

**SEQUENTIAL NARRATIVE ART & THE GRAPHIC NOVEL:
SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE INCLUSION
OF COMICS IN ART EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

By

JAMES F. WOGLOM

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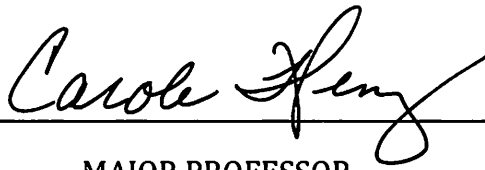
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
I. Graphic Novel in Contemporary Culture.....	5
<i>Comics in Academic Literature.....</i>	5
<i>Recent Expansion of the Comics Market.....</i>	6
<i>The Internet-Based Comic.....</i>	8
<i>The Graphic Novel.....</i>	8
<i>Comics as Artifacts of Visual Culture.....</i>	12
<i>Comics in School Libraries.....</i>	14
<i>Comics in University Systems.....</i>	15
<i>Comics and Cultural Institutions.....</i>	17
<i>Comics in Education.....</i>	19
II. A Brief History of the Graphic Novel and its Milieu.....	24
<i>Proto-Comics.....</i>	26
<i>Early Innovators.....</i>	29
<i>Supermen.....</i>	34
<i>The Golden Age of Comics.....</i>	37
<i>Anti-Comics Sentiment and the Comics Code Authority.....</i>	39
<i>Will Eisner: Father of the Graphic Novel.....</i>	45
III. How Graphic Novels Work.....	52
<i>Formal Conventions of Comics Art.....</i>	53
<i>Comics and the Transactional Readership Theory.....</i>	59
3. PROPOSED UNIT OF INSTRUCTION.....	61
Introduction.....	61
The Unit of Instruction.....	62
Field Test.....	71
4. CONCLUSION.....	79
5. APPENDICES.....	83
Appendix A.....	83
Appendix B.....	89
Appendix C.....	90
6. REFERENCES.....	100

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Action Comics No. 1.....	33
Figure 2: Captain America Comics No. 1.....	36

1. INTRODUCTION

When I was a very young boy, my mother stitched a ribbon of yellow silk into the shape of an 'S' on the back of a bright, red, terry cloth towel. After fastening the lengthwise ends together with a safety pin, she presented the absorbent length of fabric to her wide-eyed son, and, donning the makeshift cloak, I instantaneously underwent a drastic transformation. Suddenly, I was faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Besides providing me with hours of entertainment at almost no cost, Mom had taught me a number of life-changing lessons over the span of a single exchange. She had clued me into the extent to which imaginative play, in concert with a cultural artifact, can be extended into a boundless universe of possibilities. Further, she had demonstrated, with under an hour's worth of work, the potential magic of a handmade object, as I wore across my shoulders an idea that transcended the physical object it inhabited. Finally, and perhaps most influentially, she instigated my first interaction with a major facet of American visual culture, namely the comic book and its ephemera, one that I have remained in consistent contact with for twenty some-odd years hence.

Years later, my forays into the world of comics were furthered with the assistance of my grandparents on my father's side. Once a month, I would go to stay at their apartment across town, and, after the Saturday morning cartoons had run their course, we would walk together to the downtown shopping area. While they sat and drank coffee at the diner next door, I immersed myself in the first community of aesthetic discourse that I had ever been privy to: the comic shop full of fans.

The comic book specialty shop, though popularly demonized by not entirely unfounded caricatures of those establishments and their staffs (like the one seen in the Fox network's *The Simpsons* cartoon) allows fans, such as myself, to become part of a countercultural "community of readers" (Allen, 2005, p. 265). I found that, inside the confines of the small and cluttered store, in spite of my very young age,

adults respected my knowledge and opinions on various aspects of the medium. As Botzakis (2009) observed in his study of comic readership, I was afforded “an opportunity... to usurp the authority of texts to gain [my] own version of authority as a scholar” and to use “what could be considered frivolous popular culture readings to construct an identity as an intellectual authority, one who conversed in a circle of peers” (p. 54). On a very naïve level, I was participating in some of my first group critiques of visual and material culture.

Meanwhile, at school and at home, comic book characters had begun to appear on every bare paper surface I came in contact with. Sketching them became a near compulsion. It was through the copying of comics works and the unforgivably derivative creation of my own superheroes and funny, talking animals that I first plied my hand at the act of drawing. Art production began to take up the bulk of my time, as doodling consistently broke my attention from more significant scholarly pursuits.

Entering high school, drawing *became* my core scholarly pursuit. I registered in every art class at Cranford High (my alma mater) as well as a continuous series of after school classes at community colleges. At first, I was entirely unaware of ‘high’ and ‘low’ distinctions in the visual arts, but, as I began to seriously consider art as a life’s pursuit, I found that I was roundly discouraged by many teachers from the continued pursuit of many of the more commercial aspects of my personal cultural interests, including comics art, as a means of self expression. This leaning amongst my instructors was in keeping with the general tendencies in arts classrooms of the time, as, “historically, visual arts curriculum has been based on the concept of the fine art object exemplar (their production, history, criticism, and aesthetic), rather than on the range of other artifacts”(Freedman, 2003, p. 17) that students deal with from day to day. While I can’t say I fully understood the difference between these outlets at that point, I went along with it, and my compositions, once peopled with trite variations on Batman, became riddled instead with uninformed abstractions and clumsy studies of nature.

In the art schools I attended after graduating from high school, the delineation between fine artists and the illustrators who created comic books persisted, probably due, to some extent, to the pervasive belief that the differentiation of art forms in institutes of higher learning “simplifies the visual arts and helps to make them administratively and conceptually manageable” (Freedman, 2003, p. 16) a supposition that, while doubtlessly true, logistically speaking, tends to undercut the multimodal and interdisciplinary tendencies of contemporary visual culture. I had chosen my camp, and, as I was reveling in the romance of posing as a young painter in New York, I was not inclined to stir the water. Instead, my relationship with comic books (and by that point, graphic novels) became that of a reader simply enjoying a pastime in his spare hours.

I probably would have continued along in much the same fashion, too, if it hadn't been for the intercession of a pair of well-timed influences. One of these appeared in the form of my good friend Brian. While I had strayed from the flock of comics enthusiasts, Brian had remained true to the cause. He had kept up with innovations in the field as they appeared, eventually becoming fairly successful as a web-comics artist. In introducing me to the world of the web-comic, Brian showed me how comics art had progressed past the world of the commercial object of entertainment that I, through the intervention of my teachers, had once perceived it as, evolving into a tool of purgative self-expression to a growing community of artists. Inspired, I sat down with a sheet of Bristol board, a pencil, a brush and some black ink, and immediately found myself hooked by an engaging and rewarding visual arts practice, which I still engage in daily.

The other of the aforementioned pair of influences that reinvigorated my interest in the potential of comics as an art form was a particular school of thought that I encountered in my pursuit of literature regarding art education, newly chosen as my prospective career. In my curriculum theory classes, I was made aware of the Visual Culture Art Education Movement, a schematic philosophy of the arts in which, as Freedman (2003) described, “the visual arts make up most of visual culture,

which is all that is humanly formed and sensed through vision or visualization and shapes the way we live our lives" (p.1).

Visual culture theorists acknowledged the idea that "informal art education happens throughout our lives as we encounter visual culture and have thoughtful discussions or debates about it" (Freedman, 2003, p. 2), a notion that had occurred to me throughout my life, as the art forms that I enjoyed most were often rejected out of hand by many of teachers. Visual Culture literature opened my eyes to the educational possibilities that appear once educators and students are freed of the constricting hierarchies that the arts have been burdened with at many levels, helping me to reframe my misspent youth, wasted on the vapid fare of comic books, as a diligent, in depth study of a substantive American mode. Once again, I was "allowed" to take the arts that I loved seriously.

In the applied project that follows, my intention is to provide a framework for examination of the graphic novel and its related media. My belief that the graphic novel is a rich and nuanced art form with a storied history is echoed by countless critics and devotees, and, through providing the necessary background information with which to better understand its origins, contemporary context and formal mechanisms, I hope to provide a jumping off point for teachers interested in entering into the conversation regarding the comics medium. I will also provide an example of a possible unit of instruction with which educators might begin to introduce students to the world of comics and sequential art, hopefully offering some of those students with a means through which they can make sense of their world.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I. Graphic Novels in Contemporary Culture

Comics in Academic Literature

Comics were predominately overlooked in art education literature for most of the twentieth century, despite their widespread cultural impact and, at times, massive audiences. As Jeff Adams (1999) observed: “looking at the mainstream art curriculum programmes and attendant art history literature in the corresponding period [of the rise of comics art] one would be forgiven for believing that it had not happened, even in a minor way” (p. 69). This absence of discourse on the subject of comics is not limited to the field of art education. Rather, it is pervasive, apparent in the literature of many of the disciplines to which the study of the form might be considered pertinent. Following a brief spike in psychological and public policy related texts discussing comics and sequential art published in the 1950s, a tacit pan-Academic moratorium seemed to have been placed on the topic, one that has only recently been “lifted”.

This dearth of literature on the subject of comics art is probably more than partially due to a wholly undeserved general stigmatization of the ‘comic book’ form, perpetrated by a government lead moral crusade against the medium in the 1950s (which I will discuss at greater length in the “history” portion of this paper), a stigmatization that understandably discouraged educators from tackling the medium in a classroom setting. The few scholarly papers that were written on the comics form during this period are predominately anecdotal (Viadero, 2009) and deal, for the most part, with the literary and social implications of comics (Hudson, 2008), rather than with the formal aspects of comics art and its intricate vocabulary of visual conventions.

In the intervening years since comic books came under institutional scrutiny, the comics medium has effectively shed most of the taint of the stigma it was

beleaguered with in the fifties and sixties. Comics art and its advocates have even begun to step out from the underground, fringe arenas of the comic book specialty stores, comic 'fanzines' and comic 'cons', in order to offer their art to a wider audience, an audience that is rapidly growing in our country, as well as one that has already reached substantial dimensions in Europe and Japan. Comics have regained a cultural foothold, in part due to the attention afforded them by the adaptation of comics pieces to other media, such as television and film, as well as through two new formats for the dissemination of comics art, the graphic novel and the Internet based serial web-comic. Through the resulting hubbub, scholars and their institutions are beginning to take notice.

Recent Expansion of the Comics Market

Though the comic book format and its attendant industry have had to bear extreme fluctuations in popularity over the years, in part due to a number of regrettable societal impositions, there is one alley of comics art that can be said to have successfully maintained mass appeal and readership throughout the century since its inception, perpetuating awareness of the idiom; namely, the newspaper comic strip.

Reading the newspaper comics section has been a daily ritual of many Americans since the beginning of the twentieth century. Newspaper comic strips are an incredibly inexpensive and thus democratically far-reaching form of entertainment, often characterized as a light respite from the harsh realities of other printed news media, despite the fact that many poignant and aesthetically substantive pieces of drawing and writing have emerged from the rabble. They have achieved ubiquity as a form of decoration of personal spaces, little newsprint declarations of personal ideologies and humors, easily snipped from the pages of the papers in order to adorn refrigerators, cubicles and classrooms. Due to their inherent link to daily periodicals, they are often timely and predominately inoffensive, giving them a tone of comforting vitality. Their syntax and reading levels are estimated between the first and seventh grades, making them an ideal portal

into not only the world of comics, but also the world of reading in general, besides being an ideal means of carrying the same idea to the broadest possible demographic (Wright, 2006).

Studies have reported the comics section of the newspapers as the favorite section by 85% of the children respondents and that 90% of children between the ages of 8 and 13 read newspaper comics as a part of their regular schedule. Reports examining the reading preferences and interests of school age children suggest that there is evidence that students greatly enjoy newspaper comics and that they can subsequently be utilized to both educational and inspirational ends in literary curriculum. Over fifty years of scholarly research has shown that comics have the capacity to maintain the interest of students of disparate ages, and are popular with intermediate, junior high school and primary age children (Wright, 2006), as well as being important as an area of continued reading habits for adults who otherwise might not engage in habitual reading after secondary school (Botzakis, 2009). Comics expose readers to nearly twice as many words as the average children's book (Behler, 2006) and many students have learned the ins and outs of such subtle and difficult literary devices as irony and foreshadowing through the consumption of comics works (Wright, 2006).

While newspapers have long been the customary venue for the publication of comic strips, the decline of the print news industry has been precipitous since the advent of digital media. As of the beginning of the 21st century, less than half of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 read a daily newspaper, and readership is lowest amongst Asian and Hispanics, the country's two fastest growing minorities. News is now more often obtained through electronically based media including television broadcasts and Internet postings. Subsequently, the comic strip syndicates, wishing to avoid extinction through adherence to the form their texts have long inhabited, have joined the legions of self-publishing web comics in posting many of the classic newspaper comic strips in an Internet-based format (Wright, 2006). This migration of successful comics artists to the Internet, coupled with the 'do-it-yourself' blogging trend that has brought the voices of an untold number of

prospective writers to the Worldwide Web, sparked the newfound attention for the web-comic artist.

The Internet-Based Comic

Web-comics, advocated for years by comics theorists like McCloud (2000), have become a major release of creative energy for a growing community of Internet cartoonists. Predominately posted to blog sites, these serialized works tackle a variety of genres and styles, in as many different media. Often affecting an anti-establishment, Dada-esque tone in relation to the comics universe at large, web-comics artists have adopted ingeniously playful and innovative modes of operation within the context of the serialized, sequential comic strips. Strips such as *XKCD*, which presents situational jokes enacted by crude stick figures, are prime examples of the immediacy of this new forum, which bypasses potentially restrictive commercial concerns entirely, through its straightforward and uncensored format.

One of the major comics publishers, Marvel Comics, has entered the web-comics arena through the practice of digitizing large portions of its catalogue and providing monthly access subscriptions to these digitized archives. The comics are read through a site-based viewing program, with which the viewer can zoom in and out of images, magnify text and navigate over the surface of each page before turning to the next. The viewer program approximates the path the reader's eyes travel across the page of comic book when reading manually, making for a dynamic reading experience. Much of Marvel Comics oeuvre has already been digitized, and new titles are added weekly.

The Graphic Novel

Another conveyance of comics art stirring a good deal of excitement in comics culture and culture in general, is the aforementioned graphic novel (referred to as "Albums" in Europe and collected "Manga" in Japan). Graphic novels tend to be either hardcover or trade paperback books that contain sequenced imagery, ordered in the service of telling a story. The term graphic novel refers to the

physical format of the book in question rather than the content (Williams, 2009), thus works of non-fiction, biography and autobiography are fair game when we discuss graphic novels (Bucher, 2004).

The logistical definition of the graphic novel as recognized by publishers tends to be that they are any comics work between 64 and 179 pages that tells a continuous, cohesive story (Bucher, 2004), though I have seen exemplary outliers on either side of these specified page number limitations, as well as texts in which the “cohesive story” qualifier has been abandoned entirely. As Williams (2009) put it: “graphic novels present a story with a distinct beginning and end, even when that story is told in multiple volumes” (p.167). This is an important distinction because it serves to exclude continuously serialized comics that have been collected in a bound book form (which are traditionally considered low, commercial art by many of the traditional comic book’s detractors), while including works like Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* (1987) and Jeff Smith’s *Bone* (1991), exemplary works of comics art, both of which, though originally released in a serial format and often collected in a series of trade paperbacks, were intended to be read as a finite narrative .

Though the development of the graphic novel phenomenon has been looked upon skeptically by many comics artists who see the term as an undue distinction between high and low art within the world of comics, the development of the graphic novel, and, specifically, the press and sales statistics surrounding it, have helped to facilitate a movement of comics texts out of the comic book specialty shop and into the more commonly traversed halls of the local book store or library (Behler, 2006). This model has also served to instill the comics art form with a new air of gravitas, as, “in moving from periodical to book, an implicit claim of permanent worth [is] being made” (McCloud, 2000, p. 29). Whereas the perceived disposability of the pamphlet-style comic book reminds many of its transient nature and intrinsic link to the periodical industry, these high quality texts are worthy of collection in personal libraries, enhancing a dualism in perception between the comic book as a product of commercialism, in opposition to the concept of the graphic novel as precious object (Roeder, 2008). It is important to remember,

though, that just because a comics work is packaged and marketed as a graphic novel rather than simply a comic book, this does not guarantee any higher level of quality of content. Many comic books are exquisitely drawn and written while many graphic novels are comparatively slapdash in nature. As McCloud (2000) so eloquently warned: "Slick white paper and a square binding are no guarantee of literary merit"(p. 29).

