Visual Media Genre Analysis:

Comic Books and Graphic Novels - Print vs. Web

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Introduction

The Genre

The visual media genre I've chosen to analyze is comic books and graphic novels. This is an interesting genre because not only has the genre struggled to gain respect both as literature and as art, it wonderfully incorporates both to construct complex characters and storylines that have gained avid and loyal readers over the span of decades. As the digital environment known as the web emerged, authors and illustrators have had to adapt to this medium that seemed to hold countless possibilities.
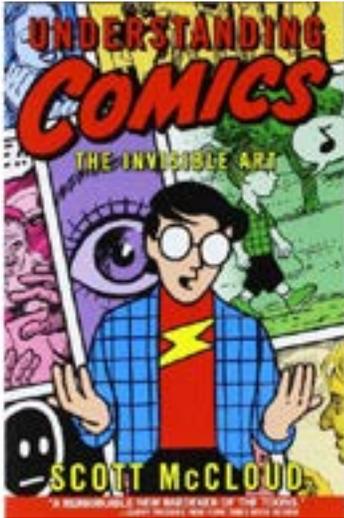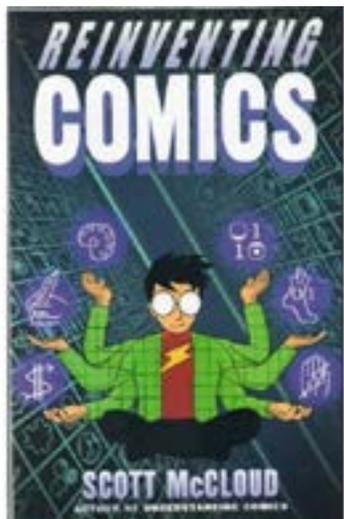

Figure 1.1: Understanding Comics

Methodology

Throughout this report, I reference comic theorist Scott McCloud, who has made remarkable discoveries regarding both print and web comic books and graphic novels as a visual media genre. After reading two of his books, Understanding Comics (1994) and Reinventing Comics (2000), I was able to choose categories that are unique to comic books and graphic novels in terms author/illustrator creative choice and reader interpretation and engagement. After applying such categories, I've identified several commonalities among all items in my genre inventory. Because the visual media genre analysis is meant to focus on web publications specifically, I've invested less time discussing print publications within each section.

For the close analysis of sample(s), I've chosen one print and one web comic book/graphic novel. The print comic book I've chosen has been considered controversial yet has successfully broken the boundaries of print literature in comic book/graphic novel form. The web graphic novel I've chosen serves as evidence of print illustrations adapting to new media in a successful manner, and has interesting implications on how this adaption affects reader interpretation and engagement.

Figure 1.2: Reinventing Comics

Key Findings

By using the categories outlined in my genre inventory, I was able to categorize all of the items I studied. Overall, panel-to-panel transitions (which type and how many) coincided with whether the publication was classified as fiction or non-fiction, and the medium used for delivery. For example, non-fiction print publications tended to use one transition, while fiction print publications tended to use multiple transitions.

Furthermore, the medium used for delivery (print vs. web) often determined the illustration style as well (realistic vs. iconic). For example, web publications tended to use more realistic illustrations, while print publications' illustration style depended on whether it was fiction or non-fiction. These key findings will be explained in further detail in subsequent sections.

Theorizing the Genre

Pre-print to Post-print: Remediation in Action

What is Remediation?

The evolution of the comic book and its adaptation from print to digital form can be analyzed through the theory of remediation. Bolter and Grusin explained remediation as "the representation of one medium in another medium," which they also argue is "a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). In the case of comic books and graphic novels adapting from pre-print, to print, to online viewing, remediation appears to be the process.

In his publication Understanding Media, Marshall McLuhan introduced the idea of "the medium is the message," meaning that "the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan, 1964). As the technology advanced, so did the art form of the comic book. This theory coincides with McCloud's view that the art form of the comic book undergoes a "durable mutation" and adapts to its environment.

Pre-print

Pre-print graphics can be described as those that were created and displayed on surfaces other than paper. Examples include pre-Columbian picture manuscripts in Mexico, the 230 foot-long "Bayeux Tapestry" in France, or a bas-relief sculpture rising up a stone column in ancient Greece (McCloud, 1994 & 2005).

