International Comparative Literature Association
Report of the Activities of the Comic Studies and Graphic Narrative Research Committee

27 July 2016

Contents

Executive Summary:

The research committee was formed and approved during the 2014-2015 school year and the 2016 meeting hosted by the University of Vienna marked the first formal meeting of the group as a research committee.

Activities among the group members included "Future in Comics" hosted by a group member, Francesco Ursini, in September 2015. A symposium hosted by Stefan Buchenberger at Kanagawa University was held in June 2016.

A vibrant series of sessions was planned for the AILC/ICLA meeting.

An executive committee meeting was held on 22 July at the University of Vienna, during which publications, plans for the 2019 ICLA meeting and the possibility for hosting a session at the ACLA 2017 meeting in Utrecht were discussed.

Description of the Committee:

The research committee Comics Studies and Graphic Narrative seeks to advance the study of the medium of comics in the field of comparative literature. The committee aims to facilitate opportunities for discussion, to present research in joint sessions at the AILC/ICLA congresses and other major meetings, to encourage and enable the publication of the results in journals and anthologies, and to support young and emerging scholars in the field. The main research foci of this committee are:

- The history of the medium, in particular of specific genres (the superhero, the graphic novel, bande dessinée, manga, autobiography and other nonfiction genres);
- The history of the comics industry, and future developments in the production of comics including, for example, digital comics;
- Narrative studies in comics (the forms and conventions of graphic storytelling, the development and adaptation of narrative theory in analyzing comics);
- The relationship between text and image;
- The culture of comics and fandom;
- Media studies of comics, in particular the study of adaptation and translation, (transmedial relations between comics and other media, such as screen media;, comics and the history of literature and the visual arts;
- Cultural studies of comics, for example the study of gender, race, politics, disabilities, place and the environment;
- The teaching of comics, and the pedagogical uses of comics;
- comparative approaches to these studies from different traditions, cultures and language areas;

All research committee members share a strong commitment to developing methods of analysis and comics' theory as well as trans- and intermedial relations.

Objectives

The research committee Comics Studies and Graphic Narrative seeks to advance the study of the medium of comics in the field of comparative literature. The committee aims to facilitate opportunities for discussion, presentation of research in joint sessions at the AILC/ICLA congresses and other major meetings, and by encouraging the publication of the results in journals and anthologies.

Completed Activities:

"Future in Comics" hosted by Francesco Ursini, in September 2015. A collection is underway and will appear in 2017 under the McFarland imprint.

Kanagawa University symposium hosted by Stefan Buchenberger. Kai Mikkonen presented.

Ongoing and Future Activities:

1. 2016 Sessions
   - The sessions were successful and well-attended
   - We were grateful for the room assignment and enjoyed the venue very much
2. Facebook group
   - A facebook group was founded some years ago and is actively updated by the membership on an ongoing basis
3. Web site
   - A web site or page on the AILC/ICLA site is planned. K Mikkonen to reach out within ICLA to determine next steps.
4. Future meeting planning
   - A core team (S. Buchenberger, L Pao, and N Hirasihi) was formed for meeting planning for 2019
   - Discussion opened as to whether group members sought to propose a seminar to ACLA 2017 or to include a panel in one of the seminars currently being planned by research group members. Deadline for seminar submissions is August 31st.
5. Publications
   - De Gruyter press expressed an interest in publishing new work in comics studies
   - L DeTora and L Pao to reach out to T Lassiter regarding planning for a volume

Appendix: Group Session Description for the 2016 AILC/ICLA Meeting in Vienna

Group Session, Research Committee "Comic Studies and Graphic Narrative"

