Welcome to the first official newsletter of the Comics Studies Society!

We are delighted to announce that the Comics Studies Society has officially received official non-profit 501(c)(3) status, and we can now begin our first membership drive!

Executive officers were elected at an initial meeting during the November 2014 Festival of Cartoon Art at The Ohio State University and since last year board members have been hard at work to establish non-profit status so that we can begin our mission to support the “critical study of comics, improving comics teaching, and engaging in open and ongoing conversations about the comics world.”
In the upcoming year we are looking forward to partnering with worthy events, such as the International Comic Arts Forum 2016 Conference at the University of South Carolina, to promote comics scholarship and are working on a variety of scholarly projects, which we hope to announce soon. In the meantime we hope you will take advantage of our very special Founding Memberships, which offer a discounted price over a two-year period and special member perks such as our newsletter!

CSS & ICAF

CSS will partner with the International Comic Art Forum (ICAF) for its 18th annual conference from April 14-16, 2016 at the University of South Carolina. Since 1995, ICAF has been dedicated to promoting the scholarly study and appreciation of comic art in all forms. The conference provides a supportive, collegial environment to showcase innovative comics scholarship and comic art from around the world. ICAF 2016 will feature a keynote address by Prof. Michael Chaney and artist presentations by Howard Cruse, Keith Knight, Dominique Goblet, Cece Bell, Roy Thomas, Sanford Greene, and Gary Jackson. CSS will sponsor an academic roundtable session on professionalization in comics studies with the Graduate Student Caucus. Also of note to CSS affiliates: ICAF sponsors the John A. Lent scholarship for student research in comic art (applications due Jan. 8, 2016). For more information, visit ICAF online (internationalcomicartsforum.org), Facebook (facebook.com/icafcomic), and Twitter (twitter.com/icafcomic).

Best 2015 Comics

No year-end newsletter would be complete without a round-up of the best comics of 2015. What cartoonists did you first discover over the last twelve months? Did you find yourself moving backwards in time, too, reading comics you’d once loved but had grown tired of? Whatever the case, here are some suggestions:

- "The Art of Making Comics: Reflections of a Life in Art" by Françoise Mouly and MoMA
- "The Complete History of Comics" by Will Eisner
- "The Business of Comics: How to Make Money in an Unpredictable Industry" by David Knapp
- "The Complete History of Comics: How to Make Money in an Unpredictable Industry" by David Knapp
discussed their work, their lives in the upper Connecticut River Valley, and their practice as teachers. The CSS looks forward to sponsoring other events like this, sessions that invite artists, scholars, and students to consider the history and potential of the medium.

Meanwhile, the Executive Board also held monthly meetings on a range of topics, including membership levels and incentives, plans for the 2016 ICAF, and the Society’s peer-reviewed journal.

Did we say peer-reviewed journal? Yes, that’s on its way, too. To keep track of what’s already happened and what’s coming next, be sure to follow the CSS on Twitter and on Facebook. And if you have any questions, especially about how you can sign up to be a member of the CSS, please contact us!

Notable Scholarship

The CSS’s A. David Lewis and Charles Hatfield spotlight innovative and inspiring scholarly publications from 2015 both online and in print.

Beaty, Bart, Twelve-Cent Archie

CH: Beaty’s concise, punchy, and endlessly readable study of Archie comics in the 1960s is very much a conceptual book. Its unusual form (a hundred short chapters, most of which could be read in any order) mirrors the discontinuity of the Archie franchise itself during that era. Leaping back and forth between large topics (e.g. gender, race) and small (Archie’s jalopy, Betty’s ponytail), Beaty reads the Archive universe as a story-generating machine, a set of formulas that could be rebooted, with variations, again and again. The challenge here is to find the interest in a self-evidently formulaic line of comics that has been ignored by scholars and critics. Beaty does this, in surprising ways that call into question the very rules and

but forgotten about? Or did you finally come to terms with your affection for Devil Dinosaur, and admit that it is, perhaps, the single greatest Jack Kirby comic ever published? (Don’t tell the CSS President I said that.)

