



*The Journal of
Multimodal Rhetorics*

Vol. 3, Issue 1

**Special Issue: Comics and/as
Rhetoric**

Editor's Introduction

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In “The Critique of Everyday Life,” their introductory essay to the first issue of *The Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, Christina V. Cedillo and M. Melissa Elston write, “Multimodal practices not only facilitate communication; they also transmit values and traditions.” Like other multimodal texts, comics act as such sites of communication and complex rhetorical practice, with meanings, values, and traditions continuously negotiated between comics creators, publishers, and readers. Comics provide a rich terrain through which to explore the ways in which multimodal rhetorics and literacies are and can be enacted in everyday life.

This intersection of comics and rhetoric is an area of research that has not, as yet, been explored as much as it needs to be. This special issue of *The Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics* is an attempt to push the conversation on comics and rhetoric forward by presenting five pieces of scholarship that examine the rhetorical uses of comics and the rhetoric surrounding comics in order to think through important questions of multimodality and rhetorical theory. These essays address not only the rhetorical purposes for which comics have been used, but also their rhetorical situations and audiences.

We open with Rachel Rys’s “Powerful Marginality: Feminist Scholarship Through Comics,” a piece of scholarship in comics form that showcases the affordances of comics as part of a scholar’s available means of creating and communicating knowledge. In both its argument and form Rys’s work presents a convincing case for the production of scholarship in comics form. In “Disidentification, Disorientation, and Disruption: Queer Multimodal Rhetoric in Queer Comics,” Rachel Ryerson demonstrates how comics can be used as a site for a multimodal queer rhetorics that disrupt normative rhetorics and provide a space for the rhetorical construction of queer identity. Jessica Boykin’s “Filling in the Gutters: Graphic Biographies Disrupting Dominant Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement” examines specific comics—*King*, *March*, and *Malcolm X*—as a way to examine the political rhetorics they present and to show how they can contribute to a re-examination of specific Civil Rights figures through the application of a critical multimodal literacy. Michael Faris, in “Sex-Education Comics: Feminist and Queer Approaches to Alternative Sex Education,” shows how sex-education comics can teach sex and sexuality as civic and relational practices, rather than merely as technical information. In doing so, Faris shows that graphic medicine can act as a form of civic rhetoric as it engages in the rhetorical creation of knowledge. Finally, Tara Hembrough’s

“Rural and Native American Students’ Utilization of Autobiographical Comic Strips to Explore Their Identities through Digital Storytelling in the Multimodal Writing Classroom” presents a case study of her own classroom to examine the inclusion of making of comics in the composition classroom. She convincingly argues that such an inclusion not only increases multimodal literacy, but also contributes to the rhetorical construction of identity, especially for marginalized students.

Taken together, these essays address the important question: what if we think about the processes of creating and reading comics as fundamentally rhetorical? In presenting these essays, my hope is that we can begin to explore how comics can complicate our ideas of rhetoric and how rhetoric can complicate our ideas about comics.