



BEYOND THE VISUAL: THE ROLES OF THE SENSES IN CONTEMPORARY COMICS

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ABSTRACT

We tend to think of comics as a visual medium, a means by which stories are told using a sequential arrangement of images and (sometimes) words. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly apparent that this conception of the medium is not as valid as it arguably once was. Comic artists are moving to take advantage of new technologies such as the internet to produce comics that are not only visual in nature, but incorporate elements that stimulate the other senses as well.

Over the course of this article, I discuss examples of such works, and think about the ways in which creators are working with a diverse array of materials and technologies to develop comics that are still primarily visual, but not exclusively so. Additionally, I outline some of the possibilities and implications of the use of the non-visual senses in comics.

I consider each of the non-visual senses in turn, and look at a range of examples of the ways in which creators have taken up the challenge of incorporating sounds, textures, smells and even tastes into their comics to create what are truly multisensory reading experiences. My article does not focus on a particular comic, but rather it takes in a selection of works from various areas, including Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Ben Katchor's *Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer* radio cartoons and the recently launched UK small press anthology *Solipsistic Pop*.