

Class 4b

## The Stories We Play: Comics, Animation, Video Games

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### Outline

- Playing stories: reception vs. configuration
- How we configure: the communal construction of context knowledge
- Modes and media: comics as an example
- Intertextuality

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### Playing Stories

#### Reception vs. Configuration

- Two models of interacting with texts
  - Reception – the “reader” observes the outcomes
  - Configuration – the “reader” determines the outcomes
- Sacred texts pose unique issues
  - How is it sacred when the medium is common (phone, tablet)
  - How is it sacred when it can be dissociated from its context (by cutting and pasting, streaming)
  - Who has the authority to determine meaning anymore?

*As we answer these questions, we form communities with people who answer them in similar ways.*

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## Playing Stories

### How Do We Configure Meaning?

- Do we configure meaning alone?
  - Not exactly
  - First, there's our relationship to the original author/text/reader



- Second, there's been a lot of other people who've interpreted before us
- Thus, we always interpret as part of pre-existing interpretive communities
- Sometimes we choose them

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## Playing Stories

### The Meanings that Configure Us

As products of culture, texts always draw on their predecessors, be it through their choice of topic, genre or style

Their audience recognizes these choices when it reads or watches a text and (usually) classifies it accordingly.

[To interpret,] audiences draw on their previous experience with media texts, recalling character types, iconography, speech styles or standard situations from their share in popular cultural memory and using these as context knowledge.

Kukkonen, "Popular Cultural Memory," 261

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## Context Knowledge

### Definition

Knowledge of the codes, conventions and values in popular cultural memory that we use to understand new texts.

These new texts are built on prior texts that have shaped the cultural memory.

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## Context Knowledge

### Examples

How do we know who the "good people" are in a book, film or cartoon? How is evil marked?

Your example of a fairy tale, fantasy, comic, or animated film, and a convention in the animation that you immediately understand without being told. How do you know that?

- character types
  - standard situations
  - genre conventions
  - discourse types
  - icons
- These codes/conventions are objectified
- Then they are reconstructed by a new author




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## Playing Stories

### How Do We Configure Meaning?

- In addition to codes, we use MODES
  - Modes are socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning
    - speech
    - image
    - gaze
    - posture
    - gesture
    - writing
  - Each mode has potential uses, stemming from the perceivable properties of the object (these are called "affordances").
- The media through which we communicate often use multiple modes (multimodality), and the MEDIA shape interpretation too



Gunther Kress  
b.1940

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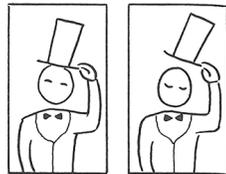
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## The Comic Medium

### Definitions

Comics are juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.



What "modes" do comics use?

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### The Comic Medium Affordances

- Abstraction allows
  - universality
  - self-referentiality
- Image and gesture
- Text (as image and word)
- Spatial play
- Sequence
- Closure: the gaps we fill




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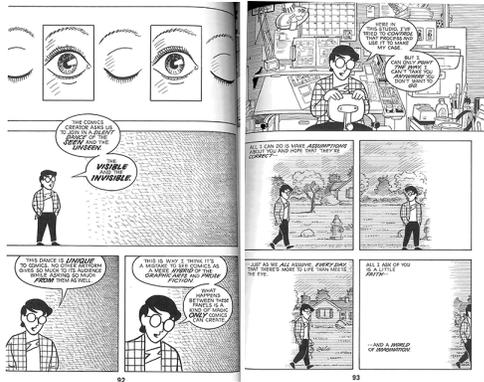
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### Closure - YOU Configure the Meaning




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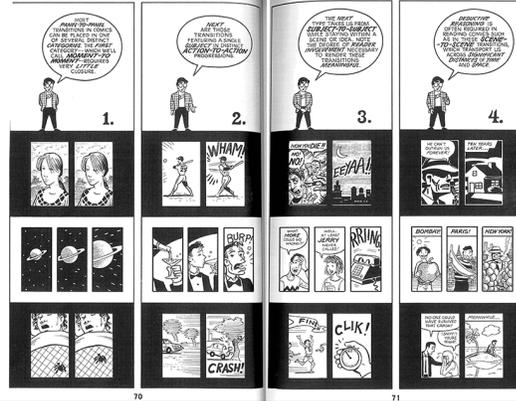
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### Sequence




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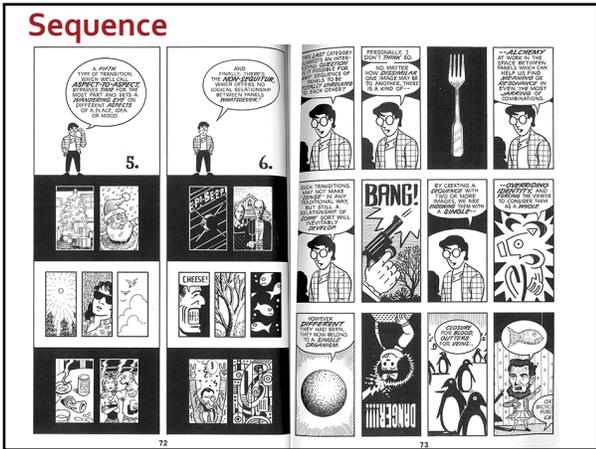
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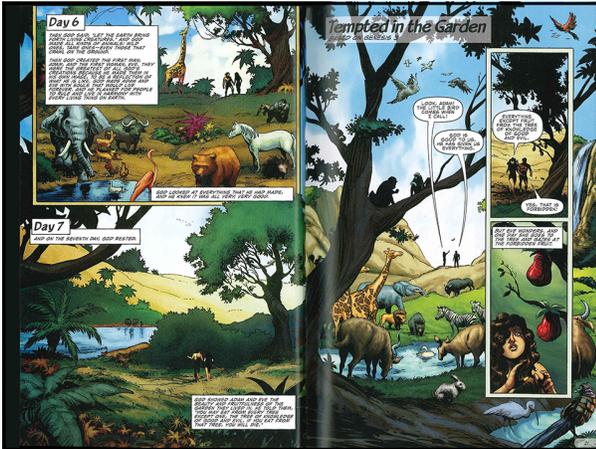
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**Intertextuality**  
Cultural Memory at Play

- Intertextuality is the reference to another, separate and distinct, text within a text.
- In the postmodern era, it refers to combining samples of previously published text to form a new and original work ("memes")

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## Intertextuality Cultural Memory at Play

- An evil wizard, long thought dead, returns to bring havoc and chaos to the world. Only the descendant of his most hated enemy can stop him.
- A good wizard walks down a road extinguishing street lamps as he goes.
- Magic users make good their escape using a bewitched flying car.
- A child is sent to a school of witchcraft to be trained in the mystic arts.
  
- A well meaning man keeps a giant Spider as a pet.
- An evil wizard cannot be killed while his soul is hidden elsewhere.
- There is a mirror that shows your heart's desire.
  
- An unpopular teacher turns out to be a hero.



Len Hazel, "The Joys of Intertextuality: Recycling an Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Flash Fiction Chronicles Blog* (26 September 2013), online, <http://www.everydayfiction.com/flashfictionblog/the-joys-of-intertextuality/>, accessed 14, October 2015.

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