Figure 2: Mexican Painting preserved in the Borgia Museum, at the College of Propaganda in Rome

Print

When the printing press was introduced and mass communication emerged, the art form adapted in an interesting way. The newer form of comic books and graphic novels present themselves in rectilinear panel arrangements, simple line drawings out of tone, and a left-to-right reading sequence (McCloud, 2005). Within 100 years, word balloons and captions are incorporated and the modern form of comic books begins to take shape. Figure 3 shows how Western readers navigate through printed pages, specifically comic books and graphic novels.
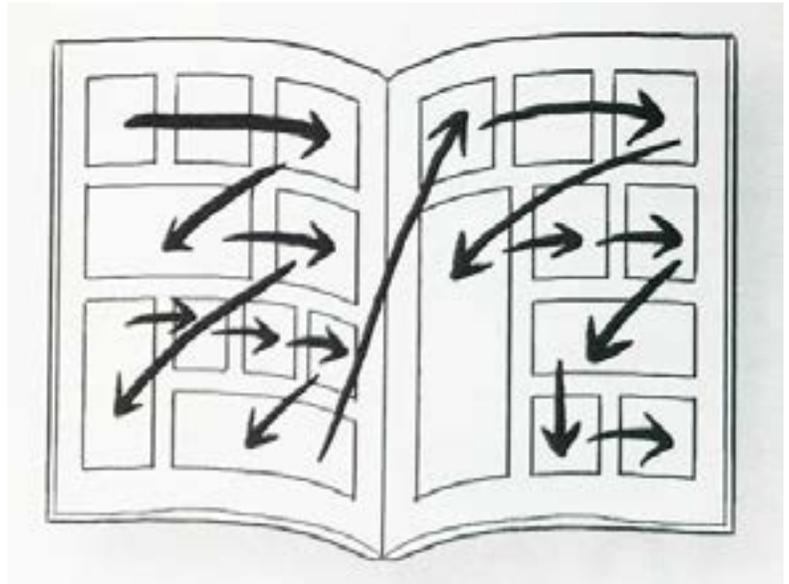

Figure 3: Sample from <u>Reinventing Comics</u> pg. 220

Post-print

As readers adapting from the paper to the computer screen, we tend to treat the computer screen in the same way that we treat the paper - as a page (McCloud, 2005). This notion explains why on-screen versions of comic books initially replicated the conventional version.

Figure 4: Scanned copy (cbr/cbz file) of *The Boys* issue #45

According to Bolter and Grusin, the adaptation of the comic book and graphic novel through the years represents remediation at one extreme, where "an older medium is highlighted and represented in digital form without apparent irony or critique" and that "the computer is offered as a new means of gaining access to these older materials, as if the content of the older media could simply be poured into the new one" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Figure 4 shows an example of this extreme, with a scanned version of *The Boys* issue #45, ready to view on the Amazon Kindle Fire mobile tablet.

What Scott McCloud proposes, however, is to look at the computer screen as a window or infinite canvas. It is with this method that comics undergo what he calls a "durable mutation," an art form that adapts to its environment. This adaptation leads to remediation attempted in a more dramatic manner. As Butler and Grosin explain, "it can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the presence of the older media and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Comic books and graphic novels designed specifically for online viewing serve as evidence for this claim. Such meant-for-web publications in this visual media genre refashion the older medium by adding sound, animation, and interactivity.

Genre Inventory

While developing my genre inventory, I aimed to logically categorize all items as they relate to comic books and graphic novels as a unique genre. With the help of Scott McCloud, I've chosen to focus on three categories to compare and contrast my selected inventory items: Panel-to-Panel Transitions, Realistic vs. Iconic Illustration, and Navigation and Interactivity.

Panel-to-Panel Transitions

In his book <u>Understanding Comics</u>, McCloud outlines six ways (See Figure 5) that artists construct illustrative transitions in comic books and graphic novels (1994). While developing the genre inventory for this visual media genre analysis, I've used these guidelines to compare and contrast both print and web versions of items that I've studied:

Very little action occurs between panels

A single subject completes an action between panels

Different subjects are presented between panels, while staying within a scene or idea

Readers are transported across significant distances of time and space between panels

Panels feature different aspects of a place, idea, or mood

No logical relationship between panels whatsoever

Figure 5: McCloud's six types of panel-to-panel transitions

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Print Publications: Non-Fiction vs. Fiction

Of the eight print comic books/graphic novels that I studied, five could be categorized as non-fiction – all of which used only one panel-to-panel transition technique. Two out of these five used "subject-to-subject" panel transition, another two used "action-to-action" panel transition, and the last used "scene-to-scene."

Figure 6.1: Subject-to-subject and aspect-to-aspect panel transitions in *The Avengers* Volume 1 Issue #4

Because scanned versions of existing print comic books and graphic novels are not altered in any other aspects besides the medium through which they are delivered (reading a paperback copy of a publication vs. reading a copy of the same publication on a mobile device/tablet), similar combinations of panel-to-panel transitions appear in these versions as well. The subject matter of the comic book or graphic novel appears to have some influence on how many transitions are used. For example, some issues of the drama series *The Walking Dead* use up to five transition types within one issue. Figure shows three transition types in the very first issue.

