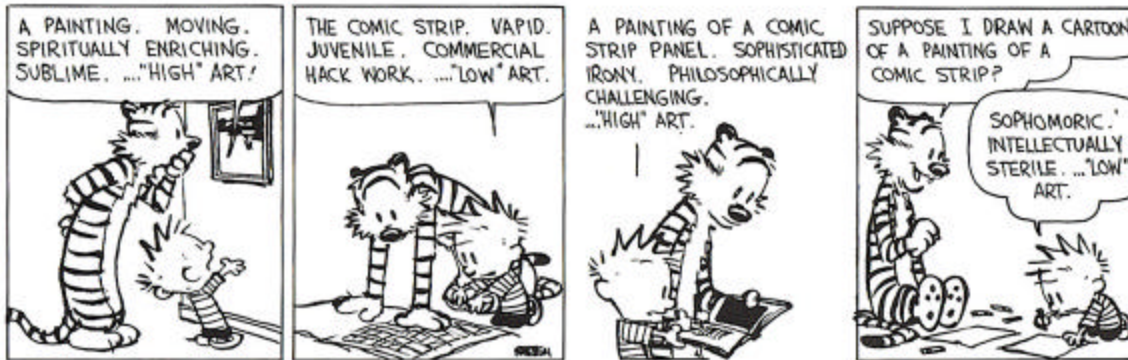


PHIL308F: The Aesthetics of Comics



07/11/05-07/29/05 M/Tu/W/Th/F 1:00-3:40 pm Skinner 0108
University of Maryland, College Park Summer 2005, Session II

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Office Hours: I will be available after each class for further discussion; otherwise, by appointment.

Outline

The primary aim of this course is to investigate the aesthetic issues at play in the medium of comics, beginning with determining what, exactly, qualifies as a comic. From here, we will investigate a number of topics of particular philosophical interest, including the language and form of comics, as well as the metaphysics and ontology of the medium. We will look to differentiate comics from similar and related art forms, including film, literature, and the visual arts (with 'pop' art in particular), and we will investigate how comics operate with regard to expression, function, and aesthetic experience. Readings for the course will be taken from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, as well as a wide selection of readings on comics and core aesthetics (as listed below). Aside from McCloud's book, specific comics will generally not be assigned for reading, though a wide range of examples will be used during class. Students are encouraged to discuss and write on comics that particularly interest them, and/or to consult the list of Recommended Comics (below) for suggested reading. Students of this course will receive a 10% discount on purchases at Liberty Books & Comics on Rte. 1 in College Park.

Course Requirements

Regular class attendance and careful study of assigned readings. There will be a term paper (30%), a cumulative final exam (30%), and two short writing assignments (15% each). Class attendance and participation will make up the final 10%.

Required Reading

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) (selected chapters)

Other readings, as listed below, will be handed out in class and available in the Philosophy Lounge. Readings are subject to change.

Absences

You need *not* e-mail me to let me know you will miss a class *unless* there is an assignment due or an exam on that day. In that case, you will need to provide a university-approved justification for your absence in order to be allowed to take a make-up exam or to hand in the assignment late.

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities that require special class or exam accommodations must present a form from Disabilities Services specifying their needs *during the first week of classes*.

Classroom Courtesy

Please be courteous to your fellow students and avoid unnecessary disruptions. Arrive on time, leave on time, and *turn off your cell phone during lecture*.

Class Schedule

Materials must be read before the day for which they are listed.

Writing assignments listed are due at the beginning of class.

