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“We’re not rated X for nothin’, baby!”
Satire and Censorship in the Translation of
Underground Comix

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 7 January 2015, two brothers, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, armed with rifles, forced their way into an unmarked office at 10 Rue Nicolas-Appert in the 11th arrondissement of Paris. That morning twelve people were shot dead and other eleven were injured. Militant Islamist terrorist group Al-Qaeda's branch in Yemen took responsibility for the shooting, while the office besieged by their attack was the headquarters where, following a 2011 firebombing, the members of the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo used to hold their meetings. Charlie Hebdo's director Charb (Stéphane Charbonnier) together with Cabu (Jean Cabut), Philippe Honoré, Tignous (Bernard Verlhac) and Georges Wolinski were all cartoonists who died that day. In the wake of the shocking event, pencils became symbols of resistance to armed threats of censorship and the phrase "Je suis Charlie" turned into the (often abused) slogan of those who (at least formally) supported freedom of expression.

Among the first who paid their homage to Charlie Hebdo – not surprisingly – there is the American underground cartoonist Robert Crumb, who has lived in a small village near Sauve in southern France since 1991. Crumb showed his support to the cause of freedom of expression with two cartoons published on the newspaper *Liberation* on 10 January 2015. The former, entitled "A Cowardly Cartoonist", shows the author's caricature holding a picture of "The Hairy Ass of Muhamid" and balloons reciting: "Just kidding!" and "Actually, this is the ass of my friend Mohamid Bakshi, who's a film director in Los Angeles, California". The idea recalls Charb's cartoon published in Charlie Hebdo on 11 November 2011, in the aftermath of the bombing of its headquarters for daring to show the Prophet's caricature, in which Mohammed's buttocks are drawn with the caption "Et le cul de Mahomet, on a le droit?" ("Is it allowed (to draw) Mohammed's ass?"). The "friend" Mohamid Bakshi Crumb refers to is a pointed reference to director and animator Ralph Bakshi, with whom the cartoonist has a long-term feud over the rights of the iconic character Fritz the Cat.

The second cartoon is the outcome of a collaboration with Crumb's wife, Aline Kominsky, who drew their caricatures while debating over the publication of "A Cowardly Cartoonist" and the consequent possibility to be chased by terrorists and concluding with the sarcastic comment: "Well, it's not that bad. And, besides, they've killed enough cartoonists, maybe they've gotten it out of their system".

Crumb maintained that he wanted his homage to be personal and to reflect on his own fear and cowardice at the thought of challenging terrorist threats by drawing cartoons on the Prophet Mohammed. “A Cowardly Cartoonist” also includes the dedication “Showin’ solidarity with my martyred comrades”. Charlie Hebdo’s cartoonists are defined martyrs (of freedom of expression) and “comrades”. Indeed, in an interview with *The Observer* (1 October 2015), Crumb argued that, in the history of the United States, the only experience close to Charlie’s tradition is that of underground comics, or comix. Charlie’s cartoonists were praised because they “were merciless, to everybody. It was a really funny magazine. They just didn’t hold back towards anybody. You know, they didn’t let anybody off the hook, which was good” (ibid.). Likewise, underground comix, spelled with an “x” to emphasise their x-rated contents, did not hold back. They were the product of the 1960s’ counterculture, that is to say, the product of a period of great cultural renewal in the history of the United States, marked by the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, the Free Speech Movement, anti-war and anti-Establishment struggles, hippie communes and urban guerrilla. Comix surfaced as an ‘antagonist’ art form: although different in style, quality and profoundness, these works shared the bad blood towards authorities, dogmas and the (self-)censorship grip which bended the comic industry. The will to defend freedom of expression against any form of censorship and self-censorship is the main drive of the underground comix phenomenon as well as Charlie Hebdo’s provocative cartoons. While the latter suffered from an extreme form of silencing, underground authors had to deal with media lynch, exclusion from distribution circuits, seizures of materials, fines and detention of retailers and gallerists collaborating with them. Moreover, several artists with a public job had to work under pseudonym to avoid potential backlash.

A question may arise then: how come that comics elicit such a harsh reaction? In an interview with Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh broadcasted on *Democracy Now* on 8 January 2015, Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic artist and former underground cartoonist Art Spiegelman accounted for this issue in the following terms:

Great cartoons [...] [put] things in a high relief. And when they’re in a high relief, you can see them. You can then surround them with lots of words trying to contain them. But the images cut past all that. They move so directly into your brain that there’s no place to avoid them. They’re in there. Then you try to, like, put this salve around them, which is language. And that’s where we got that –whatever the currency rate has, a

thousand words for each picture? Takes 10,000 words, because pictures keep leaking out in ways that weren't intended even by the artist making it, but that are thereby functional – functioning as Rorschach tests for what actually are we living through right now.

Thus, in addition to the communicative potential of words in combination with the complex syntax of the comic page (panels, gutters, their arrangement and relationship), comics benefit from the power of images, which are capable of amplifying semantic nuclei of the possible worlds narrated and in which different levels of meaning intersect. Visual elements can add vividness and strength to verbal texts. In fact, words can certainly offend, shock and upset, yet images can also visualise the sources of gut-wrenching tension and distress. Images have historically stirred iconoclastic outrage with a violence that words never reached. Thus, their trenchancy combined with witticism and sarcastic verbal jokes may explain such virulent reprisals. In the case of Charlie Hebdo, the heresy of portraying the Prophet was worsened by the biting satire its cartoonists directed at any form of institution and 'untouchable' issue. And for their intransigent universalisation of their libertarian principles and their uncompromised freedom of expression, they paid the highest price.

The present dissertation attempts a reconstruction of the twisted relationship between the underground comix of the late 1960s and 1970s and the different forms of censorship they faced throughout the short-lived counterculture's experience as well as in the years to follow, in their homeland as well as in such an utterly different context as the Italian one. The latter purpose entails an examination of underground comix in translation, with a focus on the processes of magnification and narcotisation of the most controversial themes of this subversive production.

Linguistic study of translation should be linked to broader cultural, aesthetic and political discourses (Billiani, 2007: 2). Beside linguistic considerations, several scholars argued for the need of embedding the study of translations within extra-textual discourses by considering the ideological bases of translation (Baker, 2006; Bayhmart and De Fina, 2005; Bermann and Wood, 2005; Billiani, 2007; Harvey, 2003; Simon-St-Pierre, 2000; Spivak, 2005; Tymoczko, 1999; Venuti 1998a, 1998b). Billiani, in particular, argued that "censorship itself must be understood as one of the discourses, and often the dominant one, produced by a given society at a given time and expressed either through repressive cultural, aesthetic and linguistic measures or through economic means" (2). For these reasons, the research was developed as an interdisciplinary study beyond language.

In order to reconstruct the role, ideologies and aims behind the birth of the underground phenomenon in the United States and its reception in Italy, a preliminary step of analysis involved the collection of periodicals, magazines, fanzines and comic books but also the study of critical works on the topic. As for original materials, few authors managed to breach the 'overground' market, namely Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. Comix by other artists did not find their place within mainstream circuits and their works are available only through fanzines and limited prints. And the same goes as for their Italian translations. Such authors as Crumb and Shelton received much attention by both independent and mainstream publishers, whereas other authors' comic strips were published only in limited-circulation magazines and anthologies, extremely difficult to retrieve. And even in the case of the underground 'gurus', Crumb and Shelton, the collection of their corpus was no easy task, especially in the case of early publications by alternative houses and short-lived editorial experiences. The creation of the corpus of analysis was the outcome of a work in synergy with libraries, private collectors, archives and foundations. In addition, despite the growing interest in underground authors few critical studies entirely dedicated to the topic exist. At present, works focusing solely on underground comix are Mark James Estren's *A History of Underground Comics* (1974), Patrick Rosenkranz's *Rebel Vision: Underground Comix* (2003), Dez Skinn's *Comix: The Underground Revolution* (2004) and Denis Kitchen and James Danky's collection of essays prefacing the catalogue of the exhibition *Underground Classics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix* (2009). Even though these publications are not academic accounts on the topic, they were fundamental for the development of this research since they collect interviews and a comprehensive (though partisan) reconstruction of the salient moments in the historical evolution of the phenomenon.

The research on this corpus is divided into three different sections. The first section focuses on the roots of underground comix: on the one hand, the complex relationship between comics and censorship or, better said, self-censorship is explored from a historical and sociological point of view. Indeed, comix were born as a reaction against the sanctimonious 'square world' society as well as the so-called Comics Code Authority (CCA), a self-imposed censorship body regulating the comics industry from a content and distribution point of view. Chapter 1 explores the crucial events leading to the establishment of the CCA in 1954, paying particular attention to the evolution

of the comic medium in parallel with the change of American society and the growing climate of hysteria culminating with the so-called ‘Comics Scare’ of the 1950s. In this respect, a particularly useful publication was David Hadju *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (2008), in which statistics, interviews and data from the period are collected.

Chapter 2 delves into the analysis of counterculture and underground comix. Prior to presenting the latter, it first attempts a definition of such thorny concepts as “underground”, “subculture” and “counterculture” and provides an exploration of the historical, sociological and philosophical frameworks within which comix developed. The history of comix and their fight for freedom of expression is deeply imbued in this climate and, at the same time, the history of the Age of Aquarius shines through the pages of these exuberant, brazen works. It is no coincidence that today historical accounts on a graphic novel format (in collaboration with former underground members) are gaining momentum: e.g., Gary Dumm and Harvey Pekar’s *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* and Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki and Paul Buhle’s *A People’s History of American Empire: A Graphic Adaptation*, both published in 2008. For this reason, it is useful to tackle the main events and ideas inspiring counterculture as a whole, also approaching its faults and contradictions, reflected and often satirised by cartoonists themselves.

The second section regards the materials and methods used for the contrastive analysis of comics in translation in the light of their multimodal nature. Indeed, comics “involve linguistic, typographic, and pictorial signs and combinations of signs as well as a number of specific components such as speech bubbles, speed lines, onomatopoeia, etc.” (Kaindl, 1999: 264). A first hypothesis to verify is whether translators tend to look only at the verbal dimension of comics – i.e., the elements to be rendered into another language – thus neglecting non-verbal text constituents, as if comics were monomodal works. On the other hand, given the fundamental role of images in comics, translators may also be mesmerised by the visual elements and the verbal component may be consequently relegated to a mere corollary function, disregarding the specificities of the original text and the meaning-making processes triggered by the word-image interplay. In this light, Chapter 3 begins with an analysis of visual semiotics starting from the postulations by Greimas (1984) and Group μ up to the Visual Grammar by Kress and Van Leeuwen ([1996] 2006), also providing an

overview on the recent developments of multimodal analysis in relation to the translation of comics. Subsequently, comics are investigated from a narratological and semiotic point of view through the studies of Groensteen (2013) and Barbieri (2017), also addressing the basics of semiotics of passions and rhythm¹. A last concept taken into close consideration in this section is that of isotopy, as a potential tool guiding the interpretation and translation of comics. The notion, first introduced in semiotics by Greimas (1966a), refers to the iterativeness of units of signification – both verbal and visual – which guarantees the semantic cohesion and homogeneity of a discourse. Though research on isotopies traditionally focused on verbal texts, it is argued that its study may be extended to such multimodal texts as comics, in which non-lexical items participate in meaning-making processes and thus to the creation of isotopies. In particular, the translation of comics may benefit from the application of a tool centred on relations of signification of both verbal and graphic devices without privileging or neglecting either.

The third section of the present dissertation includes the analysis of underground comix in translation: after presenting the corpus of Italian translations under scrutiny (Chapter 4), each chapter is centred around one of the most controversial themes characterising underground authors' production, introducing some general considerations on the role it played within counterculture and then developing a proper textual investigation: sexuality (Chapter 5), drugs (Chapter 6), political violence (Chapter 7) and religion (Chapter 8). Some of the questions guiding this inquiry are: what approaches are adopted by Italian translators? What ideologies and editorial policies stand behind certain translations and how can they be inferred by textual evidence? Is it possible to talk about censorship in translations? Are there differences between translations produced within the Italian underground context and the mainstream publications aiming at broader audience?

In point of fact, since underground comix were translated by alternative, militant publishers as well as by mainstream houses in different time periods, this corpus enables a comparison of multiple translations of the same work, each showing the

¹ The fact that in this dissertation the Peircean school of semiotics is much less quoted and elaborated than the European one is not so much a choice meant to prefer the latter to the former, as the outcome of a selection of interpretive and analytical tools among those made available by researchers who have worked on such a popular, complex and intriguing object of study as comics. I consequently found the tools developed within the European (Hjelmslevian, in particular) tradition of semiotic studies most effective in analysing the appearance of social sense in relation to the comic medium.

signs of different time periods, editorial policies and target audiences. To understand how the underground comix were presented in Italy, it is crucial to consider not just what was translated and how, but also what was excluded, silenced or forgotten. A relevant portion of the underground production was never considered for translation, perhaps because deemed minor or in the attempt to tone down extreme contents. This selection is inherent in the process of canonisation of certain authors with respect to others as well as of a given work with respect to an author's body of texts.

Today, underground comix are witnessing a period of re-discovery worldwide. Crumb's works were exhibited at the Modern Art Museum of the City of Paris (2012), at the Venice Biennale's 55th International Art Exhibition (2013) as well as in several galleries (e.g., the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 2005, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco in 2008, the David Zwirner Art Gallery in London in 2016 and New York in 2017 and 2019). In addition to the aforementioned exhibition "Underground Classics" hosted by the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Wisconsin (2009), in 2014 the British Library in London dedicated a retrospective exhibition to the discovery of the United Kingdom's underground roots, strictly connected with the American experience, entitled "Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK" and curated by Paul Gravett and John Harris Dunning. Step by step, these subterranean routes are surfacing, its most representative authors taking their place in the Pantheon of the masters of comics. As a consequence, underground comix are also increasingly translated worldwide.

In the wake of such a growing interest in comix, this study attempts to investigate the transfer of these works in such a different context as the Italian one. Better said, the manifold hermeneutic process which shaped the image of this phenomenon is reconstructed so as to ascertain whether comix, beacons of the fight for freedom of expression, ultimately suffered from modifications or even censorship of their contents, and, if so, to evaluate the ideological premises and cultural frames that have arguably affected their reception in Italy. In fact, the historical value of comics has often been neglected and the present dissertation was a chance to investigate an emblematic case-study which, given its remarkable communicative potential and sociological value, also laid the foundations for a reflection on the complex dynamics between freedom of expression and censorship.

SECTION 1: FROM X-MEN TO X-RATED

Chapter 1. “DEPRAVITY FOR CHILDREN – TEN CENTS A COPY!”²

1.1. A Nation of Stars and Comic Strips

“Comics were originally intended for adults, not kids, and we’re slowly getting back to that again” (De Falco in Sabin, 1993: 171). This quote from the American comic book writer and editor Tom De Falco underpins how the comic medium was not born as a form of juvenile entertainment, but rather as an adult-oriented product. According to De Falco, the emergence of underground comix during the 1960s marked the beginning of “the modern era in the evolution of adult comics” (ibid.), but *de facto* this was not the first time that comics addressed a more mature audience. As this chapter will briefly outline, the comic medium can boast of a rich and complex history dating back to over a century ago, and was never completely restricted to children throughout the main stages of its evolution. Going back in time, the first forms of sequential art will be investigated in this chapter to shed new light on what they had in common with underground comix besides the adult audience, including the bond with the press, the constant swing between originality and standardisation of the works, the biting social satire and the general disapproval by the middle-class American cultural establishment, though it was at first no more than high-hat disdain.

Already in 1971, in one of the first accounts on the history of comics, Les Daniels interpreted a recurring theme in such evolution, i.e., the development according to a “devilish impulse creating a sensation, then gradually being watered down into a conformist norm, leaving a vacuum which would be filled again by some new challenge to the sanctity of society and the printed page” (3). Again, this critical tendency characterised both the first strips and the underground comix, and it may be argued that the whole pathway leading to contemporary comic art seems to follow a dialectical movement and unremitting dialogical drifts, in its Shklovskian understanding, with a continuous switch between action and reaction, experimentation and stagnation, rebellion and censorship, through the heated confrontation with now highbrow, now lowbrow realisations.

Thus, the aim of the present chapter is to analyse some of the most significant phases of the history of comics which may help explain the outbreak of underground comix. But before delving into the core of the investigation, three meaningful specifications should be

² Title of an anti-comics article published by the *Hartford Courant* on 14 February 1954.

made, by quoting the words of the two editors of *Underground Classics* (2009), cultural critic James Danky and publisher and cartoonist Denis Kitchen:

Despite what your parents may have told you, comics are not trash. Garish, sometimes tasteless or violent, frequently non-comical, yes – but they can also be needle-sharp, provocative, and brimming with fresh language and ideas. (Sorry, Mom.)

And contrary to what you've been told by pop-culture historians, comics did not exactly begin in the 1890s with the *Yellow Kid* or *Little Nemo*. As an art-driven storytelling medium, comics go back at least as far as the mid-nineteenth century and, arguably, to Goya, the Greek and Roman frescos, the Bayeaux Tapestry, and the cave walls of Lascaux.

Nor did comix, with that hip terminal "x," spring magically to life in 1968 with *Zap Comix* no. 1 or *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*. As with so many other art forms, "legitimate" or not, the evolution of comics is long, complex, and worthy of serious research and explication. (Sorry, man.) (17)

What these three statements emphasise and is of interest to our research is that a large part of our conceptions regarding comics are still biased, or at least superficial; Roger Sabin (1993: 249) articulated this lack in terms of “public ignorance” with respect to the potential range of this medium, a void ultimately resulting in the manipulation (often trivialisation) and rewriting of its history for reasons that will be investigated throughout the present dissertation. Thus, as Danky and Kitchen stressed, the comic phenomenon is more complex than what one may think. Comics were not invented by a genius at a given moment but are the outcome of a long process which, according to their fascinating retrospective, dates back to the Upper Palaeolithic³, and, as this chapter will pinpoint in the specific case of American comics, constantly intertwines with the main historical, political and cultural events. Just as important, the analysis of the social dynamics related to comics is of no little significance. In particular, the reference to “what your parents may have told you” implies a generational conflict which will be at the core of the present discussion and the propulsive force for the censorship campaign against comics and for the subsequent boom of underground art. In order to fully grasp the role and context of underground comix, it is fundamental to trace their roots within such an interwoven scenario.

³ Daniels pointed out that the “defenders of the comics medium” constantly try to legitimise the value sequential art by creating a bond with prehistoric wall paintings, oriental ideographs, Egyptian hieroglyphics, Medieval tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, journalistic cartoons, religious and political pamphlets, or even the Tarot “to reassure serious thinkers that the bad boy of the arts was no orphan, and might even have royal blood in his veins” (1). Certainly, these references purport that visual storytelling is not an isolated phenomenon, and comics have roots in more culturally-respected forms. This sort of “justification” often disregards more tangible links, such as eighteenth and nineteenth century caricatures and humorous comic cuts and lithographs with satirical contents, Victorian penny dreadfuls and a long tradition of children’s book illustrations.

The reconstruction of the tangled family tree of the comic medium is still object of great debate – and far from the aims of the present study – since all the major comic traditions (whether European, American or Japanese) followed different paths. In America, the first key moments in the evolution of comic art corresponded to the advent of the first prototypes of cartoons in 1747, when Benjamin Franklin published a pamphlet entitled *Plain Truth* and including a woodcut illustration of Aesop’s fable “Hercules and the Wagoneer”, and in 1754, when he published “Join or Die”,⁴ which is considered the first political cartoon ever to appear in an American newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. But the actual turning point in the evolution of comics is indisputably represented by the 1890s, a period of radical change in the economic as well as sociocultural contexts. Even though, humorous cartoon-based magazines, such as *Puck* (1877), *Judge* (1881) and *Life* (1883) already existed, U.S. sequential art in its pioneer form has the shape of a bald smirking child wearing a yellow smock, i.e., Richard Felton Outcault’s Yellow Kid.

Though there is no agreement on when the Yellow Kid first appeared and under which circumstances, in his historical account on the topic, Richard D. Olson (1993) proposes 17 February 1895 as the date of his official first appearance on a newspaper, i.e., Joseph Pulitzer’s New York *World*. The cartoon “Fourth Ward Brownies” from the series *Hogan’s Alley* was reprinted from the weekly magazine *Truth* and, contrary to popular belief, at first Mickey Dugan, this is the name of the Irish child, was not the protagonist of the cartoons, and did not even wear his famous yellow nightgown. In the first cartoons, the child was one of the many inhabitants of the sordid New York slums and his nightshirt was either black and white or blue. The subsequent use of the colour yellow in Pulitzer’s newspaper represented a cutting-edge innovation in printing technologies: indeed, the introduction of yellow ink was considered a technical breakthrough which, added to red and blue, made full-colour reproduction possible in newspapers for the first time. The yellow gown became the background of the Kid’s irreverent messages, an expedient which consecrated the character as a commercial success. *Hogan’s Alley* became a full-page Sunday colour supplement and, quoting Daniels (1971: 2), the character “became the ‘Yellow Kid’ by popular acclaim, and so gave the strip his own new name”. Outcault published the strip in the pages of the New York *World* until October 1896, when he accepted William Randolph Hearst’s offer to draw

⁴ The woodcut was published in 1754, during The French and Indian War: it featured a snake cut into eight sections, representing the colonies ordered according to their position along the coast, with New England joined together as the head and South Carolina as the tail. Under the snake, Franklin added the message “Join, or Die”, which gave the name to the cartoon, to purport colonial unity against French and Indian enemies.

the character for the *New York Journal*. Interestingly, Pulitzer continued to publish his version of the Yellow Kid drawn by George Luks and thus two different Yellow Kid strips were issued in two different newspapers. The boom of cartoons and strips in newspapers is strictly connected to the war between Hearst (*New York Journal*) and Pulitzer (*New York World*), New York two press giants struggling to attract readers with sensational journalism and captivating expedients⁵. Pictures pushed up sales of books in the United States –thus proving how right Mark Twain was when he claimed “to my mind the illustrations are better than the book” (Beard, 1939: 478) – and gave access to new markets, such as the working class and the immigrant populations, for whom English was not the first language and images certainly resulted to be more understandable than words. The Yellow Kid’s fame was even more bolstered by the New York press controversy, to the point that he gave the name to the neologism “yellow journalism” to indicate this form of sensational press with eye-catching headings and an increased use of cartoons and images. The Kid is the first serialized and recurring figure in the history of American comics and its publication marked the beginning of the modern comic strip era. Moreover, as Mark J. Estren (1974: 25) pointed out, it represents the first direct ancestor of underground comix, especially by virtue of their akin irreverence and their tongue-in-cheek satirical commentary on American society expressed through printed press. It is important to stress that, as a matter of fact, the Kid was no kid stuff. As Daniels (1971) maintained:

What the Kid had going for him was vulgarity. [...] He existed in a world that was crude, noisy, sordid and eccentric, and he commented disdainfully upon it, first with wry expressions of his idiot’s face, later with phonetically rendered slang inscribed on his expansive nightshirt. There was nothing overtly attractive about him; his appeal seemed to be a function of his offensiveness. (2)

The Kid’s crude jokes were written in sort of nonsense pidgin on his nightie and not on balloons, which developed at a later stage. Tasteless, rude, sarcastic, and iconoclast, the Yellow Kid was the first of a long series of satirical attacks against public decency carried out through the comic medium and culminated with the underground comix. The fact that such attack was led by a kid, was certainly part of the strip blunt force. It served as a literary device allowing a displacement of perspective. Through his demystifying eye, readers have had a glimpse of the life in the sordid gutters of Manhattan’s Lower East Side and a disenchanting

⁵ Besides the *New York Journal* and the *World*, near the end of nineteenth century, more than 30 daily newspapers were reportedly competing for the allegiance of New York’s reading public. For a full account, see Hajdu, 2009, Chapter 1.

commentary on the self-satisfying, bourgeois society of the United States, positioning the comics in the realm of what Bakhtin (1984) described as carnivalesque-grotesque form. According to David Hajdu (2008), such strips were characterized by “skepticism towards authority” and the “delight they took in freedom” (11). All civil servants, from policemen to dogcatchers, were unfailingly portrayed as victims rather than as valiant heroes, and the juvenile delinquency ruled the roost. It was an apex which Outcalt never reached again in his subsequent works⁶.

The popularity of the Yellow Kid led to the proliferation of dozens of serialised cartoons using a permanent set of characters and frame sequences instead of single panels. The evolution was quite rapid and on 12 December 1897, during the full-scale war between newspapers, the *American Humorist*, the Sunday supplement of Hearst’s *New York Journal*, published the first pictures of a series which can be called a comic strip in the fullest sense of the word. Page 8 of that day’s issue carried the first instalment of *The Katzenjammer Kids* created by the nineteen-year-old German immigrant artist, Rudolph Dirks. Originally, *The Katzenjammer Kids* had no dialogues, but Dirks subsequently added them, couched in a weird American-English influenced by a strong German accent, by using speech balloons for the first time. This device proved to be particularly useful, as it gave voice to the characters and enabled the straightforward expression of their thoughts. As Jerry Robinson (1974: 27) pointed out, balloons enhanced the illusion of immediacy, made dialogue possible and became an invaluable feature of comics. In this sense, Dirks can be considered one of the fathers of the comic strip.

Now that the evolution of colour comic strips was completed, they gained more and more space within newspapers, becoming the most awaited section of the Sunday supplements. Comic strips gradually supplanted dime novels as a popular form of entertainment and, in their accessibility to non-readers, surpassed the books in popularity⁷. In particular, ethnic humour served to appeal to specific immigrant groups. In this regard, Hajdu (2008) highlighted the peculiarity of the bond between ethnic minorities and strips:

⁶ In particular, the new character of Buster Brown represented Outcalt’s a conservative turn. Buster’s adventures made their debut in the New York *Herald Tribune* in 1902, before being acquired by Hearst in 1906 and becoming the trademark of Brown Shoe Co. from 1904 to 1930: blonde-haired, elegant, wealthy, pretty, almost effeminate, Buster became the Yellow Kid’s bourgeois counterpart and his strips the moralistic drift of Outcalt’s satire.

⁷ In addition to the already-mentioned strips, other famous works created in that period include *The Kinder-Kids* (1906) by Lionel Feininger, *Polly and the Pals* (1912) by Cliff Sterrett, *Mutt and Jeff* (1908) by Bud Fisher.

[N]ewspaper comics spoke to and of the swelling immigrant populations in New York and other cities where comics spread [...]. The funnies were theirs, made for them and about them. Unlike movements in the fine arts that crossed class lines to evoke the lives of working people, newspaper comics were proletarian in a contained, inclusive way. (11)

Ethnic humour and references to the low-class environment seemed to create a provisional and perhaps timeserving bond between this form of expression and marginalised strata of the population, one which was to go lost in the following years only to re-surface preponderantly with underground comix and their future developments in the contemporary graphic novel format. The idea of comics as the voice of the outcast became the flag of a whole generation of authors who found in the blend of words and images the perfect way to convey previously unheard messages. Nonetheless, comics at first did not entail an explicit social and political commitment. The time was not ripe. Comic strips were not yet meant to be taken seriously and this potential remained largely unexploited for many years: most of the comic production followed the motto “Life is serious, the art of comics lighthearted” (Reitberger and Fuchs, 1971: 29) and mainly served as a solace, distracting people from everyday troubles, economic unrest and political tensions. They were based on burlesque (even grotesque) gags, which is the reason why comic strips are still widely known as ‘funnies’. However, it is essential to emphasize that not all funnies can be labelled as flippant lampoon, merely serving the purpose of escapism. Two authors, in particular, who both appeared in Hearst’s newspapers, stood out for their sophisticated, bitter-sweet humour, thus enabling a deep and subtle reflection on human condition, one which was often couched in allegorical terms, though through only apparently materialistic and even base content. As Sabin (1993: 136) argued, George Herriman and Winsor McCay “showed the perimeters, artistic and cerebral, to which the strip medium could aspire”: indeed, Herriman and McCay are considered the most influential authors both among underground artists and for the history of comics in general because of the importance they gave to style and content of their works, bridging the gap between the realms of aesthetics and philosophy through the medium of comics.

McCay’s most famous works are *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1926) and *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend* (published with the pseudonym Silas from 1904 to 1926, though with no continuity). In his stories McCay mainly dealt with the oneiric dimension of the human psyche, which he aimed to represent and expose either as the dream adventures of a seven-year-old child or as adult anxieties and neuroses. According to Hajdu, Nemo was “a majestically crafted amalgam of art nouveau design and surrealistic story content first

published in 1904, the year Salvador Dali was born” (14). Indeed, McCay can be considered a Surrealist cartoonist, especially on account of the creation of such a weird world (whose minute details were strongly influenced by Art Nouveau), the experimental and sometimes bizarre use of timing and pacing, and for a bold manipulation of perspective which also involves the shape and size of the panels and the use of almost cinematic techniques (e.g., McCay’s choice to keep the same perspective over multiple panels of the same size resembles a steady-camera movement in a film). The architectural precision in the construction of the page, the art-driven conception of comics, and the constant play with formal conventions represent McCay’s strong points as well as one of the cornerstones prompting a revolution in the world of comics which decades later the underground authors were to take to its most outrageous extremes.

Just as McCay may be viewed as a Surrealist author within the world of comics, George Herriman is often regarded as a Dadaist (Inge, 1990: 41) cartoonist for his “inspired sense of nonsense” (Estren, 30), experimentalism, and unconventional interpretation of comic art, as most famously exemplified by his masterpiece, *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944). The story wisely relies on a recurring formula: the cat, Krazy, alternatively male or female, and deliberately ambiguous, is in love with a mouse named Ignatz, who not only does not reciprocate, but also takes some cynic joy from throwing bricks at the back of the cat’s head. The ‘guardian of the law’, Offissa Pupp, who also develops romantic feelings for Krazy, completes this love triangle and contributes to the successful deployment of the strips as he fiercely struggles to stop the mouse and jail him. The rationale of, if not the philosophical meaning underlying, this strip is that the cat conspires with the mouse, as Krazy conceives the bricks as a manifestation of Ignatz’s love. The premises of the story are simple, reiterated into infinite variations and framed within beautifully-drawn landscapes and meticulous layouts. As Umberto Eco (1985) explained, the poetry in *Krazy Kat* resides in this reiteration: the strips are enjoyable if considered together as a whole and not separately. In fact, Herriman’s work “acquires flavor only in the continuous and obstinate series, which unfolds, strip after strip, day by day”. Another peculiarity of Herriman’s work is the language as the author focuses on the phonetic value of words, the alliterations and the musicality of the written text. The importance of the poetic concerns over the actual readability of text is a distinctive feature of *Krazy Kat*. The reader is somehow befuddled by the clash between the repetition of events and the constant fluidity of dialogues, settings, pages, and even gender, considering Krazy’s ambiguity. Eco also argued that:

The best proof that the comic strip is an industrial product purely for consumption is that, even if a character is invented by an author of genius, after a while the author is replaced by a team; his genius becomes interchangeable, his invention a factory product. The best proof that *Krazy Kat*, thanks to its raw poetry, managed to overcome the system, is that at the death of Herriman nobody chose to be his heir, and the comic-strip industrialists were unable to force the situation.

Likewise, Estren argued that underground authors are either consciously or unconsciously indebted to Herriman, for he cut across the norms dictated by the comic industry and “planted some special seeds of irreverence, of disrespect for convention both in drawing and in language” (31). On the one hand, he showed to the underground generation how characters and stories could appear simplistic at first, but entail deeper meanings and multi-layered subtexts which are up to the readers to interpret. In particular, among the different interpretations of Herriman’s strips, a most striking one resonates of the idea of anarchy – as epitomised by Ignatz – always instinctively struggling against order – as represented by Ofissa. On the other hand, the bond between the underground and Herriman is even deeper than the influence on themes and narrative models: Herriman showed that comics could be treated as an art form, personalised in the style, thoroughly detailed even in the slightest visual variations (in particular, regarding the backgrounds) and highly experimental in the manipulation of the verbal language. Unsurprisingly, tributes to Herriman are diverse. Some of them are more explicit, as in the case of the style of Bobby London’s *Dirty Duck*, while others may appear less evident. As Paul Krassner highlighted in his introduction to the Viking Press edition of Robert Crumb’s *Head Comix*, Crumb was “the illegitimate off-spring of Krazy Kat” (9), and the underground author himself defined Herriman as “the Leonardo da Vinci of the cartoon world”, while Art Spiegelman defined him as one of his “conscious influences”. In imitation of the early *Krazy Kat* strips, originally located below *The Family Upstairs* strips, Gilbert Shelton created the small spin-off topper strip *Fat Freddy’s Cat*, featuring the adventures of the cat of one of the protagonist of his *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* strips. The strips were subsequently issued in independent comic book collections dedicated to the Cat, which included new longer stories. Among them, in the seven-page story “Paradise Revisited” – first appeared in *Fat Freddy’s Comics & Stories* 1 (1983) and reprinted in *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers Omnibus* (2008: 602-608) – the Cat visits Heaven, where “all the great cats of cartoon literature live” (603), and Shelton dedicated a panel to the encounter with Krazy Kat, the first to give an official welcome to the newcomer.

It should be stressed that McCay’s and Herriman’s works became critically acclaimed long after their publication. Indeed, they were not a commercial success upon being

published and, as said, their experimental temperament should be regarded more as an exception than the norm. In general, publishers did not look for artworks, appealing to a niche of connoisseurs, but for ‘catchy’ strips increasing journal sales. Being a profit-oriented industry, comic strip publishing seemed to privilege less ambitious works – what was defined as “straightforward knockabout buffoonery” (Sabin, 1993:137) – which conformed to the taste and preferences of the majority and were easily intelligible for readers of all social extractions and cultural backgrounds. However, the choice of quantity over quality, and flippancy over complexity, obviously led to several consequences, some of which are worth being mentioned here, since they are clearly related to the increasing level of dissatisfaction and even criticism against comics. Just as in the case of the dime novels of the late nineteenth century, the Middle-class hegemonic cultural establishment often accused strips of being “crass, ephemeral and detrimental to reading” (ibid.), especially lamenting how several people bought newspapers only for the strips, rather than for their actual news-pages. This led to a further complaint, based on a racial and classist posture. Indeed, according to Hajdu, “much of the early criticism of newspaper comics condemned them as lower-class, as if that status alone were cause for condemnation” (12). This charge does not even try to conceal a form of class prejudice: the idea of extending the market to include immigrant communities was perceived as a degradation. A nation aspiring to become a civilizing country and a new cultural pole, could not stand to be associated to such a symbol of illiteracy and juvenile, vulgar entertainment. Sabin (1996: 25) maintained that American class prejudice was also characterised by religious and racial overtones. Extreme Christians resented the very fact that strips were published on Sunday, which in their view was a day devoted to God rather than trivial entertainment, and – even worst – that they explicitly addressed even immigrant populations who were non-Christian.

Some concerns against such a subliterate and vulgar form of entertainment were raised on the press as well. In the August 1906 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Ralph Bergengren called comic strip supplements “humor prepared and printed for the extremely dull” and “a thing of national shame and degradation”; he also lamented with over dramatic tones that “[r]espect for property, respect for parents, for law, for decency, for truth, for beauty, for kindness, for dignity, or for honor, are killed, without mercy. Lunacy could go no farther than this pandemonium of undisguised coarseness and brutality.” An article entitled “A Crime Against American Children,” published in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, in January 1909, stated:

Are we parents criminally negligent of our children, or is it that we have not put our minds on the subject of continuing to allow them to be injured by the inane and vulgar 'comic' supplement of the Sunday newspaper? One thing is certain: we are permitting to go on under our very noses and in our own homes an extraordinary stupidity, and an influence for repulsive and often depraving vulgarity so colossal that it is rapidly taking on the dimensions of nothing short of a national crime against our children.

Though such complaints had no strong impact at first, they nonetheless represented the roots of an articulated opposition, one which was bound to grow louder and louder and whose legacy will be investigated in the next pages. The backlash was initially limited to church meetings and complaint letters to newspapers, nothing which could arrest the seemingly irresistible growth of the comics industry. In fact, despite the criticism, the first funnies kept on ranging from flippant jokes to ethnic humour as though there was no threat of censorship in the air. Authors were relatively free to express themselves and their art could reach high levels of experimentalism, regarding both form and content, as in the case of *Little Nemo* and *Krazy Kat*.

However, the first limitations came from within the comic field: as previously mentioned, the budding new medium was the tool of a few newspaper publishers whose authentic ambition was to control the market and, as the press tycoons soon realized, it was necessary to smooth the rough edges off the strips to address an even wider audience. Business factors and sales expectations proved to be the first actual opponents of comics' evolution. Starting from 1910s, big distribution syndicates were established to regulate reprint rights and grant permissions for the publications of the strips on behalf of the authors as well as to help promote comic sales in as many newspapers as possible. They supplied strip series in tabloid or newspaper format, with the required sizes and page divisions and ready-made comic sections with the title of the newspaper. Syndicates also understood that bigger profits could come from increasing standardisation, i.e., with comics being adapted to the taste of the middle-American classes and of the increasingly global petit bourgeois, rather than to the cultural standards of minorities, an adaptation which obviously entailed the preference for much less salacious a satire. Comic historians share this view. According to Reitberger and Fuchs:

When the syndicates entered the scene, self-criticism started and provocative humour was (and remains) outlawed; feeble attempts at ethnic jokes soon petered out, while 'black humour', the 'sick joke', never existed in comics. Humour was then limited to the highlighting of minor human weaknesses of a universal nature. Satire or indirect comment on social conditions lost its bite; although a form of self-criticism of the masses, it was not allowed to hurt anybody. The white lower middle class, which has the

highest percentage of comics readers, found itself mildly caricatured, but never really provoked by satire. (29)

Daniels (1971) stressed the same aspects:

Somewhere, somehow, it was decided that what the people needed was reassurance – perhaps the people themselves decided it – that what should be going into millions of homes all over the United States was a comforting and conformist version of the lives that were lived in those homes. Time and again, strips were sterilized and homogenized to meet a national norm, which, until the coming of the comics, had been nonexistent. (4)

Daniels's comment on the standardisation of strips is crucial, as it poses the question of what can be considered standard, or better said, the canon of a new-born medium and whether it needs to comply with the rules of other long-lived media, such as literature. During the Depression Era, as syndicates became more organized and had a country-wide distribution of strips, they set standardised formulas and plot outlines, with domestic comedy being the most popular genre, tailored to appeal to the middle class by reproducing its more conformist mindset and sharing its goals. Between 1929 and 1934, newspaper comics shifted in tone and style, and other genres developed, largely influenced by a similar type of publications, i.e. pulp fiction. Indeed, both newspaper strips and pulp fiction had inherited the audience of dime novels, which were born as a form of entertainment for the working class, who were attracted by their sensationalism, cheap price – they were sold for 10 cents – and colourful, lurid covers. Even years after the decline of dime novels, such pulp magazines as *Amazing Stories* (launched in April 1926) and *Dime Detective Magazine* (launched in November 1931) still targeted the same readership by offering sensational adventure stories. While most strips had always focused on humorous contents up to that moment, the success of pulp publications indicated that even comics did not have to be funny at any cost. Roy Crane's *Wash Tubbs* and Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, both published in 1924, can be considered the precursors of this new trend, even though the starting point of the adventure strips era is undoubtedly the publication of Harold Foster's *Tarzan* in 1929, from the homonymous pulp novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Adventure strips started to gain great popularity among both young and adult readers. Within a few years, the growth in the demand of adventure strips resulted in the publication of capital comics such as Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* (1931) – displaying a fascination with the criminals of the prohibitionist era, which will influence the subsequent evolution of comics – Dan Moore and Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* (1934), Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* (1934) and Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* (1937).

In his work *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics*, Daniels (1991: 16) links the success of adventure comics to the socioeconomic conditions of that period: “the stock market crash of Oct 1929, and the long depression that followed, helped guarantee that the new serious note of comics would not be just a passing fad. Readers wanted more than laugh; they also wanted images of strong men taking control of their world”. Likewise, Sabin (1996:139) highlighted that “they represented a much-needed source of escapism for large portions of the population from the devastating effects of the Great Depression” by transporting their readers elsewhere, whether the outer space or some exotic land, far from the troubles of real life. According to Hajdu, adventure strips succeeded on account of their capability to appeal to the male readers’ imaginary:

Their tales of extravagant heroism, physical prowess, and wile gave opulent expression to the fantasies of male adolescence, and the bold but essentially realistic (or literal) artwork of Foster, Raymond, and Caniff conferred upon the comic strips a new kind of legitimacy. If the adventure strips were lacking the cryptic visual poetry of *Little Nemo* or *Krazy Kat*, they represented something with more currency to many comics readers: a working-class ideal of skilled craftsmanship in the service of manhood. (17)

During the same period, the most successful strips began to be collected and published in reprint-books by either the newspapers or independent companies (e.g., Cupples and Leon), thus paving the way for the creation of the comic book format. The first collections were of course *Yellow Kid*, *Little Nemo* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*. The tradition of collecting cartoons from satirical periodicals actually dated back to the nineteenth century, with 1883’s *The Good Things of ‘Life’* being a celebrated case in point. However, the transition to comic books with original material was not smooth and had a few false starts, including most notably Dell’s *The Funnies* (1929), whose readers were reluctant to pay for something that up to that point had come free with newspapers. Moreover, Hajdu reported that most of the reprints served as giveaways according to the slogan “[b]uy so many boxes of such-and-such cereal, and receive a free funny book” (21). Hajdu highlighted that: “comic strips, having been created for an intrinsically disposable medium, were thought of as worthless after they were printed; they derived their value from their freshness, like produce and journalism (and, to a degree, works of modernism)” (21). Accordingly, the reprint collection which is generally regarded as the first comic book, *Funnies on Parade* (1933), was not intended for sale but used as a free premium for purchasers of Procter & Gamble products. However, the publication of *Funnies on Parade* and 1934’s *Famous Funnies* by Eastern Color represented a major change in the industry, which experimented a new format: smaller than a Sunday

page (10,5x 7 inches), full colour, and an affordable cover price of 10 cents. It was a success and consolidated the format for future comic books.

Reprints of successful strips became a guarantee of sales and syndicates would soon run out of materials to meet the demand. *New Comics* produced by National Allied Publishing in 1935 proposed the first anthology of original humorous strips, similar in content to traditional newspaper strips but in collections of 60 to 80 pages. The price remained the same to the detriment of underpaid creators. Indeed, the exploitation of artists represented a major issue within the comics industry: comics workers were no more than factory workers on an assembly line made of artists, writers, inkers and letterers. Pays were on page and artists had no right over characters⁸, a fact which would become one of the underground cartoonists' main recriminations against mainstream comics. Just a few years after the failure of *The Funnies*, the time was finally come for comic books. And this of course determined a further change in the medium.

1.2. Comic Books: Shades of a Golden Age

In the introduction of *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (1989), Joseph Witek dedicated a few pages to make sense of the difference between comic strips and comic books. At first sight, the main difference certainly seems to be one of length since the former is a series of panels, while the latter is composed of a multiple-page sequence. But it is precisely by virtue of this discrepancy that comic books evolved as something original and different from mere anthologies of reprinted newspaper strips. Witek argued that even though comic strips and comic books form part of the sequential art medium and share a common narrative vocabulary and grammar, they constitute different literary forms because of their different situations in the marketplace, their cultural status, and their physical mode of presentation. Comic strips have formal and thematic constraints because, on the one hand, they have to fit the editors' space requirements, and, on the other hand, they are expected to appeal to the target audience of the newspaper publishing them. Conversely, since comic books evolved as stand-alone publications, which were voluntarily purchased, they were also free to develop their own formal and thematic conventions, with different contents addressing different audiences. Comic books thus progressively detached from domestic comedy to explore budding pulp

⁸ For instance, Dell published Disney comics, but the only name mentioned was Disney's and no one else's. Even the most famous of its authors, Carl Barks, worked anonymously for much of his career.

genres such as adventure and crime, which could find more space in the new format. Witek also emphasised that the two forms diverge in the reading conventions they evoke, as for both the differing time dedicated to reading these works and the differing structures of thought in reading them. The salient feature of a strip is its brevity as it requires few minutes at most for its reading and comprehension. It relies on the repetition of motifs and surprise effect, rather than on a long and structured chain of events. By contrast, being multi-page stories, comic books work on longer segments, which enables the development of complex narrative structures as well as of elaborated visual/verbal effects:

Comic books can be discursive and oblique in their narrative and thematic connections; comic strips are of necessity concentrated, with each verbal and visual element directed to a single and immediate effect: the termination of a strip becomes its rationale. A strip's unity is perceived visually, with its closure present to the reader's sight. Comic books, like all long printed narratives, promise but continually defer their endings until the final page. (9)

In this respect, it was no coincidence that comic books materialised at the zenith of comic strips' success because the increasing demand for strips indicated that the public was ready for comic periodicals and the new format was perfect for the new genres. However, comic books necessarily evolved according to a different pathway and, on account of their unconstrained nature and broader narrative potential, had to deal with a more virulent criticism. To understand the roots of such hostility, the main trends of the two decades following the Depression Era have to be taken into account.

In general, after that the bond with humorous strips was loosened, a second phase began, and the period from mid-1930s to 1955 is unanimously considered the Golden Age of Comics. While verifiable data on comic-book sales are unavailable, Hajdu reported that "the ghetto of comics was becoming a boomtown" (33): the number of comic books published went from about 150 in 1937 to nearly 700 in 1940. Seven to ten million comics were esteemed to be sold each month, for annual gross revenues going from eight to twelve million dollars in 1941. By way of comparison, the same year, traditional children's books (though generally more expensive than comics) grossed about two million dollars. These results indicate how comics could be considered a mass medium and America could be rightfully appointed as the capital of comics. Moreover, it soon became clear that young readers were the substantial part of the audience for these publications and therefore comic authors and editors started to tailor their output so as to target them. American comics started addressing teenagers and kids with such publications as *Archie* (1942), benchmark of

mainstream, bluenose comic books, and John Stanley's *Little Lulu* (1945), one of Robert Crumb's favourite comics by virtue of the author's powerful storytelling abilities. Dell made a licencing deal with Disney Studios and produced Walt Disney's *Comics and Stories* (1940). This move was a hit, mainly thanks to the high quality of the artworks and to the mutual boost in sales granted by the partnership with animated films. This also contributed to the consolidation of funny animal comics as a genre, inspiring other adaptations of animated cartoon characters. Dell also made a licensing deal with Warner Brothers to publish several Looney Toons comic books, based on both original materials and adaptations: *Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies* (1941), *Bugs Bunny* (1942), *Porkey Pig* (1942) and *Duffy Duck* (1953). Estren (1974: 27) viewed Looney Tunes as a pivotal form of moulding of youngsters' anti-establishment and anti-police feelings as they championed the underdogs' cause and supported the single individual against the rest of society: "the basic message of the cartoon, that the law is arbitrary, harsh, and foolish, is crystal clear (maybe clearer than the cartoon's producer ever intended)". According to Charles M. Jones, the director of such cartoons, characters like Bugs Bunny were rather counter-revolutionary since he simply reacted against people – such as Elmer Fudd, whom Estren identified as the "prototypical small, property-owning conservative" – who "bugged" him in the first place. Then, Estren argued, even underground cartoonists can be considered counter-revolutionaries as they were reacting against the American system 'bugging' them. Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Road Runner cartoons, notwithstanding their producer's scepticism, became an ancestor for underground works. And their stories remained deeply ingrained in the mind of 1960s authors who, still children at that time, would reinterpret them as symbols of social anarchy.

Another funny animal comics crucial for the underground scene is *Pogo the Possum* by Walt Kelly, published by Dell in *Animal Comics* in 1941 and then in *Pogo Comics* in 1946 – though Kelly subsequently reworked the story into newspaper-strip format in 1948. Estren (29) defined Kelly as "one of the most overtly political of the straight cartoonists", who "often wrote words which the underground cartoonists put into effect". Kelly's work was considered the ultimate limit of socio-political satire of that time. Many papers refused to publish Kelly's strips, while others asked for adjustments. An all-too-familiar plot with underground artists. On the other hand, not all comics served the cause of social criticism. On the contrary, most themes were still bound to comply with market laws and tastes. The demand for genre titles increased (in particular, western, adventure, crime and romance) and publishers organized the work in studios, thus mimicking the Fordist production process:

tasks were split in an assembly line of people appointed to writing, drawing, inking, colouring, lettering. This granted low costs, mass production and flexibility in adapting the product to the market tastes.

Among the different genres, super-heroes changed the course of the industry. Super-heroes made their appearance in *Detective Comics* in 1937 and *Action Comics* (by National Periodicals later renamed DC Comics) in 1938, featuring the adventures of Superman (first appeared in *Action Comics 1* in 1938) and Batman (first appeared in *Detective Comics 27* in 1939), which soon received their solo comic book series in light of their huge success. Superman and Batman were the perfect combination, or using Sabin's words (1996: 144), the "complementary superhero paradigms – supernatural versus super-athlete, strength versus wit and day versus night". It was the perfect recipe on the market and "set the definition of a comic thereafter as quintessentially juvenile" (ibid.)⁹. All comics publishers turned their attention to superheroes – Doll Man, Amazing Man, Master Man, Wonder Man, Wonder Woman, the Flash, Johnny Quick, the Whip, Hawkman, Hourman, Sandman, Aquaman, Bulletman, Roy the Superboy, Captain America, Captain Marvel, all published by the end of 1941 – even though with different standards of quality and originality of the materials published.

Nonetheless, nearly all young people were attracted to comics and all sort of comic publication could find its marketplace. Given their cheap price, Hajdu explained, "comics, like sodas and candy bars, were among the few things children of the post-Depression years could afford to buy by saving the pennies they could pick up on the sidewalk or earn by running errands" (69). And this paved the way for another phenomenon: comics "instilled a pride of ownership rooted not in adult conceptions of value, but in their absence. Parents considered comics worthless; therein lay their worth to kids" (37). Hajdu argued that the success of comics is linked to this generational gap: "[t]o read comics was to belong to a vast yet exclusive club, one whose membership was restricted primarily by age" (37). The fact that parents, or adults in general, patronised comics naturally made them even more appealing for the kids. And it is interesting to notice that, despite the obvious differences, an akin generational 'breach' will be the triggering factor behind the youth revolts during the

⁹To give an idea of Superman's success it is worth mentioning that, according to Hajdu's account, a few months after Superman's first publication, a survey by National Periodicals found children asking for Superman's character by name. By its nineteenth number, *Action Comics* was selling some 500,000 copies per month (i.e., more than four times as much as any other comic book). In 1939, in addition to Superman's solo comic book which in a year reached 1,250,000 copies sold per month, National spun off a syndicated Superman strip published in 300 cities.

counterculture years, which prompted the boom of the underground comix phenomenon. Hajdu also quoted the words of comic author Jules Feiffer, who accounted for the bond which the medium created with its young audience in the following terms: “[t]he rowdiness, the crude drawing, the cheap printing, the fact that they were looked down upon – these are the things that made them attractive. There was practically nothing else that we thought of as ours in those days” (ibid.): interestingly, as Chapter 2 will detail, these very words could have been used by any of the underground artists of the 1960s to account for the roots of the underground comix phenomenon.

The low expectations and the shared idea (at least among adult society) of comics as “junk” (Hajdu, 35), had another effect: comics creators were left free to experiment with the medium and to accordingly improvise. Jerry Robinson, one of Bob Kane’s collaborators in the creation of Batman, described this period in really positive terms:

We were inventing the language as we went along, and some of us had an awareness of that. Every time we did something that we didn't think had been done before, it was exciting –maybe something like the whole first page as a splash page to introduce the story or breaking out of the panel format. Really, what we were trying to figure out how to do was give a perception of time, cross-cutting, and setting the scene, and establishing character, and we had to break away from the conventions of newspaper comics to do that. (34)

Such originality and creativity further increased the extraordinary popularity of comics, which shook the public perception of the medium. According to Sabin (1996: 41), when adults realized the growth of the comics industry, they were forced to reckon the primacy comics had already achieved among kids and teenagers’ leisure activities: “[p]ut simply, youngsters were involving themselves in something over which adults had no control, and for the reason above there seemed to be a need for people to have an opinion”. In point of fact, criticism was based on the same argument characterising the pre-world-war charges for adult strips, now specifically addressed to youngster products. One allegation was that not only were comics inferior to written stories, but they could also hinder the children’s learning and reading skills. Furthermore, they were born to appeal to the lower strata of society and therefore provided negative examples to kids who were either from well-to-do families or educated by their families as though they were so. The idea of comics as harmful publications stemmed from a hard-to-die form of class prejudice and resulted in upper- and middle-class families’ boycott of comics, without realising that this would ultimately lead to the youngsters’ even greater fascination for a ‘forbidden’ reading.

Sabin (1996: 43) highlighted that the attitude towards comics was even more contradictory because, at the same time, a more liberal and undeniably romanticised approach developed: comics were seen as a symbol of the children's state of innocence. As a legacy of the Victorian age, children were conceived as pure, angelic figures and the fact that comics started addressing them was perceived as a chance to let kids develop a sense of adventure, stirring their will to play and concoct innocent mischiefs. Nevertheless, the condition was that the worlds of children and adults could not collide in comics: hence, the absolute lack of reference to sex, violence, politics, and ideologies. Simply put, comics had to avoid any reference to the actual world, on pain of destroying the perfect illusion of an uncontaminated stage of humankind. Both postures seem rather biased and comics found themselves stretched between two poles, both ultimately imposing a limit to the freedom of expression of the medium.

The debate on comics also involved other media such as newspapers, radio programmes discussing on the topic of whether comics were good or not for kids, with a decisive inclination towards the former position. Surprisingly, in the field of psychiatric and psychological research, one of the first studies on comics revealed rather optimistic results. Lauretta Bender and Reginald S. Lourie, two child psychiatrists of New York's Bellevue Hospital, presented a paper on comics at the annual meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, held in New York in February 1941, revealing the positive effects of comics on patients. In an excerpt of their presentation, they claimed that:

The comics may be said to offer the same type of mental catharsis to [their] readers that Aristotle claimed was an attribute of the drama. [...] Well balanced children are not upset by even the more horrible scenes in the comics, as long as the reason for the threat of torture is clear and the issues are well stated. (547)

In the light of their research, they also concluded that comics were “the folklore of the times, spontaneously given to and received by children, serving at the same time as a means of helping them solve the individual and sociological problems appropriate to their own lives” (550). Unsurprisingly, however, Bender's and Lourie's voices remained practically unheard. On 8 May 1940, the *News* published an article by Sterling North with the title “A National Disgrace (And a Challenge to American Parents)”. The paper recited:

Virtually every child in America is reading color “comic” magazines – a poisonous mushroom growth of the last two years. Ten million copies of these sex-horror serials are sold every month. One million dollars are taken from the pockets of America's children in exchange for graphic insanity. The bulk of these lurid publications depend for their appeal upon mayhem, murder, torture and abduction – often with a child as the

victim. Superman heroics, voluptuous females in scanty attire, blazing machine guns, hooded “justice” and cheap political propaganda were to be found on almost every page. The old dime novels in which an occasional redskin bit the dust were classic literature compared to the sadistic drivel pouring from the presses today. Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed – a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems – the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder makes the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the “comic” magazines. But, of course, the children must be furnished a good substitute. And never before in the history of book publishing have there been so many fine new books for children. The shame lies largely with the parents who don't know and don't care what children are reading. It lies with unimaginative teachers who force stupid, dull twaddle down eager young throats, and, of course, it lies with the completely immoral publishers of the “comics” – guilty of cultural slaughter of the innocents. But the antidote to the “comic” magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore. The parent who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence. (3)

North stigmatised comics as a “poisonous mushroom”, a “sadistic drivel pouring from the presses”, “pulp-paper nightmares”, while paradoxically portraying children either as a “ferocious generation” or as innocent victims of a “cultural slaughter”. Either way, they did not read comics by choice: according to North's conspiracy theory, money was forcibly taken from their pockets only to receive in exchange graphic insanity and, possibly, to even lose the sense of colour. Even the idea of comics' cheap printing betrayed a bias against “low-budget” modes of expression offering affordable products to lower classes and children. Moreover, the dichotomy between comics as poison and traditional books as an antidote relies on the utterly inconsistent assumption that the two media were mutually exclusive. The same child could apparently not read both comics and books. And parents had to take a stance: did they want to tarnish their image of good parents with an act of criminal negligence or were they willing to acquire the antidote?

North's plea did not go unnoticed and by 1941, about forty newspapers had reprinted “A National Disgrace” in full or in part. While sales kept increasing to up to 15 million copies a month in 1943 – only considering superheroes adventures (Sabin, 1993: 146) – in the same year the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association started questioning the excess of violence in a product within everyone's reach, above all naive readers such as children. However, one of North's allegations against comics, i.e. being “cheap political propaganda”, ironically sounded true (though not in the way he intended): after the disruption of the Second World War, like all the other entertainment arts from movies to the radio, comics became an instrument of wartime. Real-life villains such as Mussolini, Hitler

or Tojo appeared in comic pages. Superheroes fought for their country against real dangers and served as morale-boosters for both the troops, who received them together with other supplies, and the young readers who remained in the homeland. Some comics, particularly infused with patriotism, became the epitome of American values and strength, such as CC Beck and Bill Parker's *Capitan Marvel* (1940); Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's *Capitan America* (1941) and William Moulton Marston and Harry G. Peters's *Wonder Woman* (1941). But after Pearl Harbor, almost every superhero stopped fighting traditional crime to focus on saboteurs, spies, scientists working for the Axis, even though, as Hajdu pointed out, editors cleverly avoided the issue of why superheroes failed to use their powers to end the war in a few panels (55). Superheroes also spoke directly to their readers, by exhorting them to make their contribution to the war by collecting scrap metal and glass from the neighbourhoods. Moreover, all the titles of National and All-American Comics included a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr., asking readers to buy a ten-cent War Savings Stamp every week "to pay for part of a gun, plane or ship which your fathers, brothers or uncles are using for the defense of our country" (ibid.).

It should be noted, however, that at this stage comics were not directly involved in politics. They did not openly campaign for either conservative or liberal positions, something that several underground artists would subsequently lament. This commitment to the WWII-cause was rather a symptom of the impossibility to keep reality and fantasy completely separated. Real life, in all its facets, had begun to intertwine with storylines more and more explicitly – and kept doing it for long. And since comics were influenced by what was happening in the real world, and it evidently could not be otherwise, they did include references to, and were contingent on, the political context. Emblematic is the case of Superman, who was first presented as a "champion of the oppressed", inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, but subsequently switched to a more conservative position of "fantasy guardian of world order" during the Cold War (Sabin, 1996: 61). It is undeniable that the idea of a medium reflecting the children's state of innocence ultimately proved a mere utopia.

When the Second World War ended, patriotism lost some of its appeal and the popularity of superhero comics severely diminished. Other genres derived from pulp fiction (especially western, crime, science fiction, detective stories) were attracting more and more readers and, once again, the industry started to focus on an older audience who was obviously more interested in real-world troubles, besides appreciating pulp narratives. According to

Sabin (1993:147), a 1950 survey in a town of Ohio showed that adult over 20 years of age represented 54 per cent of the total number of readers and argued that this could be extended to a national level, thus proving that comics were more appealing to adults than to kids. In particular, in 1942 editor Lev Gleason hired Charles Biro to publish comics based on the pulp tradition of “true” crime stories – *Actual Detective Stories* (1937-43), *Actual Detective Stories of Women in Crime* (1937-43), *Certified Detective Cases* (1940-47), *Confidential Detective Cases* (1942-76), *Crime Detective* (1938-76), *Crime Confessions* (1939-57), *Front Page Detective* (1936-95), *Real Detective* (1931-85), *Real Police Stories* (1934-55), *Spicy Detective Stories* (1934-42), *True Detective* (1941-95), *True Detective Mysteries* (1924-95), *True Gang Stories* (1941-42), *Uncensored Detective* (1942-53)– targeting young adults rather than children. To give an idea of Biro’s climb to success, the first issues of the *Crime Does Not Pay* sold about 200,000 copies. By 1947, Hajdu (87) reported that every issue was selling around a million copies, each one of them being passed to another six to ten readers. Charles Biro himself inserted a banner across the top of every issue claiming: “More than 5,000,000 Readers Monthly”.

Since the first Sunday funnies, the protagonists of comic pages had often been mischief- makers, usually children going against adult authorities. However, by 1940s rascals and troublemakers had been downgraded to secondary characters, while crime fighters, no longer object of ridicule, had become the new protagonists. Inspired by the fascination with gangsterism started during the Prohibitionist era, Biro’s effective insight was the choice to subvert this trend by focusing on lawbreakers and their crimes, rather than on crime-fighters:

Gambling, alcohol, sex, shooting, brawling, knifing – Charles Biro packed in nearly everything that mid-century America considered sinful except jazz and homosexuality, although we can guess what kind of music would have been playing in that bar, and what were those two men doing on the balcony, anyway? All that was missing, from Biro’s first cover onward through the comic’s first several years, was restraint. (Hajdu, 64)

Among Biro’s requisites was literal realism, which inextricably entailed the graphic depiction of violence, gunplay, sadism and blood. He also paid close attention to the characterization of criminals, though he ultimately portrayed them as pathologically corrupt and was not interested in providing sociologically accurate representation of the reasons behind criminal acts: Biro was a man of his time and, according to a widespread Manichean vision of good and evil, crime was a simple matter of evil, which the author wanted to portray it with graphic sophistication. “Invulnerable in the panels of the comic books, superheroes succumbed to common criminals on the newsstands” (ibid.) and by the late 1940s, dozens of costumed characters, including Captain America, the Flash, the Green Lantern and the

Human Torch, were all discontinued by publishers who shifted their focus on the new trend, crime. Crime had represented about three per cent of all comics in 1946; nine per cent in 1947; fourteen per cent in 1948. Thirty new crime titles appeared in 1948 alone: *All-True Crime Cases*, *Authentic Police Cases*, *Crimes By Women*, *Crime Detective*, *Crime Exposed*, *Crime Must Pay the Penalty*, *Crime Reporter*, *Criminals on the Run*, *Famous Crimes*, *Gang Busters*, *Guns Against Gangsters*, *Justice*, *Justice Traps the Guilty*, *Law Against Crime*, *Lawbreakers Always Lose*, *Manhunt*, *Murder Incorporated*, *Official True Crime Cases*, *Pay-Off: True Crime Cases*, *Real Clue Crime Stories*, *True Crime Comics*, *Wanted*.

This boom led to a recrudescence of the criticism against the medium. However, the industry was not undermined by the emerging campaigns against crime comics. On the contrary, this contributed to the creation of an aura of allure around them. Unwittingly, step by step, “crime comics were becoming criminal” (Hajdu 103): the debate over comic books went from the back of the newspaper to the front, from book reviews to religion columns, reaching women's clubs, parent-teacher associations, and other civic groups, charging comics of being “crude, illiterate, badly printed, salacious, addictive, stunting, fascist, Communist, conducive to wrongdoing of all sorts” (ibid.). For their part, many comic artists and writers were completely focused on their frenzied work and had little awareness of the controversy emerging around them. This is at the least the opinion of many professionals, including the world-famous author Will Eisner: “We were too busy to do our own work. [...] We lived in a bubble, and lived, breathed, and ate comic books. The world could blow up outside the studio, and the average comic-book man wouldn't notice. As a matter of fact, that's exactly what was starting to happen, and none of us was looking out the window to see it” (ibid.).

Among the religious groups, the Catholic one unsurprisingly reacted to the boom of comics with a pragmatic and apparently twofold attitude, the same which has often accounted for the Church's wavering policies with respect to controversial issues. Traditionally relying on inspirational imagery to reach the poor and illiterate as well as the educated, in accordance with a cross-classist pedagogical approach, the Catholic Church was among the first cultural institutions which recognized the comic book's effectiveness in appealing to a broad audience. Therefore, it promptly exploited the new medium and by the 1940s many parishes purchased and distributed through their Sunday schools the volumes of a series of educational comics, *Picture Stories from the Bible*, created by M.C. Gaines, the former salesman for Eastern Color Printing who had already contributed to the publication of *Famous Funnies* (and hence laid claim to inventing the comic book). Started in 1942 and

published in *Old Testament* and *New Testament* editions, the series represented heroic accounts such as “Jonah and the Whale,” “The Boy Who Heard the Voice of God,” “The Story of Jesus,” “Paul’s Four Journeys” in a style tailored to attract young readers. The first issues were published by National/All-American, which was ultimately keener to support superheroes comics rather than educational one. For this reason, Gaines decided to create his own company: Educational Comics, or EC.

The case of Gaines can be seen as an utterly emblematic example of the twisted relationship between the Catholic Church and the comics industry: indeed, while Gaines was still one of the executives of All-American Comics, one the company’s publications, *Sensation Comics*, the title that featured *Wonder Woman*, was included in the list of forbidden books issued by the Church’s National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL). The Catholic Church founded the NODL in February 1939, in the wake of the successful pro-censorship campaign promoted by the Catholic Legion of Decency against motion pictures, which pressured the Hollywood studios to adhere to the rigidly puritanical content standards of the Hays Office, the Hollywood self-censorship body. The idea of a ‘black list’ of pernicious readings grounded upon mid-sixteenth century’s *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. According to the 1917 revised version of the code of canon law, the Vatican specified that bishops on the diocesan level, in addition to the pope, had the authority to impose bans on books and other works depicting obscenity, divorce, atheism, paganism, heresy, or non- Catholic editions of the Bible. On this basis, once a month, after an evaluation of the objectionable publications, NODL issued its roster of Publications Disapproved for Youth. NODL’s volunteers patrolled places of distributions of comics and other supposedly harmful publications, such as newsstands and drugstores and pressured for the withdrawal of such publications from the market.

Superheroes such as Wonder Woman and Superman, rather than criminals, were the main objects of the Catholic Church’s early campaign against comics, pursued through incendiary articles and pamphlets conflating paganism with fascism. In the paper “What’s Wrong with the ‘Comics?’” published in the February 1943 issue of *Catholic World*, Rev. Thomas F. Doyle accused comics of paganism and fascism: their supernaturalism, their “untold power” to “defy natural laws”, superheroes professed themselves as false pagan gods with a fascist nature:

In a vulgar way, [Superman] seems to personify the primitive religion expounded by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. "Man alone is and must be our God," says Zarathustra, very much in the style of a Nazi pamphleteer. Like it or not, there are plenty of American children who know more about the man-wonder Superman than they do about Christ or any of the great characters of the Bible.

This idea is shared in another 1944 pamphlet published by the Catechetical Guild with the title *The Case against the Comics* by Gabriel Lynn. The pamphlet warned parents about the damage caused to children by "cancerous growth" of comics failing "to meet the standard of good recreational reading" (back cover), i.e., comic books in which "violence is glorified" (4), those representing a "menace to chastity" (5), and above all those depicting heroes going against "the American way" (7). According to Lynn, "a large number of the comic books depict the heroic adventures of one or more characters whose philosophy may only be described as un-American and in a few instances, anarchistic. The vigilante spirit is rife in the comics: the gestapo method is glorified" (ibid.). And this, Lynn argued, "constitutes a threat to the perpetuation of American liberties and represents a step toward the type of oppression of which Adolf Hitler stands as a current symbol" (7-8).

Again, the article entitled "Parents Must Control the Comics", published in *St. Anthony Messenger* in May 1944 by Rev. Robert E. Southard, a Jesuit priest and professor at Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri, condemned the "Anti-American, dictator propaganda in the glorification of these wrong-righting supermen" (4). America was now dramatically "ready for a Hitler" and, he lamented, "we would not now have a war on our hands" if "German youth" had not been similarly "persuaded that [Hitler] was a superman with a mission to right the wrong of the German state . . . the Hitler way" (ibid.). The fact that Superman's creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, were the children of Jewish immigrants and that even the hero's Kryptonian birth name, "Kal-el", has a Hebrew meaning – the "-el" suffix is used to denote Elohim – makes this claim pretty puzzling. In the subheading to the article, Southard wrote that "[e]very month 25,000,000 comic books are published in this country. Many portray crime, violence, gun-play, sex, and are largely responsible for juvenile delinquency" (ibid.). According to Hajdu, Southard's paper represented a major turning point in the evolution of the crusade against comics, primarily because the charge did not involve faith alone, but also stroke a correlation between comic books and juvenile delinquency by taking "[c]atholic inquiry into comics from the realm of their nature (moral and political) into that of their effects (individual and social)" and venturing "from the Church's home terrain of sin onto the state territory of crime" (66).

Ironically enough, Catholic criticism degenerated in a form of cultural erasure and censure which was well-known during the Nazi regime. Catholic Schools started to organize comic-book protests with ceremonial fires in 1945. In Binghamton, N.Y., Students of St. Patrick's parochial school collected and burned 2,000 comic books and, on this very account, according to Syracuse's *Catholic Sun*, they deserved "national recognition". Similarly, at Saints Peter and Paul elementary School in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, nuns held a competition among students to gather the highest number of comics included in Rev. Robert E. Southard's list, raffling the title of the king and queen of the subsequent bonfire that consumed 1,567 comic books. After these episodes, on 26 October 1948, in the town of Spencer, West Virginia, on the wake of a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)'s campaign against the evil effect of comics on children's mind, elementary School students organised a door-to-door collection of comic books which resulted in a bonfire in the public-school yard. Spencer's case reached mass cover in *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and dozens of other papers around the country. Quoting the *Charleston Daily Mail*, Hajdu maintained that the news that, just three years after the Second World War and the bonfires of books spreading "un-German ideas", American citizens were burning books was alarming and contrary to the democratic ideals America, allegedly, wanted to embody (118). As stated in the *Charleston Daily Mail*:

The burning of books is too recent in our memories. The Nazis burned them. They went on from there and, in one way or another, burned the authors too. It was the purge by fire of those elements which the Nazi party could not tolerate. This purge has no place in a democratic educational system. It is not that books as books are sacred. It is just that the idea of burning them is profane. It is a resort to witchcraft when the need is for education, the use of fire when enlightenment [sic] is called for. Perhaps the point can be clarified by asking how many of the boys and girls who burned 2,000 "bad" books have read 2,000 good ones? Of the two possible tasks, the second deserves priority.

Notwithstanding, the idea of fighting comic books with fire grew in popularity, particularly in Catholic parishes. Hajdu commented the bonfires of the late 1940s as "a multilayered demonstration of the emerging generation's divided loyalties and developing sense of cultural identity" (120) and not just a mere act of puppet-mastery of reactionary adults exploiting children.

On 29 March 1948, *Time* magazine published an article entitled "Puddles of Blood" which reported on a recent symposium on "The Psychopathology of Comic Books", conducted in New York City under the auspices of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy. The thesis proposed by the head of the Association, the psychiatrist Fredric

Wertham, was that comics were shown to contain an excess of violence which was escalating in parallel to the alarming increase in juvenile delinquency. Wertham's opinion was clear: "[c]omic books not only inspire evil but suggest a form for the evil to take" (67). He was not the first anti-comics crusader, but he was the first man of science proposing a thesis not based on either aesthetics or faith, but on his own clinical experience. He was collecting evidence proving that comic books caused juvenile delinquency, though his work cited one instance only of a child imitating a behaviour seen in comics.

The point here is that the correlation between comics and the so-called juvenile delinquency was becoming more and more ingrained in the public conscience and had to be framed within the general debate about the influence of mass media which began in the mid-1940s and, as it will be explored in the next pages, boomed during the 1950s. However, in general, as pointed out by historian James Gilbert (1988: 25), "juvenile delinquency has been a label applied to youthful misbehavior since the beginning of the twentieth century". Minor charges against comics' depiction of and instigation to juvenile misconduct dated back to the ephemeral controversy over Sunday newspaper strips raised in a handful of newspapers prior to the First World War. Afterwards, in 1940, Sterling North simply recovered that idea when he raised the spectre of "a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one." However, according to Gilbert, the meaning of juvenile delinquency, during World War II and the post-war years, came to "symbolize a series of fears and expectations about the impact of war on children through rapid social disorientation and change" (ibid.). Evidence suggested that youth criminality had increased significantly since December 1941 but, Gilbert argued, this increase was more a forecast anticipated by supposedly experts in juvenile issues, than the result of proper investigations. The experts' warnings generated public expectations of a crime wave and the topic became a talking point soon after Pearl Harbour: newspapers and magazines across the whole country were reporting on the effects of war on the traditional family unit. Neglected, fatherless children, often growing up with absentee working mothers, were more prone to develop disreputable behaviours.

The label 'juvenile delinquency' became the umbrella term to define all deviations from the conventions of proper society, from language and style to reading matter. In particular, the growing concern over the influence of media, including comics, in the spread of these deviations certainly developed almost simultaneously with the eruption of tensions in the political sphere. During the late 1940s, the cold war took a new turn and the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union worsened considerably when the latter

blockaded West Berlin in Germany on 24 June 1948, generating the US eleven-month airlift of food and supplies. In the same year, civil groups wrote letters and pressed charges to Police and Local Government law enforcement officers, who began taking vigorous action against comic books. In April 1948, Detroit was the first city to ban comic books which violated the state law prohibiting the sale of publications portraying crime, violent and obscene material. On 23 September 1948, the County of Los Angeles outlawed the sale of crime comics to minors, punishable by 500 dollars fines or up to six months in jail. In the months to follow, more than fifty municipalities, including several of the most populous in the United States, developed initiatives to curb the sale of comics and, by 1949, laws to regulate comic book sales were pending in fourteen states. In particular, in New York State a bill proposed by the Republican Benjamin F. Feinberg, directly targeted comic books authors (not just their sellers) and contents by enacting a form of *a priori* censorship: a committee established by the State Department of Education would have had the authority to approve or reject the content of comics prior to their distribution, thus posing a direct threat to the industry and its freedom. The bill passed the State Senate but was ultimately blocked by Thomas E. Dewey, the Republican governor of New York, who declared it too vague. In an editorial of 25 February 1949, the *New York Times* reacted to the bill by claiming:

It is a dangerous invasion of freedom of the press, with which all freedoms are joined, to set aside for governmental pre-censorship one form of publication. [...] We think the comic books have, on the whole, had an injurious effect on children and in various ways. But in time, and before they have done too much harm to morals or taste, public opinion will succeed in making the reforms needed. To wait for that to happen is far less dangerous than to abridge freedom of the right to publish. (22)

On 19 March, the *Nation* echoed:

We would be the first to acknowledge that a generation of Americans has been driven several degrees toward illiteracy by the “comic” book. And it is appalling that 60,000,000 comic books are sold in this country every month. This being granted, however, we must put ourselves on record against the current nationwide drive to liquidate the comic book through censorship. Comic books are an opening wedge. If they can be “purified” – that is, controlled – newspapers, periodicals, books, films, and everything else will follow.

What does not go unnoticed is that both newspapers did not question the pernicious effects of comics in the first place, an idea which at this stage was entrenched in the public opinion’s mind. They rather raised objections as to the possibility of establishing a form of state-control capable of obstructing the right to publish *a priori*. Their fear presumably was

that such a law would have a dangerous precedent and severely jeopardised the freedom of speech of all media.

In 1949, in Canada, a bill passed amending the country's penal law to provide for a maximum sentence of two-year imprisonment for the publication and distribution of crime-related materials potentially corrupting young audiences. The comics industry could not turn a blind eye on these provisions. Under the siege of sensationalist newspaper headlines, legislation, public burnings, sermons and speeches in town halls and schools, publishers had to rethink their position and somehow take action, often a pre-emptive one. In this regard, Hajdu highlighted how "the history of censorship in twentieth-century America is largely a story of self-regulation in the name of self-preservation – voluntary restraint enacted on the assumption that governmental restriction would be worse" (127). And this response concerned comics as well as the film industry, defined "the comic-book business's older cousin" (ibid.), which on occasion had to deal with similar controversies.

As briefly mentioned in the previous pages, in 1915, in the *Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* case, the Supreme Court upheld the legitimacy of an Ohio state film-censorship body and determined that motion pictures were not considered as art but as commercial products, and thus were not covered by the First Amendment. In order to stop the proliferation of city and state censorship boards and avoid federal provisions, the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry was formed in 1916 (then renamed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America in 1922, and Motion Picture Association of America in 1945). The association proposed to its members the guidelines to follow in order to regulate movie content by introducing its own Motion Picture Production Code in 1930, also known as Hays Code, after Will H. Hays, the president of the Association who was appointed to the implementation and enforcement of the Code. Hays Code was the model for the Comics Code created by a small group of comic-book publishers and distributors forming part of the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers established in 1948, which included *Crime Does Not Pay's* publisher Lev Gleason and Bill Gaines of EC among others. The organization set a code of minimum editorial standards arranged in six principles (Gabilliet and Nguyen, 2010):

- Sexy wanton comics should not be published. No drawing should show a female indecently or unduly exposed, and in no event more nude than in a bathing suit commonly worn in the U.S.A.

- Crime should not be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy against law and justice or to inspire others with the desire for imitation. No comics shall show the details and methods of a crime committed by a youth. Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions should not be portrayed as stupid or ineffective, or represented in such a way as to weaken respect for established authority.
- No scenes of sadistic torture should be shown.
- Vulgar and obscene language should never be used. Slang should be kept to a minimum and used only when essential to the story.
- Divorce should not be treated humorously or represented as glamorous or alluring.
- Ridicule of or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible. (313)

The code, however, was a complete failure since it lacked standards for its use (the ACMP soon abandoned its original plan to screen pages before publication) and participation. In point of fact, it was ignored by both large and small publishers, which were not part of ACMP and held their own editorial guidelines. The producers of the most violent crime comics (e.g., Fox and Harvey) as well as the publishers of some of the most popular titles, such as National/DC (*Superman*, *Batman*), Timely/Atlas/Marvel (*Captain America*), Fawcett (*Captain Marvel*), MLJ Comics (*Archie*) and Gilberton (*Classics Illustrated*), all disregarded the code, and so did even one of its founding member, EC Comics, which abandoned the association. Nonetheless, several comic publishers toned down their materials or added labels such as “Not Intended for Children” and “For Adults Only” on their covers. In terms of contents, several criminal titles had disappeared since 1948 and, by 1950, even *Crime Does Not Pay* had turned to an almost bloodless magazine, focusing on the consequences of criminal acts rather than glamorising the lives of perpetrators. Publishers, rapidly shifting from a profitable trade to another, started understanding that comics could be a domain no longer restricted to young males. This led to the boom of romance comics as one of the most popular genre on the newsstands. Suffice it to think that in 1947 Crestwood's *Young Romance* was the only love-story comic book, whereas in 1950 up to 148 romance titles were sold by 28 different publishing houses.

While the arrests of minors started to level off after the war, in 1950, Estes Kefauver, a first-term senator from Tennessee, announced the creation of the United States Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce, whose hearings were broadcasted by television and radio. With the assistance of psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, Kefauver Committee's agenda included a report on the allegations of a relationship between comic books and juvenile delinquency. Even though the report could not make a strong case

against comic books, Amy Kiste Nyberg (1998: 54-55) pinpointed that this was the starting point of the subsequent investigation of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency which, as the next subchapter will explore, turned its attention to the mass media.

1.3. Comics Scare: (Self-)Censorship and Hysteria

When interviewed in a 1949 article by the Catholic weekly *The Commonweal*, entitled “How the Comic Book Started – and How the Originator Looks on It Now”, Harry Wildenberg, one of the two printing salesmen for Eastern Color (together with M.C. Gaines) who had both laid claim to inventing the comic book, claimed that he regretted his invention and wished he could see the whole comic-book medium abolished. He was in favour of burnings and law ordinances against comics: “I don't feel proud that I started the comic books. If I had an inkling of the harm they would do, I would never have gone through with the idea. I'm glad parents and educators are waking up to the menace of the comic books” and added that, in his view, “[t]he primary appeal of comics to the juvenile mind lies in their goriness and violence. The more violent the greater their fascination for the young” (quoted in Hajdu 143). This hint was taken verbatim by the son of his former colleague and rival, M.C. Gaines, William “Bill” Gaines, who inherited the family business after the death of the father in 1949.

After changing the name of the company from Educational Comics to Entertaining Comics, Bill Gaines and his collaborator, editor and artist Al Feldstein started what they called “A New Trend in Comic Books”. Concretely, in 1950, they introduced two titles, *The Crypt of Terror* (renamed *Tales from the Crypt*) and *The Vault of Horror*, and Gaines announced to be the first publisher in the United States to print horror comics. In point of fact, prior to the advent of EC comics, other comic books were entirely devoted to horror, such as *Spook Comics* (published since 1946) and *Eerie Comics* (since 1947). By fall 1949, even Timely/Atlas/Marvel was replacing superhero titles with horror-oriented books such as *Amazing Mysteries*. Thus, EC publishers were not the first to work on horror comics, but they undoubtedly came to be the industry's benchmark for the genre. EC comics were developed as anthologies, their names were interchangeable (readers recognised the line by the logo), and, apart from the narrators (Crypt- Keeper, the Vault-Keeper, and the Old Witch), there were no recurring characters. The strong points of this “New Trend” were a fresh and exuberant art, the high quality of each storyline and, above all, the will to shock the audience and overturn comic conventions. EC's break-through resulted from the strength in

undermining the intimate, reassuring atmosphere of the traditional family and modern America's ideal life, by turning it into domestic terror. In an interview collected by Hajdu (180), Kamen, one of EC authors, declared:

I would dress the women well in elegant clothes, and the men would have beautifully tailored suits, and they would be living in a nice house somewhere, and they would go out for a nice walk, and she would push him in front of a truck. There were no happy couples, except for the girl and the truck driver in the end, and something terrible would happen to them, probably. There was no such thing as a happy household in EC.

Indeed, even more than the representation of humans devoured by a giant alien cockroach or baseball games played with human body parts, what was truly subversive in EC's productions was that in their stories Good did not necessarily triumph over Evil – quite the opposite.

Soon after the launch of *The Crypt of Terror* and *The Vault of Horror*, EC introduced two science-fiction oriented titles: *Weird Science* (formerly entitled *Saddle Romances*), and *Weird Fantasy* (formerly *A Moon. A Girl. A Romance*) and a crime drama *Crime Suspense Stories* (and its 1952 follow-up, *Shock Suspense Stories*). By the end of 1950, a third EC horror title, *The Haunt of Fear* (formerly *Gun-fighter*) was replaced with a war comic, *Two-Fisted Tales*, edited by Harvey Kurtzman. Kurtzman worked for EC since 1949, when he had quit writing a page-filler cartoon called *Hey Look and Sheldon* for Timely. Bill Gaines assigned him the editorship of *Two-Fisted Tales* and its follow-up, *Frontline Combat*, which had been originally conceived as a comic book about adventurers, but became a war comic after American forces landed in Korea, in June 1950. The stories reflected Kurtzman's antimilitarism, in that war was never glamorized, nor was the fate of soldiers ever romanticized. The main stylistic feature of Kurtzman's art was his straight realism. When Gaines proposed him to edit a new comic book, Kurtzman decided to devote EC's new title, *Mad*, to humour. *Mad* can be considered a cultural institution and a milestone, certainly EC's most successful publication and a main reference for all underground comix authors. The brilliant idea behind *Mad* was to elevate humour from mere juvenilia to a product for young adults. Its first issue, subtitled "Humour in a Jugular Vein", *Mad* presented itself as a rude, cruel parody of every aspect of society, including the very comic industry. The first issues of *Mad* initially were a loss in terms of sales and it was only with the fourth issue that its sales picked up and it became the "forum to mock all of American culture" (Hajdu, 215), which shaped the underground authors' keen taste on needle-sharp satire.

Gaines also adopted an unusual approach within the comics industry because he raised the salary to 25 dollars per page (against the industry norm of 15-20 dollars per page) and encouraged rather than suffocate the artists' creativity: comics authors were free to experiment, to use their own styles, rather than forced to adapt their work to given editorial stylistic standards. And above all, they were allowed to sign their works with no anonymity requirement. This new way to conceive comic art paid: by the end of 1952, romance was still a popular genre, but horror comics came to be nearly one-third of all the comics published. More than a dozen publishers shifted to the production of about 150 horror-oriented titles (*Chamber of Chills*, *Witches Tales*, *Tomb of Terror*, *Out of the Night*, *Weird Thrillers*, *Nightmare*) and, since the debate over comics had dwindled, their works grew ever more gruesome and lurid. Within a year of its first issue, *Mad* had spawned no fewer than six imitations from other publishers: *Flip* (Harvey); *Madhouse* and *Bughouse* (Ajax/Farrell); *Crazy*, *Wild* and *Riot* (Atlas); *Eb!* and *From Here to Insanity* (Charlton); *Get Lost* (Mike Ross); *Nuts!* (Premier); *Unsane!* (Star); *Whack* (St. John). EC published another humour comic book, *Panic*, which appeared on the newsstands in December 1953. Due to the contents of one of its stories, "The Night Before Christmas," the Governor's Council of Massachusetts called for a ban of the comic within the state on the grounds that its desecrating depiction of Christmas.

The debate over comics soon reawakened, with EC's "New Trend" providing rich new sources of fuel for complaint and the issue of juvenile delinquency coming alive again after the start of the war in Korea. In this regard, Gilbert (1988) described the American antagonism to mass media as a wavering phenomenon both old and new, with continual stops and goes: it was old because it rested on a history of controversy practically as ancient as the misbehaviour of youth. It was new because the media in the 1950s, and their growing, often alarming impact on American society, represented something almost revolutionary in the history and shaping of mass culture. Gilbert also used the idea of "episodic notion" (4) to define this phobia concerning the detrimental effects of media on youth which appears, fades and reappears throughout American history and relies on the assumption that any change in the cultural environment, and all the more so any advent of new forms of popular culture possibly challenging the traditional, old-fashioned structures and assumptions of the social order, accounted for misbehaviour and delinquency. In his view, "since the control of youth is, even in the best of times, problematic, and since the cultural history of the United States is filled with dramatic changes in the content and form of popular culture, the seduction of the innocent by culture is a primary example of an episodic notion" (ibid.).

Likewise, according to John Springhall (1998:3), since the nineteenth century, the “ideologues of cultural standards” labelled as “pernicious”, “sensational” or “wickedly corrupting” all the antecedents of mass culture. In this sense, the concept of episodic notion may effectively describe even the paranoia concerning comics which, after a brief truce, boomed during the 1950s. In one of the most thought-provoking passages of his historical account on comics, Hajdu provided an insightful definition of what may be called “Comics Scare”:

The panic over comic books falls somewhere between the Red Scare and the frenzy over UFO sightings among the pathologies of postwar America. Like Communism, as it looked to much of America during the late 1940s, comics were an old problem that seemed changed, darkened, growing out of control. Like flying saucers, at the same time, comics were wild stuff with the garish aura of pulp fantasy. Comic books were a peril from within, however, rather than one from a foreign country or another planet. The line dividing the comics' advocates and opponents was generational, rather than geographic. While many of the actions to curtail comics were attempts to protect the young, they were also efforts to protect the culture at large from the young. Encoded in much of the ranting about comic books and juvenile delinquency were fears not only of what comics readers might become, but of what they already were – that is, a generation of people developing their own interests and tastes, along with a determination to indulge them. (112)

We have seen how, after World War II, adolescent behaviour changed abruptly as for clothes and appearance, sexual and marital behaviour, work habits, consumption, and, above all, in their attitudes towards the adult world. Gilbert stated that adolescents were creating their own world characterised by a premature adulthood if compared to their previous status, a sort of “ambiguous adult/child status” (23) which made them be perceived dangerously ‘out of control’: “[a] great many of them worked at jobs that financed their new consumer life-styles; more drove cars, more married early, more appeared to initiate sexual relations at an early age. They looked and acted differently. Often, they seemed remarkably hostile or even criminally inclined” (ibid: 17). In other words, according to conservatives, they were not so much developing new forms of autonomy, as they primarily “looked and behaved like juvenile delinquents” (ibid). And yet, social changes did not regard young people only. It goes without saying that the whole society was changing. From 1940 to 1943, the percentage of working women rose by a third, but for children it reached up to 300 per cent. From slightly less than a million in 1940, 3 million adolescents aged 14 to 17 joined the US labour force during the summer of 1942. For the first forty years of the twentieth century, employment of children and adolescents had declined with compulsory high school attendance. However, World War II unsurprisingly reversed this trend and children began to

work while attending school. This phenomenon, however, did not stop after the war and by the mid-1950s about half the high-school-age population joined the labour force for some time during the year, thus granting teenagers a certain economic independence and eventually influencing their consumption behaviours. Being confronted with an increasing generational gap, most parents, and adults in general, explained this change in two ways. On the one hand, comprehensive schools were associated to the spread of lower-class values. Statistics show that in 1930 about 50 per cent of working-class students attended high school, while by the early 1960s, this figure was estimated to be over 90 per cent. A report from the Midcentury White House Conference on Children observed that: “There arises the possibility that the standards of the lowest class can through the children reach some of the boys and girls of other social groups” (7). According to Gilbert, “a more commonplace prejudice branded youth culture as lower class in origin and delinquent in effect” (18). On the other hand, mass culture was blamed for spreading uncontrolled and often pernicious changes through society, especially among youngsters, who adopted their own codes, including new words, fashions, and customs inspired by comic books, radio, films, and television. This necessarily caused a breakdown in generational communication – as it was presumably meant to – as well as an increase in the fear of not being able to control this mass of young adults in the old-fashioned, authoritative way. The idea of new media standing between children and parents explained why the latter could no longer impress their value systems and was thus identified as the cause of family disputes. Gilbert recognised that, to some degree, adults were right to perceive a barrier cutting them out of the youth world – indeed, that was the intent. As the next Chapter will highlight in reference to subcultures, new fashion and costumes were the means used to erect that barrier, walling off “a secret and potentially antagonistic area of American culture” (15).

From a sociological perspective, other considerations are necessary here. Such historians as Howard Zinn (2005), Corey Robin (2004) and Bruno Cartosio (2010) highlighted how, throughout their history, the United States constantly required an enemy, even a phantasmal one, a collective projection of an ‘external’ force – or at least perceived to be from the outside – to blame for present concerns. In this specific case, it has been discussed how the idea that comics, and new media in general, may have played a crucial role in the burst of juvenile violence was a leitmotif in Western conservative culture throughout the twentieth century. However, the suspicion concerning new media in general turned into hysteria when, not too long after the Palmer Raids and his paranoid and xenophobe

patriotism, the second Red Scare during McCarthyism (1950-54)¹⁰ adjoined political paranoia with moralism and even bigotry. During the second Scare, named after Wisconsin's Senator Joseph McCarthy, mass media were besieged and thousands of intellectuals, artists, scientists were incriminated, often with no evidence for the countless informers' spurious claims. Cinema was particularly affected. Many screenwriters, actors, directors, musicians included in the so-called "Hollywood blacklist" were fired, denounced and denied employment on the basis of their alleged membership in or sympathy for the Communist Party. And as it will be reported below, the same happened to comics¹¹.

Thus, after the burst of the war in Korea and, in general, in an era of large-scale geopolitical reordering of the world by the Soviet Communist and American capitalist blocs, it should not surprise that the debate over comics rekindled with zombies and monsters providing rich new sources of fuel for complaint. On the one hand, comics were giving shape and fully exploiting American fears. Soviets' test of their own atomic bomb in 1949 and the fright of brainwashing born with the Korean War were at the forefront of American anxieties, and Chinese military use of the so-called human wave had traumatised US soldiers and created a whole new frightening imagery in people's minds. Comics, in a way, fuelled such imagery, introducing provocative contents in a period in which susceptibility was turning into into paranoia. And in such a time of turmoil, what both the US government and the public opinion needed most was to find a scapegoat, a concrete embodiment of the people's worries. As much as comic readers increasingly appreciated the quality of horror works, comic detractors found the perfect charge which could easily inveigle more people into joining the movement against such pernicious graphic readings. In the interview reported by Hajdu (2009), the cartoonist Howard Post recalled that period in the following terms:

The witch-hunt psychology was starting to spread, and comics were right there in it. McCarthy had the nugget of a good thing, and so did a lot of people criticizing comics, including Wertham - the guys over there [in the Soviet Union] were butchers, and there were comics that were going crazy. There was some nasty stuff out there. But McCarthy was a maniac, and he did nothing but harm, and Wertham was no better. He condemned all of comics in a blanket way, and we all started to feel it. I remember really starting to

¹⁰ The first Red Scare (1919-1920) occurred in the years following World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. As in the case of McCarthyism, it originated from the anxiety about the potential spread of radical ideas and culminated with the so-called Palmer Raids, from the name of their promoter, U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, during which suspected radical leftists, especially anarchists, and trade union militants were captured, arrested and deported from the country.

¹¹ In this respect, Hajdu's Appendix to the volume *Ten-Cent Plague* also included a list of all the authors, inkers, colourists affected by the witch-hunt that shocked the comics industry after 1954.

feel the heat just around the same time as McCarthy. It started to be, if you said you were a comic-book artist, people would look at you funny and move away, [as if] you said you were a Communist.

The association between comics and juvenile delinquency, the paranoid alert to anything which could be just slightly nuanced of anti-Americanism and the all too prompt outrage to any offence to public decency became an automatic, simplistic mechanism: it provided an excellent justification for both religious and secular institutions to counter-attack any social development, regardless of its true nature, by dismissing it as the jeopardy posed to American unity and integrity. Comics Scare reached its peak in 1954, a year Daniels (1971:83) defined as “a troubled one” and as “a time of witch hunts and blacklists, name-calling and backbiting” in which the “comic book took its place among the suspicious characters who were to be exposed to an intensive scrutiny”. According to Daniels, comic art was “under attack by those who viewed it as exclusively a medium for children, and one which would have to be altered to conform to very narrow concepts of mental hygiene”. The scholar explains this controversy in terms of hysteria as well as of intellectual snobbery, which exploded – likely not as a coincidence – during a period of great development of the comic industry both in terms of sales and quality and sophistication of works. In his view, it was also too early for a widespread and organised defence of the medium by communities of fans and writers would stand up against the concrete manifestations of the discontent towards comics.

The principal agents of 1954 disruption were Wertham’s publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* and the creation of the Comics Code Authority (CCA). Daniels (1971:84) added another factor, i.e. the “Mothers of America”. As a result of Wertham’s writing and the code-creators’ austerity, women increased their concerns about what their kids were reading: “[w]hile legislators and philosophers pondered the significance of a new and powerful means of communication, an army of mothers took to the streets. Bridge clubs turned overnight into vigilante committees, pressuring news dealers into suppressing what somebody had found offensive.” Without the effective boycott they enacted, news dealers arguably would never have paid close attention to neither CCA’s seal of approval nor Wertham’s warnings. As for the latter, Wertham¹² is unanimously considered one of the main protagonists of the

¹² Born in Bavaria (Germany) in 1895, Wertham studied medicine in England, Austria, and Germany, and psychology with Emil Kraepelin in Munich. After migrating to the United States in 1922, he took a position as chief resident at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic of Johns Hopkins Hospital. During this period, he also ventured into the courts as a legal witness. In 1932 Wertham moved to New York City to become senior psychiatrist at Bellevue and director of the Clinic of the Court of General Sessions. In 1939 he was appointed director of the

Comics Scare, credited for bringing the debate over the influence of comics and mass media on children to a coffee table. Starting from the title, Wertham willingly established a parallel with Sterling North's 1940 paper which charged comics publishers of being responsible for the "cultural slaughter of the innocents", and with nineteenth-century book "Traps for the Young" (1883) by Anthony Comstock¹³, US moral crusader and founder of the Society for the Suppression of Vice (1873-1950) appointed to the surveillance of public morality and responsible for James Joyce's *Ulysses* ban in the United States until 1934. Interestingly, Hajdu maintained that the title "in its evocation of sexual conquest and youth (the latter referenced explicitly in the subtitle on the cover)" Wertham was establishing a metaphorical connection between comics and paedophilia, "as if to say that comic books represented the intellectual rape of American children" (230). Ironically, he also stressed that such phrase "also had the ring and punch of hard-boiled fiction (*Street of the Lost, Dagger of the Mind*), the adult counterpart to the comic books Wertham saw as destructive to young readers" (ibid.). These premises already suggest the sensationalist style of Wertham's work, which is described in the Publisher's Note as "the result of seven years of scientific investigation", supposedly "documented by facts and cases", proving "the effects that comic books have on the minds and behavior of children who come in contact with them".

Wertham was not the only critic writing on comics but certainly was the first to dedicate to them a whole book and promote it as the outcome of a scientific research. Before him, other writers such as Gilbert Seldes in *The Great Audience* (1950) and Albert E. Kahn in *The Game of Death: Effects of the Cold War on Our Children* (1953) had written chapters devoted to critical analyses of comics and their effects. In particular, Gershon Legman (defined by Hajdu as "a professional eccentric who, under a pseudonym, had previously written a cunnilingus handbook, *Orogenitalism: An Encyclopaedic Outline of Oral Technique in Genital Excitation*) self-published a book entitled *Love and Death: A Study on Censorship* (1949). The

Psychiatric Clinic at Queens Hospital Center, where he remained through the 1940s. As a result of a collaboration among Wertham, the writer Richard Wright, and the clergyman Rev. Shelton Hale Bishop, Harlem's Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic was founded in 1946 to provide low-cost psychotherapy and counselling for black residents (many of whom were recent migrants to the city) and a model for nationwide efforts to address racial disparities in the provision of mental health care in the United States.

¹³ According to the Collins dictionary, "comstockery" is defined as "ruthless suppression of plays, books, etc. alleged to be offensive or dangerous to public morals" and "immoderate censorship on grounds of immorality". The word was coined in an editorial in *The New York Times* in 1895 and popularised by a letter to the *New York Times* by George Bernard Shaw in 1905, after Comstock had alerted the New York City police to the content of Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. In response of Comstock's epithet "Irish smut dealer" referring to the author, Shaw remarked that "Comstockery is the world's standing joke at the expense of the United States. Europe likes to hear of such things. It confirms the deep-seated conviction of the Old World that America is a provincial place, a second-rate country-town civilization after all".

very fact that *Seduction of the Innocent* was anticipated by an article in the November 1953 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* – followed by articles such as “Revolution in Mothballs” and “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” – and not in one of the peer-reviewed publications in his field, such as, for instance, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, has to be taken in serious consideration. Nonetheless, Wertham promoted the book as a scholarly work of scientific research, though his patronising attitude and the very assumption of a pure, innocent childhood corrupted by comic books seem to be rather biased and naïve.

In a way, Wertham was right to note that the very young had access to every type of comic book on the newsstand, and that the “For Adults Only” label was likely to appeal to rather than discourage readers. However, according to Hajdu, “if, to many readers, the book appeared to be a serious treatment of a popular subject, it was elementally a popular treatment of a serious subject”:

Wertham conducted no scientific investigation – that is, no study applying the scientific method; he employed no formal measures to test anything, and he had no control groups. His book provided no endnotes and no corroborative support for his conclusions, which were derived mainly through his psychiatric diagnoses of his patients (and his staff's diagnoses of their patients) at three treatment centers in New York City: the Lafargue Clinic, the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center, and the Mental Hygiene Clinic at Bellevue Hospital. Wertham looked no further, drawing solely upon the cases that came before him and his colleagues, and he extrapolated from their evaluations of those cases the judgment that all comic books – not merely crime or horror or romance comics, but all – were harmful to the development of young minds. (234)

Rather than offering concrete proof of his findings, Wertham's method often relied on the juxtaposition of improper behaviours and comics: for instance, in a case involving a child breaking his sister's arm, he concluded that comic books prompted the outburst of violence. In his account, the young delinquents or disturbed subjects he questioned had all read comics. By blaming their readings, he completely missed to evaluate the social environment and family background which harmed his patients' upbringing and blindly considered the influence of comics as the only potential factor. According to Gilbert:

Wertham's method of analysis, which he often referred to as clinical, was built on impressions gathered from case-by-case studies of delinquency and childhood maladjustment. Although he defended these conclusions as scientific, he declined to exhibit his material in public or release any quantifiable results. Inevitably, other psychologists, sociologists, and social workers faulted his material as impressionistic because it lacked the use of controlled situations or statistical comparisons. (97)

Paradoxically, this method seemed to satisfy his actual target-readers' thirst for ‘scientific knowledge’. And though academically unsound, Wertham's evangelical zeal and

sensationalism “were enough to inspire widespread moral panic” (Sabin, 1996: 68). Indeed, outside of the comic-book business and the scientific community, *Seduction of the Innocent* was ultimately taken seriously and well received by most critics. Sterling North even claimed that it “may well be the most important book of the year.”¹⁴ After he had been incorporated into some comic books as ‘Dr Frederick Froyd’ in Johnny Craig’s “Nightmare! A Psychological Study” (originally from *The Haunt of Fear* 17, 1950) and thoroughly ridiculed, the so-called “Savonarola of comics” (Sabin, 1993: 157) soon saw to it that his opponents stopped laughing. His success was granted by several factors. Most of all, he established a causal relationship between the rise of comics, endowed with the power of mass conditioning of children, and the boom of juvenile delinquency, describing the latter as a virtually new social phenomenon. In his view, crime comics, in particular, had become more brutal, supposedly relying on an extended display of sadism, masochism, masturbatory situations, and homoerotic art. They were aimed at undermining such traditional institutions as family, church, and school and promote racist, fascist, and sexist ideologies by using illustrations which were easily internalised by children. As previously highlighted, considering the freedom of expression these works had reached in that period, they represented the perfect scapegoat. Wertham’s book summarised all the concerns and paranoia regarding the medium, and provided the remedy to this jeopardy, by demanding a federal law preventing the sale and display of all crime comic books to children under fifteen. Indeed, this was precisely the key of *Seduction of the Innocent*’s success according to Gilbert: “Wertham isolated a cause and suggested an immediate solution that could be implemented at the local or national level. The control and censorship of culture was within the imaginable grasp of many of the readers who accepted his analysis.” (93) When reconsidered three decades later and addressed from a sociological perspective, the whole issue appeared to unfold rather clearly: “Wertham offered a simple explanation to delinquency and a rapid solution by tackling two major social changes of that time: the progressive emancipation of youngsters and the generational gap it caused, and the unstoppable developments of mass culture.” (Gilbert, 104)

Moreover, Wertham freed parents from responsibility, exonerating them from every possible culpability for their children’s problems. Today scientific literature on the topic proved the crucial role played by parents in the development of fundamental character traits

¹⁴ This comment was included in the advertising of *Seduction of the Innocent* as a quote from North’s review of the book in the *New York World-Telegram and Sun*. However, the review did not include the phrase, possibly suggesting that North supplied it separately.

at the elementary stage, which are not related to the harmful or a beneficial effect of comics. However, according to the psychiatrist, all children, even the most innocent, may potentially develop a violent or delinquent behaviour and, in the final passage of his book, he describes how he reassured a mother who brought her delinquent son that she could not be responsible for that: "Tell me again," she pleaded; "Tell me again it isn't my fault." And the book ends with his answer "And I did.", emphatically positioned in a separate paragraph. Wertham also reported on the reading disability supposedly caused by comics: in his view, children scanning comic books up and down were likely to develop a malfunction of the eye movement called "linear dyslexia". In addition to preventing the development of reading skills, comics confused the child's fantasy world and the educators, psychiatrists, and psychologists advocating a beneficial effect of comics were apologists "who function under the auspices of the comic-book business (although the public is not let in on the secret)" (17).

The McCarthyist era was Wertham's great time on account of its collective hysteria, which he exploited or, maybe, was victim of. What is undeniable is that his words touched a raw nerve of public concern, since he spoke to already existing fears about the replacement of traditional culture with mass culture, and, in particular, about the effects of new media in the formation of children's minds. Going back to Hajdu's prior definition of Comics Scare as something falling "somewhere between the Red Scare and the frenzy over UFO", Wertham described comics in terms of an invasion of the home by mass culture. He articulated a fear that lay close to the surface of discussion and claimed to provide scientific evidence for what up to that point was mere paranoia. "Parents and upholders of traditional respectability who could not understand – or did not sympathize with – the changing behavior of children and the new youth culture were easy converts to Wertham's comic-book theory" (Gilbert, 108).

It has to be stressed that Wertham found himself in the middle of two ideological postures and was not entirely comfortable on either side. Cultural censorship ideas granted Wertham the support of local church groups, parents and service organisations demanding a broader censorship, something that Wertham himself opposed. Nor he agreed with the principles and tactics of the Catholic Legion of Decency as well as those who blamed communists for the comic 'plague'. On the other hand, his thought could be related to a Marxist critique of modern capitalism for replacing moral relations and free thinking with market relations and mass culture. In the following two excerpts, Gilbert articulated this in-

between state of Wertham's thought and, along similar lines, the inherent paradox of the whole crusade against the comic medium:

In fact, Wertham's personal politics were nothing if not hostile to the conservative agenda of many of his ardent admirers. His dismay over mass culture was anchored in an elitist cultural critique of American (and modern) civilization. He was only tangentially related to the populist outcry against the homogenization of American society and the evaporation of local custom that so animated other media critics. Thus his perplexing fate was to be misunderstood by the public that seemed to support him. (105)

The changes that appeared to flow from comic books, movies, and the mammoth infant of television seemed a cause, not a reflection of the vast changes that gathered speed and energy in the mid-1950s in American society. And surely, they did not recognize in Wertham a popularizer of some of the most radical European criticisms of mass society. Nor did they realize that he was echoing an important position in a vigorous contemporary debate among American intellectuals about the nature of the new society that had emerged from World War II. (108)

During the mid-1950s, in fact, a major segment of the American intellectual community debated a similar proposition, questioning whether mass media had absorbed and destroyed true culture. The concern over the degeneration of civilisation due to mass culture is epitomised by Ray Bradbury's sci-fi novel *Fahrenheit 451*. It is no coincidence that the book was published in 1953, at the height of McCarthyism and during the heated public debate over the role of and threats posed by mass media, as it fictionalized the fear that mass culture would inevitably denature and trivialise traditional culture. Bradbury was also clearly influenced by the memory of Nazi book burnings, Joseph Stalin's Great Purge, in which even writers were arrested and often executed, and the HUAC's hearings against Hollywood screenwriters and directors. In the near-future society portrayed by the novel, firemen are appointed to burn books, symbol of culture and thus of dissident thought. Only mass culture, in the form of television, three-dimensional sex magazines, trade journals and, significantly, comics, survives and is actually sponsored by government who exploits it to control people and make them unable to think – "More cartoons in books. More pictures. The mind drinks less and less" (54). It is in the first place a story about how mass media destroy the interest in literature. It is interesting to note that the protagonist, the fireman called Montag, meets a refugee called Dr. Simmons, a specialist in Ortega y Gasset, who published *The Revolt of the Masses* two years before. Bradbury's novel can be seen as a literary manifestation of the debate about the impact of mass culture on modern society which is somehow reminiscent of Wertham's crusade against media violence and shares some of his concerns and, as Gilbert pointed out: "This debate revolved around the questions that Fredric Wertham had raised in

his book and articles: 'To what extent did modern culture shape society and social behavior? How were culture and behavior linked? How could intellectuals influence a culture largely defined by the designs of corporate producers of mass media? Should intellectuals blame mass culture for their powerlessness?' (110).

Wertham fears were reflected in the philosophy of his German compatriots from the Frankfurt School who had fled to Switzerland in 1933, after Hitler's ascent, and then, in 1934, to Columbia University. The Frankfurt School had been housed at Columbia in the Institute of Social Research since the late 1930s and early 1940s and shared similar concerns regarding overseas mass culture and its supposed distortions of consciousness, summarized in the school's central notion of "critical theory". According to such thinkers as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944), mass culture and the notion of art as a mediated and mechanically reproduced product was against the very essence of art as criticism towards society - rather serving the opposite purpose of reaffirming the *status quo* of a capitalist society driven by free-market rules. Art was no longer appointed to educate people and to question their life conditions, since it was downgraded to superficial amusement and to economic revenue to be distributed as widely as possible, becoming a fully-fledged factory-produced standardized cultural good – indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) specifically talk of "culture industry"¹⁵. Adorno called this process "reification", i.e. the transformation of complex human motivation and individualism into trivialised, affirmative, and commercialized aspirations¹⁶. Another German *émigré*, Hannah Arendt, though rejecting the Marxist ideas of the Frankfurt School, expressed her concern over mass culture and mass society, devouring its products in search for light entertainment, obsessively consumer-oriented, and thus unable to care of the actual concerns. And according to Arendt ([1951] 1979), a society made of apathic, acquiescent citizens underlies the establishment of a totalitarian state. Many of these issues were also part of the research carried out by Noam Chomsky (1988) in relation to mass media, information, culture manipulation and ideology.

According to Gilbert, these scholars "rejected the conservative elitism of other European critics of mass culture, such as Ortega y Gasset, but there was, nonetheless, an inherent elitism in their criticism of American culture. Their attack on the mass media and

¹⁵ As Adorno maintained in his essay *How to Look at TV* (1954): "The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance" (216).

¹⁶ Similarly, as seen in Chapter 2, in the following years, Marcuse will address the minimal personality of the "one-dimensional man" (1964) – from the homonymous 1964-work –, no longer able to think critically and thus subdued by political repression.

its middle-class message was founded upon a defense of the august traditions of European culture” (113). Above all, “they worried about the degradation of high culture, the insipid contagion of mass culture that infected creativity” (114) and the idea of mass culture having a direct and destructive effect on society is in a way consistent with Wertham’s fears. On different levels, both the debate among intellectuals and Wertham’s crusade against violence in comics represented an expression of the growing concern about the effects of post-war media revolution in America. And, according to Gilbert, they both “were debating the same philosophic question: had mass culture created an unwanted mass society?” (ibid). Ironically, Wertham himself derived much of his success from the cunning exploitation of mass media to promote his research: as a matter of fact, he published his works in popular magazines, his appearances on television were frequent, and he was often a guest speaker on radio talk shows.

Wertham chose to direct his attacks to the comic book industry rather than other media for several reasons. Firstly, while other mass media were all aimed at general audiences, comics were considered a juvenile product, once again proving to be stuck in a Victorian idea that (supposedly) children readings had to reflect the pureness of their world and not the brutality of real life. Secondly, they were the least censored media, since films and radio had their own censoring boards. Even comic strips remained comparatively immune to his attacks because a self-censorship had already been adopted by syndicates. Thirdly, as for their ideological contents, Wertham also charged comics for their allegedly racist and fascist overtones in representing villains as foreign-born, Jewish, Oriental, or black, thus fixing in their readers’ (supposedly white, Christian kids) minds the idea of a potential danger coming from other cultures and ethnic groups. In his view, children were exposed to degenerate ideas in so far as comics not only incited violent behaviour, but also undermined the idea of racial equality in favour of social segregationism and hate.

Wertham claimed “[n]ot only are crime comics a contributing factor to many delinquent acts, but the type of juvenile delinquency of our time cannot be understood unless you know what has been put into the minds of these children” (103). The point is that Wertham’s book reveals an improper use of terminology: virtually all comic books – including romances, Westerns, science fiction, parodies, and jungle stories – were defined ‘crime comics’. All of them, in his gross categorization, found its crucial, distinguishing feature in the violation of legal, moral, or religious codes. Going back to the first charges to newspapers strips, even the other genres, such as teen humour and talking-animal books,

were nonetheless guilty of being vulgar and ungrammatical poor-quality works jeopardising the children's eyes. This choice to use "crime comics" as an umbrella term for all comic productions enabled Wertham to persuade his readers of the dangerous correlation between actual and fictional crime: "[o]ur researches have proved that there is a significant correlation between crime-comics reading and the more serious forms of juvenile delinquency" (164), Wertham explicitly wrote.

To worsen comics' position, as Daniels (1971) pointed out, Wertham's argument was grounded upon a trilogy based on sex-violence-anarchy: "[w]hen we call these concepts by their respectable titles of 'love', 'death' and 'freedom', we recognize their true significance as our most meaningful triad of spiritual mysteries" (86). However, comics did not adhere to such conventional, reassuring labels and "made the fatal error of expressing these dreams openly in an oppressive atmosphere where the established opinion-makers favored careful observation and dissection" (ibid.). Among all the comic productions, National/DC's *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman*, became the embodiment of the worst youth deviations, which the psychiatrist identified respectively in fascism, homoeroticism, and sadomasochism – seizing upon Freudian terminology to legitimate his analysis of deviant behaviours. As already argued, Wertham's success was a product of its time, and the mere fact that his charges involved chapters' headings as "I want to be a sex maniac" and such terms as "homoeroticism" and "sado-masochism" in a period and in a social context in which even the mere thought of explicitly dealing with the topic of sexual identity – not to mention youngsters' sexual identity! – was a taboo, was enough to fuel the public opinion.

To prove his point, the psychiatrist used personal inferences and interpretations of comics' storylines reached on the basis of visual signs and alleged subtexts. The argument exposing Batman's homosexuality is a rather emblematic example of this rather "unscientific" method:

Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a "socialite" and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner: "Something's wrong with Bruce. He hasn't been himself these past few days." It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together. (190)

Despite the speculation on the possible liaison between Batman and Robin, this quest for subliminal messages exacerbates considering that, apart from the coarse terminology and the

evident lack of scientific method, one of *Seduction of the Innocent's* major flaws – and sources of criticism– is the use of illustrations. In the middle of its 397 pages, he included a 16-page insert of illustrations, reproduced in black and white – and without respecting authors' copyright – from comic-book pages and covers. Wertham used particularly provocative panels which he removed from their context to confirm his theories by adding misleading captions, such as “Children told me what the man was going to do with the red-hot poker” – ten out of 31 captions included the word “children” even though the images were not taken from children comic books – with no connection to the actual storyline. Wertham even identified a subliminal image of a woman's genitalia by showing a tight close-up of a tiny triangular section of a muscled jungle-man's bare shoulder by adding the caption “In ordinary comic books, there are pictures within pictures for children who know how to look”. The authors' names were whited-out from the drawings and none of the reproductions was credited.

In addition to misplaced credits, Wertham also overtly ignored the relationship between comics and their creators. Unwillingly or not, he did not conceive comics as works of creative expression. In his trivializing view, comic creators should not be blamed in the first place because they actually did not want to become authors of such pernicious publications, and inadvertently were equally victims of a ruthless, profit-based industry. He thus completely bypassed the much more serious and thorny issue of the freedom of expression by shrewdly claiming that comics are not cultural and artistic creations but concocted products:

By portraying comic-book creators as helpless victims of Dickensian overlords, Wertham hid a refusal to consider their legitimacy as artists behind a defense of their honor as artists. In the same stroke, he exempted himself from the responsibility of assessing how the contents of comic books might relate to the inner lives of their makers. Could it have been that superheroes, in their alien omnipotence, were fantasy outlets for artists who felt powerless, by virtue of their class, race, education, or personality factors only a psychiatrist could explain? Was it possible that the lawbreaking and violence in comics were, to some degree, projections of their creators' frustrations? Could the heroes' victories in the final panels tell us something about their makers' sense of self-worth? (Hajdu, 237)

Seduction of the Innocent assumed that creators and readers were equally unable to think nor act freely. A patronizing, paternalistic viewpoint is clearly employed, one which erased such cogent issues as artistic freedom, social legitimation and state censorship. Hajdu

reported his interviews with EC's Al Feldstein and Bill Gaines. The former commented the book in the following, rather blunt terms:

To me, the most offensive thing about that book was that [Wertham] presumed that everybody who read comics was a child or an idiot. We [at EC] functioned out of a presumption that our readers were at least fourteen, maybe thirteen, and older-up to adulthood, through adulthood. Mature readers, in terms of comic books. That never occurred to [Wertham]. That never occurred to a lot of people who didn't understand comics. Our readers were more mature. They were almost adults, or on their way there, that's why they were reading us. (quoted in Hajdu, 239)

Gaines affirmed that the book was full of the worst kind of mistakes: “[Wertham] completely missed the point of a number of our stories. We found his book humorous. It was amazing how a man could be so far off base on this sort of thing. The things he read into our motives, they were completely fallacious because his understanding of the stories was screwed up” (241). Among the few public critics to Wertham, Denney Reuel, in *The New Republic*, highlighted the interpretive flaws in Wertham's methodology and even in his logical thinking:

[Wertham's] theory of how people get meanings out of what they read and see in pictures is psychologically over-simplified. [...] It assumes that the messages received by comic-book readers are unambiguous. It assumes that children themselves are unaware of the questionable quality of the 'messages' that the author himself finds in some of the comic books. This study overworks, as well, the same fallacy that other psychiatrists have deluded themselves with—the notion that fiction is quite directly responsible for the fantasies and emulations of readers.

Several child-study experts, sociologists, and psychologists discredited Wertham's assaults to comics. Already in 1949, the *Journal of Educational Sociology* had devoted a special issue to comic books and to disparaging Wertham's theories. It was sponsored by the Payne Foundation, which in the 1930s had funded several complex and controversial studies on the harmful effects of movies on children. As stated in the Editorial by Harvey Zorbaugh (1949), whenever people advocate “burning of books and cries for censorship—however much they may be in the American tradition of violent controversy—there is cause for alarm” (193). In particular, the issue included an article entitled “The Comics and Delinquency: Cause or Scapegoat?” by Frederic Thrasher, juvenile delinquency expert and professor of educational sociology and media studies at New York University, who meticulously analysed and refuted Wertham's methods in the light of his former publication of *Show of Violence* (1949), a prelude to *Seduction of the Innocence* in which he described his experience as a forensic psychiatrist:

We may criticize Wertham's conclusions on many grounds, but the major weakness of his position is that it is not supported by research data. He introduces extraneous facts and statements which by implication he links with his thesis that the comics are a major factor in causing delinquency and emotional disturbance in children. Wertham cites a series of sensational child crimes headlined in the press (not his own cases), which he imputes to the comics without any evidence that the juvenile offenders involved ever read or were interested in comic books. Of the millions of comic books which Wertham claims deal with crime and brutality, he is content to rest his case on the selection of a few extreme and offensive examples which he makes no attempt to prove are typical. No systematic inventory of comic-book content is presented. Without such an inventory these conjectures are prejudiced and worthless. In conclusion, it may be said that no acceptable evidence has been produced by Wertham or anyone else for the conclusion that the reading of comic magazines has, or has not a significant relation to delinquent behaviour. (195)

Thrasher warned his readers that juvenile delinquency and crime could not be solved by scapegoating and regulating the comics industry. Nevertheless, his voice went unheard among the non-experts and the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* not only resulted in a commercial success, but ultimately generated a wave of public indignation, which resulted in the United States Senate's creation of a Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. The Senate hearings on delinquency, led by Robert C. Hendrickson of New Jersey, with help from the co-sponsor of the committee, Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver, followed the model of Kefauver's previous hearings on organized crime, on the wake of the impact they had on the general public thanks to their television broadcast. Hajdu emphasises the date of the hearings because it marked two major changes, one for the comics industry and one for the history of the United States:

Hendrickson scheduled two days of Senate hearings on comic books to begin on Wednesday, April 21, 1954. For two days in April 1954 senators heard testimony from child psychologists, comic book publishers, and cartoonists seeking insight into whether comics required government regulation. Two flashpoints of postwar paranoia coincided on April 22, 1954. Both took the form of congressional hearings, and both were front-page news across the country that day. As Robert C. Hendrickson concluded his inquiry into comic books and juvenile delinquency, in New York, Joseph McCarthy began his probe into alleged Communist infiltration of the Army, in Washington. Both sessions were decisive, but in contrary ways. The comic-book hearings boosted a crusade on the ascent, setting into motion a whirl of events that would soon prove devastating to the comics industry, while the Army hearings eroded a movement in decline, discrediting McCarthy and his school of vitriolic Red-baiting. Within a year of the dual hearings, McCarthy's political career would essentially be over, and so would be the creative careers of a great many of the people who made comic books. Soon after the Hendrickson hearings and the nearly simultaneous publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, comics artists and writers began to feel their effects. (274)

The controversy over comic books reached a turning point when Gaines was summoned to testify before the Senate Subcommittee on Delinquency, with the problematic

task of defending the whole genre of horror comics from a group already hostile and prejudiced towards the medium. His attempts to save the cause of comics as reading enjoyment, emphasizing the possible coexistence of the collection started by his father, *Picture Stories from the Bible*, and horror comics, and refuting Wertham's charges of race hatred (based on illustrations decontextualized to suit Wertham's purposes) and instigation to criminal behaviour in children. Nonetheless, Gaines's speech did not convince the jury and resulted in a general condemnation by the other witnesses, including Wertham, as well as by the public, who judged EC comics as an epitome of bad taste and gruesomeness. According to Daniels, (1971) "the fact that the debate was over taste rather than legality indicated how weak the case was against even the wildest comics" (86). However, though the hearings *de facto* did nothing concrete about the comics controversy, the debate on comics and censorship continued on talk shows, newspapers and public speeches. They had given momentum to the comics detractors and publishers quickly recognized the implicit threat of a national censorship movement. Gaines decided to start his own retaliatory campaign against Hendrickson's inquisition by calling for EC fans to defend the medium. In particular, he published "A Special Editorial – This Is An Appeal For Action!" which ran through all EC titles at the time and in the bulletin mailed to the five thousand members of EC's house-run "Fan-Addicts Club". The editorial stated that:

Comics are under fire. [...] Due to the efforts of various "do-gooders" and "do-gooder" groups, a large segment of the public is being led to believe that certain comic magazines cause juvenile delinquency, warp the minds of America's youth, and affect the development of the personalities of those who read them. Eventually, everyone gets frightened. The newsdealer gets frightened. He removes the books from display. The wholesaler gets frightened. He refuses shipments. The congressmen get frightened. November is coming! They start an investigation. This wave of hysteria has seriously threatened the very existence of the whole comic magazine industry. [...] Your editors sincerely believe that the claim of these crusaders [...] is nonsense. [...] We believe that those who oppose comics are a small minority. Yet this minority is causing the hysteria. The voice of the *majority*...you who buy comics, read them, enjoy them, and are not harmed by them...has not been heard! [...] IT'S TIME THAT THE MAJORITY'S VOICE BE HEARD! It is time that the Senate Subcommittee hears from YOU... *each and every one of you!* [...] Of course, if you or your parents *disagree* with us, and believe that comics ARE bad, let your sentiments be known on that too! The important thing is that the Subcommittee hear from actual comic book readers and/or their parents, rather than from people who never read a comic magazine in their lives, but simply want to destroy them.

Gaines encouraged readers to write letters to the Subcommittee as well as to show support to news dealers and to the industry as a whole. The concern over national measures against comics ultimately led him to try and build a coalition of comic publishers, with the

idea of funding authoritative research to confute Wertham's charges and develop a cohesive public-relations campaign to restore confidence in all comic books. The general aim of the assembly was to replace the ineffectual Association of Comics Magazine Publishers, soon becoming the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA). Nine publishers accepted the invitation upon the first meeting, thirteen upon the second, and by the fourth meeting, thirty-eight publishers, distributors, printers, and engravers attended the session. Their first order of business was the creation of a new code of standards to regulate comic-book content to avoid legislation against the industry and clear its increasingly blackened name. Things, however, did not go as Gaines expected since not only the other group members agreed to offer the position to Fredric Wertham, but they also arranged as their first recommendation for the new content code the prohibition to use such words as “weird”, “horror” and “terror” in comic- book titles. Being the publisher of *Weird Fantasy*, *The Vault of Horror* and *The Crypt of Terror*, Gaines soon understood the true aim behind this move and decided to leave.

On 7 September 1954, the CMAA was incorporated: its members included 26 publishers, including National/DC, Timely/Atlas/Marvel, Archie, Harvey, Gleason, together with 19 companies involved in technical operations and distribution. Only 3 major comics publishers refused to join: Dell and Gilberton claimed that their integrity had been established well before the creation of the CMAA. EC refused to be part of an organisation clearly trying to sabotage their New Trend. John Goldwater from *Archie Comics*, likely still annoyed by *Mad's* parody of his work, *Starchie*, was elected charter president of the association, while New York City municipal-court judge, Charles F. Murphy, was appointed as code administrator instead of Wertham. On October 27, Goldwater and Murphy announced the creation of the Comic Code Authority (CCA). Comic books complying with its norms were permitted to display on their covers the seal “Approved by the Comics Code Authority”, whereas comics with no seal were more likely to be boycotted and refused by news dealers. Charles Murphy promised to enforce a strict regulation to suppress the distribution of comics with no seal of approval, by selecting five censors working full-time to screen comic books after the inking stage. The Code not only was harsher than the previous ACMP Comic Code, but was also an unprecedented self-censorship imposition in the history of American communication media, surpassing even the Hays Office Standards for Motion Pictures.

