

THE UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN CLUJ-NAPOCA

**NEO-FIGURATIVE INFLUENCES FROM THE COMICS IN TODAY'S
PHOTOGRAPHY**

Coordinator

Prof. Univ. Dr. Radu Solovăstru

PhD Student

Mihaela Simionca

CLUJ-NAPOCA

2013

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	p. 4
1. THE COMICS FROM HISTORY TO PRESENT	p. 12
1.1. The comics' historic journey	p. 12
1.2. The Graphic Novel, extension of the popular comics	p. 33
1.3. The comics within other identity spaces, others than the American one	p. 37
2. THE MUTUAL INFLUENCES BETWEEN COMICS, VISUAL ARTS AND PHOTOGRAPHY, FROM MODERN TO CONTEMPORARY	p. 48
2.1. Premises	p. 48
2.2. Theories of the explicit influences between comics and Pop Art	p. 51
2.3. Diffuse theories of the mutual influences between comics and contemporary visual arts	p. 65
2.4. The diffuse territories of the mutual influences between comics and the modern and contemporary photography	p. 83
3. THE COMICS AND THE SCENE OF THE TECHNICAL DYNAMIC IMAGES – CINEMA, TELEVISION, VIDEO	p. 97
3.1. Premises	p. 97
3.2. The mutual influences between comics and contemporary cinematography	p. 100
3.3. Influences of the comics on the video production (from entertainment to art)	p. 120
4. THE COMICS AND THE PERCEPTIVE ACCELERATION, SPECIFIC TANDEM TO THE CONTEMPORARY VISUAL IMAGE'S PRESENT	p. 128
5. REFERENCE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY, FROM THE 1ST TO THE MODERN ONE, TO THE COMICS' LANDMARKS	p. 139
5.1. Comics' identity landmarks transferable to photography	p. 139
5.2. Neo-figurative within the present's comics – identity landmarks	p. 145
5.3. Comics' identity landmarks and its influences in the pan modernity's photography	p. 167
5.4. The comics' landmarks and post-modernity and trans post-modernity's photography	p. 209

5.5. The comics' and photography's neo-figurative eclectic activism infused to other artistic and applicative visual media	p. 250
6. COMICS' NEO-FIGURATIVE VS NOWADAYS PHOTOGRAPHY'S NEO-FIGURATIVE, THE OWN CREATION	p. 276
6.1. The evolution of the personal journey dedicated to the research and modulations of the neo-figurative specific to the comics extracted from the nowadays photography's new directions	p. 276
6.2. RED NOIR – alternative graphic novel vs. alternative and experimental literary narration	p. 299
CONCLUSIONS	p. 321
BIBLIOGRAPHY	p.330

STORYBOARD

Graduate of an art school, Romulus Ladea from Cluj and of the BA and MA within the department of Photo-video-digital image processing from the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, beneficiary of few artistic residencies regarding the knowledge, experimenting and improving the partnership between graphic arts and photography, more specifically between the comics' and the nowadays photography's neo-figurative, in Quimper, at École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Cornouaille, France 2007-2008 and in Angoulême, at École Européenne Supérieure de l'Image, France, 2012-2013, for such a person choosing such a subject for the PhD thesis, engaging the preoccupations regarding the relation, the influences and partnership between graphic arts and photography, came naturally, being the core of my artistic and applicative preoccupations.

The PhD thesis having the title *Neo-figurative Influences from the Comics in Today's Photography* engaged in the theoretical research and the applicative dissemination of the one way influences or of the mutual ones.

Both the history and the actuality of any forms or situations of visual representation is transforming or evolving towards assuming the identity towards the proximities or the different degrees partnerships, sources, resources, signs and significances.

On the other side, the figurative, present and practiced within the visual representations, has its own history, the one of shaping and interpretative concept, technique and attitude, and also its influences, pressure and commandment generated by the association with the human civilization's cultural, social, politic, scientific, technical and technological sequences' evaluation. The neo-figurative exists in each phase and has permanent invasive or discrete inserts of retro-actual, of eclectic accumulations. This is why, with the present thesis we have chosen to circumscribe the neo-figurative within the comics as being the passage between the proximate, prewar and postwar modernism towards trans post modernism, daring to suggest and sustain that this one would characterize the present of the human civilization within its cultural territories and visual artistic actions. The comics and their declinations are a territory which is managed in a hybrid way – literary and visually – having an exceptional and big impact and extent (from childhood through teenage times towards the human being's maturity) over the society's landmarks. Therefore, the comics' neo-figurative is divided in three identity cores with their extensions and proximities.