Comics and graphic narratives engage in a wide array of artistic practices. They have emerged as genres from the long-debated relationship between the verbal and the visual, and have since then continuously challenged understandings of graphic storytelling. Today, scholars widely agree that comics and graphic narratives are more than a mere combination of textual and graphic media, art forms, and means of representation, but it remains an open question as to how they have critically shaped our contemporary categories of media, literature, aesthetics, and culture at large. The proposed group session aims to advance these ongoing questions about the history of the genre, and the cultural and social developments of comics and graphic narratives as significant expressions of historical and cultural realities. With the focus on "unsettled narratives," the sessions brings together recent topics and approaches such as, but not exclusively, the theme and representation of war and conflict, the role of gender in superhero comics, and the history of satire and journalistic publications; topics that continue to invite us to ask what it means to read, interpret, and analyze graphic novels and comics not only as a part of today's literary scene but a fundamental question of literary criticism and comparative literature. The session is a continuation of the symposia held at the previous ICLA congresses in Hong Kong, Rio, Seoul, and Paris, and invites papers that contribute to these developments, including historical and comparative approaches (questions about genre, medium, production, and reception), narrative studies (forms of storytelling, sequence, temporality, spatiality, voice), culture, social, and media studies (globalization, comics and other media, gender, ethnicity, politics, pedagogy), as well as analytical and theoretical approaches in linguistics, literature, philosophy, and arts.

Titles and Presenters:

1. Umberto Rossi (Independent Scholar)
   The Myth of the Great War: Hugo Pratt's W.W.I Graphic Novelettes
2. Nicola Paladin (University of Rome)
   Will Eisner's Spirit's Participation to the Second World War
3. Francesco Ursini (Stockholm University)
   Conflict and Social Control in Shingeki no Kyojin

4. David Coughlan (University of Limerick)
   Grant Morrison's Human Animal Man
5. Adnan Mahmutovic (Stockholm University)
   Maxime Miranda in Minimis Reimagining Swarm Consciousness and Planetary Responsibility through Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind
6. Stefan Buchenberger (Kanagawa University)
   Future Imperfect: Dystopia, Time Travel, Absolute Power and the Incredible Hulk.

7. Tracy Lassiter (Independent Scholar)
   Marvelous! New Depictions of Heroines in the Comics/Graphic Novel Genre
8. Noriko Hiraishi (University of Tsukuba)

Girls on the Battlefield: from Cross-Dressed to Girly Fighters in Japanese Manga
9. Angelo Piepoli (Independent Scholar)
    Gender gaps in the clouds. Conservation and revolution in the Italian comics

10. Kai Mikkonen (University of Helsinki)
    Picture Story, Strip Design and the Order of Sequence - Narrative organization in late early nineteenth-century British "comic strips"
11. Angelo Piepoli (Independent Scholar)
    Wordless. How visual sequence becomes storytelling
12. Lea Pao (Penn State University)
    From Goya's "Caprichos" to Mahler's "Gedichte": What Comics Teach Us about How to Read a Poem
13. Lisa DeTora (Hofstra University)
    The Quantum Gaze in Twenty-First Century Graphic Novels

14. Barbara Grüning (University of Bologna)
    The public uses of comic books and the construction of collective memory
15. Chris Ceyns-Chikuma and Désiréé Lorenz (University of of Poitier)
    Muslim Superheroes in France: reception of Kamala Khan as a case study of an unsettled narrative
16. Alison Halsall (York University, Toronto)
    Unsettling Narratives of Fear Visually: Illustrating and Adapting Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book
17. Christian Bachmann (Ch. A. Bachmann Verlag)
    The Unsettled Medium and Its Unsettling Media

Abstracts for the 2016 Meeting

Umberto Rossi (Independent Scholar)
The Myth of the Great War: Hugo Pratt's W.W.I Graphic Novelettes

