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# Reading and Playing Graphically Narrated Stories in a Live Audio-Play

Abstract: By reading, viewing and discussing graphically narrated stories, children developed plays out of pictures and texts. These approaches shall be deepened in the context of an intervention study: in a project-week at a primary school, Anke Kuhl's comic style novel Lehmriese lebt! [Clay Giant's Alive!] (2015) will be scenically staged in a live audio-play. In this story, two children unintentionally create a Golem during a game. The Golem's quest for orienting itself brings about chaos. Finally, its creators can prevent a catastrophe by giving the Golem the right task: to play with them. Reading and playing the comic style novel shall bring narrative resources of the respective art form to the children's attention, but also change and widen perspectives on the story. The question emerges: how do waves of literary learning become visible in the soundtrack development and implementation of Lehmriese lebt! [Clay Giant's Alive!]? Therefore focus lies on the children's imagination, their subjective involvement and their perception of language and pictures in the comic style novel. The scenic development and conversation about it will be audio- and video-recorded. Based on this data, observation protocols and transcripts will be written in order to enable the analysis of verbal and non-verbal expressions. Transformation processes in a multimodal literary context will be explored from two different angles: transformation of the story (written language and pictures are transformed into spoken language and sounds) as well as the liminal experience of the children in the play. The reason for choosing Lehmriese lebt! [Clay Giant's Alive!] is the Golem-motif, whose core aspects are transformation processes and animation from inanimate materials.

**Keywords:** comics and graphic novels, transformation processes, (live) audio-plays, acting out literature, reception processes, literary learning, Golem

### INTRODUCTION

The reading, contemplation, and understanding of multimodal texts, such as comics and graphic novels, is a particular challenge for children, but also offers new opportunities for their implementation and transformation. Transformation processes (Dehn 2014) can take place between language and image, as

well as writing, speaking, and pictorial design, but also in scenic reading and acting out graphically narrated stories.

In order to better understand literary learning (Spinner 2006) in the context of graphically narrated stories, I will examine the acquisition of the comic style novel *Lehmriese lebt!* [*Clay Giant's Alive!*] in a project week in a primary school. The children develop the soundtrack of the panels through sound and speech formation. In the following, making sound in response to the pictures of the book is called 'live audio-play'. Tape recorder and video-cameras will record the development process and the implementation of the live audio-play. I will describe this data in protocols (Reh 2012), transcripts (Selting et al. 2009) and then make a interaction analyse (Krummheuer & Naujok 1999). The study is a part of the research project "Stories in texts and images – graphic novels in the German classroom" under the direction of Jeanette Hoffmann.

## COMICS, GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC STYLE NOVELS

There are many words for graphically narrated stories: comic, comic style novel and graphic novel. What are the differences between them?

According to Scott McCloud comics are, "spatially arranged sequences, images, or other drawings that convey information and/or should work as an aesthetic effect for the viewer" (McCloud 1997: 17). Graphic novels differ from comics in four ways: First through their length because they don't have a limited page number (Fokken 2012: 38). Second through their format, as graphic novels are completed stories that are similar to novel format. Third through their content, which is narrative more complex (Dolle-Weinkauff 2011: 327–328). And as a fourth point, graphic novels use different ways of telling the story: aesthetic innovation, montage and complex combinations between text and image (Jesch 2012: 53–54). In this way, graphic novels released from the classical narrative style of comic, such as a structured, rigid panel composition, speech bubbles, thought bubbles, sound words and motion lines. *Lehmriese lebt!* [Clay Giant's Alive!] is a completed story in novel format, that narrates in a classic comic style. For this reason, I call it a comic style novel.

### READING AND TRANSFORMING GRAPHICALLY NARRATED STORIES

The reception of stories in both speech and images requires special demands for children. Reading and viewing is a construction process that is not possible without participation from the recipient, who creates his/her own image of the story in mind. As a result, no one can read or view exactly the same story, the same picture, the same text. According to Wolfgang Hallet, reading and viewing comics and graphic novels is a "multi-literal act" (Hallet 2012: 4) in which many pro-

cesses are involved: Reading comprehension, viewing comprehension, the perception of shapes and colours, the decoding of sound words and other symbolic drawings of the comic-language, as well as the acquisition of the panel-sequence, the panel-composition and the page layout. This means that the reader must understand what happens in a single panel, but also the connection of them in the panel-sequence. By connecting the pictures with each other, he/she has to fill the space in between with imagination. It's not only the *amount* of signs that differs reading comics from reading continuous texts, but also that the recipient has to handle with all these signs *simultaneously* (Becker, Giesa and Knott 2012: 8).

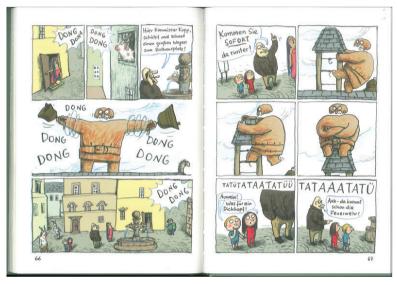


Figure 1 – Classic comic style in Lehmriese lebt! [Clay Giant's Alive!]

This mental construction of graphically narrated stories is of special interest in this study. This process will be deepened, and becomes observable, as making an audio-track means transmitting visual signs into acoustic signs – with the vocal design of the characters, with environmental noise, and atmospheric mood sounds. By doing so, spoken language interprets written language and gives ancillary information through para-verbal and non-verbal signs. Regarding the para-verbal aspect, speaking expressive can differ in tempo, dynamism, melody and articulation (Schau 1996: 56). Non-verbal signs, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture and proxemics, always accompany speaking, thus they make the speaker's interpretation of the text visible. In addition there are differences between spoken and written language concerning their space-time-continuum: spoken language is fleeting, while written language is constant (Müller 2012: 21).

In this context, it is to notice that written language in comic style novels has an acoustic side. This acoustic side becomes clear especially through sound words and typography (Meurer 2011: 142). The lettering can show us how

loud, how dynamic and with what intonation and emotion we shall read a text. This acoustic side makes this genre for the soundtrack development especially appropriate.

#### WAVES OF LITERARY LEARNING

One central research question reads: *How become waves of literary learning visible in the soundtrack development and implementation of* Lehmriese lebt! (Clay Giant's Alive!)?

Waves of literary learning are selected aspects of literary learning (Spinner 2006). The selection of the aspects depends on the idea of their arrangement. Literary learning means learning processes in consideration of literature. Kaspar H. Spinner formulated eleven different aspects of literary learning, which include both enjoying literature and reflected dealing with it. They are independent of reading skills, thus they can take place even by listening to literature, by regarding literature or by acting out. Aspects of literary learning are explicitly not to be understood as levels of literary competence in terms of improvement (Merklinger and Preußer 2014: 157). It is worth mentioning that Spinner's detailed description of literary learning changed to opposite the traditional value: Imagination, empathy and subjective involvement in interplay of accurate perception serve as a basis for other aspects of literary learning (Grenz 2010: 144). Spinner himself explained his idea of their arrangement in these words: They "fall just like a drop or an object into the water, where it is so immersed, just like the reader is immersed within their imagination, and the waves expand in waves into tangible circles" (Spinner 2015: 193). I would like to see exactly where the drop meets the water and track the following waves:

- 1. Ideas are developed through reading, viewing and hearing (imagination building)
- 2. Subjective involvement and accurate perception are put into play with one another (feeling and understanding)
- 3. Linguistic and visual designs are attentively noticed

# THE COMIC STYLE NOVEL LEHMRIESE LEBT! [CLAY GIANT'S ALIVE!]

Now I would like to take a closer look at *Lehmriese lebt!* [*Clay Giant's Alive!*] (Kuhl 2015), a "humorous visual-linguistic variant of the story about the important and mystical figure of the Golem in Jewish literature and its entry into society" (Führer 2017: 29).

The comic novel tells the story chronologically in eight chapters. Apart from chapter one and two, every chapter deals with a new place, which is introduced by a full page. At these places, the Golem has to cope with a very heterogene-

ous society. The other characters, partly anthropomorphic animals and fantastic characters are not astonished to meet a living clay giant – maybe because all kind of bizarre appearances have become normal for them. They do not realise that the clay man, as he is just born and not yet introduced into society, has no idea about social rules. For this reason, the Golem evokes much chaos in the small town, which threatens to escalate. Finally, the story leads to a happy end.

