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<CT>***El Volcán: Forging global comics cultures through alliances, networks and self-branding***

<CA>**Nina Mickwitz**

<H1>**Introduction**

<FO>This research grew from a chance encounter at the Helsinki Comics Festival 2017, the main themes of which included Latin American comics. ‘Helsinki Comics Festival, organised by Finnish Comics Society, is the largest annual comics festival in Northern Europe. The festival features an exciting gathering of comics artists and publishers from all around the world, and attracts ca. 11,000–20,000 visitors each year’ (Helsinki Comics Festival 2019). In 2017 the invited guests included different generations of Argentine comics creators (José Muñoz and Berliac), and the editors and contributing artists of the newly published anthology *El Volcán: Un presente de la historieta latinoamericana* (2017). This encounter with an anthology of Latin American comics at an event in the far north-eastern reaches of Europe brought into focus the fact that Comics Studies still has work to do when it comes to the global circulation of comics.

Comics Studies have grown exponentially over the past ten to fifteen years. Since the *International Journal of Comic Art* (1999–present), other journals have emerged: *European Comic Art* (Berghahn, 2008–present); *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (Routledge, 2010–present); *Studies in Comics* (Intellect, 2010–present), *Mechademia* (2006–present); and *Inks: The Comics Studies Society Journal* (University of Ohio Press, 2017–present); *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre la Historieta*

(2001–10); *Nona Arte: Revista Brasileira de Pesquisas em Histórias em Quadrinhos* (2012–present); *Comicalités: Études de culture graphique* (2013–present); and *Deutsche Comicforschung* (2005–present). Online journals dedicated to comics include *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, *Comics Grid*, *Closure*, *SANE Journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education* and *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art*. Alongside the longstanding publisher of comics scholarship, The University of Mississippi Press and their Great Comics Artists Series, Rutgers University Press run a series entitled Comics Cultures, McFarland & Co has published numerous monographs and edited collections on the topic, as have Routledge’s *Advances in Comics Studies* and Palgrave’s series *Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels*. Regularly occurring conferences are too numerous to list here.¹ The maturing of the field can be observed in the emergence of scholarly readers that attempt to set out key concerns and debates. *The Language of Comics: Word and Image* (2001) edited by Christina Varnum and Gibbons; *A Comics Studies Reader* (2009) edited by Kent Worcester and Jeet Heer; and Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan’s *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* (2012) have been followed by volumes such as *The Routledge Companion to Comics Studies* (2017) edited by Frank Bramlett, T. R. Cook and Aaron Meskin; *The Cambridge Companion to Graphic Novels* (2017) edited by Stephen A. Tabachnik; and *The Rutgers Companion to Comics* (forthcoming 2019) edited by Bart Beaty and Charles Hatfield. The Anglo-American weighting of the listed outputs is undeniable. That does not mean that contributing scholars are limited to these particular geographies, nor that the subjects of study are necessarily located within these parameters. In fact, a cursory glance across the contents pages of most journals and collections of essays demonstrates substantial cultural and geographical diversity when it comes to examples examined and histories explored. It is nevertheless fair to say that

production cultures with long established international circulation, namely North American comics, Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinée* and Japanese manga, have tended to dominate scholarship across borders.

Coming across *El Volcán* in Helsinki brought to the fore a number of related questions concerning global networks, encounters and identities, and cultural and linguistic translation in relation to comics. In some ways, this encounter represents a connection between two cultural contexts that can each be framed as peripheral. This has certainly been the case in relation to international comics circulation, as each has provided markets for the import of comics to a degree significantly exceeding their capacity to access foreign markets for their own production. In a broader sense, neither belongs to a dominant cultural paradigm. Within Europe, Finland can be described as a small nation at some remove from the continent both geographically and in terms of political and economic muscle.² The economic and political dominance of the United States has historically also positioned Latin America as marginal. But this dynamic is complicated by the fact that Finland belongs to the privileged global north, while Latin America is a constituent of the global south. In this sense, a centre-margin relation remains part of the overall equation.

Thirty years ago, Arjun Appadurai (1990) argued that the contemporary global cultural economy is now ‘a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centres and peripheries)’ (Appadurai 1990, 588), while Ulf Hannerz (1990) suggested that a centre-periphery dynamic still effectively holds sway, not least in the way dominant ‘world’ languages uphold advantages for certain sections of global populations. Since then, the tectonic plates of geo-political alliances and economic power (and their fault lines) have shifted considerably and technological developments

have shaped, further deterritorialised and reconfigured global cultural landscapes. But the unevenness of flows that constitute the global cultural economy has, if anything, intensified. Asymmetrical relations of mobility and exchange are often entrenched and reproduced by further disparities in terms of visibility and attention. At the same time, the global marketplace requires and encourages differentiation, and cultural identity can be utilised for such purposes.