Italian-born but absolutely cosmopolitan sequential artist Hugo Pratt (1925-1997) is one of the masters of historical adventure comics, and one whose sequential narratives are dense with literary and artistic references--especially the cycle of Corto Maltese. Two of the adventures of the stateless seaman and adventurer are set during the Great War: "Sotto la bandiera dell'oro" and "La laguna dei bei sogni", both published in 1971 in France ("La lagune des beaux songes" in Pif, Editions Vaillant, # 117; "Sous le drapeau de l'argent" in Pif, Editions Vaillant, # 143), then reprinted in Italy. The two stories--especially "La laguna..." are evidently inspired by the literary treatments of the war (possibly a short story by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Le déserteur", plus some classical British war memoirs), but also based on Pratt's accurate research (especially visual details of uniforms, airplanes, tanks, trucks, weapons etc.). Both express a critical vision of the conflict which chimes in with the reconsideration of W.W.I which had started in the mid-1960s and would climax with the publication of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, but also with the relatively less famous (in the English-language world) monograph by Mario Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra*, both aimed at deconstructing the myth of the war and its cultural and political implications. Pratt's graphic novelettes must then be set against their historical-cultural background (a time in which the Vietnam war was a hot issue) to understand their complex resonances and allusions.

Barbara Grüning (University of Bologna)
The public uses of comic books and the construction of collective memory

Aim of the paper is to investigate different public uses of comics in representing difficult pasts on the basis of four case studies: the National Socialist and the German democratic Republic pasts in the German memory field and the Fascist past and the terrorist/mafia massacres in the Italian memory field. The comparative analysis will focus on three assumed factors of influence:

1. the narratives and aesthetic forms culturally legitimated in the two national public memory spaces. Two questions are here pertinent: to which extent comics participate in public memory debates and in which cases they are successful in constructing autonomous memory discourses;

2. the cultural frames which define a specific past. In the comparative analysis the author will attempt to highlight whether some cultural frames are more difficult to negotiate than others and why. That means also to understand in which cases comics are successful in creating new ways of representing a difficult past and in actualizing it according to the current questions of a collectivity; 3. the cultural paradigms hegemonic in the transnational memory comics field. The crucial matter is how they circulate and are received in the two analyzed national comics fields and how they influence the way of narrating 'local pasts'.

Then in the analysis I will contemplate not only the graphic representations of the past, but also who are the social actors (artists, publishers, political institutions, public intellectuals) involved in this process of collective working memory, their symbolic and cultural resources and their power relationships

Lisa DeTora (Hofstra University)
The Quantum Gaze in Twenty-First Century Graphic Novels

The quantum gaze refers to looking relations that change the object of the gaze, drawing on what physicists refer to as "the observer effect" in quantum mechanics—the verified fact that systems under continuous observation behave differently than those not under continuous observation. In an earlier paper that considered the workings of a quantum gaze in feminist film theory, I suggested that animals and cavemen could reconfigure their bodies by evading the gaze of the (extradiegetic) viewer as well as the (diegetic) bearer of the look. Unlike film, where 'the gaze' (as defined by Mulvey and others) regulates looking relations in relatively fixed, linear, and sequential visual systems, the graphic novel invites (if not requires) a discontinuous gaze and the management of pages, frames, and interstitial spaces as well as the diegetic space of the narrative. The current work considers the possibility that a quantum gaze could operate in graphic novels. How can the ability to 'frame' corporeal identities be changed in recent graphic novels, depending on the ability to maintain visual contact? Of particular interest is the ability of bodies to unmake and remake themselves only so long as they remain outside both reader and diegetic observation simultaneously. For example, in *Fables* (2002), the mystery of Rose Red's murder hinges not so much on finding a killer as identifying whether a blood constitutes adequate evidence for murder. Later volumes examine the identity politics of disembodied heads, wind, wolves that can turn into humans, and the faceless, unknown Adversary. This paper will also consider recent graphic novels such as *Rachel Rising* (2012) in which a woman digs herself out of a shallow grave to discover her own murdered body and *Unknown Soldier* (2008).

