

Comics and Power

Comics and Power

Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects and Communities

Edited by

Rikke Platz Cortsen, Erin La Cour
and Anne Magnussen

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Comics and Power:
Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects and Communities

Edited by Rikke Platz Cortsen, Erin La Cour and Anne Magnussen

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Rikke Platz Cortsen, Erin La Cour,
Anne Magnussen and contributors
Cover by Ashod Simonian

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7086-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7086-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	viii
Contributors.....	xi
Acknowledgements	xvi
Introduction	xvii
Anne Magnussen, Erin La Cour and Rikke Platz Cortsen	
Part I: Power and Institutionalization: Shifting Cultural and Medial Perceptions	
Chapter One.....	2
Comics: This Bitter Art Øystein Sjøstad	
Chapter Two	23
“You Wouldn’t Get It”: “Penny Arcade” as Gaming Communication Hub and Webcomic Andreas Gregersen	
Chapter Three	44
An Artist, a Cowboy and Some Ontological Jokes: A Nordic Contribution to the Understanding of Comics in Art Fred Andersson	
Chapter Four.....	72
Between Media: David Mack’s <i>Kabuki</i> Steen Christiansen	
Chapter Five	89
“Shades of Conan Doyle! A lost world!” Fantasy and Intertextuality in Don Rosa’s “Escape from Forbidden Valley” Katja Kontturi	

Part II: Power and the Subject: Exposing the Politics of Subjectivity and Identity

Chapter Six 110
 Opening a “Thirdspace”: The Unmasking Effects of Comics
 Rikke Platz Cortsen and Erin La Cour

Chapter Seven..... 131
 On Politics, Everyday Life, and Humor in Cecilia Torudd’s Comic Strip
Ensamma mamman
 Kristina Arnerud Mejhammar

Chapter Eight..... 154
 Comics Reenactment: Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza*
 Øyvind Vågnes

Chapter Nine..... 173
 “[A] matter of SAVED or LOST”: Difference, Salvation, and Subjection
 in Chick Tracts
 Martin Lund

Part III: Power and Society: Reproducing and/or Contesting National Communities and Ideologies

Chapter Ten 194
 Fearing Religious Satire: Religious Censorship and Satirical Counter-
 Attacks
 Dennis Meyhoff Brink

Chapter Eleven 218
 Transnationalism in the Finnish 1950s Debate on Comics
 Ralf Kauranen

Chapter Twelve 244
 Comics in Postcolonial Senegal: Suggesting and Contesting National
 Identity
 Margareta Wallin Wictorin

Chapter Thirteen	263
Drawing Disaster: Manga Response to the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake	
Gunhild Borggreen	
Chapter Fourteen	285
All Men Are Not Created Equal: Identity, Power, and Resistance	
in <i>Superman: Red Son</i>	
Mervi Miettinen	

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter One

Figure 1. CALVIN AND HOBBS © 1993 Watterson. Reprinted with permission of UNIVERSAL UCLICK. All rights reserved.

Chapter Three

Figure 1. *A Pava*, folded by Fred Andersson, 2002. Photo by Leopoldo Iorizzo, 2003. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 2. Åke Karlung, from the animation *Homo Ludens I*, 1964-65. © Jon Karlung.

Figure 3. Elis Eriksson, *VERNiSSAGE* (2002) photo from 1964 by Urban Eriksson. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 4. Elis Eriksson, *VERNiSSAGE* (2002) photo from 1964 by Urban Eriksson. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 5 (see Centrefold). Elis Eriksson, collage with colored paper and details in ink, ca 30,5 x 22,5 cm, private collection. Photo by Fred Andersson, 2004. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 6. Elis Eriksson, *Pavan* no. 1, 1965. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 7. Elis Eriksson, *Pavan* no. 1, 1965. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 8. Elis Eriksson, *Pavan* no. 1, 1965. © Annita Jobsmyr.

Figure 9. Volume, shape, edge. Fred Andersson, 2007.

Chapter Four

Figure 1. *Kabuki: Circle of Blood*. © David Mack.

Figure 2 (see Centrefold). *Kabuki: Dreams*. © David Mack.

Figure 3 (see Centrefold). *Kabuki: Dreams*. © David Mack.

Figure 4 (see Centrefold). *Kabuki: Dreams*. © David Mack.

Chapter Six

Figure 1 (see Centrefold). *Mother, Come Home* © Paul Hornschemeier. Courtesy of Fantagraphics Books.

Figure 2 (see Centrefold). *Mother, Come Home* © Paul Hornschemeier. Courtesy of Fantagraphics Books.

Figure 3 (see Centrefold). *Mother, Come Home* © Paul Hornschemeier. Courtesy of Fantagraphics Books.

