



**Saturday October 25th 2014 at
Birkbeck, University of London**

Transitions 5 is part of Comica - The London International Comics Festival, and organised in association with Birkbeck College, Studies in Comics, European Comic Art, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, Comics Grid and The Contemporary Fiction Seminar.



Keynotes:
Dr Jason Dittmer (UCL) and
Dr Antonio Lázaro Reboll (University of Kent)

Respondent:
Professor Roger Sabin (Central Saint Martins)

A one-day symposium promoting new research and multi-disciplinary academic study of comics/ comix/ manga/ bande dessinée and other forms of sequential art.

This is a free event, but please register by email at transitions.symposium@gmail.com

TRANSITIONS 5 – New Directions in Comics Studies 2014
Birkbeck, University of London
Main Building, Malet Street (entrance Torrington Square)

9.30 - 10

REGISTRATION (basement, main building Malet Street)

10 - 11 Room: B35 (basement)

Welcome

Key Note: Jason Dittmer

Comics as Assemblages: Thinking Topologically and Materially About Graphic Narratives

11.15-12.15 Room: 630 (6th floor)

CHARACTERS Chair: Nicola Streeten

Grace D. Gipson: Martha Washington - A Reimagined Black American Icon

Miriam Kent: Unveiling Marvels

Essi Varis: Why Characters matter

11.15-12.15 Room: B35 (Basement)

SOUND AND COLOUR Chair: John Miers

Barbara Uhlig: Colour in Lorenzo Mattotti's comics

Paddy Johnston: Colour in Bryan Lee O'Malley's comics

Daniel Goodbrey: Sound in web-comics

11.15-12.15 Room: B04 (basement)

COMICS AND MENTAL

HEALTH Chair: Pen Mendonca

Ian Williams: On Justin Green

Megan John Barker, Caroline Waters and Joseph De

Lappe: Mental health in comics

12.15-12.30

Break

12.30-1.30 pm Room: 630

CREATORS Chair: Rebecca Klette

Fred Francis: The 19th Century Background to Frank Miller's Batman

Chris Thompson: Hunt Emerson and the birth of the *Fortean Times*

Martin Flanagan: 'Half Gandalf, Half Mr. Kipling': The Marvel and DC Work of Paul Cornell

12.30 – 1.30 pm Room: B35

PORNOGRAPHIC COMICS

Chair: Caroline Walters

Jude Roberts: Savita Bhabhi, Indian on-line pornographic comics

Anna Madill: Boys Love

Comics and legislation

Sina Shamsavari: 'Alternative Gay Porno Comics'

12.30-1.30 pm Room: B04

SPACES OF REPRESENTATION Chair

Xavier Marco Del Pont

Edward Jackson: Melodramas of Precorporation: Kurt Cobain in Comics

Emma

Hayward:

Remembering New York in *Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer*

Daniel King:

The Crafting of Queer Domestic Space in Jaime Hernandez's *Love and Rockets*

1.30 – 2.15 pm

LUNCH

2.15 – 3 Room B35

Key Note: Antonio Lázaro-Reboll

Comics Culture and Comic Art Scholarship in Spain (1965-1975)

3 – 3.15

Break

3.15-4.15 Room: B35

What we talk about when we talk about comics studies Chair: Ernesto Priego

Ian Horton: *Info-Comics, Science (Fiction) and Public Relations*

Ahmed Jameel:

Rethinking collaboration

Ann D'Orazio: The Matter of Comics Studies

3.15-4.15 Room: B04

DISSIDENCE Chair Maggie Gray

Katherine Hubbard: 'You like that, you goddamned queer?' Psychology, gender and sexuality in Moore & Gibbons' *Watchmen*

Joseph Willis: Female Sex and Sexual Identity in the Superhero Narrative

Christina Scholtz: Trans_identities in *Dial H* and *Batgirl*

4.15– 4.45

Break

4.45-5.45 Room: B35

HISTORIES Chair: Paul Gravett

Ann Miller: Binet's *L'Institution*: The First French Comics Autobiography?

Marisol Rodriguez: *El Libro Vaquero*

Rik Spanjers: Questioning the Nazi Past Through Handwriting and Composed Text in Peter Pontiac's *Kraut*

4.45-5.45 Room: B04

IDENTITÉ Chair: Tara-Monique Etherington

Arezo Adibeik:

The (re)presentation of Self and Others in *The Adventures of Tintin*

Xavier Marco Del Pont: You All Look the Same to Me: Doubling and Incest in *Bande Dessinée*

Rebecca Klette: Other'-ness and Hyper-reality

5.45 – 6 pm

Break

6 - 6.30

COMMENTS BY OUR RESPONDENTS FOLLOWED BY WINE RECEPTION IN B04

TRANSITIONS 5 – New Directions in Comics Studies

Keynotes: Dr. Jason Dittmer (UCL, *Captain America & the Nationalist Superhero*); Dr. Antonio Lázaro-Reboll (University of Kent)

Respondents: Professor Roger Sabin (Central Saint Martins, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels*); Dr Joan Ormrod (Manchester Metropolitan University, *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics*); Dr Julia Round (Bournemouth University; *Studies in Comics*)

Respondents:

Roger Sabin is Professor in Popular Culture at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. His research interests encompass cultural history, cultural studies, and subcultural studies. He specialises in comics, graphic novels, and manga; marginalised and underground literature/graphics/film; punk and counter-culture; comedy; television crime drama; the 19th century entertainment industry (music hall, penny press, etc.); and cultural theory, especially postmodernism in history.

Joan Ormrod is a senior lecturer in film and media studies at the Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. She researches women in comics and subcultural identities. She is currently writing a book on Wonder Woman which examines cultural, political and social influences upon the representation of the human body from the 1940s, and is also editing a book with Dr Matthew Jones of UCL in time travel in the media. She co-edits Routledge's *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* with David Huxley.

Julia Round is a senior lecturer in the Media School at Bournemouth University. She has published and presented work internationally on cross-media adaptation, television and discourse analysis, the application of literary terminology to comics, the 'graphic novel' redefinition, and the presence of gothic and fantastic motifs and themes in this medium. Her book, *Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels*, was published this year by McFarland. She co-edits the Intellect journal *Studies in Comics* with Chris Murray.

Part of *Comica – The London International Comics Festival*, this is currently the only regular academic comics event based in London. *Transitions* is devoted to promoting new research into comics in all their forms, aiming specifically to provide a forum for research by postgraduate students and early career lecturers/researchers. By deliberately not appointing a set theme, we hope to put together a programme reflecting the diversity of comics studies. Comics studies encourage cross-disciplinary pollination and a convergence of distinct knowledges: literary and cultural studies, visual arts and media, modern languages, sociology, geography and more. By thinking about comics across different disciplines, we hope to stimulate and provoke debate and to address a wide spectrum of questions, to map new trends and provide a space for dialogue and further collaboration.

Supported by Comica, The Centre for Contemporary Literature (Birkbeck), and the Contemporary Fiction Seminar
Thanks to John Miers for a great poster

Keynotes:

Comics as Assemblages: Thinking Topologically and Materially About Graphic Narratives

Dr Jason Dittmer (UCL)

In this paper I outline assemblage theory and trace its relevance to comics studies. I argue that this approach offers the possibility of integrating the various disciplinary strands of comics studies: the discursive, the visual, the material, and so on. I do so via empirical reference to the recent Hypercomics exhibition at Battersea Park, Chris Ware's 'Building Stories', and the comics scene in Cambodia. These varied engagements with comics-as-assemblage illustrate the way in which comics are always a precarious encounter between artists, writers, and audiences, mediated by a material form that is itself a precarious achievement.

Jason Dittmer is Reader in Human Geography at University College London. He is the editor of *Comic Book Geographies* (Franz Steiner, 2014) and the author of *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and Geopolitics* (Temple University Press, 2013). His current research is on everyday diplomacies and the production of geopolitical assemblages.