The 1st core seems to be the development of the narrative information regarding the aggressive stereotype of the superhero generated by the autarchic confidence in solving all the problems by the specific force and violence. Revealing and representative for this core are the identity landmarks of the Marvel Galaxy. This galaxy's characters are men and women characterized by imbalances of mundane reality, by aggressiveness, muscles and extreme sports, permanently suspicious and solving "each second" the humanity's faith by "destructing the enemy" presented each time as being ultra-negative and harmful. The graphic performance and landmarks are connected with the popular horizon, the associations with the visual arts coming from the Pop Art.

The 2nd core seems to be the one of mimetic performances, bringing on the comics' territory realistic and hyper realistic drawing artists, preserving their appetite for shaping according to the exact anthropological resemblance. This is a territory where the graphic performance manages to install itself within the limits of the visual arts (meaning mannerist realism, academic realism, mimetic drawing, hyper realistic painting, photo painting, photo realism and the prime, direct and classic photography).

The 3rd core is the pan-eclectic one, which, despite the expressive differences (Ero Guro, Manga, stylized graphic, caricature graphic, synthetic drawing, experimental and alternative graphic) shows a mutual engagement proposing the practice of the real by the quality declinations, in a sense accepted by the theory and practice of today's visual arts. This neo-figurative core's graphic performances are associated with the avant-gardes and modernism.

If at the beginning of the photography the comics' influences were literary and visual, the result being the comics' contribution to the comics' editing, to its sequencing, collage and photo-montage, the figurative influence being reduced to so called „mise en scene" and smooth or brutal retouches made either on the photographic negatives, either on the positives, this all will change once improving the offers of the photo laboratory and the appearance of the digital lab. The digital lab allows a powerful "retouch" of the real elements. The differences from other "retouches" stands in its accessibility in time and in dimension as well as in its "betrayal" of the real in favour of the unreal without "divorcing" the real.

Today's photography assumes all these action landmarks strengthening or making a derogation from the real, for the primacy of the unreal to the real, not as a "retouch", but as a performance of shaping, inventing, creating and re-creating a literary-visual narration having realism as its source and the exploration of the unreal as its end. The majority of the landmarks belonging to the today's photography, from the applicative one to the promotion

one, photo reportage, graphic design, graphic novel, video games or 3D modeling are opened towards this transit / transfer of using the real in the visual representation.

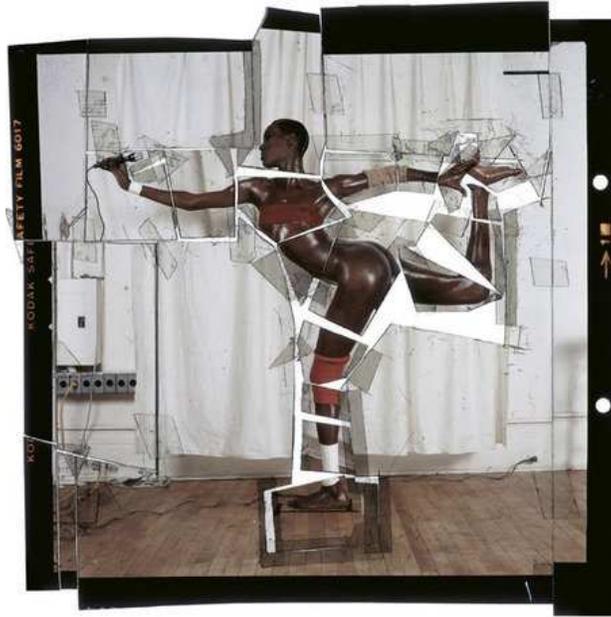
Seen, by some people, as an “alteration” of the photography in its spirit and essence, and by the others as “qualification”, “improvement”, all this proves to be a crossing path of the photography from the disciplined visual representation of the real elements to the imaginary, assured by the digital modeling, by the post-modern elements, by the hybrid narrations (comics and graphic novel), by the neo-figurative coming from the comics. All this passage of the photography has as a warrantee the affordability due to the permanent education and training of the creators and of the public in decoding, perceiving and assimilating the new image propositions or other forms of presentification. This “qualification” of the public is one of the main sources in the comics’ and its declinations’ pan-history.