Chapter Seven

Figure 1. Cecilia Torudd, *Ensamma mamman*, first published in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in 1985. © Cecilia Torudd/ billedkunst.dk

Figure 2. Cecilia Torudd, *The Merry 60s and 70s*. © Cecilia Torudd/ billedkunst.dk

Chapter Eight

Figure 1. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 2. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 3. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 4. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 5. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 6. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Figure 7. *Footnotes in Gaza* © Joe Sacco.

Chapter Ten

Figure 1. “Kirche Heute,” *Titanic*, April 2010. © *Titanic*, Rudi Hurzlmeier.

Figure 2 (see Centrefold). George Cruikshank: *The Royal Shambles or the Progress of Legitimacy & Reestablishment of Religion & Social Order - !!! - !!!*, 1816.

Figure 3 (see Centrefold). George Cruikshank: *A Free Born Englishman! The Admiration of the World!!! and the Envy of Surrounding Nations!!!*, 1819.

Figure 4. Anonymous, *Die “gute” Presse (The “Good” Press)*, 1847.

Figure 5 (see Centrefold). Honoré Daumier, *Un Autodafé au XIXème siècle (An auto-da-fé in the 19th century)*, 1851.

Chapter Eleven

Figure 1. Exhibition Piirrettyä julmuutta (Drawn Cruelty) 1955 © Kansan Arkisto.

Chapter Twelve

Figure 1. T. T. Fons, *Goorgoorlou: Serigne Maramokho Guissane* (1992). © T.T. Fons.

Figure 2. T. T. Fons, *Goorgoorlou: Serigne Maramokho Guissane* (1992). © T.T. Fons.

Figure 3. Fatou Sarr and Kabs: *Talatay Nder. La veritable histoire de Nder racontée aux enfants* (2010). © Fatou Sarr.

Chapter Thirteen

Figure 1 (see Centrefold). Yoshimoto Kôji, cover of *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012). © Kôji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

Figure 2. *Morning Paper*, March 13, 2011. © Iwate Nipou.

Figure 3. *Yomiuri Shinbun* picture magazine. © *Higashi Nihon daishinsai. Yomiuri shinbun hôdô shashinshû*, Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbun Tôkyô Honsha, 2011.

Figure 4. Yoshimoto Kôji, *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

Figure 5. Yoshimoto Kôji, *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

Figure 6. Yoshimoto Kôji, *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

Figure 7. Yoshimoto Kôji, page from *Santetsu. Nihon tetsudô ryokô chizuchô Sanriku tetsudô daishinsai no kiroku* (2012) © Koji Yoshimoto / Shinchosha.

CONTRIBUTORS

Andreas Gregersen is Associate Professor in the Department of Media, Cognition, and Communication at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. His primary research interests are cognitive theory, communication theory, research methodology, genre theory, computer and video games, interactivity and gaming culture, and cross-media manifestations of media content. His most recent publications follow a model of embodied interaction, connecting game interactivity and gamer embodiment to questions of genre. These include “Cognition” (in *The Routledge Companion to Video Games*, Routledge, 2014) and “Generic Structures, Generic Experiences: A Cognitive Experientialist Approach to Video Game Analysis” (in *Philosophy & Technology* 27. 2 (2014): 159-175).

Anne Magnussen is Associate Professor at the Department of History, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, and holds a PhD from The University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She has edited books on comics, place, and history, and has written articles on Spanish and Latin-American comics as aesthetic, historical, and political signs, as well as on public memory in Spain and in Texas, USA. Her recent work on comics includes the co-edited volume *Comics and Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics* (with Hans-Christian Christiansen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000). Most recently, she has authored “Mara and Paracuellos – Interpretations of Spanish Politics from the Perspective of the Comics” (*Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art* 1.1 (2012): 26-44); “The New Spanish Memory Comics. The Example of *Cuerda de presas*” (*European Comic Art* 7.1 (2014): 56–84); and “Spanish Comics and Politics” (in *Comics & Politik*. Christian A. Bachmann Verlag, 2014). She is a founding member of the Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE).

Dennis Meyhoff Brink is a PhD candidate at the University of Copenhagen. He is currently finishing his dissertation on the history of religious satire in England, France, and Germany. Focusing on graphic prints as well as satirical novels, his research aims at demonstrating how religious satire contributed to the European Enlightenment. His most

recent publication on the topic, “Religionssatirens fødsel ud af grådighedskritikkens ånd,” appeared in *Passage* 71 (2014).

Erin La Cour is a lecturer in literature and media studies at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands. Her current research focuses on the intersection of media, aesthetics, and archive theory, especially in the context of art and museal practice. She was project advisor for the Van Abbemuseum’s “Black or White” (2013), an exhibition that challenged the exclusion of comics in the museum. Her most recent publications on the topic include “Sequential Art in the Museum” (*Radically Yours* 8 (2013): 11-14) and a co-authored chapter “Coding/Decoding the Archive” (with David Gauthier, in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Pressures of Memory and the Bodies of History*, Ashgate, 2014).

