

Question chosen:

Question 1: From MESSAGE, MEDIUM, CONTEXT research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relates to your practise or interests, and construct a 2,500 word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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Course title: BA Illustration

Word count: 2,708 words

Lecturer name : Gwenllian Beynon

Graphic novels,an indepth look at the practise

/Introduction...

The theme that I've chosen for this essay is Graphic Novel as it relates to my field of practice. This is a great area in the art world to research further. Following this I will talk about two artists Jamie Hewlett and Naoko Takeuchi. Following this I will discuss how my chosen artists link between my theme and how they have changed the way I've been creating my art work which will end with my final thoughts on the whole topic. Key theorists will also be included followed by research to back up their own thoughts about the topics that are linked within the theme of graphic novels. The main key theorists that I will be talking about in this certain section of my essay will be Will Eisner and E.M Forester. These two theorists will back up my own thoughts in the conclusion of my essay including the artists Naoko Takeuchi and Jamie Hewlett. I then shall finish the essay by writing a few quotes if it is relevant to my theme in any way. All in text references will be implemented into my research as well where it is relevant to do so. Alongside this I will include some images to support my research which will give an insight to the different styles of graphic novels there are and how they could be compared with each other within their own art practise. I will then finish the essay off with a conclusion about what I've learnt whilst doing my research and how it has changed my perspective on the theme of graphic novels. Furthermore I will go over small areas of research that stood out to me and I will link them together to recap on the more interesting areas of my research that I've done.

Graphic Novels: what's the history behind my theme?

The whole area of Graphic Novels has a long history to it such as how the Egyptians created hieroglyphics to communicate with others and how Roy Lichtenstein used the comic book art style as influence to create his own art work. As far as we know people have been telling stories through illustration for a very long time. The exact definition of 'Graphic Novel' and the origins are up for discussion as some areas of history of when exactly when 'Graphic Novels/illustrations' haven't been documented the best (Unknown, *History of graphic novels*, 2012). An interesting area to look for something similar to graphic novels are in the

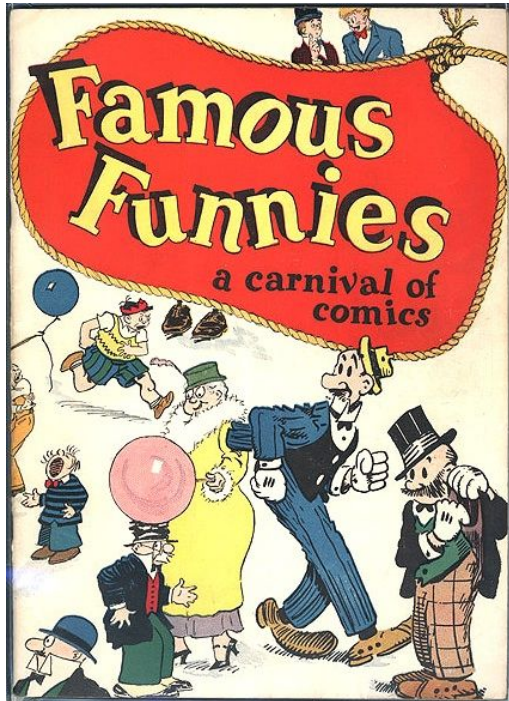
period of the Ancient Egyptians and other civilisations that used hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics were illustrations that were used to communicate with each other and to record certain events or managements (Unknown, *History of graphic novels*, 2012). The purpose of these drawings were to allow working class and popularites to send and receive the messages without knowing the language.



Example of Ancient Egypt hieroglyphics

As technology started to develop, mass machines were able to mass produce everything in such a short period of time and this gave people more free time to get on with their lives more rapidly (Unknown, *History of graphic novels*, 2012). As more people started to read the small comic strips newspapers started to sell a lot more copies. Max Gaines in 1934 started to arrange making little full-colour magazines which only contained newspaper comic strips and it was sold in droves. This was the first claim to fame of the name comic books as they became more famous they earned the right of the famous title and because of this popularity there wasn't enough comic strips. The longer version of this comic strip was only seven pages long and these were built into the original version of the comic strip book.

