



Comics Culture and Roy Lichtenstein Revisited: Analysing a Forgotten ‘Feedback Loop’

Hugo Frey and Jan Baetens

While to date no single standard historical work has been written on the intersections between pop art and comics, two common interpretations have crystallized, neither of which represents the last word on the matter. On the one hand, significant scholarly attention has been paid to ‘Batmania’, in particular how in January 1966 ABC television launched the pop art infused miniseries adaptation of the comic strip. As the star actor from the series, Adam West, famously pronounced: ‘Batman will be considered pop culture in the time continuum of our society. Talking in art terms I guess you could say that I am painting a new fresco [...] I’m the pops of the film pop culture.’¹ On the other hand, it has been commonplace to criticize pop art for copying from comics artists without sufficiently acknowledging the independent cultural achievement of the comic. This perspective is comparable to some of the initial criticism expressed by fine art critics in reaction to the work of Lichtenstein. Graham Bader explains: ‘Claims of fraudulence were thrown at Lichtenstein almost immediately with his first pop exhibition at New York’s Leo Castelli Gallery in February 1962.’²

Let us unpack each of these currents of thought in further detail. Literary, pop culture and television studies scholars (including Will Brooker, Lynn Spiegel and Henry Jenkins, Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, Sasha Torres) have underlined the historical significance of the Batman television series.³ They have discussed it as an example of a trans-media cultural event, analysed the popularization of a queer aesthetic in the series and the critics’ and viewers’ sometimes homophobic response, and written detailed micro-histories of the significant change in the representation of Batman evidenced in the show’s new ironic line. They have also focused upon the way in which fans of the original Batman comics soon tired of the television programme’s repurposing and that by the end of the 1960s the comics themselves responded by becoming more serious and less pop and camp. For art historian Sara Doris, the television programme is illustrative of how the mass media took pop art from fine art circles and made it a catchall fashion trend that was influential across much of American life.⁴ In hindsight, it is understandable that the Batman series has attracted such a substantial amount of academic attention. From the start its producer, William Dozier, argued for its cultural relevance and status, recruiting both Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein to its premiere screenings. A key site in the evolving heritage of the Batman mythology as a whole, the series is also regularly revisited whenever a new interpretation of Batman is added (as the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs explained, collective memory is revived for present-day social need).⁵

Detail from inside back cover and dust-jacket flap, design attributed to Art Spiegelman, of Alex Raymond, *Flash Gordon*, New York: Nostalgia Press, 1967 (plate 9).

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1 In parallel to the scholarship devoted to pop and Batman, it is common for comics
2 artists to express resentment about how pop art copied from their work or tradition,
3 with most of the antagonistic attention being directed specifically at Roy Lichtenstein
4 (who is the central figure for so much that we will discuss further in the present
5 article). For instance, the comic artist Irv Novick is on record making a number of
6 derogatory remarks about Lichtenstein's Second World War record and asserting that
7 his art 'was just making large copies'.⁶ With less hostility, in May 1963, fellow comics
8 artist William Overgard wrote to *Time Magazine* to draw attention to Lichtenstein's
9 borrowing from his work, *Steve Roper*, in his painting *I can see the whole room and there's nobody*
10 *in it!* (1961). Overgard informed his readers:

12 Though he may not as he says copy them exactly, Lichtenstein in his painting
13 currently being shown at the Guggenheim, comes pretty close, to the last
14 panel of my *Steve Roper*, Sunday page August 6 1961. Very flattering [...]
15 I think.⁷

17 At Tate Modern's major Lichtenstein retrospective in 2013, similar perspectives
18 continued to be aired: a collective of present day comics artists protested about
19 Lichtenstein's approach by reappropriating images from his well-known oeuvre to
20 create new satirical treatments. The dominant protagonist in this protest was the
21 artist who had worked with Alan Moore on the important graphic novel *Watchmen*,
22 Dave Gibbons.⁸ According to Gibbons, Lichtenstein was second rate, a manipulator of
23 the work of others, a cynical disruptor of images that were best left in their original
24 cultural and narrative home of the comic book.⁹ As readers of *Art History* will appreciate,
25 the brouhaha that developed during the Tate Modern show echoes an earlier debate
26 that had developed when the graphic novelist Art Spiegelman lampooned the Museum
27 of Modern Art's 'High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture' exhibition of 1991.
28 Cartooning for *Artforum*, Spiegelman targeted the pretensions of that exhibition, its
29 commercial sponsors (AT&T), and its limited engagement with the history of the comic
30 strip, in and of itself.¹⁰ In this same satirical piece a classic Romance comics character
31 proclaims: 'Oh, Roy, your dead high art is built on dead low art! [...] The real political,
32 sexual, and formal energy in living popular culture passes you by. Maybe that's why
33 you're championed by museums!' Moreover, the general point made by Gibbons and
34 Spiegelman is widely circulated by others working in the field of comics. For example,
35 one thinks of Daniel Clowes's short strip, *Art School Confidential* and the subsequent film
36 adaptation featuring the actor John Malkovich as the failed fine art tutor ('those who
37 can, do; those who can't, teach').¹¹ Again, the same tone of negativity is expressed in
38 Adrian Tomine's 'Dylan and Donovan' strip, as well as being a significant part of Julie
39 Doucet's world view.¹² In addition, the groundbreaking academic work from Bart Beaty
40 underlines how comics and fine art have had a conflicted relationship.¹³ Explicitly
41 and implicitly drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski, Howard S.
42 Becker, and Arthur Danto, Beaty argues that the art and comics worlds developed in
43 oppositional power relations, and that the latter was marginalized by the former. He
44 adds that it has only been recently that some graphic novelists, such as Chris Ware,
45 have moved between the two worlds, being appreciated by both communities. Such
46 matters remain complex, not least because Ware has on occasions used his comics to
47 express his own doubts about the contemporary art establishment.¹⁴

48 Equally, there have been quite different approaches to those two frames of
49 interpretation outlined above. Specialist art historians have discussed the relationship
50 between Lichtenstein's work and his source comics (our main emphasis too).¹⁵ There

is also David Barsalou's remarkable 'Deconstructing Roy Lichtenstein' project that posted his research online in order to pin down the comics artists' names concealed behind Lichtenstein's artworks.¹⁶ We must note, as well, that one or two graphic novelists make the exploitation of pop art central to their work. For instance, there is a synthesis of assemblage and appropriation in David Vandermeulen's *Ric Remix*, while Jeanne Martinet continues Lichtenstein's appropriation of Romance comics by reprinting exact copies of them with her own feminist-inspired speech and thought bubbles replacing the originals.¹⁷ Another case in point is the comics critic, Bob Levin who mocks the outrage of comic fans when they complain about Lichtenstein. He asserts with characteristic brio: 'What burns the comic fan's ass is Lichtenstein getting all this money and attention for ripping off Russ Heath. But this outrage is justified only if wealth and fame are perceived as important. They needn't be. [...] The Lichtenstein is huge, shiny, on canvas, and isolated on one of those sanctifying walls. Heath has no more claim on us than the guy who made Duchamp's urinal or the stuffer of the goat Rauschenberg once stuck a tire around.'¹⁸

This article returns to the 1960s to narrate and analyse a different kind of art history from that implied in the two dominant, yet (as we have shown) not always hegemonic, currents of interpretation of comics and pop. Consulting original archival material from the Roy Lichtenstein Archive New York, the Billy Ireland Library, Columbus, OH, and the Special Collections unit at Syracuse University (relating to the 1960s 'beat' avant garde and occasional graphic novel publisher, Grove Press), and elsewhere, we want to suggest a more nuanced set of historical responses is needed when considering the relationship between comic strips and pop art in general, and Roy Lichtenstein in particular. Few specific details have so far ever been published in this area. Both Cécile Whiting and Sara Doris point the way in their work by consistently analysing and historicizing how pop art and pop style moved rapidly from gallery spaces back into mass media and advertising design.¹⁹ Yet, neither scholar interrogates how comics used pop. Michael Lobel provides some helpful context by indicating in his work that some comic artists did cooperate and associate with Lichtenstein on selected projects, dating from the mid-1960s. We will return to this herein.²⁰ Writing some years earlier than Whiting, Doris or Lobel, Lawrence Alloway commented in his classic work, *American Pop Art*, that, by the late 1960s, comics artists were re-using materials and images in the strips that had earlier been made famous in pop art, proposing that there was a 'feedback loop'.²¹ He explained his thoughts further in his contribution to *Three Studies in Modern Communication*:

exchangeable and repeatable imagery [...] cross-media exchanges and the convergence of multiple channels is the core of pop art; in opposition to the pursuit of artistic purity. Thus Pop Art is able to share on the basis of translatability and commonality, themes from popular culture [...] any event today has the potential for spreading through society on a multiplicity of levels, carried by a fast anthology of signs.²²

Or as Dick Hebdige wisely underlined, pop was always for Alloway about a continuum from mass media forms to fine art and 'the variable significance of objects and images as they circulated in different consumer markets [...] pop formed up at the interface between the analysis of "popular culture" and the production of "art".'²³ From our research we suggest herein that four distinct levels marked the pop art/comic interface: (i) explicitly commercial operations that rebranded selected comics into new pop art productions; (ii) new and significant historical appreciation of older comics that

1 Front cover, drawn by Jean-
2 Claude Forest, of Jean-Claude
3 Forest, *Barbarella*, New York:
4 Grove Press, 1966.

BARBARELLA



BY JEAN-CLAUDE FOREST / GROVE PRESS, INC.