Fred Andersson is a researcher and coordinator of the Visual Studies program at Åbo Akademi University, Finland, and holds a PhD from Lund University, Sweden. His main research interest lies in semiotics as a methodological tool, and he has conducted semiotic studies of word and image interaction, visual storytelling, the social impact of images, and the rhetoric of art criticism. His focus on the comics medium concerns its multimodality and its modes of mapping fictive worlds. Among his most recent publications is *Ting och tecken* (Lund University, 2007), which is a study of the work of Swedish artist Elis Eriksson.

Gunhild Borggreen is Associate Professor in Visual Culture at Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. Her main research area covers issues of performance, gender, and national identity in Japanese contemporary art and visual culture. She is the editor of and contributor to *Performing Archives - Archives of Performance* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013), and she publishes in international journals such as *Performance Research* and *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*. Her book *Disrupted Images. Nation in Contemporary Japanese Visual Culture* is forthcoming from Brill.

Katja Konturi is a doctoral student studying contemporary culture in the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Currently, she is finishing her dissertation on Don Rosa’s Disney comics as postmodern fantasy comics. Her research interests are in comics, fantasy literature, and postmodernism. She is a co-editor of the *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art*, a member of FINFAR (Finnish Network for Fantasy Research), and NNOCORE. Her non-academic article about Don Rosa’s fantasy world was

included in *Collected Works of Don Rosa*, published in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany.

Kristina Arnerud Mejhammar is a PhD candidate at the Department of Art History at Uppsala University in Sweden and also a Museum Curator/Lecturer at the Norrköping Art Museum. In 1996 she completed a Licentiate in Philosophy thesis in Uppsala on Swedish comics, entitled *Alternative Comics: Tradition and Renewal*. In her doctoral thesis she pursues the study of Swedish comics, focusing on the self perception and world view of a number of artists emerging in the late 1900s.

Margareta Wallin Wictorin is Senior Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture at Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden, where she is active in the Center for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies. Her main areas of focus in the comics field are postcolonial perspectives on comics, educational comics, and autobiographical/autofictional comics. Her other research interests are contemporary African art and art education. Her most recent publications include “Dak’Art, The Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary African Art in Dakar. A site charged with political issues” (in *The Challenge of the Object. 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art*, Nuremberg, Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2014), and “West African Tellings with Images and Words – Comics from Senegal” (*International Journal of Comic Art*, 15. 2 (2013): 145-166).

Martin Lund holds a PhD in Jewish studies from Lund University, Sweden. His dissertation, “Rethinking the Jewish-Comics Connection,” is a study of configurations of identity in American mainstream comics by Jewish writers and a critical dialogue with the extant literature on the subject. In it, he situates the comics studied within historical American identity formations and Jewish American and American history, arguing that the oft-claimed Jewish–comics connection most clearly emerges as an expression of what it meant for the discussed writers to be Jewish Americans in their own time. Lund is currently a Swedish Research Council International Postdoc at Linnaeus University and a Visiting Research Scholar at the Gotham Center for New York City History, CUNY Graduate Center, New York. His current research focuses on the representation of New York City in American comics and graphic novels.

Mervi Miettinen is a researcher at the University of Tampere, Finland. Her dissertation for the University of Tampere (2012) focused on superhero comics and American popular geopolitics. Her future research will continue to focus on the superhero from a transmedial and transnational perspective. She has presented several papers at comics-related conferences both in the UK and the United States, and has had work published by John Benjamins and McFarland. Her most recent articles include “Past as multiple choice – Textual Anarchy and the Problems of Continuity in *Batman: The Killing Joke*” (*Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art* 1.1 (2012): 3-25).

Øystein Sjøstad is Lecturer in Art History at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas, University of Oslo, and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Kunst og Kultur*, published by the National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design, Oslo. He is interested in text/image relations in nineteenth-century art and literature as well as the relationship between art and comics. His latest books are *A Theory of the Tache in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Ashgate, 2014) and *Christian Krohg. Fra Paris til Kristiania* (Labyrinth Press, 2012).

Øyvind Vågnes is the author of *Zaprudered: The Kennedy Assassination Film in Visual Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2011), which received honorable mention at the American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence. He is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Copenhagen where he is affiliated with the research project “The Power of the Precarious Aesthetic.” Among recent publications are “John’s Story: Joe Sacco’s Depiction of ‘Bare Life’” (in *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*, forthcoming in 2015 from University of Mississippi Press); “The Unmaking of the World: Trauma and Testimony in Two Stories by Joe Sacco” (*Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* 39.1 & 2 (2011)); “Showing Silence: On David Small’s Stitches” (*Studies in Comics* 1.2 (2010)); and “Inside the Story: A Conversation with Joe Sacco” (*Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 1.2 (2010)).