David Coughlan (University of Limerick)
Grant Morrison's Human Animal Man

The comic book writer Grant Morrison has addressed the question of the animal repeatedly throughout his career, most notably in *The Filth*, *WE3*, and the earlier series which is the focus of this paper, *Animal Man*. Given that comic's clear engagement with the theme of animal rights, it is odd, as Marc Singer notes, that critics have largely analysed it only as metafiction. This paper seeks to readdress this, with particular reference to Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and David Herman's work on the representation of animal experience in graphic narratives. It might be expected that *Animal Man* would provide an example of "how the representation of what it is like for (nonhuman) characters to experience events is shaped by medium-specific properties of graphic narratives" (Herman), but Morrison and artist Chas Truog seem unwilling or unable to exploit the multimodality of comic narratives to deliver an exploration of animals' worlds. Instead, it emerges, it is exactly Morrison's use of metafiction which provides his most profound insights into animal experience and animal suffering, because the path which leads to Animal Man's discovery that he is a comic book character also renders him powerless, and deprives him, like the animal, of speech, an experience of death, mourning, technics, laughter, and crying. This paper concludes, therefore, that Morrison's series exemplifies what Derrida describes as the radical "possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower," and dramatises what living is for nonhuman and human animals.

Adnan Mahmutovic (Stockholm University)
Maxime Miranda in Minimis Reimagining Swarm Consciousness and Planetary Responsibility through Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

Hayao Miyazaki's manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* can be said to reimagine the notion of "swarm consciousness" in order to challenge the ways insects have been portrayed in literature and film. Originally a concept from biology, swarm consciousness explains the self-organizing systems of social insects such as bees or ants. The view that insect societies consist of mindless drones governed by a central authority (the queen) permeate those genres in which insects often feature. Basing our view of swarm consciousness on the more recent understanding of insect self-organization, we challenge this rigidly divided traditional perspective and propose that Miyazaki's novel has the potential to help us envisions new and more creative interactions between humans and insects. These interactions are not limited to an in-group/out-group mentality. Rather, swarm consciousness can be used to imagine interactions between groups, irrespective of their species identity. Due to this shift towards a more decentralized perspective in which the queen is not longer the sole governing entity, it is possible to create a new way of imagining what Jakob von Uexküll termed the umwelt, the unique environment of vastly different creatures. We pursue the notion of swarm consciousness because it challenges both how we can think, but also who we can think with and, as a consequence, opens up new ways of perceiving unique and individual worlds, as well as the entire planet. This creates opportunities for an increased sense of planetary responsibility.

Stefan Buchenberger (Kanagawa University)
Future Imperfect: Dystopia, Time Travel, Absolute Power and the Incredible Hulk.

In 1992, one of the most prolific writers of the INCREDIBLE HULK, Peter David, together with artist George Perez, created one of the more memorable stories of the green giant with the two part prestige format *Future Imperfect*. In this comic the Hulk faced a monstrous future version of himself, the Maestro,

the absolute ruler in a post-apocalyptic world, where all the other superheroes had long since perished. Only by luring the Maestro back in time to the exact moment when the first gamma explosion turned Bruce Banner into a raging monster, could the Hulk beat his future self.

One of Hulk's greatest challenges, from a story point of view, was always to give him a real challenge since: "Hulk is the strongest one there is", as he would often point out after beating his adversary to a pulp. Two of his more memorable adversaries, The Leader and The Abomination, are just different versions of himself, created by gamma radiation. The only adversary he could not beat but had to outwit by uncreating him at the moment of his own creation was therefore his future self.

This paper would like to show that *Future Imperfect* is on the one hand a science fiction story, with its use of a dystopian future and time travel as central plot elements. However, on the other hand*Future Imperfect* gives a new twist to the eternal struggle between the Incredible Hulk and his alter-ego Bruce Banner, who like their Victorian predecessors Dr, Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde constantly vie for the same physical space. As destructive as the Incredible Hulk can sometimes be, his monstrous future self reaches new heights when it comes to madness which in return makes him even more powerful since the Hulk gets stronger the madder he gets. The background of *Future Imperfect* with the Maestro as the lone survivor of the super being community, taking whatever he likes, because he simply is the most powerful being left, also contains a strong political message as in 1992, after the end of the Cold War, the hubris of the world's lone remaining super power led to a winner takes all policy with terrible consequences, and the only thing that could beat it would be itself.

