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Journal of comics scholarship

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## Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

# Our Pandemic Year: On the Comics Scholarship to Come

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This editorial article reflects on the past, present and future of *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*. It discusses the challenges overcome so far, and discusses the tenth volume of the journal, corresponding to 2020, "our pandemic year". The article presents the authors' vision for the type of comics scholarship they would like to see in future volumes of the journal, calling for greater diversity and inclusion and for work which is 'media-specific' in at least three ways: firstly because the field's focus is comics, in all their multifaceted diversity, complexity and vibrancy; secondly because the study of comics, like many of the studied comics themselves, mostly exist and take place today somewhere in the spectrum of digital environments, and thirdly because comics studies as a field operates within academic institutions and cultures, and therefore plays a role within established hierarchies of knowledge production.

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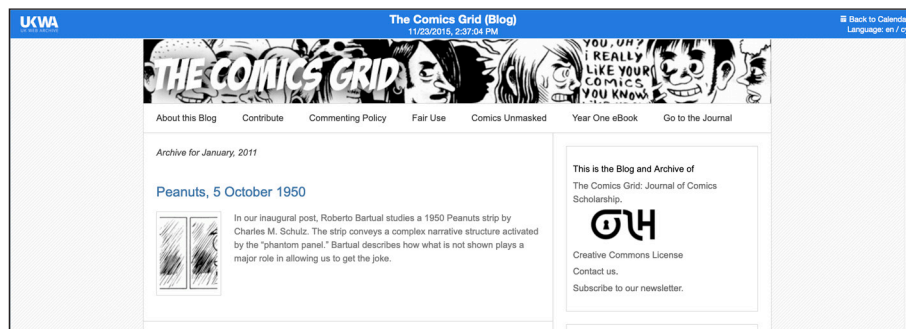
**Keywords:** comics studies; peer review; publishing; scholarship; scholarly communications

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## The Past; The Present

This has been an exceptionally challenging year for everyone. It is likely to be remembered by most around the world as what we could call (with apologies to Pekar, Brabner and Stack 1994) "our pandemic year". As we close what is the tenth volume of this journal, we would like to take stock and look back, in order to set the gaze towards the future.

Once upon a time, in what now seems a galaxy far, far away, the very first article on the Wordpress incarnation of *The Comics Grid* was first published on 31 January 2011 (**Figure 1**). This means that in January 2021 we will be celebrating a decade of



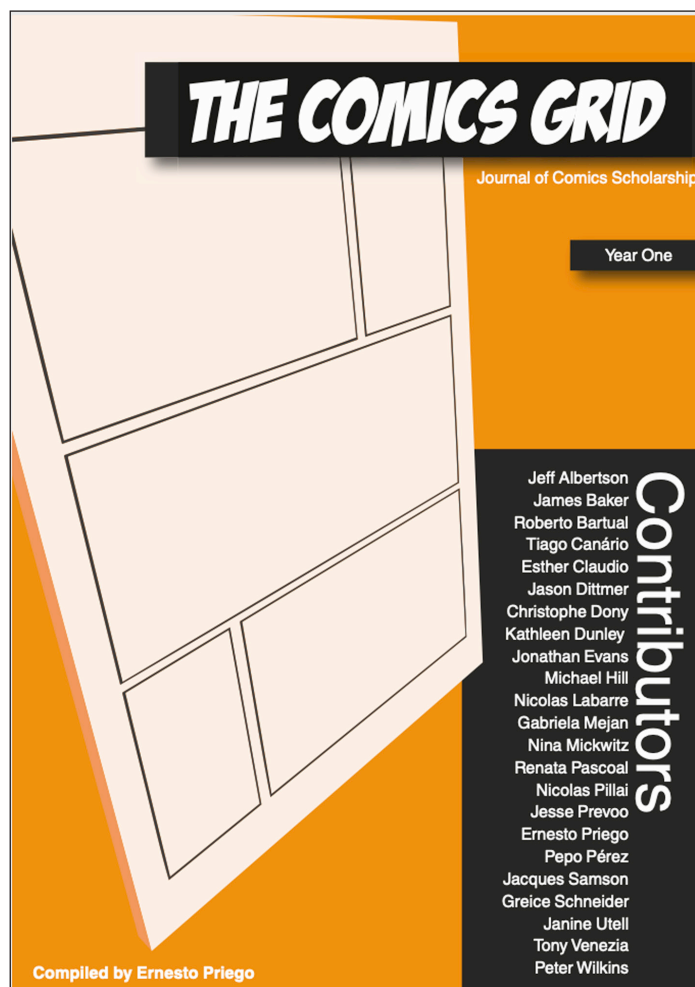
**Figure 1:** Screenshot of the January 2011 archive of The Comics Grid, as archived by the UK Web Archive. Available from <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/en/archive/20151123143704/http://blog.comicsgrid.com/2011/01/> [Accessed 5 November 2020] The *Comics Grid* logo was first conceived by Greice Schneider using the Badaboom BB font.

