Comics' Mobility Across Time, Space, and Media: Introduction

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Iɴ comic art as in any other area of cultural activity, every text (widely understood) draws on and integrates in one way or another previously existing texts, inscribing itself into an ever-evolving intertextual web of meaning. Moving beyond such an ontological notion of intertextuality first proposed by Julia Kristeva, towards a single text's potential multiplicity, we know that any comic can itself take on a variety of different forms and catalyze other texts, each one of which, in turn, is bound to generate multiple readings. This pluri-dimensional openness of cultural products has been conceptualized from different angles.

Reception theory and reader-response criticism (see, e.g., Iser; Jauß; Fish) emphasized the indeterminacy of meaning of texts—often with a narrow focus on fictional literature—that were otherwise assumed to be stable in themselves, drawing attention to the crucial role of the reader in the process of meaning making. Textual scholarship shifted the focus towards the textual condition itself as one of "change and variance" (McGann 9), drawing further attention to "textual materials which are not regularly studied", beyond what Gérard Genette considered under the label of *paratexts*, such as "typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to [. . .] 'the text as such'" (McGann 13). Similarly driven by the aim to dispel the idea of texts as closed, self-contained entities, but in explicit contrast to the indeterminacy of meaning outlined above, John Bryant declared the textual condition as "fundamentally fluid not because specific words lend themselves to different meanings or that different minds will interpret the words fixed on a page in different ways, but because writers, editors, publishers, translators, digesters, and adapters change those words materially" (4). This notion of fluidity was still conceived against the horizon of a narrow concept of literature as a body of semiotically monomodal works of imagination. But it is clear that for comics, where text and image typically exist alongside each other interacting in multiple and diverse ways, the possibilities for material change are exponentially greater and more complex. As comics take shape in their real-world contexts of production, transmission, and consumption, the fluidity at the heart of the textual condition manifests itself in different forms and degrees of mobility.

The various genetic lines along which comics are frequently traced—the Bayeux Tapestry, William Hogarth, or Rodolphe Töpffer, to name some popular candidates (see, e.g., McCloud 12–17)—ultimately point towards a form of visual narrative that resists essentialist definitions and that functions best as a paradigm to which individual comic works are connected by way of family resemblance. Whether we consider comics a system with "an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning" (Groensteen 2), or conceive of the medium in terms of a visual language with "some sort of constituent structure analogous to that of [human] language" (Cohn et al. 69; see also Bateman and Wildfeuer), comics have the capacity to challenge generic conventions, as well as to adapt and integrate other visual media such as photography, painting, or architecture, and imprint different timelines across media.

The articles in this themed issue explore the processes, devices, and strategies that characterize comics' mobility across time, space, and media. Mobility is understood here to include all processes of transformation undergone by comics in their journey across history (time), cultural and linguistic boundaries (space), and different forms of artistic production (media). These three axes of comics' mobility are often interconnected but have so far mostly been explored in isolation and from the perspective of a single discipline or language.

Comics' travel through time has not been explored with the same frequency and analytical depth as some other facets of the medium's mobility. Here, aspects that may in part appear peripheral to the text, such as different textual and paratextual environments in anthologies and re-editions, changes to the artwork and format, and practices of re-drawing deserve closer attention. The expansion of the context of production and consumption of graphic narratives beyond their original historical or socio-cultural bounds through different forms of intertextuality and intermediality goes beyond the narrated and narrative times of discourse: citation, reproduction, remediation, reimagination are among the linguistic and graphic devices that implicitly or explicitly reframe time and space.

The conditions of the production, distribution, and reception of comics in an increasingly global marketplace have changed substantially since the nineteenth century. Not only has the predominant publication medium shifted from newspapers and magazines to albums and books, but the quality of the paper and printing also opens different travel routes. Collections, for example, force changes in format when works initially produced for magazines of a certain size are published in the ubiquitous form of today's graphic novel; and series originally conceived as comic strips with a loose thematic unity are now often marketed as unified works.

The reception and recovery of historical comics can further involve a touch of nostalgia or irony for readers. Canonical works of comic art have different reception venues than pulps, but both genres are being recovered for globalized markets. New digital formats such as the Amazon-owned platform Comixology or the distribution through social media create forms of mobility that are yet to be explored, but that seem to be increasingly the norm rather than the exception in the institutional universe of comic production, distribution, and consumption.

Last but not least, the way we explore comics as readers across time and space is facilitated and conditioned by processes of cultural selection and institutional gatekeeping (see Williams).

