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Introduction: Comics|Histories – Texts, Methods, Resources

We, the editors, of the newly founded book series, titled *Comics|Histories*, at Rombach publishing house in Germany (Rombach Wissenschaft), are absolutely thrilled to present the first volume in a series of forthcoming projects focusing on comics and histories. To start, we would like to not only explain the structure and content of the present volume. These opening pages are also meant as a preamble to the new series, explaining its purpose and goals as well as serving as an invitation, addressed to you – graduates, post-graduates, early career scholars, adjunct faculty, tenured professors, independent scholars, and non-academics – to submit your future research projects as part of the *Comics|Histories series.* Your submissions can include anything from monographs, anthologies, edited volumes to PhD dissertations and post-doctoral theses).

But first: Why a new book series on comics that focuses on questions revolving 'histories,' and why now?

The international scholarship on the medium of comics has grown extensively, in particular in the past twenty years, in and across different academic disciplines (see, for example, Lent, "The Winding"; cf. also Aldama; Badman; Edlich, Meyer, and Stein; Domsch, Hassler-Forest, and Vanderbeke).[1] Next to literary and cultural studies, film and media studies, or foreign language pedagogy, social-science disciplines like gender studies and queer studies, and, more recently, cognitive and brain research have begun to engage critically with comics and other forms of graphic narratives (in this context see, for instance, Giddens, *Critical*, and Giddens, *Graphic*; see also Hatfield and Beaty; Steirer; Cohn). Publishing houses such as Routledge, Palgrave, De Gruyter, and Bloomsbury, to name but a few, and diverse University Presses, too, have launched book series on comics such as, for instance, *Studies in Comics and Cartoons* (Ohio State Uni-

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1 Here, we would also like to highlight two sections in the newly published *The Cambridge Companion to Comics*, edited by Maaheen Ahmed: The "Introduction" provides a short, very useful, overview on the scholarship on the history and evolution of the medium of comics. The "Chronology" in her edited volume offers a helpful timeline of some of the most impactful primary texts since the appearance of William Hogarth's serialized plates titled *A Harlot's Progress* in the early eighteenth century.

versity Press), or *Comics Culture* (Rutgers University Press). Scholarship on comics is likewise published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Inks*, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *Studies in Comics*, *European Comic Art*, or *Manga Kenkyu* (*The Journal of the JSSCC*), as well as the Stockholm Studies in Media Arts Japan, and special issues on comics have been published in a variety of scholarly journals in different fields of research. Online journals like *Comics Grid*, and other open access formats have furthermore contributed to the increasing visibility of Comics Studies. Last but not least, the scholarship on comics sees an increase in MA theses as well as dissertation theses, and post-doctoral projects being made available in print and in digital form. Our new book series *Comics|Histories* positions itself within this growing field of Comics Studies. It distinguishes itself from other journal/book series in four different, yet interconnected, ways:

First, as distinct from the bulk of comics research, which tends to prioritize contemporary productions, our series spotlights *histories and genealogies*, or preconditions of what appears as comics and other forms of graphic narratives and sequential art today.[2] This includes a revision of the wide spectrum of what is now regarded as comics (caricature, cartoons, graphic novel, etc.), and a broadening of view that is important not only retrospectively, but also prospectively, i.e., at a moment in time when modern media identities are dissolving (in this context see, for instance, Thomas). Monographs and edited volumes in the new series should thus offer historicized narratives of the variety of graphic forms of expression and experience from the nineteenth century (the beginning of comics as a mass medium) up until today, the conditions under which specific opti-

