

Media in Cultural Context: Comics, Cartoons, and Graphic Storytelling

"Comics are just words and pictures. You can do anything with words and pictures."

-- Harvey Pekar

This is a course about words, pictures, and stories. We hope over the term to map as broad a range of different things you can do with words and pictures as possible. Our central focus will be on two important strands of graphic storytelling -- comix (understood as both comic strips and comic books) and cartoons (understood as moving images). We will also be looking along the way at other forms of graphic storytelling, ranging from tapestries to children's book illustrations. We will be examining some of the groundbreaking work which helped define comics as a medium in the early part of the 20th century as well as cutting edge work in classical and contemporary comic books (both independent and mainstream). We will be talking about superheros and funny animals, since they have been at the heart of the American comics tradition, but we will be reading a broad range of work which has nothing to do with either genres. We will be looking at issues of visual style, narrative and narration, myth and genre, authorship, ideology, and audience. A word of warning: comics are expensive and we are going to be reading lots and lots of them, so the course readings are going to be astronomically expensive compared with any other CMS subject you have taken before. I will be working with the class to make this material as accessible as possible, but be ready to explain to your parents why you just spent several hundred dollars on funnybooks.

Required Books:

Jimmy Gownley, *Amelia Rules #5* (Will be provided free on the first day of class)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 22.95

Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* 22.99

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan*

Herge: *The Adventures of Tintin, Vol. 1* ("The Calculus Affair,"

"The Red Sea Sharks," and "Tintin in Tibet.")

Neil Adams (Ed.) *The Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told* 15.95

Alan Moore *Watchman* 19.95

Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross, *Marvels* 19.95

Art Spiegelman, *Jack Cole and the Plastic Man* 19.95

Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 14.95

Daniel Clowes, *Eightball #22* 19.00

Joe Sacco, *Palestine* 24.95

Brian Michael Bendis, *Fire* 9.95

Elizabeth Watasin, *Charm School 1, 2*

Neil Gaiman, *Death: The High Cost of Living* 12.95

Naoki Yamamoto, *Dance Till Tomorrow* 15.95

Dylan Horrocks, *Hicksville* 10.00

Additional comics and secondary readings are available in the reserved book room.

Requirements:

1. Weekly Response Papers. Select one page from one of the comics we have read each week which you think deserves closer attention. Write a one page analytic discussion of that page. You may deal with it from the point of view of form, character, narrative, genre, authorship, ideology, myth, or

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any of the other approaches we are developing through the class. You may make reference to other moments in the book or in other books by way of comparison but the central goal should be to illuminate something that emerges from a close examination of a single page. (40 percent)

2. Early Comics Digital Project: Using the early comics digital archive, develop a short essay discussing one aspect of early comics making use of at least five panels from the collection and at least one of the critical essays. You will be given five minutes to present the main ideas from this paper to the class. (10 percent)
3. Author Report: There are simply more great animators and sequential storytellers than we can include in even a course as far reaching as this one. Select someone you value but who was not included in the course. Write a 5-page essay for distribution to your fellow students summarizing what you see as their primary importance to the evolution of graphic storytelling. These materials will be made available to the class as a whole. (20 percent)
4. A final essay for undergraduates, 5-7 pages; for graduate students, 10-15 pages. You should choose a personally meaningful topic in consultation with the instructor. Topics may range beyond the specific works, genres, or authors represented in the class, but the paper should demonstrate a mastery over the analytic frameworks we have been exploring and thus should make use of the assigned secondary materials. (20 percent)
5. Class attendance and participation. (10 percent)

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UNIT ONE: The Aesthetics of Graphic Storytelling

SEPTEMBER 4, 2002

Introduction

Read and discuss in class: Jimmy Gownley, *Amelia Rules!*

SEPTEMBER 9, 2002

The Image

Read: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, chapters 2, 5, and 8.

Will Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art*, "Expressive Anatomy."

Greg M. Smith, "Shaping the Maxx: Adapting the Comic Book Frame to Television."

Lab: Screening- *The Maxx, Comic Book Confidential*

SEPTEMBER 11, 2002

The Frame

Read: Scott McCloud, chapters 3, 4.

Eisner, "Timing," "The Frame."

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan* (part one).

Catherine Khordoc, "Visual Sound Effects in Asterix."

Gene Kannenberg, Jr., "The Comics of Chris Ware: Test, Image, and Visual Narrative Strategies" (rec.)

SEPTEMBER 16, 2002

Words and Images

Read: McCloud, chapter 6.

Eisner, "Comics as a Form of Reading" and "Imagery."

