

ENGLISH 517.13 THEORETICAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES
COMICS AS A WAY OF THINKING
Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:15
Classroom: SS1153

FALL 2015

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Course description: This course will explore comics as a unique and robust communication form, with an emphasis on understanding comics by making them. We will take a multifaceted approach to analyzing the medium, from uncovering comics' historical roots and examining the various genres developed in the West and across the globe, to delving into the theoretical and formal elements, as well as considerations of comics in relation to other media such as film, poetry, and even architecture. Beyond narratives, we will look at the growing role comics are playing in the fields of journalism, education, and health/medicine. While making comics will be a significant component of the course, *prior drawing experience is not required*. Rather, we will expand upon what drawing means by creating spaces for students to play and explore the multiplicity of possibilities that emerge when we work in the bilingual fashion that comics facilitate. The course will serve as a springboard for students to develop ways to incorporate visual practices gleaned from comics into their own creative and critical work. **PREREQUISITE:** One full-course equivalent in English at the 400 level or consent of the Department. (Please see Calendar Description for more information)

Briefly on my teaching philosophy: 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. As a class, we all come from different backgrounds and offer distinct vantage points – 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. I want to emphasize the importance of play as a form of learning – that doesn't mean it's not hard work, it's that we learn by doing, by trying, by falling, by diving in with vigor and seeing what happens.

Texts and readings:

Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics* (Avon).
Matt Madden. *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* (Chamberlain Bros.)
Lynda Barry. *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* (Drawn & Quarterly)
Peter Kuper. *The System* (PM Press)
Marjane Satrapi *The Complete Persepolis* (Pantheon)
Ellen Forney *Marbles* (Avery)
Paul Karasik, David Mazzucchelli, Paul Auster. *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel* (Picador)

All of the above are required for this course and are available in the bookstore. Additional shorter readings will be provided by the instructor or available online.

Materials: Since we will be drawing (!) – you will need to have a few simple and readily available materials on hand. You can of course get more than these if your interest allows, but here are some basics:

A notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort
Drawing implements: pencil, blue line pencil, colored pen, pencils/markers, brush pen (optional)
Construction paper, scissors, glue

Participation: This includes actively participating in discussion and engaging in the in-class comics/drawing exercises, and your attendance. Some thoughts and specifics:

We learn in community and 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: Class functions best when we are all present to continue ongoing discussion. Of course, sometimes obligations, illness, or other unforeseen events make attendance impossible. If you know of an upcoming obligation or ongoing health/personal challenges that that will preclude your attendance, let me know in advance and we will make alternative arrangements.

Ongoing Short Assignments: a variety of activities that may include comics-making or other drawing exercises, visual analysis/annotations of comics, responses to readings in comics form, brief presentations – introducing the class to a particular work or way of working in comics and its significance, others to be dreamed up by participants and instructor as we go! Emphasis will be placed on inventiveness, curiosity, effort, and willingness to dive in and try with vigor something you haven't. Student evaluation will be based primarily on completion not skill – we want to build a portfolio of your explorations that should be rich in its depth.

Composition Journal: We will be keeping a notebook or journal for notes, exercises, and some specific visual journaling and notetaking explorations, drawing on the work of Lynda Barry, sketch-noting, and more. This is a chance to do your thinking through physical activity and visual representation. As with the description of Short Assignments above, attending to it with inventiveness is most valued.

Midterm: at home, in-depth visual analysis/annotation of a small number of comics pages.

Final Project: Conduct an extensive exploration in comics or a related image-text form that demonstrates the use of comics within a particular context. This will be something related to your own work or area of interest. Alternatively: write up in more traditional form, an analysis of the usage of comics within a particular context, addressing its effects and ways it can increase understanding. Topic and format will be discussed in class and approved in conversation with the instructor, and as part of your final, you will produce a short proposal statement laying out the goals of the project. Everyone will make brief project presentations in our final sessions – completed projects are due one week after last meeting (Dec 15).

