

COMICA SYMPOSIUM 2010

TRANSITIONS



NEW DIRECTIONS IN COMICS STUDIES

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 5TH 2010

From 9:30 until 17:00hrs

School of Arts, Birkbeck, University of London,
Room B01, Clore Management Centre, 25-27 Torrington Square, London WC1E 7JL.

Transitions is a one-day symposium devoted exclusively to promoting multi-disciplinary research of comics and graphic novels, manga, bande dessinée, webcomics and other forms of sequential art. Its aim is to highlight research from postgraduate research students and early-career lecturers and bring together different perspectives and methodologies, whether cultural, historical, or formal, thereby mapping new trends and providing a space for dialogue and further collaboration to emerge.

Dr. Roger Sabin, Reader in Popular Culture at Central Saint Martins and author of *Adult Comics* and *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*, will introduce the event and respond to the panel papers. Following the papers and response, there will be a roundtable discussion from artists and scholars who will reflect on the links between the two practices. Work will be on display in the foyer and the day will conclude with a wine reception.

SPEAKERS Maggie Gray (UCL); Chris Howard (SOAS); Sarah Lightman (Glasgow); Ben Little (Middlesex); Catriona MacLeod (Glasgow); Ernesto Priego (UCL); Nicola Streeten (Lincoln); Maria Vaccarella (KCL); Sarah Zaidan (Kingston). **CHAIRS** Dr. Will Brooker (Kingston); Paul Gravett (director of Comica); Dr. Ariel Kahn (Roehampton). Respondent: Dr. Roger Sabin (Central Saint Martins).

ATTENDANCE IS FREE

Contact Tony Venezia and Paul Gravett to register. (a.venezia@english.bbk.ac.uk and paul@paulgravett.com).

Transitions is organised as the opening event of Comica 2010, the London International Comics Festival in association with Birkbeck, University of London, *Studies in Comics*, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* and *European Comic Art*.
www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/news/comica-symposium-2010 and www.comicafestival.com

COMIC STRIP ILLUSTRATION: BILL BRAGG, ICON MAGAZINE. POSTER DESIGN: PETER STANBURY.



Comica Symposium 2010
Transitions: New Directions in Comics Studies

Friday November 5th 2010

9:30 am to 5 pm, room B01, Clore Management Centre,
School of Arts, Birkbeck, University of London, London WC1E 7HX

**A one-day event promoting the multi-disciplinary academic study of
comics/comix/manga/bande dessinée and other forms of sequential art**

Comics studies is a growing field in the academy, as testified by the emergence of multiple conferences and journals dedicated to comics in all their forms both nationally and internationally. It is an area that occupies, in the UK at least, a necessarily interdisciplinary space. Such a position is potentially one of strength, allowing for the convergence of diverse disciplinary knowledges, including; English, Cultural and Media Studies, Cultural History, Fine Art, Modern Languages, and History of Visual Media. ***Transitions*** is a one-day symposium devoted exclusively to promoting multi-disciplinary research of comics and graphic novels, manga, bande dessinée, webcomics and other forms of sequential art. Rather than be restricted by a specific theme, the aim of the symposium is to highlight research from postgraduate research students and early career lecturers bringing together different perspectives and methodologies, whether cultural, historical, or formal, thereby mapping new trends and providing a space for dialogue and further collaboration to emerge.

Dr. Roger Sabin, Reader in Popular Culture at the University of the Arts and author of *Adult Comics* and *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*, will introduce the event and respond to the panel papers. By thinking about comics across different disciplines, the intention is to spark debate and address a wide spectrum of questions.

Tony Venezia
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With special thanks to all the speakers and chairs, Dr. Roger Sabin, Paul Gravett, Catherine Catrrix and Dr. Anthony Bale at the School of Arts, and Birkbeck PhD colleagues Zara Dinnen and Sam McBean.

Transitions: Schedule

9:30 am Introductions: Dr. Anthony Bale (Birkbeck); Paul Gravett (Comica director); Dr. Roger Sabin (University of the Arts)

10:00 Panel 1 Superheroes Chair: Ariel Kahn (Roehampton)

Maggie Gray (Middlesex) - "Nothing but flat, dead wood"?: Comics and Ecocriticism

Ian Hague (Chichester) - Adapting *Watchmen*

Ben Little (Middlesex) - The Caped Bolshevik: *The Dark Knight Returns* and Miller's Shifting Class Discourse

11:15 Coffee (foyer)

11:45 Panel 2 Comics International Chair: Will Brooker (Kingston)

Maria Vaccarella (King's College London) - Graphic Storytelling in the Medical Humanities

