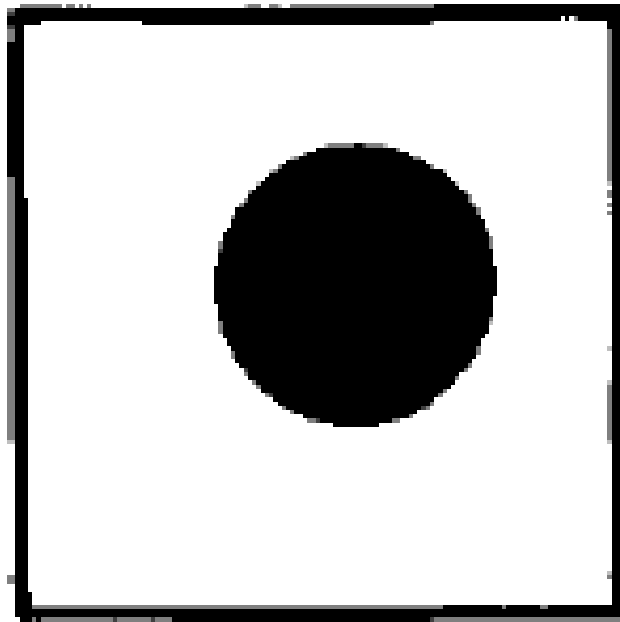


Source: Slam Dunk - Inoue (1995)

In Figure 14, the focal point occurs due to the difference in intensity and direction of the lines, but it ends up being exalted by the decentralization. When we displace a unit of the figure from the center, a force makes the image unstable, as if our mind were trying to rearrange the elements. We can observe this effect in Figure 15, which shows a circle that is displaced from the center, and even without the use of measuring tools, it is evident.

In addition, an invisible force attracts it to the center, which goes beyond the logic generated by our mind. (ARNHEIM, 1960). Another item that has significant importance in comics is the characters. As mentioned in the introduction, the characters help the author in the narrative so that the reader identifies with and begins to experience the story.

Figure 16 – Balance and weight.



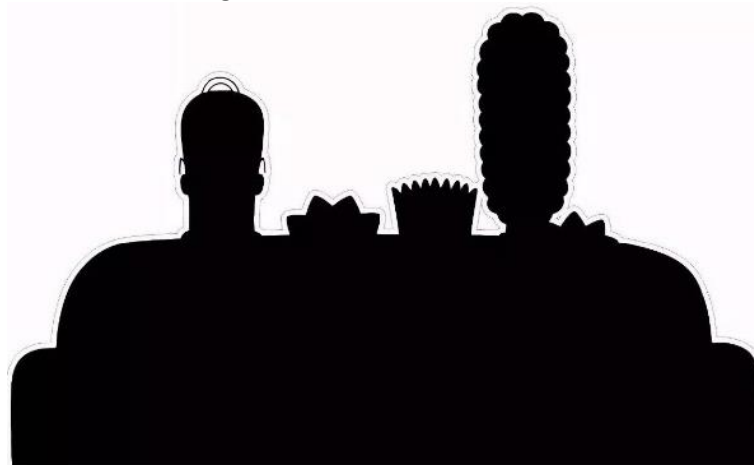
Source: Arnheim (1960)

Of course, the characteristics of the character may vary according to the author's style, but in general, creating more straightforward characters improves reader identification. Moreover, the same occurs in the opposite situation, where the more detailed and confusing the character's characteristics are, the greater the generation of "unfamiliarity." (MCCLLOUD, 1995)

According to Gestalt concepts, the excess of irregular and disordered information in an image makes it confusing, creating a specific disharmony and discomfort.

Thus, a well-constructed shape for the character allows it to be recognized even when only its silhouette is displayed.

Figure 17 – Distinct silhouettes.



Source: Elo7 (2023)

This shape can sometimes gain a specific value that can be recognized even in

simpler figures, becoming a symbol.

Figura 18 – Quando a forma se transforma em símbolo.



Fonte: McCloud (1995)

3. MÉTODO

We carried out bibliographical research based mainly on books by classic authors that deal with the theme of Comics and scientific articles that portray the theme with approaches in the direction of this research to achieve the objective proposed by this research; other sources used were master's dissertations, doctoral theses, and design and color psychology references. We use a qualitative approach to research because the treatment of the theme is based on arguments, beliefs, values, attitudes, aspirations, meanings, and motivations. Regarding the objectives, it is exploratory research because its purpose is to explore the theme so that it becomes more familiar, more profound knowledge, and understanding so that it becomes more unambiguous and more explicit.

4. RESULTADOS E DISCUSSÃO

Comics have always aroused the general public's interest due to the involvement of the story with everyday life or even an allusion to the desire to have the reader's life projected onto the character. In this sense, figures or drawings with simple lines from earlier times, when computer graphics did not exist, aroused the reader's interest (GOMES FILHO, 2008).

Speech and communication about what the author wants to show mix with the drawing and the reader's imagination. This combination allows the story to come to life and project time in its narrative and in the representation given by the drawing, thus forming an expression of fact that can be unquestionable for the reader (PESSOA, 2016).

