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Published online: 31 Mar 2016.

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'Mummified objects': superhero comics in the digital age

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This essay reads the museum-in-a-book-format of publications such as *The Marvel Vault: A Museum-in-a-Book with Rare Collectibles from the World of Marvel* and *The Batman Vault: A Museum-in-a-Book Featuring Rare Collectibles from the Batcave* as part of a historiographic turn in superhero comics and as one prominent answer to the challenges of digital culture. Drawing on historian Andreas Huyssen's theories of musealisation, the essay suggests that these museum-books simulate the tactile pleasures and potentially auratic qualities of earlier forms of comic book production and reception in an attempt to thwart the looming demise of the printed superhero comic book as a popular medium.

Keywords: superhero comics; serial narration; digitisation; musealisation; museal gaze; museum-in-a-book format

To suggest that the digital age is changing the ways in which superhero comics are created, published, and received comes rather close to stating the obvious. The statement is much less obvious, however, when we ask ourselves when exactly the digital age began. With the creation of the first digital computers, such as MIT's vacuum tube machine, called Whirlwind, completed in 1951? With the first instantiations of the Internet in 1969? With the broad-scale introduction of the Internet to public and commercial usage in the early 1990s? Or perhaps as early as in 1939, when Hewlett Packard was founded in Palo Alto; or 1940, when Konrad Zuse assembled the electromagnetic relay computer Z2 and when the first primitive remote access computing machine, the Complex Number Calculator, was designed by George Stibitz?

The search for singular origins of innovations often turns out to be futile, as it tends to obscure the incremental processes that prepare the way for new technological achievements. Yet one may wonder about the apparent congruity between the few – and admittedly somewhat arbitrarily chosen – key moments in the history of digital computing and the history of American superhero comics. How come that the founding of Hewlett Packard in 1939 and Zuse's as well as Stibitz's computers, all of which express a desire to transcend the limits of individual human capacity – the speed and scope of human thought, or computation abilities – occurred more or less simultaneously with the publication of the first superhero comics, in which the prototypical Superman launches a whole genre of gravity-defying superheroes? Why did these technological innovations occur at the very moment when the budding comics industry began rapidly producing comic book after comic book and did so by embracing a work-for-hire system that

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increased the speed of production and thus managed to transcend the limitations of the single author?

How come, one may continue wondering, that the beginnings of the Internet in 1969 roughly coincide with the prolific networking activities of comics fans, ranging from the creation of virtual communities through fanzine production to the creation of face-to-face communities through comics conventions and comic book stores? If superhero comics production in its early phase had largely laboured under the façade of popular author fictions – with Bob Kane as the allegedly sole creator of the Batman and Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster handling Superman as a team – the situation changed throughout the 1960s, when what had initially functioned as a largely one-way form of communication gave way to a multi-directional form of communication: of ongoing storylines that were produced by an amalgamation of actors with diffuse powers over a particular character, series, or fictional storyworld. I am thinking, for instance, of practices such as letter writing and the reprinting of strategically selected letters in monthly comic books, as well as of the complex ways in which comics fanzines inscribed themselves into the discourse about, but also into the discourse of, superhero comics by seeking different forms of legitimisation and authorisation from both industry figures and readers of comics. All of this suggests that, by the 1960s, comics' authorship had become a shifting network of actors and media rather than a stable system of active producers and passive receivers.[1]

How come, one may wonder once more, that the commercial introduction of the Internet in the early 1990s coincided with fundamental changes in the legal and cultural status of comics authorship in American comics publishing? Think of the arrival of creator ownership stipulations, the emergence of Image Comics as a major industry player, as well as the rise of alternative comics and the format of the graphic novel, all of which may be interpreted (at least in part) as a reaction to the democratising promise of the Internet as a digital network that is much faster and much bigger than anything the analogue networking culture of 1960s' fandom and its offshoots could have created. The Internet offered opportunities to reach more readers and sell more products as well as new ways of stimulating the efforts of fans to pay tribute to their favourite creators through early forms of online communications, such as message boards and listservs. Yet it also issued a threat to the comic book industry because the better connected the recipients of popular serial artefacts became, and the more aware they became of their connectedness, the greater their lobbying power and thus the greater their influence on the production of their favourite comic books.[2]