Chris Howard (SOAS) - Manga and Postmodernism

Catriona MacLeod (Glasgow) - Francophone Comics and the (Post-)Colonial Utopia

1:00 pm Lunch (own arrangements)

1:45 Panel 3 New Archives Chair: Paul Gravett

Sarah Lightman (Glasgow) - Why am I curating *Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women?*

Ernesto Priego (University College London) - 21st Century Comics: Comics as Migrant Art

2:45 Panel 4 Artists & Scholars Chair: Alex Fitch (Resonance FM)

Nicola Streeten (Lincoln) - An Experience of Research: a Research of Experience - Embedding the Anecdotal in the Academic

Sarah Zaidan (Kingston) - The Adventures of *MetaMan*: The Male Superhero as a Metaphor for Modern Western Masculinity

3:45 Response from Dr. Roger Sabin, followed by discussion.

4:15 Wine reception (foyer)

5:00 End

For anyone interested we will reconvene at The Crown public house on New Oxford Street.

ABSTRACTS

Maggie Gray (Middlesex) - 'Nothing but flat, dead wood'?: Comics and Ecocriticism

This paper will address Alan Moore, Steve Bisette, John Totleben *et al*'s run on DC's *Swamp Thing* title in the mid-1980s in relation to the interdisciplinary field of Ecocriticism. While comics have often been a space of environmental critique, from newspaper strips such as Walt Kelly's *Pogo* and underground comix like *Slow Death Funnies* to the zines of today's climate change activists, *Swamp Thing* remains one of few serious attempts within mainstream Anglophone comics to articulate a radical ecology. This paper will not only examine the environmental issues raised in the visual narrative, but how the title engaged with political and ecosophical debates within the contemporary green movement, and affirmed an ecological consciousness by transforming standardised formal and structural comics conventions.

Ian Hague (Chichester) - Adapting *Watchmen*

The medium of comics has long been associated with the concept of sequence; narrative meaning is produced by the sequential, spatial juxtaposition of images. Film too is a sequential medium that generates meaning through sequences of images, albeit ones that are juxtaposed temporally within the same space. In this paper, I will consider the nature of the sequence in the two media, using Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' graphic novel *Watchmen* and the film adaptation directed by Zack Snyder to do so. Specifically, I will consider the difficulties inherent in presenting the character of Dr. Manhattan, who perceives all time simultaneously (i.e. for him there is no distinction between past, present and future), and look at the differing ways in which the two media do so. I will discuss the roles of both sequence and simultaneity in the reading/viewing experience and look at areas where the narrative of *Watchmen* is predicated upon the concurrence of the two, paying close attention to the ways in which the graphic novel demands that the reader break the apparently natural bond between reading and seeing, and considering whether it is possible to replicate this on screen or whether the book is, as Alan Moore has described it, 'impossible to reproduce in terms of cinema'. Finally, I will seek to use this discussion to consider the broader problems associated with the employment of film studies techniques to analyse comics and vice-versa, arguing that the two media are not as similar as they may superficially appear.

Chris Howard (SOAS) - Manga and Postmodernism

Whilst postmodernism is now of fading critical interest in European and American universities, it continues to have a strong currency in Japan, circulating not only in the academy but also as part of wider public discourse. One reason for this was the appeal of postmodernism for explaining some of the effects of Japan's economic rise, particularly during the 1980s. This paper, however, looks at the continuing interest in postmodernism during the last decade through two key texts: philosopher Azuma Hiroki's *Dobutsuka suru posutomodan* (recently translated into English as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*) (2001) and *manga* theorist Itō Gō's *Tezuka izu Deddo* (*Tezuka is Dead*) (2005). Whilst Azuma identifies a shift to a database logic of small narratives in *otaku* culture such as *anime* and novel games, Itō transposes similar ideas to the aesthetics of *manga*. Taking the opportunity to critique the previous generation of *manga* theorists still mourning the passing of the great storyteller Tezuka Osamu, Itō instead looks at how *koma kōsei* (frame structure) and *koma tenkai* (frame development) can also be used to differentiate *kyarakuta*

(narrative embedded characters) from a more database-like logic of *kyara* (icons). Whilst considering the connections between Azuma and Itō, I question whether their interest in databases or *kyara* represents an effective form of critical engagement also looking at some of the ways in which narrative in *manga* continues to be an important political tool for situating contemporary Japan.

Sarah Lightman (Glasgow) - Why am I curating *Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women*?

This show is a kind of yichus — Yiddish for “bloodline” — of autobiographical comics by Jewish women. It’s a creative and ongoing lineage. That Jews have had such an extensive contribution to comics is well-documented. But the focus has mostly been on men and superheroes. How did women contribute to the history of comics, and, in particular, to autobiographical comics, a genre they helped birth? What’s particularly Jewish and female about how they did it? “Graphic Details” explores that history by honouring some of the women who made it happen, and others who are doing it now.

