Editorial
Comics and Transnational Exchanges

The title of our journal implies there is such a thing as European comic art, even if in practice it is intended to indicate we focus on work produced (outside the United States) in European languages, leaving the fields of South East Asian and US comics to other publications in the discipline. However, European comics clearly have not developed in isolation from other comics traditions: from the earliest days, they have both impacted and absorbed influences from elsewhere: to cite an obvious example, Rudolph Dirks's *Katzenjammer Kids* was modelled on Wilhelm Busch's *Max und Moritz*, and both have served as templates for generations of mischievous children from Alain Saint-Ogan's *Zig et Puce*, through *Dennis the Menace*, in both US and UK incarnations. Of course, not only character types cross national borders: such transfers also operate at the stylistic and thematic levels: Frank Miller has taken inspiration from manga, while Lewis Trondheim, perhaps the most important artist to emerge from the French small-press movement, has acknowledged his debt to the great American artist Cark Barks. The most American of genres, the Western, with its iconography of landscapes and guns, and its themes of frontier, conquest and settlement, has loomed large in Franco/Belgian comics, albeit with a certain demythologisation, while the superhero genre, with its themes of double identity and the blurring of boundaries between humans and machines, has flourished both in the United States and Japan, arising out of different cultural traditions (including Norse legends for the former and Noh theatre masks for the latter) but exerting considerable mutual influence. The process is never simply one of integration but necessarily involves transformation. The articles in this issue of *European Comic Art* all include a focus on transnational interactions and exchanges, and on the new meanings generated as redrawing and reframing bring about a recontextualisation.

Our first article, by Maaheen Ahmed, concerns *Achtung Zelig!*, by the Polish artist and writer team Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and

Krystian Rosenberg, first published in 1994, which challenges official, Soviet-influenced accounts of the Second World War by incorporating alternative versions of history drawn from popular cultural sources of varying national origins and across different media. Ahmed begins with a theorisation of the notion of media memories, stressing that cultural memory is a matter not of reproducing reality but of remediation, and arguing that comics, as a polygraphic art, in Thierry Smolderen's term, is particularly apt as a vehicle for transmedial interactions and mutations. She finds in Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg's story, which features a circus-clown-turned-Nazi-officer and a Jewish father and son who have grotesque faces, resembling an alien and a frog, respectively, echoes of a carnivalesque tradition of performance that can be tracked through manifestations such as the commedia dell'arte Pierrot and the Joker, traces of other comics including Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (referenced obliquely by the cats that stalk through the narrative) and Horst Rosenthal's *Mickey au camp de Gurs*, and evocations of films by Roberto Benigni and Charlie Chaplin. The resolute non-realism of this highly mediated story both runs counter to socialist realism, Ahmed points out, and enables the authors to represent the unrepresentable historical trauma of the Holocaust.

Yaakova Sacerdoti's article is devoted to Rosenthal's aforementioned book, written and drawn in 1942 while the artist was interned in the Gurs concentration camp in the south of France, before his murder in Auschwitz-Birkenau, at the age of twenty-seven. Sacerdoti's analysis deploys Gérard Genette's work on transtextuality to investigate the meanings created by this intrusion of an American comic-strip character, Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse, into a Holocaust narrative set in France. At the level of the paratext, she suggests, the reader is already confronted with the disconcerting clash between two incompatible worlds, setting the scene for a story in which the absurd becomes everyday reality. At the architextual level, that of genre affiliation, Sacerdoti finds allusions to the conventions of the fairy tale, not as they are transmuted into the saccharine ingredients of Disney films but rather as they occur in their darker European originals. This is, though, a fairy tale that functions as a satire, and Sacerdoti analyses Rosenthal's use of stock comedy types, the alazon, or fool (whether self-deceiving bureaucrats or naively optimistic prisoners) and the eiron, the role taken on by Mickey as narrator, exposing the folly of others. She finally looks at the hypertextual level, reading Rosenthal's text as an ironical imitation of

Dante's *Inferno*, with inmates led into the hell of the camp as punishment for the sin of being Jewish.

