

Faire Corps ? Depictions and claims of women in comics in Europe and the Americas

September 22, 2022 at the MSH Paris Nord and September 23, 2022 at the BnF

This symposium is organized by Les Bréchoises, a study group about women in comics, connected to the association La Brèche. It is supported by the University of Paris 8, in collaboration with the EUR ArTeC, the MSH Paris Nord, the University of Paris Nanterre, the University of Bordeaux Montaigne, the association Archives du Féminisme and the LEGS/CNRS. Our international partners are the University of Lausanne, the University of Genoa and the University of Valencia.

Arguments

Women are discriminated against in the French comic book industry. The report of the [*Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*](#) (2018 : 50), points out that female comics creators are less published and experience more difficulties in getting into the professional life, despite the fact that women are the majority students in specialized schools. This report also states that women are granted fewer subsidies and publication grants, are less recognized by critics, by their peers (at awards and cultural events) and by institutions (no presence in museums, no exhibitions devoted solely to women, very little presence in specialized literature, etc.). Thus, we can see the exclusion of a large fraction of professional women, including scriptwriters, cartoonists, colorists, editors and layout artists. These difficulties, being acknowledged as professionals, but also finding a professional path, have a significant material consequence: their greater precarity compared to men who work in the same field. The [*États Généraux de la bande dessinée*](#) thus underlined that women creators form the most precarious social category of the comics industry. This precarity leads many women creators to give up their calling, contributing to the rarefaction, but also to the erasure of women in the cultural industry.

The [*Collectif des créatrices de bande dessinée contre le sexisme*](#) was founded in 2015, in response to the need to fight the sexist biases endured by women in the comic book industry. This awakening of consciousness echoes the equally slow and complex constitution of a professional community (as evidenced by [*Pierre Nocérino's*](#) thesis). One of whose notable progress, in France, was the creation of a union branch specifically dedicated to comics within the *Syndicat des Auteurs et des Compositeurs* (SNAC) in 2007. In Spain, the *Colectivo Autoras de Cómic (AC)*, associated with the *Collectif des créatrices de BD contre le sexisme* in France, was also created to join forces to fight for real and effective equality in the comics industry. Its members insist on the need to recognize artists for their work, for their merits, without referring to their sex and/or gender, or the alleged female "sensitivity". In Spain, the socio-professional context of female comics creators is similar to the French one:

precarity and difficulties in getting into comics publishing are one of the main reasons for giving up the comics profession (cf. Pérez-Ibáñez, M., & López-Aparicio, I. [2019]).

The Collectif establishes in France the emergence of a real movement regarding the claims of women creators. This is part of the logical consequence of a history of claims for the recognition and visibility of women in the comics industry: publication of *Ah! Nana* (1976-1978), a magazine produced almost entirely by women creators, involved in the feminist debates at the time; publication in *Le Monde* in 1985 of the manifesto "Navrant", signed by Nicole Claveloux, Florence Cestac, Chantal Montellier and Jeanne Puchol, denouncing the sexist downward slides in the comics press; creation of the Artémisia prize which, since 2007, has been rewarding a comic book made by one or more women authors, etc.

In this context, we consider it urgent to question the gendered ratio of powers at play in the comics sector - [one of the most lucrative markets](#) in the French publishing market, according to the [GfK survey "Comics: which profiles, which opportunities?"](#) - [2019]¹. This symposium yearns to bring together approaches from different disciplines of the Human and Social Sciences in order to fill the gaps in research on women and comics. By focusing on the actions, publications and claims of women in this cultural and disciplinary field, we aim to highlight the part they played. We propose conducting this study between two cultural areas, Europe and the Americas, along three major axis. The following approaches are non-restrictive proposals.

Approches

1) Europe and Americas, a comparatist study

The crowding out of women in comics goes beyond the borders of France and Europe. The history of women in the comic book industry has been widely explored by Trina Robbins. Apart from this central contribution, the subject remains little explored in comics studies. While women creators have been publishing comics since the late nineteenth century, they have often been reduced to comic books and newspaper strips for women and children (Robbins; 2013). Today, despite an increase in the number of women in comic books and a decompartmentalization of positions that were inaccessible to them, they still remain a minority in the industry and confined to less visible positions such as colorists, editors or designers. This observation of a lower representation of women in the comics industry, but also of a change of this *status quo* for the last twenty years, seems to be shared by other countries throughout the American continent.

How has the place of women in comics evolved? Which positions are most recognized and why? Is the 9th art a “No women's land”? How can we write (rewrite) the history of comic book female pioneers in Europe and the Americas? Which obstacles do they face? What are the constraints that

¹ With a +20% growth in sales in 10 years, comics have become the 3rd largest segment of the book market [in 2017] [« La Bande dessinée, une pratique culturelle de premier plan : qui en lit, qui en achète ? »](#), SNE, March 2018.

prevent them from fully exercising the occupation of female comic book creators? Comparatist approaches are welcome. Taking into account the history and the role of women in the comics industry (which vary according to the cultural area), this symposium aims to bring together papers from different eras and throughout several countries on each side of the Atlantic ocean.

2) Strategies and politics of women in comics

Women creators are *de facto* a minority in the comics industry. Since the beginning of the medium, women have been present and have established strategies to be accepted in this creative sector. From the invisibilization of femininity (female comic book authors signing with neutral or male pseudonyms) to the publication of non-mixed works (such as the editorial board of *Ah! Nana* or the magazines *Wimmen's Comix*, *La Bûche...*), women have been able to make a place for themselves in comics. These actions are not all claimed as political and/or feminist, and it will be adequate to question the relationships the women creators have to these concepts. Which connections emerge or can be created within the networks and other social movements resulting from common mobilizations (or struggles)? What are the strategies that allow to thwart the inequality of treatment in the 9th art? Struggles, casualization, desertions and reconversions: how to make a career in comics and after comics? What are the materials that contribute to spread out, in the best conditions, the minority voices of the comics production? Self-publishing and fanzine during the 1970s in the United States were places of experimentation for committed comics, but they often turned out to be very masculine environments. Is this reality shared by other cultural areas? What about the current times? What are the arguments used by minority voices to justify their editorial choices?

3) Gendered representations

This last axis focuses on the representations of women and gender in comics, especially (but not only), in those produced by female creators. We incite a political reading of female comics, even when they do not claim any political dimension in their production. How are the female characters defined through the stories, graphically or scenaristically? Are stereotypical men the only models portrayed, or are other forms of masculinities represented and how? In what ways do comics allow us to question notions of gender and sex? Do works allow for the critique of social bi-categorizations, or do they question intersectionality, by integrating other factors of oppression (gender, class, validism, race, etc.)?

Terms of contribution

Proposals should be sent (in English, Spanish or French) in the form of an abstract of no more than 200 words, accompanied by a short bio-bibliographic note to the following address: lesbrechoises@gmail.com .

A publication, at the end of this symposium, is planned.

Calendar

- September 16, 2021: release of call for papers
- February 14, 2022: closing of the call
- March-April 2022: evaluation of proposals
- May 2022 : announcement of the final program
- September 2022: symposium proceedings

Organizing Committee

- Bonadè Sophie, doctoral associate at the SLAM laboratory
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- Hertiman Marys, PhD student at the University of Paris 8
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