

Comics Forum 2025

Abstracts and Speaker Bios

Organised by panel order

THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER

PANEL 1A: Newspaper Strips

Ian Horton

Newspaper Strip Syndication and the Twice-Told Tales of *Modesty Blaise*

In 1942 Curtis D. Macdougall noted that “Comic strips, for instance, are still the backbone of the syndicate business. The average daily newspaper uses ten or fifteen comic strips and has a choice of about three hundred on the market”. The syndication of newspaper strips was a central to the comics book industry throughout the 20th century, but it has received little critical attention, this paper will focus on how syndication could impact on the form and content of adventure newspaper strips using *Modesty Blaise* as a case study.

This strip, created by writer Peter O'Donnell and artist Jim Holdaway in 1963 for publication in the *Evening Standard*, followed the adventures of former criminal mastermind Modesty Blaise and her sidekick Willie Garvin. An example of the impact syndication had on the content of *Modesty Blaise* was the way in which nude scenes in the original British strips were censored and redrawn when published in America. The major influence syndication had on the form of *Modesty Blaise* started in December 1974 when the *Evening Standard* stopped publication on Saturdays. Many newspapers who ran the syndicated *Modesty Blaise* strips continued to publish on Saturdays and therefore still needed this content. This resulted in the creation of additional Saturday strips, for syndication only, which had the suffix A added to their numbering. These additional A strips could not include significant developments in the plot so generally these strips retold the story from the Friday strip and then foreshadowed the Monday strips. By examining these A strips in detail, it is possible to reconsider the form of adventure newspaper strips and the iconography employed within them.

Dr Ian Horton is Reader in Graphic Communication at University of the Arts London. His present research is focused in three related areas: comic books, graphic design and illustration. He is a founder member of the Comics Research Hub (CoRH!!) at the University of the Arts London, co-editor of *Contexts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge 2019) and *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge 2019) and is associate editor of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. More recently he has collaborated with Maggie Gray (Kingston University) on *Art History for Comics: Past, Present and*

***Potential Futures* (Palgrave 2022), and the edited collection *Seeing Comics through Art History: Alternative Approaches to the Form* (Palgrave 2022).**

Mathieu Li-Goyette

Wishing for an Atlas: On Sidney Smith's *Wishing Jinks*

Generally regarded in comics history as an effective but uninventive artist, Sidney Smith is reduced to his creation, *The Gumps*, a huge popular success—if not a critical one—of the 1920s, and the only work to have been, very partially, republished over the years in recognition of his pioneering work in narrative arcs (Jared Gardner). However, when we delve into Smith's career through his comic strips, which remain locked away in the archives of major daily newspapers, we discover an outstanding innovator, particularly through a strip that has fallen into oblivion, *Wishing Jinks* (1906), which presents a rare case of episodic continuity contemporary with the early experiments of Lyonel Feininger (*The Kinder-Kids*, 1906) and Winsor McCay (*Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 1905).

Using statistical data related to newspaper circulation as well as an in-progress methodology inspired by Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, we will observe how *Wishing Jinks* makes a good case study to analyze the distribution of works, their reproduction, and their varying visibility across the United States in the newspapers ecosystem. This atlas of strip circulation will be used to map the influences and references between the works of Smith (based in Philadelphia), Feininger (in Chicago), and McCay (in New York). How did geographical distance, technical reproducibility constraints, and accessibility can break down the classic comic strip canon? How do these works, which predate the ubiquity of syndicated press agency distribution in the late 1910s, inform us about the narrative innovations of this period?

Mathieu Li-Goyette is a film critic, film programmer and comics researcher with a PhD in comparative literature from the Université de Montréal. As the editor-in-chief of the film magazine *Panorama-cinéma*, he curated numerous film events and retrospectives in Montréal and Paris, and served as a guest programmer for the Berlin Critics' Week. At the Université de Montréal, his master's thesis focused on the materiality of black dots in the work of Jack Kirby and his dissertation on the emergence of the American comic strip in the newspaper ecosystem at the turn of the 20th century. Recently, he became a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam and cofounded the Montréal Critics' Week, whose 1st edition took place in January 2025.

PANEL 1B: Process

Emre Altındag

Silent Resistance: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Non-Industrial Comics Practices in the Age of AI

This paper explores silent and wordless graphic narratives as non-industrial or even anti-industrial forms of storytelling that push back against mass-market expectations and the growing influence of automation and generative AI in comics production. Drawing from my

own practice-based research, including the creation of the graphic novel *Fishes May Come Back* and its 3D animated adaptation, I argue that silent comics enact a unique form of ethical resistance. By embracing slow, contemplative narrative structures and hand-crafted aesthetics, they disrupt the accelerationist logic of today's digital production economies.

This presentation situates silent comics within broader debates surrounding the ethics of comics production, authorship, and creative labour precarity. It also considers how ecological and affective themes embedded in non-verbal comics align with post-industrial, care-oriented modes of creation. Inspired by thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Ursula K. Le Guin, I reflect on what is lost when visual storytelling is reduced to algorithmic patterning and commercial utility.

Ultimately, I propose reimagining comics not merely as mass-produced media, but as artisanal, affective and ecologically attuned practices, an approach that becomes increasingly urgent in the face of environmental crisis and technological disruption.

Emre Altındağ is a visual artist and researcher. His debut graphic novel, *Fishes May Come Back* was published in the UK and explores themes of silent storytelling and ecological balance. His work has been featured in *The Guardian* and exhibited in UK-based social impact projects. He is the co-founder of Light and Memory, a storytelling and art research initiative and are currently pursuing a PhD in practice-based animation research. Emre's artistic practice challenges dominant narratives through speculative ecologies, non-verbal storytelling and inclusive, interdisciplinary approaches.

Yu Feng

Beyond Industry: Co-Creating Educational Children's Comics for Heritage and Identity

Research has shown that educational comics support learning and motivation and can serve as an intermediate step toward complex disciplines and abstract concepts. They are also widely used in transcultural pedagogy to support children's identity development, yet these benefits have limits. In the current children's educational-comics market, production is often series and IP driven (e.g., *Dog Man*, 2017), prioritising quick gags and plot beats that can marginalise deeper self-narration. Issue-focused books like *Azzi in Between* or *Guts* (2013) are widely used in class. Their teachability helps, but it can narrow open interpretation and children's own voices. Readers are often positioned as recipients rather than makers. Even when activity pages or teaching guides are included, for example in *Cat Kid Comic Club* (2021), tasks tend to follow a "read-then-do" format, which limits co-authorship and weakens meaning-making.

Grounded in social constructivism and enactive/embodied cognition, the project discussed in this paper uses a co-creation method to reposition children's educational comics from didactic to dialogic, moving beyond the industry's focus on standardisation, speed, and answer-driven outcomes. This practice-based project works with Chinese immigrant children and their families in London to make comics about heritage. It uses comics to generate new ways of thinking, perceiving, and potential action, investigating how comics can draw on heritage to help children reflect on tradition, cultural identity, and belonging, while also

highlighting how co-created comics can amplify children's voices and reframe educational practice.

Yu Feng is an illustrator, PhD researcher at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, and Associate Professor of Fine Art Education at Shanghai Normal University, China. Her practice explores visual storytelling, comics, and children's illustration, with a focus on migration, identity, and intergenerational dialogue. Her recent practice-based research centres on co-creating comics with Chinese immigrant families in the UK. Her illustrations have been featured in major exhibitions and recognised with awards, including Ma Liang and the Magic Paint Brush (The 10th Shanghai Fine Art Exhibition, 2019), Fantastic Little Bridge (2017), and Dream Home (2015). The Lion in Love received Best Editorial Illustration at the 3rd Greater China Illustration Awards.

Mark Hibbett

Who Cares About The Colourists?