This list of coincidences and my attempt to link key moments in the emergence of the digital revolution to the changing forms of comics production and reception is certainly vulnerable to critique. One might cite different dates and events both in the history of digital computing as well as in the history of superhero comics that would complicate and perhaps even undermine this little thought experiment. Nonetheless, there is something fundamentally intriguing about the connections between the serial figure of the comic book superhero and the serial logic of digitisation: the 'algorithmic computation processes (the speed of which escapes direct human perception and is measurable only by technological means),' as Shane Denson and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann (2013, 1) have written about the notion of a specifically 'digital seriality', recalls the opening lines of the Fleischer Studios' *Superman* television cartoon of 1941: 'Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.' At the very least, historical coincidences between superhero comics and digitisation can serve as a reminder that the history of superhero comics may be more productively understood as an ongoing interaction with digital computation (and its prototypical forms) than as a history that only entered into a relationship with digitisation once the Internet became widely accessible.

One way of studying this interaction is to consider the relatively recent turn in the material historiography of the comic book superhero.[3] Of course, this focus on the historiographic practices of an inherently future-oriented genre might seem counterintuitive. After all, if the aim is to trace the interconnections between superhero comic books and digitisation, one might expect an assessment of, say, the impact of digital tools on the creative processes and aesthetic properties of these comics or a study of new modes of digital dissemination and reception. I would nonetheless argue that we can learn much about today's digital culture by focusing on the creation of retroactive accounts of comics history and by realising that the 'serial drive' that Christoph Lindner has identified as 'an endemic feature of our twenty-first century, hypermediated world [… and] globalised culture' (Lindner 2014, ix) is often a drive towards conservation and preservation rather than innovation and change. This is not to say (at least not necessarily) that superhero comics have hit a dead end. Indeed, apart from the arrival of new digital tools, distribution systems and reception modes, recent company-wide reboots, attempts to make the genre more ethnically and sexually diverse, as well as concerted efforts to extend its reach into television series and serialised film adaptations certainly signal ways in which the comic book superhero may extend its position as a significant figure of American and increasingly global popular culture for many years to come. Yet it is fair to say that the serial drive inherent in recent forms of digitisation has forced the official producers of superhero comic books to reconsider, reconstruct, and reconsolidate their product's genre backstory and media history. Therefore, instead of focusing on processes of serial proliferation and transmedia spread (which mark what I would call the centrifugal forces of popular serial storytelling), I am concerned with processes of genre conservation and preservation (the genre's centripetal forces) at a time when the initial carrier medium, the printed comic book, may be becoming obsolete.[4]

Indeed, the struggle to 'save' the superhero comic book and secure its survival as a print-based form of popular serial storytelling centres to a substantial degree on practices of collecting, displaying, and re-enchanting allegedly ephemeral and rare memorabilia from past decades.[5] Even though these practices entered the culture of superhero comic books on a full scale in the 1960s, when organised fandom first emerged as a formidable force in comics historiography, they have taken on new functions in the digital era. While the online proliferation of such practices seems largely driven by non-industry actors, and while DC and Marvel Comics have been issuing reboot after reboot in order to position their properties in the digital environment, it is the conservative and backward-oriented practices such as canonisation and musealisation that have shaped at least part of the reaction of the superhero genre to the challenges of digitisation.

In order to explore this argument, I focus on two publications that are neither comic books nor the kinds of glossy illustrated coffee-table size treatments that began selling superhero history to aficionados in the 1990s. My case study revolves around *The Marvel Vault: A Museum-in-a-Book with Rare Collectibles from the World of Marvel* (Thomas and Sanderson 2007) and *The Batman Vault: A Museum-in-a-Book Featuring Rare Collectibles from the Batcave* (Greenberger and Manning 2009).[6] The titles of these publications already announce multiple layers of meaning, most prominently through the trademarked 'museum-in-a-book' format, but also through the references to Marvel's and DC's 'vaults' and their allegedly rare content – references that present Marvel and DC not just as the owners but also ultimately as the custodians of their own back catalogue. Yet it would be too easy to simply suggest that these references merely tap into the institutional authority of the museum and make the most in commercial terms of the newly gained art status of twentieth-century popular culture productions.

