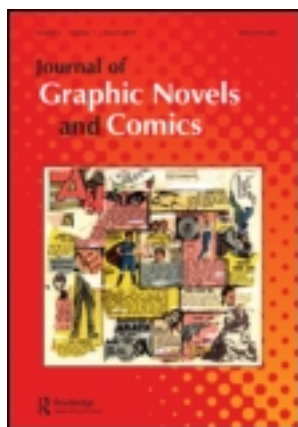


This article was downloaded by: [Universitätsbibliothek Bern]

On: 01 May 2014, At: 12:23

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcom.20>

Transnational perspectives on graphic narratives. Comics at the crossroads, by Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein

Ralf Kauranen^a

^a University of Turku

Published online: 20 Dec 2013.

To cite this article: Ralf Kauranen (2014) Transnational perspectives on graphic narratives. Comics at the crossroads, by Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, 5:2, 236-239, DOI: [10.1080/21504857.2013.860381](https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2013.860381)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2013.860381>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

BOOK REVIEW

Transnational perspectives on graphic narratives. Comics at the crossroads, edited by Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, xvi + 294 pp., £65.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-14411-8575-4

Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives. Comics at the Crossroads, edited by Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein, collects 16 articles, accompanied by a Foreword, an Introduction and an Afterword, presenting studies of comics in their transnational contexts. The publication of the book signals the arrival of the ‘transnational turn’ in comics studies. The term ‘transnational turn’ has been used in reference to at least literary studies (Jay 2010), American studies (e.g. Pease 2011) and migration studies (Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen 2004), to describe the increasing interest in cultural and social processes crossing national borders, the entanglement of national histories, and at times the diminishing significance of the category of the national and the nation-state. To describe this change in interest as a ‘turn’ in the theoretical and empirical orientations of a field may imply a significant change to the field as a whole, a description that would be exaggerated and precipitate when it comes to comics studies, which still is predominantly occupied with projects confined by the borders of nations. The addition that the volume *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives* brings to comics studies is a welcome one, and I can only agree with the hopes of the editors who wish that the book will ‘serve as a discussion starter that raises many more pertinent questions and, as such, enables new transnational perspectives on graphic narratives’ (p. 8).

The articles of the book are divided into three sections. The first, ‘Politics and Poetics’, presents analyses of how transnationalism and questions of identity are represented in a number of comics. This section opens with Michael A. Chaney’s eloquent article on two works dealing with US slavery, Tom Feelings’s *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* and Kyle Baker’s *Nat Turner*. The article sets a critical tone towards simplistic analyses of representations of transnational themes in graphic narratives, by pointing at ways in which the analysed works in an Afrodiasporic context not only narrate a transnational story, but significantly also present a take on the problematics of depiction and knowing. In the following article, Elisabeth El Refaie studies Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* through the concept of cultural identity as a transnational hybrid form as metaphorically portrayed by shape-shifting in the comic. Two articles, by Georgiana Banita and Aryn Bartley respectively, apply the concept of cosmopolitanism on works of comics journalism, Joe Sacco’s work being central. Banita’s article focuses on silent panels as a form of sceptical commentary on cosmopolitanism as meaningful dialogue. Bartley’s analysis of *Footnotes in Gaza* points at the possibilities of ‘a transnational conversation about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict’ (p. 79) opened up by a critical treatment of empathy rather based on difference than mere identification.

The politics of transnational poetics are highlighted in two more articles: Iris-Aya Laemmerhirt’s study of R. Kikuo Johnson’s *Night Fisher* and Daniel Wüllner’s analysis of works by Warren Craghead III. Informed by Arjun Appadurai’s discussion of global flows and their impact on imagination, Laemmerhirt points at various aspects of *Night Fisher*’s

treatment of colonial history, migration and identity formation in a Hawaiian context. Wüllner shows how Craghead's comics – *How to Be Everywhere* and *seed toss, kick it over* – transgress various boundaries creating connections not only transnationally, but also transmedially and between production and reception.

The second part of the book directs focus on superhero comics. Five articles shed light on Batman in a transnational context, Spider-Man in India and Japan, the Muslim superheroes of *The 99* and on the transnational authorship of Warren Ellis.

Katharina Bieloch and Sharif Bitar's article on Batman comics rewriting the Americanness of the character (Grant Morrison's *Batman: Incorporated* in particular) introduces the concept of transcultural work, referring to 'the inevitable hybridity of culture and its constant flux in a globalizing world' (p. 113). The understanding of transcultural processes is diversified in Shilpa Davé's article on *Spider-Man India*, which is interpreted through the concept of transcreation (a term coined by one of the co-creators of the series). Transcreation is set against processes of translation and cultural exchange, and interestingly in Davé's treatment covers business strategic relations of transnational coproduction as well as textual and narrative relations of intertextuality and generic crossings. Tracing the history of Spider-Man's adventures in Japan and as both Japanese and American manga, Daniel Stein also uses transcreation to describe the various turns of adaptation and readaptation of the Spider-Man comics. The historical dimension stretching from the early 1970s *Spider-Man the Manga* until the twenty-first century and the number of various attempts to transform Spider-Man transpacifically allows the telling of a story of multidirectional circulation rather than one of a unilinear movement from one national or (comics) cultural field to another.