When academics, fans and historians discuss the comics industry they tend to privilege the work of writers and artists, excluding the other professionals such as inkers, colourists and letterers who are intrinsic to the production of these texts. In mainstream superhero comics this happens despite the fact that all of these professionals are usually named in exactly the same way, alongside each other in credit boxes on the first page of the story. This paper will illustrate this disparity by comparing the results of a survey of comic fans with an empirical analysis texts within the so-called 'Marvel Age', demonstrating the huge difference between the people fans think created their favourite stories, and the people who actually did. It will look for societal explanations for this problem via Cultural Memory theory and individual reasons via Fuzzy Trace Theory, before finally explaining - with a song - why this is a vital issue not just for comics studies but for society as a whole.

Mark Hibbett is head of research information systems at University of the Arts London, UK. He has spent thirty years working with research data in arts and science contexts and his current research focuses on transmedia character cohesion, particularly related to superheroes and children's humour comics.

PANEL 2 A: Creators

Imane Ghebache

Who Owns the Story? The Struggle for Creative Agency in the US Comics Industry

US comics have long thrived on collaborative production, yet the industry's corporate machinery often erases the very voices that define its stories. Indeed, the industrial production of US comics, characterized by the "assembly line" model of editors, pencillers, inkers, and corporate executives, has long fragmented creative control, therefore, alienating authors from their own work. But what happens when creators fight back on and off the page against the structures that claim ownership of their imagination? This paper examines how Alan Moore's disputes with DC Comics over *Watchmen*, alongside the metafictional strategies of postmodern titles such as Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* and John Byrne's *She-*

Hulk, transform this authorial alienation into a narrative and thematic critique of the industry itself.

Moore's career stands as a manifesto against this creative dispossession. His disputes with DC Comics over the ownership of *Watchmen* and his public critiques of Hollywood adaptations of his work highlight the systemic alienation of creators in a corporate-dominated industry. His characters, from Dr. Manhattan's estrangement from humanity to Rorschach's uncompromising defiance, echo Moore's refusal to be absorbed by the corporate machine. Likewise, metafictional superheroes who shatter the fourth wall like in Animal Man and She-Hulk, rewrite their own narratives and confront their creators. Therefore, becoming avatars of authorship and narrative resistance, laying bare the mechanics of an industry that commodifies both story and storyteller.

This paper positions these works as intertwined acts of rebellion; By making the machinery of production visible, these texts confront the corporate erasure of individual creativity and reclaim narrative agency. Through this, authors prompt readers to question power structures shaping stories and to recognize the invisible labor behind their creation.

Imane Ghebache is a second year PhD student specializing in US Comics Studies at the university of Montpellier Paul-Valéry. She is currently teaching at the same university and writing a thesis titled "Shapeshifting Superheroes: The Dual Identity of Anti-heroes in the Dark Age of Comics" under the supervision of Pr. Fiona McMahon (University of Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) and Pr. Nancy Pedri (Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador). Her Master's thesis was on "Archetypes in Comics: The Dionysian Superhero in Alan Moore's Watchmen". Her latest publication is an article titled "Transtextuality in Fiction: Alan Moore's Watchmen as a Meditation Upon Power" in the journal *Aleph: Langues, Médias & Sociétés*.

Daishan Xu (Werther)

Gender Performativity of Female Creators in the Male-Dominated Shōnen Manga Industry

As a core sector of the Japanese manga industry, Shōnen manga (teenage adventure comics) has a significant global influence; it has long been dominated by male creators and the market of male readers. In this male-dominated industry, the creative practices of female authors are often accompanied by "gender performativity". They need to obey the industry's creative norms of heterosexual masculinity in their narratives and character development, and even hide their sex, in order to gain a foothold within the industry.

This paper will examine the construction of female characters in the representative Shōnen manga work *Reborn!* (家庭教師ヒットマ) and its female creator, Akira Amano, as a case study, considering how these characters reflect and reinforce gender ideology within the Japanese manga industry. As we can see, female comic/manga creators face a double situation in this process: on the one hand, they achieve success in male-dominated industries through gender performativity to themselves and their artworks; On the other hand, they may also be inversely regulated by the industry's creative norms, further reinforcing their male-dominated gender representation.

Using the theory of Judith Butler, this paper aims to reveal the complicated relationship between gender performativity and gender representation in Japanese Shōnen manga industry, providing a new perspective for understanding author identity, agency and gender politics in both the comic and the wider manga industries.

My name is Daishan Xu (Werther). I'm currently a second-year PhD student at the University of the Arts London. My PhD supervisors are Dr. Ian Horton and Dr. Jess Baines. My research mainly focuses on gender representation in Asian teenage adventure comics. The title of my PhD research is Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Chinese Shaonian Comics. I am also an experienced commercial illustrator and am currently creating my own adventure graphic novel. My research interests also include transcultural comic studies and the relationship between the supernatural powers in adventure comics and the mysticism of reality.

Cassia Hayward-Fitch

A World of Difference or Similarity? Translating Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby* into French

This paper examines Jean-Paul Jennequin's French translation of Howard Cruse's "Stuck Rubber Baby" (1995), published first as « Un Monde de Différence » by Vertige Graphic in 1999, and republished under its English title by prestigious bande dessinée publisher Casterman in 2021 to great critical acclaim. It compares the paratext of the Casterman edition to the English language First Second Books 25th anniversary republication (2020) to show how Jennequin's introduction, created for the French version, provides an entry point to the narrative to situate readers unfamiliar with the history of American Civil Rights struggles. It further analyses how Jennequin preserves the narrative's American linguistic context while making it accessible to Francophone audiences through his decisions of when and how to translate different verbal elements, including songs, newspaper headings, onomatopoeias, and text embedded into the comic's imagery. The numerous instances where Jennequin maintains the original language render his translation extradigetically bilingual. The paper argues that the comics medium is particularly suited for such translation efforts, as, for Francophone audiences with their own bande dessinée culture, American comics iconography can remain simultaneously untranslated and comprehensible, enabling readers to experience more of the original language than they can in a translated prose narrative. Consequently, this paper posits that the French translation of "Stuck Rubber Baby" involves two levels of "bitextuality": one seen within the prose itself, and another created through the juxtaposition of translated words alongside untranslated images.

Cassia Hayward-Fitch acquired a PhD in American Studies from the University of East Anglia in June 2025. She is the 2023 recipient of the International Comic Arts Forum's Lent Scholarship in Comics Studies. As part of winning this award, the paper was published. It can be found in the International Journal of Comic Art. Her thesis, "Drawn this Gay: Queer Community Activism in the Serial Comics of Alison Bechdel and Howard Cruse", draws on archival material to show how American queer newspaper comic strips from the 1980s and '90s acted as communal spaces, making specific reference to Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* and Howard Cruse's *Wendel*.

PANEL 2B: Digital Comics

Ernesto Priego

Comic Books as Creative Industry: Comics and the pre-digital Revolution

This presentation will explore the evolution of comics in relation to materiality, production, and their position within the creative industries. Through a historiographical approach, I root the development of comics in the legacy of the Industrial Revolution, highlighting how mass-production technologies—such as lithography, wood engraving, and later, photomechanical reproduction—enabled the serialisation, dissemination, and standardisation of visual narratives. These innovations not only lowered costs and increased circulation but also embedded comics within broader industrial logics of scale and commodification. Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) catalysed moral panic, leading to the creation of the Comic Code Authority, which imposed aesthetic and narrative restrictions, but paradoxically spurred formal innovation. As creative products, comics illustrate a hybrid nature: born from artistic labor but deeply entangled in mechanical reproduction and market constraints.