Tracy Lassiter (Independent Scholar)
Marvelous! New Depictions of Heroines in the Comics/Graphic Novel Genre

It's an interesting moment in comics and graphic novel history: Marvel plans to release in October 2015 several titles that will feature prominently female heroes. At the same time, though, Marvel Studios (and Hollywood in general) has been slow to release films starring superheroines since Catwoman and Elektra more than ten years ago. This is the case despite the fact that in the U.S., 42 percent of the ticket buyers on the opening weekend of 2015's Ant-Man were women. Elsewhere, male fans responded negatively (and sometimes in troll-like fashion) to DC Comics' changes to Wonder Woman's outfit—which covered much more of her body—while barely commenting about similar changes to Batman and Superman's clothing.

 These issues persist despite the many female comic/graphic novel writers and artists, heroines and protagonists. The focus of my particular paper is on female-male disjunctures, highlighting, for example, cultural shifts in female-centric stories for girls that resist the "damsel in distress" trope and reliance on a male heroic figure. However, on the whole this panel welcomes any gender question emerging from the comics/graphic novel genre or its fan base. During my presentation, I'll cite authors like graphic novelist and writer Hilary Chute, comics scholars John Lent and Roger Sabin, feminist scholar Helene Cixous and postmodern scholar Linda Hutcheon. The panel continues and responds to our online forum's discussion of gender-in-the-comics issues.

Kai Mikkonen (University of Helsinki)
Picture Story, Strip Design and the Order of Sequence - Narrative organization in late early nineteenth-century British "comic strips"

In this paper, I will examine the main options that were available for organizing a picture story in the historical context of the so-called British Golden Age of caricature (1780-1820) and, in particular, in the caricature magazines published during the following decade (1825-35) . In this historical investigation of a narrative form, I will privilege certain formal and compositional features of narrative drawing and picture sequence, and specifically examine the conception of panel arrangement and relations in the early comic strips published in satirical caricature magazines such as *The Glasgow Looking Glass, Northern Looking-Glass* and *Every Body's Album* . In this regard, my intention is to argue that (and illustrate how) the caricature magazine played an important role in the development of the narrative comic strip as well as show that narratological inquiry can be significant for thinking about the historical relation between the publication format and the means of storytelling.

Francesco Ursini (Stockholm University)
Conflict and Social Control in Shingeki no Kyojin

Shingeki no Kyojin ('Attack on Titan', in its standard translation: Isayama, 2009-ongoing) is a shounen/seinen manga that features the fight of the last survivors of a battered humankind against the "titans". The titans are human-looking entities that can vary in height and size, appear to be of limited of no intelligence, and yet they were able to bring human beings to the brink of extinction by eating and devouring humans. The narrative opens when two titans, who apparently have not breached the walls enclosing human territory in 100 years. The three main protagonists, step-siblings Eren Yaeger and Mikasa Ackermann, and friend Armin Arlert, lose their families in this attack. They thus seek revenge by enrolling in the survey corps, with the purpose of defeating the titans and freely exploring the world beyond the walls. However, as the narrative unfolds, the main trio and their comrades discover that much more sinister forces control the titans and the world within the walls.

The goal of this paper is thus to explore how social control, and with it the never-ending conflict against the titans as the dangerous "other" are construed in SoK' narrative. For this purpose, we apply the propaganda model found in Herman & Chomsky's manufacturing consent (Herman & Chomsky), in particular the principles (or filters) of "flak" (those who reveal secret information are punished) and "the war on terror" (the creation of an ever-present mysterious, terrifying enemy). We show that the role of the elites in Shingeki is that of fostering an artificial state of conflict against the titans and manipulation of humankind's history and collective memories. We then discuss how Eren and the survey corps fight against the titans as a "fabricated" terror, but also against the elites' flak and the control on any flow of information within the walls.

Works cited

Herman, Edward S.; Chomsky, Noam. Manufacturing Consent (2nd edition). New York: Pantheon Books, 2001. Print.
Isayama, Hajime. Shingeki no Kyojin. Kodansha: Tokyo, 2009-ongoing. Print.

