General Introduction

The Editors

European Comic Art has moved from Liverpool to Oxford, and we are happy to be working with Mark Stanton and his colleagues at Berghahn Books, whose headquarters are within sight of a dreaming spire or two but just as close to East Oxford, where the longest-standing continuous annual comics festival in Britain, 'Caption', has been held every summer since 1992.

We open this new partnership with another departure. *ECA* 5.1 is devoted to Quebec, a nation noteworthy both for its long history of comic art and for being home to a vibrant contemporary comics scene. Brilliant artists of the early-twentieth century chronicled and satirised a rapidly changing and increasingly urban society, their descendents of the 1960s and 1970s played a part in the redefinition of Québécois identity in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, and the astonishingly inventive small-press artists of the twenty-first century continue to produce work that is recognisably rooted in a sense of place, but a place where the local intersects with the global and transnational.

The introduction to this issue is written by Bill Marshall, an eminent specialist on Québécois culture, particularly cinema. He offers a consideration of complex issues of nationality and identity in Quebec, caught between the desire for fixity within an Oedipal narrative and the pleasures of difference and dispersion. He suggests, moreover, that comics scholarship is well placed to question boundaries and hierarchies, and to open up new relationships within the study of metropolitan and non-metropolitan cultural production.

By taking Québécois comic art as our theme for *ECA*, we do not, of course, imply that it is a subcategory of European comic art. Our inclusion of an article on *Tintin au Tibet* by one of Quebec's foremost *bande dessinée* theoreticians, Jacques Samson, does not signal any intention to co-opt Québécois comics into a Franco-Belgian narrative

of origins, but rather to emphasise, on the one hand, the key role played by Québécois academics in producing a body of critical work on the medium and to exemplify, on the other hand, the relationship of tension that exists between Québécois comics production and that of its various cultural Others. Samson's article shows how Hergé's album works at an unconscious level to disrupt the boundaries between self and other, as the famous legibility of the *ligne claire* is perturbed by a series of illegible traces, a latent content brought to the surface by receptiveness to the text as dream work. Samson's insightful and critical reading of Hergé is echoed in a reference made by Jimmy Beaulieu to the work of Luc Giard (see Figure 6 in Beaulieu's article), whose childhood memories of immersion in the fictional world of Tintin are refracted and transformed through the sensibility of an adult artist and sculptor.

Jimmy Beaulieu, outstanding comics artist and cornerstone of alternative comics publishing in Montreal, also alludes to a different set of Others with whom Québécois comics artists have had to contend, as the thriving comics culture of the earlier part of the twentieth century died out, unable to compete with the cheaper American comics being dumped on the market. However, Beaulieu acknowledges the positive impact, in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century of the U.S. underground, of an important anglophone Canadian group of comics artists and of the metropolitan French alternative comics scene, even if their combined prestige made the task of creating and sustaining a readership for Québécois comics a daunting one. Beaulieu's struggle is epic, and his compelling article conveys a powerful sense both of the satisfaction of bringing creative projects, often collaborative, to fruition, but also of the solitary days and nights spent on the arduous, minutely detailed technical procedures involved in running a small comics press.

Along with our distinguished Québécois contributors to this volume, we are delighted also to include articles from two anglophone scholars, Christopher Rolfe and Catriona MacLeod.

Rolfe, a pioneer of Quebec studies in the U.K., and a specialist in Québécois printmaking, contextualises the development of comics within a wider cultural scene, including visual arts and literature. He traces their involvement with competing discourses (the excitement of industrialisation and modernity, versus the mythologisation of rural life), and, subsequently, with the upheavals of the 1960s, which brought about a renewal of style as well as a more virulently anti-establishment content. Rolfe laments the failure of the Chiendent group, the most original Québécois comics artists of this period, to find the publishers and audiences that their work merited. However, in an interesting

reversal of the usual hierarchy, he analyses the later output of Chiendent artists who had become printmakers, and detects a strong influence of comics techniques upon their work.

The article on Julie Doucet by MacLeod, a young researcher at the beginning of her career, inaugurates a series of articles on Québécois artists that will be continued in subsequent editions of *European Comic Art*. MacLeod proposes a close reading of the Québécoise artist's *Changements d'adresses* ['Changes of Addresses'],¹ noting that this album consistently portrays male characters as hindering the creativity of Doucet's textual self, and contains a series of visual indications that link her sexual encounters with men to the theme of death. Doucet's work, claims MacLeod, not only functions to enhance the visibility of women within a medium that has traditionally marginalised or negatively stereotyped them, but offers a demonstration of a specifically feminist deployment of the graphic line.

Artists to be featured in forthcoming editions will include Guy Delisle and Michel Rabagliati. The fact that we are receiving increasing numbers of submissions based on the work of Québécois artists undoubtedly reflects their high profile and their appeal to a new generation of researchers, but we would encourage colleagues to investigate also work that is less familiar outside Quebec. This edition constitutes, therefore, our first foray into the rich and fertile landscape of Québécois comics. We hope that, as readers, you will be enchanted by the imaginary (psycho)geography of Quebec evoked by the illustrations to the articles by Rolfe, Beaulieu and MacLeod. For the fans that we are, one of the pleasures of putting together *ECA* 5.1 has been the email contact that it has afforded us with many artists whose work we admire, and who have been generous in giving permission to use their images. We would also like to thank Madame Christiane Chartier, to whom we wrote in connection with a page and a cover produced by her father, Albert Chartier, the most emblematic of Québécois comics artists whose career, as Christopher Rolfe reminds us, spans, celebrates and lampoons transitions in the life of Quebec over much of the twentieth century. In her letter, Madame Chartier pointed out that her father would have been a hundred years old this year – and so it is to him that we dedicate this issue.

1 Julie Doucet, *Changements d'adresse* (Paris: L'Association, 1998).