Using examples from Gaiman, Flanagan, Moore and others I'll discuss how scripting, editing, and collaboration —facilitated by industrial processes—shaped the final comics text. I argue that comics function as “cultural interfaces” where the physical format (page size, printing, distribution) becomes integral to meaning, mirroring dynamics of other creative industries, such as music and film, where technology and craft co-produce value. Underground comics (1960s–early 90s), enabled by cheap xerography and alternative distribution channels, challenged corporate structures and reclaimed authorial control. I'll argue comics exemplify how the industrialisation of art can produce both constraint and innovation—making them a key component of the creative industries, born from the print technologies of the 19th century but resonating with the cultural and technological shifts of the 21st.

Dr Ernesto Priego is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design, and a co-director of the Data, Policy and Society MSc at City St George's, University of London, and editor and founder of *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*. As a researcher he has explored the role of comics as narrative, conceptual and speculative design tools and applies user-centred, participatory co-design methods to the creation of comics within public health or social interest domains. Ernesto led the “Parables of Care. Responses to Dementia Care” project (2017-2021), which explored the potential of comics to enhance the impact of dementia care research.

Linda Berube

“The All-Seeing Eye”: Digital Comics Creators and Agency within the Platform-Based Ecosystem

While underground and alternative comics have long been self-published with minimal tools, they still required some form of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as a photocopier, to produce multiple copies for wider distribution. Even experimental comics rely on the ‘new mechanical’, the digital mechanical, to achieve a finished product. The key difference between earlier modes of production and today's digital technologies lies not

only in the in scale of distribution but also the accessibility of and immediacy afforded by the digital ecosystem.

What emerges from the creative processes and workflows that evolve within this ecosystem is the merging of multiple creative activities and professional roles into the single identity or brand of comics creator. The concept of Author as Franchise was not created by digital self-publishing (see Freeman, 2018 on Edgar Rice Burroughs). But the digital ecosystem affords this possibility to more creators not established and even to some extent supported within the industrial environment. This expansion of purview, for a greater number of creators, over the processes as the “all-seeing eye” (Priego, 2011) would imply more control, more agency and in some ways this is so. However, this control and agency for creation within the platform environment, especially as it is subject to the influences of AI as social and creative mediator, may be an illusion.

In this presentation, I will share empirical findings from my doctoral research, Digital Comics Ecosystems: Investigating creation, publishing, consumption, and communication practices, on the evolving role of digital comics creators. I will examine their working from within their own personalized creative ecosystems. Finally, I will look at how creator and ecosystem is connected in a symbiotic relationship with the broader, platform-based digital and digital comics ecosystems.

Linda Berube, Visiting Lecturer in Computer Science at City St. George's, was an AHRC Collaborative Partnership doctoral researcher investigating digital comics ecosystems through UK digital comics creation, production, and consumption processes (<https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/35359/>) , supported by the British Library and the Human-Computer Interaction Department (HCID) at City St. George's, University of London. She has worked in the public sector developing web-based services and has researched and published on user interaction with comics, comics archives, and nonprint legal deposit collections. She is the author of Do You Web 2.0? Public Libraries and Social Networking (Elsevier, 2011).

Daniel Merlin Goodbrey

The Industry of One: An Examination of Solo Webcomic Production from 2015 to 2025

In the print comics industry, major comic companies typically make use of teams of freelance comic practitioners to create the comics they publish. These freelance creative teams are supported in their labour by in-house editorial, publishing and sales teams. In contrast to the mainstream print industry, the majority of webcomics are the work of individual comic practitioners, working alone. These practitioners are solely responsible for all aspects of their webcomic's design, creation, publication and monetisation. This paper examines the labour of solo webcomic production through the lens of my own experience as a webcomic practitioner. Four webcomic series published between 2015 and 2025 provide case studies of change and continuity in webcomic production across a period of ten years.

The paper explores the limitations placed on webcomic creation due to the demands of publishing frequency and available production time. It examines a range of pragmatic approaches to ideation, narrative creation and illustration that help to address these

limitations. A variety of approaches to panel layout for page and screen are discussed, with a particular focus towards format specific and format flexible modes of production. Changes in format and readership related to the rise of smartphones and the increase in popularity of large-scale anthology sites are also considered. In connection with this, the paper looks at shifting usage of social media as both promotional tool and direct channel of webcomic publication and distribution. The implications of these shifts for the marketing and monetisation of webcomics are also examined.

Daniel Merlin Goodbrey is a principal lecturer in comics, narrative and interactivity at The University of Hertfordshire. Daniel has gained international recognition as an innovative comic creator and a leading expert in the field of experimental digital comics. His work can be found at <http://e-merl.com/>

PANEL 3A: Genre

Joan Ormrod

Assembling 1950s UK Romance Comics: Hollywood to Italy and Back Again

In the mid-1950s, UK comics publishers such as DC Thomson, Albert Pearson, and Fleetway Publications produced a range of comics aimed at the lucrative teenage market. The format was an assemblage of articles, picture stories, advice columns, and pop music features (Dittmer 2014; Platz Cortsen 2012), and it enabled a simpler adaptation of material including content catering for national tastes. One title, *Mirabelle*, looked different in the layout and aesthetics from other UK titles: it was printed in magazine format with sophisticated, realistic and glamorous imagery akin to Hollywood films. *Mirabelle* was assembled from Italian content that was syndicated across Europe and America and the analysis of its contents demonstrates the glocal aspects of adapting content from one nation to another (Baetens 2017; 2019). Glocalization is a concept developed by Roland Robertson (Robertson 1995) to describe "overlapping fields of global-local linkages...[leading to] a condition of globalized panlocality" (Gabardi 2000, 33). Often, as Pascale Lefevre (2010) argues, comics research tends to be more localised than other media because of the distinct format, historical, distribution and aesthetic systems in place that have to be considered in any comparable analysis of comics, "each publication format contains an aesthetic system with a set of norms that offers a bounded set of alternatives to the individual creator of comics" (89). This paper makes a limited comparative analysis of these different industrial approaches to the adaptation of the contents to show the publisher's attempts to adapt them to what they assumed were the tastes of these varying readerships.

Joan Ormrod is an independent scholar and editor of Routledge's *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. Her research revolves around popular culture, fantasy/ science fiction, gender and comics. These include a monograph *Wonder Woman, the Female Body and Popular Culture*, an analysis of how changes in the female body were reflected in the ways *Wonder Woman* was portrayed over 80 years. She has also published book chapters on aliens, time travel, fantasy and the landscape. Her latest research is in the origins of UK romance comics and pop music in the 1950s and '60s.

Dragoş Manea

“Because the prophecies had to be fulfilled”: Genre and Industry in Robert Crumb’s “The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick” (1986)

In 1986, Robert Crumb published “The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick,” in *Weirdo* #17 (Last Gasp Comics). Adapting Philip K. Dick, the *Last Testament*, a 1985 collection of interviews edited by Gregg Rickman, the short comic details the SF writer’s 1974 visionary experiences—likely a series of psychotic episodes—which directly led to his gnostic philosophy and to his VALIS trilogy of novels. Like Dick’s work, Crumb’s comic is deeply inflected by weird fiction. In the BBC Two Arena documentary “The Confessions of Robert Crumb” (1987), for instance, Crumb highlights a 1954 issue of *Ghostly Weird* (Star Publications). He singles out the work of Jay Disbrow and “the mood that he creates” through his use of “heavy blank ink (which Crumb would also employ in “The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick”).

My interest in this paper lies not merely in exploring Crumb’s engagement with the weird comics—his employment of dark, sometimes heavily textured backgrounds and detailing bordering on the obsessive anticipates Junji Ito’s more recent work—but also in weird fiction’s broader influence on the American underground and alternative comic book industries. Crumb was not the only artist interested in adapting Dick’s work. Art Spiegelman, for instance, recounts wanting “a collaboration with Phil for *Arcade* magazine—he gave us something sort of essaylike, clearly religious. It concerned taking Christopher to the hospital [a scene that Crumb would ultimately depict in his later comic]” (*The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). What this collaboration would have produced is unclear—the little scholarly opinion that exists is divided—but it does testify to Dick’s influence in the period and the weird’s broader impact on the American comic book scene, which I discuss at length in my paper.

