Research Thesis

The Relevance of the Graphic Novel as a Form of Visual Communication

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**Declarations**
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Please note: This dissertation consists of more than one document. As well as this written theoretical discourse, a practical project was undertaken during the course of study. The product of this creative process – a graphic novel titled *Tsuruhane* – is included as the first item in the Appendix. In order to gain a proper understanding of the progression of my study, as well as capturing the correlation between the two individual components, *Tsuruhane* should be read either prior to, or during, the reading of Chapter 5 (p. 174-244) of this thesis. Other related material can be found in the Appendix; this can be read when prompted to by the text.
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Abstract

The graphic novel is a medium which tells a story. Through the use of two main structural components - imagery and text - a sustained narrative is conveyed to the reader. The graphic novel format relies on this interaction between its textual and pictorial elements; these two components are integrated, forming a unified visual language. Just as style and content can vary widely from one graphic novel to another, there are also innumerable different ways in which text and imagery can be combined. Some graphic novels depend predominantly on text or prose, with only a few illustrations in between paragraphs. Others give imagery key responsibility, relegating text to captions or speech bubbles. As these ratios between text and image change, the graphic novel’s structural composition alters drastically, and the way in which meaning is conveyed to the audience follows suit.

The purpose of this study is to examine the different ways in which text and imagery can be combined. In the context of a graphic novel, this combination must serve the purpose of telling a story, and as such, I will examine the correlation between design fundamentals, visual structure, literary techniques, and narrative content. In order to achieve this aim, the available literature pertaining to the topic will be thoroughly researched; historical and cultural contexts of the graphic novel will be explored; various graphic novels will be critically analysed through the use of case studies; and a graphic novel, authored by myself, will be produced during the course of a practice based enquiry.

As an outcome of having undertaken this study, I wish to better facilitate my ability to use visual communication for storytelling purposes. By performing both an exposition on the format’s history and a critical analysis of the medium’s current examples, I aim to better inform myself (and this dissertation’s reader) as to the specific features which make the graphic novel such an advantageous means of presenting narratives to an audience. In doing so, I will go some way towards uncovering the graphic novel’s full potential, determining what it has to offer the both author who creates it and the audience who reads it, by filling both of these roles myself. I will use the discoveries I make to augment my theoretical understanding of my topic, as well as improving my practical capabilities as a visual communicator.