

## NNCORE NEWSLETTER 7 (June 2013)

Edited by Anne Magnussen

On May 23-25, NNCORE held an International conference at Helsinki University. It was the network's biggest event until now, and it will therefore take up most of the space in this newsletter. But please note that the newsletter also contains a report from the last of the NNCORE seminars, about didactics and comics, held in Copenhagen on May 31. Read more about the seminar at the end of the newsletter.

### NNCORE 2013 at the University of Helsinki

As will be apparent below, the conference was replete with presentations, discussions and lively exchange of ideas. None of this had been possible, however, without the work of the main organizer of the conference, Kai Mikkonen, his assistants and the infrastructure of the University of Helsinki, so thank you very much. From NNCORE we would also like to thank *The Danish Council for Independent Research* (FKK, Kultur og Kommunikation) as the main source of finance of the event. *The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies* contributed very kindly with funding that paid the hotel costs for the Advisory Board members, which we are very thankful for. We would like to thank the *Finnish Comics Society* for their hospitality and their help organizing part of the conference. Last, but not least, we wish to thank all the participants, including the Advisory Board members who are all busy scholars but nevertheless took the time to participate in the conference, - and of course the many non>NNCORE members from across the globe.

#### ***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Rebecca Scherr***

The NNCORE conference was an intense 3 days, during which I found it very exciting to hear about the range of comics scholarship being practiced across Scandinavia and beyond. Since it seems that most of us who were there do comics scholarship alone at our various institutions, it was very meaningful to myself and many I spoke with to feel part of a scholarly community. Since the conference, I have had contact with several people I met at NNCORE, and we have exchanged our writing and ideas. More than anything else, it is these exchanges and networks that will continue to shape how comics scholarship develops in this region.

*Rebecca Scherr, Associate Professor,  
Dept of Literature, Area Studies, and European Languages, University of Oslo, Norway*



### NNCORE 2013: the Key Notes

The conference ran for two and a half days and included three Key Note presentations that were held by three of NNCORE's Advisory Board members. Ann Miller, University of Leicester, opened the conference with her talk on *Comics and Politics*. On the second day, Jan Baetens, University of Leuven, discussed *The 'roman dessin : A forgotten subgenre of the postwar era?*, and on the last day, Thierry Groensteen, le

Musée de la Bande Dessinée (Angoulême), presented *A few thoughts about self-representation in comics*. All three Key Note speeches were thought-provoking and included truly original material and ideas.

#### ***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Jorge Falcones***

In the next few lines, I will try to resume my experience in the NNCORE 2013. As someone non-related at any level to NNCORE, I hope this little recap will give another perspective about the meeting hosted in the University of Helsinki. I basically could sum up my experience in one word: Inspiring. I was inspired by seeing a lot of people from diverse backgrounds working together and I was inspired by observing how egos were put aside just to pursue a common goal. I was lucky to witness, how with some funding and a lot of human effort, a great research network has been built and how it is still working and growing up. It was a great experience and I hope I could be able to make it again next year!! Thanks to everyone!!

*Jorge Falcones, Language Lector, School of European Culture and Languages, University of Kent, UK*



#### **NNCORE 2013: 15 sessions and a PhD seminar**

The conference included almost 50 presentations, divided between 15 sessions, and they involved a broad range of themes, comics genres, theoretical frameworks and questions. The presenters were a good combination of experienced scholars and PhD and MA students, and there was a surprisingly broad international representation. The Nordic countries were very well represented, as many NNCORE members naturally participated, but it was a very positive surprise that the conference had attracted many participants from beyond the Nordic countries. The conference therefore combined two of NNCORE's main objectives: to strengthen relationships among Nordic comics scholars and to use NNCORE as a platform to connect to other comics scholars. The last session at the conference was a PhD seminar at which four PhD students presented their projects and received comments and questions from the Advisory Board members present. It was a pleasure to witness the high quality and enthusiasm of this new generation of comics scholars and we truly hope that they will continue to contribute to comics research in the future.

#### ***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Kees Ribbens***

Travelling to the Nordic countries is especially rewarding when one has the pleasure to attend the recent NNCORE conference. I felt very welcome at the University of Helsinki where all attendants were well taken care of (and I easily forgive the organizers for letting us have to finish our meals within 45 minutes). The conference program showed an interesting variety, not only in the length of academic careers of those attending, but most certainly in the topics presented (from theoretical to historical items, showing a diversity in approaches from literary to more sociological) as well as in the geographical origin of the participants. The usually high level of the presentations combined with the willingness to exchange views made this trip to Finland an inspiring one!

*Prof. dr. Kees Ribbens, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam, NL*



### ***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Sabrina Seerup***

“So - how was the conference?” he asked me while picking up my suitcase. “It was nice”, I replied, barely being able to keep my eyes open as a result of three days of information overload and a diet consisting of mainly coffee and beer. “I guess it was more than ‘nice’ ” he said laughing, when I was unpacking at home – scrutinizing every place where a piece of paper might hide in my clothes or luggage, sorting whatever I found into small piles of references; piles that could form my future. The e-mail addresses were of course being handled with specific care.



“Yes”, I answered. “It was.”