In spite of this admonition, a number of excellent comics works have been published in the graphic novel form, and many have been critically accepted in terms of their literary achievement alone, a feat that was sparsely if ever accomplished in the comic book industry previous to the advent of the graphic novel. Some have received recognition and acclaim independent from and beyond those afforded exceptional comics works by the comics community at large. One of the first comics works to receive an award for literary merit outside the comics industry was an issue of Neil Gaiman's DC comics series *The Sandman*. Describing a fanciful account of how William Shakespeare came to conceive his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the issue received a World Fantasy Award for best short story in 1991.

In perhaps the most widely discussed case of a piece of comics art transcending its understood arena, Art Spiegelman's detailed illustration of his parents' concentration camp internment during World War II, *Maus* (1986,1992), won a special Pulitzer Award after the release of its second installment in 1992, and is now taught as a literary work in high schools throughout the country. Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* was the first graphic novel to be awarded the Guardian Prize, a British fiction award, in 2001(Weiner, 2003). Gene Luan Yang, a high school computer teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area won the Michael L. Printz Award, a medal of excellence bestowed by the Young Adult Library Association, for her work *American Born Chinese*(2006), and was a National Book Award finalist for the same work (Smetana, 2009). Brian Selznick's graphic novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2008) won the Caldecott Medal, the American Library association's annual award for excellence in an illustrated work for children

(Williams, 2009). Selznick's book has since been optioned by the director Martin Scorsese, for development into a film to be released in 2011. Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and was rated as one of the best books of the year in *Time* magazine (Roeder, 2008).

Critical success may be one of the factors that have led to the financial windfall the graphics novel industry is currently experiencing. If the sales figures attributed to this fledgling medium are any indication of a continuing trend for national attention, then the popularity of graphic novels is definitively on the rise. The form has made a series of substantial jumps in sales, from \$75 million to \$120 million between 2001 and 2003 (Bucher, 2004), nearly doubling to \$207 million in 2004, and according to the most recent available figures, leaping as high as \$395 million in 2008. Production of graphic novels has increased in kind, from 1,826 available titles in 2004 to 7,717 in 2007 (Williams, 2009). In what is certainly the most noteworthy statistic in comics and graphic novel related business, the major media corporation Disney recently purchased Marvel Comics, a corporation that, despite its proliferation of outlets, is basically a publishing house, for the outrageous sum of \$4 billion dollars (Blaine, 2009), in a financial climate in which outlets of publication are generally considered to be in decline (Weiner, 2003).

American comics publishers, long relegated by circumstance to a very specific niche audience and its economy, are still reeling from the reaction of the public to the new book format that has only just taken off over the last decade or so, and, subsequently, are still learning how to exist within the world of book publication (Hudson, 2008). In cultural environments, including France, Belgium and Japan, where the market and sales structure for this medium have existed unhindered for some time, the statistics are even more impressive (Adams, 1999).

In France, for instance, one out of every five books sold is a graphic novel (Weiner, 2003) and while this might seem like a heavy rate of consumption for comics art, it soon becomes dwarfed when one turns to comics sales statistics in Japan. Japanese Manga sales make up a major stake of all published materials in

Japan (Allen, 2005), with annual Manga sales adding up to a total of 5 billion dollars, or about 40% of the entire Japanese publishing market. The societal stigmatization of comics forms that crippled the comics industry in the U.S. never occurred in Japanese culture, so evolutions in form, publication and production occurred undeterred. Parental opposition to Manga in Japan is nearly non-existent, and the popularity of the form among youths is so high that 99% of students in a study of Japanese junior high school and university students reported that they had read Manga. Japan even has a documented cultural practice of loitering at comic shops or Manga sections of bookstores called 'tachiyomi' (Allen, 2005), essentially making comic shops a common social meeting place for youths. The audience for Manga in the U.S. is growing as well, and, in an interesting turn away from the perceived stereotype of comics as a type of media predominately consumed by male adolescents, 60% of U.S. Manga readers are female (Roeder, 2008).

Comics as Artifacts of Visual Culture

As we discuss comics art specifically, we should remember that, regardless of the mode in question, it is important for teachers to be aware of their students' cultural actions outside of their classrooms in general, of which comics, web-comics and graphic novels are increasingly a part. Personal literacy is a demonstration of a student's own cultural agency, as well as being a substantial signifier of a student's cultural experiences and abilities (Allen, 2005) and his or her worldview. Visual works shape "our thinking about the world and leads us to create new knowledge through visual form"(Freedman, 2003, 2). As Freedman (2003) suggested:

The visual arts are expanding not only in their forms, but in their influence through connections to the range of social issues, including issues not always thought of as social in character, such as ecology and conceptions of self. As a result, the visual arts have become fundamental to the cultural transformation of political discourse, social interaction, and cultural identity that characterizes the postmodern condition (Freedman, 2003, p. 1)

Since comics have long been aimed at an adolescent audience that is just on the cusp of being fully aware of their place within a larger society, comics and comics communities have often played the role of sounding boards for youths to develop their own understanding of the world, as well as providing a palatable, broad stroked reflection of the societal undercurrents to which students are acclimating (Wright, 2006). At the same time they have provided an alternative to the mainstream culture of parents.

Indeed, one of the strongest draws of the comics or graphic novels for students is that they *feel* different than the books that they have been assigned thus far in their educational careers, making the reading of comics material a departure from the perceived norms of the more staid materials that many students may already have preconceived misgivings about (Allen, 2005). The sheer newness of the graphic novel form has doubtlessly contributed to its ability to excite a large audience. Allen (2005) points out that traditional, text-block-centric, required readings tend to “reflect the values of those in power, such as teachers”(p. 265) and the parents, boards, and institutions that both back and influence them, and, subsequently students who cast themselves in the role of the subjugated are often suspicious of them.

Graphic novels can be lumped in with the groundbreaking digital and multi-media forms that did not exist at all just over thirty years ago (Behler, 2006). The dynamic visuals and complex, nonlinear storylines that dominate many comics are more akin to the television, films, Internet sites and video games that contemporary students are familiar with than the books provided by their teachers and parents (Bucher, 2004). Developing practices and forms in the arts, such as those just discussed, provide students with the sense of excitement one might attribute with being on the cusp of an avant-garde movement in culture, allowing students who are fluent in these forms a sense of mastery over a material that their elders might not understand as intuitively, as well as giving students integrated practice in the interpretation of visual imagery (Allen, 2005), an increasingly important skill set. Our role as educators, then, becomes that of guidance in terms of both visual and

cultural literacy, and modeling of aesthetic critique, as students continue to deftly and constantly consume and manipulate visual cultural material.

Comics In School Libraries

One of the educational venues that has taken a serious look at the graphic novel since its emergence in popular media is that of the school library. Graphic novels caught the attention of librarians when many noticed that they were popular amongst teens, a notoriously difficult group to encourage reading habits in (Williams, 2009). "School Library Now", a periodical for school librarians, now contains a "Graphic Novel Roundup Sections" in its pages (Bucher, 2004) and graphic novels are regularly reviewed by many periodicals that cater to library professionals, including *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *Publisher's Weekly* and *School Library Journal* (Williams, 2009). In an illustrative anecdote, one high school librarian calculated that graphic novel borrowing accounted for more than 17% of her total number of texts checked out despite the fact that graphic novels only accounted for 1.5% of that schools collection (Williams, 2009).

The suggestion made by many librarians that reading graphic novels can be a potential gateway into wider reading habits has been supported by a recent study conducted at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles by Professor Stephen D. Krashen, which showed that 7th grade boys who read comic books tend to read more books in general (Viadero, 2009). Findings such as these have caught the attention of education associations, including The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), who included 11 graphic novel themed events at their annual conference in San Antonio in 2008 (Hudson, 2008).

Following the commercially based rationale for an upward trend of national attention towards the graphic novel form suggested earlier in this text, institutional interest in the medium could be said to be similarly on the rise. Sales of graphic novels to libraries and schools have increased from around \$1 million in 2001 to more than \$30 million in 2007. These statistics have brought the attention of publishers to the relatively untapped potential of the educational graphic novels

market (Hudson, 2008). In one such case, Françoise Mouly, the art editor of *The New Yorker* and wife of the renowned comics artist Art Spiegelman, has founded a publishing imprint called Toon Books that releases texts that have been especially developed for kindergarten through third grade students. Toon Books utilizes the Lexile scale system of ascertaining the reading level of texts (Hudson, 2008), ensuring ease of integration into the school library system.

Comics in University Systems

While graphic novels are readily available in many primary and secondary school libraries, the presence of graphic novels in colleges of education has not grown along with the publication, production and consumption trends. A study examining the holdings of graphic novels on the 2007 and 2008 Great Graphic Novels for Teens list (or GGNT) of 100 exemplary graphic novels, was prepared by the Young Adult Library Services Association in 667 American Institutions accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as well as those accredited by the ALA. 84% of the institutions held less than 10 of the listed titles while nearly 25% of the institutions held none at all. If teachers are not readily given access to this medium as it emerges, how can they then be expected to develop a feel for the quality of these texts? (Williams, 2009).

This underwhelming representation of the form in university libraries notwithstanding, it appears that many institutes of higher learning are beginning to give serious attention to comics and comics artists in other regards. For instance, many American universities, including Boston University, Michigan State University, and Ohio University, have collections of original comic art (Wright, 2006). The University of Mississippi Press has even launched its own comics imprint, overseen by the comics historian M. Thomas Inge (Weiner, 2003). Further, Fordham University, in the borough of the Bronx in New York City, recently held a conference on “Graphica in Education” (graphica is a newly coined and, as far as I have seen, sparsely utilized academic term for comics and sequential art) on January 28th,

2009. The event was a great success, drawing 125 educational scholars and professionals (Viadero, 2009).

Classes on comics and graphic novels have sprung up in colleges across the country. Though most are predominately concerned with the literary content of the books or contextualization of the comics form and its ephemera as social artifacts, rather than examination of the formal aspects of the medium (Hudson, 2008), any scholarly attention to a fledgling art form is encouraging. The application of comics art in the classroom was discussed at length at a 2007 meeting of the College Art Association (CAA) in New York (Roeder, 2008), and The National Association of Comic Art Educators (NACAE, pronounced “nay-say, www.teachingcomics.org), an organization of educators who teach the comics form, have developed a website on which members have posted exercises, lesson plans, study guides, handouts and syllabi, as well as a list of exemplar comics artists and works, and a list of schools that have offered comics related courses (Roeder, 2008). The University of Florida has even gone so far as to offer a Comics and Visual Rhetoric track within its doctoral program in English literature (Roeder, 2008).

A number of academic scholarships and grants have been founded in response to the surge of attention to the graphic novels and other comics forms in colleges, universities and cultural institutions. The Swann Foundation Fellowship at the Library of Congress, for one, awards up to \$15,000 annually for projects in the field of caricature or cartoon art that make use of the library’s holdings during a two week residency. Similarly, The American Antiquarian Society offers short-term fellowships for scholars of pre-1876 American visual culture who use graphic materials as primary sources and The John A. Lent Scholarship provides a travel award each fall for a young scholar to attend and present research at the International Comic Arts Forum in Washington, D.C. (Roeder, 2008, p. 8). In one extreme example of a comics artist receiving institutional funding for the creation of comics works, Ben Katchor, whose work depicts the Jewish community in New York City, received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1996 and a MacArthur Fellowship or “genius award” in 2000 (Weiner, 2003).

Comics and Cultural Institutions

The U.S. government has also made a number of efforts on behalf of the comics medium (a form considered by many to be a time-honored genre of Americana), efforts that have helped to assign a level of institutional legitimacy to the field. For instance, comics texts have been read into the Congressional Records since 1987. In 1994 the Library of Congress Authority File added graphic novels as one of their authorized subjects (Williams, 2009) and held an exhibition of comic strip art and published an exhibit catalogue in 1995 and another in 2006-2007. Even the United States Postal System has recognized the popularity of comics icons, issuing stamps emblazoned with the faces of popular comics characters (Wright, 2006).

In another case of expanding and changing venues for the comics art medium, comics art and artists have begun to gain the attention of museum curators and gallery owners, so much so that American comic strip art has been exhibited in such widely esteemed institutions as the Louvre in Paris. The United States is currently home to two museums that specialize in the exhibition of comics art, The International Museum of Cartoon Art in Boca Raton, Florida and the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, California (Wright, 2006), and gallery shows can be viewed in cities throughout the U.S.

This trend appears to have begun in 1992, when the Museum of Modern Art in New York exhibited a show of Art Spiegelman's work from his critically acclaimed, Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel *Maus*. In another example of comics art being displayed in a major museum in New York City, Chris Ware, comics author of the widely lauded formal masterpiece *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2001), and contributor to both *The New Yorker* and *New York Times Magazine*, was the first comics artist to be invited to participate in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Biennial in 2002. He has also had solo exhibitions of his work in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the University of Nebraska's Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in Lincoln, Nebraska (Roeder, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, The Library of Congress held a show entitled *Cartoon America* in the winter of 2006-7 in which were displayed 102 comics works from the Art Wood Collection of Cartoon and Caricature. Supplementary materials from the Library's own comics collections were included in the show's catalogue (Roeder, 2008).

A traveling museum show entitled *Masters of American Comics* began touring the United States, visiting art museums in Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and New York City in 2006 (Wright, 2006). *Masters of American Comics* opened in the fall of 2005 and closed in January of 2007 (Roeder, 2008) and featured the work of many well respected comics artists including Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, R. Crumb and Art Spiegelman. It showed pieces of comics art at various stages of production, from pencil roughs, to inked compositions printer's proofs (Roeder, 2008).

Comic Abstraction, a 2008 show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, focused not on comic artists per se, but, rather, artists that appropriated comics conventions in their work, including Takashi Murakami and Sue Williams (Roeder, 2008). In the same year, another themed show, this time at The Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey, opened. Entitled *Reflecting Culture: The Evolution of American Comic Book Superheroes*, this show observed how superhero comics reflected societal values, from the creation of Superman in 1938 through the death of Captain America in 2007 (Roeder, 2008).

Comic collecting is often linked with the collection of other nostalgic artifacts of childhood, like baseball cards and classic toys, and while it is difficult for me to ascertain the conceptual difference between the practice of amassing such items from the trade of more traditional fine arts, while still maintaining that the former categories are, themselves, important aspects of an inclusive visual culture, there does appear to be a separation, beyond the simple fact that galleries and auctions separate them. Be that as it may, comics art has proven to sell exceptionally well. Comic strip art by cartoonists such as Winsor McCay, creator of *Little Nemo*, George Herriman, author of *Krazy Kat*, and Alex Raymond the artist/writer at the helm for

Flash Gordon have sold for more than \$20,000 (Wright, 2006). Comic books have sold for considerably more, with, in an extreme case, *Action Comics No. 1*, the very first printed appearance of Superman, selling for \$1 million in February of 2010 (Gustines, 2010).

Comics in Education

One extremely successful program that has made use of the comic book format as a pedagogical vehicle is The Comic Book Project, created by educational theorist Michael Bitz. The Comic Book Project was originally envisioned as a means of improving literacy skills through the integration of the visual arts. It was initially field-tested in New York City between October and December of 2002. The study's participant population was made up of 733 fourth-through-eighth graders. Most of these students were identified as low performing, and more than half of them were second language learners. 48 teachers in 33 sites helped to facilitate the project in inner-city after-school programs (Bitz, 2004).

The project's processes consisted of having students write comic book manuscripts and then transpose those manuscripts into a comic book form through a number of sequential steps. Their completed works were drawn into eight page comic book templates provided by the comic book publishing company, Dark Horse Comics. Not only did participants in this program surpass the literary performance standards identified by the Board of Regents of New York State, the creation of comics provided the students with an outlet for the description of the disheartening realities of their lives in low SES districts (Bitz, 2004). After the success of the New York program, The Comic Book Project spread. It is currently being utilized in 900 schools throughout the U.S., with 115 schools instituting the program in 2008 alone (Hudson, 2008).

