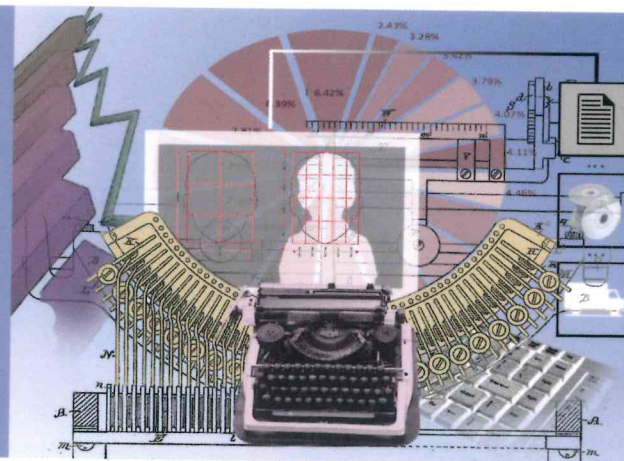


In this volume, we define media economies as a set of cultural practices that exert a direct influence on the aesthetics, tastes, and ethics of a consumer's lived experience. These practices rest both on emotional and affective exploitation and investments that result from media branding as a specific form of media economy. It renders a social group's lived experience by teleconomics, i.e. the use of media forms as based on experienced limitations of public and private spheres and new media's discursive practices of broad- and narrowcasting. Last but not least, media economies are understood as a corporate and global set of cultural practices that inform standardized modes of production, reproduction, and distribution. This understanding of media economies informs the threefold structure of this anthology that collects contributions from European and American scholars working in the fields of media and communication studies, English and American literature, and visual studies.

MEDIA ECONOMIES

Perspectives on
American Cultural Practices

MARCEL HARTWIG
EVELYNE KEITEL
GUNTER SÜSS
(EDS.)



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Media Economies: An Introduction

Marcel Hartwig, Gunter Süß

Homo oeconomicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics* (226).

In this volume, we define media economies as a set of cultural practices that exert a direct influence on the aesthetics, tastes and ethics of a consumer's lived experience. These practices rest both on emotional and affective actions and investments that result from media branding as a specific form of media economy. It renders a social group's lived experience by teleonomics, i.e. the use of media forms as based on experienced limitations of public and private spheres and new media's discursive practices of broad- and narrowcasting. Last but not least, media economies are understood as a corporate and global set of cultural practices that inform standardized forms of production, reproduction, and distribution. As such they address issues of authorship, ownership and generic features of media forms. Our understanding of media economies informs the threefold structure of this anthology.

Initially, this project was an enquiry into a possible paradigm shift within Media and Cultural Studies. In their essay "Critical Media Industry Studies," published in 2009, Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz and Serra Tinic point out that Media Studies have habitually neglected economic and corporate issues: "If the ways that we have traditionally studied the media can be categorized into general areas of industry, text, and audience, then the vast majority of critical media scholarship has favored the latter two areas" (234). In the same year, Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren suggest in their "Introduction" to the anthology *Media Industries* that because of rapid changes to the production, distribution, and consumption of media texts in a globalized and digitalized world the academic discourse of Media Studies should be expanded to include an important new subdiscipline, namely the field of Media Industry Studies:

These myriad developments have created a pressing need to bring interdisciplinary scholarship on media industries into a common dialogue. It is therefore our belief that media industry studies should be mapped and articulated as a distinct and vitally important field itself. (2)

Moreover, following the burst of the housing bubble in 2008, the financial crisis, and the economic meltdown in many countries of the (Western) world, discourses on the

Popular Seriality, Authorship, Superhero Comics: On the Evolution of a Transnational Genre Economy

Daniel Stein

What happens when popular products travel from one culture to another? This is, of course, anything but a simple question. Indeed, the movement of products (and people) across cultures and their dispersal throughout different regions of the world has always been a lived reality rather than the consequence of nineteenth-century industrialization and twentieth-century information technologies. As Edward Said writes, “the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds of different cultures” (261). Said’s economic metaphors do not subscribe to any vulgar version of cultural and media imperialism according to which a Western center, frequently represented by a near-omnipotent and manipulative American culture industry, forces consumer goods onto more or less powerless regions on the periphery, thereby destroying local cultural production. Rather, they suggest an understanding of global cultural flow that, as Arjun Appadurai suggests, no longer views the United States as “the puppeteer of a world system of images but [sees it as] only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (*Modernity* 31).¹

Superhero comics participate in the construction of such transnational imaginary landscapes, even though they are seldom studied in this context. As serially produced, widely circulated, and commercially viable products, they contribute to what I want to call a “genre economy.” In this genre economy, images and stories do not originate in a single place from which they are then exported. Instead, they are produced in many different spaces, adapted across national borders, and redefined across various cultural contexts. The goal of this essay is to trace the evolution of this transnational genre economy by focusing on manga adaptations of superhero comics and their re-adaptation for the American market.² I proceed from the assumption that

¹ The spatial metaphor of a culturally authoritative and politically dominant center and a culturally subordinate, dominated periphery was introduced by Edward Shils in his work on the structures of societies in 1961. In the context of globalization theories, the center-periphery model is frequently associated with Western imperialism (political, economic, cultural) at the expense of non-Western countries and regions. For an early version of this argument, see Galtung.

² I understand “adaptation” broadly as revisions of stories and characters as well as the creation of completely new stories based on established characters and fictional universes (see also Hutcheon).

theories of cultural and media imperialism too often stress the manipulation of audiences and thus tend to overlook the transnational productivity of popular authorship, while they too rarely account for the generative power of transcultural revisionings and remakings of popular genres.³

My claim that American superhero comics constitute a transnational genre economy rests on a specific understanding of a phenomenon I call “popular seriality.”⁴ When I speak of popular seriality, I mean, first and foremost, the affinity between popular culture and serial narration. Indeed, many of the most popular productions in American culture (but also beyond) since the nineteenth century have been serially organized, from dime novels, newspaper comics strips, and early film serials to magazine fiction, comic books, television sitcoms, quality television, and even Hollywood blockbusters.⁵ Most of these productions are explicitly (and often unabashedly) commercial and (sometimes implicitly) multi-authored, and they generally address heterogeneous and potentially global audiences. As Umberto Eco has famously argued, a dialectic of repetition and variation, of reproduction and innovation, underlies all serial narration, but it is particularly prominent in the realm of popular culture, where it leads to complex authorization conflicts and authorship contestations.⁶ Indeed, this dialectic facilitates the proliferation of popular narratives by generating not just officially sanctioned authors (or author teams, production studios, etc.) but also diffusely authorized and even unauthorized authors whose interests in the continuation of these narratives can differ vastly from those who own trademarks and copyrights.

While popular serial narratives may not erase established roles of producer and consumer, or author and reader, they ultimately blur such distinctions by variously turning producers into consumers, authors into readers, and vice versa. If you want to write, say, an authoritative Batman story at the beginning of the twenty-first century, you have to be knowledgeable about the history of the series, its position within the superhero genre, its transmedial extensions, and so forth. Which means: You essentially have to be a dedicated reader of Batman stories in order to become a competent author. And for many such a reader, a personal investment with the series motivates different forms of authorship outside the sphere of professional cultural production, from fan letters and fan fiction to the editing of fanzines, the drawing of

³ Such transcultural remakings and revisions do not necessarily climax in what Gravett labels “world comics” (157). See also Stein, “Of Transcreations and Transpacific Adaptations.”

