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Historicizing the Emergence of Comics Art Scholarship in Spain, 1965-1975

Antonio Lázaro-Reboll

Abstract

This article traces the formation of comics art scholarship in Spain during the period 1965 to 1975. This decade witnessed the beginning of the study of comics as a serious object of cultural analysis. Reading formations surrounding the medium, in particular historical and critical reading protocols, as well as a set of key critical debates, were concurrent with the establishment and the development of mass communication studies as an incipient field of research in Spain in the mid-1960s. The aim of the article is to provide a close examination of the first generation of critics participating in and writing about the scene in relation to hitherto overlooked local and transnational contexts that shaped the constitution of the Spanish field of comics.

Keywords: comics cultures, constitution of field, cultural intermediaries, fanzines, pioneering critics, Spain

Any examination of the constitution of the Spanish field of comics between 1965 and 1975 requires a detailed contextualization of wider historical, social and cultural processes across national borders and of the formation of comics cultures in Europe, namely France and Italy.¹ At a time, late Francoism, when rapid economic and cultural transformations – the rise of mass consumerism, the growth of the publishing industry and of media consumption, the burgeoning of popular cultural forms – coexisted with the realities of dictatorship, Spanish cultural critics and intellectuals adopted new historical and aesthetic categories and sensibilities to discuss not only comics-related phenomena but also other popular cultural forms (television, film) ushered in by the nascent age of consumerism. New press legislation introduced in 1966 by the (then) Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga Iribarne (1962-1969), allowed for the *apertura* [opening up] of expression in the publishing industry.

¹ A note on the nomenclature adopted throughout the article. I use the term ‘comics’ since it emerged as a new critical category in the period under discussion. However, both the generic terms *tebeo* – coined from the comic strip magazine for children *TBO. Semanario Festivo Infantil* (1917-1983) and not approved by the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* until 1968 – and *historieta* are maintained when original sources are quoted.

The law, commonly known as the *Ley Fraga*, ‘allowed, if not an open expression of opinions, at least the printing of opinions with clear glimpses of dissidence in the late 1960s [since] newly minted research centres, publishing houses and political magazines emerged under these conditions and provided vehicles for demands for change and debates about the shape of a future where political and cultural freedoms could be exercised’.²

This decade saw a surge of writing about the critical status and critical value of comics. The dominant disciplinary perspective until the mid-1960s located *tebeos* within the domain of children’s literature and press history, with pronouncements about their pedagogical, moral and religious effect on children.³ In the second half of the decade, a discursive approach through the methodological lens of press history characterized the work of Antonio Martín Martínez, whose ground-breaking ‘notes’ on the history of the medium in Spain were published across four instalments in *Revista de Educación* issued by the Ministerio de Información y Turismo.⁴ Simultaneously with the emergence of communication studies during the final decade of Franco’s dictatorship, whereby public bodies started to engage ‘in research in the field of information, propaganda, public opinion, advertising, and visual communication preferably from a sociological perspective’ close to the ideology of the regime,⁵ there emerged a new generation of cultural critics inspired by the intellectual and theoretical developments associated with the formation and organization of comics criticism in France around the fanzine *Giff-Wiff. Bulletin des bandes dessinées* (1962-1967), instigated by Francis Lacassin, and with the research of Italian mass media theorists, in particular Umberto Eco and his highly-influential *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964).

² Núria Triana-Toribio, ‘Film cultures in Spain’s Transition: the “other” transition in the film magazine *Nuevo Fotogramas* (1968-1978)’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15, no. 4 (2014), 455-474 (462-63).

³ See Jesús María Vázquez, *La prensa infantil en España* (Madrid: Editorial Doncel, 1963).

⁴ See Antonio Martín Martínez: ‘Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos I. Los periódicos para la infancia (1833-1917)’, *Revista de Educación* 194 (1967), 98-106; ‘Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos II. La civilización de la imagen (1917-1936)’, *Revista de Educación* 195 (1968), 7-21; ‘Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos III: Tiempos heroicos del tebeo español (1936-1946)’, *Revista de Educación* 196 (1968), 61-74; ‘Apuntes para una historia de los tebeos IV. El tebeo, cultura de masas (1946-1963)’, *Revista de Educación* 197 (1968), 125-141.

⁵ Nelson Ribeiro, ‘Communication Studies in the Iberian Peninsula: A Comparative Analysis of the Field’s Development in Portugal and Spain’, in *The International History of Communication Study*, ed. Peter Simonson and David W. Park (New York: Routledge, 2015), 152-170 (162).

In order fully to historicize the emergence of Spanish comics studies, this article proposes to engage critically with a variety of contemporary material in order to examine the range of different positions, tastes and sensibilities, official and emerging, that offered competing interpretations of comics in book-length studies produced by the first wave of pioneering critics, feature articles in popular culture magazines and the press, and fanzines. Luis Gasca reflected in his *Tebeo y cultura de masas* (1966) the diverse impetuses propelling European comics criticism forward, from art history to didactics to semiology. When pop culture critic Terenci Moix turned to comics in *Los "comics", arte para el consumo y formas "pop"* [‘Comics’, an art for consumption and ‘pop’ forms] (1968), he read camp and nostalgia as cultural phenomena revealing the mechanics underlying the production and consumption of cultural products like comics.⁶ Leading academic journals such as *Estudios de información*, affiliated to the Secretaría Técnica del Ministerio de Información y Turismo, devoted a double issue to the study of comics in 1971, documenting the state of an incipient Spanish comics field, and, in the process, conferring cultural respectability upon the medium.⁷ The first fanzines came to light during the decade, too: *Cuto. Boletín Español del Comic* (Luis Gasca, 1967-68), *¡Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* (Antonio Martín and Antonio Lara, 1968-1977) or *Comics Camp Comics In* (Mariano Ayuso, 1972-1975).

