Authorship, Collaboration, and Art Geography

Martin de la Iglesia

German National Library of Economics

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, Purdue University Press selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation


This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.
The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 940 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the CC BY-NC-ND license.
Abstract: In his article "Authorship, Collaboration, and Art Geography" Martin de la Iglesia explores the connection between geographical spaces and works of art, a connection often made, but hardly theorized, by scholars in the field of art geography. He suggests that the link between space and object is established by the creator of the object. A feasible method is devised to determine the creator's geographical identity, which in turn determines which space is assigned to the object. Particularly, the implications of multiple authorship for such a methodology are considered. The procedure is exemplified by a geographical analysis of the comic book series Civil War, which was produced by four main creators from the United Kingdom, Canada, and the USA. This spatial-stylistic analysis results in the conception of the work as a patchwork of geographical influences bestowed by its creators. To successfully interpret the results of such an analysis, it is necessary to view them in the context of the general geographical circumstances of the world of comics.
Authorship, Collaboration, and Art Geography

When talking or writing about art, the use of geographical concepts seems almost essential. For instance, if we look at any issue of the German art magazine *art: Das Kunstmagazin*, geographical terms are found in almost every article. Hardly ever are artists mentioned without being characterized via geography. For example, we read about "Berlin-based John Bock," the "German artist living in New York" Dirk Skreber, "British artist Anthony McCall," and so on (all quotations are examples from issue 2 [2008]; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Frequently — no less than twenty-one times in one particular *art* issue — art itself is tagged directly to geographical attributes. The geographical terms used by the *art* authors range from cities ("Leipzig School," "New York abstract expressionism") to nations ("German romanticism," "Danish design"), to sub-national ("middle Italian fresco art"), and supra-national regions ("European pop art," "design becomes global"). On what basis — with what legitimation — do these casually and naturally made attributions of geographical spaces to works of art take place? One of my aims in this article is to show that the decisive link between art and space is established by a certain trait of the artist. My other aim is the exploration of methodological consequences which result from the consideration of the concept of collaborative authorship. The former of these two concerns targets a problem which is surprisingly dealt rarely with in art geographical literature. It is surprising because the connection between the work of art and the space is the very subject of art geography. Before working with space-work relationships, one should ask how they are formed.

There were only a few art geographers who made statements about whether the place of origin of an artist, or his/her place of residence at the time of the production of the work — the place of production — was decisive for the geographical assignment of the work. When reading Paul Pieper's 1936 book *Kunstgeographie*, one has the impression that he is arguing for both. On the one hand, he seems to favor the artist's place of origin as the crucial factor: "A master can teach his students certain matters, certain composition schemata, certain formal characteristics, but a spatial style [Raumstil] cannot be taught – either one has it or not" (96). On the other hand, he stresses the importance of the place of production, when he writes: "One may assume that artists adapt fairly quickly to the local temperament" (96). However, according to Pieper, "there will always be artists who maintain their inborn nature in a foreign environment. Works of such masters will yet, with sufficient visual experience, be perceived as foreign. The others [i.e. other artists] though, the changing [Wandelinden], must be attributed to the spatial style in which they integrated themselves and in which their artistic work found its fulfillment" (96). Thus, Pieper's view on the problem is somewhat ambiguous, but it is clear he suspected that the artist somehow established the connection between the work of art and the geographical space. Even nowadays, art geographers cannot or would not agree on a method for determining the relevant spaces. Therefore, there are many different methods to be found in scholarship for constructing an art geographical space, which are based either on political borders (without saying how or why the works of art fit into these borders), or on the ethnicity of the artists, the place of production of the works, the nationality of the commissioning patrons, the place where an object was found, or on its place of destination (all of these examples are from an issue on art geography of the journal *Ars: Časopis Ustavu dejín umenia Slovenskej akadémie vied*). Two things are striking about this diversity: first, art historians who write about the ethnicity or nationality of people do not tell us how these traits are connected to the works of art and second, these considerations only play a role in theory: when these scholars make assignments between art and geographical spaces in the same texts, this is done casually, without any explanation or the use of the previously elaborated theoretical groundwork.

There is probably more than just a single "right" method for the placement of works of art that makes all other methods look "wrong." Depending on the question, the many different approaches can be sometimes more, sometimes less fertile. However, when it comes to the construction of art landscapes, of spaces in which the works of art assigned to them should have as many common attributes as possible, it is the concern of this article to emphasize the role of the artist in this assignment process. The central thesis of my argumentation is that the artist can "charge" the places
Many different types or concepts of identity are mentioned in scholarly literature from various relevant disciplines. Which identity is the one responsible for an artist's spatial style? Certainly, national identity may play a role, but this concept may not be comprehensive enough if we consider the identification of artists with sub- or supra-national regions. The less common term "regional identity" is not precise enough either if we consider spaces on a sub-regional, i.e., local, level, e.g., different city districts. Widely used in scholarly literature is ethnic identity, but it is not useful for our problem either, because an artist can identify with a space even if he/she does not belong ethnically to the people primarily settling there. The concept of cultural identity is too wide, because this term does not imply any connection to geographical space (although it was recently used in an art geographical article; see Łabno 186-88). A more fitting social psychological category would be spatial identity, but its scope is also too wide, because this category also includes "place identities" with spaces that can be beyond the grasp of a geographical scale (Howard 382-83). Territorial identity refers to politically defined spaces, which is too specific in this context (see Kaplan and Herb). A rarely used term, but the most apt one here, is geographical identity, which can refer to all sorts of geographical spaces. Therefore, I suggest the geographical identity of the artist as being the primary criterion for the construction of the space-work relationship. When speaking about identity, it is necessary to mention the theory of multiple identities in one and the same individual, sometimes called "patchwork identity" (this problem is also dealt with by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, who is generally more reserved towards the whole concept of identity in art geography than this text [111-12]). According to this theory it is unlikely, if not impossible, to determine only a single geographical space of identity for an artist. Instead, it has to be assumed that an artist identifies with several spaces. To account for this in the art geographical operationalization of geographical identity, several possibilities can be thought of. First, an artist could be assigned all geographical identities that can be concluded from various clues. Many artists would then have not only one geographical identity, but two or three or even more. Second, one could try to determine the degree of an artist's identification with different spaces, from which different shares of the artist's geographical identity could be derived. For instance, if we find that an artist identifies equally with three spaces, then for each space a share of a third of the geographical identity would result. The third and most easily applicable possibility would be to select from all the spaces an artist identifies with the one which has the strongest impact on his or her geographical identity. Thus the multiple identity is again reduced to a single, and all spaces apart from the most significant are ignored. This seems to be the most feasible way for dealing with the problem of multiple identities, especially for models with several artists. Therefore, this option is selected for the example that follows later in this text.

The geographical identity is an artist's trait that is purely mental, not a physical trait that can be perceived and measured from the outside. But how is it possible for external observers to make
statements about an artist's geographical identity? We could look for external evidence through which the geographical identity shows, for instance written statements by the artist about his/her attitude towards specific geographical spaces. However, it is more effective to look for clues which are not the result, but the cause of geographical identity. Following the aforementioned thesis of Paul Pieper, according to which an artist adapts to his environment in the course of only a few years, an artist's place of residence seems to be an adequate clue. In order to devise a simple, manageable operationalization, one could define a chronological threshold stating how long an artist has to live in one place before it can be said he or she has acquired a new geographical identity. This allows us to deduct an artist's geographical identity, or a geographical identity for a certain period in the artist's life, from his/her biography. This method thus enables us to place works of art geographically, if we know enough about their respective creator. However, it should be kept in mind that many works are not created by a single artist, but by several. This is especially the case in genres beyond the traditional ones like sculpture, painting, etc. Film making, for example, is more often carried out in collaborative authorship than not — usually, the director and the screenwriter are different people, but both are attributed large shares in the creative effort. Likewise in pop music: here it is primarily the roles of composer and lyricist that are often executed by different artists. In literature too more people are often involved in the production of a text than the names printed on the book cover may make us believe, as Jack Stillinger has expounded with his theory of the "myth of solitary genius."

