

EDITORIAL

Comic books, also referred to as “comic magazines” or simply “comics”, derive their English name from the 1930s American comic books, a compilation of humorous comic strips. However, the cultural phenomena itself finds its roots in 18th century Japan, from where it influenced the 19th century European tradition and emigrated to the American continent in the 20th century. In short, history confirms what is apparent today: comics are a global phenomena.

Regardless of the different cultural contexts of provenience and different genres that they belong to, there are certain attributes that helps us recognize a comic book at first sight, most notably the combination of image and text, a sequential juxtaposition of panels representing individual scenes that are, as a rule, accompanied by dialogues, thoughts or narrative in word balloons, the hallmark of the art of comics. Speaking Lacanese: comics operate on the levels of symbolic (language) and imaginary (visual) at the same time, thus touching upon the real in a specific and quite unique way. That is demonstrated by the persistence of authorial creativity, insistence on industrial production, and insatiability of their consumption (the selling rate is the same and sometimes even surpasses those of ordinary books), reproduction (reprints, reboots, ecranizations, novelizations, etc.), and of course ... enjoyment (everyone enjoys their own private theater while reading comics).

It is precisely enjoyment which is the real thread that governs the content of this two-part special edition of *Teorija in praksa* on cultural studies of comic books, since every participating author was asked to write about those comics, aspects, problems or contexts that he or she finds most interesting.

Jela Krečič Žižek's *Superheroes: The Making and Unmaking of a Genre in a Stupid Culture* claims that the genre of superheroes is troubling in regard to the following question: how to explain the popularity of heroes with superpowers, strange fashion choices, and conservative ideological backgrounds? Many authors interpret superheroes in religious context. In contrast to this approach, the article follows Eco's analysis of the genre in his text on Superman where he traces the phenomenon back to ancient mythologies, which the genre combines with the elements of modern age novel. The shift from the ironic self-referential tone of early Superman and Batman films to the more serious tone in later adaptations is not a sign of progress but of regression. Shyamalan's *Unbreakable*, on the other hand, opens up a new way to interpret the genre.

Tilen Izar Lunaček in his *Juicily Juxtaposed: Pleasure tropes in the history of erotic comics* argues in favor of the ninth art as the most suitable medium for artistically and critically engaged depiction of human sexuality, and demonstrates the point with a historical tour of the genre from Tijuana bibles

through American superhero and horror comics to the US underground, European mastery and, finally, Moore and Gebby's 21st century meta-porn masterpiece, *Lost girls*. The article enriches this historical tour with meditations on the relations between erotica and pornography, funny and serious, and fantasy and reality in the sex life of humans.

Aleš Bunta's *Crepax and Magnus: The Art of Pornological Reflections* focuses on the political dimension of two comics belonging to the golden era of the Italian comic-book genre *fumetto nero*: Guido Crepax's *Valentina* and Magnus & Bunker's *Alan Ford*. He argues that their respective provocative effectiveness is the result of two artistic approaches: "pornological reflection" (i.e. the comic-book's specific capacity to mirror the perversions, inherent to given society) and a more "metaphysical" approach (for it consists of the artist's capacity to "capture" reality within its seemingly false negations).

Natalija Majsova in her *The Hazy Gaze of the Bogatyrs of the Russian Byliny* discuss the aesthetic potential of one of the first post-Soviet comics, *Bylinnaya Rus'*, created by Viktor Agafonov. The comic saga, now valued as a most original example of rare post-Soviet comic book art, presents the adventures of a Russian folk hero Ilya Muromets in a daring aesthetic manner. The composition, colour scheme, fonts, and text presentation of the work demonstrate clear parallels with the tradition of Christian Orthodox iconography. This article offers a double reading of the work, reliant on the one hand on narrative analysis, and on the other on an iconographic reading: it may be considered as an annotated introduction to a possible iconography of the comic book text.

Mirt Komel in his *The Ghost outside its Shell: Revisiting the Philosophy of Ghost in the Shell* engages with the popular Japanese media franchise *Ghost in the Shell*, discerning its cultural aspects and influence through a philosophical reflection of its main materialistic idea, namely, the dual relationship between the mind and the body. The interpretation is legitimized by the fact that the author of the original manga series, Masamune Shirow, was influenced by Arthur Koestler's book *Ghost in the Machine*, essentially a structuralist anti-Cartesian meditation. The author argues that the main underlying materialistic idea of the ghost in the shell can be originally reinterpreted and developed further through Hegelian dialectics.

There is, therefore, only one thing left from this editorial to say in the name of the whole team of comic book academic lovers: enjoy our symptoms!

Mirt Komel
Guest editor