Imagining a Global Visual Rhetorical Tradition
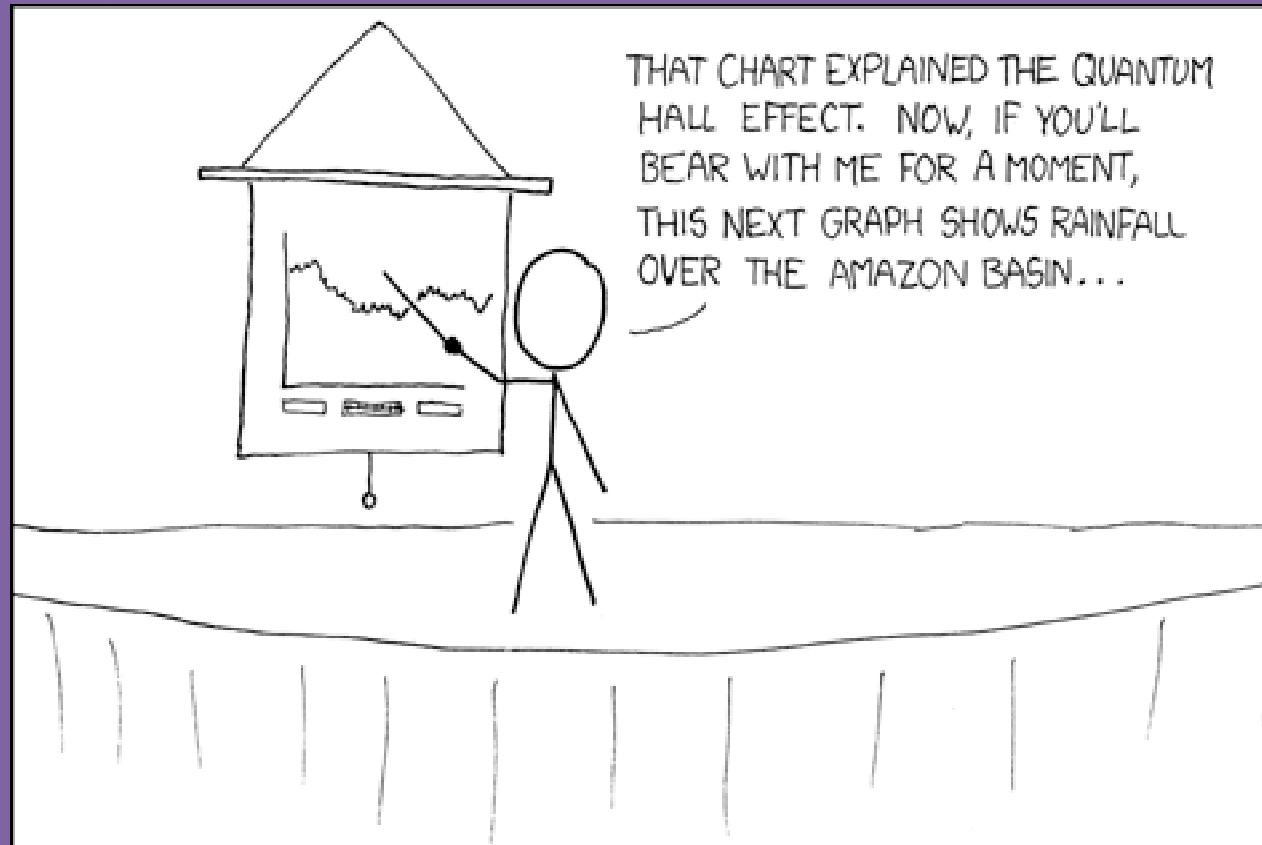
Or, Comics Lessons from Rhetoric Histories

Or, What You Will

I SWEAR THIS IS NOT WHAT I'M DOING…SO BEAR WITH ME

How I situate my work

- Colonial subjectivity
- Native studies, sliding into Chican@ studies
- Rhetoric and composition, visual rhetoric, and literacy studies
- Decolonial methodology— paracolonial work?

Comics Studies and Native Studies?

- Representations of native people in comics?
- Comics produced by indigenous artists?
- Indigenous visual rhetorical traditions via critiques of the history of rhetoric

What is the Rhetorical Tradition?

- Foundational narrative of Rhet/Comp
- Massive anthology required in History of Rhetoric courses
- Field created in 20th century to train English teachers…yet we trace our origins back to Aristotle through this constructed narrative

Critiques of this narrative

- Story leaves out entire literate intellectual traditions
- Not repaired by adding works to "the canon"—stapling Gloria Anzaldúa onto the end of the book does not help
- Multiplicity of rhetorical traditions contributing to writing today
- Codex rhetorics—Baca and Villanueva

Codex Rhetorics

- Intersection of Chicano/a Studies and Native Studies
- Amoxtli, vuh
- In xochitl, in cuicatl
- Tlamantinime
- Parallels to Aristotelian conceptions of rhetoric