Comics Culture and Comic Art Scholarship in Spain (1965-1975)

Dr Antonio Lázaro-Reboll (University of Kent)

This talk maps the formation of comics culture and comic art scholarship in Spain from 1965 to 1975, focusing on a local scene created by comics authors, media critics and fan writers who forged international networks with contemporary comics book cultures in Europe and the United States. Focusing on pioneering studies, specialist publications and fanzines, it examines how the adoption of American and European theoretical explorations of mass media phenomena was applied to the study of comics, comics-related phenomena and other popular cultural forms. The Spanish case is discussed in relation to contemporary comics book cultures in Europe and the United States exploring transnational relationships and cultural exchanges.

Antonio Lázaro-Reboll is a Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies at the University of Kent. He is the author of *Spanish Horror Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012) and the co-editor (with Andrew Willis) of *Spanish Popular Cinema* (Manchester University Press, 2004). His research interests are in Spanish cultural studies and film studies, especially Spanish popular film, the development of film cultures in Spain (reception, consumption and fandom), and the cross-cultural dialogue between Spain and other world cinemas (international traditions of the horror genre, global psychotronic culture). He is currently working on the emergence of subcultural modes of production, reception and consumption in Spain in the 1970s across different media (film, comics, magazines) and their relation to two key moments of recent Spanish history, late Francoism and the Transition.

Panels:

The construction of ethnic identities in comic books: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the (re)presentation of Self and Others in *The Adventures of Tintin*

(Arezoo Adibeik, Lancaster University)

The bulk of literature highlights the semiotics of visual racism, their relevant discourses and multimodal realisations (e.g. Richardson and Wodak, 2009; Wodak and Reisigl, 2000; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000). For the past three decades, the emergence of power and ideology in comic books has triggered much interest in multimodal analysis from a socio-cultural point of view (e.g. Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975; Barker, 1989). While political comics and comic book volumes have been explored for their multimodal and semiotic aspects in recent years (e.g. Wodak and Forchtner, 2014; Forceville, 2011; Van Leeuwen and Suleiman, 2010; Mizushima and Stapleton, 2006), the (re)presentation of different ethnic identities in a complete comic book series has been less under scrutiny from a critical

discursive point of view. In particular, little research has been conducted on the representation of Self and Others in a comic book genre such as *The Adventures of Tintin*. These books as one of the most controversial and widely distributed comic book series in the past century is still of interest among people with different linguistic and non-linguistic backgrounds. Since its first appearance in 1929, the series have sold over 200 million copies in more than 70 languages (Farr, 2007; Rifas, 2012). Despite their public interest, the series have been frequently accused of promoting racial stereotypes in recent years (e.g. the stereotypical depictions of Africans).

This paper explores the discursive and multimodal construction of the most frequently occurring South Asians and Middle Easterners, specifically focussing on ethnic stereotypes (e.g. fakirs and emirs) in these adventures. I apply the theoretical insights from the socio-semiotic approach (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2008) with the Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) in order to explore and understand the patterns of discursive and visual racism within images and texts via both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Mental Health in Comics

(Meg John Barker [Open University], Dr Caroline Walters [Middlesex], Joseph De Lappe [Open University])

Many of the most acclaimed comics, and related tie-ins, utilise themes and characters that directly or indirectly touch on mental health. They often do this in ways that are thoughtful, challenging and provocative but also have the potential to be manipulative, voyeuristic and stereotypical. Key examples of depictions of mental health in well known comics are the characters of Delirium and Despair in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series, and the Joker in both Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight Trilogy* of films and in the Scott Snyder helmed *Death of the Family* story arc that recently ran across the Batman DC comics. At the same time, the rise of media such as web comics, and alternatives to the classic comic genres which incorporate memoir, journalism and social history indicate the potential of comics to portray lived experience in vivid tones. Questions that we examine include: Does the representation of often deeply personal feelings, both painful and joyous, as expressed by individuals with their own experiences of mental health issues connect collectively? Can we identify shared themes and concerns in the work of comic artists who are concerned with, or, who have experience of mental health issues?

This paper will draw on the experiences of the three contributors of putting together a workshop on comics and mental health, and a special issue of *Asylum Magazine*, which is a non-traditional journal for anyone interested in mental health and psychiatry.

The Matter of Comics Studies

(Ann D'Orazio, University of New Mexico)

Comics Studies is no longer fighting for legitimacy as an academic field. As Comics Studies continues to grow, a canon has emerged and certain discourses and accepted narratives of how to approach comics have begun to dominate. While these approaches have much to offer, they often rely upon treating comics in some problematic ways. Some approaches call for treating comics as literature; others analogize the emergence and growth of comics to the explosion of American film in the early twentieth century; still others see comics as part of a kind of global genre turn away from the novel, as the novel purportedly once did from the epic. These approaches often valorize the single-creator independent mode of production. Rather than focusing upon the collaborative nature of comics—or what is typical of and in comics, i.e. the conventions of genre comics—these approaches end up missing and ignoring the bulk of comics produced.

This paper seeks to argue for an approach to Comics Studies that takes a longer historical and cultural view, drawing upon promiscuous readings of the work of David Kunzle, Charles

Hatfield, and Thierry Groensteen for support. In this paper, I argue that in order for Comics Studies to avoid replicating the ossified structures imposed upon Art History, Literature, and Film Studies, scholars must avoid total obedience to the paradigms found within these disciplines, and treat comics as separate entities rather than surrogates to the objects of study within traditional Humanities disciplines. This paper will form part of a larger project that analyzes the emerging discipline and uses Warren Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* to examine the complexity of the multiple contributor-produced genre comic, and push back against the canon that has already been established.

'Half Gandalf, Half Mr. Kipling': The Marvel and DC Work of Paul Cornell

(Martin Flanagan, University of Sheffield)

Paul Cornell's work for the 'big two' U.S. publishers¹ transfers a distinctly British (mainly, but not exclusively, English) sensibility into a field where the centre of cultural gravity, in terms of tropes and iconography, tends to be the USA. Cornell's skills at writing fresh versions of thinly-drawn superheroes like Blade led to a run on one of Marvel's leading titles, *Wolverine* (2013-14), and he has at various times been given the controls of Superman and Batman by DC. In a move encapsulating his authorial signature, DC gave Cornell the opportunity to imagine what English analogues of Batman and Robin would be like (in *Knight and Squire*, with artist Jimmy Broxton [2010-11]). Unlike earlier efforts of Marvel's UK wing to work American characters into British landscapes dominated by icons of international recognisability, Cornell's work on *Captain Britain and MI-13* (2008-9) and other titles uses a less mechanical method of introducing a British dimension to the Marvel Universe. Rather than 'postcard views' (Liz, 2014: 5), it relies on a sense of a collective British consciousness, with appropriate symbols playing their part and magic presented as a unique driving force. A de-emphasis on physical power and spatial value, and an accent on feelings (defined in various ways), also characterises his work. In terms of the national dimension, and squaring a British symbol-system with the US-centric mythology of DC and Marvel, Cornell's motto might be drawn from the pages of *Knight and Squire* #1: 'You don't need power, you need moderation'.