The Code was composed of 41 requirements regulating comic-book imagery, text, covers, titles, and advertisements with vaguely worded restriction. In addition to prohibiting

words as “horror”, “terror”, “weird” and of course “crime” – since *Crime Does Not Pay* was still one of the main competitors of the publishers in the CMAA – other highlights from the document are (Gabilliet and Nguyen, 2010):

Policemen, judges, government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited.

Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.

Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and, wherever possible, good grammar shall be employed.

Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.

Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.

Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered.

The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.

Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals. (313-14)

Anything which these points did not specify was covered in Part C of the Code's General Standards, stating that: “All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited”.

This regulation dictated the style and the content of the whole medium, and it was up to the CCA's censors the decision whether a comic book complied with their conception of morality and decency, an aleatory choice which sounded nothing but suspicious. Sometimes works were rejected for mere grammatical errors, or because the dress of one character in one picture did not meet the standards of approval. Publishers tried their best to comply with CCA, preventively modifying their comics before submitting their material. Between the autumn of 1954 and the end of 1969, CCA tested exactly 18,125 comic books. Daniels (1971) manifested his suspects on the objectivity of CCA:

It is possible to be more than a little suspicious about the value of the whole comics controversy. The attack was perhaps more sincere than sensible, and the defense was more successful as a business maneuver than as an artistic stand. The success of the code concept made it a simple matter to squeeze presumably objectionable publications off the market without ever proving them to be in any way illicit or illegal. (84)

This organisation was appointed to impend a national censorship which might have destroyed the comic genre, but it proved to be a suicidal move. Some of the contents banned in comics could be easily found in any other medium and could hardly have been prohibited by constitutional legislation. "Freedom of the press came to be a less important consideration than freedom from pressure" (ibid.), and the role of CCA was that of a placebo to stop complaints and make people forget about the Comics Scare. That being said, comics remained an avant-garde medium with social and cultural relevance, especially in relation to the dialectics between freedom and censure. In this respect, Daniels further maintained that:

It is notable that three members of the press who attacked Senator Joseph McCarthy nationally before he was censured by his colleagues were Walt Kelly, Herblock, and Harvey Kurtzman. All were cartoonists; all were censored. And nobody noticed. Except millions of kids. Those perennially concerned with the problem of youth soon found new targets like television and rock and roll music, but not before the world of comic books had undergone some permanent and unfortunate changes. (ibid.)

On the whole, the Code had a profound, devastating effect for the comics industry. Many publishers were unable to conform their products to the Code and thus could not get the seal of approval for the distribution. According to Hajdu's statistics (315), between 1954 and 1956, more than half the comic books on the newsstands disappeared; the number of titles published in the United States dropped from about 650 to some 250. In 1954, several publishers went out of business: Fiction House (home of the jungle queens and female artists), Stanley P. Morse's four companies (Aragon, Gillmore, Key, Stanmor), Comics Media (*Danger, Death Valley*), Timor (*Blazing Western, Crime Detective*) and Stanhall (*G.I. Jane*). Harvey,

one of the major publishers of horror comics, survived by discontinuing its line and replacing it with kid-titles (*Baby Huey, Little Dot, Casper, and Hot Stuff*). By the end of 1955, five more publishers crumbled under the pressure of CCA: Star (*Intimate Secrets of Romance*), Sterling (*Captain Flash, Tormented*), Toby Press (*Billy the Kid, Super Brat*), the comic-book division of the United Features syndicate (*Nancy & Sluggo*), and Eastern Color, M. C. Gaines's old company, where, in 1933, the first comic book, *Famous Funnies*, was published. In 1956, Lev Gleason discontinued *Crime Does Not Pay*, since sales had dropped from 2.7 million per month in 1952 to 800,000 per month. In the same year, Ace (*Crime Must Pay the Penalty, Atomic War!*), Avon (*Davy Crockett, Bachelor's Diary*), Premier (*Criminals on the Run, Nuts!*), and Superior (*Ghost Rider, My Secret Marriage*) closed. Stan Lee, the top editor at Timely/Atlas/Marvel, announced he was closing in April 1957: at the start of that year, the company was publishing 85 comics titles but the publisher, Martin Goodman, was forced to discontinue all but 16 series (only a mix of teen, romance, Western, and war comics survived) and had them distributed by its rival, National/DC. Despite the creation of CCA, more than 100 acts of legislation were introduced on the state and municipal levels to ban or limit the sale of comics. In New York, the creation ultimately did not stop the approval of a law concerning the censorship of comics on 2 May 1955, which prohibited the publication or the distribution of comics “devoted to or principally made up of pictures or accounts of methods of crime, or illicit sex, horror, terror, physical torture, brutality, or physical violence”, the sale of any such comic books to those under the age of 18, and the ban the words “crime”, “terror”, “horror”, or “sex” in comic books. Violations were punishable with one year in jail, a \$500 fine, or both.

By fall of 1955, bills on comic books had passed in the legislative bodies of California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. Legislation was proposed and either voted down or not acted upon in Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin. The combined efforts of Wertham's crusade, the Senate Subcommittee hearings and the CCA had such a disrupting effect on the comics industry that even nowadays they are considered one of the most brutal forms of censorship arising from moral panic concerning popular culture in the United States. Today's sales do not reach the levels of the past Golden Age and could not be compared to the current levels of the Franco-Belgian area or of Japan.

But what happened to EC? Just before the announcement of the Code, Gaines decided to discontinue all horror and crime comics and launched the “New Direction” line starting from early 1955 (with titles such as *Piracy*, *Impact*, *Valor*, *Aces High*, *Extra*, *M. D.* and *Psychoanalysis*). The final issues of EC’s horror and suspense titles included an editorial note under the headline “In Memoriam”:

As a result of the hysterical, injudicious, and unfounded charges leveled at crime and horror comics, many retailers and wholesalers throughout the country have been intimidated into refusing to handle this type of magazine. Although we at EC still believe, as we have in the past, that the charges against horror and crime comics are utter nonsense, there's no point in going into a defense of this kind of literature at the present time. Economically, our situation is acute. Magazines that do not get onto the newsstand do not sell. We are forced to capitulate. We give up. WE'VE HAD IT! Naturally, with comic magazine censorship now a fact, we at EC look forward to an immediate drop in the crime and juvenile delinquency rate of the United States. We trust there will be fewer robberies, fewer murders, and fewer rapes!

The only titles from the New Trend he did not discontinue were *Mad*, *Panic*, *Weird Science-Fantasy*, and *Incredible Science Fiction* which, at first, Gaines decided not to submit to the CCA. However, he soon found out that comics with no seal of approval were not distributed in the newsstand so, in the end, he decided to join the association, only to find further obstructionism by the censors and irreparable losses in terms of sales. Therefore, by the end of 1955 he decided to abandon comic books. He made the bold move of turning *Mad* into a magazine, rather than a comic book, in order to avoid the CCA, distributors’ boycott and any form of legislative restrictions on comics. This move was a sort of anti-establishment counteroffensive, a deed of cultural retribution. *Mad* became in a way a symbol for all the youngsters who saw their favourite titles discontinued. Its satire spoke directly to them and against the conservative, conformist adult generation of McCarthy’s era. In the sixteenth number of *Mad* (October 1954), Jack Davis, regular contributor to it as well as to EC horror comics, commented: “[e]ven as we speak, grown-ups of America battle tirelessly to destroy evil reading matter that is corrupting youth! However, behind their backs looms unchallenged evil reading matter that is corrupting grown-ups!”

Satire comics were eventually strengthened by the Comics Scare since authors, publishers and readers sharpened their criticism towards the cultural establishment which had condemned the industry. The idea a self-righteous, hypocritical society, responsible for this collapse spread among the young readers who, in the following decade, became protagonists of the counterculture. As feared by their detractors, one may argue that the ban of EC comics in a way shaped the consciousness of their readers, made them angry and

resentful, prone to protest and displaying an irreverent attitude towards authority. The revolution of the Sixties is arguably grounded upon this very dissatisfaction. Authors experienced the same: underpaid, living a hand-to-mouth life and gagged as soon as their art was starting to achieve a proper recognition and a certain freedom of expression, they shared and gave voice to the anger of their readers and to a widespread desire to regain that freedom. From this discontent, one of the most prolific phases of comic history began, as the underground production of the following years indisputably renewed the medium and stretched the boundaries of what comic art could express and aspire to. Comics and contestation became a dyad which even today fuels a heated debate, especially in the relation to the limits of the freedom of expression. Indeed, the swing between action and reaction which characterised the first comics took different turns, but never stopped. And for this reason, even today, in a period of conservative policies and unabashed populism, it is important to investigate the effects of purpose-built hysterical scares and paranoid crusades aimed at changing political, cultural and commercial balances.

Chapter 2. “HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN?”¹⁷: RISE AND FALL OF A COUNTERCULTURAL REVOLUTION

2.1. Underground and Counterculture: A Definition

As soon as the Comics Code Authority was established, on October 1954, Harvey Kurtzman launched the sixteen number of *Mad* whose cover showed a quite eloquent headline: “COMICS GO UNDERGROUND!” It could not be more prophetic: just a dozen years later, underground comix were giving voice and visibility to what is by now known as Counterculture. This chapter aims to define underground comix as a product of 1960s and 1970s social history of the US, with a focus on its Countercultural movements. In doing so, it explores the specificities of the sociopolitical context that led to their outbreak and questions the triggering factors behind their success and, ultimately, their decline. Before delving into these topics, a prior terminological distinction should be made and some of the issues discussed in the following paragraphs accordingly anticipated.

The definition of “underground” encompasses a broad scenario, certainly not limited to the comic world. Indeed, comics were not alone in paving the way for the underground revolution. As this chapter will outline, this climate of cultural turmoil could be experienced through a range of media, including the mainstream ones, and, by the end of the 1960s, art, cinema, theatre and press had all, in some respects, “gone underground”. Accordingly, in order to gain a thorough understanding of all that the word “underground” stands for, we have make a step backwards. Indeed, though it came to identify the forms of expression characterising the controversial years known as the Sixties, historically the term has been used in a figurative sense to refer to a wide array of activities “below the surface”. In actual fact, in nineteenth-century United States the term underground was associated to the anti-slavery struggle and, in particular, to the networks of secret routes known as Underground Railroads, which favoured the escape of Afro-American runaways to free states and Canada. The concept of underground was subsequently linked to the anti-Fascist forces and the resistance movements sprung up in Europe and Asia during the Second World War. As for the United States, at first, the imagery linked to the underground fight against the Nazis was fuelled by hundreds of Hollywoodian films celebrating the courage and the self-sacrifice of

¹⁷ Title of a song from Creedence Clearwater Revival’s album *Pendulum* (1970).

resistance fighters: Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* and Frank Borzage's *The Mortal Storm* are famous cases in point. Just as the myth of the unsullied freedom fighters did not correspond to the actual truth, the end of the war and the rapid escalation of events leading to the Cold War-era tensions ultimately resulted in the minimisation of the role of Resistance for the outcomes of war. The turn was such that partisans lost the aura of heroes, took off the cool clothes they had dressed in the Hollywoodian imagery, and were now charged as camouflaged communists or communist sympathizers. Thus, the glorious emphasis on the underground dimension of the anti-Fascist resistance rapidly vanished into thin air. In the inescapable process of negotiation of history, the machine of revisionism had already been set in motion, turning partisans into fanatics and the idea of underground into a *terra incognita* for the most.

Things only started to change a decade later: "The great artist of tomorrow will go underground." With this statement, Marcel Duchamp, pioneer of Dada, ended his speech entitled "Where do we go from here?" in a symposium held at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art in March 1961 (1975). Duchamp advocated a revolution of art against the dilution process that could be observed on a cultural level in that period: "This enormous dilution, losing in quality what it gains in quantity, is accompanied by a levelling down of present taste and its immediate result will be to shroud the near future in mediocrity" (28). Other artists shared Duchamp's idea. During the 1960s, the Pope of Pop Art, Andy Warhol, adopted and produced the experimental rock band called – not accidentally – *The Velvet Underground*, led by Lou Reed. Above all, Warhol worked on several films which formed part of the production of the underground cinema movement, composed of such filmmakers as Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, the Kuchar Brothers, John Waters and Jim Bidgood. According to Sheldon Renan (1967), underground cinema was "a medium of and for the individual, as explorer and as artist", whereas commercial cinema, the so-called mainstream, was "medium of and for bankers, craftsmen, film crews, and audiences" (17-18). It is worth quoting Renan's definition of "underground film":

It is a film conceived and made essentially by one person and is a *personal statement* by that person. It is a film that dissents radically in form, or in technique, or in content, or perhaps in all three. It is usually made for very little money, frequently under a thousand dollars, and its exhibition is outside commercial film channels. (ibid.)

Thus, underground production refers to i) the expression of a personal belief, against the homogenisation proposed by mass media; ii) low budget and usually self-financed works, once again in contrast with Hollywoodian big-budget productions; iii) different, alternative

channels of distribution outside of commercial theatres (e.g., microcinemas, museums, art galleries and archives) and addressed to a niche audience; iv) most importantly, the radical dissent expressed through form, technique and contents challenging the canon and stretching the boundaries of the medium. All these features, as this chapter will demonstrate, came to characterise underground comix as well, and found their below-the-surface equal even in the press, which played its part in the subterranean fight against their over-ground counterpart. In his *On the Ground* (2011), Sean Stewarts provides a comprehensive definition of what “underground press” stood for:

The birth of the underground press took place at the intersection of a period of rapid evolution in printing technology and the beginnings of what would become the greatest youth movement in U.S. history. By the late fifties and early sixties, not only was it possible to afford the printing bill for thousands of copies of your own tabloid-sized newspaper, chances were you would find a community of sympathetic souls to actually buy the thing. Originally reflective of the regional character of the communities and scenes from which they sprang, the newspapers that would comprise the underground press grew to cover and sponsor sit-ins, be-ins, love-ins, yip-ins, Black Panthers, third-world liberation, women’s liberation, gay liberation, grease power, red power, black power, brown power, student power, people power, abortion, crash pads, communes, comix, SDS, Weatherman, peace, love, self-defense, Viet Cong, Motherfuckers, hippies, Yippies, Diggers, dope, rock ’n’ roll, and fucking in the streets. (5)

Even in this case, the press used alternative forms of publication and distribution partly by design, as in the case of cinema, and partly out of necessity, on account of the impossibility to get unbiased news and insights about the most controversial topics of the day, such as the Vietnam War, the drug culture, radical politics, alternative religion, ecology and rock music. Similarly, non-square communities (i.e., out of the capitalist, military, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, patriarchal, white, heterosexual, masculine “square world”) and minorities were not represented in mainstream newspapers. The underground press gave voice to all of them and, as it will be stressed in the following pages, gave space to some of the first underground comix authors. Among the most successful and influential publications were New York’s *Village Voice* and *East Village Other*, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, the *San Francisco Oracle*, and – at the beginning – the still on-going *Rolling Stone* magazine. At their first stages, these magazines addressed only local communities, but their success resulted in the creation of a national and international network of underground prints. Jay Lynch, cartoonist and editor of the underground comix magazine *Bijou Funnies*, commented the label “underground” as an invention of the *Time*, like “beatniks”, a term initially coined by the *San Francisco Chronicle*

columnist Herb Caen, in 1958, by mixing “Beat Generation” and the suffix recalling the satellite Sputnik, and then published by the *Time* magazine:

But back to *Time*'s penchant to add to the pop lexicon: It was *Time* that invented the label "underground newspapers" in a 1966 article about the phenomenon. Andy Warhol was known for his underground movies, and this inspired *Time*'s phrase. (Well-it could have been worse. At least they didn't call these groundbreaking publications “Warholniks.”). (7)

The term undeniably entailed a secretive and intriguing connotation. But the idea of such a subterranean world, even provided with its own network of printed papers, one which rejected the dominant culture and its official news sources, also recalled the experience of the Second World War: not just the imagery of gold medals and strong romanticised American patriotism, but rather the unofficial, unmythicised and forgotten versions of it, which formed part of the aforementioned subterranean resistance. In particular, the underground press made reference to the tradition of secret newspapers, such as the German *Pow Wow* (acronym for Prisoners of War Waiting On Winning), aimed at keeping prisoners informed on what was happening outside the concentration camps. Though with different socio-political circumstances, the underground press and all the other “undergrounds” made a direct reference to this connotation of the term and to a specific notion of resistance as fight against an established, coercive authority. This connection was also stressed by Duncan Reekie (2007):

The term ‘Underground’ was first deployed by beat and early counter-cultural agents to designate their subculture of resistance beneath the square world: it was a metaphoric invocation of the resistance groups of World War Two who secretly sabotaged the Fascist occupation of Europe. Crucially the Underground understood itself to be a culture; to be not only a community and a way of life but a sensibility that could realise the secret subtext of utopian liberation in popular culture. (139)

Reekie also emphasises how underground artists and journalists were conscious of being “a culture”. In this regard, underground should be analysed in the light of the akin concepts of “subculture” and “counterculture”. A first, rather obvious, analogy is between the prefixes “under” and “sub”. In sociology, the earliest occurrences of “subculture” referred to the subdivisions of a national culture (Lee, 1945; Gordon, 1947), i.e., the cultural subgroups of a pluralist society, the parts composing the cultural system. Subsequently, however, “subculture” shifted in meaning, coming to identify the parts going against the system. In *The Myth of Mass Culture*, Alan Swingewood (1977:26) defined culture as “historical”, “specific” and “ideological”. In this view, culture is not a neutral concept. Just as it may act

as a cohesive force binding people together by means of social norms, values and aspirations shared and transmitted by major social institutions (which Swingewood identified in family, religious, educational, political and trade union organisations), it produces disjunctive elements. Indeed, whenever a dominant culture imposes itself, distinct subgroups, values, and life styles take hold. Denying this would imply an ahistorical, generalist, and idealist view. By all means, this implies that subcultures have a relationship to the overall dominant culture, which, given its pervasiveness, is unavoidable. Membership to a subculture necessarily involves membership to the dominant culture, which the subculture is an extension of, even though in opposition to. Parkin (1971) talked of “subordinate value systems” as a negotiation of the dominant ones. In this regard, Michael Brake (1985) systematized these reflections by arguing that:

Culture may be seen as containing a source of signs or potential meaning structures which actors inherit and respond to. Subcultures, by their very existence, suggest that there are alternative forms of cultural expression reflecting a cultural plurality in a culture, which often seems, on superficial examination, to dominate the members of a society. (8)

Subcultures revolve around a set of actions, values and behaviours differing from the dominant ones. Membership to a subculture are related to class, age and education. Brake (1985) argued that “[e]mpirically, clusters of subcultural groups are found in specific locations of the social class structure, with a common experience in terms of background, class, education and neighbourhood” (15). Moreover, as in the case under scrutiny in this chapter, the relation of subcultures and age classes is of utmost importance: indeed, subcultures and young people have a strict relationship because, in times of social, economic and cultural instability, young people are more vulnerable and prone to absorb the changes occurring on different level (from occupational to educational changes). Brake explained how “changes amplify contradictions in the structure which are experienced not only in class terms but also in generational terms” (22), thus paving the way to the affirmation of subcultures which P. Cohen (1972) identified as “imaginary”, “magical” solutions to real problems and actual contradictions within the main culture. According to Clarke and colleagues ([1975] 2005), subcultures “‘solve’ but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved” (47). As stated in the previous chapter, in the early to mid-twentieth century, U.S. sociologists developed an identifiable body of research on youth cultures which was boosted by a drive to understand what at that time was considered a manifestation of adolescent crime and deviance. Starting from the second half of the twentieth century sociological research on the topic sharpened. Matza (1962) talked in general terms of youth as

a time of rebelliousness, declined in terms of delinquency, radicalism and Bohemianism. In this light, Brake (1985) subsequently divided the study of youth into four areas – which will return in the discussion of what 1960s underground represents: respectable youth (not involved in subcultures - what subcultural groups would define as conformist or straight), delinquent youth, cultural rebels (middle-class young usually attracted by the Bohemian tradition of *poètes maudits*) and politically militant youth (issue-oriented groups, ethnic groups, with a vast scope of political interests). In point of fact, not all subcultures are related to youth and not all the young are involved in subcultures. However, Paul Hodkinson (2007) stressed that, by virtue of its liminality, youth is a time of confusion and upheaval in which legal, sexual, educational and economic changes occur and “individuals break free from many of features of childhood without yet fully adopting all of the characteristics associated with being an adult” (1). Given such a state of uncertainties, young people have a proclivity for becoming part of communities offering a sense of belonging, a status, normative guidelines and, crucially, prompting the rejection of dominant values. B. Berger (1963) challenged the over-generalisations of explanations of youth culture: “What we are in the habit of calling youth culture is a creature of some young and some not so young persons” (394). The youthful, rather than the young, create youth culture, and thus we should rather talk of “youthful” subcultures, in the sense that they have a young outlook but are not chronologically young¹⁸, particularly in relation to middle-class subcultures, and this may be the reason why they last longer and do not have the time-limit of working-class subcultures which coincides with the brief period of insecurity between the end of school and the start of adulthood with a stable job and settling down into marriage. More in general, Murdock’s (1974) definition of subculture may include both youth and youthful motivations:

Subcultures are the meaning system and modes of expression developed by groups in particular parts of the social structure in the course of their collective attempts to come to terms with the contradictions of their shared social situation. More particularly subcultures represent the accumulated meanings and means of expression through which groups in subordinate structural positions have attempted to negotiate or oppose the dominant meaning system. They therefore provide a pool of available symbolic resources which particular individuals or groups can draw on in their attempt to make sense of their own specific situation and construct a viable identity. (213)

¹⁸ According to Andy Bennett (2007), the notion of “youth” has multiple and often conflicting meanings: “The meanings now attached to youth reflect a variety of different political, ideological and aesthetic positions. Thus, the term youth is no longer regarded as straightforwardly linked with the condition of being young. [...] [T]he exclusive association of youth with the young has become weakened due to the fact that many of the traits once connected with youth are now observed across a far broader age range. To some extent, this is attributed to changing sensibilities relating to ageing and the life course in late modern society” (23).

Consistent with this idea of subculture as “accumulated meanings and means of expression”, the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) developed some of the most relevant research on the topic during the 1970s. The works of such scholars as Phil Cohen, John Clarke and Dick Hebdige consisted of theoretical reflections drawn upon a combination of Marxist theory, particularly of such authors as Gramsci and Althusser, and Saussure’s and Barthes’ studies on signs and languages. Much of this research was characterized by what Rhoda McRae (2007) defined “outsider-out” (51) approach: subcultural groups were considered as ‘outsiders’, rejecting dominant cultural groups by developing clearly distinctive spectacular styles. Indeed, consistent with the explosion of youth-oriented culture industries after 1950s, their analysis linked subcultures and style¹⁹, which was regarded by them as a symbol of resistance, the defining element of a group, a set of communicating acts remarking a group identity in a creative, active manner. A.K. Cohen (1965) emphasized the symbolic use of style in differentiating subcultural groups and expressing the degree of commitment of its members: “[a]n actor learns that the behaviour signifying membership in a particular role includes the kinds of clothes he wears, his posture, his gait, his likes and dislikes, what he talks about and the opinion he expresses” (1). He regarded youth subcultures as “a compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents... and the need to maintain the parental identifications which support them” (P. Cohen 1972: 26). According to Clarke and colleagues (1976), subcultures thus represent a way to gain some space for a group of people struck between age and class constraints (especially the traditional working-class culture of their parents) and the hegemonic values of capitalism and consumption.

Though recent sociological analyses partly rejected CCCS’s accounts of subcultures²⁰, the concept of “underground” shares several features with Dick Hebdige’s theorisation of subcultures. In his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige explored the nature of subcultures and discussed their role, particularly in the case of Britain, where the social and economic decline following the Second World War led to a polarization of dominant

¹⁹ According to Brake (1985:12), style consists of three core features: image (i.e., the appearance: costumes, accessories, hair style, artefacts and jewels); demeanour (i.e. expressions, walk, posture); argot (i.e., slang and ways to deliver it).

²⁰ CCCS’s theories were criticised by some sociologists. Such theories are thought to be aimed at following their own neo-Marxist theoretical agenda, to the detriment of the empirical reality of subcultural groups (Redhead, 1990). Moreover, the subjective perspectives of the members of the subcultures under scrutiny were never investigated, thus confining the research to a purely theoretical framework and overly fixed impression labels which highlighted particularly spectacular minorities rather than the actual “everyday” life of youth groupings (Bennett, 1999; Muggleton, 2000).

middle-class and subordinate working-class communities. As a consequence of the latter's frustration and alienation, and under the influence of black cultural forms (e.g., music), younger generations developed an attitude refractory to any ruling hegemony and adopted connoted styles to publicly exhibit their dissent and accordingly signify their identity. By relying on Marxist theories about class consciousness and ideology as well as on French structuralism, Hebdige provided a semiotic analysis of several styles (those of punks, dreads, skinheads, hipsters, beats, teddy boys, mods, rockers, Bowie-ites) and, most of all, a noteworthy definition of subculture, a word "loaded down with mystery", and suggesting "secrecy, masonic oaths, an Underworld" (4). In his postulations on the meaning of subcultures, Hebdige showed an entropic vision of subcultures, conceived as "noise":

Subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy 'out there' but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation. (90)

By evoking Jean Genet's poetics, Hebdige articulated subcultures in a form that is (cannot but be) posited as a "crime against natural order" (3):

Subcultures express forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgressions of sartorial and behavioural codes, law breaking, etc.). They are profane articulations, and they are often and significantly defined as "unnatural" (91-92)

Thus, subcultural forms are opposed to social order, which is commonly passed off as natural, but *de facto* represents a symbolic construction grounded upon a set of authorized codes and seemingly universal taboos. In this respect, Hebdige talked of "sanctity of language" (91) as a guarantee of that order. The boundaries posed to the possibilities of linguistic expression, in a way its crystallization, are legitimized by a supposed principle of unity and cohesion. Thus, subcultural manifestations represent symbolic forms of resistance, a disturbance to the hegemonic power and a direct blow to "the myth of consensus" (18). According to Hebdige, tabloid press referred to members of subcultures as freaks, rats, and animals because they misinterpreted the breaking of rules as absence of rules – a distinction which was already at the basis of Claude Levi Strauss's ([1949] 1967) definition of natural and cultural processes – and, it may be argued, the subversion of culture as absence of culture. Again, Hebdige's reflection will prove particularly influential for the purposes of this chapter.

Nonetheless, subversion, intended as a modification, or even as the utter destruction, of a code is connected to the formulation of new ones which move beyond it. What cannot be neglected here is that subcultures are strictly bound to the explosion of a youth consumer market²¹, which provided the raw materials subcultural styles hijacked and reassembled in a creative process of *bricolage*, whereby consumer objects were symbolically transformed in subversive parodies of conventional and authorised codes. The visually spectacular image of these subcultural groups helped to mark them off from other social groups and portrayed a sense of cultural distinctiveness. However, as stated above, subcultural rebellion neither concretely solves any problem nor overthrows power relations. It rather provides an imaginary, utopian, elusive solution and is ultimately engulfed by the dominant culture and normalised as soon as their potential in the mass market is recognised. Anticipating the core issue regarding comix and counterculture, Hebdige stated that “[y]outh cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions, by creating new commodities” (96). This dialectic process which describes the creation and eventually the decline of subcultures is defined as a “cycle of resistance and defusion” (130). During the Sixties, this will be associated with the notion of co-optation, i.e., a subtle form of repression by which the Establishment assimilates subcultural forms and take possession of their symbols, thus depriving them of their genuinely revolutionary content and selling them back to the masses as a fad. As a consequence, subversion of the dominant culture tends to look for new, uncorrupted, and increasingly extreme forms of expression of their dissent. As highlighted by Jonathan Culler (1976) regarding aesthetic expressions, subcultures as expressive forms aim:

to communicate notions, subtleties, complexities, which have not yet been formulated, and, therefore, as soon as an aesthetic order comes to be generally perceived as a code (as a way of expressing notions which have already been formulated), then works of art tend to move beyond this code while exploring its possible mutations and extensions. One might even say that much of the interest of works of art lies in the ways in which they explore and modify the codes which they seem to be using. (100-01)

²¹ Chapter 1 highlighted how the post-Second World War period did mark a significant change in the way youth were perceived and in the way they perceived themselves. At the same time, the number of young people was particularly high and their spending power increased (Shumway, 1992), thus prompting the development of consumer industries and products (magazines, music, fashion, television programmes) directly appealing to them (Chambers, 1985; Bocoock, 1993). People’s active consumption practices and the youth consumer industries, as well as their emphasis on the importance of class position, had an extensive and lasting impact within and beyond the field of youth subcultural studies. Such formulations served as the primary yardstick against which a range of recent youth cultural research was outlined (Muggleton, 2000; Bennett, 2000; Hodgkinson, 2002; Nayak, 2003; Huq, 2006; Laughey, 2006).

In this sense, can we talk of subcultures in terms of art? Hebdige came to the conclusion that “subcultural styles do indeed qualify as art but as art in (and out of) particular contexts; not as timeless objects, judged by the immutable criteria of traditional aesthetics, but as ‘appropriations’, ‘thefts’, subversive transformations, as *movement*.” (129). Thus, the underground counterculture, and underground comix in our case-study, can be considered as art forms, Dionysian rather than Apollinean, and as a movement – intended as change and evolution of artistic ideas as well as of social and political values.

In point of fact, it should be remembered that Hebdige’s analysis focused on the British context and its specific social class dynamics. Nonetheless, his definition of subculture is also relevant to the American social landscape during the Sixties. Historically, in the United States, where different ethnic groups, languages, cultural backgrounds have mixed following the massive arrival of immigrant labour force. While the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) elite tried to impose its culture as the dominant one, and many of the immigrants absorbed it to fit in, different subcultures, sometimes of a hybrid nature, emerged. Though it developed in different socio-political contexts and within other cultural frameworks, counterculture in the United States had similar roots and similar outcomes to those of the subcultures Hebdige described. However, it is important to stress that counterculture was born as a middle-class subculture. Brake argued that middle-class subcultures differ from working class subcultures in both their formation and their organisation: working-class youth subcultures are defined as part-time (i.e., temporary episodes of short duration), neighbourhood-based and limited to leisure activities which mediate the control of adult authority; on the contrary, middle-class subcultures are not limited to the local social ecology of the neighbourhood: Brake highlighted their wider sphere of influence, nationally and internationally shaped. Moreover, they tend to be more self-conscious and to have a longer influence over their members’ life styles, as they involve both the context of work/study and leisure. Another aspect which arguably marks the gap between the two class-subcultures is their relation to the values of the dominant class and its culture. Blake highlighted how “the very notion of ‘dropping out’ presupposes a location in the class structure from which to drop (and to return), as opposed to the harsh reality of working-class life, which is instead a flight from the ‘never had’” (84). As for generational differences, it was previously stressed how middle-class subcultures involved not-so-young members who could afford a life *on the edge*. While they could benefit from higher education and more wealth, working-class youth had to deal with economic restrictions and needed to put their leisure subversive activities in

stand-by modality so as to deal with every-day life duties and needs.

Having said that, what Chapter 2 will ultimately show is how, more than on a class-based conflict, the polarity between American underground subculture and dominant culture was grounded upon the notion of freedom, the direct and indirect threats of censorship by institutional power and the repressive discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate forms of expressions. This chapter analyses how its history intertwined with the history of comics, by focusing on the antecedents which led to their boom, the themes they shared and avoided, and their common goals. Chapter 1 has analysed some of the crucial moments in the history of America and in the history of comics which paved the way for the Sixties' revolution. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how the post-war era and the Fifties were subverted by the advent of what came to be known as counterculture and how comix happened to become the manifesto of a whole generation of cultural rebels. Thus, ultimately, another preliminary terminological specification should be made. Indeed, in the case of 1960s' America, the notion of underground became almost synonym of counterculture. However, can counterculture be considered as a particular conjugation of youth subcultures? The first analysis of "counterculture" as a peculiar form of subculture was made by J. Milton Yinger (1960). The scholar coined the term "contraculture" (derived from Talcott Parson earlier use of "counter-culture" in the analysis of the culture of deviant groups in his *The Social System*, 1951: 522) to define the normative system of a group containing "as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society" (629). While subcultures indicate sub-societies and their local norms, contraculture defines a specific organization born in opposition to dominant forms of expression and beliefs. The limit of this first postulation lies in its completely abstract form: indeed, Brake refutes this distinction by claiming that no empirical study has ever assessed the existence of a pure contraculture directly conflicting with the established culture. We may rather talk of oppositional elements existing within a subculture. What is crucial for the present analysis is that Yinger conceived of contraculture as a fully-fledged oppositional phenomenon which dialectically produced a clearly separate fully-fledged set of norms and values in conflict with the dominant ones. If successful, such conflict may result in the contraculture becoming the new dominant culture and thus may stimulate the creation of a new set of oppositional norms and values.

Theodore Roszak revived the notion of "counter-culture" in his pivotal work *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969), which popularized the term to the point that it came to identify the whole season of cultural radicalism in the Sixties. By all means, being a seminal

work, Roszak's book is not free from flaws but it has to be credited as the first scrupulous critical work on a phenomenon still in bud at that time, anticipating several themes of utmost importance for the contemporary analysis of that period. These very elements represent preliminary guidelines for the development of Chapter 2 and will therefore return in the analysis of comix in the sociocultural context of the Sixties. Roszak provided the theoretical framework of counterculture by establishing a continuity with its heroes' schools of thought, which he identified in "the New Left sociology of Mills, the Freudian Marxism of Herbert Marcuse, the Gestalt-therapy anarchism of Paul Goodman, the apocalyptic body mysticism of Norman Brown, the Zen-based psychotherapy of Alan Watts, and finally Timothy Leary's impenetrably occult narcissism" (64). Among them, Roszak recognised the key role of MAD magazine in shaping its young readers' consciousness:

...the nasty cynicism MAD began applying to the American way of life – politics, advertising, mass media, education – has had its effect. MAD brought into the malt shops the same angry abuse of middle-class America which comics like Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce were to begin bringing into the night clubs of the mid-fifties. The kids who were twelve when MAD first appeared are in their early twenties now – and they have had a decade's experience in treating the stuff of their parents' lives as contemptible laughing stock. (24)

According to Roszak, counterculture sprung up in the convergence of a turbulent historical period against a pervasive enemy jeopardizing the society of the United States: technocracy, which he defined as the "mature product of technological progress and the scientific ethos" (8). In this view, in technocratic societies "those who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who, in turn, justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge. And beyond the authority of science there is no appeal" (ibid.). The scenario Roszak envisaged resembles George Orwell's *1984* dystopic society, in which regulation and control have swallowed the basic foundations of human identity:

The business of inventing and flourishing treacherous parodies of freedom, joy, and fulfilment becomes an indispensable form of social control under the technocracy. In all walks of life, image makers and public relations specialists assume greater and greater prominence. The regime of experts relies on a lieutenancy of counterfeiters who seek to integrate the discontent born of thwarted aspiration by way of clever falsification.

Thus:

We call it "education," the "life of the mind," the "pursuit of the truth." But it is a matter of machine-tooling the young to the needs of our various baroque bureaucracies: corporate, governmental, military, trade union, educational. (15-16)

Technocratic values came to dominate every aspect of human life and people did not even

recognise how their entire existence was steered by “an expertise which has learned a thousand ways to manipulate our acquiescence with an imperceptible subtlety” (19). This became possible thanks to the blind faith in science as a source or reliable knowledge to explain reality. Indeed, technocratic society can be explained in the light of another cultural phenomenon: “the myth of objective consciousness” (ibid.). Roszak combines myth and science by conceiving myth as “that collectively created thing which crystallizes the great, central values of a culture” (214) and objective consciousness as “alienated life promoted to its most honorific status as the scientific method” (232): promising technical, efficient and coordinated solution to social problems, technocracy managed to permeate people’s life. Technocracy exploited the people’s commitment to the scientific world-view and led them to believe that rationality and objectivity are the *conditio sine qua non* to acquire knowledge. Subjectivity and attachment to nature and humankind are discredited; such values as kindness, openness and brotherhood besmirched. If people see each other as objects, estrangement and alienation follow. And this paved the way for technocratic totalitarianism. Technocracy was grounded upon a subtle and pervasive form of manipulation: “Politics, education, leisure, entertainment, culture as a whole, the unconscious drives, and even protest against the technocracy itself: all these become the subjects of purely technical scrutiny and of purely technical manipulation.” (7) The solution for human future relied, according to Roszak, on Marcuse’s notion of “Great Refusal” developed in *One Dimensional Man* (1964): if everything is contaminated by technocracy and its false mythology, people have to abandon culture and society as a whole. Counterculture thus “turned from objective consciousness as if from a place inhabited by the plague” (215). It refused “reductive rationality” to embrace non-intellectual consciousness, the magical sense of reality, the cultivation of a poetic sensibility and a return to the shamanistic view of the world. Counterculture may represent the way to create a post-technocratic society for post-WASP human beings.

With the exception of poets and thinkers who inspired this revolution, Roszak conceived the counterculture as a youth-led upheaval: the children of the Great Middle Class were the one appointed to reverse the society of their parents. The bond between subcultures and youth has already be stressed above, and even counterculture, as a peculiar form of subculture, can be linked to a generational rift, though it starts from the middle-class and is not based on wealth claims: “For better or for worse, most of what is presently happening that is new, provocative, and engaging in politics, education, the arts, social relations (love,

courtship, family, community), is the creation either of youth who are profoundly, even fanatically, alienated from the parental generation, or of those who address themselves to the young” (1). He even talked of “adolescentization of dissent” as a new phenomenon differing from the “proletarianization of dissent”. This is a crucial point which will lead to a fracture within the radicals: according to Roszak, true countercultural rebels were fundamentally apolitical. The Great Refusal stands for a refusal to be co-opted. Not just liberals and conservatives, but also communists, traditional as well as new leftists, trade unionists and civil right activists were excluded because their commitment “finished with merely redesign-ing the turrets and towers of the technocratic citadel. It is the foundations of the edifice that must be sought.” (55) Their aim was an institutional reform, whereas rebellion must aim to overturn institutions: a universalistic purpose which cannot be restricted to single factions’ vindications and class interests. In this regard, Roszak did not even sympathise with the students who were protagonists of the May 1968 General strike in Paris as they tried to form an alliance with French workers:

Is workers' control immune to the dangers of technocratic integration? Unhappily not. [...] Surely the touchstone of the matter would be: how ready are the workers to disband whole sectors of the industrial apparatus where this proves necessary to achieve ends other than efficient productivity and high consumption? How willing are they to set aside technocratic priorities in favor of a new simplicity of life, a decelerating social pace, a vital leisure? These are questions which enthusiasts for workers' control might do well to ponder. (68)

Critics of the apolitical view of counterculture found this statement of Roszak’s rather naive: on the one hand, it privileged the “simplicity of life” and “free imagination” to activism and struggles to recognise civil rights and constitutional amendments (Heath and Potter, 2004); on the other hand, Roszak’s thought appeared to be unwilling (or unable) to relate cultural and political-economic revolution (Herbst, 1970). However, Roszak’s theoretical postulations affected the Sixties’ revolution and its universalistic purpose, paradoxically leading to its fragmentation.

To summarise, counterculture, as defined by Roszak, is a holistic movement detached from the traditional notion of subculture. The debate on its meaning, however, is far from over. According to Peter Braunstein and Michael W. Doyle (2002), “counterculture” is an umbrella term which stands for “all 1960s-era political, social, or cultural dissent, encompassing any action from smoking pot at a rock concert to offing a cop” (5). They defined it a “nebula of signifiers comprehending bongos, protest demonstrations, ashrams, and social nudity” (7), lamenting the risk of decontextualisation, de-historicisation and

conversion into assumptive categories in the hand of the wrong people. And ironically, while Roszak used “counterculture” in a restricted sense to define cultural radicalism, during the 1990s posthumous accounts “there were as many definitions of ‘counterculture’ as there were utopian fantasies during the actual counterculture” (ibid.). The risk was that of reifying something which was not a social movement *strictu sensu*:

It was an inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, “lifestyle”, ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negations, and affirmations. These roles were played by people who defined themselves first by what they were not, and then, only after having cleared that essential ground of identity, began to conceive anew what they were. What they were was what they might become - more a process than a product, and thus more a direction or a motion than a movement. (10)

Anderson (1995) argued that counterculture came “in many shapes and colors, which resulted in many inconsistencies” (241) and is classifiable as a specific sub-set of the massive phenomenon known as the Movement, the former being “a counter to the dominant cold war culture” developed after 1968, and the latter comprising “a counter to the political establishment” (ibid.). What is the Movement then? Anderson explained that the Movement was a fluid and amorphous phenomenon whose connotations changed throughout the decade and according to the approaches adopted to study it:

Activists defined and redefined their movement throughout the era. In the early years demonstrators referred to the “struggle” for civil rights while others later felt part of “student power” or the “peace movement,” and if they rejected the draft, the “resistance”. During and especially after 1968, alienation soared, the ranks of protesters swelled, and the counterculture bloomed. Political activists then described themselves as the “conspiracy”, the “underground”, while long-haired hippies talked about “the people”. The movement lost focus, and by 1971 a participant defined it as “a grand geodesic dome fitted together from pieces of Marx, Freud, Zen, Artaud, Kesey, Lenin, Leary, Ginsberg, Che, Gandhi, Marcuse, Laing, Fidel and Lao Tsu...with a 40-watt rock amplifier strapped to the top - a gaudy, mindblowing spectacle and an impossible intellectual syntesis. (xvi)

What the Movement’s activists shared was that felt compelled to question the status quo as it was perceived as unjust. They diverged in protest methods, from marches to sit-ins, from the Great Refusal to street guerrilla. They diverged in their geography of activism, from Greensboro to Selma, from Berkley to Columbia, from Chicago and Milwaukee to New York, to the hippie nest in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco. They even diverged in ideologies and aims, but ultimately shared their demand for change –in politics, in culture and, in a word, in consciousness– and in their confidence to make their voice heard: “Nothing was sacred, everything was challenged, and the result was an era we simply call

“the Sixties”.” (xiii) In point of fact, according to counterculture activist Mitchell Goodman (1970), the Movement *is* a “primitive (Counter)Culture” (vii). The two notions, in their fluidity, overlap. And interestingly his definition of Movement echoed Roszak’s idea of counter-culture:

The Movement is anarchist in its deepest impulses: it is decentralization that leads back to community and wholeness and away from the atomized non-community of men helpless in the machinery of the centralized state. It is primitive at least in the sense that it involves a return to sensation, to the living body and its senses, its capacity for feeling and imagining the life in others... (viii).

In the attempt to provide a temporal frame for the Movement/counterculture, Anderson claimed that the Movement-era goes from 1960, date of the first sit-in by black students at Greensboro, N.C., to approximately 1972-75, years in which the Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment and the U.S. Army retired from Vietnam. On this basis, Anderson discerned two waves within the Movement, according to their chronological development, their participants and general attitude. The first wave went from 1960 to 1968. It included the “children of the fifties” (xiv), born between the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s, who attended college during the 1960s. Anderson defined them as “intellectual, idealistic, and ideological” (ibid.), geared towards debate, the re-discussion of the Old Left’s guidelines and, in general, the legacy of the 1950s. The year 1968 represented a ‘rip tide’ which led to the second wave, lasting until the mid-1970s, i.e. until the alienation of the Nixon era plunged the Movement’s aspirations into nihilism. New activists were the “children of the sixties” (ibid.), the post-war baby boomers, who inherited their predecessors’ ideas of America as an imperialist, sexist, racist country. The focus was no longer on debate. It was on action against authority, with “empowerment” and “liberation” as imperatives: “many addressed local issues, empowering themselves in their communities”, whereas “others tossed off mainstream traditions and liberated themselves, plunging into a sea of counterculture, attempting to bring about a New America” (xviii).

As for a periodisation, Braunstein and Doyle (2002) divided the Sixties’ counterculture into two major phases: the first is the “Flower Children” period, from 1964 (when the Beatles launched their first tour) to 1968 (when Nixon was elected), reaching the zenith in 1967-68. It was youth-based (though the leaders were considered Leary, Ginsberg and Snyder), optimistic and utopian. This view was largely engendered by economic growth and the dream of a leisure society liberated from work-related duties, a ‘postscarcity orientation’ which believed that capitalistic exploitation would transcend thanks to the

advent of machineries, an illusion which revealed the middle-class constituency of hippies. Hippie and counterculture were synonyms, while after 1968 hippie became a signifier for fashion and lifestyle. Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin's provocative burning of dollars and the hippies' voluntary poverty could not conceal the underlying security they had taken for granted and sounded like mockery for immigrant people and actual indigents. And this optimistic view was shared by politicians and rebels alike: President Johnson (1964) talked of "learn the wise use of abundance" (77), Beat writer Alan Watts (1967) of "huge leisure society" (10) and Yippies of "full unemployment" and "let the machines do it" (Hoffman, 1968: 167).

The second phase started in 1969-70 as a result of the economic downturn and Nixon's 'law-and-order' policy. Given the hostility of the political system and the acknowledgement that economy was not going to change any time soon, counterculture fragmented into different groups, each advocating different actions and radical changes. However, such pluralism to some extent characterised the whole:

There is no simple way to explain what went on in the Sixties, no easily identifiable event, like the assassination at Sarajevo, which one can point to and say, "there, tensions might have been growing for decades, but that's the spark that touched off the explosion." Indeed, the more thoroughly you study the Sixties, the more comforting becomes a concept like the *Zeitgeist*. (Jay Stevens, 1989: 230)

Braunstein and Doyle confirmed the paradox of fixing a schema and historicizing a phenomenon which self-proclaimed itself as anti-schema and non-linear, rejecting traditional epistemology and rigidly chronological accounts:

The countercultural mode reveled in tangents, metaphors, unresolved contradictions, conscious ruptures of logic and reason; it was expressly anti-linear, anti-teleological, rooted in the present, disdainful of thought processes that were circumscribed by causation and consequence. Countercultural knowledge can't be accurately represented by a straight line, or even the squiggly line; a more evocative figure would be the matrix, or perhaps the concentric circle. (13)

The scenario was even broader if we consider all the different stances and vindications sprung up during these years:

What seemed important to a black college student at North Carolina A&T College in 1960 might not be relevant to a white student at the University of Michigan teach-in during the spring semester of 1965, to a Yippie at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, to a Chicano Brown Beret at the Los Angeles riot of 1970, or to a working woman marching for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1973. In their own ways, all thought of themselves as part of the movement. (Anderson, 3)

Moreover, if looked from a conservative perspective, the Sixties' values were summarised in a despicable legacy of individualism, consumerism and erosion of democratic public authorities, disregarding the key role civil rights and welfare rights movements, antimilitarism and feminism had and the general disaffection people felt (Young, 2002: 2). Young defended the role counterculture had in voicing the withdrawal²², both contemporary and retrospective, from the automatic trust in the legitimacy of public authority and American ethos: "the country in which they thought they lived- peaceful, generous, honorable- did not exist and never had" (ibid.: 3). In this sense, the Sixties were about a cultural as well as political revolution, though political positions remained posthumously overshadowed by the "sex, drugs, rock n'roll" glamorized triad.

Within this multifaceted scenario with no clear beginning or end, the task of establishing the boundaries of the underground comix phenomenon is no easy to perform. Timelines and places in the underground panorama cannot be monolithic, under pain of overlooking some of the facets which consecrated this phenomenon as maverick par excellence. Nonetheless, some of the features of this Zeitgeist must be defined in order to provide a general framework for the present analysis. Underground comix are children of the Sixties, they could not be born at a different time or in a different country, even though they subsequently influenced other underground productions abroad. They occupied a complex position within the counterculture, visualising its most controversial themes and satirising some of its excesses and inconsistencies.

2.2. How the 1950s fed Counterculture

Three quotes introduce the historical context in which underground culture and comix sprung up:

- "The seeds of the crisis of the 1960s lay in the 1940s" (Godfrey Hodgson, 1976: 17).
- "I am going to look at the Fifties, then, as a seedbed as well as a cemetery." (Todd Gitlin, 1993: 12).
- "We are trying to change society. In the '50s, the beat generation ran away from it. My generation knows we have to strike at the system to make it

²² Young defined "Vietnam syndrome" the dissent characterising the Sixties.

respond. The system my father was part of, and is part of..." (David Smith, 1965).

The historical roots of the underground phenomenon lie in post-war years and the Fifties' cold war culture. America lived with two myths. The first one regarded World War II as a 'good war' which restored American economy after the Great Depression and affirmed its power abroad as the nation which "has never lost a war": no enemy was too strong to be defeated, "[a]ll we had to do was to try hard enough, work as a team, and use our Yankee ingenuity" (Anderson, 4). This led to the glorification of America and the American way of life: a brave nation which exemplified the good, struggled to defend what was good and won. In this self-appointed image of saviour, America became the beacon of freedom, which stood up against the evil: totalitarianism, fascism and everything which was anti-American. Ironically, fascism and censorship became the charges thousands of young rebels levied against the nation in the years to follow. For the 'World War II generation', however, these were undisputable truths. And the sons of this generation grew up with the proud legacy of the good war, fuelled by such films as *Wake Island* (1942), *Air Force* (1943), *Bataan* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *Gung Ho!* (1943), *A Walk in the Sun* (1945), *They Were Expendable* (1945), *Battle Ground* (1949), *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Halls of Montezuma* (1951), *To Hell and Back* (1955).

However, to strengthen its role of 'good nation', America needed a new enemy, and the previous chapter emphasized how the fear of the Soviet Union degenerated into collective hysteria. In 1947, the Truman Doctrine marked the beginning of the cold war and three years later, in 1950, only after five years of peace, America was in combat in Korea. The year 1949, in particular, with the first atomic bomb dropped by Russia, started the 'atomic age' and the subsequent arms race. Anxiety and paranoia escalated. "The Communists in the Kremlin are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world. If they were to succeed, the United States would be numbered among their principal victims. It must be clear to everyone that the United States cannot – and will not – sit idly by and await foreign conquest" declared President Truman in a live radio broadcast in 1951.

Thus, the world was once again split in two: good versus evil, the Communists versus the free world. As Anderson highlighted:

...the world was bipolar: Moscow versus Washington. East Bloc against West Bloc. Reds versus Whites. There were few neutrals during the era, none that could be trusted, and magazines such as Time and U.S. News and World Report published maps in which most of the 140 nations of the world were coloured either red or white: Friend or Foe. Us or Them. (7)

Media played their part in strengthening this view with films, particularly belonging to the sci-fi genre (e.g., the 1953 film *War of the Worlds* focuses on the conflict between red Martians and white Americans²³), and unsophisticated news which exacerbated the Red Scare. Few questioned this Manichean view of the world, for they were neither able to disengage from the honourable model of World War II patriots, fighting fiercely against evil forces, nor dared to question the status quo and thus potentially risk of being accused of being Red. Anderson described this scenario in the following terms:

In a world frozen by cold war, most Americans began to accept another notion: there were no just causes for revolution. Americans apparently forgot about 1776 and arrived at the conclusion that revolts in colonies or developing nations were no longer caused by nationalism, poverty, or social and political oppression. Instead, all were “Communist-inspired.” That being the case, most citizens felt that it was in the national interest to maintain the status quo, both abroad and at home. Almost two centuries earlier James Madison had put it like this: “Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to the provisions against dangers, real or pretended, from abroad.” Madison was referring to the Alien and Sedition Acts, but the same idea applied to the Red Scare following World War I and also to the cold war era. (8)

And it was more than fear if one considers that Truman’s Executive Order 9835 enabled the investigation of federal workers, who could be dismissed on the “reasonable grounds for belief in disloyalty”. This granted more and more power to special committees, subcommittees and to the FBI. Just as in the case of comics, from 1947 to 1956 approximately 2,700 workers were fired by the federal government on account of their potential affiliation with the communists, and another 12,000 employees resigned. Among population, the idea of informing on potentially subversive people became accepted: Anderson reported that an opinion poll found that two-thirds of those asked agreed with the statement that one should inform on someone, even though some innocent people got hurt (8).

Left-wing journalist I. F. Stone (1953) denounced the attempt to turn “a whole generation of Americans into stool pigeons” (99). And enraged by the outcomes of red hysteria, Jean-Paul Sartre declared “Watch out, America has the rabies!” (quoted in

²³ Studios produced many other anti-communist movies to demonstrate the patriotism of the industry with respect to the cold war cause: *The Iron Curtain* (1948), *I married a Communist* (1949), *The Red Menace* (1949), *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951).

Anderson, 14). Without even realising it, the much-vaunted glory of War World II was tarnished by the purges of the cold war era. Chapter 1 dealt with the impact of McCarthyism on comics, but the carnage involved all institutions, from federal positions to education. More than 600 teachers and professors lost their job (Anderson, 11), television and radio producers fired 1,500 employees, while the blacklist made about 350 actors and writers unemployable by Hollywood. “Commie” had become the general derogatory word to define everything American society despised, the responsible for every possible deviation in youth, together with comic books and television, of course. There was nothing worse than being anti-American. The Manicheism of World War II had clearly transferred to the following generation: politics was seen as black or white, good forces or evil forces. And Americans were indisputably the “good guys”: Anderson talked of “My country right or wrong. Love it or leave it,” a mentality which subsequently led to the Vietnam War in order to stop another enemy’s aggression.

The result was cold war culture, which displayed a general concern in security reinforced by the fear of communism abroad as well as at home, and a widespread desire to ‘fit in’ on account of the McCarthy’s crusades: this ultimately led to a culture of consensus and conformity as well as to a need to feel part of a group. The sense of belonging was reassuring and comforting. The rise of suburbs may be the best example of this trend: suburban population (white couples with children or middle-aged and middle-incomed people) doubled between 1950 and 1970, all living in almost identical houses, all looking and acting in similar ways:

Men idolized John Wayne or perhaps William Holden, and women modelled themselves after June Allyson, Debbie Reynolds, or Audrey Hepburn, actresses who played sweet girls who became whole-some and cheerful wives like Dinah Shore. The fifties was the Wonder Bread decade: Campbell’s soup, Spam, Velveeta. Suburbanites embraced sameness, while many of them feared changes. (16)

Family was the institution in which this process of homogenization was nurtured: “Being a ‘happy family’ was not just a good idea – it was a requirement” (ibid.: 15). The unity of the family was a guarantee of safety. Anderson identified in the popular sitcom *Father Knows Best* the pinnacle of 1950s’ American mythology, with the paradigm of family togetherness expressed by the couple played by Robert Young, the super-father, wise, tender and sympathetic, and Jane Wyatt, in the role of the perfect wife and mother: “it was the same reality that forced Jane Wyatt, in one bedroom scene with Robert Young, to wear a brassiere under her nightgown. That seemed to typify the program, which was about as realistic as a

bra under a nightie” (23). The sitcom was not realistic, but it was what most American wanted to believe as real. Weekends to the park, presents to demonstrate love, perfect and happy marriages, good schools where kids were taught how to become “good Americans”. Even studying at school was a matter of consensus: “[w]hen students studied history, their textbooks reported only about ‘great Presidents,’ ‘strong-willed pioneers who conquered the west,’ or ‘hard-working men who built America’” (17). When in college, students joined fraternities and sororities. Americans joined clubs and leagues, while Churches exponentially increased their membership. Teamwork was extremely valued and sports were strongly supported as they enhanced strength and determination, just like the war heroes of the prior decade. “Be normal and you will be popular” is the motto Anderson used to express the climate of those years, claiming that “[a]t the University of Michigan in 1952 nine out of ten students were afraid to sign a document; it was the Declaration of Independence without the first sentence” (18). The idea of debating, protesting or marching against the Establishment was unthinkable. Youth had to go ‘steady’: boys had to look up to the role model of their fathers, girls followed the (still too small) steps of their mothers. Fifties’ kids ultimately became known as the Silent Generation, aging as a Silent Majority. They were charged of being laconic, apathetic, with no enthusiasm and void of thought.

However, as Paul Goodman emphasised in his 1960 work *Growing Up Absurd*, only half of the adolescents actually finished school and a mere 15% attended college. The great majority had to go to work, to live in poor economic conditions. Not everybody was part of that suburban “American dream”: the point is that society and media only put in the limelight examples of success. Sparkles of protests were easily hushed. Goodman’s thesis is that under the unfair label of “Silent Generation”, American kids were either spoiled or repressed, never truly understood or helped. Their passiveness may be blamed, but their protests were labelled as manifestations of delinquency of a bunch of “rebels without a cause”, quoting the eponymous 1955 James Dean’s film. The cult of conformity was so pervasive that it resulted in the loss of identity. Everything outside the white, middle-class success-oriented ethos tended to be denied and erased, especially if reminding the Great Depression’s struggle. Again, self-censorship proved to be far more powerful than institutional threats. Every other social model, or cultural background, could not stand the exclusivity of the “Happy Days” one, the popular TV series arguably epitomising the idealised way of life of that time - in which the ladies’ man in leather jacket Arthur ‘Fonzie’ Fonzarelli represents the ‘most threatening’ figure for the perfect life of the Cunningham family.

The second half of the 1950s represented a time of supposed prosperity: the war in Korea was over and McCarthyist hysteria faded, economy was on the rise and technological development was gathering momentum. But, then, on 4 October 1957, as a part of the Sovietic space program, the Sputnik spacecraft was launched: it was a Pearl Harbour 2.0 which renewed the fright of an atomic war and ratcheted the arms race up. However, both foreign and domestic politics shuddered. Indeed, just a couple of years before, something had started rippling the surface of this ideal scenario and challenging the apathy of the Silent Generation. On a cultural level, this may be exemplified by Allen Ginsberg's publication of the collection *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956, which included the homonymous work, considered one of the masterpieces of the group of writers known as the Beat Generation. On a social level, starting from December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, after Rosa Parks's refusal to go to the back of the bus where black people were segregated, Martin Luther King led the black community through a 381-day boycott which marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, the only mass protest movement of the decade.

2.3. Home-Made Sputniks: The Beats, the Civil Right Movement and the Boom of Counterculture

One of the trailblazers for the underground was undoubtedly the Beat movement of the 1950s, whose rebellion to Us-post-war ideal life was inherited by the hippies and converted from spiritual *malaise* to action by the mass rebellions of the 1960s. In 1958, in the February issue of *Esquire*, John Clellon Holmes defined the Beats in these terms:

Now, with the word 'beat,' we may have their sobriquet at last. Everyone who has lived through a war, any sort of war, knows that beat means, not such much weariness, as rawness of the nerves; not so much being 'filled up to here,' as being emptied out. It describes a state of mind, from which all unessentials have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it, but impatient with trivial obstructions. To be beat is to be the bottom of your personality, looking up; to be existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre, sense.

Prior to Kerouac's *On the Road*, John Clellon Holmes's novel *Go* (1952) is considered the first beat novel ever published and serves as a chronicle of the lives the Beats lived before their success. Holmes claimed that the Beat generation had inherited the worst of the possible worlds. In the *Introduction* to the graphic history dedicate to the Beats by underground heroes Paul Buhle and Harvey Pekar (2009) with the collaboration of several artists from that period, Beats were defined as an alternative to compulsory conformism, standing "between the social

collectivism of the Franklin D. Roosevelt years and the do-your-own-thingism of the 1960s, squarely (even while hating “squares”) within the era of Cold War anxiety” (vii). They offered “wild sex, recreational drug use, determined uprootedness, and most importantly, experimental writing of all kind” and dealt with “American Indian themes, homosexuality, draft resistance, and a whole range of previously unacceptable, almost unutterable ideas” (ibid.). Norman Mailer (1957) claimed that “[o]ne could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one’s own voice, for the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone” (2). And in a way this is the contribution of the Beat to the Sixties, namely the redefinition of the ‘rebel’ figure and the rediscovery of the primacy of freedom of print. “The beatniks delighted in demonstrating undisciplined behaviour”, claimed Anderson (35), and their indiscipline aimed to challenge cold war culture and the misleading notion that “it was America’s Century”. In his article “The philosophy of the beat generation”, Holmes (1960) defined the Beat’s condition as “emptied out”, as “a state of mind from which all unessentials had been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it”: the influence of existentialism is evident. Beats inherited the nihilism and the scepticism towards social action and change developed in the Left Bank of Paris, after the Second World War, and exemplified by the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Raymond Aron. The Beats represented an American revision of the Parisian Bohemian intellectuals. Their refusal for the sickness of the American Dream took the shape of withdrawal from and cynicism towards the world, possibly looking for new visions and alternative truths in marijuana and recreational drugs, the annihilation of heroin, Oriental mysticism and philosophy, casual sex and orgies, all accompanied by Charlie Parker’s be-bop or Archie Shepp’s jazz. They showed sensibility to the racial cause and openness to homosexuality, but their lack of commitment often resulted in social irresponsibility and sexist attitudes. Their focus on the individual and the present resulted in the inability to propose collective solutions. This was far from their aim. Brake summarised their ethos in terms of (89):

- Withdrawal—from all but the barest minimum contact necessary for survival with the square;
- Disaffiliation—from traditional family, social and career structures; and
- Existential solutions—to what were conceptualised as basically existential problems.

Beats adopted workers’ uniforms and style but were middle-class intellectuals, with a completely different cultural background. Nonetheless, they despised the middle class and

preferred a life in poverty, experiencing working-class life and celebrating Kerouac's "fellaheen". Closed in a sort of romantic idea of anarchism, Beats refused to be committed and to settle down both symbolically, building life careers and family trees, and geographically, especially avoiding the straight suburbs and preferring bohemian ghettos. Beats' intellectual nucleus met at Columbia University, where Allen Ginsberg, Herbert Huncke, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr and Jack Kerouac met in 1944, later joined by other Beat authors such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes and, *On the Road* hero, Neal Cassidy. They moved from Greenwich Village, New York, to the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco, which was to become the cradle of counterculture. The Beats had their own magazines, such as *Beatitude* in San Francisco or *Big Table* in Chicago, which can be considered as the underground press forerunners. *Big Table*, in particular, was born in reaction to censorship, as it was launched in spring 1959 following the suppression of the winter 1958 issue of *The Chicago Review*, the University of Chicago literary magazine. Even though short-lived, it was a first attempt to face authority and the general apathy of the campuses. However, they did not try to inflame masses with calls for revolution. They were appalled and disturbed by the era they were living in and were the product of, and this resulted in the detachment they had for life, and the whimsical approach they had to literature. The legacy of the Beats rather lies in this: they "ridiculed society; they dented the chrome 1950s. They provided a style of rebellion that lent momentum to the idea that a person could question and reject society" (Anderson, 36). This thought influenced future activists. Anticipating what Roszak would argue years after, in the 1959 essay "Variations on a Generation", Gregory Corso advocated "a new art whose objectivity will be the accuracy of its introspection, [...] the fury of subjective revolution" (quoted in Charters, 1992: xxviii). And he would say that: "the hippies are acting out what the Beats wrote" (quoted in Cook, 1971: 143). Among the Beats, Ginsberg shared many of the counterculture's values and adhered to the Sixties' cultural revolution. Ginsberg's poem "Howl" (1956) can be considered his generation's ode, with its iconic first verse

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo
in the machinery of night [...] (9).

Unsurprisingly, in 1957, the poem was seized and an obscenity trial was brought against its publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti. But Ginsberg's "Howl" did not remain unheard.

It reverberated outside the narrow circle of poets of the Beat Generation to join the outcry of the Sixties generation. If the latter learned to make its voice heard on the street, it was thanks to the black people's Civil Right Movement which openly challenged the status quo of the silent generation.

It is no coincidence that Mitchell Goodman (1970) started its "Quick Chronology of the Movement" (x-xi) with the year 1956: in December of the previous year Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and this gave rise to Martin Luther King's 381-day black boycott. Goodman conceived the protest against racial segregation as a model for the Counterculture, together with all manifestation of dissent from the WASP-credo: "Blacks, Vietnamese, Indians. From them the young in America have something to learn- and they know it" (vii). Black activism opened the eyes of millions of Americans who up to that point had largely ignored or, more or less explicitly, despised black people: "blacks were not a concern because they were invisible", claimed Anderson (38). As a matter of fact, Southern trees were still bearing the same strange fruit Billie Holliday sang about years before. But America did not look, it did not listen. Connivance proved a form of obscurantism as pervasive as official censorship. Prior to the outburst of the protests, media had traditionally focused on black people only whenever 'racial accidents' occurred in the North, but largely overlooked the situation in the South: "[s]ome things were best left unsaid, many parents reminded their children, and that included discussions about race" (Anderson, 16). The situation in the South, in which the so-called Jim Crow segregation system based on "separate but equal" ratio was "a step away from slavery" (ibid.), was labelled as a symptom of local backwardness, not regarding the nation as a whole. Public facilities were separated, education disparity was shocking: according to Anderson's account on the matter, in Clarendon County, South Carolina, officials spent 179 dollars on every white student in 1950 and 43 dollars on each black one; fourteen years later in Holly Bluff, Mississippi, those figures were over 190 dollars for a white student and 1.26 dollars for a black one. Bruno Cartosio (2002: 122) highlighted how white youth suddenly discovered that in the South black and white people had separate waiting rooms, hospitals, jails, drinking fountains, bus services, trains, public spaces, taxis, churches, schools, sport arenas, cinemas, theatres, swimming pools, toilets, restaurant tables and bars. In Atlanta, white and black witnesses could not swear on the same Bible in court and in New Orleans even prostitutes in red-light districts were segregated. Blacks had to keep their eyes down when talking to a white, they could talk only if questioned and had to answer "yes, sir" or "no, sir", and had

restrictions in voting rights. As for occupations, blacks only could aspire to humble jobs and earned less than their white counterparts. Those who were educated were nonetheless victims of wage discrimination.

Suddenly the children of the suburbs discovered that America was a country split according to “White Only” and “Colored” signs. The country which freed Jews from the concentration camps exposed such signs as: “We Do Not Serve Mexicans, Niggers, or Dogs.” In the North, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) refused loans for integrated housing projects in the suburbs. Anderson quoted the example of Levittown, Pennsylvania, which in 1957 was inhabited by some 60,000 people and not one was black. Even though segregation was not established by laws, housing practices determined the creation of ghettos and consequently all-black schools. And even if black people had voting rights, no politician represented their interests. In general, America was racist. According to popular opinion polls reported by Anderson, interracial relationships were opposed by 90% of northern and 97% of southern white people, while mixed neighbourhoods were frowned upon by half of northern and three-fourths of southern white. And this led to a feeling of shame in black people, and racism between light-skinned blacks towards darker ones (28). Racism towards other minorities was also widespread: Mexicans were greasers; Puerto Ricans, spicks; Asians, chinks; and Jews, were kikes, yids, or jewboys. As Anderson lamented, “those who tried to cross the color line, who attempted to use the rights guaranteed by the constitution, received a blunt warning or a vicious response: beatings and killings” (29). Between 1880s and 1950s over 3,800 blacks were lynched in the South. Such ideas as “white supremacy” spread all over the South, where vigilante committees, such as the Ku Klux Klan or White Citizens Councils, were created. And although the court ordered the desegregation of schools in 1954 and interstate travels, yearly only 1% of southern schools integrated black students and buses and trains remained separated. The White Citizens Council of Louisville divulged flyers suspecting that integration was part of outside agitators’ plan: “EXPOSED! The Communist Plot to Integrate Public Schools, Pools and Housing Projects”.

The Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) started working against segregation in 1950 and offered legal and financial support to black people’s lawsuits. However, even their constitutional successes were still unheard prior to the Montgomery boycott, which de facto marked the beginning of a new phase for black demur. The lives of black people in the town were reorganised: churches, associations, workers organisations, single volunteers, all cooperated to provide ‘public’ services with private means and collect

money for the lawsuit against the municipality. Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr., soon-to-become symbol of the Civil Right Movement and nonviolent resistance, organised the boycott which did not stop until the desegregation process ended. Montgomery demonstrated that people united could achieve great results, they could ask for change “here and now”, and this stimulated action and further claims as for education rights and free access to public places. In 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, when the waitress refused to serve “negros”, four A&T College students started a new form of nonviolent protest, the sit-ins at lunch counters. This event, according to Anderson, represented the actual beginning of the movement: it ignited young people, both black and white, to become activists and give their small contribution to a major cause. The sit-ins spread all over America, and were followed by read-ins, paint-ins, wade-ins, kneel-ins in white-only libraries, galleries, beaches and churches. The repression was violent, perpetrated by both white supremacists and the police arresting peaceful demonstrators. This served as fuel rather than deterrent: “it helped young blacks form a common bond, gave them a new sense of pride, and encouraged most of them to try harder to beat segregation. They were putting their lives on the line, [...] they launched the 1960s” (Anderson, 46-47).

Television played a crucial role in broadcasting the protests with the effect of showing how brutal and anti-American, the American segregation was. Middle-class students, with relatively more free time and less responsibility than adults or their working counterparts, were the first to embrace the Civil Right Movement’s cause. Students who grew up in the cold war culture were fascinated by idealist concepts and by the Freedom Rides, driving interstate buses across the South to support the black cause. As black people gathered together to make their voice heard, the white youth seemed to break the silence of the Fifties’ generation. Music became one of the most effective driving forces for the contamination between blacks and whites. Race music imposed a distinction between white country and black rhythm and blues. But when white singer, and white audience, discovered the power of black music, the sound and the explicit lyrics of this niche genre began to be valued and even influenced rock and roll stars such as Elvis Presley. In the case of underground comix, black music will become, especially for Robert Crumb, who would start playing himself, a topos symbolising the freedom from restraints, the inner wildness of human beings. Blues and jazz will be the soundtrack of America for a long time, from the Beats’ poetry to underground strips.

However, it is crucial to stress that black activists’ and countercultural rebels’ causes

ultimately branched: Black Power, which arose in the same period, did not share the anti-war commitment of white people, who on the other hand did not take part to the protests in the ghettos. Nonetheless, the black movement undeniably gave momentum to the Sixties' youth upheaval as well as to the re-discussion and re-negotiation of the US-history up to that point, no longer according to the white masters' perspective but rather collecting the memories and the cultural heritage of former slaves. This prompted the investigation of history according to the outcasts (immigrants, women, native Americans, and the low strata of populations), i.e., what Cartosio called "storia dal basso" (140), "history from below", with a clear analogy to the topic of this research: the underground.

However, it would be wrong to assume that, except for the Beats and the newly revisited study of US-history from below, no other work developed some form of socio-political criticism towards cold war culture. Other prominent voices expressed their dissent and subsequently inspired the Sixties' political activity. In comparing American thinkers, authors and intellectuals to the European novels questioning Western culture, such as the works by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka and Herman Hesse, Anderson enlisted among the inspirations behind the Sixties' revolution Lewis Coser, Irving Howe, Erich Fromm, A. J. Muste, Dwight Macdonald, publishing their sharp invective in such journals as the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *Dissent*, *Nation* and *New Republic*. Among the books against the 1950s' status quo it is important to mention William H. Whyte Jr.'s *The Organization Man* (1956), C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (1956), Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (1959), John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1959), and the already mentioned *Growing Up Absurd* by Paul Goodman, anticipated by the groundbreaking 1950 study on American "new middle-class" *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* by David Riesman. Goodman's book was rejected by nineteen publishers on account of its criticism to 1950s' "organized system" and "impregnable feudalism" (xvi). He anticipated the Movement's protests by advocating that: "[o]ne has the persistent thought that if ten thousand people in all walks of life will stand up on their two feet and talk out and insist, we shall get back our country" (ibid.). Mills's influential notion of "power elite" focused on the economic, political, and military institutions which controlled and manipulated a society which, for the sake of security, had given away its democratic principles. Similarly, revisionist historian William Appleman Williams published *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), in which he asserted that the triad of corporate-military-political power elites had created ad hoc and exasperated the dichotomy between the evil Soviet

Union and the good United States to legitimise an expansionist foreign policy (especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia) to set the country as a modern empire. His work represented a sort of manifesto of the emerging New Left, which opposed America's liberalism and its democratising wars concealing the desire to spread its dominance in such countries as Vietnam.

By all means, the great inspirers of the counterculture actually were from Europe. Karl Marx's critique of ideology was pivotal for the birth of countercultural thought. Marx developed the concepts of "commodity fetishism" and "alienated labour" as the roots of capitalism²⁴. Such notions accounted for much of the Sixties' assumptions, particularly for the idea that consumerism was objectifying social relationships and thus people were becoming a nation of clock-watchers, prisoners of a mental cage which resulted in an actual social constriction. And any society unable to cut across the capitalist superstructure is a society unable to revolt and to subvert the status quo. These notions had been further developed by thinkers as Antonio Gramsci who argued that capitalism had created a false consciousness in the working class, by establishing a cultural hegemony: the bourgeois ideology was reflected in the canon of literature, music and art, which shaped and homogenised the mind of the whole society. In his *The Prison Notebooks* ([1930] 1971), Gramsci delivered his solution, the only possible one to break the cage: "the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture" (275-6). This idea was developed well in advance of the countercultural revolution. In 1930s' Italy times were not quite ripe; in 1960s America it sounded like a call for action.

According to Heath and Potter (40), Marx's thought would not have taken hold in the United States without the Freudian turn of its critique, since as previously said, America did not develop the same class consciousness of European countries. Freud's contribution to the countercultural cause lies with his theory of repression (1995 [1905]). The basic assumption of his analysis is that the human mind is divided in id, ego and superego: while the id is free from self-restraint, "venue" of wild and uncontrolled desires, the ego is the conscious mind which imposes order and self-discipline and the superego is an unconscious censorship structure, associating a sense of guilt and shame to the fulfilment of basic instincts. Culture and civilisation led to the repression of id and the subjugation of inner

²⁴ The notion was first developed in K. Marx, *Capital. Volume 1: The Process of Production of Capital*, Penguin Books, London, 1990 (1867).

human desires. For Freud, the sacrifice of such primordial freedom was inevitable for the progress of society. For the countercultural rebels, in order to recover human natural freedom, society and culture had to be rejected as a whole, for they amounted to nothing more than systems of repression. According to Freud's "pressure-cooker" model of the mind, the repression of one's longings is the cause of neurosis. Likewise, the repression of society was leading to its sclerotisation, increasing tensions, frustration and unhappiness. This Faustian compromise in which civilisation is achieved only through the loss of freedom is a notion which such philosophers as Thomas Hobbes (1991 [1651]) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1997 [1762]) already developed. What Freud suggested, on the other hand, is that the primordial impulses are not lost, but subdued. The more society progresses, the more repression suffocates the id and, consequently, the more people feel unhappy. This trade-off between a repressed society and the freedom of the state of nature will be one of the leitmotifs of Crumb's production, particularly in Whiteman's adventures. In the comix world, the use of humour was further legitimised by Freud's theory of jokes (2011 [1905]): wit generates brief moments of relief and pleasure, because it momentarily evades the censorship of the superego, deceiving it through fast, humorous punch lines teasing taboo themes such as death and sex. This is one of the reasons why comix artists thought of humour as a weapon against censorship and inhibitions. Moreover, members of the counterculture in general increasingly made use of drugs which ease disinhibition and free the mind from superego's constraints.

Psychoanalysis met Marxism in the postulations of the Frankfurt School. In particular, Herbert Marcuse's ([1955] 1966) reflections on the psychological roots of fascism had a great impact on the evolution of the counterculture: "concentration camps, mass exterminations, world wars, and atom bombs are no 'relapse into barbarism', but the unrepressed implementation of the achievements of modern science, technology and domination" (4). The idea behind this statement is that superego subdued human inner violence, but whenever such control fails society plunges into totalitarianism and genocide. Thus, on the one hand, modern society was grounded upon the subjugation of violent instincts; on the other hand, it required the narcotisation of sexual urges. American democracy may have defeated Nazism, but its people were nonetheless subjugated by a subtler form of tyranny, the one of capitalism: the mechanisation of human body and the renunciation to natural sexual drives were at the root of mass production, granting an army of alienated workers and a crowd of potential buyers who sublimate their repressed desires

with consumerism – another recurring theme in the underground comix which are object of the present analysis. Thus, as claimed by Heath and Potter, the Frankfurt School saw a continuum between fascism and the modern developments of Western society, and this very idea spread in the ranks of countercultural rebels: “So when hippies denounced Western governments as ‘fascist pig states’, they meant it quite literally” (52).

In fact, following Marcuse’s theories, Roszak (15-19) argued that the most sophisticated forms of totalitarianism involved “repressive sublimation” rather than brutal repression. The aforementioned concept of Great Refusal appeared as a valuable option to break these chains. In this respect, Marcuse’s position inspired Roszak’s call for change, particularly in the passages from *One Dimensional Man* in which he postulated that “the technological society is a system of domination” (xvi) and:

Men must...find their way from false to true consciousness, from their immediate to their real interest. They can do so only if they live in need of changing their way of life, of denying the positive, of refusing, it is precisely this need which the established society manages to repress using the scientific conquest of nature for the scientific conquest of man. (xliii)

The trade-off was pretty clear for baby boomers: Did they accept to renounce to freedom and ‘sell out’ to a neurotic, conformist society, or did they want to experience the inner rebelliousness of the id? Resistance and rebellion were romanticised by those who embraced the latter option. But the limit of this view lies precisely in the idea that all institutions represent obstacles to freedom and society had to be rejected as a whole (Heath and Potter, 58). Heath and Potter (60-61) conceived the notion of “oppression” as the ultimate blending between Marx’s theory of exploitation of the working class and Freud’s idea of repression of society. Without focusing on any specific class distinction, oppressed groups of people were victims of the unjust psychological, rather than social, subjugation of dominating groups. No reform on an institutional level could change the situation, for institutions were the prime oppressors. Hence the need of a transformation on a conscious level. As Roszak emphasized, “the revolution which will free us from alienation must be primarily therapeutic in character and not merely institutional.” (97) Accordingly, in *The Greening of America* (1970), Charles Reich echoed:

There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed, and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. It is now spreading with amazing rapidity, and already our laws, institutions and social structure are changing in consequence. It promises a higher reason, a more human

community, and a new and liberated individual. Its ultimate creation will be a new and enduring wholeness and beauty — a renewed relationship of man to himself, to other men, to society, to nature, and to the land. This is the revolution of the new generation (3).

According to Green and the majority of countercultural rebels, politics was no longer the tool to achieve justice for the oppressed: “Must we wait for fascism before we realize that political activism has failed?” (252). In this light, culture represented the silver bullet which had the power to tear down the Establishment: “The revolution must be cultural. For culture controls the economic and political machine, not vice versa” (ibid.). The rationale was pretty easy: “if you want to change the economy, you need to change the culture, and if you want to change the culture, fundamentally you have to change people’s consciousness” (Heath and Potter, 61). The Beatles were arguably the new gurus of this generation of rebels as they sang “You say you’ll change the constitution Well you know We all want to change your head You tell me it’s the institution Well you know You better free your mind instead”. Beastie Boys will echo them by singing “you gotta fight for your right to party”. Fun de facto became young rebels’ weapon against the dullness of society. This way of thinking had some practical outcomes, which will be thoroughly analysed in the light of textual evidence: consciousness was changed by relying on alternative measures, such as mystical quests, commune’s life, and drug culture; the focus on social justice shifted towards individual consciousness; if all institutions are nothing more than cages, *every* act of subversion was politically radical and useful to change the system (from casual sex to Weathermen’s bombings); arts, especially subversive or neglected forms, bloomed, including guerrilla theatre, rock music and comix; scepticism towards media increased exponentially. In this regard, prior to Jean Baudrillard’s theories of *The Consumer Society* (1970) and *Simulacra* (1981), radical Marxist Guy Debord, founding member of the Situationist International, wrote *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which inspired the Paris 1968 uprising. Just as Plato used the metaphor of the cave in his Republic, Debord used the image of a spectacle to explain the veil of illusion covering modern society: people no longer experience authenticity, as “[a]ll that was once directly lived has become mere representation” (12). Capitalism was turning everything into commodity, and even social relationships were degraded in a world marked by “the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing” (ibid.). Mass media and advertising shape people’s way of seeing and thinking through the spectacle and this generated increasing alienation. On the one hand, the spectacle has become “the nightmare of imprisoned modern society, which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to

sleep” (20). On the other hand, countercultural rebels can wake up from the nightmare through “the consciousness of desire and the desire for consciousness” (53). But how? Debord talked of cognitive dissonance: even small signs of rebellion and “disturbances with the lowliest and most ephemeral of origins have eventually disrupted the order of the world” (ibid.). Dissonant art, music, clothing, all which Hebdige summarised in his notion of subcultural style, can unplug people, set them free from the world of the spectacle. The idea of counterculture stems from this awareness, whereas mainstream media are felt to represent the enemy and mainstream society the system to subvert.

Heath and Potter argued that counterculture’s intolerance of rules paradoxically shared many of neoliberalist and free-market ideological postures and a cultural programme assigning such a special value to individualism and individual consciousness could find fertile ground on which to develop on account of America’s myth of self-reliance²⁵. However, it is important to stress that such notions as market were actually redundant for the counterculture: rules were unnecessary because people did not need property rights once their consciousness would be free from the notion of possessiveness and privatisation. Most radicals actually did not agree with the communist thought *strictu sensu* as this seemed to be conceived as another rigid form of state tyranny. Many of them favoured anarchism, as it rejected all coercive authority structures, including the state and the market laws. During the counterculture this position resulted in the utopian programme of building a new society based on mutual sharing and cooperation, as in the case of the Diggers’ experience. In particular, the Sixties saw the boom of communes, experimenting alternative ways of life, free from impositions and disparities. However, as elucidated later on, communal living arrangements soon revealed their difficulties and inconsistencies, reproducing many of the negative features characterising the outer society. Indeed, anarchism will ultimately take a negativist turn with punk culture: if the system could not be changed, it had to be razed to the ground/annihilated.

In *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (1989), Richard H. Pells claimed that “postwar intellectuals became the parents and teachers -literally and spiritually- of the New Left, the partisans of the counterculture, the civil rights

²⁵ The New England transcendentalists, most prominently Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau, had developed their thought around this notion already during the nineteenth century. The right wing thought that any government should not impose top-down regulations. Friedrich von Hayek postulated the theory of spontaneous order, while Ayn Rand argued that individual freedom should not be made captive by uniforming rules: self-interest and common good could be balanced by the invisible hand of the market.

activists, and the movement to end the conflagration in Vietnam” (ix). Despite the need to include these works in the general framework of analysis of the Sixties, the risk, Anderson lamented, is to overemphasize the role of these thinkers for the development of the Movement’s activism. Rather than in critical studies, the rebellion was largely inflamed by concrete experiences: black people’s discrimination and poverty, the selective service for Vietnam experienced by college students, the apathy caused by the conformed life of middle-class kids in the suburbs and the male chauvinism experienced by women. As Mario Savio claimed, “you don’t need an ideology for the civil rights movement – it was America contradicting itself on its own best terms” (interview in Eynon, 1989: 51). Nonetheless, the aforementioned thinkers certainly had a crucial role in shaping activist students and professors in universities, who in turn prompted the creation of the New Left and the crack in the general apathy of the Silent Generation. “The employers will love this generation” is the ironic prophecy written by the president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, in 1959: “they aren’t going to press many grievances. They are going to be easy to handle. There aren’t going to be any riots” (quoted in Raskin, 1997: 31). In 2 December 1964, outside the Sproul Hall, University of California, Berkeley, Mario Savio, the leader of the Free Speech Movement pronounced his famous “Bodies upon the Gears” speech:

We were told the following: if President Kerr actually tried to get something more liberal out of the regents in his telephone conversation, why didn't he make some public statement to that effect? And the answer we received, from a well-meaning liberal, was the following: He said, ‘Would you ever imagine the manager of a firm making a statement publicly in opposition to his board of directors?’ That’s the answer! Well, I ask you to consider: If this is a firm, and if the board of regents are the board of directors; and if President Kerr in fact is the manager; then I’ll tell you something. The faculty are a bunch of employees, and we’re the raw material! But we’re a bunch of raw materials that don’t mean to have any process upon us. Don’t mean to be made into any product. Don’t mean... Don't mean to end up being bought by some clients of the University, be they the government, be they industry, be they organized labor, be they anyone! We’re human beings! There’s a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part! You can’t even passively take part! And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels... upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you’ve got to make it stop! And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all! (quoted in Cohen, 2009: 327)

The Free Speech Movement was the first mass protest on an American college campus in the 1960s and paralyzed the University, which the students found guilty of prohibiting political activity within campuses. Savio, who was only 22 years old at that time, became a countercultural icon. The wild Sixties had begun, and the fault between with the

Fifties' Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers eventually ruptured. "There must be some kind of way outta here", Jimi Hendrix was to sing soon. What may be considered an irreconcilable generational gap arose from such social issues as alienation, the crisis of authority, conformism and hypocrisy:

Social ironies are always present in any culture, of course, but those paradoxes had an abnormal impact on the massive sixties generation. These kids had been raised in the cold war culture, where there were concrete rules of "normal behaviour" and "right and wrong." Authority. When a teenage daughter questioned if God existed, her father retorted, "As long as you live in this house you'll believe what I tell you to believe. Don't question, play the game". Parents demanded that their children "fit in" and "be normal." Kids did fit in, but then later critics complained that they were apathetic, that they lacked idealism and moral commitment. Students began to march, to demonstrate, and again the older generation complained. [...] There were double standards, for boys and girls for children and parents, for individuals and government. (Anderson, 251-52)

The problem was often couched in terms of Young versus Old by the public discourse, as in Braunstein and Doyle's (2002) brilliant remark about a "youthquake" (10). However, as Anderson more subtly pointed out, the social climate was such that authority per se and all institutional forms of power were actually questioned: "Dropping out [...] usually meant dropping the value of the older generation – developing ones for the New America – and the counterculture values were a reaction to mainstream ones." (ibid., 255) Thus, while cultural revolution opposed traditional values, a sometimes spiritually-inspired antimilitarism opposed the cult of 'good' war, and political anarchism spontaneously and still staunchly opposed any loyalty to the myth of Stars and Stripes. To put in metaphorical terms, a "noisy minority" challenged a "silent majority", "a generation of Jacobins, a rude, unwashed, overeducated mob" challenged the "quiescent teens of the Fifties" – who had by then become adults (Stevens, 1989: 231).

Stevens highlighted how the so-called "Generation Gap" was the result of the misunderstanding between the two generations, one which, in the light of the aforementioned considerations, could be defined as the product of an American-Manichean conception of life, values and, in general, of identity:

But these were just two entries in an enormous ledger of misunderstanding and suspicion. It seemed to the kids that the parents were always saying NO! That everything about them, their hair, their music, their clothes, the way they talked, their heroes, their dreams, all were considered illegitimate by a generation who couldn't stop patting itself on the back over how democratic and liberal it was. On the other hand, it seemed to the parents that the kids were always saying "fuck you!" That everything about them, their hair, their relationships, the clothes they wore, the cars they drove, etc. This internecine squabble soon became dignified as the Generation Gap, and while the sociologists and

psychologists labored mightily to explain its genesis, the kids couldn't have cared less: they wanted to let the chasm widen until there was sufficient space to create their own alternative culture. (242)

In his introduction to the “revolution kit” *The Movement towards a New America*, Mitchell Goodman stressed the relevance of such Generation Gap on several occasions:

We live in confusion verging on chaos, in the midst of a process of change we barely understand. Only the young (and those who grow with them) begin to understand: they are native to a world in which there is no predictable future, in which governments offer control and terror in place of the "pursuit of happiness." (vi)

This new epistemological condition, one which previous generations could not fully grasp, prompted a reaction in the young people who first began to perceive themselves as a community and gradually developed a cohesive identity and a sense of belonging:

The young in America are a class, in the neo-Marxian sense -abused, processed, exploited- and they have come to see their common interest. But more importantly, they are a tribe, a primitive tribe held together by their remarkable peer-group solidarity. (Their elders have failed them. Most of their learning is from one another. They make mistakes, but learn from them. They want to learn. They are willing to start from scratch.) (vii)

And such identity was based on the assumption that, as a generation, they had to carry out an epochal mission: “I see the people of the Movement as New Americans, who recognize that the old America is destroying itself, and that in its paroxysms of fear, greed and hate it may destroy the whole earth. They see the necessity, then, to make a new culture” (vii). Hence the dissent and distrust, which, as already stated, addressed authorities on all levels. And in resonance with such a subversive attitude, Tom Paxton in *What Did You Learn in School Today?* was singing:

I learned that Washington never told a lie. I learned that soldiers seldom die. I learned that everybody's free. And that's what the teacher said to me.

I learned that policemen are my friends. I learned that justice never ends. I learned that murderers die for their crimes. Even if we make a mistake sometimes.

I learned our government must be strong. It's always right and never wrong. Our leaders are the finest men. And we elect them again and again.

I learned that war is not so bad. I learned of the great ones we have had. We fought in Germany and in France. And some day I might get my chance.

On a political level, two different generational breaks happened to become evident: on the one hand, Kennedy launched a new era of American politics along with a corollary of developments, frictions and even resistance; on the other hand, the Sixties opened a fracture

within the Left, with clashing agendas for the Old and the New Left. On 21 January 1961, in his famous inauguration speech delivered in Washington, John Kennedy proclaimed: “We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom – symbolising an end, as well as a beginning – signifying renewal, as well as change” (Kennedy, 1991: 12) These words were prophetic: indeed, celebration of freedom and will to change can arguably represent the two key-words to understand the Sixties. Kennedy, the youngest President ever elected, had won against Nixon with about 100,000 votes in the national popular vote, thus showing how difficult it was for his “New Frontier” to breach the old guard. During his brief administration, the United States saw a rapid escalation of events on both a national and international level. In the latter case, Kennedy pursued an anti-communist policy, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the massive dispatch of American instructors and advisors in Vietnam. On a domestic ground, he supported the Civil Right Movement, together with his brother Robert, showing his support to King’s cause. At the same time, America was witnessing the increasing boom of affinity groups against institutional politics. To the shock of American and the entire world, Kennedy was murdered in 1963. With the assassination of Kennedy, Johnson’s foreign policy degenerated in the Vietnam War in 1964: as the 1971 Pentagon Papers published by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* demonstrated, the events triggering the war had been falsified, but at that time war had already escalated and anti-war movements had united to contrast an Establishment which for the first time was openly contested as imperialist, militarist and, somehow ironically for the WWII veterans, fascist.

According to Cartosio (134), the approval of civil rights in 1964 led to the fragmentation of the Movement between white anti-war radicals protesting on the street and black militants in the ghettos. This dramatic change of route was marked by the affirmation of such figures as Malcom X, who was assassinated in 1965, and the Black Panther party. Quite similarly, the counterculture was deemed to split between hippies and politicians, the former advocating a cultural revolution, the second protesting for a political one.

To follow such splits and divergence means to follow the diverse specialisations of the Movement. The term “hippie” itself came to cover a wide array of meanings. From a sociological point of view, hippies were conceptualised in the literature as “educational drop outs, seeking an escape from the technocratic, materialist society of modern industrialism, seeking a romantic revival of a pastoral innocence” (Brake, 90). Studies on hippie lifestyle focused on their drug use and sexual experimentation (Berger, 1967; Davis, 1967; Willis,

1978; Young 1973) as well as on their belonging to a specific generational unit and to the counterculture: they rejected traditional values as well as the notions of family, occupational roles, education and morality. Above all, they rejected the “system”. Wieder and Zimmerman (1974) identified immediacy, spontaneity, hedonism, rejection of property and welfare as their distinctive features. As previously stated, the condition of drop-outs and the Bohemian lifestyle of young hippies was enabled by the student grants and the economic prosperity of the time. In this sense, they differed from the part-time membership of working-class subcultures. Brake argued that hippies belonged to the middle-class, they were relatively older, more educated and had better work prospects for the future. They could take the time to explore their identities and the uncertainty of their young age was “a source of richness rather than a cause of concern” (94). Brake argued that the American welfare of the time not only could afford to sustain one and half million of unemployed dropouts, but it was even estimated that if they had demanded jobs, the situation might have been not so prosperous. American economy was shifting from a production-oriented to a consumption-oriented system. Indeed, as Hearts and Potter advocated in their critical study *The Rebel Sell*, the very position of countercultural rebels as antagonists to the dominant consumption society as well as parasitic upon its surplus and leisure activities should be strongly emphasised. Brake also stressed upon the existence of a sort of hierarchical pyramid in the hippie social system (95-96):

- 1) the charismatic “aristopocracy” elite of rock stars and counterculture heroes;
- 2) the “alternative bourgeoisie” of accultured bohemians mastering communication and organising skills;
- 3) the “lower middle-class drop outs” often exploited by the higher classes;
- 4) the “lumpenhippies” or “street people” who were poor, coming from difficult home lives and with no actual place in straight society, living of petty theft, prostitution and drug dealing.

Music and dance accompanied the life of the hippie community, who thought of themselves as living in a romantic fairy tale, a permanent carnival, some of them even abandoning cities to live their myth of pastoral arcadia in agrarian, often mystical, communes exploring alternative lifestyle, health and education systems. Hippie subculture was mainly visual, colourful and psychedelic, just like the comix covers they contributed to inspire. It is no coincidence, then, if a form of communication like comics, heavily relying on the visual component, flourished again during this period. Above all, comix evolved as an artform in a

period evaluating art and culture (encapsulating active militancy) as a vehicle of political change. Politics was a matter of romantic anarchy, or apoliticism (Brake, 101). New Left structures were limiting the freedom “in your head” that hippies aspired to. Nonetheless, unlike the Beats’ refusal of the world, hippies rather challenged and provoked the Silent Majority, though not in the *traditional* way. Roszak, as seen above, preached against political involvement because it entailed a continuity with institutions. Similarly, Abbie Hoffman (2003) argued that politics merely “breeds organisers”, while counterculture needed “outlaws” (259). Accordingly, Reich claimed that “the revolution must be cultural in nature because culture controls the economic and political machine, not vice versa” (255). The author also added that a new consciousness, which he called Consciousness III (the first being 19th century small businessmen mind, and the second the organisational society preceding the Sixties) (1) originated with the individual, one which could also change the political structure only as its final act: political change, then, was related to the change of values and ideas. Brake wrote that hippies “gave shape to the non-economic aspect of political life, representing the expressivist rather than activist pole, stressing the personal, the private and psychological – that is, subjectivity in politics. This is their major contribution, and also the roots of their erosion” (92). Leaving the erosion of the hippie phenomenon aside for a moment, in the light of such a disaffiliation with active politics, some scholars saw hippie as the actual representation of counterculture, rather than a politically active movement (Westhues, 1972). Flacks (1971) argued that:

The culture that is needed to mesh with our state of technological development is one that is incompatible with capitalism. The culture that is struggling to be born stresses cooperation over competition, expression over success, communalism over individualism, being over doing, making art over making money and autonomy over obedience. (129)

Flacks’s assertion summarizes the values in which the hippie community believed. Most of all, it emphasizes the oppositional dimension of counterculture: against technology, against the destruction of the environment, against the decline of freedom, against the loss of the self and of the sense of community, against work, against structures and materialism. These features and their ephemeralist and utopian drive paved the way for the increasing downplaying of hippie culture. The hippie community was gradually trivialised and it soon became a harmless show victim of its own immobilism and engulfed by the system it wanted to take the distance from.

The Sixties’ radical scenario is far too complex and multifaceted to explore in a few

pages. Despite the hippies' apolitical attitude, it is undeniable that a strict relationship exists between militant radicalism and cultural revolution and counterculture. The Sixties' middle-class radicalism differed from its working-class counterpart (Parkin, 1968: 2): while the latter was essentially focused on economic reforms and material benefits for their class, the former was keener on social reforms with moral content, the psychological and emotional components of politics, and the expression of personal values. Their campaign revolved around civil rights, abortion and, most of all, the end of the Vietnam War. Their pacifism was fuelled by the fear of a nuclear war. The so-called 'Vietnam syndrome' certainly gave momentum to radicalism. The new radicalism detached from Old Left's policy, deemed too serious, rigid and dogmatic with respect to Marxist theories. Born from the ashes of McCarthy's witch-hunt, the New Left had a different idea of politics: it criticised bureaucracy and hierarchies and promoted humanistic socialism, direct democracy, spontaneous militancy, libertarianism and organisational decentralisation. Their criticism towards the system was ethical first and political afterwards. It denounced America's militarism, neo-colonialism and racism. Their instruments were campus demonstrations, street marches and passive resistance, which was inspired by the Civil Right Movement. The latter had showed America's contradictions: a nation publicising its sense of justice and democracy but disregarding the rights of minorities, prioritising the Army and not the poor.

The New Left rose to prominence as a college and university campus movement. They demanded direct democracy, individual empowerment and a change in US politics. Inspired by Mills (1959) idea that personal troubles and public issues overlapped, New Leftists' slogan was "the revolution is about our lives" (Doug Rossinow, 2002: 99): they shared the hippies' focus on cultural revolution but advocated a major role to political commitment. According to them, politics shaped culture and not the contrary. Among the different organisations within the New Left, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was among the most representative groups and focused on the role young white college students and graduates could have on the revolution. The difference with hippie groups was crucial: national vice president of SDS Jeff Shero Nightbyrd (1966) argued that the New Left dealt with "questions of power" rather than "our generation's alienation" (17), while Ken Kesey, leader of the psychedelic hippie group Merry Prankers, distanced himself by declaring that politics was "what *they* do" (quoted in Wolfe, 1968: 200).

Activism saw some sparkles of revolution: Columbia University's 1968 April student strike and occupation, the Democratic Convention of Chicago in 1968, the Mobilization Day

in 1969. In 1969 the joint action of Berkeley's radicals, hippies, students and local residents resulted in the People's Park community, which experimented collective gardening against urban exploitation and created a social programme for the people, prior to the intervention of California Highway Patrol and Berkeley police officers which resulted in the death of a student, two others blinded and several casualties. The Chicago Convention saw the growth of the Yippies (Youth International Party) and the Diggers as prominent community political forces. The Convention led to a police riot and the consequent trial of leading youth culture figures, a fact which did much to further divide the counterculture between mystical hippies and militants, who were more conscious of their political role and thus ready to act against Amerikkka.

According to Mario Maffi (1972: 101), the Movement actually started during the Seventies, in the light of the further radicalisation of student groups and the New Left, and the politicisation of the underground culture. Indeed, the Seventies opened with a political crisis in which radicals decisively walked away not just from the hippie attitude but from the New Left as a whole, hoping to fill in the gaps the Movement was actually revealing: the lack of a defined and unitarian strategy, the missed occasion to develop a mature and concrete political programme in a moment of socio-economic change, the failed attempts to translate and fit Marx into the American context, the intellectualism and abstraction of postulation, the undeniable bourgeois attitude of SDS, the lack of a clear and limpid ideology, the failed attempt to integrate with the Black Power, the increase of a mass of students and activists protesting against specific causes but with no general purpose or bigger plan. The reason for many of these drawbacks was that, by its very nature, the Movement had no fixed party structure: several organisations struggled to recognise their rights and advocate some acknowledgement. As a community, it was fragmented, and each branch did not coordinate with the others. Hence their volatility: groups tended to spring up, die, transform rapidly, their position changed and evolved, usually followed by new manifestos and often contradictory claims.

In the light of the visual and theatrical nature of American radicalism, Maffi talked of underground cultural and artistic experience in terms of "gioco", i.e., "play" (201). Whether Yippie or hippie, living theatre performers and artistic movement exponents (particularly, Dadaist and Surrealist artists who inspired and were inspired by the countercultural way of life), all relied on the concept of "play" to express their revolutionary stances. Political action, non-programmatic attacks to the Establishment, action painting, art laboratories,

countercultural manifestations revolved around the notion of playfully deconsecrating what was previously thought as rigid and impassive. Again, the Freudian notion of “joke” was at stake. In this very atmosphere, comix emerged for their capacity to subvert the clichés characterising the medium of comics in the years before. Irony and jokes were expressed in two ways: on the one hand, they threw in the fire line moralism, patriotism, the enhancement of bourgeois values, the integrity of the heroes, the candid simplicity of young girls longing for true love. Characters were foul and filthy, either devoid of any form of morality or concealing their depravity behind a veil of self-righteousness. On the other hand, the life of hippie and radicals were explored and equally satirised in their idiosyncrasies. No one was spared. One of the achievements of counterculture was the rebirth of a medium once symbol of censorship and self-censorship, which subsequently became the model of unrestrained freedom of expression, fiercely advocating the right to step on any toes.

2.4. Visualising Counterculture: Underground Comix

Whoever delved into the study of underground comix agreed on one point: comix and countercultural years were inextricably linked. James Danky and Denis Kitchen argued (2009) that “underground comix are indeed a product of the sixties. Like a new- life-form, they were heaved up on shore during a decade of social and political turmoil, of changing societal and cultural norms” (17). And Patrick Rosenkranz underpinned how (2009) “[f]or a brief time they became an ascendant force on the cultural zeitgeist, and a popular lifestyle accoutrement through the sheer audacity of the stories, the explicitness of the sex, and the wild-and-crazy graphic experimentation, along with a big ‘fuck you if you don’t like it!’ to authority” (23). The whereabouts of underground comix are as mixed up as the boundaries of counterculture, the former being impossible to understand without the latter. Rosenkranz explained this *liaison* in rather epistemological terms:

Underground comix sprang up in the convergence of political repression, psychedelic drugs, the protest movement, and new innovations in printing technology. The movement was about both action and reaction – advocating revolution in the streets and sexual freedom, but also springing from a suburban angst and a fatalism steeped in atomic bombs drills – drawn in a pictographic language that reflected the shared rites and customs of American youth in mid-twentieth century: television, comic books, movies and rock’ n’ roll. (24)

This is why Kitchen (2004) called underground comix “the bastard child of a wayward generation” (6), this being both the product and the “lifestyle manuals” of the nascent counterculture (Skinn, 2004: 10).

If New York had been the nest of the first comic strips and comic books, San Francisco was undoubtedly the cradle of the revolutionary *Zeitgeist* of underground comix. By June 1966, Stevens estimated that fifteen thousand hippies were living in the Haight-Ashbury district (317), where the Beat movement had previously established its den. Dez Skinn described the area in the following terms:

That term, “Haight-Ashbury”, probably bears some explanation for out of towners. Described by today’s commentators as “the world’s first psychedelic city-state,” the Haight-Ashbury was little more than a few square blocks that stretched from the edge of Golden Gate Park for around a half mile down Haight Street. On Haight Street there were sidewalk cafes, head shops such as the Psychedelic Shop selling drug-related paraphernalia, poster shops like the Pacific Ocean Trading Company and hip boutiques such as The Blushing Peony. Running parallel to Haight Street is the Panhandle, a very narrow slice of Golden Gate Park which was the site of many free concerts and protest rallies. Its counter cultural ethos proved irresistible to the restless youth of the ‘60s. From across the world, they flocked to Haight-Ashbury with the district’s population exploding from 15,000 in 1965 to almost 100,000 by the summer of 1967. (11)

Their choice of San Francisco may be related to multiple factors, such as good weather, low rents, the perception of apparently more tolerant authorities. Whatever the case may be, artistic and political movements flooded into the area and, quoting the Pulitzer-prize winner Art Spiegelman, “It did feel like this must have been what the cubists were going through. All the magic of being in Paris for the post-impressionist moment did feel somehow like being in San Francisco in the early ‘70s” (quoted in Rosenkranz, 14). Buhle (2009) maintained that San Francisco was a “Greenwich-Village-of-the-1910s-like artistic centre” (40) at that time. For the comic history, this represented a major turn: the core of creativity and production of comic book was no longer New York, who in a way betrayed and abandoned its offspring, but San Francisco, where comix amalgamated with other art forms.

However, though it is indisputable that much of the comix production was settled in “The City by the Bay” –setting of many of the storylines as well– it should be remembered that underground comix hot spots sprung up in different parts of the States: Gilbert Shelton and his “Texas Mafia” were in Austin, Texas; Skip Williamson and Jay Lynch were in Chicago, Illinois; Denis Kitchen was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It would be a mistake to consider the publications set in these cities as peripheral since they proved to be among the most prolonged and successful and the contacts/contaminations with the Haight-Ashbury

area were continuous. They all communicated and collaborated with each other, being long-term acquaintances from fanzine, college magazines and previous publications along their careers.

If circumscribing comix on the map may be hard, the attempts to draw a timeline for the underground comix phenomenon always represented a tricky endeavour, as Patrick Rosenkrantz provocatively stated in the foreword of his 2002 *Rebel Vision*:

This year, we celebrate the 34th anniversary of underground comix, which began in February 1968 when Robert Crumb sold *Zap Comics* #1 on Haight Street. No, wait! It could be considered the 36th anniversary, because Joel Beck published *Lenny of Laredo* in 1966. But hold on, it might really be the 38th anniversary because Gilbert Shelton published Frank Stack's *The Adventure of Jesus* at the University of Texas in 1964, at the same Jaxon published *God Nose*. But then, what about *The Cartoon History of Surfing*, drawn by Rick Griffin and published by Greg Noll in 1963? Damn it! What anniversary is it? It was underground. So who knows? It was during the cultural wars. Lines were drawn. Names were changed to protect the innocent and guilty alike. Underground comix were inevitably entwined in the confusing context of their age. Let's go back to a time not so very long ago, when you could go to jail for writing the word "fuck" in a book. Oops. (12)

In point of fact, it is no easy task to disentangle such a complex web of authors, papers and works. It was not until 1967 that underground comix started to be considered all together as a new, recognizable form with Skip Williamson and Jay Lynch's experimental magazine *Chicago Mirror*, which soon became known as *Bijou*, and Don Schenker's Print Mint's first publications in the West coast. Above all, if the term "canon" was ever to be used for this mammoth corpus of works, however, Robert Crumb's *Zap Comix* 1 (published on 25 February 1968) unanimously considered as the benchmark for this generation of cartoonists. Several independent efforts by Frank Stack, Joel Beck and Jack Jackson, and, in addition to the candidates proposed by Rosenkrantz, Vaughn Bodé, often considered at the margins of underground, self-published *Das Kämpf* in 1963. In this light, *Zap* may not be the first comix published, and certainly it represented only the top of the iceberg of a seething ferment already sweeping through the underground for some years, but it undeniably "reinvented the comic book" – using the words of the underground-penitent Bill Griffith (quoted in Rosenkrantz, 71). That being the case, it may be argued that underground comix did not actually start with *Zap*, they boomed out thanks to *Zap*²⁶, which Kitchen (2004) defined "the catalyst for the stream of work that followed" (6).

²⁶In point of fact, *Zap* 1 was not even Crumb's first publication. After drawing his own fanzines and refining his style while working for the American Greeting Card Company, he worked for *Help!*, *Cavalier* magazine (in which, in 1965-66, he published the first version of his infamous character Fritz the Cat), and wrote by 1964

The very history *Zap*, both boosted and busted time and again, embodies the developments of the whole comix phenomenon. Its first publisher, Apex Novelties' Don Donahue, accounted for its revolutionary role by saying that: "The thing about Zap, about underground comix in general, is here is this whole medium of expression that had been neglected for so long or relegated to this very inferior position and nobody had done much with it. And all of a sudden someone did start doing something with it, and then there was this explosion" (quoted in Skinn: 22). Likewise, Spain Rodriguez claimed that "[b]efore Zap, comics were hardly ever worth reading" (ibid). *Zap 1* was supposed to be the second number of the series but what subsequently became *Zap 0* (published in late 1968) had gone missing together with Crumb's first editor Brian Zahan. At first sold on the streets of Haight-Ashbury by Crumb and his pregnant wife, Dana, *Zap 1* was the lifeblood of the medium with his explicit parody of CCA seal and his satire against 1950s' hypocritical comics, winking at the *Mad*-experience. *Zap 2* saw light in June 1968, published by Don Schenker's Print Mint, and introduced the work of Rick Griffin and Victor Moscoso, already famous in the sunset industry of poster, together with the artist who most strongly influenced Crumb's subsequent poetics, i.e., S. Clay Wilson. With the introduction of Gilbert Shelton in *Zap 3* and Spain Rodriguez and Robert Williams in *Zap 4* the 'Zap artists' circle was complete.

Zap was a beacon for the whole underground comix industry even though Crumb himself was neither a hippie nor an active supporter of any form of label or subculture. He was, nonetheless, a critical mind, an experimentalist artist in constant evolution, always observing society and the comic medium trajectory with fresh eyes. And this is likely the reason why he truly epitomized the anarchic and libertarian sensibility of those years, as he himself argued: "When people say 'What are underground comics?' I think the best way you can define them is just the absolute freedom involved... we didn't have anyone standing over us". Much could be said about Crumb's art. Moscoso jokingly claimed that "I couldn't tell if it was an old man drawing young, or a young man drawing old. Just like the old-time comics on acid. [...] But what really got me was the format. Color cover, black and white newsprint inside for only 50 cents" (interview in Groth, 2015: 185).

Estren (1974) argued that *Zap 1* reunited West coast and mid-West and contributed to the coagulation of underground comix as a movement. However, styles and quality of works diverged considerably, insomuch as Estren claimed that "[t]hat commitment to

his comic book *R. Crumb's Comics and Stories* (parodying the title *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*), subsequently published by Rip-Off Press in 1969.

pictures is about the only thing that holds the underground cartoonists together in a group – that, and the fact many of them know each other personally, and almost all are familiar with their compatriots’ work” (58). Estren also quoted Bill Pearson, co-editor of the underground-forerunner magazine *witzend*, who considered their variety as the main strength of these works:

The fun thing about underground comics is that all manner of rascals – painters, designers, philosophers – are attracted to the medium because it is one of the very few (and probably the only cheap) communication form that can be created totally by one person, without mutilation of the result by editors, distributors, or *modifiers* of any sort before it reaches the audience for which it was intended. They don’t always succeed – many are naively self-indulgent – but even these have the impetus and the vigor of originality. (109)

This quote casts light on another important issue: underground authors did not necessarily start their career as cartoonists, and most of them had parallel jobs. What drew them together, then, was the opportunity this multimodal medium gave to express themselves creatively, effectively and with no restriction. Skinn described the common denominator of this “handful of heroes” as a liberation from all kinds of constraints: “No more publishers...no more editors...no more deadlines or late cheques. And, most importantly of all, no censorship” (30). This heterogeneity resulted in eclectic works, a panoply of themes, and zero planning or concordance as to the material to work on. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Jack “Jaxon” Jackson’s idea that “comics are only one aspect of art for me. You pick the medium that will best express what you have to say, right? It just happens that comics are one of the best mediums” (quoted in Danky and Kitchen, 5).

In open contrast with the “relatively anemic mainstream output” (Danky and Kitchen, 20) which made it past the barrier of CCA, underground authors were influenced by the experience of pre-1954 comics. EC Comics were the most direct inspirers of the underground comix experience, in that, up to that point, they represented the “best-written, most original and intelligent things ever printed in comic-book form” (33). Horror, violence, the absence of hero-like figures, the indiscriminate suffering of good and bad people was all material which shaped the imagery of the artists of the Sixties, who included frequent homages to EC in their works. Most of all, *Mad* served as the bridging point between EC and the satire of the underground. Underground comix harboured a deep hatred towards the CCA which showed through their pages and often resulted in direct provocations against the self-righteous system behind it. The antagonism towards CCA was displayed in the comic form as well. It suffices to mention the comic book series *Dr. Wirtham’s Comix & Stories*

(1976-1987), created by Clifford Neal or the gold dust *Gothic Blimp Works* 8 (1969) including a strip by Spain Rodriguez in which a horde of monstrous creatures rising from the sewer attacks Dr Lester Prong from CCA, responsible for their censorship. Rodriguez even claimed that he conceived comix as a form of revenge against CCA, which caused the decline of EC: “It makes me feel good that we made our blow in the cultural war. We were able to kick the despicable Comics Code in the teeth. We were able to make a living. We were able to reflect our times” (quoted in Rosenkranz, 24).

Tributes to EC include the cover of *Zap* 6 by Gilbert Shelton which mimicked Basil Wolverton’s style, while *Bijou Funnies* was made to look like an EC publication and, as highlighted in the following pages, included an editorial in the inside front cover which recalled EC’s struggle against comics censorship. In some cases, EC masterpieces were reprinted. Moreover, EC’s former editor Harvey Kurtzman was almost unanimously considered as the greatest precursor, the “father-in-law”, of comix. After leaving *Mad*, Kurtzman edited two short-lived magazines, i.e. Hugh Hefner’s humour magazine *Trump* and *Humbug*, which, according to Kitchen (2004: 6) changed his, and Crumb’s life. When both projects failed, Kurtzman created his own independent magazine, *Help!*, and gave visibility to the young cartoonists which in a few years were meant to run the underground comix revolution: Robert Crumb, Jay Lynch, Skip Williamson and Gilbert Shelton. Though belonging to the generation underground rebels despised, he remained the reference point and privileged interlocutor for many of these artists (though many considered him a “sell-out” since he returned to Hefner’s court to work on *Playboy*).

For many underground authors, the other source of inspiration coming from the previous generation was Will Eisner who, with his *The Spirit*, presented a pivotal notion of hero with no pedantic moralism, a witty sense of irony and even black humour, and an inclination to rediscuss traditional values mixed with a clever, non-prosaic plotting. Eisner himself was extremely fond of the underground experience:

Freed from the economic constrictions, from the dictatorship of a publisher enslaved by a mass audience, [the underground cartoonist] could talk to a segment of the audience with freedom from fear. The audience was able to split into small pockets of common taste, being freed from having available to them only those publications that would survive, because they catered to the broadest audience with wide common-denominator editorial material... there is even a place for old talents looking for more elbow room, a place to keep on expanding. And that is why I am trying to make The Underground. (quoted in Estren 40)

Among the milestones for the evolution of underground comix, Jay Lynch (2009) also included i.e., Paul Krassner's *Realist*, a magazine of "social-political-religious criticism and satire" – quoting the headline of its first number. A preliminary observation to position the *Realist* is that it was first published in the spring of 1958 in the New York offices of MAD. It mixed the latter's jeering spirit with the provocative attitude of Lyle Stuart's anti-censorship, daredevil monthly tabloid *The Independent* (founded in 1951 with the name *Exposé*), which voiced contentious news and articles. The *Realist* published both article and satirical cartoons which "zoomed in on the sham and hypocrisy of society at large" (Lynch, 13). Though it was published on the newsstand, it was still considered an integral part of the underground pantheon of subversive publications.

However, along with cartoonists and inspiring editors, the birth of comix stemmed from the development of an akin form of publications in the so-called fanzine format, which Estren defined as "small-circulation magazines produced by amateur cartoonists with particular interest in certain aspects of the comics world" (43). Fanzine spanned from a wide variety of genres, from sci-fi to satire. They were the product of the hard core of fandom, strengthened and compacted by the "Great Comic Book Cleanup Campaign of the McCarthy era" (ibid), and it should not be surprising to learn that underground comix authors largely relied on this form of publication for their works. Among the fanzines, *Wild* (1959-1962) is arguably one of the most prolific examples, managing to survive almost through eleven issues, though funding problems stopped its run. *Wild* published some of the early works by *Bijou Funnies* cartoonists Jay Lynch and Skip Williamson (prior to their professional debut in *Help!*), as well as by Art Spiegelman, who subsequently worked on his own fanzine *Blasé*. Even Crumb worked on three issues of his own humorous horror fanzine, *Foo*, together with his brother Charles. Sold door-to-door by young rookies for no more than 15-cent a copy, the fanzine experience was not meant to last, and it does not account for the roots of underground artists alone since they were not independent comic books. *Zap* artists Victor Moscoso and Rick Griffin, for example, started their careers in the field of psychedelic posters, experimenting with shapes and especially the harsh contrast of colours and bringing their innovations in comix.

Several authors took their first steps in the comix world by publishing their cartoons in campus and off-campus magazines, such as University of California at Berkley's *The Pelican* (which published early works by Joel Beck and John Thompson), Los Angeles' *Occidental College Fang*, *The Harvard Lampoon*, M.I.T.'s *Voo Doo*, Ohio State's *Sundial*, Stanford's *Chaparral*,

U.C.L.A.'s *Satyr* and University of Oklahoma's *Charlatan*. In particular, pre-*Freak Brothers* Gilbert Shelton worked as an editor at off-campus magazines, particularly *Bacchanal* and *The Austin Iconoclast*, as well as at the University of Texas' campus magazine *The Texas Ranger* and formed, together with Jaxon, Foolbert Sturgeon (Frank Stack) and Fred Todd the first group of underground artists, the so-called "Texas Mafia" (Skinn, 2004:18). It was a synergic work: Shelton was the first to collect Stack's *The Adventures of Jesus* strips, drew a cover for him, and printed and distributed 50 photocopies around the campus. Influenced by them, Jaxon published 100 copies the work which is even accounted as the first underground comic book, *God Nose (Snoot Reel)*, published in 1964. Stack and Jackson signed their works with a *nom the plume* because they were worried about the implications of publishing religious satire in the Bible Belt: in particular, Stack started working in the fine art department of the University of Missouri and was afraid to lose his academic tenure. As he recalled in an interview with Rosenkranz: "It wasn't civil service. It was political. You really had to watch your step. If you did anything weird, they'd bounce you out of your ear, so it was imperative that I use a pen name to cover up my identity" (30).

Despite the risk, underground cartoonists were willing to fight for their freedom of expression. In this, they found a powerful and pervasive ally in the circuit underground press. As previously highlighted, the relationship between comix and press was extremely tight since underground newspapers provided the first platforms in which these cartoonists could publish their works. In 1969 New York City's *East Village Other* even started his own all-comics supplement *Gothic Blimp Works* (eight numbers in 1969) which included works of such authors as Vaughn Bode (editor of the first two numbers), Crumb, Griffith, Kim Deitch, Spain Rodriguez and Trina Robbins. In the wake of its success, SDS's journal *Radical America* created its own publication, *Radical America Komiks* in 1969, prior to the radical group's fragmentation. In 1967, *Yarrowstalks* dedicated its third issue to Crumb's art, paying him with 500 copies of the paper which he sold in San Francisco's head shops. Several other comic books, such as *Yellow Dog*, Spain Rodriguez's *The Collected Trashman*, S. Clay Wilson's *King Bee*, actually appeared in the newspaper format and size. According to Danky and Kitchen, underground press was the binding agent which kick-started the underground comix revolution and connected its exponents:

The editors of the Los Angeles Free Press, the San Francisco Oracle, the East Village Other, and thousands of similar papers nationwide combined a free-swinging journalistic style with a strong visual sense, attracting a small army of artists whose wild graphics and

mind-boggling satire exploded in their pages as well as on concert posters, leaflets, T-shirts, and comic books. (17)

Underground press bloomed owing to the advent of offset printing which cut the costs of small print runs. This enabled politically aware papers to be printed and distributed with great ease. In addition to the aforementioned major underground titles, the *Berkeley Barb*, the *Chicago Seed*, Philadelphia's *Yarrowstalks* and Detroit's *Fifth Estate* were among the most prominent publications, all including cartoons in their pages after the successful model implemented by the *East Village Other*.

Danky and Kitchen argued that comix authors would never have found “natural or even pragmatic support outside the counterculture”, also considering that “much of the product was deemed pornographic, but also because of its anarchistic nature (and not just the content)” (18). Underground artists shared an almost “dogmatic insistence on totally unrestricted self-expression” and were considered as an “entire school of comic books that are not distributed through ordinary channels and are not bound by the economic considerations” (Daniels, 1971:165-166). The libertarian creed prompted underground authors to create their own publishing houses: in particular, the “Big Four” (Danky and Kitchen, 18) underground publishing groups were Print Mint, Kitchen Sink Press (i.e., Krupp Comic Works), Last Gasp and Rip Off Press. The distribution system they established was based on a web of headshops, poster shops, record stores, flea markets, street hawkers, or at concerts and gatherings. According to their success, comic books were reprinted multiple times or single-printed. Of course, no previous assessment of demand prior to publication was available and, therefore, titles were printed in limited copies to avoid unsold materials and thus major losses for both authors and underground publishers, who usually were underfinanced and hazardously relied on the profits generated by a previous title to finance the following. This was positive in terms of themes they could deal with and lack of pressure for strict deadlines, even though the price to pay was irregularity in the publication of works as well as in their continuity. The issues with a given title may have completely different contributors, even different publishing companies, and the same author used to work for different underground projects while the same character could be found in different collections, stand-alone comic books or papers. This apparent confusion was but a manifestation of such freedom, deemed to influence every stage of the comic creation and publication.

Freed from the constraints of the market and the CCA's moralism, comix were representatives of a libertarian philosophy which perfectly summarised the goals of the wider phenomenon of counterculture. Just as the latter aimed to broaden people's mind, underground comix aimed to "expand the scope of comics", as stated by *Young Lust* co-editor and cartoonist, Jay Kinney (quoted in Estren, 109). Kinney conceived the exploration of taboo themes such as sex and drugs, radical politics, psychology, religion as a right and an obligation for comics. These authors were attracted by the possibility to portray reality for what it was, in contrast with the unrealistic representations of society of straight comics. The principle behind this reasoning was analogous to the idea of mainstream media as unfaithful and biased, which had led to the proliferation of the underground press as an alternative source of truthful, uncensored and therefore reliable information. It was as if underground cartoonists wanted to open the readers' eyes on how people truly suffered, how families were not so perfectly happy and close-knit, how sexual urges rather than good intentions ruled interpersonal relations, how corruption and decay hid behind the flag and rhetoric of their country. In this regard, Estren emphatically stressed the strong point of underground productions:

Not every strip in the underground comics uses words like "fuck" and "shit," and not every strip deals with subjects deemed taboo by the comic-book blue-noses (sex, religion, the victory of criminals, the *visible* portrayal of blood and gore, etc.). But if someone *is* shot in an underground comic, he bleeds – and it's not pretty. The underground comics deal with whatever subject their artists wish, in uncompromising visual and verbal terms.
(20)

This statement summarises, and in a way legitimises, the core investigation of the present work and ushers in another crucial consideration: the graphic nature of comix texts makes them an easy target for censorship and disdain. On a preliminary stage of analysis, this sheds light on the rejection of compromises by these authors. Everything could become a theme and be dissected by the eye of these cartoonists because if the only rule was the absence of rules and boundaries, this was supposed to remain valid even in the case of the underground itself: their biting satire did not spear comrades or the medium, self-mockery and jokes being the antidote to heal a strait-laced society with no sense of humour. As for the topic of laughter, Estren argued that: "The laughter provoked by the underground comics is that of irreverence, of amusement (of ten mixed with anger) at human foibles and failures. But the laughter is genuine (a rare thing in these days of television laugh tracks) – and this too helps explain why the comics are 'underground'" (23). Underground comix disregarded the rules

established by syndicates or CCA as for what “fun” means, preferring to rely on a quasi-Freudian notion of joke as a liberation of the Id. Freedom and change of consciousness, then, just as in the case of counterculture, are the key-words to bear in mind while exploring the world of comix. In this case, the fight against the Establishment took the form of a struggle against overground comics, whose authors were gagged and kept in check by 1954 advent of CCA. In this sense, the discourse regarding the Generational Gap between 1950s’ culture and 1960s’ counterculture could be extended to the comics, as comix precisely aimed to renew a withering medium, victim of its own set of rules. Comix embraced freedom as a whole, what Estren called “freewheeling approach” (112), and granted escapism to whoever decided to approach this artform. This is one of the reasons for their success, not only in terms of readership but also of the number of contributors and the proliferation of magazines and comic books in the brief time span of the counterculture’s years.