*Sabrina Seerup, independent Scholar, Denmark*

### **NNCORE 2013: Debates**

Apart from the Key Notes and the 15 conventional sessions the conference included a series of debates that introduced subjects with relevance for comics scholarship generally. Roger Sabin, Central Saint Martins (London) and part of the NNCORE Advisory Board, introduced a series of questions and challenges for comics scholarship as he discussed hot topics such as publication formats, peer reviewing and copyright. Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff, Wolfgang Goethe-University (Frankfurt), who is also part of the Advisory Board, participated in a debate about building and maintaining comics archives. The debate included Akihiko Ieshima, Shimane University, and Reija Sann, representing the Finnish Comics Society, and also Joachim Trinkwitz, Bonn University, presented his database of comics scholarship. Creating and maintaining databases of comics and comics research is crucial for the field as a whole, and all four encouraged everybody to participate in this work. Joachim Trinkwitz’ database is available on <http://www.comicforschung.uni-bonn.de/>, but we will be happy to publish any further information about the database initiatives in the August newsletter.

Two other debates, one about the potential for a comics theory reader, and another about the interdisciplinary characteristics of comics research. Both of these debates involved a panel of scholars and very exciting interventions.

### ***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Katja Kontturi***

It was such an amazing thing to meet all these brilliant colleagues and comics scholars, not only from the other Nordic countries but literally all over the world. Being part of the group and hearing about ongoing research was a great inspiration to keep on working my own dissertation. I got very good tips for source material and quite a few new observations that I need to include in my study as well. And what is best, I found another scholar working on Disney comics! All in all, I can’t wait for the future events and to see everyone again!



*Katja Kontturi, PhD student*

*Dept. of Art and Culture, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*

### **After NNCORE 2013: Publications, projects and the future of NNCORE**

In his comment to the conference (see below), Stephan Packard states that the conference “started more chapters than it concluded,” which is exactly right. At the end of the conference, many both formal and informal initiatives and plans were taking shape, and we hope to see a series of common research projects and publications in near future as a result of this.

In the next NNCORE newsletter, in August, Kai Mikkonen will discuss the subject of publication, with a specific focus on special issues of journals, but this should not slow down plans that are already under way.

NNCORE is as mentioned earlier funded by the *The Danish Council for Independent Research* (FKK, Kultur og Kommunikation) for a two-year period, and that ends by August 2013. In Helsinki we agreed to continue the network beyond this period, and an interim board will spend the 6-9 months to figure out how to organize NNCORE as an association. The August newsletter will contain more information about the process and how individual members can participate. As always, if you have any advertisement or information that you would like to include in the next newsletter, please send an email to [magnussen@sdu.dk](mailto:magnussen@sdu.dk) before the end of July.

***The NNCORE 2013 Helsinki conference according to Stephan Packard***

In a few short and very full days, the NNCORE conference 2013 gave room to an amazing array of different perspectives and disciplines; and most importantly, it gave ample room for debate and discussion. Comics studies in its best sense happens between scholars rather than for each of them, and this was definitely the case here. The impressively interdisciplinary and international field of scholars was brought together for a truly productive opportunity for exchange. Together with the discussed projects concerning a comics theory reader, a perpetuated NNCORE structure as well as possibilities for a European umbrella cooperation of comics scholars, the conference started more chapters than it concluded, and offered participants lots of additional encouragement and motivation, new questions, ideas, and not least new reading lists. I've taken home a suitcase full of new perspectives to think about, and for that I am very grateful and happy.

*JunProf. Dr. Stephan Packard, Institut für Medienkulturwissenschaft, Freiburg University, Germany*



## **Didactics Seminar in Copenhagen, May 31**

By Marianne Eskebæk Larsen

Few days after the NNCORE conference in Helsinki, the comic didactics group from NNCORE met at a workshop in Copenhagen to discuss their work and progress. The presenters involved the Danish cartoonist and illustrator Erik Petri, who talked about his work as a graphic facilitator. According to Erik the didactic potential of g.f. is that it activates people more, it makes discussions more concrete and it makes people more innovative. Erik had us all drawing in order to show that it is not about technique! Erik Petri was followed by Karin Kukkonen, who presented some of the points from her soon to be published book *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*. Finally, Michael Løhde presented the outline for a model to analyze comics he has created in collaboration with the Rikke Platz Cortsen and Marianne Eskebæk Larsen. The aim is to come up with a model that gives a starting point for teaching comics. Attending the workshop was apart from the above mentioned, Sabrina Seerup, Andreas Gregersen and Malik Nairat. Subsequently Marianne has created a LinkedIn group for the discussions to continue.

The day after the workshop also filled the University of Copenhagen with comics scholars and enthusiasts, since the Copenhagen Comics festival began with an academic program filled with both researchers and practicing comic book artists. The international line of guests contained Karin Kukkonen from Oxford, who

talked about how to teach students the art of close reading comics. Kalle Hakkola from Helsinki's Comics Center talked about the lack of comics for children and presented the new Nordic anthology *Dreambuddies*. The British comic book artist Charlie Adlard attracted quite a few more people to the auditorium. He works on the popular American comic book series *The Walking Dead*. Among the local presenters were NNCORE's own Rikke Cortsen and geographer Chris Kjeldsen, who presented their project with the goal of incorporating comic books in the research and teaching of the natural sciences. Also the two creators behind the Danish success *Taynikma*, Jan Kjær og Merlin P. Mann, came to talk about how they have managed to reach out to children all over the world with their unique combination of text and comic. *Taynikma* has been successful in motivating children who are not considered strong readers. The program also included Nota, the national library for people with reading difficulties, who presented sound-comics (?) that seem to motivate children with reading difficulties to read more. All through the day was a discussion on genre, both in relation to *Taynikma* and inevitably graphic novels, but also sound-comics where the dialogue is read aloud by actors thus giving the medium a scenic character. The program gave the audience examples on how and why to use comics in the class room and gave insight into the process of making comics.