



Of Comics

and Men

A Cultural History of
American Comic Books

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2010

Calls for Censorship

By placing comic books at the crossroads of the public and political spheres, calls for censorship recast the mass cultural production in a new legal light. The primary issue raised by such occurrences is the legitimacy of the First Amendment, which affirms the inalienable right of freedom of speech for all citizens of the United States. Second is the freedom of individuals to obtain and consume cultural products whose contents appear to be at odds with the dominant morality. In both cases, because of their low cultural status, comic books were cast as scapegoats for social dysfunctions whose actual gravity far exceeded the legal debates to which self-proclaimed censors attempted to confine them.

There have been two main phases in the history of comic book censorship efforts, which were fairly distinct in scope and magnitude. The first one took place from the 1930s to the 1950s, and it peaked in the decade following the Second World War, when comics magazines were at the forefront of many public debates. The second phase began in the second half of the 1980s, as cases of police harassment of comic book specialty shops accused of distributing obscene and pornographic material multiplied. Between these two periods there were various skirmishes, the most notable of which was, at the end of the 1960s, the obscenity trial concerning two New York bookstores that carried *Zap Comix* #4. Although the magazines covering the industry and the ambient discourse of fans and professionals constantly reiterate anecdotes confirming the perpetuation of censorious practices against comic books, a detailed analysis of the parallel evolutions of both public attitudes and mass cultural products challenges this point of view in the contemporary period.

The argument that comic books are promoters of social and intellectual backwardness arose shortly after the appearance of the first comic magazines. At the same time, it echoed previous condemnations of newspaper comic strips.¹ The first critic of comic books was Sterling North, a children's book author and literary critic for the *Chicago Daily News*. In an editorial published on May 8, 1940, he castigated comic books as a "national

disgrace" and "nightmares on bad paper."² North preached against the proliferation of these magazines in the name of literature, but this justification quickly became only one of several anti-comics arguments. In the January 1941 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Lovell Thompson scathingly predicted the advent of a generation that was prepared, thanks to comics books, for an apocalyptic future³ of the type envisioned by many Americans prior to their engagement in the Second World War. In the aftermath of the war, the debate took on quasi-mystic tones: in October 1945, an article published in the *Arizona Quarterly* denounced Superman and Wonder Woman as vehicles for fascist and pagan ideology, which glorified force in ways similar to the Nazi regime.⁴

The Hysteria of 1948-1950

The first phase of the postwar campaign against comic books peaked in 1948. It was organized around several axes. The first was the disproportionate media attention paid to isolated cases of juvenile delinquency, in which the young actors appeared to be inspired by depictions of crimes found in comics magazines. The second was the increasing media fascination with Dr. Fredric Wertham. Since 1947 this progressive psychiatrist, devoted to the protection of children, had launched an informal campaign against comic books, which had become a personal crusade. His interpretation of the comic book issue was diametrically opposed to that of the Child Study Association of America. Since the Second World War, the CSA had publicly minimized the "problem" of comic books, recalling on several occasions that the impact of cartoon magazines on juvenile delinquency was negligible, and that comics were crucial for the psychological development of children, because they enabled children to discover the differences between good and evil. Conversely, Wertham's discourse was monocausal, obsessive, and populist. He pointed out that the experts who worked hardest to demonstrate the harmlessness of comic books were employed by various publishers to act as moral and scientific supporters. He postulated that comic books could push *all* of their readers toward delinquency and that, consequently, children needed to be protected. This unnuanced position quickly turned into a crusade and earned Wertham undeniable credibility with parents and governmental and religious authorities who were at a loss in the face of what was widely regarded as an inexorable explosion of juvenile

delinquency. As he synthesized the disparate criticisms leveled against the comic book, he endowed them with a scientific legitimacy that seemed credible to those seeking solutions to the apparently insoluble social issue of juvenile delinquency.

These events unfolded at the beginning of the cold war, and the tense climate surrounding comic books rapidly turned into hysteria. Evaluative committees were established. The National Office of Decent Literature, a proselytizing body created in 1938 by the Catholic Church, began to examine comics and issued lists of "acceptable" comic books from 1947 on. The Committee on Evaluation of Comic Books, founded in Cincinnati in June 1948, benefited from a long-lasting nationwide visibility. Less suspect of partisan aims than its Catholic counterpart, it focused on comic magazines and for several years published its annual results in *Parents Magazine*.⁵ Comics were singled out by all sorts of critics: the American Legion, mayors, district attorneys, teachers, librarians, women's and parents' clubs, lawyers, Parent-Teacher Associations, religious groups, and spokespersons for children. Practically anyone invested with moral authority turned into a virulent detractor of the comic book. Detroit's police commissioner seized all of the comic books on sale in the city because he discovered that they were "loaded with Communist teachings, sex, and racial discrimination."⁶

The supposedly deleterious effects of comic books on children became a particularly sensitive issue following the accidental suicide of a boy of twelve in Pittsburgh on August 29, 1947. The police inquiry concluded that Billy Becker hanged himself while attempting to imitate a scene from a comic book found open at his feet. On May 21, 1948, James Bodard, eleven years old, and Robert Peterson, twelve, stole an airplane in Oklahoma City and flew it to Cheyenne. After their arrest, they became a media sensation when they declared that they had learned to pilot the plane in a comic book. In August, the public learned that in New Albany, Indiana, three boys aged from six to eight almost hanged a boy of seven while reenacting a scene from a comic book for fun.⁷

Crimes committed under the inspiration or the imitation of comics were largely isolated incidents. Nonetheless, they were systematically blown out of proportion as a way of corroborating the theories popularized by Dr. Wertham. In the autumn of 1948, under the pounding media stigmatization of isolated cases,⁸ the public became convinced that comic books were a poison that turned children and adolescents into criminals, a new drug openly sold to young Americans. John Mason Brown, an influential critic

of the period, coined a phrase that took hold when he termed comic books "the marijuana of the nursery."⁹ The hysteria reached its zenith with the wave of comic book burnings between December 1948 and January 1949. Initiated "spontaneously" by children or organized by parochial schools, the pamphlets were heaped in piles on the ground before being publicly torched.

In the face of this rising sentiment, a number of actors in the industry founded the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers (ACMP) on July 1, 1948. Its members chose to comply with a self-regulating code, whose six articles pertained to nudity, the representation of crime and sadism, the correct use of language, the representation of divorce, and attacks on racial and religious minorities (see appendix). Presided over by Phil Keenan, publisher of Hillman Periodicals, the ACMP was represented by the lawyer Henry E. Schultz beginning in September 1948. Its credibility was extremely fragile from the start. Of the thirty to forty active publishers in the industry at the time, only twelve joined the association, while two others simply adopted the code without actually becoming members.¹⁰

The ACMP was responding to what increasingly appeared to be a censorious conspiracy. Its primary goal was to prevent local authorities from launching censorship measures that would have an immediate economic impact on the publishers. Local censorship initiatives began at the end of May 1948, following the affair of the stolen airplane. A number of titles were banned in Indianapolis, Chicago, and Hillsdale, Michigan.¹¹ The municipality of Los Angeles was particularly active. A decree passed on September 22 banned all comic books containing scenes of violence under penalty of a fine or prison term.¹² Beginning in October, similar measures were implemented in fifty cities.¹³ Local comic book censorship became common in many communities through the end of 1949. The most noticeable move took place in March when the Legislature of New York State voted to create a Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics after a previous bill adopted by the Senate on February 23 was vetoed by Governor Dewey as unconstitutional.¹⁴

Much more drastic were the legislative measures taken in Canada, where there was no equivalent to the First Amendment impeding legislation. Wertham's most vocal supporter in that country was Edmund Davie Fulton, Member of Parliament for Kamloops, British Columbia. In 1947 Fulton took an awareness campaign about the danger of comics to Parliament in Ottawa, after which the parents in his constituency demanded that he

take steps against this menace. In December 1949, he succeeded in passing an amendment that added crime comics to the list of obscene publications covered by Section 207 of the Canadian criminal code. With this, the manufacture, printing, publishing, distributing, sale, or possession of crime comic books became an offense punishable by two years in prison. In practice, this amendment targeted Canadian publishers producing crime comics printed from plates acquired from American publishers.¹⁵

The frenzy began to recede by the end of 1949. The multiplication of ordinances in the United States and the passing of the Fulton amendment in Canada inspired a number of publishers to change their titles (notably in abandoning taboo words such as *crime*) and, above all, to fall back on romance comics which, at least at the start, did not meet with the same kind of opposition as their predecessors.¹⁶ However, the nature of the accusations against comic books drew the attention of the Special Committee on Organized Crime chaired by the Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver. Noting frequent references to the presumed impact of comic books on juvenile delinquency during committee hearings, Kefauver asked Dr. Wertham to supervise an inquiry into this subject. The psychiatrist developed two questionnaires, one for the authorities and one for publishers, that were mailed to dozens of recipients on August 8, 1950. Their replies were collected in a report published in November. Overwhelmingly, experts and laymen considered comic books as a secondary cause of delinquency. The publication of these results temporarily calmed the spirits and put an end to the first phase of the postwar anti-comic-book movement.¹⁷

The Campaign of 1952-1954

The respite was temporary. The hysteria of 1948-1949 was focused on crime comics and the ordinances curbing their dissemination had no bearing on other types of comic books. Romance comics were scapegoated in the early 1950s because some of them used a style then perceived as erotic, or even pornographic. Around 1952, comic books were singled out once again, this time by the "House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials" chaired by Arkansas Democrat Ezekiel C. Gathings. The Gathings Committee was something of a public sensation because it indicted cheesecake magazines, paperbacks, and comic books all at the same time.¹⁸ Since the Kefauver Report of 1950, the profile of the comics market had undergone

a marked change. In addition to comics castigated for the reasons given above, the proliferation of war comics, in the wake of the Korean War, and horror comics, from 1951, provided new relevance to the comic book controversy. The monocausal discourse about juvenile delinquency was again caught up in current affairs in which mass culture was scapegoated: radio, television, magazines, cinema, and comic books once again found themselves on trial.