The opportunities and challenges arising from comics translation and from the wide-spread practice of comics adaptation (especially from narrative prose and into film) have received considerable attention in recent years (see, e.g., Zanettin; Altenberg and Owen; Borodo; Mitaine et al.; Schmitz-Emans and Bachmann; Trabert et al.). Language moves across its own temporalities and spaces whether through diatopic and diastratic variations or as indexical forms of its use. The constructed orality ("oralidad fingida") (Brumme, ch. 3; see also Pfister, ch. 4) of comics establishes a specific temporal and spatial language imprint. However, the verbal element of comics can be transformed across space and time in different ways. Firstly, from their early beginnings, comics have been subject to translation across socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such processes, by showing known and unknown practices in the target language, are in dialogue with the original language, imposing certain restrictions. These range from the different length of words in the source and target languages to the manipulation of visually coded scenarios of the linguistic landscapes in which the plot takes place. Secondly, translation has an interrelation with the visual aspect of comics that, in principle, can also be subject to modifications. Changes to the lettering, onomatopoeia, and proper names, for example, are far from uncommon. A special case in this context is intralingual translation, where a comic's verbal element is transformed to reach a different audience within the same language—for example, by translating an Argentine comic for a Spanish audience—or to reach greater neutrality and intercomprehensibility across a linguistic community.

The transformations involved in adapting comics to and from other media have predominantly been studied in relation to comics adaptations of literary classics. This focus reflects the fact that until relatively recently, comics' relationship with other media has for the most part been conceptualized as derivative and unidirectional. However, in recent years the lines of inquiry have shifted, largely abandoning the paradigm of fidelity criticism inherited from (anglophone) film studies (see Johnson) and paying more attention to the long-standing practice of adapting comics to other media. The numerous blockbuster films based on DC and Marvel superheroes are a prominent manifestation of the relative ease of the circulation of story material and specific texts within the realm of popular culture. But more complex and sophisticated comics and comic characters like Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*, Hergé's *Tintin*, the less-widely known Spanish take on superhero comics *El vecino* [*The Neighbour*], by Santiago García and Pepo Pérez, or the forthcoming *García!*, by Santiago García and Luis Bustos, have equally found their way onto the screen.

It is important to note here that the cultural hierarchy that continues to regulate the flow of adaptations between literature and comics—a flow that is for the most part a unidirectional downflow: from the top of the hierarchy towards the bottom—does not in the same way govern the relationship between different me-

dia formats within popular culture. And the rise to respectability of a certain type of comic over the last few decades—generally under the label of *graphic novel*—has certainly done its bit to erode long-standing assumptions about comics' place in the hierarchy of cultural products (see García; Baetens and Frey). When exploring adaptations in their context of production, dissemination, and consumption, the concept of the *adaptation industry* introduced by Simone Murray with regard to film adaptations of literature can usefully be applied to comics as well. Here, however, the complexity of the processes, devices, and strategies is even greater, involving some stakeholder groups not considered by Murray for literary adaptation. Research into these aspects of comics' mobility is still in its infancy.

The Articles in This Issue

THE first contribution, "Reading Comics in Time", explores the processes of consumption and transmission of mainstream adventure strips from the angle of their multi-layered temporality. Jan Baetens argues that most reading theories fall short of providing a satisfactory account of the internal temporality of the act of reading, neglecting the experience of *reading in action*. For the reading of comics, Baetens highlights the dialectic tension between a lack and an excess of time. On one hand, the fast-paced consumption of mainstream comic strips is characterized by close attention to the plot and a rhythmic suspension and fragmentation because of the predominant instalment format; in conjunction with the relative stability of the medium's formal structure, these characteristics of the reading experience bestow the comics medium with a quasi-timelessness. On the other hand, the repetitive nature of comics reading—be it as an individual or transgenerational phenomenon, or in the form of "remembered reading"—, according to Baetens, "burden[s] comics with an excess of time" (6). The second part of this contribution considers the mechanisms that govern the cultural transmission of comics over time. Here Baetens distinguishes between institutional, mediological, and aesthetic processes of gatekeeping. From an institutional perspective, comics' cultural transmission is conditioned by educational, political, and industrial agendas. Baetens argues that even if institutional gatekeepers favour a comic's cultural transmission, the unaffordability of the product can still prevent it from finding a readership. From a medialogical angle, while Baetens considers comics to meet the conditions for long-term survival in an ideal way, he also draws attention to the friction between some extreme forms of commercialization on one hand, and the retreat of certain comic authors into elite culture, on the other. From an aesthetic perspective, finally, in Baetens's assessment the postmodern appreciation of the zany, the cute, and the interesting—at the expense of the emphasis on beauty and originality—benefits the transmission of comics. Baetens closes his reflections highlighting the ways in which comics travel in time not only as an institutionalized aesthetic medium, but as part of a wider cultural context that is implicit in the very act of reading and in the way we read comics over time.