My initial theoretical and methodological framework is specifically informed by Luc Boltanski’s ‘The Constitution of the Comics Field’ (1975),⁸ a ‘Pierre Bourdieu-inspired analysis’, which traces the appearance and formation of the comics field in France throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s.⁹ The article builds on other Bourdieusian notions beyond those of the intellectual field, class habitus and the logics of distinction as they are deployed by Boltanski. Of particular significance is the role of what Bourdieu calls ‘cultural intermediaries’, that is to say those cultural producers and commentators whose practices, dispositions and tastes contribute to the mediation, intellectualization and popularization of symbolic goods.¹⁰ Here the activities, dispositions and writings of individual figures like

⁶ Terenci Moix, *Los "comics", arte para el consumo y formas "pop"* (Barcelona: Llibres de Sinera, 1968), 43-61.

⁷ *Estudios de información* no. 19-20 (1971).

⁸ Originally published as ‘La Constitution du champ de la bande dessinée’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 1 (1975), 37-59.

⁹ Ann Miller and Bart Beaty, eds, *The French Comics Theory Reader* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 276.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 366.

Gasca and Martín, among others, are placed in relation to social and cultural networks of scholars. The constitution of the field in Spain is comparatively underexplored and undertheorized in comparison to the French tradition, where Bolanski's article stands as a critical landmark.¹¹ Given the lack of translations of the works of Spanish pioneers into English, mainstream scholarship on comics studies has made cursory references to the Spanish context or has omitted it altogether. In 'The winding, pot-holed road of comic art scholarship' (2010), John Lent abridges Spain's contribution to research on comics during these decades to the figure of Gasca, described as 'a major writer about comics, often American ones', whose 'articles appeared in newspapers and magazines'.¹² Charles Hatfield's 'Foreword' to the recent *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* is almost entirely US-centered in its (re)telling of the history of American Comics Studies with the exception of a gesture to 'the larger trajectory of French Comics Studies'.¹³ In this same volume, Ian Horton acknowledges in his chapter on art-historical approaches to the study of comics in both France and the English-speaking world in the 1960s and 1970s that there are traditions 'in Spanish (both European and South American), Italian, and German that deal with the origins of the art form but they are not translated into English and consequently their impact on the international field of comic studies is more limited'.¹⁴ Since a detailed analysis of the emerging field of Spanish comics art scholarship between 1965 and 1975 remains to be written whether in English or in Spanish, this article seeks to tease out a more nuanced cultural history of the constitution of the field in Spain, and to contribute to a wider reconfiguration of Spanish comic art scholarship distinguished by transnational flows and by importations of theoretical and methodological explorations of the medium which are also constitutive of the field.

¹¹ See Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée. Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007) and Laurence Grove's *Comics in French. The European Bande Dessinée in Context* (New York: Berghahn, 2010) for English-language accounts of the establishment of French comics scholarship as an object of critical attention.

¹² John Lent, 'The winding, pot-holed road of comic art scholarship', *Studies in Comics* 1 no. 1 (2010), 7-33 (20). Lent's exhaustive international bibliographies such as *Comic Art of Europe Through 2000: An International Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 2003) list other Spanish pioneers beyond Gasca.

¹³ Charles Hatfield, 'Foreword. Comics Studies, the Anti-Discipline', in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, ed. Matthew Smith and Randy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-17 (8).

¹⁴ Ian Horton, 'The Historians of the Art Form', in *The Secret Origins*, ed. Smith and Duncan, 56-67 (67).

Transferring Legitimacy

In ‘La constitution du champ de la bande dessinée’ Boltanski provides a detailed sociological examination of the transformations in the production, reception and circulation of comics, in particular the mechanisms, practices and dispositions that contributed to the cultural elevation and legitimation of comics and their study. Among the ‘mechanisms that accompany the appearance of a field when it is structured like the model of high culture’, Boltanski notes, are ‘the creation of an apparatus (magazines, conferences, prizes, publishers, educational institutions, etc.)’ which contributes to the process of celebration and of legitimation of the field.¹⁵ Legitimation, argues Boltanski, is central to the emergence of new fields of study. Boltanski identifies the ‘discourse of celebration’, the ‘transfer of academic habits’, and the bestowing upon ‘comics (of) the antiquity that is constitutive of every legitimate cultural tradition’ as key mechanisms and strategies to elevate the cultural and symbolic capital of comics.¹⁶ Throughout the decade legitimacy is transferred to the study of comics from multiple quarters in the Spanish context. Titles such as Lara’s ‘Un nuevo arte nos ha nacido’ [A new art has been born] (1967),¹⁷ included in the monthly cultural magazine *Cuadernos para el Diálogo* as part of an issue devoted to current cultural trends (‘Cultura Hoy’), or Muñoz Suay’s ‘La seriedad del “comic”’ [The seriousness of the ‘comic’] (1969),¹⁸ printed in popular film magazine *Nuevo Fotogramas*, literally vindicated the artistic, cultural and intellectual worthiness of the medium.