Noriko Hiraishi (University of Tsukuba)
Girls on the Battlefield: from Cross-Dressed to Girly Fighters in Japanese Manga

This paper aims to clarify the characteristics of fighting girls in Japanese comics (manga) from a gender perspective.

Fighting girls in Japanese male comics appeared in the 1960s, particularly in the works dealing with science fiction and ninja. During this period, many sexually appealing female ninja appeared in adult comics, while boys' manga began to focus on "heroic teams" that fight against evil in sci-fi settings. In these works, the team usually has one female member: she participates in the battles, but always in a supporting capacity, such as a nurse or liaison. Her true role in the story is to be the sweetheart of the protagonist, the strongest hero of the team. In this context, the female member has always been an unassuming and beautiful character.

On the other hand, girls' comics gave birth to an impressive fighting girl in the 1950s: *Princess Knight* (1953), created by Osamu Tezuka. Set in a medieval European fairy-tale-like place, the story's main focus is the circumstances of the heroine, Princess Sapphire, who must pretend to be a male prince to be eligible to inherit the throne. Traditionally in Japanese manga, factors of age and gender seem to be key elements in determining the role and status in society for a given character. Although *Princess Knight* did not actually threaten any gender/sexual criteria, the gender-crossing representation of Sapphire had an enormous impact on the audience of the day. The cross-dressed fighting girls became important figures in girls' manga in the 1970s and 80s.

The examinations of these fighting girls in clothes and attitude of men lead us to the structure of ambivalence, which criticizes the male-oriented society but is also bound by it. In my analysis of the trend of "girly" fighters which followed in the 1990s, I will shed light on the significance of these figures, as it is an acute reflection of the state of gender differentiation in society.

Angelo Piepoli (Independent Scholar)
Wordless. How visual sequence becomes storytelling

Comics are traditionally regarded as a form of literature characterized by the use of two distinct systems of sign vehicles, words and images, combined with each other into an almost always indissoluble interconnection. That means that if one of the two components is subtracted from a comic book story, the sense of the story is compromised or at least changes. The most recent research on comics language have insisted that the juxtaposition of words and images is not the main feature of comics, instead giving this role to sequentiality. Comics made only of drawings, for example, owe the sequence the possibility of conferring a narrative sense to the juxtaposition of those drawings.

This presentation aims to focus on the interpretation of comic books, or parts of them, that do not include the verbal component. It will attempt to identify how narrative sense is conferred to a sequence of pictorials, also taking into account other key concepts such as time. It also will offer examples of stories without words, not included in the landscape of contemporary comics, in an attempt to understand if they can be considered as a form of comics.

Lea Pao (Penn State University)
From Goya's "Caprichos" to Mahler's "Gedichte": What Comics Teach Us about How to Read a Poem

In the late eighteenth century, Francisco Goya published a series of eighty etchings of dark and satirical imagination. His "Los Caprichos" are caricatures of a world between the Enlightenment's reason and religious and societal superstition that is both comical and horrifying. Much of this world's depictions depend on these images of monsters, animals, witches, grimaces, and shadows, but they also recognize the

simultaneous metaphorical and figurative forces of the images' minimal words, titles, and short descriptions that create the sharp vagueness of satire. Nicolas Mahler's "Gedichte," published in 2013, on the other hand, is a small collection of forty poems "without a single line of poetry" (Raimund Fellinger), in which one-line titles are each paired with a drawing creating ironic metaphors of each other. With these two examples, this paper explores how comics (and what we understand as their tradition) engage in a practices of creating interpretatory spaces that are, for example, aware of metaphor's uses of "word" and "image" in both their distinction from as well as their dependency on each other. They teach us, in other words, a relation between comics and poetry beyond a combination of genres, traditions, or media, but as a practice of reading and essential to all acts of interpretation and meaning.