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2 In this context see, for instance, the two volumes on *The History of the Comic Strip* (1973; 1990) by art historian David Kunzle, a pioneer in comics histories, as well as his essay on "Goethe and Caricature: From Hogarth to Töpffer." Furthermore, see Thierry Smolderen's insightful study on *The Origins of Comics* (2014), Roger Sabin's chapter "The Pioneers" in his *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels* (1996), or the 1998 volume *Forging a New Medium*, co-edited by Charles Diereck and Pascal Lefèvre. Moreover, see Pramod K. Nayar, on the history of the *Indian Graphic Novel* (2016). An early study on comic book characters and films based on comic books and comic strips is Luis Gasca's (unfortunately long forgotten) *Los comics en pantalla* (1965); on the relationships between painting and comics see also *La Pintura en El Cómic*, co-authored by Gasca an Asier Mensuro (2014). Here, see also Blanchard (1969). See also Deneyer; as well as Groensteen, *M. Töpffer*. For an overview on *Southeast Asian Cartoon Art* see Lent, *Southeast*. For a well-researched overview on manga and the state of its history and study see Shige (CJ) Suzuki (2023) *Manga: A Critical Guide.* Commenting on the historicity of manga are Jaqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity" (2008), and Go Ito, "Manga History Viewed Through Proto-characteristics (2006).

ons emerged, and the affordances generated by the respective forms. Tracing/re-examining the processes, technologies, and transnational 'actants' involved in the emergence and evolution of the medium of comics will allow for enhanced knowledge of specific configurations in the past (and what they meant) and a better understanding of the possible reconfigurations in the present moment and their affordances.

Second, the book series *Comics|Histories* welcomes in particular projects that engage with both theories and methods employed in Comics Studies so far, and crucial *disciplinary concerns of history* (as specified in, for example, literary, cultural, media, or art history). While there is already a significant number of publications that foreground representations *of* history in comics, our book series seeks to highlight comics-specific contributions *to* history. This includes consideration of critical issues that are prevalent in research on contemporary comics, namely, intersectionality, postcolonialism, or agency in user cultures, in their relation to the aesthetic and cultural media specificities of comics (here see, for example, Gardner; Mikkonen; Sommerland and Wictorin; see also Einwächter, Ossa, Sina, and Stollfuß; on intersectional perspectives on comics see, for instance, Cox; Quesenberry; Scott and Fawaz; see also the recently published volume *Identity and History in Non-Anglophone Comics*, edited by Harriet E.H. Earle, and Martin Lund; on postcolonialism and/in Comics Studies see, for example, Mehta and Mukheri; Wictorin). Research projects will furthermore tackle theories and methods used for historical analysis, the archives consulted during research (and their availability and accessibility), and the value attributed to (online) resources. In brief, upcoming projects in the series will address the questions of how the history of the medium of comics is researched and how researchers have come to their objects (here see, for instance, Whitted).

Third, and in addition to the two trajectories just outlined, we invite projects that address comics from a *transnational*, while culturally situated, perspective, without privileging national histories of the medium in the narrower sense, i.e., as confined to areas that are regarded as having strong comic cultures, like the North American, Franco-Belgian, or Japanese publication markets and the evolution of the medium of comics up until today.[3] By spotlighting the transnational entanglements of the medium of

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3   Studies on transnational comics histories include, for example, Beers Fägersten, Nordenstan, Romu, and Wallin Wictorin; Brienza; Chiu; Denson, Meyer, and Stein; Glaude and Odaert; Groensteen, "Challenges"; Kesper-Biermann and Severin-Barboutie.

comics (in relation to, for instance, practices of authorship, questions of copyright, aesthetics, publication contexts, channels and modes of distribution) we aim to put in the spotlight those *Comics/Histories* that have so far been under-researched. The increased interconnectedness and digitization of cultures means not just that new forms emerge and others are at risk of being forgotten, but on the contrary, that, for example, through the digitization of library archives, the study of historical resources on comics becomes ever more accessible and will hopefully lead to more insight and original scholarship. In addition, with the incredible amount of digitized material, research using traditional methods is no longer sufficient. Digital working methods and techniques are becoming increasingly important in this context. The same applies in particular to born digital material, which on the one hand has hardly been archived so far and is thus subject to rapid changes that traditional research can hardly keep up with. This raises questions about the possibilities of stronger cooperation between fans, practitioners, researchers and archives - and thus also about new forms of documentation.

