Greetings, Comics Folks!

Welcome to the Comics Studies Society Newsletter. We are delighted to announce that we have started our very first membership drive and are offering Special Two-Year Founding Memberships! You can enroll by visiting: http://www.comicssociety.org/members/

Coming in March: CSS elections!
This is the last newsletter you will receive unless you decide to join CSS, so please do sign up and enjoy exclusive benefits like this newsletter, an upcoming INKS premium and journal bonus, and super-secret invisible decoder ring (supplies limited)!

**INKS and the Journal Bonuses**

We are proud to announce that next year the CSS will launch its journal of record, *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, under the editorship of Jared Gardner. *Inks* will be published by the Ohio State University Press on behalf of and in partnership with the CSS—and will carry on the name and spirit of the original groundbreaking journal *Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies*, edited by pioneering scholar Lucy Shelton Caswell and also published by the OSUP from 1994 through 1997. In this way CSS aims to pay tribute to the founders and pathmakers in our field, even as we acknowledge the tremendous growth in comics studies over the past twenty years.

**Meanwhile, Back in Megatropolis: An Interview with Cartoonist Don Simpson**

Have you noticed anything different about the CSS webpage? The handsome CSS logo is the work of cartoonist Don Simpson. The creator of the acclaimed series *Megaton Man*, Simpson also created the science fiction serial *Border Worlds*, which, along with “America’s Most Bombastic Super-Hero,” will also return to print next year. In addition to his long career as a writer and artist, Simpson earned his Ph.D. in the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh in 2013.

First published by Kitchen Sink in the 1980s, *Megaton Man* takes up where Harvey Kurtzman and Wallace Wood’s “Superduperman” left off in 1953. Kurtzman, as I’ve argued elsewhere, identified the One-Dimensional Man a decade before Herbert Marcuse described him in 1964. Like Kurtzman’s Clark Bent, Megaton Man’s alter ego Trent Phloog exists in a world where, to borrow a line from Marcuse, “people recognize themselves in their commodities,” with the “soul” flickering “in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (Marcuse 9). The cover of *Megaton Man* No. 6 tells the story: as the hero struggles with his creator, a note pinned to the drawing table offers readers a preview of what’s to come: an “explosion,” a “fightscene,” a “recap,” another
Jared Gardner, our Journal Editor, reports that “things are coming together nicely” for a 2017 launch. This new version of *Inks* will continue the rigor of the original (including the practice of peer review) while adding substantial new features keyed to the resources and developments of comics studies today. The journal will bring together comics scholars, cartoonists and other comics professionals, and independent scholars in what promises to be an exciting showcase for research, archival discoveries, and debates about the future of comics and its study. CSS members can expect a journal that serves the Society’s needs and reflects the ever-growing nature of our field.

Members signing up during our Founding Membership drive will receive the first year of the new *Inks* as well as a special premium, *The Best of Inks, Series 1*, a collection of outstanding essays and articles from the original *Inks* in 1994-97. More details TBA!

**ICAF**

CSS is excited to partner with the International Comic Arts Forum on several fantastic events this April. CSS will co-sponsor a luncheon at the ICAF conference on Thursday, April 14th from 12:30 - 1:35 PM, and is working with the Grad Student Caucus on a panel discussing, “Getting a Job When You Work on Comics: Q&A sponsored by the Comics Studies Society Grad Student Caucus” on Friday April 15th from 3-4:10. The roundtable will feature Ben Owen (Ohio State University), Susan Kirtley (Portland State University), Theresa Rojas (MIT), Frederik Byrn Køhlert (University of Calgary), and Andrea Gilroy (University of

But what’s the story behind the CSS logo? Don attended the 2014 ICAF at Ohio State, where the CSS made its debut. As he explains below, he started sketching a few ideas and shared them with CSS Interim President Charles Hatfield. I’ll let him tell the rest of the story.

Don and I conducted this interview over email on February 19, 2016. Here, in addition to talking about his work as an artist and as a teacher, he also speaks to the connections between comics and
Furthermore, CSS will announce election results in the final days of ICAF. So please join us at this great event! You can find more information on the full lineup of impressive speakers, including CeCe Bell, Howard Cruse, and Keith Knight at: http://www.internationalcomicartsforum.org/.