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan* (part two)

Lab: From Winsor McCay to Max Fleischer Brothers

Read: Donald Crafton, "Graphic Humor and Early Cinema" in *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990)

Screening: selected works of early animation

Little Nemo

Gertie the Dinosaur

The Sinking of the Lusitania

The Flying House

Felix Revolts

Felix in Fairyland

Koko's Earth Control

She Reminds Me of You

A Date to Skate

Chess-Nuts

Betty Boop's Bizzy Bee

Minnie the Moocher

Crazy Town

Betty Boop's May Party

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SEPTEMBER 18, 2002 (sub: Susannah Mandel)

Eurocomics

Read: Herge, *The Adventures of Tintin, Vol. 6*

UNIT TWO: The Historic Evolution of the Comic Strip

SEPTEMBER 23, 2002

STUDENT HOLIDAY ? NO CLASS

SEPTEMBER 25, 2002

Early Masters

For this unit, we are going to be working with a digital archive of early comic strip material.

Read: David Kunzle, "Movement Before Movies: The Language of the Comic Strip."

N.C. Christopher Couch, "The Yellow Kid and the Comic Page."

R.C. Harvey, "Peddlers to Poets."

SEPTEMBER 30, 2002

The Aesthetics of Early Comics

Be ready to present your projects in class.

Read: M. Thomas Inge, "Fantasy and Reality in Winsor McCay's Little Nemo"

Gilbert Seldes, "The Krazy Kat That Walks By Himself"

Lab: Warner Brothers

Jones Hugh Kenner, "Who's in Charge Here?"

Screening: Selected Warner Brothers Cartoons; Chuck Jones Documentary

Chuck Jones -- Extremes and Inbetweens

What's Opera Doc

Duck Amuck

Rabbit Fire

Duck Dodgers

UNIT THREE: Superheroes, Now and Forever

OCTOBER 2, 2002 (sub: William Uricchio)

The Classic DC Superhero

Read: William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, "I'm Not Fooled By That Cheap Disguise."

Selections from Neil Adams, *Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told*.

OCTOBER 7, 2002

The Superhero Across Media

Read: Thomas Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman."

Gary Engle, "What Makes Superman is So Damned American."

Lab: (Part One) Superhero Across Media (concluded)

(Part Two) The Marvel Way: Genre and Authorship

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, "The Origins of the Fantastic Four," "The Coming of the Sub-Mariner,"

"Battle of the Baxter Building," *The Complete Essential Fantastic Four Vol. I and II*.

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Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, "Introducing Spiderman," "Return of Doctor Octopus," and "Unmasked by Dr. Octopus" from the *Essential Amazing Spiderman Vol. I*.
R. C. Harvey, "What Jack Kirby Did" and Earl Wells, "Once and For All, Who Was the Author of Marvel?" in *The Comics Journal Library Volume 1: Jack Kirby*.
Gerard Jones and Will Jacobs, "The Hero Who Could Be You."

Screening:

The Shadow

Green Hornet

Electric Earthquake

Japoteurs

Eleventh Hour

The Underground World

OCTOBER 9, 2002

Revising the Superhero 1

Read: Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross, *Marvels*.

Scott Bukatman, "Boys in the Hoods" (Forthcoming).

OCTOBER 14, 2002

COLUMBUS DAY ? NO CLASS

OCTOBER 16, 2002

Revising the Superhero 2

Read: Paul Chadwick, "A Stone Among Stones" and "A New Life."

Scott Bukatman, "X-Bodies (The Torment of the Mutant Superhero)."

OCTOBER 21, 2002 (sub: Sajan Saini)

Revising the Superhero 3

Read: Allen Moore, *Watchman*

UNIT FOUR: An Alternative Tradition

Lab: Disney

Luca Raffaelli, "Disney, Warner Brothers and Japanese Animation."

Screening:

Trees and Flowers

Musicland

The Ugly Duckling

The Country Cousin

Mickey's Orphans

Truant Officer Donald

OCTOBER 23, 2002

Funny Animals with Funny Ideas

Read: Carl Banks, "Uncle Scrooge ? So Far and No Safari" and "Uncle Scrooge in the Second-Richest Duck."

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Martin Barker, "Deconstructing Donald."

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Postwar Surrealists

Read: Art Spiegelman, *Jack Cole and Plastic Man*.

Basil Wolverton, "A Nightmare Scare" and "An Encounter at the Counter."

Harvey Kurtzman, "Superduperman."

Lab: Screening - Selected of Tex Avery and UPA

Read: J. Hoberman, "Vulgar Modernism."

Leonard Maltin, "UPA."