Dragoş Manea is a lecturer in the American Studies Program at the University of Bucharest, where he teaches courses in contemporary American literature, cultural memory studies, perpetrator studies, and media studies. His main research interests include the adaptation of history, cultural memory, and the relationship between ethics and fiction. Relevant publications include *Religious Narratives in Contemporary Culture: Between Cultural Memory and Transmediality* (edited with Maria Sabina Draga-Alexandru, Brill, 2021) and *Reframing the Perpetrator in Contemporary Comics: On the Importance of the Strange* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

Hailey Austin

Smut Peddlers: How the Spicy Pulp and Publishers Shaped Superhero Comics

Before popular comics characters like Wonder Woman or Superman, there were pulp magazines. Pulp magazines were cheap, fast fiction magazines with alluring covers and interior illustrations that were published from 1896 into the late 1950s. While the pulps

expanded into almost every genre, one of the most popular was the ‘hot’ or ‘spicy’ pulp that explored erotic themes.

In this presentation, I will discuss how the publishing industry’s reactions to censorship led to many superheroes and tropes still seen today. I will draw lines between erotic pulp magazines, Tijuana Bibles and the superhero genre. Many of the people who sold erotic pulp magazines, like Harry Donenfeld, would go on to own superhero magazines. Many superhero artists also made pornographic material before or after their superhero stints. Censorship of nude bodies and sexual content permeated into the superhero genre. The iconography of pulp magazines, drawing from fetish and pornographic magazines as well as political cartoons, utilised double-voicing that alerted readers to the content within the magazine while sliding under the radar of censorship.

Tracing the lineage of the industry professionals working in comics at the time (both publishers and creators), we can see the secret origins of superhero comics as smut specifically designed to get around the censorship of the time.

Dr Hailey Austin is a Lecturer in Visual Media and Culture and the Programme Lead for the BA (Hons) Game Design and Production course at Abertay University in Dundee Scotland. She got her PhD in Comics from the University of Dundee where her thesis focused on the anthropomorphic body as a site of fetish in comics. Her research interests include revealing overlooked and marginalised voices in the creative industries including comics, zines, and games.

PANEL 3B: Graphic Medicine

Jiahao Ji

Graphic Medicine as Social Prescribing: Embedding Comics in Healthcare as an Intervention Method

Social prescribing has gained considerable attention in recent years. Prominent models include “arts on prescription” and “books on prescription.” Such projects typically provide creative and participatory ways to support patients with mental and physical health issues, offering a framework that extends beyond clinical interventions. Similarly, books-on-prescription initiatives draw on curated self-help texts recommended by GPs or mental health professionals. Graphic medicine reflects this orientation: its interventions communicate medical procedures, treatment plans, preventive care, health outcomes, behaviour change, and engagement with services—closely aligning with social prescribing models.

This paper presents an innovative method, tested through interviews and participatory action research with art therapists and counsellors in the UK, Australia, and China, who then piloted it with their clients. The method demonstrates how comics can serve as a tool for direct visual communication and intervention in therapeutic contexts. In practice, this method could be delivered by art therapists through one-to-one or group sessions, with

patient narratives consolidated into book form to foster counselling, peer support, and doctor–patient communication. Drawing on practitioner and client feedback, alongside a collaboratively developed evaluation framework, I argue that integrating user experience and co-creation into graphic medicine has the potential to function as a form of social prescribing. My research explores how graphic medicine can be embedded within healthcare as a “service,” transforming comics into socially useful labour while opening pathways for assessing its impact and sustainability in healthcare contexts. This reframes authorship from cartoonist to patients, family members, and carers, with clients creating or reading comics as part of their healthcare experience.

Jiahao Ji is a PhD research student at Kingston University. Her research focuses on enhancing the therapeutic potential of visual metaphors and comics to improve mental health. Currently, she is developing a toolkit and accompanying guidance booklet for creating and recreating metaphorical comics, designed to support daily emotional self-care for individuals with anxiety. This work is grounded in the principles of Art Therapy, Narrative Therapy, and Metaphor Therapy. Her practice-based research emphasizes co-creation. She works closely with art therapists, mental health professionals, and individuals facing mental health challenges. Jiahao collaborates with mental health charities and art institutions to conduct workshops.

Ishita Mondal

Locating the Temporal Affordances of the Industrial Shift to Webcomics in Graphic Medicine

Webcomics have produced new mobilities within the comics industry. Emblematic of the digital turn in artistic expression and experimentation, webcomics have been especially attractive to chronically ill artists who face temporal barriers in the procedures of formal publishing. This paper is interested in how the medium of webcomics provides temporal affordances to chronically ill comics artists both in terms of the production process and the expression of time within. It looks at Joan Reilly’s webcomics about her brain tumour which highlight the fragmented and atemporal nature of illness experience (Reilly). Reilly’s comics represent the waiting and uncertainty of diagnosis results, doctor appointments, and the unpredictable symptoms of chemo and illness which suspends one out of the regular narrative loop of experience. Within this uncertainty the act of creation and representation can become doubly more ostracizing when you have to put it into coherent narrative structures, forcing what Wasson calls “labour of coherence” (108). The episodic medium of webcomics, however, provides the author the freedom to represent her illness without having to make sense of the wider narrative, and express an alternate temporality. Reilly also mentions how she often ends up creating her comics in waiting rooms, and surgery beds. The unhindered and self-regulatory nature of webcomics publishing provides a comfortable medium and pace to work with for a chronic patient. This paper will analyse how webcomics as a medium is able to provide the artist with an individual “temporal map” to archive and represent their experiences (McCloud 206).

Ishita Mondal is a PhD research scholar in the Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Her research interests include graphic medicine, comics studies, self-writing, and medical humanities. She is specifically interested in the shifting epistemological boundaries between the personal and the

medical, depending on personal, cultural, and social contexts. She has presented her research papers in several national and international conferences. Her most recent paper presentation was at the “Auto / Bio / Fictional Graphic Narratives: A Symposium”, at Goldsmiths, University of London.

John Miers

Graphic Medicine in the British healthcare industry

This paper outlines a proposal for four categories of graphic medicine production identified in the early stages of an investigation into the use of comics in the UK healthcare industry.

Patient narratives, or “graphic pathographies,” have established themselves within the comics industry as a significant subgenre of graphic memoir. Despite being arguably the most recognisable manifestation of graphic medicine practice, such stories, which frequently adopt a critical stance towards formal healthcare and highlight the alienating effects of navigating bureaucratic systems, are less frequently used within healthcare industries.

What Murray and Nabizadeh, and Horton, have called “public information comics” constitute the primary use of graphic medicine in institutional healthcare. Common aims include informing people with chronic conditions about self-management and alleviating anxiety about surgical and diagnostic procedures among children. These comics portray healthcare workers as compassionate and competent, and healthcare systems as adequate.

Comics by healthcare workers themselves often challenge such portrayals by expressing frustration at the constraints of working within under-resourced infrastructure, and engaging in critical reflection on the quality and appropriateness of interpersonal care. These themes are present in both self-initiated practitioner comics and those elicited from trainee healthcare workers during their professional education.

Finally, “graphic facilitation,” a form of large-format live visual recording, focuses more on what Sibbet has called “public listening,” by aiming to create records of how healthcare infrastructure is negotiated and maintained by groups of stakeholders.

The presentation will substantiate these summaries with reflections drawn from interviews with graphic medicine practitioners representing each category.