El Volcán: Un presente de la historieta latinoamericana identifies its offering ('presente' can be translated as 'gift', which makes the subtitle suggestive of a benevolent act of sharing) through cultural and regional identity. At the Helsinki festival, *El Volcán's* celebration of the idiosyncratic and often hand-crafted clearly connected with the sensibilities of Finnish small press and independent creators on show. These local counterparts were selling comics and other merchandise on tables in one of the smaller halls on the festival site. As invited international guests, the *El Volcán* editors and contributors were a focal point of the festival programme, including an exhibition of art work and interviews and panel appearances on stage. The intention of this chapter is to examine how regional and cultural identity (as constructed by *El Volcán*) works as performative identification and as a category through which products are engaged with and understood.

The study of comics, like that of many other cultural forms, often applies a national frame. Approaches to Latin American comics (L'Hoeste and Poblete 2009; Manthei 2011; Vergueiro 2009; Ostuni et al. n.d.; Gociol and Rosemberg 2000; Suárez and Uribe-Jongbloed 2016; Gomes 2016) are no exception. Ana Merino (2017, 70) has rightly argued that histories of comics production in different Latin American countries have been shaped by distinct socio-economic and political contexts and demand specificity of address and attention. Yet national labels tend to obscure mobilities and

exchanges that continually take place across borders, and which have multiplied with the growth of the internet. On the whole, geo-political and cultural categorisations are often more complex than national frameworks can adequately account for. ‘It is so taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society that the terms “society” and “culture” are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 6–7). A regional frame is no less at risk of flattening internal differences, but can help account for cultural resonances, commonalities and collaborations not beholden to national borders.

Using *El Volcán* as a case study, and with the generous assistance of José Sainz, Alejandro Bidegaray, Muriel Bellini, Joni B., Jesús Cossio, Powerpaola³ and Júlia Barata, I have been able to develop these thoughts further. Rather than focusing on the visual or narrative comics work included in the book, this chapter approaches *El Volcán* in its capacity as a networking tool, examining how this publication enables the construction of comics communities both within Latin America and beyond.

Following a brief summary of genesis and contents, the chapter considers the anthology format and its functions. I then go on to explore how various levels of belonging – local, national and regional – are articulated within *El Volcán*. How does this publication embody specific and local comics cultures, how do creators themselves place their practice, especially in relation to wider comics cultures, and what is at stake in mobilising the regional? Having considered these questions, attention turns to the networks of transactional relationships that connect publications, exhibitions and international festivals. The chapter thus argues that a publication such as this requires consideration as both text and project, and, in terms of global comics cultures, as a networking node in its own right.

<H1>An outpouring of talent

<FO>*El Volcán: Un presente de la historieta latinoamericana* is a 25 by 20 centimetre tome, and by comparison to UK and US paperback formats its production values are striking. The book opens with a contents page and editor's foreword, and ends with three pages of short biographical notes. These introduce the 42 comics creators. These paratextual elements bookend 272 glossy pages of short form comics, some in monochrome but many rendered in uncompromising full colour. They convey a busy and energetic impression in clear correspondence with the title, and eponymous bursting forth of flames from the volcanic crater on Javier Velasco's front cover (see Figure 2.1).

< INSERT FIGURE 2.1 HERE >

<FO>Edited by José Sainz and Alejandro Bidegaray, *El Volcán* was published by Editorial Municipal Rosario⁴ and Musaraña Editora in 2017. The project first took shape as the brainchild of Bidegaray, who originally ventured into publishing to provide financial support for this bookshop. Musaraña Editora has since grown into an autonomous proposition. Its inaugural and most high-profile title to date is *Vapor* by fêted Spanish creator Max⁵ in 2013, originally published in Spain by La Cúpula (2012), and later brought to Anglophone readers by Fantagraphics (2014). Between then and early 2018, the imprint has published a string of graphic artists' work and currently counts 18 titles in several formats: pocket books; larger albums; fanzines; risograph fanzines (Alejandro Bidegaray, email to author, 23 April 2018). Bidegaray asked fellow comics aficionado and promoter José Sainz to join the *El Volcán* project early on. Sainz,

based in the city of Rosario in Santa Fé province, had in 2015 published *Informe: Historieta argentina del siglo XXI* with the collaboration of local authority run publisher Editorial Municipal Rosario. EMR's involvement with comics began with the 2014 publication of the Spanish translation of Johnny Weissmüller's *Johnny Jungle – Première Partie* (originally published by Deveney, Jouvray and Jouvray in 2013) with the support of the Victoria Ocampo Publishing Assistance Program of L'Institut français d'Argentine. Sainz describes EMR as 'a public publishing house but with the mindset of an independent, alternative publisher', giving specific mention to director Oscar Taborda, editor Daniel García Helder and designers Lis Mondaini and Juan Manuel Alonso (José Sainz, email to author, 23 April 2018). Previously instrumental in reinvigorating discussions around contemporary poetry, EMR's initial comics publications came out of national cartoon competitions (Concurso Nacional de Historieta Roberto Fontanarrosa 2008 and 2010). Since *Informe* (2015) EMR has published several individual works as well as *El Volcán* (2017) and the anthology *Historieta LGTBI* (2017).⁶