‘Un nuevo arte nos ha nacido’ unashamedly heralded the status of comics as art. Lara welcomed the fact that ‘revistas prestigiosas se ocupen del tema con un rigor total, desprovisto de frivolidad’ [prestigious magazines [like *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*] covered this topic with total rigour, devoid of any type of frivolity], despite the fact that comics seemed to be nowadays ‘un tema de moda’ [a fashionable topic].¹⁹ (Frivolity is a loaded term that was bandied around in many a review). Lara was unequivocal in his assessment of comics: ‘el problema consiste en que los tebeos han sido ignorados por la “crítica” estética oficial que, sin examinarlos, los ha relegado al papel de entretenimiento infantil, como algo sin valor’ [the problem is that *tebeos* have been ignored by the official aesthetic ‘criticism’

¹⁵ Boltanski, ‘The Constitution of the Comics Field’, 281.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁷ Antonio Lara, ‘Un nuevo arte nos ha nacido’, *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, no. Extra Summer (1967), 50-54.

¹⁸ Ramón Muñoz Suay, ‘La seriedad del “comic”’, *Nuevo Fotogramas* (17 January 1969).

¹⁹ Lara, ‘Un nuevo arte’, 54.

that, without having examined them, has relegated them to the sole purpose of entertaining children, ascribing no value to them].²⁰ For Lara, the cultural validation of comics intersected with the wider ‘*rehabilitación de géneros tradicionalmente menores* – la novela policíaca, de terror, de ciencia ficción’ [*rehabilitation of genres traditionally considered to be minor* – the detective novel, the horror novel, the science-fiction novel], as well as popular cinema.²¹ Concomitant with their participation in the constitution of the comics field, Gasca and Moix, for example, were embracing popular film genres displaying their respective connoisseurship of international horror and fantasy traditions and Spanish and Hollywood melodrama in the pages of *Nuevo Fotogramas* and *Terror Fantastic*. But, in order to elevate the lowbrow to the models of the fields of high culture, academic habits and dispositions had to be transferred. Lara called for ‘*expertos en Sociología, Psicología, artes plásticas, escritores, dibujantes*’ [experts in Sociology, Psychology, fine arts, writers, artists] to ‘*parcelar el terreno de trabajo*’ [stake out the field of work]. Critics were needed to work on the ‘*historia de los personajes*’ [the history of characters], historians to reconstruct ‘*los textos estropeados por la censura*’ [the texts mangled by censorship], publishers to ‘*editar los ejemplares perdidos o escasos*’ [publish texts that have been lost or are rare].²² A year later, the publisher Editorial Cuadernos para el Diálogo sponsored the publication of Lara’s *El apasionante mundo del tebeo* [The thrilling world of the comic] (1968) granting further prestige and symbolic capital to the new art. In ‘The Seriousness of “Comics”’ – partly a reflection on Gasca’s and Moix’s volumes – film critic Muñoz Suay considered the particularities of contemporary Spanish comics culture: on the one hand, he argued, the conditions of possibility for writing about comics as legitimate objects of cultural analysis must be located ‘*más allá de nuestras fronteras, y ya atendiendo a los estudios que sobre los “comics” nos iban llegando, fuimos configurando nuevas tesis*’ [beyond our frontiers, and then taking note of those studies about comics that were reaching us, we began to configure new theses]; on the other hand, ‘*en España la “cultura” de los “comics” está vinculada, como historicidad y como vivencia, a una educación escolar de posguerra que, durante tantos años, ha estado reflejada en ese género de publicaciones*’ [in Spain ‘comics culture’ is linked, as historicity and as lived experience, to a post-war school education, which was reflected in these type of publications].²³ To be sure, the writings of Lara and Muñoz Suay may suggest a forthright celebratory discourse, but the

²⁰ Ibid., 51.

²¹ Ibid., 53.

²² Ibid., 54.

²³ Muñoz-Suay, ‘La seriedad del “comic”’.

publications that endorsed the artistic and serious status of comics also situate the legitimation of the field in a broader context. Madrid-based *Cuadernos para el Diálogo* and Barcelona-based *Nuevo Fotogramas* played a significant role in importing and disseminating international developments in culture and aligned themselves in different yet complementary ways with anti-Francoist positions.