John Miers is a Senior Lecturer in Illustration at Kingston University, and a Leading Researcher in Graphic Medicine at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. He is the author of *Visual Metaphor and Drawn Narratives* (Palgrave 2025). His comics depicting experiences of living with multiple sclerosis have been recognised in artistic (Broken Frontier, Myriad First Graphic Novel) awards and appeared in scholarly volumes (*Graphic Medicine*, University of Hawai’i Press) nominated for Eisner and Council of Editors of Learned Journals awards. With Ian Horton and Elizabeth Allyn Woock, he is currently co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*.

PANEL 4A: Independent Publishing

Damon Herd

Myra Hancock: A Square Peg in a Round Industry?

Myra Hancock: A Square Peg in a Round Industry?

As one of the few female creators in what could loosely be termed the 'Fast Fiction' crowd of the early 1980s, Myra Hancock was an important figure in the small press comics scene in Britain. In her 10-year career in comics, she self-published eight issues of *Myra* (1981-86), an A5 zine style comic described as 'earthy autobiographical vignettes' by Roger Sabin, as well as one-offs such as *Is This Romance?* (1982). She also contributed strips to the first three issues of *Escape* magazine in 1983 and to issue 10 of *Wimmen's Comix* in 1985. As a writer, in 1989 Hancock made the move to mainstream British comics and began a collaboration with artist David Hine. Together they created 'Sticky Fingers', which appeared in 12 issues of the *2000AD* spin-off comic *CRISIS* in 1989 and in 1991 they produced the strip 'Tao de Moto' for *2000AD*, which ran for 26 issues, and after which Hancock left the comics industry.

This paper is a historical examination of Hancock's career as it moved from the small press publishing of the 1980s, inspired by punk fanzines and facilitated by access to cheap printing and newly available photocopying technology, into British mainstream comics as a writer for Fleetway publications *2000AD* and *CRISIS*. It will examine ideas of agency, authorship and alienation within these industrial contexts to explore David Hine's claim that Hancock was a square peg in a round hole within the masculine comics industries of the time.

Dr Damon Herd (he/him) is an artist, researcher and educator. He is Programme Director of the MDes Communication Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee. His research includes autobiographical comics and comics 'off-the-page' including the intersections of comics, fine art, and performance. He has self-published several comics and zines including autobiographical work featuring his avatar Ticking Boy. He is the founder of DeeCAP, a comics and performance event based in Dundee that has showcased comics performances across Scotland. He is also a founding member of the Comics and Performance Network and Creative Submissions Editor of *Studies in Comics* journal.

Rounak Gupta and Partha Bhattacharjee

Decolonising Comics Art: The Revolutionary Impact of Independent Presses on Indian Comics

Independent publishers, such as Navayana, Yoda Press, Ektara Trust, Braindead, Blaft Publications, Zubaan Books, and Leftword Books accelerated the surge of long-form comics, graphic anthologies, and periodical zines in the postmillennial Indian comics scene. Despite the presence of multinational publishers as well as legacy comics publishers and studios, these small presses have attracted a readership for "comics as literature" (e.g., *Suit, Foods and Farming, This Side That Side, Drawing the Line, First Hand* Volume 1 & 2, Chute 2008, 462). In this context, this paper argues that a combination of decolonial visuality and politics

supports this rise. These publishers pay attention to less-discussed socio-economic and political issues like communal harmony, farmers' agitation, the healthcare system, female participation, and manual scavenging etc. Through this, they become mouthpieces of the exploited class in Indian society, communicating with the urban elites. By introducing new artists, they simultaneously challenge the recesses of the medium itself, creating new forays into it by disrupting the structural-linguistic grammar of comics. Therefore, these small presses create a 'third space' for under-represented groups (like sanitation workers, farmers, construction workers, survivors of gender-based violence, etc.) in India and beyond, utilising an art form which is a culmination of Indian visual rhetoric, metonymy, and decolonial visibility. While searching for a pertinent answer to the recurring question, "How does an alternative industry form?", this paper positions these presses as frontiers of decolonial comics activism. It ultimately illustrates how small and independent presses can establish decolonial visibility in Indian comics and generate 'artivistic' solidarity towards political dissent.

Rounak Gupta is a Junior Research Fellow at SRM University-AP's Department of Literature and Languages, researching coloniality, decoloniality, and their representation in contemporary literature and graphic narratives. His interests include South Asian comics, trauma, and visual anthropology; he publishes and reviews for the Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics and HSSC.

Partha Bhattacharjee, Assistant Professor at SRM University-AP. He is also an Editorial Board Member of Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Springer Nature and Journal of International Women's Studies. His research interests include Comics of the Global South, South Asian Comics, Comics and Gender Studies, Non-fictional Comics, and Comics and Communication.

Reed Puc

How do underground comix get remembered?

How do underground comix get remembered? Underground comix of the 1960s and 70s were printed cheaply and using highly acidic materials, they – like most comics – were considered disposable and were circulated not just between publisher and consumer, but often by consumers themselves amongst each other. These considerations make them objects that seem especially vulnerable to being lost to time. Yet, underground comix of the late twentieth century are also some of the most culturally significant comics ever made. For example, Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, typifies the dual significance and vulnerability of underground comix. While Binky Brown is considered the first autobiographical comic, it remained out of print for decades after Green sold off the original drawings not long after the comic went to print. How do these comix get preserved? How do archiving institutions interact with underground comix? This paper offers some initial findings based on a four-month placement within the British Library auditing the J. B. Rund Collection.

The Rund Collection contains work by many of the most important underground cartoonists of the period. In addition to multiple comics by Green, the collection includes the complete *Zap Comix*, *Air Pirate Funnies*, and *Bijou*. How did these American comix end up at the

British Library? This paper will discuss issues faced within both comics publishing and library/archival services when archiving underground comix. It will identify unique factors from the Rund donation that present learning opportunities for collecting institutions and comix publishers.

Reed Puc is a PhD researcher in English Literature at City St George's, University of London. Their PhD project, "'Whose Streets?': Urban Spatial Imaginaries in Superhero Narratives," is an abolitionist examination of urban superhero comics and their impacts on our relationships with justice, policing, and safety. The first chapter of his dissertation, "Spider-Sensibilities: Seeing the City Through Spider-Man's Spatial Imagination," was awarded the Carceral Geography Working Group's 2023 Postgraduate Dissertation Prize. From June 2025-October 2025, they were member of the Eccles Institute for the Americas and Oceania working on the J. B. Rund Collection.

Panel 4B: Representing Industry

Geraint D'Arcy

History, Vernacular and Identity, look you, an' the "Cartoons of the Welsh Coal Strike"

April 1st until September 1st 1898 saw the longest Welsh Mining strike of the 19th century. At the centre was the abolition of the sliding scale, a wage system which was based not on how much coal was mined, but on its price. The sliding scale had no "bottom": if the price of coal was pennies, workers would starve. The scale favoured mine owners and was inevitably exploited politically and morally by those owners, who for the most part were also local MPs.

Capturing the conflict for the Western Daily Press was J M Staniforth, a cartoonist recognised then as the most astute political commentator in Wales. Staniforth's cartoons chronicled the industrial action in a twice-collected series called "Cartoons of the Welsh Coal Strike", featuring a range of political caricatures, abstract personifications and Dame Wales aka Cymru Mam: a pervasive and problematic figure of female agency and compromise in Welsh national dress.

Collected in one place, Staniforth's cartoons produce a historical graphic narrative offering insight to the shifts in his own attitude towards the strike and its outcomes, as each key event redrew both the battle lines and the way the main cast of characters were depicted. The legacy of the strike both on workers rights and on Staniforth's representation of the Welsh working class remained pervasive for much of the twentieth century. But in post-industrial Wales the lingering stereotype of the Welsh Mam remains just as problematic. . .

Geraint D'Arcy is an Associate Professor in Media Practice at The University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. He is author of *Mise en Scène, Acting and Space in Comics* (Palgrave, 2020) which looks at the crossover of theory from film, theatre, and comics, and of *Critical Approaches to TV and Film Set Design* (Routledge, 2018) which established theories of production design.