Sarah Lightman and Michael Kaminer, Introduction to the catalogue for *Graphic Details Confessional Comics by Jewish Women*.

Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women, opened on October 1st 2010 at The San Francisco Cartoon Art Museum. It features the work of 18 international comic artists including: Vanessa Davis, Bernice Eisenstein, Sarah Glidden, Miriam Katin, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Miss Lasko-Gross, Miriam Libicki, Corinne Pearlman, Sarah Lightman, Sarah Lazarovic, Diane Noomin, Trina Robbins, Racheli Rottner, Sharon Rudahl, Laurie Sandel, Ariel Schrag, Lauren Weinstein, and Ilana Zeffren. The exhibition is accompanied by an 8 page catalogue published by The Jewish Daily Forward, with contributions by Trina Robbins, Paul Buhle, Eddy Portnoy, Ranen Omer-Sherman, Federica K. Clementi, Ariel Kahn and Sarah Jaffe and a back page collaborative comic between the late Harvey Pekar and Tara Seibel. Interest in the exhibition has been extensive and international with press coverage in *Haaretz*, *The Bay Area Reporter*, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, *J. Weekly*, *The Comics Journal* and *The New York Times*. *Graphic Details* has 3 tour sites confirmed so far including The Gladstone Hotel, with The Koffler Centre for The Arts, Toronto (2011), Yeshiva University Museum, New York (January 2012), and University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (September 2012). Sarah Lightman is both an artist in the show and one of its curator’s, and she will present the genesis of the show from newspaper article to world touring exhibit and explain her own personal motivations for being involved in the project. Sarah will also discuss the importance of the show within the history of comics, and ask why, for a show of so many sub-groups - Jewish/ women/ autobiographical- it has such universal appeal?

Ben Little (Middlesex) - The Caped Bolshevik: *The Dark Knight Returns* and Miller's Shifting Class Discourse

This paper attempts to account for the political shifts in Miller’s work from *Daredevil* at the turn of the 1980s through *Ronin* in 1984 to the celebrated *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Miller himself discusses the comic as an inadvertent flirting with fascism, but by the end of *TDKR* the politics of the superhero himself actually seems to be far closer to Bolshevism ideologically. The paper will look at how Miller’s exploration of class in *TDKR* seems to be an imperfect assimilation of the politics of the 2000AD group of British creators who were starting to make their names in US

comics at the time (most notably through the work of Alan Moore). It will look most closely at the shift between the brutish depiction of the working class as the backdrop to the high court drama at the centre of *Ronin*'s plot and the steady emergence of class consciousness in Batman's travails in *TDKR*.

Catriona MacLeod (Glasgow) - Francophone comics and the (Post-)Colonial Utopia

With few depictions of colonised locations or peoples before the Second World War and a subsequent censorship law prohibiting potentially politicised content not relaxed until the late 1960s, the depiction of (post-)colonialism in the bande dessinée (the French-language comic) has developed almost entirely during the afterlives of the French and Belgian empires. A medium unique in its integration of textual and visual forms, the hybridity of the bande dessinée has allowed the possibility of multi-positional political stances to develop within such texts featuring aspects of (post-)colonialism. This paper will consider the layering of both utopian and dystopian (post-)colonial representations in specific bandes dessinées, with a particular focus on the role of gender in simultaneously maintaining this combination of disparate political positions. Comparative case-studies of popular Belgian creators Warnauts and Raives' texts *Equatoriales* (set in the pre-war colonized Congo) and *Lettres D'Outremer* (depicting modern-day Guadeloupe) will be presented, examining in each the interconnection of textual dystopian political/social commentary predominantly made by male characters and the visual 'utopianisation' of these differing settings through the sexualising and exoticising of (post-)colonial female characters. How the black women featured in each texts are 'othered' and eroticized throughout their relationships with white men will be considered via the artists' manipulation of the formal specificity of the bande dessinée, with particular focus on how this exotic sexualisation paints a utopian metaphor of colonialism onto the body of the black female for consumption by the white reader. Further, the conflict of this visual eulogy for the patriarchal spoils of colonialism and the dystopian dialogue largely invoked by male characters present in each text will be examined, the divergent approaches of the pictorial and textual components of each work and the interaction of gender therein leading to wider questions about the post-colonial female in the BD and wider Francophone visual culture.

