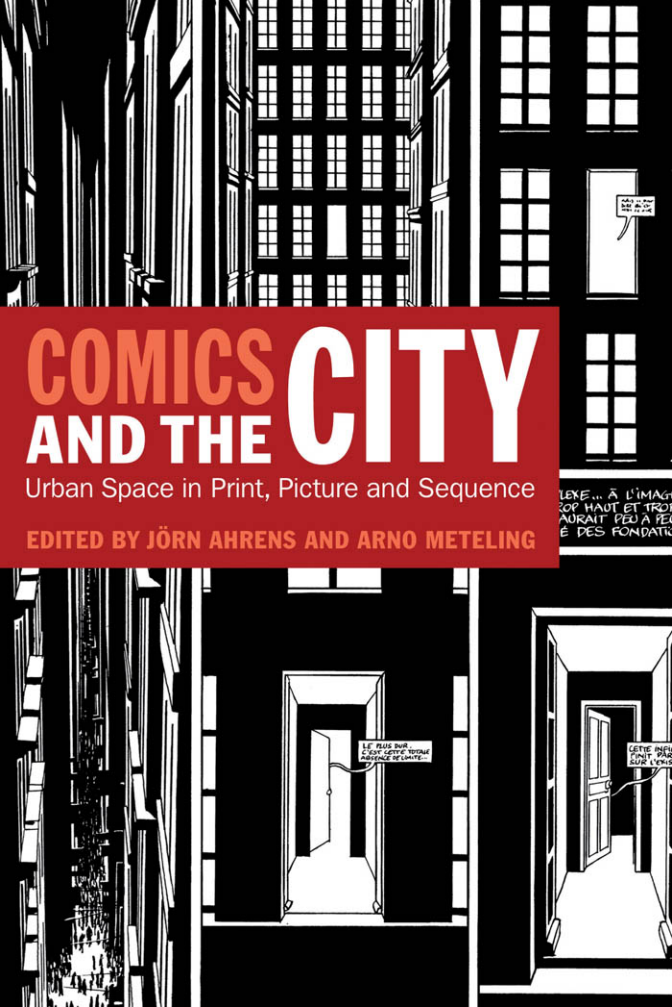




COMICS AND THE CITY

Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence

EDITED BY JÖRN AHRENS AND ARNO METELING

« C'EST LA
MÊME CHOSE
QU'UN JOUR »

LEKE... À L'IMAG
ROP HAUT ET TRO
AURAIT PEU À PE
É DES FONDATIO

LE PLUS DUR...
C'EST CETTE TOTALE
ABSENCE DE LIMITE...

CETTE INFIL
FOUIT PAR
SUR L'ENVI

Comics and the City

This page intentionally left blank

Comics and the City

Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence

Edited by

JÖRN AHRENS AND ARNO METELING



continuum

2010

The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc
80 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038

The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd
The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

www.continuumbooks.com

Copyright © 2010 by Jörn Ahrens, Arno Meteling, and contributors

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

ISBN: HB: 978-0-8264-0389-6
PB: 978-0-8264-4019-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Pindar NZ, Auckland, New Zealand
Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Notes on the Contributors	vii
Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling: Introduction	1

I History, Comics, and the City

1 Jens Balzer: “Hully Gee, I’m a Hieroglyphe” — Mobilizing the Gaze and the Invention of Comics in New York City, 1895	19
2 Ole Frahm: Every Window Tells a Story: Remarks on the Urbanity of Early Comic Strips	32
3 Anthony Enns: The City as Archive in Jason Lutes’s <i>Berlin</i>	45

II Retrofuturistic and Nostalgic Cities

4 Henry Jenkins: “The Tomorrow That Never Was” — Retrofuturism in the Comics of Dean Motter	63
5 Stefanie Diekmann: Remembrance of Things to Come: François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters’s <i>Cities of the Fantastic</i>	84
6 Michael Cuntz: Paris au pluriel: Depictions of the French Capital in Jacques Tardi’s Comic Book Writing	101

III Superhero Cities

7 William Uricchio: The Batman’s Gotham City™: Story, Ideology, Performance	119
--	-----

8	Arno Meteling: A Tale of Two Cities: Politics and Superheroics in <i>Starman</i> and <i>Ex Machina</i>	133
9	Anthony Lioi: The Radiant City: New York as Ecotopia in <i>Promethea</i> , Book V	150
10	Jason Bainbridge: “I Am New York” — Spider-Man, New York City and the Marvel Universe	163

IV Locations of Crime

11	Greg M. Smith: Will Eisner, Vaudevillian of the Cityscape	183
12	Björn Quiring: “A Fiction That We Must Inhabit” — Sense Production in Urban Spaces according to Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s <i>From Hell</i>	199
13	Jörn Ahrens: The Ordinary Urban: <i>100 Bullets</i> and the Clichés of Mass Culture	214

V The City-Comic as a Mode of Reflection

14	André Suhr: Seeing the City through a Frame: Marc-Antoine Mathieu’s <i>Acquefacques</i> Comics	231
15	Andreas Platthaus: Calisota or Bust: Duckburg vs. Entenhausen in the Comics of Carl Barks	247
16	Thomas Becker: Enki Bilal’s <i>Woman Trap</i> : Reflections on Authorship under the Shifting Boundaries between Order and Terror in the City	265

Notes on the Contributors

Jörn Ahrens is Stand-In Professor in Cultural Sociology at the University of Giessen. His research focuses on cultural theory, popular media, questions of the self, violence and myth. His publications include “How to Save the Unserved World? Visiting the Self in *12 Monkeys*, *Terminator 2*, & *The Matrix*” in A. Holba and K. Hart (eds.), *Media and the Apocalypse* (2009); and “Der Mensch als Beute. Narrationen anthropologischer Angst im Science Fiction-Film” in *Zeitschrift für Kultur- und Medienforschung* (2009).

