The authors of this volume thus open and mark out new paths that allow the reader to look at the universe of superheroes from a new perspective.

It is true that the axiological approach favoured by the authors gives too much weight to the question of values, to the detriment of graphic and aesthetic considerations. Moreover, some of the articles are too descriptive, quotes are occasionally too lengthy and, in a couple of instances, the space devoted to the theoretical apparatus is such that it does not leave much room for a demonstration of its application to a specific body of works. Their value is nonetheless not in question, however, since they contribute to the general thrust of the volume. As for the introduction, which is very dense and comprehensive, it may well give away too many answers too soon instead of inviting the reader to read a particular essay. It does occasionally add profitably to some of the individual contributions. However, such complementary considerations should probably have been moved to an afterword.

The whole is coherent, and the diversity of works and methodological approaches both add to the strengths of an ambitious scholarly project that allows the reader to understand better the phenomenon of the superhero and all its implications. In addition, the texts read well and engage the reader's curiosity. In sum, this collection throws a new and valuable light on the already significant body of works devoted to this particular subject and is thus well worth reading, disseminating and debating.

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Dan Mazur and Alexander Danner, *Comics: A Global History, 1968 to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014). 320 pp. ISBN: 978-0-50029-096-5 (£19.95, $39.95)

Beginning with the timely, and promising, statement that 'no single culture or country can claim ownership of the medium' as 'there have always been cross-cultural and transnational influences' (7), Dan Mazur and Alexander Danner's book sets out to rewrite the history of comics from a global perspective. This appears to mean primarily a broadening of subject area. Just as recent research on comics cultures compares, in the main, North America, Western Europe and Japan,

occasionally including Korea and the Chinese-language markets, *Comics: A Global History* also focuses on the three major players: American comics, *bande dessinée* and manga. The space dedicated to the latter is striking: five out of the book's nineteen chapters are explicitly dedicated to graphic narratives from Japan. In addition, Korea is briefly introduced (279–281), while Italy, Spain, Argentina, Brazil and Scandinavia are mentioned as well. This scope is facilitated by an extensive bibliography of secondary literature in Western languages that evinces the authors' endeavours to familiarise themselves with foreign cultures and introduces notable articles. Likewise beneficial to the reader are the '289 illustrations in colour and black and white' highlighted on the title page. In view of the time-consuming efforts it takes to obtain permissions, the images cannot be appreciated enough, especially as they are accompanied by insightful captions. However, some methodological questions arise with regard to the manner in which the material is organised, particularly with respect to the implied concepts of the historical and the global.

Overall, the book presents itself as a conventional historiography; it is organised chronologically and rests on factual claims. Unfortunately, many of these, while presumably verified, are not properly referenced, and they are not contextualised within the different comics discourses either. One of these discourses relates to the methodology of comics historiography itself. In this regard the book could have benefitted, for example, from considering David Carrier's discussion of comics as 'posthistorical art' and the limited applicability of art historical tools to it.[4]

Comics: A Global History takes 1968 as its point of departure, on the grounds that it is at this juncture that 'comics creators … began to aggressively demonstrate that comics could be more than an ephemeral vehicle for children's entertainment' (8). What unfolds over the course of three parts – 1968–1978, 1978–1990 and 1990 onwards – is a narrative of 'maturation' and of the 'legitimization of comics' as an 'international art form' and 'true literature' (162). While purporting to address comics in general, the authors exhibit a strong penchant for 'higher aspirations than to entertain' (133), for stylistic and thematic 'sophistication' and for *auteurisme*. They do not explain why, nor do they test the assumptions on which these preferences rest against other approaches such as those focused on media ecologies, institutions or fans' cultural

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4 David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 107–123.

practices. Occasionally, this leads to arbitrary judgements, especially though not only with respect to manga. For example, Masamune Shirow's science fiction narratives – most famously his *Ghost in the Shell* – were obviously appreciated by North American fans for their semiotic density, but the authors assert that 'much of that density takes the form of confusing technobabble, which does little to illuminate the characters or plot' (202) – as if character and plot were exclusive and self-evident markers of quality. Further, they find Akimi Yoshida's artwork in *Banana Fish* 'uninspiring', and they regret that 'even some of the best manga [such as *One Piece*] follow[s] a wacky quest formula' (269). Yet, on what grounds a 'formula' appears regrettable, and to whom, stays out of the picture.

Informed by a traditional notion of modern art, *Comics: A Global History* draws a line between marketability and artistic originality, entertainment and self-expression, self-contained autonomous work and open-ended, user-friendly narrative, realism and escapism, book format and periodical, children and adults, and so forth, the overarching division being the one between 'mainstream' and 'alternative'. This distinction is assumed to be universal, and it is indiscriminately applied to the United States, Europe and Japan as well as to the predigital and digital eras. Even if the book's last chapter concedes that 'the "mainstream vs. alternative" division is fast becoming obsolete' (293), it traces this change back to 'the rising stature of the graphic novel', not the rise of the information society that has brought participatory and transformative culture to the fore and with it new forms of self-expression and authorship as well as other alternatives to corporate publishing businesses. One of these alternatives can be found in *dōjinshi,* not necessarily 'amateurish' manga-related comics that are published by fan artists and purchased mainly by members of that same fan culture. However, this kind of comics does not catch the authors' attention.

