

Precarious Identity

Labelling Oneself *Fumettista*?

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Abstract

The Italian comics market has recently discovered the works produced by contemporary women authors, who navigate between mainstream and alternative channels such as social media or collectives and self-publishing productions in constructing their own audience. How precarious is their position? Is it a conscious choice, resulting in different outcomes for different markets? This chapter seeks to answer this question conjoining a double methodology: a survey to enquire about the self-perception and identity building of *fumettiste* born since the 1980s and an analysis of their comics to understand their differences, similarities (genres, models) and their gender marketing.

A new generation of women comics artists

Although the comics industry has been a male world for a long time, women have always been involved in Italian comics, as cartoonists, writers, comics creators, editorial directors, or editors. Starting with Paola Lombroso (1871–1954), who came up with the concept for *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the first comics magazine in Italy, and with Lina Buffolente (1924–2007), the first woman *fumettista* (comics artist).

Generation after generation, their presence in ninth art has continued and increased: as comics artist and publisher Laura Scarpa explains, the presence of women in comics goes hand in hand with their political and social history (Bonomi et al. 2020, 20), in particular in the 2000s, when new technologies and even more women artists emerge. According to Scarpa, the sex ratio in the industry—at least in “authorial” comics or in some genres—is, in fact, moving towards an inversion in numbers (Bonomi et al. 2020, 22).

Arguably, the Italian comics market has only recently discovered ninth art produced by young women. During the 2020s this resulted in a new generation of *fumettiste* (born after 1980), who got the attention of both public and critics. This generation of authors navigates between mainstream and alternative channels, such as social media, collective or self-publishing productions, in constructing their own audience. They are also marked by their time, growing up in the nineties, with the spread of manga—in particular *shōjo manga*¹—the Internet—followed by social networks—and the increasing relevance of fairs and festivals. These three elements paved the way for both women who had already approached comics and girls, creators, or readers, that were preparing to do so hesitantly (Scrivo quoted in Bonomi et al. 2020, 161).

This generation enters comics industry in the 2010s, when the graphic novel booms in Italy, in part because of the Zerocalcare phenomenon.² The success of the graphic novel as a format in the 2010s had also been prepared between the nineties and the beginning of the 2000s, as the end of the magazine period led new publishers to publish comics books (Tosti 2016, 881). As Andrea Tosti indicates, the presence of *romanzi a fumetto* both in libraries and on newspapers (2016, 876) appealed to these publishers' intent on gaining mainstream interest in comics.

The rise of women in comics, coinciding with the book-format explosion, resulted in an increasing number of graphic novels made by women artists. New publishers, specialized in graphic novels, were fundamental in this respect: BeccoGiallo Editore, for example, was one of the first to give attention to young authors. In 2012 it published *Ci sono notti che non accadono mai* (There are nights that never happen), the first graphic novel by Silvia Rocchi; a year later, her exhibition at the Bologna comics festival BilBolBul was one of the first events dedicated to an artist of her generation. In 2013, Canicola Edizioni, a small publisher born as a self-publishing entity always attentive to young artists, printed *Roghi* (Blazes), by Anna Deflorian; Diabolo Edizioni, another small, alternative publisher, edited Lucia Biagi's *Punto di fuga* (Vanishing Point) in 2014.

In the following years, especially since the middle of the decade, talented comics artists gained increasing attention. In 2015 and just to mention a few of them, the first comic books by Alice Milani (*Wisława Szymborska: si dà il caso che io sia qui* [It turns out that I am], BeccoGiallo Editore) and Alice Socal (*Sandro*, Eris Edizioni) came out, in addition to Giulia Sagramola's second book (*Incendi estivi* [Summer Fires], Bao Publishing); in 2016 Cristina Portolano made her debut with *Quasi signorina* (Nearly Miss), thanks to Topipittori.

More publishers would give space to graphic novels made by young women, up to the point where they produced anthologies conceived to collect and promote them. In 2018, Diabolo Edizioni dared to release the all-women anthology *Materia Degenera* (Degenerate Matter): five short stories by five novice authors, each of them focusing on a different genre. Feltrinelli's *Post Pink. Antologia di fumetto femminista* (Post Pink. Anthology of feminist comics) would follow one year later, with a more explicit reference to feminism, reuniting some of the most representative creators of the generation. Doubtlessly, 2019 legitimized this new wave, when the major debut prizes at Napoli Comicon, Treviso Comic Book Festival and Lucca Comics & Games festivals, three of the most important events in Italy, were awarded *ex aequo* to young artists ZUZU³ (*Cheese*) and Fumettibrutti⁴ (*Romanzo esplicito* [Explicit Novel]), with two autobiographical graphic novels. Published by two of the most important comics publishers specialized in graphic novels, Coconino Press and Feltrinelli Comics, both were debuts backed up and promoted with strong marketing strategies by recognized comics artists currently working as editorial directors.⁵ In short, a spontaneous trend was detected by the publishing system and incorporated, leading to a unique media exposure for these artists.⁶

Notwithstanding the obvious diversity of these authors' artistic output, recurring elements can be observed in their cited works. In spite of different styles and techniques, in most cases these comics artists narrate the intimate and the personal, describing not fantasy worlds but rather realistic stories.⁷ In contrast—or maybe because of that—their adopted visual styles are often strongly personal. Above all, most of them took their first steps online, first during the “blogosphere” period⁸ and later, around 2010–2011, with social networks'—Facebook firstly—rapid spread.⁹ The same years saw an increasing legitimization of DIY practices in comics, leading to a boom in the 2010s.

In this chapter, we will try to explain this production, starting with a survey we held with a number of young Italian female comics artists. The questionnaire, that will take up a big part of our essay, is later combined with an analysis of the artists' path. While alternative publications or graphic novels that embrace (auto)biography are the most common form the artists adopt, we also indicate fewer

common themes or form(at)s. This chapter is also studying how precarious their position as artists is and whether DIY is a conscious choice, resulting in different outcomes and genres for different markets. Furthermore, we wanted to let the artists' voices be heard, by asking them how their situation influences their self-perception and identity as *fumettiste*.

Figure 10.1 Excerpt from the comic book *Suomi*, published online between 2014 and 2017, later self-printed by Laura “la Came” Camelli with Associazione Culturale Mammaiuto. The work is a graphic journal of the artist's journey in Finland.

Three back silhouettes, possibly two men and a woman, talk in the street. One of them looks depressed; the woman tries to comfort him.

Understanding the *fumettista*. A questionnaire

This chapter is the outcome and interpretation of a mixed-method sociological enquiry involving 34 young women comics artists (November 2020–February 2021). The selection was made using the following parameters: all the participants were born after 1980, they identify themselves at present with the female gender and they are professionally linked to Italy's publishing market through the publication of at least one book, or the participation in one book—in the last five years—with a national editor. In addition, these artists had experience, in their careers, through self-publishing or, in general, alternative channels—such as publishing digital comics on social media platforms. 21 women out of the 34 selected artists answered the questionnaire.¹⁰ To get a clear insight into the authors we are studying, we designed a LimeSurvey questionnaire which we sent via email. The survey revolved around four strands: the artists themselves (focusing on their education, identity building and generational (dis)similarities); their artistic output inspiration, genres, themes, styles, techniques, formats, places of publication and success; the importance of certain genres (autobiography) or formats (graphic novel, fanzines, anthologies, etc.); and the reasons for the precarity of their job—job inherent or gender related—to understand if, despite the increase of this production, the gender gap in comics jobs follows the employment imbalance existing in Italy.¹¹

The starting point of our survey revolved around the possible ambiguous label of *fumettista*. Most authors preferred the term *fumetto*¹² over the English term “comics” to define their work, while “graphic novel” denominated for them the format of a book to be found in bookshops rather than the medium itself. In any case, the hypothetical categories did not entail all alternatives (Dejasse 2014, 35), which is probably why, even at the end of the questionnaire, two artists claimed that they identify themselves rather with the denomination *illustratrice*. Moreover, artists adapted the definition of their work to the publishing context: 16 artists have been published abroad, where they were well or even better received than in Italy.¹³ But most of the artists (16) are living and working in Italy, and so *fumetto* as a term “does justice” to the Italian word and practice. The choice for *fumetto* might also derive from the fact most of these women are consciously and specifically, either studying *Fumetto e Illustrazione* at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna (6),¹⁴ training in other Academies of Fine Arts (6, and one abroad at LUCA School of Arts Belgium) or taking two or three-year courses in comics schools (6) or in academies or institutes like IED, NABA or IAAD (1). Most of them (19), however, feel that this formal preparation does not define them as *fumettiste*, only two were convinced that this training turned them into comics artists.

This reality underscores Menu's and Dejasse's idea of alternative comics being less ethnocentric and thus more readily “exportable” than traditional comics (Menu 1999; Dejasse 2014). Greco has termed them “deterritorialized narratives” (2014, 267), Stein, Denson and Meyer have opted for “transnational” (Stein et al. 2013), and many are to be found in “deterritorialized” flourishing bookshops and festivals which favour international collaborations such as Inuit bookshop and BilBolBul Festival in Bologna.

What about their artistic output and format preference? 11 of them stated to privilege the format of the graphic novel. This might be a result of our selection parameters. Other formats mentioned were in particular short stories (7), presumably a “steppingstone towards longer narratives in the future”; alongside online cartoons or chapters, in some cases for social media like Instagram or membership platforms such as Patreon.

Since these women belong to the same generation, they have been part of the same collectives and started publishing around the same time (during the 2010s); several questions targeted possible similarities in style, themes, and inspiration. While the majority of the 21 artists who answered enumerated heterogeneous influences, some names kept reappearing. Italian artists mentioned twice or more were Davide Toffolo, Manuele Fior and Altan.¹⁵ However, these women clearly search for transnational inspiration in authors such as Frederik Peeters (2), Mariko and Jillian Tamaki (3), Olivier Schrauwen (2), Adrian Tomine (2), David Mazzucchelli (2) or Simon Hanselmann (2), Joann Sfar (2), Jamie Hewlett (2), Ai Yazawa (2), Craig Thompson (2), Camille Jourdy (2) or Daniel Clowes, remembering what Dejasse has claimed “heralds of the independent comics scene” (Dejasse 2014, 37).

They are arguably the first generation who actively read manga—as we explained before—and were influenced by magazines such as *Mondo Naif*¹⁶; but the inspiration is not necessarily from the past, as two artists refer to one of their peers, Alice Socal. This does not come as a surprise as many of them claimed that their professional identity was formed both individually and through collectives such as La Trama or Attaccapanni Press (9) rather than during their formative years, seeming to be the starting point of their future careers.

Furthermore, these women are inspired by studies in Fine Arts or other media such as painting, illustration, and cinema. As a result, their output is quite eclectic, as they use a wide range of techniques and more than half of them opt for mixed media to create their comics.¹⁷

As their inspiration is both similar and eclectic and many of these women have worked together, we were interested in whether this amounts to (dis)similar artistic output. While 8 artists did not see similar generational tendencies, 9 artists claimed they did and several of them noticed that (auto)biography dominates; simultaneously, 9 of them expressed the need to “talk about themselves.” We will return to the shared interest in the booming “genres” biography and autobiography, both highly marketable choices,¹⁸ as the focus of some editors on comics biographies reveals (Dallavalle 2020, footnote 3) after discussing the artists’ economic situation and whether possible precariousness is perceived as gender related.

The question of gender

Hilary Chute claims that graphic women “investigate concerns related to the silence and invisibility of the private, particularly centred on issues of sexuality, and all address childhood trauma” (2010, 4). Similarly, these young women authors seem to declare: “My drawing and body are my own.”¹⁹ Statements like these are essentially labels that artificially separate female and male artists for discussion and can therefore be potentially biased—the same thing could count for our chapter. We asked these young women if they had been “labelled” for their gender excessively.

Even though some artists have never felt this to be an issue, others (13) do: none of them saw it as a personal choice or as something caused by social media but rather blamed the general press (7), festivals (4) and the specialized press (2) for this label. In an industry where the majority of editors, critics, journalists, and jury members are still men, examples of gender stigmatization are interview questions enquiring about personal lives—relationships, fashion, the desire for children or women conversation, with a direct influence on promotion of their works. Reactions to this gender inequality

is artists choosing an artistic name that does not reveal their gender (e.g., Roberta “Joel” Muci) or the need to create feminist collectives such as Moleste.²⁰

Only 8 out of 21 artists sensed a strong or vague difference in the promotion of their works with respect to male colleagues: if some of these artists feel you must be “double as good,” editors and cultural organizers seem to profit from what we could call “marketable feminism.” In some cases, this results in a difference in readers’ reception, especially when the divide between authors and protagonists becomes narrow, or when artists draw female nude.

Figure 10.2 “Television is dead. Would you ever have said that? We were parked there for years. It raised us. It educated us. And when it died, we were at computer. What immoral children.” Excerpt from the first generational graphic novel realized by Nova, *Stelle o sparo* (Bao Publishing, 2018). Source: *Stelle o sparo* © 2018 Alessandra De Santis/BAO Publishing.

A young woman watches ads on TV lying on the couch, while eating pizza.

Analyzing the content: Self-biography

In their works, and in line with Dejasse’s observation that the graphic novel is inevitably assimilated to the autobiographical “genre”²¹ (2014, 35), many of the young female comics artists have expressed themselves. Besides the already mentioned ZUZU and Fumettibrutti, among the *fumettiste* interviewed, for example, Cecilia Valagussa worked for her master’s project on her own experience living abroad in *P.I.G.S.* (published in Dutch in 2016 by VOS Stripgilde uitgeverij), Cristina Portolano in 2017 in *Non so chi sei* (I don’t know who you are) told about her sexual experience using dating apps, Sara Menetti started in 2018 her *Pregnancy Comic Journal* as a weekly, personal diary published online to reprocess her motherhood experience. “The need to express oneself” is confirmed by 15 of the interviewed artists and seems to be a generational tendency, and it is also identified by scholars as a typical element of recent graphic narratives, whether or not written by women (Chute 2010; Dejasse 2014; El Refaie 2012; Greco 2009). Autobiography appears, more generally, to be the chosen mode of post-modern culture and contemporary art, as it offers a minimal focus and authenticity, which seems a valid alternative to the grand narratives whose disingenuousness has been refused (Baetens 2004).

This refusal of inauthentic narratives was a central and repeated concern of most of the artists we interviewed. Several of them claimed that addressing personal problems or narratives must always make sense and be relevant to the reader. In other words, personal memory—past and present—needs to serve the collective memory, which confirms one of the stereotypes Jan Baetens mentions in his study on autobiographical comics: it seems that an autobiographical comic is judged badly when it only relies on the narcissism of the creator presented as a hero rather than as an anti-hero (Baetens 2004). Some Italian scholars mimic this judgement in their reactions against what they feel to be egocentrism.²²

Notwithstanding one artist’s claim that comics as a medium seem to be “inherently auto-exhibitionist,” autobiographical graphic narratives are probably so frequent because they are encouraged by the web and social media, as Tosti states (2016, 695). Based on the success of blogs and diaries of authors such as Guy Delisle or Zerocalcare, artists like Giulia Sagramola were able to turn their blog into a published volume, in her case *Milk and Mint* (2008). What is interesting about this evolution is that it reveals the ambiguous nature of autobiographies as “authentic” narratives: as Daniele Barbieri states on the back cover of *Milk and Mint* that literature in blogs plays on this ambiguous nature of private-public, pretending to speak in the mirror of the diary while speaking in the arena of the public.

Two artists argued that this autobiographical tendency might be linked to a sense of loneliness which they feel to be the root of their personal explorations. For others, these autobiographies are rather intended as autofiction as comics are a pliable way to draw characters that “can live things that the author did not experience or would never do.” These “indirect autobiographies”²³ work on another level than would a simple diary as characters live through experiences of the author in a different time or space. As Baetens states, then, autobiography is subordinate to the logic and the rules of the work-in-progress as the artist invents a way to formally translate “*autobiographèmes*” (Baetens 2004). On the one hand, following Bakhtin, this is linked to the genre being built on the dialogue between the reader and the first-person narrator, who is necessarily different from the protagonist or author of the story (Greco 2014, 231). On the other hand, this intricacy arises from the medium itself, as comics complicate the notion of narrator. Not only is there a split between verbal and graphic narrator—Philippe Marion termed this the *graphiateur*—but the autobiographical can also be expressed in the formal or stylistic rather than in the narrative—even in the case of a “complete author,” i.e., when writer and artist coincide (Baetens 2004). An example of this could be *Malibu* by Eliana Albertini (BeccoGiallo 2019): thanks to a vivid representation of the Venetian Province of Polesinewhere the artist lives—and to its particular style, this work could be defined as autobiographical even though she does not represent herself.

To avoid labels like “egocentric” or “untruthful,” some artists link their private stories to the sociocultural background of their generation. Some focus on the political, ethical possibilities of committed and engaged²⁴ feminist autobiography, waging small or big battles of women, from body acceptance to gender equality, freedom, and reflection on society. In mainstream publishing, this political stance is evident from the anthology *Post Pink*.²⁵ Other artists use autobiography as an authentic starting point to build bridges, spontaneous connections with an empathetic reader, as emotions are universally recognizable.²⁶ Invoking what Greimas has termed “recognition” (1983, cited in Greco 2014, 148), a contract is established with the reader who accepts to believe what the intradiegetic narrator tells and shows, even though throughout the narration this dialogue can cause both trust and suspicion. As comics are a multi-modal medium both the text and the image can cause either trust or possible suspect (Greco 2014, 200).

Figure 10.3 “There is nothing to do.” Source: Excerpt from *Malibu* by Eliana Albertini (BeccoGiallo, 2019).

A suburban road, with a truck and two motorcycles, one overtaking the other.

Apart from an abundant number of autobiographies, there is, however, also a clear interest—from the makers, the publishers, and the readers—in biographies. The draw on realism and non-fiction is evident from the following examples. Cecilia Valagussa worked on the link between artists and World War I in *Colore inferno* (Colour Hell); Eliana Albertini turned the life of Luigi Meneghello into comics; Silvia Rocchi did the same for Tiziano Terzani and Alda Merini; Alice Milani narrated Marie Curie, Wisława Szymborska and Don Milani’s lives; Cristina Portolano made the comics biography in French *Francis Bacon: la violence d’une rose*. Many of these non-fictional works were commissioned, by publishing or NGO, such as Alice Socal’s *Pink Donkeys*, part of the project “Redrawing Stories from the Past: Escape and Migration in Europe.” These young women’s graphic narratives thus conquer a central position in the translation of documentary sources and valorization of knowledge gained from archives and memory (Greco 2014, 265). The final intention of these works is the same as that of the autobiographies: to satisfy the essential need for knowledge, reaching out to a heterogeneous audience by stimulating its feelings (Greco 2014, 266).

Still, this production does not necessarily avoid all genres that are not (auto)biographical. As the anthology *Materia Degenere* has shown, the editorial politics of alternative publishers do not necessarily forbid genres but rather oppose their traditional use (Dejasse 2014, 37). Under the

coordination of Marco Galli, *Diabolo edizioni* gave young women artists Federica Bellomi, Fumettibrutti, Roberta “Joe1” Muci, Elena Pagliani and Monica Rossi the chance to publish short stories in different genres: western, thriller, noir, science fiction. The experiment has been repeated with Tuono Pettinato and Matteo Contin guiding Upáta, Louiseen Smith, Roberta Scomparsa, Nova and Ferraglia.

Analyzing the format: Self-publishing

From our questionnaire, we learned the majority of these women artists have produced comics independently through self-publishing: in fanzines (5), anthologies (10) or in other formats (5). This choice is not surprising and was one of the elements we identified in this generation’s efforts to construct their own audience. A practice that involves dealing with the entire comics production process,²⁷ the production and the publication of DIY comics increased even more in recent years, thanks to technical and cultural factors: easier access to digital layout, economic online digital printing, a growing number of comics schools, and a surge of independent comics festivals. Thanks to these factors, our selected artists were able to work as creators and as editors or organizers of (underground or alternative) festivals by themselves or with their own labels.

Analyzing the answers to our survey and the self-publishing scenario, we can discern some reasons why this generation decides to invest their energies in DIY comics. Some *fumettiste* use it to prove themselves during their formative years or to receive payment for their comics. By exposing their art—illustrations and comics—in specialized festivals, they can draw the publishers’ attention, without going through portfolio reviews.²⁸ Actually, since Zerocalcare’s boom, mainstream publishers are acting as talent scouts, visiting DIY comics events and festivals to discover new authors.²⁹ From this perspective, self-publishing is seen as an essential stage in their career. In addition to these formative reasons, we can find two more socially related motives. First, self-publishing can be an ethical-political choice. As Roberta “Joe1” Muci responded in our survey, making DIY comics, becoming involved in festival organizations or fanzines and the production of illustrations is a form of creative resistance. Second, these *fumettiste* express the desire to compare themselves with same-aged artists, creating a network through schools, events, festivals, social networks, leading to collective projects—self-publishing groups or anthologies.

Many of these women have established relevant collectives such as La Trama (Francesca Lanzarini, Alice Milani, Viola Niccolai, Silvia Rocchi), active from 2009 to 2015 with a focus on realistic stories and mixed techniques—drawings, painting, woodcut printing.³⁰ For Attaccapanni Press (Laura Guglielmo, Ariel Vittori, formerly with Laura Vivacqua), established in 2016, self-publishing is a way to search for talent in order to write and draw comics together. As they are specialized in anthologies, they reunite illustrators and comics artists around thematic projects, such as eroticism or witchcraft, launching their DIY projects through crowdfunding.³¹ Another similarity of these artists is that they work at the intersection between online platforms—blogs, websites, and social networks: Facebook and Instagram—and traditional publishing—DIY or mainstream)—promoting their works across multiple platforms, online and offline. See, for example, Sara Menetti from Associazione Culturale Mammaiuto, whose online *Pregnancy Comic Journal* was later collected in a DIY volume and in a Feltrinelli Comics’ book.

How precarious is their job? Due to one of the results of the research into the “jobs of making comics” (i.e., *Mestieri del Fumetto* hence MeFu),³² namely, that more than 61.5% of Italian comics creators make less than 5,000 euros annual profit, our survey also enquired about labour precarity. The majority of these artists indicated they felt insecure (20), either purely economic (10), or as a combination of financial and professional insecurity (10). None of the artists linked precarity to their gender but blamed the kind of job they perform. With the job comes a publishing market that “does not work very well” and within which it is “a constant struggle to be taken seriously professionally.”

Others assert their projects are “not taken into consideration easily” and the subsequent payments are said to be “belated” or with low fees. That is why many of them make an additional living in other artistic fields, such as in illustration, craftsmanship (7),³³ graphic design or fine art prints—such as silk-screen printing—animation, game development or educational publishing. Although one artist addressed the poor revenue gained out of these extra activities, it is clear that these supplementary occupations are both an interest and a necessity. To ensure a regular income, some even count on functioning in other markets or fields such as working as a curator for art galleries and museums, or in education.

Conclusions

To conclude, and combining our observations with the survey, we argue these young *fumettiste* claim to be making Italian comics while their output reflects a larger international scene that mostly occupies alternative markets. Self-identity as a comics artist and within the comics has dominated the discourse. We have signalled their generic preference for (auto)biography as a means of reaching out to a public or to make a reading that is thought to be worthwhile. In an attempt to gain readers and (scholarly) attention or to act as activists or express themselves, these artists have joined collectives. Notwithstanding the growing attention for these collectives or individual artistic endeavours, their current occupations do not provide most of them with a liveable income. Contemporaneously, many of these young women still produce DIY comics, in an attempt to express their identity, maintaining a delicate balance between the self and the collective, the mainstream and the alternative. Their eclectic output merits the attention of an international audience, and a scholarship that can start doing comparative research on young (women) artists in Europe and beyond. We hope our chapter is a first step towards this research.

Notes

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¹ *Shōjo manga* is Japanese comics aimed at a teen female target audience (ages 10–18). In Italy, their publication exploded precisely in the 1990s as a result of the anime *boom* in the country. See Pellitteri (2008).

² Zerocalcare (Michele Rech, 1983) is formed in the self-publishing scenario, gaining enormous success with his comics blog and with *La profezia dell'armadillo* (Bao Publishing edition, 2012) which currently has sold around 100,000 copies.

³ ZUZU (Giulia Spagnolo, 1996), the comic artist and illustrator, drew critical and public attention with *Cheese* (Coconino Press, 2019), where she addresses issues such as friendship and anorexia.

⁴ Fumettibrutti (Josephine Yole Signorelli, 1991) is a comic artist with a huge popularity on social medias, also for her feminism and LGBT activism (she identifies herself as a transwoman). Besides *Romanzo Esplicito*, she also published *P. La mia adolescenza trans* (2019) and *Anestesia* (2020), always for Feltrinelli Comics.

⁵ Since 2017, Coconino Press has been directed by Ratigher, an independent author renowned for his self-publishing books. Feltrinelli Comics is the comics series of Feltrinelli, the leading Italian publisher. Started in 2017, it is led since the beginning by the screenwriter Tito Faraci.

⁶ See Luca Valtorta's article "Il corpo è mio il disegno pure," *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, April 16, 2021.

⁷ As explained by Cristina Greco, there has been a recent rediscovery of autobiography, thanks to comics artists and comics publishers' focus on public figures and ordinary life stories (Greco 2014, 19).

⁸ About *blog BD*, see "Le temps des réseaux sociaux, ou la formation de la blogosphère" by Julien Baudry in Robert (2019). In Italy the *blogosphère* arrived a few years later than in France: for example, Giulia Sagramola opened her blog in 2010, Associazione Culturale Mammaiuto and Zerocalcare in 2011, Loputyn in 2013.

⁹ The transition from active research of artists on blogs/websites to a more passive exploration on social networks leads to a greater, popular access for non-comics readers.

¹⁰ The artists that replied all the questions were Eliana Albertini, Bianca Bagnarelli, Flavia Biondi, Laura Camelli "la Came," Veronica Veci Carratello, Laura Guglielmo, Roberta "Joe1" Muci, Jessica Cioffi "Loputyn," Elisa Macellari, Giorgia

Marras, Sara Menetti, Elisa Menini, Alice Milani, Margherita Morotti, Kalina Hristova Muhova, Alessandra De Santis “Nova,” Cristina Portolano, Silvia Rocchi, Giulia Sagromola, Margherita Tramutoli “la Tram,” Cecilia Valagussa.

¹¹ See the recent statistics published by Istat Istituto Nazionale di Statistica on February 1, 2021:

<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/253019>.

¹² *Fumetto* is the Italian word for “balloon” (also *nuvoletta*), a “fundamental element of comics’ semantics” referring either to speech or thought of the characters (Eco 2016, 146–147), so evident a characteristic it was used in Italy to name the medium itself (Brancato 2000, 30). Luca Boschi indicates that the term “*fumetti*” was introduced a bit before the birth of the magazine *Linus*, at the beginning of the 1960s. He refers to the publication of Carlo Della Corte’s book *I fumetti* by Mondadori in 1961 (Boschi 2010).

¹³ For example, Giorgia Marras, who works primarily in France, opts for *bande dessinée* or *roman graphique*.

¹⁴ The course started in 2004 within the Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna, is the first cycle degree on comics and illustration within the Italian artistic academies.

¹⁵ Others were named once: Barbara Baldi, Paolo Bacilieri, Andrea Pazienza, Francesco Cattani, Andrea Accardi, Lorenzo Mattotti, Grazia Nidasio, Igort, Lorena Canottiere, Sara Pichelli, Giacomo Nanni, Grazia La Padula. Between them, also Francesco Cattani, Sara Pichelli and Grazia La Padula born after 1980.

¹⁶ *Mondo Naif* was first a comics miniseries (1996), then an anthological magazine (1998–2005), published by Kappa Edizioni and curated by Kappa Boys (Andrea Baricordi, Massimiliano De Giovanni, Barbara Rossi). The idea was to promote young Italian comics artists, such as Vanna Vinci, Davide Toffolo, Otto Gabos, Sara Colaone, Keiko Ichiguchi.

¹⁷ The materials they declare to use include ink and dithering, pencil on paper, ink and digital colouring, acryl, gouache, watercolor, tempera and Ecoline liquid watercolors.

¹⁸ Tosti talks about the “overproduction” (Tosti 2016, 699) of autobiographies, indicating that it is, nevertheless, a relatively “new” genre within graphic narratives: Tosti claims Justin Green’s *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) to be one of its pioneers, as artists such as Robert Crumb or Art Spiegelman claimed it to having been their inspiration. Elisabeth El Refaie also refers to the commercial success of (auto)biographical comics: “publishers and authors continue to refer to autobiography/memoir as a separate genre, partly perhaps in order to cash in on its popularity. As the healthy sales figures of celebrity memoirs, in particular, clearly show the public’s appetite for ‘true’ stories of ‘real’ lives has apparently not abated at all; if anything, it seems to have increased over the last few decades” (El Refaie 2012, 17).

¹⁹ See Luca Valtorta’s article “Il corpo è mio il disegno pure,” *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, April 16, 2021.

²⁰ *Molestie* is a feminist collective, established in 2020 by a group of women authors that had the necessity to share abuse experiences or sexist discrimination in the Italian comics industry.

²¹ According to Dejasse, if alternative comics are always associated with the graphic novel, their inevitable assimilation to the autobiographical “genre” constitutes another commonplace.

²² Scrivo calls it a serious mistake to turn one’s work into a social wall on which to pour out “one’s own business” with proud exhibitionism (Bonomi et al. 2020, 163). Tosti finds these autobiographical comics immersions in the lives of the authors, not devoid of voyeurism and egocentrism (2016, 694).

²³ Term used by Giorgia Marras, in answer to our survey question “Why do you feel the need to express yourself in your work?”

²⁴ Such as political and social topics, or comics that exemplify dignity, the defence of people’s rights, and rebellion against injustice and madness.

²⁵ Nine young artists were involved: Fumettibrutti, la Tram, Sara Menetti, Alice Milani, Margherita Morotti, Sara Pavan, Cristina Portolano, Silvia Rocchi, Alice Socal.

²⁶ One artist claims to prefer to treat current topics or that have roots in reality, such as reportage, training, education, and intimate stories.

²⁷ Creation, development, physical realization, promotion and distribution of a product via direct sales in festivals, events, online shops, and specialist bookstores.

²⁸ See the assertions by Alessandro Baronciani (Pavan 2014, 31) and Francesco Cattani (Pavan 2014, 78). Giorgia Marras confirmed this reason too (online interview, March 30, 2021).

²⁹ Browsing through the catalogues of Bao Publishing or BeccoGiallo Editore one can trace most of the artists we mentioned.

³⁰ La Trama produced several monographic publications: above all, we recall the series *Coppie miste* (2013–2015), composed of albums, each of which was written and drawn by artists.

³¹ Launching a publication through a crowdfunding campaign allows the collective to organize promotions and estimate the number of issues for printing better. Attaccapanni Press has been using this system since their first *Grimorio* anthology (2016).

³² MeFu’s research is available at <https://www.mefu.it/indagine/>.

³³ Some craftsmanship examples are tailoring, pottery, embroidery (Kalina Muhova, Bulgarian illustrator and comics creator that has lived and worked in Bologna since 2013), pillow-toys (Giulia Sagramola), t-shirts and pins (Eliana Albertini).