

Comics, an outline for notes (at no extra charge!)

We looked at architecture as a visual rhetoric. Next, the rhetorics of various media, various visual media, most of them mass media, beginning with the comics.

Why begin with comics? Most of us have had some experience with them, reading them, watching them. AND comics are very accessible. The way we analyze, or deconstruct, the visual rhetoric of comics is the way we analyze or deconstruct any visual rhetoric.

Definition of comics:
sequential art (Will Eisner)
words juxtaposed with images presented sequentially (McCloud)

What isn't said is every bit as important as what is said. Much in comics is silent, in the gutter, between the panels. It must be assumed. We imagine what isn't there.

All media are defined in part by their relationship with time. How is the passage of time denoted in comics?

Note the heavy reliance of comics on symbols, all of which are *learned*. We don't get symbols from God, or genetically.

What is the basic grammar of comics? Panels. Speech balloons. Text boxes. Images. Borders. Gutters.

What is the vocabulary of comics? Symbols. Icons.

The spectrum of realism to abstraction, or uniqueness to universality

We see the human face in everything, or we try to.

The more realistic and, therefore, unique, the more we merely receive it. The more abstract, however, the more we have to perceive. SO, much of comics are perceived, because they are largely abstract. The medium lends itself to perception versus reception. Film/cinema, by contrast, is way over on the reception side, very realistic.

The more realistic something is in a comic, the more objectified it is. The sword example.

What does it mean to be mediated? Mass mediated? ALL media are indirect, their messages processed, almost always in a multi-phase process.

Discussion of style, how one particular person uses that medium, or how a school of thought influences the medium.

Discussion of color. Why is Superman the colors he is? Why those colors? Always track the forces of commerce and technology, inexorable forces in, for any medium.

Sources:

- Will Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art* (New York: Poorhouse Press, 1985).
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

Comics collections:

Edwin and Terry Murray Comic Book Collection (HUGE) at Dook

Also has good collection of graphic novels

<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/rbmscl/murraycomics/inv>

Grand Comics Database Project

Volunteer-maintained searchable database

<http://www.comics.org/>

Comics Research

Annotated bibliography site for comics research

<http://www.comicsresearch.org/>