Granted, comics are no longer regarded as children's entertainment and are now being taken 'seriously' as aesthetic artefacts as part of a process that Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (2009, 9) have described, rather tongue-in-cheek, as 'out of the trash and into the treasury'. Yet we can discern more complex processes at work that can be identified as indications of a much more sweeping shift in Western societies brought on by digitisation. In the final part of this essay, I will therefore discuss these museum-books as part of what historian Andreas Huyssen identifies as a pervasive trend since the 1990s towards a 'musealization' of the past: a 'museal gaze' (Huyssen 1995, 14, 19) that is shaping the ways in which we construct our sense of the past, present, and future.

Museums in a book: *the Marvel Vault* and *the Batman Vault*

One of the first things we notice when we look at these museum-books is that they differ in shape and format from the thin periodicals to which they are devoted as well as from massive tomes such as Paul Levitz's (2010) *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking*. The museum-books have the rectangular sideways format and the spiral binding of a family photo album and thus conjure up a sense of personal recollection and intimate memories rather than the sense of aesthetic pleasure and more distanced appreciation we might associate with art books. Perhaps we can also link this format to the kind of scrapbooks that collectors of newspaper strips and self-identifying comic book fans used to create before publishers began to offer reprints of stories and before collecting became a popular pastime with more or less fixed rules and regulations. At any rate, the distinguishing element of these museum-books is that they bring together mostly conventional and heavily illustrated narratives about Marvel's and Batman's 'origins' and multi-decade evolution with facsimile reproductions of 'original' artefacts. These facsimile reproductions sanction the books' claim to museum status: a claim that is certainly disingenuous when we consider the fact that museums generally gain their institutional and cultural authority from the ability to display original artefacts invested with unique aesthetic value (in the case of artworks such as paintings), the aura of the exotic (artefacts from foreign cultures), or the aura of the extinct (artefacts from cultures that no longer exist).

One could argue that the museum-books get away with peddling these reproductions in the name of authenticity precisely because our digital age has been shaped by '[t]he politics of the copy, rather than the "original,"' as Diana Taylor (2010, 7) suggests. Quite obviously, mass-produced superhero comics do not lend themselves all too easily to any kind of auratic display because they have always reached their readers as copies of an otherwise unattainable 'original'. In the first few decades of their existence, the artwork from which the final product was assembled was frequently thrown away, and the published artefact came into being through an assembly-line production process in which multiple creators collaborated on a single comic. The resulting product was printed on flimsy paper, sold in great numbers for a cheap price, and was owned by commercial publishers primarily interested in creating the next sensation and securing future sales rather than in creating lasting works of art.[7] In order to compensate for this lack of aura, comic book historians (academic and non-academic) have often sought to establish strong authorial figures, identify canonical stories, allocate original drawings, and seek out cultural legitimacy through a museal gaze at a type of popular serial storytelling that, at least in its early years, was intended for pleasurable consumption instead of a distanced aesthetic appreciation, aficionado collecting, and sustained critical analysis. In other

words: they have played the role of the curator of narratives and artefacts from the not-so-distant past.

The *Marvel Vault* and *Batman Vault* books utilise several familiar historiographic practices. These include the retroactive establishment of authorial originators, the sacralisation of unpublished materials and fetishisation of sketches as signifiers of authorial originality, and the often nostalgic embrace of promotional materials of popular culture ephemera with which Marvel and DC (often through licensing intellectual properties) have ensured a continuous flooding of the market. More importantly, the museum-books feature artefacts to which self-identifying fans rarely have access, such as a set of 'original drawings' (ostensibly by Carl Pfeufer) from the early days of Marvel's forays into the superhero genre (1941–1942). Other examples from the *Marvel Vault* are facsimiles of Stan Lee's typewritten synopsis of the first Fantastic Four story outline from 1961, the programme for the first Mighty Marvel Comic Convention of 1975, and an assortment of items that Marvel sent to the members of the Merry Marvel Marching Society (M.M.M.S.) fan club in the 1960s. These artefacts seem valuable precisely because they are not easily owned and therefore stake their credibility on a heightened claim to archival documentation because they were long hidden away in the Marvel vault and are only now being displayed as exclusive treasures.[8]

Digital technology, however, has enabled the makers of the museum-books to produce facsimiles that, at least at a first glance, look rather authentic. In the case of the Pfeufer sketches, the pencil drawings, the faded yellow colour of the drawing paper, and even the kind of paper that was used to create these facsimiles feel remarkably like the real deal – you have to flip over the page to find the tiny word 'reproduction' hidden away on the lower right bottom. This emphasis on the materiality of the displayed work, on its pre-production status as well as on the haptic pleasures of taking it out of the plastic sleeve, works against online displays of comic book artefacts and their reduction to digitised images that can be downloaded but, as endlessly reproducible digital copies, cannot compensate for their ingrained lack of aura.