The other three print comic books/graphic novels I studied could be categorized as fiction, all of which use three types of panel-to-panel transitions – "action-to-action," "subject-to-subject," and "aspect-to-aspect." These three publications were all based on popular superheroes and are considered "mainstream" comic book series (Marvel's *The Avengers*, and DC's *The Justice League* and *The Justice Society of America*). Figure 6.1 shows two transition types in Marvel's *The Avengers* Volume 1 Issue #4.

Figure 6.2: Subject-to-subject, aspect-to-aspect, and aciton-to-action panel transitions in *The Walking Dead* Volume 1 Issue #1

Web Publications: Non-Fiction

Of the nine web comic books and graphic novels I studied, three of them could be categorized as non-fiction – all of which used at least two panel-to-panel transition types. The difference between these genre inventory items and the print publications were the subject matter –these web publications were not only intended to educate the reader, but also to retell a story.

For example, *The Nisoor Square Shootings in Baghdad* by Dan Archer is an interactive web comic that uses a map, timeline, and panels that pop up when the user hovers over a particular element located on the map (See Figure 7 for a screenshot example). The web comic uses several interactive features to visually explain a true event, which change depending the location on the timeline – therefore, using multiple transition types is an effective method to tell the story as it happened over a period of time.
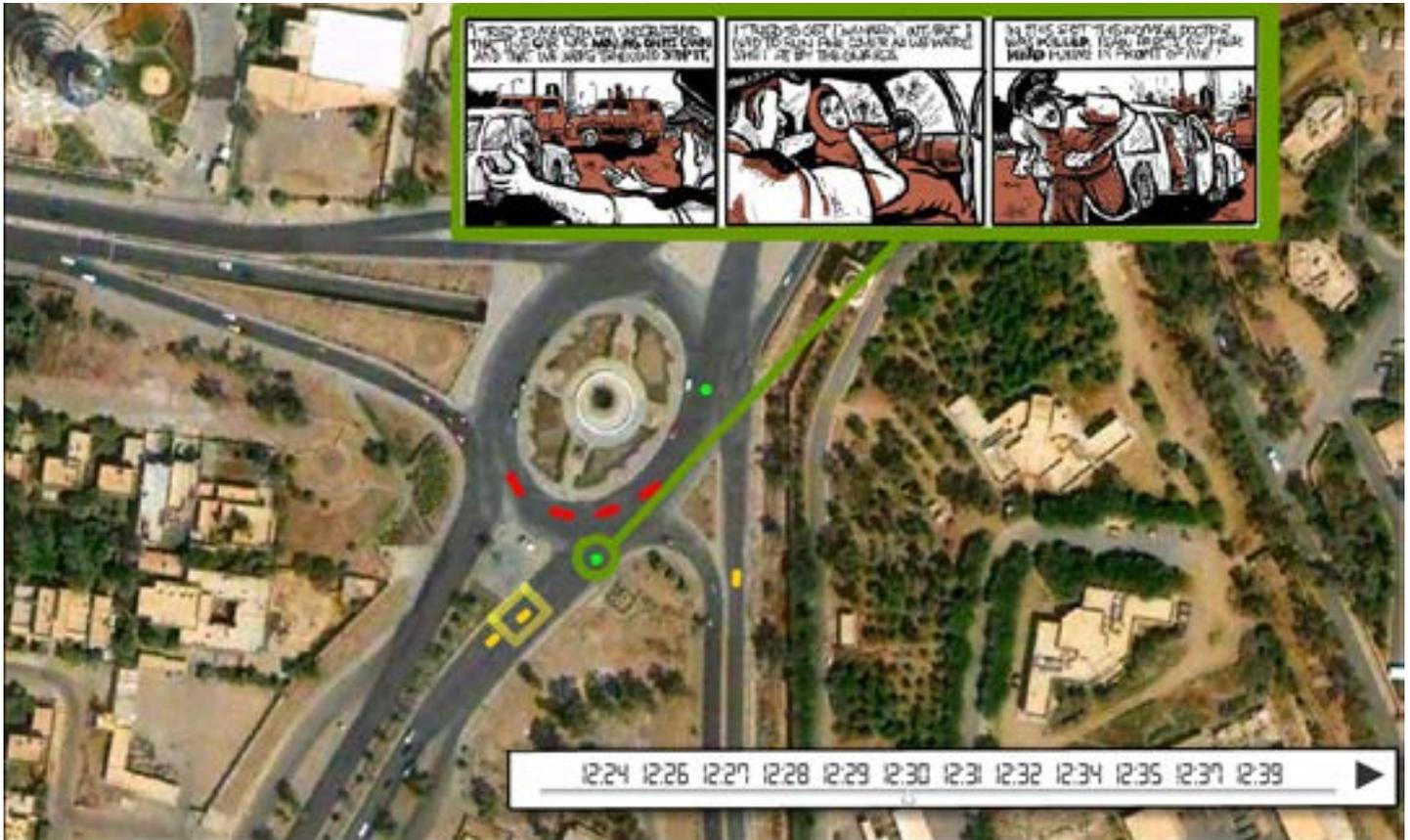

Figure 7: Screenshot example of a panel strip that displays while hovering over an element at a point in the timeline.

