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Question; From the MESSAGE, MEDIUM, CONTEXT, research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designer's that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2500 – word essay, critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Traditional vs Digital Graphic Novels

Introduction

During this essay, I will look at comparing traditional and digital views on graphic novels/comic books, I will research the history behind both mediums, to distinguish the positives and the negatives, success and problems and summarise if the digital era is evolving for the greater or latter as an opinion from the research I gather.

I will investigate many different artists/illustrators also fans to see what views the public has towards digital evolution.

I'm interested in discussing this topic, being an illustration student with a desire to become a concept artist, I am currently working on a graphic novel myself within another assignment in University. It only makes sense that I improve my knowledge and understanding of this subject. It will be interesting to learn the origins of the graphic novel /comic book industry and how much this industry has evolved.

What I'd like to discover is whether the process for producing a digital version diminishes the charming traditional authentic physical artwork which is sought to be much more valuable to collectors this day and age.

Another area I am interested in analysing is the design and creative process for artists/illustrators for both mediums.

I would like to demonstrate the difference between graphic novels and comic books.

During my research graphic novels and comic books seem to be classified as the same media, due to their similarities. Their layout, typography, speech bubbles, onomatopoeia, etc, however, there are many differences to distinguish them.

This is how I distinguish them; comic books are like a tv series, they publish short stories that are dragged monthly, keeping the fans engaged for the next issue. Graphics novels are like a film, deeper, longer stories are published, engaging fans from start to finish in a single book.

History of comics/graphic novels

I began my research by looking into the history of graphic novels/comic books to see how they became so popular and admired even now to this day.

Using art to tell stories has been a staple of human behaviour for quite some time.

Art, sketches and drawings weren't only used to tell tales they were also used to convey messages, in many cases political messages in a manner that would reach a wider audience that couldn't read, a few centuries ago, that was a lot of people.

Looking right back to cave drawings, Egyptian hieroglyphics, the hieroglyphics by the Mayans, art done by the Greeks and the Romans. For as long as humans have been around art presented in a sequential manner has been human nature in one form or another. (Jarroush, 2020).

Originally comics began with one-panel cartoon drawings, usually presented with a caption underneath the drawing to convey the idea of what was being presented.

The target audience was children as a throwaway medium, but that changed once publishers began to cater to an older audience.

The first multiple panel cartoon was published by American artist Rudolphe Topffer in 1827 then a decade later Topffer created a collection of strips called the adventures of Obadiah old buck and put those strips in a forty-page book (The Comic Book). (Jarroush, 2020).



Topffer, 1827, (Marshall, 2020)

In 1895, comic strips became published in local newspapers due to a rivalry between two New York newspaper titans who was trying to outsell each other (Jarroush, 2020).

This is where the first comic strip (Hogans Alley) featured in the New York Times.



The New York Times archive, The Kid from Hogan's Alley (Published 1995), (2020)

New York's growing population of immigrants is what made this comic strip so appealing, the stories we're relatable to the immigrant public with difficulties in reading English, Hogans Alley illustrated cartoon comic strips became a huge success. (Canemaker, 2020)

The comic strip became so popular and demanding that other newspapers wanted to hire cartoonists to create comic strips for their papers.

By the 1920s the creation of characters we know today like Tarzan, Dick Tracy, Pop-eye became popular.

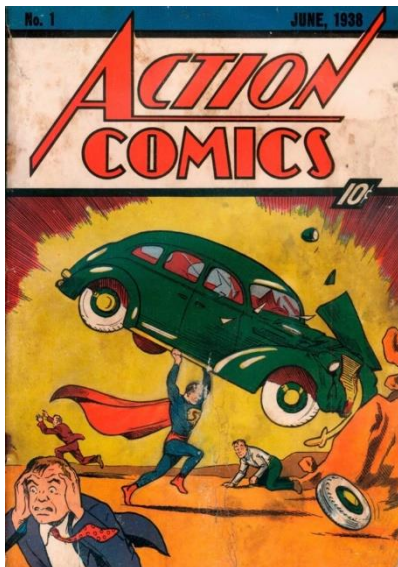
Then by the 1930s newspapers dedicated full pages in newspapers in full colour to comic strips.

Shortly after, American publisher, Maxwell Gaines, reprinted comic strips from newspapers in order to publish them into a book form, then came the first American comic book (The Famous Funnies no 1).