Famous funnies by Max Gaines (1933)



Then in 1937, the comic book stepped out from just including small comic strips to having full on comic books by the creation of *Superman* (*Superman*(1938), Jerry Siegel and Joe Shusterimage).

Superman brought the comic book genre out of its first breakout of just the comic strips and into its first character driven plot that wasn't seen anywhere else before which still has an effect on culture still to this very day(Unknown,*History of graphic novels*,2012) .In the 1970's the term 'Graphic Novel' started to pop up in American comic book circles. Comic book historians argued a lot to determine what was the first Graphic Novel that all historians could agree on what was the first of its kind. *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* which was created by Will Eisner (1978) and he had been working on the comic book style for over four decades and this is debated as being the first Graphic Novel with its title. Graphic Novels were always the next-hit item but were never current on the minds of people. It also had a slow growth and when The New York Times featured the Graphic Novel in their newspaper and it finally made it to the top (*The New York times*(1978) Since then many publishers started putting out more graphic novels that include movie adaption and novel adaptations.

Then as the 21st century came along there were very noticeable changes and this is where manga and Japanese comics came along(Unknown,*History of graphic novels*,2012).The origins of the art style Manga started around the 12th and 13th century but it didn't begin to get more finalised in its art style and popular until the 21st century. The art style of Manga is mostly well known for having an over stylized cartoonish look to it with big eyes being its main feature. With this overstyled style artists had this meant that 'japanese artists' could

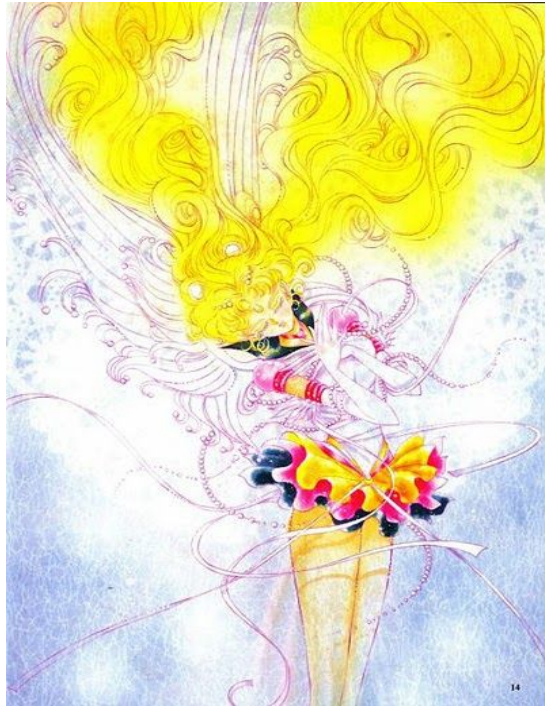
explore more with their art styles after world war happened. With the more creative freedom for artists the United States brought over their comics and cartoons to Japan which heavily influenced the style of Manga at the time(Unknown,*History of graphic novels*,2012). A famous stylistic innovator was Machiko Hasegawa, creator of Sazae-San. Both Osamu Tezuka and Machiko Hasegawa's innovative techniques paved the way for 'Shonen' (which is for Manga created for young boys) and 'Shojo' (which was created for young girls) and it is the most popular genre of manga still in the present day (Edward Diep,A brief history of japanese manga(2019). The style difference between traditional Graphic Novels and Manga has such a noticeable difference because graphic novels didn't have a lot of previous art styles to get inspiration from and that's why the style has somewhat stayed consistent with its style over these many years. But with the Manga artstyle having previous inspiration from America it was a lot easier for artists to adapt the artstyle to make it look more unique from the stereotypical comic book style art.

Why do graphic novels inspire me?

