

## Seriality and Intermediality in Graphic Novels

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### Comics and Graphic Novels: More than just a Product of Popular Culture

Over the last thirty years a vast number of comics and graphic novels have been published and have enjoyed enthusiastic popular reception and increasing academic appreciation in the Anglophone world. In addition to such perennial heroes as Superman and Batman, licensing and merchandising have made many comic books and graphic novel characters more widely known to the general public than ever. At the center of this project are serialized Anglophone graphic novels printed in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Despite their undeniable success, comics and graphic novels have often been stigmatized as popular-culture products and lowbrow entertainment, being primarily suitable for children and the uneducated masses. However, due to the increasing importance of cultural studies and their interest in popular forms, comics and graphic novels with their repetitive structures, their formulaic plots and effects of recognition have experienced a re-evaluation. Also, with W. J. T. Mitchell's proclamation of an "iconic turn" in twentieth-century Western culture, a growing interest in visual culture has led to more in-depth investigations in the humanities of bi-, pluri- and intermedial phenomena such as comics and graphic novels. Our project focuses on two aspects of comics and graphic novels which have been neglected by researchers so far: Firstly, seriality is not considered to be merely a reduction of aesthetic complexity and part of the culture industry's ideological context of deception, but rather a form of standardization and schematization, generating new possibilities for formal, experiential and ideological variation. We understand seriality as an interaction of formal-material conditions and experiential practices. Secondly, we will investigate intermedial narration. Several scholars have pointed out that the lowbrow reputation of graphic novels has prevented them from receiving the theoretical attention their unique blend of graphic and verbal signs deserves: "Comics [stellen] derzeit ein weitgehend unerschlossenes und daher ausserordentlich spannendes Gebiet literaturwissenschaftlicher Forschung dar. Noch nicht einmal die unter Kennern anerkannten Klassiker sind erschlossen. Im Bereich der Erzähltheorie sind zahlreiche, zum Teil auch kulturwissenschaftlich höchst ergiebige Fragen noch völlig offen" (Martin Schüwer. *Wie Comics erzählen*: 2002, 213). While the narrative structures of other pluri-medial forms such as film have been investigated over the last decades, research of the narratology of comics is still in its infancy. Since graphic novels are intricate narratological cases ? they not only narrate serially, but also involve two media, texts and pictures ? it is our second research goal to contribute to the development of a narratological model that describes graphic novels' serial and bi-medial storytelling. Against the backdrop of general media theories we will approach the question of how the bi-medial graphic novels narrate. This will help to develop a narratology which transcends the boundaries of media and of disciplines in order to cope with the ubiquity of narrative phenomena in contemporary culture. The project group will approach the topic from two angles: 1) Aesthetics of Seriality in Graphic Novels and 2) Practice-Production, Reception and the Marketplace.

**Project team**

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**Project duration**

09.2008 - 03.2014

**University unit**

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**Research area**

Languages and Literature, English Language and Literature

**Index terms**

(Practice and Theory of) Seriality; Intermedial Narration; Aesthetics of Seriality; Comics Studies; Anglophone Graphic Novels; Sequentiality; Production Processes; Fandom Practices; Marketplace Conditions; Typology of Seriality.