The impact of the digital modeling, either of the real environment, either of virtual, either 2D, or 3D, provoked by the “holographic” representations. Therefore a new horizon, a new visual territory has appeared, also subject to various influences.

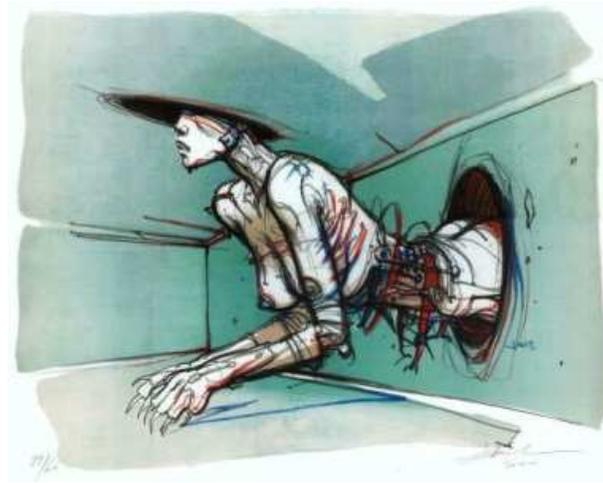
Numerous landmarks, sequences and territories of transferring the „know-how” between comics and photography were detected all along the documentary investigations. In this summary we decided to exemplify only one of these landmarks.

The example refers to Jean-Paul Goude and to his complex work. Jean-Paul Goude (born in 1940) is plenary illustrating the present photography’s location in a topologic, semantic and attitude territory characterized by a powerful eclectic. He is a graphic artist, illustrator, photographer, director and drawing artist of promotion films within the French, European space. He is often, skillfully and freely wandering the spaces of the visual representation from publicity to visual arts, from “improving” the stereotypes to therapeutic innovations, he is both a servant and a leader. He makes an exceptional junction between the “personal mythology”, dear to the post-modernism and “the others Pygmalion-ization”, an example in this matter being the image of Grace Jones. Without being copied, we find in his photos or staging both attitude and expressive references to Sergio Toppi, Hugo Pratt, Frank Frazetta, coming from the comics, but to Erwin Olaf, Jan Saudek, David La Chapelle, Gerard Rancinan coming from the trans post-modern photography.

Jean-Paul Goude is the most powerful example of the artist / creator / photographer bringing into his artistic “speech” not only the comics’ neo-figurative influences in the photography, but also the partnership between the two of them.



Jean-Paul Goude, *Grace revue et corrigee*, image from the series *Grace Jones*, 1978



Enki Bilal, sequence from a comics

So, *Grace revue et corrigee*, image from the series *Grace Jones* by Jean-Paul Goude, is a qualified example of a photographic image having obvious influences from the comics' neo-figurative and from other elements of the comics as well as from the visual representations characteristic to the trans post-modernism. We add here another example, a graphic sequence placed under the sign of the comics' neo-figurative, to illustrate the expressivity transfer from the graphic arts' neo-figurative towards the present photography. The example belongs to Enki Bilal, probably the most characteristic creator of comics having mutual influences between the comics' neo-figurative and the present photography.