Over the past decades there has been a growing research (but also media) interest in Japanese manga and related genres, anime, games, as well as reader, consumer, and fan activity based on these. Suzuki Shige and Ronald Stewart's 2023 *Manga, A Critical Guide* (Bloomsbury Comics Studies) offers the most up to date guide on Japanese manga as a whole. Manga Studies is a well-established field within Japan with its own academic association, the Japan Society for Studies in Cartoons and Comics (JSSCC, est. 2001), and increasingly across the world. In comparison, other East Asian comics, like those of China, Taiwan, and Korea are comparatively under-researched. The same can be said for those of Southeast Asian countries, like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Asian countries like Nepal, India, and Pakistan. In Japan, the members of the government funded Women's Manga Research Project, under the leadership of Ogi Fusami, have been conducting research on comics (in Japanese referred to as manga as well, in spite of not being Japanese) in other parts of Asia, through the lens of gender studies, resulting in the collection *Women's Manga in Asia and Beyond: Uniting Different Cultures and Identities* (2020, Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels), edited by Ogi and her collaborators Kazumi Nagaike and Rebecca Suter, and John A. Lent. Lent too, often in collaboration with Singaporean comics critic Cheng Tju Lim, has frequently published books, papers and articles on comics from areas of Asia not limited to Japan. Prominent archives of manga material like

Kyoto International Manga Museum and the Yonezawa Yoshihiro Memorial Library of Manga and Subcultures, at Meiji university in Tokyo, are developed their own digital and non-digital archiving methods optimized for materials in the Japanese language, while collaborating with foreign researchers and comic artists on exhibitions featuring comics from outside of Japan in their many forms. Kyoto International Manga Museum organized an exhibition and a series of events featuring comics artist from francophone African countries in the fall of 2023, and in October of the same year, Yonezawa Yoshihiro Memorial Library organized an exhibition on the history of Taiwanese comics. In this series, we hope to make our own contribution and publish more original research that covers under researched areas in comics studies.

Last but not least, we call for papers that put the spotlight on the *historiography* of the expanding field of Comics Studies, in other words, the inter- and transdisciplinary research on comics as an object of analysis in itself. Multidisciplinary assessments of the field and its practices of research and publishing, and author- and editorship promise to produce new insights into processes of knowledge formation, as well as the power relations involved. The series invites monographs and edited volumes by researchers in a variety of disciplines on topics that include but are not limited to: historical comics research (i.e. historiography of comics, including the relation of modern comics to caricature, cartoons, picture books, animation, digital art etc.); critical reflection on theoretical frameworks of historical research in relation to (in its applicability to) comics studies; methods and tools of historical comics research; conditions of historical comics research (i.e. resources, materials, archives and libraries); digital humanities for comics historiography; transnational, transregional, and transcultural comics histories; representative comics historians and their work in context (in this context see, for instance, Robbins). We are hoping that the collection of (ongoing) research projects introduced in this volume will spark readers' curiosity, and ignite ambition to explore the history of comics further and in many-varied ways.

Against this backdrop, the present volume brings together altogether nine chapters, addressing questions relating to practices of canonization, periodization, and digitization, as well as providing historical perspectives on a variety of humor magazines and newspapers, issues of adaptation and remediation in different parts of the world and in different cultures. It is the result of an international conference on Comics|Histories, which took place online (because of the Covid-19 pandemic) in July 2021. In order

to offer a variety of approaches on comics histories, contributors to the present volume include a number of international experts from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, e.g. literary and cultural studies, media studies, history, children's and youth literature research, computational studies and digital humanities.

