Capa do livro sobre Li'l Abner (Ferdinando), do professor Arthur Asa Berger.

Comics Scholarship: Its Delayed Birth, Stunted Growth, and Drive to Maturity[1]

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Abstract: This article aims to present the trajectory of scholarship on comics, showing the difficulties faced by researchers and the future of scientific research in this area of study.

Key words: Comics; Comics Scholarship;

American author and professor Arthur Asa Berger (2002: 42) tells how in the 1960s, faculty and students at his university were "outraged" that he would do a Ph.D. dissertation on the comic strip "Li'l Abner," and how, when his topic was announced at graduation ceremonies, the audience laughed.

When the first volume of David Kunzle's monumental history of the comic strip was slighted by art history's "scientific literature," Kunzle facetiously proposed that the second volume he contemplated be called: "The Acquisition and Manipulation of New Sites of Comedic Narrative Discourses and Significations by Volatility-prone Social Sectors" (Kunzle, 1990: xix). Such was the shameful status of comics in the academy pre-1980s and 1990s.

The guffaws are not as loud or as frequent now as comics research has gained a foot in the doors of some universities, as increasing numbers of books and journals related to comics are published, and as academic conferences worldwide are devoted to the topic.

This brief essay is intended to discuss the hesitancy concerning the development of comics scholarship, its contemporary status and continuing issues, and steps needed to get it fully into the academy.

[1] Artigo eleborado a partir da palestra apresentada na abertura das 2as Jornadas Internacionais de Histórias em Quadrinhos, no dia 20 de agosto de 2013, na Escola de Comunicações e Artes da USP.

Let me venture some possibilities for the slighting of comic art as a field of study:

1. Comic art had been perceived to be unimportant, irrelevant, and not worthy of being studied because, (a). not many scholars had gone in that direction and usually researchers dare not move outside the perimeter of what will get them tenured, promoted, or otherwise accepted; (b). funding has not been plentiful in comic art scholarship; (c). comics studies links to popular culture made it unimportant in the eyes of those who made distinctions between high culture and popular culture, to the benefit of the former. Fortunately, the debate over high and low culture has diminished as it is recognized that much of what is considered fine art now was not held in such high esteem at its time of creation, and globalization and commercialization have blurred the lines between the two. Groensteen (2000), sidestepping the high and low art debate, suggested other reasons why comics were "condemned to artistic insignificance":

1) It is a hybrid, the result of cross breeding between text and image; 2) Its storytelling ambitions seem to remain on the level of a sub-literature; 3) It has connections to a common and inferior branch of visual art, that of caricature; 4) Even though they are now frequently intended for adults, comics propose nothing other than a return to childhood.

2. In many academic quarters, there has been an inbred snobbishness, a tendency to protect one's own turf. Mass communication generally, and film and television specifically, faced this snobbery early on, popular culture and comic art more recently. The principal founder of popular culture studies, Ray Browne (1989) delighted in telling how, in the 1960s, his English Department colleagues voted him out of their ranks because of his interests, but had to keep him because, as his provost at the time said, no other department would take him.

3. Because comic art is a relatively new field of inquiry, it may have appeared that a theoretical base or handy framework, a set of approaches and techniques, did not exist for its study. Similar to other new fields of study, some theory and the techniques are borrowed from older disciplines, such as literature and mass communication (itself, a borrower from the social sciences), from which comic art has been spun. Thus, perspectives of sociology, psychology, philosophy, art and aesthetics, business and economics, or history can be applied to comic art study. As for techniques, researchers can examine the content and form of comic art using textual methods such as semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, literary analysis, rhetorical analysis, and content analysis. The focus can be a more macro-level analysis of the production of comic art and/or tis effects, in which case, research techniques such as historical analysis, case studies, surveys, interviews, and experiments would

be appropriate.[2] Of course, non-traditional and/or innovative techniques are encouraged, but, it is likely that "new" approaches will contain elements of the time-tested research methodologies mentioned above.