To take on the problem of making statements on the geography of works by several creators, I now draw on an example of a single work produced in multiple authorship. It is a work from a genre appropriate for this purpose, in which division of labor with exactly defined roles is the norm, and for which there is a sufficient amount of accessible information on the creators involved. It is the genre of comics, superhero comics to be precise, like the ones produced by the two big U.S. publishers Marvel and DC. In this genre, in most cases the role allocation in the production of a comic book looks like this: a writer devises the plot for an issue of approximately 20 pages length, writes the dialogue and caption text, and determines in written directions the basics of the visual design of the pages, such as the approximate size and distribution of the panels. According to these specifications, the penciller, who is often not in personal contact with the writer, produces the drawings in pencil for the whole issue. These preparatory drawings are then redrawn by another artist, the inker. Next, color is added to the drawings by the colorist, nowadays usually done using a computer. Further persons involved in the creation of a comic book are the letterer, who places the writer's texts into the drawings (also usually done digitally), several editors (series editor, editor-in-chief), and last but not least various persons involved in the printing and physical design. With the exception of the editors, who can intervene at all stages of the production process, the order in which these tasks are carried out matches the creative effort and prestige attributed to them by the recipients (and also by the creators' employers, which shows in salary differences). Thus, usually only writers and pencillers may become real celebrities in the comics scene, with the writer being awarded slightly more prestige than the penciller. In conversations and texts, comics are mentioned far more often together with only their writer than with only their penciller (or both). A similar difference between esteem and assumed creative merit exists between penciller and inker (even if in rare cases the fame of an inker may overshadow that of his/her penciller), and likewise between inker and colorist. Finally, the other aforementioned involved persons are usually not even mentioned on the comic book cover, but only in small print in the imprint. Therefore, in the following text I limit the scope to the four "leading roles" assuming that they are carried out by different single individuals.

In the art geographical context of my article, the most interesting objects are the ones whose four creators have plainly different geographic identities and this was the main criterion for my choice of the example object in this article, which is one of the most successful superhero comics of the last few years: Civil War, published by Marvel Comics. It is a series of seven comic books, 22 to 33 pages each in length, published monthly between July 2006 and January 2007. In 2007 this miniseries was collected in a trade paperback, a copy of which I used for my analysis. It should be noted that these seven comic books form the core of a crossover storyline of the same name, i.e., the plot of this series was taken up, continued, and explored more deeply — coordinated by a few editors — by other authors in simultaneously published issues from other Marvel comic book series. The English Wikipedia
thus lists over a hundred comic books from different series whose plots are connected to the Civil War series. However, in this article, only the seven issues of the Civil War core series are examined.

Already on the cover of the Civil War trade paperback (and also on each cover of the seven comic book issues) we encounter the four names I am interested in, and which are again listed on the interior cover with their respective role: Mark Millar is the writer of Civil War, Steve McNiven the penciller, Dexter Vines the inker, and Morry Hollowell the colorist. It should not be taken for granted that four authors are listed on the cover — often only the writer and the penciller are granted this honor. Through these four individuals I locate the comic Civil War art geographically, as described above. In order to do so, I start with assigning a geographical identity to each of the four mentioned main authors. In the process I follow the (necessarily simplifying) procedure explained above by considering the available biographical data of the artists. From the internet we learn about Mark Millar on his homepage: "Millar was born in Coatbridge, Scotland, on December 24th, 1969" and further, "He has no plans on leaving Scotland ever, though he does like to travel and top-up his tan" (millarworld.tv <http://www.millarworld.tv/bio.html>). Thereby, his geographical identity can be called Scottish or British. McNiven's official website offers less information, but several other sites call him a Canadian, and in an internet forum he writes: "I live in Halifax Nova Scotia, have been here most of my life. I love living in Canada!" (<http://www.606studios.com/bendisboard/showthread.php?t=59625>). Hence we can assign a Canadian identity to McNiven. About Dexter Vines we learn on a website of an event he attended, "Atlanta native and 13-year comics vet Dexter has inked them all and at most companies in the biz. Dex is part of that other Atlanta Studio, Studio Revolver" (dragon*con <http://www.dragoncon.org/dc_guest_detail.php?id=1325>). Even if we cannot exclude the possibility that, in the meantime, Dexter Vines has moved from Atlanta and works in a different place for Studio Revolver, there is no indication that he is living in another country, so that we can safely assign him a US-American identity. Finally, we gather from Morry Hollowell's profile on his official homepage: "Hometown: Eagle River, AK", and "Location: Tampa, FL" (mocolors <http://web.mac.com/mocolors/Mocolors/About.html>). Although we do not know when Morry Hollowell left Alaska and how long he has been living in Florida, since in this context I am only interested in the national level, his geographical identity can be determined without further information as US-American too.