having appeared as a publication in the comics scholarship landscape. By our third year we had launched as a full-fledged open access journal thanks to Ubiquity Press. We had by then, as noted in the journal's inaugural editorial, "published 92 peer-reviewed short articles in open access form offering critical analyses of specific examples of comics pages as well as 48 peer-edited blog posts (interviews, conference reports, calls for papers, book reviews)" (Priego 2013).

You can read a compilation of the journal's first volume of peer-reviewed short articles in the 292-page ebook *The Comics Grid. Journal of Comics Scholarship. Year One* (Priego, comp. 2012; **Figure 2**), which was also an experiment in collaborative, DIY researcher-led collected edition digital publishing. The book's foreword also includes important background on the early days of this journal.

*Year One* shows we were willing to do the walk and not just the talk by demonstrating 'publishing' is something academics could do ourselves without the mediation of for-profit third parties. This spirit of independent experimentation still defines what we do today, and remains our ethos. We are proud *The Comics Grid* continues true to its first reason for existence, which is providing immediate open access to comics studies outputs on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

We acknowledge we still need to find a way (i.e., secure funding) to retrospectively re-publish and safely archive the work published on our Wordpress blog during



**Figure 2:** Cover of *The Comics Grid. Journal of Comics Scholarship. Year One* (Priego, comp., 2012). Cover design by Nicolas Labarre. Brad Brooks was in charge of the editorial design.

2012, which was our second volume. At the time we ensured the articles published in the blog were archived by the British Library via the [UK Web Archive](#), and the articles we published that year (as the whole Wordpress-based resource) can still be accessed that way<sup>1</sup>. We take digital preservation and archiving seriously and the retrospective re-publishing work of our second volume is regrettably still on the horizon for us. It

<sup>1</sup> As we type this, we learn the UK Web Archive has won [The National Archives Award for Safeguarding the Digital Legacy](#), recognising 15 years of web archiving work (Cooke 2020; Wisdom 2020).

exemplifies why it was so important for us to migrate towards a formal, sustainable, and more permanent and persistent scholarly publishing infrastructure that would provide the work we publish all the required affordances of academic versions of record. As demonstrated by the technical challenges the journal faced during our first three years, the fragility of the web means that a great number of online academic resources have disappeared and remain inaccessible. The permanence of the scholarly record is crucial and it has been part of our mission to ensure the journal remains available in the future.

In 2016 the Open Library of Humanities took us under their wing. This removed the perceived obstacle of Article Processing Charges. The Open Library of Humanities does not charge any author fees, and in the current landscape, as a researcher-led academic journal in what could be called a 'niche' field, that has indeed been a blessing. (This, of course, does not mean that the journal and our publisher do not have costs: they are paid by an international library consortium).

Another key benefit of our partnership with the Open Library of Humanities is that the journal is indexed by SCOPUS, Nordic list, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Chronos, ExLibris, EBSCO Knowledge Base, CNKI, CrossRef, JISC KB+, SHERPA RoMEO, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCOHost, OpenAire, ScienceOpen, and Academia. *The Comics Grid* is also available for remote metadata harvesting via [OAIPMH](#), a mechanism and set of standards that allow the sharing and collection of bibliographic information across databases and repositories, facilitating the wider dissemination of our content.