Ernesto Priego (UCL) - 21st Century Comics: Comics as Migrant Art

In the 21st century, the periodical, serialised American comic book, like the broadsheet newspaper, appears to be an endangered species. Comics in general, but perhaps more so flexible-spine comic books, as examples of print culture, are not exempt from the consequences of a general crisis in the publishing market affecting books, newspapers and magazines of all sorts. This crisis is of a theoretical order but also, and perhaps firstly, a financial one. As 'graphic novels' gain popularity amongst audiences that until recently would have dismissed comics as unworthy reading material, in many countries the periodical comic book is suffering sale losses and therefore reduced runs and readership. But in spite of both the popularity and best-selling status of portable media readers and laptop computers of all kinds and the fears of techno-catastrophists the sales of physical books, at least according to the data available publicly, do not seem to have been greatly affected. Nevertheless, like other types of information, printed comic books are continuously digitised, uploaded to the Internet and potentially presented in different supports such as electronic screens of all types and various printed formats; 'born digital'

comics are made with or for Internet technologies, are distributed online, and often merge with the discourse of video games and animation. These digital manifestations of comics language trouble the ontology of comics, or 'the comicbookness of comics'. This paper interrogates the prejudices that oppose print culture to digital culture and 'digital natives' to 'digital migrants' and proposes 21st century comics as a paradigmatic example of multimedial 'migrant art.'

Nicola Streeten (Lincoln) - An Experience of Research: a Research of Experience - Embedding the Anecdotal in the Academic

In this paper I will show how I have applied the flexibility and independent learning style of research that underpins the Master of Research in Art, Architecture and Design degree to my wide topic area of gender and the graphic novel. I will explain the rationale for a trajectory that began with a Master's degree in Design, focusing on the practical creation of my graphic novel and changed to a non-practice based academic course. The training in research skills and techniques has concentrated my study area. This has facilitated a contextualization of my creative practice parallel to my research, rather than as a part of it. My research started with an overview of the literature in my chosen area of graphic novels. This included graphic novels from the late 20th and 21st century with an autobiographical focus in a Western context, particularly the UK and USA. I combined this with a review of feminist literature. Using narratology as an initial methodological tool I applied this to a case study of two graphic novels. My finding was that feminist methodology could be used to address the theoretical problems of narratology. Widening my case study to include further graphic novels, I contrasted the visual imagery of women with that of *Wonder Woman* and interpreted my analysis by drawing on psychoanalytic feminist theory as has been developed in feminist film theory. My finding is that an emerging pluralistic 'ideal woman' is being presented in graphic novels through stories of women's experiences that reflect current feminist theory.

Maria Vaccarella (KCL) - Graphic Storytelling in the Medical Humanities

Over the past decade authors have increasingly privileged graphic storytelling for their memoirs, with a recurrent focus on the impact of disease in their or their close ones' lives. In this presentation, I will initially review the growing field of graphic illness narratives or graphic pathographies and how they encompass various socio-cultural discourses, as diverse as science, technology, politics and medicine. I will also briefly explore how they are being used and fostered in medical and patient education as an engaging teaching tool and a source of valuable insights into the personal experience of illness. In the attempt to show how illness narratives can benefit from the use of graphic devices, I will then analyse David B's graphic novel *Epileptic* and the German educational manga *Epilepsie? – Bleib cool!*. I will argue that, in the specific case of epilepsy, graphic vividness can greatly enhance the depiction of the convulsive body and can help convey the fragmentary approach to reality, often experienced by people with epilepsy. These two works exemplify to what extent some specific cartooning techniques, such as David B's disproportions or super-deformed (SD)/chibi characters in *Epilepsie? – Bleib cool!*, can profitably draw readers' attention to complex issues such as the embodiment of illness and disability-related stigma.

Sarah Zaidan - The Adventures of *MetaMan*: The Male Superhero as a Metaphor for Modern Western Masculinity

MetaMan is a superhero whose adventures began at the start of World War II. His comic books were a runaway success, inspiring a generation of Americans. His post-war popularity waned in the face of comic genres but by the time the 1950s ended, he was back with a new look and attitude. Throughout the 1960s, MetaMan struggled to do the right thing in an America buffeted by change. This resonated with his youthful audience who were experiencing the same inner conflict. A feature-length film in the 1980s catapulted MetaMan off the printed page and established him as the icon of popular culture in America he remains to this day. If this character is so long-lived and well-known, then why has no one heard of him before? MetaMan is, as his name implies, a metaphor. He is every superhero who survived the ups and downs of American comic books' seventy-year history to achieve iconic status. He is every superhero whose name conjures up images of valiant, selfless deeds in the name of justice, even in individuals who have never picked up a comic book in their lives. He is an ever-changing representation of the world beyond the pages of his comic books, representing the ideals and tastes of every decade. He is the childhood companion of the next generation, thrilling his audience while inspiring, shaping and informing their ideas on not only how to be a hero, but also how to become a man. This paper examines his subtle, yet indelible impact on and reflection of Western civilisation.

