

## FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS: “Sites of Visual and Textual Innovation”

Instituto Franklin - Universidad de Alcalá  
 Alcalá de Henares, November 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

### CALL FOR PAPERS.

The International Conference on comics and graphic novels intends to be a space of reflection on the cultural, social, historical, and ideological dimensions of comics. With this in the background, the conference will focus on three main areas: a) the origins of comics; b) avant-garde and experimental narration; and c) biography and autobiography.

### The origins of comics

Every art has its myths, and the mythology of comics states that the first comic was “The Yellow Kid and his Phonograph”, published in 1896. The origins of comics are,



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however, an under-researched area, because any formal element we can identify in this strip can also be found in older works. Thus, the use of a sequence to represent movement is characteristic both of the French symbolist strips (1880's *Chat Noir* magazine) and of the “novels in pictures” by Rodolphe Töpffer (1830-1840s). The balloon was a common narrative device since the Renaissance, and strips dramatizing

conversations have been found by David Kunzle in magazines like *Fliegende Blätter*, or by Manuel Barrero in *La Charanga* and *Don Junípero*. Then, what are the formal or narrative elements that determine the use of the term “comics”? What are the advantages of a more inclusive or a more restrictive definition of “comics”? Is there anything that the predecessors of *Yellow Kid* can teach us? How are they related to modern comics?

### Avant-garde and experimental narration



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Today's comics, BDs, mangas and graphic novels display a wide range of narrative and artistic techniques which have enriched the medium beyond previous limits.

Some creators look back (Art Spiegelman said that “the future of comics is in their

past”) and they rescue those formal aspects which turned comics into a unique language. Many authors include key features of current cultural production like metafiction and they reflect upon the reception of comics and the artistic framework into which they fall. Others parody the autobiographical trend that has fed comics production in the last decades (Ruppert and Mulot’s *La Maison Close*) or experiment with performance (Spiegelman’s *Drawn to Death*). And in some cases, the labyrinthic *mise en page* and the non-linear narratives of certain works merge with the interactive kind of reading that cyberculture has helped to expand. These and other issues may be debated in those presentations interested in analysing the formal innovations of contemporary comics.

### Biography and autobiography.



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Since the publication of *Binky Brown meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972, Justin Green), the autobiographical genre has been one of the foremost trends, first in the underground comix scene, then in the graphic novel format. In fact, comics seem to be a particularly apt medium for the expression of personal experiences and self-confession since cartoonists can use their own hand-gestures to draw personal experiences. Proposals for this panel may consider the following topics: Do comics allow for a more direct relation between art and life?; In what ways authors of highly autobiographical graphic novels (Art Spiegelman, *Maus*; Antonio Altarriba, *El Arte de Volar*) re-create and negotiate autobiographical personas and identities?; How do theoretical developments in literary analysis, which consider identities to be fluid and multiple, affect the portrayal of the author’s identity in graphic novels and comics?; Autobiography and the margins (Pekar, *Crumb*...); To what extent is the author the real “leading force” in the creation of an autobiographical text?; Is an autobiographical text only the product of the author’s imagination in the case of comics and graphic novels?; Graphic novels as an outlet for what cannot be said (e.g. *Our Cancer Years*, *It’s a Bird...*, *Maus*, *In the Shadow of No Towers*).

Other possible issues of interest may be:

- Web-comics and the possible effects of hand-held electronic technology in comics.
- Mythology and sagas.
- Audiences and readership.
- Fan culture.

- Gender issues.
- History of the graphic novel.
- Censorship.
- Narratology.

All proposals should be submitted online. Each submission should include a 500-word proposal of the paper that is to be considered for presentation and a 200-word biographical sketch of the author(s), along with other relevant information included on the submission form.

The deadline for submitting proposals is **May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011**. Updated information will be available at the conference website.

Languages will be both English and Spanish.

The Conference will be held at the Instituto Franklin at the University of Alcalá, Spain, 10-12 November, 2011.

Contact information: [graphicnovel@institutofranklin.net](mailto:graphicnovel@institutofranklin.net) or see the conference website at <http://www.institutofranklin.net/en/conferences/graphic-novel>