Jason Bainbridge is Senior Lecturer in Media, Journalism and Communications at Swinburne University, Melbourne, Australia. He has published widely on a range of subjects including superheroes, media representations of law and justice, chequebook journalism, marketing newsreaders and merchandising. He is co-author of *Media and Journalism: New Approaches to Theory and Practice* (2008) and his favorite comic book of all time remains *The Micronauts*.

Jens Balzer lives in Berlin and works as cultural editor for *Berliner Zeitung*. In 1990, he co-founded the comics research centre Arbeitsstelle für Graphische Literatur (ArGL) at the University of Hamburg. He has written numerous essays on the aesthetics and history of comics and authored two comics: *Salut, Deleuze* and *Neue Abenteuer des unglaublichen Orpheus* (1998 and 2001 respectively, both with M. tom Dieck). He is the German translator of Art Spiegelman and Scott McCloud. His most recent book is *Outcault. Die Erfindung des Comic* (2009, with Lambert Wiesing).

Thomas Becker is a scholar at the “Aesthetic Experience with Regard to the Delimitation Process of the Arts” collaborative research centre at the Freie Universität, Berlin. His current research project looks at the

medium of comics on its journey towards legitimate art. Recent publications include *Mann und Frau, Schwarz und Weiß: Zur wissenschaftlichen Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Rasse* (2005) and “Matrix versus the Ghost in the Shell” in *Journal Ethnologie* (2007).

Michael Cuntz works as a researcher and lecturer at the Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnik und Medienforschung (IKKM) at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. His current fields of research are: romance literature (mainly nineteenth to twenty-first century prose), visual narratives, French theories of culture and technology, agency and its distribution, and relations between humans and things. A recent publication is *Unmenge — Wie verteilt sich Handlungsmacht?* (2008, co-editor with I. Becker and A. Kusser).

Stefanie Diekmann is Visiting Associate Professor in Theater Studies at the Freie Universität, Berlin. She publishes on film, photography, theater and comics. Her fields of research include intermediality, media theory, image and text, and theory of space. She is the author of *Mythologien der Fotografie* (2003); guest editor of two issues of *Fotogeschichte* (2006 and 2007); and co-editor of *Szenarien des Comic* (2005), *Latenz* (2007) and *Poetik der Pose* (forthcoming).

Anthony Enns is Assistant Professor of Contemporary Culture in the Department of English at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His work on popular culture has appeared in such journals as *Screen*, the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *Popular Culture Review*, *Studies in Popular Culture*, the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, and *Science Fiction Studies*.

Ole Frahm is a founding member of the ArGL at the University of Hamburg. He writes about the theory, history and aesthetics of comics. His Ph.D. was published in 2006 as *Genealogie des Holocaust. Art Spiegelmans MAUS — A Survivor's Tale*. He is currently working on a book about the aesthetics of comics.

Henry Jenkins is Provost's Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts University of Southern California. His publications include *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) and *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (2006). He writes

regularly about the media and cultural change on his blog (<http://www.henryjenkins.org>) and is one of the principal investigators for Education Arcade, for the Center for Future Civic Media, for GAMBIT and for Project NML.

Anthony Lioi is Assistant Professor of Liberal Arts and English at the Juilliard School in New York City. He is an ecocritic who specializes in American literature and popular culture. His work has appeared in *Feminist Studies*, *Crosscurrents*, and *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. He maintains a blog (<http://planetaryblog.wordpress.com>) which is devoted to issues of Green pedagogy.

Arno Meteling teaches literature at the Westfalian Wilhelms-University Münster. His research focuses on Romantic and modern literature, film history, media theory, and the fantastic. His publications include “Genius loci: On Memory, Media, and the Neo-Gothic in Georg Klein and Elfriede Jelinek” in E. Peeren and M. del Pilar Blanco (eds.), *Popular Spirits* (2009); *Die Unsichtbarkeit des Politischen: Theorie und Geschichte medialer Latenz* (2009, co-author); *The Parallax View: Zur Mediologie der Verschwörung* (2009, co-editor); *Monster: Zu Körperlichkeit und Medialität im modernen Horrorfilm* (2006); and *Kursbuch Kulturwissenschaft* (2000, co-editor).

Andreas Platthaus is the cultural editor for *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and is responsible for the supplement “Bilder und Zeiten.” Since 1983 he has been a member of the “German Organization of Non-Commercial Devotees of Unsophisticated Donaldism” (D.O.N.A.L.D.) and has held the position of Honorary President since 1995. In 2007 he was made a Honorary Member of D.O.N.A.L.D. His most recent book about comics is *Die 101 wichtigsten Fragen: Comics und Manga* (2008).

Björn Quiring teaches literature at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). His publications include “A Consuming Dish” in *Law & Literature* (2005) and *Shakespeares Fluch* (2009). His research focuses on the close but problematic relationship between law and literature.

Greg M. Smith is a professor in the Moving Image Studies program of the Department of Communication at Georgia State University. His

books include *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of Ally McBeal* (2007); *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (2007); and *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (1999).