BIOGRAPHIES

Maggie Gray has recently completed a PhD in the History of Art at University College London (UCL) with a thesis entitled '*Love Your Rage, Not Your Cage*' *Comics as Cultural Resistance: Alan Moore 1971-1989*. It addresses Moore's early work as a case study to consider the potential for the creation of adversarial mass culture in the context of the rise of Thatcherism and New Right hegemony. She has taught comics, aesthetics and the history of art and design at Middlesex University, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and UCL.

Ian Hague is an MPhil/PhD student working on comics and the senses in the History department at the University of Chichester under the supervision of Dr. Hugo Frey. He is a director of the academic strand of Thought Bubble, the annual sequential art festival in Leeds. His research interests include comic theory, the senses and technology. Contact details: I.Hague@chi.ac.uk

ChrisHoward holds a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London where he currently teaches in the Centre for Media and Film Studies. He specialises on Japanese cinema and popular culture.

Sarah Lightman is an artist and curator currently researching a PhD in autobiographical comics and graphic novels at The University of Glasgow. She has written on autobiographical comics and visual diaries for *Studies in Comics* and *The International Journal of Comic Art*. She is curating *Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women*, with Michael Kaminer, which opened at The Cartoon Art Museum, San Francisco in October 2010. Sarah co-founded *Laydeez do Comics*, a monthly autobiographical comics forum with Nicola Streeten. Sarah is also chairing the conference *Women in Comics II* at Leeds Art Gallery, as part of Comics Forum,

in November 2010.
www.sarahlightman.com
graphicdetailstheshow.wordpress.com

Ben Little completed his PhD on the politics of Anglo-American comics in May 2010. He is a lecturer in the Media department at Middlesex University and splits his precious research time between comics and the politics of generation Y. He is currently working on a proposal for a book about the 1980s 'British Invasion' of American comics and his edited ebook on young people for the 2010 election is available at: www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html

Catriona MacLeod is currently in the third year of her PhD entitled *Invisible Presence: The Representation of Women in the Francophone Bande Dessinée* at the University of Glasgow. Her recent publications include reviews for journal *European Comic Art* and her article 'Adopting and Adapting: Ethnic Minority Women's Quest for Identity in the Bande Dessinée' will be published shortly in the forthcoming Peter Lang title *Adaptations*.

Ernesto Priego wrote his PhD thesis about the materiality of comic books and digital media (UCL, 2010). His master's thesis dealt with traumatic structure in graphic narrative in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (UEA Norwich, 2003); his BA thesis explored how narratological tools could be used in the analysis of *Watchmen* (UNAM, 2001). He has written about graphic narrative for Library Journal, The Nieman Storyboard of Harvard University, *The Comics Journal*, *Studies in Comics* and other publications.
<http://butterflyhunt.tumblr.com/>

Nicola Streeten has been an illustrator since 1996 and is studying for a Master of Research in Art, Architecture and Design degree at the University of Lincoln. Her research area is gender and the graphic novel. Her first graphic novel, *Billy, Me & You*, will be published by Myriad Editions in September 2011. It appears in serialised form in Liquorice Magazine. She is co-creator, with artist Sarah Lightman, of *Ladyeez do Comics*, a monthly graphic novel forum with a focus on the new wave of comic work; more domestic than superheroes, based on the drama of everyday life.
www.streetenillustration.com
www.liquoricemag.com
www.laydeezdocomics.com

Maria Vaccarella, PhD, is a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Centre for the Humanities and Health, King's College London. Her main research field is narrative medicine and she has worked on medical-themed graphic novels, particularly on epilepsy and breast cancer. She was one of the convenors of the workshop *Translating America into Words and Pictures: Graphic Novels in Contemporary American Culture* at the 20th AISNA International Conference, University of Turin, Italy, September 2009 and of the conference *Comics and Medicine: Medical Narrative in Graphic Novels*, School of Advanced Study, Institute of English Studies, University of London, UK, June 2010.

Sarah Zaidan's passion for art and storytelling manifested itself at the age of two when she discovered Greek mythology and proceeded to draw sequential narratives depicting centaurs and dryads on seven-foot-long sheets of paper. This dedication to

visual narrative grew until it came to dominate every aspect of her life, leaving no choice but for her to pursue an education in comics. She holds a BFA in Sequential Art from the Savannah College of Art and Design, an MA in Illustration from Kingston University and is currently knee-deep in the writing-up year of a practice-based PhD in Illustration from Kingston University to be completed in March 2011.