On June 1, 1953, the Senate Judiciary Committee created a subcommittee on juvenile delinquency chaired by Senator Robert Hendrickson (Republican, New Jersey). In fact, the committee was the brainchild of Senator Kefauver, always on the lookout for media-friendly springboards likely to bolster his presidential ambitions.¹⁹ The indictment of comic books in 1954 resulted essentially from the public response to "What Parents Don't Know About Comics Books," an article published by Fredric Wertham in the November 1953 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*. Having pursued his crusade ceaselessly since 1947, in this piece he condensed the most shocking and sensational elements of the in-depth study of comics that was to be released the following spring. The letters received by the magazine in the following weeks testified to readers' emotional reaction to the issue. At the same time, the mail received by the subcommittee following Wertham's article prompted Senator Hendrickson to announce on February 20, 1954, that it would hold sessions concerning comic books and juvenile delinquency in New York on April 21 and 22.²⁰ Since 1950, the political pressure on comics magazines had increased markedly: the simple inquiry in 1950 within the framework of the Kefauver committee on organized crime was succeeded by a more formal suspicion on behalf of the House of Representatives in the form of the Gathings commission. That a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee decided to address the issue so directly demonstrated that some politicians had become acutely aware of the controversial nature of comic books seven years after the first indictments of the medium.

The Hendrickson Committee Hearings

April 21, 1954

The twin goals of the commission, defined by Senators Hendrickson and Kefauver at the opening of the hearings, was to "determine the possible delinquency producing effect upon children of certain types of crime and horror comic books" and examine whether the magazines broke federal laws against the dissemination of obscene material (2-3).²¹ During the first

day, the various testimonies addressed the validity of the crime-inducing hypothesis. The executive director of the commission presented an overview and summary of articles written on the question. According to most experts comic books were harmless for well-balanced children yet likely to influence problem children. Each of the next witnesses presented his or her view of the problem. Harris Peck, a psychiatrist associated with the juvenile courts, declared that many delinquents that he had examined seemed to be affected by reading comics (64). Fredric Wertham insisted that no household was safe so long as crime comics existed (84) and continued to fuel the sadistic fantasies of children. In the other camp, ACMP counsel Henry Schultz criticized the psychiatric discourse linking comics and delinquency (75), while acknowledging the failure of self-regulation. After presenting himself as the originator of horror comics EC publisher William Gaines directly attacked Wertham's contention that comic books were the source of all evils, turning children into monsters whom their parents should fear (98).

Gaines's testimony was the most memorable moment of the hearings as it highlighted the committee's censorious agenda and contained an exchange that was subsequently, and eagerly, picked up by the press. After the publisher acknowledged that the two criteria guiding the choice of material for his publications were commercial potential and good taste, Kefauver brandished a copy of a recently released comic book, *Crime Suspensories 22* (May 1954), and asked if he believed that the cover, which depicted a severed head in full view, was "in good taste." To this Gaines responded: "Yes, sir; I do, for the cover of a horror comic. A cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the neck could be seen dripping blood from it and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody" (103).²² The exchange became even more heated as the committee inquired about his illustrated editorial, "Are You a Red Dupe?" which explicitly associated all censorious reasoning with communist ideology. Mentioned three times during the hearings (58-63, 92, 108), this biting editorial linked the attack on comics to communist propaganda and the communist critiques of these publications as a form of capitalist alienation.²³ By insinuating that their adversaries had been duped by the Reds, Gaines undermined the implicit value system contrasting "respect for the law/parents/American" with "delinquency/children/un-American" upon which the committee's legitimacy rested. The final testimony of the day only aggravated the bad impression made by Gaines. Three representatives of the newspaper comic

strips (Walt Kelly, Milton Caniff, and Joseph Musial) deplored the comic book industry's commercialism and failure to live up to the medium's educational potential. Highlighting the contrast between the successful moral code of the National Cartoonists Society's and the ACMP's failed self-regulation, they realigned the debate with the committee's agenda.

April 22, 1954

The next day, the hearings broadened their scope without actually hearing dissenting conclusions. Representatives of Story Comics and Marvel publishing were brought in to acknowledge the bad taste of their magazines. The credibility of the Child Study Association of America was called into question when its director admitted that researchers who were employed as counselors to comic book publishers had supervised the reports defending comics published by his organization.²⁴ Caught in this contradiction, the psychiatrist Lauretta Bender, a longtime opponent of Wertham's theories, exonerated crime comics from the harmful influences attributed to them, but her lengthy association with DC cast doubt on her testimony's validity (155–158).

The hearings then shifted to some legal aspects of comic book distribution. The committee proceeded to examine products offered for sale by mail in the magazines, as well as the practice of tie-in sales by wholesalers with regard to retail vendors. A lawyer representing the latter group described in detail the pressures that his clients were subjected to by unscrupulous distributors who forced magazines on them that they did not necessarily wish to place on sale (184–189). Next, two publishers of obscene and pornographic material were asked to describe their mail-order advertisements in comic books. Like the previous day, the hearings concluded with the exemplary testimony of representatives of Dell, whose statements confirmed the committee's ideas: Dell published no horror titles, nor crime comics, and only accepted advertising for food in its magazines. Moreover, it had steadfastly refused to join the ACMP so as not to serve as a moral shield for crime comics (198–199). Dell's virtuous aura only blackened the image of the industry painted over the previous two days.

June 4, 1954

On May 27, Hendrickson announced that the committee would hold new hearings dedicated to comics and television programming. On June 4 the hearings dealt with the legislative aspects of the comic book business and

deepened the inquiry into forced sales to retailers. On the first topic, three witnesses were heard. James Fitzpatrick, representative for Plattsburgh in the New York legislature and president of the New York State Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics, spoke about the work that they had undertaken, and particularly the State's adoption of a law sanctioning the unfair practices with regard to retailers (203–204). Edmund D. Fulton, who had led Ottawa to intensify measures against comic books two months earlier, detailed his experience with the censorship of comic books in Canada, all the while acknowledging the limitations of his actions; the allusions made to the murders that had been committed in Canada by children influenced by comics (250) provided a certain gravitas to his comments. The last witness was the chairman of the Juvenile Delinquency Committee, Union County (New Jersey) Bar Association. He spoke of a proposed law in his state to forbid the printing, sale, and distribution of any publication that could stimulate the lascivious instincts of minors (282).

The six other witnesses heard on this day all testified about tie-in sales. To overcome the reluctance of retailers who judged the sale of certain works indecent or inappropriate, many distributors compelled dealers to display all of the titles given to them if they wanted to continue to receive the best sellers (202–248, 266–280). Two representatives of newsstand dealers declared that they were regularly subjected to these practices, especially when they refused to sell certain comics. A drugstore owner testified that he had received a reduced number of *TV Guide* copies when he refused to put crime comics on display (233–236). Responding to these accusations, four representatives of the wholesalers denied the assertions of the retailers and contended that the members of their industry were highly discriminating when selecting the titles that they distributed. The Hendrickson hearings on comic books concluded with charges of blackmail, commercialism, incitation to delinquency, and threats to magazine retailers.

The impact of the hearings in the media was immediate and profound. At a time when Americans were discovering the instantaneous sensations offered by television, the story hit the front page of the *New York Times* on April 22. The first day of the hearings coincided with the release of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, planned by the publisher accordingly. Although Wertham's screed immediately stirred up the wrath of the psychiatric community because its sensationalist rhetoric and questionable scientific method enabled Wertham to draw biased and one-sided conclusions, it quickly became the scientific basis for activists involved in the debate.

Arguments justifying the crime-inducing character of comic books became commonplace in the statements of every group involved in the crusade against mass culture. In order to ward off a large-scale boycott of their publications the leading publishers took the initiative to create a trade association, the Comics Magazine Association of America, whose main assignment would be to create a self-regulating code.

As the Senate subcommittee had made it clear that it would not recommend any legislation likely to infringe upon the First Amendment, the action of anti-comics groups assumed the form of individual initiatives taken by retailers and local legislations at the municipal and state levels. For example, Safeway food stores boycotted crime comics in California and Colorado as of January 1955. Likewise, pharmacist associations in New York, Minnesota, and Mississippi asked their members to stop selling these magazines. Nationwide newsstand dealers generally met with much less resistance when they refused to carry titles they had not ordered: their cause had been presented to the public and the existence of tie-in sales had been revealed to the entire country.²⁵

However, the condemnation of mass-market periodicals was primarily focused on comic books. Between the summer of 1954 and spring of 1956, fourteen states adopted laws restraining their sale to those over the age of eighteen, or simply banned their sale entirely.²⁶ Nine other states passed similar laws that were not ratified; five additional states created committees to study the issue. At the municipal level, in the last six months of 1954, eighteen major cities in thirteen states adopted ordinances regulating the sale of these publications. However, all of these local measures might not have significantly impacted the industry if it had not been hit at home. That was what happened when a law completely banning the publication of comic books with questionable content was passed in New York on July 1, 1955. Since nearly all publishers were based in this state, the new legislation made self-regulation mandatory and left the Comics Magazine Association of America no other option but to enforce the code it had purportedly designed to clean up the contents of comic books.

