The CPJ wrote: “By detaining Vanessa Leggett, the U.S. government is effectively reducing the stigma associated with the jailing of journalists. This sends exactly the wrong signal to authoritarian governments who may now show even less restraint in using the state power to restrict press freedom” (McMasters, 2001). Words of Fire underscores the price of freedom and reminds us that the struggle is certainly not over yet.

Reference

Comics and Ideology

A review by Arthur Asa Berger
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Because the comic art form has for so long been discredited as subliterary trash and unworthy of scholarly attention, we must be grateful that books like Comics and Ideology, which take the comics seriously, are being published. It shows how useful the comics are for the social scientist in reflecting social, cultural, and political values and beliefs.

In the first chapter of this excellent anthology, the authors offer a working definition of ideology and explain their approach to the comics. Ideology, they write, is “tied in with issues of social power,” asking, “Why and how may comics challenge and/or perpetuate power differences in society?” and if comics legitimize or subvert the status quo (p. 2). This definition of ideology is somewhat broader than the way it is traditionally defined by political scientists, but a latitudinarian approach to ideology is perfectly acceptable.

The authors then explain the critical perspectives that will inform the book: cultural studies, political economy, feminist criticism, queer studies, and mythological (in the Roland Barthesian Mythologies sense of the term) analyses. Each of the chapters uses one or more of these approaches in analyzing comic books and comic strips. What the authors mean by ideology, we see, really means the way comics reflect various social and cultural beliefs in a given society.

Eleven chapters cover various topics such as the concentration of ownership of comics in the United States, the woman’s suffragist movement, a textual analysis of a feminist comic in Hong Kong, sex and violence in Japanese Manga, Wonder Woman and the melting pot metaphor in America, Marvel’s comics about Vietnam, Superman, the British comic Judge Dredd, gay and lesbian characters in comics, and the way Dilbert reflects workplace issues. Not only does the book cover a number of different topics and critical approaches, it also deals with comics in other societies—UK, Hong Kong, and Japan.

In all of the chapters the authors provide a useful service of tying the comics to the societies in which they are found. Thus, in the chapter on the infamous Manga, we find that Japanese husbands spend only 11 minutes a day doing housework compared with 108 minutes for husbands in the U.S., that Japanese women “have virtually stopped having babies” (p. 109), and that only 21% of
Japanese women consider bringing up children a joy, compared with 70% of women in France and Britain.

The chapter on the Hong Kong feminist comic strip artist Lau Lee-lee was also somewhat of a revelation. Lau, we are told, sees the “promotion of self-determined sexual desire” (p. 77) as an important element in her work. In her comics, a number of which are reproduced in the book, she attacks traditional gender roles and stereotypes in Hong Kong and deals with traditionally taboo subjects, such as “sexual practices, tampons, and other markers of feminine identity and experience” (p. 89).

Comics are, generally speaking, relatively simple art forms, though in recent years, some comic book artists have transmogrified themselves into the creators of graphic novels. It turns out, however, that comic strips and comic books are rather difficult art forms for scholars to deal with in that comic strips and comic books have dialogue, a narrative structure, and art work to be considered. For example, in analyzing certain comic strips, you might be dealing with a work that has been appearing for 30 or 40 years, or even longer. In such cases, we must ask—what is the text? How does one deal with changes that have taken place over the years in the strip?

In 1951, Marshall McLuhan published a book that can be described as the UR text for the ideological analysis of the comics. In *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan analyzed what might be described as the social and “ideological content” of such comics as *Crime Does Not Pay* comics, *Li’l Abner*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Blondie*, *Superman*, and *Tarzan*. In his chapter titled “Money in Comics,” he shows a picture of a very young Stan Lee, smoking a pipe and looking very professorial, on the cover of the November 1947 issue of *Writer’s Digest*. He had written an article for the magazine, “There’s Money in Comics!” He was right.

Reference


**Eastern European Journalism Before, During, and After Communism**


A review by Ullamaia Kivikuru

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The bulk of work done on media and journalism evolution in East/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union since 1989 has been country-specific and predominantly carried out by Western researchers, as these authors, all well-known American authorities on the Eastern European media, admit. *Eastern European Journalism* is something of an exception to this tradition. The authors cover the development of journalism and media structures in a vast geographical area, ranging from the Baltic countries to the Balkans, describing changes in the mediascape during the dramatic sociopolitical change that Eastern Europe went through roughly 10 years ago. Until the political map changes, this book will be a useful handbook for someone seeking condensed information about the government and media relationship, or information on changes in journalistic education in these countries.