Comic Convergence: Toward a Prismatic Rhetoric for Composition Studies

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COMIC CONVERGENCE:
TOWARD A PRISMATIC RHETORIC FOR COMPOSITION STUDIES

by

ORIANA SOLTA GATTA

Under the direction of Dr. Mary Hocks

ABSTRACT
This dissertation examines the feminist intersections of composition studies, visual rhetoric, and comics studies in order to identify a rhetorically interdisciplinary approach to composition that moves beyond composition studies’ persistent separation of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, rhetoric and ideology, and analysis and composition. Chapter one transgresses the qualitative/quantitative divide using keyword analysis and visualization of 2,573 dissertation and thesis abstracts published between 1979 – 2012 to engage in what composition studies scholar Derek Mueller terms a “distant reading” of the extent and contexts of composition studies’ self-identified interdisciplinarity. Complementing my more traditional literature review, the results of this analysis validate the necessity of my analytical and pedagogical interventions by suggesting that composition studies has not yet addressed comics through the feminist
intersections of visual rhetoric and critical pedagogy. Chapters two and three develop a rhetorical analytical approach to comics that moves beyond comics studies’ persistent separation of rhetoric and ideology by positing conflict as an identifiable form of rhetorical persuasion in the Martha Washington comics. These comics were collaboratively created by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons between 1989 – 2007. Following feminist rhetorician Susan Jarratt’s case for rhetorical conflict as a pedagogical tool and extending Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval’s conceptualization of meta-ideologizing in which oppressive ideologies are re-signified via recontextualizations that juxtapose ‘old’ and ‘new’ signs of ideological meaning, I explore the rhetorically persuasive conflict arising from visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions of race, class, and gender made visible in these comics. Chapter four outlines a feminist, critical, visual rhetorical – what I call prismatic – approach to composition pedagogy that requires (1) contexts in which differences and conflicts can be identified and engaged, (2) explicable sites of intersection between ideological perspectives and rhetorical construction, and (3) models for the transition from ideological critique to (re)composition. This is not an add-pop-genre-and-stir approach to composition pedagogy; rather, it intentionally deploys comics’ inherent multimodality as a challenge to students’ often narrow definitions of rhetoric and composition.

INDEX WORDS: Chela Sandoval, Comic books, Composition pedagogy, Composition studies, Feminist pedagogy, Feminist theory, Ideology, Interdisciplinarity, Keyword visualization, KWIC, Many Eyes, Martha Washington, Meta-ideologizing, Visual rhetoric
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by

ORIANA SOLTA GATTA

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Georgia State University

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by

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College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2014
DEDICATION

In memory of my grandmother and kindred spirit, Dorothy Nolan.

And to my future selves.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals who made this dissertation possible. Foremost among them is my chair, Mary Hocks, whose expert guidance, positive energy, and belief in the significance of my work supported and sustained me throughout my dissertating process. The invaluable insights from each of my committee members – Michael Harker, Greg Smith, and George Pullman – also pushed me to articulate more of the intricacies and interconnections I work toward in this dissertation.

My experiences as a Rhetoric and Composition graduate student in the English Department at Georgia State University have also directly and indirectly impacted the shape my research has taken. As a graduate teaching assistant, the opportunity to decide how my introductory composition course designs would meet established departmental objectives allowed me to test out the pedagogical use-value of digitally-mediated pop culture analysis and composition. Further, GSU’s grad student community supported me with countless opportunities to share and receive feedback on my successes and failures in the never-ending processes of professional and personal development. In particular, I would like to thank Melinda Mills, Jennifer Forsthoefel, Cara Minardi, Juliette Kitchens, Melanie McDougal, Peter Fontaine, Diana Eidson, Andrew Davis, and two non-GSU peeps – Joy Hebert and Jon Nye -- for their irreplaceable friendship.

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characteristic Gatta humor or lend support even when I wouldn’t or couldn't ask for it. And my siblings, Jeremy and Keira Gatta, regularly inspire me with their dedication to living life to the fullest. I’ve chosen amazing friends and colleagues, but I couldn’t ask for a better family.
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1 THROUGH A PRISM, BRIGHTLY: AN INTRODUCTION

“The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.” (Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” 36).

“To hope, then, is to look critically at one's present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated” (Paula Mathieu, Tactics of Hope, 19).

1.1 Introduction

Critical analytical work is often viewed as a light, one that, if shined intensely enough on the subject of analysis, will bring about a greater understanding of that subject’s meaning. Further, the light of scholarly work is often generated from disciplinary perspectives, tingeing understanding with a particular hue. This has been the case when we consider how disciplinary perspectives address the multifaceted prisms of visual culture. Whether we see a literary or artistic genre, words or images, in the reflected light, often depends on whether the light of literary studies or art is employed. Certainly, interdisciplinary perspectives also exist, ostensibly mixing the hues into a new color. Cultural studies is one such attempt at interdisciplinarity, one whose blended light reflects/reveals ideology in the prism of culture. However, ideological meaning, when illuminated by the light of cultural studies often retains a hue much like that of literary studies. Ideology is read as a linguistic system composed of signs without much regard for their aesthetic construction.

This dissertation operates from a different perspective, one that sees the ideological meaning and aesthetic construction of culture as mutually constitutive – as rhetorical – and working at intersections of comics studies, visual rhetoric, and feminist theory, I develop an
interdisciplinary approach to rhetorical analysis and composition that engages the rhetorical construction of ideology. As I outline in more detail later, defining “interdisciplinarity” has become its own line of scholarly inquiry, making it necessary for me to establish here how I define “interdisciplinarity” and why I use such an approach in this dissertation. The “how” and the “why” are intimately connected. Like ideologies, disciplinary perspectives function as frameworks with and through which we interpret reality, or more specifically, identify answers to the questions we find pressing. However, multiple disciplines (including comics studies, visual rhetoric, and feminist theory) have and continue to engage the subject of the question guiding this dissertation – how are ideologies rhetorically constructed? – making it more likely that the answer to my question will result from my engagement with the aspects of many of the disciplines that address my subject. This definition of interdisciplinarity is most closely akin to what educational scholar Lisa R. Lattuca terms “conceptual interdisciplinarity,” because it is, and I am, more interested in finding an answer to my question than I am in disciplinary distinctions. For the same reason, my definition of interdisciplinarity involves the use of multiple method/ologies, including keyword analysis and visualization, rhetorical analysis, and curriculum design. The keyword analysis and visualization of terms I associate with my interdisciplinary approach, including “interdisciplinary,” “feminist,” “visual rhetorical,” “critical pedagogy,” and “comic books” reveals the absence of feminist, visual rhetorical, critical pedagogical, and comics studies’ intersections in composition studies, thereby establishing the exigence for my ideological analysis of the Martha Washington comics. Doing so also evidences the productive potential of keyword analysis and visualization as invention strategies for composition studies. Further, my analysis of the Martha Washington comics establishes an example of the kind of analytical work essential for rhetorically effective comic compositions.
Combining these method/ological approaches, therefore, yields a more complex understanding of ideology’s rhetorical construction and its applicability to social change via (comics) composition than they could achieve individually. In other words, a multifaceted subject of inquiry requires a multifaceted, or what I term a prismatic, approach.

The primary focus of my analysis is a group of comic books collaboratively created by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons featuring Martha Washington, a young, poor female of color. While Miller’s and Gibbons’ work prior to, contemporaneous with, and following their collaboration have been frequent subjects of academic analyses, their collaboration has yet to receive much scholarly attention. Unlike the two published analyses that address these comics from ideologically separated perspectives of gender or race, my analytical approach involves addressing ideological intersections of gender, race, and class. Further, I do not stop at applying my analytical approach to these comics; it functions as the foundation for an approach to composition pedagogy that directly engages the rhetorical construction of ideology at ideological intersections of gender, race, and class.

In order to understand how this dissertation’s approach to analyzing the rhetorical relationship between ideological meaning and aesthetic construction in the Martha Washington comics, as well as how this relationship compares to that of contemporaneous work, we must first survey the scholarship from which the exigence for this project emerged. Because of this project’s complexity, the most productive approach to understanding its trajectory will be to break the survey down into four separate locations of theoretical and material intersection. These include: 1) interdisciplinarity and digital archival method/ologies, 2) comics studies, text/image binary, ideological compartmentalization, and Martha, 3) stereotypes, feminist theory, and visual rhetoric, and 4) popular culture, comics, critical pedagogy, and composition. Each of these
locations also raises more specific research questions that can be used to explore the topic of this dissertation in more depth.

1.2 Interdisciplinarity and Digital Archival Methodologies

In her 2011 CCCC Chair’s Address, associate professor of women’s and gender studies Gwendolyn D. Pough characterizes rhetoric as “one of the original interdisciplinary fields” and, focusing on CCCC's-related activities as catalysts, calls on her audience to “start thinking about building our own critical interdisciplinary studies, a critical interdisciplinary studies grounded in writing and rhetoric” (302, 309). She goes on to suggest that CCCC's-related activities such as attending conference sessions on work unrelated to our own interests, submitting proposals using the “interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross-contextual perspectives” category, and meeting new people and potential collaborators online via the CCCC Connected Community, are catalysts for this construction. This call to action is a welcome reminder that disciplinary inertia need not steer the course of knowledge making and that disciplinary boundaries are only as significant as we make them. Interdisciplinarity itself, however, is not a stable concept, perspective, or action, as it signifies differently within, among, and across disciplines – making it the subject of a substantial body of scholarship. In “A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity” Humanities professor and internationally renowned scholar of interdisciplinarity Julie Thompson Klein distinguishes among several binary categories of interdisciplinarity, including shared and cooperative interdisciplinarity, methodological and theoretical interdisciplinarity, and instrumental and critical interdisciplinarity (19-23). While Pough identifies collaboration as a fundamental component of interdisciplinary work, the difference between shared and cooperative interdisciplinarity suggests otherwise. The former is a divide-and-conquer approach in which “different aspects of a complex problem are tackled by different groups [that] possess
complementary skills, communicate results, and monitor overall progress. . . . [D]aily cooperation does not necessarily occur” (Klein 19). By contrast, cooperative interdisciplinarity “requires teamwork, exemplified . . . in research on public policy issues such as energy and law and order” (Klein 19). Klein also notes a distinction often made between theoretical and methodological interdisciplinarity – that between the construction versus the application of a conceptual framework (Klein 19-20). Pough appears to reference both construction and application by asking her audience to (re)consider the epistemological bases of composition studies and what new theories and practices might result. And “a critical interdisciplinary studies grounded in writing and rhetoric” could be characterized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) typology’s definition of transdisciplinarity, which exists “when a new overarching concept or theory subsumes the theories and concepts of several existing disciplines” (Klein 21).

Klein’s distinction among multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity parallels the results of Lisa R. Lattuca’s inductive approach to defining interdisciplinarity in her study of the ways college and university faculty from public and private four-year institutions describe their research. Lattuca’s analysis, however, frames the different types of interdisciplinarity she identifies in relation to a continuum: at one end lies allegiance to disciplinary knowledge while the other ignores or actively questions such compartmentalization. She uses “informed interdisciplinarity” to refer to teaching and research that may incorporate, or borrow for other disciplines, but whose questions have a solid disciplinary basis. “Linked” interdisciplinarity addresses the intersection of disciplines or a gap between or among them, and transdisciplinarity’s goal is to synthesize different disciplinary perspectives. Conceptual interdisciplinarity challenges the necessity of disciplinary distinctions or an umbrella
(trans)discipline by using and addressing concepts and questions without a disciplinary basis (Lattuca 5-7). As a fitting description of composition studies work that views writing as a rhetorical act and impact of meaning making, this form of interdisciplinarity enacts Kann’s definition of radical politics to the extent that its concepts and questions challenge disciplinarity’s exclusionary and oppressive effect on knowledge making. This dissertation proposes to continue this challenge, specifically by engaging feminist theory and pedagogy, visual culture and rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and comics studies.

However, as Richard Haswell notes, “[s]cholarship cannot grow without knowledge of what has gone before,” so our first move must be a step back to investigate the interdisciplinary history of composition studies Pough references in order to better understand its interdisciplinary potential (206). One approach to analyzing the extent to which composition studies has thus far identified itself as “interdisciplinary” and what “interdisciplinary” means in the context of composition studies is through archival research. The logic of archival research is simultaneously inductive and deductive, with patterns of meaning emerging from the archived text to which we bring our own questions based on presumptions about their significance. I am certainly not the first to notice the subjective, socially constructed character of archives (Connors, 1992; Kirsch, 1992; Turner, 1998; Bieseker, 2006; Glenn and Enoch, 2010; Graban, “Emergent,” 2010; Lerner, 2010; and Waterton, 2010). The advent of digital technologies, however, provides historiographers and archivists with new tools, methods, and methodologies with which to analyze “the provisionally settled scene[s] of our collective invention” (Biesecker 124). And a small but growing number of rhetorical historiographers have begun to address, engage, and question the theoretical, methodological and practical implications these technologies for
archival work. Jessica Enoch and David Gold’s introduction to their special issue of College English summarizes much of this work:

Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne . . . describes 'Archives 2.0' as the emergent and 'participatory' archival form that enables researchers to cull information from the archive, and to add both content and commentary, creating new methodological possibilities for researchers in the process. Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette have put specific feminist methodologies in conversation with digital innovations, asking scholars to 'consider not only how digital innovations may correspond with or enhance feminist historiographic priorities, but also how they might detract from or run counter to our goals and investments' (636) . . . James Purdy contemplates how digital archives 'challenge our assumptions about the pace and rigor, evidentiary options and scholarly potentials, and inclusive opportunities and disciplinary influence of archival work" (43)" (107).

Not included in this summary is Patricia Sullivan and Tarez Samra Graban’s contemplation of the feminist potential of “digital-only searching,” Janine Solberg’s investigation of the assumptions underlying Google’s search algorithms, Graban’s argument for organizing archives via the emergent taxonomies provided by archival metadata, data identifying an archived text’s rhetorical significance, or Royster and Kirsch’s keyword search of Google.com, Amazon.com, and a university library’s holdings as an initial step towards identifying “evidence in RCL of vitality and vibrancy regarding a convergences of rhetorical, feminist, and global studies” (116).

Given the relative newness of digital technologies and their archival application, each of these pieces also calls for additional ethical consideration and careful articulation of digital historiography and archival research methods and methodologies. For Tara McPherson, Matthew
J. Kirschenbaum, and Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette, this means cultivating openness to new understandings of familiar texts and practices that digital methods and methodologies may provide. We may, according to McPherson, “understand [our] arguments and [our] subjects differently, even better, when [we] approach them through multiple modalities” (121). This statement responds to an implied concern that new digital methods and methodologies will replace familiar ones in waves of forced obsolescence. Part of this concern may stem from extant relationships between digital and quantitative methods, and the undoubtedly positivist ends to which quantitative methods have and continue to be used. However, as Richard Haswell notes, “quantitative method assumes that dimensions can be created by humans, not only ‘found’ in nature” (187). This suggests that both quantitative and qualitative methods consciously engage in meaning making and are, therefore, both “culturally situated and inscribed, never disinterested or impartial” (Kirsch 248). In other words, positivism is as positivism does.

Further, as Kirschenbaum explains, new methods and methodologies create more options, not dustbins, for meaning-making: “The goal is not to use the machine to supplant the judgment and expertise of a human expert who has spent a lifetime reading Dickinson, but rather to see if [digitally-generated] classifications can ‘provoke’ new insight among a body of familiar texts” (n.p.). In other words, digital methods and methodologies can be used to “provoke” what Royster and Kirsch call “strategic contemplation,” or “the capacity to see both patterns and possibilities that may exist in support of knowledge creating and understanding – including traces of a stream that may become visible when we stand back, observe, reflect, and meditate about the contexts of various practices and the choices that rhetors make or might make” (90).
1.3 Comic Studies, Text/Image Binary, Ideological Compartmentalization, and Martha

Though comics studies is a comparatively new area of scholarly interest, it does not lack theoretical perspectives and analytical frameworks drawn from literary studies, art, art history, film studies, media studies, and cultural studies, which is evident in the foci Greg Smith identifies in contemporary comics studies scholarship done in the U.S.: authors and the comics industry; the historical development of comics; comics’ aesthetic construction, superheroes; and international comics, particularly European and Japanese. As can be expected of a new field, a lot of time has also been spent attempting to define comics (e.g. Cohn, “Un-Defining”; McCloud, *Understanding*; Groensteen; Harvey; and Hatfield, “An Art”), as well as challenging the possibility of a single definition (Horrocks). These definitions have tended to hinge on different formulations of the alphabetic image/non-alphabetic image binary that typifies a traditional distinction between literature and fine art and that treats alphabetic images as more complex and in need of deciphering than non-alphabetic ones. When alphabetic and non-alphabetic images are both addressed as semiotic texts, explorations of their formal construction often take place separately from their cultural significance. And when the cultural significance, or ideological meaning, of comics’ alphabetic and non-alphabetic images is addressed, the focus tends to be on one or two ideological perspectives rather than multiple intersections.

In his foundational text *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud bases his distinction between alphabetic and non-alphabetic images, what he terms “words and picture,” on their relative abstraction, alphabetic images being more abstract and taking more work to understand than non-alphabetic images: “Words are totally abstract icons. That is, they bear no resemblance at all to the real McCoy. But in pictures the level of abstraction varies” (28). This potential a non-alphabetic image (what he calls a “picture”) has for variation in levels of
abstraction assumes that non-alphabetic images, unlike completely abstract alphabetic images, have the potential to realistically represent reality. In other words, non-alphabetic images can, according to McCloud, function mimetically to more closely re-present our lived experiences and self-images than alphabetic images, which take more time to interpret. The problem with this distinction between alphabetic and non-alphabetic images is that it assumes there is a ‘one true’ reality that and should be re-presented in order to engage an audience who are assumed to be familiar with this reality based on first-hand experience and observation. Additionally, McCloud frames comics’ power to elicit audience engagement in terms of self-identification. Because a cartoon’s relative simplicity mirrors what McCloud assumes to be the less specifically defined images we have of ourselves in contrast to the more detailed images we have of others, we can see ourselves in comics: “while most [comics] characters were designed simply, to assist in reader-identification -- other characters were drawn more realistically in order to objectify them, emphasizing their 'otherness' from the reader" (McCloud Understanding 44). Here McCloud’s use of “simplicity” functions as a synonym for both “basis” and “similarity” to the extent that he presupposes all self-images are similarly representative of a ‘one true’ reality whose characteristics can be simply identified. This equation of the simple, basic, and similar characteristic of cultural essentialism elides the possibility that we can be familiar, can identify (with), dissimilarity by presupposing that familiarity (i.e. an audience’s self-identification) necessitates similarity and ignoring how simplicity is constructed via rhetorical choices to focus on one or more specific aspects over others. While McCloud gives lip service to this rhetorical reality, he does not recognize how his focus on the biological existence of two eyes shared by many humans specifies two eyes as the simplest, most basic, and therefore most important, shared biological reality. He does not, in other words, address how comics’ formal construction
rhetorically communicates cultural assumptions regarding how we should experience ourselves and the world.

When cultural assumptions such as those regarding definitions of gender, race, class, and sexuality communicated via comics are addressed in comics scholarship, they are addressed separately. In Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology are Revolutionizing an Art Form, McCloud discusses gender and minorities (sexual and racial) as separate bases upon which the appeal of comics could be increased, and in their “Comics and Ideology” chapter of The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture, Duncan and Smith discuss representations of women, blacks, social causes, and war as separate ideological concerns (11). A quick review of the titles of more recently published works shows little deviation from McCloud’s precedent: Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture; “Is there an African-American Graphic Novel”; “Black Nationalism, Bunraku, and Beyond: Articulating Black Heroism through Cultural Fusion and Comics”; Black Superheroes, Milestone, and Their Fans, Brown; and “Spectral Memory, Sexuality and Inversion: An Anthrological Study of Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic.” Interestingly, class seems to be addressed indirectly, mainly through discussions of the comic book industry and comics as a medium of popular (versus high) culture.

The writers and artists in the developing canon of contemporary comics referenced in this work, including individuals such as Art Speigelman, Chris Ware, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Dave McKean, Harvey Pekar, Linda Barry, Frank Miller, Jamie Hernandez, Gilbert Hernandez, and Marjane Satrapi are considered masters of their craft, and their comics and graphic novels, including Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth; Maus, Sandman, The Dark Knight and The Dark Knight Returns; The Watchmen; One! Hundred! Demons!, American Splendor, Love
and Rockets, and Persepolis are defined by their unique perspectives on particular moments in history, their cultural characteristics, and, to a much smaller degree, their aesthetic construction.

This separation of ideological and aesthetic domains may be why, despite the multiple and intersecting perspectives represented in the texts, the sole academic work published on the Martha Washington comics to date, a section of a chapter in Inness’s Tough Girls, only addresses Martha’s character in terms of its ability to challenge traditional gender norms. When considering the rhetorical relationship between ideological meaning and aesthetic construction, then, it will be important to consider which ideological perspectives get represented in the Martha Washington comics, to what extent they are interconnected, and how this interconnection is aesthetically enacted.

1.4 Stereotypes, Feminist Theory, and Visual Rhetoric

Stereotypes play a similarly foundational role in feminist theory because of their defining characteristic as negative/false representations of individual identities, social groups, and cultural practices that arise from both the intended misrepresentation and unintended ignorance of the nuances of lived experience. Indeed, according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, both “woman” and “feminism” have been employed as stereotypes by western liberal feminist work that ignores women of color and indigenous forms of feminism. When this perspective is combined with the postmodern approach to visual culture, the possibilities of visual rhetorical work appears limited to fatalistic analyses of how images act on their audiences, forcing them to accept stereotypical representations of reality. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno point to the commodification of images in popular culture as evidence of a culture of “sameness” designed to encourage conformity through visual repetition (94). Frederic Jameson echoes this sentiment in “Transformations of the Image,” claiming that “all beauty today is meretricious and the appeal to
it by contemporary pseudo-aestheticism is an ideological maneuver and not a creative resource” (135). This perspective, combined with Jameson’s argument made elsewhere that the sheer number of images created and made available via modes of popular culture production deprive images of their meaning based on their lack of correspondence to the ideas and experiences they purport to references, characterizes contemporary visual culture as either empty rhetoric, signs that encourage repetition without apparent reason, or one-dimensional directives accepted at face value.

