Multimodal Composition and the Rhetoric of Comics:
A Study of Comics Teams in Collaboration

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Abstract

The field of writing studies has long inquired about how writers engage in individualized writing processes. As an extension of this inquiry, contemporary scholarship in writing studies began to study collaborative writing through the understanding of writing as a social act. Our understanding of writing processes and collaborative writing has expanded through studies of writing as it occurs in the academy, the workplace, and extracurricular settings. Still, to a large extent, inquiries about writing processes and collaborative writing activity centered on alphabetic texts and focused on writers. Rarely do studies engage—in addition to writers—artists and designers as authors in the collaborative writing process. Composing, as understood by scholars and teachers of writing, is changing due to technological shifts in media and yet, as a field, we have failed to question multimodal composing as an individual or collaborative process.

To extend previous writing studies scholarship, this dissertation engages qualitative case study methodology to explore three unique multimodal collaborations of comics authors. As a visual rhetoric scholar with a personal focus on teaching students about composing in all media, I am drawn to asking questions about *how* arguments are composed using multimodal means. My personal and scholarly interest in comics led to inquiries about how comics are composed and initial research found that comics are often composed in collaboration, with writers and artists who with them carry multiple and varying literacies (alphabetic text, visual, spatial, etc.). Comics provide a rich subject of study to address this inquiry because of their inherently multimodal nature as a medium that incorporates both word and picture in diverse combinations and for a variety of rhetorical purposes. For this study, I have chosen to focus on

comics texts that differ in terms of subject matter, genre, and collaborative makeup in order to examine multimodal collaborations and create distinct cases. Through three cases of multimodal collaboration—*Understanding Rhetoric*, the Cheo comics, and *Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline*—this study argues for a further complication of our field's understanding of writing processes and collaborative composing.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation and all of the work that went into it to my Mom and Dad, Janet and Robert Scanlon. Thank you for the love you have given me that allowed me to have enough confidence in myself to take on a project like this. I love you.

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Chapter 1
Introduction and Historical Contexts of Comics in the United States

The most important texts in a culture—our laws, policies, mission statements, histories, and popular fictions—are inevitably collaboratively produced documents. These texts determine the purposes, values, and actions of individuals, communities, and organizations. An annual report will touch many desks/computer screens before it is ever seen by the decision-making body which will approve the next year's budget and secure another year of funding. A poster advertises a visiting speaker for an academic department but also represents the identity of the department and so may be planned by one individual, designed by another, and must also seek approval by the Department Chair before it is displayed. A civic organization operates through texts and documents, each collaboratively produced. Its newsletter has editors and communication consultants which write/edit a majority of its content, but a message from the organization's president is also included, so that the newsletter becomes the collective voice of the organization and a way for the organization to maintain a unified identity.

Of late, technological advances in production and distribution have cultivated an interest in and an ability to produce texts that are increasingly multimodal in nature—advertisements, comic books, websites, computer interfaces, multimedia entertainment, etc.—and have resulted in more images in broader, more familiar modes or contexts. The sub-discipline of visual rhetoric is surely a testament to an exploration of how visual argumentation and increasingly multimodal writing has become pervasive as of late: document design in genres of professional communication (Hocks, Kostelnick and Hassett, Brumberger), the role of visuals in the rhetoric of advertising (Barthes, Enos, Bernhardt), the image as an ideological or cultural artifact (Tagg, George, McCallister et al.), and even the image/text interdependence that creates visual narrative in forms such as comic strips, longer comic book works, and the new genre of the graphic novel (Mitchell, McCloud, Versaci).

Within the field's foundational research interest in composing processes and the negotiations of collaborative writing, researchers looked closely at the collaborative processes through which texts are read and produced. Now, as texts take on new forms and modes, given the potentially far-reaching and long-term effects of collaboratively composed texts, we continue to seek an understanding of how visual and textual collaborators work together to produce uniquely multimodal texts. After all, both constitutions and comic books can drive the purposes, values, and actions of individuals, communities, organizations, and cultures for years to come.

As a visual rhetoric scholar with a personal focus on teaching students about composing in all media, I am drawn to asking questions about *how* arguments are composed using multimodal means. My personal and scholarly interest in comics led to inquiries about how comics are composed and initial research found that comics are often composed in collaboration, with writers and artists who with them carry multiple and varying literacies (alphabetic text, visual, spatial, etc.). Composing, as understood by scholars and teachers of writing, is changing due to technological shifts in media and yet, as a field, we have failed to question multimodal composing as an individual or collaborative process. My research asks, What can be learned by studying the collaborative multimodal composing processes of comics authors? Comics provide a rich subject of study to address this inquiry because of their inherently multimodal nature as a medium that incorporates both word and picture in diverse combinations and for a variety of rhetorical purposes.

1.1 Multimodal Texts: Comics and Literacies

Considerations of the comic as imagetext[1]—interdependent combination of the word and the picture—allow writing studies, as a field, to explode the false dichotomy of words and pictures. Most important to this study, the comics medium instead allows us to identify the different kinds of work each can do and the unique work they can do *together*.

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[1] The use of the term *imagetext* is purposeful. It was first articulated by W.J.T. Mitchell as a way to conceive of the word and picture as inseparable in discussions of the formal and rhetorical properties of comics.

W.J.T. Mitchell's theories of the imagetext posit that word and image are both interpretive and can achieve a multiplicity of meanings when used in relation to one another, a relationship which "reflects, within the realm of representation, signification, and communication, the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings" (43). For Mitchell, employing word and image in an interdependent manner reaches the highest rhetorical potential: "Effective rhetoric is characteristically defined as a two-pronged strategy of verbal/visual persuasion, showing while it tells, illustrating its claims with powerful examples, asking the listener to *see* and not merely *hear* the orator's point" (Mitchell qtd. Varnum and Gibbons x). Mitchell's theory draws upon the work of German 18th century philosopher and art critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing whose contribution to the age old debate about visual representation describes painting as a medium which "us[es] forms and colors in space" and poetry as one which can "articulate sounds in time" (95). Lessing's analogy has significant implications for a medium like comics which engages both colors and sounds in space and time to formulate a visual narrative complete with representations of aural elements through the use of formal features like world bubbles, lettering, and the like. These formal features are dynamic and change with the genre of the comic, but nonetheless, reading comics relies on the ability to interpret the imagetext. Charles Hatfield describes this process of reading a comic, admitting that perhaps

> [f]rom a reader's viewpoint, comics would seem to be radically fragmented and unstable.
> I submit that this is their great strength: comic art is composed of several kinds of
> *tension*, in which various ways of reading—various interpretive options and
> potentialities—must be played against each other. If this is so, readers must call upon
> different reading strategies, or interpretive schema, than they would use in their reading
> of conventional written text (36).

Hatfield argues that comics' attempts to collapse the dichotomy between pictures and words is the medium's strength, for, "[w]e continue to distinguish between the function of words and the

function of images, despite the fact that comics continually work to destabilize this very distinction. This tension between codes is fundamental to the art form" (37). This tension between codes (word and image) has been explored extensively in comics studies scholarship.

In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud describes the decoding process through a concept called closure, the "phenomenon of *observing the parts* but *perceiving the whole*" (63, emphasis original). For McCloud this aspect of decoding is essential for comics readership, because comics are a "medium where the audience is a willing and conscious *collaborator* and closure is the agent of *change*, *time,* and *motion*" (65, emphasis original). Using the gutter, the space between panels, "comics panels **fracture** both **time** and **space**, offering a **jagged staccato rhythm** of **unconnected moments**. But closure allows us to **connect** these moments and **mentally construct** a **continuous, unified reality**" (67, emphasis original).

Dale Jacobs' work, the first comics scholarship to be published in *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*, focuses on the literacy skills readers must develop in order to make meaning from the multimodal form. In "*The Man Called Nova*: Comics as Sponsors of Multimodal Literacy," Jacobs explores the work of comics, saying "[C]omics are a rhetorical genre, comics are multimodal texts, and comics are both an order of discourse and discrete discursive events. As cultural artifacts, sites of literacy, means of communication, discursive events and practices, sites of imaginative interplay, and sponsors of literacy [. . .]" (181-182). He draws both from personal experience and literacy theorist Deborah Brandt in making this claim: "Whether Marvel, DC, Archie, Harvey, or Gold Key, comics were a major site of literate practice, where we learned and practiced not only print literacy but also, perhaps more importantly, multimodal literacy—the ability to create meaning with and from texts that operate in print form and in some combination of visual, audio, and spatial forms as well." (181). And entertainment is not necessarily the only primary end in comics publication. Increasingly, we are seeing comics and other visual narrative media being used for pedagogical ends both within (*Understanding Rhetoric* for first-year students) and outside of the classroom (the Cheo

comics for construction workers to learn about safety on the job). No longer are comics seen as "stepping stones" to higher-level verbal literacies, but complex media that require an altogether new pedagogy of multimodal literacies in order to compose and consume.

What was once chastised for its assault on literate acts through its simplicity, comics are now viewed by contemporary scholarship like Jacobs' in order to identify the ways in which multimodal literate acts are incredibly complex. Jacobs' argument for the multimodal literacies of comic book readers is rooted in the complexities of the comics form, complexities which Scott McCloud attempted to parse out in *Understanding Comics*. Comics cannot fully be "read" until the reader knows the vocabulary of comics, can identify its interplay of words and pictures, and can speak to the parts which make up the visually-dominant whole. Readers must be familiar with physics (space and time), human anatomy (facial and bodily expression), human psychology (inward and outward expressions of emotion), art history (specifically representational, iconic, and abstract art) and finally, the role of words and letters as symbols/signifiers, the most abstract art form of all. McCloud attempts a taxonomy of the potential combinations of image/text interplay: 1) word specific in which "pictures *illustrate*, but don't significantly add to a largely *complete* text;" 2) picture specific in which "words do little more than add a *soundtrack* to a visually told sequence;" 3) duo-specific "in which both words and pictures send essentially the *same message*;" 4) additive in which "words *amplify* or *elaborate* on an image or *vice versa*;" 5) parallel combinations in which "words and pictures seems to follow very different courses—without *intersecting*;" 6) montage "where words are treated as integral *parts* of the picture;" and 7) interdependent "where words and pictures go *hand in hand* to convey an idea that neither could convey *alone*" (153-5, emphasis original). McCloud, and many comics scholars privilege the interdependent combination of words and pictures because its effect is a multimodality unique to the comics medium. As McCloud puts it, the imagetext, or interdependent combinations

aren't always an *equal balance* through and may fall *anywhere* on a scale between [the

two]. Generally speaking, the more is said with *words*, the more the pictures can be freed

to go exploring and vice versa. In comics at its *best*, words and pictures are like *partners*

in a *dance* and each one takes turns *leading*. When *both* partners try to lead, the

competition can *subvert* the overall goals....But when these partners *know* their roles—

and *support* each other's *strengths*—comics can match *any* of the art forms it draws so

much of its strength from. (155-6, emphasis original)

McCloud's work in *Understanding Comics* was monumental for comics readers and writers

because his take on visual/verbal collaboration allowed a new appreciation for the medium to

emerge out of a more exclusive comics readership toward a broader public. Similarly, other

scholars have been investigating the rhetorically powerful combinations that emerge from

multimodal texts.

In a similar investigation of multimodality, Susan Hagan sought to identify the ways in

which image and text can "collaborate" to produce what she calls "untapped rhetorical

opportunities" (49). She identified four types of collaboration (between image and text) all

varying in level of relationship and weight of meaning on either image, text, or both. This tight

collaboration, which she calls interweaving but which I call imagetext, is the type usually

employed in the comic and is recognized by the complete interdependence of image and text so

that varying levels of meaning can be applied to the image or to the text, but neither can operate

independently.

Jacobs' lens of multimodality, McCloud's theoretical taxonomy of word/picture

combinations, and Hagan's views of visual and verbal collaboration in general, collectively

demonstrate just how complex the comics medium can be—for readers and writers alike. And,

while literacy studies' focus has been on the consumption of comics, interest in writing studies

can equally be granted to the production of comics and other multimodal texts.

While comics studies has clearly interrogated the meaning making processes of comics readers, literature on the composing processes of comics authors has received significantly less treatment. The collaborative composing process of comics is certainly worth exploration for its possible implications for readers and scholars of comics, and readers and scholars of writing studies scholarship. Among these implications is a better understanding of the ways in which multimodal texts are composed collaboratively, a great contribution to both writing process and collaborative writing research. For comics, this study may remind comics readers and scholars of the myriad of ways in which comics are composed collaboratively—a reminder that is essential in an age dominated by the assembly line processes of The Big Two, DC Comics and Marvel Comics.

When I sought to conduct a study of the collaborative multimodal composing processes of comics authors, I anticipated being able to find literature that, while perhaps not choosing to focus entirely on the topic, would at least nod to the complex process of making a comic. I was pleased to find the book *Envisioning Collaboration: Group Verbal-Visual Composing in a System of Creativity* from Geoffrey Cross, Professor of English at the University of Louisville. Cross' study of advertising agency artists and writers engaged many of the same inquiries I had been posing about how writers and artists communicate and how exactly they bring together their unique literacies to produce multimodal texts. I owe a great deal to Dr. Cross, for I leant on his book frequently as I designed my study. I also read and reread the work of Jeffrey Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*, which engaged not an inquiry of composing process, but an ethnographic research methodology. I had to rely so much on the work of Dr. Cross and Dr. Brown because, surprisingly, I learned quickly how little multimodal collaboration research had been conducted, despite our field's sincere commitment to expanding our definitions of literacies, modalities, and composing.

Significant research in multimodal or collaborative composing has yet to reach our leading publications, yet it is an essential aspect of our field's commitment to multiple literacies

and a turn to digital composing for pedagogical and rhetorical aims. I became even more convinced that this work was needed. This study offers the field of writing studies an opportunity to examine the composing processes behind multimodal texts like comics. Through this study, I have learned precisely how varied collaborations can be and just how one-sided representations of comics composing can be from the perspective of mainstream comics publishers. I have learned how authors' identities in the collaboration and authors' motivations for composing can influence the motivations of other members, the process of composing, and the text itself. I hope to share the dizzying complexities of these collaborations and the fascinating and rhetorical negotiations that must persist in order for the text to make it. Lastly, I have learned the value of qualitative research methods for the purpose of studying comics. Somehow, comics studies—as a new interdisciplinary pursuit—has not sought to engage methodological pluralism. Textual analysis dominates most work, and when authors or fans of comics are interviewed or observed, it is primarily in journalistic spheres. Even the journal to come out of University of Florida's Comics Studies program, *ImageTexT*, engages an auteur approach reminiscent of film theory approaches. With such significant focus placed on the comic text itself, on the final product once it's materially produced and circulated, I cannot help but insist that we are missing out on a very large gap for research purposes in writing studies, comics studies, and beyond. And, I am confident that there are others like me who wish to pull back the curtain of comics composing and see how it's all done.

In this study, I indulge my temptations and pull back the curtain on three case studies of collaborative multimodal comics composing. I present my three cases.

Jonathan Alexander, Liz Losh, Zander Cannon, & Kevin Cannon - *Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing*

Understanding Rhetoric is a nod to a landmark text in comics scholarship, *Understanding Comics*, by Scott McCloud. In it, McCloud animates himself and his concepts in the comics form to produce a book-length treatise on theories of reading and writing comics. As writers, artists,

and publishers engaged their collaborative process, the imagetext nature of the comics medium forced the publishers to completely reinvent the composing process in which, as they said, they *all* felt like they were authors. Playing on the association of this title with the landmark work, *Understanding Comics*, writers Losh and Alexander have—with the help of publishers at Bedford St. Martin's and Big Time Attic Comics, Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon (no relation), composed a first-year rhetoric textbook entirely in comics form. Big Time Attic has accrued much experience with full-length academic comic books with titles like *The Stuff of Life: A graphic guide to genetics and DNA, Bone Sharps, Cowboys and Thunder Lizards* and *T-Minus: A Race to the Moon* about DNA concepts in biology, the history of paleontology, and the historic space race, respectively. The project was still in production through the spring of 2012, when I began data collection. I was able to arrange for interviews about the collaborative process and request documentation of the project's stages including drafts and comments. See Figure 1.1 for an example page from *Understanding Rhetoric*.

Figure 1.1 Example page from *Understanding Rhetoric:* Chapter 2: Why Rhetoric? Page 6. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson, the Cheo comics

This series of comics was created by combining qualitative technical communication research, rhetorical purpose, audience awareness, the tutorial genre, and a little bit of humor a la Mexican popular culture and theories of intercultural communication. The title character, Cheo, is a Latino construction workers who learns about safety standards and workplace best practices related to ladders, roofs, and scaffolds. The comics are the result of collaboration between technical communication professor Carlos Evia, work environment professor Maria Brunette, and artist Nick Thorkelson. Typically, Carlos Evia writes a script (similar to the captions below the sample) and uses stick figure drawings to communicate specifics about character blocking

and the risks of the construction environment. Interestingly, Carlos and Nick work out of very different disciplines and Nick often wants to rely on more text to explain the safety concept, an approach Carlos' research has determined to be less effective with the ELL Hispanic construction worker audience the comics were written for. Overcoming obstacles such as these is what makes Carlos' and Nick's comic of particular interest to this study. This example focuses on safety practices when using stationary and mobile scaffolds because, as Carlos put it, "The main thing in construction is working heights. That's what we tackle in the project." See Figure 1.2 for an example page from "Cheo and his Uncle."
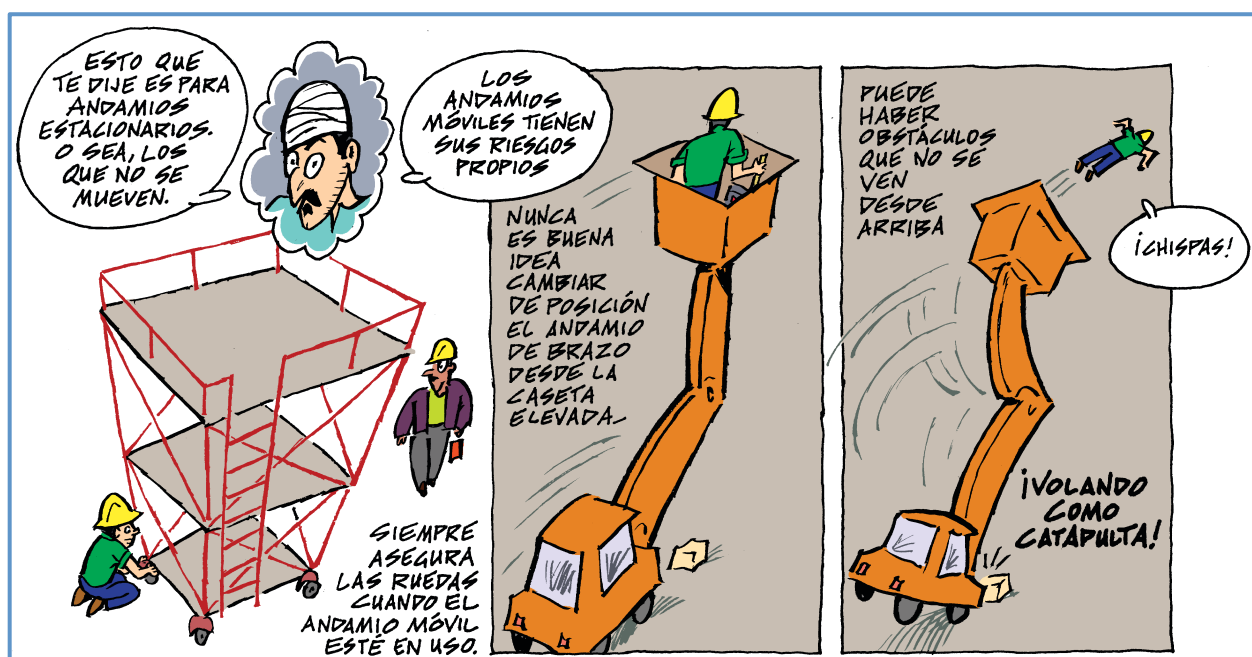
Figure 1.2 Example page from "Cheo and His Uncle." Used with permission of Carlos Evia.

- "This thing I told you is for stationed scaffolds; that means, those that do not move."
- "Mobile scaffolds have their own risks."
- Always secure the wheels of a mobile scaffold when it is being used.
--
- It's never a good idea to move the scaffold from the elevated nest.
--
- You can miss some obstacles invisible from above.
- "Yikes!"
- Flying like a catapult!

Guy Sims and Dawud Anyabwile, Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline

Brotherman is a comic about Antonio Valor, a young assistant district attorney in Big City, who happens to have an alter ego: "Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline." The comic was unique not only because of its Black title character and all-Black cast, but also because of the independent family owned and operated business that made it happen. Unfortunately, despite incredible critical acclaim and broad acceptance in many circles when it debuted in the early 1990s, Dawud Anyabwile (formerly known as David Sims) and Guy Sims took a hiatus after the death of their parents and their oldest brother. In the near future, they will be releasing a full-length graphic novel that will bring readers back to Antonio's tale through a prequel. As the graphic novel is still in production, there was no better time to study the brothers' collaborative process. It is Brotherman's two identities that create tension for the title character and allow the authors to discuss issues of urban community building, socioeconomic status, and education. Brotherman's two identities are the focus of the comic spread below that provides a juxtaposition to show, as Guy put it, "Antonio Valor addressing some thugs and Brotherman, laying the smack down." See Figures 1.3 and 1.4 for example pages from *Brotherman* Issue #3: "Ya'll Hail the King," and Issue #8: "Sketches of the Sinister."
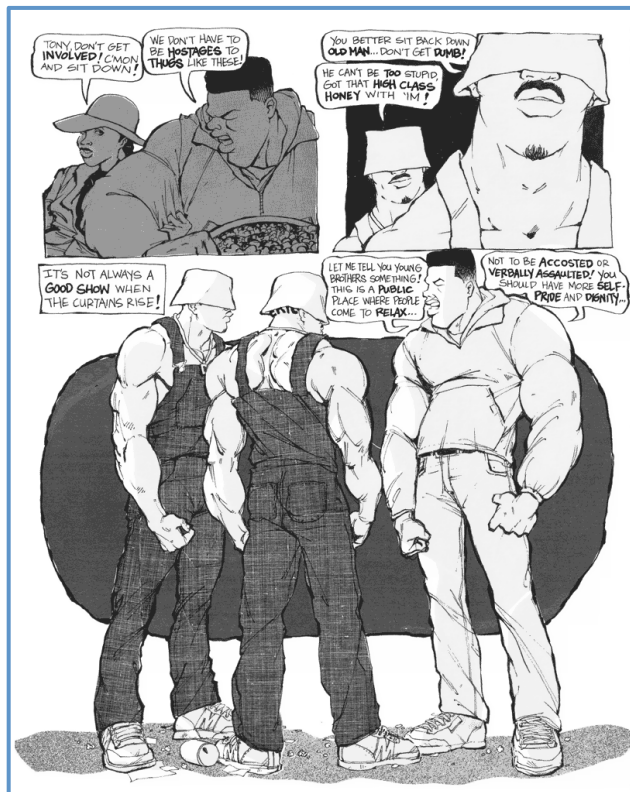
Figure 1.3 Example page from *Brotherman* #3: "Ya'll Hail the King." Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Figure 1.4 Example page from *Brotherman* #8: "Sketches of the Sinister." Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Before I go into more detail about each of these cases and the methods I engaged to study them, I would like to present a historical context of comics in the United States. Whether they were inspired by an artistic style, a writer's wit, or an author's playfulness in the genre, the authors in this study owe some aspect of their collaboration to the comics authors and the comics forms that came before them. From a historical perspective, each of these cases was born of American comics traditions and I would like to begin by chronicling that history here. I will then summarize the contents of the chapters that follow and lead into research methods in the following chapter.

1.2 Historical Context: The United States Comics Tradition

Using a historical frame, I will introduce readers both to the broader scope of comics as a popular culture medium and as a subject of scholarly attention. While addressing these periods of American growth of the comics medium (the Golden Age, the emergence of Underground Comix, the Silver Age, etc.), I will make reference to the three case studies included in this project and to their respective historical roots in the American comics tradition.

Each of the three case studies I present in this dissertation not only emerge from this rich rhetorical comics tradition but also demonstrates the ways in which the tradition is constantly shifting through authorship, readership, and genre.

Comics at the Turn of the 20th Century: From Panels to Strips to Books

Comics, as understood by contemporary readership and scholarship, emerged out of the single frame editorial cartoon of the late 18th century. In a widely agreed upon but admittedly reductive conclusion: artists William Hogarth (1697-1764), and Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), are among the first artists mentioned most often in this history, as their work relied mainly on the visual for meaning making. For example, Heer and Worcester write: "Töpffer integrated the element of time into his stories; equally important, he wrote extensively on how sequential images work and how they differ from other art forms" (13). Even before Töpffer, Hogarth pushed the visual medium through iconic cartoons in a commentary on the socioeconomic

cultural implications of visual representation through early photography. It is important to note that what the 18th and 19th centuries offered comics was not only its multimodality of words and images contained in the panel, but also the earliest primary rhetorical purpose of a comic: social commentary. But, about whom? For whom?

The late 19th century would present a new way of reading comics, transforming its grammar from a single panel to the recurring comic strip, while keeping with its inherently rhetorical aim of satirizing issues and figures of the American society in which it operated. Arthur Asa Berger's *The Comic-Stripped American* claims that comics—as we have come to understand the medium today—began with strips like Rudolph Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids* of December, 1897. With Dirks, Berger argues, "we find the essential ingredients of the comic strip as listed by Pierre Couperie and Maurice Horn (A *History of the Comic Strip*): '…narrative by sequence of pictures, continuing characters from one sequence to the next, and the inclusion of dialogue within the picture'" (Berger 35). Unlike the single-frame pictorials of the 18th and early 19th century, late 19th century comics—like *Katzenjammer Kids* and its early counterpart *Hogan's Alley*—pushed the medium into the form of several sequential frames for the purpose of storytelling without abandoning its rhetorical aim.

R.F. Outcault's *Hogan's Alley*[2] was first printed in Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* in 1895. *Hogan's Alley* assembled, as did *The Katzenjammer Kids*, "all the essential elements of the form—the sequential narrative, continuing characters, dialogue enclosed within the picture" (Gordon 7).   Media moguls, Pulitzer and Hearst, were notorious for "stealing" talent from one another through lucrative salary increases and promises of more artistic freedom; hence, their competitive ploys incited comics writers and artists to push the envelope for the sake of a wider and wider readership—namely, immigrant, lower class, and low-literacy or uneducated

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[2] Outcault's "Yellow Kid" is the main, nameless character in the serial strip *Hogan's Alley*. Though not the official title of the comic strip, comics historians still refer to this early American comic as "The Yellow Kid."

populations, the kind of demographic to which the remainder of the paper's pages did not or could not appeal (Hadju).

Under the leadership of William Randolph Hearst, Outcault "brought the form to fruition in the *New York Journal* " primarily because "The Yellow Kid simply reflected a social reality familiar to residents of American cities" (Gordon 7-8). In their situating of the comic as ideological, McAllister et al. describe Outcault's portrayal of "in-your-face urban poverty": "The Yellow Kid and his friends were poor, and many seemed to live on the streets. The environment was a slum, their clothes were simple, and there was often a look of poverty even in their facial expressions" (McAllister et al. 1).   The Kid problematized issues of urbanization by bringing issues of class and social status to the forefront through socially critical art.

Focusing upon this earliest comics readership is essential to this project. Throughout their history, American comics have, from their earliest origins at the turn of the 20th century, been written about/for/to marginalized populations in urban America:

> In their earthiness, their skepticism toward authority, and the delight they took in freedom, early newspaper comics spoke to and of the swelling immigrant populations in New York and other cities where comics spread, primarily through syndication (although locally made cartoons appeared in papers everywhere). The funnies were *theirs* [emphasis original], made for them and about them. Unlike movements in the fine arts that crossed class lines to evoke the lives of working people, newspaper comics were proliterian in a contained, inclusive way. They did not draw upon alleys like Hogan's as a resource for refined expression, as Toulouse-Lautrec had employed in the Moulin Rouge, nor did they use Hooligan's clashes with the law for pedagogy, to expose the powerful plight of the underclass, as John Steinbeck would utilize Cannery Row. The comics offered their audience a parodic look at itself, rendered in the vernacular of caricature and nonsense language. The mockery in comics was familial—intimate, knowing, affectionate, and merciless. (Hadju 11)

This aspect of comics as appealing to the poor and illiterate is precisely what earned them so much criticism from institutions of American culture that sought to establish America as a cultural influence aspirational to that of their European peers (Hadju 12). Participation and eventual victory in both World Wars would help to solidify America's status as a cultural, as well as economic, international presence.

Additionally, both *The Katzenjammer Kids* and *Hogan's Alley* demonstrate the undeniable importance of turn-of-the-century journalism of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer as a catalyst for the growth of comics as a popular American form. Gordon concludes that "comic art contributed significantly to the formation of a culture of consumption," a trend which will continue well into the 20th century with the Works Project Administration's FDR-commissioned documentation of the Great Depression, the propaganda of WWII, and America's post-war culture of prosperity.

> Like jazz and film, popular arts that also took form around the turn of the century,
> newspaper strips were not well received in the cultural establishment until the years
> after the First World War, when a new perception of the United States as having some
> parity with Europe helped spark a surge of interest in American culture. (Hadju 14)

Framing the history of the American comics tradition through a cultural perspective is particularly useful in a rhetorical study such as this because it allows us to ask questions about the nature of comics development in the public eye as well as public perceptions of comics readership and comics authorship in order to unearth ideological substructures. It is essential to note here that forms of popular culture, like comics, are subject to adoption by academics for a wide range of motivations, including everything from awareness for the purposes of inoculation (in order to protect ourselves and our students) to an appreciation for popular culture as text, art, rhetoric, etc. Each of these perspectives is important to acknowledge because, as Bongco puts it, the study of both dominant and marginalized cultural consumption implies that

popular culture matters: it has clearly mattered to those who have sought to classify it or

control it, and should now matter to those who seek to challenge existing social, sexual,

and cultural relations. Examining in any form relegated to the popular cannot escape

ideological implications, especially in analysing reader-text relations, since factors such

as class, gender, race, and age, as well as the conditions for text production and

articulation, affect their definition. (Bongco 42)

The production and articulation of comics is also worth noting, for as the 20th century

progressed into an age of eventual economic prosperity for the United States, so did the comic as

a form independent from its newspaper roots. Well into the 20th century, journalistic comics

enterprises had gained enormous popularity, supplying Americans with a weekly dose of *Little*

Orphan Annie, *Gasoline Alley*, and *Happy Hooligan* in their Sunday funnies. With a growing

readership secured, "comic strips became a respectable feature in most North American daily

newspapers and inspired the birth of the newer form of the comic book (Pamphlet-form

publications that reprinted newspaper strips as well as original material)" (Heer and Worcester

14). This narrative of the evolution of the editorial cartoon to the comic book as an

acknowledged publication medium considers both the cultural impact of the newspaper medium

and the craft of the American comic, an important assertion which began to secure comics as a

medium worthy of cultural, intellectual, artistic, and scholarly attention.

The American Superhero: a New Genre, a New Frontier, and a Symbol of America

As comics publishing grew into an industry separate from newspapers, the nature of

comics to appeal to marginalized populations remained part of their essence. As David Hadju

writes in *Ten Cent Plague*, a history of comics in America, "Comic books, even more so than

newspaper strips before them, attracted a high quotient of creative people who thought of more

established modes of publishing as foreclosed to them: immigrants and children of immigrants,

women, Jews, Italians, Negroes, Latinos, Asians, and myriad social outcasts, as well as Eisner

who, in their growing regard for comic books as a form, became members of a new minority"

(Hadju 25-6). As the form's genres developed and its sales exploded, comics authors and comics readers alike would all be pegged members of this new minority—a minority which initially represented an appreciation for this new literacy and a passion for its artistic possibilities, and which grew out of the purely commercial lucrative nature of the comics industry. Comics artist Joe Kubert, in an interview with Hadju, tries to characterize what it was like to be a comics artist during the 1920s and 1930s as comics genres broadened to adventure, mystery, drama, and romance.

> 'It was wide open—nobody knew what they were doing,' said Joe Kubert, a Polish-born son of a butcher, who was ten years old in 1936 when he took the subway to Manhattan from Brooklyn, walked into the offices of an early comic-book studio, and was given work as an artist. 'If you wanted to do comics and you had a little bit of talent—hell, even if you didn't have any talent—there was work for you. Maybe you had a lot of talent but you had a different kind of style, something unique and different, that the art directors in the slick magazines didn't like. [. . .] The doors were open to any and all.' (Hadju 22)

The way the story is told, Superman of *Action Comics #1* was the title that broke the creative levy for comics writers and artists to create the costumed hero genre and eventually push beyond it. And yet, even mainstream titles like Superman which attracted broad and diverse readership appealed to masses of the oppressed through its hero's relentless protection of the indefensible, "avenging the battered wives and vindicating the unduly punished, Superman spoke directly to survivors of the Depression; he was an immigrant (from another planet) himself, and he embodied the Roosevelt-era ideal of power employed for public good" (Hadju 30). During the war, comics characters like Superman and Captain America were recruited to join the Allied front, bring down fascists with jaw-breaking blows: "All the entertainment arts [...] did service as instruments of wartime booster-ism. Comic books, an outlet for many young Jews, were particularly zealous in their creative assaults on Fascism" (Hadju 55).

It was during this time that publishers and artists, editors and writers, worked together to create the collaborative composing process that continues to inform mainstream comics production today. For example, business partners Jerry Iger and Will Eisner developed a process whereby one of them would develop the idea for a character and the idea would be handed to the chief writer who crafts the story itself. From there, an artist does panel breakdown, another artist pencils the main characters, another artist pencils the secondary characters, and yet another draws in the backgrounds. The pages are then given to an inker who renders them in ink—meticulously, by hand using India ink—and then he, or an outside technician, adds color. This Henry Ford-like assembly method was the result of the comic book itself becoming so popular that its commodification was inevitable if it were to reach so many readers. Initially, when the 28-page pamphlet form broke away from the strips found in the newspapers, it wasn't always sold independently. Often, manufacturers of other products would throw in a comic book as a purchase incentive, much like a cereal box prize—comic books were cheap and easy to produce, but the kids loved them.

Among these cheap giveaways emerged more memorable stories and historically groundbreaking artistic endeavors. Noted for its great narrative appeal, "Eisner's world seemed more real than the world of other comic book men because it looked that much more like a movie…When one Eisner character slugs another, a real fist hits real flesh. Violence was no externalized plot exercise; it was the gut of his style" (cartoonist Jules Feiffer qtd Hadju 28). Eisner primarily drew detective comics and his most well-known serial, *The Spirit*, is still considered noteworthy for its experimentation with the form. In 1940, Eisner described the new comics format in *The Philadelphia Record*: "The comics strip, he explains, is no longer a comic strip, but, in reality, an illustrated novel. It is new and raw in form just now, but materials for limitless intelligent development. And eventually and inevitably it will be a legitimate medium for the best of writers and artists. It is already the embryo […] of a new art form" (Hadju 39).

And because it was considered an entirely new art form, there were no rules to be followed or broken, no critics to define its conventions or artistic parameters.

Batman comics artist Jerry Robinson describes the climate of unchained creativity: "We were inventing the language as we went along, and some of us had an awareness of that. Every time we did something that we didn't think had been done before, it was exciting—maybe something like the whole first page as a splash page to introduce the story or breaking out of the panel format. Really, what we were trying to figure out how to do was give a perception of time, cross-cutting, and setting the scene, and establishing character, and we had to break away from the conventions of newspaper comics to do that" (qtd Hadju 34-5). Such unestablished methods and forms drew a readership of young adults—not because of their perceived simplicity, but because, "Kids recognized in comics something resolutely, gloriously unadult. [...]At ten cents a copy, comics, like sodas and candy bars, were among the few things children of the post-Depression years could afford to buy [...] and they instilled a pride of ownership rooted not in adult conceptions of value, but in their absence. Parents considered comics worthless; therein lay their worth to kids" (Hadju 36).

The superhero genre is especially noteworthy here. Not only did comics continue to appeal to members of non-dominant cultural groups, but the characters of the comics themselves came to represent the defense and protection of such groups. Characters like Superman, Batman, Captain America, and the unnamed "mystery man" embodied ideals of American prosperity, individual strength and fortitude, and both the means and the will to act in the face of injustice. Each of these ideals is among those denied marginalized groups, which is perhaps why for decades title characters took the form of Caucasian, male, masculine figures. Since the origin of Superman in 1938, it was nearly 30 years until a hero of color would take the title role of hero in a comic book.

The first Black hero to earn his own cover art and title was the Black Panther, released by Marvel Comics in 1966.[3] Since then, many more Black superheroes have emerged (Storm, the Panther's wife; Nick Fury, the leader of the Avengers, Falcon, partner with Captain America, etc.) but their minority status among comics publications, especially mainstream comics, is still acknowledged. Which is why, in 1989, when Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims wrote and sold *Brotherman*, their work was and still is considered revolutionary to the culture of comics readership. Even today, with superheroes being brought back into the larger public focus through film (Ironman, Spider-Man, The Avengers, etc.) title characters are largely light-skinned Americas. Heroes of color continue to be marginalized in the world of "The Big Two," Marvel Comics and DC Comics. Despite its continued profitability, superhero comics are among the only mainstream comic book genre to thrive over the course of the 20th century despite the fact that just as the costumed hero genre emerged, the comics industry as a whole would soon come under attack at national and local levels.

For example, after national journalists like Sterling North decided the form was illegitimate art and worse, harmful for literacy and moral development alike, the industry suffered a relentless attack for the better part of two decades. While early comic books were primarily apolitical, Hadju concedes, "in the penchant for bestowing great powers upon the weak, they could have struck a conservative such as North as suspiciously left-leaning" (41). And sure enough, North, in *The Chicago Times* once wrote: "The 'comics' magazines, in our opinion, are furnishing a pre-Fascist pattern for the youth of America…. The chances of Fascism controlling the planet diminish in direct proportion to the number of good books the coming generation reads and enjoys" (qtd Hadju 44). North also characterized comics as a poison on America's children, and one that would only be inoculated through the consumption of proper literature. Should a parent fail to seek out such treatment, they were deserving of public scorn: "But the antidote to the 'comic' magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore.

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[3] The Black Panther was created by renowned writing duo, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee who are responsible for dozens of household names in comics including Spider-Man.

The parent who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence"

(North qtd Hadju 41). By the early 1950s the comics censorship trend was gaining momentum

and transforming into a full-fledged national literacy crisis.

Comics and the 1950s: The "Golden Age"

By mid-decade, comics were so widely read that "ninety-percent of kids aged eight to

fifteen were regular comic book readers" (Benton qtd Versaci 7). Yet, only a decade into their

"Golden Age," comics were culturally condemned and chastised by journalists like Sterling

North and child development psychologist Dr. Frederic Wertham. Hadju chronicles the

movement as it gained momentum through local schools and churches: "Predictably, the main

charges were that comics negatively impacted literacy, that 'comic-book readers [were]

handicapped in vocabulary building because in comics all the emphasis is on the visual image

and not on the *proper* word'" (North qtd Versaci 8, my emphasis). The charge against comics as

an unintelligent print medium preying on the proper literacy of America's children only

intensified as Dr. Wertham's 1954 *The Seduction of the Innocent* concluded that comics were a

direct cause of juvenile delinquency (Hajdu). Despite little compelling evidence that

incarcerated juveniles had ever picked up a comic, the mere presence of such accusations

spiraled out of control.   Hadju elaborates, reminding contemporary audiences that

> "[c]rime was always just one aspect of juvenile delinquency, anyway. To both the young
>
> people labeled as social deviants and their labelers, residence in the subculture called
>
> delinquency involved an array of conscious deviations from the conventions of proper
>
> society: improper language, attitudes, modes of dress and personal grooming, tastes in
>
> music, styles of dance, and reading matter. (Hadju 84-85)

Comics was already perceived as a childish pursuit because of the visual nature of its material,

and the cultural assault on comics would continue to entrench comics readers and authors in an

adolescent subculture whereby they would adopt the medium as symbolic of their own

marginalized position in their communities and in broader American society. This "witch hunt"

narrative of American comics is often told. I include it here not because it's boilerplate, but because I wish to use it to frame the comics witch hunt as a necessary development for the medium to gain further adoption by marginalized groups and further experimentation through a broadening of genres, both of which began occurring in the 1960s with underground comix. This reclaiming of the medium during the 1960s and 1970s marks a turning point when comics writers abandoned the evangelization of the medium and began to embrace comics' counterculture stigma to engage a visual rhetoric of social justice.

The 1960s: Underground Comix and Social Criticism

As comic books became associated, culturally, with adolescence, deviance, and abnormality, writers like Robert Crumb and Harvey Kurtzman openly embraced this stigma and began to exploit it through what was later coined underground comix—misspelled purposefully to exacerbate literacy crisis claims (Hatfield).

The comix movement of the 1960s and 1970s was significant for two reasons. For one, historically this time period is one of parody and satire for the comics industry. No longer were comics just for laughs, but rather they had grown increasingly political through subtlety and parody. Secondly, evidenced in this parodic movement was the realization that comics were now enough of a popular medium with recognizable genre and character types, that they were capable of being parodied in the first place. Much like Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* was proof of the emergence of the novel as a dominant 18th century writing form, underground comix evidenced the comic book's cultural significance.

The 1960s and 1970s in America saw a rise in domestic turmoil, which led to cultural rich texts and artifacts, especially in comics. Charles Hatfield writes, "At their best they combined reflexive playfulness with an acute social vision, showing how much comics could do in the right hands; at their worst they were self-absorbed and self-defeating, as if prefiguring the counterculture's retrenchment—its decline from revolution to mere 'lifestyle'" (Hatfield 20).

These were the days of Bill Gaines' *MAD Magazine*, of Robert Crumb's *Zap!* and *Wimmen's Commix*; "Many of the comix books were awash in irony, based on the appropriation of popular (or once-popular) characters, styles, genres, and tropes for radically personal and sometimes politically subversive ends" (Hatfield 18). Comics for social welfare purposes simultaneously developed out of this politicization of comics. Also emerging during the comix period were thousands of much smaller comics pamphlets/booklets being self-published by social justice organizations. Nick Thorkelson, artist for *Cheo Comics*, began his illustration career developing visual rhetorical materials for a range of non-profit organizations including The People's Press and The Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) in the Bay Area, as well as the Community Press Service and Urban Planning Aid organizations in Boston. And his work with Carlos Evia in the Cheo comics is another example of comics created for an audience of readers who might otherwise miss important material—like construction workers who find it difficult to read in English, let alone comprehend dense safety regulation discourse. The choice to use comics for the tutorials on construction safety came from Carlos' intimate knowledge of how popular the medium was among Latino cultures, particularly Mexicans.

In Mexico, where comics are as culturally prolific as they are in Japan, parodies of popular culture began emerging in the 1990s. Carlos Evia, writer of the Cheo comics, recalls one particular parody that sparked the slapstick humor and silliness used to make Cheo's workplace adventures so memorable to workers, and thereby more effective in the education of workers' safety. The Cheo comics are a nod to this parodic method as much as they are a result of the politicization of comics during the same time period in America.

The Silver Age and the Emergence of American Comics Scholarship

Will Eisner's 1985 *Comics and Sequential Art* is most notably one of the first complete published treatises of *how* comics accomplish their visually-dominant narrative form. His intention was to "examine the unique aesthetics of sequential art as a means of creative

expression, a distinct discipline, and art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (Eisner xi). Eisner's exigence in publishing this work extended far beyond the rhetorical purpose stated in the author's foreword; Eisner transformed a reader's interaction with comics into a subject worth scholarly attention and, in doing so, elevated the production and consumption of this mass media to the level of art, of literature. For this reason, and not necessarily his position as *the first* writer to do so, Eisner is unofficially considered the father of comics art. An award bearing his name is granted annually to outstanding comics work.

Since then, the investigation into the workings of comics and graphic storytelling has continued, and our knowledge of the history of comics has grown as a result. Where Eisner attributed the first comic books to the mid-1930s, Scott McCloud traces visual storytelling to the time of prehistory: the Egyptian paintings for "the tomb of Menna," dated 1300 B.C. (14), the recent find of the French Bayeux Tapestry of the Norman Conquest in 1066, "The Tortures of Saint Erasmus" circa 1460, and Cortes's 1519 discovery of a pre-Columbian picture manuscript in modern-day Mexico (10-16). An important insight can be gained from McCloud's laundry list of historical comics; cultures centuries and even millennia older than ours utilized the powerful combination of words and images to make meaning within their own cultures. In North America especially, the influence of historical visual storytelling and contemporary visual rhetoric broadened the constraints of the comics medium in order to produce new genres for new audiences.

Comics, Literacy, and Multimodality: Ever-Broadening Definitions

What was once assumed to be a nearly-worthless product of mass media and the newspaper wars of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, only to be appropriated by readers and authors for its symbolism of counterculture, comics are now placed in the realm of interdisciplinary study, evoking investigations into the historical and socioeconomic factors that circulate comics texts, authorship, and readership.

Among these comics scholars is English professor Rocco Versaci, whose work in *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature*, places comics within the context of literary scholarship, comparing the medium to the memoir, traditional journalism, and film, among other genres within those media. For Versaci, comics genres can allow "escapism" for the reader. The ability of comics to transform their readers is an investigation Versaci felt needed significantly more attention in the conversation of literary criticism, noting the ability of comics to "challenge us to see the world differently…by using exceptional and unique representational strategies, by subverting commonly held beliefs and assumptions, and by calling attention to both how texts represent the world and what is at stake in those representations" (Versaci 7). Comics scholars, among which Versaci is just one, now confidently proclaim that with comics genres broadening into both works of fiction and non-fiction—like Art Speigelman's Pultizer Prize-winning *Maus* about the Holocaust, Marjane Satrapi's autobiography, *Persepolis*, about growing up in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution, or Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza* about the historicity of the Israel-Palestine conflict)—a comic's ability to carry serious subject matter with rhetorical sophistication is no longer questioned. In addition to personal memoir and other nonfiction genres taking up the comics medium, so have other genres in various discourse communities including construction workplace safety—as in Carlos' and Nick's Cheo comics tutorials—but also in the classroom with comics for pedagogical aims.

Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing is an embodiment of the broadened adoption of the comics medium in publication, especially in the academic community and within our discipline of writing studies as well. While comic textbooks have been in circulation for decades[4], the publication of *Understanding Rhetoric* will be a first for writing scholars and writing teachers.