⁴ The concept of “popular seriality” was developed by the DFG-Research Unit “Popular Seriality: Aesthetics and Practice” at Georg-August-University Göttingen. For an introduction, see Kelleter. My argument in this essay is related to a joint research project with Frank Kelleter on “Authorization Practices of Serial Narration: The Generic Development of Batman and Spider-Man-Comics.” We formulate our objectives in Kelleter and Stein, “Autorisierungspraktiken.”

⁵ On comics and serial storytelling, see especially Gardner.

⁶ See Eco’s chapter “Interpreting Serials” in *The Limits of Interpretation*; on authorship and authorization, see Kelleter and Stein, “Autorisierungspraktiken.”

amateur comics, the presentation of criticism on Internet blogs, and more – all of which may, in one way or another, feed back into official comic book production. These practices, I contend, drive the diversification and transformation of popular materials into new forms, formats, and media. One could argue, then, that the tension between commercial standardization and the diffusion of authorized as well as unauthorized transformations is a central dynamic that shapes both the generic development of the superhero genre and what may be described as an overarching system of American popular culture. In fact, as figures whose diegetic exploits are premised on an ability to transform from private identity to costumed public identity and whose reception depends on a media-intrinsic demand for readerly produced closure, superheroes are prone to all kinds of popular transformations, including transnational ones.⁷

Superhero comics are obviously more than a collection of texts that share a common set of themes, character types, visual iconographies, and story structures. In fact, they constitute an evolving serial genre. They emerge from specific modes of production, take on particular physical and medial forms, and collectively articulate a continually shifting set of generic conventions. Every new installment of an ongoing series both activates and redefines (however slightly) the total sum of genre enunciations – and it makes certain paratextual and extratextual discourses possible while rendering others impossible, or at least implausible. Following Bruno Latour, a superhero comic book is not an “intermediary” that “transports, transfers, [or] transmits” generic information without affecting it, but a “mediator,” “an original event” that always also “creates what it translates” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 77–78). As such, all comic books actively participate in the evolution of the superhero genre because they “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, [or] forbid” new genre performances (Latour, *Reassembling* 72), including future installments as well as transgeneric and transmedial adaptations. This is especially prominent in the realm of popular culture, where multi-authored, commercial, and standardized narratives engage audiences in ongoing and open-ended fictional universes more effectively than self-contained works. This engagement does not stop at national borders but, as I will argue in the following, extends into a transnational economy of textual production and reception.

Indeed, the transformative processes of genre evolution and the fluidity of producer/consumer and author/reader roles are not limited to any nationally bound culture. This is true in a double sense: Not only can transnational readers become authors of localized adaptations of superhero comics; local cultures may also act as collective authors who infuse (more or less) homegrown styles and stories with the material forms and formal aesthetics of cultural imports. This does not mean that these

⁷ The notion of closure goes back to McCloud (cf. 63). On the “formal anchoring” of superhero comics’ transnational transformations, see Denson; on popular culture as an evolutionary system of serial practices, see Kelleter and Stein, “Great, Mad, New.”

authors necessarily or even primarily use imported products for subversive and counterhegemonic gain, but rather that they mix and mash, adapt and transform, revision and remake these products to suit their own interests and needs, which can be affirmative as much as they can be resistant but which ultimately contribute to the diversification of the genre. As Koichi Iwabuchi suggests, “the global distribution of the same commodities, images, and capital” does not lead to the homogenization of cultures but rather “produces [...] new cultural diversity” (39). Appadurai further reminds us that “[t]he globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization” but more often results in a “*repatriation of difference*” according to which cultural imports are reintegrated into national imaginaries and made to speak to both local and global concerns (“Disjuncture” 307).

The global production, dissemination, and reception of popular genres are shaped by what Paul Jay calls a “reciprocal relationship between economic and cultural forms of globalization” (7). In order to account for this relation, I turn to an economic model of cultural criticism proposed by Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen. The authors distinguish among three main levels of economic analysis. The first level is *production*, and it looks at “the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which individual or related works have been produced.” It considers the economic situation of specific authors, their position and self-positioning within various marketplaces, the wider economic structures that govern the production of texts and artifacts, and “the national, regional, or transnational economies during the time of a work’s composition” (35). The second level is *internal circulation* and relates to “the internal or intratextual ‘economies’ of a text or texts” (36). Focusing on “intratextual economies of meaning,” analysis on this level foregrounds “an understanding of texts as systems of exchange involving dynamic patterns of interlocking metaphoric transfer” (37, 36). The third level concerns *extratextual circulation and consumption*, for instance “the market forces at work in canonization; the selling or publicizing of art or literature; the changing dynamics of aesthetic value; the condition of authors or artists as commodities and celebrities” (37). It extends to economies of reading and reception and to the impact of “intertextual forces in literary history that impinge upon a text or texts” (37).

This model provides the scope and vocabulary through which we can describe the transformation of superhero comics across national borders in economic as well as cultural terms. It allows us to connect extratextual factors of production, such as the cultural authority of specific authors and publishers, with the structures of local and global comics markets, and intratextual economies of visual-verbal signification with the extratextual circulation of genre-specific as well as genre- and border-crossing practices. What is more, it encourages us to trace the intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual dimensions of an economy of authorship (cf. 6) that participates in the evolution of an overarching genre economy as a “system [...] of differential relations [that are] worked out very differently in different periods” (Frow 132).

The case studies selected for this essay range from the 1960s, the decade in which American superhero comics were first adapted into manga, to the present, a time when manga are “a global media phenomenon” whose transnational flow, more than ever before, “goes both ways – in and out of Japan” (Johnson-Woods, “Introduction” 10).⁸ Specifically, I will look at three manga adaptations, Jiro Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga* (1966–1967/2008), Kia Asamiya’s *Batman: Child of Dreams* (2000–2001/2003), and Yoshinori Natsume’s *Batman: Death Mask* (2008) as well as their re-adaptations for the American market.⁹ These adaptations can tell us much about the significance of intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual authorship constructions and their effects on the transnational superhero genre, while the American re-adaptations grant special insights into the ways in which the perceived “Americanness” of this genre is impacted by Japanese works and the authorial challenges they pose. In order to contextualize these productions further, I discuss Grant Morrison, Yanick Paquette, and Michel Lacombe’s mini-series *Batman Incorporated* (2011) at the end of this essay.

Jiro Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga*

Jiro Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga* were serialized in the *Shonen King* and *Shonen Gaho* magazines and published by Shonen Gahosha between April 1966 and May 1967. In terms of their extratextual circulation and consumption, it is notable that they were produced with the knowledge and consent of DC Comics. The appearance of these Batman manga followed the popular appeal of ABC’s *Batman* live-action television series in Japan, where it was broadcast in the same year as in the United States (1966). Once Shonen Gahosha had gained the publication rights, they commissioned Kuwata to rewrite and redraw the *Batman* comics for a Japanese audience. This commission created an authorial hierarchy that extended from the American authorship of *Batman* comics to the producers of the television series and then to Kuwata’s own authorial position vis-à-vis these comics and television narrative. The television narrative is repeatedly acknowledged through movie stills placed prominently on the covers and title pages of *Bat-Manga*, while the American authorship of Kuwata’s sources remains largely implicit. In a recent interview, Kuwata recalls that he had planned to adopt a “Western” drawing style but that the pressures of serial production

⁸ The transnational flow of American comics into Japan extends to the nineteenth century. Bainbridge and Norris argue that manga “are already somewhat hybridized and therefore familiar to a globally dispersed audience” (241). On Japan’s role in the production of global (popular) culture, see Befu and Guichard-Anguis; Iwabuchi; on manga as a transcultural and global phenomenon, see Berndt; Berndt and Richter; Johnson-Woods, *Manga*.

⁹ My focus on Batman is exemplary; for analysis of Ryoichi Ikegami’s *Spider-Man the Manga* (1970–1971/1997–1999), Yamanaka Akira’s *Spider-Man J* (2004–2005/2008–2009), and Marvel’s *Mangaverse* (2000–2002, 2005–2006) comics, see my essay “Of Transcreations and Transpacific Adaptations.” See also Dittmer’s essays on the transnational serialities of superheroes such as Captain America.

had prevented any extended study: "My initial plan was to practice the realistic and dynamic drawing style of American comics, and then blend it into my original drawings. [...] I ended up being too busy to try any of that. I couldn't take the time to imitate and practice Bob Kane's Batman at all and had to do it my way"¹⁰ Here, then, cultural and economic concerns collaborate in the creation of a new form of blended – transnational – authorship that promotes itself as an original event rather than as the copying of existing series texts.

Kuwata created his *Bat-Manga* on the basis of manuscript copies he received from his Japanese editors, who got them from DC Comics. Ironically, he attributes these manuscripts to Bob Kane, most likely because they carried Kane's signature, as Batman comics routinely did until the late-1960s. Thus, while a production process in which an artist collaborated with an editor and assistants was relatively common in Japan, Kuwata was oblivious to the existence of a similarly multiauthorial production process in American comics. At the very moment when the myth of Kane's solitary authorship was crumbling and an understanding of comics authorship as a joint effort of changing editors, writers, pencilers, inkers, and letterers was taking hold in the US, Kuwata was reading *Batman* as the product of a single mind. While the superhero genre was thus evolving on a national American scale, where new notions of authorship made new kinds of stories and new serial forms possible, it was also evolving on a transnational scale, where it transmogrified into the first manga superhero adaptation. The fact that American *Batman* comics had to be rewritten and redrawn for a Japanese audience should therefore prevent all too easy assumptions of comics as a symbol of an omnipotent and omnipresent American media imperialism that destroys indigenous cultural production. The very existence of this adaptation signals the productive powers of repatriated difference. Instead of following the exploits of a single American Batman through translated texts, readers actually encountered different visual renditions and narrative realizations of the caped crusader that were not just indigenously produced but also geared toward more or less local interests and desires. Kuwata's *Bat-Manga* are indeed mediators that authorize the transnational flow of American superhero comics into the visual and narrative economies of Japanese manga, but they do so by re-patriating these comics into a product of Japanese popular culture. This is particularly pertinent because Kuwata was granted liberties unattainable to any American comics artist at the time, liberties he used to create the textual hybrid of the superhero manga: "What I'd do was first read the stories, decide which characters, villains, and story settings to use. Then I totally reconstructed them so they would appeal to Japanese readers."

Kuwata's reconstruction of these *Batman* comics as manga retained the prominence of paratextual material that was typical of American comic books. Readers of such comic books purchased more than serialized stories told in words and images. They

¹⁰ All citations and information about this Manga's publication contexts from Kuwata are taken from Kidd's unpaginated *Bat-Manga*.

bought colored magazines that not only contained advertisements for consumer products and upcoming comics but also featured a letters page reserved for an editorially controlled exchange between those who read the stories and those who produced them. This letters page contributed to the emergence of a discourse that acknowledged the collaborative nature of comics creation and essentially birthed the celebrity figure of the comic book author.¹¹ Similarly, Kuwata's *Bat-Manga* use paratextual means to construct specific roles for the implied author and his implied readers. They do so through short statements which are printed in the margins of the comics pages and include messages to the readers from an editor named Suzuki as well as a wide range of (supposedly authentic) fan responses.

On the side of authorial construction, the editorial messages promote a geographically grounded authorial figure whose hobbies are not far removed from the interests of his youthful target audience and thus offer a bond between author and reader by way of the editor's chatty revelations. This authorial figure even enters the diegesis in the first part of "The Man Who Quit Being Human!," where we see a mangafied Kuwata behind the drawing board as he is thinking up ideas for the strip and is talking directly to his readers.¹² This is a forceful reminder that the *Bat-Manga* are created – and not simply translated – by a Japanese author. Moreover, it reframes the presentation of stories based on American sources for a Japanese audience. While the stories may have originated elsewhere (and thus retain parts of their foreign aura), they are "Japanized" both intratextually and extratextually by Kuwata, the author who is responsible for their transformation into the manga style and who doubles as a "beach boy" fond of playing Japanese chess and assembling plastic models, as readers are told in the marginal commentary. Finally, as editorial comments by an editor who directly addresses a community of readers and repeatedly refers to Kuwata's assistants, many of these marginal statements point to the collaborative production and communal reception of the *Bat-Manga* and thus acknowledge the existence of an economy of authorship that only nominally differs from American comics production.¹³

¹¹ In *Batman* comics, letters pages were introduced in August 1959 (#125); in *Detective Comics*, they first appeared in May 1964 (#327). For analysis, see Brooker; Kelleter and Stein, "Autorisierungspraktiken;" Stein, "Superhero Comics."

¹² Narratives and images of authorial creation appeared early on in the history of *Batman*. The first issue of *Batman* (1940) featured a biographical essay about Bob Kane and reprinted his photograph alongside the text. The story "The True Story of Batman and Robin! How a Big-Time Comic Is Born!" in the fifth issue of *Real Fact Comics* (Nov.-Dec. 1946) shows Kane's invention of Batman and Robin in the form of a comic. I discuss these depictions in "Superhero Comics."

¹³ The editor repeatedly suggests a community of readers: "Let's all read about Batman's showdown with Go-Go!"; "Batman's been caught in Karmak's trap! Get out, Batman!" Like American comics, the *Bat-Manga* paratexts also feature promotional discourse: "The large edition 'Batman' issue is now on sale and doing well. It's 76 Yen and all-color. If you like adventure, this is the book for you."

On the side of readerly engagement, we find equally revealing examples, ranging from simple declarations of fandom (“I’m a big Batman fan. What I like is how cool his bat-style and Batmobile are.”) to more complex statements that establish normative forms of reception and clearly communicate who the ideal readers of these manga are: the whole family, not just kids; dedicated fans, not just casual readers. They further indicate how these manga are to be integrated into everyday life (as family reading cool enough to be discussed with peers in school) and which kinds of readerly reactions they are intended to produce: heightened investment with narrative developments and emphatic identification with the fictional characters. What we also find are direct appeals to Kuwata that acknowledge his personal drawing style as well as his narrative powers and thus foreground the interactive nature of author constructions that Woodmansee and Osteen describe as a crucial element in literary economies. One reader writes: “I am a big fan of Mr. Kuwata. Mr. Kuwata’s manga are cool, smart, and great for modern kids. Go, Batman!!” In some cases, even the names and home regions of senders are named, thus turning readers into public authors. This, then, signals a possible transformation from comics reader to professional author that is more strongly pronounced in the American discourse of the 1960s.

This paratextual discourse functions as a mediator in the Latourian sense; it does not merely reflect the editor’s, author’s, and readers’ interests, but extends into the extra-textual realm of manga circulation and consumption by actively shaping, even creating, them. For example, it encourages reader participation beyond letter writing by promoting fan clubs. This is another intriguing parallel to the American comic books, where talk of fan clubs was also part of the letters pages and where, as in Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga*, the impetus came from fan letters, rather than the publishers (the first letters about fan clubs may have been written by an editor to popularize the idea). In the margins of a *Bat-Manga* story titled “The Man Who Quit Being Human! Part 3,” a reader named Nakajima Hide writes: “I’ve formed a ‘Bat-Group’ with friends in my neighborhood. We wear ‘Batman’ badges and do small deeds of good conduct.” Significantly, it is Jiro Kuwata, and not the editor, who answers: “Dear Nakajima, there are lots of other kids just like you forming similar bat-groups. Please, be like Batman, who has a love of morality!” The author appears as a figure of authority whose privileged interpretation of Batman legitimizes fan activities. Kuwata does so by reminding fans of their common denominator: Batman’s moral code, which binds both author and readers into an imagined community shaped by a “Japanized” version of an American fictional comic book universe.¹⁴ Thus, it is only logical that the marginal commentary in a later installment of the series explicitly calls on readers to “Start your own ‘Bat-Group’! If you’ve started a ‘Bat-Group’ please send us a picture.

¹⁴ For Anderson, an imagined community (here: the modern nation) “is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” and “fraternity.” It exists through media that allow dispersed people “to create a community out of signs” (16, 20). This notion of imagined community readily applies to fan cultures in the United States and Japan.

Those who do will receive memorabilia.” Finally, the marginal discourse establishes an intertextual and transnational (even global) awareness of a wider media economy in which the *Bat-Manga* – as well as their author and readers – participate: “I’m really happy that Batman is in *Shonen King*. Mr. Kuwata, please make it more interesting than the *Batman* TV show,” reads one comment; “All across Japan and America, Batman is the most popular! It’s being talked about all over the world,” reads another. These are explicit encouragements to create fan communities based on the serial consumption of transnational comic adaptations. The consumption of this seemingly exclusive commodity, one should note, offers readers a chance to distinguish themselves as knowledgeable fans and informed followers of the latest trends in popular culture, but it also opens up an Asian submarket that allows DC Comics to recharge established American products with new exchange values by promoting their sale and reception abroad through indigenous companies such as Shonen Gahosha.

In his analysis of globally marketed Japanese anime and manga, Koichi Iwabuchi argues that “bodily, racial, and ethnic characteristics are erased or softened” and that characters often do not look “Japanese” at all (28). Yet in Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga*, we find a curious intratextual economy of ethnic visual signifiers. As a series that preceded the export of manga to the United States and was clearly geared towards a Japanese audience, this manga renders almost all of its characters Japanese. This is not to say that Kuwata’s depiction of Bruce Wayne, Dick Grayson, and other characters strives for the verisimilitude of photorealistic depiction but rather that it adheres to manga conventions (the cartoonish reduction of facial features, including big eyes and toothless mouths, and the prominence of disproportional physiques).¹⁵ Even when Dick Grayson is dressed up as Robin, the features behind his mask are visibly manga-like. The only exception is Batman, who is closely modeled on his American source. In that sense, Japanese readers encountered an American superhero who fights crime in a fictional universe in which the cars are American, the names of major characters are American, the action takes place in Gotham City, but everybody speaks, and most people look, Japanese.

Such transnational amalgamation also appears on the level of narrative construction. Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga* shares a visual vocabulary with American superhero comics, such as motion lines, sound words, and a fairly regular arrangement of panels with similar shapes and sizes. Yet Kuwata’s motion lines tend to occur with greater frequency, and they are more expressive, often extending throughout whole panels and completely surrounding the (usually fighting) figures. Sound words also appear more frequently and more prominently than in the *Batman* comics of the mid-1960s. In terms of larger narrative structures, Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga* are similar to their source texts; their story arcs extend over several installments but do not build up to a long-term continuity in which characters would accumulate a serial memory. Two major

¹⁵ Several magazine covers were drawn by different artists and use a more realistic style that clearly depicts Batman and Robin as Japanese.

differences are the reversed reading order (back to front; right to left) and the absence of color. In contrast to the American four-color scheme, *Bat-Manga* are largely black-and-white and only rarely (and somewhat randomly) add specks of beige and muted red. Thus, they stay within the manga mode and do not import the American visual aesthetic. Repatriating Batman thus meant accepting commercial mandates (black-and-white as the cheap industry standard) as well as adhering to established aesthetic concerns (manga as conventionally drawn in black-and-white).

In order to further assess the ways in which Kuwata adapts his source material, one must look at individual stories. In some cases, he either takes over American villains (Clayface) or simply renames them but stays close to the actual story. The Weather Wizard from *Detective Comics* #353 (July 1966) becomes Go-Go the Magician in the manga version, but other than that, the story is essentially the same. In other cases, Kuwata comes up with villains of his own, villains that are loosely based on various American sources but do not clearly follow a single comic book precursor (Dr. Faceless, Professor Gorilla). Moreover, his stories usually exceed the length of their source texts. In the case of a story about Lord Death Man, the American comic book (*Batman* #180, May 1966) is 24-pages long, whereas Kuwata's "Lord Death Man" extends to more than twice the length (60 pages). In addition, Kuwata tells his story at a slower pace, devoting more space to individual moments of the narrative and extending fight scenes over several pages when the American comic does with substantially less space. In contrast, the extent of verbal narration is much less pronounced. Missing are the square boxes that usually feature the narrator's words, and the speech balloons also contain a smaller amount of dialogue. As these examples indicate, the transformation from comic to manga obviously goes beyond the mere linguistic transfer of American words into Japanese. It is the whole visual grammar and narrative structure that is adapted from one intratextual economy of meaning to another. That this adaptation indigenizes the American source text by rendering it in the manga style (intratextual level) but also retaining strong traces of this transposition – Batman's iconography, for instance, as well as several panel swipes that faithfully reproduce the American source (intertextual level) – places this text in the transnational genre economy of superhero comics (extratextual level).

Beyond the historical context of Kuwata's *Bat-Manga* adaptation, the discovery and American publication of these texts in 2008 raises important questions about the cultural impact of superhero manga. The very fact that it took this Japanese Batman so long to enter American comic book culture (with its various fandoms and their interest in even the most arcane phenomena) and the fact that its discovery was a result of the efforts of an avid collector (Chip Kidd) rather than an example of DC Comics' policy of selling material from their vaults to new generations of readers underscore the notion that the transnational flow of superhero comics had been, for the longest time, more or less unidirectional: from the United States to Japan. Yet when the collection of Kuwata's strips finally appeared, manga had already become a mainstream phenomenon in the United States, and it meant that fairly little (re-) adaptation was

necessary. Sound words were left in the original Japanese, and the reading order from back to front and right to left was retained. The individual panels were, however, retroactively numbered, probably because contemporary readers of superhero comics may otherwise have been thrown off by this obviously dated text. Moreover, the re-translated *Bat-Manga* did not appear as a series of comic books or as part of one of DC's archival formats (*Batman Chronicles*, *Archive Editions*, *Showcase Presents*) but as a coffee-table book published by Pantheon and officially authored by Kidd and his co-editors, rather than Kuwata. It is positioned as part of the growing trend toward the construction of a nationally resonant comics historiography and is presented as a cultural oddity that offers a curious spin on a canonized serial superhero. As such, it does not in any way threaten current comic book aesthetics but rather exemplifies a retroactive repatriation of difference.

If the goal of Kuwata's *Bat-Manga* had been to establish a mangafied version of American superhero comics on the Japanese market, it failed. It seems that the strength of indigenous comics production in Japan, where manga were (and still are) produced in mass quantities and read by vast audiences, was responsible for the lack of sustained interest in this textual hybrid. It is equally reasonable to attribute the failure of *Bat-Manga* and later superhero adaptations such as Ryoichi Ikegami's *Spider-Man the Manga* (1970–1971) to broader cultural differences as well as more minute differences in visual styles, storylines, and narrative structures. In the 1990s and 2000s, however, several new manga adaptations of superhero comics were launched, among them Juzu Tokoro's *Shadows of Spawn* (1998–1999) and Hiroshi Higuchi, Miyako Kojima, and Koji Yasue's *X-Men the Manga* (1998–1999). While both series deserve close study, I want to continue my focus on Batman adaptations and turn to Kia Asamiya's *Batman: Child of Dreams* and Yoshinori Natsume's *Batman: Death Mask*, which were written and published at a time when manga (mostly non-superhero) were rapidly gaining popularity in the United States.¹⁶

Kia Asamiya's *Batman: Child of Dreams* and Yoshinori Natsume's *Batman: Death Mask*

Batman: Child of Dreams originally appeared in two volumes in November 2000 and November 2001 in *Magazine Z* and was published in the United States in 2003; *Batman: Death Mask* first ran as a mini-series in 2008 as part of the CMX manga division of DC's Wildstorm imprint and was published as a graphic novel in the same year. The different production histories of these two works highlight a shift in

¹⁶ The arrival of manga in the United States dates to the 1980s, when Ikegami's *Mai the Psychic Girl* (1985–1986/1987), Ikegami and Kazuo Koike's *Crying Freeman* (1986–1988/1988–1994), Osomo Katsuhiro's cyberpunk *Akira* (1982–1990/1988–1995), and Koike and Goseki Kojima's samurai epic *Lone Wolfe and Cub* (1970–1976/1987–1991) found critical and popular acclaim.

American attitudes towards superhero manga. The fact that Asamiya's earlier work was initially published in Japan and was flopped to conform to the Western front-to-back and left-to-right reading order suggests a readership that was assumed to be only partially competent (or eager) to follow a manga version of their favorite superhero character. Natsume's work, by contrast, was expressly commissioned for an American audience and was only later released in Japan.

The adaptive process through which Asamiya's *Child of Dreams* became Americanized is mediated through various paratexts at the end of the graphic novel. These paratexts thematize the extratextual economy of transnational authorship as much as they illustrate intratextual and intertextual economies of signification. A section called "From Japan To America: How Batman: Child Of Dreams Made The Journey Back Home" reprints images that illustrate a chain of production from "Mr. Asamiya's original thumbnail sketches" to "[t]he finished work, as it appeared in Japan," and then to the "digitally 'flop[ped] pages,'" the "digital [...] substitution [of] the new script," and the "painstaking [...] alter[ation of] the art." Informing its readers that this comic is "[a] truly international cooperative venture" and that "the story was coordinated by editors on both sides of the planet," it familiarizes them with the transnational economy of comics production. For these readers, Asamiya's position in this economy called for further explanation. The interview that follows the chain of production images therefore promises "an interesting insight into the motivations of a man as obsessed with the Dark Knight as any American-born superhero fan," and Asamiya addresses the issue of transnational authorship and reception directly:

If [...] you feel this manga is not Batman as you know him, I think you misunderstand what Batman is all about. Keep in mind that the movie Batman may be based roughly on Batman, but it is not the real Batman. The Batman which the Japanese are familiar with is more influenced by the movies. I wonder what you think of my original Batman manga, based on the true concept of who and what Batman is.

To write an authoritative Batman story, these statements insinuate, one not only has to be a fan of the character, but an obsessive one, to boost. This obsession, it is alleged, will wipe away national and cultural differences and will allow a foreign author to establish himself as a legitimate creator of superhero stories: as someone who knows "the true concept of who and what Batman is." Asamiya further recalls his initial exposure to Batman through television and movies, and his self-positioning as a moviegoer and comics reader confirms his ability to match the knowledge of American-born fans: "I have read lots of different Batman comics. I picked them mainly by artists and have been especially influenced by the works of Frank Miller, Mike Mignola, and Todd McFarlane's work on Batman." Moreover, he evokes the fantasy of personal transformation from comic book reader into omnipotent superhero that has always been one of the genre's greatest appeals: "I admire Superman, but I'd want to be Batman if I could."

Nonetheless, entering the field of Batman comics neither meant creating a comic book that aimed at being quintessentially American nor producing a text that adhered

to an overly exotic manga aesthetic. "This is the first time any Japanese artist has done original work for DC on a Batman comic," Asamiya claims, and "I could not use certain Japanese manga concepts in my version of Batman." Asamiya's nod towards the restrictions under which he created his Batman manga raises crucial questions: How does the text inhabit the transnational space of cultural production, and how does it relate to the precursor texts that are traditionally coded as authoritative and potentially superior intertexts? For one, Asamiya seeks to diffuse the loaded distinction between original and copy: "I created an original character, Yuko Yage [...]. I made her someone who had never met Batman before, much like most of the Japanese manga readers." By inventing this focalizing figure, a news reporter for a Japanese television station who travels to Gotham to produce a documentary about Batman, Asamiya translates his own transnational perspective and uncertain authorial status into the diegesis. For American readers, this decision offers a different set of reading incentives. It invites them to a narrative journey in the course of which they learn to view Batman through the eyes of a Japanese character and through the lens of a Japanese author, and it encourages them to follow Bruce Wayne/Batman on his travels to Japan in the second half of the story. Furthermore, matching Asamiya's paratextual statements, the characters themselves address the transnational perspective in the diegesis. Wayne suggests, "There's probably no one like that [i.e., Batman] in Japan," to which Yuko replies, "Absolutely not" (55), and later, "We don't have superheroes in Japan" (69).¹⁷ Thus, the primacy of American superhero comics is superficially affirmed, but the story's self-reflexive commentary about the cultural differences between American and Japanese understandings of Batman suggests a more nuanced understanding. When Yuko confesses to Wayne, "I'm sounding like a cub reporter ... for some Batman fan-club newsletter" (71), she offers one way in which Asamiya's own authorial status may be read. Yuko's youthful naivety and her journalistic amateurishness may be taken as evidence of a Japanese cultural inferiority that reaffirms the superiority not just of American superhero comics but also of American comics culture at large (from professional comics journalism to sophisticated fan publications). But such a reading is ultimately questioned by the manga's knowing references to the extratextual realm of fan clubs and newsletters and Asamiya's self-conscious investigation of cultural differences. It is further undermined by the manga's awareness of its status as a commercial product whose aesthetic value is not solely determined by its intrinsic qualities but also by the market forces that structure the production and reception of texts within the genre economy of the superhero comic as well as by the processes of canon formation that Woodmansee and Osteen assign to the extratextual realm of literary circulation and consumption.

¹⁷ Bruce's answer, "I don't believe Batman considers himself a 'superhero'" (69), caters to readers aware of the fact that Batman possesses no superpowers but derives his abilities from years of physical and scientific training.

The story of *Batman: Child of Dreams* begins with attacks on Gotham's citizens by the Joker, Two-Face, and the Riddler, all of whom are soon revealed to be the victims of a new drug that causes people to shapeshift and hallucinate that they are supervillains. Dubbed "the faux foes" by the news media, these fake villains die from the drug and leave Batman with a messy case to solve. In this regard, the story foregrounds the tension between original and copy that underlies the very nature of this manga adaptation and that reappears in the discrepancy between an allegedly authentic superhero and various inauthentic fakes, the latter of whom Batman tries to dismiss as "parodies of their originals" (119; cf. also 298).¹⁸ The supervillain who eventually entraps Batman confesses to being his "biggest fan" (106). Such fandom is premised on Batman's status as a popular icon. "I have become a kind of media figure myself" (121), he acknowledges (this is true, of course, both on an intratextual and extratextual level). As such, Batman has always had to grapple with his share of imposters and contenders, and it is only logical that Asamiya makes use of this narrative convention when he pits the American Batman against two drug-enhanced Japanese Batmen. The first of these Batmen is Yuko's producer Nagai, who takes the drug to prove himself superior to the American crime fighter: "I am you, Batman, but younger... ..stronger... ..and out for blood" (132); "you have become an anachronism" (139). Once he has been beaten, he confesses: "When I was a child... I dreamed of being you... And for a moment, my dreams... came true" (154). This foreshadows the story's climax, which will mobilize a second and even more powerful Batman against the American superhero. Yet Nagai's words also invite readers to consider the transnational attractiveness of this iconic figure: to acknowledge the dreams it induces among readers abroad but also the geographic dispersal of those who dream up superhero adaptations (like Asamiya himself) that may be more innovative – or at least less anachronistic – than the American version.

The second half of the story takes place in Japan, a space both foreign and familiar, as Bruce Wayne notes when he arrives in Tokyo: "now I'm on your side of the ocean... but I feel strangely at home here" (188–189). When Wayne talks to Yuko's uncle, Kenji Tomioka, the president of a transnational pharmaceutical company, he learns that Tomioka wishes "that Tokyo, like Gotham, had its own Batman" (199). The ensuing discussion reframes the tension between original creation and derivative copy – between ownership and appropriation – as a question of cultural difference. Wayne launches a plea for Batman's American specificity, suggesting that "an individual like Batman arises only from a unique set of circumstances," whereas Tomioka believes in Japan's ability to reproduce American originals that cannot claim uniqueness: "But science can often replicate *seemingly* unique circumstances" (emphasis added; 199). Even though Wayne's rejoinder that "Batman's relationship with Gotham can't be replicated elsewhere" (199) is meant to override doubts about Bat-

¹⁸ Parody is a major mode through which popular productions are challenged as well as diversified by diffusely authorized authors, as I argue in "Spoofin' Spidey."

man's origins, such declarations are complicated both within and without of the comic.¹⁹

Within the comic, the American Batman will face a Japanese Batman whose DNA is based on his own. Without, the reader perusing this very story is, of course, perusing a manga replication (with important differences) of the American comic book character: a manga replication that is genetically related to its American ancestors. On the diegetic level, such relations lead Batman to note about the drug-enhanced Catwoman that "[t]he carbon's better than the original" (251); on an intertextual level, Asamiya's manga intervenes in Batman's serial history by showing Yuko as a child on a trip to Gotham, where she and her parents are saved by Batman from a group of muggers (cf. 202–203). Yuko's account triggers Wayne's memory of the night in which his parents were murdered, and this memory allows Asamiya to include a scene that almost exactly copies the cover illustration of the first volume of Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's retelling of Batman's origins in *Batman: Year One* (Feb. 1987) (cf. 206).²⁰ Thus, the issue may not even be whether the carbon copy is better or worse than any original but rather whether the very distinction between original and copy can be maintained in the realm of serially produced popular culture, where Asamiya's manga may claim the same authoritative status as Miller and Mazzucchelli's work, which had itself been a revision, or adaptation, of many previous enunciations of Batman's origins.

At the climax of the story, Batman confronts his Japanese replica, Tomioka, who is his "biggest fan" (278) and has amassed the largest collection of Batman memorabilia on the planet: "There are many Batman collectors out there, of course... ..but mine is the collection to end all collections" (279). Having trapped Batman, Tomioka boasts: "I've finally accomplished something few collectors ever manage ... I've completed my collection" (283). Completing his collection by killing Batman implies ultimate authority over this superhero, both in the text – where Tomioka would succeed Wayne as Batman – and extratextually – where Asamiya would demonstrate his authorial power over this American serial icon by ending his life, even if only for this single storyline. In the end, Tomioka does not manage to kill Batman (he is killed himself), but his plan to upstage Batman by turning himself into a drug-enhanced and DNA-modified ultra-Batman remains a significant statement about the transnational challenge faced by American superheroes. Tomioka's verbal attacks on Batman's state as a popular emblem of American culture resonate far beyond the story in which they are launched: "I couldn't bear to see you become a second-rate hero," Tomioka explains (288); "In such a brave new world, an aging Batman would not do... As your marketing people in America might say, it's time for a new, improved Batman" (289); "I will be the Batman for the 21st century" (290). Of course, these

¹⁹ In fact, Batman's relationship to Gotham has always been subject to constant iterations and reiterations by various authors at different times and in different contexts (see Uricchio).

²⁰ Because of the flopping of the pages, the image is reversed.

ambitions are shredded when the American Batman kills Tomioka in self-defense and Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham. Nonetheless, the ending does suggest that it is far from clear who the Batman for the twenty-first century will be and who will be able to wield ultimate authority over the character – in fact, we are led to recognize the absurdity of Tomioka's assumption that a whole century will be dominated by a singular superhero controlled by a single author (which has never been the case throughout comics history). And if single authorship and singular superheroes are absurd, then Asamiya may just as well be a legitimate successor not just to established American comics creators but also to Kuwata's fans, who were promised memorabilia of their favorite character if they sent in pictures of their fan club activities: "I have a large personal collection of Batman memorabilia, and ever since I started working on the project, I have become very greedy and am collecting more and more."

Who knows where this greed will ultimately lead beyond Asamiya's manga Batman? In a global genre economy, the improvements of popular products and narratives are no longer – or at least not exclusively – made by those who have originated the product but by a vast array of diffusely authorized as well as unauthorized authors: "Are you so isolated in your ivory tower, Bruce Wayne, that you don't see the world around you? Your villains have admirers too... ..Joker web sites, Riddler appreciation societies" (299), Tomioka asks. Such statements reference the extratextual realm in which Batman's transnationalism is created and contested, claimed and reclaimed, by authorized as well as unauthorized authors and where distinctions between original creation and transnational adaptation are increasingly difficult to maintain.