A pilot program of a Comic Book Initiative, lead by the Maryland State Department of Education in concert with Diamond Comic Distributors and Disney Publishing Worldwide was implemented in 2004 in the state of Maryland. The Initiative teaches lesson plans based on a Disney 'toolkit' that was integrated into

the state curriculum with the help of teachers and principles, and has seen great success in as many as 160 schools (Hudson, 2008). It is probably the first statewide program to utilize comics as a pedagogical instrument in schools (Viadero, 2009).

One of the strengths of the graphic novel form touted by educational proponents of comics is the potential universality of texts that include multiple clues for discerning meaning, a trait that makes the graphic novel especially attractive to students who, for whatever reason, might have difficulty with a specific portion of the reading act. In one example in which comics were shown to enrich the reading experiences of a specific population, Smetana, Odelson, Burns and Grisham (2009) conducted a study in a high school summer school class where Deaf students who had difficulty reading at their age levels were taught English. They implemented a graphic novels based curriculum in an attempt to teach American Sign Language (ASL) fluent students who had failed 9th through 12th grade English classes to read and write in English. This is often a difficult prospect for ASL speakers, because written English is a sound-based system, describing oral linguistics. The educators were drawn to the visual nature of comics, which has proven appealing to Deaf students and educators of Deaf students as Deaf students are often visual learners (Smetana et al, 2009).

Deaf students, especially those that communicate predominately in ASL, are often considered second-language learners (Smetana et al, 2009). Second-language educators apply a 'ladder-type' model to students' acquisition of language skills. The first rung of the ladder is practice in Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). This rung is a traditionally difficult one for Deaf students to attain, as they rarely interact in the kind of oral back-and-forth that is available to most other second-language learners. It is essential that this step be reached if the student is to be expected to continue onto the next rung, called Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is the level of linguistic cognition most important to successful academic achievement in a secondary setting. Comic books and graphic novels have been proven useful as a means of demonstrating the use of written English in context, through the illustration of individuals talking back and forth.

Through the comics convention of talk-bubbles, Deaf students are afforded an opportunity to visualize the manner in which conversational English is conducted between speakers (Smetana et al, 2009).

A similar application of the comics medium has been observed by Carlo Vacca (1959). Vacca, a Spanish language teacher, saw success in attempting to teach complex ideas concerning idiom, syntax, colloquialism and vocabulary in context through the introduction of Spanish comic books to his classroom (Vacca, 1959). This second language learning application of comics was studied at length by Jun Liu (2004) of the University of Arizona. After ascertaining the language proficiency levels of a number of second language students and separating them into two groups of high and low level students, respectively, she provided all members of these two groups of students with different level rated texts, while simultaneously providing a focus group within those two populations with a supplementary comic strip. The result of a two and three way ANOVA assessment of immediate recall protocols showed that low-level students who had been given the high-level text as well as the supplementary comic strip scored significantly higher on the test than students in the same subset who had not been allotted a comic strip supplement (Liu, 2004).

Liu attributed the positive effect of comics on the comprehension levels of second language learners to what she calls Dual Coding Theory (DCT). DCT suggests that readers organize text along the mental representation of the senses that the text appeals to, and that by providing explicit guidelines for this organization through the inclusion of comic texts in the process, this end is arrived at much more intuitively (Liu, 2004). Once offered divergent, yet supplementary coding material, the students have an easier time breaking down and retaining the meaning of a text.

For some *art* educators, specifically, comics are just one part of the visual culture that informs a student's knowledge base, fills their visual reservoir, and has a formative effect on their personal character development, as they walk the streets of the towns and cities where they live with their eyes wide open. Contemporary art

educational theorists such as Kerry Freedman and Paul Duncam have touted visual culture theories that have been derived from this broadened conception of the arts as the sum of an individual's visual experience. They have outlined those theories in a series of recent publications, and have caught the attention of many within the community of art educators. The number of presentations on visual culture art education that have been made available at the National Art Education Association's annual conferences have increased drastically, suggesting a steep rise in interest in visual culture concepts amongst educators and scholars alike (Chalmers, 2005).

While the burgeoning popularity of the visual culture field might suggest a certain level of newness to some, the core philosophies upon which visual culture art education is based have been discussed for some time now. As early as 1929, art educators such as John Cotton Dana advocated the observation of "common" cultural artifacts as a means of training students in the discussion of aesthetics (Chalmers, 2005, p.7). This idea was expounded upon by a series of scholars and instructors, as a new ideation of the lines between high and low culture began to be championed in the 1960s.

Following the 60's emergence of the "Pop Art" movement, popularized by theorists such as Lawrence Alloway, and artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein (both of whom utilized comic book imagery in their compositions), questions regarding the various delineations of the arts arose in both the art world and its related areas of discourse. Art educators of this period, including Vincent Lanier, Corita Kent and June King McFee, developed art educational theories and practices that allowed for a more expansive view of what could be considered art, one that might be extended to include forms such as comic books. Lanier specifically mentioned comic books as a potential vehicle for aesthetic and critical study (Chalmers, 2005). It was this re-contextualization of popular art forms, including comic books, which lead to the possibility of discussion of such as forms as viable and substantive artifacts of human experience.

Though I am hesitant to discuss professional art careers at any great length in a discussion of primary and secondary art-curriculum (as I am concerned that concerted efforts towards those ends can foster an air of exclusivity or tracking in Art Education communities), I do feel it worth mentioning that, due to the logistics of the “shop system” in which comic books and graphic novels are traditionally created, there are a variety of viable job opportunities in the comics field for a student interested in gainful employment in the arts (Adams, 1999). The creation of a professional comic involves an entire creative team, including writers, pencillers (the draftsman who envision the scene), inkers and colorists. Between the ever-growing pantheon of titles being created by the existing publishing houses, independent publishing houses on the rise and the emergence of self-publication as an increasingly feasible possibility, there is work to be found in the comics arts, especially as innovators are historically encouraged and celebrated amongst the comics community.

Broad strides are being taken to cover the expansive ground of possible applications for the comics form in art education specifically and education in general. In the following chapters I intend to offer some background information regarding how comics came to be and how they “work”, in hopes that through providing contextualization for comics as a visual cultural mode, it may facilitate still more examinations of a fully culturally integrative, prospective educational future.

II. A Brief History of the Graphic Novel and its Milieu

Before art educators can be expected to confront the task of developing a framework for the art historical context surrounding the comics medium that can be utilized in the art education arena, it would be advisable to first adopt an adequate definition of exactly what it is we are talking about when we discuss comics. While Eisner (1986) suggested that the term sequential art be used when comics are discussed in scholarship, this terminology is flawed in as far as it can just as easily be applied to film, television and a plethora of other forms in which visual material is viewed in sequence over time (McCloud, 1993). McCloud (1993), on the other hand, offers a sufficiently succinct and specific description of what he considers comics, namely: “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”(9). This definition is lacking in specificity in that it fails to account for the many conventions that have become visual signifiers of the comics experience, essential to the task of whittling down the incredible mass of works that might be lumped under this broad set of standards. As with many artistic mediums, though, there is room for a great deal of semantic slippage, and a more precise description might only serve to drain our pool of pertinent works further than necessary. Thus, McCloud’s offering seems like an adequate jumping-off point.

While some overzealous comics historians have attempted to trace the roots of the comics form back to the Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux near the village of Montignac in southwestern France (Berkowitz, 2001), the compositions there, though clearly depicting a collection of scenes, do not appear to describe a deliberately sequential series of events. Still others look to the Egyptian glyphs, often suggested as some of the earliest sparks of what would one day become comics, but these are really more of an early form of printed language. The sequential symbols found in glyph compositions are meant to represent sounds rather than the objects or animals they resemble (McCloud, 1993). These symbols would eventually evolve into the more abstract shapes that we understand today as writing.

While the glyph connection is a little weak, perhaps a more explicit link can be made between comics and ancient Egyptian paintings, such as those found on the walls of the tomb of the scribe 'Menna', executed around 1300 BCE. Experts believe that these paintings tell a sequential pictorial narrative that can be read from the bottom left to the top right (McCloud, 1993). This is arguably the first piece in history that fits the bill, providing us with a cogent point of origin for our history of comics and sequential narrative art.

A great number of works fulfill our definition of comics art in the intervening years between the painting of Menna's tomb and the printing of the first comic book in 1934. Trajan's Column in Rome (113 CE), for instance, depicts a sequential pictorial narrative of a number of the Roman Emperor Trajan's military victories in the form of a stone frieze. The stories, ascending, wrap around the height of the 38-meter tall, marble column structure (Sabin, 2008).

Later, the 230-ft. long (McCloud, 1993) Bayeux Tapestry in Normandy (c1100CE) depicts a sequential pictorial narrative describing the Norman conquest of England in 1066CE(Sabin, 2008). There has also been a continued European Christian tradition of the separation of biblical narratives into portions based on iconic scenes, as exhibited in the depictions of the 'Life of Christ and the Virgin Mary', and the 'Stations of the Cross' shown in stained glass windows (McCloud, 1993), ceiling frescoes and altarpieces.

Perhaps the most obvious trait that serves to formally separate these works from our contemporary understanding of comics art is that all the pieces described above are large, site specific installations, many existing in situ to this day (Sabin, 2008). Those that were created with the intention of being viewed by the general public at all, limited their audiences through the simple necessity of that audience having to travel to their site in order to see them. If sequential visual narratives were to be disseminated to a larger population, they would have to become considerably more portable. The Japanese made headway in this respect through their tradition of anthropomorphizing animals for social criticism and comedy on

temple scrolls, which had existed since the 13th century (Allen, 2005). Meanwhile, in Mesoamerica, Pre-Columbian picture manuscripts discovered by Cortes (1519 CE), depicting narratives apparently based around deity mythologies, were painted in bright colors on a 36-ft. long screen-fold (McCloud, 1993), a portable, if weighty format.

Proto-Comics

The audience that sequential narrative art would reach grew exponentially in conjunction with the invention of mass printing processes. Suddenly, media could be reproduced in a comparatively cheap manner, making once exclusive, handmade texts available to much larger audiences. Looking back in search of comics earliest, undeniable antecedent, scholars have pointed to their conceptual similarity to British Medieval 'broadsheets', poor-quality woodcut prints, published and sold as souvenirs in England to the crowds that had gathered to witness public executions (Sabin, 2008). These broadsheets included, and were perhaps the origin of, what would become classic comics conventions, including panel borders (lines that separate individual moments or scenes within a page), word balloons (usually circles or oval into which text was introduced) and speed lines (Sabin, 2008).

Eventually a market for broadsheets independent of the economy surrounding capital punishment was developed in England. These new broadsheets were of a higher quality and lower production cost due to the improvements that came with the development of copper plate engraving. Copper engravings were more easily crafted than woodcuts, and the nature of the form allowed for more detailed and textured renderings of images. They were also more durable than their wood alternatives, and, thus, could facilitate far more reproductions per plate. These new broadsheets were vehicles for satire and crude humor, and there is even evidence that they were called 'comicals' (Sabin, 2008).

Higher caliber artists began to lend their hands to such narrative endeavors in prints. William Hogarth brought a higher level of quality to the 'picture-story' field with his six piece narrative *A Harlot's Progress* (1731 CE), first depicted in

paintings and later distributed through prints from plate engravings (McCloud, 1993) while the Swiss artist and schoolteacher Rodolphe Topffer, hailed by many as the “father of modern comics”, began creating many comic strips in the mid-1800s. His subject matter was never particularly serious, and perhaps this set the tone for the textual levity of the comics production that followed (McCloud, 1993).

Over time, British broadsheets evolved into tabloid sized illustrated works that covered a variety of subjects. Documentarian publications appeared, such as the *Illustrated London News* (1842) and *Illustrated Police News* (1864), making use of the power of the printed image in the service of providing the populace with easily read news. Lurid tales of the macabre and off-color picture stories directed at a middle-class male youth audience called ‘penny dreadfuls’ also became popular. Christian-themed antagonists to this genre were published as well, in hopes of combating the demoralizing potential of these periodicals (Sabin, 2008), perhaps providing the first hint of the moral indignation that would later be directed against comic books and their milieu.

In yet another step towards what we understand as comic books today, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, a British magazine published by Gilbert Dalziel in 1884, included strips, cartoons and prose, all centered around a single character, the incorrigible Ally Sloper. These *Ally Sloper* serials were satirical and humorous content, tabloid style in format. They enjoyed a large readership, were distributed through news agents, and sold for cheap, usually for just a penny. The creation of the first headlining character, Ally Sloper, was crucial to the maintenance of a readership. If readers developed a relationship with a character, publishers found they would be more likely to follow his exploits from month to month (Sabin, 2008), a tendency that would be observed time and again in the comic industry.

As innovations in the art of printing became available to British publishers, many cut prices of their wares to a half-penny, beginning the so called half-penny revolution, products of which were defined by an immense jump in production and an equal drop in quality. The concept of pocket money was introduced around the

turn of the century, and children could often be enticed to spend their traditional 'Saturday penny' on comics. *Puck* no. 1, a humor themed comic paper of this era was the first color-printed work in comics (Sabin, 2008).

Across the Atlantic, the newspaper publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, locked in a perennial media battle with his closest competitor, Joseph Pulitzer, found success publishing *The Yellow Kid* in 1896 (Sabin, 2008), inspiring Pulitzer to follow suit. Soon after, comics were published as full color supplements in newspapers, having proven to be an effective means of appealing to immigrant populations in cities (Sabin, 2008). Comic strips like Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* (a strip about a poor young immigrant youth who spoke in broken English), Rudolph Dirks' *The Katzenjammer Kids* (debuted 1897, a strip about a troupe of troublesome immigrant youngsters) and Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* (debuted 1907, a strip about two incorrigible ne'er-do-wells) were popular as syndicated features in American newspapers since the 1890s (Wright, 2001).

While many of the works listed above were simplistic strips whose subject matter was manageable for a broad audience, a number of more aesthetically forward-thinking artists were producing strips concurrently. Windsor McCay, for one, demonstrated the possibility of a higher level of artistic execution and imaginative whimsy in comic strips in 1905, with his surreal fantasy *Little Nemo in Slumber Land*. Though innovative, the strip was less financially successful than some of its lower quality competitors (Sabin, 2008). George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* (1913), a violent strip about a cat, a dog, and a mouse, on the other hand, was equally as formally inventive as McCay's work, but, perhaps because of its formulaic subject matter, it proved more accessible to the comic strip reading public. In an interesting side note, Herriman's work was identified as being influential to the Dada movement (Sabin, 2008).

Early Innovators

While the newspaper comic strip was introducing the public at large to the concept of stories told through the juxtaposition of imagery, a handful of more “serious” artists were dealing with the same visual vocabulary without ever acknowledging a kindred intention to comics artists of the time. The Belgian printmaker Frans Masereel, for instance, composed a series of woodcut novels, perhaps the finest of which was *Passionate Journey* of 1919 (McCloud, 1993) a “novel” told through the sequencing of 165 wordless black and white wood cuts was certainly one of the first graphic novels by modern standard. Similarly, American narrative artist Lynd Ward’s woodcut novels told stories, such as *God’s Man* of 1929, through a series of beautifully expressive and painstakingly crafted wood engravings (McCloud, 1993). *God’s Man*, specifically, was an autobiographical text that described his life in 1920s America in 139, stark, black and white wood cut images. The piece is, according to every stipulation found in our definition, a very impressive piece of comics art. In one variation in mediums, the German surrealist painter Max Ernst created a ‘collage novel’ in 1934, entitled *A Week of Kindness*. This 182-plate collage sequence of juxtaposed, poetic images, describe a dream-like series of events starring a lion-headed man in a military uniform. Though never called a comic book in any of the critical literature of the time, it certainly fulfilled all of the qualifications deemed necessary for a piece to be defined as a comics work (McCloud, 1993).

As the woodcut printmakers and other fine artists made their share of formal innovations in the creation of what would one day become the graphic novel, the purveyors of the commercial comic strip industry were also committing a goodly piece of effort to the expansion of the graphic novel’s history. Their next big step, the hardcover printed collection of comic strips, evolved over time. In 1911, *The Chicago American* newspaper packaged a number of reproductions of Bud Fisher’s *Mutt and Jeff* as a pamphlet, distributing it to readers who had collected the necessary

coupons from six issues of the paper (McNickle, 1952). Comic strips collected and bound in hard cover book forms had been distributed and sold in bookstores since the beginning of the twentieth century, usually best-of-the-best compilations of the most commercially successful strips (Wright, 2001). Dell Publishing, perhaps inspired by the success of such collections, experimented with comics conveyances in 1929, releasing a weekly tabloid-size publication, entitled, simply, *The Funnies*, that included both comics along with jokes and puzzles. Though the venture failed after a year and 36 issues, they effectively set the precedent from which later permutations would develop (Wright, 2001).