On the river: The two children Olli and Ulla build a clay giant "from proper beautiful, thick clay" (Kuhl 2015: 6).

Over night: During the night, there is a massive storm. The clay man is, for just a moment, lit up – possibly due to a lightning strike. The storm finally breaks and the morning light begins to shine. A flower, which is next to the head of the clay giant, catches a raindrop and lets it land on his forehead. In this moment, he opens his eyes.

In the Stumpwald (The Stump Forest): The clay man enters the privately owned forest of a forester named Stump and is supposed to pull weeds for him (i.e. plucking out everything that is not a Douglas fir). But alas, the clay giant incorrectly uproots a Douglas fir. The forester, beside himself with anger, throws the clay giant out of his forest.

With the ice cream seller: Olli and Ulla buy an ice cream and discover that their clay man has come to life. He takes ice cream without paying for it. Instead of eating the ice cream, he lets it melt and pours the ice cream cone over his head. Olli and Ulla secretly follow him.

At the hairdresser's shop: The Golem enters a hairdresser's shop with a sign hanging outside the entrance saying "Help Wanted". Olli and Ulla observe what is happening inside through a window. They can see the hairdresser with two female customers. When he sees the Golem, he employs him as temporary help. However, as the clay man washes the hair of one customer, his hands begin to dissolve in the water and need to be re-formed. The woman is upset and the Golem has to leave the hairdresser's shop. Olli and Ulla follow him further.

At the supermarket: While at the supermarket, the clay man discovers that Olli and Ulla are following him by using a telescope he made by rolling up a magazine. The children flee from his view and disappear. Because of his huge size, a customer asks the Golem for help, but he becomes angry and destroys a part of the supermarket. Olli and Ulla are worried about it, but decide not to tell adults that they were the ones who built the clay giant. In addition, they do not think anyone will believe them anyway.

At the police station: The forester Mr. Stump, who has observed what has happened in the supermarket, reports the clay giant at the police station. The police man afterwards establishes that the clay man has knocked a dustbin and a bicycle over.

On the rooftop: The clay giant climbed on the rooftop of the courthouse. The fire department is supposed to spray him with water to make him come back down. Olli and Ulla are appalled by what might happen, so they decide

to explain that they built this man of clay and then he came to life. This allows them to save the clay giant at the very last second: The hairdresser and the police man realise that the children created a Golem and a Golem will only listen to its creators. The children should employ him for things that could be useful for the adults (styling hair, making ice cream, building a supermarket). However, Olli and Ulla urge the clay giant to climb back down from the roof and play with them. As they found the right task for him, the danger is overcome. In the end Olli, Ulla, and the Golem play happy games together.

This comic style novel tells its story through rigid panel sequences. Border rules (habitus) and letters look like handwriting. For expressing paraverbal aspects, the text appears in shaky, oversized or underlined words, thus they show anger, volume or fear. In figure 2, we can see shaky lettering and differences in size between the words in the speech bubbles. In this way, the typography shows us, that the children shout excitedly and loud, while the other two speech bubbles seem to be quieter in the background. The capitals "AUTSCH" in one of them make clear, that this person speaks a bit louder than the other one.



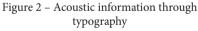




Figure 3 – Motion lines and soundwords

Altogether, many comic-specific signs are used: what appears are speech and thought bubbles, sound words and motion lines (figure 3). There are, however, also passages without any text at all and the chapter *Over Night* is told completely without language.

# THE GOLEM AS THE MAIN TOPIC OF LEHMRIESE LEBT! [CLAY GIANT'S ALIVE!]

The most essential topic of this story is the Golem motif, whose core is the transformation process: the children create the giant from clay in a playful, artistic action. It comes to life by magic. Therefor *to become alive* and *to* 

bring to life are inseparably connected with the Golem motif – and with the story Lehmriese lebt! [Clay Giant's Alive!], as the title of the book indicates. The coming to life aspect of the clay man expresses the power and the magic of children's play: The Golem is made by playing and finally even for playing. Furthermore, artists use the metaphor of the Golem for creativity, for the struggle to find a form, and for bringing to life inanimate materials. As soon as the work is completed, the creator cannot control it anymore. Exactly this happens to Olli and Ulla. The children unintentionally bring their creation to life and lose control over it. However, they can save the Golem and they make the story end happily by giving him the right task. Therefor aspects of independence and losing control become important, but also how to tame something and how to rescue.