Rosenkranz argued that “catharsis” was one of the main aims of comix: “Flaunting fears, shedding demons, confession, confrontation, and revenge were often behind the creativity” (24). Consistently, Kitchen declared: “We refuse to compromise our creativity, our gripes, our statements. The beauty of it is unrestricted expression” (quoted in Estren, 113). But such beauty was not the result of stunning graphics alone, and explicit images were not the only feature distinguishing underground works from their surface counterpart. By using the words of Danky and Kitchen:

Unfettered language, graphic depictions of sex, depictions and championing of recreational drug use, and the sometimes extreme violence in comix were alluring liberations for underground artists and readers alike, but it was also the literate choice of words, the unrestricted range of topics, and the wildly idiosyncratic drawing styles that truly distinguished and distanced comix from both their predecessors and their contemporary distant cousins on the newsstands. Whether clean and simple, ugly and jarring, complex, psychedelic, or elegant, the styles of underground cartoonists are distinctive and recognizable: each clearly shows an individual’s distinct expression within the medium. (20)

And in such a chaotic ensemble which is the underground comix phenomenon, this common intent may represent the connecting point of all artists as maintained by Chicago cartoonist Justin Green:

It was a loose community of artists devoted to revitalizing a humble art form, though not all spirits were kindred. Like any movement, there were cliques and warring factions, but all held to the ideal of reaching a common audience while reinventing the formal boundaries that had defined the medium. Like any utopian experiment, ideal were challenged and rewritten in the face of the daily grind. It was a harsh life lesson for me, but there were lots of laughs and some beautiful times, too. (quoted in Rosenkranz, 14)

Daniels chose to include underground comix in his historical account on the medium owing to their link with a tradition of comics as “pure fantasy”, in which “concepts and characters [are] of mythic proportions”, since “[f]ree from the burden of respectability, comic books have provided, for creator and consumer alike, an opportunity to explore the wild dreams and desires which seem to have no place in our predominantly rationalistic and materialistic society” (180). The statement certainly is a product of its time, in which comics did not benefit from the status of “respectable” publications. But it is precisely by virtue of this misconception that underground artists chose this humble, underrated form of communication to convey their message. Few years after Daniels’ study, in his extensive 1974 account of comix, Estren emphasized how impossible it was to define them solely on the basis of their appearance. His “attempt at definition” (15-17) started from the cover warning that the material contained was “for adult only” or “for adult intellectuals only”, a qualification included by virtue of a conscious and deliberate choice. Moreover, *Zap* mocked the CCA’s seal of approval with fake seals such as “Approved by the ghost writers in the sky” (*Zap* 1) or “Approved by the united geeks of America” (*Zap* 2). Such titles as *Yellow Dog*, *Spiffy Stories*, *Feds’n’Heads*, *Death Rattle*, could never relate to anything from the post-1954 era. And even after getting past the titles and the content warnings, images could only confirm this thought: readers were in front of something new, call them comix, komiks, karmix or simply funnies, something unashamed to display taboo subjects with a “startling variety of styles” (17).

According to Estren, comix were “three-dimensional” in the sense that they could be read on several different levels (18). On the one hand, comix dealt with topics related to social and political realism; and Dave Sheridan talked of “opportunity for total freedom [...] in a constructive and contributive form” (quoted in Estren, 111). On the other hand, several authors were rather attracted by the possibility to give a form to their nonsensical ideas. Sometimes comix became actual calls for revolutionary action, sometimes the works which seemed less pretensions and committed actually managed to provoke thought and convey the sharpest criticism to society. On the level of contents, there were light-hearted vignettes and there was more sophisticated and intellectual satire, such as the one included in *Young Lust*, *Zippy the Pinhead*, *Short Order Comics* and, on a later stage, *Arcade*, with works by Art Spiegelman, Kim Deitch, Jay Kinney, Justin Green and Bill Griffith.

Underground authors also experimented the so-called jam-sessions, in which they produced comics together, usually in the format of strips or splash pages, one taking off from

the drawings of the other. Even in the E.C. tradition, collaborations were not unusual, but jam sessions served to joke with the medium, often satirizing the most famous characters of the colleagues by providing personalised interpretation or even mimicking each other's style. *Bijou Funnies* 8 (1973), which included a powerful editorial against censorship, consisted of parodies of famous underground comix and was purposely aimed at making self-satire under the principle that nothing was sacred even within the movement. In some cases, cartoonists themselves were mocked, as in the case of Gilbert Shelton's inclusion of Robert Crumb-inspired character in the "Wonder Wart-Hog"'s story in *Zap* 4, epitomizing the potentially perverting force of (underground) sex comix and the filthy mind of the "comic-book pusher" who produced them. Ultimately, the super-hog brutally beats the degenerate cartoonist to the cheer of blood-thirsty children amused by such rampage. The point made is rather clear: society is keener on condemning graphic sex than explicit violence. Ironically, *Zap* 4 was seized with obscenity charges.

However, despite their proximity with Freudian wit, comix were not a product tailored to appeal to the readers' taste. Estren argued that underground sarcasm could not be easily grasped by "straight" readers who almost certainly would ask themselves either "What's so funny about that?" or "What's wrong with that?" (163), on account of their distasteful excesses or, conversely, their realism. As Buhle stressed:

The good comics are most definitely NOT MEANT TO AMUSE READERS, or minimally to amuse them on one level while other things are going on in other levels... No underground cartoonists are mainly attempting to titillate you in the same way that the daily comics strips in the bourgeois papers do... the actual drawing of the strips is like the actual writing of poetry: it is a side-product, an after-effect, of living and thinking a certain way. If that were not so, the comix artists would have watered down their stuff to get syndicated, and amuse as many people as possible. (111)

In point of fact, even among the members of the counterculture, not everybody accepted such forms of unrestrained sarcasm. Jay Lynch (2009) lamented that hippies did not even understand satire:

It seemed that the hippies just didn't seem to grasp the concept of satire. [...] at this time, the press had been reporting that some hippies had been drying and curing banana skins to smoke for a legal high. In the *Mirror* we ran a piece satirically stating that smoking dog poop would provide an excellent psychedelic experience. We went on to say that the best variety of poop was something called "Lincoln Park Brown," and we gave tongue-in-cheek instructions for preparing the poop for smoking. We said that the new breed of dog-poop smokers were known as "shit heads." Get it? "Pot heads"? "Shit heads"? It's satire, right? But then when I was selling the mag on the street, this hippie came up to me and said, "Hey, man! Thanks for the tip on how to cure dog poop! We've been smoking it all week, and it's *groovy!*" I tried to explain to the kid that it was satire and that

he shouldn't *really* be smoking dog poop, but he wouldn't listen. Apparently he was too blissed out of his mind on the nitrogen content of dog feces to grasp my explanation.
(14)

Lynch also recalled that: "Then Zap #1 came out, and we figured that Crumb really had balls to publish something like that. We weren't sure if it would sell, 'cause hippies in them days were very snobby about taking drugs, and took the whole thing very seriously. Hippies seemed to lack a sense of humour". In addition, in a 1969 article published in *Leviathan* (quoted in Mitchell, 413), Paul Buhle, at that time working for *Radical America Komiks*, asserted that the advent of comix (which he called komix) created a schism within the New Left between those who recognised the potential in the intrusion of "new culture" in the comics industry and those who were distressed to see such excitement towards a medium which could not be taken seriously on a political level, and was likely to be part of a manoeuvre of the Establishment to pervert the revolution. Conversely, Buhle saw comix as "subversive thrusts at capitalism coming right out of a popular cultural tradition" which should not be misunderstood for an elite leisure activity: drawing on Walter Benjamin's idea of cultural dialectic expressed in *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), he described three stages in which art, and comix, could develop as "politically revolutionary forces": firstly, a phase of experimentalism with the form; secondly, a period of "*schlock*" in which political implications and future artistic innovations are held back; finally, the birth of a new style which is uncensored and free from capitalist constraints.

Thus, it may be argued that comix were not a mass culture commodity tailored by the Establishment to brainwash (the reference to Red Scare's brainwashing being a hard-to-die trope internalised even within the counterculture). They rather shared the distrust in mass media and, for instance, their relationship with television was extremely different from that of mainstream comics: according to Estren, the latter absorbed the idea that "people like to watch dramatic shows with punchy stories" and concluded that comics with "still pictures", i.e. illustrations, were good as long as they maintained the same level of drama; comix, conversely, were influenced by television solely as for the "highly visual orientation" and "impact" of their works (23). Images had no longer an ancillary role in the medium since words alone would no longer convey the actual meaning of the story, nor would they grant the internal coherence of the text.

Regarding how mass media looked at the underground comix phenomenon, unsurprisingly, just as in the case of pre-1954 comics, the mainstream press did not spare its criticism towards the underground world, especially after it revealed its full potential far

beyond the Haight-Ashbury perimeter. The reactions to the phenomenon were mixed. Some articles, such as those in the *National Insider* (15 December 1968), labelled underground cartoons as the “Latest ‘Art’ Trend – Hippie Sex Comics”. The use of inverted commas revealed the will to degrade these works, whereas galleries, and the authors themselves, were starting to recognize the comics medium potential. Moreover, by narrowing the scope of comix to the superficial categorisation as “hippie” and “sex”-related productions, the *Insider* pointed the finger to the topics which would certainly give rise to great indignation. The supply of accurately censored and –in full Wertham’s style– uncredited cartoons only contributed to the spread of such dudgeon. Those who tried to describe comix from a serious perspective, such as Bob Abel’s article included in *Cavalier* (April 1969), switched between overstatements and simplistic, one-dimensional assumptions (e.g., such comments as: “Often they are out to outrage the already outrageous, but of course we must judge them on accomplishment, not on intent”, quoted in Estren, 243). In this case, images and words were not censored with marks, but they were nonetheless selected upstream, so as to avoid all excesses and provide an acceptable notion of comix. Even when a contact point between culture and counterculture was attempted, straight media tended to make their own *a priori* selection of what the features of counterculture were. Woodstock, for example, was a palatable expression of hippiedom, one which could be publicised and even tickle the imagery of respectable society. Weathermen were not. Similarly, as for comix, Estren believed that the “overground” was “willing to acknowledge the existence of the underground but unwilling, really, to show their readers what it’s all about” (244). It may be argued that straight media displayed tolerance, and even interest, towards the digestible part of the underground, blatantly overlooking what was deemed unsuitable, excessive and distasteful (“it’s all right to show a girl’s tits but not a guy’s prick”, quoting Estren, *ibid.*). The point is that underground comix were all about distastefulness and arbitrary censorship was nothing but another form of gagging of free speech.

Another problem underground authors had to deal with in their relationship with the overground was rip-off. This occurred on several levels. Sometimes works were published in another country and translated into another language without asking for permission or providing a retribution for the original authors. For instance, this was the case of *Gung-Ho*, a publication of over 200 pages with works by Shelton, Lynch, Williamson and a powerful cover by Rick Griffin with Mickey Mouse holding a Coca-Cola, symbol of capitalism, and a swastika, symbol of Nazism. The comic book was published in Dutch without permission,

but no lawsuit was filed since it remained within the international underground network. The freedom many authors advocated at all levels often resulted in the absence of copyright notices, since comix were conceived as “a medium of the people and for the people” (Estren, 246): the inside front cover of *Snatch* 3 included the caveat “Reproduction of all material in this magazine is up for grabs and is o.k. with us”, and even though it added “...but pay us” the volume bore no copyright and the first sentence would invalidate the latter statement in court. This initial liberal attitude essentially did not consider that their works were available for anybody and for any use (and misuse), and only after several episodes of rip-off cartoonists started to seek for legal protection, though against their personal philosophy. Indeed, the idea that underground material was being used by the straight world to produce mass-manufactured t-shirts and gadgets. A famous case regards Robert Crumb’s “Keep on Truckin’” panel from *Zap* 1. The one-page comic was exploited to create unlicensed merchandise by A.A. Sales. When Crumb tried to sue the company in 1973, after multiple attempts to solve the controversy, Judge Albert Charles Wollenberg established that, under the 1909 Copyright Act, the omission of copyright notice had caused the work to be public domain. The decision was reverted only in 1977 and, paradoxically, the Internal Revenue Service started pursuing Crumb for thousands of dollars for the royalty-payment taxes owed, though he never received any income for the material reproduced. The brilliant satire Crumb himself crafted on the topic is a 1972 splash page included in *XYZ Comics* in which each panel reproduced a different “Keep on” slogan over and over, with copyright notices thoroughly repeated panel by panel, ending with: “And don’t forget to keep on buying those ‘Keep On Shuckin’ posters, patches, t-shirts, cigarette papers, baseball caps, bath mats, beach towels, bumper stickers, drinking glasses, buttons, matchbooks, balloons, notebooks, sneakers, toilet seat covers, wallpaper, and so on ad nauseum...”. The original reproduction of the “Keep on Truckin’” panel was copyrighted for a total of four times.

When the underground tried to collaborate with the mainstream counterpart, the results were often flawed by more or less grave forms of misconduct. For example, *Esquire* started acknowledging the potential of comix already in 1964, when including Shelton’s strips in the September number. In 1970, they commissioned a work by Crumb and Kurtzman who decided to include Moscoso, Shelton, Spain Rodriguez and S. Clay Wilson in the project. However, the latter’s cartoon of a motorcyclist and his girl stained with semen was considered too explicit by *Esquire*, so that the caption “Bernice, what’s come over you?” was changed with “I don’t know what’s wrong with this machine, Bernice. The timing is off and

it seems to be missing”, much to the author’s surprise. Another example related to *Esquire* is Kurtzman’s colour-washing of Shelton’s black and white cartoons in the June 1971 edition. Though this is not a major damage to the work, these sorts of appropriation betrayed a form of disregard of the comics medium which dated back to the origins, the casual ‘it’s-just-a-cartoon’ attitude which has always accompanied the view of comics as juvenilia, or disposable publications. Given the mixed reactions to comix, either looked down or virulently busted, underground cartoonists started to become very careful about the protection of their works. Libertarian feelings, thus, had to compromise with the need to prevent the misuse of their art. The first semi-official unions of cartoonists were formed in this period, such as the Cartoon Workers of the World and the United Cartoon Workers of America (UCWA), whose members included Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman and Spain Rodriguez among others.

Suspicious and paranoia rose even within the underground since what happened to Wilson was not an isolated case. As soon as comix started to boom, many publishers started to be increasingly business-orientated: artists started to feel exploited even by the editors who proclaimed to be anti-capitalists. The Print Mint and The San Francisco Comic Book Company were charged of being too focused on personal profit, while cartoonists started to work either independently or in collectives. For example, as previously mentioned, Gilbert Shelton founded his own publishing house together with his Texas colleagues, the Rip Off Press, aiming “to rip off more of the profits for the artists” (quoted in Estren, 250). Collectives usually took the form of brief collaborations with authors sharing production costs, work and income. These cooperative experiences adhered to the anarchist spirit of the authors but could not stabilise by their own nature. Among the major underground publishers which tried to maintain the business-like model but integrate authors’ opinions in the decision-making process, Ron Turner’s Last Gasp Eco-Funnies is certainly one of the most successful examples. Born as an ecology project in 1969, Turner’s publishing by late 1973 had become one of the major underground companies and the distributor of several other independent houses, including the already mentioned Print Mint. Another example is Apex Novelties by Don Donahue, which, despite its small size, produced some of the most important underground works such as *Zap* 1 and *Zap* 0. Other companies, such as Denis Kitchen’s Krupp Comic Works and Jay Lynch’s Inc. Bijou, were founded by cartoonists themselves. What they all had in common was a more or less general lack of distribution efficiency and continuity. The paradox was that whenever a publisher, or a cartoonist, started

settling their business, or started being successful, the charge of having become “straight” or “sell-out” was around the corner. Harvey Kurtzman argued that underground artists had to be unsuccessful to be accepted:

Once you start making money and you hit it big, you're out of it. You've got this paradox-yes, you do your best work when you don't have conditions, but when you become part of the establishment of success, you unavoidably inherit the conditions of that establishment, i.e., the easy life, formula work, material possessions. So the cartoonists have kind of a suicidal philosophy, and all of them are very frustrated guys [...] because, in a practical sense, they *don't* have the success they want. (quoted in Estren, 256)

The case of Robert Crumb is a good illustration of this problem. Estren argued that Crumb was considered by mainstream media as “THE underground cartoonist” or “Mr. Underground Comics”, even though he never adhered to the hippie-life style or expressed any interest in becoming the flag of the countercultural revolution. However, since he was deemed as the apex of the whole movement, he became the catalyst of interest and criticism. Despite the suspicion straight media had for his work, his style was ripped off multiple times. After the case of the “Keep on Truckin’” panel mentioned above, several television commercials used his art for advertising Fiddle Faddle snacks and 7-up soda. But Crumb’s art was also the first to be collected in book form by a major publishing company, the Viking press. *R. Crumb’s Head Comix* saw the light already in 1968, including strips from *Zap* and the original story “Fritz the Cat”, and a powerful introduction by Paul Krassner, editor of the satirical paper *The Realist*. Even in this case, the overground somehow disappointed the author’s expectations since a form of arbitrary censorship was exercised by the editors: this occurred both on a verbal level (the words “niggers” and “Schwartz” were removed by the story “Life Among the Costipated”, though “niggers” still occurred in the story “Whiteman”), and a visual one (a vagina was covered with band-aids in “Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics”). Moreover, after paying in advance 2,500 dollars for the publication of another comic book dedicated to Fritz, Viking rejected the new work owing to the explicit sex scene between animals. Nonetheless, the Fritz-controversy was far from over. The new work was re-issued by Ballantine Books but the publication indicated how lower the quality of Crumb’s art was, a fact that showed the author’s low consideration of the overground.

However, Fritz became so popular in the mainstream that Ralph Bakshi and Steve Krantz felt the right to use the character to make a movie, the first X-rated animated cartoon in history. *Fritz the Cat* appeared in American cinemas in 1972, with the approval of Crumb’s

first wife Dana, and became a worldwide success, if considered its low-budget independent production, and even receive a sequel, *The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat*, in 1974 by Robert Taylor. That year, however, marked the beginning of a long legal battle between Crumb and the filmmakers, since Crumb wanted his name removed from the credits due to the supposed exploitation of the original comix and the distortion of its message. The film showed criticism towards radical politics and the counterculture rather than being its expression. In this sense, Crumb felt that his material had been betrayed and reacted in his Crumb-ish way by creating “Fritz the Cat – Superstar”, published in *The People’s Comics* later in 1972, a satire of his own most successful character, which, overwhelmed by its popularity, is ultimately murdered with an ice pick by its jealous ostrich girlfriend. This marked the end of Fritz’s stories and the author refused to draw the character ever again. *The People’s Comics*, in a way, represented Crumb’s direct response to his own popularity among the mainstream media. And as in the case of other rip-offs, Crumb answered with his art.

The underground occasionally tried to reverse rip-offs, though legal battles for copyright infringement were not fought in a care-free manner for those who conceived their art as a private intellectual property and not a social good. In particular, Disney was often stormed by underground cartoonists’ satire as the symbol of capitalism in the multimodal media industry and, in particular, in comics. At first, lawsuits were filed as for the creation of t-shirts portraying, for example, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Peter Pan as drug-addicts and Snow White molested by the Seven Dwarves. The Court’s severity, which lacked in the case of Crumb’s rip-off, was certainly expressed by the sentences against comix’s rip-off of Disney characters, showing how a one-way legal system could affect the whole phenomenon. In particular, Disney Studios continued their legal battle against the Air Pirates authors, which worked on comix explicitly using Disney’s characters with satirical intents. In *Zap 3* a cartoon portraying oral sex between Donald and Daisy Duck had previously been published and, more in general, underground comix used to satirise all cultural totems, especially multinational corporations’ pop-icons. This was also the aim of the Air Pirates collective, founded by Dan O’Neill in collaboration with Gary Hallgren, Shery Flennicken, Bobby London and Ted Richards. They worked together to the two-issue comic book *Air Pirates Funnies* by Last Gasp in 1971, whose common ratio was to imitate the style of an old-time cartoonist and recreate a new underground-style storyline for his characters. These included Mickey Mouse and Minnie’s sexual intercourse by O’Neill and Donald Duck and Goofy as peeping toms in the work by Hallgren. The general aim was to satirise Disney’s characters as

symbols of capitalism and bourgeois hypocrisy, the actual result was a lawsuit by Disney and the injunction to stop the publication of materials violating copyrights. O'Neill decided not to stop and continued publishing Disney-inspired materials until 1980 (*The Tortoise and the Hare*, Last Gasp, 1971, confiscated; *Communiqué* 1 and 2 from the M.L.F. appeared in the magazine *CoEvolution Quarterly* in 1979), even founding the artist's organization, The Mouse Liberation Front. After risking jail and fines amounting to 190,000 dollars in damages and 2,000,000 dollars in legal fees, O'Neill desisted and Disney dropped the charge.

The paradox within the relationship between overground and underground was expressed by Estren in clear terms:

So the underground and the overground media remain at each other's throats, the overground adapting and adopting whatever seems most saleable in the underground and the underground fighting for the right to see and do things in its own way and on its own terms. [...] The straight media persist in recognizing that the underground cartoonists have got something to say, then turning around and distorting the message by ripping off underground material and misusing and abusing it. (260-61)

The underground, for its part, was arguably naïve and too easily open to exploitation: once reached a certain level of popularity, they inevitably got in the spotlight of mainstream media. Their irreverence could be contained, disintegrated if necessary, in two ways: direct censorship or absorption, the latter often leading to a progressive blurring of the boundaries between the two poles. Even copyrights in a way were conceived as the failure the paradigm of "free-art-for-and-of-the-people". It was a "straight" tool, used primarily to fight "straight" abuses and, while some saw copyright as a way to compete on equal terms, others, precisely for this reason, saw it as a sign that the underground cartoonists were "selling out" (*ibid.*). Bijou's editor, Jay Lynch, in addition to copyrighting all materials, asked for the double permission (from himself and from the artists) in order to use the works he published. Times were certainly changing, but it should also be stressed that these measures were part of an ongoing process of recognition of authorship and prestige of the comic medium. As for censorship, it was previously pointed out how comix were treated as obscene material. The theme of sex and sexuality will be thoroughly analysed in Chapter 5. However, what is important to stress here is the relationship the American legal system and censorship bodies adopted with respect to controversial material. Estren pointed out the paradoxical situation at the time:

There are some things you may do if you wish to satirize American society. You may draw cartoons depicting the country's leaders as fools and madmen, the communication media as inanities run by robber barons, and the social system as a degrading, materialistic

cycle leading to nowhere and back again. But you may get in trouble if you couple this social satire with depictions of people doing things with their own and other's private parts. (230)

A similar point was emphasized by Gershon Legman in his *Love and Death* (1963):

Murder is a crime. Describing murder is not. Sex is not a crime. Describing sex is. Why? The penalty for murder is death, or lifelong imprisonment—the penalty for writing about it: fortune and lifelong fame. The penalty for fornication is... there is no actual penalty—the penalty for describing it in print: jail and lifelong disgrace. Why this absurd contradiction? Is the creation of life really more reprehensible than its destruction? (94)

According to Daniels's account on comics, which could not but include the ongoing ferment of underground in his analysis but ultimately failed to grasp its full deployment, comix were considered controversial material owing to "their totally inhibited treatment of sex" (165). In particular, according to Les Danies, 1960s' underground comix were the tip of the iceberg of a tradition of underground publications going from eight-pagers to comix, whose peculiarity was social-issue addenda. Eight-pagers or Tijuana Bibles flourished in the United States between 1920s and 1930s, through the 1950s. They were eight-page long (for this reason, they are also known as eight-pagers), cigarette-packet sized, black-and-white booklets sold under the counter owing to their thematic and copyright infringements. Tijuana Bibles can be considered the forerunner of comix owing to their parodies of thousands of icons (outlaws, actors, comic characters, politicians from Winston Churchill to Mahatma Gandhi) of American society and their absurd and comical sexualisation. Given their unknown origins, these pamphlets acquired the designation "Tijuana" likely from the association with Mexico, whose sexual habits were considered to be more liberal by Americans. Explicit sexual contents were portrayed as adolescent fantasies and often represented the only sources of sexual education for adolescents (Daniels, 1971: 168). The traditional notion of "forces of good" was mainly satirised, showed in all their illicit facets. Being the product of Great Depression and Prohibition²⁷, these booklets were particularly appreciated (and largely influenced) underground artists for their anarchic spirit and iconoclastic attitude towards America's mythical figures. Daniels (1971) maintained:

²⁷ As soon as Tijuana Bibles started to almost disappear, other forms of under-the-counter sex comics emerged, particularly the so-called "kinky comics", preferring mild sado-masochism and bondage to 'straight sex', even in this case an imagery which some underground authors will not miss the chance to explore in graphic terms. Kinky comics were more focused on showing licentious poses than in developing storylines and were completely devoid of the desecrating intents of the most influential Eight-pagers.

...it is possible that these hot items have been thought to represent the depths of depravity not only because of their concentration on sex but because of their sociological and revolutionary implications. These implications, humanistic and anti-authoritarian, make some of the eight-pagers the obvious but unacknowledged predecessors of today's underground press. (166)

A clear-cut case of direct inspiration may be found in Gilbert Shelton's "Wonder Wart-Hog" in which the underground atypical super-hero is impotent due to his micro-penis. Similarly, eight-pagers explored the intimacy of Superman, as a beacon of super heroism and asexuality, owing to the micro size of his genitals. Robert Crumb himself honoured Eight-pagers with the publication of *Snatch Comics*.

As new – more committed – versions of Tijuana Bibles, comix exploited the full outraging potential of graphic sex. However, graphic sex may have been the catalyst of the attention of many readers, as well as moralists, but it was hardly the reason behind the persecution of comix. In this regard, Rosenkranz clearly states that: "It wasn't just the sex. It was the coupling of unnatural desires with the audacity to disrobe authority. Hell, Republicans and Mormons make millions renting porno films in their hotel chains all across America. They love sexually explicit media – just not when it's combined with satire and sedition" (23). Likewise, after several busts occurred during the Nixon-era, Dan McLeod, publisher of the underground paper *Georgia Straight*, claimed that: "It was never about the sex. We got fed up with being dragged through the court all the time. They'd always come after us for the sex charges, but they were just thinly disguised attempts to suppress our political views. It wasn't sex that was the problem" (quoted in Rosenkranz, 23-24).

On the one hand, scepticism towards the comic medium had a long history. On the other hand, sex was more a façade than the focus of these publications. It was both a catchy theme and a nuisance, but more often served as a political attack to public rigor than to please the readers. The choice to narrow the scope of underground comix to sex tales would be as defective as narrowing the scope of the counterculture to the "free love" motto– and for this reason one of the general aims of the present work is to get through this mismatch. Nonetheless, sex was the most evident part of comix, and an easy target for censors. Indeed, in most cases, local authorities tried to hinder the circulation of underground comix, relying solely on obscenity charges. Since it was impossible to stop the proliferation of independent works with no seal by the CCA, they opted for intimidations directed to distributors and dealers: Estren's account on the topic mentions the bust of Moe's Bookstore in Berkeley for the possession of *Snatch Comics* and *Zap Comix* and the arrest of the Phoenix Gallery's owner,

Simon Lowinsky, who exhibited *Zap* collective's cartoons; likewise, the Third Eye's bookseller in Encino, California, was arrested for commercialising *Zap 2*, though the judge ultimately stated that the material included (in particular, S. Clay Wilson's *Head First* story) did not stir the readers' "prurient interests" (Estren, 230). The most famous case of seizure regards the infamous *Zap 4* which was busted soon after its publication in 1969, with retailers arrested both on both the West and the East Coast. In the former case, accusations were soon dropped, though at the beginning the Print Mint was raided by the Berkeley Police Department and its owners, Don and Alice Schenker, were arrested and charged with publishing pornography. Even after the lawsuit was dropped, informal intimidations continued to be sent, thus forcing editors to hide the copies of the comic book. San Francisco's City Lights bookstore was raided and fined as well, but its owner, the Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, continued to sell it, without being browbeaten. In New York City, however, charges were not dropped, and two booksellers were arrested. Estren (230-241) provided a thorough account of the escalation of events which led *Zap 4* to become the first comic book in history to be found legally obscene. Briefly, in 1973, four years after *Zap 4*'s outburst, the New York State Court of Appeals court even rejected the motion to overturn the convictions and established a fine of "just" \$500 for each retailer on account of their offense. Worst yet, the American legal system had launched a major attack to the freedom of expression brandished by the underground after the Supreme Court's decision on obscenity standards during the 1973 trial 'Miller vs. California': the Court established subjective guidelines for local communities to determine what constituted obscene material. This meant that highly personal interpretations of what was conceived of as obscenity would determine the legality of potentially "prurient" works. In particular, the Counter set that:

1. Obscene material is not protected by the First Amendment. [...] A work may be subject to state regulation where that work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest in sex; portrays, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and, taken as a whole, does not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. (23-24)

2. The basic guidelines for the trier of fact must be: (a) whether "the average person, applying contemporary community standards" would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, Roth, supra, at 489, (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. If a state obscenity law is thus limited, First Amendment values are adequately protected by ultimate independent appellate review of constitutional claims when necessary. (24-25)

3. The test of “utterly without redeeming social value” [...] is rejected as a constitutional standard. (24-25)

4. The jury may measure the essentially factual issues of prurient appeal and patent offensiveness by the standard that prevails in the forum community, and need not employ a “national standard”. (30-34)

Although the decision did not directly make reference to comix, the underground web of authors, publishers and retailers immediately realised what this statement, entailing the potential exclusion from the right of free speech granted by the First Amendment, could represent for their “industry”. Moreover, sentences largely relied on the quality of the court’s morality, which nobody could foresee. Thus, the Appeals Court’s decision regarding *Zap 4* shed new light on the notion of censorship: Royce Smith, executive director of the American Booksellers Association, in *Publishers Weekly* (21 March 1973) underpinned how “frightening” this sentence was, and added: “No one can possibly know in advance what a court will consider obscene. The effect of the decision is to make every bookseller in the state a censor”. The whole head shop web of under-the-counter distribution was threatened, as sellers could risk imprisonment and jeopardise their trade of drug-related items. According to Estren, the whole handling of the *Zap 4* trial in New York City was the “classic demonstration that the Establishment can use its laws as a club against underground culture, if it so chooses” (230) and disapproved how underground authors’ social criticism “*must* be judged by the standards of the very society-at-large which they satirized and reject” (233). Counterculture, by its very nature, should not have been judged according to the frameworks established by the dominant culture it was fighting against. Many cartoonists considered the bust of *Zap 4* a political attack to the counterculture: given the lack of objectivity regarding obscenity charges and America’s general inclination towards Puritan moralism, it was easier to silence controversial publications for their graphic depiction of sexuality than for their political antagonism to the Establishment.

The point is that *Zap 4* was not the most deplorable comix ever published, but it was one of the clearest manifestations of the authors’ nihilism and cynic socio-political view of society, family and humankind as a whole. Sex acts, particularly in the contentious “Joe Blow” incestuous story by Crumb, served precisely this purpose, the association with moral harmfulness and obscenity being a misrepresentation and a dejection of such social criticism. As Estren reported (236-37), underground authors believed that the whole trial served as a warning for a phenomenon which was starting to expand beyond expectations, reaching a wider audience and posing a threat to the “over-ground”. At that point, pressures

and warnings from the legal system gleamed, as it was during the Fifties. Will Eisner stressed how “[n]ow today, the underground is emerging from giggling graffiti toilet-wall jokes, to professional-experimental art and thoughtful stories. New styles, new ideas, new directions are emerging like wild flowers in an unplowed meadow” (quoted in Estren, 237). Eisner envisaged a new starting point for the underground, growing out of the redundancy of sexual comix and paving the way to more substantial works. What truly happened is that the publicity generated by the trial increased the allure surrounding the underground, the exploration of deviant behaviours surely moved forward with remarkable results, but the proliferation of sex-based comix was far from over. Arguably, it spread all the more, with mixed results in terms of originality and depth of insight, though several problems with sales and distribution appeared and were destined to affect the underground comix proliferation. Further discussion emerged concerning the conception of comix as pornography. As Robert Williams wrote in his *Coochy Cooty Men’s Comics*: “Any persons found in the act of masturbation with this material in their possession must be considered subject of fetish as this material is hardly prurient” (quoted in Estren 237-39). Ironically, Estren argued, actual pornography had a social function and a “redeeming social value” as it enabled to privately release sexual impulses and make society work. Comix, on the other hand, used sex to satirize society, and potentially to destroy its Puritanical, self-abnegating, and hyper-controlling system. However, it is disputable whether this level of philosophical reflection was the triggering factor behind censorship and busts.

After the trial against *Zap* 4, several underground publications took stance on the matter, such as *Armageddon* 3 and the already mentioned *Bijou Funnies* 8. Just as the E.C. had struggled to defend their industry against McCarthy’s censorship, the inside front cover of *Bijou* 8 featured an inflamed editorial entitled “Um Tut Smut?” – a wordplay on the Sanskrit mantra “Om Tat Sat” – in which they explicitly affirmed the parallelism between the Fifties’ witch-hunt and the present:

Remember the Nixon commission, which set out to study the effects of pornography on society and found it to be **harmless**, much to the president’s embarrassment! There has been **no** study which **disproves** this conclusion; no study has linked increased crime rates with the liberalization of obscenity laws. [...] It’s like the 1950’s when sensationalist Fred Wertham, author of garishly titled **Seduction of the Innocent** cited evidence that most criminals had read comic books as children, but ignored the fact that most law-abiding citizens had also read comic books as children! Wertham’s rantings led to Congressional investigation on comic books which resulted in “The Good Comics Code” – a form of censorship based on the blacklisting by distributors of non-Code books. In a country that exalts freedom of the press, it’s shocking to observe our

community leaders burning books for the protection of society. Outlawing sexually oriented media sets a fine precedent for outlawing other materials which might occasionally deviate from the establishment morality – like the daily newspaper which brings us news on political scandals...

In the best E.C. tradition, the editorial ended with a call for action, both through votes and letters to governors: “Please readers don’t take these words lightly, if you don’t act now, a free press in America is **doomed**”.

When comix were required to bond against a common antagonist, the chinks within the movement started to appear. In particular, the extremes they reached in terms of violence and sex revealed how the world of underground comix was essentially white-straight-male dominated. As for race issues, Emory Douglas, Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, was arguably the only black author who worked on cartoons for underground press, but can hardly be considered an underground cartoonist, and most certainly did not belong to the group of artists generally included under the “underground comix” umbrella term. More problematic was the position of women, who had worked in the underground world since the beginning but were relegated to an ancillary role in their community. Progressively, women cartoonists started to take possession of the medium and used it to advocate *their* freedom and *their* rights. This theme will be tackled in Chapter 5 but it is fundamental to stress how underground comix were to become forum for all those voices previously unheard even within the counterculture. Indeed, women’s works have historically been considered as separate (if not excluded) from the dominant male-dominated comix production. In 1971 Trina Robbins edited *It Ain’t Me Babe* (Last Gasp Eco Funnies), one of the first women’s liberation paper, certainly the first all-women comix and, in general, the first comic book entirely made by women. Trina’s experiment succeeded and was followed by other titles such as Joyce Farmer and Lynn Chevely’s *Tits n’Clits*, which undoubtedly had a troubled history since, besides being ostracised by many feminists and male underground cartoonists, it became object of a pornography investigation in 1973 by the district attorney’s office of Orange County, California, after the bust in the Fahrenheit 451 bookstore and the arrest of the owners. *Tits n’Clits’* authors waited for the sentence in fear, as, in addition to the fine, they risked jail and the revocation of the custody of their children. Only after the intervention of the American Civil Liberties Union the case was dropped. When *Tits 2* was published, in 1976, sellers had already stopped risking their business for underground titles, with the exception of few male artists, such as Shelton and Crumb. Indeed, it was a form of discrimination, especially since male chauvinism was an undeniable component of

underground works. In this sense, women's works have always been conceived as a reaction to them, rather than as a part of them. It was a battle, that between sexes, fought in the context of another war, that between the underground and the overground. The Women's Cartoonist Collective (composed of about 50 women authors) was arguably the most visible part of this fringe of contestation within the countercultural milieu. Their main effort was *Wimmen's Comix*, published from 1972 to 1992, a magazine aimed to be "feminine" prior to "feminist" (Estren, 272), a forum for both beginners and long-standing authors (including such female cartoonists, Lee Marrs, Willy Mendes, Michele Brand, Aline Kominsky, Lisa Lyons, Diane Noomin, and Dori Seda) who did not find their place in a male-dominated industry and were excluded from both mainstream and underground channels. As Lee Marrs pointed out: "There was to be no feminist line, no theme restrictions. The deal was for everyone to do what turned them on or pissed them off. We wanted to show women as they really are" (ibid.). Marrs mixed humor and social commentary on real life, her focus being primarily women's condition:

I guess my ideal reader would read a panel, laugh hysterically, and five minutes later see some insight they hadn't gotten to before... Being a lifelong aggressive female, I dig stories centered on women. Having women be who they really are could be in comix is one of the innovative potentials of underground comix. [...] There's a whole world outside and many worlds inside – *anything* should be possible! (Estren 274)

Marrs – and many other female cartoonists – found in comix a platform to spread their previously unheard message. In this respect, as she pointed out, beside their seemingly flippant outlook, comix played a social and political role: they wanted to make their readers think as well as to "laugh hysterically".

In his pivotal study *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan put forward a definition of the role of comics which closely resembled what the underground artists would subsequently maintain:

Picasso has long been a fan of American comics. The highbrow, from Joyce to Picasso, has long been devoted to American popular art because he finds in it an authentic imaginative reaction to official action. Genteel art, on the other hand, tends merely to evade and disapprove of the blatant modes of action in a powerful high definition, or "square," society. Genteel art is a kind of repeat of the specialized acrobatic feats of an industrialized world. Popular art is the clown reminding us of all the life and faculty that we have omitted from our daily routines. He ventures to perform the specialized routines of the society, acting as integral man. But integral man is quite inept in a specialist situation. This, at least, is one way to get at the art of the comics, and the art of the clown. (153)

The circus metaphor is particularly fitting for the topic of the present analysis: it was argued that comix were humorous, like a clown show, but, at the same time, behind the make-up, they hid their true colours of social criticism. Many artists came to rely on comix after experimenting fine arts and other media. However, the so-call highbrow art was perceived as cold and distant: Frank Stack called it “cheap sleazy boring fine art” with no “sense of humanity”; Wendel Alan Pugh termed museum art “decadent” and “insular”; Justin Green conceived canonical art “carcass of [a] dead culture” (all quoted in Estren, 154). Besides pre-1954 tradition of comics, most cartoonists were nonetheless experts in fine arts. The major influence from this field came from Surrealism (which was very active and politically committed in the United States during the Sixties), Abstractionism, Expressionism, Pointillism and Superrealism, which was blooming in that period.

Social criticism pervaded all comix production, or at least all its hard core. Whether dealing with graphic sex-scenes or motorcycle gang fights, comix sketched out, with different degrees of effectiveness, their reflection on some snapshots of social reality. Underground cartoonists conveyed political and social messages which make the label entertainer inadequate. Justin Green stressed this form of commitment by arguing that his work was conceived as “a vehicle for social change” (Estren 156). However, as Chapter 7 will detail, underground artists were neither arrogant preachers nor mere entertainers: they wanted to provoke both laugh and thought, but seldom intended to provide any solution or road to follow. They were satirists and criticised society, the *pars destruens* of a process which had to culminate with the change of consciousness of individuals. They were the product of the radicalism of the Sixties, and it goes without saying that such sensibility inevitably influenced their goals, in a more or less explicit way. Canadian cartoonist Rand Holmes remembered how “I think mostly I felt I was doing important work. You’d be right to laugh, but there was magic in the air then, and I really thought that we were going to change the world for the better. Well, hey, we’re all entitled to be young and naïve once in our life” (quoted in Rosenkranz: 24). Interestingly, unlike hippies who were often charged with escapism and uncommitted cult of hedonism, most comix authors, consciously or not, actively encouraged the “revolution of the mind” advocated by the counterculture, though they employed satire rather than public speeches and manifestos. Ultimately, despite their differences and collisions, as Estren pointed out:

The one thing which unites the attitudes of all underground cartoonists toward the messages their work carry is that all of them feel the need to communicate – not

necessarily specific ideas or philosophies, but at least an overall impression that they are there, that they care about what they are doing, and that they care about the people viewing their work. (205).

This statement cast new light on another discrepancy between comix and the previous tradition of comics: underground cartoonists shared a bond with their audience, owing to generational proximity, common life experiences and beliefs. This point was strongly emphasized by Danky and Kitchen:

Underground cartoonists were directly connected with their readership and shared generational values. There was a self-consciousness among the comix creators of what was being accomplished, an awareness unavoidable within a youth-drive counterculture largely focused on addressing the burning issues of the day: ending an unpopular war, legalizing marijuana, and supporting the rights of women, gays, and racial minorities. (20)

In line with the rift on both a generational and value-driven level, the two authors also talked of the polarization of the “us vs them” mentality in which underground comix took a firm stand against “them”. The connection established between authors and readers, what created the “us”, was a “matrix of political, economic, technological, and artistic forces” (ibid. 21). The mainstream comics market aimed at a wider audience, generally much younger than the cartoonists, the latter being employed as factory workers rather than artists conveying their ideas through the medium. It is no coincidence that the word “artist” was not used in the previous chapter. Indeed, the full acknowledgement of comics as art and cartoonists as artists came at a very late stage of the evolution of the medium, and the underground movement took the first step towards this achievement. Rosenkranz recognised this pivotal role as he maintained that: “It was a determined cadre of cartoonists who precipitated one of the most revolutionary art movements of the twentieth century. Using the humble medium of comic books, the work they created [...] rearranged the comics landscape forever” (23).

The influence of the underground indisputably reached and changed, sometimes for good, mainstream publications. Daniels (1971) even mentioned a letter written to Denis Kitchen by Marvel’s guru Stan Lee, in which Lee declared: “In a way I envy you. It must be a gas to just let yourself go and do whatever tickles your funny bone” (180)²⁸. In this regard,

²⁸ Marvel even tried to create its underground title, *Comix Book*, from 1974 to 1976. The experiment was edited by Denis Kitchen and involved several top-cartoonists, such as Justin Green, Kim Deitch, Trina Robbins, Art Spiegelman, and S. Clay Wilson, with the promise to give them national exposure. Nonetheless, it never made it past the third issue. Marvel’s sales had dropped just like the rest of the comics companies and *Comix Book* represented an attempt to rebalance the market and return to New York-based comics as the epicentre of the industry. The result was hybrid, since Marvel could not risk compromising its reputation and thus asked to smooth the edges of traditional comix style.

already in 1971, Daniels perceived a change of course in the comics industry with respect to the Fifties as comix “created a climate in which the Code-approved product has begun to appear dangerously dull” (ibid.). Rosenkranz summarised the benefits brought to the overground in terms of “industry practices” and “social mores” (26). A major innovation in the mainstream industry regarded distribution: underground comix were distributed in headshops by relying on a wholesale system. This method, i.e., direct sales, was subsequently adopted by comic shops, which at the beginning were nothing more than used magazine stores. Subsequently, mainstream companies started adopting this method and provided original materials for direct sales, thus abandoning the traditional consignment distribution in which, if the comics sold, news dealers paid a percentage of the retail price to publishers, but if not, the comics were returned (usually with the cover ripped-off to prove they were not sold). Of course, comics were not a remunerative business since they costed about 12 cents, whereas other magazines costed up to 50 cents; for this reason, news dealers favoured the latter on the newsstand and the comics industry found itself on the verge of collapse. Ironically, anti-capitalist underground artists provided the solution to get the industry off the ground. Several small publishers sprung up and started printing comic artists, such as Fantagraphics Books, Drawn & Quarterly, Top Shelf Production, Dark Horse Comics. Moreover, while mainstream companies pre-paid cartoonists flat rates regardless of the actual success and sales of works, underground artists were paid royalties, like literary authors, and retained the copyright of their creations, remembering what happened to Superman’s creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, just to make an example. Successful underground authors paid with royalties gained more than their mainstream counterparts and since they owned the property of their works they benefited from merchandising and sales of their rights. Underground cartoonists were the first of their field to have a sense of their profession’s history and role, including the need to change the economic system of the comics industry. Nowadays mainstream artists can negotiate ownership and retain original art as well, this being one of the greatest achievements of the underground tradition. Denis

Kitchen’s company was saved by Marvel and the premises for the compromise were good: copyrights and artworks pertaining to the authors and no advertising. The problem lied in the work itself: it was not underground since it lacked its essence, freedom and uncompromised themes; neither was it a traditional Marvel work owing to its piquant, bizarre contents. Sales were so negative that Lee decided to cancel the project after three issues, though two other issues were ready and ultimately were printed by Kitchen Sink. Lee failed to find its audience, and likewise failed to realise that the underground by 1974 was no longer ahead of the curve.

Kitchen even founded the non-profit association Comic Book Legal Defense Fund in 1986 to defend the comics industry's First Amendment right.

Crumb believes that “[t]he influence of the early underground cartoonists has loosened up comics and broadened the horizons that people saw for comics” (quoted Rosenkranz, 27) though he recognises how comix did not change the world, in the end. In the scenario of fine arts, comix certainly changed the perception of the whole medium, to the point other media started looking at its “language” – from cinema to painting. The problem of recognising such a controversial legacy still remains. Rosenkranz accounted for the notion of “subterranean” influence in the following terms:

They were harsh, violent, full of drugs and casual sex and calls for revolution. Their wider impact was offset by their blatant disregard for the tender sensibilities of others. Their appeal is to a limited audience – enthusiastic, but finite nonetheless. Underground comix will never be accepted by a mass audience. (27)

Comix changed with the change of the counterculture, as well as of the whole social reality they satirised. According to Estren, a change of name may even be required, such as “counter-cultural comics” (264) to stress their tie with that specific and unrepeatable historical moment and to distinguish them from the subsequent underground works. As the Seventies developed, many authors left the industry, and others replaced them over time. Some remained in the field, but their works lost the original revolutionary impact. Legal issues, economic problems and censorship contributed to the weakening of the movement. By 1973 *Freak Brothers* had sold up to a million copies and more than three hundred titles were in print. But for every Crumb and Shelton, a panoply of minor publications existed, some of which displaying really poor quality and originality level, printed just to fulfil the demand of new comix, and ride the wave of attention surrounding the phenomenon. Rosenkranz lamented how publishers were willing to print “both treasures and trash without discrimination” (24). Likewise, Bill Griffith argued that, for example, Print Mint published “thirty-two pages of [...] acid trips” and *Zap* (ibid). Though several milestones in the comix history still had to see the light at that point, Danky and Kitchen talked of “crash of ’73” (19) on account of two main factors: on the one hand, the direct sales method of distribution implied that comix were not returnable goods, and thus unsold low-quality works created an “inventory glut” for retailers. On the other hand, the already-mentioned ‘Miller v. California’ issue on obscenity destabilised the partnership between underground publishers and headshops: the fear of busts due to obscenity charges represented a jeopardy for the business of drug-paraphernalia sellers which preferred to abandon the sale of comix rather than more

profitable items. Once again, paranoia seemed to take over comics. If the verdict of 'Miller v. California' could conceivably be reckoned as a jolt for the underground, the political changes of the 1970s led to a progressive metamorphosis of the counterculture as a whole, including comix. The Vietnam War had ended, marking the end of the anti-war movement, counterculture was cracking and fragmenting under the vice of "Tricky Dick Nixon": headshops were closing, mild drugs were classified as narcotics, and radical groups were infiltrated. Even publishers and artists started taking up different careers. Some cartoonists specialised in certain niches, such as Jaxon's historical comics, and Justin Green's *Binky Brown* which established the genre of autobiographical comics. *Arcade* (1975-76), edited by Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith and published by the Print Mint, arguably represented the last glimpse of this generation, a bridging point between the underground and the 1980s' alternative comics. It served as an anthology, presenting underground artists to the following generation of cartoonists.

Rosenkranz stated that when the underground started to encounter the first substantial difficulties its unity and cohesion started to crumble: "things became more competitive. Rival camps of cartoonists took snipes at one another, gender conflicts divided former friends, royalty checks arrived late, if at all, and newcomers faced stiff competition for pages in popular titles" (24). He believed that underground artists partly "sowed seeds of their own destruction by choosing to represent rebellion and by rejecting the traditional rewards of the 'free market'" (25). They had a suicidal philosophy, well expressed by Shelton's motto: "If we succeed, we've failed. But if we fail, we're successful" (26). Likewise, Kurtzman defined the underground "doomed to self-destruction" (25). Moreover, paper cost increased sharply, and so did cover prices. Comix were no longer cheap prints sold on the streets. Several artists, Shelton, Crumb and Spiegelman above the others, were undergoing a process of "canonisation". They entered the heritage of the dominant culture and their work started to be printed by major publishing houses.

Paul Buhle (2009) affirmed that the problem related to underground comix is not the fact that they had their history and then faded, since all movements, from Cubism to Dadaism, had their own *parabola*. However, what happened is that the old hippies' fandom became a yuppie army, rejecting the matrix which united them with comix. As Rosenkranz argued:

It's almost like people want to forget them – a kind of revisionism, like when your kids ask you if you took drugs when you were their age, and instead of saying, "hell yeah! All

the time. It was great!” you start to prepare a lecture in your head. [...] Too many Baby Boomers have matured into the legions of the easily offended. (23)

The point is that their very history, existence and full significance have been denied: “It has often seemed that, like the counterculture years at large, underground comix have come to occupy a dreamlike space in American life and art, scarcely understood at the time, more mythicized or repressed (sometimes both simultaneously) than appreciated”, argued Buhle (2009: 36). Few efforts have been made to investigate the poignance of underground comix. The present research aims to investigate what is the legacy of these works and how translation shaped their reception abroad, either giving them new life or misinterpreting their original message and their deep core. On the one hand, the following chapters will explore how comix thematised some of the key-issues within the counterculture: sexuality, drugs, politics and violence, and religion. On the other hand, the processes of magnification and narcotisation of such thorny questions in translation will be taken into account. However, before delving into this investigation, Chapter 3 will introduce the main tools of semiotics and multimodal analysis which will be employed in the constrastive study.

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY OF ANALYSIS

Chapter 3. TRANSLATING COMICS: SEMIOTIC AND MULTIMODAL TOOLS

3.1 Comics Studies and Translation

Prior to venturing forth into the analysis of Underground comix in translation, some methodological considerations should be tackled. On an academic level, Comics Studies still represent a fledgling discipline, one which encompasses several research fields. The reasons for this are manifold. Thierry Groensteen (2007) poignantly emphasised how Comics Studies fell prey to “myopic scholarship, nostalgia, and idolatry” which “have structured the discourses around comics” (1). Umberto Eco (2005: 36) maintained that, on the one hand, Comics Studies are constrained by the relentless need to legitimise themselves, to formulate apologetic statements about such a research subject. On the other hand, comics are more frequently studied by members of a fandom, rather than by research communities whose scholars often disregard comics as an object of study altogether, or simply do not read them. Likewise, Charles Hatfield (2009) stated that comics are largely neglected as research topic and bound to “remain at an impasse” because they are “rhetorically constructed as ‘easy’” (132). This posture *de facto* betrays a prejudiced conception of the medium based on public opinion’s bias.

Deficiencies regarding the study of comics with respect to other media may thus be explained in the light of a general laxity towards what was considered a form of juvenile and disposable publication occupying a peripheral position within the literary and the socio-cultural system. The very fact that comics can be accounted as literature is disputable, encumbers the development of Comics Studies as an independent discipline and downgrades comics to a lower position within the literary canon. As a result, the heterogeneity of comics and the complexity of their texture, characterised by the peculiar co-presence of multiple interacting codes, have been largely overlooked. Indeed, research on comics has often lacked an integrated approach, one adequately pointing out the intricate knotwork characterising the medium, and has rather focused either on verbal or visual element analysis. As stressed later on, the acknowledgement of multimodal meaning is a relatively recent achievement, concurrent to visual culture’s considerable sway in academic research, especially after the consolidation of studies concerning such media as television and cinema.

In this scenario, even the translation of comics still remains an under-investigated topic within Translation Studies. In 1999, Klaus Kaindl (1999) lamented that “[t]o date, there has been no systematic attempt at providing a comprehensive account of comics translation” (265). Likewise, Nadine Celotti (2001: 42-43) highlighted that no book-length study on the topic exists and comics seldom feature in most indexes of reference works. This state of the art contradicts a trend in the publishing industry. According to Abret and Hennart’s (1991) review of comic international market, such countries as USA, France, Belgium and Japan have a well-established tradition of comics and can be considered as “exporters”. By contrast, “importers” like Scandinavia, Germany, Austria mainly purchase foreign-language comics and, according to Kaindl (1999:264), in these countries the medium tends to have poor reputation. Italy is positioned among the importing country of comics (D’Arcangelo and Zanettin, 2004) and Italian readers, much like German and Austrian ones, commonly enjoy comics in translation (Rota, 2003, Kaindl, 1999 among others). Indeed, statistics showed that, in Italy, the majority of publications are translated (Vigini 1999) and, in the case of comics, 70 per cent of the works published are translations of Japanese manga (45 per cent) and American comics (40 per cent) (Rota, 2003).

Though comics represent such a high-volume translation segment, Translation Studies have largely overlooked research on this field so far. Most research on comics in translation (and comics in general) regards the translations of American daily-strips and Franco-Belgian works, whereby specific aspects of linguistically-demanding comics (e.g., Asterix²⁹), such as puns, metaphors, onomatopoeias, proper names, interjections and other particularities were scrutinised from a normative point of view³⁰. Zanettin and D’Arcangelo (2004: 187-88) emphasized that such a narrow-minded focus solely on the translation of specific linguistic problems was rarely combined with any considerations on the interaction with images, the editorial dimension of the industry, and the sociocultural context in which comics are produced and exported. Likewise, few studies accounted for the role of pictorial and typographic elements in translation (e.g Kaindl, 1999). On the contrary, comics were investigated as a form of constrained translation (Grun and Dollerup, 2003), in view of panels and speech balloons represent a limit to the possibilities of the translator from a spatial point of view. Rosa Rabádan (1991) argued that pictures are “el código universal que restringe e impone limitaciones a la expresión lingüística [...] en los casos de traducción subordinada”

²⁹ See, for instance, Jacqumain and Cole, 1970; Spillner, 1980; Embleton, 1991; Richet, 1993.

³⁰ See, for instance, Embleton, 1991; Monti, 1992; Soriano, 1999.

(296), in which “traducción subordinada” refers to the notion of constrained translation as a form of spatially limited translation. This assumption has been largely criticised, as this Chapter will maintain on several occasions. In particular, Celotti (2008) contested the notion of constraint translation in the context of comics and argued that the translator of comics should be a “semiotic investigator” (47) who is conscious of the interdependence of words and images. And this statement of her will guide all the subsequent reflection on methodologies and approaches to adopt in the creation of an adequate framework of analysis. Also in Celotti’s view, the “visual language can be a resource rather than a constraint for the translator” (35), one which clears up possible ambiguities and helps the translator in his choices.

A thorough semiotic enquiry of visuality and comics is indeed the starting point of the present investigation and the source of tools of analysis which will be implemented in the contrastive analysis presented in Section 3, namely isotopies. The purpose is to integrate semiotic investigations and Translation Studies, also because semiotics, as a discipline, first grasped the potential of comics as a medium, as well as the link between media other than verbal-only ones and translation. Semiotic analysis encompasses the empirical study of signifying elements in a discourse, i.e., a semiotic process which at first sight is seen as articulating linguistic and/or non-linguistic elements. This approach enables a focus on the specific meaning-making mechanisms characterising comics. It is no coincidence that, in his seminal work *Apocalittici e Integrati*, Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1964) laid the foundations for a study of the language of comics. Likewise, by adopting a Greimasian perspective, Jean-Marie Floch (1997) provided the first thorough account of the syncretism³¹ of comics, i.e., the relationship between verbal and visual elements. And this relationship represents the core of the medium, its essence. As for comics and translation, a pioneer reference was made by Roman Jakobson (1960) as he mentioned comics when referring “to the possibility of transposing *Wuthering Heights* into a motion picture, medieval legends into frescoes and miniatures, or *L'après-midi d'un faune* into music, ballet, and graphic art. However ludicrous may appear the idea of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in comics, certain structural features of their plot are preserved despite the disappearance of their verbal shape” (350-51) It is significant to notice how Jakobson referred to comics while dealing with the translation of verbal messages into other systems of expression, i.e., what he labelled as “intersemiotic

³¹ In *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (1979), Greimas and Courtés defined as syncretic “les sémiotiques qui – tels l’opéra ou le cinéma – mettent en œuvre plusieurs langages de manifestation” (375).

translation” or “transmutation” in his pivotal study *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (1987). Such essay introduced the following tripartition of translation:

- 1 Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
- 2 Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
- 3 Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. (429)

According to Eco and Nergaard (1998), translation “does not involve comparing a language (or any other semiotic system) with another language or semiotic system; it involves passing from a text ‘a’, elaborated according to a semiotic system ‘A’, into a text ‘b’, elaborated according to a semiotic system ‘B’” (221). In this understanding, the translation of comics does not concern the interlingual translation of the verbal component alone. In particular, in the passage from a semiotic system to another, a visual interpretation necessarily occurs as well. As Federico Zanettin (2008a) highlighted, considering that comics are a syncretic semiotic environment, their translation into another language occurs “within the context of visual interpretation” and “is primarily their translation into another visual culture” (12). Moreover, a translation may entail a change in publication format (page size, layout, panel arrangement, reading direction, colour/black and white), genre, readership, form of production and distribution. The interpretation of such system of signs, much like images, relies on shared cultural assumptions. Neither visual language nor comic conventions are shared by all cultures. Despite the debate on this topic, visual elements are not universal. Transliterating what Ducrot (1991) stated regarding words, Celotti (2008) poignantly maintained that “no picture is ‘innocent’” (35). When dealing with the study of comic translation, it is impelling to adopt a more integrated approach which cuts across verbal communication and encompasses both a sociocultural and a semiotic stance to investigate the plurality of what Daniele Barbieri (1991) calls “languages” of comics. Thus, going back to Jakobson’s triad, the translation of the verbal component may be agreed to represent the “translation proper” phase of translating comics. However, this is absolutely not the case, because to adequately scrutinize the construction of meaning, translators are required to consider the whole system (or, in a Greimasian fashion, semiotics, with its hierarchies, mutual dependences and correlations, recurring norms, etc.) and the target may have to feature words

or other signs through which the connotations associated to visual signs in the source culture and absent in the target culture are compensated and made intelligible to the target comics readership. This chapter aims precisely to establish such an all-inclusive critical framework of analysis. It involves embedding three methodological priorities into research designs: i) a focus on the specificities of the comic mechanisms; ii) a study on the relations between verbal and visual components; iii) an enquiry on the overall meaning-making process.

To achieve this aim, in addition to visual semiotic considerations, this Chapter will present some reflections on the concept of multimodality and intersemiotic relationships between modes so as to elucidate how the multimodal nature of comics influences translation and how the relationships between the verbal and the visual modes may be exploited in the translation process. It therefore focuses on the ways in which the two modes interact and contribute to the creation of meaning on a multimodal page, and on the transformations their relationships may undergo in translation. In addition narratologic and enunciative considerations will be tackled so as to investigate the multi-layered levels of discourse organisation comics deploy on account of their verbal and visual interplay.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning Charles Hatfield's (2009) classification of the four tensions which, in his opinion, characterise comics. First of all, comics are defined by the tension "between *codes* of signification" which regards the clash and the cooperation of verbal and non-verbal components. In addition, a further tension is established "between the *single image* and the *image-in-series*" which regard the complementary notions of breakdown (Harvey, 1994) and closure (McCloud, 1993), i.e., the process in which narration is split into a visual series of images (i.e., the breakdown) and reconnected by inference in a narrative sequence (i.e., the closure). The third tension is that "between narrative *sequences* and page *surface*" and regards panels and page layout (in French *planche* to distinguish it from the physical page). According to Hatfield, "the single image functions as both a point on an imagined timeline – a self-contained moment substituting for the moment before it, and anticipating the moment to come – and an element in the global page design" (140). In his view, this tension accounts for the effectiveness of comics. A reader can linger on the single panel, as well as see it as a part of a whole, and each panel may generate balance or imbalance in the overall scheme. He added that "comics exploit the *format* as a signifier itself" especially in relation to the "perceived time and perceived place" (144). Finally, the tension "between reading-as-experience and the text as material *object*" concerns the capacity of comics' materiality, i.e., its design and physical qualities (size, shape, binding, paper, printing), to

communicate additional meanings to the text. Technological and economic means affect materiality, which in turn affects techniques and style, the latter being an “inextricably part of, and prerequisite to, the story’s meaning” (145). Hatfield distinguishes between the smooth, continuous *Ligne Claire* (Clear Line) tradition (e.g., Belgian cartoonist Hergé’s *Tintin*) and a more frayed, expressionistic style: the first one overlooks materiality to favour the “democracy of form” (McCloud, 190), in which the flatness of lines contributes to the defined (hopefully verisimilar) and equal rendering of figures and settings; expressionistic styles, with their raw lines, “revel in the texture of the page” to increase the level of vividness and immediacy of the page, privileging “expressiveness over clarity and precision” (Groth and Fiore, 231-32). Crumb’s works are particularly effective examples of this “mark-making” style (Hatfield, 146). Readers are affected by materiality as “the form of drawing draws attention to the object represented in a way that deviates from ordinary perception” (P. Lefèvre, 1999: 142).

The recent tendency to vary the graphic style is clearly a symptom of the growing attention paid to the communicative potential of comics, or, better said, the awareness about the possibility to “end the dogma of homogeneity” (Groensteen, 2013: 112) and therefore to experiment with modulations of colours, drawing and writing techniques. These breaks in style usually signal a greater emotional investment in the narrative, expressed through aesthetic syncretism and discontinuity: “[w]hat has changed is that an artist’s style is no longer perceived as ‘a signature feature’ that must be kept intact, and drawing is now considered as a flexible medium whose expressive potential is infinite”. The discovery of the rhetorical potential of images, the beginning of the era of “narrative polygraphism and polyphony” (117), increases the possibilities of the medium, by bringing “a jazz attitude to comics” (Groensteen, 2013: 115). Quoting the insightful comment of Renato Calligaro, reprised by Groensteen:

Diversity of styles and techniques is not a gratuitous game, but the inevitable consequence of the effort to reinvent reality. The potential is always polymorphic, and so the author’s project is to concretize disparate potentialities. [...] And, just as a text can be, in turn, descriptive, allusive, moralistic, stream of consciousness, onomatopoeic, etc., so the image can become, successively, naturalistic, cubist, abstract, graphic or picturesque. (114)

In this light, prior to delving into the study of translation, the analysis of visual components is of utmost importance. Although not comprehensive, such investigation will shed light on some fundamental notions which a translator should not overlook. The final

aim is to provide a general framework, through which the kaleidoscope of underground comix production will be assayed.

3.2. Visual Semiotics: Greimas and Groupe μ

The brief introduction inevitably points out at the elephant in the room of the present dissertation: visual images as a system of signification proper. Contributions to the study of visuality have been made by several schools of semiotics, including the Lund Semiotic Cycle (Sonesson, 1989), the group referring to Fernand Saint-Martin (1987), the multimodal analysis research strain (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). As a starting point of the present analysis I have referred to Greimas's essay *Sémiotique Figurative et Sémiotique Plastique* (1984), which provided an insightful account of visual semiotics studies. Following the approach delineated by his research, and subsequently followed by Bertrand (2000), the notion of figurativity relates to the textual rendering of the perceptive experience of the different senses. In this understanding, twentieth century semiotics heaviness draws from Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Figurative semiotics, in particular, focuses on the interpretation of visual configurations (colours and lines) as objects of the real world. The figurative effect is certainly more complex than what may seem, as the mimicry of reality depends on the background knowledge and culture of the viewers as well as to the iconicity (realism) or abstraction of the figures. Plastic language, on the other hand, concerns the sense effects produced by graphic elements (plastic formants) beyond the imitation of perceived reality. Plastic analysis investigates such formants according to three components: topological (spatial arrangements: position, orientation, frames, format, debrayage etc.), eidetic (lines and shapes), chromatic (significant differences generated by degrees of colours and shades of lights) categories.

Drawing on Greimas's reflections, a new program of research in visual semiotics was also developed by the Liège Groupe μ . In 1992 Groupe μ published their seminal work *Traité du Signe Visuel*, which still represents one of the main foundations of structural studies on visuality. Groupe μ aimed to propose their study on the semiotic structure of the image and develop a general rhetoric framework of the visual message. Thus, they moved away from that idea of 'linguistic imperialism' which is completely absent in Peircean semiotics whereas it allegedly paved the way to semiological (i.e., Saussurean) approaches to the 'domain of images' in Europe: "L'idée que le langage est le code par excellence, et que tout transite par lui par l'effet d'une inévitable verbalisation, est une idée fausse" (52). The idea of language as

the most important system of communication was engrained in European semiotics since the publication of *Cours de Linguistique Générale* ([1916] 1967), in which Ferdinand de Saussure explicitly stated that: “La langue est un système de signes exprimant des idées, et par là, comparable à l’écriture, à l’alphabet des sourds-muets, aux rites symboliques, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaires, etc., etc. Elle est seulement le plus important de ces systems” (33). Groupe μ lamented how this predicament was inherent in many subsequent works, even when focused on codes other than verbal language. For example, Groupe μ argued that Barthes subordinated all systems of signs to the linguistic one (52), Dora Vallier investigated the chromatic triangle on the basis of the vocalic one (53), and Felix Thürlemann studied colours starting from language and not from a chromatic system (234). Rather, visual semiotics should make reference to the visual channel, its distinguishing properties and features. Groupe μ dedicated many pages to the analysis of the eye and visual perceptions: the eye perceives an object as a shape the viewer recognises as the sum of permanent properties which he/she can frame within his/her memory boxes and background knowledge. The shift from the perceptive to the cognitive level relies on the existence and knowledge of a repertoire of objects. Likewise, Eco (1997) reflected on cognitive processes starting precisely from the idea of visual perception and coined the notion of Cognitive Type as a semiotic mechanism of cognition based on the private construction of the image of an object (as in Kant’s scheme): despite the general scope of the theory, the cognitive phenomena of recognition, identification and successful reference Eco describes – and all of his examples – are clearly grounded on visuality.

Groupe μ subsequently focused on the visual sign, and made a distinction between the plastic sign and the iconic sign. The notion of plastic sign refers to those signs with no direct reference to the real world. In general, plastic signs were conceived as marks or features constitutive of iconic signs, and thus dependent and functional to their recognition. Only after the canonisation of abstract art during the twentieth century, plastic signs started to be considered independently. Groupe μ performed an analysis that concerned both the system of visual form (“système de la forme”), the system of colors (“système de la couleur”) and the system of textures (“système de la texture”). In the vein of a structural approach, each system is defined by its own set of basic units such as formemes (“formèmes”), colorememes (“chromèmes”) and texturemes (“texturèmes”), respectively. As a further sub-set, three types of formemes exist, i.e., position, dimension (or size) and orientation. All three criteria are relative, as they function in relation to the picture plane and

to its central point of focus. Thus, depending upon the position of an element in relation to the picture plan and its centre, it is possible to affirm that a form is at the centre, at the bottom, above, to the left or to the right of the space in question.

The analysis of plastic form is far more complex and may entail further factors which Groupe μ decided to exclude from their study. What they highlighted is basically the meaning associated to formemes and identified as “repulsion” (in connection with the position), “dominance” (in relation to the dimension) and “balance” (in connection with the orientation). The contents of form are therefore the result of the relationships between formemes, which, in turn, are culturally determined: on the one hand, a formeme may be emphasised with respect to the others to convey a specific value; on the other hand, a form may be associated to different values (e.g., a circle can convey a sense of perfection, of divinity, a ban or a negation).

Texturemes can be textural elements (e.g., a brushstroke) and their repetition (e.g., the repetition of such brushstrokes). Texture depends on synesthetic signifiers, originated by the perception of the grain of the surface and visual/tactile sensory projection of the receiver. For this reason, the perception of this textural element is influenced by the receiver’s distance: to put it simply, the farther one goes from a painting, the less he/she perceives of its textural elements. Nonetheless, Groupe μ does not seem to distinguish between physical textures which are tactilely perceptible and the textures represented. In general, texture depends on the nature of the medium, the choice of materials and the artist’s tools. Without going in further details, the signified associated with the texture are the grain and the macula. The former is related to the microtopographic support (e.g., paper), the properties of the material used (e.g., graphite) and the type of impasto (smooth or raised). The latter regards the state of texture, considered in its flat form.

Finally, colorememes are divided into chromatic dominant (“dominante colorée”), brightness (“brillance”) and saturation (“saturation”). Colorememes are associated on the level of content to a plastic signified which is culturally determined. For example, the colour red may acquire different meanings, including passion and sensuality, as well as anger, violence and aggression, based on psycho-social, cultural and even ethnographic considerations. Although each system has its own identity, form, colour and texture work in synergy, and thus form part of a meaningful whole. Indeed, it is from this set that it is possible to originate an effect of meaning, that is to say, a plastic signified. This conception is an extension of the Saussurean structure of sign, i.e., a dual (bipolar) entity whereby a sensorially transmittable

signifier is associated to a signified. Such conception does not fit within the Peircean triadic structure of semiosis and is somehow closer to Ogden and Richards's conceptualisations (see below).

According to Groupe μ , the structure of the iconic visual sign is different from that of the other signs, in particular to the plastic sign. Moving beyond the Saussurean "signifier-signified" structure, they developed a triadic diagram of iconic signs constituted by the iconic signifier, the type and the referent, all three acting simultaneously. The referent is defined as "designatum actualisé", i.e., "l'objet entendu non comme somme inorganisée de stimuli, mais comme membre d'une classe [...] le référent est particulier, et possède des caractéristiques physiques" while the type "est une classe et a des caractéristiques conceptuelles" (136-137). Such position can be related to Eco's Cognitive Type theory mentioned above and Groupe μ was clearly influenced by his previous critique to iconism, developed in *Trattato di Semiotica Generale / A Theory of Semiotics* (1975): in fact, by rejecting the identity between conventional and arbitrary links in the production of signs in favour of cultural connections, Eco also problematised the notion of iconic signs, affirming their motivated (the opposite of arbitrary) and conventional nature. To account for the notion of motivation, he distinguished between ratio facilis and ratio difficilis: the former refers to arbitrary languages (e.g., verbal language) in which the relationship (ratio) between a pre-defined expression-type (type) referring to the content and the expression-occurrence (token) referring to the individual realisations is in agreement. The latter occurs in the case of iconic signs, i.e., when "an expression-token is directly accorded to its content, whether because the corresponding expression-type does not exist as yet or because the expression-type is identical with the content-type" (Eco, 1976: 183): iconic signs are concrete occurrences directly referring to the mental scheme of the objects represented. For Groupe μ , the referent of a represented figure is the object that served as a model, one that can be physically experienced in our real life (and not represented). It may be argued that the plastic sign has no referent. The type is the mental representation of the object, not its physical reality, and is grouped into repertoires of types according to their differences and oppositions. Types enable the perception of the equivalence between referent and the iconic signifier, which can be defined as an "ensemble modélisé de stimuli visuels correspondant à un type stable" (137). Types are articulated according to different levels of signifiers: entities, sub-entities and supra-entities which correspond to the mental models of type, sub-type and supra-type. An entity is a unit which possesses sub-units, such as the body and its subdivision into head,

arms, legs, etc. The decomposition of entities below the level of sub-entities can reach the level of plastic signs, or marks, which are functional to the recognition of the type. According to Groupe μ , a simile can be established between type and referent (the latter being recognisable only in the light of a stabilised type), and type and signifier, but not between referent and signifier, which have no direct relation. An akin conceptualisation can be found in the triangle of reference (or triangle of meaning) modelled by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), which describes the relation between subjects, linguistic symbols (signs) and the objects they represent (referent). Even going back to Plato's notion of idea, it would not be possible to recognise a woman or a man without an a priori idea of what they are. The same happens with types. Unlike what Plato said about ideas, however, types are cultural productions as they are created on the basis of varying stylizations of referents. Such cultural value and its continuous process of transformation are fundamental features of visual signs.

The distinction between iconic and plastic signs is not always clear: “Il n'est pas aisé de distinguer empiriquement le signe plastique et le signe iconique” (120). In the majority of cases, visual texts make use of a combination of iconic and plastic signs. In some other, plastic signs still tend to be interpreted as marks of the iconic ones, thus overlooking their independent meaning. This often occurs in abstract art, as viewers have a penchant for the association of plastic signs with iconic references, like a stain of blue interpreted as the sky or a yellow circle as the sun. The linguistic system and the visual one thus present some differences which can be summarised in the following tables³²:

Linguistic channel: features and data perception	Visual channel: features and data perception
Medium power	High power
Sequential perception of texts	Simultaneous perception of texts
Chronological reading of sentences	Tabular reading of images
Non-spatial translation of signs	Bi-tridimensional translation of signs

Linguistic Semiotics: features	Visual Semiotics: features
A type of sign	Two types of signs (plastic and iconic)
Arbitrary link between signifier and signified	Theory of types: the link between signifier and referent is not totally arbitrary in iconic signs

³²Both tables are taken from Amado (2008) and translated in English by the editor.

Clearer segmentation between the plane of expression and the plane of content (codified and stable system)	More fluid segmentation between the plane of expression and the plane of content (not rigidly-codified system)
Biunivocal relation between expression and content	Unstable relationship between expression and content
Units with a systemic value independent of the use within an enunciate	Units which express a content within a larger visual expression plane
More limited role of the recipient in the attribution of meaning to the enunciation	More important role of the recipient in the attribution of meaning to the enunciation

According to this view, the main differences between the two channels and the two semiotics are therefore structural: some regard the degree of conventionality and codification, some others the substance of verbal and visual texts, e.g., the possibility to have a simultaneous spatial perspective, the types of signs and the existence of such culture-based mental models as types. In this respect, it is worth touching upon Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1976: 697) as he enhanced the role of word as a medium, an abstract sign referring to a concept, a simple designation which transmits a content without focusing the attention on itself (external designation). Visual art products, by contrast, are not mere instruments conveying a meaning. Visual codes rely on expression forms more than other codes, including the verbal one. Visual communication is thus a communication always ‘with’, or even ‘within’ expression forms and substances – as in some marked uses of verbal code, such as poetry – and it almost never works simply ‘by means of’ or ‘through’ those very forms.

3.3. On Multimodality and Translation

Research on visual communication boomed in the recent years, particularly in the field of multimodality. Lim (2004) stated that “we live in a multimodal society, which makes meaning through the co-employment of semiotic resources” (52). Likewise, Paul Duncum (2004) stressed how “there is no avoiding the multimodal nature of dominant and emerging cultural sites” (259). Indeed, the study of multimodality, made popular in recent years by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001, 2006 [1996]), is gaining momentum in contemporary research in several different fields (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001), particularly in Halliday-based social semiotics (e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006 [1996]; Jewitt, 2013 [2009]); O’Halloran 2004; Kress, 2003, 2010; O’Toole, 2010 [1994]). According to Jewitt (2013 [2009]), “multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to

be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use-image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on-and the relationships between them” (15). Multimodal discourse involves “the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as (spoken and written) language, gesture, dress, architecture, proximity (and in film for example) lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, and so forth” (O’Halloran, Tan, Smith and Podlasov, 2011: 110), with semiotic resources being the “systems of meaning that people have at their disposal” (Jewitt, 23).³³

Thus, communication is formed by a multimodal ensemble in which language is only a part and meanings are conveyed through a combination of heterogeneous semiotic resources which, just as in the case of language, are shaped through historical, social and cultural contexts of use – against any claim of universalistic codes (see Rabadan, 1991). Even in verbal-language texts, meanings are also transmitted by non-linguistic attributes which readers are capable of interpreting automatically, and multimodal studies precisely focus on the analysis of such attributes.

To better define what multimodal research involves, it is useful to sketch out some working definitions of the basic notions undergirding this analysis. First of all, modes are “semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001: 21). Likewise, Page (2009) defined the mode as “a system of choices” and “an open-ended set, ranging across a number of systems including but not limited to language, image, color, typography, music, voice quality, dress, gesture, spatial resources, perfume, and cuisine” (6). Both definitions are developments of Halliday’s loose notion of mode as “what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context” (12). Nonetheless, it is important to stress that modes do not have to be mistaken for media. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) contended that “[m]ultimodality and multimediality are not quite the same thing” (67). Media are “the material resources used in the production of semiotic products and events, including both the tools and the materials used” (22). They comprise the channels of communication and the physical materials (airwaves, print etc.). Drawing his definitions on Krees and Van Leeuwen (2001) and Jewitt (2006), David Herman (2010) provides an insightful description of the difference between the two concepts: “modes are

³³ Similar conclusions were drawn by Ruth Finnegan (2002) in the field of anthropologic studies as she maintained that all communication is multimodal and (potentially) multimedial.

semiotic channels (better, environments) that can be viewed as a resource for the *design* of a representation formulated within a particular type of discourse, which is in turn embedded in a specific kind of communicative interaction”, whereas “media can be viewed as means for the dissemination or production of what is being represented in a given mode” (79). Meaning can be derived from the combination of different modes and different media. Thus, for instance, one may refer to visual, linguistic, spatial, aural, and gestural modes, while photographs, films, podcasts, video games, newspapers, magazines, books and comics are media. As such, the verbal mode is only “one mode nestled among a multimodal ensemble of modes” (Jewitt, 2013: 15): its role may be primary or subordinate with respect to the other modes, just as the latter may communicate the core meaning of the semiotic product or simply occupy an ancillary position as embellishments.

Another key-word associated with multimodal research is affordance³⁴, i.e., “the potential and limitations of material drawn into semiosis as mode” (Kress, 2009: 58). Thus, given the fact that modes vary from community to community and specific modes are selected based on the purpose of the communicative act, different modes have different affordances and a different meaning-making potential: “different modes do different kinds of communicative work and [...] each of them is specific and suited to different communicative goals and contexts” (Bock, 2013: 65). In this light, it is crucial to understand how different semiotic resources function and interact. In this regard, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) argued that the idea of multimodality can be summarised as “[t]he use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” (20). Kress (2009) believed that, in this sense, multimodality is not a theory but rather a “domain of enquiry” (54). As such it may be applied to various discourses, such as advertisements, websites, museum exhibitions, and textbooks, as well as comics, in which different modes melt.

As mentioned above, modes are culture-bound and, in fact, they may be defined as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning” (Kress, 2009: 54), which is governed by its specific logic (e.g., the mode of speech by the logic of time, the mode of

³⁴ The term, originally coined by James J. Gibson, can be defined as follows: “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment” (Gibson, 1979: 127). This notion was subsequently applied in several fields, from perceptual psychology to design and technologies. The definition of affordance in multimodal analysis partially diverges from the original ‘interactionist’ perspective. While Gibson focused on agent-situation interactions, modal affordance diverges from the perceptual considerations to refer to material, cultural, social and historical factors which determine the potentialities and constraints of different modes, i.e., what is possible to communicate with the semiotic resources of a given mode.

still image by the logic of simultaneity and space, etc., see Jewitt, 2013: 25). According to Kress's (2010) social semiotic approach: "what counts as mode is a matter for a community and its social representational needs. What a community decides to regard and use as mode is mode. If the community of designers have a need to develop the potential of *font* and *colour* into full means for representation then *font* and *colour* will be mode in that community" (87). According to Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014), this indicates that "there are many more semiotic modes than are generally discussed in the literature" and, for instance, "we find that comics [...] have their own quite distinctive ways of connecting together elements" (182). It is no surprise that multimodal analysis found its pivotal expression in social semiotics studies, particularly in the integration of verbal and visual modes.

Saussure ([1916] 1967) famously formulated a distinction between diachronic and synchronic view of language, i.e., between language either seen in time or framed in a given moment. Sociolinguistics has ever since moved away from the conception of language as an isolated, autonomous system and insisted on the connectedness between linguistic and social changes. In particular, Kress (2003) maintained that:

It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from the vast array of social, technological and economic factors. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen. (1)

In this field of research, not only language is not seen as an autonomous means of communication, but it is also considered 'just one of many'. Thus, a theory which focuses on language alone does not suffice. In this regard, Kress (2001) explicitly advocated the role of multimodal analysis in "decentring language" that:

... the shape and the direction of the current communicational world demand a re-assessment, in which language is just one of a number of modes of communication, all of which are culturally and socially shaped. Verbal language is being displaced as a communicational mode by image, in many sites of public communication: whether in school textbooks, in newspapers, in reports produced in institutions of all kinds, in the electronic media, and in the information and communication technologies in general. Image has ceased to be there as mere illustration; that is, as an embellishment of the central, the written text. Image is now fully communicational in very many forms of text. (67)

In this respect, comics occupy a liminal position by virtue of their idiosyncratic nature: on the one hand, they are books and, as such, part of the old-fashioned media

supplanted by the screen; on the other hand, comics are composed of images and benefit from the experiential and perceptive landscape of visuality, to the detriment of traditional, canonical literary writing.

In communication, meaning-making processes rarely rely on verbal language alone. Nowadays images, colours, sounds, action symbols are no longer considered as paralanguages and certainly do not play a subordinate role with respect to words in several of the media commonly employed. In the seminal work *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Berger posited “[s]eeing comes before words” (7) and the contemporary society is *de facto* dominated by an increasingly visual culture: images do not play a merely ancillary role in communication and meaning-making processes and their pervasiveness grows as picture books, graphic novels and comics, advertisements and films increase their prominence (cfr. Goldstone, 2004; Serafini, 2009 for picture books; Kress, 2003, and Serafini, 2011, for the role of the visual mode in contemporary new media). Even books and articles rarely avoid the use of visual devices. The majority of texts permeating everyday culture combine verbal components with non-verbal resources. Kress (2003) believed that “the effects of the move to the screen as the major medium of communication will produce far-reaching shifts in relation of power, and not just in the sphere of communication. The world told is a different world from the world shown” (1).

For this reason, an increasing body of research has been devoted to frame the growing prominence of images in communication. The significance of images was already advocated by such theorists as McLuhan (1964), Debord (1983), Benjamin (1937) and Baudrillard (1994). Some pivotal studies specifically dedicated to images are Horn’s *Visual Language* (1998) and Mitchell’s *Picture Theory* (1994) as well as McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993), which can be acclaimed as one of the founding texts of Comics Studies. These books share the intuition that, in a vast portion of communication, the interaction of visual and verbal components have semantic relations and co-participate in the creation of a meaningful whole. Further research highlighted how images are considered more effective in developing a direct emotional impact on the viewer, while verbal language is more functional to the exposition of logical analysis (Arnheim, 1974; Elkins, 1999). Images are thought of as a way to visually reproduce human experiences with transparency and immediacy (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). Likewise, social semiotics conceives different epistemological roles for language and images in multimodal discourses due to their different affordances: the former represents the narrative world, the latter the displayed world. According to Kress (2003):

The two modes of writing and of image are each governed by distinct logics, and have distinctly different affordances. The organization of writing – still leaning on the logics of speech – is governed by the logic of time, and by the logic of sequence of its elements in time, in temporally governed arrangements. The organization of the image, by contrast, is governed by the logic of space, and by the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organised arrangements. (2)

Thus, in a cartoon, for example, by looking at the written text in a balloon, meaning is conveyed by the position of the text in a temporal sequence and, when the visual image is considered, meaning is conveyed by spatial relations (e.g., size, position composition).

In the aforementioned classic semiotic work *The Rhetoric of the Image* (1997 [1964]), Barthes analysed the relation between images and verbal messages and identified three possible functions: i) illustration, when images merely support verbal texts; ii) anchorage, when verbal texts are used to focus on one of the multiple meanings and interpretations images may possess by virtue of their polysemic nature, or using Barthes's words, when "the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image" (25); iii), relay, when verbal texts participate in the meaning-making process in connection with images, i.e., when they have a complementary relation and "the unity of the message is created at a higher level: the level of the story" (32-33).

Kress's work stems from the postulations of Roland Barthes with respect to semiotics applied to social and cultural life, though, just like Groupe μ , he ultimately criticised his understanding of language as a privileged mode, from which he assumed all theoretical frameworks for the other modes should be derived. By contrast, the collaboration of Kress and Van Leeuwen resulted in the elaboration of their *Visual Grammar* (2006 [1996]): the two theorists saw the visual component of a text as "an independently organized and structured message – connected with the verbal text, but in no way dependent on it: and similarly the other way around" (17). They noted how "language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so by means of its own specific forms, and independently" (17), although "not everything that can be realized in language can also be realized by means of images, or vice versa" (17).

The theoretical foundation of Kress and van Leeuwen's study is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday (1978) conceived language as a "social semiotic" and defined it i) functional (i.e., regarding what can or cannot be done with it); ii) semantic (i.e., it makes meanings); iii) contextual (i.e., socio-cultural factors influence meaning exchanges); iv) semiotic (i.e., meanings are selected "from the total set of options that constitute what can

be meant” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:53). Halliday elaborated a theoretical framework of three meta-functions operating simultaneously within language which he defined as “three kinds of meaning that are embodied in human language as a whole, forming the basis of the semantic organization of all natural languages” (ibid.):

- the Ideational metafunction regards the representation of what is happening in the world, i.e., “our experience of the world that lies about us, and also inside us, the world of our imagination. It is meaning in the sense of ‘content’”.
- the Interpersonal metafunction constitutes communicative interactions, i.e., “meaning as a form of action: the speaker or writer doing something to the listener or reader by means of language”.
- the Textual metafunction serves to create texts as coherent complexes of signs which are consistent on an internal and external levels, i.e., with each other and in the context where they are produced. Halliday talked of “relevance to the context: both the preceding (and following) text, and context of situation”.

These three metafunctions pertain to all texts, not just to verbal ones. Halliday himself argued that “other ways of meaning, other than through language” exist and “there are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language” (4). Though his focus was primarily language-based, he set the groundings for the analysis of semiotic-system interrelations as, in his view, these “other” modes are “all bearers of meaning in the culture. Indeed we can define a culture as a set of semiotic systems, as a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate” (ibid.).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar and, in particular, the metafunctions of language as a socially-based semiotic system can also be applied to visual studies, among others. They proposed the term “Visual Grammar” to cover all aspects of visual communication and argued that “the visual, like all semiotic modes, has to serve several communicational (and representational) requirements, in order to function as a full system of communication” (41). This means that, to convey meaning, the visual mode simultaneously performs the same communicative metafunctions of language, which they renamed as representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. With their Grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen provided the descriptive framework and the vocabulary needed to analyse images based on Halliday’s metafunctions, proposing a groundbreaking model with a wide range of applicability in different domains.

As for representational meanings, Kress and Van Leeuwen argued that “[a]ny semiotic mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans” (42), that is to say, a mode “has to be able to represent objects and their relation in a world outside the representational system”. Representational meaning regards objects and elements which Kress and Van Leeuwen called “represented participants” (47). Actually, two different types of participants are distinguished: in a communicative act, interactive participants are the image producers and viewers, i.e., those “who speak and listen or write and read, make images or view them” (48), whereas represented participants “constitute the subject matter of the communication; that is, the people, places and things (including abstract ‘things’) represented in and by the speech or writing or image, the participants about whom or which we are speaking or writing or producing images “ (ibid.).³⁵ Kress and Van Leeuwen classified representational meaning as narrative representation and conceptual representation, based on the criteria whether an image involves a “vector” or not. Narrative processes follow vectorial patterns which illustrate “unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements” and “when participants are connected by a vector, they are represented as doing something to or for each other” (59). The concept of vector characterising narrative processes may refer to eye contact, body movements, tools in actions, graphic indicators of directionality, all elements in the image which form “an oblique line, often a quite strong, diagonal line” (59).

According to the type of vectors and the number and type of participants involved in the visual images, different kinds of narrative process exist: action, reactional, speech, mental, and conversion processes. Action processes are composed of an “Actor”, i.e., the participant from which the vector departs, and a “Goal”, i.e., the participant the vector is directed at (64). In this case, Kress and Van Leeuwen defined the process as transactional. If the structure is bidirectional and each participant plays both roles they are called Interactors. If the image includes just one participant, usually the Actor, and the action has no Goal and “is not ‘done to’ or ‘aimed at’ anyone or anything”, the narrative process is defined as non-transactional. If only the vector and the Goal are represented the process is called Event. In an image, reactional processes may occur as well, whenever “the vector is performed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants”. In this case, “we will speak not of Actors, but of Reactors, and not of Goals, but of *Phenomena*” (67). Reactions may be transactional or non-transactionals, the latter being the case of gaze

³⁵ This distinction reminds of the one developed by Greimas between enunciation actants and utterance actants.

directed at out-of-the picture Phenomena. Speech and Mental Processes specifically regard comics, in which “a special kind of vector can be observed [...]: the oblique protrusions of the thought balloons and dialogue balloons that connect drawings of speakers or thinkers to their speech or thought” (68). Dialogue balloons connect speakers, called Sayers, to their speech, called Utterance, whereas thought balloons link thinkers, called Sensers, and thought, called Phenomenon. Finally, the Conversion Process regard chains of transactional processes, i.e., a third participant, named Relay, is included in the image and plays the role of Goal for one of the participants and Actor for the other.

In addition, secondary participants may be included in the narrative structure, though they are not linked to the main participants through vectors. Kress and Van Leeuwen called this type of participants Circumstances and subdivided them into Setting (locative circumstances), Means (circumstances presenting tools of action) and Accompaniment (participants not linked by vectors). Circumstances make an image more detailed and, even though their absence does not change the narrative structure, it would ultimately represent a loss of information. By contrast, conceptual representations can be defined as non-narrative structures with no vector, “representing participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning” (79). They are divided into classificational, analytical and symbolical processes. Classificational processes “relate participants to each other in term of a ‘kind of’ relation, a taxonomy: at least one set of participants will play the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate” (ibid.). This type of conceptual structure is further classified into overt and covert taxonomies, depending on whether the Superordinate is displayed or not. In overt taxonomies, a Superordinate is connected to Subordinates through a tree structure which may be either single-levelled or multi-levelled. In the latter scenario, a participant who is Subordinate to someone and Superordinate to some other is called Interordinate. In covert taxonomies, the Superordinate is generally presumed, i.e., it is “inferred from such similarities as the viewer may perceive to exist between the Subordinates, or only indicated in the accompanying text” (ibid.). In this case, Subordinates are “distributed symmetrically across the picture space, at equal distance from each other, equal in size, and oriented towards the vertical and horizontal axes in the same way” (87).

Analytic Processes “relate participants in terms of part-whole structure” (ibid.) and involve two kinds of participants, a Carrier (whole) and the Possessive Attributes (parts). Kress and Van Leeuwen distinguished different types of analytical processes (87-104):

unstructured (no Carrier represented); temporal (Possessive Attributes on a timeline as stages of an unfolding process); exhaustive (all Possessive Attributes represented); inclusive (much of the Carrier unaccounted); topographical (physical and spatial relations represented); topological (logical relations between participants represented); and spatio-temporal (applied to charts). Symbolic processes, on the other hand, regard “what a participant *means* or *is*” (105). In particular, Symbolic Attributive process, if the image includes the Carrier, i.e., the participant “whose meaning and identity is established in the relation”, and the Symbolic Attribute, i.e., the participant “which represents the meaning and identity itself” (salient, often out-of-place elements charged with symbolic value and usually pointed at, e.g., by gesture). Conversely, a process can be Symbolic Suggestive if the picture includes only the Carrier, whose meaning and identity are “coming from within, as deriving from the qualities of the Carriers themselves” (106) and not conferred by Symbolic Attributes.

Just as sentences in language, pictures can be either simple or complex according to “the relative size and conspicuousness of the elements” (107) and may form a “powerful, multidimensional structure” (109). In particular, Kress and Van Leeuwen talked of Embedding when narrative and conceptual structures appear together in an image, thus increasing the level of complexity in the patterns of representation of participants.

The analysis of visual images is further complicated when one considers that two kinds of participants exist and three levels of mutual relationships may develop: represented participants are related to each other, but they also relate to interactive participants, the real people who produce and view the image and who, of course, may also mutually interact and relate. The interactive metafunction especially deals with interactive participants “who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be ‘said’ with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted”. These interactions may be direct and immediate but in many cases the context of production and reception differ. In writing, the physical disjunction between the writer and the readers left alone in the interpretation of texts has been widely investigated by literary theorists (Booth, 1961; Chatman, 1978; Eco, 1979; Rimmon-Kennan, 1983). Eco (1979:7) imagined the existence of a “model reader” and the presupposition of a “specific encyclopaedic competence” to correctly interpret the literary code and style.

As for the interactive meaning of images, Kress and Van Leeuwen investigated the role of and relationship between interactive participants and images according to three

dimensions: image act, social distance and perspective. Image act regards represented participants' gaze direction: if they look directly at the viewers' eyes (Demand), a vector establishes an imaginary contact between the two parts, thus creating a visual form of direct engagement; on the contrary, if no direct gaze contact is established between the participants (Offer), the image conveys a sense of detachment between the represented subjects and the viewers, with the former being objects of contemplation or items of information for the latter. Upon this very basis, Stoichita distinguished between full-face and in profile photographic portraits (and "traditional Western representations of a person" in general) in *A Short History of the Shadow* (1997: 226) and how these affect the person's identity. Social distance is accordingly related to the different sizes of frame (close-up, medium, long): based on Edward Hall's (1966) proxemic research and the idea that social relations are related to the literal or figurative distance, Kress and Van Leeuwen argued that the closer the represented participant, the greater the engagement of viewers.

Finally, the last dimension is perspective which regards the selection of the proper angle towards which represented participants are viewed. Semiotic effects of the choice of perspective and socially determined viewpoints were investigated in film (Comolli, 1971), though the tradition of studies on perspective actually goes back to the Renaissance. Images can be either Objective or Subjective. As for the former, "[s]cientific and technical pictures, such as diagrams, maps and charts, usually encode an objective attitude" (143-44) and this is usually achieved by using a directly frontal angle or perpendicular top down angle. Though such angles suggest the viewer's position, perspective distortions are neutralised and, in a way, the viewers are disregarded, as the aim of objective images is to reveal "everything there is to know [...] about the represented participants, even if, to do so, it is necessary to violate the laws of naturalistic depiction or, indeed, the laws of nature" (130). On the other hand, in Subjective images, the perspective is "selected *for* the viewer" (131): the producer selects the angle and the way to relate to represented participants, and viewers conform to it. In fact, the angle selected also influences the different relation between the participants: the horizontal angle "is a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the image producer and the frontal plane of the represented participants. The two can either be parallel, aligned with one another, or form an angle, diverge from one another" (134). Thus, the image may have either an oblique or a frontal perspective and each of them is related, respectively, to a form of detachment or involvement between the represented and the interactive participants. The vertical angle is linked to power-relations:

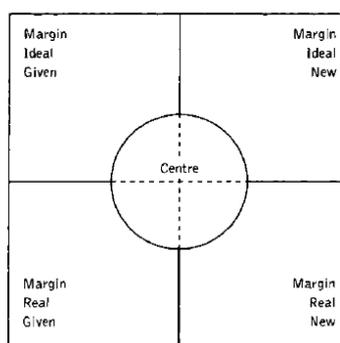
...if a represented participant is seen from a high angle, then the relation between the interactive participants (the producers of the image and hence also the viewer) and the represented participant is depicted as one in which the interactive participant has power over the represented participant – the represented participant is seen from a point of view of power. If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then the relation between the interactive and represented participants is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant. If, finally, the picture is at eye level, then the point of view is one of equality and there is no power difference involved. (140)

Kress and Van Leeuwen also discussed the question of the reliability of message, which affects both verbal and visual messages, since “visuals can represent people, places and things as though they actually exist in this way or as though they do not (as imaginary)” (156). Modality markers function as textual cues which can provide some evidence on the factuality of a message. In linguistics, modality refers to “the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world” (155). Visual design, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen, relies on a complex interplay of markers: colour saturation, differentiation and modulation inform about the naturalistic modality of an image, as “the more that is [...] abstracted from the colours of the representation, [...] the lower the modality” (159); contextualization regards the articulation of the background, on a scale from absence of setting (generic represented participants with no context at all) to fully detailed backgrounds (overexposure); representation refers to the level of pictorial detail the participants are shown with, from maximum abstraction and stylized images to hyper-real pictures; depth informs on the perspective of the picture (central, angular-isometric, frontal-isometric, overlapping); illumination and brightness regard, respectively, the degree of representation of the light-shade interplay and bright values. These markers intertwine within a picture with different outcomes: the same picture may display different levels of abstraction and naturalism according to the marker considered and visual modality “rests on culturally and historically determined standards of what is real and what is not, and not on the objective correspondence of the visual image to a reality defined in some ways independently of it” (163).

The last metafunction, called compositional, regulates “the way in which representations and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole we call ‘text’” (181). Composition relates representational and interactive meanings by virtue of three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing. As for the first system, “[t]he placement of elements (participants and syntagms that relate them to each other and to the viewer) endows them with the specific informational values attached to the various ‘zones’

of the image: left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin” (177). In Western culture, given a visual space structured along the horizontal axis, the left side is related to given information, familiar elements and, in general, it serves as the viewer’s point of departure for decoding the message. The right side, on the other hand, is related to new information and unknown elements, which consequently demand closer attention. One may wonder whether Kress and Van Leeuwen’s partition is accounted for by a calque of the unmarked informational flow of verbal structures, as conceptualised by Halliday, whereby the theme corresponds to the given and comes before (i.e., on the left hand side of the conventional left/right axis of Western alphabetic writings) the rheme which corresponds to the new information. As such, this interpretation could actually be reversed in cultures where writing is not aligned along a left/right axis.

On the vertical axis, the top of the visual space is related to ideal information and promises, whereas information on the bottom is more practical, concrete, specific, and, in a word, real. The alignment centre-bottom also conveys information value as the nucleus of information lies at the centre of the visual space, while ancillary and subservient elements are positioned at the margin. As previously pointed out with respect to the left/right axis, the same could be argued here with respect to the centre/margin structural organisation, which can be consequently modified through different visual patterns, including those specific to other cultures. The final representation of the dimensions of visual space in Western culture is summarised in the following Figure taken from Kress and Van Leeuwen’s model:



Concerning salience³⁶, “[t]he elements (participants as well as objects, facts/situations) are made to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees” (177).

³⁶ French mathematician René Thom (1990) opposed the notions of salience and pregnance in the analysis of perception. In his view, salience is characterised by discontinuity in that a form is salient when it stands out and can be perceived and recognised with more clarity with respect to its undifferentiated, continuous background (and thus they are context-bound). Salient forms are unexpected and discrete and affect perception for a shorter time. By contrast, pregnant forms are imbued with long-lasting impacts of attraction and repulsion and intense

Salience is evaluated on the basis of the complex interaction of visual clues which are not objectively measurable, but which provide a “hierarchy of importance among the elements of spatially integrated texts, causing some to draw more attention to themselves than others”. Factors influencing the ‘visual weight’ of represented participants are: relative size, position in the visual field, differences in sharpness of focus, placement in the visual field, depth (e.g., foreground, background, overlapping), contrasts in tonal value and colours (e.g., black and white, saturated and soft tones), as well as specific cultural factors (symbols). These elements determine the sense of rhythm and compositional balance of the image, which in turn influence the viewers’ aesthetic perception and affective relation to the represented participants.

In this regard, a crucial role is also played by framing, the last system connecting interactive and represented participants: “The presence or absence of framing devices (realized by elements which create dividing lines, or by actual frame lines) disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense” (177). Framing (strongly or weakly) marks separations in the units of information. Simply put, “the absence of framing stresses group identity, its presence signifies individuality and differentiation” (203). (Dis)connection between represented participants can be created by different semiotic resources. In particular, the notions of segregation and separation refer to differences created by physical frames and empty spaces, respectively. Integration and overlap refer to elements occupying the same space coherently and frameless elements with meanings merging into each other. Colour, posture, size, etc. can also be used to either create links and relations (repetition) or emphasize differences (contrast) between elements. Connectedness can also be realized through vectors, depicted elements, and abstract graphic elements. Style also influences the sense of connection or disconnection, e.g., in comics drawings, the way in which lines are drawn may be strongly demarcated or subtle and even impalpable. Thicker lines may indicate the individuality or the detachment of the figure drawn.

3.3.1. Recent Developments of Multimodal Analysis

During the second half of 1990s, the interest in multimodal texts in the field systemic-functional semiotics grew (e.g., Lemke, 1998; Martinec, 1998a, 1998b; Royce, 1998, 2007;

values associated to biological meanings (e.g., hunger or sexual desire), thus triggering major changes in the subject perceiving them.

O'Halloran, 1999) and Kress and Van Leeuwen's model has been subsequently extended (Royce, 1998; Saraceni 2001, Lim 2007, Liu and O'Halloran, 2009, Painter et al. 2013). The analysis of the outcomes of these developments of multimodal studies are far from the aim of the present work. However, it is worth mentioning how the relation between visual and verbal modes was also investigated by Martinec and Salway (2005), based on Halliday's (1985) notion of status and logico-semantic relations between clauses. On the one hand, just as the status of two clauses may be equal or unequal according to their degree of dependency, "images and texts are considered to be unequal in status when one of them modifies the other", whereas "equal status between images and text is further divided into independent and complementary" (343). The independent status describes images and texts which are "joined on an equal footing" without modifying each other. The complementary one indicates that they are equally joined and modify one another.

Drawing on Halliday's logico-semantic relations, Martinec and Salway distinguished two broad kinds of image-word relationships: Expansion and Projection. The category of Expansion is further split into three typologies: i) Elaboration, when the verbal text conveys meaning already transmitted by the image, i.e., the meaning is repeated through different modes; ii) Extension (sub-divided in exposition and exemplification according to the level of generality), when the text adds new information regarding the image, or vice versa; iii) Enhancement, when one mode expands on the other by providing circumstantial information (space, time, reason/purpose). In the case of Extension and Enhancement, meanings are added rather than repeated. As for the category of Projection, Martinec and Salway maintained that "Projection is a logico-semantic relation that mainly seems to appear in two image-text contexts: in comic strips and in combinations of text and diagrams" (352). In the case of comics, "[d]istinguishing between locution and idea, or projection of wording and meaning in comic strips is straightforward because there are developed conventions for doing so – locutions are enclosed in speech bubbles and ideas in thought bubbles". Again, one may suspect a parallelism between multimodal approach and the more traditional semiotic one, particularly with respect to these typologies and Barthes's distinction between relay and anchorage, with the former reminding of Extension and Enhancement, and the latter reflecting Elaboration.

when verbal texts are used to focus on one of the multiple meanings and interpretations images may possess by virtue of their polysemic nature, or using Barthes's words, when "the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image" (25); iii), relay, when

verbal texts participate in the meaning-making process in connection with images, i.e., when they have a complementary relation and “the unity of the message is created at a higher level: the level of the story” (32-33).

A similar implementation of Halliday’s and Kress and Van Leeuwen’s theories was developed by Royce (1998, 2007), who investigated intersemiotic relations in multimodal texts by focusing on verbal-visual complementarity in an illustrated article in *The Economist* magazine. In his view, just as visual modes of communication can be investigated within the framework of Halliday’s linguistic metafunctions, the relations between different modes in multimodal texts can be analysed from an ideational point of view by using the categories of textual cohesion developed by Halliday and Hasan (1985). In particular, Royce classified such relations as: *repetition* (same experiential meaning); *synonymy* (similar experiential meaning); *antonymy* (opposite experiential meaning); *hyponymy* (relation of a general class with its subclasses); *meronymy* (relation of a whole with its parts). Such relations can explicate the ideational cohesive relations between the visual and the verbal modes in a multimodal text. A question which may arise with respect to such classification is whether these relationships are maintained in the process of translation from a language (and a cultural context) to another.

Multimodal studies addressing translation started gaining momentum after 1980s, i.e., after Translation Studies were established as an independent discipline and broadened the scope of investigation beyond language. After the boom of visual investigations, the pictorial language, previously considered irrelevant in translation processes, was integrated in translational enquiries, especially in the field of audio-visual translation, focusing on the role of modes other than the verbal in the subtitling process. Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014) argued that “the relationship of film – i.e., sequences of *moving* images – to language and even film considered ‘as language’ has been with us for almost as long as film itself” (180)³⁷ while the same question with respect to “*static* images” such as comics is a more recent phenomenon (Evans, 2009; Cohn, 2013; Miodrag, 2013). In the field of translation, it was previously mentioned how comics were not investigated as multimodal texts, but rather focusing on the meanings transmitted by words alone. Despite the flourishing of multimodal research, the interrelation between verbal and non-verbal elements in comics, and the role of non-verbal elements in their translation is still largely neglected. According to Kaindl (2004: 174), Comics Studies historically suffered from methodological problems as

³⁷ See Metz (1964) for a preliminary discussion on the topic.

monomodal disciplines traditionally segmented comics and investigated single components, thus overlooking their wholeness. In this sense, the implementation of a holistic approach is imperative, especially since the visual mode is the core feature characterising the medium. Indeed, silent comics exist (e.g., Rick Griffin and Victor Moscoso in the underground context), whereas it is difficult to have language-only comics. Likewise, Celotti (2008) defined comics as “a narrative space where pictorial elements convey meaning, no less than verbal messages, over which they often have primacy” (33) and it is “the simultaneity of the visual and the verbal languages generates the diegesis” (34). The verbal mode would thus play either an ancillary or a complementary role.

However, the vast majority of comics relies on the interplay between the two modes, whether they overlap or diverge in the generation of meaning. According to Peeters (1993), as for the essence of comics, “[i]t isn’t about captions nor illustrations but about a real complementary relationship between the readable and the visible, two instances, each taking its own part” (26). This is another characteristic typical of multimodality as “[a]t times the meaning realized by two modes can be “aligned”, at other times they may be complementary and at other times each mode may be used to refer to distinct aspects of meaning” (Jewitt, 2013: 25). McCloud (1994) defined comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). In his commentary to such utterance, Rota (2008) argued that verbal messages, considered “other images” (79), are treated as graphic elements as well. Readers become viewers. According to Rota, words are subordinated to images, as proved by the fact that comics with no verbal components exist, whereas the contrary does not. This does absolutely not mean that words have no value. Conversely, they share the aim of drawings in the creation of meaning, but as graphic representations.

When considering the visual component of comics, drawings are not the only elements appointed to convey meaning and rhythm to the narration. In this regard, Kaindl presented two insightful studies (1999 and 2004) on the multimodal nature of comics in relation to translation. First of all, based on the distinction between verbal and non-verbal elements in comics as a narrative form (1999: 273-75), he proposed an “anatomy” of comics by distinguishing between translation-relevant groups of signs, all contributing to meaning-making processes: linguistic, typographic and pictorial elements.

Linguistic elements include “titles, narrations, dialogue texts, onomatopoeias and inscriptions in the pictures” (273). Titles are considered signs of “opening and recognition”

and, especially for comic series, serve the function of product identification or, by using Christiane Nord's (1993) nomenclature, a "distinctive function" (87), usually including the name of the protagonist and a subtitle with details on the specific story. Narrations, usually located in boxes at the top or at the bottom of the panels, have an epic function: they provide information which cannot be derived from the picture alone, such as spatio-temporal coordinates and details on situations and moods. Dialogues, fulfilling a dramatic function, are generally in balloons or underneath the picture. Speech and thought balloons are the trademark of comics. Onomatopoeias verbally represent sound and noises within the picture. Kaindl (274) distinguished between interjections, derivations of nouns and verbs and invented words. In this regard, Eco (1964: 147) maintained that, even though onomatopoeias originally were linguistic signs, they now pertain to the language of comics and represent conventional signs with a purely evocative function to visually represent sounds and noises. Inscriptions are linguistic elements which are placed on objects within the images (labels, posters, flyers, shop signs, road names etc.). Another classification of verbal messages in comics was provided by Celotti (2008), who pinpointed four different verbal areas in which the translator is expected to intervene, which she defined "loci of translation" (38): i) the balloon, the site of written spoken messages and thoughts of the characters; ii) the caption, which "denotes the intervention of the narrator" (Groensteen, 2009: 38) and provides spatiotemporal indications; iii) the title, functioning as an "attention-getter" advertising the work (Celotti, 38); iv) the linguistic paratext, a term coined by Margarito (2005) on the wake of Genette and used to define all the verbal elements located inside the drawing of the panel (onomatopoeias, road signs, graffiti, advertising billboards, letters, newspapers, inscriptions, labels and so on). Going back to Barthes's *Rhetoric of Images*, in the case of comics, verbal language has a relay function as the message relies primarily on the complementarity of visual elements and the four loci Celotti identified. A fond reader of comics may find this conclusion rather obvious, indeed. A non-specialized translator, however, may fall into the trap of focusing only on the decoding of the verbal message.

Typographic elements regard "the technique of shaping characters in the interface between language and pictures" (274). They include graphemes and pictograms, font, proportion, size and width of words, (straight, curved, undulating) directionality of and spacing between letters, rhythm of lettering to indicate speed, movement, directions or intensity of emotions and noises. Font, for example, can also be used to indicate nationality

(e.g., stylized hieroglyphics for Egyptians), while colouring may inform on the emotional state of the characters (e.g., red for anger).

Pictorial elements correspond to “panels, colour, speedlines, perspective, format, etc.” which form the visual composition of the picture. Kaindl distinguished between signs of space and action signs, respectively serving the function of representing the scene and carrying forward the narration. Visual representations, both pictorial and typographic, can be culture-specific and difficult to translate into another. In this light, contrary to scholars who even supported the idea of a universally comprehensible visual language (Rabadàn, 154), Kaindl (2004) questioned the idea of a “visual Esperanto” (183) as images may be decoded differently according to the culture in which visual works such as comics are translated. Images are mistakenly considered reliable representations of reality, whereas Eco (1968, 1975) maintained that the visual code is based on culture-specific conventions and the proper interpretation of images depends on the understanding of the significance a given visual element has in a given culture. In this respect, Allwood (2002) defined body movements as “a major source of the multimodal and multidimensional nature of face-to-face communication” (15) and pinpointed a number of categories which may be relevant in the analysis of comics, such as body posture, facial gestures, direction of the gaze, movements of hands and arms, distance between communicators and spatial orientation. The medium of comics is able to reproduce the characters’ body movements, which include gesture, posture, eye gaze and facial expressions. Nonverbal interactions, the position of characters in the panels and their proximity with respect to each other convey additional meanings and inform the readers/viewers on the nature of the relationship between them (e.g., closeness, hostility or discomfort) and the emotional state of the character. Movements, however, are strictly bound to culture and may be interpreted differently by viewers with different backgrounds. Moreover, as already observed about the languages of comics, this medium is particularly bound to a system of conventions regarding panels and the elements within the panels, i.e., on a macro-structural and micro-structural level.

A further point against the notion of “visual Esperanto” is that even the visual mode may undergo a process of transformation when comics are exported into another culture in order to fit the conventions of another time and place. Indeed, characters and panels may be redrawn (Kaindl, 1999: 279, 283), visual signs may be erased (D’Arcangelo and Zanettin, 2004: 197; Zanettin, 2008b: 206) or substituted (Kaindl, 2004: 185). According to Rota (81), cultural specificity of comics can be seen from bookshelves positioning comics by nationality

as well as from the layout, graphic and narrative techniques, the length and size of publications. Comics culture has elected favourite formats (Japanese tankobon differ from Italian bonelliano, the French album or the American comic book), and such format influences the creative process as well. Editorial processes resulting in the exportation of comics abroad may encompass the manipulation and change of format, and thus significantly alter the original publication. Rota argued that the comic texture as “the complex structure resulting from the interweaving of text and pictures” (84) undergoes a manipulation according to expectations and taste of the receiving culture. Size, reading direction, font and colour may be modified in order to appeal to a new target readership and this may certainly affect the way in which a comics is received and interpreted, as in the case of mirror-inversion of pagination in Japanese manga: when translated and imported into Western countries, manga which are usually read right-to-left are often adapted to the left-to-right reading habit with obvious consequences in terms of scenes and movements.

Also changes of lettering may lead to the standardisation of typographical rendering (handwritten texts, font size) and the whole ‘packaging’ (i.e., the cover, titles, logos) may undergo a number of changes as a part of what D’Arcangelo and Zanettin called “localization effort” (196). The internal structure may change as well. Paper quality and price may be different, especially if comics are perceived as quality works or cheap forms of popular entertainment. The reception largely depends on source and target cultures and their disposition towards comics.

Social factors which may affect publishing strategies, and thus the translation of comics, include the different status accorded to comics in different countries, their cultural sensibilities and their readership. For instance, in American comics translated in Italy during the fascist era – before their publication was banned altogether for ideological reasons – balloons were deleted and replaced by captions whereas the narrative text was often rendered in rhymes, given that comics were to be understood only as literature for children (Laura 1997). Censorship subsequently put an end to the importation of comics, with the only exception of Disney’s productions which survived the fascist ban, allegedly on account of Mussolini’s fondness for them (De Giacomo, 1995). Thus, according to Kaindl (1999), the study of comics in translation should have “the sociological environment as a point of departure” (272). The scholar maintained that:

Comics undergo a number of changes, with respect to both the language and the level of the picture. Neither a linguistic nor a purely textual approach is sufficient to deal with these changes. If translation is understood not only as a linguistic or textual operation, but as a social practice, the social context of action in which the translation process is embedded has to be taken as the starting point for analysis. (265)

References to cultural-specific aspects are disseminated throughout comics: in translation source texts are imbued in the source culture and fully comprehensible only if the readers and the authors share the cultural background of the plot. Sometimes in translation elements which are deeply embedded in the source culture are lost in translation and added values may be deleted or even evoke different feelings.

Kaindl developed a theoretical framework for the analysis of comics in translation which consider the comics medium as a social practice: drawing on the idea that the production and reception of a text depends on the position and value that that text possesses in a given culture, even comics, as well as their translations, are imbued in the sociocultural context which produced them both in his visual and verbal mode. Kaindl used Bourdieu's (1966) theory of the cultural field to describe comics as a social phenomenon, and subsequently analysed their translations (273) by classifying changes occurred during the process of translation according to Delabastita's (1989) rhetoric categories for film translation: repetition (linguistic, typographic, pictorial elements taken over in their identical form – especially in the case of onomatopoeias and inscription which are difficult to modify without compromising the picture; rare due to size and format adjustments), deletion (removal of elements), detraction (parts of the elements being removed), adjectio (elements being added to replace or supplement other material in the original, e.g., colouring, notes, when a volume is split into instalments, visual elements may be replaced by verbal summaries), transmutation (change in the order of linguistic and pictorial elements, e.g., reversed prints of Japanese manga) and substitution (source material replaced by equivalents in target texts). The strong point of these categories is that such rhetorical concepts can be applied to both verbal and visual elements. Groupe μ (1992) highlighted that rhetorical figures expressed by language can find a visual expression. Moreover, they can combine together and be applied to individual elements within the panel.

Kaindl also focused on the multimodal implications of humour in comics (*Asterix*, *Tintin* and *Peanuts*) with respect to their translation and provided a useful framework of analysis of translated humour in this type of works, which include the study of translation strategies as well as of verbal-visual cooperation in the creation of meanings. Kaindl argued

that comics “are narrative texts (whose plot needs not to be comical) which contain humorous elements but whose comic effect results from the overall narrative context. Rather than jokes, comics often work with techniques such as verbal and non-verbal puns, parody, allusion and intertextual reference” (174). Translation of humour in comics has to take into careful consideration the multimodal implications of the medium as humorous effects are generated by the “dual perspectivisation” (ibid.) of verbal as well as non-verbal elements. Even in this case, unsurprisingly, only word-plays have been thoroughly considered in research. Such a narrow-oriented approach overlooked the meaning conveyed by non-verbal semiotic systems. In fact, humour largely relies on intertextual references which Genette (1982) described as quotations, plagiarism, parody and textual allusions. These references are clearly culture-bound and the rendering of their meaning is connected to the assumption of a shared cultural background knowledge. In his analysis, Genette focused on verbal intertextual relations, but his discourse may be extended to visual culture as well, as in the case of humorous comics in which intertextual references may depend on multiple modes. In particular, in Kaindl’s study, five categories of play on words and/or non-verbal signs are distinguished: mono-modal ‘plays on words consisting basically of linguistic signs’ (i.e. puns); monomodal ‘plays on signs consisting only of non-verbal elements’; multimodal ‘plays on words reinforced by non-verbal signs’ (e.g., gestures accentuating a pun); ‘non-verbal plays on signs reinforced by verbal signs’ (e.g., a character pointing out the incongruity between two visual signs); ‘plays on signs depending on a multimodal combination’, (e.g., an incongruity between a verbal and a visual messages) (176).

Drawing on this study, Borodo (2014) argued that the relevance of multimodality in comics should be explored beyond the specific case of humour. In his analysis of the Polish translations of the Franco-Belgian comic book series *Thorgal*, Borodo investigated how the transformations of the original text may be related to or conditioned by the concurrence of the visual mode: the original text may be condensed, exploiting the meaning overlap between the verbal and the visual, as well as modified and elaborated, e.g. to eliminate the instances of incongruence between text and pictures or to reinterpret certain panels. In audiovisual studies, this research led to the conclusion that visual components may help the subtitling process. Chuang (2006) maintained that “the translator does not have to render everything in the dialogues into the subtitles, but he can choose to ignore those meanings that are represented in other semiotic modes” (375); likewise, Taylor (2004) stated that “[i]f the meaning, or a part of the meaning, of a section of multimodal film text is carried by semiotic

modalities other than the verbal [...] then a paring down of the verbal component can be justified” (161).

Similar considerations may be suitable in the field of comic translation. Grun and Dollerup (2003) investigated the concept of loss and gain in the translation of comics in the case of the Danish translation of Donald Duck and Calvin and Hobbes, and argued that “liberal” translations may enrich the original text and do not automatically lead to an impoverishment of the originals. In their view, a successful translation of comics “functions well in the target language with target audiences” and combines “various semiotic channels, language and pictures, as well as the overall theme or idea, to fulfil the audience’s expectations successfully” (213). In their idea of the translation of comics as a form of constrained translation, they concluded that it does not automatically represent a reduction of the original text, but also a range of potential additions. In this regard, after taking a distance from the notion of “constraint”, Borodo highlighted two trends: on the one hand, as for expansions, he noted how liberal translations often introduce new meanings which were not expressed by the verbal mode, but are consistent with the visual mode in the original text and possibly disambiguate apparent incongruences between the two, thus clarifying confused passages. On the other hand, as for condensation, translators may exploit the overlapping of the visual and verbal meanings to condense the translated text. Thus, certain verbal meanings are lost in translation, but deletions are not significant as long as they are compensated by the visual elements. In some of these cases, such solution may even avoid the target readers’ perception of redundancy. Thanks to the specificity of the comic medium, condensation is not necessarily an inappropriate possibility.

A further categorization of translation strategies which is worth mentioning was proposed by Celotti (2008). Though her analysis focused on comic paratext, her conclusions may be generalised to include the whole system of what was previously defined as loci of translation. In particular, she pointed out how the linguistic paratext requires translators to choose whether to translate it or not, as it may play a fundamental role for the diegetic process, provide useful information regarding the context of the story or be part of a pun. Celotti (2008: 39) identified six different strategies with respect to the latter locus: the verbal language may be either translated, translated with footnotes, culturally adapted (in Venuti’s terminology “domesticated”), left untranslated, deleted or approached with a mixed technique. In her analysis of these strategies, the author came to the conclusion that adaptation and deletion may “mask aspects of the source text” and “create a gap in the

meaning and interrupt the diegesis” (42). The translator is called to make a conscious choice and consider the relevance of paratexts, and verbal loci in general, also in the light of their interaction with each other and with the other meaning-making components. In this sense, she advocated an active role of translator as “semiotic investigator” by which she meant that, in order to adequately interpret and translate a comic text, a translator is appointed to read images as well as verbal messages. Accordingly, the following pages will be dedicated to enunciation and narratology from a semiotic standpoint, the very standpoint this dissertation aims to employ so as to analyse American underground comix and their Italian translations.

3.4. Elements of Comics Enunciation and Narratology

After investigating visual communication and its interplay with the verbal language from the viewpoint of multimodal analysis, the difference between stories told through words and stories told through images will be analysed from an enunciative and narratologic point of view. Up until now, comics theory has had very little to say on enunciation. The notion of enunciation was first developed by Emile Benveniste as a “mise en discours” of Saussure’s concept of *langue*. According to Benveniste (1966), enunciation functions as the structure mediating Saussure’s general and theoretical notion of *langue* as a social system of signs, and speech, or *parole*, as an actual, concrete, individual manifestation of language. He defined it as “la mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d’utilisation” (80, literally, “putting language to work through an individual act of utilisation”).

Greimas and Courtés (1979) provided two different definitions of enunciation according to implicit or manifest epistemological premises: on the one hand, it can be defined “comme la structure non linguistique (référentielle) sous-tendue à la communication linguistique”; on the other hand, “comme une instance linguistique, logiquement présupposée par l’existence même de l’énoncé [utterance] (qui en comporte des traces ou marques)” (126). In the former case, Greimas and Courtés spoke of “situation the communication” and “contexte psychologique” of the utterance. The latter definition considers utterances as “le résultat atteint par l’énonciation, celle-ci apparaîtra comme l’instance de médiation, qui assure la mise en énoncé-discours des virtualités de la langue”. In summary:

Selon la première acception, le concept de l’énonciation aura tendance à se rapprocher de celui d’acte de langage, considéré chaque fois dans sa singularité; selon la seconde, l’énonciation devra être conçue comme une composante autonome de la théorie du

langage, comme une instance qui aménage le passage entre la compétence et la performance (linguistiques), entre les structures sémiotiques virtuelles qu'elle aura pour tâche d'actualiser et les structures réalisées sous forme de discours. (ibid.)

Enunciation theory was engendered by reflexions on verbal language. Nonetheless, communicative phenomena also develop in relation to non-verbal discourses (visual, auditory, olfactory, audio-visual, gustative etc.) and enunciation theory can thus be extended to these fields. In comics, as in any narrative communication, sender, message and receiver are not simultaneously present. Thus, the existence of an utterance (the actual comic work) presupposes that the enunciation has already occurred temporally and logically. According to Greimas and Courtés (79-80), the subject of the utterance is disengaged from the subject of the enunciation, in that both have their own subject and the author may embed within the simulated imitations of the enunciation, including the author's own narrative simulacra³⁸. Indeed, the personal pronoun “I” in a narration is nothing but a mask, a simulacrum of the enunciator. Whenever the subject expresses him/herself, a projection of such simulacrum is produced, a “not-I”, which regards identity as well as time and place, i.e., a “not-now” and a “not-here”. This process of projection and disjunction is called *débrayage* (shifting out). According to Greimas and Courtés, a *débrayage* can be defined as:

...l'opération par laquelle l'instance de l'énonciation disjoint et projette hors d'elle, lors de l'acte de langage et en vue de la manifestation, certains termes liés à sa structure de base pour constituer ainsi les éléments fondateurs de l'énoncé-discours. Si on conçoit, par exemple, l'instance de l'énonciation comme un syncrétisme de “ je-ici-maintenant “, le *débrayage*, en tant qu'un des aspects constitutifs de l'acte de langage originel, consistera à inaugurer l'énoncé en articulant en même temps, par contrecoup, mais de manière implicite, l'instance de l'énonciation elle-même. L'acte de langage apparaît ainsi comme une schizie créatrice, d'une part, du sujet, du lieu et du temps de l'énonciation, et, de l'autre, de la représentation actantielle, spatiale et temporelle de l'énoncé. D'un autre point de vue, qui ferait prévaloir la nature systématique et sociale du langage, on dira tout aussi bien que l'énonciation, en tant que mécanisme de médiation entre la langue et le discours, exploite les catégories, paradigmatiques de la personne, de l'espace et du temps, en vue de la mise en place du discours explicite. Le *débrayage* actantiel consistera alors, dans un premier temps, à disjoindre du sujet de l'énonciation et à projeter dans l'énoncé un non-je, le *débrayage* temporel à postuler un non-maintenant distinct du temps de l'énonciation, le *débrayage* spatial à opposer au lieu de l'énonciation un non-ici. (79)

Embrayage (shifting in), on the other hand, “désigne l'effet de retour à l'énonciation, produit par la suspension de l'opposition entre certains termes des catégories de la personne

³⁸ “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold together” (Barthes, 1977: 145; cf. also Greimas and Courtés, 128, 370) .

et/ou de l'espace et/ou du temps, ainsi que par la dénégation de l'instance de l'énoncé". In the analysis of comics as discourses it is fundamental to address enunciative applications and débrayage and embrayage strategies, which are linked to changes in viewpoint, perspective and focalisation. For instance, the beginning of a flashback can be considered an internal débrayage – given that any storytelling is in itself the débrayage of an utterance – while the return to the main narration is an example of embrayage. This structure may be further entangled by the fact that débrayage and embrayage mechanisms can occur on several levels. In every text, a second, or even a third-level débrayage may be detected as narration is built on dovetailed assemblies. This continuous recurrence is called *mise en abyme*, a self-reflexive embedding of images, concepts and structures within the text. What Greimas and Courtés emphasized is that enunciation proper should not be mistaken for “énonciation énoncée” (literally, “uttered utterance”, “enunciated enunciation”), which is its simulacrum within the discourse: the “I”, “here” and “now” within an enunciated discourse do not represent the subject, place and time of the enunciation, but rather form part of one of its subcategories.