The Fear of Juvenile Delinquency

In the 1940s and 1950s those who waged the crusade against mass culture, and comic books in particular, did so in the name of the struggle against

juvenile delinquency. After the Second World War youth criminality became, alongside the fear of a nuclear war, the theme that concerned the greatest number of people in North America. The best study on this issue has been James Gilbert's *A Cycle of Outrage*: he spotlights the ins and outs of the process whereby a circumscribed social issue became a panic shared by virtually all Americans.²⁷

In 1942, official reports pointed to the growing number of juvenile delinquency cases recorded since December 1941 across all social classes. The phenomenon was explained by contemporary factors such as the conscription of fathers, the ensuing dislocation of families, and the general social instability resulting from the entry of the United States into the war. As these reports predicted an unprecedented wave of juvenile delinquency in the following years, newspapers quickly picked up the ominous forecasts and their apocalyptic rhetoric, reminding Americans that the country had experienced a surge of adolescent delinquency following the First World War and generally blowing out of proportion the various criminal news stories involving children and adolescents, two categories of individuals systematically conjoined in the ambient discourse (25–27).

Three factors caused the panic to coalesce in 1943. The first was the zoot suit riots in Los Angeles. From June 3 to 12, 1943, violent street clashes pitted young Hispanics—distinguished by their long hair and eccentric zoot suit clothing—and draftees from the military bases around East Los Angeles. Although these eruptions stemmed primarily from racial tensions, they were interpreted by the media as outbreaks of uncontrolled juvenile delinquency for which Hispanic youths should be held responsible. The second paranoia-inducing factor was the release of the short film *Youth in Crisis*. This semidocumentary, based on research conducted by the FBI and the Children's Bureau, presented an "official" interpretation of the new scourge that threatened American society and the remedies that were required to deal with it. The film argued that, because of the impact of the war effort on families (fathers abroad and mothers at work), youths had fallen into a spiral of delinquency from which they could escape only by selling war bonds or by engaging in community work. Third, at the end of the year, a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Labor and Education, chaired by Claude Pepper (Democrat, Florida), a reformist and a close ally of President Roosevelt, organized juvenile delinquency hearings that increased the public's anxieties and highlighted a few particularly sordid aspects of the problem, such as the appearance since the beginning of the war of "Victory

Girls,” adolescents who engaged in “sex delinquency of a non-commercial character” with soldiers around troop training centers.

The Pepper committee did not arrive at any conclusive results but its hearings had a decisive impact on public opinion. By 1944, the idea had become commonplace among Americans that wartime conditions led to the disintegration of the family and hastened young people into adulthood, thereby touching off all of the adverse effects inherent in an accelerated accession to social and economic maturity. After the war, this vision of social reality became more and more widely adopted by the public. It was indeed a response to an existing type of criminality but the lasting impact of this perception stemmed from three main factors:

- the considerable attention paid to youth in this era;
- the weight of a very critical discourse about the labor of women in general and mothers in particular even before 1945. As female labor increased during the conflict because of the economic demands of the war effort and the departure of men to the army, many commentators began arguing that the women who had taken jobs had *de facto* quit their households and ceased to fulfill their traditional functions necessary to maintain the affective balance of families;
- the diffuse fear that an irrepressible wave of juvenile delinquency might be an early sign of the contamination of American society by the fascism that had ravaged Europe.

This discourse and the anxieties it conveyed were, strictly speaking, infinitely more significant than juvenile delinquency, whose actual increase was in no way commensurate to the baby boom’s demographic growth. Rather than a genuine crime wave, it was a panic fueled by the consensus between a public prone to alarm, authorities who were quick to suppress, and mass media that relayed and amplified existing fears about delinquency (71).²⁸

The initial campaign against comic books took place in this sensitive context. Even if the whole of mass culture was suspected by the protectors of America’s youth, comic books were the first target for two reasons. First, they were perceived as a medium expressly destined for children. Second, like the rest of mass publishing (but unlike radio and film), they occupied an extremely marginal economic and cultural domain: they had not given rise

to a star system and, consequently, did not benefit from any political, economic, or media support. This specificity explains how the debate around the alleged dangers of comic books took place almost entirely between experts, pressure groups, and the industry itself, without any well-known figures intervening to lend their credibility to the cause of comic magazines. A limited number of arguments were brought to bear in the controversy, but it gained momentum in the media because it permanently amalgamated two sensitive issues of the time, the alleged disintegration of families and the effect of mass culture on juvenile delinquency. While the campaign against comic books became metonymically linked to the crusade driven by the forces championing order and family values against the decadence inspired by mass culture, Fredric Wertham became the personality most emblematic of the battle by the mid-1950s.²⁹

The Arguments of the Intellectuals

Experts, i.e., all those who, under one title or another, could couch their discourse and opinions in scientific terms, were held in very high esteem by Americans during the cold war. The following pages present the main arguments that were advanced by the intellectuals in this debate, through three books published between 1949 and 1954. The first, a caustic essay written by the folklorist Gershon Legman in 1949, was titled *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship*. The second was the study by Dr. Fredric Wertham that has been widely reported on, *Seduction of the Innocent*. The third, *Parade of Pleasure: A Study of Popular Iconography in the USA*, was an essay written by the British journalist Geoffrey Wagner.³⁰

Gershon Legman: Censorship and Civilization

Gershon Legman was an eccentric intellectual and probable fellow traveler of the Communist Party after the war. Although he worked foremost as a folklorist and wrote works about limericks and dirty jokes, he was extremely well versed in Marxism and psychoanalysis, and he edited, at the end of the 1940s, *Neurotica*, a quarterly Freudian journal for lay readers in which were published several texts that were later collected in his book on censorship, which was itself published in the wake of the hysteria that took place in 1948–1949.³¹ At first sight, *Love and Death* presents itself as a radical essay on an extremely sensitive topic. The first part, “Institutionalized Lynch”

(7-24), opens with the statement that the representation of sex has always been subject to censorship, but that it can be bypassed if one finds a substitute for sex: sadism, the thrill that takes the place of the orgasm. With this term, Legman means stimulation, the promise of ecstasy that never arrives but which draws its sensual force from non-accomplishment. According to him, the thrill is a murder by proxy that leads to the following critical paradox: while sex is legal in reality, it has become illegal in the written form and an institutionalized valve for the sublimation of frustrations.

The frustrations implicit in twentieth-century life, that make necessary our diet of murder, have not been resolved and cannot be resolved within the framework of our profit-economy and anti-sexual morality. Love being unwholesome, and revolution unhealthy, only one petcock of release is left us: we may dream of violence, of death; watch it in arenas, quiver over it on paper, run amok in fantasy, identifying ourselves always with the killer, the killer of killers—the superman. Our need is acute. The demand is paramount. And blood and death and violence will therefore continue to be supplied. (23)

The transition goes without saying: for children, whose legal and affective status is special, representations of murder by proxy are supplied by the comics to which Legman devotes the second part of his book, under the title “Not For Children” (27-54).

His analysis carries with it traces of the campaign against crime comic books so in vogue at the end of the 1940s when he published his book. Legman reacted violently to the violence in comic books, arguing: “The effect, if not the intention, has been to raise up an entire generation of adolescents—twenty million of them—who have felt, thousands upon thousands of times, all the sensations and emotions of committing murder, except pulling the trigger” (32). First savaging the psychiatric discourse that defended comic books in the name of catharsis, he successively took on the consensus regarding the innocuousness of funny animals (33-35), crime comics (35-36), educational comics (36-38), superheroes and their fascist imagery, as well as the sexual perversions that can be found in all of these apparently benign images (38-43). Then, in a lengthy digression, he explains how the comic book industry exploits the sadistic urges of adolescents (43-49) before arriving at the conclusion that forms the leitmotif of the entire work: violence is the basis of an enormous industry in the United

States and it is by means of a hypocritical discourse that we dare not present it for what it is. Accordingly, censorship hounds sex but allows violence to continue:

The defenders of free speech generally break down at about that point, too. They are willing to take the chance that murder-comics, murder-magazines, murder-headlines, murder-books, murder-movies, murder-radio & television—strange how respectable all these are, when “sex book” is a sneer—murder, murder, murder, murder, a steady total dose of murder, will not harm in the slightest degree the most impressionable child or adult. But no one seems willing to suggest that in the case of the plainest pornography would hurt them even less. At least sex is normal. Is murder? (53)

Legman’s argumentation relies heavily on psychoanalysis, of course, but particularly on the works of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. His text is pervaded by the idea that mass entertainment in general, and comic books in particular, are means used by capitalist civilization to maintain frustration and create in all individuals a latent sadism fueled by the culture industry. Legman embodied a radical populist foreshadowing of the American New Left: anticipating the accusations that C. Wright Mills would level against the elite capitalist conglomerates a few years later,³² he condemned mass culture, which he perceived as the by-product of a neoliberal ideology engineering individual alienation within contemporary society.

