

Comics strike back: digital comics, digital audiences, digital practices

Location: Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Ghent University, Belgium

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Website: <http://digitalcomics.ugent.be>

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Deadline for abstracts: 22 December 2021

Digital comics encompass a variety of works, ranging from print comics that are then digitised or pre-published online to e-comics that resist print publication and have stronger affinities with videogames, animations, and other digital products. Online or offline, static or animated, reproducing the page format or expanding beyond the borders of a screen, digital comics always imply some degree of adjustment of processes and habits, because comics are also cultural objects, creative practices as well as models of production and consumption.

Consequently, scholars have showcased a growing interest in the topic (some of the most interesting contributions include Robert 2016; Baudry 2018; Kashtan 2018; Kirchoff and Cook 2019; Kleefeld 2020; Rauscher, Stein and Thon 2020). Despite this expanding critical attention, the fruitful convergence between comics production and consumption and digital cultures is still far to be exhaustively explored. Much attention has been paid to the many forms of digital comics. Nevertheless, the multifaceted phenomenon of digital comics, especially from a diachronic perspective, remains overlooked. Since the beginnings of the medium in the 1980s and the 1990s, comics authors have actively experimented with its affordances. However, even after more than thirty years digital comics continue to experiment with the medium's possibilities and expand its potentialities. They remained a hybrid object in the process of becoming, with a heterogeneous and hardly definable status.

Going in search of what makes comics that crisscross media and supports still *comics* (Frezza 2017: 19), then, implies a complex approach: as Benoît Crucifix and Björn-Olav Dozo affirm, productively adopting perspectives from media archaeology and media comparative theory, “understanding digital comics today requires us to take into account the larger history of intermedial dialogues between comics, film, and animation” (2018: 583). The complexity of this enterprise is perhaps exacerbated by the notorious lack of communication amongst different methodological traditions and languages. The current landscape thus calls for reframing digital comics in a more holistic perspective that accounts for the peculiarities of the medium while managing to place them in a broader context viewed from a multidisciplinary perspective.

In the light of the above, this conference aims to address theoretical shortcomings and bridge this disciplinary gap by focusing on the social, cultural and economic practices of digital comics. We seek contributions highlighting the semiotic innovations of digital comics, underlining their symbolic potential and their capacity to throw light on contemporary social dynamics and processes. Proposals analysing medial and cultural convergences, audience practices and the social impact they entail are especially welcome.

The conference will explore, without limiting itself to, the following lines of investigation:

- The transformation caused and encouraged by digital comics concerning the production, distribution and consumption of comics;
- Social and economic changes behind the processes of democratisation of artistic production in which digital comics often participate;
- The materiality of digital objects;
- The imaginaries that digital comics activate;
- Digital comics’ continuities with, and divergences from, analogue media;
- Socially engaged, participative and activist practices connected to digital comics.

While we will thoroughly take into account the evolution of the Covid-19 scenarios and plan the conference accordingly, at present we plan to organize the conference **on campus**, at the **Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of Ghent University** (Blandijnberg 2, Ghent, Belgium). In order to guarantee accessibility for those who are unable to travel to Ghent, a **limited number** of non-presential papers will be accepted and one of the three days of the conference will be organized in a blended format. Please, do mention your preference and the reasons for which you propose a non-presential paper when submitting your abstract.

The working language is English. Proposed abstracts should not exceed **350 words** (bibliographical references excluded) and be accompanied by a short biography; they should be sent in a single PDF/Word document (filename: author’s name and surname) to **digitalcomics@ugent.be** no later than **December 22**. The conference will result in a special issue in an international peer-reviewed journal at the end of 2022/in the first half of 2023 (the organizers are currently negotiating the details; more information will be communicated soon).

For any further information, please feel free to write to **digitalcomics@ugent.be**.