This leads to a further consideration. Indeed, reflections on verbal narrations, e.g., a novel, start from the theoretical assumption that at least two main enunciational figures exist: the author and the narrator (Genette, 1972). The two figures often seem to overlap and the difference between the “narrative I” and the “authorial I” blurs. However, this is a communicative effect created by purpose-built textual constructions and the two roles essentially and necessarily remain separated. The narrator can be extra or intra- diegetic, etero- or omo- diegetic, according to his/her position within or outside the story, and whether such story is somebody else's or his/her own. In the latter case, he/she may be auto- or allo-diegetic according to his/her role as protagonist or secondary character.

As a matter of fact, there cannot be a verbal text without a sender, as well as a novel without a narrator and a word without a speaker saying it. According to the position defended by Barbieri (2017), this is not the case of visuality: natural images exist without anyone formulating them. For this reason, visual texts may be said to have an author, but not necessarily a narrator. Images certainly are related to viewpoints, though viewpoints are not necessarily single nor do they necessarily exist (e.g., in art: paintings prior to Renaissance's perspective studies, cubism, and abstractionism), that is to say, the viewpoint does not account for the existence of a narrator. This is the crucial element which marks the difference between verbal and visual enunciations: stories told through images may exclude a narrator and give prominence to viewpoints, exploiting the possibility to constantly change the focus

of narration (suffice it to think of camera shot types in cinema, such as the over-the-shoulder shot or the two-shot).

In this regard, Barbieri defined comics as “racconti senza racconto” (19), which may be translated as “narration-less narrations”, as events can follow one another without a proper act of narration (by a narrator). Comics, of course, may have a narrator. However, while in novels his/her words are stand-alone, in comics the story is grounded on the interrelation between his/her voice and images. Verbal elements constantly have to face visual elements, and this results in a panoply of interchanges on the enunciation level. In this context, words in balloons represent an intra-diegetic enunciated enunciation as they voice the characters, not the narrator. In some cases, however, narrations start from the balloon, as words pronounced by a character, and then move to the captions usually in combination with images, thus mimicking an extra-diegetic narrative voice.

Barbieri (20) argued that the difference between the first proto-comics during the nineteenth century and Richard Felton Outcault’s *Yellow Kid* is that, in the former case, images were used as illustrations and captions were appointed to narrate actions, whereas in the latter case, narration stops being extra-diegetic and the topical role of narration shifts from captions to images. Verbal texts become intra-diegetic elements, such as balloons, signs and other paratextual elements. Captions, when used, are minimal communicative acts either with an orientational function (time and place) or including brief narrations which integrate the main story. Quoting Antonio Rubino (1938), director of Disney’s collections for the Italian publishing company Mondadori, a comic story is not a tale, “racconto”, but a scenic act, “azione scenica”, looking like a spoken cinematography, “cinematografia parlata”.

The distinction between tale and scenic act is piercing, as it describes the development of comic stories as a sequence of acts. And this also prompts the question: how does enunciation in visual texts work and how does it combine with the verbal one? It was previously stressed how, in Barbieri’s understanding, images may not have a narrator, though they clearly have an author. The subject of the viewpoint is not as clearly defined as the narrating subject who produces and organises the narration through comics. The subject of the viewpoint (implicit viewer) does not play an active role, but rather a perceptive one, as it is through his/her perception that the narrated world is viewed. However, he/she cannot be said to play an enunciating role. If a viewpoint exists, it rather serves to describe a scene from a given position, and in this sense it is intra-diegetic. However, since the subject’s viewpoint coincides with the viewer’s one, it is also extra-diegetic. The coincidence of implicit and actual

viewer, i.e., the overlapping of intra- and extra-diegetic viewpoints is crucial and can be exploited in several ways. For example, as illustrated by Kress and Van Leeuwen's *Visual Grammar*, when characters look towards the implicit viewer, and thus towards the actual one, a sense of interlocution is being created, like with the eye contact of camera look in films.

From the point of view of enunciation, the use of framing in comics can be compared to a free indirect discourse, i.e., "a way of reporting what a protagonist thinks or says that is distinct from both direct and indirect discourse. In particular, while pronouns and tenses are presented from the narrator's perspective, as in indirect discourse, other indexical and expressive elements reflect the protagonist's point of view, as in direct discourse" (Maier, 2014: 143). The basic difference with respect to verbal discourses is that in comics the narrator would not be necessary. A similar reflection was developed in the study of cinema (Fabbri, 1994), which is based on photographic images and thus on the necessity of a viewpoint. A drawing in comics may not require a viewpoint, though the majority of them employs it to give more clarity to the image. Nonetheless, comics may play with it, either multiplying or weakening it by building a schematic, background-less scene. A neuter viewpoint may serve to highlight dialogues, facial expressions or ongoing psychological dynamics. The viewer is not distracted and can focus his/her attention on the narrative element the author wants to emphasize. However, aside from these cases, comics usually privilege the use of viewpoint, according to Barbieri, so as to appear as cinematographic as possible (33).

If in narration-less narrations the narrator does not exist, the sequence of images has to be constructed in a way that the viewer, i.e., the narratee, can interpret narratively. However, while, for instance, the narrator's opinions and interpretations are somehow framed within a novel, comics cannot frame the narratee's thought. Instead, they can play with framings and provide different viewpoints to either engage the viewer in the scene or create a sense of detachment. In this sense, going back to the notion of free indirect discourse, in comics the receiving/viewing subject of discourse (the narratee) is responsible for the viewpoint, but at the same time the viewpoint may be said to belong to an invisible character framing the scene through his/her gaze. Being the position of the narratee weaker than that of the narrator, comics are allowed to swap viewpoints through changes in framings. The narratee thus identifies himself/herself with the character gazing at the scene and this creates a more or less strong engagement on a psychological level. In a novel, it is

the narrator the depository of a character's interiority, whereas in comics it is the reader/viewer through the identification of the viewpoint suggested by the author. Through the gaze, the external viewer can identify himself/herself now with a character (and his/her psychology), now with another. Notwithstanding, the viewer's gaze can still be recognised in neutral framing.

Thanks to the variability in framings and gazes, such visual narrations as those in comics enable the interchange between characters, alternatively becoming subjects and objects. In theatre, characters are subjects and objects at the same time, all being presented on the same plane. In novel, characters are objects of the narration and become intradiegetic subjects of secondary narrations with direct discourse or identify with the narrator in free indirect discourse. Comics can make use of point-of-view shots, even shot-reverse shots, and make characters subjects or objects in the shift from one panel to the other. This technique is exceptionally effective in coral narrations as well as in introducing collateral narrations from the viewpoints of characters previously considered secondary.

A narration is a sequence of events, regardless of how these are transmitted (words, images, etc.). From this point of view, narration is the structure of an action. The description of an action is a story *in nuce*. Of course, stories are usually more complex than a single action, but the basic structure of action they are grounded upon can be sketched out even for articulated narrations, thus unveiling unexpected similarities and differences between them.

Narrative studies are as old as Aristotle's *Poetics* and far from the purposes of the present research. Only some basic notions are here recalled to subsequently understand how comics' micronarrative elements mark the difference between this medium and verbal-only texts. In particular, Greimas's narrative semiotics (1966a, 1970) is a combination of narratology and semiotics meant to develop a scientific method of analysis of literary works. Greimas's generative model was strongly influenced by Saussure's ([1916] 1967) structural linguistics, Propp's ([1928] 1958) analysis of folklore and theory of characters, Levi-Strauss's (1958) work of myth and its basic units, the mythemes, and Chomsky's (1968) studies of syntax and generative grammar. According to Greimas, the elementary structure of action is described by the Narrative Program. Every action is prompted by motivations, requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and has an outcome, which may be either positive or negative, and is subject to an evaluation. The canonical narrative schema which describes actions is segmented into four phases: i) Manipulation (wanting-to-do and having-to-do), in which a *Destinateur* convinces the Subject to perform the major action to acquire the Object;

ii) Competence (wanting-to-do, having-to-do, knowing-how-to-do, and being-able-to-do), in which the Subject comes to understand what factors are required to accomplish the action; iii) Performance, the actual realization of the action, made possible by the acquisition of competence, which results either in the achievement of the Object or in a failure; iv) Sanction, in which the *Destinateur* evaluates the action of the performing Subject to determine the corresponding retribution (reward or punishment).

The roles of Subject, *Destinateur* and Object are the entities, called actants (or actantial roles) investigated in actantial analysis. Every actant can be played by different actors, as well as by a single one. Other actants also include the *Destinataire* of the *Destinateur*'s actions, the Anti-Subject, possibly manipulated by the Anti-Destinateur, to oppose the acquisition of the Object. At first, Greimas included Adjuvants (or Helpers) and Opposants (or Traitors), but ultimately they resulted to be other types of Destinateurs. Actantial analysis and Narrative Program structures prove useful tools for the investigation of narrations which moves beyond the traditional, typically anthropomorphic identification of actants, as these need not be human agents or characters and may be physical objects or states, psychological conditions or emotions.

The generative model proposed by Greimas also highlighted another aspect: the Narrative Program presents a rather simple structure, though several narrations make use of much more complex constructions. For instance, the Subject's and the Anti-Subject's Narrative Programs may conflate, and each stage may further split into other smaller actions, each with their own Narrative Program. In this case, Greimas spoke of Use-Narrative Programs, these being part of the main Narrative Program. Use-Narrative Programs may interlock, overlap and virtually multiply in an endless chain. Furthermore, novels, comics, movies etc. do not usually present a single narration, but rather different stories running parallel to the principal one and reaching different conclusions. On a deeper level, however, all narrations share a similar Narrative Program. The Use-Programs and the way these are linked to the main one mark the difference between stories, together with the characterisation of actants. Despite their similarity, different stories will be read with different spirits, since the system of expectations related to their (more superficial) specificities may diverge.

Eco (1978: 79-84) used the notion of "sceneggiatura", or script – drawn from Minsky's theory (see below) of frames and Filmore's (1987) frame semantics – to describe contextual and process-related competences. These can be natural if they belong to the readers' everyday life, intertextual if they are apprehended through literature and sedimented

into the readers' minds. According to Eco, very broadly speaking, people possess process competences which enable them to understand how something should be even without actually knowing what that is. These competences are context-bound, so that intertextual and natural scripts, as well as different genres in stories, are selected according to the context. Humour, for instance, may exploit this contextual feature of communication to apply a given script to a wrong, ironical, however hilarious, context. A parody, on its part, plays with elements of an already-known script, changing them or placing them within an inadequate context.

In narrations, it is important to stress the difference between *fabula* and plot. The former defines the sequence of events in the very order they occur in the possible world of the story, whereas the latter defines the sequence of events in the order they are presented to the addressees through the narration. The two notions overlap only in very simple narrations, since the *fabula* usually is only a virtual category in tales (i.e., when deciding which event should be narrated first in a chain of parallel events, the *fabula* is already interrupted). In this sense, the *fabula* is impossible to narrate, whereas plot-related decisions may determine the narrative-discourse re-order of a given. In particular, Genette (1972) referred to analepsis and prolepsis, to describe how the plot may “flash back” to an earlier point in the story or “flash forward” to a subsequent moment in the chronological sequence of events, respectively. In comics, analepsis and prolepsis frequently occur, generally in the shift from one panel to another.

From the point of view of enunciation, the presence or absence of a narrator marks the difference between verbal and visual discourses. The same cannot be said as for narrative structures, at least on a macroscopic level. This does not entail that the narration presented in a novel is equal to one in the comics form and certain types of stories are definitely better suited for one medium than for another. Barbieri (2017: 48) argued that verbal narrations may be more adequate to describe actions occurring on a virtual or psychological level, whereas comics are more apt for super-heroes' adventures and humorous narrations, as they privilege conciseness and, moreover, images are more direct than verbal descriptions and favour rhythmic intensity. Nonetheless, comics have proved particularly effective in narrating the human psyche and, recently, were chosen by several authors to recollect traumatic events and reflect on mental states and emotions. Such paradox suggests that the medium of comics is arguably not more or less effective according to the content (actions, psychological

processes, etc.) as it can powerfully express everything and its contrary. This boundary between humour and action versus psychological condition results to be rather blurred.

Verbal communication is grounded on specific micro-units such as sentences and clauses. Likewise, visual communication is arranged according to such devices as the relevance of elements positioned at the centre with respect to the periphery. Beside visual-verbal specificities, comics are characterised by other narrative microelements. In particular, the blank space (or gutter) is widely considered one of the defining features of the comic medium. The blank space separates the frames of panels: though usually white (in Italian, it is known as “spazio bianco”), it may also be black or even coloured. When panels are frameless, an irregularly-shaped blank space may be appointed to separate the scenes; it may even be the frame itself or the turn of the page or the reiteration of a character with different postures in the same panel (without any line fragmenting the scene). What the blank space actually represents is the temporal hiatus between panels. The blank space functions in much the same way as a change of framing in a film and evokes a movement, a change in the situation or a temporal void with a variable duration. The actions represented in the close-by panels determine the length of the time-interval, though in some cases the tightness or largeness of the blank space may influence the temporal fluidity of actions. The same may be evoked by the use of black or of other colours rather than white, since they act as a void-filler and thus as a temporal-hiatus filler. Fluidity in action is reinforced by the continuity of the background from a panel to the next one, a technique resembling the panning device used in cinema – i.e., camera is swivelled horizontally from a fixed position – so as to prompt a fluid horizontal movement of the viewers’ eyes and evoke a similar fluidity in the action narrated, despite the fragmentation of the movements by means of the blank space. Another device is the “free” blank space, i.e., the absence of lines separating the scenes, thus letting the change of events isolated in the white space of the page as the only demarcation of the panel. By adding a frame, the event is emphasized and detached from the rest of the panels.

Background is another crucial device in comics. In a novel, the setting is not always described, whereas in photography, the image captured includes all the elements in the background. As for comics, both possibilities are available. In general, a blank background is used in humoristic comics for the economy of representation and to focus the attention of readers on the humoristic effect. In other genres, the blank background is employed to highlight the elements in the foreground, these being characters or actions. Otherwise, the

background can be drawn in the first panels and then gradually stylised, according to the author's style and communicative priorities.

As for colours, Chapter 1 explained how Yellow Kid was born thanks to the first use ever of yellow colour in prints, which inaugurated the era of four-colour printing. The history of comics, since its beginning, is intertwined with colour experimentations. Colour makes the image more vivid and immediate on the level of perception, and it is no coincidence that it was especially used for children's comics. Black and white comics, on the contrary, require a lot of work to achieve the same level of immediacy. Several cartoonists decided to experiment either with the endless modulations of black-and-white or with colours as a hatch, contour or object sign, rather than just using it to fill shapes. In this sense, it is impossible to consider colours as a prerogative of children's comics because many works reached high levels of complexity and expressionism.

In Barbieri's view, another thorny issue should be considered as to whether comics "consumers" are readers or viewers. Comics being a narrative sequence, they should be regarded as readers. However, images as well as the layout of the page are meant to be viewed and, in this sense, the reading activity seems more grounded on a viewing activity. Better said, the "consumer" views the image prior to reading verbal texts and his/her eyes capture the whole graphic composition prior to capturing such details as the words in a balloon or a caption. In fact, verbal texts do not offer the chance of a 'preview' of the overall scene. They are arranged into sequences (as said, the use-narrative programs conflating into the main narrative program), while such visual texts as comics are arranged into pages, where the verbal narrative programs are integrated. Turning the page of a comic book automatically entails a panoramic of the images and the events occurring, even though it amounts to just a glimpse. Surprise elements are usually found at the beginning of the page, exploiting the suspension granted by the act of turning the page. An act which can be regarded as a temporal hiatus far longer than the usual blank space. In this regard, the page has a crucial role not just as that of the platform where the drawings are framed, but as a narrative structure: page architecture is fundamental for the creation of a story, the distribution of suspense-elements, salient information and so forth. Page construction can be said to contribute to the meaning-making process, something which is not required for a novel. Suffice it to think of how differently daily and Sunday strips, monthly or weekly comic book series have to distribute elements on their pages: the temporal hiatus of the last page has a completely different weight

in the economy of the story and thus macro and micro events as well as self-contained narratives have to be adapted to the publication format and schedule.

Everything in comics starts from the act of viewing. And semiotic reflections have to start from the visual experience. Words do not play a secondary role, of course. It is the narrative polyphony generated by the concomitance of the two components which generates the communicative peculiarity of comics. And words themselves have graphic substance, as they carry a semantic value even from the visual point of view. Hatfield poignantly stated that comics “collapse the word/image dichotomy” (133) because in comics words can have graphic substance, just as images can be abstract and symbolic. Pictograms may stand in for words and dialogues, panels, vector and speed lines can reinforce the diegetic process, especially in wordless comics. Onomatopoeias are emblematic examples in this respect: they escape the ‘cage’ of caption-boxes and balloons and appear directly on the drawing space, like physical objects. Their ‘invasion’ of the visual space confers dynamicity as well as sonority to the scene, as they serve to visually portray the sounds of the world represented. They almost have a cinematographic role. However, while in films, spectators actually hear the sounds, including their intensity and duration, in comics these elements are graphically rendered by changes in the dimension and shape of the onomatopoeia, thus conveying a sense of spectacularity, expressivity and dynamism to the words. Onomatopoeias are on the border-line between the verbal and the visual, between the auditory and the graphic.

Beside this peculiar element of comics, it should be remembered that even words in captions and balloons are graphically connoted by lettering choices. Most comics usually select a standard, uppercase lettering. Non-standard lettering is used to convey a particular emphasis to a word, or utterance or in texts in which the author wants to play with the uppercase and lowercase letters and with fonts. Recent works have employed a software mimicking handwriting or typewriting which has considerably reduced production time and costs.

As for the analysis of comic visual components, strictly speaking, the semiotics of comics is a subset of the semiotics of images. In comics, images are created to represent something with a certain degree of transparency and/or opacity. An image is transparent when the figures it represents are realistic, whereas it is opaque when it resists the illusion of reality and aims to emphasize the fictitious nature of a work. No picture can be utterly transparent, while abstract images can reach a level of complete opacity. The choice of the

level of opacity is up to the author, whereas transparency is mediated by the viewpoint of the observer.

A peculiar type of transparent image is, of course, photography: in this case, the viewpoint adopted by the observer coincides empirically with the author's. The photographer selects the moment to capture – what is included and what is left out, which perspective is used, the horizontal, vertical or square format, the scale, the light, etc. – and, in a way, is a character in the scene, though an invisible one, as he/she sees and frames such moment upon taking the picture. Even though a photo is the outcome of the author's subjective choices, it is generally considered more objective and trustworthy, and even regarded as a document and a testimony. Graphic fiction generally does not aim to make readers' believe in the veracity of what is recounted, unless it is a documentary or an autobiography which present themselves as realistic. Graphic style in drawings clearly differ from photography (though the inclusion of photos in works of graphic journalism has become widespread) as for both the degree of transparency and the number of author's choices.

In his seminal work *Understanding Comics*, McCloud argued that “pictures are received information”, which does not require specialised knowledge to decode the message, whereas “writing is perceived information” and its abstract symbols need time and specialised knowledge to be decoded (49). Pictures can aspire to resemble reality or may be non-iconic. When abstracted from reality, they get closer to words and call for a greater level of perception, while words expressed in bold, or other fonts, can be perceived with greatest immediacy, much like images. On the top of his pyramid of “pictorial language”, McCloud's placed the picture plane, i.e., the non-iconic level “where shapes, lines and colours can be *themselves* and not pretend *otherwise*”, which arguably corresponds to the plastic level of Greimas's approach; on the bottom, he drew a line connecting reality (on the left corner) and meaning (on the right corner), i.e., from extremely realistic pictures to pure language. Cartoonists' different styles range considerably from one end of the chart to the other. As for the positioning of underground comics, McCloud argued that these authors stayed on “the *right* of mainstream comics art while covering a broad range of writing styles” and “used cartoony styles to portray adult themes and subject matters” (56). Ironically, but not casually, cartoony style characterised the art of underground authors as well as of children's comics. McCloud stressed how the positioning on the chart, though not inflexible, revealed much about the authors' values and loyalties in art, whether they are attracted by the natural world,

art or ideas. As the medium evolves, the universe of comics expands with new forms of expressions.

Drawing from McCloud's chart, Barbieri argued that comics can be organised on two axes, one of conceptual abstraction (from reality to meaning) and one of visual abstraction (from realism to abstract art). Though the positioning of a style on the set position is rather difficult (and far from the purposes of this analysis), this scheme enables the configuration of a graphic register, spanning from maximum realism to caricatures. Caricatures have often been associated to humour, though the term actually refers to the exaggeration of certain features of a figure – and the reduction of others – to make them more evident and, as a consequence, to make such figure more recognisable. Caricatures are widely employed in comics and are usually positioned toward the top right side of McCloud's chart. However, not all humour is conveyed through caricatures and not all caricatures are employed for humoristic purposes. Suffice it to remember Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Andrea Pazienza's *Zanardi*.

According to Barbieri, ambiguities in the register increase the complexity as well as the fascination of comics. But complexity increases even more, if the analysis of line is included (Barbieri, 2005; Arnheim, 1974). In particular, Arnheim's chapter on 'Space' categorizes line into three different ways: the object line, the hatch line and the contour line, which respectively constitutes an object of the represented world (e.g., the mouth of a human face, a silhouette, a leg), produces shadows and their interplay with light and, more frequently, delineates the outline of a figure. All these three types usually fulfil the hatch line role, usually with the exception of simple contour lines employed in simplified humour comics which privilege synthesis and immediacy over the level of information conveyed. Simplification, however, cuts out a great deal of elements from the scene, such as the dramatic and expressive ones. Thus, by contrast, comics aspiring to a high level of expressivity rely on a wide range of lines which mimic the complex intertwining of shapes perceived in the real world. According to McCloud's chart, realism corresponds to an increase of perceptive complexity and, thus, of lines used. Moving away from that pole, the number of lines used decreases.

Lines also convey a sense of movement and dynamicity to static images. This is achieved by employing brief lines, numerous angles, a high degree of line modulation, a low number of hatch lines, the predominance of diagonal lines with respect to orthogonal ones, the presence of lines which do not delimit closed areas (Barbieri, 2017: 76). The higher the

use of these devices, the higher the dynamism of the image and the lower the definition and the number of details – much like it happens when looking at moving figures in the real world. Of course, in comics dynamism is only perceptive and evoked by the shape of lines. This increases the level of tension in the story and the sense of a flowing sequence of events, whereas long lines, the absence of angles and modulation, a high level of hatch lines, orthogonal lines and closed areas provide a sense of immobility, stability and a static perception.

The elemental figurative symbology developed by comics are part of what Eco (1964: 146) called “*semantica del fumetto*” (semantics of comics) to stress how signifiers convey different meanings according to a set of conventions which can only be interpreted in relation to the comics code. As already seen, conventional signs of movement and expression can be used in comics usually to reinforce the comprehension of a specific physical or psychological state. In particular, movement signs reinforce the perception of movement in a dynamic figure: they may be lines following the figure in movement– or even sketched repetitions of such figure – and forming a perceptive residual, a sort of wake which reminds that the figure was there and already moved. They have a metaphorical value and reproduce the idea that in the real world bodies and entities move and leave a trace in our memory. Likewise, expression signs are metaphorical representations of a psychological condition. They serve to stress a state, rather than to introduce it, and are widely employed in comics, which thereby developed their own conventional signs: e.g., a light bulb turning on above a character’s head indicates that he/she developed a new idea³⁹.

The same set of conventions exists regarding the employment of balloons. Each author selects a standard form, and, starting from such standard, variations (and individual styles) are established: cloud-like bubbles are used to indicate thoughts, since they are metaphorically less material than oral speech; jagged balloons are used with screams or words coming out of phones, television or radio, with jags likely reproducing metaphorically the irradiation of sound. Likewise, the frames of panels may be used to convey specific meanings. For example, the standard rectangular frame composed of a continuous line may be replaced by one made of dashed lines, smoothed angles, in flashbacks or dreams.

Plastic elements regarding the page composition should also be considered as the overall graphic architecture creates a meaningful visual ensemble. In this regard, Pierre

³⁹ For an extensive repertoire, see L. Gasca and R. Gubern (1988).

Fresnault-Deruelle distinguished between linear (i.e., sequential) and tabular (non-sequential) layouts. In his study *Case, Planche, Récit* (1991: 41-60), Benoît Peeters elaborated a model to investigate the layout of the comics page, by distinguishing four conceptions of it or, better said, the *planche*, respectively designated as conventional (panels share the same format, and the relationship with the narrative is neutral), decorative (aesthetic organization of the *mise en page* designed in advance and prioritised, with the consequent emancipation from the narrative), rhetorical (panels and pages subordinated to the action being described, primary function is to serve the narrative) and, finally, productive (the organization of the page engenders and dictates the narrative).

Groensteen (2007) argued that “gridding corresponds to the moment of taking possession of the original space” (144). The first glimpse at a page prepares the reader for what is going to happen or, simply put, “sets the mood” for the reading experience. On the level of compositional abstraction, several schools of thought may be distinguished. Hergé’s *Line Claire* is an example of composition with a minimum level of abstraction, in which figurativity is completely functional to narration and narrative effectiveness. Other comics rather display a high degree of compositional detail, which makes the discourse more complex than what narration alone would do, but ultimately achieves spectacular levels of graphic articulation.

The composition of the page certainly contributes to the polyphony of comics, creating labyrinths of panels, playing with monumental splash pages alternated by tiny panels, with diagonal dynamic lines alternated with static orthogonal lines, or with the symmetry of vignettes. The visual architecture is definitely influenced by the type of publication of the comics: the focus of a Sunday strip is the effective reproduction of a sequence of actions, not the graphic construction of the page; a comic book, on the other hand, is often more aware of the potential of page architecture and focus on the accurate planning of panels. Groensteen believes that it is the concatenation of panels that defines the comics form, not just the details of the drawing. He developed the notion of spatio-topia (“space”/“espace” + “place”/“lieu”) to distinguish between the idea of time-image and movement-image of cinema from the idea of space-image and place-image of comics. For this reason, the core of his study is the *mise-en-page*, the layout of the comic page. On this basis, his arthrology – literally, a study of joints or joining, from the Greek arthron, articulation (21-23) – developed as a set of rules of conjunction, repetition and concatenation of images. The page is the hyperframe regulating the relations among images, which may be elemental and linear

(*découpage*) or interweaving across the total work (braiding/*tressage*). A notion like *tressage* entails a major principle characterising comics: everything can connect to everything else. For Groensteen, “every panel exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others” (146) and theoretically in relation to the tier, the page, the sequence, the whole text, and even across the subsequent publications of the series. In particular, the scholar distinguished three regimes, namely, string, series and sequence, and subsequently added four modalities of co-presence before the readers’ eyes, namely, spatial complementarity, perpetuation, configuration and rhythm. As for the regime of series, it pertains to poetic comics which “are not under the sway of the logic of the action or the tyranny of the plot” (Groensteen, 2013: 34), as images are “linked by a system of iconic, visual or semantic correspondences” (Groensteen, 2007:147). By contrast, sequences are related to the narrative deployment of panels in the traditional sense. As for the four modalities, spatial complementarity deals with co-presence from a synchronic point of view, i.e., “the page must be filled, the whole of the area made available for graphic inscription by the hyperframe must be occupied” (34). Perpetuation, on the other hand, regards co-presence from a diachronic point of view, i.e., the “flow of images, which catches the attention of the reader and vectorizes his/her eye movements, [and] continues without interruption” (ibid.). Groensteen added that, in case the flow produces meanings according to the reader, then it also creates expectations on the course of actions and their conclusion. Then, from a visual point of view, configuration is defined as “the solidarity of the images across the surface of the page”, i.e., “the positioning of the frames” and “the distribution over the page of the iconic content of each panel”. Finally, the question of rhythm will be explored in detail in the following pages.

Groensteen (2013) pinpointed how, as the reader processes the image in order to grasp its meaning, his/her interpretation exceeds what can be seen (the *shown*) to include the *intervened* — “whatever is supposed to have taken place between the preceding image and the one we are reading” in terms of temporal and causal articulations (37) — and the *signified*, i.e., what has occurred on the ideational level and exceeds narrative intents. The *intervened* regards the inter-iconic blank space, a space which, as seen before, actually represents a time-interval of variable length, a hiatus between two moments which the reader is expected to quantify and fill in. The *signified* requires a further level of interpretation as it regards the subjectivity of the character, the style of the author or graphic and rhythmic effects. McCloud reached a similar conclusion when, tackling the concept of closure and developing his classification of panel-to-panel transition between consecutive images, he argued that readers

are asked to cooperate in the interpretation of such ellipses. According to the model developed by McCloud, image sequentiality carries semantic value and narrative potential, and panel transition may occur according to six possible categories: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect or non-sequitur transition types⁴⁰.

Groensteen's position with respect to comic enunciation and narratology in comics diverges from Barbieri's. He starts from the assumption that comics rely on a narrative scheme, with the main characters being generally repeated, remaining the centre of the action, which may regard their appearance and relationships. Groensteen (2013: 36) maintained that: "Appearance" refers mainly to bodily posture and facial expression; "relationships" are interactions with other characters and with the surroundings. The nature of these relationships tends to be, in Van Lier's (1988) term, "intergestural" (by analogy with "interlocutory"). As for meaning-making processes, Groensteen (36) argued that: "[t]he discontinuity that is the basis of the language of comics forces the reader to make inferences in order to interpret each new image appropriately, that is to say to ensure that it correlates with the previous one and to the wider context of the whole text within which it occurs". He also called this operation "conversion of the utterable into an utterance". In what Groensteen calls "behaviourist narratives" (121), readers can only come to know the actions and words of characters, but not their thought. Comics make use of speech balloons, defined as "false orality" (122) or "speech records" (Chatman, 1978: 62), and develop a system of thought balloons (Chatman's "records of thought") to complement them in the expression of a character's inner voice. This is the reader's exclusive privilege, as the represented participants in the image are not allowed to access other people's mind. Groensteen conceived thought balloons as a "false enunciation", because they present a discourse which does not really occur in the narration. In this sense, the narrator is omniscient, having free access to the minds of the characters and sharing it with readers by means of the reciter (indirect speech reporting the characters' thoughts) and the monstrator. In the latter case, it should be remembered that comics also have at their disposal visual resources to represent body movements, facial expressions and gazes, all elements which explain a lot about the subjectivity of characters. In addition, based on Mort Walker's *The Lexicon of Comicana* (1980),

⁴⁰ As McCloud noticed, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene transitions are the most frequently used in US and European comics, whereas Japanese comics (or manga) make a great use of aspect-to-aspect transitions.

Derik Badman (2010) spoke of “emanata” to define “various visual effects to make an image show a character’s internal thoughts or feelings”. These include: “dashes, droplets, spirals, stars, and other graphic signs placed near a character’s face in order to convey an emotion or physical state” (Groensteen, 124). In addition to emanata, Walker’s lexicon of comics refer to symbolia, also called pictograms, as symbols replacing words to convey feelings, thoughts or other states. Groensteen stressed and tried to explain this power of comics:

Comics has the unique capacity to be able to illustrate with the same force of conviction the “real,” the imagined, the thought, and the felt – and in the transition from one panel to the next it can glide smoothly from an objective to a subjective register. It is therefore very easy for it to offer equivalents for the free indirect style, to change the point of view and invade the consciousness of its paper denizens. Since storytelling is the natural inclination of the medium, any kind of inner expression (whether thought, reverie, fantasy, or reminiscence) is ipso facto narrativized. (131)

In particular, comics exploit the possibility to use an actorialised narrator as a narrative strategy: the narration is but the product of a character's consciousness, and the reader sees events filtered through his/her mind, according to a principle called “subjectivized objectivation”, i.e., “we see the characters from the outside, but in the way that they themselves see the world and project themselves into it” (130).

According to such French narratologists as Tzvetan Todorov (1977), Gérard Genette (1972) and Paul Ricoeur (1983), there cannot be a story without a narrator⁴¹. Unlike Barbieri, the narrator is conceived by them as the intermediary between the readers and the story which is told according to his/her viewpoint – equivalent to Todorov’s “vision”, Genette’s (1988) “focalization”, Franz Karl Stanzel’s ([1955] 1971) “Mittelbarkeit” (literally, mediacy), and Ann Banfield’s (1982) “subjectivity”. The debate on the figure of the narrator developed within literary studies, but the question recently encompassed film theories as to whether the same notions of narrator and narration can be extended to other domains. In comics studies, which only recently approached the debate on the existence of a narrator in the medium, Groensteen was one of the first scholars to take a stance on the topic, by maintaining that “each medium heightens or diminishes awareness of the intervention of one or other of these instances by seeming to give substantial embodiment to some narrative functions to the detriment of others, and by distributing them differently”. In his view, every medium functions according to different enunciative mechanisms. Comics, at least the narrative ones,

⁴¹ See Sylvie Patron (2009) for a debate on the topic.

abide to their own set of narratological norms which have to take account of their polysemiotic nature and the role images and words play in the narrative process.

Groensteen's enquire into the narratology of comics starts from two assumptions. On the one hand, in his view, "[u]nlike those in a film, comics images do not create the illusion that the events are taking place as we read" on account of several factors:

...the visible discontinuity of the sequential flow of the narrative; the fact that readers cannot forget the physical, concrete situation in which they find themselves, that of having a book in their hands (or in front of them), and turning the pages, at a rhythm that is not imposed but under their control; finally, the fact that each new image does not obliterate the previous one, does not take its place, but is added to it on the mode of accumulation, collection, with the totality of images remaining easily accessible at any time. (82)

For this reason, it is not possible "to evoke any effect of erasure of the narrator, which is normally the consequence of this "happening as we watch' impression" (ibid.).

On the other hand, and this is a crucial point in order to understand communicative mechanisms in comics, the Manichean division between words and images does not account for narrative processes within the medium: "there is not [...] a text that tells (and which would be *diegetic*) and [...] images that show (and would be solely *mimetic*)". Simply put, narration, the *told*, is not the result of words alone, as in the literary tradition. Images, the *shown*, are the *told* themselves. This is what Groensteen (2007: 12) meant when he argued that comics are "*a predominantly visual narrative form*". In this sense, the tools analysis developed by traditional narratology applied to literary, most notably Genette's theory, cannot account for all the narrative facets of a medium like comics and, as a consequence, Comics Studies have traditionally relied on other approaches, such as film narratology for a framework of analysis.

Genette's narrative instance addressed three questions: i) the narrative voice ("who is speaking?"); ii) the time of the narration ("when does the telling occur, relative to the story?") and iii) the narrative perspective ("through whom are we perceiving?"). As for the latter, it entails the notion of focalization which refers to "a restriction of 'field' – actually, that is, a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*" (Genette, 1988 [1983]: 74). Genette distinguishes between zero focalization (omniscient narrator who knows more than the characters and inform the reader on their emotions and thoughts); internal focalization (the narrator adopts the viewpoint of a character and filters knowledge through him/her); external focalization (the narrator observes the character from the outside, like a camera lens, with no access to their thoughts). As for comics, Ann Miller argued that "[i]n the case of heterodiegetic narration, *bande dessinée*

allows for zero, internal, and external focalization” (110). Groensteen (2013: 84) maintained that the perceptual source of the perspective in comics may be either personalized, if related to a character, or impersonal. Kai Mikkonen (2008) indeed explained how “[t]he non-character-bound perspective, generally speaking, is coded for transparency: while showing and framing a field of vision, it does not presuppose a human narrator or a reporter” (312).

Groensteen borrowed from film studies – and partly from rhetoric which traditionally distinguishes between “show” and “tell”, whereas sign languages show while telling – the notion of monstration “in order to characterize and identify that mode of communication in a story that consists of showing characters who act rather than recounting the events that they undergo, and in order to replace “representation,” a term that is too marked, overused, and too polysemic” (Gaudreault, 1988: 91). Of course, some distinctions should be made as “monstration in comics is far from having the same figurative transparency as in film”, since in comics “the graphic material [both drawings and lettering] tends to resist such figurative transparency” in favour of a “persisting opacity” which “prevents the act of monstration from being fully transparent and transitive” (Marion, qtd in Baetens, 149). In addition, Philippe Marion defines graphiation and graphiateur as the enunciation typical of comics and the agent responsible for it, respectively:

Beyond the very distinction of narration and monstration, the reader-spectator of the comics is invited to achieve a coincidence of his gaze and the creative movement of the graphiateur; it is only by acknowledging and identifying the graphic trace or index of the artist that the reader can fully understand the message of the work. From this viewpoint, graphiation is eminently self-reflexive and autoreferential. (ibid.).

Marion places particular emphasis on the fact that comics, rather than bound to objective reality, are strictly connected to the subjectivity of their creator, and thus constantly remind (and depend from) his genius and perception of reality. Groensteen (2013) contested the notion of graphiation as redundant since it merely accounts for the existence of stylistic features, a “graphic trace effect” (85), which, however, are unavoidable in comics. All readers, in his view, are able to discern that the images in comics are drawings, i.e., artifacts of a creator. In his view, the concept of monstrator suffices “to designate the instance responsible for the *rendering into drawn form* of the story”, as well as to remark that “what is *seen* [by the reader] is the result of what is *shown* [by the monstrator]” (ibid.).

As for the second question posed by Genette, the time of the narration (“when does the telling occur, relative to the story?”), Groensteen explained the relation between comics

and temporality using Deleuze's (1985) words: "there is no present that is not haunted by a past and a future" (54). In particular:

...at the moment when our attention is focused on one panel, the preceding ones have not yet disappeared (they remain available, retrievable at any time), but, above all, we already have sight of the following panels, and we can see that the future is *already there*. If the future that pulls our reading towards is already present, then the present inevitably tends to slip back towards a past to which, in fact, it already belongs. The idea that successive presents can coexist is paradoxical: unlike the past, the present cannot be cumulative. [...] The next stage is already accessible, and it is possible for us to glance ahead and catch a glimpse of events yet to take place – or even to go straight to the end of an album and start by looking at its final page. (Groensteen, 87)

Comic narratives, in general, tend to be in the past as everything is already available to the reader. There is no "right-here-right-now" sensation like in films, no deictic attachment to the present. In point of fact, what is perceived is rather the present of the characters, the narrative voice being the instance appointed to modulate time-relations. As for the modalization of the narrative discourse, Groensteen (2013) maintained that "the comics narrative seems to be characterized by an inherent fluctuation in relation to its temporality: it produces a narration that tends to be in the past by juxtaposing images that tend to be in the present" (108). The reciter usually makes use of the past-tense as the events recounted are generally set in a distant or near past. However, things change in the case of actorialized narrator, which will be investigated below, which functions as the "deictic center" (Karl Bühler, 1934: 140) of narration (I-here-now).

Verbal enunciation takes the form of a voice-over, expressed by the instance of the reciter – i.e., the equivalent of the monstrator for drawings. The reciter's functions were classified by Groensteen (88-89) as follows: i) "to establish a link with the previous adventure in the series [...] as a reminder of events previously recounted"; ii) "management function [...] simply intended to provide a temporal link between two sequences of events [...] or a spatial link", or both; iii) "references back to previous episodes in the same series [...] to substantiate the claim that this is a *body of work* [...] and viewed at the same time as a kind of advertisement, an inducement to buy and read the other books if the reader does not yet know them" – usually in footnotes; iv) translations and subtitles. What these interventions have in common is their information value to help the reader in the comprehension of the text. Nonetheless, it often occurs that the reciter suspends its neutrality in favour of "emotional coloring" with feigned expressions of surprise, empathy, fear, and so on. In some cases, it may also personalise itself with a narrative "I". In this light, Groensteen admitted

variation in the reciter according to three criteria, which determine “a *stance* in relation to the narrative”: i) reciter in the background/interventionist; ii) neutrality/involvement; iii) reliability/deception.

Groensteen tried to apply the same criteria to the monstrator, concluding that i) contrary to the reciter which can appear or not in the narrative, the monstrator is always required, with the sole exceptions of text-only panels, purpose-built blind images and hidden scenes; ii) a monstrator is neutral if the story features an homogeneous style throughout the panels, heterogeneous and thus activating modes of involvement when the style varies in the narration of salient events; iii) the monstrator can be considered as deceptive in cases of “images that initially mislead the reader and whose meaning is retrospectively readjusted” (94), e.g., when the transition between reality and a dream sequence, or an hallucination, is not adequately pinpointed and the reader realises it only at the end. The peculiarity of comics is that monstrator and reciter do not necessarily act in conjunction. Thus, the emphasis is not on who sees, who speaks, and with what authority, but rather on the reciprocal relations between different stances. They may converge or diverge on the basis of “the authority of a higher enunciating source” which corresponds to the actual notion of narrator (94). Thus, the narrator is defined as “the ultimate instance responsible for the selection and organization of all the types of information that make up the narrative”, or, quoting Gaudreault “a truly supra-diegetic (and always already extra-diegetic)” stance (150). In this hierarchy of stances, the monstrator and the reciter act as delegates of this higher stance, which is the overall narrator, the “great arthrologist” (96), appointed to orchestrate the layout, the breakdown and the braiding of the narration, as well as all the arrangements regarding information supply.

The narrator intervenes at the level of dialogues as well, as images can quote speeches and thought processes, but it is up to the narrator to ‘record’ the dialogues characters supposedly had. Groensteen (97) is careful to emphasize that these dialogues are fictional and never occurred – unless they report historically-accounted speeches. The narrator pretends they are real and makes the character live through the paper. In cases of first-person narrations, he considers actorialized narrator as an explicit figure within the story. This form of narrative intervention is classified as follows. In the case of autobiography, this may lead to the identity of the instances of author, narrator and character. This identity, however, is based on the graphic construction of the ‘I’. As such, on the one hand, the character is but a simulacrum of the author, and, on the other hand, the actorialized narrator becomes a

‘puppet’ in the hand of the monstrator. In this regard, Groensteen distinguished between “an objective regime (here monstration)” and “a subjective regime (first-person narration)” (103). The actorialized narrator may simply serve the purpose of setting the story in motion as in the case of E.C. horror comics, which, as Chapter 1 highlighted, used the Crypt-Keeper (from *Tales from the Crypt*), the Vault-Keeper (from *The Vault of Horror*), and the Old Witch (from *The Haunt of Fear*) as the only recurring characters of the series with the purpose of introducing the story about to be told. The actorialized narrator may also remain extradiegetic, usually anonymous and absent from the story, or set a “play-acting” game by mimicking the author’s voice. Finally, the actorialized narrator may be an improbable narrator, such as Fat Freddy’s Cat, which even received its own spin-off series. Actorialized narrators’ position is not limited to recitatives, as in the case of the implicit narrator. If they are included in the image, they may use balloons, even intervene in action, and display a higher degree of emotional involvement – also in the light of the possibility to represent gesture and facial expressions, what Groensteen called “double eloquence” (107). The greatest advantage of actualized narrator is undoubtedly the “power of speech”, whereas the extradiegetic reciter is forced to silence as soon as he confers the narrative voice to the characters.

3.5. Semiotics of Passions and Rhythm

Barbieri (2017: 88) maintained that the final aim of comics is to guide the reader on an emotive experience throughout its pages. In particular, he referred to the pleasure of syntony and the pleasure of surprise. Questioning such issues as pleasure and syntony has been quite common in works about passions by semioticians who have received Greimas’s class. However, a distinction should be made between feelings and passions related to the fruition of cultural products by readers, viewers etc., and the “sentimenti e passioni rappresentati nel discorso”, i.e., the feelings and passions represented in a discourse (Fabbri and Marrone, 2001: 222). The latter were the goal set by Greimas himself will be the focus of the following pages. Greimas (1991) first argued that semiotics had to open itself to the analysis of passionate discourse,⁴² as passions take part in any type of discourse and the relative meaning-making processes. In this light, narratives are not merely linked to the acquisition of an Object, but also to feelings which make/act a Subject act as it does. Passions are thus

⁴² For a review of the semiotics of passions, see Parret (1986), Greimas and Fontanille (1991), Fabbri (1998), Pezzini (1998).

related to narrative actions, as the latter may be connected and form stories precisely on the basis of a common pathemic denominator. The narrative construction of meaning, in fact, depends on action as well as passion: “nessuna azione è possibile senza una doppia interfaccia, da un lato con il sapere e dall’altro con l’affettività” (Marrone, 2011: 70), and narration is “un processo orientato di trasformazione di azioni e passioni, dove ogni azione genera una passione e, viceversa, ogni passione genera un’azione” (75). Passions exist on a discursive level with specific configurations. Pathematic mechanisms should be conceived as a dynamic, manifold process, just like a narration: every element of the story acquires an identity and a meaning as events progress. For this reason, drawing on the narrative program of Greimas’s generative narratology (manipulation, competence, performance, sanction), Fontanille (1991) organised pathemic processes according to the so-called canonical pathemic schema of constitution, sensibilisation (disposition, pathemisation, emotion) and moralisation.

A sensationalist text would certainly make use of an enunciation strongly inclined to tensive elements, whereas a more objective and neutral text would be more controlled from a pathemic point of view. In this understanding, any reading contract also entails a passionate contract, i.e., a communion of values, passions and co-feeling. A story does not merely describe what happened: it conveys an idea of how readers should feel in that respect. Hence, passion is part of the *effect de sens* of a narrative discourse.

As Fabbri and Marrone maintained (2002: 225), just as an action is but the tip of the iceberg of structures of values and narrative chains, passions regard a deeper textual level in the generative process of signification. On a basic level, passions may be either pleasurable or displeasurable and regard the relation between the Subject and the Object, the Narrative Program and other actants. This relation is determined by evaluating the axiological investment of thymic deep components. Thymia is defined as “una categoria “primitiva”, detta anche propriocettiva poiché con il suo aiuto si cerca di descrivere, assai sommariamente, il modo in cui ogni essere vivente, iscritto in un ambiente, e considerato come “un sistema di attrazione e repulsione”, “sente” se stesso e reagisce a ciò che lo circonda” (cfr. Greimas, 1983: 93). In semiotics, thymic analysis is concerned with evaluating passionate states as euphoric (happiness, hope, admiration, curiosity), disphoric (shame, fear, uncertainty, anxiety, melancholy, envy), diaphoric (i.e., both euphoric and disphoric according to the situation, as in the case of love) or adiaphoric, (i.e., neither euphoric nor disphoric, as in the case of indifference and apathy). Thus, going back to narrative analysis,

every passion is foremost a euphoric or disphoric movement toward the world: prior to discursive passions and ideological values, the Subject displays its thymic disposition towards what surrounds him/her. Passions may not be expressed, or even expressible, and are rather fathomable as pathemic dispositions.

Passional configurations rely on Modality, which is what modifies the predicate – while modalisation refers to the production of a modal text. And thymism bears some special connections with some modalities. The modalizations of wanting, knowing, being-able-to and having-to determine the actants' doing (modal competence) as well as their being (modal existence) through their articulation and overlapping. For instance, the Subject can perform an action only if he/she previously acquired a wanting-to-do and a being-able-to-do status. Likewise, in nuce the pathemic disposition of the Subject depends on modalisations as well: greed (passion for the Object) is a not-wanting-to-be-disjoint from the Object; jealousy (intersubjective passion) is a wanting-to-know in relation to the connections of the Subject; obstinacy is a combination of not-being-able-to-do and wanting-to-do; curiosity is a wanting-to-know; shame may be connected to a not-being-able-to, while revenge may be related to a having-to. In general, wanting and being-able-to are euphoric modalities, having-to is disphoric (though it is euphoric if it prompts some kind of action) and knowing may be one or the other according to the situation: e.g., the acceptance of an occurrence for what it is is disphoric, the discovery of a secret is euphoric.

The categories of the analysis of passions are: Intensity, Tension, Temporality, Aspectuality and Rhythm. The intensity of passions determines the passional involvement of subjects, how far passions influence their actions, their importance and their degree of amplification, reduction and transformation as the narration progresses. Tension regards passional conditions in process, not yet concluded. It differs from intensity and euphory, as it focuses on duration. In this regard, the category of temporality defines the relation between time and passions, as the latter may strictly regard the past (nostalgia), the future (hope, fear) or the present (horror). Stoicism even conceived passions as “temporality sickness”, not just in the chronological sense but involving all the passional process, i.e., duration, intensity, repetition, completeness and incompleteness. Aspectuality provides a sort of observation point of the process of pathematic configurations, i.e., the starting point, the ending, the duration and the completeness. Passion can be terminative (horror) and durative (fear). Some may increase over time (hope, curiosity) and some may fade (happiness, anger). Aspectuality can be conveyed by the very meaning of the passional lexemes (e.g., the intuitive difference

between an instantaneous ‘love at first sight’ and ‘affection’). A text may inform regarding the aspectuality of a passion by using linguistic (morphological, lexical, syntactic) and paralinguistic elements, syntagmatic concatenations as well as, especially in the case of images, the selection of and emphasis on salient elements. In this way, the reader is led to delve into the passional state of the character from an aspectual point of view.

Interestingly, the passional dimension is also defined by Fabbri and Marrone as the “*trait d’union*” between the rhythm of expression (music, chromatic variations, tone of voice, word exchange etc.) and the rhythm of content (narrative, thematic, figurative) (227).

Since Cicero’s rhetoric, musicality and rhythm were studied for their emotive impact on the public. Rhythm can be defined as the effect generated by the reiteration of a scheme or a pattern. Rhythm can be slow or fast, regular or irregular, a crescendo or a diminuendo, it can create expectations or muffle them, thus interfering with tension and intensity. Whenever a pattern is recognised and constantly returns in the narration, the readers’ expectations are satisfied – and this is what Barbieri considers pleasure of syntony – just like in the case of music. The repetition of a pattern, and thus the musicalisation of communication, has a great impact on the perceptive level, because the target audience is not passive with respect to rhythm and tends to internalise it and turn it into an imaginative movement.

The question of rhythm in comics is all-pervasive. According to Groensteen (2013), comics are indeed related to music on account of duration being a natural dimension of their narrative. In his view, “everything that has duration contains music” (133) whether it is short (comic strips) or long (graphic novel). And given the capacity of comics to turn time into space, rhythm and duration also rely on spatiality:

The “text” of comics obeys a rhythm that is imposed on it by the succession of frames – a basic heartbeat that, as is seen in music, can be developed, nuanced, and recovered by more elaborate rhythmic effects stressed by other “instruments” (parameters), like those of the distribution of word balloons, the opposition of colors, or even the play of the graphic forms. (Groensteen, 2007: 45).

The frame is the comic device appointed to fulfil the rhythmic function as a *beat*, or as the agent of a “double maneuver of progression/retention” as each panel simultaneously hastens and holds back the narrative. Groensteen quoted the words of comic artist Christophe Blain to highlight how crucial the notion of rhythm is for authors:

Comic art is like signing. Rhythm is part of the challenge. [...] When I start writing a story, before getting to the stage of the storyboard, I tell it to myself, giving it a rhythm that

has to include moments of intensity. The story has to move along, but the rhythm must not be jerky. It needs subtleness, changes of tempo, accelerations of pace. Every story has an underlying musical score. (Groensteen, 2013: 134)

The reference to music is iterated in the quote, as well as the concept of tempo which is related to that of *beat*. The tempo of narration can be accelerated and slowed down to different paces. Will Eisner (1985) argued that timing is influenced by the size, shape and number of panels. Barbieri focused on rhythm evoked by the sequences of panels as well as by the sequences of pages, the former being strictly linked to the rhythm of narration and the latter being relatively free – thus representing a useful device to change situations. Even the presence and absence of verbal discourses or the reiteration of visual elements can influence the rhythmic situation. Going back to Groensteen’s previous postulation, he argues that colours, the position of balloons and graphic forms all contribute to either speeding up or slowing down the story, according to what Isabelle Guaitella (2003) defined “intersecting play of iconicity and rhythm” (519). Based on this definition, Groensteen categorises comics into smooth, if the rhythm is dictated by the preconfigured multiframe, and accentuated, if other parameters intertwine so as to increase the level of complexity of rhythmic effects. By multiframe Groensteen intends the division of the page in a subset of smaller frames, which in his systemic conception of the comics medium serves as a “solidarity operator” (135). Such page is conceived by the reader both as a “fraction of a story” and as a “visual unit”. What Groensteen calls “the beat” (136), i.e., the basic, background rhythm of the narration, is determined by the number and size of panels: the beat of a page composed of only two large panels is slower than that of a page packed with a sequence of multiple small panels. Therefore, the number of panels a page is composed of defines its density, an element which at a glance informs readers on the reading time (and the effort required) and its rhythm. Groensteen is aware of the “power of attraction that entices the reader forward” (ibid.) and uses the metaphor of a stairway to explain how, on the one hand, the reading activity deconstructs the page into small steps but, on the other hand, such fragmentation at the same time urges the reader to rush through each one of them, according to the ‘and then...and then...and then...’ method. In this cumulative reading experience spelled out by a sequence of narrative micro-blackouts, the beat is essential in setting the rhythmic pattern. And the reader is aware of such underlying rhythm even when the entanglement of narrative events seem to take over.

Time of fruition of comics is the product of reading habits and difficulty proper of the type of text, and this is linked to the attention required to understand it. The narrative

time is not perfectly overlapping the reading time, though. Some panels may require a lot of effort to be decoded, while others may just need a glimpse at the sequence of events. This time lapse is different from the narrative time and the represented time, something which differentiates comics with respect to both films and novels. Narrative time regards the chain of events scanned by the panels, while the represented time is the ‘duration’ portrayed in a single panel: the panel, indeed, is not a photography of a moment, and amounts to a small time span (e.g., the time required to pronounce the utterance in a balloon or to complete a movement) during which several events occur. What the viewer can see is but a synthesis of a series of actions. The reading time is different in another way: on the one hand, the time required to decode an image is generally shorter than that required for decoding verbal texts; on the other hand, reading a balloon is quicker than pronouncing the sentence contained in it. As a consequence, the represented time for a dialogue to occur is always longer than the actual reading time, whereas in cinema the two timelines coincide, and in photography the reading time is always longer than the one represented in the snap-shot. An author is thus able to modulate reading time and thus modify the rhythmic pattern of the narration. An action scene with few dialogues and little detail certainly has a higher rhythmic intensity and a lower reading time, whereas a descriptive scene with longer verbal texts and/or complex graphic constructions (many characters and/or signs) serves to slow down both rhythm and reading pace. Peculiar is the case of splash pages as they usually break the standard sequence of panels with a large image creating a surprise effect which accelerates the rhythm, while at the same time requiring a short time to be read.

A rhythmic pattern can certainly be interrupted and anomalies may generate a surprise effect. These may be light or radical, according to the kind of difference brought about in the rhythmic pattern. Nonetheless, a surprise is always a relevant moment in any narration, focusing all the attention on some rhythmic break. Relevance⁴³ is crucial in the fruition of texts and influences the creation of “eminent rhythms” according to the frequency and intensity of relevant moment, i.e., the distribution of the narrative time. An action scene full of *coup de theatre* will have a higher rhythm with respect to a descriptive scene of meditation. Eminent rhythms in narrations are related to content and are usually purpose-built in order to increase the pleasure of syntony and surprise. An author may even recur to

⁴³ In the analysis of comics, relevance is the quality of more or less regular, more or less unexpected rhythmic elements accordingly gathering the attention of readers. In fact, in semio-linguistic subjects, the notion of relevance covers a range of issues and, alternatively, has a structural function, a phenomenological value, and, as in Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory, a pragmatic-cognitive understanding.

crescendos, i.e., to the repetition with an always increasing intensity or frequency, i.e., by using a sequence of multiple, small panels, each representing an event or increasing the number of relevant points. A crescendo is related to the state of euphoria and characterises the development of all stories, whereas the calando would lead to the stagnation of a story and a consequent loss of interest by the readers.

The readers' attention is strictly related to their expectations. In everyday life, people do not direct attention to all phenomena, but rather focus on those from which they are expecting something. External stimuli and changes of mind may vary this condition and attention may be shifted onto other phenomena. Something relevant at a given moment may lose its centrality, whereas something on the borderline may turn into the new centre of one's attention. The same occurs in narrative paths: readers focus on some textual aspects, then reflect on elements previously overlooked or go back to them after unforeseen stimuli. Expectations entail the formulation of predictions, e.g., the Subject finding the Object and receiving the Sanction. Whenever the resolution of the readers' expectations is delayed, their level of involvement and the pleasure in the reading experience increase, by capturing their attention and prompting the continuous formulation of predictions on the conclusion (or closure) of the narrative event. Such involvement is thus engendered by the lengthening of expectations, a mechanism capable of engaging readers as active subjects in textual fruition. Engagement goes hand in hand with the tension produced by characters and situations in the text but should not be confused with it nor with any semiotic categorisation of passion represented in the text. In fact, expectations were fulfilled straight away, readers would soon lower their attention level. It goes without saying that tension in any discourse is also related to surprise elements and to rhythmic intensity, as the increase in the former raises the latter. In comics, as in other forms, many parallel tension lines may be drawn, each relying on their moment of relevance and reaching their closure, through which either the single tension narrative or the whole story may conclude.

In comics, the panel is the atomic unit framing a single event, while the end of a page does not automatically require the closure of a narrative. Comic architecture, however, can reach high levels of articulation and, in order to end a narration, all the smaller tension units must come to a close. In some cases, the micro-events may have partial resolutions while the main tension proceeds further. Tension is thus related to anticipation, though this should be well parcelled out in order to avoid the readers' loss of attention as well as the creation in them of unattainable expectations.

An effective method to increase tension and extend anticipation in comics is saturation, i.e., the repetition of the same situation (e.g., the same panel, the same action, or even the inclusion of collateral elements to postpone the main action, such as landscape, gesture, gazes) instead of proceeding with actions. The concept, borrowed from Gestalt's psychology, refers to the prolonged expectation of a narrative development which is always on the verge of happening but is never realized, with the consequent wait exponentially increasing the level of tension.

Expectations are related to established and typical content lines of a series or a genre (e.g., drug-culture related events in Shelton's *Freak Brothers* or sexual intercourses in Crumb's *Snatch Comics*). If expectations of this sort are not met, tension increases as a result. Something similar is transmitted onto the reader when the prime suspect of a murder case in a detective story results to be innocent to the detriment of all the evidence collected up to that point. Going back to the narrative program of Greimas's generative semiotics, readers know that the elements required for the development of the narration will occur. However, their involvement is prompted by postponing their appearance, by developing the plot in tentacular use-narrative programs or even by faking the main narrative program. Of course, some comics cannot handle the second reading as all their elements of tensions are unveiled, while some other require further readings to grasp all the details of the plot. Furthermore, considering that the narrative program corresponds to the *fabula* but not the actual plot, by changing the order of events or adding elements such as prolepsis and analepsis, the level of tension can be further increased.

Seriality regards the arrangement and publication of comics in a sequential manner. It is based on the reiteration of characters and situations. Series can be iterative series, including stories disconnected from a temporal point of view, which can be read in any sequence since there is no development from one to the other. Otherwise, they can be sagas, developing in a sequence of open-ended episodes which are strictly related to one another and cannot be fully understood if they are not enjoyed in a correct order. Among these two poles, the so-called spiral series represents a peculiar case of narration, in which, even though each episode has its own ending and is self-sufficient, the following narration takes the lead from the previous one according to a continuity model. Based on its development, a spiral series can be closer to the iterative style of sagas. From a certain perspective, series can be seen as a simplification mechanism, as readers know well in advance what to expect when

approaching it and thus fulfill their search for pleasure with repetition and rhythmic patterns in combination with original elements.

Humour is a particular case of interaction between tension, rhythm and readers' laugh. From a compositional point of view, humour has a simpler architecture with respect to narrative paths since a gag cannot develop on a long tension line. Barbieri (2017: 116-22) classified four different types of tension models for humour: i) self-contained comic strip; ii) serial narrative comic strip; iii) long narration; iv) long narration with humoristic purposes.

The comic grid, or “multiframe,” in the term coined by Belgian philosopher Henri Van Lier (1988: 5) is a “mechanism designed both for transformation and iteration, with a built-in dialectic between movement and immobility” (Smith and Duncan, 2017). Groensteen (2013) highlighted how the multiframe has the capacity to turn space into time, a “temporalized spatial form” (138). It goes without saying that the beat created by the multiframe is strictly bound to the page layout, i.e., the architecture of the panel frames. The regular layout, analysed in Groensteen (2007: 96-97) as waffle-iron grid, presents panels identical in size and shape. Though this structure has been criticised as mechanical, prosaic and, in general, as an hindrance to the free expression of creativity, Groensteen maintained that, by virtue of such repetitiveness, the waffle-iron grid has “the potential for setting up spectacular and violent breaks with the norm initially established” and thus for experimentations with changes in the rhythmic pattern. As a matter of fact, a regular grid of frames corresponds to a regular beat, what was previously defined as smooth. Such regular cadence – a “metronomic regularity” (144) – conveys a sense immutability and stability; it is “ideal for materializing the inexorable flow of time” (138) and “inducing a state of receptiveness in the reader” and a “more immediate integration of meaning” (Guaïtella, 519). The reiteration of the same pattern creates an *ostinato* rhythm, or, better said, “an extended diegetic time frame conveyed by a narrative tempo that gives the impression of a brisk rhythm” (Groensteen, 2013: 143).

Regular progression, Groensteen's “immutable cadence” (138) may be reinforced by means of several devices or “seriality effects”, operating on the level of sequences of panels or pages. When the same scene is repeated over and over, a suspension of time is created, which increases the dramatic tension — “as if the reader can hear the reverberation of the drum that beats out, unflinchingly, these solemn and dreadful moments” (145). Rhythmic pattern can be modified by alternations in iconic contents as well as in such features as colours, frames and angles of vision. Far more complex is the presence of a periodic

alternation, a notion derived from Henri Ban Lier's study on the variations of human walking, regards the creation of the so-called stanza, standing out against the background beat. The concept of stanza, as in poetry, stands for a group of panels which can be distinguished by virtue of some salient characteristics they share. The elements in the stanza "echo each other and display one or other of these types of cohesion to a remarkable extent" (ibid., 146). In terms of rhythmic patterns, this creates an interlocking structure, which modifies the perception of the panel sequence of the page. Another effect which can achieve similar outcomes is progressivity, which Groensteen defined as cinematic (146), if it regards the decomposition of actions, and optic, if concerned with the zoom in and out of a represented element.

In waffle-iron grids, any infringement of the pattern is salient and stands out with respect to the overall structure. A splash-page breaking the grid, the metric structure around which the story revolves, would represent a break point, a change of pace, with great impact. On the contrary, the rhetoric layout⁴⁴ (Peeters, 1991: 48-53), in which frames are adapted to contents and thus present irregularities, does not display a basic rhythmic pattern. But this does not mean that the beat is inexistent. When cadence is lost and irregularity is the norm, it is the presence of stanzas the element standing out.

Of course, the rhythm perceived by the reader is influenced by his/her level of alertness and sensitivity (149), as well as by his/her engagement with the story. In this regard, Groensteen is very clear:

The configuration of the multiframe and the density of the information are objective criteria. However, nothing is more subjective than our involvement in the *fabula* that is being recounted or shown, the narrative discourse that is addressed to us. It is all the more subjective for having a double motivation, emotional and aesthetic. (151)

As a consequence, it is important to stress that the reader is not passive in the creation of rhythm, and "contributes to the rhythm of the narration, which, ultimately, coincides with the pulsating flow of the reading process".

Groensteen (153) also included the resources of the spatio-topical systems as potential devices to accentuate (or differentiate) a rhythmic pattern on the level of panels or stanzas: the position, the shape, the size of the panel(s), as well as changes in the chromatic range and scale of images, in addition to the amount of text. Different strategies may be

⁴⁴ Peeters included among the features characterising the rhetorical layout, the modification of the shape or size of panels to fit the action it encloses, e.g., a vertical frame for a single character staying upright, and a wide frame for a crowded scene.

adopted at the same time, thus increasing the level of salience of the panel/stanza modifying the pattern and creating a rhythm “made up of accelerations and pauses, moments of intensity and glissados” (Groensteen, 2002: xlvi). Several different patterns can interweave in the same comics, all enriched by different effects.

3.6. Isotopy as a Tool of Analysis

A substantial body of research focused on the semiotic system of comics, breaking it down to constitutive units, but said very little on its language as a whole. Groensteen (2007) particularly criticised Guy Gauthier (1976) and Ulrich Krafft (1978) who investigated the microunits of comics. The former believed that: “in every image, it is possible to isolate lines or groups of lines, spots or groups of spots, and to locate, for each signifier thus determined, a precise signified, itself corresponding to a part of the global signified” (126). The latter dissected images into characters (in the background and the foreground) and objects (in the background and the foreground), subsequently classifying each of them into smaller signs. Gauthier’s and Krafft’s research on microunits of comics can be assimilated, respectively, to plastic “marks” and to the division of iconic signifiers in sub-entities, two notions previously mentioned as part of Groupe μ ’s visual semiotics. Groensteen (2007: 4) stressed how an analysis of comics from the point of view of iconic and plastic elements would not provide new insights into the language of comics as a unitary system. The notion of system is crucial, as the primary aim of Comics Studies should be “to find an access road to the interior of the system that permits exploration in its totality so as to find coherence” and “to define the sufficiently encompassing categories for the majority, or the totality, of linguistic processes and the observable tropes in the field that can be explained by these concepts” (4). A close-up, the use of a given colour, an iconic sign do not bear a value in themselves, but only a relation to other images, other elements “in a situation of co-presence”. Groensteen introduced the term iconic solidarity to indicate how the “ontological foundation of comics” relies on the “relational play of a plurality” of “interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated – this specification dismisses unique enclosed images within a profusion of patterns or anecdotes – and which are plastically and semantically over-determined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia*” (18). Indeed, when reading comics, panels are never considered in isolation, but in the context of all other adjacent panels in the page. This is the “necessary condition so that visual messages can, in first approximation, be assimilated within a comic” (20). In this regard, Groensteen

considered comics as a *system*, i.e., as “an ensemble of things that are held” (Littré), on account of their relationally based nature.

The concept of relational system of interdependences opens to an investigation of one of the core features of the present dissertations, namely isotopies. The notion of isotopy (from Greek, ἴσος: “the same”; τόπος “place”) was borrowed from physics, in which isotopes are atoms belonging to the same element, and thus with the same chemical properties, though with a different mass. Isotopy was first introduced into linguistics by Greimas in *Sémantique Structurale* (1966a), a highly influential body of research, which became the most cohesive epistemological core of the semiotic School of Paris. Greimas drew on Saussure’s and Hjelmslev’s argument that language is grounded on structural relations and differences among its elements (*Course de Linguistique Générale* [1916] 1967: 170), a “système dont tous les termes sont solidaires et où la valeur de l’un ne résulte que de la présence simultanée des autres” (159):

Un système linguistique est une série de différences de sons combinées avec une série de différences d’idées; mais cette mise en regard d’un certain nombre de signes acoustiques avec autant de découpures faites dans la masse de la pensée engendre un système de valeurs; et c’est ce système qui constitue le lien effectif entre les éléments phoniques et psychiques à l’intérieur de chaque signe. (166)

Saussure’s pivotal assumptions prompted the Glossematic theory of Hjelmslev and the structural linguistic framework of Greimas. The three scholars all agreed in conceiving language “as a system of relations (more precisely, a set of interrelated systems) the elements of which - sounds, words , etc. - have no validity independently of the relations of equivalence and contrast which hold between them” (Lyons 1968: 50). In *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1961), Hjelmslev reformulated Saussure’s dichotomy between signifier and signified in his glossematic model: the Danish author observed two planes, those of expression and content, and further split each of them into substance and form, respectively. In this quadripartition based on the isomorphism of expression and content, form of the expression and form of the content should be regarded as abstractions, whereas substance of the expression concerns the concrete manifestations of language production on the basis of a given code and substance of the content refers to the ideas and concepts already referred to in a given culture.

Just as Saussure, Hjelmslev examined “mutual dependences” and “relationships” as a basis of his glossematic analysis: “both the object of the examination and its parts have existence only by virtue of these dependences; the whole of the object under examination

can be defined only by their sum total, and each of its parts can be defined only by the dependences [...] A totality does not consist of things but of relationships” (22). He believed that linguistics should focus on the “aggregating and integrating constancy” within language and “not anchored in some reality outside language” (8). However, the point where Hjelmslev’s and Greimas’s theories seem to complement each other is the object of linguistic analysis: just as Saussure, who focused on the study of signs, Hjelmslev conceived language as a “system of *figurae* that can be used to construct signs” (47), whereas Greimas (1983) argued that “it is at the level of the structures, and not at the level of the elements, that the elementary signifying units must be sought [...] Language is, not a system of signs, but an assemblage [...] of structures of signification” (20). Indeed, Greimas’s aim was to move beyond the scope of single word analysis to focus on the overall text (or discourse), and to shift from the study of signs to the study of signification⁴⁵. According to Greimas (1966a), any message is a “totalité de signification” (53), a meaningful whole, which partakes in creating a semantic universe. Therefore, Greimas and Courtés (1979) conceived semiotics as a “une théorie de la signification” (345), one which “becomes operational only when it situates its analyses on levels both higher and lower than the sign” (Nöth, 1995: 315). This led him to focus on the denuclearization of meaning into minimum semantic components (as we will see in semic analysis) and the analysis of textual units on a discursive level.

Semantic threads and relations constitute what Greimas considered the “elementary structure of signification”, which is also the specific object of the semic analysis he developed in *Semantique Structurale*. This can be compared to a phonological analysis in that it also systematically arranges its minimum units, with semes corresponding to phonemes. Semic analysis focuses on “effect de sens” (Greimas, 1966a: 45), the manifestation of sense, also known as sememes, which, in turn, are the combination of minimum units of signification, called semes or semantic markers. Greimas’s theory prioritised the study of relations rather than isolated elements, and, along these lines, signification only exists as an elementary relation of either disjunction (e.g., “male” versus “female”) or conjunction (e.g., the semantic category of “sex” which is common to both “male” and “female”) between two or more semantic elements⁴⁶. Greimas argued that lexemes, the minimum “unités de

⁴⁵ Signification is then the core of Greimas’s semiotics, but it is important to stress that terminologically, he differentiated “signification,” considered “articulated meaning» from “meaning” which is “anterior to semiotic production» (Greimas and Courtés, 298).

⁴⁶ In this Greimas does not differ from Hjelmslev, except for the former’s claim that semes which compose a sememe are not finite. This was also maintained by American structuralism and their componential analysis (Lyons, 1977a and 1977b).

communication” (ibid., 42), i.e., virtual, surface structural units of lexicon which may be defined as entries in a dictionary, are polysemous by their own nature. This means that each occurrence of the same lexeme is characterised by the presence of some semes and the absence of others: for instance, the lexeme /tall/ may be described through the semes of «spatiality», «dimensionality» and «verticality»; the lexeme /long/ by the semes of «spatiality», «dimensionality», «horizontality» and «perpectivity»; finally, the lexeme /wide/ by the semes of «spatiality», «dimensionality», «horizontality» and «laterality» (Greimas, 1966a: 58). Prior to their actualisation – i.e., the semantic investment performed through their actual use – lexemes virtually possess multiple potential semes and thus multiple potential meanings. Whenever a lexeme is actualised in a discourse, a potentially different sememe is produced. Thus, sememes change according to texts (or co-texts) and communication contexts. At this point, Greimas distinguished between two types of semes: nuclear semes are invariable, permanent, specific and context-independent; classemes are variable, contextual and generic⁴⁷. While nuclear semes are always part of the meaning effect (sememe) produced by the use of a lexeme, classemes are either present or absent, depending on the context. In Greimas’s famous example, “the dog is barking”, the sememe “barking” is composed of the nuclear seme «cry» and the classeme «animality», actualized by the presence of “dog”, which excludes the classeme «human» which would instead be actualized in “the colonel is barking”. As for the sememe “dog”, the presence of the sememe “barking” enables the selection of the classeme «animality» and excludes the classeme «object», which would be selected, for example, in the case of a “fire-dog”. Both lexemes may result ambiguous if uttered separately. However, the selection of the proper semes usually becomes intelligible in any context where both terms are present. In this simple example, the seme “animality” can be identified in the sememes expressed by both lexemes: it is expressed twice and, broadening the scope of the analysis to a discourse level, it is likely to appear again as the narrative concerning the dog proceeds. Each time the seme is reiterated, it becomes more redundant and the level of intelligibility and disambiguation increases. Such semantic redundancy is called isotopy and its study is grounded on semic analysis, as it regards the iterativeness⁴⁸ of semes along a syntagmatic chain. As maintained by Bertrand (2000, 118), isotopies depend on the

⁴⁷Bernard Pottier’s (1974) study on semes differs from Greimas’s in that he distinguishes three sets: semantemes which are specific and constant, classemes which are variable and generic, and virtuememes which are connotative. The classifications of semes is further debated among the different semioticians. However, for the purpose of the present work, Greimas’s twofold partition is considered.

⁴⁸Greimas and Courtés defined iterativeness as “la reproduction, sur l’axe syntagmatique, de grandeurs identiques ou comparables, situées sur le même niveau d’analyse” (199).

syntagmatic dimension, as they regard how semantic categories develop in a discourse. The iterativeness of units of signification – not simply of words or signs – guarantees the semantic cohesion and homogeneity of a discourse. Isotopies differ from both the semantic field (i.e., a group of lexemes with a common structural organisation, that is, shaping up a conceptual area, which would be the first step in a thematizing process) and the lexical field (i.e., a group of lexemes referring to items from a common experiential universe) in that they relate the semantic category of seme (not of lexemes), which better suits the analysis of a discourse. A basic isotopy is created when a classeme partakes in at least two sememes. Its reiteration in different textual elements establishes a relation of coherence between them and prompts a preliminary interpretation of the text.

At first, Greimas provided two different definitions of isotopy, each entailing a different aspect of it. In *Sémantique Structurale* (1966a: 96), he defined it as “la permanence d’une base classématique hiérarchisée qui permet, grâce à l’ouverture des paradigmes que sont les catégories classématiques, les variations des unités de manifestation, variations qui, au lieu de détruire l’isotopie ne font que la confirmer”. This first definition focuses on classemes as semantic units granting the signification and homogeneity of a text by virtue of their iterativeness, as in the case of the abovementioned example “the dog is barking”. Isotopies are thus conceived to be created starting from the basic units of signification, its semes, by their cumulation, concatenation and hierarchization, according to what Bertrand (120) defines a “from-the-part-to-the-whole” approach.

Greimas subsequently broadened the scope of the concept to encompass all elements of signification, not just classemes. Accordingly, multiple levels of isotopy can be enucleated and the poly-isotopic nature of texts highlighted. Indeed, in the same year, in the essay “Éléments pour une théorie de l’interprétation du récit mythique” (1966b), he defined isotopy as the “ensemble redondant de catégories sémantiques qui rend possible la lecture uniforme du récit telle qu’elle résulte des lectures partielles des énoncés et la réalisation de leurs ambiguïtés, qui est guidée par la recherche de la lecture unique” (30). Unlike the former definition, this moves from the whole to the part, with the signification process taken into consideration from the viewpoint of the text-decoder and his/her hermeneutic effort. Signification, thus, is grounded on the assumption that an isotopy de facto exists, regardless of the intention of a text-sender, whenever a coherent pattern in a text is decoded by a message-receiver.

A text is a figurative discourse which articulates semantic figures presented to the readers and resembling the figures of the real world through a mimetic process aimed at recreating a reality-effect. But the mimetic and figurative level belongs to the surface of the text and serves to give access to the immediate meaning of the text. According to Bertrand (119), two levels of isotopy may be distinguished, namely figurative and thematic isotopies. Figurative isotopies concern the actors, time and place of a text; they provide an ‘effect of real’ and belong to the surface of the text, i.e. to the figures this text refers to in order to symbolically represent a possible world. However, as Greimas and Courtés argued (1979), the figurative acquires sense when they are thematised (146). Indeed, figures may be thematised in the light of a more general and abstract interpretive framework. Drawing on values external to the text, thematic isotopies are based on associations made *in absentia*, i.e., on the paradigmatic axis of the discourse. Thematic isotopies thus result from a hermeneutic act in which figures are correlated and provided with a narrative value, and content is explored on a deeper level, beyond the surface of the text, often on the basis of a predetermined reading level (religious, Protestant, political, Marxist, artistic, Expressionist, Freudian, etc.). Greimas and Courtés (1979) defined the figurative path as “un enchaînement isotope de figures, corrélatif à un thème donné” which is “fondé sur l’association des figures propre à un univers culturel déterminé” and “en partie libre, en partie contraint, dans la mesure où, une première figure étant posée, elle n’en appelle que certaines autres, à l’exclusion des autres” (146). Greimas and Courtés pointed out that “seen the multiple possibilities of figurativisation of a theme, the theme can be subjected to different figurative paths, which enables us to justify variants”.

The selection of figures and their association to a theme depends on a cultural inference, which may be related to what Marvin Minsky (1974, 1986) called “frames”. This influential theory was grounded on the fact that knowledge representations and reasoning schemes function according to frames, i.e., whenever a new situation is encountered, humans select from their individual ‘memory boxes’ a predetermined structure, originally derived from semantic networks and past experience stored in their memory, and use it to categorise such situation. In the case under scrutiny, thanks to such intertextual scripts, readers are able to position the text within a given context and frame, and therefore to interpret it accordingly, functioning just like Eco’s encyclopaedic knowledge (1976). In this regard, Eco highlighted the pragmatic relevance of contextual pressure, which drives any act of interpretation (Eco, 1990: 21). Eco also investigated the notion of topic, which he used interchangeably with that

of theme. In his first postulation (1979), he argued that “the topic as question is an abductive schema that helps the reader to decide which semantic properties have to be actualized, whereas isotopies are the actual textual verification of that tentative hypothesis” (27). While isotopies are verifiable (and actualised) semantic properties of a text, the topic is not a textual element but a pragmatic and “cooperative device activated by the reader [...] for the purpose of identifying the isotopy for interpreting the text” (Eco, 1980: 145). Thus, isotopies grant order to a text and, to a certain degree, a scientific basis to the study of communication, as they provide “a systematic, exact and, generalizing” tool of analysis, just as in the linguistic science advocated by Hjelmslev (1961: 9) years before. According to the reiteration of an isotopy, interpreters also select the frame within which sememes should be positioned.

Going back to Greimas’s definitions, isotopic analysis may present some risks: while the first one may be conceived as restricting the construction of sense by readers – with isotopies being already established – the second one may result in forcing figures to fit in the interpretive framework adopted by the listener/reader. However, interpretations may seem constrained, resulting from the either deliberate or even unconscious will of the interpreter to channel the text in a given direction by freely connecting sememes. In this regard, Groupe μ (1970) even developed the concept of allotopy to describe situations in which semantic elements not only do not form isotopies and recur coherently through the text, but also contradict each other and result in two or more incompatible interpretations. Allotopies are particularly interesting for the present study as they can trigger a diverse range of rhetorical effects including humorous, ironic, blasphemous and estranging ones which are vital to the reception of underground comix⁴⁹.

The uniform interpretation of a text is no easy task as new elements are constantly introduced as the narration proceeds, which may either participate to or differ from the dominant isotopy. As Ugo Volli (2000) stated “ogni testo che non sia piattamente denotativo [...] tende a giocare con le possibilità che le parole gli offrono di trasmettere più percorsi di senso possibili contemporaneamente” (70). Connotations⁵⁰ thus involve polysemy and polysotopic texts. Given the complexity of the signifying universe, isotopies are entangled in the knitting of a text. Multiple isotopies cohabit the text and, to make things even more

⁴⁹ This is also the case of other media: for instance, Arthur C. Clarke’s short-story *The Sentinel* (1948) and Ron Howard’s film *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) can be considered examples of storylines relying on the reversal of isotopic coherence.

⁵⁰ Hjelmslev (1961) introduced the notion of connotation as a semantic surplus to the denotative (definitional, literal) level of signification which derive from external systems and structures, such as socio-cultural and individual (ideological, emotional) associations.

complicated, polysemic terms (also called shifters or *embrayeurs*) participate in different isotopies. As Greimas and Courtés maintained, “la polysémémie de la première figure posée peut virtuellement ouvrir sur plusieurs parcours figuratifs correspondants à des thèmes différents: d'où le phénomène de la pluri-isotopie qui développe plusieurs significations superposées dans un seul discours” (146). Thus, the hermeneutic process, rather than a passive exercise, entails the selection of a figurative path according to the frames virtualised by the text and recognised by the reader, and the consistent hierarchisation of the isotopies which result to be dominant. It may thus be argued that interpretation starts from the selection of the isotopic nuclei around which less relevant isotopies gravitate. Qualitative and quantitative analyses are required for the recognition of such isotopies and possible strategies include looking for relevant sememes in salient positions like the beginning or the conclusion of a text (Eco, 1979: 91), or to the recurrence of classemes in the highest number of sememes (Van Dijk, 1972; Arrivé, 1973). The choice of dominant isotopies is crucial as it will influence the thematisation of figures and the final interpretation of the text. On the one hand, such process of selection and hierarchisation, as well as the choice of the context in which a given sememe expresses its full potential and highlights the relative isotopies, result in either the “magnification” or the “narcotisation” of semantic elements (Eco, 2003: 139). On the other hand, precisely because different interpreters choose different isotopies, misunderstandings of polysemic texts are likely to occur.

Indeed, people tend to select isotopies according to their background knowledge, individual frames as well as conscious choices to give a text a different reading. The same applies to the connection of figures and the perception of the semantic continuum between them which largely relies on the readers who are appointed to decode them. In addition to hierarchisation, isotopies may establish other types of relationship: embedding, derivation, correspondence, and disjunction.

The possibilities provided by these relationships, as well as by *embrayeurs* and poly-isotopic texts, are exploited, for example, in jokes playing with the humoristic effect generated by the double meaning of a term, in stories using ambiguity to engender a surprise effect, or in advertising exploiting redundancy to convey their persuasive message. According to Bertrand (120), figures of speech based on a *double entendre*, especially metaphors, analogies and metonymies represent paradigmatic cases of two or more levels of significations as they act as connectors or shifters of isotopies: the direct level of signification inherent to the trope establishes a figurative isotopy which is mapped (and shadowed) by a thematic isotopy,

a semantic investment occurring on the indirect, or tropic, plane of signification. In this way, the first level of signification is amplified and two different, sometimes contrasting, reading levels cohabit the text. Thus, isotopies shape figurative language and their rhetorical configuration. By acting as magnetic fields, they exert an influence also on register, rhythm and syntax. In this sense, it may be inferred that authorial style is either consciously or unconsciously affected by them. As Andrea Binelli (2013) argued, “the notion of isotopy provides a key not only to the theme of the text but also to the formal – stylistic – elements that govern the relationship between the form and the content [...]. In other words, isotopies can be regarded as illustrative of an author’s style, this being what characterizes a book beyond his content” (26). In this regard, he defines style as “the outcome of references, knowledge, sensibilities, projections that are seldom made explicit in their writing and yet pervade and structure the possible world shaped in their representations” (27).

Moreover, contrary to a restricted idea of isotopy involving solely the level of content, Rastier (1972) proposed to extend the notion of isotopy to all textual levels, i.e. including those produced by the iterativeness of all linguistic units: “on appelle isotopie toute itération d' une unité linguistique. L'isotopie élémentaire comprend donc deux unités de la manifestation. Cela dit, le nombre des unités constitutives d'une isotopie est théoriquement illimité” (82). This statement purports the extension of isotopic analysis to the level of expression, a point of view embraced by such scholars as Arrivé (1973) and Klinkenberg (1973). Greimas (1972) himself progressively accepted to widen his focus to the “niveau phonémique” (16). Groupe μ (1977) explained the distinction between an isotopy on the level of content and one on the level of expression in the following terms: the former is defined as “la propriété des ensembles limités d'unités de signification comportant une recurrence identifiable de sèmes identiques et une absence de sèmes exclusifs en position syntaxique de détermination” (43); the latter, characterising poetry in particular, is conceived as “la répétition réglée des mêmes unités du significatif (manifestes ou non, phoniques ou graphiques)⁵¹ ou des mêmes structureurs syntaxiques (profondes ou de surface) au long d'un énoncé” (36). In the analysis of Molly Bloom’s monologue in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Groupe μ (1976) had previously stated that “[d]ans l'exemple de James Joyce, les ruptures non réévaluées connotent précisément le monologue intérieur serait alors constituée par l'unité de l'instance énonciatrice. On parlera dans tous ces cas d'*isotopie de connotation*” (52). Following Groupe μ , Pugliatti and Zacchi (1983) defined “isotopia dell'espressione un significato di

⁵¹ And this would be the case of comics.

connotazione veicolato da una qualche manipolazione del significante la quale tenda, consapevolmente o no, ad opporre ostacoli alla irregolarità del livello espressivo della manifestazione linguistica” (31). Isotopies in comics can therefore be – and often are – the outcome of semantic coherence among visual elements in their formal presentation (light and colours, lines and lettering, angle and salience, framing and page layout, etc.) and texts in balloons, caption boxes and elsewhere, all of which happen to share some relevant *classemes* and accordingly suggest a homogeneous understanding of these syncretic, multimodal texts.

The fact that a *sememe* can be connotatively expressed by formal, non-lexical elements, on different levels is crucial. According to some scholars, the Paris School’s body of research “have served more to provide heuristic tools than to condition the discussion” (Ahonen, 1990: 426) on semiotics. Nonetheless, Greimas’s concept of isotopy proves a very effective tool to use when working on practical case-studies. Moreover, it being a semiotic category and not merely a linguistic one, isotopy can be applied to the analysis of all codes. In a similar understanding, Umberto Eco (1979: 120) maintained that, as Greimas’s and his disciples’ work proceeded, the concept of isotopy became an umbrella term to include different semiotic phenomena which, regardless of the code being employed, suggest a coherent reading path in relation to messages of any kind.

Isotopies and their multimodal potential prove particularly useful in such disciplines as Theatre Studies, Cinema, Advertising, Translation Studies and Comics Studies. As for the field of translation, for instance, Greimas and Courtés believed that translatability was a salient propriety of semiotic systems and the grounding of any semantic process (398). When approaching translations from a semiotic point of view, “two texts – one the translation of the other – can be compared on various grounds, including lexical items, isotopies or sense levels, narrative structures...” (Steconci, 2011: 260). Isotopy pertains the discourse, not to the single word, unless it entails a possible frame. As such, it indicates correspondences on the textual level between the totality and its parts. As maintained by Binelli, since isotopies act as “gravitational centres around which the textual coherence of texts is organized”, they may represent “constraints on the work of translators” (24). They provide binding instructions regarding the semantic profile of a text and how it should be rendered in another language. In this respect, they also help translators in their choices: “[t]o a reader the isotopy is a map that tells you where you are. To a translator the isotopy is a compass that tells you where to go” (ibid.).

The translation of isotopies regards the thematisation of the source text's figures within another culture and with the resources of another language. And by following the meaningful path delineated by isotopies, translators are eased in the reproduction of a dianoetic nucleus in the target texts. Isotopies thus fulfil two functions: they neutralise the "noise" on the syntactical level, while at the same time providing continuity on the semantic one. In this respect, isotopies inform translators on the web of connections between semantic units, one which they should try to reproduce in translation in order to convey the same level of coherence of the source text and to reproduce the style of the author.

Authorial style is particularly relevant in the case of literary translation. According to such scholars as Katie Wales (2001) and Segre (1985), style is an ensemble of expressive and content specificities which makes an author recognisable. However, stylistic evaluations are no easy task in Translation Studies. As Jean Boase-Beier argued in *Stylistic Approaches to Translation* (2006), four kinds of style, defined as the "outcome of choice", can be considered in translation:

- i. the style of the source text as an expression of its author's choices
- ii. the style of the source text in its effects on the reader (and on the translator as reader)
- iii. the style of the target text as an expression of choices made by its author (who is the translator)
- iv. the style of the target text in its effects on the reader. (5)

The translator is expected to recognise main stylemes, i.e., the minimum units of style which characterize a text, and to reproduce them into another language, i.e. through different linguistic structures, to different audiences and within different cultural frameworks. The analysis of isotopies – and the recognition of the connections between phonetic, syntactic, enunciative, rhetoric and of course semantic properties which compose them – is thus essential whenever a translator aims to reproduce the style of an author. The investigation of isotopic paths and threads in translation may be a starting point towards the translator's rendering of a style: "[s]uch connection between isotopy and style mirrors the relationship between the interpretation induced and oriented by a frame and the relative hierarchy of isotopies, on the one hand, and its figurative and even sensorial manifestation, on the other hand". (Binelli, 26-27). In this regard, isotopies function as a map for both the translator's task of rendering stylemes and the contrastive analysis of source and translated texts.

Despite its direct applicability, few scholars developed a study of translation on the basis of semantic isotopy. Among them, exceptions are Pugliatti and Zacchi (1983), Mudersbach and Gerzymisch-Arbogast (2001) – who even proposed the new term “isomorphic translation” (168) – Nord (2005) and Binelli (2013).

In the contrastive analysis proposed in the following chapter, isotopies will be one of the core features employed to analyse both the source and the target texts. If for the author of a text the creation of isotopies may be conscious or unconscious – and this does not affect the very structure of its manifestation (Greimas, 1966a) – a translator’s choice to translate them may be deliberate or not. Indeed, translators may even decide to adapt their not only lexical choices to dominant isotopies without being aware of their presence. Dominant isotopies may thus be completely preserved but their semantic charge may ‘weigh’ differently; some isotopies may be added and others erased or downgraded, especially when the translator does not recognise them or when certain *classemes* do not pertain the target language and culture. Indeed, as Jakobson argued, “on the level of interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units, while messages may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code-units or messages” and “equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics” (139). This may be particularly complex when dealing with the translation of connotations, and isotopies help in the selection of the elements to translate in order to achieve some degree of connotative preservation of connotations in a different cultural environment.

Going back to Eco and Nergaard’s (1998) postulation, according to the Text-Semiotics approach applied to Translation Studies, “[t]ranslation does not involve comparing a language (or any other semiotic system) with another language or semiotic system; it involves passing from a text ‘a’, elaborated according to a semiotic system ‘A’, into a text ‘b’, elaborated according to a semiotic system ‘B’” (221). Drawing on this method of analysis, Translation Studies can move beyond the investigation of literary translations to encompass “the countless translations of mass-communication texts which often involve more than one semiotic system and move across linguistic and cultural boundaries” which include the “so-called syncretic texts such as television programmes, film, advertising, comic strips, and so on” (*ibid.*). In this light, isotopic analysis may also provide useful tools for an integrated study of such hybrid texts as comics. Though research on isotopies traditionally focused on literary texts and, in general, verbal language, similar considerations may extend to other languages, such as that of comics, in which non-lexical items such as images, onomatopoeias and

graphic conventions all participate in the creation of isotopies. For example, in a film, the reiteration of a frame or of a camera shot may suggest an isotopy. A stylistic choice to privilege and reiterate close-up shots or full shots will have an impact on the overall meaning-process of the film. The same occurs for the use of a particular colour or eidetic element, and the meaning they may convey.

Not only the isotopic analysis of syncretic texts is possible, but it also may prompt the development of a joint study of all the components which characterise a medium like comics and make this medium different from verbal-language based ones. Semiotic research on comics may thus benefit from the application of a tool centred on relations of signification of both verbal and graphic devices without privileging or neglecting either. Given the complexity of hybrid texts, isotopies may support a homogeneous interpretation by highlighting the patterns of signification to follow in the intricate web of elements interacting panel by panel, page by page. The whole structure characterising comics, as it was analysed throughout this Chapter, may partake in the creation of an isotopy: a fascinating perspective to explore, indeed. Further questions may thus arise, especially regarding the (conjunctive or disjunctive) relation between components: do verbal and non-verbal elements cooperate in the creation of meaning or do they rather clash? Are allotopies exploited by the author in this form of interplay, also in the light of the satirical content of comix? A further question may regard how this type of analysis relates to translation: which isotopies are magnified and which narcotised or, more straightforwardly, censored? Such processes as magnification, narcotisation, censure may in fact be the consequence of the relative importance given by translators to *classemes*, possibly because they simply went unnoticed or exaggerated, or because the receiving audience was believed not to be able to recognise them on account of the lack of familiarity with such topics in their culture. And, finally, how do these processes of magnification, narcotisation and censure ultimately shape our reception of such complex foreign texts as underground comix published and translated in Italy?

SECTION 3: CORPUS AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Chapter 4. COMIX AMID MYTHOLOGIES

4.1. Corpus Design

“It has often seemed that, like the counterculture years at large, underground comix have come to occupy a dreamlike space in American life and art, scarcely understood at the time, more mythicized or repressed (sometimes both simultaneously) than appreciated” (Buhle, 2009: 36). Chapter 2 ended with this bittersweet consideration by *Radical America’s* founding editor Paul Bulhe, which is worth repeating as the opening of the present Chapter, specifically dealing with the analysis of underground comix in translation, for two main reasons: on the one hand, such encore serves as a bridge connecting the study of comics in translation with the previous analysis of the historical and sociocultural roots of the underground comix phenomenon. On the other hand, the processes of mythicization and repression Bulhe referred to may be conceived as two different, though not mutually exclusive, trends which the translations of underground comix considered may or may not reflect. In this regard, prior to further detail these statements, a first description of the corpus of analysis is to be offered. The set of translated texts chosen for the study comes from anthologies of works by single authors and magazines belonging to different time periods, different publishing houses and, consequently, responding to different editorial policies.

Among the works available for this analysis, the first translation of underground comix – predictably, Crumb’s works – was published in August 1970 in the comic monthly publication *linus*, though a version of *Fritz the Cat’s* adventure “Fred the Teenage Girl Pigeon” is already attested in December 1968, in *linus’s* supplement *Ali Baba Speciale*, surprisingly ahead of its time. The comic magazine *linus* was founded by Giovanni Gandini in April 1965 and published by Figure, subsequently renamed Milano Libri. The publishing house edited such experimental underground papers as Franco Quadri’s *Ubu*, published between 1970 and 1971 – featuring some works by Crumb and Shelton which, unfortunately, are untraceable – and the first Italian translation of Jerry Rubin’s *Do it!*, entitled *Fallo! Sceneggiatura per la rivoluzione* (1971). Milano Libri was thus the first Italian company to bet on the potential of a magazine entirely dedicated to comics: its name, *linus*, was taken after the iconic character from Charles M. Schulz’s *Peanuts*. With the attempt to move beyond the hard-to-die idea that comics were exclusively either lowbrow or childish publications, *linus* focused on both national and international productions, including adult comics and satire, as well as articles

and editorials on politics, society, literature, cinema, music, and cultural highlights, explicitly displaying a leftist stance. In the first issue, in fact, Gandini (1965) declared:

Questa rivista è dedicata per intero ai fumetti. Fumetti s'intende di buona qualità, ma senza pregiudizi intellettualistici. Accanto alle storie e ai personaggi più moderni e significativi come i "Peanuts" (studiati ormai come un autentico prodotto di cultura), la rivista intende presentare fumetti di avvenuta, classici per l'infanzia, inediti di giovani autori. L'unico criterio di scelta di questa "letteratura grafica" è quello del valore delle singole opere, del divertimento che ne può trarre il lettore, oggi; non quello di un interesse puramente documentario o archeologico. I classici della storia del fumetto che pubblicheremo saranno solo quelli veramente originali e ancora validi oggi, verificati a una lettura il più possibile disinteressata, scevra di mitologie. Cercheremo poi di presentare al pubblico italiano quei fumetti che ancora non conosce, di rivelargli tempestivamente le nuove scoperte di tutto il mondo, di tenerlo informato su quanto avviene e si dice in questo campo. (1)

This declaration of intents, poignantly advocating the exemption from mythologies acknowledged that *Peanuts* had become cultural products worth of proper investigation, after Umberto Eco's *Apocalittici e Integrati* (1964), which contained the essay "Il mondo di Charlie Brown" and prompted a campaign for the reappraisal of comics. And it is no coincidence that the first issue of *linus* also included an interview to the novelist Elio Vittorini and Oreste del Buono by Eco.

In addition to *Peanuts*, the magazine featured such comic classics as Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*, Elzie Crisler Segar's *Popeye*, Herriman's *Krazy Kat* and Walt Kelly's *Pogo* as well as Italian productions such as Guido Crepax's *Neutron* and *Valentina*, and Enzo Lunari's *Girigibiz*. When, in 1972, Milano Libri was sold to Rizzoli and the direction of *linus* was taken by the journalist Oreste del Buono, *linus* further increased its prominence in the Italian cultural scenario, also featuring Italian and French satirists: e.g., Altan, Vincino, Vauro, Filippo Scozzari, Georges Wolinski, Jean-Marc Reiser, Gérard Lauzier. As for underground satire, under Gandini's and Del Buono's directions, *linus* published stories of Crumb's most famous characters, Mr Natural and Fritz the Cat, in February, April, July and August 1970, and from July to December 1972, respectively, together with works by Richard Corben and Vaughn Bodé (in August 1969, in the 1970 supplement *linusgrasso* and in three 1976 issues). When in 1981 Fulvia Serra became the new director, *linus* had already stopped focusing on the underground, but Crumb's name had reached popularity in the Italian comic milieu far beyond its pages. Fritz the Cat's story "Fritz bugs out" was split in six issues and published as monthly strips with adjustments to fit *linus*'s page layout (a couple of panels were removed

in the September issue). The same translation was republished as a part of Milano Libri's Fritz the Cat's adventures in the homonymous big-format anthology in 1972.

The subsequent year, Milano Libri translated the Viking Press's edition of Crumb's *Head Comix*, infamous for the arbitrary censorships by the New York publishing house, which displeased Crumb himself as his dialogues were modified (e.g., the words "nigger" and "Schwartz" were removed) and the picture of a vagina covered with band-aids. Even though an uncensored version of *Head Comix*, a true milestone for the diffusion of Crumb's art in America and abroad, had been reprinted by Ballantine in 1970 (two years after Viking published and then discarded Crumb), Milano Libri opted for the censored version, a choice consistent with their mitigating reception of Crumb.

Another publishing house, La Nuova Sinistra/Edizioni Savelli, founded in 1963 in Rome to voice and spread radicalism in Italy, published its own fanzine of Crumb's art, *R. Crumb Comix*, as a part of its series of controversial publications *Fallo!*, inspired by Jerry Rubin's homonymous book. As advocated in the back cover:

Questo Crumb è il Dante dello strip americano. È il più violento, irriducibile, incazzato e terribile commentatore, in strip, del mondo alternativo della West Coast. Soprattutto, del triangolo magico San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland culla del mondo psichedelico, alternativo, liberato, che non si sa dove andrà. Non è il Crumb leccato del film Fritz (leccatissimo filmotto per far soldi, e da Crumb stesso ripudiato). Questi sono fumetti di battaglia e di commento, carognissimo e strippatissimo, sul nostro lifestyle...ma basta menare... ci spiace per le mille lire... ma, caldo da Berkeley Barb e altri giornali della West Coast...

Crumb is presented here as "Dante della controcultura mondiale" by Angelo Quattrocchi, editor of *Fallo!*, leading figure of the Italian underground and founding member of the Ippi party. Quattrocchi also polemically stressed how "Quando ancora si parlava di controcultura, senza paura che arrivasse il solito Eco e ci mettesse a fare da belle statuine all'Espresso, diciamo nel '69-70 la musica rock, i fumetti e i giornali Underground erano veramente l'espressione d'un'altra vita, qui adesso, subito", and he added "Mentre il solito Eco (delle cose) rimasticava il solito Linus, e i Feiffer da Museo, lo Shulz dei peanuts che sono il rosario quotidiano del bravo lettore medio coglione italiano [...] si ritrovava Crumb per casa". Quattrocchi was angry: angry with Eco, charged for trying to institutionalise something which by its very nature was against the institutions, with "il solito Linus", with Wolinsky, who neglected his "freak" past of the 1968 Paris turmoil, through Satanik and Diabolik, considered the product for repressed desk clerks from the 1950s, and with publishing companies such as Arcana, labelled as "recuperatori". Quattrocchi was especially

angry with “i freak falsi, quelli che usano le parole giuste ma solo le parole”. And he projected his anger onto Crumb, defined as “il più violento, irriducibile, incazzato e terribile” among the American cartoonists, and it will be interesting to verify how this projection may influence the translation of his comics. In the introduction to Malatempora’s anthology of Crumb’s comics, Quattrocchi claimed that, during a meeting in Paris, Crumb himself suggested which comics to publish.

Interestingly, Savelli also published an anthology of comics by Clay Wilson, *Paranoia*, which is by now irretrievable, and the only Italian collection of American feminist comix, *Foemina Strips: antologia di fumetti femministi americani*, edited by Marco Giovannini in 1979. Giovannini published the anthology concomitantly with the brief all-Italian experience of *Strix: giornale di fumetti e di altro, fatto da donne*, a feminist comic magazine created by thirteen authors reuniting in “Libreria delle donne” (also called Libellula) in Strada Maggiore, in Bologna, between late 1978 and the summer of 1979. The anthology includes over 20 authors, with short-stories from *Wimmen’s Comix* as well as such underground feminist publications as *Girl Fight*, *Dynamite Damsels*, *Fresca Zizis*, *Tits & Clits*, *Wet Satin*, *Pandora’s Box*. The stories were grouped according to three thematic units: Epico (epic), Quotidiano (daily) and Fantastico (fictional), all sharing a common sense of humour and self-humour which, Giovannini argued, had traditionally been considered an exclusive attribute of men.

During the 1970s other fanzines approached underground comix. Unfortunately, two works cannot be found: the first is *Kufù*, edited by the cartoonist Luciano Pradella and published by Ignazio Maria Gallino’s IAP in Milan in 1973. *Kufù* presented works by the Italian underground, including Pradella, Matteo Guarnaccia and Capa, together with comix by Crumb and, for the first time in Italy, Gilbert Shelton, exactly a year before the official publication of Arcana’s anthology. The second volume is a limited edition of Shelton’s *Freak Brothers*, edited in 1979 by Tipografia Zanolo, a typography set in Naples. No further information on this print is available. Pablo Enchaurren and Claudia Salaris (1999: 195) also maintained that Crumb’s and Shelton’s works were used in a two-metre long eliography created in 1970 by a commune called “Madria” to celebrate the literary and artistic references which inspired its birth.

Among the retrieved works from the 1970s, in September 1973 Milano Stampa published *Big Comics 1*, a 64-page black-and-white work collecting two stories: *Capitan Guts: Potere Negro* by Larry Welz and *La Belva di Wolfton* by Richard Corben, together with Bobo Hal by Grass Green and a small moulded figure included in the package. The experience of

Big Comics was short-lived (with only the first issue published) but it provided the only attested translation of Welz's production in Italy as well as one of the few translations of Corben's work of the underground period. It is interesting to notice how the cover of *Big Comics* 1 reproduces the cover of *Capitan Guts* 2, also mimicking the font of the title and adding the inscription "edizione per adulti". Likewise, the inside back cover promotes the forthcoming second issue, which unfortunately never saw the light, by showing the cover mimicking *Zap Comix* 0, even in this case changing the title and adding the inscription, together with the writing "idee supersex" instead of the "apex novelties" logo inscription.

In 1974, as mentioned above, Arcana published the first anthology of Gilbert Shelton's *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*. Arcana is a peculiar publishing house, founded by Raimondo Biffi and Fernanda Pivano in Rome at the beginning of the 1970s, with the aim to spread the knowledge of the countercultural artistic experience (and from the 1980s, music culture in particular) in Italy as well as to publish Italian underground authors. In particular, alongside the translations of Allen Ginsberg's *Diario Indiano* and Jerry Rubin's *Siamo tanti!*, Arcana published Shelton's comics as epitome of the Sixties' zeitgeist. Two versions of Arcana's edition exist: the 1974 original and a second edition dated 1979. The featured the oversize format (24 x 33.5 cm) typical of French albums and included quotes from counterculture icons (e.g., Bob Dylan, Timothy Leary, Jerry Rubin, Frank Zappa) or other underground prints by Arcana (e.g., Nicholas Saunders's *Controguida alla Londra dei Giovani* and Fernanda Pivano's *Beat Hippie Yippie*). The latter reduced the format and eliminated the quotes from comic pages. However, the Italian underground scenario did not always support Arcana's project, and even labelled it as "recuperatori", as seen in Quattrocchi's preface to *Fallo!*.

Quattrocchi continued his work on underground comix in Italy with the short-lived magazine *Riso.Amaro* and *Risamaro Comix: Mensile di Fumetti e Movimento*, number 1 and 2. Both issues are prints by Editor's Studio (Milan), the cover and back cover being handwritten with two illustrations, one from Crumb's *Home Grown Funnies* (Kitchen Sink, 1971) and one with Shelton's Fat Freddy and his cat. As for the American authors translated in the volumes, the first issue included works by Crumb, Shelton, Bill Griffith and Ron Cobb, while the second focused on Shelton, Cobb and Jay Kinney. *Riso.Amaro* 1 also included a caustic editorial by Quattrocchi, who presented the project as "una delle pochissime voci, fuori dal Palazzo" (1). He positioned himself as the radical alternative to the contemporary scenario:

Da una parte, abbiamo il nouveau punk del Male (e del suo piccolo cugino Cannibale) interprete fedele delle malefatte di questa sciagurata repubblica. Dall'altra, Linus e i suoi vicini, a sgranare da sempre un rosario di peanuts e strip predigerite (per quanto belle). Noi nasciamo con un intento radicalmente diverso, e radicale. Vogliamo portare al pubblico i grandi fumetti “radical” che sono nati nella splendida stagione alternativa degli anni Sessanta e Settanta, in America, ma anche a Londra, Parigi, e perché no? anche in Italia. C'è una grande ricchezza, ormai quasi una tradizione, di fumetti nati dalla strada, dalla gente e fatti dalla gente: immediati godibili dirompenti. Il fumetto convenzionale, di regime, dalla Marvel Comix (una multinazionale) all'Intrepido, tanto per intenderci, rispetta un rigido codice di censura, che pubblicheremo. Dal “niente più del bacio” al “crimine non paga” sono prodotti confezionati bene, moralmente letali: eroina della mente. Contro le leggi di questa grande industria mondiale, ci sono state, e ci sono, ribellioni, ovviamente (ibid.).

Quattrocchi ultimately did not manage to publish the censorship code for comics, but incessantly stressed the dichotomy between a culture and a counterculture, championed by Crumb in “Amerika” and Guarnaccia in Italia. During its brief life, *RisoAmaro* aimed to conjugate the two countercultural heroes and proposed a compelling mix of local and imported comix.

In the aforementioned excerpt, Quattrocchi made reference to *Cannibale*, another radical magazine which saw its sunset concurrently with *RisoAmaro*. Indeed, in July 1979, Primo Carnera Editore published its last volume called *Cannibale “USA Only”*, an anthology of comics dedicated to the underground inspirations behind the works of arguably the most avant-garde generation of Italian comic authors⁵². Founded in Rome between June 1977 and July 1979 with a name paying homage to Francis Picabia's homonymous Dadaist magazine, *Cannibale* was the breeding ground of the experimentations of Stefano Tamburini and Massimo Mattiotti, with the contributions of Filippo Scozzari, Andrea Pazienza and Tanino Liberatore. Tamburini conceived *Cannibale* as the Italian equivalent of *Zap*, the comic book of the Movement, harsh, violent and experimentalist. However, despite the financial support of Stampa Alternativa and *Il Male* as well as the praise and (unwanted) promotion by Del Buono's *linus*, *Cannibale* only survived for a couple of years, likely too ahead of its times to be understood in all its creative potential, and its authors continued creating art in another magazine: *Frigidaire*.

⁵² In this respect, Comicon Edizioni published *'77 anno Cannibale. Storie e Fumetti da un Anno di Svolta* (2017), catalogue of the homonymous exhibition which took place in Naples from 8 April to 14 May 2017. The volume collects insightful essays – with a selection of works – on the generation of artists revolving around *Cannibale*, *Il Male* and *Frigidaire*. Possibly less accurate but certainly more passionate is Scozzari's memoir, *Prima Pagare poi Ricordare – Memorie dell'Arte Bimba. Fanciulli Pazzi. Tutta la Storia* (2017), which collects the author's autobiography and the story of the Italian '77 seen through his and his colleagues' eyes.

In fact, *Cannibale* “USA Only” is not the first issue featuring American underground authors. In May 1979, *Cannibale* “Bootleg” (number 8 in chronological order, number 13 according to the editors’ peculiar numeration) printed an unlicensed story by Richard Corben, called “Moschi” (originally, “Flys”, published in *Hot Stuff* 1 in 1974) and, plunging into a polemic with *linus*, published the original, untranslated version of another panel from Corben’s “The Beast of Wolfton”, in comparison with the Italian censored version published in Del Buono’s supplement, *Alter Alter*, in October 1978. Just as Quattrocchi’s *Fallo!*, the Italian underground milieu behind *Cannibale* did not conceal a contentious attitude towards Milano Libri’s comics and its censorious interventions, though it is important to stress that Andrea Pazienza collaborated with the publisher for much of his career and Del Buono himself spoke highly of *Cannibale*.

In June 1979, *Cannibale* “Science Friction” (number 8, number 1 of the new series according to the editors), the number preceding “Usa Only” included *Hawkins*, a work illustrated by Tom Veitch and written by Jack Jackson (published in *Slow Death* 4 in 1972). The translation was made by the comic book legend Stefano Tamburini. In July, *Cannibale* “USA Only” unfortunately marked the ending of Tamburini’s first editorial experience. The magazine poignantly does not include stories by Crumb or Shelton, the most famous voices of American comix, but rather focuses on the art of Greg Irons, Tom Veitch, Kim Deitch, S. Clay Wilson, Mary Kay Brown, the only woman of the group, Spain Rodriguez, Robert Williams and Justin Green. For many of them, *Cannibale* is the only platform in which their Italian translations are available for the present analysis. At all rates, *Cannibale* “USA Only” is also fundamental because it published American underground cartoonists selected, edited and translated by Italian underground cartoonists, thus establishing the most actual bridge between the two experiences.

The 1980s opened with a new interest in underground comix. In summer 1981, Tipografia La Nuova Idea printed *Le Orribili Ossessioni di Robert Crumb*, translation of Robert Crumb’s 1974 *Les Horribles Obsessions De Robert Crumb* by French publisher Actuel Novapress. The cover already points out the primary topic of the publication, Crumb’s sex comics, heralding it as “numero speciale dedicato ai palpatori”, “riservato agli adulti maggiorenni e vaccinati”, “un nuovo libro di comix che vi offre...avventure palpitanti!”. *Le Orribili Ossessioni* is the only collection of Crumb’s works from the 1980s referred to in the corpus, though the magazine *Totem Comic* (Nuova Frontiera) is reported to have published both Crumb and Shelton. Nonetheless, only the March 1988 issue including *I Favolosi Freak Brothers in Salvate*

i Criceti Giganti (1988), the sign “par Gilbert Shelton” indicating that it is a translation from French, is available. As detailed afterwards, in 1998 Totem Classic edited a seven-volume collection of Robert Crumb’s comics, though it is not possible to determine whether these are reprints of the 1980s translations or new versions.

Going back to the 1980s, in 1983, *L’Isola Trovata* published the only volume entirely dedicated to Vaughn Bodé’s comics: *Erotica* 1. This is the only publication of his art together with *linus*’s selection of his works during the 1970s. In the same years, Stampa Alternativa took a special interest in Gilbert Shelton and translated his works starting from 1981. Stampa Alternativa is a rather unique house within the Italian publishing industry. It was founded in Rome in 1970 by the radical activist Marcello Baraghini, who collaborated with Quattrocchi on *Fallo!*, with the support of Marco Pannella, founder of Partito Radicale. Stampa Alternativa followed the model of the American alternative press and voiced Italian countercultural and counter-informational forms within the radical context, orphan of the ’68 enthusiasm but still replete with artistic potential and ideas. Baraghini mainly printed fanzines and militant political pamphlets and promoted collective authorship according to the anarchistic model of “comune urbana” (Soraci, 1992: 11), “aperta ininterrottamente ventiquattro ore al giorno, in cui giovani di tutta Italia leggevano, scrivevano, dormivano” (Di Giampaolo, 1996: 14). Starting from 1973, he even distributed to radical activists the so-called “Tessera Stampa”, which granted them the status of Stampa Alternativa’s news correspondent in case of need (e.g., during demonstrations, travels, etc.). In an interview by Duccio Dogheria (2003), Baraghini thus recollected his project:

Fu conseguenza naturale del nostro vivere da capelloni-fricchettoni alla fine degli anni ’60. Alcuni di noi, me compreso, uscivano con l’autostop dall’angusto confine italiano e al ritorno portavano libri e riviste. Le riviste erano quelle di controcultura inglesi e americane. Ci affascinavano, passavamo giorni e notti a leggere, commentare e fantasticare. Poi qualcuno tradusse alcuni articoli ed inchieste, qualcun altro ne ciclostilò due, tre, quattro. Finché, a grande richiesta, decidemmo di diventare editori. Il nome venne da sé, sulla scia delle underground press americane e inglesi che tanto ci affascinavano: Stampa Alternativa, anno di nascita 1970.

Provocative by nature, Stampa Alternativa’s first publication was *Manuale per la Coltivazione della Marijuana* (1971), followed by *Contro la Famiglia – Manuale di Autodifesa dei Minorenni* (1974), which enraged Catholic institutions and right-wing parties. After a long trial, in 1976 *Contro la Famiglia* was seized and Baraghini charged with 137 prosecutions for breaching article 528 regarding pornographic publishing laws and sentenced to 18 months in jail by the Court of Cassation. Years which he never served, as he hid disguised as a shepherd in

Tuscany, until the amnesty was granted on the subsequent year. All his career was devoted to free communication – he even published William Andraghetti's *Diario di un Pedofilo* (1996), advocating that all taboos must be addressed, including incest and paedophilia – and counter-information, as exemplified by the *Festival Internazionale di Letteratura Resistente* organised in Pitigliano, in Tuscany, since 2003. Above all, he believes in the power of culture for the people and promoted the so-called Millelire publications from 1989 to 2002, a paperback series of miniature books sold for 1,000 lire.

Stampa Alternativa – called Stampa Alternativa/Nuovi Equilibri after 1983 – zestfully promoted the circulation of underground comix in Italy, first focusing on Gilbert Shelton's *Freak Brothers*, to which the publisher devoted several volumes: *Freak Brothers in...l'Erba del Vicino è sempre più Verde* (1981), *Nell'Era Atomica coi Freak Brothers* (1983), *Freak Brothers e Altre Storie* (1984), *Ciccio Freddy il Gatto & Co.* (1985), *The 7th Voyage of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* (1985), *Freak Brothers e Altre Storie* (1998, reprinted in 2002), and *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers: Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998). During the 1990s, their focus on underground comix grew thanks to the work of JD Jakini (Gian Domenico Iachini), who in 1992 and 1994 published a selection of works from *Snatch Comix* – respectively with the cover from the second and first issues of the homonymous American underground comix series (1968-1969) – as part of the Millelire series, which are now freely available online on the Strade Bianche website. In 1996 Jakini edited a third volume of *Snatch Comics* for another of Stampa Alternativa's series, *Eretica*. This issue, presenting the cover from the third issue of the original *Snatch*, includes a selection of works from all three issues of the series as well as from *Jiz* (1969), *Zam (Zap Jam)* (1974), S. Clay Wilson's *Pork* (1974) and *Felch Cumix* (1976). In 1996, Jakini edited the translation of *Zap Comix* 0-4, always for *Eretica*, presenting for the first time in Italy the most controversial numbers of the iconic magazine with a 24-page introductory essay on the underground comix experience. In 2004, Stampa Alternativa published a volume dedicated to Crumb's Mr Natural. As in the case of Savelli's edition, the introduction states that the stories presented are far from “i personaggi carini e ‘pulitini’ dei suoi primi lavori” to make room for a grotesque kaleidoscope of characters, epitomised by Mr Natural, which, they maintained, is presented in Italy for the first time: “di cui possiamo finalmente leggere le storie per la prima volta in edizione italiana” (1).

Between 1999 and 2000, Angelo Quattrocchi's new editorial project, Malatempora, returned to publish comix: an anthology of Crumb's “philosophical” comics, entitled *Le Grandi Storie* (1999), and the only Italian anthology of S. Clay Wilson's comics, *Sporche Storie*:

Politically Scorrect (2000), with a preface by Matteo Guarnaccia. To stress the need of new underground, independent publications, in the inside back cover of *Sporche Storie*, Malatempora presented itself in the following terms:

La disperazione per il presente (malatempora currunt) e la ricerca di percorsi di radicalità nella landa desolata delle idee usate ci ha spinto a questa editrice, [...] con una matrice che ci piace definire contro-culturale. Perché le nostre radici affondano nel beat-hippie-freak, e in una visione altra della cultura che molti nomi ha avuto: antagonista, underground, contro-culturale. Robin Hood, se volete, contro lo sceriffo di Sherwood, chiuso nel suo palazzotto.

While anthologies of the masters of comix were starting to crawl, Malatempora aimed to provide a glimpse of “l'altra Amerika” and to faithfully reproduce what was perceived to be the true underground essence. In fact, the 1990s and 2000s also saw the boom in the publication of Crumb's comics. In 1992 and 1993 Acme Comics/Macchia Nera published *Io e le Donne* and *Fritz il Gatto*, both prefaced by Marco Giovannini, who previously edited Savelli's *Foemina Strips*. *Io e le Donne* collected some of Crumb's works from the 1980s, a more mature phase in which the underground impulse irremediably waned, though Crumb did not lose his sharpness and salacious verve, shining through the adventures of his traditional characters (Mr Natural) as well as his autobiographic neurotic relationship with women. The latter volume, dedicated to the iconic character of Fritz, proposes the first complete anthology of all its stories, from the first sketches to its tragic death. Both translations were subsequently reprinted in a small bonelliano format by Mare Nero: a reduced version of *Fritz il Gatto*, without Crumb's juvenile works and several short stories in 2000; the whole version of *Io e le Donne* in 2002. Both Acme and Mare Nero were founded by Francesco Coniglio, who had started his career in 1978 as a publisher of comics with the fanzine *L'Urlo*. Halfway between the underground and more structured editorial experiences, though despising Fulvia Serra's *linus*, who he awarded with the ironic label of “una vita sprecata per il fumetto” (interview by Luca Boschi, 2011), Coniglio also created Blue Press and the iconic erotic magazine *Blue*. In 1994, *Blue* dedicated a whole number of *Gli Albi di Blue* series to Robert Crumb, entitled *La Diavolessa*: it is an adult only publication featuring four of Mr Natural's adventures, written from 1986 to 1991. Blue's mission was to voice the unconventional eroticism of authors outside the mass market, and Crumb fitted the profile as “la sua “filosofia” creativa gli impone di mettere sempre il dito nella piaga”, quoting the backcover of the paperback volume.

During the 1990s other Crumb's comics were published: *Mode O'day e i suoi Amici* was published by Granata Press, a short-lived (1989-96) publishing house of comics and manga set in Bologna in 1992, which featured one of Crumb's characters from the *Weirdo* years in the 1980s. In 1993 *Robert Crumb disegna il Blues* was published by Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, led by one of the Panini brothers, who used to own the famous publishing company, before Maxwell's acquisition in 1988. In both cases, the two publishers opted for the translation of some of Crumb's less controversial works, superb in quality yet devoid of the irreverence which had characterised his comix. Here a mature Crumb is presented, akin to the Italian *fumetto d'autore* rather to than the Sixties' 'far-out' excesses.

The interest in Crumb seemed to grow to the point that, by the end of 1990s, Nuovi Equilibri, the aforementioned publisher of Totem, decided to translate all his works within the series *I Classici di Totem*. The original project, simply called *Crumb Comics* and using the layout of *The Complete Crumb Comics* collection which inspired the project, aimed to produce fifteen monthly issues including the highlights of Crumb's career, but ultimately stopped after seven numbers, randomly published between November 1998 and March 2000. The translation choices by Totem are particularly relevant for the present analysis, though, as previously emphasised, it was not possible to determine whether they actually date back to the 1980s and the publication of *Totem Comic* magazine.

The 2000s marked the definitive consecration of the most prominent underground authors, Crumb and Shelton, as celebrities outside the subterranean circuits of alternative presses. In 2004, an anthology of Crumb's most famous comics, called *Fritz il Gatto, Mr Natural e altre Storie*, was published in the Italian newspaper *Repubblica's* series *I Classici del Fumetto: Serie Oro*. After four brief introductory essays by Andrea Plazzi, *Repubblica* opted for a focus on Crumb's most famous characters, as the title suggests, and for stories from different periods (from 1972 to 1987) and with different length: "The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick", stories on blues, "Mr Snoid in Once I led the Life of a Millionaire", which is arguably the harshest story in the collection. As highlighted below, no excesses of sex and violence are included in this comics.

Two other anthologies gleaning material from the underground were published in 2009 in Arnoldo Mondadori's *I Maestri del Fumetto*, namely *Robert Crumb: Fritz il Gatto* and *Gilbert Shelton: Freak Brothers*, and sold with the magazine *Panorama*. These adventures included *Idiots Abroad* and stories published between the end of 1970s and the 1980s, together with the full-coloured *Il Gatto di Fat Freddy in "Hollywood Brucia"* and *L'inverno del '59*, originally

drawn by Dave Sheridan and published in *Playboy* in 1975. The fact that Mondadori, the largest Italian publishing house, owned by Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest group, published Crumb and Shelton would have been unthinkable back in the 1960s. And yet, no more than 40 years after the countercultural boom, Crumb and Shelton appeared in qualitatively excellent volumes, prefaced by comics scholar Daniele Barbieri. And in 2011 Mondadori also translated one of the most famous works of the latest Crumb, *Il Libro della Genesi* (*The Book of Genesis*, 2009), within *Le Strade Blu* series. In *The Book of Genesis* Crumb illustrated all 50 chapters of the book, reporting word for word the text, with no parodic intent or satirical innuendos. The original 207 pages were also exhibited in the 2013 edition of Venice's Biennale, entitled *The Encyclopaedic Palace* and directed by Massimiliano Gioni, who declared in an interview with Niccolò de Mojana (2013):

...nessuno ha gridato allo scandalo o è rimasto troppo sorpreso dall'inclusione di Crumb in questa Biennale. E la mia scelta di presentare il suo lavoro e la Genesi in particolare non era particolarmente provocatoria. Crumb ormai è quasi un classico. E più che la provocazione di imporre il fumetto come forma d'arte – di cui peraltro siamo ormai tutti convinti – mi interessava l'ampiezza e la completezza di questo ciclo di disegni: mi interessava l'idea di un artista che dedica parte della sua vita a dare forma a un mondo, immergendosi completamente in quello stesso mondo.