Dr. Will Brooker is the head of Kingston University's Film and Television Department, and the author of books on various aspects of popular culture, including the box office film hits *Batman*, *Star Wars* and *Blade Runner*. His next monograph, on Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films, is due out in 2012.

Paul Gravett is the director of Comica, the annual London International Festival of Comics. He is an experienced journalist, editor, curator and broadcaster. The Man at the Crossroads co-edited the seminal *Escape Magazine* in the 1980s with Peter Stanbury, and is co-author of numerous non-fiction books on comics.

Alex Fitch is allegedly a popular radio interviewer, film reviewer, events organiser and Eagle Award nominee. He is the presenter/researcher of *Panel Borders*, Resonance 104.4 FM's weekly programme on comics, and reviews films for *Electric Sheep Magazine*.

Dr. Ariel Kahn is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Roehampton University, and Head of Film Theory at the Met Film School, Ealing Studios. He is a contributor to *The Jewish Graphic Novel* (Rutgers, 2009) ed. Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman, and writes regularly for the *International Journal of Comic Art*.

Dr. Roger Sabin is Reader in Popular Culture at London's University of the Arts. He is the author of *Adult Comics* (1993) and *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* (2001). He has published extensively on comics, fanzines and television.

Tony Venezia is a PhD student at Birkbeck, supposedly working on a thesis on history and historiography in the work of Alan Moore. He has published reviews and articles in the *International Journal of Comic Art* and elsewhere. As well as comics, wider research interests include genre fiction, critical theory, and literary and cultural histories.



School of Arts

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Welcome to the School of Arts, one of the liveliest and most successful university schools in the country. The School is home to Birkbeck's courses in English and Humanities, History of Art and Screen Media, European Cultures and Languages, Media and Cultural Studies, and Iberian and Latin American Studies. Our diverse, innovative and vibrant prospectus ranges from short courses to PhDs.

The School of Arts is located at number 43 Gordon Square in the heart of London's historic Bloomsbury. Gordon Square was developed in the 1820s by Thomas Cubitt, then London's best known builder. It is famous for its association with the Bloomsbury Group, a collective of intellectuals, writers and artists, including Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster, who lived and worked around Bloomsbury in the first half of the 20th century. The economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) lived at 46 Gordon Square, which is marked by a blue plaque. The same house was used by the Bloomsbury Group when the painter Vanessa Bell lived there before Keynes. The writer and biographer Lytton Strachey lived at 51 Gordon Square.

Extensively refurbished at a cost of £1.7million, 43 Gordon Square is the academic and administrative hub of the School of Arts. The building also houses the architecturally acclaimed, state-of-the-art Centre for Research in Film and Visual Media. Opened in 2007, the Centre has been specially designed to be used for teaching, research and conferences, and is equipped with a 70-seat luxury cinema. It is mainly used by students, but is also hired out by the International Cinema Office for previews and conferences. Once a week it opens to the public for London-related films.

Approximately 700 undergraduate students and 460 postgraduate students currently study at the School of Arts, with more than 2,000 students taking short courses. In addition, over 200 students are undertaking research at PhD level. We are located in Gordon Square, in the famous Bloomsbury area of central London. It's a unique part of the capital, offering world-famous museums and galleries in a setting of beautiful, leafy squares.



Where: London Print Studio and other venues
When: Throughout November 2010

Friday, 22 October 2010 saw the opening of the **Comica Festival 2010** and the exhibition I have curated with a full two-month run at the London Print Studio, 425 Harrow Road, London W10, on till 18 December and admission free. Entitled **That's Novel: Lifting Comics Off The Page**, it presents original artworks and specially conceived digital prints by a range of British and transnational creators. The accent here is on innovation and on how comics can transcend their printed forms, both literally and physically in Karrie Fransman's and Philippa Rice's hand-crafted three-dimensional comics, or adapted for the big and small screens, such as Charlie Adlard's Walking Dead or Pulp Theatre's Alien Ink for Channel 4's website, as well as more subtly, for example being used to help carers, patients and relatives coping with depression or mental illness in Brick's Depresso or Darryl Cunningham's Psychiatric Tales, or as searing personal testimonies and astonishing works of art in their own right, as in the case the late John Hicklenton's last, tortured masterwork, 100 Months. The exhibition at the London Print Studio forms the hub of this year's **Comica Festival** and already we've got an array of brilliant events lined up there, kicking off with **Comica Conversations** with Brick and Darryl Cunningham, and with Charlie Adlard and Alex Fitch, on Saturday 6 November, and a rare UK appearance by Ho Che Anderson, graphic biographer of Martin Luther King Jr, on Monday 15 November, talking with UK artist Paul Peart-Smith. More amazing events to come at LPS but meantime be sure to book tickets online as numbers are limited. And we have not left the ICA, by no means. The grand finale event on 1 December will be at the ICA's Cinema 1 where two legends of British comics, Steve Bell and Bryan Talbot, get together to reveal all about their prolific careers and launch their brand new books.