However, stereotypes are constructed via relation, and postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s work in “The Other Question: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism” may provide visual rhetorical practice with a way to see this relationship in a more flexible light. Following Edward Said’s stance on cultural production in Orientalism, Bhabha argues that “despite the ‘play’ in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (41). The stereotype, then, is not dangerous “because it mischaracterizes the other but because it assumes a total fixity of the image” (162). In other words, stereotypes can naturalize relationships between individuals and oppressive ideologies such as the ones, to use one of Bhabha’s examples, which exoticize Cleopatra. Stereotypes territorialize identity. This is where Bhabha’s work diverges from Said’s. By focusing on the evaluation of how positively or negatively images portray colonized subjects, Said reinforces the strength of the stereotype with his assumption that the stereotype can only be read one way. Stereotypes, for Bhabha, are ambivalent; they vacillate “between what is always ‘in place’,” the naturalized association between Cleopatra and hypersexuality, for example, and “something that must be anxiously repeated,” such as the association between Egyptian womanhood and hypersexuality (37).
Acknowledging this ambivalence is productive, then, because it challenges stereotypical authority.

Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa asks us to take a further step into the ambivalent territory of self and other representation and recognize how these images, not just the identifiably stereotypical ones, represent borderlands between our often uncategorizeable lived experiences and their categorized visual representation. For Anzaldúa, the ability to recognize a borderland’s existence, an ability she terms “mestiza consciousness,” comes from the experience of multiple, intersecting oppressions such as those of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism that work more heavily on and are therefore more visible to those who cannot or will not conform (80). Though Anzaldúa points to survival against all odds as the catalyst for a mestiza consciousness, it is also possible to recognize one’s own conformity to oppression, especially when it becomes clear that the relationship between self-representation and oppressive ideologies is not absolute. As the first step towards a feminist visual rhetorical analysis of the Martha Washington comics, then, we must ask what stereotypes are employed in these texts as possible representations of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and nationalism/patriotism.

Focusing specifically on gender identity as a series of stereotypes, Judith Butler points out that the ideological construction of ‘male’ and ‘female’ comes with a set of expectations regarding how males and females should look, or how their masculinity and femininity becomes evident. These expectations constitute an inherent pressure to meet them, to continually look male or female in order to be male or female: “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization” (140). The visible seems of identity construction and ideological conformity must therefore be
 anxiously concealed by each repeated performance, and the performances become
“performative. . . in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express
are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means”
(136, emphasis in original). Based on the fabricated nature of the performance, opportunities also
exist to challenge expectations to perform in a certain way with a certain effect in mind by
alterations in self and other representation: “Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, so
these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the
performative statues of the natural itself” (146, emphasis in original). This use of performativity
encourages the audience to visualize alternatives to the stereotyped expectations, categories, and
standards being challenged by the performance. It enacts the visual construction of meaning in
addition to simply pointing out how the previously constructed visions/versions of reality are
problematic. We must, then, consider to what extent the Martha Washington comics make the
seams of stereotypical identity construction visible, in other words, where visual representation
fails to live up to stereotypical expectations.

Like Bhabha, Anzaldúa, and Butler, Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval argues that the
connection between repressive ideologies and those whose subjectivities they attempt to
constitute can no longer be understood as natural and that the same process by which signs
become decoupled from signifieds is also the process by which new, less oppressive meanings
and subjectivities can be constructed. Sandoval also brings this understanding further into a
visual rhetorical praxis via her conceptualization of meta-ideologizing, or the repurposing of
ideological structures in service of less oppressive ones. While the focus of Sandoval’s analysis
is the Western academy and its bastions, both old and new, of theory-driven scholarship, she also
points to a few popular culture texts that evidence elements of differential consciousness,
including films such as “Repo Man (1982), Brother from Another Planet (1984), Total Recall (1990), Thunderheart (1992), Pulp Fiction (1994), . . . The Matrix (1999) . . . and comic books that feature mutant citizenry such as the X-Men” (69). We can infer from this list that meta-ideologizing in visual culture entails the intentional alignment of images with incongruous sets of stereotypical expectations as a way to challenge the authority of one or both sets. As a final consideration in the development of a feminist visual rhetorical analysis of the Martha Washington comics, then, we must ask whether this kind of incongruity exists in the texts and what stereotypical, ideological expectations it appears to challenge.

1.5 Popular Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and Composition

As I hope to have made clear, engaging in a feminist visual rhetorical analysis of the Martha Washington comics will engage in the kind of interdisciplinary work that intentionally crosses and blurs the boundaries between word and image, content and style, ideological meaning and aesthetic construction, and metaphor and stereotype so that comics may be valued for their unique contributions to the identification and analysis of the gendered, raced, classed, sexualized, and nationalized ideologies that shape the way we see ourselves and the world. Critical pedagogy allows us to extend this work to the composition classroom, as “critical” dually reflects the necessity of challenging oppressive ideologies employed by an increasingly globalizing capitalism to dehumanize individuals and the kind of analytical work required to succeed in these challenges. Identifying and analyzing the rhetorical form and function of these ideologies in a composition classroom can therefore help students become more aware of how they define themselves and others and teach them rhetorical strategies to ethically enact these definitions via composing practices.
As critical theorist Roland Barthes points out, ideologies function in culture at the meta-narrative level\(^1\), persuading us through repetition to accept the values they indirectly imply, often through stories. Critical pedagogue AnaLouise Keating labels these “status quo stories,” stories we are told and in turn tell to "normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and norms so entirely that [we] deny the possibility of change" (23). The meta-narrative and narrative are often combined in popular culture texts such as commercials, music videos, sit-coms, films, and comic books, making each of these media valuable focal points for critically analyzing the form and function of ideology.

Given the intensely visual nature of popular culture, using these media in a composition classroom also necessitates the exploration of visual rhetoric. And certainly, as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen\(^2\) note, if visual texts are becoming an increasingly common form of communication and the goal of composition instruction is to teach students how to communicate effectively, then focusing on the visual construction of texts should be an important part of students’ rhetorical training. A strong connection also exists between visual rhetorical theory and critical pedagogy, as evidenced by Paulo Freire’s use of images of the everyday lives of peasants to engender critical responses to their circumstances. Several composition pedagogues have also merged the visual culture and cultural critique in helping their students understand the relationship between design and ideology. In “awaywithwords: On the possibilities in unavailable designs,” Anne Frances Wysocki calls for the examination of constraints on communication, specifically their historical, cultural development into “naturalized, unquestioned practice” (57). Anne E. Richards and Carole David, in their introduction to

\(^1\) See *Mythologies* (1972).
Writing the Visual: A Practical Guide for Teachers of Composition and Communication, assert that

Writing teachers hoping to awaken in students a broad understanding of the cultural influences on individuals or of the rhetorical elements influencing the interpretations of discourse do well to acknowledge the importance of the visual: how we live, think, act, and read are all influenced profoundly by images appearing in print and digital media. (3)

C. Richard King’s work with “racial metaphors” in his classroom offers one example of how visual rhetoric and critical pedagogy can be combined in a composition classroom (88). Not only does he ask his students to identify visual representations of racial stereotypes in popular culture, he also asks them compare the “ways in which visual rhetoric differentially racializes human communities, social problems, identities, possibilities, pleasures, and privileges,” and, specifically, how stereotypes become visual metaphors used, via allusion, to contextualize multiple forms of victimization (101). In telling a story of one perspective via another, the latter may be silenced. In this way, it is possible to explore how stereotypes become narrative devices for oppressive ideologies.

By virtue of their dually verbal and visual format, comic books and graphic novels can also be used to explore visual rhetorical construction. Comic book artist and scholar Scott McCloud questions the assumption that a firm distinction can be made between visual and verbal texts, arguing instead that words and images exist along a continuum of abstraction. While, according to McCloud, images often more directly refer to what we might see when looking at an object, words take a less direct route by using the abstract image we have created to represent the object in our minds. In either case, though, a process of association must occur. Visual
Rhetoric scholar Charles Hill argues that, based on this process of visual association “between an image and a specified product, institution, political candidate, or ideological concept . . . images [can be] used persuasively” (120). From there, moving to a discussion of particular images and what associations they make to ideas and cultural values may become easier for students.

Even as supplemental texts, however, comic books and graphic novels’ potential as critical pedagogical tools is clear. In “Showing and Telling History through Family Stories in *Persepolis* and Young Adult Novels,” high school teacher Marla Harris documents the use of *Persepolis* as an entre into a discussion of stereotypes as they relate to religious and cultural persecution. Similarly, Allen Web and Brandon Guisgand lead their students through a comparative analysis of stereotypical representations of Jewish identity in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and Will Eisner’s *Fagin the Jew*. Elizabeth Rosen asks her students to consider, by examining graphic novels *Blankets* and *Violent Cases* and comic book *Swamp Thing*, how the visual framing of comic narratives is itself a narrative device that can suggest plotlines on its own, as well as highlight plotlines’ metaphorical significance.

Comic books and graphic novels can also be used as invention devices for research topics on social issues, as the subject for comparative analyses of gendered, raced, and classed ideologies in traditional and fractured fairy tales, and as examples of the visual rhetorical devices pop culture often employs. Further, as visual rhetoric and new media scholar Mary E. Hocks argues in “Understanding Visual Rhetorics in Digital Writing Environments,” “Design becomes essential in times of intense social change . . . . design moves us from rhetorical criticism to invention and production. The "shaping" of resources gives students' work social and political impact and allows them to learn how to represent new forms of knowledge” (644-45). In keeping, then, with critical pedagogy’s goal of envisioning alternative realities as a precursors to their
construction, students can be asked to create their own comic book narratives using such tools as ComicLife software, ToonDoo freeware, their own drafting skills, or some combination thereof, that reflect values they wish to support or challenge.

Finally, comics force us to cross-disciplinary boundaries and the distinctions between high and popular culture artificially erected to control knowledge production. In other words, comics provide critical pedagogues and their students with opportunities to theorize and operationalize what, almost twenty years ago, W. J. T. Mitchell called “indiscipline,” or “moment[s] of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and practice comes into question” necessary to move from meta-narrative critique to new knowledge production (541). Clearly, there is room to identify and enact this rupturing in the theorizing about and pedagogical application of visual culture.

1.6 Looking Forward

As feminist anthropologist Margery Woolf argues in her ethnographic study, *A Thrice Told Tale*, triangulating perspectives on the same set of events offers us a more nuanced understanding of those events. Similarly, I take three different approaches to engaging the rhetorical construction of ideology. Where Woolf employs anthropological field notes, a piece of fiction, and a social science article, I use this analysis of dissertation and thesis abstracts, a close reading of a comic book series, and an exploration of comics as pedagogical tools enabling students to move from analysis to (re)composition. Chapter One, “Frame by Frame: A Keyword Exploration of Composition Studies’ Inter/Disciplinarity,” presents my keyword analysis and visualization of 2,573 dissertation abstracts addresses the extent and contexts of composition studies’ self-identified interdisciplinarity. Preliminary results indicate both the total number of dissertations and theses published between 1979 and 2012 and those referencing each of my key
terms (from 1990 to 2012) have steadily increased. However, I found only a few instances of references to two terms in one abstract (“interdisciplinary” and “feminist,” “feminist” and “visual rhetoric,” or “visual rhetoric” and “comic books”) and no references to three or more key terms in one abstract. These results associate composition studies with a breadth of theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical approaches that allude to an underlying commitment to critical interdisciplinarity. They also validate the necessity of my pedagogical intervention by suggesting that composition studies has not yet addressed comics through the feminist intersections of visual rhetoric and critical pedagogy. Both Chapter Two, “Visual, Conceptual, and Embodied Juxtapositions: Meta-ideologizing in The Life and Times of Martha Washington,” and Chapter Three, “Mediated Myths: The Stories We Tell Ourselves,” employs Chela Sandoval’s conceptualization of meta-ideologizing as the basis for a rhetorical analysis of raced, classed, and gendered intersections made visible by the MWCs’ visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions. Chapter Four, “From Analysis to (Re)Composition: A Prismatic Pedagogy,” outlines a feminist, critical, visual rhetorical – what I call prismatic – approach to composition pedagogy that requires (1) contexts in which differences and conflicts can be identified and engaged, (2) explicable sites of intersection between ideological perspectives and rhetorical construction, and (3) models for the transition from ideological critique to (re)composition. Building on work done by feminist, digital, and rhetorical theorists Anne Francis Wysocki, Mary E. Hocks, and Cheryl E. Ball to emphasize the interrelationship of analysis and composition, particularly in relation to new media, digital, and multimodal composition, I argue that comic books and graphic novels are generative sites for this tripartite pedagogical approach. I also provide original designs for an introductory expository writing course and advanced undergraduate visual rhetoric course as initial pedagogical applications. I begin with the data
analysis and visualization of dissertation and thesis abstracts as another approach to contextualizing the exigence for this dissertation that complements the more traditional literature review provided in this introductory chapter.
2 FRAME BY FRAME: A KEYWORD EXPLORATION OF COMPOSITION STUDIES’ INTER/DISCIPLINARITY

2.1 Introduction

Jerry A. Jacobs and Scott Frickel, following Diana Crane, argue that the level of concept diffusion among multiple disciplines can be used to indicate interdisciplinarity. As evidence of their claim, they point to the use of the term “‘postmodern’ . . . “in thousands of journal articles spread across disciplines in the humanities . . . the social sciences . . . as well as various applied fields such as education” (50). My exploration of rhetoric and composition’s self-identified interdisciplinarity builds on this approach by looking at both the incidence and context of references to “interdisciplinarity,” in a corpus of 2,573 dissertation and thesis abstracts extracted from ProQuest’s Dissertations and Theses online database. Additionally, my keywords are feminist theory and pedagogy, visual rhetoric, visual culture, critical pedagogy, and comic books – like postmodernism – and these terms are all perspectives and/or subjects engaged with/in by multiple disciplines, and by exploring the extent to which this corpus employs the terms “feminist,” “visual rhetoric,” “visual culture,” “critical pedagogy,” “comic books,” “comics,” and “graphic novels,” and in what contexts, I hoped to gain a more complex, layered understanding of composition studies approach to interdisciplinarity, specifically with regard to the subjects of my dissertation.

I chose to analyze dissertations and theses for several reasons. First, I chose abstracts rather than full documents based on time constraints and the desire construct a pilot study that I can dig further into based on the results. Second, these texts document the process and product of becoming part of a field (or fields) of scholarly inquiry, and a goal of this process of becoming requires that one establishes a simultaneously connected and unique perspective. And the extent
to which these texts reference the keyword interdisciplinarity may indicate the extent to which
interdisciplinarity is seen as an avenue for constructing connected and unique perspectives in
composition studies. Third, as an example of archival research, my analysis of dissertation and
thesis abstracts affords me the opportunity to challenge composition studies’ problematic
distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

2.2 Methodology

I employ two methodological approaches to analyzing the dissertation and thesis
abstracts. The first is distant reading, an approach to textual analysis that, beginning with Franco
Moretti and continuing with Derek Mueller, expands composition studies’ methodological
toolkit. In Mueller’s words, "deliberately altering scale allows us to see aggregate patterns
linking details and non-obvious phenomena, and . . . the systematic compilation of replicable
data may empirically corroborate local, tacitly felt impressions about changing disciplinary
conditions" (Mueller, “Long Tail,” 196). Similarly, Chris Anson characterizes empirical,
quantitative research with the valuable potential to support or challenge long-held beliefs with
updated or new evidence culled from studies done in contemporary contexts. Mueller’s analysis
of CCC citation practices is one example of this. Investigating the claim that the field of
composition studies has expanded beyond its original scope, Mueller analyzed the number and
type of citations in the CCC over the past 25 years and found a pattern of increasing reference
variety. I hoped this type of longitudinal analysis would reveal some characteristic(s) of
references to interdisciplinarity, feminist theory and pedagogy, visual culture/rhetoric, critical
pedagogy, and comic books. It is also important to note that, in employing distant reading, I must
work from the assumption that perspectives significant to a dissertator’s work are not only
implicitly enacted, but also explicitly identified. In other words, I acknowledge the possibility
that dissertations address interdisciplinary and/or feminist work, for example, without using the terms “interdisciplinary” and/or “feminist,”

Secondly, while keyword frequency gives us some indication as to which words are significant, understanding how and why they are significant requires a more involved “assaying” process (Royster and Kirsch 16). Creating and analyzing key word concordances is one way to do this. Bridging computer science, artificial intelligence, and linguistics, KWIC is a method of natural language processing that identifies concordances, or co-incidences of keywords and related terms within a specified textual corpus. These concordances can be visualized as word trees, in which associated text branches off from a key term. These word trees offer additional insight into a keyword’s context, because each concordance is grouped into like concordances based on the character or word immediately following the key term. Accordingly, I used Many Eyes, another open-source data mining and visualization tool, to create concordance-based word trees for “interdisciplinarity,” “feminist,” “visual rhetoric,” “critical pedagogy,” and “comic books.” Given the relatively small size of my corpus, this also involves close(r) reading as a method through which I identify categories into which I then place individual references associated with each of the key terms. By training lenses on the far and near, this two-pronged methodological approach also serves the larger purpose of challenging the quantitative/qualitative binary that situates the former as arbiter of capital “T” truth.

2.3 Procedure

To create the corpus of 2,573 abstracts, I began by searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database for full text documents containing the phrases “rhetoric and composition,” “composition and rhetoric,” “composition studies,” and “writing studies.” This yielded an initial list of 3,793 documents published between 1970 and 2013. After saving this list as a rich text file,
I engaged the assistance of computer science PhD candidate Ayush Sthresha, who wrote a code to transpose the information in the .rtf file into an Excel file. Using the Excel file, I was able to identify and remove duplications, entries with no abstract available, and entries clearly unrelated to rhetoric and composition. For example, most likely resulting from my use of “composition” as a search term, the search turned up work in the natural sciences such as metallurgy. I’m not performing in that kind of mining. This data filtering resulted in the corpus of 2,573 abstracts published between 1990 and 2012, a time-frame that corresponds with composition studies’ turn towards critically interrogating writing in and as social contexts (Trimbur; Kinney, Girshin and Bowlin). In order to identify the abstracts that addressed interdisciplinarity, feminist theory and pedagogy; visual culture/rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and comic books, I search the Excel file for those that referenced the following key terms.

![Diagram of data filtering process]

**Figure 2.1: Creating the Corpus**

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3 Ayush Sthresha and I were both 2CI New & Emerging Media doctoral fellows during the initial stages of this data analysis project.

4 I did not use the plural form of most of these terms, as they would be captured using the singular form. The search terms were also not case sensitive, so as to capture terms used at the beginning of sentences.
My search resulted in a total of 289 abstracts, or 11% of the 2,573 corpus, referencing one or more key terms.

2.4 Results

Figure 2.2: A Sliver of Interdisciplinary

As the figure demonstrates, only a small portion (less than 3%) of the abstracts referenced interdisciplinarity. The reference infrequency suggests composition studies does not identify itself as interdisciplinary. If this is the case, then interdisciplinarity cannot be characterized as a commonly used approach to identifying a connected yet unique perspective in the field. However, as Lattuca and Klein define them, the goals of informed interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are to answer disciplinary questions or create a new, overarching perspective, as Pough calls us to do. This means that the use of perspectives, concepts, methods, methodologies, and/or pedagogies may not be characterized as interdisciplinary because their overarching purpose is disciplinary.

Like the numeric increase in citations per article in Mueller’s analysis, both the total number of dissertations and theses published between 1979 and 2012 and those referencing interdisciplinarity (from 1990 to 2012) have steadily increased from one to 293 per year and from one to eight per year, respectively.
The increasing number of incidences in which the terms “interdisciplinary” or “interdisciplinarity” have been used over the past twenty-five years suggests that interdisciplinary work in composition studies has increased. Taking a closer look at the contexts in which these terms (“interdisciplinary” and “interdisciplinarity”) were used offers us more insight into what composition studies means by interdisciplinarity.
2.5 “Interdisciplinar(ity)” in Context

In order to complement the data just discussed by considering the contexts in which these references were made, I tracked branches of words that followed “interdisciplinary” in the abstracts by making a word tree. To do this, I used Many Eyes, a free data visualization application provided by IBM. I uploaded the text of all abstracts that referenced interdisciplinary, identified “interdisciplinary” as the key word I wanted to visualize in context, and the following is what resulted:

![Figure 2.5: A KWIC “Interdisciplinary” Word Tree](image)

Interpreting this tree required a less distant, closer reading strategy in which I read each of the branches and identified words and phrases that appeared to be characterized by the term “interdisciplinary.” I was then able to identify the following categories for the contexts in which “interdisciplinary” and “interdisciplinarity” appear: field/discipline, individual, relationship, characteristic, theory, method, or critique.
2.5.1 Fields/Disciplines

The largest category referred to interdisciplinarity as a field or discipline. Of these 29 instances, a little over a third could be identified as firmly humanities-based and half as many would fall into the social sciences. The largest portion of fields/disciplines referenced could be characterized as bridging the humanities and social sciences.

Table 2.1: “Interdisciplinary” Fields/Disciplines

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<th>Humanities-based</th>
<th>Humanities and Social Science-based</th>
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<td>Creative Nonfiction</td>
<td>American Studies</td>
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<td>Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td>Chicana/o Studies</td>
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<td>Educational Psychology</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Composition Studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Native American Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trauma Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5.2 Individuals

There were 14 references to specific individuals, most of whom have had a demonstrable impact on multiple fields of study, e.g. history, philosophy, rhetoric, literature, psychology, sociology, urban planning, and economics.
These individuals represent different historical periods, including ancient history (Cicero, Plato, and Quintilian), the 18th century (Adam Smith), the 19th century (Friedrich Nietzsche), the 20th century (Lev Vygotsky, William S. Borroughs, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida), and the 21st century (Jacqueline Jones Royster, Robert Bullard, Bob Evans, and Julian Agyeman).

2.5.3 Relationships

The term “interdisciplinary” was also used in reference to 13 different interdisciplinary configurations, which I call “relationships.” Six of these relationships involved two different fields/disciplines, and the other seven involved three or more.
Table 2.2: “Interdisciplinary” Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Field/Discipline Relationship</th>
<th>Three-or-more-Field/Discipline Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary work bringing together areas of writing centers and performance theory”</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary approach drawing on feminist theories, psychoanalytic theory, and composition studies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary study connects American Studies with Native American Studies”</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary approach that draws on literary theory, composition pedagogy, colonial history, and postcolonial theory”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interdisciplinary dissertation examines the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and composition pedagogy</td>
<td>“through the lens of medical rhetoric, memoir, critical studies, literary analysis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary course in writing that bridges composition to English education”</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary studies of metaphor and image in linguistics, philosophy, literary theory, feminist studies, and cognitive and developmental psychology”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary blending of composition and performance studies”</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary perspective from educational technology, educational psychology, and college composition studies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary conversation between composition studies and cognitive psychology”</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary engagement among journalists, rhetoricians, and theory students”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“interdisciplinary contexts of rhetoric and composition, linguistics, and Chicana/o studies”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These relationships appear to result from interests in intersections of cultural contexts, theory and pedagogy, and ontologies of communication.

2.5.4 Characteristics

Nine of the seventy-one abstracts also characterized or defined “interdisciplinary” in specific ways. Six of them refer to meaning-making processes that juxtapose various perspectives and experiences. The other three identify discrete entities.
Table 2.3: “Interdisciplinary” Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning-Making Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“a ‘participatory democracy’ in which participants theorize from their experience and value the process over gaining expertise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary nature, which includes interpreting the relationship between writers and their discourses from a broad scope that includes the physical, ideological, and rhetorical environments to which a writer ascribes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“reflects a unified theory of cognition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“questions that exceed traditional disciplinary boundaries”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary work can enhance understanding within and potential for the field composition studies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary study which uses theory from one discipline to explain the experimental procedures of another”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary and integrative in its content and method”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary and diachronic perspective”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary research is replacing the rationalist dichotomy of so-called cognitive rational thought and imaginative imagistic metaphorical thought with a more unified view of cognition”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These characteristics define interdisciplinarity as context-specific approaches to meaning making.

2.5.5 Theory

When used to characterize theory, “interdisciplinary” referred to a specific body of theoretical work six times, theorized concepts twice, and a specific method for meaning-making once.

Table 2.4: “Interdisciplinary” Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body of Theoretical Work</th>
<th>Theorized Concept</th>
<th>Meaning-making Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization Theory</td>
<td>“interdisciplinary theories of the self, particularly in literary criticism, wherein Feminists offer the most productive research”</td>
<td>“a theory for the reading and deconstruction of digital works and their viewers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Theory</td>
<td>Classical Rhetorical theories of improvisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcolonial Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoanalytic Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.5.6 Methodology

When used to characterize a method or methodology, “interdisciplinary” referred to a methodological perspective five times and referred to a specific method three times.

Table 2.5: “Interdisciplinary” Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary methodologies drawn from the fields of literary studies,</td>
<td>case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theatre, rhetoric and composition, and women's studies”</td>
<td>rhetorical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“interdisciplinary concepts in intentionality detection, decoding and</td>
<td>literary analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluation in fictional texts”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

media studies

 cultural criticism

 political theory

The one “interdisciplinary” reference that suggested a critique of interdisciplinary work did so from an arguably disciplinary perspective: “confusion that directly impedes the work of the literary scholar.”

The keyword concordances for “interdisciplinary” and “interdisciplinarity” overwhelmingly characterize interdisciplinarity as a (set of) critical analytical perspectives.

2.6 Interdisciplinarity by Other Names

While interdisciplinarity was directly referenced in only three percent of the corpus, reference percentages for all key terms total 11%.
And like references to interdisciplinarity, feminist, critical pedagogical, visual rhetorical, and comic book references have increased between 1990 and 2012.
2.7 “Feminist” in Context

When I analyzed the abstract corpus for “feminist” references, I found that they outnumbered the interdisciplinary ones almost 2 to 1. After uploading abstracts that included feminist references to Many Eyes, I identified several categories of reference, including relationship, subject, characteristic, individual, theory, method/ology, location, and critique.

![Figure 2.9: A KWIC “Feminist” Word Tree](image)

2.7.1 Relationships

Three different textual indicators suggest relationships between “feminist” and other disciplines, theories, methods, pedagogies or physical locations. The comma (,) suggests at least a loose connection, the word “and” suggests a close connection, and the backslash (/) suggests overlap. The comma created the largest number of connections, followed by “and” and then the backslash.
Table 2.6: “Feminist” Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comma</th>
<th>And</th>
<th>Backslash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feminist theory, queer theory, animal studies, postcolonial theory, and queer ecocriticism</td>
<td>feminist theory and pedagogy</td>
<td>feminist/postmodern rhetorical analysis and critique of academic discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist theory, cultural studies, critical race theory, and literary studies</td>
<td>feminist theory and cultural studies</td>
<td>feminist/womanist theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist historiography, performance theory, Bitzer's rhetorical situation, Habermas' notion of the public sphere</td>
<td>feminist and other anti-discriminatory pedagogies and theories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, gay and postcolonial theory</td>
<td>feminist and other identity-based paradigms for politics and theorizing across disciplines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, progressive pedagogies</td>
<td>feminist and teacher research methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, community-based organizations</td>
<td>feminist and techno-feminist approaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, materialist analysis</td>
<td>feminist and black feminist/womanist theories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, anti-racist pedagogy</td>
<td>feminist and human rights movement literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, transnational, or postnational critiques of nationalism</td>
<td>feminist research and teacher-researcher research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist, rhetorical, and translational methods</td>
<td>feminist thought and practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist rhetoric, histories of rhetorical education, and composition studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These relationships suggest that, in composition studies, feminist work engages in intersections of cultural contexts, theory and practice, and pedagogy.
2.7.2 Individuals

The second largest category references individual scholars.

Table 2.7: “Feminist” Individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminist (Rhetorical) Theorists and Critics</th>
<th>Feminist Historical Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Field Belenky</td>
<td>Margaret Fuller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Biesecker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Bizzell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith Butler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blythe McVicker Clincy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Gilligan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Rule Goldberger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katharine Hayles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Hollingsworth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bell hooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Jarratt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nel Noddings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Mattuck Tarule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but one of these 14 references identifies living scholars who participate in feminist (rhetorical) theory and criticism. This suggests the importance of ongoing, active engagement for feminist work in composition studies. As a historical figure, Margaret Fuller is the exception, though, in this corpus, she is the subject of a dissertation that argues for an interpretation of her work as feminist. Additionally, four of the scholars referenced collaborated on the same publication – *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development Of Self, Voice, And Mind*, which first came out in 1986. Additionally, all individuals referenced are cisgendered women, only one of whom identifies as a woman of color (bell hooks).

---

5 A cisgendered individual’s self identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex, e.g. an individual born female that identifies as a woman.
2.7.3  **Theory**

There were nine references to theory, which were almost equally divided between theoretical perspectives and theorized concepts. All of the references to theorized concepts came from the same abstract.

Table 2.8: “Feminist” Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Perspectives</th>
<th>Theorized Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>theories of location</td>
<td>feminist theories about voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theories of technology</td>
<td>feminist theories about silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theories of pedagogy</td>
<td>feminist theories about reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theories of writing and pedagogy</td>
<td>feminist theories about action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist standpoint theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7.4  **Methodology**

Of the eleven methodological references, two were to methodological perspectives, and the rest were to specific methods. None of these references can be specifically identified as a quantitative, empirical methodology.

Table 2.9: “Feminist” Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Methodologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>case studies</td>
<td>critical discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>materialist analysis</td>
<td>interdisciplinary methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical analysis and critique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textual analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>translational methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminist composition theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist pedagogical theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of the four locations specifically referenced were to physical classrooms, and the other was to a set of online courses. The one reference to a critique suggested potential for hypocrisy: “ironically mirror phallocentrism.” As a pervasive critique of liberal feminism, its
relative rarity in this corpus, combined with the aforementioned preponderance of references to white, cisgendered women as feminists, begs the question to what extent composition studies engages with and employs multiple feminist perspectives.

2.8 “Critical Pedagogy” in Context

References to “critical pedagogy” accounted for almost two percent of the corpus, and I identified six categories of reference, including individual, characteristic, critique, relationship, context, and coursework.

Figure 2.10: A KWIC “Critical Pedagogy” Word Tree

2.8.1 Individuals

The largest type of references to critical pedagogy included those that pointed to specific individuals.
Table 2.10: “Critical Pedagogy” Individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetoric and Composition</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Various Fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda Brodkey</td>
<td>William Stanley</td>
<td>Anne Anlin Cheng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Richards</td>
<td>Henry Giroux</td>
<td>Dana Boyd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claude Hurlbert</td>
<td>Jennifer Gore</td>
<td>Diane Shoos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Brandt</td>
<td>Paolo Freire</td>
<td>Isaac Watts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana George</td>
<td>Patti Lather</td>
<td>Philip Doddridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira Shor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Berlin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Welch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Blitz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Bizzell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Elbow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Jarratt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 23 references, 12 are or were scholars working in rhetoric and composition, six are or were working in education, and the remaining five represent scholarship in Asian American and African American literature; Media, Culture and Communication; Visual Studies and French Language; and work as 18th century English hymn writers. Notably, Bizzell, Jarratt, Lather, Shoos, and Welch, characterize their work within the context of feminist/women’s studies, and Boyd, Richards, and Welch all work in technology studies.

2.8.2 Characteristics

Of the 24 references that defined critical pedagogy with some specific characteristic, all referred to those commonly associated with critical pedagogy in composition studies literature.
Table 2.11: “Critical Pedagogy” Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Literacy/Reflection</th>
<th>Additionally, the results suggest a correlation between advanced student-reader value and critical thinking and writing</th>
<th>can actually encourage the critical consciousness that is the goal of the enterprise</th>
<th>which offers an alternative model to the uncritical curriculum and depressed aspirations learned by these women in their vocational courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>as they are generally practiced by compositionists, from reproductive to resistance theories of education</td>
<td>that employ resistance theory</td>
<td>that focus solely on natural or broader cultural critiques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language-Based</td>
<td>suggests that compositionists and critical educators need to view the classroom as a unique rhetorical context that shapes (and limits) how students and teachers can engage in discussions about difference and politics in language use.</td>
<td>Their [Issac Watts and Philip Doddridge] emphasis on the epistemological power of language, for example, prefigures the theoretical foundation upon which Freire constructs his critical methodology</td>
<td>Foremost, Watts and Doddridge create participatory learning that centers on practical subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Context/Discourse</td>
<td>&quot;has focused on the social contexts of writing&quot;</td>
<td>that does not seek to emancipate its subject as much as it seeks to empower the subject within the discourses of the academy and of culture.</td>
<td>as &quot;regimes of truth&quot; (Foucault), which define the valid propositions and appropriate subjects within a particular discourse (Jennifer Gore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience-Oriented</td>
<td>Use these critiques to help theorize an audience oriented writing pedagogy</td>
<td>can productively intersect with a non-managerial notion of audience</td>
<td>seem to defy Burke's Pentad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centered</td>
<td>make the pedagogy more reactive to students' needs</td>
<td>assumes a student-centered classroom as a key goal of its mission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>can help transform society, students, and classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The largest number, four, referenced the significance of critical thinking, and relatedly, and the four second largest categories referenced forms of resistance enabled or enacted by critical pedagogy; its place in language, social contexts, and discourse; and its audience orientation. There were two references each to critical pedagogy as student-centered and focused on change, and critical pedagogy’s breadth, its approach to authority, its use as a method, and its historical context were each referenced once.

2.8.3 Critiques

Several references to critical pedagogy also appeared to be critiques, and seven of the nine referred to a missing or limited element that negatively affects critical pedagogy’s ability to address individual, social, economic, and cultural realities.
Table 2.12: “Critical Pedagogy” Critiques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Lack of Application</th>
<th>Contradictory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>model-minority discourses together hail Asian American teachers into</td>
<td></td>
<td>is marred by irreconcilable contradictions such as its inappropriateness for non-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normative roles through the deployment of affects like &quot;euphoria&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>oppressed students, is neglect of student needs, and its unsuitability for most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Anne Anlin Cheng)</td>
<td></td>
<td>[instructors privileged by the dominant ideology]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite the increase of historical projects in the field of rhetoric and</td>
<td>we know little about how critical pedagogy functions outside of theoretical discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composition, we still know very little about how marginalized students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have gained rhetorical [expertise in times when the traditional academy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has been hostile or indifferent to them]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[critical pedagogy for composition] rely upon static notions of authority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which fail to recognize how student and teacher authority is shaped and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constituted by myriad forces that comprise [the rhetorical context (or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethos) of writing classrooms]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prescribes the limits of oppression, the pedagogical paradigm does not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allow for types of difference and contradiction that would inform pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and help . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has recently come under scrutiny on the grounds that it opposes students'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pragmatic views and career concerns, effects student resistance in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classroom, devalues [students' personal experiences, and stigmatizes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white students (particularly white males).]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this work shows how the pedagogical framing of most discussions about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resistance in composition are limited to our collective understanding of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has focused on the social contexts of writing at the expense of stylistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>features of text themselves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.8.4 Relationships

Similarly to references to “feminist,” and’s and commas suggest relationships between “critical pedagogy” and other theories and pedagogies.
Table 2.13: “Critical Pedagogy” Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AND</th>
<th>Comma (,)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>resistance to advance</td>
<td>feminist and other anti-discriminatory pedagogies and theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the post-positivism of postmodern theories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the process and expressive pedagogies of the late 1970s and early 70s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curricular theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another set of textual indicators – “for” and “in” – suggest context in and for which critical pedagogy can, are, or should be employed, and in almost all of these references the context is college-level writing.

Table 2.14: “Critical Pedagogy” Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN</th>
<th>FOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English studies</td>
<td>composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action</td>
<td>this first-year course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college writing classrooms</td>
<td>first-year college writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first year composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last two categories of reference include types of assignments and/or classroom activities and method/ologies. In the former, “letter-to-the-editor assignments,” “service learning,” and “discussions of the public sphere” appear. The latter references “qualitative methods” and “critical discursive psychology." Overall, the extent to which this keyword’s context in the corpus offers a detailed map of composition studies engagement with critical pedagogy as both popular and extensively critiqued pedagogical approach is impressive.
2.9 “Visual Rhetoric” in Context

References to “visual rhetoric” accounted for less than 1.5% of the corpus. I identified five categories of reference, including relationship, characteristic, critique, method/ology, and individuals.

Figure 2.11: A KWIC “Visual Rhetoric” Word Tree

2.9.1 Relationships

The largest category of references to “visual rhetoric” were those that contextualized it as connected to other concepts or fields (using a comma), as characteristic of another concept or field (using “of”), as part of a larger issue or field (using “with,” “in,” “within,” or “emerging from”), or as synonymous with another concept or field. Five of these 20 references connected visual rhetoric to digital media or placed it within a digital context, three are production oriented, another three reference social, political, and/or cultural contexts, and two connect visual rhetoric to design.

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6 This decrease in total number of references necessarily circumscribes my analysis and reduces the number of categories of reference I am able to identify.
Table 2.15: “Visual Rhetoric” Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OF</th>
<th>WITH/IN, Emerging from</th>
<th>Comma (,)</th>
<th>Backslash (/)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of electronic-aided publishing technology</td>
<td>in the dominantly visual world of the 21st century</td>
<td>cultural studies, composition studies, and expressivist rhetoric</td>
<td>/literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of modern social activists, particularly in what Kevin Deluca calls &quot;image events&quot;</td>
<td>in the writing classroom</td>
<td>and persuasion</td>
<td>/design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the best female performers of the period</td>
<td>with a specific emphasis on looking to indigenous visual rhetorical traditions to learn new ways to read and write contemporary comics texts.</td>
<td>akin to figural arts, imperial ceremonies, and various literary genres use for the expression of political, social, and religious ideology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of literacy</td>
<td>with respect to production in the digital medium</td>
<td>the principles of interpreting visual art, and the study of theatrical costume design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of design</td>
<td>within the multidisciplinary field of rhetoric and composition</td>
<td>pictorial autoethnography, and visual composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of new media</td>
<td>emerging from amidst other digital production concerns, including accessibility, sustainability, and extensibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in new media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.9.2 Characteristics

Three references defined “visual rhetoric” with specific characteristics.

Table 2.16: “Visual Rhetoric” Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reconstitutes the ancient five-part canon, especially the canon of memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>often refers to the type of critique and rhetorical analysis applied to particular electronic genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tend to be more interested in analyzing visuals rather than generating them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two references pointed to critiques of visual rhetoric, including a lack of consideration for images as “non-discursive texts” and a lopsided emphasis on analysis over production.
Interestingly, the one method/ological reference to “visual rhetoric” was to “an attempt to articulate an intensely personal method of visual reflexivity,” and the one reference to an individual was to communications’ scholar Kevin Deluca, whose work focuses on the visual rhetoric of environmental activism.

2.10 “Comic Books” in Context

The smallest percentage of references includes “comic book” references, and I identified three categories of reference, including characteristic, individual, and comic text.

Figure 2.12: “Comic Book” Word Tree

2.10.1 Characteristics

The 13 definitional references to comics can be broken down into categories, the nine that pointed to comics as communicative and/or transformative tools and the four that identified their visual and verbal composition.
Table 2.17: “Comic Book” Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communicative/Transformative Tool</strong></th>
<th><strong>Visual &amp; Verbal</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>can be used for rhetorical action, specifically within the academy.</td>
<td>comics create both visual and verbal representations of Bakhtin's ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can help us make the shift to what image/word theorist W. J. T. Mitchell predicts is new paradigm that will transcend the word/image dichotomy.</td>
<td>combine words and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an art for artists who have left their 'homes' in disciplinary iterations of art (unart) and for artists who are more concerned with [working between media than they are within a specific medium (intermedia).]</td>
<td>they are a discourse that intentionally embraces hybrid texts with words and images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find new ways to manifest heteroglossia, through the many ways they can visually represent the voices of many speakers, pure dialogue, language as ideology.</td>
<td>are what Mikhail Bakhtin would call a hybridized construction because they combine two languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are a technology, and situates them within the context of literacy technologies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conveys ideological values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comics, as I use the term, does not refer to a specific medium, but works as a form of thought in the Deleuzian sense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are helping language evolve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use language in new ways and present particular challenges to their readers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notably, comics are characterized with the ability to transcend disciplinary definitions of art and represent ideological meaning.

2.10.2 Individuals

Of the seven references to specific individuals, three were to critical theorists, two were to comics studies scholars, and two were to comic artists. Critical theorist Gilles Deleuze also appeared in the “individuals” category of “interdisciplinary” references.
Two of the three comics specifically referenced – Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* and David Mazzucchelli’s *Asterios Polyp* – are longer-form, nonserialized graphic novels, and all three – including the illustrated *9/11 Report* – would fit two of the descriptive references to types of comics, including those on “issues of social concern” and those that “critique social norms.”

### 2.11 Conclusions

When comparing the data identified for each keyword, characteristics of composition studies work more generally begin to emerge. Composition studies aligns with humanities and social science oriented disciplines though, methodologically, qualitative discourse analysis predominates. Also, critiques are reserved for feminist and critical pedagogical work that most directly engages the relationships between discourse and culture, and the majority if individuals referenced are white contemporary critical theorists and rhetoricians, with cisgendered men outweighing references to cisgendered women. Further, when I looked specifically for co-occurrences in keywords, I found only a few instances of references to two terms in one abstract, and no references to three or more.
The three single instances of feminist and critical pedagogy, interdisciplinarity and critical pedagogy, and interdisciplinarity and visual rhetoric are too small to be visualized on this chart.

This data suggests that composition studies has yet to address intersections among feminist theory, visual rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and comics studies. In response, the next three chapters directly engage these intersections, first by outlining and applying a prismatic approach to rhetorical analysis and second, by outlining and applying a prismatic approach to composition pedagogy.
3 VISUAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND EMBODIED JUXTAPOSITIONS:
META-IDEOLOGIZING IN THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MARTHA WASHINGTON

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the extent to which interdisciplinary intersections of feminist theory, visual rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and comics studies exist in composition studies scholarship. Little to no overlap between or among these areas, despite, as I argue, their shared characteristics, necessitates an intervention. Leading by example, this chapter brings together feminist, visual rhetorical, and comics studies perspectives for a prismatic analysis of comic books’ meta-ideological potential. As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, ideology, or the constructed frameworks with which we interpret meaning and thus reality, functions both as a system of oppression and as a necessary site of resistance for social change. Ideology functions through signification, which also leaves ideology open to resistance via re-signification. Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval terms this resignification process “meta-ideologizing,” and identifies it as one of the five tools of differential consciousness employed by U.S. third world feminists to challenge “neocolonizing postmodern global formations” (2). More specifically, meta-ideologizing resists the ossification of oppressive ideologies by intentionally producing “another level of signification parasitically based on the level of dominant ideology” (109). Juxtaposing ‘old’ and ‘new’ signs of ideological meaning will “either display the original dominant ideology as naïve – and no longer natural – or reveal, transform, or disempower its signification in some other way” (109-110). Meta-ideologizing, therefore, moves beyond the fixed opposition in classical rhetorical argumentation, which juxtaposes two or more conflicting perspectives in order to persuade an audience to choose one among them, instead inviting an audience to recontextualize each perspective in relation to the other(s). While my use of the term
“inviting” alludes to Sonja K. Foss and Cindy Griffin conceptualization of “invitational rhetoric,” I used the term differently. As Foss and Griffin outlined it, invitational rhetoric involves a problematic distinction between persuasion and invitation. By distancing themselves from the winner-takes all approach to persuasion they associate with classical argumentation, they miss the opportunity to identify invitation as persuasion. In other words, inviting an audience to consider multiple perspectives can work to persuade them of the importance of access to multiple perspectives. And if we define juxtapositions, as I alluded to above, by the spaces they create for entertaining and evaluating multiple perspectives, they provide concrete examples of persuasion as invitation.

Sandoval’s recontextualization of influential Western theorists’ work through the lenses of U.S. third world feminists’ differential consciousness provides several conceptual models for meta-ideologizing, including: Franz Fanon’s “chiasmic metaphor” of skin and/as mask, Jacques Derrida’s “différence;” Hayden White’s “middle voice;” Roland Barthes’s “revolutionary exnomination,” “mythology,” “punctum,” and “third meaning;” Michel Foucault’s “desire,” Audre Lorde’s “erotic;” Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestizaje;” and Donna Haraway’s “cyborg theory.” Sandoval also briefly lists a few popular culture texts as meta-ideological examples, including “Repo Man (1984), Brother from Another Planet (1984), Total Recall (1990), Thunderheart (1992), Pulp Fiction (1994), . . . The Matrix (1999) . . . and comic books that feature mutant citizenry such as the X-Men” (69). Each of these texts use mutants, cyborgs, and ostensibly human characters with divided loyalties and the Western, post-industrialized societies they inhabit to juxtapose officially documented American history with dystopian science fiction. These juxtapositions function meta-ideologically to re-signify American history as dystopian science fiction, thereby pointing to, commenting on, and suggesting possible alternatives to
problematic and intersecting constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, patriotism, and technology present in American culture.

Each of Sandoval’s pop culture examples is also an example of visual rhetoric. As outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, my definition of visual rhetoric assumes a rhetorical relationship between formal aesthetics – including genre- and medium-based conventions related to color, contrast, emphasis, theme, perspective, characterization, allusion, point of view, setting, spatial arrangement, symbolism, panel, layout, sequence, and so forth – and raced, classed, and gendered ideologies. The ideological juxtapositions necessary for meta-ideologizing, therefore, must result, in part from a text’s visual rhetorical construction. In this chapter, and building on Sandoval’s conceptualization of meta-ideologizing, I argue that visual rhetorical construction can be used to engender three types of meta-ideological juxtaposition: visual, conceptual, and embodied.

The first type, **visual juxtaposition**, invites us to compare the comics’ images, panels, and sequences with each other. The second type, **conceptual juxtaposition**, invites us to compare the comics’ allusions to historical and fictional events and comic contexts in which these allusions are made. And the third type, **embodied juxtaposition**, invites us to juxtapose the comic’s visually depicted (and alluded to) realities with our own. While I directly address visual and conceptual juxtapositions throughout my analysis and leave their connection to embodied juxtapositions implied, I conclude the next chapter with a brief discussion of the my responses to the invitations constructed via embodied juxtapositions to engage with the raced, classed, and gendered ideologies that differentially shape my experiences in relation to those presented in the texts I analyzed. Conceptual, visual, and embodied juxtapositions all invite comparison, which creates the possibility for productive conflict, or meta-ideologizing, in which both similarities
and differences may re-contextualize and thereby shift the meaning of the realities and positionalities being compared. Further, the categories of visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions are not mutually exclusive. The extent to which a text’s different visual aspects appear to be juxtaposed may depend upon their conceptual connections. Conceptual juxtapositions result from interpreting the relationships between a text’s formal (visual and diegetic) construction and its historical and cultural contexts. And the visibility of these connections depends on the embodied experiences a reader brings to her interaction with the text.

Rather than focus my analysis on the visual culture texts referenced in Sandoval’s work, many of which have been the focus of extensive scholarly attention, I engage with a set of texts that share rich interconnections with the genre of dystopian science fiction on which Sandoval’s examples draw heavily. Between 1990 and 2007 Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons collaboratively created three mini-series and three one-shots, including the four-issue *Give Me Liberty* (1990), the five-issue *Martha Washington Goes to War* (1994), the one-shot *Happy Birthday, Martha Washington* (1995), the one-shot *Martha Washington Stranded in Space* (1995), the three-issue *Martha Washington Saves the World* (1997), and – spoiler alert – the one-shot *Martha Washington Dies* (2007). An omnibus, *The Life and Times of Martha Washington in the 21st Century*, was published in 2009. Despite the vast and continued popular and scholarly recognition Miller, as writer and artist, and Gibbons, as artist, received for the foundational contributions *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, respectively, made to the deconstructed superhero genre, the Martha Washington comics remain largely unexplored in comics studies scholarship.

The very small amount of published scholarship that does address the MWCs only addresses *Give Me Liberty* (henceforth *Give*) and primarily through the critical lenses of gender
or race, enacting the kind of ideological compartmentalization characteristic of comics studies scholarship I address in the introduction to this dissertation. Cultural studies scholar Sherrie Inness addresses gendered identity construction in *Give*, specifically how Martha Washington’s actions challenge expectations regarding behavior traditionally associated with men, representing a world in which women can be just as “tough” as men. This focus on gender equality typifies liberal feminism, which tends to work from the assumption of a naturalized gender binary and has historically identified women, via omission, as white, middle or upper class, heterosexual, and biologically female. More recently, in his *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*, Adilifu Nama works at the analytical intersection of race, class, and to a lesser extent, gender to support his argument that black superheroes in American comics, film, and television reflect historical shifts in and alternative possibilities for U.S. race relations. However, as he engages with the MWCs no further than to describe Martha Washington’s character in *Liberty* as “a truly original and reconfigured image of black American patriotism for the twenty-first century,” we are left largely on our own to figure out what this originality means in the context of his larger argument (105).

To address the MWCs’ meta-ideological potential, then, this chapter does not take a compartmentalized approach to ideological constructions. Instead, I explore the intersections of race, class, and gender the comics’ visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions make visible. The resulting productive conflict invites us to consider the raced, gendered, and classed intersections of war, superheroism, and mythology. My analysis, therefore, broadens the scope

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7 Mythology, like many of the terms employed in this dissertation, has several definitions. Roland Barthes’ use of the term to mean a meta-narrative framework through which we construct meaning is synonymous with my working definition of ideology. In this chapter, however, I use “mythology” and its lexical variants (“mythologies,” “myth,” “myths,” and “mythical”) to refer
of scholarly approaches to the MWCs, extends the applicability of Sandoval’s conceptualization of meta-ideologizing by addressing its role in Western, post-industrialized visual culture, and instantiates the role of meta-ideologizing in visual rhetorical meaning-making.

3.2 Meet Martha

We first meet Martha in *Give*, which chronicles her birth; her childhood in Cabrini Green\(^8\) raised by her widowed mother; the traumatizing impact of witnessing her teacher’s murder; her relocation to a mental facility where she meets Raggedy Anne, one of her future sidekicks; her self-defensive murder of a Health Force officer; her decision to join the U.S. army known as the Peace Force (PAX) to avoid prison; and the various missions on which she is sent by her superior officer Colonel Moretti, who wishes her dead. On one of the missions intended to kill Martha, she meets another of her future sidekicks and love interest, Baby’s Breath Wasserstein, a Native American lawyer-turned-outlaw attempting to save ancestral land that has been poisoned by oil refineries. We meet the Surgeon General, intent on replacing Martha’s independent personality with that of one of his nurse drones, on another mission, one Martha survives with Wasserstein’s and Raggedy Anne’s help. Martha also saves the animate brain of a former president, exposes Moretti’s treason, and bears witnesses to his suicide.

In *Martha Washington Goes to War* (henceforth *Goes*), PAX’s combat technology continues to malfunction, leading to Martha’s near death and recapture by the Surgeon General, who decides to keep her permanently decommissioned in spite of her value as a soldier. Wasserstein, who Martha took for dead after learning of Chicago’s nuclear destruction – where

primarily to the narratives, or stories, such as those found in Greek, Roman, Norse, African, and/or Christian mythological traditions.

\(^8\) Cabrini-Green, constructed between 1942 and 1962 and demolished between 1995 and 2011, was a Chicago housing project designed much like a prison and became, post WWII, known for its dilapidated conditions and gang violence.
he and Raggedy Anne had previously been shipped for observation – restores her to health with technology developed by scientists who have defected from the U.S., a la *Atlas Shrugged*, to construct a utopian society. Martha tracks Wasserstein back to the scientists’ stronghold, an oasis at the center of radioactive Oklahoma City. When PAX’s tethered satellite, Harmony, attacks this oasis, Martha realizes PAX was behind Chicago’s, Oklahoma City’s, and most of the U.S.’s nuclear destruction. This realization causes her to defect and join forces with Wasserstein. Against Venus’s, the world-wide communication system’s, commands, Martha also saves Wasserstein from PAX while being attacked by the Surgeon General, who is accidentally destroyed by falling detritus from PAX’s failing technology. PAX’s last-ditch effort to destroy the defectors with their entire nuclear arsenal simultaneously signals their end, as none of them detonated due to malfunction. *Goes* ends with Martha assisting in the country’s reconstruction.

In “Collateral Damage,” the first story in *Happy Birthday, Martha Washington* (henceforth *Happy Birthday*), Martha rescues Nixon during a mission to subdue the Manhattan militia. 9 From Nixon, Martha discovers the militia’s leader has been murdered, making any further military action unnecessary. However, Martha is unsuccessful in persuading her commanding officer of this reality and ends up waiting out the crossfire with Nixon. In the next story, “Logistics,” we find out that the 94th constitutional amendment, which “strictly forbids the breeding, slaughter, or sale of red meat,” sparked the second American Civil War in which Martha is fighting. Martha and her PAX team have been charged with enforcing this law. After setting free hundreds of cattle being raised in the American Southwest, Martha orders her troops to eat the only food they’ve had access to for several days: illegal Fat Boy burgers. In the third

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9 Nixon, aka Carl Seltz, is the tax collector, insurance investigator, and cyborg protagonist of Frank Miller and Geof Darrow’s *Hard Boiled* three-issue miniseries published by Dark Horse Comics between 1990 and 1992.
story, “State of the Art,” Martha is now in Louisiana – the First Sex Confederacy’s territory – and charged with testing newly developed weapons systems that turn out to be seriously flawed. After escaping their self-destructing systems and coming face to face, Martha and her First Sex Confederacy opponent realize they have both been using the same faulty technology and decide to wait together until one of their units locates them. In the final story, “Insubordination,” Miller and Gibbons pay homage to Jack Kirby with the super-soldier character Captain Kurtz\(^{10}\), who’s blood Martha has been ordered to harvest as it contains the last vestiges of the superhero serum he invented. Martha finds him in Independence Hall, where he went, after disobeying director orders, to save the Liberty Bell from the Aryan Thrust, a group of militant gay neo-Nazis. Unwilling to take more from Captain Kurtz than the she believes U.S. already has, and in her own act of insubordination, Martha smashes the vile containing Kurtz’s blood.

In *Martha Washington Stranded in Space* (Henceforth *Stranded*), Martha has been sent to investigate a black hole. After mistakenly firing on an emerging ship attempting to make peaceful contact, Martha and her lieutenant, Pearl, pass through the anomaly to rescue Big Guy, who offers them the opportunity to live in an alternate universe where earth is peaceful and clean.\(^{11}\) Martha and Pearl decline the offer, and after being sent back through the black hole, they are attacked by what appear to be flesh-eating monsters. The monsters, however, turn out to be an elaborate hoax designed by Venus to test Martha’s reaction.

In *Martha Washington Saves the World* (henceforth *Saves*), Martha must protect the world against Venus, who has developed a deadly goddess complex. She orchestrates the deaths of increasingly larger numbers of individuals, including the crew of Martha’s spaceship and a

\(^{10}\) Captain Kurtz is a reference to the name Jack Kirby was born with: Jacob Kurtzberg.

\(^{11}\) Big Guy is the U.S. military-created robot sent to save Tokyo from a giant reptile in Frank Miller and Geof Darrow’s 1995 two-issue miniseries *Big Guy and Rusty the Kid Robot*. 
Mars colony of 300, to persuade Martha that any resistance to her will is futile. After Martha has been falsely assured of Venus’ complete deactivation, she is sent on a mission to observe the largest recorded asteroid, the Juggernaut, so that Venus’ minions can implant a mind control chip into Martha’s brain. Being placed in cryogenic sleep for transport makes this possible. The asteroid turns out to be a transportation device for a probe sent by aliens to observe the life on Earth they created. When Venus sends two of her robot minions and a brainwashed Wasserstein to kill Martha for her continued free thinking despite the implanted b-chip, Martha uses the probe’s energy source destroy Venus by shutting down the Earth’s electrical circuits. Saves ends with Martha and her crew preparing to follow instructions left by the aliens who created Earth, which will lead them through the Looking Glass, a galaxy short cut.

In the final one-shot, Martha Washington Dies (henceforth Dies), Martha is now 100 years old, and on July 4th, during a brief respite from her world’s continued tumult, her wish to pass again through the Looking Glass and return to the alien civilization responsible for Earth is granted.

3.3 Genre of Mass De(con)struction

According to linguistics scholar John M. Swales, a key component of the genres we use to categorize discourse is their “double generative capacity . . . to establish rhetorical goals and to further their accomplishment” (45). In other words, genre conventions establish contexts in which meaning making can occur. For dystopian science fiction, this means that both realistic and unrealistic representations of reality serve as both social commentary on the complex issues of contemporary life and an inverted road map out of harm’s way. In M. Keith Booker’s words, dystopian science fiction can be used as social criticism because “dystopian societies are generally more or less thinly veiled reconfigurations of a situation that already exists in reality”
Dystopian, as opposed to utopian, fiction has gained in popularity since the end of the 19th century, and Booker attributes this to post-WWI and WWII disillusionment. Not surprisingly, then, war as diegetic action and thematic content pervades much of dystopian science fiction. This is certainly the case for the MWCs where numerous allusions to historical wars construct visual, conceptual, and ideological juxtapositions that invite us to compare these military conflicts with the MWCs’ fictional ones. In “Death and Taxes,” Give’s fourth and final issue, we are presented with a map of the U.S. and the nine territories threatening secession, including (clockwise from the top right) The New England Federation of States, The East Coast Capitalist District, The First Sex Confederacy, Florida, The Lone Star Republic, The Mexican Territory, Real America, Wonderland, and God’s Country.
This map is both a visual representation of *Give*’s central military conflict and a point of origin for diegetic conflicts present in the rest of the MWCs. Identifying and analyzing its visual and conceptual juxtapositions will, therefore, offer us insight into the meta-ideological construction of the MWCs’ invitation to consider the relationship between war and intersections of race, class, and gender.

Several visual juxtapositions invite us to compare the territories’ respective ideological positions. First, the map’s borders visually demarcate each territory’s geographical area, each of which are represented by a different color. Further, a speech bubble is connected to each of the
territories, reinforcing the invitation to identify each geographical area with its own ideological perspective. Each of these visual juxtapositions equates geographical and ideological territory and invites us to compare the sum of each equation. The New England Federation of States, including Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, “seeks to repeal nearly every Constitutional Amendment passed since 1990,” which suggests its disagreement with the U.S. stems from its constitutional fundamentalism (Life 185). Contrary to any assumptions we might make based on the East Coast Capitalist District’s name and territory that includes New York City, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, it has no clear agenda. Because it is primarily consumed with “fighting block by block against the white, gay, racist Aryan Thrust; The Black Supremacy Front; and as many as fifty other separatist movements,” its underlying agenda may simply be to keep profitable conflict going (Life 185). In North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, the First Sex Confederacy blames men for ‘everything wrong in the world” and has placed bans on “pornography, marriage, sexist remarks, and ‘negative role models’ in entertainment” (Life 185). Without food and the ability to communicate, Florida’s formerly “stable and militarily equipped planned communities” are now ripe for “annexation by Cuba” (Life 185). The Lone Star Republic of Texas’s “Guns, beef, and beer” motto reflects their rejection of the constitutional rights to free speech, a fair trial, and, within the MWC’s fictional world, the prohibition against the “breeding, slaughtering, and selling” of cattle (Life 185, 184). The Mexican Territory, which includes all of Mexico except Baja California, is home to many of Fat Boy Burger’s cattle farms and its cheap labor force. Real America, comprised of New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, is Big Boy Burger’s home base and where a formidable military force protects their illegal (based on the 94th amendment) enterprise. In southern California and Las Vegas, Wonderland’s “funny-
animal robots are on the warpath, demanding ‘cultural autonomy’ and an ‘end to the enslavement of artificial intelligence’” (Life 184). Comprised of Washington, Oregon, Northern California, Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota, God’s Country “prohibit[s] under penalty of death . . . ‘bad music, bad food, bad language, contraception, pornography, and adultery’” and “pledges to ‘lay waste to the impure and create a smoke-free, drug-free paradise’” (Life 184). The only section of the map without its own speech bubble is the United States of America, which creates another visual juxtaposition between the nine separatist groups and the U.S.

In addition to a map of geographical borders, then the visual juxtaposition of these territories invites us to read the map as an illustration of capitalist-fueled identity politics that conflate ideological differences with material ones. As Sandoval explains:

“A vertical-to-horizontal shift in how power is being experienced and understood changes human relations with a strange, perverse, new shimmer of ‘equality’ which results in ever-new modes of democratically exchanged hostilities, competitions, antagonisms, and suspicions. This phenomenon appears in leftist periodicals that describe the growing frictions between oppositional activists along lines of sexual orientation, gender, race, class, nation, or other differences as forms of ‘horizontal hostility.’ In these cases, differences perceived between constituencies are apprehended as evidence of an increasing need for greater division and remobilization in order that one’s own power base be better secured. Success in aggregating similar differences leads to greater fear and hostility toward other constituencies, insofar as all individuals and groups are perceived as equivalent contenders on the grid for services of power. This dynamic renews tendencies toward ‘nationalist’ and supremacist ideologies” (75).
In other words, capitalist-fueled identity politics function as a series of dividing practices\textsuperscript{12} that create and reinforce differences between conflated ideological and material realities. And because the map represents the result and possibility of military conflict, its visual juxtapositions invite us to consider the relationship between war and gendered, raced, and classed dividing practices.

The map’s conceptual juxtapositions reiterate this invitation. Centered at the top of the map in bold, black capital letters, is the map’s title, “A Nation Divided,” which references Abraham Lincoln’s now famous speech to Illinois’ Republican Party on June 16, 1858 in response to his nomination as the Republican candidate for state senator. Employing a line from the book of Mark 3:25, Lincoln uses the metaphor of “a divided house” to illustrate the necessity of presenting a united front against slavery in the U.S. (Lincoln n.p.). The title, therefore, creates a conceptual juxtaposition between the issue of slavery, one of the major catalysts for the American Civil War, and the issues driving the nine separatist groups to threaten secession. Because the fictional U.S. map directly beneath the title excludes Alaska and Hawaii, which became states on January 3, 1959 and August 21, 1959, respectively, we are additionally invited to conceptually juxtapose the fictional political climate represented by the map and the political climates historically associated with the American Civil War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the Korean War.\textsuperscript{13} The following diagram visualizes these conceptual juxtapositions:

\textsuperscript{12} Dividing practices, as Michel Foucault conceptualized them, involve seeing society and individuals as comprised of different binary groups or characteristics and fitting into different oppositional categories. It is through the act of comparison that an individual distinguishes herself as a separate entity, as an individual. These comparisons do not necessarily result from individual initiative, but are built into and reinforced within social structures (Rabinow 11).

\textsuperscript{13} The American Civil War lasted from 1861-1865, the Cold War officially lasted from 1945-1991; the Vietnam War lasted from 1946-1975, and the Korean War lasted from 1950-1953 (Arnold and Wiener ix).
The diagram also visualizes the invitation the above-mentioned conceptual juxtapositions make to consider the extent to which these conflicts all problematically conflate ideological and material realities.

3.4 The Cost of Liberty

*Give* presents several images that visually juxtapose Martha Washington and the Statue of Liberty, originally named “Liberty Enlightening the World” (“Liberty” n.p.). These images also include several historical and fictional allusions to war, which connects them thematically to the map explored above. This thematic connection places these images within the map’s context of ideological and material conflation, thereby inviting us to consider the relationship between war and liberty. Additionally, given the thematic content each of these images share, they can be

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14 In my own attempt to employ meta-ideological tactics, this subtitle references a key phrase in an address John F. Kennedy made in response to the Cuban Missile crisis: “The cost of freedom is always high – but Americans have always paid it” (Kennedy n.p.).
read as their own sequence, or what comics studies scholar Thierry Groensteen terms a “braided” sequence,\textsuperscript{15} within the larger narrative of the MWCs.

The Statue of Liberty’s design, created by sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, involves a combined representation of two female figures often employed early in America’s nationhood to represent the meaning of America: Columbia and Liberty. According to historian John Bodner, Columbia “was the American version of the English goddess Britannia and the dream of national power. ‘Liberty,’ however, signified less the authority and power of the new nation and . . . more the transnational symbol of human rights [as a statement against slavery]” (213). The statue also holds “the torch of enlightenment” above her head in her right hand and \textit{tabula ansata}, or “tablet of the law” inscribed with the date of the Declaration of Independence in her left (Khan 4). Beneath her left foot is a broken chain. Each of these elements was chosen to “articulate the ideal of liberty not through revolutionary uprisings but through the exercise of legal procedures” (Bodner 213). The tablet symbolizes the U.S. Constitution, and inscribing it with the date of the Declaration of Independence suggests that liberty is the basis of the constitution and that the constitution is liberty’s arbiter. The idea for the statue originated with political thinker and politician Edouard de Laboulaye, a fervent abolitionist who saw the American Civil War as both a conflict over slavery and a trial by fire for democracy. Laboulaye read the South’s defeat as a sign of democratic life and proposed the statue as a representation of the U.S. and France’s joint antislavery and antimonarchy commitments. The broken chain on which Liberty steps was, therefore, meant to signify chains of slavery broken by the North’s triumph in the Civil War, as well as human rights more generally (“Edouard de Laboulaye” n.p.).

\textsuperscript{15} Groensteen bases his definition of “braiding” on Jan Baetens and Pascal Lefèvre’s claim that comics can be read by “searching, beyond linear relations, to the aspects or fragments of panels susceptible to being networked with certain aspects or fragments of other panels” (Baetens and Lefèvre 72, as translated by Groensteen 146).
As Bodner tells it, however, Laboulaye’s vision was realized by “upper-class businessmen and industrialists in France and the United States who led drives to finance the statue and build the pedestal in New York to serve as a foundation” whose motives were decidedly different: “These men . . . saw liberty in terms of unencumbered economic activity and the free pursuit of wealth more than they saw it as a renunciation of despotism and slavery” (214). Additionally, despite U.S. Constitution’s legal separation of church and state, the torch of enlightenment in the statue’s right hand draws on a prevalent motif in Christian mythology: “the right hand is used particularly as a synecdoche to emphasize God’s person and actions. God’s right hand is said to be ‘filled with righteousness’ (Ps 48:10) and effective might (Ps 80:15-16, 89:13). With his right hand he delivered Israel out of Egypt . . . and brought them into the land of promise” (“Right” 727-28). Enlightenment in this context results from religious devotion. The Statue of Liberty’s significance is, therefore, conflicted, and the sequence of images visually juxtaposing Martha Washington and the Statue of Liberty throw this conflict into meta-ideological relief. The first of these juxtapositions appears on the cover of Give’s first issue.
Figure 2.3: First Statue of Martha
Instead of seven spikes representing “the seven seas and seven continents of the world,” eight screw-like shapes jut out of crown-like contraption on her head. Instead of a classically Roman draped robe, Martha wears a green hospital gown. Instead of a tabula ansata at her left hip, Martha holds a Raggedy Ann doll to her chest. As Martha looks into the distance above and behind our heads, her arm is raised but no “torch of enlightenment” is visible. In fact, because Martha’s hand is not visible, we do not know what, if anything, she is holding. Unlike the enormous three-dimensional statue located on Liberty Island in the Hudson River Bay, Martha’s figure establishes a visual bridge between the juxtaposed image of Cabrini Green to her left and the Amazon rainforest to her right. Rather than an inscribed excerpt from Emma Lazarus’s poem “The New Colossus,” we find the title of Give’s first issue beneath Martha’s image: “Homes & Gardens,” which creates an additional visual juxtapositions between the image of Cabrini Green and “Gardens” and between the image of the Amazon rainforest and “Homes.” While “liberty” is part of the statue’s name (The Statue of Liberty) and the mini-series title above Martha’s image (Give Me Liberty: An American Dream), it describes a volitional subject in the former and is an object of desire in the later.

We learn from the third image in this sequence, which is located in Give’s third issue, that the crown on Martha’s head in the first image is actually a device constructed by the Surgeon General to replace Martha’s “dirty” memories, represented by the individuals surrounding her in the second image in this sequence, and personality with a “clean” one represented by the female health force troops’ eyes in the second image in this sequence. In Give’s first issue, we learn that Martha’s green gown is standard issue for the mental institution into which she’s placed after seeing the body of her brutally murdered mentor in a Cabrini Green classroom and defending herself against the same fate. After overcoming her initial shock, she
realizes that liberating herself from Cabrini Green and the literal prison of poverty depends upon her ability to remain in the mental institution. And staying in the mental institution requires her to keep up the pretense of shock. Juxtaposing Martha’s mental gown with that worn by the Statue of Liberty, therefore, invites us to consider the extent to which liberty that results from war is relative to one’s socioeconomic status. The cover’s additional conceptual and visual juxtapositions add gender and race to this consideration.

The Raggedy Ann doll in Martha’s hand alludes to the fictional children’s book character and doll created by John Gruelle for his ailing daughter by combining characteristics from two of James Whitcomb Riley’s poems: “The Raggedy Man” and “Little Orphant Annie” (Harmon 952-53). Gruelle’s daughter died at 13, and because he thought her death was the result of a vaccine, Gruelle used the Raggedy Ann doll as a symbol for the anti-vaccination movement (Allen 99). Several stories published by Dell Comics between 1942 and 1966 also feature a Raggedy Ann character (“Raggedy Ann” n.p.). The doll consistently appears throughout initial section of Give’s first issue that depicts Martha’s childhood before entering the mental institution run by the Surgeon General, which she does, not coincidentally, at the age of 13.

Figure 3.4: Raggedy Ann Doll
It is in the mental institution that Martha first sees an individual who reminds her of her Raggedy Ann doll to the extent that she names the individual “Raggedy Ann.”

In *Give*, the Surgeon General uses this human Raggedy Ann in a vaccinating capacity of sorts. Like vaccines, which use a small portion of the disease they are meant to prevent, the telepathic function of human Raggedy Ann’s mental illness, schizophrenia, is used to obtain military secrets. Further, Martha’s understanding of a Health Force administered vaccine’s euthanizing consequences leads her to the act of self-defense that makes a decision between prison and the military necessary. Juxtaposing the Raggedy Ann doll with the human Raggedy Ann in the MWCs, therefore, invite us to understand the position against vaccines as a position against
defining illness as a crime and “health” as moral “purity.” In other words, the law (via the constitution) should prohibit equating illness with crime, and in the torch’s absence, any law created to enforce this equation would be an unenlightened one.

Until the age of 13, Martha lives in Cabrini Green, which is a direct reference to Chicago’s now demolished public housing project of the same name. Juxtaposing the image of Cabrini Green and “Gardens” highlights the name’s irony, since there is no apparent greenery in the fictional prison for the socioeconomically poor and numerous difficulties staying alive in both the fictional Cabrini Green and the historical one, whose high crime rate continues to be used as evidence against public housing plans that treat residents like criminals not deserving of humane living conditions (Whitaker; Hunt). Martha’s life is consistently in danger in both Cabrini Green, her childhood home, and in the Amazon rainforest into which she’s sent on her first military mission at President Howard Nissen Johnson’s request to remove Fat Boy Burgers’ cattle farms causing massive deforestation. Juxtaposing an image of the Amazon rainforest and “Homes” invites us to construct this parallel, and, by extension, one between low socioeconomic status and physical danger. And the visual juxtaposition of the Martha bridging the rainforest and Cabrini Green and the ampersand in “Homes & Gardens” drives home the point that only those who can afford the magazine subscription have access to the safe environs captured in Better Homes and Gardens.

Finally, the first half of Give’s title, Give Me Liberty, is a line famously attributed to Patrick Henry, which he used during his speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses persuading them to send troops into the Revolutionary War. The “Give Me Liberty” alphabetic image on the cover, therefore, sets up conceptual juxtapositions between fictional Martha Washington and
historical Patrick Henry and, by extension, the American Revolutionary War and the conflict(s) in which *Give* will engage.

As a white, educated, and landowning male, Patrick Henry was in a position to influence the direction of the Revolutionary War because his position required a response to his call to arms. Washington, on the other hand, as a young, poor, formally uneducated female of color has very little control over becoming a member of the U.S. military and no control over its engagements. In other words, Henry has the liberty to choose between liberty and death, and Martha does not. This synonymous relationship between liberty and death for those of devalued races, genders, and classes, is additionally reinforced by the fact that “Give me liberty” are Martha’s final words in *Dies*. Liberty for both Henry and Washington, then, is relative to their raced, classed, and gendered positionalities.

The second image juxtaposing Martha and the Statue of Liberty appears on the cover image of the third volume in the miniseries.
Figure 3.6: Second Statue of Martha
Martha is wearing the crown whose points now extend past the panel’s frame, suggesting a second image of a multiply fractured mirror on which the faces of the story’s key characters are projected. In the upper-left corner, the Surgeon General is paired with Wasserstein, Martha’s comrade and possible romantic interest. In the upper right corner are the domineering and defeated images of Martha’s commanding officer, Colonel Moretti, who sends Martha into impossible situations in an attempt to kill her and who ultimately commits suicide after being convicted of treason. In the bottom-right corner are Raggedy Ann, the schizophrenic Martha saves from the mental institution, and the Raggedy Ann doll Martha had as a child. In the bottom-left are the two presidents in power during Martha’s lifetime, President Rexall and President Nissen Johnson. These sections of the image generate several additional visual juxtapositions, including 1) the Surgeon General and Wasserstein, 2) Wasserstein and President Johnson, 3) a sober President Johnson and Colonel Moretti, 4) Colonel Moretti and a clone, 5) a clone and the human Raggedy Anne, 6) the human Raggedy Ann and the Raggedy Ann doll, 7) the Raggedy Ann doll and President Rexall, 8) President Rexall and a drunk President Johnson, 9) a drunk President Johnson and a clone, and 10) a clone and the Surgeon General.

Ironically, while the wires attached to Martha’s head create visual distinctions among the represented characters, their diegetic purpose to erase Martha’s individual memories, i.e. what distinguishes her from other individuals, creates an invitation to see these juxtapositions as evidence of shared, not isolated, characteristics. And, indeed, each of these characters share traits with the others. We find out in Give’s last issue that the Surgeon General is a self-constructed robot, and Wasserstein robotically responds to Venus’s commands in Goes and Saves. Wasserstein is a member of the Apache tribe with whom President Johnson signs peach treaty, and both men have weaknesses that subvert their good intentions. While Colonel Moretti
blackmails President Johnson into bombing the oil refinery where the Apache Nation resides, both are responsible for Native Americans’ almost complete annihilation. Both Colonel Moretti and the individual under which the clone serves, the Surgeon General, want to control Martha for their own megalomaniacal purposes. Though the clone appears to be as mercenary as the human Raggedy Ann is not, the Surgeon General uses both to further his cause. As mentioned above, both the human Raggedy Ann and the Raggedy Ann doll function in a sidekick capacity for Martha. After the attack on the White House, all that remains of President Rexall is his brain, so the government keeps up appearances by constructing a dummy replica of Rexall’s body. In this context, both President Rexall and the Raggedy Ann doll are inanimate objects kept as morale boosters. In addition to both holding the office of the President, Rexall and Johnson both end up as Moretti’s puppets – in Rexall’s case, literally. Similarly President Johnson and the clone are used as means to others’ ends, Moretti’s in the former’s case and the Surgeon General’s in the later’s. In addition to this user-used relationship between the Surgeon General and the clone, the Surgeon General is also a clone that appears to be able to endlessly reduplicate itself.

The only two unbroken images are two pairs of eyes placed parallel to and on either side of Martha’s own eyes. They are those of the tall, blonde, blue-eyed Health Force “built for battle bimbos” originally cloned by “billionaire Burt Blank” to be “perfect-parts party girls” (Life 124). This is the identity the Surgeon General later forces onto Martha in an attempt to pull secret military knowledge from her mind and effectively render her incapable of thinking for herself. The fact that Martha’s own eyes are whited out certainly suggests the blindness to reality the Surgeon General hopes to inflict on her, as well as the possibility that reality is based on how we (don’t) see rather than on what may actually be there.
In *Global Democracy, Social Movements, and Feminism*, Catherine Eschle writes “When we study ‘the real world’ we do so with a conceptual, epistemological, and moral framework already in place, shaped by our location in structures and relations of power and informing what we look at and how we evaluate its significance” (12). In other words, what we see as the world is shaped by the lens(es) we use to look at it, lenses that are constructed by our material realities. When the Surgeon General replaces Martha’s eyes as a part of the procedure designed to give her a new identity as a Health Force clone, he is attempting to erase the experiences Martha has had that could compel her to challenge his authority and the authority of dominant ideology itself. The ‘health’ he dispenses, then, is just as ironic as the ‘liberty’ it offers. The image of Martha’s blindness also references the absence of a torch in the first visual juxtaposition of Martha and the Statue of Liberty, further suggesting that the economic liberty offered by capitalism does not exist for everyone.

The last image juxtaposing Martha and the Statue of Liberty occurs when we see the Surgeon General giving Martha her new identity.
Figure 2.7: Third Statue of Martha
She is suspended high above him, attached at the head to several wires that make her the centerpiece of the large, organ-like apparatus. We look up at her as we would the Statue of Liberty, but unlike the clothed statue, Martha’s vulnerability could hardly be more apparent in this naked, spread-eagle position. We are also not able to see her face, and she becomes an anonymous body to be manipulated at the hands of the Surgeon General. Taking on a new identity or subjectionhood in this context does not simply mean changing military fatigues for nurse’s scrubs. It requires one’s complete objectification. While this chapter primarily engages with *Give*, the next chapter extends my examination of visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions with analyses of the ideological intersections made visible throughout the MWCs via representations of mass media and mythological references.
4.1 In Media Res

Visual representations of multiple media characterize many comics, most notably for our purposes in *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*. Literary scholar Jesse Molesworth describes the multiple media represented in these texts as “not merely aesthetic statements on the strengths and limitations of their given medium [but] statements [that] proceed precisely through an evaluation of the strengths and limitations of other forms of media” (n.p.). More specifically, these visual representations of multiple media suggest that (re)mediated realities are subjective realities; meanings shifts, and can be shifted, with shifts in medium.

Not surprisingly, as their first collaboration directly following the publication of *DKR* and *Watchmen*, *Give* includes numerous visual representations of multiple media, including posters, magazines, broadcast television, and computer screens. The military employ three of these media, posters, magazines, and television broadcasts, each of which invite us to consider the relationship between the military’s self-representation and militarized realities.
After killing a Health Force officer in self-defense, Martha disguises herself to evade police capture, and it is a military recruitment poster that encourages her to join the military.

Staring directly at us, the audience, with a rather sultry expression, is a stereotypically attractive woman who makes the following statement: “On the Run? Join P.A.X.” She simultaneously gestures at us to follow her into, based on the text below her head shot, the Amazon rainforest. The poster is visually striking in no small part because of its color-coding.
Both “On the Run?” and the officer’s lips are the same shade of red; “Join” and the officer’s eyes are the same shade of blue; and “P.A.X,” the officer’s speech bubble, and “Amazon Action” are white. Together, these elements suggest a distinctly “American,” given the red, white, and blue combination, quid pro quo: legal leniency and sexual favors for military service. Based on Cynthia Enloe’s extensive research into the impact of militarization on women’s and men’s lives, this kind of service exchange is indicative of the military’s problematic and differential valuation of masculinity and femininity: “In scores of different societies [military policy makers] have acted as though most men need to be continuously reminded that their grasp on the statues of ‘manly man’ depends on women thinking of them as such” (Maneuvers 37). Accordingly, based on heterosexist assumptions, one way in which the military has controlled men’s self images has been to control how women behave towards men, behaviors that include military-sanctioned prostitution.

The militarizing effect on gender and sexuality is even more apparent in Give’s visual representation of a fictional magazine, Meatrack.
Figure 4.2: Meatrack Magazine Cover
While Martha is still housed in the mental institution, she finds a copy of this magazine in the lap of a sleeping security guard. The direct eye contact, smile, post, military accouterments, state of undress, visual alignment of the rifle and breast, and saddle-bag style belt of the woman pictured encourage the audience to read her as a reward for military service. More specifically, pointing your gun will arouse her and after trudging through battle, she will allow you to ride atop her. The title of the magazine’s featured section she’s meant to represent – “Girls of the Peace Force. What We’re Fighting For” functions primarily as alphabetic reinforcement for her non-alphabetic image.

In what appears to be a section from another issue of Meatrack, we are presented with a brief history of the human female clones now used by the Surgeon General for battle, as well as visual renderings of three completely naked clones in weight training.
Figure 4.3: Inside *Meatrack* Magazine
The pink text, pink triangles, and muscular physiques, and phenotypical appearance suggest multiple problematic relationships among gender, sexuality, and the military. Pink triangles were used to identify male homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps, a marker that ‘earned’ them inhuman treatment by guards and fellow prisoners alike, including sterilization in the form of castration (Heger; Setterton). In the 1970s, however, pink triangles were reclaimed as symbols of LGBTQ solidarity and pride (Rapp 1). And the ability to serve in the military as openly gay is currently seen by many as a gain in the area of LGBTQ rights. However, as Enloe points out, this problematically characterizes military service as a valued activity all should have the right in which to participate (Maneuvers 15). Additionally, the women’s physical “perfection” reflects problematic expectations of white femininity that intersect with definitions of “acceptable” lesbian identities.

Compared with these two-dimensional representations, the televised image of a male PAX officer who is allowed to speak, even if it is only to offer a public relations-approved version of his decision to join the military, offers us a clear definition of the type of masculinity the sexualized images of women are used to reinforce.
He has perpetrated acts of violence, including “armed robbery and murder one,” experiences he says will come in handy as an officer. His smile is also the widest when he takes the safety off of his gun, an action we are meant to hear: “CHKCHAKK.” Because this action takes place on the last panel of the page, positioned on the bottom left, we are also invited to anticipate the result of the officer’s action. Turning the page, we are “rewarded” with the newscast announcement that “Our country is at war with forty nations – and with itself.” No doubt soldiers like the one featured in the previous telecast are expected to have no qualms participating in the legalized robbery and murder of these wars.

4.2 Superheroic Myths

Including or alluding characters from other comic narratives is another story-within-a-story device often employed by comics. This is certainly true for superhero comics whose
intentional intertextuality, according to compositionist Dale Jacobs functions rhetorically to encourage readers to explore (i.e. purchase and read) the stories of the comic book characters being referenced. Superhero comic books also draw heavily on mythology, which is often used to define or contextualize comic book superheroism (Coogan; Kovaks and Marshall). These direct and indirect allusions construct conceptual juxtapositions between a superhero/ine’s various comic book and mythological iterations. In the MWCs, for example, the black panther that appears in Give’s last issue alludes to the comic book superhero The Black Panther and the Egyptian goddess Bast, the Captain Kurtz character that appears in “Insubordination” alludes to comic book superhero Captain America and the mythological tropes of sacrifice and a dying god, the description of the human female clones identified by Martha in Stranded as “Valkyrie clones” alludes to the comic book villainess/superheroine Enchantress/Valkyrie and Norse goddesses of the same name, and the Venus character present from the end of Goes to the end of Saves alludes to the comic book superheroine and Roman goddess of the same name. Martha is also visually juxtaposed with each of these allusions: she alone sees the panther; she alone interacts with Captain Kurtz; the Surgeon General unsuccessfully replaces Martha’s identity with that of a Valkyrie clone; and Venus expends much of her energy attempting to control Martha’s thoughts and actions. These conceptual and visual juxtapositions invite us to consider how ideologies of race, class, and gender inform definitions of superhero(in)ism and to what extent Martha reinforces and/or challenges these definitions.

4.2.1 Spirited Black Panthers

Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the Black Panther first appears in Fantastic Four issue #52 (1966). In the African nation of Wakanda, the title of “Black Panther” is given to the leader of the Panther clan in a ceremony during which the leader is bound to the clan’s panther
god, Bast. A connection with the panther god significantly enhances an individual’s physical abilities. To become the king of Wakanda, an individual must complete physically and intellectually arduous tasks. In issue #52, T’Challa, son of the late leader of the panther clan and king of Wakanda, T’Chaka, invites the Fantastic Four to Wakanda to prove himself able to be the next king of Wakanda by evaluating each of the Four’s powers and subduing them one by one. After successfully besting them and evaluating their characters, T’Challa asks them to become his allies in protecting his country and its technologically advanced society. The physical, intellectual, and ethical prowess T’Challa exhibits, which result, in part, from his connection to the panther god, simultaneously earn him the position of Wakandan king and establish his superheroic credentials. The Black Panther comic book superhero represents, for Nama, “a strident critique of African colonial and postcolonial politics” because the Black Panther’s origin story characterizes Africa as a technologically advanced society in danger of invasion and characterizes him with physical and intellectual powers both equal to and greater than those of the Fantastic Four (43). In other words, the Black Panther comics employ a fictionalized plotline to comment on the very real exploitation of Africa at the hands of western imperialism and argue for understanding African men and men of African descent to be just as (super)human as European men and men of European descent. However, the panther god with whom T’Challa connects and whom a sitting panther totem represents, clearly references the cat-headed Egyptian goddess Bast (Leeming 47). This gender reassignment and representational shift problematically naturalizes a connection between black masculinity and wild animals. Rather than challenging race-based definitions of superheroism, remaking Bast in the image of a male

16 In comics featuring the Black Panther after Give’s publication, Bast is characterized as both god and goddess (“Panther God” n.p.).
black panther reinforces a distinction between wild black (super)heroism and domesticated white (super)heroism.

Like the Black Panther’s, Martha’s physical and intellectual prowess are also impressive, as evidenced in particular by her bare-handed cliff-scaling in *Saves* and her self-protective mind control in both *Goes* and *Saves*. Her bond with a black panther in *Give*, however, is not a sought-after honor nor does it enhance her abilities. In Martha’s origin story, her race, class, and gender, consistently put her in positions of extreme vulnerability, and the panther appears to be a psychological manifestation of Martha’s extreme physical and emotional duress, a last-resort persona taken on in self-defense. As such, her panther affinity functions more as evidence of and commentary on the raced, classed, and gendered ideologies of American colonialism.

Martha introduces us to the panther during a back-and-for-the sequence of panels representing previous exchanges with her fellow officers (former death-row inmates who try to rape her) and Colonel Moretti (who denies her request for a transfer out of the unit of officers who tried to rape her) and her more recent contemplation of these interactions while alone in the Amazon rainforest.
The scenes depicting Martha’s interactions with her fellow officers and Colonel Moretti are in present tense, giving us a sense of how Martha would have experienced them first hand. The thought bubbles that appear in scenes depicting Martha’s later contemplation of these interactions, however, are her present thoughts about the relationship between the panther’s appearance (first watching Martha and then sniffing her) and her thoughts while in the jungle where the panther appears about the earlier interactions with her fellow officers and Moretti. In other words, Martha has flashbacks to her interactions with fellow officers and Colonel Moretti while thinking about what she thought about those interactions. This metacognitive attempt to
explain the concomitant appearance of the panther and her desire to be out of harm’s way (i.e. far away from her fellow officers and Colonel Moretti), suggests that the panther represents Martha’s desire to protect herself. The panther’s subsequent appearances reinforce this suggestion.

We next see the panther while Martha attempts to escape the Native American reservation where she and Raggedy Ann are being held hostage as a bargaining technique to establish the Apache Indians’ right to create their own independent nation. Between the panel where Martha is hit with the first tranquilizing dart and when we see her attempting to defend herself against further attack, there is a full-page panel of a bald eagle and panther in conflict.
Figure 4.6: Second Panther Sighting
Given the connection previously established between Martha and the panther, it is possible that the eagle shares a similar relationship with Wasserstein. Like bald eagles, Apache Indians are native to America, and like bald eagles, their numbers have dwindled as a result of mass murder and forced relocation. Also, Wasserstein’s comment, “A cat. Of course,” which he makes while watching Martha succumb to the tranquilizers assumes a relationship between Martha and the panther. While panthers are, technically speaking, big cats, “cat” is most often used to describe less dangerous, domesticated animals. Calling Martha a cat, therefore, suggests that the tranquilizers have “domesticated” Martha by rendering her harmless.

The Surgeon General’s methods for rendering Martha harmless are more extreme: he wants to replace her identity by first erasing her memories. The panther reappears in one of the panels depicting the last vestiges of these memories, which also include her mother smiling at her, a leaky classroom ceiling, a Fat Boy Burger tank, her dead teacher’s broken glasses, a dying soldier, a snowy night in Cabrini Green, and one of President Rexall’s election parades.
The visual juxtaposition of these panels with the keys on the instrument the Surgeon General plays to remove Martha’s memory suggests that while these panels are not a chronological sequence, they are nonetheless connected. Further, placing the panel depicting Martha’s teacher’s broken glasses on the floor of her classroom, which signifies his death and Martha’s
escape from the same fate, next to the panel depicting the panther reminds us that Martha was forced to develop survival skills at an early age.

The panther next appears in a full-page panel following a sequence in which the human Raggedy Ann returns Martha’s memories to her.

Figure 4.8: Fourth Panther Sighting
In this panel, unlike the previous one that offers us an aerial view of the panther so that we can look down at it walking through the rainforest, the panther makes direct eye contact with the audience while walking towards us with bared teeth and visible claws. The shift in panel size and perspective suggest a shift in the panther’s significance to Martha. Before, the panther symbolized Martha’s fear and desire to live. That the panel following this one depicts Martha walking away from us and toward the Surgeon General’s headquarters further evidences the shift in Martha’s position from defensive to offensive.

The panther’s next and final set of appearances occurs during Martha’s attempt to save President Rexall’s brain from Colonel Moretti. She, the President, his wife, Wasserstein, and Raggedy steal a Health Force plane and fly into the rainforest where Colonel Moretti seriously injures Wasserstein and again tries to kill Martha, this time, directly.

Figure 4.9: Fifth Panther Sighting

Figure 4.10: Sixth Panther Sighting
Prior to and during Moretti’s attack, Martha and the panther are never in the same panel, and like the previous sequence, the panther and Martha face different directions. This time, the panther lunges diagonally away from us, and Martha lunges diagonally toward us. Further, while Martha attacks Moretti, the individual the panther attacks appears to be a big game hunter. This visual juxtaposition of Moretti and the big game hunter highlights his raced, classed, and gendered status relative to that of Martha’s. While Martha, as a panther, resorts to violence in order to survive, Moretti, as a game hunter, has the liberty to treat violence as a sport.

4.2.2 In Myth We Trust

Created by Joe Simon Jack Kirby, Captain America first appeared in 1941 in Captain America Comics issue #1. On the now famous cover, we see Captain America punching Adolf Hitler. Inside the issue, we learn Captain America’s origin. Professor Reinstein has created a super-soldier serum, which is injected into a physically weak looking Steve Rogers, making him grow both physically and intellectually. Professor Reinstein names the enhanced Rogers Captain America and tells him to keep America safe from Nazis. This origin story, according to comics scholar Matthew J. Costello instantiates Captain America as “a bearer of a vision of American democracy” (13). More specifically, Captain America’s defense of individual freedoms makes his character and actions symbolic of individual liberty, the “trampling” of which comes to characterize Cold War communism: “So long as we cherish liberty – so long as the bitter seed of tyranny can never take root upon our shores – then all of us are heroes and the dream which is America will long endure” (Lee n.p., as qtd. in Costello 67). The MWCs highlight the ideological function of Captain America as symbol of liberty with allusions the mythological tropes of sacrifice and a dying god, and the visual juxtaposition of the captain and Martha, like that between the Statue of Liberty and Martha, invite us to consider to what extent American
“liberty” is problematically defined by the same raced, classed, and gendered ideologies that perpetuate the use of white heterosexual males with no apparent financial concerns as the standard comic book superheroic identity.

In “Insubordination” we meet a Captain Kurtz, a war hero wearing a costume very similar to that of Captain America, who has been in every U.S military engagement since WWII and who, against a direct order, crossed enemy lines to save the Liberty Bell from the Aryan Thrust. Because he is now dying and his blood contains the last vestiges of the serum – the Omaha storage facility was bombed and the mixing instructions were destroyed – Martha has been given orders to collect the Captain’s blood. Martha finds him hugging the Liberty Bell, the one thing he could not bear to see the Aryan Thrust capture regardless how much of his life force was depleted in order to reach it. Kurtz devoted every one of his considerable talents to rebuffing external attacks on individual liberty, a devotion for which he is willing to die. The scene of Martha’s death also invokes mythological tropes of sacrifice and a dying god, which invite us, via visual juxtaposition with Kurtz’s death scene, to consider the extent to which Kurtz and Martha represent similar relationships between mythology and superhero(ine)ism.

Where Kurtz’s actions suggest sacrifice and characterize him as a dying god, the scene of Martha’s death directly invokes Christian mythological versions of these tropes.
A crucifix is prominently positioned above Martha’s head in a setting suggestive of a destroyed church. In garments reminiscent of those worn by Catholic nuns, Martha sits in front of her comrades and family who wait, vigil-like for her to die. As Martha falls from her seat, she utters “We’re dust,” a version of the burial prayer based on a passage from the King James Version of the bible.\textsuperscript{17} Also, a nun’s face is among those whose concern and grief over Martha’s death is shown in close-up. Unlike Kurtz, then, whose conceptual juxtapositions place him in a god-like position, Martha’s death places her in the role of devotee called on to make sacrifices rather than initiating her own god-like self-sacrifice. In other words, Kurtz’s superheroism is god-like and the god of Christian mythology dictates Martha’s superheroism. Because Kurtz’s characteristics invoke mythological tropes of sacrifice and a dying god, they also create a conceptual juxtaposition that invites us to consider the extent to which these tropes also inform

\textsuperscript{17} “In the seat of thy face, shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).
the definitions of American democracy and liberty established by the definition of superheroism Kurtz represents.

4.2.3. **Femme Fatales**

Created by Roy Thomas and John Buscema, the superheroine Valkyrie first appears in *Avengers* #83 in 1970. She has convinced Scarlet Witch, Black Widow, and Medusa to band together as the Liberators in order to “battle male oppression” and the “apparent double standard in being a superhero” (“Avengers” n.p.). However, after she and her fellow Liberators save the male Avengers from the Masters of Evil, Valkyrie reveals that she is actually Enchantress seeking revenge on all men for her partner, the Executioner’s, betrayal. In her next two appearances, in *The Incredible Hulk* issue #143 (1971) and *Defenders* issue #4 (1973), respectively, Enchantress transforms other women into Valkyrie in further attempts to seek revenge on men and win back the Executioner. We later find out that the Enchantress’s ability to control the Valkyrie’s spirit started when Enchantress trapped Valkyrie’s spirit in a “mystic crystal of souls” after Valkyrie attempted to end their adventures together (“Valkyrie” n.p.). Valkyrie's spirit is reunited with her body in *The Avengers* issue #108 (1982). After this, she is charged with teaching Moondragon humility. Moondragon, who first appears in *Iron Man* issue #54 as Madame MacEvil, has significant powers of mind control, which she uses on Iron Man, Thor, and an entire planet at war.

Thomas and Buscema clearly borrowed from Norse mythology to create their Valkyrie character. A Valkyrie is one of a group of female gods in the Norse pantheon who are tasked with choosing heroes among half of the dead warriors on earth. These heroes will fight in the world-ending and world-renewing battle of Ragnarok (Leeming 334). After bringing the heroes to the kingdom of the gods, Asgard, the Valkyrie serve them mead to prepare them for battle
(“Valkyries” 1066-1067). All valkyrie are lead by the “warlike but beautiful princess” Brunhilde, who in the German epic Nibelungenlied, is tricked into marrying someone who has not passed the tests she establishes as marital prerequisites (Leeming 55-56). Upon consummating her relationship, she loses all of her supernatural strength (Leeming 288).

Because Thomas and Buscema’s Valkyrie is tricked by a woman who uses the guise of liberal feminism to win back her man and must control similar tendencies in another potentially dangerous female at the behest of the all-father god Odin, their Valkyrie’s superheroism appears to function primarily to enforce white patriarchal standards of white femininity. Similarly, the MWCs’ Valkyrie clones created by rich white Burt Blank for his own sexual satisfaction rebel against this expectation. Militarizing the clones -- they become PAX officers, Health Force officers, and First Sex Confederacy officers – redirects their independence into “appropriate” and controlled channels, including the Surgeon General’s expectation that they will be able to physically restrain Martha and serve as the prototype for the personality with which he wants to replace hers. And where the Valkyrie’s cloning and militarizing point to the constructed nature of white femininity, the visual juxtaposition of the Valkyrie clones and Martha made visible by Martha’s identity replacement invites to consider how white femininity can be used to control and (re)construct femininity across race.

4.2.4. Venus in Retrograde

Created by Stan Lee and Lin Streeter, the heroine Venus first appears in Venus issue #1 (1948). She has become bored with her ruling role on planet Venus and decides to explore life

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18 The parallel I draw here between Thomas and Buscema’s and Miller and Gibbon’s Valkyrie characters is not meant as an argument for reading Miller and Gibbon’s characters as reinterpretations of Thomas and Buscema’s. The similarity is only important to the extent to which it highlights how both Thomas and Buscema and Miller and Gibbons draw on and reinterpret the Valkyrie character presented in Norse mythology.
on planet Earth. Her astounding beauty causes quite a stir upon arriving in New York City, where she is quickly persuaded by Beauty Magazine publisher Whitney Hammond to become both the new face and new editor of the magazine. The following eighteen issues in this nineteen-issue series engage the audience in the love triangle that develops among Venus, Hammond, and Venus’ co-worker Della Mason. The series’ plot also, according to comics studies scholar George Kovaks, “takes a sharp turn into action-adventure and another turn to nearly surreal science fiction and finally, for two issues, into a horror title. By that time Venus had devolved into the standard plucky and useless-though-vocal-in-the-face-of-danger heroine” based on her almost complete inability to use her goddess powers on Earth (17-18). We find Venus still on earth in her next appearance in Sub-Mariner issue #57 (1973), but in her new profession as UCLA professor of Humanities her primary purpose is to promote peace, and Namor (aka the Sub-Mariner) aids Venus in foiling the God of war Ares’ attempt to return her to Atlantis.

The contrast between these comic book versions of Venus prior to the MWCs and the Venus presented to us in the MWCs is rather stark.
This Venus is a disembodied, computer-based system of communication bent on creating world peace via complete submission by others to her will, presenting us with an image of the destructive results of disembodied power. The comic book versions of Venus prior to the MWCs, therefore, seem to represent characteristics more closely associated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite than her Roman counterpart Venus. According to Leeming, Aphrodite was associated in Greece with “irrational passions” evidenced by her role as stimulator of “the joys of love and the guiles that women employ to seduce men” and her affairs with the human Adonis and the “her fellow Olympian Ares” (Leeming 22). Unlike Aphrodite, Venus “takes on the kind of
serious stature that Athenians gave to Pallas Athena rather than to Aphrodite” due to her role as
the mother of Aeneas and, therefore, the mother of Rome (Leeming 394). Also, unlike the
“comic and sexual” relationship between Aphrodite and Ares, “the pairing of Venus and Mars
[Ares’ Roman counterpart] served a more theological and nationalistic purpose, bringing
together the two myths of the founding of Rome” (Leeming 394). Roman Venus and MWCs’
Venus, however, are not as similar as Greek Aphrodite and pre-MWCs’ Venus. Roman Venus’s
power is primarily symbolic; pointing to her representation as the mother of Aeneas lends power
to the myth of Rome’s origin. However, while the MWC’s Venus communicates via computer-
generated images, the MWC’s Venus wields direct control her computer-generated head-sans-
body images. That her demise results from an electric current, orchestrated by Martha, strong
enough to short-circuit all electrical systems on Earth, invites us to consider the value and power
of Martha’s and our own embodied realities.

4.3 (M)a(r)thena

As evidenced by the above discussion of Bast, Valkyrie, and Venus, definitions of comic
book superhero(in)ism are constructed in part via direct references to mythological figures. The
MWCs also include several indirect references to Greek goddess Athena who, when juxtaposed
with Martha, invite us to consider relationships among racism, classism, and sexism and their
role in superheroism’s exigence.

According to extant accounts of Athena’s birth and parentage, she sprang fully armed
from Zeus’s head, an image that is meant to signify her battle skills and intelligence. In *Give*
Martha is also armed from a very young age in order to protect herself from possible assailants
Her weapons at this point, however, are gender-masking boys’ clothes worn in order to deflect
any unwanted interest. In this way, Martha’s character uses and challenges the unequivocally
positive light with which classical literature views Athena’s weapons by suggesting an alternative reason for them: raced, classed, and gendered vulnerability.

Figure 4.13: Martha in Disguise
*Give* extends this challenge with an allusion to another element of violence present at Athena’s birth. According to ancient Greek lyric poet Pindar, Hephaestus splits Zeus’s head with an axe in order to release Athena (Leeming 36). While Martha is being born in one of Cabrini Green’s dirty, understaffed hospitals, her father suffers a fatal blow to the head from the butt of a military officer’s semi-automatic weapon for protesting Cabrini Green’s prison-like conditions. Reframing this proximity to violence from birth in a contemporary setting thus invites us to consider the raced, classed, and gendered impact of institutional power.

Martha’s training in distrust leads her to kill a member of the Health Force in self-defense, an act that also forces her to choose between prison and the military, where her record would be wiped clean. Martha chooses the military, and like Athena, becomes a “protectoress and preserver of the state and social institutions” (“Athene” par. 22).
For Martha, however, becoming an officer was the lesser of two evils, further cementing a view of the state’s power as oppressive and further evidencing the need for ethical intervention. And like Athena, Martha’s actions are never indiscriminately violent. In incident after incident, we see Martha exhibit the “purely ethical character” attributed to Athena (“Athene” par. 9).

Martha’s successful escape from the Aryan Thrust leads her into the hands of the Apache Nation, the last small group of Native Americans alive in the U.S. who are also preparing an attack on the government who turned their reservation into a toxic wasteland. Despite the fact that this group is an enemy of the state Martha has sworn to protect, she harms none of them in her escape,
and empathizes with the conditions of poverty and severe ill-health to which they have been reduced. At the end of *Give*, Martha also exposes Captain Moretti’s subterfuge -- through which he was supposed to profit handsomely at the unnecessary expense of soldiers’ lives -- and offers him her belt so that he can end his life. In enabling the death of a violent, power hungry individual, Martha here recalls Athena’s defeat of Ares and his “savage love of war” (“Athene” par. 14). Moretti’s desire for power is also coupled with monetary greed, implicating the free market of contemporary Western society in the racism, sexism, and classism of state-sponsored warfare.

4.4 Epic Reloads

Evidence of resistance, even if the efforts are ultimately thwarted, can itself function as a form of critique, and according to classics scholar David Quint, epic narrative structure can do just this. While the linear narrative of Virgil’s *Aeneid* became associated with Rome’s unequivocal historical and cultural victory, the episodic disunity in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* raises the possibility that war begets only losers: “If the teleological epic narrative is directed towards answering the question ‘Who has won,’ the absence of an organizing teleology proposes the answer ‘Nobody wins’” (46). The MWCs’ similarly episodic structure invites us to consider the extent to which its military conflicts represent war as a series of dehumanizing absurdities.

Time after time, mini-series after mini-series, issue after issue, Martha crosses legal, logistical, and even logical lines in order to resist the dehumanizing impact of circumscribed ‘liberty.’ For example, the “State of the Art,” after realizing that she and her opponent in battle face each other with exactly the same faulty technology, she decides to sit and wait with her rather than find out how evenly matched their tactical skills are. In *Happy Birthday’s* “Logistics,” after discharging her duty to disperse cattle being illegally raised for beef production,
Martha orders her troops to buy and eat Big Boy Burgers, as it is the only food source around and they have been without army-provided rations for several days. And in “Insubordination,” Martha decides let Captain America die with dignity rather than drain the last drops of his chemically enhanced blood for U.S. government’s use.

Martha also recognizes the lengths to which Venus will go for world domination in Saves when Venus brainwashes three hundred colonists on Mars into committing suicide. Given Miller’s documented fascination with the Battle of Thermopylae in his Sin City mini-series, The Big Fat Kill, published the same year as Goes and his graphic novel 300 published the year after Saves, this mass suicide is more than likely also a reference to the ancient historical conflict in which Greek soldiers unsuccessfully prevent Persian forces from gaining territory in the later’s campaign to capture all of Europe. This reference juxtaposes military strategies with brainwashing and their outcomes as entirely senseless. Making this reference, therefore, functions as an episodic catalyst for Martha’s continued fight against the totalitarian regimes of neo-colonizing global capitalism. While the MWCs do begin and end with Martha’s birth and death, both events happen amidst continued conflict, which suggests that Martha’s death is only a temporary respite from the struggle for peace, the end of the Martha Washington comics should not be read as the victory over Martha of institutionalized power and the racism, sexism, and classism it can engender, but the loss of humanity this oppression causes.

20.50  Lines of Sight

Up to this point, I have focused primarily on the MWCs’ visual and conceptual juxtapositions. However, the act of reading a comic book, whether in print or digital form, requires the reader to face the text, which results in a physical juxtaposition of the reader and the text. This juxtaposition between the audience’s viewpoint and that of the narrative can, and often
is, acknowledged directly with characters who face the audience and look straight ahead, as if into the audience’s eyes. This visual merging of audience and character viewpoints reminds us of our positions as (participant) observers, thereby inviting us to compare our own and the character’s positionalities. As evidenced by the previously addressed images, the MWCs construct embodied juxtapositions between the audience and each of its main characters. Likely based on her role as protagonist, instances of Martha’s direct eye contact far outnumber those of other characters. She looks at us while trying to fall asleep in Cabrini Green, while in shock at her teacher’s death, while moving from shock to awareness in the mental institution, while absorbing the horrors of a toxic gas attack in the Amazon rainforest, while Moretti shoots her, while flying an aircraft into battle, while greeting her mother, while watching the bodies of dead officers float in outer space, while planning her escape from the Apache’s oil refinery, while the oil refinery explodes, while under the Surgeon General’s observation, while jumping out of an aircraft in an attempt to save President Rexall’s brain, while apologizing to Wasserstein for the death of the Apache Nation, while aiming an arrow at one of Moretti’s troops, while climbing a tree for a better vantage point, while leaping down from the tree to attack Moretti, while ordering her officers to free Fat Boy cattle, while unsuccessfully attempting to use a transformer-like piece of military equipment, while regaining consciousness in the Surgeon General’s decommissioning body tank, while trying to avoid an outer space missile attack on her ship, while watching the Mars colony commit suicide, while reuniting with Wasserstein outside the U.S. defectors’ hideout, while communicating with Venus, while attempting to regain control of her space ship, while falling into cryogenic sleep, while commanding a technician to allow Wasserstein’s ship to dock, while watching the ship she allowed Wasserstein to enter explode, and while Venus is destroyed. Many of these experiences contextualize Martha’s sight as a
catalyst for her active response to the hostile conditions in which she finds herself. Accordingly, though Martha’s experiences and reactions are fictionalized, they reference the all-too-real dangers present for those who share one or more of Martha’s positionalities as a poor woman of color. According to the 2012 National Crime Victim Survey, people of color – identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, or those in two or more categories of race – are more likely that those identified as White to be victims of “rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault” (Langton, Planty, and Truman 7). The risk of violence is also higher in communities characterized by “increased levels of unemployment, poverty, and transiency; decreased levels of economic opportunities and community participation; poor housing conditions; and a lack of access to services” (“Violence” n.p.). Martha’s direct eye contact, therefore, invites us to compare her fictionalized experiences and the real ones to which they allude with our own. As a white, middle-class, cisgendered woman with an advanced degree and the promise of continued, stable employment and excellent health care, I do not have first-hand experience being imprisoned by public housing and mental institutions; being forced to engage in military combat; being physically, psychologically, or sexually abused; or, more generally, being discriminated against based on my raced or classed identity. I have, however, witnessed or been privy to others’ first-hand experiences, second- and third-hand experiences that continue to persuade me of the dangers inherent in ignoring the ways raced, classed, and gendered identities differentially intersect.