1 were disseminated under the sign of pop; (iii) direct association and collaboration
2 with Lichtenstein; (iv) the production of new pop-inspired comics and graphic
3 novels, published by Grove Press, and drawing on their international connection to
4 the Parisian art and literary scene. At Grove two major works were translated from the
5 French: Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella* (plate 1) and Pierre Bartier and Guy Peellaert's
6 *The Adventures of Jodelle*. In short, there was a significant international aspect to the
7 associations between pop art and the various subworlds of the comics.²⁴

8 Taken together these four levels of feedback between pop and comics constitute
9 a significant cultural phenomenon. Building on Alloway's work, we will explain that
10 the loop clearly included a strong economic impulse where comics were redesigned to
11 seem like pop art products to attract consumers interested in the trend. Nevertheless,
12 in the slipstream of the fashion for pop, new opportunities for comics occurred,
13 including genuinely original and serious projects such as reprinting and re-evaluating
14 lost historical works dating from before the Second World War. The same feedback

process included genuine experimentation and redesign, as well as establishing new networking connections between comics people and the fine arts – notably Roy Lichtenstein. Furthermore, our hypothesis is that the feedback loop in general, and across the four levels, identified and redirected comics towards a new, adult, older readership. The alignment of comics with pop fashion in the new works from Grove, and in republished classics and rebranded historical titles, invited the engagement of consumers much older than what until then was considered to be the typical comics reader. This did not mean that children or teenagers stopped reading comics – they remained a core, if declining, market, one now also attracted to television, popular music, the new American cinema, and alternative counter-cultural DIY lifestyle choices. The feedback from pop into comics simply invited imagined consumers of comics who were themselves holding sufficient cultural capital (even if often in a rudimentary way) for an awareness of pop, a sense of interest in and knowledge of cultural trends, and an open mind about the ironic stance on comics that pop art recurrently advanced. This invention of a different reader-consumer of pop-inspired comics closely resembles the still valuable lines of reader-reception theory so ably outlined in Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*.²⁵ The comics' repurposing as pop products was certainly about making a pop-styled reading code that signalled to imagined audiences that the works were different from before, now constituting a part of a national adult art-fashion trend, meant for consumers who were in step with that trend. To borrow the language of Rimmon-Kennan, the pop-influenced comics selected their readers because of the messages they were communicating through their new stylizations.

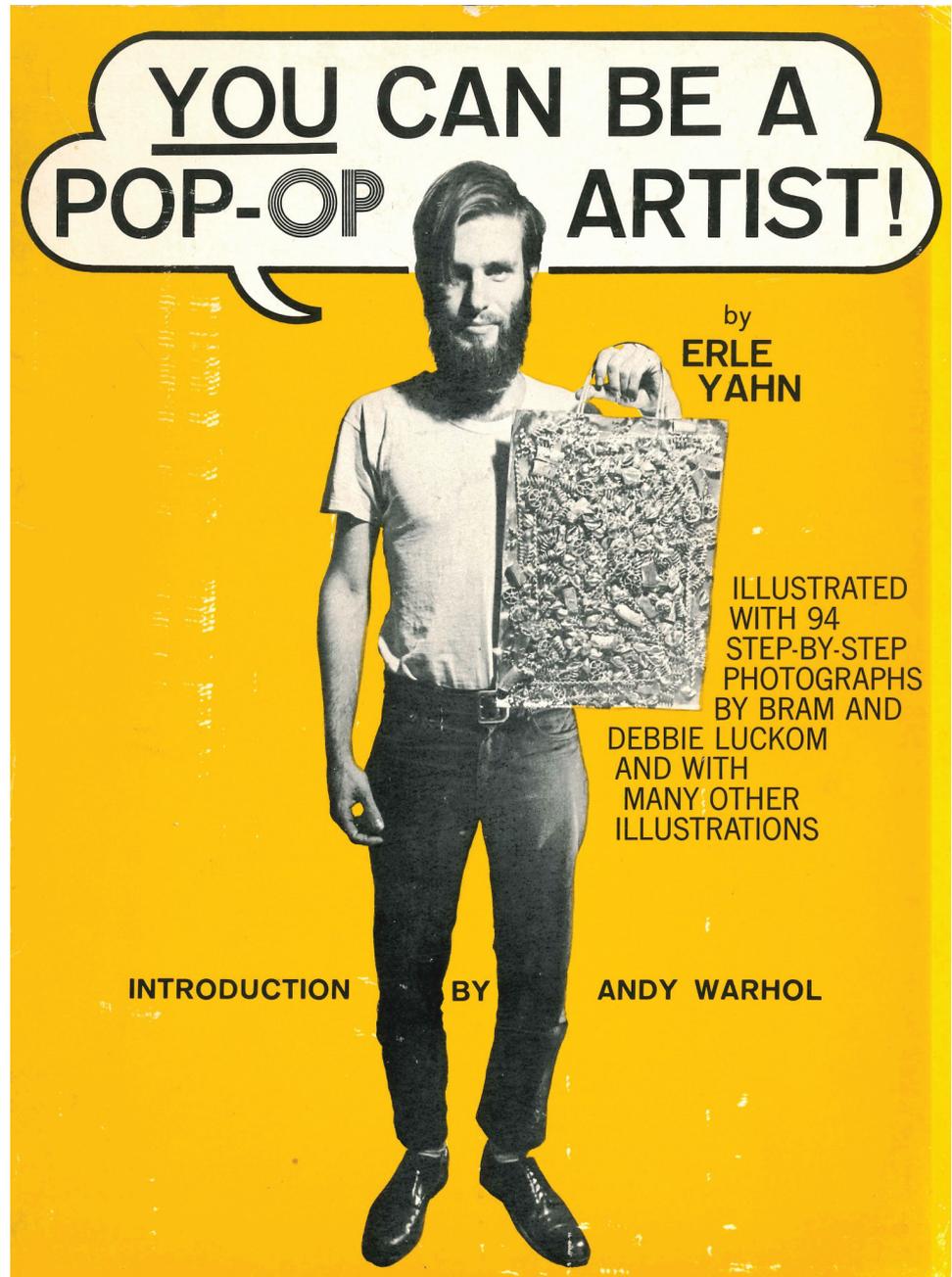
The speed of the development of the feedback loop was relatively rapid, mainly concentrated over the period 1965–68. To recall the chronology, Lichtenstein's new works were first exhibited in 1962, while by 1964 *Life Magazine* broke pop as a national scandal with its 'Is this the Worst Artist in the World?' provocative intervention. One year later the tone changed to enthusiastic advice for pop fans, when Gloria Steinem informed readers of the same magazine on the 'Ins and Outs of Pop Culture'.²⁶ The four major and distinct parts of the comics feedback loop we discuss in this article began at precisely this mid point in the decade, at the height of the popular promotion of pop.

Commercialization: Rebranding, Reframing, Reappropriation, Reprinting

Pop represented an important commercial opportunity for the comics industry. As Doris and Whiteman have underlined, pop quickly moved from being a fine art phenomenon to becoming a part of mass culture, being taken up by advertising, fashion, and interior and graphic design. The comics industry was no exception and it too made strides towards recuperating the pop look back into its own original field for commercial gain. This process of borrowing pop style was sometimes quite banal, often amounting to little more than the cheap commercialization of comics characters in 'blown up' poster art, or in the use of slogans that chimed with the pop zeitgeist. Nonetheless, on occasions significant repositioning was also attempted. Though modest in number, some directly pop-inspired paperback books were published (graphic novels well before the idea really had any currency in the world). More subtly, artists also started to play with the repetition and redeployment of stereotypical images that had been made famous by their pop art appropriation – a recuperation that Alloway spotted first in his *American Pop Art* (1974).

Commercial presses and publishers used the new popularity of pop art to merchandise original pop-branded ephemera derived from comic strip characters.²⁷

2 Front cover, designed by Erle Yahn, of *Erle Yahn, You Can Be a Pop-Op Artist!*, Norwalk, CT: Silvermine Publishers, 1966.



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Posters, illustrations and other souvenirs that celebrated the rise in interest in comics were marketed for the first time. For example, Art Prints by Lambert Studios purveyed what it titled as handsome posters of images from the comics (e.g. 'Mandrake') alongside work from Picasso, Renoir, Kollwitz, Matisse and Van Gogh.²⁸ In the pages of the Chicago-based horror film fanzine *Castle of Frankenstein*, Matt Fox's horror-cartoon prints were sold to readers with the strapline, 'It's monstrous! It's pop art!'²⁹ Original packs of film stills from the 1930s and 1940s cinematic adaptations of comic strip stories were among other products made ready to buy. Photo-novel-style books composed of original film stills from the adaptations of comics were also available for readers nostalgically hankering for the originals.³⁰ Furthermore, already by 1966, the pop art buzz was itself attracting commercial satirical publications, notably Erle Yahn's *You Can Be a Pop-Op Artist!* for Silvermine Inc. publishers (plate 2). This tongue-in-cheek

guide to achieving fame and fortune in contemporary art was a photomontage, including in its first few pages the witty guidance on how to make 'bad comic books' into art (plate 3 and plate 4) – itself of course delivered through text and image organization.

In addition to the commercial and satirical, the two major comics publishing houses, DC and Marvel, briefly rebranded their titles to link up with pop art. In 1965 Marvel issued a number of comics with the logo 'Pop Art Productions' and branded their series collectively as 'Marvel Masterpieces!', using the language of fine art. Not to be outdone, their rivals DC Comics invented their own new pop style logo – a check of black and white squares known as the 'Go Go Check' design.

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A COMIC STRIP PANEL

Step 1. On a prepared canvas (stretched and sized) the rough outline of a comic strip panel is drawn with a pencil, although a piece of charcoal could be used. For this painting, an especially bad comic book of love stories was chosen.



Step 2. The outline of the figures is completed. The "balloons" have yet to be added.



1 Several popular comic book serials were reformatted into new long-length
2 paperbacks designed to mimic the style of pop art. This was achieved through pop-
3 themed advertising blurbs, dust jacket designs and a new approach to the page layout
4 of the content. Thus, Marvel's 'Marvel Collector's Albums', published by Lancer Books
5 in the United States, brought out six different pop-inspired paperback volumes,
6 including *The Fantastic Four*, *The Hulk*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *Dare Devil* (plate 5).³¹ Each of their
7 covers employed intense, clear images of the eponymous comic heroes, reminiscent
8 of the core strategy of pop: the magnification of iconic imagery, while also removing

Step 6. The outlines are nearly completed.



Step 7. After all outlines are painted, the words in the balloons are lettered, still using black paint.



Step 8. The finished comic strip painting, in garish colors.



4 Page 21 of Erle Yahn, 'Comic Strip Panel', from Erle Yahn, *You Can Be a Pop-Op Artist!*, Norwalk, CT: Silvermine Publishers, 1966.

5 Front cover, design attributed to Bill Everett, Johnny Romita and Gene Colan, of Stan Lee, et al., *Here Comes... Daredevil*, New York: Lancer Books, 1967.



or minimizing anything surplus to value. In addition, the blurb on the back covers
framed the works as being part of the wider multi-media cultural trend by frequently
using buzzwords such as 'groovy', 'hip' and 'cool', while including endorsement from
mainstream or counter-cultural publications (*Village Voice*) and universities (e.g. Yale – it
is not clear if this is from faculty, or students, or both). Inside pages offered an even

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6 Front cover, designed by Jack Kirby, of Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, *The Mighty Thor*, London: Souvenir Press, 1966.