When a story is represented using simple lines and shapes, even if some frames have imperfect lines, the reader's imagination and involvement with the story, as well as the fact that he or she can project himself or herself with the character

into that environment represented by the comics, make the story always present and current, as happens in the comics of "The Adventures of Tintin" (MACCLOUD, 1995).

In addition to this, experimental psychology, silhouette (pregnancy of shapes), and colors are added. Experimental psychology was developed by the Gestalt school, which formulated theories to understand how certain forms are interpreted by our minds and the influence they have on the interpretation of the story (GOMES FILHO, 2008).

Regarding the importance of forms, the reader wants clarity, balance, and visual harmony in the comic strip's image since it is part of human nature to have a certain logic in the projection of images (SOUZA, 2011). Therefore, a silhouette can represent a real figure, or the imagination can project what is desired within the proposal at that moment for the comic strip.

Other vital aspects that bring life to comics are the representation of space and time, which are relevant because they allow us to give a sequence to the story represented. At the same time, we can control the narrative by constructing each message within a space of time according to the event narrated by the author. Color also plays a vital role in giving more life to the comic strip and allowing the reader to immerse themselves in the story by complementing it with their imagination (OLIVEIRA, 2008).

Comics show their importance in representing reality, whether based on fact or not, helping the reader project themselves into the character's life using their imagination and transmitting messages of motivation, joy, happiness, and satisfaction with the character's life and their own life.

5. CONCLUSÃO

Although comics are often portrayed as children's literature in Brazil and other parts of the world, they are artistic works as complex as any other type of expression.

Much more than drawing skills are required for the artist to manipulate the environment within the comic strip and get the reader involved. The artist's creative process and natural skills make the drawing, which is the product, successfully represent the story he wants to communicate or some event he wants to convey to the public.

In principle, portraying a story through images makes it easier to illustrate the scene. However, as seen in this article, variations in shapes can often generate interpretations utterly different from what the artist intended without the correct knowledge. The portrayal of a character whose silhouette does not have the correct angle can generate confusion in the reader's mind, making it difficult to understand and even making the art "repugnant."

Gestalt principles are important tools widely used in various areas. Understanding how shapes are interpreted helps convey the meaning of images or objects, making them not only pleasant to view but also pleasant to use. This

is why Gestalt is an important tool for professionals in architecture, photography, design, illustrators, and comic artists.

The use of Gestalt Theory is just one tool for understanding how shapes can affect the observer. In addition to Gestalt, understanding the reader (target audience), their environment, and their cultures is essential to understanding their way of thinking and thus predicting their tastes.

The relationship between comics and Gestalt Theory is evident and profound. Applying "gestalt" principles in the creation of comics contributes significantly to readers' visual and narrative experience. By analyzing the principles of proximity, similarity, continuity, closure, and meaning, we can see how comics are a rich and complex art of expression that benefits from understanding these psychological principles. This article only addressed using the psychology of forms to help develop a story in comics and how understanding forms allows us to manipulate a narrative. However, it is still necessary to understand other arts, such as photography for better framing of the scene and theater for understanding expressions through the body so that we can understand how complex an excellent comic book is.

REFERENCES

ARNHEIM, Rudolf. **Arte e percepção visual: psicologia da visão criadora**. Reimpressão da 1ª. ed. São Paulo: Pioneira Thomson Learning, 1960-2005.

GOMES FILHO, João. **Gestalt do Objeto: Sistema de Leitura Visual da Forma**. 8. ed. São Paulo: Escrituras, 2008.

GOULARTE, Victor Martins. **Narrativa Gráfica: Análise sobre a Passagem do Tempo**. Orientador: José Aguiar. 2018. 20f. Monografia (Especialização) – Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná, Curitiba – Paraná, 2018.

MEIRELES, Selma Martins. Kafka Metamorfoseado em Quadrinhos. **Veredas – Revista de Estudos Linguísticos**, Juiz de Fora, Jan 2008
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A200117511/IFME?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=fccdbcd2>.

MCCLLOUD, Scott. **Desvendando os Quadrinhos**. São Paulo: MAKRON Books do Brasil, 1995.

MCCLLOUD, Scott. **Reinventando os Quadrinhos**. São Paulo: MAKRON Books do Brasil, 2000.

PESSOA, Alberto Ricardo. **A Linguagem dos Histórias em Quadrinhos**. João Pessoa: Editora da UFPB, 2016.

OLIVEIRA, Maria Cristina Xavier de. **A Arte dos "Quadrinhos" e o Literário**. Orientadora: Nelly Novaes Coelho. 2008. 207 f. Tese (Doutorado) - Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2008.

SOUZA, Audrey Setton Lopes de. O Desenho como Instrumento Diagnóstico: Reflexões a

partir da Psicanálise. **Boletim de Psicologia**, vol 61 no.135 São Paulo,2011
http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0006-59432011000200007.

VARGAS, Alexandre Linck. **A Invenção dos Quadrinhos: Teoria e Crítica da Sarjeta**.
Orientador: Luiz Felipe Guimarães Soares. 2015. 320 f. Tese (Doutorado) – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, 2015.