But does Gioni's argument that Crumb is a classic mean that counterculture itself is canonised? Is it possible to frame something that stands (or aims to stand) outside culture within cultural paradigms?

The canonisation of Crumb and Shelton would appear to be evident even in the light of the most recent efforts of Comicon, a comics publishing house recently set in Naples, where it organises the homonymous comics convention on an annual basis. Comicon included the two authors in the series *I Fondamentali*, aimed at “presentare in Italia inediti e ristampe, curate filologicamente, di opere di grandi autori italiani e internazionali, da considerare come riferimento definitive per tutti i lettori”. The series includes two volumes by Shelton, *I Favolosi Pelosissimi Freak Brothers Vol. 1: Idiotti all'Estero* (2014) and *I Favolosi Pelosissimi Freak Brothers Vol. 2: Grass Roots* (2016). As for Crumb, five volumes have been published, together with an art book entitled *Art & Beauty* (2018). The collection, still ongoing, precisely aims to translate all of Crumb's production and currently comprehends: *Kafka, Dick, Bukowski visti da Me* (2014), *Fritz il Gatto e Altri Animali* (2015), *La Musica di Crumb* (2015), *Mr Natural e Altri Perdenti* (2017), *Le Donne* (2018). The latter was published after the present analysis was completed. For this reason, unfortunately, its translated texts are not investigated in the following pages, with the exception of the one-page story “And Now, A

Word to You Feminist Women”, which prefaced the volume and was available as preview. Future research will hopefully fulfil the task of developing a thorough study of this and other likely forthcoming anthologies by Comicon. However, the translation and publication of more anthologies dedicated to the underground comix phenomenon cannot but be welcomed as a positive sign of the interest and critical acclaim that this production is enjoying and shows the importance of developing research in this field.

Other recent initiatives to account are Comma 22’s publication of Crumb’s *Mr Nostalgia* (2008), Crumb’s work dedicated to blues and American traditional music, and Shelton’s *Not Quite Dead* (2009), a series created with French cartoonist Pic between 1993 and 2010, a sort of commentary of the American underground during the 1990s, as much as the Freak Brothers served as narrators of the counterculture’s years. Castelvechi Editore published *Il Cuore di Crumb* in 2012 as a part of its series *I Mappamondi*. It is an illustration book of his art, with drawings and sketches of different subjects far from the satire and provocations of the underground period. Moreover, his graphic work on Kafka (with texts by David Zane Mairowitz) was published by Feltrinelli in 1995 as *Kafka. Per Cominciare* and by Bollati Boringhieri in 2008 as *Kafka*.

4.2. Framework of Analysis

The analysis here developed only considers works from the underground period, with exceptions in the case of 1980s and 1990s Shelton’s and Crumb’s stories related to characters (e.g., Freak Brothers and Mr Natural) and situations of the countercultural context. Comics vary in quality, length, and target. Of course, according to the type of work considered, translation strategies vary considerably as well. For instance, as for length, a splash-page, a cartoon and even a strip usually include a pun which requires some inventiveness on the translator. A storyline diluted throughout several pages usually is less demanding. If the work is part of a series, the translator is asked to bear in mind previously conveyed information on the characters as well as the possible linguistic idiosyncrasies and slang they may possess, which tell the readers’ much about their personality. Underground comix differ extensively in this respect. It is fundamental to consider the readership for the translated comics, particularly their expectations as well as the reviewers’ and editors’ policies. The latter may lead translators to adapt the original material to the new receiving context, with translations of proper names and specific cultural references. However, if a text is translated while having

a more sophisticated readership in mind, the translation presupposes a covenant with readers, based on the shared knowledge of the original culture and its references. Scatasta (2002: 102) maintained that “il traduttore, in sostanza, deve conoscere l’argomento che traduce e, se possibile, deve essere in sintonia con quello che traduce, ovvero avere una certa passione per i fumetti e leggerne diversi in modo da formarsi una sorta di *background* a cui ricorrere istintivamente quando traduce”. The risk, in his view, is that “si può conoscere l’inglese in ogni sua sfumatura, ma si resta interdetti di fronte alle affermazioni di alcuni personaggi, perfettamente comprensibili al lettore della serie, ma deliranti all’orecchio del traduttore profano”.

In addition, it is important to stress that the translator is not merely a decoder/recoder, but foremost a cultural mediator (Katan, 1997). And in this light, he/she can select, highlight, silence, conceal, and transform linguistic and cultural elements in the passage from the original to the translated text. Morini (2002) maintained that “l’incommensurabilità linguistica sfuma nell’adattamento culturale, l’automatismo traduttivo si alterna e si confonde con il travisamento consapevole” (120). A translation, in his view, can be getaway from, victim or accomplice of power dynamics. It still entails the integration of an alien element within a given culture and, as such, it is subject to selection, evaluation and regulation processes. Lefevere (1992) spoke of refraction process and believed that all translations are rewritings and as such they reflect a particular ideology, no matter what their purpose is. The translator actualises a series of either conscious or unconscious conditionings, what Toury (1995) defined as “norms”, which are not only institutionalised regulations from established authorities, but also values, ideas and habits shared by community members.

Recent developments in Translation Studies have consistently stressed the utmost importance of overcoming approaches inflexibly linked to linguistic structures and bridging the linguistic analysis of translation with a reflection on extra-textual discourses (cultural, aesthetic, political, ideological), with a broader focus encompassing the particularities of the cultural systems producing and receiving texts (Baker, 2006; Baynharn and De Fina, 2005; Bermann and Wood, 2005; Harvey, 2003; Simon and St-Pierre, 2000; Spivak, 2005; Tymoczko, 1999; Venuti 1998a; 1998b). Venuti moved the debate forward when tackling the question of the invisibility of translators (1995). Reviewers and editors’ expectations push the translator towards the domestication of texts to make them fluent. What happens is that translated texts are evaluated positively if they do not look like translations. Thus, translators

are asked to conceal their presence, and, in a way, censure all elements which may result as foreign to the readers. A posture shared by prominent translation theorists such as Nida and Taber (1969) until the 1970s. In this case, rather than censure as an actual erasure of a text or parts of it, a translator acts as a censor in prompting linguistic normalisation and adaptation of aesthetic, political, ideological assets (see also Gouanvic, 2002; Inghilleri, 2005). Studies on censorship in translation (e.g., Billiani, 2007; Boase-Beier-Holman, 1998; Bonsaver-Gordon, 2005; Sturge, 2004) advocated “the need to assess the phenomenon not only from its overtly repressive angle, but also in response to the ambiguous status of a translated text; at the same time aspiring to be faithful to its original and yet prone to productive manipulations”, especially considering that “a text to be translated allows translators a greater degree of paradoxically productive freedom” (Billiani, 4) with respect to other texts.

For this reason, this Chapter focuses on the adaptations of the most controversial themes of the underground so as to investigate the mechanisms of linguistic and cultural selection occurred during the translation process. In a poignant passage of his analysis of underground comix as a reaction to the CCA, Roger Sabin (1993) pinpointed how “[t]he Code stipulated ‘no sex’, so the comix revelled in every kind of sex imaginable; the Code stipulated ‘no violence’, so the underground took bloodshed to extremes; above all, the Code stipulated ‘no social relevance’, yet here were comics that were positively revolutionary” (171). However, such themes as sex, drugs, politics and religion are inevitably in the crosshairs of charges of obscenity, blasphemy and sedition. And how does translation relate with this?

The answer possibly lies in the mythisation and repression processes mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4. Danky and Kitchen (2009: 21) argued that underground authors underwent a process of canonisation which is typical of advanced societies: Crumb can be found in art galleries as well as on the bookshelves of Barnes & Nobles. They also remarked that it is not the process in itself to blame, but rather the ways institutions approach the underground phenomenon. Canonisation by its very nature involves a selection: a selection of authors as well as of which sides of such authors to put under the spotlight. But the very act of putting something under the spotlight entails that something else has been outshined, repressed. The following chapters focus on the Italian translations of underground authors by using the multimodal and semiotic analytic tools reported in Chapter 3 so as to assess the

verbal and non-verbal transposition of the themes of sex, drugs, politics and religion into Italian.

Chapter 5. SEX, SATIRE AND SEDITION

5.1. A Carousel of *Sexy* Stereotypes

The 2009 volume *Gilbert Shelton: Freak Brothers* by Arnaldo Mondadori includes the full-colour story entitled “L’inverno del ’59”, which was written by Gilbert Shelton and drawn by his collaborator Dave Sheridan and published in *Playboy* with the title “Winter of ’59” in 1975. The story begins with a 1950s-theme party set in 1975’s New Year’s Eve, an occasion for the Freak Brothers to linger in a flashback of their life in the 1950s. This long debrayage describes how back then New Year’s Eve was characterised by fake self-restraint and a poise – unnatural for the trio of squatters – held together with elegant dresses and hair carefully combed, only to explode in a collective brawl and binge drinking after a few panels. With an embrayage, the final page returns to the narrative present with a large central panel occupying much of the page. The theme-party has turned into a 1960s’ celebration with the guest stripped naked playing and dancing, embracing each other, smoking joints, consuming LSD in the punch, painting the roof with a starry sky. A bra flies above the characters’ hairy heads, a writings on the wall (left in English) says “Impeach the postmaster generation”, while the poster “Bring back the 50s”, also present in the first panel, has been changed in “Bring back the 60s”.

But the 1960s which *Playboy* – and Mondadori – wanted to bring back are summarised by the balloons of the feisty crowd of people: “tipo, **lsd** nel **punch!**” (“like, **lsd** in the **punch!**”); “tipo, non **ingoiarti** quella **canna**, amico!” (“like, don’t **bogart** that **joint**, my friend!”) – it should be noticed here that the reference to *The Fraternity of Man*’s homonymous song, made popular by Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider* (1969), is lost in the translation; “tipo, **fiori e tramonti**” (“like, **sunshine** and **flowers!**”); “tipo, **amore e pace!** Ballare **nudi** nel **parco!**” (“like, **love** and **peace!** Dancing **nekkid** in the **park!**”); “tipo, **vibrazioni calde!**” (“like, **mellow vibes!**”); “tipo, **perline e body paint!**” (“like, **love beads** and **body paint!**”); “tipo, **più volume!**” (“like, **more volume!**”); “tipo, hai degli **spicci?**” (“like, **spare change?**”); “tipo, **luce bianca!**” (“like, **clear white light!**”); “tipo alla fine del **tunnel?**” (“like at the end of the **tunnel?**”). The story ends with a long bottom panel appealing to the readers: “Cercate meravigliosi oggetti per ricordare gli anni sessanta presto in vendita nel Vostro locale DISCOUNT HEAD SHOP” (in original “Look for these wonderful Sixties nostalgia items on sale soon at your local discount head shop” – the font of “Sixties” and

“nostalgia” in the original also recalling a popular typographic style of the 1960s goes lost in the Italian version). The objects embodying the 1960s’ spirit are: “capelli lunghi e barba” (“long hair & beard”); “medaglione della pace” (“peace medallion”); “occhiali della nonna” (“granny glasses”) “ ‘I Ching’ in miniatura (alto due centimetri)” (“miniature ‘I Ching’ (one inch tall)”); “hookah (pipa per l’hashish)” (“hookah” (hash pipe)); “l’occhio di dio” (“God’s eye”); “giacca Nehru” (“Nehru jacket”); “wood stroboscopica da 1/3 di watt” (“1/3 watt stroboscopic black ught”); “quotidiani alternativi” (“underground newspapers”).

This is the imagery associated to the 1960s. Of course, references to hashish are present but the version of the counterculture era proposed here is largely stereotyped. Shelton is making fun of such a narrow vision of counterculture, but what about Mondadori’s choice? The fact that no work from the 1960s is included in the anthology is rather peculiar. And the effect generated is that the 1960s resound in the pages like a fabled period of fun and carefreeness. The Freak Brothers were something more than that. The counterculture at large was more than that.

This last panel of the story is particularly iconic. For instance, it was used in the 1981 publication *Freak Brothers in ... l’Erba del Vicino è sempre più Verde*, edited by Stampa Alternativa. The image is decontextualized, and simply used as an illustration. The balloon “come, don’t bogart that joint, my friend!” is left partially untranslated so as to arguably preserve the reference to *The Fraternity of Man’s* song. The balloon “like, **spare change!**” becomes “come, **prima più di prima!**”, likely to make another musical reference, in this case to the Italian singer Tony Dallara’s 1958 song *Come Prima*, whereas “like, **love beads and body paint!**” is changed into “come, **baci e abbracci**”. The reasons behind this solution is of course unknown, but possibly related to the difficulty to translate such terms as “love beads” and “body paint” into Italian.

The present investigation on sexuality started *ex abrupto* with this carousel of stereotypes to exemplify how the “Fabled Sixties” are often squeezed in the triadic label “sex, drugs & rock’n’roll”. However, the research will not deal with the latter term pecifically, though comix and music are strictly related, both through explicit references in comic works, through poster for concerts signed by such cartoonists as Victor Moscoso and Bill Griffin, and through album covers: e.g., Crumb’s 1968 cover for *Cheap Thrills* by Janis Joplin’s Big Brother and the Holding Company band. More emphasis will be laid on the analysis of sex and drugs, which came to connote comix as well as the counterculture which produced them. In particular, while dope was identified as the symbol of mental freedom and mental pleasure,

for hippies sex was the expression of physical freedom and physical pleasure, an appropriation of one's body, combined with the liberation from all forms of repression and inhibition.

In the United States, the counterculture largely corresponded to the disruptive sexual revolution, whose most important achievement was the rise of public consciousness towards sexuality in all its forms (including masturbation, homosexuality, bisexuality) and the support to the legalisation of all private acts between consenting adults, thus loosening the stigma against those who did not comply with what was perceived as 'decent' and 'respectable'. Indeed, during the Sixties the opinion regarding sex overturned. Sex was fun, sex was communication, and for many underground members sex was held to be revolutionary. Indeed, considering that sex was an unspeakable matter for the self-righteous American society and decency was the bastion of the previous generation's culture, then sexuality turned into a perfect battleground for the counterculture. As Anderson (1995) explained:

Elders had taught children Puritan values, that sex was reserved for married adults. Youth must avoid premarital sex and promiscuity, and rumors abounded that masturbation caused everything from blindness to hand warts. The sledgehammer to prevent such behavior was GUILT. Hippies rebelled, calling those ideas "hang-ups" and advocating "free love." Of course, they did not invent the idea [...]. But freaks expanded the idea so sex seemed freer than at any time in memory. (260)

And the same could be argued for nudity: "[s]ince nudity outraged the older generation, that was reason enough to take off clothes" (ibid.). Given that nudity was a taboo, it could be easily turned into a tool for social dissent. Clothes were considered a hindrance to interpersonal communication, a negation of what was natural and certainly far from shameful or dirty. Thus, nude-ins became a widespread form of protest. In 1968 Louis Abolafia ran for president as nude candidate with the slogan, "What have I got to hide?", the Shiva Fellowship used disrobing as a form of resistance during demonstrations to prevent attacking and beating from the police. For such groups as the Shiva Fellowship and its successor, the Psychedelic Venus Church, and the Om United Brigade, nudity and sex also acquired sacramental value, though with contentious outcomes. Miller (1991: 30) highlighted how both underground papers and comix contained a huge number of images of naked bodies ranging "from the explicit to the depraved" and lamented how, in some cases, such fixation, though "determined to smash the prevailing society's taboos so vigorously" ultimately "had little redeeming social importance".

In the aforementioned example by Shelton, sex and nudity certainly represent the most salient feature of the panel, the catalyst of the readers' attention before the words in the balloons – which still remit to the topic. In general, sex is the theme that mostly caught the eye of the public opinion and caused much controversy; it should not surprise, therefore, that comix were identified as “sex comics” or even “apolitical pornzine” by the very members of the counterculture (Peck, 1985: 212). When Crumb and co. started experimenting with the comic medium, sex was one of the most firmly enforced taboos of the CCA:

- Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.
- Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.
- Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.
- Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.
- Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Rape scenes, as well as sexual abnormalities, are unacceptable.
- Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.
- Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.
- Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.

These prescriptions reflected a trait of American society in general: the tendency to conceal sex to a taboo subject, relegating it to the private sphere. For this reason, it was natural for most underground authors to resort to sex in humorous, satirical terms, especially in relation to such moralist and puritanical views of society. Crumb himself stressed his commitment to “smash the prevailing society's taboos” – quoting again Miller's line. When interviewed by Ron Mann in the film *Comic Book Confidential* (1989), Crumb himself declared: “You had to break every taboo first and get that over with... y'know, doing racist images, any sexual perversion that came into your mind, making fun of authority figures... and get past all that, and then really get down to business”.

However, the fact that comix came to be identified as “pornzine” possibly reflected a commercialisation of the original desecrating intents. As Skinn recollected (2004), “[w]hereas sex would sell itself. No great depth, no hidden meaning, no angry voices screaming defiance. All it took was a salacious cover and outrageous title for an instant sell-out” (60). This does not mean that desecrating intents did not exist, or that the sexuality in comix was simply a matter of graphic copulation. As Chapter 2 highlighted, comix hit a nerve as soon as they unleashed forbidden fantasies and depraved desires. In point of fact, Patrick

Rosenkranz (2009) believed that “[i]t wasn’t just the sex. It was the coupling of unnatural desires with the audacity to disrobe authority. Hell, Republicans and Mormons make millions renting porno films in their hotel chains all across America. They love sexually explicit media – just not when it’s combined with satire and sedition” (23). Sex, satire and sedition was in fact the ill-famed triad which made comix a jeopardy for traditional America. Comix were seized with obscenity charges because this was the easiest way to silence their political views. And the amount of sex-themed comix made even easier to label them as trivial sex publications. Buhle (2009) maintained that the “Sex sells” (40) motto undoubtedly prompted the distribution of low quality works exclusively aimed at satisfying the demand of uninhibited comics. Nonetheless, it would be reductive to overlook what sex in comix actually stood for.

In analysing the translation of comix into Italian, the position of underground cartoonists is also questioned. In general, sex was not thematised uniformly among underground artists. On the one hand, sex in all its facets was perceived as a subject unjustly obscured and relegated to the sphere of the ‘unspeakable’ and ‘unrepresentable’. In this respect, comix aimed to demystify the topic, to joke with it and to treat it not as a taboo but as a simple fact of life. They also satirised mainstream comics for having removed the sexual sphere from the life of their heroes. On the other hand, precisely on account of the shock sexual matters generated among American bluenoses, comix stretched the boundaries of all possible graphic representations of sex, far beyond humorous vignettes, by prompting the so-called “smut revolution” (Skinn, 60) of comic art. The reactions against the excesses of the smut revolution were harsh, not just on the part of the ‘square’ world, but also of counterculture itself, particularly among the Feminist Movement, which enrolled several female cartoonists. These criticised male chauvinism, the objectification of women and the violence against them underground comix showed through. Thus, female comic production ushered in a novel trend, one displaying sex from a previously unconsidered perspective. The outburst of feminist contestations against comix, in turn, engendered a reaction in male cartoonists, who saw their freedom of expression undermined from within the Movement.

The following pages will report on how all these thorny issues were shaped in the Italian context. A preliminary consideration which can be made is that, even by looking at most covers of Italian underground comix, sex-related contents proves the most salient, eye-catching and publicised topic. Volumes often combine graphic images and explicit titles, as in Vaughn Bodé’s anthology, whose heading *Erotica* 1 is accompanied by the full-figure of a

naked nymphet, and S. Clay Wilson's *Sporche Storie. Politically Scorrect* showing a panel of his with a bare-chested woman and a demon thinking of female genitalia. Sexual references are everywhere in Crumb, who obtained worldwide fame as a master in the representation of graphic sex. Five out of seven covers of Totem's volumes display voluptuous women and explicit reference to sex, and so do the anthologies *Io e Le Donne* in both Acme's and Mare Nero's editions, Blue's *La Diavolessa*, and Comicon's *Le Donne*. The cover of the 1981 anthology *Le Orribili Ossessioni* makes clear that the main focus of the collection is the exploration of sex in all its deviant forms, as indicated by the writing "sesso" on the top right corner of the page, inscribed on a ribbon with female breasts on the back as well as by the selection of images from Crumb's "Whiteman" and "Look out Girls!! The Grabbies are coming!!", which were coloured by the editors. Five caption boxes further stress the point by claiming "Numero special dedicato ai palpatori!", "riservato agli adulti maggiorenti e vaccinati", "Un nuovo libro di comix", "che vi offre...", "...avventure palpitanti! HA HA HA!". Moreover, all three issues of *Snatch Comics* were printed with the original cover and explicit sexual contents drawn by Crumb. Likewise, most of the other anthologies dedicated to Crumb showed his most iconic character, Fritz the Cat, in company of lovers: from Milano Libri through Acme and Mare Nero to Repubblica, all used the same image of Fritz sitting on a sofa with a paw touching his cat lover's breast under the shirt. The same image was used to promote Fritz's film. Comicon's *Fritz il Gatto e Altri Animali* shows Fritz arguing with his rabbit lover, whereas Mondadori, which entitled the anthology *Fritz il Gatto* even though it included only two of its narrations (i.e., "Fritz the Cat" and "Superstar"), is the only publisher using Fritz alone in the cover. In general, Fritz the Cat is also the comic character most frequently published abroad, Italy making no exception. The reasons for its popularity are likely to be found, on the one hand, in the lighter contents of its stories if compared to Crumb's later production. Indeed, despite their sharp and witty satire, Fritz's adventures belong to an early phase of Crumb's experimentations and cannot be considered 'a punch in the gut' like other underground comix. Thus, it is more palatable for the wide public willing to approach Crumb as a 'master of American comics', though possibly unaware of what the counterculture is and easily disconcerted by such publications as *Snatch Comics*. Moreover, the infamous Ralph Bakshi's film adaptation was distributed in Italy already in 1972 by Medusa, and the character has enjoyed wide popularity ever since. Ironically, as in the case of comics, even the history of the Italian film adaptation of *Fritz* is rather controversial. In point of fact, two versions of the film exist, distributed almost concurrently between 1972 and 1973: the

former, now almost completely irretrievable, preserved the original dialogues, whereas the latter is dubbed using Italian regional dialects in place of American slangs, adapting all the cultural references and gags to the Italian context and even changing the nationality of characters, with Afro-American crows becoming Italian immigrants. Given the interest the Cat aroused in Italy, its adventures represent a good starting point to delve into the analysis of comix beyond their cover.

5.2. Cupidity killed the Cat

Fritz's editorial history in Italy reflects the twisted love-hate relationship between the creator and his character: just as mainstream editors displayed interest in its stories and republished them, underground editors took distance from *Fritz* to focus on other types of more politically committed and more shocking works. Though "Fritz the Cat" can hardly be considered a sex-centred comic series, its adventures enclosed *in nuce* many of the sexual taboos Crumb subsequently developed in more blatant forms: incest, sex with teen-agers, promiscuity, orgies, macho attitude towards females, all represented by using the funny animals up to that point typical of children comics. According to Maurice Horn (1985: 88), "Crumb had a keen ear for the cant that pervaded much of the sexual revolution of the sixties as well as a sharp eye for its more egregious lunacies. He was very much in tune with his times but could also revert with a wink to the practices of an earlier, more repressed era, using a blackout technique that stopped just short of the depiction of the sex act".

Since his early strips, Crumb was capable of teasing the readers with sexual innuendos, as exemplified by Fritz's first official appearance on Harvey Kurtzman's *Help!* 22 in January 1965 and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 3: Starring Fritz the Cat* (1988: 5-6)⁵³: in "Fritz Comes on Strong", published by Milano Libri's *Head Comix* (33-34)⁵⁴, Acme (12-13) and Comicon's *Fritz il Gatto* (entitled "Fritz non perde tempo", 27-29), a two-page frameless sequence of panels shows Fritz progressively undressing a partner. As he removes one item after the other and jumps on top of her, the suspense increases, though finally, instead of having sex with her, he reveals his true aim through one hilarious balloon: "Now be patient, my sweet – them little fleas are hard t'get hold of". Two different versions of the second page actually exist, with minimum differences and the same verbal component. Comicon's introduction to the story suggests that Crumb decided to change the original

⁵³ Crumb's original stories were consulted in *The Complete Crumb Comics* collection (1987-2005).

⁵⁴ In case of missing page numbers, as in *Head Comix*, pages are counted from the first comic strip.

ending in order to avoid obscenity charges on his very first official publication (26). The verbal text is essential to convey the humorous effect to the sequence, as the images are suggesting something whereas words prove the readers wrong in their salacious assumptions. The three available translations differ. In particular, Milano Libri seems to preserve the double entendre of the original “hard”, which leaves the suspect that Fritz is only taking advantage of the situation, rather than actually helping the female cat with fleas: “Calma Tesoro... queste pulcette sono dure da beccare!” (34). Acme and Comicon, on the contrary, do not make verbal innuendos through their similar translations: “Abbi pazienza cara. Queste pulci sono difficili da prendere!” (13) and “Pazienza un attimo, gioia... Le pulci piccole sono difficili da prendere!” (29), respectively.

A similar ambiguous ending can be found in a story Crumb self-published in *R. Crumb Comics and Stories* in April 1964, and republished in June 1969 with Rip Off Press and in 1988 in *The Complete Crumb Comics 2: Some More Years of Bitter Struggle* (61-70). In the story Fritz visits his family home and discovers that his little sister has grown into a fine girl. While joking by the river, the two lose track of time and, as darkness falls, Fritz takes advantage of his sister. Readers only get to see their shapes blending into the dark of the night as Crumb exploits the possibility of black and white colours to stir the readers’ imaginery. Indeed, it is unclear whether the intercourse is consensual or not. The original final balloons (70) are:

I feel your nipples...
Oh...Hee... hee...come on Fritz... stop it...
Ha ha... hey get offa me, Fritz... oohh...you...
Tee hee...

Three Italian translations are available. The first is from Acme’s volume (107-116):

Ti sento i capezzoli...
Oh..hihi...dai, Fritz, smettila...
Ah ah... hey, Fritz, togliti di dosso... oohh...ma...

Ooooooh...

The second is part of Repubblica's anthology on Crumb's art (13-22):

Ti sento i capezzoli...

Oh, ih ih...dai, Fritz, smettila...

Ah! Ah!... ehi, Fritz, togliti di dosso... ooh...ma...
--

Ooooooh...

The most recent version is Comicon's (9-18):

Sento i tuoi capezzoli...

Oh...hi hi... Dai, Fritz... basta...

Ah Ah... no, dai, levati, Fritz...ooh...tu...

Hi hi...

While Fritz harasses his sister, the original text is interrupted by ellipses and interjections. The ending is left ambiguous in Acme's and Repubblica's versions (which are identical), with the interjection "ohhh" replacing the original "tee hee" cry of Fritz's sister. In English, she is seemingly nervously laughing, surprised and uncertain as to what is happening. In this respect, Comicon is more faithful to the pragmatic value of the uncontrolled utterances, choked during the intercourse, as the translation reproduces the laugh "hi hi".

A further example of Crumb's subtle use of the comic medium to create innuendos comes from another two-page story, "Fred the Teen-age Girl Pigeon", originally published in *Help!* 24 in May 1965 and reprinted in *The Complete Crumb Comics 3* (13-14). The comic strip was published in Italy by Acme Comics with the same title (14-15), by *Head Comix* as "Piccioncella quindicenne" (35-36), by Repubblica with the original title and the note "Fred, Piccioncina Adolescente" (23-24), and by Comicon as "Fred, la Picciona Adolescente" (31-

32). However, the very first version published in Italy was in *Ali Baba Speciale* in December 1968, presented with the original title. Fritz, now become a celebrity, invites to a hotel room one of his teen-age admirers who follow him around. The last three panels show first the pigeon girl sitting on the bed visibly upset, while Fritz smiles slyly as he draws the curtains of the window, and then the cat lying in bed alone. The teenager is absent and only her clothes and underwear can be seen in the panel. It may be implied he had a sexual intercourse with the underage girl (and *Head Comix* specifically states that she is only 15 years old). However, in the last panel, the only balloon of the whole story simply frames the onomatopoeia “urp!”, suggesting that the cat is belching just after eating the pigeon. In a very Proustian conflation of loving and eating experiences, Crumb arguably profanes the Eucharistic sacrament and, more in general, debases the total dedication of certain disciples to their Gods and myths. Again, Crumb plays with the readers’ hypotheses on what may have occurred. In this case, the title is the only verbal component available for a translational evaluation, but it still include the most provocative element of the story, i.e., the fact that the cat, mimicking the stereotypical attitude of the Sixties’ rock star, is taking advantage of one of his little (and naïve) supporters. From a narratological point of view, the title can be conceived as a condensation of the story and a summary of its dominant isotopy. In the present comic work, it informs about the identity and young age of the humanised pigeon. In this respect, some pragmatic inferences, or implicatures⁵⁵, can be drawn. In particular, there could be a double warning here: one targeting the naivety and enthusiasm of the uncritical mass and one targeting the eagerness for total power and possession of the leading figures of the countercultural movement. All of Fritz’s subsequent stories become more and more explicit in this representation of the cat’s rock-star attitude, displaying orgies, bondage and an increasingly nasty attitude of Fritz towards his female partners. A keen eye may notice the evolution of the author’s poetics starting from the embitterment of Fritz’s storylines, culminating with its death right at the height of its fame.

5.3. Delightful Disgust and Smugly Smut

The aforementioned evolution in underground production which is clearly evident in Crumb – as the most prolific of the underground authors – regards the whole underground comix phenomenon. A crucial turning point in their art is the challenge to the very notion

⁵⁵ Grice (1975) formulated the notion of implicature to define what is not expressed literally in an utterance and is rather suggested or hinted at by the very string of words.

of taboo started with *Zap Comix 2* and the “smut revolution”, i.e., when Crumb’s sophisticated satire met S. Clay Wilson grotesque world. Robert Williams and S. Clay Wilson are both credited for starting the “smut revolution” (Skinn, 60). In particular, Estren (1974: 116) maintained that it is after his encounter with Wilson that Crumb developed an interest in the Forbidden. Crumb (1990) himself admitted that Wilson had a great influence on his art and helped him give “the last little push [...] to let open the floodgates” (viii). As Moscoso recalled:

First Wilson comes out with the Checkered Demon, then Captain Piss Gums and his Perverted Pirates in which he is drawing my worst fantasies! Frankly, we didn’t really understand what we were doing until Wilson started publishing in *Zap*. I mean, he’s not a homosexual, yet he’s drawing all these homosexual things. He’s not a murderer, yet he was murdering all these people. All the things that he wasn’t, he was putting down in his strips. So that showed us that we were, without being aware of it, censoring ourselves. (quoted in Skinn, 63)

By destroying all conceivable content barriers, underground comix started flaunting the utter disregard for limitations Wilson had pioneered. Sexual taboos were the first to be besieged. Comic titles came out with rather blatant names: *Big Ass Comics*, *Jiz Comics*, *Snatch Comics*, *Cunt Comics*, *Bizzarre Sex Comics*, *Tales of Sex and Death*. *Zap Comix 3* was released with the cover tag line “Special 69 issue”, which, dated 1968, it obviously alluded to the sexual position, a sexual innuendo further reinforced by the fact that the volume was conceived as a flip book with two front covers, drawn by Rick Griffin and S. Clay Wilson, respectively, each followed by 24 pages ending in the middle and requiring readers to flip the comic book over to read the other story. In the Italian edition of *Zap*, *Stampa Alternativa* maintained the flip-book structure.

American smut comix permeated the Italian context mainly through fanzines and independent prints. Crumb’s anthologies by such publishing houses as Milano Libri, Mondadori and Repubblica could not be completely devoid of the author’s sexual references or nudes, though works were carefully selected among those which display minimum levels of “smut” disturbing their audience. In particular, Mondadori and Panini publications were part of a series dedicated to other cartoonists as well, and the exhibition of Crumb’s most outrageous stories could affect sales. Economic considerations were not the reason why other prints, particularly Quattrocchi’s *Fallo!*, excluded smut comix: Quattrocchi was already dealing with obscenity charges and did not want to compromise the publication of Crumb’s political message with further compromising sexual contents.

The pioneer publishers in this regard were undoubtedly Tipografia La Nuova Idea with its *Le Orribili Ossessioni di Crumb*, followed by Stampa Alternativa, Malatempora and Nuovi Equilibri's Totem, though the latter with some controversial outcomes. In November 2018, Comicon released some of the most provocative works by Crumb in the fifth number of Collezione Crumb, dedicated to the author's relationship with women. However, only the preface strip of the volume was available at the time of the present analysis and no further considerations can be made on a translational level.

While all anthologies include smut comics as part of their authors' production (this is the case of Totem and Comicon as for Crumb, and Malatempora for Wilson, but also of Stampa Alternativa's *Zap Comics*), the 1981 anthology *Le Orribili Ossessioni* stands out for the explicit choice to provide a sample of all the most controversial sex-related topics ever represented by Crumb: lesbian porn fantasies, nymphomania, molestation, paedophilia, zoophilia, rape, gang-rape, face-rape, defloration, incest, choking, beating and murdering of women, an attempt to force an abortion and explicit anti-feminism. The very fact that such a work, though in fanzine format and far from the mainstream circuits, saw the light in Italy in 1981 is quite remarkable. The French mediation is crucial in this regard. Few years later, in 1986, France would also publish the first edition of Crumb's *Bible of Filth*, edited by Futuropolis, an anthology which was never distributed in the United States owing to its explicit sexual content. The book collected some of Crumb's most controversial comics from such underground magazines as *Snatch*, *Jiz*, *Zap*, *XYZ*, *Big Ass*, and *Uneeda*, printed on refined paper with a leather binding gold-embossed to look like an actual Bible and no indication on the content in the cover. The reprint by an American editor, David Zwirner Books, occurred only in 2017. This indicates that France was much more receptive to Crumb's art and it is no coincidence that the author decided to move there. Likewise, Stampa Alternativa's three issues of *Snatch Comics* do not reflect the contents of the original prints, as they include a miscellany of works from *Snatch*, *Jiz*, *Pork*, *Zam* and *Felch Comics*.

Among the most famous works of the smut phase, *Zap 4* is certainly the most famous on account of its seizure. Skinn ironically commented that "1969 was notable for two things in comics: the Apollo moon landing creating a market for sci-fi comics, and the release of the much anticipated *Zap #4* sending notaries in the legal system into orbit along with Armstrong and Aldrin" (63-64). The impact of *Zap 4* was enormous as for both the content of comix and the fame they acquired, both as intriguingly forbidden readings and pernicious publications. According to Skinn (65), after its seizure, the number of sex-themed comix

grew exponentially, to the detriment of originality, and an industry born to counterbalance the monotony of mainstream comics found itself stuck in the repetitiveness of sex-tales.

However, under the veneer of flippant sex-comics and mimicking the style and format of Tijuana Bibles, *Zap* 4 and several other no less graphic works developed a satire which was political prior to goliardic. Overt sexual bouts served to gain new spaces of freedom of expression prior to be pleasurable. Sex was blatantly exhibited for satirical purposes, but, according to Crumb, it could not be considered pornography: “It comes at it from another angle. It’s satire on itself: it makes fun of pornography” (interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine). As the subsequent case-studies will indicate, Crumb’s and Wilson’s views of sex diverge in that the former conceives sex as the object of laugh and satire of bigot and hypocritical America as well as a form of catharsis of his own sexual neurosis, while the latter used sex as a symbol of decay, a way to ink disgust “at its finest”. Wilson art was certainly not directed at children’s enjoyment, nor at adults’. The reaction to his comix always involves a rejection, a “gut reaction” (Estren, 120). In *Funny World* 12, Mike Barrier (1970) harshly criticised Wilson as “uptight little old lady in disguise” treating sex as a repugnant act. Estren, by contrast, argued that Wilson conceived sex as a repugnant act not on account of his hidden bigotry, but of his deep nihilism. Sex is never portrayed as an amorous encounter, it is always a means to deal with the violence and degradation of world, which through his pen came to be inhabited by demons and contemptible rogues. The one-dimensional world he depicts, in which violence and sex intertwine with no apparent higher purpose, and characters are portrayed in all their squalor with no possibility to investigate their psyche or sympathise with them in any way, cannot be confused with the author’s lack of ability. On the contrary, Wilson made a clever use of the medium, exploring every possibility and exploiting every blank space the comic page could give him, playing with rhythmic paces and page layout. Even the disgusted reaction he obtained with his works is purpose-built, and set the precedent for the other authors’ comix (Crumb’s in particular), revolving around the grotesque coupling of sex and revulsion. To understand this aspect, an investigation of aesthetic disgust seems to be necessary.

Disgust has been investigated within the blooming field of emotion studies. Disgusting objects have been classified as follows (Haidt, McCauley, Rozin, 1994: 701- 13): (1) contaminated or rotten foods, (2) bodily products such as vomit, pus, mucus, menstrual and sexual fluids, flatulence and faeces; (3) violations of hygiene codes; (4) lower order animals such as maggots and slimy creatures; (5) violations of the ideal body “envelope” (e.g.,

wounds and evisceration) and exterior form (e.g., deformity and obesity, aged skin and flaws); (6) sexual acts deemed inappropriate (uncontrollable erections of penis and nipples) or perverse (e.g., rape, incest, zoophilia); (7) signs of sickness, death, and decay (odour of decay being the strongest sensory attribute connected with disgust). In addition to these elicitors of “core” disgust, a further category has been considered, i.e., (8) violations of the social-moral code, generating “moral” disgust, which regard betrayal, hypocrisy, thievery and deception. Thus, disgust seems to be connected to all evidence of the human body’s frailty and to the exposure of its mortality, animal-like needs and desire as well as to the violation of the purity of the ‘soul’, on a metaphorical level (Rozin et al., 1993, Korsmeyer, 2011: 158, Rozin, Lowery, Imada and Haidt, 1999; Nichols, 2002; Nussbaum, 2006; Horberg, Oveis, and Keltner, 2011). Core and moral disgust may overlap in case of human activities connected to violence and sex, especially when coupled (rape, molestation and mutilation). William Ian Miller (1997) explains this point thoroughly as he claims that disgust “operates in a kind of miasmatic gloom, in the realm of horror, in regions of dark unbelievability, and never too far away from the body's and, by extension, the self's interiors. Disgust deals with harms that sicken us in the telling, things for which there could be no plausible claim of right: rape, child abuse, torture, genocide, predatory murder and maiming. Sadism and masochism belong here too...” (36).

In particular, disgust is cultural. Different time periods and places may consider a particular elicitor more or less disgusting, or even pleasurable. For example, the kissing behaviour is considered a pleasurable sign of affection in Western countries, but research showed that populations from South Africa, Melanesia and South America reacted with disgust in front of this practice (Junod, 1927: 353-354, Malinowski, 1929: 330, Wagley, 1977: 158). Cultural variation on a social, moral or even aesthetic base can determine what may engender a disgust reaction (Lateiner and Spatharas, 2016). Moreover, disgust is a visceral, immediate emotion achieving a reaction of withdrawal from its elicitors with extreme promptness, even more than such negative emotions as contempt, hatred and indignation (Lateiner and Spatharas, 24). In this regard, it may be the tool to marginalise morally or socially condemnable behaviors and transgressions (1-2). In this regard, Dollimore (2001) maintained that disgust has “cultural significance” as it resides “at the boundary of a culture, and of the individual identities of those who belong to it, and its focus is typically what is excluded by those boundaries and especially what is just the other side of them” (47). Just as disgust protects the bodily boundaries from dangers of contaminations, it protects cultural

ones from all non-normative jeopardies, both on a subjective and social level. Likewise, Korsmeyer stated that disgust may be used to “patrol social boundaries and norms” (5) by reinforcing vetoes going from what to eat to sexual behaviour. Thus, disgust also entails the consolidation of identity by disavowing something else. Dollimore referred to disgust as a symptom of repression and investigated its role in relation to sexuality poignantly stating that “[s]exual disgust is also a prime motor of censorship, and in a way which reveals its relationship to social control” (46). Accordingly, the display of sex is disgusting because obscene and morally dangerous. Even the language of sex is often associated with physical (e.g., terms as ‘filthy’ and ‘dirty’) and moral disgust (e.g, ‘naughty’, ‘nasty’). W. Miller⁵⁶ explicitly referred to Freud's analysis of sexuality and pleasure to investigate how desire itself depends upon a “prohibited domain of the disgusting” (137). He named “Freudian type” the disgust reaction developed, along with shame and morality, to dam unconscious desires whose satisfaction may violate the established social order. Freud maintained that infantile sexual desire – for example, towards the mother in the case of a boy – is sublimated in order to develop into a mature individual. The individual continuously struggles to maintain an equilibrium between desire and disgust, one which reflects the very struggle between instinct and civilization. In this sense, a certain degree of allure linked to disgusting object has to be connected with the surfacing unconscious desires, primal impulses and repressed sexual instincts. As a counterpart, another form of disgust may be generated by excesses linked to conscious desires, such as overeating and surfeit.

The intricacy of rejection and desire were questioned and sometimes taken to the extreme during the counterculture years, as reported in Chapter 2. It was often stressed how disgust is a cultural emotion, changing according to the change of culture itself. Sexual liberation during the 1960s greatly impacted on the objects of disgust connected to sexuality. For instance, the Gay Liberation Movement started to change the public opinion's perception of homosexuality and prompted the disgusted reaction towards homophobic responses. Bigotry started to be perceived as disgusting as well as misogynistic and racist expressions. Of course, such hard-to-die beliefs did not go away, but during the Sexual Revolution traditional roles and perceptions of what was deemed to be deviant began to be reconsidered. In particular, as seen in Chapter 2, the Freudian reading the counterculture gave to social disgust and repression held it as a symptom of, or better a reaction to surfacing

⁵⁶See his Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of the connections between disgust and sexual attraction.

unconscious desires. This point was developed by Dollimore who argued that a “major challenge to civilization’s defensive strategies comes from the sexual perversions; they above all transgress the cultural boundaries between desire and disgust. Actually it might be more accurate to speak here not of transgressing boundaries but of shifting them: perverse desire pushes back the boundaries, claiming ground from disgust but only under a state of tension with it” (57).

Sianne Ngai (2005) maintained that desire should not be considered synonym to “subversiveness” and resistance to censorship per se. Disgust “lies outside the realms of both desire and the law” as it does not represent “a moving *toward* the object, either to possess it or to be possessed by it, to engulf it or to be engulfed by it (as in desire's familiar trajectory), but a turning *away* crucial third term – one that is itself a term *of* exclusion and thus irreducible to the current pluralism of ‘desire’ or to pluralist conceptions of the democratic state” (166). Thus, Ngai maintains that the political importance of disgust in contemporary works of art, experimental writing in the case of her research, lies in “its negative potentiality as a figure of exclusion, the radical externalization it enacts in facilitating the subject's turn away from the object”. Being provocative by nature, any poetics based on disgust prompts conflict, opposition and dissent.

Korsmeyer investigated the notion of “aesthetic disgust”⁵⁷ as an emotive reaction generated by literary and artistic outputs. She defined it “a response that, no matter how unpleasant, can rivet attention to the point where one actually may be said to savor the feeling” (3). The magnetism of disgusting works of art cannot respond to aesthetic canons of beauty. Since they relate to repulsive objects, such works trigger visceral revulsion, yet they exert a certain allure according to Korsmeyer’s “paradox of aversion”, i.e. “the mystery of why seemingly normal human beings willingly seek out experiences that deliver unpleasantness, even pain” (113). Disgust has been present in arts and literature in different forms. Literary masterpieces as Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* and Albert Camus’s *The Plague* are examples of disgust present on a narrative level, capable of arousing such emotion even in their readership. Visual images are even more powerful and immediate in soliciting disgust in the viewers. Suffice it to mention masterpieces by Hieronymus Bosch, Francis Bacon, or the avulsion engendered by the view of Francisco

⁵⁷ For an overview of theories about the alluring qualities of disgust, see in particular Chapter 5 in Korsmeyer (2011).

Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son*. As for theatre, Parisian Grand Guignol (1897-1963) became famous for the naturalistic horror shows based on grotesque image and gory special effects, which influenced the birth of splatter cinema. Yet, it is difficult to maintain that works relying on revolting images are beautiful. Korsmeyer asks herself: "Most art that trades on disgust is not beautiful, nor is it intended to be. Disgusting aspects of art certainly can be funny, tragic, pathetic, grotesque, arousing, fascinating, and tender-but beautiful?" (173). Korsmeyer further argued that "[i]t would be foolish to try to cram all of their immense aesthetic impact into the category of 'beauty'" (173). Most importantly, in addition to aesthetic considerations, artistic arousal of disgust "can be turned to political, social, religious, and aesthetic ends, and it may be mingled with horror, humor, sorrow, or satire" (4). Disgust is aroused by provocative art for different purposes. If disgust is used to marginalise people, by portraying a character as disgusting may aim to prompt distance with them. Disgusting stimuli may even elicit laughter or prompt dirty jokes (Hemenover and Schimmack, 2007, Strohminger, 2013). Satirical critique and political opposition make use of disgust and grotesque imagery. As Dollimore suggested, disgust may prompt "a confronting of culture with its constitutive repressions, a provocative violation of cultural boundaries and bodily properties" (46) and precisely in the incitement of disgust "the struggle between dissidence and dominance can become especially violent, and just because it reveals so much about ourselves and our culture" (47-48). For this reason, what is disgusting is excluded from view, censored if possible.

The entanglement between sex, disgust, sedition, and the consequent reactions, leads back to the analysis of comix in their "smut revolution" phase. To describe Wilson's works, Guarnaccia (2000, 5-6) recalled Sam Peckinpah's films – famous for their crude realism – interpreted by Tod Browning's actors (i.e., to his "freaks" in the 1932 homonymous film), in the ideal setting of a saloon built on a toxic dump. His comic Hell is associated to Grunenwald's paintings, his art to Bosch, Beardsley, Ensor, Bacon and Pyle, and his creativity to Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Jarry's *Pere Ubu*. His pages are inhabited by a panoply of grotesque characters: pervert pirates (Capitan Pissgums), violent lesbian bikers (Ruby the Dyke), and lewd demons (Checkered Demon) thrown into decrepit ships, dirty slums, revolting castles. Yet, they all represent an excuse to give graphic substance to the sickness and corruption of a world in decomposition as well as of the vulgarity and the ruthless violence of the humans inhabiting it.

As indicated in the introduction, with the exception of Savelli's irretrievable *Paranoia*, Wilson's art arrived in Italy only through the anthologies by Stampa Alternativa (*Snatch Comics* in 1992, 1994 and 1996, *Zap Comix* in 1998) and Malatempora (*Sporche Storie* in 2000, the only one entirely dedicated to Wilson). Among the works included in these collections, *Star-Eyed Stella*, originally published in the infamous *Zap* 4, is a particularly comprehensive example of Wilson's poetics. The story was translated in both Stampa Alternativa's *Zap* and in Malatempora's *Sporche Storie*. Both publications are characterised by explicit provocative intents which espouse Wilson's outraging narration. As detailed below, both versions feature some imperfections on a translational level. Nonetheless, both manage to reproduce the original atmosphere, in the characterisation of setting and characters. As for the dominant isotopy of disgust, which guide the process of reading and interpretation of the story, they both succeeded in transferring the original *classemes* in the Italian versions, though with some variations due to different hermeneutic frames and a general negligence and lack of competence in translation practice.

On a visual level, figures recalling disgust fill up all the pages and are rendered with no sign of censorship in the Italian editions. Wilson left no room for free space within the panels. And in such a claustrophobic amalgam, he included some of the most famous characters born from his pen, engrossed in their deviant activities, with the excuse of discovering the location of the "sacred Yamoorian relics" (translated as "sacre reliquie yamoriane" and "sacri resti di Yamonri", respectively)⁵⁸. The author does not bother to explain what the relics are, nor do the characters actually find them. The Object of the narration in this case merely serves as an excuse for the Fat Demon to torture and eventually rape Star-Eyed Stella as well as for the pirates to pick a fight with the demons. The setting is a crumbling castle, his dungeons and the surrounding moat, full of rotten fish, flies and disgusting amphibian-like creatures. In Wilson's view the moral disgust of the characters couples not only with their surroundings, but also with their disgusting physical appearance. Indeed, the graphic depiction of these characters is merciless, with the exception of Stella, whose beautiful naked body contrasts the disgusting creatures surrounding her: in fact, the demons are fat, full of warts and lumps, constantly picking their noses and drooling, drinking glasses of sperm and bones; the guards are monstrous, deformed creatures, with two penises,

⁵⁸ From now on, the first entry will refer to Stampa Alternativa's version, the second to Malatempora's according to the chronological order of publication.

cross-eyed, furry claws, and slimy faces; the pirates are ugly and dirty, either toothless, one-eyed, hooked. Disgust is coupled with explicit sexual references: the guard with two penises is seen ejaculating in front of one of the pirates, the demons are constantly sexually harassing Stella chained with her leg wide open and with genitals and breasts showed in most panels, including in the graphic depiction of her rape. During the final battle a foot and a penis just cut-off fly above the characters' heads, the cannon of the castle has a phallic shape, and the smoke generated by it resembles a vagina, even the last panels show a pirate's fellatio to a death monster and the bare-chested queen of pirates with the legs spread of another female pirate on the background.

Such a graphic jumble of repulsive images is coupled with further repelling descriptions on a verbal level. As for the elements of the setting (the castle and the moat), figures evoked by captions and balloons all recall degeneration and stench: e.g., “smells foul in here, they never open the windows”, which is translated as “che puzza qua dentro, mai che aprono le finestre” and “che puzza schifa! Non aprono mai le finestre, qui”; “this whole place smells like shit!”, which is translated as “qua tutto quanto puzza di merda!” and “sto posto ha un forte profumo de merda!”. While *Stampa Alternativa*'s translation is rather stiff and even makes an erroneous – or maybe deliberately ungrammatical to further debase the character – use of the indicative instead of the subjunctive case in “mai che aprono”, Malatempora's version seems forced: such phrases as “puzza schifa” and the oxymoron “profumo de merda” aim to emphasise the revulsive dimension of the story and make use of slang and vernacular language which give a ‘wacky’ connotation to the narration. The monsters do not talk and only communicate through onomatopoeias such as “shit shit shit” or “ik blit shit stick”, which are left untranslated in *Stampa Alternativa*'s version and translated as “merd merd merd” and “ik blit miedr flit” in Malatempora's anthology. All characters are referred to with scatological and sexual slurs, metaphors involving insects and a particular emphasis on bodily products and deformities. Stella is constantly sexually objectified and called with such slurs as “silly tart” (“stupida troia”/ “stupida puttana”); “lil' slut” (“sorchina”/ “brutta troia”); “that bitch is hard” (“ostinata la troia”/ “quella puttana è una dura”). Sexual slurs are rendered literally, with an occasional use of such regionalisms as “sorca” and the variant “sorchina” (by both translators) and “topa” (by Malatempora). Interestingly, in several cases, the translator rendered slurs belonging domain of disgust with different figures, yet all corresponding to the same semantic field: e.g, the original “little rat” is rendered as “ratto” and “fognatura”; “bug-eyed” guards are called “occhi a mosca” and

“verme”; “disgusting wretch” is rendered as “disgustoso verme” and “mignottone orendo”. The latter solution underlies another tendency in Malatempora and is consistent with the abovementioned exaggerations and ‘wacky’ rendering of the story, even in passages in which Wilson’s text is referring to disgust with no comic subtext. A hypothesis which may be formulated is that Malatempora’s translator was influenced by the hermeneutic frame of splatstick horror films, blending the humour of slapstick comedy with the gore of splatter. Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead II* (1987) and *Army of Darkness* (1992), and Peter Jackson’s *Bad Taste* (1987) and *Braindead* (1992) are considered the cult movies of this genre, whose success prompted the production of countless comedy horrors with varying degrees of quality. Malatempora’s translator likely overlapped Wilson’s comics, which certainly anticipated splatstick films’ desecration of the sanity of body, with the language of these films, often rendered in Italian with comical overtones. Several translation choices seem to confirm this hypothesis by displaying an exaggerated emphasis on nonsense, homeoteleuton, a pronounced use of disgusting lexicon and an almost clownish language. As for nonsense, the phrase “ass against da’ wall” is rendered literally by Stampa Alternativa with “culo contro il muro” and with a nonsensical “ti inculo col muro” by Malatempora. The use of simple homeoteleuton ties words together in an echo relationship, rendering prose a sort of nursery-rhyme. This device is employed in several passages: “you sticky fingered obese ogre” becomes “lurido schifoso orco obeso” in Stampa Alternativa and “vecchio grasso orcone dita da porcone” in Malatempora with an homoteleuton between “orcone” and “porcone”; in the sentence “it was sticky and it stunk” the original alliteration is lost in Stampa Alternativa’s plain translation “era bavosa e puzzava”, while Malatempora employs another homeoteleuton: “che tipo melmoso e schifoso”; in another excerpt, “i’m gonna sniff her cute little asshole” is rendered as “io gli annuso il suo buchino del culo” and “voglio annusa’ il suo buchino di culino” in Malatempora, with the homeoteleuton reiterated in “buchino” and “culino”; likewise, “the fat demon whops into Star-Eyed Stella’s sweet sticky little kooze” is rendered as “il grasso demone sbatte la dolce fichina bagnata di Stella” and “il demone grasso infila nella fichetta dolce & stretta di Stella dagli Occhi a Stella il suo grasso cazzo”; in the case of the original homeoteleuton “hotcha! Gotcha! Your starry eyes rolled outta sight”, Stampa Alternativa renders the text as “toh! Piglia! Ti si sono girati quegli occhi a stella” with no rhetoric device, while Malatempora opts for “venuta sborata goduta c’hai gli okki, ve’ Stella, tutti sbalati...”, with a smut version of the “veni vidi vici” Latin phrase, the vernacular use of “ve” and the replacement of “(c)ch” with “k”. The tendency towards a ‘wacky’,

childish language is reflected in the exaggeration of disgusting references: “stick it – ya odd wad” is rendered as “ficcatelo nel culo” by *Stampa Alternativa* and “vaffanculo catarro vecchio!” by *Malatempora*; the utterance “his mouth is like tar...get the fuck outta here!” the translations are “hei bocca di catrame...va fuori dal cazzo!” and “che bocca di cacca! Tirati via, skifo!”, respectively, with the latter resembling a childish speech with the words “cacca” and “skifo”. The use of “k” instead of “ch”, in such words as “skifo” and “okki”, is part of the translator’s idiolect. This is likely related either to a youth slang popular in Italy after the spreading of telecommunication (especially SMS and the Web) or to a (implicit) reference to the deviant orthography often adopted during the 1970s with a contestatory purpose (e.g., Francesco Cossiga was called “Kossiga”, usually written with the nazi SS font).

After a brawl between the demons, one of the pirate resulting in the final rape of Stella. The pirate’s last words are symptomatic of the degradation in which the characters stand, but above all of the different attitude towards the translation of the original text. The original text is: “Stella got defiled finally and this place smells bad and those guards are all around, some are gone and some are here and some are beginnin’ to rot and Luke’s gone and them relics are out ther and and uk uk urk”. The peculiarity of the utterance is the use of the verb “defile” to indicate the rape of Stella. The term refers to a deflowering, a moral and material contamination, and the violation of purity and sanctity. As seen above, Star-Eyed Stella is the only character spared of any repulsive feature. Still, even though she is not a disgusting figure per se, she has to passively cope with others’ filth. In point of fact, among Wilson’s recurring characters, Stella is always relegated to a passive role as sexual object of pirates and demons. Such filth ultimately corrupts her, the rape marking the supremacy of mayhem and immorality and the consequent derangement of the pirate’s mind. Both translations fail in rendering this crucial verb. *Stampa Alternativa*’s version is: “Alla fine Stella è stata sconfitta, ‘sto posto puzza di brutto e ‘ste guardie sono ovunque: alcune andate, altre stanno qua e iniziano a marcire. Luke è fuggito e quelle relique stanno là fuori e uk suk”. The verb is translated as “è stata sconfitta”, completely omitting the reference to the rape and privileges the classeme of «fight» to the detriment of the original classemes of «sanctity», «violation» and «pollution». *Malatempora*’s version is: “Stella è finita che l’ha stuprata e questo posto puzza e le guardie dappertutto e ce n’è di morte e ce n’è di vive e ce n’è che puzzano e i resti uk uk”). The translation focuses on the classeme of «violation» but the sexual references of “è finita che l’ha stuprata” does not render the original poignancy of the verb and is wrong from the point of view of register, downgrading the formality of “to

define” with a rather colloquial construction of the sentence. However, in the second part of the utterance, Malatempora preserves the original stylistic scheme based on a polysyndeton, which slows down the rhythm of narration until the pirate is no longer able to speak. Stampa Alternativa overlooks this rhetoric device and, overall, its translation of the story is rather rigid in the rendering of the source text’s specificities. In fact, both translations show some imperfections certainly related to the translators’ inexperience, but also to the prominent role conferred to images: indeed, it is likely that words were deemed secondary with respect to the powerful visual construction of the story, with extremely graphic images and a mesmerising use of space. Malatempora’s anthology is conceived as a catalogue of Wilson’s art, even showing single illustrations and untranslated panels isolated from the rest of the stories. In translation, verbal choices are often sloppy and, in this case, dictated by the influence of splatstick films as well as to a keen desire to shock readers and exaggerate the original ‘over-the-top’ style. The cinematographic success of these films, generally imported in Italy from abroad, may have conditioned the translation of comix with akin contents on a unconscious level. Wilson’s poetics shares many features in common with 1960s splatter films, particularly with Herschell Gordon Lewis’s gore masterpieces revolving around the mix of sex and gruesome storylines, such as the ‘blood trilogy’ of *Blood Feast* (1963), *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964) and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965). But Wilson’s comics can also be considered comic forerunners of splatstick cinema and torture porns, the latter being a genre bloomed during the 2000s (after Malatempora’s translation), with such films as Takashi Miike’s *Ichi the Killer* (2001) and Eli Roth’s *Hostel* (2005) sharing many topoi with the underground cartoonist. Therefore, when reading the original text, the translator may have been influenced – on an unconscious level – by other media and other genres sharing some salient features with the source texts. This is just a hypothesis and many different explanations may concur in accounting for translation choices which somehow modified Wilson’s original comix in their peculiar use of aesthetic disgust as a means to express a nihilist view of the world.

Despite such a noticeable display of sexual violence, his art was received with less criticism than Crumb’s, at least within the American underground milieu. The reason possibly accounting for this indulgence is the fact Wilson reserves an equal treatment for men and women. Moreover, not only men raping and murdering women are never magnified in their actions, but they are also depicted in all their repulsiveness. Disgust serves as an instrument for Wilson’s cynical, unfiltered satire. And, unlike Crumb, he never ventured

outside the rather narrow countercultural circles and underground niches. It is no coincidence that *Cannibale* “USA Only” included Wilson among the authors deemed as the most representative American underground cartoonists by translating two of his most famous works, both of which are one-page stories originally published in the groundbreaking *Zap* 2⁵⁹, i.e., “Head First” (translated as “La Testa, soprattutto”) and an untitled work in which a naked man throws his own excrements to a group of grotesque characters looking at him – in particular, a woman is menacing to “whap his ass with this hair brutch” (translated as “penso che gli romperò il culo con sta spazzola!”)⁶⁰. Both stories are not histories of sex per se, though the genitals of the male protagonists are oversized to put them in a salient position within the page and, in “Head First” in particular, the abnormal dimension of the pirate’s penis is the topic of the whole story. Free of any conditioning, Wilson could condense in a single page blatant nudity, emasculation, cannibalism or a defecation in public and, as Skinn maintained, he always gave “the scarey impression he’s still holding back” (67). At that time, i.e., in 1968, comics had never reached such a level of repulsiveness before. And this trailblazing use of aesthetic disgust may account for Crumb’s choice to invite Wilson into the *Zap* collective as well as for *Cannibale*’s cartoonists’ choice to include him among the pillars of the underground. Wilson’s art may seem shallow, almost jejune in its will to disgust at any cost. Yet, as considered in Chapter 2 on subcultures, studies on disgust indicate that it is often used precisely as a dignity-destroying tool (Bloom, 2004) and, in particular, young males exploit such aspect to challenge and provoke adult norms and thus affirm their status within their peer group (Fine, 1988). The use of disgusting elements in comix is consistent with this idea, especially when the underground experience is considered in his ‘youthful’ and ‘adolescent’ tendency to tease every form of authority.

Wilson was not alone in this. For instance, the 1996 edition of *Snatch Comics* by Stampa Alternativa also included “Shit Hell Fuck Funnies” by *Zap*’s Robert Williams, originally from *Snatch Comics* 3 (August 1969). In three pages, Williams describes the sexual intercourse between Ferdinand Feces, a “corned corn studded lil’ friend” (“il nostro amico stronzo al mais”), who was “born from the bowels of a narc” (“nato dalle budella di uno

⁵⁹ The two stories are translated in Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap Comix* collection. The title proposed for “Head First” is “Prima la testa”. Surprisingly, in Malatempora’s volume dedicated to Wilson, Quattrocchi chose not to include them, despite the fame they enjoyed within the underground comix context. It is possible that precisely on account of their resonance, Quattrocchi decided to give space to less famous works.

⁶⁰ Stampa Alternativa’s translation of the phrase is slightly milder: “mi sa che gli ripasso il culo con ‘sta spazzola...”.

sbirro”) and Veronica Vaginal Mucus, “conceived from what rolled down a whore’s leg, after six matinee’s of her being fucked by a mule in front of a crowd in Juarez Mexico” (“concepita dalla sbroda colata lungo le cosce di una troia, dopo sei show in cui la montava un mulo davanti una folla a Juarez in Messico”). The story ends with the caption “taboo busters approved” indicating that the story is willingly combining repulsive and obscene images to tease censors and their seals of approval by winking at his “taboo-buster” comrades.

Thus, disgust, coupled with sexuality, may be defined as a “taboo-buster” for the underground comix. In this light, by leafing through the pages of *Snatch*, *Jiz*, *Pork* or *Felch Cumics*, it becomes apparent how the sex-book is not merely replete with casual sex, but rather of casual sex explored in its darkest facets. Graphic nudity and explicit intercourses are not enough in this sense. Such borderline, taboo topics as incest, rape, SMBD practices are the true protagonists of the collection. Stampa Alternativa did not hold back in the selection of the works to publish. A good example is the inclusion of works by Rory Hayes in the 1994 issue of *Snatch*. In his brief life, interrupted by a drug overdose in 1983, Hayes produced some of the most brutal comics by using an expressionist and primitive style. Loved more by his colleagues (with whom he collaborated in several miscellanies) than by the public, Hayes was known as a weird, maybe psychopath kid, whose works usually included horror stories with gruesome, not-so-adorable teddy bears and unrealistic subjects (e.g., *Bogeyman Comix*, 1969-1970). His most controversial work is arguably *Cunt Comics 1* (Apex Novelties, 1969), a mix of orgies, castrations (explicitly paying tribute to Wilson’s *Head First*), crude, disturbing sex scenes. According to his editor Don Donahue, it was “really gross, except that it’s a beautiful work of art, a great little artefact” (quoted in Rosenkranz, 2008: 130). The only Italian translations of his works are those included in Stampa Alternativa’s *Snatch*. In particular, in “Snot Nose Harold” (“Harold Cola Naso”) by Rory Hayes (signed as R. Hate), originally from *Snatch Comics 3*, two characters drawn in a primitive style, Harold and his girlfriend Georgia, are seen while enjoying their sexual perversions: “I just love to slick my tool down with nice gooey snot before shoving it into my girlfriend’s slit” (“adoro oliare il mio arnese con del buon moccio appiccicoso prima di ficcarlo nel buco della mia ragazza”); “I love to eat my own shit!” (“Io amo mangiare la mia merda!”), to which Harold responds “You are what you eat, bitch!” (“Sei ciò che mangi, troia!”). Harold has a nasal ejaculation as Georgia’s excrements submerge him and they subsequently play with it, with a caption concluding that ultimately “They’re happy” (“Loro sono felici”). The story

exemplifies the author's gruesome taste, which cannot but remember Wilson's scenes of defecation and sexual depravation.

A further parallelism can be drawn by considering the multiple one-page orgy-themed works included in the Italian three-issue anthology (readapting the format to two-page scenes). For example, going backwards, the 1996 number includes: Hayes's untitled work (promoting the publication of *Cunt*) orgy of monster-like people, in which genitals are on fire ("My cunt is on fire" translated as "Ho la fica in fiamme"), bleeding, breasts are beaten off, and women urinate on men's head ("Piss on you fucker!" translated as "Ti piscio addosso"); Wilson's "Horny Dwarves Frolic with the Trollops from Town" ("Nani arrapati se la spassano con le troie della città") from *Snatch Comics* 3 and "Doctors From the Infamous Felch-Porkfield Clinic Cavort With Nymphomaniac Amazons" ("Dottori della famigerata clinica 'Porkidea' folleggiano con amazzoni ninfomani") from *Felch Cumics*, signed respectively as Howard Arnherst and Crank Collingwood. The 1994 number includes Crumb's "Grand opening of the Great Intercontinental Fuck-in and Orgy-Riot" (title left untranslated), originally from *Snatch* 1, in which a pile of women and men (on the bottom right corner Mr Natural is included) having sex, with a penis flying in the air and scenes of sex mixed a more deviant drawing of feet swallowed and breast beaten, a scene which Hayes clearly payed homage to in his aforementioned orgy representation. The caption "Don't be shy! Anyone can join! Bring the whole family!" is translated as "Non siate timidi! Chiunque può unirsi! Portate l'intera famiglia!". The topos of incest which is referred to in this work is further developed in "The family that LAYS toghether STAYS together" (left in English, with a footnote translating the text as "La famiglia che scopa insieme resta insieme!"), in which Crumb represents the prototypical American family, while having a sexual intercourse between grandmother and the grandfather, the mother and the father, the son and the daughter, the dog and the baby girl. Even the painting portrays two kids having sex. The story was translated in 1981 in the collection *Le Orribili Ossessioni* and in the 1992 *Stampa Alternativa* issue, although it was created after the "Grand Opening" work, as part of *Snatch* 2. It anticipated the incest-related scandal of "Joe Blow", which would be published a few months later in *Zap* 4, always published by *Stampa Alternativa* with no (fear of) censure.

The commitment of *Stampa Alternativa* in rendering the original spirit of the American underground is reflected by the translation of the first pages of the original *Snatch* issues, which includes some of the underground phenomenon's core 'paradigms', if such a term can be applied to it. In particular, the 1992 issue includes the original first page of *Snatch*

2, which emphasises the cathartic role of comix as an expression of repressed impulses, a theory prompted by the counterculture's Freudian reading: "The pleasure is ours, folks! We really like drawing dirty cartoons! It helps us get rid of pent-up anxieties and repressions and all that kind of stuff..." translated as "Il piacere è nostro, gente! Noi amiamo davvero disegnare fumetti sporchi! Ci aiuta a sbarazzarci di desideri nascosti, repressioni e roba del genere...". Secondly, the 1994 anthology includes the back cover of *Snatch* 3 in which a panel shows a man laughing while reading *Snatch* and ignoring the breast-naked woman seating beside him. The caption above them recites "So 'hot' it runs a close second to the real thing!" which is translated with a bolder statement: "Così 'caldo' da far svanire la realtà!". *Snatch* is no second to reality, it makes it disappear. Below the drawing, the authors promise "clear illustrations", "terrific humor" and "plenty of fun", translated as "chiare illustrazioni", "formidabile humor" and "assai divertente". These are salient ingredient of comix. In a reverse order, the 1996 edition of *Snatch* published the original first page of *Snatch* 1, which is willingly provocative as the presentation clearly states that "[t]he editors sincerely hope that our readers will get all hornied up looking at this book and proceed to the nearest piece o'real-live poontang!" which is rendered as "Gli editori si augurano sinceramente che con questo libricino ai nostri lettori gli tiri parecchio e che si fiondino prontamente sulla prima fica che passa." Below them a cartoon shows a man following a woman, both naked and aroused, with caption claiming "Now there's a cat who's hip to the conversation!!!!!" and "...the chickie-doo isn't any fink either!!!!!". The Italian translation is "Questo sì che ha capito come funziona!!!!!" and "...e la pollastra non è da meno!!!!!". This passage once again jokes about the possible clash between reality and fiction, something the underground authors would often satirise about on account of the multiple charges of promoting real-life misbehaviour through comics. The auspice of real-life sexual misconduct obviously was part of the author's teasing aimed at their detractors, as *Snatch* was not actually meant to trigger any sexual activity. In the commentary to the collection *Snatch Comix Treasury* (2011), whose proceeds were given to the S. Clay Wilson Trust Fund, helping Wilson with his medical expenses, Rosenkranz stated that "[d]espite all the hubbub and hullabaloo triggered by *Snatch Comics*, the books ultimately served a social purpose. They loosened restrictions on artistic expression, and inspired other artists to examine their own internal censors. Today just about anything goes in books, magazines, films and video games. Whether that's a good thing or not is up to each individual to decide".

Robert Crumb's comics arguably represent the most prominent example of the struggle with such inner censorship. The cartoonist is indeed the major contributor to *Snatch* (all the aforementioned presentations are his creation, just as all the covers of the series) and the author of some of its best artworks. More than other cartoonists, Crumb capitalised Wilson's lesson and combined aesthetic disgust, sexual redundancy and his trademark bitter humour. Among the high-quality works included in the series and published by Stampa Alternativa, the 1994 Italian issue translated "Don't Touch Me" (10-13, title left in English), originally from *Snatch 3* and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 6: On the Crest of the Wave* (1991, 51-52). The four-page comic story is a specimen of how Crumb (here employing the nickname R. Crunk) can manipulate the medium's features for his narrative purposes, particularly through the management of rhythm and tension as well as by exploiting comics' interplay of images and words to emphasise aesthetic disgust. Half of the first page is occupied by the close up of a woman screaming in fright as she looks directly at the readers and her hands make a gesture of retraction towards them. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal model, when represented participants' gaze direction points directly at the viewers' eyes a Demand situation is created and a vector establishes an imaginary contact between the two parts, thus creating a visual form of direct engagement. In semiotic terms, when characters look towards the implicit viewer, and thus towards the actual one, like with the eye contact of camera look in films, an embrayage of the textual "I-you" is engendered.

The gesture of retraction, on the contrary, seems to push readers away, to distance them from the subject as she is frightened by what she is seeing. This disjunctive relationship is combined with another opposition: the caption above the title explains that the "shapely body" ("corpo formoso") of the "luscious brunette" ("invitante Brunette") is pressed against the wall, cornered by a "huge brute" ("enorme bruto") out of the panel, who is approaching her – thus putting readers in the position of the brute⁶¹. In the original the isotopy of sensuality is disjunctive with respect to the isotopy of disgust. The mistaken translation of brunette with a proper name ("Brunette") and "luscious" with "invitante", which in Italian means "tempting" as well as "beckoning", implies that the girl is not inviting the brute to take advantage of her and her sensuality is perceived as a provocation for the male gaze.

⁶¹ This is a classic device used in pictorial art. Velázquez's *Las Meninas* represents a particularly emblematic example in this respect, especially in the wake of Michel Foucault's analysis of the painting in the opening chapter of *The Order of Things* (1966).

Conversely, her eyes and expression, her position on a proxemic level, the reciter's (appointed to *verbally recount* the story) caption including such terms as "cringe", "fearfully", "terror", "cried out" and the title on a verbal level, all partake in the isotopy of fear dominating the scene. The corresponding Italian translations are "si rannicchiava", "dalla paura", "terrorizzata" and "gridando". Moreover, the title, written with a huge font, mimicking her loud but trembling voice with flickering capital letters, actually represents what she is screaming. The lettering partakes in the isotopy of scream, with stands in a derivative relationship with the isotopy of fear, also sharing some figures. The translator of the Italian version correctly decided to leave the original title because any modification of the verbal text would entail an intervention on a visual level as well. This seemingly obvious choice should not be taken for granted, since in several cases paratextual elements and titles were modified for the sake of translation, disregarding the graphic substance of words.

On a thymic level, the disphoric emotion of fear is durative from an aspectual point of view and projected towards the future from a temporal point of view. She is afraid of what is going to happen. Tension increases as well, as readers know that the brute "advanced on her", "le si avvicinava". But the frame is freezing the moment, suspending the action and making it impossible to know what will occur. By turning the page, readers find a sequence organised according to the waffle-iron grid, which sets a slow rhythmic pace: panel after panel, an increasing close-up shows the brute's nauseating facial features, from the half-bust to his blackheads. The scene is another freeze-frame, in which, by mimicking a camera effect, the mostrator (appointed to *visually show* the story) progressively lets the reader get closer and closer to the character. The point of view is switched as readers now see the brute, and even in this case moral disgust overlaps with the physical disgust of the figure. The brute does not talk. The only verbal texts are the reciter's captions. The perspective adopted is that of the girl, as the readers can see what she sees and the caption describes what she hears, smells, and feels: "she could hear" ("lei poteva sentire"), "she could smell" ("lei potè odorare"), "she could feel" ("sentiva"), "now she could hear" ("ora lei sentiva") as he approached her. In the description of the scene, the English text reiterates the structure with a movement verb ("approached her", "got closer", "began closing in"), followed by the modal verb "could" and a verb of perception to construct the progressive form of the verb in the past. The English tense corresponds to the Italian 'imperfetto'.

The repetition of a pattern has a great impact on the perceptive level, since the target audience tends to internalise and turn it into an imaginative movement. Chapter 3 referred

to saturation as a device to increase narrative tension and extend the anticipation in comics by repeating the same situation instead of proceeding with actions. In this case, saturation is reached by combining visual and verbal devices, lingering in the zoom on the brute's face and reiterating verbal structures. In Italian, as for the verbal version, the repetition of "sentire" in three out of four occasions (though with different forms) partially fulfils this function, but the saturation effect is weakened. Yet, the translation is effective with the reciter's thorough description of the brute in all his repulsion, with a series of figures such as "trickle of saliva" ("filo di saliva") as he foretastes "the morsel of sexuality he was about to enjoy" ("boccone di sesso che stava per gustare"); "heavy breathing" ("pesante respirare"), "beads of sweat of his forehead" ("le gocce di sudore sulla sua fronte"), "slow guttural sound" ("greve suono gutturale", "deep within the beastly churl's throat" ("profondo della sua rozza gola schifosa"), "maniacal giggle" ("risatina maniacale"), "smell his disgusting hairy body" ("odorare il suo disgustoso corpo peloso"), "filthy unwashed clothing" ("ripugnanti vestiti sudici"), "she could feel his hot stinking breath on her face" ("sentiva il suo caldo e puzzolente alito sulla faccia"), "blood-shot eyeballs bulged out of his desire-crazed head" ("le palle dei suoi occhi striate di sangue schizzavano fuori da quella testa pazza di desiderio"), "heart pounding with lust" ("battito voglioso del suo cuore"), "see every pore and stubble on his greasy sweating face" ("vedeva ogni poro e pelo su quell'unta faccia sudata"). This long list goes hand in hand with the zoom sequence, interrupted by the change of page. On a translation level, most utterances are rendered word-for-word and many occurrences suggest that the translator is non-professional and unexperienced: e.g., the abundance of possessive adjectives which are generally unnecessary in Italian ("sulla sua fronte", "della sua rozza gola"), such constructions as "pesante respirare", "ripugnanti vestiti", "caldo e puzzolente alito" in which the adjective precedes the noun just as in an English clause. On the one hand, the translator is hypnotised by the original text and unable to detach from the literal rendering of the English syntax, word order and deictic value of adjectives, which do not correspond to the Italian one, as in the present example. Inexperience often leads translators to a mechanical reproduction of the original text without considering the intrinsic differences between two languages and the need to adapt the source material to the structures and norms of the target language. On the other hand, the translator's focus seems to be on the semantic rendering of the figures of disgust describing the image rather than on formal adequacy. In front of the challenge posed by the foreign language, he/she chose to 'play it

safe' by sticking with pictorial evidence and powerful images of loathing to the detriment of fluency and accuracy.

The third page accelerates the rhythm, each panel showing an action of the rape sequence as he first strips her naked, fondles her breast, covers her mouth, order her to kiss him, jumps on the top of her while drooling, and knocks her on the ground. No caption is added, the only verbal items being onomatopoeias and the order "Kiss me!" which the Italian version leaves in English. This could be either a further sign of lack of attention (given the small size of the balloon or even by mistaking it for another onomatopoeia) or a deliberate choice to use an Anglicism (possibly on account of the widespread use of the term "kiss" in songs and films).

The fourth and final page slows the rhythm down again with the saturation effect, as the first four panels represent the sex scene with little change between one and the other, the viewers simply witnessing the intercourse from afar. The last two panels serve to generate a humorous effect as the resolution of the story is different from what was expected. The girl does not complain for the rape per se but for not being able to climax, as he faints straight after the beginning of the intercourse. Her balloon recites: "You lousy rotten selfish son-of-a-bitch!", and adds "I never get to come!!" ("Lurido egoista figlio di puttana!"; "Io mai che vengo!!"). Thus, the alternation of tension and action serves to reach the bottom line and the final coup de théâtre. In order to render the original ungrammatical language, the translator uses the indicative case instead of the subjunctive so as to lower the register of the conversation. In this respect, rather than a mistake by the translator, the wrong clause can be regarded as a translational choice meant to maintain the realist quality of the exchange.

The exploration of Crumb's reading of 'smut' is the core of the 1981 anthology *Le Orribili Ossessioni* by Tipografia La Nuova Idea, surprisingly ahead of its time, yet unsurprisingly dedicated to the author who came to embody the phenomenon. And the translation provided does not shrink back in front of these themes. Still, it is important to remember that the selection was made by the French editor Actuel; thus, every consideration regarding the contrastive analysis of original and Italian is mediated by the French translation.

A particularly illustrative case-study is "Paulette Pantis", originally entitled "Horny Harriet Hotpants" and published in *Your Hytone Comics* in February 1971 and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 7: Hot 'n' Heavy* (1991, 125-32)⁶². The story is presented in both

⁶² In late November 2018, the story was republished in Comicon's *Collezione Crumb: Le Donne*, with the title "L'arrapata Harriet Hotpants". The present analysis was performed prior to the release of the volume and thus

English and Italian as a story for female readers: “And now, a little story for you lady-comic-fans...” translated as “Ed ora, signore, una storiella per voi...”. Crumb is provocatively teasing those who accused him of being a misogynist pervert by creating what seems to be a sex-obsessed female character who wanders around looking for men, wearing a pair of pants only. The Italian version stresses her obsession by adding the paratext “Non pensa che a quello”, arguably replacing the adjective Horny of the title. However, Horny Harriet is never treated with mercy by Crumb as in the end she becomes another victim of male violence and abuses. The true protagonists of the stories are the Snoids, a race of perverted homunculi, first appeared in Crumb’s sketchbooks in 1964-65 and officially in *Yarrowstalks* in 1967. The Snoids embody Crumb’s darkest impulses and emotions and are most recurring figures in his smut phase. In Horny Harriet’s story, the girl is first presented while chasing a man, a former macho turned into a “Crumb-like” figure, incapable of keeping up with her sexual urges (125 in *Crumb Comics*, 6 in *Le Orribili Ossessioni*). Crumb sketches out the reasons for her nickname “horny”:

Original	<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>
Come back here!!! I wanna have sum more orgazms!	Ritorna! Fammi godere ancora!
The girl likes to do it!	La ragazza adora “quello”!
Then again...m-maybe it’s all my fault...what if...what if I’m...OVERSEXED!?? OMIGOD!	Ma... forse...è possibile.. che io sia... NINFOMANE!?? Mio dio!
Christ I’m horny!!	Sì, ne sono ossessionata!!

These excerpts indicate a dominant trend in the translation of the story. At first glance, a dyscrasia in the register of the female character is evident: with respect to the original, Harriet’s speech is normalised in Italian. This couples with the erasure of Harriet’s active and performative role, relegating her to a passive one. In the first example, modalisation changes from the female subject’s “wanting-to-do” to the male subject’s “having-to-do”. In the second, her performativity is erased by eliminating “to do”, since the

does not include references to the recent translation. It is a question of future research to develop a thorough study of Comicon’s version and a contrastive analysis in comparison to the former.

verb “adorare” does not convey the original active meaning. At the same time, in the last example, the adjective “ossessionata” does not possess the same meaning of “horny”: it is weaker in the sexual connotation as well as in expressing her sexual drive and sexual activity, not just her obsessive (sexual) thoughts. The translator’s attitude towards the rendering of the character of Harriet may be summarised in the word choice for the key-term “oversexed”, i.e., “ninfomane”. While the whole story is triggered by Harriet’s attempt to cure her “oversexed” behaviour, being “ninfomane” is not something that can be defined by science. The term “nymphomania” is not scientifically meaningful, nor a clinical condition (such as hypersexuality and sexual compulsivity). The label “nymphomaniac” – in English also found as “nympho” – is used with a pejorative and derogatory connotation, to define (almost exclusively) women’s sex drives deemed excessive on a subjective base. It denotes a double standard in the way society judges negatively women’s sexually active behaviour (by calling them “nympho”), whereas men with the same conduct may be called “studs”. In a way, the idea of a woman ‘stealing’ the active role with her higher sex drives is threatening and therefore denigrated. In Italian, Paulette suffers the same belittling treatment, her active “oversexed” role being reduced to that of a character of a ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’/‘all’Italiana’ film. The genre became popular during the Seventies and early 1980s, as a trivial sub-category of the ‘commedia all’italiana’, stripped of its social criticism in favour of clichéd storylines revolving around female nudity, flippant humour based on sexual innuendos and slapstick elements. The translation analysed in this pages seems deeply imbued in this frame of reference and fully embraces its rhetoric and register: for instance, in this cinematographic tradition, male characters are appointed to downgrade the verbal register below the standard, whereas female characters’ speech is normalised (as previously observed in the translation of Paulette’s discourse).

Another possible frame of reference is that of 1970s’ Italian erotic and pornographic comics, such as *Lando* (1973-1984), *Il Tromba* (1975-1986) by Edifumetti and *Il Montatore* (1975-1982) by Ediperiodici. These comics were not conceived as satirical works and were absolutely not connected with the underground experience. They revolved around basic storylines, flippant humour based on simple sexual innuendos and an infantilised representation of sexual content. This frame seem to have influenced the Italian translator of the volume: e.g., the first story of the anthology, originally entitled “Look out Girls!! The Grabbies are coming!!”, is translated as “Attenzione ragazze! I Palpatori arrivano!”, which strongly resembles *Lando*’s October 1976 issue “I Porcheggatori”.

The same type of humour can be found in the translation of Crumb’s sexual innuendos and wordplays characterising Harriet’s story, which are rendered with levity and simplicity in Italian.

Harriet (126/7) pays a visit to the clinic “Dottori A. Nale & O. Rale Psichiatri Specialisti del Sesso”, originally “Doctors Orra Lee & Recta Lee Psychologists Extraordinaire & Specialists in the psycho-sexual field”. The sign on the clinic recites: “Yes we’re open” marking a mental openmindedness. In Italian, another interpretative frame is activated: indeed, “La casa è aperta” creates a wordplay with the Italian “casa chiusa” as a synonym of brothel, focusing on the strictly sexual domain (in fact, the doctors are experts in sex, not in the psycho-sexual field). The two psychologists are actually two Snoids, faking their position only to persuade Harriet to have sex with both. After no less than eighteen hours the two are exhausted and Harriet dissatisfied – she calls them “Quitters!”, translated in Italian as “Molluschi!”, with an explicit reference to water warts, which are often spread by sexual activity. The following tables (127-29; 8-10) lists some of the renderings of the original wordplays into Italian.

To put it in laymen’s terms, you’re oversexed!!	In lingua volgare, lei è ninfomane!
Yup... it’s a tough nut to crack...	Sì... è duro trovare la cura!
B-but I already came in your mouth six times today!!	M...ma è la sesta pippa che...
Mountain Everhard in Tibet! The highest peak in the world... you have to climb all the way to the top!!	Il monte Everard! La cima più alta del mondo...seguire i cartelli, sempre dritti!
Pant puff this seems rather silly... wheeze... I don’t see how this is going to do me any good!	Sì... davvero duro... sì... questo è il prezzo della mia guarigione!

In the first example, the expression “in laymen’s terms” means “in plain language”. The noun “layman” partakes in a religious isotopy underlying the whole text. The profanity of Crumb’s story stands in the disjunction between this isotopy and the “oversexed” one. Indeed, the Snoids sneers at the contrast between the idiomatic expression and the context

in which it is pronounced. However, the Italian translator completely overlooked the classeme of «religion», privileges the humorous sexual innuendo by opting for the solution “in lingua volgare”, which in Italian may mean both “in plain language” and “in coarse language”; therefore, in the Italian panel, the Snoids are laughing about the sexual reference with no blasphemous undertone. Moreover, once again, the Italian Paulette is treated as a nymphomaniac by the Snoids who are unable to keep up with her. The subsequent idiomatic expression “tough nut to crack” is rendered with another double entendre, i.e., “è duro” (literally, “it’s hard”). A similar device is used in the translation of the last excerpt, in which “rather silly” is translated with “davvero duro” and the girl’s puffing is rendered as “sì... sì”, i.e., with typical exclamation associated with sex. These types of wordplay are rather basic and are in line with an infantilised translation of sex. For instance, the original “I already came in your mouth six times” is translated as “ma è la sesta pippa”, the term “pippa” belonging to the aforementioned all-Italian frame of 1970s’ ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ films and humorous pornographic comics.

In some cases, the wordplays and sexual references are lost: for instance, in the fourth example, the wordplay between Mount Everhard and Mount Everest does not result so immediate for an Italian reader; moreover, the ambiguity of such phrases as “the highest peak in the world” or “to climb all the way to the top” is not rendered. On page 129 (10), Harriet reaches Tibet “Many fucks later...”, translated with a milder “Dopo molto tempo...”. In several other cases, balloons are left blank, though rather than a censorious act, these choices seem to be dictated by space limits and a general negligence in rendering the original, thus avoiding the translation of balloons deemed unnecessary for the story (e.g., a small balloon in which Harriet says “Gimme your weener!”; a balloon in which a Snoid has a psychological meltdown: “I no no who I be! I be you? No... you be me? No...”). The following table includes further examples of the translator’s negligence (128, 9):

Don’t fall off th’mountain, now, y’hear? N’ don’t ketch any diseases! Haw haw!	Fa attenzione a non scivolare su una buccia di banana! Ha ha!
I hadda tell’er somethin’ didn’t I? an who knows, it might work!	Bisognava pur dir qualcosa! E dopotutto lei ci è cascata!
Besides, I was growing weary of the girl... I wanted to get her out of here!	E poi, diavolo di una ragazza! È un peccato lasciarsela sfuggire! Buon sangue!

Oh Ghod! You... you cold unfeeling cad! You unspeakable churl!	Che razza di sentimentale sei, e stupido!
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These passages are interesting cases of radical modification of the original text, from the replacement of the sexual innuendo of her falling off the mountain and getting a (venereal) disease with the phrase “non scivolare su una buccia di banana”, to the utter change of the Snoids’ dialogue: while in the original the two are arguing over how cold one of them was in deceiving Harriet, in Italian the emphasis is rather on how sentimental he is and how he regrets leaving the girl. Another difference to stress regards the register: the low register of the original is rendered with a higher register which erases the sociolinguistic traits of the Snoid’s speech, full of ellipses, slang expressions, interruptions, contractions, lexicalised pronunciations. And this aspects clearly points to the influence of the ‘commedia sexy’ frame.

In this regard, despite the higher register erasing the original slang, when the Snoids drag Harriet down a hole on the peak of the mountain (130/11) their level of verbal violence is increased with respect to the original (e.g., “Come wiz me!” becomes “Porta qui il culo!”) and epithets towards the girl show once again the influence of the ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ frame (e.g., “Hot dawg!” becomes “La sporcacciona!”).

In the final pages of the story, Harriet is abused by the group of Snoids. On a visual level, the violence perpetrated against her is extremely graphic, though more grotesque than disturbing. In a way, readers feel what the girl is feeling thanks to the panel construction, which suggests a sense of suffocation as the horde of Snoids completely occupy any available space, even overflowing the boundaries imposed by the frame. As one Snoid tells the other, the waiting list is kilometric since “every orifice is filled”, a sentence referring to Harriet’s body as well as to the page, utterly replete with depraved creatures. One of the Snoids claim: “Get ready t’meet yer maker kiddo!”, translated with “Stai per presentarti davanti al tuo creatore, piccola!”. The religious isotopy introduced on the previous pages is here reiterated with the reference to her “maker” (“creatore”), which in this case is translated into Italian as well. This thematisation is essential as the final panels of the story on page 131 (12 in Italian) see the intervention of Jesus, who comes to save Harriet after three weeks of abuses. In contrast to the crowd of the previous page, here the colour black dominates the first four panels, with darkness ruling the roast, with the exception of the halos surrounding the girl’s brutalised body and Jesus’s arm and head. And one should not forget how visual items of this kind partake in the religious isotopy and corroborate its presence and symbolic

value as an interpretative frame. After he proposed her, the couple leave the hole on the mountain (climbing a stair) and get marry in the very office where the story begun, in which the two Snoids are now disguised as Reverend Holier & Thou:

Hey, let's get married! Whaddaya say?? You know how much I've always loved you! Please say yes!	Vieni, andiami a sposarci! Tu sai che ti ho sempre amata... se accetti mi farai felice!
Oh, I'm so glad! You're mine at last!!	Io sono così felice!
I now pronounce you dead-er – I mean man'n'wife! You may kiss th'bride...that will be ten bucks!	...e io vi dichiaro mor...marito e moglie... abbracciatevi... fanno diecimila lire!

After Harriet's acceptance of Jesus's love to achieve salvation (a metaphor of redemption from carnal sin through faith which sounds incredibly ironic given the author of the story), the plot twist is finally revealed as readers discover that she is actually dead, as the Snoid envisaged by claiming that she was about to meet her maker. In addition to the lack of expertise showed by the rendering of personal pronouns ("tu", "io") which are unnecessary in Italian, these examples indicate that, once again, the register is elevated in Italian with respect to the original. Moreover, the dialogism of Jesus's balloons is erased as the question "Whaddaya say??" is removed as well as the subsequent sentence "You are mine at last!". The role of Harriet is passive until the end. However, on the whole, the translation of this story stands out for the simplification and banalisation of the original, as for both the rendering of the form and the contents. Above all, Crumb's symbolic complexity is lost in favour of levity and of a general hilarious (even superficial) attitude, which turns the story into a sex-tale whose deep meaning has been smoothed over.

A similar level of grotesqueness is reached by the subsequent story in *Le Orribili Ossessioni*, "Schizo e Zozo" (14-20), the only available Italian translation of "The Simp and the Gimp", originally published in *Motor City Comics 2* by Shelton's Rip Off Press and then included in *The Complete Crumb Comics 6: On the Crest of a Wave* (1991, 134-40). The narration revolves around Simp and Gimp, in Italian Schizo e Zozo, two lunatics locked up in a mental hospital and their escape – after face-raping a nurse – to join up with a hippie commune. The settings of the story, i.e., the asylum and the hippie commune, makes reference to two core themes deeply embedded in Crumb's poetics, i.e., neuroses and satire against the

inconsistencies of counterculture itself. By focusing on the former, and particularly on the intertwining between mental pathologies and sex, the translation of “The Simp and the Gimp” present some interesting peculiarities. First of all, close to the title, Crumb added a caption box presenting the work as: “Another malevolent comic strip that will undermine all your good intentions and finest ideals by R. ‘the choir boy’ Crumb”. The Italian version is: “Ancora un fumetto malsano di Crumb (detto ‘il chierichetto’) dedicato ai meglio intenzionati”. The reference to ideals is here removed, though it is a central reference anticipating the author’s satire against the inhabitants of many hippie communes, prone to accept anyone bragging about their commitment to the counterculture, often disregarding their potential deviancy. The emphasis is rather on Crumb’s nickname “il chierichetto”, isolated between brackets and inverted commas. Since nothing is sacred for the author, particularly in this controversial story, the nickname acquires a clearly humoristic accent. In the Italian version, however, this religious reference is even more important, since several consistent modifications to the original texts ultimately give prominence to the religious isotopy throughout the story. Delving into the analysis, the following table summarises some illustrative excerpts from the story⁶³.

1	Nurse – Now now. Don’t be like that! I’m here to help you!!	Andiamo, siate ragionevole! Io sono qui per aiutarvi!
2	Simp – Personally, I’m rather horny today, nurse... would you...could you...suck my dick??	Personalmente sono piuttosto eccitato ora... le spiace farmi un pompino?
3	Nurse – Tsk tsk...let’s not react with hostility...why don’t we just sit down and talk it all out...	Tsk...tsk... non sia così aggressivo... sediamoci e conversiamo un po’...
4	Simp – Who’s being hostile!? I want my prick licked! Honest to God!	Chi è aggressivo? Voglio solo un pompino, è tutto!
5	Nurse – Come on... you’ll feel better if you talk about it...we’ll get along just fine and I won’t have to have you sent to the rubber room!	Venga qui. Lei starà meglio dopo una piccola conversazione! Oh, il Maligno che c’è in lei se ne andrà...

⁶³ The examples included in the table are taken from page 15-17 of the Italian text and are numbered from 1 to 20. To ease the analysis, the discussion will address each excerpt by referring to the number indicated in the first column.

6	Simp – I'll feel better when I'm sucked off is how I feel!	Andrà tutto bene se lei mi farà un pompino!
7	Gimp – Shad up!	La tua gola!
8	Simp – Hey big nurse, you look funny!	Ha ha Big Nurse! Sei tu il Maligno!
9	Nurse – You're both totally insane, you –	Siete impazziti splr plsk blaarp
10	Gimp – I told you to shut up!	Te! Apri la bocca!
11	Gimp – Look! She's a suction pump!	Guarda ti va bene così?
12	Gimp – Hey try stickin'yer pud in there, simp!	Avanti, caccia quà il tuo arnese!
13	Simp – Haw haw! Yer sick, Gimp, but I'm game!	Ha ha sei un birichino zozo!!
14	Simp – Wow! What a great come! Hey! My thing!! It's stuck in her face!	Wao! Che getto! La vacca! Qui resto incollato!
15	Gimp – Musta created a vacuum!	Forse farà da ventosa!
16	Doctor – What in God's name is going on here?	Grandiol! Cosa è successo!
17	Doctor – How could they do this to someone assweet and kind as a nurse? What twisted sickness warped their minds to the point of committing such a horrible act on another human being!?	Come hanno potuto conciare così una ragazza dolce come lei! Devono avere il diavolo in corpo per fare tali atrocità!!
18	Doctor – Hmm...ah ha! Degradation of women – an infantile anal sadistic compulsive obsession...of course! Ver-ry interesting!	Ecco qui! Distruzione del corpo femminile! Ossessioni sado-anali nella prima infanzia! Molto int-te-res-san-te!

19	Doctor – Where are those two psycho-ward cases!? I'll have them placed in straight-jackets!!	Dove sono finisti quei due pericolosi psicotici!? Mettiamoli nelle camicie di forza!
20	Doctor – Ah, you're nuts! Don't bother me anymore! Gotta find those two maniacs!!	Guardate ovunque! Dobbiamo trovare quei due maniaci!

Starting from page 135 of the original and 15 of the translation, the Italian version generates a humorous effect absent in English as the nurse asks the two lunatics to be reasonable (“siate ragionevole”, point 1). When the nurse tries to establish a contact point with Simp and Gimp and to mitigate their “hostility” (translated with the adjective “aggressivo”) through conversation, Simp starts harassing her with an invitation to oral sex. In both versions humour is generated by reiterating the dialogue between the two, though with a remarkably different nuance, since the translation is less pornographic than the original and sexually explicit contents are reduced to vulgar and trivial utterances. In detail, in English all of the nurse’s attempts to be helpful and make them talk with her (point 1, 3, 5) are matched with Simp’s lecherous request of a fellatio, always re-elaborated: “could you...suck my dick” (point 2), “I want my prink licked” (point 4) and “I’ll feel better when I’m sucked off” (point 6). By contrast, the Italian version relies on the repetition of the term “pompino” as the answer to whatever the nurse says: “le spiace farmi un pompino?” (point 2), “voglio solo un pompino” (point 4), and “Andrà tutto bene se lei mi farà un pompino!” (point 6). The translation exploits the humorous effect engendered by the obtuse stubbornness of the lunatic to the detriment of his original characterisation, which is far from idiotic.

Moreover, as mentioned above, in the original text, the first part of the story revolves around two dominant themes: sexuality and madness. The Italian version adds a third theme: religion, which is marginal in English and simply evoked by the Crumb’s nickname “choir boy” and such expressions as “Honest to God!” (point 4) and “What in God’s name is going on here?” (point 16). Interestingly, while Simp’s “Honest to God!” phrase is not translated (point 4), the nurse tells him that after a conversation with her “il Maligno che è in lei se ne andrà” (point 5). The original version made no reference to a demonic possession, as it simply refers to the “rubber room” which corresponds to the padded cells of psychiatric hospitals. The figure of “il Maligno”, i.e., Satan, belongs to the Christian tradition, and can be thematised according to the isotopy of religion. Its inclusion in the text suggests that the

cause of Simp and Gimp's misconduct is not a mental illness, but a spiritual possession. Even though, the idea to misinterpret the symptoms of a mental illness as a demonic possession is part of a long tradition of religious superstition, the fact that the 'diagnosis' eventually comes from the nurse of a psychiatric hospital completely overturns the whole meaning of the sketch: while the original emphasises the curative power of communication, the Italian translation opens up to another dimension, i.e., that of religion and, in particular, occultism and the weight of spiritual concepts as sin and guilt. Indeed, the association with Satan also entails the connotations of «sin» and «blasphemy», which connote Simp and Gimp's coarseness as well as their subsequent violent and sexually abusive acts. It is also possible that the translator's choices were influenced by the success of the *The Exorcist* (1973), a milestone in the history of cinema: in the film, physicians fail to diagnose a psychiatric condition to Linda Blair's character, who turns out to be possessed by the demon Pazuzu and, under its influence, performs vulgar acts, uses an obscene language and exhibits an abnormal strength. Given this hermeneutic frame, the translator likely added a demoniac dimension to Crumb's story.

Gimp, after catching her from behind, starts pressing her face while ordering her to shut up (point 7 and 10). The choice is again reductive. Additional, symbolic meanings go lost, deliberately, and all connotations are biased by the one, simplified content: violence driven by mere lust. Gimp's gesture and reiterated command oppose all her good intentions to have a dialogue with the two: the invitation to talk is counterbalanced with a violent imposition to stop talking. In Italian, though the gesture is clearly understandable on a visual level, the disjunction between the two positions is lost as the texts in the balloons, emphasised in bold, rather focus on the sexual practice (“La tua gola!” at point 7 and “Apri la bocca!” at point 10). The scene is observed by an amused Simp joking about how “funny” the nurse is (point 8). Nonetheless, the Italian version “Ha ha Big Nurse! Sei tu il Maligno!” once again refers to the isotopy of religion: the situation is turned upside down because the lunatic sees in the nurse the embodiment of sin, in this specific case of carnality. Devoid of any religious connotation, the original rather reiterates the isotopy of mental illness as the nurse claims “you're both totally insane” (point 9) and Simp calls Gimp “yer sick” (point 13).

In Italian, the isotopy of madness is preserved in point 9, though “siete impazziti” entails that the two were not insane before that act, whereas it is lost in point 13 in favour of “sei un biricchino zozo!”, referring to Gimp's impertinence. The register of the two in the passage in point 12 and 13 is higher in Italian than in English: for example, slang words and

coarse language, such as “stickin’ yer pud” and “I’m game” are respectively translated as “caccia qua il tuo arnese!” and eliminated. The Italian text rather sounds like a typical B-movie, with its very banal, predictable speech, and without any sociolinguistic idiosyncrasy. As in the case of “Paulette Pantis”, Italian 1970s’ newsstand pornographic comics may have influenced the translator. For instance, in a surreal, horrible scene (136 and 16) in which Simp is having sex with the nurse’s face turned into what looks like an anus (or possibly a vagina since Simp and Gimp will subsequently refer to the nurse as “Cunt-face”), the Italian version of his speech balloon is: “Wao! Che getto! La vacca! Qui resto incollato!” (point 14), in which the offensive (and sexually connoted) term “la vacca!” is added by the translator as it does not correspond to any item of the original text. As in the previous story, the translation seems to emphasise the components of male violence and disturbing hate towards women stirring sexual perversion by using slurs pertaining to non-intellectual, flippant sex-stories.

As the doctor arrives to help the nurse and the two manage to escape from the asylum, Crumb takes the chance to delve into a parody of psychoanalytical theories, still reiterating the isotopy of madness. Several visual and verbal figures partake in this: the book with the title “Freud”, the phrase “What twisted sickness warped their minds” (17), the subsequent interpretation the doctor provides in point 18 (“degradation of woman” and “infantile anal sadistic compulsive obsession”), the reference to Simp and Gimp as “psycho-ward” who need “straight-jackets” (point 19) and “maniacs” (point 20), and the expression “you’re nuts” (point 20) referred to the other lunatics in the asylum. In this passage, psychoanalysis recurs as one of the constants of Crumb’s poetics, but the author is also implicitly joking about the charges of misogyny and perversion against him, which were often traced back to pseudo-Freudian readings applied to his comics. And it is no coincidence that the doctor’s facial features resemble the caricature Crumb usually makes of himself – as well as of other perverts and ‘wimp’ characters. The situation is even more bizarre on account of the presence of the nurse with a face turned into genitalia trying to communicate with the doctor with onomatopoeias (“glrp” and “plplplp!”). The Italian version in most cases does not preserve the isotopy: in particular, while the original conceptualises psychoanalysis within an intellectual frame, such expressions as “distruzione del corpo femminile” and “ossessioni sado-anali nella prima infanzia” are banalisations and simplifications of Crumb’s text, within the very trivial frame highlighted above. In fact, “distruzione” is not the proper translation for “degradation” as well as “ossessioni” does not render adequately “compulsive obsession”.

Moreover, in point 20, the translation “guardate ovunque” does not correspond to the original, and the Italian “maniaci” is not overlapping the English meaning of “maniacs”. However, the major change occurs in point 17: the refined register of the speech is completely goes lost and with it goes lost its apparent incongruence with what is shown in a visual level; in addition, the isotopy of madness is replaced by the religious one once again when the doctor refers to the demoniac possession (“devono avere il diavolo in corpo”). The only reference to religion in English is (rather vague) in the phrase expressing astonishment at point 16: “What in God’s name is going on here?” (translated as “Grandio! Cos’è successo?”). However, being a man of science, the doctor does not make any further remark either on deity or devilish possessions. At this point, it appears necessary to confront the Italian version with the French one to verify whether the change was made in the intermediary translation as well. When in point 5 of the Italian text, the nurse claims “il Maligno che è in lei se ne andrà”, the French version refers to “la vilaine chambre capitonnée”, which translate the English “rubber room”. In point 8, the Simp’s phrase “ha ha Big Nurse! Tu sei il Maligno!” is translated as “Ha ha Big Nurse! T’as l’air malin!”. Finally, in point 17, the French version diverges from the English one as the doctor’s balloon is translated with “Fault-il qu’ils aient le diable au corps”, which is consistent with the Italian “devono avere il diavolo in corpo”. Another stretched hypothesis may be that the Italian translator mistook “vilaine” and “malin” for a reference to Satan, further confirmed by the explicit reference to the Devil in the third example. However, on page 14 of the Italian and French volume “malin” is translated as “furbo” (“sharp dude” in the original), thus making it hard to believe in an involuntary mistake in the subsequent page. What appears more plausible is the will to add a blasphemous connotation to the text. In general, the anthology seems to willingly modify the source text to make Crumb’s comics fit a given frame, that of ‘newsstand’ comic (and comical) pornography, based on a ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ humour, with characters’ dialogues resembling a filmic script for a comedy played by such actors as Lino Banfi, Pippo Franco or Alvaro Vitali pursuing Edwige Fenech or Gloria Guida. Theo Hermans (1985) maintained that “all translation implies a certain degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose” (11). In the present case, the purpose of the publication is render Crumb’s stories palatable for a market share of readers looking for an American version of *Lando’s* comics. The same operation would not be viable in the case of Wilson’s art, deemed to gory and completely devoid of any sensual appeal. Considering Eco’s (1964) distinction between apocalyptic and integrated artists, one may ask whether, within the underground

scenario, Wilson may be considered apocalyptic and Crumb integrated. While Wilson's art is (deliberately) confined to the underground world and, in a way, may be easier to render in translation, Crumb's comics are extremely complex to interpret and translate with no manipulation and misunderstanding, especially on account of an ostensible approachability, which actually conceals the multi-layered reading, a refined use of language variations and a compound intellectual reflection.

In the case of "The Simp and the Gimp", the magnification of 'commedia sexy all'italiana' elements occurs at the expense of another capital theme linked to Crumb's poetics, i.e, the exploration of the dark side of the mind – and it is curious the parallelism which may be drawn between Crumb and Woody Allen, since the latter's cinematographic poetics and his Freudian strain suffered a similar manipulation and trivialisation in the passage from English to Italian dubbing.

As seen in the overview of the Italian covers dedicated to Crumb, the author's production is almost exclusively presented in relation to the sexual dimension. By contrast, only two covers are dedicated to Crumb's keen interest in psychoanalysis, namely Totem's *Crumb Comics 3* (1999) and Stampa Alternativa's *Mr Natural* (2004). Both covers reproduce a cartoon Crumb made for *The East Village Other* vol. 3 no. 47, published on 25 October 1968, which shows Mr Natural explaining to a puzzled housewife the basics of psychoanalytics by using a vacuum cleaner and ready-to-use dirt. As the caption informs: "Mr. Natural, disguised as a vacuum cleaner salesman, talks to the Housewives of America". The balloon says: "Okay, lady, now let's just say that this **dirt** is your conscious **mind**...". Both translations do not include the caption, and only translate the balloon. Totem's version is: "Ok, signora, le idee che le passano per la testa sono nere come questo carbone! Ora ci penso io...". On the other hand, Stampa Alternativa's version is more literal: "Bene, signora, ora faccia conto che questo **sporco** sia la parte conscia della **mente**...". The difference between the two versions is crucial, since the former refers to the darkness of the mind, which is unconceivably compared to black charcoal, and not dirt. The latter translates Crumb's actual message: the dirt stands in the conscious mind, bombarded by the television screaming on the background, caged in the perfect living room of the housewife's house, while wildlife and nature are only though emblematically framed in a picture on the wall. Mr Natural's vacuum is appointed to remove that dirt and, in a way, this is Crumb's self-appointed task. And sexual urges, as a part of the subdued unconscious mind, are a means to explore what stands beneath such dirt.

5.4 Blankening “Whiteman”: Censorship and Trivialisation of Comix

Among the most succeeded comics on the aforementioned topic of psychoanalysis, Whiteman’s two stories, “Whiteman”, included in *Zap Comix* 1⁶⁴, and “Whiteman meets Bigfoot”, originally published in *Home Grown Funnies* in January 1971 by Kitchen Sink Press⁶⁵, investigate through the comic medium the relation between civilisation and repression. Quattrocchi published both stories, the former in *Fallo!* and the latter in *Risoamaro* 1 and *Le Grandi Storie*⁶⁶, as paradigmatic examples of Crumb’s “philosophical” works. Whiteman’s first story was also published in *Head Comix* (with the title adapting the name as “Il Signor Bianchini”), in Totem’s *Crumb Comics* 5, in Mondadori’s anthology *Robert Crumb: Fritz il Gatto* and in Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap Comix*. The second story, besides Quattrocchi’s publication, can be found in Totem’s *Crumb Comics* 1⁶⁷.

By anticipating some issues which will be subsequently tackled in the light of textual evidence in the following pages, Whiteman is one of Crumb’s most famous characters, portrayed as the prototypical American middle-class businessman: tired and frustrated, surrounded by an aura of greyness and pressed under the weight of family and job-related duties, bills, road congestion and, above all, the constant need to keep up appearances. It was argued that Whiteman’s character was originally inspired by Crumb’s own father (Holms, 2005: 75), which relates to the generational gap characterising the Sixties, when young Baby Boomers rejected their parents’ lifestyle, values and political views. However, Crumb’s discourse couched the problem not only in terms of Young versus Old: no longer perceived as ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’, America and its society as a whole were ridiculed for their inconsistencies and the oppressive system of conventions and norms which produced a nation of only apparently strong, though actually repressed, spineless individuals. In developing the character, Crumb is influenced by the success of Freudian and sociological theories among countercultural artists and activists. In their understanding, the Establishment was grounded on the suffocation of natural instincts with discipline and rules, a Faustian compromise in which civilization could only be achieved through the loss of

⁶⁴ *The Complete Crumb Comics* 4: *Mr. Sixties* (1989, 105-108).

⁶⁵ *The Complete Crumb Comics*: 8 *The Death of Fritz the Cat* (1992, 8-29).

⁶⁶ Page numbers will specifically refer to this edition.

⁶⁷ In late November 2018, the story was republished in *Comicon’s Collezione Crumb: Le Donne* with the title “Whiteman incontra Bigfoot”. The present analysis was performed prior to the release of the volume and thus does not include references to the recent translation. It is a question of future research to develop a thorough study of Comicon’s version and a contrastive analysis in comparison to the former.

freedom.⁶⁸ This idea had already been debated and developed by such philosophers as Thomas Hobbes (1991 [1651]) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1997 [1762]), though Freud further advocated that primordial impulses can only be tamed and never completely eradicated. It was previously highlighted how, according to Freud, much like steam in a pressure cooker, repressed urges build up and fester to the point of causing a nervous breakdown, hysteria or aggressiveness.

Crumb's repulsion towards the lifestyle blatantly championed by the United States pours out in Whiteman's twofold conflict, which represents a leitmotif in his adventures: on the one hand, the struggle within himself, torn between his depressed existence in the 'square' society and his repressed primordial desires; on the other hand, the encounter between Whiteman, as an epitome of such 'square' society, and the outsiders, those who cannot fit the WASP canon of adequacy. In this, the comic medium provided the adequate platform to develop such a multifaceted narration. Readers are guided into Whiteman's mind by three dominant isotopies, which may fall under the labels of Eros, Americanism – the latter being disjunctive with respect to the former – and Thanatos. By focusing on the thematisation of sexuality, a rather compelling example regarding Eros is provided in the character's first adventure, "Whiteman", particularly in the last panels on page 120. These panels use a zoom technique, with readers getting close-ups on Whiteman's face as he starts revealing his true colours. The balloon illustrates the transformation occurring:

But if I stop, they'll see... they'll find out... My real self deep down inside... the raging lustful beast that craves only one thing!

Se non lo faccio, si accorgeranno; vedranno... Quello che veramente sono, dentro... la bestia umana che desidera un sola cosa! (<i>Fallo!</i> , 37)

Ma se la smetto la vedranno... se ne accorgeranno... Il mio vero io dentro nel profondo... La belva bramosa che anela a una sola cosa! (<i>Head Comix</i> , 39 from the first page after the cover)
--

Ma se smetto, vedranno... loro scopriranno... La mia vera natura... la furia della bestia lussuriosa che brama una sola cosa! (<i>Zap Comix</i> , 61 from the first page after the cover)
--

Ma se mi fermo, se ne accorgeranno! Scopriranno la mia vera personalità: la bestia lasciva che pensa a una cosa sola... (<i>Crumb Comics</i> 3, 41 from the first page after the cover)
--

⁶⁸ In this regard, see in particular Freud ([1905] 1995).

Ma se smetto, vedranno... scopriranno...Il vero me stesso nascosto in profondità.. la bestia furiosa e lussuriosa che desidera una sola cosa! (*Fritz il Gatto e altre storie*, 84)

The passage explores what stands beneath the surface of Whiteman's persona, his "real self deep down inside", translated as "quello che veramente sono, dentro", "vero io dentro nel profondo", "vera natura", "vera personalità" and "vero me stesso nascosto in profondità". The different translations all remain in the semantic field of the inner mind, providing more or less similar versions of the original. What only Mondadori's version translates adequately is the subsequent "raging lustful beast" ("bestia furiosa e lussuriosa"), whereas all the others are less philologically careful in the rendering of both dimensions: violence (Thanatos) and lust (Eros), which are the *classemes* reiterated along the whole story. Indeed, in the final close-up, his hidden desire is revealed: Whiteman is seen with an open, salivating mouth which resembles the jaws of a ravenous animal (accompanied by the onomatopoeias "slurp" and "drool") and craving eyes. On the bottom of the panel, three small balloons "I'm virile", "I read playboy", and "I'm badass", pop up from Whiteman's jaws, while, on the top, the writing "Sex!" floats above his forehead with a super-sized font: in this case, the word acquires graphic substance and, on a visual level, it is the most salient element of the page. As these element hint, sexuality and virility are associated to the *classemes* of beastliness and aggressiveness, which are verbally and visually reiterated throughout the panels. The translations of the three balloons are literal in most cases: "Sono così virile!" "Leggo Playboy!" and "Sono un duro!". The only significant variations are in Totem's and Mondadori's translations for "bad ass": while in American slang, the term refers to toughness and fierceness, the former refers once again to the character's craving desire with "Sono morboso", the latter proceeds with to a moral evaluation of his own awfulness with "Sono pessimo!". However, in that glimpse of a moment, Whiteman is free from moral conditionings, empowered by his recovered virility. It is only in the subsequent page (121) that Whiteman manages to "get a grip" on himself, by appealing to his American pedigree as "a grown man! An intelligent adult! With responsibilities!".

This brief example illustrates how Crumb's satire here exploits the simplistic dichotomy between sexual abstinence-civilization and sexual freedom-animality, upon which much of America's Puritan moralism was grounded. As stressed below, eventually, Whiteman's first adventure has an open ending with him encountering the epitome of

Otherness⁶⁹ in the form of a parade of black people and asking himself (and his readers) whether he should “join the parade” or not (124). More resolute is his position in “Whiteman meets Bigfoot”, in which his commitment to the ‘square’ world is challenged by the encounter with Yetti. The storyline revolves around the meeting between the dichotomic worldview the two characters embody: feminine versus masculine, wildness versus civilization, freedom versus social constraints, and sexual disinhibition versus (self-) repression. The dualism between Whiteman/Civilization and BigFoot/Beastliness is evident starting from the title: “Whiteman” is written with the very American car-logo font which recalls the Winnebago Renegade (and a corollary of the “American Drivers Association”) he is driving in the first panel (the letter W in the car body stands for both the logo and the character’s initial), whereas “Bigfoot” is written with a graphic font reproducing Yetti’s fly-covered, malodorous, hairy skin. In the Italian translations, while Totem Classici kept the original writings “Whiteman” and “Bigfoot”, Quattrocchi changed “Bigfoot” into the Italian version “L’Abominevole” and, in the prior publication with Risoamaro, even removed the proper name of the protagonist and simply called him “Il Nostro Eroe”. In the reprint for Malatempora, the name Whiteman appears in the title but he is referred to as “il nostro eroe” along the whole story as the translation of the texts was left unaltered. Again, “il nostro eroe” comes from television jargon, more than from a popularised meaning of sociological, psychological or philosophical canonical texts. The transformation of Whiteman in “il nostro eroe” is not an isolated case and posits a cultural problem, given the very American essence of the character and the fact that “nostro”, in an Italian understanding, may fail to emphasise this crucial essence enough. Consistently with this appropriation, Quattrocchi translated all names: Whiteman’s wife Louise becomes Luisa, his children Dick and Jane become Piero and Maria, Dr GreyFace, the specialist studying Yetti in the laboratory, becomes Dr Tristezza, though in English “greyface” does not refer to sadness, and is rather (as defined in the online Urban Dictionary) a derogatory term “for a bureaucrat or other order-obsessed person” and “a person, who is confident in just fulfilling the typical ideas of being a member of society. Working, consuming, not questioning anything. People which adopt the ideas, believes and so on they are told to believe”. As often stressed also below, the two translations also present some mistakes: for instance, “maniac” (19) is translated as “maniac” in

⁶⁹ The concept of Otherness in social sciences and humanities refers to the outcomes of a dialogical process in which a dominant group constructs its identity as ‘Us’ through a binary opposition to ‘Them’ usually based on the stigmatisation of (supposed) differences. ‘Black man’ is thus recruited as the Other of ‘white man’ (Fanon, 1963) while the Other of ‘man’ is ‘woman’ (de Beauvoir, 1952).

Quattrocchi's version (52); the sentence "Well, when are y'gonna be ready, Mr. High'n'Mighty!!" (73) turned into "Sì, ma potrebbe accadere che, quando tu te la senta, il sig. Hugh si sia stufato di aspettarti" in Totem, thus misinterpreting "Mr High'n'Mighty" for the name of Whiteman's employer and elevating the register with respect to the original (the subjunctive verb in "quando tut e la senta" is extremely formal with respect to the communication context). In some other cases, verbal elements are left untranslated: for example, on page 54 of Malatempora's (and Risoamaro, version), a whole balloon as well as the paratext in the newspaper showing the news of Yetti's capture in Oregon are left untranslated. In the same panel, Totem (72) opted for a partial translation of the newspaper, leaving the rest in English. Nonetheless, on page 74 of Totem's *Crumb Comics*, the small caption "Whiteman's composure sorta slips" (23) is eliminated, while in the other version it is translated with a harsher "il nostro si incazza" (56).

By looking over the text, the story starts with Whiteman, still overwhelmed by the stressful obligations of his bourgeois life and unfulfilled with his family and job, being kidnapped by Bigfoot and becoming his daughter's mate, he called Yetti. Whiteman is thrown again into the domain of Otherness, where the impulses he strives to suppress are freely displayed: just as Whiteman presented himself as a "raging lustful beast" in the previous comics, the claseme of beastliness is here associated with Yetti, who is addressed as "mountainous hairy ape-like cretinous beast", with a "musky animal odor", "all furry" (15), "monster" (20), "strange creature" (23), and again "beast", "stunt" and "ape" (29). The two Italian versions present some interesting particularities as for the translation choices in the representation of Yetti and her (sexual) relationship with Whiteman.

Since their first encounter, Whiteman's comments as he is kidnapped by the group of abominable snowmen, reiterate the classemes of «monstrosity», «animality» and «smell»:

Original (12)	Malatempora (45)	Totem (63)
What are these monsters?	Ma che mostri sono questi?	Chi saranno 'sti mostri?
Ugh...What a stink! Gag!	Ugh...che puzza! Gag!	Uh, che puzza! Buargh...
Oh God no! Don't tell me this animal wants me to...	Ho Dio no! Non mi dire che questo animale vuole...	Santo cielo non mi dite che questa bestaccia vuole...

The terms “monster” and “stink” are translated literally, while “animal” is translated with the pejorative expression “bestiaccia” in Totem, but overall all classemes are preserved. After going through Yetti’s facesitting sexual practice, Whiteman is forced to accept Yetti as his “bride” and become her “mate”, living together in a “nest”/”shelter” as a “newly wedded couple” (13). Even in this case, the classeme of «animality» is preserved in translation, in addition to the classeme «marriage»: Malatempora’s version chooses “compagna” and “sposa” for Yetti (though not Whiteman), and translates “tana” and “capanna” literally (46); Totem’s translation focuses on the marital bond between the two, by using such words as “moglie”, “sposini” and “mogliettina”, while the classeme of «animality», which is embedded in the isotopy of the abominable, is kept in the literal translation of “tana” and goes lost in “mate”, referred to Whiteman, which is not translated at all. In the subsequent page, the sentence “You must have some pretty strong teeth to eat that stuff” (14), is translated as “denti” (47) in Malatempora and, significantly as regards the reiteration of the classeme of «animality», “zanne”, i.e., fangs (65), in Totem. Such magnification of the animal element and the related characterisation can also be highlighted in a subsequent passage:

Original (15)	Malatempora (48)	Totem (66)
Phew! She sure smells!!! Kind of like it almost... musky animal odor...	Mamma mia, come puzza! Quasi quasi mi piace... è un odore animale, forte...	Puah! Come puzza! È peggio di una scrofa!

The original text refers to her “smell” as “musky animal odor”, reiterating the classemes of «smell» and «animality» partaking in the isotopy of the abominable. While both translations render “smell” with “puzza”, the second phrase is translated as “un odore animale, forte” by Malatempora, whereas Totem’s translation eliminates the reference to Whiteman’s liking the smell and apostrophises Yetti as worse than a sow (“scrofa”). In Italian, the term can also be associated to dirt and used sexually connoted derogatory term, something that in the original is not implied, despite the image showing Whiteman on the top of her already suggests what is going to happen in the next panels. Totem’s translation does not resist stereotypes. This passage is a very emblematic example of a clear attempt to make the translated text simpler, adherent to a cliché, while the source text is absolutely not clichéd; it is artistic and complex, in a way that it is feared by the Italian translator.

And indeed, in the subsequent scene, Whiteman is shown while taking off his trousers:

Original (15)	Malatempora (48)	Totem (66)
C-could I actually be sexually aroused by this mountainous hairy ape-like cretinous beast?	Ma come è possibile che una bestiona così possa farmi eccitare??!!!	Possibile che questa lurida bestiaccia, più pelosa di un gorilla, possa eccitarmi sessualmente in un momento come questo?

The original “mountainous hairy ape-like cretinous beast” shows how Crumb used absolutely no easy lexicon and the story is far from being a banal, clichéd ‘fair of stereotypes’. Crumb’s lexicon is refined and intellectually complex, certainly not easy to translate (e.g., “cretinous” and “mountainous”). With respect to the original, Malatempora seems to simplify the way in which Whiteman calls Yetti, since “bestiona” includes the classemes of «animality» and «bulkiness» (in the original expressed by “mountainous”), but with a poorer language and, above all, with no reference to Yetti being “hairy ape-like” and “cretinous”. As for the latter term, its translation is crucial since, according to the OED, cretinism defines “a species of imperfect mental and physical development” and “a combination of deformity and idiocy”. Yetti is not only reviled for her animality, but also for her psychological condition, which Whiteman is deeming inferior. In Totem, rather than translating the original *enumeratio*, the translator relies on a hyperbolic phrase “più pelosa di un gorilla”, translating “hairy ape-like”; the choice depletes Crumb’s vocabulary and banalises the content of the balloon. The phrase “lurida bestiaccia” reiterates the classemes of «dirt» and «animality» already expressed by “scrofa” and is meant to solicit disgust, though with a poor and inadequate reduction of the original language. Crumb’s story is certainly developing the dynamics between repulsion and attraction thematised by Wilson and his aesthetic disgust. However, such a deep intellectual involvement is completely erased by the Italian translators. As such, the censorship besieging the story is the outcome of negligence, not just of deliberate blankening.

It is crucial to stress that the original text is implying that Whiteman feels somehow legitimated in his actions – which accordingly appear less barbarian – by Yetti’s “abominable” condition of (mental and physical) inferiority. In fact, the subsequent page describes how he takes advantage of his sleeping mate:

Original (16)	Malatempora (49)	Totem (67)
Oh well... I must be really horny! I'll think about Raquel Welch while I'm doin'it... Okay baby! Spread'em!	Mi sa che sono proprio arrapato... vuol dire che mi metto a pensare a Jane Fonda e via... Okay baby apri le coscione!	Eppure è così. Sono eccitatissimo! Vorrà dire che mentre me la scopo penso a Marilyn Monroe! Forza. Pupa, apri un po' ste coscione!
First I'll finger her a little to get 'er goin'...	Mi sa' che prima la sditalino un po' per scaldarla...	Sarà meglio accarezzarla... uhm, com'è ispida...
Shh! Quiet! You want everybody to –oops – forgot! There's nobody here but us! God! She gets wet fast! What a mess!	Shhh! Zitta! Ci sentono i vici... ah noo...! Qui non ci sente nessuno; questa si bagna proprio presto, cristo	Tu, zitta e buona! Vuoi che ci sentano tutti? Lascia fare a me...
Wow! Louise was never like this!! Yetti, you're incredible!! Ya make me feel like a real man!	Wow! Luisa non è mica così! Yetina ma sei proprio una gran ficona!!!	Cazzo! Luisa non si è mai eccitata così! Cara Yeti, tu sei una forza della natura! Sei una favola!
Good Lord! Woulja look at that cunt!	Gesù! Madonna! Guarda che fica!!!	Che mondo sconosciuto!

