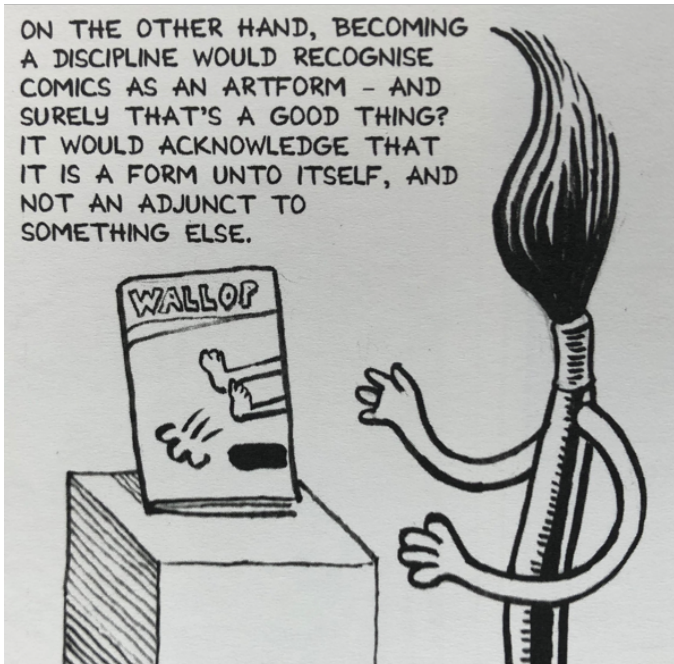


Institution: UAL		
Unit of Assessment: 32		
Title of case study: Comics Studies		
 <p>ON THE OTHER HAND, BECOMING A DISCIPLINE WOULD RECOGNISE COMICS AS AN ARTFORM - AND SURELY THAT'S A GOOD THING? IT WOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS A FORM UNTO ITSELF, AND NOT AN ADJUNCT TO SOMETHING ELSE.</p> <p>Drawn by John Miers for <i>Comics in the Academy</i>, Professor Roger Sabin's Professorial Platform 2019.</p>		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012–2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Roger Sabin Dr Ian Hague	All Comics Research Hub (CoRH!!) members: Professor of Popular Culture Contextual & Theoretical Studies Coordinator	October 1993–present September 2015–present
Dr Ian Horton Dr Nina Mickwitz	Reader in Graphic Communication Lecturer Contextual and Theoretical Studies	March 2007–present October 2015–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>UAL's commitment to research in Comics Studies has been instrumental in the development of the field, shaping what is now a recognised scholarly discipline in the UK and worldwide. The work of a group of researchers at the University has brought about substantial change in the discourse around the subject, while cultural impact in the public arena has been created through contributions to high profile projects such as The British Museum's <i>Manga</i> exhibition. The University's research has had ongoing impact in higher education through the creation of new methodological and pedagogical approaches, and their dissemination, as well as impact on the collection and management of comics archives. By positioning the comic form as a legitimised subject for study, UAL scholarship has enabled discussion about comics in relation to key themes including philosophy, health and decolonisation.</p>		

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

UAL's investment in Comics Studies forms part of its strategic endeavour to demonstrate the importance of the arts to wider public concerns. Its approach to comics research comes in two forms. Firstly, working in the context of an art school, researchers at UAL have placed an emphasis on comics as 'sequential art', thus moving the teaching and analysis of the topic away from literary criticism, the dominant mode since the early 1990s. Secondly, emphasis is given to comics as information graphics, seeking to understand the medium as a sophisticated conveyor of information, generally referred to as 'applied comics', in which the sub-field of 'graphic medicine' has also become a key area for UAL researchers. Each researcher works from one or more perspectives; collectively, the work forms a comprehensive, far-reaching contribution to the field. The research outlined in this section reveals the broad range of approaches to Comics Studies at the University.

Building on his previous work in the development of comic studies, **Sabin's** 2015 book chapter [3.1.] argued that the 19th-century debate about the 'worth' of the new medium of comics was a key ingredient in the definition of 'popular culture'. It critiqued the idea that 'literature' and 'comics' were on different trajectories—one 'improving', the other 'damaging'—asking why comics were seen as 'lesser literature' to books. Using new primary sources from the contemporary press, this interdisciplinary research spanned comics studies, literary studies, media studies and art history.

Horton's 2014 paper [3.2.] explored the representation of colonialist stereotypes and the colonised 'Other' in British comic book adventure stories. Researching traditional comic books, such as *Eagle*, *Hotspur* and *Victor*, Horton argued that, regularly, from the 1950s to the 1980s, comic books contained adventure stories that used 'exotic' locations and caricatured representations. This both maintained mythological stereotypes and shaped narrative structures, continuing the traditions and imperialist outlook of the adventure stories contained in boys' illustrated magazines of the early 20th century such as *Gem*, *Magnet* and *Champion*.

Hague's research examined the relationship between comics and the senses (2014) [3.3], working to counter the fact that attempts to define what comics are and explain how they work have not always been successful because they are premised upon the idea that comic strips, comic books and graphic novels are inherently and almost exclusively visual. Hague challenged this premise, outlining the multisensory aspects of comics: the elements of the medium as they relate to sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. A wide range of examples demonstrated how multisensory communication systems work in both commercial and more experimental contexts.

Mickwitz's 2016 book [3.4.] examined a cluster of early 21st-century non-fiction graphic 'novels' through the lens of documentary theory, challenging the persistent assumption that ties documentary to recording technologies. Instead, **Mickwitz** presented an understanding of the category in terms of narrative, performativity and witnessing, arguing that these comics share a documentary ambition to narrate visually, and represent aspects of, and events in, the real world.

With **Sabin** as Co-I, the Marie Duval Archive project (2014–2016, AHRC, GBP195,476.00) involved comprehensive research into the work of this hitherto forgotten 19th-century female cartoonist (1867–1885), which had remained uncatalogued since its initial publication. The research identified approximately 1,500 strips, cartoons and illustrations. The basis of the project was **Sabin's** previous work on Duval, in particular in relation to the 19th-century cartoon character, Ally Sloper. Questions included: How does Duval's work challenge the male-dominated canon of cartooning, and what does this process reveal, especially in terms of academia's slowness to acknowledge female cartoonists?

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1. Sabin, Roger (2015) 'Comics versus books: the new criticism at the 'fin de siècle'. In:

Transforming Anthony Trollope. Studies in European Comics and Graphic Novels. Leuven University Press, Belgium, pp. 107–129.

3.2. Horton, Ian (2014) 'Colonialist Heroes and Monstrous Others: Stereotype and Narrative Form in British Adventure Comic Books.' In: *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels*. Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies. Routledge, London, pp. 130-145.

3.3. Hague, Ian (2014) *Comics and the Senses: A Multisensory Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels*. Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies. Routledge, New York & London.

3.4. Mickwitz, Nina (2016) *Documentary Comics: graphic truth-telling in a skeptical age*. Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

3.5. Sabin, Roger (2016) *The Marie Duval Archive*. Funded by an AHRC Early Career Research Grant (GBP197,213, Co-I Sabin). Collaborative project with Simon Grennan (PI) and Julian Waite (Co-I).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

UAL's research in Comics Studies has been highly influential in British higher education in the arts, at the heart of the creation of a subject in its own right rather than an adjunct to 'lit. crit.' or film studies. UAL's work in the area has been consolidated by the setting up of the Comics Research Hub (CoRH), providing a context for the wealth of ongoing comics research at the University and for other academics working in the field worldwide. The day after the launch of CoRH at UAL in 2018, the website received over 2,000 hits; it has been name-checked at major comics-related events since (e.g. 'What is Manga? Exploring Japanese manga and visual narratives' symposium at the British Library, 2019). CoRH is the world's largest comics research facility with an influential membership, in addition to the University's internationally recognised comics research staff. The network has provided opportunities for collaboration and impact both internally and externally, in the UK and worldwide.

The audience for Comics Studies is both public and academic, with a notable and important overlap between scholarship and general culture in this context. Often, individuals engage with comics initially as fans, then, through a public-facing event or exhibition, become involved at an academic level. An illustration of this is the annual Comics Forum (est. 2009), a central event in the comics scholarship calendar, co-convened by **Hague** in collaboration with Leeds Central Library as part of the Thought Bubble Comic Art Festival. Leeds City Council Librarian: "We welcome this diverse forum as part of the wider Thought Bubble Festival ... which draws new audiences to Central Library every year". [5.1.] Assistant Director, Thought Bubble: "Having Comics Forum running alongside the festival has helped to set [the festival] apart as a unique event: one which celebrates creators and artists, and views comics as a serious tool, which can educate, enlighten and inform." [5.2.] A number of individuals attending the 11 conferences to date have gone on to successful PhD studies at UAL, subsequently taking up posts in Comics Studies at other universities. Three major research titles (Routledge) have resulted from Comics Forum: *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels* (2015, eds **Hague & Ayaka**), *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* and *Contexts of Violence in Comics* (both 2019, edited by **Hague, Horton and Mickwitz**).

UAL's research has had cultural, public-facing impact. **Sabin** was consultant for the British Museum's record-breaking exhibition *Manga* (2019). The Museum aimed to reach a younger audience and increase visitor numbers. **Sabin** (with UAL curating staff) advised on elements such as narrative wayfinding and dealing with 'extreme' content. The exhibition attracted a diverse audience profile, with 43% aged 25–34—the youngest audience on record at the Museum—and high levels of overseas visitors. (Total number of visitors: 175,134.) [5.3.] The exhibition had approximately 16,000 visitors in the first four days, and was sold out in the final months. It received extensive media coverage internationally (Europe, USA and Japan).

Sabin's Marie Duval project led to the creation of an open access digital archive, a touring exhibition (Berlin, London, New York) and two co-authored books. The archive pioneered unique

software, and differs from other archives of 19th-century material in that it brings the work of an individual practitioner together in one place. It is the largest digital comics project yet funded. Media coverage included BBC Radio and *The Guardian*. The project has shown that a woman is key to the development of comics as an artform; until that point, the history of comics had been presented as a predominantly male realm. In 2020, the exhibition travelled to the USA where, typically, it had been believed that the comics form originated. American comic *The Yellow Kid* was first published in 1896; the work in the Duval exhibition dates from 1869–85, challenging the widely held belief that comics is an American artform. **Sabin**, with Simon Grennan and Julian Waite (2018), published *Marie Duval* (Myriad Press), an illustrated study of Duval's work; *Marie Duval: Maverick Victorian Cartoonist* (**Sabin**, Grennan and Waite, Manchester University Press) was published in 2020.

A UAL/British Library collaboration on a CDP PhD project based on digital comics has been designed to shed light on the collection and management of 'emerging formats': 'Collecting UK Digital Comics: social, cultural and technological factors for cultural institutions' looks at how cultural institutions respond to innovative digital material, and the cultural, social and ethical questions that inform collection-building. The project is an examination of the collecting culture of the British Library and how its collecting and archiving policies can be modified and progressed to incorporate this kind of publication (AHRC-funded, three-year studentship supervised by **Sabin** and **Hague**, with the British Library's Digital Curator, Contemporary British Collections).

Advised by **Sabin**, the University has secured major additions of comics material to the UAL Archives and Special Collections Centre (ASCC) including the Les Coleman Collection, which features a significant collection of work by Robert Crumb. UAL's comics archives attract researchers from all over the world; CoRH members John Miers and Will Grady were researchers-in-residence at the Centre. As examples of academic work picked up by a non-academic forum and promoted to the wider comics community, Miers' interpretation of his own health journey, through the comics medium of graphic medicine, a growing field in the medical humanities, investigated how producing graphic autobiography might help artists to express and process experiences of illness. His award-winning comic, *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now* (Best One-Shot, 2020 Broken Frontier awards) [5.4.], is now held in the Wellcome Collection Library. Miers presented this work at 'Drawing Yourself In and Out of It' (2nd International Amsterdam Comics Conference, 2018, with a keynote by **Mickwitz**). [5.5.]

Material from the archive forms the subject of many exhibitions and projects, providing a valuable resource for scholars from inside and outside the University. **Sabin**, **Horton** and **Hague** were also involved in negotiations around the 'Hansen Bid' to save for the nation a large comics collection of children's titles, owned by UK comics collector Peter Hansen.

In 2020, CoRH hosted the annual 'International Graphic Novels and Comics Conference' (IGNCC), the main annual conference in the field's European calendar. With the event taking place early in the first lockdown, CoRH took the decision to host it online. The conference's innovative structure (using FigShare), theme and content received excellent reviews, with a global spread of delegates (highest proportion: USA, 50%; UK, 21%). By 31 December 2020, the conference platform had received 39,234 views, with 3,303 downloads. [5.6.] Leading comics research society, Gesellschaft für Comicforschung, congratulated CoRH for the way the IGNCC conference was transformed into a virtual conference, with the organisers saying that "it has now set standards for digital academic conferences with its very nearly seamless combination of recorded open access lectures, lively synchronous online Q&A sessions and extended debate in social media. A model, then, for ComFor's annual conference this fall...". [5.7.]

Horton co-founded the Applied Comics Network in 2015, a network for individuals who work with graphic narrative and information. In 2019, an event at Newcastle examined user-experience design in heritage and cultural institutions; comics in classrooms and libraries; healthcare and patient information. As a result the broader impact has been to disseminate research from a variety of fields to a wider, public, audience. Comics Jam—Preserving British Comics History, a collaboration between the British Cartoon Museum, University of Dundee Scottish Centre for

Comics Studies and CoRH, was held in November 2019, with high-profile speakers including Posy Simmonds and Jonathan Ross. Horton has recently published 'Comic Books, Science (Fiction) and Public Relations', in Simon Collister and Sarah Roberts-Bowman *Visual & Spatial Public Relations: Strategic Communication Beyond Text* (Routledge, 2018), which addresses directly the use of comics to engage with different audiences, and thus the impact that comics can have in the public relations field, identifying how comic books have been used extensively in promoting health campaigns across the world.

CoRH members act as consultants for an extensive range of external organisations and provide press commentary on comics-related issues. **Sabin** has been Consultant Curator, 19th Century, for 2014 British Library exhibition *Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK*, which broke attendance records; Tate Gallery, *Rude Britannia*, 2010; House of Illustration; *The Guardian*, British Museum; bid assessor, Wellcome Institute, Fulbright, Leverhulme, AHRC, Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Sabin has been described as "a cultural studies critic and journalist whose comics-related works *Adult Comics* (1992) and *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (1996) have become standards in the history of Comics Studies". [5.8.] The Sabin Award for Comics Scholarship (est. 2016), "intended to recognise and encourage comics researchers at an early stage in their career and to honour Professor Roger Sabin's dedication to furthering the cause of comics study", is awarded annually to the best paper presented by a postgraduate student at the 'International Graphic Novel and Comics Conference'.

The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics (Routledge) was founded by **Sabin**. He is commissioning editor for the booklist Palgrave Studies in Comics. His books have been described as "classic" (*The Guardian*) and have been acknowledged as being foundational for the field. A Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media, University of Manchester: "[**Sabin**] goes beyond the curriculum and is the most highly influential and respected researcher in British and international Comics Studies. He is the go-to person for publishers who want to either start up a journal, or review journal and book proposals". [5.9.]

Mickwitz's *Documentary Comics* has been impactful in film studies and documentary studies, while **Hague** is described by Aaron Kashtan in *Between Pen and Pixel: Comics, Materiality, and the Future of the Book* as "the leading authority on non-visual sensory aspects of comics".

With work including **Hague's** work on the senses, **Horton's** on colonialist stereotypes, **Mickwitz's** on documentary and **Sabin's** on bringing women into the canon, coupled with Miers' work in UAL's Archives and Special Collections Centre and the UAL/British Library's Collecting UK Digital Comics project, as well as the Applied Comics Network, collectively, this group of UAL researchers' work is setting an inclusivity agenda and, as such, influencing the future of the comics studies discipline.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1. Testimonial, Leeds City Library, Comics Forum conference. UAL on request.
- 5.2. Testimonial, Assistant Director, Thought Bubble Festival. UAL on request.
- 5.3. British Museum, Manga exhibition, figures sent by email. UAL on request.
- 5.4. [Best One-Shot, 2020 Broken Frontier awards.](#)
- 5.5. ['Drawing Yourself In and Out of It'](#). The 2nd International Amsterdam Comics Conference 15–17 November 2018.
- 5.6. IGNCC attendance data from Figshare. UAL on request.
- 5.7. [Stephan Packard, The Intermittent ComFor Update, as of July 2020 Comics Forum.](#)
- 5.8. Smith, M.J. and Duncan, R. (eds). *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, (2017), New York: Routledge, p19. UAL on request.
- 5.9. Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media, University of Manchester. UAL on request.