MLA Round-Up

MLA 2016 offered a wealth of great panels and presentations for comics scholars. The excitement kicked off with a panel on “Comics Pedagogy” moderated by Keith McLeary and Derek McGrath. The packed house was treated to a rousing discussion of comics in universities and classrooms. Panel participant Elizabeth Losh blogged about the “lively panel” for Bedford at https://app-community.macmillan.com/community/the-english-community/bedford-bits/blog/2016/01/25/becoming-academically-respectable-notes-on-comics-from-mla-2016.

The MLA Discussion Group on Comics and Graphic Narratives presented three panels: "Satire and the Editorial Cartoon," "Latina/o Comics," and "Charlie Hebdo and Its Publics." All were well attended and well received. The Discussion Group recently announced a call for next year’s MLA convention, where they will be proposing another three panels, on "Temporality," "Adaptation," and "Alien Lines." Please see the call at graphicnarratives.org and consider applying!

“"To Make the Absent Appear”: Hillary Chute’s Disaster Drawn

architecture that echo the obsessions of creators like Chris Ware and Edie Fake (who has also looked to Jane Jacobs by way of Samuel R. Delany for inspiration). I’d like to thank Don for taking the time to answer these questions and for lending his talents to the CSS. While he’s here, I’d also like to thank him for the Partyers from Mars, the Megatropolis Quartet, Doctor Software, Yarn Man, the Quantum Leaper, the Cosmic Cue-Ball, Bad Guy, The Woooverine, and, of course, for Kozmik Kat, who, along with Raul from Howard Chaykin’s American Flagg!, is one of the great feline heroes in all comics.

Now, as Megaton Man himself likes to say, “WOO!”

BC: Can you talk a little about the Comics Studies Society logo? I guess I’m asking you to tell me its origin story!

DS: I was attending ICAF 17 in Columbus and sketched up the logo idea for Charles on the spot. We discussed some other possibilities, but I’m basically a first-idea guy, and we ended up going with what we had. I refined the idea in Adobe Illustrator and tried a number of different color schemes and shadows to see what would work. Then it was really up to the approval of others.

BC: In 2013, you completed your Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh. Can you talk a little about the relationship between your career as an artist and about your academic work?

DS: I went back to school in January 2003 after a year of soul-searching following September 11, 2001. I gravitated to art and architectural history as a discipline and ended up doing a dissertation on city planning history, specifically the origin of the concepts of civic center and cultural center in American urban planning, or what Jane Jacobs referred to as monumental centers (because the architecture of museums, libraries, city halls, courthouses, etc., are often neoclassical, and usually set in a park or green space). There is an
It won’t be possible for me, in the space I have here, to include all of my notes on Disaster Drawn, Hillary Chute’s startling and often moving new book, so I’d like to begin with the brief summary she offers in her introduction: “The subject of this book, at its most basic, is the relationship of drawing to history. What does it mean to draw history, to bear witness through the mark?” Then, another question: “What is the difference of narrative embodied as drawing, as marks on the page?” (Chute 25).

To honor what Chute has accomplished here, I’d like to consider that question in relation to a figure that I encountered just a few days ago. It’s one of the drawings from Tom Hart’s Rosalie Lightning, a self-portrait that appears on page 25 and again on the dust jacket for the book: over the Pacific Ocean, listening to Tim Buckley’s “Song to a Siren,” Hart, along with the reader, stares at his reflection in the small convex window of the jet that carries him and his wife home. A white moon hovers over his head. We might be looking at him, or he might be staring back at himself—or, maybe, we’re floating outside, in the interest in urban planning and architecture evident in my previous comics work, but I never had any aspiration to be an architect! Heaven forbid if any of my backdrops ever had to stand up! But in that sense there is some continuity. More generally, I always wanted to become more familiar with the great ideas, the great thinkers, and get more well-rounded book learning than I had gotten. I was an art school drop out in part because I was mainly a self-taught artist and found art school not very challenging, intellectually. I certainly read and wrote an enormous amount over the decade back in school and I developed a much greater confidence as a writer. That wasn’t a goal, but it balanced out the effort I had put into mastering drawing over my lifetime previously. I wouldn’t necessarily recommend a Ph.D. in the humanities for someone who wanted to write fiction, and that wasn’t my goal at all, but the two pursuits are not at all incompatible. Whether fiction or non-fiction, good writing is good writing, and putting facts from archival research into a coherent argument or imaginative material into a compelling narrative involves many similar skills and strategies.

