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Nick Dodds
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Reframing the Graphic Memoir: How does the comic-strip artist negotiate modality and fidelity in the depiction of personal and historical narratives?
Presentation of current doctoral research & studio practice

This thesis investigates the potency of the comic strip as a medium to address real-life narratives, which are “fabricated in and through drawing and design” (Whitlock & Poletti:v).
Defining the Graphic Memoir*

The term ‘memoir’ is preferred over ‘autobiography’ as it refers to selected memories or episodes taken from life, rather than the story of a life . . .

. . . and best describes what will be the outcome of practice-led research.

*also referred to in comic-book scholarship as autobiographix, autography, autographics, autobiocomics, graphic life writing etc . . .
Practice-led research - themes

- Modality
- Temporality (& memory)
- Authenticity

(The Graphic Memoir)
Modality

The formal & structural properties of the comic strip and their application within the graphic memoir genre;

• page multi-frame & readership control
• the comics graphic-code
• anchorage > the relay between text & image
• representational style
Temporality (& memory)

Chronology, tempo and issues concerning the depiction of time and memory within the memoir;

• clock time/subjective time/psychic time in comic book narratives
• the panel as time controller
• the transitional influence of negative space
Authenticity

How does the stylized and iconographic content of the graphic work complicate perceptions of fidelity?

• the authorial ‘pact’ and/or ‘performed integrity’ of the artist (Refaie:171)
• historical accuracy and/or ‘memory retrieval’.
• relation of the graphic text to other memoir texts or ‘truth’ discourses.
• the drawn image v other visual means of capturing real life people and events.
The Checkweighman
Pilgrimage from Nenthead (Chester Armstrong)

working class memoir (1928)

Key themes from PFN
- mining community
- growing politicalization
- autodidactism
- rationalisation & enlightenment

Project in hand
Graphic adaptation of Pilgrimage text - a work that intertwines familial & sociopolitical storylines.
In 1898, aged 30, Chester cofounded the *Ashington Debating and Literary Improvement Society* (ADLIS) with John Moffett Gillians, with a modus-operandi to debate social and philosophical issues, and dissect the keynote modernist works of the day (Armstrong:121-173).

The *Morpeth Herald* archive.
textual & pictorial resources for time period
Psychogeography (from Guy Debord SI) - how the geographical location and/or environment effects the emotions and behaviour of individuals
PROLOGUE

The Checkweighman

1: PILGRIMAGE FROM NENTHEAD

2: HARDEST WORK UNDER HEAVEN

3: THE LARGEST PIT VILLAGE

4: LOVE & THRIFT

5: THE COTTAGE AND THE CASTLE

6: FOOD FOR THE IDEALIST

EPILOGUE
Roaming it thought over the universe

I saw the little that is good

steadily hastening towards mortality

And the vast all that is called evil

I saw hastening to erase itself

and became lost and dead
In this broad earth of ours

And the measureless openness

And the slag

Enclosed and safe

Within its central heart

Nestles the seed perfection
In thy ensemble, whatever else withhold not from us.

Belief in plan of free, enclosed in time and space.

Health, peace, salvation, universal.
Nay but the lack of it the dream.

And failure in life's love and wealth a dream.

And all the world a dream.
The mediating role of the artist . . .

'It's about choices being made, of finding what one can tell . . . and what one can reveal beyond what one knows one is revealing''

(Spiegelman:2011:73)
References

- Armstrong, C. 1938. *Pilgrimage to Nenthead* [Methuen]
- Bechdel, A. 2006. *Fun Home* [Jonathan Cape]