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[4] Among the most recognized "textbook comics" authors is Larry Gonick who has authored over a dozen comics covering just about every secondary level subject including history, biology, physics, chemistry, climate change, calculus and statistics.

Within the past few decades, comics have come to be considered as both serious subjects of scholarly study and a legitimate medium of publication in writing studies alone. Just one of our field's national conferences—the Conference on College Composition and Communication—reflects this interest with the number of panels on comics/graphic novels growing every year. A further reflection of this growth is the University of Florida's PhD track in Comics and Visual Rhetoric—one that is listed among more traditional tracks such as Victorian Literature or Feminisms, Genders, & Sexualities. The Comics and Visual Rhetoric program has also produced an academic online journal, *ImageTexT*, which publishes a range of articles including original research and book reviews ("Comics Studies"). One aspect of this program, as reflected in *ImageTexT*, is the auteur approach whereby scholars focus on the opus of a single author in order to glean his/her unique writing style, artistic perspective, composing process, and/or rhetorical framing. Other approaches adopted by comics studies scholars include: studying the genres of comics (superhero, memoir, etc.), the history of comics (American, Mexican, French, etc.), and the role comics readership plays in comics and fan culture worldwide.

This study, however, will extend the great work of previous comics scholars by asking questions related to composing. How are comics collaboratively composed? How do writer and artist create a process for composing a multimodal text? And what role does genre play in this composing? How does the medium of the comic influence the process? Lastly, while many studies have engaged issues of readership, how do author's conceptions of audience influence their process as they compose?

1.3 Dissertation Overview

In the next section, Chapter 2, I will extend this discussion in order to pose research questions about collaborative multimodal comics composing processes. I will elaborate on my research methods and present a review of genre theory and activity systems theory, the two major theoretical lenses through which I studied each case.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I examine the case of *Understanding Rhetoric*, a first in the composition textbook industry. Through the lens of genre theory and the problem of naming the new genre of *Understanding Rhetoric*, I identify the difficulties in negotiating media convergence, that is, the shift from a genre's application in one medium—a print composition textbook, for example—to another—a didactic composition comic textbook. I also interrogate the collaboration behind *Understanding Rhetoric* in order to better understand how a large textbook publisher in our field undertook this project and how the activity system of the collaboration witnessed contradictions related to author identity and author motivation were negotiated through the use of metagenres.

In Chapter 5 I present the Cheo comics case and the complex rhetorical situation to which it responded. Through a collaboration of technical communication professors and Nick Thorkelson, a career cartoonist, the Cheo comics were composed in order to reach Latino construction workers. By adapting the tutorial genre, familiar to writers in technical communication, Drs. Maria Brunette and Carlos Evia were able to create a series of comics that addressed the riskiest aspects of construction: working in heights with ladders, roofs, and scaffolds. Variance in author motivation created contradictions for Nick and Carlos, but the broader shared enthusiasm for reaching their audience led not only to a negotiation within the activity system, but an effective—and therefore successful—text for the workers.

In Chapter 6 I describe the historically significant *Brotherman* comics and the familial collaboration that was—and still is—responsible for its success. Beginning in 1990 as a family effort, *Brotherman* hit the Black Expo in New York City to thousands of eager Black consumers. Through its 11 issue run, the series only grew in popularity but was brought to a halt when the Sims brothers lost their parents. *Brotherman* is a rich story of a family that vocalized what they saw as a necessary shift in the monolithic superhero comics scene that was all but void of heroes of color. As part of a counterpublic that formed around *Brotherman* and other Black comix, Guy Sims and Dawud Anyabwile (fka David Sims) produced what many of their fans consider "the

first Black comic." One of the leaders in Black comix, *Brotherman* was a first of its kind.

Brotherman was written by Black authors, sold independently by the family owned and

operated business, starred a Black superhero in its title, and featured a world in which the

characters were all Black. This chapter examines how *Brotherman* came to represent the exodus

of the Black comix movement and the counterpublic that created it. Returning now, nearly 20

years later, *Brotherman* is answering the calls from a counterpublic that has been eagerly

waiting for the next big thing and they're convinced that once again, it's going to come from Guy

Sims and Dawud Anyabwile in the form of *Brotherman: Revelation*.

      In conclusion, Chapter 7 will reintroduce the project's research questions posed in

Chapter 2. I will address these questions through a summative review of each case. Then,

without attempting to generalize based upon these three individual cases, I will take a step back

to consider what conclusions this project has to offer overall and which patterns emerged

throughout this study of multimodal comics composing. I will conclude by considering aspects

of future study that might build from this work.

Chapter 2
Research Methods & A Review of the Literature

This project was born of a personal curiosity about the multimodal and collaborative writing processes of comics writers and artists. As such, my methodology argues for qualitative case study research methods in order to examine three separate collaborations. I interviewed author teams, collected documentation of the collaborative process, and read the comics texts. To study these data, I engaged a triangulated approach informed by numerous theoretical lenses of writing studies scholarship, which I will address later in this chapter. Lastly, I will introduce aspects of feminist research methodology that came to influence my study in a myriad of ways as I worked toward an ethic of representation and a relationship with my participants that was informed by reciprocity.

2.1 Research Questions

R1. How do artist and writer negotiate the composition of their particular comics genre, including the constraints and affordances of the genre, and make rhetorical decisions during the process?

R2. In what ways is collaborative writing complicated by the medium of the imagetext, by the negotiation of print and image on the comics page?

R3. In what ways do writers and artists impose the goals of larger activity systems on the smaller collaborative system of the comics composing team?

R4. How do these writer/artist teams work to negotiate the contradictions that arise within a confluence of activity systems?

2.2 Research Methodology

This study was conducted primarily through interviews with participants, analysis of collected documentation of the composing process (including communication documents produced during the composing processes, drafts of the comic, comments on drafts) and analysis of the

comic text itself. This triangulated approach is informed by case study methodology, which allowed me to study these teams for phenomena of their collaborative composing processes with the explicit intention of arguing for a *multiplicity* of processes, and without the intention of moving towards generalizability of *the* comics writing process. I take my definition of case study methodology from Susan MacNealy. The case study is "a qualitative tool; as such, it aims to provide a rich description of an event or of a small group of people or objects (usually not more than 12). Because the scope of a case study is so narrow, the findings can rarely be generalized; but a case study can provide insights into events and behaviors" (195). I gravitated toward this definition because MacNealy acknowledges, for example, the widespread use of case study methodology in workplace studies in order to understand how writing works in larger social contexts as a means of describing, not generalizing, writing processes as they occur. As the foci of my study is the collaborative composing processes of comics authors, case studies allowed me to identify each participant as working towards different goals in their comics—with differing identities and motivations creating contradictions within the teams themselves. As noted by Geoffrey Cross, case studies are advantageous for studies of collaboration and composing because they "allow a fine-grained description and comparison that has allowed composition to formulate theories of composing" (219). The theories, however, cannot emerge from a single study or even a single methodological approach, however rich they might be. Interviewing, for example, is a primary data collection tool in this project and a method from which I draw upon the language used by participants to describe composing processes. Using language to produce these texts in collaboration, reflect on their processes, and communicate aspects of identity in the collaborative composing process, research participants can share with the researcher a rich and diverse amount of information during the interviews.

For many scholars of writing studies, interviewing has been proved an effective means of reaching participants' socially constructed truths; it is a flexible method that allows the researcher both to control the general direction of the conversation during this data gathering

process and to surrender interpretation of the data to not only those theoretical frameworks but also to participants themselves. For example, during a previous study with some of the same participants, I often sought a second interview in order to clarify statements they had made, share patterns I saw emerging in their language, and requested further reflection or interpretation on their part. This frequent interaction was an important part of working towards reciprocity with my project's participants.

Beginning with the participant interviews, I outline the steps that I took during the data collection phase of this study:

> **Step 1—Interview Participants:** In this initial stage of data collection, I interviewed participants in person or via Skype, inquiring about various aspects of their collaborative composing process and their roles in the collaboration. Interviews averaged between 60 and 90 minutes.

> **Step 2—Transcribe and Code Interviews:** From the audio files recorded of interviews, I used ExpressScribe software to aid in efficient transcription. I then uploaded the documents into Dedoose, a software program designed by social scientists for qualitative and mixed methods research analytics. Using their coding software, I coded each interview transcript, identifying patterns related to my methodological frameworks: 1) the influence of the comic's genre in composing; 2) detailed stages of the composing process and participants' roles, responsibilities, and motivations; and 3) visual rhetorical choices made by authors through either individual or collaborative negotiations, compromises, and decision-making.

> **Step 3—Collect Collaborative Documentation:** These documents include texts from throughout the composing process (emails, brainstorming notes, layouts, outlines, scripts, drafts, comments, etc.) as well as the final comic text.

> **Step 4—Analyze Documentation:** Using these documents, produced during the process, I began to identify more specific aspects of the collaboration and the roles of the

writer and the artist in overcoming conflict and negotiating decision-making during the
writing process. Documentation was also used to verify the timeline of each
collaboration.

Step 5—Develop Distinct Cases: This final stage of the research culminated in the
identification of distinct cases of collaborative composing multimodal comic texts and
the patterns which emerged in each case based upon data collection (interviews,
documentation, final comic text).

As I engaged in Steps 2 and 4, analysis of data collected, I employed the following framework.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In this study, I investigated three teams of comics authors and their collaborative multimodal
composing processes. Understanding the many ways in which the visual-verbal medium of
comics can be composed could have significant implications for writing studies scholars in the
subfields of literacy studies, visual rhetoric, collaborative writing, and theories of the composing
process. Within literacy studies, definitions of literacy continue to broaden and research on
multimodal literacies—like those that inform processes of consuming and producing comics
texts—are still absent from core pillars of literacy education research. For scholars of visual
rhetoric, these comics cases can serve as examples of the broad genres of comics being read and
composed in rhetorically sophisticated ways. In collaborative writing inquiry, multimodal text
creation has been largely ignored and this study can being to illuminate the ways in which
collaborating on a multimodal text like a comic can present contradictions and negotiations not
seen in purely textual collaborative writing processes. Lastly, process theory has been informing
the field of writing studies for decades, informing many scholarly inquiries about how texts are
indeed composed. This study will contribute to this pursuit by engaging a similar inquiry around
multimodal texts, about which we, as writing scholars, know very little in terms of composing
process. This study hopes to contribute to this ongoing conversation of the interdependent
relationship of: 1) text and image, 2) genre and medium, and 3) author and audience, that work

in unison to create rhetorical comic genres. Thus, genre theory also informed my analysis of

genre-related choices negotiated during the composing process, specifically as it is driven by

audience expectations.

Lastly, studying composing processes has been a disciplinary pursuit for decades and has

grown out of the classroom and into the workplace using activity systems theory. Activity

systems theory affords the researcher an ability to look at the integral aspects of collaboration in

the production of texts and to identify the unit of analysis as something over than the text. Each

case study warranted a different identification of unit of analysis and therefore begged a unique

theoretical framework for data analysis.

Information garnered from these research methods allowed me to engage four

theoretical frameworks: collaborative writing, visual rhetorical theory, genre studies, and

activity systems theory. Combining these four frameworks helped me to analyze collaborative

documentation, comics texts, and the interview transcripts in ways any one of them would not

have afforded by itself.

Lens 1: Theories of Collaborative Writing
The multimodal nature of comics, for me, made these particular collaborations seemingly

complex and unique compared to the scholarship I'd read on collaborative writing in the past.

For example, the fields of technical communication and professional writing have documented

the composing processes of visual/verbal teams (Mirel et al, Cross, among others).

In the late 1980s, collaborative writing scholarship emerged alongside process theory as

scholars of writing began to understand that many sites and genres of writing practice involve

multiple writers. Most notably, the debate between Kenneth Bruffee and John Trimbur engaged

in theories of social constructivism and the cultural and ideological implications of working

toward consensus in collaborative learning settings. Bruffee's research led him to the work of

M.L.J. Abercrombie who found that medical students produced more accurate diagnoses and

effective treatments when working together than they had when being quizzed individually

(636-7). Bruffee saw the ways in which collaboration could be used to evoke in students their naturally social ways of engaging in thinking, speaking, listening, and writing in order to produce consensus. Trimbur, however, considered the ways in which power structures might impose this tendency for conforming consensus to uphold dominant ideologies in discourse, arguing instead how conflict and dissensus is often just as productive for learning (611). Their debate sparked a subfield of writing studies that continues to engage in questions about how social contexts inform the ways we write—both as individuals and in collaboration. Most notably, the collaborative scholarship of Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede not only emphasized the importance of understanding how students negotiate writing tasks but also demonstrated through their own work and publications how professionals in academia and the workplace require similar negotiations valuable for study.

Extending these earlier investigations, collaborative writing scholarship has continued to engage rich considerations of composing in order to understand composing among multiple authors. Recently, research in other subdisciplines of the field has begun to broaden the kinds of research questions asked by those studying collaborative writing. For example, studying the production of multimodal texts, we understand, will require an alternative approach to those ways in which earlier scholars have studied single-mode texts. Additionally, literacy studies scholars have argued for decades that writers come to the collaborative process with various levels of verbal and visual literacies. Technical and professional writing contexts have become rich sites for the study of collaboration and multiple literacies.

Mirel et al. wrote in 1987 about a collaboration in which the authors engaged to produce a software manual. Theirs was the first study of its kind to focus on collaboration between writers and artists. Mirel et al. touted the added interpretive power of combining words and images/design in interdependent ways (283) through a collaborative approach called "melding" and articulated the ways in which—as the authors qualified it—collaborative composing itself produced richer texts than single author text production alone:

Melding symbolic forms and words into a single representation for scenario examples required the processes of dialogue and codevelopment, with all the false starts, joint invention, and fine tuning that come only from these processes. Linear assembly-line collaborations, by contrast, bar a synthesis of verbal and visual perspectives, the essence of our practical examples (283).

Before Mirel et al., members of the field assumed that dialogue and increased communication enriches collaboration but research had yet to document this fact. Mirel et al. used their collaboration as an example case to demonstrate that "when writers and graphic designers have an ongoing dialogue, as [they] did throughout the development process, they unite their distinct concerns to discover, create, and implement richer and more flexible designs than when they work alone or in assembly-line fashion" (260). While we might currently take for granted the truth in this statement, such findings were perhaps surprising and even suspect to a field emerging from literary studies which valued the single-author manuscript over all others. The implications of Mirel et al.'s study for workplace writing alone were incredibly informative.

Geoffrey Cross engaged in a similar study of collaboration among copywriters and artists at an advertising firm—though he was merely a observer, not also a participant like the authors of Mirel et al. For Cross, studying writers and artists as they compose together demonstrated how important collaborative composing skills are for writer and artist alike:

[C]ollaborative verbal-visual composing is called for because of the need of writers and visual communication specialists to collaborate. Collaborative decision making involves skills such as "how to interrupt, latch onto the sentence of another speaker, illustrate with non-verbal means, and disengage from talk," skills themselves dependent on subskills such as presentation and identifying convincing evidence to persuade" (204).

For Cross, there were two key conclusions that emerged from observing the brainstorming sessions of writers and artists. Cross found that both writer and artist engaged visually in order to generate ad concepts. A majority of their comments were based on visual conceptions of a magazine print ad. First, this visual brainstorming leaned significantly on one writing tool, a visual layout: "The complex, iterative writer-artist teamwork involved in assimilating rhetorical design elements and making them coalesce verbal-visually is enabled by layout. Even for vague, undeveloped ideas in the dyadic brainstorming sessions, layout was an important starting point" (200). And secondly, this engagement with the layout as the foundation of the collaboration allowed Cross to see the ways in which strict roles of writer and artist are more dynamic than static: "[N]ot only does the concept of authorship change from that of the romantic writer working alone in the garret, but also *our very concept of writer and artist change as these roles overlap and to a degree merge.*" (149-150, emphasis original).

This study will extend the work that has already been done on multimodal collaboration by undertaking a more explicit examination of the ways in which the verbal, text-based literacies of the writers and the visual, image-based literacies of the artists must be negotiated within the composing process of a multimodal text like a comic. Thus, collaborative writing scholarship will constitute the first lens through which I will analyze these case studies. In order to inform the analysis of the visual in this collaborative context, I will also draw upon the rich body of knowledge around visual rhetoric.

Lens 2: Visual Rhetorical Theory

As rich as collaborative writing scholarship has been, these works fail to directly address how writers' consideration of audience meaning-making influences the writing itself and the choices writers make. Thus, from my reading of works in comics studies, I have determined that there is a real gap in our understanding of how the following factors influence writers' decisions during the multimodal composing process of comics authorship: 1) the imagetext nature of the comics medium, 2) the formal and rhetorical patterns of a given genre, and 3) assumptions about

audience's interpretation practices[5]. Thus, visual rhetoric will constitute my second theoretical

lens because of what it offers in terms of theories of visual interpretative processes of reading

and composing multimodal texts like comics. In order to augment this visual interpretation, I

will also engage genre theory so that in addition to formal features of these comics, I can also

consider the visual as inherently rhetorical.

Lens 3: Genre Theory

Scholars like Barbara Mirel, Susan Feinberg, and Leif Allmendinger, and Geoffrey Cross

have asked how texts can be created among collaborators. Single-mode and multimodal texts

alike have been investigated through the collaborative composition in both academic and

professional settings.

During my initial study and interviews with comics writers, each of the comics writing

teams presented stories cataloging the influence of comics read previously (American superhero

and crime comics, Marvel superhero comics, and Mexican-American vigilante comics) and the

ways in which the generic conventions of those comics and more contemporary comics inform

their current writing practices. Studying comics through a generic lens will allow me to see

more formal features of the text and to focus on the roles generic conventions play into the

collaborative composing process.

In genre studies, form and rhetorical action are intertwined and interdependent as the

genre operates as a familiar response to a social situation. In 1984, Carolyn Miller asked, "What

constitutes a *rhetorical* genre?" Her response, that "Genre, in this way, becomes more than a

formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention

and effect, an aspect of social action," (153) allowed the field not only to consider the

hierarchical relationship between form and function, but also to broaden the scope of our study

to genres of everyday writing practice:

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[5] See Chapter 2: Review of the Literature for an expanded discussion of visual rhetorical theory as it relates to comics and meaning making.

    To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation,

the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper,

as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon,

is not to trivialize the study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are

immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves (Miller 155).

Today's comics are more diverse in genre than ever before and have begun, in the last few

decades, to carry serious subject matter in less literary and more rhetorical genres. The work of

Joe Sacco comes to mind. Creating a new genre of comics journalism, Sacco has been able to

engage in a journalistic investigation of Palestinian lives in Gaza and the West Bank. From there,

Sacco's work went into an even deeper exploration of historical issues of the region and then

shifted focus to the Third Balkan War in Serbia and Kosovo. Rhetorical genre studies will allow

me to consider the comic as a medium with diverse genres and to examine how writers and

readers alike come to genres with expectations that inevitably construct the way the form is

composed.

    While much of the literature I have read about comics covers the predominant genre of

serial superhero comics like *Batman*, *Spider-Man*, and *Buck Wild* (Zimmerman, Rhoades, and

Brown, respectively) genres of comics can be incredibly diverse and can range from short,

humorous newspaper strips like *For Better or For Worse*, to serious genres including *Palestine*,

a work comics journalism by Joe Sacco, personal memoir like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and

even educational comics like *The Action Philosophers* or *Foucault for Beginners* which elucidate

concepts of philosophy and critical theory for readers. My study will explicitly address three very

different genres (a first-year compositing textbook written in comic form, a technical

communication comics tutorial, and a Black superhero comic) and will consider the ways in

which these genres and their expectations for reader and writer alike can influence the

composing process. In each of these cases I found that there were explicit decisions made by

writers and artists to simultaneously conform to the genre expectations of their antecedent

genres—that is, the genres that inform them—and challenge genre conventions for purposes of formal experimentation and rhetorical gain.

Studying this process has the potential to not only inform our field about additional ways of perceiving relationships among collaborative composing team members, but will also interrogate the ways in which relationships between writer and audience inform the writing itself through the authors' understanding of audience expectations and rhetorical interpretations.

This study will engage two ways of looking at collaborative composing through a lens of genre theory. For one, genres—through perceived patterns in formal features—are often immediately and subconsciously identified and along with that realization comes expectations. This allows me to identify the ways in which the medium of the comic functions through three very different genres. While *Brotherman* is most certainly a text which falls within the superhero genre, this study will also benefit from countering this dominant genre of comics (the serially produced superhero genre) with stories from participants about how such work is done through other genres such as a technical communication tutorial. And secondly, through everyday writing, we tend to produce writing within dozens of genres. These are often communicative and document our understandings of past, present, and future action, especially related to collaborative work. Dorothy Winsor, Clay Spinuzzi, and Mark Zachry have all demonstrated, through studies of workplace writing, the ways in which these seemingly menial, everyday genres can be studied to find traces of collaborative conflict, negotiations, and decision-making. These two aspects of genre theory will inform the analysis of interview transcripts and documents collected.

Lens 4: Activity Systems Theory
As forms of popular culture and therefore cultural artifacts, there is an inherent value in these three comics. Such an understanding is based upon the assumption that meaning is socially constructed through a culture's language practices. Social constructivist theory is rooted in the

work of social psychologist Lev Vygotsky who posited that communication among humans relied on meaning making within very complex social situations and interactions. Vygotsky believed that a subject simultaneously developed thought and language ability through what he called "cultural-historical evolution of mental functions" (xxviii). For Vygotksy, we are all socially constructed beings whose thoughts and language are culturally and historically shaped.

In other words, language mediates our social experiences and such a theory places texts and the process of text production at the center of study and also within a larger system of social activity. Later, Leontiev would apply call these situations activity systems. Activity systems

> view communication and learning as social in origin, and human activity as collective. In these models, we humans (subjects) act together with others humans and material tools to change something in our world, the object of our activity. The tools that we use, including writing, mediate our thinking and doing. One such tool, writing (and the action of writing) actively mediates—shapes—both our thinking and our action together, our activity (Russell & Yanez 335).

 In other words, language communication is what mediates our social experiences and such a theory places texts and the process of text production at the center of study. For example, in her longitudinal study of four junior engineers over nine years, "Genre and Activity Systems: The Role of Documentation in Maintaining and Changing Engineering Activity Systems," Dorothy Winsor studied genre production in an engineering firm, specifically the production of documentation, which was often the junior engineers' responsibility. What she found was the role of these seemingly small, everyday genres in the larger activity system of the engineering firm. For engineers, documentation was used not only to "cover their asses" and prove work had been completed, but also to prompt future action in collaborators, "a concrete tool around which people orient their participation in the activity system" (Winsor 216). Such actions were more completely understood by writer and recipient when both were part of the same activity system

with the same collectively understood goals, or, "That is, writers aimed to create cooperation in the midst of discontinuity to maintain the coherence of the activity system" (Winsor 207).

Activity systems theory has been extensively applied to understand activities within workplace and professional environments with an inherent structure. Scholars like Clay Spinuzzi, Dorothy Winsor, and Mark Zachry use this structure to illuminate the activities of writing within it. For voluntary collaborations, however—like those I study in this project—there lacks an inherent structure and so creating that structure through the writing process leads to some very engaging perspectives on collaborative composing, especially as contradictions arise and negotiations ensue. To extend the work of scholars like Winsor, I would like to apply a similar framework of activity theory to a very different collaborative dynamic. Studies of workplace or activity systems have contributed greatly to how the field understands writing in large, systematic contexts, but, I would argue, such frameworks can be equally helpful when looking at smaller, less-hierarchical contexts like the three teams I will be studying. Such systems of activity, rather than being imposed from the top-down through organizational structures or institutional hierarchies, are formed from the ground-up when writers and artists come together—and with them, bring traces of activity systems from other social contexts of their lives.

For example, in the *Understanding Rhetoric* team, Liz Losh and Jonathan Alexander (and perhaps even the publishers/editors) see themselves as working within academic activity systems, whereas artists Kevin and Zander see themselves decidedly outside of it—Kevin and Zander have an established reputation as "the educational comics guys" in the comics community, but they don't see their use of visual art to illustrate concepts and ideas as academic. As one might imagine, these conflicting activities have created contradictions in our collaboration, including discussions of the politics of representation in both image and text (the language an audience will both comprehend and learn from, the ways people of non-dominant

populations and cultures are pictured, etc.). As David Russell and Arturo Yañez argue, activity

theory is a powerful theoretical lens because it can be applied as a heuristic to study units of

analysis beyond the text itself. Where contradictions arise in the system, space is created to

allow for the dynamic nature of social activity throughout the process (335).

In this study, activity theory will allow me, as the researcher, to identify contradictions in

these three collaborative teams in order to identify the sources of conflict and ways members

worked to change their respective systems in order to facilitate shared goals. In *Understanding*

Rhetoric, the writing process itself becomes the unit of study as collaborators scramble to

recreate a process largely informed by textbook publishing but better suited to accommodate the

multimodal nature of the comics medium. In the Cheo comics, the outcome—to educate workers

and prevent workplace injury—becomes the unit of analysis. In response to a highly complex

rhetorical situation, collaborators negotiate the tutorial genre to addresses this shared outcome.

Finally, in *Brotherman*, the unit of analysis becomes the counterpublic evoked in response to

the texts. Data limitation steered findings away from the composing process and toward results

of the product, the original series of 11 *Brotherman* installments. Sibling collaborators Dawud

and Guy share the ways in which the Black comix counterpublic emerged out of and continues to

circulate the *Brotherman* comics in anticipation of an upcoming graphic novel. Activity theory,

then, allows this study to consider how, why, and to/for whom comics texts are composed.

A combined framework of genre and activity systems theory is important for a study like

this one precisely because it will allow me, as the researcher, to examine each collaboration as its

own distinct process, and each comic as its own distinct text. Genre theory allows any and all

written forms to be seriously considered for the social action they enact and the situation they

stabilize while being written or read. As well, studying the documentation genres that arises

from collaborative composing of these comics texts will allow me to look for similar moves

within the activity system, to identify when subjects appear to understand their shared goals and

their responsibilities in achieving them, or alternatively, where the collaborative process breaks

down and where the activity system is consequently weakened.

2.4 The Texts/Participants

In applying each of these theoretical frameworks to the following case studies, I determined that

there is a real gap in our understanding of how the following factors influence writers' decisions

during the collaborative multimodal composing process of comics authorship: 1) the imagetext

nature of the comics medium, 2) the formal and rhetorical patterns of a given genre, and 3)

assumptions about audience's interpretation practices.

I examined several projects and chose them based upon not only the collaborative nature

of their composing process, but also the ways in which each team of writers/artists uses the

medium of the comic to accomplish something very different through various genres as a

demonstration of the rhetorical power behind a seemingly "simplistic" medium. Guy Sims and

Dawub Anyabwile's Black superhero, *Brotherman*, fights injustice and teaches readers about

somewhat unfamiliar issues of urban community building, specifically those related

socioeconomics through a familiar superhero genre; Carlos Evia (Virginia Tech) and Nick

Thorkelson authored three comic technical communication tutorials in which Cheo, a Hispanic

construction worker, teaches real-life workers/supervisors about safety through his humanizing

effect on serious subject through dramatization and humor; a team of artists called Big Time

Attic join two writing studies professors, Liz Losh (UC San Diego) and Jonathan Alexander (UC

Irvine), in *Understanding Rhetoric*, a college textbook for first-year writing students written

entirely in comic book form.

Through a lens of genre and activity systems theories, I first began to consider how this

study offers our field an opportunity to examine each multimodal text as it forms through the

eyes of the writers and artists who compose it.

The fields of technical communication and professional writing have documented the

composing processes of visual/verbal teams (Mirel et al., Cross, among others). This study

hopes to extend the kind of studies which have been done on collaboration before through a more explicit examination of the ways in which the verbal, text-based literacies of the writers and the visual, image-based literacies of the artists must be negotiated in order to compose a multimodal text like a comic.

Understanding how the visual-verbal medium of comics is actually composed could have significant implications for writing studies scholars in the subfields of literacy studies, visual rhetoric, collaborative writing, and theories of the composing process. For one, our field can gain a more precise understanding of how multimodal collaborations are formed and organized. Secondly, studying the process of composing a multimodal text with multiple collaborators can contribute to existing writing process research that has primarily focused only on textual literacy collaborations. Lastly, it is my hopes that this study will continue the work of comics scholarship in illuminating the formal and rhetorical affordances of the comics medium and its worth of study in writing studies to advance theories of visual rhetoric and media studies. This project contributes to an ongoing conversation of the interdependent relationship of text and image that work in unison to create rhetorical comic texts. However, in addition to focusing on the composing process and the comics authors themselves, this study will also explore how these authors conceive of their audience during their composing processes and how such a conception influences their rhetoric within the comic text.

2.5 Feminist Methodology: Reciprocity and Ethics of Representation

In order to conduct this research in a way that was generous to my participants, I informed my overall approach through several aspects of feminist research methods. My understanding of feminist research methodology comes primarily from the work of Gesa Kirsch, Patricia Sullivan, and Ellen Cushman.

In their edited collection *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, Kirsch and Sullivan articulate the pluralistic nature of feminist research methodology. At its root,

feminist methods aim to interrogate the socially constructed nature of human experience, especially as they pertain to social categories, inclusive/exclusive practice, and ethics of representation. Pragmatically, feminist research includes considering researcher stance and bias, identifying power structures, and advocating for marginalized voices. As Denzin and Lincoln argue, because qualitative research methodology was initially informed by early anthropological methods, researchers must interrogate their relationship with the researched. For feminist methodology, this reflexive practice is ongoing and resulted in theories surrounding ethics of representation as well as practices of reciprocity.

In considering my stance as a researcher of writing, it was important for me to design this study in a way that balanced generous yet accurate descriptions of how comics are composed collaboratively. I worked to achieve ethical representations of my participants and their work by sharing final writing with them. Interviewing, as a method, relies on an understanding that people make meaning from lived experience (Seidman 9). Interviewing, therefore, places significant trust in participants to effectively articulate those experiences from which meanings are drawn. The researcher, then, can construct narratives based upon this data in order to formulate cases. Thomas Newkirk argues that the narratives we compose around our participants can quickly fall prey to the temptation to see "cultural myths being reenacted" (Kirsch & Sullivan 136). In my analysis of *Brotherman*, for example, I wanted to tell the story of a family that composed historically significant texts only to fall from the tragedy of family loss, yet rise decades later with the return of their much-anticipated graphic novel. Narratively, it was tempting. Methodologically, it was inaccurate and misrepresented not only the collaborators, but also the audience to whom they were writing. In order to resist creating similar reenactments, I pursued participant feedback. Once a findings chapter was drafted and had been seen by my chair, Diana George, I sent it to the collaborators themselves. I was working towards an ethical representation of not only each case, but each participant. This practice allowed participants to articulate misrepresentations in my writing and to share conclusions of

their own. It allowed me, as the researcher, to consider limitations in data collection as

participants identified gaps in my narratives and findings. But, requesting feedback from

participants meant requesting more of their time and effort. I was forced to ask, What does my

research offer my participants in return for their valuable contributions to my scholarship,

degree conferral, and long-term career?

Thus, a second result of my reflections on my researcher stance led me to the "basic

question of research for whom, by whom, and to what end" (Seidman 13). Practices of

reciprocity are significant in feminist research methodology because they address issues of

power as related to researcher stance. To conduct academic scholarship is to be working in and

from a position of privilege, a position of power. Academic culture tends to privilege the

perspectives of the researcher and comparatively marginalize the views of the researched.

Similarly, the privilege granted scholars in American society writ large—a national culture that

values education as a means of social mobility—results in yet another dimension of power for

those in academia. As my study progressed, it became more important to engage participants as

collaborators rather than subjects in work that extended beyond the research itself.

With *Understanding Rhetoric*, I remained engaged in the review process for textbook

chapters long after my work with Bedford's TA Advisory Board[6] was complete. I worked to

develop interview questions that would help writers, publishers, and artists to reflect on their

work and its collaborative and multimodal nature. I also contributed to a video being filmed in

order to promote the textbook to other teachers of writing. It was not until the book was

released, during the CCCC conference in Las Vegas, that I learned of the truly reciprocal nature

of my work with the case. In the introduction, Liz and Jonathan acknowledge the value of the

external feedback they received and list reviewers; among them, I was listed. But this was not

surprising. What did surprise me was that my name appeared a second time in a separate

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[6] Bedford's TA Advisory Board is an annual committee assembled through recommendations by writing studies
faculty at various colleges and universities. I was nominated by Diana George. The Board members are responsible for
reviewing two projects currently in production and to attend a professional development/feedback session in Boston,
hosted by Bedford. Participants are remunerated with a small stipend for their reviews.

acknowledgement, among a much smaller list of contributors. The paragraph read, "For

contributions to our thinking on the instructor's manual for *Understanding Rhetoric*, our

gratitude goes to Henry Jenkins, Keith McCleary, Emily Roxworthy, Molly Scanlon, Cynthia

Selfe, and Wayne Yang" (x). In asking participants to reflect on their processes and

collaborations, I was able to contribute to an understanding of their work for other teachers of

writing.

In the Cheo comics, I became familiar with not only the texts themselves, but also the

process through which they were created through technical communication research and

observations of workplace practice. I had a friend who taught construction at a vocational high

school in Maryland and worked closely with Carlos Evia to develop a means of testing the

comics' efficacy among students of construction before they entered the job site. We co-wrote a

125-page proposal to integrate the comics training materials into existing instruction and to test

knowledge gain through short quizzes. The principal of the school failed to grant permission to

the county-level office that grants approval for research, however, the proposal is completed and

can be used in future research contexts.

In my work on *Brotherman*, I achieved reciprocity in less direct ways. Rather than

collaborating with participants outside of the research itself, it was my collaboration with

Dawud and Guy on this research that led to their feelings of reciprocity. After handing the

chapter over to Dawud and Guy for feedback, I received an email from Guy in which he shared

his feelings on the value of the research itself. Guy wrote, "[Dawud and I are] both excited for

your project…especially me, knowing all that goes into a dissertation. You might not realize it

but you are adding tremendously to an overlooked part of African American culture." One of the

primary reasons I study writing is my interest in the politics of language and the image and the

power of alternative discourses and counterpublics to enrich our communities and diversify our

perspectives. I am committed in my scholarship to illuminate great work being done, especially

when it emerges from the margins. To receive this feedback from Guy was a pivotal moment in my work towards reciprocity.

Ethics of representation and issues of reciprocity informed this study in a myriad of ways. As you read the following chapters that describe these cases, conceive of this research as a series of collaborations formed around reflexivity and the meaning making of human experiences.

Chapter 3: *Understanding Rhetoric* as a Genre Resulting from Convergence

In a recent article in the online comics studies journal *ImageTexT*, educational comics historian Sol Davidson discusses the difficulty of defining educational comics. A collection of educational comics was recently assembled for a library archive, and because an archive must have distinct criteria for inclusion or exclusion, Davidson confronted the issue of definition:

> The entrepreneurs of educational comics provide one hint: they named their comics Real Facts, Real Heroes, Real Life, as opposed to, I suppose, fiction or entertainment. Just as educational aspects are present in all comics, dramatization, embellishment and imagination are part of even the severest factual presentations. Still, there is a minimum threshold of truth or knowledge the compilers must seek. (n.p.).

In an entry in *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, Leonard Rifas, an educational comics author, lists more than a dozen distinct genres that could be considered educational comics, including,

> local and global history comics, 'true fact' comics, illustrated adaptations of novels and plays, instructional comics, propaganda and psychological warfare comics, religious education and proselytizing comics, advertising and industrial public relations comics, political campaign comics, health education comics, biography and autobiography comics, development education comics, educational fotonovelas, benefit/cause comics, comics-illustrated brochures, cartoon-illustrated nonfiction picture books, infotainment and classroom-based edutainment" (Davidson n.p.)

It is evident from this list that comics are widely adopted for pedagogical purposes. Yet,from this list of examples of educational comics, it is evident that writing studies is not a discipline that has appropriated comics texts. To appropriate comics for pedagogical purposes requires more than just good intentions for student engagement, it requires a sophisticated understanding of

the affordances of the medium. Without a purposeful approach, the final educational product may very well *look* like a comic without engaging any of its imagetext rhetorical qualities. Composing a text that merely looks like a comic does not engage what the comics medium can *do*. For this reason, comics studies scholarship has primarily dismissed pedagogical comics from serious discussion of the medium. *Understanding Rhetoric*, on the other hand, is a project that allows our field to engage in a thorough discussion of pedagogical comics in terms of genre, writing process, author identities, and consideration of audience. This chapter will introduce readers to authors, extrapolate aspects of their identities that influenced the process, and then proceed in engaging a discussion of genre in order to better understand the rhetorical and formal elements that underlie *Understanding Rhetoric* as a composition textbook. The chapter that follows will address this case in terms of writing process and the authors' consideration of audience as it informed this process.

I will begin this chapter by describing how I became involved in the project and came to engage genre-based inquiry, activity system theory, and process theory of convergence in order to best understanding this multimodal collaboration and the resulting first-year Rhetoric textbook, *Understanding Rhetoric*. In sharing this narrative, I argue for evidence of reciprocity in my methodology as I, too, became a part of the composing process.

When Karita dos Santos, Marketing Development Manager at Bedford St. Martin's, told me they had a "graphic novel textbook" available for review, I was anxious to see how the medium would be taken up. I was primarily concerned that the textbook publisher would not fully comprehend the affordances of the medium and so would fall victim to simplicity, producing a textbook that modeled a comic's formal properties without engaging in its rhetorical potential for multimodal meaning making.

The manuscript I received for review modeled playwriting: the authors described panel content, including the visual intended for the panel—like the setting and stage directions for a play—with the dialogue and narration for the characters. The two main characters, Jonathan

and Liz, addressed the audience in a friendly, direct manner and with an informal and conversational tone. They broke the fourth wall, played on words, and included humor on every page; most importantly, they had taken the medium seriously by engaging both the image and the text interdependently to convey their argument.

PANEL 5
Layout of a crowded half page opposite the blank one with JA and LL in the same positions, now almost lost in a chaotic and noisy "Where's Waldo"-style landscape of towering masses of books, people – including teachers, famous writers, peers, etc., abstract concepts, networks of connections, place names, time periods, computer screens, media, etc. Cindy and Luis [student characters to appear in the mini-comics throughout the book] make their first appearance in this chaos.

LIZ

OR, they are awash in thoughts, ideas, insights, and observations that crowd out their ability to think clearly and communicate concisely.

JONATHAN

There's SO MUCH to say—how do you know what's worth saying?

… and when?

… and how?

PANEL 6
Liz and Jonathan continue to battle their way through an increasingly wacky horizontal scene in the top panel on the next page, no longer out in the world but now on a theatrical stage.

JONATHAN

There are sometimes so many possible aspects to consider when we sit down to write something that we are tempted simply to ignore many of them, as we would a distraction.

PANEL 7
A curtain with the words "too much information" is lowered on the scene. LL's head pokes out of the curtain.

LIZ

So we may not be consciously aware of all the influences, audiences, agendas, and media to which we are responding.

As a member of the publisher's TA Advisory Board, I was asked to review *Understanding Rhetoric* and was invited a meeting during the 2011 CCCCs conference in Atlanta. Writers Liz Losh and Jonathan Alexander, and Editors Leasa Burton and Carolyn Lengel were also present. They spoke at length about the project: how the unique visual nature of the textbook turned the traditional publishing process on its head, how they imagined audiences might receive the text. As discussion continued, I was hesitant to raise an issue that I, as a student of writing studies and a reader of comics, felt had to be addressed: "Why aren't you *calling it* a 'comic'? It's a

comic." They knew enough to say that it was not a graphic novel, because it wasn't a work of fiction. Comics tend to be funny, observed Carolyn, and this is funny at times, but its main purpose is to teach. A few other voices piped in and finally Leasa settled it, "We're calling it a graphic guide because that's what they have called similar projects in the past"—"they" being artists Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon and "similar projects" being the educational comics to come from publishers at Hill & Wang[7]. Rhetorical genre studies tells us that genres are not formed through the process of naming. Rather, genres form through typified and repeated social action. For me, the question of genre persisted.

Genre-based inquiry is a theoretical lens which allows us to look at writers/writing through the social activity systems in which they produce/are produced. For this reason, and because genre so organically emerged as a frequent topic among the interviewees, I think it is important to understand the genre of *Understanding Rhetoric* before more closely examining the process through which it was composed—a subject I will address in the following chapter. By examining the genre traditions in which this unique text was born, we can examine the ways in which *Understanding Rhetoric* both meets and challenges genre conventions.

3.1 "Comic (text) Book," "Graphic Novel Textbook," "Graphic Guide:" The Genre Naming Problem in *Understanding Rhetoric*

When considering *Understanding Rhetoric*, the genre seems deceptively clear to readers: two writing studies professors wanted to work with a composition textbook publishing company to produce a first-year Rhetoric written in the comics medium. Naming this new genre was not as easy to articulate. Writers, publishers, and artists all struggled to name the genre during interviews, settling on a term only to abandon it and grasp at a new term in the very next sentence. This pattern of naming and renaming emerged quite organically in the data and I began to formulate research questions regarding the overall relationship of genre and medium in the case of *Understanding Rhetoric*:

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[7] Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon have co-authored a number of comics trade paperback titles for Hill & Wang including *DNA: The Stuff of Life*, and *Evolution: The Story of Life on Earth*.

- When you situate an established genre in a new medium, to what extent is it the same/a new genre?
  - o To what extent do authors conceive of it in the same way?
  - o To what extent do audiences approach it with the same generic/rhetorical expectations?
- How does *Understanding Rhetoric* fit into the composition (textbook) tradition?
- How does *Understanding Rhetoric* challenge the composition (textbook) tradition?

The data collected in this study did not allow me to address all of the questions fully. For one, the textbook was released during CCCC in Las Vegas during March of 2013. In order to explore audience responses to the text, I will need to wait until the text is adopted by teachers and students of writing. Secondly, this inquiry is addressed largely in terms of how authors perceive of its genre as I assume them to be the most knowledgeable about this text as this stage.

In order to address these questions as fully as I could, I first sought interview data, which allowed each member of the collaboration to communicate how they conceived of the genre. What resulted was a range of language and terminology. Therefore, this section will include brief excerpts of my interviews with the *Understanding* Rhetoric team members in order to isolate participants' articulations in an attempt to describe the genre.

In these excerpts, there are a number of themes worth exploring. For example, variations of "learning" discourse are found—*educational, learning, pedagogical, guide*—because the textbook is associated with a learning environment, be it academic, professional, or self-directed. Likewise, terms that are familiar to our field emerge quite often: *rhetoric, pedagogical, composition, writing* because of the writers' and publishers' respective roles in the field of writing studies and writing pedagogy. Lastly, terms used to describe comics and other print media are also found here, albeit in hybrid forms: *comic book, comics, graphic, graphic guide, graphic novel, visual*—an acknowledgement of the text's visual formal features.

Sharing larger excerpts of participant language patterns allows me to describe why I am drawn to these particular acts of genre naming and identification. I will also use this space to introduce the individual members of the collaboration behind *Understanding Rhetoric* in the hopes that a better understanding of their identities will contextualize their conception of genre.

In the following chapter, when I interrogate other contradictions and negotiations of the activity, I will discuss identity in greater depth along with other aspects of the collaboration and their composing process.

Zander Cannon & Kevin Cannon: Authors/Artists, Big Time Attic Comics

Zander and Kevin are two self-employed comics artists from Minneapolis, Minnesota operating under the company name, Big Time Attic comics. Zander and Kevin complete projects individually about as frequently as they collaborate. The duo has co-written a number of educational comics, including *T-Minus*, a narrative about the 1960s space race. They have developed a reputation as "the educational comics guys" among colleagues, a title they embrace. It was this reputation that drove Thomas LeBien of Hill & Wang to recommend them to Leasa Burton for the project. Leasa cannot recall how she described the *Understanding Rhetoric* project back in 2008 when she first approached the artists, but now, five years later and with the project almost complete, Zander and Kevin describe the genre of *Understanding Rhetoric* in this way:

Molly: What would you call this genre? How would you describe it?

Zander: This book? The rhetoric book? The genre? I don't know… [*Zander turns toward Kevin with an inquisitive look on his face. At the same moment Kevin turns toward him, looking equally thoughtful but puzzled*]…educational comics? [*Laughter*]

Kevin: Sure, textbook. [*Kevin throws his arms up as he shrugs his shoulders*]
        [. . .] I think this is above our pay grade. [*Laughter*]

Zander: What it's trying to do, that it has in common with comics, is sort of leverage comics' accessibility and say, "Rhetoric seems to be this ill-understood word. Let's use comics, let's use comics' accessibility to make that story a little bit, or to make this concept a little bit more accessible." So, in that way, I think that it wants to make it as much like other comics as it can, but I think by its very nature—and the fact that it's this sort of educational, pedagogical narrative means that it's going to be different from Spider-man [*Laughter*] and all of that stuff, obviously, but even than other nonfiction comics.

To best interpret how Zander and Kevin describe the genre of *Understanding Rhetoric*, readers must consider aspects of their identity and their role in the collaboration that inform their understanding. Zander and Kevin are artists by trade. They write and draw from within a

discourse community, and their work in this community spans several genres including

historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and even children's books[8]. Zander and Kevin are

accustomed to a much larger audience for their work where, perhaps, the name of the genre

matters much less to the discourse community than the social action of the genre, the text's

ability to allow readers to laugh, escape, learn, and think through humor, fright, excitement,

adventure, conceptualization, and abstraction. Zander's and Kevin's identities in this

collaboration—authors who are primarily responsible for the visual transformation of the

written script—undeniably informs how they conceive of *Understanding Rhetoric* as a genre.

They are not academics, nor are they textbook publishers and so they are members of yet

another discourse community, that of comics readership and authorship. For the artists, it is

more important to focus on the visual medium than it is to consider its genre tradition. For this

reason, Kevin and Zander's consideration of the genre might seem insignificant and yet, within

this collaboration, they are the only authors to have composed in this medium. The artists'

formal consideration of the genre differs from how other collaborators conceive of the project

and its genre.

Jonathan Alexander: Author/Writer, UC Irvine

Jonathan is a Professor at the University of California, Irvine, where he holds several

distinctions and administrative roles: Chancellor's Fellow and Professor of English

School of Humanities; Campus Writing Coordinator; Director, UCI Center for Excellence in

Writing & Communication; and Writing Director, First-Year Integrated Program (FIP). He has

been teaching writing for over 20 years and has previously authored textbooks for first-year

writing courses. His interest in *Understanding Rhetoric* was spiked when Liz tantalized him

with the comics medium.