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stronger mimetic reproduction of the pop style. Rather than replicating a standard comic book grid, the pages were recomposed entirely of single or dual frames, the majority of which were oriented in a landscape format on the page. Sequential narrative was still deployed but exclusively through this very pop-informed framing that insisted on the magnified single or dual panels filling the whole page. The Jerry

Siegel-scripted paperback *High Camp Superheroes* repeated much of the same pop-derived style outlined above. Authored by a father of the Superman comic, it was presented in 1966 by its publisher Belmont as an explicitly cool, new pop art-style production:

A couple of dozen years ago, if you'd have been caught dead or alive with a super hero comic book, you might've been laughed at, spat upon, or merely ostracized. Today, you can proudly carry a super hero comical book and be lauded [...] High Camp devotees have gone ape over long underwear-attired villain clobberers [...] if cinema spy capers are beginning to lose their zing for you, then immerse yourself in HIGH CAMP SUPER HEROES.³²

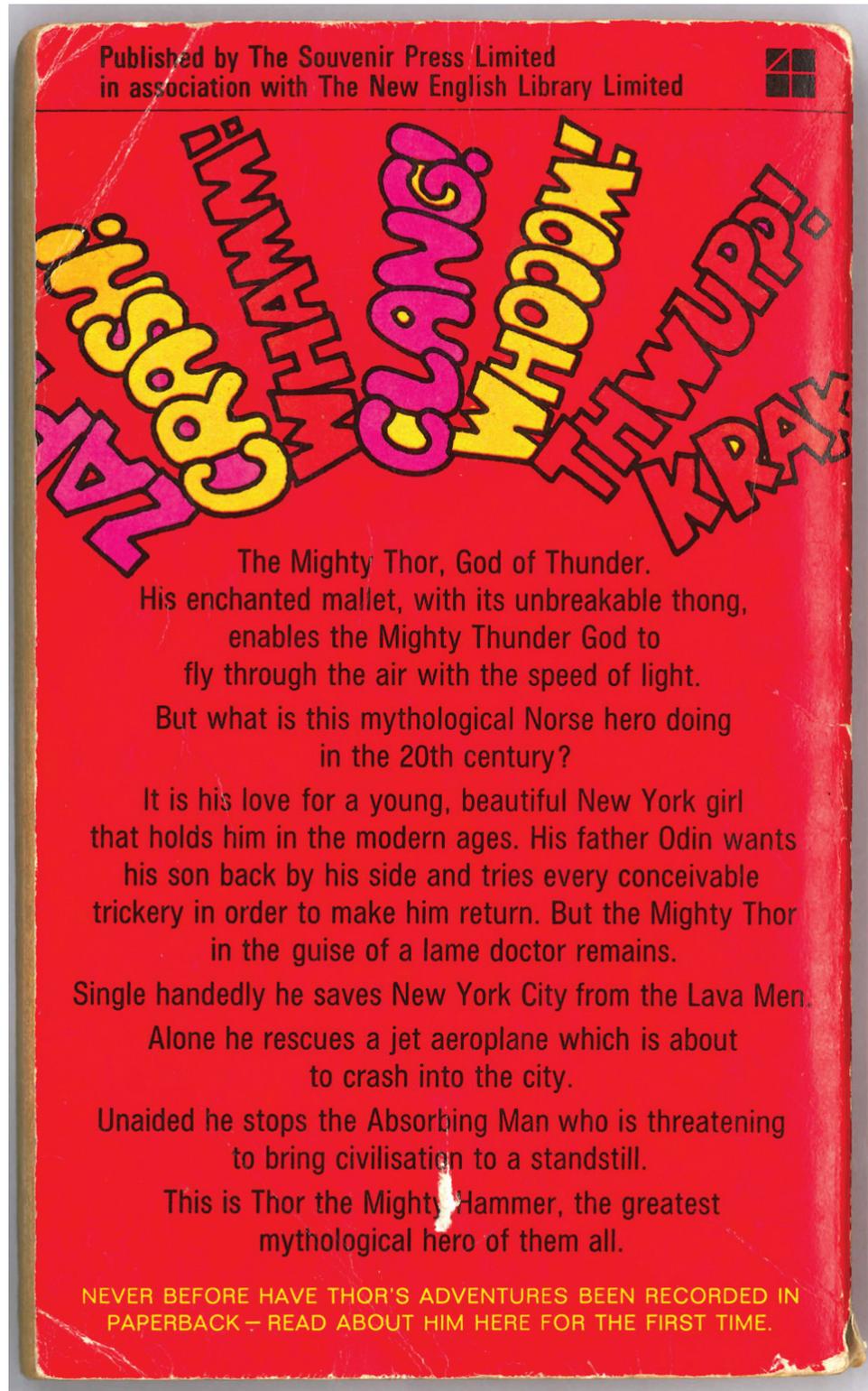
Its content shared the panel designs used in the Marvel Collectors paperbacks, while its graphic design as a pop object added the psychedelic touch of dying the end papers a lurid shade of green. The narrative content of *High Camp Super Heroes* may have been no more than the old school superheroes fighting evil villains, but what was important was that this story world was now framed for purchasers as offering an experience of the pop art sensation at a price they could afford. To borrow again from Rimmon-Kennan's well-known notion of reception theory, the images and texts set out paratextual design and layout signals that invited readers to understand them as like pop art.

When the Lancer Book titles were distributed in the United Kingdom via Souvenir Press/Four Square Books, the covers (as Genette's definition of paratext would lead us to expect) were redesigned to further exaggerate the pop style, presumably in case British readers were too ignorant to pick up on the fashionable point.³³ Take, for example, the UK reprint of *The Mighty Thor* (plate 6 and plate 7). The UK cover design included pop-lettering 'Whoom', 'Crash!' and 'Whamm!', which had not featured in the US version. The UK cover for *The Hulk* also repurposed the US illustration in classic Lichtenstein-style, removing the background detail (flying fighter jets) and replacing them with a plain white backdrop. This visual rhetoric maximized the intensity of the image of the Hulk and allowed nothing to detract from that. The success of the Batman television series led to the publication of three similar Batman titles that shared the core features of the Marvel and Belmont paperbacks. Taken together, these titles constitute a significant corpus of new pop-look comic paperbacks. Moreover, it was a format that evolved further in the early 1970s, when editor Byron Preiss reprinted the new socio-politically informed 'Green Lantern/Green Arrow' series as 'Paperback Library Comics'. This was noted at the time in one comic fanzine as a significant attempt to capture student readers.³⁴ It also aimed to popularize the series to those unwilling to read flimsy comic books and who preferred standard paperbacks. They also served to announce to a new readership that the Green Lantern titles constituted a product for adult readers. Furthermore, the new design format corresponded to a significant change in narrative content: Green Lantern in this period openly supported the civil rights movement and engaged with political themes, including environmentalism and social welfare.

Comics thus directly introduced reference to pop art into their content as well as their design and publishing format. Making moves to exploit pop fashion in comics was therefore explicit and, in terms of impact, strong, if only for a short period and in the selected editorial contexts. It is also the case that artists themselves made more implicit steps to speak in the language of pop, if only in coded and ironic ways. Irv Novick started to echo images from Lichtenstein's repertoire in his own run on the *Batman* strip. As we draw attention to in *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, in an issue from 1970 he produced

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images clearly aligned with those found in Lichtenstein's *Whaam* (1963). Earlier the same series featured re-drawings of work from Mel Ramos described in the comic as 'A Sensational "Pop Art" Show', while in 'Art Gallery of Rogues' one panel constitutes an approximate re-drawing of Lichtenstein's *Drowning Girl* (1963).³⁵ On one level such allusions offered to knowing readers a species of visual banter, assertive repossessions of



7 Back cover, designed by Jack Kirby, of Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, *The Mighty Thor*, London: Souvenir Press, 1966.

8 Page 118, designed by Steve Buscema, from Archie Goodwin, 'Thunder in the Ruins', from *The Fantastic Four*, New York: Marvel Comics, 1971.



what had been appropriated by pop. It is also the case that this coded reappropriation by comics carried with it more powerful effects for readers willing to read the signs. Take for example a page from 'Thunder in the Ruins', *The Fantastic Four* (118, 1971). Written by Archie Goodwin and drawn by Steve Buscema, it makes direct reference to Lichtenstein's *The Kiss II* (1962) in a magnified panel at the heart of the page (plate 8). The image also echoes a visual trope found in Lichtenstein's *The Ring* (1962) in that it uses star-like lines to draw the eye to the centre of the image. What does such a reappropriation mean? For us it signals self-reflexivity. It displays a bold self-awareness that comics draw

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book are considered to be the peak of Alex Raymond's efforts on *Flash Gordon*. His style was electric and vibrant; it always flowed in new directions. He constantly experimented with new ideas and techniques, always searching for new ways to present his tales. The tales themselves are inspired. More than a combination of fine drawing and fantasy, they are capable of gripping and holding the reader.