A Brief History of Comics Studies

The reluctance of the academy to accept comic art as even a sub-discipline meant that the pioneers of scholarship in the field came from elsewhere. In a number of instances — for example, in Australia, Canada, England, Japan, Taiwan, and the U.S. —, much of the earliest scholarship was written by private collectors and fans (and critics, in the case of Japan) who used their own collections of books as resources; here, Bill Blackbeard of the U.S., Hoong Tei-lin of Taiwan, Denis Gifford of England, Shimizu Isao of Japan, and John Ryan of Australia come to mind, but there were others. Also, the occupations of the pioneers were far removed from university settings: Shimizu Isao of Japan was a salaryman; John Ryan of Australia, a sales manager of an industrial rubber factory; Maurice Horn of the U.S., a State Department interpreter, and others, such as Okamoto Ippei and Suyama Keiichi of Japan, Coulton Waugh and Jerry Robinson of the U.S., and Alvaro de Moya of Brazil, were cartoonists. A considerable amount of the literature on comic art until recently appeared in journalistic and fan-based periodicals, such as Comics Journal, Comics Scene, Alter Ego (U.S.), Rantanplan (Belgium), Phenix, Giff-Wiff, and Cahiers Universitaires (France), and Linus,
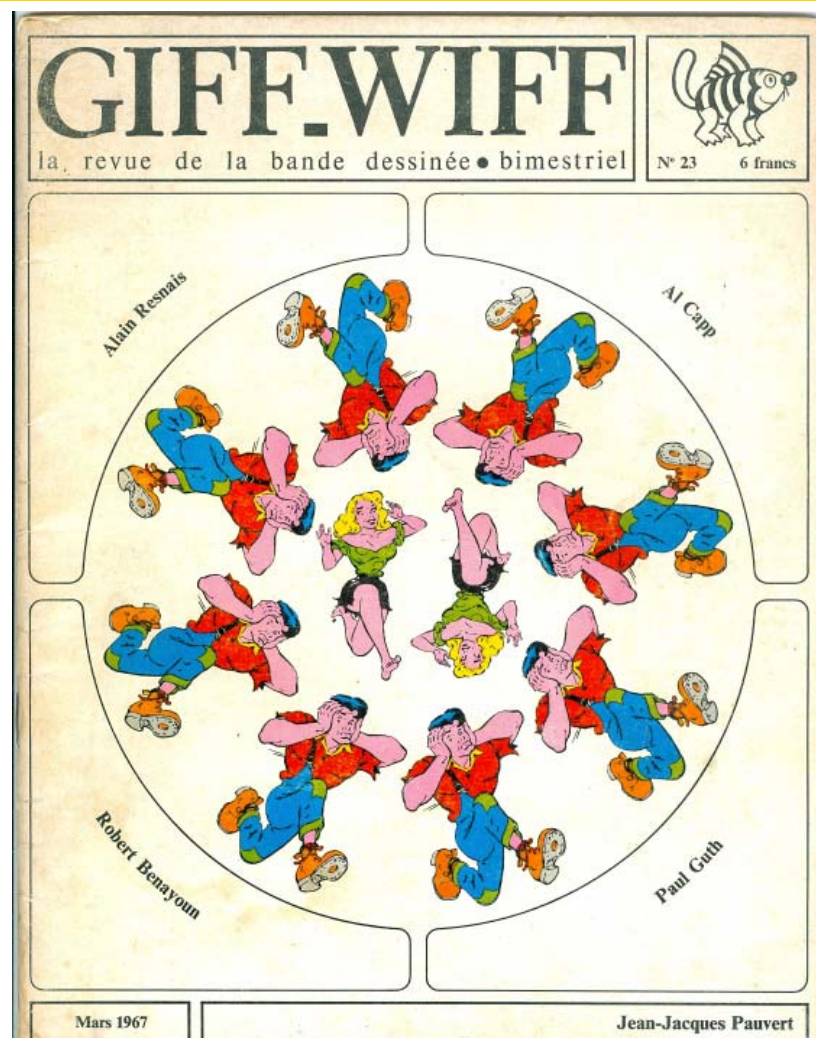
Capa da revista francesa Giff-Wiff

Il Lavoro, Comics, Sgt.Kirk, Comics Club, and Eureka (Italy).

