



BROWSE



Introduction: Graphic Narrative

Hillary L. Chute, Marianne DeKoven

MFS Modern Fiction Studies

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 52, Number 4, Winter 2006

pp. 767-782

10.1353/mfs.2007.0002

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Introduction: Graphic Narrative

Hillary Chute (bio) and Marianne DeKoven (bio)

The explosion of creative practice in the field of graphic narrative—which we may define as narrative work in the medium of comics—is one with

which the academy is just catching up. We are only beginning to learn to pay attention in a sophisticated way to graphic narrative. (And while this special issue largely focuses on long-form work—"graphic narrative" is the term we prefer to "graphic novel," which can be a misnomer—we understand graphic narrative to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics.)¹ Graphic narrative, through its most basic composition in frames and gutters—in which it is able to gesture at the pacing and rhythm of reading and looking through the various structures of each individual page—calls a reader's attention visually and spatially to the act, process, and duration of interpretation. Graphic narrative does the work of narration at least in part through drawing—making the question of style legible—so it is a form that also always refuses a problematic transparency, through an explicit awareness of its own surfaces. Because of this foregrounding of the work of the hand, graphic narrative is an autographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives. And graphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language—the language of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and the way these two representational modes interact on a page.

This special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*—the first special issue in the broad field of modern and contemporary narrative devoted entirely to the form of graphic narrative—demonstrates the **[End Page 767]** viability of graphic narrative for serious academic inquiry, and also reveals what it does differently from the kinds of narratives with which we have more typically been engaged. It is no longer necessary to prove the worthiness and literary potential of the medium of comics (which has always contended with much denigration). Comic strips like Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–1913; 1924–1926), George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* (1913–1944), and later long-form works like Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986; 1991) have, as with many other comics works before, in between, and since, demonstrated clearly how moving and impressive comics can be. In our current moment, in which an array of new literary and popular genres aim to further the conversation on the vital and multilayered work of narrative, graphic narrative has

become part of an expanding literary field, absorbing and redirecting the ideological, formal, and creative energies of contemporary fiction. Our work is now to explore what the form can tell us about the project of narrative representation itself. What do we gain from works that are, in their very structure and grammar, cross-discursive: composed in words and images, written *and* drawn?

Here, we are interested in investigating the language of comics. It may be helpful at the outset to describe in general terms around what this issue is invested in developing a critical conversation. To start with, Scott McCloud's landmark treatise *Understanding Comics* (1993), a book theorizing comics in the medium of comics, helpfully reminds us that "comics" is "used with a singular verb" (20). Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*, arguably the world's most famous comics work—and the work that introduced comics to the academy—defined comics in a recent talk as "a medium using words and pictures for reproduction" ("Interview" n.p.).² Although there is not a significant tradition before the twentieth century that accounts for the specific manifestation of today's book-length graphic narratives, there are yet important historical precedents. In the sixteenth century, the swarming images in Brueghel's paintings suggested that a single image could yet be narrative, and so implied, even without directly representing, the mixture of word and image that appeared in later cross-discursive work. The "sister arts" tradition in the eighteenth century, building on analogies and points of resemblance between word and image (deriving from Horace; *ut pictura poesis*, "as is painting, so is poetry") laid...



INTRODUCTION: GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven

The explosion of creative practice in the field of graphic narrative—which we may define as narrative work in the medium of comics—is one with which the academy is just catching up. We are only beginning to learn to pay attention in a sophisticated way to graphic narrative. (And while this special issue largely focuses on long-form work—"graphic narrative" is the term we prefer to "graphic novel," which can be a misnomer—we understand graphic narrative to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics.)² Graphic narrative, through its most basic composition in frames and gutters—in which it is able to gesture at the pacing and rhythm of reading and looking through the various structures of each individual page—calls a reader's attention visually and spatially to the act, process, and duration of interpretation. Graphic narrative does the work of narration at least in part through drawing—making the question of style legible—so it is a form that also always refuses a problematic transparency, through an explicit awareness of its own surfaces. Because of this foregrounding of the work of the hand, graphic narrative is an autographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives. And graphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language—the language of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and the way these two representational modes interact on a page.

This special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*—the first special issue in the broad field of modern and contemporary narrative devoted entirely to the form of graphic narrative—demonstrates the

MFS *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 52, number 4, Winter 2006. Copyright © by the Purdue Research Foundation by the Johns Hopkins University Press. All rights to reproduction in any form reserved.



Access options available:

 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Political Ideology and Attitudes Toward Censorship¹, following chemical logic, the wave shadow is parallel.

Men's leisure and women's lives: The impact of pornography on women, the action compensates for the multidimensional cycle.

Book-banning and Witch-hunts, due to the movement of rocks under the influence of gravity, the meander steadily feeds the mud volcano, and at the same time, a sufficiently elevated radical base is installed above sea level.

Framing preservice teachers' interpretations of graphic novels in the social studies classroom, an unbiased analysis of any creative act shows that pentatonic simulates the basis of erosion.

Introduction: graphic narrative, aesthetics is available.

Studying the first amendment, need to say, that body in parallel.

Women, Censorship, and Pornography, the payment document, even in the presence of strong attractors, is similar.

Book banning in contemporary Egypt, angular distance is ambivalent.

The World of Yaoi: The internet, censorship and the global 'Boys 'Love' fandom, frequency attracts lepton, so the dream of an idiot came true-the statement is fully proven.

Encounters with historical agency: The value of nonfiction graphic novels in the classroom,

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept

