

Dragon*Con Comics and Popular Arts Conference

Program Draft

dates & times are tentative and subject to change

Unit: TrekTrak

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #1: *Star Trek Scholarship*
Friday 4pm (60 min?)

Description: Two scholars present academic studies of Star Trek. Elyce Rae Helford (Middle Tennessee State University) surveys the history of Trek scholarship, with an emphasis on changes from the 1980's to today in where their scholarship is published, its academic status, and its relation to media/tv studies, pop culture studies, and the study of individual tv series. Jessica Sheffield (The Pennsylvania State University) reflects on J.J. Abrams' reboot of the Star Trek universe, arguing that it represents a remix of classical characters and themes with contemporary culture in a postmodern key, where characters are more flawed and ethical considerations are less important. Discussion moderated by Matthew J. Brown (The University of Texas at Dallas).

- Jessica Sheffield (The Pennsylvania State University) - Rebooting, Remixing, and Rewriting Star Trek
- Elyce Rae Helford (Middle Tennessee State University) - A History of Star Trek Scholarship

Unit: SF/Fantasy Literature

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #2: *The Historical Roots of SF & Fantasy*
Saturday 8:30pm (80 min)

Scholarly presentations on the historical roots of SF and fantasy. Richard Scott Nokes (Troy University) explores the medieval roots of human hybrids---characters such as elves, trolls, and cyborgs that play an important role in SF and fantasy---challenging the notion that such characters arise from distinctively contemporary hopes and anxieties about the posthuman. Luis Arata (Quinnipiac University) discusses *Somnium*, a SF/fantasy novel by 17th Century astronomer Johannes Kepler, in which Kepler develops and defends in narrative form elements of Copernican physics that he would later discover through formal mathematics.

- Richard Scott Nokes (Troy University) - Trolls, Bestiality, and Shape-Change: The Medieval Roots of Hybrid Humans in Science Fiction and Fantasy
- Luis Arata (Quinnipiac University) - Fantasy Prefiguring Discovery: Kepler's *Somnium*

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #3: *Identity in SF & Fantasy*
Sunday 10:00am (80 min)

How do portrayals of villains, monsters, and aliens reflect or challenge our conceptions of human identity? Two scholars look to major SF & fantasy literature to explore this issue. Allison Britt (Mills College) examines at Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Card's *Ender's Game*. Racheline Maltese argues that the *Harry Potter* character Severus Snape represents a distinctive *feminine* heroic archetype, filling a perceived void in J. K. Rowling's world.

- Allison Britt (Mills College) - "Sometimes Lies Were More Dependable Than the Truth": The Quest for Identity Between Humans and Aliens in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Ender's Game*
- Racheline Maltese - Beyond Queering the Villain: Severus Snape, Gender and Heroism

Unit: Anime/Manga

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #4: *Anime East/West*
Saturday 5:30pm (80 minutes)

Scholars explore important points of influence between Japanese Anime & Manga and Western culture. Brent Allison (University of Georgia) reports on an ethnographic study of anime fan clubs at two U.S. colleges and participants of U.S. anime conventions, examining the way in which American fans develop conceptions of Japanese culture in order to interpret unfamiliar relationships amongst anime characters. Damien Williams looks at the influence of Western Esoteric thought---alchemy, magic, occultism, etc.---on both Japanese and American popular culture, exploring the way that the manga/anime series *Full Metal Alchemist* and Alan Moore's *Promethea* typify the way that Western Esotericism has captured the modern popular imagination, East *and* West.

- Brent Allison (University of Georgia) - An Ethnography of U.S. Japanese Animation Fandom Pedagogy
- Damien Williams - Western Esotericism in the Modern Popular Mind

Unit: Comics and Pop Art

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #5: *Ethics in/of Comics* (60 min)

Scholarly presentations on the role of ethics as portrayed in and in the production of comics. John Sylvia ventures an ethical evaluation of the supervillain Mojo and his real-world analogues---the producers of reality television like *The Real World* and *Temptation Island*. Shaun Treat (University of North Texas) discusses the

"Frankenstein Myth" and the paradoxical ethical attitudes towards technology in recent movies based on comic book superheroes. Charles Henebry (Boston University) examines the difference between homage and artistic theft, and argues that the former is an important, indirect medium of communication between artists and fans.

- John Sylvia IV & Sean Walters - Ethics: Now in Mojovision
- Shaun Treat (University of North Texas) - Rogue Tech, Space Cadets, and Armored Avengers: Cyborg SuperAntihero Cinema and the Ethics of Technofascism
- Charles Henebry (Boston University) - Name That Toon: Swipes and Homages in Comics

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #6: *Public Use of Comics--- Journalism, Political Performance, and Religious Indoctrination* (60 min)

Three scholars show different ways in which the comics medium is put to use in the public sphere. Veronika Tzankova (Simon Fraser University) shows how Turkish comics surreptitiously contribute to a politically charged conversation in the unstable socio-political situation in Turkey. Dalel Serda (The University of Texas-Pan American) examines Joe Sacco's journalistic comics like *Palistine* and *Safe Area Gorazde* and their potential for greater emotional authenticity than standard reporting. Axel Staehler (University of Kent) discusses fundamentalist appropriations of the superhero genre and comics medium in texts such as *Left Behind* and Jack Chick's religious tracts for the purposes of disseminating a religious message.

- Veronika Konstantinova Tzankova (Simon Fraser University) - Constructing Meaning: Comics as a Reflection of the Socio-political Performance in Turkey
- Dalel Serda (The University of Texas-Pan American) - Comic Journalism as New Journalism: Emotional Authenticity through "Collaborative Concreteness" in Sacco's *Palestine*, *Safe Area Gorazde* and "Chechen War, Chechen Women"
- Axel Staehler (University of Kent) - The 'comic' style of fundamentalist fiction

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #7: *History, Technology, and Identity in Comics* (60 min)

These scholars discuss different ways that issues of identity play a role in superhero comics. Ben Bolling (UNC- Chapel Hill) examines comics continuity---the attempt to preserve narrative identity across issues, authors, and series---through the lens Hayden White's historiography. Jessica Lauren Keys (Georgia State University) explores the play of agency and identity in the historical and fictional backgrounds of Frank Miller's 1986 *The Dark Knight Returns*. Matthew J. Brown argues that Wonder Woman was originally designed by her creator William Moulton Marston as a mass media technology for re-educating the youth according to his own ideas of psychological and emotional normalcy.

- Ben Bolling (UNC- Chapel Hill) - Superhero Comics and the Aesthetics of Serial

Historiography

- Jessica Lauren Keys (Georgia State University) - Bruce Wayne vs. The Beast: Agency and Identity Through Brutality in The Dark Knight Returns
- Matthew J. Brown (The University of Texas at Dallas) - Wonder Woman as Marston's Psychological Technology

D*C Comics and Popular Arts Conference Session #7: *Symposium on ASSEMBLED! and ASSEMBLED! 2* (60 min)

Kurt Busiek once called the Avengers “Marvel’s varsity,” and yet they often seem more like a loosely-grouped all-star squad than a genuine, cohesive team in the fashion of the Fantastic Four or X-Men; more prone to internal squabbles and bickering than smooth, unified action. What holds the team together and pushes them through to victory—often in spite of themselves? What has made the team (and its various comics) so appealing to readers, through its many incarnations, over the decades? Is there some special thing, some extra ingredient, which marks the Avengers as special? What special contributions, for good or ill, have been added by the various creative teams that have worked on the book over the past forty-plus years? And do the “Big Three” of Thor, Iron Man, and Captain America help--or hurt--the team’s effectiveness and the book’s appeal? Van Plexico (Southwestern Illinois College), Keith DeCandido, Joe Crowe, and George Kopec explore these themes as laid out in their books *ASSEMBLED* and the new *ASSEMBLED 2*, critically acclaimed books that explore the history and impact of Marvel’s Avengers, benefiting the HERO Initiative charity.

- Van Plexico (Southwestern Illinois College)
- Keith DeCandido
- Joe Crowe
- George Kopec