Shortly after more and more comics became popular in the 30s.

In 1930 Jerome Siegel (script writer) and Joseph Schuster (artist) struggled to make it in the comic world, with their work being discarded as boring, most of it was destroyed with anger "Joe got very upset and tore it up" ~ (Siegel) (2012)

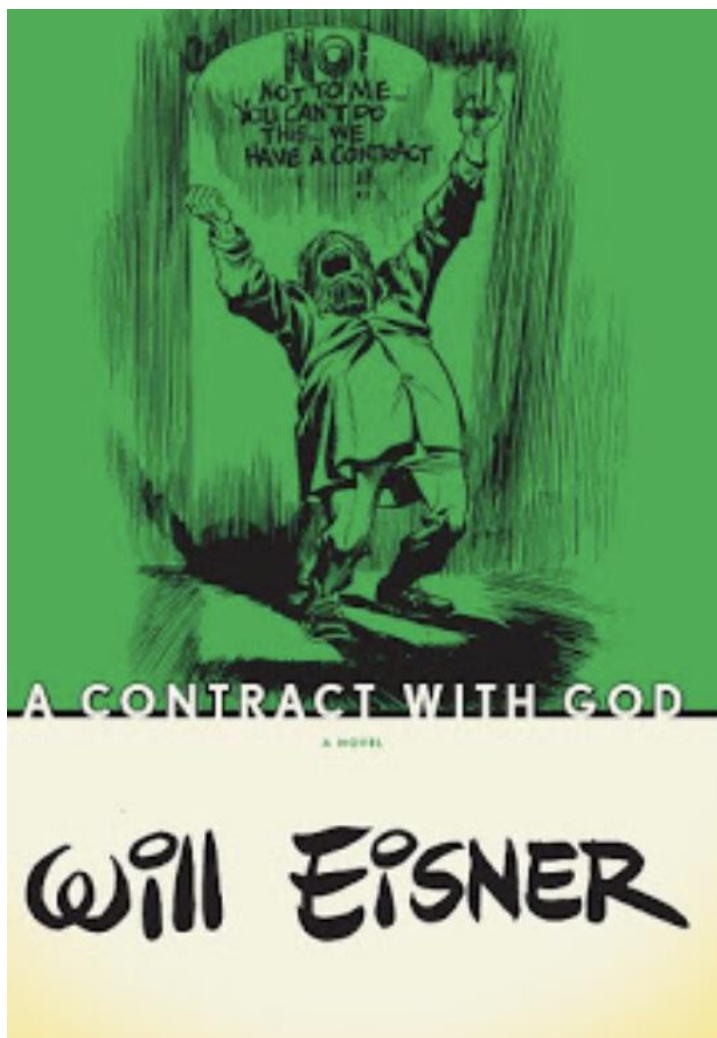
In 1938 they finally found success with their first action comic called 'Action Comics' this is when Superman was discovered for the first time and is still as big and successful to this day.



(Joe shuster & Jerry Siegel) (Grand, 2017)

The term 'Graphic novel' was said to be introduced by comic historian, Richard Kyle who supposedly created the term in a 1964 essay in comic fanzine, Capa-Alpha however the term Novlas Graficas was used in Latin America as early as the 1950s.

There is a lot of controversy over who published the 'very first graphic novel' it is hard to pinpoint the correct one. However, will Eisner is said to have published one of the first successful graphic novels with 'A Contract with God' in 1978



Will Eisner, (1978)

A contract with god is a based-on Will Eisner's memories as a child growing up, in New York's poor Jewish migrant community. The novel was a collection of four stories linked by themes of

disillusionment and guilt. ~ (Ma, 2017)

Will Eisner an American artist died in 2005 at the age of 87, his work is very popular in the world of comics. Unlike many comic books/graphic novels you see published, Will Eisner's work was solely created by himself, he was the artist, the storyteller and the letterer for all his creations. His comics/graphic novels are a work of art. He thought comics/graphic novels was an artform and he wasn't wrong.

The rise of digital comic books/graphic novels



Illustration by R. Kikuo Johnson (Wolk, 2011)

Reading your favourite comic book/graphic novel has evolved vastly over the years through the power of web.

The digital era has made it possible for fans to read their favourite comic books\graphic novels anytime anywhere with websites and free apps offering a massive collection to choose from. Comixology, Marvel, DC Comics and more offer these services for a monthly subscription fee, where fans have access to a library of popular stories to choose from.

With technology evolving in a way to make it possible to flick through the pages that will give sound effects and in some cases involve the reader to interact with puzzles, It's no wonder the digital revolution is growing vastly popular all over the world.

Past graphic novels/comic book creations

I have covered a brief history of graphic novels/comic books.

Now I will investigate production and creation of them from the earlier days to the present.

From the 1930s to roughly the late 1990s comic books/graphic novels were created using the traditional tools, paper, inks, typewriters, pencils, pens, brushes and dyes with some digital augmentation along the way.

The process to creating a comic book nowadays is pretty much the same as the earlier years, the stages of development are practically the same.

1. The script
2. Draft several thumbnails
3. Pre-draw/refine
4. Ink
5. Detail

6. Clean up

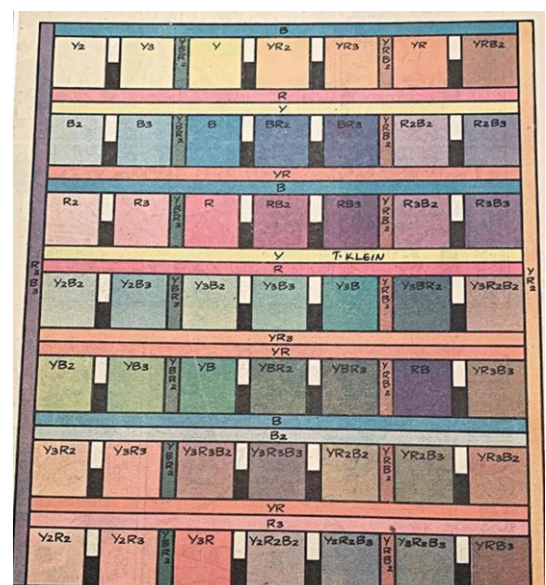
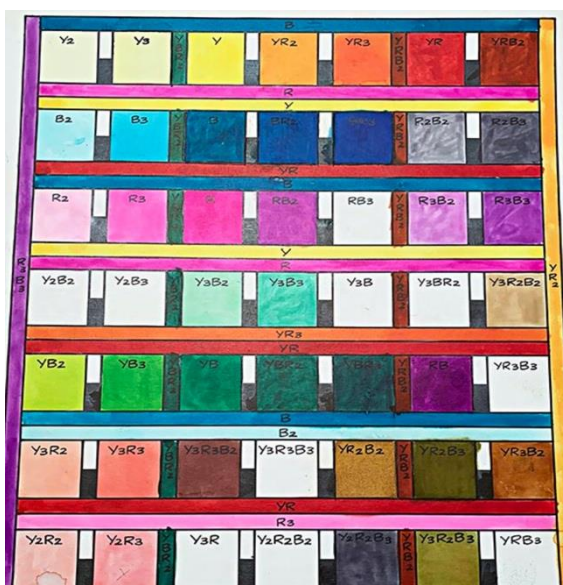
The colour and detail process however have developed greatly throughout the years.

As you can see from the images below the process for colour in modern comics was a very tricky, time consuming process.

Todd Klein is one of the most recognised lettering workers for DC comics who has been an artist in the industry since 1977, in 2004 Klein co-authored 'THE DC COMICS GUIDE TO COLORING AND LETTERING COMICS'. (Klein et al., 2008)

Images below demonstrate the process in the early ages of comic book productions.

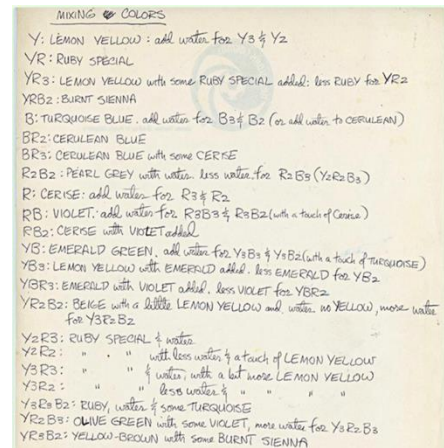
Ink was defined by a coding system, there was only four tones of colour to work with, yellow, blue, magenta and black. The colours that were mixed to create different tones was practically the same as the original colour and when printed the colour quality wasn't the best, especially with the poor quality paper used. "A very complex system, and one with lots of room for errors, of which there were many". ~ (Klein et al., 2008)



Original ink colour chart 1970s



Printed version 1970s



The four images above are sourced from Todd Klien's blog. (Klein et al., 2008)

Before there was desktop computers and digital design, each page of work that was created traditional had to be laid out on paper, the page 'mechanical' a typewriter and script was needed for all the type which was then then sized and laid out as a rough form by cutting and pasting copies of the script, or by arcane markings and measurements that would be interpreted by a typesetter. Once printed from a one – cylinder printing press on a variety of different papers, the four coloured inks were printed as four interlinking tiny dots, naked to the human eye, forming various colours for that image. This process was named the ben dot process, named after illustration artist and printer specialist Benjamin Henry Day. The Ben dot process was an affordable technique for printing colour back in the 17th century.

The comic book is made by the pages being attached together by staples or glue.



Roy Lichtenstein, M Maybe, 1969 (Freud, 1993)

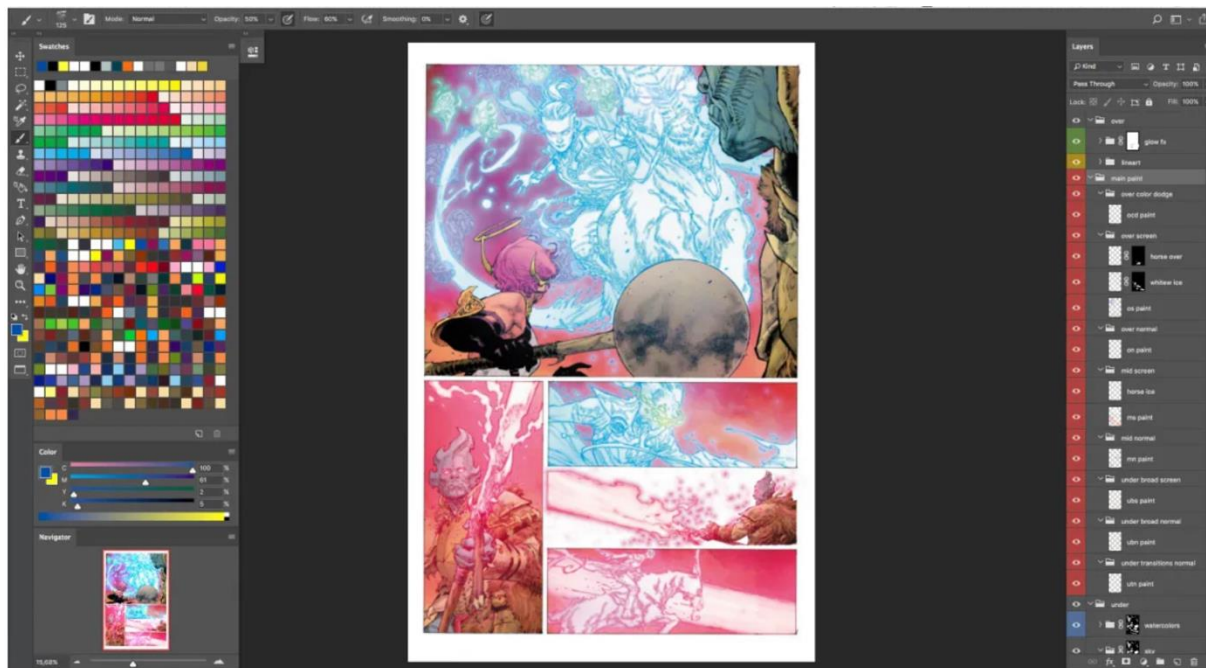
The rise of digital technology

Throughout the years as electronic devices and tools became much more affordable and powerful, the comic book/graphic novel creation process switched from analog process to digital.

Nowadays after the rough sketches become cleaned up onto a dummy book ready for digital alterations on photoshop/Procreate, comics books/graphic novels can easily be shared with publishers to view the work at the touch of a button.

This wasn't an easy process traditionally where the artists would need to print and keep numerous copies of their comic books/graphic novels stored away ready for pitching, which was a costly process.

With the use of photoshop/Procreate, mistakes are easily fixed, there is no risk of having to redo the whole piece of work, which saves a lot of time and effort, unlike traditional pen and ink, where if mistakes were made, the whole process would have to be redone, if not corrected with some sort of cover up. One copy is created and stored on a file or cloud resulting in a faster more time effective process.



