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## Editorial

This time last year a panel debating the use of comics as research methodology and to report research took place at the Lakes International Comic Art Festival in Kendal (LIKAF). The panel was suggested by Stuart Medley and Bruce Mutard from Edith Cowan University, Melbourne, Australia and they were joined by Erika Fülöp of Lancaster University, David Huxley and Joan Ormrod of *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. A main concern for the panel was in the effectiveness of the images produced for analysis. Bruce Mutard, a practitioner, raised the pertinent issue of who produces the images if you are not a practitioner? A point that suggests a close working relationship between writer and artist. A summary from each presenter, Stuart Medley, Bruce Mutard and Erika Fülöp, is published below. The reason for including this debate is because comics scholarship, comics and comics as a research method is becoming ever more popular. Comics can create an attractive, outward facing, opportunity to engage people outside of academia. As such, it represents funding opportunities for researchers. It is also used in education, as several papers in previous issues of this journal can attest. Three papers in this issue deal with these ideas and, with more comics research and comics production used across education, it is a useful time to share ideas and enrich our research and teaching communities.

Sarah McNichol's article, "Telling migrant women's life stories as comics," describes a research project using digital comics produced by women from the British Bangladeshi community in Greater Manchester. The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the comics produced detailed the women's experiences of migration and their consequent issues of belonging and identity.

The next two articles deal with comics as education tools and though the first, Susan Ogier and Kerenza Ghosh, "Exploring student teachers' capacity for creativity through the interdisciplinary use of comics in the primary classroom," applies to the UK it can be adapted for teaching purposes elsewhere. Ogier and Ghosh examine how comics can be used in primary teaching to enrich and create confidence in students when teaching the national curriculum in the UK. Saddam Issa's "Comics in the English Classroom: A Guide to Teaching Comics across English Studies," analyses the positive effects of using comic book production in colleges. The article also provides ideas for teaching, and assignment design.

The remaining five articles are concerned with translation from one culture or language to another. Returning to the importance of the artist and writer collaboration, in "Reading a Retelling: Mahabharata in the Graphic Novel Form" Varsha Jha (Singh) & Mini Chandran examine the theme of reconciling the image and word in the adaptation of the Hindu religious text, *Mahabharata*. They discuss how "'retelling' this work establishes 'showing' and 'telling' as inextricably enmeshed processes." In "Analysis of pictorial metaphors in comicbook art: Test of the LA-MOAD Theory" Igor Juricevic, discusses the ways comics deal with motion and this has implications for producing comic art in addition to its analysis.

“Synchrony issues in comics. Language transfer and gender-specific characterisation in English translations of Greek Aristophanic comics” by Dimitris Asimakoulas analyses the transfer of Aristophanes plays *Assembly of Women* and *Ladies’ Day* into comics form to show how adapting the plays into another language and medium effects characterisation. The final article by Robert Mana, “When the Phantom Became an Anticolonialist: Socialist Ideology, Swedish Exceptionalism, and the Embodiment of Foreign Policy” examines how a comicbook can be revised in its transfer from one culture to another. In this case, it is the Phantom’s transfer to Swedish culture from American culture shifts the ideological focus from colonial fantasy to a commentary on decolonisation that reflects Swedish politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

There are also book reviews by Whitney Porter on Jeffery A Brown’s, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* and Nicholas E. Miller’s *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*. We hope you enjoy this issue. Issue 9:5, edited by Anna Madill and Will Grady, is a special issue on *youi* to follow up 4:1, 2013.

### **Comics for Comics Scholarship: A Discursive Challenge**

#### **Stuart Medley**

Comics discourse in the academy has often come from literature departments. With the best intentions, this has sometimes limited the discussion to the elements one expects to find in literature. Dylan Horrocks observed, some time ago, such scholarship tends to ‘focus on such elements as plot, characterization, narrative structure, the use of language, and so on’ (Horrocks 2004). A move to comics for delineating comics scholarship would require a greater reliance on the image to show rather than the word to explain, than has been used before now, for most of us. One thing we might want to know more about is in what way pictures can be used more deliberately than we might have previously assumed.

There are many common instances of pictures being clear and precise (in instructional design), and in fact, pictures may be used to disambiguate words. The trick is for scholars to become more adroit at beholding and critically analysing pictures, and most importantly applying them deliberately in arguments. Gibson, Wharton, Forceville, Lakoff & Johnson, Lopes are all worth reading in this regard. My sense is that we don’t yet know what communication is possible through pictures alone because we haven’t rigorously tested the boundaries yet.

