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The Comic as a Medium

Comics are very distinct from text in that they can convey the same information, often with extra details. Comics inherently tell much more of an author's perspective than text alone; the drawing style, text font, and even comic layout can tell how an author feels about a particular issue. Planning and creating these important features becomes very time consuming. Thus, when I translated an online article into comic form, there were many challenges in directing the argument of the comic.

First and foremost, I had to present the information found in the article because it was central to the argument. The New York Times article presented different opinions on graffiti and its value as art. The particular opinion I chose favored graffiti, and gave several examples of it being treasured in places such as Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The author then concludes that while graffiti is a divisive issue, it still has meaning as art. This information I organized into three different pages, each with their own category. One page is devoted to the author's favorable inclination toward graffiti. Another showed the attitudes of Rio de Janeiro. The final page demonstrates the mixed feelings that people have toward graffiti. In doing so, graffiti presents itself as an issue having multiple sides.

But in translating the article into a comic, some details were obscured. For example, the article mentions a graffiti artist named Banksy and the acclaim his work received. It also notes that the criticism graffiti receives is similar to the criticism the hip hop genre once drew.

Including all these details in the comic would make it difficult to ascertain a clear argument and also make panel organization difficult. For example, the current panel styling sums up each topic with extreme brevity. Including every detail the author wrote would make the comic significantly lengthier.

The creativity of the comics medium also made the translation much more difficult. In relaying the textual information, I had to do so using a combination of text and images. It raised the issue of whether to convey a particular point by using text or by using images, or a combination of the two. For example, in the first two pages, I largely explained everything using text alone; the visuals of the comic served to emphasize certain points or give further insight. The last page, however, mainly gives its message using an image that presents both opinions on graffiti. Choosing the number of panels to use was very similar to choosing the number of sentences in a paragraph to devote to a specific topic. To give more information in a comic, more panels might be necessary. However, creating a more detailed image within a smaller number of panels might achieve the same effect. Making creative choices can be especially difficult because every choice impacts the overall impression a reader will receive from the comic.

Furthermore, designing these images was especially difficult. To demonstrate that graffiti was illegal and characterize the policeman on page one, I exaggerated many of his features. The policeman became a giant, enraged aggressor attacking an innocent artist. The policeman's wild eyes and open mouth, coupled with the artist's look of agony and position on the ground, create the rhetoric of the scene. Designing facial expressions and other body language for characters was an issue not seen in the article. The third page's image was difficult in that I attempted to represent complex graffiti that could be seen as art; this is a direct contrast

to the graffiti shown on page one, which is of a more simplistic style. This graffiti depiction utilizes fire and a heart, things which are normally associated with strong emotions. This is very different from simple text with the name "Joseph" seen in page one. Choosing characters to react to this complex graffiti was also difficult; in the end, I elected to use authority figures that most people would recognize: George Bush, Barack Obama, and Sarah Palin. The size of the dialogue favoring graffiti on page three gives this argument more prominence than the dissenting opinion.

Changing the textual argument into a comic argument was challenging. The author's opinion was that art was meaningful, but the focus of the text was on the divisiveness of the issue of whether graffiti is art or vandalism. Thus, I had to show these different perspectives on graffiti, but give the impression that graffiti is indeed both art and vandalism. I do this in all three pages. In the first page, the captions favor graffiti while the images suggest otherwise. In the second page, the two panels distinctly show the different attitudes toward graffiti in Rio de Janeiro (though these attitudes are manifested in different time periods). In the third page, the image alone represents the two different sides; the characters' body language such as thrown up hands suggest their attitudes, and the dialogue inside speech bubbles supplements these arguments.

Comics are a much more visually intensive media than text. Indeed, an author's choice of font in a book might contribute to the feeling of it, but it does not have the inherent creative freedom of the comics medium. A comic can demonstrate information without explicitly stating it using a combination of different visuals such as facial expressions, extreme text fonts, and drawing style. Because of the creativity required of these visuals, creating a comic can be massively more difficult than creating a text.

Works Cited

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