This page is one of the most interesting cases of censorship in this corpus and this does not come as a surprise considering that we are dealing with a most troublesome example of provocative, even disturbing artistic freedom. In particular, we saw how Crumb's texts suffer from the banalisation of sexual contents by erasing the intellectual, cultural, psychological dimension on a verbal level and relegating sex either in the domain of crude biology or to a petty 'fair of stereotypes'. In addition, this passage is mutilated by a direct, shocking intervention on a visual level. But first things first: in the first passage, "horny" is translated as "arrapato" in Malatempora and "eccitatissimo" in Totem, the former lowering the register of the original. On the other hand, it is interesting that the situation is reversed as "while I'm doin'it" is translated as "e via" in Malatempora and "mentre me la scopo" in Totem. Both

versions use “coscione” instead of the pronoun in “spread’em”, whereas the original actually relied on the image to make readers understand what is going on. The choice of the noun “coscione” may be explained by a shared frame of interpretation: both translators were subjected to: the all-Italian tradition of ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ movies. Such expressions as “coscione” and “gran ficona” evoke such titles as Mariano Laurenti’s 1972 *Quel gran pezzo dell’Ubalda tutta nuda e tutta calda* (*Ubalda All Naked and Warm*), Sergio Martino’s 1973 *Giovannona Coscialunga disonorata con onore* (*Giovannona Long-Thigh*) or Lucio Dandolo 1973 *Quant’è bella la Bernarda, tutta nera, tutta calda*. The first translation by *Riso.Amaro*, reprinted by Malatempora, dated back to 1979, in the period of maximum success of the ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’. Likewise, Totem’s whole editorial experience is certainly mediated by this cinematographic tradition and the relaxation of censorship grip in relation to a form of representation of sex deemed unharmed.

Malatempora also provides a translation of “finger her” and “get ‘er goin’” similar to the original, whereas Totem considerably mitigates Crumb’s explicitness with “accarezzarla”, also adding the comment “com’è ispida”, which is not present in English but likely resumes the idea of Yetti as a “hairy ape-like” creature and is therefore coherent with the frame “animality”. Such mitigating tendency in Totem is particularly evident in the third example: on a visual level, the image suffers an arbitrary and definitely unusual blackening of female genitalia as well as the erasure of vaginal fluid in the scene displaying Whiteman fisting Yetti; likewise, on the verbal level, “She gets wet fast” is turned into a “lascia fare a me”, thus placing emphasis on Whiteman’s gesture and removing any verbal reference to the vaginal fluid already visually deleted from the panel. It is interesting to notice that in the previous pages fluids were not covered (64-65), likely because they were not combined with a graphic representation of genitalia during a sexual act.

Another detail to notice about this panel is that, in a scene depicting Whiteman’s sexual approach, Crumb ironically signalled with a caption box his argyle patterned socks, likely joking on how old-fashioned and “loser” the character is, even when in a position of power. Both translations left “argyle” untranslated and, as a consequence, this subtly humorous and sociologically relevant element is lost in the Italian editions, unless readers know that “argyle” refers to the lozenge pattern and this is possibly to always the case. Another very important element which goes lost in both Italian versions is when Whiteman compares his wife Louise to his mate Yetti and exclaims: “Ya make me feel like a real man!”. The sentence is erased in both translations, thus silencing that Whiteman appears to feel a

real man only through the release of his sexual drives, which is possible by such a wild creature as Yetti. Malatempora rather magnifies Whiteman's naivety and childish vulgarity with "sei proprio una gran ficona!!!", which translates "incredible", whereas Totem reiterates the isotopy of wildness again with "tu sei una forza della natura!", and provides an ecstatic though light and frivolous strain to "incredible" with "Sei una favola!". In addition, at the beginning of the balloon text, while the original and Malatempora use a simple interjection "Wow!", Totem makes use of the crude exclamation "cazzo!". Such an explicit display of coarse language does not entirely match the censorious attitude showed on the previous as well as on the following panels.

In point of fact, on the following panel, the extremely graphic image of Yetti's vagina is completely blackened and the vaginal fluid is erased. Even in this case, visual censorship goes hand in hand with the verbal one: once Whiteman's composure is completely lost, his register lowers as well, and he starts using a crescendo of coarse language culminating with: "Good Lord! Woulja look at that cunt!". Totem's version entirely narcotises such climax and it comes up again with a solution focusing on a naïve, childlike and jerky reaction of the male character, as the balloon simply comments the blackened vagina with "Che mondo sconosciuto!". Though first published 19 years before in *Riso Amaro*, Malatempora's translation did not resort to these extreme forms of censure, and the translation of the balloon reproduces Whiteman's scurrility, by combining profanity and sexual reference: "Gesù! Madonna! Guarda che fica!!!". On a visual level, no change is made. The reason likely lies in the fact that *Risoamaro* and Malatempora's *Le Grandi Storie* did not have a mainstream circulation and did not risk (or fear) sanctions. Moreover, it is possible that the 1998 translation included in Totem's publication was affected by an episode occurred to another comic book, Miguel Àngel Martín's *Psychopathia Sexualis* edited by Jorge Vacca's Topolin Edizioni⁷⁰, which was seized and charged of offence to public decency and instigation to paedophilia by an Italian magistrate between 1996 and 1997. Of course, the link between *Psychopathia Sexualis*'s seizure and Totem's censorious act is just a hypothesis and this episode remained an isolated case. However, it may explain why such publishers as Nuova Frontiera, publishing Totem, may have decided to avoid particularly graphic images, as in the present

⁷⁰ The charges against Vacca were only dropped in 2001, after a long trial which cost the collapse of his small publishing house. *Psychopathia Sexualis* was subsequently published by Purple Press in 2010, in a wrapped edition displaying the indication "Rigorosamente vietata la vendita ai minori di 18 anni". It includes an interview of Vacca, a letter by Milo Manara expressing his sympathy to Vacca's cause and an interview of Davide Toffolo, founder of the Italian Fondo per la Libertà di Espressione (FOLE).

case, and, in general, to distribute comics on the newsstand with the seal “V.M. ANNI 18” and a cellophane wrapping. The subsequent issues show no sign of visual censorship. Totem’s censored edition of “Whiteman meets Bigfoot” arguably represents an isolated case, yet it represents of the most significant examples of visual censorship included in the present corpus and, in general, in the whole underground production translated in Italy.

Going back to the narration, the sexual encounter between Whiteman and Yetti represents a turning point for both of them. As for Whiteman, though his personal crisis with civilisation will be discussed below, it should be mentioned his change of attitude towards his mate, a display of affection which is rather unusual in Crumb’s male protagonists – e.g., he starts calling her “Yetti, my love” (17), literally translated as “Yettina, amore” (Malatempora, 50) and “Yeti, amore mio” (Totem, 68). An important development follows:

Original (17)	Malatempora (50)	Totem (68)
I dunno... I've gotten sort of used to you... it may sound silly, but I'm actually very fond of you Yetti... and our sex life is so incredibly great... I never thought I could experience such exciting... well... you know	Non so... mi sono abituato a te.. sarà stupido.. ma mi pare di voleti bene, yettina.. e poi scopiamo così incredibilmente bene...non avrei mai creduto..	Non so... ho avuto la fortuna di abituarmi a te... sembrerà assurdo ma... sono contento di stare con te, yetina mia, e la nostra vita sessuale è proprio straordinaria...

In the case of Malatempora, the reference to their “sex life” and the suspended sentence hinting at Whiteman’s excitement are condensed in the more overt expression “scopiamo così incredibilmente bene”. In Totem, “I’ve gotten sort of used to you” is translated with “ho avuto la fortuna di abituarmi a te”, likely mistaking “sort” for a synonym of “luck”. The reference to the sexual life of the couple is rendered with a sober “sono contento di stare con te, yetina mia, e la nostra vita sessuale è proprio straordinaria...”, removing the ambiguity engendered by the adjective “exciting” and the suspension of the sentence with “...well...you know”.

The encounter with Whiteman represents a watershed for Yetti as well. As a creature not abiding to the Faustian civilization-repression compromise, she used to be free to live in a state of nature, with no restraint to her primordial instincts especially from a sexual point

of view. However, the civilized world, first epitomised by her own mate, tries to impose its supremacy over wildness: indeed, Whiteman was the first to take advantage of her while she sleeps (15-16), and in the subsequent pages his attempt to go back to the civilized world with her results in Yetti being beaten, threatened with guns, tethered and ultimately captured and sent to a laboratory (19-21). The connotations of «monstrosity» and «animality» are here reiterated through the words of the hunters capturing her:

Original (20)	Malatempora (53)	Totem (71)
We better take this monster over to the ranger station in Yetti! They'll know how to handle it!	Portiamola dai ranger, loro sapranno cosa fare!	Portiamo questo mostro alla stazione di polizia. Loro sapranno come trattarla...
I can't believe it! A real live abominable snowman!	Non ci posso credere un abominevole...	È incredibile! Un'abominevole donna delle nevi!
Bwah howdy! A female one at that!	E femmina per giunta!	Dopotutto, è una donna!

In the first example, Malatempora removed “monster”, though isotopy of the “abominable” is preserved in the sentence “un abominevole... e femmina per giunta!”. Conversely, Totem translates into “mostro”, though it subsequently refers to Yetti a woman. Moreover, “dopotutto, è una donna!” sounds really ambiguous, as the adverb “dopotutto” does actually not correspond to anything in the original. The surprise effect and the overall euphoric rhythm are also dampened by the anticipation of “Un'abominevole donna delle nevi!”. Thus, the verbal message simply becomes a repetition of the balloon preceding it. The term “abominable” is isotopic to the image, in which she attacks the rangers growling and gritting her teeth. Though she towers over them, they capture her just as wild game during a hunt.

Once returned to his petit-bourgeois routine, Whiteman understands he misses Yetti and their life away from civilisation. When visiting the laboratory where she is kept, he assaults Dr Greyface in order to be able to see her.

Original (23)	Malatempora (56)	Totem (74)
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Look, you! She's mine! Do you understand?? That Yeti woman is my mate!! She was given to me by her own father! I want to see my mate right now!! Right this goddamn fucking minute!	Senti, stronzo... lei è mia, mia capito! La yetti me l'ha data suo padre, a me!! E io la voglio vedere adesso, subito capito!!	Mi ascolti bene! Lei è mia, lo capisce? Quella yeti è la mia compagna! Suo padre in persona me l'ha regalata! Voglio vederla subito!
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This passage exemplifies another crucial point in the relationship between Whiteman and Yeti, the latter being treated as an object and a possession, always passive with respect to what the male world around her (her father, her mate) decides. Malatempora particularly emphasises Whiteman's possessiveness with the repetition of pronouns "lei è mia, mia capito!", and "me l'ha data suo padre, a me". Verbal violence, which in the original is conveyed by "goddamn fucking minute", is transmitted by "senti, stronzo", which is very colloquial and harsh, in line with the outburst of rage showed in the image of Whiteman attacking the doctor. Conversely, in Totem the register of the balloon is unexplicably formal as, despite the aggressiveness of his pose, on a verbal level, Whiteman sounds very polite in addressing the doctor. As for the relationship with Yeti, he calls her "la mia compagna", thus sanctioning his role as the yeti's mate. The translator subsequently opts for a very telling verbal choice "me l'ha regalata", acknowledging Yeti as a gift, nothing more than an object exchanged from one man to another.

Ultimately, Yeti manages to break out of prison: in spite of a comic story carefully built with regular layout and framing, her foot breaks the panel cage at the bottom of page 25 and she runs away across the city. However, once free, Whiteman tries to disguise Yeti, making her wear human clothes and a wig – and even in this case he utters "I had to hunt all over the city t'get you some clothes!!" (26) where 'hunt' and the relative isotopy of hunting is derived from the isotopy of wildness – just as in the previous pages, when Yeti was captured by the rangers. Considering the aforementioned figures characterising Yeti as well as her capture and imprisonment, hunting and wildness represent corresponding isotopies, developed in parallel along the story. However, neither translation renders it in Italian (59 in Malatempora, 26 in Totem) – and, as they walk on the street, passers-by do not refrain from making sexual comments:

Original (27)	Malatempora (60)	Totem (78)
This is embarrassing! I can't stand to be conspicuous!	È imbarazzante sentirsi così guardati!!	Che vergogna! Impossibile passare inavvertito...
Holy Toledo!	La madonnina!!!!	Che chiappe!
Man, that dude sure got his hands full! Haw haw!	Waw, quello sì che cià le mani in pasta!!	Quello è sicuro un milionario!
Hey bud! Hope ya don't fall in! Har har!	Ah moro non è che ci caschi dentro ha ha!	Per forza! Con quella bonazza!
Why don'tcha let'er take us all on at th'same time! Hyuk hyuk!	Che ci lasci entrare tutti assieme, a bella! Hyuk! hyuk!	Perché non ce la presti un po' anche a noi?

In this case, Malatempora's version is more similar to the original and makes use of such regionalisms as "La madonnina!", "ah moro" and "a bella!". Totem's version displays some differences: at point 2, an explicit appreciation of Yetti's body, "che chiappe", takes the place of the exclamation of surprise; at point 3, a reference to Whiteman being a billionaire is added, thus extending the meaning of the idiomatic expression "got his hands full"; at point 4, the dirty joke is substituted by another crude advance to Yetti and, finally, the reference to group sex is softened with a less explicit, yet allusive "Perché non ce la presti un po' anche a noi?". The reference to physical sexual abuse is substituted by verbal harassment, which may attenuate the violence, yet still represents an abusive language. Once again, the hermeneutic frame adopted seems to be that of 'commedia sexy all'italiana'. One may argue that such expressions as "che chiappe!" and "che bonazza!" were not perceived as abusive as they would (and rightly so) nowadays.

Crumb's unmerciful satire rears its head and portrays Yetti being constantly treated either as an animal or as an object of desire and violence by those very phonies who, according to underground artists, hypocritically set themselves up as the guardians of the moral order. Eros and Thanatos, in the form of sexual violence, represent white men's endeavour to 'domesticate' wildness and beastliness, thus subverting the semantic relationships established initially established. As showed below, the aggressiveness generally attributed to savage beasts will ultimately come to define American civilised men. All in all, however, Yetti remains unbound: her primitive force overpowers the cages of modern

society and enraptures Whiteman. This is figuratively exemplified in a compelling set of panels on page 29, when she destroys Whiteman's precious Winnebago Renegade, after he tries to push her inside to find a hiding place.

This page also provides a comparison between the two female figures of the story: Yetti and Louise. They both serve as mirrors to Whiteman's identity, though, if the former embodies his desires and freedom from constraints, the former, perfectly integrated within civilized society, just exemplifies Whiteman's duties and responsibilities, always shouting at him and treating him as a whimsical child. The following passages, excerpted from page 29 of the original are quite illustrative of Louise's function:

Original (29)	Malatempora (62)	Totem (80)
Louise – I wish you'd grow up!!	Ma cerca di essere serio!!	Mi piacerebbe conoscerlo!
Louise – I hope you're happy!! You've ruined our jeep trying to run off with that...that beast!	Spero sarai contento, ora che hai rovinato la roulotte, per scappare con quella bestia!	Sarai contento di aver distrutto la nostra roulotte con quel... mostro!
Whiteman – She's not a beast, Louise... she's the most beautiful creature I've ever...	Non è una bestia Luisa... è la più bella creatura che io...	Non è un mostro...è una dolce creatura!
Louise – Mark it, jack! No way no day you gonna get away with a stunt like that!!	Ma non ti credere che puoi passarla liscia così, on no! no no!!!	Ti avverto, Jack, che non ti permetterò di sottrarti alle tue responsabilità!
Louise – You rotten louse! You son of a bitch!! I wish you would leave! Go on! Go with that ape!	Vergognati, svergognato, di un irresponsabile! Vai! Vattene via con quella scimmia!!	Ah è tardi? Allora sai che ti dico? Che dovresti davvero andartene con quella tua scimmia? Sei matto da legare!
Louise – And furthermore, if I ever...	E poi se anche io decidessi...	Aiuto! Che fa il mostro?

The reference to Whiteman's need to grow up and put an end to his 'adolescent' rebellion is translated differently: in Malatempora, Whiteman's infatuation with Yetti is considered nothing but a joke, while Totem completely changes the topic and refers to Whiteman's lie about Yetti being a friend (28). Louise also reprimands his husband for destroying their precious car to be with "that beast" (point 2 and point 3). Malatempora's translation reiterates the isotopy of abominable through the very *classeme* of Bachtinian «animality», whereas Totem retrieves the rather Gargantuan *classeme* of «monstrosity». One may here observe that the former *classeme* employs quite a strong debasement of the woman protagonist whose human traits are erased, whereas the latter *classeme*, «monstrosity», is so hyperbolic that the derogatory attitude is immediately recognised as a politically incorrect, though playful exaggeration, one which many would find less offensive.

Totem also mistakenly translates the derogatory term "jack" with the proper name "Jack" and, more to the point here, adds a reference to Whiteman's responsibilities to fulfil. Ultimately, Louise displays all her verbal aggressiveness by calling Whiteman "You rotten louse! You son of a bitch!!" and Yetti "ape". Malatempora's translation mitigates the insults by referring to the shameful and irresponsibility of the man, while preserving the isotopy of animality with the literal translation "scimmia". The same does Totem, also adding a reference to Whiteman being "matto da legare". The final passage shows how in Totem, the translator also adds a further remark on Yetti being a "mostro". Whiteman seems to hesitate in front of Louise as to whether stay on the straight and narrow or abandon himself to his wild side, and the ultimate action is up to Yetti, who grabs him and take him to the forest where he can finally give free rein to his desires, adopting the 'hippie' looks he was mocked for once returned in the straight world, after the first kidnapping (21).

Drawing some partial conclusions on the basis of this analysis, Italian translators seem to have a tendency to explain images rather than translating the original verbal elements. They are hypnotised by the signification pathway suggested by the visual code, thus disregarding the – not necessarily coherent – relation the latter establishes with the verbal one (and in contrast with Barthes's definition of relay). A first hypothesis to account for this proclivity is that translators are influenced by the idea that comics are first of all visual narrations, verbal elements being relegated to the ancillary role of corollary and appendix. Another possible explanation brings into play the cultural frames within which American counterculture is read, received and interpreted, usually provided by such pervasive media as cinema and television. In this respect, a flippant, playful and light-hearted image of 'happy

hippie' comix seem to have overshadowed the complex nature of these subversive, vitriolic and far from trivial works. The often unconscious expectation of finding comedy in comics at all costs, which betrays a biased conception of the medium as ludicrous, ultimately results in an inauthentic translation of source texts, trying to force them into a frame too narrow for their multifaceted character.

What Italian translators arguably failed to recognise is that a story as “Whiteman meets Bigfoot” is much more than a sexy comedy about a ‘geek’ and a ‘wild bombshell’. It is a reflection on society, repression and the clash between civilisation and Otherness. In spite of labels, cages and the violence the ‘civilised’ world tries to exert on those who refuse to submit to its conventions and rules, Otherness ultimately displays the inner freedom Whiteman longs for. This represents the challenge to (self-) censorship Crumb embedded into his satire: in opposition to sexual inhibition, social impositions and all cultural constraints counterculture calls for emancipation. And Whiteman, in the attempt to grasp some glimpse of freedom, eventually gives up to the American Dream. While the social implications of this ending will be investigated below, it is interesting to notice how Crumb’s poetics is deeply embedded in the exploration of a “contact zone”⁷¹ between white men and their counterparts – black, feminine, uncivilised– representing a leitmotif in his production. Another crucial example is represented by one of his most iconic characters, Angelfood Mc Spade – the name ironically mixing the homonymous cake with the derogatory term “spade” for blacks – usually depicted as a naïve nymphomaniac and an easy prey of males, whether humans or humanoids. The four-page story analysed here was published in *Zap Comix 2* and reprinted in *The Complete Crumb Comics 5* (1990: 16-19), among the others. The translations are taken from Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap Comix* and the Totem’s *Crumb Comics 5*. The introduction to the former states:

Angelfood McSpade, come altri suoi [Crumb’s] personaggi di colore, è una satira dello stereotipo razzista presente nelle strips, nei comic book e nei film della produzione di massa. Angelfood, la prima delle “primitive” create da Crumb, rassomiglia alle grosse e pelose creature umanoidi che negli anni Venti si riteneva vivessero nelle zone più selvagge di Canada e Stati Uniti. (16)

In Jakini’s description, Angelfood reminds of Yetti. Indeed, in an interview with B.N. Duncan (reprinted in Holms, 2004: 121), Crumb himself maintained that Angelfood was a

⁷¹ The theoretical notion of contact zones was articulated by Mary Louise Pratt, who defined them as “social spaces where cultures, meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt, 1991: 33-40).

“goddess, a vision of perfect, primitive sexuality”, while Yetti was a “further development of this theme...the lusty Amazon sex goddess who lives naked in the jungle”, much as the American comic book jungle girl heroine Sheena, the Queen of the Jungle⁷².

As seen above, Yetti lives freely on the mountains before encountering Whiteman. Likewise, being an incarnation of men’s sexual desires, Angelfood has been declared illegal and “confined to the wilds of darkest Africa. The official excuse being that civilization would be threatened if she were allowed to do whatever she pleased!” (17). Policemen are seen keeping an eye on her, against men, labelled as “punk”, harassing her. The Italian translation proposed by *Zap* (97) for “punk” is “verme”, “worm”, which rather emphasises the moral despicability of an individual, rather than the “rascal” attitude of Angelfood’s “admirers”. By contrast, Totem increases the verbal violence of the original with “bastardo” (50). On the following page, the reciter explains that only researchers are allowed near her, as they are immune to her sexual allure.

Original (18)	Stampa Alternativa (98)	Totem (50)
The pity of it is that only officially sanctioned researchers are allowed near the dark-skinned sex bomb.	Il peccato è che soltanto a ricercatori ufficialmente autorizzati è permesso avvicinare la bomba sexy dalla pelle nera!	Il guaio è che permettono soltanto ai ricercatori legalmente autorizzati di avvicinarsi a quella bomba sexy di colore!
...and those creeps can't hardly ever get one up! Poor devils!	...e a quei cervelloni non tirerebbe mai! Poveri diavoli!	...e quelli nemmeno si eccitano!
I mean, there she is, all ready, willing, and able, with plenty of what it takes, dying just to give it away, but no! They insist she's too hot to handle!	Dico, eccola là, pronta, disponibile, abile, con tutto quello che ha e non vede l'ora di dar via, invece no! Per loro è roba che scotta troppo! È	Insomma, è qui che sta aspettando vogliosa e sensuale, con una gran voglia di scopare e invece niente! Quelli

⁷² The character of Sheena, a young blond orphan who grew up in the African jungle where she learnt to fight and talk with animals, was born from the pen of Will Eisner and Jerry Iger and, even prior to Wonder Woman, became the first female comic book heroine with her own title (1937 in Great Britain; 1938 in the United States). Her popularity, already granted by her iconic (and widely imitated) pin-up look with an audacious leopard-printed bikini, increased with a TV series broadcasted between 1955 and 1956.

She's too risky! Something might...um...happen!	troppo rischiosa! Chissà che può... um...accadere!	insistono che non è facile controllarla...
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In the first example, *Stampa Alternativa*'s choice to translate pity as "peccato" is interesting as it keeps the connotation of religion, which also features in "poveri diavoli" and "oltraggioso", Totem's version omits it. The third excerpt confirms the tendency of *Stampa Alternativa* to mitigate Crumb. For instance, the series of sexually allusive adjectives "ready, willing, and able" is more neutrally translated as "pronta, disponibile, abile" and the expression "dying just to give it away" is smoothed into "che non vede l'ora di dar via". Totem turns the text into a much more sexually explicit one: "vogliosa e sensuale" and "con una gran voglia di scopare". In the same panel, the balloon further strengthens the woman's openness as she claims: "Ah, don't mind a bit, so go ahead!", translated by *Stampa Alternativa* with "E gli se ne frega, daddi da fare!". The translation is wrong as it denies Angelfood's active role in claiming that she is not displeased by sexual encounters and relegates her to a passive role.

It is interesting that in this balloon as well as in the few others where Angelfood is allowed to speak, she uses Black American English, or jive, which is reproduced in Italian with a mangled language, with "d" for "t", "b" for "p", and "g" for "c" and "q". Both in the original and in *Stampa Alternativa*, the sociolinguistic choices are aimed to exaggerate a racial stereotype, rather than to depict Angelfood's authentic speech. In America, until the 1960s and the adoption of jive as a social identity marker (and the subsequent recognition of its set of dialects as English varieties), black speech was stigmatized and associated to poor education and low social status⁷³. The reproduction of this peculiar sociolect thus partakes in the thematisation of Angelfood's primitivism, which is maintained in translation, though such mangling of Italian varieties sounds more like a lampoon of black people's pronunciation than a variety per se. Thus, an average Italian reader is likely not to fully perceive the social and racial implications of these linguistic choices. Totem avoids any manipulation or lexicalisation of improper pronunciations and simply translates the balloon as "Forza! Fatevi sotto!". Once again, the active role is up to men, her perspective being completely erased ("Ah, don't mind a bit" is omitted).

⁷³ By late 1960s and early 1970s Labov (1972a) worked on the definition of Black English (mainly New York-based) as a variety of English autonomous from a sociolinguistic point of view and thus deserving a proper investigation. In this respect, he developed the sociolinguistic notion of "marker" (1972b) by describing a variety as influenced by diastatic and diaphasic variations of a language.

Going back to the thematisation of sexuality, the subsequent page continues with the hyperbolic description of Angelfood's lewdness:

Original (19)	Stampa Alternativa (99)	Totem (51)
She can do the most outrageous things with her tongue! It's incredible!	Lei può usare la sua lingua per le cose più oltraggiose! È incredibile!	È fantastica! Con la sua lingua è capace di fare le cose più incredibili!
...and when she flexes the muscles in her powerful thighs, it's just too <u>atrocious</u> !	...e quando contrae i suoi muscoli indurendosi tutta, è un vero delirio!	E quando flette i muscoli delle sue coscie potenti è semplicemente... la fine del mondo!
Men would quit their jobs if they got a chance to see ol' Angelfood shake that thing!	Uomini che mollerebbero il lavoro se solo avessero l'occasione di vedere Angelfood scuoterlo così!	Gli uomini pianterebbero in massa il lavoro se solo potessero vedere la dolce Angelfood dimenare le sue immense chiappe!
The overwhelming smell of her...er...ah...thingie tends to disrupt clear thinking. The stockmarket would take a nose-dive!	L'irresistibile odore della sua...em...ah...cosina distrarrebbe incantando chiunque. Il mercato andrebbe di sicuro a rotoli!	L'inebriante profumo del suo...ehm...ugh... "affare", provoca alterazioni delle capacità intellettive. Anche gli agenti di borsa andrebbero in tilt!
But, like, she could care less about that sort of thing! Investments and what-not. She spends her time bopping around in the jungle! Just a simple primitive creature!	Ma, del resto, lei se ne strafrega di questo tipo di cose! Investimenti e simili. Passa tutto il suo tempo qua e là nella giungla! Una semplice creatura primitiva!	Ma a lei della borsa non gliene importa un fico e seguita a girovagare per la selva! Non è altro che un'incantevole creatura primitiva!
But if you dig her, go get her! If you dare!	Ma se siete pazzi di lei, raggiungetela! Se avete il coraggio!	Che devo dirti: se ti piace, va' a cercarla! Ma ricorda: ci vuole molto coraggio!

In the first excerpt, as mentioned before, the adjective “outrageous” is translated with the Italian equivalent “oltraggiose”, which also preserves the connotations of religion, shame and immorality, but loses the meaning of “beyond the point of sexy” – as pointed out in the definition of the online Urban Dictionary. Totem proposes a milder “incredibili” and introduces the connotation of belief, which in the original is conveyed by the expression “It’s incredible!”. The connotation of sexiness is mostly conveyed on a visual level, especially by Angelfood’s expression, with her sensual glance to the viewers and her tongue out. Likewise, in *Stampa Alternativa* the verbal reference to her “powerful thighs” is replaced by “indurendosi tutta”, in consideration of the salience of the visual thighs, at the centre of the panel and highlighted by motion lines and the onomatopoeia “Flex! Flex!”. This is one of many occurrences when translators felt that the job done by the visual code was enough and the verbal code could rather be used in translation to convey different, non redundant meanings. By contrast, in this case, Totem chooses the literal, explicit rendering of “coscìe potenti”. In the following phrase “it’s just too atrocious!”, the reciter means that Angelfood’s moves are too shocking for human eyes. While *Stampa Alternativa*’s choice is a reference to madness “è un vero delirio”, Totem opts for “è semplicemente...la fine del mondo!”, adding an apocalyptic dimension to the scene.

In the third example, a subtle change in the caption tells a lot about *Stampa Alternativa*’s translator’s attitude: “Uomini che mollerebbero il lavoro” differs significantly from the original “men would quit their job”. Crumb is telling that all men would abandon their duties for Angelfood, including him. On the other hand, the Italian version takes a distance from those men by claiming that there are men who would quit their jobs for her, but not necessarily everybody. Conversely, Totem’s solution reflects the original with “Gli uomini pianterebbero in massa”. In the same passage, the solution adopted for “shake that thing” in *Stampa Alternativa*’s version is adequate as it maintains the ambiguity with “scuoterlo così”. The image suggests what Angelfood is shaking, though the verbal ambiguity holds the line of the sexual innuendo as to what else she may “shake”. Even in this case, Totem is more explicit in the rendering of the visual component “dimenare le sue immense chiappe”.

In the subsequent panel, it is suggested that the smell of her “thingie”, translated respectively as “cosina” and “affare”, may indeed jeopardise the power of thinking, even causing a “nose-dive” of the stock exchange. The wordplay nose-dive/smell is lost in both translations. However, *Stampa Alternativa*’s solution “andare a rotoli” is particularly effective

as the image shows a businessman distracted from his reading of a ticker tape by Angelfood's smell. Thus, even on a visual level the tape in his hand is counterbalanced by the wavy smell lines tickling the man's nose. However, while the original points out how that odour can "disrupt clear thinking", the translation undoubtedly softens the text by saying that it "distrarrebbe incantando", i.e., it would cause distractions with its charm. What Crumb implies is quite rougher, as Angelfood is not portrayed as charming, but rather as an arousing character. Such a mitigating, almost censorious attitude somehow blurs the representation of Angelfood as the embodiment of primordial instincts and pleasures, deprived of any charm and fineness. She is the opposite of the modern society's rational thinking, free from the cages of morality, decency, duties, and, in a word, of civilisation. As for Totem, though the register is slightly elevated, the solution "alterazioni delle capacità intellettive" renders the original meaning, while in "gli agenti di borsa andrebbero in tilt", the expression "in tilt" preserves the classiness of chaos associated with Angelfood. Totem sometimes uses a higher register, with such terms as "girovagare" for "bopping around", "selva" for "jungle" and "incantevole" for "simple", which adds that very classiness of charm to the character which Crumb did not want. The same occurs in *Stampa Alternativa's* last panel: the slang verb "to dig" is translated as "essere pazzo di", which in Italian involves fondness for an object of desire, while "go get her" is translated as "raggiungetela", literally, "catch up with her". In general, the translation stands out for its change of register, from slang to standard, still informal but sober. Here Totem adopts a neutral solution with "se ti piace" and "va a cercarla". However, Totem's overall translation shows a tendency to make sexual references explicit, even when the original is purposely ambiguous, although Yetti's story displayed an opposite attitude. Moreover, the subsequent story dedicated to Angelfood in the volume, "Backwater Blues: Angelfood McDevilsfood" (originally from *Home Grown Funnies* in 1971, and here translated as "Angelfood McDevilsfood in Inondazione Blu"), is more graphic than "Whiteman meets Bigfoot", as it shows Snoid shoving a pole into Angelfood's genitalia (54). Here, vagina and fluids are not censored, which may indicate that the scare linked to potential censorious acts was lessened. In fact, the fifth issue of Totem's collection includes some of the most shocking stories by Crumb with no blackening anywhere.

The very characterisation of Angelfood is among the most harshly criticised within Crumb's universe, as it was also charged with racism. While depicting Angelfood as a tribeswoman with black skin, big lips, rings on her ears and around her neck, bare-breasted and wearing a palm-tree leaves skirt only, Crumb is satirising the infamous 'blackface'

iconography white people have used ever since the nineteenth century, first as a theatrical make-up, then in film, cartoons, advertising and logos, thus contributing to the spread of racial stereotypes. His use of 'blackface' provides a satirical mirror to racist portraits of black people as identical and caricature-like, deprived of any distinctive facial feature and, by extension, of their own identity as individuals. Arguably, the racism Crumb ruthlessly depicted is American society's racism, not his own – a topic further developed in Chapter 7.

However, such figures as Angelfood and Yeti inspired other works within the underground comix milieu, which reached Italy through alternative channels. In particular, the topos of a black woman opposing a white man is developed in "You got a point there, pop!", originally published in the second and last issue of *Deviant Slice* (1973), a title born from the collaboration of artist Greg Irons and writer Tom Veitch. The duo is famous for their gruesome, extremely dark comix. Violence is their core theme, though it is never used per se, but rather functional to a socio-political satire. The story was included in *Cannibale "USA Only"* (translated in a footnote as "Gran perdita di punti, amico!"). The plot revolves around the struggle between men and women to conquer the planet in an alternative world. At the top of the first page, the cartoon explains that "the story is for all you Women's Libbers", which is translated as "e 'sta storia la dedichiamo tutta a voi, femministe! (Murfe! Murfe!)" and the narrative plot is summarised as follows:

It's near the end of the last war between the men and the women. The men hold Europe and most of the Eastern seaboard. The ladies hold everything West of Chicago and are pushing hard towards th' coast! As our story opens, two lone enemies are about to meet on an isolated hilltop in Pittsburg.

Siamo più o meno alla fine dell'ultima Guerra tra maschi e femmine. Gli omi cianno l'Europa e quasi tutta la costa atlantica degli States. Le siore cianno tutti i territori ad ovest di Chicago, e premono per arrivare al mare. La nostra storia s'inizia che due nemici sbandati sbattono l'una contro l'altro, sulla cima desolata di una collinaneì pressi di Pittsburg... ale' forza ragazzi!

The birth Women's Liberation Movement (see Chapter 5.5 for details) and the renegotiation of the role of women during the counterculture influenced underground comix and became object of several reflections by these authors. The fact that the story is explicitly dedicated to the Libbers may be either a form of sincere endorsement or an ironic remark owing to the

frequent dispute feminists had with male underground authors for their often sexist comics. Given the active role of the incensed female protagonist, the first hypothesis may be correct. The Italian translation stands out for the addition of the term “murfe!” and the comment “Alè, forza ragazzi!”: while the meaning of the former is not intelligible, the latter may represent either an encouragement for both parties or indicate the translator’s support for the ‘males’. In fact, in Italian, the use of universal masculine is ambiguous. The translation also makes use of vernacular forms (“omi”, “cianno” and “sioire”) and uncorrect syntax which is presumably meant to render a slang. Moreover, the adjective “lone” is translated as “sbandati”, a solution which even in the following caption is used referring to the female protagonist, Ruth O’Leary “of the fighting 51st”, who is defined “una sbandata del 51° rgt. ‘incazzate’”. By using the term “sbandati”, the translator is implicitly referring to Italian mavericks who did not abide any political affiliation during the turbulent years following the 1968. It was an eterogeneous group from freaks to “Lotta Armata” supporters. *Cannibale* was close to the Indiani Metropolitani experience⁷⁴, the most artistic and creative fringe of the Movimento del ‘77, which mixed the language of political militancy with freak exuberance. In this story, the use of a term connected with this milieu is not a magnification per se. The semema “sbandati” is marginal with respect to the whole story. However, it suggests that the political frame influenced the Italian translator, permeating their cultural context. As the aforementioned Crumb’s comix, here the comparison is between men and women as well as between races, a white man against a black woman, the former being equipped as a soldier, the latter presented as a bare-chested savage. The two fight against each other until Ruth manages to capture the man, named Lem, and, after making him believe to be indulgent and even sexually available, she slices his throat, emasculates him and eats his testicles, prior to torturing him by carving his chest.

On a visual level, the pages constantly play with the opposition between the two: white against black, man against female. While in Crumb’s comics the brawls between Angelfood and her male counterparts ended with her submission, the situation here is overturned as similar wrestling moves are performed by Ruth. The depiction of Lem’s

⁷⁴ Pablo Echaurren dedicated the volume *La Casa del Desiderio. '77: Indiani Metropolitani e Altri strani* (2005) to the Indiani Metropolitani phenomenon. Moreover, he collaborated with Matteo Guarnaccia and Guido Pautasso to exhibition *Felce e Mirtillo: dalla Beat Generation agli Indiani Metropolitani : (1967-1977)*, which took place at Derbylius in Milan in 1998 and at the Civica Galleria di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Monza in 1999 (and co-edited its catalogues). In 1999 Echaurren and Claudia Salaris also published the volume *Controcultura in Italia (1967-1977)*, which features an account on such groups as the Indiani Metropolitani, the sbandati and the different communities developed within the Italian counterculture.

ejaculation on Ruth’s vagina and the emasculation sequence are described in graphic, gruesome detail. On a verbal level, besides the endless references to violence, captions and balloons abound with terms referring to these two opposite worlds. In Italian, *Cannibale*’s translation seems to exaggerate sexual references and slurs, expanding original utterances or even adding phrases absent in the original text: rebel forces becomes “fighe ribelli”; “her abdomen” is expanded in the phrase “il nero, lucido, morbido ventre”; “wimmins” is rendered with a derogatory “femministe troie”; “her eyes heavy with man-hate” becomes “I pesanti capezzoloni sono occhi che fissano Lem con odio”; “her camp” is expanded in “accampamento di quella furia nera”, adding a reference to her rage and her skin-color. As occurred in the previous case-study, *Cannibale*’s translator is hypnotised by images and lingers in the description of visual elements (her breast, abdomen, nipples, skin, the enraged attitude conveyed of facial expressions on a proxemic level). Likewise, verbal violence in Lem’s balloon (“femministe troie”) is increased as the translator is rendering the image (showing the furious man menacing Ruth with a shotgun) into words. Further sexual slurs are referred to the male protagonist. In particular, since Ruth frequently uses such epithets as “Mr. Porkdog” (“mister cazzo”) and “Mr. Pigs” (“maialotto”), the sentence “pay for your sexist crimes against woman” is rendered, by extension, with the addition of the epithet “uccellone”: “dovrai pagare per i tuoi crimini sessisti, uccellone”, whereas the original slur “hard hog” is expanded in “t’è venuto duro”, once again describing the image rather than focusing on the verbal code.

In addition, what *Cannibale* surprisingly modifies is Ruth’s final monologue, leading to the horrific emasculation of her opponent. In a series of balloons the woman claims:

I know you’re young and you’re fighting this war just ‘cause some old men told you to...
--

Sei giovane, e so che combatti questa Guerra solo perchè qualche vecchione t’ha obbligato...
--

...The root of the physical struggle between the sexes lies in the sexism and ideological supremism of the masculine ego!

...Una volta finita sta guerra, sareste ancora lì a sbavare per le nostre spacche, e saremmo ancora nella vecchia merda di sempre !
--

...and when it's all over my sisters are going to run this planet!
--

...così, molto meglio per noi non avervi tra i piedi, quando tutto il mondo sarà nostro!
--

Until that day comes, no man will take his satisfaction with a woman!

E fino a quel giorno, nessun maschio sonderà buchi di donna!
--

Can you dig it, big man?

Capisci, cazzo?

The original touches different key-notions on the debate developed within the counterculture, especially in the light of the Women's Liberation Movement's claims: the Generation gap, "sexism" and the "ideological supremism of masculine ego". However, just as in the case of Crumb and the erasure of intellectual elements sharpening his vitriolic satire, *Cannibale's* translation silences all references to social, political and psychoanalytical themes. The Italian text rendes the speech a vulgar, trivial and coarse tirade, reducing the generational conflict to "qualche vecchione t'ha obbligato", sexism to "sbavare per le nostre spacche" and "nessun maschio sonderà buchi di donna", erasing the reference to ideological suprematism and male ego and replacing it with a banal lamentation: "saremmo ancora nella vecchia merda di **sempre**", also adding the sexual slur "cazzone" as a final remark. Despite the shared underground experience, *Cannibale's* translator overlooked the original verbal components and completely disregarded the original style, register and solemnity of the feminist claim. The translation betrays a slovenly attitude, showing the same flaws of other case-studies analysed in the previous pages, privileging images over words, triviality over thoughtful themes, a poor language over the original complexity of language. This attitude proves costant in Italian translators and hinders the comprehension of the actual message of American underground comix.

Another comic story showing similar topoi and a similar translational manipulation is *Big Comics*, published in Italy by Milano Stampa (1973), in which occurs the story "Capitan Guts: Potere Negro" by Larry Welz (originally, "Captain Guts Meets Black Power" published in *Captain Guts 2* in 1970). The superhero – or better said, the caricature of the prototypical American superhero – is the alter-ego of Artur Quim (Fillmore Grinchbottom in the original, though this story does not mention his name), who transforms into Captain Guts by drinking some beer. In total, Welz produced three issues of the hero's adventures, in which Captain

Guts, the bastion of traditional values (and repressed deviancies), is appointed to fight hippie revolutionaries, the Black Power and dope dealers, i.e., all the threats counterculture posed to the allegedly peaceful, American, middle-class society. In the only Italian translation available, the white superhero fights the black woman Ambrosia “la Manza” (Ambrosia Sweetmeat). Ambrosia is the “queen” of “Black Phantom Elite Party”, translated as “Pantere Nere”, while “Elite Party” is mistaken for “party d’elite”. As Quim sees the girl, he thinks she is a prostitute and decides to take advantage of her, only to discover the hideout of the Party. The story has three parts, each developing the fight between the two, one in which their secret weapons are his penis and her vagina. When the Party manages to capture Captain Guts, he is sentenced to death, with sex as the ultimate form of deadly torture. However, the unexpected outcome of the intercourse is that, as they climax, Ambrosia turns white and ultimately begins a new life as a white lady – as long as she regularly has sex with Captain Guts.

Even in this case, race, gender roles and sexual references intertwine in the narration. The Italian translator once again seems to emphasise trivial and vulgar expressions, particularly explicit sexual references and racial slurs. As for the former, “look at those tits” is rendered with the coarse expression “guarda che minchia di tettone”; “She’s black! Pant! Gasp! Must be a-a prostitute!” becomes “è pure negra! Dev’essere una pro...pro...prostituta! Che bona!”, with the addition of a vernacular comment (“che bona”) and the use of the derogatory term “negra”; “mammy” is translated as “figlia di puttana”, with an increased verbal violence. Captain Guts is also called with such sexual slurs as “finocchione” (Italian addition) and “palle sgonfie”, translating the original “flat head”. As for racial insults, the Black Phantom Elite Party members are “stronzi neri” (translating “lousy”) and “carboncini belli” with no equivalent in English, while Captain Guts is called “coglione bianco”, an insult either translating the epithet “whitey” or simply added to the text with no correspondences in the original.

As said, genitalia represents the weapons of the two opponents. Curiously, the sentence “ah got th’most pow’ful thighs this side of Philly” is rendered as “Ora conoscerai la presa segreta di Ambrosia e della sua “filippa”!!!”. The translation of “Philly” (nickname for Philadelphia) with the vernacular form “filippa” is reiterated throughout the whole story with the aim of generating a humorous effect. Therefore, the slur “black whore” becomes “la ‘filippa’ più zozza degli States”, the sentence “the penalty fo’ these crimes is death” becomes “la pena per questo crimine è la morte tramite ‘filippazione’ and “i’m gonna execute

the sentence *wif ma own thighs*” becomes “*la condanna sarà eseguita immediatamente! Ho la ‘filippa’ pronta!*”.

In English, in several utterances a solemn register was used so as to engender a humorous effect with the clash between the verbal code and the smut scenes displayed by the visual code. However, in line with this ‘*commedia sexy all’italiana*’ style, such sentences are rendered with coarse vernacular expressions (“*chiavando*”) and rather explicit figures referring to sex (“*viene*”, “*perde come un colabrodo*”): “*you gon’die a beautiful but excrutiatin’ death...*” becomes “*Morrai beatamente, chiavando fino alla morte!*”, and “*On and on the battle rages, shaking the very walls of the Phantoms subterranean lair, until suddenly...*” is turned into “*La lotta si fa sempe più cruenta: Guts non ‘viene’ ancora, resiste... l’Ambrogia invece ‘perde’ come un colabrodo, ma insiste... finchè improvvisamente...*”. Likewise, the comment of one of the Party-member escaping after the battle (“*ah’m runnin’*”) is rendered with “*Che forza di sburrata!*”.

It may be argued that Welz’s satire does not have Crumb’s, Iron’s and Veitch’s edge, nor he reaches Shelton’s level in mocking mainstream superheroes. The whole story revolves around the simple opposition between the white superhero, considered a “*reactionary fascist counter revolutionary*” (“*reazionario fascista contro i rivoluzionari*”), and Ambrosia’s Party. The latter is presented as revolutionary in the choice of a female leader, but its members are ultimately reduced to “*black-face*” caricatures when facing defeat. And even the female protagonist, who uses sex as a weapon, is ultimately objectified by the white man. However, in translation Welz’s poetics is still degraded to a farcical narration, stressing features belonging to the ‘*commedia sexy all’italiana*’ tradition rather than on the actual countercultural frame. In this light, such attitude may be considered a constant in translation when dealing with sexual contents, which especially emerged in these controversial representations of black women-white men intercourses.

In all these case-studies, black women are represented as exotic objects of desire and discriminated individuals at the same time. In this light, the black woman is a fantasy, the epitome of the experientially Unknown and the socially Forbidden, interracial relationships being stigmatised. The idea of the white man taming the black woman fulfils the former’s desire to dominate and submit the Unknown and reassures him of his self-appointed supremacy. Underground comix plundered this imagery and show the white man’s repressed drive with garish and blatant drawings. Perhaps even for this reason, Angelfood’s comics, though most popular, are usually not included in Crumb’s anthologies, unless she features as

a secondary character – and, for this reason it is impossible to evaluate how Mondadori or Repubblica would translate such controversial works and which frames would be activated.

For instance, despite the backcover inscription “Solo per adulti intellettuali”, Mondadori’s *Fritz il Gatto* selected Crumb’s works which were less compromising in terms of graphic material. Sexual contents, when included, are far from the excesses Crumb used to reach. The editors certainly found “Angelfood McSpade” story too explicit and rather included “Freak Out Funnies” (169-70), originally from *Zap Comix* 0, in which in a brief series of panels Angelfood, tired of her life in Texas, is teleported in an alien spaceship and it is implied that she is sexually abused by the group of aliens. The anthology also includes one of the three different versions of “It’s Cosmic”, originally published in *Head Comix*, where Angelfood makes a brief cameo only to be beaten by a man as a punishment for looking out of a window. In a panel on page 70 of *The Complete Crumb Comics 4*, a naked Angelfood is portrayed as laying on the ground screaming “No!” as the man, standing above her in a position of power, claims: “Now it looks lak ah’m gone hafta beat yore ass!”. A vector is created by her frightened gaze directed at his foot, saliently exaggerated to appear even more frightening. Though the subsequent three panels do not show the beating directly, the first zooms on the man’s foot, secluded in a circular frame contrasting with the regular layout of the page, the second is occupied by the onomatopoeia “Tromp!” and the third shows Angelfood tongue out, with birds tweeting above her head, and curled lines and stars suggesting she’s just been knocked out. The Italian versions of the story, namely Mondadori’s *Fritz il Gatto* (156), Totem’s *Crumb Comics* 7 (..) and Milano Libri’s *Head Comix* (53 from the first story), report: “Sembra proprio che ti dovrò prendere a calci in culo”; “Ora vedrai come ti faccio il culo!!”; “Adesso ti spacco il culo!”. Mondadori chose not to publish Crumb’s most explicit graphic depictions of sex, and yet included this story of violence and abuse. Perhaps mainstream publications have less problems with sex and violence when they are not shown graphically.

When Ranieri Carano presented Robert Crumb in *linus*, in 1970, he spoke of “il meno pornografico e il piu dotato dei giovani underground. Si rifà piuttosto ai vecchi maestri” (34). At that time, Crumb had already published *Big Ass Comics*, *Jiz*, *Snatch* as well as the infamous *Zap* 4, all distributed between 1968 and 1969, and Mr Natural’s stories, translated by *linus*. Carano reads in Crumb’s comics elements of “contestazione marxista e anarchica”, “sberleffi al consumismo esasperato, alla psicanalisi da salotto come rimedio all’alienazione, all’industria culturale”, “sberleffi anche al mondo hippie, pericolosamente minato da gerghi

e mode” and “droga”. These features certainly pertain Crumb’s poetics and where other editors felt an obsession for sexuality, Carano rather highlighted its socio-political value. However, by narcotising the theme of sex, Crumb’s reception is no less jeopardised. This tendency turns into censorship as Milano Libri’s editors directly intervened on the contents of the text. First of all, *Zap Comix 2* included the five-page story entitled “Mr Natural”, in which the phony guru travels to San Francisco, searching for his creditors, and is confronted with Ashbury Haight’s life. Several translations exist, including Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap*, a subsequent retranslation in the anthology *Mr Natural*, mainstream anthologies (Totem, Repubblica, Mondadori and Comicon’s *Mr Natural e altri perdenti*) illustrative of Mr. Natural as well as of the socio-cultural climate of the time. However, the first documented version of “Mr Natural” ever published in Italy was in *linus* in July 1970. Few panels are enough for Crumb to satirise the hippies’ virtual headquarter. Mr Natural, unable to receive his payments, decides to become a “silent god-mad saint”, translated as “santone vagante” (*linus*), “santone fanatico” (Mondadori), “silenzioso santo di dio” (Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap* and Repubblica), “silenzioso santone fanatico” (Stampa Alternativa’s *Mr Natural*), “mendicante vagabond” (Comicon). However, nothing goes as planned: as he arrives in the famous crossroads, carefully represented with its characteristic store signs and tons of dust and waste on the street, he is surrounded by rowdy people (all stereotypical inhabitants of the area, such as hippies, a black guy, a Native American, a dope seller) and, on page 4, despite his disguise, followed by a crowd of pseudo-gurus imitating him as “Holy Ned, the only guru on Haight Street with a theory worth imitating” (and here it is worth noticing the peculiar translation choice of Mondadori: “Zio Kant, il solo guru di Haight Street con una filosofia degna di imitazione”, with a wordplay between “Zio Kant” and the reference to philosophy, while the others opted for the name “Zio Santo”, with the exception of *linus*’s “Santo Podda” and Comicon’s oximoric “Santo Diavolone”). Tired of all the mess, Mr. Natural finds relief in another phenomenon Ashbury Haight was infamous for, i.e., the grooming of young, and easily bamboozled, girls. The final panel culminates with Mr. Natural having sex with one of these girls, the caption saying that “Now he’s Mr. ‘Snatcher!’ You never saw such a horny old geezer!”. The translations proposed vary from Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap*: “Ora lui è Mr. ‘Snatcher!’ Mai visto un vecchio pazzo così arrapato!”, which maintains the original name and the intertextual reference to their *Snatch Comics* series; Stampa Alternativa’s *Mr Natural* “Ora è arrivato mr. ‘Snaturato!’ Mai visto un vecchio matto tanto arrapato!”, Mondadori’s “Ed eccolo nella parte di Mr. ‘Snatural!’ Mai visto un vecchio balzano così arrapato!” and

Comicon's "Adesso lo chiamano Mr. 'Supernatural! Ma s'è mai visto un vecchiardo così arrapato?", which all opt for a wordplay with the original name of the character; Repubblica's "Ora lui è 'Mr. Passeral! Mai visto un vecchio pazzo così arrapato!", the name referring to the Italian translation of "snatch". In *linus*, however, the whole panel ending the story is removed and substituted with a balloon saying "Per questo mese, almeno... FINE...psst...psstst". As already mentioned, in "Fritz bugs out", *linus*'s editors felt free to split the story into separate issues, thus excluding two panels to make space for the inscription "Sommaro". In "Mr Natural", far from being the outcome of layout choices, the censored panel showed the old man having sex with a teenager.

While *linus* displayed such a censorious attitude, in Tipografia La Nuova Idea's *Le Orribili Ossessioni* Mr Natural is shown in even more lewd terms. "Mr Natural On the Bum Again" (translated as "Sulla Strada", 53-61), originally from *Mr Natural* 1 (August 1970) and then republished in *Complete Crumb Comics 7: Hot'n'Heavy* (99-107), the guru, tired of city life, takes the train to head west. While on board, a lady asks him to look after her baby and runs away. At that point, a debrayage introduces a dream sequence in which Mr Natural and the baby dance together and a sexual intercourse begins. The dream is interrupted by an embrayage driving the story back to a narrative present, in which Mr Natural wakes up and discovers that the baby was having oral sex with him while he was asleep. At first, he is afraid of being accused of "child molesting" (102) (translated as "corruzione di minorene", 56), but, after the two run away from the train officer and start wandering in the desert, he himself proposes her another fellatio instead of giving her a baby bottle, something which in the end causes his arrest by a police officer with the charge of paedophilia. In the Italian version, he refers to the baby girl as "porcellino" (59) and "piccola baldracca" (60), two additions by the translator, as in the original no insult is ever referred to the baby and, in general, Mr Natural usually talks with an higher and more polite register than the rest of Crumb's characters. Actually, "piccola baldracca" looks like a translation of the French version which uses the term "petite salope". This translation confirms *Le Orribili Ossessioni*'s tendency to to simplify and trivialise Crumb's stories. While Milano Libri censored smut contents, *Le Orribili Ossessioni* forces them into a frame filtered by the 'commedia sexy all'italiana' genre, an operation representing the other side of the same coin with respect to the narcotisation of Crumb's poetics.

In line with this tendency, we saw that in 1973 Milano Libri launched a translated version of *Head Comix*, a true milestone for the diffusion of Crumb's art in America and

abroad. The edition of the original chosen for the publications is the infamous Viking's version (1968), known for the changes and arbitrary censorship of the original, which outraged Crumb himself. Among the changes made, in the reprint of "Life among the constipated" (3, entitled "Vita fra gli stitici", 67 in *The Complete Crumb Comics 4*) the original paratextual elements are modified by erasing the racial slurs "Schwartz" and "nigger" written on a wall. In "Ehi Boparee Bop" (37-38 in the Italian version, 60 in *The Complete Crumb Comics 4*), previously published in *Yarrowstalks 2* in 1967 with the title "Head comix", the layout was rearranged from one page to two pages, and four panels featuring the characters Av'n'Gar sexually harassing a woman were removed. In "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics" (16-18 in the Italian version, 111-13 in *The Complete Crumb Comics 4*), a three-page work originally from *Zap 1*, the New York publishing house decided to cover a vagina with band-aids drawn by another artist. The comic work in question is considered among the most experimental, avant-garde pieces of psychedelic comics (Chute, 2012: 411; Molotiu, 2016: 122), clashing with any traditional idea of comics as bastions of figurative drawings. The peculiarity of this work lies in its unreadability: speech balloons have no dialogue, only numbers, icons or almost unintelligible marks. There is no narrative direction: jagged panels dovetailing with no regularity, each drawn with a different shape, can be read either vertically or horizontally. No diegetic temporal movement is perceived as Crumb did not abide to any sequentiality pattern, and thus to no time progression. Even though the comics is a self-proclaimed piece of abstract art, some shapes and forms are not completely opaque. Readers can recognise a woman's body silhouette, a stylised half-bust in a medium close-up, several eye bulbs, a rose, teeth, legs, cityscapes, wagons, explosion emanata, comic icons and so on. The work, built as a hallucination, aspires to the *mise en crise* of graphic and narrative norms, and the arbitrary censure of genitalia is heavy if considered that it likely stems from the misconception of comics not as an art form but as a disposable good. Though an uncensored version of *Head Comix* had been reprinted by Ballantine in 1970 (two years after Viking published and then discarded Crumb), Milano Libri opted for the censored edition, a choice which is consistent with the mitigating tendency in the reception of Crumb highlighted in *linus*. In this regard, the Italian editors did not intervene directly on the text. The censorious act resides in the choice of Viking over Ballantine. Decades later, "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics" was reprinted in Italian anthologies in its uncensored version in Stampa Alternativa's *Zap Comix* and Mondadori's *Fritz il Gatto*, while no further publication of "Ehi Boparee Bop" is attested.

In the case of mainstream publications, hardcore contents were considered inappropriate for the general public. Even *Cannibale's* cartoonists did not include Crumb in their anthology and rather privileged less famous underground authors. In some cases, the choice was also made for political reasons. For example, in the anthology by *Fallo!*, Quattrocchi warned his readers that no excesses of nudity were included in the comics selected (“non ci abbiamo messo quelli con cazzi e fighe ovvi”), since the publisher Savelli was already dealing with obscenity charges for the publication of *Fallo! Oltre la Gelosia l'Amore*, which included an adult only version of Red Riding Hood – and the issue was ultimately seized in the same period the fourth number of *Zap* was under trial with obscenity charges. Crumb's most controversial works were not displayed in *Fallo!* in order to avoid further legal issues and presumably also to privilege the stories Quattrocchi considered more militant and politically thought-provoking. Crumb's socio-political satire – and not the naked women who made him infamous or Fritz, which Quattrocchi considered his dullest, “leccatissimo”, character – was the true protagonist of the anthology. This did not mean that sex was obscured, but rather that Crumb's art was explored beyond both the “sex sells” motto and the idea of Crumb as author of “pornzines”. To him and others, nudity and sex had a political meaning prior to a captivating leisure value.

5.5. “The Personal is Political”⁷⁵: Women's Comix in Italy

Savelli, a politically committed publisher, edited a collection of women's underground comix where sex was everywhere. In these years, inspired by the struggle for equality in terms of class and race, women started advocating their own liberation. Without delving into the analysis of such a complex issue, underground comix were certainly influenced by the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s and 1970s, also called Women's Liberation Movement, which “encompassed a wide variety of social view and positions, sometimes antagonistic to one another” (Stansell, 2010: xiv) and “differed according to ideology, strategy, goals, and style” (Berkeley, 1999: 52). This “movement [which] was changing the lives of real women” (Robbins, 1999: 83) also involved female underground cartoonists, who aimed to overturn the morality of CCA as well as the walls erected by their male counterpart. Sabin (1996: 105) maintained that feminist comics collectives were formed to protest about “being excluded from the male-dominated underground [...] and about the sexism that was

⁷⁵ Slogan of second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, made popular by a homonymous essay by feminist Carol Hanisch published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970.

rife in the movement [...] and more directly about women's politics generally". An exception in a context where comix were generally "bastions of male chauvinism" (Estren, 127). As Skip Williamson argued, "[t]o deny sexism is to deny the cultural heritage of the comics. That's one reason comics are basically counterrevolutionary" (quoted in Estren, 127). As previously mentioned, Wilson was usually excluded from charges of sexism as his comics display a misanthropic despise for women as well as for men. Feminist cartoonists rather tended to criticise Crumb's attitude as female characters in his comics are always objectified and society is never satirized through their eyes. There could not be a Miss Natural as Crumb never represented women outside the stereotyped, one-dimensional role of object of desire. In his treatment of women, Crumb was at odds with countercultural critics and with feminist critics in particular.

Crumb's position was not so strange even even within the counterculture. Symbolically, on 24 January 1970, a group of militant feminists took over the offices of Jeff Shero's *New York Rat*, and published Robin Morgan's manifesto "Goodbye to All That" ([1970] 1978) against the male-dominated countercultural system in which radical women were considered second-rate comrades, always prevented from speaking-up and bound to fight for everyone's freedom except their own. They argued that the sexual revolution, which preceded the Women's Liberation Movement, was de fact male-oriented, and the pleasure granted from sexual freedom was male pleasure. The same can be argued about underground papers, which even published sex-advertisement columns in which men published announcements in search for "groovy chicks". According to Miller (1991:25), "perhaps the gap between expansive hippie rhetoric and the disinclination of many hip males to liberate themselves from old sexual thinking helped some spur new feminists into revolt" and indeed "much of the early feminist press in the late 1960s had distinctly countercultural graphics, makeup, and rhetorical tone" (38). In relation to the life in communes, marked by contradictions in community politics and rights and division of labour, Brake (120) argued that hippies were caught in a scissor between men who "reduced women to earth mothers, sexual conquests or companiate appendages rather than true and equal partners" and women who "demanded responsible relationships and more equality in domestic and nondomestic life [...] and an equal share of responsibilities". Thus, the attitude displayed by hippies as well as by some underground members was the handover of a thought preceding the 1960s and hard to die.

Already in 1965 and 1966, respectively, Nancy Kalish (“Panzika”) and Trina Robbins started drawing their cartoons for the New York underground newspaper *The East Village Other* (EVO). Their works and Willy Mendes’s were also published in EVO’s tabloid comix collections, *Gothic Blimp Works*, edited by Vaughn Bodè. However, when Robbins and Mendes moved to San Francisco, hoping to join the cream of the underground comix community, they experienced ostracism towards female cartoonists. As Robbins claimed, “unfortunately it proved not to be a Mecca for us. We found the entire comix scene to be a closed Boy’s Club, with no room for women.” (quoted in Skinn, 157). Robbins thus started collaborating with *It Ain’t Me, Baby*, Berkeley’s feminist underground newspaper. With the collective of the newspaper, she also published a homonymous one-shot underground comic book in July 1970, the first comic book entirely drawn and written by women in the world, edited by Last Gasp. In 1972 the latter decided to put together another feminist comic book, *Wimmen’s Comix*, with the works of a collective of eleven cartoonists, including Robbins, Lee Marrs and Aline Kominsky. The work was published concomitantly with *Tits & Clits* by Joyce Farmer and Lyn Chevely (1972-87), which was arguably the most explicit title, together with *Wet Satin* (1976-78), both dedicated to the exploration of feminine sexuality outside the male chauvinist world of underground comix. Some of these works were edited by Marco Giovannini and published by Savelli in 1979. This remains the only available translation of this cartoonists, with the exception of Aline Kominsky’s works drawn together with her husband, Robert Crumb. One may ask whether the Italian counterculture was devoid of machismo and aware of what was happening overseas. To answer this question, the present subchapter provides an analysis of the Italian translations of feminist underground comix, with a focus on their “intercultural value” (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1998).

While the Libbers marched on the street with their slogan “The Personal is Political”, female underground cartoonists “put the body on the page” (Chute, 10) and represented their intimacy through the comic medium. Just as Crumb explored his own neurosis, his wife Aline Kominsky published “Goldie a Neurotic Woman in Hard Work and No Fun” in *Wimmen’s Comix* 2 in 1973 (page 78-81 of *The Complete Wimmen’s Comix*), translated as “Goldie Donna Nevrotica in Fatica Tanta, Piacere Niente” (53-56). Goldie is an alter-ego of Kominsky and the strip is considered the first ever autobiographical comic made by a woman, and one of the first in general. Chute defined Goldie’s comics “uninhibited representations of her own forceful sexuality in a light that is not always palatable, or favourable” (30). Goldie shows the author’s impulses and insecurities, even her most hideous

traits. And this comic strip is revolutionary precisely because it puts on paper the story of a woman in all her vain, lustful, ravenous, insolent and constantly self-deprecating character, with no mediation by a male gaze. Despite the importance of “Goldie” as a cornerstone of female autobiographic comics⁷⁶, Kominsky has received little scholarly attention, and this four-page work is the only story available in Italian. Still, some of Kominsky’s most representative topoi are here portrayed: her tormented relationships with her body, food and sexual life, this conceived of in terms of both autoerotism and intercoursing with men, and the “resolutely deidealised” (Chute, 24) image of femininity against any attempt to glamourise women as super-heroine or to blanken the darkest side of their mind. Since the title, the connection with Freudian theories is explicit: “neurotic woman” and “hard work and no fun” translated as “donna nevrotica” and “fatica tanta, piacere niente”. In this respect, the translation of “fun” with “piacere” is consistent with the hermeneutic frame derived from the presence of the psychoanalytic term “neurotic” in the title as well as by the naked body in the foreground. Indeed, in the first page (78-53), Goldie is shown masturbating and thinking of men (among them Crumb himself appears) and then speaking to her consciousness (in the original “conschunz”, a wordplay referring to the Jewish origins of the author, lost in translation) regarding the changes she wants in her life, especially her “gross” body (translated as “ciccia”). The masturbation scene of the first panel, which occupies the widest portion of the page, is particularly worth of attention: Goldie is placed at the centre of the panel, in a salient position, and graphically represented in her act. She is surrounded by a total of six balloons: three thought balloons represent some men, her potential partners, and three speech balloons voice the character:

Here I am again jackin’off to my fantasies but no real boy pussy for me.	Rieccomi qui, persa nelle mie fantasie, ma poi non c’è nessuno che mi desideri realmente!
Me, I’m a fat ugly nobody!	Povera me! Sono una cicciona deforme!
I’m coming	Vengo!!

⁷⁶ Such contemporary autobiographic and semi-autobiographic graphic novel authors as Alison Bechdel (*Fun Home*), Phoebe Gloeckner (*The Diary of a Teenage Girl*) and Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*) were clearly influenced by Aline Kominsky’s work, especially as for the sense of humour and the often self-loathing introspection.

The Italian version of the first balloon is rather mild if compared to the original: such slang words as “jackin’off” (“persa”) and “pussy” (“che mi desideri”) are not translated and the register is high. The reference to sex is still conveyed by the verbs “che mi desideri” and the subsequent “vengo”, but the effect engendered is outright different: in the original, she is coarse and unrefined, while in Italian the first balloon has a fairytale-like connotation (“Rieccomi qui, persa nelle mie fantasie...”), contrasting with the actual visual scene representing a masturbatory act. As for the other two sentences, the translation is more literal, though in the second the emphasis is on her deformity rather than on her being a “nobody”. In this case, the translator adopts the frame of bodily disgust in the interpretation of the text, derived by the adjectives “fat” and “ugly” which both share the classemes of «body» and «deformity». However, in the original “nobody” is essential for the understanding of Kominsky’s strip. The noun is opposed to the pronoun “me”, each saliently positioned at the beginning and the conclusion of the utterance. Goldie walks the threshold between the will to affirm her identity (“me”, followed by “I”) and the negation of such identity (“nobody”) through constant self-loathing. And although her body, saliently at the centre of the panel, dominates the page, she ultimately feels nullified.

In the conversation with her conscience in the subsequent panels, the latter uses coarse words and a slang language: it refers to Goldie’s body as “gross” (translated as “ciccia”) and also calls her “schmuck” and “asshole” which in Italian are respectively left untranslated (likely mistaking “schmuck” for her surname) and translated as “troietta”, which sexually connotes a dialogue already referring to Goldie’s need to find a “gig” (in Italian translated as “fustaccio”). On the subsequent page, Goldie starts working on her physical improvement as well as on her “mental development and personal charisma” (translated as “sviluppo mentale” and “personalità”). The result is the creation of a “sex object with a brain” (“sexi-oggetto con cervello”): a thinner, well-dressed version of Goldie wearing “glasses to show intellectual bent” (“occhiali per dimostrare le attitudini intellettuali”). Thus, the outcome of her work on physical and mental development still entails the loss of subjectivity, yet the fact that she refers to herself as an “object” is clearly provocative. The modernity of this page is evident. In a way, Kominsky provides her satirical response to male underground cartoonists’ representation of women as sexual objects, though she never reached the level of open conflict of other feminist authors. As she declared in an interview with Priscilla Frank (2017):

There were two factions: militant feminists who wanted nothing to do with men and women who wanted to be strong and independent but sexy too. That's who I aligned with. The possibility of really having fun appealed to me at that time in my life. Sex was too much fun, I didn't want to give it up. I liked to dress up, go to parties. I was wild and bad. I didn't want to give that up either. So I controlled my life. I worked. I wasn't anybody's dupe. But I could have a lot of sex if I wanted to. I was very conscious of the entire feminist movement, but I realized there was an extreme part of it I couldn't relate to.

This desire to express her freedom in sexuality as well as by having fun is consistent with the representation of her cartoonish alter-ego: Goldie joins a party where she meets "HIM" ("LUP"). Kominsky is not interested in telling her readers his name, all they get to know is that he is a lead guitarist of a band, he is a prototypical Sixties' man, and he is interested in Goldie. The final page shows the sexual encounter between the two, one which leaves Goldie completely dissatisfied. In the second panel of the page, she looks with an amused smile (rather than with lust) at the man's micropenis and thinks: "All I need for this cutetip is my thumb and pinky" translated as "Questo brufolino ha solo bisogno della mia lingua...". The penis is referred to as "brufolino" in Italian, with the addition of an allusion to the oral sex she is going to practice, while the original rather focuses on her partner's small size. In addition, he selfishly does not think about her sexual satisfaction and she wonders: "But...what about me?" ("Ma? E io?"). Again, her identity ("me"/"io") is questioned, as she is treated as an object and her desires are ignored. Just as she felt a "nobody" during the masturbatory act, she feels a "nobody" during the sexual intercourse with the man. The experience is completely disappointing and she ultimately decides to leave him at dawn, followed by a pack of lecherous dogs: here the translation appears rather mild with respect to the original. The reciter in the caption (Goldie) says: "I walked home thru the city...A pack of dogs sniffing my crotch!" which is translated as "Cammino verso casa nella città vuota, con un branco di cani che mi annusava fra le gambel!", while the dog's thought balloon "Hot cunt" is rendered as "Senti che profumo!". The Italian version adds the reference to the desolation of the city, which includes the *classeme* of «solitude», implied on a visual level by the fact that the road is empty, with the exception of Goldie and the dogs, despite all her plans for the 'new' her looking for "gigs". The original text, however, is less poetic and rather vulgar ("sniffing my crotch" and "hot cunt"). The *classeme* of «solitude» is conveyed on the visual level by the setting of the panel, combined with the rather desolating image of the dogs trotting over and sniffing at her groin, an unforeseen – and unwanted – outcome of her efforts, confirming the return to the self-loathing attitude of the "fat ugly nobody". Overall,

the Italian translation omits certain figures, which are crucial to the rendering of the articulated meaning of the text, above all in relation to Goldie’s feeling a “nobody” and her vulgar speech. Some other isotopic patterns are emphasised, particularly solitude and disgust. Rather than direct, conscious censorship, negligence and lack of professional and semantic competences and the low esteem for the interpretive abilities of the audience arguably account for outcomes which do not differ so much from those of censorship.

Another important work included in Savelli’s anthology is Michelle Jurras’s “Strangers in the Night” from *Wimmen’s Comix* 7, published in 1976 (286 of the *Complete Wimmen’s Comix* collection and p. 58 in Italian). Since in *Foemina Strips* the original title is always included, the reference to the homonymous 1966 song by Frank Sinatra is preserved. Jurras voices the frustration of a prostitute, lamenting how society has always looked down on her profession despite constantly requiring it. She poses two interesting questions: on the one hand, she wonders why she has to be discriminated and unprotected, while men exploiting her are still considered respectable:

Since we are an established institution, society should treat us with respect...	Se fossimo un’istituzione riconosciuta, la società ci tratterebbe con più rispetto!
I mean, we’re all whores of society... everybody sells themselves out!	Cioè, siamo tutte prostitute della società, ognuno si vende!

In the first example, the English and the Italian version diverge: the former maintains that prostitution is already an established institution (“Since we are”), though illegal in the United States (with the exception of Nevada), as it is ‘history’s oldest profession’ and thus deserves proper respect; the latter seems to advocate legal recognition with the use of the conditional clause (“Se fossimo”), thus abrogating the so-called “Legge Merlin” of 1958, which fuelled a long debate on the regulation of prostitution. Jurras’s prostitute poignantly states that society turned everyone into “whores”, the coarse word being translated with a milder “prostitute”. And as she reflects on the lack of respect towards her and the discrimination she receives from both the police and the supposedly decent women, she is declared under arrest by an officer. However, she quite naturally follows him in his wagon and offers him her services. Without interrupting her monologue, she stresses the absurdity of living in an unhappy marriage with “fatwives” (“mogli ciccione”), if this means to betray them and be “frustrated neurotics” (“nevrotici frustrati”). In a passage resembling Crumb’s Whiteman, the isotopy of

frustration pervades the text and is correlated with sexual repression and hypochrisis in enduring unsatisfying relationships (just as Whiteman did with his wife Louise). The reference to this concept and to Freudian theories is a constant even in feminist underground comix, with more or less explicit emphasis.⁷⁷ In this regard, as in Kominsky's comic strip, the key-notion of neurosis is addressed and properly translated. However, when talking about sex, Jurras's prostitute wonders "Why is it that something so natural and pleasurable is labelled wrong & immoral?", which is translated as "Perchè una cosa così bella e naturale è bollata come immorale?". In this passage, the influence of Freudian theories as well as of countercultural thought is evident. However, the Italian translation lacks of the same semantic sensibility, thus rendering "pleasurable" with "bella", disregarding the psychoanalytical frame, and the omitting "wrong". Despite being a "natural" a part of everyone's life, sex is deemed "wrong" by the square society, banned by the CCA in comics, charged of obscenity by law. Despite being "pleasurable", sex is deemed "immoral". The rendering of the adjectives was essential. Indeed, neurosis is the ultimate consequence of such sexual repression and the critique of this self-righteous attitude is at the core of Jurras's poetics as well as of the underground comix production in general.

Even in the subsequent work by Jurras, entitled "The Agony and the Ecstasy" and originally published in *Tits & Clits Comics* 4 in 1977, the stigmatisation of people living their sexuality freely returns in the narration of the protagonist's affairs, striving to feel excitement and exploring BDSM practices, multiple relationships (one of which resulting in pregnancy and subsequent abortion) and homosexual intercourses, finally experiencing her first orgasm thanks a vibrator. Likewise, in "My Deaf Groin" (translated as "La mia fichina sorda", 101), written by Lee Mars and illustrated by Joyce Farmer and originally published from *Tits & Clits* 4, the protagonist is confronted with her undisciplined vagina, constantly striving for new sexual adventures. On the one hand, she tries to invoke the "innate good sense of my inner self" ("innato buon senso della mia intima natura"). The fact that the Italian version privileges nature weakens the reference to the "self" in the psychoanalytical sense. The subsequent page, in fact, shows the vagina recalling how "this dodo's got no awareness of the primal forces of nature", i.e., "questo babbeo era insensibile alle forze primordiali della natura". The contrast here is between the girl's inner self (her superego), trying to impose

⁷⁷The best example in Savelli's collection is arguably Casserine Grenier's wordless comic page "Untitled number one" from *Bizarro Sex* 4 of 1975, in which the moon takes the shape of a breast and goes through the window to kiss the female protagonist in bed (99).

self-restrain, and the wildness of natural impulses, which want to liberate themselves. The isotopy of religion is also present as in the subsequent panel the girl is dressed as a nun, with a crucifix on her neck and one on her hands mimicking a praying gesture, though she still wears her lipstick and looks at the boy behind her. Indeed, in the caption she says “I’ve got to face it. For the rest of my life – **I’m doomed!**” translated as “me ne sono dovuta fare una ragione. Per il resto della mia vita sono DANNATA!”. The open disjunction between the visual and the verbal level (sanctity and damnation) contributes to the caustic irony of the comic strip and its blasphemous effect, which in this case is properly translated. These examples seem to suggest that the translator is not omitting any crucial passage for choice, but a combination of negligence and lack of adequate hermeneutic frames limits the rendering of the source text signification process. In 1979, when *Foemina Strips* was translated, feminism and Freudian thought had little dialogue in Italy. The translation of Julie Mitchell’s “Psychoanalysis and Feminism” was published in 1976, but was given a lukewarm reception. In an article on the topic from the March 1976 issue of the feminist magazine *Effe*, Eugenia Parise and Anna Maria Piccicacchi advocated a major involvement of feminists in Freudian reading, lamenting that “per troppo tempo, noi donne siamo rimaste estranee a qualsiasi tipo di dibattito che fosse riferito all’immediato, regalando sempre ai maschi il privilegio della teoria” and “l’interesse femminista per la psicoanalisi è divenuto progressivamente più scarso, restando confinato per lo più in gruppi ristrettissimi di «spécialiste» e nella sostanza estraneo al movimento nel suo complesso”. Therefore, going back to the translation of underground comix, it is likely that the translator suffered from a similar lack of the background knowledge required to translate psychoanalytical key-terms. Indeed, the volume was far from willing to censure feminist art and many controversial graphic works were included in the collection.

In Cory’s “The Adventures of Cindy Shark Sexual Gourmet” (*Le Avventure di Cindy Shark intenditrice di sesso*, 62-63), originally published in *Tits & Clits* 4, the male/female roles even reverse as Cindy penetrates her partner with a strap-on dildo: the woman turns into an animal-like creature as she prepares for the penetration act, described with an extremely graphic sequence of panels. The reversal of male/female roles is the theme of other works, such as “Ballbreakers” (7-10) by Peti Buchel, originally from *Wimmen’s Comix* 5 (June 1975) and, in particular, “In Debasement” (“In Cantina”, 116-21) by Melinda Gebbie,

originally from *Fresca Ziziz* (1977)⁷⁸. “In Debasement” is one of the most contentious works as it turns over the ‘traditional’ perspective of men submitting women by showing what happens when the role are turned upside down and women take their revenge.

The clamour generated by Gebbie’s comic story, vaguely inspired by Pauline Réage’s *Story of O* (1954) for the atmosphere and the presence of sex-slaves, can be explained by the openly male antagonism the story displays: in a dystopian society in the future (precisely, 2023), women capture, abuse, and ultimately murder and even eat the flesh of men, guilty of rape and violence against them in the first place. It is not the only story of abuses told in the *Fresca Ziziz*, but certainly the most striking for the revengeful violence it displays. Since the beginning, the reciter intervenes to state: “This is not a pretty story... it is a story of ugliness, cruelty and humiliation. Female rage is evident everywhere, and as usual, it is the men who suffer the most. Stop.” translated as “Questa è una brutta storia. Una storia di crudeltà e abiezione. La rabbia delle donne è esplosa e i maschi devono subirla. Stop”. The Italian translation omits some crucial items, i.e., “humiliation”, “everywhere” and “as usual”: the noun “humiliation” anticipates that the narration to come is a story of degradation, a *classeme* which is essential to understand the overall rationale behind the comic strip; the second informs the readers that in such an ‘upside-down’ world women’s fury was the norm (“everywhere” and “as usual”) rather than a momentary outburst – something that the verbal choice “è esplosa” also seems to suggest. The limits of space of the caption box may account for the choice to condense the text in translation. Certain omissions are necessary in translations from English into Italian, yet in this specific case the translator’s selection is questionable. Along the whole narration, several items partaking in the construction of meaning are carelessly removed. For instance, a soon-to-be-brutalised man laments: “I don’t feel safe anymore! I heard Collin was beat up the other night! They ravaged him!” translated as “Non mi sento sicuro stanotte. Le trentenni hanno picchiato Collins. L’anno rovinato”. In addition to the typhographical error (“l’anno”) and the confusion between thirty and thirteen, the Italian translator replaced “anymore” with “stasera” and omitted “the other night”, thus circumscribing the perception of unsafety to that moment and once again missing the allusion to the general climate of men’s fear. Moreover, the harshness of the verb “ravage” (usually referred to women, as in the case of Shelton’s *Wonder Wart Hog*) is lost with the verbal

⁷⁸ *Fresca Ziziz* is a controversial publication, banned in Great Britain after it was imported by Knockabout Comics in 1985 and declared “pornographic” by Margaret Thatcher’s administration on account of the graphic contents exploring female sexuality, abuses, violence with a surrealist, fairy-tale-like style.

choice “rovinato”, which is inadequate with respect to the original scene of violence. Likewise, when, in the following pages, tortured men are revealed to be gang-rapists, the terms “gang-rapist” and “gang-rape” are either omitted or rendered with “stupratore”, neglecting the reference to the “gang”. All these choices confirm the lack of attention towards the rendering of semantic nuclei owing to a need to condense texts. Another element to notice is the wrong translation of the term “dykes” with “arpie”. This is not an isolated case of wrong translation.

With the exclusion of Wilson, *Foemina Strips* includes the only examples of underground comics dedicated to homosexuality ever translated in Italy, i.e., Roberta Gregory's⁷⁹ “Superdyke” (translated as “Superpupa”, originally from *Dynamite Damsels* of 1976) and “A Modern Romance” (“Una Storia Moderna”, originally from *Wimmen's Comix* 4): both stories focus on a lesbian protagonist, though the translation of the former's title actually neutralises the reference. Nonetheless, the shirt she wears with two female sex symbols, the constant flirt with female secondary characters and the gay bar in which part of the story is set imply the sexual orientation of the Superdyke. The girl represents the feminist lesbian version of a superhero, a “champion of justice” (“campione di giustizia”), though with casual clothes and no superpowers. When a man reproaches her, “You dyke!”, the Italian translation opts for “Ehi bisteconal!”, once again erasing the reference to lesbianism. However, on the subsequent pages, two men plan a beating in a “homo-bar” (“I haven't beaten up a fag beater in a long time...”) and Superdyke decides to intervene and stop them (“So you boys better think twice before you try to mess with queer folks!”): the Italian solutions for “fag”, “homo-bar” and “queer” are “frocio”, “homosex bar” and “omosessuali” – the latter elevates the register of communication, a choice being accounted for by the lack in Italian of an adequate neutral (i.e., with no derogatory connotation) term to translate “queer”. The fact that a term as “fag” is translated while “dyke” is transformed may be accounted for either by the translator's negligence and semantic and cultural incompetence with respect to the slang connected to lesbianism (not so likely) or as form of discomfort in the use of the term “dyke” by someone who does not belong to the lesbian community. Indeed, the term was originally used as a homophobic and misogynistic slur and only subsequently became a positive identifier for lesbians (in 1983, American cartoonist Alison Bechdel even created the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*). The anthology also

⁷⁹ Besides her work in *Wimmen's Comix*, Gregory is famous for her work for *Gay Comix* and subsequently for her 40-issue series *Naughty Bits* published from 1991 to 2004.

includes Gregory's much more explicit lesbian romance of "Una Storia Moderna": the comic tells the story of college student Anne and her first experiences with love for the radical feminist Jane Watson and the clash with the discrimination still affecting homosexuals. Since the first page (164-87), "dyke" is translated as "pesante", while such terms as "lesbian" and "lesbian bar" are properly translated with "lesbica" and "lesbo-bar". Though it is impossible to know for sure the reason behind this choice, it is worth noting how such omission has an effect similar to censorship as for the rendering of the source text.

Foemina Strips also included autobiographic comic strips. For instance, Gregory wrote an autobiographic page to present her self-published solo comic book *Dynamite Damsels* in 1976, considered one of the first solos by one woman. The page in question, "Lady Artist Comic" ("Fumetto sull'Artista"), is used as an introduction to her work. The artist and her talking cat Pumpkin develop a bizarre dialogue, in which she briefly explains the effort to self-publish this volume and how the stories included are partly the product of her fantasy and partly inspired by real-life experiences of herself and of women she knows. Even more poignant is the autobiographic page "And now Girl Fight Comics invites you to: A visit with the artist in her own studio!!!" ("E ora Girl Fight Comics vi invita a: una visita all'artista nel suo studio!!!") by Trina Robbins in *Girl Fight Comics 2* (1974) (34 in the original, 80 in Italian). This brief comic page is capital for the understanding of Robbins's ideas with respect to feminism, comix and male chauvinism⁸⁰.

To understand the true aims behind this one-pager, it is first worth considering the work by Robert Crumb which Robbins is implicitly answering: the famous one-page monologue entitled "And Now, a Word to You Feminist Women from that ol' Male-Chauvinist Pig, R. Crumb Himself!!", originally published in *Big Ass Comics 2* (September 1969 and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 8* (73)). The work was translated in multiple Italian publications, particularly in *Le Orribili Ossessioni*, Mondadori's *Fritz il Gatto* and the most recent anthology by Comicon, *Le Donne*, which used it in the preface and thus is available for the present study. This vitriolic page is considered a sort of manifesto of underground comix's freedom of expression and it is no coincidence that Comicon as well as *Le Orribili Ossessioni*, used it as a preface to the volume, while in *Fritz il Gatto* it is part of the section "Biographix" dedicated to the autobiographical works by the author. This is not

⁸⁰ In addition to comix, Robbins produced several historical books on female figures in the comics industry: *A Century of Women Cartoonists* (1993), *The Great Women Superheroes* (1996), *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of Women's Comics from Teens to Zines* (1999), *The Great Women Cartoonists* (2001), *Nell Brinkley and the New Woman in The Early 20th Century* (2001).

the only comic rant Crumb created to defend and legitimise his work, but certainly the most poignant for the issues tackled halfway between seriousness and joke. Graphic elements are extremely reduced, as the panels simply show in sequence a series of close-ups of the author sitting on a sofa, with the exception of the last one with a Snoid, the embodiment of Crumb's darkest drives, who runs away sneering.

Though he ironically addresses feminists as “chicks” (literally, “pollastre”, rather wrongly translated as “ganze” and “fighe” by *Le Orribili Ossessioni* and Mondadori, and more appropriately as “pupe” by Comicon) since the first line, the comic begins with the author's caricature proclaiming all his good intentions. In the first panels, the author's alter-ego seems to send his support to the feminist cause, while at the same time teasing them with his ironic remarks on his friendliness. The truthfulness of his first assertion is obviously impossible to evaluate, though, as for the second, Crumb's art has always been famous for displaying anything but friendliness. In “The Litany of Hate” (2005), the author himself declared: “I'm such a negative person, and always have been. Was I born that way? I don't know. I am constantly disgusted by reality, horrified and afraid. [...] I hate most of humanity. Though I might be very fond of particular individuals, humanity in general fills me with contempt and despair” (386).

The translation in *Le Orribili Ossessioni* detaches from both the original and the French intermediary, the latter providing a thorough translation of all the passages considered. Indeed, several sentences are modified or wholly omitted, compromising the satirical intent of multiple panels. A hypothesis to account for this choice is the lack of space in the balloon (handwritten), which forced the exclusion of the final passages of wordy balloons. The other versions benefit from digital technology advances in the possibility to adapt the size of characters to the size of the balloons. For instance:

Original	But don't get me wrong, ladies! I'm not advocating that men should do these bad things to women! I'm not portraying this antagonism as something to be admired! Something heroic!! Far from it!
<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>	Ma non fraintendetemi! Non ho mai detto che i maschi debbano sottomettere le donne alle pratiche ripugnanti che descrivo! No!
Mondadori	Ma non mi fraintendete, signore! Non sto sostenendo che gli uomini dovrebbero fare quelle brutte cose alle donne! Non sto raffigurando

Original	questo antagonismo come qualcosa da ammirare! Qualcosa di eroico! I think it's an oversimplification to say that a picture or drawing is Lungi da me! promoting something just because it portrays it! Like a female being
Comicon	Però, signore, attenzione! Io non faccio propaganda a quelle brutte beatén up, let's say...
<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>	cose contro le donne! Non descrivo questo antagonismo come Pretendere che la rappresentazione di una scopata con una ragazza degno di ammirazione, come qualcosa di eroico! Tutt'altro! nuda sia un incoraggiamento a farlo è errato
Mondadori	Credo sia una semplificazione eccessiva dire che una vignetta o un disegno incentivano qualcosa solo perché lo ritraggono! Come per esempio mostrare delle donne percosse...
Comicon	Dire che un'immagine, un disegno promuove qualcosa solo perché lo raffigura, per me è semplicistico! Non so, una donna picchiata...

The overall meaning of the balloons is that the depiction of violent subjects does not necessarily entail the author's endorsement of violence. *Le Orribili Ossessioni* cuts a consistent portion of the original text in the first balloon, particularly the statement that male antagonism towards women is not considered exemplar but rather contemptible. In the second passage, the translator utterly changes the content of the balloon with sexual references completely missing in the source text ("scopata" and "ragazza nuda"). The original is forced within the sexual frame even though the topic addressed is broader and all-encompassing. Even in comparison with the most recent translations, the difference is remarkable. Since the 1981 volume focuses on Crumb's sexual obsessions, this comic preface is manipulated so as emphasises the theme of sex, rather than violence. Indeed, in another passage, Crumb calls himself a "sexual criminal", a "pimp" and a "sexist pervert", which *Le Orribili Ossessioni* translates as "perverso" and "ossessionato", once again condensing the text and manipulating it to symbolically preface the dominant theme of the anthology: sexual obsessions.

The purpose of the tirade, however, is the defense of freedom of expression against censorship, self-censorship and, in general, all forms of repression, even from within the Movement itself. It is important to stress that Crumb does not refer to his freedom alone but to both male and female artists, and their instinct. Only the 2018 edition pays attention to this point by saying "artista, uomo o donna". The passage is crucial to maintain that Crumb does not discriminate women in their possibility to express their own ideas, and female

cartoonists can take advantage of the same freedom he advocates. However, Crumb's speech surprisingly turns into an invective in the final panels:

Original	Would you like me to stop venting my rage on paper? Is that what you'd like me to do, all you self-righteous, indignant females? All you poor persecuted down-trodden booshwah CUNTS? Would you rather I went out and raped twelve-year-old girls? Would that be an improvement?
<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>	È questo che volete eh? Donne egoiste, malnate! Vorreste farmi abbandonare la mia strada? Vi piacerebbe vero?
Mondadori	Volete che smetta di sfogare la mia rabbia sulla carta? È questo che volete che faccia, femmine presuntuose e indignate? Tutte voi povere fiche noiose, perseguitate e oppresse? Preferireste che uscissi a stuprare ragazzine di dodici anni? Sarebbe un miglioramento?
Comicon	Volete che smetta di sfogare la mia rabbia sui fogli da disegno? Volete questo, femmine moraliste e indignate? Povere stronze borghesi perseguitate e calpestate? Preferireste che andassi a violentare qualche dodicenne? Sarebbe meglio così?

Original	Well, listen, you dumb-assed broads, I'm gonna draw what I fucking-well please to draw, and if you don't like it FUCK YOU!
<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>	Ascoltatevi pazzi! Continuerò con i miei fumetti e se non vi piacciono andate a farvi FOTTERE!
Mondadori	Bene, ascoltatevi, stupide zoccole, io disegnerò quel che stracazzo mi pare, e se non vi piace vaffanculo!
Comicon	Beh, state a sentire, donnette tonte, io disegno quel cazzo che mi pare. Non vi piace? ANDATE A FARVI FOTTERE!

The two balloons are explicit in their invective and can be considered examples of the idiotic verbal violence Crumb's comics afforded to reach. Texts like these pose some challenges to translators, for their derogatory terms, the pragmatic texture and the overall anger. Regarding the first passage considered, the 1981 translation completely overturns this text: the reference to the cathartic use of drawing to vent the author's fury, another of Crumb's topoi, is entirely

lost in favour of the translation of the sentence “Is that what you want?” present in the previous balloon; the series of slurs referred to woman “self-righteous”, “indignant” and “poor persecuted down-trodden booshwah CUNTS” is condensed in “donne egoiste”, with a reference to egoism which is absent in the original, and the old-fashioned “malnate”; even more blatantly, the whole sentence referring to Crumb’s provocative threat to rape a child is replaced by “Volete farmi abbandonare la mia strada?”. In this case, the sentence was likely too inconvenient even for an anthology showing multiple rapes and paedophilia. The translations published by Mondadori and Comicon represent the more akin to the original. However, the former shows a note-worthy modification when translating the chain of insults directed towards women: in addition to the wrong order of adjectives, “self-righteous” becomes “presuntuose” and “booshwah” (the slang form of “bourgeois”) is rendered as “noiose”. These changes modify a fundamental element of criticism Crumb is highlighting: within the counterculture, such epithets denote the feminists’ attachment to the Establishment’s sanctimonious, conservative system. For cartoonists and radical feminists who rejected dominant culture in favour of freedom of expression, this charge has a social, political and ideological meaning. Few panels above, Crumb defined “totalitarianism” and “dictatorship” the imposition of a given line of conduct. This time, he calls bourgeois the people imposing such a conduct. The omission of these adjective thus hinders the comprehension of the author’s vitriolic comment and erases the political connotation of the balloon (just a few lines after claiming that the artist is essentially apolitical). Comicon correctly renders this passage, particularly the charge of being “moraliste”, which translates the key-term “self-righteous”.

What is then Crumb’s real thought on the matter? This question is inevitably left without a definite answer. He ends the one-page story with an instrumental, irrational invective towards women, as his alter-ego completely loses his temper and reacts with the same verbal violence he tried to mitigate first. After Crumb’s vent, the Snoid is portrayed while running away in the night, laughing at the outcome of the author’s tirade. Indeed, the final outburst of rage rather seems an easy getaway from a thorny issue.

In her one-pager, Trina Robbins is undoubtedly responding to Crumb’s provocation, which Savelli included in the anthology as an alternative manifesto of artistic freedom. Overall, the translation of this strip is strongly resembling the original, with the exception of the use of bold font to emphasise salient words, which is avoided. Trina firmly declares to be a feminist, “what ya might call a **women’s libber**” rendered as “quella che voi definireste

una “women’s libber”, taking for granted that the target readers of the translated text would understand the reference to the American Movement. The aim of the strip is to present her “**total philosophy**” by addressing two categories of potential detractors of her work: on the one hand, just as Crumb in many comic strips spoke directly to feminists, she refers to “men **uptight**” criticising her art as she claims that if their “taking it personally it was probably **meant** for you”. She does not deny her “**genuine hostility**”, especially towards those men who maltreat women. The translation of the passage is rather similar to the original: “Dunque in sei pannelli non posso illustrarvi la mia filosofia. So che il mio lavoro fa incazzare molti uomini...hey! Maschietti, se ve la prendete così a male qualche motivo ci sarà pure no? Da parte mia ammetto una certa dose di genuina ostilità. Comincerò ad apprezzarvi di più quando apprezzerete di più le donne!”. Crumb stressed that (at least initially) he had no hatred towards women, nor he had any commitment to political movements. By contrast, Trina strongly advocates the militancy of her works and her antagonism towards male chauvinists. On the other hand, she rejects any possible accusation of sexism by defending her choice to be feminist and feminine at the same time – and, in this respect, she ironically changes look in every panel, also adding a paratext with the brand of clothes she is wearing. She claims: “well, lissen, I **love** women and I think they’re **beautiful! I insist** on the right to be a feminist and still wear pink satin!” (“dunque state a sentire: io amo le donne e penso che siano belle. Insist nel diritto di sentirmi femminista e indossare vestaglie in satin rosa!”). In this passage, she is likely addressing the radical feminists’ rejection of feminist comix. Just as male cartoonists were often charged of being counterrevolutionary and too flippant with respect to radical militancy (see Chapter 7), female cartoonists at first were not considered even within the feminist milieu. Indeed, Margaret Galvan argued that “the feminist movement did not so easily support the comics medium” (2015, 204), while Bill Sherman maintained that such attitude was the outcome of being “so hung up on their own intellect that somehow it isn’t any good to them unless it’s a sixteen-page tract of gray words” (1980: 54). Likewise, cartoonist Lee Mars lamented that “the women’s movement in the beginning didn’t have any sense of humor in itself, which is sad but typical” (interview with Jessica Lipsky, 2016). The charge of being anti-feminist owing to the feminine portrayal of her characters is fully refuted by Robbins, who purports her right to express herself freely. Freedom of expression seems to be the common denominator of both Robbins and Crumb. What characterises Robbins’s comic is the interference of real life, and real life commitments, in her panels. All frames are broken by the call of her daughter, screaming “Mommy!!!”, louder and louder (as expressed

by the increase in the font). Ultimately, the girl screaming “Hey, mommy! I hafta go to the potty!” (“Mamma! Devo fare la cacca!!) and the onomatopoeia “pop” end Robbins’s monologue as she need to fulfil her duties as a mother (“Aw **fuck**...anyway folks it’s a hard life...you’ll hafta **excuse** me...” translated as “Oh! Cazz...mi dovete scusare... che vitaccia!”).

The interpretation of the comic is twofold: on the one hand, Robbins is a mother prior to a cartoonist and a militant. In this sense, her commitment is tied down by other priorities and this ironically reminds of Crumb’s Lenore Goldberg⁸¹. On the other hand, her commitment is strengthened by the fact that her comics go hand in hand with real life, and her fantasies, self-analysis, self-celebration come always second to her real life experiences. This is central in Crumb’s production in the 1980s, but it is interestingly anticipated by his feminist counterpart in this strip. Trina seems to claim that the private is political, or as the feminist slogan recites: “The Personal is Political”. In addition, while mainstream comics celebrated superheroes, Robbins preferred to glimpse at women’s “hard life”, in this case the very life of an artist, in line with Kominsky’s “resolutely deidealised” (Chute, 24) poetics. Autobiography thus gained recognition with underground comix. And the co-participation of fiction and reality in comic narrations was avant-garde for the time and laid groundwork for the future generation of female cartoonists. However, feminist comix received little consideration by scholars and publishers. In Italy, Savelli’s volume is the only exception to a general oblivion surrounding feminist underground cartoonists. This anthology was the product of the political turmoil of the 1970s and the renegotiation of the female role during the second-wave of feminism, which led to the introduction of a law for divorce (1970) and a law regulating abortion (1978) as well as the reform of family law removing adultery as a crime and making male and female partners equal by the law (1975). Unfortunately, it remained an isolated case and no further effort in the publication of these authors was made. Overall, the translations in *Foemina Strips* suffer the same deficiencies of many of the underground works rendered by non-professional translators: lack of philological attention, omissions and manipulations of portion of the text disregarding semantic and cultural components. Drawing from Eco’s famous distinction between apocalyptic and integrated artists, one may question whether within the underground scenario Wilson should be

81 The character of Lenore Goldberg, leader of the Girl Commandos, is featured in *Motor City Comics* 1 and 2, published in 1969 and 1970, respectively. In the second story, she suspends her militant actions to start a family and raise a baby, deeming activism incompatible with her new lifestyle.

considered apocalyptic and Crumb integrated. And, following this analysis, the temptation to answer yes is quite strong. Robbins, in turn, represents the artist who escapes this dichotomy on account of an art whose political dimension is always both private and public. And this makes her translations more difficult, in that keeping the apocalyptic and its corollary of carnevalesque characterizations is easier than working around the complex practicality of topics swinging to and from private/intimist and public discourses.

5.6. Sex, Satire and Shelton

Prior to concluding this section of the analysis, Shelton's representation of sex-related themes must be addressed. First of all, Shelton's debunking of mainstream comics largely relied on their sexualisation, which was meant to satirise the supposed lack of sexual drive in traditional superheroes. Paul Buhle in *Leviathan* (July-August 1969: 13-17) made his point clear in this regard:

Even more than Tarzan or Prince Valiant, Superman was sexually starved: his infantile toying with lampposts is the only act of possible sexual significance I ever discovered (which is not to say more subtle actions were not understood: I have it on good faith that some pre-adolescents had sexual fantasies on Mighty Mouse). As a grownup, neither Clark nor Superman gets Lois Lane; Wonder Woman never marries Col. Steve Trevor; Batman (this is banal by now) has only one very obvious implied relationship. And this sexual frustration is related to the violence they perform, as it is not unusual for the villains to die at the hands of the indomitable superhero, who suffers no consequence for his acts and feel no remorse if the victim is an enemy of order.

Estren maintained that such asexualized representation of characters is at the root of underground's satire against superheroes: "if Superman is a sexless symbol of ideal manhood, the Hog of Steel is the ugliest superhero going, but is sex-starved (he is especially stimulated by gory photos) and completely animalistic in his lechery" (124). The Hog of Steel Estren referred to is one of Shelton's most representative creations: the Wonder-Wart Hog. Indeed, both Buhle and Estren agreed that sexual starvation in comics coupled with violence, and Shelton's Hog epitomised this principle: "his sexual desires have a way of erupting into violence and murder. And Wonder, like the "straight" superheroes, has no difficulty in returning to everyday life". (150-53). Shelton coupled sex and violence in order to voice one of the strongest critiques of mainstream comics: why is violence accepted if at the hand of heroes, while sex is always irremediably banned? Legman would maintain: "The really surprising thing is the hypocrisy that can examine all these thousands of pictures showing half-naked women being tortured to death, and complain only that they're half naked. If they

were being tortured to death with their clothes on, that would be perfect for children”. This is a point all underground cartoonists reflected upon.

In Italy only *Stampa Alternativa* published Hog’s most controversial story, “The Hog of Steel Wonder Wart-Hog... breaks up the Muthalode Smut Ring and also ‘balls’ Lois Lamebrain!”. Two different translations exist: the first one, entitled “Il Super-Porco d’Acciaio Wonder Wart-Hog...distrugge i depravati di Muthalode e pure Lois ‘le Tette’ Lamebrain!”, is part of the 1984 anthology *Freak Brothers ed altre Storie* and reprinted in 1998. The addition of “le Tette” as a nickname for Lois is due to her busty figure and arguably is thought as a sexual reference substituting the verb “balls”. Moreover, the translation of “smut ring” as “depravati” weakens the idea of a clique of degenerates, which, as we will see, actually refers to the underground comix group itself. The second translation, entitled “Il Porco d’Acciaio Wonder Wart-Hog...fa a pezzi il giro sconcio di Muthalode e si ‘sbatte’ Lois Lamebrain!” can be found in JD Jakini’s edition of *Zap Comix*, included in the infamous *Zap* 4. On a content level, smut is the central theme of the story, a concept reiterated throughout all pages with different conjugations. As the very title emphasises, the narration follows two different, yet intertwined, routes.

Readers are confronted with Hog’s fight against crime, particularly perverts selling “funny books” to children. To expose such racket, Philbert Desanex, Hog’s human alter ego, disguises himself as an elementary school-girl to attract the degenerate in question, who turns out to be none other than a caricature of Robert Crumb, called Scum as one of his pseudonyms, self-proclaimed “king of the underground cartoonists”, and the pernicious reading he distributes to the child is *Snatch Comics* 1. The inclusion of Crumb in the comics is part of Shelton’s will to satirize the public opinion’s fear of the corrupting force of underground comix, seen as a jumble of genitals with no artistic value. Crumb himself recalled in an interview with Gerard van der Leun in “The Unreal History of Snatch Comix” (1970:12): “When people I knew saw Snatch #1 and then Snatch #2 they’d always be asking me when I was ‘going to get off that sex trip’. [...] I handed a copy of Snatch to this girl I knew and she glanced through it and handed it back to me like it was a turd or something”. The episode, which culminates with Scum’s beating to death, also enables to highlight the twisted link between smut and violence. Hog, once revealed his identity, claims: “Not so fast there, smut peddler! Nobody flashes pictures of dongs at Wonder Wart-Hog and lives.”, and continues in the following panel: “I’ll teach you to corrupt innocent American kids, you God damn fucking son of a bitch! You prick! You cocksucker!” as he start beating him, incited by

the kids in the schoolground: “Yea, Wonder! Kill him!”, “Smash him to death!”, “Rip him to shreds!”. Both translations of these panels are rather effective. The 1984 version of the passages considered are: “Ehi! Fermo un attimo, spacciatore di oscenità! Nessuno può far vedere **certe cose a Wonder Wart-Hog e sopravvivere!**”; “Ti insegno io a corrompere gli innocenti **bimbi americani**, fetentissimo **figlio di puttana** e ciucciabigolazzi!” – here it is interesting to notice the use of “ciucciabigolazzi” which is a rather uncommon insult based on the dialectal term “bigolo” (denoting a type of pasta and, in Northern Italy, especially in the region Veneto, male genitalia) and likely tries to mitigate a much stronger slur like “succhiacazzi”; “Vai, Wonder! Uccidilo!”; “Fallo morire!”; “Distruggilo!”. The 1998 translation is: “Non così presto, **spaccia schifezze! Nessuno** sbatte in faccia dei **cazzi a Wonder Wart-Hog** e la passa liscia.”; “Ti insegno io a **corrompere bimbi innocenti americani** maledetto fottuto figlio di **troia! Stupido! Succhiacazzi!**”; “Alè, Wonder! Uccidilo!”; “Spaccagli la testa!”; “Fallo a pezzi!”. Hog finally kills Scum and cannot ask him about the typography producing smut comics, an epilogue recurring in all his adventures as he never manages to control his temper and outbursts of rage and kills the criminals prior to receiving any information of their crimes. The isotopy of violence is dominant in the original as well as in the two translations in different forms: while the image graphically depicts the beating, verbal violence in the form of swearwords (“figlio di puttana”, “figlio di troia”, “succhiabigolazzi”, “succhia cazzo”) and verbs sharing the classeme of «death» and «annihilation» (“sopravvivere”; “la passa liscia”, “uccidilo”, “fallo morire”, “distruggilo”, “spaccagli la testa”, “fallo a pezzi”). However, violence does not come from the smut cartoonist, but rather from Hog, i.e., the guardian of the law, and the kids, i.e., the supposed epitome of innocence, thus making the readers question who the actual degenerate is. As Estren argued, “[t]hus do we hear a society that so thoroughly approves of violence and so thoroughly condemns sexuality” (226).

And this question is raised even looking at the other Narrative Program followed in the story. Since the first panel, the story is presented as a parody of *Superman*: Lois Lanebrain, the parodic version of Lois Lane, is the object of sexual desire of the protagonist, Philbert Desanex, much like Clark Kent was in love with Lois in the original comics. At the same time, she dreams of marrying Hog – and in this case the 1984 translation opted for the erasure of the paratext in the newspaper announcing their wedding – ignoring that he and the so-much-despised Desanex are the same person. The character of Lois – her surname, Lanebrain, already connoting her since the title – is portrayed as a “sex object” from the

start: her posture is always extremely sensual and her breast and curves are shown off through her provocative dress; Desanex is constantly shown while staring at her with lusty eyes and, by using the “hogvision”, he can see her breast multiplying; her body is the most salient element of the forth page and occupies the widest portion of five out of six panels, which meticulously show Hog undressing her and preparing to abuse her, though her face is never clearly showed. It is interesting how it is through the gaze that she is objectified and, in a way, the author also turned the readers, or viewers in this case, into Hog’s accomplices as their eyes linger on her body for a whole page. And indeed, the gaze is at the centre of the story from the beginning when, in the very first panel, Lois thinks “I sure wish that icky Mr. Desanex wouldn’t stare all the time!”. The 1984 translation of this passage is: “Non mi va proprio che questo Mr. Desanex stia sempre lì a fissarmi così arrapato!” and so does the 1998 one: “Vorrei che quello schifoso Mr. Desanex non mi **fissasse** tutto il giorno!”, with the bold font emphasising the verb. Likewise, Desanex in that moment is thinking: “Ignore me, will you?” and, in this case, the 1984 version reiterates the classemé of sight with the rendering “Non mi guardi neanche eh?”, while Jakini’s is: “Prova a ignorarmi?!”.

Going back to the final pages, a noteworthy element in the layout construction is that the page displaying Lois’s naked body is facing a page in which five out of six panels are entirely occupied by Hog’s naked body (and Lois’s in the rape scene panel). In these panels, the readers are the witnesses of her rape⁸² and defenestration, ultimately being informed in the last panel that her “nude body” was “mysteriously found in the middle of a downtown street, literally **blown apart at the seams!**”. But Lois’s mangled body is not something they are about to see, although Desanex’s primary concern is to ask: “Any photos?”. The translations of “blown apart at the seams” are “letteralmente scoppiato” and “letteralmente esploso in mille pezzi”, showing the translator’s lack of reticence in verbalising violent contents.

Nudity and body are at the centre of the two final pages, though each page projects a different idea of corporeality: Lois’s body is beautifully and realistically drawn, though the sensation it conveys is not sensual, but rather that of being either a dead body or a mannequin; on the other hand, the Hog’s body is hairy and disproportionate, resulting to be grotesque and caricature-like. As he abuses Lois, it looks like he is taking advantage of a doll. As such, this comics is far from promoting male chauvinism. In fact, the point is that

⁸² The 1984 version erased some of the onomatopoeias of the original, particularly “snort” and “ravage”, leaving untranslated “rip” and “root”.

masculinity is not enhanced in any way. As much as he is a rapist, a violent, and a wannabe-macho, Desanex is far from being the alpha male bending anything to his will. On the contrary, he is constantly vilified. Manhood as a whole is vilified. Lois defines Desanex as “icky”, “uncool” and “fat pig” (translated respectively as “arrapato”, “loffio”, “brutto porco” in 1984, and “schifoso”, “sfigato”, “grasso maiale” in 1998); Scum is a scrawny, slightly hunchbacked man evidently with no self-esteem. As his comics is scorned by Hog in disguise, he dejectedly claims “Sigh...another strike-out... (Too bad, too. Nice **figure**.)”, which is translated as “Sigh...un altro fiasco...(troppo sfigato...bestia che figura!)” in 1984, and “Sigh...ancora buca...(peccato, un bel **figurino**.)” in 1998. In the former solution, the influence of Italian cinematographic ‘commedia’ is evident, since “bestia che figura!” is a popolare catchphrase used by the comedian and actor Massimo Boldi (who even recorded a song with the same title). The 1998 translation is inappropriate since the original is referring ironically to the appearance made, while the Italian “figurino” refers to the human body and has not clear meaning in this context. Even Hog, the super-hero, is mocked by Lois as he is affected by a micropenis condition, “Your “**thing**”! It’s all **little** and **curly** like a **piggie’s tail**!”. The two translations are “Il tuo “**cosa**”! è così piccolo e ricurvo che sembra la **coda di un maialino!**” in 1984 and “Il tuo “**affare**” è tutto **piccolo e riccio** come la **coda di un porco!**” in 1998. Hog’s micropenis, according to Estren (27), was inspired by an eight-pager where Superman’s asexuality is explained by his micropenis. His muscles, his violence, his machismo plumped down as the girl start laughing at him and his lack of virility. Ultimately, he has to use his snout to prove himself virile, though what he actually proves is but his animality. In this respect, Trina Robbins maintained that “Shelton is funny as hell and I have *never* seen a sexist comic by him – his comics are real, fair, and funny” (quoted in Estren, 60). Likewise, Estren (ibid.) argued that: “Shelton’s humor cuts across everyone equally, and he is virtually the only male underground cartoonist whose work is completely free of sexism”.

Among the stories collected in Arcana’s *Le Avventure Alternative dei Favolosi Freak Brothers*, an untitled⁸³ 18-page story⁸⁴ created in 1971 narrates how the three brothers are forced out of the house they are living in after they missed the rent payment of for six

⁸³ In point of fact, each page presents a panel with the same logo “The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers” and the drawing of the three protagonists, together with the copyright notice. Shelton usually changed the style of the title for every adventure, but in this case he decided to use the same one, also in the light of the continuity of the story, and rather play with the arthrology of the page by putting the panel in a different position for each page (e.g., moving from the top left to the bottom, then turning it upside down, splitting it in two and so on).

⁸⁴ All of Shelton’s comic strips on the Freak Brothers were collected by Knockabout Comics in *The Freak Brothers Omnibus*, used as a reference for all stories included in the present analysis.

months. After they all decide to go their separate ways, Fat Freddy returns to his hometown, Cleveland, where he only encounters unfriendly “ciula” (literally, “dumbass”, which translates the English “honky”, it being a derogatory term of white people) and bikers who kick him out of their pubs and beat him. Finally, he encounters a young and outgoing girl who befriends and invites him to her family house – here it is interesting to notice in the original Fat Freddy’s pick-up line “What’s your sign?” (translated as “che segno sei?”), which is typical of the 1960s owing to the fascination the zodiac exerted on hippies. Once in the house, the two enjoy a bath together, and it is up to the readers to imagine what happens after the girl strips naked in front of him, while the subsequent panel only shows the house from the outside, with onomatopoeias coming out of the window and a car approaching. The pair is interrupted by the girl’s parents, who surprisingly happen to be Fat Freddy’s parents as well, thus revealing that he just had sex with his younger sister in his childhood house he last visited five years before and had no recollection of – a revelation he embraces with a “far out” exclamation in English, simply translated with a more peremptory “NO!” in Italian. The expression “far out” is typical of the hippie jargon of the 1960s, strictly connected to the world of dope investigated in the next chapter (in Chapter 6 a full analysis of the term is developed). Unable to find a proper equivalent, Arcana opts for a simple negation, which does not convey the relative relaxation of the character after discovering the incest. Since he also has nowhere to sleep, Freddy stays in the bathtub, in which he previously had an intercourse with his sister – a point subtly emphasised by Shelton with a waving underlining of the word “bathtub”. After this detour, Fat Freddy’s story soon reconnects with his brothers’ and this episode remains isolated. Its plot is rather unpretentious, even prosaic, one may say. However, behind it lies Shelton’s depiction of the taboo theme of incest, and of a dysfunctional family which opposes the image of the traditional 1950s family of the suburbs. The fact of presenting all this as a simple “far-out” part of life is what make Shelton’s art so peculiar. Far from the coarseness of most of his colleagues, he reached the same level of poignancy by describing the sordid reality hippies were living in linearly, with witty humour. Sex was part of underground cartoonists’ life, and as such of their comics. Stories did not have to revolve around sex or nudity per se; in many cases they were just casually portrayed as the normality, i.e., as something that did not have to be concealed. According to Estren, these stories proved most successful as the “reduction of sex to just another animal activity is the breaking of a greater taboo than the portrayal of human genitals in clinical details”

(115). Among the corpus of works considered, Arcana is the only publishing company daring to publish this story and explore these facets of Shelton's production.

Comicon's *Grass Roots* anthology includes a one-page work by Shelton, originally used as a back cover for *Hydrogen Bomb and Biochemical Warfare Funnies* (Rip Off Press, 1970). The image is composed of two different parts: on the bottom right of the page, a circular seal warns the readers: "Il Capo della Polizia Segreta dichiara: "I fumetti rendono degenerati." and adds "... nella vostra fumetteria o libreria" (in original: "the Chief of the Secret Police Says: "Comic books lead to degeneracy"" and "at your local comic shop or bookstore"). The seal clearly mocks the CCA and the criticism towards comics and their corruptive power. As a visual proof of such degeneracy, much of the page is occupied by a larger scene, depicting what may be conceived as the after-effect the reading of pernicious publications like comix⁸⁵ had on the Freak Brothers. And degeneracy may be thematised as the isotopy guiding the comprehension of the work and the hierarchy of the other isotopies. Among them, sex and nudity certainly stand out: the shabby bed where Franklin and a girl lying naked and their intertwined bodies are the most salient elements on the page and cut the scene in half. Beside the bed, a whip, a camera and a snap-shot with the barely-visible naked girl lie on the floor. All these figures partake in the isotopy and are connoted by the classem of sex. Fat Freddy is standing on the right corner of the room, and is seen taking off his clothes and looking at his friends in excitement, ready to join them in a *ménage à trois*.

The balloon says: "Oh wow, che **sballo!** Leggiamone ancora, **rifacciamolo!**", which translates "Oh, wow! That was **far out!** Let's read some more of **those** and do it **again!**". The use of bold fonts in the original emphasizes three terms: "far out", "those" and "again". On the one hand, the adjective is connected to the sexual intercourse presumably just occurred, and the adverb suggest its forthcoming reiteration; on the other hand, the pronoun is to be linked to what the girl is indicating, i.e., the underground comix on the floor, which are therefore sexually connoted as well. It is implied that their obscenity is the actual triggering factor for the act, and its repetition. The Italian version preserves the emphasis in bold for the exclamation "che sballo!" and the exhortation "rifacciamolo!", but partly weakens the stress on comics with the loss of the pronoun and the choice to use the clitic "-ne" in "leggiamone" elevates the register of the utterance excessively – the use of

⁸⁵ The underground publications on the floor are: Jack Jaxon Jackson's *God Nose* (1964), Robert Crumb's *Big Ass Comics* (1969), Frank Stack's *The New Adventures of Jesus* (1969) and some numbers of the magazines *Mother's Oats Comix*, *Motor City Comics* and *Skull Comics*.

“leggiamoli” may have been more adequate but the risk was a confusion with the following “-lo” referred to the sexual act (i.e., by turning the balloon in an exclusive reference to the act of reading). The gesture and the word “ancora” for “some more” preserve the bridge between the reading activity and sex, though not with the same emphasis.

The bed ripping up the scene also demarcates the laceration within the counterculture: as pointed out multiple times, the Sixties were not just a matter of free and casual sex, it was also violence, drug abuse and wretchedness. By anticipating some issues regarding the isotopy of violence, even though the Freak Brothers have the outlook of three hippies they are far from pacifist: on the very same bed Franklin and the girl are lying, a straight-laced Phineas is focused on his study of “Chairman Mao” with a shotgun besides him. The classeme of «violence» can be found on several other figures: Franklin’s dagger tattoo on the arm, his angry look directed either towards the readers or Fat Freddy, the aforementioned whip, and the posters on the walls with such slogans as “Dodge the draft”; “Fuck for peace”; “Kill the pigs”; “Resist the State”; “Viva Che” (all untranslated) and the raised fist drawing. The posters, together with Phineas’s reading and the flag of the United States with the svastika, also participates to a political isotopy making reference to the countercultural fringe of anarchic insurrectionalism and its intransigent and refractory attitude towards the Establishment. Finally, the comics and the clothes chaotically spread on the floor, the empty can, the insects, the broken glass, the wall scrapped off, the light bulb dangling above their heads, the multiple drug references (heroin, spoon, syringe, pipe, marijuana plant on the window, the “Try LSD” poster), are figures in which the classeme of «anarchy» is reiterated, and all come to connote the poor conditions in which the three squatters are living. This work represents a particularly salient example of intertwinement between multiple isotopies, which cooperate in the meaning-making process and provide the hermeneutic instructions for the semantic rendering of the text. The panel, though isolated and apparently lacking of plot, tells the readers much more than what it seems about counterculture’s reality and about the subtle satire against those who believe that this degeneration was led by comix. Shelton sharply sketched out the nature and the contradictions of the counterculture from within. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 will investigate how his comix voiced the counterculture’s political dissent and, just as Crumb’s sex-based satire was labelled as “pornzine”, his radical comix were often constrained under the label of “drug sponsors”.

5.7. *Conditio Erotica sine qua non*: Translating Bodè

To homage Vaughn Bodè a year after his death, in June 1976 Oreste del Buono published on *linus*'s pages an excerpt of the cartoonist's *Deadbone* series, translated as "Osso Morto" and celebrated him as a "cartoonist anticartoonist" who died while the revolution in the comic world was spreading (table of content). *Deadbone* was actually Bodè's erotic whimsical fantasy world, inhabited by lizards, bizzare creatures, together with the "broads". In a sketch presenting the inhabitants of *Deadbone*, also included in the Italian magazine, the broads are introduced in the following terms:

These creatures have soft, squishy **parts** that have a disturbing emotional effect on **lizards** and stuff... **broads** seem to have a sexual purpose that can even excite eunuchal things like trees and rocks... the importance of evolutionary **propagation** is easily felt by the opulence of their little **fannys** and bobbly **tits**.

Queste creature hanno delle **parti** del corpo strane e soffici che provocano dei disturbi emozionali nei **rettili**... pare anche che abbiano un istinto sessuale capace di eccitare anche cose amorfe come alberi e rocce... l'importanza della **riproduzione** evolutiva può essere colta nella pienezza delle loro morbide tettine...

Just as the characters in all Bodè's strips are visually depicted as almost naked nymphets with hippie looks, flowers in the hair and body paint, the verbal description of these creatures corresponds to an ideal of femininity which is deeply ingrained in male fantasy, that of women as sensual, sexually available, maternal figures. The Italian text smoothens the original contents: "eunuchal" is removed and replaced by "amorfe", the reference to the broad's genitalia ("little fannys") is omitted and the term of almost child-like endearment "morbide tettine" is employed instead of "bobbly tits".

Deadbone strips were first published in *Galaxy Magazine* from 1969 to 1971, but it is with *Deadbone Erotica* strip that he reached success, even replacing Crumb in *Cavalier*, after he decided to kill off Fritz the Cat. He even edited *Gothic Blimp Works*, the supplement of *East Village Other*. However, his flamboyant appearance and rock-star approach to comics, the charges of adding erotic figures palatable for the wide audience for no other reason than winking at the mainstream industry, made him a controversial character within the underground scenario. Quoted by Estren, Bill Griffin even claimed: "I hate'im!! It's not merely his dialogue, or lack of it, that ruins him, it's his humorlessness and the absence of

human qualities” (97). Sexuality in his comics seems to be devoid of any cultural reference or social satire purpose. The nonsense is the true protagonist of his stories. The analysis of the Italian version of the collection *Erotica 1*, originally edited by Last Gasp in 1983 and published the same year by L’Isola Ritrovata, suggested that this specific aspect of Bodé’s poetics was further emphasised in translation. For example, on page 7 of both versions, the strip “Getting Shafted” (the Italian edition preserves the original titles drawn by Bodé, with the addition of a small note indicating the translation, in this case “Frecciatine”), two lizards are hit by the arrows thrown by some wild broads hidden in the trees. The humorous effect is generated by the fact that the two do not understand what is happening until it is too late. The Italian version emphasises the absurdity of the scene by modifying the verbal code, so as to make it even more ridiculous. For instance:

You look a little silly!	Cìai un’aria un pò da scemo
Hey youse just got another one in you!	Hey e propio ora ce n’hai a trapasso un’altro!
Ow now I got one stickin’ in me!	Ora mi se n’è attaccato uno ammè!

These three excerpts show how the Italian version opted for the lexicalisation of wrong pronunciations (“Cìai”, “propio”, “ammè”), the voluntary use of ortographic errors (“un’altro”), and vernacular forms (“ce n’hai a trapasso”). Likewise, in the strip “Climbing abroad” (“Scalata Esplorativa”) on page 8, two lizards are descending a slope which reveals to be the body of a woman. The dialogue between the two, as they descend from the lips, to her nipples and her navel and prepare to explore below, is just as much bizarre as the former:

Jus’shut up!	Shtà zitto!
Tie da line!	Lego sto shpago!
Hum...it looks like it was blocked off on purpose	Hum... sembra come se l’anno ostruita per apposta!
I brought’em!	Si, ce l’ho portati io!

Even in this case, what look like linguistic mistakes (“l’anno”, “per apposta”), unusual contractions of the sentence (“ce l’ho portati io”), and mangling of language (“shtà”, “shpago”), all serve the purpose of highlighting the nonsensical dialogue of the two freak

characters. In the strip “Candy Cancer” (“Cancro alla caramella”) on page 12, in which the lizards are performing a surgery, the linguistic mangling is exasperated by using such expressions as, “attensione” (“attention”), “esplorazione chirurgica” (“exploratory surgery”), “oggi il compito odierno...” (“our job here today is...”), “pinse” (“clamp”), “faszoletto per le lagrime” (“tissue tearer”), “Christo, ma qui è un affar serio!” (“Christ, dis thing is diseased!”), “sto mezzo faszoletto non ci prova neanche a sorbìr l’infeszione!” “Look it da limpid middle tissue, it’s not even tryin’ to fight the infection!”), “pulsazzioni” (“pulse”). The rambling story way of talking of the lizard surgeon is even more emphasised by the verbal manipulation of the Italian text.

On page 13, the story “Tit Troop” (“L’Esercito Tettuto”), the emperor lizard and his sergeant are preparing their troops of broads for a battle. The almost naked armed broads are shown on the background, completely colored in yellow. While the emperor uses a pompous lexicon to address the women, his subordinate is appointed to translate his words in military jargon, which ultimately is not other than a series of derogatory terms and sexual references referred to the troops. In this case, in addition to the exasperation of lexicalised pronunciations, ortographic mistakes and linguisting mangling, the Italian translation also stress the verbal violence against the broads:

<p>Okay you syphilis-plagued whores, you is all gonna haul ass into dis gawdamn fiasco or I’ll give everyone of you mothers a hysterectomy wif my bare hands!</p>	<p>Ochè! Prostitutone sifilitiche, lavorate sodo per questa shtramaledetta sicura sconfitta, sennò care le mie matrone, vi pratico con le mie manine un’isterotomia io di persona!</p>
<p>If youse pigs can wallow up outta’ da’ muck of yer sex dreams...</p>	<p>Se voi maialesse la piantereste per due minuti di sguazzàr nella porcheria dei vostri sogni di sesso...</p>
<p>An, if any of you cows happens, by accident, to survive dis massacre, da emperor wants to ball ya...!</p>	<p>E, se a qualcuna di voi, vacche, vi succede percaso che sopravvivete a ‘sto massacre, l’imperatore vi scopa...</p>

In this case, the broads are sexually connoted, being called “prostitutone”, “maialesse”, “vacche”, lost in the “porcheria dei vostri sogni di sesso” and sent to an almost certain death with the promise of being possessed by the emperor if they survive. Sexuality in the story as

well as in the anthology as a whole, is emptied of his social valence and treated as a crude biological act for these “mothers” and the weird inhabitants of Deadbone. The hermeneutic frame adopted seems to be, once again, that of ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ (e.g., such films as *Fiorina la Vacca* and *Corpo di Ragassa* seem to share since the very title an akin taste for wordplays implying verbal slurs and mangled language for humorous purposes). In Italian, the verbal code is appointed to further highlight how ‘freak’ these creatures are, through over-the-top, nonsensical, illogic dialogues. And this can be explained on account of the symbolic value Bodé’s production has, the reflection of a psychedelic, kinky portion of the underground comix world. As such, the translation aims to stress this aspect for the Italian audience through the redundancy of inconsequentiality, verbal violence and macaronic language.

Drawing some conclusions, the representation of sex in the Italian translations of underground comix is rather controversial. In some cases, comix were victims of a visual form of censorship. More often, a subtler, more pervasive form of censorship occurred, one which is the product of negligence as well as of the use of inappropriate, banalising hermeneutic frames filtered through the models and narrative structures of the cinematographic genre ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ and of the 1970s and early 1980s erotic comics. Crumb’s art, which had already been the primary target of censorship in the US during the counterculture period, is the author most affected by this form of censorship in Italy too, where his texts are constantly manipulated, misinterpreted and trivialised by translators. Other authors’ texts suffered from minor forms of re-editing and received less attention by Italian publishers. Apocalyptic cartoonists’ art (e.g., Wilson) remained within the underground milieu and several voices were only represented with just one or two comic strips belonging to small collections (e.g., *Foemina strips* or *Cannibale*) and fanzines (e.g., *Big Comics*) addressing a niche readership of aficionados. In general, the Italian publishing industry only covered a tiny proportion of the monumental production of underground comix thematising sex. The next chapter will deal with another dominant theme, drugs, and will investigate whether the same translation approach persisted or it only applied to sexuality on account of a biased conception of it.

Chapter 6. SMOKE SIGNALS: DRUG-CULTURE AND THE REVOLUTION OF THE MIND

6.1. When “The Only Hope [was] Dope”⁸⁶

In an article published in the underground paper *Other Scenes* in March 1968, an anonymous author who went by the nickname of Pun wrote in capital letters: “FUCK THE GAMES. [...] SMOKE DOPE EVERYWHERE”. The article maintained that the consumption of “dope” could no longer be hidden and even had to be showed off, since “Dope is Great, it’s fun, it’s healthy”. Its use had a specific aim: “Get every creature so stoned they can’t stand the plastic shit of American culture. [...] Smoke dope, it’s your duty to future generations, turn the world on, it’s your duty to the universe”. These few lines are helpful to introduce the relationship between counterculture and the world of drugs and, in particular, how underground comix dealt with the topic. To further stress how strict this bond was, suffice it to mention that a 1968 study on counterculture members published by Lewis Yablonsky in *The Hippie Trip* found that 90.7% of the sample had used marijuana and 68.2% LSD. Likewise, according to Timothy Miller’s statistics (1991: 28), several reports, witnesses, and news sources referred that 99% of Woodstock attendees were smoking marijuana. In fact, as Pun’s article hinted, within the counterculture milieu, the word “dope” came to be a synonym of fun, socio-political revolution and inter-generational clash.

Given the counterculture’s cult of hedonism, dope was seen as source of escapism, a mix of pleasure and idleness which provoked and challenged a system imposing mechanical and alienating work and duties. From a sociological point of view, however, drug use may actually be related to middle-class values, such as individualism, self-exploration and self-improvement (David and Munoz, 1968). It was the inheritance of the Beats’ bohemian quest for short-term hedonistic experiences, subsequently glamourized by rock stars and popularised by Timothy Leary’s proselytism at Harvard and Ken Kesey’s bus journeys, the Summer of Love and Woodstock – arguably the peak of the acid experience. Accordingly, Stevens (1989) commented the role of dope in terms of “new space of middle class white kids”: “an inner space as well as outer space. It became a ritual-sitting around with your friends, passing a joint from person to person, listening to music, eating, talking, joking, maybe making out-all the senses heightened”. This idea of ritualism relates to the spiritualist

⁸⁶ “The Only Hope is Dope” is part of a section title in Timothy Leary’s *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1968: 43).

connotation drug-experiences acquired. Dope was considered a tool to receive insights, “related to the search for authentic human existence where a person is not alienated from himself and estranged from his fellow man and where God is more than a dead word” (Miller, 30). Religious and existential questions, thus, strictly intertwined with drug consumption, as explicitly stated by Leary in *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1968): “Pursuing the religious life today without using psychedelic drugs is like studying astronomy with the naked eye because that’s how they did it in the first century AD, and besides, telescopes are unnatural” (38). This even led to the countercultural phenomenon of the so-called dope-churches, inspired by the charm the Native American Church worked on the Sixties generation of rebels. Though the Native American Church was not open to them and many of their ancient native traditions were not entirely comprehended, hippies were fascinated by native communities’ outsidership to the mainstream society, as well as by the use of drugs (particularly, peyote) for ritual purposes. Therefore, they decided to create their own tribes with a personalised version of (psychedelic) spiritualism, exemplified by prominent groups such as Leary’s League for Spiritual Discovery, Chief Boo-Hoo Art Kleps’s Neo-American Church or John Aiken’s Church of Awakening, as well as by smaller and short-lived groups such as the Shiva Fellowship Church, the Psychedelic Venus Church, the Fellowship of Clear Light, the American Council of Internal Divinity, and the Psychedelic Peace Fellowship, only to mention a few. These groups were associated with the hippie commune phenomenon and cults, analysed in Chapter 8, in which drugs were allegedly used to establish social control. Though the exploration of this thorny issue is far from the purposes of this investigation, what is crucial to understand is that dope, on the one hand, became “a path to ultimate religious truth” (Miller, 11), and, on the other hand, prompted a new “sense of social ‘belongingness’” (Sheperd, 1972: 6). “LOVE through dope” was the messianic message several of these communities preached. In his essay on the topic, Miller pinpointed the main links between dope as a “means to heighten intimacy, interpersonal interaction, and cooperation”, to raise the “awareness of nature and one’s unity with it” as well to improve sexual experiences (14-15). However, questions were raised on the sacramental use of dope, as many members of the counterculture appealed for its secular nature and its primary role as a means to foster revolution.

If the primary purpose of the counterculture was to change the people’s consciousness, it goes without saying that dope was considered a major tool in the process of alteration and expansion of the mind, and thus one of the driving forces to break out of

the Establishment's cage and embrace a new culture. As LSD-guru Leary maintained: "[y]ou have to learn the outside dope which is TV, and the inside dope which are drugs, and if you don't someone's going to do it for you and they're going to cop your mind completely. That's why your only hope is dope" (quoted in Miller, 3). This idea rapidly spread among revolution-seekers: "[t]he drug revolution is with us, despite border shutdowns, surveillance techniques, police, everything. It's a revolution that's sweeping the world". And, indeed, Miller argued that the main reasons for the rapid increase in the consumption of dope was precisely the idea that dope was revolutionary, fun and good for body and soul. Dope was thought to grant something the Establishment wanted to hinder: freedom of mind. The underground believed that this was the reason why it was illegal, and why the Establishment was so scared of it. Heath and Potter (2004) explained the dope-revolution by using a syllogism: "change the prevailing mode of consciousness and you change the world; the use of dope *ex opera operato* changes the prevailing mode of consciousness; therefore, universalise the use of dope and you change the world" (168). They added that drugs would not have such an allure if it were not for the existence of punitive drug law: by enjoying something prohibited by the system, rebels hoped to undermine the structure of that system with their anti-conformism. According to not few scholars, such a claim was the same characterising the imagery connected to absinthe in the second half of the 19th century. In fact, though the majority of hippies supported the legalization of dope, for some of them it had to remain illegal in order to preserve its revolutionary potential and its symbolic value against dominant social norms. Hippies were undoubtedly optimistic about the power of dope, but their efforts in establishing a drug ethics should also be praised as they contributed to an increase in the knowledge of drugs, no longer considered a taboo topic, either ignored or addressed with scaremongering by the previous generation. Indeed, according to Miller, "[t]he commitment to – as opposed to furtive use of – dope was the single largest symbol of the difference between counterculture and Establishment culture" (1). Indeed, what countercultural rebels purported was that America was a nation of tranquillizer-abusers – *Mother's Little Helper*, as the Rolling Stone would sing – nicotine-addicted and alcoholics. How could parents blame their kids for consuming *poi*? Once again, suspect arises that the drug issue should be tackled according to an "us-against-them" perspective.

The countercultural movement even introduced a sort of "private code" revolving around drug culture. Miller stressed how the terms "dope" and "drugs" were not synonyms (26). While the majority of people considered all substances as equally addictive, for the

underground the two words were connoted with a specific meaning, drawing a line between good substances (e.g., marijuana, hashish, LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, peyote, morning glory seeds) and bad substances (e.g., amphetamines, methedrine, DMT, STP, barbiturates, cocaine, heroin and other opiates): “dope” identified psychedelics which were used to expand consciousness; “drugs” included substances like speed and downers which only made people addicted and “dumb”. A lexical difference occurred even between “dealers” selling dope and “pushers” selling bad substances. By comparing the choice of dope and drugs to a political and anti-cultural stance, Tom Coffin (1969) explained the difference in the following terms:

We're talking about and doing Revolution, attack on all fronts, political, educational, religious, cultural, even business... And dope is part of that revolution, and if you fear dope (Dope, not drugs—alcohol is a drug, pot is dope; nicotine is a drug, acid is dope; drugs turn you off, dull your senses, give you the strength to face another day in Death America, dope turns you on, heightens sensory awareness, sometimes twists them out of shape and you experience that too, gives you vision and clarity, necessary to create Life from Death) if you fear dope more than you fear Richard Nixon and his Machines Men of Death, then you have indeed sold out and bought in... The difference between Stupor and Ecstasy is the difference between Jack Daniels and Orange Sunshine, between the Pentagon and Woodstock, between The New York Times and Good Times. We all have to make our choices.

Therefore, marijuana and hashish made rebels “get high”, hallucinogens and psychedelics helped them “blow their mind”, whereas heavy drugs were considered a “bad trip” or a “bummer”. Stevens (1989) enlisted some other examples of this slang:

LSD was acid; a frequent user was an acidhead; a single dose was a hit or a tab. Marijuana was known variously as pot, hemp, hay, grass, reefer, or simply good shit...in any case the point was to get high. Getting high at the Fillmore was a groovy (pleasurable) experience, though depending on any number of ancillary factors, it might also turn into a heavy (emotionally fraught) experience, or possibly even a far out one - far out, and its semantic sibling, out of sight, were Edge City words: in those realms things either verged on the cosmic (the very best) or turned into a bummer (the very worst). In any case, it was all Karma (fate) and there was no sense hassling over what was inevitable. That was a game the straights (everyone who wasn't hip) played, all those uptight nine-to-fivers with no appreciation of the Here and Now, so caught up were they in the materialism gig. (133)

At first the hippie slang was deemed as the language of that particular subculture, though it subsequently spread like wildfire among all strata of the population. Indeed, Stevens maintained that: “[i]ronically, the hippie argot was the one thing the straight world found useful. It wasn't long before Madison Avenue was featuring advertisements for cars and soft drinks with modifiers like ‘mindblowing’ and ‘far out’” (ibid.). This peculiar slang related to “drug-culture” can be found in underground comix as well, especially since the theme itself

was most popular within this production. Unfortunately, yet unsurprisingly, as in the case of sex and violence, the notion of “drugs” came to serve merely as another label to identify, and often vilify, comix as products and actual sponsors of illegal substances. However, as this investigation will try to highlight, underground authors’ relationship with dope and drugs was more multifaceted than that: for some of them, this theme was just another gimmick to shock the straitlaced bourgeoisie minds, for others dope was a way to expand their own mind, some authors openly criticised certain additive substances, while for almost everybody drugs in general were nothing more than a part of their daily lives to narrate freely in the face of moralist censorship.

Indeed, despite some exceptions, such as Frank Stack who reportedly declared that he did not made use of narcotics and Jay Lynch who argued that after using LSD the quality of his works had deteriorated⁸⁷, the majority of underground artists experimented several substances and incorporated them into their works, particularly LSD, hashish and marijuana, the latter being the most popular substance referred to in comix as well as the most widespread among their readership. Among the hallucinogens, LSD had a great influence on underground works, and on psychedelic art in general, affecting the use of colours, the extreme accuracy in details and the visionary element in several drawings. For instance, as Ida, wife of *Zap*’s artist Rick Griffin, recalled in an interview with Rosenkranz (2008: 84): “Rick was seeking truth and purity. He only used natural drugs, marijuana, peyote, mushrooms and pure LSD. No alcohol. That was a taboo”. Griffin and Moscoso translated LSD-related imagery in their colourful and psychedelic art, both in their poster production and comix. The same influence was exerted on drawing, as in the case of Wilson, whose “extreme complexity and detail of [...] drawings – the things which gave them their peculiar power and vehemence – show early drug influence” (Estren, 217). In his works, every page is usually packed with characters whose minimum details are minutely drawn. Readers are confronted with incredibly dense scenes, in which spatio-temporal limits collapse and become indiscernible. Indeed, Wilson often challenged the notion of time conveyed by panel sequences playing with both spatiality and temporality apparently with no scheme. This device, one of the most innovative features among those which he introduced in the world of comics, is clearly related to the different perception of the time continuum induced by

⁸⁷ He specifically recounted that “Skip Williamson moved to Chicago and convinced me that LSD was leading to my downfall, so I quit takin’ the stuff cause all I was drawing was paisleys and flowers. When I was taking drugs, I could only draw organic looking things and my work from that era was really awful. Today I am vehemently antidrug, and Skip is th’biggest acid head in town” (quoted in Estren, 208).

hallucinogens. Likewise, John Thompson's mystical works were heavily influenced by his drug use: "those drawings, influenced by Eastern culture as well as by drug use, show the value of Thompson's LSD experiences in a way that verbal communication can never match" (Estren, 215).

However, a fundamental point should be clarified. In his preface to the Viking Press edition of Robert Crumb's *Head Comix* (1968), Paul Krassner made a strong statement regarding the relationship between art and drugs: "Someone who starred in Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* once told me that I should get thoroughly zonked to truly dig the film, but if any art has to *depend* on drugs in order to be appreciated, then I don't exactly consider it the pinnacle of creativity" (9-10). The point Krassner wanted to emphasise is that, unlike someone may have thought, underground comix do not require people to be *stoned* to be appreciated. By contrast, what some readers may truly require is a shared knowledge of what "to be stoned" means, i.e., the capacity to grasp all the references and the subtexts lying behind many of their storylines. Comix were created by underground artists for an underground audience, under "the assumption that the reader knows about and uses grass allows the cartoonists to play around a good deal with what might be called the marijuana ethos" (Estren, 211). This includes the procedures of producing and obtaining it, as well as the relationship between dealers, cops, and users. The results are often humorous and with a great deal of self-mockery (e.g., in Jay Lynch's *The Great Marijuana Debate* [1972], the cartoonist portrayed "The pot user self-image" and "The pot user as others see him").

Gilbert Shelton's *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* strips undoubtedly represent the most prominent example of successful marriage between drug culture, radical politics and comix, and the most frequently referred to in the present analysis. However, many other authors dealt with the topic, though their art never reached the Italian audience. For example, Dave Sheridan, Shelton's collaborator in the illustrations of the *Freak Brothers*, produced his own comix, *Dealer McDope*, debuting in *Mother's Oat* 1 by Rip Off Press (1969), and appearing in the subsequent issues. The homonymous character even served as a poster image for the 1972 California Marijuana Initiative, a campaign in favour of legalization, and had its own board game, the *Official Dealer McDope's Dealing Game*, created by Last Gasp Eco-Funnies. Together with Shelton's and Sheridan's creations, Larry Todd's *Dr Atomic* completed what Skinn (2003) labelled as the "spaced-out triumvirate of stoned comix characters" (90). The link between comix, dope and counterculture is further stressed by the commitment in the campaign for the Timothy Leary Defense Fund. Indeed, in 1973,

following Leary's arrest for drug possession charges (which was supposed to result in 25 years in prison), Aline Kominsky organized *El Perfecto Comics*, published by The Print Mint, to raise money for the Fund. The volume featured the works (mostly one-pagers) of 31 underground artists (e.g., Robert Crumb, Rory Hayes, Justin Green, Kim Deitch, Bobby London, Victor Moscoso, Gilbert Shelton, Trina Robbins, Bill Griffith, Spain Rodriguez, Jay Kinney) dealing with the topic of drug culture from a variety of perspectives and often with satirical intents. *El Perfecto Comics* also emphasized the potential of the collaboration between male and female cartoonists, for once not as enemies but as equals. It proved how comics could join forces at the service of a cause they deemed worthy. Several other publications approached the topic of drugs, though few reached the popularity of Shelton's work. However, the number of titles which directly addressed drug culture is certainly impressive: *Dope Comics*, *Cops 'n' Dopers*, *Dope Fiend Funnies*, *Dopin'Dan*, *Home Grown Funnies*, *Stoned Out Funnies*, *Stoned Picture Parade*. During the 1970s, however, a polarisation between comics against heavy drugs (e.g., Print Mint's *Tuff Shit Comics* in 1972, and Mary Wings's *Are Your Highs Getting you down?* in 1980) and those glamourizing their increased use (Last Gasp's *Cocaine Comix* launched in 1976 and Kitchen Sink Press's *Harold Hedd in Hitler's Cocaine* in 1984 by Canadian author Rand Holmes) accentuated the discrepancy between cartoonists. However, in many cases, drug use began to degenerate into abuse and overdoses started dropping bodies among counterculture heroes, from musicians (Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Tim Buckley, Keith Moon) to activists (e.g., Diggers' founder Emmett Grogan) and ultimately cartoonists (Rory Hayes). As stressed below, many authors lost their enthusiasm regarding their use, especially with the increasing abuse of speed and heroin. For example, such authors as Simon Deitch in *Bogeyman Comics 3* (1970) and Trina Robbins in *Tuff Shit* (1972; the Print Mint) represented hard-drugs users as skeletal, zombie-like figures, no trace of magnification or compliance being included. In the light of the increase in heavy drug consumption and the use of drugs to lure and subsequently exploit young hippies, underground cartoonists' satire on the topic also served as a 'wake-up call' and even as an instrument of denunciation. And as Estren maintained, the "public service" (220) performed by comix may have been more effective than parental control and laws since the advice came from *within* the counterculture and not from the Establishment, from people knowing and making use of these substances and not from those who stigmatised them. For instance, Crumb showed his criticism towards speed in "Street Corner Daze" (*Zap Comix* 3, 1968),

one of the first works directly advocating their “public service” for the counterculture community which became a symbol of the underground struggle against heavy drugs.

In general, however, drug use is showed off in comix whenever possible and such ostentation is openly provocative, especially since these substances are illegal. Thus, their display served foremost as a political statement against authority and law enforcement. If comix have been historicised as ‘drug-abuse sponsors’ and the role of drugs has been overemphasized up to this point, underground authors arguably hit the mark, finding an incisive way to upset the ‘overground’ with something the civil society barely knew but feared and harshly condemned.

6.2. A Trip into Gilbert Shelton’s *Freak* World

In Shelton’s *Freak Brothers*, the quest for dope is used as an excuse to trigger most of the three brothers’ adventures and narrate with irony the world of squatters, student protests, policemen’s searches, farcical journeys across the globe and so on. The strips were among the most acclaimed underground works at that time on account of their blending of witty satire and apparent flippancy masking the commitment of Shelton’s discourse. In his strips, drugs are a fact of life, part of the reality in which Shelton himself lived and the means through which he could describe with (self-)irony the counterculture in its most humorous facets, even in its contradictions. And he could do it precisely because his position was endogenous to the counterculture. Even today the *Freak Brothers* are listed among the most famous characters coming from the underground and the most widely translated, though their never-ending quest for dope is now seen as a facetious symbol of the Fabled Sixties rather than conceived as harmful material. Undoubtedly, Shelton’s strips are the most copious portion of underground comix dealing with the theme of drugs translated in Italy. What needs to be investigated is how this theme was approached in the transition to the Italian context, and whether it preserved the original subversive character or merely used as a humorous device. Indeed, in John Coupdbar’s interview to Shelton used as a preface to Arcana Press’s anthology, Shelton thus explained this frenzy regarding drug consumption: “I *Freak Brothers* sono gli eroi di una storia, l’espressione esagerata di un’epoca. Sei il primo a insistere sul loro lato fumo. Ma credo che gli europei siano molto preoccupati dalla drogatina. Per me, questo fatto sociale è un argomento comico, il lato più appariscente di una situazione più complessa” (1). Given the concern Shelton’s perceived regarding the portrayal of drug in

Europe, a contrastive analysis of the English and the Italian versions seems to be a particularly interesting field to explore.

At first, Shelton's *Freak Brothers* were published exclusively by alternative and independent publishers, namely Arcana Press, which published *Le Avventure Alternative dei Favolosi Freak Brothers* in 1974 (reprinted in 1979), Angelo Quattrocchi's *RisoAmaro 1* and *Risamaro Comix 2* (which dedicated the cover to one of the three brothers, Fat Freddy, taking some pills), *Totem Comic* and *Totem* magazine issued respectively in March 1988 and September 1998, and above all by Marcello Baraghini's *Stampa Alternativa* which dedicated seven volumes to the three brothers, without counting the reprints⁸⁸. *Stampa Alternativa* found in Shelton's comix the embodiment of its own vision and intents. It is no coincidence that the first publication of the publisher was *Manuale per la Coltivazione della Marijuana* (1971), featuring an illustration of the three brothers running from the police as Fat Freddy is smoking dope, Phineas Phreak is holding a box full of marijuana leaves and Freewheelin' Franklin is showing a "Free Dope" banner. Likewise, small wonder that the first *Freak Brothers*' anthology published by *Stampa Alternativa* was entitled *Freak Brothers in...l'Erba del Vicino è sempre più Verde* (1981).

After decades in which Shelton's *Freak Brothers* had remained exclusive of the Italian alternative and independent milieu, Mondadori decided to publish its own anthology dedicated to the trio, *Gilbert Shelton: Freak Brothers*, in 2009. In the preface to the volume, entitled "Il Delirio Quotidiano", Daniele Barbieri stressed that the world of the *Freak Brothers* revolved around dope, but abhorred heroin: "*Dope* è, per i nostri eroi, sostanzialmente l'universo degli allucinogeni, di marijuana, hashish e LSD. L'eroina è invece del tutto fuori gioco [...]. Siamo dunque del tutto all'interno di quella concezione che vede nella droga, in alcuni tipi di droga, un *allargamento della coscienza* che viene pubblicizzata in quegli anni dalla vulgata dei libri di Carlos Castaneda" (7). Barbieri also highlighted that what Shelton masterfully constructed was actually a satire of this world, which he observed with a keen eye in all its inconsistencies and frailties. Indeed, Shelton's comix were *from* the underground but most importantly *about* the underground. What remains to investigate is how this reality was rendered in the Italian translation by a mainstream publisher. Unlike the first Italian anthologies, Mondadori also did not translate the strips belonging to the first

⁸⁸ In chronological order the volumes are *Freak Brothers in...l'Erba del Vicino è sempre più Verde* (1981), *Nell'Era Atomica coi Freak Brothers* (1983), *Freak Brothers e Altre Storie* (1984), *Ciccio Freddy il Gatto & Co.* (1985), *The 7th Voyage of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* (1985), *Freak Brothers e Altre Storie* (1998, reprinted in 2002), and *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers: Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998).

phase of Shelton's work, i.e., those coming directly from the counterculture years, from mid-Sixties to the mid-Seventies and focused on his subsequent production. Shelton continued to work on the three characters even after the countercultural revolution dream started fading, though his works no longer reflected directly the climate of political turmoil of the time and rather lingered on the humorous aspects of what survived of that world through the three brothers' adventures. This editorial choice may be dictated by commercial reasons, given the success of such stories as *Idiots Abroad*, but it is no less poignant.

Subsequently, Comicon included Shelton's strips in the collection "I Fondamentali", issuing two volumes: *I Favolosi Pelosissimi Freak Brothers Vol. 1: Idiotti all'Estero* (2014) and *I Favolosi Pelosissimi Freak Brothers Vol. 2: Grass Roots* (2016), the latter displaying the original cover illustration of the homonymous publication edited in 1984 by Rip Off Press, in which the three characters are immersed in a marijuana field. *Freak Brothers Vol. 2* also includes a selection of Shelton's early short-stories. In Comicon's first publication, an essay by Shelton himself is translated, in which he retraced the editorial history of this iconic trio. In particular, he explained how the theme of drugs caused several problems to his Rip Off Press as head shops under Nixon were searched following the assumption that if they were selling comics sponsoring drug use, they were also selling paraphernalia related to the consumption of illegal substances (116-17). Likewise, Great Britain's customs seized the volumes prior to their import by Hassle Free Press/Knockabout. When they finally managed to reach the United Kingdom by licensing the strips, the police burst into their office and seized all materials with titles including the term "drug" (including a publication listing rehab centres). Fortunately, since no direct reference to drug was included in the titles *Freak Brothers'* prints were overlooked, though the publisher risked bankrupt after being charged of the infringement of the Obscene Publication Act.

In order to investigate how this theme was presented to the Italian audience and to verify whether it suffered from similar censure, a corpus of texts selected among the different editorial experiences will be analysed. A first hypothesis which could be made is that the translations coming from the Italian underground milieu could provide a more adequate translation of terms referring to drugs, on account of their common "affiliation" and unity of purposes. Indeed, in the introduction to *Stampa Alternativa's* 1981 anthology, the editors, signed as "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers Fans Club", maintained that the translations of the texts was made by "un volenteroso nucleo di amatori del fumetto d'epoca" and that "nel corso dell'operazione si è fatto largo uso di stupefacenti, muschi licheni e pizze/chitarre,

violini e pifferi/parrucche e bouquet di fiori/banana/whisky-dischi e cha cha cha... mancavano, è vero, la coca e le pupe ma, pazienza...” (2). What these lines suggest is first of all a shared knowledge of the texts translated, a common background experience for the author and the translators, who belong to the same *sub*-cultural context which brought the trio to light. And already in 1979, in the editorial of *RisoAmaro* 1, Angelo Quattrocchi stated that his aim was to publish “radical” comics, “completamente indipendenti, anche da ogni condizionamento industrial-culturale”, against the multinational of mainstream comics, which he defined as “eroina della mente”. The comparison of the comic industry to heroin suggests how the rejection of heavy drugs was common for the two contexts, in addition to the core aim of radical subversion.

Consistent with the idea of dope as a source of escapism and a symbol of countercultural cult of hedonism, in “Those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers Acquire a Groupie” (6-9 in original; 56-59 in *Arcana*; 148-51 in *Comicon*), dope is presented as an essential part of what is defined “creative procrastination” (6), translated as “procrastinazione creativa” (56; 148) by both *Arcana* and *Comicon*. Indeed, the story enables a contrastive analysis between the respective translations of the very first anthology dedicated to the trio (published in 1974) and the most recent one (2016) with respect to the pies related to drugs. In particular, in this excerpt, Phineas, Franklin Fat Freddy respectively maintain that their ideal life is:

Original	<i>Arcana</i>	<i>Comicon</i>
Phineas – This is th’life! Smokin’ de ol’ grass and coolin’ de ol’ feet by the breeze of a \$3.79 Sears and Roebuck ee-lectric fan!	Questo è vivere! Un po’ d’erba e i piedi al fresco di un ventilatore Standa £3.800...	Ah, che vita! Un po’ di erba come si deve e le fette all’aria di un ventilatore elettrico (Sears & Roebuck, 3,79 \$)!
Franklin – I say there’s nothin’ like smokin’ hash, reading my free trial- subscription magazines, and listenin’ to my collection of free record-club records!	Per me non c’è niente come fumare, leggere e ascoltare la mia collezione di buona musica!	Date retta: niente come fumare hashish, leggere copie omaggio di riviste e ascoltare i dischi omaggio del club del disco!
Fat Freddy – Well, as for me, I’m gonna spend the	Io voglio fumare roba, mangiare roba, bere roba e	Beh, quanto a me, io l’estate la passerò fumando droga,

summer smoking dope, eating dope, drinking dope, and otherwise altering my consciousness!	in ogni caso allargare la mia coscienza... (*coscienza!)	mangiando droga, bevendo droga e alterando in ogni altro modo la mia coscienza.
Phineas and Frankling – The trouble with you, Fat Freddie, is you’re hung up on dope.	Il tuo guaio Freddi, è che ce l’hai troppo con la roba!	Sai il tuo problema, Fat Freddie? Sei fissato con la droga!
Phineas – Here’s to a summer of bliss!	Sarà un’estate beata!	A un’estate di gioia!
Freak Brothers – Oh sheeee-it! It’s a bust! Hide the stash!	Meeeerda! La perquisa! Nascondiamo la roba!	Meeeerda! Una retata! Nascondiamo la roba!

All three balloons share a similar stylistic scheme, with sentence structure effectively conveying what can be defined an isotopy of “procrastination” through repetitiveness and an extremely slow rhythmic pace: on a verbal level this is transmitted by the reiterated use of present participle forms (smokin’, coolin’, smokin’, reading, listenin’, smoking, eating, drinking, altering) which express the continuous aspect of the actions. And it is no coincidence that smoking dope always ranks first among these activities.

In Phineas’s balloon, a polysyndeton (Mortara Garavelli, 1997: 201), a figure of speech generally used to slow down the rhythm of narration, is particularly evident in the repetition of the -ing structure and “de ol”, coordinated with the conjunction “and”. Both translations disregard this stylistic device, omitting the verb and opting for “un po’ di erba” coordinated to “i piedi” or “le fette”. Even the adjective “ol” is omitted, though its meaning is central for the isotopy of procrastination since it makes “reference to a customary pleasure indulged in fully: plentiful, great, enjoyable, memorable” (OED online) as well as for another isotopy: “relaxation”. The latter intertwines with “procrastination” in the text and is reiterated by such figures as “grass”, “coolin’”, “breeze”, “fan” in addition to “ol”, all sharing the classeme of «pleasure» and «relax». Thus, procrastination is linked to something positive, pleasurable. Indeed, in the subsequent page, Phineas uses the expression “bliss”, sharing these very classemes, while he is smoking his joint. The isotopy of relaxation is preserved in translation; in particular, Arcana refers to “erba”, “fresco” and “ventilatore”, and later

translates “bliss” as “beata”. Comicon begins the balloon with the interjection “Ah”, a sigh conveying a sense of easing, and follows with “erba”, “all’aria”, “ventilatore”, and then “gioia”. In the main, Comicon’s lexical choices (“droga”, “gioia”, “retata”) resonate with the hippies’ jargon much less than Arcana’s (“roba”, “beata”, “perquisa”). The chronological gap (1974-2016) only partially accounts for this difference which also owes a lot to the distance between Arcana’s target, its readership often overlapping subcultural communities, and Comicon’s wider and ‘normalised’ readership. This is one of the many examples where Comicon can arguably be reported to comply with a more conventional, popular though preferably middle-class attitudes and practices, typical of established mainstream publishers, exactly what the house aims to become. The obvious consequence of this aim on Comicon’s translation approach is to mitigate the underground argot in an attempt to popularise its already selected contents. Therefore, if censorship is not precisely the goal of such translation approach, its outcomes do not differ significantly from it.

Regarding this balloon, two further considerations should be tackled. Phineas’s speech is marked by the abbreviation of words (“th”, “smokin”, “ol”, “coolin”) and lexicalisation of pronunciation (“de”), which both translations fail to render with a standard Italian. However, the register can still be considered quite informal on account of the slang term “erba”, literal translation of “grass”, employed in both versions, and, in the case of Comicon, the colloquialism “fette”, typically used in Southern Italy to metaphorically address “feet”.

Another element to notice is Arcana’s cultural adaptation of “\$3.79 Sears and Roebuck ee-lectric fan”: the American chain of department stores “Sears and Roebuck” is turned into the Italian “Standa” and, likewise, the price in dollars is converted into lira. The tendency towards cultural adaptation from the American context into Italian was frequent in Arcana’s text and regarded festivities (e.g., Thanksgiving translated as “giorno del tacchino”), pop-culture references (e.g., Groucho Marx Junior becomes Nanno Loa – mangling the name of the Italian television director Nanni Loy – and the television programme Candid Camera becomes its Italian equivalent Specchio Segreto), toponymy (e.g., “Council Bluffs... from Iowa?” becomes “Roccasecca...dell’Iowa?”), and proper names (e.g., Fat Freddy is alternatively called Fat Freddy, Ciccio Freddie, Freddy Lardo, Freddie Lardo, Freddi, Freddie, even within the same strip). This strategy underlies a form of domestication of the original culture in translation, which has been defined “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values” (Venuti, 2008: 15). Franca Cavagnoli (2010) maintained that such

an extreme form of illicit cultural appropriation, with its often grotesque implications, has been banned for the last thirty years. Arcana's adaptation thus looks a product of its time, in which thorough philological and ethical considerations regarding translation were not widespread and thus, whenever cultural references could not be understood by the readers, the translator often decided to move the text towards them (Munday, 2012: 218) and simply neutralise or erase the original loose ends. In addition, as investigated below in the case of *Stampa Alternativa* and *Fallo!*, Arcana's choices can be explained in the light of a perceived proximity between the American and the Italian underground experiences. The English text had to be understood primarily for its shared "countercultural" values, no matter whether characters of the comic strips were from Iowa or from Frosinone.

Franklin's balloon continues the list with another triplet of -ing form verbs: "smokin", "reading", "listenin". The activity of smoking, even in this case, occupies the first position. In particular, he refers to "hash", a contracted form for hashish, translated by Comicon with the full name and only implied by Arcana. This omission is not a censorious act, though. The translator is taking for granted that the readers share the knowledge of the implicit object of the verb "fumare", since nicotine is considered a heavy drug and generally abhorred by hippies, while in the Italian drug slang hashish is actually called "fumo". Thus, the object does not necessarily have to be specified, as readers are supposed to know what the character is consuming. In general, Arcana's translator seems to privilege a condensation strategy by merely listing the activities in an infinitive form "fumare", "leggere" and "ascoltare". Even though the reference to dope is preserved, such approach still undermines the full rendering of the message of the balloon. Indeed, what the original and Comicon emphasise is that, besides smoking, all of the activities listed come for free: "free-trial subscription magazines" (translated as "copie omaggio") and "free record-club records" ("dischi omaggio del club del disco"). This point informs about another crucial aspect of the life at the margin of the trio: all of their belongings do not come from regular trades, especially since they reject the market as a symbol of capitalism. The translation of the reiterated adjective "free" ("omaggio" in Comicon) is thus fundamental in order to frame their mind-set and lifestyle.

In this regard, most stories start with the Brothers finishing either their stash, hidden in a box or a bag with the writings "stash" or "dope"⁸⁹, or their money, hidden in a sugar

⁸⁹ As for the translation of the paratext, Arcana's approach is not uniform, either adding a second caption box with the translation "merda" and an arrow pointing at the box, erasing the writing or simply leaving the original

bowl. In the latter case, Franklin’ often interrupts his reading of *Zap*, *Snatch* or newspapers to pronounce his worldwide famous motto (mimicked by Fat Freddy in the “Arcana 2” slot in the table):

Original	Arcana	Arcana 2	Comicon
As we all know, dope will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no dope!	Come ben sappiamo, la merda è più utile nei giorni in cui non c’è grana di quanto la grana nei giorni in cui non c’è merda!	Come dicono tutti, l’erba è più utile quando non c’è denaro di quanto lo sia il denaro senza l’erba!	Come tutti sanno, si sfanga meglio un periodo senza grano con l’erba, che un periodo senza erba con il grano!
Because grass will carry you through times of no money better than money will carry you through times of no grass!	Perchè l’erba ti aiuta quando non hai grana più della grana quando non hai l’erba!	-	-

The opposition between dope/grass and money is symbolically at the centre of the Freak Brothers’ stories. Whenever forced to choose between the two, the brothers always opt for dope, not merely because they are self-proclaimed “dope addicts” but also because it first represents a metaphor of the lifestyle they chose and the counterculture values they endorse. Indeed, their life at the margin of society is an informed choice: money, standing for duties, jobs, capitalism, is rejected completely in favour of total freedom from the Establishment’s coercion, and subversion, intended in all its political and humanist facets. Thus, dope consumption is portrayed as a means of expression and the triggering factor behind their decision. The incipit “as we all know” precisely indicates the shared ideals of a community behind this motto. As proposed only in the first translation by Arcana, the use of the first person plural is essential to communicate this collective, identitarian

unaltered. As stressed below, this inconsistency seems to confirm the presence of multiple translators and editors working on the text.

commitment/understanding. In the subsequent pages, when the very sentence is repeated by Fat Freddy, the translator shifts the subject on the third person, making the message universal but losing the focus to the niche community of freaks sharing this thought. It is reasonable to believe that in the case of Arcana, the adventures were rendered in Italian by different translators as translation choices often differ, even in more recognisable items, including the names of the characters, the editing of paratexts, the orthographic adaptation of English interjections. It is possible that different translators – with different sensibilities – worked on the two texts without knowing the solutions each of them adopted for these recurring formulas. Even the translation of the terms “dope” and “money” diverges: the first version shows a tendency towards a lower register by employing the slang word “merda” and the colloquialism “grana”; the second one uses “erba”, still belonging to the drug slang but with a less harsh undertone, and the common term “denaro”, opting for a normalised translation. Both use the verb “essere utile”, literally “to be useful”, to render “to get through”, in which the classeme of «commodity» is privileged to the detriment of the classeme of «life» pertaining to the original verb, whose original meaning is closer to the idea of survival and overcoming of difficulties. Dope is a vital element for the trio, just as money is thought to be vital for any American citizen. It is not a mere matter of commodity goods or usefulness, but a deeper bond underlying the notion of dope as a fundamental part of counterculture life. In this respect, the third available version, i.e., Comicon’s translation, is closer to the original as the slang verb “sfangare” preserves the classeme of «life», as well as the classemes of «difficulty» of the original. It also adds the classeme of «mud», belonging to the original literal meaning of the term, which fits the context of blight, dirt and decay in which the trio of squatters lives. Comicon seems keener to adopt slang terms, such as “erba” and “grano”, so as to fit a low register. Together with the first translation by Arcana, it is also careful to reproduce the chiasmic structure of the English text: “A will get you through times of no B better than B will get you through times of no A”. However, the incipit of the sentence employs the third person plural, just as Arcana (2), thus failing to reproduce the original “we”-dimension of dope. The second version of the motto, with “grass” instead of “dope” and “carry through” instead of “get through” is translated only by Arcana. In this case, the translation opts for the terms “erba” and “grana”, mixing the former versions by the same publisher, and employs the verb “aiutare”, which preserves the classemes of «difficulty» of the original.

Going back to the table listing the trio’s “creative procrastination” attitude, Fat Freddy, the most comical characters of the tree, is seen lying on the ground with four bowls

labelled “ups”, “downs”, “ins”, “outs” (left in English by both Arcana and Comicon), likely containing different narcotics. Fat Freddy’s ideal summer completely revolves around dope consumption, as emphasised by the epistrophe “smoking dope, eating dope, drinking dope”. Both translations use the same rhetorical device: “fumare roba, mangiare roba, bere roba” in Arcana, “fumando droga, mangiando droga, bevendo droga” in Comicon. In original, Fat Freddy specifically refers to dope as his way of “altering my consciousness”. The use of the slang term “roba” is less specific than the original, but still effective in including narcotics in general. The employment of the verb “allargare” in fact suggests that the substances used are light drugs, such as cannabis and lysergic drugs, and excludes heavy drugs. Curiously, the typo “coscenza” is corrected with an asterisk and the proper word between brackets. Comicon’s translation adopts the term “droga”, which includes light and heavy substances, and indeed the difference is perhaps less perceived in Italy, where the stigma regarding drugs is all-encompassing, especially among the wide public. Comicon literally renders the verb “altering” with “alterando”, which can be referred to both types as well. However, the reference to consciousness still implies that the narcotics consumed are not heroin or amphetamines, although the readership has to be familiar with this concept, and the cultural frame which it belongs to, to fully grasp the meaning of the whole balloon.

Fat Freddy’s obsession is mocked even by his comrades, who ironically state that his “trouble” (translated as “guaio” and “problema”) is to be “hung up on dope”. The verb “hung up” refers to an actual obsession, and in this case Comicon’s “fissato” renders adequately his dependency, while “ce l’hai troppo” is less emphatic. In point of fact, Fat Freddy represents a caricature of the “stoned”, pleasure-seeker hippie, whereas Phineas is more committed to radical politics and Franklin, perhaps too violent to be considered an actual hippie, is an avid reader and, as stated above, fond of music, another inextricable element in the counterculture life. However, Fat Freddy is not the only “hung up on dope” of the trio. Quite the contrary, dope consumption is a common denominator for all three, as seen above, and it serves as the starting point not just of their balloons about “creative procrastination” but of all their adventures. Dope is certainly related to fun and escapism, it triggers humorous episodes and makes Shelton’s readers chuckle in front of the gimmicks the three brothers excogitate to “score”. However, the meaning behind the exasperated references to dope is more than just recreational.

Indeed, in the episode considered, as the three hear someone knocking on the door, the first thought they have is a police's bust. And the slow rhythmic pace is broken by the thought of law enforcement finding their dope:

Original	Arcana	Comicon
Oh sheeee-it! It's a bust!	Meeeerda! La perquisa!	Meeeerda! Una retata!
Hide the stash!	Nascondiamo la roba!	Nascondiamo la roba!

The two translations similarly render the imprecation “Sheeee-it”, emphatically prolonged with the letter “e” so as to mimic a sort of scream, while they hide their “stash” a term inherently referring to concealed narcotics, translated by both as “roba”, being the classmate of «hideout» conveyed by the verb “nascondere” alone. The slang term “bust”, meaning police raid, is translated as “perquisa” by Arcana and “retata” by Comicon. The term “perquisa” is the contracted form of “perquisizione”, which was largely employed as a slang term by Italian radical Leftists. In this case, Comicon adopts a more neutral term, i.e., “retata”. The term is regularly used in the subcultural context today, but it is also the term everybody outside that context, including the police, would employ. In this respect, it does not convey a sense of exclusiveness, of “belonging” to a given subgroup. As stressed in the next Chapter, “perquisa” was treated by alternative publisher as a keyword referred to the ‘enemy’. And even in English, the very concept of “bust” is crucial to understand the Freak Brothers’ narrative, as it represents the moment of clash between counterculture and Establishment. With its rituals, language and models partaking in the construction of an identity for its users, the world of dope can reasonably be considered an alternative culture, one which requires the refusal of the paradigms of the dominant culture and a choice of self-marginalisation. Again, dope-culture can be framed within the “Us versus Them” logic which characterised the whole movement.

The aforementioned story, “Those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers acquire a groupie”, actually opens with a girl bringing the freak brother’s home her new boyfriend. Without even gazing at him, by simply hearing his words, Freewheelin’ Franklin recognises that he is an undercover narc:

Original	Arcana	Comicon

Groupie – Hi, fellows! Meet my new boyfriend! I met him down at the corner trying to score!	Ciao gente! Vi presento il mio nuovo ragazzo! L’ho incontrato giù all’angolo: vuole comprare dell’erba!	Ehilà, compari! Lui è il mio nuovo ragazzo! L’ho incontrato qui fuori, voleva comprare del fumo!
Norbert the Narc – Groovy, man. I need a hit! Got any acid, man? Wow, man. Like, turn me on!	Salve ragazzi! Mi ci vuole un fix! Ce l’avete l’acido? Dai, dai, sballiamo un po’!!	Figata! Acidi ne avete? Cioè, tipo, ho bisogno un flash!
Franklin – Oh, great! She’s brought home notorious Norbert the Nark!	Ma che brava! Ci ha portato Esposito, il pulotto della narcotici!!	Ah, magnifico! Ci ha portato in casa il famigerato Norbert della narcotici!

The girl employs such terms as “fellows” and “to score”. The former informs on the companionship of the group, while the latter pertains to a shared drug-related lexicon, meaning “to buy narcotic substances”. The translations proposed for “fellows” are “gente” and “compari”. The former is a typical term belonging to the teen slang, while the latter is inadequate for the context: it preserves the original classem of «camaraderie», yet it sounds old-fashioned and hardly relatable to the underground jargon. However, Comicon’s greeting “Ehilà” partially compensates the higher register and still confers an overall idea of youthfulness to the phrase. Indeed, the girl is introducing a boy she just met as her boyfriend, which informs the readers about her naïve and easy-going personality as an exuberant teenager. The drug-related term is translated as “comprare” by both editions, though Arcana selects “erba” as the object, Comicon “fumo”, i.e., hashish. The original does not specify the object and the term can be applied to both light and heavy drug purchases. Though in multiple panels the three brothers are seen trafficking both, in general the trio is associated to the massive consumption of dope, and therefore the choice to opt for light drugs reasonably seemed more adequate to both translators. At this point, the guy’s balloon lists a series of slang words typical of the 1960s counterculture. The term “groovy” is translated as “salve” and “figata”, respectively. It is one of the most famous terms characterising the 1960s slang, and may be used as a synonym of “cool”, “pleasurable”, generally in reference to drug-related experiences. Arcana fails to render the term adequately, while Comicon’s solution is closer to the original meaning. Specific drug-related terms are “hit”, “acid”, “turn me on” which are translated as: “fix”, “acido”, “sballiamo” by Arcana; “acidi”, “ho bisogno un flash”

by Comicon. In this case, while the translation of “acid” is literal in both, the latter version omits the translation of “hit”, indicating the single dose, while Arcana uses an English borrowing, “fix”, which is generally related to heavy drugs. Even as for the verb “to turn on”, Arcana provides an akin solution, while the latter employs an expression commonly used by young smokers, though the preposition and article “di un” are omitted, likely owing to a typo. A last comment concerning this passage regards the translation of interjections: the typical West Coast teen slang term “like” is rendered as “dai, dai” in Arcana, which normalises the sentence and does not share the same connotative value, and “cioè, tipo” in Comicon, the latter striving to reproduce the Italian equivalent of a hippie-like interjection. The other interjection, “man”, is omitted in both versions. The OED describes “man” as a colloquial interjection “used to express surprise, delight, disbelief, amazement, [...] or to give force to the statement which it introduces”. According to the OED, the usage appears to have originated in the early 19th century, at first among African-Americans and South Africans. The jive interjection was subsequently made popular by the beats. In the 1949 film *D.O.A.* by Rudolph Maté, the protagonists visit a nightclub in San Francisco, in a scene providing one of the earliest portrayals of the Beat subculture. As the characters in the club talk to each other they use such expressions as “Man, am I really hip” and “Oh don’t bother me, man. I’m being enlightened!”. Likewise, in 1969 (1972) Ginsberg wrote “Man, I’m really stoned out of my skull” (535). The beats contributed to the spreading of such expressions within the 1960s counterculture, while films popularised them among the mainstream society. However, by its very nature, such slang was born to differentiate a subculture from the rest of society.

According to Julie Coleman (2012), slang “creates in-groups and out-groups and acts as an emblem of belonging” (3). In contrast to Standard English, the scholar pointed out that slang words primarily perform a social function in a given context: “communicating meaning is often a secondary function for slang; it’s really for communicating attitudes and cementing relationships” (111). Slang itself is defined as “an attitude (insolence, for example, coolness, disdain, admiration, or a desire for conformity) expressed in words.” (306). Therefore, when slang is used by strangers to a given subculture, such as adults using young slang and narcs using hippie slang, it ultimately underscores how old and ‘out of touch’ with respect to that subculture these outsiders are. Thus, the excessive emphasis on and repetition of slang words triggers a self-parody effect and denotes the speaker’s belonging to the dominant culture. This is what happens in this strip: the narcotics officer makes use of slang practices which

clearly do not belong to him. While the girl does not grasp the difference because she actually is only a fickle ‘wannabe’ dropout, the narc is arguably exposed by Franklin who easily recognises the linguistic stretch. In the case of Arcana, it is worth noticing the adaptation of the name Norbert, changed into Esposito “il pulotto della narcotici” – a change occurring exclusively in this story. The scene is relived in the subsequent pages (8), with the man exclaiming “Groovy, man. Cool. Up tight. Outa sight.” and “Too much, man.”: Arcana’s version of the passage is: “Che sballo! Joint, joint, fantastico!” and “Troppo, troppo”, whereas Comicon’s opts for: “Dai, figata. Togo. No, davvero!” and “Mi prende bene”. To convey the idea of the forced use of the language of the speaker, who is clearly overdoing in his mimicking attempt, the original version used a climax of drug-related terms: “groovy” and “cool” are followed by “up tight” and “outa sight”, a crescendo of effects engendered by dope consumption, which ironically culminates with the literal ‘down’ of Norbert, thrown out of the window. Arcana, once again, uses the term “sballo”, here in the noun version, which is adequate as it belongs to both the teen slang and the Italian drug slang in reference to the excitement generated by a dose. Moreover, the borrowing “joint” is also used: its reiteration condenses all the original terms with a phrase linked to them by a metonymic relation, i.e., by referring to the cause rather than the effect. The term is certainly familiar to readers sharing a common background knowledge of drugs, though the overall solution sounds extremely odd and unnatural to a habitual user of the drug slang and thus triggers the same effect of the original in the Italian readers. On the other hand, Comicon uses terms as “figata” and “togo”, the latter belonging to the 1970s Italian slang, used especially in Northern and Central Italy. Since Comicon’s book was published in 2016, the term sounds anachronistic, though still intelligible to the readers of the story, who would likely laugh at how old-fashioned Norbert’s speech is despite all his attempts to sound ‘cool’. Therefore, although a different rhetoric device is employed, the result is close to the original in terms of the signifying process underlying the balloon. As the narcotics officer is exposed and defenestrated, his last phrase is “Too much, man.”, which is translated by Arcana with “Troppo, troppo” and by Comicon as “Mi prende bene”, the latter using another Italian drug-related term, generally associated to the positive effects following dope consumption. The comical turn-up of the episode is that until the end, he persists in his under-cover role. Indeed, this gag is recurring in several strips with Norbert as a protagonist.

In another one-page story (129) translated by Arcana, Norbert hides an odour-transmitter in the trio's house to detect marijuana and uses a series of slang terms, in original enclosed between inverted commas:

Original	Arcana
When they light up a “jay,” we “move in!”	Appena accendono uno spinello li becchiamo!
There go those well-known drug users, the “Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers,” leaving their hideout!	Ecco I “Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers”, ben noti drogati, che lasciano il loro nascondiglio!
I’ll “bug” their “pad” while they’re out “doing their things!”	Metterò il vaso nella tana mentre sono fuori.
If they smoke any “mary jane” anywhere in the building, I’ll be able to get a whiff of it!	Se fumano un po’ di Marianna in qualsiasi punto, sarà in grado di prenderne una boccata

Here marijuana is called with the common nicknames “jay” and “mary jane”. The fact that they are isolated between inverted commas denotes the attempt to distance himself from the concept the terms refer to. The translation provided by Arcana are “spinello” and “marianna”, without inverted commas. Nowadays both terms are scarcely recurring among young people and generally used by the older generation. In the 1970s, they were more common within the drug slang, and so the fact that inverted commas are not used as an isolating element weakens the overall comic effect, though humour is still inherent in the fact that they are employed by a narc. Another element to emphasise is the phrase “well-known drug users” referred to the trio: given the difference existing between drugs and dope highlighted above and the fact that the whole strip revolves around the latter, the epithet “drug users”, on the one hand, is a pejorative and, on the other hand, denotes Norbert’s lack of knowledge of the difference between the two. The translation preserves this misunderstanding with “ben noti drogati”. The fact that the brothers are called with the full name of the strip is also left as in the original: they are well-known precisely because they are Shelton’s ‘creatures’ and even within the text they are frequently treated as characters, a fact which “breaks the fourth wall” in the narration. In another passage, Norbert uses inverted commas for all code-terms “bug”, which is a code term for law enforcement, “pad”, which is a slang term usually related to criminals’ hiding places, and “doing their things”, which is

connoted by an halo of suspicion, whereas the trio is simply going to the restaurant. The Italian version here loses all the connotative terms with a milder translation: “Metterò il vaso nella tana mentre sono fuori”. However, by using the term “tana”, a classeme of «animality» is added to the sentence in reference to the brothers. This addition should not surprise since what the Italian version magnifies is the recurring public opinion’s stereotypical representation of hippies with animal-like features, an element which is constantly reiterated in the Freak Brothers’ strips with satirical intents. By simply turning the page, in another one-page story, Freewheelin’ Franklin is preparing for the “dope dealers convention” and is insulted by two men:

Original	Arcana
Hey, you smell like trash! Go take a bath!	Ei, puzzi di merda! Vai a fare un bagno!
Hey, can’t you hear through all that hair?	Ei, ci senti con quei capelli?

The Italian version opens with an adaptation of the interjection “hey”, in an Italian “ei” (this time with no “h”). In the sentence, one of the men addresses the commonplace of hippies’ smell, which in Italian is rendered with the reference to a repulsive stench of excrements. The translation of “smell” with “puzzi” and “trash” with a “merda” makes the phrase even harsher than the original, while the omission of “all that” in the subsequent passage partially weakens the allusion to the quantity of hair – though, readers can still infer it from the visual character design of Franklin with very long hair. The story is also interesting for the far-from-pacifist reaction the hippie has towards the insults, with an outburst of verbal and physical violence, which will be investigated in the next chapter. By remaining within the scope of drug-related features, the Italian translates the abovementioned “dope dealers convention” with “trafficienti di droga”. The solution is not wrong per se, though Frank specifically refers to “dope” trafficking, which he hopes to liven up by distributing amyl nitrite (correctly translated as “nitrate d’amile”), a substance with euphoric effects especially when combined with such stimulant drugs such as cocaine and MDMA. The fact that the Italian opts for a generic “trafficienti di droga” suggests that the difference between dope and drugs is either unknown or disregarded. This occurs in another significant episode included in Arcana’s anthology. When visiting the Rip off park (called “Parco S. Rapina”) to “score weed”, Fat Freddy meets some delinquents who claim to be “drug addicts”, translated as “tossicomani”. Freddy protests by claiming “Hey, well, God dammit, i’m a dope addict too!” translated as

“Beh, porco mondo, anch’io sono un tossicomane!”. The translation of both “dope addict” and “drug addict” as “tossicomane” erases the differentiation between the two, as well as the humour inherent in the fact that Fat Freddy claims fiercely to have an addiction too, though it is clearly less dangerous. Drug addicts are shown as criminals organised in gangs, and indeed the gangs of the park start fighting each other for Fat Freddy’s money, resulting in their defeat and Freddy’s safe escape with some ‘souvenirs’:

Original	Arcana
Well, I couldn’t locate any grass, but I found some smack and a bunch of yellows and reds and sixteen switchblade knives and a couple of .32 authomatics... not to mention a coupla fifths of *** wine... and eight bottles of romilar...	Beh, l’erba non l’ho trovata! Però ho riportato polverine, pillole, fialette, siringhe, sedici coltelli a serramanico e un paio di pistole automatiche, senza parlare di qualche fiaschetto di vino e 8 flaconi di romilar!

Among the heavy drugs taken from the “drug addicts”, the original refers to heroin (“smack”) and anphetamine (“yellows and reds”), romilar (declared illegal in 1973) and alcohol. The Italian version explicitly refers to romilar and wine, but generically speaks of “polverine, pillole” and add, by extension, “fialette, siringhe”, i.e., instruments for their consumption. Interestingly, drug use is linked to violence as both the original and the Italian version refer to such figures as knives and guns. Thus, the distinction between “dope addict” and “drug addict” is even more crucial, as it implies a larger discrepancy between lifestyles (though, it is important to stress that the trio does not disdain violent acts when directed against authority). Despite the detail and accuracy in translating the material items related to both, the overall difference between the two is overlooked by the translators, thus missing the implicit connotative meaning behind the whole episode. The fact that this crucial difference is overlooked is indicative of the translator’s sensibility as for the topic, and the lack of the adequate frame to interpret the comic sketch. Though the translator in question was familiar with Shelton’s cultural background, he/she presumably considered that most Italian readers could not distinguish between dope and drug. This is arguably a wrong audience design, a very frequent mistake by Italian translators who tend to downgrade the educational and cultural level of their readers and by so doing ultimately fail to increase such level.

Going back to the analysis of drug-related slang in Norbert’s speech, in another comic strip (47), he secretly enters the trio’s house:

Original	Arcana
Reciter – It’s notorious Norbert the Nark, out searching for the “killer weed”	Si tratta del notorio “Basettoni” d’asso della narc. in cerca della marijuana assassina!..
Norbert – I saw three hippie punks leave this apartment! If they have dope here I can “send them up the river”!	In questa casa abitano tre hippì! Se trovassi un po’ di droga potrei spedirli “al fresco”!
Norbert – ...sometimes the crazed addicts hide their “tea” inside the furniture!	A volte questi drugà nascondono la paglia dentro i mobili...

First, the adaptation of the name Norbert with a new Italian version should be noted: “Basettoni”, a nickname clearly borrowed from the so-called “Commissario Adamo Basettoni”, the Italian name of Chief Seamus O’Hara, the Irish chief of police in the Mickey Mouse universe. The change was made likely on account of Shelton’s frequent caricatures of mainstream comic strip characters, including Disney’s, which may have suggested the translators the comparison between Norbert and O’Hara. This new adapted version of “Basettoni” finds in the Freak Brothers his nemesis. In the original he calls them “hippie punks” while the Italian version opts for an Italianisation of the word “hippie” with “hippi” (in 1972, Quattrocchi had founded the Ippi party, without “h”, though both versions are attested), with no reference to their delinquency. According to the recurring Narrative Program of Norbert’s adventures, the Object to be found is dope. In this case, it is referred as “killer weed” and simply “dope”, in Italian translated as: “marijuana assassina” and “droga”: “killer weed” is actually a slang name for phencyclidine (PCP), a narcotic substance pushers often spayed on impure marijuana or parsley to fool customers, charged of creating manic agitation, paranoia and psychoses with violent outbursts. In Italy it was known with the name “polvere d’angelo”, from the nickname “angel dust”. It is likely that even in the original Norbert does not know exactly what he is looking for (he uses it between inverted commas), since the limited knowledge of the substance in question for a long time created a misconception regarding the negative side effects of marijuana in general, overlooking the fact that it was often mixed with another drug (deliberately or not). People thought that

cannabis was responsible of the hallucinatory states and the outburst of violence actually caused by the mix with PCP. The Italian translator privileged a translation not referring to PCP but to the ironic effect generated by the use of the term “killer”, since another frequent commonplace is that all narcotics, even marijuana, could bring to death. Likewise, in another story, entitled “The truth about the killer weed marijuana”, and translated as “La verità sulla marijuana assassina”, “killer weed” is the focus of a film sponsored by the parent-teachers association who consider it as dangerous as heroin and speed. Indeed, the film is described as “an educational motion picture produced by the city parent-teachers assembly”, i.e., “un film pedagogico prodotto dall’associazione insegnanti-genitori”. It is thus appointed to discourage marijuana consumption, by suggesting that it is the cause of criminality: the protagonists of the film are, of course, the three Brothers, who smoke some weed (translated as “erba” and “merda”) and automatically start planning the murder of an old crippled lady, the rape of a child, and a fight over money to “get me a shot of heroin” (“mi ci faccio un buco di eroina”), ultimately leading to their death. Ironically, at the end, the three show the film to their friends, and one of the viewers comments with: “Out of sight comedy!”, translated in Italian as “Una storia magnifica!”. The phrase “out of sight” is a slang expression used to define extremely positive experiences, in this case the film, perceived as a comedy by hippies on account of the hyperbolic representation of the effects of dope. In Italian, the sentence is modified. In particular, the register is elevated as the slang term is replaced by the rather formal adjective “magnifica”, but the reference to the comic perception of the film is also removed, as it is simply considered a story, “storia”, with no hint about its ridiculousness. The disregard of register is a frequent flaw in Arcana’s translations.

In the aforementioned example taken from Norbert/Basettoni’s monologue, the trio is defined “crazed addicts”, referring to their folly and their dependency from drugs, which the Italian version translates as “drugà”, a regionalism from the Milan area. The vernacularisation of Norbert’s speech contributes to the lowering of the register of the balloon with respect to the original. However, this choice may be explained as an attempt to reproduce the original idiolect characterising Norbert’s speech, i.e., a mix of medium-high register Standard English, matching his position as a committed member of law enforcement, and drug-related and criminal slang terms. Another example of this type is the use of the slang term “tea” usually referred to cannabis, which is translated as “paglia” in the Italian text, though removing the inverted commas. Even the expression “send them up the river” is a colloquialism for “send them to prison”. In this case, the Italian translator found an

adequate equivalent in “al fresco”, this time preserving the original inverted commas whose emphatic use is crucial to mark off low register terms and connote them with a humorous undertone.

Norbert is not the only character whose speech alternates slang words and Standard English. In another story, Freeweelin’ Franklin gets a ride from a “redneck”, aspiring to enter the business of dope dealing after having learnt about it in Acapulco and bought a camper full up with a hundred and fifty kilos of Acapulco Gold. The redneck mimics the slang commonly used to refer to marijuana by using the word “Merry-jew-wanna” (96-97), with the word “jew” isolated by dashes clearly satirising rednecks’ ultra-conservative, generally racist political positions through the allusion to Jews. In Italian, Arcana likely deemed the reference too obscure to be understood and opted for the lexicalisation of the wrong pronunciation of the word “hashish”, either called “assisc” or “hasch”. Even in this case, inverted commas are used to underline the slang unusually employed by ‘overground’ speakers. In the same story, prior to accepting the ride of the man, Franklin rejects the offer of a heroin addict. The man is portrayed as a lumpy, almost toothless, squint-eyed caricature of a ‘junkie’, a recurring one in Shelton’s comic strips. As he hands a syringe to Franklin, the latter looks at it with concern:

Original	Arcana
Junkie – Hey, man! Wanna do some smack?	Hei, bello! Che ne diresti di un fix?
Franklin – Er, uh... no, thanks! I gotta get off at the next corner...	Hum...no grazie... ...tanto scendo subito...

The greeting “Hey, man” is rendered with the slang equivalent “Hei, bello!”, with “hei” here lexicalised with the “i” – again, this may be counted as a hint of the plurality of subjects involved in the translation process. According to a metonymic link, the term “smack” is translated with another English borrowing, “fix”, which refers to the single dose of heroin, and was absorbed in the Italian drug slang. Here it is interesting to notice the reaction of Franklin, who is quite worried about the journey with the lumpy man. On a thymic level, his hesitancy (a ‘not-wanting-to-do’ modality) is rendered with an extended use of ellipsis, which is further emphasised in Italian, and the interjections “er” “uh” translated with “hum”. Curiously, the same reaction is triggered by the subsequent offer by a fat blonde woman on a Cadillac, who hands him over some gin:

Original	Arcana
Woman – Hop in, sonny! Have a snort!	Salta su pupo, e fatti un cicchetto!
Franklin – Er, uh... I don't actually need a ride! I was just drying out my thumb!	Emh...no grazie, anzi non mi muovo da qui! Stavo solo facendo prendere aria al pollice!

The woman calls Franklin' "sonny", an informal epithet for young males, which is translated in Italian as "pupo", the male equivalent of "baby", thus making the subtle sexual connotation even clearer. The lady uses such colloquialisms as "hop in" and "snort" to sound confidential, a connotation expressed also by the Italian phrases "salta su" and "cicchetto". And even in this case, Franklin's hesitancy is rendered through ellipses and interjections in Italian as well. In English, the anaphoric repetition of "er, uh..." in Franklin's balloons is replaced by a variation in the interjection "Emh..." followed by the repetition of "no grazie". In the original, Franklin' maintains that he was not asking for a ride, but rather drying out his thumb. The humorous effect is generated by the nonsense of the action and the double entendre produced by verbal choices: "to ride" is a slang synonym of 'to have sex', while "to dry out" is a slang verb meaning 'to recover from alcohol addiction'. As for the former, "non mi muovo da qui" completely loses the sexual innuendo of Franklin's utterance. As for the latter, since the woman is offering him a bottle of gin, his remark is clearly ironic. In Italian "far prendere aria" does not share the same meaning, thus erasing the wordplay about alcoholism. In general, in Italy, alcohol is not as stigmatised as in America, where since the Prohibitionist era alcoholism has been considered as a serious social threat. Hippies considered alcohol a drug, just as opiates and amphetamines, since it was addictive and did not expand consciousness or liberate the senses. On the contrary, alcohol made users seem 'dumb' and, even worse, was the drug the Establishment used to 'get high'. Of course, the Freak Brothers are sometimes seen drinking beer – never gin, though – just as casually consuming heavy drugs, but in general these are presented as exceptional episodes, not ingrained in the subversive narrative which finds its spark in dope.

In general, dope is used as 'in-group' self-discriminating factor which differentiates the (counter-) cultural milieu epitomised by the Freak Brothers even on a generational level. In a one-page story (51), Fat Freddy finds a job as Santa Claus at "Whiteway department store", simply translated as "grandi magazzini", thus omitting the ironic reference to the fact that the department stores and malls are often addressed as the 'temple' of white American

people. Prior to starting his new job, Fat Freddy Santa decides to smoke: “I’ll get good and stoned so I’ll be plenty jolly”, translated as “Prima di iniziare conviene farsi un po’”. This balloon once again shows the translator’s tendency to condense text and shorten phrases. What misses in this passage is the link Fat Freddy establishes between smoking and being “jolly”, whereas the Italian version presents the act as something suitable for the occasion in general, through the deontic modality expressed by the verb “conviene”. At the department store, the children Fat Freddy is confronted with are all famous mainstream comic strip characters, such as Charlie Brown from *Peanuts*, Nancy Ritz from *Nancy*, Dennis the Menace from the homonymous strip, and a student of *Miss Peach*. The kids, instead of asking for toys, deemed either too childish or too violent, are keener on dope:

Original	Arcana
Charlie Brown – I want to score a key	Voglio tre etti di roba!
Fat Freddy – Oh no! If I tell anyone what I just heard, I’ll get busted for sure! I’ve got to get rid of this kid fast!	Cielo! Se qualcuno lo viene a sapere mi arrestano subito!
Fat Freddy – Time’s up kid! Why don’t you let the next kid have his turn!	Meglio spedirlo via!
Nancy – [...] Just get me a couple of tabs of acid!	[...] Vorrei solo un paio di zollette d’acido!
Dennis – ...and a water pipe, a roach clip, and plenty of papers – licorice!	...un narghilè, un cilum e cartine alla liquerizia!
Miss Peach’s student – ...a rolling machine, some strawberry incense, and a little hash pipe!	Una macchinetta per rollare, incenso e una pipa...

The kids’ requests are specific items for dope consumption and denote an in-depth knowledge of its slang and semantic field. In the first excerpt “to score a key” means to obtain a kilo of narcotics, both the verb and the object being part of the lexicon of trafficking. The Italian translator likely understood the overall meaning, though it changed the quantity. The expression “voglio tre etti di roba” conveys the idea that the kid is unnaturally expert and shrewd. The translation of “roba” is appropriate, as in the original it is not specified the type of substance he requested and the Italian term “roba” can refer to all narcotics, just as

the English “stuff”. The subsequent two phrases are Fat Freddy’s thought and speech, respectively. By using Kress and Van Leeuwen’s model, Fat Freddy is both a Sayer and a Sayer, and his balloons are, respectively, a Phenomenon and an Utterance, as the cloud-shaped and the bubble-shaped balloons inform. The Italian translator, in his process of condensation of the text confuses the two, and distributes the message of the thought balloon in both boxes, removing completely the text of the utterance. This fact is crucial to exemplify that many translation choices made here and in the whole anthology by Arcana are mistakes dictated by a certain degree of negligence, rather than censorious acts. In this case, the translator condenses “If I tell anyone what I just heard” in “Se qualcuno lo viene a sapere”, and “I’ve got to get rid of this kid fast!” in “Meglio spedirlo via!”. In general, the register is still higher than the original, as exemplified by the exclamation “oh no!” turning into a more aulic “cielo!”, or the slang term “get busted” rendered with the standard expression “mi arrestano”. The subsequent passages list other items requested by kids. The Italian version is more polite (“Vorrei solo”), while the original insists on the colloquial style of the kids (“Just get me”). As for the terms related to dope, the text entails a certain familiarity with dope paraphernalia, and indeed the Italian text is close to the English version, with the exception of “roach clip”, a metal holder to avoid getting burnt with small joints, which turns into a “cilum” pipe, the omission of some specifications, such as “plenty” for papers, the flavour “strawberry” for incense and “hash” for the pipe. Among them, the omission of “strawberry” likely weakens the reference to the fact that the requests come from kids, still preserving their childish tastes in that they ask for liquorice papers and strawberry incense. But again, the omission is to be conceived as the outcome of the translator’s scarce philological attention. The epilogue of the story results in Fat Freddy getting fired as the children’s mothers ask him what their kids want. His answer is: “Er, well, uh...a whole buncha shit.” which is translated as “Eh!...ehm...un casino di...merda!”. The Italian increases the level of hesitancy by using ellipsis, thus putting the term “shit” even more in a salient position, isolated at the end of the sentence. The term is translated with the equivalent “shit”, meaning both dope and a generic derogatory term for things. The final panel shows Freddy at home telling his brothers: “I cound’t bridge the generation gap!”, translated as “vittima del conflitto generazionale!”. Here the original text refers to the famous notion of generation gap referred to in Chapter 2. Freddy stands at the centre of two different generations, the adults firing him for misconduct and the children becoming increasingly uninhibited. He ultimately sides with the latter, as he shares their language and interest. Dope

is the common ground uniting the two, and thus creating a breach with the older generation, symbolically marked by his predictable loss of the job. The cultural value of this concept is combined with an isotopy of “voidness” reiterated in this punch line by the terms “bridge” and “gap”, both sharing the classeme «void». The Italian translation of the concept is usually “gap generazionale” or “conflitto generazionale”, the latter being the choice made by Arcana’s translator. Interestingly, in Italian the modal competence “not-being-able-to” is omitted, as Freddy simply calls himself “vittima”, a modal existence of the subject being coerced, according to a “not-wanting” mixed with a “having-to” modalisation. The term “vittima” also shares with “conflict” the classeme «violence», opposing the isotopy of “war” to the former isotopy of “voidness”. Indeed, the counterculture in Italy acquired a more militant connotation with respect to the American one. Hippies were not seen as escapists, but generally as part of radical activists’ communities, involved in the hot political turmoil of the “Anni di Piombo” (see Chapter 7). In this sense, the generation gap referred to in relation to dope is naturally translated in the Italian context as a battle between the factions. Once again, Shelton’s strip can be read on multiple levels: first, the satirical employment of famous comic strip iconic children as dope consumers challenges the bigotry of the comic industry as well as the stereotyped idea of children as innocent, angelic figures. Moreover, Shelton uses dope as an element of jollification and a device to provoke society and reflect upon the opposition between the latter and counterculture. This aspect is magnified by the Italian text precisely by adding the dominant isotopy of “war” in the punch line, while the “jolly” facet of dope consumption is omitted. Ultimately, it is worth repeating that Fat Freddy loses his job for the umpteenth time on account of dope.

Dope is thus the battleground between the two, used as an opportunity to provoke and oppose authorities by the former, and as an opportunity to silence and convict subversive subjects by the latter. The theme of dope is a symbol of the rejection of cultural values as well as a ritual dictating new ones. In this sense, the role of dope is cultural and political, even when presented as ‘jolly’. This is especially true for the texts selected by *Stampa Alternativa* a decade after Arcana’s anthology was published. Similarly to Arcana, the series of comic book collecting the *Freak Brothers*’s strips suffers from a general dissimilarity in the quality of translation. The fact that *Stampa Alternativa*’s antologies included works by different translators and different editors, with different degrees of expertise and different sensibilities is evident as the style varies from volume to volume as well as from strip to strip.

In some cases, translators were careful to add footnotes in the case of puns unintelligible for an Italian readership (e.g., *Nell'Era Atomica*, 2) or cultural gaps, as in the case of football. In cases of small balloons with no room for the Italian translations some translator opted for leaving the text in original and adding the translation in a note on the blank space (e.g., *L'Erba del Vicino*, 11 leaves in the balloon “Lucky day, my ass!” translated as “Giorno fortunate ‘sto cazzo!”; 173 in the original), sometimes the balloons are blanked in case of information deemed unessential (e.g., *Nell'Era Atomica*, 10, “Yeah, mon!” blanked; 175 in the original), or cut and condensed (e.g., *Odissea Mexicana*, 7; 142 in the original). The volume *Odissea Mexicana* also suffers from misprints, affecting the reading of the text and the cohesion of the story. For instance, page 2 and page 7 are inverted, thus creating two narrative gaps in the story. Likewise, page 21 suffers from a mirror-inversion of pagination: the sequence of actions originally conceived from left to right was reversed and, given the nonsense generated by the temporal discontinuity and the missed cause-effect relationship in the chain of events, translator tried to change the balloons, preserving, when possible, the dialogues in the original order. When balloons could not be modified, the overall sense of the story was affected. Moreover, in some cases the Spanish terms or the wrong pronunciation of English words by Mexican people are removed (e.g., “mañana” translated as “mattina”, “mohney” translated as “denaro”), though the removal of the original exoticisation is not a norm (e.g., “señor” is preserved) and rather the product of a quite negligent translation.

As exemplified by the vulgar expression “sto cazzo” in the aforementioned clause “Giornate fortunate ‘sto cazzo!”, another peculiarity of Stampa Alternativa’s translations, especially *Nell'Era Atomica*, is the strong influence of regionalisms from the area of Rome. In the following excerpts such influence is particularly evident if compared to the most recent version by Comicon:

Original	Stampa Alternativa, 1983	Comicon, 2016
Take it easy! I’m rolling us a huge joint of killer Cambodian! (518)	Tranquillo! Mò rollo una gran canna di cambogiana assassina! (27)	Tranquillo, sto preparando un cannone di cambogiano micidiale! (125)
We need to dress “punk”! (534)	Mò dobbia essere punk! (45)	Dobbiamo vestirci “punk”! (140)

I'm making a suit out of garbage bags! (ibid.)	Io mi faccio un vestito coi sacchi della monnezza! (ibid.)	Io mi cucio il vestito con i sacchi dell'immondizia! (ibid.)
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The interjection “mò” is a typical regionalism which may be translated as “now” or, as in the first excerpt, with the English present continuous. The apocope of the verb “dobbiamo” in “dobbia” is also a characteristic of Rome’s speech, as well as the noun “monnezza” for “garbage”. The version proposed by Comicon is devoid of any regional inflection and, particularly in the passage of “killer Cambodian”, which the trio ironically call “pol pot”, include a thorough note at the end of the book explaining the pun between the sanguinary Cambodian dictator Pol Pot and “pot” as a synonym of marijuana. This may also account for the name “killer Cambodian”, which is translated by Comicon as “cambogiano micidiale”. The philological work the publisher dedicated to Shelton’s works is certainly worth being mentioned, since many cultural gaps which are not translatable into Italian, or just difficult to understand, are explained in the appendix of notes. What will be investigated in the subsequent pages is the rendering of political references in these editions, certainly not displaying the same degree of commitment to the underground cause of *Stampa Alternativa*. The latter is certainly lacking the same detailed-oriented editorial work, but it is also possible that, for example, the pun generated by “cambogiana assassina” and “pol pot” is more immediate to its readers, informed about Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge group and their violent politics. Of course, this is impossible to determine with certainty and what is up for an evaluation is the general translation policy of the publisher based on textual evidence. As for Rome’s speech, another example can be found in *Freak Brothers e altre storie*, published by *Stampa Alternativa* the subsequent year:

Original, 1971	<i>Stampa Alternativa</i> , 1984
Light up a kazoo of Colombian!	Vi appicciate un bombardone di colombiana!

The verb “appicciare” is typically used in the dialects of Southern Italy and extended to the Roman dialect with the meaning of “light up” when associated to the frame of dope, whereas “bombardone” is a by now obsolete synonym of “cannone”, used back in the 1980s. The

overall meaning of the sentence is not compromised, since the image clearly shows Phineas lighting a joint.

Another element which is worth mentioning is that, in *Stampa Alternativa*, proper names are often readapted, especially in cases of “loaded names”, which according to the categorisation of Theo Hermans (1988), diverge from “conventional names” in that they are connoted with specific meaning and motivation. As such, they are often translated to convey the original meaning to the readers of the translated text. In this particular case, loaded name of characters and places are often translated, though it is not the norm in all stories. For example:

Original	Stampa Alternativa 1983
Norbert the Narc	Norberto della Narco
Luncho	Magna
Weave	Onda
The girls at the Owl	Le pupe del locale
Herman the German	Ermanno il Normanno
Oakland Annie	Anna Oak'lin
Cousin Country Cowfreak	Cugino di Campagna
Willie the Wino	Willie Sbronza

In most cases, the adaptations are translations of the original nicknames, such as “Luncho” and “Weave”. The name of the Owl, likely a bar, is replaced by the general term “locale”, avoiding any precise collocation. In the case of Herman the German, *Stampa Alternativa* tried to render the original rhyme, while Country Cowfreak, the trio’s adopted cousin, is translated with Cugino di Campagna, clearly making a reference to the famous 1970s and 1980s Italian pop band I Cugini di Campagna. In the story “Take me out” from *Freak Brothers e altre storie*, translated as “Giochiamo a baseball”, a similar form of adaptation occurs:

Original	Stampa Alternativa, 1984
Choker Hackoff	“Soffocatore” Calcioni
Leviathon Jones	Johnny “Vi faccio vedéio”
Cannonball Crowley	Palla di Cannone Crowley
Hunkerson’s Hardware	Carpenteria Pincirolì

Finklestein's Furniture	Ferramenta Romanò
Ty Cobb	Joe di Maggio

In these cases, the choice to adapt the name of people and places to the Italian context is particularly evident. In the case of Choker Hackoff, Leviathon Jones and Cannonball Crowley that would be explained by a will to clarify the loaded name, though “Calcioni” and the regionalism “Vifacciovèdéio” are clearly the translator’s addition. In Comicon’s translation, entitled “Portami fuori”, the first name is translated as “Strangolatore” Hackoff and “Leviatano” Jones, with less radical adaptations. The other names are left in original. In the case of “Ty Cobb” the translation’s choices by both publishers are rather interesting. In the original, Franklin tells the other: “Just call me Ty Cobb!” to which Fat Freddy answers: “How about Ty Stick?”, in which the pun is generated by the similar pronunciation of “ty” and “thai”, thai sticks being a type of dope. In the attempt to reproduce the pun, Stampa Alternativa replaces Ty Cobb with Joe di Maggio, another famous Italian-American football player, widely known also for his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. In addition to his fame, the name also offered an opportunity for Fat Freddy’s joke: “E perchè non Joe Novembre?”. This solution clearly sacrifices the reference to dope, which would have been more appropriate to the context and to the characters’ usual dialogues. Indeed, Comicon’s version opts for removing the reference to baseball and translates the balloons as: “Va’ che cannonata!” and “Chi è che parla di cannoni?”. The expression combining the apocope “va”, standing for “guarda”, and “cannonata” as a slang form indicating something impressive, excellent, is associated to the image of Franklin showing his uniform. In this case, the translation exploits a multimodal play on words reinforced by non-verbal signs. The linguistic pun and the reference to dope are both preserved since Fat Freddy’s joke relies on the shared root of “cannonata” and “cannoni”.

This omission in Stampa Alternativa is far from representing a deliberate omission of a drug-related term. On the contrary, as highlighted above, the publishing house fully embraced Shelton’s poetics but was limited by the lack of professional translators working on the text. Since the very first publication, *L’Erba del Vicino*, the emphasis on drugs is evident in all the titles given to the single stories, belonging either to the main series of “The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers” comic strips or to “Fat Freddy’s Cat and his Friends” strips. Shelton’s stories usually include only the comic strip name written with different fonts, sporadically presenting also a subtitle under the heading. In the case of *L’Erba del Vicino*, several comic

strips are provided with an independent title – either translating the subtitle and using it as a title, or inventing a new one – positioned in the first panel where the comic strip name is usually drawn, often removing it. For instance:

Fat Freddy’s Cat and his Friends... one pizza with mushrooms to go! (172)	Una pizza ai funghi e via...(6)
Fat Freddy’s Cat and his Friends... (136)	Polizia e pappagalli (15)
Fat Freddy’s Cat and his Friends... (139)	La marijuana e il sesso (16)
Taking the Lumps (134)	A caccia di zollette (18)
Fat Freddy’s Cat and his Friends... (290)	Elezioni e coca (22)

These examples show how the titles used by *Stampa Alternativa* always relate to drugs, or in one occurrence to the police, the other focal theme of Shelton’s comics. In the first case, dedicated to magic mushrooms, the editors even drew some mushrooms on the panel. In “A caccia di zollette”, since the story revolves around Fat Freddy erroneously buying heroin instead of sugar, the original title plays with the double meaning of “lumps”, which in English can refer to sugar cubes – and, by extension, to heroin since “sugar” is one of its nicknames – and thus be translated as “zolletta” or to the dermatological side-effect typical of heroin consumption, translatable as “bozzolo” in Italian. The title can therefore be translated as “Prendere le zollette” and “Prendere i bozzoli”. And since the story refers to the former meaning, the title refers to the latter, being ironically written with a font mimicking actual skin lumps. This wordplay could not be reproduced in Italian, since no term refers simultaneously to sugar, heroin and heroin side-effects. Therefore, the title is modified in “zollette”, with a font mimicking cubes and not dermal protuberances. The titles “La marijuana e il sesso” and “Elezioni e coca” are invented by the Italian translators on account of the focus of each story, establishing a connection between the theme of drugs and the other two fundamental themes of underground comix, i.e., sex and politics (see Chapter 5 and 7, respectively). Clearly these titles magnify the theme of drugs, pointing at it as the cornerstones of Shelton’s works.

And drug-related terms permeate the translated texts through borrowings from English found at all register levels. For example, the sentence “We’ve gotten stoned every morning since 1967” (518) is translated as “Ci siamo stonati ogni mattina dal 1967!” (*Nell’Era Atomica*, 27), showing as “stoned” had been commonly readapted to the Italian context to

refer to the specific sense of numbness and lethargy caused by narcotics. In 2016, the same sentence is translated by Comicon (2016) by using the verb “ci stoniamo” (125), thus making it clear that the term is still used in the drug-related slang. The sentence “Wait’ll we get out of the garage! You’ll really flip out!” (525) is translated as “Aspettate di uscire dal garage! Allora sì che flipperete sul serio!” (*Nell’Era Atomica*, 34) whereas Comicon (2016) opts for “vedrai che sballo!” (132). The borrowing “flippare”, commonly used in youth slang, derives from “to flip out” and refers metaphorically to an overdose effect and can be connoted either positively (as in this case, which refers to a journey on the road) or negatively. In another story from *Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998), Freddy speaks of an “overwhelming dosage of UV” (562) which is translated as “un’overdose di raggi UVA” (24), the term “overdose” being completely integrated in the Italian standard language.

Drugs are certainly engrained in most stories presented in *Stampa Alternativa* as a part of the trio’s every-day-life, with different variations on the theme and with an interesting evolution from the hippie’s years to the punk era, which the Freak Brothers themselves bridged with their adventures. In particular, drugs are either presented as an occasion of fight with law enforcement or with the new generation of punks, often disrespecting the practices and values of the old counterculture. Many stories present the famous “bust” scare as their incipit, with the brothers throwing everything they have out of the window. A classic example is the 1974 story drawn by Sheridan “The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers finally get the message” (133) translated in *L’Erba del Vicino* as “I Freak Brothers finalmente capiscono il messaggio” (133), in which the trio makes all the stash disappear, fearing the arrival of the “cops”, who merely want to return them a dog:

Original	Stampa Alternativa
Quick! Flush the coke!	Svelto! Butta la coca!
Dump the hash!	Nascondi il fumo!
Swallow the acid!	Ingoia i trip!

All substances are translated with their corresponding slang term “coca”, “fumo” and “trip”, the latter representing another borrowing from English, specifically referring to the most popular substance of the Sixties. To hide any sign of dope, they “flush”, “dump” and “swallow” it, translated as “butta”, “nascondi”, “ingoia”, all recurring verbs in the translations of these strips. Precisely to tribute this leitmotif, in a 1991 story drawn by

Mavrides (550-51) and translated in *Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998, 13-14), the trio narrates their habits of throwing stash out of the window in case of raids by the police to a group of punks, while listening to Sex Pistols' *Good Save the Queen*. The punks define these episodes “stories about the old days” (“storie dei vecchi tempi”) and cherish the music exchange they had between their tapes and the trio’s “antique music tapes” (“nastri di musica antica”). The isotopy of “senility” is the cornerstone of all adventures with punks. And in this particular comic strip the outcome is that punks fake a police bust so as to force the trio to throw their stash out of the window, where they are waiting for it. Even more than twenty years later the balloons are still ironically the same:

Original	Stampa Alternativa
Quick! Throw the dope out of the window!	Presto! Buttiamo giù tutta la roba dalla finestra!

Just as back in the Sixties, the strip begins with “Quick!” (translated as “Presto” and “Svelto”), and “dope”, here referred with the generic term “roba”, is defenestrated. The outcome is different as the three brothers are mocked by the punks, exploiting their gullibility.

The generational gap between the Freak Brothers’ generation and punk is detected in the change of subcultural paradigms and rituals, drugs, music and language. In a one-page story from 1977 (175), translated in *L’Erba del Vicino* (10), right in the transition point between the two experiences, a perplexed Phineas reads the news: “Youth switching back to booze”, translated as “La gioventù torna all’alcool”, with “booze” being an informal nickname for alcohol. The key-term engendering Phineas’s concern is “switch back”, since, as seen above, alcohol is the drug of the 1950s generation, widely contested by the 1960s counterculture. And indeed, youngsters asking to buy him wine are negatively portrayed while vomiting and violently throwing him an empty bottle. However, in a liquor shop – head shops were closing down in the Nixon era – the alcoholic teen is called “sir” (“signore”), while Phineas asking for rolling papers is looked at with anger and asked to sign a police register in case he wanted to buy papers with no tobacco. Alcohols starts entering the trio’s stories as Fat Freddy is seen “loaded” (e.g., 516) or “drunk” (e.g., 515), translated as “sbronzo” (*L’Erba del Vicino*, 24; *Nell’Era Atomica*, 15), marking the increase in alcohol-related slang in Shelton’s work. The alcoholic teen’s speech in the previous story is

characterised by the interjection “mon” (repeated at the end of each balloon). As said, Stampa Alternativa’s translations tend not to pay particular attention to sociocultural variations in language and regionalisms. In this case, “mon” is translated twice as “capo” and omitted in the rest of cases. The guy also uses improperly the pronoun “ourselves”, which is translated with a correct Italian expression, “da noi”, and “naw, mon” instead of “no”, rendered with a more polite “No, grazie”.

The change of slang is crucial to mark the change of time. With the advent of punks, the hippie’s style is defined old-fashioned. The isotopy of “senility” is exemplified also in a 1982 story (515), translated in *L’Era Atomica* (15), drawn by Mavrides and Sheridan, in which a group of punk insult Fat Freddy as he is smoking marijuana:

Original	Stampa Alternativa
You stupid fucking hippie! Don’t you know marijuana is passé?	Stupido pirla di un hippie! Non lo sai che la mariuana non è più di moda?
Everyone does wine and thorazine now!	Adesso ci si fa di vino e torazina!

A first element to notice is the verbal violence directed at Fat Freddy as a hippie. The punk movement was a harsher, more nihilist and violent subculture than the hippie’s. This is exemplified on a verbal level by the expression “stupid” and “fucking”, which in Italian are translated as “stupido” and “pirla”, the latter being a typical northern derogatory term spread in current Italian as well. The comparison between countercultures and punk subculture is established in terms of drugs, since punk nihilism was expressed in the use of more self-destructive substances, such as heroin and amphetamines, which prompted the obliteration of consciousness, rather than its expansion. In this excerpt, the isotopy of “senility” is reiterated in the word “passé”, which is a French borrowing for out-of-date, referred to marijuana (lexicalised in Italian as “mariuana”), in contrast with wine and thorazine cocktails. In another 1981 story (532-38) dealing with the hippie-punk opposition, translated in *Nell’era atomica* (43-49), punks’ speech is characterised by other French borrowings and terms diverging from the 1960s slang, such as: “Sounds marvy!”, a diminutive of “marvellous”, and “Très outré!” (535) translated respectively as “Suona ‘fico!” and left in French (46). The same story, translated by Comicon (2016, 147), translates “marvy” with “trendy”. The different slang of punks and hippies is likely relatable to a change in aesthetics, with the former sounding more radical chic than the latter and the counterculture of the Sixties.

Likewise, in late 1970s, underground cartoonists embraced the new aesthetics of alternative comics, with a consequently renovated and refined language and style. By contrast, the Freak Brothers always remained true to themselves, though their surroundings were changing. Both translations rendered this conflation, the former with the youth slang exclamation “fico” isolated between inverted commas, an expression rarely associated to the hippie context; the latter used another borrowing from English, “trendy”, which is now commonly used by Italian speakers, especially young people.

On an aesthetic level, in the attempt to find a contact point between the two subcultures, Fat Freddy tries to watch the horror films loved by punks and is extremely bored, and fruitlessly uses speed (“anfe”) to get the inspiration to create his own horror story, mocked by his brothers as “Crankenstein” and “Gertrudestein” (515). In Italian the films are called “5 piste di velluto bianco” and “Anfestein”, the former creating a wordplay with Dario Argento’s horror cult, *4 Mosche Di Velluto Grigio* (4), and the latter using “anfe” plus “stein” from “Frankenstein”, just as the original used “crank”, a slang word for methamphetamine (15).

On a musical level, just as the psychedelic years of the counterculture were accompanied by the sound of Janis Joplin, whose concerts were abusively attended by the Freak Brothers, during the 1980s the trio also tries to set up their own punk band, hoping to get fame, sex but, most of all, even more stockpiles of dope. In their view, the paradigm of punk is “the worse the better” (532), which *Stampa Alternativa* erroneously translates as “o la va o la spacca” (43), and *Comicon* as “meno sai e meglio è” (138). On a visual level, punk aesthetics, despite the impression of being alternative and “marvy”, is connoted with this very *classeme* of «shabbiness», with such figures as dirty and worn-out clothes, empty cans of beer on the floor and in the air during concerts, scarred faces with shark-teeth. Trying to copy their look, the Freak Brothers wear “garbage bags” (140) and use a “trash can” (139) as a music instrument, translated, as previously mentioned, as “sacchi della monnezza” (45) and “bidone” (44), both sharing the *classeme*s of «shabbiness» and «dirt». *Comicon*’s version even adopts the same term, referring to “bidone dell’immondizia” (139) and “sacchi dell’immondizia” (140). Another peculiar translation choice regards the name of a narcotic cocktail made of “drano”, a type of household drain cleaner, and “baby laxative” which caused an overdose to the punk band the Freak Brothers are replacing in a live show: while *Comicon* finds a proper equivalent in “Wc Net e lassativo per neonati” (141), in *Stampa Alternativa* “Drano e I Lassativi” becomes an actual band, usually playing at the Chez Cheeze,

with no mention of their overdose episode. Moreover, even the name of the pub, mixing the French word “chez” with a rather shabby food name, “Cheeze” – changing the “s” with a “z” to make an alliteration – becomes the certainly not-so-radical-chic “Ciccio Formaggio” in *Stampa Alternativa*’s text, a ridicule name which still brings up the classiness of «stink», partaking in the general isotopy of “disgust” connected to the punk world.

Besides the ironic representation of the punk sphere, in all of Shelton’s production, disgust is a recurring isotopy, especially in stories dealing with heavy drugs. In the previous chapter, it was related to the theme of sexuality in its crude, bestial facets. In Shelton, disgust also combines with the satire of a world far from the myth of Woodstock and the myth of “gentle people with flowers in their hair” wandering around the streets of San Francisco, as in Scott McKenzie’s 1967 homonymous hit. The anthology *Freak Brothers e altre Storie* (1984, 31) included the translation of “The Freak Brothers’ favourite 14-year-old runaway... Little Orphan Amphetamine” (117), translated as “I Freak Brothers e la loro quattordicenne preferita”, originally in *Hydrogen Bomb Funnies* (1970), which exemplifies Shelton’s satire of the ‘myth of San Francisco’ combined with a parodistic use of mainstream comics, relying on their sexualisation and the overt reference to the world of drugs. Indeed, Amphetamine is the alter-ego of the protagonist of Harold Gray’s *Little Orphan Annie*, one of the most famous American daily comic strips, first published in 1924, in the *New York Daily News*. The strip can be considered a celebration of bourgeois values as Annie is constantly confronted with the jeopardies coming from the villains from the lower classes, and ultimately saved by her rich benefactor, Oliver “Daddy” Warbucks. Blatantly conservative, almost reactionary, in its development, the comics strip is the perfect target of the satirical distortion coming from the underground.

In Shelton’s one-page work, on the top of it, the three Brothers are seen reading the newspaper which hosts the strip. In this sense, it is hinted that the readers are able to see what the brothers are seeing and read what they are reading. With a debrayage, readers also manage to enter the newspaper page, constructed as the original strip, with the title sharing the same lettering, the same waffle-iron grid, and even the same caption box containing an inspiring quote at the beginning of the story. In this case, ironically, the quote is from Mao Tze-Tung’s *Red Book*, widely read among the Sixties’ radicals: “Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realized in the process of socialist transformation of society as a whole”. The Italian translation for the passage is: “La vera uguaglianza tra i sessi può realizzarsi solo attraverso l’intero processo di trasformazione della società in senso socialista”. The

“transformation of society” Annie experiences, however, is not what she expected. In the strip, Shelton’s Amphetamine is a busty adolescent version of the character of Annie, still recognisable by her characteristic curly hair and ‘ground glass’ eyes. Tired of the bourgeois life with ‘Daddy’, who wants her to find a job, the girl decides to run away from home together with his dog Gruntcakes – a nickname for faeces, translated as “Sgagna”, a regionalism for “mordere”, which loses the classness of «disgust» participating in the isotopy which will frame the whole story – and hitchhikes towards San Francisco. Prior to leaving, she looks for her hidden drugs: “First, I gotta get my stash...”. The Italian translation, in this case, is: “Innanzitutto, la mia roba!”. The solution adopted for “stash” is “roba”, which may either refer to dope or to her belongings in general, since, on a visual level, she is simply drawn while rummaging in a cabinet. Such ambiguity may be a deliberate pun, taking it for granted that *Stampa Alternativa*’s aficionados may easily interpret the correct meaning of “roba”. However, other slang words related to the world of drugs are not adequately translated, though once again, rather than overt censorship, these divergences seem to be caused by the general lack of philological attention to the original texts. For example, as Annie starts hitchhiking, she is lured by an old man offering her a ride and forced to have sex with him. The man’s balloon says: “It won’t do you any good to cry, little girl! No one ever comes along this back road!” and is translated as “Non piangere, piccola, nessuna si è mai vista sola su questa strada!”. In Italian the man seems to be blaming her for walking there alone, whereas the original is pointing out how useless it is for her to cry since nobody is going to rescue her. It is possible that the translator misread “along”, mistaking it for “alone”, thus modifying the overall meaning of the sentence. However, the humorous effect of the characters’ exchange is not affected, since it relies on the multimodal combination of the verbal and the visual codes, in this case establishing an antithesis between the man’s words and Annie’s reaction: indeed, not only is Annie not crying but also seems rather indifferent to the abuse, as indicated on facial and proxemic levels by her glassy eyes and bored posture. Accordingly, her balloon recites: “Wow, man, what kind of fucked up trip are you on? Oh well, go on and do your thing!”, translated as: “Ehi, ma come la meni, fai quello che devi fare e mollami!”. The girl uses the typical west-coast slang, with such expressions as “wow, man” and “fucked up trip”, the latter being clearly borrowed from the drug language, in which it originally refers to negative side-effects of narcotic consumption. No proper translation of the slang phrase is provided in Italian, in which the sentence is rendered with “ehi, ma come

la meni”, which, on a thymic level, rather indicates impatience as he ‘is beating around the bush’.

Annie’s apathetic attitude changes as she arrives in California and follows what she calls a “groovy looking guy”. In this regard, the Italian version opts for a more generic “c’è un sacco di bella gente qui...”. However, on the one hand, “groovy” is not translatable as “bello”, as it is a typical 1960s slang word for “cool” people and situations. Moreover, the fact that the Italian version generically refers to it as “gente” partially weakens the humorous effect generated by the lumpy appearance of the guy in question, ostensibly shabby-looking, disreputable and, as his jacket explicitly states, a “speed fiend” (left untranslated). The pimply man takes her to what presumably is his squat, inhabited by other creepy rogues who inject her some heroin and acid, abuse her in group, rob her of her belongings and menace to eat her dog. The theme of drugs clearly intertwines with the isotopies of violence, physical and moral debasement and material squalor, which are coherent with a series of figures and come to define both the physical and – by extension – the moral features of characters: on a visual level, the walls are crumbling and the floor is full of syringes (one of which was previously used to drug Annie) and the men are ugly-looking, drooling, toothless, hairy, wild-eyed, with scars on the face and flies and stink lines above them. On a verbal level, the terms linked to drugs and disgust are not always translated adequately:

Hey! Do you have forty five dollars so we can go and score some skag	Hey! Hai mica 45 dollari che andiamo a farci un giro?
I musta O.D.’d an’ gone to hell!	Ma valà
Look at all those big black spiders on the ceiling!	Uh, quanti ragni!
Live snakes everywhere!	Buaaaahhhh

The references to heroin (“skag”) and overdose (“O.D”) are completely omitted, with the colloquialism “ma valà”, connoting the text with a comical tone. Moreover, the repelling animals addressed in the original balloons, partaking in the aforementioned isotopy, are likely index for the men’s hallucinations, which continue to fear a police bust and death (the latter omitted in Italian). The Italian version simply opted for a cut in this regard, omitting the reference to snakes, and the adjective “big” and “black” referred to the description of spiders.

Just as disgust is downplayed and even brought to silence, the translation of terms and expressions referring to sex seem to be amplified:

Here, do some smack n' acid...	Qui, qualche bacio in acido!
Always room for one more... (heh heh)	C'è sempre posto in camera mia (he he...)
Hi! You can come sit on my face!	Hi, puoi sederti sulla mia faccia!
Hey, I know a guy who might pay twenty bills to fuck you, sweetheart!	Hei, conosco un tipo che pagherebbe bene per trombarti!

The cocktail of heroin and acid is turned into a “bacio in acido”, likely mistaking “smack” for the onomatopoeia of a kiss, while the second excerpt adds the sexually connoted allusion to the bed room which is absent in the original. The other excerpts show the same level of explicitness and verbal violence, with no qualm despite the harassment is directed to a fourteen-years-old girl (e.g., “puoi sederti sulla mia faccia”, “trombarti”). The choice is interesting, as Shelton here is graphically satirising the degenerated reality of San Francisco during the Sixties, when many adolescent dropouts suffered Annie’s fate. And as occurred to many of them, ultimately the girl calls her “Daddy” to ask him some money to go back home, and see a doctor and a “shrink”. The reference to her need of psychological treatment is omitted in Italian – as occurred in Crumb’s comics analysed in Chapter 5 – as she simply asks for “un medico”. Again, the translator’s generalisation, arguably aiming at an uneducated readership, makes the target text more superficial, thus resulting in the suppression of important content. For the first time, Annie looks at the reader in despair. In multimodal analysis, the direct gaze is a position of Demand which denotes a major engagement with the viewers, i.e., the interactive participants, since a vector establishes an imaginary contact between them and the represented participants, in this case Annie – whose eyes acquire some degree of expressiveness for the first time. Nonetheless, this is just a glimpse of a moment and in the subsequent panel she is back to normal, still criticising his benefactor and his “capitalist pig” attitude (translated as “porco capitalista”), thus suggesting that her adventures with the underground and its “transformation of society” are far from over. This recalls the ending of many serialised comics in which, no matter what the protagonists went through, they ultimately return to their daily life with no apparent consequences. In this last case, the reference to drug slang is translated in Italian, as she claims: “Why don’t you drop acid and get off your incredible power trip?”, which is translated as “Perchè non ti fai un acido e butti

via il tuo trip di potere?”. Despite the choice of the verb “buttare via”, which does not usually collocate with “trip”, the translation is correct and conveys the overall sense of Annie’s words. It is interesting to notice that capitalism is treated the same as a “bad trip”, with acid representing the alternative. This association is a recurring topos in Shelton’s narratives, where heavy drugs are the consciousness-obliterating substances used by the Establishment to oppose the countercultural revolution of the mind.

In a 1974 story drawn by Sheridan, entitled “Recommended by nine doctors out of ten” (289), translated as “Raccomandato da nove dottori su dieci” (13) in *L’Erba del Vicino*, Norbert the Narc explained how the Federal Bureau of Drug Abuse poured tons of methedrine into American water supply to fight economic recession in the same way as doctors usually fight depression. Their method explicitly imitates the Yippies’ threat of pouring LSD on water supplies during the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. The fact that the Yippies are first of all presented as drug abusers is part of Shelton’s satire. Furthermore, in Norbert’s original speech, recession is associated to the classeme of «war», included in the verb “combat”. The same classeme is linked to drug abuse and connected to the terms “fight”, “menace”, “enemy”, “tactic”, “threatened”. Thus, both economic recession and drug abuse can be linked on account of the dominant isotopy of “war”. In Italian, this very isotopy is preserved. Recession is associated to the verb “combattere”, drug abuse to the term “vincere”, “nemico”, “tattica”, “minacciarono”. Moreover, the term “menace” is translated as “peste”, which adds the classeme of «disease» to the connotation of drug abuse. This is consistent with the isotopy of disease triggered by the reiteration of the same classeme in the subsequent panels, when referring to recession as a form of “depression”, also mentioning such sememes as “doctors”, “cure”, “prescribe”, and “drug”, correctly translated as “depressione”, “medico”, “curare”, “prescrivere”. Thus, drug abuse is translated as a pest, but drug is also a cure. This incongruence ironically represents the American attitude towards narcotics, seen as a jeopardy as well as a gateway from the society’s issues. However, something goes wrong as the governors learn what drugs have been prescribed, i.e., amphetamine. Since the plan discussed by the politician is to increase interest rates, taxations, wage and price controls, increase of savings and more funds for weapons, people are required to be ‘sedated’ and not livened up:

Original	Stampa Alternativa
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You fools! You got it all backwards! We want to calm people down, not stir them up!	Pazzi! Non avete capito niente, noi vogliamo calmare la gente, non tirarla su!
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The key-term to understand their plot stands in the opposition of the two verbs “to calm down” and “to stir up”, which Norbert “got it all backwards”. *Stampa Alternativa* in this one-page story provides a thorough translation of the passages regarding the Yippies and the Government’s plot. In this excerpt, however, the antithesis “up” and “down” is not rendered with the same emphasis as in the original, just as “backwards” is translated with a not-knowing modal competence. Overall, the meaning of the story is not affected, though. And Norbert (translated as Norberto) orders to dump tons of Quaaludes into the water supply. Ultimately, Phineas wakes up and all is revealed to be one of his nightmares, which far from being pleasant he defines “ominous”, translated as “tremendo”. Just as the offer of a “fix” caused Franklin’s hesitant withdrawal, the thought of drugs in water caused Phineas’s scared reaction.

In another coeval one-page strip from “Fat Freddy’s Cat” adventures (290), previously mentioned for its Italian title “Elezioni e Coca” (22), the same topos is developed according to the dichotomy between youth and adults, between voters and governors. As suggested by his 19 years old son, who also happens to be a cocaine dealer, the candidate Rodney Richpigge, a loaded name poignantly translated as Rodney Porcoricco, tries to increase his popularity among young people by disguising his advisors as dealers, selling confiscated cocaine to hippies. After snorting a “good toot” of cocaine – rendered as “è proprio tosta” – the Freak Brothers jokes about the effects such cocaine had on the fake Rodney Jr., since he clearly looks older than expected. The dichotomy young-old is developed on a verbal level through the use of such expressions as “out of it” which the adults do not understand, translated as “fuori dal mondo” and by using “cocaine” between inverted commas. In Italian the inverted commas are not used, and even the expression “out of it” is not translated with a slang form. Moreover, the punch line is not translated correctly, since Phineas ironically maintains that: “All that cocaine dealing must take a lot out of a guy!”, implying that Rodney Jr looks too old for his age. Likely connecting the balloon with the previous “è proprio tosta”, *Stampa Alternativa* translates the text as “Certo che tutta ‘sta coca farà uscire di testa un sacco di gente!”. The focus of attention is shifted from the fake dealer to the effects of cocaine on the potential voters. This change may be due to the lack of knowledge of the meaning of the phrase “take a lot out of” which could be translated as

“togliere un sacco di energie”. With the exception of this mistake, the strip is interesting for the translation of Richpigge with Porcoricco, labelled by the brothers as “law-and-order fascist governor”. *Stampa Alternativa* called him “governatore fascista ‘legge e ordine’”, with a literal translation of the English phrase corresponding to the Italian “ordine pubblico”. This opens to the following discussion on the epithets for authorities. Interestingly, the government’s ‘drug scare’ ends when profit begins. And the topos of heavy drugs dispatched by authorities is frequently employed by Shelton and can be detected during all the stages of his production. For example, in “Fat Freddy goes back to grade school” (292), translated in *L’Erba del Vicino* as “Ciccio Freddy torna a scuola” (21), Fat Freddy disguises himself as a six-grader at the Bojangles Elementary (adapted as “Fresconi”), as he learns that they are giving children Ritalin, a form of amphetamine. However, he soon discovers that the school where Ritalin is distributed is “Ronald Reagan Elementary”, adapted as “Craxi” in Italian. Such a replacement of American politicians with Italian ones is crucial in understanding the translation policy of *Stampa Alternativa* as well as of *Arcana*, and will therefore be the core of Chapter 7.

In this regard, another example comes from “The 7th Voyage of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers: A Mexican Odyssey” (1975), drawn by Sheridan and published as a solo comic book by *Stampa Alternativa* in 1985. As stressed above, several translation mistakes and inaccuracies compromised the overall product in Italian. However, the story represents one of the best examples of the trio’s struggle against the police and the constant entanglement of endless travels, drug-related issues, chases, corruption and prison life. Narcotics are the background of all the in-text adventures of the trio, starting from the ketamine offered them by Franklin’s friends in Hollywood, hosting the Brothers on their way to Mexico after the eviction from their house. The band from Hollywood explain how ketamine, magnified in the Italian text with an oversize font, is the drug of the “decadence” fashion, as it gives “a three-day nightmare” to its users. After corrupting the frontier police, escaping marijuana inspections by accidentally dropping a ten-dollar bill, quickly collected by another corrupted guard, being chased by the Guardia Nacional, Franklin and Phineas are imprisoned in the Montegringo jail, both with the charge of being cocaine smugglers. Following their escape thanks to Fat Freddy and the yaqui Indian witch-doctor Don LongJuan, the three brothers discover the evidence of the federals’ corruption, i.e., their field of opium poppies to produce heroin. As they are discovered by the American guards, they are sentenced to death:

Original (163-64)	Stampa Alternativa (22-23)
Good Lord! We've stumbled upon a gigantic heroin factory! It must be run by the mafia or something! Jeez! Lookit all those poppies!	Oddio siamo finiti in una gigantesta fabbrica di EROINA! Deve essere tenuta dalla mafia...o qualcosa del genere...quanti papaveri!
They... they wouldn't kill us just because we saw their smack factory! Would they?	Ma non ci uccideranno mica solo perchè abbiamo visto la loro fabbrica di "ero" o no?
Yeah, listen! Everybody knows you guys have to deal a little "shit" once in a while! To make ends meet! I know how it is; I'm on welfare!	Hey! Sentite lo sanno tutti che ogni tanto trafficcate un po' di roba... non c'è niente di male... si fanno due lire...

The writing “eroina”, just as for ketamine in the previous pages, is written with an oversize font in the Italian version. The last excerpt diverges from the original in that the Italian text does not include the deontic modality of the verb “have to deal”. In the dialogue, Franklin maintains that the federals’ involvement in drug traffic (referred to with the term “deal”, usually employed for dope) is engendered by necessity, “to make ends meet”. In addition, he establishes a contact point between the two, by claiming to be on welfare, and thus needing some alternative income as well. This is not made explicit by Stampa Alternativa, which only minimises the weight of their crime with “non c’è niente di male” and “si fanno due lire”. However, no contact point is made between the two, nor Franklin talks of dealing as a need. Only the trafficking is magnified by editing the lettering of “eroina”. Overall, despite the negligence in the work of translation and editing, when dealing with the theme of drugs, the text is managed with a higher attention level. This may be explained by the shared sensibility of author and translator towards drug-culture.

The antagonism towards heroin was also linked to the widespread idea of an involvement of government with the rapid spread of the substance in the States, and the protection CIA granted to the production of opiates especially in Indochina. However, the fact that U.S. government deliberately used drug enforcement to systematically set up political radicals and undermine counterculture is unlikely. Still, Chapter 2 mentioned how

an agency of the U.S. government, i.e., the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), engaged in a covert effort to undermine the political capacity of countercultural movements actually existed. The FBI developed a secret program called COINTELPRO, engaged in extensive activities to pursue and discredit countercultural political activity. COINTELPRO involved a great many illegal activities against numerous political organizations, especially the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Panther Party, the Nation of Islam, as well as most of the organizations resisting the Vietnam War. However, despite its power and influence, it is important to recognize that this was a secret program, probably not known to any Member of Congress and officially not authorized by the President, thus receiving funds out of control agency of the Department of Justice. Rather than a formal government policy, it reflected the power and prejudice primarily of the Director, J. Edgar Hoover.⁹⁰ However, the FBI in those years was not officially involved in drug control and did not have authority to investigate the drug trade, which was the responsibility of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in the Department of Justice.⁹¹

Even though COINTELPRO was not directly linked to drug enforcement, it was a common belief that ‘if the government really wanted to stop drugs, they could do so easily’. This simplistic proposition fuelled the idea that the widespread distribution of drugs was the evidence that the government specifically intended to make drugs available, with the objective to hinder free, radical thought. And the idea that government agencies were unreliable was spread even beyond the countercultural milieu. Indeed, confidence in the U.S. government had been low since the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In particular, during the presidencies of Johnson and Nixon, it became widely understood that the president and his principal advisors were frequently, if not routinely, lying about the conduct of the war in Vietnam. As explained in Chapter 2, underground newspaper became popular because they provided unbiased information, especially as from the war in Vietnam. An untrustworthy government could not but struggle to suppress voices out of the box. And drugs were certainly thought a valuable vehicle. Moreover, most of the federal drug arrests were made against low level offenders, i.e., dope dealers, and this may account for the

⁹⁰ The actual existence of this program was discovered in examination of documents stolen in a burglary of the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, on 8 March 1971. COINTELPRO was investigated by a U.S. Senate Committee known for the name of its chair, Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) (Medsger, 2014).

⁹¹ Until April 1966, this was the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in the Department of the Treasury, reportedly corrupt and badly managed, which later merged with the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control, an agency in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare created to address psychedelic and related pharmaceutical drugs, to create the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in the Department of Justice (Jonnes, 1996; Valentine, 2004).

suspicion that heavy drugs, i.e., the mind-obliterating substances, were actually protected by authorities, suspecting clandestine relationships between traffickers and intelligence agencies.⁹²

In Italy, this idea was shared by the underground community. Guido Blumir's book *Eroina. Storia e realtà scientifica. Diffusione in Italia. Manuale di autodifesa* (1976) maintained that the 'Drug Scare' in Italy had a precise date: 20 March 1970, when Rome's Narcotics officers found a vessel containing a supposedly massive quantity of drugs on the shores of the river Tevere. Media created a national case regarding the degenerate habits of the capital city, caused by the empowerment of the Leftists. The journal *Il Tempo* wrote: "Infame centrale del vizio nel cuore di Roma – casa della droga per minorenni in un galleggiante sul Tevere – Sequestrati hashish, eroina, eccitanti, siringhe, alcoolici alterati, ricettari rubati" (21 March 1970, quoted in Roghi, 2018). The scapegoat found for the scandal was the world of the "capelloni", charged of being communist drug sponsors. As Blumir explained: "Nasce in Italia la 'psicosi' droga: per decine di milioni di italiani la droga diventa un 'male oscuro' per centinaia di migliaia di giovani, una tentazione proibita. Solo tre anni dopo l'opinione pubblica viene a sapere, da un dossier di controinformazione di Stampa Alternativa (La droga nera), che la storia del 'Barcone' era una truffa". Stampa Alternativa was thus directly involved in the process of debunking the case. But this did not stop the growing suspicion regarding students, radicals and hippies, who generally smoked light drugs. Consequently, police's repression towards the Italian countercultural groups started to be increasingly legitimised. As the police increasingly repressed the illegal market of hashish but did nothing to prevent the boom of heavy drugs, during the 1974-75 winter, called "l'inverno dell'eroina", heroin breached the Italian drug market, with the widespread idea, within the underground milieu, that this operation was the product of the joined forces of the Italian police and the mafia. On 2 July 1975, Stampa Alternativa denounced the Narcotics' chief, captain Mazzotta, for "corruzione e spaccio di eroina" at the Procura della Repubblica di Roma proving with a dossier that officers did not persecute heroin trafficking even when pushers worked out in the open.

⁹² Subsequently, this was the case of the cocaine supply chains, as accounted in Webb (1998). By the end of the 1980s, the spread of crack cocaine, particularly in Los Angeles, was blamed on government policy, in particular, as the work of the CIA, which was aware that many of its operatives had been or were currently working in the drug business, using their government connections to facilitate their cocaine smuggling. Many high officials were deemed complicit in the damage caused by that drug use, and the CIA was considered responsible for deliberately causing the crack epidemic.

In this light, the massive presence of stories negatively portraying heroin in *Stampa Alternativa*'s anthologies will not surprise. Quoting Franklin, enraged after Fat Freddy was “burned” by a creepy pusher and bought heroin instead of sugar, “This ‘sugar’ is 95% heroin... it hardly even makes the coffee sweet” (75). In *L’Erba del Vicino*, the translation is literal: “Questo ‘zucchero’ è eroina al 95%... non addolcisce nemmeno il caffè!”. Contrary to popular belief, Freddy was “burned” not because he bought sugar instead of heroin, but because he bought a substance that they do not consume. Pushers are not members of the counterculture. And indeed, Fat Freddy’s pusher is a lumpy guy with a hat and a raincoat, not corresponding to the hippie aesthetics.

In the 1982 dystopic adventure “The Fabulous Furry Freak Broz in 21st Century” (524-28), translated in *Nell’Era Atomica* (33-47) as “The Fabulous Furry Freak Broz nel 21° secolo”, the trio lives in a ultra-technological and ultra-polluted future, in which they need to “score” some dope by going to the countryside in Peaville, where their cousin Contry Cowfreak (the famous “Cugino di Campagna”) sells his legendary “Peaville Pride” – rendered as “Peaville Glory”, resembling Morning Glory, seeds producing a LSD-like effect, in *Stampa Alternativa*, whereas *Comicon*’s translation is the literal “l’orgoglio di Peaville”. In this passage, *Stampa Alternativa* also magnifies the transaction between the brothers and Cowfreak, by elevating the register of his speech to that of an almost biblical prophecy:

Original (527)	<i>Stampa Alternativa</i> (36)	<i>Comicon</i> (134)
Take good care of this plant, now, and it will continue to produce for years and years! Just keep a thousand-watt light shining on it 24 hours a day!	Abbate cura di questa pianta, ed essa continuerà a produrre per anni ed anni! Basta lasciarla perennemente sotto una lampada da 100 watt!	Se la terrete bene, questa pianta sarà produttiva per anni! Basta tenerla sotto una lampada da mille watt accesa ventiquattr’ore al giorno!

Temporal deixis here plays a role in elevating the register in *Stampa Alternativa*’s version. Indeed, the phrase “per anni ed anni” and the adverb “perennemente” almost have a fairy-tale connotation, which sounds formal with respect to the context and the speaking characters. In comparison, *Comicon*’s recent republication opts for more informal solutions, i.e., “per anni” and “ventiquattr’ore al giorno”. Other elements marking the more formal register are the pronoun “essa”, very unusual in colloquial speech, and the use of “ed”, the

euphonic form of the conjunction “e”. Even the clause “abbiate cura di questa pianta” conveys a sense of prophetic solemnity through the use of the imperative. The effect is likely created on purpose, since it clashes with the concerned faces of the brothers and is followed by a panel in which the first balloon is much less solemn, “Porca vacca!”, translating the English “Oh my gosh!” – whereas Comicon’s translation is a milder “Oddio!”. Indeed, as expected, the bucolic dream of a dope cultivation is interrupted on the way home by the police, which disrupts the trio’s plan in a chase ending with officers shooting a combination of heroin and Thorazine to sedate the three hippies. Even in this case, the shooting is but a dream of Phineas, though it is ultimately drawn as an alien creature, leaving the whole meaning behind the episode suspended.

Overall, the quality of *Stampa Alternativa*’s translations is rather poor, though the translator’s knowledge of the topic is certainly high and no intentional attempt of deliberately censoring the theme is attested. Drug-culture is explored in its more political facets, which – it is important to remember – pertain to the whole production of the *Freak Brothers*. Nonetheless, the outcome of such poor quality ultimately resembles censorship in that it hinders the transmission of important contents.

A story which enables a further comparison between different translations, in different time periods is “Grass Roots”, edited by *Risamaro* in 1979 and Comicon in 2016. The title of the story, one of the longest ever by Shelton (drawn by David Sheridan) can acquire different meanings in English. Of course, since on a graphic level the title of the story emerges from a field of marijuana, Shelton is creating a wordplay with “grass”, a nickname for marijuana, thus joking about the trio’s roots grounded upon dope consumption. However, the phrase “grass roots” may also refer to a return to spontaneism and to a rural, simple and genuine dimension of life, and, as a matter of fact, the story revolves around the brother’s attempt to establish a self-sufficient commune in the countryside. In this regard, the translation of the title adopted by *Risamaro*, “Ritorno alla Terra” and Comicon’s subtitle “Ritorno alla Natura” both share the classemes of «naturalness». However, by extending this notion of spontaneism to the political sphere, the phrase “grass roots” (often written as a single term “grassroots”) also came to define movements and organizations which reject traditional top-down power structures in favour of self-organization, bottom-up decision making, participatory development starting from the local level, and active engagement of ordinary people in the political discourse. Grassroots movements’ primary aim is to prompt social action and political participation in their community members, believing that power

derives from the people, an ideal akin to the countercultural values and semantic nucleus of the story created by Shelton and Sheridan. In Italian grassroots movements are known as “movimenti grassroots”, or “movimenti di base”. Thus, politically informed readers could easily grasp this reference and the title may be left untranslated. However, only Comicon preserves the original as the title for the whole anthology, whereas Quattrocchi translates it and, in the back cover, presents the story as “una demenziale avventura [...] tutto natura, coca e pulotti”. However, despite the ostensible graphic premises of the title, in *Grass Roots* – even more than in other stories – drugs are just an excuse to develop a narrative on the creation of a local community, on the establishment of social democracy and even the election of Phineas (presenting himself as Phineas T. Freakerears, adapted in Italian as “Frikkettoni” by *Risamaro*) as the first hippie sheriff, applauded by a cheerful (and clearly “high”) crowd of people. The story is clearly comical, yet it provides an interesting insight of Shelton’s political and social background, strictly bound to the countercultural turmoil of the Sixties. And this is exactly what poor translations are more likely to miss in their trivialising attitude merely focused on the comical aspect.

Though Quattrocchi introduces the characters as “più fatti e stravolti che mai”, *Risamaro* entirely cuts the first part of the story about them squatting an old mansion, resulting in the retrieval of a huge quantity of cocaine with which they buy a van and a property in the countryside. In the first page of *Risamaro*, actually, the trio gives a ride to three hitchhiking girls and invites them to their newly bought country house, promising a year’s supply of cocaine. The three girls accept, gazing cocaine with eagerness, exclaiming “Sure we do!!! That sounds like a lot of fun!”. *Risamaro*’s translation for the passage is: “Sì, sì, veniamo, veniamo anche noi!”, whereas Comicon’s version is: “Eccerto! Sembra proprio una pacchia!”. The correlation between cocaine and fun is completely omitted by *Risamaro*, in which such parallel is established only on a visual level. Referring to the representational meaning model of Visual Grammar, the image shows a typical example of Transactional Reactional Process in which a vectorial pattern is established by the characters’ gaze (the Reactors) directed at the cocaine (the Phenomenon). The direction of the glance of the represented participants is appointed to convey the narrative representational meaning, combined, on a facial level, with the smile implying the excitement and amusement generated by the situation. In the light of such an obvious connotation, *Risamaro* likely relied on the visual component to convey the classeme of «fun» in relation to drugs, thus omitting it on the verbal level. As maintained above, verbal elements are often perceived as a mere corollary of visual ones because images

are conceived to be more ‘talkative’ than words, for which no need is felt. On the other hand, Comicon’s “pacchia” reiterates this *classeme* and preserves the isotopy of “bliss”, which will clash with the harsh reality of poverty and labour awaiting for the characters as the euphoria caused by cocaine has worn off. A last element partaking in the isotopy in this page is the translation of the captions of the panels preceding the salient writing of the title, which actually appears only six pages after the beginning of the story. Comicon writes all caption texts in rhymes, mimicking a song, whose last verse is the title, the most salient element of the page with its oversized font and its collocation within the image. Even in this case, *Risamaro* avoids the rhymes and, in so doing, overshadows the isotopy of “bliss” on a verbal level, leaving to the bucolic images the task of communicating it. In the rest of the story drugs are marginal, with the exception of a single panel in which Fat Freddy eats a magic mushroom. Only after Phineas’s election, people celebrate with the liquor made of that very magic mushroom. The change of pace in the narration is signalled by a splash-page, which breaks the standard sequence of panels, their rhythm and the metric structure around which the whole story revolved. The splash-page creates a high-impact surprise effect, with a scene of people dancing naked around a fire, from which Dionysus himself emerges, playing the sax with a band. The *topoi* of music, nudity and dance, characterising Shelton’s production, as exemplified at the beginning of this Chapter, are often related to drug consumption and the isotopy of “bliss” of the first pages. The choir of naked people are singing: “Let’s all get drunk and go naked, all get drunk and go naked, all get drunk and go nayyy-kedddd, and lie in a great big pile!”. Comicon’s version preserves the *classemes* of «*nesso*» (“*nudi*”, “*ammucchiamoci*”), and «*ebbrezza*» (“*sbronzi*” repeated three times as in the original), also adding the *classeme* of «*natura*» with the reference to “*prato*”. All partake in the aforementioned isotopy of “*gioia*”, seemingly coming full circle by linking the beginning to the ending of the country-life experience of the trio with a bust by the democrat sheriff candidate. By contrast, *Risamaro* once again condenses the verbal text, by omitting the song and simply writing “Let’s dance together” in English. It may be argued that, since in these passages the hedonistic dimension is already suggested by images, words are deemed redundant and this may be why *Risamaro* avoids the reiteration of the message. More attention is paid to the translation of such paratexts as “the people’s choice” sign with “La scelta del popolo!” (translated by Comicon with the less populist “La scelta della gente!”), thus retrieving the meaning of grass roots from the title. A last element to notice is that the republican candidate tries to corrupt Phineas with drugs, money and women, while the

democrat candidate and his violent clique intimidate him with menaces. The latter are defined: “senile, drunken old fool”, (*Risamaro*: “vecchio bevuto”, “vecchio beone”; *Comicon*: “vecchio ubriacone rimbambito”), “drunken rowdly” (“alcolista molesto”) and “drunk loony” (“pazzo”). The reference to the democrats being alcoholic is partially omitted by *Risamaro*, yet it is clear that, even in this story, a clear distinction between heavy and light drugs is drawn.