The edited volume is divided into four parts. **Part I: Re-Reading** *Punch* **Magazine** has two chapters, starting with Anu Sugatahn's "The Emergence of Comic Art and Graphic Narratives in India." The chapter unfolds the print history of comic art in India. Although the visual narrative or graphic story-telling tradition in India exists in various forms like petroglyphs, Indian murals, *kalighat* paintings of Bengal, *kalamkari* art of Andhra Pradesh, *patua* picture recitation of Bengal, or *Phad* painting of Rajasthan, the beginning of comic art can be traced back to the nineteenth century colonial India when cartoons and caricatures first appeared in print media. The emergence of cartoons as a cultural commodity of colonial modernity reflects comics medium's historical and cultural patterns associated with the urban space in terms of its readership, content and production. The form of the cartoon was modified and appropriated by Indians (natives) as a reaction against the British rule. It became an agency (which was neither institutional like classical art forms of India nor imitational as a copy of the cultural imports such as cricket, oil painting and English language) that emerged from the interactions and intersections with the Empire which could not be commodified or controlled. The circulation of cartoons and caricatures during colonial times further paved way for the rise of comic strips, comic books and graphic novels in India. The second chapter is Mohit Abrol's "Unpacking the *Punch*: A Genealogical Account of *Punch* Cartoons in Nineteenth-Century India." As the title suggests, the chapter provides a genealogical account of *Punch* cartoons in India in the nineteenth century. Abrol focuses on questions of representation, mimeticism, the subversive potential of cartoons, and cartoons as forms of resistance – in the context of the British rule in nineteenth-century India. By doing so, Abrol aims to offer a critical reflection on "traditional historical accounts based on the binary approaches of the colonizer and the colonized, the Europe and the Other, the center and the periphery, the vocal and the silent leave behind" (###).

The first chapter in **Part II: (Re-)Productions** is by Jean-Matthieu Méon. The basic premise of his paper "Untangling History and Patrimonialization: Woodcut Novel Reprints and Jean Davallon's Model," is that if comics history is established through academic researches, it is also

largely dependent on other sources. Reprints, reviews and awards (such as Angoulême's *Prix du patrimoine*) all contribute to current conceptions about comics' past. In considering this past, it is thus hard to distinguish between what comes from historical research and what comes from patrimonialization, i.e. the social process of selecting elements of the past to give them a new status in the present. Méon discusses the usefulness of Jean Davallon's communication model of patrimonialization (2006) for comics historiography, illustrating it with one specific example. This is followed by Stéphane Collignon's "The First Studio Productions." With reference to Lawrence Streicher 1967 essay, in which he argued that while caricature, cartoons, comic strips, and animated cartoons appeared historically in that order, they have since existed together and are connected in a series of creations that he describes as 'para-artistic,' Collignon aims to have a closer look at this 'comic-strip connection.' As Collignon observes, animation pioneers never hid their printed roots, on the contrary, it even was a selling point. It was not animated films that the first cinema goers came to see, but 'moving comic strips.' It would take about a decade for early animation to begin to develop its own aesthetic – one that would consider the specificities of the medium. However, upon analysis it is clear that early studio animation always kept its print ancestor's key characteristics at its core. In his chapter, Collignon argues that studying the aesthetics set up at the turn of the 19th and early 20th century by caricature and print cartoon artists, is essential to understand the birth of animated cartoon aesthetics. In a limited context of study on the reception of animated cartoon aesthetics, the author claims that it is possible to forge a theoretical model of animated aesthetics based on the study of caricature and comics, a model that can then be re-injected into a more global understanding of graphic narration.

The next section focuses on **"War [in] Comics"** (Part III of this volume), which consists of three chapters. Paul Malone opens the section with a chapter entitled "The Forgotten World of Vienna's Interwar Comic Strips." He zooms in on early 20th-century European newspapers which served highly literate, linguistically uniform readerships, paying special attention to comic strips with continuing characters produced by Austrian artists in the Viennese press between the World Wars. These strips appeared in papers spanning the political spectrum; a few appeared daily or weekly for over a decade. Although a couple of these strips, notably Ludwig Kmoch's *Tobias Seicherl*, have been researched, most of them remain unknown, forming a research gap in European comics history, which