Lakota Winter Counts

- Tribal history—Craig Howe and "event-based history"
- Long-form sequential art
- One panel per year
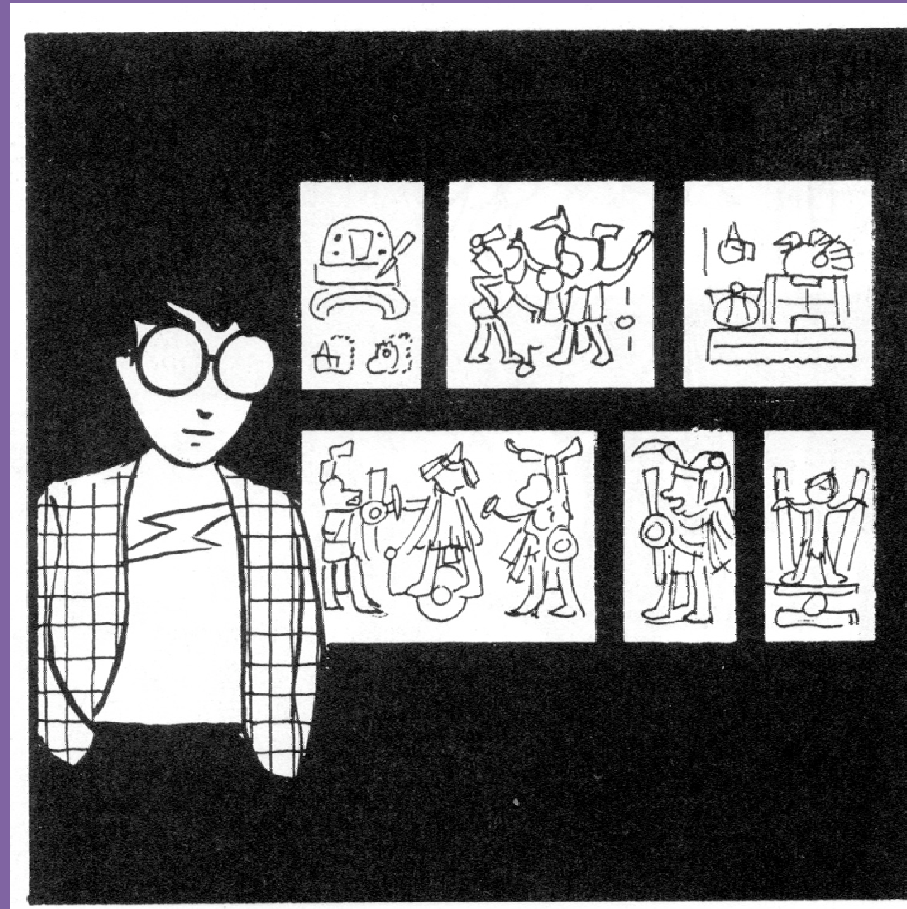- Mnemonic for count-keeper

Challenging Definitions of Literacy via Walter Mignolo

- What is literacy? What is reading?
- Colonial project of the spread of alphabetic text and Christianity
- Reading as discerning vs. reading as alphabetic
- **Reading the word vs. reading the world**

How does this relate to comics?

- Scott McCloud makes the connection in **UC**

Are these things comics?

- No, I don't think so….
- But they are all examples of visual rhetoric—to read them is to interpret images as well as decode letters
- Talking about them in a comics context can be productive
- Comics form as literacy technology, content part of visual rhetorical tradition

Literacy Technology

✧ Dennis Baron, "From Pencils to Pixels"

✧ Technology as a way of engineering materials to achieve an end.

✧ Begins with restricted communication function

✧ Small elite or subgroup—priestly caste

✧ Distrusted at first but spreads as it is adapted to older, more familiar uses of a previously popular technology

✧ "And as the technology spreads, so do reactions against it from supporters of what are purported to be older, simpler, better, or more honest ways of writing. Not only must the new technology be accessible and useful, it must demonstrate its trustworthiness as well." (115)

Visual Rhetorical Tradition(s)

- According to Mignolo, a tradition "a multiplexed and filtered ensemble of acts of saying, remembering, and forgetting."
- "The loci where people are bonded in…ways of organizing and conceiving themselves in a given space (by country or border) by constructing an image of both the self and the other."
- Visual rhetorical tradition—ways people are bonded in representing themselves and others in a visual way

The Darker Side of the Renaissance p. xv

Considering Comics as Technology

- Anti-Lockean critique of how any given people begin to make something called "comics"

- Alternative to tabula rasa view

- Technology has a purpose—what are comics for? Can this question be complicated by indigenous traditions?

Taking Texts Seriously

- Codex Espangliensis—big project
- Nonsense Comix #7—small project
- Both are examples of contemporary comics-identified work looking to visual rhetorical traditions
- Rhetorical purpose—what can comics do?

Codex Espangliensis:
From Columbus to the Border Patrol

- Collaborative modern codex project by Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Enrique Chagoya
- Collaged images from Mexica amoxtli, Chicano iconography, and comic books
- Visual rhetoric as performance script
- "metaphorical recuperation of textual heritage"
- "post-Columbian Spanglish comix/codex"

WHOOF!
NO GOOD!