Ralf Kauranen is sociologist based at the School of History, Culture, and Arts Studies at the University of Turku, Finland, and is involved in several projects financed by the Kone Foundation, including the project “Voice and Wilence of Class – Critique of Recent Conceptions.” His current research interests are on transnationalism and multilingualism in the field of contemporary comics in Finland. He is a former editor of the

Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art and is a founding member of the Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE)..

Rikke Platz Cortsen is currently working on a postdoctoral project funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (FKK) about space and place in contemporary Nordic comics at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Her PhD thesis is entitled “Comics as Assemblage – How Time and Space is Constructed in Comics.” She has published several articles on various aspects of comics scholarship and has presented at a number of international conferences. Her most recent publications include “Full Page Insight: The Apocalyptic Moment in Comics Written by Alan Moore” (*Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5.4 (2014)) and “Between Propaganda and Entertainment: Nordic Comics 1930s-1950s” (co-authored with Ralf Kauranen, Louise C. Larsen, Anne Magnussen, and Michael Scholtz; in *Comics & Politik*, Christian A. Bachmann Verlag, 2014). She is a founding member of the Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE).

Steen Christiansen is Associate Professor of English at Aalborg University, Denmark. His research interests include visual culture, popular film, and science fiction, with a particular emphasis on questions of embodiment and sensation. He is currently working on two book projects, one on postvitalist science fiction and the other on action cinema in the 21st century. His most recent publications include “Hyper Attention Blockbusters: Christopher Nolan’s Batman Trilogy” (*Akademisk kvarter* 7 (2013): 143–157), and “Suburban Apocalypse: The Haunted House of Capitalism” (in *Terminus: The End in Literature, Media and Culture*, Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 2013).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would like to thank the board members of the Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE) who have been very helpful in commenting on our ideas in the initial stages and developing this publication further. Thank you Ann Miller, Jan Baetens, Roger Sabin, Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff, Bart Beaty and Thierry Groensteen for your engaging and thoughtful comments, as well as for your participation in seminars and conferences where the discussion delved into many of the issues addressed in this volume.

The editors would also like to thank the Danish Council for Independent Research (FKK – Det Frie Forskningsråd/Kultur og Kommunikation) for their support in establishing the network that sustained the collaboration and continued exchange of research and ideas between the members of NNCORE, some of whom are presenting their work herein.

INTRODUCTION

Many introductions to comics scholarship books begin with an anecdote recounting the author's childhood experiences with comics: how and where they used to read them, a particular title that made a lasting impression, or how reading comics shaped their life in some way or another. These sorts of stories testify to the power of comics in engaging readers and also connect with an aspect of comics and power that has frequently played a role in the history of comics: how comics impacts young readers. However, comics and power are intertwined in a number of ways that go beyond the concern for children's reading habits. Since the beginning of the medium's modern history at the turn of the 20th century, the fascination for comics has been combined with its cultural marginalization. From this position, comics have played with (and in some cases have questioned) existing power structures, which—in combination with their mass appeal—have made them the subject of continuous institutional efforts to regulate their content. As with any other critical medium, comics are both shaped by and participate in shaping identities, communities, and ideas about art and culture, but *how* comics engages with these topics is unique due to both its societal position and form. The chapters in *Comics and Power* represent very different ways of studying this complex and diverse relationship between comics and power.

The importance of comics' influence—and society's perception of this influence—is changing due to the developments within both the study of comics and the medium itself. *Comics and Power* explores these changes within its three sections. The first, *Power and Institutionalization: Shifting Cultural and Medial Perceptions*, is concerned with comics' position within institutionalized discourse on art. The chapters in this section address the question of the medium of comics in its relationship to other medial forms, including art, online gaming, and literature. They illuminate the complexity and criticality of the form of comics and thereby assert its power as a specific art form. The second, *Power and the Subject: Exposing the Politics of Subjectivity and Identity*, offers a series of examples that illustrate the enormous potential of comics as an art form in its own right. The section explores how comics challenge the conventions of identity imposed upon (and taken up by) the subject through state, culture, gender, and religious apparatuses. In specifically looking at various genres

concerned with identity—including documentary, (auto)biography, and autofiction/false memoir—the chapters in this section offer a critical look at and a questioning of societal norms and power relations as they relate to the individual. The third and final section, *Power and Society: Reproducing and/or Contesting National Communities and Ideologies*, broadens the scope of the previous section to consider and contribute to debates about national and cultural identities and struggles. The chapters in this section span time and place to offer both a historical and contemporary look at how comics site-specifically navigates existent power relations and thereby enter into the discourse on national and cultural ideology.