Max Gaines and Harry Wildenberg, two employees of The Eastern Color Printing Company of Westbury, Connecticut (the same company that had printed *The Funnies* for Dell) developed the 8x 11 inch pamphlet format in 1933, a standard that has been maintained in comics ever since. They first utilized this sizing in a publication entitled *Funnies on Parade*, a collection of syndicate-released strips that had been commissioned by Procter and Gamble (Wright, 2001). The first original content comic book, *Famous Funnies*, was published by Gaines through the Eastern Color Printing Company and distributed by the American News Company in the summer of 1934 (Wright, 2001). After a rocky start, the venture began to sell out consistently, and the comic book industry was born.

Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a pulp magazine writer, began a comics concern called National Allied Publishing in 1935. His company was the first to avoid the expense of the licensing fees leveled by the syndicates that supplied other comic books with their content by hiring freelance comics artists to create original material to be printed solely in their releases. In 1937 National Allied Publishing released the first issue of *Detective Comics*, the series that the company would become known for, and, eventually, named for, when they later changed their moniker to DC Comics (Wright, 2001).

Harry Donnenfeld and Jack Liebowitz, two executives from the Independent News Company, the firm that had been distributing for Wheeler-Nicholson, bought

the National Allied Publishing venture from him in 1938. Thus was born the first consolidated comics company, with every aspect of the production, publication and distribution of comics overseen 'in-house' (Wright, 2001). DC Comics exists to this day as one of the so-called Big Two (the other half of this pairing being Marvel Comics, recently purchased by the Disney Corporation), the two comics publishing houses that have historically accounted for the majority of the comic book market share in America.

The general content of early comic books was an amalgamation of two popular art forms of the early twentieth century: the comic strip, discussed above, and the pulp novel. Pulp magazines are thought to be direct descendents of Civil War era dime novels. Pulp literature and its authors had developed their own counter culture of sensationalist topics, such as horror and noir detective thrillers. Their commercial success suggested to publishers that there existed a substantial market for content that was removed from the mainstream culture. These two venues of creative thought and imagination driven escapism first became merged in 1929 when the popular pulp characters Tarzan and Buck Rogers were adapted to their own newspaper comic strips (Wright, 2001).

The shop system, in which letterers, pencillers, inkers, and writers would collaborate on comics in order to produce content in the most economically efficient manner, was born of the sudden rise in the sheer quantity of work that was needed to fill the pages of the new titles introduced by the emerging comic companies. Comic books were a product of an industrial age, and this was reflected in how they were made. "We made comic book features the way Ford made cars", Will Eisner, a comics artist noted, "I would write and design the characters, somebody else would pencil them in, somebody else would ink, somebody else would letter" (Wright, 2001, p. 6). As comic book production was not considered a serious or respectable mode of employment for artists, anonymity was widespread, with many artists adopting *nom de plums* and others opting not to be credited at all. Unfortunately this would lead to a set of traditions in the comics industry that would undercut artist rights in regard to intellectual properties (Wright, 2001).

The shop system also raised question regarding authorship, an important issue in modernist discourse regarding art (Roeder, 2008). Modernists were interested in the hand of the artist as it directly expressed the aesthetics of the maker. In this system, where the production of the work was delegated amongst a collaborative troupe of artists, it was harder to discern the voice of any specific individual amongst the din. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that comics art was initially rejected by most in the 'high art' community.

No. 1

JUNE, 1938

ACTION COMICS

10¢



Figure 1: Action Comics #1

Supermen

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two teenage high school students living in Cleveland, Ohio, created *Superman* in 1934. Both were unpopular sons of lower-middle-class Jewish immigrants, and, perhaps tellingly, both wore glasses. The Eisner/Iger shop and Max Gaines' EC Comics turned down *Superman* when the pencil roughs came across their desks. Discouraged, Siegel and Shuster signed over full copyright ownership to DC (Wright, 2001). Superman was immensely popular, providing the American comics industry with a symbol behind which they could galvanize the American people.

A number of the classic comic characters, dubbed "superheroes", including Batman, followed close in Superman's wake, as DC and the other comics houses pushed their artists to bring them variations on the caped, super powered wonder. A shadowy figure with a richly psychological back-story, artist Bob Kane based the design of the Batman on a drawing of a theoretical flying machine composed by Leonardo DaVinci and had written the character as a scarred young man, forever seeking vengeance, a time honored literary archetype. William Moulton Marston, a psychologist hired as a consultant by DC Comics, tried his hand at comics writing in 1941, creating the first female superhero, Wonder Woman, who appeared for the first time in *All Star Comics* (Berkowitz, 2001).

Superheroes and their trials and tribulations quickly became the mainstay of the comic book industry. In an aside, I feel it is worth mentioning my feeling that, while it is heartening to see that a variety of topics, literary genres and concerns and innovative formatting are being handled by comics artists in the contemporary graphics novel movement, the fact that the majority of the space on comic shop shelves is still taken up by standard pamphlet format adolescent power fantasies (as described by McCloud (2000)) need not be considered a cause for concern, or, for that matter, viewed as a negative at all. This genre, one that grew directly out of the comics form, thus having an intrinsic and inseparable link to its milieu, may play a more positive role in the cognitive and emotional growth of its young readers than

many detractors might think. Gary R. Hoff (1982) suggested that the tendency for adolescents to be drawn to visual narratives that depict superheroes is a healthy step in these students' growth.

Hoff compared American super-power fantasies to the European tradition of the fairy tale, citing the work of Bruno Bettelheim, who suggested that the fairy tale is useful as a kind of emotional buoy, a means of keeping pre-adolescents afloat while their concept of the world as they know it undergoes potentially traumatic changes. Stories that describe a setting in which the understood scientific laws of the universe have been upended mirror the drastic physical and societal shifts that they are experiencing, ensuring them, through the "evil is fairly easily identified" and "the good-guys always win" formulas, that, though everything is confusing and tumultuous now, it will all work out for the best. Comic books tend to distort cultural reality in such a way that it becomes more palatable for youths (Wright, 2001). The "allegories for modern life" (Bucher, 2004, p. 68) that superhero stories provide can be used as coping mechanisms through the rough-and-tumble early teen years, fulfilling an "explanatory and therapeutic function" (Wright, 2001, p. xiii). Some were even specifically designed to acclimate or alert the reading public to social changes occurring around them.



Figure 2: Captain America Comics #1

The Golden Age of Comics

Captain America (1941), a Marvel Comics published story, penned by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, centered around a physically disabled soldier named Steve Rogers who volunteered to be experimented upon by the American government's super soldier program, became the first example of a comic book hero who participated in World War II in Europe. The cover of the very first issue of *Captain America* showed the star-spangled avenger abroad in what appears to be a Nazi conference room, squarely punching an unsuspecting Adolph Hitler in the jaw (Berkowitz, 2001). The book predated the U.S.'s involvement in the war by more than nine months.

Several other superhero books quickly followed in the good Captain's patriotic footsteps. By the time the U.S. had entered the war effort, comic heroes had already been locked in battle with the Axis powers for months. This involvement in the Second World War further broadened comics market share by providing American soldiers a fanciful escape from the horrors of modern warfare, as well as a pantheon of heroic archetypes with which to relate. Comic book sales at U.S. post exchanges during World War II exceeded the combined sales of *Life*, *Reader's Digest* and the *Saturday Evening Post* by a ratio of ten to one (McNickle, 1952, p. 222).

Soldiers returning home with a taste for comics became a part of an already substantial readership of comic books. While I have discovered a number of disparate accounts regarding the revenue generated by the comic book industry, suffice it to say that in the late 1940s and early 1950s, comic book circulation was reaching astronomical levels in spite of its humble beginnings. In an examination of statistics relevant to the comic book form and its economy, McNickle (1952), offered a series of findings. As of 1940, just 168 available comic book titles sold over 12 million issues a month, with estimated annual revenues of \$15 million. As of the initiation of his research, these statistics had jumped to 300 titles earning \$70 million annually. In 1943, a Gallup poll found that over half of all American adults and over two thirds of American children read comic strips, an estimated total

audience of about 70 million people. A *Newsweek* study in 1949 suggested that independent newsstand wholesaler's sales of comic books made up about a third of their total sales. There was documentation by the N.W. Ayers newspaper directory of a sworn circulation of 42 million units in 1951, but, as many comics publishers furnished no circulation statistics, this number was not truly indicative of the total. The audience was even more difficult to estimate, as sharing of comic books was a common activity, so much so that one comic book might find its way into the hand of a number of readers (McNickle, 1952).

Further, in 1952, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The New York Times* were the only American daily newspapers (out of a total of 1,750) that did not include any comics of any kind in their pages. A survey of the population of Dayton, Ohio in 1948 showed that 40% of all Daytonians were comic book readers. In 1952, estimates regarding comics readership showed that 95% of boys and 91% of girls between the ages of six and eleven read comic books, with these numbers falling to 87% for boys and 81% for girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen, descending further between the ages of eighteen and thirty to 41% and 28% for females, and finally plummeting to 16% for men and 12% for women older than thirty (McNickle, 1952).

The comics boom of the 40s and 50s, oft referred to as the Golden Age of comics, was widely documented, and rightfully marveled at. According to Schmitt, "comic book sales reached an all time high in the 1950s, with cases documented ... of children reading 50-75 comics a week" (Schmitt, 1992, p. 156). While it appears to be an extreme outlier when compared to most of the statistics I've found, Wright (2003) cites *Publishers Weekly* as having reported "that an estimated 540 million comic books were printed in 1946" (p. 88), perhaps establishing a high water mark for overall comics sales in America.

Anti-Comics Sentiment and the Comics Code Authority

In the tense climate that came hand in hand with the increased governmental conservatism of the McCarthy Era of the early 1950s, comics, along with most other mass media, came under intensive scrutiny. Comic books were the “most visible, least censored and most popular expression of youth entertainment”, as the statistics above could attest, as well as being the “most bewildering and alien medium to adult sensibilities”(Wright, 2001, p. 88).

Frederick Wertham, a New York psychiatrist, and eventual author of the quintessential anti-comics text, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), led those bewildered adults in one of the most widespread and oppressive censorship campaigns ever seen on American soil. Wertham, born in Bavaria in 1895, studied in England, Austria, and Germany before eventually accepting a position as a psychologist at New York’s Bellevue Medical Hospital in the United States. He became the leading theorist and most eloquent spokesman behind the growing anti-comic book movement, (Wright, 2001). He presented his theories in March of 1948 at a “Manhattan symposium held by the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy titled “The Psychopathology of Comic Books” (Wright, 2001, p. 94).

In his polemic, he outlined what he believed to be the degradation of youth culture in the United States through the influence of comic books. He blamed a plethora of society’s ills on the comics industry’s wares, from teen suicides and illiteracy to poor eyesight. He claimed that comics were responsible for a rise in the level of juvenile delinquency in New York (McNickle, 1952).

The effect of Wertham’s work spread like wildfire. At a convention in Indianapolis in August of 1947, the Fraternal Order of Police publicly criticized comic books, calling them “one of the contributing factors to the cause of juvenile delinquency” (Wright, 2001, p. 90), calling for a ban. The criminal law section of the American Bar Association reinforced these claims (Wright, 2001).

Still more influential organizations came out in force against comics culture. Religious leaders, including the Bishop of the Albany Catholic Diocese recommended a boycott of comics to his congregation. Professional organizations like the New York State Pharmaceutical Association and its 6,900 member drug stores instated an organizational ban on the sale of comics. Even the U.S. Army Character Guidance Council attempted to ban the sale of comic books on bases before eventually dropping the issue. One report by Charles S. Rhyne of the National Institute of Municipal Law Officers “ranked the control of comic books among the most serious issues confronting the nation’s local governments” (Wright, 2003, p. 99).

By 1948, anti-comics sentiment had grown to an unrelenting fervor. Spurred to action by the rising tide of a moral crusade against the comics form lead by concerned parents and inspired by community leaders, efforts were made by local legal authorities and community activist organizations in a number of U.S. cities to restrict the trade of comics in major towns and cities. There were public comic book burnings in Binghamton, New York (where, in December of 1948, students at St. Patrick’s Parochial were impelled by their parents to ignite a bonfire of about two thousand comics in one of the school’s courtyards), New York City (the capital of production and publication of American comic books and ultimately, the battleground to which the anti-comics advocates brought their fight into the public arena) and Chicago (where the Chicago City Council attempted to form a comic book censorship board(Wright, 2003))(Berkowitz, 2001). In the same year, civic groups in Indianapolis implored officials to ban the sale of comic books, and were partially successful, inducing magazine distributors to halt the sale of 25 specified titles in that city. Police in Detroit had similar success, ultimately banning a total of 36 titles. A national activism group called the National Congress of Parents and Teachers assembled a nationwide public relations campaign against the comic book form (Wright, 2003).

Come Autumn of 1948, at least fifty U.S. cities had legislated bans or instated censorship measures regarding comic books. In what was probably the most extreme case, in Los Angeles, California, The Los Angeles County Board of

Supervisors passed an ordinance that “made it a misdemeanor, punishable by \$500 fine or up to six months in jail, for anyone to sell, ‘give or in any other way furnish to anyone under eighteen a book, magazine or other publication’ that depicted ‘an account of crime... through the use of drawings or photographs’” (Wright, 2003, p. 98). This act, sufficiently ambiguous in its wording to take aim at and effectively ban the sale of comic books without ever mentioning them by name, inspired copycat legislation in Chicago, Hartford, Topeka, Des Moines and Birmingham, as well as a failed attempt to enact such a bill in Philadelphia (Wright, 2003).

The New York legislature passed a ban on the sale and publication of comic books, recommended by a subcommittee that had at that point spent nearly two years studying the supposedly negative effect of comics on American youths. Republican Senator Benjamin Feinberg formally proposed the bill in January of 1949 (Wright, 2001). Its specific intent was to legislate the formation of a comics censorship board based out of the New York State Department of Education which would exert almost complete control over comics content, since nearly all of the comics publishers were based out of New York City (Wright, 2001). The New York State Senate passed the ban in a nearly unanimous decision, passing both Houses of the New York state legislature overwhelmingly. The Senate passed the act with a vote of forty-nine to six (Wright, 2001,105). Then-New York Governor Thomas Edmund Dooley vetoed the act in April of 1949 (McNickle, 1952), ultimately establishing legal precedent as higher courts upheld his decision(Wright, 2001).

Though the initial attempt at maintaining an anti-comics bill was unsuccessful, Wertham continued his crusade. In the spring of 1954, The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, instigated by Sen. Estes Kefauver and lead by chairman Sen. Robert Hendrickson, and advised by Wertham, investigated effects of comic books on American youths during a three day hearing in New York. During these hearings the subcommittee called twenty-two witnesses, and accepted thirty-three exhibits as evidence. The hearings are often referred to as the Kefauver Committee, because of Sen. Kefauver’s role in bringing the government’s attention

to the influence of comics on the lives of children and the possibility of comics as a causal factor of societal detriment (Nyberg, 1998).

Kefauver and Wertham had prepped for the hearings intensively, constructing a survey from which they derived most of the information they presented in the hearing. They sent this survey out in August of 1950 to a select group of individuals whose expertise they deemed pertinent to the debate surrounding comics, including judges of juvenile and family courts, probation officers, court psychiatrists, public officials, social workers, comic book publishers, cartoonists, and officers of national organizations who were interested in the issue (Nyberg, 1998):

Has juvenile delinquency increased in the years 1945 to 1950? If you can support this with specific statistics, please do so.

To what do you attribute this increase if you have stated that there was an increase?

Was there an increase in juvenile delinquency after World War II?

In recent years, have juveniles tended to commit more violent crimes such as assault, rape, murder, and gang activities?

Do you believe that there is any relationship between reading crime comic books and juvenile delinquency?

Please specifically give statistics and, if possible, state specific cases of juvenile crime which you believe can be traced to reading crime comic books.