In tune with the times, **Comica Festival** also continues to offer you great free events, and this year's programme kicks off again on Friday 5 November - 'Remember, Remember!' - with a free full-day **Comica Symposium**. Come and hear, and engage with, some of the UK's brightest researchers into all kinds of comics culture, from manga to superheroes, bandes dessinées to autobiography, and watch the fireworks fly!

And we're adding an exciting new venue and attraction to the regular free **Comica Comiket Independent Comics Fair** this year from 12-5pm at the Royal National Hotel, Bloomsbury on Sunday 7 November. As well as a dazzling variety of self-publishers, small presses, zinesters and collectives offering you the chance to buy their latest titles direct, we've invited a range of exciting artists from this scene to a 'Drawing Parade', in which they will draw live, before your very eyes, and inside their books if you like, and have their performances viewable on a large overhead screen. Among those taking part are: Charlie Adlard (Walking Dead), Paul Duffield (Freak

Angels), Hunt Emerson (Firkin, Fortean Times), Garen Ewing (Rainbow Orchid), Paul Grist (Jack Staff, Torchwood), Roger Langridge (Muppets, Thor), Ellen Lindner (Whores of Mensa) and others.

This year's 4th **Observer/Jonathan Cape/Comica Graphic Short Story Prize** has once again unearthed some amazing UK-based talents. The winner will have their 4-page strip printed in The Observer on Sunday 7 November, but you can see many of the finalists on show at Orbital Comics Gallery from Monday 1 November till the end of the month. We're also compiling links again to as many entrants' stories as we can, so do please contact us once you've posted yours online.

I'll sign off there, with the promise of more frequent newsletters as the Comica Festival season bubbles into life and as our very first Escape Book, **The Great Unwashed** by Warren and Gary Pleece, nears completion, ready for us to preview to you soon. Thanks again for supporting my websites and the varied events and projects that spin out of them. Your continued interest means a lot to me and do hope you can spread the word to let more people know about them. I hope you'll enjoy more of the wonders of the comics world with me.

Warmest wishes.

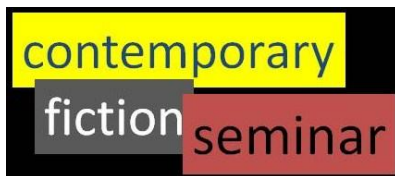
www.paulgravett.com
www.comicfestival.com
www.escape-books.com

Paul Gravett
Comica Director

Cafés etc.

There is a Costa in the foyer of the main Birkbeck building in Torrington Square opposite the Clore. The canteen and student bar can also be found in the main building, on the 5th and 4th floors respectively. There is also a small café in the School of Arts itself in 43 Gordon Square, a building designed by Escher. The ULU student union is just around the corner on Malet Street, opposite Waterstone's. The Lunchbox café and student union shop are located on the ground floor serving basic student fare, while The Gallery and Duck & Dive bars are both on the first floor and also serve food from mid-day. There is also a larger Costa in the basement of Waterstone's. Nearby is the Bloomsbury café on Gordon Street, a self-service outlet on the upper ground floor of UCL's Bloomsbury building. There are numerous places to either sit down and eat or pick up a takeaway around Russell Square. On Woburn Place, on the way to Euston, is Café Toscana which is relatively cheap and cheerful. In Russell Square park there is the Café in the Gardens which does passable generic continental fare. Next to Russell Square tube is Bar Centrale, which does good coffee. Opposite the tube is a Prêt à Manger and a Tesco express. Round the corner on Judd Street there are numerous reasonably priced eateries. Adjacent is the Brunswick centre in which can be found numerous overpriced eateries.

The best espressos in London can be found at the Wild and Wood café on New Oxford Street, and the Espresso Room Great Ormond Street. Both are a short walk from Torrington Square.



The Contemporary Fiction Seminar has been set up by postgraduate students to read and discuss all aspects of contemporary fiction, however periodised or defined, for students and faculty at Birkbeck and beyond. We aim to reach the parts other reading groups don't by attempting to map a way through late 20th and early 21st century literature and culture. Through focused readings of selected texts, alongside critical materials, we hope to provide a valuable forum for people working in or with an interest in the field. We're especially interested in getting guest speakers, whether research students or lecturers, to lead sessions or present short papers for future meetings. Since establishing ourselves in the summer we have engaged with a broad spectrum of contemporary writing, from the literary neo-modernism of Tom McCarthy to the genre-splicing of Jonathan Lethem, from Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir to the postcolonial fiction of Patrick Neate. Future sessions are planned on Australian SF writer Greg Egan, Kelly Link's Gothic tales, and American writer Nicholson Baker.

