

EXPLORATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR EXPRESSION AND MEANING-MAKING OF IMAGE-TEXT INTERACTIONS AS DEMONSTRATED IN COMICS. THROUGH CLOSE-READINGS OF SEVERAL MAJOR WORKS, WE'LL EXAMINE THE DIFFERENT WAYS THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT CAN BE MANIFESTED.



W 4-6:45 ZOOM
NICK SOUSANIS@SFSU.EDU
STUDENT HOURS T1⁵⁰2³⁰ W OR BY Aprt!



THINK THROUGH MAKING!
NOT ABOUT DRAWING
SKILLS - WE WILL CREATE
PIECES OF THINKING!

MATERIALS

- NOTEBOOK/SKETCHBOOK
- DRAWING TOOLS
- SCISSORS
- ????

Make Comics
& OTHER
IMAGE
HYBRIDS

THEMES
PLAY, MAKE, ASK,
COLLABORATE, DISCOVER
WHERE WE ARE GOING
TOGETHER - CLASS WILL
EMERGE FROM
CONVERSATION...

RESPONSES TO OUR READINGS
WILL BE DONE IN CLOSE ANALYSIS,
DIAGRAMS, SKETCHNOTES,
WRITING, AND, SIGNIFICANTLY,
COMICS-MAKING.

PROJECTS

ALL IN THE FORM - AS COMICS,
SKETCHNOTES, OR SOME
IMAGE-TEXT INNOVATION

ASSESSMENT

55% ONGOING ACTIVITIES
10% INQUIRY
10% IMAGE-TEXT
25% FINAL PROJECT

SPECIAL
GUESTS
TBA

WE'LL ASK SUCH QUESTIONS AS: HOW DO WORDS
SPEAK TO IMAGES TO SHIFT THEIR MEANINGS AND
VICE VERSA? HOW CAN WORDS AND PICTURES MOVE
CLOSER TOGETHER? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WORDS
BECOME IMAGES? HOW CAN IMAGES ACT AS TEXT?

IN DOING SCHOLARLY STUDY OF COMICS
- FOCUSING ON THE THEORETICAL AND
ANALYTICAL - WE'LL ALSO CONSIDER
HOW COMICS CAN BE CONSIDERED
SCHOLARLY FORMS.

3 INTERWOVEN
THREADS

COMICS
IMAGE-TEXT
THEORY
INQUIRY

INQUIRY READINGS

WEEK 1
1/27

MAJOR COMICS
READINGS

THEORY ARC

- ANTI-IMAGE BIAS
- HOW IMAGES WORK
- DRAWING AS THINKING
- HOW ARE IMAGES & TEXT
ALIKE/DIFFERENT?
- HOW DO THEY INTERACT?
- HOW DO THEY ACT LIKE
THE OTHER?

IMAGE THEORY READINGS

- JOHANNA DRUCKER
- SUSANNE K. LANGER
- RUDOLF ARNHEIM
- WJT MITCHELL
- JOHN BATEMAN
- NEIL COHN
- PAUL F DAVIES
- HANNAH MIODRAG
- THIERRY GROENSTEEN
- KARIN KUKKONEN
- ROLAND BARTHES SEMIOTICS
- NELSON GOODMAN
- ISOTYPES
- EKPHRASIS
- CONCRETE POETRY

EMIL FERRIS
MY FAVORITE THING
IS MONSTERS

MOORE & GIBBONS
WATCHMEN

JIM WOODRING
FRAN

MEGHAN PARKER

SOUSANIS

YEN YEN
WOO

A.D.
CARSON

IBN-AL RABIN
SPLENDORS & MISERY

ALISON BECHDEL
FUN HOME

RONALD WIMBERLY
PRINCE OF CATS

G. HERRIMAN
KRAZY KAT

KYLA WAZANA TOMPKINS
GOOD QUESTIONS

NOTE: NOTHING ABOUT THIS MOMENT IS NORMAL,
AND OUR EXPECTATIONS MUST REFLECT THAT. YOUR
HEALTH, YOUR LIVES, NEED TO COME FIRST (AND
SHOULD ALWAYS COME FIRST). DEADLINES ARE
IMPORTANT, BECAUSE THEY KEEP THE CONVERSATION
MOVING, BUT LIFE IS BIGGER, ALWAYS, SO WE'LL BE
FLEXIBLE AND WORK IT OUT TOGETHER.

* LET ME KNOW IF YOU DON'T WANT ME
TO SHARE ANY OF YOUR IMAGES ON MY
WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA. - NS

San Francisco State University: Liberal Studies
HUM 706 Image & Culture: Picturing the World
COMICS
Spring 2021

Class Meetings: W 4:00-6:45; ZOOM

Instructor: Nick Sousanis sousanis@sfsu.edu

Student Hours: T 1:30-2:30, W TBA, or by appointment

A Note about Now: Let me acknowledge to start off, nothing about our current circumstances is normal, and our expectations must reflect that. As understanding as I typically am about deadlines and workload in normal times, I'll be even more so now. Your health, your lives, need to come first (and *should always* come first), and we can work out solutions for whatever is going on (preferably with a good channel of communication). I want to see the work we do together as helpful to what you are experiencing and not an added burden. This doesn't mean we won't work hard and that it won't be challenging, just that it serves you as something meaningful and relevant to find your own ways into it. Deadlines are important, because they allow us to keep the conversation moving and keep learning from one another, but life is bigger, always, and definitely now, so I'll remain flexible and we'll work it out together.

I'm intending to keep the course synchronous, to preserve the dynamic, interactive, and frequently collaborative atmosphere that has been so key to these classes, but all will be recorded, all instructions and resources will be available on iLearn, and there will be no penalty for not being able to make a session. We can check in outside of class, and make sure everyone is up to speed no matter their circumstances. Let's see this course and my role as being there to support you in where you are going. With that said, on with what we'll do together...

Overview: Examination of visual culture in relation to other cultural forms, particularly narrative, with reference to the distinct grammar and vocabulary of visual cultural studies.

Exploration of the potential for expression and meaning-making of image-text interactions as demonstrated in the comics form. Through close-readings of several major works in comics, we'll examine the different ways the interrelation between image and text can be manifested by comics authors. We'll ask such questions as: How do words speak to images to shift their meanings and vice versa? How can words and pictures move closer together? What happens when words become images? How can images act as text? In doing scholarly study of comics – focusing on the theoretical and analytical – we'll also consider how comics can be considered scholarly forms. Responses to our readings will be done in close analysis, diagrams, writing, and, significantly, comics-making.

Philosophy: Thinking through making. We will make, play, question, and collaborate (and come up with ways to do the latter in zoom environment). This will be a discussion-based course, run seminar-style. While I have planned a lot of pathways and readings to support us, I anticipate that the class will emerge from conversation and we will discover where we are going together...

While it will be a theoretical course, students will expressly conduct their explorations of comics and theory through visual methods – making responses and arguments in comics or other image-text hybrids that we invent for the purposes of the course. This is not about drawing skills, rather that we will be using what we learn from comics and our readings to create pieces of thinking. This will in turn be an exploration of the very way we conduct scholarship – using the comics we study themselves as models for doing scholarship.

I intend to follow this *general arc* of theory unfolding behind our comics readings: Anti-image bias; How images work; Drawing as thinking; How are images & text alike/different? How do they interact? How do they act like the other? Besides comics, we will make use of sketchnotes, and explore things like concrete poetry and calligraphy, isotypes, and other forms where the boundary between images and text isn't so far.

[Prerequisite: Graduate standing or consent of the major advisor or instructor.]

Major Comics Readings (available at *Comix Experience* for a discount for students who present the syllabus):

- *Watchmen* Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons
- *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* Emil Ferris
- *Fun Home* Alison Bechdel
- *Prince of Cats* Ronald Wimberly
- *Fran* Jim Woodring
- *Splendors & Misery of the Verb* Ibn-al Rabin (Instructor-supplied)
- *Krazy Kat* George Herriman (Instructor-supplied) (many others will also be provided)

Corollary readings in comics scholarship as well as author interviews will supplement and inform our discussions of the individual major readings.

We will absolutely have far too many potential readings to handle this semester – so some jigsawing will be required! That is, we'll distribute the reading across the class and depend on your visual notes to help us put all the pieces together! What follows are some possible things that we'll draw on – some just for me to contextualize things, but some that you'll read excerpts all together or jigsawed.

Image Theory Readings – we'll read a ton of excerpts from these and more, all provided:

WJT Mitchell (*Picture Theory* or *What Do Pictures Want*), Susanne K. Langer, Rudolf Arnheim, John Bateman, Neil Cohn, Johanna Drucker, Paul F. Davies, Hannah Miodrag, Thierry Groensteen, Karin Kukkonen, Roland Barthes (Semiotics), Nelson Goodman, Isotypes, Ekphrasis, ...