Taken together, the three sections reveal the complexity of comics—how in strikingly varied and intricate ways comics is both the result of societal and cultural processes, and is a critical contributor in modifying these processes. The focus on the analysis and discussion of specific works in each chapter underlines the range of critical voices within the medium of comics and reveals the need for refined analytical tools to address this art form. In bringing together these critical investigations, *Comics and Power* suggests that the power of comics lies in the medium itself and in its formal and contextual engagement with institutional, subjective, and societal power structures.

Comics and Power: Historiography

The chapters in *Comics and Power* have as their point of departure two basic ideas. First, they all understand power as a dynamic concept in which comics takes part, whether through potentially challenging specific power relations or participating in the reproduction of them. As a second point, the chapters all consider these processes to be complex societal and cultural networks involving text genres, readings, social practices, institutions, and relationships of power. Within this overall framework, the chapters subscribe to different theoretical frameworks and concepts of power, and they focus in their analyses on different parts of the processes and networks involved. As will be apparent below, this common framework relates to comics research both by drawing on existing arguments and conclusions—and by shaping them in new ways.

What can be considered a first phase of research into comics and power had a decidedly one-dimensional focus, namely the way in which comics more or less directly influenced young readers. In the 1950s neither comics nor its reception were considered especially complex: both were based on the idea of a direct *effect* from comic to reader that was

most famously elaborated upon by American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham in his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*.¹ Even though Wertham's study has been simplified more than it rightly deserves, it nevertheless saw comics' influence on young Americans as a relatively straightforward process of effect, according to which the readers uncritically took in the content and copied the ideas, values, and actions represented in them.² The view of comics having this kind of (negative) power was influential far beyond academia; it defined the agenda in public debates about children and media in many parts of the world beyond the US. Indeed, *Seduction of the Innocent* had an important impact in Europe generally and in the Scandinavian countries particularly.³

Another seminal work in the history of research on comics and power is Ariel Dorfman's and Armand Mattelart's study of Donald Duck that was originally published in Chile in 1971 and later translated into *How to Read Donald Duck* in 1975.⁴ Here, too, the focus was primarily on the effect that comics has on the audience—in this case *Donald Duck* comics and Latin American audiences. From the 1970s, a Marxist perspective shaped important parts of academia, and Dorfman and Mattelart argued that *Donald Duck* had the power to induce a young audience with US capitalist ideas and values. The book became a key study in the criticism of the social oppression that resulted from the relationship of power between the US and Latin America, or in broader terms, between the so-called first and third worlds.⁵ Parallel to Wertham's analysis, the comics in themselves were seen as means of communication of simple, clear-cut messages—in this case not of violence and anti-social behavior as in Wertham's study, but of capitalist ideology. Dorfman's and Mattelart's study involves two dimensions of interest here. For one, they see the Disney comics as mirrors of specific US capitalist values, and second, they argue that the readers in Latin America took over these values more or less uncritically.⁶

By contemporary comics scholarship standards both Wertham's and Dorfman's and Mattelart's studies can be viewed as too simplistic or too narrow-minded in their analyses of the connection between readers, comics, and society, and fortunately the study of the reception of comics moved away from this simplified idea of direct causal effect. This is one of the main arguments that Martin Barker makes in his important study on comics, ideology, and power from 1989.⁷ Barker represents a new development in comics research that, since the late 1980s, has focused on comics themselves, as well as the relationship between comics and their readers, as complex phenomena.⁸ The new development within comics research understood the reading of comics as a far more complex process

that required a more sophisticated analysis of both comics and their reception and audience. The studies of superhero comics and comics as propaganda especially followed this focus on the dynamic relationship between power and comics and of studying comics as part of more complex societal networks. However, when looking at comics research from the 1980s and 1990s, what stood out more than a focus on the relationship between comics, readers, and society, was an interest in comics as an art form and/or as a unique form of expression. A considerable part of the research zoomed in on comics as a complex means of communication with its own codes, aesthetics, and narrative patterns, which were worthy of analysis in and of themselves.

The focus within comics research on *works* was closely related to developments within the comics medium itself, which saw the emergence of new comics genres, themes, and aesthetics. In the US the *Underground* comics from the 1970s were a case in point, and in the European context, comics concerned with erotic and/or intellectual and political themes became more and more visible in countries such as France, Belgium, and Italy. Both developments were accompanied by new generations of cartoonists, or *auteurs*, and small and independent publishers. The new study of comics as an art form and means of communication in its own right was especially strong in the Franco-Belgian comics research tradition; Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle and Francis Lacassin started out in the 1970s, paving the way for researchers such as Thierry Groensteen, Benoît Peeters, Philippe Marion, and Jan Baetens. The increased interest in comics as an object of study was accompanied by the inclusion of the medium in literature and art courses, and by the emergence of more and more specialized comics magazines, journals, seminars, and conference sessions. The focus on comics aesthetics and narrative was decisive for the furthering of comics as an art form and questioned, of course, the historically dominant idea of comics as simple, easily understandable messages, as was implied in the study of the comics' effects on its audience. It was also an important development in terms of comics' cultural status and significance and, in this sense, added a new dimension to the relationship between comics and power: comics began to be seen as questioning cultural hierarchies.