Schedule

What follows is a roadmap for our work together. It is not meant to be a rigid document, but something that will evolve as we explore and generate responses to the material we cover. As our course alters to accommodate new ideas and unanticipated detours, I will keep you all apprised in class and via email to ensure we all remain on the same page.

Please Note, I have an opportunity to speak about my work in the United States and overseas on several occasions over the term. This will mean that I will have to miss a few class sessions – but as is noted in the schedule there will be special guests presenting on those days, this includes eminent comics scholar Professor Bart Beaty, UofC doctoral candidate Tom Sewell, and postdoctoral fellow Frederik Köhlert. Each will speak from their particular areas of expertise in comics and work within the general scope of our discussion.

- Class 1** **Introduction**
Sept 8 Course Map, Opening conversation on just what are comics anyhow?
Ex: Grids/Gestures – abstract comics making
HW: For Sept 10 – Read/View Mike Rohde on sketchnoting
<http://alistapart.com/article/sketching-the-visual-thinking-power-tool>, Giulia Forsythe on Visual Note-taking (video)
<http://gforsythe.ca/visual-notes/>, Scott Torrance visual essay on shifting from text to visual <https://medium.com/visual-thinking-in-business/the-shift-from-text-to-visuals-e260ef138fae> **Make** a quick sketch-note-diagram what brought you here and where you want to go with comics...
- Class 2** **History & Lineage**
Sept 10 Early definitions, a look at precursors to comics throughout history and pre-history, and the seminal moments that helped shape the form as it is today
Ex: Relationship cutout drawings (bring scissors, colored paper!)
Reference Molly Bang, Mark Gonyea
HW: Read McCloud *Understanding Comics* Ch1-3 for Sept 15; Do Grids/Gestures as Diary, 3 Days
- Class 3** **Sequential Art**
Sept 15 McCloud’s definition, sequential nature of comics
Ex: Panel Lottery (by Madden/Abel)
HW: Read Horrocks
(<http://www.bicksville.co.nz/Inventing%20Comics.htm>),
Understanding Comics McCloud Ch4, *The Comics Journal* responses to McCloud (Online UofC Library): Witek, Beaty, Frome, Hatfield/Sturm for Sept 17
- Class 4** **Simultaneity**
Sept 17 Simultaneous aspects of comics as visual art, discussion of Groensteen’s theorizing, time in space, McCloud Ch4
HW: How You Got Here in 3 panels/2 pages for Sept 29; Read Beaty Ch2 of *Comics vs. Art* for Sept 22
- Class 5** **Guest: Professor Bart Beaty**
Sept 22 What Were Comics project, History, Archie Comics, ...
HW: Read Bernard & Carter, John Miers for Sept 24
- Class 6** **Guest: Doctoral Candidate Tom Sewell**
Sept 24 Watchmen, Multiversity: Pax Romana, Time and space in comics
HW: Read Madden for Oct 1, Chris Ware “Heads or Tails” finish 3 panels for Sept 29, Peeters, Read Spiros, Groensteen
Ware Heads or Tails link:
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/10/books/review/13ware.html>
- Class 7** **Space/Time (cont)/Architecture**
Sept 29 Chris Ware’s Building Stories, nonlinear comics approaches (Jason Shiga),