Angelo Piepoli (Independent Scholar)
Gender gaps in the clouds. Conservation and revolution in the Italian comics
History of comics in Italy is strongly characterized by a long and unfinished process of social acceptance of comic as a narrative medium with the same "dignity" as other media, like literature or cinema. One of the most interesting aspects of that history, and also one of its interpretative keys, is the difficulty to fill a gender gap in the stories published. Not only the preponderance of male protagonists, but also the difficulties encountered by comic itself when the authors have attempted to renegotiate gender roles were among the fundamental constituents of a situation that has started to show the first signs of a substantial change only since the 60s.

This presentation aims to focus on the change of that gender gap in the history of Italian comics, seen as a sign of the social change in Italy.

The paper will make a brief reference to the case of the US, which is an important precedent for the impositions from above that the comics productions had to suffer in Italy, then will focus on the first clear signs of gender role changes that have occurred in the comics scene nationwide starting from the first half of the Sixties, and will end on the observation of the most recent situation in comics landscape.]

Christian Bachmann (Ch. A. Bachmann Verlag)
The Unsettled Medium and Its Unsettling Media

While comics have been published in newspapers since the late 19th century and in comic books since the 1920s, comics have only been released in the book format—i.e. the codex—for the past c. 30 years. That is to say that only for a comparatively brief period of time have comics artists had access to this carrier medium with its specific mediality.
As S. Ditschke argued, the book format made comics fundamentally more accessible at least to the German feuilleton, thereby helping the comics to improve their public standing in Germany. Ditschke's findings support a notion propagated by, amongst others, R. Chartier, according to which the carrier medium, especially the book, is of major social importance and can have a large impact on whatever content is published in this form. However, the book format does not only change the rules of how comics are seen in the public, but also opens up heretofore unavailable aesthetic practices for comics artists.
A significant number of comics by artists such as C. Ware, B. Katchor, and P. Hornschemeier is indicative of an ongoing development that can be traced back at least to the advancement of the so-called alternative comics in the 1980s. Going far beyond applying the label "Graphic Novel" to something previously known as a comic merely because it is now published in a perfect bound book, this development has

arguably unsettled the comics medium itself. Between the book only just having become an actual option and web comics challenging print materiality altogether, an increased and ever-growing awareness of the materiality of carrier media can be observed in comics artists. This new awareness, in turn, brought forth a number of meta-comics such as Hornschemeier's "Mother, Come Home" or Katchor's "The Cardboard Valise" that explore—and thereby underline—the specific mediality of comics embodied in the book format.

Building on insights by scholars such as G. Kannenberg and E. Tinker, this paper seeks to highlight specific works dealing with the mediality and materiality of the book and its aesthetic consequences for the comics as a medium within the broader context of comics aesthetics in the 21st century.

Désiréé Lorenz (University of Poitier)
Muslim Superheroes in France: reception of Kamala Khan as a case study of an unsettled narrative

Only four months after its English publication in 2014, the first volume of Ms Marvel: No Normal was translated and published in France. It could be quite surprising considering the French Republicanism conflictual relation to Muslim religion (e.g., Bowen, 2007). Sporadic creations of Muslim superheroes can be found in DC and Marvel comics since the mid-20th, and the positive recognition from Barack Obama of The 99 demonstrates the successful integration of Muslim superheroes into the US. But if Muslim superheroes are well known by US readers, this is actually not true for French readers. Pictures of an anti-Muslim France could be over simplistic. While the French republican model of assimilation is questioned, the definition of a French multiculturalism is supporting by many researchers (e.g., Stora, 2007). The creation of Nightrunner, a French Muslim superheroes of Algerian origin, sparked violent reactions from the US readers who do not recognize the French identity of this character. In contrast, French translation of the Nightrunner episodes did not initiate any controversy or hostility. While Muslims superheroes are not well known in France, we do not assert that they are or might not be legitimate. So, what is the Meaning of Kamala Khan's translation ? To answer this question, we propose a multidisciplinary approach of the reception phenomenon. First, our goal is to bring out the Kamala Khan's translation in a history of Muslim superheroes in France and in the current sociocultural context. Second, we will study the comic books and its translation. Third, we will analyze how it is received by the critiques, audiences and fans in France. Then, in order to advance in our understanding of the French people relationship to Muslim superheroes, we propose to investigate the content and structure of the social representations related to Muslims superheroes using well validated social psychological methods.