By now I have determined the creators of Civil War as a Briton, a Canadian, and two US-Americans. Again, one must bear in mind that ultimately the individuals' real geographical identity cannot be definitely grasped, because it is a psychological condition which can only (if at all) be known to the concerned persons themselves, and that is revealed only indirectly through physical phenomena such as the choice of the place of residence. The simplifying assignment of authors and countries, which I have just undertaken, yet allows us to also assign art geographical spaces to the comic Civil War. Again, there are now several ways to deal with the geographical heterogeneity of the creators. Firstly, from the three spaces eligible for the geographical placement of the comic (USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom) the one with the strongest impact could be picked. To follow the methodology developed so far — the assignment of spaces to works via the assignment of identities to authors — we could select from the four artists the one whose influence on Civil War is strongest, and assign the space of his geographical identity to the comic. This could prove difficult, and in any case, the complexity of the interplay of different geographical influences in this work would be ignored. Secondly, we could circumvent the problem by trying to unite the three nation-state spaces into a single other geographical space. In this case, even a continental region like North America wouldn't suffice — to include the United Kingdom too, an appropriate space would be the Anglophone language area, to which all three countries (mostly) belong, or the "Western world." The use of the latter would shift the level to Kulturkreise ("culture areas"), which have been discussed for a long time, and that latter, in the shape of Samuel Huntington's concept of "civilizations" attracted renewed interest in many cultural geographers (see Ehlers). This approach would lead to less precision in the art geographical assignment, because if there are only a few large spaces to choose from, many works would have to be assigned to the same spaces. To maintain a certain degree of significance of the spatial assignments, it seems to be advisable to remain — at least in the context of this article — on a level of spaces not exceeding nation-state size.
A third approach appears to be the most advantageous: since only the four most important authors are considered here, and since only one single space of geographical identity is assigned to each of them, the geographical space of the comic can be determined fractionally. If we assume, for simplicity's sake, that all four creators have the same share in the production of Civil War, and that all four geographical identities have the same impact on the comic, we may conclude that the work must be regarded as being a quarter British, a quarter Canadian, and half US-American. At first, this American-British-Canadian space into which Civil War is thus categorized is nothing but an artificial construct. Now it must be tested if this assignment is justified, i.e., if it has anything to do with the inherent characteristics of the comic, and if it is even possible to recognize conversely in some way these geographical spaces in the content and the form of the comic. I start with the question of the "Americanness" of the contribution of the two US-Americans, Morry Hollowell and Dexter Vines. Morry Hollowell's colouring is not untypical of U.S. superhero comics: for instance, considering the second panel of the first page after the title page (see Figure 1), almost every colour area can be seen to be minutely modulated.

![Image]

Figure 1: Civil War, book 1, page 1, panel 2.