In the early period of comics research (1960s - 1970s), European writers, more readily than those of the U.S. and elsewhere, applied intellectual and aesthetic approaches (particularly, semiotics) to the study of comics. Dozens of intellectuals, artists, and writers in Europe (e.g. filmmakers Alain Resnais and Federico Fellini and writer Umberto Eco) were involved in comics, and in France, Sweden, and Italy, associations were formed in the 1960s that fostered comics study. In 1971, a chair of theoretical comics studies was established at the Sorbonne, occupied by Francis Lacassin; it

[2] Steirer (2011: 269-276) provided six ways in which to study comics: factual (often historical), socio-cultural, ideological, auteur, industrial, and formalist. Chapman (2013) boiled the approaches to just two: cultural theory (semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism) and cultural history ("understanding comics as products of the culture in which they are published and consumed"). He was in sympathy with cultural theory, because its "emphasis on signifying codes and structural processes too often seems to deny space either for any creative energy on the part of the writer or artist, or any sense that the readers of comics are individuals rather than an undifferentiated mass." Lefèvre (2010), calling for economic and social (and not just aesthetic and thematic) approaches, categorized comics studies into compartments of institutional, formal, and content analyses.

was later replaced with a chair of film animation (Morita, 2010: 33). Exhibitions (most notably, one at the Louvre in 1967) and festivals and congresses (such as those at Bordighera and Lucca in Italy, and La convention de la bande dessinée in Paris) added to the interest in studying comics. Also, in the 1960s and beginnings of the 1970s, individuals such as Kees Kousemaker in the Netherlands, Luis Gasca in Spain, Sture Hegerfors in Sweden, Wolfgang Fuchs and Reinhold Reitberger in Germany, and Denis Gifford and David Kunzle of England, played significant roles in comics scholarship with their books and articles.

Other parts of the world saw the birth or reawakening of comics scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s. In Japan, writers such as Ishiko Junzô, Ishiko Jun, Shimizu Isao, and Katayori Mitsugu, studied manga from literary, artistic, and historical perspectives, publishing their findings in many books they authored, and, in the case of Katayori, the earliest journals on manga (i.e. Rodo manga kenkyuu [Labor Cartoon Studies] and Manga geijutsu kenkyuu [Manga Art Studies]), both of which he edited.

Chinese comics scholarship owes a huge debt to cartoonist Bi Keguan, who wrote some of the earliest theoretical and historical books, beginning his research in the early 1970s, while in Australia and Canada, comics research was first undertaken by fans and collectors. The already-mentioned Ryan started Australia's first comics fanzine in 1964 and wrote the country's first comics history. In English-speaking Canada, an amateurish attempt at a comics history was published by two fans/collectors, while in the French-speaking sector, early research was done by a former high school teacher, Richard Langlois, who also started a course on American and British comics in 1970, that soon after, was made "official" in all colleges of Quebec Province by the Ministry of Education.

Of all Latin American countries, Brazil stands out in its acceptance and promotion of comics scholarship. Pioneering these efforts was cartoonist Alvaro de Moya, who, in 1951, held what probably was the first comics exhibition in the world. A year earlier, he began writing to U.S. cartoonists, asking for their originals so that he and others who had formed a club could learn from them. It was that collection that he unsuccessfully offered to the Museum de Arte de S. Paulo, whose staff said they were "against comics." De Moya said the intention of the exhibition was "to say that comics was an art and the Brazilian culture must be shown in the newspapers and magazines" (de Moya, 2002: 25). But, some Brazilians suspected the aims of the exhibition: press owners thought de Moya's team wanted to ban syndicated U.S. strips and replace them with their own; the Communists called the organizers "young innocents fantoches of the decadent imperialist American culture" (de Moya, 2002: 24). De Moya and his collaborators lost their cartooning jobs because of the show. In 1970, his book-length contributions to comics scholarship

began with Shazam! followed by his other titles História em Quadrinhos, O Mundo de Disney, and Anos 50, 50 Anos. Comics scholarship grew in Brazil with publications and, by the 1970s, a university comics program. Another monumental undertaking was Herman Lima's four-volume História da Caricatura no Brasil in 1963, laying down a definitive chronology for future historians.