Here’s my list of five. (Want to share yours? Visit our CSS Facebook page and let us know what you enjoyed the most this year.)

Keiler Roberts, Miseryland. A Chicago-based cartoonist who teaches comics at the School of the Art Institute, Roberts trained as a painter. If you haven’t read Roberts’s series Powdered Milk, start with Miseryland, which collects several recent issues. Marvel at her comic pacing in stories and vignettes that are outrageously funny one moment, serious and contemplative the next.

A friend suggested I read Ben Passmore’s Goodbye, or The State of Nature: A Comik, after hearing me rave about Mickey Zacchilli’s series Rav. Although Passmore, who now makes his home in New Orleans, shares a certain design sense with Zacchilli, his line-work is much cleaner and more precise. I could describe Passmore’s work as a blend of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, but he’s after something else, I think. Maybe it’s the visionary, utopian spaces in Eleanor Davis’s work, which also takes science fiction conventions as a starting point before demanding something far more true and personal from them. If it were the 1960s, I’d tell you to put on a copy of the first MC5 album, crank it up, and then read Goodbye. It’s that loud, and it’s that good. See for yourself:
conventions of comics studies. This is a gauntlet thrown down, challenging the canonization and gentrification of a certain few comics at the expense of the larger tradition. Must reading (I have already used it in the classroom).

**Burke, Liam, The Comic Book Film Adaptation**

CH: Comics-based movies, particularly superhero ones, seem inescapable now, and the topic may tired comics purists (like myself!) who wish to separate comics per se from their inevitable adaptations in other media. Burke's book, however, covers the topic with such thoroughness and care that it made me want to teach an entire course on the subject (and, again, I have already used this book in class).

Burke examines comic book films from many different perspectives: ideological, industrial, formal, aesthetic, and those of fandom, reception, and genre. The result is likely to be a standard reference for years to come. What's more, he shows both a fan's passion for tradition and minutiae and a critic's toughness and independence of mind. I see this in my Literature and Film syllabi, coming up.

**Darius, Julian, Classics on Infinite Earths: The Justice League and DC Crossover Canon**

ADL: For almost two decades, the Sequart Organization (also known as the Sequart Research & Literary Organization) has been the public, popular face of comics scholarship. So, it's little surprise that their founder and president Julian Darius would produce such a breathless and bold work on the DC Comics superhero catalog longitudinally. Best yet, the book itself leverages the strength of Sequart's enduring online status, having emerged from a over a decade of writings via the site. Whereas comics studies has to frequently point out that it is concerned with so much more than simply superheroes, Darius and his fellow pop scholars remind us that there is still

I love *The Unbeatable Squirrel Girl*. I'm even ok with the fact that, as they proclaim on the cover of a recent issue, they've "only" had two first issues "so far this year." Written by Ryan North and drawn by Erica Henderson, the series, which features a character created by pulp scholar Will Murray and artist Steve Ditko, is, like *Ms. Marvel* and the new *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, the kind of comic that makes me wish the 7-11 up the street still had a spinner rack. It's for kids, it's for adults. It's funny. The art is simple and well-paced. It's the kind of comic that, were C. C. Beck still alive, he'd probably love it, too. I don't know any higher praise than that. And Will Murray—who wrote *The Duende History of the Shadow Magazine*—and Steve Ditko (you know, *Spider-Man*, *Doctor Strange*, all that) came up with the character. What more strangeness and history can you ask of one comic?

Most of you will know Gene Kannenberg, Jr., from his work as a comics scholar, or his book *500 Essential Graphic Novels: The Ultimate Guide*. But have you read his comics? In 2015, Kannenberg has produced on abstract comic a day. Some of them are parodies or "covers" of existing comics, others are Sunday funnies, and a few even feature Charles Atlas and Sea-Monkeys. In June, he put together *Comics Machine #1*, a minicomic collection of some of the strips.