André Suhr is editor and team manager of the Department of Elementary Science in Primary School at Cornelsen Publishers, Berlin. His publications include *Kursbuch Kulturwissenschaft* (2000, co-editor); “Consumer Communications nach dem Ende der Zielgruppen” in *PR Magazin* (2000, with T. Düllo and O. Schieleit); and “‘Would the Real Slim Shady Please Stand Up?’ — Eminem und der Aufstand des White Trash” in *FLM — Texte zum Film* (2002, with A. Meteling).

William Uricchio is Professor and Director of Comparative Media Studies at MIT and Professor of Comparative Media History at Utrecht University. He co-edited *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* (1991) and has since been exploring the alternate worlds of history and computer games. His latest book is *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identity* (2008).

Introduction

JÖRN AHRENS AND ARNO METELING

IN RECENT YEARS COMICS HAVE received broader acknowledgment within the context of modern culture as well as in academic debate. This tendency has successively been underpinned by the global reception of singular achievements in comics, for example, the American comic books *Maus — A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, or *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, all published in 1986, “our favorite year” (Jones and Jacobs 1997: 296–311).¹ But even before, one could observe an adult approach to comics, a discourse slowly leaving the narrow confinements of comic book culture. In Europe, especially in Franco-Belgian comics culture, but also in Italy, with artists like Moebius, Jacques Tardi, Hugo Pratt, and Enki Bilal, and in the U.S.A., this discourse usually conferred on certain comic artists the status of auteur. These artists represented art and high culture, or at least economic and political “independence,” or sub- or counter-culture (e.g. Robert Crumb or the Hernandez Brothers). Today, the cultural and academic reception of comics has expanded and is no longer limited to its avant-garde products. Art history, literary criticism and cultural studies are interested in comic books as an important part of a global popular culture, and these disciplines analyze the structure, aesthetics and discourses of comics as well as the practices of fan culture and the transmedial effects comic books initiate.

I Without any doubt, comic books, their characters, and their formats are by now deeply engraved in America's, Europe's, and Japan's cultural memory and exert their influence on cultural communication and dynamics. Apart from the mythical heroes of ancient Greece and Rome

and national popular heroes, characters like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Superman, or Batman can be considered to be the most popular and most iconic fictional characters in the Western hemisphere, at least. This is supported by the fact that at the present time Hollywood's blockbuster and the independent cinema have been revived by topics and aesthetics that pertain specifically to comics. This is not only true for animated pictures, but also for real-life movies, like the superhero movies since the 1990s (*Blade 1–3*, *Spawn*, *X-Men 1–3*, *Spider-Man 1–3*, *The Hulk*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Daredevil*, *Iron Man*, *Batman Begins*, *Superman Returns*, *The Dark Knight*, or *Watchmen*) and more or less independent comic book movies like *Road to Perdition*, *Constantine*, *Ghost World*, *American Splendor*, *From Hell*, *A History of Violence*, *Hellboy 1+2*, *V for Vendetta*, *Sin City*, *300* or *Wanted*. Not only do the numerous screen adaptations of comic books emphasize the cultural influence comics have, but the specific aesthetics and narrative style of comics modify the global universe of signs.

So, the medium "comics" is not only reflected in the plethora of film adaptations or in the ever growing global fan culture, but also in the ubiquitous use of comic contents, icons and aesthetics in all aspects of modern life. Comics can be understood as one of the decisive pictorial elements of popular culture since the second half of the twentieth century. The contribution of the comic book to a cultural self-understanding of modern mass culture, its mythologies, and its perceptions of the self, thereby becomes more and more evident. Although there is a significant output of academic books on comics (see "Further Reading" below), there is still no such thing as an academic discipline called "comic book studies" within the framework of graphic art, literary, cultural, or media studies. This lack is highly conspicuous because the border between high culture and popular culture was breached long ago and other modern arts and media, such as photography, motion pictures, television series or video games are widely accepted by now and have become the subject of academic research. Yet comic books, which are already more than 100 years old, still remain only of marginal interest to the academic world. For this reason, anyone opting for the serious treatment of comics is forced to legitimate himself. This may be explained by the still-existing condescending judgment of the artistic qualities of comics or their status as ubiquitous mass media. Above all, the still prevalent academic disregard of comics seems to be motivated by two main factors: First, there is a general ignorance of the variety

of the topics and subjects comic books offer, which coincides with the belief that comics are the province of children and semi-alphabetized adults. The second factor can be traced back to the specific nature of this medium, for comics are a unique hybrid media that combine words and pictures in a spatial sequence.

This combination of traditionally quite differently coded media means that, on the surface, comics appear to be simple and easily comprehensible. The merging of pictures, words and sequences evidently symbolizes an immediate nature. Therefore, comic book techniques are used for instructions, danger signs, or advertising graphics. But if a critic or researcher wants to have a closer look at comics and analyze them, as well as the interactions and mechanisms of this combination of codes, he runs into difficulties because he is in need of a comprehensive descriptive and analytical apparatus. Such an apparatus would have to contain concepts and information relating to the study of literature and of graphic art. So, on closer inspection, comics are confusing to readers of linear texts as well as to contemplative viewers of paintings and photos.

