

**Dissertation Proposal:** Design and specification of a digital edition based on an analysis of requirements on existing editions and the retrospective analysis of a prototype example.

The comic book is a popular form of culture and expression that has existed within society for a number of decades, but its roots lie as far back as 3000bc and possibly even further. The comic book is as relevant to modern society as a form of visual narration and historical evidence as it was in the form of Egyptian wall paintings and engravings of 3000bc, Japanese Satire in 500ad, Japanese manga, and British political caricature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The comic book is a rich source of information and interest and there are many dimensions to such an artefact that contribute to this, some of which are as follows:

- Subject Matter
- Artwork and Artists
- Advertisements
- Letters and Fan mail
- Language
- Decade and Historical Period of publication
- Print and Bindings
- Editions

Each of these factors can help to reveal a large amount of information about the time and period the comic book was released, also the audience who may read such a publication. Therefore it is important to preserve such an artefact on a number of levels, not least so that an art form is not lost, or stories and concepts are not lost, but because of what it can reveal as an artefact from our culture at a single period in time.

In creating a digital edition it is not just enough to study what we can get from a comic book, it is also important to understand the audience reading it, the material conditions under which the comic book is read, the way it is purchased, even the maintenance of this artefact which is fundamentally printed on paper of average quality and is bound with no more than staples. Comic books are also not just published in single issues but also comic strips exist, special edition annuals exist, and many comic books issues are also collected to bind an entire storyline together in a single collated edition. Again this is important detail that requires looking at to help us understand why this is done, and how it can be represented digitally knowing the intentions of the publishers, artists, and writers involved in such a project.

A preliminary study has been completed that looked at revealing the issues involved with comic books but did not aim at going into each issue in depth. A research project of this manner looks to analyse each area in depth and answer the questions revealed in the preliminary study and any other that may arise during the analysis of this subject. Some questions relating to the digitisation of a comic book that the preliminary study revealed are as follows:

- What are the material conditions of reading a comic book?
- How would one represent reading a comic book in various places?
- How is a comic book held while being read?
- What values material and otherwise are there about a comic book that has lead to original editions from the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century surviving, still in excellent condition?

As well as the study of the artefact in its current form, I believe it would be interesting and illuminating to create a prototype based on research as it is, and try to discover how a digital edition can be advantageous from that point of view, but in determining a prototype it can help us to see the limitations of a digital edition thus highlighting how a comic book achieves what it does, by comparing the limitations to the comic book's features.

Kilgour 1998 highlights three stages of successful mechanical invention:

1. An event wherein the invention is conceived and thought through

2. An area of development in which a prototype is constructed to demonstrate the machinery will run
3. Building a machine that will work, in the sense that it will put out a product that is successful in the marketplace.

In modifying these three stages slightly to make it a more iterative process, completing stage two but going back to one as many times as necessary to iron out difficulties in various prototype editions, this research project will look at stages one and two, with a view to creating a working design that will allow the successful creation of a product in stage three.

Therefore I propose that this research study covers the following areas:

1. Creation of a prototype digital edition of a comic book
2. Retrospective analysis of the digital edition
3. Analysis of the comic book in general, covering the issues already highlighted and others that may become apparent
4. Design and Specification of a final digital edition

These shall be the deliverables for this research project.

It will be necessary to complete the first prototype by the week beginning 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005. Further analyses of the subject matter shall occur concurrently and throughout the project until a further prototype/product can be determined from this research and from the analysis of the first prototype.

Ross Spencer  
16<sup>th</sup> February 2005

### **Bibliography**

Kilgour, F. G. (1998). *Evolution of the Book*. Oxford

McCloud, S. (2000). *Reinventing Comics*. Harper Collins