Leonie Sharrock

Grains of Carbon: practice as research in the making of *Coal* a graphic personal-ancestral memoir

Social, industrial and creative histories are inextricably linked, this we know. It is nevertheless useful at times to burrow down into the particular murk of a given industry and its parallels with others, shining the beam of one's headlamp where useful seams of information might be extracted. As an artist situated genetically and physically within the industrial history and landscapes of coal in the north of England and South Wales, I am currently working on a personal ancestral graphic memoir: 'Coal, Cotton, Paint' and working through the impact those industries had on my family and me. For the first part, *Coal*, I am drawing in ink and carbon pencil, best suited to the gritty, smudgy filth of the subject matter. As I draw and research the subject, I notice parallels with the comics industry I am involved in: the capitalization and commodification of labour, mass production, mass consumption, and mass entertainment, which codify the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth and early 20th centuries. Mining contexts in this way leads me to the realization that my 'industry' of drawing comics, particularly as an analogue artist, has followed a similar trajectory, and like the industrial mining complexes of Britain, in spite of the 'Faustian pact' with art and academic institutions that Spiegelman outlined, we face certain demise. Perhaps at best, like the independent 'Freeminers of the Forest' we return to a pre-industrial age of working the seams of our own rabbit-hole mines, where art and community matter more than the industry.

Leonie Sharrock has been an artist and story-maker at the service of teaching for over forty years, currently a part-time Senior Lecturer at the University of South Wales on the BA 2D and Stop-Motion and MA Animation courses. While recognizing the need for symbiosis with the digital, Leonie is a passionate advocate for the continuing relevance of analogue material practice at all levels of teaching and making stories within and beyond education. Leonie finds her artistic practice moving through various iterations of story-telling through comics, animation, painting, puppets, poetry and collage, to seek synthesis in hybrid comic-making.

Mihaela Precup

"But first, she has to sell it": Comics, Pygmy Goats, and Other Industries in Alison Bechdel's *Spent* (2025)

Alison Bechdel's latest graphic novel, *Spent* (Mariner, 2025) is a humorous meditation on the necessity, seriousness, and absurdity of artistic and activist endeavors during late capitalism, featuring a fictionalized version of Bechdel who finds herself predictably torn between her principles and the need to maintain a certain level of financial comfort. In the book, "Alison" is a cartoonist who has recently become reluctantly involved in the world of "Shmetflix" after her graphic memoir, *Death and Taxidermy*, is loosely adapted as a TV series. She and her wife own a pygmy goat sanctuary that places financial and acoustic strain on the family and their guests, some of whom are characters from her successful syndicated cartoon, *Dykes to Watch Out For*. As Sam Thielman notes in his overall positive

New York Times review of *Spent*, the publication context of the book also mirrors some of the issues raised by the characters from *Spent*, among which “the uncomfortable fact that a black-and-white strip about boomer radicals that ran in alternative newspapers for 25 years has been gentrified into a full-color hardcover published by Mariner, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp.” This paper considers the contribution made by *Spent*—particularly through humorous and metafictional references—to current debates on the place of comics among other related media forms (among which TV adaptations), and also on the position of originally small independent comics in the contemporary media landscape, particularly streaming platforms.

Mihaela Precup is Associate Professor in the American Studies Program at the University of Bucharest, where she teaches American visual and popular culture, contemporary American literature, and comics studies. Her latest publication is “Of monsters and women: Gender, sexual violence and the logic of familiarity in Drawing Power” (*Studies in Comics*, Vol. 15, Issue 1-2, Jan. 2025)

FRIDAY 14 NOVEMBER

PANEL 5A: Production

Brian M Clarke

London Editions Magazines: How Ones and Zeroes Changed the Comics Business

London Editions Magazines (LEM) was a UK comics publisher owned by Egmont Publishing, a Danish charitable trust. I joined LEM in 1986 as an editor, later taking on the roles of Managing Editor, International Project Co-ordinator (following a joint venture partnership with Fleetway) and Publisher (with my own company Newsstand Publishing Services/Burghley Publishing).

During the 1980s LEM experienced several evolutions in its business practices as it responded to:

- Rapid and concurrent changes in the way comics were produced
- Changes in readership
- A reordering of the comics retail sector

My presentation will focus on how these changes impacted the creative process and concomitant changes in sales and marketing. I will discuss how word processing impacted on how comics were written; how digital colouring changed the look of comics, the interdependence of fax machines and overseas art studios, and the rise of licensed comics as the dominant form of 1990s UK comics.

I will also address the replacement of local newsagents by supermarkets as the latter became mass retailers of comics, and the impact of EPOS (Electronic Point of Sale) data on how comics were solicited by distributors and major retailers. This will conclude with a

section on how television influenced publishers' portfolios (increased emphasis on licensed comics) and retail decisions (will it be on TV and will TV advertising be part of the promotional plan?).

The presentation will be supported with many behind-the-scenes images from all sides of the business.

Brian M Clarke is a comics scholar with decades long experience as a professional comics writer, editor and publisher. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Salford, where he researches the history of American comic strip adaptations of classic literary sources. His thesis title is: 'Classics Illustrated; Ideology and Innovation at The Gilberton Company'. He previously presented papers at the Leeds Comics Forum on adaptations (2023), and embodiment (2024). As writer, editor and publisher he worked with The Egmont Group, Warner Bros., Disney, Cosgrove Hall, Mattel, Hasbro, DC Thomson, DC Comics and dozens of TV properties.

Nigel Kitching

Sonic the Comic: Can licensed comics ever be good?

Sonic the Comic was published from 1993 to 2002. For much of that time I was writing the main Sonic strips, as well as writing and sometimes drawing other less well known Sega strips such as *Decap Attack*. On this series I sometimes collaborated with the artist Mick McMahon better known for his work on 2000AD.

Initially, *Sonic the Comic* was hampered by Sega and their representatives, in this case a company called as Copyright Promotions whose job it was to police the brand. The impact of this restrictive environment led to a meeting being arranged between the Fleetway editorial staff, Sega, Copyright Promotions and several of the artists and writers, including myself. This was a turning point.

This paper will explore the situation I found myself in and my determination to create comics featuring engaging storytelling which were not restricted by misguided attempts to protect the brand. I discuss the ways I navigated the various stakeholders, which included my editor at Fleetway as well as Sega and Copyright Promotions. Importantly, I also describe how I developed an innovative way of working with my artists, introducing some elements of the collaborative approaches that were claimed to be employed at Marvel Comics.

In this paper I argue that, in the 1990s, *Sonic the Comic* represented a distinct approach to a licensed comic which demonstrated a successful negotiation between Sega, Fleetway and the freelancers who worked on the comic.

Nigel Kitching began his career in advertising before becoming a full-time comic book writer and artist in 1989. Kitching is best known for his work on *Sonic the Comic* but has also worked on many other comics including 2000AD where he, with the artist Richard Elson, created the series A.H.A.B.. From 2007 to 2024 Kitching worked as a Senior Lecturer at Teesside University where he created several courses including an MA in Comics. He is currently working on his PhD by published work.

Simon Grennan

Industry repurposing Industry: collaging *Cassell's Family Magazine* in Sāmoa, Hawaii and Scotland

Collage is work undertaken in any medium by fragmenting and repurposing existing media. It is increasingly recognised in a wide range of disciplines as a method of enquiry, used to identify underlying structures and make them available to analysis, restructuring and reformation.

This paper will reflect upon collage workshops undertaken with young people in Honolulu, Hawai'i in 2022, in Apia, Sāmoa in 2023 and in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2023. Participants created new drawn and collaged visual stories, utilising any aspects of original pages supplied from 1880s editions of *Cassell's Family Magazine*, a British industrial product contemporaneous with Edinburgh-born Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific travels.