Alison Halsall (York University)
Unsettling Narratives of Fear Visually: Illustrating and Adapting Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book

Acclaimed British novelist Neil Gaiman is the focus of my proposed talk. In particular, The Graveyard Book, published in 2008, and adapted in graphic novel form by P. Craig Russell in 2014. I will argue that Gaiman's appropriation of the Gothic topos deliberately unsettles the conventions of the Gothic to allow his principal protagonist to take refuge in the strangeness of the Gothic world. Protagonist and child reader enjoy a temporary sense of belonging in the Gothic narrative, one that proves that the Gothic as a genre can help rather than "shatter and discompose the [child's] Spirits," as Enlightenment scholar John Locke once claimed. In turn, Gaiman's unsettling of the Gothic provides much creative possibility for the visual artists who interact with his hybrid text. No stranger to the interaction of word and image on the page, Neil Gaiman's fascination with the visual can be seen on the first page of The Graveyard Book. Illustrated by Dave McKean, The Graveyard Book features black, white and sepia sketches that

complement the words on the page. In opening Gaiman's novel a child reader falls into a world that appears to be dark and dangerous, but that is in actuality safe and comforting. In effect, Gaiman's unique Gothic world allows his child readers to escape from the horrors of everyday life into the mysteriously appealing graveyard on the hill, for a temporary time at least. Interestingly, expanding on the interrelationship between word and image that already exists in the novel version of The Graveyard Book, American comic book artist and illustrator P. Craig Russell adapted Gaiman's novel into a graphic novel published in two volumes in 2014. This graphic novel adaptation of The Graveyard Book develops the hybridity of Gaiman's source text even more. Each chapter is adapted by a different artist, forming a total of 8 distinct visual approaches to Gaiman's source text. The contributors boast an impressive artistic pedigree, in terms of comics and graphic novel work. Not only are these volumes a testament to the visual potential of Gaiman's Graveyard Book, but they mirror in a visual fashion Gaiman's own approach to the Gothic, which is to unsettle and transform the once frightening world of ghosts and goblins into a world in which the child protagonist and reader would feel at home.

Nicola Paladin (University of Rome)
Will Eisner's Spirit's Participation to the Second World War

Will Eisner's Spirit can be historically identified as one of the early models for the American comics superheroes tradition. Among his most distinctive features, Spirit's patriotic aura tends to move to the background of his persona. However, be it openly or not, from the first publications of The Spirit, Eisner often alludes to the historical context, in particular to the possibility for the US to intervene into the Second World War.

For example, in the first panel of October 27, 1940 The Spirit strip, titled "Conscription Bill Signed", the Spirit explains his friend Ebony the draft as it follows: "Look at this way. Suppose some big bully is going around picking fights with everyone. He hasn't picked on you yet, but he will, as soon as he licks the fellow he's fighting now... What would you do?" As Jeremy Dauber clarifies, the Japanese attack to Pearl Harbor represents the turning point in Will Eisner's attitude to WWII and the Nazi menace. Although his references to the issue became explicit only after the attack, it is arguable that a strong anti-Nazi feeling as well as a pro American intervention propaganda constitute a recurrent subtext throughout the adventures of The Spirit.

In my study I will focus on the allusions, characters and settings related to WWII, in the adventures of the Spirit: for example, Octopus, Spirit's nemesis, is often supported by former Nazis; consequently, the blurred nature of Spirit's enemy is complemented by a Nazi connotation. This helps to characterize him as "the" bad guy, since he is related to the "bad guys" par excellence. The Spirit established a bond between the imaginary Central City and the battlegrounds of WWII: hence, my purpose is to demonstrate how the presence of WWII elements in The Spirit's strips helps to better shape the enemies of the vigilante. In other words, my aim is to show how the transposition into comics of the concrete enemy of America impacts the enemies of Spirit, who can be configured as an embryonic "sentinel of liberty".