El Volcán's 42 contributors are distributed across roughly 13 countries, a map occasionally complicated by multiple affiliations. The largest clusters represent Argentine, Brazilian, Peruvian and Colombian comics cultures, and most contributors are born in the 1970s and 1980s, with some exceptions at either end. Max Cachimba, who worked in the magazine *Fierro* in the mid-1980s,⁷ can probably be identified as something of a lodestar, while other Argentine creators include Muriel Bellini, Juan Vegetal, Mónica Naranjo Uribe, Diego Parés, Jorge Quien, Jazmín Varela, and Javier Velasco. Chilean contributors are Amanda Baeza (resident in Portugal), Catalina Bu and Maliki, while the Brazilian contingent includes Mariana Paraizo, Pedro Frantz, Laura Lannes, Jaca, Fabio Zimbres and Diego Gerlach. Puiupo and Júlia Barata are

both Portuguese, although Barata is now based in Argentina. Bolivia is represented by Marco Tóxico and Cuban-born Frank Arbelo, Costa Rica by Edward Brends, Uruguay by Maco, Paraguay by Regina Rivas, Venezuela by Carlos Sánchez Becerra and Ecuador by Powerpaola. Powerpaola is now an active member of the Colombian comics scene, alongside Mariana Gil Ríos, Truchafrita, Jim Pluk, Stefhany Yepes Lozano, La Watson and Joni B. Mexican creators include Inés Estrada, Abraham Díaz and Pachiclón, while Peru's contribution numbers Jesús Cossio, Rodrigo La Hoz, David Galliquio, Eduardo Yaguas, Jorge Pérez-Ruibal, Amadeo Gonzales and Martin López Lam (who lives in Spain). The challenges of determining precise boundaries and criteria for the project indicated in this summary overview flag up issues of identity and regionality central to this chapter. But before tackling these questions, the format of the publication deserves some attention.

<H1>The anthology as themed selection and statement

<FO>Chris Couch (2000) has claimed that 'the first comic books were anthologies of newspaper strips', although these were collections of previously published material. Capitalising on popular products that, having circulated among readers, had most likely been thrown away rather than kept, these publications were motivated by maximising sales. 'Usually the publishers of such books were the newspapers in which they had first appeared' (Sabin 1996, 25). Before simply adopting the term 'anthology' for such early historical examples, it is helpful to consider its defining features and provenance. What, for example, is the distinction between collections and anthologies? Anne Ferry (2001) defines the anthology by multiple authorship, and thus something distinct from a collection of works by the same creator (which in the case of comics might be taken to mean the same creator, or group of creators). An anthology is most commonly

associated with a themed selection of writing in book form. Magazines, for instance, might be identified by a specific theme and usually also consist of entries by multiple contributors, but are not considered to be anthologies. Not solely a consequence of publication format, the anthology is a genre designation weighted with ideas of cultural worthiness and esteem. Despite the value attached to these publications in retrospective and revisionist accounts, the word ‘anthology’ thus seems incongruous with the very early comic books that redistributed newspaper strips. However, by the 1990s comics anthologies, clearly positioning themselves as such, played a vital role in shaping the publishing landscape.

Bart Beaty (2007, 28) has traced the contemporary international comics anthology of ‘avantgardist traditions and independent tendencies’ to L’Associacion, the French publishing co-operative that announced itself with the collection *Logique de Guerre Comix* in 1990. The characterisation of L’Associacion, in terms of ‘an ideology of independence, autonomous production, and selection that privileges an idea of creation as founded exclusively in the arena of personal expression and individual style’ (Beaty 2007, 43), transfers to the approach taken by Bidegaray and Sainz with remarkable ease, as does the observation that, during the 1990s European comics renaissance, the earlier emphasis on authorship in comics shifted towards visual creatorship.

The importance of anthologies appears particularly pronounced for small press, independent and self-publishing creators, as a means of visibility and reach. Where the national context is too limited to sustain a comics culture, anthologies offer a useful means of widening exposure, either by placing local creators alongside peers from other national contexts, or collecting locally produced work that addresses wider readerships and professional networks. Among Beaty’s examples, the Spanish magazine *Nosotros somos los muertos* (1995–2007) and the Portuguese anthology *Para Além dos Olivais*

(Cotrim and Saraiva 2000) appear to share the outlook and ambitions of Bidegaray and Sainz. Closer to home, and ten years prior to *El Volcán*, Jorge Siles (2007) wrote in celebratory tones about ‘The Boom in Bolivian Comics’ by mentioning titles such as the anthology magazine *Crash* (published by Eureka and initially headed up by Frank Arbelo) and *Suda Mery K!* The latter is especially interesting in terms of transnational efforts. Published from 2005 to 2008, in five bi-annual editions, this title was a joint project between three independent comics publishers – the French-Argentine Ex Abrupto, Bolivian Eureka and Chilean Ergo Comix – under the label ABC (Siles 2007). Since the early 2000s comics events in the region range from relatively small scale to the massive FIQ (Festival Internacional de Quadrinhos) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. This belies the idea of a sudden eruption, instead suggesting that the contemporary comics scene represented in *El Volcán* has evolved gradually through multiple efforts and networking initiatives.