Outlets for studies of comics in cultural monthlies and in popular culture magazines increased the cultural capital and worthiness of the medium. The publishing houses that put the first studies on comics written in Spanish into circulation increased their intellectual and literary legitimacy. *Tebeo y cultura de masas*, published by Editorial Prensa Española, partook of the ‘significant increase in the production of books dealing with communication topics, namely public opinion, journalism and media history (still known as press history)’.²⁴ Moix’s *Los “comics”* and Gubern’s *El lenguaje de los comics* came out in a different milieu: Llibres de Sinera and Ediciones Península respectively, two Barcelona publishing houses at the vanguard of the editorial world in Spain at the time. Within these editorial contexts of production and distribution, the prologue might be said to function as one of the ‘most ritualized techniques of scholarly routine’²⁵ for the transference of symbolic and cultural capital, and, of course, prestige, from academic figures associated with established disciplines to a younger generation of popular and mass culture specialists. While the prologues of *Tebeo y cultura de masas* and *Los “comics”* were authored by recognized academic voices, by the time *El lenguaje de los comics* was published in the early 1970s it was Gasca himself who was legitimising the work of a fellow young media critic, confirming a significant shift in the formation of the comics field and the standing of its social actors. Not coincidentally, reviews of these pioneering texts followed a comparable trajectory for commentators of *Tebeo y cultura de masas* and *Los “comics”* belonged to the editorial worlds out of which the critical projects had emerged. Critical reception, therefore, read these founding texts on comics against dominant and residual historical and cultural dispositions towards the role of mass media in education and society and against fresh and urgent attempts to appreciate contemporary popular cultural production.

Tebeo y cultura de masas is prefaced by the internationally renowned Spanish psychiatrist J.J. López-Ibor, an influential voice in academic and intellectual circles. Those expecting allusions to American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham and his *Seduction of the*

²⁴ Ribeiro, ‘Communication Studies in the Iberian Peninsula’, 161.

²⁵ Boltanski, ‘The Constitution of the Comics Field’, 287.

Innocent (1954) would be disappointed for López-Ibor approaches Gasca's book as the duty of a scholar who must 'tomar conciencia del tiempo presente' [become aware of our present times] where *tebeos* – a 'tipo de literatura infantil' [type of children's literature]²⁶ – are to be understood in relation to developments in mass culture and the predominance of images. López-Ibor pondered that 'la apetencia por determinado tipo de héroes en la sociedad de masas' [the desire for particular types of heroes in mass culture society] calls for an analysis of their influence – not necessarily harmful, as Wertham had put it – in the psychological development of a child. And, López-Ibor asked, '¿[q]ué nos dicen sobre nosotros mismos esas manifestaciones de la cultura contemporánea?' [what do these manifestations of contemporary culture tell us about ourselves?], and, more specifically, what do they tell us about the 'mitología infantil' [children's mythology] and its persistence in adulthood in a 'mundo desmitificado' [demythologized world]?²⁷ Reviews of Gasca's book emphasized without fail the psycho-pedagogic potential of comics and the formative role of mass communication media; the *ABC* reviewer, Dr Alfonso Álvarez Villa, an active researcher in the Instituto de la Opinión Pública and editorial member of *Revista española de la opinión pública*, wondered whether 'el "tebeo" [es] mera diversión y pasatiempo' [the "tebeo" is a simple entertainment and a pastime] or whether 'contiene, como un pequeño cartucho de dinamita, potencias insospechadas para la formación o la desintegración de la sociedad' [contains, like a small dynamite cartridge, unsuspected powers for the education or disintegration of society?]²⁸ While Álvarez Villa did not attempt to answer the question in the review, his position had been made clear the previous year in his article 'Supermán, mito de nuestro tiempo' for *Revista española de la opinión pública* where he had condemned the damaging influence of Superman comics, and, by (tacit) extension, American popular culture, on Spanish children.²⁹ As the prologue and the review of *Tebeo y cultura de masas* demonstrate, its reception was framed through the educational, psychological and sociological concerns arising from comics on Spanish public opinion and contemporary culture.

²⁶ J.J. López-Ibor, 'Prólogo', in *Tebeo y cultura de masas*, Luis Gasca (Madrid: Editorial Prensa Española, 1966), 9-11 (10)

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ Alfonso Álvarez Villa, 'El tebeo pequeño gigante', *ABC* (4 March 1967).

²⁹ Superman comics had been banned in Spain in 1964 by the *Comisión de Información y Publicaciones Infantiles y Juveniles* (C.I.P.I.J.).

Moix's text came out in a very different intellectual and publishing milieu. Barcelona was at the forefront of the dissemination of contemporary European and Latin American literary texts in Spanish or Catalan translations with publishing ventures such as Editorial Seix Barral since the late 1950s, Edicions 62 from 1962 onward, and Editorial Lumen in the late 1960s. Seix Barral is accredited with leading 'a renovation of Spain's literature and its dissemination abroad, bold marketing of Latin American writers globally [...] and the translation and diffusion of European avant-garde writers in Spain'.³⁰ Edicions 62 and Editorial Lumen promoted particularly 'the publication of texts exploring new trends in popular culture (music, photography, comics, films) considered important at that moment'.³¹ *Los "comics"* certainly benefited from this editorial milieu. The prologue was prefaced by Joaquim Marco, a recognized Catalan editor, literary critic and scholar, who was a pivotal figure in the world of publishing and criticism in the Barcelona literary scene, and actively engaged in the publishing strategies of Llibres de Sinera. Marco reflected on a number of critical *topoi* around mass culture in general and comics in particular, in relation to older media and high culture: the distrust of new languages, the artistic and literary aspirations of comics, and the influence of popular forms in high culture in Western literary traditions. However, Marco ended with a significant intervention by elevating comics to adult status and by making a proposal – similar to that put forward by López-Ibor – to withhold ideological and intellectual biases towards the commercial and artistic values of comics. In his words, 'El cómic no es una manifestación dirigida al público infantil, como algunos pueden suponer' [Comics are not a product addressed to a child readership, like some people may assume],³² because 'el autor de cómics ha sido un adulto que ha pensado *en adulto* e, involuntaria o deliberadamente, se ha dirigido a un público adulto' [the comics producer is an adult who thinks *as an adult*, and, who, unintentionally or deliberately, is addressing an adult readership].³³ Adopting a deferential position, Marco concluded that Moix's volume 'ilumina un género, cuyas posibilidades y realizaciones sólo empezamos a comprender' [sheds light on a genre, whose potentials and products we can only begin to comprehend].³⁴ *Los "comics"*

³⁰ Tatjana Pavlović, *The Mobile Nation. España cambia de piel (1954-1964)* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 60.

³¹ Mercedes Mazquiarán de Rodríguez, 'La Mosca Revisited: Documenting the "Voice" of Barcelona's Gauche Divine', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008), 35-59 (37).

³² Joaquim Marco, 'Prólogo', in *Los "comics", arte para el consumo y formas "pop"*, Terenci Moix (Barcelona: Llibres de Sinera, 1968[2007]), 15-23 (21-22).

³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

was reviewed in the most relevant Catalan cultural magazines of the period, among them *El Ciervo* and *Destino*. Worthy of note is the review in *El Ciervo* since Moix's book was discussed in conjunction with the Spanish translation of Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati*, published that same year by Editorial Lumen. Both books, according to critic Enrique Sordo, traversed similar territories – 'pop' cultural forms like comics, film, television and pop music – and responded to 'fenómenos tecnocómicos que necesitan de la revolución económica de la clase media para desarrollarse plenamente' [techno-economic phenomena dependent on the economic revolution of the middle classes to attain their full realization].³⁵ In *Destino*, Josep Maria Carandell proclaimed 'Els comics a la universitat!'³⁶ imagining Moix as the lecturer conveying the contemporaneity and the proximity of comics to a new generation of students set to modernize the university curriculum.

Barcelona was at the centre of the staging of colloquia, round tables, book launchings and exhibitions. In comparable fashion to what had happened in the literary scene since the early 1960s and what was happening with the Barcelona School of filmmaking in the late 1960s,³⁷ Barcelona became the central port of call for the transfer of cultural theories and methodologies and the circulation of intellectual trends developing in Europe and across the Atlantic. The launching of Gubern's book in May 1972 is a case in point since it articulates the convergence of social and cultural actors around the 'Creation of Events', to use Boltanski's phrase. The book's presentation also acted as the opening of an exhibition of the work of Enric Sió, who had been awarded the prestigious Yellow Kid prize in New York for best foreign artist the previous year. Held in the culturally innovative Sala Aixelà in Barcelona and promoted by the night-club Bocaccio, renowned for its association with the city's *gauche divine*, the event brought together the vanguard of Barcelona's culturati and of the editorial world to celebrate, in the words of Gubern, the international success of 'la escuela de cómic de Barcelona' [the Barcelona School of comics] epitomised by Sió and to vindicate, according to art critic Cirici, 'la capacidad de profundización del cómic' [the intellectual capabilities of comics].³⁸ Cirici was also accompanied by literary critic José María Castellet in his capacity as General Editor of publishing house Península, created under

³⁵ Enrique Sordo, 'Cultura de masas', *El Ciervo* (April 1969), 15-16.

³⁶ Josep Maria Carandell, 'R.T. Moix y los comics', *Destino* (January 1969), 39.

³⁷ Rosalind Galt, 'Mapping Catalonia in 1967: The Barcelona School in Global Context', *Senses of Cinema* (November 2006), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/feature-articles/barcelona-school>.

³⁸ n.a., 'Exposición de Enric Sió y presentación del libro "El lenguaje de los comics"', *La Vanguardia Española* (9 May 1972).

the auspices of parent company Edicions 62. This exhibition-cum-presentation is a prime example of the intersection of comics with cultural interlocutors from the worlds of literature and art history as well as the intensification of interactions ‘between the comics field and the intellectual field’ according to the operations of scholarly models.³⁹

If anything, this book launching party was yet another iteration of similar events staged by young Catalan intellectuals and cultural practitioners in Barcelona. Five years earlier, in February 1967, a cluster of Italian scholars based in Palermo, known as Gruppo 63, had been invited to an interdisciplinary colloquium on the theme of avant-garde art and politically committed art in the context of contemporary popular and mass culture and mass media. The visiting scholars included Gillo Dorfles, Antonio Porta and Umberto Eco. The colloquium was held at the recently instituted independent Escuela de Diseño Eina, amongst whose founding members were Román Gubern, Alexandre Cirici, Albert Ràfols and Francesc Tous, and which pioneered the delivery of industrial, graphic and interior design courses. Organized by members of Eina, including Gubern and Cirici, and facilitated by Beatriz de Moura of Editorial Lumen, who was extremely well connected ‘with Italian publishing houses and Italian writers’, the impact of the Gruppo 63 ‘would be felt in the years to come’.⁴⁰ As Gubern acknowledged in his memoirs *Viaje de ida* (1997), the ‘contact with European intellectuals, in particular Eco, made the home group aware of their need to update their “*mochila cultural*” [cultural kit]’.⁴¹ The study of comics featured prominently during the three-day visit. The interdisciplinary colloquium, as Mazquiarán Rodríguez has documented, led to the creation of *La Mosca*: ‘[A]n “underground” publication disguised as a “Boletín de novedades”, announcements of new offering by the participating publishing houses (Edicions 62, Seix Barral, and Lumen)’.⁴² *La Mosca* buzzed for seven issues between December 1967 and December 1969, and amongst its contributors featured the names of the Barcelona group of intellectuals and professionals already mentioned in this article: Castellet, Sió, Muñoz Suay, Gubern, Cirici, de Moura, or Ràfols. When Eco returned to Barcelona two years later, in February 1969, on the occasion of the presentation of the Spanish translation of *Apocalípticos e integrados* by Editorial Lumen, the visit was deemed by the magazine *Triunfo* as a unique opportunity for ‘los jóvenes intelectuales españoles más rigurosos [...] para estrechar los vínculos que deben unirnos a la cultura europea contemporánea, cuya