Thus, Hollowell creates highlights on the characters' clothing and skin, and on objects like the TV camera. Also sophisticated is the colour treatment of the plants, which is a blend of different green and brown tones, and the wooden house wall, which changes between grey and brown. Hollowell does not content himself with filling in the areas defined by the penciller and inker. Instead, he extends their line structures with his own means, for example the bark pattern of the trees, the blades of grass on the lawn, or the drapery of the clothing. Thus, the coloring is very elaborate, which is certainly not the case in all comics published by Marvel, but, as I have indicated, in many. In comparison with international comics, however, we find that, although in some countries like Japan the coloring of comics is generally unusual, the coloring of many European comics from the last years show likewise elaborate modulation and structures. Therefore, Hollowell's contribution to Civil War cannot be unambiguously characterised as "American." The situation is similar with the work of Vines, whose task as inker it is to translate the pencil lines by McNiven into ink. Since it is not possible to translate between the two very different media, pencil and ink, exactly one-to-one, a great deal of interpretative work is expected from the inker. Vines chooses clear, broad outlines and discreet interior structures in much finer lines, as can be well observed in the aforementioned second panel, e.g., in the cameraman's arm with its thick left boundary line and its thinly drawn hairs. Shadings are carried out by Vines rather cautious and with simple parallel hatching of a few lines (like on the clothing of the character Night Thrasher, second from left). This clear, calm style sets Vines somewhat apart from many of his inker colleagues who prefer more expressive, dynamic lines and darker shaded areas. When we compare Civil War to comics from other countries regarding the inking, we find a clear contrast to Japanese manga, which usually feature finer outlines and more shades of grey. European comics, however, often show similarly clear, reduced inking designs like Civil War. One might even say, Vines's style is closer to that of European comics than to US-American. In any case, the US-American identity that I attributed previously to Vines does not show clearly in his contribution to the comic either.

McNiven's work is even more complex, because as a penciller he enjoys a relatively large degree of creative freedom — depending on how detailed or vague Mark Millar's script turns out. So we
cannot be sure with all elements of Civil War whether they were invented by Millar or by McNiven. Therefore, I turn to how the pictorial elements are executed, since only McNiven is responsible for this. Drawing styles can be best recognized from human figures and so I focus on them. The five figures on the previously mentioned second panel already show McNiven's comparatively naturalistic approach. The anatomies of the characters could also occur in the real world. They certainly represent extremes: Microbe (second from right) is extremely obese, whereas Speedball (centre) and Namorita (on the left border) are extremely slim. These figures are also representatives of the three body types that dominate McNivens drawings: young attractive women, young attractive men, and unsightly but strong male figures (who mostly appear as antagonists). McNiven caters permanently for the predominantly male readership of superhero comics with erotic signals by depicting female figures mostly as extraordinarily attractive and often in tight and/or sparse clothing in (content-wise unmotivated) seductive poses, or suggestive panel framing (for instance She-Hulk in the four panels on the fourth page of the second book, see Figure 2). This tendency towards latent eroticism is typical of US-American superhero comics. McNiven's drawing style, therefore, seems US-American, even though he himself is Canadian. Traces of a Canadian spatial style (however it would look like) are not found in this comic. McNiven's background settings appear US-American too: the backgrounds of the panels in which the action is set in the U.S. often contain country-specific details like the aforementioned wooden house (see Figure 2), a yellow school bus, the skyscrapers of New York, firemen and policemen in correctly observed uniforms, and several more. In contrast, the few settings outside of the U.S. show hardly any local colour: in the fictitious African country Wakanda (book 3, pages 2 and 3), possibly only the high grass reminds us of an African landscape, and the likewise fictitious underwater realm Atlantis (book 6, pages 6 and 7), the North pole (book 6, pages 12 and 13), and the fictitious parallel world Negative Zone (book 5, page 20) hardly show any connection to real-world geography either. Finally, there is also a single panel in which the action temporarily shifts to McNiven's native Canada (see Figure 3).
But instead of using his knowledge to characterize the setting as Canadian, McNiven depicts it as neutrally as possible. From above we see four figures standing on a floor apparently made of stone, on which red letters read "OMEGA FLIGHT," the name of a Canadian group of superheroes featured in many previous Marvel publications. Altogether, McNiven's style seems more US-American than Canadian.