As addressed above, the image of Martha staring blindly forward while all other key MWCs’ characters make direct eye contact with the audience presents us with several differential intersections, and meeting each gaze creates an opportunity to consider how our
raced, classed, and gendered positionalities and our intentions compare with those of the Surgeon General, Wasserstein, President Nissen Johnson, Colonel Moretti, Valkyrie clones, the human Raggedy Ann, the Raggedy Ann Doll, and President Rexall. I share a raced identity with Johnson, a gendered identity with the Valkyrie clones, and my classed identity aligns most closely with that of Johnson, Rexall, and Moretti. In a rather uncomfortable realization, I can also see myself heading down a path similar to Johnson’s, in which my desire to remake the world according to my ethical standards clouds my ability to distinguish between means and ends, keeps me from establishing and maintaining communication with all parties involved, and reinforces rather than challenges my white, middle-class privilege. This makes the meta-ideological work of invitation as persuasion via visual, conceptual, and embodied juxtapositions that much more significant to me as a reminder of my positionality and intentions.

4.6    Concluding Invitation

Bringing together feminist, visual rhetorical, and comics studies perspectives, this chapter represents the first extensive scholarly engagement with MWCs. Extensive but not exhaustive. I have no doubt the MWCs will engender additional insights when addressed from positionalities and intentions different from mine. My hope is that this chapter functions as its own persuasive invitation to engage these texts further. My analysis of the conceptual, visual, and embodied juxtapositions also serves as a primer for the kind of intentionally meta-ideological composition I argue in the next chapter should be one goal for rhetorical instruction.
5 FROM ANALYSIS TO (RE)COMPOSTION: A PRISMATIC PEDAGOGY

5.1 Introduction

The use of comic books as educational tools in the U.S. has a long, complex history. Between the 1940s and today, approaches to alphabetic literacy, English language acquisition, literary analysis, critical literacy, cultural literacy, visual rhetorical analysis, visual rhetorical composition, and multimodal literacy have at times characterized comics as having pedagogical value. Unfortunately, much of this scholarship approaches comics from the compartmentalizing assumptions that words and images can be easily distinguished from one another and that non-alphabetic images can be more easily apprehended than alphabetic text (e.g., Burmark; George; Hoeness-Krupsaw; Leibold; McCloud, Understanding; and Schraffenberger). Similarly, there is a relatively clear-cut division between the analysis and critique of comics as, on the one hand, ideologically imbued cultural artifacts and, on the other, sites of formal design and production. The scholarship employing comics as sites for teaching cultural critique can be further subdivided into those analyzing representations of gender (e.g., Chute, Jonet, and Thalheimer), race/ethnicity (e.g., Chaney, Cong-Huyen and Hong, King, Nama, Rifas, Strömberg, and Wanzo), and sexuality (e.g., Van Dyne), respectively. For composition studies, a field invested in understanding and developing our students’ and our own abilities to communicate in complex, multiple, and intersecting historical, cultural, and social contexts, it is counterproductive to take a “separate but equal” approach to visual and verbal texts and their analysis, production, and ideology

I am not the first to make this claim. Work done by feminist, digital, and rhetorical theorists such as Hocks, Anne Francis Wysocki, and Cheryl E. Ball, particularly in relation to new media and multimodal and digital composition, emphasizes the interrelationship of analysis
and composition. Hocks, Wysocki, and Ball, drawing in part on the work of the New London Group, use the framework of “design” to discuss both formal construction and the sets of assumptions or ideologies—such as those that dichotomize images and text, analysis and composition, and even rhetoric and ideology—that shape a composer’s decisions and contextualize an audience’s reception. They argue that the extent to which we can facilitate our students’ awareness and understanding of these assumptions is the extent to which we enable them to be more conscious consumers and, even more importantly, rhetorically savvy composers of culture. Their work therefore parallels and extends a critical pedagogical approach to composition that requires acknowledging the rhetorical construction of ideology.

Further, as critical theorist Roland Barthes points out, ideologies function in culture at the meta-narrative level, persuading us through repetition to accept the values they indirectly imply, often through stories. Feminist scholar AnaLouise Keating labels these “status quo stories,” stories told and retold to “normalize and naturalize the existing social systems, values, and norms so entirely that [we] deny the possibility of change” (23). As such, teaching students how to analyze narratives has become a common practice at all levels of visual rhetorical education. And as visual narratives, comics have increasingly been used to identify and critique representations of oppressive ideologies of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and to a lesser extent, class (e.g., Chaney, Dong, King, and Thalheimer).

Despite this analytical investment, and like multimodal composing more generally (Palmeri), much of the advocacy for and engagement in composing comics occurs in elementary and high school contexts (e.g., Bitz; Carter; Lamb and Johnson), and most of the work written about composing comics in undergraduate writing classrooms does not address the intersection of rhetorical construction and ideological meaning, nor the opportunities that comics provide for
challenging oppressive ideological perspectives (e.g., Carter, Frey and Fisher, and Haendiges). An exception is Wysocki and Dennis A. Lynch’s *Compose, Design, Advocate: A Rhetoric for Integrating Written, Visual, and Oral Communication*, which advocates an embodied approach to the rhetorical analysis and composition of comics (510). In one chapter, “Analyzing Comics,” Wysocki and Lynch argue that students can enact an embodied understanding of comics’ rhetorical construction by drawing on their individually as well as historically and culturally situated experiences. Employing two well-known texts, the “Common Scents” chapter in Lynda Barry’s *One Hundred! Demons!* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, Wysocki and Lynch lead students through the rhetorical analytical work of exploring the relationships among authorial purpose, genre, alphabetic texts, visual styles, authors’ self-representations, representations of family, representations of experience, and students’ experiences. Wysocki and Lynch then invite students to begin composing their own comic narratives using the rhetorical structures students identify.

Building on Wysocki and Lynch’s work, I argue in this chapter that comic books and graphic novels are generative locations for a feminist, critical, and visual rhetorical – or prismatic – composition pedagogy. More specifically, comics offer (1) contexts in which differences and conflicts can be identified and engaged, (2) explicable sites of intersection between ideological perspectives and rhetorical construction, and (3) models for the transition from ideological critique to (re)composition. As alluded to above, very little work addresses this rhetorical triangulation of discourse, ideology, and composition in the context of comics, and my hope is that this chapter engenders more interest in such work.

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19 Though textbooks are not traditionally recognized as scholarship, I do so here.
5.2 A context in which difference and conflict can be identified and addressed

5.2.1 The Gateway (Drug)

Diana George, in her review of visual literacy education in the U.S., describes how “visual studies [were] perceived as a threat to language and literature instruction” based on the long-held presumption that alphabetic literacy and proficiency far outweigh the difficulty and therefore value of non-alphabetic literacy and proficiency (15). Comic’s initial reception as pedagogical tools exemplifies this perspective. Their ‘obvious’ simplicity lead educators in the 1940s and 1950s to question “how faithfully [comic adaptations of literary classics] communicated the heart and soul of books they adapted . . . and about whether children were using them as a gateway to reading, or as a substitute for reading (Rifas “Educational” 165). Comics’ assumed simplicity also underlies the moral furor Dr. Fredric Wertham’s Seduction of the Innocent incited in 1950s America, forcing the mainstream comics industry not by legal sanction but by public opinion, to self regulate via the Comics Code Authority. Wertham based his objections not on comics’ inability to teach readers anything, but their power to teach the wrong thing. Violence, and to a lesser extent, homosexuality, pervaded mainstream comics, and provided, according to Wertham, examples of moral reprehensibility comics could persuade readers to replicate. This line of reasoning is based on two problematic assumptions. The first is that the meaning of comics, as simplistic images, is predefined, interpretable in only one way. The second is that a one-directional relationship exists between comics and their audiences, the latter passively receiving and accepting comics’ predefined meaning at face value.

5.2.2 Same Difference

Ironically, while the political sway of Wertham’s objections to comics has long since diminished, the text most commonly used to introduce undergraduate students to comics – Scott
McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* – works from a set of assumptions similar to Wertham’s. McCloud argues that words and images exist along multiple continua of abstraction. The first is a rather lopsided continuum that defines words at one end as complete, iconic abstraction and images, at the other end, as more or less abstract (and, therefore, realistic) depending on the amount of “iconic content” (27). The second continuum, which intersects with the first, is bookended by simplicity and complexity. The more complex an image is, the less abstract and more realistic it is. Building from this, McCloud characterizes comics’ meaning-making power as that of amplification via simplification, or the ability of a form’s basic outline – such as a circle, two dots, and a line for a face 😊 – to increase an audience’s ability to identify (with) this representation of a universally human perception of humanity:

> When two people interact, they usually look directly at one another, seeing their partner’s features in vivid detail. Each one also sustains a constant awareness of his or her own face, but this mind-picture is not nearly so vivid; just a sketchy arrangement, a sense of shape . . . a sense of general placement. Something as simple and as basic as – a cartoon . . . . When you enter the world of the cartoon – you see yourself. (36)

The essentialist assumption underlying this definition is that some universally human experience exists to which we can all relate and that, in fact, relation/identification requires that the representations of our experiences be simplified. While acknowledging similarities among experiences is important, stopping audience interaction here assumes that we can only be familiar with what we see as similar to ourselves and our experiences of the world. Limiting familiarity to similarity neutralizes potentially productive conflicts that might arise from difference between our complex experiences and a complex representation of our own and
others’ experiences. The meaning-making power with which McCloud imbues comics, therefore, strongly ends up closely resembling that of unchallenged stereotypes. In other words, familiarity is not the same as similarity. It is possible to be familiar with individuals and experiences we do not share. Feminist and critical pedagogies both highlight this distinction in order to emphasize the importance of consciousness-raising and dialogue across differences as essential elements of social change.

5.2.3 Positively Conflicted

For practitioners of both feminist and critical pedagogies, the conflict that arises from identifying differences between and among our own and others’ experiences and their (mis)representation (or lack thereof) in contemporary culture is itself a powerful learning tool, one that can be used to challenge the naturalized knowledge, or set of oppressive ideologies that structure our interactions. In her commentary on the historically synchronic emergence of feminism and visual culture, art historian, critic, and curator Amelia Jones posits that feminism has “long acknowledged that visuality (the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see) is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed in Western culture” (2). In the words of postcolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her foundational Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity, overcoming years of notions of what is normative . . . is not merely a question of whether or not we have learned to analyze in particular kinds of ways or whether people are able to intellectualize about a variety of experiences. It is also about coming to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation, without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm. (201)
An emphasis on what independent filmmaker, feminist, and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha calls “the primacy of experience” challenges the always-already existence of particular ideological structures, then, by offering experience as an analytic framework:

We need . . . [to] ask students to explore the analytic possibilities of experience by locating the experience that surrounds their habitual approach to differences; by sketching the complex discursive terrain out of and in which the self habitually speaks; by investigating how that terrain delimits our understanding of differences along lines of race, class, sex, and gender, and by exploring personal and social motivations for transforming one’s existing self-location in the process of rereading and rewriting (244, 243-44)

Paolo Freire also engaged his students in using their experiences as interpretive frameworks and relied heavily on images of everyday life as jumping-off points for discussions regarding students’ perceptions of themselves and their environment (105). This is not to say that our experiences are completely unmediated and can therefore be used as litmus tests to judge a representation’s veracity for all time. Rather, the goal is to explore the extent to which our understandings of our experiences have been influenced by their representations. In Susan C. Jarratt’s words

My hopes are pinned on composition courses whose instructors help their students to locate personal experience in historical and social contexts -- courses that lead students to see how differences emerging from their texts and discussions have more to do with those contexts than they do with an essential and unarguable individuality. ("Feminism" 277).
As this survey of feminist theorists demonstrates, analyzing and critiquing conflict between images and what they represent is a foundational characteristic of feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, and critical pedagogy. Because this critical analytical work is also the starting point for a prismatic approach to composition pedagogy, identifying and analyzing the rhetorical form and function of oppressive ideologies in a composition classroom can help students become more aware of how they define themselves and others and teach them rhetorical strategies to ethically enact these definitions.

5.3 Explicable sites of intersection between rhetorical construction and ideological perspectives

5.3.1 In Stereo(type): Rhetorical Repetition

Repeated visual presence and absence are both tools of rhetorical emphasis, and stereotypes, as recurring, oversimplified misrepresentations, are rhetorically constructed to naturalize the oppressive ideologies they represent. Stereotypes, or what Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins’s terms “controlling images,” have and continue to receive much analytical attention from feminist (and) visual culture scholars. There is also a growing body of work addressing comics’ potential to educate students in stereotypical representation. Independent scholar, artist, and educator Anne N. Thalheimer uses the scene from Diane DiMassa’s comic book *Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* in which the main character castrates a man for harassing her on the street, to challenge her students to consider the differential reception of violence against women and men in alphabetic and non-alphabetic images. Assistant professor of English Michael A. Chaney uses Lance Took’s *Narcissa* to engage his students in discussions about constructions of black masculinity in comics. Independent scholar, as well as middle and high school teacher, Marla Harris uses *Persepolis* as an entre into a discussion of stereotypes
fueling religious and cultural persecution. Former high school English teacher and a current Professor of English, English Education and Postcolonial studies Allen Web and high school English teacher Brandon Guisgand engage students in a comparative analysis of stereotypical representations of Jewish identity in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and Will Eisner’s *Fagin the Jew*. In each of these examples, students are asked to identify the ways in which characters are represented (alphabetically and non-alphabetically), and to what extent they repeat stereotypical assumptions regarding gendered, raced, classed, religious, and/or cultural stereotypes. In order to engage students’ experiences as interpretive frameworks, these representations can also be used as points of comparison with and among students’ experiences.

5.3.2 *Antistasis: Rhetorical Repetition and Recontextualization*

C. Richard King takes his pedagogical investigation of stereotypical representation one step further by asking his students to consider when, how, and to what effect stereotypes are used as “racial metaphors” to “differentially racialize . . . human communities, social problems, identities, possibilities, pleasure, and privileges” and to contextualize multiple forms of victimization (101). More specifically, King asks his students to consider the effect of visual “parallels between slavery and the treatment of animals or between imagery of Jews in Nazi Germany and imagery of Indigenous peoples in contemporary American popular culture” intentionally constructed to identify and end the problematic use of Native American mascots and cruel industrial farming practices (88). By placing images associated with one racialized context into a differently racialized context, racial metaphors function via the rhetorical trope of antistasis, in which an alphabetic or non-alphabetic image is repeated in a different or contrary sense. In much the same way that a virus spreads via mutation, rhetorical repetition and recontextualization can reinforce an ideological perspective’s impact. However, as I discussed in
the previous chapter, new contexts also provide new opportunities to challenge what is being repeated, for placing an old meaning in a new contexts requires additional work on the part of the audience to make new connections.

5.3.3 An Exploration, Divided

The above-mentioned examples of comic-based stereotypical analysis evidence a compartmentalized approach to ideological representation – gender OR race OR religion – that belies the complexities of our experiences and identities. We are defined in part by gender AND race AND religion AND class AND sexuality AND age AND ability AND nationality AND ad infinitum. Prismatic pedagogy, then, is interested in addressing the conflicts between and among these intersecting ideologies, conflicts that may help us better understand the complexities of our experiences.

Additionally, while Jarratt’s perspective on the significance of recognizing and engaging experiential differences and the ways in which these experiences are historically and socially contextual echoes that of Mohanty and Minh-ha, we can also identify a presumption that the instructor has already done this work and the like-mindedness towards which students work is a predetermined goal. This presumption also turns up in “Beside Ourselves: Rhetoric and Representation in Postcolonial Feminist Writing,” in which Jarratt describes Gayatri Spivak’s and Minh-ha’s disruptive tactics as ones that can be used to “open up distance between the writer and audience rather than close it” (“Beside” 170). Instead of discussing the ways in which both instructors and students can collaborate on this work, however, Jarratt proposes that teachers use these tactics to diagnose students’ lack of critical distance from institutional power:

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20 I use the term “intersecting” as a conscious reference to Patricia Hill Collins’ definition of intersectionality as “mutually constructing features of social organization” (Black 299).
I am not suggesting that students will consciously employ the complex tactics I’ve outlined . . . but rather that we [scholars, academics, teachers] might use Spivak’s and Trinh’s rhetorical gestures as a guide for reading traces or symptoms of texts from students writing their own relations to institutional power. (“Beside” 170)

Practitioners of critical pedagogy have also frequently been critiqued for unwittingly employing the long-standing hierarchical power of instructor over student when framing the teacher as enlightened leader tasked with raising her students’ consciousness to her level. For Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, the pedagogical goal and focus is students’ emerging critical consciousness and social action, with the implication that educators have already reached some higher level of awareness that enables them to facilitate that same growth in students. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, feminist theorist and teacher bell hooks, addresses this unwitting hypocrisy with her goal of reorienting critical pedagogues toward the importance of their own continued self-actualization, a commitment without which they could not ask their students to follow a similar path. For hooks then, critical pedagogy is an “engaged” pedagogy in which everyone is equally committed to their own learning (*Transgress*, 11). Following hooks, prismatic pedagogy is also an engaged pedagogy.

5.3.4 Analysis, Intersected

Wysocki and Lynch’s “embodied” approach to rhetorical analysis provides prismatic pedagogy with a generative with which to identify the rhetorical construction of ideologies in comics. Not only do Wysocki and Lynch ask students to identify the ways in which individual characters are alphabetically and non-alphabetically represented in relation to one particular ideological perspective, students are tasked with understanding what a comic book might be communicating about issues that involve multiple, intersecting ideological perspectives such as
the meaning of family. This work requires moving beyond identifying the ways in which a character is (repeatedly) represented. For example, in addition to questioning the ethos of Lynda Barry's "less-than-flattering" self-representation in “Common Scents,” Wysocki and Lynch ask students to explore possible relationships among the captions, drawings, and what the characters say in the drawings; extrapolate form what they see/read any strategies Barry might be employing to characterize her family in certain ways/ask her audience to view her family in certain ways; consider Barry’s possible motivation for visual but not verbal thematic repetition; consider the possible (dis)connections between the words and the color scheme Barry uses and what might be significant about them; identify drawing conventions they've learned (to identify) and how they learned these conventions; consider Barry's motivation for including phonetic spellings of Tagalog words rather than translating them into English; consider any strategies Barry might be using to evoke emotion to characterize her relationship to her past and to others; consider Barry's motivation for her use of time; and consider Barry's motivation for ending on a "note of nostalgia" and the relationship among smell, memory, and "those closest to us" (Wysocki and Lynch 522). For Wysocki and Lynch, then, as well as from a prismatic pedagogical perspective, the possible ideological import of a comic book arises from the multiple and intersecting relationships among a comic’s many rhetorical elements – including visual themes, verbal themes, narrative structure, genre conventions, and historical and cultural contexts – with the potential to reflect the complexities of our experiences. As such, a prismatic approach to analyzing comics enables us to identify ways in which we can more effectively represent these experiences and the ideological perspectives that both shape and arise from them.
5.4 Models for the transition from ideological critique to (re)composition

Unfortunately, scholarship on the educational value of comics tends to separate the investigation of comics as sites of cultural critique from their potential as models for compositions. This leaves individuals with an awareness and understanding of intersecting ideological perspectives and their complex rhetorical construction but no sense of whether or how to compose an intervention. However, if oppressive ideologies can be constructed and (via analysis) deconstructed, they can also be reconstructed into non-oppressive perspectives. Narratives lend ideological perspectives their rhetorical influence via their invitations to retell and therefore re-affirm these perspectives. This structured opportunity to retell also leaves ideological perspectives open to challenge to the extent that narrative elements can be antistatically re-contextualized in new (narrative) contexts. In Wysocki’s words, “We can create aesthetic experiences . . . for each other where we use the expected social constructions of form just enough to hold onto what audiences expect, but where we can then also make visible the particularities of our own lives and experiences and hence make visible the limitations of the forms we have been asked to grow into” (“Sticky” 172).

As antistatic recontextualizations, or what I identify as meta-ideologies in the previous chapter, define comics, they are excellent examples of this type of “provocative revision” (Fulwiler 190). According to Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, who dub comic book production in the mid-1980s onward the “Era of Reiteration,” characters from earlier comics are revived to contradict their earlier iterations’ significance. Like the MWCs discussed in the previous chapter, Bill Willingham’s *Fables* series places fable and fairy tale characters in a contemporary Western urban context in ways both challenge and reinforce the gendered, raced, and classed ideologies that informed earlier character iterations. Additionally, Willingham’s plot
structures draw from literary, historical, religious, and mythical narrative traditions, calling into question the distinctions among them. There are also numerous comic book re-tellings of literary classics, filmic re-makes of comic book narratives, and apps for reading digital reproductions of print comics and born-digital comics that provide audiences with the opportunity to more closely consider the rhetorical impact of different media on a narrative’s ideological import.