Following Beaty’s observations of ‘high art’ values in comics, the anthology format is a logical development on two accounts. The contemporary comics anthology, as Beaty points out, takes on an increasing correspondence with traditions of artists’ books. And formed by processes of selection and constitutive of framed bodies of work, anthologies can have a gate-keeping function and contribute to canon formation (2018). The process through which *El Volcán* contributors were identified and selected indicates Bidegaray and Sainz’s editorial sensitivity to the gate-keeping function and implicit weight of their choices. A decision not to duplicate any of the creators already included in the earlier *Informe* (2015) is described as deliberately guarding against overweighting towards the Argentine cohort, the local scene most familiar to the editors. Moreover, had some names been included in both anthologies they would have tacitly been positioned as particularly ‘deserving’ (José Sainz, email to author, 20 March 2018).

The selection criteria for *El Volcán* were plural and intersectional; some names included were ‘obvious choices, and I mean obvious in a good way’ (José Sainz, email to author, 20 March 2018). For example, publishing Powerpaola’s work is perceived to cement the standing of Musaraña Editora (Alejandro Bidegray, email to author, 23 April 2018) which underscores her position. Max Cachimba is an internationally feted creator with an impressive back catalogue of work and, like David Galliquio, a recurring presence on competition juries. Amadeo Gonzales, Fabio Zimbres, Frank Arbelo, Marco Tóxico, Joni B, Maliki, Diego Parés and Jesús Cossio command similar esteem. These artists built careers in the precarious first decade of the twenty-first century, after the collapse of the comics industry but before a newer notion of a Latin American comics scene had begun to coalesce. More recent arrivals currently in the process of making their names are identified by Sainz and Bidegray as the following ‘wave’. The anthology thus brings together creators already commanding recognition with others who are less established to set out and expand its field.

Association with respected peers works as a validation mechanism. Bellini expresses her admiration for many of the other contributors, describing being included in *El Volcán* as ‘an honour’ (Muriel Bellini, email to author, 20 February 2018). Júlia Barata mentions the opportunity for her work ‘to travel’ and gain access to different geographical locations and contexts beyond her own direct reach, and the importance of her work being positioned ‘between a lot of artists that I admire’ (Júlia Vilhena, email to author, 6 February 2018).

Cossio (email to author, 21 February 2018), if from a patently different perspective, offers a similar understanding:

<EXT>It is a good opportunity to disseminate my work in other circuits, outside Peru. And to support an initiative that will surely help introduce the work of

several colleagues in places where they were previously unknown. The project also offers an overview of the range and plurality of what is being done in South America.

<FO>That inclusion works as a form of validation and recognition for creators clearly points to the role of anthologies in canon formation (Ferry 2001, 6) and the vital and formative role of editors. However, Jeffery Di Leo (2004, 3) has suggested that '[a] more progressive and optimistic view of anthologies locates their value in the topologies of the literary world that they create'. He continues: 'A topical anthology literally creates a place or region – a topos – that can be easily visited or identified'. In an anthology based on regional identification such as *El Volcán*, the cultural topology constructed has two dimensions, one related to Latin American comics production and the other temporal (the early decades of the twenty-first century). Similarly picking up on both time and place, Bidegaray (email to author, 23 April 2018) outlines the intention to illustrate what has 'been going on in comics here in the last 15 years, [. . .] since we started thinking about ourselves as part of something bigger than our national borders'. The aims of the project were always two-fold: to consolidate connections within the region and to promote the creative momentum of regional comics cultures further by reaching out to wider, in particular European, audiences (José Sainz, email to author, 12 August 2018). This calls for some further unpacking of relations between the local and transnational, and of how the regional frame figures in the context of international exchange.

<H1>**Labels and identifications: Thinking through the local, regional and transnational**

<FO>In work presented in *El Volcán*, the local appears inscribed and asserted in narrative terms, in the use of language and through specific historical, visual and cultural references, and by its representation of clusters of creators in various localities and national contexts. Creators might be geographically dispersed and still conceive of themselves as part of a wider community. Yet the principle of agglomeration, as it ‘arises from spatial proximity’ (Rosenthal and Strange 2010, 278), also supports the emergence of distinct nodes of activity in urban centres. The term ‘scene’ better captures the fluidity and temporal indeterminacy involved here. The benefits and ‘enabling circumstances’ (Mommaas 2009, 46) of such scenes include validation through shared interests and social aspects but also professional knowledge exchange and organisation, generation of readerships and reputation building. Thus, Júlia Barata tells of regularly meeting with other women creators in Buenos Aires to sketch and make artwork together (Júlia Vilhena, email to author, 6 February 2018). The importance of these meetings and networks to her practice supports this picture of a localised community and social interaction between creators. Powerpaola has similarly described partaking in weekly creator meet-ups and collective drawing sessions in La Paz (Paola Silguero, email to author, 12 March 2018). If *El Volcán* has facilitated and strengthened regional networks between such local nodes of cultural activity, its very existence also depended on them.

The local now works in tandem with digital networks, platforms and interactions offering deterritorialised spaces and means of interaction. This is likely to be of particular importance for independent artisanal comics producers outside large-scale industry and publishing structures, such as newspaper and weekly magazines. Certainly, websites and blogs play a significant role in presenting work, linking with professional networks, constructing and maintaining a visible profile. Such extended

capacities of visibility, access and connectivity do not, however, diminish the vital role played by local support networks. These clearly provide the creative and professional conditions that make possible a groundswell of productivity and the collectivity implied in the term 'comics cultures'. Nor has the transnational reach of digital cultures rendered the national frame obsolete.

<H1>National identifications and beyond

<FO>Despite globalising forces and flows – of people, capital, information, technology and ideas – that exceed the boundaries of nation states (Appadurai 1990), the nation is far from an exhausted framework where the analysis of culture is concerned. It remains relevant for understanding histories and developments intrinsically bound to specific economic, political and cultural institutions and policies. Even when fundamentally outward looking, such structures tend to be founded on the state as a sovereign administrative unit. National identity functions as a useful device not only for analytical endeavour but also as a curatorial concept. Both funding opportunities and promotional strategies often remain tied to and reproduce association with national identity.

In other words, the conditions that form specific historical comics cultures are contingent on national contexts. The nation's importance for the way comics are produced and circulate consequently informs approaches to their study. Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete's *Redrawing the Nation* (2009) uses national identity as its organising principle and the contributors offer informative accounts of specific comics histories. 'Latin American countries have historical backgrounds linked with their cultural differences that represent long traditions' (Merino 2017, 70). Merino nevertheless recognises that contemporary Latin American comics creators are

increasingly engaging in transnational dialogue and collaboration, both through online spaces and in the form of events and festivals. Fernando Suárez and Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed (2016) have elaborated on this contemporary context, one that might be described as post-industry comics production. Here the discussion is framed and articulated specifically through national histories and conditions, as in writing about independent comics publishing (Reati 2009, 100; Vergueiro 2009, 165) that also forms part of *El Volcán*'s genealogy.

However, as a whole the anthology resolutely transcends national parameters. It describes belonging beyond citizenship, formed instead through affiliations, cultural practices and consumption rarely restricted by national boundaries. Such transnationality has more often given cause for discussion in fandom and audience studies (Morimoto 2018), but is no less pertinent when considering creators. The intent here is not to offer a detailed examination of the stylistic or aesthetic qualities of *El Volcán*'s individual contributors. Indeed, such interpretation is inevitably subject to situated cultural knowledge and reference points. For instance, finding the scratchy lines and expressionist linework in Pachiclón's story 'Grosería' (61–8) of two nihilist punks reminiscent of the German expressionist Georg Grosz might reveal more about my arts education than the artist's influences (see Figure 2.2).

<INSERT FIGURE 2.2 HERE>

<FO>If the aim is to establish an art-historical genealogy, relying on creators' own accounts would be equally problematic; such accounts are likely to be impacted by potentially short-lived enthusiasms and displays of cultural capital. However, creators'

responses offer some indication of how they position themselves in relation to others in the field, and indeed how they conceive their practice. For instance, that Cossio cites Joe Sacco and Edilberto Jiménez as influences comes as no surprise (see Figure 2.3).

<INSERT FIGURE 2.3 HERE>

<FO>Cossio's retrospective renditions of the political violence that has ravaged Peru are based on research by the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and witness testimonies. It thus offers clear correspondences with Sacco's work, in particular *Footnotes in Gaza* (2010). Jiménez is likewise known for drawings and paintings informed by witness testimony that deal with the internal armed conflict in Peru's recent past.⁸ Cossio's interest in experiential narration, memory and factual modes in comics, and international reference points, are reflected in the mentions of Chester Brown, Phoebe Gloeckner and Sarah Glidden, Paco Roca and Emmanuel Guibert (Jesús Cossio, email to author, 21 February 2018).

Powerpaola's cited influences include Julie Doucet's *My New York Diary* (1999) and the anthology publications *Twisted Sisters* (1976–1994) edited by Aline Kominsky and Diane Noomin (Paola Silguero, email to author, 12 March 2018). Her other mentions, beyond the Peruvian David Galliquio,⁹ also suggest a broadly international positioning. Colombian creator Joni B.'s responses (email to author, 21 February 2018) highlight how comics histories of transnational circulation predate contemporary attention to authors and creators. He notes that his earliest comics influences – *Cementeria* (*Cimiteria*), *La Gata* and *El Libro Vaquero* – did not identify authors. Having believed these were Mexican comics, he only later learned that they were in fact Italian imports.

Joni B. goes on to mention the US underground and a later influx of names from the 1980s and 1990s, mainly North American and Spanish.

