Despite divergent histories of comic art publishing in the United States, western Europe, and Japan, in recent decades there has been an apparent convergence of publication formats: the graphic novel in the United States, the album in western Europe, and the collections called tankobon or manga in Japan. Although these three formats are similar in appearance, each is the product of a unique history that affects demographics of readership, patterns of distribution and sale, and cultural meanings associated with the formats.(1)

In the United States, the graphic novel is viewed as the descendant of the pamphlet-form comic book, published for sale on newstands. Comic books were invented in the 1930s by M. C. Gaines, a salesman for Eastern Color Press which printed Sunday newspaper comic sections for newspapers throughout the United States. In the depression, as sales of newspapers decreased, Gaines conceived of the comic book as a way to increase the press's business. The first comic books were giveaways, promotional items for companies and their products. The size and shape of comic books was determined by the proportions of a folded and stapled newspaper page that would yield a booklet approximating the size of a newsstand magazine. The first comic books were anthologies of several different popular comic strips reprinted from newspapers. The stories were not complete in a single issue, but instead had the same long continuities as the newspaper strips they reprinted, in which stories were told over the course of weeks or months. As the number of comic books increased, publishers ran out of Sunday strips and began commissioning original features. Comic books were still collections of different stories, and the stories were still continued stories, following the model created in the first comic books.(2)

Comic books in the U.S. moved away from the continued stories in the comic strips when the superhero genre began to dominate the comic book publishing field in the United States. Comic books continued to be anthology publications, but the stories were in most cases complete, rarely serialized, and in some books all or almost all the stories were centered on a single popular character.

The models for this kind of popular publication in the U.S. were American fiction magazines—the pulps like Black Mask and other mystery and detective fiction magazines or Amazing and Astounding science fiction magazines. Such pulp fiction magazines were anthologies of different, unrelated works linked only by genre. Black Mask developed a stable of writers whose names would sell the magazine, as well as a few characters which appeared on a irregular basis whose popularity still sells books and movies, such as Philip Marlowe and the Thin Man. Science fiction magazines and
magazines featuring adventure and other genres, including romance, featured a similar mix of stories, developed writers like Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose names would sell magazines and, as with the detective magazines, characters like Burroughs's Tarzan, which appeared irregularly but also served to increase sales. There were also pulp fiction magazines that, like comic books, concentrated on the adventures of a single, eponymous character, such as The Shadow and Doc Savage. These magazines would usually feature the same mix of story lengths as the other pulps, with novels or novelettes and short stories. Unlike the other anthology pulp magazines, the stories in The Shadow and Doc Savage were credited to a single author, Walter Gibson and Kenneth Robeson respectively, although the stories were created by multiple authors.

Both these types of pulp magazines can be seen as models for the dominant form of comic books in the United States, the superhero comics that formed the majority of comic books sold in the United States in from the late 1930s until today. After the success of the Superman comic book, the character's popularity led to many more, including Batman, Wonder Woman, and others were created for the publisher of Superman, DC Comics, while the antecedent company of Marvel Comics, Timely, developed the Sub-Mariner, Human Torch and others, and the Fawcett Company developed Captain Marvel. After the development of superhero comic books, the narratives in comic books departed from the format of the Sunday comic strips of newspapers, with their long story arcs extending over weeks or months, and their combination of multiple genres and a variety of characters within a single publication. Like pulps, comic books featured multiple, self-contained stories in a single genre or featuring a single, usually eponymous, character. Many pulp magazine writers also wrote for the comic books. This pattern dominated comic books in the United States through the 1970s.

Newspaper comic strips were serialized fiction, comparable in many ways to the characteristically Victorian model of publishing novels in multiple parts, either in magazines or as independent publications. Pulp fiction magazines also featured serialized fiction, which would tend to link them to these Victorian models and separate them from comic books. From another point of view, however, the inclusion of serialized novels serves to highlight certain features of pulp fiction magazines that links them to comic books, and separates the development of U.S. comic books from other national and regional traditions in comic art publication. Pulp fiction magazines did include serialized novels, but rarely would a single issue of a pulp include more than one serialized title. The majority of the contents of pulp magazines were independent and complete stories, and the novels that were serialized were usually in relatively few parts, as few as two or three and rarely more than a half dozen. In the pulp magazines dedicated to a single character, the major feature of each magazine was usually a complete story, a short novel, appearing in only that single issue.

Unlike Victorian serialized fiction, or even the fiction serialized in more elite magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*, there was no certainty that a novel serialized in a pulp fiction magazine would appear in the form of a book. The best-known authors' works would be published as books, whether by premier presses like Knopf in the case of Hammett and Chandler, or secondary or regional publishers like Chicago's A.C. McClurg in the case of Edgar Rice Burroughs. But many mystery and science fiction writers' works had to await the development of specialty presses in these areas in the 1950s, or the development of major mass market paperback lines in the 1950s and especially the 1960s before being reprinted in books. The other stories in pulp magazines were rarely collected in books, many never reprinted in any form.
Like the shorter-format stories in pulp fiction magazines, the fiction in U.S. comic books was not collected nor republished in any other form until the development of specialty publishers or publishing programs like DC Comics’ archive series, phenomena of recent date associated with the development of a collectors’ market since the 1970s. Comic book stories were available to readers only for the month that each individual issue was for sale on newsstands. The contents of the comic books were never collected, never reprinted, and disappeared within weeks of their first publication. In the U.S., the development of comic books as the only form in which comics appeared on newsstands led to a separation between comic books and comic strips. Comic strips had been reprinted in books before the advent of comic books, and continued to be reprinted in book form afterward, as they are today. But these reprints are purchased in bookstores only, and even today published collections of newspaper strips are the dominant form of comic art available in bookstores.

There can be little doubt that these developments affected the cultural position of comic books and comic strips in the U.S. Comic strips were and remain superior in tacit cultural hierarchies to comic books. Comic strips are associated with journalism, family readership, and publication in books and sale in bookstores. Comic books are associated with sensationalism, child and adolescent readership, and sale on newsstands. Although now eighty percent of comic books are sold in comic book shops, the public perception of such stores is perhaps even less positive than that of newsstands.

In the most influential European comic art markets, those of the United Kingdom and France and francophone Belgium, the primary medium for the dissemination of comic art quickly became weekly comic magazines. Unlike the comic books of the United States, many of the first European comic magazines were published for distribution with newspapers, and later developed into independent magazines published weekly and sold on newsstands for the entire week.

In the United States, the comic supplements of newspapers lost their early identification with humor magazines within a decade of their first appearance. The dialectical division that divided the elite humor magazines from the newspaper supplements in the United States increased over time. In Europe, the magazine format comic supplements of newspapers never lost their identification with newstand magazines, and while American comic features were reprinted in this format almost from the beginning, European features were developed as well, particularly beginning in the 1920s. Like American comic strips and the earliest comic books, European weekly comic magazines featured continuing stories starring popular characters. The European magazines featured American strip reprints and locally created imitations of American comic strips. But throughout the 1920s, European strips developed that soon became more popular than the U.S. strips, even before European governments began to proscribe American strips in the 1930s. For example, Herge published the first installment of the Tin Tin strip in 1929, and this story was collected one year later in the first Tin Tin book, *Tin Tin in the Land of the Soviets*.

European comic weeklies, like American Sunday newspaper sections and the first comic books which derived from these, are anthologies of continued stories. Unlike the American comic books, which share with the European weeklies the format of periodical magazines, the European comic weeklies never abandoned this continuing-story format. As with Herge’s Tin Tin, other comic strips appeared in the magazines, and then each story arc was collected in a book. After Tin Tin, Albert Uderzo’s and Rene Goscinny’s Asterix is perhaps the most popular, but the production of these
collections, usually referred to in English as albums, numbers in the thousands of titles. Also unlike American comic books, these albums were sold from the beginning in bookstores.

Popular titles like Tin Tin and Asterix have been described by writers on the comics as children's stories, and certainly the demographics of the readership of the weekly Continental comic magazines included large numbers of children; the best parallel with U.S.-based comic art media would be newspaper comic strips rather than comic books. Newspaper strips (and given their origins in newspaper supplements, the European anthology comic magazines certainly are closely allied to newspaper strips) are aimed at a readership that professional comic art publishers in the U.S. call "all ages." This term, which gained importance in marketing comics in the U.S. after the development of the Underground comics in the 1970s and independent comics in the 1980s, does not mean that the comics are not intellectually engaging and entertaining enough to attract adult as well as younger readers. Rather, it means they have little or no sexual references or extreme violence. The continuing popularity of Tin Tin with adults throughout the world indicates that, although the basis of the readership and much of the marketing was based on younger readers, an adult readership base always existed as well.

In the 1970s, both in the United States and in Europe, alternative comic art traditions developed, certainly fueled by the political and social dislocations and developments of the era. In the United States, the Underground comix movement included comic strips in radical and alternative newspapers, but the most famous works of the movement appeared in comic books. The comic book may have appeared a more natural medium for radical change than the newspaper strip, a more conservative medium in the U.S. In addition, comic books were a ubiquitous, inexpensive, and in a sense democratic medium, available on every newsstand.

In Europe, however, the dominant model of publishing comic art for the widest audience was the weekly comic magazine. When the currents of change flowed across Europe in the 1970s, new publishers founded alternative weekly comic magazines that imported some U.S. Underground work, but were the home of a new and aesthetically innovative and frequently politically radical group of artists. Metal Hurlant in France and Frigidaire in Italy brought comics by artists like Moebius, Enki Bilal, and many others to a new public. In the United States, Underground cartoonists published in 32-page black and white comic books, which remained in print for years, and were only occasionally collected in books. In Europe, the new artists followed the publishing patterns set by Herge and his heirs: publication in weekly or monthly comic magazines, followed by publication, usually in color, in collections in hardcovers or paperback. These albums, originally the province of "all-ages" readers, are slender, color volumes, most often in hard covers, each containing a complete story that had been serialized.

The European albums have continued to be the dominant format in the European comic market, but have had little impact in the U.S. Despite the success of the American version of Metal Hurlant, translated into American English as Heavy Metal, few other anthology periodicals have appeared in the U.S. market. There have been few comic anthology periodicals in the U.S., most notably Art Spiegelman's and Francoise Mouly's influential Raw. A few publishers have translated European albums for the U.S. market, like Tundra and Heavy Metal. The most extensive and successful program of publishing albums has been that of NBM, Terry Nantier's New York-based press which has successfully combined translated albums, original European-influenced U.S. work, and reprints of American comic strips.
In Europe, the albums drawn from the alternative comic periodicals led to a renaissance of comic art in Europe, the development of an adult readership, and an unparalleled period of artistic experimentation and growth. In the United States, the experimentation and growth began with the Underground Comix movement, and received particular impetus from the return of Will Eisner to the comic art field after several decades in educational publishing. Graphic novels have become more and more popular in the United States over the last decade and a half. The term "graphic novel" was coined by Will Eisner with the publication of *A Contract with God* in 1978. Eisner has said that he grew tired of working only in the short-story format that had dominated U.S. comic books almost since the beginning. When he returned to the field, he wanted to do something new, a novel-length work published as a book. He hit upon the term graphic novel because it combined two words with positive meanings.

Although most histories of comic art in Japan recall the traditions of visual and satirical art that developed from Japanese painting and calligraphic traditions, the primary development of comic art that concerns us in this comparative analysis took place after the Second World War. The development in the Edo period of both artistic and literary works that dealt with the urban environment of the Japanese capital, and particularly the tradition of creating printed works with woodblocks that described the life of the city and its fashionable and artistic denizens, usually called "ukiyo-e" or floating world, is often cited as the beginning of comic art in Japan. Certainly, just as long traditions of cartooning and caricature from Hogarth, Daumier, and the cartoonists of satirical magazines like *Punch*, informed and influenced the development of comic strip and later comic book art in the United States and Europe, the traditions that flourished with artists like Hiroshige helped develop traditions and receptivity in Japan that later flourished in comic art.

However, the major development of popular comic art as a mass medium took place in the periodical publications that grew in Japan in the aftermath of the devastation of World War II. No discussion of this tradition can be valid without discussion of Osamu Tezuka. Although not as well known internationally as he should be, Tezuka is one of the most influential comic artists and animators of the century. Called in Japan "the god of manga," Tezuka's comic stories and later animated films brought the tropes and storytelling techniques of American and, to a lesser extent, European comics and animation to Japan. Much-discussed in recent years has been the unacknowledged and uncompensated origin of Disney's *The Lion King* in Tezuka's manga and anime creation, *Kimba the White Lion*. For our purposes, however, much more important is his contributions to comic art in the multiple manga series he created for Japanese weekly and monthly publications after the war.

Tezuka is reputed to have created 150,000 pages of comic art during his five-decade career as a manga artist. Whether or not this astonishing figure is correct, Tezuka's popularity and the productivity of his studio helped ensure the supremacy of comic books, as opposed to newspaper-based comic strips, in Japan in the postwar period.

Although many other artists created works of importance while Tezuka was active, it was the continuing demand for his works that helped create the current Japanese system, which bears certain parallels to the European and American models of publication, but which developed independently. As in Europe, Japanese comic art is primarily published in weekly or monthly magazines that appeal to specialized audiences, with continued stories that are eventually collected in books that present entire stories appearing under the names of a single creator, or as the creations of a writer and artist. However, unlike the European model, in which contemporary
creators are most often writer-artists, or when work is created by a single artist, it is produced by a single individual in a studio. In Japan, the continued stories of the most popular artists are created in studios with many employees. In some ways, this mode of production can be compared to the shop system that provided materials for publication in comic books in the 1930s through the 1950s. However, in Japan, where animation and comic art are much more closely linked than in Europe or the United States, it is also worthwhile to note the parallel with animation studios, where an assembly line of artists, colorists, etc. are marshaled to produce the finished, marketable product. The shop system of comics in the United States eventually became less anonymous, and developed into the contemporary system where writers, pencillers, inkers, and colorists create the monthly product for the most prominent titles of the major companies. In Japan, the staffs of studios usually receive credit for their work on the continued stories and collected editions that dominate the market.

Tezuka produced stories of many different kinds, and the market for comic art in the years that saw the reconstruction of the economy and society of Japan in the 1940s and 1950s saw the development of weekly and monthly comic magazines targeted to increasingly narrow segments of the consumer spectrum. The development of magazines is paralleled by a development of a terminology that defines the intended markets. One of the best-known comic magazines, for example, is *Shonen Jump*, which features stories for boys and young men. Perhaps the broadest categories into which comic art is divided in Japan are shonen manga, comics for boys and young men, and shoujo manga, comics for girls and women. Although action/adventure and romance are part of the distinction, it is much subtler and more carefully developed, so that artistic style and character development may be better guides to the classification of comics into these two broadest categories than simply action versus romance. (5)

Unlike the United States, and to a lesser extent Europe, Japanese comic art continues to be distributed through newsstands. Weekly and monthly comic art anthologies appear in a profusion that American and European readers find almost unimaginable on newsstands throughout the country. Although bookstores also carry comic art periodicals and collections, and there is an increasing development of back issue sales through specialty stores in Japan (and with continuing development through the Internet), the primary means of distribution of comic art continues to be through newsstands.

Also unlike the United States, but with many parallels to Europe, the collection of the continued stories from the weekly and monthly anthology magazines is a large, well-developed, and universally accepted part of the comic market in Japan. At a time when U.S. comic publishers continue to struggle to get any sort of graphic novel section in bookstores, all Japanese bookstores have extensive sections of anthologies as part of their stock. And works may be kept in print and continue to sell for years or decades. A huge library of Tezuka volumes, including series many volumes long, may be found in any well-stocked Japanese bookstore. In the United States, some comic book reprints may have long lives, such as *Watchmen* (Moore and Gibbons 1987) or *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller 1986), but most are sold only briefly. For older reprints, only the high-priced hardcovers with limited availability are published, such as the DC Archives series, and the press runs of these volumes are usually limited to quantities of 5,000 copies or fewer.

There are certain inescapable ironies in the comparative situations of the publications of collections, albums, and graphic novels in the United States, Europe, and Japan. The comic books of the United
States collected long, continued stories from American newspapers, but with the arrival of popular, costumed superheroes, continued stories disappeared from the comic books. American comic book readers lost the art of reading continued stories, and comic-book anthologies of such stories all but disappeared from the United States. The short-story template that succeeded so well in the superhero comic books dominated all U.S. comic books, in all genres, until the mid to late 1970s. In Europe, collections from magazines became the album form, which from Tin Tin to Les Humanoides remains a major and widely-respected form of publication for comic books. In the U.S., the rebirth of collections had to await the creation of the term graphic novel and the longer comic-book continuities of the 1970s, but the popularity of longer-form comics continues to grow every year. The convergence of European and U.S. traditions and marketing strategies found both aesthetic and commercial success when European writers like Alan Moore moved to the American market to create popular and influential works like *Watchmen*.

Japanese comics have enjoyed increasing popularity in the United States over the past decade, but with few exceptions they have not been published in anthologies but as 32-page U.S. style comic books, with their continuing stories being seen by American readers as story arcs of the kind made familiar to them by the longer continuities of American superhero comic books that began in the 1970s. A few Japanese-style anthologies have appeared from U.S. publishers, such as *Mangavization* or *Pulp*, but most Japanese manga in the U.S. market still appear as individual monthly comic books. These comic books are not taken directly from the pages of Japanese anthologies; rather, they are published after the appearance of collections in Japan, and represent the disassembling of Japanese collections into U.S.-length parts. The anthologies, in English translation, are then reassembled after serial publication as comic books and marketed in the U.S. as graphic novels.

As the market for individual comic books in the United States continues a decline that began a decade ago, the market for bound collections of complete story arcs continues to grow. The growing dominance of long-form works of comic art-graphic novels-is frequently heralded as an indication of the aesthetic and literary development of the comic art medium in the United States.(6) Such a development might equally be viewed as a convergence of related traditions of comic art in the United States, Europe, and Japan.

**Notes**

1. The most thorough analysis of the formats of publication of comic art is Lefevre's article, which emphasizes heterogeneity rather than convergence. Sabin's insightful monograph, *Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels*, deals with formats passim, as well as highlighting them in the title. McCloud's works, *Understanding Comics* and *Reinventing Comics*, also offer insights into publication formats, particularly in the latter volume, which extends the analysis to digital publication.

2. The innovations of M. C. Gaines, whose son Max Gaines was the publisher of the *EC* Comics line and *Mad* magazine, are described in most general histories of comics in the U.S., including Robinson's classic study, and Daniels's eloquent history of comic books.

3. The connection between narrative structure in pulp magazines and comic books has not to my knowledge been discussed previously; the best recent study of pulp magazines and their reception is Smith (2000); there are many popular histories of the pulps, including Server (1993), and the full recent survey by Robinson and Davidson (1998).
4. The importance of Hergé and Tin Tin in the development of the comic weekly and album is tacitly accepted by most histories of European comics, including Horn and Couperie, as well as in monographs on Hergé, including those by Goddin and Peeters.

5. The best references on Japanese comic art, with much information on Tezuka, are the two volumes by Schodt; further material on Tezuka and his publications can be found in Piovan.

6. See Couch for a recent commentary on the U.S. comic book market; the status of graphic novels in the U.S. is indicated in part by the bibliographic and acquisitions guides for librarians by Weiner and Rothschild, which also contain commentary on the form.

References cited


LEFEVRE, Pascal, "The Importance of Being 'Published;'' a Comparative Study of Different Comics Formats." [Forthcoming].


DC Comics likewise began collecting series and published them in book format. Two such collections garnered considerable media attention, and they, along with Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning Maus (1986), helped establish both the term and the concept of graphic novels in the minds of the mainstream public. The Publication and Formats of Comics, Graphic Novels, and Tankobon. Retrieved December 20, 2008. Kaplan, Arie. Keywords: comics, manga, tankobon, publication. Despite divergent histories of comic art publishing in the United States, western Europe, and Japan, in recent decades there has been an apparent convergence of publication formats: the graphic novel in the United States, the album in western Europe, and the collections called tankobon or manga in Japan. Although these three formats are similar in appearance, each is the product of a unique history that affects demographics of readership, patterns of distribution and sale, and cultural meanings associated with the formats.(1). In the United State Common forms of comics include comic strips, editorial and gag cartoons, and comic books. Since the late 20th century, bound volumes such as graphic novels, comic albums, and tankâbon have become increasingly common, while online webcomics have proliferated in the 21st century.Â [88] Other critics, such as Thierry Groensteen [92] and Scott McCloud, have emphasized the primacy of sequences of images. [93] Towards the close of the 20th century, different cultures' discoveries of each other's comics traditions, the rediscovery of forgotten early comics forms, and the rise of new forms made defining comics a more complicated task. [94].