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[8] The children's book, *The Gluten Glitch* by Kevin Cannon, is illustrated and is therefore predominantly visual, but is not composed in comics imagetext.

"I am working on a comic with my colleague Elizabeth Losh, called *Understanding Rhetoric*. And, it is a graphic book—we kind of actually don't know what to call it—I think a lot of people who work in this form don't necessarily know what to call what they produce. It's not a graphic novel because it's not a work of fiction. But, it's not exactly a comic book because it's an instructional book, so it's a graphic comic. Comic instructional. Words don't really capture it. But we settle pretty much on graphic book or graphic guide. We intended it to look a lot like a comic book and it borrows pretty substantially, at times, from the tropes of traditional comic books. So, for instance, there is a super hero. There is a detective character. There is an extended science fiction scene and things of that nature. Um, but it is really a textbook. We intend it to be a textbook that would be used in lower division writing courses as an introduction to rhetorical concepts and to the writing process" (Alexander).

Elizabeth Losh: Author/Writer, UC San Diego

Liz Losh, media scholar, found comics through an adult interest in graphic novels such as *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, and Art Speigelman's *Maus*. She considered the ways in which comics could teach and began to see parallel between her interest in media studies, particularly what media seduction and what she calls "contemporary anxieties about new media" and the 1950s witch hunt for comics. Liz now directs academic programs in the sixth college and the culture, art & technology program at the University of California, San Diego. Liz and Jonathan's shared interest in contemporary media studies fueled the flame further and the pair realized how valuable it would be to compose in a contemporary medium about writing rhetorically in contemporary media.

"the genre that we're presenting has a kind of consistent didacticism to it in ways like a book like Understanding Comics and we have sort of sub-styles, and sub-homages inside the comic" [. . .] "Well, the editors are in a tough position because this is a totally different of kind of product from anything that they've really marketed before and they have to kind of figure out everything from the production cycle to how they're going to make it fit into their existing product lines. I think the artists want to make sure that it works as a comic book and so and we're really sort of supportive of that because we really want to make sure that it reads like comic book. The most common note that Jonathan and I will give the editors when we push back—because most of the time we agree with what they have to say—but if we feel it makes it too textbooky, we'll fight that.

Leasa Burton: Editor, Bedford St. Martin's

Leasa is a Senior Executive Editor at Bedford. She has been with the company for 15 years and has been involved in developing, revising, marketing, and selling every textbook genre that

Bedford offers: readers, handbooks, and Rhetorics. She had previously considered something

like a comic but waited until she found authors who were equally serious about working in the

medium.

> "the script that they had done originally was just really smart and fun and, I thought, if there is
> going to be a Rhetoric graphic novel that these are the people to do it."

Carolyn Lengel: Development Editor, Bedford St. Martin's

Carolyn is a development editor at Bedford. She works directly with the authors as they develop

the concept and the manuscript for a textbook. She then follows the textbook through its full

publishing process from author to copyeditor, production editor to printer. Carolyn's recent

work, aside from UR, includes Andrea Lunsford's various textbooks, which are revised for new

editions every three years, making each year a revision year for one edition or the other. Before

Understanding Rhetoric, she had not worked on a first edition. For a long time, Carolyn

describes, she had been itching to work with comics in some capacity and was thrilled when

Leasa approached her about *Understanding Rhetoric.*

> "And there are an awful lot of people teaching with graphic texts now. I mean, people who are
> using that kind of text in their writing class as readings. People are teaching Maus all over the
> place, and Persepolis and things like that [. . .] there's the canonical graphic novel text or graphic
> memoir—graphic text comic—we're still playing around with terminology. [*Laughter*] Yeah,
> that's the thing that makes my head spin."

As this pattern of genre naming emerged, it became clear that the task of naming a genre is a

reflection of that genre's temporary stability within an activity system—or in this case,

instability. composition textbook publishers calls this genre a Rhetoric[9], a textbook that is

neither a reader nor a handbook, but rather the main instructional text that conceptualizes

writing theory and practice for students in a writing course. In our field of writing studies, we

are quite familiar with the Rhetorics we select each year for our students, at least in terms of

genre expectations, what we expect to see in the textbook (concepts of rhetoric and writing

practice, etc.) and what expect not to see (grammar instruction and practice, a focus on

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[9] Throughout Chapters 3 and 4, I use capitalization to differentiate the textbook genre, Rhetoric, from
theories of rhetoric.

literature, etc.). There can also be variations based upon regional textbook naming practices—for example, in Texas, teachers of writing refer to handbooks as Rhetorics. *Understanding Rhetoric* serves as an additional variation on the traditional.

Understanding Rhetoric both challenges and affirms the genre tradition of the textbook Rhetoric. Through genre-based inquiry, we can learn about much more than just the text. We see a seminal moment in composition textbook publishing as a result of decades of the field's research. Genre-based inquiry allows us to ask "how and why texts as cultural artifacts are produced; how they in turn reflect and help enact social actions; and how, finally, they can serve as sites for cultural critique and change" (Bawarshi 336). In this way, genres are seen as "sites of contention between stability and change," (Berkenkotter & Huckin qtd Caple 244) which is significant in two ways. For one, genres can reflect constants in the writing activities of a discourse community. Alternatively, genres can also serve as the battleground for change within communities. So what's the constant in the discourse community of *Understanding Rhetoric*? What's the change in the discourse community of *Understanding Rhetoric*? I attempted to address this question through interviews with participants by asking, "In what ways does this comic affirm the Rhetoric genre tradition in composition textbook publishing? In what ways does this comic challenge the Rhetoric genre tradition in composition textbook publishing? Participant responses reflect historically significant shifts in the research and practice of college-level writing instruction.

3.2 A Genre Tradition: Historical Perspectives on Rhetorics

After analyzing interviews for the language used to describe the genre of *Understanding Rhetoric*, I reviewed the literature on the Rhetoric textbook tradition in composition in order to best understand the genre tradition of a textbook Rhetoric. This tradition includes two components: the social issues related to textbook publishing in composition (politics, economics, and disciplinary issues) and the formal and rhetorical properties that emerge as a result of these issues. I will first address disciplinary factors related to the relationship between

a commercial industry and an academic discipline. From there, I will discuss more specific

rhetorical and formal genre conventions of a Rhetoric. At times, the social and formal aspects of

textbook publishing and textbook genres may overlap—for example, the disciplinary inquiries

into writing process, which began in the 1980s, manifest in the formation of process theory and

a compulsory inclusion of "the writing process" in composition textbooks even today. Lastly, I

will compare these generic analyses with *Understanding Rhetoric* to better understand the ways

in which it both affirms and challenges the contemporary Rhetoric genre tradition in

composition textbook publishing.

Textbook Publishing as informed by Composition Research

Historically, the contemporary textbook emerged through the 19th and 20th centuries. Writing

textbooks are informed by the understanding of rhetoric as a theoretical subject with concepts

that inform students' composing behaviors and must be applied through argument.. The growth

of publishing technologies during the American Industrial Revolution secured text as a

commodity and no longer a luxury and a concurrent 19th-century rise in schools without a

proportionate rise in trained teachers, creating the need for texts from which students could

learn independently (Connors). From the early 20th century, the dominance of the modes of

discourse as the primary theory informing textbook publication and composition pedagogy. It

was believed that if students could memorize the purpose of each mode and master the ability to

write in expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentation modes, that they would be

prepared for a range of rhetorical composing contexts. The modes of discourse rose and fell in

popularity over the course of the 20th century but continue to inform contemporary texts as

remnants of current-traditional rhetoric pedagogy, as Kathleen Welch argues in later

publications.

Where Robert Connors gave us a historical context for understanding the rise of the

composition textbook and its modes of discourse from the 19th to the 20th century, Donald

Stewart (1978) picks up the story in the mid-1970s in order to hone in on the development—and what he argues, the denigration—of the composition textbook niche.

Stewart argues first, that other mass media were able to speak to much broader audiences than textbooks in composition theory and practice; and second, current-traditional pedagogy continued to dominate as the discipline's paradigm despite research that broadened the teaching of writing to include much more than the product. In its place, Stewart proposes a textbook that might combine some of the best research being done in composition: "(1) a revival of interest in invention as presented in classical rhetoric, best exemplified in a text like Edward P. J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student; (2) the development of pre-writing techniques by Gordon Rohman and Albert Wlecke of Michigan State; (3) Kenneth Burke's dramatistic method, characterized by the pentad of act, agency, actor, scene, and purpose; and (4) Kenneth Pike's tagmemic theories, which, according to [Richard] Young, combine the best features of prewriting and classical invention" (172). Stewart was curious: "To what extent have these assaults upon prominent features of the current-traditional paradigm in rhetoric and composition been reflected in widely used composition textbooks?" (173). So, he went about surveying current composition textbooks, 34 in total: 15 handbooks, 9 rhetorics, and 10 readers. Stewart found that "only seven of the 34 contained any appreciable awareness of the work of people like Corbett, Rohman, Burke, Pike, Zoellner, or Weathers" (173). Stewart lamented the publishers' inclination to continue disseminating product-centered current-traditional pedagogies (grammar-centric skills/drills, modes of discourse, prescription, classification, etc.) in lieu of significant growth in theory and practice, particularly toward the understanding of writing as a process and therefore a student-centered pedagogy. Stewart's argument reflects a significant historical movement toward professionalizing composition as a discipline in its own right, a necessary shift before textbook Rhetorics could accurately reflect the work of its scholars.

Years later, Stewart (1982) would come across a "flyer advertising X. J. and Dorothy Kennedy's Bedford Reader," which—despite its overall prescriptive approach—reflected what he saw as a move in the right direction, including a recognition of rhetoric from classic to modern times, a reflection on writing as a process, and finally, an encouragement to evaluate student writing in ways that reflect a concern for concepts and ideas before copyediting. Stewart concludes that while the reader was able to move in stride with some of what teachers of writing understood and practiced in their classrooms, the reader was still remiss in ignoring composition research itself as a source of authority for writing instruction best practices. To remind readers, these practices are for the teaching of students, students who were rarely considered by publishers or book evaluators as the product's primary audience or even end user.

In a *College English* article from 1982, Arn Tibbetts and Charlene Tibbetts begged the question "Can Composition Textbooks Use Composition Research?" Their response, based upon decades of teaching, scholarship, and textbook publishing echoes Stewart's question of audience:

> A textbook is a product. By this we mean that people design it, produce it, market it, sell it. All along the way there is a good deal of fretting and worrying about the product. Is it well designed? Can it be made at a reasonable cost? What is the best way to market it? Will anybody buy it? Will it be a Ford Mustang or an Edsel? (855).

Tibbetts and Tibbetts reminded readers that textbooks are commercial products sold within an industry as competitive as the car market, a factor of publishing that often gets lost amid debates of contemporary theories of writing pedagogy. But the authors also consider that—unlike the buyer of the car who will mostly likely drive or ride as a passenger in the car—the primary textbook consumer is the teacher, not the students, and writing teachers want familiar materials for instruction, particularly grammar instruction and references regarding conventions of standard academic English (856). The consequence of this teacher-centered approach by

textbook publishers, Tibbetts and Tibbetts argue, is two-fold. First, students' needs are largely

ignored in terms of the materials included and how they are presented. Second, composition

research is largely enacted through classroom practice, a slow process that requires classroom

teachers to be informed of disciplinary conversations. Because writing is taught by teachers in

many types of employment situations—four-year colleges, two-year colleges, tenure-track,

tenured professor, full professor, adjunct, etc.—writing instructors are not always economically

enticed to stay abreast of disciplinary issues. Tibbetts and Tibbetts see these consequences as

problematic for the field of composition, a discipline largely defined by its pedagogical

imperative and undergoing an identity crisis at the time of the article's publication: "if [research]

can't be translated into textbook terms that teachers will accept and students will tolerate, the

whole affair may come to nothing" (858). The authors problematize the disciplinary

development of composition pedagogy—as informing and informed by the ongoing research

imperative—and its reflection in teaching practice and the textbooks that represent this practice.

Kathleen Welch further challenges this interrogation of research informing practice by

arguing for the existence of ideological similarities between writing teachers and textbook

publishers. Welch argues first that textbooks, as of 1987, did not reflect the current composition

scholarship and theory; second, textbooks continued to frame writing far too much in terms of

modes of discourse or the rhetorical canons as Connors had noted a decade prior; third, the

content of textbooks tends to include fixed frameworks/hard-and-fast rules that do not reflect

the dynamic nature of writing/rhetorical situations; and lastly, professional writing illustrations,

which are either reductive or misrepresentative of the theories, deter teachers and intimidate

students. Welch concludes, "Theory does not deny practice. Theory is practice," reminding

readers of the first sentence of her article, "Of the hundreds of pounds of freshman writing

books produced each year, few are constructed with any overt indication that composition

theory has ever existed" (Welch 280; 269). Because textbooks inevitably become where teachers

themselves learn the practice of writing pedagogy, Welch argues, the textbooks should be where

they also learn the theoretical rationale behind such practices. Therefore, she concludes, in order to effectively improve writing instruction to make it reflect the work of the discipline, we must change the textbooks first.

In her dissertation, more than 15 years after many of these first articles were published, Libby Miles engaged in an economic and political consideration of contemporary textbook publishers and publishing practices in the composition textbook industry. In Miles' investigation of the rhetorics of production, she argues for the value of studying the processes of textbook composition and production in order to better understand the relationship between textbook production and writing scholarship. In this study, this is precisely what I intend to do through the case of *Understanding Rhetoric*. Rather than continuing to criticize the complex economic and disciplinary relationship between textbook publishing (itself a writing process that falls into our disciplinary purview) and academic writing studies, members of our field can perhaps benefit from a more rigorous approach to understanding textbook production through not only pedagogical theories, but broader theories of written discourse, particularly rhetorical genre studies. Understanding this relationship between the industry and the academy will aid my study in an examination of the academic textbook publication process and help me to identify contradictions with in the activity system of this collaboration, the first of which we discuss is the issue of genre. For example, in composition publishing, there are three major genres: readers, handbooks, and rhetorics. *Understanding Rhetoric* is considered a Rhetoric.

3.3 A Tradition in Transition: The Genre of *Understanding Rhetoric*

For those familiar with the stagnation that is sometimes used to characterize composition textbook publishing, *Understanding Rhetoric* can be seen as both conforming to and challenging the Rhetoric genre tradition through a process which Henry Jenkins and many others have called convergence. In this section, I provide an in-depth look at the genre and medium of *Understanding Rhetoric* and then discuss the ways in which they are informed by the dynamic tension of the convergence process. So as to allow for a broader examination of this

collaboration beyond genre, I will then shift to a description of the collaborative process that produced this unique genre in a more thorough discussion of other contradictions that arose within the activity system of *Understanding Rhetoric*.

Examinations of textbook publishing and composition pedagogy and scholarship allow members of our field to examine the political, economical, and ideological implications of our own publications as well as of the texts we adopt and ask our students to read and learn from. These works especially will aid in my study of *Understanding Rhetoric* as a complex collaborative team consisting of academic textbook publishers, writing scholars/teachers, and comics artists. Another vein of textbook scholarship has looked more closely at the rhetorical and formal conventions of Rhetorics, a textbook genre which publishers and writing teachers consider the primary instructional text for a writing course.

Where some may read this literature and assume it entirely historical, there is still evidence of dissatisfaction among teachers of writing when it comes to reflecting current pedagogies in textbooks. Even more than twenty years later, the words of Stewart and others continue to echo in textbook scholarship. In 2003, Victoria Tischio argued that contemporary textbooks appeal to the idea of composition as a service course and as a way to prepare students for the "real" writing they will do in their majors or careers, placing students unfavorably within a production-consumption binary. Tischio, like so many who came before her (Welch, Miles, Stewart), argues that textbooks reinforce social inequities and ignore the ways in which writing and discourse can allow students to be empowered and effect change in their realities. Instead, argues Tischio, even contemporary texts within the rhetoric genre continue to focus on a linear writing process and reductive understandings of contemporary rhetorics. Textbook publishing is an established industry that could be described as resistant to the changes our field's writing research has the potential to impose on its texts. The textbook industry's collective resistance to content change is especially important to remember when considering *Understanding Rhetoric*.

Understanding Rhetoric challenges many of the Rhetoric genre traditions through both formal

and rhetorical properties via its unique medium and its pedagogical content:

UR affirms the Rhetoric genre tradition in that its form:	*UR* challenges the Rhetoric genre tradition in that its form:
…is a print medium, albeit predominantly visual. …organizes pages into chapters. …organizes content via themed chapters. …includes questions at the conclusion of each chapter. …concludes each chapter with assignments. …differs from handbooks and readers.	…does not include textbook elements such as call-out boxes and other marginalia/commenting. …resists the textbook design in order to take the comics medium seriously. …intentionally borrows tropes from the comics medium (visual, linear, imagetext), including movement outside of the panel in the gutter. …directly addresses readers via cartoon characters representing the authors. …and content was produced through a collaboration with academic and non-academic (credited) authors. …becomes part of what is scrutinized rhetorically. Readers are asked: How does the medium actually function? How does it work as a genre? How does it have its own rhetorical affordances? It becomes an object of study in itself in the classroom. …is intended to draw potential readers from outside of the academic context.

UR affirms the Rhetoric genre tradition in that its purpose:	*UR* challenges the Rhetoric genre tradition in that its purpose:
…is intended to be read by students …serves as the primary instructional text for students in a lower division writing course …introduces students to traditional content of the course, reflective of contemporary composition research: rhetorical concepts (ethos, pathos, logos), the rhetorical situation, the writing process (its recursive nature), conducting research (finding and integrating sources, entering the conversation), multiliteracies, and visual rhetoric.	…is informed by writing studies scholars who acknowledge the value of diverse literate acts and model them in the form and content of the textbook itself. …models the visual rhetorical text it elaborates (multimodal imagetext). …resists some aspects of traditional course content: linear representation of the writing process, a full research paper example, etc. …includes content not traditional in the

	content tradition: e.g. an entire chapter focused on writer identity.
…is to articulate the nature of how we make arguments in public spaces and how we see our own/develop our own voices as civic actors. …includes meta-awareness in that the authors refer back to a topic that readers were introduced to earlier.	…delivers narrative and didactic content through characters and stories in each chapter in an act of worldmaking[10]. …is to problematize how writing is defined. …is to portray writing as public, social, and involves both embodiment and identification in the examination of written expression.

Articulating the ways in which *UR* affirms and challenges the composition textbook genre tradition of a Rhetoric, allowed me to convey why naming this new genre becomes so difficult. Leasa shared that innovation is typical among genres at Bedford, as she discussed the ways in which editors "are actually very used to making up genres of textbooks. Bedford invented the comb-bound reference handbook and "pocket style" genre of handbooks with the publication of Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* and *A Pocket Style Manual.* A significant part of [Leasa's] job is thinking about innovative genres of instructional information that work better for students and teachers" (Burton). Still, addressing the issue of naming a hybrid genre proves difficult until its rhetorical and formal properties repeat and become typified. *Understanding Rhetoric* is still in its own invented category for the time being. This research cannot offer conclusions in terms of this question of genre naming, but it can extend the field's conversations about textbook politics through the language of participant interviews in order to understand how genre can be a gateway to the study of more than the rhetorical aspects of a text.. Through activity system theory we can further explore these aspects of the collaboration and the writing process which created *Understanding Rhetoric*.

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[10] A term used by Michael Warner to describe the actions of a public in its adoption of texts and self-organization through interpellation.

3.4 Genre: A Tool within the *Understanding Rhetoric* Activity System

Through a lens of rhetorical genre studies and activity theory, I will attempt to address the contradictions within the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system that have produced this unnamed hybrid genre.

Activity theory is especially useful in studying genre because while genre is only one aspect of the activity system, it is often the object which serves to reflect, antagonize, and negotiate tensions between subjects, motives, tools, divisions of labor, and rules and norms: "AT is a way of analyzing human activity over time, especially change—including that kind of change called learning. It does not claim to provide a neat way to predict outcomes, but rather offers tentative explanations. It is a heuristic" (Russell and Yañez 335).
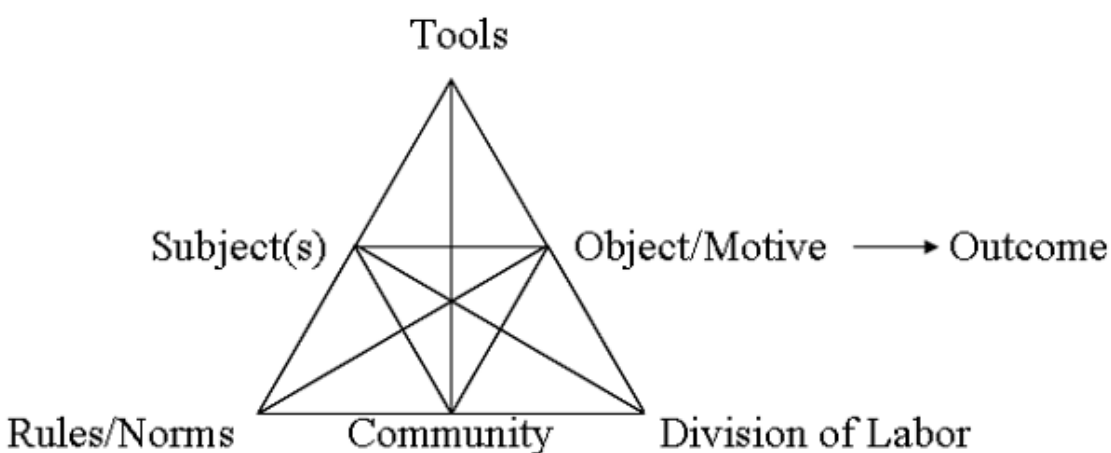
Figure 3.1 Visualization of an Activity System.

David Russell and Arturo Yañez claim that because people are subjects in a number of activity systems, these networks can sometimes overlap or differing motives can be the cause of contradictions. Similar contradictions were seen emerging with *Understanding Rhetoric* with regard to subjects' identity and, what Russell and Yañez term, tools of literacy. Tools of literacy are a key in studying the activities and can include both external tools for mediating actions (technologies like a pen, a word processing software, a tablet) and internal tools for mediating actions (language, schemas, genres). Studying tool-mediated action in systems of social activity

is about studying change (Bawarshi). In the next section, I will argue that *UR* is the result of both internal and external tool-mediated actions. By studying these tool-mediated actions, we may understand the collaboration's multimodal composition process and place this process in the context of the changing composition textbook tradition.

First, the hybridization of genres is a result of the overarching process of convergence that occurs more and more in the age of multiliteracies. Alice Trupe observed that "texts produced electronically require a new set of literacy skills and challenge our teaching of single mode genres, moving us toward a model of multimodal or hybrid genres (Bawarshi & Reiff 161). *Understanding Rhetoric* is one such example of a hybrid genre, but first I will summarize the example used by the authors, the weblog. Bawarshi and Reiff describe hybrid genres as having "genetic imprints from prior [ancestral or antecedent] genres" (164). For the blog, they list, "the diary, clipping services, broadsides, commonplace books, and even ship's logs" as among the ancestral genres which combine to create the "complex rhetorical hybrid" genre of the blog (Bawarshi & Reiff 164). For *Understanding Rhetoric*, we are dealing with two very distinct antecedent genres: the first-year writing Rhetoric textbook, and the didactic, instructional comic book. As authors Liz Losh and Jonathan Alexander began imagining the type of text that could accomplish their rhetorical goals, the existing textbook genre did not seem to do it. There were some texts that took initial steps including *Seeing and Writing*, and *Speak Up!* Which featured several sections with work from comics artist Peter Arkle. *Understanding Rhetoric*, as Leasa puts it, "was taking that one step further" by having the entire text in the comics form. The authors and editors went outside of the tradition to borrow from other genre traditions in order to produce a text that not only challenged the existing textbook tradition in its form, through the comic medium, but also in its purpose, through didactic content focused on what Liz describes as "the relationship between embodiment, identity, and written expression." The newly minted genre serves the communicative purposes of its authors and continues to serve as a symbol of

the problematic contradictions between the two traditions that becomes embodied within the

activity system. Hence, the struggle to name this new genre continues.

3.5 Convergence: Extending the work of RGS and AT

The struggle to name is a demonstration of how contradictions can emerge among collaborators

as new genres and new media converge. It is no coincidence that Bawarshi and Reiff use the

example of a blog to demonstrate the ways in which hybrid genres form through a convergence

catalyzed by technological development and resulting social changes, especially within online

ecologies through the digitization of existing media. This hybridization of two genre traditions

is, as Henry Jenkins argues, often the result of convergences, a process he defines as

"technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our

culture. [. . . Convergence is] an ongoing process or series of intersections between different

media systems, not a fixed relationship" (322). Jenkins also describes what the process of

convergence *does*: convergence encourages and creates new avenues for participation and

collaboration through media intersection and collective intelligence; convergence can also lead

to a concentration of power, either from the top-down multinational media conglomerates or

the bottom-up consumer advocacy grassroots movements; and finally, our present convergence

culture documents a moment of transition from various perspectives: "where old and new media

collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer

and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2). Convergence

is perhaps most visible within the world of global news corporate conglomerates who at one

time numbered in the tens (50+ in the 1980s to be exact) and which now consist of six entities

that control television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and online publishing venues: (list them

here) (Shah). This convergence of media has resulted in not only cross-media advertising well

beyond traditional product placement, but also fanfiction emerging from a popular television

book series, and video games extending the narrative presented in an action film. Jenkins writes

that convergence was a mechanism developed by producer and consumer alike to navigate "a

moment of disorienting change. Convergence is, in a sense, an old concept taking on new meanings" (Jenkins 6). Jenkins also reminds readers that convergence is a word describing a process, the process of converging new media and old media, one genre and another genre, a top-down corporate structure with a bottom-up grassroots structure:

> Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. Convergences alter the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process news and entertainment. Keep this in mind: convergence refers to a process, not an endpoint. (Jenkins 15-16)

In describing the newly formed relationships emerging from the convergence of film and video games, for example, Jenkins describes the fallout, saying, "Such collaborations meant taking everyone out of their 'comfort zones,'" including, as I will argue, the reader/viewer (Jenkins 9). Thus, while digitization provided the affordances for convergence, corporate motivations for profit made it an imperative. Ithiel de Sola Pool predicted the process of digitization would lead not to swift, radical change but rather a period of what Jenkins calls prolonged transition. Pool writes, "Convergence does not mean ultimate stability or unity. It operates as a constant force for unification but always in a dynamic tension with change. . . . There is no immutable law of growing convergence; the process of change is more complicated than that" (Pool qtd. Jenkins 11). The dynamic tension Pool describes parallels the tension described by RGS scholars regarding hybrid genres. It is in this similarity that space is created for these two theories to come together in order to describe the entirety of a text like *Understanding Rhetoric*, not only in its generic past and present, but through a better understanding of how it was composed.

In the chapter that follows, I will apply a lens of activity theory to *Understanding Rhetoric* in order to examine in greater detail the aspects of the text, its authors, and its audience that influenced the formation of its composing process. I will argue that it is perhaps this composing process that reveals this case's most compelling implications for writing studies

and collaborative multimodal composing process research specifically. Lastly, I will re-introduce the concept of convergence and again discuss the ways in which convergence can add to activity theory as a writing studies heuristic and an avenue for multimodal collaborative composing process research.

Chapter 4: *Understanding Rhetoric as a System of Social Activity*

In the previous chapter*, Understanding Rhetoric* was examined through a lens of rhetorical genre studies (RGS). RGS allows researchers to identify antecedent genres and the extent to which the hybrid genre borrows from each of them. To extend this inquiry, the work of media scholars allows us to ask, "How is this hybrid genre composed? Produced materially? and Distributed to its audience?" The answer is through the process of convergence. Jenkins' theory of convergence likewise fits activity theory in that Jenkins describes more holistic interpretations of how old and new media collide and the dynamic tensions that result, but activity theory allows us to ask, "How do these tensions manifest in the composing process and resulting texts?" AT is a helpful frame to apply in studying the manifestations of these dynamic tensions through contradictions within the activity system.

4.1 Contradictions and Negotiations: Composing as Convergence in the Activity System of *Understanding Rhetoric*

For *Understanding Rhetoric*, the genre hybridization of textbook Rhetorics and instructional/educational comic books inform the activity system through convergence. The process of converging the rules/norms, subjects/motives, tools, and communities associated with each of the two genre tradition systems significantly informed each contradiction that arose within the collaboration of *UR*. The section which follows will elaborate on three more contradictions that arose within the *UR* activity system and the ways in which activity system theory and convergence help us to better understand and demystify both the academic textbook publishing process and the multimodal collaboration of comics publishing. While the term may have an air of negative connotation, within the activity system, contradictions are the spaces that allow for and effect change:

But contradictions also present a constant potential for change in people and tools

(including writing)—for transforming—re-mediating—activity systems. Thus, there is

always potential for learning, both individual and social, for becoming a changed person

and changed people, with new identities, new possibilities—often opened up (or closed

down) through writing in various genres.[. . .] [Contradictions] realize social motives,

focusing attention and coordinating action, and they shape (and are shaped by) the

identities of participants. (Bawarshi & Reiff 341; 351)
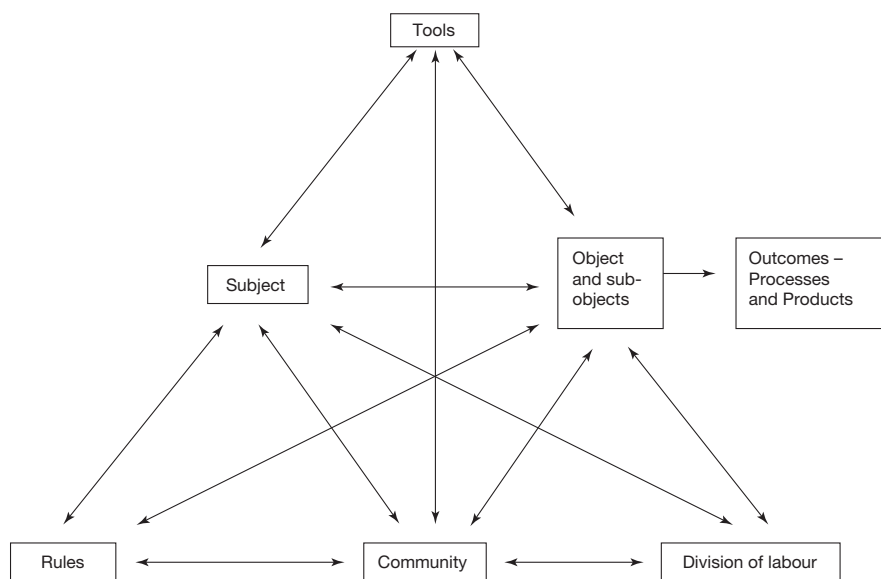
Figure 4.1 The Structure of an Activity System.

In order to identify contradictions within a system of social activity, each of the elements of the

system can be examined in order to best understand how texts mediate the achievement of goals

or objects. Each of the following sections will identify elements of the system and elaborate on

the ways in which contradictions arose through these aspects of the system of *Understanding*

Rhetoric.[11]

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[11] Where many aspects of activity systems overlap (rules/norms and the community which informs/is informed by
them; subjects and the motives that drive them to do their work in the system; tools and the division of labor which
ensures proper tool execution is assigned to the right subject; etc.) I have chosen to group them together for this

4.2 Rules/Norms: Issues of Affordance and Audience

In the system of activity of *Understanding Rhetoric*, rules and norms can be best understood in terms of how the system defines the media through which they accomplish their goals or produce their object, and, "[i]t is the object that shapes the actions of participants within that particular community, and over time, forming the dispositions and identity of the members of the community" (Hung & Chen 249). For *Understanding Rhetoric*, the object is the material production of the textbook and this object is informed by the affordances of the medium they chose and the audience they conceive of as they compose within the genre. The medium is important to consider in this activity system particularly because of the ways in which the comics format informed so many aspects of the collaboration. Particularly salient in participants' interviews was also the awareness of audience and how their audience would receive this product in a way that would make it successful. How each participant defines "success" is an important distinction, which I will address, in further discussion on the object and the outcomes of the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system.

The Writers on Project Outcomes

When she began toying around with the idea for a comic, Liz had some hesitation about how the textbook would be received in the composition community and how that might theoretically inform how publishers approached it: "The problem is that so many publishers would want to treat it as 'Composition for Dummies' and I think too often the work of the compositionist is seen as remedial anyway, so I was really wary about doing a comic book even though I knew it was a great form for expression and thought it could really work well" (Losh). As it went, Bedford's approach aligned with Liz's resulting in the comics medium being taken up with serious consideration for its rhetorical potential. As a scholar, Liz appreciates the efficacy of the comics medium: "One of the things that we believe as writing teachers is that we're really talking about writing for a lifetime, this is not just writing for college, and one of the things about using

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analytic portion of this and future chapters. I have grouped them according to where they overlap within activity system theory but have also informed my organization through the ways in which I saw contradictions arise within the UR activity system.

the comics format is that it's really designed to appeal to a variety of audiences and even though we have characters in it who are college students, it's really a book about writing for your whole life. It's a book about writing for audience, writing with purpose. It's about much more than simply writing in the four-year academic context" (Losh). Her identity as a media scholar and teacher of rhetoric and writing largely informed Liz's understanding of the ways in which the comics medium would reach a student audience, particularly through narratives with dialogue from actual writing teachers themselves.

While issues of identity and representation will be discussed in the next section, it is worth mentioning here that the writers' conception of their audience was a major influence in decision-making around how not only they, but the student characters as well, were represented visually. To make the student characters more authentic, Liz and Jonathan did something common to writers of fiction: they created a world and a life within that world. For them, it is an instructional world where teachers and students interact but engage in other aspects of life as well. This effort, explains Jonathan, comes from their desire to establish "some sense of verisimilitude without being too hokey" (Alexander).

In order to test their target audience, Jonathan and Liz shared *Understanding Rhetoric* with their own students. Jonathan admits, he was nervous, "When [students] began to actually look at samples of the book, they began to realize that we were going to be taking the comics medium seriously and, in fact, our goal was not to be patronizing at all but to demonstrate our serious interest in the medium and to use it to communicate about rhetorical concepts as they are really important to understanding a variety of convictive media" (Alexander). To aid in student readers' perceptions of the text, Bedford's President—at the time—Joan Feinberg conceived of including student characters throughout the text. Liz and Jonathan worked toward developing both their own characters and the student characters authentically, "Particularly with the student characters, [because] in the beginning [Jonathan and Liz] had a tendency to make them a little too teacherly" (Losh).

The team's serious effort of engaging in the comics medium often meant pushing the creative capabilities of the writers and artists. Where Liz and Jonathan pushed back against the simple diagrams and simplistic definitions of writing and media they had seen in other textbooks. And the editors and Bedford were on board to reflect the complex and recursive nature of rhetoric and composition. For the writers as well as the editors, it was important that students who were being asked to intelligently engage in media had a textbook that modeled that engagement and consideration for them. Jonathan explains the importance of the textbook in terms of media studies,

> We're not just tricking students into learning about rhetoric and writing through the comic medium, but the medium itself becomes part of what is scrutinized rhetorically. How does the medium actually function? How does it work as a genre? How does it have its own rhetorical affordances? It becomes an object of study in itself in the classroom. At least, that's what we really hope will happen. And the book refers to itself at times. It asks students to do things with it so its own mediation is part of what is under study, part of what is taken seriously. (Alexander)

While some of these efforts included reference to contemporary media (particularly social media and hybrid genres like *Understanding Rhetoric* itself), they also included a reexamination of older materials to be examined through the lens of new rhetorics. Rhetorical theory chapters include some writing/quotes from Plato and Aristotle, but there's more. For the issue on critical readings, Jonathan and Liz saw some particularly enticing parallels between self-representation in new media of today and the struggle Frederick Douglass recounts in his literacy narrative about portrait photography and autobiography. Jonathan elaborates on the strength of this material, "I think it's a particularly good chapter because it allows us to take advantage of some older material in the public domain and visually render it very engaging and for me, that's been an unexpected delight and powerful feature: to be able to show, in this very current medium,

much older texts or issues that have long histories that remain relevant, vital, and interesting today" (Alexander).

The Editors on Project Outcomes

Carolyn Lengel, Executive Editor at Bedford St. Martin's, had also been itching to include more and more visual instruction in textbooks since she began at the company nearly ten years ago. Lengel saw an increase in the number of excerpts from what she calls "graphic texts"—comics, visualizations, photographs, diagrams, etc.—in more and more textbooks, particularly handbooks and wondered why Rhetorics didn't embrace the affordances of visual media as well. As development editor, Carolyn's responsibilities include oversight of the text production itself. She worked with Jonathan and Liz on a day-to-day basis, tweaking textual elements, organization, and narrative movement.

Leasa Burton, on the other hand, is a Senior Executive Editor and her job considers a much broader perspective, from weekly conversations with the writers to a holistic understanding of the composition textbook market, its teachers, and its students. For Leasa, students are her primary audience, but she also considers teachers to be an important audience. She hadn't even gone so far as to narrow this idea to students/teachers at four-year or two-year colleges, but all students/teachers of writing. She wanted to ensure the book included materials students are expected to master by the end of their first-year writing curriculum, no matter which type of institution they attend.

Leasa shares her reflections on the comic with a student audience in mind, "Kevin and Zander have an instinct to bold a lot more words. When I look at it, when words are bolded so frequently I feel like it's such a lower level and level is a big issue when we're trying to do a comic for first-year writing. We don't want to do something that's going to feel like it's talking down and not respecting students, but at the same time, it's a fun thing so I think there's a careful balance sort of feeling your way along" (Burton).

For Leasa, who has worked in composition textbooks for 15 years, the textbook's visual medium is a radical twist, but not because of any stigma she associates with the comics medium. Rather, Leasa knows that for those who read and teach comics, the textbook will be warmly received. But, for teachers of writing who are less familiar with comics as a serious medium, Leasa wonders,

> I think this book is going to be tricky for people to adopt. The things that we have to work to overcome like assumptions that people are going have. [. . .] There are a lot of comp directors who would be open to this but they're worried that the course won't be taken seriously by the administration or there's going to be some other kind of perception problem, "Oh, I've assigned a comic book, what does that say about my program?" I've actually heard that from people (Burton).

Burton hopes that marketing will be able to hedge some of the hesitation from teachers, but she also acknowledges that pedagogical grounding isn't the only criteria teachers consider when selecting a textbook. The cost of textbooks is a factor, and Leasa recognizes that the visual nature of the book gives the appearance of costly production: "I hope that people assign it and see the value of their students buying it. I think that's just generally, right now, a challenge in the textbook market, people are very price conscious. [. . .] We don't want people to immediately dismiss it because they think it's expensive or they can't afford to add on a book like this. So…my concern is that they might just photocopy pages out of it that are good heuristics and not actually assign the book. It's really susceptible to that kind of borrowing, I'm afraid" (Burton). The editors at Bedford acknowledge meeting audience needs as just one dimension of success for the textbook; their overall definition of "success" for *Understanding Rhetoric* results in a textbook that turns a profit for the company but simultaneously symbolizes a shift in textbook publishing products as an innovative and effective pedagogical tool. For Leasa and Carolyn especially, their role as editors is as much about success in the classroom as it is about success for the company.

The Artists on Project Outcomes

As is the case with many rhetorical situations, the audience—the student in the writing class in which the book is assigned—informs many of the artistic decisions made throughout the artists' writing process. For Zander and Kevin, a successful comic—and therefore a successful outcome for the activity system—is a strong bond of trust between the authors and readers. Kevin compared fictional narrative to the educational didacticism of *UR*, explaining that with fiction, moving the story along is important to gain and maintain reader interest. The textbook genre, on the other hand, wants to take advantage of those timely narrative pauses to review materials for readers or to have characters recall earlier concepts/events. And for Kevin and Zander, this aspect of educational comics—breaking the fourth wall—is one they particularly enjoy. Zander discusses the ways in which he and Kevin's creativity with the script allows them to establish a connection with the reader.

> There's that sort of honesty and partnership with the reader, you know, "We're doing this to make this as accessible as possible to you. We're not just giving you a sequence of identical panels that's telling you a linear story; we're engaging you with the entire big picture. [. . .] There's sort of an allowance for that fourth wall being broken where you can just sort of have a character who says, "Hey! Our chief idea here is to inform you, not to entertain you," so [as a writer] you don't have to feel self-conscious about speaking directly to the reader. (Z. Cannon)

Zander and Kevin are storytellers, and their idea of success for *Understanding Rhetoric* translates to wide readership—as Liz described—beyond the first-year writing classroom and toward a broader public reception so that more readers might learn the concepts of rhetoric and the practices of writing that they spent so much effort illustrating. For Zander and Kevin, the medium itself is a typical delivery tool for instruction, but a comic which really enacts the medium will appeal to a larger audience.

A common theme that emerged from the data includes a consideration of the comics medium and whether audiences will/will not receive it positively. Borrowing from Jenkins' conception of medium, I consider medium to encompass not only the material object itself, but also the community and therefore the standards/norms/spoken or unspoken rules that inform and are informed by the community. Jenkins says, that we can think of a medium *not* as delivery technology, but rather "first, a medium is a technology that enables communication; second a medium is a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology" (Jenkins 13-14). The importance of looking at medium allows for a better understanding of subjects and their audience, but it also allows us to ask, from a rhetorical perspective, What does the comics medium give us in terms of meaning making?; What does the comics medium limit in terms of meaning making?; and, How do you think this medium will allow you to reach your audience? For the collaborators behind *Understanding Rhetoric*, there were a multitude of responses to these questions.

It is clear in participants' discussion of the project's outcomes—a classroom text embraced by students and teachers, a challenge to pedagogy, a reflection of contemporary rhetorical theory, a connection with the reader—the members of the UR activity system are committed to the use of the comics medium and its affordances for the project. However, as is the case with any collaboration, the understanding of how those affordances will be taken up and used to argue for the benefit of writing theory to first-year college students relies heavily upon whom in the collaboration you ask.

Affordances and Limitations of the Medium: Reflections of Community Norms

In any rhetorical situation, social aspects of composing cannot be ignored. *Understanding Rhetoric* is no different. Informed by Vygotskian theories of socially constructed learning, Hung and Chen consider the ways in which community informs subjects through norms and standards of practice:

The subject exists in a community which comprises of other individuals and subgroups

that share the same object. From a Vygotskian perspective (Vygotsky, 1 981), these

(psychological) tools play a crucial role in identity formation. The relations between the

subject and community are mediated by the community's collection of mediating rules

such as explicit and implicit regulations, norms and handbooks that encourage and

constrain actions and interactions within the activity system. (249)

Because *Understanding Rhetoric* combines two distinct genre traditions—as discussed in

Chapter 3—there are rhetorical and formal aspects to consider from the two perspectives of

composition theory and comics studies. In comics studies, the rhetorical potential of the comics

medium is often the subject of discussion in papers, anthologies and conference presentations.

Taking the comics medium seriously includes considering the rhetorical affordances which allow

words and images to combine into an interdependent imagetext that, as Carolyn Lengel

articulates, is stronger than either alone: "Words and images together make meaning in this

mystical way that's beyond what you can convey with either on alone. If you put them together

you can get something more than the sum of its parts." Lengel notes that she is quoting Alison

Bechdel, and her understanding echoes what many comics scholars have claimed in saying,

"Effective rhetoric is characteristically defined as a two-pronged strategy of verbal/visual

persuasion, showing while it tells, illustrating its claims with powerful examples" (qtd. Varnum

and Gibbons x). In the previous sections, I have addressed how the writers, editors, and artists

describe the rhetorical advantages of working in this medium. Still, rhetorical affordances

included, the comics medium remains a primary aspect of the project that makes the textbook

difficult to market; it simply has elements that a traditional print textbook wouldn't.

The formal elements of the medium also created some issues for those who worked on

the project, particularly in Bedford's Copyediting and Production departments which often rely

on standard operating procedures and house styles for formatting, designing, and materially

producing textbooks. Formal constraints of the production process had to be negotiated in order

for the authors to take full advantage of comics as rhetoric. In my interview with Jonathan, he mentioned particular aspects of the medium which caused some pause from production, including movement outside of the panel and into the gutter, and the use of lines for rhetorical purposes[12] (wavy panel lines to indicate movement into an alternative time period, for example) that are not always consistent with the way other panels are bordered.

Carolyn recalls the formal elements requiring some adjustment, but was pleased by how quickly production was able to incorporate the new style, saying, "The outside of the panel stuff is no problem at all because the way this book is happening is that Zander and Kevin are producing the files that will go directly to the printer, so whatever they want to draw on the page, as long as it fits within the print boundaries, is fine." On the other hand, Carolyn recalls, "We do have to worry about making sure that we end each chapter on the left because it's like an issue. It has to start on the right and end on the left. We have this front cover and back cover, or at least the illusion of a front and back cover [. . .] so that each issue is its own thing that's enclosed by covers of the one color. So we have to make sure that things fit, that the end falls in the left page and the beginning is on the right" (Lengel).

Material aspects of the textbook's production—style and delivery—it would seem, were accommodated with significantly more ease than others, particularly considerations of invention and arrangement in the writing process. For example, the textual limitations of the medium came into conversation with the discussion of representation, particularly Liz's and Jonathan's identities as writing teachers. When the use of words is limited—as it is in comics—how does an author establish ethos to an audience of writing teachers and students? Liz compares it to writing academic prose, saying that their careful use of language is, "part of who we are, that's how we establish expertise with our students, that we can give a relatively detailed, complex, and nuanced answer to a question. But, you can't have a detailed, complex, and nuanced comment in a small speech bubble [for an audience of first-year students]" (Losh). Where comics limit

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[12] At the 2008 CCCC meeting New Orleans, Marilyn Cooper presented on the rhetoric of lines, particularly as adopted by comics authors and other visual artists. Her talk referenced the work of Tom Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*.

textual elaboration of rhetorical concepts, they simultaneously allow for visualization of

concepts through images that come out of the narrative pattern. Zander acknowledges this as a

strength of the medium, that "it doesn't have to just be this narrative, you can also have

diagrams, you can also have illustrations of a certain concept, instead of having to have some

sort of complicated workaround of how you are going to get that information into the story" (Z.

