

Queer as Style: Ariel Schrag's High School Comic Chronicles

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Focusing on the artistic and personal development on display throughout the four installments of Ariel Schrag's High School Comic Chronicles, which were largely published while the author was still in high school, this paper provides a consideration of Schrag's work that argues that the books' origin in zine culture, combined with the comics form's serial nature and visual instability, provides Schrag with both a vehicle for self-expression and the tools to experiment with visual and verbal codes in order to delineate and assert the queer and in-progress teenage self as experimental artist. In doing so, Schrag's four books gradually begin to employ the full arsenal of the comics form in order to stylistically express the difference and excess associated with queerness. As Schrag's narrative becomes increasingly sophisticated in both storytelling and imagery with each new installment, it becomes evident that the multiple narrative and visual possibilities of the comics form are essential to her personal and artistic development and their implications for her depiction of a constantly changing, growing, and maturing self. For a young, queer, and female artist, further, this radical—in scope as well as content—act of depicting both her exterior and interior realities constitutes a counter-discourse initially made possible by the accessibility of the comics form and its concrete expression as part of handmade and self-published 1990s zine culture. If, as Brian Loftus claims about queer autobiography, "the project of queer is to explode the seamless coherence of the 'I' [and] to reveal its gaps, multiplicities, contradictions, and dependencies," then Schrag's collected autobiographical comics can be understood as inescapably queer in form as well as content, and as an expression of the immense amounts of self-reflection necessary to claim this identity while staying true to the project of documenting the in-progress teenage queer self.

Kurzbiographie

Frederik Byrn Køhlert is a Lecturer at the University of East Anglia whose research concerns issues of representation in comics. Among his publications are articles on trauma and gender in such journals as *South Central Review* and the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, and his book *Serial Selves: Identity and Representation in Autobiographical Comics* is forthcoming from Rutgers University Press. His most recent research focuses on political comics and cartoons, including a special issue of *SubStance* on the intersection of comics and anarchism. His current projects examine the representation of racial whiteness on the comics page and the reception of comics outside their original national contexts.