Screening:

Bacall to Arms

Screwball Squirrel

Red Hot Riding Hood

King-Size Canary

Bad Luck Blackie

Symphony in Slang

TV of Tomorrow

Gerald McBoing Boing

The Tell Tale Heart

The Unicorn in the Garden

Rooty Toot Toot

Family Circus

Munro

OCTOBER 30, 2002

Seduction of the Innocent?

Read: William Krigstein, "The Bath" and "Murder Dream."

Jack Davis, "Telescope."

Jack Kamin, "Cold War."

Robert Warshow, "Paul, The Horror Comics and Dr. Wertham."

Amy Kiste Nyberg, "The Senate Investigation."

NOVEMBER 4, 2002

Day 16: Underground Comics

Read: R. Crumb, "Fritz Bugs Out."

Justin Green, "Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary."

Roberta Gregory, "Hippy Bitch Gets Laid."

Aline Kominsky, "Growing Up as Arnie's Girl."

Mark James Estren, "Sex and Sexism."

Lab: Screening- *The Faith and John Hubley Story* (with filmmaker Sybil Delgaudio)

NOVEMBER 6, 2002

Day 17: The Raw Bunch

Read: Charles Burns, "Teen Plague."

Kim Deitch, "Karla in Kommieland."

Richard McGuire, "Here."

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Art Spiegelman, Andrea Juno (ed.) *Dangerous Drawings*.
Art Spiegelman, "Ace Hole, Midget Detective."
Ben Katchor, "The Evening Combinator."

NOVEMBER 11, 2002

VETERAN'S DAY ? NO CLASS

NOVEMBER 13, 2002 (sub: Kim De Vries)

Sequential Tarts

Read: Neil Gaiman, *Death: The High Cost of Living*.
Elisabeth Watasin, *Charm School 1,2*.

NOVEMBER 18, 2002

The Autobiographical School

Read: Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby*.
Stanley Wiater and Stephen R. Bissette, "Howard Cruse."

Lab: Digital Comics, Webtoons, and Computer Animation

Read: Scott McCloud, "The Infinite Canvas: Digital Comics."
Scott McCloud, "My Obsession With Chess."

<http://www.scottmccloud.com/comics/chess/index.html>

Demian 5, "When I Am King." <http://www.demian5.com/>

Patrick Farley, "Chrysalis Colossus" <http://www.e-sheep.com/chrysalis/>

Tristram Farnon, "Rhapsody in Yellow."

<http://www.leisuretown.com/stories/travel/ryellow/index.html>

Daniel Merlin Goodberry, "Doodleflak." <http://www.e-merl.com/flak.htm>

Jason Lex, "The Awful Science Fair: Snapping Turtle Cabaret."

http://www.opi8.com/sequence/asf/asf_1701.html

Screening:

Pencil Test

A Cosmic Zoom

Luxo Jr.

Tin Toy

Knickknack

NOVEMBER 20, 2002

Comics and Ethnic Identity

Read: Jaime Hernandez, "100 Rooms."
Gilbert Hernandez, "Chelo's Burden" and "Heartbreak Soup."

NOVEMBER 25, 2002

Experiments in Narrative and Narration

Read: Excerpts from Edward Branigan, *Narration, Narrative Comprehension, and Film*.
Daniel Clowes, *Eightball 22*

Lab: Screening - Waking Dreams

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Excerpt from *The Simpsons*

NOVEMBER 27, 2002

Documentary Comics

Read: Joe Sacco, *Palestine*

DECEMBER 2, 2002

Words and Images (Revisited)

Read: Brian Michael Bendis, *Fire*.

David Carrier, "The Speech Balloon; or, the Problem of Representing Other Minds."

UNIT FIVE: Cartoons and Comics in the Global Marketplace

Lab: Animation in Canada and the UK

Screening:

Begonne Dull Care

The Cat Came Back

The Sweater

The Street

25 Ways to Quit Smoking

One of These Days

How to Kiss

The Wrong Trousers

Excerpt from *Monty Python*

Excerpt from *Yellow Submarine*

DECEMBER 4, 2002

Animation in Eastern Europe

Screening: *Masters of Animation -- Yugoslavia*

DECEMBER 9, 2002

Comics in Japan

Read: Sandra Buckley, "Penguin in Bondage: A Graphic Tale of Japanese Comics."

Matt Thorn, "What Japanese Girls Do With Manga, and Why."

<http://www.matt-thorn.com/jaws.html>

Naoki Yamamoto, *Dance Till Tomorrow*

Lab: Anime

Read: Susan J. Napier, "Anime and Local/Global Identity."

Screening: *Metropolis*

DECEMBER 11, 2002

Comics in New Zealand

Read: Dylan Horrocks, "A Letter from Hicksville: Why I Love New Zealand Comics."

Tom Bollinger, "Comics in Antipodes: A Low Art in a Low Place."