To ensure permanency of its articles, *The Comics Grid* also uses [CLOCKSS](#) and [LOCKSS](#) archiving systems to create permanent archives for preservation and restoration. We may be wrong but we suspect that some of these services and acronyms are likely to sound intriguing to many an arts and humanities scholar. If we are to "re-take responsibility for the way we communicate", as James Baker argued in the fifth volume of this journal, it is essential that as a field we all start learning more about how it is that scholarly publishing infrastructures operate (Baker 2015).

*The Comics Grid* advocated open access before it was officially mandated by our governments and institutions. We were not forced to adopt open access: we embraced

it as a precondition and advocated it from the start. In the UK, the Research Councils UK -now UKRI- Policy on Open Access came into force until 1 April 2013, “requiring funded research to be made publicly available through a repository with six months for STEM subjects and 12 months for AHSS subjects”<sup>2</sup>. The journal’s creation was motivated by an understanding that fully-fledged open access was important not only because it made articles immediately available as versions of record at no cost to the reader from the journal itself, but also because open licensing allows for such research to be accessed, distributed and reused without the usual barriers and the friction they cause. In fact, the journal pioneered Creative Commons licenses in the arts and humanities during times when dominant scholarly cultures strongly resisted them (see, for example, Osborne 2013).

We are proud to have embraced a strong tradition in comics publishing, and increasingly in academia too, which is the struggle of authors to retain the copyright of their own work. Since day one, authors of articles published in this journal have remained the copyright holders of their original work, granting third parties the right to use, reproduce, and share the original contents of the article according to the Creative Commons-Attribution license agreement. In parallel, we have also actively promoted a more sensible and less conservative approach to the essential inclusion of third-party material for the purpose of academic citation in scholarly study, commentary and review (Deazley 2014).

We think it is fair to say that, at least in terms of publishing infrastructure, *The Comics Grid* has come a long way. We still have a lot to get right, though. We see ourselves as part of a larger, ongoing process, and we hope to continue learning and playing a part in the ongoing transformation of scholarly cultures.

## **Our Pandemic Year**

The COVID-19 pandemic this year has been, indeed, “inescapable [...] a shared experience that emphasises, through the pandemic’s pervasive disruption, the social interactions and behaviours that define our shared world” (Callender et al 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> See “A Brief History of Open Access”, University of Cambridge Scholarly Communications, available at <https://osc.cam.ac.uk/open-access/brief-history-oa> [Accessed 5 November 2020].

However, not everyone has been affected in the same way (Khunti et al 2020; Dyer 2020). In academic publishing specifically, the pandemic has worsened inequalities (Peterson Gabster et al 2020). By changing the conditions of production of many of us, the pandemic has in many ways evidenced systemic issues. In this respect, after a decade of leading a researcher-led peer-reviewed journal, we note that the pandemic has made even more visible the structural challenges academic publishing and peer review systems currently pose for colleagues, working as a gatekeeping mechanisms that are personally taxing and institutionally expensive.

The journal's editorial team and pool of reviewers are composed by academics who work in the journal as one more component of their academic workloads, which means we are not paid by the publisher or the journal to work on it. Though historically the journal has aimed for rapid (or at least efficient) review and publication timeframes, editors and reviewers have a limited capacity and, importantly, the journal has a limited budget to consider and publish a certain number of articles per year, which also allows us to focus more strictly on quality rather than quantity. However, we suggest that scholarly publishing should not have to rely on the good will and volunteer labour of colleagues. This way of doing things is not inclusive as it assumes the privilege not just of expertise and esteem but of time and appropriate conditions, both at a premium in today's academia. We are concerned it is not and has never been a sustainable way of doing things, and as most of us have juggled many more responsibilities during the pandemic, this concern has been intensified. On the one hand higher education depends on the quantity and quality of peer-reviewed publications (so much depends on it: employment and professional development opportunities, career progression, funding, rankings, student fees), but expects the labour required to make research publishing and assessment possible to be performed by academics mostly voluntarily and without sufficient recognition and reward. This is incongruent and continues to be the source of much toxicity and exclusion.