As elsewhere, fans, collectors, cartoonists, and other independent researchers set the foundation for U.S. comics studies. In the 1940s, comic strip fan Martin Sheridan and cartoonist Coulton Waugh wrote books primarily about newspaper comic strips, both criticized later by scholar Joseph Witek (1999:9, 11, 13) as not placing comics in aesthetic and intellectually interesting contexts. The third of the pioneering volumes, Comic Art in America…, by Stephen Becker, in 1959, broadened the scope to include other dimensions of comic art besides newspaper strips. In 1963, mass communications researcher David Manning White and co-editor Robert H. Abel published The Funnies: An American Idiom, which had as its main question: "what do the comic strips tell us about American culture?" U.S. fandom began to organize in 1961-1962 around fanzines such as Alter Ego, Xero, and Comic Art, all of which carried articles of historical importance. It was also in the 1960s and 1970s, that Blackbeard and Randy Scott independently recognized the importance of preserving comics and began to build huge collections in San Francisco and East Lansing,
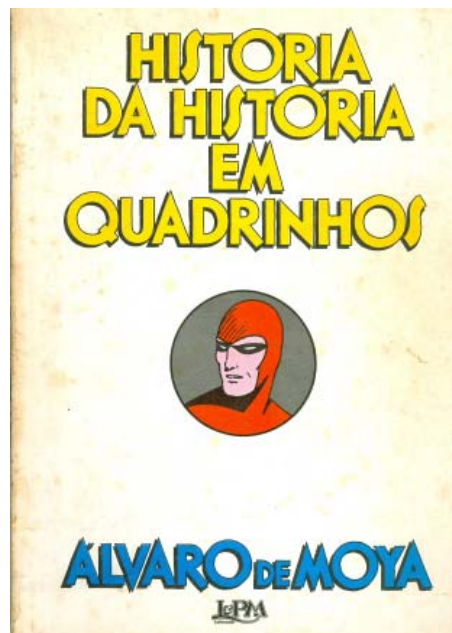
Livro escrito pelo pesquisador brasileiro Álvaro de Moya.

Michigan, respectively (see Lent, 2010, for a fuller history of comics scholarship).

The Status of Comics Scholarship

In light of an over-arching principle of this essay—that comics scholarship differs from country to country—, I will not attempt generalizations, but rather, provide case studies based on the few published country overviews of comics scholarship that are available. Whether comics studies exist, and to what extent, depends on how one defines the term. Stein (2011) makes this point relative to Germany, saying if one defines comics studies as "Comic-Wissenschaft in analogy to Literaturwissenschaft (Literary Studies) or Kulturwissenschaft (Cultural Studies), then the answer might be a hesitant 'no,'" but if comics studies is identified as "a conglomeration of increasingly networked research activities, the answer … must be a tentative 'yes.'"

Sticking with the German scene, a number of significant

monographs and essay collections have appeared in less than a decade, as well as the beginnings of institutional structures and scholarly networks. Among these are Gesellschaft für Comic forschung (ComFor), founded in 2005 as a comics research society for German-speaking countries; Arbeitsstelle für Graphische Literatur (Work Center for Graphic Literature), active at the University of Hamburg since 1992, and the interdisciplinary Research Unit "Popular Seriality — Aesthetics and Practice" of the University of Göttingen, which includes two comics projects. Stein (2011) believes German comics studies have moved from being just an academic fad, but he does not envision students in the foreseeable future receiving degrees in comics studies. His hope for German comics scholarship is prescriptive worldwide — that researchers study comics,

from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, develop approaches that do more than simply force comics into established paradigms, place high-quality scholarship in peer-reviewed national and international publications, expand and tighten existing scholarly networks (both nationally and internationally), secure third-party funding from major institutions, and continue the productive dialogue between their "home" disciplines and the burgeoning field of Comics Studies.

