

Comm 8780.7 Special Topics

Comics: Words, Pictures, Stories, Histories

Fall 2007
Thursdays, 4:30-7:00
Syllabus

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Comics have transformed in the public eye over their history. They rose in conjunction with (and helped bring about) the popularity of the mass market newspaper in the 1890s, and they remain a hugely popular feature of newspapers today. In the 1940s comic books gained their broadest readership in America, including many adults, but they remained associated in the culture with children. This made it possible to attack comics as a cause of juvenile delinquency, leading to their self-censorship. Comics reemerged as a medium of self-expression when underground artists discovered them as a low-cost method of distributing their art. This expanded the “language” of comics, making it possible for the medium to become capable of “graphic novels.” American comics today are read by a small, loyal fan community, but they are arguably even more central to the broader popular culture. Comics serve as a primary “research and development” arena for modern motion picture storytelling. They are the most profitable source of material for mainstream film adaptation, including superhero blockbusters (Spider-Man 3), Ancient Greek war spectacles (the upcoming 300), low-budget independent films (American Splendor), pulp fiction updates (Sin City), and auteur-directed dramas (David Cronenberg’s A History of Violence). As globalization increases its reach, Japanese comics (“manga”) are dwarfing the American product, giving them a \$5 billion global market. The Web and the photocopier make possible new forms of low-cost distribution, enabling new voices with different aesthetics and narratives.

Although comics themselves are culturally and aesthetically complex texts, comics scholarship is in its early stages, still burdened by the medium’s cultural position as a simple children’s form. This course takes this popular medium seriously. As a seminar for senior graduate students, this course assumes that the student is already familiar with at least one preferred method/perspective/approach to research. The course focuses on providing students with the historical context and aesthetic tools to do original research on comics in his/her chosen field.

Required Texts:

Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics

Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood

Gerard Jones, Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book

Gerard Jones and Will Jacobs, The Comic Book Heroes: The First History of Modern
Comic Books from the Silver Age to the Present

Coursepack (available at Bestway Copies, 18 Decatur St.)

Course Requirements:

Final Paper	50%
Final Presentation	20%
Reading journals	20%
Participation	10%

The bulk of the credit for the course is based on a final 20 page research paper and on an in-class presentation of that research. Primary sources for comics can be difficult to find, so this class requires that the student select a topic by September 27, thus giving students time to acquire materials. Topics must be approved by the instructor. A two-page research proposal is due October 18 (detailing the research question(s), the approach/methodology, and the progress to date on the paper). Students must hand in the first 10 pages of their research paper by November 15 and the final draft by December 13. All versions/components of the research paper must be submitted electronically in Word or Word Perfect format.

To make the process of finding research materials easier (and less expensive), the instructor is making his comic book collection available for student use (if desired). Students must return these reading materials in good condition by December 13, or the student will receive an incomplete.

The student is expected to hand in a weekly journal of their responses to the readings. This journal may include: critiques of the readings; questions/issues raised by the readings; summaries of the main arguments in the readings; comparisons with other readings, and so on. The journals will be graded based on the level of critical engagement with the readings and on the student's understanding of the week's readings. Journals must be handed in at the beginning of class. Late journal entries will not be accepted.

Class Policies:

It is expected that the student will: attend all classes having read the required material for the day; give his/her full attention to the in-class learning activities; and participate in class sessions with civility and respect for others.

Plagiarism/cheating in any form will not be tolerated and will result in failure for the entire course (see the Policy for Academic Honesty, Section 409, GSU Faculty Handbook: <http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwfhb/fhb.html>).

The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

Please turn off cell phones, pagers, etc. at the beginning of class.

October 15 is the last day to withdraw and possibly receive a W.