July 11/05: Defining Comics

July 12/05: The Vocabulary of Comics

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*, Chapter 2 “The Vocabulary of Comics”
- Lacassin, Francis. “The Comic Strip and Film Language” in *Film Quarterly* (26: 1, 1972)

July 13/05: Word & Image

- Harvey, R.C. *The Art of the Funnies*, Chapter 1 “The Aesthetics of the Comics: A Preamble through History and Form”
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*, Chapter 6 “Show and Tell”
- Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*, Chapter 3 “Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method”

July 14/05: The Metaphysics of Comics

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*, Chapter 3 “Blood in the Gutter”
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*, Chapter 4 “Time Frames”

July 15/05: Identity and Iconography

- Jezer, Martin. “Quo Peanuts?” in White & Abel *The Funnies: An American Idiom*
- Wollheim, Richard. “Imagination and Identification” in *On Art and the Mind: Essays and Lectures* (1973)

July 18/05: Likeness & Caricature

- Töpffer, Rodolphe. *Enter: The Comics: Rodolphe Töpffer’s Essay on Physiognomy and The True Story of Monsier Crépin* (1965)
- Gombrich, E.H. “The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and in Art” in Gombrich, Hochberg & Black *Art, Perception, and Reality*
- ❖ *Writing Assignment 1 due*

July 19/05: The Ontology of Comics

- Carroll, Noël. “The Ontology of Mass Art” in *JAAC* (55:2, 1997)
- Margolis, Joseph. “The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art” in *JAAC* (36, 1977)

July 20/05: Comics & Film

- Harvey, R.C. *The Art of the Comic Book*, Chapter 8 “Only in the Comics: Why Cartooning Is Not the Same as Filmmaking”
- Cwiklik, Gregory. “The Inherent Limitations of the Comics Form as a Narrative Medium” in *TCJ* 184 (1996)
- ❖ *“American Splendor” handout and film screening*

July 21/05: High Art, Low Art & Artworlds

- Fortress, Karl E. “The Comics as Non-Art” in White & Abel *The Funnies: An American Idiom*
- Danto, Arthur C. “The Artworld”
- Cohen, Ted. “High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences” in *JAAC* (57:2, 1999)

July 22/05: Expressionism I: Gesturalism & Arousalism

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*, Chapter 5 “Living in Line”
- Tilghman, B.R. “Seeing-As: Further Considerations” in *The Expression of Emotion in the Arts: A Philosophical Inquiry* (1970)
- Aldrich, Virgil. ““Expresses” and “Expressive”” in *JAAC* (37:2, 1978)

July 25/05: Expressionism II: Idealist Theory & Infection Theory

- Collingwood, R.G. TBD
- Jahn, Gary R. “The Aesthetic Theory in Leo Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?*” in *JAAC* (34:1, 1975)
- ❖ *Writing Assignment 2 due*

July 26/05: Comic Art, Original Art, and Pop Art

- Carlin, John and Sheena Wagstaff. “Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Comic Quotation in Contemporary American Painting” in *The Comic Art Show: Cartoons in Paintings and Popular Culture*
- Collins, Bradford R. “Modern Romance: Lichtenstein’s Comic Book Paintings” in *American Art* (17:2, 2003)
- Meiland, Jack W. “Originals, Copies, and Aesthetic Value” in Denis Dutton (ed.) *The Forger’s Art* (1983)

July 27/05: The Function of Comics

- Beardsley, Monroe C. “The Relation of Design to Subject” in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958)
- Stecker, Robert. “Historical Functionalism, or the Four-Factor Theory” in *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (1997)

July 28/05: The Experience of Comics

- Carrier, David. *The Aesthetics of Comics*, Chapters 4 “Words and Pictures Bound Together; or, Experiencing the Unity of Comics”
- Carrier, David. *The Aesthetics of Comics*, Chapter 5 “The Content of the Form; or, Seeing Pictures, Reading Texts, Viewing Comics”

July 29/05: Final Exam

Further Reading on Comics

Interested students will find available a wide variety of texts written on the history of comics, as well as texts focusing on particular comics and creators (from Outcault’s *The Yellow Kid* and Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* to the art of Chris Ware). Rarer are texts focusing on the medium and form of comics, generally. Of these, I particularly recommend:

- Carrier, David. *The Aesthetics of Comics* (2000: The Pennsylvania State University Press)
- Eisner, Will. *Comics & Sequential Art* (1985: Poorhouse Press)
- Groth, Gary et al. *The Comics Journal* (1974 – present: Fantagraphics Books)
- Groth, Gary and Robert Fiore (eds.). *The New Comics* (1988: Berkley/Fantagraphics)
- Harvey, R.C. *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (1994: University Press of Mississippi)

- Harvey, R.C. *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (1996: University Press of Mississippi)
- Inge, M. Thomas. *Comics as Culture* (1990: University Press of Mississippi)
- Klock, Geoff. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002: Continuum)
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics* (1993: DC Comics/Perennial Currents)
- McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics* (2000: Paradox Press)
- Sabin, Roger. *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (1993: Routledge)
- Töpffer, Rodophe. *Enter: The Comics: Rodolphe Töpffer's Essay on Physiognomy and The True Story of Monsieur Crépin*, E. Wiese, ed. (1965: University of Nebraska Press)
- Varnum, Robin & Christina T. Gibbons (eds.). *The Language of Comics* (2001: University Press of Mississippi)
- Watterson, Bill. *The Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book* (1995: Andrews and McMeel)
- White, David Manning & Robert A. Abel (eds.). *The Funnies: An American Idiom* (1963: The Free Press of Glencoe)
- Wiater, Stanley & Stephen R. Bissette (eds.) *Comic Book Rebels* (1997: Underwood Books)
- Witek, Joseph. *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (1989: University Press of Mississippi)

Further Reading in Aesthetics

There is an enormous range of writings in aesthetics, from the ancient to the contemporary, both analytic and continental (and all points in between). For students interested in aesthetics, generally, I suggest visiting the university library and investigating the material available. For those just starting out, however, I recommend the following material in particular:

Introductory

- Ground, Ian. *Art or Bunk?* (1993: Bristol Classic Press)
- Lyas, Colin. *Aesthetics* (1994: UCL Press Limited)
- Sharpe, R.A. *Contemporary Aesthetics* (1991: Gregg Revivals)

Journals

- *The British Journal of Aesthetics* (Oxford)
- *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Blackwell)

Anthologies

- Goldblatt, David & Lee B. Brown (eds.). *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts* 2/e (2005: Pearson)
- Hanfling, Oswald (ed.). *Philosophical Aesthetics: An Introduction* (1992: The Open University)
- Kivy, Peter (ed.). *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (2004: Blackwell)
- Lamarque, Peter & Stein Haugom Olsen (eds.) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition* (2004: Blackwell)
- Levinson, Jerrold (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (2005: Oxford University Press)

Literary Criticism Anthologies

- Allen, Gay Wilson & Harry Hayden Clark (eds.). *Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce* (1941: Wayne Books)
- Gilbert, Allan H. (ed.). *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden* (1940: Wayne Books)
- Harari, Josué V. (ed.). *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (1979: Cornell University Press)

Recommended Comics

Although I am open to discussion and/or writing on just about any comic (strips, series, graphic novels), I particularly recommend the graphic novels listed below. The vast majority of these books are still in print, and available at good comics shops or online. To help defer costs, students of this course will receive a 10% discount on purchases at Liberty Books & Comics on Rte. 1 in College Park.