There also has been a flourish of comics scholarship activity in Great Britain of late. Numerous academic conferences are held, including some on very specific topics (e.g. medicine and comics), and on-going ones at Leeds and Dundee, and three journals have sprouted during the past decade — European Comic Art, Studies in Comics, and The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics. Perhaps more impressive is the development of a MLitt in Comic Studies at Dundee University (see Hague, 2012, for discussion on the setting up of this degree), as well as practice-based degree programs at three other universities and colleges. A longtime comics lecturer, David Huxley (2011), said much of this development happened after 2009, a period he called a "tipping point" when the reputation of comics improved in Great Britain.

The situation relative to comics education is entirely different in France, where, according to Groensteen (2010:18), comics ceased to be taught in French universities, and almost all the comics scholars carry out their research outside academic institutions. Though such independence can mean "financial precariousness," Groensteen (2010: 18) welcomes it, saying not being tied to a

university allows a "more inventive approach toward the media, that we are less confined within the existing theoretical frameworks and their ideological presuppositions...; we do not try to verify pre-existing theories by applying them to comics." Perhaps, French universities' lack of interest in comics scholarship relates to "the degree of development" of disciplines, Groensteen (2010:19) explained; for example, cultural studies and gender studies, both of which are important in the Anglo-Saxon world, are either not well developed or non-existent in France, where semiotics is still popular.

As a final European case study, Greece seems to be faring well, given its lack of a comics tradition and the youthfulness of comics studies there. A few academic institutions have accepted comics, notably the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication of Aegean University, which offers comics modules, organizes academic comics conferences, and houses Greece's only comics research team (Iconotopia), and the Department of Communication, Media, and Culture of Panteion University, the first to accept comics as an academic subject. In recent years, there have been academic conferences, books, and Ph.D. dissertations devoted comics studies, which, just a few years ago, was unthinkable (Tsene, 2012).

Outside Europe, comics scholarship of two other countries is discussed here: Australia and Japan. Kevin Patrick (2011) finds it difficult to fathom how little about comic books shows up in popular culture literature in Australia, in light of the vaulted and sometimes controversial place they occupied in media at one time. He said the "body of literature devoted to Australian comic books appears paltry," although he sees some recent progress, such as the University of Melbourne hosting the country's first academic comics conference, "Holy Men in Tights," in 2005, Australian scholars increasingly contributing to international comics scholarship, more undergraduate and graduate students engaging in comics research, and the publishing of the journal Scribble.

In contemporary Japan, critical discourses about manga in the 1990s, aimed to promote manga studies to the public, were built around works of Yomota Inuhiko, Natsume Fusanosuke, and Tekeuchi Osamu and what they called hyôgenron (theory on expression). Their approach examined "the internal logic of what makes manga 'manga'" by analyzing "the system of expression that is unique to manga" (Yomota, 1994: 15-17, quoted in Suzuki, 2010:69), accomplishing this by focusing on "formal function, internal structure, and the meaning of discrete elements in the manga medium" (Suzuki, 2010:69). Similar to the Western-oriented formalist or semiotic approach, hyôgenron discounted the "primacy of authorship (sakkasei) or the cartoonist's philosophy (shisôsei)" (Natsume, 1992: 13-14, quoted in Suzuki, 2010:70).

Much of the Japanese comics scholarship today centers

around Kyoto Seika University, a private art college with the longest history of educating manga artists at the university level (Berndt, 2010: 7). Seika's International Manga Research Center, tied to the International Manga Museum Kyoto, has held several international comics conferences since 2009, the proceedings of which have been published as a monograph and a symposium in the International Journal of Comic Art. Berndt (2010:12), pointing out that manga studies started with collectors and critics, said this research on the "institutional offside (zaiya),"

> gave rise to two extremes, that is, either over-respecting conventional academism, or conversely, u n d e r e s t i m a t i n g i n s t i t u t i o n a l i z e d scholarship. Since the 1970s, there has been a strong skepticism against both research in the humanities and intellectual discourse, out of the fear that cultural elites might snatch manga away from its readers and misappropriate it for their "foreign" purposes. … the unfamiliarity of manga critics with academia has furthered notions of scholarship which tend to put emphasis on positivist historicism, or structuralist semiotics at the expense of critical theory and political contextualization.