In accordance with that central theme of the story, the second research question is:

How do the children develop ideas about the Golem in the transformation processes?

# THE INTERVENTION STUDY – DIDACTIC PREPARATION AND DATA COLLECTION

The intervention study will take place for nine days in the context of free working time (two hours of work time) with 19 children from a mixed-year school class. The children will read the book with a partner or watch it via picture book cinema (a digital version of the story, where the panels are presented and read aloud one by one) (cf. Hoffmann 2013). The children will work around different topics of the story by forming clay sculptures, writing, drawing, acting/playing and making sounds. These tasks shall extend the interpretative potential of the story, as the children have to combine, juxtapose and emphasize their different interpretations.

First day: First, the story will point to how Olli and Ulla want to build "something amazing with some stuff" (from clay). Then the pupils create something out of clay with a partner, so they can feel like Olli and Ulla. Later, they will see that Olli and Ulla built a clay giant.

Second day: The chapter "Over Night" will be shown and the children will become acquainted with the topics of *coming to life* and *making something come to life*. They make a perceptual travel by playing the clay giant when he comes to life. They try to find a sound for it by experimenting with objects from the sound-suitcase (a suitcase filled with articles of every-day use, that make different noises, such as pots, plastic films, foils, elastic bands and straws).



Figure 4 - Sound-suitcase

Third day: The children will read the chapters *In the Stump Forest, With the ice cream seller, At the hairdresser's shop* and *At the Supermarket*. Afterwards they will draw or make sounds around a self-selected topic of the story that became important to them.

Fourth day: At the police station will be shown in a picture book cinema. Then the final chapter *On the rooftop* will be conducted in a panel reading: in preparation the children draw character-cards or sound-cards. Then the teacher will show the panels one by one, while the children speak characters or make sounds when their soundword appears in a panel. At the end, they will talk about the Golem.

Fifth day: The children will write a text in the context of the question *What would it be like to have a Golem?* Then they work in small groups and try to find a sound for the Golem with objects taken from the sound-suitcase. Afterwards they present their sound to other students and discuss it with them.

Sixth day: The children come up with important characters of the story and formulate for each one a typical sentence, which is written down in a speech bubble. Then they walk around in the room playing the characters. By doing so, they interpret them both non-verbally (through posture, way of walking, gestures and facial expressions) and para-verbally (through different ways of speaking the sentence).

Seventh day and eighth day: The students work in groups of 3-4. They create an audio-track for a part of the story (one to two chapters). By doing so, they shall speak the characters; make environmental sounds and atmosphere sounds.

Ninth day: Finally, the children will present the panel reading to other students.

Overall, five different types of data are collected: Firstly, a sculpture made of clay with a partner. Secondly, images, sounds and movements around central topics or characters of the story. Thirdly, an illustrated text answering the question *What would it be like to have a Golem?* Fourthly, reading conversation with a partner about the comic novel. Finally, there is of course the development process and the product of the live audio-play.

#### FIRST RESULTS

As the data is not completely analysed yet, I will give a brief insight in some topics the children worked on. I concentrate hereby on themes closely related to the Golem.

#### EXAMPLE 1 - SOUNDS FOR COMING TO LIFE

By developing sounds for *coming to life*, it became obvious that the children rather experimented with the sound-objects than discussing the story. Even though, they described later their ideas about the sounds with consideration. Several descriptions were not explicitly related to the story, e.g. Greg described sounds for *coming to life* "refreshing" and "relaxed". Some of them reminded him of Pokémon (especially the creation of a Pokémon named Mewtu). In the following, I will focus on ideas about *coming to life*-sounds that referred to the comic style novel. Most of them referred to the Golem's surroundings, when he came to life.