I find that the area of graphic novels have inspired me alot throughout my art career down to unique identity in its artstyle. It's less about the meaning of on particular artwork and more about creating an emotional story written with characters. With these character driven stories it has inspired many people such as myself to create my own character driven stories but a certain area in the graphic novel area inspired me the most and that was the popular style in graphic novels called manga. I got this first insight into this style of art when a friend recommended me to check a manga book out, since then it's inspired me to create artwork of my own to someday inspire any future artists that may be on the horizon. One of the very first artists to inspire me was the japanese Manga artist called Naoko Takeuchi. She is well known for creating a very popular manga called Sailor Moon during the 1990's and she has inspired many people with Sailor down to the main characters being all female. This was a new turn in the 90's due to it promoting female empowerment which was rather rare to see at the time. Naoko Taekeuchi is a well known artist in the world and she published her first comic while she was still a university student. It was awarded the Nakayoshi Shinjin Manga Award for best newcomer 1986. Early success spurred her onward and it was in 1991 that she created "*Codename: Sailor V*". This became a successful manga and it doubled itself as a prototype for "*Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*". Naoko became interested in animation and she worked closely with toei animation which turned Naoko's manga "Sailor Moon" into a full fledged anime tv series. Even though the Manga was aimed for more adult audiences, (Kris Kosaka,Naoko Takeuchi 'Sailor Moons' strong-willed guardian of girls manga,(2019)unfortunately the 90's anime was aimed at children to produce toys and to

make money.

Which annoys me because there's plenty of children's cartoons but I personally feel there's a lack of adult themed cartoons from around then and that's what I'm hoping to do with my own comic in the future to prove there is a market for female empowered adult cartoons.



Naoko Takeuchi's concept art
from *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*

Another artist that inspires me and that relates to the concept of Graphic Novels is Jamie Hewlett. Jamie is known for creating such works as "*Tank Girl*" and co creator of "Gorillaz" which ended up being the most successful virtual band ever. Jamie Hewlett's art style is rather different from Naoko's artstyle, for example Jamie's artwork is of a more cartoony style than Naoko's artwork which is strongly influenced by the Manga artstyle. Something interesting is that Jamie Hewlett was very inspired by anime as well such as Studio Ghibli and if you look close enough you can see how Japan influenced him in his art style alongside with some of his characters he has created (unknown, *Jamie Hewlett biography*(2017)).

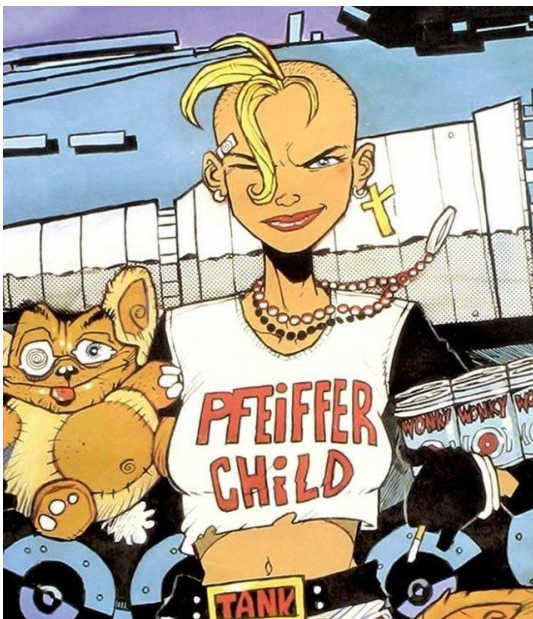


Illustration by Jamie Hewlett
from his comic book *Tank Girl*

Key Theorists in Graphic Novels

From 'comic book writer/artist' Will Eisner linked the first words of 'graphic novels' in the year of 1978. Eisner described the term 'graphic novel' for a number of 'comic books' he created under a single title, (Unknown, graphic novel(2020) which led to him a rather long publication of books. The unique way in which Eisner wrote his words failed to bribe any publishers even though Will offered his books to them first, either way the term of 'graphic novel' has finally been entered into the literacy genres of lexicon (unknown, *graphic novel*(2020). The English Oxford Dictionary does have a definition of the 'graphic novel term as 'a fully- lengthened science fiction and fantasy that is published as a full comic strip but in a format(OED). It is quite fairly known that Eisner created this term so he could distinguish his currently made work. For example any graphic novel books, any pop cultural artifacts which would have a long history of judgement or hate for less edited content used.