Box 293, Franklin Square, N. Y. 11010



book designed by Art Spiegelman

1 **9 Inside back cover and dust-**
 2 **jacket flap, design attributed**
 3 **to Art Spiegelman, of Alex**
 4 **Raymond, *Flash Gordon*, New**
 5 **York: Nostalgia Press, 1967.**

6 upon stereotypes and that these images were themselves now adjusted again by pop art.
 7 Moreover, the same *Fantastic Four* page adds a small but effective feminist re-reading of
 8 the values of the 1950s Romance comics (now already ten to twenty years in the past):
 9 in the panel that immediately follows the pop-styled kiss, the female protagonist pushes
 10 back the male party and exclaims: 'How dare you lay hands upon the Goddess, Ixchel?!'
 11 This page was in some regards much ahead of its time, anticipating similar reversals in
 12 the feminist rewriting of Romance comics created by Jeanne Martinet over thirty years
 13 later. The phrase also smartly echoes the short and punchy exclamations Lichtenstein
 14 had selected to employ, simply adding the denouement that Goddess Ixchel was now a
 15 feisty 1970s woman who hit back, rather than a sobbing one without much agency. For
 16 readers of Art History familiar with 'Kiss 2' there is also another important reorientation
 17 in the page from *Fantastic Four*. Even if the image is almost a duplicate, when one compares
 18 closely one can point out that in 'Kiss 2' the young female protagonist is compliant, her
 19 eyes firmly closed, while in the new strip panel this is no longer the case. This is a visual
 20 revision that supports the explicitly feminist-leaning text.
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A second mode of commercial feedback was provided by the rise of reprints of older
 comics, now reframed as both pop (new) and collectible classic (old). Thus, in 1965
 the artist and writer Jules Feiffer published *The Great Comic Book Superheroes* for Dial Press
 (at the time managed by novelist E. L. Doctorow).³⁶ As well as including Feiffer's paean
 to the strips of the 1930s, it offered to younger readers their first book-format contact
 with such historical strips. Two years later, in 1967, an extensive reprint of *Flash Gordon*

strips by Alex Raymond received a comparable resuscitation, this time by the tellingly named Nostalgia Press Inc. (plate 9, featuring a *Flash Gordon* jacket design attributed to the young Art Spiegelman – a very early piece from his long career in comics).³⁷ This collection of strips was the first of a series of titles edited and repackaged into book format by Nostalgia Press. Further titles included *Prince Valiant*, *Little Nemo*, and *Terry and the Pirates*. Nostalgia Press was the brainchild of Woody Gelman, the entrepreneur who would later be editor for Topps bubble gum cards, for whom Art Spiegelman was a long-serving commercial artist.³⁸ Pop therefore opened up space for new forms of comics publishing. The newfound interest generated in comics expanded into a new market: the reprinting of pre-war titles, bringing attention to almost forgotten strips and their creators. This material was framed through pop-like aesthetics – especially in the cover art and dust jacket designs that were used. From the point of view of the history of commercial comics publishing this was probably the most important impact of all, for it opened up a model whereby permanent sales of anthologized backlist comics could potentially one day underwrite sponsorship of new works.

Let us note here too that by the beginning of the 1970s, Nostalgia Press Inc. continued to expand, experimenting with a comic book-magazine format, rather than a book-length reprinting, when redistributing classic historical comics as *Nostalgia Comics*.³⁹ In such original products for their day, the pop design aesthetic continued to be advantageous for the marketing of the long-forgotten strips. In a clever inversion of Lichtenstein's approach, it is the comics artists themselves and not their pages or panels – Charles Flanders, Lyman Young, and Austin Briggs – who now are reframed, magnified, and made the focal visual point of attention on the cover.

The commercial feedback loop between pop and comics was thus multifaceted. There were crude attempts to repackage comics into products related to, if not actually directly regarded as, a kind of pop art. The wave of national interest in pop art was being constantly exploited (even if quite understandably so from any business perspective). But such exploitation also required significant aesthetic changes, making comics resemble pop art, most blatantly in the pop-infused designs of paperback collections. More subtly, pop iconography was rerecuperated back into new comics – often to ironic or critically interrogative effect. The reprinted historical materials from the 1930s and 1940s provided another reorientation attractive to older readers. The book format printings of the 'old' comics were now mediated through lavish, pop-designed hardbacks and what we would call today 'collector's editions'. This material invited in readers who had once collected the strips of the 1930s and 1940s in their childhood and who were now approaching early middle age. Consistently across all these interventions one can therefore locate how comics were moving to establish older, more historically aware and reflexive readerships. In each case there was an exploitation of the visual rhetorical power of pop art, yet such an appeal relied on readers who felt fashionably engaged by and concerned with pop. Nevertheless, the repacking of comics as pop materials had to be subtle, not least because the proximity of the formats risked confusion or failed communication.

Collaboration and Association: The National Cartoonist Society, *Giff-Wiff*, and Roy Lichtenstein

On at least two occasions the comics community worked directly with Roy Lichtenstein: first when the National Cartoonist Society congress in New York in 1965 used the artist's work and discussed it with him; second, in Spring 1966, when the Paris-based intellectual comics fanzine, *Giff-Wiff*, printed an original interview between Lichtenstein and the US illustrator and comics artist, David Pascal.⁴⁰ Neither

1 of these episodes is particularly well known, so let us establish the historical content
2 of each (though such a reconstruction will necessarily be fragmented and incomplete
3 since little documentation remains available). What becomes evident is that dialogues
4 did take place between commercial comics and the pop artist. There was a serious
5 discussion about roles, in which each party wanted to gain from a connection to
6 the other. The comics community was looking to benefit from Lichtenstein's fame.
7 On the other hand, the artist himself seems to have wanted both to differentiate his
8 work on comics from commercial practice, and yet also publicly respect that field
9 by establishing his appreciation of some of its exponents and confessing politely his
10 limited knowledge of many others.

11 A piecemeal archival record of these encounters begins in 1965 when the National
12 Cartoonist Society (NCS) used Lichtenstein's work to promote their annual Reuben
13 awards dinner, commissioning his original poster print *This Must be the Place* to publicize
14 the event (plate 10). This image of a futuristic city directly evoked a Buck Rogers strip,



10 Roy Lichtenstein, *This Must Be the Place*, 1965. Offset lithograph, 54.2 × 40.6 cm. New York: Roy Lichtenstein Foundation. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS/Artimage.

as Lichtenstein in later interviews stated, though he did not name the original artist or the strip's date.⁴¹ The awards were an annual event that dated from the first meeting of the society in 1946. The society itself was set up by cartoonists who were serving in the US armed forces. Its founding president was Rube Goldberg, while in 1965 it was led by Bob Dunn. Cartoonists of all kinds were welcomed as members whilst former presidents included newspaper serial comics creators Milton Caniff (President 1948–49) and Alex Raymond (President 1950–52). In 1965 the society awarded its major prize, the Reuben, to Leonard Star (though the previous year it went to the better-known Charles Schulz). Alongside this award the comics serial prize in 1965 was given to Wallace Wood, a founding creator of MAD magazine and an artist who had previously worked across all of the major comics presses (EC, DC, Marvel, Tower). In the mid-1960s the military origins of the society remained intact: the society presented a special award to General Omar Nelson Bradley, former US Army Chief of Staff, and first Chairman of NATO (among numerous other distinguished military roles).⁴²

Records indicate that Lichtenstein probably spoke to the National Cartoonist Society at the same event he had helped promote via the 'Buck Rogers' print. The Roy Lichtenstein Archive has kindly provided us with their transcript of a speech he delivered in 1965 and that we will reproduce here in full for the first time. The document is described by the archive as an 'Acceptance Speech'; another document in the Roy Lichtenstein Archive confirms this and that it relates to the April 1965 National Cartoonist Society convention. However, no specific named prize seems to have been awarded by the NCS to Lichtenstein, even though the tone of his speech suggests an award was made. The documented transcript of the speech reads:

I am honored and very much amazed that you are feeding me in[stead] of stringing me up. I think a good part of the art-world beli[eves] I am polking [sic] fun at cartooning rather than at art – which is much closer to the truth. Cartooning is in touch with American life – with modern life.

The kind of cartooning, as you can see, that I am most concerned with, for my own work, is not the kind which looks like art – and often is art – Thurber and Steinberg. But comic book cartooning which is often looked down upon – but which I find interesting and a solution to the problem of wedding painting and poetry. Now I find that intellectuals everywhere have always been great comic book fans. Of course Picasso himself loved the American comics – particularly the Katzenjamer [sic] Kids. The reason I copy the cartoons is that, being a fine artist, I don't know how to draw anything.

It's also strange that the only hint of a law suit in this connection has come from a fine art source and not from cartoonists. Instead, William Overgaard [sic], who does Steve Roper, noticing the striking similarity of one of our works, sent me an original strip which I prize highly.

Of course, what I am trying to establish here is that anyone who sues me is a fink.

But really, I want to thank you for this gracious [sic] gesture.⁴³

Here Lichtenstein perhaps shows that it is unwise to bite the hand that feeds you (literally on this occasion, as is clear from the first sentence of the speech). Nor for that matter is he going to offend an organization that has commissioned his work.

1 Nevertheless, Lichtenstein's words reveal a great deal that, over the years, has been
2 overlooked. First, it should be stressed that Lichtenstein shows a sensitivity about and
3 critical self-awareness of the potential for appropriation to offend, which he deflects
4 through humour. Second, Lichtenstein's words indicate that he acknowledged comics
5 existed as an independent art form, deserving acclaim in their own right (using as
6 examples, the work of Thurber and Steinberg). Third, Lichtenstein self-presented his
7 work as being about 'art', a historical-critical intervention in this field, and not one that
8 was about the world of cartooning per se. There is also a very human self-deprecating
9 tone to the speech – framed for his audience perhaps – that is captured in his self-
10 assessment of his drawing skills. He further neatly underlines the irony that now that
11 he, a fine artist, has shown interest in comics, other 'intellectuals' have suddenly taken
12 up discussing them, unearthing lost connections, such as Picasso's interest in the
13 Katzenjammer Kids.