Cannon). Instead, Kevin adds, breaking the fourth wall in order to address the audience in the

narrative allows for inclusions of many types of visual arguments, not only those which fall into

the scope of the story. For example, in this excerpt from the Introduction, Jonathan and Liz

address the readers in order to articulate why they chose to write a textbook in the form of a

comic.

Figure 4.2 Comments on *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction,
page 17. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

Likewise, Jonathan and Liz wanted to push the linearity of the medium in order to fully take

advantage of its visual affordances. They too wanted to be able to craft visuals which neither fell

into the narrative expectations nor the genre expectations of a Rhetoric. For example, in a later

chapter, Liz and Jonathan engage the reader in an intimate discussion of writer identity in

which Jonathan discusses his queer identity as a gay man. Aspects of this identity have already

been woven throughout the textbook, like in this excerpt from the Introduction in which the

authors discuss the logo of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), an organization well known for

its advocacy of gay civil rights.
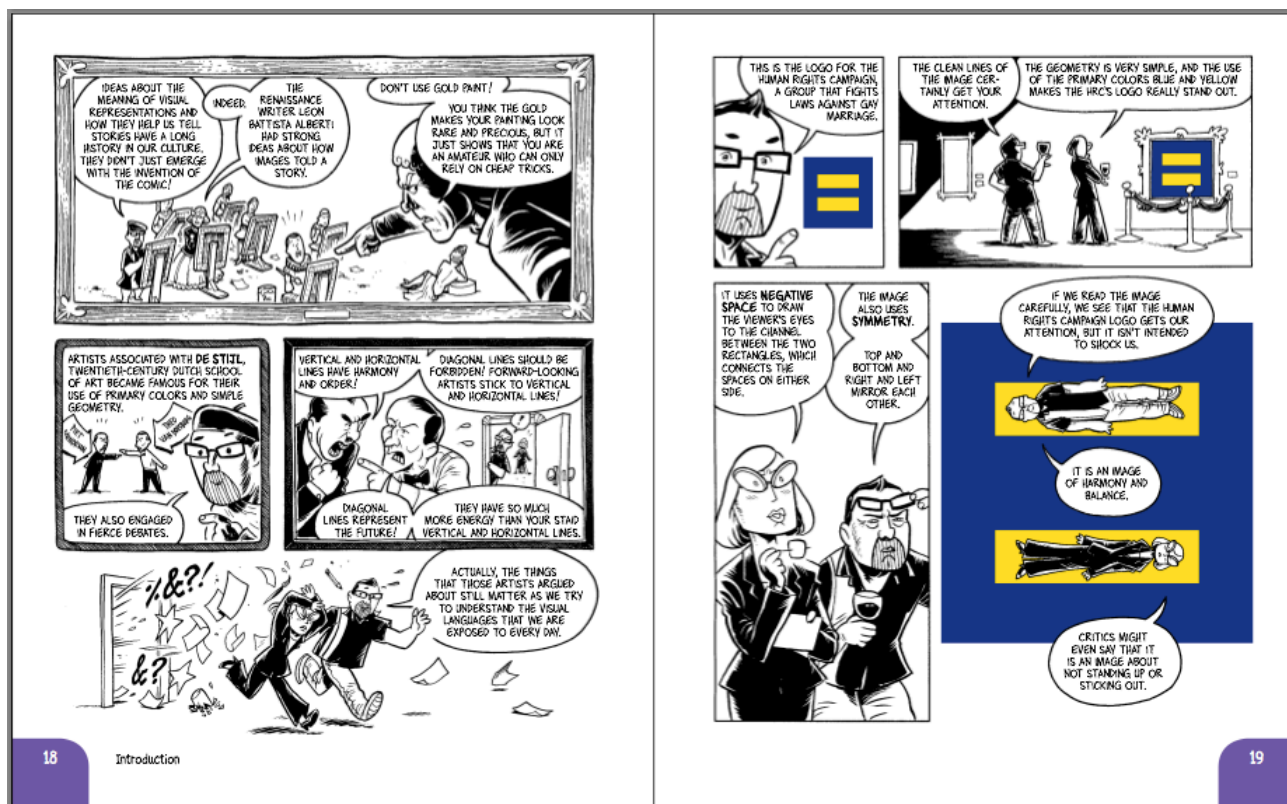
Figure 4.3 *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction, pages 18-19. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

Considerations of audience—during the writing process and in the medium adoption—

are additionally informed by the writing pedagogy community in which Liz, Jonathan, Leasa,

and Carolyn are a part: composition. The textbook is unique not only because of its added visual

and narrative elements, but also because of elements the authors chose not to include, elements

that are expected conventions of the genre. Liz and Jonathan, for example, chose not to include

a full research paper example though they spend significant time in the book discussing

conducting and writing about research. Instead of a full model paper, Jonathan, says, the entire

book models ways of doing and writing about research: "We really have laced [research writing]

throughout with alternatives—by alternatives I mean a willingness and an invitation to engage

various kinds of media" (Alexander). Pedagogically, the writers' reasons for not including a full

model paper can be understood by writing teachers who might relate either to the hesitation to

provide "models" for students, or to the inclination to focus more heavily on process than

product. Neither Leasa nor Carolyn mentioned the missing model paper as a cause for concern

among the audience. Other challenges to the Rhetoric, however, were less familiar to the editors,

and required quite a bit of back-and-forth.

There are two particular contradictions in *Understanding Rhetoric* that had to be

negotiated—one concerned the writing process as a concept[13] and the other concerned

arrangement of textbook sections into chapters.

During interviews with the writers and editors, I recorded discussion around the

question how to represent the writing process to readers. For Leasa and Carolyn, a visualization

of the writing process seemed promising. They could imagine the visual medium illustrating

writing process models effectively and efficiently to capture the complex, recursive nature of

composing. In one page, perhaps, the visualization could articulate writers' processes in a way

that textual explanations had previously dragged on for entire sub-chapters. Leasa and Carolyn

received feedback that including coverage of the writing process was very important to reviewers

and would be helpful for students. For Jonathan and Liz, however, it was not as important to

include coverage of the writing process, even though it had the potential of working nicely in the

linear mode of the comic. It wasn't a pedagogical or theoretical opposition to the writing process

visualization that bothered Jonathan and Liz, but rather the inclination for "easy" visuals that

they recelled from other texts. An initial draft of the concept of writing process took on Liz's and

Jonathan's idea for the visual metaphor of a linear manufacturing assembly line in which ideas

(planning) moved down the line toward processing (writing) and continued along the conveyor

belt until the product was finished and inspected (revising). Another visual portrayed a model

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[13] In language used by interviewees, teaching readers about the concept of process was repeatedly referred to as "the writing process." This singular reference to "a" process is not necessarily a verbal denial of the multitude of process that different writers engage; rather, it is a reflection of the field's discourse in which it has become common to refer to the theories behind process pedagogy as thinking about "the writing process."

of the digestive system to demonstrate the ways in which writing is recursive and situated in larger contexts. Reviewers didn't respond to these metaphors as well as the writers had hoped and a new approach had to be developed that would take advantage of the medium as it reflected contemporary scholarship.

Thus, for the writers, the writing process debate centered much less around pedagogy and teaching philosophies than it did around the medium itself. Jonathan admits, "To be fair, the Bedford editors themselves don't really buy into the writing process as a linear process so it wasn't always about convincing them, but it was pushing back against the easy visuals [we were used to seeing in other works]" (Alexander).

Interestingly, no writing process visualization—neither the manufacturing or digestive visual metaphor or alternatives—made it into the final text. Instead, the section, "Going Boldly Through Writing Processes," portrays Liz and Jonathan asking Zander, the artist, about his writing process. They then share their own processes and discuss just how individualized writing processes can be. The section delves into an explanation of how the writers and artists collaborated on the textbook, once again allowing the text itself to become part of what is interrogated rhetorically. The coverage, albeit brief, is a compromise between what the editors knew readers would want in terms of content and what the writers knew the medium could offer in terms of narrative and author identity.

Another contradiction emerged around the question of how to organize the textbook into sections. Would they be called "chapters" as in traditional textbooks, or "issues," as in traditional comic books? The structure of each section of the textbook—call it an issue or a chapter—is the result of yet another negotiation between Liz and Jonathan and the editors at Bedford. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, back matter is a typical genre convention for textbook chapters and include supplementary materials like questions for understanding, reviews of concepts covered, assignments to apply what's been learned. It is expected that each

chapter or major conceptual explanation will conclude to review what has been learned and, typically, to ask students to apply it in their own writing. Such a summative pause at the conclusion of a chapter is atypical in narrative or even didactic comics. In fact, the primary goal of mainstream superhero comics writers in the final pages of an issue is not to conclude the narrative but to do the exact opposite. Serial comics writers use the final pages of a comic to introduce a twist or complication that gives fuel to the reader's interest in the story and motivation to buy the next issue. Which genre would inform the organization of *Understanding Rhetoric*?

The writers and editors found themselves brainstorming how to bring these genre expectations together in the new hybrid genre, at first deciding that "each chapter would sort of function as its own comic [. . .] so that both [the writers and the editors] have something that was more comic-booky and something more textbook that would read as a visual didactic educational comic with chapters" (Losh). At a meeting, editors suggested the idea of the "Re-Frame" so that students could see how to apply the advice they had read in the chapter. The negotiation came through conceiving of each section's narrative as an issue with added back matter typical of a textbook. The back matter served as an intermediary between the theoretical content discussed in the chapters and the practical application typically asked of students in a writing class. Like monthly installments of *Spider-Man*, each issue stands alone and tells its own story consistent with the characters and narrative elements established in prior issues, including Liz and Jonathan and student characters. In the introductory issue Re-Frame, for example, Cindy and Luis are discussing why they would use a comic book in a writing class, planting the opportunity for students and teachers that adopt the textbook to have similar conversations. Liz reflects upon this compromise and the ways in which it helped solidify a new hybrid genre so that "[t]he genre that [they're] presenting has a kind of consistent didacticism to it in ways like *Understanding Comics*. [. . .] In the section on plagiarism [they] have another artist, Tom,

coming in and doing the art for part of the section to demonstrate" shifts in voice that result

from a writer including another writer's work and calling it his own (Losh).

To accommodate the narrative structure of the individual issues, another aspect of the

chapters/issues would be different from traditional textbooks. Leasa Burton observes that while

traditional textbook print media has its limitations, it also has unique affordances including the

ability to separate concepts without overlap because "[w]ith other books, if you're telling a story,

you might revisit or bring in a fact that you've talked about before. It often felt repetitive in this

book because it was visual and [we had to ask], 'We just talked about that in this last chapter.

How is the narrative or point being extended here?' We worked very hard to make sure the

scope of the chapters had good boundaries" (Burton).

Leasa Burton adapted her 15 years of experience in textbook publishing to the new

medium, negotiating with Liz and Jonathan about which elements, conventions and affordances

absolutely had to be included based largely upon reviewer comments. There are conventions of

print media that are sometimes overlooked: indexed sections (chapters), a table of contents,

visible divisions between sections, and page numbers. Leasa said that even these aspects of the

medium were up for negotiation but some choices were made to accommodate what they

perceived as audience need.

> Every chapter starts out with what we call the splash page—originally we tried and we
>
> still call each chapter an issue because we're trying to keep with that genre. [. . .] This
>
> treatment of the headings on the opener is one of the things I really advocated to have
>
> added to make it easier to find the coverage in the chapter, because one of the things that
>
> you can do in a textbook that you can't do in a graphic novel is to [easily] refer back to a
>
> topic that you read about earlier. And, that's something Jonathan and Liz wanted it to
>
> read like a story, but it doesn't make it very functional for students, or teachers for that

matter. Page numbers were something they were a little bit squeamish about at first—too much of a textbook element for them. I feel like it's really important. (Burton).

The example below shows a splash page from Issue 1: Why Rhetoric? And features a table of contents and page numbers.

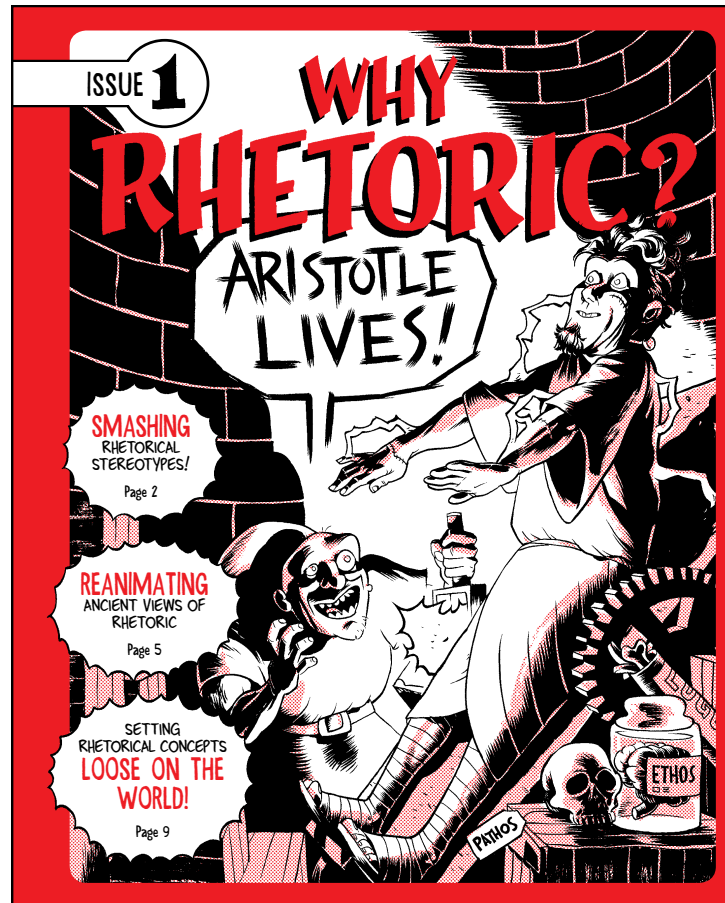Figure 4.4 *Understanding Rhetoric*. Chapter 2: Why Rhetoric? Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

The editors' concerns about the text's usability was negotiated and the result was a successful hybrid genre in which both comics and textbook conventions are incorporated. This is one of the reasons why the collaborators are confident in the textbook's success. There are several more.

Not too Textbooky, but not too Comic-booky: The Anticipated Success of *Understanding Rhetoric*

In our interview, Kevin lamented not having similar textbooks available when he was in college. He could imagine buying books at the beginning of the semester and being glad to find a comic among his list because "[y]ou can read it a couple of times pretty quickly and I think the visual aspect and the humor in it helps to sort of lay a groundwork like a foundation of understanding. So then you sort of have the basics down so then when you start reading textbooks later on, the denser information is easier to categorize in your head" (K. Cannon). Zander agrees, citing a often-used metaphor related to learning. For Zander, "[*Understanding Rhetoric*] shows you the forest first before you start talking about, 'This is this kind of tree. This is this kind of animal that lives in that tree.' If you start off with those details, I think it's impossible to see the big picture" (Z. Cannon).

Kevin and Zander also cite the visual affordances of the medium as aiding in memory because the comic combines narrative, visual illustrations, and visual cues to directly and indirectly instruct readers. For example, in Chapter 4: Argument Beyond Pro and Con, while Liz and Jonathan are explaining best practices for secondary research data collection, the artists inserted a sub-plot in which Jonathan is ravenous for a snack and can't seem to grab a bite of anything before he and Liz are onto the next page talking about the next concept. Such sub-plots can be used to integrate concepts through cohesive narrative structure.

> Zander: Even if [Kevin and I] knew that [the manuscript we had] wasn't going to be the final version, we kind of knew how to structure it. And we're going to need to add a sort of visual hook to this chapter so that we can, so we have something to build around. I recently was just working on this chapter and added a sub-sub-sub-sub plot of Jonathan being constantly hungry throughout the chapter and I kept coming back to it and kept putting in little jokes and it, it helps tie the chapter together especially since he keeps almost being able to eat something.

[*Laughter*]

Kevin: And it eventually pays off with a little gag at the end. Little things like that will

help make the chapter itself feel like a whole.

Zander and Kevin hope the text serves as "visual mnemonic," aiding in understanding as well as

retention.

For Liz Losh, the appeal of a textbook like *UR* is implicit in the fact that it is a cultural

artifact of visual media that is asking students to scrutinize it and all other visual media they

encounter: "We want students not to just be consumers of visual culture but people who are

capable of producing it and people who are capable of critiquing it" (Losh). Another of Liz's

primary motivations for writing an educational comic was not only the element of using a

multimodal text to talk about composing using multiliteracies, but also the appeal to readers of

all kinds who write in all kinds situations, not just those learning to master academic prose

because the authors are

trying to challenge some of the pedagogical structures that might seem like they aren't

really changing student behavior and certainly aren't creating more student engagement.

As everybody knows who's assigned page 253 to 271 in a composition textbook to your

students, and then you're with them in class on Monday and strangely enough, none of

them have read it. The challenge is that when you're putting in graphic elements in a

textbook [that is primarily] textual, you're designing the textbook so that students can

skim it more rapidly for content, but, of course, in our graphic elements, it's slow going.

Students see a graphic novel and they think, "Oh wow! Easy reading!" and what they

don't realize is that when you have to read the pictures as well as the words, it takes

forever to read 100 pages. It's much slower going! (Losh)

Liz predicts *UR* will be successful simply because it will be read. Unlike some textbooks, which

may not appeal to students, Liz and Jonathan hope that the visual textbook will engage students

in new and different ways by asking them to practice multiple literacies. Carolyn agrees that the potential of the medium is just too enticing to pass up, especially during a time of expanded understanding of writing and literacies; "It just seems like so obviously this is the time to do serious things in this medium and it's time to push the boundaries of the educational. Everyone knows that comics are a great tool for teaching people about certain things and why not have it be absolutely directed to teaching you about the content of the course?" (Lengel).

The collaboration's success in navigating community norms, standards of language, and uses of media will ultimately determine the success of the project, but it is clear from their conversations that audience-centered composing allowed for considerations of community norms. Teachers and students of writing will be engaging this text and approaching it with a particular set of expectations related to teaching/learning writing practices for academic contexts. *Understanding Rhetoric*, in many ways, will challenge those expectations and present both teacher and student with broader definitions of writing, beginning with the very textbook they use to understand it.

 Through the identities of these writing scholars and teachers, textbook editors, and comics authors/artists, *Understanding Rhetoric* benefitted from multiple perspectives and creative practices, including literacies.

Community norms and standardized practices inform and allow for the mediation of identity among members of the activity system. Identity also includes the multiliteracies of each member, literacies which are crucial in any activity system but become especially salient in *Understanding Rhetoric* because of the uniquely multimodal nature of its produced text.

4.3 Subjects/Motives: Issues of Identity and Literacies

According to Hung and Chen, "[i]t is the transformation of the object into an outcome that motivates the existence of an activity" (249). In this activity system, the object is the production of a new kind of textbook and one that exists within a preexisting community of norms, discourses, genres, and literacies as well as being constantly re-informed by classroom

applications. In this section, I will once again examine the authors' and editors' identities to include the ways in which identities lend themselves to certain sets of literacy practices.

Within the last twenty years, literacy scholarship has penetrated the field of rhetoric and writing. New theories of literacy have emerged from our ever-broadening understanding of what it means to be literate. Deborah Brandt and others foreground this research and their work serves to ground my own research in theories of literacy and the advent of related subfields including visual literacy. As 20th-century technological developments allowed a wider dissemination of images in multiple modalities, advertisements & screen experiences have come to saturate our daily experience. This does not mean we have only just become a visual society; indeed, we always have been. Visual literacy is a field that studies the kinds of analytical and critical thinking that allows us to make meaning in images.

Brandt approaches literacy through a critical and cultural lens that views literacy (as broadly as you can imagine it) as "nested in and sustained by larger social and cultural activity"—an understanding of "the situated nature of literacy [that] has provided avenues for treating the ideological dimensions of literacy, the politics by which reading and writing preferences of elite groups get installed as the measure against which other versions are deemed inadequate or undesirable" (3). Individual identity is among these ideological dimensions of literacy. For Brandt, "individual literacy exists only as part of a larger material systems, systems that on the one hand enable acts of reading or writing and on the other hand confer their value" (1). So, if we extend Brandt's question in a way that can inform this study, what is the value of comics literacy for participants in the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system? For the writing teachers and scholars in the field? For their students?

As identity and literacies exists in a dialogic relationship with one another, it is important for this study that I consider both the participants' identities and their literacies. In terms of value, I will contextualize the participants' literacy practices within the *Understanding*

Rhetoric activity system and will elaborate on the ways in which participants' identities lent to

literacies, which became either a strength or a weakness in the collaborative activity.

Writers in an Unfamiliar Genre: The Comics Script

Liz and Jonathan describe themselves as teachers of writing and scholars of writing studies.

They have written and published in textbooks as well as academic prose texts and the specialized

discourses of their field. Outside of these "teacherly" identities, Liz and Jonathan also enjoy

comics and share a background of interest and participation in theatre. They regularly attend

ComicCon, the largest popular culture comics convention, which is held annually in San Diego.

Together, Liz and Jonathan contribute a number of literacies of value to the activity system

including a familiarity with:

- textbook publishing (as an industry)
- textbook authoring (as a writing process)
- the playwriting genre (creativity and humor)
- discourse and the ways in which language allows us to navigate among discourses and disciplines
- composition practice and theory (pedagogical/new teacher training methods)
- rhetorical concepts including audience awareness (<u>what</u> to say)
- collaboration in academic-related writing projects
- collaboration with other writers in their field (they have collaborated in the past)

On the other hand, Liz and Jonathan are *less* familiar with:

- comics publishing (as an industry)
- comics authoring (as a process)
- the comics script genre
- rhetorical concepts concerning meaning making in the visual (<u>how</u> to say it)
- collaboration in non-academic projects
- collaboration with artists

When asked to reflect upon their strengths in the collaboration, Jonathan and Liz responded in

differing ways. Jonathan enjoyed merging his identities as a writing teacher/scholar with his

personal interests in comics, theatre, and creative writing: "I think part of my role is to help

make the creative connections amongst the different visual dimensions of the book, the

formatting dimensions of the book, the genre of the book, and the various pedagogical concepts

and pedagogical apparatuses that underlie the project" (Alexander). Liz focused more heavily

on her identity as not just a writing teacher and scholar an extension of this work—teacher training of GTAs, new instructors, emerging colleagues:

> A lot of it was work that we had done to try to get new writing teachers to rethink the modes of writing they might have inherited from their previous writing instruction and make sure they were aware of writing as a research field and some of the work that was done there. You know, ways to think about giving feedback [about writing] that are more productive, ways to think about writerly identities that might be more productive [for students]. So, I think a lot of it came out of our teacher training background. (Losh)

Where their strengths lie in pedagogical knowledge, their literacies extend beyond academic discourse. Because of their shared interest in comics and performance/visual arts, Jonathan and Liz were familiar with collaborative efforts in comics composing genres and knew that their writing would take the form of a script which artists could then take and visually transform. Leasa was thrilled when Liz approached her about the project, recalling that "the script that they had done originally was just really smart and fun [. . . m]ainly because their descriptions of the illustrations were so vivid and they have a really cinematic way of describing the scenes and the panels" (Burton). When the artists joined the collaboration and began working from the scripts, they were pleased with the unstructured nature of the writing because it allowed the artists more freedom for artistic interpretation including dividing and merging panels. Kevin recalls thinking during the process that "one of the big problems when you're dealing with people who have never written a comic before is, they don't know how much can fit on a page and they try to put too much on there, just too many words, too many pictures. So, that's one of the things that's really nice about working with Liz and Jonathan [they acknowledge that they are new to comics]" (K. Cannon).

Liz's and Jonathan's unfamiliarity with the collaborative comics script genre allowed for more artistic freedoms for Zander and Kevin. Zander describes the ways in which the

manuscripts were different from scripts they had received from writers in previous

collaborations, saying, "It's been really interesting to take their scripting style and not be

hemmed in by a certain page count and not be hemmed in by certain page breaks and to be able

to take that content and shape it and present it in a way that works for us. [. . . H]ere the intent I

think is to make each page really look like its own work, [. . .] its own sort of unique layout and

unique composition just for those sequence of things" (Z. Cannon).

Still, the process changed how Liz and Jonathan see the script genre. They have learned

significant aspects of the comics script and the ways in which it differs from theatric/cinematic

scripts. Liz laughs every so often as she recalls, "When I look back on those first scripts it's kind

of funny. We didn't really understand that you really had to choose words very carefully because

you can only fit so many words in a speech bubble. And, initially we didn't understand that this

whole thing has to be dialogue, it has to work as a narrative and there have to be embodied,

speaking characters in it." When Jonathan and Liz began crafting a narrative and including

themselves as more prominent characters, they resolved to get together after each major

revision of an issue and read the script in their teacherly character voices. Their shared interest

in theatric/cinematic media allowed them to perform the script in order to improve its authentic

tone. About four stages of revision were completed for each issue's script, a laborious process

that added up to significant time spent performing *Understanding Rhetoric*. Liz argues that

these script draft stages were essential to the success of the issue's narrative coherence: "After

each cycle of revisions Jonathan and I still have to get back together. We have to read the whole

chapter through in our own voices and make sure it's still working right because we found that if

we didn't, we would get material back from the artists and be like, 'Where's the narrative in

this!? Oh, yeah, we didn't do that final read-through.'"

Overall, Liz and Jonathan's identities and literacies suited the collaboration well, and

their collaborators spoke highly of their improving efforts on the scripts. Jonathan credits their

collaborative success to a mutual passion for comics and a willingness to reflect on literacy

practices to meet one another half-way, saying, "Liz and I have read a lot of comic books, Kevin

and Zander have read a lot of books and so you figure out ways to talk about these things. In a

lot of their professional graphic work, they do the writing too. Part of the process has been to

navigate across our different disciplines and field expertise and talk productively about the

project" (Alexander). Perhaps it also helped the collaboration that the writers' and artists'

literacies didn't overlap, that their disciplines were different enough that neither made

assumptions about the other. That the writers' and artists' literacies complemented one another

led to success in this project. The editors, on the other hand, share space in the discourse

community of composition research and teaching, and therefore share many of the same literacy

practices in addition to those that come from years in the textbook publishing industry.

Editors Unfamiliar with this Kind of Process/Product

Leasa and Carolyn are employees of Bedford St. Martin's, a textbook publisher which produces

books for a number of disciplines. They both specialize in English/composition. Leasa is an

Executive Editor. Carolyn is a Development Editor. Leasa's interest in comics arose from her

work with textbook publishing, particularly readers which included visual texts. Carolyn's

interest in comics goes back a bit further. Carolyn has had a personal interest in comics for some

time and enjoys reading various fiction and nonfiction genres. This experience informs Leasa's

and Carolyn's literacies to include a familiarity with:

- textbook publishing (as an industry)
- textbook authoring (as a writing process)
- intimate knowledge of target audiences
- each of the three major composition genres: Rhetorics, Readers, and Handbooks
- conceiving of how composition curriculum is integrated into these genres
- comics genres and genre conventions (Carolyn specifically)
- reading and responding to all types of drafts of traditional textbook content
- incorporating visual texts into textbook genres

Adversely, because Leasa's and Carolyn's literacies are so heavily informed by their experience

in textbook publishing, they are less familiar with:

- comics publishing (as an industry)
- comics authoring (as a writing process)
- comics genres and genre conventions (Leasa specifically)

- conceiving of how composition curriculum is integrated into comics genres
- reading and responding to early drafts of visuals (layouts, un-nuanced visuals)
- composing an entirely visual textbook genre

For editors Leasa and Carolyn, working on a comic book—that the authors didn't want the book

to be "too textbooky"—was a bit of an outlier compared to their typical projects in Rhetorics,

Readers, and Handbooks. Liz and Jonathan consistently articulated their aversion to

Understanding Rhetoric becoming "too textbooky." Carolyn said that at one point she laughed

and thought to herself, "We do publish textbooks. You know that, right?" (Lengel). Among the

writers and artists there emerged an identity division in which they label themselves as "the

creatives" and Leasa and Carolyn as "the corporates." However, Jonathan paused after this quip

and retracted. Jonathan's reflection touched upon these identities and the ways in which they

became so fluid on this particular project, noting the "many ways in which [their] primary

editor, Carolyn Lengel, is very much part of the writing process. It's really interesting. A good

editor, in many ways, co-writes with you. Not in an obtrusive way but in a way that really guides

the writing" (Alexander). And, just as Jonathan and Liz had come to the project forthcoming

about their weaker literacies, Leasa and Carolyn approached the project determined to bring

good writers and artists together to compose what they knew would be a powerful new genre

using an older visual medium. The Bedford team sought feedback from an assemblage of

reviewers, including the TA Advisory Board, an open invitation session at the 2011 Conference

on College Composition, subject matter experts, writing studies scholars whose research focus is

in comics and visual arts, and a wide range of teachers of writing. Leasa admits that before the

project she was "not well versed in what comics styles mean" and relied heavily on reviewers and

the artists to inform her understanding and visual literacy (Burton). In terms of responding to

drafts, however, Leasa and Carolyn had to do their best to learn what to look for and how to

communicate their feedback. Establishing a traditional feedback loop proved difficult.

> It was a really interesting problem that you don't encounter in other textbooks. You have
>
> the instruction and then you have features that might break out and have different

functions and you have readings or examples that are bringing in different voices but in

traditional textbook making you have very defined and well-developed sets of features

that you're paying attention to and art is usually done a little bit later. This model is

really turning it all on it's head in terms of thinking about [textual and visual] elements

that you're developing at the same time. (Burton)

Carolyn recalls looking forward to the rough pencils (the first visual draft with both text and

sketched out layout/images) because she was less familiar envisioning the textbook in this new

medium what she was reading in the scripts.However, she recognizes the value of her alphabetic

literacies and the ways in which her visual literacies grew in terms of the project, claiming, "I've

gotten better at thinking about how much text we can do and if the description of [the visual] is

so insanely detailed that there's no way we can get that into a single panel or a single page, then

we need to scale back our expectations. But, I still don't know what it's going to look like until I

open it up and see it" (Lengel).

In terms of their textbook experience, Carolyn and Leasa brought an understanding of

what is expected by readers of the Rhetoric genre. A unique combination of audience and genre

awareness was among the most valued literacies the editors brought to the activity system. In

order for the project to be successful,the textbook would have to sell among the target audience.

An intimate understanding of that audience and its expectations became essential[14].

Artists Inform the Process via Metagenres/Discussion of Literacies
Zander and Kevin have distinctly different literacy practices than the writers or even the editors.

Zander describes himself as a cartoonist. Kevin describes himself as a (graphic) novelist. They

both have worked as professionals in visual media since the early 2000s. Zander and Kevin have

individual projects as well as collaborative projects. They have experience authoring comics for

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[14] In chapter 4, the topic of the genre is discussed in great detail, concluding that the genre is a hybrid of educational comics and textbook Rhetorics, brought together through Henry Jenkins' theory of the process of convergence in which media traditions borrow from one another and even, at times, collide to create new forms in new contexts.

educational purposes. They also regularly author comics in fantasy, historical fiction,

action/adventure, and science-fiction genres.

Zander and Kevin careers in comics afford them a wide range of visual literacies,

practices that are separate from literacies of the writers and editors. Zander and Kevin possess a

familiarity with:

- comics publishing (as an industry)
- comics authoring (as a process)
- the comics script genre
- educational genres and genre conventions
- comics genres in general
- rhetorical concepts concerning meaning making in the visual (<u>how</u> to say it)
- collaboration in non-academic projects
- collaboration with artists

Understanding Rhetoric was largely informed by these literacies and experiences. Still, Zander

and Kevin were unfamiliar with academic textbook publishing and composition theory and

practice and yet, according to their writer and editor collaborators, Zander and Kevin and their

literacies became invaluable for the project.

In the data collection pool writ large, there is more discussion of what Zander and Kevin

brought to the project than there is about any other member(s) of the collaboration. The writers

credit these artists for taking their script and running with it, to include their own voice,

character quips, visual gags, and narrative coherence. The editors credit Zander and Kevin with

teaching them extensively about the comics writing process, particularly a deeper understanding

of how drafts are conceived and when feedback is helpful during those draft stages.[15] Not all of

these contributions were initially anticipated by the writers and editors; the artists'

contributions brought both pleasing results and a few unanticipated features.

The writers and editors acknowledged that they lacked certain literacies and looked to

Kevin and Zander to address those gaps. Carolyn was particularly impressed by Zander and

Kevin after the first meeting not necessarily because of their educational comics repertoire, but

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[15] An in-depth analysis of the writing process of *Understanding Rhetoric* will be discussed in the following section, 5.4: "Tools and Division of Labor: Issues of Theory and Practice."

because of their solo projects, "I mean, *Stuff of Life* is also cool and it's clear that they know how to think about serious academic topics and present them in visual ways, but they also have genuine comic cred" (Lengel). Lengel's Facebook status that day read, "I had dinner with the author of Chainsaw Vigilante." Lengel was pleased to be working with artists who were intimately familiar with the medium. For Jonathan, the first of the artists' strengths to emerge was the ability to visually conceive the drafts of the script. Where Liz and Jonathan, Leasa and Carolyn couldn't "see" it, Zander and Kevin would invent multiple ways to visualize a concept. Jonathan found this ability particularly helpful in feedback on the scripts themselves: "[Zander and Kevin] have offered tremendous suggestions of what, in their view, works and what doesn't work. This has certainly been the case in which Liz and I will have an idea or a visual concept that just does not work. It just does not communicate what we thought it would or it has resonances that are inappropriate to what we wanted to communicate" (Alexander). Liz recalls the difficulty of trying to generate materials for a section on visual literacy in the introduction. The intended outcome is to improve students' ability to read visual texts—particularly, the textbook itself—in order to avoid assuming certain literacies of their audience. She and Jonathan felt this section on visual literacy would also help teachers, but coming up with the material—a visual conception of visual literacy—was tricky: "It's exciting to sort of see how some our material, particularly around things like visual literacy, are being represented because, for us, it's a topic that is very hard to develop good materials about" (Losh). Leasa agrees, noting with conviction that "[Zander and Kevin], they're really smart and adept at taking very complex topics and making them accessible" (Burton). Carolyn adds that conceptualization wasn't the only aspect of their work that impressed her. She also appreciated their storytelling abilities; "They were really thinking about it as a visual story from the beginning. So, I think they were good at visualizing that kind of thing" (Lengel).

Liz saw the potential of the artists' storytelling experience as well. Where she succeeded in creating engaging panel dialogue and art, she had difficulty conceiving of the panels as a cohesive page. She describes how the script genre led her to think in these panel fragments: "[The script] is panel-by-panel and so it's harder to translate in your mind from that script format where you're writing the instructions to [asking], 'How do all of the instructions on the page fit together?' We really count on the artists to help us with that, giving that page coherence" (Losh).

For every expectation the writers and publishers had about what the artists *would* bring to the process, they also encountered an unexpected contribution that they *hadn't* considered. For example, where the writers expected some liberal interpretations of their script, they ended up receiving—and welcoming—more substantial feedback, both in the conceptual inventions stages and on the pages of the book: "Seeing the first things come back where the artists had generated gags—when they were adding material in—was sort of a surprise, but then it became kind of fun. It was challenging to think about the whole page" (Losh). Earlier, Liz had discussed counting on the artists for page coherence to the narrative and dialogue she and Jonathan had drafted. Liz was surprised by the ways in which Zander and Kevin generated narrative tropes and added to the content itself to create this coherence, rather than relying solely on the art or the panel layouts on the page. Jonathan adds, "We were generally very, very happy with what Kevin and Zander had done with our basic directions. Obviously, we wanted them to have some freedom and to be able to create their own 'voice,' have their own stamp on the project" (Alexander). This cooperative approach to the text solidified the collaboration of writers and artists, who eventually came to identify themselves as "creatives," and as marginally separate from the Bedford "corporates."

Leasa also came to find their content creativity valuable: "Another thing that Kevin and Zander came up with was having the characters in the pages interacting with the texts" (Burton).

Just as Kevin had reflected, didactic/educational comics allow for a breaking of the fourth wall that other genres of comics do not. This includes acknowledging the text itself as a way of asking students to think about the book as a text worthy of (visual) rhetorical—and not just narrative— engagement.

For Jonathan, the surprise came when they incorporated visual aspects of educational comics that he hadn't considered before: "There have been many things that Kevin and Zander have done that are just absolutely gorgeous. You know, these wonderful spreads, that for us were kind of throw-away. [. . .] Some of the most striking multi-page spreads that they have are the book within the book. And I don't think we knew how powerful that could be and for us" (Alexander).

Perhaps most importantly, the artists became significant informers of the process itself. Initially, the editors attempted to proceed while relying on their traditional publishing process which—because it is textual—allows for significant content changes in the first two draft stages, called passes. With a visual text like a comic, Zander instructed them, the first visual draft is already too late for major narrative or conceptual revision. During feedback on one particular chapter, Carolyn recalls that they editors went back to Zander and Kevin, asking for a section to be removed and another to be extended. This was an important moment for the process: "That was when Zander kind of gave us a talking to about how it would be better for us to spend more time getting the manuscript to the point where everybody was totally happy with it, rather than think that maybe we could make changes after we see it and decide we don't like this part after all" (Lengel). Like Liz, Carolyn had a hard time imagining the pages as coherent units and so once in layout form in the rough pencil stage, she saw changes that she would not have been able to articulate previously, whereas "[Zander and Kevin] have to think about how the panels work together, the size of the panels, what's happening in the panels, and that it's visually interesting [. . .] so, it's a big deal if we want to change something major. We were thinking of the layouts more as like first pass pages, when you get page proofs and you can still make a lot of changes at

that point" (Lengel). Negotiating this process will be discussed at length in the next section, but is worth mentioning now because of how their experience in comics allowed the artists' literacies to become incredibly valued within the activity system.

Kevin also recognizes, too, how educational comics genre knowledge allows for other types of flexibility in the art. Kevin reflects that "one [strength of us as artists] is having a handle on the audience. We're trying to educate people and so some drawings need to be specific, some drawings are fine if they're simple and cartoony. I think we know where in the process to make that difference" (K. Cannon).

Zander's and Kevin's contributions to the textbook—some of which were expected and some which were not—led to their attribution as authors, something which Leasa and Carolyn are not accustomed to. Typically, as they have discussed in previous sections, their work with visual texts was limited to excerpts from graphic novels or single diagram or visualization of a writing concept. For Carolyn, changing her language was an indication to her that this process really was different from other projects. She recalls continually having to be reminded by the artists that they too were credited authors: "We're used to calling the [writers] the authors. Zander and Kevin had pointed out, 'We're authors too!' So we've tried to consistently [. . .] think of them all as authors. The illustrators definitely are authors, so it's not meant to be dismissive of their contributions, but it is a mind shift to try to accommodate" (Lengel).

One literacy skill that Zander and Kevin bring to which they spoke specifically, is what Scott McCloud refers to as an understanding of the spectrum of realism and iconicity. McCloud's theory of cartoon images assumes that realistic is to specific as abstract is to general; the more generic a character appears, the more readers can apply their own familiarities to it. The more realistic a character appears, the less audiences are able to adapt that character—and the story— to their own understandings. To help communicate this literacy to the writers and editors, Zander and Kevin went to the source, McCloud himself. They included the following panel from *Understanding Comics*—the very didactic treatise to which *Understanding Rhetoric* is alluding.

Zander and Kevin used the spectrum to communicate to the writers and editors how artists go

about, "finding a level of abstraction that will work for this kind of narrative. That is a very

important thing because I think people don't realize what a cartoon tells you and what a cartoon

doesn't tell you and let's you fill in yourself and I think that those are—and there's this sliding

scale of realism" (Z. and K. Cannon). The panel helped Zander and Kevin to explain why Liz and

Jonathan's likeness needed to be, as they call it, "cartoony." The level of iconicity in more

abstract character drawings actually expands the opportunity for audience understanding but

initially Liz and Jonathan struggled a bit with this "cartoony" representation. Where Liz and

Jonathan had reflected upon the visual representations of themselves in the text, they were

particularly discerning in representations of students: "[The student characters] also needed not

to be caricatures and we just kept saying "comic booky caricatures" and we thought, to these

comic book artists, can you make them look not so much like comic book characters?"

(Alexander).

     Issues of identity and representation are key elements of the textbook content as well. In

one chapter, on critical reading, Frederick Douglass becomes the focus—particularly his work on

visual representation through photography and the hesitation he had about representing free

slaves everywhere. Alexander describes the tension in representation, "Sort of like Douglass,

arguing not only on behalf of this individual person but on behalf of his race, you know, is very

concerned about what does a literate former slave look like and how is his self-representation

going to be picked up politically" (Alexander). The politics of representation remain salient in

contemporary studies of rhetoric and visual argument, which is one of the reasons why Liz and

Jonathan advocated so heavily for a text like *Understanding Rhetoric* to be the one that brings

rhetorics of identity to the forefront. Because of this focus on identity, representations of

figures—either historical like Frederick Douglass or contemporary artist Tom Gammill—had to

be carefully considered. Carolyn recalls "We decided to be really cautious about using humor in

anything to do with Frederick Douglass because [of the topic related to] slavery and there were

illustrations that came out where it was kind of this whimsical sort of drawing with a runaway

slave in the background. I mean, I know Zander and Kevin weren't in any way trying to make

fun of things, but it looked a little too lighthearted" (Lengel).

Negotiations of these contradictions (identities, literacies) were somewhat unique to this

case's activity system. Much of what makes this collaboration interesting is the ways in which so

many aspects of the activity system had to be negotiated. In activity theory, identity is also

informed by division of labor and the tools used to facilitate the activities. According to Hung

and Chen, "[t]he division of labour (or roles) and tools involved in mediating toward that goal

assists in shaping the identity of those members who use the tools and perform their roles and

functions" (249). In this next section, I discuss the tools that the collaboration incorporated—

and in some cases created—in order to negotiate their collaborative composing process.

4.4 Tools and Division of Labor: Issues of Theory and Practice

As Leasa and Carolyn (and others at Bedford, for that matter) had been publishing textbooks in

such a standardized manner for so long, it was assumed, early on in the process, that they would

proceed with the traditional textbook publication process—writers would compose drafts,

editors and others would provide feedback, and the writers would make revisions. This cycle

occurred at least eight times for each issue, with each stage reducing the amount of substantial

content change until finally, the compositor lays the text out on the page and allows only for

placement of visuals and sentence-level copyediting. It wasn't until Zander and Kevin re-

informed the traditional process with their understanding of comics publishing—via the use of

tools, both internal and external—that the collaboration began to grasp this new process.

Activity theory divides tools into categories of internal and external. Internal tools are

examined in order to better understand the ways in which abstract concepts like community

norms, accepted discourse practices, and schemas can influence the subjects, the community,

and the system's activities. In *Understanding Rhetoric*, for example, because the outcome is

both a reflection of and contribution to pedagogy and writing studies, we can conceive of

composition theory, comics studies, and rhetorical theory as internal tools used in system-related activities. However, because the outcome is a product, we can also consider capitalism and a favor of free market economy as informing the system's activities.

External tools are more tangible, concrete materials that can be held/distributed/pointed to. External tools are sometimes adopt tools from previous collaborations or activity systems or created within the activity. These unique tools, when they take a written form, are referred to as metagenres. It is important to remember that metagenres are not considered a part of the outcome. They are a process, a mediation employed by subjects within the activity system in order to facilitate outcomes by clarifying, standardizing, expediting, or articulating activities. A significant example of an external tool is a metagenre. Bawarshi and Reiff elaborate, "[A metagenre's] function is to provide shared background knowledge and guidance in how to produce and negotiate genres within systems and sets of genres. Meta-genres can take the form of guidelines or manuals for how to produce and use genres—genres about genres—but they can also take the form of shared discourse about genres. (Bawarshi & Reiff 94). In their study of student interns in a new workplace environment, Bawarshi and Reiff observed how "student interns learned how to use their genre knowledge to navigate new workplace sites and for understanding how genres function to accomplish different kinds of work within these sites—how the activity of planning, producing, and using documents enables co-workers to discuss issues, negotiate positions, make decisions and develop relationships" (Bawarshi & Reiff 136).

In the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system, an important internal tool becomes the negotiated publishing process, a hybrid of traditional textbook publication and comics publication. I will first describe the traditional textbook publication process, as explained to me by Leasa and Carolyn; second, I will describe the new process which emerged through a recognition of contradictions and a determination to seek negotiations. Lastly, I will incorporate

external tools into the discussion by sharing metagenres created by the artists to help this negotiated process along.