Berndt said these tendencies were evident in papers presented at the annual conferences of the Japan Society for Studies in Cartoon and Comics (Nihon manga gakkai). Started in 2001, the society publishes Manga Studies, a quarterly journal of research papers and presentations, reports, and symposia. (Since the mid-2000s, South Korea also has had a journal, Cartoon & Animation Studies, published by the Korean Society of Cartoon and Animation Studies.)

Despite important advances made in manga studies, the field has its critics. Odagiri (2010) said manga studies are insular, unaware of foreign comics or of past notions of manga. Berndt (2010:11) was more sweeping, stating that scholarship "in the sense of theoretical thinking, methodological sophistication, familiarity with a variety of critical discourses and thus the ability to communicate across both comics cultures and established academic disciplines" is rarely seen in Japan, as well as the rest of Asia. But, again, it is important to remember that comics scholarship in other parts of Asia (in Taiwan, China, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and India) is predominantly a 21st Century phenomenon, carried out by a very small number of individuals; as a result, it needs to be recognized for what it is — a beginning — and supported with critical discourse, available at regional conferences and through the Internet.

As noted already, comics studies are relatively new everywhere, not just in Asia, which accounts for topics which occasionally pop up in comic art discourse, such as definition and disciplinarity, thought by some scholars as hallmarks of legitimatization.

Despite decades of efforts to define comics, a consensus has not been reached on what they are, because different words are used and their meanings vary from country to country and because the forms of comics are not static. It is still a challenge to find a definition whose parts are all inclusive, yet mutually exclusive. But, that is the challenge of any type of categorization.

For each definition given, an exception comes to mind, and the term itself might not be most appropriate. Comic art implies humor, which is not always the case; to call the medium narrative art, as Eisner (1985) did, is equally perplexing as the conceptual limits of that term are still undefined, and, of course, not all comic art is narrative.

The confusion deepens when attempting to define types of comic art, where distinctions often are not made: comic books and comic strips are used interchangeably, as are comic strip and cartoon, and cartoon and caricature; throughout parts of Europe, karikatur is the common word for cartoon. Definition is even more elusive when trying to describe comic art and its offspring in different cultures and languages. To the French, they have been bande dessinée (drawn strip); the Germans have used bilderstreifen or bildergeschichte (picture strip, picture story); the Italians, fumetto (puff of smoke, referring to speech balloons); the Hungarians, képregény (picture novel), peculiarly defined by Rubovszky (2000:121) as, "A description with the help of pictures of a sometimes emotional story which is full of changes"; the Spanish, historieta, and the Portuguese, quadrinhos.

Like a chameleon, the term "comics" changes, both across spatial and temporal planes: in Japan, this art is called manga; China, manhua; Korea, manhwa; Philippines, komiks; Indonesia, cergam; Sri Lanka, comics papers, etc. They have taken on still other terminology in the past.

With long periods of cross-fertilization and the recent conglomeratization of the medium, the contours of comic art have been changed significantly. At various times, American comic books have felt the impact of invasions of Filipino, British, Spanish, and Canadian creators and of the style and format of manga. In turn, American comic books have left imprints on humor and narrative storytelling globally.

In their attempts to establish the parameters and characteristics of comic art, scholars have looked for help in the lexicons of literature, graphics, and cinema. Although each has an impact on and connection with comic art, one cannot find the answer strictly in these disciplines. As an example, comics and film share much in common, but they are different in their essentials: one is a static form; the other moves (Harvey, 1994: 8; also see Duncan and Smith, 2011, for a comparison of the development of film and comics studies).

My thinking is in line with that of Delany (1999: 239); that we avoid rigorous definitions and recognize that comics "exist rather as an unspecified number of recognition codes (functional descriptions, if you will) shared by an unlimited population, in which new and different examples are

regularly produced." Delany, as others, sees the urgency to formally define comics as an attempt at legitimatization:

> our discussions are striated by a fear that without the authoritative appeal to origins and definitions as emblems of some fancied critical mastery, our observations and insights will not be welcomed, will not be taken for the celebrational pleasure that they are. What can I say, other than that we need more confidence in the validity of our own enterprise (Delany, 1996: 268).[3]

Writing in 2004, I answered my own question, what can we say definitively about defining comics? with "Maybe not much, which is not so bad a conclusion. Definition and categorization have as their purpose, delimiting something so that we can talk about it in mutually understood terms" (Lent, 2004). If scholarship is presented with the reader's interest in mind, such delimiting is already present, some coming from whatever "norms" exist, some from the creativeness of the author (see Troutman, 2010, for an analysis of the use of introductions in comics research articles, which are useful for demarcation purposes).