BC: I know you’ve taught classes and seminars on comics and cartooning. I’m curious to learn more about your teaching strategies. How do you teach comics (as a craft or discipline, but also as a narrative form)?

DS: I’ve taught non-credit workshops on cartooning and drawing, and studio art at the undergraduate level. It is not a situation where one can preview portfolios, so students come in with a wide array of backgrounds, skill levels, and ambitions. In such a case the instructor has to find where each student is at and help them along to the next step in their development. Some people are learning to draw a straight line, others are ready for guidance in anatomy or storytelling subtleties. So you are starting with where
As I continued reading Chute—her history of remarkable artists from Jacques Callot and Goya to Keiji Nakazawa and Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco—I centered myself by returning to Hart’s drawings. The two books suddenly began to resonate for me in unexpected ways. “Activating the past on the page,” Chute argues in the introduction, “comics materializes the physically absent” (27). Citing John Berger, she suggests that the art form “inscribes and concretizes, through the embodied labor of drawing, ‘the spatial charge of a presence,’ the tactile presence of line, the body of the medium. The desire is to make the absent appear” (Chute 27). Disaster Drawn, I think, like Marianne Hirsch’s groundbreaking 1997 study Family Frames or the late W. G. Sebald’s final novel Austerlitz is, in addition to being a book about the relationship between drawn images, photographs, and memory, also a kind of ghost story, one impossible memory after the next transformed and made solid again first by the artist and then by the reader.

Disaster Drawn,

Asked about the compelling nature of old
photographs like the ones in his books, Sebald explained that, staring at them, we get the sense of appeal. They’re stepping out. Having been found by somebody, after decades or half-centuries, having been found by somebody, all of a sudden they come stepping back over the threshold, and they say, “We were here too, once. And please take care of us for awhile.”

Perhaps the marks that Chute describes make the same request of those who see them. It’s not a demand, or an invitation, but a gesture, a remark, a shadow. How can writing ever hope to compete with images? Through poetry, of course. And Disaster Drawn is that rare work of comics scholarship, one that should be read in poetic counterpoint to the harrowing but sublime works that it studies.

Hillary Chute’s Disaster Drawn is now available from The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Review: Ramzi Fawaz's The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics

Superheroes have drawn considerable academic attention, at conferences, in journals, and in books; in fact the young century has seen a raft of journal issues, anthologies, and monographs devoted to the genre, in both its comics and onscreen variants. Despite this, superhero studies still seems to labor under a sense that it has been marginalized, or relegated to

I am currently completing Megaton Man: Return to Megatropolis, an original 160-page graphic novel, this spring, and planning a second graphic novel Megaton Man: The Doomsday Factory (publication plans TBD). Border Worlds is being collected with a new concluding 30-page chapter by Dover Publications for a Spring 2017 release.

To read more about Don and his work, including information on commissions, please visit his website: www.megatonman.blogspot.com

Grad Caucus Notes
underdog status—an ironic counterpoint to the genre’s assumed preeminence in comic book fandom and comic shops. This beleaguered sense of not being taken seriously, though, ought to be melting away now, for the academic ground has decisively shifted; in recent years a number of brilliant scholars have offered unexpected, eye-opening perspectives on this most familiar of genres. In this context, Ramzi Fawaz’s monograph *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*, newly published by NYU Press, should be a sensation, deservedly so.

Simply put: everyone who cares about superhero comics both as popular art and as reflectors and refractors of American culture should read Fawaz’s book as soon as they can. It is that unexpected, and that interesting. Fawaz takes seriously the cultural politics of the genre, and its utopian possibilities. He argues, with a wealth of detail culled from comic books and fanzines, how superhero comics of the 1960s and after offered a radically egalitarian, inclusive, democratic worldview—not just acknowledging diversity but offering models for living with and valuing the heterogeneity and complexity of our society. Through in-depth studies of such titles as the *Justice League of America*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *X-Men*, Fawaz shows how superhero comics, particularly team stories, model a democratic ethos that he calls a *cosmopolitics*, which “value[s] the uncertainty of cross-cultural encounter and the possibilities afforded by abandoning claims of individualism in exchange for diverse group affiliations” (16). Informing his argument is a queer culture-influenced

Hello from the Graduate Student Caucus of the CSS!