The Traditional Process

The Traditional textbook publishing process can be thought of as two separate metaprocesses. The first metaprocess is overseen by the developing editor/sponsoring editor and entails developing the concept (what does this approach give students? Instructors?) and the manuscript—which goes through several drafts—and includes feedback from reviewers, instructors, in-house editors, and authors. During the manuscript stage, writers are still making significant content changes and editors and art directors are determining design and art features. This manuscript development stage takes about two years and results in rough pages in which the text is in a very finalized form but without art or design features, including page layout/makeup. The second metaprocess entails preparing the rough pages for production. While the development/sponsoring editor is still overseeing the process, the rough pages become the responsibility of the project editor who ensures the pages are seen by copyeditors, designers, and the art program. The project editor then collates these comments and passes them to the compositor. The compositor combines textual and visual elements of the textbook to produces the first pass pages. The first pass is probably what most of us think of when we think of page proofs. So, if you can imagine, the pages are beginning to look like a textbook; the pages now include document design features like headers, formatting elements, pagination, page makeup, illustrations and art, etc. At this point, the textbook will go through additional review by authors, in-house editors, designers, art program, and the compositor. Feedback is received from each, collated by the compositor, and the second pass pages are finalized. As this point, major content changes are no longer advised. Instead, the focus of feedback includes asking questions regarding missing content, the location of art features, the style/design, and the page makeup across the chapters. This type of review occurs once more on the second pass and is once again collated to produce the final pass. The final pass is given to the printer who often

conducts press tests to ensure that colors, design elements, and art features print correctly. The

textbook goes through the production process of printing and is ready for distribution. The

flowchart below provides a visualization of the traditional textbook publishing process. Changes

to this process, made necessary by the comics form of *Understanding Rhetoric* will be discussed

in the next section.
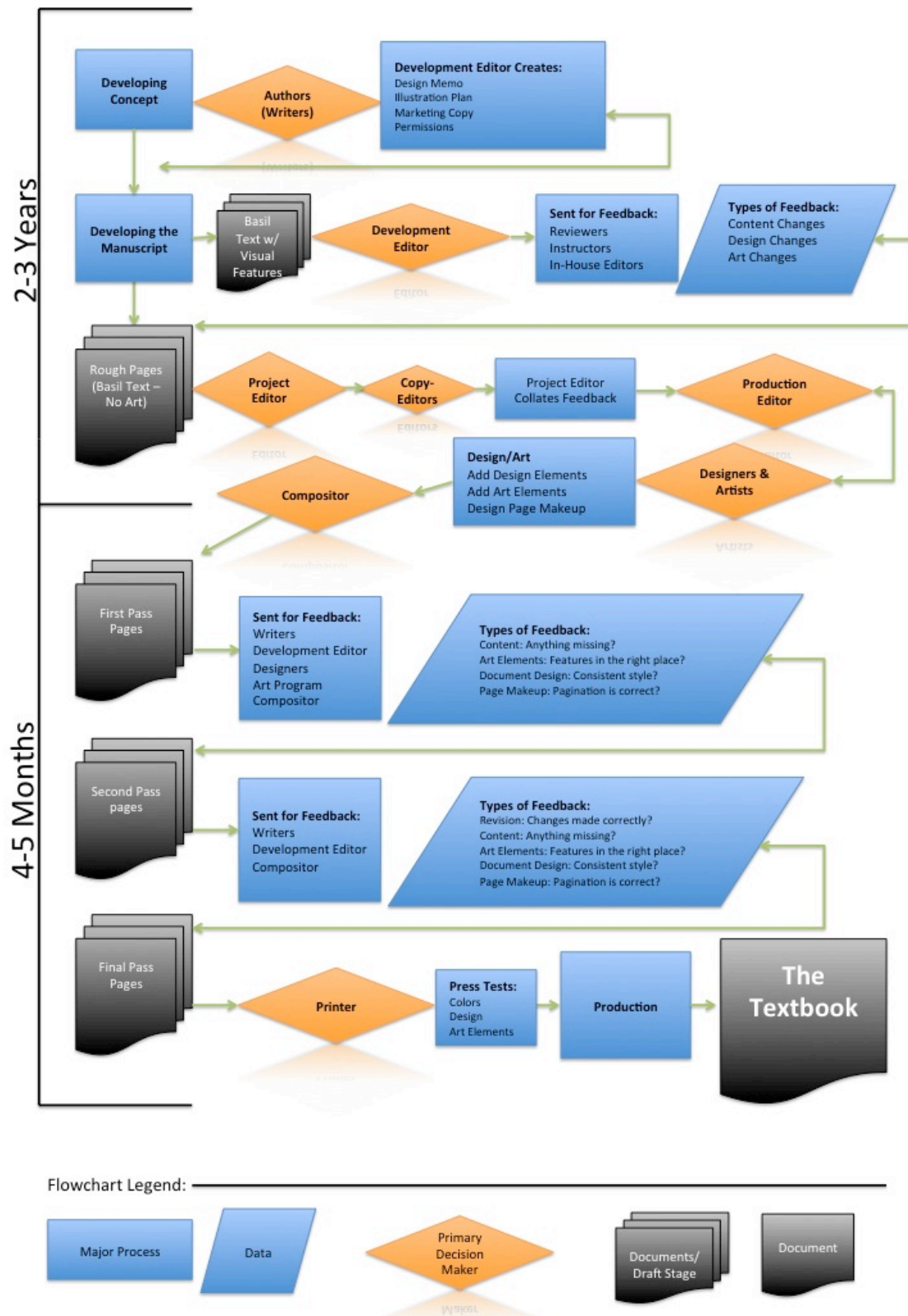
Traditional Textbook Publishing Process

2-3 Years

- **Developing Concept**
- **Authors (Writers)**
- **Development Editor Creates:**
  Design Memo
  Illustration Plan
  Marketing Copy
  Permissions

- **Developing the Manuscript**
- Basil Text w/ Visual Features
- **Development Editor**
- **Sent for Feedback:**
  Reviewers
  Instructors
  In-House Editors
- **Types of Feedback:**
  Content Changes
  Design Changes
  Art Changes

- Rough Pages (Basil Text – No Art)
- **Project Editor**
- **Copy-Editors**
- **Project Editor Collates Feedback**
- **Production Editor**

- **Compositor**
- **Design/Art**
  Add Design Elements
  Add Art Elements
  Design Page Makeup
- **Designers & Artists**

4-5 Months

- First Pass Pages
- **Sent for Feedback:**
  Writers
  Development Editor
  Designers
  Art Program
  Compositor
- **Types of Feedback:**
  Content: Anything missing?
  Art Elements: Features in the right place?
  Document Design: Consistent style?
  Page Makeup: Pagination is correct?

- Second Pass pages
- **Sent for Feedback:**
  Writers
  Development Editor
  Compositor
- **Types of Feedback:**
  Revision: Changes made correctly?
  Content: Anything missing?
  Art Elements: Features in the right place?
  Document Design: Consistent style?
  Page Makeup: Pagination is correct?

- Final Pass Pages
- **Printer**
- **Press Tests:**
  Colors
  Design
  Art Elements
- **Production**
- **The Textbook**

Flowchart Legend:

- Major Process
- Data
- Primary Decision Maker
- Documents/ Draft Stage
- Document

Figure 4.5 Traditional Textbook Publishing Process.

The Understanding Rhetoric Process

For the publication of *Understanding Rhetoric*, several negotiations occurred in order to revise

the traditional textbook publishing process to accommodate the visual medium of the comic.

As is typical with the traditional process, the most time-consuming metaprocess

included the development of the concept and the manuscript. In this case, the scripts went

through at least eight revision cycles before they were drawn in the pencil stage. The major

differences between this and the traditional process include skipping design element and art

feature feedback, and including the artists, Zander and Kevin in the development stage. In this

stage, the manuscript was meticulously revised so that the pencil stage wouldn't need to include

the addition/deletion/relocation of panels, which can alter the page order. The pencil stage

(similar to rough pages) is the first visual layout of the comic, making the script revisions even

more important since any changes made after this point aren't just noted in the text, but are

made to the visuals/panels. Comments on the pencils include an examination of page order and

page placement. Since cover/splash pages must begin on the right (to model the formal

conventions of the comic), then each chapter's Re-Frame/Assignment sections have to end on

the left. Feedback is also made on the images and the text; most important to this stage of

feedback is global issues of narrative flow, focus on concepts, image's ability to convey concepts,

and extended stories or metaphors being used to explain a concept. This stage no longer

requires feedback from the designer on art features but the pencils draft will go to the designer

to examine page makeup such as gutter size (space between panels) and the location of page

numbers (which should be consistent but may vary depending upon the layout of a particular

page). Below is an example of the PDF commenting on the splash page of "Issue 0:

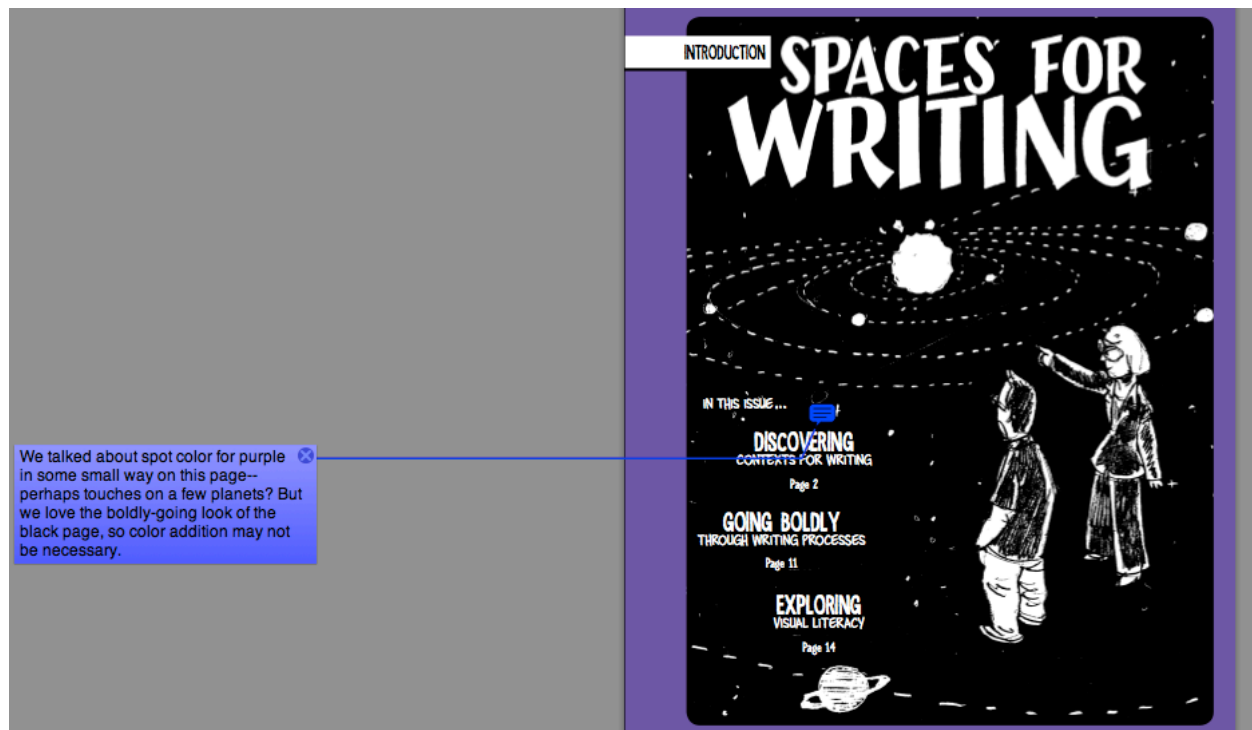Introduction" and comments on page 12 of that chapter:

Figure 4.6 Comments on *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction, Splash page in rough pencils stage. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.
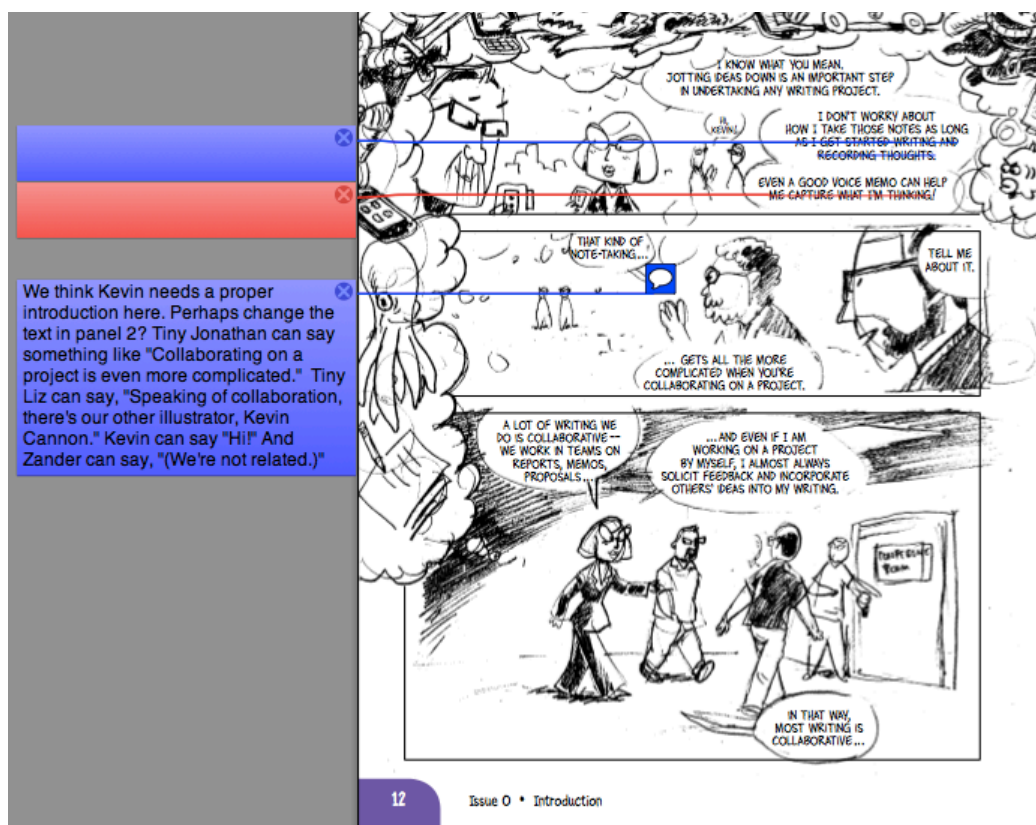

Figure 4.7 Comments on *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction, page 12 in rough pencils stage. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

As you can see in these examples, comments at the pencils stage consist of feedback related to color, "touching up," dialogue balloon edits, dialogue balloon additions, and copy editing. Another comment in this PDF file suggested swapping one page (page 17) for another (page 19) for narrative flow. But, there were no other significant global changes that would require new artwork altogether. When the pencils are ready to go to the artists for inking, this metaprocess is concluded. For *Understanding Rhetoric*, the initial process of developing the idea and the manuscript took four years since substantial content feedback had to be so limited after the pencils stage.

Once the pages are inked, they are once again reviewed for feedback. Leasa describes the ink draft by saying, "It looks more final than it is." Surprisingly, the inks can still be revised. At this stage, the draft includes, for the first time, nuanced backgrounds, character representation, and action. At this stage, commenters can examine character facial expressions, body positioning, and relationship to objects, setting, and other characters. Backgrounds can also be revised at this stage because it is change within the panel and doesn't require the addition/deletion/relocation of panels. Examples below are the same pages featured above from Issue 0 (the splash page and page 12), but this time from the inking stage. In these comments, the focus is on more local changes. Comments from editors, writers, and designers here are much more specific and nuanced when compared to comments from the pencils stage. Still, no changes require adding pages or panels, changing the story, or major revisions to an explanation of the concept. Instead, the comments are largely from an art and production perspective, considering what needs to happen before the pages can be printed. Anna Palchik, the art director, is referenced often in these comments for her important feedback related to the material constraints of the page related to the production of the textbook. Jonathan commented, during our interview, about the art jumping outside of the panels. Artwork extending into the gutter is a common formal feature of comics and one that had to be negotiated in terms of the technical parameters demanded by the traditional textbook publication process.
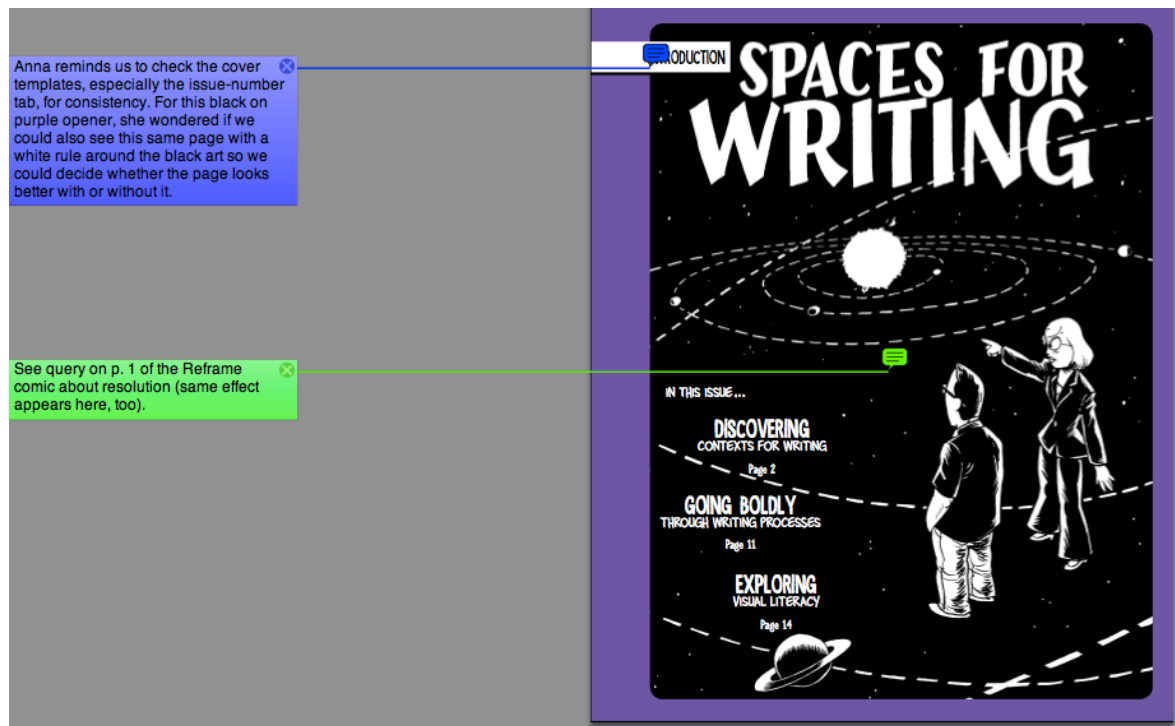
Figure 4.8 Comments on *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction, Splash page in ink stage. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.
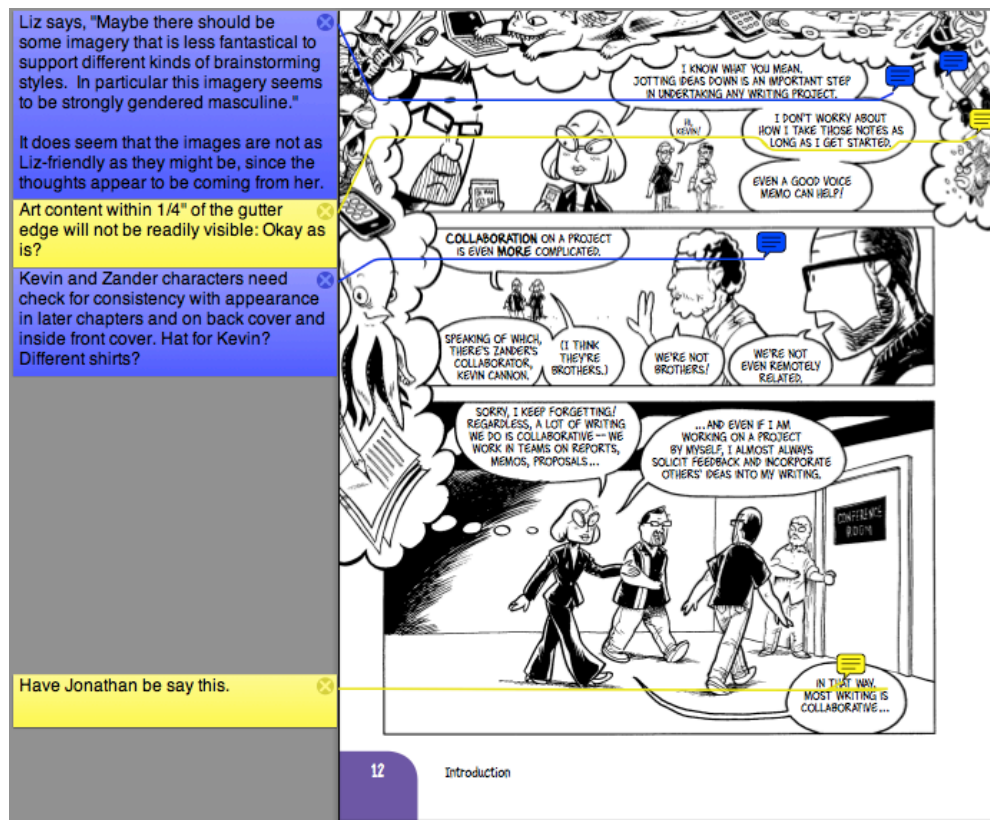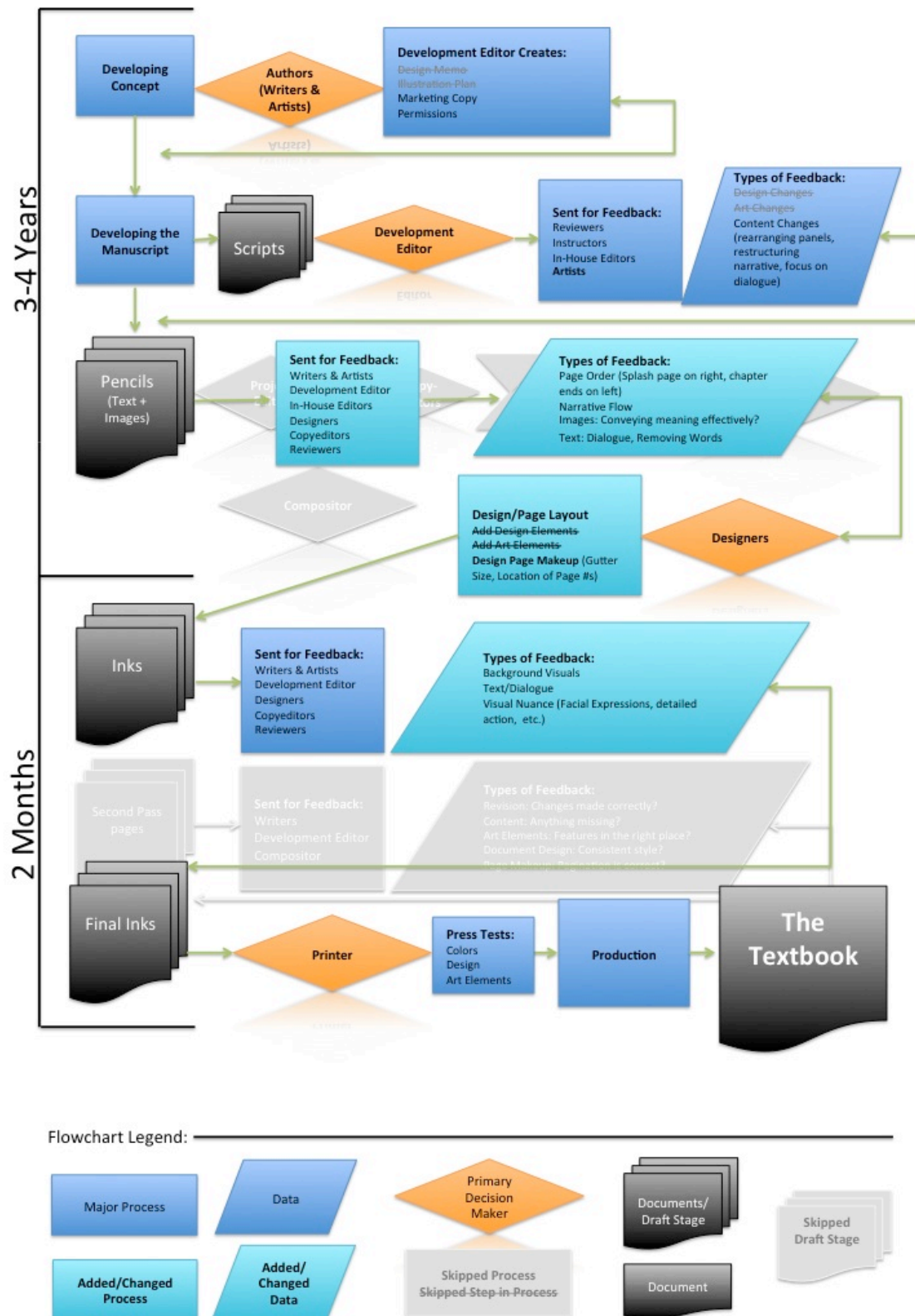
Figure 4.9 Comments on *Understanding Rhetoric:* Introduction, page 12 in ink stage. Used with permission of Bedford St. Martin's Publishing.

When Zander and Kevin receive feedback on the inks, they make small changes and produce what will be the printed page, including design elements. From this final inks stage, the textbook experiences a production process similar to a traditional textbook. It is press tested, submitted for final approval, approved and then printed and distributed. This flowchart below shows the revised publishing process for *Understanding Rhetoric* (in teal) as well as the stages of the traditional process that are revised (in gray) to accommodate the comics medium.

Understanding Rhetoric Publishing Process

Figure 4.10 The *Understanding Rhetoric* Publication Process.

"The Checklist" and Other Metagenres

During various stages of the textbook publishing process, there is an extensive period of commenting on the most recent draft and collating those comments to allow for revision. Guiding and keeping track of this feedback process becomes one of the most labor-intensive aspects of the textbook publishing process. Since metagenres are external tools which aid in the activity of a system, I sought out these metagenres for *Understanding Rhetoric* and found many: Word Review track changes and comments, PDF Commenting Sticky Notes, A Google Doc to trace the file as it moved among authors and editors, and lastly, the review materials which were distributed to outsiders in order to elicit specific feedback.

The most prominent metagenre in the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system was the checklist which would guide the writers, editors, and reviewers as they wrote comments. It became clear rather quickly that feedback varied greatly from global to local issues and Zander and Kevin suggested that the team work together to develop a better understanding of which comments are most helpful to the artists during certain stages of the process. Zander and Kevin focused on page layouts and elements of the comic medium while Leasa's experience in textbook publishing led to a holistic consideration of intertextuality and references across chapters.

Checklist for Stage 1 (Layouts) from BTA

1. Page Layout
Check panel sizes, arrangement of panels on pages, overall flow.

2. Backgrounds and Settings
Ensure character situations are clear and make sense for the narrative (where that's important).

3. Images
Make sure they work with text and convey appropriate message.

4. Dialogue and Captions
Note anything to add, change, cut.

5. New characters (if any)
Is the design OK? Note corrections to weight, race, clothing, general appearance.

6. Navigational content
Add cross-references to other content in the chapter or in other chapters?
Do we have any/enough quick-reference features? If not, consider placement and content of reference material.

The authors and editors often spoke to the difficulty of commenting on the pencils stage. During this stage, panels are part of the page layout, and each panel has dialogue and a sort of skeletal, loosely sketched artwork of characters' actions. Therefore, content that appears to be quite temporary is in actuality closer to finality and less flexible for revision than one might assume—and the editors and writers did. Carolyn recalls one comment that was made on the first penciled chapter. The comment asked for a revision that would have meant adding/deleting/moving panels, an act which ripples into affecting the panels on the pages before and after it, multiple page layout changes, and possible page order changes. In response, Zander and Kevin drafted the checklist, a document that offered guidelines to the writers and editors about which comments were most helpful during certain stages. During the pencils stage, major panel adding/deleting/moving is to be avoided for efficiency purposes. Instead, Zander and Kevin asked editors, writers, and reviewers to focus on the storytelling, narrative metaphors, conceptual explanations (too much imagery or text), image conveyance, page order, and page design elements that need attention, such as action that breaks the frame and extends into the margin or issues of style consistency (gutter size, page numbers, etc.). Lastly, because of the sketchy nature of the pencils stage, Zander and Kevin particularly learned to ignore comments related to art/lines unless they affected larger structural/narrative changes. Without the nuance of the complete visual, the editors often struggled with this aspect of commenting.

In contrast, the inking stage is the place for attention to detail and nuance. Though not as set-in-stone as the final inks, the initial inking stage is where full pages are ready for review. During the inks, the two areas that are least finalized are the characters and the background behind the characters: characters' facial expressions, body positioning, and relationship to objects, the setting, and other characters, as well as background action, gags, detail, setting and so forth.

The pencils and the inks are most similar to the rough pages and the first pass pages of the traditional process and yet, the difference in types of feedback is substantial. The work of a

metagenre like the checklist helps to facilitate the adjustment and mollify the tension as writers

and editors work in a new medium and a new genre. I conclude this analysis of the activity

system with metagenres because of the ways in which they come to represent the work of the

system itself. Metagenres aided in the production of outcome genres, the successful activity of

the system, and the process of convergence as two genres/media collided in *Understanding*

Rhetoric.

4.5 Case Conclusions

In summary, the process of convergence creates dynamic tensions manifested through

contradictions, which allow for change within and beyond the activity system. When the various

activity systems of which we are a part begin to adopt convergence as standard practice in

working toward communicative goals, a dynamic culture emerges. This convergence culture

> represents a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media, that we are making
>
> that shift first through our relations with popular culture, but that the skills we acquire
>
> through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political
>
> process, and connect with other people around the world. (Jenkins 22-23)

Within the *UR* activity system, and beyond to the much broader community of composition

instruction, scholarship, and publishing, convergence presents a number of shifts, both material

and theoretical. As Charles Bazerman wrote, "Considering the activity system in addition to the

genre system puts a focus on what people are doing and how texts help people do it, rather than

on texts as ends in themselves" (15). Thus, the study of how *UR* was composed collaboratively

becomes a much broader study of how the text itself represents shifts and tensions in

communities, social norms, tool-mediated action, and motives manifested from its convergence.

The presence of *UR* in the textbook market is itself a reflection of convergence culture.

Where entertainment media corporations (news, film, etc.) once dominated convergence

practices, other media industries are finding convergence suitable for them communicative

purposes as well. Bedford's interest in *UR* is neither purely commercial nor purely scholarly.

While it seems self-evident that a corporate entity is focused primarily on profit margins and market share, the editors at Bedford St. Martin's are motivated by innovation in the practice and research related to college-level writing instruction. Thus, while the corporate aim is the sale of textbooks, which inevitably inform what is taught and sold among teachers of composition, the field informs the content and medium in which such texts are produced and disseminated. Writing scholars like Liz Losh and Jonathan Alexander, for example, have developed theories around the scope of the composition classroom based upon the ever-broadening definition of what we consider writing or composing. Jonathan argues that:

> [The discussion about multiliteracies] is to be going to be a challenge for a lot of people in composition. [. . .] I am increasingly convinced and I believe Liz is as well; I am committed to a literacy education that is very broad. While I believe that students need composition courses—that is courses in actual writing—I'm also thinking they need general ed. courses in other kinds of literate activity. Being able to productively being able to make a video that can be posted to YouTube is probably just as significant of a literate act and maybe even—at this moment—more of a significant literate act than writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper that nobody reads anymore. [. . .] I'm thinking writing a video response to a YouTube video. That is a skill that people need to engage in the public sphere. So, where do we make room for that? [. . .] and so really expanding what composition means so that we can make room for lots of different kinds of literate activity. So, the book, I think is kind of pitched weirdly halfway where. You know, saying, it's still for a writing class but what we understand as composing is undergoing change. (Alexander)

Jonathan's broadened understanding of literacy informed his role in the collaboration and, as he says above, his practice as a teacher of writing. Much of our field's exploration of new multiliteracies is informed by an increased interest in asking students to compose in multiple

modalities without significant research on how such texts are composed—either by a single author or a collaborative team.

What is most significant for this case is the ways in which studying the activity system allowed for a new understanding of the collaborative multimodal composing process involved in making comics. Comics composing is a significantly less fluid and recursive process, much less so than text-based composing—with which most of us are more familiar. While the manuscripts for *Understanding Rhetoric* went through multiple drafts with feedback ranging from global to local feedback, once the layout stage was initiated, global feedback was significantly limited; there was no easy way to address desired changes in narrative, argument focus and organization, or visual metaphors of the concepts being explained. Since the 1980s, our field's understanding of "the writing process" has evolved through the research of Janet Emig, Linda Flower and John Hayes, and Sondra Perl, as well as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford. It is my hope that this research continues in order to ask similar inquiries of multimodal and collaborative composing processes. This is perhaps the most significant finding related to the study of *Understanding Rhetoric*.

Chapter 5
Cheo Comics: Technical Communication & Underground Comix Collide

5.1 Introduction

The rhetorical situation[16] facing the collaborators of the Cheo comics was complex and for many reasons the collaboration could have resulted in unsuccessful texts. For one, the writers and artist had conflicting exigence. Where the writers sought to compose for the purposes of academic research in technical communication, the artist was motivated to create a comic that would effect social change for Latino construction workers by disseminating information about safety that they would otherwise be denied or unable to comprehend. Secondly, the text had to serve a dynamic audience. Latino construction workers occupy much of the construction workforce in the United States and yet, Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) standards and regulation rarely addresses their language and literacy needs. Lastly, occupational culture is an aspect of technical communication that must be considered as a significant constraint for collaborators. Because construction is an industry marked by competitive contractors and subcontractors, bottom-line priorities of the workplace often conflict with the personal safety priorities of the worker. The rhetorical situation becomes increasingly complex when considering issues of conflicting exigence, dynamic audience, and intercultural constraints. Each of these issues will be addressed in an examination of how the collaborators engaged the technical communication genre of the tutorial to successfully create a series of the Cheo comics that effectively communicate safer behaviors to Latino construction workers in American worksites. But first, I will introduce you to the collaboration responsible for authoring the Cheo comics.[17]

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[16] Here I draw from Lloyd Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, constraints.

[17] There is, however, one exception. The *Cheo* safety instruction materials were initially created out of a collaboration between Nick Thorkelson and Dr. Maria Brunette of the University of Massachusettes, Lowell. Unfortunately, during the time of data collection, Dr. Brunette was on sabbatical in Peru and so I was unable to interview her on the origins of the project that spurred the Cheo comics. This was a limitation of my data collection process.

Nick Thorkelson

Nick Thorkelson is an accomplished comics artist. He has an impressive repertoire including

contributions to chapters in *Wobblies!* (2005), *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic*

History (2007), *The Beats: A Graphic History* (2009), *Studs Terkel's* Working (2009),

Yiddishkeit: Jewish Vernacular & the New Land (2011), and *It Started in Wisconsin* (2012).

These nonfiction histories are perhaps his most popular contributions, but Nick has been

drawing comics for social change for more than three decades. In his twenty-plus years with

Works Rights Press, Nick has produced several books in collaboration with author and publisher

Robert M. Schwartz in order to inform workers of their rights on the job. Works Rights Press

titles include: *The FMLA Handbook* (1996); *Workers' Comp: A Massachusetts Guide* (2002);

Strikes, Picketing and Inside Campaigns (2006); and *The Legal Rights of Union Stewards*

(Thorkelson "Resume"). Nick continues his contributions to the Works Rights Press including

the recent release of a title on union rights as related to discipline cases: *Just Cause: A Union*

Guide to Winning Discipline Cases.

Nick then produced three comics pamphlets for the health and safety program in the

Department of the Work Environment at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell (UML). Dr.

Maria Brunette, an associate professor of Work Environment at UML, contacted Nick to help

created a number of safety training materials. They collaboratively created flyers, presntations,

and a bilingual workers' dictionary. It wasn't until 2009 that Maria came into contact with

Carlos. The collaboration between Nick and Carlos produced the Cheo comics. Nick's work with

the Cheo comics spurred further interest in safety training and workplace communication to

prevent injuries and save lives. His work with the National Institute for Occupational Safety &

Health (NIOSH) began in 2011 for which he is now developing comics directed at Hispanic

construction workers on nailgun safety for NIOSH's Division of Applied Research &

Technology" (Thorkelson Resume).

From his laundry list of impressive works, one can surmise that Nick Thorkelson is happily pegged a social change comics artist. Nick is motivated by the opportunity to reach people in communities that aren't aware of their rights or who are denied protection in ways others are afforded—communities like Latino construction workers. For Nick, the desired outcome of his collaboration on the Cheo comics is to reach mass audiences in order to engage readers and teach them about safety related to working at heights (ladders, roofs, and scaffolds). Nick perceives the workplace as the site of intervention, a nucleus of local change that can spur an ever-growing ripple-like effect as more and more workers receive safety training materials and shift the values of the occupational culture.

Carlos Evia

Carlos Evia spent his youth in Merida, a town along the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, occupying his time with both American and Mexican comic books. Today Carlos describes himself as a technical communication scholar. Carlos earned a B.A. in Communication from the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales de Mérida (ICSMAC), in Yucatan, Mexico. He then studied Computer Systems at the Universidad La Salle in Mexico City, earning a Master's degree, and subsequently earning a PhD in Technical Communication and Rhetoric from Texas Tech University.

Currently, Carlos is Associate Professor of Technical Communication at Virginia Tech and was recently appointed the Director of the Professional Writing Program in the Department of English. Like Maria, Carlos' primary research agenda has been related to work environment but, while Maria's focus is the quality of working life in general, Carlos' focus targets workplace communication practices. Specifically, Carlos identifies technical communication research foci including "planning and developing technology-based solutions for workplace communication problems, particularly in situations involving multicultural audiences" ("Carlos Evia, Ph.D.").

Most recently, in June of 2012, Carlos co-wrote an article with Ashley Patriarca and was published in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. In their article, "Beyond Compliance: Participatory Translation of Safety Communication for Latino Construction

Workers," Evia and Patriarca articulate why this particular population of Latino construction

workers is the focus on their research interventions: "The most tangible product of these

communication problems involving Latino construction workers is the high incidence of

workplace injuries and fatalities. The risk of workplace death for Latino construction workers is

40% to 80% higher than it is for their non-Latino peers (Dong, Entzel, Men, Chowdhury, &

Schnei- der, 2004), and their risk of work-related injuries is 30% higher (Dong et al., 2010)"

(Evia and Patriarca 2). Carlos' work argues for the need to direct tutorials specifically to an

audience of Latino workers.

As Carlos' research spans multiple disciplines (technical communication, computer

science, building construction, safety and health, etc.) his work reaches academic journals in the

social sciences (communication, rhetoric, etc.) as well as the physical sciences (engineering,

building construction, etc.). In 2001, Carlos published "Localizing and Designing Computer-

Based Safety Training Solutions for Hispanic Construction Workers" in the *Journal of*

Construction Engineering and Management ("Carlos Evia, Ph.D.").

Carlos' research publications indicate that he is motivated largely by the intellectual

pursuit for knowledge that hopes to accurately reflect workplaces for the study of

communication practices. This approach to describe practice can subsequently form theoretical

approaches that can help workplace communication in multiple contexts. Through participatory

design[18] Carlos perceives of the workplace as fieldwork site through which existing

communication practices are observed and new approaches tested in order to contribute to

academic research that has the potential to re-inform technical communication theory and

workplace practices. In fact, it was Carlos' prior research engaging participatory design, which

put him in contact with Maria Brunette. In an email dated July 5th, 2007, Carlos wrote to Maria

---

[18] Clay Spinuzzi argues, in a 2005 *Technical Communication* article that participatory design is a research method and its object of study is "the tacit knowledge developed and used by those who work with technologies" (165). It has come to be associated with qualitative research methods by which researchers avoid a "top-down" model of data collection or intervention and instead work collaboratively with—in this case—construction workers to create solutions which address recognized problems based on the local knowledge of the workers themselves. It is widely held that participatory design allows for a more reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant.

in order to ask her about using Cheo's likeness in a paper he was writing that featured comics

composed by construction workers with which he had been researching. Carlos writes,

> At a recent participatory design session with some workers from El Salvador, they were
>
> supposed to make comic books representing safety lessons. One of the workers found a
>
> copy of your piece "Development of Educational and Training Materials on Safety and
>
> Health" (from Family & Community Health) in our folders, and asked if he could use the
>
> illustrations of "Cheo" for his comic book. Later on, when we analyzed the data, we used
>
> this worker's input and gave "Cheo" and his family dialogs for a comic book. I think the
>
> origin of this anecdote (the worker seeing the character and wanting to give it a voice) is
>
> very unique and interesting. As I prepare a manuscript based on this research project, I
>
> wonder if I could include the Cheo anecdote and a copy of the resulting comic book.
>
> (Evia, "Using 'Cheo'").

From there, the collaboration formed and evolved to include the Cheo comics, which constituted

the first phase of a long-term project to develop more effective safety materials for Latino

construction workers.

5.2 The Tutorial Genre

In order to examine the ways in which the Cheo comics confirmed and challenged genre

conventions of the technical communication tutorial, I began considering the genre's purpose:

1. What formal and rhetorical conventions are associated with the tutorial genre in
   technical communication?

I begin first by defining genre through a number of perspectives, including Carlos Evia's. As the

writer for the Cheo comics, Carlos describes the purpose of the tutorial as being centered around

behavioral change at the individual level and why instructions were not chosen for workers:

> It's very difficult to have a comic that gives you steps because that means that you are
>
> going to be doing something—the instructions, the procedural genre—is based on: "Do
>
> this. Change that. Move that." So you have to have it in your hand [. . .] but you need to

be doing it and at the same time, reading it. Whereas a tutorial is something you read

and then you go out and you do it. In our case [the comic] is not necessarily trying to be

instructions or procedures with that logical sequence of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. It's more like a

tutorial. You read it, and then you go out and you try to do something, trying to generate

some kind of behavioral change. So the comic as an agent of personal change, [. . .]

making people aware of their own problems and how they can implement changes.

(Evia).

I then sought secondary sources that would allow me to examine the genre through the lens of

additional technical communication scholars.

Technical Communication Genre: Conventions of the Tutorial

Through the lens of rhetorical genre studies, I will first examine one of the primary antecedent

genres that informed the Cheo comics, the tutorial.

1. What formal and rhetorical conventions are associated with the tutorial genre in
    technical communication?

As described earlier, by Carlos Evia, behavioral change at the individual level is the primary

rhetorical action being motivated by the tutorial genre, "a series of steps leading to new

behaviors" (Acosta et al. 150). But how does the tutorial achieve this goal of motivating change

in its audience? This question is among many of the questions posed by scholars in technical

communication and one that has led to numerous studies to examine and determine the most

effective means of motivating behavioral change in the audience. For Burke et al., "[t]he most

engaging methods of safety and health training focus on the development of knowledge in stages

and emphasize principles of behavioral modeling. Behavioral modeling involves observation of a

role model, modeling or practice, and feedback designed to modify behavior" (Burke at al. 315).

Often, methods of safety and health training take primarily textual form and rarely employ other

modes of information display for workers. As articulated by Cullen and Fein, heavily textual

dissemination of important health and safety prevention information has largely been found to

be ineffective for its intended workplace audience; "Creating these materials in bureaucratic or

highly technical language not commonly used by the [workers] themselves would increase the

likelihood that the regulations and materials will be ignored" (18).

With technical communicators faced with the complexities of audience needs and a

widely adopted understanding that text alone is an ineffective mode of communication, Burke

asks, "What is the relative effectiveness of different *methods* of safety and health training in

modifying safety-related knowledge, behavior, and outcomes?" (Burke et al. 315, emphasis

original). By interrogating technical communication genres, scholars and practitioners of

technical communication can begin to shape the genre to more effectively address the formal

and rhetorical needs of the audience for whom the genre is intended.

5.3 Rules/Norms: Issues of Affordances and Audience
Examining the rules and norms—as they are perceived by subjects—within an activity system

can allow researchers to examine a number of influences on the activity itself. When studying

the Cheo comics, there are three specific questions I posed regarding genre conventions, comics

medium affordances, and the intercultural nature of its communication.

1. How has the tutorial genre shifted to accommodate audience need?
2. How can comics bridge technical and non-technical communicators? What does the comics medium offer the tutorial genre that make it more accessible?
3. How can comics consider workplace culture in order to bridge intercultural communication?

The analysis that follows addresses each of these questions in order to more closely interrogate

the system of social activity that led to the creation of the Cheo comics.

Tutorial Genre: Shifting to Address Audience Need
Realities of how workers learn have been studied by technical communicators in order to better

address audience need. For safety tutorials like those informing the work of the Cheo comics,

workers' literacies and workplace culture primarily inform the question of whether a tutorial can

effectively catalyze behavioral change. And so I considered:

1. How has the tutorial genre shifted to accommodate audience need?

Audience Literacies

As identified in the previous section, textual information dissemination has been found to be largely ineffective for, or worse, ignored by workers. Consequently, technical communication has shifted its audience focus to consider first the literacies of the workers/managers to whom the communication will be addressed. Literacy must be considered for *every* training medium chosen be it print, personal instruction, film and video, or diverse computer-based training programs (Dholakiya 10, emphasis added).

For genres like instructions and tutorials, the common training medium is a combined visual/textual approach. Visual communication has, in fact, been adopted in technical communication to accommodate audience literacies and literacy needs.

Brumberger defines visual communication broadly, engaging a number of genres and media to demonstrate how prolific the visual is among technical communication, including "designing print, Web, and multimedia documents (including decision-making about issues such as layout, typography, color, etc.), creating visual displays of information/data, generating other visual material (e.g., images, photographs) for professional documents, and any other communication tasks which rely on visual language" (373). For Penrose, the efficacy of the visual in technical communication is invaluable to a genre like a tutorial and can include everything from, "Pictures of tools, especially unfamiliar ones, needed for the construction of something; Wiring diagrams or process flow diagrams; Concept drawings, perhaps showing inputs, processes, and outputs; Sequence drawings that intentionally avoid words so that all audiences (and languages) can follow the development" (Penrose 412).

Carolyn Rude argues that when technical communicators don't consider the visual, the document inevitably fails the audience. For Rude, the cause of this multimodal blind spot lies in

organizational structure which isolates writers and designers in an effort to streamline the

composing process. Instead of working in collaboration with artists, "[w]riters have been trained

to rely almost exclusively on verbal communication and to entrust decisions about appearance

of text to graphics specialists, who, in turn, have been trained to make decisions on the basis of

aesthetics, not function" (Rude 64). Rude claims that good design is as crucial to audience

understanding as the words themselves, arguing that "[i]ncreasingly, research on the ways in

which texts work for readers shows that the visual aspects of a document are functional, not

simply aesthetic" (64).

Visuals, then can—and, arguably, should—be used for effective persuasion and increased

audience engagement. However, in addition to considering issues of literacy, technical

communicators must take into account language competency—particularly for English Language

Learners (ELL)—in order to more fully accommodate audience need.

Yet another reason for relying on visualization is that instructions are "increasingly

directed to both English-speaking and non-English-speaking audiences; [. . .] readers may be

less proficient with words. Many of us learn best through a combination of words and nonwords

[photographs, drawings, diagrams, and maps]" (Penrose 411). Carlos Evia has committed a

large portion of his research agenda to studying technical communication and its ability to meet

audience need.

Indeed, the visual has become crucial to meaning-making practices and has led to a

broader understanding of literacies themselves. Yet, much like textual literacy practice, visual

literacy practice is not an assumed skill. To read the visual is "[t]o make meaning from images,

the 'reader' uses the critical skills of exploration, critique, and reflection. Images can be very

powerful. Visual [literacy] involves problem solving and critical thinking" (Dholakiya 52). But

before technical communicators can move forward, literacy and language are not the only

aspects of audience to consider. Visual literacy is culturally informed; visual problem solving and critical thinking can produce wildly different understandings if issues of culture are not taken into account (Mangan 245).

Workplace Culture

The intersection of technical communication and intercultural communication has established that workplace culture undeniably shapes not only communication practices but also conceptions of safety and risk at the micro-cultural level. Cullen and Fein articulate the shifts in the tutorial genre by addressing the additional influencing force of workplace culture. They argue that "[f]or any training to be truly effective, it is necessary to choose the theoretical framework that best fits the trainees themselves as well as the organization's training objectives and its occupational culture. The goal is not necessarily to increase knowledge, but rather to create expertise" (Cullen & Fein 13). This concept of expertise is often discussed in conjunction with issues of workplace culture, a pervasive element of occupational behavior patterns that cannot be ignored when considering the genre's goal of individual behavioral change.

