

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH INTO GRAPHIC FORM

Class Time: Thursday 10.50 - 15.20

Co-working Lab (voluntary): Tuesday 15.30 - 17.20

Basis:

Built as an interdisciplinary lab, the course aims at introducing students to the language of comics, both as a conceptual framework and as a practical tool for production and dissemination of academic research. This class is an introduction to the hands-on making of comics. Students will engage in numerous in-class exercises and small projects in making comics alongside analysis of comics, in order to grow their understanding of how to communicate in comics and discover methods that best work for them.

General goals:

The course's objective is to develop a short (6 to 8 pages) comic based on each student's research. Over the course of six weeks of intensive discussion and production, the class aims to lead the students through the history of the medium, its narrative mechanism, the potentiality of visual content to develop a pragmatic approach to academic research, and its dissemination. Over the course of the 6 weeks through instructor-led in-class and at-home individual and collaborative exercises, students will learn basic methods of constructing a page, developing a narrative across multiple pages, and a variety of formal issues that go into the creation of comics.

Prerequisites:

- 1) A class on comics can seem daunting, especially if you are not used to drawing. At the very outset, allow me to underscore that comics are not about "good" drawing. They are about building compelling narratives. You don't have to be skilled at drawing—as Lynda Barry (who we will read) puts it, "You don't have to have any artistic skills to do this. You just need to be brave and sincere." Moreover, the class interprets "drawing" quite broadly—it can include diagramming and collaging (or whatever medium you want). We will see many examples where artists use basic stick figures and shapes to tell complex stories (see XKCD or Hyperbole and Half). Being able to draw, therefore, is NOT a prerequisite, effective communication through sequential art is not about good drawing skills.
- 2) Have a story in mind you want to transform into comics, this can come out of your fieldwork, archival research, a conceptual reflection, a piece of writing that you want to render graphically, or an idea. You need to come to the first class having decided what this story is as the class is to be built around developing it.
- 3) Having read McCloud "Making Comics" before the course. We will go over this each week in class but for you to have read the book ahead of time will be essential for the discussion (pdf is attached below).
- 4) Coming to class with a notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort and drawing tools of your choice: pencils, a blue crayon, ink, any kind of colors (watercolor, crayon, acrylic etc...), any digital device you are used to use for drawing.

Learning outcomes:

This class aims at providing the students with:

Theoretical and practical knowledge about comics as a medium;

Basic knowledge of the comic's elements, structure. And storytelling mechanism;

Practical experience based on a project on how to use the comics language in academic research and its dissemination.

Instructors:

The class will be led by Sara Fabbri, an award-winning comic artist and art director, and Claudio Sopranzetti, Associate Professor in the Sociology and Anthropology department. Together they co-authored the *King of Bangkok* (Toronto University Press 2021), a graphic novel based on ethnographic research in Thailand which won the 2021 Thai Editor Choice Award, the 2022 PROSE Best non-fictional graphic novel award of the Association of American Publisher, the INDIES Bronze medal for best Graphic Novel and was shortlisted for the Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing. The book is available in the CEU Library and downloadable on Moodle.

WEEK 1: Introduction to comics & come up with a story idea

- a. Comics as a language
- b. The ways to say it: the articulation of a binary system.
- c. How come are you already be able to read a comic?

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class drawing exercise 1: Everyone can read a “visual story”
- In-class drawing exercise 2: Show, don't tell - Ivan Brunetti exercise (J.D. Salinger classic, *The Catcher in the Rye*)

Class activity: pitch presentation of student's projects (5 mn each)

From idea to script – the whole journey

Overview of the steps required to develop the student's research into a comic script/storyboard/final page.

(Introduction: how we will delve into the process for the next classes)

Theoretical frontal lesson

Class activity: decision of potential collaborations between students, or/and start the individual work on the student's idea.

- a. What is the purpose of the story?
- b. Who are the characters?
- c. Who is the target?
- d. How can summarize the idea in 6/8 pages?

Readings:

Betty Edwards - Drawing on the right side of the brain – Chapter 1 and 2 and related exercises.

Will Eisner – Comics and sequential art – Chapter 1 and 2

Lynda Barry – Making Comics – intro and part 1 from page 1 to 43

WEEK 2: Comics: a language – From idea to subject

- a. What is a subject, analysis of the parts?
- b. Required key points.
- c. The Batman: example of subject writing

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class writing exercise 1: write a quick subject (15 min) from the suggested list.

