October 14, 2014

* Comic Books & Ideology
  + (Critical visual analysis of 1000 words related to your own research topic.)
  + Key terms: comic books, ideology, history, etc.
  + Ethnicity, gender, war and propaganda
  + What’s ideology?
    - A set of sense-making ideas about how the world works. They aren’t hidden. They are composed of taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the social world works.
    - Ex: A weather forecaster forecasts a great day: sunny. However, not everybody will think that sunny = great. That assumption is ideological.
    - Why should we care about ideology?
    - Ideology is intertwined with issues of power. Those who benefit from a dominant idea often wield power in society.
    - Ideologies are perpetuated through a number of institutions in society including mass media
    - Comics are produced by individuals or groups of individuals who bring their own pre-existing ideas to a work
    - Whether intentionally or unintentionally the work of comic book creators embodies elements of their ideologies.
    - Preferred Reading: When the creators intent matches the reader’s understanding of the message
    - Oppositional Readings: when the creators intent does not match the reader’s understanding of the message
    - Negotiated Readings: where some ideological assumptions are accepted, and others are rejected.
  + What is Propaganda then?
    - (Ideology that propels something; it “works”)
    - Definitions: A series of related communication acts tat spread to a particular interpretation of and event. Propaganda tries to reach a large audience though use of mass media. Often manipulative in nature.
    - Comics and propaganda:
    - Propaganda works best when audiences are NOT aware that they are exposed to it.
    - Comics are a perfect medium to address contentious subjects, because the word makes people drop their guard; it is expected to be funny, light, and kid friendly.
    - Perception of propaganda is very subjective. If we perceive that a comic book is advocating and ideology we do not support, we are likely to view it as propaganda.
    - Some of the most blatant propaganda is produced during times of conflict (military or political)
  + Superheroes in times of war
    - War comics
    - Wrold war II: Simplistic depiction of war, no superheroes, the “good guys” always achieve victory.
    - A few stories might detail an individual soldier overcoming inner conflict before engaging in an act of courage.
    - After the simplicity of WWII many characters went on to opposing the threat of invasion and tyranny from unnamed aggressor nations, dictator nations, and people’s dictatorships. WWII —> Cold war.
    - Correlation between war comics and sci-fi
    - Anti-war comics
    - Harvey Kurtzman is the earliest anti-war creator for his work on EC Comics’ Frontline Combat (1951-1954) and Two Fisted Tales (1950-1955)
    - Majority of the stories took place in the Korean War
    - Kurtzman resisted glorifying war and using racist stereotypes; used death to indicate the futility and horror of war.
    - Insisted in his stories that the enemy is as human as ourselves.
    - Government produced comic books
  + Ideology & Propaganda
  + Representation
    - Representation is always infected with ideas; it’s an “idea” of something or someone. It’s never simply a “copy”. It always has meaning.
    - Ideology serves the interest of the dominant group in a society by defining their role in relation to other (less powerful) members of the society.
    - Subordinate groups in an ideology are often portrayed in popular culture as “The Other”; designation that makes them seem strange, unusual, and distant.
    - Definition through negation: “We know what we are by labelling what we are not”.
    - As those definitions are repeated (in mass media) over time, they become harder to dismiss.
    - “Representation” is central to exploring ideology in mass media.
    - Women in Comics: (of victimization and hyper-sexualization: refrigerators & cheesecake)
    - 1999: Gail Simone posted a list outlining a number of female leads & supporting characters who had been maimed in mainstream comics.
    - Titles the list “women in refrigerators” in reference to Green Lantern #54 (1995)
    - Dead men defrosting
      * Ron Marz: “To me the real difference is less male-female than main character-supporting character. In most cases, the main characters who support their own books are male. The supporting characters are the ones who suffer. A lot of supporting characters are female.”
      * In response John Bartol (WiR site editor) wrote an article entitled “Dead Men Defrosting
      * When male heroes are
  + Victimization or Plot Device
    - Cheesecake?
    - Hyper-sexualization of women in mainstream comics