Grade Breakdown:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	70-76
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
F	below 60

Course Schedule

August 23	Introduction
30	McCloud, <u>Understanding Comics</u> Will Eisner, "The Frame," from <u>Comics and Sequential Art</u> (partial) Greg M. Smith, "Shaping <u>The Maxx</u> : Adapting the Comic Book Frame to Television," http://www.gsu.edu/~jougms/Maxx.htm
September 6	Satrapı, <u>Persepolis</u> Groensteen, from <u>The System of Comics</u>
13	Early Comic Strips Introduction and Conclusion, David Kunzle, <u>The History of the Comic Strip, V. 2: The Nineteenth Century</u> Scott Bukatman, "Comics and the Critique of Chronophotography, or 'He Never Knew When It Was Coming!'" Elisabeth Crocker, "'Some Say It with a Brick:' George Herriman's <u>Krazy Kat</u> " http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/crocker Comics: <u>Krazy Kat</u> , <u>Little Nemo in Slumberland</u>

September 20	<p>The Rise of the Comic Book Jones, Prologue, ch. 1-10 Comics: <u>The Spirit</u></p>
27	<p>Superheroes John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, from <u>The Myth of the American Superhero</u> Thomas Andrae, “From Menace to Messiah: The Prehistory of Superman in Science Fiction Literature” Umberto Eco, “The Myth of Superman” Reynolds, from <u>Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology</u> William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, “I’m Not Fooled By That Cheap Disguise” G.C. Bunn, “The Lie Detector, Wonder Woman, and Liberty: The Life and Work of William Moulton Marston” Comics: Superman, Batman RESEARCH TOPIC DUE</p>
October 4	<p>Comics under Fire: Scandal and Self-Censorship Jones, ch. 10-12 Wright, “Reds, Romance, and Renegades: Comic Books and the Culture of the Cold War,” and “Turning Point: Comic Books in Crisis, 1954-1955”, from <u>Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America</u> Bart Beaty, “Wertham and the Critique of Comic Books,” from <u>Frederic Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture</u> Amy Kiste Nyberg, “Creation and Implementation of the Comics Code,” and “Evolution of the Comics Code,” from <u>Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code</u> Comics: EC Comics, <u>Mad Magazine</u></p>
11	<p>The Silver Age Jones, ch. 13-14, Jones and Jacobs, ch. 1-20 Matthew Pustz, “Historical Reading Communities,” from <u>Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers</u> (partial) Scott Bukatman, “The Boys in the Hoods: A Song of the Urban Superhero” Scott Bukatman, “Secret Identity Politics” Jason Bainbridge, “‘Worlds within Worlds:’ The Role of Superheroes in the Marvel and DC Universes” Comics: <u>Fantastic Four</u>, <u>Spider-Man</u></p>

October 18	<p>Underground comics</p> <p>Roger Sabin, "Going Underground," from <u>Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels</u></p> <p>Mark James Estren, "An Attempt at Definition," "Content: An Overview," "Sex and Sexism"</p> <p>Comics: <u>Zap, Binky Brown Meets the Virgin Mary</u></p> <p>RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE</p>
25	<p>The Modern Comic Book Landscape</p> <p>Jones and Jacobs, ch. 21-47</p> <p>Scott Bukatman, "X-Bodies (the torment of the mutant superhero)"</p> <p>Patrick Parsons, "Batman and His Audience: The Dialectic of Culture"</p> <p>Matthew P. McAllister, "Ownership Concentration in the U.S. Comic Book Industry"</p>
November 1	<p>Webcomics</p> <p>Scott McCloud, from <u>Reinventing Comics</u></p> <p>T. Campbell, "Category Search" and "The Downloading Interlaced GIF," from <u>A History of Webcomics</u></p> <p>Henry Jenkins, "'Just Men in Tights: Rewriting Silver Age Comics in an Era of Multiplicity,"</p> <p>http://www.henryjenkins.org/comics_culture</p> <p>Comics: Various webcomics</p>
8	TBA
15	FIRST TEN PAGES DUE
22	Thanksgiving break
29	Research presentations
December 6	Research presentations

Final paper due December 13, 5:00 p.m.