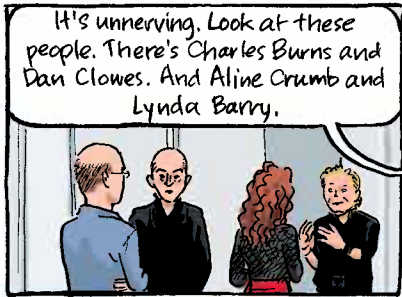


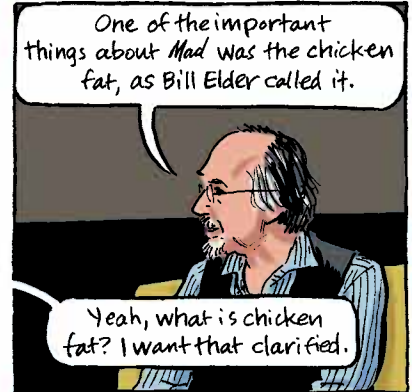
The Comics: Philosophy and Practice conference at the Logan Center for the Arts drew 17 cartoonists and hundreds of observers, in person and online, for three days in May of intense discussion of the field.



# CHICKEN FAT

By Jessica Abel, AB'91

Art Spiegelman, in discussion with W.J.T. Mitchell, set the terms for the weekend: on the one hand, the luscious "chicken fat" of cartooning that makes it so compelling to read, reread, and study...



Everybody talked about chewing the fat.



I want to give that sense of just being overwhelmed by things going on. It's not one thing in front of you that you can focus on.




Too much to take in?

W. J. T. Mitchell      Joe Sacco

Too much to take in, but also giving a lot of information to those who really want to study it. Pages like this, there are no words, but they're meant to be read slowly.



There's so much stuff coming at us now with the Internet and TV and movies and everything. I wanted to try to make something that compels reading in some way.




Charles Burns      Dan Clowes, U-High '79      Seth      Chris Ware


I agree. One of the things I most feel about work that I love is the sense that I want to repeat the experience.

I guess that's why I don't really respond to the digital format, because to me that physical book invites me to actually reread it.

Instead of the word "graphic novel," for me it was just a long comic book that needs a bookmark and wants to be reread.



The idea of rereading is really important, and that's what comes from this whole chicken fat notion. This idea that the more time you spend, the more it offers.



... On the other hand, the "Faustian deal" comics have struck with high culture: we make works rich with chicken fat, you keep reading, but does that reading and analysis come with overthinking and deadening of the artistic process?

I was realizing comics, even in the '70s, were beginning to wane from their glory years when they were a truly mass mass medium. I thought of it very literally as a Faustian deal that had to be made with the culture. And it was a fraught one and a dangerous one...

...but it was necessary for comics to find their way into libraries, bookstores, universities, and museums, because otherwise there wouldn't be an apparatus that could sustain what had been sustained by Sunday newspapers and pamphlet comics in the latter part of the 20th century.

The only danger is that it gets arid. The Faustian deal is worth making, it's just then you gotta make more dangerous comics, not more domesticated ones that can be explicated in Hillary's classes.

Alison Bechdel and I won this Mellon Residential Fellowship for Arts Practice and Scholarship, so it's under the auspices of her being on campus that this whole thing is happening. I think they're really trying to get artists to come to campus. And the idea is that there's some kind of conversation.

Conference organizer Hillary Chute, English Department

I think for some of the cartoonists, they don't care, and for some of them, they're actually really interested. I know that Aline, for example, was so shocked to know that there were people studying her work.

I really liked seeing Aline Kominsky.

Julia Wetherell, AB'12

Aline Kominsky-Crumb.

Alex Gordon, '14

Aline Kominsky-Crumb. She's awesome.

Liza Dzul, AB'12

There was a tension between the purported purpose of the conference, which was this academic examination of comics, and then the artists being kind of resistant to that.



I think this happened when Alison and Hillary were on stage, and...

Why do you have your own text box partially on top of the photograph you draw of your mother, and then partially on top of this column about hospitals? How are you thinking about composing the page?



Uh... heh... I don't know, I just liked the way it looked.

I thought Hillary would be traumatized by those clashes, but she actually found them really exciting.



Yaaayyy!

(Lynda Barry)

In class, we're talking about autobiography, reading really dense autobiography theory, which Hillary has assigned everyone. I have to read it too. There's a curious tension between thinking about something and examining it and just doing it.



But I do think there's a little inverse relationship, like the kids who are the most articulate in class often aren't the ones doing the strongest comics.

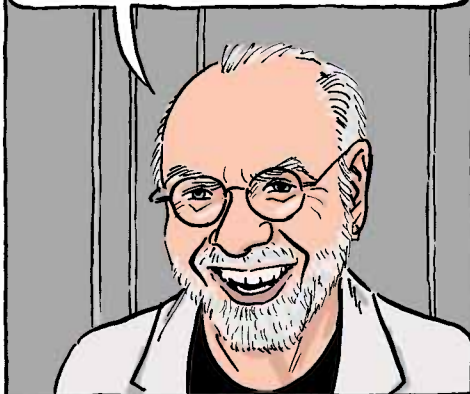


It's the quiet kids who aren't speaking up who understand visual language.



Mitchell reflected on what the "Comics Con" means to UChicago going forward.

It's a momentous intellectual event; it's not just that a bunch of stars showed up. The level of discussion has been extraordinary. They're bringing their A game.



Does it change things afterward for the University? I hope so. I believe it will. The arts are now important to this university in a way they never were.



People are always asking me, "Where're the humanities going?" and I think this is a sign: a certain kind of conversation between art and scholarship that marks a new beginning.

Jessica Abel's book *Mastering Comics: Drawing Words & Writing Pictures Continued* (First Second) came out in May.