Editorial

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Welcome to a new era of **The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship**.

We believe that comics scholarship requires platforms that provide the legitimacy and recognition that academic authors need without compromising on most readers' ability to access quality research. Current technologies and open licenses provide the means to empower authors to take ownership of their published work by granting them the freedom to share it as widely as possible.

The Comics Grid published its first born-digital, media-specific article on 31 January 2011. Since then we have published 92 peer-reviewed short articles in open access form offering critical analyses of specific examples of comics pages as well as 48 peer-edited blog posts (interviews, conference reports, calls for papers, book reviews).

Our goal when we started **The Comics Grid** was to create a platform for a comics scholarship of the so-called digital age. As we phrased it in an internal document dated 23 May 2011, **The Comics Grid**'s mission was:

> "To consolidate an international network of comics scholars and to offer a forum to promote their academic work online. Our intention is to become a reliable online research resource.
>
> We function as an online laboratory where different critical approaches to comics are publicly and collectively put to test. Though our scope wants to be as diverse as possible, our aim is to focus on the analysis of specific comics page layouts and panels. Our content is media-specific.
>
> We foster public engagement through open access, Creative Commons licenses, social media tools and other dissemination activities."

Two years later, the general values that underpinned our mission statement still stand.

We worked very hard and long hours online across borders and time zones on collaborative, open peer review, and for many editors and contributors this meant learning to navigate our WordPress platform. As authors and editors, together, we also became very much aware of the inner mechanics of online publishing. For some this meant a steep learning curve that soon delivered benefits.

However, one of the reasons many colleagues explained they were not submitting to the journal was that we were blog-based; they argued that as academics aiming to advance their careers they needed to publish research articles in journals that they could submit to evaluation committees. Though our initial intention was mainly to demonstrate that peer-reviewed academic blogging was possible, over time we realised that our platform offered some limitations for both readers and authors, and we started working towards becoming a full-fledged open access journal that would guarantee the sustainability, accessibility, and quality of the articles we were publishing.

WordPress was too fragile for the sustainability and preservation requirements of professional academia, and its setup did not really offer the features that review processes for promotion, tenure, etc. in academe demand currently of publications in order for them "to count." By migrating from a WordPress-based publication to an open access Journal platform, we are guaranteeing the sustainability, preservation, and peer-reviewed quality assurance academics require.

There was no way we could keep working at the rapid publication pace we had set up for ourselves without professionalizing our editorial workflow and therefore without securing a way to make this work sustainable (at some points we were reviewing one article per week). The amount of email and collaborative editing on Google Docs was time-consuming, technical and laborious, but time and professional incentives to participate were not the only challenge. The first core editorial team could hardly even afford the yearly web hosting fees—so after two full years of our initial system, it was clear to us it was time to take the next step.

Now published by the London-based open access independent, researcher-led publisher Ubiquity Press, the journal you are now reading, **The Comics Grid**, has finally become, in its third year, a fully-fledged a full-fledged open access journal offering all the features that will make publication attractive to academics seeking a quality venue for their born-digital research work.

Perhaps more importantly, **The Comics Grid** remains loyal to the principles that saw its birth and development as an online academic resource. We will keep encouraging collaboration and transparent constructive feedback through our open peer review process, and enabling open access to all of its content, at no cost to readers whomever and wherever they may be.

What this means is that the journal continues and will continue to combine peer-reviewed publication with academic blogging, offering a hybrid digital publication that can offer the best of two worlds, guaranteeing the quality and fixity that current academic standards require via peer-reviewed articles in HTML and PDF form, coupled with the flexibility and ease of use and access of academic

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blogging via short, timely posts written by comics scholars.

The Comics Grid's editorial board is very pleased that Ubiquity Press has taken us as one of their journals. Ubiquity Press aims to support smaller journals with the same features larger publishers offer, but in an affordable manner. We are now the first UK-based, independent, born-digital, full open access peer-reviewed journal of comics scholarship, and as far as we know the first open access journal dedicated to comics scholarship to provide Digital Object Identifiers and metrics to every peer-reviewed article..

Some of the features readers and authors will find in our new platform are:

· **Digital Object Identifiers for All Peer-reviewed Articles.** DOIs are essential so that articles can be cited properly, and those citations can be tracked to assess 'impact.' DOIs broaden the 'findability' of the articles. This is important for authors, and something that US tenure committees and UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) panels take note of. This is something that we lacked in our blog-based stage, and which many other peer-reviewed journals still lack. When articles have DOIs, authors can easily add them to the ORCID profile via CrossRef search, for example.

· **Articles Available as HTML and PDF.** We have already migrated all the peer-reviewed articles we have published during 2013, which is our Volume 3. We are currently applying for funding to migrate Volume 1 (2011) and Volume 2 (2012), at absolutely no cost to the authors who published with us during these years. (We are still looking for funding to mark-up and PDF 87 articles from Volumes 1 and 2, so if you have any ideas, please do let us know!)

· **Mark-up and Findability.** From now on, all published content will be marked up by a specialist supplier into JATS XML and typeset into print quality PDF. This will enhance the quality and functionality for the readers. It will also mean that the back content is in the same format as the new content, which will help maintain consistency and develop the look of the whole journal. For example, having PDF versions of HTML publications means authors can now submit full citation data, including page numbers, to academic committees. References will also be linked in the HTML text, linked by DOI, and deposited in Cross-Ref, again enhancing the findability of the article.