From a historical and formal point of view, the comic book perspectives used in the pictures or frames ("panels") can be described by camera positions ("zoom," "sequence shot," "pan shot," "tilt shot," or "jump cut") used in film-making. But comics remain — in stark contrast to film — a purely spatial medium. Its elements, such as panels, picture strips or pages are static. So, whereas the *mise-en-scène* can be analyzed as an arrangement of narrative space and layout of the comic book page, editing (*montage*), which marks the transition from one scene to the next and therefore indicates a lapse of time, is confined to film-making and has only a metaphorical function for the comic book. In this connection, the temporally and spatially indeterminate white borders (the "gutters") between the pictures are of special interest because they have been breached — abundantly in recent comics but even in very early comics, for example, those by Winsor McCay. To sum up: Comics are definitely part of the "Gutenberg galaxy of books" (see McLuhan 2002). The reader still has to leaf through the medium and read it, while her gaze alternates constantly between fast cursory reading and stataric viewing of pictures.

II

From an historical point of view and against the backdrop of the modern age, comics are inseparably tied to the notion of the “city.” The history of comics begins — not taking into consideration the long history of combining pictures and words since Ancient times and the tradition of illustration, caricature, and picture stories in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (William Hogarth, Wilhelm Busch, Rodolphe Töpffer) — with the emergence of comic strips in American newspapers around 1900. The first contributions of cartoonists appeared in magazines such as *Puck* (1877), *Judge* (1881), or *Life* (1883), but the rivalry between the New York newspapers (or rather their publishers), between Adolph Ochs’s *New York Times* (1851), Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* (1860), and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* (1895), all of which put great emphasis on illustrations and an illustrated Sunday supplement, caused a dramatic development in the importance of comic strips. On February 17, 1895, a crucial event in the history of the comic strip took place in the *New York World*: The renowned artist Richard Felton Outcault introduced the character “The Yellow Kid” in his comic strip *Hogan’s Alley*. From then on, this strip, which features naturalist and partly satirical street scenes as well as background descriptions as social commentary of New York City street life, developed into one of the crucial selling points for the newspaper. Shortly afterwards, star artist Outcault switched employers, taking with him his “Buster Brown” character, the American model for all rascal comics, and started working for Hearst’s newspaper the *New York Herald* (1835). Other successful comic strips that appeared in newspapers are Rudolph Dirk’s *The Katzenjammer Kids* (1897), *The Captain and the Kids* (formerly *Hanz and Fritz*) (1918), and George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* (1913). Common to all these comic strips is that the characters are influenced by the incredible speed of life in the New York City metropolis and that speed determines the rhythm of the city’s newspapers and comic strips. As the expansion of comic strips led to them taking up whole pages, the space reserved for the city in the comics also expanded. Winsor McCay, for example, used the whole page as the basis for his comic strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1906) in order to create fantastic worlds and real cities.

Eventually, comics outgrew the newspaper world. When the new format of the comic book was established as an independent publication, new characters filled the new comic book cities with life, such as Will Eisner’s *The Spirit* (1940), which started out as a comic strip in

newspapers; Superman, who inhabits Metropolis (1938), and Batman, who fights crime first in Manhattan (1939) and, from 1941 on, in Gotham City. Various distinctive comic book series at the end of the 1930s thus explored the city as living space and origin of modern myths. In particular, the characters of the superhero comics and the detective comics delved deep into the aesthetic, atmospheric, and scenaristic possibilities of the city. From then on, the city acted even more as the foremost setting for comics in all genres and stylistic variants. The city functioned as an important plot element, even an atmospheric, and symbolic protagonist, and suddenly became the focus of attention in many genres.

III

There is undoubtedly a link between the medium of comics and the big city as a modern living space. This emphasizes the need to investigate how specifically urban topoi, self-portrayals, forms of cultural memorizing, and variant readings of the city (strolling, advertising, architecture, detective stories, mass phenomena, street life, etc.) are on the one hand being incorporated in comic books, and the need to investigate if comics have special competences for capturing urban space and city life and representing it aesthetically because of their hybrid nature consisting of words, pictures, and sequences on the other. Does the spatial inertia of the sequences in contrast to film, video, or television result in retardation in order to ease the saturation that has been attributed to the big city since 1900?

Since the 1930s the authors and artists of comic books have continued to incorporate urban space into their narratives again and again. In doing so, they have referenced the whole repository of iconography from other media and occasionally exceeded and expanded on that cultural history. In the U.S. the works of Frank Miller (*Daredevil*, *Ronin*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Sin City*), Alan Moore (*V for Vendetta*, *Watchmen*, *From Hell*), Warren Ellis (*Transmetropolitan*) and Dean Motter (*Mister X*, *Terminal City*, *Electropolis*) exert their influence on cinematic settings (*Blade Runner*, *Batman*, *Batman Returns*, *The Fifth Element*, *The Matrix*, *Sin City*). An analogous interaction between comics and cultural history can be found in the influential science fiction and fantasy comics in France and Belgium, for example, in the works of Moebius (*La cinquième essence*/*The Incal*, *Le garage hermétique*), Enki Bilal (*Nikopol*), Marc-Antoine

Mathieu (*Acquiefacques*), Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières (*Valérien, agent spatio-temporel*), and François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters (*Les Cités Obscures*). In particular, the earlier Franco-Belgian École Marcinelle opened up the urban space for the so-called “semi-funnies” (André Franquin, Maurice Tillieux). Yet Japanese manga cultivated such approaches as well — still most famously in the work of Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*, *Domo*) but also in works by Jiro Taniguchi or in science fiction manga by Masamune Shirow (*Ghost in the Shell*, *Appleseed*).