As Legman criticized the psychiatrists who argued that comic books were harmless for children in comparison with other social factors, he was one of the first to subscribe to the views of Wertham and cite him by name (49). However, it is necessary not to draw too close a connection between these two critics: where Legman, anticipating the Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization*, demonstrated how capitalism, under the pretext of decency, alienates individuals and augments their sexual frustrations, Wertham adopted a “scientific” and “medicalized” discourse (to borrow the terminology of Michel Foucault) through which one could see a humanist concern that is not really shared by Legman.

Fredric Wertham: The Protection of the Child

Dr. Fredric Wertham is remembered today as the Anthony Comstock of fifties comic books, as a backward-looking conservative emblematic of the

McCarthy period and of the narrow-minded zeitgeist of the cold war era. It is true that his arguments went over very well with the right-thinking North American middle class. However, the lingering image of this man and of his self-imposed mission has been deformed by the passage of time and by the historiography of American comic books, which has been heavily biased in its treatment of the postwar anti-comics crusade.³³

Dr. Wertham differed from the vast majority of those who agreed with his views, and he was not typically in tune with the spirit of the times. Born Frederick Wertheimer in Nuremberg in 1895, he studied medicine and later psychiatry in Austria before emigrating to the United States in 1922. He then Americanized his name and became a naturalized citizen. Unlike the far right-wing actors in the witch hunt, Wertham was aligned ideologically with the forces of progress: from the 1940s he was involved as a medical and psychiatric expert in the area of civil rights (he was one of the first defenders of nudism) and against the censorship of modernist literature. Additionally, he was a knowledgeable collector of modern and primitive art.³⁴ However, the main cause he defended was the protection of young people and the prevention of the deleterious effects of modern life on the childhood psyche. Battling against a system that prevented disadvantaged children from receiving psychiatric care, he founded the Lafargue Clinic (named for Karl Marx's son-in-law) in the basement of a Harlem church in 1946. In this clinic, which was open on weeknights, patients could consult with a psychiatrist for a symbolic fee of fifty cents. Wertham's crusade against comic books initially stemmed from commendable intentions. An expert in juvenile delinquency, he became convinced that problem children were all readers of comic books, to at least some degree. He singled out this medium more than others because it was the only one that was primarily targeted to children—and above all because the period was responsive to his message.

In retrospect, his reasoning contained three weaknesses that were justifiable when he launched his criticism but became problematic later. First, his scientific approach was extremely questionable. It presupposed a monocausality of juvenile delinquency and relied on a simplified and compartmentalized methodology in which he concluded that all children, emotionally well-balanced or not, predisposed to instability or not, were threatened (297) by comic books because the magazines presented them with a model in which they ran the risk of self-identifying (116 ff.). Second, Wertham systematically proceeded to mix arguments, presenting, in the same breath,

the criminological potential of comic books, the harm that they did to reading, as well as the regression or social immaturity that they brought to all who consumed them. Finally, and this is probably the item for which he has been most criticized, his awareness campaign was not exempt from the commercialism that he himself condemned in his writings. Beginning in 1948, he became a personality sought after by the news media and public pressure groups. Like Gershon Legman, he cast a psychiatrically informed eye toward comics and saw behind them metaphors for sexual perversion; but, unlike the author of *Love & Death*, he benefited from the scientific caution of the general practitioner. As a liberal, and one opposed to all forms of censorship, he did not prescribe the suppression of comic books but the interdiction of their sale to minors under the age of fifteen. In his view this was the only possibility for legislation that would preserve the liberty of adults to purchase comics for their children, *if they wanted to* (316).

How to assess the four hundred pages of *Seduction of the Innocent*? The work was much more than a mere critique of comic books, however vitriolic. In the wake of Legman, the author expanded the indictment against the entire mass publishing industry in the United States at the time, in which eroticism competed with the hypocrisies of marketing. Comic books played the role of scapegoat. The critique offered by Wertham would have applied just as well to cinema, radio, and pulp magazines. In this respect, his accusation against the American postwar cultural industry was admissible. Nonetheless, a close reading of the book calls his credibility into question because of his obsessive focus on comic books and the inadequacy of the clinical methods that he used. Although Wertham entertained scientific goals, the absence of any critical apparatus and the populist overtones of his writing combined to make his book an irredeemable rant. His arguments appeared convincing to much of the public at the time because they rested on three rhetorical tropes:

1. A drawn-out metaphor comparing comic books to an addictive, crime-inducing drug, from which one could not wean without negative aftereffects, ran through *Seduction of the Innocent*, a self-proclaimed objective, scientific study.
2. The book is dotted with references to "the industry," presented as a homogeneous, monolithic, and inhumane mafia where a code of silence reigns and implicit but very real threats of retaliation hang over all who dare criticize it. This device is particularly notable

in the twelfth chapter, "The Devil's Allies. The Struggle Against the Comic Book Industry" (295–351).

3. Throughout the book, Wertham casts himself as a crusader who, acting alone, must confront the sprawling comic book industry, the incredulity of the public, as well as the hostility of other psychiatrists toward his theories, while the children suffer and become delinquent because of the seemingly inoffensive comics that we place in their hands.

Greeted as a providential book by the pressure groups already active in the debate, *Seduction of the Innocent* set off a general outcry in the psychiatric community and among comic book publishers. Once the passions had cooled, Wertham continued to make reference to comic books in his later works on juvenile delinquency, while eventually giving up the monocausal discourse upon which he had established his name.³⁵

Gershon Legman's discourse was too ideologically marked and too deliberately iconoclastic to find a favorable reception within the public and the media. In showing himself to be just as critical but far less provocative than Legman, Wertham erected an argument that struck a responsive chord by pandering to the American public's unwavering faith in the innocence of children. Acting as a righter of the wrongs caused by an industry obsessed with profit and lacking regard for individuals, this left-wing humanist intellectual erected a pseudoscientific discourse in which the middle class recognized a "scientifically" formalized version of its own petit bourgeois values.³⁶

Geoffrey Wagner: The Disapproval of the Middle Class

The third work to address comic books at the beginning of the 1950s appeared several months after Wertham's. According to its author Geoffrey Wagner, *The Parade of Pleasure: A Study of Popular Iconography in the USA* was a critical study of visual mass culture in the United States (cinema, comics, photo magazines, and television). Its second part, "Comics: The Curse of the Kids" (69–112), was a methodical attack against American periodicals. *Parade of Pleasure* is of much less interest than the preceding two volumes. Wagner was neither an acerbic polemicist like Legman nor a driven progressive like Wertham. His work was a journalist's topical synthesis in which the most frequently mentioned names were those of his two predecessors.

Wagner essentially picked up the same arguments (and often the same examples) as the others but his approach was more pedestrian. Indeed, as Martin Barker has observed,³⁷ the only real innovations in his comments were the criticisms of the supposed anti-intellectualism of the comic books (82–83, 88–89) and of the idealized representation of war where the enemy is, by definition, idiotic, and where obedience and discipline are totally absent (93). There was little, if any, of Legman's radicalism and Wertham's ill-inspired progressivism in Wagner's reasoning. Unlike his two predecessors, whose writing was steeped in populist rhetoric, Wagner embodied the ideology of the upper-middle class, or those aspiring to wealth. As a result, his posture was one of consensus and propriety that critiqued the demagogic undertones perceptible in the apparent contempt of comics characters for intellectuals and the heavy-handed coarse comedy of many war comics. Wagner agreed wholeheartedly with the ambient discourse, and the ideological framework of his comments was the petit bourgeois conformity of the postwar period. If he is the blandest of these three critics, he is nonetheless the man who embodies most clearly the values adopted by the public calling for the ostracization of comic books.

At the time, practically no one rose to the defense of comic books. Only the famous Jewish intellectual Leslie Fiedler, in a 1955 article titled "The Middle Against Both Ends," reframed the debate around the insecurity of the middle class in matters of cultural consumption in a democratic society. For him, the image of a delegation of outraged parents of schoolchildren rallying in the name of great literature while gripping a copy of the latest issue of *Life* was itself a revealing metaphor for the unstable intermediary position of the petit bourgeois middle class on the rise. Those who reviled the lowbrow culture of the lower class (to which they or, at least, their parents used to belong) simultaneously failed to gain access to the highbrow culture of the higher class to which they aspired.³⁸ Highly elitist in inspiration, Fiedler's position was more of an attack on the middle class emblematic of American society in the age of Eisenhower than a true defense of a publishing industry singled out by a moral panic.

Artists and Models

In his 1956 motion picture *While the City Sleeps*, Fritz Lang depicted serial killer Robert Manners (played by John Barrymore Jr.) as a reader of crime

comic books, who reacted hysterically to the attack waged against them on television by crusading journalist Edward Mobley (Dana Andrews). This dramatization of the most extreme views bandied about during the hysteria testifies to the anti-comics consensus then common in American society. However, Frank Tashlin's movie *Artists and Models* (1955) appears as the only work of fiction addressing the comic book controversy as a key plot element. Tashlin was, by training, a cartoonist. He began his animation career in the Van Beuren studios between 1930 and 1932, emerging gradually as a writer of animated films, then feature films, before becoming a director in 1951. With a genuine gift for comedy, he directed the best films starring Jerry Lewis before the actor became his own director in the 1960s. The first collaboration between these two men, *Artists and Models* is, on the surface, little more than a frivolous comedy blending somewhat simple-minded amorous intrigues, an unbelievable spy story, and several musical numbers that allow Dean Martin to demonstrate his talents as a seductive crooner. However, the film's subtext addresses both the mindless effects of modern society embodied by mass culture and the self-righteous discourse on art and creativity. Released at Christmas 1955 in the United States, the movie came out in France in the summer of 1956 and immediately received positive reviews from the young Turks of French film criticism like Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and François Truffaut.³⁹

The plot is disarmingly naive: playboy Rick Todd (Dean Martin) and mawkish youth Eugene Fullstack (Jerry Lewis) are longtime friends living in New York, the first with aspirations to become a painter, the second hoping to write children's books. Chronically broke, the two men are never able to hold on to their jobs because Eugene spends his days deep in the world of the comic book adventures of Bat Lady, who obsesses him to such a degree that he talks in his sleep about the adventures of Vincent the Vulture. They do not know that their upstairs neighbors are two gorgeous women, Abigail Parker (Dorothy Malone), artist of the Bat Lady adventures, and Bessie Sparrowbush (Shirley MacLaine), secretary in the company that publishes the super-heroine and also the in-the-flesh model for the character. After an unexpected meeting, Eugene falls in love with Bessie, the "real" Bat Lady, while Rick becomes the suitor of Abigail. Two sequences in the film concern the acid vision, likely that of Tashlin, toward the censorship campaign against comics: the first is a long scene unfolding in the office of the Murdock Publishing Company, while the second takes place on a television broadcast during which Eugene voices his own criticism of comic book readers.

The first scene shows how the publisher, Murdock (Eddie Mayehoff), fires Abigail because she does not meet his expectations. He constantly demands more violence in his children's magazines so as to rival television, which he describes as a source of rivers of blood, of murders, and of decapitations—while at the beginning of the film, Eugene thus describes the comic that he is reading with "I'm on the third murder. Looks like the Bat Lady is gonna blow one of the rat men's heads off" As he is leaving his offices, Murdock collides with Mrs. Stilton (Sara Berner), an infuriated mother who orders him to keep watch over her son while she goes shopping so that Murdock will understand the true impact of his publications on young people. The publisher slips away, leaving the boy under the watch of Bessie and Eugene. Little Richard Stilton (George "Foghorn" Winslow, a child actor born in 1946 who had a short film career in the 1950s as a result of his deep voice) turns out to be a monster in every sense of the term: totally undisciplined, he speaks with a low-pitched voice that is completely out of place in an eight-year-old boy. Declaring that he finds the adventures of Bat Lady "too tame" for his tastes he throws a letter opener that almost nails Eugene to the wall before overturning a water dispenser. This scene gathers the main clichés of the anti-comic-book campaign. On the one side, a rapacious publisher with no moral conscience (Tashlin depicts him as a spineless character dominated by women) living in an unhealthy environment where money is indistinguishable from the representation of violence. On the other, a child that mass culture has turned into an unstable, future juvenile delinquent (the letter opener anticipates the switchblade of a soon-to-be gangster).

Unlike little Richard Stilton, Eugene embodies the harmless and naive reader: his obsession with comic books only fuels his nocturnal reveries with images that mix the rowdy violence of the comics and his own mental universe, filled with gentle animals found in children's stories like "Goosie the Goose." This is why the spectator is invited to take with a grain of salt the scene where Eugene engages in self-criticism during a televised round table on the harmful effects of comic book reading. Presented by Art Baker (an actual television host of the period known for his weekly program, *You Asked For It*), *Better America Forum* is a caricature of debate programs where conformist opinions on social subjects were regularly aired. Around the table are Abigail, Eugene (presented as an example of "what can happen to the human brain on a steady diet of comic books"), and two childhood specialists in the Wertham style. In response to the questions posed by the

moderator, Eugene launches into a memorable monologue: "I'm here to tell you how bad comic books are for you. I never thought they were bad myself until my friend Rick Todd told me how bad they were. . . . How right he was! And I almost became a dope reading comic books and I realized that that's why I'm a little bit tired now. You see, I was very slow in school. That is: comic books made me very slow in school. . . ." When the host asks him if he has ever learned anything from comic books, he responds: "I learned to grow poison plants in a windowsill flower pot, how to keep the tarnish off brass knuckles. Also how to start a fire by rubbing two gasoline cans together—wow, the fire that makes—and also how to make a hangman's knot, and last but by certainly no means least, how to prepare rat poison so that it spread [sic] like peanut butter."

The testimony of Eugene, a character that the spectator recognizes as slow-witted and harmless, implicitly debunks the era's commonplace assumptions about the debilitating and criminological effects of comics. The line is forced, but this is deliberate on the part of Tashlin. A former comics artist himself (his strip, *Van Boring*, inspired by one of his patrons, the animation producer Van Beuren, was published under the pen name Tish-Tash in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1934 to 1936), he takes a distance from the anti-comics hysteria which had culminated in the latter half of 1954 with the creation of the Comics Code Authority, just when he was working on the film's script (October 1954 to January 1955).⁴⁰ However, it is more comics as a means of expression in the service of the press than the comic book industry that finds approval in his eyes, as is witnessed, in the final musical number featuring Martin and Lewis, which has a homage "To the guys who draw the bunnies / In the Sunday morning funnies / And brighten up the world today." Tashlin condemns the stupidity of the arguments leveled against comic books yet also includes these magazines in his general critique of American society. The first scene of the film is problematic from this standpoint. Following a blunder by Eugene, a giant billboard for cigarettes hurls dozens of comic book pages onto the sidewalk from a machine that is supposed to produce smoke. Through this scene, in which an advertisement spews out bits of lowbrow culture, Tashlin charged the consumer society with two cardinal sins: making money and transforming the public into morons. Here, comics ultimately symbolize cultural dumbing down and exemplify the scapegoats (the communists, the mafia, mass culture) that American society manufactured to blame for its own flaws during the cold war era.

The Calming of Passions

Beginning in 1956, the media less frequently echoed the public's animosity toward comic books. The fashion for works criticizing mass culture did not endure for long, and, even if Dr. Wertham continued his crusade, he did so increasingly alone as mass media and, consequently, the public lost interest in this exaggerated moral panic. In the end, the campaign wound down because it had achieved its goals: the horror comics disappeared and female characters were fully dressed. The comic books produced from 1955 onward were indeed different from those that came beforehand, although they became neither edifying nor literary and remained sufficiently violent to continue to attract the wrath of Wertham. But this was no longer a problem that the public cared about. They had gotten what they wanted. The creation, in 1954, of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) and, more importantly, of the measures taken by the Legislature of the State of New York in 1955 had succeeded in forcing the industry to make concessions in the face of the emerging middle-class consensus. The nationwide ostracism of comics translated into more or less draconian, variously enforced ordinances, but the problem was no longer there.

In the second half of the 1950s, treating comic books as scapegoats for the social ills affecting North American society became an outmoded and rear-guard action, the dated expression of a postwar anxiety that mutated into a new concern about television and pornography. The report published in New York State in 1960 by the Younglove Committee on the production of obscenity illustrated this change. Extremely critical of cinema, publishing, and television, the text devoted only a half page to comic books. It highlighted a distressing propensity for violence in comic book westerns, however marginal that genre was, but acknowledged the general improvement of the contents in the five years of oversight provided by the CMAA, all the while insisting that self-regulation should continue.⁴¹

Comic books were less subject to criticism because they had lost much of their visibility (see chapter 5). Initially created to guide the conscience of the comic book industry, the CMAA pursued an agenda that was presented to the public in moral terms. In reality, its intention was to limit the economic impact on the industry by changing its image, in order to encourage traditionally reticent advertisers to publish their ads in comics magazines. On two occasions in the 1960s, despite a lack of any noteworthy pressure

from public opinion, they expanded the restrictions on acceptable advertising in comic books. In 1963, they forbade ads for guns that fired real projectiles and, in 1968, ads for air rifles and toy tanks, cannons and military weapons were outlawed.⁴² These measures aimed to definitively dispel the connotations of hidden violence that were still attached to these magazines as a result of such ads and which legitimized the suspicions of many advertisers with regard to all types of comic books.

Society had changed and the middle-class consensus underwent a transformation that was accentuated as the baby boomers matured into adulthood. What was once the culture of postwar youth became the dominant consensus, overthrowing the values inherited from the Second World War and the cold war—at least from the viewpoint of mainstream mass media. Although it did not disappear by any means, juvenile delinquency no longer obsessed the public, which was increasingly concerned with the Vietnam War and the struggle for civil rights. Having been reduced to a minor role in the daily life of North Americans, comic books were no longer the targets of organized criticisms or attacks. It is impossible to compare the *Zap* affair in 1969–1970 (see chapter 7) with the postwar anti-comic book campaign. The *Zap* trial did not condemn comics as a mode of expression so much as the counterculture and the banalization of obscenity that it necessarily entailed. In fact, at the beginning of the 1970s, mainstream comic books had almost totally lost their subversive edge and criminological connotations. When, in 1971, Stan Lee wrote a Spider-Man story about narcotics he encountered no difficulty in portraying this, not as a stimulation of the unhealthy curiosities of his readers, but as an important act highlighting a significant social issue. As a result, the Comics Code was modified. In adopting a new rule permitting comic books to depict narcotics in negative terms, and in recognizing their potential to tackle genuine social problems in a responsible manner, they eliminated the stigma that had been attached to the form for the past seventeen years.

It is possible to consider this event as the official end of the first period of censorial discourse concerning comic books, which lasted a quarter century from 1946 to 1971. This discourse had a profound influence on the entire industry. On the one hand, it encouraged the ascension of superheroes in the 1960s. On the other, it nurtured among those artists who considered comic books an important mode of expression a deep frustration that was to give rise to the underground comics movement and, in the 1970s, alternative productions. However, this discourse also significantly contributed

to the marginalization of comic books within the framework of American mass culture.