On the whole, the cited influences are temporally and geographically diverse while positioning the respondents squarely in creator-centred and ‘arts’ affiliated comics cultures. This tendency towards eclecticism and arts is even more explicit in the responses from Muriel Bellini and Júlia Barata. Bellini cites Nell Brinkley, the self-taught and prominent early US illustrator and comics creator, but also British twentieth-century poets and contemporary artists, US painters and film-makers among her influences. Her Latin American reference points were the Spanish-born illustrator based in Argentina Alejandro Sirio (1890–1953) and *El Volcán* co-contributor Rodrigo La Hoz (Muriel Bellini, email to author, 20 February 2018). Júlia Barata’s range is similarly broad-reaching, and includes canonical European film directors and US singer-songwriters. Her mention of Mauricio de Sousa’s *Turma de Mônica* thus stands apart as a singular representation of popular and specifically Latin American comics traditions (Júlia Vilhena, email to author, 6 February 2018).

The editors’ foreword states their desire to represent a particular strain of Latin American comics production, one succeeding prior comics cultures devastated by the economic crisis of the 1990s, and one they claim is now growing ever more buoyant and vigorous: ‘Latin American comic languages of the first decades of the twenty-first century, which cover a wide stylistic spectrum, expand and diverge through a magma of experimentation that includes all the levels of content and expression’ (Sainz and Bidegaray 2017). While this description aptly summarises the diversity of the contributions, it also indicates the editorial emphasis on expression and experimentation, which is echoed in the creators’ responses. Beyond an evident ‘art world’ (Beaty 2012) positioning and a number of current names receiving attention,

certain comics periods repeatedly emerge as reference points: the US underground of the 1960s and 1970s; the authorial 1990s in both North America and Europe. The impact of women creators and autobiographical approaches is also considerable for many of the creators consulted here. The responses suggest that while factors that determine influence include proximity, they are as likely to indicate wider and often transnational consumption practices.

El Volcán's aesthetics appear to be shaped through distinctly transnational influences, stylistic affiliations and taste cultures. How, then, do these aspects relate to the regional identification in the anthology's very title?

<H1>Regionalism

<FO>Notions of the regional have undergone various and important historical shifts, and have included discussions directly addressing Latin America. However, these debates often deal with economic, fiscal and political concerns (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012) that go beyond the scope of this chapter. When it comes to writing specifically about Latin American comics, approaches adopting a regional frame include Flora (1984), Page and King (2017) and Catalá Carrasco, Drinot and Scorer (2017). The notion of regional networks, as symbolically construed and presented by *El Volcán*, seem particularly meaningful in the context of precarious conditions, financially fragile and often short-lived publication initiatives (Suárez and Jongbloed 2016). I will limit my discussion to two contributions, neither of which speak directly to a Latin American context but both of which are useful for the purposes at hand. The first is Leo Ching's (2001) thesis that globalisation and regionalism are tied in a mutually constitutive dynamic, and importantly, that rather than conceived exclusively through an economic

lens, these concepts are also always cultural and therefore simultaneously exist in a symbolic realm. He rejects the notion that either one of these, economic or cultural, is determined by the other, but instead conjures an image of a mutually formative dynamic.

<EXT>If globalization is to be taken as a process in space, and localization is to be understood as a specificity in place, the regional appears to be a terrain ‘in between,’ a geographic reality and a constructed discursivity that is both spatialized in its transnational deterritorialization and yet reterritorialized in a specific configuration bounded by historically invented geography.

(Ching 2001, 284)

<FO>Rikke Platz Cortsen and Ralf Kauranen’s (2016) article on Nordic comics anthologies argues that regional identity can function as a ‘brand effect’ and that ‘the relatively small countries of the North have a better chance of getting noticed if they pool their efforts together and make their promotional strategies abroad under the heading “Nordic”’ (2016 n.p.). Territories and populations of the Nordic region are tiny compared with Latin America, but in both regions artisanal and small press comics cultures depend on niche markets. Expanding the reach of their output by accessing globally scattered readerships supports sustainability, and a consolidated effort identified by a regional label is a useful strategic move.

Ching (2001) and Platz Cortsen and Kauranen (2016) concur that regionalism is a discursive construct. It has no autonomous or given meaning, but ‘is always directed against another territorial discourse (the world system, nationalism, or other regionalisms)’ (Ching 2001, 285). According to Platz Cortsen and Kauranen (2016) the regional label ‘is not used as an epithet for a stylistic or thematic commonality, but

instead a platform for [regional] collaboration in the comics field' (n.p.). This analysis fits the pan-regional approach of *El Volcán*, yet the notion of 'difference' carries distinct weight in relation to the region's cultural and historical colonial legacies. The very term 'Latin American' has been rejected by many for its homogenising effect, its erasure of many ethnic and social groups. Its qualification appears to underline the US's claim to American-ness while obscuring the extent to which it is, in fact, a Spanish-speaking nation. The term moreover lends itself to an external 'interpretive network of aesthetic values, judgements and myths which continue to invent the discourse of "Latin American" art as elsewhere and "Other"' (Genocchio 1998, 4–5). Sainz and Bidegaray's discussion of the regional banner as it relates to their selection criteria conjures a more nuanced and reflective interpretation:

<EXT>When we asked ourselves, what it means to be Latin American, comics-related and in the context of globalization, we answered that nationality or territory are of course important but not defining terms. So, we started to consider those who aren't obvious at all because you may not think of them as Latin American, maybe because they don't live here or don't publish here or maybe because they weren't born here, and we thought it was important to have them in the book since mixture, fusion, miscegenation or whatever you may call it is one important part of Latin American identity.

(José Sainz, email to author, 20 March 2018)

<FO>The regional identification of *El Volcán* acts as an assertion of collective purpose and internal dialogue between participating comics cultures. The editors' responses suggest that the anthology's intention is to support and further embolden comics production in locations where it remains fragmentary. But it simultaneously provides a label that has purchase in markets beyond the region. According to Ching, current

mobilisations of regional identity are not merely signifiers of colonial pasts, but serve different and more strategic purposes. In the contemporary global cultural economy ‘difference itself exists only as a commodity, a spectacle to be consumed in a globalized capitalist system precisely at the moment when exteriority is no longer imaginable’ (Ching 2001, 285).

The *El Volcán* project includes a small, simply printed and stapled leaflet of translations to accompany the anthology, as and when required. Its eight pages include the editors’ foreword and the textual elements and dialogue from each comic translated into English by Micaela Ortelli. This freestanding publication is in itself an interesting response to the thorny issue of translating comics, a form where textual elements are uniquely integral to the visual composition of a panel and page. Extricating them in order to carry out linguistic translating thus often presents an impossible task. Moreover, this leaflet indicates the wider address of this anthology and ambition to circulate this collected showcase not only within but also beyond the region itself.

<H1>Expanding transactional networks

<FO>‘We live now in an era of the enterprising self. Emphasis is increasingly placed on the entrepreneurial aspects of creative talent with the artist and cultural producer encouraged to find a niche, fill a gap, know their audience, innovate, promote, package, brand and sell him/herself and their work’ (McCall and Houlihan 2017, 154). As constitutive aspects of contemporary comics cultures as professional and entrepreneurial networks, the mutual relations between publication and events are fairly self-evident. Publications beget promotional events, and events bring people together to stimulate further undertakings, creative and/or enterprising. Such dynamic

affordances are corroborated by Bidegaray, explaining how his bookshop has not only given rise to a publishing venture but also related events: 'From Musaraña we also produce exhibitions and festivals, Festival Fanzín (fanzines) and Festival Sudestada (drawing and illustration). I work as a creative director in both, and as a curator in several exhibitions outside our own space' (Alejandro Bidegaray, email to author, 23 April 2018). The festival event, characterised by its particular and spatial qualities and temporal specificity (Peaslee 2013, 815), is a crucial network node in its capacity to bring together people and offer fertile grounds for further collaborative endeavour. In this capacity, festivals align particularly well with a changing conception of culture into 'something much more open and horizontal, but also more commercial' (Mommaas 2009, 45). They work as platforms for performing 'notions of artistic professionalism, the cultural resourcing of artistic creativity, the composition of critical audiences, artistic role models, and the reputation of creative careers' (Mommaas 2009, 45).

Sainz (email to author, 23 April 2018) recounts being introduced to Kalle Hakkola, the executive director of the Helsinki Comics Festival, who was attending a comics festival in Buenos Aires as an invited guest, and a subsequent chance meeting at Fumetto (the annual International Comics Art Festival in Lucerne, Switzerland) in 2016. The connection initiated in Buenos Aires and Lucerne was instrumental in bringing *El Volcán* to the Helsinki Comics Festival in 2017. The transactional nature of this exchange is evident in the financial arrangements: helped by grant funding at either end, the festival organisers took care of exhibition production and accommodation costs for the guests, while the delegates covered their own travel costs. 'It was expensive, of course, but sales were really good in Helsinki and the book ended up paying for it' (José Sainz, email to author, 23 April 2018). This is a relationship of mutual benefits as well as contributions. The festival offers important promotional and sales value for the book,

while in return the anthology presents thematic coherence, plurality of content and cultural interest in line with a cosmopolitan outlook and taste cultures. An introduction to the artistic director of Fumetto, Jana Jakoubek, in 2016 also set in motion events resulting in *El Volcán*'s inclusion in the 2018 Fumetto festival programme. At this event, *El Volcán* benefitted from being placed next to the Swiss-Brazilian project 'Magma' that was one of the festival's main exhibitions (José Sainz, email to author, 23 April 2018). Touring with the anthology and exhibition has not just been a promotional endeavour but has also enabled first-hand encounters with other comics cultures: 'We thought of *El Volcán* as a bridge in both directions and it seems to be working' (José Sainz, email to author, 23 April 2018).