Digital tools are also increasingly being used to compose and produce both print and digital comics, but these tools are seldom discussed in the scholarship on comics in undergraduate literature and composition courses. In the few pieces that do, including Jason Haendiges’ dissertation, *Mobility and the Digital Page*, Comic Life predominates as the digital composing tool of choice. And for good reason. It offers a wide variety of genre and period-based layout options, customizable word art and word balloons, image filters, and most significantly, the opportunity to import images into the layout rather than selecting from preset options or hand-drawing each panel. All of this flexibility also comes with a price tag. *Comic Life* is not free beyond a 30-day trial period. While this time frame is workable within a semester course, it limits students’ opportunities to learn, experiment with, and revise any work composed with this software. And while requiring students to pay the approximately $30 for unlimited access is not unreasonable, the institutional mechanism by which students access their financial aid prior to and during the first three weeks of a given semester at my university precludes them from using their aid to purchase *Comic Life*. They must pay out of pocket. Fortunately, there are several free options for digital comic composition, including Bitstrips, ToonDoo, and Pixton that give students a good introduction to the relationship between rhetorical construction and ideological meaning, which they can then test out in their own comic compositions and apply to multimodal composition more generally. More specifically, preset and character design options
such as backgrounds, characters, and props function as sets of naturalized assumptions regarding where and who we should be against which students can compare their own experiences. This comparative analysis can then be used to identify the existing and potential realities students want to represent and how they might compose these realities.

5.4.1 On Background

Bitstrips and Pixton each offer over 200 choices of backgrounds, almost all of which I would describe, based on an initial review, as industrial or non-industrial, inside or outside, work or leisure, commercial, and/or holiday. As definitions of “industrial” differ, I use the term to refer to scenes where there is demonstrable human intervention/alteration. So Bitstrips’ “Huts” scene is “industrial” despite the former’s association with non-industrialized societies, its “Forest” scene is non-industrial despite the possibility that a groundskeeper has maintained it. At 190 and 22 options, respectively, the industrialized scenes outnumber the non-industrialized ones almost 8 to 1. Given the preponderance of industrial spaces, it is not surprising that Bitstrips’ scenes inside an enclosure outnumber those outside an enclosure, though by a smaller margin of almost 2 to 1.

Less prominent but still significant themes emerged when considering that 43, or 21%, of the scenes reference a commercial/retail context such as a corner store or a fast food restaurant, and that scenes of leisure activities (35/16%) such as a hot tub, outweighed those referencing employment, such as a cubicle, 2 to 1. Additionally, of the small number of holiday-themed scenes (12/6%), all but one are references to Christmas. According to Bitstrips, then, individuals worthy of attention (should) participate in leisure activities in industrialized, commercial, and indoor locations.
ToonDoo’s own preset background categories, including Scenery, Space, Abstract, Fantasy, Indoors, Outdoors, Landmarks, and Sports—align with those I used to describe Bitstrips’ backgrounds, though in ToonDoo, there are only slightly more Indoor scenes (65) than Outdoor ones (51), and the 156 abstract backgrounds far outnumber the rest. For ToonDoo, then, no place identifiable is better than any familiar place.

What Pixton’s twenty scenes lack in quantity, they make up for in cultural cues regarding appropriate social roles and interactions. The classroom scene, for example, places the outline of an individual in front of a chalkboard and gesturing at it with a wooden pointer, suggesting a relationship among formal education, lecturing, and technological simplicity. In a bathroom scene, we see the outline of one individual gesturing at another, both of whom are standing in front of a toilet with its seat up—a scene regularly employed to reference a naturalized gender binary.

5.4.2 Propped Up

ToonDoo also offers a large number of preset prop options, which are divided into nine categories, including Celebration, Eatables, Trees Plants, Indoors, Outdoors, Sports, Our World, Shapes, and Logo. Here, too, there is only a small difference in the number of Indoor (245) and Outdoor (227) props, but the second largest number of prop options are in the “Our World” category, which includes images of every U.S. state and every country’s flag. This suggests that the United States of America are equivalent to all the countries in the world, and that the U.S. can (or should) represent the world.
5.4.3 *In Character*

Gendered, as well as raced and classed assumptions also pervade Bitstrips’, ToonDoo’s, and Pixton’s preset character options. In all cases, there are more identifiably male characters than female ones, more identifiably white characters than characters of color, and more of the male characters have identifiable professions, both white and blue collar. The images ToonDoo uses to represent their character categories are illustrative examples:

![Figure 5.1: ToonDoo’s Characters](image)

The head of a white man with a very pronounced jawline represents Men, the head of a white woman with a heart-shaped face, large eyes, and pouty mouth represents Women, a U.S. football player represents Sports, and the heads of George W. Bush and Salman Rushdie represent Famous characters.

Bitstrips and ToonDoo also give users the opportunity to create their own characters, and asking students to do so moves them from analyses of how others construct reality to compositions in which they narrate their own versions of reality. Compared to the preset character options, the character design tools appear unconstrained, but when compared to the
variety of identities we embody, cultural assumptions regarding how we should embody which identities reappear.

Bitstrips’ character design options are structured as an ordered series of choices, the first of which is gender – male or female, suggesting that individuals are identified first and foremost by their gender. This assumption is reinforced by differences between the options for male and female characters. Male characters have 13 facial hairstyle options, while female characters have 9 blushes, 18 eye shadows, 9 lipsticks, and 4 chest sizes to choose from. After gender, users select from 18 skin tones. These selections do not overtly reference racialized identities, but the default skin tone for both males and females is one stereotypically associated with those raced as White. Next, users choose from nine face shapes, 18 hair colors, 5 hair lengths, three hair types, 9 jaws, 25 eyebrows, 4 eyelashes, 18 eye shapes, 9 pupil shapes, 18 eye colors, 18 noses, 9 mouths, 9 face details, 19 glasses, 5 heights, and 7 builds. Because a Bitstrips character cannot be Slender and Buff or Heavy and Buff, these options do not appear to account for all possible body types. The choice of outfits, including casual, sporty, work, dressy, outdoor, and costume styles comes last, and only 342 hairstyle choices outweigh the 253 outfit options. This suggests that individuality is defined more by what you wear than what you look like in those clothes.
Like Bitstrips, ToonDoo’s default character is a young, ostensibly White individual, but unlike Bitstrips, ToonDoo’s TraitR options for facial and body characteristics are not labeled with alphabetic text. They also do not have to be made in a particular order or in relation to a male/female gender binary. Further, users can upload an image for points of reference in constructing a character.

Figure 5.2: ToonDoo’s TraitR

As such, asking students enact a comparison of these to character creation tools by creating characters with these tools provides opportunities to discuss both the characteristics often assumed to be the most significant to identity construction and those students think should be valued.
5.5 Practicing Prismatic Pedagogy

I will conclude with two examples of my own in which I taught composition pedagogy from a prismatic perspective. The first is English 1101, the first of two freshman composition courses required by the university at which I teach. The second is English 3135 Visual Rhetoric, an upper-level undergraduate elective offered by my university’s English department.

5.5.1 Once Upon a Composition: Fairy Tales, Myths, and Legends in English 1101.

Working from the understanding that 1) myths, legends, and fairy tales communicate ideological perspectives and that 2) references to and revised versions of fairy tales, myths, and legends in popular culture are examples of antistasis, students in the English 1101 class I taught in the fall of 2009, as their final projects, composed their own comic book versions of a myth, legend, or fairy tale meant to comment on and/or challenge what the student identified as the ideological perspective of a myth’s, legend’s, or fairy tale’s earlier iteration. Building towards this goal, we read and responded to three retellings of fairy tales, myths, and legends: Legends in Exile – volume one of Willingham’s Fables comic book series, Neil Gaiman’s American Gods novel, and Junko Mizuno’s Cinderalla graphic novel. I chose these texts as they exemplified the kind of critical analytical and (re)composition work I hope they would accomplish in their final projects.

Legends in Exile includes a cast of characters from many fairy tales that students familiar with Western culture and the literature it has produced would find easy to identify: Snow White, The Big Bad Wolf, Prince Charming, Beauty and the Beast, Jack and the Beanstalk, the witch in Hansel and Gretel, and Pinocchio. There are also a few characters that may be less recognizable to students but are still very much part of the fairy tale tradition, notably Blue Beard and Rose Red. On the surface, or rather, the obvious plotline of the story is the disappearance of Snow
White’s twin sister, Rose Red, and the process of finding out what actually happened to her. As the story unfolds, we find out that the fables currently residing in New York in a small, cloistered neighborhood protected from sight by powerful spells have actually been forced out of their “homelands” by an as yet nameless “adversary.” We also learn that the violent acts committed by fables in the community while they were still living in the homelands have been forgiven in order for the community to live together peacefully. Beyond that, the text seems to offer some pretty invitations to compare the ideological perspectives represented by the *Fables* characters and those characters and narratives to which they refer.

The clearest examples of this center around the relationships of fairy tale characters whose unions were supposed to end happily ever after. Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella, for example, are all the ex-wives of Prince Charming. This not only invites us to consider the extent to which the heroes in *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella* share characteristics, but also the possibility that the man they were supposed to trust implicitly was actually a philandering Casanova. The marital relationship between Beauty and the Beast is not idyllic either. The curse Belle supposedly lifted by falling in love with the Beast lifts temporarily and changes him back into his beast-like form whenever she becomes angry with him, inviting us to consider the way sin which gendered and sexual identities are assumed to be mutually constitutive.

When looking at the visual representation of these stories a deeper connection can also be made between the fairy tales and the culture(s) that created them. Before the beginning of each chapter, there is a full-page illustration using a different style than the panel-by-panel images that illustrate each of the chapters. They employ a more realistic style and do not seem to correspond directly with the plot of the particular chapter that follows each of these illustrations. They
therefore give the impression of offering a story behind the story, or possibly foreshadowing of events to come. The former is clearly the case in the first of these illustrations.

Figure 5.3: *Fables’* Garden of Eden
Snow White is holding an apple in front of a very large tree while also sitting on part of the wolf costume that has been unzipped to allow the human male manifestation of The Big Bad Wolf, Bigby, to emerge bare-chested. The illustration clearly alludes to Judeo-Christian mythological figures: Adam, Eve, and the Tree of Knowledge. The tree is, in fact, placed firmly in the center of the illustration. At the very top, along the edge of the tree line, is a faint outline of a metropolitan city, which we may assume to be New York, the setting for the story enclosed the chapters that follow. The city almost seems to be an outgrowth of the tree, as if the ensuing story is a new outgrowth of an older tale. The arrangement of this visual juxtaposition invites us to consider the extent to which the biblical story is the foundation of the reinterpreted fairy tale and whether the biblical story could itself be a fairy tale. As such, when looking at the plotlines and the visual representations used to reinforce those plotlines and suggest others, we can see how the verbal and visual reinterpretation of fairy tales presents us with persuasive invitations to consider the relationship between the cultural contexts of the representations and their allusions.

And because of students’ expected familiarity with many of the stories that get reinterpreted in Legends in Exile, I began the course by asking students to read it and write comparative analyses of the characterization of one of the fairy tale characters in the text and an older version of a story in which that character appears.

Some of the students wrote about how Willingham used the contemporary setting to suggest that the values present in the older tales no longer apply to modern Western culture. However, many students argued that despite the very different situations in which the characters found themselves, some of the same cultural assumptions could still be pinpointed in both versions of the tales. In an essay on Jack and the Beanstalk, one student pointed out how both
characters represented immaturity and foolish greed, though in *Legends in Exile*, these characteristics are not rewarded.

Moving on from *Legends in Exile*, we read *American Gods*, an alphabetic novel by writer and comic book artist Neil Gaiman that incorporates mostly mythic and legendary characters. It also raises more direct questions about the origins of myths and legends, the power belief has to physically manifest itself, and the effect relocation has on belief. The plot centers around the understanding that, as people move, they bring their beliefs with them and that people have been coming to America with their gods for thousands of years. The relocation, however, does not leave the people or their gods unchanged. Many of the gods are forgotten, and by the end of the twentieth century, are forced to work as taxi drivers, store clerks, hookers, and con men. They have been forgotten in part as a result of the differences in location, but also the ‘advancement’ of civilization to a point at which mythical explanations for the beginning of the world or natural phenomena are no longer accepted as valid. In America, new gods of technology have slowly risen to power and now want to complete control. In order to do so, they believe they must exterminate any old gods still hanging around. These older gods have come from Norse mythology, Native American mythology, Indian mythology, African mythology, West Indian mythology, and Japanese mythology. There are also quite a few older American legends such as Johnny Appleseed who have fallen out of favor and who rally to the side of the older gods at the urging of Odin, the Norse All-Father, or Wednesday, as he’s referred to throughout the novel. At the end of the novel, (spoiler alert!) the gods go to war with one another, and, as it turns out, Odin and Loki, another god in the Norse pantheon, worked together to orchestrate this war so that there would be blood sacrifices in their names. This suggests that if belief creates the gods and gods represent belief, then belief is also powerful enough to create beliefs that sacrifice each
other for power. Three different groups of students led class discussions on different sections of this text, and the beliefs we discussed related to the nature of love and relationships, sin, forgiveness, friendship, and death.

To follow these discussions up and apply the connections we made between the characters and story line to larger cultural beliefs, I asked the students to select a pop culture text predominated by references to a fairy tale, myth, or legend and based on a rhetorical analysis of that text, argue for which particular belief or beliefs these references represent. Many students chose to analyze contemporary recastings of fairy tales such as Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast, though some chose more obscure, filmic representations of Christian mythology.

I chose Mizuno’s *Cinderalla* to give students the opportunity to look at how a very familiar story has been transformed by its relocation to another geographical and cultural location and intentionally used to challenge some of the core values represented by earlier versions of the story. Originally written in Japanese, it was translated in English and republished in the U.S. two years after its publication in Japan. Judging from the inside cover alone, it is clear that Mizuno is playing with the standards of femininity and sexuality reinforced by earlier versions of Cinderella with the outrageous infantalization and hypersexualization of her Cinderalla character.
The style in which the characters are drawn and the alterations to the plotline suggest that this text is playing with the childlike quality of the fairy tales that have an explicitly moralizing intent, as well as the very sexualized and darker imagery used in older folk versions intended for adults. Because of the ways in which Mizuno visually and verbally challenges gender constructions present in other versions of the Cinderella story by outrageous, and hilarious, exaggeration, I thought her text would offer students a good example of the kind of work I asked them to complete for their final assignment, a visual narrative, in which students create their own reinterpreted fairy tale, myth, or legend.

Figure 5.4: Cinderalla Centerfold
At the beginning of the tale, Cinderalla works with her father at his yakitori (barbequed chicken kebab) restaurant that he’s made famous with his secret barbeque sauce. He dies suddenly from overeating, and after a short period of mourning Cinderalla discovers that her father is a zombie who is perfectly happy to come back to the restaurant and continue his work. He brings back with him a new wife and two stepdaughters (also zombies) who cause quite a few problems. Cinderalla’s stepmother must be fed constantly or she will pass out, one stepsister is constantly requesting new bras be made for her larger than average breasts, and the other stepsister is constantly harassing the patrons with sexual advances in her quest to get married. Cinderalla herself falls in love with a young male zombie and gets her fairy-in-training friend to turn her into a zombie for one night so that she can attend the concert at which “the Prince” is performing. While escaping so that he will not see her transformation back into a live young woman, Cinderalla, still in zombie form, loses an eye. The Prince finds the eye, and vows to make the woman whose eye it is his wife. Upon hearing this, several of the Prince’s adoring zombie fans pluck out their eyes in the hope that Cinderella’s eye will fit their sockets. Cinderalla successfully reunites with her zombie love interest when her fairy godmother casts a spell to send all of the eyes of these young women back to them, leaving only Cinderalla without the eye that Prince then returns to her. Cinderalla and her extended family live happily ever after in a restaurant remodeled as a castle where the Prince is the nightly entertainment.

I hoped that the effect of visual choices on the arrangement and presentation of a story would strike students more clearly as a result of their unfamiliarity with the style Mizuno uses or the specific genres of manga her style represents and challenges. I also hoped the text would allow us to talk at greater length about how its visual construction does just as much to convey meaning as the verbal construction and what kinds of visual choices students can make in
constructing their own projects. In reality, students were more challenged by this text than I anticipated, possibly because more than the other two texts, it called some of their gendered and raced assumptions into question. Some of them, however, were able to apply Mizuno’s formula to their own final projects. The more successful ones used a variety of rhetorical recontextualization strategies, including changing a character’s gender, changing a character’s narrative role, representing a character’s symbolic significance with a visual metaphor, and using first-person narration to personalize previously impersonal narratives.

5.5.2 (Re)Visions: A Critically Comic Approach to Visual Rhetoric

Using Ball and Kristin L. Arola’s visualizing composition 2.0 as a jumping-off point, we began by identifying formal features of visual culture. I chose Ball and Arola’s text as it offered definitional to analytical explorations of several visual rhetorical elements (e.g. color, contrast, alignment, organization, etc.) exemplified by both student-produced and professional work. We catalogued these elements as the first set of criteria for the visual rhetorical analyses to be completed (both formally and informally) in and for the course. We also read and discussed the second chapter of Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art concurrently with completing the visualizing composition 2.0 exercises to begin considering how visual rhetoric functions within the medium of comics. Additionally, I chose Understanding Comics an example of the kind of work I was looking for in students’ final projects, i.e. a sequential narrative exploration of how the topic of interest has been (visually) represented and understood and what we should (not) think/do about that representation and understanding. In other words, I hoped it would provide an example of a non-fictional approach to sequential narrative.

To complicate our understanding of the visual rhetorical elements thus far identified and to provide examples of possible research topics for the final project, we read Wysocki’s (2004)
“The Sticky Embrace of Beauty: On Some Formal Relations in Teaching about the Visual Aspects of Texts,” the first three chapters of John Berger’s (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, and Stephen Greenblatt’s (1989) “Culture” essay. During class discussions of each of these readings, we added to our list of analytical criteria “bodies/embodiment,” “gender,” “race,” “class,” “age,” “sexuality,” “strangeness,” “absence,” “genre,” “medium,” “foreground/middle ground/background,” “values,” and “symbolism” and discussed ways in which all can be visually represented.

While we consistently drew parallels between contemporary digital culture and the media and genres of visual print culture addressed in the readings thus far addressed, I paired our discussion of the introductory chapter of Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* with volume one of Mike Carey and Peter Gross’ *The Unwritten* to engage the class in considering the increasingly blurry distinction between producers and consumers of digital culture, the opportunities digital media provide to both support and challenge a given status quo, the rhetorical function of intertextuality in contemporary digital culture, i.e. the contextual meaning created by references to specific texts and/or genre conventions, and how each of these subjects might be addressed in a fictional sequential narrative form. Several students identified their research topics based on their critical engagement with *Convergence Culture* and *The Unwritten*, topics such as the ways digital media can be used to expand comic artists’ creative opportunities and the definition of comics itself, the use of social media in human rights campaigns, the romanticization of suicide in contemporary music and movies, shifts in sitcom representations of “awkwardness, the misrepresentation of Zen in self-help books, and possible parallels between contemporary celebrity worship and human sacrifice. After submitting project proposals identifying their research topics, students completed digital collages
of topic-based images and rhetorical analyses of these images in order to begin researching their topic and considering which textual and genre references they could/should make in constructing their sequential narratives.

Before beginning work on their final projects, students completed annotated bibliographies to engage them in more deeply considering the complexities of their topics and read the first chapter of McCloud’s *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels*, which provides a useful overview of many of the rhetorical choices it is necessary to contemplate in constructing a sequential narrative, be it a strip, book, or another variation. We also used class time to explore several of the options for digital composition I had given them, including *Comic Life*, *ToonDoo*, *BitStrips*, and *Pixton*, and most students chose to use *Bitstrips* or some combination of hand-drawing and design software. For the remainder of the course, students workshopped drafts, presented finished narratives, and composed written rhetorical analyses of these narratives. The narratives and analyses both evidenced the progress students’ made in understanding and composing visual rhetorical texts. Certainly, the level of artistic skill varied, but students’ rhetorical use of available means was apparent in their intentional adaptation of genre conventions employed in the media they chose to research. The student exploring webcomics made a webcomic; the student exploring (mis)representations of Zen used basic forms, a watercolor technique, and a black and white color scheme in reference to superficial perceptions of Zen; and the student comparing celebrity worship to human sacrifice employed several visual references to classic horror films.

To conclude, I hoped this course’s focus on comics as examples of antistatic recontextualization would give students a more complex sense of how their realities are constructed and what rhetorical tools they have at their disposal to envision, represent, and
potentially enact the realities in which they want to exist. And based on the coursework students completed, this hope has been realized. Accordingly, this course provides one solid approach to challenging the continued primacy of textual analysis in undergraduate composition courses that also addresses the rhetorical construction of ideology so central to a prismatic composition pedagogy.
AFTERWORD

My desire to connect intellectual interests with political investments has made my path through this research challenging and rewarding. While I have committed much of my scholarly life to analyses of popular culture, it wasn’t until I’d started a Master’s degree in Women’s Studies that I began reading comic books. This wasn’t intentional avoidance on my part, but more of a passive acceptance of my status as uninvited outsider. White boys and middle-class, middle-aged White men read comics. Not middle-class White women. Fortunately my graduate work gave me the opportunity to challenge this and many other enculturated notions of gender, race, and class. Dr. Layli Maparyan mentioned the MWCs in our New Directions in Women’s Studies course, and I was immediately intrigued. What was a young woman of color doing on the cover of a comic book? Why hadn’t I heard of her before? Why did this surprise me? What could my surprise teach me? Dr. Maparyan also introduced me to Chela Sandoval’s work, which showed me through her conceptualization of differential consciousness that all intellectual work is ethically informed and can be ethically, and tactically, deployed to raise the kind of questions the MWCs initially raised for me. While I hope my research has answered questions related to why I’m reading and teaching with comics – they’re ideologically complex, rhetorically persuasive, and fun – I hope it also prompts others to ask why they might. Their responses will certainly inform how the conversation among feminist theory, visual rhetoric, comics studies, and composition pedagogy continues.
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