Do you believe that juvenile delinquency would decrease if crime comic books were not readily available to children? (Nyberg, 1998, p.95)

In spite of the leading tone of this text, the majority of respondents to this survey, nearly 60%, insisted that there was no direct link between reading comics and juvenile delinquency, and even more (70%) were opposed to the idea of banning comics as a preventative measure. In an interesting side note, J. Edgar Hoover came out on the side of comics, claiming that he had seen no evidence that the form was contributing to American juvenile delinquency levels (McNickle, 1952). Despite what might have been considered a negative return from this study, the subcommittee continued to pursue their goals (Nyberg, 1998).

The committee had a summary of all works on the comic book's effect on children compiled by The Library of Congress and reviewed the findings of similar committees during the national movement to affect a ban on comic books. They also sought the assistance of the United States Postal Service, in hopes that following a review of comics materials they might rule the media unmailable. This tactic came to naught, as the Post Office failed to identify any violations. Witnesses at the hearing included Fredric Wertham, comic book publishers such as William Gaines (son of the then deceased Max Gaines), James Fitzpatrick, then chairman of the initial, failed New York subcommittee, and E.D. Fulton a Canadian who had successfully drawn up and implemented a ban on comics in his own country (Nyberg, 1998).

Following the hearings in New York, comics publishers banded together in an attempt to avoid being driven out of business by more successful legislation. The group they created, dubbed the Comics Magazine Association of America, developed *The Comics Code*, a restrictive text that suggested strict guidelines for the content permitted to be published in comics. They proposed that they would self-regulate comics works, through the careful adherence to this code, policed by a censorship body called the Comics Code Authority (CCA), thus undercutting the need for drastic action by sensationalist officials in the government. In order for a comics work to find its way onto a newsstand rack, it had to earn the CCA seal of approval. The Comics Code appears in its entirety in Appendix A (Nyberg, 1998).

Through the incredible mass of malignant press surrounding both the attempted ban of comics by a slew of major American cities and the Senate Subcommittee hearings in New York, comics began to acquire a level of cultural stigmatization, much in the same way (and possibly to a more extreme degree) , that Jazz music and its practitioners did in America in the 1920s (Lopes, 2006). Lopes (2006) suggested a framework for how stigma can attach itself to an area of popular culture, to wit:

1. Stigma can attach to various social objects, including both forms and practitioners [seen in this case as comics and comics publisher were both roundly condemned by a public driven to anger by a moralizing initiative].
2. Stigma can be global or more specific to genres, styles, or social roles [evidenced in the case of comics by the peculiar fact that comic strips never received the brunt of the stigmatization that the comic book form did].
3. Stigma is a process of discrediting forms and making them problematic [as demonstrated in the media campaign against comics that proceeded any and all institutional intervention in the comics industry].
4. Stigma usually implies potential harm or pathology [like the accusations of physical and mental detriment to the health of comics reading youths leveled by Wertham and his associates].
5. Stigma can lead to various forms of intervention [as described above].
6. Stigma elicits defensive claims, stigma management, or alternative theories [one example of which might be the Comics Code Authority].
7. Both stigma and stigma management can affect the development of a cultural form [which can be demonstrated through the comparison of the comics art industries in America to those of Japan, where undeterred progress has lead to formal innovation].

8. Stigma theories can change over time [thankfully, as we are witnessing now]. (Lopes, 2006, p. 391-2)

In the wake of the Kefauver hearings, comics culture experienced a precipitous decline. Some comics publishers were forced out of business by the restrictive Comics Code. Those that were left shared a fraction of the once bountiful market. Stigmatization of the medium and diluted content in the books drove away fans. DC Comics maintained some success through the re-contextualization of still beloved characters like Superman and Batman, conservative, pro-establishment crime fighters. Underground “comix”, dealing mostly with student activism issues (like sexual liberation, narcotic experimentation and the Vietnam War) began to appear in “head shops” (stores where counterculture paraphernalia was sold) in the 1960s. These head shops eventually became the business model around which a slowly growing number of comic book specialty stores would eventually model their businesses. The underground comix, created by such ultimately celebrated cartoonists as the inimitable R. Crumb, helped comics art to retain social relevance, and the movement’s artists and advocates had an integral role of motivating one of the giants of the comics industry to trail blaze the next developmental step in sequential art (Weiner, 2003).

Will Eisner: Father of the Graphic Novel

The term “Graphic Novel” and its form, decades in the making, were coined and imagined respectively by the master comics artist Will Eisner as part of an ultimately unsuccessful pitch to Bantam Books, whose editors he was imploring to publish his book-length comics work, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (Wiener, 2003) in 1978. One of the pioneers and progenitors of American comics art, Will Eisner, born William Erwin Eisner on March 6, 1917, in Brooklyn, New York, had worked his way into the comics industry in his teens, during the mid-1930s.

At the tender age of nineteen, Eisner, already a seasoned comics creator, entered into a partnership with friend and fellow comics artist, Jerry Iger. Their

Eisner-Iger Studio supplied stories to comic book publishers and employed many of the early greats of comics art, from Bob Kane (the creator of Batman) to Jack Kirby (creator of Captain America, and, later, one of the major creative partners of Stan Lee, with whom he created Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four)(Will Eisner Studios Incorporated, 2010).

Eisner left Eisner-Iger Studios in 1940, at the age of twenty-two, selling his share in the company to Iger for \$20,000, in order to begin producing a newspaper strip called *The Spirit*. *The Spirit*, originally conceived as a straight, serialized detective story, much in the spirit of the then popular *Dick Tracy* and the prose of noir novelist Dashiell Hammett, was altered to become a superhero strip when Quality Comics publisher Everett M. Arnold beseeched the young artist to bring him a Superman (Will Eisner Studios Incorporated, 2010). For Eisner, this was as easy as penciling in a Zoro-esque mask onto the already existing drawings and writing a supernatural incident into the back-story of the character.

The Spirit was to fill the role of leading man for a 16-page newspaper insert that Quality Comics had been commissioned to create by the Register and Tribune Syndicate. Under this contract, Eisner and his new stable of artists were required to create more than 200 pages of original comics per month . This grueling work schedule did not go unrewarded though, as *The Spirit* was highly successful and internationally syndicated, and, as the business savvy young Eisner had maintained all of his intellectual property rights, something of a cash cow for the artist(Will Eisner Studios Incorporated, 2010). Though morphed into a superhero through acquiescence to those who held the purse strings, Eisner never allowed the character to bow to the already clichéd conventions of the countless Superman wannabes that crowded the newsstands, always imbuing the character with humor and humanity.

Besides being one of its most renowned practitioners, Eisner was an ardent and outspoken supporter of the comics form. As the success of the *The Spirit* brought the attention of the mainstream media to Eisner, he began to take up a

place on the soapbox, expounding the virtues of comics as a unique and independent American art form in print interviews. In one such interview with the Baltimore Sun of around 1940, he claimed that comics had “legitimate merit” in terms of their untapped literary and artistic possibilities (McCloud, 2000, p. 26). Unfortunately, his views were widely rejected, not only by critics, but by his comics artists peers as well (McCloud, 2000).

Eisner continued to work on *The Spirit* until 1952 when the strip was discontinued. Committed to the idea of comics as a viable means of effectively and efficiently communicating information, Eisner established a publishing company that applied the comics idiom to instructional materials, notably *P*S*, a technical manual distributed by the United States Military, as well as classroom teaching materials (Eisner, 2008).

In 1971, Phil Seuling, one of the entrepreneurs behind the emerging comic book specialty shops movement, invited Eisner to speak at a comic book convention in New York (Weiner, 2003). Reinvigorated by the spirit of unrestrained creative invention he saw in the works of underground “Comix” creators, an emboldened Eisner sold his stake in the aforementioned educational comics company and returned to the world of writing, rendering and selling comic narratives.

Eisner took it upon himself to create a work that illustrated the ability of comics art to portray mature and substantive subject matter, as well as to convey nuanced depictions of the human experience. To this end, he began composing *A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories*, a long form (180 pages) narrative piece. Though arguably not a “novel” in the strictest sense, as it is made up of four independent storylines, all four of these tales center around a central locale, each serving to describe a facet of what life might have been like there. As such, analogies can be drawn to such critically accepted masterpieces of the American novel as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (Weiner, 2003), Carson McCullers’ *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and John Dos Pesos’ *U.S.A Trilogy*, all of which employ variations on the same device.

Set in a fictional tenement building at 55 Dropsie Avenue in the borough of the Bronx, New York, during the 1930s, Eisner weaves an intricate portrait of Jewish life in twentieth century America. In the first installment, entitled *A Contract With God*, he tells the tale of Frimme Hersh, a righteous young man who writes up and signs a contract with God, stating that he will commit his life to doing good works, as long as God looks with favor upon him. When his beloved adopted daughter dies suddenly, he is filled with indignation at what he perceives as God's act of ill will. Throwing the stone upon which the contract was originally etched into the adjoining alley, he turns to a life of financial gain and sinful debauch. After years of self-indulgent behavior, he seeks the council of three learned Rabbis, offering to donate a substantial amount of money to their Synagogue in return for a more officially consecrated contract. The Rabbis begrudgingly oblige, but before Frimme can determine whether or not this new contract will prove beneficial, he dies of a heart attack.

Next up comes *The Street Singer*, the story of a wandering vocal minstrel who, during his travels through the back alleys of the Bronx, attracts the attention of a washed-up professional opera performer named Diva Maria. The aging woman sees potential in the young man and offers to train and represent him, enticing him with food and money. Leaving the house excited and comparatively wealthy, he hurries himself to the nearest liquor store, blowing his newfound riches on bottles of whiskey. Returning home to his pregnant and embattled wife, he commences to physically and orally abuse her and their young child, whilst guzzling down his ill-begotten gains. He wakes the next morning in a haze, only to find that, because his heavy drinking, he has entirely forgotten the address of his benefactor.

In *The Super*, the grizzled old building superintendent of 55 Dropsie has become the scapegoat for the failing workings of the battered tenement. Animosity festers between the super and the tenants until a young girl accuses him of sexual harassment. These accusations eventually lead to an encounter with the police and the superintendent's suicide.

Cookalein describes the time-honored tradition amongst New York families of traveling to the Catskills en masse. It covers the topics ranging from marital-infidelity and rape, to bravery in the face of adversity and childhood discovery of an adult world.

These Tenement Stories were hardly the stuff of traditional comic book fare. They were adult stories; not the black and white morality fables and teen power fantasies of Marvel and DC, nor the lurid gore, sex and drugs touted in the underground, but complex parables regarding religion and identity and the wages of sin. The facial expressions and postures of the characters sang with emotion and the page layouts and compositions of scenes carry an incredible contextual weight. The text, hand drawn and deftly considered, was not only integrated into the scene, it was often illustrative of the environment in which it existed: covered with snow in the winter, made up of windblown laundry on the line and, in perhaps its most oft quoted sequence, dripping with the storm that Frimme Hersh trudges through in the opening pages. Eisner sought to merge typeface into the idiom of comic art, eschewing the tradition of the word balloons that he perceived as one of the factors of the medium that served to drive away adult readers. In rendering his backgrounds impressionistically, with minimal notes, Eisner allowed the viewer to participate in the creation of the world in which they subsequently became absorbed.

The work was fully cohesive in form and content. One might even be inclined to empathize with the executives at Bantam for being unnerved by the prospect of championing such a work. For the first time in American comics, a literate voice was telling lived-in stories of contemporary life in a deeply textured and visually rewarding way, all without bending to the expectations of the masses.

While this first graphic novel was, finally, quietly and independently published, it was immediately recognized and exalted by forward thinking comics artists like Art Spiegelman, Frank Miller, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and Scott McCloud, as the new standard bearer for conceptual heft in a comics work. Eisner

had raised the bar, and though he would labor on, mostly alone and under encouraged critically, he would eventually be acknowledged and accepted as the father of the graphic novel.

While some artists might be resigned to having had a formative role in an offshoot of a major cultural medium (not to mention some of the conventions of that basic medium itself), Eisner continued to carry the torch for comics art. Without pausing in his subsequently prolific output of graphic novels, he found time to author the first formal and conceptual treatise on comics art as he understood it. While teaching comics and sequential art at the School of Visual Art in New York, he began to work the comics medium theoretically, adapting the syllabus he had been using in his classes over time into an instructional book, entitled *Comics and Sequential Art*, published in 1985, that covers everything from the nuts-and-bolts vocabulary of comics to advanced writing and composition advice and suggestions for possible applications in teaching art (Eisner's theories will be discussed at greater length in the Art Production portion of this paper). The self-published work is considered a touchstone piece in comics theory and is currently in its thirtieth edition (Eisner, 2008), having been joined in Mr. Eisner's oeuvre by supplementary volumes entitled *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* and the posthumous *Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative*.

The comic book fan magazine *Wizard* has bestowed on Mr. Eisner the title of the most influential comics artist of all time, and, given his vital role in comics' inception and evolution, the claim can hardly be said to be an overstatement. The Will Eisner Comic Industry award, or the Eisner, the comics world's version of the Oscars, are distributed annually at the Comic-Con International festival in San Diego. His esteem was not relegated to the comics world and its immediate milieu, though. In 2002, Eisner received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Federation for Jewish Culture. This was only the second time in the history of this organization that this award had been presented. Will Eisner died from complications related to open heart surgery on January 3, 2005, having lived just

long enough to begin to see his dreams of comics being taken seriously as an art form begin to take hold (Will Eisner Studios Incorporated, 2010).

III. How Graphic Novels Work

Perhaps the reason that the implementation of graphic novels into the contemporary canon is unnerving to educational institutions is that, to some extent, the graphic novel format serves to further the subversion and deconstruction of standard reading practices, an uncomfortable prospect in a climate of increased standardization and standardization-centric accountability (Schmitt, 1998). This is an unfounded apprehension, as well as one that needs to be overcome, since literacy as a concept is a different animal in regards to the context of digital age youths, understood by many educators in a broader and more multifaceted sense than it once was (Allen, 2005) and as “in the context of changing visual culture, an investigation of challenges to the boundaries of form, the boundaries of the object, and the boundaries of school subjects is in order” (Freedman, 2003, p. 15). The rise of the graphic novel is strikingly concurrent with the emergence of other similarly complex, multidisciplinary forms of cultural intake and personal expression.

The educators and reading theorists Dresang and Kotrla (2009) described a series of consistent indicators that suggested the ways in which digital age youth became accustomed to interacting with media on a variety of levels. They observed that the tendencies and media intake habits of digital age youth included “using predominantly graphic information, obtaining information through combined media, seeking information nonlinearly, creating a self-defined sequence, following complex paths, using media interactively, speaking for themselves, and forming new types of social networks.” (p. 95). They further suggested that the impetus for these changes lay in:

The interactivity, connectivity, and access (aspects) of the digital environment, most readily identified by one or more of the following: graphics in new forms and formats; words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy; nonlinear or non-sequential organization and format; multiple layers of meaning from a variety of perspectives; cognitively, emotionally,

and/or physically interactive formats; sophisticated presentations; and unresolved storylines (Dresang, 2009, p. 95)

All of the above can be said to apply to comics and graphic novels.

Comics are unique in that they are “multimodal texts” (Allen, 2005, p. 267), particularly timely as, “n the postmodern world, what students come to know and *how* they come to know breaks traditional boundaries. Currently students gain more information from images than from texts”(Freedman, 2003, p. 15) They are possessed of an understood visual language, which allows for “a more immediate processing time within the reader, on the level of interpretation”, as well as a “more efficient exchange between author and audience”(Royal, 2007, p. 7). In spite of, and perhaps because of, this efficient and immediate exchange, comics can also, at times, reach an infinitely layered depth of interaction. As Allen (2005) suggested:

Since meaning is conveyed at different levels, such as the layout of the frames, illustrations, scripts and words, a successful reader must process and interpret the meanings of these layers in order to build an understanding of the text. The ability to deal with multiple layers of meaning is part of the intertextuality of [comics] and according to readers we have interviewed, is learned by themselves. (Allen and Ingulgrud, 2005, p. 267)

Formal Conventions of Comics Art

Comics tend to be constructed from a series of sequential panels (or rectangular picture planes contained within the broader context of the page) each depicting an image or scene that conceptually moves the narrative of the text through imagined time. Though these panels have traditionally been arranged from left to right and then top to bottom, in the understood manner which English texts are usually read, this convention has been manipulated by many artists and abandoned completely by other, so much so that “ the layout of the separate framed images on the page is often non-linear, with diagonal, circular and single configurations instead of the left-to-right, top-to-bottom configuration of early

comic books, which mimicked one long comic strip, laid out in book form” (Schmitt, 1998, p. 158). These panels are often separated by lines or areas of empty space referred to as ‘gutters’. Gutters provide the space in which the reader interacts with the text.