Written and drawn almost a decade after *Batman: Child of Dreams*, Yoshinori Natsume's *Batman: Death Mask* also employs paratextual material to explain its transnational status, albeit for a readership assumed to be more familiar with manga storytelling. In his interview with editor Jim Chadwick at the end of the graphic novel, Natsume speaks about the issue of transnational communication: "I was thinking that [...] giving it a Japanese flavor would likely please American readers"; "I assumed the story would be released in Japan, but came to the conclusion that the most important thing was how the story would be taken by American readers, [...] so I focused on writing a story for an American audience" (197).²¹ Recalling Asamiya's reference to the restrictions under which he produced his Batman manga, Natsume implies that

²¹ Natsume's use of the term "flavor" evokes Iwabuchi's distinction between Japanese exports of "culturally odorless" products, which lack any distinct cultural connotations, and products with culture-specific "fragrances," which necessitate an audience willing and able to engage with a foreign culture (27). Jenkins suggests that fragrant cultural imports tend to appeal to niche audiences and usually undergo a "deodorization process" that strips them of some of their cultural specificities and thus makes them palatable for mainstream audiences (159). As transnational texts, Asamiya's *Batman Child of Dreams* and Natsume's *Batman: Death Mask* are not culturally odorless, but neither are they fully deodorized products.

the transnational cooperation meant accepting certain compromises when he mentions that the "people at DC [...] let me stick to my usual Japanese manga style and format *as much as possible*" (emphasis added, 198). Whatever these compromises were, they would have been negotiated by an American editor interested in a manga adaptation of Batman and a Japanese mangaka whose preparations for the project included reading and studying both American and Japanese superhero stories:

I did a lot of reading of Batman stories from both American and Japanese creators [...] such as Katsuhiro Otomo and Kia Asamiya and I returned over and over again to the short manga stories of Yuji Iwahara, which have an atmosphere that's close to American comics. [...] I learned a lot from poring over the most successful Batman comics from the U.S., especially from creators like Jim Lee, Frank Miller, Mike Mignola, etc. [...]. But no matter what comics I looked at, all I thought about was how I could bring Batman to life and put my own spin on the character. (198)

This statement makes room for Natsume's work in the sprawling canon of increasingly transnational Batmen, and it seeks to place its author among the ranks of established superhero creators. As such, it advocates a performative understanding of comics authorship as a role to be performed not just by American creators, but also by non-American mangaka like Matsume, whose work represents a transcultural revision of established stories and styles.²²

Natsume's familiarity with his American and Japanese precursors explains his skilled use of retrospective continuity (retcon) – the retroactive insertion of his story into the history of the Batman universe. Parts of this story unfold at a time before Batman makes his first appearance in Gotham; they show a young man traveling Japan to acquire martial arts skills. The main narrative is set in the present, but frequent flashbacks connect the present Batman to a former version of the character – "before I became the Batman... ..and when I wasn't Bruce Wayne" (50) – and thus supply him with a Japanese backstory. This personality split, according to which Bruce Wayne not only possesses a superhero alter ego but also a previous private self called George, is tied to a theme of masking that questions the certainty of narrative origins and complicates notions of original authorial ownership. The story begins with Batman standing in front of a shrine of Japanese Oni masks, the narrator pondering the nature of his identity: "To hide one's true self... to change into another... ..people put on masks to assume a false identity. But is it truly 'false?' Or is what's behind the mask... ..really the false identity?" (3). A few pages later, the narrator employs one of superhero comics' most effective narrative modes, the speculative what-if scenario, which enables the exploration of storylines outside of a character's serial continuity: "What if the Batman isn't Bruce Wayne wearing a mask? What if he exists as a completely separate personality? What if the real mask is Bruce Wayne?" (11). Crucially, these self doubts are placed over a double splash page of Gotham's most notorious villains, all of whom are American creations and will not appear in the story that follows. The manga thus promises an exploration of Batman's past and

²² For a performative reading of transnational comics authorship, see also Ecke.

psyche that leaves the American setting behind and questions Wayne's "true identity" from a Japanese angle. Furthermore, this exploration implies a related investigation of the characters' emergence from a transnational economy of authorship: Who is behind the story? And what if Batman's completely separate personality was actually controlled by a non-American author?

The acts of transnationalizing Batman and claiming narrative authority over this superhero are signaled by a change in visual aesthetics. Whereas the first pages of *Batman: Death Mask* are drawn in the style of many contemporary American comics, the rest of the story is rendered in a style commonly associated with manga, thus underscoring Natsume's claim to being a legitimate creator of a Batman that was produced outside of the United States and that projects the American hero into a transnational context. The "dynamic patterns of interlocking metaphoric transfer" (Woodmansee and Osteen 36) that most strongly establishes this context is the analogy between Batman's mask and Oni masks that Natsume uses to retell Batman's story. Natsume talks about this analogy in his interview with Chadwick, explaining that Batman's silhouette made him think of an Oni mask (cf. 197). In Japanese mythology, Oni are ambiguous figures that may either be good-natured and ward off evil spirits or appear as demonic, devilish, and powerfully violent creatures. In *Batman: Death Mask*, this ambiguity is an integral plot element as well as a metaphor for the hybrid textual status of this superhero manga and for Natsume's complicated authorial position as a mangaka working in an American genre. This metaphor unfolds its meanings when Bruce Wayne (as George) encounters the Oni mythology in the form of an onigawara, a rooftop ornamentation of the dojo in which he is training. This onigawara "looks like a gargoyle" (57), as George points out, and it evokes one of Gotham's most recognizable icons. The closeup of a Gotham gargoyle that follows a closeup of the onigawara (cf. 81–82) further signals the existence of a transnational economy of signs on which both American comic book authors and Japanese mangaka can self-consciously draw.

In Natsume's manga, Oni masks are first displayed in an art exhibition sponsored by the Agurama Corporation. They are the property of Jiro Agurama, president of the corporation, and, as the reader finds out eventually, they kill those who wear them. Long before this is revealed, Agurama explains:

The world is blessed with a variety of civilizations and cultures and almost all of them have their own unique masks. Some people put on a mask to hide themselves. Some to become another person, and some to even gain the abilities of that which they portray... These are the common desires of all humanity. (35)

This claim, though voiced by the story's ultimate villain, actually authorizes Natsume's manga adaptation. While Japanese Oni masks and American superhero masks may stem from different cultures, they are said to express universal human desires. The implication is that comics may manifest themselves differently from culture to culture and heroic characters may figure differently across cultures, but the superhero genre offers means for authorial empowerment through artistic (self-)

creation for creators from different national contexts. They allow their creators to traverse cultural differences and become another person, an author of superhero comics who claims transcultural authority by displaying his artistic abilities in an initially foreign genre. Such authorial empowerment has consequences for the transnational dispersal and global proliferation of superheroes. As a fictional character usually based on a rather cryptic origin story, a basic setting, and a limited set of attributes, the comic book superhero has always been highly malleable and prone to endless transformations across genre and media. Thus, it seems only logical that the job of supplying this character with diverse storylines, changing settings, and new attributes now extends across national borders and comics traditions.

