Graphic novel/zine assignment: Reality as Told through Comics  
American Idol(s), BCUSP 104/107, Lerum & Toft, Fall 2011

When we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as much as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential “meaning,” an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t.  
- Scott McCloud, “The Vocabulary of Comics”

“Zines” are short for magazine or fanzine, zines are self-publications, motivated by a desire for self-expression, not for profit. Zines can be xeroxed or printed; small or big; written, typed, typeset or drawn; and on any subject the creator cares about. Zines have been around as long as printing presses have been. For most of this century, zines have usually been “fanzines” (a zine about one subject that the creator is a big fan of). But over the last ten years, more zines have appeared that are not “fanzines” any more. Most of the zines you’ll read about these days are more like mini-magazines, but with a personal touch.  
- Barnard Zine Library website and Action Girl Online, Zine-O-Rama

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to explore issues of reality and representation by writing and illustrating a “true” story about you. You will “publish” your illustrated story in the style of a “zine.”

Due: Your zine and 1 page artists’ statement is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, Oct. 25. Bring at least two copies of your zine to class. (One for the instructors, and one for you) Do not give us your only copy; keep the original for yourself!

Process: This assignment involves several steps. 1) writing your story 2) illustrating your story 3) publishing a small booklet or zine for your story, and 4) providing a 1 page artist statement explaining your rationale for your illustrations.

1. Writing your story: The first step is to write a story about you. Based on the outline of your story that you bring to class, nail down the “arc” of your story. What is the point of the story? From whose perspective will you tell it (e.g. first person, third person, or via another story character)? What themes, emotions, or images do you want to emphasize in your story?

2. Illustrating your story: After you are satisfied with your basic arc and elements for your story, start thinking about the types of images that best call attention to the “meaning” you want to convey. Worried about your drawing skills? Don’t be. In fact, more simplistic drawings may be better for this medium. Scott McCloud (1993) describes this as “amplification through simplification” (p. 30). According to McCloud not only do simplified images allow the ‘meaning” to be amplified, but simplified drawings of people invite your audience to identify with your characters. Remember, the (denotative) style of your illustrations will impact the (connotative) meaning they convey to readers. You may attempt, as many cartoonists do, to contrast more detailed “realistic” backgrounds with cartoony figures, or to provide more realistic detail in some characters than others (serving to distance or objectify that character for the reader). There is no “correct” way to illustrate here, but you should be able to explain how your choices in style serve your particular purposes.
3. **Publishing your story.** Your illustrated story must be made in “zine” style -- just as you saw during our fieldtrip to ZAPP. All pages MUST be front and back, like a book or magazine. **Do NOT just use regular 9x11 lined notebook paper for this assignment.** You want your end product to look like a zine that could potentially be placed in the ZAPP archive. Illustrate your story on back-to-back pages, with the pages bound together (side staples are ok). Your zine should run between 8-16 pages front to back, and it must have a front cover with a title and a back cover with some text or other illustration. Bring TWO copies of your zine to class. One for your instructors and one for you. (Keep the original for yourself). Instructions on making zines can be found in a variety of places including:

- “How To Make a Zine” from Zine-O-Rama www.houseoffun.com/action/zines/diy.html
- Several zine tutorials are also available on Youtube. One of my favorites (link below) describes how to make an easy 8 page zine: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xh1W15BWCUK

4. **Provide a 1-page artist statement explaining your rationale for your illustrations.** Similar to your analysis essay for the visual alphabet assignment, your artist statement should focus on a) the inspirations for your story, and b) the relationship between your choices and the meanings you were attempting to convey. How can you explain why you made the choices that you did, and how those choices support the kinds of ‘meanings’ that you were aiming for based on your story outline? These are fundamental questions of meaning and representation. You will write a short statement (400-500 words, double spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins) that explores the following questions:

- What is this story about?
- What were you hoping to convey with this story?
- What choices did you make about how to represent this story?
- How can you explain what kinds of (denotative) choices resulted in what kinds of (connotative) meanings?