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## EDITORIAL

### Of Time, Renewal, and Scholarship: Volume 11 (2021) Wrapped

Ernesto Priego\* [corresponding author]

\*Ernesto.Priego.1@city.ac.uk

City, University of London, UK

Jeanette D’Arcy, Independent Researcher, UK

Kay Sohini, Stony Brook University, USA

Peter Wilkins, Douglas College, Canada

## ABSTRACT

This editorial discusses the articles published and the activities undertaken by *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* during 2021, and calls for research system-wide cultural changes and wider contextual awareness in order to make scholarly communication fairer and up to the challenges of our time.

## Keywords

Comics Studies; Peer Review; Scholarship; Scholarly Publishing

## Playback

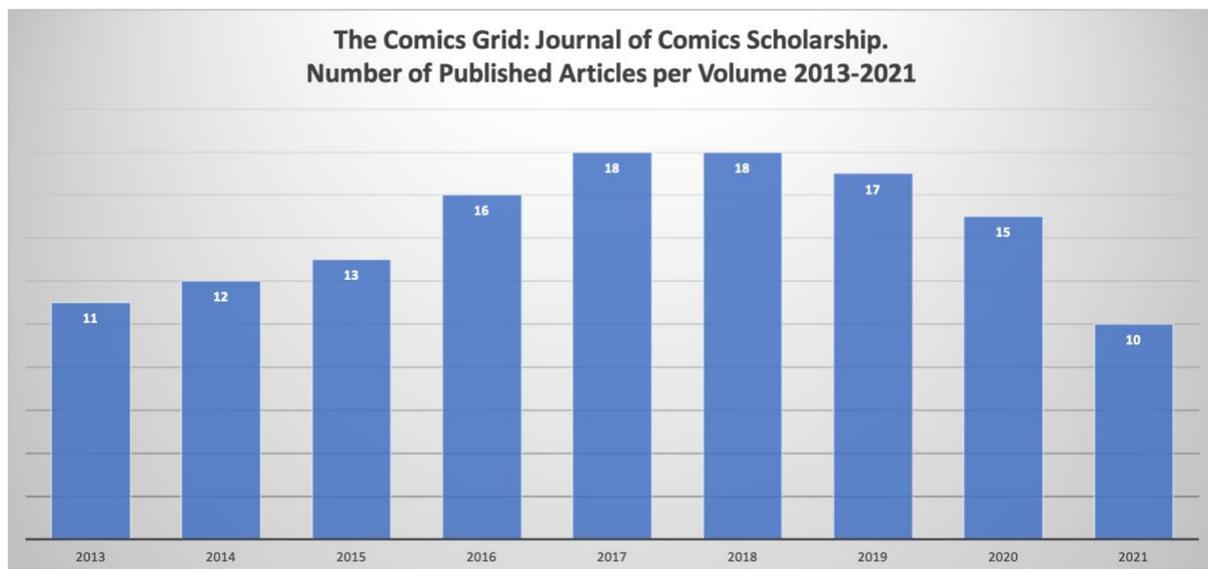
We are living in the future. On the one hand, it seems difficult to believe that we should be writing an editorial for the 11th volume of this journal, when a mere decade ago we were wondering what the future would bring. Time is relative, particularly in scholarly publishing, where editorial peer review may date as far back as 1663 (Biagioli 2002:23; see also Kronick 1990; Kronick 2004:96; Fitzpatrick 2011:20-22). On the other hand, it is also hard to believe that 2021 is now drawing to an end, and that it is time to “wrap” this year, to use the online phrase *de jour*.

We write this at a time, indeed, in which the year, not yet officially finished, is already being declared “wrapped” on the first day of the 12th month on all social media platforms (Spotify Newsroom 2021). Exactly a year ago at the time of writing, we had already published the editorial for our 10th volume, corresponding to 2020 (Dunley, Priego & Wilkins 2020). There we reflected on the challenges ‘our pandemic year’ had posed for the journal, while marvelling at the fact we had managed to publish 15 articles during what was experienced as an extraordinarily difficult year. We also write this in the awareness that we are also always-already in the past, and that, since this is not blogging (which benefits from speed) but scholarly publishing (which is often everything but speedy), it is possible that by the time this editorial gets published it will already be 2022.