³⁹ Boltanski, ‘The Constitution of the Comics Field’, 289.

⁴⁰ Mazquiarán de Rodríguez, ‘*La Mosca* Revisited’, 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

problemática suele formularse con tanto retraso entre nosotros' [the most rigorous young Spanish intellectuals [...] to strengthen the links that must bring us closer to contemporary European culture, whose questions tend to be formulated so belatedly amongst us].⁴³ Leading the proceedings were, once again, Gubern, Gasca and Sió, whose work was exhibited alongside that of fellow Catalan comics artists Josep María Beà and Esteban Maroto.

Cultural Intermediaries: from Gasca to *Bang!*

A key attribute of cultural intermediaries, write Smith Maguire and Matthews, is 'the ability [...] to undertake the construction of legitimacy' [...] through 'transposing the hallmarks of established authority [...] on to new cultural forms [and] on particular forms of capital and subjective dispositions'.⁴⁴ Moreover, cultural intermediaries, as Bourdieu conceptualizes them in *Distinction*, are 'a group of taste makers and need merchants whose work is part and parcel of an economy that requires the production of consuming tastes and dispositions'.⁴⁵ Amongst the occupations associated with this concept, Bourdieu cites 'the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of "quality" newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers', whose profession involves 'presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth)'.⁴⁶ Within the Spanish context of a developing consumer economy, of an increasing attention to mass media history, and an emerging 'new' petite bourgeoisie, figures like Gasca, Martín and Lara acted as intermediaries participating in actual processes of legitimation and of mediation between producers and consumers, and connected agents and groups within the field. Gasca's multiple facets as a journalist-writer or a writer-journalist, as fanzine editor or as editorial director, to name but a few, certainly fit this Bourdieusian concept. Similarly, Martín and Lara as the editors of *Bang!* played a critical role in the formation of a critical discourse on comics.

Gasca's bourgeois upbringing in the Basque city of San Sebastián, his university education at the University of Zaragoza where he graduated in Law, and his professional participation as a teacher in the new Higher Education degree programmes launched at the

⁴³ Eduardo G. Rico, 'El comic y la cultura de masas', *Triunfo* (15 February 1969).

⁴⁴ Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, 'Bourdieu on Cultural Intermediaries', in *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, ed. Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews (London: Sage, 2014), 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 325.

Jesuit-funded *Estudios Universitarios y Técnicos de Guipuzcoa* (EUGT),⁴⁷ where he delivered courses on tourism and advertising between 1963 and 1968, locates him squarely within the new petite bourgeoisie Bourdieu describes in *Distinction*. As part of the activities of the EUGT, he founded the *Centro de Expresión Gráfica*, a collective that brought together comics studies pioneers from other parts of Spain such as Lara and Martín, and edited the first Spanish fanzine, *Cuto. Boletín Español del Comic* – a total of three issues – between May 1967 and October 1968.⁴⁸ The first two front covers devoted to the American characters Rip Kirby and Steve Canyon, respectively, displayed the sensibilities of the time: a nostalgic nod to classic US comics strips and a critical gesture to Eco’s original 1962 reading of Milton Caniff. The third – and final cover – designed by the up-and-coming Basque illustrator and comics artist Juan Carlos Eguillor, conveyed the encounter between comics and pop art (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE. Caption: Eguillor’s artwork design for the cover of *Cuto* in line with pop art. *Cuto. Boletín Español del Comic*, number 3. Artwork © 1968, reproduced with the kind permission of Luis Gasca and Biblioteca de Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea - Diputación Foral de Gipuzcoa (Fondo Luis Gasca).

Throughout 1968 he also published the weekly section ‘Los comics’ for the Basque daily *El Correo Español*, disseminating writings about comics to a broad public.

The proximity of San Sebastián to the French border, combined with the economic capital afforded by his class position, enabled Gasca to travel regularly to Paris to immerse himself in the vibrant French comics culture scene by attending events, frequenting the famous bookshop *Le Minotaure*, joining newly created associations, and interacting with a wider network of comics art scholars across Europe and beyond. Thus he joined the *Centre d’étude des littératures d’expression graphique* (CELEG), becoming the Spanish correspondent in the mid-1960s, and contributed to Lacassin’s *Giff Wiff*. Similarly, his presence in the first international comics conventions gave Gasca first-hand access to the burgeoning intellectual field of comics criticism as well as to various national markets. Such was the case with the *Salone Internazionale dei Comics de Bordighera* held between 21

⁴⁷ The EUTG was located in what it is now the campus of the University of Deusto in San Sebastián.