The above description of comics research historiography indicates two major strands in comics research that to some extent are also regionally defined: an Anglo-Saxon focus on comics, ideology, and society, and a Franco-Belgian interest in comics aesthetics and narrative. To an increasing degree, today's comics research cuts across the two strands, most conspicuously in textbooks and general introductions to the comics

medium, which typically include chapters both on comics aesthetics and form and on comics in society.⁹ With few exceptions, though, scholarly work that bridges the two in particular studies about comics and power are hard to find.¹⁰ As will be apparent in the short section descriptions below—and in the chapters themselves, of course—the chapters in this anthology stand on the shoulders of earlier developments, combining the two major strands described above in new ways. They recognize comics as complex *works*, while at the same time emphasizing the way in which they interact in power relations in society. It is important also that the chapters consider society to be highly complex, involving institutions and a broad range of media, and investigate power relations on many levels, from interpersonal and medial relations to national and cultural identities. In this context, *Comics and Power* stands out as one of the few anthologies that highlights the role of power in different and interrelated ways, and through various genres, from superhero comics and manga to newspaper strips and thematically more challenging graphic narratives. *Comics and Power* thereby represents the new generation of comics research.

Comics and Power: Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects, and Communities

The first section in *Comics and Power* includes studies of comics as part of broader medial and cultural processes. Referring back to the emergence of new comics genres and audiences in the 1970s, in this section power is addressed in relation to comics' changing position within and outside of cultural hierarchies. In the 1970s, the combination of new themes and aesthetics in comics, the development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the analysis of individual comics, and the construction of an academic infrastructure were crucial features in furthering comics studies because they also challenged existing cultural hierarchies. Today, debates about comics as an art form and the power of comics in relating to its cultural status are still ongoing. The focus of the first section of this anthology: *Power and Institutionalization: Shifting Cultural and Medial Perceptions* contributes to this important discourse. It approaches the relationship between comics and power in terms of its institutionalization (or lack thereof) and how comics as a form of expression challenges other art forms and the discourse surrounding them. The chapters in this section discuss how the nature and characteristics of comics' influence (and societal institutions' perception of this influence) have changed over time depending on developments both in society and in the comics medium itself. The discussion of power in this section is twofold: one points from

comics outward, dealing with its relationship to other media and art forms, and the other points inward, debating the way comics is considered an art form in its own right and how the notion of *what comics is* is constantly challenged by experiments, developments in production, and the evolution of the medium.

As mentioned above, the focus on comics aesthetics and narrative in the 1980s and 1990s brought with it an interest in the analysis of individual works, which resulted in studies related to power and society being quite marginalized, if not entirely missing. This phase of comics research was nevertheless important for the development of a more sophisticated and multifaceted perspective on comics and power: it paved the way for studies about power relating to interpersonal psychological struggles. Such aspects of power are targeted in the chapters in the second section of the anthology, *Power and the Subject: Exposing the Politics of Subjectivity and Identity*, with explicit efforts to bridge the divide by pointedly broadening the discussion to include societal and cultural contexts. The individual chapters explore specific comics from various genres, including documentary, (auto)biography, and autofiction/false memoir, in order to expose how comics can provide a space for a critical look at and questioning of societal norms and power relations. Their aim is thus twofold: by focusing attention on the relationship between power dynamics in personal and cultural spaces as well as the spaces created in the form of comics, they assert that comics can challenge, expose, and/or critique the conventions of identity imposed upon (and taken up by) the subject through state, culture, gender, and religious apparatuses.

In recent years there has been an increase in studies on comics and ideology in a broad sense. Many of the studies that focus on comics, power, and society are concerned with US and British comics—including studies on superhero comics as propaganda, which is the case of Christopher Murray's work, and on comics' effects on youth culture, as is explored by Bradford W. Wright.¹¹ More recently, studies that analyze comics in former European colonies have emerged, which often focus on the very interesting intersections between the former colonial powers and the new nations.¹² The chapters in *Comics and Power's* third section, *Power and Society: Reproducing and/or Contesting National Communities and Ideologies* belong to the group of studies about comics and power as part of broader societal, political, and national processes. This section is focused on power dynamics on a "grand scale" in that they relate to national, transnational, or regional communities and the role that comics have in questioning and/or reproducing the power structures of such communities. The chapters in this section all study comics and/or

caricature examples that primarily question existent power relations in specific communities or societies, and together represent an amazing variety when it comes to time and place: they span from the 19th century until the 2000s, and are about Europe, the Nordic countries, Senegal, the US, and Japan.