· **Citation.** Each article includes a 'How to cite' feature, enabling easy referencing, linking and attribution of academic work.

· **Indexing.** All articles will be sent to appropriate indexers, again to help readers find the content.

· **Membership to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).** *The Comics Grid* is thoroughly peer-reviewed and now has membership to the Committee on Publication Ethics.

· **Improved, International Editorial Board.** We are honoured to welcome all the new members to our Editorial Board, Editorial Advisory Board and Scholarly Communications team. Our Board includes expertise from different fields in the humanities and social sciences relevant to comics scholarship and academic publishing.

· **Open Peer Review.** As from the very beginning, all research articles submitted to this journal will continue to be fully open peer reviewed. We have worked hard to make this process as fast and efficient as possible. Previously we had worked using Google Docs, but now we will be using our internal submission and peer review allocation system. We also ask our reviewers to provide formative feedback, even if an article is not deemed suitable for the journal. The journal strives to make the peer review process as open as possible, and the editors encourage two-way dialog during the review process. Authors can expect to know who is reviewing their submission, and see a full disclosure of the comments provided by the reviewer to editors.

· **Professional Online Presence.** We provide and maintain a professionally designed journal platform, incorporating features such as most popular articles and article metrics on the front end. On the back end we provide anti-plagiarism checking, archiving, indexing and DOI registration. Our platform also automatically provides authors with online-readable versions (HTML), which are preferred by many readers and better indexed by search engines such as Google.

· **Article-level Metrics by Impact Story.** All our peer-reviewed articles will offer article-level metrics. These will provide standard statistics, such as article views, downloads and citations, as well as 'altmetrics' that indicate the wider online impact of the article, such as citations and mentions on Twitter, Facebook, academic blogs, Wikipedia references, etc. As with DOIs, these metrics are increasingly important as they enable authors and evaluating committees to track the reach and reception of academic work within and outside academe.

· **Anti-plagiarism Checks.** As described above, all submissions will now be done via our own platform and include a Cross-Check anti-plagiarism service, to ensure that all submitted papers are checked prior to peer review.

· **Permanent Archiving.** *The Comics Grid* is now permanently archived with the CLOCKSS service, which also guarantees their long-term availability as open access.

· **Impact Factor Registration.** *The Comics Grid* is now set up to meet the criteria for Impact Factor qualification. Please note, however, that this can take two years to receive!

· **Financial Sustainability.** Ubiquity Press is publishing *The Comics Grid* on an at-cost basis, and all charges are fully transparent. We aim to cover production costs and to ensure full open access delivery through an Article Processing Charge (APC). When a submission is accepted for publication after open

peer review, an APC will be requested to cover publication costs.

· **Low Cost and No-Questions-Asked APC Waiver Policy**. We have aimed to keep the APC as low as possible. Our APC has been set at £200. As well as the typesetting and professional presentation of an article, the APC goes towards benefits such as having a registered DOI, permanent archiving and indexing services, website hosting and maintenance, anti-plagiarism checks, and editorial membership to organisations such as the Committee of Publishing Ethics (COPE) and CrossRef. The Article Processing Charge is one way of ensuring that the journal is produced not only professionally but also sustainably. **If an author does not have the funds to cover the APC, the author will be able to choose to waive the fee. We do not want fees to prevent the publication of worthy work, Let us emphasise that APCs are only requested after a submission has been accepted after peer review, and that an author's inability to cover the APC will never deter the publication of accepted work** (for context, the APC for the "Open Access Option" at Intellect is £750, and the "Open Select" option at Routledge/Taylor & Francis is £1788).

· **Easy for Authors.** We are currently integrating our platform with the Open Access Key system, which enables the automatic transfer of APCs from author's institutions/funders without the need for them to be involved in the paperwork. Hopefully this is something comics scholars might benefit from in the not-so distant future!

· **Fully Open; Fully Shareable.** We license our original content with CC-BY and all authors retain copyright over their own work. All articles are completely available for text-mining and can be deposited in any additional repository the author wishes.

· **Best of Two Worlds.** We will continue with our Meta Grid blog and we remind our readers and contributors that our call for submissions is permanent. All blog entries are subject to editorial checks, but are not peer reviewed. We welcome submissions to the blog covering all aspects of comics in academia like calls for papers, calls for submissions, interviews, conference reports, announcements, book reviews, comics reviews, etc. The blog and all of the journal's previous content can still be accessed at http://blog.comicsgrid.com.

Comics are, after all, a popular expression that interests millions of readers of all ages and backgrounds around the world. We strongly believe that all readers, regardless of their affiliation or career, who are interested in high quality comics scholarship should be able to access it. We also believe that authors should be able to track and demonstrate the reach of their work within academia and beyond. Sustainable open access publishing is a route to achieve this.

There are challenges in scholarly communication that we are only beginning to tackle, but the opportunities are too great for us to remain comfortably protected by the shade of conservatism. Progress demands the taking of risks, and there is no solution that will fit all.

We have seen in online technologies the means to recover control, as academics, over our own work, and to re-connect academic research once again with its most noble mission, the dissemination and construction of knowledge, across borders and without paywalls for those who should most benefit from it: learners and readers, regardless of who or where they might be.

With this new stage of *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* we are starting a new adventure (not without its dangers) towards a born-digital, fully-open access, fully-sustainable open peer-reviewed publishing platform for the 21st century. We hope many of you will be willing to share the journey with us.

To submit, go to: http://www.comicsgrid.com/about/submissions