Interestingly one of the best experiments in communicating only with pictures come to us in comics. You’ll all be familiar with Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival*. Not only does this communicate clearly the emotion of the émigré experience, it speaks of the difficulty of communicating when you don’t have a shared spoken or written code, and the ease with which (some) pictures can cross language barriers.

One of the ways to be more clear about communicating deliberately with pictures is to regard pictures as having a job to do. Depending on the communication task at

hand one can imagine any image being presented through pictures of varying levels of fidelity. This level of fidelity impacts upon whether a picture is more suitable for identification of specific people, things and places or better to help the beholder categorise more broadly the classes of things depicted. Implicit in this modelling is a difference in definition between IMAGE and PICTURE.

An important way to do this was touched on in Scott McCloud (1993) but needs much more attention. That is, to place pictures on a realism continuum. This is crucial since each artist makes pictures in a different way to everyone else. This is the essence of style (where there is a choice in how to depict, style will become apparent, according to Martin Stacey). Not only does this help the scholar to discuss any particular comic's visual aesthetic, it may enable the scholar to think how to present the visual aspects of their own research. An artist's style may be more appropriate for certain stories than for others. The artist themselves may not be aware of this. What is appropriate is itself a rich field of discussion that can be approached through a lens such as visual rhetoric (Schneller and the Swiss Design Network in general are every strong on this). Knowledge of this may also be a key to a scholar working with an artist.

### **Bruce Mutard**

While producing comics scholarship in the form of comics is something to be encouraged, I want to explain some practicalities—not to pour cold water over it, but as challenges to meet. Firstly, I counsel scholars who 'can draw a bit' not to take on the task of making comics. It is not as simple as putting written words and pictures into frames in a grid on a page; find a comics maker to collaborate with and you'll get much better comics. Second, I would counsel that you bring your collaborator on the work very early so that he or she is invested in the idea from the start. They will help you adapt your words to pictures early on by providing ways to 'show' than 'tell'. Comics scholars are for the most part, logocentric and used to explaining everything with verbosity, which is not necessary with the presence of pictures, diagrams and charts.

Creating pictures for comics can be very time-consuming work. Each maker has accumulated an extensive corpus of tacit knowledge otherwise known as a 'style'. Their methodology will allow them to make a page of comics in a few hours to as long as several days; some makers can do several 'styles'. But think on this: an eight page article could take a maker three days (for a fast one) to 24 days work. A book chapter of 20 pages: nine-ten days work to upwards of 60 days. Multiply that by *fair pay* at about \$50/£25 per hour and you are talking serious money: \$4000 - \$24000. A book length project... something like a senior academics annual salary. Remember, you are paying for a highly trained skillset that few people possess—it should be rewarded thus (even if it almost never is). Remember that these makers will most likely not be academics, hence the reward of publishing points and the like is of no use. You may need to look at research grants (within or outside academia) to

assist in payment. Better yet, see if your institution has an art faculty and if their visual arts, graphic-communication or animation departments could allow a student to gain credit for the project. Another option is to attend the comic festivals and cons and find an up and coming maker whose work you like, then offer them payment in 'exposure bucks', but only if there really will be such exposure. All new makers tend to say yes - as did I for a long time and still do. It's good practice in collaboration and we get to make comics!

### **Erika Fülöp, Lancaster University**

Beyond the practical challenges that practicing comics scholarship in the form of comics present, this method also invites us to think in a fundamentally different way about the relationship between the critical discourse and its object of study. Despite much creative experimentation, comics have remained a primarily narrative genre. Most existing comics scholarship is accordingly focused on two central questions: comics as a medium of storytelling and comics as a medium of creating or representing a world. These questions are discussed in a mode of academic discourse that is primarily argumentative. It may include visual illustrations and narrative elements, but the purpose, in line with academic discourse in general, remains to build an argument, rather than to tell a story – which is the case of comics, even when the story also serves the purpose of making a point. In this light, one major challenge that comics scholarship in the form of comics will be facing is adapting a visual language developed for a narrative discourse to primarily argumentative purposes, or inventing such a language. McCloud (1993) and Sousanis (2015) have made the first steps in theorizing comics in the form of comics, but especially the latter also shows that the switch from language to a combination of visual and linguistic expression is not just a question of form: it is an entirely different mode of theorizing and thinking that it involves. And it is not only the relationship between image and text that is at stake, but also the one between traditionally distinguished modes of discourse.

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