In order to produce effective tutorials, the training must work within the culture itself, meaning more than a surface-level understanding of "culturally acceptable constructs" of mentoring, storytelling, and local knowledge.

> If training materials are going to be truly successful, they must not only include accurate and relevant content, but must also work seamlessly within the culture the trainers seek to influence, or they will face the resistance that the members of that culture will exhibit. Culture is a difficult thing to identify, but can be simply explained as "the way we do things around here." It effectively defines what is acceptable and what is not (Cullen & Fein 16).

Among industry leaders, the work of Geert Hofstede has become a widely-sought source for

heuristics which can aid in the process of understanding culture at the (inter)national level.

Hofstede's 1976 groundbreaking research on national culture dimensions at IBM granted

business organizations a way to discuss cultural difference in ways previously inaccessible to

managers of globally invested companies and intercultural teams. Hofstede's dimensions

include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualist vs. collective, and masculine vs.

feminine.

Power Distance

Hofstede defines the dimension of power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful

members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is

distributed unequally. Institutions are the basic elements of society, such as the family, the

school, and the community; organizations are the places where people work" (61). On

Hofstede's scale of power dimension, America receives a rank of 40, placing it in the bottom 20

and arguing that American culture has a small power distance; we largely work toward equality

and fairness in our institutions and organizations. In the workplace, small power distance

means "subordinates easily approach or contradict bosses" (61).

Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede defines uncertainty avoidance as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel

threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (191). On Hofstede's scale of uncertainty

avoidance, America receives a rank of 46, placing it in the bottom 20 and arguing that American

culture has a low index of uncertainty avoidance (a weak or low UAI). In the workplace, a low

UAI means rules are judged as less necessary, ambiguity is tolerated, short-term employment is

typical, and common sense is valued.

Individualist vs. Collective

Hofstede defines individualist cultures as "societies in which the interests of the individual

prevail over the interests of the interests of the group. [. . .] 'I,' their personal identity, is

distinct from other people's 'I's, and these others are classified not according to their group

membership but instead according to individual characteristics" (91). Collective, on the other

hand, refers to "the power of the group. The 'we' group is distinct from other people in society

who belong to 'they' groups, or which there are many. The 'we' group (or *in-group*) is the major

source of one's identity and the only secure protection one has against the hardships of life" (91).

On Hofstede's scale of individualist vs. collective, America ranks as the highest individualist

culture among all other nations with a score of 91. In the workplace, individualist culture means

the self-interest of employees and employers are often parallel, and managers perceive their job

as the management of individuals.

Masculine vs. Feminine

Hofstede defines this dimension in a society as "the desirability of assertive behavior against the

desirability of modest behavior" (136). Historically, "Men, in short, are supposed to be assertive,

competitive, and tough. Women are supposed to be more concerned with taking care of the

home, the children, and of people in general—the tender roles. Male achievement reinforces

masculine assertiveness and competition; female care reinforces feminine nurturance and a

concern for relationships and for the living environment" (138). On Hofstede's scale, America

received a ranking of 62, which places it among the top 20 most masculine societies. In the

workplace, masculine cultures aim for higher earnings, more recognition, occupational

advancement, and intrinsically rewarding challenges (138).

Among those most critical of Hofstede's dimensions are those who acknowledge the

existence of culture at macro (international, national, regional) as well as micro levels

(academia, military organizations, and occupational cultures). Rather than focusing on culture

at the national level as Hofstede did, Peterson and Spencer focus solely on the individual

organizational culture, using a very similar theoretical framework of visible and measurable

behaviors and underlying values that inform them, including histories, heroes, rituals &

symbols, and strongly held beliefs about the organization; in other words, "the dominant

behavioral or belief pattern that reflects or holds the institution together—a kind of

'organizational glue'" (7). Evia and Patriarca describe why contemporary American

construction sites can be particularly difficult to define at the level of organizational micro-

culture: "The complex hierarchy of contractors, subcontractors, and labor specialists in

construction projects[. . .] can create a babel of communication styles and needs, even with

native speakers of the same language" (Evia and Patriarca 2).

For example, in one study of a specific worksite and its occupational culture, Acosta et al.

developed the first "bilingual and bicultural occupational health and safety interventions"

through a partnership with Texas High School Equivalency Programs through the Department

of Education (DOE). Among many considerations for creating effective safety materials, the

following were described as crucial issues: (1) fear of asking supervisors about working

conditions, (2) knowing how to recognize work hazards, and (3) knowing what resources are

available for them when injured" (Acosta et al. 143). In this particular study, Acosta et al.

determine that although American culture—at the macro level—has relatively low power

distance, worksites can exhibit much higher power distance, resulting in one-way

communication practices between supervisor and worker. In these contexts, workers are actively

discouraged from speaking up about safety concerns or "whistleblowing," as it is known

pejoratively.

In many American construction worksites, safety training and learning practices are

rarely effective when communicated by supervisors and regulatory officials from organizations

like OSHA. Instead, training is more commonly disseminated from worker to worker, as Cullen

& Fein found in their study of mining that "[a]lthough federal law requires miners to attend

safety training classes, in reality, these workers tend to learn their trade in a mine, not in a

classroom, and they generally learn from more-experienced miners in a master-apprentice

relationship rather than from reading training manuals or safety policies and regulations" (10).

Cullen and Fein's findings described the training practices of miners and revealed a concept

called "vicarious learning.". Largely informed by social learning theories like Vygotsky's theory

of social constructivism and Leontiev's activity systems theory, Bandura's theory of vicarious

learning

> [. . .] becomes even more significant when considering that, in the mining industry,
>
> many of the experiences shared by mentors are descriptions of close calls or are stories
>
> about people they have known who were injured or killed on the job. Sharing such
>
> histories is an integral part of the oral tradition of the mining culture; it is hoped that
>
> new miners will avoid such close calls and learn the lessons simply by hearing about
>
> them. For miners working in potentially dangerous environments, this can mean the
>
> difference between working safely and being injured or even killed. (Cullen & Fein 14).

Scholars of risk communication note that due to hierarchies of power in organizational cultures,

local knowledge among the workers is often ignored during the process of composing official

accounts of user documentation. "As [Dorothy] Winsor noted about the Challenger space shuttle

accident, 'people with power decide what counts as knowledge,' and [. . .] this exertion of power

over local knowledge can have damaging effects on more than just the social relationships

between communicators and audiences" (Evia and Patriarca 8). Often this power distance

dynamic fails to include and worse, alienates, participants in the development of risk

communication materials for occupational safety.

    In sum, technical communicators must consider a plethora of issues related to producing

effective training materials like tutorials for a diverse readership: the demand for a visualized

medium, workers' literacies, multilingual competencies, and workplace culture(s). With such a

complex rhetorical situation to account for when producing a tutorial, it is perhaps not such a

leap to consider the comics medium as a way to address the complex needs of its audience. The

next question to pursue, then, becomes:

2. How can comics bridge technical and non-technical communicators? What does the comics medium offer the tutorial genre that make it more a effective medium for its worker audience?

Affordances of the Comics Medium

In my research on the tutorial genre and its evolution in technical communication, I found that a

number of scholars and practitioners had adopted comics. In order to understand the reasons

behind this decision, I will explore on the affordances of the medium itself, including the

visual/verbal meaning making practices evoked by comics, the benefits of narrative structure,

and the ways in which this visual storytelling effectively address issues of workplace culture and

considerations of intercultural communication.

The ImageText

In previous chapters, I have argued that the affordances of comics allow a medium to be

rhetorically effective in a number of genre traditions and for a diverse authorship and

readership. For technical communicators specifically, there are three primary strengths of the

medium identified in technical communication literature:

- Comics can provide accessibility to complex concepts
- Comics can engage multiple cognitive meaning making processes
- Comics can aid memory through improve retention of concepts learned

In order to articulate the accessibility of comics, I begin with a quote from Brian Boyd, who

recently published a history of the medium.

Not only did comics work out ways to combine the high-quality information of vision,

language and story for low comprehension costs, they also promised high benefits. [. . .]

Comics have also always tended to exploit their capacity to present physical extremes or

improbabilities in immediate, now-you-see-it form. For low-comprehension cost they

can therefore offer high-attention value (Boyd 105-6).

For Boyd, the most advantageous affordance of comics becomes the cognitive efficiency for readers, achieved through the interdependent combination of images and text that convey complex concepts in widely accessible ways. For this reason, it is not difficult to imagine the ways in which comics can be effective for technical communicators, particularly genres of instruction and tutorial. Tatlovic argues that "the performance of technical tasks that such comics address is sequential in nature, just as comics are, and the success of comics as teaching tools 'lies in the fact that the reader can easily relate to the experience demonstrated'" (12). Tatalovic's theories of comics rested heavily on Will Eisner's concept of comprehensibility. Eisner maintained that readers bring common, even universal, human experiences to their readership and Eisner maintains that it is the artist's primary duty to speak through this vocabulary in order for readers to follow the sequential art with ease. Any interruption in the narrative or sequence is to be attributed to artist error, not the short attention span or wandering eye of the reader. In Eisner's opinion, a truly talented comics artist uses the tools of pictures and words in conjunction and this powerful partnership alone should lead to success through the cooperation of the reader. Because reader meaning making is so important in the comics medium, technical communication scholars argue that this cognitive demand actually boosts the potential for learning, and even the ability to retain concepts learned.

Comics, for example, ask readers to engage "multiple learning modalities (visual-spatial, kinesthetic-tactile, and auditory-sequential)" (Afrilyasanti & Basthomi 553) so that during the process of meaning making, "both halves of the brain are involved in the interpretation of image contents" (Petterson 52-53). Active engagement[19] is a cornerstone to numerous contemporary learning theories according to these scholars, and one which improves not only comprehension

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[19] Active engagement has been defined in numerous ways and for the purpose of this chapter, I define active engagement as learner-centered instructional design that, at its strongest, includes learners themselves in the design of instructional materials. Coming from scholars in literacy studies, active engagement is similar to participatory design but is pedagogical in nature and not considered a research methodology.

processes, but a learner's ability to retain and recall information long after. Afrilyasanti and

Basthomi argue that "comics and cartoons are also considered excellent teaching tools because

they not only add humor to a topic but also illustrate the idea in a memorable way" (555). Many

have argued, in fact, that it is not only this multimodal cognition involved in reading comics, but

also the narrative form that assists in reader retention.

For many technical communicators, the linear and sequential form of comics lends

readily to narrative. And narrative, as argued by Barton & Barton, is becoming an increasingly

adopted and valued trope of technical communication genres, particularly within instructions

and tutorials.

The Narrative

When comics are viewed from the lens of narrative studies, there is an important distinction to

remember regarding the various forms comics can take. From three-panel strips to full-length

novels, the medium has as much variance as any. Tatlovic articulates the correlation of material

length and narrative complexity, noting that "[t]here can conceivably be four levels or categories

of related art: single-frame cartoons, short comic strips, comic books and graphic novels, in

order of ascending length and level of narrative complexity" (Tatalovic 3). For the purposes of

technical communication, then, comics can engage varying levels of narrative complexity. And

narrative, according to Barton and Barton, is an increasingly valuable tool for technical

communicators.

Narrative is pervasive in technical communication whether it takes the form of oral

tradition storytelling or visualized sequence:

Clearly, most of us find narrativity in histories of science and technology, and in progress

reports, process descriptions, procedure outlines, and instructional or 'how-to' manuals.

We all also recognize the narrativity of 'organizational stories' and the many legends told

widely about the 'giants' of science and technology (Barton & Barton 40).

For Barton and Barton, narrative has been embraced throughout many facets of technical

communication. First, they discuss the "master narratives that govern the scientific and

technical enterprises, and affect institutional values" (Barton and Barton 40). Included in these

master narratives are concepts like the scientific method, organizational identity, origin stories,

editorial politics, and even the romantic notion of the scientific pursuit of truth. For more visual

forms of narrative, Barton and Barton mention genres like flowcharts and circuit diagrams, but

also discuss the ways we interpret scientific phenomena visually; a microscope allows

observation of cell reproduction, a telescope allows access to star formations and changes, and

MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) provides a sequence of fragments which allow not only a

visible whole, but a medical explanation or diagnosis. Barton and Barton elaborate on the

rhetorical advantage of engaging the narrative, arguing that narrative texts "are read faster,

processed more effectively, and remembered better" than expository texts (43). This comparison

of media (text vs. image) is often avoided by those who study writing because of potentials for

misrepresentation and dichotomization. However, technical communicators writing for the

purposes of safety and health look to engage a medium that best serves its audience—and when

potential readers work in high-risk occupations, like construction, there is a very real exigence to

engage in direct media comparison.

According to the literature of technical communication, the benefits of the comics

medium extend beyond the reader. Brian Boyd's studies of comics have concluded that

"[c]omics offer not only visual immediacy for their audience, but visual flexibility for the artist,

allowing any degree of stylization or realism, iconicity or particularism. Comics styles can have

even more degrees of freedom than written language" (Boyd 106). And it is the wide degree of

freedom within the medium that allows comics to achieve their rhetorical potential. Barton and

Barton argue that visual narrative especially can help bridge gaps between subject matter experts and intended audience. Demands for rational scientific logical appeals can often engage specialist language and exclusive literacy practices that apply to only a small audience and tend to alienate and polarize. Visual narrative can apply to a much broader audience by producing identification and reconciliation, bridging specialist and non-specialist language gaps, and allowing for multiple meaning-making literacy practices and improved retention.

And because comics can engage multiple learning modes as they accommodate multiple literacy and language abilities, they can also be situated rhetorically within the occupational culture of the workplace itself. The comics tutorial, like any genre, is born of a discourse community or, as Lave and Wenger term it, a community of practice—much like the U.S. construction industry.

> True learning does not take place in isolation, but rather in a socially interactive environment. Stories are inherently social. They entertain, but they also show what others would do in a given environment when faced with a certain set of circumstances. Those watching or hearing stories of this type are drawn into the tale. They associate with the characters, and by placing themselves vicariously into the scenario, they can investigate how they would feel or behave in similar circumstances. The benefits of vicariously experiencing dangerous or harmful environments or incidents are obvious. Learning can take place while the learner remains safe. (Cullen & Fein 20)

By engaging the narrative, comics tutorials can embrace both the affordances of the comics medium as well as the local knowledge of the workplace in order to engage safety training through vicarious learning that is both accessible and memorable. In addition, storytelling itself is already practiced in workplace communities and is engaged in ways that not only provide potentially life-saving information, but also articulate why such training is important to the

worker and his crew. Sometimes the reasons for safety practices must be articulated before they

are considered valuable. Storytelling often engages this practice despite workplace cultures that

demand productivity because in order "[t]o openly go up against a traditional norm, people have

to be convinced that the new behavior is a *better choice* and that the choice to follow it is *their*

choice. The key then, is to find the internal control switch in each trainee that provides the

answer 'because it makes sense for me to care. It may save my life some day.' Stories have the

ability to do this" (Cullen & Fein 19, emphasis added). In the Cheo comics, this appeal of choice

is a common theme and the following section will elaborate the ways in which the Cheo comics

consider occupational culture in a strategic use of comics that engage vicarious learning through

intercultural storytelling.

Cultural Considerations in the Cheo comics

In the previous sections, the affordances of comics and narrative traditions were discussed in

terms of their applicability to technical communication best practices. In this section, I will

evaluate the Cheo comics in terms of these established technical communication best practices.

3. How can comics consider workplace culture in order to bridge intercultural
   communication?

I stated earlier that many scholars have argued for the media affordances of comics and that

tutorial comics have the potential to reach and engage readers through accessible narrative

structure and multiple learning approaches. But, are we safe to assume that construction

workers are familiar enough with comics to engage effectively in visual literacy practice?

Tatalovic argues that engaging a popular culture medium like comics is not only effective for its

engaging form, but because there is a fairly high chance that target audiences will have already

interacted with them, particularly "if comics are a part of popular culture, [then] this could be a

strength as it allows them to reach many people of various backgrounds" (Tatalovic 1). And, for

the particular audience targeted by the Cheo comics, there are few popular culture media more

pervasive in Latino countries. In fact, "Mexico has a higher per capita consumption of comics

any other country in the world," including Japan (Malvido qtd Hinds & Tatum 1). Not only that,

but when compared to the United States', Mexico's readership is significantly broader and more

diverse. While some popular culture scholars point to low (text) literacy levels as an explanation

for comics' popularity in Mexico, Hinds and Tatum articulate a counterargument which

conceives of reading practices more broadly, saying that the deception of simplicity behind the

medium "ignores the fact that considerable education is necessary to read some comic books"

(Hinds & Tatum 7). However, for many Latino construction workers, reading a comic to learn

about work practices and cultural values may be nothing new.

Mexican Comics

The Mexican comics tradition is so much a part of Mexican national identity that I find it

important to first acknowledge the ways in which comics tutorials incorporated into safety

training and embraced by Latino workers. Secondly, Mexican comics genres are more diverse

and serve a much broader readership than their cousins in the States. For example, Mexican

serial comics genres include not only superhero/adventure stories—the most popular in America

by far—but also tales of romance, western, regional adventure/humor, political, children's

humor, family humor, and police/detective. (Hinds & Tatum x). On the whole, Mexican comics

are typically more serious in nature; their subject matter addresses contemporary issues of

national identity and economic growth in an era largely informed by the globalization efforts of

the United States and other First-World nations.[20] Hinds and Tatum claim that "[o]ne does not

have to be in Mexico very long to realize that, in contrast with the United States, it is quite

acceptable for adults to read comic books" (Hinds & Tatum 34). In America, "[r]eaders over

twenty-eight were unusual. Mexican comic books, on the other hand, were not only for children

or for those who continued their education beyond secondary school. They were mainly for

---

[20] In the next section, 6.5 Subjects and Motives, I will more thoroughly discuss this aspect of Mexican identity as reflected in their popular comics.

adults, those who had taken a place, no matter how insecure, in the world of work" (Hinds &

Tatum 22).

In order to understand the Mexican comics tradition, a historical consideration provides

some further comparisons to American comics. I have discussed at length the history of comics

in the United States, but how did comics emerge differently in Mexico as to become such a

dominant aspect of Mexican popular culture? Comics emerged in Mexico in the 1900s, about

twenty years after American comics (Campbell 2). Like many commodities produced in America

at the turn of the twentieth century, comics were exported to Mexico either officially or through

a phenomenon Hinds and Tatum call pass-along readership by which comics are extensively

shared among communities. It is estimated that each comic that goes to the printer is read by

four different people; "Comic books are freely lent to family members, friends, and fellow

employees; are provided for patrons at places of business, for example barber shops, juice stalls,

and shoe-shine stands; are purchased collectively by members of a reading circle so the cost is

shared, then passed around; [and] are read aloud to paying groups, especially in small towns

with high illiteracy rates" (Hinds & Tatum 5-6).

Eventually, Mexican publishers began to print comics themselves, both in response to

uncontainable demand, and an "[a]nnoyance with the undependable supply and licensing

requirements of United States strips [that] led Mexican newspapers to sponsor the creation of

local products" (Hinds & Tatum 2). While they borrowed from some American conventions,

Mexican comic books also drew heavily on Mexican themes, language, and character types,

frequently those of lower-class origins (Hinds & Tatum 3). The readership in Mexico is unique,

not only for its pervasiveness, but also because

> [comics have] very different niches in the cultural ecologies of every region where they
>
> are found, and they rarely translate well. In Western Europe, they are a relatively
>
> expensive form of art book. In Japan, they are commuter entertainments [. . .]. Only in
>
> the United States, however, is the comic book audience essentially confined to boys and

young men; and only in the United States do comic books compete for consumer dollars

with cinema and video games, rather than other forms of print media. A caution to U.S.

readers is in order here: Mexican *historietas* are not what you may expect. Their

audience is neither adult nor male. Their stories are often set in an entirely familiar

world, rather than some alternative universe, and it is a world without superheroes"

(Rubenstein 8).

In order for the Cheo comics to effectively adopt the comics medium to create safety practice

tutorials for Latino construction workers, significant consideration had to be given to issues of

intercultural communication and, in this context, there are several:

- Many aspects of storytelling are culturally informed (Visuals, Narrative, Humor, etc.)
- Occupational culture varies from workplace to workplace
- Latino men engage in machismo (read manly) culture which encourages risk-taking
- Mexican comics have a very prolific and proud tradition
- Mexican comics readership is particularly earnest; they take the medium very seriously

And yet, despite the complexities of this rhetorical situation, the tutorial genre and the comics

medium combined to form the Cheo comics and effectively address the needs of Latino

construction workers with low (textual) literacy levels and limited English proficiency. "Lucky

Cheo" engages themes of management pressure in occupational culture as it tells the story of a

young worker pressured by management to take risks when using ladders so that the work can

be more profitable. "Cheo and His Advisors" examines machismo culture through a story in

which Cheo is visited by the proverbial angel and devil on your shoulder. Cheo must choose to

make good decisions despite the pressure to take risks.

Figure 5.1 Mr. Know-It-All and Mr. Use-Your-Head. From "Cheo and His Advisors."
Used with permission of Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson.

Cheo: Mr. Know-It-All...
Mr. Know-It-All: Take a few risks.
Mr. Know-It-All: Time is money, Viejo!
Mr. Know-It-All: Show them what you're made of.
--
Cheo: And Mr. Use-Your-Head.
Mr. Use-Your-Head: Better safe than sorry.
Mr. Use-Your-Head: Your crew is depending on you,
Mr. Use-Your-Head: Not to mention your family.

Lastly, in "Cheo's Uncle," vicarious learning is the primary theme. Cheo's Uncle has been injured

and as he works throughout the day, he considers what his Uncle has told him about scaffolding

safety. Each story takes place entirely in a work context.
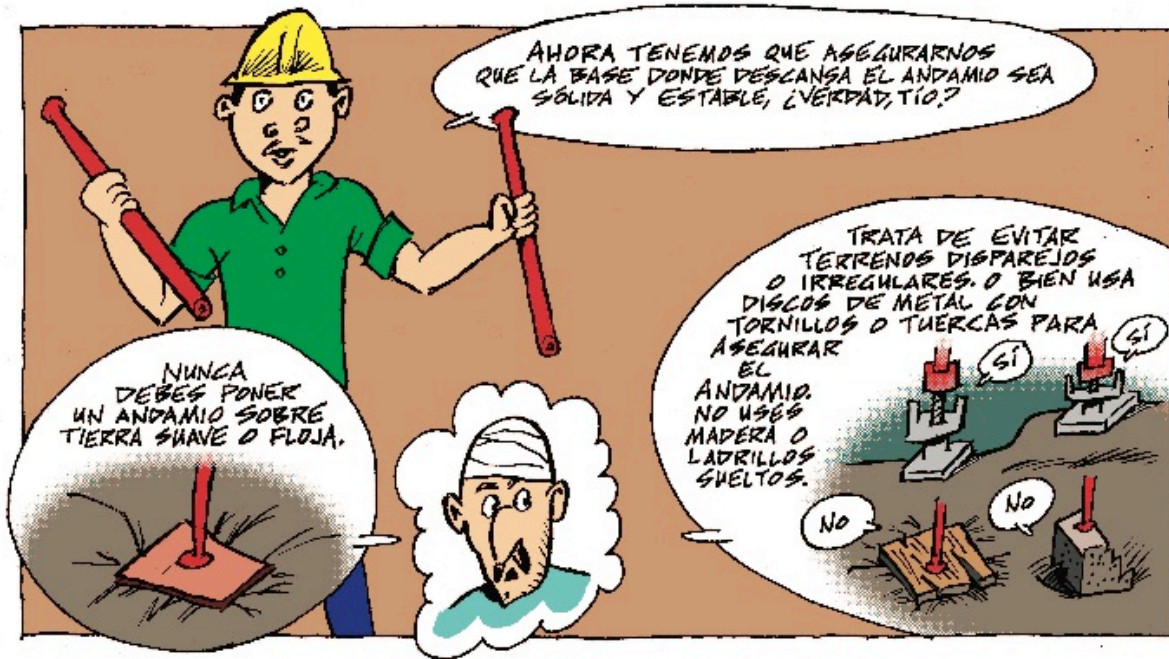
Figure 5.2 Solid Foundation. From "Cheo and His Uncle." Used with permission of Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson.

Cheo: "Next we have to make sure we have a solid foundation. Whaddya say, Uncle?
Tio: "I say: never build a scaffold on sinking or softening ground."
Tio: "Try to avoid uneven ground. If you can't avoid it, compensate with approved base plates and screw-jacks, not with scraps of wood, concrete, blocks, or bricks. Yes. Yes. No. No."

The subject of work is an incredibly common subject for comics in Mexico. Comics are not just for entertainment; they both reaffirm and challenge issues of national identity, regional cultural values, family structure, gender roles, and the role of work in everyday life.

Historietas are tremendously popular and their popularity cuts across lines of region, age, gender, and even class. [L]ocal *historietas* alarm Mexican conservatives far more than the escapist North American superhero fantasies could. But such lurid tales have, historically, helped Mexicans cope with the effects of change in their own lives. They showed Mexicans who moved to the cities how to behave at the workplace and in their new neighborhoods, warning them of what to expect while consoling them with the possibilities of middle-class comfort and family happiness" (Rubenstein 8).

Considering intercultural communication in an activity system like the Cheo comics meant an overlap in contradictions regarding identity of the subjects (the authors and the audience). Cultural consideration requires intimate knowledge of about what is shared and agreed upon but also unspoken and assumed, and contradictions arise when cultures assume they understand one another. In the next section, I will discuss specifics about the identities of the authors, Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson. I will also discuss generalities about the identity of the audiences who were engaged via participatory design and those future audiences who have not yet been invoked.

5.4 Subjects/Motives: Issues of Identity and Literacies

Within a system of social activity, studying subjects and their motivations is a means of reaching contradictions and negotiations that form related to identity. In the case of the Cheo comics, the subjects include writer Carlos Evia, artist Nick Thorkelson, and their audience of Latino construction workers. The workers as subjects are conceived of in two ways, both as an abstract collective, and in reference to specific groups of workers with which Carlos worked to develop the training materials and comic tutorials.

As is the case in any activity system, issues of identity undeniably inform not only the outcomes, but also the contradictions that arise among subjects, and the negotiations which subjects are able to achieve. In this particular case, for example, there are three major questions I have posed:

1. How does identity create contradictions in the cooperation between Carlos and Nick?
2. How does identity create negotiations in the cooperation between Carlos and Nick?
3. How does the identity of the audience influence both Carlos and Nick in the act of composing the comic itself?

Each of the collaborators discussed in the introduction played a significant role in the production of the Cheo comics but there is an additional subject to consider, and one which is more influential than I first considered.

Cheo, The Worker

Cheo is a symbol of the collective identity of the Latino construction worker. The name, "Cheo" is a dialectic twist on "Jose" indicating a Mexican identity. Cheo is an everyman character for the purposes of the comics. His identity is largely informed by what Maria, Nick, and Carlos conceive of as cultural values and principles of Latinos in Central and North America.

Although machismo culture is often associated with Latinos—the luchadores of Mexico, for example—Cheo represents the more deliberative manner characteristic of Mexican patriarchs and of *Kalimán*, the most popular comic character in all of Mexico and a namesake "strongly influenced by its rise as a cultural product amid the prosperity of the Mexican economy of the 1960s. [. . .] Mexicans learned to be Mexicans not only by going to the cinema but also by reading comics" (Fernández L'Hoeste 70). Some scholars compare *Kalimán* to the American Superman, but there is a significant difference between American *super*heroes and Mexican heroes.

Unlike American superheroes whose strength is almost always physical, *Kalimán* was a man of the mind, admired for "his extra-ordinary mental powers, which were developed by the Tibetan lamas [where he was raised] and are sustained by daily meditation. *Kalimán* represents the maximum potential of the human mind and he asserts that his only foolproof weapon in his struggle for justice is his perfectly developed mind" (Hinds & Tatum 36). *Kalimán* is significant to mention here because he is neither an alien, nor the product of nuclear mutation or molecular experimentation. *Kalimán* is a man who uses his mind and a character who symbolizes Mexican cultural values.

In Bruce Campbell's study of politicized Mexican comics during its richest period of growth, he found that the stories tended to be melodramatic like soap operas—both in their emplotment and in their visual tone—and were largely created to reflect while reaffirming conservative values. For example, workers in these types of comics were seen through the authoritarian lens of management. Perhaps equally popular throughout the 1940s and 1950s in

Mexico, were didactic comics aimed at laborer audiences and depicting the plight and triumph

of the worker. The comics engaged a more authentic perspective that reflected the complex

dynamics of occupational culture (Campbell 19). Comics for social change are no stranger to

Mexicans as they were used alongside other mass media "in the postrevolutionary era [. . .] as

the best available space for dissent, negotiation, and accommodation" (Rubenstein 3). As

Rubenstein elaborates, economic issues often took center stage as the subjects of dissent and

negotiation. In fact,

> [e]conomic expansion created, as well as soothed, social tensions. In Mexico after 1940,
>
> deep-rooted family structures, strongly attached to moral values and religious beliefs,
>
> were challenged by the new widespread patters of urbanization, industrialization, and
>
> migration—above all, by the increasing number of women who worked both outside their
>
> homes and (unlike agricultural laborers) away from their families. This transformation
>
> of ordinary family life, and of its associated patterns of belief and behavior, was mapped
>
> in radio dramas, state-supported films, and comic books. (Rubenstein 5)

In fact, several sources on Mexican comics collectively conclude that the Mexican comics

traditions emerged alongside Mexico's national identity—an identity which cannot ignore the

influence of economics on its day-to-day living. Comics became helpful resources particularly

for those who emigrate to the U.S. to seek more economic opportunity and find themselves

employed at a construction site with extensive regulation and dictated standardization written

in a language unfamiliar to them. Comics became a sort of guide for Mexicans to engage these

new sites of work because "[w]hile it is the case that many Mexican comic books present a

conservative vision, [many] either explicitly or implicitly, *provide models for social change*"

(Hinds & Tatum xi, emphasis added). Rubenstein argues that because the topic of so many

comics was focused on work, there was an implicit focus on family and financial support. Cheo is

always thinking about his family while he is making decisions regarding family—and that is

precisely how Maria, Nick, and Carlos designed it. Partly to counteract the tendency to take risks

that is informed by machismo culture, and partly to engage Mexican values of patriarchal

responsibility to financially support your family, the emotional appeal to family became a

cornerstone of Cheo's motivations to make safer choices in the workplace. The lesson contained

in the materials created by Maria and Nick reminded workers, "Please Protect Yourself...Your

Family Needs You!" (Hispanics Work Safe). In the example below, workers are being informed

about how safety risks are heightened for Latino workers. While the document is text-heavy, it

incorporates the figure (an earlier prototype) of Cheo that workers can identify with, a

visualization of proper ladder use, and short sentences that provide advice and instruction in the

same way a tutorial might.

Figure 5.3 *Protect Yourself* 3. Used with permission of Nick Thorkelson.

Later, when the comics were created, there is a similar lesson on ladder use in *Lucky Cheo*, this

time employing the comics medium.

Figure 5.4 Dos and Don'ts of Ladder Safety. From "Lucky Cheo." Used with permission of Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson.

The capacity of the ladder should be at least four times the user's weight.
Side rails should be wood or fiberglass if working near live electrical equipment.
--
Inspect regularly for cracks, dents and missing rungs.
Never lean a stepladder against a vertical wall.

As narrative tropes, lessons or morals are crucial to Mexican comics plots, as crucial as having a hero. For Carlos, a hero is perhaps the most common trope of Mexican comics. When I asked Carlos about heroes, he replied, "Of course they have heroes. Not necessarily superheroes. But they drive the action, sometimes they do stupid things, but at the end of the day, they're the main character and they overcome something" (Evia). Unlike the heroes in Mexican comics, however, Cheo is not considered a hero. In some comics he makes poor choices and we see him suffer. In others we see him choose the safe choice and we cheer for him as he stays safe on the job. He *can* serve as a heroic decision-maker, but he doesn't always.

To summarize, Cheo is an average man who is capable of making better, safer choices. And he does. Cheo has a family to support so he protects himself on the job. Cheo is symbolic of the identity of the Latino worker in an intercultural workplace. Cheo possesses characteristics

that are not only familiar to Latinos, but align with Latino values that encourage dedication to

family and commitment to work. Lastly, Cheo the character becomes a site of rhetorical

negotiation between authors and audience. Cheo is himself a reflection of the participation of

the workers that was elicited during the writing process.

Identity-Related Contradictions and Negotiations: Conceptions of Audience and Need

1. How does identity create contradictions in the cooperation between Carlos and Nick?
2. How does identity create negotiations in the cooperation between Carlos and Nick?
3. How does the identity of the audience influence both Carlos and Nick in the act of composing the comic itself?

The fact is, both Nick and Carlos possess a fairly accurate understanding of social change

comics. Carlos understands the Mexican tradition better, but Nick has been working in labor-

related comics for a long time. Carlos' childhood in Mexico included avid comics readership,

including both American and Mexican comics. It is no surprise that Carlos possesses intimate

knowledge of Mexican culture that Nick cannot.

For example, in the title, "Lucky Cheo in Ladder Safety," Cheo is asked to use ladders in

unsafe ways by a manager who cares much more about time and money spent than the safety of

his workers. Cheo replaces a light bulb using a ladder that is not quite tall enough, causing him

to stand on the top step. In the next sequence, Cheo is asked to join a coworker on an upper

floor. When Cheo asks if the ladder has been tied down, the coworker—now depicted as a

skeleton—replies, "No. I'll do it later." Nick described how the skeleton metaphor fits:

> I think by introducing some humor into the story, that also helps to get past the
>
> resistance that people have to being lectured and told what to do, as opposed to being
>
> scolded [. . .] and you can go farther in a comic than you can in a written piece. In fact,
>
> the managers of this construction site are skeletons—it says without exactly saying that if
>
> you went by the profit motive alone, many will die and that would be a rough thing to say

in so many words but you can imply it and, in some ways state it even more strongly with

images. (Thorkelson)

On the other hand, the sudden change to skeletal form struck Carlos as reflecting the

miscommunication that can arise from intercultural contexts. Carlos explains:

[Cheo] is going to change a light bulb and then for no reason, the other characters

become skeletons. In Mexican folk culture, the skeleton has deeper meanings [like the

celebration of The Day of the Dead]. And even now, in North Mexico cartels there's a big

religious influence of the Santo Muerte, or the Holy Death. Many of the guys in the

cartels pray to the skeleton. I question, "What is this supposed to mean?" And if you look

at Nick's vision, I think he's trying to show that if you don't follow these procedures, you

will die, and you will become a skeleton. But I ask, "Well, isn't this something we should

be talking about and discussing, [whether] this is an effective approach?" (Evia)

Figure 5.5 Cheo changes a light bulb. From "Lucky Cheo." Used with permission of
Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson.

Boss: "Could somebody replace that light bulb? I can't read these plans."
Cheo: "Got it, Boss."

The top of a stepladder is not to be used as a step. But Cheo was lucky.

Figure 5.6 "I'll get to it soon." From "Lucky Cheo." Used with permission of Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson.

Coworker: "Hey, Cheo, come on up here!"
--
Cheo: "Did you tie the ladder down?"
Coworker: "Not yet. I'll get to it soon."

How much luck does Cheo have left?

Nick was surprised to hear Carlos' feedback on the skeleton metaphor, saying, "I was probably moved to use skeletons to some extent because of my (undoubtedly superficial) knowledge of the "dia de los muertos." To me, skeletons are extremely intense and vivid figures that mostly cannot be used in North American comics and graphics because we have this puritanical squeamishness about death, so I welcomed the chance to use them here. I had no idea they would lead to misunderstandings" (Thorkelson "Chapter for your Review"). Unfortunately, since "Lucky Cheo" was being published just as Carlos joined the team, this particular question of cultural symbols was left unaddressed, and there was no mention in my research of workers themselves reacting to the skeletons in "Lucky Cheo." In another comic, "Cheo and His Uncle," Carlos and Nick worked more closely, a collaboration which engaged worker participation in order to more accurately acknowledge and address the needs of the worker.

Identity-Related Negotiations: Participatory Design in the Writing Process

Despite an upbringing wholly informed by American cultural influence and a less intimate

knowledge of Mexican culture, Nick was able to successfully approach the Cheo comics through

the lens of the American underground comix movement that aligned culturally with one of the

largest impetus for comics stories in Mexico: comics for social change.

Both Nick and Carlos engaged the audience of Latino construction workers in

rhetorically effective ways: Nick through the grassroots rhetoric of workers rights and the power

of knowledge to effect change for working conditions and Carlos through the aim of improved

tutorials and other safety training materials that better served Latino workers than the

incomprehensible OSHA manuals. In these ways, both Nick and Carlos engaged participation

from the workers in order to produce comics tutorials that motivated individual behavioral

change.

Among technical communicators, engagement with target audiences is often limited and

engagement on the level of participatory design is, in fact, rare. Burke et al. articulate why

engaging the learning audience is so important because

> [t]he greater effectiveness of more engaging, hands-on training in reducing negative
>
> outcomes and increasing knowledge acquisition lends support to the calls of researchers
>
> and practitioners advocating the design and implementation of learner-centered,
>
> participatory approaches to worker safety and health training. (Burke et al. 320)

In a recent paper, Carlos discusses how he engages his audience in order to work toward a more

effective learner-centered, participatory approach, arguing that "Latino construction workers

provided us with direct creative input, helping us create safety and risk communication products

that not only complied with OSHA regulations but were evaluated as effective and culturally

relevant for these workers and their peers" (Evia and Patriarca 3). The products mentioned have

included a wide variety of modes for Evia and his collaborators. In addition to the comic, Carlos

has also created motion comics, which audibly narrate the dialogue and instruction as a camera

sweeps slowly over the pages. He has also filmed stop-motion animation films using

construction worker figurines to produce live-action safety scenarios. In every case, Carlos has

explored these options *alongside* workers, an act labeled "textual activism." Evia and Patriarca

describe, through the work of Scott, how technical communicators can engage in textual

activism whereby their position as intermediary between subject matter experts and end users of

documentation situates them in a unique position to advocate for the audience's unique needs.

For Evia and Patriarca,

> "[t]he results of collaborative development in this project are reflected in the video's
>
> themes, which were derived directly from workers' statements in the discovery-process
>
> sessions. These themes include good communication with a supervisor who is accessible
>
> and respectful but a firm authority figure, collaboration with peers in a friendly
>
> environment that allows playful competition, the importance of workers' family and
>
> home life, elements of humor (involving some use of slapstick, nicknames, and sarcasm),
>
> the negative consequences of taking shortcuts and not following directions at work, and
>
> the collective goal to protect coworkers and themselves. They did not include graphic
>
> representations of accidents and death. (Evia and Patriarca 21)

For Evia and Patriarca, textual activism does not end with advocacy. Rather, the process of

incorporating worker voices continues throughout the production of various materials such as

the comics or videos. Like the encounter described in this more recent article, Carlos'

engagement with workers for the Cheo comics was also an essential component of the writing

process. The composing process will be discussed more in the following section through an

analysis of the tools and divisions of labor in the Cheo comics activity system.

5.5 Tools/Divisions of Labor: Issues of Theory and Practice

By seeking a balance of technical communication theory and authentic workplace practice,

Carlos and Nick were able to produce comics tutorials that recognized and addressed the needs

of their audience. Collaboratively, Carlos and Nick used the comics medium to conceptualize

complex ideas about technical subjects (like roofing, working with ladders, and scaffolding

regulations). Because the medium is both visual and verbal in its meaning making, the writing

process—in this case—involved both writers and artist. Tatalovic explains how this division of

labor can complicate rather than facilitate effective work precisely because

> [t]he constraint of the comics medium may affect science communication. For example,
>
> Eisner pointed out that artists and writers have to work well together in order to
>
> successfully convey a story through the medium of comics. "The ideal writing process
>
> occurs where the writer and artist are the same person" he says. Eisner maintains that in
>
> the process of translation of the script to images, artists can distort the writer's vision
>
> and add their own elements to it (13).

For Carlos and Nick, this visual/verbal division of labor proved successful. And it was Carlos'

theoretical approach and grounded participatory practice that allowed the comics to be so

successful. In fact, if Carlos hadn't met with a group of workers to discuss training materials,

Cheo might not exist today.

Engaging in participatory design, as discussed above in section 6.5, is a pillar of

researching technical communication best pratices. Without an intimate understanding of the

realities facing the audience in everyday workplace culture, the technical communicator is

shooting into the dark and relying only on theory.

Since Nick's profession is creative, he rarely engages in research of this nature himself.

Rather, it is his collaborators that inform his approach. For Cheo, it was Maria who first served

as an intermediary between Nick and his worker audience through a serious of focus groups and

informal evaluation by industry members on the first phase of training flyers and presentations.

Nick reflects:

> I did a cartoon of a worker with his family and someone said, "He wouldn't be wearing a
>
> hard hat" with his family. I think there was more testing and focus groups with the first

phase than with the comics. I do remember hearing things that would help me. I don't

think Maria ever managed a construction site or did construction work so she did rely

on—she was very grassroots and she had many contacts with people in the industry and

she had people to turn to for good feedback and she saw the importance of that.

(Thorkelson)

Figure 5.7 From "Seguridad en la Obra." Used with permission of Nick Thorkelson.

Carlos gave Nick feedback that he had elicited from the workers themselves after they examined

the above page:

"I think the problem here is about focusing on our intended audience. We are developing

materials for residential roofers and framers who probably are not very literate. They will

mostly look at the drawings and get an idea of what's going on, but they will not read the

whole thing. The current idea requires that they read from A to Z to catch the problem

with Cheo's luck. In previous experiments, I have seen workers who develop their own

context for the comic books based on their experiences. I showed them one of the images

of Cheo [Maria] created before (the one where he is with his family) and of course the

context was that Cheo was still at home and going to work. However, they didn't/couldn't

read the whole text and assumed Cheo was with his family at work, and said it was a bad

thing because "you are not supposed to bring your family to the jobsite." (Evia, "Ladder

Safety Comic").

In the second panel below, Nick has considered feedback and has depicted Cheo as leaving for

work in his everyday clothing, without his hardhat or safety vest.
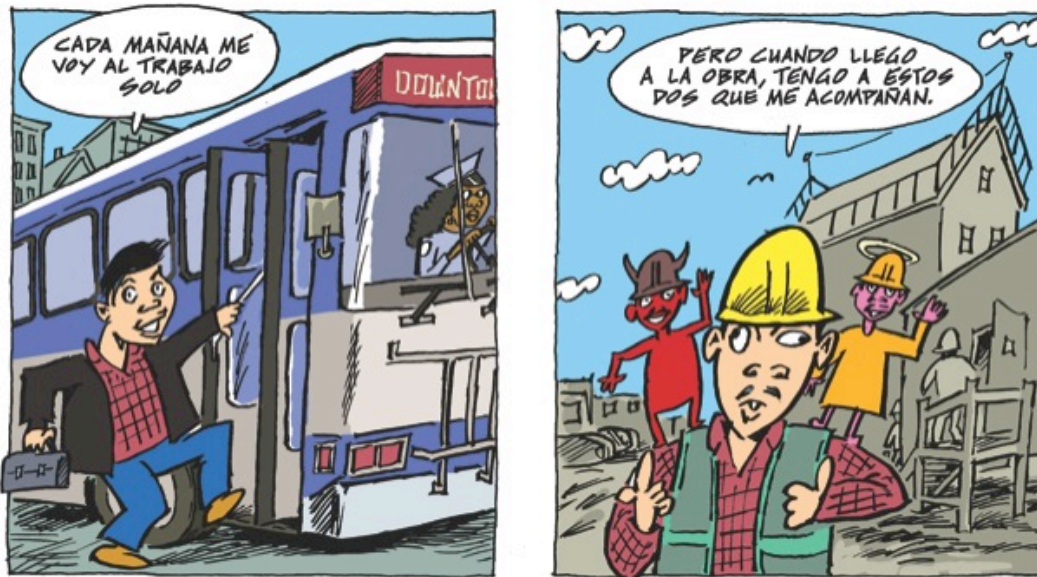

Figure 5.8 From "Cheo and His Advisors." Used with permission of Carlos Evia and
Nick Thorkelson.

Cheo: "Every morning I leave for work by myself."
--
Cheo: "But when I get to the job, I have these two with me."

Research from Maria and Carlos that engaged participatory design and elicited feedback from

workers largely informed Nick's composing process for the comics. He considered not only

technical aspects of the drawings themselves, but the occupational culture of risk-taking and

bottom lines, which he employed via the angel and devil trope in "Cheo and His Advisors."

     Carlos' research into the needs of workers began in order to create more effective

training materials for the 2.7 million Latino construction workers in the U.S. of which more than

2 million were not born in the USA and speak very little English. Carlos realized that

> [m]ost of the regulations from OSHA are in English and in very geeky and complicated
>
> terms. So OSHA has been trying to give people training in a form that they can really
>
> understand. And with that research question, I went out and said, "Ok. What can I learn
>
> from the workers? And the tacit knowledge that they have? And the ways in which they
>
> have been able to bridge these things in the past?" And levels of literacy, attention spans,
>
> and overall genre preferences took me to doing things that were more in the form of
>
> entertainment education. An easy way to give them something and communicate is if you
>
> make a little comic book and give it to them and it's almost guaranteed that their
>
> reaction will be positive because it has little drawings and pictures and it looks like fun!
>
> And as they spend a couple of minutes going through the pages, the hope of the research
>
> is that they can learn something, that some of that knowledge can be transferred in a way
>
> that will not be possible if we give them a document, in English, or even if we give them a
>
> very verbose or lengthy document in Spanish. So, that's the goal. That's where comic
>
> book comes into play. (Evia)

The choice of comics was largely made by the workers themselves. During a meeting with Carlos

in El Salvador, the story goes, one worker was playing with a flyer that had an early prototype of

the Cheo we know from the comics. A worker amused himself by having Cheo dance around and

narrating Cheo's thought processes. And with that, we are back to the beginning of the story of

the Cheo comics, Maria and Carlos' early meeting, and the system of social activity that formed

it.

5.6 Case Conclusions

The comic medium, then, becomes a tool within the Cheo comics activity system, and one which

bridges the motivations and identities of all subjects—identities that can sometimes cause

contradictions among the divisions of labor. Yet, they did not. Why? After all, Carlos, Nick,

Maria, and the workers all share a common goal: Employ appropriate communication in order

to keep workers safe and prevent workplace injury and death.