For more details contact the convenors, Zara Dinnen and Tony Venezia (zara.dinnen@gmail.com and a.venezia@english.bbk.ac.uk). You can visit our group page at:

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/our-research/research_seminars/contemporary-fiction-seminar.

The Frivolous Now: November spawns a monster in the shape of an informal collaborative blog established by seminar regulars. The site is the brain(ier) child of the Contemporary Fiction Group at Birkbeck. It's without institutional affiliations and was started up by various members of the group with the intent of finding an online space to post all the extra writings, doodlings and notices that tend to float around on email. We are calling this site para-academic: it's not a site for academic publishing; it is a site for quality writing about anything and everything that interests us, and now you. We welcome contributions from friends and not-yet-made friends on the usual topics: art, literature, film, politics, culture at large. This will hopefully be a site for culture writ large. Visit us at **<http://frivolousnow.wordpress.com/>**. If you'd like to contribute you or have any questions about content please direct any hate mail to **frivolousnow@gmail.com**

Come and have a look. You know you want to.



Laydeez do Comics

...is a graphic novel reading group or forum with a focus on comic works based on life narrative, the drama of the domestic and the everyday. Launching the first meeting in July 2009 the group has been set up by illustrator Nicola Streeten and artist Sarah Lightman. As well as selecting favourite works to base discussion on, artists, academics and fans will be invited to speak. A platform for people to test new works and ideas or works in progress will also be included. There is a new wave of comic work that is more domestic than superheroes, and yet little space to discuss these books. Coming to the world of comics from art and illustration backgrounds, Nicola and Sarah became aware of this and felt they can't be alone in their passion for this type of work.

Cost: £1.50

EVERYONEmen and women.....WELCOME !

Anyone interested in these areas is welcome to come along and participate....or just come along, we'd love to meet you.

THE FORMAT: Invited guest speaker + q+a

Book discussion about comic book/graphic novel recommended by guest in advance

Open Space with 10 minute slots for people to present works/ideas

Each month the meetings are recorded by invited guest bloggers.

A lovely room in a trendy venue just off Brick Lane.

The Sewing Room

The Rag Factory

16-18 Heneage Street, London E1 5LJ

www.ragfactory.org.uk

Directions:

Nearest Tube: Aldgate East. Follow the exit which directs you to the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Turn LEFT out of the tube into Whitechapel High Street. Take the first left into Osborne Street and carry straight on into Brick Lane. Take the fourth turning on the right into Heneage Street and The Rag Factory is a little way up, on the right.

<http://www.nikjep.demon.co.uk/layindex.htm>

Comics/Book Shops around Bloomsbury

Cartoon Museum

35 Little Russell Street
London WC1A 2HH
020 7580 8155
<http://www.cartoonmuseum.org.whisky.webhoster.co.uk/site/>
Tottenham Court Road tube

Comicana

237 Shaftesbury Avenue
London WC2H 8EH
020 7836 5630
comicana.com
Tottenham Court Road tube

Forbidden Planet

179 Shaftesbury Avenue
London WC2H 8JR
020 7420 3666
forbiddenplanet.com
Tottenham Court Road tube

Gosh!

39 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3NZ
020 7636 1011
<http://goshlondon.blogspot.com/>
Tottenham Court Road tube

Megacity Comics

18 Inverness Street
Camden, London NW1 7HJ
020 7485 9320
megacitycomics.co.uk
Camden Town tube

Orbital Comics

8 Great Newport Street, London
WC2H 7JA
020 7240 0591
orbitalcomics.com
Leicester Square tube

Waterstone's

82 Gower Street
London WC1E 6EQ
020 7636 1577
Goodge Street tube

Foyles

113-119 Charing Cross Road
London WC2H 0EB
020 7437 5660
Tottenham Court Road tube

Blackwell's

100 Charing Cross Road WC2H 0JG
020 7292 5100
Tottenham Court Road tube

Book Warehouse

120 Southampton Row
Bloomsbury, London, WC1B 5AB
020 7242 1119

London Review Bookshop

14 Bury Place
London WC1A 2JL
020 7269 9030
<http://www.lrbshop.co.uk/>
Holborn/Tottenham Court Road tube

Skoobs Secondhand Books

off Marchmont St, 66 The Brunswick
Centre WC1N 1AE
020 7278 8760
<http://www.skoob.com/>