



# Of Comics

# and Men

A Cultural History of  
American Comic Books

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## Production

Like any cultural industry, the comic book industry rests on the complementarity between the creative end, the structures and processes that are articulated around writers and artists, and its opposition to the business end, the activities of publication and circulation that constitute the domain of publishers and publishing houses. The two sectors can never be considered separately: publishers employ creators and the prosperity of publishers depends on the competence of creators. This chapter evokes the practical conditions of the production of comic books.

Generally, the contents of comic books have been the fruit of collective labor. Examples of complete individual comics creations are in the minority and are found only in underground and alternative production, never in mainstream production. The norm for comic books originated with the fragmentation of the creative process, which considerably delayed the emergence of “authors” (in the literary sense of the term) and a star system of creators. In concrete terms, the majority of pages published in mainstream comic books have always originated with a collaboration between writer, artist, inker, letterer, and colorist, with each individual contribution requiring one or more interventions, if need be, from the editor under whose supervision the story was conceived. Historically, the first suppliers for publishers were the studios (*shops*, or more pejoratively, *sweatshops*) where pages were produced in mass quantity and literally in an assembly line to fill up the comic books.

### The Studios

Initially, comic books required little-to-no capital investment. The first publishers, such as Eastern Color and Dell, purchased the reprint rights for strips previously published in the newspapers from the syndicates at a small price (from five to ten dollars per page in the middle of the 1930s) and collected them without any thought to continuity or theme under a

cover drawn by a hack. Once printed, the pamphlet was ready to be sold. The recycling that characterized the first comic books explains why the very first publishers were often syndicates, such as United Features and King Features, who found in comic books an ideal opportunity to profit from their enormous stock of comics a second time. Thirty years before Marshall McLuhan announced his famous aphorism about the medium and the message in *Understanding Media*, comic books offered an excellent example.<sup>1</sup> The first original strips introduced into collected reprints risked being mistaken for the rest of the contents of the early comic books: drawn expressly for publication in pamphlets, they nevertheless presented themselves in the form of daily strips, with a recurring head title. When Sheldon Mayer, editor of *The Funnies* for Dell, introduced his character "Scribbly" in its second issue, he presented all the pages as Sunday panels because, at the time, the fact that a strip had previously appeared in a newspaper was perceived as an indicator of quality. Every strip presented in a different fashion would have been suspected of having been previously rejected.<sup>2</sup> Major Wheeler-Nicholson was the first to offer pamphlets exclusively made up of original strips for the simple reason that he did not want to spend the money to pay the reprint rights demanded by the syndicates. His National Allied Publishing company was not intended to be a large corporate entity, but stemmed from his personal desire to be a publisher, irrespective of what he published. The demand for comics existed: it remained to be seen how it could be satisfied.

The turning point was made in 1936. Coming from an advertising background, where he acquired a profound knowledge of the production of newspapers and periodicals, Harry "A" Chesler (1898–1981) opened the first art studio specifically intended to supply comic book publishers. Recruiting his employees through personal contacts and ads in the *New York Times*, he surrounded himself with artists such as Paul Gustavson, Gill Fox, Fred Schwab, Charles Biro, Creig Flessel, Fred Guardineer, Irv Novick, and Jack Cole, who were paid twenty dollars a week to produce four to five pages of comics. Chesler took up two frontline activities: he published titles under the publishing name Ultem (*Star Comics*, *Star Ranger*) and supplied ready-to-be-published strips for National Allied Publishing, Comics Magazine Company (its two primary clients), Centaur (starting in 1938), and MLJ (starting in 1939). It was in the Chesler studios that the principal MLJ superheroes were created: The Shield (conceived by Irv Novick), The Comet (Jack Cole), and Steel Stirling (Charles Biro). At the height of these activities after the war,

the studio employed almost forty artists whose strips were published in three hundred comic books. In fifteen years, Chesler provided comics for close to fifty different publishers, ranging from isolated stories to complete pamphlets ready to be printed. Chesler put an end to his publishing activities in 1947 and closed his studio in 1953.<sup>3</sup>

Before Chesler, the first studio to supply comics was Majestic Studios. From the start of the 1930s, under the direction of artist Adolphe Barreaux, it supplied covers and illustrations for the pulps on demand. The first Wheeler-Nicholson magazine contained two pages produced by this studio, which apparently stayed active until the start of the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> The first outline of a system of studios took shape at the beginning of 1936. John Henle, a shirt maker, decided to enter into comic book publication. He engaged Samuel M. "Jerry" Iger as an editor and charged him with recruiting artists to work on his comics magazine *Wow! What A Magazine*. Iger secured the services of two enthusiastic adolescents, Bob Kane and Will Eisner. In the fall of 1936, Henle ceased his publishing activities, throwing his studio into unemployment. Iger, who was aware of Chesler's new activities, quickly took advantage of the situation. By the end of the year, he opened a studio (located at Forty-first Street and Madison) with Eisner, whose primary task was the production of strips for export to Great Britain and Australia. At first, Eisner took on all the graphic responsibilities with the exception of the lettering (which was left to Iger). By the end of a year, the studio had fifteen employees. The first was Bob Kane (the future creator of Batman), followed soon after by the veteran illustrator Alex Blum, his daughter the writer Toni Blum, and the youngsters Lou Fine, Jack Kirby, Bob Powell, Joe Simon, Mort Meskin, and George Tuska. In addition to salaried employees, the enterprise employed independent collaborators paid by the page, like Klaus Nordling or André LeBlanc. In his autobiographical book *The Dreamer*, Eisner showed the workings of a studio of that era: sitting at one end of the room he supervised the work of a team that started with more or less developed scenarios, written by himself, Toni Blum, or Bob Powell, followed by pencils (that often elaborated on a layout prepared by Eisner), then the lettering, and finally the inking. As the studio prospered, new personnel were added to the initial team, including illustrators responsible for backgrounds and young assistants charged with the final preparation of the panels (erasing pencil marks and whitening out stray marks or traces).<sup>5</sup> The process stopped there since at that time, coloring took place during the printing stage.

In 1937, Iger was contacted by the pulp publisher Fiction House, who wanted to move into comics magazine publishing. Iger collected comic strips that had been produced the previous year to produce a magazine in tabloid format titled *Jumbo Comics*. Eisner-Iger thus became the second comic book studio to become profitable. In 1939, they supplied work to newly created publishing houses such as Quality and Fox. In the summer of 1940, when Eisner launched the *Spirit* section for the syndicate Register & Tribune, he separated from Iger and took with him several talented collaborators. Situated in the heart of the Tudor City complex, his studio employed Chuck Mazoujian, Nick Viscardi, and Klaus Nordling on *Lady Luck*; Bob Powell and Fred Guardineer on *Mr. Mystic*; Eisner himself and Charles Cuidera on *Blackhawk*; John Celardo and Lou Fine on *Uncle Sam*.<sup>6</sup> As many young artists were at risk of being called upon for military service during the war, Iger, as sole head of the studio, found a solution by engaging several female artists—Lilly Renée, Ruth Atkinson, Frances Hopper, Ann Brewster, Nina Albright and Marcia Snyder—who produced alongside their male colleagues numerous pages of “good girl art,” notably for Fiction House.<sup>7</sup>