Each panel describes a specific and finite moment within the narrative. As McCloud (1993) put it, “the panel acts as a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided” (p. 99). The gutter, weighty in its absence, is the implication of all of the actions that take place between one frame and the next. The reader is offered a chance to determine what occurs in that implied time, given the limitations of the visual images on either side. McCloud (1993) calls this process ‘closure’ describing it as “the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (p.63). He compares it to a more cognitively active version of what takes place when one watches a film, pointing out that in the case of film media, closure takes place instinctively and “continuously... twenty-four times per second... as our minds, aided by the persistence of vision, transform a series of still pictures into a story of continuous motion” (p. 65). When we read comics, the aforementioned closure process is aided by our personal, imaginative preferences. While film and television can be absorbed relatively passively, the reading of comics and graphic novels calls on students to exercise both their analysis and synthesis skills (as pieces of visual artwork “are made up of and refer to a combination of possible meanings, rather than a single, unified, intended meaning” (Freedman, 2003, p.13)), forcing them to be more conscious in their interactions with comics pieces (Lockbee, 2005).

McCloud (1993) went into considerable depth in his description of the manner in which ideas can be expressed through the juxtaposition of imagery. He breaks the pairing of panels down into a number of sub-categories based on content, each accomplishing their own effect. In the first such panel-to-panel transition, which he calls moment-to-moment, each of the ordered panels depicts one specific moment out of a series of events, with the following panel depicting the very next moment in time. For instance, a panel showing a close-up of a woman’s face might show her with both of her eyes open, only to be followed by a panel with her right

eye closed. The implied effect is that of a wink or a blink. Since the two moments are so close together in perceived time, closure is nearly as instantaneous as film, with the author relying very lightly on the effort of the reader. The immediate proximity of a series of moment-to-moment transitions can even give the feel of a slow motion film. McCloud (1993) went on to describe five more, equally specific subcategories of planar juxtaposition (Action-to-action, Subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and Non-Sequitur) and their implications at great length.

The side-by-side ordering of sequential, gutter-separated images isn't the only manner in which a sense of time and motion is conveyed in comics art, either. Comics allow readers a variety of means through which the passage of time and space can be 'read'. Time can also be conveyed through the inclusion of symbols that represent sound, arranged from left to right and top to bottom across single or contiguous planes.

For instance, if, in a picture of a group of people, several of the characters depicted are shown to be speaking through the addition of speech bubbles, it is understood by the reader that the space of time described by the plane or planes has to be long enough that all of the utterances shown could be spoken. Therefore a scene in which a significant amount of sound or speech is added through could be said to describe a far longer period of time than a snapshot of the same grouping of individuals without any verbal description of the conversations occurring between them. Further, through repeating images, eliminating panel barriers, toying with the size and shape of panels, 'bleeding' images off of the edge of the page and a number of other conventions, the speed at which the viewer perceives time can be manipulated (McCloud, 1993). One device for the description of a manipulated time recently derived from the film industry is that of 'bullet time', pioneered by and oft copied from the producers of *The Matrix*. By showing objects, such as bullets, which traditionally suggest an incredibly high velocity at a standstill, the subjects interacting with these objects, counter-intuitively, appear to be moving at a comparably high speed.

Motion, through space over time, has its own vocabulary in comics, as well. Conventions for the description of motion in images were revolutionized following the images created by the British photographer Eadweard Muybridge, from 1878 on, in which humans and animals were captured in motion over multiple frames through the use of a number of cameras concurrently. Muybridge's photographic compositions anticipated the invention of motion pictures that would soon follow, further cluing pictorial artists into the wonders that can be created through the ordering of adjacent images. Artists like Marcel Duchamp were inspired by both of the aforementioned to create paintings that addressed these new understandings of the figure in motion that were being developed in conjunction with emerging technologies, such as in Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase no. 2*, in which a geometrically abstracted figure is shown taking several steps down a staircase over the surface of a single picture plane, overlapping itself spatially as it walks (McCloud, 1993).

Thus a cultural language regarding drawing clearly legible motion began to form. The first and still most predominate convention for the description of movement through space is that of motion lines or 'zip ribbons', which can be utilized in a diagrammatic fashion to show the path of motion across the scene in which the character moves. Another movement device, perhaps suggested by the Futurist works described above, involves the application of a series of ghost images of the moving subject that follow in the wake of what is understood to be its corporeal entity. In other words a running man, say, is pictured at the front of a line of overlapping running men, describing the series of actions he has just undertaken. Similarly, streaking or blurring an image so that it resembles an element (an object or individual) which was moving rapidly in a photograph when the shutter opened and closed. McCloud (1993) describes another convention for the description of movement that involves blurring imagery, one that he calls subjective motion. In subjective motion, the moving subject is clearly illustrated but the space through which it travels is blurred in order to demonstrate the velocity at which the subject is traveling in comparison to the relatively slow moving world around it. Yet

another method involves the rendering of Polyptych panels in which there exists a continuous background through which the character or object can perform a single act in each frame (McCloud, 1993).

Beyond the complexities of how this fourth dimensional quality of comics art is handled, the act of reading works of comics art is further complicated by the fact that the eye cannot decipher both the text contained in the word balloons and captions *and* details of the pictorial composition simultaneously. As Schmitt(1998) put it:

The presence of the one necessitates the absence of the other, creating a signification and stable meaning is continually deferred as the eye, instead of scanning left to right in even, linear patterns, jumps between words and pictures, spiraling, zigzagging and often interrupting the entire process to re-scan the information in a new way. Rather than two 'stable' texts (words and pictures) juxtaposed, the comic book is a self-inflicted 'double-writing', collapsing traditional strategies for reading word and picture texts(p.158).

Words and text take on a complex and varied significance within the comics idiom, breaking free of many of the traditional boundaries that serve to constrain their conceptual capabilities (Schmitt, 1998). While the English language is commonly expressed phonetically through the combination of a series of twenty-six characters in proscribed sequences that refer to sound and ultimately form words that describe ideas, the English language as utilized in comics works is morphed and mutated in order to accomplish even more than the clear cut conveyance of concepts. Typeface, for instance, often becomes a conceptually rich compositional element (Schmitt, 1998), as discussed earlier in the description of Will Eisner's hand drawn lettering in *A Contract With God*.

There is also a tradition within the comics medium of the attempted implication of audio dynamics through the alteration of fonts. For instance, a **bold font** might be utilized to bring attention to an important piece of text or signify a rise in volume. Smaller print, on the other hand, might be adopted as a means of

suggesting a hushed or whispered conversation. Further, the shape, style or color of a font might be manipulated by a comics author in order to suggest something about the vocal traits of a character (Schmitt, 1998).

The speech-balloons in which the characters' exchanges are contained are also possessed of a conceptual tradition. Balloons that resemble clouds are meant to signify the characters inner thoughts or psychic conversations between characters that can project their thoughts. Jagged edged balloons are used to suggest an electronic origin of text, such as a radio, television or robot. In conjunction with the word balloons, blocks of text within a panel can be used to signal the input of a narrator, or of an overdubbed conversation, taking place elsewhere that is contextually pertinent to the scene depicted in the panel.

Words are still further distorted through intentional misspelling, often in order to achieve a description of differing levels of phonetic accuracy. This tradition is affected for the purpose of describing accents, speech impediments or mispronunciation, either for the sake of implying a low level of education, or the suggestion of a country of origin through the description of a colloquial dialect (Schmitt, 1998).

Additionally, onomatopoeia is combined with formal abstraction in comics, in order to create a series of symbolic 'sound effects', further dissolving the use of written language to the point of pure descriptions of audio effects. These shapes of sound, signifying gunshots with bold, red "BANGS" and the scrape of car tires with sharp edged "shhhrrriekks" cut across panel compositions, startling the viewer visually in an attempt to imply the experience that the reader might experience if he or she were to actually hear that abrupt noise (Schmitt, 1998). Other combinations of letters as symbols exist, such as the classic mash up of nonsensical letters and punctuation (i.e.: !@#\$\$%&) meant to stand in as symbols for deleted expletives. Much in the same vein, emanata, or emoticon-reminiscent symbols, such as hearts (for love) or light bulbs (for ideas), that convey meaning in a similar capacity to words, are often substituted for words in comic texts (Viadero, 2009).

Comics and the Transactional Readership Theory

The multi-layered ordering and juxtaposition of images and text is only ever effective, though, when said orderings and juxtapositions are activated in the mind of the reader. Reading comics and graphic novels is a complex activity, a simultaneous mental cooperation between the receptive, creative and connective areas of the mind (Botzakis, 2009), all participating in an extremely personal, interpretive practice that includes “analysis, interpretation and conjecture, all higher order thinking skills” (Smetana, 2009). The practice of reading comics and graphic novels, is, as Botzakis(2009) suggested:

intimately tied up in people’s ‘arts of existence’, as have been practiced for millennia in western culture. Reading has long been promoted as part of the regimen for producing sound minds and sound bodies, as the transferring of information and development of mental acuity have been involved in the development of an able and informed citizenry. In this conception, reading is very much related to identity. (Botzakis, 2009, p. 52)

This existential aspect of the graphic novel reading experience is in keeping with Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978) Transactional Readership theory, in which the act of reading is a non-linear process in which the text “activates certain elements in [the reader’s] past experience – external reference, internal response – that have become linked with ... symbols”(p. 11), and through the internal activation of symbols, the reader constructs an individual meaning from the text. She goes on to suggest that:

Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized as *[the reader] senses them*. The symbols point to these sensations, images, objects, ideas, relationships, with the particular associations or feeling-tones created by his past experiences with them in actual life or in literature. The selection and organization of responses hinge, to some degree, on the assumptions, the expectations, or the sense of possible structures, that he brings out of the stream of his life. Thus built into

the raw material of the literary process itself is the particular world of the reader. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 11)

Not only do the individual viewers bring their own experiences to the work, but the work also becomes part of each reader, as viewers appropriate the content of the pieces that they interact with them, ultimately informing aspects of their self-definition (Freedman, 2003). There is a social parrying, a concerted back and forth between the piece, its creator and the population of prospective viewers (Freedman, 2003). Within a classroom community, discussion of the different paths along which a comics work can be read in a group critique or reading of comics texts would afford students an opportunity to observe the range of possibilities of interpretation. Thus, they might be able to glimpse the drastic disparity of personal views of the world, modeling for them the concept that visual artwork “ mediates social relationships between and among makers and viewers and among viewers”(Freedman, 2003, p.3), ideally promoting greater interpersonal consciousness.

3. PROPOSED UNIT OF INSTRUCTION

Introduction

In order to more clearly and explicitly describe how I would envision the implementation of a comics based unit in the curriculum of an art education classroom, I have constructed a sequential unit of five lessons that are intended to holistically impart a number of the more integral and defining notions of which comics art is traditionally comprised.

The prospective unit begins with an art historical and critical examination of the comics form, which culminates in a group critique of a piece of exemplar comics art. In the second lesson, I suggest having the students tackle the practice of cartoon character development, with a formal model sheet of a character as their assigned final product. The next two lessons would deal with the use of facial expressions and body gestures in the service of affecting motion and emotional content, with each concept assigned correlative exercises. In the fifth and final lesson, all of the previously addressed topics would be delved into at greater length, in the service of composing a four panel, narrative strip addressing an event in the students' lives.

The unit was originally designed with a middle school classroom setting in mind, and was subsequently field tested on sixth, seventh and eighth grade populations. That being said, I believe the conceptual content to be sufficiently malleable as to be applicable in both primary and secondary settings. Through a few simple alterations in the corresponding rubric that the instructor who implemented the following unit might develop in order to standardize expectations for the students' products, as well as a gradation of the rigor and complexity of the assignments along grade levels, I think the lessons could just as easily prove as rewarding to a first grade class as to a group of high school seniors.

The Unit of Instruction

Lesson I- Introduction to the Comics Medium

Established Goals:

This lesson will fulfill the following content standards, as listed in The National Standards for Art Education:

Content Standard #2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students generalize about the effects of visual structures and functions and reflect upon these effects in their own work.

Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.

Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas.

Content Standard #3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

Content Standard #5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:

Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art.

Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.

Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras.

The above standards will apply to all of the subsequent lessons, except where noted.

Understandings

Big Ideas:

One of the integral points to be made in a discussion of comics and graphic novels as an art form is that sequential art is just one of a huge number of cultural outlets that make up a broader, world spanning visual culture. Through the detailed examination of one piece of that broader visual culture, we can hope to suggest to students the unseen conceptual and historical breadth and depth that each cultural venue may hold.

Understandings:

Students will understand that sequential art has a storied history, a rich oeuvre and a conceptual depth that warrant investigation in consequent lessons.

Predictable misunderstandings:

Students entrenched in a more canonical view of the arts may have trouble understanding why a discussion of comics art is relevant in the arts classroom.

Essential Questions

-How have innovations in technology for the dissemination of information (from woodcut, to intaglio, to Photostat to digital internet-based work) affected the style, audience and ultimately the message of works as the comics medium developed?

-How did censorship affect the evolution of comics in America when compared to those in nations like Japan, where no such censorship occurred? How might American comics have progressed if not for the intercession of Wertham?

Students will know...

-Students will be aware of the evolutionary path that one creative medium has taken

on its way to inhabiting its current format.

-Students will participate in a theoretical discussion of the aesthetics surrounding the comics milieu, introducing them to the practice of deeper philosophical discourse regarding an understood media.

-Students will participate in group critique of a comics work, investigating the formal and conceptual content of the form.

Performance Tasks

-Students will participate in a historical and aesthetic discussion of the comics medium.

-Students will critique a comics work (suggested guidelines for the selection of appropriate comics material for a classroom setting are provided in Appendix B)

Other Evidence

-Active Participation in Discussion.

Learning Plan

-Students will be presented with a slide show of the historical progression and evolution of the comics form, following the brief history provided above in the text, as well as a theoretical examination of how the comics medium works.

- Students will discuss the aesthetic merits of the comics medium in an open discussion.

- Students will read a provided comics work.

- Students will critique the exemplar work as a group.

Lesson II- Character Development

Understandings

Understandings:

-Students will actively consider the details that go into constructing a memorable character.

-Students will understand the dynamics of the creative process that comes with

creating a comics character.

Predictable misunderstanding:

- Be careful to discuss the fine line at which abstract description of typified features slips into the area of potentially offensive stereotyping.

Essential Questions

- Who are some of your favorite fictional characters? What details have been combined in order to make that character memorable/ likeable?

Students will know...

-Students will be asked to consider archetypes and how understood character types are utilized in order to lend a feeling of timelessness and familiarity to stories.

- Students will be asked to discuss how body-type and physical features can be combined in order to suggest something about a character, or, adversely, resonate against preconceived notions of physicality and character identity.

Performance Tasks

-Students will be expected to complete a “model sheet” (in the two-dimensional medium of their choice), with the created character depicted in profile and full-frontal view.

-Students will work with the instructor with the aim of developing a rubric with which they will assess the success of their creations.

Other Evidence

- Students will compose a short written back story, describing their characters essential motivations and drives.

-Following the completion of the final work, students will participate in a group critique of each other’s work, constructively criticizing formal aspects of the narrative pieces, while simultaneously considering the effectiveness of their application of narrative elements.

Learning Plan

- Students will design an original character that will serve as the applied person that

they will be expected to manipulate in the later lessons in this sequence.

Lesson III- Communication of Ideas Through the Facial Expressions of Characters

Established Goals:

Understandings :

-Students will understand the importance of facial expressions as an important vehicle for the expression of ideas and communicative processes.

Essential Questions

-How does the face both voluntarily and involuntarily express the inner thoughts of the individual?

- How can the depiction of those inner thoughts be utilized in the service of telling a narrative?

Students will know...

-Students will be asked to consider the process of symbol structuring, especially in terms of the face and how it conveys emotive messages. They will further be expected to keep in mind that their ultimate goal for the unit is the productive use of formal elements in service of constructing a cohesive and coherent narrative, and, subsequently, should consider how the use of facial expressions will carry certain elements of their story.

Performance Tasks

- Students will be provided with a list of base emotions, as well as a list of hypothetical scenarios, such as “ someone has just stolen your bicycle”. With the aid of a mirror they will enact facial reactions of those emotions, as well as the emotions that they would expect to go along with the prescribed scenarios. After observing the expressions on their own faces, they will be expected to apply those expression to the face of the character that they designed in lesson two in the two-dimensional

medium of their choice.