When it comes to Japan, manga critics agree that the year 1989, at the latest, saw the productive dichotomy between 'major' and 'minor' come to an end,[5] even if the alternative magazine *Garo,* which *Comics: A Global History* privileges, continued to exist for more than a decade. 'Mainstream' manga artists had engaged in both kinds of comics concurrently much earlier, starting with Osamu Tezuka. *Comics: A Global History* claims that Tezuka finally 'moved toward more realistic work

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5 Gō Itō, *Tezuka izu deddo: Hirakareta manga hyōgenron e* [Tezuka is dead: Toward a new manga stylistics] (Tokyo: NTT, 2005), 48. The author-supplied English translation of the title is: 'Tezuka is Dead: Postmodernist and modernist approaches to Japanese manga.'

aimed squarely at adults' in the 1980s (200). However, by that time his adult-oriented series *Dororo* (1967–1968), *Buddha* (1972–1983) and *Black Jack* (1973–1983) were already out. More connected to Tezuka than *Garo,* the sort of manga that passes as most 'mangaesque' on a global scale today facilitates a kind of fluid identity with respect to national culture, adulthood and gender, as well as 'art', authenticity, (non) sense, representation and performativity. Such manga can serve as an effective tool for questioning the divisions that Western cultures have inherited from their particular modernisation.

   Comics: A Global History provides a progressive narrative that fosters divisions not only between mainstream and alternative, but also cultural regions. While the publisher advertises the book on its website as 'the first to integrate the global story of comics over the last five decades', the book juxtaposes rather than integrates. North American, Western European and Japanese comics are allocated separate chapters with commonalities and differences being occasionally pointed out, but never discussed in-depth. Issues worthy of their own subchapter could have been the impact of TV on the comics industry, the role of female artists and readership, the significance of teenagers or young adults as readers (which *Comics: A Global History* sees as an 'unexpected trend in web comics' [301], completely dismissing the influx of manga in that regard) and traditions of sexual representation that may appear politically incorrect today, especially in the societies of North America and Australia.

   Overall, two factors appear to hinder a well-rounded grasp of the globalisation of comics. The first is the restriction of intercultural encounter to 'influence', a notion that presupposes the existence of discrete, self-contained entities that affect each other while maintaining their identity. This may apply to the 'internationalism' of alternative comics, but not necessarily to 'global manga'.[6] In *Comics: A Global History,* we are, for example, told that Kojima, the artist of *Lone Wolf and Cub,* 'uses western-influenced shading and modeling, and a strong, gestural line' (68). As for the *Akira* creator, '[p]erhaps no Japanese creator better encapsulates the trend of international influence flowing through Japan in the 1980s than Katsuhiro Otomo' (201). Yet, what insights are to be gained from such observations if they do not proceed to illuminate the specific negotiations, domestications and stylistic fusions involved?

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   6 See the forthcoming volume edited by Casey Brienza: *Global Manga: Japanese Comics without Japan* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015).

The second factor is the inclination to assign too much influential power to American comics. Not only do many sentences begin with the words 'just as in the U.S.', categories stemming from American comics are also uninhibitedly conferred to other contexts. To give just one example: although for manga, content-based genres are not as important as gender- and age-specific ones, *Comics: A Global History* posits that *Kamui* and *Lone Wolf and Cub* belong to the 'historical action genre known as *jidaigeki*' (68) and Taku Tsumugi's *shōjo* manga *Hot Road* to the 'taboo romance genre' (205). It goes without saying that manga series often become subject to other generic classification upon crossing borders. Observing such shifts could trigger a greater awareness of one's unstated, naturalised cultural assumptions. Unfortunately, *Comics: A Global History* misses this opportunity.

A final word of caution is in order: the book's manga-related parts contain numerous linguistic inconsistencies (pertaining to both the Romanisation of Japanese words and the order of Japanese names) as well as plenty of incorrect historical information, especially with respect to female artists and genres. Hideko Mizuno's *Fire!* was not the first *shōjo* manga to feature a male protagonist (70), and Riyoko Ikeda's *Roses of Versailles* was not 'the first success of the Year 24 group' (73) – most Japanese critics do not even consider Ikeda part of that group. Similarly unreliable are blatant generalisations concerning, for example, 'higher-class audiences' (268). The sources that are cited here without proper referencing can easily be identified by manga researchers. But rather than taking issue with correct referencing, particularly since such matters are not always in authors' hands, manga researchers might self-critically note how few solid English-language accounts of manga are actually available so far and what remains to be done.

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Annessa Ann Babic, ed., *Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014). 272 pp. ISBN: 978-1-61147-556-2 (hardback, $85.00, £51.95)

This anthology is an intriguing and ambitious – perhaps overambitious – contribution to the ongoing disciplinary formation of comics studies in the academy with a series of essays on the role of comics