Web Publications: Fiction

The other six web comic books and graphic novels in my genre inventory could be categorized as fiction, all of which used at least three panel-to-panel transition types (two of the six used four). More specific trends can be found below:

- Six out of six publications used "action-to-action" transitions.
- Five out of six publications used "aspect-to-aspect" transitions.
- Five out of six publications used "subject-to-subject" transitions.
- Four out of six publications used "moment-to-moment" transitions.

The digital environment that is the web offers many possibilities when it comes to comic book and graphic novel creation and publication – especially when it comes to fiction-based stories. Using multiple types of panel-to-panel transitions allows artists to take advantage of the digital world while engaging readers who typically expect more from the web.

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Realistic vs. Iconic Illustration

The second category I've used to compare and contrast both print and web publications of this visual media genre is Realistic vs. Iconic Illustration. McCloud explains that images in comics and graphic novels can fall on any point along a spectrum of two extremes (1994), which can also be seen in Figure 8:

Realistic:
Images that most resemble their real-life counterparts (i.e. a photograph).

Iconic:
Images that abstract away from their real-life counterparts (i.e. a cartoon).
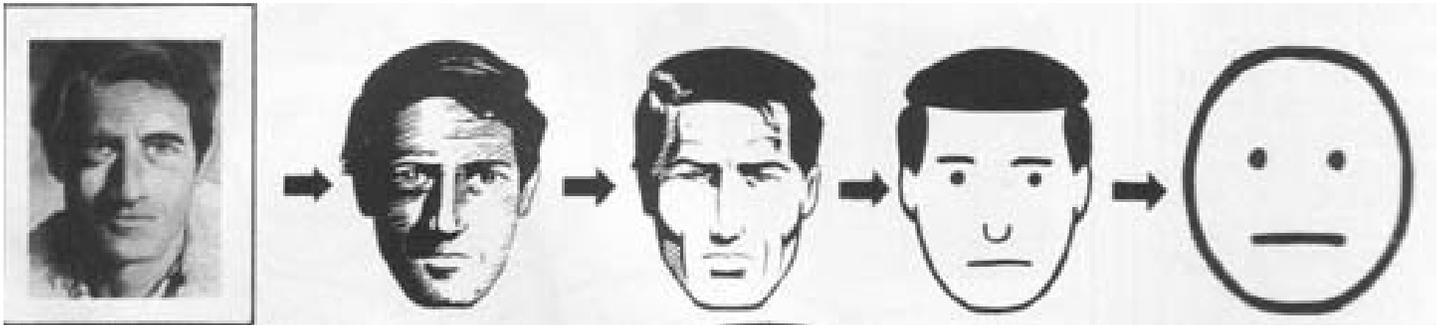
Figure 8: Sample image from Understanding Comics, pg. 29

Print Publications: Non-Fiction vs. Fiction

Of the five non-fiction print publications I studied, only one of them featured more realistic illustration, while the other four featured iconic illustration (See Figure 9 for an example of iconic illustration in print fiction). All three of the fiction print publications I studied featured more realistic illustration (See Figure 6.1 on page 5 under the "Panel-to-Panel Transition" section for an example of realistic illustration in a fiction publication). Also, since scanned versions of comic books and graphic novels don't add or remove any features from the paperback version, these publications use realistic illustration as well.

Figure 9: Sample panel from *The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA*

Web Publications: Non-Fiction

Figure 10.1: Sample from *Different Person, Differen Life* by Dan Archer and Ruth Tam

All three of the non-fiction web publications included in my genre inventory featured realistic illustration.

As stated previously, these examples were intended to retell an account of true events. Hence, it makes much sense that artists would render the characters in a realistic manner. By doing so, the readers are more likely to take the subject matter more seriously and adopt the mindset that the story is in fact real.

Figure 10.1 is an example of a non-fiction web publication that uses realistic illustration.

Web Publications: Fiction

The six fiction web publications included in my genre featured illustrations that fell on various points along the realistic-iconic spectrum. Specific details are listed below:

- Three out of six publications used realistic illustration.
- Two out of six publications used illustration that fell in the middle of the spectrum.
- One out of six publications used iconic illustration.

Two of the three publications that used realistic illustration were actually comic book/graphic novel versions of existing television shows. One might conclude that these publications had to more closely resemble their small-screen counterparts, and as a result, were rendered to appear more realistic in order for fans and/or readers to easily recognize the franchise.