14 Let us add that cartoonist and NCS member Mort Walker recalls inviting
15 Lichtenstein to a National Cartooning Society event, quite probably the same one as at
16 which the above speech was delivered. Speaking to *The Washington Post* in 2013 Walker
17 commented:

19 I invited Roy Lichtenstein [...] Everybody was going to attack him [for gaining
20 fame and fortune from "stealing" comic art in his paintings]. But he was such
21 a nice guy. He said he had been starving in his office and decided to paint
22 one [comic-art painting with Benday dots]. He said: "That one sold. All of a
23 sudden, I was making money." [By the end of the talk] everybody went up and
24 congratulated him.⁴⁴

26 Analysing another 1965 event, Michael Lobel has researched a further connection.
27 The Newspaper Comics Council (NCC) held an exhibition and charity auction
28 for the United Service Organization that encouraged its members to use pop art
29 techniques. This exhibition, entitled 'Comics Art Goes Pop', was hosted at the
30 World House Gallery (987 Madison Avenue), and its works were then shown at the
31 'Top of the Fair' Restaurant as part of the 1965 New York World's Fair. For these
32 shows the cartoonist Alfred Andriola created an image of his cartoon detective
33 Kerry Drake capturing three pop artists, whose photos are ironically presented as
34 typical police mug shots – Lichtenstein next to Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist.
35 Lobel explains that Lichtenstein and Andriola were photographed posing in front of
36 the image, suggesting a playful acceptance by Lichtenstein of the 'criminality' of his
37 pastiches.⁴⁵

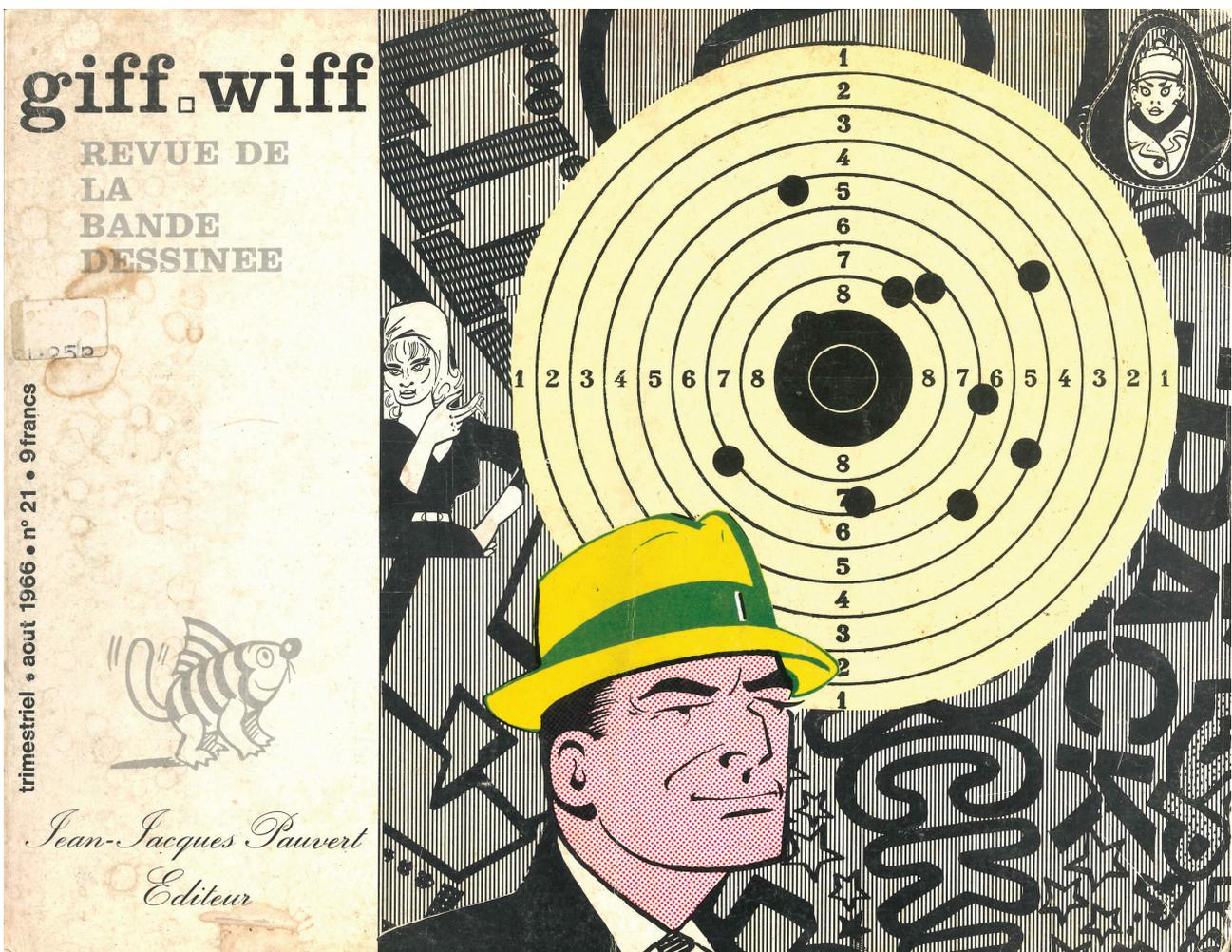
38 So comics creators and Lichtenstein engaged with each other through 1965
39 in an open, mutually respectful dialogue. Comics were certainly getting more
40 positive attention than in previous periods, and the NCS and the NCC worked to pull
41 Lichtenstein into their events, by implication associating their own profession with
42 his fame as a fine artist and the pop fashion more generally. It was an opportunistic
43 intervention in which Lichtenstein collaborated and directly engaged. This trajectory
44 resembles that of contemporary advertising agencies who also took up the pop style,
45 taking it back into the world it had been in part derived from (as discussed by Cécile
46 Whiting). But it was also different: Lichtenstein and the comics community recognized
47 each other's field and displayed some mutual appreciation. Both sides effectively
48 networked with the other. Yet as the archived documents reveal, Lichtenstein selected
49 illustrators Steinberg and Thurber for praise and not, as we must emphasize here, any
50 of the comics creators he had engaged with in his work, such as, Milton Caniff, Russ

Heath, Joe Simon or Tony Abruzzo. Certainly Lichtenstein retained some reservations and, as we noted earlier, while comics artist Overgard had not taken out a legal case against Lichtenstein, he did draw to the attention of *Time Magazine's* readers that it was his original art that was being 'copied'.

In Paris in 1966, Lichtenstein's work became of particular note to intellectuals interested in and promoting comics as a serious medium (notably, Alain Resnais, Francis Lacassin, Jean-Claude Forest, and Remo Forlani). Indeed, their comics cultural magazine, *Giff-Wiff*, published an original interview between him and comics artist-illustrator, David Pascal (plate 11).⁴⁶ To summarize, this important discussion was frank and wide ranging. It was an open and intellectually rich exchange and not at all what the French like to call pointless argument, a dialogue of the deaf. Throughout the interview Pascal implies that Lichtenstein did not go far enough in his praise of comics. However, Lichtenstein does openly contemplate the possibility of their aesthetic potential in and of themselves (a line that is consistent with the views he presented to the NSC the previous year). For example, when Pascal asked Lichtenstein if he was a comics fan, the artist replied that he had not been and that he had only recently discovered how people appreciated them so much. He added that he was not an expert, but he found himself reading the comics and was often 'completely absorbed by them'.⁴⁷ In the same interview Lichtenstein underlined that he did not see comics as the same as art but rather as constituting a different form of visual stimulation – one

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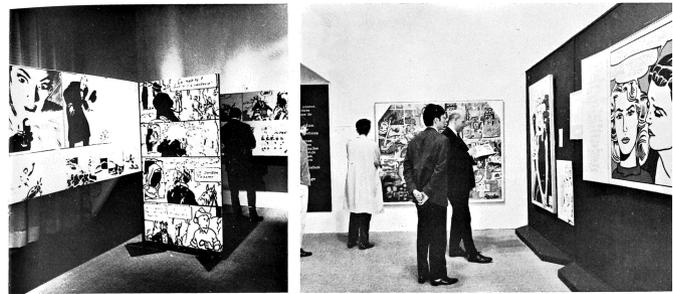
11 Front cover, designed by Alain Tercinet, of *Giff-Wiff*, number 21, August 1966.





Salle des « Cubes ». Ce ballon devient une image dans l'image.

« C'est le règne de la bande dessinée. Lee Falk est venu au théâtre par la bande dessinée. » Monique Pantel. Paris-Presses l'intransigeant.
 « Aussi la SOCCERLID tient à ce que les amateurs de cette forme d'expression en deviennent les défenseurs... en connaissance de cause. » Jeanine Warnod. Le Figaro.
 « Les bandes dessinées ne sont pas toujours stupides, loin de là, celles d'hier surtout, peut-être parce que les arts populaires ne se consomment qu'au passé... » André Fermigier. Le Nouvel Observateur.
 « Ces réserves, qui s'appliquent au prosélytisme de la Soccerlid, n'empêchent rien de la qualité de l'exposition... » Otto Hahn. L'Express.
 « ... Elle pose avant tout un problème de langage et c'est à cela précisément qu'ont voulu répondre les organisateurs de l'actuelle exposition du Musée des Arts Décoratifs, les théoriciens spécialisés de la SOCCERLID. » Pierre Restany. Arts et Loisirs.
 « La bande dessinée qui compte quelques expositions à Paris (organisées par la Soccerlid) est entrée au Musée des Arts Décoratifs. C'est son jour de gloire... » Jacques Michel. Le Monde.
 « Il s'agit tout autant d'ailleurs d'une consécration que d'une explication... » Henri Gault et Christian Millau. Paris-Presses l'intransigeant.
 « Une immense exposition passionnante s'est ouverte récemment au Musée des Arts Décoratifs... » Anne Cendres. La Tribune de Genève.
 « Oui, on aurait grand tort de confiner les bandes dessinées parmi les genres mineurs... » Pierre Mazars. Le Figaro Littéraire.
 « Hier encore dénigrées et attaquées de toutes parts, les bandes dessinées suscitent aujourd'hui un engouement et un intérêt extraordinaires. » Gerald Casson-Talbot, Claude Molteni. Les Nouvelles Littéraires.
 « Ce n'est pas l'avis de la Soccerlid qui, après avoir lutté pour la promotion de la bande dessinée, lui donne droit de cité aux Arts Décoratifs. » Femme Pratique.
 « Tintin sera l'une des vedettes... » France-Soir.
 « Le père de Tarzan rejoint les dissidents de la Bande Dessinée. » Michel Piot. Le Figaro.
 « Even the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, in Paris is currently exhibiting comic strips Milton Caniff... Look Magazine.
 « American comics and their creators are the center of attraction at an international exposition here in the Louvre one of the world's most famous museums... » Lauderdale News.
 « "Moon Mullins and Dick Tracy" in the austere Louvre Museum? » Daily News.



En haut à gauche, Salle réservée à la technique narrative. A droite la première salle de la figuration narrative. Au premier plan un tableau de Roy Lichtenstein.

Ci-dessus, La salle présentant le Jc1 Bomber III de James Rosenquist (28 m de long).

« Burne Hogarth, Mell Lazarus, Lee Falk and Milton Caniff among american on hand at the opening ceremonies, hailed the exposition's acceptance at the Louvre as a major step in artistic impact of comics. » Columbus Dispatch.

« The exhibition is of great interest both for fans of the comics as for those altogether unfamiliar with this kind of illustrated narration. » Tania Bothezat. The Sun Baltimore.
 « Excellente exposition. » La Nation.
 « En consacrant une exposition sur les bandes dessinées, le Musée des Arts Décoratifs a voulu inciter le public à réfléchir sur ce genre de narration qui réunit l'héritage d'un merveilleux millénaire et les diverses expressions de l'actualité. » Frank Eigar. Le Parisien Libéré.