Other Evidence

-Acting out the facial expressions in the mirror is a basic theatrical assignment.

Learning Plan

- Students will be shown exemplar, facially expressive works, like those in Will Eisner's *Expressive anatomy for comics and narrative (2008)*.

-After a discussion of the ways in which facial expressions can carry a narrative, students will be presented with a mirror and the aforementioned list of emotions and scenarios. They will then be asked to compose a single-page series of head-shot depictions of those scenarios and emotions in the two dimensional medium of their choice.

-Following the completion of the final work, students will participate in a group critique of each other's work, constructively criticizing formal aspects of the narrative pieces, while simultaneously considering the effectiveness of their application of narrative elements.

Lesson IV- Implied Motion and Body Language in Comics and Sequential Art

Understandings

-Students will understand the conventions that have been developed in order to convey a sense of movement in two dimensional comics compositions (as described at length in the conceptual framework above)

Essential Questions

-How do the disparate panel transitions and motion implications such as zip-lines affect the idea of motion in a comic in different ways?

- How is the implication of motion a form of symbolic representation of an idea?

Students will know...

- Students will know how to convey a sense of motion in Two-dimensional works

Performance Tasks

- Students will attempt to convey the effect of motion on the character they created

in lesson two in a series of prescribed actions in the two-dimensional medium of their choice.

Other Evidence

- Students will compose preparatory thumbnail sketches.
- Students will participate in an oral group critique of each other's finished work, during which time they will reflect on their use of the narrative tools learned.

Learning Plan

- Students will be shown the work of exemplar artist Jack Kirby, after which they will discuss the conventions that Kirby developed as a means of describing motion in a still, two-dimensional form.
- Students will be provided with a list of motions (i.e., throwing a baseball) and will be asked to compose a single-sheet composition of those actions in the two-dimensional medium of their choice.
- Following the completion of the final work, students will participate in a group critique of each other's work, constructively criticizing formal aspects of the narrative pieces, while simultaneously considering the effectiveness of their application of narrative elements.

Lesson V- Composition of a Four-Panel Sequential Narrative

Established Goals:

This lesson will fulfill the following content standards, as listed in The National Standards for Art Education: ***All of the standards stated in Lesson I, with the addition of:***

Content Standard #6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Achievement Standard:

Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share

similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context.

Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts.

Understandings

Students will combine all of the understandings that they learned in the previous four lessons in to a cohesive narrative piece, thus understanding how those individual elements resonate to become a coherent story structure.

Essential Questions

How is motion conveyed in a narrative piece?

How are facial expression utilized communicatively in a narrative piece?

What are the unique traits of sequential narrative works that are different than those utilized in other contemporary storytelling practices, such as film an written text-block works?

Students will know...

How to construct a narrative using sequential imagery.

How to combine text and images in a narrative.

How to effectively imply motion and emotion in the context of a two-dimensional, sequential narrative.

Performance Tasks

Students will compose a four panel narrative sequence starring the character they have worked with in the previous three lessons. The composition will be executed in the two-dimensional medium of their choice.

Other Evidence

Students will participate in an oral group critique of each other's finished work, during which time they will reflect on their use of the narrative tools learned.

Learning Plan

Students will be asked to compose a four panel sequential narrative piece, effectively displaying knowledge of the issues discussed in lessons 1 through 4.

The narrative should focus on a specific moment or event from that student's everyday life, allowing the students to construct a personal narrative around an

event that they deem to carry personal import.

Students will again be allowed to choose any two dimensional medium that they are familiar and comfortable with in order to complete the requirements of the assignment, with a concerted emphasis being placed by the instructor on the point that different mediums can be utilized in order to establish certain mood or effect.

Before composing their finished work, they will complete and present four thumbnail compositional sketches, which they will then discuss in regards to their individual merits with the instructor.

Following the completion of the final work, students will participate in a group critique of each other's work, constructively criticizing formal aspects of the narrative pieces, while simultaneously considering the effectiveness of their application of narrative elements.

Field Test

In an attempt to ascertain the logistical applicability of the learning plans I sketched out in my suggested unit of instruction, I field-tested the last lesson of that unit with middle school students at St. Joseph's Catholic School, a kindergarten through eighth grade private school in Athens, Georgia. These sixth, seventh and eighth grade students are usually taught art three times weekly by the graciously helpful Frances Chapman, who was kind enough to welcome me into her classroom and assist in instruction. We met on the morning of Thursday, the 25th of April, 2010, and, in three sequential class periods (one for each grade level) we discussed our shared understanding of comics art, I presented information regarding the formal and theoretical conventions of the comics idiom and the students were allotted time and supplies, with which they composed their own pieces of sequential art.

As these classes meet for only 45 minutes per period, I found myself rushing to fit a great deal of conceptual information into an inordinately short span of in class time. I began each class period by informally polling the individual grade levels regarding their own personal experience with the comics form. In the first period, eighth grade class, a couple students suggested that they were aware of comics culture, but only one female student admitted to habitually reading comic books. In the second period, seventh grade class, in which the group as a whole seemed considerably more interested in the subject of comics art, two young girls in particular had had extensive experience reading Japanese Manga, displaying both knowledge of the culture, as well as considerable abilities in imitating Manga stylistic flourishes in their own work. In the third period, sixth grade class, several of the students claimed they read comics strips (*Garfield* was named specifically) from time to time, while two students, one male and one female, professed that they were devout fans of *Archie* and *Bleach* (a popular Manga title) respectively.

In what was probably the most surprising piece of information to emerge from this casual study, *Archie* was the most oft mentioned title when students were

asked what their favorite comic book title was. Perhaps this has something to do with the age of the participants, as the Archie comics tend to deal with the struggles of teen archetypes. Personally, I had a preconceived notion of the title as being somewhat dated, and was shocked that it seemed to outrank the statistically popular Manga titles in this small test population.

If nothing else, this brief examination of the familiarity with comics amongst a small sampling of students is illustrative of the fact that, though the population statistics of the community of fans of comics art, suggested by sales, is steadily on the rise, comics art is still a niche interest. This does not necessarily discount the pertinence of discussion of comics art in art education, though, or even, for that matter, in this specified setting. The central concern of visual culture art educators needs not be that the most popular of art forms should be perpetually made to usurp the “dated canon”, but, rather, that each facet of the visual culture as a whole be given its due diligence by educators and theorists.

There are, after all, a number of advantages to providing students with a view from the margins, so to speak. For one, in showing students an art form that they had little knowledge of, those students were afforded an opportunity to construct their own personal understanding of that medium from square one. Further, those handful of students that did possess an in depth knowledge of comics art were transformed, through the attention of their classmates to a precious (and, likely, predominately private) pursuit or interest, into resident experts and master craftsman. Throughout the practice portion of the lesson, neighbors and peers continuously tapped these students for opinions, advice and guidance.

Besides being a sure-fire self esteem builder for the “expert” students in question, this also helps, ideally, to clue students into the pluralism of tastes and concentrations that exist within the classroom community, in which they operate daily. In the best-case scenario, they might even be expected to conceptually extrapolate that variance in personal involvements over other communities, of which they are apart, thus providing them a deeper insight into the way people

construct their personal cultural hierarchies within themselves. On a simpler level, the introduction of fringe artistic modes as serious subjects for discussion in a classroom, could help to enforce a feeling of justified worth towards the personal preferences of those students who are already attached to those modes, introduce potentially enriching modes, of which students were unaware until that introduction, and, help to foster communities for deeper aesthetic and cultural discussions amongst those that share a common interest in those modes.

In order to familiarize students with the nuts-and-bolts components of comics and sequential art, I followed our short discussion of students' knowledge of comics forms and culture with a brief Power Point presentation (lasting about five minutes) in each of the three classes. I offered some suggestions concerning the compositional considerations, including choice of moments, frame, image, words and flow, then succinctly covered the available possibilities in panel-to-panel transitions, as discussed by McCloud(1993), showing, through selected illustrations, the effects that can be created through the sequential juxtaposition of imagery in a sequential narrative. I further presented a number of examples of how expressive elements, such as facial expression and body language, can help to carry a story and add depth and nuance to the way that its told. Following these points, I introduced students to some of the understood conventions, such as word balloons, zip lines (and other motion implication methods), and sound effect graphics, as discussed earlier in this text. Finally, I introduced students to the concept of the gutter, explaining how the goal of the comic artist is essentially to engage the reader's imagination so that they can follow the implied actions of the pieces' characters or objects from one frame to the next.

After passing out a stack of white drawing paper and a standard number 2 pencil to each of the students (I chose to keep the rendering implements as rudimentary as possible, in order to emphasize the inherent conceptually based nature of the project, independent of material concerns), I instructed the students in each of the classes to fold their papers into quarters. These four partitions became the panels through which the students would compose their narratives. I instructed

the students to choose a moment from their lives. I then helped the students to consider how they could convey those stories in sequenced pictures, assisting them in selection of moments and angles of framing.

We talked about character development, and how images of an individual could be simplified or abstracted, while still maintaining the essence of his or her persona. We discussed how, over the course of the essentially reductive process of assigning specific traits to the visual personification of a character, we must make choices of those that most succinctly and clearly carry the essence of the character we are describing. If more time had been available, I might have asked the students to compose model sheets, drawings in which these characters would be worked out from both frontal and profile views, which would have allowed the students more time to consider the potential intricacies of their characters. I chose to keep the instructions as loose and ambiguous as possible, in order to allow conceptual breathing room for students' conception of personal narratives. Once we had covered these bases, the students began to draw their comic strips.

All three classes were slow to start, though clearly absorbed in thought over what event they would choose to illustrate, as well as how they would go about doing so. The issue, I believe, stemmed from my choice to field test the fifth and final portion of the five-lesson unit of instruction I had constructed. While I had assumed that each of the lessons could be taught autonomously, the "building" aspect of the unit I proposed, in the pages preceding this description of the study, proved integral to the efficacy of the teaching plan. The students got noticeably hung up on the ideas of background development, character development, and rendering, each of which could have been covered previous to the more involved process of composing a sequential piece. Many students bypassed these issues by extreme simplification of their compositions, utilizing stick figures for characters and lone, signifying objects to suggest their backdrops. In a way, this proved to be helpful, in that, through necessity, it drove home the point of reductive abstraction, a stylistic mainstay in cartooning.

The stories that the students eventually chose to work with were limited to a short list of themes, which I have grouped into three overarching categories. The foremost of these was athletic activities, followed shortly by personal calamities, and, finally, wish fulfillment (i.e., “I got a puppy for Christmas”). While I admit to having initially expected a little more variety in the students’ choice of thematic content, in retrospect, it makes sense that the span of students’ worldviews would be limited at their age, and that the things that they applied import to would be mediated by their classroom community, thus restricting their areas of interest. Despite this constraint on semantic substance and the previously mentioned tendency towards restraint in detail, the students managed to depict a range of stylistic choices, expressing personal voices along a broad continuum of tones and moods.

For instance, though athletic activity made up the vast majority of content in students’ strips, the types of such activities, as well as the different moments or action connected with those sporting events, provided a plethora of possible imagery. From tennis, soccer and basketball to swimming, skateboarding and playing poker, each of the games offered their own series of compositional problems to address.

Formal ingenuity was needed, in the case of one particular sixth grade student, to express, without any text, a series of skateboarding tricks he was working on mastering. Through the utilization of zip lines and a variety of angled shots, the student effectively rendered “kick-flips”, “olleys” and ramp tricks in four consecutive panels. In the final panel, an on-looking crowd of admirers goes wild for his exploits.

Similarly, a seventh grade girl who was a competitive swimmer made use of compositional angling, successfully putting her self into the role of the imaginary camera man, capturing shots of herself as she participated in a remembered swim meet. She shows herself hurling forward from the starting block in the first panel,

submerging headfirst into the pool in the second, executing a flip-turn under water in the third, and winning the race by a body length in the last.

A sixth grade student, who had made an overt point of expressing his disinterest in the act of drafting comics, became decidedly more engaged when it occurred to him to draw “ a bunch of dudes playing cards”. Through being allowed to describe an activity that he perceived as being both cool and to some extent illicit, he was drawn into the project, and, ultimately drafted an impressively detailed series of shuffling cards, dealing, betting and finally revealing the winning hand of two pairs, Aces over Queens.

One particular sporting moment was repeated in three separate occasions, with startling similarities in execution. Perhaps due to the cultural ubiquity of the archetypal scenario of the shot from the foul line as the last seconds of a basketball game tick away, the manner in which all three students drew this sequence was nearly identical. In an establishing shot, we see our hero, poised, with ball in hand. Cutting to the next frame, the ominous clock glares back at the viewer, with a few remaining moments, from its place on the scoreboard. Following this tension raising detail, we are relieved to see the basketball, arching towards its intended target, and, in the ultimate scene, the ball plunging into the basket with a “swish” sound effect. Without fail, the crowd filling the surrounding stands erupts with adulation.

Another repeated scenario, seen over and over again in the work of several students, stemmed less from the collective cultural subconscious, but, rather, from a shared, communal experience. As has probably already been demonstrated in the prior anecdotes, St. Joseph’s is possessed of a close-knit athletic community. Subsequently, many students had been present for a middle school girls’ soccer game the previous afternoon. In the closing minutes of a close match, a sixth grade girl on the St. Joseph’s team was toppled and stepped on by a player on the opposing team, drawing a foul. The resulting penalty kick ended up winning them the game. Students from each of the three classes presented this scene from a number of

differing angles, emphasizing the reality of multiple points of view to those that saw the pieces. It also presented a microcosmic model of how communities create their folklore.

The preceding story might also be deemed pertinent in our discussion of the next most popular category of composition, the personal calamity. Apparently an attempt at simple humor, these narratives were interesting in that they invited detailed framing of events that could easily be described in as little as one sentence. “I fell off my tricycle”, becomes an energetically detailed, epic composition. “I tripped down an escalator”, becomes an exercise in exaggerated perspective. In a story about a day at the beach spoiled by rain, facial expressions and body language were employed to great effect.

In what was perhaps the most poignant of all of the stories depicted in the students’ comic strips, one girl took this theme to a darker and more personal place than her peers. When I asked the young lady (who was wearing a New Orleans Saints hat for the school’s “Hat Day”) what account she intended to portray, she very nonchalantly informed me that she planned to describe the day when she and her family returned to her former home in New Orleans to inspect the damage done to it by hurricane Katrina. She was clearly pleased by the prospect of telling her tale, and went into considerable detail in her composition, describing the harm done to her family’s property down to the minutia. While it would be too much to expect that other students would have this kind of depth of experience, her commitment to composing her piece was undoubtedly influential on her classmates. Drawing the piece was probably a simultaneously cathartic and enriching experience for the student, as well, as, in telling our life stories, we are able to reflect on them and define their meaning as formative events.

In the end, this field test proved helpful in ascertaining the strengths and weaknesses of one of the lessons of a potential full unit of instruction. Most notably, it reinforced for me the importance of the issue of incremental presentation of concepts. Rather than overload students with a mountain of information about a

subject as complicated as composition of a sequential visual narrative, it would doubtlessly prove to be a more rewarding experience for students if the compositional act were broken up into smaller, more manageable lessons, as I had initially suggested in my proposed unit of instruction. That being said, the single lesson that I was able to present went over well with the students. Despite the fact that few expressed much knowledge, or even interest in the comics form, they were all, at the very least, engaged, and in some cases, fully absorbed by the process of making their own sequential art. Those that had come into class that morning with a love of comics art were given both an opportunity to delve into a discipline they were enamored with and assist in teaching others about something that was of great personal import to them. Those that arrived with no connection to the medium at all may very well have been introduced to a mode of cultural expression that would prove as influential to their sensibilities as it has been to mine.

4. CONCLUSION

I began this applied project, regarding the art educational potential of comics art, with an anecdotal history of my personal experiences dealing with the form in question. In doing so, I had hoped to present a case in which a visual culture art form and its milieu had been at least partial causal contributors to a student's impetus to pursue further study of the arts.

Following this introduction, I undertook the task of examining the current state of the comics world. I discussed the recent rise in the form's popularity, widely attributed to the development of the graphic novel and web-comic formats. I outlined the burgeoning acceptance of the comics art form in institutional settings, such as libraries and universities, and cited a number of studies that have already determined a range of educational advantages inherent to the comic book.