The second article, "Two Distant Soils: Colleen Doran's Authorial Journey", traces the external and internal history of US-American Colleen Doran's science-fiction comic *A Distant Soil* over almost four decades. Isabelle Licari-Guillaume explores the impact of external factors and aesthetic influences on Doran's development as an artist, drawing particular attention to the challenges and legal disputes arising from the precarious conditions while working for the independent publisher WaRP, which first released her serialized narrative from 1983 to 1986. One of the article's central claims is that, unlike certain US-American comic artists who directly borrowed from manga before its international boom, Doran's own mangaesque style is indigenous to the United States. Licari-Guillaume argues that, while Doran "is fluent in the manga graphic idiom" (24), she developed her own artistic voice in relation to a diverse range of influences and in parallel to manga, rather than directly influenced by it. The different versions of *A Distant Soil* show the imprint of authorial and editorial interventions in relation to both the author's artistic development and her changing position in the art and comic field, allowing us to better understand some of the struggles in 1980s independent comic publishing and pointing towards the close connection between an artist's position within the institution and gain of cultural capital, on one hand, and the creative and technical choices available to them, on the other hand.

In the third contribution, "Translating *Irmina* (2014), by Barbara Yelin, from German into Spanish", Itziar Hernández Rodilla provides an inside perspective on the transformations the graphic novel underwent in its journey from Germany to Spain. She highlights the importance of making the different geographical and socio-cultural settings of the story—England, Germany, and Barbados—accessible for a Spanish-speaking audience; spanning fifty years in total, each one of these settings corresponds to a different stage in the protagonist's life, which in turn is linked to a particular historical context: pre-War London, Nazi Berlin, and 1980s Barbados, respectively. Hernández Rodilla emphasizes that, while the publication format of the translation remained unchanged and no alterations to the artwork were possible, the linguistic adaptation required modifications that dialogue in different ways with the three settings of the story. The verbal encoding of the stages in the protagonist's life demanded strategies of negotiation with the visual material that contrast with those found in the source text. The fact that the original text is firmly rooted in German culture and language required a careful and flexible approach to rendering the constructed orality of the dialogue across the varying socio-cultural contexts. While on a story level, the protagonist's movement through geographical space is inseparable from that through time, the journey from Germany to Spain of the text itself implies a new centre of gravity, which is superimposed onto the story. Relative to this new centre, linguistic microdetails and socio-cultural parameters of the Spanish translation establish new relations.

Federico Zanettin's article "Global Comic Book Heroes: Intra- and Inter-Cultural Translations of Tintin, Asterix and Paperinik Comics" draws on semiotic approaches to discuss examples of translation from three globally successful comic series. In so doing, he reviews the different kinds of transformations that enable these sto-

ries to travel both across linguistic and socio-cultural boundaries and through time. Like Baetens in his article, Zanettin stresses the historicity of these transformations. More specifically, regarding the infamous Tintin adventure "Tintin au Congo" he argues that, when looking at the processes of re-editing and translation over time, translation is neither linear nor unidirectional, but involves a complex socio-cultural interpretation. Turning to an intermedial reference in "Astérix légionnaire" to the painting "The Raft of the Medusa", by Théodore Géricault, Zanettin observes how some translation strategies manage to maintain the wordplay and corresponding reference, while others translate literally at the risk of losing the referentiality. The understanding of the parody in the text—in the translation as much as in the original French comic—depends on the understanding of the intermedial reference to the painting and its socio-cultural context. Assumptions regarding the target readers' world-knowledge therefore weigh on the linguistic transformation and its interpretation with respect to the visual element. Finally, Zanettin reconstructs the interrelations between Donald Duck and his Italian alter ego Paperinik. The character is seen as a composite that integrates multiple influences, from US-American superhero comics to the early-twentieth-century fictional character Fantomas, created by French writers Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre. Characters, however, are constantly updated, re-edited in different markets, and changed according to decisions that include adaptation to a diverse socio-cultural environment and to changing times.

Pascal Lefèvre maps comic publication formats across a range of countries and through time, analyzing the impact of format changes on the adaptation into Swedish of a popular British comic series from the 1960s. In his article "'Modesty Blaise' Cut up in Sweden: The Challenges of Adapting a Newspaper Comic Strip to the Comic Book Format", he finds that the aspect ratio of daily comic strips decreased over the course of the twentieth century and outlines the multiple constraints changes to the publication format entail. With regard to "Modesty Blaise", he shows that the Swedish translation opts for a format adapted from the US-American market to a Swedish magazine. This decision implies restrictions leading to the elimination of multiple layers of information along several axes: lettering, aspect ratio, and the cropping, extension, and deletion of panels. Because of the incompatibility of the Swedish magazine format with that of the British comic strip, one third of the panels in the original material were modified, which leads to a significant transformation of the text's discourse structure: one that poses the question of the artists' right to see the integrity of their work preserved. These effects of comics mobility across time and space, in turn, highlight publishers' responsibility regarding the transformation to different socio-cultural contexts and markets.