The second issue lingering in comics scholarship is that of disciplinarity — whether comics studies should continue to be tied to other fields of study or be a discipline unto itself.

The discipline from which a field of study sprouts most often determines how it is researched;

thus, according to Morita (2010:33), comics scholarship, based on literary and art history models, treats as its main issues, "methods of creation, criticism and appreciation," to the neglect of sociological and economic factors. But, as some writers contend, comics studies does benefit from multidisciplinarity. Hatfield (2010) argues that comics studies cannot have a disciplinary status, because,

> The heterogeneous nature of comics means that, in practice, comics study has to be at the intersection of various disciplines (art, literature, communications, etc.); and … because this multidisciplinary nature represents, in principle, a challenge to the very idea of disciplinarity. Comics studies forcefully reminds us that the disciplines cannot be discrete and self-contained; in effect, the field defies or at least seriously questions the compartmentalizing of knowledge that occurs within academe.

Thinking of comics study as interdisciplinary, Hatfield (2010) applauded contact with scholars from other disciplines for its potential to "inform and enliven the way we talk about change within our own respective disciplines." Calling upon the work of Klein (1990), Hatfield said interdisciplinarity (the functioning together; teamwork) works better to describe comics studies than does multidisciplinarity (an additive; not integrative

[3]Commenting along the same lines, cartoonist/teacher Donald E. Simpson (2013) asked,

> what constitutes cultural legitimation, or for whom the legitimation is being sought. … more to the point, it is unclear how either the enjoyment of comics or their scholarly study has been hampered by this perceived lack, or how something described as cultural legitimacy would be of material benefit to creators and scholars. … I know of no scholarly field that foregrounds the question of cultural legitimacy of its objects of study to such an extent as comics studies.

relationship). He used the categorization of "intended interdisciplinarity" set down by Lattuca (2003), namely, informed (borrowing occasionally from other fields), synthetic (linking disciplines around questions), transdisciplinarity (posing questions that reach "across" disciplines), and conceptual (attempting to create "new intellectual space").

Arguments for disciplinarity run the gamut. Smith (2011) is simply "tired of the impulse to tie comics to another medium," adding, "Dealing with comics alone is hard enough without compounding the difficulty by studying two different objects." Writing that comics studies occupy an "academic no-place," Steirer (2011: 263) said, "Without the ability to position itself in relation to existing disciplinary formations, comics studies thus risks 'ghettoizing' itself within the academy." Steirer (2011: 264) is quick to disavow the imitation of traditional fields of studies with a kind of "strictly delineated and carefully controlled disciplinarity"; instead, he proposes "an active or dynamic model of disciplinarity, produced through an interrogative and even competitive approach to self-identification among its representatives."

Beineke (2013) adamantly supports disciplinarity, warning that "it must do so in order for an incarnation of comics studies that is dedicated to the study of comics as comics to take root and prosper inside academia." He calls for comics studies to develop specific tools and methods of its own, and to be "worthy of study on their own terms," not on the coattails of other disciplines. He questions whether, under the current situation, anyone can call him/herself a comics studies scholar (Beineke, 2013).

Perhaps again, too much importance is being placed on the necessity for a separate discipline. Why cannot a researcher working in an established discipline be called a comics scholar? Why cannot the same researcher experiment with "new" concepts and techniques while working within literature, fine arts, communications, or any other departments? Why would a researcher not feel free to do so? Discussion on the topic of disciplinarity should proceed, weighing its advantages and disadvantages, but, in the meantime, researchers should venture out of their boxes, adapting (not just adopting) theory and methodology from various disciplines, and creating different approaches by interacting with comics creators, fans, and the non-comics community

Directions for the Future of Comics Scholarship

Before discussing the road comics studies should take, it is fitting to suggest the ones they should avoid.