⁴⁸ The title of the fanzine is a homage to 1940s Spanish comics character Cuto and his creator Jesús Blasco (1919-1995).

February and 2 March 1965.⁴⁹ Here Gasca, and many other European comics enthusiasts and pioneering scholars, absorbed rising approaches to the study of comics carried out in pedagogy, sociology, mass communication and archival research.⁵⁰ French and Italian networks – CELEG and Rome-based *Instituto di scienza della comunicazioni di massa* respectively – linked up in Lucca a year later, an event Gasca reported on for *Triunfo* in an article entitled ‘La Venecia del comic se llama Lucca’ [The Venice of comics is called Lucca]. Frequenting these circuits, Gasca operated as a link to contemporary comics cultures in Europe and as an intermediary in the dissemination and promotion of currents of influence for the study of comics. By 1966 Gasca was at the heart of what Lacassin described in a *Giff-Wiff* editorial as ‘la deuxième année de [l]a consécration’ of comics as an art comparable to film and television.⁵¹ A final example should suffice to establish Gasca’s assiduousness in the critical and industrial development of the field in Spain: his work as editorial director for San Sebastián-based *Buru-Lan* and for Editorial Pala S.A. Through *Buru-Lan* Gasca embarked upon a series of projects that ranged from the republication of classic American comics in Spanish to be distributed in the Spanish and Latin American markets to the diffusion of the genre work of Spanish comics producers like Beà, Sió and Maroto in the form of collectable fascicles in the magazine *Drácula* (1972-1973).

In the summer of 1968 a new fanzine entered the scene. In its first issue, a brief piece by Gasca, ‘De “Cuto” a “Bang”’, welcomed its ‘hermano pequeño madrileño’ [smaller brother from Madrid] and endorsed the enterprise led by Martín and Lara to address the ‘carencia de estudios concienzudos que aporten nuevas luces sobre la historia y las implicaciones de este medio de comunicación’ [the lack of diligent studies that can shed new light on the history and the critical implications of this medium of communication].⁵² Martín and Lara returned the compliment on the same page acknowledging that *Cuto* had paved the way for the study of comics in Spain with a reference to Antonio Machado’s well-known verse ‘caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar ...’ [Wayfarer, there is no way,

⁴⁹ Gasca also participated in the *Primera Bienal Mundial de la Historieta* in Buenos Aires organized by David Lipszyc and Oscar Masotta in 1968, and in *La première convention européenne de la bande dessinée* celebrated in Paris the following year.

⁵⁰ The convention was organized by the *Istituto di pedagogia dell’ Università di Roma*, the *Centro di sociologia delle comunicazioni di massa* and the *Archivio italiano della stampa a fumetti*.

⁵¹ Francis Lacassin, ‘9eme ART, AN II’, *Giff Wiff* no. 22 (1966), 1-2 (1).

⁵² Luis Gasca, ‘De “Cuto” a “Bang”’, *Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* no. 00 Aug. (1968), 3.

make your way by going farther],⁵³ an apt image to capture the pioneering work of this first generation of critics. Named *¡Bang! fanzine de los tebeos españoles* for the first five issues (00 to 3) and *Bang! información y estudios sobre la historieta* as of the fourth issue in 1971, albeit popularly known as *Cuadernos Bang!*, it was the most ambitious and sustained attempt at providing analysis and criticism of comics with a total of fourteen issues published between 1968 and 1977 (Figure 2).⁵⁴ The publication came out of the activities of the association GELPI (*Grupo de Estudio de las Literaturas Populares y de la Imagen*) – clearly modelled on the French *Centre d'études des littératures d'expression graphique* – whose founding aim was to bring together Spanish specialists working on the study of popular and industrial art. Until 1972 the editors also released fifty-eight bulletins only to be distributed among its subscribers for free. In its two manifestations, fanzine and bulletin, *Bang!* became synonymous with the language of comics.

FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE. Caption: Aficionados, collectors and scholars had in *Bang!* an indispensable source of information on comics. *Bang! Información y estudios sobre la historieta*, number 4. Artwork © 1971. Reproduced with the kind permission of Antonio Martín.

By 1968, Martín's and Lara's professional credentials and connoisseurship of the medium were firmly established in the field. Both had graduated in journalism with dissertations on Spanish *tebeos* from the disciplinary perspective of children's literature and press history. While Martín, who had graduated as a 'Técnico de Prensa Infantil' from the Escuela Oficial de Periodismo in 1964, published his 'notes' on the history of the medium in Spain, and contributed regularly to *Gaceta de la Prensa Española* and *Triunfo*, it was Lara who produced the first academic study on the serial 'El Guerrero del Antifaz' in the Escuela de Periodismo de la Iglesia in 1965. Like Gasca, Martín and Lara found in fanzines a medium through which to display and disseminate their technical knowledge and through which to connect networks of ideas, people and texts. In the opening pages of their second issue in November 1968, Martín and Lara presented themselves as cultural intermediaries and curators. With a call to arms, they appealed for the need to unite for a common cause and to establish a productive partnership between editors, contributors and readers to achieve the

⁵³ Antonio Martín and Antonio Lara, 'Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar', *Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* no. 00 Aug. (1968), 3.