Inquiry Readings – short excerpts to get us thinking about how we conduct our research inquiry:

Tim Ingold *Making*, Kyla Wazana Tompkins *Good Questions*, Graeme Sullivan *Arts-Based Research*, A.D. Carson Yen Yen Woo, Sousanis, Meghan Parker, ...

Comics Scholarship: scholarship essays on Alison Bechdel and on Alan Moore, Hillary Chute, David Berona on wordless comics, *PanelxPanel* special issue on *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*, ...

Required Materials: Since we will regularly be drawing and making comics in this course, it goes without saying that you will need to have basic drawing materials. You will be responsible to build up your own tool set as you develop your particular approach to making, but I've listed the bare essentials here.

- Likely multiple notebooks/sketchbooks of your choosing
- Drawing tools of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.) (Color options are nice too)

Assignments and Evaluation: (These particular assignments are open to revision, should the class in our work together determine a better path to move our work forward...)

Participation in Discussion, Ongoing Assignments and Exercises, Attendance (55%):

Ongoing responses to our theory and comics readings in the form of sketchnotes, visual annotations/analysis, diagrams, comics constructed from visual metaphors, and more. This is a seminar class, so participating in discussion, keeping up with and creating visual notes and analysis to share on the readings is a must. The class will thrive if all contribute.

Special Projects: in the form – as comics or other image-text innovations.

1) Inquiry (10%): Exploration of how you do inquiry or statement about what is scholarship to you.

2) Text-Image Affordances Project (10%): Develop a small comic or image-text amalgam of some sort exploring a particular way images and texts interact or an affordance their interaction makes available.

3) Final Project (25%): Put it all together – Make a piece of Inquiry! You can create something about a comic, with a comic, about theory, about your process of study/inquiry, using comics or some image-text form itself as part of the argument. It should demonstrate the student's understanding of the affordances that comics and/or image-text interactions make available and leverage those to offer a clear argument.

Course Outline Our schedule will evolve as we explore and generate responses to course material together. I will keep you all apprised in class, via email, and iLearn of what's coming. To ensure we remain on the same page, you are expected to check *iLearn* and your **sfsu email** account regularly.

iLearn: We will be using the iLearn website for this class, in which you are automatically enrolled.

For assistance with iLearn, see the Academic Technology website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>

iLearn log-in page: <https://ilearn.sfsu.edu/login/index.php>

Course Policies

Classroom approach: I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one's own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together – that is particularly true in this case. We all offer distinct vantage points and we want to draw on all of them – to expand the possibilities for what we can all learn as we each find our own way. Hence, **Class participation** is essential! We learn in community, gain from each other's perspective. Let's be here, on time, and respect one another's point of view and discover what we can learn together. We want this classroom to be a great learning environment for everyone, so we need to all take care of each other to make it so. Laptops and smart devices, if used well, can complement discussion and so are permitted. If they are being used in a way that detracts from the overall environment, the instructor will address that.

Attendance: This class will be conducted seminar-style. This means that everyone is expected to participate in ongoing discussions on the readings and topics, and that you come to class well-prepared to do so. Attendance and participation are critical components of this class and will be taken very seriously. In addition, repeatedly coming late to class is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Of course, sometimes obligations, illness, or other unforeseen events make attendance impossible. Let me know in advance of any such that will preclude your attendance, and we will make alternative arrangements.

Late Papers and Homework Assignments: An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of class on the day it is due. Assignments that are turned in on-time will be graded and returned in a timely fashion. Assignments that are turned in up to a week late will be marked accordingly, and receive a full-grade deduction. Medical or family emergencies are valid excuses and will be accepted with written documentation.

Contact and Feedback: You are encouraged to visit office hours or make an appointment to discuss issues in class, and to clarify any questions you may have about assignments and requirements. When sending emails to me, please use your "sfsu.edu" account when possible, and put "HUM 706" followed by your subject in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person

to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an “F” grade. All instances of plagiarism in LCA will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu.

University Policy on Sexual Harassment & Violence: SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; [SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)
Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; [Counseling and Psychological Services Center website http://psyserve.sfsu.edu](http://psyserve.sfsu.edu)

For more information on your rights and available resources see: [Title IX at SF State http://titleix.sfsu.edu](http://titleix.sfsu.edu)