INTRODUCTION TO COMICS STUDIES

Professor Scott Bukatman
Film Studies 114S • T/Th 10:30-12:20 • Oshman Auditorium • Summer 2016
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Comics have come out of hiding and seem to be everywhere these days (perhaps hiding behind the term “graphic novel”). Remarkable work is being produced in a multiplicity of styles and formats, while lavish reprints are introducing readers to some of the finest works in the medium’s history. Long derided as neither literature nor art, comics, with its complex juxtapositions of word and image, and of images with one another, are increasingly understood as a unique, sophisticated mode of communication and expression. Different from other courses at Stanford, this one will provide an historical and stylistic overview of the comics medium. The treatment of time, rhythm, and tempo will be considered alongside explorations of the panel, the sequence, the page, the story, and seriality. To grasp the flexibility of the medium, we will explore comic strips (humorous and dramatic), superheroes, undergrounds and independents, political satire and pedagogy, autobiography, experimental works, and children’s comics. To keep things manageable, emphasis will be on North American comics; because it has a rich history, special attention will be given to the superhero genre. Critical readings will accompany readings of the comics themselves to provide a nuanced exploration of this dynamic form.

Please note: Some material presented in the class will probably be offensive to many of you in some way (at least it should be). In part this is an inevitability of the historical periods being examined, but some material is deliberately provocative.

Requirements:
- **Attendance** at lectures (no more than two absences without grade impact)
- **Prepared (reading completed) and participating** in discussion (15% of grade)
- 1-2 short comics **exercises**, some in-class (10% of total grade)
- 3 short **essays**
  - first essay: 1200-1400 words, 15%
  - second essay: 1400-1600 words, 25%
  - final essay: 2000-2500 words, 35%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required texts: Critical</th>
<th>Required texts: Comics (continued)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scott Bukatman, <em>Hellboy’s World: Comics and Monsters on the Margins</em></td>
<td>Lynda Barry, <em>One Hundred! Demons!</em></td>
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<td>Jared Gardner, <em>Projections: Comics &amp; the History of Twentieth Century Storytelling</em></td>
<td>Alison Bechtel, <em>Fun Home</em></td>
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<td>Matt Madden, <em>99 Ways to Tell a Story</em></td>
<td>Dan Clowes, <em>Ice Haven</em></td>
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<td>Mike Mignola, <em>Hellboy in Hell: The Descent</em></td>
<td>Alan Moore &amp; Dave Gibbons, <em>Watchmen</em></td>
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<td>Chris Ware, <em>Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth</em></td>
<td>Yuichi Yokoyama, <em>Travel</em></td>
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**Comics Reader Software**
You’ll need to download an application that can read .cbr and .cbz files on your laptop. SimpleComic is the best bet for the Mac, while ComicRack seems to be best for PCs. These are free downloads. For the iPad, Chunky is excellent and free. You should not be reading comics on anything smaller than a standard iPad.