    - Since the 1990s - hyper-sexualization has become especially pronounced in mainstream (as well as many indy comics).
    - Cheesecake - the depiction of women in highly suggestive clothing or poses, often to the level of anatomical impossibility.
* *(There was a pretty big debate between students at this point as to why “cheesecake” was so big in comics. One person said the point of it was to draw people to read it; it makes comics interesting; without it people wouldn’t read them. The cheesecake is supposed to compensate for not being real-life (“3D”). [They made great pains to say they didn’t agree with it, that they know many women who felt affected in their self-esteem by such images, but never-the-less that was their explanation “why” cheesecake existed.] Members of the class heavily disagreed, asking why we need images of characters to be tantalizing or attractive for us to take them seriously? Why do we need our teachers of morality to be “sexy” for people to want to read about them? It became a little heated with a lot of interrupting each other. Aoife had to step in and change the focus.)*
* *(Back to slideshow notes:)*
  + Why?
    - Ethnicity
    - African-American Representation
    - Earliest depictions almost always shaped by racist stereotypes. - The interests of the white majority being served by existing representations.
    - Harsh caricatures - ignorant savages in need of enlightenment by a white hero or comic relief in an all white cast.
    - After WWII, depictions of African-Americans all but disappeared; mostly white creators tried to figure out how to portray minorities without relying on insulting stereotypes.
* Writing Workshop:
  + Key ideologies in the comic books we saw.
    - White/western powers/men were dominant and “good”.
    - We can assume the industry was mainly white-male dominated in terms of creators
    - Society was vastly patriarchal.
    - Narratives were simple; good vs. Evil
    - “Sex sells”, perhaps?
    - They were predominantly power fantasies (straight, cis, white, male power fantasies)
    - Focus on physical violence as a means of plot device, story progression, and conflict resolution
    - That violence is excusable as long as it is good fighting evil; the ends justify the means
    - Minorities or subordinate groups in society were portrayed as strange, different, or dangerous; which alienates those people.
  + My observations (Harvey Kurtzman’s comic page in handout):
    - The work is black and white;
    - Dynamic compositions with a lot of movement.
    - Heavy lines delineate the characters, with harsh black shading; lots of contrast and subsequent drama.
    - Lines are full of life; they are tight, but not realistic. The subtle deforming and “cartooning” of the figures heightens the emotional tension.
    - The composition works to keep your eye on the most important elements; the person’s leg points to the helicopter, the leg points to the soldier in question, the lines of action emphasize the movement of the characters and makes the most important elements obvious.
    - Excellent use of interesting negative shapes to make strong silhouettes that clearly indicate body language and action.
    - Subtle amounts of dry-brush texture emphasizes the gritty reality of the scene; it is not 100% clean-cut.
    - We don’t get a very great sense of grand space; the biggest space is the sky, emphasizing the importance of the helicopter for escape and safety. The ground is de-emphasized, almost claustrophobic; we do not see the aggressors, but the tight focus helps to imply that they were just beyond the edges of the panel, ever threatening. This serves to make the main character appear trapped, stuck, in danger, when he is unable to leave on the helicopter.
  + Formulating my main claim:
    - The compositional elements create an emphasis on the sky, which becomes a symbol of safety and freedom, while the ground is relatively claustrophobic and therefore dangerous.
    - Harvey Kurtzman was a master at composition, using staging and layout to effectively communicate the emotional tensions of the scenes he illustrated.
  + How do the formal elements impact the meaning of the artwork?
    - There is a dearth of space in the image; all of the feeling of space is taken up with the sky. We see very little of the land or its horizon; the sky takes up the majority of the composition, while the land is de-emphasized. This makes the land feel incredibly claustrophobic; we don’t know what’s happening just beyond the edges of the panel; danger likely lurks there. There is no sense of space, nowhere to run. The sky, with its space, becomes the symbol for safety and freedom. It was the character’s salvation.
  + Relate the work to other work you have studied:
  + Support your claim with visual details:
  + (Etc.; it’s all on the handout.)

