
Introduction: Diversity and New Directions

The Editors

Future directions are often shaped by quirks of necessity or chance: the groundbreaking iconoclast that is Moebius's *Garage hermétique*, with its rejection of conventional narrative or character coherence, came as a result of the author having forgotten previous scripts from one week to the next; Rodolphe Töpffer, so often credited for having invented the modern comic strip, initially saw himself as producing no more than scribblings for the entertainment of his pupils; one of the earliest of text/image forms, the emblem, may well be the result of Augsburg printer, Heinrich Steiner, adding images in 1531 to Andrea Alciato's epigrams, a far cry from the composed intertwining of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499. Mirroring such processes in our own way, *European Comic Art* is embarking on a new direction, as we turn to issues that can reflect the diversity of comic art rather than being necessarily united by a single theme. It is a logical direction, but also one shaped by chance and necessity, that of the diversity of high-quality submissions that we have been delighted to receive.

Unification through diversity is, however, in itself a paradoxical theme. On the formal level, this current issue demonstrates the rich variety of approaches and presentations that comic art scholarship can sustain. We present four analytical articles with very different methodologies and subject matter, as well as annotated interviews from two contemporary artists. The volume is richly illustrated by both archival material and original artwork, and the broader context of current scholarship is explored in the reviews section. To take the two artists featured prominently, their lives and activities may seem as different as can be imagined, yet such diversity is riddled with overlaps. Farid Boudjellal (b. 1953) is from Toulon, of Algerian and Armenian heritage, and has been living and working in Paris for several decades. His comics criss-cross the Mediterranean from Algeria to France and back, and often tell stories related to colonisation, war and working-class migration. However, his work cannot be easily pigeonholed. For example, some of it combines the realist and fantastic genres,

and his comics references are wide-ranging, from Milton Caniff to Essegese, and from Louis Forton to Gébé. Morvandiau (b. 1974) works through off-the-wall caricature often to provide biting political satire, coming through the underground presses now to reach mainstream audiences via such publications as *Marianne*. In *D'Algérie*, the book that is the main focus of the interview, he abandons his habitual register to investigate the links between the story of his *Pied-noir* family and the wider history of France's colonial relationship with Algeria. The post-colonial inheritance therefore runs through the work of both artists, and these interviews raise similar themes of identity, belonging and cultural memory.

Likewise, our four scholarly articles, from authors based in four different countries, explore different approaches that come together when least we expect it. Anna Giaufret's article brings work in pragmatics to bear on the dialogues in two albums set in Corsica. Moreover, her discussion focuses specifically on the question of transcultural communication, or miscommunication. Her article examines the way in which the conversational strategies used by the Corsicans are misunderstood by the outsiders (in one case Astérix and his fellow Gaulois, in the other case the Parisian detective Jack Palmer) to comic effect. Giaufret takes a highly productive approach to the analysis of humour in comic art. Based rather on the work of a single author, Fabrice Leroy's contribution examines the world of Joann Sfar. But from unity springs diversity as Leroy considers trans-media borrowing and inspiration (*bande dessinée* and painting), with transnational implications: the Russian-French-Algerian connection is through Sfar's painter figure via Marc Chagall; the success of *The Rabbi's Cat* in English translation; and no doubt the forthcoming film, surely designed to be released beyond France. Pascal Lefèvre and Morgan Di Salvia's analysis moves towards the sociological as it presents, from the basis of a questionnaire, the economic profile of contemporary comics artists in Belgium and uncovers some contrasts between the responses of French- and Dutch-speaking artists. Finally, history is not forgotten here with James Baker considering satirical print media in early nineteenth-century England. Here again we find interdisciplinarity, as Baker, like Boudjellal and Morvandiau, builds bridges between art and its history, political agitation and communication theory.

Unexpected links in seemingly disparate productions can lead us to overall unity, in this case via the notion of border-crossing. The eclecticism of our contributions crosses not only national borders but also those of time and critical stance. They bring together contradictions that in themselves are a microcosm of European comic art and of *European Comic Art*. On a further level, just as the diversity of this issue can be a theme in itself, so the new direction is an old one, as we remember that the very first issue of *European Comic Art* introduced itself by presenting a varied sample of approaches to come.

Presenting a range of approaches, styles, content and national traditions,

with overlapping elements, is perhaps more valid in early 2011 than ever. As we write, the Angoulême Festival has recently awarded its *Grand Prix* to Art Spiegelman. That the leading European festival should give its main accolade to a North American is a significant reminder of the internationalisation of comics. But such internationalisation is interdependent, and can seem contradictory: Spiegelman may appear to be the archetypal New Yorker whose work rarely leaves Manhattan, yet through his personal and professional collaboration with Françoise Mouly, his outspoken views against US foreign policy, and the European works that have influenced him and that he has influenced, Spiegelman demonstrates as well as anyone that comic art thrives best in a worldwide and interdisciplinary context. The new recession is hitting European comics hard, but we are reminded of Spiegelman's *Maus*, which has shown it to be in the nooks and crannies of diversity – and adversity – that we find the capacity for distancing, reflection and irony that is an essential part of survival.