The Batman Vault is similar to the *Marvel Vault* in its choice of illustrations and the gist of its historical narrative. It reprints iconic covers from old to recent comic books and tells the familiar tale of Batman's transformations through the decades. Like the *Marvel Vault*, it acknowledges the significance and effects of repeated character extensions into other media (mostly television and movies) and reprints both previously unpublished material (scripts, sketches, in-house letters) as well as paratextual material that is usually excluded from commercial reprint formats: for example, advertisements featuring Batman and Robin or Kane's authorial origin story presented in 'Meet the Artist'. The reproductions range from an 'authorized Batman Mask' that had been included in a Golden Book collection of stories from 1966, to a publicity brochure for the 1990s animated television cartoon series, to pencil sketches that inspired the sets for Tim Burton's first *Batman* film in 1989.

The Batman Vault begins with a foreword by Jerry Robinson, who is now, after many decades of debate, recognised as the 'inventor' of Batman's most intriguing and most popular antagonist, the Joker. Robinson appears as an authenticating figure whose first-hand knowledge lends credibility to the historical narrative and artefacts presented in the museum-book. His sentiments position this narrative as a largely nostalgic one, premised on personal memories and a characteristically intimate relationship between the comic book, its producers, and its consumers: '*The Batman Vault* is a trip down memory lane for me', he muses (Robinson 2009, 4). Yet the main author of the *Batman Vault* is Matthew K. Manning, whose introduction follows Robinson's foreword. Manning is a self-declared

Batman fan turned comic book writer turned industry-employed comics historiographer who now acts as a kind of curator of Marvel's legacy. As we learn from the author credits, he 'can't remember a day when he wasn't writing and drawing comic books' (Manning 2009, 5), a confession that roots his authority in personal experience and an insider pedigree that begins almost at birth. In his introductory essay, he expresses his love and passion for Batman in terms that have become staples of comic book author constructions. Statements such as 'I first met Batman in 1989' and '[i]t wasn't long before I found my way into a comics shop' (Manning 2009, 5) emphasise an intimacy between historiographer and historical object that works against the grain of academic historiography by insisting on personal identification, emotional attachment, and an inside perspective as prerequisites for writing legitimately about superhero comics.

Once Manning has demonstrated his credibility and has signalled to his readers that he is one of them (even though he is an industry player with a commercial mandate), he pitches the book for his imagined audience:

> For you longtime collectors and fans who, like me, have read thousands of Batman comics, dating back to before your parents where even an idea in your grandparents' minds, this book will show you images you've never seen, give you bits of trivia and history that you didn't know even existed. For those of you new to Batman, this book will serve as a nice introduction and help you get your feet wet. So go ahead, crack open *The Batman Vault*, and get better acquainted with the Dark Knight. (Manning 2009, 5)

This statement casts the comic book as a form of popular serial storytelling that can unite several generations of producers and audiences across time, a notion that counters conceptions of comics as ephemeral entertainment and grounds this museum-book in a personally meaningful history for both author and reader. For those who have no personal memories of superhero comics, Manning offers a vicarious trip down memory lane, an exploration of 'images you've never seen' and 'bits of trivia and history that you didn't know even existed': an exciting journey into the history of American comic books that promises to make the past come alive through 'original' artefacts that are not explicitly identified as reproductions in the introduction.

The seduction of the vault

The introduction to the *Marvel Vault* is more self-reflexive than the *Batman Vault* about its goal of creating comic book memories. It labels itself

> a book of memorabilia, in the broadest definition of that word. Memorabilia can be a published comic book, […] a type-filled sheet of paper, a scribbled sketch tossed away when a larger finished drawing is done, only to be retrieved from the wastebasket (and not always by the person who tossed it there). Memorabilia […] can be anything that records the history of Marvel Comics […] from 1939 to the present, and shows why and how things turned out the way they did, instead of some other way […]. And it's all there, when you […] pry open – the Marvel Vault. (Greenberger and Manning 2009, 6–7)