The next article, "Transmediality against Transphobia: The Politics of Transsexual Self-Portraiture in Fumettibrutti's Work between Comics and Photography", focuses on the autobiographical work of Italian comic artist Fumettibrutti (Josephine Yole Signorelli). Nicoletta Mandolini argues that the 2019 graphic novel *P. La mia adolescenza trans* forms the cornerstone of a transmedia narrative about Fumet-

tibrutti's own experience as a transsexual woman. She shows how the artist expands the scope of her comic book by posting selfies and comic vignettes on the social media platform Instagram, putting the autobiographical narrative in dialogue with wider issues of (trans)gender representation, discrimination, and abuse. According to Mandolini, the tensions and contradictions found in the self-representation of the female subject in Fumettibrutti across different platforms are constitutive of postfeminist aesthetics. While rejecting gender dualities, the artist manages to stage and question the politics of desire in a heteronormative context in which the transgender is projected as taboo. Fumettibrutti's gender transition is performed both in the diegesis of the comic and through the artist's presence on Instagram. This co-construction of the autobiographical self through the androgynous portrayal in the comic, on one hand, and gender-normative erotic Instagram selfies, on the other, implicitly questions the referentiality of the photographic medium and turns Fumettibrutti's work into a critique of simplifying approaches to gender representation.

Questions surrounding the representation of gender identity are also at the centre of the article "Mobile Masculinities: Changing Representations of the Gay Male Form in Comics over Time". Spanning a period of about fifty years, Garry McLaughlin takes a look at how the male gay body has been represented in three comics from different historical and socio-cultural contexts. He argues that, although the varying approaches to representing gay masculinity do not directly respond to socio-political developments, they are indicative of changes in the acceptance of models of gay masculinity. While in the 1960s the camp sensibility found in certain gag strips, for example, could be seen as a political stance against existing heteronormative models—with subtexts that recreated and re-appropriated social stereotypes—, the subsequent AIDS crisis largely put an end to gay sexual liberation, exacerbating feelings of shame and guilt. McLaughlin shows that the absence of the gay male figure in Fabrice Neaud's autobiographical comic *Émile* (2000) is an extreme way of dealing with the challenges involved in representing the figure of the gay man in a context of increasing identity politics and "non-localized, transtemporal trauma" (118). The final example of the corpus, *Greek Love*, from 2014, draws on Ancient mythological figures, casting them as openly gay lovers in an Arcadian utopia of sexual liberation. McLaughlin sees this fictionalization of gay sexuality in a largely realistic style as a counterproposal to the socio-cultural reality of the early 2000s. Throughout, the author draws attention to the importance of the changing circumstances of comics' distribution for a full understanding of the medium's precarity and inaccessibility, in particular regarding queer comics.

Comics' engagement with the passing of time and the medium's use as a means of reconstructing transgenerational memory is the focus of the final contribution, "Remediating Photography in Second-Generation Graphic Narratives: Haptic Imaginaries and Genealogies", by Natalie Dupré and Inge Lanslots. The authors explore in detail the intermedial strategies and their effects in three recent graphic memoirs (*Palachinche*, *Mendel's Daughter*, *Two Cents Plain*) whose narrators strive to

recover their respective family histories through the reproduction of photographs, personal documents, and archival materials. In these texts, the incorporated media and materials stand in for the historical contexts recreated, lending authenticity to the narrative. However, the authors argue that the many instances of intermediality transcend their referential function, charging the narrative with additional layers of meaning that arise from the narrator's emotional response to recovered haptic, olfactory, and gustatory experiences embedded in the texts' intermediality. For the narrators of these graphic memoirs, the multi-sensory experiences prove more powerful in connecting them with their family history than "visual repositories of family memory" (144) on their own. On their journey into their family's past, the second-generation narrators all draw heavily on photographs; but as Dupré and Lanslots show, it is ultimately the visual and verbal "nesting" of images that unleashes the affective responses and corresponding sense of connection and belonging.

I<small>N</small> his seminal study *The Textual Condition*, Jerome J. McGann affirmed: "What is textually possible cannot be theoretically established. What can be done is to sketch, through close and highly particular case studies, the general framework within which textuality is constrained to exhibit its transformations" (30). The articles in this issue of *New Readings* set out to examine some of comics' specific transformations from the vantage point of the medium's multidimensional mobility with the aim of advancing our understanding of the textual possibilities of this art form, looking beyond the universe of anglophone mainstream superhero comics.

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