Finally I turn to Mark Millar's contribution to the comic, the writing. Although more than one person is involved in the design of a storyline of a comic that is of such an importance to the publisher as Civil War (in this case, a significant contributor to the plot idea was Brian Michael Bendis; see Singh), the exact definition of the plot, the rough layout of pages and panels, and all texts, were laid in the hands of only, or at least primarily, Mark Millar. As I have mentioned before, Millar sets the action mostly in the United States. His British home country is neither a setting, nor is it mentioned in the text, and neither are there British characters. Instead, Millar emphasises the US-American setting even more by placing numerous national symbols into the comic (which, however, might theoretically also have been devised by McNiven, but in the following I assume they were invented by Millar). Apart from the US-American flag on a school building (book 1, page 6) and on a stage at a press conference without apparent involvement of the U.S. government (book 2, page 22), there are two particularly striking uses of the stars-and-stripes. On the one hand, a mostly burned flag, fixed onto the remains of a flagpole, lies in a debris landscape in the splash panel on the double page 8/9 in the first book (see Figure 4).
The debris is from the ruins of the residential area destroyed on the previous page, in which also the school was located, so that it could be the same flag (although it appears to be larger on page 6). In any case, this flag seems to have fallen from one of the destroyed buildings, and now it lies, seemingly by accident, at the feet of Captain America, one of the main characters in the comic. The flag already hints at the national scale of the (at first only local) disaster, as will be explained later. On the other hand, the star-spangled banner suddenly appears in the background of a panel in which the superhero Iron Man, the other main character in Civil War, stands on the top of a high-rise building, communicating via radio with another superhero (book 6, page 3; see Figure 5, and once again in a smaller panel on the next page).

Here the appearance of the flag could be also explained as pure chance, since there are flags attached to many buildings in the USA. But it could be also interpreted as a hint that Iron Man has close links to the government, in contrast to other superheroes in this story. It should be noted that the flag behind Iron Man has also been noticed by an anonymous weblog author, who sees it as evidence that Mark Millar wanted to redefine the previously neutral, hedonistic character of Iron Man as a patriot (“Comic Reviews January 2007”). Further national symbols used by Millar are: the White House (book 1, page 28), US president George W. Bush and several members of his government (whose names are not mentioned, but whose appearance unambiguously resembles the respective real politicians; also in book 1, page 28), and an interior view of the Oval Office (book 7, page 25). Thus, the U.S. government is often present in Civil War, and although it is depicted neither as positive nor as negative (which is in line with the intention of Mark Millar to keep Civil War a politically and ideologically neutral comic, see Singh), its presence adds to the US-American feel of the writing.

Also interesting from the geographical angle of this article is the plot of the comic: an avoidable fight between superheroes and supervillains causes an explosion that destroys a whole residential area in a town in New England. This causes a public outcry, leading to Congress passing the "Superhero Registration Act," a law regulating the crime fighting activities of superheroes. According to this law, the (mostly masked) superheroes have to reveal their secret identities, and require permission from the government to continue using their superpowers. Some superheroes do not yield to this law and are prosecuted by the government, which is supported in this task by other superheroes loyal to the government. Although the plot revolves around fictitious characters with superhuman powers, a resemblance to the real world events cannot be denied. Five years before the publication of Civil War, there already was a sudden catastrophe of unimagined scale in US history, leading to an overreaction of the public and government, causing innocents to be deprived of their freedom and feeling bullied and kept under surveillance: the attacks of 11 September 2001 led to the "Patriot Act" and other anti-terror measures which restricted the rights of U.S. citizens, and many Muslims and Arabs in the USA were exposed to the open hostility of the rest of the population. This resemblance has been noted before in many reviews of the comic. As examples I would like to point out two reviews with a decidedly political angle: the ones by Tama Leaver and Jeremy Adam Smith, both published shortly after the considered Civil War issues. Neither did the allusions to 9/11 escape the notice of foreign media (Borcholte). Apart from the mere allusions in Civil War, the resemblance of the fictitious events
to 9/11 is expressed directly in a spin-off comic book series called Civil War: Front Line, published simultaneously and created by different authors, in which a caption text reads: "This was put into motion the day some angry extremists decided to fly a couple of planes into some tall buildings in Manhattan. We jumped into fighting mode then, and we were ready to do it again now" (Civil War: Front Line book 1, page 5). Millar also exploits iconographically the well-known images of the 9/11 attacks: in the first Civil War issue, on the pages following the destruction of the town of Stamford, we see not only superheroes, but also numerous firemen, who amidst the debris and ruins are occupied with the recovery and care of the victims. Firefighters, together with policemen and medics, were declared heroes of 9/11 by the media, and these three occupations are prominently represented together in a panel in the seventh Civil War book on page 18 (see Figure 6).

Seven rescue workers keep Captain America from knocking out Iron Man in a fight. Among them are an African-American man, an Asian looking man, and an African-American woman. Thus, in this panel, not only September 11 is invoked, but also the widespread image of the U.S. as a multicultural nation. Altogether, the whole plot of the comic is strongly focussed on the U.S. Of course, writers from countries other than the United States also write stories set there, but there is no sign in Civil War that Millar approaches his US-American topic from a non-US-American angle. Therefore we have to conclude about Millar’s writing that it, too, seems US-American rather than British.

Thus, I have assessed the respective contributions of colourist Morry Hollowell and inker Dexter Vines as not unambiguously US-American, but those of penciller Steve McNiven and writer Mark Millar as US-American, although the former are US-Americans and the latter not. So did my method of geographically classifying Civil War fail? To answer this question, it is necessary to have an understanding of the geographical character of the world of comics in general. Apart from the U.S., two other regions with a long and mostly independent history of comics I mention here: Europe — and by Europe I mean primarily France, the most important European comics producing country — and Japan. Often, comics from either of the three countries (the U.S., France, and Japan), are so distinct that they can be told apart from those from the other two countries, even if there are US-American comics that are influenced by French, and US-American and French that imitate Japanese manga, etc. These three countries shape the whole genre of comics. Other comic-producing regions are usually influenced by one of these three, or even stylistically dependent. Connected to the French comics culture in the first instance are Belgian (e.g., Hergé, Edgar Pierre Jacobs) and Swiss (e.g., Derib, Cosey) artists. With Japanese manga, the resemblance of Korean manhwa and Chinese manhua is obvious. And finally there are two countries in which comics production is closely linked to the U.S., namely Canada and the United Kingdom (see also Sabin 14-21 and de la Iglesia 336), the respective home countries of McNiven and Millar. So it is not unusual, but rather typical, that the US-American-British-Canadian coproduction Civil War gives a mostly US-American impression. Under these circumstances, does it make sense at all to call this comic not only US-American, but also British and Canadian? The answer is definitely yes, because the influence of U.S. comics has in fact become a fundamental component of the British as well as the Canadian culture of comics. British and Canadian
comics styles resembling the US-American does not mean they cannot be thought of as categories, as a set of common traits. Conversely, we could also say that British and Canadian influences actually made the US-American comic what it is today.

In conclusion, let me return to my previous question: how feasible is the methodology I develop to view works of art as patchworks of geographical influences bestowed by their creators if it does not always, as in the case of Civil War, lead to unambiguous results in empirical tests? Arguably, the analysis of a single object may not be enough to support or reject this method. Thus, for as long as no other, more appropriate procedure is devised, further application of the ideas introduced here to diverse works of art, as well as the theoretical engagement with these ideas, might be of interest for art geographical research.

Works Cited


Author's profile: Martin de la Iglesia is working as librarian at the German National Library of Economics (Deutsche Zentralbibliothek für Wirtschaftswissenschaften). His fields of interest in research include comics, art geography, reception history, and art historical methodology. His recent publications include "Geographical Classification in Comics," International Journal of Comic Art (2007). E-mail: <martin.deilaiglesia@gmail.com>