Production timings remain one of the key challenges for everyone. As a journal we have taken steps to be context-sensitive and hopefully contribute to small

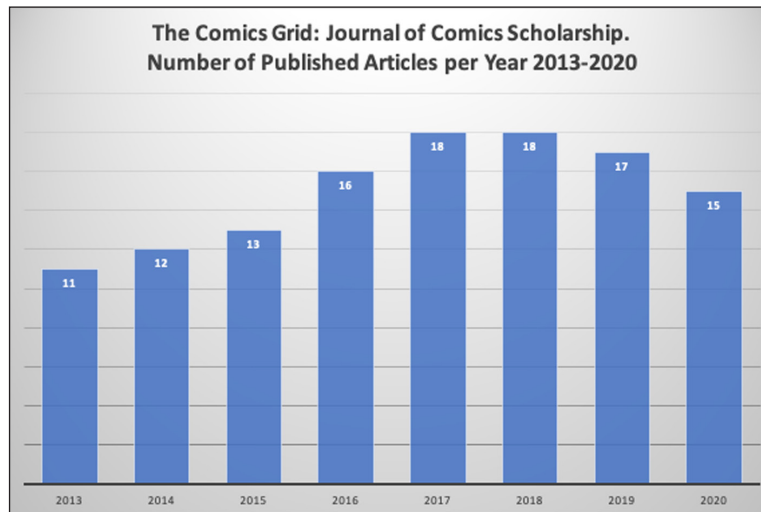
improvements. We published our current call for papers for the Special Collection: Translation, Remediation, Spread: The Global Circulation of Comics in Digital Distribution in May 2020, and intentionally set a deadline for full text submissions of 30 June 2021, to allow authors more time to prepare their work, and correspondingly established a more generous timeframe for peer and editorial review<sup>3</sup>.

We suggest that academic Workload Allocation Models, where they exist, should consider at the very least the time required for peer review and editorial work. Moreover, the time and labour invested in editing a journal volume does not differ too much from that required to edit a collected edition in traditional book form, and yet the arts and humanities appear to continue to hold the latter in higher esteem. There is no objective basis for this disparity, except the reputational economy of tradition (on reputation in scholarly publishing, see Eve 2014). Therefore sometimes engaging in researcher-led journal publishing (editorial work; peer review) may seem like a thankless effort, done against the grain and without the required resources. For us, however, editing the journal is not a hobby nor a luxury, but a central component of our professional practice.

It is therefore no surprise that this year in particular would pose unique challenges in producing the journal. However, though this year we struggled editorially to get peer review requests accepted, and when accepted, completed, we are pleased we were able to consider the highest number of submissions we had ever received. In this challenging context, however, this tenth volume of the journal includes a majority of articles authored by women. In total, including this Editorial, this year the journal published a total of 15 articles. Excluding this Editorial, the articles published this year have authors with affiliations or residence in Canada (3 articles), United States (3), UK (4), Ireland (1), Czech Republic (1), Australia (1), and Sweden (1). For context, the following chart quantifies the number of articles we have published per year since 2013 (**Figure 3**).

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<sup>3</sup> The call can be retrieved from <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/cfp/2020/05/13/call-for-papers-%E2%80%93-special-collection-translation-remediation-spread-the-global/> or from the announcement section of the journal's home page at <https://www.comicsgrid.com/>.



**Figure 3:** Number of published articles published in *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 2013-2020 (Priego 2020).

This volume includes eight articles in the Research category, two book reviews, two interviews, one note, and one graphic submission. Two of the articles in the research section are part of the Graphic Justice Special Collection (Giancaspro 2020 and O'Connell 2020), with editorial work led by Thom Giddens, and the graphic submission of the Graphic Science Special Collection (Woock 2020), with editorial work led by Nicolas Labarre.

In order of publication, we list below, excluding this editorial, all the articles the journal published this year. Consider it the Table of Contents for this volume:

**Rifkind, C.**, 2020. The Elements of a Life: Lauren Redniss's Graphic Biography of Marie Curie. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.178>

**Besette, L.S.**, 2020. Teaching Comics/Teaching with Comics: A Review of *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comic Books*. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.190>

**Letizia, A.J.**, 2020. Truth, Politics and Disability: Graphic Narratives as Illustrated Hope. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.184>

**Bond, S.**, 2020. "It's Showtime, Synergy!": Musical Sequences in *Jem and the Holograms*. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.144>

**Corcoran, M.**, 2020. Bleeding Panels, Leaking Forms: Reading the Abject in Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods* (2014). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.198>

**Degand, D.**, 2020. *Brotherman*, Family, and Legacies: Recognizing the Contributions of African American Independent Comic Book Writers and Artists. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.203>

**Giancaspro, M.A.**, 2020. Picture-Perfect or Potentially Perilous? Assessing the Validity of 'Comic Contracts'. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.188>

**Priego, E. and Scott, S.**, 2020. Where Comics and Cultural Heritage Meet: A Conversation with Damien Sueur and Yannis Koikas on BDnF: The Comics Factory. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.212>

**O'Connell, A.**, 2020. Generic Super Heroes: Can They Exist? DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.185>

**Woock, E.A.**, 2020. Nuns in Action: A Graphic Investigation into a Graphic Issue. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.189>

**Mehrstam, C.**, 2020. Silver Lining: The Emblematic Exemplum of *Silver Surfer* #40–43 (1990). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.191>

**Berube, L.**, 2020. Context is Everything: A Review of Comics Studies: A Guidebook. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.221>

**Earle, H.**, 2020. The Politics of Lace in Kate Evans' *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (2017). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.215>

**Michaels, J.**, 2020. Graphic Backgrounds: Collective Dissociative Trauma in Rutu Modan's *Exit Wounds* (2007) DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/cg.206>

Over the years, we have seen a gradual and significant increase in submissions for the Research section, and given our practical and budgetary constraints (considering and publishing each article open access costs money and has overheads), article acceptance has become significantly more competitive, with our acceptance criteria becoming more clearly delimited. For example, this year we made a special effort to

publish articles where comics were front and centre and not accessory or incidental. Our aim remains to publish articles that present novel and sophisticated arguments about comics form, technique, affordances, and so on. We cannot mention and discuss each of the articles published this year, but articles like Susan Bond's "It's Showtime, Synergy!": Musical Sequences in *Jem and the Holograms*" (Bond 2020), Miranda Corcoran's "Bleeding Panels, Leaking Forms: Reading the Abject in Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods*" (Corcoran 2020), and Harriet Earle's "The Politics of Lace in Kate Evans' *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis*" (Earle 2020) represent that effort. Each of these submissions is medium-specific, and focuses on formal features of their respective comics. Although we are not wed to a formalist approach, we want to focus on writing that pays attention to form's relation to content rather than simply content without reference to form.

One of the fascinating things about editing a journal is that it provides you with unique insights into scholarly trends and dominant discourses and narratives. In the last three years we have received plenty of submissions on superhero comics that fall into the category of disembodied content. Often, these submissions discuss the representation of a social issue in certain superhero comics without considering medium specificity. We receive many articles about subjects that comics cover but that say little to nothing about why it matters that these subjects be presented in comics form. This is not the case of an article like Christian Mehrstam's "Silver Lining: The Emblematic Exemplum of *Silver Surfer* #40–43" (Mehrstam 2020), that presents unexpected thematic and formal qualities of the comic. Mehrstam's argument that the medieval exemplum structures the issues he discusses is detailed and precise as well as challenging and even controversial.

The volume's contributions to our Graphic Justice special collection also have the kind of specificity we are looking for. They highlight legal issues of publishing comics that readers probably knew little about beforehand. Aislinn O'Connell's "Generic Superheroes: Can They Exist?" (O'Connell 2020) is a case in point. Who knew that the term we use to describe a genre of comic was actually trademarked? The article highlights the way the comics medium is enmeshed in issues of commerce and branding.