Concluding Remarks

This anthology is the result of the emergent cooperation among Nordic comics scholars. Since 2000, and especially within the last couple of years, Nordic comics research has taken off. We have seen the growth of both a series of Nordic and international conferences as well as the creation of the Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE).¹³ Within the framework of comics and power, the Nordic cooperation can be seen as an example of how comics research is becoming more spread out geographically; the institutionalization and visibility of Nordic research, together with strong academic comics research fields in Germany and in the Asian countries, has begun to nuance the US/British and Franco-Belgian comics research traditions.¹⁴

Comics and Power, with its three particular perspectives, also exemplifies the way in which comics research has broadened its scope. Combining the study of comics as artworks with institutional, identity, and societal perspectives on power offers a plurality of analytical perspectives that mirrors the plurality of comics themselves as well as comics readership. If this development continues, in the near future comics research may have reached a status similar to that of other media and art forms, making it unnecessary to introduce a comics study similar to this with a reference to its cultural marginalization. With this anthology we hope to contribute to the ongoing development of the field, and especially to the complex and fascinating study of comics and power.

Notes

¹ Wertham, Fredric. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1954.

² See Beaty, Bart. *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.

³ See Kauranen, Ralf. "Serier Och Makt." *Valör*, no. 2011/2 (2011): 6-16. See also Kauranen's chapter in this anthology.

⁴ Dorfman, Ariel, and Armand Mattelart. *How to Read Donald Duck. Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. New York: International General, 1975 (1971 in Spanish).

⁵ An example in point is the following quotation from the book: "Underdeveloped peoples take the comics, at second hand, as instruction in the way they are supposed to live and relate to the foreign power center" (Dorfman and Mattelart, p. 98).

⁶ Other critics can be said to belong to this group, including critics of gender representation in comics. For a discussion of several of these critics and their analyses, see Barker, Martin. *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1989.

⁷ Barker, 1989.

⁸ Another example is Jim Collins' work on comics, e.g. in "Appropriating Like Crazy: From Pop Art to Meta-Pop". In: *Modernity and Mass Culture*. (Ed. by J. Naremore & P. Brantlinger) Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, and Collins, Jim. "Batman: The Movie, Narrative: The Hyperconscious." In *The Many Lives of the Batman. Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, edited by Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. London and New York: Routledge, 1991, in which he argues how comics readers are sophisticated semioticians.

⁹ This is the case in monographs such as Sabin, Roger. *Adult Comics. An Introduction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993; Hatfield, Charles. *Alternative Comics. An Emerging Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005; Smith, Matthew J., and Randy Duncan, eds. *Critical Approaches to Comics*. New York & London: Routledge, 2012; Duncan, Randy, and Matthew J. Smith. *The Power of Comics. History, Form & Culture*. New York & London: Continuum, 2009; Heer, Jeet, and Kent Worcester, eds. *A Comics Studies Reader*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009; Magnussen, Anne, and Hans-Christian Christiansen. *Comics & Culture. Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000.

¹⁰ An exception is McAllister, Matthew P., Jr. Sewell, Edward H., and Ian Gordon, eds. *Comics & Ideology*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001, that has certain similarities with *Comics and Power* in the choice of main theme. That being said, it has a considerable representation of gender, sexuality, and nationality, and not the three dimensions of power represented in *Comics and Power*.

¹¹ Murray, Christopher. *Champions of the Oppressed? Superhero Comics, Popular Culture, and Propaganda in America During World War II*. Cresskill: Hampton

Press, Inc., 2011; Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation. The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

¹² Examples of monographs: Fernández L'Hoeste, Héctor, and Juan Poblete, eds. *Redrawing the Nation. National Identity in Latino/O American Comics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; McKinney, Mark. *Redrawing French Empire in Comics*. Ohio State University Press, 2013;

¹³ The Nordic Network for Comics Research (NNCORE) received a two-year grant from the Danish Council for Independent Research, 2011-2013 and has been organizing a series of seminars and conferences in the Nordic countries. It is continuing as an association of comics scholars after the funding period.

¹⁴ Japanese research, especially focused on manga, has evolved considerably, and Kyoto Seika University has a center for manga research (<http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/eng/edu/manga/> (January 16, 13)). In Germany, the research network *ComFor* has been crucial in making visible a very lively German comic research field.

PART I:

**POWER AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION:
SHIFTING CULTURAL AND MEDIAL
PERCEPTIONS**

CHAPTER ONE

COMICS: THIS BITTER ART

ØYSTEIN SJÅSTAD

If you must go to art school for God's sake, make the most of it... Seldom if ever again in life will you be afforded the chance to scrutinize such an array of losers in an environment that actually encourages their most pretentious inclinations!

—Daniel Clowes, *Art School Confidential*¹

People always make the mistake of thinking art is created for them. But really, art is a private language for sophisticates to congratulate themselves on their superiority to the rest of the world. As my artist's statement explains, my work is utterly incomprehensible and is therefore full of deep significance.