Influenced by British television (for which he has scripted *Doctor Who*), we can regard the Britain that emerges through Cornell's work as deploying a familiar and eccentric cast of characters, or, viewed in a different light, a host of repressed cultural obsessions rising up (as does Richard III in *Knight and Squire*). Thus, Cornell provides a way for cultural motifs from outside the U.S. to be exercised on the terrain of some of the most famous superheroes. This paper will review aspects of Cornell's work, including:

- An element of the domestic: both within Cornell's aesthetic, and as a tonal counterpoint in his heroes' environments;
- Hero versus costume: Cornell explores the self-destructive aspects of uniforms, and regularly takes away, reinvents and generally explores the meanings of powers;
- The carnivalesque, and the role of the pub in Cornell's comics

Reference

Liz, M. (2014) 'From Europe with Love: Urban Space and Cinematic Postcards'. *Studies in European Cinema*, Vol. 11, No. 1. 3–13

The Dark Knight Rereads: The 19th Century Background to Frank Miller's Batman

(Fred Francis, University of Kent)

Although Frank Miller is a highly controversial figure within comics today, his importance for the superhero comic during the 1980s is critically near-unanimous. Current opinion holds that Miller's innovation was to re-read and re-write the superhero narrative, using the long history of superhero comics to his own end by offering a personal revision of previous

¹ Excepting, perhaps, the more directly American-themed *Saucer Country* for Vertigo (2012-13).

stories. However, it is also possible to see a revision of the American literary heritage in Miller's work which provides a basis for the Gothic, violent Batman which would become the standard for the superhero in the 1980s. One of the major elements in this on is the direct allusion to Poe and the history of the detective story which Miller makes during the end of *The Dark Knight Returns*. By situating his work in this lineage, Miller makes a claim for his work to be read in a context of literary history. Doing so, and tracing the many less obvious allusive gestures to American literature, and particularly the formative American gothic trio of Poe, Melville and Hawthorne, offers a new way to understand Miller's work. In particular, critically complex aspects of the books, such as Miller's political conservatism, celebration of anti-state violence, or fascination with decaying cities and gang violence, can be read as Miller's reuse of themes prevalent in 19th Century texts, as he attempts to remake the superhero comic as American literature. My paper will present several aspects of correspondence between Miller's Batman and 19th Century texts, alongside their historical contexts, to suggest a similarity that emerges from a shared project – making American literature – between the two moments.

“Give Me Liberty: Dark Horse Comic, Martha Washington-A Reimagined Black American Icon”

(Grace D. Gipson, University of California Berkeley)

The Life and Times of Martha Washington in the Twenty First Century is a comic book collection, created by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons, published by Dark Horse Comics, that chronicles the life of futuristic freedom fighter Martha Washington and her journey from birth in the notorious Cabrini Green housing projects, to her 100th birthday and final moments of life. We are introduced to her as she makes her first appearance in the 1990 issue, “Give Me Liberty: An American Dream.” The title of the series comes from a quote in the March 23rd, 1775 speech given by politician Patrick Henry: “I know not what course others may take but—as for me—give me liberty or give me death.” In his speech Henry is attempting to stimulate this idea of “American patriotism” amongst the troops as they were headed toward a direction of war with Britain and that peace was no longer an option. According to Miller and Gibbons, through the Martha Washington character they sought to have a “a real resonance between Martha's fictional world and our world,” using her comic book narrative to reflect and remind us of what is taking place in the present day world. Furthermore, Martha Washington's story initiates a conversation regarding issues of race and gender, womanhood, and Black American patriotism. Despite her impoverished beginnings, lack of opportunities, and the evil ploys of various foes, Martha Washington becomes a resilient leader, war hero, and noted figure in deciding the future of the United States. Overall, this essay examines the 1990 cover and the four issues that comprise this comic book miniseries. I argue that Martha Washington via the cover and through each issue can be viewed as an original comic book character who personifies an image of a Black American patriot for the 21st century.

The Sound of Digital Comics

(Daniel Merlin Goodbrey, University of Hertfordshire)

This paper provides a critical exploration of the role of sound in comics and how that role has changed with the digital remediation of the form. Comics are a multimodal medium in which information is communicated via a combination of written and visual language. They are also traditionally thought of as a monosensory medium relying solely on the reader's sense of sight for the transmission of this information. But the digital remediation of the comics form has brought with it the potential for plurisensory comics that directly incorporate audible sound alongside the visual modalities of word and image.

The paper focuses its central case study on a new digital comic created as a practice-lead inquiry into the incorporation of sound with the comic form. To augment this case study it considers a range of other digital comics that feature incorporated audible sound. With reference to the theories of Groensteen (2013) and Hague (2014), it considers the

relationship between the imagined sounds of traditional comics and the perceived sounds of these new digital hybrids.

The study makes use of McCloud's thinking on word and image interaction (1993) and attempts to extend these ideas to include interactions with audible sound. In doing so it also draws on ideas concerning the role of sound in cinema (Chion 1990) and videogames (Nitsche 2008). Within this framework it examines the use of both diegetic and non-diegetic sound and considers their potential impacts on a comic's pacing, navigation, narrative and atmosphere.

Remembering New York in 'Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer'

(Emma Hayward, University of Liverpool)

All representation - whether in language, narrative, image, or recorded sound - is based on memory. Re-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. (Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, pp. 2-3)

This paper draws on Huyssen's concept of 're-presentation', to examine the relationship between memory and the visual-textual representation and construction of New York in Ben Katchor's long-running newspaper strip 'Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer'. Rather than claiming to offer an 'authentic' historically accurate version of New York, Katchor's strips create a dialectical tension between the recognisable and the unrecognisable, the surreal and the banal, and emphasise the importance of fantasy in the construction of our experience of the city (and our understanding of that experience). Utilising the distinctive formal devices of the newspaper comic strip, Katchor examines the creative and political potential of the 'fissure', exploring non-linear time through a synthesis of past, present and future, thereby challenging the dichotomous divide between direct experience and representation.

Info-Comics, Science (Fiction) and Public Relations

(Ian Horton, London College of Communication)

Comic books have a long and mostly unacknowledged history in the field of public relations. Notable British examples from the 1980s include the Department of Health campaign against smoking that pitted Superman against the supervillain Nic O'Teen and Raymond Biggs' anti-nuclear weapon graphic novel *When the Wind Blows*. More recently comic books have been extensively used in promoting health campaigns across the world and this has started to receive some critical attention through the *Graphic Medicine* network and associated conferences.

Comic artist and theorist Will Eisner would have categorised these examples as instructional comics and this term will be explored in relation to issues of public engagement using science (fiction) based examples. The science fiction genre has been a mainstay within comic books since the 1930s and the two case studies examined here draw on different visual aspects of this genre and were designed to engage schoolchildren of various ages in science based issues and topics. *Dreams of a Low Carbon Future* was published in 2013 by the University of Leeds with ESPRC funding to examine and promote solutions to climate change. *Asteroid Belter* was produced by Newcastle University in conjunction with the British Science Festival 2013 to promote science mainly to primary school children.

An analysis of these examples concludes by examining the concept of impact as defined by various research funding bodies, how this notion links to public engagement and how comic books are a valuable tool within the public relations profession.

'You like that, you goddamned queer?' Psychology, gender and sexuality in Moore & Gibbons' Watchmen.

(Katherine Hubbard, University of Surrey)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, like much of their other works, highlights certain uncomfortable truths about society. This paper will focus on what uncomfortable truths they portray within the graphic novel regarding Psychology, gender and sexuality. As a historian of Psychology I will use a particular historical lens to consider time in both the world of *Watchmen*, and the time in which it was published to explore these issues. Some of what has been written about gender and sexuality in *Watchmen* so far fails to recognise certain feminist and affirmative approaches to gender and sexuality. In response to this I adopt a distinctive queer feminist approach in analysis of the graphic novel. In doing so, I will especially focus on the characters Rorschach and The Silhouette. In addition, I will draw upon the references made in *Watchmen* towards Psychology and discuss how Psychology is central to the narrative, especially for the character Rorschach. Finally, I wish to illustrate how psychology, gender and sexuality are interrelated both in the history of Psychology and within *Watchmen*. My queer feminist reading and interdisciplinary approach to *Watchmen* not only goes beyond what has been previously argued in texts such as *Watchmen* and *Philosophy* (Irwin & White, 2009). I also aim to develop an analysis that is more affirmative to the 'goddamned queer'.