The purpose of the Graduate Student Caucus is to assess the needs and represent the interests of graduate students within the Comics Studies Society and to provide fellowship, support, and advocacy for graduate students pursuing graduate work in comics studies. The Grad Caucus was formed at the same time as the CSS, with an initial membership of 17 graduate students who attended our first meeting at Ohio State in December 2014, during the ICAF Conference. Over the coming months and years we plan to provide graduate students with opportunities for professionalization and training, connections to mentors, and places to discuss their professional and scholarly interests and concerns. We’re kicking things off with a roundtable at this year’s ICAF in Columbia, SC, April 14-16, “Getting a Job When You Work on Comics.”

Graduate student members of the CSS are automatically also members of the Caucus. Starting now, with the official membership drive, the CSS will be growing rapidly, and so it’s particularly important for grad students to be involved in planning the scope and function of the Society. Please find us on our blog, Facebook, and Twitter to tell us what you want CSS to do for grad students; to share any information you have about upcoming conferences, panels, cons, lectures, and other events relating to comics; or just to say hello. We also welcome submissions for blog posts on topics of interest to grad students, including discussions of your own experiences researching or teaching comics. We want the Grad Caucus to be a hub for information and opportunities.

The Grad Caucus will also be having elections for four positions on the Caucus Executive Board—Vice President, Secretary, and two Members-at-Large—in
embrace of alternate forms of kinship and connection, beyond traditional notions of family, and an understanding that such connections extend beyond the private, into the social and political.

Against a historical backdrop of radical social movements and progressive politics, Fawaz takes this controversial genre, so often condemned as inherently right-wing and authoritarian, even fascist, and offers instead a new but persuasive counter-reading, one that may help to explain the burgeoning popularity of the genre beyond comic books today, as well as the powerful hold the superhero has on fan communities. This is no small accomplishment. Whether viewing the JLA through the lens of transnationalism, or the Fantastic Four through the lens of queer family, or the cosmic X-Men tales of the late 1970s as a saga of “interspecies encounters across the cosmos” shaped by women’s and gay liberation, Fawaz reads the comics generously, and with care, attuned to their utopian embrace of difference—not as something to be resolved into a generalizing liberal humanism or unquestioning consensus, but as something radical that accepts uncertainty and unassimilated Otherness even as it stresses social bonds.

*The New Mutants* is an original, provocative, deeply optimistic book that joins José Alaniz’s watershed study *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* (2014) as a game-changer in superhero studies, one that opens up a field of possibilities and can teach even the most jaded superhero reader to re-approach the genre with a sense of wonder over its political and social implications. I can honestly say that it has rewired my understanding of comics I thought I knew very well.

April, with results announced at ICAF. We’ll be soliciting nominations soon, and then we’ll send members information about the candidates and online voting procedure. We strongly encourage any Caucus members both to vote and to nominate people for the positions.

Best,
The Graduate Student Caucus Executive Board

Ben Novotny Owen, President
Colin Beineke, Vice President
Alison Sagara, Secretary-Treasurer
Theresa Rojas, Member-at-Large
Biz Nijdam, Member-at-Large
Coming in March: CSS elections!

CSS members, please vote in the upcoming elections for Executive Board officers. Electing the CSS leadership (and standing for election yourself) is your right!

Active, up-to-date CSS members, expect information about the ballot and the voting process within the next few weeks.

The CSS Executive Board is responsible for the content of this newsletter:

Charles Hatfield, President (interim)
Susan Kirtley, Secretary (interim)
Nhora Serrano, Treasurer (interim)
Jose Alaniz, Corey K. Creekmur, Brian Cremins, Rebecca Wanzo, and Qianna Whitted, Members At- Large
Benedict Owen, President of GSC
Jared Gardner, Journal Editor
A. David Lewis, Web Editor