If I had more space, I’d include others—Glen Head’s memoir *Chicago*, for example, or Alan Moore and Jacen Burrows’s *Providence* or Isabella Rotman’s minicomics (you should look those up, too). For my last selection, however, I’d like to mention Doug Potter’s *Denizens of Deep City*, a Kitchen Sink series that ran from late 1988 until early 1990. You should be able to find all eight issues on Ebay, or
Gateward, Francis, and John Jennings, editors, *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*

CH: Issues of representation and identity are central to contemporary comics studies. This collection follows the Eisner-winning anthology *Black Comics* (ed. Howard and Johnson, 2013) and also invites comparison to, for instance, the anthology *Multicultural Comics* (ed. Aldama, 2010). Without losing focus, the book addresses an impressive range of material, from EC comic books to *bandes dessinées* to comics strips and graphic novels, and takes varied critical perspectives: colonialism, Black nationalism, Afrofuturism, gender, visual rhetoric, geography, and more. Diverse creators are studied, from Jackie Ormes and Aaron McGruder to Kyle Baker, Donald Goines, and Chris Ware. Finally, the range of scholars included is impressive (including CSS’s own Rebecca Wanzo and
Qiana Whitted). This book manages the rare feat of being a mix of voices and yet a cohesive volume, valuable not just for individual standouts but as a whole.

**Sousanis, Nick, *Unflattening***

ADL: It’s bad form to quote oneself, but allow me this small indiscretion. As I’ve said elsewhere, *Unflattening* is a beautiful hybrid as a popular piece of elite art, as an Ivy League comic book, and as a new foundational work in the field. In short, through his mastery of both the brush and the theory, Sousanis has produced what might be akin to a new high-water mark as the Comics Studies flag-bearer. *Unflattening* demonstrates as it investigates how comics can reopen closed discourse, how they can overcome unseen obstacles, and how they can reconnect dormant concepts to modern culture. Not since perhaps Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* has a stand-alone work -- which, in its own smartly paradoxical way, still manages to connect to everything -- promised to reach so widely and into so many disciplines.


CH: Another multi-author essay collection. This first entry in Mississippi’s new series of anthologies, "Critical Approaches to Comics Artists" (edited by David Ball), bodes well for the future. Worden’s introduction is an excellent essay in itself, trenchant and polished, and fully justifies and contextualizes the volume. The essays that follow are impressive in reach and rigor. It’s nice to see diversity in discipline here, including not only the expected scholars in literary study but also voices from political science, international studies, communications, and other fields. Welcome names like Lan Dong, Marc Singer, and (CSS’s own) Ben Owen and Jared Gardner are joined by (to me) new names, and the book, smartly organized, bridges politics, formalism, aesthetics, and ethics--no small
feat. I suppose we have been waiting for an academic book focused on Sacco, and wow is it good to see this. It could be the backbone of a semester-long seminar.

Other Notable Publications

- Delgado-García, Cristina, "Invisible Spaces for the ‘Impossible’ State: National Identity and the Production of Space in Joe Sacco’s Palestine," *ImageTexT* 8.1
- Gavaler, Chris, *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1.*
- Gibson, Mel, *Remembered Reading: Memory, Comics, and Post-War Constructions of British Girlhood*
- Kunzle, David, editor and translator, *Gustav Dore: Twelve Comic Strips*
- Lent, John A., *Asian Comics*
- Levitz, Paul, *Will Eisner: Champion of the Graphic Novel*
- Lewis, A. David, "Pedro Zamora and *Pedro and Me* in Requiem: Scoring the Loss," *The Comics Grid* 5.1
- Regalado, Aldo J., *Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero*
- Schelly, Bill, *Harvey Kurtzman: The Man Who Created Mad and Revolutionized Humor in America*
The **CSS Executive Board** is responsible for the content of this newsletter:

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