The workers become bookends to the Cheo comics activity system: the process began

with a desire to reach workers with more effective training tutorials and ended with the

production of the Cheo comics, works informed by a tightknit collaboration between technical

communication theory and workplace practice.

Chapter 6
Brotherman: A Counterpublic Suspended in Salute

The study of *Brotherman* and its creators revealed a methodological limitation in my data

collection methods and for that reason, this case stands as somewhat of an outlier in this study.

The cases of *Understanding Rhetoric* and the Cheo comics involved collecting data through

interviews and collaborative documentation. Where interviews allowed me to understand how

collaborators felt about their experiences of working with others, the collaborative

documentation allowed for a deeper analysis and description of the collaborative process. I was

not able to achieve this methodological triangulation as I explored the process behind

Brotherman.

      First, while *Brotherman* creators Guy Sims and Dawud Anyabwile spent significant time

with me in interviews, they could not offer collaborative documentation about their project,

which was initiated nearly 20 years ago; there simply was not the type of communicative

documentation technology available that allowed for archival ease. Other participants provided

digital copies of email correspondence, PDF commenting, drafts with Track Changes, etc. When

Guy and Dawud wrote the first issue of *Brotherman*, they worked using paper and postal mail or

faxing correspondence to share their work with one another. Unfortunately, this documentation

was not available for me to analyze. However, through textual analysis and interviews, I was able

to interrogate some aspects of the brothers' collaborative processes.

      Secondly, despite the hype surrounding *Brotherman* and its creators has been reinvigorated

with the promise—and significant online promotion—of a full-length graphic novel, I was not

able to acquire any excerpts of this text. Where I had all 11 original issues of the *Brotherman*

series, I was curious to compare it to rhetorical and artistic aspects of this new text. In response

to my request to see portions of the graphic novel, Dawud communicated that he was not yet

comfortable sharing the material, noting a raw composing process and slower progress than he

had anticipated. This new text was not available for me to analyze and I relied more heavily on

interview data than originally anticipated in the study's design.

     In spite of this dearth in data to analyze, I was able to examine many aspects of this case,

its creators, and its audience. Specifically, I was struck by two fascinating aspects of this case.

For one, as a result of its original release in 1990, *Brotherman* was one of the first Black[21]

superhero[22] comics written by Black authors and distributed by an independent, family owned

and operated company. The familial nature of this collaboration becomes significant in my

analysis. Secondly, despite a rather brief run of 11 issues over four years, a national following

formed around *Brotherman* and its creators, Dawud Anyabwile (formerly known as David Sims)

and Guy Sims. With a full-length graphic novel currently in the making, Dawud and Guy have

begun to see resurgence in the existing fan base. This resurgence has allowed for a retrospective

analysis of the Black comix counterpublic originally evoked by *Brotherman*'s release in 1990.

    In this case study examination, I will first introduce the work of Michael Warner to

characterize the *Brotherman* fan base as a counterpublic formed around the alternative

discourse presented in Black comix of the 1990s. I will introduce the historical context of Black

comix and situate *Brotherman* within its context to allow for a better understanding of the

extraordinary response it received and the ways in which it helped to facilitate the formation of a

Black comix counterpublic. Lastly, as I have done with each case study before it, I will examine

the *Brotherman* collaboration through the lens of activity systems theory in order to better

understand how this historically significant text was composed.

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[21] Throughout this paper I will be using the term "Black" in its capitalized form. In the literature I have read about Black comics and comics authors, the term Black is used primarily—as opposed to alternatives like African American, for example. I have chosen to capitalize Black because it is used in place of African American which is a proper noun and would therefore be capitalized.

[22] Feedback from Dawud and Guy elicited a footnote here to explain the use of "superhero" despite the lack of supernatural powers. Because *Brotherman* drew originally from the superhero genre tradition and because of fan responses that claim the character is indeed "super," I will use the term "superhero," but the authors do not. (Sims, Guy. "Chapter for your Review").

6.1 Introduction: Publics, Counterpublics, and *Brotherman*

In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner develops a theory of the formation of self-organized publics and counterpublics around discourse. With text at the center of his study, Warner argues that text and publics and counterpublics are created simultaneously. Warner defines a public by describing the ways in which members of the public interact within the discursive site produced by the texts:

- "**A public is self-organized**" (67): A public comes into existence and self-identifies through the emergence of a text; they do not and cannot exist outside of discourse.
- "**A public is a relation among strangers**" (74): Public gatherings and texts do not constitute a public until the text is absorbed into a larger discourse received by familiar and stranger alike.
- "**The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal**" (76): Members of a public simultaneously acknowledge that they are being spoken to and—unlike being a member of an audience—recognize that it is also others, strangers, that are being spoken to.
- "**A public is constituted through mere attention**" (87): Extending Althusser's theories of interpellation, Warner proposes that multiple receivers are hailed by a discourse and that the public formed by such a discourse exists only as long as texts are being circulated and received.
- "**A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse**" (90): A discourse is composed of multiple texts. Members of the public it evokes can achieve reflexivity through circulation of those texts. The discourse is dynamic and capable of change just as the public it evokes can shift.
- "**Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation**" (96): Publics are historically situated and cannot exist outside of the timely circulation of the texts that hail them to attention and self-organization.
- "**A public is poetic world making**" (114): The formation of a public results in material, linguistic, and ideological implications which inform how members of that public interpret the material world, how language allows them to engage in such a world, and how ideological assumptions underlie such communication.

Evident in these descriptions of how a public forms is a reliance on both the initial and sustained circulation of texts that constitute a fundamentally dynamic discourse. Therefore, to study a

public is to study the texts and discourses that call such a unifying formation of strangers into being—a methodology theoretically familiar to those of us in writing studies. Warner expands upon the importance of discursive reflexivity in the formation of publics by saying, "No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse" (90).

That being said, Warner posits that not only publics but also counterpublics are formed around discourses. Counterpublics are formations oppositional in nature to the texts and discourses of a public. Warner extends the work of Nancy Fraser when he insists that counterpublics provide a compulsory alternative discursive formation that challenges the hegemonic discourses of a public. Fraser defines counterpublics as "subordinated groups [that] have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies'" (qtd Warner 118). More importantly, Warner suggests that alternativity becomes an essential aspect of counterpublic self-identification; counterpublics know they are discursively oppositional to publics and this underlies their very formation.

Lastly, Warner then applies this theory to the metaphor of a flag being raised and a group of individuals—strangers—raising hands in a coordinated salute that interpellates the whole of them as a public. Warner argues that the texts and the publics and counterpublics are created simultaneously; "Public discourse says not only 'Let a public exist' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, and see the world in this way.' It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists [. . .]. Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes. Put on a show and see who shows up" (114). This metaphor is particularly helpful in understanding Warner's complex approach to defining—or, describing—the ways in which publics and counterpublics are formed through discourse.

To apply Warner's theories of publics and counterpublics is to examine the discursive phenomenon of circulating texts. *Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline* is a comic about an

ordinary man turned superhero and takes place in a fictitious city in which crime is rampant and

one young man decides to "challenge people to choose the right path." (Sims). After five years of

publication in the early 1990s, the *Brotherman* flag was put at half-mast due to a family-related

hiatus and then finally retired when production stopped for 16 years. Beginning in 2009,

Dawud and Guy began plans to bring *Brotherman* back to print with a full-length graphic novel

that would serve as a prequel to the original books. The *Brotherman* counterpublic had been

suspended in salute for nearly two decades.

Cast of Characters

My first introduction to the team behind *Brotherman* was a visit to their website and a

page titled "About the Creators.[23]"

Figure 6.1 Brothermancomics.com, "About the Creators." Pencil art by Dawud
Anyabwile. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

The contrast between the two brothers is striking. In Dawud's self-portrait he characterizes

himself with a cold, heavy stare. By contrast, he captures Guy mid-smile, a nod to Dawud's

training in figure and gesture drawing. Guy chuckled as he explained the difference with few

words: "Dawud's fighting the system and I'm part of the system." Interestingly, these brothers

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[23] See website: <http://www.brothermancomics.com/bm_about_creators.html>.

have been collaborating on *Brotherman* for more than two decades, and their relationship both personally and professional seems to reflect their unity.

Guy Sims

As the Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs, Guy Sims works with students in the many student centers and student activities on the Virginia Tech campus. Guy feels very strongly about one of his job responsibilities, one that is perhaps the most important to him: listening to students. His job, however, asks many responsibilities, especially the task of writing in many genres. And Guy describes himself as a writer—a description that informs both his personal and professional identities.

Generally, Guy values the power of storytelling and appreciates the form whether it's published through a graphic novel or, as he says, a traditional novel. His writing for the comic is also presented through the lens of a deep and intimate personal/working relationship with his youngest brother. It is clear that Guy values writing as a special craft and that he enjoys practicing it at work and at home. But, the appeal of the collaboration is often more about family and brotherhood than it is about the writing. Since the work of writing *Brotherman* is done primarily in his personal time, after long days at the university, Guy largely defines his work on the project as stemming from family collaboration and a commitment to family coherence.

While writing the script for *Brotherman*, Guy relied on his experience writing creatively in other genres—playwriting especially, which helped him to use dialogue to move the story, narration to set the scene, and what he calls "choreography" to provide movement direction to Dawud who would be drawing the art. It was important to Guy that he be descriptive so that Dawud could either keep the direction or employ his own artistic vision. A strong bond of trust exists between the brothers; they respect the skills each brings to the table. For Guy, Dawud's artistic talents are a point of pride.

Dawud Anyabwile (fka David Sims)

Dawud has been drawing characters in his sketchbook since 3rd grade when a new neighbor

introduced him to Marvel comics. Rather than meticulously collecting serial collections like his

new friend, Dawud recalls buying cheap comics at the flea market so that he could afford and

therefore consume more of them. But he didn't only consume. At a very young age, Dawud

engaged critically in the world of comics production. He asked his Dad one night after dinner,

"How come they don't have comics for us Black kids?" His father encouraged him to write one,

saying, "You've gotta be the one to do it. You can't wait around for somebody to give you

something. You'll be old and grey waiting." (Anyabwile). This was when Dawud created his first

comic.

Creating Antonio Valor/Brotherman

For years following, Dawud pursued art study and began his professional career as an airbrush

t-shirt artist in East Orange, New Jersey. He and his brother, Jason Sims, ran the business

together. Dawud was the creative input while Jason provided business oversight. It was during

this era that the Black Expo commenced in New York City in 1989 and the Sims brothers went to

check it out. They conceived of a comic book that would serve primarily as a marketing tool to

bring Black customers over the bridge into East Orange from Manhattan. The three brothers—

Jason, Guy, and Dawud—got together over the next year in anticipation for the 1990 Black Expo

and *Brotherman* slowly evolved from an undeveloped sketch in Dawud's notebook to a fully

conceptualized character.

From Delaware, Guy began to write based upon a drawing that Dawud had done of a

man wearing a shirt with a "B" on it. Early *Brotherman* comics writing relied heavily on Guy's

understanding of the comic book genre, with which he was familiar since Dawud read comics

and their eldest brother read *MAD Magazine.* Leading up to the expo, he and Dawud began to

learn about the pacing aspect of comics writing. The brothers drew on ideas and styles that were

familiar to them. Hip hop influence, comics readership as a child, and the family dynamic

simultaneously informed many of Guy's and Dawud's decisions for the setting, the plot, and

even the characters which were based largely upon friends and family and their experience growing up in Philadelphia. Antonio Valor's parents, for example, are modeled after their mother and father. Their father was a professor and their mother taught at an alternative public school.

Of course, Dawud's long and rocky relationship with American comics also informed the original *Brotherman* series, but largely by negation. Dawud and Guy saw what other comics lacked and pursued artistic choices that allowed them to work within and outside of traditional American superhero comics. And their fans saw it too.

When Guy arrived at the Expo, his brothers were already setting up the booth that was filled with 10,000 copies of the first issue of *Brotherman*. Guy's memory of that day is scattered: "I think we almost sold out, then and there. I was amazed. I'm trying to talk with people and read it at the same time. It drew enough people to garner some publicity. Then people [were asking], 'When are you coming out with the second one?' And I was like 'Wow! Ok!'" Jason, Dawud, and Guy were pleased when they saw how many readers welcomed *Brotherman*. Largely considered one of the first Black comix, *Brotherman* is important to examine as a part of the long American superhero comics tradition.

In the following section, I will provide historical context of Blacks in comics and the resulting Black comix movement, which, similar to underground comix, was a political response to under/mis-representation of Blacks in mainstream comics. Doing so will allow readers to better understand why *Brotherman* was written to provide a different perspective and why it was so poised to make a lasting mark when it entered a rather homogenous comics scene in the early 1990s.

6.2 Historical Contexts: Counterpublics of Black Comix

This history will unearth some of the titles of Black comics from the 1960s and 1970s that engaged in essentializing Black men and women. The Black comix counterpublic was a movement that emerged in many ways as a direct response to some of these titles. As readers

and writers of Black comics rebelled against these essentialized representations, Black comix

intentionally moved away from the mainstream, both ideologically and artistically and

Brotherman is considered a landmark work in this shift.

Black Comics

The first appearance of Black characters in comics took place in 1947 with the release of *All-

Negro Comics* with Ace Harlem, Lion Man, and the Little Dew Dillies. The characters were

African—not Black, not African American, but African—and were created by a Black news

reporter who was used to seeing Blacks stereotyped in comics. As the only reporter at a

Philadelphia newspaper, Author Orrin Cromwell Evans considered the inclusion of the strip in

the paper to be a milestone for Black journalists and comics artists ("Orrin C. Evans" n.p.). Still,

stereotypes of African culture informed much of the characters so that "[t]he villains were a

couple of zoot-suited, jive-talking Negro muggers, whose presence in anyone else's comics might

have brought up complaints of racial 'distortion.' Since it was all in the family, [Evans] thought

no Negro readers would mind" ("The Press: Ace Harlem to the Rescue" n.p.). The series never

saw a second issue.

Then, in 1954, Atlas Comics released *Jungle Tales* with Waku, Prince of Bantu. Also

largely informed by othered and essentialized aspects of African culture, *Jungle Tales* regularly

included Black characters. Interestingly, though it only lasted for one year, the series continued

into *Jann of the Jungle*, one of the first comics starring a female hero ("Jungle Tales").

From the comics of the 1940s and 50s into the 1960s, there is a shift in representations

of Blacks. *Lobo*, the first comic to feature a Black protagonist, was depicted as African-

American. While this shift is recognized, it in no way meant the end of the othering of African

culture. The following year, for example, Marvel released the series *Jungle Action* with the Black

Panther or T'Challa, King of the African island state of Wakandan ("Black Panther (T'Challa)").

Written by Stan Lee and penciled by Jack Kirby, this comics continues to be a Marvel universe

staple. The Black Panther is largely considered to be the first Black (read African) superhero in

mainstream American comics. Where Ace Harlem, Waku, and Lobo were among the first

prominent characters, The Black Panther was the first Black character to be granted super

powers. The Black Panther's powers of strength, stamina, and heightened senses made him

valuable to the Fantastic Four, which is where he first debuted. Nama argues, "in spite of the

cringe-inducing title, *Jungle Action* was progressive in the way it avoided many of the

ghettocentric clichés of the 'black experience'" (44). Nearly a decade later, The Black Panther

would marry X-Men character Storm, the first Black female superhero and also the most widely

recognized Black superhero in contemporary mainstream American comics (Nama 102).

Black comics history formed through the release of comics titles that featured and

starred Black characters, and a counterpublic began to form out of the American superhero

comics tradition. In Warner's description of publics, he emphasizes both circulating discourse

itself and its temporality. In the case of Blacks in comics, this is the point in American history

when Black characters were both in demand and in—albeit marginal—supply. Warner describes

the formation of a public or counterpublic as being created out of "the reflexive circulation of

discourse" (90) informed by their desire to color the all-white world of superheroes. As more

and more representations of Blacks emerged in comics, increased circulation bore attention

among interested readers. The release of Falcon and his partnership—as opposed to sidekick

status—with Captain America serves as a seminal moment in the formation of Black comix

counterpublic discourse.

In 1969, Marvel joined Steve Rogers/Captain America, a well-established series

character, with Sam Wilson/Falcon, the first African American superhero, to partner and fight

more than fictional battles (Nama 69). Falcon first appeared in *Captain America* #117 where

together they fight Nazis to liberate an occupied island. Captain America was Stan Lee's way of

incorporating the heightened political environment of America in the 1970s to the comics

universe and through the relationship of Rogers and Wilson, arguments in support of racial

equality were sewn throughout the comics (Nama 72). Eventually, they joined the Avengers

where they continue to fight. A progressive character, Falcon also worked closely with Luke

Cage, *Hero for Hire/Power Man*. Luke Cage achieved superhuman strength and skin "hard as

steel" after agreeing to scientific experimentation in exchange for paroled release for a crime he

didn't commit. Though Luke Cage is a protagonist, he serves as a historical example of the ways

in which white comics writers engaged in a practice referred to as Blaxploitation, or the

exploitation of Black characters through exaggerated stereotypes and behaviors. Often,

Blaxploitation media portrayed Black men, like Luke Cage, as hypermasculine and

hypersexualized. Resistance to depictions that drew on Blaxploitation tropes became an

argument held by the Black comix counterpublic, and whereas John Shaft became the epitome

of the Blaxploitation film industry, Luke Cage became a symbol of Blaxploitation in mainstream

comics (Nama 53).

But it wasn't all bad. In *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*,

African American literature scholar Adilifu Nama credits a comic not for being the first to

feature or even star a Black protagonist, but for being the first comic to incorporate issues of

race, class, and gender into its pages. Between 1970 and 1972, The Green Lantern and The Green

Arrow presented complexities in their plots, settings, and character dynamics in ways that

pushed the superhero genre itself, let alone the changes it effected in social spheres. Nama

argues that

> [w]hat made *Green Lantern Co-Starring Green Arrow* unpredictably complicated was
>
> that a significant part of the stories addressed topical and pressing social issues: poverty,
>
> race, overpopulation, and drug abuse. The comic symbolically pitted the conservative
>
> politics of the 'law and order' elites against the 'Age of Aquarius' idealism of youth
>
> activists that championed changing the world by challenging the status quo. The
>
> magnitude of the social issues Green Lantern and Green Arrow confronted along with
>
> the audaciousness of having make-believe figures confront real and troublesome social

issues turned the superhero tandem into charismatic characters and politically charged

symbols (Nama 15).

In addition to playing out uncomfortable scenarios of race relations, *Green Lantern Co-Starring*

Green Arrow also introduced The Black Lantern, a character who would come to symbolize

Black Power and movements encouraging Black pride.

In this brief history, I have identified the first of its kind in four major categories of

historic Black comics: first appearance of African Blacks (*All-Negro Comics*), first appearance of

African-American Black protagonist (*Lobo*), the first male and female Black superheroes (The

Black Panther, Falcon and Storm), and the first to confront issues of race within the comic's

pages. As the superhero tradition in comics continued into the politically tumultuous mid-

twentieth century, there became additional characters of both note and criticism from comics

readers.

For example, Tyroc (Troy Stewart) debuted under DC Comics. Critics recall that the

writers tended to focus readers' attention on the character's racial difference rather than his

superpowers, which, as they argue were rather weak. Tyroc's "reality-warping scream" was

considered a weak, emasculating denial of "real" powers in the silent medium of the comic and

Tyroc became an example of how even well-meaning editors' racial biases crept into the comics

themselves. Tyroc was DC's first Black protagonist and its first Black superhero. Mike Grell,

writer and artist at DC during the time of the release, had previously been discouraged from

incorporating any Black characters into the Legion of Super-Heroes.

When the project for Tyroc was green-lit, there were high hopes, but when scripts came

down from the editors, the artists were quickly disappointed. For one, since the universe created

for the Legion of Super-Heroes had previously failed to include any diversity, the writers created

a reason: all of the Black inhabitants of 30th-century Earth were exiled to the island of Marzal off

the coast of Africa, an island that disappears from the dimension every 200 years. This

segregationist move didn't serve to introduce the plot or the character well, and the character of

Tyroc was itself equally unsettling to those who wrote the comic. Even the artist Mike Grell

hated the project and subverted its success with a silly "Elvis Presley goes to Las Vegas" costume

and what he referred to as "the world's stupidest power," the "reality warping scream." Jim

Shooter, DC artist at the time, found the project's approach appalling ("Tyroc"). Nama takes a

different perspective, arguing for parallels between Tyroc's reality-changing voice and the

protest movements taking place all over the country. Though Tyroc is the only specific example I

will include here, the argument for more ethical representations of both Blacks and the

American racial climate formed in response to repeated misrepresentation. Shortly after the

debut of Tyroc in 1976, some of the first Black comix would be published in direct response by

members of the counterpublic. Warner's characteristics of a public or counterpublic include the

assertion that "a public is a poetic worldmaking" (114). The commencement of the Black comix

counterpublic contributing texts based upon their own reflexivity becomes a moment which

reflects this world-making. Through the growing authorship and readership of Black comix, this

counterpublic begins to shift the discourse of American superhero comics toward the ideological

interpretation of their world, a world that includes heroes who look like them.

Black Comix

This section will describe the ways in which comics texts changed to reflect a shifting discourse

around American superhero comics and those who author them, including Guy Sims and Dawud

Anyabwile of *Brotherman* and other forefathers and foremothers of the Black comix movement.

Comics scholar Jeffrey A. Brown discusses how the need for more Black superheroes

incited a number of writers—not only those from Marvel and DC—to begin to change the

landscape. In *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*, Brown characterizes the

comics cultural climate leading up to breakthroughs of the 1980s and 90s:

For decades, young readers have encountered a defining and idealized image of heroism

that was explicitly honest, law abiding, chaste, excessively masculine, and above all,

white. For the majority of readers these caped avengers who could fly, bend steel bars

> with their bare hands, and deflect bullets with their broad chests were the ultimate
>
> power fantasy played out in flashy monthly installments. Yet for comic book readers
>
> from different ethnic backgrounds there were no heroic models that they could directly
>
> identify with, no heroes they could call their own. (Brown 3)

Brown's work focuses on the ways in which Milestone Comics, a once-independent company,

joined forces with DC to bring their entire line of Black heroes to a more mainstream readership.

When Milestone began releasing their lines of comics under DC in 1993, they articulated very

specific goals of their collaboration with the comics powerhouse.

> The first point was that they wanted their comic books to reflect people from a variety of
>
> cultural backgrounds. Although three of Milestone's original four comic book series
>
> focused solely on black heroes, the creators are always careful to declare that their line
>
> emphasizes multicultural characters. [. . .] The second crucial point that the Milestone
>
> founders agreed upon was the need to reach the largest audience possible through a
>
> professional system of distribution. With their combined experience of the comic-
>
> publishing business they knew that creating quality books would not be a major problem.
>
> (Brown 28; 29)

Through characters like Hardware, Blood Syndicate, Static, Icon, and Rocket (a Black female

superhero) Milestone Comics was able to produce multiple representations of Blacks, which

were particularly dynamic when juxtaposed in the comics themselves:

> [Iron and Rocket] represent different ideological poles politically and they often act as
>
> platforms for the narrative to work out diverse reactions to controversial issues. On the
>
> one side Icon is a very conservative persona very much akin to the Booker T. Washington
>
> success-through-perseverance philosophy he has adopted, while on the other side
>
> Rocket, a Toni Morrison and W. E. B. Du Bois fan, stresses the social injustices at work
>
> in the world, injustices that subjugate the downtrodden. [. . .] Rather than taking a
>
> solitary political stance according to one racially informed position, Icon carefully

> illustrates the various personal and political perspectives that are possible within a single
>
> cultural community. (Brown 37; 38)

Thus, Black superheroes continue to serve as symbols for "how to be Black," as a fan argues later

in Brown's book. But, this point is often contended, even resented, by comics writers and artists

who wish that every appearance of a Black character didn't mean having to turn the character

into a symbol. A significant part of the Black comix movement involved an overall mission to

saturate the monochromatic landscape of American comics with differences articulated by the

counterpublic:

> The central goal of Milestone in their attempt to address the lack of minority
>
> representation in comics, and the often stereotypical nature of that representation when
>
> it does occur, is to show the quality and diversity of African American life. "To," as
>
> [founder] Dwayne McDuffie puts it, "break up the idea of a monolith." (Brown 31)

English and Communication Professor William H. Foster III declares that any point in time

there are more Black comics then ever before (53). Foster argues that the exponential growth of

the comics industry since the 1980s makes this statement true. For Foster, he sees this growth

as a means of diversifying the comics landscape; "the more people that are out there sharing

their unique visions, the less we will have to be worried about one character that has to carry the

weight for the entire race" (Foster 53). As this theme of multiplicity recurs in the literature, we

can assume that a primary motivation of the Black comix counterpublic involved a more ethical

representation of Blacks as coming from not a single character, but diversifying the comics

industry as a whole; the more Black characters in comics, the less they each have to stand in for

all Blacks.

Foster includes *Brotherman* among his list of African American comic book creators,

alongside Richard "Grass" Green, Scott Roberts, and Tony Robinson. Foster describes the

significance of *Brotherman* in saying, "This is the comic book that inspired the efforts of a new

generation of black comics artists and writers. [. . .] Their unique vision is easy to read and

provides a welcome splash of color to the much too white world of comic book heroes" (32). For some, Foster included, breaking up the monolith involved not only a broader and more representative cultural climate in comics themselves, but in the spaces where comics were written, drawn, and sold.

In his introduction to *Black Comix: African American Independent Comics Art and Culture*, comics author and scholar Damian Duffy focuses on the significance of independence for Black comics authors. Duffy defines "independent" comics authors as those who "persist, undaunted in a daunting pursuit: making and selling art that is entirely their own. From the pencil, pen, marker, airbrush or computer to the page or the screen, they create: stories, drawings, words, sequence, art. This is the art and culture of self-determination, of meanings deeper than melanin content. This is *Black Comix*." (Duffy & Jennings 9). In the article on "Brotherman & The Pioneers of Big City," Duffy and Jennings identify *Brotherman* as one of the first Black independent comic books. In a testament to the influence of *Brotherman* in Black Comix, the feature on *Brotherman* and the Sims brothers stretches for eight pages to discuss 11 issues and the upcoming graphic novel; other artists, like Jerry Craft (author of currently syndicated *Mama's Boyz* comic strip), are showcased in only two pages. It is *Brotherman*'s status as a comic produced and written by an independent company that informed its ethos as one of the first. Which is all to say that despite a hiatus that has lasted almost 20 years, *Brotherman*'s past circulation continues to influence Black comix in ways that newer artists are only beginning to achieve in a more diverse comics landscape.

A second aspect of *Brotherman* that allowed the comic to become so popular among comics readers, was that the Sims brothers not only included characters that were underrepresented, but set the story in Big City, a space that incorporated artistic stylizations and urban aesthetics that had not previously been included in comics. Duffy and Jennings also discuss this aspect of the *Brotherman* comics in the section of their book titled, "Culture and

Remix: Hip Hop and Comics." Guy is quoted as saying, "I have found that what resonates with

people in terms of hip hop is the realness that readers draw from the stories and

characterizations. Hip Hop comes from the soul and the street. This is something that is also at

the foundation of the style of the *Brotherman* comic" (Duffy & Jennings 115). The comic's

crossover style wasn't lost on its readership; the fan base continues to recall the ways in which

Brotherman's aesthetic was revolutionary for combining dynamic aspects of culture in their

portrayal of Antonio Valor/Brotherman and other characters. If a counterpublic becomes "the

social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse," then *Brotherman* is one of the first

texts to circulate within the discourse and in doing so, helped to carve out a space for comics of a

different color to reflect a space that already existed within the American social milieu.

But aesthetics is not the only aspect of the genre tradition that Guy and Dawud

intentionally pushed against. In many ways, the defining characteristic of the *Brotherman*

comics was that its authors were determined to toy with the genre tradition in order to make a

comic they hadn't seen anywhere else. In the next section, I will discuss *Brotherman* in terms of

its genre and the ways in which it works within and stands outside the American superhero

comics tradition.

6.3 Rules/Norms: Issues of Genre and Audience

Popular commonplaces of comics genres and comics writing processes are heavily influenced by

the superhero genres of large-scale comics publication. In this section, I will present some

examples of how large companies like Marvel and DC—called "the Big Two" in some circles—

inform fans' understandings of how comics are collaboratively composed and materially

produced. Second, I will discuss how aspects of marketing tend to limit the genres presented by

the Big Two. Then, I will contrast these narratives with information that I learned from studying

Brotherman, both as a Black comic that revolutionized the superhero comics genre, and as a

process developed by three brothers and an independent company that introduced elements of

hip hop artistic style, social change messages, and a unique universe of all-Black characters. I

argue that *Brotherman* simultaneously works within and stands outside the American

superhero comics tradition in terms of process, storyline, characters, setting, and artistic style.

Marvel and DC Comics: The Process

In order to represent the production of comics by industry giants like Marvel Comics and DC

Comics, I consulted Shirrel Rhoades' *Comics Books: How the Industry Works*. Rhoades was a

former publisher with Marvel Comics and describes for readers the process through which

comics are made within a large comics publishing company. According to Rhoades, Marvel and

DC combined account for 80% of comic book sales each month (1).

The profit-driven comics industry developed its method for writing comics decades ago,

and with the exception of increased freelance work, the assembly line process of making comics

has remained roughly the same for more than 50 years. Creative teams are chosen by editors

and are often carefully picked based upon talent. As Jeffrey Brown discussed in his study of

Milestone Comics, fans are often encyclopedic with their knowledge of comics art and artists;

big names can draw big sales. Writers submit the script to the editor—a careful process which

must consider the serial nature of comics and the need for publishers to employ narrative

strategies to keep readers interested. Stan Lee, creator of *Spider-Man*, once compared the comic

to a soap opera (Rhoades 123). The script, much like a screenplay, contains no images, just

dialogue and a description of the action. From there, scripts are sent to the artists: the pencilers,

letterers, inkers, and colorists. This process, according to Rhoades, can take two forms: the

scripted method, or the Marvel Method. With the scripted method, "the artist follows a panel-

by-panel plan laid out by the writer" and the Marvel Method is "a more collaborative way of

working in which the writer shares the story idea with the artist and lets him work out his own

panel-by-panel breakdown" (Rhoades 128-9). Thus, within Marvel at least, it is the pencilers

who tend to have the most creative control with the art as their lines will be merely traced by

inkers and letterers, the next two members of the team to work on the comic. Inkers and

letterers make distinct lines around existing artwork and add stylization to the dialogue text and

the characters' appearances. Lastly, a colorist employs either watercolors or digital coloring software to the pages (Rhoades 122).

Marvel and DC Comics: The Superhero Genre

Comic book genres currently published by Marvel and DC are predominately superhero comics. According to Bob Harris, former Marvel editor-in-chief, superheroes become archetypal symbols which are cultural informed and culturally reflective. Zimmerman identifies archetypes in superheroes, including the tropes of a secret identity, super masculine strength, and a moral code. Rhoades extrapolates the cultural significance of a few popular comic book characters and their archetypal symbolism: "Spider-Man: 'with great power comes great responsibility;' Green Arrow: Crusading for the underprivileged and the working class; Superman: the secret hero within us; Wonder Woman: the inner strength of womanhood; Batman: the catharsis of revenge" (112). Brown acknowledges the roles of genre expectations in building a fan community to the extent that "[f]ans expect certain generic elements from the stories they read, elements such as costumes and powers and a basic fight between good and evil. Likewise, the creators use these formalized conventions to construct an immediately recognizable story pattern or to expand on the basic reading of the formula" (195).

Missing from contemporary comics industry giants like Marvel and DC is the visible presence of *other* comics genres. Scott Bieser, author of "The Comic Book Market," discusses the industry's Catch-22 and what he sees as an inevitable diversification of genre in the future, not because of fan demand, but because of economical constraints.

> The Big Two won't risk alienating their market, and don't seem to know how to expand into other genres; current comics readers, for the most part, aren't interested in much else. [But, t]he 32-page comics pamphlet format is becoming increasingly uneconomical [. . .]. The medium is going through a transformation [. . .]. And there will be a wider array of genres: horror, sci-fi, romance, western, contemporary drama, historical drama, children's, and even some non-fiction [. . .]. Just like 'real' books" (qtd Rhoades 29).

These commonplaces of comics in popular culture paint the comics form and the way it is

composed in an incomplete and inaccurate light. For one, as Bieser points out, comics genres

are much more diverse than those produced by Marvel and DC Comics. Secondly, as this study

demonstrates, in addition to mass production, comics are published independently and written

by individuals and small collaborative teams.

If, as I argue, *Brotherman* is a text in the larger discourse of a Black comix

counterpublic, then it must be informed by an ideology that resists the American superhero

comics tradition in terms of process, storyline, characters, setting, and artistic style. I will

examine each of these elements in order to address the following questions:

1. How does Brotherman exist within the mainstream American comics genre tradition?
2. How does Brotherman stand outside the mainstream American Comics genre tradition?

In order for the story of Brotherman/Antonio Valor to form in the minds of Jason Sims, Guy

Sims, and Dawud Anyabwile, the storyline and character conceptions drew largely upon

traditional tropes of the hero narrative. The timelessness of this this approach that extends

historically beyond comics themselves: a story of good versus evil, of community, of chaos, and

of eventual salvation. But when time came to compose the second issue, Guy and Dawud began

to play around with the genre. As they put it, Dawud and Guy realized "what [they] *didn't* have

to do" with their comic. In this section, I will focus on the plot concept and the principal

characters. Later I will elaborate to include two additional narrative elements of setting and

point of view, elements which evolved along with the composing process.

Plot: "Everything's gonna be alright"

Guy wrote Antonio Valor with an alter-ego of Brotherman as a costumed hero. The comics series

existed, first and foremost for entertainment. Like comic books—and much of fiction—it created

the hero/villain, good/evil dynamic with which readers can identify. The hero is not only

capable of doing what others cannot, but he exists comfortably within the ideology and values of

the community he serves. Antonio Valor, without his mask, is an aggressive yet sensitive

character tuned to the needs of the people of Big City. This balance, for Dawud, is significant; "that's what makes a *warrior* versus a thug." Guy and Dawud knew what they would have to include in the comic in order for readers to find the story enjoyable and entertaining.

First, it is worth mentioning what is missing from the pages of *Brotherman*: gunplay. In fact, fighting and violence is not the focus throughout most of the storylines. Pieces of the writing that were inspired to include examples from everyday life also chose not to include examples from everyday life. At the time of the *Brotherman* comics, national tensions and the nightly news reflected race riots in Los Angeles, gang formations in other major cities, and countless acts of violence. For Guy, removing these elements meant replacing them with other events and actions, other conflicts aside from race and other solutions aside from violence. As a reader, "you know what's going on [in American society], we don't have to replay it. It's gonna call for more creativity, but that's okay" (Sims). Such creativity was put into the heroes and the villains of *Brotherman*. On the cover of the first issue of *Brotherman*, Brotherman's eyes pierce the reader's. Just above, the title reads, "He's Here!" and just below, readers are assured, "…Everything's Gonna Be Alright" (Sims and Anyabwile, *Brotherman* No. 1). Through characters like Antonio, Melody, and Duke, legal repercussions enact legal justice in place of civic violence.

Characters: Heroes and Villains

The characters of *Brotherman* were carefully crafted so that the story itself would be reflective of

the types of personalities and sensibilities one might

encounter in an urban environment like Big City. Guy

described his approach as avoiding clichés in that the

characters "each have something that's a little different.

Not cookie cutter and not so noble that they would say

'Nothing bothers me!' No. No one has it all under

control in Big City" (Sims).

Figure 6.2 Antonio Valor as Brotherman. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Brotherman/Antonio Valor, Assistant District Attorney

The comic's message was delivered through the

protagonist's duality; Brotherman is a hero that represents justice in an unjust world, but

Antonio Valor is a metaphor for the community in which the Sims brothers were raised, an

environment in which his mother and particularly his father were determined to surround their

boys with positive Black male role models. In Philadelphia, gang violence was decreasing and

men in their neighborhood taught martial arts and self-defense classes to young men to avoid

violent confrontation. Dawud says the brothers agreed to "create a character that personifies the

attributes of these men that go to their grave and nobody knows who they are, rather than the

negative men are the ones who we always hear about. Let's hear about the ones that *were*

upstanding, that *did* take care of their families, and that were the brother of man. That's what

Brotherman personified" (emphasis added).

Melody Rich, Assistant District Attorney

Melody is a character that contrasts Antonio Valor. The two characters differ in many core

values; where Tony grew up in Big City and went to community college, Melody is from a higher

socioeconomic background. She is buying her time in the DA's office until she can leave to work and live elsewhere. As Dawud puts it, she is bright and hard working, but "she doesn't have the faith in the system like he does. She's doing it so she can make the money to move to the next stage. She wants to get out of the public service to get into a private firm. And [Tony is] the public servant" (Anyabwile).

Figure 6.3 Melody Rich. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Guy included strong female characters for the same reasons that he wanted to include strong male characters; "These are the experiences that I encounter working in higher education. So, I want Melody to have her own concerns and experiences as an individual character. She's not just the background character that comes in to bounce off Antonio, she's challenging. There's times where she is the "superior" character, and there are times when she retreats" (Sims). While portrayed as a bright lawyer, Melody is also a sexualized character who has a crush on Antonio. Their unrequited and inevitably platonic relationship serves as a source of tension for the two characters throughout the books.

Duke Denim, District Attorney
Where Antonio symbolizes humanity and the promise of hope, his boss, District Attorney Duke Denim, reminds readers just how broken the system is, and just how hopeless public servants in Big City can feel. Duke's rugged nature and pessimistic attitude is a sharp contrast

Figure 6.4 Duke Denim. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

to Antonio's unending optimism and commitment to make a difference. Guy puts his spin on the character, saying that "[Duke] came up a different way than [Antonio and Melody]. He's frustrated at times, but he's got a little [bit of] hope left" (Sims).

Lola Hubris/The Seductress

With *Brotherman*'s first villain, the Sims brothers broke two genre conventions; villains don't have to be men, and villains don't have to be violent. The Seductress (of #1 and #2) commits a series of bank robberies through seduction; she uses her dual degrees in chemistry and biology to concoct a potion that she applies as perfume. The potion makes men highly suggestible, resulting in bank managers and employees simply handing over the money. Antonio even falls victim to her seductive scent when he attempts to apprehend her as Brotherman. The Seductress, like Melody Rich, is depicted visually as a sexual character. She is more aggressive with her sexuality than Melody,

Figure 6.5 The Seductress. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

but is another example of how women characters—even in a progressive text like *Brotherman*—can be objectified in comics.

Edison Pratt/BLOCK
& Eric and Derek/The Twin Terrors

The Sims brothers took another chance when they created the Twin Terrors. Villains don't have to be costumed; they can look like anybody in the streets. As Guy put it, "maybe they just embody the conflict they cause" (Sims). And their leader, Block, adds an additional twist to the clear-cut hero/villain dichotomy. Villains are more human than we portray them and readers

Figure 6.6 Block and the Twin Terrors. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

come to sympathize with them. Block is a familiar character to anyone who was teased in school. His self-given alias stands for "Boundless Logic of the Original Concrete King." He is of a small stature and enlists the physical attributes of The Twin Terrors (The Twinz) to do his dirty work of inciting chaos in Big City. Originally, however, Dawud had drawn Block as a character whose stature was equal to that of Antonio's. Then Dawud changed his mind.

Then we said, "Nah. Let's make him more vulnerable. Let's make him a little short guy." Because every time there are stories about the inner city or you see a music video, everybody's always cool. They walk in slow motion and smack people five. They know all of ladies and all that stuff and that's like *the city kid*. And I said, "But think about all of the people you knew back home and all of the city kids. They didn't know all of the girls. You know, they knew the city. They could get around, but they didn't have a lot of friends. They could be in a city of millions of people and probably only have a couple phone numbers." Block kind of represents that. He's the outcast within his own city.

A unique character like Block is often recalled by *Brotherman*'s fan base, not only because of his sympathetic nature, but also because of his speech.

One unifying element of each character—even minor characters—is the authentic dialogue soundscape of Big City. Fan testimonials frequently mention the realistic depiction of African-Americans in Guy's writing and Dawud's artwork, particularly the performative speech the characters embody. Guy and Dawud drew upon conversations with their parents, their brothers, and their friends and teachers growing up. They both actively avoid clichés in characters' speech. Antonio embraces his anger and impatience and filters them through

preaching a call to action. Duke Denim laments and complains ad nausea; his hopelessness is exhausting and he even tires himself out. Characters like Melody, for example, constantly engage in code-switching to reflect how socially situated speech is performed. For example, Melody is a well-educated lawyer but she also served a brief stint in prison and has lived in Upper Crust County as well as Big City. She is frequently engaging in conversation with both the judges she addresses and the criminals she prosecutes. This aspect of the writing is something that readers often praised and is yet another element informed by the brothers' upbringing. Rather than falling victim to genre conventions for the sake of conforming, the brothers actively sought alternative methods and representations for the characters and their actions. Such creativity was informed by the Sims brothers' individual literacies, the Sims family's unique character, and the urban setting of Philadelphia.

In this next section, I will elaborate on the ways in which Guy's and Dawud's identities influenced the *Brotherman* comics in terms of process and product. And I will explore the identity of the Black comix counterpublic. In the final section, I will discuss the narrative devices and social engineering tools that allowed their unique process to be embraced by the Black comix counterpublic.

6.4 Subjects/Motives: Issues of Identity and Literacies

As one might expect, the collaboration between Guy Sims and Dawud Anyabwile is largely dependent upon their sibling relationship. Their closeness as young adults led to the creation of *Brotherman*, and their ability to share an artistic vision allowed them to continue to be successful through 11 issues.

The Sims Brothers

When the idea for a comic emerged back in 1989 after the New York Black Expo, Guy says, the roles were assumed from the start; "I knew my role was the writer. No one has to say it. And David will draw it. Unlike other people that might be quasi-artists and writers and you have to decide who does what. We had clearly defined roles" (Sims).

The brothers have an ability to bring these different talents together in order to create. Dawud shares the back-and-forth process of creating, as he reflects: "When Guy writes certain lines in the book, certain lines actually spark my creativity to create something more in-depth. And vice versa, so I'll draw something and Guy will see something in the drawing and come back and get more in-depth with the writing. That's how Big City evolved. So by the time we got to issue number 3, we had neighborhoods at that point" (Anyabwile). Throughout the issues, the brothers continued to develop their collaborative process. Guy, for example, learned that while specifics of fighting scenes could be left to Dawud's imagination, certain aspects of the page needed to be addressed for storytelling purposes. Guy began to consider that "[b]y the time they get to the end of the fight, he's subdued, or we know it's going to continue to the next page." Guy's approach was inspired by Mario Puzo, the author of *The Godfather* series. Puzo's writing walks a fine line of character detail. For Guy, such a balance allows readers to bring their imagination, and it also allows for creative space for his brother. And so, despite their different roles, the brothers have developed what they describe as a cooperative and respectful method of working together. One email correspondence between the brothers is from Dawud and addressed to Guy. In it, Dawud asks Guy for "some good suggestions from way back" to add to a classic soul music mix he is compiling. The music, as Dawud puts it, "helps inspire me to get into the mood as I draw this book" ("Graphic Novel Inspirational Music"). In the same correspondence, it's back to business as Dawud suggests publishing not one but two graphic novels to deepen the story and expedite the production process. The email is dated January 14, 2009. The graphic novel, despite being an important collaboration for the brothers, is still a side project, professionally speaking. The same ambition that drove the brothers to create the comic bleeds into their careers—Guy as Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs at Virginia Tech, and Dawud as Broadcast Designer at Turner Studios. The drive that I speak of and which both brothers embody is rooted in their childhood and family environment of Philadelphia.

The Sims Family

A unifying aspect of both Guy's and Dawud's identity is family. Much of what inspired the creation of *Brotherman* was informed by the brothers' upbringing in Philadelphia with a professor father and teacher mother who both demanded success from their boys. And yet, the brothers developed different literacy practices and therefore different affinities for creating with words and images. Guy tends to separate himself from comics and gravitates toward literature, a preference evident in his writing of "Ya'll Hail the King." Dawud, on the other hand, is an artist and drew heavily from other artists that he read in Marvel comics, *MAD Magazine*, and various inspirations that made their way into his sketchbook. Growing up, both brothers kept a notebook in which they would record ideas for stories, character sketches, and chronicles of funny things people said or did. They were actively encouraged, by their parents, to explore alternative ways of doing, saying, or thinking.

Inside the Home

Guy describes the house he grew up in as vocal. The household included his mother, father, and four boys. He elaborates, "Vocal as in making a point. Everyone thinks they're funny. Everybody thinks they're intellectual." He recalls that when the family was watching television together, they would become a peanut gallery so that when "Something happens on the screen, you want to offer an alternate reaction, alternate ending to it. And my father did that too, you know, adding lines to characters, adding lines as they applied to culture and ethnicity, adding lines…it was a tool to use for your entertainment versus you just sitting there. We all added our own commentary" (Sims). This family trait also translated to constant reimaging reality with slight differences or more elaborate acts of future casting[24] in which the Sims boys were challenged to not only imagine but to become the change they wanted to see in their world. For example, when he was in the 7th grade, Dawud's father pushed him to consider how Blacks were (under/mis)represented in the comics he was reading.

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[24] Future casting is a rhetorical strategy in which a member of a community re-envisions their community's past, present, and future based upon its collective identity and shared cultural values. It is currently being used as a social change strategy by researchers in Columbus, Ohio and at the Ohio State University. See Selfe et al.

> [My Dad] called me downstairs and he said, "Let's look at your comics. Out of all these
>
> comics, where are your Black characters?" I was like, "Aww man, okay. We've got Luke
>
> Cage, Black Panther, Falcon" and that was it. So then he was like, "Look at this stack and
>
> now look at this stack. Now, let's go into the comics." And that's when it first dawned on
>
> me. I didn't realize how stereotypical Luke Cage was...a lot racial undertones in Luke
>
> Cage and my Dad hinted me to a lot of that. At that point I was really disappointed in it.
>
> He said, "I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just telling you to be aware of it." He had the
>
> fireplace going one night and I came down and I threw all of my comics into the
>
> fireplace. I was angry and therefore I was done with comics. (Anyabwile).