Contemporary Arguments Against Comic Books

In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States returned to local communities the power to define their own censorship standards. Since then, a tremendous heterogeneity has existed with regard to obscene representations.⁴³ Because the First Amendment protects publishers and authors, it was only possible to suppress the advertising, distribution, and sale of obscene products. As a result, it was specialty stores who were most at risk of prosecution, as they also sold general interest magazines that abounded in sex and violence. Frequently, charges were initiated when a plainclothes police officer purchased several magazines or books whose contents contravened local legislation. Creating spaces restricted to minors often did not suffice to demonstrate the good faith of merchants, even if they strictly complied with the restriction, as was almost always the case.

Although the public is not generally aware of it, this type of repression is a constant anxiety for the comic book industry, which today almost completely depends on a network of specialty stores. The arrest of Michael Correa, the manager of Friendly Frank's in Lansing, Illinois, on charges of disseminating pornographic products in 1986, was the event that brought about the foundation, by publisher Denis Kitchen, of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) in the spring of 1987.⁴⁴ Supported by voluntary donations from publishers and others concerned with freedom of speech, the CBLDF partially or completely finances the legal fees of comic book stores brought up on obscenity charges. Its first case was a success for the industry: Michael Correa was ultimately acquitted on appeal on November 16, 1989, almost three years after his arrest. Meanwhile, nonetheless, the negative publicity around the trial forced owner Frank Mangiaracina to close the store in 1988.⁴⁵ A similar group was created by American fans concerned with freedom of speech in late 1988 to defend the owners of the Canadian comic book store Comic Legends in Calgary. Initially based in Berkeley, California, the Comic Legends Legal Defense Fund (CLLDF) paid the legal fees for the trial held in Calgary. This time, despite their efforts, the sentence handed down in October 1988 was upheld on appeal in August 1989, although with a reduced fine. Now jointly based in Toronto and Vancouver,

the CLLDF carries out a struggle in Canada that is analogous to that of the CBLDF in the United States.⁴⁶

The questionable character of contemporary comic books is a topic addressed every so often by local news media yet totally absent from the national public and political debate. It is not possible to speak of an opinion campaign against comics such as the one that existed after the Second World War. Since the resurgence of the neoconservative moral order in the late 1970s, its targets have not been comic books but television and heavy metal music. Thus, every time controversies about the necessity of controlling the levels of violence on television arose, for instance, during the summer of 1993, or in the spring of 1999, following the shooting spree at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, comic books were never mentioned.

The struggle against violence and pornography in the media may be read, admittedly, as a symptom of neoconservative morality but the processes associated with it are both latent and endemic: repression is isolated, localized, and dispersed. Despite the occasional visibility conferred on comic books by seizures of magazines deemed pornographic or obscene, comic books are largely unnoticed in current public debates. Still, some latter-day anti-comics crusaders follow Fredric Wertham's lead a half century later. The National Coalition on Television Violence, founded by Dr. Thomas Radecki in the second half of the 1980s, launched an attack on comic books in a report published in May 1989; it ultimately had little impact on the industry. John Fulce, the author of a 1990 screed titled *Seduction of the Innocent Revisited*,⁴⁷ was a former comic book store owner who gave up that line of work when he became a born-again Christian. His virulent and error-riddled diatribe against comic books gained almost no foothold, likely because the battle that he sought to wage was effectively settled, and his fanatical and mystical rhetoric appealed to too few readers.

All indications are that the North American public is indifferent to comic books nowadays and has no desire to censor the material found in them. Repressive local legislation by no means reflects broad public opinion. Obscenity trials against specialty stores always revolve around a handful of erotic and pornographic titles that do not represent the majority of the industry's output. Local legislation does not bear on comic magazines per se—as was the case in the 1950s—but on obscene contents. An isolated, but revealing, example of this debate is that which involved the

ultraconservative Republican senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms, on October 14, 1987. In a speech, he condemned a series of educational comic books about AIDS published by New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis, not because they were comic magazines, but because, he claimed, they had benefited from federal funding in order to promote "sodomy and the homosexual life style."⁴⁸ An investigation ordered by the Secretary of Health and Human Services ultimately found that the organization had financed its pamphlets through private donations. This anecdote is revealing: even among extreme conservatives, comic books themselves are no longer objects of reprobation; only their contents are, if they are deemed obscene. The public concerned with such issues is infinitely more troubled by television programming and heavy metal music than it is with comic books.

However, an artist was convicted of obscenity in the 1990s. From 1989 to 1991, Mike Diana produced eight issues of *Boiled Angel*, a xeroxed comic book with a three-hundred-copy print run, whose contents revolved primarily around rape, cannibalism, necrophilia, Satanism, all of which were presented in an excessively rudimentary graphic style derived from his two underground models, S. Clay Wilson and Rory Hayes. In 1992, Diana was interrogated by the police from Pinellas County (Florida) in connection with several murders committed in the Gainesville region after representations of murders, rapes, and eviscerations in two of his comic books were brought to the attention of authorities. Although he was quickly cleared of any connection to the crimes in Gainesville, he became the subject of another legal proceeding. Having sold by mail two issues of his magazine to a buyer who turned out to be an undercover police officer, he was subsequently convicted by a jury in 1994 of having published, sold, and advertised obscene material. Only the first two of these accusations were upheld on appeal. Following the exhaustion of his last appeal in 1997, lawyers for Diana and the CBLDF, working with the support of the Florida branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, submitted his case to the United States Supreme Court who refused to hear it, thereby ending the process. The trials of Mike Diana were a unique case in the annals of American justice where an artist was convicted of obscenity. Its precedent-setting impact has remained limited because the verdict was pronounced by a county court, but it disturbingly demonstrates how the 1973 ruling of the Supreme Court leaving obscenity standards to local communities has de facto limited the First Amendment's protection.⁴⁹

The Identity-Building Function of Freedom of Speech

According to the CBLDE, the Mike Diana affair painfully demonstrated that the battle against self-proclaimed censors must never cease to be a matter of concern for actors in the field of comic books. Self-regulation remains a preferred policy, although its implementation is ambiguous. The Comics Code ceased to be an important symbol of control or repression in the 1970s but it remained a badge of "quality" (that is, innocuous "family-oriented" contents) for the largest publishers worried about their public image, such as Marvel, DC, and Archie for many years afterward. While Archie, who monopolizes the market for very young readers, killed a line of superhero titles in 1992 after realizing that the characters and the violence in the stories could harm its family-friendly image, the Big Two have found means of circumventing this conformist image for their own readers. Up to the 1990s, Marvel's Epic imprint published creator-owned comics not submitted to the Comics Code, and since 1987, DC has offered comics "Suggested for Mature Readers," only some of which were submitted to the code. Many independent publishers fell in line with this trend, less for the sake of readers than of retailers, who were more easily able to sort their products into areas that were or were not accessible to children.

The discourse on censorship and self-censorship has changed. In the 1950s, under public pressure, publishers were forbidden to introduce "questionable" content into their magazines. In the 1980s, the publishers no longer had to ban such material, but warned readers of the nature of the contents. Here the expression "Adults Only" also serves as a promise: it offers readers a guarantee of transgression rather than of "literary" content. The reader is able to make an informed decision. The hypocrisy of this reasoning fools no one: warning the consumer is not self-regulation, but more often is an incentive to purchase. There is nothing really new here: in the 1920s trash publisher Bernarr McFadden surrounded himself with a council of moral and religious advisers who vouched for the edifying nature of *True Story*, a magazine made up of stories drawn from the most private confidences of its readers.⁵⁰ DC did the very same thing when comic books were taking off in the second half of the 1930s, less out of an ethical concern than in order to protect itself from attacks on moral grounds.

The doublespeak that reigns in the field is revealing. It is based on two arguments: first, that the industry does have ethical concerns; second, that art and freedom of speech must be defended. In other words, restrictions

on free speech are a fundamental attack on liberty and may not be condoned, but readers have the right to be warned about contents that might shock them. This is the twofold argument that underpins the economic and ethical health of comic book publishers. In fact, contrary to the accepted wisdom propagated by industry and fans, publishers and artists have never enjoyed as much freedom from censorship as they do today. This liberty, of which they are not aware, emerged gradually over the few decades it took for the consensual discourse about the noxious character of comic books to disappear. The legal proceedings brought against specialty stores from time to time are exceptional occurrences, not the norm. The comic book industry has never shaken off the memory of the postwar anti-comic-book hysteria. This is why it perpetuates an anti-censorship discourse, even while censorship itself—at least as it pertains to comic books—has become an isolated phenomenon that can in no way be compared to its manifestations of the 1940s and 1950s. Today the public's indifference toward comic books is infinitely stronger than its tendency to become alarmed about them and the consensual discourse on the need to censor has, as a result, disappeared. Yet, the idea that the industry must preserve itself at all times from threats of censorship persists.