The paper will orient these workshops with a review of theories of collage, historicising the activity as a now-entrenched medium, understood to subvert traditional media. It will outline ways in which collage has been theorised as resistance, seeking to contradict or reform inequities in existing power relationships, as resistance to industrial coercion, colonial violence and hegemony, including the institution of language. It will argue for a relational theorisation of collage, creating new power relationships between previously bifurcated makers and viewers. The paper will utilise this theorisation to reflect upon some of the workshops participants' approaches to working to repurpose parts of the 1880s 'Magazine'.

Finally, the paper will focus on a new relationship between Honolulu collagist James Kamakaokalani and Mariam Kerns, the 1881 visual journalist whose drawings he uses to tell a new story. It will show how collagists entered 1880s British storyworlds, or reproduced generic expectations of their past and present, revised the past or created new equitable dialogues with artists, writers and producers, across widely different times and places.

Dr Simon Grennan is an awarded scholar of visual narrative and graphic novelist. He is Professor of Art and Design and Associate Dean for Research and Innovation at the University of Chester and author of 'Thinking about Comic's (2026), 'Thinking about Drawing' (2022), 'A Theory of Narrative Drawing' (2017), 'Marie Duval' (2018) and 'Dispossession' (2015). He is co-author of 'The Marie Duval Archive'. He is half of international artists team Grennan & Sperandio and Principal Investigator for 'Marie Duval presents Ally Sloper' and Co-investigator of 'Remediating Stevenson: Decolonising Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Fiction through Graphic Adaptation, Arts Education and Community Engagement'.

WORKSHOP

Kelly Lindberg

Distributing Otherwise: A Zine-Making Workshop on Comics and Counter-Industry

What happens when comics are made without the press—or outside the industry altogether? In this interactive workshop, participants will explore comics' para-industrial futures through hands-on zine-making and discussion. Building on David Kunzle's definition of comics as inherently industrial, we'll challenge this notion by experimenting with lo-fi, analog, and DIY approaches to comics creation and distribution.

We'll begin with a short introduction to counter-industrial comics practices, featuring examples from zine libraries, artist-run distros, and digital-first platforms like itch.io and Gumroad. Then, participants will create a one-page comic zine in response to prompts about authorship, access, and resistance in media systems. We'll close with an open discussion on how these practices intersect with questions of labor, ethics, and identity in the comics field.

All materials will be provided (paper, pens, folding guides), and no drawing experience is required. This workshop invites artists, scholars, educators, and industry participants to consider how alternative production modes might inform the future(s) of comics.

Kelly Lindberg is a librarian at Ringling College of Art + Design, where she teaches with zines and comics to support critical information literacy. Her practice bridges academic research and grassroots culture, having presented at New York Comic Con's Educator Day, St. Pete Zine Fest, and the ARLIS/NA Annual Conference, as well as at local non-profit organizations. She creates interactive learning opportunities and comics-infused outreach materials that blend analog and digital techniques. Kelly is particularly interested in the ethics and infrastructures of media distribution and the role of counter-industrial practices in shaping the future of comics.

PANEL 6A: Comics and the UK Industrial Strategy

Panel Discussion featuring:

Ian Hague, Comics Forum founder (Chair)

Sam Arthur, Co-Founder/Creative Director, Nobrow/Flying Eye Books

Phoebe Hedges, Editor, Titan Comics

Dave Lander, Co-Founder, Decadence

Tom Oldham, Co-Founder, Breakdown Press

Ben Smith, Head of Film, TV & Publishing, Rebellion

Myfanwy Tristram, Co-Director, The Comics Cultural Impact Collective

PANEL 6B: Making Histories

Gareth Brookes

Autoclasm and Aura – The graphic novel's auto destructive structures of cultural legitimacy

This paper develops Christopher Pizzino's notion of 'autoclasm' describing a tendency within comics practice, criticism and marketing to simultaneously assert and deny the legitimacy of comic's cultural value in an auto-destructive gesture.

As Pizzino argues, the perennial discourse around the graphic novel as a form separate from comics which has 'grown up', elides the history of anti-comics campaigns and represents a marketing strategy advertising graphic novels as possessing legitimate literary artistic value. I will consider how autoclasm manifests itself through the visual register and argue that imaginative tactility represents an aesthetic effort to distinguish graphic novels from comic's more transparent relationships to industrial mass-production.

I will discuss the role of materiality, embodied drawing and reproduction in this autoclastic aesthetic strategy and highlight it's relationship to Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'aura' of the work of art. Through examples including my own graphic novels, I will argue that attempts to produce comics that convey materiality in terms more usually associated with fine art represent a contradictory but none-the-less effective attempt at simulating aura in a mass-produced form.

I will argue that this autoclastic gesture often involves digitally confected fictive space where reproduction stands in for the original. In this space haptic elements assert themselves as material facts even as they reveal themselves as mimetic fiction. This fiction becomes increasingly precarious as modes of production, reproduction and dissemination in comics become ever more computational, multimodal and simultaneous, rendering attempts to impose auratic terms on the technologically reproduced image, ever more autoclastic.

Dr Gareth Brookes is a graphic novelist and comics scholar. He gained a PhD from Central Saint Martins, UAL, in 2024 with a thesis entitled *Embodied Responses to Materiality in the Making and Reading of Comics*. He has published four graphic novels, including *The Dancing Plague* and *The Compleat Angler*. He has contributed scholarship to the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *Studies in Comics* and *ImageText*.

Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru

Reperforming Visual Histories: From Bison Hide Paintings to Industrial Comic Prints in Turner Mark-Jacobs' Massacre of Don Pedro Villasur

The Segesser hide paintings (I and II) are 18th century depictions of early Spanish colonial life in current New Mexico, following the Native American tradition of (mostly bison) hide painting, which records history in painted, rather than written, form. The Jesuit priest Philipp von Segesser von Brunegg acquired them in 1758 and took them back to Switzerland, his homeland. More than a couple of centuries later, the prints were taken

back to New Mexico and were exhibited in the New Mexico History Museum at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. There, they recently inspired a comics artist, by the name of Turner Mark-Jacobs, to recast Segesser II – the illustrated depiction of Don Pedro Villasur's bloody encounter with the natives of the New Mexico area – as a series of comics panels recasting Segesser II in contemporary comics form, exhibited at the New Mexico History Museum in the summer of 2025.

This paper aims at reading the dialogue between the 18th century Segesser hides and Mark-Jacobs' reinterpretation of them in contemporary comics key, with a view to questioning the concept of historical authenticity in relation to current industrial multiplication of the visual, which can reach a larger audience and thus educate as to the lesser known aspects of history. I will aim to prove that industrial reproduction serves an important educational purpose in rewriting history, but also to interpret Mark-Jacobs' redrawing act as an instance of reperformance of history through comics (mainly with the help of Geraint d'Arcy's concept of *mise-en-scène*).

Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru is a Reader in English at the University of Bucharest. She is interested in global writing in English, ecocriticism, ethnic and African American literature and visual culture, gender and multiethnic identities. She has published several authored and co-edited books and articles in journals such as *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Perspectives*, *Indialogs*, *Kritika Kultura* and others. Her forthcoming book is *Ecological Privacies: From Alternative Landscapes to Private Spaces of the Mind in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Brill, forthcoming 2025) and is interested in comics as alternative storytelling.

PANEL 7A: War

Brian Fagence

Entropy: Arc, War as Industry

War as industry will be explored in this talk. The ceaseless perpetuation of unquestionable war, and in the fictional storyworld of the comic's script *Entropy: Arc*, how this was designed and why.

The comic script, *Entropy* tells a story about doomed redemption. It is a science fiction story that follows the journey of Aban Ro, its initial primary character. *Entropy: Arc* is set a thousand years earlier, this story is a causally, connected history, it is a reflection on the need for a war's incessant preservation, and follows a group of Confederation troopers into the unravelling of their damned present.