**Students with documented disabilities:** Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an *Accommodation Letter* for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, 723-1067 TTY)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6/21</td>
<td>Introduction: What Are We Doing When We Read Comics? (and Sunday Playgrounds)</td>
<td>Read: Matt Madden, <em>99 Ways to Tell a Story</em></td>
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| 6/23 | World-building and Chronophotography | **Comics:** Winsor McCay, *Sammy Sneeze* and *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*  
**Critical:** E. H. Gombrich, “The Experiment of Caricature” (from *Art and Illusion*); R. C. Harvey, “How Comics Came to Be;” Bukatman, *Hellboy's World*, “Introduction” and Ch 1 (to page 41) |
| **Week 2** | | |
**Critical:** David Kunzle, “Rodolphe Töpffer's Aesthetic Revolution;” Jared Gardner, *Projections*, Ch 1 |
**Critical:** Mark Newgarden & Paul Karasik, “How To Read Nancy;” Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Ch 3; Gardner, *Projections* Ch 2 |
| **Week 3** | | |
**Critical:** Martha Rust, “It's a Magical World: The Page in Comics and Medieval Manuscripts;” Bukatman, *Hellboy's World*, Ch 3 |
**Recommended:** the first story in Will Eisner, *A Contract With God*  
**Critical:** Art Spiegelman, “Forms Stretched to Their Limits;” Charles Hatfield, “An Art of Tensions;” |
| **Week 4** | | |
| 7/12 | Comics, Everyday Life, and Expanded Storytelling | **Comics:** Chris Ware, *Building Stories*; Frank King, *Walt & Skeezix 1921 & 1922* (at least half).  
**Critical (recommended):** Gene Kannenberg, Jr., “The Comics of Chris Ware” |
| 7/14 | The Rise of the Comic Book and the Birth of the Superhero | **Comics:** *Golden Age*: Siegel & Shuster, *Superman*; Simon & Kirby, *Captain America*  
**Silver Age:** Weisinger, Infantino, et al., *Flash*; *Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane*  
Stan Lee, Kirby, Ditko, Steranko: *Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD*  
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<th>Week 5</th>
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<td><strong>7/19</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Critical:</strong> Walter Benjamin, writings on children’s literature; Tom Gunning, “The Art of Succession: Reading, Writing, and Watching Comics”</td>
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<td><strong>Recommended:</strong> Jules Feiffer, <em>Meanwhile</em></td>
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<td><strong>7/21</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> <em>Hellboy in Hell: The Descent</em></td>
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<td><strong>7/26</strong></td>
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<td><strong>AND Harvey Kurtzman’s War Stories and MADness</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Al Feldstein &amp; Bernie Krigstein, “Master Race” &amp; other Feldstein Comics Stories; Harvey Kurtzman et al., stories from <em>Frontline Combat</em>, <em>Two-Fisted Tales</em>, and <em>MAD</em></td>
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<td><strong>7/28</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Robert Crumb, et al; <em>Zap Comics</em>, <em>Bijou Funnies</em>; Daniel Clowes, <em>Ice Haven</em> (Eightball #22); Justin Green, <em>Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary</em> (excerpt); John Porcellino <em>King-Cat Stories</em> (selections); Julie Doucet, <em>New York Diary</em></td>
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<td><strong>Critical:</strong> Gardner, <em>Projections</em>, Ch 4</td>
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<td><strong>8/2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Allison Bechdel, <em>Fun Home</em> (excerpt); Art Spiegelman, <em>Maus</em> (excerpt); Lynda Barry, <em>One Hundred! Demons!</em>, Frank Miller, <em>The Dark Knight Returns</em>, Chapter 1.</td>
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<td><strong>Critical:</strong> Hillary Chute, Introduction and “Materializing Memory” from <em>Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics</em></td>
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<td><strong>8/4</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Joe Sacco (TBD), Art Spiegelman, <em>In the Shadow of No Towers</em>; Keiji Nakazawa, <em>Barefoot Gen</em></td>
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<td><strong>Critical:</strong> Hillary Chute, <em>Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form</em>, Chs 4-5</td>
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<td><strong>8/9</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Grant Morrison et al., <em>Final Crisis</em> (ebook); Garth Ennis &amp; Darrick Robertson, <em>The Boys</em> #1</td>
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<td><strong>8/11</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Comics:</strong> Gary Panter, <em>Abstract Comics</em>; Yuichi Yokoyama, <em>Travel</em>; Jack Kirby, <em>The New Gods</em></td>
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<td><strong>Critical:</strong> Andrei Molotiu, “Introduction” from <em>Abstract Comics</em>; Bart Beaty, “Roy Lichtenstein’s Tears” from <em>Me Am No Art</em>; Charles Hatfield, <em>Hand of Fire</em>, Chs 3-5; Gardner, <em>Projections</em>, Ch 6</td>
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**List of Terms**