The two publications that used illustration that fell in the middle of the realistic-iconic spectrum appeared to reflect the subject matter and writing style. While the two publications appear to have different subject matters, neither are obviously categorized as "more serious" or "more tame." By using middle-of-the-spectrum illustration, the artists are able to create a publication that coincides with the topic and message of the text.

Figure 10.2 shows an example of "middle-of-the-spectrum" illustration

Figure 10.2: Sample panel from web publication *Sarah Zero*

Take-Aways from Transitions and Illustration	Print	Web
Non-Fiction	• Typically use **one transition** type • Typically use **iconic** illustration	• Typically use **one transition** type • Typically use **realistic** illustration
Fiction	• Typically use **multiple transition** types simultaneously • Typically use **realistic** illustration	• Typically use **multiple transition** types simultaneously • Typically use **realistic** illustration (some use iconic or "middle-of-the-spectrum" illustration)

Navigation and Interactivity

Print versions of comic books and graphic novels don't offer much in terms of navigation and interactivity. While it is up to the reader to correctly navigate from panel to panel in the intended order, it is not much different than regular literature – the reader typically learns to follow the page from left to right and top to bottom. On the web, however, comic books and graphic novels don't always follow this convention.

Attempts: Computer Screen as a Page

Three of the web publications in my genre inventory maintained the same form as print publications – it appeared as if the artists simply took a page out of the comic book/graphic novel and pasted it onto the computer screen. The story is developed in a way that requires the reader to follow the panels from left to right and top to bottom, just like on print. However, one of these publications, *Burn Notice* on USANetwork.com, does feature "life-like" page-turning as well as interactive components on multiple panels (marked by orange icons). Figure 11.1 shows a sample page from *Burn Notice*, with instructions for the reader to take note of the interactive features. Nevertheless, the presentation of the comic book/graphic novel in web form still replicates print versions.

Figure 11.1: Sample from *Burn Notice* online graphic novel on USANetwork.com

Innovations: Computer Screen as a Window

In his TED talk (2005) and also his book Reinventing Comics (2000), Scott McCloud proposed the idea of utilizing the computer screen as an "infinite canvas" when it comes to displaying web comic books and graphic novels (Figure 11.2 illustrates what McCloud had envisioned). While multiple web publications in my genre inventory make that proposal come to life in various ways, two examples are the closest representations of what McCloud had discussed.
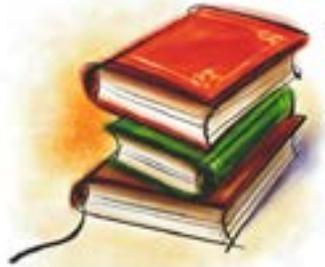

Figure 11.2: Sample from Reinventing Comics pg. 222

One example is *The Wormworld Saga* by Daniel Lieske, which displays each chapter on one entire webpage. Readers scroll down the page to progress through the chapter until they reach the bottom of the page. A similar example is *The First Word* by Patrick Farley, which also displays the story on one entire webpage, except readers scroll from left to right to progress through the narrative until they reach the end. This form of display represents McCloud's idea of the "infinite canvas" because there are no pages that separate groups of panels – the entire chapter/story exists on one page, and users control what parts of the are displayed at any given point.

Consequences for Participants

While the emergence of the web allowed comic books and graphic novels to take on a new form of display and delivery, those involved – namely the creators and the readers – were forced to adapt as well. New mediums require participants to learn new skills and technologies to successfully assimilate to the genre:

Necessary Skills, Knowledge, and Technology	Print	Web
Production	• Storytelling • Creativity • Research • Illustration	• Storytelling • Creativity • Research • Digital Illustration (Photoshop, Illustrator) • Computer and Scanner • Internet Access • Coding languages for display and interactivity (HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP)
Consumption	• Abilitiy to Read • Money to Purchase OR Library Membership	• Ability to Read • Money to Purchase OR Library Membership • Computer or Mobile Device • Internet Access

Close Analysis of Samples

Print – *Maus I:A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman

Shortcomings – The Print Medium

One of the main difficulties that print comic books and graphic novels face is the medium in which it is delivered – paper. Artists and illustrators attempt to appeal to all five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and speech – through ink on paper. If the reader sees a blurred background behind a car on the road, he or she can interpret that the car is moving within that scene. While artists have certainly found ways such as these to overcome the challenges of the print medium, static images limit the reader's engagement potential.

Shortcomings – The Stereotype

As mentioned earlier, comic books and graphic novels have struggled to gain respect both as literature and art. Typically, publications within this genre are classified as fiction – the stories, characters, and actions are created within the author's mind, and many of the characters' capabilities are impossible (i.e. superpowers). Certainly, there is nothing necessarily negative about this approach – many artists, publishers, and franchises have become very successful and gained a rather large fan base by entertaining readers.