(Wilson, 2019)

Conclusion

From the research I have gathered, I do believe that the evolution of the digital era is such a powerful advantage in both areas in the process of a comic book/graphic novel is created and the way it is accessible for the fans.

For the artist, the whole process is convenient, fast, money saving with the ability to reach out to a wider audience, with the advantage of self publishing being more reachable on websites, apps and social media. If anything from what I have seen, the comic book industry sales and success are increasing more now than ever.

I wasn't aware of the process nowadays, how to create and publish a comic book/graphic novel, to how they were traditionally made back where they began, where the charm and authenticity of the roughs are something of interest to fans and collectors, as well as rising artists interested in this

field as a career.

A lot of work today is created, where traditional and digital co-exist in a project, original artwork is still traditionally sketched onto paper then scanned onto digital for cleanup.

Then there are artists that completely avoid the traditional process that use digital remotely, so their roughs and dummy books are saved and easily accessible, which was my initial concern.

The other area that I was interested in knowing was whether accessing comics books/graphic novels online demonised hard paper copies?, Paper copies are still printed and accessible online to collect.

Until recently, publishers are introducing 'first online', this is where paper hard versions are not available in stores to buy, however they are still available to be ordered. This is a new strategy the publishers are testing due to Saving money and only printing copies that are seen to be successful online.

Various online exposure such as Facebook, Instagram, Etsy, EBay, Pinterest and comic forums.

Various comic book/graphic novel authors have achieved celebrity status and characters have been integrated into North American mythology.

I have looked at the feedback from various artists and they all have a positive attitude towards the digital era.

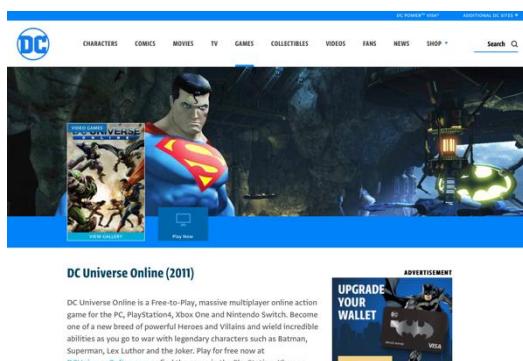
"Hill finds Dropbox a valuable tool. In fact, it's one of the few digital tools, along with Adobe Photoshop and a Wacom Cintiq tablet, that are essential parts of many comic creators' workflows." ~ Bryan Edward Hill (Wilson, 2019).

"If I didn't like a page, I had to redo the whole thing," he said. "Now, I can copy panels, so I don't have to begin again from nothing." ~ Amrit Birdi (Wilson, 2019).

"It's great for centralizing all information about a title in one place that's accessible to any branch of the company," ~ Hazel Newlevant (Wilson, 2019)

From a fan's perspective, when looking at various forums at discussions between comic book/graphic novel enthusiasts, it is clear that the digital option is beneficial, with easy accessibility and more availability, discussion forums with other fans (social aspect), offering compelling ways to read comic books/graphic novels, with the ability to zoom in on each panel.

There are many different subscription sites that offer great deals, where the subscriber has access to a library full of comic books and graphic novels. There is an option on other various websites like Amazon, to purchase the comic books/graphic novels as a one-off purchase, however, by choosing this option can be quite expensive, so not very beneficial. Subscription sites such as DC comics, Comixology, Hoopla and Marvel offer a more affordable way to access the world of comics and graphic novels, this way of digitally reading is growing more and more popular everyday.



DC. 2020. DC. [online] Available at: <<https://www.dccomics.com/>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].



Marvel Entertainment. 2020. *Marvel Comics | Marvel Comic Books | Marvel*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.marvel.com/comics>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].



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<https://www.hoopladigital.com/browse/comic/popular?page=1> [Accessed 9 December 2020].



Comixology.com. 2020. *Digital Comics - Comics By Comixology*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.comixology.com/> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

Digital technology is growing intensely, it is evolving into a greater future. Who's knows what the future will hold and how comic books/graphic novels will be or if it will continue to keep up with the forever growing evolution demands in the future, but the comic/digital world will keep growing with its pace, and hopefully the traditional aspect will always co-exist.

The history of where it all began will always be remembered by the power of digital technology.

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