Phrases such as 'crack open' (in the *Batman Vault*) and 'pry open' (in the *Marvel Vault*) suggest ways of handling these museum-books and the reproduced artefacts they hold in store that recall haptic sensibilities reminiscent of childhood: sensibilities that are conducive to what Jean Baudrillard (1994, 7) calls 'invested affect': cracking open a birthday present or prying open a treasure chest filled with toys. Moreover, the

introduction to the *Marvel Vault* conflates history with memory and archival material with memorabilia selected from Marvel's commercial vault. What we find here is an object-centred nostalgia that claims to record as well as yield the whole history of Marvel's comic books through the reader's ability to engage directly with materials that are assumed to have stimulated the imagination of past generations. As these and other passages indicate, the 'seduction of the innocent' that Fredric Wertham (1954) identified as the harmful potential of comic books in the 1940s and 1950s has transitioned into the 'seduction of the archive' (or vault, in this case) that Huyssen (2003, 5) describes as a crucial feature of our present moment.

Consider, for a moment, the differences between vault and archive. Labelling the museum-books 'vaults' appears as a self-conscious distinction of comic books as a type of commercial popular storytelling that has produced pleasure for generations of readers precisely because it has flown under the radar of public acceptance, cultural veneration and institutional support. These books claim a vault-like three-dimensionality that promises to venture beyond the two-dimensional confines of the printed book and allocate the exclusive authority over the 'rare collectibles' they pretend to offer into the hands of the comic book publishers who command vaults filled with previously unknown material. While archives tend to collect, classify, and preserve remnants of the past for future re-emplotments of history, vaults come across as more unruly, more mysterious, and more adventurous places of fun and entertainment.[9]

Moreover, access to the vaults is confined to those who own the materials and control access to them. In the case of Marvel and DC, the growing online display and sale of old comic book memorabilia calls for some kind of reaction by publishers in search of new ways of generating revenue. The museum-books thus appear as an attempt to reign in on the centrifugal effects of digital proliferation of comic book memorabilia and as an effort to re-establish narrative authority on the part of Marvel and DC. What is more, the institution of the archive implies the implementation of particular 'system[s] of recording, storage, and retrieval' (Steedman 2002, ix) with which the commercial vault is not necessarily burdened – Marvel and DC are notoriously opaque when it comes to their in-house archives, often preventing scholars from accessing past correspondence, business contracts, and other material of historical interest. But as the museum-books indicate, this does not preclude them from mobilising a discourse that promotes their vaults as 'imbued with authority' and embraces 'notions of historical accuracy, of authenticity, authorship, property (including copyright), specialised knowledge, cultural relevance, even "truth" [as they] are underwritten by faith in the object found in the archive' (Taylor 2010, 4–5). In fact, by evoking such a 'circular legitimating epistemic system' (Taylor 2010, 6), Marvel and DC cling to a self-fulfilling prophecy that turns reproductions into 'rare collectibles' and memorabilia into history-yielding objects.[10] The museum-books are physical manifestations of a conservative (and commercially driven) impulse towards preserving the legacy of the superhero comic book in the digital age as musealisation practices that seek to counteract the centrifugal effects of digitisation with a centripetal move towards genre consolidation and canon reaffirmation.

Comic book musealisation

With the printed superhero comic book in crisis, it is no surprise that there is new concern with the history of the genre: a concern shaped by a profound interest in preserving what once was a thriving serial medium. This concern extends beyond American comic book culture. In his studies on cultural memory, Huyssen has written about the practices of musealisation and the

workings of a museal gaze through which Western societies have tried to renegotiate their relationship to the past, solidify their grasp of the present, and make reassuring predictions about the future. In *Twilight Memories*, Huyssen (1995, 1) diagnoses a 'fear of cultural amnesia' starting in the late 1980s and 1990s with the fall of the Soviet empire, the waning of personal memories of the Holocaust, and the onset of digitisation. Huyssen (1995, 7) speaks of an 'obsession with memory in contemporary culture' and a 'memory boom' that expresses a deeply felt 'need for temporal anchoring' and serves as a 'reaction formation against the technical processes that are transforming our *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld).' If the museum had long stood as a stable signifier of tradition, heritage, and canon (Huyssen 1995, 13) but came under increasing fire in the 1960s for its implication in the colonial abuses of the West, the current 'museumania' signals a resistance against the 'planned obsolescence of consumer society' (Huyssen 1995, 14).