Little opportunity exists for authors and artists to stand out, and there is little that can be attempted, let alone accomplished. That is, until Art Spiegelman released *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. It is for this reason that I have chosen to study this publication further.
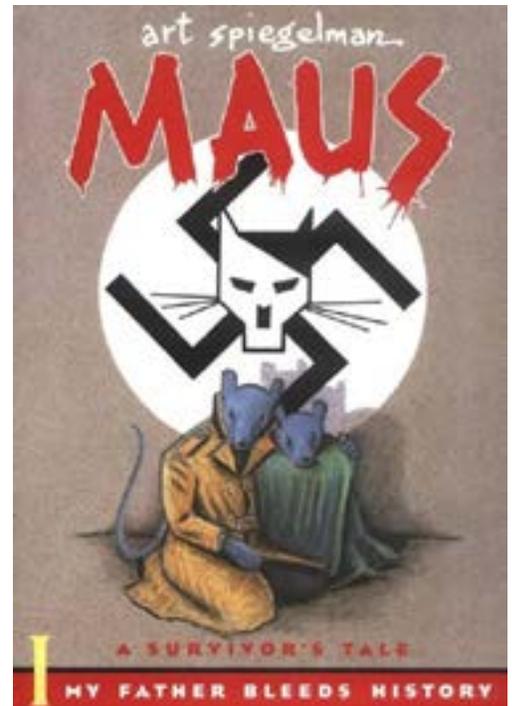
Figure 12: *Maus*

Shortcomings – Closure and Transitions

In Understanding Comics, McCloud discusses the idea of "closure," which he defines as the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (1994). The blank spaces in between panels contain no illustration or text – yet as readers, even though we can't see anything happening in between the panels, we know that something is still going on within the story that continues onto the next panel. Figure 13 illustrates this idea.

Figure 12: Sample from Understanding Comics pg. 92

In the Genre Inventory, I introduced six panel-to-panel transitions that take place within comic books and graphic novels. The panel-to-panel transitions that authors and illustrators have a direct effect on the type of closure that the reader is required to develop w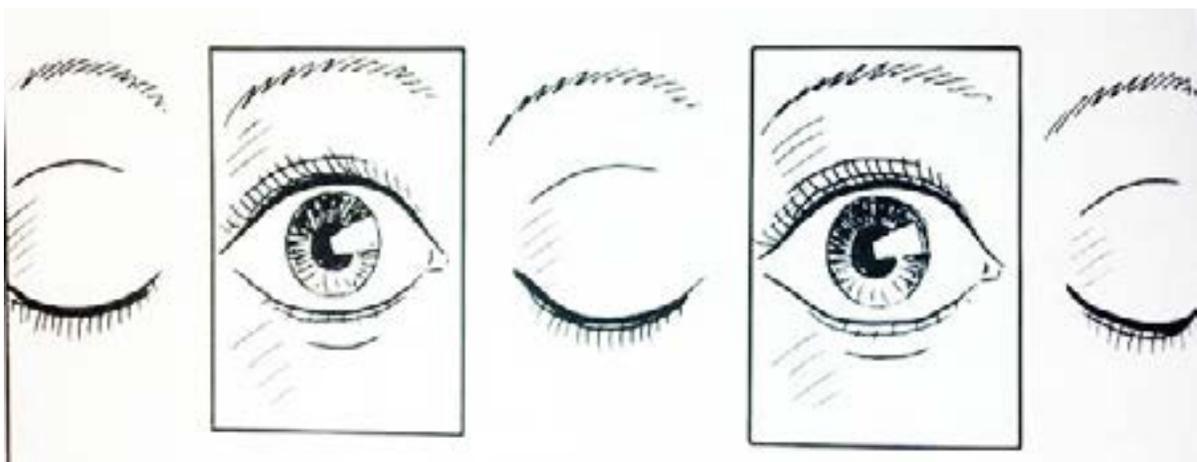ithin his or her mind. *Maus* uses multiple types of panel-to-panel transitions, however two types are used most frequently: "scene-to-scene" and "action-to-action." Given the "flashback" nature of the story, "scene-to-scene" transitions make much sense, and allow the reader to further understand when the story progresses back and forth between the past and the present.

"Action-to-action" transitions, on the other hand, require very little closure – the reader does not have to imagine too deeply as to what is happening in between panels. This choice could be considered a shortcoming because the reader is not as engaged as he or she could be – the story's progression moves rather slowly due to little closure required, which can become tedious if the reader is not particularly interested in the subject matter. Figure 13 shows use of "action-to-action" panel transitions in *Maus*.