- Brown, Chester. *Louis Riel* (Drawn and Quarterly)
- Chadwick, Paul. *Concrete* (several collections, Dark Horse Comics)
- Cruse, Howard. *Stuck Rubber Baby* (Paradox Press)
- Eisner, Will. *The Spirit Archives* (16 vols., DC Comics)
- Gonick, Larry. *Cartoon History of the Universe* (3 vols., Doubleday/Norton)
- Hernandez, Los Bros. *Love & Rockets* (15 vols., Fantagraphics Books)
- Ito, Junji. *Uzumaki* (3 vols., Viz)
- Karasik, Paul & David Mazzucchelli. *Paul Auster's City of Glass* (Avon)
- Lapham, David. *Stray Bullets* (4 vols., El Capitan)
- Matteis, J.M. & Jon J Muth. *The Compleat Moonshadow* (Vertigo)
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics* (DC Comics/Perennial Currents)
- McKean, Dave. *Cages* (NBM)
- Mignola, Mike. *Hellboy* (5 vols., Dark Horse Comics)
- Miller, Frank & David Mazzucchelli. *Batman: Year One* (DC Comics)
- Miller, Frank. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics)
- Milligan, Peter & Duncan Fegredo. *Enigma* (Vertigo)
- Moore, Alan & Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen* (DC Comics)
- Moore, Alan & David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta* (Vertigo)
- Moore, Alan & Eddie Campbell. *From Hell* (Eddie Campbell Comics/Top Shelf)
- Otomo, Katsuhiro. *Akira* (6 vols., Dark Horse Comics)
- Ralph, Brian. *Cave-in* (Highwater Books)
- Schultz, Marc. *Xenozoic Tales* (2 vols., Dark Horse Comics)
- Seth. *Clyde Fans: Book One* (Drawn and Quarterly)
- Seth. *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (Drawn and Quarterly)
- Sim, Dave. *Cerebus* (16 vols., Aardvark Vanaheim)
- Smith, Jeff. *Bone: One Volume Edition* (collected or in 9 vols., Cartoon Books)
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus* (collected or in 2 vols., Pantheon)
- Sturm, James. *The Golem's Mighty Swing* (Drawn and Quarterly)
- Talbot, Bryan. *The Tale of One Bad Rat* (Dark Horse Comics)
- Thompson, Craig. *Blankets* (Top Shelf)
- Waid, Mark & Alex Ross. *Kingdom Come* (DC Comics)
- Ware, Chris. *Jimmy Corrigan: Smartest Kid on Earth* (Pantheon)
- Wolfman, Marv & George Pérez. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (DC Comics)

I also recommend investigating a variety of comic strips, many of which are available in collected anthologies. Given the number of good strips produced in the last 100-plus years, this list is by no means comprehensive:

- Breathed, Berke. *Bloom County, Outland, and Opus*
- Foster, Harold. *Prince Valiant and Tarzan*
- Griffith, Bill. *Zippy the Pinhead*
- Groening, Matt. *Life in Hell*
- Herriman, George. *Krazy Kat*
- Johnson, Lynn. *For Better or For Worse*

- Kelly, Walt. *Pogo*
- King, Frank. *Gasoline Alley*
- Larson, Gary. *The Far Side*
- McCay, Winsor. *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*
- Outcault, P.F. *The Yellow Kid*
- Schulz, Charles. *Peanuts*
- Watterson, Bill. *Calvin and Hobbes*
- Wiley. *Non Sequitur*

Finally, I recommend investigating the better “gag” cartoons, particularly those published by *The New Yorker* and *Playboy*. These cartoons are available in a large number of collections.

Recommended Film Adaptations

Especially recently, films about popular comic characters abound (Batman, X-Men, Fantastic Four, etc.). Rarer, however, are films that seek to adapt a particular comic series or graphic novel. Of this smaller group, I particularly recommend:

- *Akira* (1988)
Adapted from *Akira* series (1988-1995) by Katsuhiro Otomo
- *American Splendor* (2003)
Adapted from *American Splendor* series (1976 – present) by Harvey Pekar et al. and *Our Cancer Year* (1994) by Harvey Pekar & Joyce Brabner
- *From Hell* (2001)
Adapted from *From Hell* (1999) by Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell
- *Ghost World* (2000)
Adapted from *Ghost World* (1998) by Daniel Clowes
- *Road to Perdition* (2002)
Adapted from *Road to Perdition* (1998) by Max Allen Collins & Richard Piers Rayner
- *The Rocketeer* (1991)
Adapted from *The Rocketeer* series (1982 – present) by Dave Stevens
- *Uzumaki* (2000)
Adapted from *Uzumaki* (vol. 1) (1998) by Junji Ito