A noticeable attack on the comic book industry in America during the 1950's, this came to light because of Frederic Wertham's book called '*Seduction Of The Innocent*' that came out 1954.(Unknown,graphic novel(2020) Along this timeline the government started to take more of a closer look at what was going into the culture media at the time and what content comic books were selling. This was no surprise for Will as he was rather familiar with the criticism of comic books and it did not surprise him when he found out about this news of graphic novels being criticised. Eisner who was well known for being a master of art worked on his comic books until he passed away in 2005.

People mostly try to describe the meaning of graphic novels as in attributes that are current to the area of comic books. To demonstrate graphic novels are said to be lengthier and stronger than the traditional load of comic book structure(unknown, *graphic novel*(2020). It is also said that graphic novels can cost a lot more than comic books. Some critics do talk about if the term suggests that there is certain content Critics should debate to whether the term of anthology could be considered to be used. Could this term be used, or can it work to have an envision as it being published as graphic novels normally are. A very important definition of understanding the term of 'graphic novel' is for it not to be predicted on the issue of the amount,size,plot or how much it cost. An explanation of a graphic novel should at least consider linking the two words 'graphic' and 'novel' to describe that particular area of art.A definition of graphic novel should consider linking the words 'graphic' and 'novel' to describe this specific medium. Another area that should be considered that relates to the term graphic novel is the plot and the book. Inside the book '*Narrative and Graphic*

Storytelling, Will Eisner goes on to say “ *the story is the most critical component in a comic.. the intellectual frame on which all artwork rests*” (Will Eisner from 1996). Like most comics could have been thought of as having just three single panels for each cartoon strip; this would define the characteristics of a novel not being used to its full length but of how much realism might be left out and the length matter down to how it is told by the curator themselves (unknown, *graphic novel*(2020)). But E.M Forester argues that “*is its story-telling aspect*”. He explains the story is the backbone of the novel and the ticking clock that starts our thoughts racing , it's like the reader wants to know what happens next. Another interesting thing that is pointed out is that the time spent inside of a novel is wondrous time inside the novel is undeniable and this time grants us time to experience an essence of the realism of a novel. For example a comic book with a 300 pages does not make it more of a graphic novel. Such as a *Peanuts* comic strip that has only four panels because they each display what the definition of Ian Watt's thoughts are on realism. That the premiere (or a primary convention is a novel that has a full and authentic report from the human experience.(unknown, *graphic novel*(2020)) .



***Peanuts* comic strip by Charles Schulz's**

Conclusion..

To conclude this gathered research based on graphic novels it is known that the Egyptians had an interesting part in how graphic illustrations were used as a way to communicate with people of importance. It is interesting to see this as it proves there was more than one way to communicate than just talking. The Egyptians in their illustrations looking back on it were rather proud of their cultures and especially how they depicted the tales of their gods that they worshiped. These illustrations would prove to stand the test of time as today archaeologists are still digging up ancient artifacts buried under the sand in Egypt. The area of graphic novels is one of the most overlooked areas in art in my opinion. There are so many interesting artists who create detailed illustrations that have changed the art industry within how it is depicted such as Naoko Takeuchi and Jamie Hewlett. With Naoko promoting female empowerment and Jamie co creating a virtual band it demonstrates that graphic novel artists are very important to free the creative mind and to inspire other upcoming artists. Some historical key theorists agree such as Will Eisner that graphic novels have been targeted by the government and being criticized for some unknown reason. It proves that there will always be a stigma against comic books down to some of the more adult driven stories that are created because normally comic books are depicted to be for children and adults did not think this was suitable to be released to the public. Graphic novels will always be a part of history from being used to communicate by the Egyptians to connecting to readers there will always be a place for graphic novels no matter how small or big its appearance maybe. Some it may disgust and some it may inspire, the results can be unpredictable but what is known for sure that there will always be a place for graphic novels despite it having a more adult focused audience even if that audience maybe be small it shall always inspire others to create onwards.

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