Figure 13: Sample from *Maus* pg. 159

Shortcomings – Iconic Illustration and Criticism

Another shortcoming of Maus is the iconic illustration style – more specifically, the portrayal of different races and nationalities as different kinds of animals. Some may see this technique as a unique way of portraying the characters and storyline – yet this method was criticized as well. Some feel that the cartoon-like illustration and animal characters contradicts the serious nature of the storyline. Further criticisms regarding this technique are listed below:

- Hillel Halkin objected that the animal metaphor was "doubly dehumanizing" and reinforced Nazi beliefs (Hatfield, 2005).
- Harvey Pekar saw Spiegelman's use of animals as potentially reinforcing stereotypes (Pekar, 1986).
- Peter Obst and Lawrence Weschler concern over Poles' depiction as pigs (Jewish culture views pigs and pork as non-kosher) (Obst).
- Walter Ben Michaels found Spiegelman's racial divisions "counterfactual" (Americans, no matter what race, were portrayed as dogs, which seems to ignore the racial inequality occurring in the U.S.) (Loman, 2010).

Undoubtedly, when a serious topic is presented through an unconventional medium such as comic books and graphic novels, especially when it uses a unique illustration style such as the one discussed, it is bound be criticized and harshly received. Nevertheless, Spiegelman's work has become very popular and has gained recognition as a book that rises above the genre to become something completely unique and difficult to replicate.

Unique Offerings – Breaking the Mold

Maus is unique as a print comic book/graphic novel in the sense that it is not merely created from the top of Spiegelman's mind. The story is based on very true events revolving around Spiegelman's father's experience as a Jewish man during Adolf Hitler's reign in Germany and the Holocaust. With the exception of educational comic books and graphic novels, very few publications can be classified as fiction. *Maus* is unique in that it falls into multiple categories: memoir, biography, autobiography, history, and fiction.

Even though the story is based on a survivor's experience of historical events, many ideas are prevalent throughout the work as well. As Spiegelman attempts to learn more about his father's past, the reader gets the sense that the Holocaust continues to affect all aspects of the father's life, and is never far from his mind. While this is understandably the case in the lives of most, if not all Holocaust survivors, historical fiction does not necessarily allow the author to express such character development in this manner. Not only does the reader learn about one person's experience during such events, but he or she also learns about the life-long emotional effects these experiences have on the survivor. Figure 14 shows an example from the story.

Figure 14: Sample from *Maus* pg. 6

Unique Offerings – Accolades Earned

Not only does *Maus* break the mold of the print comic book/graphic novel genre in terms of classification and character development, but also in terms of professional recognition. The publication and its sequel, *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, has been nominated for many awards internationally and won most of them (Brown, 1988; Colbert, 1992; Eisner, 2012; Pulitzer, 2012; Tout, 1998):

Awards:
* 1998: Angoulême International Comics Festival Awards – Religious Award: Christian Testimony & Prize for Best Comic Book: Foreign Comic Award (*Maus: un survivant reconte*)
* 1988: Urhunden Prize – Foreign Album (*Maus*)
* 1990: Max & Moritz Prizes – Special Prize (*Maus*)
* 1992: Pulitzer Prize – Special Awards and Citations – Letters (*Maus*)
* 1992: Eisner Award – Best Graphic Album: Reprint (*Maus II*)
* 1992: Harvey Award – Best Graphic Album of Previously Published Work (*Maus II*)
* 1993 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction (*Maus II: A Survivor's Tale*)
* 1993: Angoulême International Comics Festival Awards – Prize for Best Comic Book: Foreign Comic (*Maus: un survivant raconte, part II*)
* 1993: Urhunden Prize – Foreign Album (*Maus II*)

Nominations:
* 1986: National Book Critics Circle Award
* 1992: National Book Critics Circle Award

The publication's track record is nothing short of impressive, and certainly deserves the recognition it has received. As far as print comic books and graphic novels are concerned, *Maus* has indeed successfully broken the negative stigma that similar publications within the genre have striven to overcome, and has opened many doors for other publications to follow.

Web – *The Prisoner* on amctv.com

Shortcomings – Limiting the Window

As mentioned earlier, Scott McCloud discussed the idea of viewing the computer screen as a "window" instead of a page. Early adaptations of web comic books and graphic novels failed to accomplish this, but eventually publishers began to discover the possibilities of the digital environment. One of the more interesting examples in my Genre Inventory is *The Prisoner* developed by palm prē and found on amctv.com.

The story is presented through a rectangular box on the webpage, and the reader clicks on "Next" or "Prev" to navigate through the story. By doing so, the reader will see the window view change as a new panel comes into view via a sort of "slideshow" transition. Because the reader is not required to scroll up or down to progress through the story, one may view the computer-screen-as a-window attempt to fall short.