Sean McPhail considers Anike Hage's 2013 manga adaptation of Gudrun Pausewang's novel *Die Wolke* [*Fall-Out*], published in 1987, the year after the Chernobyl accident, whose subject matter is a (fictional) nuclear disaster on German soil and its consequences. McPhail notes the change in the political and ideological climate that has taken place since Pausewang's book was written: where her protagonists, in the context of the Cold War, fear nuclear annihilation, that concern is outweighed for Hage's protagonists by the threat of ecological disaster. Similarly, Hage exorcises the lingering memories of the Second World War, disillusionment with democratic institutions and a keen awareness of West Germany's situation on the front line of East-West tension, pervasive in Pausewang's book. McPhail points out that the use of the manga format is itself emblematic of a change in German sensibilities: comics had been regarded with suspicion in the aftermath of the war as a non-German medium, resented for its association with occupying US soldiers. By 2013, a renewed faith in democracy and an outward-looking vision of Germany within Europe allowed for the growth of a comics culture that was not only open to indigenously produced works but also served as a meeting point for transnational stylistic and thematic tendencies, including manga, taken up by German artists and representing an ongoing dialogue between Japanese and European comics.

David Leishman writes about an advertising campaign for Irn-Bru, the (other) Scottish national drink, which ran from 1939 to 1970, in the form of a comic strip featuring 'The Adventures of Ba-Bru', a beturbanned Indian character. The choice of this figure to promote a product so closely associated with Scotland seems less incongruous, notes Leishman, in the context of a period when the marketing of Irn-Bru stressed not Scottish identity but a Britishness that was bound up with the imperial enterprise, in which Scots were heavily invested. The graphic character had first appeared in 1938 in poster ads recalling a long tradition of colonial iconography across various media, connoting both subservience and exoticism, in opposition to the implied dominant community made up of white readers. In the comic strip, though, Ba-Bru was endowed with an energy that Leishman likens to positive images such as that of the young actor Sabu, who had starred in the 1937 film *Elephant Boy*. However, as from 1943, when the stereotypically Scots character Sandy was introduced into the strip, the Indian was rele-

gated to a supporting role, that of naive recipient of Sandy's pedagogical exposition of Scottish achievements and customs. Leishman argues that the form of consumerist nationalism fostered by the adverts had a political dimension in its affirmation of Scottish distinctiveness, but by the 1970s, discourses around national identity were increasingly built on the rejection of Unionism, and the Ba-Bru strips, reminiscent of a British colonial heritage, were dropped.

David Morgan's article pursues the transnational theme at the level of critical approaches, importing a Lacanian framework to shed light on the pleasures afforded to spectators of eighteenth-century English satirical prints. He compares the distortion of these images of the powerful to the phenomenon of anamorphosis, described in Lacan's analysis of the skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, which only becomes recognisable when the viewer steps away from the painting, disrupting the Cartesian assumption of a subject in full command of geometric rationality. It thereby betrays the unassimilable loss and unfulfillable desire that is normally screened by perspectival illusionism, and the precarity with which the Symbolic order is kept in place. Morgan cites George Townshend's representation of the Duke of Cumberland as a grotesque and obese fop, which indicates the void that lies beneath the surface glamour of aristocracy. He then introduces Lacan's explanation of the subject's ability to manipulate the gaze of the Other in order to maintain a sense of him/herself as a social being and argues that George Cruikshank's derisive caricatures of current fashions may be read as a comedic exaggeration, and revelation, of desperate attempts to keep the social mask from slipping. Likewise, James Gillray's double portrayals of political figures set their public personae alongside a more scurrilous twin. Morgan concludes with a consideration of Gillray's satirical attacks on George III, which ostensibly focus on his attempts to exchange awkward banter with his subjects and render the symbolism of the Crown conspicuous by its absence.

The works of European comic art discussed by our five authors thus include a Polish comic on the persecution of Jews in the Second World War that escapes realism by a strategy of perceptible mediation through highly resonant texts from different media and national origins; a French comic (considered here in its English translation) by a German Jew that uses an icon of American popular culture to spotlight the insanity of the regime in the concentration camp where the author is interned; a manga adaptation of a German novel written a quarter of a century previously, allowing for a comparison between very different

political and cultural conjunctures, not least in relation to the status of the comics medium itself; an advertising campaign for a Scottish product that features and subsequently discards a figure of the colonial imagination, as discourses on national identity evolve; and a set of eighteenth-century English caricatures that are shown, with the aid of a French psychoanalyst, to dismantle the psychic apparatus that underpins the imagined mastery of the individual subject and the symbolic authority of the Crown. The fertile imagination of comics creators will never be confined by national boundaries.

—*The Editors*