Melodramas of Precorporation: Kurt Cobain in Comics

(Edward Jackson, University of Birmingham)

Commentators have often considered Nirvana, and especially Kurt Cobain, to be indicative of neoliberal capitalism's incorporation of counter-cultural difference into the mainstream. Mark Fisher goes so far as to read Cobain as the epitome of 'precorporation' – the preemptive "establishment of settled 'alternative' or 'independent' cultural zones, which endlessly repeat older gestures of rebellion and contestation as if for the first time" (Fisher, 2009). In other words Cobain, and the generational dissidence that Nirvana's music was taken to represent, signals the impossibility of creating any alternative space to the market, making his 'gestures of rebellion' suspect because they are always-already saleable. This reading has implications for how we interpret the posthumous proliferation of Cobain in popular culture as a martyr for counter-cultural dissent. *Godspeed: The Kurt Cobain Graphic* and *Kurt Cobain: When I was an Alien*, in particular, retell Cobain's frustrated rebelliousness through a melodramatic logic of stark moral divides and expressive excess. Both comics exploit such melodramatic tropes by deploying fantastical images of alien abduction and religious iconography to recount Cobain's life. Indeed, by rendering Cobain's struggle for musical authenticity and his dislocation from society through so melodramatic a lens, both comics defamiliarize his status as the embodiment of how late capitalism 'precoporates' resistance. Images of Nirvana as alien interlopers or of Cobain as a weeping angel perform, in John Fiske's words, 'the work of the dominant ideology, but then exceeds and overflows it' (Fiske, 1989). These comics thus continue the marketization of Cobain as a figure of futile rebellion and yet, in their excessiveness, foreground this image's constructedness. As a result, both comics create space for resistant readings to the otherwise widely disseminated story of Cobain's (and 1990s counter-culture's) foreclosed capitulation to capitalism.

Rethinking collaboration

(Ahmed Jameel, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts)

Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman - these creators are considered comics authors or auteurs. They are hailed as the minds and voices that create great intellectual works in a unique medium. But what of the collaborating artists? It is true that artists are celebrated by fandom and the industry, but it is usually the authors, or the 'complete' comics creators who

both draw and write, who are considered somehow 'superior'. Yet in many cases, a great deal of narrative responsibility is assumed by the artists, and commonly they realise all the mechanisms that make a comic, such as closure and tressage.

This paper will explore aspects of collaboration, using examples from mainstream and independent American comics, and from my ongoing practice-based PhD. When creators work together they must realise each other's ideas, and in the process become a new creative unit that is greater than the sum of its parts. I want to argue the importance of rethinking the centrality of collaboration in comics and reconsidering notions of authorship. Is authorship the natural baggage of a field that draws from other disciplines such as film studies and literary criticism? How different might the theoretical landscape be if we dispense with the idea of the auteur and instead focus more on the reader-viewer's experience?

From *Scott Pilgrim* to *Seconds*, from Monochrome to Technicolor: Uses of colour in the comics of Bryan Lee O'Malley

(Paddy Johnston, University of Sussex)

Bryan Lee O'Malley is best known for his *Scott Pilgrim* series, originally published in black and white from 2004 to 2010. Following the success of this series and its film adaptation, O'Malley's next project was a full colour standalone graphic novel, *Seconds*. Since 2010 the *Scott Pilgrim* books have also been reissued in full colour hardback editions.

O'Malley's works can be understood as "Alternative Comics," as termed by Charles Hatfield and other comics scholars, but his recent works have much higher production values than those we traditionally associate with Alternative Comics, which are more often than not black and white, constrained by the economic and cultural factors surrounding them and, most significantly, by their being produced often (but not always) by a lone cartoonist rather than the teams present in the genre and deadline-driven mainstream. O'Malley's full colour comics, however, have required the use of other comics workers – significantly the colourist Nathan Fairbairn.

This paper will explore O'Malley's uses of colour, and use these to theorise on the meaning, significance and effects of colour in comics, with O'Malley's work and career as a key case study. I will use this case study to theorise, as I did in a previous article on colour², that alternative cartoonists working alone may wish to work in full colour, but they may be unable to due to constraints of technical and cultural production, and this is a significant factor in how we understand and engage with colour in comics, as scholars and readers.

Colour has received less attention than many other aspects of the form in comics scholarship. With this paper I hope to expand on my earlier work on colour and present a way we can understand it, from the perspective of cultural production and the historical differences between alternative and mainstream comics, using Bryan Lee O'Malley as a significant cartoonist.

Unveiling Marvels: The New Muslim Superheroines of Marvel Comics

(Miriam Kent, University of East Anglia)

The stereotype of the veiled, supposedly oppressed and victimised, Muslim woman dates back numerous centuries as part of 'Romantic notions of the passive, Oriental female, cooped up in the harem or behind the veil, waiting to be rescued by the Western male hero' (Morey & Yaquin 2011:10). Such representations remain a part of Western media discourses to this day, as evidenced by authors such as Edward Said (1981), Myra MacDonald (2006), Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin (2011) and others. Recently, comic book publisher Marvel

² See 'Alternative Comics in Colour? Imagine That!', *Graphixia*, 9 April 2014 (URL: <http://www.graphixia.cssgn.org/2014/04/09/162-alternative-comics-in-colour-imagine-that/>)

Comics made headlines with the introduction of the new teen Muslim heroine, Kamala Khan, the new Ms. Marvel. In this paper, I offer an examination of the discourses surrounding women, Islam and the media with reference to female Muslim heroines in Marvel superhero comics. A brief textual analysis of Marvel's two most prominent Muslim heroines—*New X-Men's* Sooraya "Dust" Quadir, and Kamala Khan—creates the foundations of this paper. Here, I discuss the ways in which issues involving women and Islam are articulated through these comic books, from the contentious topic of veiling to notions of self and identity. My analysis of *Ms. Marvel* is then supplemented by an interrogation of the critical reception of the book alongside news articles that promoted the character before the book's release. I essentially argue that while Dust was conceived of as a 'daring' move from Marvel (Morrison in Dar 2009), often explicitly referring to the controversial topic of women's role in Islam, Kamala Khan's introduction to the world of heroics focuses on bridging the perceived gap between East and West. This was often referred to by critics, who expressed delight at the character's portrayal as a teenager just like any other, without defining exactly who or what "any other" is. The discourses at work in these reviews offer insight into the ways in which women and Islam are observed in US popular media. This paper thus sheds light on a much discussed subject area through an analysis of Marvel's unique Muslim heroines and the media attention that accompanied them.

The Crafting of Queer Domestic Space in Jaime Hernandez's *Love and Rockets*

(Daniel King, University of Nottingham)

This paper brings together archival research and existing critical approaches to the study of Hernandez's work. Using critical perspectives on Chicano/a home spaces in conjunction with draft and archival material I interrogate the depiction of alternative homes and families in Jaime Hernandez's contributions to the comic book series *Love and Rockets*, arguing not just for their centrality to the narrative of the comic, but to Hernandez's conception of his characters and their world.

Love and Rockets is an on-going, joint project between "Los Bros Hernandez" – brothers Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez. Since its self-published inception in 1982 each brother has contributed their own separate narratives to each issue. Over the last thirty years, Jaime Hernandez's stories have followed the lives of Margarita "Maggie" Chascarillo and Esperanza "Hopey" Glass, queer working-class Chicanas living in the fictional Californian barrio "Hoppers 13". Unable to rent or buy a home of their own, Maggie and Hopey live with female friends and relatives. Only recently have Maggie and Hopey found seemingly permanent homes, a development absent from the limited existing scholarship on the series. Recent critical work on Hernandez's series has focussed on his depictions of Maggie and Hopey, their domestic lives, and their sexuality. Jessica E Jones and Esther Saxey both approach Hernandez's work through a queer and postcolonial lens, drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa and Judith Butler to examine the spatial limits placed upon Hernandez's characters and expressions of their sexuality.

This paper has two objectives. The first is to update existing critical conceptions of Hernandez's work. The second is to apply an awareness of the importance of Hernandez's draft material to these critical readings of his work, demonstrating the importance and sophistication of the "home" spaces within the comic.