As Dawud turned away from comics, hip hop culture infiltrated the Sims household when Guy

returned from college at Lincoln University in 1983. Dawud recalls listening to the music of

Grandmaster Flash[25], imitating graffiti stylization in his art, and studying—as he coined it—the

retro industrial urban aesthetic. Dawud's deluge into hip hop would come to inform the comic

during its conception in 1989 as did his and Guy's interactions outside of the home in the city of

Philadelphia.

Outside the Home

For Guy, living in Philadelphia meant studying its people and places. People watching and social

eavesdropping habits allowed Guy to study the people around him. Guy would "listen to people

talk, catching snippets of their conversations, playing out their conversations in [his] head. If

someone said something, [he]I would write it down, and then of course to come back and relay a

story as effectively as possible" (Sims). And he moved among the people using public

transportation. Guy recalls how riding public transit around the city of Philadelphia meant he

was "always in the midst of lots of people, taking the bus, taking the trolley, taking the train,

taking the subway. [He] could always draw back and say [*Brotherman*] became the avenue to

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[25] Grandmaster Flash was a musical artist and became widely known after his single, "The Message" topped the
charts, but he is more commonly celebrated for his contribution to disc jockey techniques like scratching and
mixing—or what we now call remixing. ("Grandmaster Flash" n.p.).

use it" (Sims). The city environment also inspired some of the comic's conflicts related to issues

of socioeconomic status. Because a city can play host to residents from a spectrum of

socioeconomic backgrounds, Guy and Dawud learned quickly how issues of privilege,

disadvantage, education, work ethic, and class status could influence and be influenced by the

city's neighborhoods. In the upcoming graphic novel, for example, Antonio—who lives in

Phoenix Hills, attends the Big City Community College, while Melody Rich—who is from Upper

Crust County outside the Big City limits—boasts a degree from a prestigious preparatory school.

Within the setting of Big City, all of these issues can come together to create the story of

Brotherman. Guy reflects, "Since we don't concern ourselves with race—that's not in our

equation—but class is a significant. Clearly, you can go to different areas. There are areas that

are kind of depressed and then there are areas where people have money. Melody is a clear

example from Upper Crust County and Scribble and Scrabble, when they want to move, they

want to move to Betterton, which is in Upper Crust County" (Sims). The Sims parents were

products of this environment as well. They encouraged independence and a dedicated work

ethic or, as Guy puts it, their father was from "the school of 'Do for yourself,'" an attitude that

informs Antonio's character and which resonates broadly among members of the Black comix

counterpublic.

Identity of the Counterpublic
When the Sims brothers set out to create *Brotherman*, their work was informed by real-life

inspirations: people, places, etc. Much of the writing and artwork and marketing of *Brotherman*

was very purposeful and calculated in order to achieve success through reception and

readership. Even more surprising is the success that the brothers could never have imagined for

their comic. In this section, I will elaborate upon the Sims brothers' motivations when creating

the comic and contrast those with the ways in which the comic was received and acclaimed by

readers, fans, critics, and scholars. Finally, I will use these reader testimonials to construct a

collective identity of the Black comix counterpublic of which *Brotherman* is a part.

When Dawud and Jason first envisioned the comic, if you recall, their primary purpose was creative marketing for a t-shirt shop. Their target audience was the Black consumers at the Black Expo in New York City in 1990. Once Guy was on board, the whole family was involved together and the process called on each member's individual talents for writing, drawing, marketing, and business management to create not only the first *Brotherman* comic, but the company, Big City Comics, that continued to publish through 11 issues. In terms of the writing, Guy called upon his experiences of reading classical literature and writing in various literary genres including fiction and poetry; this time he would set his writing within an urban megalith. For the artwork, Dawud drew the only way he knew how: from the soul, incorporating various aspects of his own cultural identity in comics, urban, hip hop, and Black communities. Jason assisted Dawud by handlng a bulk of the marketing and distribution so that Dawud could be free to draw.

In 2009 in Atlanta, Dawud hosted the art exhibit "Drawing from the Soul: The Official *Brotherman* Comics Art Experience." The testimonials shared that night embodied the collective response of both the *Brotherman* fans of the 1990s, and the thriving Black comix counterpublic. A member of the LA Breakers, a famous street dancing crew, shared with Dawud that reading *Brotherman* helped him get out of the gang scene in Los Angeles. Another fan shared that he read *Brotherman* as a kid. He now works as a documentarian following drug dealers to find their humanity; he told Dawud that his work is inspired by the public service of Antonio Valor. Another young man spoke about how *Brotherman* motivated him to study art; he is now a professional artist. Parents who read *Brotherman* in their youth buy the trade paperbacks now to share with their children. And these testimonials are from a fan base that has had decades to consider these works. These are fans for whom the graphic novel is a dream come true. These are fans who have been waiting, suspended in salute.

Through these testimonials, we can begin to glimpse the incredibly diverse identity of the *Brotherman* fan base and its shared membership in the Black comix counterpublic. Circulation

of the *Brotherman* texts is another lens that allows us to see how *Brotherman* originated and fueled the discourse of the counterpublic. When *Brotherman* first was first sold in stores, for example, it was carried in comic book stores, Black bookshops, barber shops, and beauty salons. When *Brotherman* received press, it was featured on *The Arsenio Hall Show*[26], written up in *The Source*, *Parenting*, *The Final Call*, *Rap Pages Magazine*, *The Washington Post*[27], and touted in Japanese media publications as well. All of this from three brothers who never sat down to do a demographic break-down, who never said, "If we include these narrative elements, we'll be sure to reach parents," who actively sought personal and professional excellence before any other objective; this is the success of *Brotherman* and the counterpublic it helped to create. Dawud reflects that

> [o]ne of the objectives of the book wasn't just to make a comic book to make people laugh. We always took it seriously what we were doing in terms of creating something that instills pride and something the readers can look to and be inspired and influenced and to influence somebody to that degree. [. . .] It makes me think back to when we first showed Guy, we told him, "it's going to have an impact. This is going to inspire other entrepreneurs to come out with other black comics. It's going to create this new realm of entertainment of Black superheroes." And this is what we were saying back in '89 about stuff that would happen in the 2000s and the late 90s.

The impact Dawud anticipated was purposeful but took on an emotional depth that he had no way of foreseeing. Between his soul-inspired artwork and Guy's clever writing, the Sims brothers drew on the tools they had to create a message they believed. For all of the aspects of *Brotherman* that resonated among members of the counterpublic—some were intentional, some unintentional—but the collective identity of the counterpublic found its way into *Brotherman*, where it lives today. In the next section, I will discuss how Guy and Dawud were able to create

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[26] Aired during the summer of 1990. Shared through the *Brotherman* YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEqAwZLrMQs>.
[27] Published October 13, 1991. "Drawing a New Crowd: Hip! Hop! Pow! The New Black Superheroes," < http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-1089757.html>.

Brotherman and Big City Comics through a combination of artistic tools and a "first of its kind"

family business model.

6.5 Tools/Divisions of Labor: Issues of Theory and Practice

To create the message of *Brotherman* it took three brothers, clever writing, unique artwork, and

the legacy of an entire family. The tools that allowed the message to be received and circulated

among the Black comix counterpublic included unconventional narrative tropes, unique artwork

inspired by the urban aesthetic, and a family owned and operated independent company that

itself was itself a message to the counterpublic.

Narrative Elements

The narrative and the visual tools combined allowed Guy to created a timeless story set in a very

real place, , "a neighborhood-based place called Big City." Guy imagines, "one day you're in

Phoenix Hills, then you're in Trap, then you're in Mount Breezy. It gives us the opportunity to

explore a different people of a different class. I always feel like I'm not bound." The comic

allows Guy and Dawud to follow some typical comics conventions, including a character,

Antonio Valor, who, like many of us, observes community-based issues and, perhaps unlike

many of us, finds the power to fight back through *Brotherman*.

And the city itself becomes a character in *Brotherman*. Villains like Block abuse it and

manipulate it to create chaos for their own personal gain. The city is not only a character, but it

is a dynamic character, one that has grown and evolved throughout the course of the comic.

Setting: Big City

Dawud shared with me why the creation of the "maxtropolitan" megalith of Big City was and

continues to be a point of pride for him and his brothers. Guy argues that "[t]o this day, I don't

know of Gotham City or Metropolis, or any of those fictitious cities in the comic books to have

neighborhoods like [Big City]. In the first issue Melody Rich asked a cab driver to drop her off at

457th and Double A Avenue. Most cities like New York and LA would go up to like 200-

something and by that time you're out of the city limits" (Anyabwile). While the first issue gave

readers a peek into the size of the city, Dawud and Guy still conceived of it as a setting, not a character. Now, they say, things have changed. For example, in the first issue, a transition tells readers, "Meanwhile across town," but Dawud says, they "would never do that in the comic now. Everything is described as huge, immense, or like a real place. 'Meanwhile, across town,' is a generic way that a lot of comic books would make that statement. But now we would just pull into Grand Avenue and 550th street and then we'll go down to Measly Park and then take a stroll over to Central 440th. I see the city now. It actually evolved in the book" (Anyabwile).

Figure 6.7 Big City from *Brotherman: Revelation*. Pencil art by Dawud Anyabwile. Color by Brian McGee. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Secondly, what makes Big City unique is the absence of race and issues related to racial tensions. When the Sims brothers decided to create a world in Big City, they didn't want conflicts to revolve around issues of race, so they removed race entirely. Everyone in Big City is Black. Instead, the main message is about urban community building, about neighborhood relations, and issues of socioeconomic status, education, the wealth gap, and civic power. For example, tensions between Melody and Tony emerge because of her preference for prestige and his affinity for down-in-the-trenches hard work.

Point of View: Hip Hop Stylization

While the comics are written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the comics employ

a very specific point of view that allowed it to reach readers. The writing itself merged genres of

classic literature with an urban setting. The illustrations are more like individual pieces of

artwork informed by a loose style and graffiti aesthetic. The city itself was retro industrial or

"steampunk" based on hip hop cultures of the 1980s and 1990s. Across the writing, the artwork,

and the embodied style of the setting, *Brotherman* was acclaimed for its unconventional

aesthetic.

In terms of the writing, Guy was able to create unique parallels between the urban goings

on in Big City and the tales of literary classics. The plots of issues #3, #4, and #5 that featured

Block and the Twin Terrors feature a life-imitating-art scenario in which Block sees the film, "All

Hail the King" and indulges in his fantasy of power over Big City by using a government petition

to remove the police force from Phoenix Hills. Throughout the scheme and its execution, the

story of Block parallels the story of the King in the fictitious film. This merging of Shakespearean

writing and urban setting was a unique combination at the beginning of the 1990s. Dawud

recalls that the storyline emerged because "Guy used to write a lot of Shakespearean-type

writings way back in the 80s. He used to mix Shakespearean writing with some urban writing

and that was unique at the time. I have seen it *since* our book. I've seen it in mass media now,

but *at the time* nobody was doing that" (Anyabwile). The page below, from *Brotherman #3*,

shows how the stories of the King and Block were threaded throughout the plot as Block seeks to

incite chaos with the help of the Twinz.

Figure 6.8 From *Brotherman* Issue #3: "Ya'll Hail the King." Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Similarly, at the time, few artists were employing the techniques that Dawud used to create the unique look of *Brotherman*. Initially, Dawud—who had never produced a comic before—attempted to create a comic via more traditional comics composing methods that included rulers and brush pens. Dawud hated rulers and couldn't quite grasp the science of the brush pen. He quickly abandoned the old tools and developed his own approach "instead of drawing from Marvel and drawing from how everybody else does. I think you can learn by studying other styles. But, at a certain point, you can't lose yourself in your search for style" (Anyabwile). Dawud traded his jars of India Ink for sheets of Zip-a-Tone, shading films that allowed him to create dark areas, shadows, and visual emphases in ways rarely employed in American popular comics. The textures offered by Zip-a-Tone allowed Dawud to create dynamic, multi-dimensional scenes that were well suited for the gritty residents, cramped streets, and dark corners of Big City. The scene below features at least four or five different shading films used to create this textured depth effect in the Twinz' jeans, muscular definition on the Twinz and Antonio, the wall graffiti, the bricked wall behind the court, and shadows on the street.

Figure 6.9 *Brotherman* Issue #4. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Before drawing *Brotherman*, Dawud had been developing his drawing style over several decades of artistic practice. Inspired by comics artists of *MAD Magazine* (Mark Drucker, Jack Davis, and Sam Viviano), Dawud focused on figure and gesture drawing in high school and college in order to develop his own personal style, a style he describes as loose. Dawud decided that the style was perfect for *Brotherman* because of how its messy aesthetic contrasted the refined lines of The Big Two. Fans were drawn to the style as well. In anticipation of the full-length graphic novel, fans of *Brotherman* have been curious about the artwork and specifically in any changes that might affect the overall aesthetic and grit of the comics: "A lot of our fans they like [the loose style] 'cause they said, 'I like seeing your rough pencil usage under it. [. . .] Keep it like that when you do the graphic novel. Don't get too refined and forget how you used to do it.' I said, 'Trust me; I won't forget'" (Anyabwile).

The Process: Family Owned and Operated

From the writing to the artwork, *Brotherman* is a creation of the Sims brothers that both reflected their past and present family history and addressed an alternative reality that inspired the future of Black comix. By drawing upon this family history, the Sims brothers were able to create dynamic and realistic characters in an imagined world but their familial bond is what allowed them to continue their success despite decades of hiatus.

The business management was family owned and it operated around a particularly unique family bond. Following the production of #10, their mother passed away; during the writing of issue #11, their father passed away. The family's coming together in the efforts of Big City Comics would be their last collective collaboration as a family unit. For these reasons, Dawud and Guy saw the comic as successful. They became motivated when fan testimonials rolled in between issues and kept writing and drawing until the pain of their family's loss became too heavy. Now, decades later, they continue to receive praise from their readers, old and new. And their readers define the success of *Brotherman* in much broader and more spectacular terms, according to Dawud.

> [W]hat's made *Brotherman* stand outside of a lot of the other books was our process and
> how we did it. Some of the things that probably I could only really credit to that time of
> the original book. The unification of the family at the time and how we all collectively
> moved on this. And, I think the experience of what *Brotherman* came out of and what it
> represented for a segment of the people in the United States who really are not
> celebrated in this medium. And this is not what we called it, but people looked at it as
> "the first real Black comic book." And I knew there were other Black comic books so I
> would always have to put it in a different perspective. This is the first comic of its kind
> that was family owned and operated and had this level of success and a Black hero in its
> own title set in a fictitious world of all Black characters. It kind of stands alone in that.
> It's in its own category.

On the first day of the *Brotherman* release, during the Black Expo in 1990, Dawud and Jason
anticipated the comic's success to mean booming business for the t-shirt shop. As Dawud
recalls, very few t-shirts were airbrushed that weekend. The original print run of 10,000 books
led to multiple re-prints that year. With each successive print, the initial print size grew. First it
was 10,000, then 20,000, and then 30,000. Dawud reminds readers that this success all came
from an unanticipated reception at the Black Expo from a comic that was meant to sell t-shirts.
Without any previous marketing or publicity, *Brotherman* grew exponentially in popularity and
its circulation among media outlets and local shops and stores aided in its success. Dawud still
speaks about the success, reminding readers,

> And this was us coming in cold! We hadn't established our name, figured out how we're
> going to distribute the books or anything. We were really utilizing comic book
> distributors, but at the same time we were bypassing them by going directly to Black
> bookstores and we also had individuals on the street who were getting them into barber
> shops, places where a lot of African-Americans wouldn't normally frequent to go buy a
> comic book. [Our book] was showing other people that route and a lot of other

entrepreneurs came up doing the same thing and following the blueprint that we were

laying.

The Sims' unconventional marketing process speaks to the comic, the company, and the family.

The success that they saw was, as Dawud reminds us, relatively unrestricted. Every single issue

received multiple print orders—every issue except #11. Dawud pushed to publish issue #11

shortly after the death of their father. After that, Jason, Guy, and Dawud decided to put Big City

Comics on hold. Dawud reflects upon the success of the comic, its abrupt end, and the promise

of hope that *Brotherman: Revelation* holds for him, for Guy, and for the fans.

We were up to 750,000 books; we'd have hit a million. It started escalating. The books

were moving faster and faster. It didn't stop because it fell off. You see, it kept

accelerating and we just stopped. That's why the re-launch is so big to a lot of the fans;

someone even said, "Man, it's like a dream to me that ya'll are bringing it back!"

(Anyabwile).

With the success of *Brotherman* and the

suspended salute of the Black comix

counterpublic, Dawud and Guy are feeling the

pressure. *Brotherman: Revelations* already has

an air of anticipation wafting around it.

6.6 Case Conclusions

Brotherman is a Dictator of Discipline, which, as

the Sims brothers created him, means he is a

character who "challenges people to choose the

right path. Most people think negatively when

they hear dictator. How about *dictator* as *the one*

delivering the message of discipline?" (Sims).
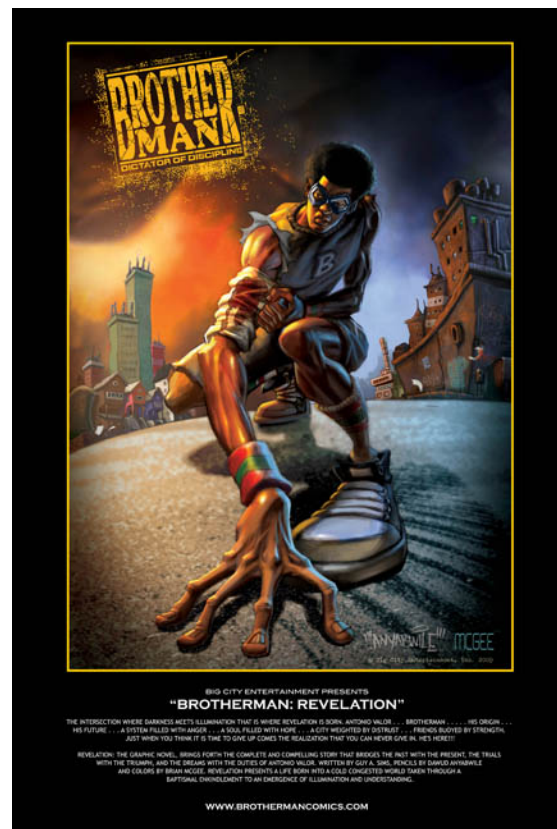
Figure 6.10 *Brotherman: Revelation*. Pencil art by Dawud Anyabwile. Color by Brian McGee. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims.

Brotherman comics provide a rare genre of comics. The Black superhero comic was told through masterful storytelling, unique aesthetics, and an unapologetic approach regarding their all Black mythological tale. *Brotherman* would serve to form a universal argument about community building and would advance the Black comix counterpublic movement for generations. Brotherman is a reflection of the ways in which personal and social histories as well as private and public places can come together to create a rhetoric that reverberates through its audience. This combination of personal history for the Sims brothers and the public nature of urban community issues for Americans was just the right balance to contribute to a discourse around which the Black comix counterpublic rallied and continues to rally in anticipation of the next *Brotherman* installation.

Considering the *Brotherman* texts in terms of this counterpublic allows not only for a better understanding of the authors who composed them and the audience that took them up, but it also allows for a consideration of how Warner's definition of publics and counterpublics can shed light on the temporality of the texts' circulation. If you recall, two of the defining characteristics of a public or counterpublic include "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (90) and historical acts "according to the temporality of their circulation" (96). Timely circulation is essential in the evocation and identification of a public or counterpublic. I wonder, Without the promise of this new graphic novel text, to what extent would *Brotherman* continue to circulate among the Black comix counterpublic? This inquiry acknowledges that multiple texts and their circulation constitute a public; the Black comix counterpublic will persist. The question, in this case, is informed by the understanding of *Brotherman* as a historically significant text, but one that—without the timely circulation of additional texts—will lose its ability to hail the Black comix counterpublic to attention. Perhaps much more is riding on the release of *Brotherman: Revelation* than the creators know. And only time will tell if *Brotherman*, as a text, continues to inform the Black comix counterpublic or fade in influence to be recalled as only historically significant in the counterpublic's formation.

Chapter 7:
Thoughts In Closing

7.1 Addressing Research Questions: Considerations and Implications

In order to conclude this study in terms of the arguments it articulates regarding the multimodal

collaborative composing processes of these three teams, I recall the research questions:

R1. How do artist and writer negotiate the composition of their particular comics genre, including the constraints and affordances of the genre, and make rhetorical decisions during the process?

R2. In what ways is collaborative writing complicated by the medium of the imagetext, by the negotiation of print and image on the comics page?

R3. In what ways do writers and artists impose the goals of larger activity systems on the smaller collaborative system of the comics composing team?

R4. How do these writer/artist teams work to negotiate the contradictions that arise within a confluence of activity systems?

The value of this study to the field of writing studies is communicated through a better

understanding of multimodal collaborations as intensely complex and deeply unique activity

systems. The three cases presented in this research describe multimodal collaborations that are

not otherwise engaged in much of the field's writing process or collaborative writing literature.

In the following section, as I recall each research question, I will first articulate some

formative findings from each case study. I will then attempt to address the research question by

considering the cases in a more summative manner in order to communicate the implications of

this study for writing process and collaborative writing research.

R1. How do artist and writer negotiate the composition of their particular comics genre, including the constraints and affordances of its genre, and make rhetorical decisions during the process?

In terms of *Understanding Rhetoric*, the new genre perplexed the collaborators. Where the

editors, Leasa and Carolyn, knew the genre of a Rhetoric quite intimately, they were less familiar

with how that genre might converge with the medium of comics—a process that resulted in a

uprooting of the traditional publishing process. Overall, the editors were surprisingly less

tolerant of content changes to the genre itself than they were of formal changes in the medium—

such as the initial decision to produce a comic and market it to writing teachers. Knowing that

their audience would expect certain subject matter to be covered in the textbook, Leasa and

Carolyn insisted on including, for example, "ReFrame" sections that would conclude each

chapter with content review and assignment suggestions. On the other hand, the publishers

allowed significant experimentation within the comic, including a section on authors' identities

in which Liz and Jonathan address readers in an intimate manner regarding the ways in which

their identities influence how they write.

In the Cheo comics, both Carlos Evia and Nick Thorkelson were committed to and

passionate about producing an end product that would reach the target audience and address its

needs for safety education. However, they both came to the project with very different

motivations. Where Nick saw the comics as a way to reach undocumented workers for the

purpose of larger social change initiatives, Carlos read the comic through its genre of the

tutorial, which is intended not for broad organizational changes in behavior, but individual

safety education and decision-making. Overall, the tutorial genre allowed these contradictory

motivations to merge through the narrative and humor of the tutorial genre made comic.

In *Brotherman*, it is clear that the Sims brothers have an immense amount of respect for

one another. Due to their upbringing, they have numerous shared values and principles. They

both, for example, wanted to publish a comic that was different than any other comic out at the

time; they were not penned in by convention, but they did draw on conventions to some extent

to create the story of an American superhero. The brothers had a shared understanding that

Brotherman would be different. And they still do. Their current work on the graphic novel,

Brotherman: Revelation, will draw heavily on some of the same values they put into the initial

series. Dawud, for example, is committed to keeping his artwork loose like fans like it, and Guy

is continuing to inform his writing through life experience; in the prequel, Antonio goes to

Strivers University and experiences life on- and off-campus.

Overall, while these results in no way lend themselves to generalizable findings, it is

interesting to learn that for each case to be successful, a firm foundation of genre had to be laid.

Whether composing a textbook Rhetoric, a safety tutorial, or a superhero comic book, the

process of composing is only strengthened by a collaborative agreement of the text's genre—even

if, as in the case of *Understanding Rhetoric*, they each call it something different. In the case of

Brotherman, an acknowledgement of the superhero genre tradition led to an outright challenge

of it; genres can also be defined by negation.

R2.In what ways is collaborative writing complicated by the medium of the imagetext, by the negotiation of print and image on the comics page?

In *Understanding Rhetoric*, the comics medium re-informed the entire publication and

production processes. To negotiate the process' contradictions, the artists became the experts in

terms of shaping the stages of the process appropriate for activity from the editors and writers

despite their lack of expertise in composition studies or composition textbook publishing. In

terms of the material production of the textbook, the material constraints of the medium weren't

really constraints at all.. Aside from initial hesitations to allow bleeds (where color extends to

the page's end) or action outside of the panel lines and in the gutters, the production went

largely unchallenged.

In the Cheo comics, there was an interesting reversal in terms of how writer and artist

approached the medium's affordances and constraints. In *Understanding Rhetoric*, for

example, the artists would comment on the amount of text Liz and Jonathan wanted to include

in each panel. This comment from artists is typical; it is not unlikely that a writer might rely

more heavily on text, even in a comic. It took Liz and Jonathan some time to limit their textual

reliance and allow the image to take on some of the rhetorical weight. But, in the case of the

Cheo comics, it was Nick who would include—what Carlos considered—too much text for their

audience. Nick's cartoons are typically written for a more political rhetorical purpose and a more educated and literate audience. The Cheo comics were for a different audience, an audience with lower language proficiency and a wide range of literacy ability. Carlos emphasized that if the text was lost on the audience, the image would make little sense and might actually misinform a reader in terms of safety best practices.

In *Brotherman*, Dawud and Guy engaged in negotiations beforehand. To some extent they share a common vision for the comic yet, to some extent, Guy is happy to leave creative control to Dawud. The two brothers do bring very different literacies to the collaboration. Guy, identifies as a writer—and *not* a comics writer. because of this, Guy verbally separated himself from the comic throughout the interviews. He referred to it often as "Dawud's thing" and at one point confessed that if Dawud wanted to call it quits, he wouldn't be upset. For Guy, the comics medium doesn't define the project; the collaboration with his brother is what's most important to him. Dawud, however, is the artist and is very committed to the comics form and to the shaping of his personal loose style and urban retro industrial aesthetic. While initial creative brainstorming comes from both brothers, it became evident early on in my interviews that the act of executing concepts in the comics form is inevitably in Dawud's hands.

Overall, the most fascinating pattern that emerged across case studies is the ways in which collaborates struggled to engage a traditional feedback loop due to media constriants. Technologically, we have developed digital means of commenting and editing prose text and have been using these tools for some time: in-line edits in word processing software, Track Changes, marginalia comments or sticky notes, etc. To comment on an imagetext, however, is a different story. Each case struggled to find tools for eliciting and providing feedback on the comic's pages. *Understanding Rhetoric* engaged PDF commenting software, Carlos broke down his comments on the Cheo comics to page, panel, and word balloon levels, and Guy and Dawud—since they are still in the early drafting stages of the graphic novel—tend to send emails with broad comments that speak to action across several pages. There is a need for commenting

software that would allow quality feedback during the various stages of multimodal writing

processes, particularly those who work from a distance and tend to share their work

electronically.

R3. In what ways do writers and artists impose the goals of larger activity systems on the smaller collaborative system of the comics composing team?

In *Understanding Rhetoric*, Bedford's typical publication process served as a template for the

collaboration but became a source of contradictions. Even Jonathan and Liz, who are

accustomed to extended periods of feedback and revision for their academic writing, were

astounded at how many stages of drafts their manuscript underwent in order to prepare the

manuscripts before the pencil stage. After painstaking and fine-toothed commentary on the

scripts, the pencils were drawn up and feedback could be limited to textual and visual nuance.

Zander and Kevin were instrumental in helping the collaboration to adapt the traditional

Bedford publishing process to a new medium. Though it took some time, the editors and writers

learned when it was time to comment and when it was too late to make changes to the

storyboard or the artwork.

With Cheo, the comics themselves were a part of a much larger research project of which

the comics were the low-tech intervention portion—meaning they only required paper to

distribute as opposed to videos and applications that require hardware. Maria and Carlos were

always looking beyond the comics series itself, as was Nick, but again, with very different visions

for intervention and impact. Maria and Carlos were no sooner testing the comics with workers

in Lowell before they were moving forward in the development of videos and web-based training

applications. Their overall goal was to identify the most effective medium for safety training

materials. Nick, on the other hand, is focused on his community within the Boston-

metropolitan area—and perhaps, more broadly, on a national scale. He stays up-to-date on

economic policies and workplace regulations that affect both documented and undocumented

workers in Boston's working class. Nick wants the Cheo comics to be seen, read, and shared. He wants the valuable information contained amidst Cheo's antics to reach the workers and help them to stay safe and return to their families at the end of the day. Nick is experienced in community organizing and he itches to distribute the comics widely for larger impact. But, as he confessed in our interview, it's not his project. He was just brought on as the artist. So he respects the goals of Maria and Carlos and is happy to be part of the collaboration for what his art can bring to the table. Still, traces of Nick's ongoing work with workers' rights leaves traces in the language and nuance of the Cheo comics.

In many ways, the *Brotherman* activity system is informed by the Sims family dynamic of their home in Philadelphia. There is an encouragement to be creative and unique; certainly the brothers enjoy pushing genre conventions for their audience. There is a pride in being clever and witty; the tongue-in-cheek humor and the parody of the superhero genre is evident here. Within the comic's pages, there is also a climate of "Do it yourself;" As Leonard Valor, Antonio's father, wanted to build a school that was informed by his own philosophy of education, Dawud's father told him, if you want a Black comic, you'll have to draw it yourself. The composing process of the *Brotherman* activity system change with the wind. Weeks could go by without correspondence and then Dawud will send a sketch and Guy will spark an idea and they'll be off for days. Then quiet again. So, to say that the *Brotherman* activity system is informed by the Sims family, is to specify the ways in which the internal tools—the values, the assumptions, the shared goals—inform the objective to write a comic that is different from anything else. Activity in other systems—Guy in higher education administration and Dawud in corporate art direction—undeniably impacts the work on *Brotherman: Revelation* because they assume priority over this elective collaborative project.

The subjects within these various multimodal collaborations are also subjects of other activity systems (textbook publishing; academics; family; professional organizations;

classrooms; collegiate administration; public organizing; etc.). Membership and activity within a

system will inform/be informed by membership and activity within another system. Among

these cases—the identites they bring, the philosophies that motivate their work, or the tools they

call on when they get stuck—there is undeniable influence of other professional, academic,

cultural, social, and familial activity systems. As our field continues to engage studies of

multimodal collaboration—whether through a lens of activity theory or others—researchers

must consider the ways in which authors' identities inform/are informed by the other acts of

composing collaboratively and the ways in which this influences the composing process itself.

R4. How do these writer/artist teams work to negotiate the contradictions that arise within a confluence of activity systems?

Because the *Understanding Rhetoric* activity system was so informed by Bedford's traditional

textbook publication process activity system, negotiations of contradiction would come in the

form of metagenres that standardized the activity within the system. For such a large-scale

publisher, no other solution would have allowed such a large collaboration to address the needs

of the entire activity system. When the initially proposed stages broke down, Kevin and Zander

produced a checklist to help editors, copy editors, writers, and production team members to

focus their comments appropriately for the stage. The metagenre of a checklist is perhaps

familiar to all of us. In large projects we draft a task list or jot a quick To Do list before we start

our day. But for *Understanding Rhetoric*, the collaborators collectively identified the creation of

the checklist as a turning point in the process, which allowed them to be more efficient in

producing the remaining chapters. *Understanding Rhetoric* called upon external tool-mediated

action to reconstruct their process.

    In the Cheo comics, Maria and Carlos sought the input of the workers from the

beginning of the project. Their consideration of participatory design informed not only the

comics, but also the ways in which they approached the larger project. In one correspondence

between Carlos and Maria, in which they were articulating their project outline, they reiterated

the importance of considering diversity within Hispanics through "cultural values, norms;

intergenerational issues/age; language/literacy levels; occupational background; country of

origin; years living in the USA; and state of residence/safety regulations" (Brunette and Evia,

"Project Outline"). In many cases, that meant including coming at regulations from two different

perspectives, demonstrated in this email response from Carlos that addresses her question of

measurement standards: "I think we need them both [Imperial and metric]. Dominican/Puerto

Rican workers would not get metric, and Mexican/Colombian and other workers would not get

inches at all" (Evia "Re: translation"). When faced with a contradiction, Maria and Carlos

returned to the needs of the workers in order to shape negotiations. The Cheo comics

collaborators focused their negotiations on the outcome of worker safety and the objective of

educating the worker himself.

In *Brotherman*, it could be said that the largest contradiction has yet to be negotiated. As

of my interviews with Guy and Dawud, the graphic novel is still far from complete. The time

dedicated to the project is minimal by mere life's necessity. Dawud and Guy are professionals

with families; despite their passion for the subject and their enjoyment in collaborating with

family, the comic takes the back burner for both of them. Based on this finding, perhaps it could

be said that some contradictions simply persist within an activity system. The brothers' ability to

negotiate the contradiction of time will only be realized with the production of the product itself;

otherwise, an activity system that does not produce an outcome cannot be considered successful.

Dawud and Guy's process is largely informed by internal tool-mediated action that indirectly

drives their motivation to create a comic about a family's values that are much like their own.

Overall, negotiating contradictions within the activity system requires cooperation. In

her study of the disciplinary and programmatic motives that inform first-year composition

classrooms and administration, Elizabeth Wardle concluded that negotiation itself is a

collaborative, cooperative activity. One subject alone cannot address a contradiction within the

system but it is within the contradictions that the dynamic nature of the activity system is born.

Activity systems theory is useful for studying collaborative activity, whether at the large scale

like the professional textbook publishing process behind *Understanding Rhetoric*, or the

familial bond between two brothers that bears small-scale collaboration but large-scale impact.

It is in studying the contradictions that an understanding of the collaboration can even begin to

form for the researcher. Activity theory has proven effective in this study and, I imagine, would

be quite effective in future qualitative studies of multimodal collaborative composing,

particularly as external/internal tool mediated action contributes to these negotiations.

Among these case-based findings regarding collaborative multimodal composing

processes, exist larger implications for the fields of writing studies and comics studies.

7.2 Implications for Writing Process Research

Composing process scholarship has a rich tradition in the field of composition and indeed was

the first subject of widespread research that inevitably allowed the field to legitimize into its own

academic disipline. Pioneering scholars like Janet Emig, Sondra Perl, and Linda Flower & John

Hayes explored the ways in which student writing can be studied and composition pedagogy can

be improved by examining students' actual writing practices. Early, very prescriptive, theories

were formed under what came to be known as "stage theory" of composing (pre-writing, writing,

and rewriting). From this, our field gained the valuable realization that there is not *the*

composing process, but that each student has *their own* composing process (Perl) and that

composing does not occur in stages, but is a rather recursive process unique to each individual

(Emig, Flower and Hayes). In fact, since Emig's study on "The Composing Processes of Twelfth

Graders," we still maintain that understanding writing as a process that will help students

improve their writing (NCTE "Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing"). But, at the time of these

studies, writing studies as a field was working with a definition of writing that did not yet

include visual rhetoric, let alone multimodality. Studies like this one, which engage composing

processes that include both verbal and visual elements, are certainly missing from the field's body of knowledge.

The most compelling finding from this study of multimodal collaboration is a further complication of our understanding of writing processes as recursive. Comics composing is a significantly less fluid and recursive process, much less so than text-based composing—with which most of us are more familiar. Once the layout stage is initiated in the comics composing process, global feedback is significantly limited; there is no easy way to address desired changes in narrative, argument focus and organization, or visual metaphors of the concepts being explained without making significant changes to page layout, page order, and the larger storyboard itself. Since the 1980s, our field's understanding of "the writing process" has evolved through the research of Janet Emig, Linda Flower and John Hayes, and Sondra Perl. Future inquiries of multimodal and collaborative composing processes should engage these issues of recursivity as they offer new ways of modeling composing processes.

7.3 Implications for Collaborative Writing Research

Earlier studies of collaborative composing (Ede and Lunsford, Allen, Mirel et al.) were only beginning to consider the importance of identity dynamics in the collaboration itself and upon the text produced. As a further extension of this early work, this study complicates theories of collaborative composing by examining how individuals collaborate to produce multimodal text.

In his study of copywriters and artists in an advertising firm, Cross was able to sit in on brainstorming sessions and record collaboration and negotiation as it occurred. His data was rich with comments which offered concepts, contributed to them, evaluated them, and challenged them (Cross 44). In describing his methods, Cross also addresses issues of methodology, explaining why being present during the collaborative process is so crucial to the researcher. Informed by ethnographic methodology, Cross asserts that previous studies were flawed because they either weren't studying the process as it organically occurred, or their interviews were taken after the fact, saying,

> It is particularly important that the researcher be on-site because composing is social action and is shaped by its culture: the code of acceptable behavior shared by members of a society. Because composing is a sequence of choices, researchers need to understand how both industry and organizational cultures (and the "structure of authority" [Faigley] that support them) can influence verbal-visual group-writing processes, products, and the reception of those products (7).

In addition to observing the process as it occurs, Cross discusses the ethnographer's goal of writing thick description, "which strives to convey the meaning of the recorded act within the social context in which it occurred" (9).

Cross' study was incredibly informative for me as I began formulating research questions about the collaborative multimodal composing processes of comics authors. There were many ways in which Cross' study forced me to ask questions about the plan I was drafting for my own study, especially regarding issues of synchronous collaboration in a shared space vs. asynchronous collaboration across distance.[28] And, while Cross' study benefits from both the early scholarship of collaborative writing as well as the theoretical considerations that can accompany a longer study, the nature of his study did not ask some of the questions which I consider important to a study of visual/verbal collaboration: namely, questions surrounding differences in literacy skills, implications of how writers/artists identify their roles within the collaboration, and the ways in which the genre of the text being produced influences the composing process.

By examining author identity in its analysis, this study offers our field additional ways of perceiving relationships among collaborators. Additionally, this study confirms that shared understandings of genre, medium, and audience among collaborators can strengthen the collaboration, inform negotiations of activity, and lead to successful objects and outcomes for the system as a whole.

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[28] See the "Limitations" section which follows.

7.4 Limitations

The *Brotherman* case became an opportunity to examine a limitation in data collection

methods. Where the other two cases were informed by interview data, collaborative

documentation, and the texts themselves, my analysis of *Brotherman* relied heavily on interview

data alone. Methodologically, interviews can give researchers glimpses into how they make

meaning of collaborative experiences.

For example, despite the fact that collaborations consist of dynamic individuals,

interview data allows a better understanding of how these individuals come together through

identified roles and divisions of labor. In *Understanding Rhetoric*, the collaboration functioned

through the collective literacies of a large number of people: editors, writers, artists, copy

editors, production managers, printers, etc. In the Cheo comics, three well-educated individuals

collaborated through script writing, project proposals, outlines, and sketches. In *Brotherman*,

clearly defined roles have been sustained over decades of collaboration between a writer and an

artist.

Interview data can also provide rich understandings of how participants feel about their

experiences, particularly the act of collaborating with others. Across these three cases, a very

distinct theme emerged when it came time to consider how writers and artists come together to

collaborate: mutual respect. In *Understanding Rhetoric*, the editors and writers praised the

artistic ability of the artists. The artists were pleased to be involved with academic authors and

textbook publishers who personally liked comics and respected the medium's rhetorical

prowess. In *Brotherman*, Guy and Dawud consistently reminded me that *Brotherman* was a

collective family affair. For, as often as a participant would use the subject, "I," she would use

"we" three times over. I'm not sure if underlying assumptions informed my data collection or if I

just happened to select three very successful activity systems for this study, but I am confident

that these cases—which, according to them, resulted in the successful completion of an object—

demonstrate that each layer of the activity system must be invested in the collaboration in order for it to be successful.

But, interview data alone cannot allow a researcher to describe a collaboration in complete terms. For this reason, a nuanced understanding of the collaborative multimodal process of *Brotherman* was not unachievable. I recall previous research on writing processes and multimodal collaboration to place this limitation in discussion with other work.

Early writing process research engaged inquiries of writing processes using various research methods. Janet Emig's early work employed narrative description of middle school students as they wrote. Linda Flowers and John Hayes engaged in think-aloud protocols in an attempt to capture writing as it occurred. Sondra Perl pushed beyond narrative descriptions of process and toward a complex textual coding method to identify the rhetorical moves of student writers. While methodologically, writing process research has shifted toward more sound practices, the field's understanding of composing processes makes naive assumptions and limits the scope of writing process research to exclude collaborations that occur at a distance. While previous workplace studies, like Cross', allowed researchers to be present in a physical space with collaborators, many collaborations—like those involved in this study—are fundamentally different.

The comics authors collaborating on their respective texts rarely share a physical space and if they do, it is the exception, not the rule. The collaborators in *Understanding Rhetoric* span the United States, with the publisher's offices in New York and Boston, and writers Liz and Jonathan in southern California. This is just one example of the kinds of collaborative work being done asynchronously and across great distance. Writing studies, as a field, needs to engage additional research on the multimodal collaborative composing process and in doing so, should explore methodological opportunities for when the researcher can't "be there" because there is no "there." In our field, as in many, our work often takes the form of asynchronous, distance collaboration. Diana George (Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia) and John Trimbur

(Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts) edit a textbook every few years and often work at a distance until they converge in Boston with the publisher for finalization. Andrea Lunsford (Stanford University, Palo Alto, California) and Lisa Ede (Oregon State, Corvallis, Orgeon), who often come to mind as frequent collaborators, employ a similar approach when co-authoring scholarship. Katy Powell (Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia) and Pam Takayoshi (Kent State, Kent, Ohio) are currently editing an anthology on socially progressive research methods with dozens of contributors from across the country (Gail Hawisher, University of Illinois, Normal, Illinois; Cindy Selfe, Ohio State, Columbus, Ohio; Stuart Blythe, Michigan State, East Lansing, Michigan; and many more). Collaborations of this nature are common and it is clear that we cannot and do not allow geographic confines to limit the types of work we can do. The work of this study acknowledges the limitations of geographic distance, and employed three types of data collection to overcome them including analysis of interviews, collaborative documentation, and the texts.

Because of technological advantages, documents can be quickly shared via communication media among collaborators. These documents (emails, brainstorming concepts, layouts, outlines, drafts, comments, etc.) which record moments of the collaborative process will be an essential resource for data collection to examine when conflict arose and how they and other obstacles were negotiated. An additional resource was the comic text itself. The final product—available except in the case of *Brotherman: Revelation*—allowed me to identify which decisions were inevitably made and to explore the reasons for these decisions in greater detail during interviews. The combined methods approach of conducting interviews, collecting documents, and examining the final text helped me to triangulate my findings to achieve methodologically sound conclusions.

Additional research into collaborative writing, particularly of multimodal texts, may benefit from further methodological exploration to move beyond narrative description and get closer to rich, empirical descriptions of collaborative composing processes.

7.5 Areas for Further Study

Outside of my initial research questions, this study's data has also yielded some emergent themes that, while outside of the scope of this dissertation, are certainly worth pursuing in writing and comics studies beyond questions of writing process research and theories of collaborative writing.

The Influence of MAD Magazine

A theme which emerged quite organically came out of a question I asked participants regarding their influences—either reading, writing, drawing, or otherwise. Over and over again, I continued to hear *MAD Magazine* listed among the most influential comics texts for participants; Liz Losh identified with *MAD*'s punk aesthetic; Carolyn Lengel sought the magazine's counterculture messages; Nick recalls *MAD* as the keystone that led him and his colleagues to the underground comix aesthetic and message; Dawud admired the artwork of career *MAD* cartoonists; and Carlos giggles as he remembers the silliness of *MAD*'s parodic and satiric comics, a humor that inspired many Mexican comics. As diverse a publication as *MAD Magazine* was, I would be interested to study the ways in which the magazine informed/was informed by the comix movement of the 1960s and 1970s even beyond the borders of the United States.

Multimodal Literacy Research

One aspect of this project—that I regret not being able to pursue in the scope of this study—is the aspect of multimodal literacy education and practice. It was my goal to be able to more deeply delve into the literacy practices of my participants in order to intimately understand the ways in which they contributed and lacked literacies within the activity system. While presenting this research, for example, I received a question from a first-year writing professor who asked—and I'm paraphrasing here—"Do you think assigning *Understanding Rhetoric* would help students to become more familiar not only with visual literacy practices but with the textual literacy practices they engage when reading traditional textbooks?" I recalled the ways in which second language instruction can help a student become more familiar with the grammar of their

home language and I realized that transferring between literacy practices might also be a means

of making literacy education more transparent to students who often take textual literacies for

granted. As a field, we understand the need to examine the ways in which engaging multimodal

literacies in the comprehension of multimodal texts can improve students' literate abilities in

comprehending purely alphabetic texts. As *Understanding Rhetoric* is adopted through

classroom practice, there will be opportunities to conduct such a study.

Comics Studies Methodologies

To my knowledge, there is only gain to be had from engaging in methodological pluralism within

the interdisciplinary field of comics studies. Currently, interviews with comics writers and artists

are conducted by journalists or through fan base factions, and inquiries that are important to

writing scholars are rarely touched upon. In order to engage these inquiries in our own research,

we should be seeking out these comics writers and authors through qualitative research that

seeks to describe how multimodal texts are written, read, and circulated among us.

Visual Representation

A compelling aspect of multimodal composition, and comics in particular, includes aspects of

visual representation, particularly human figures. Where issues of genre were addressed in the

analysis of each text of this study, patterns in visual representation were excluded from this

analysis. In many ways, visual representation within textbook genres, safety training tutorials,

and superhero comics can become typified and dynamic—just as primarily textual genres can be

identified through similar patterns in form. Further studies into visual representation may

explore the ways in which certain written genres inform/are informed by visual representations

within comics texts.

7.4 Conclusion

In closing, this study demonstrates how the comics medium itself can be engaged to articulate

complex concepts and arguments to a range of audiences. And yet, the medium continues to be

evaluated based upon deceptions of its simplicity. As readers, comics can be consumed in a

myriad of manners and well-written comics make it look easy. At some point, each of these

participants made the leap from readers of comics to authors of comics, and learned precisely

how difficult engaging visual rhetoric can be in the medium of the comic. Such a pursuit

becomes exponentially more complex and difficult when it is engaged in a multimodal

collaborative composing process. Believe me; they make it look easy.

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Appendix A: List of Figures

Figure 6.7 Big City from *Brotherman: Revelation*. Pencil art by Dawud Anyabwile. Color by Brian McGee. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims. Page 197.

Figure 6.8 From *Brotherman* Issue #3: "Ya'll Hail the King." Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims. Page 200.

Figure 6.9 *Brotherman* Issue #4. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims. Page 202.

Figure 6.10 *Brotherman: Revelation*. Pencil art by Dawud Anyabwile. Color by Brian McGee. Used with permission of Dawud Anyabwile and Guy Sims. Page 204.