

REVIEW

Enacting Graphic Mark-Making: A Review of *A Theory of Narrative Drawing*

A Theory of Narrative Drawing, by Simon Grennan,
Palgrave Macmillan; XII, 277 pages, 16 b/w illustrations,
10 illustrations in colour; eBook ISBN 978-1-137-51844-6;
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This review in graphic form responds to Simon Grennan's 2017 monograph 'A Theory of Narrative Drawing', describing its form and key ideas, and commenting on its contribution to the field, whilst enacting the graphic mark-making which is its focus. The review concludes that though some more framing material would have been useful for readers, the book repays a second reading and makes an invaluable contribution to the view of comics as an active process of meaning-making.

Keywords: comics; drawing; graphic narrative; storytelling; visual storytelling

REVIEW of A THEORY of NARRATIVE DRAWING
by SIMON GREENAWAN

PAUL FISHER DAVIES

Greenan's work is DENSE and CHALLENGING.

Its sentences are TIGHTLY constructed and encourage a SLOW READ.

We work from a lengthy section on THEORY — PART ① = DRAWING

Through a lesser section on NARRATIVE + INTERSUBJECTIVITY ②

To a pair of "DRAWING DEMONSTRATIONS" ③

THEORY NARRATIVE DRAWING

A reader MIGHT consider starting at the END and working BACKWARD!

The DRAWING DEMONSTRATIONS comprise an IMPRESSIVE recreation of STYLE — it took me a while to realise that the COVER IMAGE is NOT Chris WARE!

The movement is from the more GENERAL and THEORETIC to the PARTICULAR — from ABSTRACT to CONCRETE.

Earlier sections discussing such images as the NECKER CUBE ran the risk of comparable ambiguity — even tautology.

Greenan is AWARE (22) of this. In the early sections he is pursuing SUBTLE points + distinctions...

Such as the distinction between INDEX and TRACE in digital, manual and mechanical drawings... (15-16)

And the key distinction between drawing as a TECHNICAL ACTIVITY and as GOAL-DIRECTED ACTION. This etiological view sees drawing as COMMUNICATIVE act.

A THEORY OF NARRATIVE DRAWING
Simon Greenan

NECKER CUBE

This foregrounds PRAGMATICS as an approach to theorising drawing, and it is from this position that Greeman attacks Neil Cohn's "VISUAL LANGUAGE" (48).

① GEORGE WALKED TO THE KITCHEN
 ② GEORGE TO WALKED THE KITCHEN

For Cohn, a swap of PANEL ORDER is like a swap of WORD ORDER in syntax.

for GREEMAN
 This is untrue. Both sequences of images are coherent.

GREEMAN takes the notion of "seeing-in" in VISUAL DEPICTION to be key, and its FLEXIBILITY means Cohn cannot fit visual systems into a syntactic/semantic system of "LEXICO-GRAMMAR".

LEXICOGRAMMAR
 RESOURCE of the BODY
 HOMEORHESIS
 PRENOETIC
 NOETIC
 NEOTIC
 PRENEOTIC

and there are some proofing slips in this first printing that complicate the close reading it demands.

But it REQUIRES a second reading!

Here I'd have liked a more careful introduction of TERMS. "lexicogrammar" is a systemic-functional term - does Greeman allude to this linguistic theory?

A NUMBER of terms would benefit from a FULLER DISCUSSION at first mention.

THE GESTURE is at the core of Greeman's concerns. Particularly the leaving of marks as an act of INTERSUBJECTIVE creation as a GOAL-DIRECTED (AETIOLOGICAL) act in a social and material context (ecology).

from BODY/ MIND to BODY/ MIND via Mark-Making

is a dialogic tool as good as a material one.

The DIALOGISM of MIKHAIL BAKHTIN is also influential on this view of meaning.

an approach to meaning deriving from language.

And it is **BAKHTIN** who offers a link to the **DRAWING DEMONSTRATIONS** at the **END** of the book.

Meaning is the **EFFECT** of **INTERACTIONS** between **SPEAKER + LISTENER** (175)

VARIANTS on the **THEME** of another **discourse**, **EXPONDED** THROUGH **THOUGHT** in the **STYLE** of that thought.

BAKHTIN

Grennan takes on the **STYLE** of other artists to re-create another's strip, mediated by a **SCRIPT**.

GRENNAN

WARE

MIGNOLA

The results are **AMAZING** - convincing, playful and delightful.

Though the commentary focuses on **TECHNICAL DESCRIPTIONS** of the activity, the **distanced** in the theoretical sections...

...the idea of the **INTERSUBJECT** as realised in the **DRAWING** holds the idea together.

Grennan makes clear that this is not to be a **MENARD-LIKE** project of **BECOMING** another, (sec. 4.1.) Nor is it quite **MADDEN'S 99 WAYS TO TELL A STORY** (2005) which mainly has a set 'STYLE'.

And **DEMONSTRATION TWO** differs from **SETH'S** adoption of period style in

Grennan redraws again in the styles of the **50s, 60s, and 70s**.

And with these **DEMONSTRATIONS**, the book comes to a **CLOSE**...

FIN.

A CONCLUSION Chapter or **SUMMARY** would have been welcome to bring together the **RANGE** of ground covered...

But this makes an **INVALUABLE** contribution to the view of **DRAWING** as **ACTION**, not **OBJECT**.

CLYDE FANS Book 1

It's hard to do!

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Editorial Note

A Theory of Narrative Drawing, by Simon Grennan can be ordered directly from Palgrave Macmillan at <https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9781137521651>.

This book review is part of the Graphic Science Special Collection edited by Nicolas Labarre and Ernesto Priego. Though the Reference section has been listed in graphic form, references have also been typeset as text to enhance discoverability and citation practices.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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