This self-protecting discourse performs a unifying role: it serves as the basis for identification among fans and professionals, allies who perpetuate the contention that persecution is inevitable and must be resisted. Like the elitist discourse ("comics are no longer for kids," "comic book authors are real artists") and the historical-cultural discourse ("comic books are an important part of our cultural heritage"), the discourse advocating resistance (to a repression that is now obsolete) maintains comic book readers and makers in the self-representation of a specific mass cultural practice. This practice is marginal, because of the relatively reduced and consistently decreasing number of people who indulge in it (especially when compared to the music, film, or television industries), but its coherence is based on various legitimating discourses. This is why, if the censorial discourse *per se* no longer exists (or hardly), its counter-discourse persists. The belief that comic books are a transgressive form is still widely held by professionals who see themselves as craftsmen whose livelihood is justified by freedom of speech and by most fans, for whom the emotional investment in comic books is a building block of social identity.

estimations on the volume of comic books published monthly doubles in range: fifty million copies according to publisher David Cook and one hundred million copies according to the representative of New York State Joseph Carlino; see also U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee on Current Pornographic Material, *Hearings*, 82nd Cong., 2nd sess. (GPO, 1953), 233 (J. Carlino), 249 (D. Cook).

31. Schramm, Wilbur, Jack Lyle, and Edwin Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our children* (Stanford University Press, 1961). Cited by Parsons, 73.

32. Paul Lyness, "The Place of the Mass Media in the Lives of Boys and Girls," *Journalism Quarterly* #29.1 (1952), 43–54. Cited by Parsons, 73.

33. Jack Lyle and Heidi Hoffman, "Children's Use of Television and Other Media," *Television and Social Behaviour Vol.4, Television in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use*, ed. E. A. Rubenstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (National Institute of Mental Health, 1971), 1290256. Cited by Parsons, 74–75.

34. Klein, "Comics: The Department of Commerce," 42–43. 35. "O.K., You Passed the 2-S Test—Now You're Smart Enough for Comic Books," *Esquire* #66.3 (September 1966), 115.

36. Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 219.

37. Klein, "Comics: The Department of Commerce," 45–46.

38. Kaestle et al., 155–157. Kaestle divided the mass media into two categories: on one hand, reading (newspapers, magazines, books) and audiovisual (volume of tickets to the cinema, theater, and sports arenas); on the other hand, "electronic expenditure." The latter was subdivided into two subcategories: for one part, radios, televisions, records, musical instruments, and for the other part, the repair of radios and televisions. For example, the non-media expenditure comprised of plants, toys, sports equipment, and social life.

39. Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes*, 182.

40. Leo Bogart, *Press and Public: Who Reads What, When, Where, and Why in American Newspapers*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989), 121–126.

41. *Ibid.*, 117–119.

42. *Characteristics and Advertising Responsiveness of the Marvel Comics Primary Audience* (Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1984). The three titles that had the inserted questionnaires were: *Alpha Flight*, the new series conceived by one of the most popular creators of the time, John Byrne; *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man*, a strong selling superhero title; *Star Wars*, the comics adaptation of the films of George Lucas.

43. The print run of *American Flagg!* was cited in John Jackson Miller et al., *The Standard Catalog of Comic Books* (Krause Publications, 2002), under the entry "American Flagg!"; the print runs of the Marvel titles were those given in *Characteristics and Advertising Responsiveness of the Marvel Comics Primary Audience*.

44. Julie Stuempfig, "Survey: Industry Demographics," *Comics Retailer* (March 1993), 45.

45. "SmartGirl—Teen Read Week Survey Results," <http://www.smartgirl.com/results/trwsummary.html> (April 20, 2001).

46. "SmartGirl—Survey Archives," <http://live.smartgirl.org/speakout/archives/trw/trw2001/html> (July 3, 2003). A part of the study was reproduced at the end of Marc Aronson's article "Coming of Age," *Publishers Weekly* #11 (February 2002), 82–86.

47. "The State of the Industry: Revisiting Comics by the Numbers," *Comics Retailer* #72 (March 1998), 46.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Elements mentioned by Melchior Thompson over the course of the round table "Comic Book Statistics," San Diego Comic-Con, August 3, 2002. The examples of specialties were those most frequently cited by bookstores that had responded to the "Friends of Lulu" study; see also Cheryl Harris, 80.

50. Gérard Mauger et al., *Histoires de lecteurs* (Nathan, 1999), 233–234; on what is meant by "lectures masculines" or "lectures féminines," 231–234. See also the classic work on masculine or feminine determination in sociology: L. M. Terman and C. C. Miles, *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* (McGraw Hill, 1936).

51. "Back Issue Analysis," *Comics Spectator* (May–June 1997), <http://comtrac.net/articles.htm> (March 11, 2003).

52. "Archie Comics Reaches A Millennium Milestone with the 500th Issue! 60 Years of Archie Comics," section "Readership Demographics," http://www.archiecomics.com/acpaco_offices/presskit/2002%20New%20Media%20Kit%20part%201%20Co%20Info.htm (July 3, 2003).

53. Dirk Deppey, "You Can't Miss What You Can't Measure," *The Comics Journal: !Journalista!* Monday, December 8, 2003 (supplement), <http://www.tcj.com/journalista/zarch200312Ba.html> (March 14, 2004).

54. Dirk Deppey, "Memo from Hibbs," *The Comics Journal: !Journalista!* Monday, October 27, 2003 (supplement), <http://www.tcj.com/journalista/zarch200310Da.html> (March 14, 2004); 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).

Chapter 14

1. For an example of a diatribe against newspaper comic strips, see John K. Ryan, "Are the Comics Moral?," *Forum* 95 (May 1936), 301.

2. Sterling North, "A National Disgrace," *Chicago Daily News*, May 8, 1940; reprinted in *Childhood Education* 17 (1940), 56.

3. Lovell Thompson, "Not So Comic," *The Atlantic Monthly* 167 (January 1941), 105–107.

4. Walter Ong, "The Comics and the Super State: Glimpses Down the Back Alley of the Mind," *Arizona Quarterly* 1 (Autumn 1945), 34–48; "Are Comics Fascist?," *Time*, October 22, 1945, 67–68.

5. On the evaluative committees, see Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 23–30.

6. "Manners and Morals," *Time*, April 26, 1948, 26.

7. "Comics' Blamed in Death. Boy Hanged Himself Re-enacting Book's Scene, Mother Believes," *New York Times*, September 15, 1942, 12; "Comic Book Inspires Boys' Torture of Pal," *New York Times*, August 19, 1948, 17.

8. For a good example of the rhetoric then used in the press, see "Not So Funny," *Time*, October 4, 1948, 46.

9. John Mason Brown, "The Case Against the Comics," *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 20, 1948, 32–33.

10. "Clean-Up Started by Comic Books As Editors Adopt Self-Policing Plan," *New York Times*, July 2, 1948, 23; "Publishers To Start Regulation of Comics," *New York Times*, September 10, 1948, 26. The twelve members were, in alphabetical order: Ace, Avon, Consolidated Magazines, Famous Funnies (Eastern Color), Lev Gleason, Golden Willow, Hillman, McCombs, Orbit, Parents Magazine Institute, Premium Service, and Superior. Absent were the three largest publishers of the period (Dell, DC, Marvel) as well as small yet visible companies, like Gilberton and St. John.

11. "Three Cities Curb Comics," *New York Times*, May 25, 1948, 25.

12. "Unfunny Comic Books Barred in Los Angeles," *New York Times*, September 23, 1948, 38. The decree was repealed on December 28, 1949, after being judged unconstitutional.

13. "50 Cities Ban Off-Color Funnies," *New York Times*, October 5, 1948, 29.

14. "State Bill to Curb Comic Books Filed," *New York Times*, January 14, 1949, 18; "Comic Books Curb Vetoed by Dewey," *New York Times*, April 20, 1949, 20. This bill was sponsored by Republican Senator Benjamin Feinberg; it required that publishers wishing to produce comic books obtain prior permission from the Department of Education.

15. "Outlawed," *Time* (Canadian edition), December 19, 1949, 33–34. The preceding year, Canadian opinion had been shocked by a sordid incident: one night in November 1948, on the road between Dawson Creek and Killarren, British Columbia, a farmer named James Watson was sitting in the rear of a car driven by his son when he was shot in the head by a randomly fired bullet. A week later, police found the guilty parties, two boys of ten and thirteen years: after having stolen a rifle from a car that had been left open, they were hiding in the sandpit that ran along the highway and one of the two, his face masked by a handkerchief, fired upon the first car that passed by. See also "Just Like the Book," *Time* (Canadian edition), December 6, 1948, 38. Later, Fredric Wertham published this anecdote in *Seduction of the Innocent*, in chapter 11, titled "Murder in Dawson Creek. The Comic Books Abroad." For a detailed analysis of the Canadian anti-comics campaign, see Bart Beaty, "High Treason: Canadian Nationalism and the Regulation of American Crime Comic Books," *Essays in Canadian Writing* 62 (Fall 1997), 85–107.

16. Madeleine Loeb. "Anti-Comics Drive Reported Waning," *New York Times*, January 21, 1950, 9.

17. U.S. Congress, Senate, Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, *Juvenile Delinquency: A Compilation of Information and Suggestions . . . Relative to the Incidence of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States and the Possible Influence Thereon of So-Called Crime Comic Books During the 5-Year-Period 1945 to 1950*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess. (GPO, 1950).

18. U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, Hearings, 82nd Cong., 2nd sess. (GPO, 1953); "The Big Business," *Time*, January 12, 1953, 73.

19. On the origins of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency see James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 148–150.

20. "Comic Book Hearing is Set," *New York Times*, February 21, 1954, 45.

21. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books)*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess. (GPO, 1954); the numbers in parentheses in the text that follows reference the pages of the report.