GROUP PRESENTATION:

* National Identity (Group I)
  + Annie Pootoonook, “Eating Seal at Home”, 2001.
    - There is a preconceived notion of what first nations art is; poles, stylized figures, etc. But this is not necessarily true in the fine art aspect.
    - Scenes of life at home; contemporary scenes of family and life.
  + “Memories of My Life: Breaking Bottles”, 2001/02
    - Spousal abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. That exists in Native societies
    - This is her national identity, as it exists with the effects of colonialism.
  + Jane Ash Poitras, “Deer Dancers”
    - Combines First nations identity into contemporary artwork. Bright, modern colour schemes with images of indiginous peoples.
  + “Dalles Shaman”
    - They exist in our contemporary art world; they aren’t a frozen idea of a lost time. This is their way of carving out their own identity.
  + Hishikawa Moronobu, “Pheasants”, 1615-1868
    - Japan developed their own style after isolation from China.
    - Wood block print with ink that was affordable and reproduceability.
  + Utagawa Kuniyoshi, “Tametomo and his Son Rescued by Tengu”, 1838-1852
    - Religious ideas
  + Aya Kato, “Yamatano orochi”, 2004
    - Emphasis on flatness and bold contrast and tone. Edo period; ukiyo-e, etc. Things we’d consider “fantasy” or “sublime”, hers is a gothic approach.
  + Takashi Murakami, “Red Demon and Blue Demon with 48 Arhats”. 2013
    - Helped to pioneer the “superflat” movement. Abstraction of space, and clearly defined forms, but also interacts with commercial art subjects and expectations; it is a progressive evolution.
  + Late July, 1918, British Vogue cover by Helen Dryden
    - Very French style and iconography
    - Represents end-of-war optimism; red blue and white; rooster an unofficial symbol of France.
    - Even though this is a British publication, they are presenting France’s national identity, celebrating the victory of the allied powers.
  + May 1, 1928, American Vogue cover by Georges Lepape
    - Bold style, art deco, emerged from the war in France, became a revolutionary international style. Characterized by flat shapes, geometric shapes, and straight lines. It was direct correlation to commercialism, and worked well with American culture at the time.
    - “Golden age” of post-war American culture; jazz age; and Manhattan, America on top of fashion, architecture and industry is shown in this image.
  + Advertisement for Macy’s, 1929
    - Art deco, stylistic forms
    - A mode of commerce art, linked to consumer culture.
    - Was very commercial at the time.
    - Photography was invented long before this, but they were still painted thanks to the very sought after art deco style.
  + Dallas Society of Visual Communications Ad, by Jon Flaming, Steven Guarnaccia.
    - During post-modernism a shift from National Identity to Personal identity.
    - Questions everything; seeks open interpretations.
    - 1980s-1990s you can associate with post-modern art
    - Post-modern art is not consistent; there is no “one style” of post-modern art. All styles were used by post-modern artists.
    - There is a shift from a national identity to a global identity.
  + Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis, 2000.
    - Westernization; shows the conflict between two different cultures, particularly in Iran, where people tried to force out the Western influence in the country.
    - Shows her growing up as a young girl and her struggle of her identity as a Muslim woman and her western culture not being permitted; family struggles. They were happy with the muslim revolution, but the shift from one extreme to the other still caused a massive amount of fear.
  + “A Fair Wind”, 1932, by Miki Suizan.
    - Art deco reaches Japan, and shows western influence. Modern girls were dressed very Western. Also clash of Japanese and Western cultures with a shift away from western ideas during the intense Nationalism of WWII.
  + 50’s Pin-up Illustrations
    - Sexualization is a part of the national identity of westerners.
    - Common wih western societies is how we over-sexualize people, especially women.
    - These 1950 pin-ups were everywhere; in every club house, locker room, office, etc.
    - Meant to revolve around changing acceptance of sexuality in society
    - And were thought to be very progressive and celebrated
    - But they were also criticized for sexualizing women and causing unfair standards of beauty to enter the cultural lexicon.
    - Part of our identity is that we are sexually free; men and women are on equal grounds, theoretically, in our society.
  + “Sunstone” Comic
  + Hokusai, woodblock print, 1814
    - “Tentacle porn” has become a bit of a western idea of Japanese identity. Westerners can “judge” japan for these sexual ideas; in the story the sex was very consensual, but it was actually supposed to be a tender scene. Nowadays, this type of imagery is often used for much less wholesome reasons.
    - In Japan, this type of pornography was acceptable because penises couldn’t be shown in art at the time; it is strange to Western eyes.
  + Illustration by Malcolm Evans
    - [Political cartoon, showing two women, one in a bikini and one in a full-body covering, the former saying “Everything covered but her eyes, what a cruel male-dominated culture!” and the latter saying “Nothing covered but her eyes, what a cruel male-dominated culture!”]
    - National identity and values are a matter of perspective. What is acceptable for one may not be acceptable for another.

Class discussion:

* Marginalized people’s identities are often inextricably linked to the historical assumptions of their culture. It is difficult for people to escape those antiquated ideas of their culture and move on and create new identities for themselves in society.
* We’re not really in a national age anymore; we’re more susceptible to global concerns than national, now. Most big corporations are global. There isn’t a “Canadian art style”. It’s really hard to quantify differences in culture; “Eastern” and “Western” encompasses so much.
* Sometimes contemporary national movements these days are concerned with “we are NOT this”; identifying what they are not like to try to describe who they are.
* National identity is very difficult to identify today. Global identity is more important, as well as personal identity.
* Culturally, what kind of practices will come out of globalized conflicts and ideas? (Ex. Hong Kong; this isn’t a nationalistic(nation-wide) rebellion. It’s a bunch of students and young people; hardly the majority of the population. How will that affect their cultural identity?)