- **Writer**, **Penciller**, **Inker**, **Colorist**, **Letterer**, **Editor**
- **Panel**, **Border**, **Gutter**, **Caption**, **Speech Balloon**, **Thought Balloon**, **Tail**, **Tier**, **Borderless Panel**, **Splash Page**
- **Cartooning** as simplification and generalization;
- from McCloud: the triangular schema of **Reality**, **Meaning**, **Picture Plane**
- types of visual signs: **Icon** (by resemblance); **Symbol** (by convention); **Index** (by physical connection)
- from McCloud: the different types of **panel-to-panel transition**
- from McCloud: the different types of **word-image juxtaposition**
- **Diegesis**: the (imaginary) world of the story; adj. **diegetic**
- **Extradiegetic**: adjective applied to elements of the comic that do not belong to the diegesis; for example, the narrator addressing the reader directly, the space of the gutters, etc.
- **Composition**: the distribution of pictorial shapes across the surface of the panel • **Framing**: the set of choices made by the artist in isolating a part of the diegetic space to illustrate in one panel. They include: • **Distance of Framing**: Long Shot, Medium Shot, Close-Up, Extreme Close-up, Extreme Long Shot, etc. • **Angle of Framing**: Straight-On Angle (Eye-Level Shot), High Angle (Bird's Eye View), Low Angle (Worm's Eye View)
- **Canted Framing**: when the horizontal of the represented space is at an angle to the horizontal of the page • **Depth of Field**: Shallow Focus (everything at approximately same distance "behind" picture plane); Deep Focus (elements at varied distances from picture plane can all be seen clearly) • **Point-of-View Framing**: framing that reproduces or approximates what one character sees
- **Breakdown**: the division of the plotline into separate incidents, “moments,” or narrative beats, each of which is to be illustrated in one panel
- **Sequence**: a series of consecutive panels united by a common narrative link • **Shot/Reverse-Shot Sequence**: in a two-person scene, the alternation of panels focusing first on one character, then on the other
- **Crosscutting**: the alternation of sequences focusing on two or more different (but usually simultaneous) actions in different locales
- **Held-Frame Sequence**: sequence of panels characterized by the same or closely similar framings of the background, in which only the characters change from panel to panel
- **Pan Sequence (Panoramic Breakdown)**: sequence of panels that divides an otherwise unified diegetic space, which continues from panel to panel and can be seen "behind" the gutters, as it were; usually occupies one tier of panels
- **Following Pan**: Pan sequence in which the same character recurs in every panel • **Tilt Sequence, Following Tilt**: like Pan Sequence, Following Pan, but vertical rather than horizontal
- **Montage Panel**: panel that combines several iconographic elements that otherwise do not belong together in the same spatial relationship; creates conceptual (extradiegetic) space
- **Montage Sequence**: sequence of panels meant to be read quickly, almost simultaneously, to suggest a unified action or a unified idea or concept
- **Layout**: the formal arrangement of panels within the space of the page • **Story (Narrative) Layout**: usually grid-shaped, panels independent from each other • **Poster Layout**: not grid-shaped, more interdependence between or unification of panels, perhaps breaking down of panel borders
- **Figures of Substitution**: **Metonymy** (by association – e.g. batarang standing in for Batman) **Synecdoche** (part for whole – e.g., only hand or only foot visible), **Metaphor** (by simile– e.g. wolf and cub standing in for Lone Wolf and Daigoro)
- **Timing**: **Panel-to-Panel** and **Page-to-Page Rhythm**
- **Polyphony**: the inherent ability of the comic-book medium to juxtapose two or more simultaneous narrative threads (be they visual, or verbal, or both)
Very Partial Critical Bibliography (Books)

- José Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond*
- Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art*
- Bart Beaty, *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s*
- Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked*
- Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century*
- Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit*
- Scott Bukatman, *Hellboy’s World: Comics and Monsters on the Margins*
- John Canemaker, *Winsor McCay*
- David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics*
- Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*
- Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*
- Hillary Chute, *Outside the Box: Interviews with Contemporary Cartoonists*
- Hillary Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*
- Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*
- Ariel Dorfman, *How To Read Donald Duck*
- Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*
- Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling*
- Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Superheroes*
- Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*
- David Hadju, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*
- Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, *A Comics Studies Reader*
- RJ Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies*
- RJ Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book*
- Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*
- Charles Hatfield, *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*
- Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester, *The Superhero Reader*
- Sean Howe (ed), *Give Our Regards to the Atomsmashers!*
- Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book*
- Susan Kirtley, *Lynda Barry: Girlhood through the Looking Glass*
- Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics*
- Jonathan Lethem, *Fortress of Solitude*
- Scott McCloud, *Reinventing Comics*
- Patrick McDonnell et al, *Krazy Kat, The Comic Art of George Herriman*
- Andrei Molotiu (ed), *Abstract Comics*
- Donald Phelps, *Reading the Funnies*
- Matthew Putsz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*
- Kelly Roeder, *Wide Awake in Slumberland: Fantasy, Mass Culture, and Modernism in the Art of Winsor McCay*
- Ben Saunders, *Do the Gods Wear Capes?: Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes*
- Frederick L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*
- Frederick L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*
- Thierry Smolderen, *The Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay*
- Nick Sousanis, *Unflatten*
- Robin Varnum and Chrstina Gibbons (eds), *The Language of Comics: Word and Image*
- Douglas Wolk: *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*
- Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation*

Blogs, Bloggers, and Websites: Comics Journal, Comics Reporter, The Beat, Abstract Comics