In 1492, an
AZTEC SAILOR
NAMED NOCTLI
EUROPZIN TEZPOCA
DEPARTED FROM THE
PORT OF MINATITLAN
with a small flotilla of
wooden rafts. 3 months later
HE DISCOVERED A NEW
CONTINENT AND NAMED IT
EUROPZIN AFTER HIMSELF.
In November 1512, the
OMNI-POTENT AZTECS BEGAN
THE CONQUEST OF EUROPZIN
IN THE NAME OF THY FATHER
TEZCATLIPOCA, LORD OF CROSS-
CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS
y entonces el desmadre se comenzo a multiplicar
logo · rhythmically and logo · aritmicamente

Excerpt from "Califas" 1987

Nonsense Comix #7

- Project devoted to exploring the canon of memory in the context of the history of rhetoric as we see it
- Using the comic as an object of memoria for the knowledge learned in a course
- Micro-audience of those who experienced same events and dealt with same theories
- Narrative collage comic, but also mnemonic images

...ts of things but 300-600 pages a week is a lot

...d powerful anxiety.

Advil
friend to
grad students
everywhere
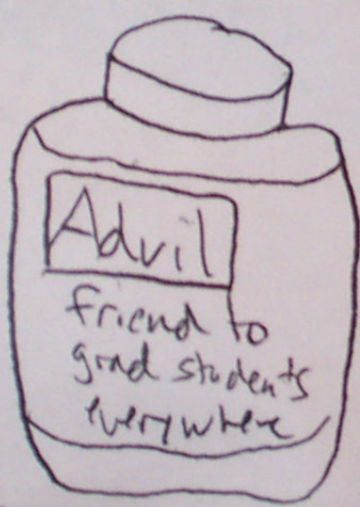
and every girl in grad school

QUERY?!

Thinks she is a fraud and a failure so that doesn't...

y thinking
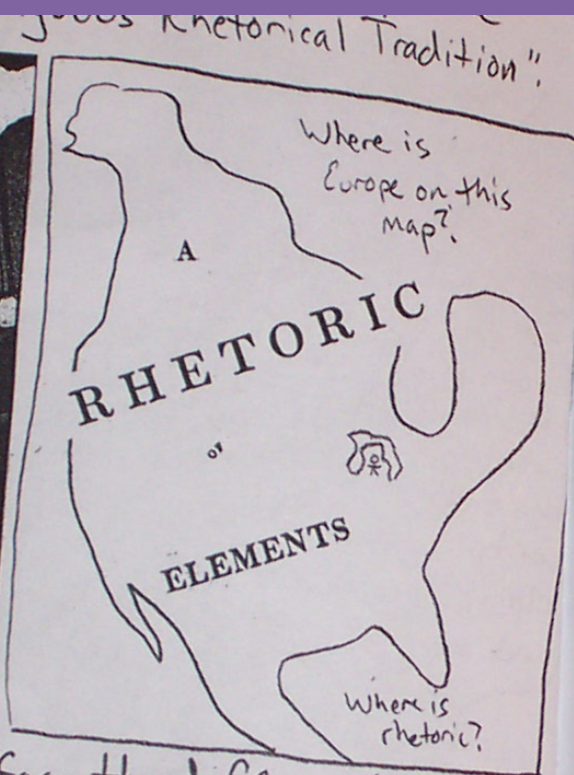
I think it is the multiplicity of voice and images engaged in making meaning.
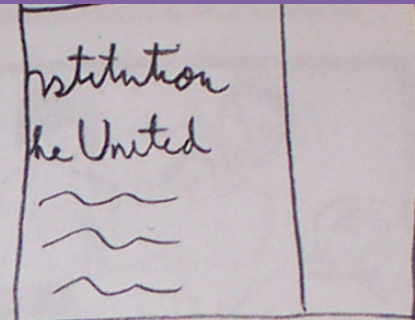
This is a thing you do in grad school. You define things. Kenneth Burke talked about man as the symbol-using animal, goaded by hierarchy, but he could have as easily meant grad students.

It has to have a place!

"... jous Rhetorical Tradition":

A
RHETORIC
of
ELEMENTS

Where is Europe on this map?

Where is rhetoric?

And it would efface the different peoples doing rhetoric, making meaning, and enacting power in that place.

...stitution
he United

Elements of Rhetoric

AΘE

ATHENA... GODDESS...

USURP HER THRONE, YOU CAN CALL...OFF... THE WAR.

SUDDENLY, YOUR MIND EXPLODES. THEN, AS IF ON CUE...

The truth about stories…

- …is that that's all we are. (Thomas King)
- What story do we tell about ourselves as comics scholars?
- McCloudean justification?
- Canon formation?
- English studies? Literature?

Imagining…

- …a multiplicity of visual rhetorical traditions all over the world, throughout history
- …interacting with comics as a literacy technology…or interacting with graffiti, or painting, or video, or anything else
- No *one* history of comics but many narratives grounded in time and place