(IMAGE_01)

The facture of *Dispossession:* trace, colour, light and time in a new graphic adaptation of Anthony Trollope's 1879 novel *John Caldigate*

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(IMAGE_02 FRONTISPIECE JC AND COVER)

This paper will discuss some of my approaches to making *Dispossession*, my 96 page graphic adaptation of Victorian author Anthony Trollope's 600 page novel *John Caldigate,* published in 1879. Published by Jonathan Cape and in French by Les Impressions Nouvelles, in the context of an academic conference celebrating the bicentenary of Trollope's birth this year, the new graphic novel *Dispossession* functions as a research outcome in the sense that its academic audience is a 'knowing one', to use Linda Hutcheon's term (Hutcheon 2006:122). This audience will both expect to read the graphic novel as the product of a self-aware relationship with Trollope's novel and make demands upon the new graphic novel that derive from their own, particularly focused, experience of Trollope's novel itself. As a result, the process of making the adaptation has distilled questions about the act of novel/comic adaptation itself that have enabled the emergence of a methodology for the adaptation process and aimed to produce the new book as a comprehensible response.

(IMAGE_03 DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD)

Following Walter Benjamin's theorisation of translation, the process of creating *Dispossession* approaches Trollope's text as the source of a protocol or set of governing rules, including an apprehension of the reading behaviour of his contemporaries and of contemporary graphic novel readers (Benjamin 1969:70). As a result, the relationship between novel and graphic novel constitutes both the

process and product of adaptation as an experience for a knowing reader.

I set myself the challenge of replacing Trollope's literary voice, his *John Caldigate* style of writing, with a visual style, constituting both storyboarding and facture, along with the further task of being able to theorise this replacement. More than his plots, Trollope's writing style, his techniques of understatement, create the overwhelming sense of the world in which he lived, his novels being set in the very recent past of the mid- and late- nineteenth century. Virginia Woolf said of Trollope's style that the reader believes in it "as we believe in the reality of our own weekly bills." However, although written at great speed, scrutiny of *John Caldigate* reveals that this effect is as much to do with the careful structuring of juxtapositions and omissions as with description. Trollope is both accurate and equivocal. 'Perhaps', he says, or 'it was said of'. Producing this sense of equivocation through the visual style of the graphic novel became one of the central challenges of showing, rather than telling, the plot: how does one draw 'perhaps'?

Hence, part of the process of creating *Dispossession* was my development and rationalisation of a number of rules to govern both the graphic novel's storyboard (that is, the ways in which the reader relates to the action in each panel and the way in which panels relate to each other) the types of mark and colour used in its facture.

Although today I want to focus upon the latter, the facture of *Dispossession*: it's trace, colour, light and some of the ways in which these create time, it might be useful to repeat these storyboard rules because they too embody my approach to depicting particular historic times in the nineteenth century:

(IMAGE_04 RULES)

a limited range of distances between viewer and scene; views of discrete actions, not divisions of actions; rhythmic changes of scene and episode on the page;

consistent rhythmic changes of point of view in a visible 1-2-3 rhythm; no extradiegetic narrative; as small an amount of verbalisation in the plot as possible; generalisation: this treatment applied in all circumstances.

in general, each panel in *Dispossession* presents an icon of action rather than the sensation of action, the anaphoras of the plot are categorically different from the anaphoras in a graphic novel structured by a movie-type regime, such as *The Dark Knight Returns*, for example.

(IMAGE_05 DKR).

Anaphoras constitute what the reader can know about the diegesis that is not shown in the plot. I am using the term 'anaphora' in its linguistic sense, to refer to types of knowledge that are indexed by a text, but which do not appear in a text. Anaphoristic knowledge has a causal relationships to the events of the plot. For example, if a plot shows a mature oak tree, then we also understand that there has been an acorn, in the past, and that, at some future time, the tree will disappear. Neither of these anaphoristic facts are shown explicitly in the depiction of the mature tree. With a movie-type comics storyboard, knowledge of the trajectory of a body moving in space might form a crucial aspect of the anaphora, as a present-time sensation for the reader. The storyboard rules in *Dispossession* make this type of knowledge largely unimportant.

There is a narratological argument to be made for the plotlessness of single images, in which the single image is only meaningful as an anchor for its anaphoras. I think that a change in the relative importance accorded to different categories of anaphora by viewers took place with the advent of movie and photography.

(IMAGE_06 CAILLBOTTE AND HH)

If we compare two paintings form the period in which modern photography then movie appeared, *La Place de l'Europe, temps de pluie* of 1877, a painting by Gustave Caillebotte with *The Children's Holiday* of 1864, a painting by William

Holman Hunt, we can see the differences between these categories of ‘unshown’ knowledge, in which the images become meaningful. In Caillebotte’s painting, it is the sense that we know that the image depicts a moment almost identical to the preceding and successive ones that is significant. In Holman Hunt’s painting, the identification of the moment of depiction, relative to surrounding moments, is unimportant. Rather, it is knowledge of the histories of each element in the image, and the juxtaposition of these histories, that is significant. To twenty-first century viewers immersed in lens-based media, Holman Hunt’s image highlights the loss of the habit of significantly relating the histories of elements to each other, whereas Caillebotte’s extraction of a moment from a continuity of moments exploits the now-expected significance of a type of knowledge of before and after.

(IMAGE_07 DOUBLE PAGE)

Approaching *Dispossession*, I made a theoretical distinction between storyboarding and mark making, including colour. It was useful to maintain this distinction, because it allowed me to partition the plot in terms of the structuring of reader points of view, relative to the panel, the page, the spread and the book. I intended the strangeness of the experience of reading *Dispossession* (brought about by the storyboard), compared with habitual expectations of reading a new graphic novel in English or French, to inculcate the strangeness of the diegetic world of the 1870s. In a sense, I aimed to place the reader in an affecting relationship with a vision of the period that is both coherent and comprehensively dis-habituating.

However, the storyboard regime was not the only way in which I represented what I consider to be the fundamental strangeness of the nineteenth century world for twenty-first century readers.

Jan Baetens has pointed to the ‘isochronic’ time, or marked equal division of time in *Dispossession,* at the level of both diegesis (the types of time represented) and

discourse (the types of time required to read). As a strict counterpoint to the rhythms created by the rules of the storyboard, the book's colour palette is also arranged for verisimilitude and to direct the rhythm of reading. Specific places, seasons and times of day are indicated by the repeated, systemic use of a small range of colours and tones. To see this rhythm simultaneously, although not strictly accurately, it is simply a question of mapping the dominant colours in each panel as a grid enumerating the whole book.

(IMAGE_08 GRID OF PAGES)

The green of vegetation in New South Wales is not the green of Cambridgeshire.

(IMAGE_09 NSW AND CAMBS)

The greens of both New South Wales and Cambridgeshire have their seasonal variations and shades, according to time of year and day.

(IMAGE_10 THE DRAIN x 2)

The plot spans five years and returns to locations seen under very different conditions: in spring and autumn, day and night and under snow.

(IMAGE_11 FULKING x 2)

This rhythm encompasses local colour, but is not constrained by it and produces surprises that are pendant to the distancing effect of the storyboard regime: transformations of colour effected by changes in the atmosphere.

(IMAGE_12 FULKING ORANGE)

In effect, the sequences of colour seduce as much as to orient and manipulate. Contra the inviolable distancing of the reader from the action, achieved by the storyboard, the sequence and rhythm of colours produce a subsuming sense of an entire, diegetic meteorology.

The overdrawing of local and dominant colours with lines of complimentary and dissonant colours creates a comprehensive illusion of changes of depth, depicting light as a unifying set of variations, anchored in verisimilitude. As with the range of possible, impossible, plausible and implausible movements of people and things dictated by the storyboard, the depictions of air in *Dispossession* are couched in specific, encompassing, anaphoristic knowledge. These types of air and light constitute a history of specific changes and belong to no other world, unless a world of discursive rather than deigetic associations.

I argue that drawing does not dress form. It is form. *Dispossession* is as good an example as any, because, in this sense, it seems to me that depictions are always absolutely unequivocal, even if diegetic ambiguity pushes us to fail in recognising what is depicted, or the atmosphere is so thick that we recognise that little can be seen, or when a depiction unambiguously presents ambiguity. So I return to the central problem of attempting to replace an equivocal 'target' written text with unequivocal drawing. But making a theoretical distinction between what John Miers has called the "flickering patterns" and the "forms", in *Dispossession,* has relevant historic precedents, particularly in Italian Renaissance 'paragone' or 'comparisons' between the depictive styles of paintings. On one hand, 'colore' described the depiction of the diegetic air by which means an image exists, with 'colorito' describing the technical methods for producing a depiction of this type. On the other hand, 'disegno' described the identification of divisions and contours as a method for depicting encompassed volumes and the boundaries between one object and

another. Compare for example, as Pietro Aretino did in the mid sixteenth century, the depictive techniques of Titian's 'colore' and Michaelangelo's 'disegno'.

(IMAGE_13 TITIAN, MICHAELANGELO)

The distinction can still prove useful and I had it in mind when drawing *Dispossession*. The book adopts a 'colore' depictive regime (that is, a regime intent upon depicting air), inspired by the stylistic devices of a small number of nineteenth and early twentieth century artists in whose drawings I recognised shared solutions to the problems of this type of depiction and hence whose works generate, for me, visions of the world of the nineteenth century relative to Trollope's, such as Cham,

(IMAGE_14 CHAM)

Honoré Daumier,

(IMAGE_15 DAUMIER)

John Piper,

(IMAGE_16 PIPER)

Walter Sickert,

(IMAGE_17 SICKERT)

and Edward Ardizzone,

(IMAGE_18 ARDIZZONE)

in which light and air are themselves being depicted.

(IMAGE_20 FULKING DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD)

In cuing the reader to an idea of a specific nineteenth century past, this approach also acts to equalise the status of people, objects and locations, unifying them across the whole book. Everything in the diegesis is seen as having the same light and air, from the most significant gesture by a major character to the least significant book tucked away in an office. Everything can be either illuminated to centre-stage brightness or made invisible by a cloaking gloom. In this sense, the colour and facture of *Dispossession* shares aims with theorisations of nineteenth century Realism, in that no hierarchy exists in the palette used to achieve this pervasive light that would render a cloud less important than an eyebrow. This equality of treatment extends to every drawn line in *Dispossession*. It is often the matter of the slightest inflection or shift in context that makes a white line the tail of a speech balloon rather than a depiction of the light reflected on an old oak floor.

(IMAGE_21 COVER)

END