"*Simulacra* and the hyperreal Other: a new approach to the study of nineteenth century political cartoons"

(Rebecka Klette, Birkbeck, University of London)

In my paper, I utilise the concept of "Hyperreality", introduced by philosopher Jean Baudrillard as a part of the postmodern condition, to show how the stereotypes produced by mass media through political cartoons came to be regarded as more real than the individuals said stereotypes supposedly applied to – a development I argue started with the invention of steam-driven presses in the beginning of the nineteenth century, enabling mass production

of print. My use of the concept of "Hyperreality" is, to my knowledge, new to this field of study, and I aim to show that the visual symbols and types depicted in caricatures and graphic illustration created ideas, specifically those of the Other, became more real than the actual concerned individuals themselves. The hypereal is a representation, a sign, without a reference, and these signs and symbols (which represents something that doesn't exist) are produced and distributed by mass media: the Other is constructed, whether he may be the degenerate Aesthete, the atavistic Criminal, the Simian Irish Paddy, or the overly cultured and malicious Jew, and imprinted into the public imagination. I argue that this development was caused by the increased production and circulation of printed illustrated magazines, periodicals, monographs, pamphlets, and medical journals, thus enabling the emergence of a state of Hyperreality. Furthermore, I apply Sander Gilman's interpretation of iconography in my study, especially his view that stereotypes, composed of several different icons, are the images through which we categorise the world, and aim to show how iconography and semiotics, such as interpretations by Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, may be utilised to interpret the hidden signs and visual markers in political cartoons and caricature, and how these cartoons produced and reinforced stereotypes that, according to my interpretation, became hyperreal.

Boys' Love manga and English Prohibited Images of Children legislation

(Anna Madill, University of Leeds)

Boys' Love (BL) is a genre of manga which portrays sexual and romantic relationships between young, often adolescent, men. Perhaps surprisingly, most BL mangaka (artist-authors) are female and most consumers are teenage girls and young women. However, despite a renowned artistic pedigree and global associated youth subculture - consisting of one of the most sexually-benign demographics - BL distributors and audience are vulnerable to prosecution under recent English prohibited images of children legislation (Coroners and Justice Act 2009). English child pornography laws have become increasingly stringent. Legislation was first against production and dealing and then extended also to possession; moved from a narrow, actual-age-based definition of 'child' to a wider, impression-of-age-based one; and expanded the type of prohibited image from the photographic to include also free-hand drawings of fantasy encounters which might involve imaginary beings. This paper argues that BL problematises key assumptions of the prohibited images of children legislation in that the law invites a literal, and privileges a singular, reading of such fantasy, erotic, visual texts. The legislation invites a literal reading through implying that given criteria coherent for the assessment of representational texts (e.g., photographs of real children) can be applied also to non-representational texts (i.e., fantasy drawings): specifically, that protagonist age can, within the ordinary everyday parameters of impression, be determined but also that a series of problematic foci (genitals or anal region) and acts can be described void of context and awarded moral status similar to that of the real. Perhaps even more problematic, the legislation invites a singular reading of texts through priming a search for the specified and reified elements by a defined audience (magistrates, District Judge, or jury) under the remit that a certain constellation may warrant prohibition. That is, it alerts hegemonically-empowered or hegemonically-representational groups to a paedophilic reading and disavows other possible readings as irrelevant if these groups can find that reading. Importantly, as an interpretative community, BL fans' own reading practices and understanding of genre conventions are discounted. Hence, paradoxically, a demographic the legislation is designed to protect (young people) is now, under its auspices, potentially vulnerable to prosecution through their BL fandom.

You All Look the Same to Me: Doubling and Incest in *Bande Dessinée*

(Xavier Marco Del Pont, Royal Holloway, University of London)

The theme of doubling recurs time and again in the most iconic works of *bande dessinée*. From Peyo's *Les Schtroumpfs*, where visual differentiation is minimal and most characters are distinguishable solely through the use of props, to Hergé's Dupont and Dupond, the differently surnamed yet twin-like detectives, the tensions between family resemblances and

uncanny similarities are evidenced throughout this era of Franco-Belgian comic art.

Starting with a brief overview of the themes of doubling, identical appearances, and family resemblances in the most famous exports of *bande dessinée*, this paper will focus on two case studies taken from Morris's *Lucky Luke* series. As early as the third published Lucky Luke story, 'Le sosie de Lucky Luke' –later included in *La mine d'or de Dick Digger* (1949), the first album–, the theme of doubling and the notion of the doppelgänger are clearly evident. The first section of the paper will explore Lucky Luke's encounter with his doppelgänger, focusing on the theme of mistaken identities and the technique of mirroring from which all narrative tension stems within the work.

Inspired by Serge Tisseron's untangling of genealogical clues in *Tintin*, Hergé's *chef-d'œuvre*, in the second half of this paper I intend to investigate –though not purely from a Freudian perspective– the complexities that riddle the family tree of Lucky Luke's main antagonists: the Daltons. Whether one reads the Daltons as purely a fictional reinvention of the late nineteenth-century Dalton Gang, or as a humorous reference to Francis Galton's theories regarding criminal physiognomy and types, or as symptomatic of some much darker family secret, their identical appearance merits further analysis. Through this paper, I intend to provide an interpretation of what appears to be a recurrent –yet underexamined– concern in *bande dessinée*, that of the impossible likeness, the carbon-copy, drawing out the implications these themes have for the form itself.

Binet's *L'Institution*: The First French Comics Autobiography?

(Ann Miller, University of Leicester)

Christian Binet's *L'Institution*, written in 1981, and re-issued in 2010, has some claim to be the first comics autobiography written in French. The author is more famous for his long-running series *Les Bidochon*, begun in 1979, a derisive take on the attempts of the hapless eponymous couple to participate in the consumerist dream. *L'Institution* is a satirical attack on the cruel and hypocritical regime of the Catholic boarding school that the author attended between the ages of six and fifteen. The exuberant graphic style adopted by Binet may make its classification as a trauma narrative seem incongruous, but epitextual material in the form of a 2010 interview with Binet describes the enterprise of creating the album as 'autotherapy' and as 'expiating', and any initial expectation that this album is going to be wholly light-hearted in tone is quickly dissipated. Its interest as an autobiography lies in its creative exploitation of the split between adult narrator and graphic self, the split that, as Jared Gardner has said, 'allow[s] the author to be both victim of the trauma and its detached observer'. Michael A. Chaney has alluded to the 'crucial and material presence of the medium in narrating trauma', and in particular to 'the uniquely supple procedures the comics form makes possible for the representation of multiple yet simultaneous timescapes'. The narrating position of this hilarious but deeply serious album is complex in the tension that it maintains between the raw emotion of the child and the distancing perspective of the adult through the interaction of different time frames, spatial perspectives and Binet's devastating graphic line.

Online porn comics and the threat to the nation from 'India's most lusted after fictional sex goddess'

(Jude Roberts, Birkbeck, University of London)

In this paper I will discuss the nexus of gender, sexualities, national identities, digital technologies and comics that emerged in the controversy surrounding the appearance, blocking by the Indian government, then re-emergence of the online pornographic comic *Savita Bhabhi*. This comic, claiming to show 'India's first international porn star', focuses on the wide-ranging sexual activities of a newly-married Gujarati housewife. Clad in traditional (although often unconventionally sheer) sari, sindoor and mangalsutra, Savita pursues sexually explicit fantasies which, while not particularly hard-core, go significantly beyond the soft-core pin-up and far exceed the extremely chaste limitations of Bollywood. Within weeks

of its appearance in March 2008 *Savita Bhabhi* gained a substantial following both in India and internationally. The level of response and particularly the enthusiasm for the comic shown by young urban middle and upper-middle class Indians, including many women, appears to have been a significant factor in the blocking of the site in June 2009.

The website on which the comic was posted was blocked by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in India following direction from the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) in its first use of legislation updated in the aftermath of the Mumbai bombings. The illegality of pornography in India, which does not prevent the existence of a thriving soft-core porn film industry, was extended in this legislation to explicitly prohibit the publication or transmission of sexually explicit material online as part of broader changes to the Information Technology Act (2000, 2008) intended to protect the 'sovereignty or integrity of India, defence ... [and] security of the State'.

The comic's anonymous creators have been particularly keen to claim *Savita Bhabhi* as an icon of freedom of speech and sexual liberation for Indian women. Following the banning of their website, the 'Indian Porn Empire' re-released the comic under a subscription model on a new site and produced a short animated film set in 2070 in which two young Indian men enlist the help of Savita to defend freedom of speech in India. Drawing on close readings of *Savita Bhabhi*, interviews conducted with one of its anonymous creators and analysis of media responses to the comic and associated controversy, I will consider the ways in which this comic can be seen as transgressing some boundaries of gender, sexualities, class and national identity whilst reinforcing others.