Considerable discussion still revolves around cultural and academic legitimatization of comics scholarship (see Groensteen, 2000; Becker, 2010; Morita, 2010). Various critics have called for the establishment of a "scientific process" for comics studies (Morita, 2010:30), the judging of comics on criteria in addition to, or other than, those of

literature (Groensteen, 2010: 10), the realization that the intellectual discourse about comics can (and should) differ from country to country, depending on all the variables that make regions unique in the first place. More than 40 years ago, discussing mass communications theories, I implored my Malaysian students and colleagues to attempt to create or experiment with theory that deviated from Western, Judeo-Christian, and capitalist notions, to search for theory more relevant to their cultures. I believe this should be the model for comics theory as well.

It seems to me that we should not try so hard to forge or force a canon upon comics studies. The creation of a discipline takes time — time to analyze how other areas of study were developed, to absorb or adapt useful aspects from those disciplines, and to carry our research that might confirm or alter theoretical or methodological approaches. In the past 60 years, I have watched the discipline in which I was educated move from journalism to mass communications and then digitalized communications. Along the way, in the 1960s and 1970s, to gain an academic footing, theory and research were so compartmentalized, emphasizing empirical, quantitative analyses, that virtually no room was left for qualitative research. Much of the resultant research was non-decipherable and irrelevant.

Then, what should be the direction of comics scholarship? Using elements in the communication paradigm (communicator, message, channel, and audience), comics studies fall short at every stage of the continuum, except the message, which receives considerable attention. Though biographies and profiles of comics creators have become more plentiful since the 1990s, another important component of the communicator stage — the publishers — is virgin research territory. Political economy studies of comics are rare (examples being McAllister, Sewell, and Gordon, 2001; Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975; Howe, 2012; and Barker, 1989), with little known about comics industries — the owners, their connections to other media and corporations, the control they exercise and their ideologies; government support and/or hindrance, etc. Few studies have been done on the channels. W e know far too little on how comics are distributed, who controls these channels, their modus operandi, the implications of digitalization, etc. The situation is not much better concerning the audience. Not much is known about readers and their motivations, although, in mid-20th Century, much was written about potential effects of comic books upon readers. What little research that does exist usually is not based on representative and meaningful samples — a handful of fans, visitors to a comic book store, etc. Chapman (2013), citing the British situation, lamented the lack of knowledge about readers, saying,

we cannot assume that the small sample of letters published in comics are representative of the editors' postbags. … moreover, even such basic information as sales and circulation are elusive. … Who read comics, how did they

respond to them, and what were the questions of readership and reception [?]

Among other needs are more research into forms of comic art, besides comic books and graphic novels, such as newspaper comic strips, political or editorial cartoons, magazine gag cartoons, advertising and cartooning, and humor/cartoon periodicals; increased study of genres besides superhero, for example, sports, adventure, romance, school, etc.; more attempts to bring women cartoonists up from the footnotes of comics research; archival research in the growing collections of comics works (rather than repeating long-held and sometimes undocumented information and opinion), and what I have called for since the 1980s, emphasis on studies of comics in non-Euro-American regions.

Lefèvre (2010) sees a gap in comparative studies, acknowledging that such research is usually handicapped by lack of language skills and cultural awareness. A solution, of course, is international collaboration between researchers of several countries, as evidenced in books by Berndt (2010), Denson, Meyer, and Stein (2013), and Lent (1999a; 1996, 2001; 2004; 2005; 2009), among a few others. Unfortunately, often those who are qualified to do comparative or international studies (e.g. bi- or multi-lingual foreign graduate students studying in the U.S. or Europe) opt out in favor of researching more popular topics about which there is an abundance of work (e.g. Maus, Watchmen, Alan Moore, Alison Bechtel, etc.).

In conclusion, compared to the 1990s and before, comics studies are in a much better position today: where a generation ago, there were many voids (empty spaces); today, more likely, there are gaps (intervals), which represents substantial progress in a relatively short time.

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