IV

Comics employ a certain self-reflexivity. As a genuine medium of urban modernity they do not only mirror different aspects of modern life, but also adopt its formal aesthetics and cultural prerequisites. By now, every modern metropolis in the world has been made the subject of comics: Berlin, Paris, London, Tokyo and, time and again, New York City. At the same time, many fictional cities from comics have found their way into the global cultural memory: Superman’s Metropolis, Batman’s Gotham City, the New York City of Spider-Man, Daredevil, the Avengers or the Fantastic Four, Tokyo and the post-nuclear Neo-Tokyo of manga, or even the Duckburg of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. This demonstrates how important comics are to modern culture since they enduringly form people’s perceptions of cultural, social, and political patterns and strongly influence what Roland Barthes has called “mythologies” (of the ordinary) (see Barthes 1972). The main premise of this book is the strong interaction between comics and the urban space as the center of modern culture and daily life in the twentieth century. The competence of comics in capturing urban space and city life can be found within the cityscape itself, for example, as combinations of words and images in the form of signage and graffiti, which are deeply influenced by the aesthetics of comics. Providing a broad range of subjects, perspectives, and interests within its focus on comics and the city, this book deals with the relationships between comic books, mass media, modern culture, and urbanity. It addresses a range of international key comic authors and works, such as Richard Felton Outcault, Winsor McCay, Walt Disney and Carl Barks, Jacques Tardi, Enki Bilal, Marc-Antoine Mathieu, François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters, Will Eisner, Alan Moore, Dean Motter, Jason Lutes, as well as crime and superhero comics.

V

The first section, “History, Comics, and the City,” examines the historical background of the fundamental connection between the rise of comics and urbanity. The origins of this new kind of media are to be found in the emergence of mass societies and mass cultures at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the context of modern newspapers. One important aspect of this relationship is the meaning of space in regard to political sovereignty and a “structuring gaze.” This structuring gaze of comics implements a topographical reading of the cityscape, which is led by the point of view in frames, panels and sequences. The urban landscape is similarly structured by panel-like blocks and grids. For the purpose of individual adaptation the modern city demands certain capacities to direct and organize the gaze as modernity’s central sense of perception. Also, the depiction of such a gaze always includes political implications, for example, in the division of the gaze between a pedestrian watching the sky and a superhero looking down on the city while in flight or while standing on a skyscraper. Jens Balzer’s essay on the gaze and the invention of comics in New York City gives a possible answer to the question: What is it that defines the comic? By examining this question the answer comes as a tautology: The distinction between comics and pre-modern picture stories is the very modernity of comics, that is, the medium’s urbanity. Comics do not demand the contemplative as well as the fixed gaze of the classic central perspective. Instead, they demand the loose and moving gaze of the urban *flâneur*. They transport the text into the vertical and therefore decentralize the image. Just how comics achieve this and what this process means are explained by Balzer using the example of Richard Felton Outcault’s Yellow Kid character who first appeared 1895 in the *New York World* newspaper. Its decentralization and abstraction demonstrates the image of perception of an integral restlessness that is characteristic of the structural gaze in the metropolis of modernity.

Ole Frahm’s essay on the urbanity of early comic strips discusses the “will” to see the city from a higher point, taking a panoptic and projective view that became popular in the late eighteenth century and is still popular today. This is the effect of the desire not to get in touch with the difficulties and contradictions of city life in the streets and thus to ignore the complex urbanity of the city. In contrast to this “will,” the French theorist Michel de Certeau proposes that the practice of walking through the city provides a different and productive view that

“reads” and “writes” the city with all of its contradictions. Frahm’s essay proposes that early Sunday pages reflect these two modes of viewing and constellate these different desires in different ways. It analyzes comic book-pages by Richard Felton Outcault, Winsor McKay, and George Herriman in regard to this concept, using the central metaphor of the “window” for the comic book-panel.

Following Jared Gardner’s claim that graphic narratives embody Walter Benjamin’s concept of the archive as an assemblage of modern mass media that breaks down the barriers between word and image, Anthony Enns’s essay on Jason Lutes’ comic book series *Berlin* (1996) explores the ways in which these assemblages are also indelibly linked to the experience of the metropolis. Benjamin employed the city as an allegory for modernity and in doing so he was largely based on Charles Baudelaire’s experience of nineteenth century Paris and his claim that “memories are as heavy as stone.” Enns’s essay explores the connections between modern media, historical memory, and the experience of the metropolis through a close reading of *Berlin: City of Stones*, the first part of an epic trilogy that traces the end of Germany’s Weimar Republic from 1929 to 1933 by referring to contemporary photographs, paintings, and drawings from the period. By drawing on this repository of cultural history and iconography, Lutes constructs an intermedial text that captures both the stories and images associated with the city.

VI

The second section, “Retrofuturistic and Nostalgic Cities,” examines the phenomenon of “nostalgia mode” (see Jameson 1991), which can be observed in the U.S.A. as well as in Europe. “Nostalgia” means a certain way in depicting history as being better than it really was. It is only interested in transfiguring the past into some perfect and idyllic epoch, a lost Golden Age that can never be attained again. “Retrofuturism” is a very specific variety of “nostalgia mode.” Retrofuturistic literature, movies or comics create imaginations of the future that refer to futuristic designs from the past, for example, utopian and science fiction designs in the 1950s and 1960s (the “ray gun gothic” in William Gibson’s words), the World Fair aesthetics of the 1930s, or the *belle époque* around 1900. In this way, the comic comes across as an interesting mode of reflection about the meaning of history and the contemporary as well as the role of the city as a life-world that takes up particular modern phantasmagorias

of the future. Henry Jenkins's essay deals with retrofuturism in the comics of Dean Motter. It is about the retrofuturistic mobilization of old icons for new purposes. Comics and other forms of popular media have circled back to the pulp magazine imagery of early science fiction in search of striking new ways to represent the directions our society is taking. In some cases, they do so to regain some of the giddy excitement about the world of tomorrow which shaped the magazines of Hugo Gernsback, publisher of the science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* (1926); the comics of Alex Raymond (*Flash Gordon*); or the rhetoric of the 1939 World's Fair. In other cases, retrofuturists do so to critique the outmoded ideologies that gave shape to those earlier utopian yearnings. Jenkins's essay focuses on some strategies for mobilizing past conceptions of the future, especially as seen in the comics *Mister X* (1983), *Terminal City* (1996), and *Electropolis* (2001) by comic writer and artist Dean Motter.

Stefanie Diekmann then focuses on François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters's graphic novels about the *Cities of the Fantastic* (*Les Cités Obscures*) (1983), a group of imaginary city-states located in a parallel universe. As an investigation of urban structures, the series constitutes a fascinating example of mock historiography, drawing on the history of art and architecture on the one hand and nineteenth century utopian designs on the other. Most noticeable about the *Cities* is the emphasis on their political, cultural, and aesthetic particularities that make them appear as models of the "Old World," or rather of Old-Worldliness. As a matter of fact, the series deals as much with the history of urban development as it mocks certain notions of urbanity and cultural diversity.

Michael Cuntz's take on the representations of Paris in Jacques Tardi's comic book writing deals with the French capital as the uncontested center of Tardi's universe, whether in his many adaptations and "illustrations" of French writers (Malet, Céline, Manchette, Vautrin, Siniac) or in his "own" invention, the *Adèle Blanc-Sec* series (1972). Cuntz's essay deals with the question of whether Paris remains the same in all comic books or whether there are significant differences, for example, the art nouveau and World Expo capital of Adèle Blanc-Sec and the rather closed universe of Nestor Burma's post-war investigations, which cannot be reduced to a mere realistic reconstruction of the settings for different historical moments. Rather than discussing the authenticity and historical accuracy of Tardi's representations of Paris, the text explores their common symbolic features, for example, Paris

as a space of murder mysteries and their investigation. The differences between the versions of Paris in Tardi's comic books are not only a matter of semantics: While most comic readers will not fail to recognize Tardi's personal style in all of his works, the way in which the city itself, its buildings, monuments, streets, bistros, or apartments are drawn varies from one series to another. So, it can be argued that Tardi uses these different views on/of Paris to "imitate" or rather to translate the specific style of each adapted writer into his own his technique.

VII

The third section, "Superhero Cities," discusses the comic-based invention of superhero cities as a development particular to the U.S. In no other media or culture has a character like the superhero been invented, and he is always related to a city, either living in a real city (mostly New York City) or protecting a fictional one. William Uricchio's essay is about story, ideology and performance in Batman's Gotham City. As the super villain, the Riddler, puts it, "When is a man a city?" "When it's Batman or when it's Gotham." Batman and Gotham are as essential as the Batman origin story, which sustains the logic behind the endless iterations of the Batman-narrative with the origin story — set on the streets of Gotham — functioning as a narrative generator. Gotham City is at once utopian and dystopian, with a decided leaning towards the latter. Like the acute contrasts of Batman's or his various nemeses' character construction, the source of dramatic tension is at once visible and generative. Yet, the city represented remains ideologically skewed, locked forever by the origin story into a place of property crime, where the extraordinarily wealthy Bruce Wayne obsessively disguises himself as Batman to combat the most trivial of transgressions.

Arno Meteling's essay deals with the change in politics and superheroics between the comic book series *Starman* and *Ex Machina*. It is about two different depictions of superhero cities, before and after September 11, 2001: the fictional "Opal City" of the DC Universe in James Robinson and Tony Harris's *Starman* (1994), and the semi-fictional "New York City" in Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris's *Ex Machina* (2004). *Starman* discusses subjects like mythology, history, family, lineages, dynasties, and the fantastic genealogies of the DC Comics superheroes and their designated cities. In contrast to its celebration of the halcyon days of Golden Age heroes (its "nostalgia mode"), ten years later *Ex Machina*

superficially shows the more or less mundane political problems of its protagonist, Mitchell Hundred, the mayor of New York City and former superhero the Great Machine. But *Ex Machina* combines superhero and mystery issues with political ones in a not-so-post-superhero city. Not only does it introduce a kind of “reality principle” (Sigmund Freud) to the superhero genre, but also questions the need for a sovereign political power in the city supported by super powers.

In his essay on Alan Moore’s *Promethea*, Anthony Lioi discusses the idea of an urban ecotopia, a contradiction in terms to the mainstream of American literature and environmentalism. Drawing on the novel that founded the term — Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), Lioi deals with the idea of a green city in the climax of *Promethea*, a comic book series about a heroine who is Story Incarnate and which figures Manhattan as Babylon and New Jerusalem as “the heavenly, radiant city.” The protagonist Promethea is also a revision of Wonder Woman and is portrayed as a figure of Hellenistic wisdom. Her most important task is to end the world, not through physical destruction but as the vehicle of gnostic enlightenment. This enlightenment radiates from New York City itself, and engulfs the whole world in a realization that the earth is holy, a manifestation of the breath of God. The result of the enlightenment is represented visually as a city supersaturated with color, contrasting vividly with earlier images of New York from the dystopian film noir tradition or superhero comics such as *Spider-Man* or *The Fantastic Four*.