We remain committed to exploring using comics to represent research. In spite of well-known works like Nick Sousanis' *Unflattering* (2015) (Finch 2015; Wilkins

and Herd 2015), and a general increase in works that present comics as research, this aspect of comics studies remains more potential than realized. Nicolas Labarre has shepherded this dimension of our work. Elizabeth Allyn Woock’s “Nuns in Action: A Graphic Investigation into a Graphic Issue” (Woock 2020) demonstrates the strengths –visual interest, showing rather than telling, crystallization of complex ideas in images- and challenges -how to present text in relation to images, how to letter a text-heavy comic, how to integrate citations- of the genre. Woock’s article has a delightfully ‘meta’ angle: it is a comic explaining a figure’s recurrence in comics (Figure 4). As such, Woock’s work invokes McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993) and the history of using comics to explain comics.

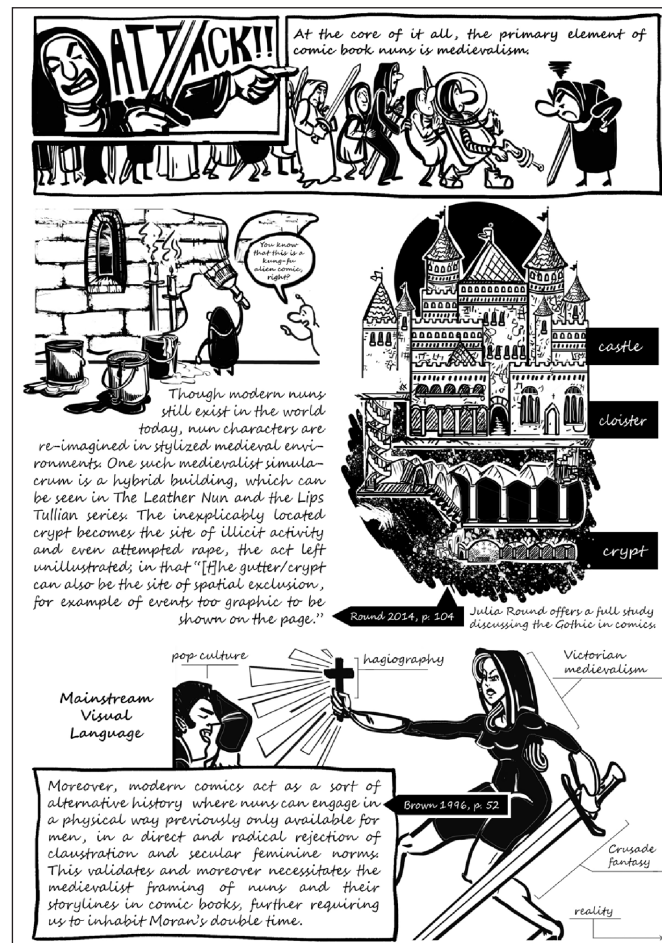


Figure 4: A page from “Nuns in Action: A Graphic Investigation into a Graphic Issue”, by Elizabeth Allyn Woock (2020).

Similarly, Angelo Joseph Letizia's "Truth, Politics and Disability: Graphic Narratives as Illustrated Hope" (Letizia 2020) demonstrates how comics scholars can engage practically, creatively and civically in comics creation, providing an empathetic, moving, inspiring and instructional example of how comics can be both personal and professional, and as such always-already political.

The inclusion of interviews, such as Darnel Degand's "*Brotherman*, Family, and Legacies: Recognizing the Contributions of African American Independent Comic Book Writers and Artists" (Degand 2020) continues to fit our vision for a type of comics scholarship composed by different types of contributions that go beyond the traditional research article, in which scholars generously share qualitative data (such as semi-structured interviews) that provide invaluable insights into authorial perspectives not always available to all researchers first hand.

As part of our interest to continue fostering engagement with our content post publication, we hosted our first webinar in a new series, "Live Chats on Comics Scholarship." The theme of our first event was "Troubling Boundaries, Leaking Forms: Reading Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Carroll's *Through the Woods*" and featured Dr. Jeanette D'Arcy and Dr. Miranda Corcoran, which was video-recorded for those who could not attend<sup>4</sup>. We are currently organising the next seminars in the series, which will take place over 2021.