The PhD thesis consists of 6 chapters accompanied by an introduction, by the conclusions and the bibliography. The PhD thesis' content indicates the sequences, the territories of the theoretical discourse and the territories of the applicative route of the thesis; therefore we will present it here:

1. The Comics from History to Present; 1.1. The comics' historic journey; 1.2. The Graphic Novel, extension of the popular comics; 1.3. The comics within other identity spaces, others than the American one; 2. The Mutual Influences between Comics, Visual Arts and Photography, from Modern to Contemporary; 2.1. Premises; 2.2. Theories of the explicit influences between comics and Pop Art; 2.3. Diffuse theories of the mutual influences between comics and contemporary visual arts; 2.4. The diffuse territories of the mutual influences between comics and the modern and contemporary photography; 3. The Comics and the Scene of the Technical Dynamic Images – Cinema, Television, Video; 3.1. Premises; 3.2. The mutual influences between comics and contemporary cinematography; 3.3. Influences of the comics on the video production (from entertainment to art); 4. The Comics and the Perceptive Acceleration, Specific Tandem to the Contemporary Visual Image's Present; 5. Reference of the Photography, from the 1st to the Modern One, to the Comics' Landmarks; 5.1. Comics' identity landmarks transferable to photography; 5.2. Neo-figurative within the present's comics – identity landmarks; 5.3. Comics' identity landmarks and its influences in the pan modernity's photography; 5.4. The comics' landmarks and post-modernity and trans post-modernity's photography; 5.5. The comics' and photography's neo-figurative eclectic activism infused to other artistic and applicative visual media; 6. Comics' Neo-Figurative vs. Nowadays Photography's Neo-figurative, the Personal Creation; 6.1. The evolution of the personal journey dedicated to the research and modulations of the neo-figurative specific to the comics extracted from the nowadays photography's new directions; 6.2. RED NOIR – alternative graphic novel vs. alternative and experimental literary narration; Conclusions; Bibliography.

The 1st chapter entitled *The Comics from History to Present*, brings into the discourse the necessary elements to decode the comics' and its identity, formal, conceptual and even national evolution. We insist here in presenting the graphic novel seen as a qualitatively superior influence on the comics' evolution and as a qualified partner in relation to the visual arts and to the applicative ones, to the photography.

The 2nd chapter entitled *The Mutual Influences between Comics, Visual Arts and Photography, from Modern to Contemporary*, operates an investigation over the visual

representation's landmarks, regarding the Pop Art, the modern and contemporary visual arts and the modern and contemporary photography.

The 3rd chapter entitled *The Comics and the Scene of the Technical Dynamic Images – Cinema, Television, and Video* engages a necessary review of the influences between the comics' territory and the territories of the technical, dynamic images, revealing the aspects of the mutual influence.

The 4th chapter entitles *The Comics and the Perceptive Acceleration, Specific Tandem to the Contemporary Visual Image's Present* focuses on analyzing and interpreting the most important work in the field - „*The Comics and the Post-Modern Canon*” written by Ion Manolescu. The ideas from this severe theoretical research are bringing, at least in the Romanian space of manifestation, an important contribution regarding the theoretical aspects of the mutual influences between the comics and the literary and visual narrations.

The 5th chapter entitled *Reference of the Photography, from the 1st to the Modern One, to the Comics' Landmarks*, develops the general theoretical discourse of the previous 3 chapters within a rich, but punctual development regarding the theoretical and illustrative aspects of the relationship between comics, figurative, neo-figurative specific to the comics and photography. It insists also on the partnership between comics and photography, between figurative and other artistic, visual and applicative media.

The 6th chapter presents and promotes the personal creation and it constitutes the applicative dimension of the PhD thesis. The applications are accompanied by texts, created either by professional writers (writers, poets, philosophers) or amateurs (visual artists, convicts, taking part in a literary-visual creation camp within the Aiud penitentiary). This sequence constitutes beside the personal, innovating creative approach, the experiment, the original and authentic contribution to the personal project dedicated to the partnership between illustration, literary creation and graphic novel, between their extensions and proximities.

The Introduction and the conclusions facilitate and guide the encounter with the PhD thesis' subject. The bibliography contains 41 titles of publications and other articles or web sites.

At the end of this summary I would like to emphasize that finalizing this PhD thesis does not mean the end of this subject. This subject is an organic part of my preoccupations and of my personal creation.

I would like to thank my coordinator, PhD prof. Radu Solovăstru for his knowledge in guiding and correcting me during these years and also the University of Art and Design Cluj-

Napoca for its support in obtaining the residency in Angouleme, France, 2012, where I had a source of benefic situations for my development and improvement as an expert in my PhD thesis' subject, as well as a visual artist dedicated to the general and punctual influences between comics, photography and graphic arts.