—Calvin in Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*²

I do like to communicate clearly. It's a pleasure. And as soon as one is involved with communication, one's already suspect in High Arts.

—Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*³

Comics and the Modern System of the Arts

The main character in Eddie Campbell's comic collection *Alec: "The Years Have Pants"* (2009) asks: "Can you be an artist not connected with any 'Art World'? Can you be one if nobody ever knows it?"⁴ One of the book's chapters opens with a visual description of the art system and the caption reads: "The map of the history of Art is like any other map. There are main roads and side streets; old masters and lesser masters."⁵ The question of the place of comics in the system of the arts becomes a central theme in the *Alec* comics, wherein comics are bitterly looked upon as a side street to real Art and the comic book artist as a lesser master compared to the "real" Artist. This segment from Campbell's comics

perfectly sets the stage for the following discussion of the power relationship between art and comics.

One of the classic discourses in the history of aesthetics is the relationship between the arts. The questions posed not only include: *What should be recognized as an art?* and *Is there an essence of art?* but also, *How should the recognized arts be differentiated and ordered?*⁶ The different dialogues between the various art forms have been an aesthetic concern since antiquity, and in the last few decades comics has entered the art scene to create further cultural clashes. The first question was if comics actually is an art, and then, if so, where comics should be placed in a system of the arts. In this essay I want to explore some of the aspects of the relationship between the comic-world and the artworld—from the comic-world’s perspective—and, towards the end, dwell on the artworld as a motif in comics. I take it for granted here that comics are art, in the same way that literature and cinema are arts.

Paul Oskar Kristeller, in his classic 1951 article, “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics,” devised the idea that the modern system of art consists of five arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry. In a way, this has been, from the eighteenth century onward, the core of our commonsense understanding of the categories of art (with other, more unstable art forms being added to these five from time to time, such as landscape design, dance, theater, opera, engraving, etc).⁷ Kristeller’s presentation is a debatable construct, and it is certainly not the only way to tell the story of aesthetics,⁸ but his article demonstrates the instability of both the definition of, and the relationships between, the arts since humans started creating dramatic and visual representations.

Today there is an understanding that different art forms exist, and that each of these has its own “world” or field of meaning-production. At the same time, the art forms share certain aesthetic qualities and areas of interest. Studying the relationships between the arts has proved to be an important part of the history of the arts, and interesting meeting points can be observed between the art forms. Dialogues are created between them, and one can also find “aesthetic crossings” or hybrids. This also means it is possible to conceive of different art forms as autonomous entities, and in this context it would make sense to talk about different *artworlds*.

The vocabulary people use to talk about the different arts and their respective worlds is confusing, so in this essay I will introduce the following model: the different “worlds” all belong to the “system of the arts.” The artworld, comic-world, literature-world, film-world, etc., all take part in this system of the arts. (In “artworld,” the word “art” is used in its narrow meaning: *fine arts*). These different worlds are relatively

autonomous but they do share certain properties. As the sociologist Howard S. Becker explains: “[...] art worlds typically have intimate and extensive relations with the worlds from which they try to distinguish themselves. They share sources of supply with those other worlds, recruit personnel from them, adopt ideas that originate in them, and compete with them for audiences and financial support.”⁹ The worlds communicate with each other, through dialogues, disputes, “wars,” cooperation, etc. An observation here is that the relationship between the artworld and the comic-world is quite different from the relationship between the comic-world and the literature-world; it seems that comic book artists relate more to the artworld than to the literature-world or cinema-world—or at least that they relate to these other worlds in a different way. In the visual culture of late nineteenth-century modernism, comics and avant-garde painting represented opposite poles. To paraphrase critic James L. Hoberman, comics and avant-garde art “arrive on the same train at the same station and the same historic moment in response to the same historical processes—industrialization, urbanization, the development of the mass market, and the rise of the mechanical reproduction.”¹⁰ Art historian Thomas Crow also comments on this polarity in visual culture: “From its beginnings [the nineteenth century], the artistic avant-garde has discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, ‘non-artistic’ forms of expressivity and display—forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture.”¹¹

It should then be clear that comics are not *part* of literature or fine arts. Different genres have developed within the comic-world, such as super hero comics, detective comics, romance, funny animal, and others. Comics have evolved into an autonomous world worthy of a place in the system of the arts. Critic Douglas Wolk offers arguments for why this is so:

Comics are not prose. Comics are not movies. They are not a text-driven medium with added pictures; they’re not the visual equivalent of prose narrative or a static version of film. They are their own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own genres and traps and liberties. The first step toward attentively reading and fully appreciating comics is acknowledging that.¹²

Comics as *Unpopular Art*

Roger Sabin writes this about how comics should be considered within this system of arts: