

Faire Corps ? Depictions and demands of women cartoonists 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 Université Paris 8, in collaboration with the EUR ArTeC, the MSH Paris Nord, University Paris-Nanterre, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, the association Archives du Féminisme, EFiGiES and the LEGS/CNRS. Our international partners are the University of Lausanne, the University of Genoa and the University of Valencia.

Arguments

Women are arguably discriminated against in the French comic book industry. According to the 2018 report of the [*Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*](#) (2018 : 50), female comics creators enjoy fewer publishing opportunities and find it more difficult to get into professional cartooning than their male counterparts, even though women account for the majority of students in specialized schools. The report also underlines that women are given fewer subsidies and grants, are less recognized by critics, by their peers (in award ceremonies and cultural events) and by cultural institutions (no presence in museums, no exhibitions devoted solely to women, women's work and careers rarely documented in specialized literature, etc.). A substantial segment of the comics-making industry including scriptwriters, cartoonists, colorists, editors and layout artists is thus commonly neglected. For women, overcoming obstacles to be recognized as professional cartoonists and find a professional path has a significant material consequence: their greater economic precariousness by comparison with the industry's male labor. The [*États Généraux de la bande dessinée*](#) have also pointed out that women creators are the most precarious social category in the comic's industry. Economic uncertainty brings many women creators to leave the industry, which in turn makes them even scarcer among comics professionals.

The [*Collectif des créatrices de bande dessinée contre le sexisme*](#) (Collective of women comic artists against sexism) was founded in 2015 to fight the sexist prejudices faced by women in the industry. This increasing awareness echoes the slow and complex construction of a professional community (documented by [*Pierre Nocérino*](#) in his doctoral dissertation). One significant step forward in this process in France was the creation of a union branch dedicated to comics within the *Syndicat National des Auteurs et des Compositeurs* (SNAC) in 2007. In Spain, the *Colectivo Autoras de Cómic* ([*AC*](#)), associated with France's *Collectif des créatrices de BD contre le sexisme*, was also created to join forces in the struggle for real and effective equality in the comic's industry. Its members insist on the

need to recognize artists for their work and merits, regardless of their sex and/or gender, or any alleged female "sensitivity." In Spain, the socio-professional context of female comics creators is similar to the French one: economic precariousness and difficulties in getting into comics publishing are among the main reasons why many women give up the comic's profession (cf. Pérez-Ibáñez, M., & López-Aparicio, I. [2019]).

In France, the Collective of women comic artists against sexism has spawned a real movement to push the demands of women creators. Its agenda follows in the wake of a long history of moves for the recognition and visibility by women in the comic's industry: the release of *Ah! Nana* (1976-1978), a magazine produced almost entirely by women creators who were involved in the feminist debates of the mid-1970s; Nicole Claveloux, Florence Cestac, Chantal Montellier and Jeanne Puchol's manifesto "Navrant" ("Distressing"), which appeared in the daily *Le Monde* in 1985 and called out the French adult comics press's unbridled sexism; the Artémisia prize which has rewarded a comic authored by one or more women authors annually since 2007, etc.

In this context, we consider it a matter of urgency to question the gendered power balance 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 will bring together Humanities and Social Sciences approaches in order to fill the gaps in the research on women and comics. We aim to highlight the part played by women in this cultural and disciplinary field by focusing on their various actions, publications and claims. The focus shall be placed on two cultural areas, Europe and the Americas, along the lines of three major topics outlined as follows in non-restrictive terms.

Topics

1) Europe and the Americas, a comparative study

The crowding out of women from the comic's industry is a phenomenon that is by no means specific to France and Europe. The history of women in the US comics industry has been extensively documented by Trina Robbins. Yet, despite her groundbreaking input, the topic is still under-documented in comics studies. While women creators have been publishing comics since the late nineteenth century, their impact has often been limited to comic books and newspaper strips for women and children (Robbins; 2013). Today, despite an increase in the number of women creators in comic books and the opening up of positions that used to be inaccessible to them, they remain a minority in the industry, still too often confined to hardly visible positions such as colorists, editors or

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

designers. The low number of women in the comic's industry, but also of a change of this *status quo* in the last two decades, are elements found in other countries across 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 woman's land?” Is it possible to write (or rewrite) the history of the comics' female pioneers in Europe and the Americas? Which obstacles do women face? What are the constraints that prevent them from being full-fledged comic book creators? Comparative approaches to address these questions will be welcome. Taking into account the history and the role of women in the comics industry (which vary according to cultural areas), this symposium aims to feature papers focusing upon different eras and countries on both sides of the Atlantic ocean.

2) Strategies and politics of women in the comics industry

Women creators are *de facto* a minority in the comics industry. Since the beginning of the medium's history, women have been present and established strategies to be accepted into this creative sector. From the invisibilization of femininity (female cartoonists signing with non-gendered or male pseudonyms) to the publication of works by women-only groups (such as the editorial board of *Ah! Nana* or the magazines *Wimmen's Comix*, *La Bûche...*), women have been able to carve out space for themselves in comics. These actions are not all labelled as political and/or feminist, and it will be relevant to document how women creators relate 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 unequal treatment on the basis of sex and gender in the 9th art? Struggles, precariousness, desertions and reconversions: how to make a career in comics and after comics? What are the formats best adapted to propagate minority voices in comics? Self-publishing and fanzine publishing were key spaces of experimentation for committed comics in the United States in the 1970s, but they often turned out to be male-dominated environments. Is this reality replicated in other cultural areas? What about now? What are the arguments used by minority voices to justify their editorial choices?

3) Gendered representations

This last topic addresses the representations of women and gender in comics, especially (but not only) those produced by female creators. We look forward to political readings of comics by women cartoonists, even when they do not claim any political dimension. How are the female characters defined through the stories, in visual or storytelling terms? Are stereotypical men the only models portrayed, or are other forms of masculinities represented and how? In what ways do comics enable us to question notions of gender and sex? Are there works critiquing social bi-categorizations, or do they

question intersectionality by integrating other factors of oppression (gender, class, validism, race, etc.)?

Terms of contribution

Proposals in English, Spanish or French including an abstract of up to 200 words and a short bio-bibliographic note should be e-mailed to: lesbrechoises@gmail.com.

A publication will be drawn from the symposium.

Calendar

- September 16, 2021: release of call for papers
- January 7, 2022: deadline for submissions
- February-March 2022: evaluation of proposals
- April 2022 : announcement of the final program
- September 2022: symposium proceedings

Organizing Committee

- Bonadè Sophie, doctoral associate at the SLAM laboratory
- Carballo Laura, post-doctoral student at the University of Clermont-Auvergne
- Hertiman Marys, PhD student at the University of Paris 8
- Schipper Johanna, comic artist, professor, PhD student at Université Bordeaux Montaigne
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