Jason Bainbridge’s essay on Spider-Man and the Marvel Universe stresses the importance of New York City for comics in general and especially for superhero comics, as New York City was not only the birthplace for the comic strip in the newspapers, but also for important Marvel comics writers and artists like Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. In comics, New York City always had been a more or less generic city, adaptable to the demands of the narrative — until Marvel Comics located its superheroes, for example, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and Spider-Man, in this city. They are juxtaposed against the realistic and familiar backdrop of the city in order to create a cohesive Marvel Universe, consisting of extraordinary figures in front of an ordinary world. While superheroes in DC Comics, like Superman or Batman, function as archetypes in stylized and exaggerated fictitious cities, the Marvel style is about realistic compositions, locating the heroes in recognizable places in New York City, for example, with the Fantastic Four basing themselves in the Baxter Building, a Manhattan office building, Dr. Strange living in

Greenwich Village, and the Avengers living in a mansion on the Upper East Side. The Marvel Universe is predicated on the connectivity and social networks of both its titles and its individuals, and its main novelty can be called “realism.” So, just as New York City makes Marvel Comics legible, Marvel Comics similarly makes New York City legible to the comic-reading community.

VIII

The fourth section, “Locations of Crime,” focuses on the city as a place of crime and drama. In this case, the city can truly be called an international setting because of its stress on storytelling and the aesthetics of modernity. The imagination of crime condenses phantasms of the modern self that links to individual and socio-cultural (metaphorical and structural) yearnings, anxieties, and limitations. In Franco-Belgian comics this genre quickly developed into one of the core subjects of comic narrations. As such it continually accompanies and comments on processes of transformation within the urban environment. There is a strong tradition of detective and crime narratives (deriving from pulp literature) in comic strips too, with Chester Gould’s *Dick Tracy* (1931) and *The Spirit* (1940) being the most popular ones. In his essay on Will Eisner, Greg M. Smith analyzes another aspect of *The Spirit*, namely Eisner as a “vaudevillian of the cityscape.” In *The Spirit* Eisner uses urban architecture in two ways: as a naturalistic background for staging conflicts between brave heroes and menacing villains, and as a foregrounded graphic element to be textualized into highly stylized “opening credit” frames. Smith’s essay examines how the cities in Eisner’s comics merge both of these techniques to create cities that are themselves menacing to his immigrant characters, actively framing and constricting their struggles for immigrant assimilation and ethnic identity.

Björn Quiring’s essay on urban spaces in Alan Moore’s comic book *From Hell* (1991) discusses the city as a projected image of utopian order — a New Jerusalem to be attained — but also as an indomitable chaos, a repository of fragmented histories, which, in their synchronicity, produce an overload of sense and sense perception. Founded on both divine law and human violence, urban space appears both as a wilderness of incompatible, ambiguous signs and as the promise of their ordering. The comic, as an inherently modern and urban medium, situates itself within that very tension, as a juxtaposition of incompatible,

mass-produced signs in which entangled images and texts both disturb and complement each other. Moore's scenarios, for example, the Jack the Ripper narrative in *From Hell*, based on Stephen Knight's famous conspiracy theory (*Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, 1976) and referring to the ancient and medieval mind-mapping technique of the "theater of memory," shows conspiracies that strive for a utopian synthesis of order and chaos. However, the conspiracies always fail because the new, unified sense dissociates as soon as it is produced and the need for closure remains frustrated and the eternal city elusive. Only in its representation through art, and especially through the comic form, which makes its underlying coherence as well as its insurmountable heterogeneity palpable, urbanity really seems to come into its own. Hence, Moore's comics increasingly become allegories of their own production, the narrative process drawing the city into itself.

Jörn Ahrens reads Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso's comic book series *100 Bullets* (1999) as a reflection on the clichés of mass culture. Closely tied to the classic narrative of the crime story, *100 Bullets*, however, gives a very new conception of the genre when it plays both aesthetically and formally with the genre's characteristics. With few exceptions, *100 Bullets* celebrates the American cityscape as the classic environment for narratives of brutality and crime. It obviously holds many references to film noir and the hardboiled detective novel and also fosters a documentary-like style by depicting a panorama of contemporary U.S.A., from the life-worlds of Hispanic immigrants up to those of millionaires. But then again, the series abstracts from these models and radicalizes and threatens its subject with irony when waving a net of meaning and symbolization in which all appearing characters are interlinked, and all commentaries and gestures are meaningful. In this way *100 Bullets* presents a fractionalized narrative that mimics the fractionalized modern cityscape, an urban landscape of postmodernity. The cities in this comic constantly seem to withdraw from the foreground, since the dense atmosphere that the city creates does not seem to be real — revealing a tendency towards alienation, which is quite en vogue in numerous U.S. crime comics today.