The third big studio was that of Lloyd Jacquet, a former employee of Major Wheeler-Nicholson. After the Major had ceased his business activities, Jacquet found himself as an editor at Centaur, a publisher who had purchased the Comics Magazine Company and Ultem (the publishing house founded by Chesler when he launched his own studio). At the start of 1939, Jacquet convinced several freelance artists who worked for Centaur to join him in founding another publishing house. However, he never succeeded in rounding up the necessary funds and created in its place a studio, Funnies Inc., located on Forty-fifth Street. Among his collaborators were Carl Burgos, Bill Everett (as artistic director), Irwin Hasen, Jack Kirby, Harry Sahle, Joe Simon, and Ben Thompson. One of his first clients was Martin Goodman, a publisher of pulps, whom he persuaded to venture into comics magazine publication. From this decision *Marvel Comics* #1 (November 1939) emerged, starring the Human Torch drawn by Carl Burgos and Bill Everett’s Sub-Mariner, two characters that recalled, to various degrees, the identities that their creators had previously invented for Centaur. While Funnies Inc. worked for Goodman for a long time, they also created *Target Comics* for Novelty in 1940. The following year, the studio produced *True Comics* (on which John Daly, Harold DeLay, and Mike Roy worked) and in particular *Classic Comics* (illustrated by Malcolm Kildale, Allen Simon, and Louis Zansky, among others).<sup>8</sup>

An important part of published comic book pages came from the premises of Chesler, Eisner-Iger, and Funnies Inc. until the beginning of the 1950s. Their personnel was ever-changing—for example, Jack Kirby worked for Eisner-Iger from 1938 to 1940 before moving to Funnies Inc.—and the quality of the furnished drawings was uneven depending on the needs of the publisher. Martin Goodman withdrew *Mystic Comics* from Chesler after three issues, entrusting it to Funnies Inc. where the work was of higher quality. But when Funnies Inc. gave Gilberton’s *Classic Comics* to its less competent illustrators, Gilberton passed the job to Iger starting in 1945.

During the 1940s, small structures with short life spans also functioned alongside the three principal studios as the demand for pages to fill new comics magazines grew. One of the first of these was a studio existing from 1936 to 1942 run by artists Ed Kressy, Dick Sprang, and Norman Fallon. The studio arrangement allowed the three to be more productive than they could have been separately.<sup>9</sup> The Sangor studio, established simultaneously in New York and Los Angeles, had a productivity that probably rivaled that of the three leaders. Ben Sangor was a retired lawyer whose son-in-law Ned Pines published *Better Comics*. Between 1942 and 1948, Sangor supplied that line of comics as well as work to ACG and DC. Over 250 people worked for Sangor. Among the New Yorkers were Bob Oskner, Dan Gordon, Artie Saaf, John Celardo, Jack Katz, and Graham Ingels; the Californians were for the most part employees of animation studios that supplemented their wages by primarily drawing funny animals and humor pages.

Among the other smaller studios, we can highlight:

- the studio of Jack Binder. This veteran managing editor of the Chesler studio, who was a mediocre illustrator and a sensible business manager, directed a studio located in a barn next to his home in Englewood, New Jersey, from 1941 to 1943.<sup>10</sup> He employed over twenty-five artists to supply publishers as diverse as Fawcett, Street & Smith, Lev Gleason, and Prize. The general quality of the pages from the Binder studio ranged from average to deplorable, but on occasion they employed competent graphic designers like André LeBlanc, Mac Raboy, John Spranger, and the young Gil Kane;
- the studio of writer Emanuel Demby who, from 1941 to 1945, supplied Ace, DC, Fox, Gleason, and Quality, by employing a half-dozen personnel, which included Joe Kubert;

- the studio of Louis Ferstadt, himself a prolific artist who worked at Eisner-Iger and Funnies Inc., employed a dozen people (including L. B. Cole and Harvey Kurtzman<sup>11</sup>) and furnished Ace, Fox, Harvey, Hillman, and Holyoke from 1942 to 1945;
- Bernard Baily Studios: from 1943 to 1946, this Eisner-Iger veteran published his own titles (Baily Publ. Co.) and supplied the majority of pages for the Crestwood titles—his studio employed around forty artists of which there were future greats like Dan Barry, Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, and Frank Frazetta.

Beyond their production function, the studios played a crucial role in the comic book industry. They effectively filled a pedagogical role that allowed novices to learn their trade firsthand from experienced creators. At the same time, they favored the circulation of creators. Once cut off from their first studio, talented young individuals were either recruited by another studio or by a publisher looking for dependable collaborators. The studios experienced their golden age during the first fifteen years of the comic book industry, where the publishers privileged quantity to the detriment of quality. When sales numbers shifted at the beginning of the 1950s, the publishers had already started, over several years, to turn systematically to independent contractors, which gradually disengaged them from the contractual relations with the studios and which allowed them to exert stronger control over the quality of the finished product.

## The Era of Contracts

DC was the first publishing house to assure itself in the extended race to put creators under contract. The most celebrated examples were Jerry Siegel and Joseph Shuster, the creators of Superman, and Bob Kane, who appropriated the paternity of the Batman character by obscuring the role of writer Bill Finger in its creation. During the war, Jack Cole, a former employee at Chesler, was under contract with Quality Comics for Plastic Man, as was Will Eisner for *The Spirit*. This context was entirely different from the independent studio production, which privileged the anonymity of artists via the proliferation of pseudonyms, thereby giving the impression that a number of important artists created these stories, when in reality they were the result of a single set of hands. In these conditions, an

artist would really have to rise above the ordinary in hope of moving into the spotlight.

With the end of the independent studios in the mid-1950s, and the crisis of 1954–1955, freelancing became the norm and remained so until the 1960s, at which time the renewal of comic books coincided with the emergence of a growing community of fans who cared deeply about individual creators. Meanwhile, most publishers had several staff artists charged with ensuring the conformity of pages produced in a house style and, in the worst case, they could provide complete stories on demand if it was believed that artists would default on the job or be late with it. At Marvel, the house studio was known as “the Marvel Bullpen” constantly evoked by Stan Lee in his editorials. On the strength of one person (Sol Brodsky) at the start of the 1960s, the Bullpen progressively developed the publisher’s catalog. Few of its members, like Marie Severin and Herb Trimpe, acquired even a small notoriety in the 1970s (relative to overwhelming status accorded to personalities like Jack Kirby and Neal Adams).<sup>12</sup> When Marvel, and DC, began to systematically promote the names of the comic book writers and artists at the opening of each story, the preference expressed by readers for certain of them incited the publishers to bind creator services with contracts that made them employees of the company but which also guaranteed them better working conditions, even if they still did not hold any rights to their creations. In an era of struggle for civil and equal rights, this system made the comic book industry one of the most retrograde of publishing environments: independent of the quality of their work, creators saw themselves systematically wronged as they lost their rights once they changed employers. When Jack Kirby quit Marvel in 1970, he had no claim on any of the intellectual property that he had created, which included up to 80 percent of Marvel superheroes in the 1960s. Writer Steve Gerber experienced an analogous dispute at the end of the 1970s, when he could not come to an agreement with Marvel over the ownership of the character Howard the Duck.