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Achmed ((bubbles with a straw in a plastic bottle full of water))

Paul that was as well in the film because a river is not always so calm

Teacher okay you think about the pictures in the story that the river makes that sounds

Paul yes
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Paul relates Achmed's bubbling sound to the river on the pictures in the comic novel. He describes a river as "not always so calm". Perhaps he thinks hereby about the storm during the night.

The river became important once more. Tanja's sound reminded her classmate Veronika of it and of the storm during the night, too. As Tanja herself associates the sound with something different, Veronika changes her opinion and agrees with her idea.

In this group of four boys, it was different: They explicitly decided to imitate the storm and the wind on the pictures:

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Julian [((blows with a straw in a tin and drums alternately with a wooden rod on that tin or rubs the rod on a piece of polystyrene))

Paul that sounded like as the storm as the storm has come and the wind has blown

Teacher ah like the storm and the wind

Julian exactly that's it
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Even though Veronika's and Alena's sound is very similar to Achmed's, there is a different idea about it.

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Veronika [((bubbles with a straw in a plastic bottle full of water))

Tanja i think it sounded well because it sounded in any case like river and resurrection

Teacher resurrection how did you come up with that idea

Tanja because it sounds somehow like that (-) somehow so like the feeling as someone stands up from the grass
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Tanja associates that sound as well with the river, but also with "someone" – perhaps the Golem? – awaking and standing up from the grass. Precisely this scene is shown on the pictures: The Golem first lies in the grass next to the river. He awakens, opens his eyes and then he slowly moves and gets up from the grass. By calling this act "resurrection" and not just "standing up", Tanja points out, that this way of arising is not to compare with the everyday way of getting up.

All sounds focused on environmental noise. Even though the Golem's *coming to life* is a very mystical act, there were no atmospheric mood sounds. The children preferred to refer to the pictures – maybe because this seemed to be easier for them.

# EXAMPLE 2 – ILLUSTRATED TEXT WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO HAVE A GOLEM?

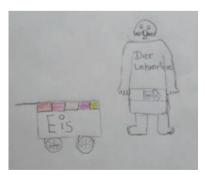


Figure 5 - Alena's (9 years) Golem

Furthermore, I want to give an insight into the illustrated texts about the question What would it be like to have a Golem?

Concerning this task there were differences between boys and girls. Almost all girls wanted to have a "Golem girl". They considered their Golem as a friend; they "go shopping", "play" and "eat ice-cream" together. Their Golem drawings reminded of Anke Kuhl's clay man, some of them as a female version with long lashes. In Alena's pictures, there are references to the story,

too: Her Golem stands next to an ice-cream stand, which looks similar to the one in the comic style novel.

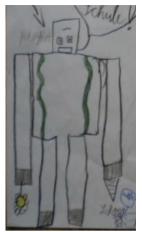


Figure 6 – Julian's (9 years) Golem

Boys had a completely different idea about the Golem: They "used" him for achieving their aims, such as many toys, money or might. Therefore the Golem was often used as a weapon or a machine. Many drawings of the Golem had similarities with the Minecraft Golem and not with the one in the comic style novel: As you can see on Julian's picture, his body is built of metallic squares. This makes him look like a robot. By asking about that, Julian explained "the first Golem every boy gets to know is the Golem in Minecraft"

#### **OUTLOOK**

The development process and presentation of the audio-track for the panels is not entirely analysed. Yet the first impression of making sounds seems to continue: Even though there were also some sounds made by voice, there was a greater interest in experimenting with objects from the sound suitcase. The most part the children made environmental sounds, there were hardly atmospheric mood sounds. Furthermore, the way of speaking a character strongly depended on the reading skills: Children from grade one and two focused on decoding the letters, while older children were able to make a performance of their reading. For this reason, the para-verbal information in the way of speaking is not always an interpretation of the story.

The next step will be to find out, which elements of pictures and texts the children acoustically performed (by speaking or by making sounds). Then I will look at the sequence of the sounds and speeches and the tempo of making it. As a third point, I will examine the exact way of acoustic design and how the children found their soundtrack. Afterwards I will compare this interpretation to their first contact with the story in the reading conversations and in the picture book cinema.

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