Exploring the Impact of Media
Course title: Animation, Simulation, and Performance
Professor: Emily Roxworthy, Theatre and Dance
Institution: University of California, San Diego

Overview: Professor Roxworthy's course Animation, Simulation, and Performance focuses on graphic representations of war, such as comic books, animated films, and video games about World War II and the global war on terror. Students learn how to analyze still and moving images of wartime atrocities, particularly in terms of the impact that different representational media have on the communicative power of these images.

Pedagogical Use of the Visual History Archive: In their first analytical-essay assignment, students compare the first volume of Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel Maus (which documents his parents’ experiences at Auschwitz) with Holocaust testimony from the Visual History Archive. They are asked how the comic book medium and the medium of filmed testimony make different demands upon their audiences, particularly along the lines of empathy and participation. While students apply theoretical concepts from key media theorists such as McLuhan and Sontag, the most important work is accomplished through students analyzing how a narrative travels from one medium to another and how this adaptation alters the audience's experience of war representation.

Observations: Professor Roxworthy's first-year students found the Visual History Archive testimony both moving and informative: “Despite the fact that their generation was practically raised on graphic novels and the comics medium, surprisingly, in their papers, the majority of these students decided that the Visual History Archive interviews provoked more empathy and participation than...
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Spiegelman’s Maus did. Even when they decided that both were participatory and empathy-generating, they generally concluded that the survivor testimony recorded in the Visual History Archive more effectively engaged its audience in a mode of participation that activated spectators,” she says.

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