An unruly way into Mexican comic books: El Libro Vaquero

(Marisol Rodriguez, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts)

Ever since its inception in 1978, *El Libro Vaquero* (The Cowboy Book) has become the longest standing and one of the most successful comic books ever produced in Mexico. The first pocket sized comic printed in colour in the country, *El Libro Vaquero* reached, at the peak of its fame in the eighties, millions of readers that every week enjoyed a new story of American Cowboys and Native-American Indians *a la mexicana*: as adventurous and violent as macho and romantic.

There is only other kind of book as widely distributed in Mexico as *El Libro Vaquero*: the mandatory books that the Ministry of Public Education offers for free to supposedly all public and private schools in the country. Children should learn to read and write on these, but the reality, specially for the most marginated, is simple: there is no bureaucracy mediating between them and the pages of *El Libro Vaquero*, and so it and others like it have become the primary literature for many, shaping not only their ways of learning but also their ways of seeing the world. After 36 years of almost uninterrupted success there is little written about this *historieta*. The analysis of a cultural product of such ubiquitousness is important for Mexican cultural history and comics scholarship as a whole. This paper will trace the history and facts about this comic book, one that acts as a mere door into the poorly explored world of Latin American comix after the dawn of its Golden Era.

Superhero_ines: Rebooted Comics and Trans* Identity

(Christina Scholz, University of Graz)

Batgirl writer Gail Simone says about comic book writing that "almost all the tentpoles we build our industry upon were created over a half century ago... at a time where the characters were almost without exception white, cis-gendered, straight, on and on". Diversity is a major issue for superhero comics, since superpowers, aliens, mutants and magic have a long history of functioning as metaphors for otherness. The era of the reboot offers comic book writers the possibility to change the gender politics inherent in a series without risking a clash with pre-existing storylines. According to Simone the issue to keep in mind is taking

care not to sermonize but to bring to the readers' attention that identity is a heterogeneous, dynamic construct, and "being trans is just part of [a character's] story".

China Miéville comments on the tradition of gender-switching in superhero comics in his rebooted series *Dial H*, when his protagonist unexpectedly changes into a female superheroine, realizing that his random transformations are not necessarily restricted to his own gender. The way Miéville chose to treat this topic is an illustration of his opinion that while gender bending is nothing new in comics, the misogynist perspective that seems to prevail has to be actively challenged and changed.

Batgirl #19 reveals Alysia Yeoh as the first transgender character in a comicbook series who has not "achieved gender-fluidity through fantastical means like magic, shape-shifting, brain-swapping, and cloning". Batgirl's reaction to Alysia's coming out foregrounds the human factor rather than gender politics while not making the mistake of 'gender blindness'.

Taking active steps towards an inclusive representation of gender in superhero comics is not (just) a matter of "taking comics to the 21st century" – it's more about matching up realities.

Alternative Gay Porno Comics

(Sina Shamsavari, KCL)

This talk focuses on what I call "alternative gay porno comics", the work of queer cartoonists whose comics take up aspects of the porn genre's conventions – explicit sex, idealized bodies, and the intention to arouse – but aim to do something different with the genre. Alternative gay porno comics subvert the conventions of the mainstream gay porno comics genre by placing explicit sexual scenarios into more complex emotional narratives. Some stories are set in the contemporary, "real" world while others are set in fantastic, otherworldly realms or involve supernatural beings, but whether "realistic" or "fantastical", I argue that these pornographic narratives open up a world of complex human emotions, sexual identities and interrelationships. In emphasizing the emotional dimensions of sex, these alternative porno comics also explore and question more conventional notions of gay identity and community, as well as binaristic notions of gender and sexuality. The comics of Jon Macy are the main focus of this talk. Macy's intertwining of explicit sex with an emotional love story in his recent series *Fearful Hunter*, as well as his questioning of normative notions of gender, sexuality and community throughout his erotic oeuvre, marks him as a particularly interesting artist who adapts the traditional conventions of gay porno comics in order to tell more emotionally rich and complex stories.

Interrogating the Past: Questioning the Nazi Past Through Handwriting and Composed Text in Peter Pontiac's *Kraut*

(Rik Spanjers, University of Amsterdam)

Peter Pontiac's – pseudonym of Peter Pollmann – *Kraut* is a 167-page illustrated letter addressed to Pontiac's father. It is one of the most highly acclaimed Dutch graphic novels made by one of the few Dutch authors to have actively participated in the American underground comix scene. The work revolves around two questions: (1) why Joop Pollmann, Peter Pontiac's father, collaborated with the German occupier during World War II and, (2) why he disappeared in February 1978. Its page-layout is constituted of large sections of handwritten text combined with images and other incorporated texts – writings by his father for the German war propaganda, history books, police reports, and court testimonies. The pages of *Kraut* do not have a conventional paneled layout that is common to most comics. Because of the difficulties of translating all these different kinds of handwritten texts, *Kraut* has regrettably not yet been translated.

My analysis of *Kraut* will reveal that when specifically focusing on this comic's deployment of text, it becomes apparent that these texts, through the use of handwriting and the composition of text, generate meaning through their visual properties as well as by way of the narrative that is represented. In *Kraut*, the constant conflict between narrative and visual

properties of text is played upon and made productive in order to represent a past that is also highly conflicted. This conflict will be the subject of first part of the presentation. Secondly, the presentation will show in what ways *Kraut's* representation of collaboration during World War II relates to representations of collaboration in other media in the Dutch context.

Depicting the 'Damned': Hunt Emerson and the birth of the *Fortean Times*

(Christopher J. Thompson, independent practitioner and scholar)

Hunt Emerson has shared a relationship of very nearly 40 years as both a cartoonist and comix artist with the journal of unexplained phenomena *Fortean Times*. The Journal was founded in 1974 to celebrate and continue the work of the eponymous Charles Hoy Fort in his scrutiny of anomalous data excluded and explained away by zealous scientists intent on maintaining the scientific status quo. Such data ranged from rains of fish and teleportation to astronomical anomalies and psychic activity reported in both popular and scientific literature. Fort likened this kind of phenomena to a precession of the 'Damned' and spliced it in his work with whimsical theories and conjectures, such as a super-sargosso sea or alien visitation, to explain them.

Emerson's comics are known for similarly wild and psychedelic subject matter and a mischievous sense of humor, mixing slapstick with anti-establishment lampoon. His work emerged from the alternative comix scene of the 1970s and, unlike many artists of his generation, is still actively producing comics. Emerson's first contribution to the journal consisted of some thirty illustrated headings in 1975; this was followed a year later by three prototypical comic-strips written by the journal's founder Bob Rickard and the late Steve Moore. In 1979 these early strips then developed into the journal's still running 'Phenominomix' which provides an important record to trace his ongoing development as an artist. This paper aims to present Emerson's engagement with Fortean phenomena (or 'Forteana') within the broader context of both his and the journal's stylistic and conceptual development. By presenting this account, it is hoped that further ground will be gained in broadening the scholarship of these two iconic and highly influential figures of British culture emerging in the 1970s.

Colors That Burn: On the Role of Color in the Comics of Lorenzo Mattotti

(Barbara Uhlig, University of Munich)

The medium of comics owes much of its success to the development of full-color reproduction. In spite of this, there has been very little research into the role of color in comics. This lack of research demonstrates the perpetual view of the subordinate role of color versus design that has dominated artistic and aesthetic theory for centuries. This negation of color could have its roots in color's "subjective and volatile" nature, one that Kemp saw as "almost infinitely slippery whenever we try to entrap them in a regular net of scientific categories"³. These unstable characteristics of color deter critics from engaging more actively with the subject. When looking at the polychromatic comics of Lorenzo Mattotti, critics have appraised their expressive quality, the highly emotional and symbolic force of his colors and claimed color had reached the status of an independent narrative language. They have failed, however, to demonstrate what exactly this new language communicated, what it added to the narrative that could not be expressed in monochromatic panels – why the narrative would be decidedly altered if it were to be reprinted in black and white. Furthermore, his work exhibits a sophisticated and subtle subversion of stereotypes and cultural connotations of color. Drawing on recent scientific research into color as well as art history and design theory, my paper aims to allow for a new perspective on the use of color in comics, by examining Mattotti's extensive body of work. It will demonstrate the complex system of color in comics and raise awareness of its powerful narrative quality.