1 12 Pages 92 and 93 of 'Bande dessinée et figuration narrative', from Phenix, number 4, third trimester, 1967.

2 that he found exciting.⁴⁸ Comics offered him something interesting even if they were
 3 not a fine art form.

4 It was also in Paris where Lichtenstein's work was probably first exhibited alongside
 5 a show including celebration of original comic strip art, during the 'Bande Dessinée
 6 et Figuration Narrative' exhibition held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (1967),
 7 itself supported by David Pascal on behalf of the National Cartoonist Society. Rather
 8 fortunately a small but important visual record of the event exists in a comparable
 9 French intellectual fanzine to Giff-Wiff, Phenix (plate 12). As is recorded here, the
 10 extensive show displayed blown-up reproductions of traditional comics alongside the
 11 new fine art. As such it is a material example of Alloway's notion of pop being about an
 12 entire visual circuit.

13 Lichtenstein's attitude to comics artists, associations, and serious intellectual
 14 fans like Pascal was considered. It would be overly teleological to read all of the past
 15 in the light of the attacks made by comics artists upon Lichtenstein. The evidence we
 16 have unearthed suggests that matters were more nuanced, interactive and contingent.
 17 The episodes also testify to complex disjunctions between Lichtenstein's motivations
 18 and those of the comics industry. For Lichtenstein, contributing to the NCS or
 19 Giff-Wiff was probably more a kind of honorable duty than a really significant cultural
 20 opportunity: his art star had risen so fast he hardly needed to note these interactions,
 21 nor was he trying to become a comics artist himself. Thus, his willingness to be
 22 courted by the comics world corrects the misapprehension that he only held them in
 contempt.⁴⁹ Indeed, he probably found it interesting to meet these artists and talk to

them about what he was doing and how this was quite different from their work. Such cordiality is also evidenced when some years later, in 1989, he had a brief but positive correspondence with Milton Caniff, a panel of whose work he had adapted for his own *Mr Bellamy* (1961).⁵⁰ The oral historian at the Roy Lichtenstein Archives has also discovered that as a student at Ohio State University, Lichtenstein almost certainly would have seen a Caniff cartoon that was mounted on display in the Phi Sigma Delta Fraternity house. This was a full-length portrait of Burma – a blonde seductress from Caniff’s *Terry and the Pirates*.⁵¹ The Caniff portrait from the Phi Sigma Delta Frat’ house is today held in a private collection. Having viewed a scanned copy, we reveal that it is an isolated pin-up style pose; and that in its sharpness, subject (blonde young female) and reduction of extraneous background details, genuinely looks quite like pop art *avant la lettre*. It would be entirely speculative, however, to think that it was in Lichtenstein’s subconscious when he moved from abstraction to pop. Tempting though it is to make biographical or psychoanalytical leaps of faith, we cannot push this argument further here.

From the point of view of the comics field there was a genuine intellectual interest in pop and the artist’s work, demonstrated in Paris at *Giff-Wiff* and the ‘Figuration Narratif’ show, but also in New York. There was an optimism that pop was giving the comics a new space and more respectful recognition. Working with Lichtenstein at public professional functions provided the wider comics community with some of his increasing symbolic capital. It highlighted to both insiders and outsiders from the profession that the status of comics could, and even should, be changed. Certainly, that was the aspiration of David Pascal and his colleagues, addressing a new, adult, artistic and intellectual community to advocate an appreciation of comics that was both serious and respectful. While Lichtenstein had joked that, since his engagement with comics, everyone was finding serious artists who had read them, contemporary intellectuals – notably New Wave filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and especially Alain Resnais – were by the mid-1960s rushing to admire them.⁵²

The Further Adventures of Pop in Comics: *Barbarella*, *Jodelle*, and *Phoebe*

In the late 1960s the New York publishing house, Grove Press, brought out three major works of graphic narrative that played with pop art aesthetics and were clearly targeted at readers wanting to engage with the wider pop art trends. In 1966 the press published the first English translation of Jean-Claude Forest’s *Barbarella*. Shortly afterwards a second translation was offered, Bartier and Peellaert’s *The Adventures of Jodelle*, and in 1968 these two were joined by an original US title, *The Adventures of Phoebe Zeitgeist*. Peellaert was Belgian, not French, and was an illustrator and graphic designer, not immediately associated with the world of European comics. Nevertheless, an irregular trilogy had appeared. The best recent history of Grove Press has entirely ignored Grove’s attempts to promote these Franco-American pop comics.⁵³ Certainly, they sit uncomfortably in the memory for a number of reasons. The consistently sexualized gaze that these works direct at their female heroines has become highly problematic, no longer libertarian but, rather, sexist. Also the titles did not sell in significant numbers, even when *Barbarella* was adapted into an international hit movie starring Jane Fonda (1968).⁵⁴ The hybrid arena lying between pop and comic art was also an inchoate space – one that risked being neither one thing nor the other. Nonetheless, the Grove adult comics were a substantive example of pop returning back directly into the field of comics. Moreover, as with *Giff-Wiff*’s publishing of the Lichtenstein interview, literary history confirms the importance of the New York-Paris axis.

All three books’ cover art showed the possibilities of using pop aesthetics for adult comics. Hardback and large size editions provided the space to use

1 Lichtenstein tactics far better than the pocket paperbacks that had attempted
 2 the same. Thus, the cover to the Grove edition of *Barbarella* framed the work entirely
 3 through the pop approach. A segment of a panel representing the heroine was
 4 enlarged to fill the cover, reducing and removing surface details from the source
 5 panel. This was then recoloured from the original panel (originally in a single colour)
 6 to display classic Lichtenstein shades of blonde yellow hair, orange-red lips, pink
 7 skin, edged by clear line thick black contours. To reinforce the point, Benday dot
 8 motifs of black, pink, and green also pock marked the surface of the cover image.
 9 Such print dots were entirely absent from the inside content of the comic book.
 10 Similarly, Grove's edition of *Jodelle* transformed a quite different European cover into a
 11 pop-informed piece. Evoking the *Barbarella* cover, a single panel image of the heroine,
 12 directly extracted from the strip, was blown up. *Jodelle* reclines in bed, framed in the
 13 background by a Stars and Stripes flag. The original panel has been noted as Peellaert's
 14 homage to Tom Wesselman's *American Nude 1 Cent Life* (1964), but because the US flag is
 15 now included as well, there is a further reference to the famous work of Jasper Johns.
 16 The Grove book edition of *Adventures of Phoebe Zeitgeist* repeats the strategy of extracting
 17 a single panel, this time the seminal image of Phoebe being whipped by a Nazi-
 18 uniformed figure. But the cover does not emphasize this by way of enlargement.
 19 Instead, the panel remains relatively small, but is located in the centre of the cover,
 20 surrounded by white empty panels: only the lightly traced-in frames are visible. It
 21 thus becomes an image frozen in time and space, thereby evoking the approach of
 22 the whole book.

23 A short further comparison between *Jodelle* and *Zeitgeist* establishes two related but
 24 distinctive styles. For Peellaert in *Jodelle*, numerous pop techniques are adopted, and
 25 shape all forty pages of the comic. As Pierre Sterckx has explained, close attention
 26 is paid to simplifying and flattening out the images through the use of a limited
 27 but endlessly bright colour palette.⁵⁵ This is combined with extended passages of
 28 replication of images (what Sterckx labels 'seriality' and links to the works of Andy
 29 Warhol). In addition, Peellaert adapts images from numerous and diverse sources
 30 (traditional fine art images, mass culture materials, pin ball machine art, and pop
 31 art imagery). Such appropriations are never subtle. They are always underlined and
 32 made into a core part of the work. The re-use of these two classic pop art techniques
 33 (seriality and appropriation) give *Jodelle* a meta context that tells readers the work is
 34 engaging with contemporary culture, alongside traditional comic strip plotting. The
 35 quite thinly-conceived plot of the comic that is to be found is, in turn, itself a pastiche
 36 on the period's spy and science fiction capers, which were often already exaggerated
 37 and ironic treatments of older genre fiction from the 1930s.⁵⁶ *The Adventures of Phoebe*
 38 *Zeitgeist* repeats many of these methods to satirize adventure comics of the 1930s and
 39 1940s. Throughout, Phoebe is shown in repeatedly grotesque situations of highly
 40 sexualized violence. Taken singularly, any such image would stand as offensive and
 41 gratuitous. However, the endless repetition in a pop-serial style becomes an ironic
 42 critique. This visual rhetoric is underlined by the text in the strip, which includes
 43 a third-person voice-over explicitly mocking the absurdity of the visual content.
 44 O'Donoghue's constantly repeated images of female nudity and suffering therefore
 45 secure a satiric critique of mass culture. It imposes a close examination of what the
 46 old comics were centrally about (titillation; male sexual obsession; teenage lust)
 47 far more directly than Lichtenstein or for that matter Marvel's early 1970s feminist
 48 protagonist. It was also a perspective on the history of comics much removed from the
 49 loyal celebrations found in the titles brought out by Nostalgia Press. It is also certainly
 50 important to note that not everyone will read, or for that matter did read, *Phoebe* as a

pure pop satire. The material is gratuitously offered to the younger male heterosexual imagination as well. Even for its own time, it was provocative competition for the likes of *Playboy* magazine.

This feedback loop via the Grove graphic novels was an international one. In Paris during the 1960s a small but significant graphic novel publishing boom had developed, and it was from there that Grove contracted *Barbarella* and *Jodelle*.⁵⁷ Yet strong influences on these new European comics had come directly from the United States. These links had developed through multiple cultural channels. The Giff-Wiff editorial team of Francis Lacassin, Alain Resnais, Remo Forlani and Jean-Claude Forest shared a passion for American comic strips and did much to promote American works in Europe. Moreover, film director and Giff-Wiff editor Alain Resnais made tours to the US, visiting many creators, including not only Stan Lee at Marvel, but also Stan Drake, the artist behind the 'Juliet Jones' romance soap opera comic, which alongside Lee Falk's 'Mandrake' was greatly admired and copied in France in such series as *13 rue de l'Espoir*.⁵⁸ Resnais's invitations to US comics artists to attend some of the first comics exhibitions and conferences in Europe were themselves the subject of mass media reporting, already before the aforementioned 'Figuration Narratif'

13 Page 44 of Milton Caniff, 'Resnais (C.E.L.E.G.)', from *Positif*, number 82, March 1967.

RESNAIS (C.E.L.E.G.).