With this tenth volume of the journal we believe that we are well on our way to achieving what we want *The Comics Grid* to represent: lively articles that are academic but attentive to the needs of a 21st Century online audience; a journal friendly and encouraging to marginalized voices; and comics scholarship whose primary subject is comics as a medium. We hope to get even better with the 11th volume.

## The Future We'd Like to See

Despite the healthy amount of comics scholarship over the past ten years, the discipline remains theoretically open and ontologically and epistemologically limited. There is much work to be done, with many methodologies, objects of study and

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.openlibhums.org/news/397/>. The direct URL of the recording on YouTube is <https://youtu.be/rq9676xHYXQ> [Accessed 5 November 2020].

interpretive voices still absent or underrepresented. Our editorial team and pool of reviewers will be looking for submissions resulting from a motivation to share professional expertise in an engaging manner and that, as research outputs, aim to be media-specific by reflecting the diversity, vibrancy and excitement of comics and comics cultures.

The journal receives full-text manuscripts for consideration via an open submission system. This workflow means we can only consider for publication the submissions that we receive. We do not accept articles on the basis of abstracts alone, and as an open platform etc. and can only consider what is submitted, as long as our journal guidelines have been followed, and as long as domain-specific peer review can be obtained in a timely manner. As editors of a peer-reviewed journal that receives open submissions we are ultimately responsible for the journal but in the end the decisions about what is accepted for publication are based on the assessment and recommendations provided by our pool of external peer reviewers, who are asked to adhere to the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) ethical guidelines (Hames 2013). As editors, we draft calls for papers, co-design author guidelines and define policies and scopes, but do not have the curatorial prerogatives editors of collected editions or non-scholarly magazines may have. However, as editors and as authors ourselves, as comics scholars, we do have a vision for the kind of articles we would like to see, a work-in-progress, collective editorial 'manifesto' of sorts.

We seek to help construct a critical discipline that is creative, innovative, experimental and risk-taking. Our ambition is to provide a platform for work that avoids traditionally over-researched topics and perspectives and that instead focuses on those which have been overlooked, that shares new critical and insightful perspectives, in a variety of forms that go beyond the traditional research article (for example, Degand 2020; Letizia 2020). We are motivated by the need to encourage a diversity of critical reflections and free comics scholarship from the competitive, publish-or-perish, paywalled, publication-for-publication's sake aspects that often constrain scholarly research.

The majority of the submissions that we receive focus on American superhero comics, often by male authors, with particular emphasis on textual analysis and a

preoccupation with plot. We feel that the international, multi-genre complexity and diversity of world comics remains largely unexplored. A common revision query has been asking authors to clarify what research question(s) their articles seek to address, and to detail what specific methods were followed in order to study/analyse/critically-describe their objects of study.

We have witnessed a dominance of analyses that could be adjectivized with thematic, textual, and historical, including references to close reading. Often this methodological scope is present but in practice it is not mentioned, as if it were the standard and only method to engage in the study of comics. Based on many submissions we have considered, we have found that comics scholarship often appears to see itself as a method in itself, because, unlike other disciplines, its outputs tend to either not include a 'methods' or 'methodology' section, or be implicit and multi-disciplinary. We have received a good number of content and thematic analyses that identify tropes and techniques, often establishing isomorphic relationships with external concepts, and in so doing, seem to displace the focus from comics to those external concepts- as an apologetic exercise in which the 'value' of comics were to be demonstrated by signaling their similarities or relationship to concepts or phenomena thought to be more widely 'valued.' We recognise this as a dominant trend in the history of comics scholarship, but consider that it is important to declare our methodological lens more clearly and transparently, so that any bias and limitations may also be assessed.

We would like to see submissions where the methods employed are clear and to the point, so another scholar could learn how to apply them to read the same or a different comic. Questions we would like to see addressed, to give some examples, are how generalisable are the methods and the conclusions presented? What is the evidence the specific contribution the article is making has not been made before in the same way? We believe research articles on comics should be more than expert, extended book reviews that include scholarly references, and therefore there should be an element of systematic, reproducible methodology, while respecting at the same time the accepted scholarly practices of different disciplines.