Jochen Ecke asks, in an article focused on Warren Ellis, how the authorial function has changed in American mainstream comics production and to what degree the changes can be seen as the results of transnational relations. The analysis of Ellis's authorial performance, representative of other performances of the so-called British invasion, highlights the increasing 'individuality and artistic independence' (p. 170) brought about in the authorial function, but it remains somewhat unclear how much a perspective on transnational processes can account for in this interpretation. Ecke's focus on authorship, however, offers a welcome addition to the otherwise predominantly text-oriented studies of the volume. In the final article in the section devoted to superhero comics, Stefan Meier presents *The 99* with a focus on its creation of a utopian, post-nationalist and cosmopolitan superhero team based on a humanistic interpretation of Islam combined with the conventions of superhero comics. The analysis is, again, informed by Appadurai's discussion of global flows of media imagery and technologies as well as migrating humans.

As the title – 'Translations, Transformations, Migrations' – of the third part of the book indicates, the section collects a number of articles approaching the issue of transnationalism from variegated perspectives. The section opens with Florian Groß's study of wordless graphic novels (Frans Masereel's *The City*, Lynd Ward's *God's Man* and Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, as well as the fictional graphic novel *The Golem* described in Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*), pointing at the transnational thematics in the comics, yet questioning the universality of a wordless pictorial narration. Frank Miller's *Sin City* presents to Frank Mehring an example of remediation of a transnational kind. Mehring convincingly shows how *Sin City* builds on the traditions of film noir and expressionist cinema, woodcut novels and the artists of the Harlem Renaissance to invoke connotations of a global, and in that sense transnational, urban cityscape. The central concept in Lukas Etter's analysis of Jason Lutes's *Berlin* series is plurality. As in the previous article the city constitutes a central point of reference, but

now the focus is on the multifaceted life of the Berlin of the Weimar Republic. Lutes's work not only addresses this on the content-level, through manifold characters and plots, but also on the formal level through intertextual references both in the form of citations of works of various arts and by way of a mix of comics styles.

According to Mark Berninger, Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim* constitutes 'a prime example of why it makes so little sense to study comics in a purely national context' (p. 244). To define the comic as purely Canadian or as a part of American comics culture would be a simplification not accounting for the manga influences or the many references to global youth (sub)cultures related to indie rock or videogames. The final article, by Jean-Paul Gabilliet, differs from the rest of the texts in the volume as it is the only one positing reception at the centre, but also because it presents a case of failed transnationalism or at least of less successful transnational connections. Gabilliet examines the reception of the *Tintin* and *Astérix* series in the USA and convincingly describes the lack of success in terms of differing comics consumption patterns and a diverging legitimacy of the comics medium in the Franco-Belgian and American contexts. Whereas the *Tintin* and *Astérix* albums both as narratives and commodities have been exemplary of Franco-Belgian (and European, more generally) comics production and consumption, their double nature as a specific kind of content in a specific kind of format has not been easily translated into the traditions of the US comics market.

Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives offers a wealth of concepts and perspectives for the study of the transnational in comics research. Shane Denson's Afterword, which ties together the articles through the concept of framing, adds to the theoretical value of the book. The studies presented in the volume concentrate on comics as texts, and a more sociological analysis of the transnationalism of the comics field mostly lends support to the textual orientation. In his Foreword, John A. Lent rightfully calls for more studies of the political economy of the transnational comics field. Furthermore, while comics of different genres are studied, the focus of most of the articles is on contemporary works, thus creating the view that transnationalism in the comics field is a recent phenomenon occurring only in the last few decades. The historical roots or the genealogy of the transnationalism of the comics field is left for future research to look into.

Based on the general information given by the title and the back cover text of the book, it may come as a surprise to the reader that the transnational connections described in the articles are strongly tied to one specific national context, that is, the USA. All empirical case studies cover transnational relations involving, one way or another, American comics culture. As the editors and many of the authors are affiliated to the field of American studies, this trait is understandable, but it also is an obvious limitation of the book's coverage. This limitation is, however, negligible, because the field of American comics becomes something of an object of a case study, attesting to the multitudinous transnational connections defining a cultural field traditionally and usually described and named in nationalist terms. In this sense the transnational perspective not only adds to analyses done within a framework of methodological nationalism, but also stands as a corrective to them, pointing at the problematics of naming and describing things in accordance with a map of confined national cultures and nation-states, when, in fact, entangled histories and border-crossings are legion.

References

- Jay, P. 2010. *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Levitt, P., and N. Nyberg-Sørensen. 2004. *The Transnational Turn in Migration Studies*. Global Migration Perspectives No. 6. Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration.
- Pease, D. E. 2011. "Introduction: Re-Mapping the Transnational Turn." In *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, edited by W. Fluck, D. E. Pease, and J. C. Rowe, 1–46. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press.

Ralf Kauranen

University of Turku

ralf.kauranen@utu.fi

© 2013, Ralf Kauranen

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2013.860381>