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Malone's chapter attempts to fill. This is followed by Anja Lange and her chapter titled "Probing the Limits of Representation: Serhii Zakharov's *Dira.*" Lange examines how the graphic novel by the authors and illustrators Serhii Zakharov and Serhii Mazurkevych negotiates the occupied territories of the East of Ukraine, and how it tells their story about being captured in the East of Ukraine. Lange provides a close reading of a variety of artistic devices such as focalization, and addresses questions of metafiction, representations of trauma, autobiography, and issues of memory and testimony. The final chapter in this part is Sylvain Lesage's "How the Algerian War of Independence Gave Birth to the French Graphic Novel: Coral's Journal d'un embastillé, 1962." The starting point for his analysis is that in the histories of French "comic art," the shift to "adult" comics is generally identified around a few key publications such as, for instance, *Astérix* by Goscinny and Uderzo, and *Barbarella* by Jean-Claude Forest. Or these histories would place the shift a bit later, and would focus on Pratt's *Ballade de la mer salée* (1975), Moebius' *Bandard fou* (1974). None of these histories, however, ever mentions the existence of Coral's *Journal d'un suspect*. Published in 1963, just after the independence of Algeria, the book is a graphic memoir of a member of the OAS (Organisation de l'armée secrète), an organization of die-hard French colonialists ready to take the arms against the French army and the "traitors" who abandoned Algeria. Half-series of caricatures, half-graphic memoir, the book offers a recounting of the Algerian independence war. In many ways, it could constitute a solid candidate for the shift to "adult" comics. Understanding why it is systematically forgotten helps us understand the mechanisms of production of a comics canon. In France, the canon was delineated along the pages of a handful of comics magazines, and carried out through the republication in "albums."

The concluding part of this volume is titled **Periodization, Canonization, Digitization**. Mark Hibbett's "Periodizing 'The Marvel Age' Using the Production of Culture Approach" deals with challenges of periodization in Comics Studies, focusing on the genre of the American superhero comics, which has been attempted to be categorized into a system of 'ages.' Hibbett's paper suggests using the term 'The Marvel Age' instead. By using a comics-specific reading of Richard Peterson's *Five Constraints On The Production Of Culture* and particularly the methods described in Casey Brienza's *Cultures Of Comics Work*, Hibbett shows how 'The Marvel Age' can be empirically defined as covering American superhero comics with cover dates between November 1961 and October 1987.

His chapter also proposes three distinct sub-periods of 'Creation,' 'Chaos' and 'Consolidation,' and gives brief examples of how these definitions can be used as part of a data-driven corpus analysis within the field of comics studies. This is followed by the co-written chapter "On German Comic Traditions: An Explorative Approach to Digital Comics Historiography" by Felix Giesa, Alexander Dunst, and Rita Hartl. Their framing argument is that a recurring topos in the historiography of national comic traditions is the question of the independence of existing styles, even to the point of claiming that comics were invented here or there. However, global distribution channels and transnational collaboration complicate such accounts, which is why we will try to approach this question by using a distant-reading approach. In particular, we plan to focus on publications dating from the end of World War II to the 1970s, which represents the first major development phase of German-language comics. The titles from this era, around 35.000 volumes, consists largely of translations from English and French (including the United States and Belgium), but also of original productions from East and West Germany. The starting point for this study are the holdings of the Frankfurt Comic Archive, where a nearly complete collection of 70,000 German comics is held. In a first step, a sample of approximately 1.700 pages has been digitized with the aim of testing automatic recognition efforts that were developed as part of a BMBF-funded research project based at the universities of Paderborn and Potsdam from 2015-2020. These methods aim at identifying panels, speech balloons, and captions, as well as recognizing the text included in these comics pages. If these efforts are successful, they may allow for computational analysis of large amounts of comics text, tracing the historical evolution of comics layout across several decades, and comparing several national traditions present in Germany in translation. Despite having been developed for a corpus of North American graphic novels, the results of the test sample are encouraging: Panels were recognized correctly in 93,7 per cent and balloons in 90,4 per cent of all cases. The accuracy for captions is lower at 77,7 per cent, which seems to be due to the fact that several comic books included in the sample do not use drawn boundaries to separate captions from the remainder of a panel or page. In this case, existing methods may have to be adapted by training them on the distinct material included in the Frankfurt Comic Archive.

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