IX

The fifth and final section, "The City-Comic as a Mode of Reflection," examines the reflective and self-reflective aspects of comics and the

modern city. It emphasizes the abilities of the medium as well as the cityscape to reflect on the conditions of their historical origin in the mass culture of urban modernity; their cultural and medial determinations; and their spatial particularities in style, content and representation. As comics and the cityscape are very much alike in terms of their semiotics and their hybrid mixing of words and pictures, it is not only historically evident that one should be regarded as part of the other, but structurally and aesthetically evident as well. André Suhr's essay reads Marc-Antoine Mathieu's comic book series on the adventures of Julius Corentin Acquefacques, civil servant for the Ministry of Humor, as a formalistic tour de force through a dystopian city. As comics and the city have always been intricately linked on a number of levels, Suhr's essay shows that this seldom becomes more obvious than in Mathieu's comics. They present a unique reflection on the conditions that define the city as the social space of modernity and bourgeois rationality. At the same time they clearly show how comics as a form of media and the specific space of the city produce similar and maybe even related modes of perception. Meta-fictional elements stress the aspect of watching a city through the frame of a comic book page or panel, for example, in Acquefacques's first adventure in *L'Origin* (1990): Acquefacques starts to receive single pages of a comic book, pages the reader soon recognizes as pages of the very comic he or she is reading at the moment. Acquefacques realizes so too, feels the short lifespan of 42 pages rush past him, becomes the object of close scrutiny at the Ministry of Science and finally has to experience the last page of his story being burned by its author.

Andreas Platthaus's essay on Duckburg and its German counterpart, "Entenhausen," in the comics of Carl Barks deals with the enlightening similarities and differences in the portrayals of Duckburg in the original American versions and the German translations by Erika Fuchs. While working for more than 30 years as "the good artist" on Disney comics, Carl Barks developed a whole universe for his Duck family. The deep rooting of the Ducks' habits and traditions in the American way of life is contrasted by the many translations in foreign languages. The more Barks's comics gained worldwide success the less possible it was to translate them literally. So his city of Duckburg became a metropolis that every translator shaped and resettled in terms of his own nationality. The especially famous translator Erika Fuchs has changed the way the German readers regard the world of Duckburg (which she christened "Entenhausen"). In contrasting the different images of the city as it is

shown in the panels by Barks and described in the balloons by Fuchs and Barks, Platthaus presents a concept of historical urbanism in comic art aesthetics.

Finally, Thomas Becker's essay on Enki Bilal's *Woman Trap* (*La Femme Piège*) (1986) deals with reflections on authorship within the shifting boundaries between order and terror in cities. Recent science fiction movies have produced negative utopias about the climactic catastrophe, eugenic practices, and the promise of security offered by a military power. This promise of risk-control seems to be gradually perverting Western democracy. However, Becker argues, one of the first models of these prophecies appeared more than 20 years ago when Enki Bilal wrote and drew his *Nikopol* trilogy. The art historian K. O. Werckmeister called this trilogy a critique of the citadel's culture because the cities in the Western world, like the London, Paris or Berlin in the *Nikopol* trilogy (remarkably it is New York City in Bilal's movie version *Immortel* [*Ad Vitam*], 2004), are shown as powerful citadels defending their standards of health and security systems against immigrants at high military costs. But, according to Bilal's trilogy, the logic of the shifting boundary between order and terror can be attacked by the production of art.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. London: Paladin, 1972 [1957].
 Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
 Jones, Gerard and Jacobs, Will. *The Comic Book Heroes: The First History of Modern Comic Books from the Silver Age to the Present*. Rocklin: Prima Publishing, 1997.
 McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2002 [1962].

Note

- 1 However, such acknowledgment is quite different in the U.S., Japan, France, or in any country, like Germany, where the legitimacy of comics is still disputed.

Further Reading

- Alberghini, Andrea. *Sequenze Urbane: La metropolis nel fumetto*. Rovigo: Delta Comics, 2006.
 Baetens, Jan (ed.), *The Graphic Novel*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001.
 Bloom, Clive and McCue, Greg S. (eds.), *Dark Knights: The New Comics in Context*. London: Pluto Press, 1993.
 Brooker, Will. *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*. New York and London: Continuum, 2000.
 Carrier, David. *The Aesthetics of Comics*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

- Christiansen, Hans-Christian and Magnussen, Anne (eds.), *Comics & Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2000.
- Frahm, Ole. *Genealogie des Holocaust: Art Spiegelmanns MAUS — A Survivor's Tale*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006.
- Gordon, Ian. *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture 1890–1945*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998.
- Groensteen, Thiery. *The System of Comics*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007.
- Harvey, Robert C. *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
- Heer, Jeet and Worcester, Kent. *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
- Hein, Michael, Hüners, Michael and Michaelsen, Torsten (eds.), *Ästhetik des Comic*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2002.
- Inge, M. Thomas. *Comics as Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.
- Klock, Geoff. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*. New York and London: Continuum, 2002.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics. The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: DC Comics (Imprint: Paradox Press), 2000.
- Packard, Stephan. *Anatomie des Comics: Psychosemiotische Medienanalyse*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002.
- Pearson, Roberta E. and Uricchio, William (eds.), *The Many Lives of Batman*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Platthaus, Andreas. *Im Comic vereint: Eine Geschichte der Bildergeschichte*. Berlin: Alexander Fest, 1998.
- Pustz, Matthew J. *Comic Book Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
- Reynolds, Richard. *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.
- Sassienie, Paul (ed.), *The Comic Book: The One Essential Guide for Comic Book Fans Everywhere*. London: Ebury Press, 1994.
- Savage, William W., Jr. *Comic Books and America, 1945–1954*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.
- Schüwer, Martin. *Wie Comics erzählen*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008

I

History, Comics, and the City

This page intentionally left blank