Nul n'ignore qu'Alain Resnais, grand amateur de bandes dessinées, donne sa préférence à *Dick Tracy*, le détective électronique et sidéral de Chester Gould. C'est pourtant *Steve Canyon*, le frin-



gant colonel de Milton Caniff, en action du côté du Vietnam comme on peut imaginer, qui l'a invité à son réveillon de Noël, parmi un lot de convives très international (bande du 23 décembre 1966).

event of 1967 in Paris. For instance, in 1965 the creator of *Li'l Abner*, Al Capp, described his encounters with Resnais for *Life International* in an article including original illustrations.⁵⁹ Later Milton Caniff honoured Resnais by depicting him in one of his works, a homage that did not go unrecognized in Paris when it was reprinted in the film periodical *Positif* (plate 13). Resnais himself was also in correspondence with editor Richard Seaver at Grove Press, though their planned comics project never materialized.⁶⁰ Significance must also be placed on the translation and appreciation of American pulp fiction in France and on the way US science fiction titles were published there.⁶¹ While Forest's idea for *Barbarella* is, quite correctly, commonly linked to the Tarzan books and comics, equally it was influenced by the sci-fi imagination of US writer Catherine L. Moore, who was well known in Parisian sci-fi publishing circles.⁶² As in Forest's graphic novel, Moore's sci-fi fantasy fiction was one of the first to include a major female protagonist, 'Jirey'. Forest was deeply imbricated in the world of French promotions and translations of US sci-fi works, providing illustration for dust jackets and covers of the periodicals *Fiction* and *Bizarre* and had in 1955 illustrated Moore's work for the same men's magazine that would later first serialize his *Barbarella*, *V-Magazine*.⁶³

American pop art itself was also an important international influence on the original French graphic novels. Guy Peellaert had visited New York as a young graphic designer and discovered Warhol while meeting colleagues from the Push Pin Studio in 1964. Peellaert has written of the influence of American pop, including Lichtenstein:

1 a revelation of sorts [...] Pop heralded the end of a certain anachronism in
2 European art and reflected the teaching in schools that separated noble objects
3 [...] from undeserving ones [...] Pop gave us the ability to create a joyful
4 mixture of the styles.⁶⁴

6 Such innovators in Europe were 'Americanophiles' who then added a fresh inventiveness
7 to the US materials that they adored. In turn, their own work was presented to US
8 readerships by Grove, a press whose intellectual reputation was founded on identifying,
9 translating and publishing French and European avant-garde literature. In other words,
10 the shape and dimension of comics' response to pop art crossed international borders.
11 In this the New York-Paris axis was important and worked so well because each side
12 viewed the other very positively. In France, America was regarded as the home of the
13 most sophisticated forms of popular culture and visual art (cinema, comics, pop art),
14 while in New York the same French intellectual milieu was seen as representing a long-
15 established cutting-edge avant garde. The French comics fans hankered after American
16 popular culture as well as being alert to fine art trends, whereas New York Beat
17 publishers continued to see bohemian Paris as a vital source for new ideas.

19 **Conclusion**

20 As we began, the idea of a feedback loop from pop art (back) into comics was
21 recognized and discussed relatively early on by Lawrence Alloway. However, little has
22 been known about the scope, shape or dynamic of that process, and nothing much
23 written on it since the period itself. What work that has been developed has focused
24 on the Batman series and its effects, or on the comic strip community's sense of
25 frustration at being exploited. This article has aimed to put forward for debate some of
26 the central aspects of the history of the feedback process. In so doing it has underlined
27 the significant commercial aspect to this process, with major comics publishing houses
28 maximizing their wares and adopting their product design to look new and feel 'pop'.
29 Comics were not innocent victims of pop art but dynamic agents responding positively,
30 albeit sometimes with no great ambition. Some of this was probably quite cynical, and it
31 did not last much beyond the 1960s. Posters, prints, repackaged paperback book-length
32 comics, logos, and other devices all 'went pop'. The idea of a grid-like comics page was
33 even sometimes abandoned for the more maximized, limpid, Lichtenstein-like one- or
34 two-panel page inside the Lancer and Belmont paperback print runs. The recuperation
35 of images from comics already re-used by Lichtenstein was another part of the process
36 that changed comics. In part this was an assertion of the independence of comics
37 artists who were entitled to appropriate back material they saw as rightly theirs. But
38 in so doing, they introduced pop-like/Lichtenstein-like tensions back into their own
39 medium. As we have suggested, the process of repeating stereotypical images in new
40 comics, very close to those also used by Lichtenstein, opened up a critical perspective
41 on the clichés of the form. Reintroducing these statements into comics was a knowing,
42 semiotic act, and it also introduced even unconsciously an internal critique of the
43 repetitive content of the form, especially its restricted and essentially sexist attitudes
44 to gender roles. Repetition, and re-repetition, provided some distance, walking the
45 fine line between commemoration and a knowing self-satire. In each case, though,
46 the technique invited older and more sophisticated readers, searching for distinctly
47 different readerships to the (itself no doubt a cliché) younger teenage male.

48 The international pop comics published by Grove represent an apogee of the
49 recycling of pop stylization. The works from Forest and Peellaert demonstrated that
50 an original, sophisticated distribution of pop aesthetics inside comics was possible.

Large format, expensive, quality publications, resembling art catalogues, facilitated colour, expansion of panel size, as well as serialization and irony. These titles work best when read as pure pop items, gathering repeatedly in a single volume the modes first made familiar in the field of contemporary art. Alternatively – if they are not read for what Roland Barthes would have called second-degree irony – they remain just sexist material, akin to any other men’s magazine of the period.

As we explained, not all traditional comics artists appreciated the influence of pop on their field. Take as a final example here the opening words from an otherwise very positive review of Jules Feiffer’s *The Great Comic Book Heroes*: ‘Time was when we enjoyed the illustrated exploits of the masked crime fighters purely as good clean fun. Nowadays a fondness for this primeval Americana has become snobbish and fashionable under such labels as high camp and Pop Art.’⁶⁵ However, it was precisely the trend denounced in this quotation that had also facilitated a renewed interest in comics, and hence opened up the way for reprints of collected historical comics from bygone days. Furthermore, it is in establishing a market for reprints of historically significant older comics that the feedback loop has had the longest-lasting impact on the present day comics publishing industry, where the practice is now standard.

Just like the young Art Spiegelman who was starting out at Nostalgia Press, Lichtenstein was another kind of comics historian, clipping and selecting the images that his eye was drawn to for potential reimagination, and thus also a different kind of preservation for posterity. The comics community’s excitement at his fame reached a peak in the mid-1960s, and through 1965–66 Lichtenstein himself acknowledged his fame and was open to collaboration with comics groups. While he always defended his position as being exclusively a fine artist, he was also open to thinking of comics as an independent form. For their part some comics organizations, critics, and intellectual fans in Europe identified Lichtenstein as a potential ally. Collaboration and inter-action was limited and no doubt no universal attitude had developed. However, comics people did appropriate pop in to their space and on select occasions this also included a seemingly willing partner in Lichtenstein.

The helpful notion of the feedback loop implies an endless circularity of cross-reference, which carries the potential to become sterile. But to the contrary, we have underlined that original connections, new works, and a real change of comics style occurred. The different levels of response are not necessarily connected beyond their basic commonalities. It is after all quite a different thing to design a Hulk comic in the pop style than to invent a pop-comic synthesis like *Jodelle*.

Notes

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1 Adam West quoted in Michael Kackman, *Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture*, London, 2005, 89.

2 Graham Bader, *Hall of Mirrors: Roy Lichtenstein and the Face of Painting in the 1960s*, Cambridge MA, 2010, xviii.

3 Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analysing a Cultural Icon*, London, 2001; Lynn Spiegel and Henry Jenkins, ‘Same Bat Channel, Different Times’, in *The Many Lives of Batman*, ed. Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, London, 1991; Lyn Spiegel, *TV by Design*, Chicago, 2008, 259–260; Sasha Torres, ‘The Caped Crusader of Camp: Pop, Camp, and the Batman Television Series’, in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Estaban Muñoz, Raleigh, 1996, 238–255; Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, New York, 2015, 42–44.

4 Sara Doris, *Pop Art and the Contest over American Culture*, New York, 2007, 143–150.

5 See Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, Paris, 1950.

6 Novick cited in Steve Duin and Mike Richards, *Comics between the Panels*, Milwaukee, 1998, 332.

7 See *Time Magazine*, 17 May 1963. Overgard’s letter is reproduced online – see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/deconstructing-roy-lichtenstein/549849729> (last accessed February 2017).