Surely the form through which the web comic book/graphic novel is offered incorporates functions that one would expect in the digital environment – however, the "window" allows the reader to view only one part of the story at a time (See Figure 15 for an example). The reader cannot view all the panels at once, like they can with print comics. They are required to remember what happened in the previous panels –if they wish to look at it again they have to go back to the previous panel, and cannot view multiple panels simultaneously. While the reader can certainly adapt to this new form, frustration and confusion is bound to occur in the process.

Figure 15: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter One pg. 6

Shortcomings – Less Participation Required

With print comic books and graphic novels, there exists a particular set of layouts that artists and illustrators adhere to, and readers have learned a specific "protocol" to follow when navigating through a path of panels (See Figure 3 on page 3 under the "Print" section for an illustation of this protocol). The reader must follow this path correctly in order to read the story as it was intended. When those panels are transformed for the digital world, however, that protocol no longer applies.

In *The Prisoner*, the "work" is done for the reader. He or she is not required to learn the correct path from panel to panel, but rather the reader is taken to the next panel when he or she clicks on the "Next" button. This could be viewed as a shortcoming because it has a significant impact on reader engagement and interpretation – less "participation" is required to complete the story because less imagination is needed for closure in between panels. The reader is not required to read proactively, but rather acts as a passive participant.

Shortcomings – Instant Gratification Expected

Long-time comic book/graphic novel readers and fans have grown accustomed to reading on print. Print is fast and easily accessible – once the reader opens the page, the text and illustration is already there, ready to be absorbed. This is not the case when reading web comic books and graphic novels.

Readers who approach *The Prisoner* as a web comic book or graphic novel may encounter difficulties that are common for web users. For example, upon first opening the link, the reader must wait for the content to load. Depending on his or her computer's efficiency and internet speed, this can take several minutes (See Figure 16 for an example of what the reader sees on the screen just before the content is loaded). The instant gratification that was once granted by print and in some cases in the digital environment is now compromised due to the nature of the publication's presentation on the web. The reader must practice patience to enjoy the content.

Figure 16: Sample from *The Prisoner* loading status

Unique Offerings – Successful Convergence

Even though *The Prisoner* has encountered several challenges while adapting to the digital world, the artists have still accomplished success in the process. Bolter & Grusin and McLuhan call this process remediation, while McCloud calls it durable mutation. A term often used for this specific type of adaptation is "convergence," which is the "migration of traditional media to digital technology" (McCloud, 2000).

The Prisoner is a great example of a web publication fully utilizing what the digital world has to offer. Not only does the realistic illustration catch the reader's eye on the screen, but the comic book/graphic novel almost fully retains its classic 2D form even in the new medium. What makes this adaptation so successful is the publication's use of animation.

Unique Offerings – Animation

At first glance, someone reading *The Prisoner* online will likely recognize the publication as a web comic book or graphic novel because of the realistic illustration. As they progress through each individual panel, however, he or she will notice the unique animation style of the publication. Multiple elements of the web comic book/ graphic novel are presented as 2D "layers" that play a huge part in the animated sequence.

As each new panel is presented, the point of view "zooms out" while the layered elements move towards their destination within the panel. The same even holds true for the text or "word bubbles." Because this particular form of web comic books and graphic novels do not allow the reader to choose the correct path to follow, the animation guides the reader to the elements that were intended to be focused on at that particular moment. Figure 15 on page 15 under the "Shortcomings - Limiting the Window" section contains three layers on top of the background: the character in the street (behind the taxi), the taxi, and the additional panel with a close-up of the character.

This animation has an even more interesting effect for the text. The "word bubbles" do not appear until they are intended to –hence, the reader cannot read them until they appear. Since they appear in sequence, the reader does not have to guess which text to read first or in what order – the animation will show them. Whereas it is up to the reader to decide which text to read first in print comic books and graphic novels, the web form's use of animation guides his or her reading and progression through the story. Such animation keeps the reader curious as to what elements and text will be presented and how they will be presented, regardless of whether or not he or she expects it. Figures 17.1 through 17.8 show screen shots of an animated sequence that occurs within one panel - images and word bubbles emerge one after another.

Figure 17.1: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.2: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.3: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.4: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.5: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.6: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.7: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Figure 17.8: Sample from *The Prisoner* Chapter Four pg. 6

Conclusion

Comic books and graphic novels, as a visual media genre, are remarkable subjects of study. With the help of Scott McCloud, Bolter & Grusin, and McLuhan, it is easy to see how the digital environment has had a significant effect on the creation and presentation of what was initially created on print. The subject matter not only determines what authors and illustrators create, but also how they will create it. By closely examining one or two samples within this genre, unique elements are discovered and can be connected to other items within the genre. After analyzing a large set of examples, and applying theories to this analysis, I don't think I will ever look at comic books or graphic novels the same way again – and I have become a better reader for it.

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