The home planet in the storyworld of *Entropy: Arc*, has been in conflict for longer than any one of its inhabitants know. The war itself, though, is a fabrication created to engulf its various peoples in nationalistic fervour, so that they know their purpose and cannot find a way to question it. The longing for peace is twisted into the need for war, and in this story, all of the world's industrial intent is deceptively used as the only means to provide a hope for this peace.

Through an analysis of my comics scriptwriting practice in the pre-production stages of creating *Entropy: Arc I* I will analyse the conception of the story and the storyworld to examine the construction of an obfuscated by design, deliberate, agreed greed, and the perpetuation of war as inevitable fiscal reward and societal stabilisation, exploring industry as war, war as industry.

Brian Fagence is Course Leader for MA Animation and lecturer in Critical Studies and Scriptwriting at the University of South Wales. He has been lecturing since 1998 and has published articles in *The Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, *Studies in Comics* and *The International Journal of Creative Media Research*. His research interests include storytelling, scriptwriting and transmedia.

Svitlana Pidoprygora

Graphic Journalism under Fire: Comics as Industrial Forms in Ukrainian Online Media

This paper examines the use of comics as a journalistic format in Ukrainian online media, with attention to their functioning as industrial forms shaped by conditions of war and digital production. While comics have already found a place in international journalism – for example in *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* or *The Nib* – the Ukrainian case shows how this medium develops within a fragile media environment and under the pressures of ongoing conflict. The study focuses on two projects: the “Witnessing the War” section on the official War in Ukraine platform (<https://war.ukraine.ua/russia-war-crimes/>), and the comic series published by the independent outlet Zaborona (<https://zaborona.com/category/poglyad/komiks/>).

Both initiatives were launched by journalists who turned to the comic form to document civilian testimony, to convey experiences of violence and displacement, and to make complex information more accessible. These works are shaped by the economic, technological and political frameworks of their production. Ukrainian comics journalism often depends on donor funding, NGO partnerships and audience support. Its digital distribution reflects wider shifts in the media industry, including the move to mobile reading and the growing role of visual storytelling in online platforms.

Through analysis of narrative strategies and the industrial conditions of their production, the article demonstrates how comics in Ukrainian journalism operate simultaneously as tools of information, engagement, and memory, contributing to the broader media ecosystem during wartime.

Svitlana Pidoprygora holds a Doctorate in Philological Sciences that corresponds to Dr. habil. in Ukrainian Literature and Theory of Literature. She served as a professor at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University Ukraine till 2022. She worked as a short-term guest lecturer at the University of Basel (Switzerland) and the University of Innsbruck (Austria), and received several research fellowships in Germany and Switzerland. Her research interests include visual studies, comics studies, media studies, mass culture studies, and Ukrainian studies. She is currently continuing her research at the University of Innsbruck with the support of MSCA4Ukraine. Her project explores the representations of Ukraine in national and international comics.

PANEL 7B: Transmedia

Sarah Jessica Darley

Cutting Back the 'Secret Garden': (Re)Gendering the Gaze in Mia Ikumi and Reiko Yoshida's *Tokyo Mew Mew* (2000-3) and 4Kids Entertainment's Localised *Mew Mew Power* (2005)

The henshin, or transformation, sequences of mahō shōjo (magical girl) manga and anime are much more than a simple, though sparkling, outfit change. From early prototypes of the genre the henshin has encoded bodily transformation as central to magical girls' power. This bodily transformation, frequently between species or maturity, is tied to the adolescence and social freedom which typify the shōjo, and shōjo culture, within Japan. Focusing on henshin as bodily transformation, this paper will examine the body poetics and politics of Mia Ikumi and Reiko Yoshida's *Tokyo Mew Mew* (2003). Through a reading of Ikumi and Yoshida's original manga series as a model of the mahō shōjo genre, this paper will establish the Magical Girl as an embodiment of shōjo values subject to a uniquely female gaze within its native market. Before comparing the treatment of *Tokyo Mew Mew*'s henshin sequences within the native and US localised distributions of Pierrot's anime adaptation (2002-3).

Acquiring the license to *Tokyo Mew Mew* in 2004, 4Kids Entertainment's CEO Al Kahn expressed his desire to use the property to attract 'both sexes by providing girls with empowered female heroines and, at the same time, entertaining boys with "cute babes" and lots of action' (Kahn, 2004). The desire Kahn expresses marks the shifting of *Tokyo Mew Mew*'s demographic as fundamental to its localisation. Expressly, Kahn's marketing of the mahō shōjo characters as 'cute babes' for male viewers, notes the redressing of Ikumi and Yoshida's shōjo property for a male gaze. Despite 4Kids using only Pierrot's original animation, this redressing manifests in the narrative changes and visual censorship of *Tokyo Mew Mew*'s henshin sequences. This offers a unique opportunity to read the poetics of bodily transformation in mahō shōjo media through both a female, Japanese gaze, and a male, western gaze.

Sarah Jessica Darley is a PhD candidate at the University of East Anglia, currently completing her thesis: 'Like the Wild Beasts, She Lives Without a Future': The Afterlives of Angela Carter in Contemporary Fairy Tale Literature. Her first publication - 'The Magical Girl Mirror: Reflections and Transcultural Transformations of Euro-American Fairy Tales in the Mahō Shōjo Genre' - can be found within *Cross-Cultural Influences Between Japanese and American Pop Cultures: POWERS OF POP* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), surveying the complex cultural dialogue between Euro-American fairy tales and the mahō shōjo genre of Japanese media. Sarah's research focuses upon the fairy tale, children's literature, visual media, reception theory, and gender studies.

Bounthavy Suvilay

The Economics of Comics in French TV Industries (1980s-1990s)

This paper explores how French TV channels in the 1980s and 1990s leveraged print comics (bandes dessinées) as an economic extension of animated TV series, positioning them as a substitute for home video (VCR) consumption. At a time when VCR technology was

expensive and not yet widespread, TV networks collaborated with publishers to produce BD adaptations of popular animated series (Goldorak, Candy, Albator, Dragon Ball), capitalizing on their audiences through magazine serializations.

I argue that these BD functioned as an intermediate market between TV broadcasts and home media, offering a low-cost, collectible alternative to video cassettes. Drawing on industry archives and print sources, I analyze how this strategy extended the commercial lifespan of TV anime beyond broadcast slots, created new revenue streams for publishers and licensors, and shaped youth readership habits in a pre-digital era. The study situates these practices within broader media economics, highlighting how French TV industries adapted transnational anime imports into localized, profitable print commodities. By framing BD as substitute of VCR, this research sheds light on a neglected aspect of Franco-Japanese media synergies and the economic logic of repurposing TV content in pre-internet eras. The findings contribute to studies of media convergence, licensing economies, and the cultural intermediation of global animation.

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Keynote

Benjamin Woo

What Is the Work of “Industry”?

This year’s Comics Forum shines an arguably overdue spotlight on the industrial contexts in which comics are (re)produced and circulated. While obviously important to many fans and creators, this has been something of a blindspot in Anglophone comics studies. Yet, a turn to industry begs the question, who or what is the comics industry? Comics fandom, its niche and micro media, and industrial actors themselves generate discourses about “the comics industry” that typically place publishers at their centre. Without losing the insights of media industries studies, how can we break with these received notions and recover a relational conception of productive forces and their role in the comics world?

Benjamin Woo (he/him) is associate professor of communication and media studies at Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), where he directs the Research on Comics, Con Events, and Transmedia Lab. Among other works in comics studies and fan studies, he is the author of *Getting a Life: The Social Worlds of Geek Culture*, co-author with Bart Beaty of *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time*, and co-editor with Jeremy Stoll of *The Comics World: Comics, Graphic Novels, and Their Publics*. In recent years, his research program has focused on comic conventions and festivals and on comics reading across the life course.