Our interest in research articles that are structured as such is balanced by our ongoing invitation to receive submissions where the writing is energetic and theoretically and interpretively bold. While academic rigour, the inclusion and close discussion of images and citational correctness are important to us as a precondition, a key feature we ask our editorial team and pool of peer reviewers to consider is the clarity and originality of the argument, the discovery, the evidence-based eureka moments conveyed in economical, precise, and, ideally, subtle prose. Over the years we have seen submissions become longer and longer. We know well it is hard (take this long Editorial as an example!) but we do believe academic writing about comics should aim to be as striking and immediate as the medium itself, particularly when it is a fact most of us are now reading and doing research online and via screens.

Through our submission guidelines and calls for papers, we have advocated open science methods and the value of reproducibility. However, we have yet to see more authors creating, citing and reusing datasets or code in their submissions, using appropriate open-access repositories such as [CORE](#), [figshare](#) or [Zenodo](#). Whether it is qualitative, quantitative or mixed data (including images, computer code, audio, video), comics scholars can play a role in enhancing the availability, access and reuse of open humanities data by more actively preparing, sharing and reusing comics studies datasets that can always be useful to other scholars in the field. We want to advocate more emphatically for the need for clarity of methods and openly available source data because as a journal we believe it is important to widen access to the field more generally.

We do agree with Linda Berube that “the creation of new narratives should be numbered among those obligations the scholarly community owes to itself” (Berube 2020). Comics studies cannot be excluded from fully-justified calls to ‘decolonise the curriculum’: as educators, all of us working in comics studies indeed “need to recognise that the curriculum largely reflects the dominant social group, and therefore can establish a narrow, monocultural view of the world in which ‘others’ exist only on the margins” (Moncrieffe et al 2020). As editors, we are personally aware that acknowledging unconscious and unintended bias is part of an epistemological

struggle; dominant discourses, 'master narratives' operate subconsciously and have real consequences. For example, the vocabulary we have used in this text (terms like 'rigour'); the fact we are writing this in English, reveal specific cultural, geopolitical and epistemological biases that must continue to be interrogated. However, it must be said that "while recognizing these biases at a personal level is important, creating new structural and institutional conditions to reduce bias can be even more valuable" (Hatch and Schmidt 2020).

Scholarly journals play an important structural role in this sense, and we would like *The Comics Grid* to be a platform where this can happen. For too long the contributions of non-Western, non-male, non-white authors have been largely overlooked in past and current scholarship, and this can be argued to be both the result of and the cause of a common structural bias: "resources often flow to those who already have them [...] highly cited references may be more cited in part because researchers see that they're highly cited" (Hatch and Schmidt 2020).

Indeed, as Brenna Clarke Gray stated it clearly in the 6th volume of this journal, "comics scholarship has a problem with representation that could be addressed if it paid greater attention to whose voices are amplified and when" (Gray 2016). We take this seriously. There is much to be done in comics scholarship to "correct the gaze" and widen the view beyond a few ubiquitously-cited (and studied) sources (Priego and Berube 2020). In this sense, we predict it will not be long before we start seeing in comics studies more critical awareness of the politics of citation practices (Ahmed 2013) inspired by more "conscientious engagements" to counter-balance "unethical hierarchies of knowledge production" (Mott and Cockayne 2017). We are acutely aware that, in our citation (and self-citation) practices in this article for example, we may still be contributing (or not) to the very issues we are aware need tackling more critically.

We therefore have a vision for comics studies which is 'media-specific' in at least three ways: firstly because the field's focus remains comics, in all their multi-faceted diversity, complexity and vibrancy; secondly because the study of comics, like a many of the studied comics themselves, can be said to mostly exist and take place today

somewhere in the spectrum of multimodal, interactive, user-centred digital environments, and thirdly because comics studies as a field operates within academic institutions and scholarly and scientific cultures, and therefore plays a varied role within established hierarchies of knowledge production. What role exactly comics studies will continue to play beyond our most immediate contexts -in which direction we will take what we do- is up to all of us, auto-critically, collectively, cooperatively, openly, and collegially.

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This article was drafted collectively in a shared online environment across time zones. A combination of American and British spellings may have remained.

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