Even as early as July 2020, research had already indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic had altered our sense of time and how it passes (Ogden 2020). The year 2021 was not an exception. As demonstrated by Spotify’s “Wrap” and Instagram’s “Playback” (Griffin 2021), the prevalence of algorithmic culture and the automation and datafication of everyday practices have also triggered an acceleration that may be contributing to this pandemic troubling of our experience of time, to the point that we are asked to declare a year concluded, and quantify it, well before it has even ended. And yet, we remain human, living in time and space, subject to the laws of physics. Producing a journal remains a particularly human endeavour, subject to the conditions of production of authors, reviewers, editors, typesetters, developers, etc., all human beings working and living their lives in specific circumstances. It is therefore no surprise that no year, and therefore no volume of this journal, would remain exactly the same in terms of production.

The 11th Volume of this journal is the first one we produced using the Janeway journal management system (Eve and Byers 2018). Janeway is a digital platform for publishing scholarly articles online, developed by Professor Martin Eve, Mauro Sanchez and Andy Byers at the Centre for Technology and Publishing, Birkbeck, University of London, and the Open Library of Humanities, UK. The migration to Janeway required editorial upskilling, and it also offered new opportunities for innovation in both user experience and scholarly content. The move also prompted a reorganisation of our editorial board, a rethink of our workflows, and the strengthening of our academic standards. The editorial team attended workshops, submitted feature requests and user feedback, and developed internal guidance. This was not a mere technical change, but a meaningful transformation of our ways of doing editorial work which required the investment of time and labour.

This volume includes a total of 10 articles. In **figure 1**, you can see how that compares with previous years:



**Figure 1. Number of published articles published in *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 2013-2021 (Priego 2021).**

Of these ten outputs there were five research articles, one book review, one commentary, one interview, one note, and one editorial (this one). Like last year, two of the articles in the research section are part of the Graphic Justice Special Collection with editorial work led by Thom Giddens (thank you Thom!). The countries of affiliation of the authors whose contributions were published in this volume include Spain, Australia, Sweden, Canada, Germany, Denmark, UK, USA, and Mexico.

In order of publication, we list below, excluding this editorial, all the articles the journal published this year. Consider it the Table of Contents for this volume:

### **2021 (Volume 11)**

Marini, A., (2021) “Discursive (Re)Construction of Mexican American Identity in J. Gonzo’s *La Mano del Destino*”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.211>

Commins, J., (2021) “Composing the Handmaid: From Graphic Novel to Protest Icon”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.214>

Classon Frangos, M., (2021) “Swedish Norm-Critical Comics and the Comics Pedagogy of Lynda Barry”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4042>

Gonzalez-Trujillo, R. & Priego, E., (2021) “Searching for a Common Ancestry: Linguistic and Biological Analogies in Comic Art”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4351>

Reyns-Chikuma, C., (2021) “Beyond the Two Solitudes: Differences in Fluidity in Franco-Canadian BD and Anglo-Canadian Comics Through the Influence of Manga”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4041>

Scanu, A., (2021) “How to Tell a Story without Words: Time and Focalization in Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006)”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4043>

Godfrey-Meers, A., (2021) “A/effective Bodies: A Review of Eszter Szép’s *Comics and The Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (2020)”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4796>

Høegh Madsen, N. & Stengaard, M. & Schmidt-Kessen, M. J., (2021) “The Visualized Employment Contract. An Exploratory Study on Contract Visualization in Danish Employment Contracts”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.4353>

Chambliss, J. C., (2021) “Mapping the Black Comic Imaginary: Beyond the Black Panther at the MSU Museum”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.8051>

Nasar, A., (2021) “Graphic Math: A Collection of Interviews With Creators of Mathematically Themed Graphic Novels”, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 11(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.8032>

**“Discursive (Re)Construction of Mexican American Identity in J. Gonzo’s *La Mano del Destino*,”** (Marini 2021) explores the comic from a critical discourse perspective that unpacks the allegory of the *luchador*’s rise and fall. Marini argues that the protagonist represents the struggle of the subordinate Mexican and Mexican American identity. The stylized, Manichean world of Mexican wrestling lends itself to this allegory, particularly the masks that the wrestlers wear to both hide and announce their identities and the kayfabe that demands the audience suspend their belief.

Marini traces the title character's bouts as a particular identity trajectory while also illuminating the “American” visual language of the comic, influenced as it is by the style of Jack Kirby. This visual language is augmented by Gonzo’s co-optation of United Productions of America (UPA) animation style in certain frames. The dissonant, unsettling effect can be equated to James Joyce writing his Irish story in English. At the same time, Marini shows how *La Mano del Destino* depicts Mexican social stratifications through the relationship between the protagonist and his brother, and issues of gender and ableism. Marini’s

contribution is notable not just for its reading of *La Mano del Destino*'s diegesis and style as hybrid but also its analysis of how and why they are hybrid.

**“Composing the Handmaid: From Graphic Novel to Protest Icon”** (Commins 2021) offers a discussion of Renee Nault's 2019 adaptation of Canadian author Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (2010) and its burgeoning synonymity with activism and reproductive rights as protestors took to wearing the distinctive red robes and white, winged headdress associated with the various versions of the Handmaid. Commins explores the cross-discursivity of the comics form and Giddens' concept of the multiframe (2018) along with the work of Hillary Chute, illuminating the relationships between the symbolic order of legal structures, forms of and in *The Handmaid's Tale(s)* and the protest groups donning the symbolic garments of the Handmaids. She reveals in this paper the ways in which iconic images of protesters, and the very bodies of protestors themselves, 'invoke the spectre' of legal categories – Nault's Offred demonstrates 'Handmaid' as just such a 'legal category' - based on gendered social constructs that limit and constrain the feminine whilst categorising the female body.

**“Swedish Norm-Critical Comics and the Comics Pedagogy of Lynda Barry”** (Classon Frangos 2021) presents a discussion of contemporary Swedish feminist comics as a medium for questioning norms of representation, looking at how they employ *normkritik* to 'model an approach to cultural criticism using humor to satirize everything from politics to popular culture and everyday life'. This research article focuses on three examples, examined through the lens of the playful comics pedagogy of Lynda Barry: Freja Erixån's collection *Över min döda kropp* (*Over my dead body*, 2019); Ester Eriksson's *Jag, Esters rester* (*I, the remains of Ester*, 2017); Lisa Ewald's collection *Måste carpa* (*Got to seize the day*, 2017). Frangos considers comics as a tool for thinking with and through, and comics pedagogy as 'a mode of thinking and theorizing in its own right', taking influence from McCloud (1994) and Barry (2020) in understanding comics dialogically, not as the object of study but the mode. He offers a detailed discussion of Barry's pedagogical writings and drawings, with an interesting application of these ideas and the approach of 'norm-critical pedagogy', which began in Swedish educational contexts, as an approach to challenge the construction of discriminatory social norms and encourage social change, to his chosen comics and creators.

**“Searching for a Common Ancestry: Linguistic and Biological Analogies in Comic Art”** (Gonzalez-Trujillo & Priego 2021) is a note that riffs on the idea of analogous comics images in a truly ground-breaking way. They use two concepts: the linguistic analogy and the biological analogy to establish two possible analogies in comics. When the similarity between images and their lineage seems obvious, the analogy is most like a linguistic analogy. When the similarity seems accidental or serendipitous, the biological analogy is more appropriate. Analogous images in comics are thus analogous to two different kinds of analogies. These analogies are reminiscent of Ishmael's comments on the lines that appear on the skins of whales in *Moby-Dick*: some seem intentional and some seem accidental. But how

do we tell which is which? In any event, Gonzalez-Trujillo and Priego are definitely onto an idea that deserves deeper investigation. We hope they undertake it.<sup>1</sup>

**“Beyond the Two Solitudes: Differences in Fluidity in Franco-Canadian BD and Anglo-Canadian Comics Through the Influence of Manga”** (Reyns-Chikuma 2021) discusses how Anglo-Canadian Comics and Franco-Canadian *bande dessinée* respond to the popularisation of the Japanese mode of manga. According to Reyns-Chikuma, Anglo comics have been receptive to the influence of manga, while Quebecois comics have resisted it. The constrictions of form are responsible in part for this difference, as Anglo comics are more fluid than Quebecois comics and are thus more amenable to incorporating “other” styles. More surprising perhaps than their relationship to manga, is the two Canadian traditions’ resistance to each other. Anglo comics emerge from the US tradition, while Quebecois comics emerge from the Franco-Belgian tradition and never the twain shall meet. Consequently, the resistance to manga in Quebecois comics may have more to do with the Anglo threat to Quebecois culture and the latter’s fortifications against that threat than anything to do with Japanese culture. The formal rigidity of Quebecois comics, particularly their typical regular grid, represents this fortification. Reyns-Chikuma includes an analysis of Mariko and Jillian Tamaki’s comics to demonstrate the relationship between a looser grid and a more open posture towards queerness and otherness in general.

**“How to Tell a Story without Words: Time and Focalization in Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006)”** (Scanu 2021) follows a narratological approach to ‘focalization’ in analysing how the comics form is used by proponents of ‘wordless’ comics, in particular Australian artist Shaun Tan, whose 2006 book *The Arrival* explores the migration journey of its protagonist to a strange land, leaving behind his family and attempting to settle in a baffling environment. Scanu undertakes a detailed analysis of the visual components and meaning-making of the comics form and how panels, gutters, frames, colouring, texture, line and the relationships between these in the spatial organisation of pages drive the narrative focalization of the comic. This is developed as Scanu discusses what he calls ‘configurations of temporality’, and the article brings together narratological and comics scholarship in an excellent unpacking of how this comic makes meaning and stands as a skilful addition to the fields of both literary and comics criticism, broadening our understanding of the ‘very concept’ of focalization.

**“A/effective Bodies: A Review of Eszter Szép’s Comics and *The Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (2020)”** (Godfrey-Meers 2021) offers a thorough critical overview of an important recent work in the field of comics dealing with trauma, illness and war. Godfrey-Meers contextualizes Szép’s work in the current Covid-19 landscape, graphic medicine and the discourse of vulnerability by disabled people, ending with a consideration of the book’s implications and applications in these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernesto Priego did not write this article's summary.

**“The Visualized Employment Contract. An Exploratory Study on Contract Visualization in Danish Employment Contracts”** (Høegh Madsen & Stengard & Schmidt-Kessen 2021) is an exploratory case study presenting the results of an experiment used to test the efficacy of using the comics medium to improve communication of the legalities of employment contracts to employees. The article describes the legal requirements of a recent EU Directive (1152) demanding more transparency and predictability for workers, aimed at providing them with more information about their employment conditions. Høegh Madsen, Stengard, and Schmidt-Kessen use their case study to consider whether visualisation of the employment contract is both compliant with EU labour laws, and able to improve communication of the content of employment contracts to make the law more effective. Participants in the study were put into two groups, one receiving their contract in comic form, the other in written text only. Each group was asked to answer questions about the format of their contract, and from memory about legal terms (and their applications) used in the contract. The study shows an encouraging improvement in communications and concludes that comic contracts provide information in ‘a more accessible and actionable manner’.

**“Mapping the Black Comic Imaginary: Beyond the Black Panther at the MSU Museum”** (Chambliss 2021) is an insightful commentary on Chambliss’ work as curator of the *Beyond the Black Panther: Visions of Afrofuturism in American Comics* exhibition (MSU museum, virtual experience, 2021) that shines a light on his choices and processes in deciding what comics to include, how and what meanings were created by their mode of display. He examines comics through the lens of Afrofuturism, seeking to move beyond Dery’s 1994 definition and ‘build on Alondra Nelson’s (2002) framing of Afrofuturism as a way to think about black speculative practice and its connection to modernity’.

Chambliss emphasises his focus as a curator on the history of black speculation in comics, as an opportunity to contextualise speculations on the meanings of liberty in the past through the lens of the contemporary moment and all those moments in-between, demonstrated in his discussion of curating and displaying different versions of the character Lion Man and his exploration of the work of Octavia Butler through her graphic novel adapters Duffy and Jennings. The exhibition explored the themes of Aesthetics, Metaphysics, Gender, Science and Community, and Chambliss explicates how the show uses examples of comics from the post WWII period to engage with the tenets of Afrofuturism, black feminist ideology and the challenge of systemic injustice. In particular, this commentary is interested in how the exhibition engages with the transformative potential associated with black speculative work in comics, the space of the museum as essential for ‘aesthetic and cultural affirmation’, and the need to decolonize this space through ‘material culture created by and to some extent *for* African Americans’.

**“Graphic Math: A Collection of Interviews With Creators of Mathematically Themed Graphic Novels”** (Nasar 2021) offers insights from five well-known comics creators of mathematically themed graphic novels (Larry Gonick, Robert Lewis, Jennifer Granville, Apostolos Doxiadis and Gene Luen Yang). This journal continues to encourage the publication of interviews as a way of qualitative research data sharing, and as a means to

encourage further research. Conducted between June and December, 2020, the interviews will be of interest to those researching non-fiction comics, as well as the intersections of pedagogy and comics, and science -in this case, mathematics- and graphic narrative. The brief interviews offer flashes of creative insight and advice useful for writers, illustrators, and educators interested in creating or using mathematical graphic content in specific or visual scientific content in general.

## **Renewal**

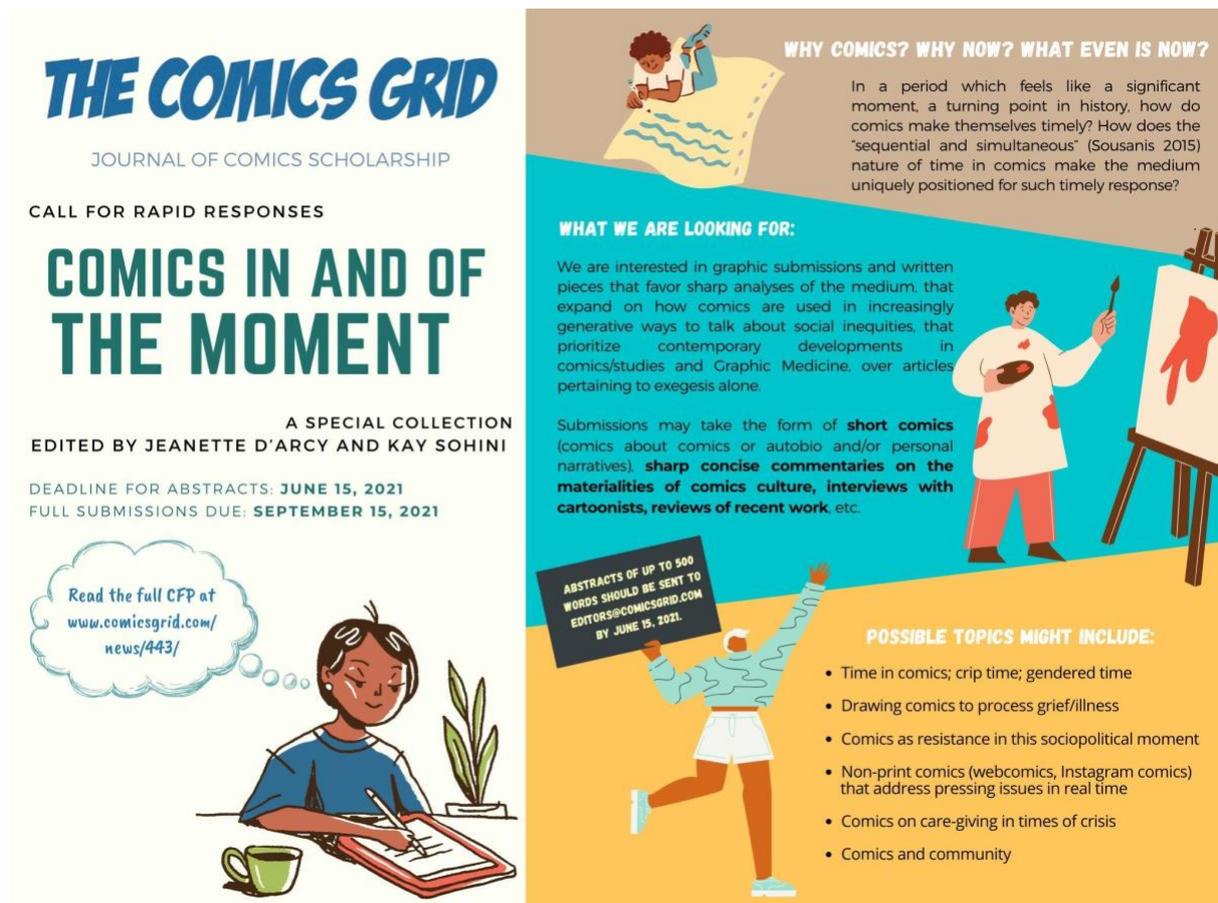
At the start of 2021 we restructured the journal's editorial team, reconnecting with longstanding members and convening on the need for renewal and innovation. On the 22nd of February we put out a call for an Editorial and Peer Review Workflow Coordinator, looking for new editorial board members who could perform crucial management, administrative, and curatorial roles, and actively shape the direction of the journal. After interviews we welcomed two new members to our team on the 12th of March: Kay Sohini and Jeanette D'Arcy.