Batman: Death Mask recalls Asamiya's *Batman: Child of Dreams* in its decision to cast a Japanese president of a transnational corporation based in Japan as its supervillain. In both stories, the American Batman emerges victorious, and so these stories seem to play into assumed reader expectations in the United States (to a greater degree) as well as in Japan (perhaps to a lesser degree), where those who pick up a Batman comic probably want to see their hero beat his opponents. Nonetheless, it is telling that Batman's claim to being the world's most powerful crime fighter is increasingly contested and that he must prove his superiority more and more often on a global scale. Early on in *Batman: Death Mask*, Agurama informs Wayne about the ideology of his corporation, which is "that global cultural exchange should rise above pure business interests" (17). This combination of economic considerations and transcultural motives may ultimately fail on the diegetic level, but it is more successful on the intertextual level, where works such as Natsume's and Asamiya's manga effectively convey transnational stories. As Agurama tells the people of Gotham: "if you can succeed in Gotham City, you can succeed anywhere in America, and if you can succeed in America, you can succeed on the world stage" (34). It is no coincidence that this statement can be readily applied to the author of this manga, who, at the time of publication, was already considering his next move in Batman's transnational genre economy: "I think it'd be fun to do an Elseworlds story about a Bat-man [sic] who fights the spread of evil in the Edo period of Japanese history" (199).

Popular Seriality and the Franchise Logic of the Transnational Genre Economy

If we want to conceive of superhero comics as an evolving transnational genre, it will not be enough to simply state that these comics are increasingly produced and consumed, written and read, around the world. Nor will it suffice to say that Japanese manga adaptations revise American comics to suit the needs of a national readership reared on a particular tradition of comic storytelling. Instead, we have to account for what Shelly Fisher Fishkin calls "[t]he cultural work done by U.S. popular culture abroad" (33), which also means that, in addition to "going outside the United States, we have to go back inside" (Fluck 28), as Grant Morrison, Yanick Paquette, and Michel Lacombe's mini-series *Batman Incorporated* (2011) illustrates. In the first

issue of this series, Kuwata's adaptation of Death-Man as Lord Death Man reappears and faces a new Japanese Batman, the so-called Batman of Tokyo. Bruce Wayne has revealed his identity in order to create an international franchise of Batmen in different countries around the world, and it is telling that the globalization of the American superhero is no longer imagined as an imperial project of installing American reign abroad but as a neoliberal business venture that capitalizes on the name recognition and popularity of this iconic figure while allowing for indigenous realizations and adaptations. Wayne eventually travels to Tokyo to train the new Batman, a comic book store owner whose name, Jiro Osamu, is an amalgamation of Jiro Kuwata and the name of Japan's most famous mangaka, Osamu Tezuka.²³ Such intercultural references are supported by various panels depicting Tokyo's cityscape as a more colorful version of Gotham. These panels are filled with signs and billboards, all of which are in Japanese and thus exoticize, rather than Americanize the scenery, even though they do not clearly evoke the history of yellow-peril depictions of Asian characters and spaces in the United States.²⁴

But perhaps the most revealing – because explicitly metareferential – moment appears in the middle of the first issue, when Batman and Catwoman enter Tezuka's comic book store and Catwoman picks up a manga, wondering, "What's the appeal[?]." A poster that reproduces the cover of this manga shows a young girl being attacked by two phallic-looking tentacles and offers a peak at the girl's white panties. The larger panel that depicts Catwoman in front of this poster is doubly revealing: On the one hand, it comments on the open depiction of sexuality in manga as well as the flashing panties as one of manga's most common visual signifiers. Catwoman's doubts about the scene's appeal insinuate an apparent discrepancy between more muted American depictions of sexuality and the more provocative representation of sexuality in manga. On the other hand, this Catwoman is wearing a skin-tight latex outfit that leaves little doubt about the exact shape of her finely tuned body. In fact, she has been shown as a scantily clad hypersexual predator with massive cleavage in previous scenes, and in this specific panel, the viewer's focus is clearly guided towards her buttocks. So even if the manga depiction of young girls as fetishized objects of a lusty male gaze does not appeal to Catwoman, the panel calls forth the superhero genre's troubled history of casting female characters as sexual objects with their very own fetishistic appeal.²⁵

Such self-reflexive commentary about competing transnational visions of superhero aesthetics indicates a new consciousness among creators both in the United States and abroad. In fact, one could argue that this new consciousness is part not just of a comics-specific transnationality but of a larger global shift toward an increasingly

²³ For further analysis, see Denson; Bielloch and Bitar.

²⁴ On American comic books and yellow-peril politics, see Mayer.

²⁵ On American superheroes and questions of gender, see Robinson; on women in manga, see Ito.

interconnected and digitally networked popular culture – Henry Jenkins's work on otaku fandoms, pop cosmopolitanism, and the emergence of a transnational media economy comes to mind in this context. It is important, too, that *Batman Incorporated* is a transnational work not just in terms of its subject matter, but also in terms of its authorial team (Morrison is Scottish, Paquette and Lacombe are Canadian). That this authorial team chose to tell a story that begins with intertextual references to Kuwata's *Bat-Manga* is especially noteworthy. After all, the Japanese manga version of the 1960s had itself been an adaptation of an American superhero source, and thus an example of transnational flow from America to Asia and back. Moreover, it is telling that the authorial team of *Batman Incorporated* imagines the transnationalization of Batman in explicitly economic and market-oriented terms: as part of a franchise system that disseminates American culture on a global scale and reflects the ways in which transnational corporations such as the Walt Disney company, which owns Marvel Comics (officially named Marvel Worldwide, Inc.), operate. I would argue that the type of franchise logic that is acknowledged in *Batman Incorporated* and enacted by the manga adaptations I have analyzed in this essay may be interpreted as creative and economic responses to the increasingly global impact of popular culture. In fact, I believe that these texts seek to transport the superhero's endless "potential for repackaging and recycling" (52) that Eileen Meehan associates with the national marketing and licensing of Batman in the late 1980s into a global genre economy in which the ability to feature prominently in repatriations of difference and creations of transnational hybridity are among the superhero's most attractive selling points.

In many ways, this franchise logic is not entirely new, and is not necessarily – or at least not exclusively – tied to any simplistic understanding of cultural and media imperialism. As William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson argue, the franchise logic is anchored deeply within the superhero genre. Interpreting Batman as "floating signifier" (182), Uricchio and Pearson connect the fact that "Batman has no primary urtext set in a specific period, but has rather existed in a plethora of equally valid texts" with the absence of an "authoritative repository" that produces "an ongoing and potentially endless stream of new texts." If "[n]either author, nor medium, nor primary text, nor time period defines the Batman," then "a set of key components [...] becomes the primary marker of Batman texts" (185), and the fluid applicability of these components "[... as] the very nature of the Batman's textual existence reveals an impulse toward fragmentation" (184). This fragmentary impulse, which feeds on the tension between the inherent instability of popular serial stories (failure is always possible) and the productive authorizing mechanisms, discourses, and paratexts these instabilities provoke (continuation must be secured), lends itself to the transnational logic of Japanese superhero adaptations. The genre economy of superhero comics, it seems, produces transnational authors whose work performs, modifies, and thus contributes to the continuing evolution of this popular form of storytelling.

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