⁵⁴ Martín became the sole editor once he relocated to Barcelona in 1970 for professional reasons as a Technical Editor for the Grupo Editorial Godó.

following: ‘ediciones especiales de todas las páginas míticas de las que todos hablan sin casi conocerlas, noticias de última hora, estudios monográficos sobre personajes y autores, diapositivas, pases privados de películas, biblioteca, originales dedicados, colecciones completas para consulta, etc., etc.’ [special editions of all the classic comics that everybody talks about without really knowing them, up-to-date news, monographs on key characters and authors, slides, private screenings, free access to libraries, signed originals, complete collections to be consulted, etc., etc.].⁵⁵ *Bang!* aimed to reach a vast social and cultural spectrum of consumers and readers who were interested in ‘la historieta, el tebeo y el “comic”, [...] médicos, abogados, albañiles, dibujantes, obreros, arquitectos y electricistas, peritos y editores, sociólogos e historiadores ...’ [the *historieta*, the *tebeo* and “comics”, [...] doctors, lawyers, bricklayers, draughtsmen, workers, architects and electricians, qualified technicians and publishers, sociologists and historians], that is to say, those consuming culture as well as those researching culture.⁵⁶ The aspirations and commitment of Martín and Lara extended to the circulation and distribution of *Bang!* nationwide and beyond. There was a team of correspondents in Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, San Sebastián and Valencia, and international counterparts in Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. While the first issues were only available via subscription, soon *Bang!* was being distributed in specialist libraries in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville and Valencia, and made available to international aficionados for \$1.50. *Bang!* announced itself as ‘una publicación de categoría internacional’ [a publication of international standing], seeking to cultivate links to contemporary comics cultures across Europe (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 NEAR HERE. Caption: Send your subscription to *Bang!*, an adult publication for an adult readership. Reproduced with the kind permission of Antonio Martín.

While the fanzine aspired to reach European circuits and served as a vehicle to disseminate theories and methods formulated abroad, *Bang!* remained distinctly Spanish in its allegiance to Spanish comics and artists: ‘hemos decidido que *BANG!* se especialice en el tebeo y la historieta españoles, máxime cuanto que ya otras publicaciones se ocupan, con gran fortuna, de la producción extranjera’ [it has been our decision to specialize in Spanish

⁵⁵ Antonio Martín and Antonio Lara, ‘PUNTUALIZACIONES en torno al fanzine *BANG!*’, *Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* no. 0 Nov. (1968), 3.

⁵⁶ Antonio Martín and Antonio Lara, ‘Editorial’, *Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* no. 1 (1969), 3.

tebeos and *historietas*, all the more so when other publications are concerned with foreign production], declared Martín and Lara in their opening issue.⁵⁷ In this respect, the curatorial role played by Martín and Lara, as well as by many of their contributors, was an attempt to activate a cultural history of the medium in Spain and to initiate the construction of a canon of Spanish comics artists. Among the sections that formed the spine of the magazine were ‘Museo de la Imagen’, ‘Museo de la historieta’ and ‘Una historieta y sus autores’. The museological disposition and the auterist methodology were certainly common practices and techniques for elevating the cultural status of comics, its producers and its critics. A comprehensive mapping of the networks and creative alliances coalescing around *Bang!* throughout its nine-year publication would provide an indispensable counterpoint to existing literature on Spanish comics criticism by considering the synergies and the riches of fanzine production and consumption, and by reassessing the contextual significance of fanzine culture in shaping the constitution of the field.⁵⁸

The cultural and intellectual dynamics and fervour present in *Bang!*, as well as in the popular scholarship discussed here, is arguably best reflected through Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’,⁵⁹ whereby new formations of thought and forms of inquiry emerge alongside dominant and residual discourses. During the final decade of the dictatorship, the Spanish field of comics began to form out of a new set of critical interactions and intersections between dominant discourses grounded in press history and emerging practices informed by mass communication research, semiotics and nostalgic readings. Its constitution exceeds a simple reprise of the names of pioneering critics and the titles of a handful of publications. This article has sought to broaden the story of the constitution of the field in Spain by repositioning currents of comics criticism in relation to the critical and cultural contexts – both local and transnational – that helped shape it. Historicizing the phenomenon ‘comics’ in Spain in the late 1960s and early 1970s is important to understand not only the development of a local burgeoning scene in fruitful dialogue with international traditions of comics art scholarship but also to explore further the migration of cultural theory

⁵⁷ Antonio Martín and Antonio Lara, ‘*Bang!*, Presentación de un nuevo fanzine’, *Bang! Fanzine de los tebeos españoles* no. 00 Aug. (1968), 2.

⁵⁸ For a descriptive discussion of *Bang!*, see Juan Manuel Díaz de Guereñu, ‘*Bang!* (1968-1976): Un nuevo discurso crítico sobre la historieta’, in *Antes y después de los Mass Media. Actores y estrategias comunicativas*, ed. José Angel Achón Insausti et al. (Madrid: Editorial Dykinson, 2016), 293-312.

⁵⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-135.

and the encounters of networks of scholars across Europe, which, in turn, could lead to a broader remapping of contemporaneous comics cultures in Europe.

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