22. Gaines has subsequently indicated that he was suffering the effects of Dexedrine (an

amphetamine that he was taking to lose weight); he had stopped taking the drug the day before in the hopes that his testimony would benefit from a clearer head. He recognized too late that he should not have made this remark; it would have been better, however, had he withheld the instructions that he had given to artist Johnny Craig attenuating the truly horrific character of the first version of the cover. However, the shocking nature of the publisher's reply was played up in the press as Kefauver's response—"You have blood coming out of her mouth"—was rephrased in the next day's *New York Times* as "You've got blood dripping from the mouth"; see also Peter Kihss, "Comics Publisher Sees No Harm In Horror, Discounts 'Good Taste,'" *New York Times*, April 22, 1954, 34. This inaccurate quotation was ultimately used by the rest of the press; see also "Horror Comics," *Time*, May 3, 1954, 78.

23. "Are You a Red Dupe?" appeared as the inside cover of a number of magazines published by EC in spring 1954, including in *Crime Suspensstories* 24 (September 1954); it is reproduced in my article cited above, 165. It is important to note that the term "dupe" was, at the time, the used to designate individuals receptive to communist propaganda, whether or not they were members of the Communist Party.

24. In the early 1950s, each DC title contained a half-page insert titled "Editorial Advisory Board" in which appeared the names of four experts explicitly presented as guarantors of the quality of the magazines ("your guarantee of the best in comics reading"): Dr. Lauretta Bender, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry, New York University, College of Medicine; Dr. W. W. D. Sones, Professor of Education and Director of Curriculum Study, University of Pittsburgh; Josette Frank, Consultant on Children's Reading, Child Study Association of America; Dr. S. Harcourt Peppard, Director, Essex County Juvenile Clinic, Newark, New Jersey. At the same time, Marvel's magazines were published with the support of an editorial consultant, Dr. Jean Thompson, MD, Psychiatrist, Child Guidance Bureau: Board of Education, New York City.

25. All of these measures are described in detail in the report by Edward L. Feder, *Comic Book Regulation*, Legislative Problem no. 2 (Bureau of Public Administration, University of California, Berkeley, 1955). The findings of the hearings held in the spring of 1954 were collected in a report published in February 1955: U.S. Congress, Senate, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency* 84th Cong., 1st sess. (GPO, 1955). The subcommittee never released a final report on the issue of comic books.

26. "Comic Book Curb Grows," *New York Times*, July 11, 1955, 24; "Ban on Lurid Comics Voted in Kentucky," *New York Times*, February 12, 1956, 37.

27. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*. The numbers indicated in parentheses in the following text refer to the pages of this work.

28. In the appendix to the transcription of the 1952 Gathings Commission hearings a letter from a mother in a separated family whose son had fallen into delinquency "because he read comic books," whereas she "had always cared for the family home and never worked outside the household." Cf. U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, 370–371.

29. James Gilbert himself dedicated chapter 6 of his book *A Cycle of Outrage* to the "Crusade Against Mass Culture" (91–108). On the social and professional trajectory of Fredric Wertham, see the article by Jean-Mathieu Méon, "Logiques et coûts d'un investissement militant. La croisade de Fredric Wertham contre les comic books: la mise

en scène d'une psychiatrie sociale et engagée," in Philippe Hamman et al. (eds.), *Discourse savants, discours militants: mélange des genres* (L'Harmattan, 2002), 225-250.

30. Gershon Legman, *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* (Breaking Point, 1949); Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (Holt, Rinehart, 1954); Geoffrey Wagner, *The Parade of Pleasure: A Study of Popular Iconography in the USA* (Derek Verschoyle, 1954).

31. For a biographical sketch of Gershon Legman see "The Sovereign of Smut. A Tribute to the Life and Work of Gershon Legman, Scholar of the Dirty Joke," http://www.spectator.net/EDPAGES/1141_sovereign.html (June 22, 2004).

32. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford University Press, 1956).

33. For a remarkable intellectual biography of Dr. Wertham, see Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

34. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik (eds.), *High and Low, Modern Art and Popular Culture* (Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 186-187.

35. On the reaction to the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, see Méon, "Logiques et coûts d'un investissement militant"; on the role of comic books in juvenile delinquency, see two other works by Fredric Wertham: *The Circle of Guilt* (Holt, 1956), 83-103, and *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence* (Macmillan, 1966), 193-199.

36. For a criticism of Wertham formulated by an author equally hostile to comic books, see Robert Warshow, "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham," *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (1962: Harvard University Press, 2001), 68-71.

37. Martin Barker, *A Haunt of Fears. The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (Pluto, 1984), 71-72.

38. Leslie Fiedler, "The Middle Against Both Ends," *Encounter* 5 (1955), 16-23.

39. Roger Garcia and Bernard Eisenschitz (eds.), *Frank Tashlin* (Festival International du Film de Locarno/Yellow Now, 1994). On the reception of the film in France, see pages 14-109.

40. *Ibid.*, 218.

41. New York State, Joint Legislative Committee Studying the Publication and Dissemination of Offensive and Obscene Material, *Report*, Legislative Document no. 83 (Williams, 1960), 78.

42. "Curbs by Comics," *New York Times*, December 10, 1968, 76. The 1954 code forbade only knives, concealable weapons, and realistic reproductions of firearms.

43. On the problems posed by the definition of obscenity, see John Atherton, "Speech, Act and the Right to Offend in their First Amendment Context," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* 52 (May 1992), 137-148.

44. "Artists Produce Benefit Portfolio," *The Comics Journal* #116 (July 1987), 21.

45. "Friendly Frank's Wins on Appeal," *The Comics Journal* #133 (December 1989), 13-15.

46. "Comic Legends Legal Defense Fund Information Page," <http://mypage.uniserve.ca/~lswong/CLLDF.html> (June 22, 2004).

47. John Fulce, *Seduction of the Innocent Revisited* (Huntington, 1990).

48. "Gay Health Group is Cleared in U.S. Inquiry," *New York Times*, December 2, 1987, A29.

49. Greg Stump, "They Said 'No': Supreme Court Declines to Hear Diana's Petition," *The Comics Journal* #198 (August 1997), 7-8.

50. André Kaspi, *La Vie quotidienne aux États-Unis au temps de la Prospérité: 1919-1929* (Hachette, 1980), 151-152.

Chapter 15

1. For a sharp problematization of the reasoning behind the sociology of art and cultural production, see Nathalie Heinrich, *Ce qui l'art fait à la sociologie* (Minuit, 1998).

2. Bernard Lahire, *La Culture des individus* (La Découverte, 2004), 7-10.

3. The information about the prizes comes primarily from Darren Hick, "Untangling the Laurels: Your Online Field-Guide to the Comics Industry's Major Awards," http://www.tcj.com/3_outline/f_laurels.html (June 16, 2003), and Joel Hahn, "Comic Book Awards Almanac," <http://users.rcn.com/aardy/comics/awards/index.html> (February 24, 2004).

4. "Alley Awards," <http://users.rcn.com/aardy/comics/awards/alley.shtml> (February 24, 2004).

5. CBG changed its format to a monthly magazine in June 2004.

6. The Harvey Awards Web site: <http://harveyawards.org/> (February 26, 2004).

"Harvey Award Winners Announced at the Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art," <http://harveyawards.org/news.html> (February 26, 2004).

7. Web site: <http://www.spxpo.com/ignatzaward.htm> (February 26, 2004). The Ignatzes were not awarded in 2001 because the Expo was canceled following the attacks of September 11 on New York and Washington.

8. Although the annual San Diego event has retained the name "Comic-Con," its organizers have shifted its focus toward the promotion of television and film properties since the early 2000s. In 2008 comic books per se occupied an estimated 20 percent of the convention's floor space.

9. The full list of Inkpot, Manning, and Clampett award winners is printed each year in the catalog published by the convention. For a list see Joel Hahn, "Comic Book Awards Almanac," <http://users.rcn.com/aardy/comics/awards/> (February 27, 2004).

10. Web site: <http://www.friends-lulu.org/awards.html> (February 27, 2004)

11. On the concept of the "singularity" of cultural objects, see Heinrich, *Ce qui l'art fait à la sociologie*, 26-29.

12. "Comics and Fandom: Where Do We Go From Here?," *Alter Ego* #3.20 (January 2003), "Spotlight on the 1965 New York Comicon," 30-38.

13. Jean-Yves Mollier, *La Lecture et ses publics à l'époque contemporaine* (PUF, 2001), 78.

14. Michael L. Cook, *Dime Novel Round-Up: Annotated Index, 1931-1981* (Popular Press, 1983).

15. Julius Schwartz, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics* (HarperEntertainment, 2000), 13-16; for a detailed description of the world of science fiction fans in the 1930s, see Sam Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (1954; Hyperion, 1973).

16. Bill Schelly, *The Golden Age of Comics Fandom* (Hamster Press, 1999), 13.

17. *Ibid.*, 13-14.

18. Jerry Weist, *Original Comic Art: Identification and Price Guide*, 1st edition (Avon Books, 1992), 22; Schelly, *The Golden Age of Comics Fandom*, 17-20. The Crumb Brothers' *Foo* was reprinted in a limited edition as *The Complete Fool* by Bijou Empire Publishing in 1980.

19. Tim Hesse, "The Pop Hollinger Story: The First Comic Book Collector/Dealer," *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* 12 (1982), A58-A66; Schelly, *The Golden Age of Comics Fandom*, 20-21.

20. Robert Warshow, "Paul, The Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham," *The Immediate*