According to Huyssen (1995, 14), we are witnessing a shift from the museum as an officially sanctioned institution to musealisation as a 'paradigm of contemporary cultural sensibilities.' If the museum had been an effect of the modern era, an attempt to secure cultural and national traditions threatened by the very ravages of modernisation (Huyssen 1995, 15), then the superhero museum-books may be understood as a means of thwarting off the threat of the digital and its latent challenge to the survival of previously popular print formats in the post-industrial age. It is true that the shift to digitisation will not necessarily erase the backlog of comic book content, even though one wonders how much of this backlog Marvel and DC will digitise and what the criteria for selection may be – probably not the criteria of the historian, but those of the commercial publisher.[11]

The museum-books arguably seek to create an aura surrounding 'original' comic book drawings and artefacts that may have never had an aura in the first place. If the digitally produced copy of an artefact with no stable origin can do so, it is because digitisation tends to 'lend an aura and reenchant objects beyond any instrumental function they may have had' (Huyssen 1995, 33). As Huyssen writes in a passage in *Present Pasts* (Huyssen 2003, 20) that deals with the recursive effects of digitisation on the status of photography: 'digitization makes the "original" photograph auratic' by completing the 'move from the photograph to its digital recycling.' One could therefore argue that the museum-books play into a pervasive 'longing for the authentic' (Huyssen 1995, 33) among contemporary aficionados of superhero comics, most likely those who have purchased, perused, collected, and communicated about these comics for many years and who are now seeing them fall to the wayside of digitisation. The reproductions of allegedly rare comic book materials act as 'mummified object[s]' that issue a false (but perhaps effective) promise: to 'yield experience and a sense of the authentic' (Huyssen 1995, 33) for readers with nostalgic memories of personal comic book encounters and even for new readers who want to re-experience the simulated authenticity of earlier generations of comic book aficionados. Offering these readers a museal gaze, the museum-books strive to 'resist […] the progressive dematerialization of the world driven by […] computer networking' (Huyssen 1995, 34) even though they are very much products of the digital age. They express and seek to mobilise a 'desire to anchor ourselves in a world characterised by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space' (Huyssen 2003, 18) through reproducing cultural artefacts that were never meant to survive their use-by-date: cultural artefacts that were intended to provide only momentary satisfaction but ended up as collectors' items.

Musealisation as a practice ventures beyond canonisation. It may be the next logical step in the evolution of a print-bound genre threatened with, if not extinction, then at least with the massive migration of content and resources into different medial forms. As Jared

Gardner (2012, 191) observes, '[d]eclining sales in serial comic books suggest that […] a chapter in the history of the form may be coming to an end'. This assessment can be connected with larger cultural anxieties about the changes that digitisation has brought to our understanding and experience of time. As Huyssen (2003, 20) puts it, 'the past is selling better than the future,' and one way of selling the past is to mobilise 'memory and musealization as a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance'. By commemorating and musealising superhero comic book history, the museum-books might work as such a bulwark, but they might also usher in the ossification – or mummification, in Huyssen's terminology – of what used to be a lively culture of interaction and immersion sustaining a once-thriving print genre of popular serial storytelling.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. For further analysis, see Stein (2013).
2. For a longer version of this argument, see Kelleter and Stein (2012).
3. See Woo (2008) for a succinct discussion of comics historiography and its problematics.
4. On the interplay of centrifugal and centripetal serial dynamics in popular television story-telling, see Mittell (2015, 222).
5. My approach here and throughout this essay is indebted to Jenkins (2013).
6. Due to limitations of space, I exclude the similarly designed *The Spider-Man Vault: A Museum-in-a-Book with Rare Collectibles Spun from Marvel's Web*.
7. For further historical contextualisation, see Gabilliet (2010).
8. Some of this original art was donated to actual museums, such as the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum of The Ohio State University in Columbus; quite a bit of it was sold to fans by artists trying to make some extra money besides their regular company salary; some of it was tied up for decades in court battles, as Jack Kirby's litigation against Marvel indicates.
9. My understanding of the archive is based on Steedman (2002); Taylor (2003).
10. The vault books are not published by Marvel and DC, but by Running Press Books. This is part of licensing policy that allows Marvel and DC to control content while finding new niches and appealing to new audience segments in the book market.
11. Huyssen (2003, 18) makes a 'distinction between usable pasts and disposable data'.

Notes on contributor

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