This scandalous status quo reached the public forum in the fall of 1975, when the press revealed that the creators of Superman lived in poverty, now totally forgotten by the industry that they had helped make such a success. Writer Jerome Siegel and artist Joseph Shuster were both initially independent collaborators who, like their colleagues, were paid ten dollars a page. After the “Man of Steel” made his appearance in the DC catalog in the spring of 1938, Siegel always regretted having definitively ceded all rights to their character when they sold their first thirteen-page story for 130 dollars

(equivalent to approximately \$1600 today).<sup>13</sup> When the sales of *Action Comics* took off after the fourth issue, DC owners Harry Donenfeld and Jack Liebowitz understood that they had a gold mine on their hands and began negotiations with the McClure syndicate to launch a daily strip in its newspapers. After an article published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in June 1941, Siegel came to understand that he and Shuster would be entrusted with the daily strip, and that they would certainly partake in a share of the dividends that would be realized. In order to maintain the rhythm of production, they created a studio in their hometown of Cleveland and hired paid assistants using Shuster's wages (Wayne Boring, Paul Cassidy, John Sikela, Ed Dobrotka, Ira Yarbrough, and Leo Nowack). In 1940, the two creators obtained a revision of their contract that translated into an increase of 20 dollars per page and a 5 percent piece of all the profits realized thanks to the Superman character. That year, they earned \$75,000 between them. In 1941, the comic book brought them 35 dollars per page but the daily strip brought 600 dollars a week; shared between them, this sum represented weekly earnings of over \$350 each. In 1947, they each earned 800 dollars a week (about 6400 present-day dollars).<sup>14</sup>

Siegel and Shuster were, in fact, well paid, and they benefited from exceptional conditions in comparison with other writers and artists of the era. But, the 1941 *Saturday Evening Post* article demonstrated the dissatisfaction of both men (in reality Siegel) of not having profited more from the character that made DC wealthy. The dissatisfaction transformed into bitterness after the war when the writer became aware that the publisher would not follow his ideas regarding the evolution of the character Superboy. Despite the advice of their friend Bob Kane, the creator of Batman, who benefited from the same privileged situation vis-à-vis DC, and without taking account of the reticence of Shuster, who was now well accustomed to the quality of his lifestyle, Siegel contacted a lawyer to take legal action against the publisher. In April 1947, the two men took DC to court to obtain five million dollars and to recover the ownership of the rights to Superman and Superboy. The verdict was handed down in May 1948: the courts ruled that Superman belonged to the publisher, and the two men would receive one hundred thousand dollars in exchange for the definitive renunciation of all of their rights to the character of Superboy. Siegel and Shuster shut the door on DC and announced, with great fanfare, the launch of their new creation, a humor strip titled *Funnyman*, to be published by Magazine Enterprises. This title ended after only six issues. For its part, DC removed the

“Siegel and Shuster” signature from every Superman and Superboy story.<sup>15</sup> Thereafter, the two men followed different paths: Shuster ended his career as an artist as a result of his failing vision, while Siegel was responsible for the comic book branch of the large publisher Ziff-Davis, as well as freelance writing for numerous small enterprises who provided anonymous scripts to DC under the tyrannical editorial direction of Mort Weisinger from 1959 to 1966, and for other various small publishers up until the start of the 1970s.

In April 1969, Siegel and Shuster brought a new suit against DC, attempting to recover the ownership of Superman based on the fact that the original copyright on the character had expired after twenty-eight years, arguing that they alone could petition for its renewal. The case was dismissed at the end of a six-year trial, in April 1975. With both men living precariously and facing health problems, they gave up the right to appeal in exchange for the promise of compensation from DC. Siegel, who for years refused all contact with anyone remotely involved with comic books, accepted an invitation to be a guest of honor that summer at the San Diego Comic Convention. Several weeks after the event, where he received a seven-minute standing ovation from the attendees at the gala, he wrote an open letter to the press in which he reiterated his grievances with DC. That fall, Neal Adams, with the support of the National Cartoonist's Society, took up the cause and began a media struggle with DC. The campaign succeeded that December. The two creators were each paid an annual salary of twenty thousand dollars, a sum that would be reevaluated on an annual basis and that would be transmissible to their heirs.<sup>16</sup> As for DC, they transformed the confrontation into a public relations effort that boosted their own image once preproduction started on the *Superman* film that would be released three years later starring Christopher Reeve and Marlon Brando.

Marvel treated its creators with little more consideration. The publisher succeeded in partially suffocating the grumblings of its creators at the start of the 1970s, when editor Roy Thomas had instituted a policy of returning original artwork to the artists after publication.<sup>17</sup> In this period, where the market for original drawings was starting to develop, this practice constituted an important secondary source of income for those who resold the pages to fans at conventions or by correspondence. Meanwhile, this policy, which DC had not adopted, did nothing to alleviate the precarious status of creators working in comic books. It is why, during the 1970s, strong-willed individuals like James Steranko and Neal Adams left the world of comic books and moved into more lucrative fields that offered better working

conditions, such as book illustration and advertising. The problem of the recognition of a creator's intellectual ownership became acute at Marvel in 1974, when Stan Lee began to publish *Comix Book*, an underground magazine under the editorial direction of Denis Kitchen. Despite paying one hundred dollars per page, which was four times higher than the average rate in the undergrounds, numerous authors, led by Robert Crumb and Jay Lynch, categorically refused to work for a business that owned the material that they would produce for it. As the project had already been launched, negotiations continued and Marvel conceded not only to the return of originals back to their authors, but also renounced their copyright claims on published pages, except for limited reprint rights. *Comix Book* only ran three issues at Marvel. It was officially canceled due to poor sales, unofficially, according to Kitchen, because creators employed by Marvel were unhappy with the concessions made to the "hippies" and Lee was afraid of a revolt by the artists that supplied the bulk of his line.<sup>18</sup>

The crisis rumbled on to the end of the decade, due to both the frustration felt by many creators as well as the fall in sales which demonstrated the inability of the majority of publishers to assure an expansion of the market. What was needed was a rupturing of the process that had always dictated the production of comic books. The long-awaited revolution was the recognition by the publishers of the artist's right to benefit financially from derivative products beyond their salary. In November 1981, DC announced the institution of a new system of payment under whose terms creators received a percentage on the revenues of titles upon which they worked, once sales passed one hundred thousand copies. Though this plan was strongly criticized, since few DC titles reached these heights at the time, it nevertheless created a positive psychological effect for all of the concerned parties, since it put an end to over half a century of genuine exploitation of comic book creators and echoed the principles involved in the belated recognition of the creators of Superman. Two months later, Marvel instituted an almost identical royalty system so as not to risk a mass exodus of staff to DC. The granting of creator's rights represented an important expenditure for Marvel since the sales of their titles were much higher than those of their competitor.<sup>19</sup>

At Marvel, the royalty emerged in a context that had been entirely unheard of for creators: at the start of the year, a new contract was created whose terms stated that the rights to some published work would remain the property of their creators (*creator ownership*). It was hoped that this innovation would attract fan-favorite artists to launch their graphic novels

with the Epic label, supported by the framework of the blooming market of specialized bookstores.<sup>20</sup> In consenting to the possibility of producing comics whose rights stayed in the possession of creators, the large publishers aligned themselves with the practices that had defined the underground ten years earlier. This reversal acted as the inspiration for the creative renewal experienced by the mainstream publishers in the 1980s. Better paid and better treated, creators discovered the motivation to explore a mode of expression that they had never had the right to practice in their jobs, in the tradition of their predecessors working in the studios of the 1930s and 1940s. All of the independent publishers that entered the field at this time subsequently adopted a similar operation vis-à-vis their creators. In 1986, work-made-for-hire contracts were the norm only at DC and Marvel (excluding Epic), and several independents like Blackthorne, Comico, First, and Vortex. Other publishers systematically offered creator ownership contracts to creators who worked on characters or concepts that they had developed themselves.<sup>21</sup>

This newfound respect for creators directly influenced the publicity of publishers and, by extension, those of specialized bookstores, by emphasizing the relationship that linked creators and creations, and by recognizing the central position of the former in the status of the comic book as a cultural object. Whereas, over the decades, the industry had done nothing to conceal the logic that its production was geared to the simple generation of profit, the foregrounding of the creators coincided with, on the one hand, an increase in cover price that allowed for increased payments to contributors, and on the other hand, the presentation of comic book stories as products of a free, individual, and original creator. These changes can be found in the policy instituted at DC at the start of the 1980s (and by Marvel only in 1997) to state the names of the contributing writer, penciler, and inker on the cover of each pamphlet, and even in the appearance of titles presenting characters so idiosyncratic that they became indissociable with the name of their creator, including *Sergio Aragonés' Groo the Wanderer* (Epic, 1985–1995) and *Howard Chaykin's American Flagg!* (First, 1988–1989).

## Manufacture

Since the beginning of comic book storytelling in the second half of the 1930s, their manufacture rested on a strict division of work that can be seen as a form of Taylorism applied to comics. Schematically, the writing of

the script, penciling, inking, lettering and, if need be, coloring, are the five basic operations in the making of a comic book story. The essential stage can be situated between the first two of these operations: breaking down the story into pages and then into the panels which confer its rhythm and readability. This was traditionally the job for writers or pencilers. The reason for this division was that, given the fact that the graphic competencies of the team were unequally shared, it seemed logical to allow those with the most aesthetically pleasing pencil strokes to do the preliminary drawings (even in the case of hack work), and to leave the finishing strokes to those illustrators with less individual styles.

One of the *raison d'être* of the first comics studios was that they favored a division of labor that negated the personal identity of those who realized the work. For example, one of the obligations of artists in the early days of comic books was the presentation of pages showing three strips of three panels each. This standardized breakdown facilitated the purchase of the strip by a syndicate for publication in the daily press. Artists who possessed sufficiently recognizable styles were the only actors in the manufacturing process who could, if need be, avoid absorption into the undifferentiated final product produced by a studio. This logic could be found in the studios of the big publishers, though the difference was that they encouraged the individuality of creators that stood out from the pack. Beginning in the 1940s, the duo of Joe Simon (writer) and Jack Kirby (artist) were familiar to readers of the comics of Martin Goodman, as were the names C. C. Beck (creator of Captain Marvel at Fawcett), Will Eisner (creator of the Spirit), and Jack Cole (creator of Plastic Man for Quality). Auteur creations were extremely marginal. In any case, they gave way to productivity imperatives that rendered experimentation impossible and established a *de facto* hierarchy among the exceptional creators. If Beck, Eisner, and Cole produced work at high quality by working exclusively on a single title, Simon and Kirby, whose range was much wider and whose production was more voluminous, were, at the end of the day, the most competent of the hacks.

Nevertheless, until the beginning of the 1980s, the logic of individual creation did not exist in the universe of mainstream comic books. After the crisis of 1954, no one considered giving creators an outlet for personal self-expression, and creators themselves had internalized the limits of the studio style in the creative process. Major decisions related to comic book creation were made by the editors who decided which direction to orient the adventures of a particular character or the content of a particular title,

Script for *Justice League* #21  
"Crisis on Earth-One!"

**PAGE 2**

**Box 1.. CAPTION: In the secret sanctuary of the Justice League of America, its members meet in an emergency session...** Acting as chairman for the meeting is the famous crime fighter from GOTHAM CITY – BATMAN...

**Wonder Woman** Batman stands at the counsel table as other members sit.

**She holds a telegram in her hand.** All here but Snapper.

Batman **WW:** Fellow members, we are assembled here today because of a challenge  
A new team of  
**From/evildoers who call themselves ---- the Crime Champions!**

**Box 2.. Vignette face of Wonder Woman** Batman

Batman **WW:** Chronos – Felix Faust – and Doctor Alchemy have all alerted us to the fact that they intend to rob the PowersCity bank – a sunken ship – and a Safeway Blinks armored car. They say boast they will – rob – and will elude us/no matter what we do!

**Box 3.. J'onn J'onzz hammers a fist on table** – near Atom -- / as Flash looks at Superman while Green Arrow grins and Batman Green Lantern looks up at Wonder Woman.

**JJ:** Those characters never learn! Atom – let's you and I with Aquaman – team up to teach that occult magician / Felix Faust, a lesson!

**Flash:** Superman, Green Arrow and I will take on Doctor Alchemy and his PHILOSOPHER'S STONE!

**Batman:** Wonder Woman, you and Green Lantern and I will form the third group: deal with the TIME THIEF, CHRONOS!

**Box 4.. CAPTION: Picking up the gauntlet of battle hurled down by the master criminals, the champions of justice set out . . .**

Excerpt of a script by Gardner Fox for "Crisis on Earth-One!" published in *Justice League of America* #21 (August 1963), reproduced in *Capa-Alpha 2* (November 1964). The bold text corresponds to text typed by Fox; the underlined names appear in bold text in the drawn page. The erasures and the passages in plain font correspond to the manuscript corrections brought by editor Julius Schwartz. Note that Wonder Woman, president of the session in the original script by Fox, is replaced by Batman in the corrected version by Schwartz, probably for both commercial and sexist reasons: of the three big DC superheroes (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman), the Amazonian princess had the lesser sales. We can equally note the (infrequent) use of the term "box" to connote "panel."



and often functioning as “writer-in-chiefs” they demonstrated to their staff how the stories should be composed. At DC in particular, editors Julius Schwartz, Mort Weisinger, and Jack Schiff exerted a considerable influence on scripts from the 1940s to the 1960s, and they did not hesitate to completely change the work of their creators (which included, during this period, Bill Finger, Ed Herron, Gardner Fox, Otto Binder, Alvin Schwartz, and Jerry Siegel, among others) so that they conformed with the spirit of the specific series, but also with the spirit of the publisher itself. For example, traces of this working method survive in the corrections made by Julius Schwartz on the first page of the Gardner Fox script for *Justice League of America* #21. The importance of these editors in the creative process was so important that theirs were the first names to appear on the title pages of their comic books in 1959, while the names of the writers and artists only began to appear progressively over the course of the 1960s.<sup>22</sup> In this, their role recalled those of Hollywood producers that, until the war, were the real heads of cinematic creation, before directors were elevated to the status of legitimate “auteurs.”

Although this form of creation was an improvement in relation to the era of studios (who contented themselves with merely filling sixty-four pages per comic), the profit imperative was displaced after the war by the simple necessity of capturing the public. At the end of the 1950s at DC, Julius Schwartz designed the cover of the comics that he supervised so as to make it attractive before charging the writers and artists with the task of inventing a story that corresponded to it.<sup>23</sup> This practice inherited from the pulps demonstrated that the logic of individual creation had no place in comic books of the period.

### The “House” Style

Studio production permitted an expansion of the comic book industry because it enabled a permanent growth in supply upon which demand followed. In the meantime, certain publishers began to demonstrate a desire to exert greater creative control on the content of their comics and only turned to the studios to furnish *fillers*, gags or short stories that were destined to enrich the primary content of the comic book, which remained under the complete supervision of the publisher.

Starting in the 1940s, the most important publishers formed their own studios or secured the services of independent studios. From 1940 to 1948, Fiction House had its own studio that was largely consisted of veterans from Eisner-Iger, all the while continuing to buy pages at Iger. The studio of C. C. Beck and Pete Costanza produced the quasi-totality of Captain Marvel stories for Fawcett between 1942 and 1953, while Charles Biro and Bob Wood supplied comics to Lev Gleason between 1949 and 1952. As with independent studios, those studios attached to publishing houses sometimes simultaneously employed freelancers and salaried artists under contract. The “Marvel Bullpen” was an example of the second category. At the end of the 1940s, Martin Goodman employed a stable of salaried writers and artists, all of whom he laid off in 1951 to return to a freelance model when he decided to create his own distribution structure.<sup>24</sup> While the production logic remained the same, this system allowed publishers to economize by avoiding the costs associated with an external studio, and to create a “house” style that could eventually become an argument for sales. In this manner, in the era of horror comics, EC only employed its own writer-artists who happened to be the best in the business and assured the popularity of William Gaines’s company. Even if the stories that were published in the EC titles were sometimes uneven, their visual style was never slapdash. Studios in the original sense of the term disappeared in the 1950s but one of their functions was perpetuated under the form of creative and “pedagogical” interactions between artists, who knew and met with each other outside of the workplace (most often at their homes) and on occasion in their regular trips to the publishers’ offices for the delivery of their pages. There, the artists crossed paths, spoke with each other, looked over each other’s pages, and exchanged professional “tricks.” Mutual observation and technical exchange contributed to the maintenance of continuity between the styles practiced by each contributor working at the same publishing house, which was expressed in a subtle manner across the line of comics, with rare personalities defying all stylistic labeling and generating no identifiable heirs (such as Steve Ditko).

The “house” style performed a dual role: stylistic unity (whose representative example was the course given by John Buscema for future Marvel artists—*How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*) and, in a manner that was much more invisible, the self-regulation of content. By the end of the 1950s, these two aspects were supervised at the large publishers by the editors.

The artists under contract (staff artists) had among their attributes the requirement to bring to the pencils any desired modification (for example, the position of an arm or the placement of a dialogue balloon on a cover). From the 1970s to 1987, John Romita Sr. served in the position of art director at Marvel, which consisted of not only ensuring that pages delivered by the artists conformed to the house style (and making the necessary modifications when this was not the case), but also producing a basic sketch of hundreds of covers that were taken up by other artists (the same role that Carmine Infantino had played at DC in the second half of the 1960s). Throughout the eighties, it became more and more difficult to pinpoint a house style at the large publishers. The individualization of creators and the stylistic diversification that resulted made it harder to distinguish, with a glance, the comic book pages that belonged to Marvel or DC. On the other hand, several generic styles rose in popularity, deriving from the influence of manga, the Image artists, and the animated series of Bruce Timm (the latter style developed more so at DC than at Marvel).

## The Marvel Method

Contrary to what Stan Lee has always affirmed, what is referred to as the *Marvel method* was less an authentic innovation than an interesting case of a systematic adaptation of a market production method. In effect, the creative process that Lee installed in collaboration with Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko at the start of the 1960s constituted a variant of the traditional production method from the 1930s, in which the artists would receive a detailed breakdown from the writers that required them to do little other than draw pages according to the instructions provided pertaining to page layout and framing.

Stan Lee has always forwarded the belief that he had invented this method of work but Eisner had already been practicing it in his studio at the end of the 1930s and it is well known that numerous artists knew how to put together stories based on a minimal outline. Lee merits the sole claim of systematizing a production chain where the synopsis is transmitted directly to the artist, without being transformed into a full script, which was an inversion of the method that had always been practiced at the large publishers like DC and Fawcett.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the writer provided the artist a plot where only the principal aspects of the story were established (there have

### Plot Synopsis for *Fantastic Four* #8 "Prisoners of the Puppet Master"

(5 pages): Thing enters headquarters. Mr. F working on something in lab which he doesn't want Thing to see – tells Torch to keep Thing out. Torch tosses up wall of flame between them. Thing gets angry – feels they are keeping secrets from him. Says he's thru – storms out. I.G. runs after him – to cool him off. Becomes invisible so as not to attract attention to herself in her uniform – people stare at invisible gal talking to Thing. They suddenly see a guy about to jump off a bridge. I.G. shoots flare over guy's head. Mr. F sees it – tries to reach out of window to grab guy – too far to reach – Torch flies toward guy and saves him. Guy is in a daze – doesn't know why he did it – is a congressman. Across town the villain has observed what happened thru binoculars – angry – FF frustrated him. He has a small model of bridge and small puppet of him. Now Puppet Master will make puppets of FF and destroy them! He has blind daughter – pretty. (He plans to demonstrate his powers to the world, and then sell his services to nation which is the highest bidder).

(5 pages): Puppet Master figures easiest thing to do is to let FF destroy themselves – he makes only one puppet – the Thing. He will let the Thing who is strongest destroy the others. He moves puppet to a model of his own apartment so that Thing will come to him. In street, Thing suddenly gets into a daze, and heads for Puppet Master's apt., followed by I.G. Thing, under PM's spell, reveals I.G.'s presence, some interesting scenes showing how PM captures her, and he finally succeeds, helped by blind daughter who can sense things unseen. PM commands Thing to return and slay Mr. F and Torch – he also tells his daughter to go WITH Thing, dressed in I.G.'s costume, to throw them off-guard. Then, PM makes puppet of warden of state prison – gonna get him to realize [sic] all of the hundreds of dangerous prisoners, to prove his power. I.G. strains to escape bonds and stop him.

(3 pages): Thing enters FF headquarters with Blind gal. Starts to fight Mr. F – knocks out Torch before Torch can burst into flame. Mr. F runs into lab – thing follows – gets exposed to artificial rays – becomes human – but only for as long as he is under rays – Mr. F tells him the rays are what he was working on earlier – to make Thing human – but didn't want Thing to know until they were perfected – because didn't want Thing to be disappointed. Not perfected yet – still has to find a way to make results more lasting. Blind gal can't understand – tells Thing she thinks he is handsome – his voice – his character – etc. – while in human form the Puppet Master's spell is broken – he is now ashamed of himself. Mr. F realizes blind gal is not I.G. – wonders where I.G. is – we switch to Puppet Master – he has opened prison gates (thru control of warden) and now is making a doll to finish off I.G. ...

Excerpt of a synopsis from Stan Lee for the first thirteen pages of "Prisoner of the Puppet-Master!" published in *Fantastic Four* #8 (November 1962), reproduced in *Capa-Alpha* #2 (November 1964): n.b. Abbreviations: Mr. F = Mister Fantastic; I.G. = Invisible Girl. A comparison with the final published version allows one take note details that were added (for example p. 5, the Puppet Master burns himself when he touches the figurine that represents the man the Human Torch has just saved), suppressed (in the published story, it is not clear that the man about to jump off the bridge is a member of Congress) or modified (p. 12, it is a liquid and not a ray that renders the Thing into human form) which testifies to the contributions of artist Jack Kirby.

been numerous testimonies that confirm that, beginning in the mid-1960s, Lee's plot constructions consisted only of several sentences, sometimes simply given over the telephone). It was thus up to the artist alone to create the breakdown of the story, which eventually produced a rhythm and a more harmonious narration than one that might have been imposed upon them. Once the drawings were completed, they were returned Lee who would write the dialogue accompanying the breakdown established by the artist.<sup>26</sup> Comparing the synopsis of the first pages of *Fantastic Four* #8 with the script for *Justice League of America*, we can note the fundamental difference between the "literary" narrative conception that was dominant at DC and Lee's conception where the progression of the story was driven by different considerations.

In this work structure, the visual dimension of the story was the domain of the artist, and the writer supplied only the initial idea and the dialogue. It was the antithesis of the method used at EC in the 1950s. William Gaines and Al Feldstein developed a process in which pages were broken down to the degree the panels were already set in place for the writer to conceive the story and place the dialogue. These were given to a letterer who would retranscribe the text by determining its placement within the captions. The artists would then receive the pages where they would have to fill the remaining empty spaces in each panel. This highly rationalized method resulted in pages that were pleasant to read but whose visual inventiveness was limited to framing and points-of-view (which was actually not too bad if we compare the EC comics with those of their competitors). Although it was extremely constraining, this method was supported by all the EC artists, with the exception of Bernie Krigstein. Starting with the pages that he was supplied, Krigstein often submitted pages to Gaines in which, out of concern for the narrative, he inserted two or three panels where there had previously only been one, and he was always reticent to accept the breakdowns prepared for him by Harvey Kurtzman or Al Feldstein. His masterpiece was the story "Master Race," published in the first issue of *Impact* at the start of 1955. By means of an extremely syncopated breakdown, Krigstein expressed a dramatic intensity rarely attained in comics by contrasting a subway trip and a traveler's memories of deportation, in which the reader came to realize that the narrator was, in fact, the head of the concentration camp whose actions haunted him throughout the story. Working with razors and masking tape over a month's time, Krigstein staged a radical reassembly of the story expanded it from six to eight pages (Krigstein wanted twelve), to the

great displeasure of his editor Al Feldstein who saw his publication planning upended and who finally published the story almost one year later in another title than the one for which it was initially slotted.<sup>27</sup>

The EC method curbed the inventiveness of its artists to a certain measure but it also produced convincing results. The Marvel method favored a freer expression for its artists, which only benefited the truly exceptional ones (such as those cited previously), and allowed for a more flexible use of narrative possibilities in comics. In the meantime, the Marvel method originated comical situations such as the epic combat sequences during which the protagonists provided extended rants, necessitated by the demands of a script for which the artist only knew the general framework. Although Stan Lee had always claimed that he was the creative force behind the characters that he created with Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, we now know with a quasi-certitude that the role Lee played in the Marvel comics published during the 1960s was of lesser importance than what he claimed, even on those titles where he himself was the writer.<sup>28</sup> One of the many legends in the comic book field is that the instructions that Lee gave to Jack Kirby to produce *Fantastic Four* #48 (March 1966), which featured the first appearance of the planet devouring Galactus and his herald the Silver Surfer, contained the terse phrase "Have them fight God!" Though this anecdote may well be apocryphal (neither Lee nor Kirby have ever clearly offered a refutation), the final result was that Galactus was cocreated by both men after a certain fashion, whereas the Silver Surfer was inserted into the story by Kirby without prior discussion with Lee. Beyond the contentious hindsight that surrounds the "real" paternity of a particular character, the Marvel method contributes to the emergence of creative teams where, by an alchemy that is difficult to define, an artist and a writer complemented each other in an exceptional manner (the *Silver Surfer* series drawn by John Buscema based on text by Stan Lee between 1968 and 1970 comes to mind) just as tandems that were much more short-lived were likely to produce average stories. Paradoxically, the less colorful characters always offered better support for the waltz of a creative team. Similarly, this "alchemic" rapport was not an illusion for the observance of the long-term evolution of titles or for the creators themselves. Even the staunchest defenders of Jack Kirby recognize that the stories that he produced for DC at the start of the 1970s after his departure from Marvel were inferior compared to his past collaborations with Stan Lee.

The freedom to assemble pages was not the factor that decisively determined the quality of a comic. Another much more mundane element was

the time given to artists to produce twenty, forty, even sixty pages a month. The production rhythm imposed on creators compromised the research necessary for innovation. Moreover, innovation was not seen as a good thing from the point of view of the large publishers. A strip that was too "original" was, in effect, always at risk being rejected by a readership that was looking for standardized products, continually searching for the same stimuli and the same stories. Similarly, though the Marvel method had participated in the rising prominence of the artist by allowing them to interpret the stories that they were assigned and by allowing a diversification of the comic book page over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, it favored a process of writing and drawing that did not allow for a genuine freedom of creation within the confines of the large publishers.

A final factor, that was largely if not totally invisible for readers of the second half of the 1960s, was the change in the size of original comic book art. Nowadays, artists working for the large publishers have to produce on average more pages in a given time frame than during the 1930s, for a purely "mechanical" reason: starting in 1966, DC then Marvel required their creators to work on pages where the drawings occupied approximately a rectangle of 10 by 15 inches instead of the 13 by 18 inches that constituted the minimum format (called *twice-up*) on which they had worked since the 1940s. The man responsible for this change was the illustrator-inker Murphy Anderson who had noted, at the time when he drew the daily strip *Buck Rogers*, that a reduction in size allowed for much faster inking. At a time when DC was searching for any possible avenue to raise their sales compared to Marvel, Anderson offered to draw two stories on smaller pages. When he found that the reduction in format allowed for plates of four pages instead of two, DC ordered all of its contributors to adopt the new method and Marvel did the same in the months that followed. The economy realized by the publishers was situated at several levels: on the cost of plates, but especially on the expected speed of the artists. Thus, while the inkers saw that their work was lightened, the work of the letterers became more complicated, given that they had to adjust to smaller printing. It was on the pencilers where the impact was most clearly felt. The change in format delighted someone like Joe Kubert, whose naturally sketchy strokes were greatly accommodated by the reduced size, but was not favored by those, like Gil Kane or Mike Sekowsky, who practiced visual styles that were closer to illustration traditions and paid great attention to details and forms.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the

reduction of the work's size contributed to the aesthetic distance between the "clean" graphic style preferred by DC since the 1950s (Infantino, Kane, Anderson, Swan) and that of the more "spontaneous" style that characterized Marvel since 1960 (Kirby, Heck, Ditko).

### "Fun in four colors"

The last step in the creative process of comic book production (and those that were charged with making them) is rarely discussed: it consists of coloring and the work of colorists. The first periodical comic book, *Famous Funnies*, originally contained reprints of Sunday pages that anticipated the four-color printing process. The latter process was absent from the first pamphlets offering original stories, though it progressively became widespread. Up until 1937–1938, there were many kinds of comic books: black-and-white, two-color, four-color, sometimes these were juxtaposed within the same pamphlet (for example, the first issue of *Action Comics* contained fifty-two color pages and twelve black-and-white pages). In effect, this posed new technical problems: comic books were printed on the same presses as those that produced the supplements for newspapers, but the addition of color affected a greater number of pages (sixty-four instead of twenty) of a format twice as small as that of a newspaper.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of the 1930s, every comic book was in color but the four-color printing process was a strong seller. In 1939, Dell launched a series simply titled *Four Color* in which each issue presented the story of a different character. And what a quantity of colors! Where there had only been one Sunday supplement a week (or two in the case of the large cities), several comic books would appear each week. Starting in the 1940s, *four-color* became (along with *comic* and *funny*) the most used adjective in the newspapers to allude to the contents of a comic book pamphlet. In the decade following the war, during the opinion campaign against comic books, expressions such as "four-color nightmares" flourished to qualify comic book magazines. Before the systematization of color photography, color cinema, color television and video, comics were the privileged space for stories whose appeal could be found in the use of color.

In effect, the division of labor involved in the manufacture of comic books led to an expansion of colorists. In contrast to the daily strip artists, who made the decisions about color in their strips, comic book artists

delegated the entire chromatic responsibility to colorists who were attached to the publishing house or to the printing studio that prepared the magazines for printing. Colorists worked on copies of pages reduced to publication format (*silver prints*) which allowed them to test the most appropriate chromatic combinations before they were realized in the four-color separation (blue, red, yellow, black) from which the process took its name.

Coloring was, in practice, the last step in the production of the work (after inking and lettering) and, since the origin of comic books, the work of colorists (who were often also color separators) belied a competence that was technical as well as narrative. A good example is that of the cover of *Action Comics* #1, the first appearance of Superman. It was the colorist Ed Eisenberg who, at the last minute, chose the color green for the car held up by Superman, instead of the red that was initially chosen and that would have reduced the impact of the character's cape.<sup>31</sup> This rule has never changed: with characters such as superheroes, whose costumes rely on established color schemes, the protagonists have to be colored first (which posed problems when the artists, who worked in black-and-white, placed them beside characters who wore identical colors) and the rest of the panel afterward. The exercise was not always simple since color changes in the decor serve to accentuate distinctions between locations (for example, when there is a passage from one place to another<sup>32</sup>) and an inexperienced colorist risked dulling the visual dimension of the narration if he or she did not correctly construct the contrast of colors between panels.

Anthony Tollin, a colorist at DC, defined his function in the following terms: "In comic books, coloring must focus attention on what is most important in a given panel, in a given page, in a given story. The accent should be placed where it is suited, where, with a little luck, the writer and artist have placed it."<sup>33</sup> It is this ability which gave colors the ability to enhance pages that were narratively mediocre in black-and-white.<sup>34</sup> For Bob Sharen, who worked for a long time at Marvel, the work of a colorist rested on two principles, contrast and clarity.<sup>35</sup> Thanks to the limitations of the reproduction process of comic books, the juxtaposition of colors close to each other was avoided (they could become indistinguishable during printing) else it would have led to very somber hues (thereby producing lifeless images). In practice, the printing methods used to manufacture comic books from the 1930s to the 1980s made coloring the poor parent of reproduction. At the time, the Big Two had each developed their own chromatic style—a washed-out palette for DC that contrasted with the overabundance

of primary colors at Marvel<sup>36</sup>—but coloring was never a commercial argument for them (in contrast to the quality of paper and printing, which was foregrounded at the start of the 1980s for the titles destined exclusively for direct market distribution).

The role played by color in the development of comics was undeniable from a cultural point of view in the first half of the twentieth century, until the cinema, followed by television, became the most immediate sources of color and more important than the pages of illustrated magazines. Laser-based coloring techniques that were introduced in the 1990s have considerably improved the chromatic rendering of comic pages: after fifty years of technological stagnation, during which colorists had access to a maximum of sixty-four colors, they now had at their disposal several million shades. While coloring played a considerable role in the narration of comics, it remains underestimated largely because of the stigma that constitutes the visual style attached to color in comics over several decades, resulting in a technology that privileged the quantity of copies over the quality of reproduction. The position of colorists at the crossroad between artisan and technician, located at the end of the comic book production line, places them behind "creators" (writers and artists) and excludes them, for the majority of fans, from the star system of comic books.

8. "Comic Shop Busted," *The Comics Journal* #114 (February 1987), 13–15. See also the articles dedicated to this affair in the following issues of *The Comics Journal*: 116, 117, 118, 120, 122, 126, and the article on its conclusion: Greg S. Baisden, "Friendly Frank's Wins on Appeal," *The Comics Journal* #133 (December 1989), 13–15.

9. The first prominent case in Canada was the seizure of 192 comic books at the "Comics Legends" store in Calgary, Alberta, on September 22, 1987. The owner, the manager, and the employees of the store were accused of selling obscene material. See also "Canadian Comic Shop Busted," *The Comics Journal* #118 (December 1987), 131–134.

10. "Mature' Comics Fall into an Unfavorable Media Spotlight," *The Comics Journal* #119 (January 1988), 9–11; "Violent Comics Draw Unfavorable Media Spotlight," *The Comics Journal* #130 (July 1989), 5–10.

11. For a presentation of the CBDLF's actions and its fights for the free expression of comic book creators, see Bob Shrek and Jamie S. Rich (eds.), *Free Speeches* (Oni Press, 1988).

12. Georgia Dullea, "Holy Bomb Blast! The Real Robin Fights On!," *New York Times* November 10, 1988, C23.

13. Gary Groth, "Black and White and Dead All Over," *The Comics Journal* #116 (July 1987), 8–12.

14. Harvey Pekar, *American Splendor: The Life and Times of Harvey Pekar* (Doubleday, 1986); *More American Splendor: the Life and Times of Harvey Pekar* (Doubleday, 1987). Pekar first appeared on *Late Night with David Letterman* on October 15, 1986; he recounted his experiences with Letterman in *American Splendor* as well as in several articles: "Me 'n' Dave Letterman," *Cleveland Plain Dealer* #1 (February 1987), 1; "Late Night of the Soul with David Letterman," *Village Voice* #25 (August 1987), 45–46; "Getting Dave's Goat," *Cleveland Edition* #22, September 1988, 1+; these television appearances were accounted for among the bravura set pieces in the film *American Splendor* (2003). Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner, and Frank Stack, *Our Cancer Year* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1994).

## Chapter 9

1. Calvin Reid, "Picture This," *Publishers Weekly*, October 12, 1990, 17–23.

2. "Maus receives wave of publicity; first printing sells out," *The Comics Journal* #112 (October 1986), 14

3. Dirk Deppey, "Memo from Hibbs, postscript," *The Comics Journal: Journalista!* Monday, October 27, 2003 (supplement), <http://www.tcj.com/journalista/zarch200310Db.html> (March 14, 2004).

4. On "bad girl art," see Trina Robbins, *The Great Women Superheroes* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1996), 166–169.

5. Harry F. Waters, "Another Kind of Superhero," *Newsweek*, August 16, 1993, 52–53. For a profound study of the reception of the Milestone titles, see Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and their Fans* (University of Mississippi Press, 2001).

6. Several films taken from comic books that were not particularly remarkable in their publishing career experienced variable levels of success: they came from the catalogs of Dark Horse (*Timecop* and *The Mask*, 1994; *Barb Wire*, 1996; *Mystery Men*, 1999), Aircel (*Men in Black*, 1997), Image (*Bulletproof Monk*, 2003), and DC (no less than three Batman films

during the decade). On the other hand, several enormous best sellers gave way to diversely received films: *Spawn* (1997) from the title by Todd McFarlane, *Hellboy* (2004) taken from the Mike Mignola title and the unconvincing Alan Moore adaptations of *From Hell* (2001) and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003). After the failures of the direct-to-video films *The Punisher* (1989) and *Captain America* (1991), Marvel played a better hand with its cards resulting in several successes: *Blade* (2000), starring a secondary character from the 1970s series *The Tomb of Dracula*, *X-Men* (2000), and *Spider-Man* (2002) all begat sequels, even though their success did not parlay in 2003 for *Daredevil* and *Hulk* despite considerable publicity hype.

7. On the Batman animated series, see Paul Dini and Chip Kidd, *Batman Animated* (HarperEntertainment, 1998). On Darwyn Cooke, see "Darwyn Cooke's New Frontiers," *Comic Book Artist* #2.3 (March 2004), 34–43, 84–103.

8. As he had promised at the start of the 1980s, Sim saw *Cerebus* through to its three-hundredth issue and six-thousandth page in March 2004, completing a creative and publishing adventure that saw a comic book originally pastiching the stories of "Conan the Barbarian" grow toward a dimension of greater metaphysical reflection, transforming itself over time into a forum that allowed Sim to express his ideas (which would alienate him over the long term with a large part of his original readers and the quasi-totality of the comics community) about subjects as diverse as the philosophy of self-publishing, the illegitimacy of feminism, the decadence of Canadian political life, and finally, his discovery of God in a syncretic faith that mixed Protestant fundamentalism with Islam. At the same time, *Cerebus* was a space of permanent formal research that saw its creator move further and further away from the conventions of graphic narration.

9. Gary Groth, "Confessions of a Smut Peddler," *The Comics Journal* #143 (July 1991), 5–7.

10. Samuel Bréan, "Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth: A Hall of Mirrors" (English master's thesis, Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3, 2001).

11. For a list of Anglophone Canadian comics creators, see Kirsten Andersen, *Contemporary Canadian Comics and Graphic Novels in English*, <http://www.yourlibrary.ca/CanadianComics.pdf> (May 3, 2004).

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1. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Sphere Books, 1964).

2. Ron Goulart, *Great History of Comic Books* (Contemporary Books, 1986), 23.

3. Emma Mai Ewing, "The 'Funnies' Can Be Serious," *New York Times*, September 12, 1976, K16; Ron Goulart, "Golden Age Sweatshops," *The Comics Journal* #249 (December 2002), 71–72; "Joe Kubert. An Interview with Gary Groth," *The Comics Journal* #172 (November 1994), 62–63; Jon Berk, "Harry 'A' Chesler, Jr.: Comic Book Entrepreneur," *Comic Book Marketplace* #91 (May 2002), 40–54. Chesler donated his archives to Fairleigh Dickinson University, situated in Rutherford, New Jersey; they were subsequently transferred to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

4. Will Murray, "DC's Tangled Roots," *Comic Book Marketplace* #53 (November 1997), 59–60.

5. Will Eisner, *The Dreamer* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1986), 21. See also R. C. Harvey, "Interview with Will Eisner," *The Comics Journal* #249 (December 2002), 65–66.

6. Harvey, "Interview with Will Eisner," 62–69; Goulart, "Golden Age Sweatshops," 73–74, 77.
7. Steve Duin and Mike Richardson, *Comics Between the Panels* (Dark Horse, 1998), 168.
8. Goulart, "Golden Age Sweatshops," 74–76.
9. Goulart, "Golden Age Sweatshops," 18.
10. P. C. Hamerlinck, "The Jack Binder Shop Days. An Interview with Nat Champlin," *Alter Ego* #3.3 (Winter 2000); "Captain Marvel Section," 38–41.
11. John Benson, "An Introduction by John Benson," *Hey Look! Cartoons by Mad Creator Harvey Kurtzman* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1992), 6.
12. A remarkable testimony on the ambience that reigned in the Marvel Offices at the start of the 1970s is Robin Green's article "Face Front! Clap Your Hands, You're on the Winning Team!", *Rolling Stone* I, 91 (September 16, 1971).
13. On the back of the check that they received for their work is a mention of the contractual terms in which they renounced all future rights to the finished work; it was impossible to endorse the check without signing the contract. This practice remained unchanged until recent times with publishers employing freelancers under the regime of commission contract. William Gaines, the owner of *Mad*, himself appended a stamp on the back of all his checks that carried text that imposed similar condition to his collaborators: see Frank Jacobs, *The Mad World of William M. Gaines* (Lyle Stuart, 1972), 36.
14. John Kobler, "Up, Up and Awa-a-y! The Rise of Superman, Inc.," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 21, 1941, 73–76; reproduced in facsimile in *San Diego Comic-Con Souvenir Programme*, 1988, 63–68. Will Murray, "Epitaph for Robert Kahn," *Comic Book Marketplace* #65 (December 1998), 52.
15. Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History* (DC, 1998), 70–73.
16. Mary Breasted, "Superman's Creators, Nearly Destitute, Invoke His Spirit," *New York Times*, November 22, 1975, 31; David Vidal, "Mild-Mannered Cartoonists Go to Aid of Superman's Creators," *New York Times*, December 10, 1975, 51; "Superman's Creators Get Lifetime Pay," *New York Times*, December 24, 1975, 25. See also the obituaries of Siegel and Shuster written by Michael Catron in *The Comics Journal*: "Joe Shuster . . . Forever Up, Up and Away," *The Comics Journal* #153 (October 1992), 20–24; "Superman Creator Jerry Siegel Dies at 81," *The Comics Journal* #184 (February 1996), 25–39.
17. "Marvel Writers Lose Claim to Original Artwork," *The Comics Journal* #60 (November 1980), 13.
18. "Comic Book: A Marvel Oddity," *Comic Book Artist* #7 (March 2000), 102–108; Jordan Rapheal and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book* (Chicago Review Press, 2003), 142–145.
19. "Marvel Announces Royalty Program," *The Comics Journal* #70 (January 1982), 10–11; "Marvel Offers Own Royalty Plan," *Comics Scene* #3 (May 1982), 10.
20. Robert Greenberger, "Marvel Introduces New Contracts," *Comics Scene* #2 (March 1982), 18.
21. Kim Fryer, "Comics Contracts: What the Various Companies Offer," *The Comics Journal* #113 (December 1986), 19–23.
22. Julius Schwartz, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics* (HarperEntertainment, 2000), 113–114.
23. Gerard Jones and Will Jacobs, *The Comic Book Heroes* (Prima, 1997), 22.

24. Les Daniels, *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* (Abrams, 1991), 68.
25. For a description of the intangible work method practiced at Fawcett, see P. C. Hamerlinck, "Fond Memories. Former Fawcett Comic Book Editor Virginia A. ('Ginny') Provisiero," *Fawcett Companion*, ed. P. C. Hamerlinck (TwoMorrrows, 2001), 65–67.
26. Harvey, "Interview with Will Eisner," 66. The method is described in detail with supporting illustrations in Daniels, *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics*, 226–231.
27. Greg Sadowski, *B. Krigstein Vol. One (1919–1955)*, (Fantagraphics, 2002), 177–179.
28. For an interpretation of the origins of Spider-Man according to Steve Ditko, see his essay "An Insider's Part of Comics History: Jack Kirby's Spider-Man," *Alter Ego* #2.3 (Winter 1999), 4–7.
29. R. C. Harvey, *The Life and Times of Murphy Anderson* (TwoMorrrows, 2003), 88–91.
30. Steve Ringgenberg, "Sol Harrison: 'The King of Color,'" *The Comics Journal* #169 (July 1994), 111–112.
31. Roger Hill, "Silver Print Rediscovered!", *Comic Book Marketplace* #25 (July 1995), 79; Pat Calhoun, "Producing Superman: Ed Eisenberg," *Comic Book Marketplace* #33 (March 1996), 31.
32. D. A. Kraft, "Anthony Tollin," *Comics Interview* #10 (April 1984), 45.
33. *Ibid.*, 47.
34. Steve Ringgenberg, "Steve Ringgenberg interviews Marie Severin," *Psychoanalysis*, boxed set "The Complete EC Library: Piracy, Aces High, Psychoanalysis, Extra!" (Russ Cochran, 1988), n.p.; Kraft, "Anthony Tollin," 45.
35. Brian Tulley, "Bob Sharen," *Comics Interview* #6 (August 1983), 37.
36. D. A. Kraft, "Steve Oliff," *Comics Interview* #1 (February 1983), 49.

## Chapter 11

1. Ron Goulart, "This is a job for adman," *Comics Buyer's Guide* #6 (October 1989), 50.
2. On the comic book ads published between the 1940s and 50s, see Miles Beller and Jerry Leibowitz, *Hey Skinny! Great Advertisements from the Golden Age of Comics* (Chronicle Books, 1995).
3. For example: *Demon* #2 (October 1972) contained one page for DC and ten pages for advertisers; *Stalker* #4 (December 1975), four pages for DC and twelve pages for advertisers.
4. Advertisements of this type of intermediary sales organization, which initiated children to consumption in the fashion of Amway or Tupperware, already appeared in the comic books of the 1930s. Harvey Kurtzman created the first parody on the cover of *Mad* #21 (EC, March 1955), and Chris Ware has also pastiched this tendency in abundance in *The Acme Novelty Library* (Fantagraphics).
5. Robert L. Beerbohm, "Secret Origins of the Direct Market. Part One: 'Affadavit Returns'—The Scourge of Distribution," *Comic Book Artist* #6 (Fall 1999), 84.
6. During the 1970s, Marvel produced, for the Hostess cream-filled cakes, a series of publicity pages that parodied its popular series. Captain America, Captain Marvel, and Iron Man, among others, led the promotion of these pastries.