- Ex: TBD (parenthetical comic)
HW: Read Madden for Oct 1
- Class 8**
Oct 1 **Matt Madden 99 Ways to Tell a Story**
Discussion and dissection of *99 Ways*
HW: 3 versions due Oct 8
- Class 9**
Oct 6 **Guest: Postdoctoral Fellow Frederik Køhlert: Representation in Comics**
Discussion of imagery, representation and autobiography
HW: Read Kuper *The System*, David Berona on wordless comics, finish 3 versions comics
- Class 10**
Oct 8 **Kuper's The System and Wordless comics**
Discussion of the System, the spectrum from text only to picture books to wordless, David Berona
HW: Wordless comics making, Read McCloud 6, Harvey
- Class 11**
Oct 13 **Wordless Comics 2**
Explore wordlesscomics examples including Kuper, Gregory Benton "B+F" & "Smoke," Shaun Tan "The Arrival," Eric Drooker "Flood," Marc Antoine Matthieu "Untitled," Winshluss "Pinocchio," Max Estes "Den Krokete Kniv," Lynd Ward, Frans Masereel "Passionate Journey," Sara Varon "Robot Dreams," Morrison/Quitely New X-Men "silent issue," Amazing Spider-Man 655, and more...
HW: Read McCloud 6, Harvey
- Class 12**
Oct 15 **Image-Text Interaction**
Discussion of ways image and text interact in comics, how text becomes a visual element, sound effects, and more, Chris Couch, RC Harvey, Comics and Cola blogpost
Ex: Telephone comic: composition>drawing>words
HW: Read from Lynda Barry "Syllabus"
- Class 13**
Oct 20 **Image-Text: Lynda Barry**
Image-text interaction as creative process, Lynda Barry's drawing and note taking methods, Mike Rohde Sketchnoting
HW: Read McCloud Ch5 (+ ch2), Humphreys, Heer, Spiegelman, How to Read Nancy, Witek, Frome on Identification:
<http://comx.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/View/1685603>
HW: Make metaphorical themed one-pager (to be explained in class)
- Class 14**
Oct 22 **Multimodality/Style & Power of Images**
Discussion of multimodality, stylistic choices, Topffer/Gombrich, Caricature, Why does it affect us so much?
HW: Mini-midterm Visual Analysis/Annotation due Oct 27, Read Mazzucchelli *City of Glass*
- Class 15**
Oct 27 **City of Glass**
Discussion of *City of Glass*, Martha Kuhlman article, script to comic
HW: TBD
- Class 16**
Oct 29 **Comics & Poetry/Comics-Poetry**
Look at connection between comics and poetry, the emerging form of comics-poetry, Alexander Rothman (possible virtual guest), and InkBrick
HW: Comics-Poem (adaptation/original), Read *Persepolis*
- Class 17**
Nov 3 **Memoir: Persepolis film**
Watch *Persepolis* in class
- Class 18**
Persepolis: Reading

- Nov 5 Discussion of the book, distinctions between film version and comics version, perhaps split class – have some read book then watch film, others watch film, read after
HW: Read Ellen Forney *Marbles*
- Class 19**
Nov 10 **Graphic Medicine**
Ellen Forney *Marbles*, David B., Clem Martini (UofC), Bechdel, Small, Miriam Katin, Forney, Graphic Medicine information
- No Class
Nov 12 READING DAYS – NO CLASSES
- Class 20**
Nov 17 **Comics Journalism**
A look at the works of Josh Neufeld, Joe Sacco, Dan Archer, Molly Crabapple, Lukas Plank, and more
HW: TBD
- Class 21**
Nov 19 **Educational/Information Comics**
A look at this growing field – starting from McCloud, Larry Gonick, ever-growing works produced intended to teach a topic, prevalence of author’s avatar, other approaches.
- Class 22**
Nov 24 **Digital landscapes**
Gif-comics: Lilli Carre, Boulet, Electricomics, Thrillbent, etc.; Infinite Canvas – XKCD;
- Class 23**
Nov 26 **Sign Language**
Connections between comics and sign-language, efforts to do comics with sign language, also Ilan Manouach’s Shape Reader for blind readers, a look at Hawkeye by Fraction & Aja
- Class 24**
Dec 1 **Maps, Diagrams**
Ways that maps and diagrams resemble comics and what we might learn about comics from them
- Class 25**
Dec 3 **Final Presentations**
- Class 26**
Dec 8 **Final Presentations**

Somewhere in here we will look at mini-comics....