Kay is a comics maker, researcher and writer, and is currently a PhD candidate at Stony Brook University, New York, where she is working on her dissertation in comics form. In 2021, Kay's work has appeared in [Women Write about Comics](#), *The Nib*'s 'Nature' issue (Sohini 2021), and the *Covid Chronicles* comics anthology (Boileau & Johnson 2021). You can see some of her amazing work at <https://www.kaysohini.com/>. Jeanette is a researcher and independent scholar currently working at UEA, Norwich. With a range of interdisciplinary research interests from comics to performance, feminism, adaptation and education her work has been published in the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* (D'Arcy 2016) as well as our own *The Comics Grid* (D'Arcy 2019).

The addition of Kay and Jeanette marked a shift in the journal, as we sought to both improve the administrative aspects of our work and to achieve even greater academic standards. Juggling significant time zone differences, we moved to weekly online meetings with the editorial team which helped to give continuity and sustained focus to our work with contributors. We have often discussed the impossibilities and health impacts of academic workloads, especially during these pandemic years, and part of the new team's job was to share the load and to make sure that work is distributed equitably. The move to the new Janeway publishing platform brought its own challenges and we have worked closely with their team to navigate and improve upon workflow systems. The importance of understanding and empathy, both between the editorial team and with our contributors and colleagues, has taken emphasis and we have tried to be mindful of how much we are asking people to do, how we are asking and when—especially as all work for the journal is voluntary. We are in the process of drawing up a Team Alliance document which will outline our ethos and ways of approaching breakdowns in communications and/or relationships. Ironically, this has been delayed due to time constraints(!) but watch this space in 2022...

## **Comics in and of the Moment**

One key result of our weekly conversations with the newest members of the team was an interest in publishing more graphic submissions, a desire for the journal to contribute to the growing scholarship responding to the Covid-19 crises, and an interest in how comics are uniquely positioned as a mode of response in ‘the moment’. Instead of focusing on the healthcare aspect of the pandemic alone, we wanted to cover a broad range of subjects: how are people using literature as a way to talk about the current public health crises? How has the pandemic been recorded by various artists across the globe? How has it affected creativity? How has it created spaces for art therapy to cope with trauma? How can comics be utilised in the exploration of interspecies relationships? What role does political cartooning play in resisting disinformation? This culminated in a Call for Papers for our newest Special Collection: Rapid Responses: Comics in and of the Moment, edited by Jeanette and Kay with help from Ernesto and Peter (**figure 2**). The call was published on May 18, 2021. Keeping with the "of the moment" theme of our collection, we were especially interested in curating Graphic Submissions, Interviews and Commentaries instead of long-form research articles that have longer turnarounds.



**Figure 2. Poster for the Rapid Responses: Comics In and Of the Moment call for papers, designed by Kay Sohini.**

We were thrilled to receive a range of excellent proposals and the collection is shaping up to be an exciting contribution to interdisciplinary comics scholarship. Since September of this year, the editorial team has focused on reviewing, taking editorial decisions and copyediting the accepted submissions. As we write this, most of the articles that will be part of the collection are already undergoing typesetting. We look forward to putting it out into the world in 2022.

### **We've Been Calling You**

Led by Jonathan Evans (University of Glasgow, UK), on the 13th of May last year we published the call for papers for the [Special Collection: Translation, Remediation, Spread: The Global Circulation of Comics in Digital Distribution](#), with a very generous original deadline of the 30th of June 2021. Due to several requests from authors, we extended the deadline to the 1st of September 2021. In spite of this extension we did not receive enough submissions to justify a Special Collection under this theme, but those considered have either received editorial decisions or still undergoing peer review and those accepted will be published during 2022.

The process of renewal started in January 2021 to reinvigorate the journal's editorial board led not only to the inclusion of new colleagues, but, as in the case of 'Comics in and of the Moment', new Special Collections. The addition of Alexandra Alberda, Anna Feigenbaum, and Julia Round (all from Bournemouth University, UK) to our editorial board led to the publication, on the 30th of April, of the call for papers for the *Conjuring a New Normal: Monstrous Routines and Mundane Horrors in Pandemic Lives and Dreamscapes* Special Collection (<https://www.comicsgrid.com/news/435/>). As the call for paper says,

'The [Covid-19] pandemic has revealed ominous and unnerving risks previously buried in our everyday events and lives. It has changed the ways we congregate for rituals like weddings and funerals and altered mundane routines from supermarket shopping to getting haircuts. A constant spectre of debt and fears of losing both loved ones and livelihoods – homes, jobs and social lives – lurk behind any attempt at building a new normal. Meanwhile, collective anxiety and living in constant states of uncertainty have led to the mass disruption of sleep patterns as we are haunted by future worries and the ghosts of past traumas.'

It would have been hypocritical of us in the journal's editorial team not to also discuss and propose different ways of conducting our editorial work during the pandemic, and as a journal we consciously implemented less strenuous deadlines, in the hope of allowing much more generous timeframes for authors and editors to contribute. Published at the end of April, the deadline to receive full papers for this call is the 1st of September 2022, with estimated publication in the Summer of 2023.

This journal has traditionally published one issue per year, with publication of articles as soon as they are ready, receiving submissions via two main routes: 1) open submissions and 2) special collection calls for papers. For open submissions, we have usually had two yearly internal deadlines, one on the 31st of March and one on the 31st of October, which means that, in practice, we as editors received, considered and managed open submissions all year round, in an ongoing fashion. On Monday the 24th of May 2021, we announced that the journal would remain closed for open submissions, to allow us to focus on the ongoing Special Collections. The journal will reopen on the 1st of July 2022 to receive submissions for the [Conjuring a New Normal: Monstrous Routines and Mundane Horrors in Pandemic Lives and Dreamscapes](#) Special Collection. Before this date, the new submissions link in the journal will remain closed.

Engagement with scholarly articles in an age of attention scarcity is tricky. This year we hosted three of our webinars on comics scholarship. In each webinar we have invited authors of two articles published in the journal to discuss their papers and explore commonalities and differences.

On the 28th of January we hosted our second webinar in the series, focusing on Music and Noir in Comics. It was co-hosted by Paula Clemente Vega (Open Library of Humanities) and Peter Wilkins (editor, *The Comics Grid*; Douglas College, Canada) and featured authors

Hailey J. Austin (University of Dundee) and Susan Bond (University of Toronto) discussed their respective Comics Grid articles on Noir and Music in Díaz Canales and Guarnido's [Blacksad](#) (2000) and Musical Sequences in Thompson and Campbell's [Jem and the Holograms](#) (2015). The webinar was recorded and can be watched [here](#).

Our third webinar took place on the 1st of June, and focused on Graphic Science and Narrative Drawing. It was co-hosted by Paula Clemente Vega (Open Library of Humanities) and Nicolas Labarre (editor of *The Comics Grid*'s Graphic Science Special Collection; Université Bordeaux Montaigne) and featured authors Lydia Wysocki (Newcastle University) and Paul Fisher Davies (East Sussex College) discussing their respective articles on the [Newcastle Science Comic](#) and “[Enacting Graphic Mark-Making](#)”. The recording can be watched [here](#).

Last but not least, our fourth webinar took place on Wrestling Graphic Novels organised on the 26th of October. In this webinar co-hosted by Paula Clemente Vega (Open Library of Humanities) and Ernesto Priego (editor, *The Comics Grid*; City, University of London) panelists Anna Marta Marini (Universidad de Alcalá) and Jessica Fontaine (McGill University) discussed their respective articles on [La Mano del Destino](#) and two [Andre the Giant graphic biographies](#). It was also recorded and can also be watched [here](#).

We hope to continue the webinar series next year.

### **Scholarly Communication in Times of Crisis**

We remain hopeful that the pandemic can be a catalyst for a wider awareness of the impact that individual decisions have on others. It may still provide opportunities to respond differently to the everyday, and to reconsider the way we have done things in the past. As an open access journal, the *Grid* embraced the challenge of facilitating rapid responses whilst maintaining scholarly standards. Particularly this year, as we have seen, this led to fewer published articles in this volume, as well as concentrating on a future collection of non-peer reviewed (but thoroughly editorially reviewed) rapid responses. By adjusting and renewing our editorial team, technologies, timelines and workflows, this year we implemented mechanisms to facilitate a more dynamic review processes, and prioritised the wellbeing of authors, editors and reviewers.

Only just published in early December 2021, the report titled *Scholarly Communication in Times of Crisis: The response of the scholarly communication system to the COVID-19 pandemic* noted that ‘...the pandemic has highlighted the pressures on the scientific publication system’. They conclude, indeed, that ‘there is no magic bullet to improving scholarly communication. It is a joint responsibility that requires collaboration and coordinated action across stakeholders in the research system’ (Waltman, Pinfield, Rzayeva et al. 2021). Individual journal innovations are important and necessary but system-wide

cultural changes are required if we want to make scholarly communication fairer and up to the challenges of our time.

Fourteen years ago, Kathleen Fitzpatrick had already warned us that ‘peer review threatens to become the bottleneck in which the entire issue of electronic scholarly publishing gets wedged, preventing many innovative systems from becoming fully established’ (Fitzpatrick 2007; Fitzpatrick 2011:16). This is proven true every day in the life of everyone engaged in scholarly publishing. The current research system often fails to acknowledge the human element, lacking a sense of the many conflicting responsibilities academics/scholars work under, and their need for rest and joy which is undermined by assumptions that, e.g., breaks in term-time are appropriate spaces for research deadlines, or turnarounds that do not take account of how long any given assignment might take, especially for those already marginalised in the academy. We need wider context-awareness in higher education as a whole and specifically in the academic publishing system, so that our ways of working align more effectively with the needs of its contributors, readers, as well as that of the wider world we belong to.

### **Authors’ Note**

This article was drafted collectively and remotely in a shared online environment that processes texts across time zones and geographical locations. A combination of American and British spellings, as well as the occasional rogue typo, may have remained.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Competing Interests**

The authors are editors of *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*. Otherwise they have no competing interests to declare.

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