³ Martin Kemp: *The Science of Art*, qtd. in Barbara L. Miller, "'He' Had Me at Blue: Color Theory and Visual Art," *Leonardo*, August 1, 2013, 461–65.

Why Comic Book Characters Matter?

(Essi Varis, University of Jyväskylä)

Characters, arguably the most central elements in graphic narratives, both are and are not being researched. While comic book scholars have devoted much time and text to discuss the nationalities, minorities, ideals and other messy concepts different comic book characters connote, few have stopped to ask: what are comic book heroes exactly, and *why* do we care about them?

Across media and decades, theoretical study of fictional characters has been surprisingly scarce. Especially in comics studies, character theory is still non-existent. This gap might have been caused by the deceptive obviousness of the definition: everybody knows that characters are “people” inhabiting fictional works. However, even the slightest scratch in the surface of the definition reveals a mass of questions: what is a fictional person in the context of the real world, how does it become foregrounded from the rest of the fictional matter and can it function as something more than a cog of a plot? Especially in comics, I argue, the simplified visual aspect of the characters gives them importance that is not only aesthetic, but also economic and philosophical.

I present character theory as a still untapped key to many on-going discussions. As vastly licensable, identifiable and transferable elements, characters impact the comic book economy: in the era of experience economy, the companies do not sell just comics but idols and identities. More revenues are created as comics-originated characters traverse several media: the multi-platform adventures of superheroes have been among the greatest success stories of convergence culture. As the gutter-divided comic pages fragment further and blur into digital media, characters become the glue keeping the boundless stories meaningful. Yet, their deepest meaning lies elsewhere still: as a medium that simplifies and exaggerates its characters into something decidedly subhuman or superhuman, what can comics tell us about human?

Layered Realities: the Iconography of OCD in Comics

(Dr Ian Williams, physician and comics artist)

Justin Green is often credited with inventing the graphic autobiography, in 1972 when he chose to ‘unburden his uncensored psychological troubles’ onto the pages of *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* - ‘an astonishing self-flagellation of catholic guilt and obsessive-compulsive disorder’ (Spiegelman 1995:4). Green used the comics medium to portray the effects of his disordered perceptions graphically: ideas of blasphemy and bodily shame crystallised as ‘pecker rays’ radiating from his genitals or other phallic-shaped parts of his body which, like laser beams, maintain their power over vast distances and confer spiritual contamination if directed at any representation of the Holy Virgin. The resulting comic was hilarious, grotesque and deeply influential. Since that time, and inspired by Green, other artists have used the flexible diegetic space of the comics medium to visually portray the subjective experience of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Using the works of Alison Bechdel, Glyn Dillon, John Porcellino and Adam Bourett, and images from my own graphic novel, *The Bad Doctor*, this paper will survey and analyse the new visual conventions deployed by comics artists which allow multiple planes of subjective reality to be portrayed in depictions of the condition.

The Monstrous Sex: Dread and Control of Female Sex and Sexual Identity in the Superhero Narrative

(Joseph Willis, University of Nottingham)

Within superhero narratives, the sexuality and sexual identity of female characters is most often constructed, curated, and interpreted by a dominant, hetero-male experience. Their sexuality is dependent upon its relationship to male sexual identity and the perception of sexual roles within a patriarchal power structure. For a female character to step outside of

this hierarchal order, to construct a sexual identity that is not dependent on hetero-male influence and experience, is perceived as subversive, transgressive, and a source of dread for the consecrated audience. However, the superhero narrative works to absorb that fear and dread. For characters such as Jean Grey, She-Hulk, Wonder Woman, and Harley Quinn, their self constructed sexual identities must become normalized by the narrative. The narrative presents sexual identity constructed without male intervention as monstrous, dangerous, destructive, and deserving of punishment. These punishments work to normalize their sexual identities and eventually place them back under the control and curation of a patriarchal power structure and in line with the expectations of the, now dread free, consecrated audience.

Biographies

Arezoo Adibeik is a full-time PhD student by Thesis and Coursework in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University. Her PhD thesis deals with "Construction of ethnic identities in interactions in comic books" focusing on Critical Discourse Analysis of the representations of Self and Others in the Adventures of Tintin. Apart from critical discourse analysis her other research interests cover pragmatics, stylistics, Literature, cultural studies and neurolinguistics.

Meg Barker is a writer, academic, counsellor and activist specialising in sex and relationships. Meg is a senior lecturer in psychology at the Open University and has published many academic books and papers on topics including non-monogamous relationships, sadomasochism, counselling, and mindfulness, as well as co-editing the journal *Psychology & Sexuality*. They were the lead author of *The Bisexuality Report* – which has informed UK policy and practice around bisexuality. (Dr Meg John Barker meg@megbarker.com)

Joseph De Lappe is a doctoral candidate at the Open University where he researches Asexual Activism as an emerging Sex & Gender Social Movement. He has recently co-authored a book chapter with Professor Mary Jane Kehily, on subcultural approaches to childhood, for the forthcoming *Children Sexuality and the 'Sexualisation of Culture'*. (Joseph De Lappe Joseph.De-Lappe@open.ac.uk)

Ann D'Orazio is a PhD student at the University of New Mexico. Her dissertation focuses upon collective material production in visual narratives from Old English manuscripts to contemporary comics and graphic novels. Ms. D'Orazio has a chapter entitled "Little Things Mean a Lot: The Everyday Material of *Palestine*" in *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* forthcoming from the University Press of Mississippi.

Martin Flanagan's doctoral thesis (Sheffield) was concerned with the cinematic relevance of Bakhtinian theories, concentrating on issues around genre, narrative, spectatorship and technology. His book *Bakhtin and the Movies: New Ways of Understanding Hollywood Film* was published in 2009 with Palgrave Macmillan. He developed the notion of the 'blockbuster auteur' in an essay concerning Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003), published in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (2004), and has contributed to other journals such as *IXQUIC* and *Reconstruction*. He has published on aspects of comic book adaptation and comics in collections such as *Film and Comic Books* (2007) and *Web-spinning Heroes: Essays on the History and Meaning of Spider-Man* (2012). He is currently preparing a book on Marvel Studios.

Fred Francis is a PhD student in the School of English at the University of Kent, and previously studied at Kent (MA) and UCL (BA). His research focuses on the literary and historical backgrounds of the 'Dark Age' of superhero comics, and in particular their similarities to early American literature and culture. More broadly, he is interested in relationships between popular culture and American literature, and has recently presented

on *Moby-Dick* and heavy metal, superheroes and 19th Century occultism, and migrations in the American Mid-West.

Ms. Grace Gipson is a current doctoral student in the African American & African Diaspora Studies program at the University of California Berkeley. Grace's area of research interests include (mis)representations of race and gender within black popular culture specifically in comic books and film, gender and sexuality, and performances of blackness. Her current research project includes exploring graphic novels, comic books, and their connection/linkage to the African Diasporic Imaginary. With research interests/projects in popular culture, her love and passion for comic books and film culture has afforded her the opportunity to present nationally and internationally, as well as being featured on NPR's *Tell Me More* with Michel Martin and in the Huffington Post. In addition to being an eager graduate student, Grace is also the creator and editor of the film blog *Black Savant Cinema*, a regular contributor for the website *Black Girl Nerds*, as well as the Entertainment blogger for *The Berkeley Graduate*. (ggipson@berkeley.edu)

Dan Merlin Goodbrey's research centres around experimental digital comics and new media and their application to fiction. He is a lecturer in new media at the University of Hertfordshire in narrative and interactive design. He is also a comic creator based out of Welwyn Garden City. E-merl.com is where he catalogues his experiments in fiction and the comics form.