- 1 Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*, New York, 1986.
- 2 Cited in Paul Gravett's essay on the controversy, 'The Principality
- 3 of Lichtenstein', available online at: [http://www.paulgravett.com/](http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/the_principality_of_lichtenstein)
- 4 [articles/article/the_principality_of_lichtenstein](http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/the_principality_of_lichtenstein) (last accessed
- 5 February 2017).
- 6 See Art Spiegelman, 'High Art LowDown', *Artforum*, December 1990.
- 7 Daniel Clowes, 'Art School Confidential', *Eightball*, 7, November 1991.
- 8 A film adaptation of 'Art School Confidential' was released in 2006.
- 9 Clowes studied at the Pratt Institute, New York.
- 10 Adrian Tomine, 'Dylan and Donovan', *Optic Nerve*, 3, Montreal; and Julie
- 11 Doucet, 'A Lesson', in *My New York Diary*, Montreal, 1999.
- 12 Bart Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, Toronto, 2014, 7; and throughout.
- 13 See Katherine Roeder, 'Chris Ware and the Burden of Art History', in
- 14 *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing as a Way of Thinking*, ed. David M. Ball and
- 15 Martha Kuhlman, Jackson, 2010, 74–75.
- 16 In addition to the major works that address this among other aspects,
- 17 see Bader, *Hall of Mirrors*, and Michael Lobel, *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein*
- 18 *and the Emergence of Pop Art*, New Haven, 2002. More specifically see
- 19 Bradford R. Collins, 'Modern Romance: Lichtenstein's Comic Book
- 20 Paintings', *American Art*, 17: 2, Summer 2003, 60–85; and Alberto
- 21 Boime, 'Roy Lichtenstein and the Comic Strip', *Art Journal*, 28: 2, Winter
- 22 1968–69, 155–159.
- 23 See [http://davidbarsalou.homestead.com/LICHTENSTEINPROJECT.](http://davidbarsalou.homestead.com/LICHTENSTEINPROJECT.html)
- 24 [html](http://davidbarsalou.homestead.com/LICHTENSTEINPROJECT.html) (accessed March 2017).
- 25 See David Vandermeulen, *Ric Remix*, Brussels, 2014; Jeanne Martinet,
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- 27 Bob Levin, *Outlaws, Rebels, Freethinkers and Pirates: Essays on Cartoons and Cartoonists*,
- 28 Seattle, 2005, 186. Originally published in *The Comics Journal* (1990).
- 29 Doris, *Pop Art*; Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*, Cambridge, 1997.
- 30 Michael Lobel, *John Sloan: Drawing on Illustration*, New Haven, 2014,
- 31 185–186.
- 32 Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, New York, 1974, 16.
- 33 Lawrence Alloway, 'Popular Culture and Pop Art', in *Three Studies in*
- 34 *Modern Communication*, London, 1969, 56.
- 35 Dick Hebdige, 'In Poor Taste: Notes on Pop', in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and*
- 36 *Fall and Rise of Pop*, New York, 1988, 81.
- 37 Jean-Claude Forest, *Barbarella*, New York, 1966, trans. Richard Seaver;
- 38 Pierre Bartier and Guy Peellaert, *The Adventures of Jodelle*, New York, 1967.
- 39 For a helpful intellectual context to Grove Press, though without any
- 40 discussion of the pop comic/graphic novel titles, see Loren Glass,
- 41 *Counter Culture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the*
- 42 *Avant-Garde*, Redwood City, CA, 2013.
- 43 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London,
- 44 1983, 117–129.
- 45 For the swift changing mood in favour of a mass pop trend see Doris,
- 46 *Pop Art*, 107–154.
- 47 Doris, *Pop Art*, 141.
- 48 Art Prints-Lambert Studios advert, *Evergreen Review*, 60, April 1966. Text
- 49 of which reads 'Handsome posters – made famous by such artists as
- 50 Warhol and Johns – lithographed in traditional bright comic strip
- 51 colors.' The new example adds to Doris's similar evidence derived from
- 52 *Newsweek* and *Village Voice*.
- 53 Matt Fox advert, *Castle of Frankenstein*, 9, November 1966, 65.
- 54 Photo Stills advert from Screen Facts Press, Kew Gardens NY, *Cahiers*
- 55 *du cinéma in English*, March 1967, 64. See also for whole books of
- 56 recomposed stills from comics-related films of the 1930s and 1940s,
- 57 *Serial Quarterly* (1966 onwards), edited by Alan G. Barbour. Issues include
- 58 recomposition of stills from *Superman*, *Terry and the Pirates* and *Brick Bradford*.
- 59 *The Fantastic Four*, New York, 1966; *The Amazing Spiderman*, New York, 1966;
- 60 *The Incredible Hulk*, New York, 1966; *The Fantastic Four Return*, New York,
- 61 1967; *Here Comes Daredevil*, New York, 1967.
- 62 Cover blurb, Jerry Siegel, *High Camp Superheroes*, New York, 1966.
- 63 Or alternatively it is also plausible to suggest that this was because it was
- 64 taken that British consumers were especially positive about pop, hence
- 65 the willingness for an even more exaggerated styling. For discussion of
- 66 paratexts see Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, 2002.
- 67 See 'Green Lantern', *Phenix: Revue internationale de la bande dessinée*, 20, 1972,
- 68 54.
- 69 Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 50.
- 70 Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Superheroes*, New York, 1965.
- 71 Alex Raymond, *Flash Gordon*, New York, 1967.
- 38 Extensive discussion of Gelman is found in Dave Jamieson, *Mint*
- 39 *Condition: How Baseball Cards became an American Obsession*, New York, 2011.
- 40 Nostalgia Comics, 1: 1, 1970, editor and publisher Woody Gelman.
- 41 David Pascal and Roy Lichtenstein, 'Entretiens', *Giff-Wiff*, May 1966, 6–15.
- 42 See Jeanne Siegel and Roy Lichtenstein, 'Thoughts on a Modern
- 43 Period', WBAI Radio interview 13 December 1967, reproduced in John
- 44 Coplans, ed., *Roy Lichtenstein*, London, 1973, 93.
- 45 For more on the history of the NCS see its extensive current website
- 46 <http://www.reuben.org/> (accessed March 2017).
- 47 Text kindly provided by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation. Special
- 48 thanks to Justin Brancato, Archivist and Associate Director, Roy
- 49 Lichtenstein Center Project, RLF, New York.
- 50 Michael Cavanaugh, 'Mort Walker Turns 90', *The Washington Post*, 3 September
- 51 2013. Again with thanks to Justin Brancato. It remains unclear if
- 52 Walker is referring to the 1965 NCS awards dinner or to a separate
- 53 lecture to the society.
- 54 See Michael Lobel, *John Sloan*, 185–186.
- 55 Pascal and Lichtenstein, 'Entretiens'.
- 56 Pascal and Lichtenstein, 'Entretiens', 15. The interview was translated
- 57 from English into French by Colette Szwarc. It also acknowledges
- 58 Illeana and Michael Sonnabend.
- 59 Pascal and Lichtenstein, 'Entretiens', 10. As Gavin Parkinson has
- 60 underlined, other intellectuals in Paris were more suspicious of
- 61 Lichtenstein than this Giff-Wiff interview shows: they identified the war
- 62 comics theme with militarism. See Parkinson, 'Pogo, Pop and Politics:
- 63 Robert Benayoun on Comics and Roy Lichtenstein', *European Comic Art*, 9:
- 64 2, 2016, 46–47.
- 65 A view expressed by one reader of this article to us.
- 66 In presumably also 1985, Lichtenstein sent Caniff a poster-print for his
- 67 exhibition 'Roy Lichtenstein' Leo Castelli Gallery, 23 November 1985
- 68 to 21 December 1989. The poster was inscribed by Lichtenstein stating:
- 69 'To Milton Caniff (fellow Ohio Stater) I much appreciate your exhibit.
- 70 R. Lichtenstein.' Ohio State, Billy Ireland Cartoon and Library Museum,
- 71 Milton Caniff Archive, Map Case AC B25.
- 72 Avis and Brancato, Roy Lichtenstein Archive.
- 73 Resnais is the best-known comics fan – critical in the creation of Giff-
- 74 Wiff. However, there are references to comics across the work of Jean-
- 75 Luc Godard in this period. It was Roger Vadim who adapted *Barbarella*
- 76 for the cinema.
- 77 See Glass, *Counter Culture Colophon*.
- 78 See Syracuse Grove Archive – *Barbarella* royalty statements and
- 79 associated correspondence linked to a putative *Barbarella II* project that
- 80 was ultimately quashed by the press. See Syracuse/Grove/Box 263.
- 81 Pierre Sterckx, 'The Jodelle Style', in Bartier and Peellaert, *The Adventures*
- 82 *of Jodelle*, Seattle, 2013, 75–76.
- 83 The first James Bond film *Dr No* was released in 1962. A micro feedback
- 84 loop from film to comics quickly occurred. French comics critics
- 85 quickly identified the film as a live-film comic book, praising it greatly.
- 86 In the UK the film was adapted into a strip which in 1963 was published
- 87 in the US by DC. Its influence on pop works like *Jodelle* is clear.
- 88 Many more *Barbarella*-like comics were published in France and Italy
- 89 than ever received translations in the US. The Grove original *Phoebe*
- 90 *Zeitgeist* was translated into French and published by Losfeld in 1969.
- 91 Stanley Drake, *The Heart of Juliet Jones*, New York, 1966; Paul Gillon
- 92 and Jacques et François Gall, *13 rue de l'Espoir* – serialized in *France Soir*
- 93 (1959–1972).
- 94 See *Life International*, 14 June 1965.
- 95 See Syracuse Grove file 'Resnais Comics project', Syracuse/Grove Press/
- 96 Box 588.
- 97 The best recent survey of the French sci-fi and fine art scene is the
- 98 encyclopedic work from Gavin Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism: Myth,*
- 99 *Science Fiction, and Fantastic Art in France*, New Haven, 2015.
- 100 With thanks to Thierry Smolderen for this reference.
- 101 The Forest illustrations have been scanned and made available online;
- 102 see <http://www.coolfrenchcomics.com/shambleau.htm> (accessed
- 103 March 2017).
- 104 Peellaert quoted in *Adventures of Jodelle*, 93.
- 105 Anonymous review, 'Jules Feiffer, The Great Comic Book Heroes',
- 106 *Castle of Frankenstein*, 9, November 1966, 65. The same issue which had
- 107 dedicated significant space to celebrating the *Batman* television series
- 108 and dedicating its cover to an image of the 'Joker'.

Comics Culture and Roy Lichtenstein Revisited: Analysing a Forgotten 'Feedback Loop'

Hugo Frey and Jan Baetens

The essay explores the ways in which pop art influenced and altered the US comics scene, circa 1965 to 1970.

It takes up and develops Lawrence Alloway's notion that pop culture and pop art were in permanent communication with each other at this time and that a feedback loop existed between art and comics and vice versa. Four distinct levels of exchange are identified.

Comics were interacting with pop art through: commercial appropriations of pop style; the publishing of comics anthologies of historical materials, that would not have existed without the interest generated by the pop phenomenon; direct collaborative activity; and developments in new international, very early, graphic novels, that shared pop art techniques. The essay provides original archival evidence for these feedback loops and identifies that process as one in which comics searched for a new, different, readership. Using literary reception theory, it understands that pop-inspired comics indicated the emergence of a new and distinctive readership. The cross media exchange from art to comics is interpreted as a history of how comics evolved to attract older and more diverse consumers. While the idea that comics were not just for kids gained significant traction in the later 1970s and 1980s, changing producer-reader relations were already being instigated in the 1960s pop-influenced era. The essay extends knowledge of the impact and influence of pop more

generally, but also explores Roy Lichtenstein's debates and discussions with professional comics artists.

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