

Chapter 8

The Scholar's Ludo– Narrative Game and Multimodal Graphic Novel: A Comparison of Fringe Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

Current discussions within videogames focus on the ways in which gameplay or narrative can be analysed by themselves, and rarely as a collaborative effort to explore a text. Although there have been a number of alternative approaches to this debate, none have succeeded in becoming prevalent within the field. This contrasts greatly with the study of graphic novels in relation to the application of multimodal analysis. In this field, discussion about the interplay between the mode of the image and the mode of the written text are more frequent. This textual analysis takes into account the two modes to focus on their collaborative effects in how the graphic novel can be understood. This chapter suggests that current videogame scholarship can benefit from pre-existing multimodal discussion that exists within graphic novels.

INTRODUCTION

Although videogames are arguably a conflation of media, there has been limited analysis of the ways in which they combine textual, visual, aural and performative elements. For the most part, scholars have relied on one or two methods of analysis to explain how videogames work, traditionally focusing on narrative or gameplay. Graphic novels, while not sharing as many different elements, can be considered to have the same analytical problems as graphic novels are a combination of textual and visual elements. However, graphic novel scholarship has traditionally involved a holistic approach to the analysis of graphic novels. Although both narrative and gameplay can be discussed within videogame scholarship, one element is usually highlighted above others. Videogames predominantly rely on the notion of a

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divide between the two elements, while graphic novels have made use of this collaboration of elements. To understand this development a discussion of the history of graphic novels is needed.

Graphic novels, produced extensively throughout the late 20th Century were only really analysed after the gritty reboot era of the 1980s, retelling of old superhero narratives (Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*¹) or the advent of darker, more emotionally complex stories (*Watchmen* [Moore et al., 1987], *Maus*² [Spiegelman, 2003], *Fun Home: A Family Tragic Comic* [Bechdel, 2007]). Here there were a number of events occurring within the panels, pages, and spreads of graphic novels resulting in a much more complex read. Although readers were incorporating a complex set of reading skills from this collage of text and image it was not formalised into a specific form of analysis for some time. It was in this type of analysis that the manner in which the reader was able to encounter the story was made apparent. With these two differing elements of image and text being presented in a non-traditional manner, a new method to analyse this approach was needed. Multimodality became the method of choice. Multimodality is the use of different types of semiotics (signs or representations) to create meaning in a text. Within graphic novels the use of multimodality allows for the combination of both image and text to be analysed effectively as individual components, as well as general components that make up the entire meaning of the graphic novel.

Graphic novels present a robust model for our understanding of multimodality in videogames. If these two elements can be analysed together in graphic novels, narrative and gameplay can be thought of in the same way in videogames. This chapter seeks to apply this method of analysis to videogames, choosing to frame videogame scholarship through the lens of multimodality in graphic novels. While graphic novel scholarship has pushed collaboration for its two elements, videogame scholarship has usually focused on one aspect in its analysis. Videogame formalism (Keogh, 2014, pp. 3-4) has increasingly sought for a collaboration of "phenomological concerns of videogames," but its implementation of these concerns has only just begun. Multimodality provides evidence that such an approach is both possible and beneficial to fringe media analysis.

Although there is a distinct application to both videogame and graphic novel scholars, this multimodal approach is a beneficial one that encourages a wide array of semiotic readings of music, image, and gesture, to provide meaning within a text. This application of analysis can easily be applied to other creative media, especially those that are emerging, and making use of digital media. Indeed its early intention was to provide a method of analysis for the increase in multimedia texts using a variety of new techniques. In this multimodality represents a good foundation where a range of multimedia analyses and complex texts can be understood.

This chapter proposes to bridge the gap between the two processes of analysis, and furthermore provides some context to the development of both mediums' scholarship. The chapter provides a context of multimodality and videogame scholarship, focusing respectively on the impact that multimodality has had on graphic novels, and the ludology and narratology discussions within videogame studies. A combination of the two approaches is then analysed, focusing on the benefits of applying multimodality to a videogame analysis. This concludes with a case study of *Call of Juarez Gunslinger*. Finally similar videogame approaches to multimodal analysis are highlighted to show the potential for further interdisciplinary scholarship. It is the hope that this chapter will highlight the effects of different approaches and suggest a more applicable one to the medium of videogames.

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