The grammar of comics – frame and paneling : how to compose a single shot

- a. Images and text are interwoven.
- b. Write for comics required a specific grammar.
- c. Lingo

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class drawing exercise 1: frame as a window: from a piece of paper cut your own “window” and look around the class to frame a specific shot who represent your idea of power. Drawing it (8 min) The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class
- In-class drawing exercise 2: class divided into 3 groups, each groups must draw Sadness, Boredom, Waiting - choosing the frame more adequate. (5 min) The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class.

Class activity: starting to discuss in class how to transform the idea in subject, go through the process randomly choose 1 or 2 research from the class to discuss.

Readings:

Betty Edwards - Drawing on the right side of the brain – Chapter 3-4 and related exercises.

Lynda Barry – Making Comics – intro and part 1 from page 44 to 60

Scott McCloud - Making Comics – chapter 1

WEEK 3: Comics: a language – From subject to storyline

- a. Why do I need a storyline and what is it?
- b. From macro to micro: how to map the information.
- c. The King of Bangkok: storyline’s sample

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class writing exercise 1: write your own storyline from *The King of Bangkok* (Chapter 1) starting from a timeline. Then choose the form that suited you the mostly (15 min) The final work will be shown and discussed by the class

The grammar of comics – page layout and panel arrangement

- d. The grid: hierarchal or invisible
- e. Paneling thorough gutter
- f. Time and timing

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class drawing exercise 1 – part 1: papers, paper-tape and ink (or watercolor, or crayon, etc). Use the paper-tape to build an invisible grid of 9 panel, than use the ink (or color, or pencil) - in an abstract way - to represent the progression of your day (or the day before) (8 min). Individuate the more significant events.
- In-class drawing exercise 1 – part 2: try to reproduce the artwork giving particular space or shape to the key point previously pointed in order to emphasize the most significant events. (10 min). The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class
- In-class drawing exercise 1 – part 3: based on the structure, add text to the pages (5 min). The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class
- In-class drawing exercise 2: every student will have 4 pages of a random mute comics. With collages technique they must compose a meaningful original single page (15 min) - with or without text
- In-class drawing exercise 3: drawing a two-panel comics (two consequential action, two non-related shot, it's up to you). Now pass to your left classmate. Draw a third panel between the previous two. Pass to your classmate. Use again panel 1 and 2 and draw a sequence of 6 panel, using an invisible grid. Pass to your classmate. Use again panel 1 and 2 and draw a sequence of 6 panel, using a hierarchal grid). The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class (30 min)

Class activity: Public review of previous realized subject, choose among the class

Readings:

Betty Edwards - *Drawing on the right side of the brain* – Chapter 5-6 and related exercises.

Lynda Barry – *Making Comics* –from page 61 to 68 – from 72 to 75

Scott McCloud - *Making Comics* – chapter 2

Nick Soulanis – Grid and Gesture exercise - <https://spinweaveandcut.com/grids-gestures/>

WEEK 4: Comics: a language – From storyline to treatment - from treatment to script

- a. How to write a treatment (and why)
- b. How to compose a final script (method, templates)
- c. Analysis of a Marvel script (Marvel zombies Halloween by Fred Van Lente)

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class drawing exercise 1: drawing a single panel choose by Van Lente script (20 min). The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class. Confront your setting to Vitti artworks (the real Marvel drawer)

The grammar of comics – style and words

- d. How style can impact your story
- e. words-picture combination
- f. Dialogue, caption, voice over

Theoretical frontal lesson

- In-class drawing exercise 1: class divided into 3 groups, each group must color a given three-panel comics choose between three specific styles (horror, romance, noir). (8 min). The drawing will be shown and discussed by the class.
- In-class drawing exercise 2: reading of Sopranzetti' s article about Thai protest, analysis of Fabbri and Sopranzetti's two-page comics realize based on that article, find your personal key to interpret the same article, drawing a two-pages comics (45 min)

Reference: Matt Madden, 99 Ways to Tell a Story – Andrei Molotiu, Abstract comics

Class activity: Collective review of previous realized subject, choose among the class

Readings:

Betty Edwards - Drawing on the right side of the brain – Chapter 5-6 and related exercises.

Lynda Barry – Making Comics –from page 124 to 136 - 154 to 161

Scott McCloud - Making Comics – chapter 3

WEEK 5: The data collection – Narrative Arch and Conclusions

- a. On the field
- b. Visual archive
- c. Documents, books, reading and films

Theoretical frontal lesson

Class activity: finishing of the script, start to setting the storyboard or final pages.

Note: This and the following class are extremely practice. Instead of a lecture followed by discussion and exercises, we will straight away go into a conversation about our script, how to break it down in our pages and start setting the storyboard (or the pencils).

There will be no more assignments.

WEEK 6: *Work on academic research - Review section*

Class activity: review of the work in progress, finishing the whole comics, and discuss your final projects.