
By

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Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. vii
Statement ................................................................................................................. ix
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................... x
List of Figures ............................................................................................................. xi

Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  1.2 Background and Context .................................................................................. 2
  1.3 Theoretical and Analytic Framework .............................................................. 13
  1.4 Research Questions and Focus ....................................................................... 15
  1.5 Overview of the Methodology ........................................................................ 17
  1.6 Significance ...................................................................................................... 18
  1.7 Conclusion and Thesis Outline ....................................................................... 20

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Methodology ......................................... 21
  2.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 21
  2.2 Theoretical and Analytical Framework .......................................................... 21
    2.2.1 Technological Change .............................................................................. 22
    2.2.2 Comic Books and the Creative Industries .............................................. 23
    2.2.3 The Conditions of Creative Work .......................................................... 24
    2.2.4 Comic Book Work .................................................................................. 28
    2.2.5 Work and Identity .................................................................................. 29
    2.2.6 Managing Identity Tension ..................................................................... 32
    2.2.7 Discourse ................................................................................................. 34
    2.2.8 A Systems Approach ............................................................................. 39
    2.2.9 Socialisation ............................................................................................ 43
    2.2.10 Capital and Risk .................................................................................... 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Methodology</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 Population of Interest</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4 Data Collection</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Data Analysis</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 General Inductive Approach</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 – Understanding Comic Book Production</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Print Industry Structure</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Work-for-Hire</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Diamond</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3 Creator-Owned</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Roles and the Production Process</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 The Editor</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 The Writer</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 The Penciller/Artist</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 The Inker</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.6 The Letterer</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.7 Simple vs. Complex Creative Production</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 - Becoming a Comic Book Worker</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 “Breaking In” and Survival Stories – The Narratives That Drive</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Complete List of Participants .......................... 366
Appendix D: Conference Data List ........................................ 368
Appendix E.1: Original Interview Questions (Experienced creators) ................................................................. 370
Appendix E.2: Original Interview Questions (New creators) ... 371
Appendix F: Sample of Additional and Follow-up Questions . 373
Appendix G: Example of Coding Process .............................. 374
Abstract

This thesis investigates how creative industries workers adapt to and influence the use of new digital technologies. It looks at how these technologies affect business models, content production and product distribution in the comics industry, and how these changes create uncertainty and risk for creative workers in this industry. It examines the strategies comics creators use to shape new industry structures and the status of digital comics within the wider industry, as well as their own identities as media industry workers.

The study uses data from interviews and historical documents to compare the experiences of editors, writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists, letterers and new digital workers who are creating content at two existing print publishers and two new digital companies to develop a theory of the creators’ ‘adaptation framework’. The adaptation framework recognises the influence of historically and culturally constructed discussions about what constitutes ‘good work’ in the comics industry and the influence this has on the adoption of new forms of digital technology for comics’ production. Critical judgment and public validation of choices made regarding the use of digital technologies encourages creators to reframe their work identity and the content they produce.

This analytical framework highlights the availability of different professional identity categories, including a ‘core’ identity and guiding values, plus a supplementary ‘pioneer’ identity, which acknowledges the creative freedom offered by digital media. Creators also use discursive practices, such as ‘reactive’ and ‘relational’ positioning, to manage their identity in relation to the field of comics production and to distance their work from negative evaluations of digital comics derived from historical exemplars of what are now perceived to be ‘poor works’, and by extension poor work by the creator. Periods of change throw
into relief existing understandings held by workers and consumers of what constitutes a ‘good’ comic book. Early digital comics projects from the 1990s and 2000s influence creators’ perceptions of whether digital technologies can produce such ‘good works’.

Pioneers and early adopters take on the role of experts and advocates, engaging in the process of socialising the new discourses and practices into the broader field of comics production. The pioneer identity is correlated with the privitisation and individualisation of risk, whereby creators invest their human, social, and symbolic capital in projects that have uncertain outcomes in exchange for creatively challenging careers and potentially reputation-building work. The pioneers are open to change, but their previous print-based identity often provides stability to their core identity as creators capable of producing ‘good work’. Creators rely on these identities to orient themselves in relation to the new norms, practices and routines of comic book work, engaging in identity management to manage the risk that their investment in skill development and time spent producing digital comics will not produce a return on investment measured through financial or social capital recognised in the industry. Adaptation to digital work forces aspects of the creator’s identity to change, but their core understanding of who they are, what they do, and why they do it is still a valuable and sustaining element of their identity as a creative worker.

**Keywords:** Identity, comic books, creative work, digitisation, risk
Statement

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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____________________________
Troy Kristoffer Aaron Mayes

____________________________
Date
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List of Figures

Figure 1 Example of swipe-based storytelling in *The Eighth Seal* by writer James Tynion IV and artist Jeremy Rock.. ........................................10

Figure 2 Cheque supplied to artist Dick Ayers in 1974 by Marvel .....................74

Figure 3 Breakdown of the print comic book production process......................87

Figure 4 comiXology homepage with Marvel and DC tabs.............................178

Figure 5 Top search results for 'comics' in iPad app store.............................179

Figure 6 Completed sequence from *Deadpool: The Gauntlet* #3..............217

Figure 7 Comparison between Character art and final Madefire build. .........254

Figure 8 Separated art layers from *Houses of the Holy: Episode 2* in Photoshop before being imported into the Madefire tool.................259

Figure 9 Marvel Infinite and Print Comic Script Comparison.......................277

Figure 10 Artist direction to Madefire Builders........................................282