It is worth noting that like conventions,¹⁰ the festivals mentioned here involve panel discussions, signings and prizes, but also often emphasise their production of spaces set apart from events involving large-scale franchises and syndication. Fumetto, for instance, characterises itself as a 'non-commercial' event, focused on 'alternative, independent comics story-telling' and located at the intersection of 'comics, visual arts and performance' (Jakoubek 2017). A focus on creators, often with exhibitions of artwork as a prominent feature, further cements the cultural standing of these events, and they are highly compatible with the values represented by the *El Volcán* anthology. Officially endorsed and sponsored by municipal arts funding and state-sponsorship (Beaty 2007, 121), such festivals play an important role in local and municipal strategies for cultural investment (O'Brien 2014). These comics festivals often adopt a model of international cultural exchange, in alignment with notions of cosmopolitan tastes and competencies (Hannerz 1990, 239). This creates a context in which the regional identification and markers of cultural specificity/difference of *El Volcán* accrue particular value.

<H1>Conclusion

<FO>*El Volcán* functions as a consolidation and reification of contemporary Latin American comics culture. It combines selection, representation and a strategic assertion of regional identity. The anthology moreover offers an interesting case study of post-industry growth of comics production within which creators (rather than characters or story-worlds) assume a central position. Idiosyncratic aesthetic markers, strongly evocative of processes of making, further underline the creative agency of creators. These creators often position themselves within communities of practice and traditions that span local and regional but also globally dispersed contexts. The project's regional identity potentially works to strengthen networks beyond national borders within the continent and has also proven a successful platform for promoting and extending outward facing networks.

By mobilising and collating small press and artisanal comics work on a regional basis, *El Volcán* is aligned well with certain international comics networks and festivals, and the anthology's Latin American-ness is an identifier that effectively supports global circulation. This commodity-concept provides a theme and umbrella that works in productive alignment with transnational agendas, both its own and that of others. In the context of international festivals, the regional identification offers a focal point and fits with the organisers' aims. The anthology form is equally conducive, as its comprehensive range of content and individual approaches offers plurality. *El Volcán* thus functions as a collective calling card and transactional networking tool as it participates in and contributes to transnational networks of creative and entrepreneurial comics cultures.

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¹ For more information see www.comicsresearch.org; some of the content is dated but this is still a decent resource and useful starting point.

² Finland is a country with a population numbering just over 5.5 million people, which in relation to its area makes it sparsely populated. In terms of global economics Finland is well off, if statistically some way behind its Nordic neighbours.

Historically a young country, before achieving independence in 1917 it was a province either of the Swedish kingdom or the Russian empire. From 1947 to the early 1990s Finland was tied in to bilateral trade and cultural exchange programmes with the Soviet Union, but since 1995 has been a part of the EU (Hjerppe, n.d.).

Culturally Finland has a distinct heritage and the Finnish language sits apart from the Germanic roots shared by Scandinavian languages. Having a very small population, a relatively small economy in relation to direct neighbours, and an isolated language, Finland found it necessary to adopt the use of a *lingua franca*, which since the mid twentieth century has been English. The country’s limited cultural heterogeneity in part derives from the absence of a colonial past, and for economic reasons emigration has been a stronger historical feature than immigration. All these factors contribute to Finland’s position as simultaneously privileged and peripheral.

³ While referred to as Powerpaola in-text, material derived from email communication will be referenced by the creator’s given name, Paola Silguero. Similarly, email communications from Júlia Barata will be referenced using Júlia Vilhena.

⁴ Rosario is the largest city in the centre-east Argentine province of Santa Fé and host to the annual *Crack, Bang, Boom* convention initiated in 2010 by Eduardo Risso, whose collaborations with Brian Azzarello have cemented his international reputation as a comics artist. The Puro Comic bookshop and associated publishing venture Puro Comic Ediciones also contribute to Rosario's status as a significant comics hub.

⁵ For more on Max (also known as Francesc Capdevila) as an exemplar of the transnational small-press comics creator, see Beaty (2007, 116–8).

⁶ Two contributors in *El Volcán*, Júlia Barata and La Watson, also appear in *Historietas LGBTI* (2017), and Jazmín Varela's *Crisis Capilar* (2016) was published by EMR.

⁷ 'The pages of *Fierro* mixed articles on art movies, detective and noir literature, science fiction, and the history of comics' (De Santis 2009, 197). Pablo De Santis describes *Fierro* as a product of the cultural revitalisation that followed the reinstatement of democratic rule.

⁸ His book *Chungui: Violencia y trazos de memoria/ Chungui: Violence and Traces of Memory* was published in 2009; a revised second edition followed a year later.

⁹ In an interview on the comics blog Comic Noveno Arte (2009) David Galliquio himself cites US underground figureheads Robert Crumb, Gilbert Sheldon and Harvey Pekar.

¹⁰ Conventions have drawn scholarly attention in particular as platforms for transnational franchises and fandoms (Jenkins 2012; Geraghty 2015).