Having outlined a contemporary comics climate, I then began to discuss the historical progression that ultimately lead to the invention of the comic book or graphic novel as we understand them today. I traced comics from their earliest, definitive antecedents, the Medieval broadsheet, through the developments of a variety of production methods that served to define both the form and audience of the comics medium, past the hardships leveled on comics publishers by moralistic naysayers, and, with the help of the guiding will of the a talented advocate and exemplar artist, Will Eisner, toward a broader cultural relevance.

Once this historical contextualization had been established, I turned my attention to the fashioning of a theoretical treatise examining both the formal and conceptual conventions of the comics medium. I combined my working understanding of comics and graphic novels with the theoretical writings of a variety of individuals interested in the comics medium in an effort to develop a rough understanding of exactly what goes on when a student reads a piece of sequential art.

With this theoretical analysis in hand, I attempted to construct a practical unit of instruction dealing with comics art. Consisting of five sequential lessons, this unit covered a number of ideas that I deemed to be essential to an operational knowledge of the art form. These ideas included critical and historical background, character development, study of the expressive opportunities made available through the manipulation of facial expressions and exaggerated body gestures, and, finally, the composition of a fully formed, four paneled piece of sequential art. I field-tested the final lesson of this unit at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Athens, Georgia, with the help of that school's art instructor, Frances Chapman. While teaching this lesson, I took it upon myself to examine the visual and semantic content of a number of the students' works in an effort to exemplify the kinds of problems and processes that can be presented, mediated and overcome throughout the course of a lesson based on comics art.

While I was encouraged by the interest of the students I worked with in regards to the comics medium, and impressed by the level of content exhibited in their work, the lessons described above are (intentionally) incredibly basic in their makeup. There is still so much more that can potentially be explored in terms of curricular experimentation with comics art.

The venue for this exploration that excites me most is that of the web-comic. Through the process of hosting a blogging site, onto which students could contribute a weekly piece of sequential journal art, instructors could potentially start their students down the path of a life of cultural contribution to the expansive universe of internet based arts. Due to the archival aspect of these blog sites, this would also present an opportunity for the class to reflect on their formal and conceptual progress over time, as they critiqued each other's work in an online setting through posted comments.

The internet is also home to a number of self publishing sites, such as Blurb.com, that print books from material that clients upload to their prefabricated templates, online. This business model offers the instructor a logistically feasible

means of publishing a body of students' sequential work for the classroom, providing the resources to create a common, bound, precious object, that each will have had a hand in composing. I might suggest a lesson in which a class composes an exquisite corpse style narrative. Each of the students would be responsible for the illustration of one portion of the story, which the teacher could then compile, format, and send off to be printed.

The graphic novel has become ubiquitous enough that I would even go so far as to propose the development of whole interdisciplinary high school courses that study the graphic novel form from both visual and literary stand points. Novels like *Maus*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Persepolis*, provide unique outlooks on the world, through which students could be expected to extract a semblance of how people from other cultures experience similar, and sometimes drastically different, human lives. Such a course could be important to educators too, as a means of learning the ins and outs of multimodal learning through the shared analysis of graphic novel works with their students, who are sure to be more fluent interdisciplinary learners.

My primary goal in researching, transcribing and formulating the preceding information was not simply to make a case for the inclusion of comics art in art education curriculum (though I am certainly for it). Rather, my first and foremost intention was to illustrate the depth and breath inherent to just one of the many facets of visual culture that had largely been overlooked by educators, until recently, for a variety of reasons. There are so many more such under-theorized media that beg a considered treatment and contextualization, without which, their untapped educational promise can not be fulfilled. I have long been a devoted fan of comics art, and, as such, I chose a cultural venue about which I could claim to have a modicum of expertise, as my jumping-off point for a discussion of what I believe to be the next step in the development of visual culture art education.

Ultimately, what I have set out to advocate for in this text is the exploration of the infinite avenues of visual culture, in partnership with our students, as they follow their personal tastes and interests through to the realization of a cognizant,

cultural agency. As Slattery (2006) observed, visual culture in the digital world is “in a continual state of becoming and should be taught as such” (p. 818). In this continuously transmutative environment, we, as art educators, are charged with the responsibility of providing learned context and informed guidance as our students begin to undertake their lifelong exploration of, and transactional relationship with, an increasingly interconnected world culture. Nokes (2006) suggested that:

What really happens to students in the [art] classroom is an interpretive and intellectual process that is all wrapped up in the stuff of personal experience and the conscious and unconscious attributes of [the students'] *original* visual culture, plus their *adopted* visual culture, plus their *preferred* visual culture, ultimately informed by parents, teachers, books, news, the World Wide Web, and the street (p.94).

Therefore, the students' personal culture should occupy the center of the curriculum. I am confident that if my primary and secondary art instructors had investigated my personal aesthetic interests, as well as those of my classmates, our learning experiences would have been significantly augmented by the diverse modes we would have discovered through each other. In an open-ended discourse regarding the cultural practices of their students, art educators could be expected to uncover a treasure trove of possible vehicles of expression, vehicles that those students had adopted in order to decipher and document the human experience. By exhaustively examining each of those vehicles, connections could be made, misunderstandings could be subverted, and new ideas and forms discovered and explored.

5. APPENDICES:

Appendix A:

The Comics Code Authority (as Adopted in 1954)

Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America. Inc. Adopted on October 26, 1954, the enforcement of this Code is the basis for the comic magazine industry's program of self-regulation.

PREAMBLE *The comic book medium, having come of age on the American cultural scene, must measure up to its responsibilities. Constantly improving techniques and higher standards go hand in hand with these responsibilities.*

To make a positive contribution to contemporary life, the industry must seek new areas for developing sound, wholesome entertainment. The people responsible for writing, drawing, printing, publishing and selling comic books have done a commendable job in the past, and have been striving toward this goal.

Their record of progress and continuing improvement compares favorably with other media in the communications industry. An outstanding example is the development of comic books as a unique and effective tool for instruction and education. Comic books have also made their contribution in the field of letters and criticism of contemporary life.

In keeping with the American tradition, the members of this industry will and must continue to work together in the future.

In this same tradition, members of the industry must see to it that gains made in this medium are not lost and that violations of standards of good taste, which might tend toward corruption of the comic book as an instructive and wholesome form of entertainment, will be eliminated.

Therefore, the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. has adopted this Code, and placed strong powers of enforcement in the hands of an independent Code Authority.

Further, members of the Association have endorsed the purpose and spirit of this Code as a virtual instrument to the growth of the industry.

To this end, they have pledged themselves to conscientiously adhere to its principles and to abide by all decisions based on the Code made by the Administrator.

They are confident that this positive and forthright statement will provide an effective bulwark for the protection and enhancement of the American reading public, and that it will become a landmark in the history of self-regulation for the entire communications industry.

CODE FOR EDITORIAL MATTER

General Standards Part A

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.
3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.
4. If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
5. Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates the desire for emulation.

6. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

7. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun-play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

8. No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.

9. Instances of law enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.

10. The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case.

11. The letter of the word "crime" on a comics magazine shall never be appreciably greater than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.

12. Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or sub-titles shall be exercised.

General Standards Part B

1. No comics magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.

2. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

3. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

4. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented

alluringly nor as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

5. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited.

General Standards Part C All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited. *Dialogue*

1. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

2. Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions of deformities shall be taken.

3. Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and wherever possible good grammar shall be employed.

Religion

1. Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Costume

1. Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.

2. Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

3. All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.

4. Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

NOTE: It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing with costume, dialogue,

or artwork apply as specifically to the cover of a comic magazine as they do to the contents.

Marriage and Sex

1. Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.
2. Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at or portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.
3. Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered. A sympathetic understanding of the problems of love is not a license for moral distortion.
4. The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.
5. Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.
6. Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.
7. Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

CODE FOR ADVERTISING MATTER

These regulations are applicable to all magazines published by members of the Comics magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

1. Liquor and tobacco advertising is not acceptable.

2. Advertising of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.
3. The sale of picture postcards, "pin-ups," "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or semi-nude figures is prohibited.
4. Advertising for the sale of knives, concealable weapons, or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.
5. Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.
6. Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be accepted.
7. Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.
8. To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to the fact and avoid misinterpretation.
9. Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health or toiletry products endorsed by the *American Medical Association*, or the *American Dental Association*, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code.

(text source: *Comics Magazine Association of America. Facts about Code-Approved Comics Magazines*. New York: the Association, 1959.)

(Nyberg, 1988, p. 166-169)

Appendix B:

Berkowitz and Packer (2001) developed a reasonable set of guidelines for the selection of comics to be addressed in a classroom setting:

1. Avoid comic art with nudity, inappropriate language, swearing, graphic/gory violence, and offensive portrayals of principal, teachers or other groups known to students.
2. If you think the principle or regular classroom teacher might have a problem with comic books in school, review with them the materials you have selected prior to meeting with students.
3. Decide when you should bring in comic art and when students can bring their own examples.
4. Note that the artist who draws the cover may be different from the artist who drew the pictures for the story inside the comic book - identify all artists responsible in image creation (if it is possible for you to determine this).
5. If looking at historical cartoons that may be offensive today, describe them in a proper context (e.g.: "In the past, some artists used to do this, but it is considered offensive by many today.")(Berkowitz, 2001, p.16-17)

Appendix C

The Power Point Presentation

Comics, Graphic Novels and Sequential Art

Things to think about...

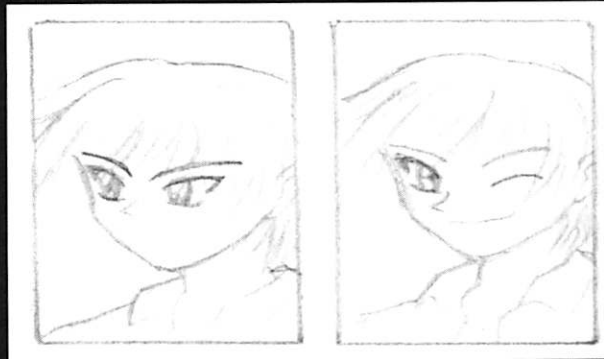
- Choice of Moment
- Choice of Frame
- Choice of Image
- Choice of Words
- Choice of Choice of Flow

Choice of moment



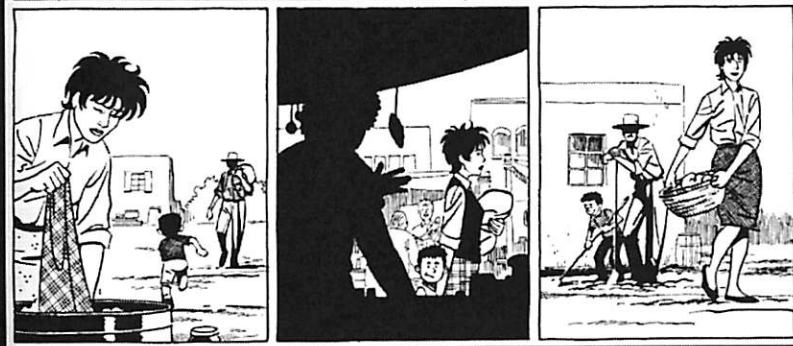
Moment to Moment

- A single action portrayed in a series of moments.



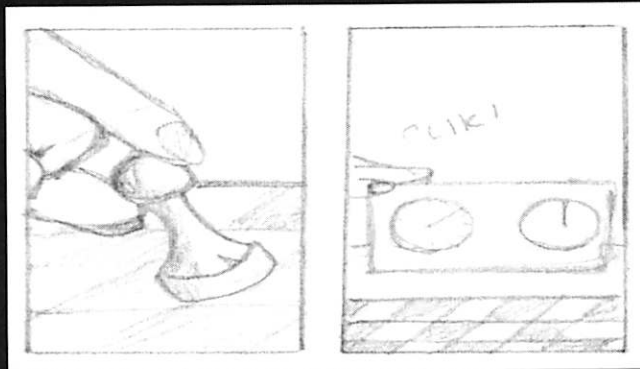
Action to Action

- A single subject in a series of actions



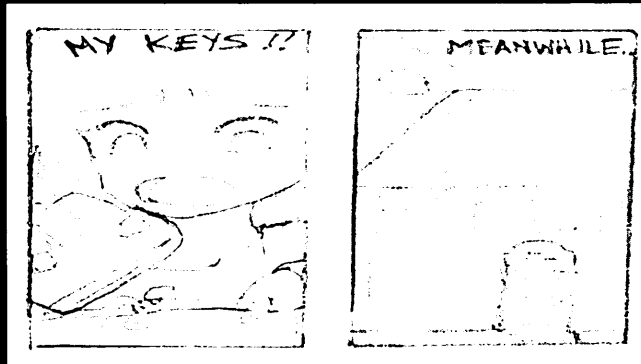
Subject to Subject

- A series of changing subjects within a single scene



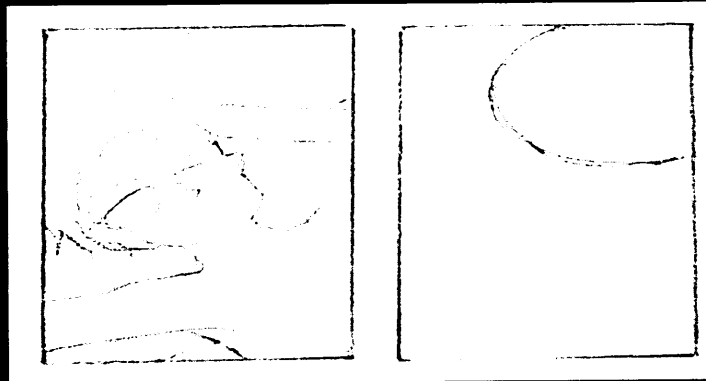
Scene to Scene

- Transitions across significant distances of time and/or space.



Aspect to Aspect

- Transitions from one aspect of a place idea or mood to another.



Non Sequitur

- A series of seemingly nonsensical, unrelated images and/or words.



The Gutter

- The space between panels where the reader's imagination is allowed to "fill in the action".

Choice of frame

“Bird’s Eye View”

“Worms Eye View”

Establishing Shot

Building Environments

Choice of image

Medium

Level of Rendering

Facial Expressions

Motion

Dave McKean

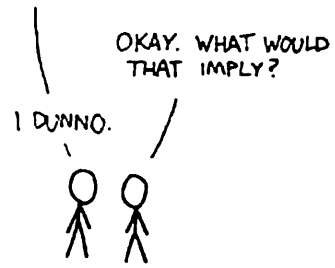


Art Spiegelman



STRING THEORY SUMMARIZED:

I JUST HAD AN AWESOME IDEA.
SUPPOSE ALL MATTER AND ENERGY
IS MADE OF TINY, VIBRATING "STRINGS."



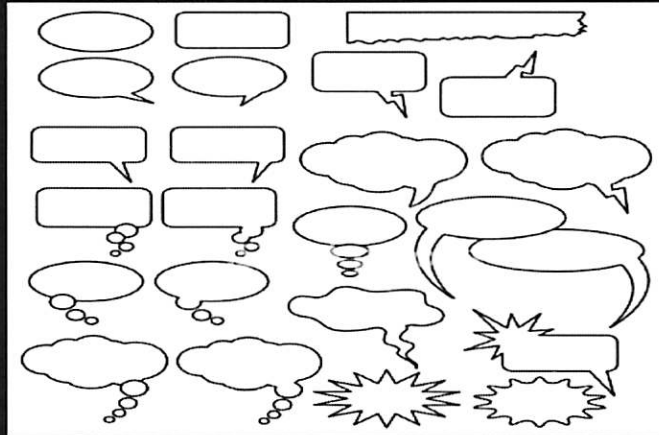
Facial Expressions



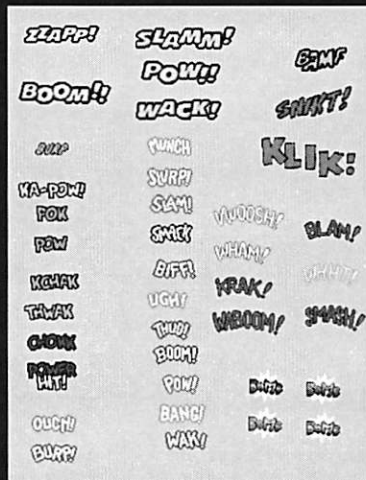
Facial expressions can carry a story...



Choice of Word



Sound Effects



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