

Comics: Cartoons & Graphic Novels from the Inside Out

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*“The humble art of cartooning, at its essence,
amounts to no less than a geometry of the human soul.”*

~ **Giambattista Vico**, *The New Science*

“Comics: Cartoons & Graphic Novels from the Inside Out,” will focus on what Scott McCloud describes as “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or reproduce an aesthetic response in the viewer,” i.e., “comics” and graphic novels. As opposed to simply studying the comics and graphic novels, we will be writing and drawing them, too.

WAIT! Before you run away: know this. I don't care how “good” or “bad” you think you can write or draw! And *you* shouldn't either! I teach art, and I can't draw a straight line or a perfect circle either, and that's not what this is about anyway. [*Hint*: That's why they invented the ruler and the compass.] We'll be exploring how writing *and* drawing support one another as a means of expression.

Consider what painter, cartoonist, bestselling writer, illustrator, playwright, editor, commentator, and teacher Lynda Barry, creator of *Ernie Pook's Comeek*, tells her students:

“A few times each semester I send my students out to draw people from life. I try to let them know that what I'm most interested in is what their hand naturally does while drawing. Sometimes hands have been at it for awhile but others are so new to the game that no particular style of drawing has had a chance to take root. *I know* that if I can just keep them drawing without thinking about it too much, something quite original will appear (almost by itself).

“The trick seems to be this: Consider drawing as a side effect of something else: *a certain state of mind* that comes about when we gaze with >>open attention<<. When we are in the groove, we are not thinking about liking or not liking what is taking shape, and it isn't thinking about us either. Yet something shows up... The practice is to keep our hand in motion and to stay open to the image it is leaving for us: a message-fragment we may not recognize until we have enough of them to understand.

“Liking and not liking can make us blind to *what's there*. In spite of how we feel about it, it is making its way from the unseen to eh visible world, one line after the next, bring with it a kind of aliveness I live for: right here, right now!”

Now compare that to Natalie Goldberg's “rules” for the basic writing exercises from her amazing book, *Writing Down the Bones* (2 million copies and translated into 14 languages):

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1. *Keep your hand moving.* (Don't pause to reread the line you have just written. That's stalling and trying to get control of what you're saying.)
2. *Don't cross out.* (That is editing as you write. Even if you write something you didn't mean to write, leave it.)
3. *Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar.* (Don't even care about staying within the margins and lines on the page.)
4. *Lose control.*
5. *Don't think. Don't get logical.*
6. *Go for the jugular.* (If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.)

Of course, we'll also study comics and graphic novels from historical, aesthetic, social, and literary perspectives, but we'll have done so not simply as consumers, but—at least for this short while—as content producers. It should be a fun and engaging ride.

ⁱ pp. 20-23, *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*, Lynda Barry, Drawn and Quarterly, 2014.