Emma Hayward is a third-year AHRC funded PhD student in the English department at the University of Liverpool, where I am writing a thesis on literary engagement with London and New York since 1990-present. My main research interests include twentieth-century and contemporary English and American writing; postmodernism and after; the intersection between architecture and literature; urban studies.

Ian Horton is Contextual and Theoretical Studies Coordinator across the School of Design at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. His Ph.D. focused on the codification of British architectural education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition to research on architectural education he has published papers on national identity and architectural aesthetics, oral history and text-based public art and colonialist stereotypes in European and British comic books. His present research is focused in three related areas: experimental typography, Dutch graphic design and comic books. Along with Roger Sabin he currently organises the Comic Studies Network at the University of the Arts London. He has recently presented papers on self-published comic books and creative freedom; experimental typography and curatorial practices; information design and graphic narratives at international conferences by organisations such as the Association of Art Historians, the Comics Forum, Comics Grid, Graphixia and the International Association of Word and Image Studies.

Katherine Hubbard is currently a PhD student in Psychology at the University of Surrey working on a thesis about the history of the Rorschach Ink Blot test in Britain. She has a range of research interests including queer feminist histories, sexualities research and graphic novels.

Edward Jackson is in the first year of an AHRC funded PhD at University of Birmingham, researching representations of masculinity in the work of David Foster Wallace. His interest in comics stems from a Masters dissertation written partly on Chris Ware, as well as his activities teaching on the module 'Popular Culture' at University of Wolverhampton.

Ahmed Jameel is a research student at University of the Arts London. He is a previously published author of short stories, and currently working on a practice-based research project on artistic identity in comics collaboration.

Paddy Johnston is a doctoral researcher in the department of English at the University of Sussex. His thesis will explore comics as work and the cartoonist as a worker, paying particular attention to alternative comics and the lone cartoonist as an auteur. He has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Exeter, for which he submitted a graphic novel for his thesis. He has given papers at conferences including Transitions 4 and The Fifth International Graphic Novels and Comics Conference, and writes for The Comics Grid, Comics Forum and Graphixia, among other journals and websites. He is also a cartoonist, singer-songwriter and podcaster, and is on Twitter [@paddyjohnston](https://twitter.com/paddyjohnston).

Miriam Kent is a PhD candidate at the School of Film, Television and Media, University of East Anglia. Her current research focuses on the representation of women in Marvel Comics film adaptations. Her other research areas include feminist media studies, gender and culture, queer theory and comic books.

Daniel King was awarded his PhD by the University of Nottingham, where he now works as a teaching assistant, in 2013. He has previously published articles on the work of Cormac McCarthy, and is currently working on an article on the work of Jaime Hernandez as part of larger project examining the editing and publishing of North American graphic novels.

Rebecka Klette has recently finished a BA in History of Ideas and Sciences (Lund University, Sweden). She recently entered the MA Victorian Studies programme at Birkbeck, where she intends to structure her thesis around representations of national character in nineteenth century caricature and early twentieth century satirical writings by Jerome K. Jerome and P.G. Wodehouse.

Anna Madill is Chair of Qualitative Inquiry in the Institute of Psychological Sciences, Deputy Head of Psychology, and member of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds, UK. She was awarded a British Academy grant to study Boys' Love manga, is former Chair of the British Psychological Society Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section, has over 70 publications, is Associate Editor of the British Journal of Clinical Psychology and on the editorial boards of Qualitative Psychology, British Journal of Social Psychology, and Qualitative Research in Psychology. Anna has an internet presence as 'UK Fujoshi' (<https://www.facebook.com/UKFujoshi?ref=hl>, <https://twitter.com/UKFujoshi>).

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Ann Miller was formerly Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Leicester and is now a University Fellow. She wrote *Reading Bande dessinée* in 2007, and co-edited *Textual and Visual Selves* in 2011, with Natalie Edwards and Amy L. Hubbell. Her translations of key French theoretical texts on comics, in *The French Comics Theory Reader*, co-edited with Bart Beaty, will be published in 2014. She is joint editor, with Laurence Grove and Mark McKinney, of *European Comic Art*.

Jude Roberts is a researcher in gender and sexualities in contemporary popular culture and an Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College. She has published on femininities, masculinities and the body, contemporary British and US fiction, and science fiction and fantasy and has forthcoming publications on comics, pornography, feminism and BDSM. Her current project is a history of pornographic comics in English, which she is blogging about at pornographiccomics.wordpress.com

Marisol Rodriguez is an art journalist and curator. Currently she studies the MA in Culture, Criticism and Curation at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. Her paper will

present part of the results of her masters dissertation on the same topic. She has curated two exhibitions as part of this research. *The Good, The Bad and The Sexy*, a survey of the cover art work of El Libro Vaquero, presented in Divus Prager Kabarett (Prague, 2012) and *The Story Inside The Story, Propaganda in Mexican Comics*, in the Anglo American University in Prague (2012). In 2012 she wrote the introduction to *LIVE/DIE* (Divus, London), the two book set compiling the work of Mike Diana.

Christina Scholz is currently writing her PhD thesis on China Miéville's fiction and teaching English Literature and Culture at the University of Graz, Austria. Her fields of interest include the further theorisation of Weird Fiction, Hauntology and the Gothic imagination, the interrelation of genre fiction and other forms of art, and depictions of war, violence and trauma in the arts. She has a Master's degree in Comparative Literature.

Sina Shamsavari is completing his PhD on the history of gay male comics at Kings College. He is also a comics artist and writer and has had comics published in the anthologies QU33R, No Straight Lines, and Publish You, as well as self-publishing his own comics *Art Fag*, *Dirty Mind*, and *Pretty Boys Ignore You*.

Rik Spanjers graduated from the Cultural Analysis Research Master in 2010 with a thesis on the Joker's laughter and resistance in comics and film. Since his graduation, he has written a substantial number of articles and reviews for the Netherlands' largest anime & manga magazine (*Aniway*) and the country's oldest comic book magazine (*Stripschrift*). In 2012-2013, he worked as a researcher for an exhibition on the globalization of Japanese pop culture to be staged at the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam (Museum of the Tropics). Rik Spanjers was awarded a four-year PhD grant by the University of Amsterdam for his research project on the representation of World War II in comics in September 2013. During his PhD research, he instigated the forming of the History, Trauma, and Comics Research Circle, which – through monthly meetings and a website – connects a group of scholars from around the globe in their interest for comic book representations of trauma and history.

Christopher J. Thompson is an independent practitioner and scholar with a BA and MA in English from Oxford Brookes University. He has both published and presented work on the British comix artist Hunt Emerson examining the sophisticated narrative techniques the artist employs at the service of parody. Current activities include preparations for a paper on the *Beano* comic strip 'Dennis the Menace and Gnasher' for the 2014 Comics Forum and a digital archival project with the *Fortean Times*. He also supports adult learners in lifelong learning, access and professional development at the University of Oxford.

Barbara Uhlig studied protohistoric archaeology and art history at the Universities of Munich and Eichstaett (Germany). She is writing her dissertation on the work of Lorenzo Mattotti and published articles on Guerrilla Gardening, early illustrated editions of Alice in Wonderland and, of course, Mattotti. Her main research interests lie in subversive art, text-image-relationships, and the development of Italian comics since the 1960s.

Essi Varis graduated in literature from the University of Jyväskylä in Central Finland in 2012. She defended her Licentiate's thesis *A Frame of You: Construction of Characters in Graphic Novels* the following year. Currently, she works on her doctoral thesis, in which she continues her inquiry into the formal and cognitive parameters of comic book characters, under the working title *Graphic Human Experiments: Cores and Limits of Comic Book Characters*. Varis is especially interested in Anglo-American fantasy comics, intertextuality, cognitive theory and experimental characterization techniques. (essi.e.varis@student.jyu.fi)

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