Overall, *Comicon*’s translation is philologically accurate, despite few exceptions. For instance, “What a bummer!” (299) is translated by *Comicon* (13) as “Mannaggia!”. As a synonym of “bad trip”, the “bummer” was used during the Sixties to refer to negative experiences caused by drugs on a psychological level, such as fear, anxiety and disorientation. By extension, it was metaphorically employed for disappointing, unpleasant and annoying situations of any kind. However, the Italian slang does not feature an equivalent preserving both classes of «droga» and «delusione», therefore the expression is difficult to render.

Comicon also provided the translation of the graphic novel *Idiots Abroad* (1984), the longest of the *Freak Brothers*’s stories, written by Shelton and drawn by Paul Mavrides, also translated by Mondadori. The story follows a similar, consolidated pattern, with Franklin asking Fat Freddy to buy dope:

Original (180)	Mondadori (18)	Comicon (14)
Franklin – Fat Freddy takes this money and go score us some smoke!	Fat Freddy, prendi questi soldi e vai a rimediarcì del fumo!	Fat Freddy, prendi questi soldi e trovaci del fumo!
Fat Freddy – Hold it! You’re not pulling that on me again! This time, you go too!	Ehi! Non mi fregghi di nuovo! Stavolta vieni anche tu!	Calma! Stavolta non ci casco. Stavolta vieni anche tu

The translations provide the same literal translation for the term “smoke” as “fumo”. Mondadori appears at ease in rendering references to drugs and using the trio’s informal style, as exemplified by the verb “rimediare” for “to score” and “fregare” for “to pull on”, or the interjection “ehi” for “hold it”. *Comicon*, in this case, opts for an informal/neutral register, providing such translations as “prendere”, “cascarci” and “calma”. However, in general, despite the presence of slang terms and colloquialisms, Shelton’s works from the 1980s onwards show fewer traces of the West-coast youth slang. This could be explained in

the light of his stylistic evolution into a mature author, more careful in the creation of well-finished works, with more structured plots and an experienced use of visual as well as verbal devices. Moreover, the author had left San Francisco in 1979, moving to Barcelona and then to Paris. No longer plunged into the lifestyle of Ashbury-Height, it is possible that Shelton's experience also influenced his characters' speech, just as the sunset of the Sixties' spirit and the dawn of the punk subculture had influenced the storylines of the three squatters. This does not mean that he adopted a higher register. On the contrary, he started playing with linguistic variations in a more conscious way. For example, as the three brothers encounter a street gang, Shelton shifts the register of conversation, adding expressions as "dig!", "sure, man!", "we was just kidding!", "Sheeeit! We you frens, mon!", "we thought you was artistas!", "sheeeit! See y'all guys later!". Mondadori's version, in this case, fails to reproduce the same jargon, translating the phrases considered as: "piacere!", "certo, amico", "stavamo solo scherzando!", "ehiiii! Siamo vostri amici!", "credevamo foste gli artistas!", "ehiiii! Ci vediamo quando tornate!". With the exception of the use of "stare" as an auxiliary verb instead of "essere" in "siamo vostri amici", the stylisation of the gang speech is not kept with a standard Italian being preferred. The translation of "man" as "amico" is even anachronistic, almost cartoonish. And the rendering of the misspelt swear word "sheeeit" with "ehiiii" is almost censorious. Comicon's solutions for these passages are: "forte!", "ma sì", "si scherzava eh!", "gaaazzo! Raga, tutti amici qui!", "credevamo che eravate artistas!", "gaaazzo! Ci vediamo al ritorno!". The solutions adopted are more adequate in the case of "raga" and in the missing subjunctive in "credevamo che eravate", which convey the idea of a youth, uncouth language. The word "gazzo" is a linguistic variation of "cazzo", likely accounted for by an attempt to reproduce the lexicalisation of the canting pronunciation of "shit". Overall, Comicon tries to reproduce the street gang's variations, whereas Mondadori homogenises all the characters' speech. When Fat Freddy gets drunk with a group of Glasgow Rangers's hooligans, Shelton mimics the Scottish accent by lexicalising their pronunciation of vowels, as in the case of "cloob", "sit doon", "fook England too", "droonk" and adds the colloquial interjections "laddie", "lad" and "aye". Both Mondadori and Comicon do not attempt any translation of the Scottish speech. However, just as in the case of "man" translated as "amico", "laddie" and "lad" are respectively translated as "ragazzo" and "figliolo", which in Italian are connoted with a paternalistic attitude not pertaining to the original; "aye" is translated as "ehi" and "cribbio", the latter being an extremely old-fashioned exclamation which is combined with the translation of "This one's so droonk..." with "questo è così

ciucco...”. In general, both editions seem to alternate a fairy-tale and a comical style in the verbal rendering of the original text. They emphasise the light-hearted comical strain in Shelton’s story, surely the most immediate and widely appreciable aspect of his work. No direct censorious act regarding the theme of drugs is detected as for the story *Idiots Abroad*, though it is important to remember that narcotics play a marginal role in the whole story.

In the other short stories translated by the two publishers, a similar tendency towards the magnification of Shelton’s light humour is still evident. A good example is “The parakeet that outwitted the D.E.A.” (1977), translated as “Il Pappagallo che fregò la Narco” in *Riso Amaro* 1, “Il parrochetto che ha fregato la D.E.A.” by Mondadori, “Il parrochetto che diede scacco alla D.E.A.” in Comicon. The story opens with the three brothers sleeping after having smoked, drunk, taken acids and sniffed cocaine. The sudden noise of someone knocking on their door wake them up in fright:

Original (333)	<i>Riso Amaro</i>	Mondadori (115)	Comicon (52)
Franklin – It’s a bust!	È la pula!	È una retata!	Una retata!
Phineas – A bust! A bust!	Una perquisita?	Una retata! Una retata!	Retata! Retata!
Fat Freddy – Breakfast?	Si mangia?	Frittata?	Frittata?

A first element to notice is the discrepancy between the translation proposed by *Riso Amaro* and the other two: the former makes use of typical slang terms, such as “pula” and “perquisita”, both pertaining to the semantic field of law enforcement, to translate “bust”. The other opts for the standard term “retata” and preserves the original epanalepsis. The humorous effect of the panels is triggered by Fat Freddy’s exclamation, who, unlike his brothers, mistakes the term “bust” with “breakfast”. Mondadori and Comicon show a major concern in finding an Italian equivalent to the original wordplay, by translating “breakfast” with the term “frittata”, which belongs to the semantic field of food and rhymes with “retata”. *Riso Amaro* does not reproduce the wordplay and simply translated the balloon with a still comical “Si mangia?”. To face the potential bust, the trio erase all traces of illegal substances:

Original (334)	<i>Riso Amaro</i>	Mondadori (116)	Comicon (53)
I'll eat all the joints and the hash!	Mi mangio tutto il fumo!	Io ingoio le canne e il fumo!	Io ingoio tutte le canne e il fumo!
I'll polish off the remaining acid and the rest of the MDA!	Spazzo via tutti i resti d'acido!	Io ripulisco quest'ultimo acido e i resti di MDA!	Io spazzolo quello che resta dell'acido e dell'ecstasy!
I'll just snort up the rest of this coke!	Io mi sniffo l'ultima coca!	Io mi pippo la coca che avanza!	E io mi tiro questi avanzi di coca!
I'll just help you snort that coke!	Aspetta che ti aiuto!	Io ti aiuto a pippare la coca!	Mi sa che ti do una mano con la coca!
Now, turn that bong over so it'll look like a sculpture and break out the rum so we'll seem natural!	Tu gira il narghilè che sembri una scultura! Tu stappa il rum e assumiamo un'aria normale!	Ora capovolgi quel bong così sembra una scultura e apri il rum così non sembriamo sospetti!	Ora rovescia la pipa ad acqua così sembra una scultura, e tira fuori il rum, per spiegare il nostro aspetto!

Riso Amaro displays a tendency towards condensation, which results in the omission of elements specifically referring to drugs, such as “joints”, “MDA” and “that coke”. Obviously, this cannot be considered a direct form of censorship, though it confirms the trend of simplification of contents deemed redundant in the light of their visual representation. Mondadori and Comicon, on the contrary, translate the whole list of substances despite the works being directed at a wide public. On a verbal level, “eat”, “polish off” and “snort” are adequately translated with low register expressions by all three: “mangiare”, “spazzare via”, “sniffare” for *Riso Amaro*, “ingoiare”, “ripulire” and “pippare” for Mondadori, “ingoiare”, “spazzolare”, “tirare” for Comicon. The term “bong” is translated as “narghilè”, though the two terms do not exactly refer to the same object: they both are water pipes (and indeed Comicon opted for a synecdochic translation “pipa ad acqua”), whereas a bong is used for a rapid and strongest individual smoke experience, and the latter is generally used to smoke in group, avoiding the ‘hit’ effect of dope. The difference in translation may be explained in the light of the greater popularity of narghiles in the imagery connected to hippies and dope consumption as a shared experience. Mondadori uses the English borrowing “bong”, as in

the original, and this interestingly indicates a change in smoking habits, since nowadays bongos are more widespread than in the past. In this sense, Comicon's use of the generic term "pipa ad acqua" is peculiar and arguably responds to an editorial choice to avoid drug 'jargon'. Another element to notice is that the original establishes a correlation between opening the bottle of rum and looking "natural". The fact that alcohol and the state of drunkenness is embedded in naturalness is clearly provocative. Indeed, it is not just a matter of concealing the effects of the massive assumption of narcotics with alcohol, since what Shelton seems to be assuming is that common people would not find the trio's drunkenness an abnormal or exceptional condition because alcohol abuse is normal. None of the Italian translations grasped the centrality of the *classeme* «naturalness» in the original, ironic remark. *Riso Amaro* does not even translate the consequential relation between the two clauses by omitting the "so" and replacing it with the coordinating conjunction "e". Mondadori is closer to the original as it keeps the consecutive relation intact, though it presents the *classeme* of «suspicion» rather than that of «naturalness». The reason for being above suspicion is left ambiguous for the Italian readership: according to their frame, they may either infer the subtle irony of the balloon or simply relate the opening of the bottle with an attempt to hide their 'high' state with an abuse of legal substances. Comicon makes this last justification explicit by replacing the original clause with "per spiegare il nostro aspetto".

The story evolves with Fat Freddy's uncle turned into a parakeet. The man is a famous dealer, and the whole comical sketch develops following the misunderstanding of the trio being either dealers or undercover DEA agents. As for the distinction between dope and drugs, all translate "dope" alternatively as "roba" and "droga", and "dope dealer" as "pusher", "spacciatore di droga" and "spacciatore", respectively. Thus, the distinction between the two is, once again, overlooked. It is interesting that all editions preserve the name "head shop", which is regularly used in Italy too. Finally, in the last panel of the story, Fat Freddy's uncle, returned to his human form, offers his wife to the trio, turned into a chicken while she was under opiates and concludes the story by claiming: "the eggs are grade B, but the shit is pure gold", which is translated by *Riso Amaro* and Comicon as "la sua cacca è di oro puro" and "ma la merda è oro puro", respectively. By contrast, Mondadori's version is "ma che pollastrella!" (130). This attitude resembles what previously stated regarding the banalisation of Crumb's comix, domesticating his works into the 'commedia sexy all'italiana' frame. This can be exemplified by several other translation choices, such as "stoned age technology" (351), in which the humorous effect is engendered by the use of "stoned"

instead of “stone”. The pun is translated by Mondadori as “novità tecnologiche nell’era della sfattanza” (133) and by Comicon as “tecnologie di stonamento” (71). The term “sfattanza” recurs often in Mondadori. In another case, the phrase “dope run” (359) is translated as “maratona di sfattanza” (141), while Comicon simply translates the literal meaning “consegna” (79). The noun is clearly relatable to the “stoned” condition owing to dope, but it is also connoted with buffoonery, especially in the second case, when the brothers refer to a normal delivery of dope. Further examples are the translation of “doobie” (354), a slang term typically used in the Sixties as a synonym of “joint”, with “bombone” (136), thus exaggerating the original for comical reasons. Even Comicon employs the augmentative “cannone” (74), yet the latter is commonly used in youth drug slang and is not tinged with a hyperbolic rhetoric. Sometimes slang terms are mistakenly translated. For instance, the slang verb “get burned” (354) often referred to Fat Freddy’s purchase of dope is translated as “si farà beccare” (136) by Mondadori, though this is not its actual meaning, closer to Comicon’s “si farà fregare” (74). In other cases, slang words are simply replaced by standard Italian equivalents, such as “wheel out” translated as “vado” by Mondadori and “vado dritto” by Comicon.

The adventures of the Freak Brothers are obviously humorous and arguably exemplify one of the cleverest use of comical devices in the underground comix phenomenon. However, the role dope played in their story is not merely ancillary to the development of witticisms, it is first of all a means of subversion, the concrete representation of a *counter*-culture refusing and often explicitly antagonising another culture. Mondadori’s emphasis on the humorous side of Shelton’s production can be noticed upstream, in the selection of the works translated, which disregard the years of the counterculture and the politically committed works, in favour of lighter narrations. But this is also evident from small details on a translational level by adopting verbal solutions which magnify the levity of the stories, rather than the underlying provocativeness.

6.3. Robert Crumb’s *High Times*

As for Crumb’s references to the world of drugs, in general, the theme is present in his comix as a part of his characters’ daily life. In particular, since much of the cartoonist’s satire targeted the hippies’ quirks, the inclusion of drugs is a must. The different translations of the theme present some discrepancies, though. For instance, the three-page story “Ducks Yas Yas”, originally from *Zap 0* and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 4: Mr Sixties*,

(90-92) was published in Italy in *Fallo!* in 1979 (27-29), Stampa Alternativa's *Zap Comix* (44-46) in 1998 and Mondadori in 2009 (166-68). Thus, three different editorial realities are available for a comparison, with three different translations spanning over thirty years, proving the all-encompassing relevance of Crumb's narration, presenting a slice of life of an underdog, between drugs, journeys with no destination and police busts. Ironically, after a quote of the song "The duck's yas yas yas" by Oliver Cobb's *Rhythm Kings*, giving the name to the strip (though *Fallo!* replaced it with a distorted version of Claudio Rocchi's "La realtà non esiste"), the introductory caption solemnly declares that:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Stampa Alternativa	Mondadori
This is a story about big city blues, about the stoned out gurus, hopped-up saints and flunked out hipsters who roam the stark streets and stay up all night and don't watch television!	Questa è una storia di blues di città, di gurus sballati, di freaks martoriati, di sporchi capelloni, depravati, che vanno in prigione e non guardano mai la televisione!	Questa è una storia sul blues della grande città, di guru andati fuori, santoni drogati e hipster reietti, che vagano per strade vuote e stanno svegli tutta la notte e non guardano la televisione!	Questa è una storia sul blues della grande città, sui suoi guru strafatti, i santi bevitori e gli hippie emarginati che vagano per le strade tetre e stanno in piedi tutta la notte e non guardano la televisione!

Music, drugs, mysticism, self-marginalisation and rejection of mass media, these are the ingredients of the story presented by Crumb: the story of many young outcasts of that period. In translation, a first element to notice is that, while Stampa Alternativa and Mondadori opt for an integral translation of the original text, *Fallo!* privileges a condensed translation and several modifications. The phrase "big city blues" is simply rendered as "blues di città", whereas the clauses "hopped-up saints" and "who roam the stark street and stay up all night" are wholly replaced. In detail, while the expression "stoned out gurus", is translated respectively as "gurus sballati", "guru andati fuori", "guru strafatti" without any significant change, "hopped-up saints", the adjective originally defining heroin effects, is translated with different solutions: Stampa Alternativa goes for the generic adjective "drogati" referred to "santoni", Mondadori for the strongly intertextual "santi bevitori", changing the addiction

in question and echoing Joseph Roth's famous masterpiece *Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker* (1939), translated as "La Leggenda del Santo Bevitore" and turned into an award-winning film by Ermanno Olmi in 1988. Arguably, since gurus and supposed saints were the epitome of the hippie-attitude, it is difficult to imagine them drinking alcohol, which, on the contrary, epitomises the addiction of the 1930s and 1950s generation. Yet, being considered a heavy drug, it is still possible to associate the adjective "hopped-up" to its effects. As anticipated, by contrast, *Fallo!* removed the sentence addressing saints, adding "freaks martoriati". The adjective "martoriati" introduces the classemes of «oppression» and «marginalisation» to the narration, the latter being inherent also to the term "freak". These classemes are reiterated throughout the text by *Fallo!*, thus making the isotopy of marginalisation the dominant *effect de sens* guiding the story. In point of fact, the original presents this isotopy by referring to "flunked out hipsters", translated as "hipster reietti" and "hippie emarginati" by Stampa Alternativa and Mondadori, and "stark streets", rendered as "strade vuote" and "strade tetre". Even in this case, *Fallo!* emphasises the social marginalisation of "hipsters", with "sporchi capelloni", "depravati", "che vanno in prigione". Hipsters are dirty, hairy, degenerate, confined people. As mentioned above, dirt, and the consequent physical disgust and moral degeneration are linked to marginalisation. Without anticipating much regarding the political themes developed in the translation of comix, it is worth mentioning that Matteo Guarnaccia published a fanzine series called "Insekten sekte", i.e., "insect sect", relying on the comparison between disgusting animals and the underground community. The reference to "prigione" also adds a classeme of «repression» to the description. The life at the margins goes hand in hand with punishment by authorities and law enforcement. This theme was particularly felt by *Fallo!*, which faced legal problems in voicing the experience of the Italian underground. Indeed, the 1970s' translation is likely influenced by the different reality Italian "hipsters" were living, closer to radical activism and political militancy. Together with Guarnaccia and Stampa Alternativa's Baraghini, Quattrocchi himself founded a political party called *Ippy*, running for the 1972 elections. Thus, even in the panel below, when the protagonist hears the sirens of the police, the 1979 translation is more emphatic: "Cristi le sirene!", written in bold and in a large font and a harsher imprecation, whereas the original is "There go the sirens again!" (the other versions are: "Ancora con quelle sirene!" and "Ecco di nuovo le sirene!"); in the next panel "Makes me share all over" is translated as "Mi scassano i nervi le sirene!". In the subsequent page, the man is paranoid about the possibility that "cop knew where I was at", rendered with "il pulotto ha sgamato" ("sbirro" for Stampa Alternativa

and Mondadori), and the fear to “get busted” (respectively translated with slang terms: “farmi beccare”, “farsi legare”, and a plainer: “essere arrestato”).

The possibility of being followed by the police is ambiguously presented as both real and hallucinatory. The story hints at the fact that he is addicted to heroin, as seen by the dirty spoon, the liquid and the paper used to hand over the dose on the table. In the caption, the intra-diegetic narrator (omo-diegetic from the second panel) calls himself a “merged”, translated as “completamente planato”, “fuso”, and “botta piena”. He explains how an unknown character called Spanish Eddy was there an hour before, and only *Fallo!* omits the name by calling him “il suo spacciatore preferito” (thus, making the narrator extra-diegetic). In the subsequent panel, it is explained that this “Spanish Eddy” robbed the man, by deceiving him with a promise, “take you off”, translated as “allumare” (actually, *Fallo!* here refers to another character, Giusi, again diverging from the original), “ripulirti” and “farti sballare”. Heroin made the man paranoid as, he argues, the sirens “makes me shake all over”, and “I can feel bad vibrations creeping in through the cracks! Man, it brings me down”. *Stampa Alternativa* here refers to “brividi”, “vibrazioni negative” and “angoscia”, Mondadori uses “tremare”, “vibrazioni negative” and “mi buttano giù”, all terms sharing the classeme of «anguish». *Fallo!* once again provides a different translation since the reaction to the sirens is rather of anger. As said, the translation is: “Mi scassano i nervi le sirene!”, and though the references to the “cattive vibrazioni” and “paura” are included, a further reference to the police’s sirens is added: “le sento venire in casa!”. Once again, the emphasis on the clash with the police is emphasised. The additions made by *Fallo!* are not isolated.

Fallo!'s version also intervenes on the original by domesticating the setting of the story into an Italian one. Thus, one of his lover instead of being from Jersey City is from Vigevano, and the man’s journey to Coney Island, Cincinnati, Iowa City Nebraska, New Mexico, only to return to Haight Street in the end, is turned into a journey stopping by Milan’s train stop La Bullona, and then to La Spezia, Bari and finally back to Milan, in the area of Brera, which corresponded to the bohemian district of the city, somehow akin to the atmosphere of San Francisco.

The journey of the man is also an experience of different types of substances, with a display of the consequent effects on the man. The man is first seen while asking for a “nicotine stick” (translated as “sigaretta” by *Fallo!* and Mondadori, and as “un po’ di nicotina” by *Stampa Alternativa*), and then while he is about to “smoke some shit” (“fumare uno spinello”, “farci una canna”, “fumare della merda”). He then meets a “dealer”, which, as

stressed above, indicates a dope seller. The term is left untranslated by *Fallo!*, thus proving to know the difference between a pusher (who sold him the heroin on the first page) and a dealer. On the other hand, *Stampa Alternativa* opts for “pusher”, and *Mondadori* for a generic “spacciatore”. As the two start hitch-hiking, they drink wine together (omitted in *Fallo!* and translated as “beviamo vino” by the others). After much wandering the man is arrested in New Mexico where he actually spends a month in jail “fucking around in my head” (“un brutto sballo nella testa”, “cazzeggiando nella mia testa”, “farmi seghe mentali”). Ultimately, as he returns to Haight Street he “dropped acid”, an experience defined “intergalactic” (“settimane di acido”, “calai acidi”, “mi faccio di acido”; “intergalattico” for *Fallo!* and *Mondadori*, “mega-galattico” for *Stampa Alternativa*). While heroin had made him paranoid, acid opened his third eye, and he is surrounded by a halo and a crown of stars. The story seems to represent a mix of travel-journal and drug-discovery account, but the main drive of the story is that of a long journey through solitude and marginalisation. The man has no name, no place to go or return to. The isotopy of marginalisation pointed out at the beginning of the story is central to the narration and, in the light of the conviction of the man, the change made by Quattrocchi is but an attempt to anticipate such debacle.

A last point to emphasise is that Crumb could not but insert some references to “a beautiful blond highschool chick with big tits” offering him popcorns, who the man “almost fucked her right there on the sidewalk!”. None of the three versions had qualms in translating these passages, but the solution adopted for the translation tells a lot about the approach each publisher had regarding Crumb’s comix:

Original	Fallo	Stampa Alternativa	Mondadori
Days later in Nebraska, a beautiful blonde high school chick with big tits offered me some pop corn! Man, I almost fucked her right there on the sidewalk! It was too	Giorni dopo a Bari, una bella ragazzotta liceale mi offre del pop corn! Quasi la scopo lì, sul marciapiede. È troppo, troppo! Donne fighe da quelle parti!	Giorni dopo in Nebraska, una bella pollastra bionda con due belle tette mi offrì dei pop corn! Oh, quasi me la scopo al volo sul marciapiede! Era troppo! Gran fighe in giro!	Giorni dopo in Nebraska, una bella liceale bionda con le tette grosse mi offre del pop corn! Amico, me la sono quasi chiavata là sul marciapiedi! Era troppo! Tettone in libertà!

much! Great girls out there!			
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In addition to the adaptation of Nebraska into Bari, *Fallo!* removed the reference to “big tits”, condensing sexual references to the verb “scopare” and the adjective “fighe”. Stampa Alternativa’s approach shows the same semantic sensibility of the original, trying to reproduce the register and style of the text (e.g., “pollastra” for “chick”, “oh” for the interjection “man” and the same clause structures). Mondadori, once again, opts for a ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ style: the references to “tette grosse” and “chiavata” is followed by a clownish “tettone in libertà” which should reproduce the original “great girls out there!”. “Great” is translated by both *Fallo!* and Stampa Alternativa as “fighe”, which is more vulgar. By contrast, Mondadori’s comical comment in a story adds an element of buffoonery to the story itself, which is not in the original. In this sense, while both *Fallo!* and Mondadori diverged from the English text in different passages, the reason behind this change is extremely different: in *Fallo!*, adaptations can be explained in the light of Quattrocchi’s attempt to make Crumb’s text as adherent as possible to the Italian underground context, thus establishing a bridge between the two countercultural experiences. By contrast, Mondadori is translating Crumb as a master of light-hearted humour and, as such, exploits the panels regarding the “blonde chick” to magnify comical aspects in a story which is devoid of levity. However, as already highlighted, banalisation turns into a form of censorship by framing the text into a simplified context which obscures ironical complexities and social values.

That several mainstream editors approach the theme of drug-consumption during the 2000s does not surprise. At that time, marijuana merchandise had already become popular and regularly sold in shops, just as the hippie look had become a widespread theme of costume parties. In this view, even the fact that Mondadori dedicated an entire section of its anthology to strips from *Zap 1* and *Zap 0* is not so astonishing. On the contrary, references to dope were present even in the very first translation of Fritz the Cat’s stories. For example, in “Fritz Bugs Out” (originally from the October 1965 issue of *Cavalier Magazine* and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 3: Starring Fritz the Cat*, 15-36), drug-related slang is used by all characters (“spaced out”, “strung out”, “I’m hip”, “take some bennies”), and marijuana consumption is the key triggering some of Fritz’s adventures: as he encounters a crown (the animalisation of black people) who invites him to a party, Fritz experiences

marijuana for the first time and, after smoking and having an intercourse with a female crow, he realises he wants to be a radical revolutionary, and subsequently becomes a runaway escaping the police. Several translations of the episode exist, it being one of the most reprinted stories among American comix: Milano Libri included a part of the story in *linus* and reprinted it in a complete version in the anthology *Fritz il Gatto* (entitled “Sulla Strada”); subsequently, it was translated by Acme/Mare Nero (“Fritz taglia la corda”), Repubblica (“Fritz toglie le tende”) and Comicon (“Fritz taglia la corda”). The aforementioned expressions are translated as follows:

Original (16-18)	Milano Libri (4-6)	Acme/Mare Nero (18-20)	Repubblica (26-28)	Comicon (36-38)
Spaced out	Si strugge, pazza, ti prende tutta l’anima e il cuore, pazza per quel tipo	Si strugge, ti prende tutta l’anima e il cuore, pazza per quel tipo	Si strugge, ti prende tutta l’anima e il cuore, pazza per quel tipo	Fuori come un balcone,
Strung out	Fradicia, vai insieme per qualcuno, sei proprio andata	Fradicia, cotta, andata	Fradicia, cotta, andata	In fissa, vai a rota,
Take some bennies	Un paio di pillole...	Prenderò qualche pillola	Prenderò qualche pillola	Calarsi qualche benzedrina

“Spaced out” and “strung out” are referred to the feeling of sensorial torpor caused by drugs and the dependency generated by heavy drugs, respectively. In this context, they are applied to the feeling of love – an addictive love– perceived by Fritz and his friend Charlene, who repeat the expressions one another, creating a chiasmic structure which engenders a humorous effect. The translations by Milano Libri, Acme/Mare Nero and Repubblica in this case are the same, though throughout the text some minimal differences were accounted (thus, suggesting that the translators likely used Milano Libri’s version as a starting point and then made some changes whenever they perceived the translation could be improved). With the exception of “fradicia” and “andata” which can also be applied to alcohol and drug consumption, all three versions provide solutions which are not relatable to drugs. Moreover,

the continuous use of synonyms results in the loss of the humorous effect of the original repetitions. This is somehow preserved in Comicon’s translation, which repeats “fuori come un balcone” for “spaced out” and alternates “in fissa” and “a rota” for “strung out”, both relatable to drugs. In particular, both “fissa” and “rota” share the classemes of «compulsiveness», which conveys a sense of dependency caused by both love and drugs. In the last, the phrase “bennies” is a slang term for the stimulant drug “Benzedrine”. Even in this case, only Comicon translates the term with a specific name, while the others use the generic term “pillole”. However, as for dope consumption, all translations provide adequate solutions for such terms as “blowin’pot”, “high on pot”, “marijuana”, “guin’on pot”, and “suck”:

Original	Milano Libri (11, 13)	Acme/Mare Nero (26-27)	Repubblica (34-35)	Comicon (44-45)
They blowin’ pot like mad	Stanno fumando come matti	Stanno fumando come matti	Stanno fumando come matti	Si fuma come camini
Cat, you ever been high on pot?	Gatto, hai mai provato un po’ d’erba?	Gatto, hai mai provato quest’erba?	Gatto, hai mai provato quest’erba?	Gatto, hai mai fumato?
You mean marijuana? No, I...	Vuoi dire marijuana? No, io...	Vuoi dire marijuana? No... io...	Vuoi dire marijuana? No... io...	Marijuana intendi? No, io...
Let’s git th’cat guin’on pot!	Facciamogliela provare un po’, eh?	Fagliela provare un po’, eh?	Ehi, fagli dare un tiro...eh?	Ehi, facciamo fumare il gatto!
Suck that thin’cat!	Tira bene, gatto...	Tira bene, gatto...	Tira bene, gatto...	Su un bel tiro gatto!

Even in this case, Milano Libri, Acme/Mare Nero and Repubblica provide a very similar translation. As said, no evident sign of censorship comes to the fore, thus suggesting that the topic of dope was not so problematic for the Italian editors in any of the periods considered. Indeed, it should be considered that the first publication of this excerpt for Milano Libri was in 1972 with *linus*, i.e., 43 years before Comicon’s anthology, and the translations provided

respectively in 1992 and 2005 by Acme and Repubblica still made reference to the first, pioneering version. However, it should be stressed that the rejection of specificities ultimately results in the inhibition of several aspects of dope culture. Moreover, without anticipating much, differences arise when dealing with the revolutionary outburst of the cat, showing a remarkable divergence in the translators' attitude towards the political references. This element will be detailed in the reflection developed in Chapter 7.

The same considerations can be made for another story, simply entitled “Fritz the Cat” (originally from *Head Comix* and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 3: Starring Fritz the Cat*, 101-110). The story is the most widely printed one about Fritz as it summarises all the themes related to this bohemian feline, living his life between music, poetry, lovemaking, improvised parties in campus dorms and never-ending police chases.

Original (p. 103)	Head Comix	Acme/Mare Nero (67)	Repubblica (66)	Mondadori (58)	Comicon (82)
There's a cat pushin' "shit" down at the "purple pee pot" for a nickel a bag!	C'è un tizio che passa "erba" giù al "bar tabacchi" per una gamba al kilo!	Giù al "Vasino Rosa" c'è un gatto che spaccia "merda" per un nichelino a busta!	Giù al "Vasino Rosa" c'è uno che spaccia "merda" per un nickel a busta!	Giù al "Cesso Viola" c'è un gatto che smercia "roba" per un nichel a bustina!	Giù al "Pisciatoio Lilla" c'è uno che ha la roba a un decino la busta!

As for this brief excerpt, in the translation of “pushin’” and “shit”, Milano Libri’s *Head Comix* uses the term “erba”, thus implying that the dealer is selling dope. However, “shit” may also refer to heavy drugs, and usually (though, not exclusively) “push” is applied to this context. Acme and Repubblica diverge from Milano Libri in this passage, though their translations are still almost identical as they both opt for the literal translation “merda” and the verb “spacciare”. Both Mondadori and Comicon use the term “roba”, a close equivalent in meaning for the actual use of the English “shit”. Their verbal choices are “smerciare” and a neutral “avere”, respectively. In the subsequent pages, references to drugs are translated as follows:

Original (108-09)	Head Comix	Acme/Mare Nero (72-73)	Repubblica (73-74)	Mondadori (63-64)	Comicon (87-88)
good stuff	roba buona	roba buona	roba buona	roba buona	roba buona
Failure as a pot smoker	Come fumatore di erba sono un fallimento!	Sono un fallimento con gli spinelli!	Sono un fallimento con gli spinelli!	Sono un fallimento come fumatore di erba!	Come fumatore d'erba sono un fallimento!
Oh baby do I feel high	Accidenti se sono su!	Oh baby come sono fatto!	Oh baby come sono fatto!	Oh baby se sto fatto!	Oh baby che sballo!
pot party	fiesta	droga party	droga party	festino	fumeria

Overall, all translations are close to the original. Milano Libri stands out for the translation of “I feel high” with the literal “sono su”, which is not widespread in Italian but still render the original sense, and for the omission of “pot” in “pot party” translation, whereas the solutions “droga party”, and “fumeria” gives a more explicit idea of what is provoking the police’s burst in the strip. Mondadori opts for “festino”, which is connoted with the idea of a transgressive, usually erotic party. Also in this case, no clear-cut censorious is too easily detected. A first, general hypothesis which can be made is that the theme of drug, of dope in this specific context, is related to a form of rebellion which is widely known. It is, de facto, a Woodstock-version of the topic, more fascinating than frightening and engendering a smile rather than indignation. This is the type of stories which could be enjoyed by everybody and, in general, this is the reason why even in American mainstream media were attracted by Fritz to the point of causing his own creator’s disavowal. In Fritz’s last adventures, the cat is never seen smoking again, and rather drinks beer or wine to compensate his malaise.

However, the topic of drugs was never abandoned by Crumb, who worked on the dichotomy between light and heavy drugs in several strips. Moreover, Crumb shared with Shelton the topos of dope as the trigger of revolutionary thought. It was first thematised in the aforementioned episode of Fritz and comes back in several other stories, though the author’s sarcasm underlying this recurring liaison is clearly explicit. Among the most famous examples of this satire targeting the hippie community, *Zap* 3 included “Hairy” (signed as “R. Crumb the Happy Hippy Cartoonist”), republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 5: Happy*

Hippy Comix (83-85; 86-87), and published in Italy first by *Fallo!* and then by Stampa Alternativa. “Hairy” (translated by Stampa Alternativa with a footnote as “Pelosa”) narrates the adventures of two hippies, completely covered with hair, whose only concerns are dope, young women and revolution:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Stampa Alternativa
Here in the “bush leagues” the situation is definitely getting hairy!	Ma qui, in serie B, la situazione è pesante...	Qui tra la “lega dell’erba” la situazione si sta proprio facendo hairy (pelosa)!
Dope?	?	Fumi?
Definitely!	Indubbiamente!	È chiaro!
Most assuredly!	Con totale certezza!	Certo che fumo!
Stoned agin!	?	Ancora fuori
An undeniable fact on the face of it!	Fatto indubbio! Non c’è ombra di errore!	Un’innegabile realtà scritta in faccia!

In the first excerpt, preceding the title, the attitude of the publishers appears evident: once again *Fallo!* privileges the emphasis on the outcast social condition of the characters, thus referring to “serie B” and “la situazione è pesante”, translating “bush league” and “hairy”, respectively. Both original terms have a double meaning. “Bush” refers to marijuana plants as well as to the hirsute look of the two men. Similarly, “hairy” may either refer to the characters’ outlook or to a hazardous, rough situation, the latter being the meaning adopted by *Fallo!* in the impossibility to find an Italian equivalent with the same double entendre. By contrast, Stampa Alternativa opted for a direct reference to dope with “lega dell’erba” and left “hairy” in the title, adding a footnote with the translation “pelosa”.

Also in the subsequent passages, the two characters’ dialogue is rendered in a different manner. In *Fallo!*, humor relies on the removal of all the balloons of one of the characters who only uses question marks, while the other acquiesces. In Chapter 3, liberal translation was seen to often rely on condensation strategies by exploiting visual devices making obvious what is occurring even without words. In this case, the presence of pipes makes it easy to understand the situation and thus the omission of the word “dope” cannot be conceived as an intentionally censorious act. The characters rather seem too “stoned” to be able to talk properly. By contrast, Stampa Alternativa opts for an epiphoric repetition of

the verb “fumare”, which metonymically translates the noun “dope”. What both translations fail to translate is the expression “on the face of it”, which jokes with the pronoun “it”. Indeed, the characters’ design clearly recalls Addams Family’s Cousin Itt, which was broadcasted in America since 1964 and in Italy since 1966. For this reason, Crumb wrote “it” in bold with an oversize font, but in Italian no translation could account for this further double entendre. While *Fallo!* jokes with the similarity of “fact” and “fatto”, Stampa Alternativa prefers the literal translation of “face” “faccia”.

In the subsequent page, the two hippies are seen approaching a young girl and talking about good vibes and zodiac. The girl confirms to be only 13 (in the original she is born in 1955, but *Fallo!* moves the date to 1961, to make it fit with the Italian publication), but this does not stop the two from drugging and harassing her:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Stampa Alternativa
She wants ta get stoned!	E vuole flippare!	Lei cerca solo lo sballo!
Comin’ right up! Shoot some speed, keed!	Una buona anfetamina per svegliarsi la mattina!	Eccolo che arriva! Ti sparo un po’ di anfe, bimba!
Thar she blows! Her head that is!	Completamente flippata!	Eccola che parte! La testa intendo!
We’ll discuss morality at another time... here comes dope!	Niente morale quando arriva la roba!	Parleremo di moralità un’altra volta...la ci si si dopa!

In this passages, both translations show examples of borrowings from the English slang of drug-culture adapted to the Italian syntax: e.g., “flippare”, “flippata” in *Fallo!* and “ci si dopa” in Stampa Alternativa, the latter being the only odd solution – one focusing on carefree fun again – since the terms “doping” and “dopare” did not mean the same in 1960s. *Fallo!* emphasises the eccentric way of talking of the two creating a rhyme with “anfetamina” and “mattina”, while in the original “speed” and the lexicalisation of “kid” as “keed” created an assonance. This idiolect is reiterated in the subsequent page, in which the two smoke a joint in a community of hairy people all singing together some rhymes dedicated to narcotics:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Stampa Alternativa
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Shoot that gage my way, ace, when you're though wid it!	Passa il cannone, cagone!	Falla girare di qua, asso, quando hai fatto con quella!
Aw reet!	Baloon removed	Cosa lieta!
It's so neat and so discreet! Zeet!	Quanto è buona questa erba!	È così carina e discreta! Reta!
It's the stuff that can't be beat, skeet!	Quanto è buona questa merda!	È la migliore del pianeta, neta!

In these excerpts, the whole humorous effect is generated by lexicalising the wrong pronunciation of words to generate rhymes, also stressing how “stoned” the characters are. In the first rhyme between “wit it” and “aw reet”, *Fallo!* opts for a shorter version, with “passa il cannone” rhyming with “cagone” and removing the other balloon: this enables the preservation of both the rhyme and the reference to the joint. *Stampa Alternativa*, by contrast, sacrifices the rhyme and normalises the language of the dialogues, with the phrase “cosa lieta”, even elevating register. Also in the subsequent balloons in *Stampa Alternativa*, the rhyme is generated by echoing the ending of the words “discreta” and “pianeta”, but the explicit reference to dope and skit (heroin) are missing and the register is higher than in the original. *Fallo!*'s solution is to create an assonance between “erba” and “merda” positioned in the two balloons sharing the anaphoric repetition of “quanto è bella questa”, again shortening the sentences but preserving the original message of the song. The story ends with them shifting the conversation to a hairy character's speech on “ze revolution”, which *Fallo!* translates without distorting words according to the character's idiolect and rather stressing the word “rivoluzione” with a bold font (and also continuing with the rhymes, e.g., in the exchange “la rivoluzione è vicina” and “cosa, la cina?”). *Stampa Alternativa* uses expressions such as “dofere penzare zolo a rifoluzione” in which phonemes are recombined to fake an Italian language spoken by with a foreign (possibly German) accent. This choice may be accounted for as a way to further stress the weirdness of the characters.

This narration is obviously comical in its portrayal of the over-the-top hippy reality and offers a clear glimpse of the actual drug-related culture of the time, from the ritual of passing each other a joint, to the stoned speeches turning into militant calls for revolution, to the dramatic abuse of guillable teen-agers by exploiting the allure of amphetamines. The stress posed in the rendering of humorous components here does not result farcical because

it is part of the original text, which teases the reader by proposing such controversial themes with supposed levity.

6.4. Greg Irons and Tom Veitch: *Cannibali* against Smack

Just as sex was a theme also outside the pages of the two gurus of the underground, i.e., Crumb and Shelton, other artists delved into the narration of the world of drugs. Wilson did not directly address the theme of drugs and his characters are most frequently seen drinking beer or rum rather than smoking or consuming heavy drugs⁹³. However, it is important to stress that, always in *Zap* 3, Wilson's story "Come fix", (translated by Stampa Alternativa) shows the "dyke" Bernice using the method of preparation of heroin and speed consumption (with a spoon, a lace and a syringe) to inject in her arm male sperm so as to grow a penis. In this sense, the concept of injecting substances into one's veins is related to a surreal act, portrayed on a graphic level with crude details. It is part of Wilson's poetics of disgust and, by inference, negatively connoted. Regarding this conception of drugs in relation to the poetics of disgust, *Cannibale "USA Only"*, which willingly explored the American underground scenario besides Crumb and Shelton, opens with a 14-page untitled story (2-15 in both the original and the Italian version) written by Tom Veitch and drawn by Greg Irons and included in the second issue of their co-production *Deviant Slice* in 1973. The narration focuses on a Vietnam veteran, Vince Shazam, returning to his home in Montana after the war. Vince struggles with the memories of Vietnam – in his thought, he constantly repeats the words of the sergeant who mutilated him – and the reintegration in his family and society. At first his parents do not even recognise him, as he is thinner and gloomier and his right hand was replaced by a hook. His gate away from memories as well as for his parents, staunch supporters of Nixon's policy and militarism is heroin. On page 5, Irons draws with clinical detail the injection of the dose in his arm and viewers perceive the change occurring to Vince by two close-up of his eye, first wide open and expressive and then semi-closed and lifeless. Moreover, three small panels show in sequence the shape of a zombie-like figure, which turns out to be Vince in a hunchbacked posture in the final panel of the page as he exits the bathroom and goes back to the dining room. The final panel opposes the first one in which he entered the bathroom with an upright posture. Veitch and Irons are merciless in the

⁹³ In the corpus analysed, only in the story "Star-Eyed Stella", previously investigated, the Fat Demon is described in a caption as "worked up with various potions, herbs, and strange powders" translated as "eccitato con varie pozioni, erbe e strane polveri" by Stampa Alternativa; "fatto di pozioni, erbe & polverine" by Malatempora.

representation of Vince’s father as a repulsive man, drooling and eating compulsively with animalistic manners, showing his disgusting attitude even in the way he ironically tells him: “Ha ha! Feel better, Vince? Nothin like a good b.m. before ya tuck into dinner!”, translated as “Ha ha! Sei più leggero, eh? Non c’è niente di meglio di uno stronzone prima ti mettersi a tavola!”. In Italian, the acronym “b.m”, standing for bowel movement, is made explicit with the use of “stronzolone”, which conveys the same spirit of the original. In the subsequent page, Irons draws two panels comparing the right half of the father’s face with the left half of Vince’s face: the former is fat and animated by his talks on war, the latter is emaciated and simply nods exhaustedly, prior to fainting on the table and then on the floor. As he recovers, he avoids his father’s job offers by going out searching for more heroin and reaches his old gang in a diner. Here the references to heroin become explicit even on a verbal level:

Vince – Damn – I only got three more hits... I gotta score...	Po-orc... emmi sono rimasti solo tre schizzi... me ne devo trovare dell'altra...
Hippies – Holy Shit... It's Vince! How ya doin' man? How was th'Nam? Shit, man... you look wasted!	Santa merda! Ma è Vince! Come va, sbarbo? Cos'hai fatto giù nel Viet-nam? Le hai scopate le gialle? 'Azzo che cera di merda che hai!
Vince – You guys look pretty weird yerself – all that hair an' shit...	Be' ragazzi, neanche voi siete un granchè...tutti quei peli, e quei tappi strani...
Lenny – Heh heh – yeah... hey man, yer just in time – wanna go smoke some fine keif?	Heh heh – yeah... ehi, arrivi giusto giusto per una sana canna di maria colombiana! Ti va?
Vince – Uh...actually...you know where a dude might score a little “h”?	Uh... veramente...sapreste mica dove posso trovare uno schizzo? ...ehm... ho cambiato gusti e...
Hippie – hey hey! You one 'o them junkie soldiers we heard about Vince?	Hey hey! Sei diventato uno di quei militi junkie di cui si legge tanto, eh, Vince?
Lenny –Have a hit on me, pal!	Dai, diamoci un colpo, amico!
Shelly – Gee, Vincie, 'member all th'good times we had in high school?	Gee, Vincie, ti ricordi i bei tempi al liceo? Gli ultimi bei cessi puliti...

Vince – Yeh... hold this tie, willya Shelly?	Yeh...mi stringi il laccio, Shelly?
Vince – God damn Lenny! Thass some good shit!	Mapporcoddio, Lenny! Che razza di roba!
Lenny –You remember that Kid, Julio Rodriguez? Yeh... well he’s comin’ back home tonite with ten pounds of skag in his belly!	Ti ricordi quel fessacchiotto, Julio Rodriguez? Sseh, bene, ‘stanotte torna a casa, con 10 chili di eroina cuciti in pancia! Niente male come business!
Lenny –Julio’s dead, man! Can you dig it?	Julio è morto, ragazzo! Ci arrivi adesso?
Vince – Yeah... dead...uh, i dunno nothin’ Lenny, just get me some o’that shit!	Ssà...morto... beh non so... non voglio saper niente, Lenny! Fammi solo avere la roba!
Vince – ...But I gotta get that smack!	...ho bisogno di polvere!
Vince – ...I gotta get a lot of it and split for Mendocino to get my head together!	...e di un sacco di roba, se voglio tenere assieme la testa! E per la roba devo prima...
Vince – Man... this old ski mask brings back some fine memories... that weekend with Shelly up on big Baldy...	Boiaddio... ‘sta vecchia cuffia da sci...quanti ricordi, quella gita in montagna con Shelly...il caminetto acceso...I suoi pompini...

A first element to notice is the characterisation of hippies made by the two authors. Far from the traditional caricatures of flower children, Vince’s group is composed of ugly, dirty rough men with an intimidating look and, as the readers soon learn, are involved in illegal trafficking of heavy drugs. While the English focused on their “hair an’shit”, the Italian version adds “quei peli, e quei tappi strani”, an addition based on the visual representation of one of the men, with circular glasses. Vince’s look is described as “wasted”, rendered as “cera di merda”. In contrast to his hairy friends, in Italian he is called “sbarbo”, a slang word for “hairless”. The attempt of the Italian translator to reproduce the lexicalised pronunciations and the sociolinguistic variations of the gang speech (e.g., “ya”, “yerself”, “yer”, “one o’ them”, “willya”, “thass”, “tonite”, “gotta”) results in the addition of slang terms (e.g., “sbarbo”) and apheresis (“azzo”, “sta”). The slang of heavy drugs abounds in the text, especially in relation to heroin consumption: “hits”, “score”, “little h”, “hit” “hold this tie”, “good shit”, “skag”, “that shit”, “smack”. With the exception of “keif” replaced by “canna di maria colombiana”, all terms related to heroin are translated adequately – e.g., “skag” is translated with “eroina”,

“smack” with “polvere”, while the Italian slang word for heroin dose “schizzo” is used to translate both “hit” and “little h”, the second “hit” is translated as “colpo”, the expression “Have a hit on me, pal!”. Precisely in the translation of this passage, the text is changed with “Dai, diamoci un colpo, amico!”: in the original Vince’s pusher does not use heroin, and simply drives a car. It is essential to understand the difference between the two. Vince is truly addicted to drugs, “one ‘o them junkie soldiers”, translated as “uno di quei militi junkie” – the term “junkie” is a borrowing in the Italian drug-slang. William Burroughs’s confessional novel, *Junkie* (1953), had already been published in 1962 by Rizzoli, though the title was replaced with “La scimmia sulla schiena”. It is likely that, given the contact point between the American and the Italian experiences, the Italian underground was familiar with the term. The correlation between serving as a soldier and being a “junkie” is related to the perception that Vietnam’s war contributed to spread heavy drug abuse. The U.S. government was tolerant about drug use among their troops in Vietnam, since any provision aimed at disciplining recruits who used drugs during war would also entail losing them from the ranks. If soldiers knew that drug use would result in being relieved from serving in combat, many more would have done so, and the combat forces would have shrunk significantly.

In the present story, Vince’s pusher, called Lenny, is a cold, ruthless man, who uses his job in a funeral home to import heroin from Vietnam, hidden inside the dead bodies of American soldiers. This is another clear reference to real-life events, or, better, said to a real-life urban legend spread at that time, i.e., the “Cadaver Connection”, a heroin smuggling operation with drug hidden in the American soldiers’ coffins, which involved the Harlem drug smuggler Frank Lucas and the U.S. Army sergeant Ike Atkinson⁹⁴. However, what was certain is that New York City had the largest heroin problem in those years. The New York City Police Department Narcotics Squad was also corrupt and played an important role in the spread of heroin into African-American neighborhoods⁹⁵.

Vince’s reaction to the discovery is one of hesitancy and confusion, as marked by several ellipses. The original “not-knowing” modality conveys a sense of confusion in Vince’s mind. In Italian, the modality “not-wanting-to-know” is added, which changes the perception of the balloon as Vince becomes willing to ignore the crime only to get his doses.

⁹⁴ The relationship between Frank Lucas and “Seargent Smack” Atkinson had great resonance in popular culture and even inspired the film *American Gangster* (2007).

⁹⁵ Some of this story is told in Schneider (2011).

And the moral disgust generated by Lenny's disrespect of corpses matches the overall representation of the heavy drugs world as something degenerate, as visualised through the scenes of vomiting, injections of heroin in the arm, and even by the kiss between Vince and his girlfriend Shelly, whose tongues intertwining evoke a feeling of repulsion rather than pleasure (which indeed climaxes with Vince vomiting on her face). And the Italian text stresses this general sense of squalor by adding the sentence "gli ultimi bei cessi puliti", which was not present in the original, to the balloon on the 'good all days' of the couple. In fact, it is interesting to notice how the Italian version adds further verbal texts to the original, such as "ho cambiato gusti" and "niente male come business". Another addition in the translated text is verbal violence. Besides the literal translation of "holy shit" with "santa merda", "shit" as "azzo", the level of verbal violence in Italian is increased considerably, e.g., "God damn" is translated as "Mapporcoddio", "man" as "boiaddio", and the dead guy whose stomach is full of heroin is called "fessacchiotto", with no equivalent at all in the original text. Verbal violence combines with the magnification of the theme of sex, completely missing in the original with the exception of the scene in which Shelly tries to seduce Vince. In the second excerpt of the table, the sentence "Le hai scopate le gialle?" is added, which sounds as a verbally violent question, since it uses the vulgar verb "scopare" and label Vietnamese women as "gialle", with a racist, all the more revolting undertone. Few pages later, Vince remembers his weekend with Shelly, the Italian adds "...il caminetto acceso...I suoi pompini...". Despite the actual aim of these additions, which may serve as captivating devices, the magnification of the theme of sex does not increase the allure of the text, but rather emphasises the moral squalor of the characters, as sex is perceived as a biological, crude act and not as a pleasurable one, and it is thus combined with disgust and moral depravation. Indeed, even the memory of Shelly's fellatio is but a brief moment preceding Vince's entrance in a bank for a robbery resulting in the slaughter of countless people who in his hallucinations are his sergeant and a Vietcong troop.

The carnage ends when Vince's father calls him with a megaphone, only to hand him over to the police and disown him as a "son of a bitch" ("figlio di puttana"). As a part of Veitch and Iron's pessimism, nobody is spared in this story. Heroin consumption is represented as degrading, but it is also confronted with a likewise degenerated world of middle-class families who blindly support war while ignoring its effects on their own children, and of gangsters with a hippie-look taking advantage of the situation. The crude realism of the two authors clashes with the general perception of underground comix as flippant works

and represents one of the clearest portrayal of the social malaise following the Vietnam war. The Italian version tried to render it by adding even more emphasis to the original text, especially by giving primacy to the theme of sex in its crudest facets, and verbal violence.

Devoid of Shelton's and Crumb's humour, the story is a ruthless account of the 'dark-side' of the counterculture years, when hippies were not always naïve pacifists and, above all, the effects of war and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder paved the way for many of them sinking into the abyss of heavy drugs. For this reason, the idea that authorities explicitly, as in the case of Ike 'Sergeant Smack' Atkinson, or implicitly provoked the outburst of heroin consumption lies behind many of the stories of underground cartoonists.

However, drawing some conclusions, the world of drugs depicted in the comix analysed in this chapter, is a world far from the stereotype of pacifist hippies' cult of hedonism. On a surface level presented as a form of recreational activity, as the epitome of "creative procrastination" – quoting the Freak Brothers –, drugs are de facto a tool and a symbol: a tool of subversion and a symbol of emancipation of the mind, a tool of political opposition and a symbol of a conscious choice of self-marginalisation from culture. Drugs are indeed a culture, with its rituals and models. The underlying message these works convey is one of subversion, self-marginalisation and emancipation, which are the premises for a countercultural revolution, which is both humanistic and and political, Jacobin, rational and still passionate. And drugs are but a battlefield with authority in this sense, starting from the busts and continuing with the opposition between mind-expanding dope and mind-obliterating substances secretly sponsored by the government itself.

And what does translation add to these issues? What signifying processes are triggered by the transfer into the Italian language and culture? At first, one may observe the lack of imposed censorship on the matter. In all periods and in both independent and mainstream publishing realities, drug-related themes and terms are apparently represented with no direct intervention. As for the works of Arcana, Stampa Alternativa, *Riso Amaro*, *Fallo!* and Cannibale, omissions and qualitative impoverishment are largely the outcome of negligence and lack of competences of non-professional translators and editors, as well as the hyponosis generated by the visual patterns of signification, which still relegate words to a secondary role of corollary. And the primacy of visuality can be seen in the high degree of condensation, in the number of omissions and on the additions made, for example, in Cannibale, where texts are modified and altered following the preconception that the overall

meaning of the story would not be compromised, since it is conveyed by the images and the articulation of panels.

What these publications seem to share is the adoption of a political frame which prompts the adaptation of the original text to the Italian context. As such, verbal texts can be modified on account of the premise that a one-to-one relationship between the original and its translations exists on an ideological level. Especially in *Stampa Alternativa*'s case, the migration of ideas across linguistic and cultural borders is at the core of the translation process prior to the qualitatively and philologically correct rendering of texts. In cases in which professional translators came into play, i.e., with the works by Mondadori and Comicon as for Shelton, but also Milano Libri, Acme, and Repubblica as for Crumb, the shared networks of significations are certainly weaker. In some cases, this led to a subtler and more pervasive form of indirect censorship, i.e., the banalisation of contents. This occurred in America when underground works were relegated to the label of “sex, drugs and rock'n'roll” lifestyle sponsor. This occurred in Italy when translations responded to inappropriate cultural frames, hermeneutically rerouting underground comics towards comedy. In the case of Mondadori's translations, for instance, it is likely that film comedies on drugs and young dropouts such as *How High* (2001), *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), *Pineapple Express* (2008) and so on – poignantly translated as “2 Sballati al College”, “American Trip” and “Strafumati” – had an higher influence on the translators than the works of Jerry Rubin, Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey and other leading figures of the Sixties. Levity rather than militancy, fun rather than biting sarcasm are often the features characterising the translation of drug-related texts. Therefore, even when translations are accurate, what is actually left outside? What stands beyond the frames of the “Fabled Sixties” tableau described at the beginning of this Chapter, with naked men and women singing and drinking LSD-spiked punch? The next chapter will complete this puzzle by answering this question through the theme of political violence and the clash with authority.

In conclusion, the unnecessary emphasis on sexuality obscuring more complex isotopies, the preference for hyperbolic characterisations to the detriment of more realistic ones, the systematic attitude to disregard the distinction between dope and drugs, to downplay the drug-related specificities of the jargon (e.g. see the failure to the reproduction the hippie-like notion of “bliss”) and to replace the political value of dialogues with a focus on light-hearted comical aspects mean to either overlook or reduce the linguistic and cultural

essence of the possible world recreated by underground comics and ultimately result in a form of censorship, although a not deliberate one.

Chapter 7. BLOWIN' IN THE WIND⁹⁶: TRANSLATING POLITICAL DISSENT

7.1. On Violence, Satire and War Comix

In an interview published in the Italian edition of *Flashbacks. Il meglio di Doonesbury dagli anni '70 a oggi* (1997), cartoonist Garry Trudeau was asked why satire had such an appeal to society. His answer was:

Perchè nel suo piccolo marcescente intimo è ingiusta. È maleducata e incivile. Non conosce il senso della misura e delle proporzioni, e non deve sottostare ad alcuna regola. È spudoratamente di parte, e più la vittima reagisce, più l'autore della satira si porta in vantaggio. E, come se non bastasse, questo sport selvaggio e senza regole è protetto dalla Costituzione degli Stati Uniti. Non è una figata? (71)

Author of the comic strip *Doonesbury* since 1970, now syndicated to up to 1,000 daily and Sunday newspapers worldwide, Trudeau was not an underground cartoonist, though his art certainly influenced – and was influenced by – the underground experience. Most of all, he shared the same ideal of freedom of expression against censorship, which jeopardised his work on several occasions⁹⁷. In *Flashbacks* Trudeau also recalled that, when asked why he had published a comic strip on incest, Crumb answered: “Perchè ero un po' stronzo” (34), i.e., “Because I used to be a bit of an asshole”. The right underground cartoonists and Trudeau – Trudeau quotes Crumb in order to argue that he felt quite the same, “per me potrebbe essere qualcosa del genere” (34) – were advocating was primarily the right to be ‘assholes’, for only in that way could they perform their role of social satirists at their best, in all their impoliteness, incivility, and lack of restraint in the (cartoonish) harassment of their victims.

By their very nature, underground comix were beacons of social satire. However, as social satirists, underground cartoonists were neither entertainers aiming at their audience's light-hearted laugh nor preachers telling them how to run their lives. Their stories were violent and irreverent, and their satire was carried out through either hyperbolic exaggerations of American society's flaws or a crude, merciless social realism which, rather than explicitly mocking society, presented it for what its true, deep essence was, without any filter. Underground cartoonists urged their readers to question the absurdity and hypocrisies

⁹⁶ Title of a 1962 song by Bob Dylan, included in the album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*.

⁹⁷ When in 1974 the *San Francisco Chronicle* suspended the printing of *Doonesbury* for one day, the newspaper received thousands of letters of complaints and Berkeley's students organised a picket to protest against the decision.

of the 'American way' starting from what could possibly be wrong, weird or just funny in a given situation or a character's attitude in a balloon. And such impertinent, saucy questions were meant to stimulate self-analysis, to make people raise their heads and look around with fresh eyes, wondering whether what was perceived as normality was really normal or not. In this respect, far from advocating a revolution in the streets, comix strived for a revolution of the mind, one starting from a social commentary, a focus on ecology and education, and a denunciation of the systematic brainwashing of mass media and advertising. By exposing their readers to such themes, these cartoonists aimed to trigger critical reflection with no pretension to suggest solutions or to point an easy way out. At most, radical action could only come as a consequence.

According to underground authors the American society was sick and much must be done for it to recover. However, their satire did not want to propose any precise cure to heal it. What most of them wanted was to expose its infections, its corrupted body. Such 'destruens' attitude was often mistaken as a sign of political levity and lack of commitment. By contrast, these authors actually believed that only when the rot of society was exposed and people's consciousness awakened, a concrete cultural and social change could truly take place. According to Estren (1974), underground cartoonists had "a sense of how wrong things are rather than how to make them right" (176) and, for this reason, by paraphrasing Kurtzman's prophetic words, their anarchic spirit carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Comix were not oriented towards political action, but "nihilist, Dadaist, anarchistic satire of existing political figures and institutions" (178). Neither were comix comparable to André Breton's revolutionary aesthetics. Kurtzman maintained that underground authors are "more interested in the battle than in what the battle is for" since "the fight is what they're good at, because they're angry men" (quoted in Estren, 181-183).

What is more, within the countercultural milieu, not all activists appreciated comix. For instance, *Radical America Komiks's* founder Paul Buhle lamented that his editorial work was labelled "petty-bourgeois radicalism" by SDS (quoted in Peck, 1985: 155). And according to Steward (2011), "the unrelenting repression of the Nixon era (1969–1974) [...] hastened the decline in readership that began with the factionalism engendered by the rise of identity politics. The increasingly militant rhetoric that started to show up in the underground press tended toward the absurd, and the further that the content drifted to the fringes, the wider the gulf between the newspapers and the community they purported to represent became" (151). This also affected the reputation of underground comix, which were demanded to

endorse the increasingly sectarian turn the counterculture was embracing. Nonetheless, this was the opposite of what the whole comix phenomenon represented.

Undoubtedly, not all authors were devoted to the countercultural cause (e.g., Thompson and George Metzger rejected any mix of politics and comic art) and, broadly speaking, some were more interested in the socio-political value of their works than others. However, they unanimously rejected any ideological dogmatism, including the one that was allegedly growing within the counterculture. In this respect, Estren collected the comments of several cartoonists (155-56). Bill Griffith joked about the underground comix phenomenon as “part of the plot to break down the bourgeois family” (ibid.). Justin Green maintained: “I have a social conscience and I would like to use my work as a vehicle for social change”, but when he felt he was becoming presumptuous, he added “man sorry this is just so much bullshit” (ibid.). On the whole, underground cartoonists showed their commitment when asked to actively contribute to a radical cause, as in the case of *Conspiracy Capers* (1969), a comic book created to raise funds for the defence of the Chicago Seven (Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, and Lee Weiner, with the addition of Bobby Searle, who was processed separately), charged of conspiring for the 1968 Democratic National Convention riots. The publication of the comic book had to face the hindrance of the FBI, who discouraged printers from accepting the underground collective’s request of publication.

The fact that underground comics revolved around social and political issues was the natural by-product of their concerns in real-life. However, they hardly ever turned into overt political manifestos. The reason was threefold. First, they were politicised, but not politicos. Accordingly, they honestly warned not to take political cues from them. Comix were humorous, desecrating, parodying everything and self-parodying. It was hard and against their nature to provide the answer to serious issues. Conversely, political representatives were not expected to make people laugh, at least not on purpose. Second, they wanted to keep their works free of constrains. Being freedom of expression the only paradigm unanimously accepted by these cartoonists, even the counterculture was often satirised for its contradictions— though it was not so much targeted as liberals, conservatives and, in general, all the “overground”. Third, in order to be truly irreverent satire involves some form of distance between the author and the subject being satirised. Otherwise, it would be difficult to find such subject humorous or worth kidding about it. To delve into explicitly political propaganda would compromise the edge of these comix. Given the underground artists’

engagement in topics touching the social context in which they lived and worked, their invective was often not too reasoned and just betrayed anger and hostility against political misuses and abuses of such issues.

The best examples of satire paradoxically came from those who managed to estrange themselves from politics and thus conveyed their criticism crosswise. In particular, Shelton is credited as the most politically effective cartoonist within the underground scenario. Kurtzman and Estren (179-80) agreed that his art benefited from a multi-level reading construction, which was funny on the surface and thought-provoking on a deeper level. He was no self-proclaimed revolutionary – and this made him free from slogans – yet his political sentiments pervaded all of his narrations, from the more jocular Freak Brothers' adventures to the powerful representation of the thorny reality surrounding the counterculture in “Scenes from the Revolution” included in *Feds'n'Heads Comix* (1968). Shelton was disenchanted by and detached from the ‘All you Need is Love’ philosophy of hippies. And it is particularly evident from both the witty satire of the *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* and the brawl of “Scenes from the Revolution”. Indeed, he looked at the two sides of the coin: to him the counterculture was the Summer of Love and Woodstock as well as the beating at Altamont, the naivety of hippies and the brutality of Hell’s Angels, the Diggers’ utopia and Jonestown’s carnage, free love and child abuse, LSD’s expanding consciousness and speed overdoses. For him as well as for many underground authors, violence was just part of the world. Likewise, Spain Rodriguez’s protagonist of *Trashman, Agent of the Sixth International*⁹⁸ is conceived as a Che Guevarian revolutionary but his adventures seem to be driven by the sake of representing violence rather than by a genuine focus on political ends. Being a member of the Road Vultures Motorcycle Club, Rodriguez had plenty of experience in the rough part of being a countercultural rebel, far from the hippies’ utopia. Rodriguez never adhered to the ideals of ‘Flower Power’, preferring the motorcycle gang-life and political militancy. His short-lived comic strip, *Manning* (1969), developed the *topos* of cops’ badge as a source of violence and sadism, owing to their abuse of power. Given the harshness of this and other works of his, Rodriguez lamented the unjust criticism he frequently received that his crudeness promoted, rather than narrated, violence:

It’s a dilemma. The idea that media creates violence is simply ahistorical. Societies have done unspeakably cruel things with very limited media. Hitler never saw TV. You can just go down the line. The idea that suddenly somebody’s going to do something that they’re not predisposed to do is not very plausible. Tamerlane used to kill everybody in

⁹⁸ Trashman’s stories are collected in *Trashman lives!: the collected stories from 1968 to 1985*, published in 1997.

cities he conquered and build pyramids of their skulls; it's hard to top that. The only thing that media does is to present a concept as opposed to the real act, then you can consider how you feel about what has been presented to you (quoted in Rosenkranz, 2011: 169).

This statement is consistent with Wilson's position that violence on the page could only hurt the eye. Wilson highlighted an intuitive yet often disregarded aspect of authorship: "Just because you depict evil doesn't mean you are evil. People always get that confused. They expect me to be all the monsters I draw. I say, 'No. I'm a repressed Victorian. I shuffle around here and I drink my morning tea'" (interview with Bob Levin, 1995: 99). As for violence, according to Estren, the question underground artists ultimately asked themselves was rhetorical: "If you are going to show violence, why in heaven's name not show violence?" (142). In mainstream comics, everything could happen in the gutters of a page, unless it was not down in black and white. However, the removal of a graphic depiction of violence did not remove violence, did it? Underground comix simply exhibited on their front pages what was previously relegated to the blank space. Everything the overground hid, the underground displayed. Indeed, among its bans, the CCA had stated that:

- Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.
- All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.
- All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

The point underlying the code is that violence could happen, but only in the mind of artists and readers. The page had to be wiped out. No bloodshed on comics equated no 'bloodshed' in the comics industry. Comix counter-attack took violence to its extremes. Horror and splatter stories⁹⁹ were also created, often with explicit tributes to the EC line.

⁹⁹ San Francisco Comic Book Company's Gary Arlington, "more an idea man than a publisher" (Rosenkranz, 131), edited several comix titles inspired by the old EC Comics, "the love of his life" which he imagined "rising from the ashes like a cartoon phoenix" (ibid). Among them, the three-issue anthology *Bogeyman Comix* (1969–1970) is considered a one-of-a-kind publication. In addition, Arlington also published other horror titles, such as *Skull Comics* (with the subtitle "An Exorpsychic Comic" to form the acronym EC) and *Slow Death Comics*. Rosenkranz defined them "a forum for their fascinations with horror, cosmic retribution, sexual power, and the lure of evil as well as an examination of the real life horrors of overpopulation and ecological catastrophes" (182-83). *Skull* was a six-issue anthology published between 1970 and 1972, first by Rip Off and then by Last Gasp Eco-Funnies. It included graphic adaptations of Poe's and Lovecraft's tales as well as original horror stories, recalling EC in the use of colourful images and lurid covers. *Slow Death*, the most successful among Last Gasp's series, was published from 1970 to 1979 for 10 issues, with a special issue in 1992. At first, it dealt with social issues and ecology (e.g., such themes as corporations, pollution and overpopulation), its first cover showing a monster voraciously devouring a planet by Greg Irons. Both anthologies included stories by such

However, real life was more dreadful. In this sense, these comix simply portrayed and satirised life by using metaphorical images or symbolically extreme episodes. Cartoonists felt that comic pages were lenses through which they showed society for what it really was. Sometimes, there was not even the need for exaggerations. Of course, Estren argued (144), some cartoonists used unrealistic depictions of violence for black humour purposes (e.g., Daniel Clyne's work for *Yellow Dog Comix* 16 in which cannibalism is portrayed as a transformation of people into "pankayks"), but most of them used it to reflect on the America of the time and their satire was largely based on their experience.

In this respect, Greg Irons provides a telling example of the powerful convergence of violence, almost splatter aesthetics, and social commitment. Native of Philadelphia, Irons started his career in San Francisco as a poster artist, especially for concerts, and subsequently specialised in extremely gruesome vignettes used as environmentalist wake-up call. As Rosenkranz recounted, "Irons maintained that the effect of reading violent comics was cathartic rather than an incitement to commit mayhem. Underground comix provided a healthy influence by bringing suppressed desires to the surface so that they can be examined and exorcised, he said. Violence can be visually interesting, he added, and it also sells comics" (177). In a 1972 interview, he claimed that what he drew was "just what's going on. I get it all out by doing comics".

Unsurprisingly, Irons's art was confined to the independent circuit. Together with the untitled work created with Kim Veitch and analysed in Chapter 6, *Cannibale "USA Only"* provided the only 'sounding board' for Irons' comix in Italy by translating "Raw War Comics", originally from *Hydrogen Bomb and Biochemical Warfare Funnies* (1970), an underground collection dedicated to anti-war sentiments during the Vietnam era. Irons and colleagues challenged the traditional war aesthetics popularised by such mainstream narratives as the 1968 film on the American involvement in Indochina, *The Green Berets*, produced, directed by and starring John Wayne. The movie became a huge commercial success – despite the poor critical reception – and "to johnwayne" entered the American slang as a synonym of "to act heroically" (Dickson, 1994: 278). Even though the glorification of war and violence had been featured in comics since the Second World War, as highlighted in Chapter 1, the Vietnam War was the first 'television war' and propaganda heavily relied on its spectacularisation and even westernization. Wayne had the support of President

artists as Greg Irons, Dave Sheridan, Jack Jackson, Rory Hayes, Spain Rodriguez, Kim Veitch, Richard Corben, Larry Todd and Gilbert Shelton.

Johnson who secured the use of props and military bases for *The Green Berets*, where benevolent American soldiers fought against the faceless army of Evil going by the name of “Viet Cong”. Wayne’s propaganda was also debunked by Emile de Antonio’s anti-war documentary *The Year of the Pig* (1968) which featured archival footages, interviews and press conferences exposing the American hypocrisy about Vietnam. To further discredit Wayne’s rhetoric of America’s ‘good war’, Daniel Lang’s investigation published in *The New Yorker* on 18 October 1969, “Casualties of War”, showed evidence of crimes, murders, beatings and rapes, while the 1971 documentary, *Interviens with My Lai Veterans*, won the Academy Award for its narration of the My Lai Massacre (16 March 1968), in which between 347 and 504 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians were killed by U.S. Army soldiers.

“Raw War Comics” is a reaction to the horrors reported by newspapers and documentaries. In just five pages, the cartoonist deconstructs the myth of heroic war and even denies the possibility to recount a war story. The narration opens with the image of a man’s head bushed by a bullet trespassing his skull from part to part. While the left side of his face is completely smashed, the right eye is still wide open and looks directly at the viewers standing outside the page (Demand position). The picture is on eye level, with an equality viewpoint. Since the perspective is neutralised, no power difference is involved. Yet that gaze is piercing and demanding, as if the dead man still had something to narrate, something unfinished to communicate to the readers. Beside him, a caption states:

Original	Cannibale
Stories for red-blooded virile males only!	Una storia per uomini coi peli sul petto!
No sissies!!	(Non per checche)

This comic strip being a choral narration, to keep the plural of “stories” would have been essential and still went lost in Italian, like the *classeme* «blood», while the original opposition turns into “uomini coi peli sul petto” versus “checche”. In fact, in *The New Yorker’s* investigation, veterans stated in front of a prosecutor that they had taken part in the group rape and murder of a Vietnamese girl because their sergeant had teased one of the soldier into by challenging his manliness, derogatorily calling him “queer” and “chicken”, just because of his reluctance to act. One of them explained:

I was afraid of being ridiculed, sir. [...] Let’s say you are on a patrol. These guys right here are going to start laughing you out. Pretty soon, you’re going to be an outcast from the platoon. ‘That guy, he’s scared of doing this, he’s scared of doing that.’ Everybody is going to make fun of you. When you go out on a patrol, you ain’t going to be as good as

you want to be, because these guys ain't helping you do anything. It is going to be yourself. There is going to be four people on that patrol and an individual.

In the comic strip, the reciter uses the same threat of the sergeant, the underlying assumption being that “red-blooded virile males” oppose “sissies”, and readers of Vietnam stories should thus not rely on the latter. In the introduction to the second volume of *The Official Splatter Movie Guide* (1989), John McCarty defined splatter as “graphic mayhem designed to evoke in us a feeling of revulsion” (1). However, if readers of the strip retreated in front of the splatter image, they would likewise be “sissies” – and they *certainly* do not want to be that. In order to delve into war – even though just paper-and-ink – they are supposed to share the American soldiers’ manliness. Emphasis on virility is also present in the subsequent captions, when the reciter refers to a “**no-man’s-land** created by **men at war**”, with the use of bold font characters. The Italian version, however, omits it and condenses the text into just “terra di nessuno”. So, as for this first part, missing the plural, missing the crucial ‘blood’ *classeme* – typical of splatter – and downplaying the verbal violence of the manly vs non-manly opposition did not serve this translation well.

Prior to continuing with the analysis of the story, it is important to recall Groensteen’s distinction between the monstrator and the reciter explored in Chapter 3. The former is responsible for the graphic representation of the story: readers view what the monstrator shows them. By contrast, verbal enunciation takes the form of a voice-over, expressed by the instance of the reciter, who can be in the background or interventionist, neutral or involved, reliable or deceitful. Chapter 3 explained how monstrator and reciter do not necessarily act in conjunction. In this respect, it is worth noting how Hymes distinguished between Their narrations may either converge or diverge on the basis of “the authority of a higher enunciating source” (94), i.e., the narrator, appointed to the arthrology of the story and the dialogues quoted in the images, which are “recordings” of speeches never occurred, part of the narrative fiction. “Raw War Comics” is constructed upon the disjunctive relationship between the reciter and the monstrator: while the former strives to narrate a series of Vietnam War stories, the latter constantly hinders such narration by showing unforeseen ambushes, explosions, hails of bullets and bombings which abruptly end the stories by killing their protagonists. Their struggle also influences the rhythm of narration. By imitating many traditional war stories, each episode starts with the anaphoric repetition of the phrase “Our story begins...”, a rhetorical device which establishes a regular cadence: Chapter 3 stressed that when the same pattern is repeated over and over, thus musicalizing

the communication process, a suspension of time is created and dramatic tension increases. This story functions as a videogame in which, whenever the player encounters a dead end, he/she can reload and start again. Regular cadence is said to convey a sense of immutability and stability. In this case, the anaphora suggests a never-ending temporal rewind. The reiteration of the same pattern creates an *ostinato* rhythm, or, better said, “an extended diegetic time frame conveyed by a narrative tempo that gives the impression of a brisk rhythm” (Groensteen, 2013: 143). Each story represents a single stanza, partaking in the overall composition. However, each stanza is shorter and shorter: the first occupies two pages, the second one, the third three panels, the fourth three smaller panels, the fifth and the sixth just one panel each. In the latter panels, one of the captions is interrupted after “Our story begins...” and the other breaks the anaphoric structure as the mushroom cloud of an explosion stops the reciter after “Our story...”. Thus, whenever the reciter strives to establish a tempo, the monstrator abruptly ends the stanza. And since any infringement of the pattern is salient and stands out with respect to the overall structure, each macabre scene of death and dismemberment disrupting the storyline and the metric structure represents a high-impact break point, marking the change of pace. As investigated before, the technique of saturation (i.e., the repetition of the same situation) is an effective method to increase tension and extend anticipation in comics, instead of proceeding with actions.

In Italian, the original anaphoric structure is not thoroughly reproduced, as the translator opts for variations of the pattern: “Il racconto s’inizia”, “La nostra storia comincia” (used twice), “La nostra storia s’inizia” (used twice), “La nostra storia”. Such choice is likely due to the translator’s negligence in recognising and reproducing the importance of the repetitive pattern. Thus, the overall structure relying on the interplay between rhythmic cadence and interruptions is weakened and the deeper sense of the comics, as we will see, is jeopardized. The reciter (presuming he is a “red-blooded virile male”) is trying to describe a situation which constantly deludes his expectations, a fact which enrages him to the point of swearing and losing the composed of the beginning of each story. The reciter seems to be the victim of the actual narrator and the monstrator’s gimmick. Yet he is hopelessly persuaded by the possibility to recount war stories through the voices of different characters.

Two soldiers (Slugger McCord and Ace Johnson) crouched in the no-man’s land recall their summertime, at home, while smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes. The narrator recorded their dialogue, which lasts two pages. Readers learn that they have “some business” to carry out, but they still have time before the mission. As soon as expectations regarding

their mission increase, their dialogue is interrupted by a hail of bullets (“Relax! Have a smoke...We’ve got plent...”). The bottom panel of the second page is occupied by the splatter image of their brutalised corpses. The reciter comments: “Jesus! That isn’t what’s supposed to happen!” and “...Er, perhaps we should begin again”. They are rendered in Italian as follows:

Original	Cannibale
Relax! Have a smoke...We’ve got plent...	Relax! Fatti ‘na paglia! C’è ancora tem...
Jesus! That isn’t what’s supposed to happen!	Jesus! Ma non doveva finire così!
...Er, perhaps we should begin again!	... ehm, forse è meglio incominciare di nuovo!

The Italian version makes use of English borrowings (“relax”, “Jesus”) and a slang phrase (“Fatti ‘na paglia”). Borrowings and slang words are consistent with the idiolect chosen by the collective of Italian cartoonists and translators in the whole volume. Such choices seem to overshadow the original style of the American authors and domesticate the characters’ speech. What is maintained in translation is the reciter’s surprise at such turn of events. Chapter 3 explained that expectations entail the formulation of predictions (e.g., the Subject finding the Object and receiving the Sanction) and are related to established and typical content lines of a series or a genre. If expectations are not met, tension increases as a result. In this case, since the expectations concerning the war narrative are betrayed by the monstrator, the level of tension exponentially grows.

In the second episode, another soldier (Joe Spence) is shown walking “lost in thought”, translated with a less romantic “pensa ai cazzi suoi”, coarseness being another recurring, sometimes unmotivated, stylistic feature of the translation. The narrator does not access these thoughts, the cloud-shaped balloon being left blank. However, as the reciter starts explaining how tired Joe is, an explosion kills him, leaving another dismembered corpse behind and another pair of wide open eyes lifelessly looking towards the readers. The anger of the reciter grows as he screams: “**God!** This isn’t in the script at all!” in a jagged caption box; hesitancy also grows, as indicated by the ellipses in the discourse preceding the next cinematographic shot: “We’d... we’d better... uh...start again”. The translation thoroughly reproduces, on a thymic level, both the anger and hesitancy of the original: “**Maddio!** Questo non c’era sul copione!” and “Noi...è meglio che... un...vabbè, ripartiamo!”. The profanity

in both cases is stressed in bold. Readers learn that the reciter has a script, as a director shooting a movie, though the monstrator apparently follows another script. As in the previous story, the end of the page marks the end of the soldier's story, of his life and of his mimicked cinematographic shooting. Lights, camera, action: as readers turn the page they meet a new soldier, a pilot named Tuck Pucker, returning from a successful mission, though, after just three panels, a raid shuts down his attempt to narrate aerial warfare. The powerful image of the pilot's body exploding together with his F.86 is also used by the editors as the cover of the volume. The reciter laments:

Original	Cannibale
Shit! Can't even get through a little war story! Maybe a different trip...	Cazzarola! Ma è mai possibile? Non si può nemmeno iniziare una piccola storia di guerra che... forse, in maniera diversa...

In this case, the scatological slur is replaced by a milder imprecation, to which the translator adds a rhetorical question, “ma è mai possibile?”, signalling the reciter's rage as his plan of narrating a “little war story” fails. The ironic remark “little” is adequately translated as “piccolo”.

At this point, Irons introduces a coup de théâtre by employing a North Vietnamese soldier's point of view (Quan-Hoy). This is a true turn of events, since only few narrations had ever considered that perspective on this conflict. Interestingly, readers do not see much of the character, as it is night and he is described during a sabotage mission while he “crawls noiselessly through the mud and darkness” and “stealthily approaches” (translated as “striscia silenzioso nel fango e nell'oscurità”, “s'avvicina furtivamente”). The reciter uses terms relatable to the canonical depiction of North Vietnamese soldiers as sly (“noiselessly”, “sabotage”, “crawls”, “stealthily”) and faceless (“mud”, “darkness”) enemies which find a correct translation: “silenzioso”, “sabotaggio”, “striscia”, “furtivamente”, “fango”, “oscurità”, respectively. His end is no less dramatic than the others', as his mission is abruptly interrupted by an explosion. Readers only manage to see his body parts rocketing everywhere across the panel: genitals, feet, hands, an eye, the spine, a tooth, his helmet and sword. And the reciter bursts out:

Original	Cannibale

What's this comic strip coming to? Things have gotten completely out of control!	Ma cosa sta succedendo a 'sto fumetto? Sta completamente sfuggendo a qualsiasi controllo!
--	---

The translator reproduces the reciter's shock. The fourth wall is torn down as he refers to the comic strip on a metanarrative level. The use of "sto" in place of "questo" is consistent with the lower register of the Italian version, which rather treasures the slang thus losing the original interplay of high and low registers.

As the story goes on and stanzas get shorter, the reciter can hardly say the soldier's name before his head explodes. Is he North Vietnamese? American? What is his name? He is just another zombie-like corpse. Thus reciter exclaims: "God damn, this is weird!" with a blasphemy further stressed by the Italian translator: "Ma è pazzesco, dio cane!". As Chapter 8 will detail, blasphemy in Italian literature has a stronger impact than in America. Here it marks that the reciter has completely lost his temper. His last attempt ends with a bomb generating a mushroom cloud. No one knows who was hit and who launched it. Even the reciter abandons his purpose with a harsh "Ahh...fuck it!", translated as "Ahh...fanculo!".

Overall, this translation is more accurate than the other excerpts from *Cannibale's* anthology analysed in the previous chapters. The most noticeable differences regard the register, style and rhetorical choices. On a content level, the translation displays a certain degree of involvement and attention to the matter tackled with such an experimentalist approach. Indeed, this metanarrative subtext experiments with the semiotics of comic narrative structure by adopting a deconstructive strategy of annihilation of the reciter's power, turning it into a sort of passive viewer of the events narrated, one who looks surprised, just like the readers, by what the war actually represents. This is the crucial point: Why is the reciter unable to narrate his story? Why are the monstrator's images more powerful than words? The message Irons stresses is that words are unable to describe war. Its horrors are unspeakable. Not only Iron's comic strip rejects any glorification of war, it also expresses the impossibility to recount it. Words are not enough and, reflecting the underground's distrust in official information, often unreliable. In this respect, Sianne Ngai (2009) maintained:

For in a consumer society in which the public sphere has become increasingly coextensive with the marketplace, the spectrum of desires is simply broader than that of disgust, offering a rich multiplicity of ways to define and express all sorts of attraction. At the same time, the language of repulsion is much more narrow and restricted, such

that we tend to find a rhetoric of disgust supplanted by weaker but categorically different styles of indignation or complaint. (338)

Words do not fulfil the task to describe the horror and revulsion of war because the latter elicits such a strong disgust that language is too narrow to comprise it. For this reason, images overpower it in portraying the ugly truth of conflicts, their dark, revolting and merciless side. Irons's war is not good. It is monstrous. Soldiers with a name and a story to tell turn into zombies. And can "red-blooded" men look at this dread or do they ultimately give up? So subtle considerations deserved a very attentive and skilled translator in order to keep and balance the formal (aesthetic and structural) and content features of such a brilliant and thought-provoking artwork. Unfortunately this was not the case with Iron's comics.

In *Savouring Disgust*, Korsmayer (2011) argued that "[t]he very purpose of some art is to upset" (90). Likewise, in "Bad Aesthetic Times", Arthur Danto (1990) defined with the term "disturbatory art" the art which "does not just have disturbing contents" but is also "intended, rather, to modify, through experiencing it, the mentality of those who do experience it" (299).¹⁰⁰ Danto is specifically referring to politically committed works aimed at shaking the minds of the audience. A similar revolution of the mind was aimed at by comix which articulated aesthetic disgust as a means to reflect on responsibilities and motivations for violent acts and disturbing situations. Irons employed aesthetic disgust in the form of splatter images in order to upset readers and unveil the actual practicalities of heroic war. And since no heroism is found in a corpse melding under a rain of bullets, the conceptual frame of glory through which the notion of "war" was experienced and interpreted in John Wayne's film is replaced by a conceptual frame of horror and dread.

According to the French writer Bernard Noël (1978) human language is endowed with the capacity to represent only what is of interest to – and therefore not moralised and, as such, censored by – the State¹⁰¹:

Revolt acts; indignation seeks to speak. From the start of my childhood, only reasons for becoming indignant: the war, the deportation, the Indochinese War, the Korean war, the Algerian war... and so many massacres from Indonesia to Chile via Black September. There's no language to describe that because we live in a bourgeois world, where the vocabulary of indignation is exclusively moral – well it's those morals which massacre and make war. How can one turn their language against them when one finds oneself censored by one's own language? [...] Language, like the State, has always served the same people. [...] The police are even in our mouth. (190)

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of performance and shock art, see Robert Rawdon Wilson, (2002, chapter 1).

¹⁰¹ Excerpted from Glenda George's translation of the postscript to a reprint of *Le Chateau de Cène* in *Curtains* (1978), republished in Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein's *The Language Book* (1984).

Noël argues that language is not free, even when advocating total freedom of expression. Consistently, Irons suggests that words are not able to describe true horror. Images, perhaps, may escape this moralisation of language and kick readers in their guts. Noël spoke of censorship and “sensureship”: while the state champions the rejection of the former, it relies on the subtle pervasiveness of the latter, i.e., on the deprivation of sense as a form of ultimate brainwashing (191). Irons opted for a “raw” description of war to escape this. In this respect, the thematisation of violence and disgust represented the toolkit to fight the frame of a glossy war mass media (cinema, comics as well as newspapers) were trying to impose. And this did not only regard the Vietnam War, but also other opaque sides of conformism, the same which the Establishment relied on and underground cartoonists reacted to, thus feeding a turbulent dynamics of freedom versus censorship.

7.3. ‘F*ck the Pigs’: Italian Adaptations of the *Freak Brothers*’ Political Satire

During the counterculture years, law enforcement was perceived as *the* enemy by definition and their gimmicks to sabotage radical activities were the focus of many comix. To establish a comparison with the mainstream comics tradition, the latter used to rely on a fixed format of (always winning) heroes fighting against (irremediably losing) villains – what Estren called “cops-and-robbers format” (146). It goes without saying that this narrative appalled underground cartoonists: when the guardians of the law are included in their stories, they are neither heroes nor winners. In point of fact, they do not fight Evil, as their brawls are sometimes random and purposeless, sometimes cynical and not even human, as their taking the shape of actual pigs clearly witnesses. Chapter 5 showed how, in Shelton’s *Wonder Wart-Hog*, sexual starvation – caused by Hog’s superhero-like asexuality – coupled with violent excesses. Even though he is supposed to act as law enforcement official, he is responsible for endless brutalities against those who are mistaken as criminals. However, according to Shelton and most of the countercultural rebels, this is exactly how law enforcement officials used to behave. The exasperation of law-and-order principles leading to further violence can be read as a mock of the superhero’s above-the-law attitude and as a subtle social commentary on the relationships between authorities and countercultures. Once removed the super-hero costume, life goes on for the Hog, just as for Ku Klux Klan

members and policemen after a beating. This mockery of law officials opposed the Code regarding the representation of crime and crime-punishers:

- Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.
- If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
- Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.
- Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.
- In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

Thus, the challenge posed to the “the good always wins” storylines was aimed at destabilising both CCA and the Establishment as a whole. But this does not entail the victory of evil forces. It was not a matter of victory. Comix simply displayed the rot lying beneath the surface of a supposedly respectable society and its power structures: the “Banality of Evil”, as Hannah Arendt (1963) maintained. Violence then became a red flag cartoonists to warn their readership, to wake them up. It was not just about sadism, but rather a way of denouncing problematic social issues by using the most lurid and garish means of communication they had at their disposal. In this respect, as Estren highlighted, “in violence as in sex, the underground cartoonists are extreme, wry, and sarcastic. The freedom with which these artists depict violence has the inherent value of any uncensored form. But it is when the violence is incorporated into a form of social satire that the underground cartoonists are at their best” (153). Again, the possibility of representing peaks of violence was granted by the liberation of the medium from the grips of censorship and such freedom often became the object of the authors’ irony. A brutal instance is Crumb’s “Nuts Boy” (*Bogeyman Comix* 2, 1969), where the protagonist tells the readers, “An’ it’s only a comic-book, so I can do anything **I want!**”, while holding a brutalised girl’s breast.

The consciousness of the medium is what arguably lacked during the Forties and Fifties. As McLuhan lamented in *Understanding Media* (1995 [1964]), censors acted without knowing either the form or the content of comics, as they only saw the violence portrayed and took its “contagiousness” for granted (168). Estren pointed out how the hypocrisy of mainstream comics could be recognised from the cover of the comic books using big-and-small fonts for the titles such as “GANGSTERS-can’t win”, “CRIME-and punishment”;

“CRIMINALS-on the run”; “Justice traps the GUILTY” and what Estren called “piece de resistance”: “hard-hitting agents of the law strike at the UNDERWORLD” (146). These titles clearly entail how editors played with the allure of crime-related words, though ultimately bound to the inescapable “good-guy-wins” logic. On the contrary, the EC titles gloated in their sensationalist use of such words as “panic” (This isn’t a magazine! This is PANIC!), “mad” (Tales calculated to drive you MAD), “fear” (Here are tales that will usher you into the HAUNT OF FEAR). The underground remained faithful to the EC philosophy, while mocking the pusillanimity of mainstream comics. Among them, *Thrilling Murder Comics* (1971) – subtitled “Terrifying Tales of Total Paranoia” – is one of the best examples of the reinterpretation of these two opposite traditions, with Robert Crumb’s four-page infamous work “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” (analysed in Chapter 8) and “Kid Kill” by Jim Osborne.¹⁰²

The struggle between law enforcement officers and the underground is epitomised by Gilbert Shelton’s Freak Brothers’ stories, which directly challenge the CCA’s taboos with the “disrespect for established authority”. Chapter 6 emphasised how Italian independent publishers shared this tenet of the American underground spirit. Arcana entitled its anthology *Le Avventure Alternative dei Favolosi Freak Brothers*, highlighting the politically ‘alternative’ value of the stories recounted. Its cover shows them running away from policemen, a symbolic image amounting to a crucial topos, which was by no chance reprised in the 1998 reprint of *Freak Brothers e Altre Storie* by Stampa Alternativa. In the latter’s original cover from 1984 a demoniac policeman is laughing while reading one of the Freak Brothers’ comic book. Again, in the first anthology by Stampa Alternativa, *L’Erba del Vicino è sempre più Verde* (1981), the back cover features an illustration of an occupied building with policemen trying to bust it while a group of squatters (including the famous trio) escapes through the roof: a meaningful and particularly cogent picture in the 1970s and early 1980s Italian political scenario. Above them, the writing “È una perquisa!!!”, belonging to the radical Leftist slang, dominates the page.

In the 1998 edition of *Storie di Fine Secolo*, the trio reproduces the poses of Eugène Delacroix’s famous painting, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), with the Brothers guiding not so pacifist a march. This brief overview highlights how the anti-police hostility and the trio’s rebellious attitude is fully embraced within the Italian context, at least in Arcana’s and Stampa Alternativa’s collections. As already stressed, Mondadori overlooked comic strips from the author’s strictly underground period and focused on more recent works, belonging to

¹⁰² It is worth mentioning the chain of alliterations of all titles in the volume.

another phase of Shelton's career. These works are certainly not devoid of social critique and anti-Establishment feelings, though the underlying political contestation typical of the first stories is weakened by the end of the countercultural revolution dream. In the case of Comicon, a selection of comic strips from the counterculture years is included in the 2016 volume, yet works from mid-1970s onwards clearly outnumber them.

The translations by Arcana and Stampa Alternativa show the shared sensibility of translators and authors and their use of similar hermeneutic frames, since they were produced in a period of turmoil within the Italian socio-political scenario which somehow resembled the American underground experience. In several cases, this led to a domesticating tendency to make the narrations developed in the original texts overlap the Italian situation by conceptualising and thematising the contents according to cultural and social frames of the target system. In this regard, Edwin Gentzler (1999) argued that, far from being a "marginal activity", translation is a "major shaping force in the development of culture", in this case of a subculture, by enabling the "migration of ideas across linguistic borders (inter-national as well as intra-national) via different systems (not necessarily just letters)" (260). And one should bear in mind that the first translations of underground comix partook in the formation of a national underground discourse, thus re-negotiating its boundaries, significations and values.

In line with this shared sensibility, Arcana's 1974 anthology is by all means a product of the Italian "Anni di Piombo" (late 1960s-early 1980s) or Years of Lead¹⁰³ – named after the translation of the title of the 1981 German film *Die bleierne Zeit* – and unsurprisingly comprises a selection of works revolving around jailbreaks, college occupations, police's telephone tapping, undercover agents, dynamiters' attacks, contestations and marches. Among Arcana's collected works, the translation of "Shootout at the County Slammer" is particularly noteworthy. The story is surprising per se, as it overturns the traditional flower children's characterisation by presenting the three hippies' assault of a prison, armed with shotguns, which they do not hesitate to use to kill several policemen – though a debrayage ultimately reveals that this was only part of Fat Freddie's nightmare. The Italian translation of the title is "Massacro alla prigione", the term "massacro" referring to the carnage recounted. This is the comic strip opening the anthology, thus sending a clear message to the

¹⁰³ Several, brief but necessary references to the Italian political situation during the Years of Lead are made below in this chapter. To delve into the topic, see Ginsborg (1989), Chapter 10; Crainz, (2003); De Luna (2009); Armani (2010a, 2010b); Caprara (2014); Della Porta (2010).

readers as for the violently anti-law enforcement character of the collection. The emphasis on the theme of violence can be noted even in one of the following passages. The English balloon recites: “We’ve killed half of the cops in this state”, while the Italian “abbiamo sterminato la polizia di questo stato” omits “half of”, thus ushering in a hyperbole, and uses “sterminare” which indicates a total annihilation, with no survivors, and recalls a holocaust. The following table will be used as a starting point for two parallel reflections: the derogatory terms used to address policemen and the intertextual references to the Italian context.

Original	Arcana
Off the pigs! (69)	Dagli ai pigs! (6)
C’mon, God damn it! This is a jail break! (71)	Dai porcomondo! Stiamo assaltando la prigionie! (9)
I hear more cops! (72)	Rumor di pulotti! (8)
Hurry, dammit! (74)	Sbrigatevi, porcomondo! (10)
You mean we’ve killed half of the cops in this state and you don’t wanna leave? (74)	Vorresti dire che noi abbiamo sterminato la polizia di questo stato e tu vuoi stare qui? (10)
C’mon fellows! Loose that hot head! At least we’ll take some of those pig bastards along with us! (75)	Dai porcocane! Riempiamoli di piombo ! Vendiamo cara la nostra pelle! (11)

A first element to notice is the domestication of “cops” into the radical Leftists’ slang term “pulotti” which is ambiguously counterbalanced by the foreignization of “pigs”, kept as a borrowing in the Italian text, implying the widespread use of this derogatory term among the target readership. Its understanding may be eased by the presence of images showing caricatures of policemen often looking like actual pigs, with chubby faces and stylised snouts (e.g., the 1969 strip on page 61 and the 1971 strip on page 86 of the original, translated on page 1 of *Stampa Alternativa*’s *L’Erba del Vicino* and in *Arcana*, respectively). The use of the slur “pig” is not an isolated case in Italian translations. For example, in another one-page strip translated by *Arcana*, the trio, together with a random hitchhiker, is stopped at a roadblock by a policeman, who will be subsequently assaulted by the hitchhiker and his dog. Their dialogue includes the following balloons:

Original (77)	Arcana

Franklin – Uh oh! Now there’s a cop after us!	Uh! Oh! Un pulotto! Ce l’ha con noi!
Hitchhiker – A pig? Oh, shit!	Un pig? Miseria!
Hitchhiker – I’ll show you how to handle a fucking pig!	Adesso lo mettiamo a posto!
Hitchhiker – FUCK YOU PIG!	FUCK YOU PIG!

Just as in “Massacro alla Prigione”, the policeman is called “cop” and “pig”, once again translated into the slang term “pulotto” and the borrowing “pig”, respectively. Also the insult “Fuck you pig!” is left in English. It is likely that the term “pig” had entered the Italian radical Leftists’ slang since the early 1970s to address law enforcement officers and rich, bourgeois people. For instance, in 1971, Milano Libri translated Jerry Rubin’s *Do it/where Eldridge Cleaver*, the Black Panther leader, argues: “Alcuni di noi lavorano per i pigs. Alcuni di noi sono pigs. Alcuni di noi uccidono i pigs”¹⁰⁴ (8) and adds “C’era una volta una classe di sfruttatori e oppressori che governava il nostro paese; la gente li chiamava pigs, cioè porci. Li chiamava porci perché...” (9). The phrase “cioè porci” is absent in the original: “Once upon a time, a class of exploiters and oppressors ruled our country and the people called them pigs. They called them pigs because...”. This addition is consistent with Peter Newmark’s (1988) seventh technique of metaphor translation whereby the image of the metaphor is kept in the target text and a gloss (its sense) is then added to it so as to ease the Italian audience’s reading. The subsequent translation of Rubin’s words makes use of the English borrowing too. For instance, on page 171 of both editions, he explains: “Da principio qualcuno esitava a chiamare pigs i poliziotti. «Pig» è un termine di San Francisco e Berkeley, inventato dalle Pantere Nere. [...] Ma demmo un’occhiata ai grossi poliziotti bianchi e blu di Zicago: «Perdìo, questi grossi figli di puttana sembrano davvero porci!»”¹⁰⁵ and adds: “PIGS contro il POPOLO. Ogni pig, per le strade, si faceva legge da sé”¹⁰⁶ (171). Even in this case, the page is supplied with illustrations of pigs and policemen with porcine faces.

Going back to the “Fuck you pig!” phrase in Shelton’s one-pager, the expression likely acquired the value of slogan even outside America and, as such, it was employed within

¹⁰⁴ “Some of us work for the pig. Some of us are pigs. Some of us kill pigs” (8), with no italics font used to emphasise the word “are”, as in the case of the Italian “sono”.

¹⁰⁵ “Some were reluctant at first to call cops ‘pigs’. ‘Pig’ was a Berkeley-San Francisco thing, inspired by the Black Panthers. [...] But we took one look at Czechago’s big blue-and-white porkers: “Man, those fat fuckers really do look like pigs!” (170).

¹⁰⁶ “PIGS vs PEOPLE. Every pig was a law unto himself in the street” (171).

the Italian counterculture with two effects: on the one hand, it partook in the creation of a “private-code” unintelligible for those who did not belong to the group, i.e., mainstream society (as in the case of the drug-slang analysed in Chapter 6); on the other hand, such unintelligibility enabled the use of an insulting phrase towards authority with no fear of negative backlash. Indeed, another element to notice from these two excerpts from Arcana’s anthology is a general tendency to avoid potential excesses of verbal violence. In “Massacro alla prigione”, “God damn it” and “dammit” are rendered with “porcomondo”, “shit” is translated with “miseria”, “I’ll show you how to handle a fucking pig!” with a neutral, and therefore banalizing, “Adesso lo mettiamo a posto”. Whenever possible, swearwords and blasphemies seem to be mitigated with milder slurs. Conversely, as Chapter 8 will detail, in *Stampa Alternativa* verbal violence often turns into an opportunity to magnify blasphemy with provocative intents. Still, in *Stampa Alternativa*’s anthologies, an akin use of English slogans can be noted, particularly in the case of paratexts. For instance, in the aforementioned example with the pig-faced policemen, an undercover officer tries to incriminate the three brothers for a bombing scheme he actually planned in order to discredit a radical march. However, as his plan is revealed, the trio ties the imposter and closes him in the trunk of a car, vandalised with such writings as “Kill pigs”, “Off pigs”, “Death to pigs”, together with “Power to the people” and “End Police State”, all expressions easily recognised by readers as slogans commonly repeated during marches and in political manifestos. In this sense, the missed translation of the paratexts is not related to a self-censorious act, but to the use of a private code aimed at strengthening the solidarity among “in-group” readers. Emphatically, even in this case, this comic strip is used as the opening of the anthology, thus delivering a straightforward signal about its partisanship.

As mentioned above, beside the use of such slurs as “pigs”, Arcana’s “Massacro alla prigione” is relevant for another element: the interference of the Italian political sphere in translation through explicit intertextual references. In particular, the exclamation “I hear more cops!” is rendered as “Rumor di pulottì!”, with the noun “rumor” used as an apocopated form of “rumore”, i.e., “noise”, “sound”. However, Rumor is also the surname of the Italian Prime Minister from 1968 to 1970 and again from mid- 1973 to 1974, the year Arcana published Freak Brother’s anthology. On 17 May 1973, a bombing¹⁰⁷ destroyed Milan

¹⁰⁷ The bombing was organised by Gianfranco Bertoli, a self-described anarchist, who was a former collaborator of the Italian military intelligence between 1966 and 1971 (Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate and then Servizio Informazioni Difesa) and probably acted in collaboration with the neofascist group Ordine Nuovo. Bertoli’s bombing resulted in four people killed and 45 injured, while Rumor managed to escape alive. Rumor

police headquarters, after Rumor (as Interior Minister under the presidency of Giulio Andreotti) had just inaugurated a bust in memory of the former chief of police, Luigi Calabresi, killed the year before allegedly by militants of the communist extra-parliamentary group Lotta Continua¹⁰⁸. The fact that a balloon from Arcana’s anthology mentioned Rumor is noteworthy. Yet, the whole context of the story, i.e., an armed assault to a prison resulting in a carnage of officers, is even more significant. It proves the relevance of political matters in that period, as Shelton’s comix was used to evoke an event which was extremely recent in the memory of readers and particularly cogent on a political level. The Years of the Lead represented a capital moment in the history of the country and had an enormous impact on the social, cultural and artistic spheres. Arcana’s translation thus provides some cues to the hot topics of those years. Curiously, Fat Freddie screams:

C'mon fellows! Loose that hot head! At least we'll take some of those pig bastards along with us! (75)	Dai porcocane! Riempiamoli di piombo! Vendiamo cara la nostra pelle! (11)
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As highlighted above, verbal violence is mitigated (“pig bastards” is omitted) and the translation is far from literal, even though the presence of the very term “piombo”, added in translation with a bold font, ” can hardly go unnoticed and actually anticipates the label this period of turmoil will be historicised with. The open fight against the police with violent outbursts is something that 1970s Italian readers would certainly interpret in the light of the political frame they were imbued in.

Without delving into the thorny issues of the Years of Lead¹⁰⁹, to exemplify how tumultuous that period was, suffice it to mention that in 1974 (i.e., when Arcana’s anthology was published) two shocking bombings occurred, both organised by the neo-fascist group Ordine Nuovo: on 28 May, the Piazza della Loggia bombing in Brescia caused the death of 8 people and 102 wounded among the participants of an anti-fascist protest; on 4 August, in the bombing of the Italicus Roma-Brennero express at San Benedetto Val di Sambro, 12 people died and 105 were injured. The same year, in June, the Red Brigades committed their

was the actual aim of Bertoli, who declared “Morirete tutti come Calabresi e ora uccidetemi come Pinelli” (quoted in Montanelli and Cervi, [1990] 2002: 186).

¹⁰⁸Only in 1988 Calabresi’s murder was attributed to Lotta Continua as a revenge act for the death of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli the chief of police was believed responsible for.

¹⁰⁹ See footnote 92 for a bibliography.

first murder during an internal feud with neo-fascist groups. Red Brigades was a left-wing organisation aiming to establish a revolutionary state in Italy through armed struggle. They attained notoriety in the 1970s for kidnappings, murders and bank robbing activities. Their original founding members, Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini, were arrested in 1974 (though Curcio escaped for a brief period) and the third leader, Mara Cagol, died in 1975 in a gunfight with carabinieri officers. The impact of Red Brigades was so strong that they were included in another intertextual translation by Arcana. In particular, in a two-page story (36-37), Phineas and Freddie accidentally smash the entrance of a bank with a remote-control car driven by a Mickey Mouse plastic toy, the bank being subsequently robbed by Disney's Beagle Boys. In the final panels, two Donald Duck-like characters comment the event by claiming: "È un colpo delle brigate rosse!", whereas the original stated: "It's the work of militants!". The translator in fact overlapped the notion of "militants" with the Italian frame "Brigate Rosse", even though the Red Brigades certainly were not part of Shelton's experiential background. The original likely refers to such Brigades-like groups as the Weatherman Underground Organization, the New World Liberation Front and the Symbionese Liberation Army, which were responsible for several bombings and guerrilla episodes in America during the 1970s, groups which both Shelton and Arcana's translators clearly regarded as unfamiliar to Italian readers and decided to domesticate.

Likewise, in "Those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers meet a groupie", when undercover Norbert the Nark is exposed, he is defenestrated by the trio while someone exclaims: "Lo facciamo volare come Pinelli!", whereas the original is "Time for Norbert's flyin' lesson!" (6). Railroad worker Giuseppe Pinelli was one of the founding members of the Milan-based Ponte della Ghisolfia anarchic group (named after an homonymous bridge), created in 1968. On 12 December 1969, a bomb exploded in Piazza Fontana in Milan, causing the death of 17 people and 88 injured. Pinelli, along with other anarchists, was held in custody for questioning regarding the attack for more than 48 hours (i.e., more than the normal detention time without charge) when, on 15 December, he fell to his death from a fourth floor window of the Milan police station. Policemen first claimed that he had died due to a suicide attempt but they soon retreated and the case was filed as an accidental death. Piazza Fontana bombing, organised by Ordine Nuovo, and not by Pinelli's group, marked the beginning of the Years of Lead, while the mysteries and lies regarding Pinelli's death and the role of law enforcement officers in the supposed accident became the topic of debates and protests of radical extra-parliamentary groups, also leading to Commissioner Calabresi's

aforementioned assassination. In music and literature several references to Pinelli can be found. In particular, Nobel-prize winner Dario Fo dedicated him the play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970), which was later set in 1920s New York to avoid censorship charges. In the translation of Shelton's strip, Italian political events are turned upside down, as a virtual retaliation, with a "cop" being thrown out of the window by counterculture members. The very fact that a simile is established with Pinelli by using the expression "lo facciamo volare come" can be conceived as an addition of a "making-to-do" manipulation from a narratological point of view. On a connotative level, this implies that the trio *makes* Norbert fly just as somebody else *made* Pinelli fly. The translator is expressing a strong personal opinion which was widely shared within the Italian underground milieu, likely including Arcana's readers, who certainly recognised the simile and endorsed its assumption.

In Comicon's version of the same passage (150), the balloon recites: "È ora della sua lezione di volo!", with no cultural adaptation. Arcana's domestication trend, as stressed before, is now almost completely banned from translation practice (Cavagnoli 2010), whereas at time it was also the by-product of the prominent role covered by comix as vehicle of transmission of countercultural thought, experiences and values. The adaptation of the American experience into the Italian context was plausible for the translator who perceived a contact point between the two experiences (e.g., militants' and Red Brigades' bank robbings; Norbert's and Pinelli's defenestration) and re-encoded the foreign text within a hermeneutic frame which may no longer be so intuitive for 2010s Comicon's readership after almost fifty years.

In another brief example, Fat Freddie decides to join a radical college occupation and claims: "I'm gonna show them boojwah campus radicals just what revolution's all about!" (38). In this case, Arcana's translation preserves the original reference to "boojwah", i.e., the lexicalised pronunciation of "bourgeois": "Faccio vedere io a quei borghesucci radicali accademici cosa vuol dire rivoluzione!" (13). In contrast, Comicon's version is: "Ora vado e faccio vedere a quei fighetti di studenti radicali che cos'è davvero la rivoluzione" (190). The Marxist-connoted meaning of "borghesucci" in the 1970s differs from that of "fighetto" in the 2010s, just as the charge of being a bourgeois during the counterculture years had a socio-political implication which a fashion-wise adjective as "posh" irremediably fails to convey. Indeed, being a bourgeois meant to be one of the "pigs", to identify as part of the society radicals wanted to tear down – even though it was also the society some of them belonged to. The stigma of being bourgeois is one of the contradictions of the counterculture and Fat

Freddie's remark accordingly sounds particularly tough. When Arcana translated the text, readers were supposed to share the same feelings towards the Italian middle class and understand the connotative meaning behind this offence. In the case of Comicon, the slur is less obvious. Not few of the readers the house's anthology is targeting are expected to be middle class without feeling either shame or resentment for such social position. Comicon's translation arguably does not entail a deliberate censorship of the original text, though its different sensibility erases the politically committed connotation in favour of a more generalised derogatory term. By contrast, Arcana's commitment is also shown in the addition of the paratexts "Potere agli studenti" and "W la Rivoluzione" on the top of the college walls drawn in the panel. The former addition provides the translation of a banner pending from a window (left in English), while the latter is included by initiative of the translator (or the editor). These paratexts magnify the political isotopies, including the revolutionary cause, and represent a form of endorsement Arcana constantly felt the need to express.

Several small episodes of cultural adaptations denote that this tendency is not desultory but part of a general editorial policy. In another comic strip, Franklin accepts a lift from a "redneck" (95), the stereotypical WASP conservative man, and Arcana translates it into "borghese", more familiar a notion for the Italian audience. In the same strip, Phineas, the most politicised member of the trio, visits his parents and reveals to be the son of a member of the "John Birch Society" (88), an ultra-conservative, anti-communist, far-right advocacy group which strongly opposed the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Arcana's translation is "Patria e Civiltà", which, beside recalling the title of a didactic book popular during the fascist era, is not a name of a particular far-right organisation of the time such as Ordine Nuovo or Avanguardia Nazionale, but metonymically refers to the values inspiring those groups and to their keywords and slogans.

In another one-pager (112), Shelton satirises the 1973 Supreme Court's decision that obscenity standards are established on a local community level. In the comic strip, the trio start picking random things as obscene material (from a dog, to its excrement to wealthy people driving a Detroit Chrome Mountain), until Phineas points at a sign on the top of the building with the writing: "Four More Years – Re-elect the President" and describes it as "the most offensive thing I've ever seen in my whole life!". In November 1972, Richard Nixon had been re-elected for his second term. This was the most obscene news radicals could possibly receive. However, in Italian, Phineas actually argues that "la cosa più offensiva che abbia mai visto in vita mia" is the writing: "Fabbriche di Armi Riunite". Therefore, the

reference to American politics is replaced by an attack against the arms industry, which, in the aftermath of World War II, had grown exponentially, thus positioning Italy among the top producers and exporters of weapons in the world.¹¹⁰

In another example of adaptation (44), Fat Freddie delivers the “Official Junior Peaceman Salute” to two policemen, i.e., he gives them the middle finger. In Italian, the sign is translated as “il Saluto del Giovane Cristiano”. The focus is shifted from pacifism to Christianity, the supposed embodiment of charity and brotherhood as well as the great enemy of Italian orthodox Left-wing radicals, which the translator took the chance to jibe through Shelton’s comix.

In some cases, modifications were made not only in reference to the Italian political situation, but also to the American: for instance, in a one-page strip, the car with the paratext “Rodney Richpigge for Governor” is translated by *Stampa Alternativa* with a corresponding pun, “Rodney Porcoricco”, and changed by *Arcana* into “Nick Nickson for president”, where “Nickson” is pronounced like “Nixon”. While *Stampa Alternativa* focused on the sense of the name, *Arcana* decided to replace it with the name of a real American politician also Italian readers were familiar with.

These forms of cultural adaptations and manipulation are frequent in *Stampa Alternativa* as well. For instance, in *Nell’Era Atomica*, the story “The Fabulous Freak Brothers nel 21° Secolo” includes a panel showing the trio chased by the future-police where the paratext “S.A. Vive!” with a stylised marijuana leaf is added (36). Neither the original (527) nor *Comicon*’s translation (134) display any sign of paratexts. The acronym “S.A.” stands for *Stampa Alternativa*, with a clear intent of positioning the publishing house at the same level of the three rebellious freaks, constantly chased by “cops” (here referred to with the slang term “la pula”, in contrast with *Comicon*’s standard Italian “un poliziotto”).

Stampa Alternativa also added references to the Italian political context. In particular, in *L’Erba del Vicino*, it was previously highlighted how “Ronald Reagan Elementary” (292) was adapted as “Craxi” (21). Moreover, in the one-pager “It’s those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers: vanno a votare” (5), the election candidates are Pietro Bongo, Valserio Cagone, Sciaboletta, Berlinguoni, Spadazza, Maxi-Craxi, instead of Goontman, McPoont, O’Bloont, Dequoont, Zootney Roont, Poontney Platterpoony, Woont, Proont, Troont, Yoont, Sploont (127). The original played with the assonance generated by the repetition of the “oo” vowels,

¹¹⁰ In this regard, see the online database provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for an updated database: <https://www.sipri.org/databases>

the similarity of the names likely implying that all candidates were the same. By contrast, the Italian translator opted for wordplays on the proper names of real Italian politicians (Pietro Longo, Valerio Zanone, Giancarlo Pajetta, Enrico Berlinguer, Giovanni Spadolini, Bettino Craxi). The volume was published in 1981, two years after the 1979 Italian General Elections which nominated the Eight Republican Parliament. That was a period of great instability: in 1978 the former Prime Minister and Christian Democratic leader Aldo Moro was kidnapped and later assassinated by the Red Brigades, also responsible of the killing of five of Moro's bodyguards. Before his murder, Moro and Enrico Berlinguer's Italian Communist Party, at that time the largest communist party in Western Europe, were trying to establish a joint government by passing a deal called Historic Compromise. Moro's death sank the possibility of a Compromise and ushered in the defeat of communists at the following elections. The political tension did not end with the new elections, as the Government remained unstable and with no defined leadership. On the morning of 2 August 1980, the terrorist bombing of Bologna's Central Station, known as the Bologna massacre, killed 85 people and wounded up to 200. The bombing was organised by the neo-fascist group Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (Armed Revolutionary Groups), linked to the Roman mafia organization Banda della Magliana and supposedly connected to some members of a masonic lodge known as Propaganda Due (P2), charged of obstructing investigation and misinformation. The bombing became the deadliest terrestrial terrorist attack in Western Europe at that time and caused large-scale demonstrations among the population and criticism towards the government. In the aftermath, the centre-left government led by Arnaldo Forlani suffered from the discovery of P2 in 1981 and the alliance of five political parties to create a new government (Pentaparty) did not stop the crisis, thus leading to new elections in 1983.

Another element which emerges from the analysis of the Italian corpus is the abundance of comic strips dealing with dynamiters' attacks in both Arcana's and Stampa Alternativa's collections. As stressed above, given the overexposure to political violence in Italy, the massive translation of comic strips related to bombings should not surprise. For instance, in a 1970 one-pager (138), Franklin sets fire to a policeman's car and screams: "Long live the Marinus Van Der Lubbe International Firebombing Society!", inventing a fictitious association inspired by the historical figure of Marinus Van Der Lubbe, a Dutch communist responsible for the German Reichstag fire in 1933. In Italian, Arcana's translation does not keep the reference to Van Der Lubbe: "Lunga vita all'Associazione Internazionale Bombaroli!". Despite the omission, the translation still endorses firebombing, thus reflecting

the climate of the period and, by using Franklin's words, praising the attacks against such symbols of authorities as police cars. The same fictitious society is also present in another 1970 story which, following the format of "Little Orphan Amphetamine", presents the three brothers reading a newspaper strip, in this case "Tricky Prickears – the blind deaf cop", defined as their "favourite law enforcement officer". Just as for Amphetamine, by using a debrayage, the narration shifts inside the newspaper, recounting the adventures of Shelton's caricature of Dick Tracy, the police detective protagonist of the homonymous comic strip created by Chester Gould and running since 1931. In this episode, the blind and deaf officer Prickears, a fervent conservative republican, goes to a meeting with Nixon's caricature wearing a hat filled with dynamite, which the Van Der Lubbe Society originally planned to use to bomb the police headquarters. However, the clumsy detective falls from the plane and crashes the boat of the very Society while the dynamiters are setting another bomb under the Statue of Liberty. The story was published in *Stampa Alternativa's* 1984 anthology *Freak Brothers e altre storie*. Just a decade after the bombing of Milan's police headquarters, the publisher edited a story starting with: "Oggi bombarderemo il commissariato con questo innocuo cappello infarcito di un potentissimo esplosivo!" (original: "Today we bomb police headquarters, using this fiendishly clever high explosive bomb disguised as a snap brim hat!!").

It goes without saying that, unlike Ordine Nuovo's bombings, these dynamiters' attacks are rooted in anti-fascist and anti-authoritarian sentiments and aim at the symbols of police and government, considered the epitome of fascism. In a famous comic strip also printed as the inside cover of *Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998), Fat Freddie argues that he prefers cats since dogs are fascists. When his comrades ask how dogs could possibly be fascists, he replies: "Has anyone ever seen a police cat?", translated as "Avete mai visto un gatto poliziotto?". The implied assumption of the enthymeme behind the pun is that all police members, including police dogs, are fascist. References to fascism are particularly frequent in *Stampa Alternativa's* collections: e.g., "fascist governor" (290, translated as "governatore fascista", *Era Atomica* 22), "loco gringo fascista" (left in original, 150; *Odissea Mexicana*, 9), and "insensitive nazi scumbag" (171, translated as "insensibile nazista di un sacco di merda", *Freak Brothers e altre storie*) in which "nazi" is used as a slur among the very trio.

The struggle against fascist "cops" is the cornerstone of all *Freak Brothers'* adventures, from the first one-pagers to the longer stories. However, while *Arcana's* and *Stampa Alternativa's* anthologies focus on adventures which are strictly bound to the political

scenario of the time, more recent translations lose the same level of commitment presumably in order to present Shelton's work to a broader target audience. As stressed in several passages of the present dissertation, the period as well as the target audience strongly influence the choice of the texts to be translated (e.g., Mondadori and Repubblica avoiding Crumb's comics from his smut phase). Likewise, no strip rooted in the turmoil of the Sixties is translated by Mondadori and Comicon. In the case of the theme of drugs, Chapter 7 emphasised how translations often went hand in hand with a trivialisation process and with a pronounced emphasis on humorous aspects, often overshadowing the political and social role played by narcotics. In the case of political violence, Mondadori's stories revolving around open conflicts with the Establishment are fewer and with less pungency, and even the brawls with policemen are humorous reprises of the Sixties' recurring scripts rather than actual satire. However, in *Idiots Abroad*, translated by Mondadori and Comicon (2014), Phineas's powerful speech still presents some of the topoi characterising Shelton's poetics, particularly his acrimony towards authority, from secular power to the army and religions:

Original (264)	Mondadori (98)	Comicon (100)
...These militarists and terrorists are the scum of humanity and the scourge of the Earth! Someone has to say no to them! There's only one type of person that's more dangerous than these authoritarian things...	Questi militaristi e terroristi sono la feccia dell'umanità e il flagello della Terra! Qualcuno deve opporsi a loro! C'è solo un tipo di persona che è più pericolosa di questi banditi autoritaristi...	Questi militaristi, questi terroristi sono la schiuma dell'umanità, il flagello della Terra! Qualcuno deve dire no! C'è una sola persona più pericolosa di questi malviventi autoritaristi...
...and that's ranting religious demagogue who takes advantage of the natural stupidity of ordinary, nice people and their superstitions in order to make a lot of money and further his own selfish aims and the aims of a bunch of	... ed è un delirante demagogo religioso che approfitta della naturale stupidità della brava gente comune e delle loro superstizioni per fare un mucchio di soldi e perseguire le proprie mire egoistiche e quelle di un	... ed è un delirante demagogo religioso che approfitta della stupidità naturale della brava gente comune e delle loro superstizioni per fare un mucchio di quattrini e perseguire gli interessi propri e di una banda di

power-hungry fascists and high-tech terrorists who want to impose their totalitarian tyranny on everyone and hold people in slavery even if it's for the slave's own benefit!	branco di fascisti assetati di potere e terroristi super-tecnologizzati che vogliono imporre la loro tirannia totalitaria su tutti e tenere la gente in schiavitù anche se è per il bene degli stessi schiavi!	fascisti assetati di potere e di terroristi tecnologici che vogliono imporre una tirannia totalitaria su tutti e ridurre i popoli in schiavitù, per il bene degli schiavi stessi!
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In the tirade, Phineas addresses “militarists”, “terrorists”, “ranting religious demagogue”, “power-hungry fascists”, “high-tech terrorists” as the source of planetary crisis. In particular, the religious demagogue referred to is Phineas himself, who became the wealthiest man on Earth during the course of the narration and founded a cult called fundaligionism based on the adoration of money. Phineas ultimately finds himself involved in a conspiracy to institute a global military dictatorship with the religious guru used as a stooge. However, the curly Freak Brother, who always represented the radical voice of the trio, uses his inaugural speech for the transmission of his anti-authoritarian message which both Mondadori and Comicon thoroughly translated preserving his solemn register (e.g., such terms as “flagello”, “delirante demagogo”, or in the case of Comicon, the anaphoric repetition of the demonstrative adjective “questi” at the beginning and “ridurre i popoli in schiavitù”), but also on the key-figures condemned (“militaristi”, “terroristi”, “fascisti assetati di potere”, “terroristi super-tecnologizzati”/ “terroristi tecnologici”, “tirannia totalitaria”). Both translations are neutral and show no sign of militant undertones. In particular, cultural adaptation is present here as well as in the whole graphic novel. This is the consequence of the change occurred in translation practices during the years, one which no longer permits such an extreme form of domestication of the foreign text as the one implemented by Arcana and Stampa Alternativa. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that also the latter, in its most recent publication of the Freak Brothers’ stories, *Storie di Fine Secolo*, rejected the domesticating approach in favour of greater care for the original material and culture.

Even though in Mondadori’s anthology no deliberate censorship of political violence occurs on a translation level, a preliminary skimming *de facto* excluded violent extremes a priori. In point of fact, even though the punk subculture replaced the hippies’ way of life and nihilism overshadowed radicals’ revolutionary momentum, in Shelton’s strips antagonism

towards policemen still remained. In a 1991 comic strip (549-550), Phineas is beaten after camera-recording a group of policemen hitting an unarmed man with a club. The strip serves as a denunciation of police brutality, which represents a serious issues affecting the United States, and particularly the black community¹¹¹. Fat Freddie asks Phineas: “Remember that guy in L.A. who videotaped the cops beating up the black dude?”, a passage which *Stampa Alternativa*’s *Storie di Fine Secolo* translates as: “Ricordi quel tipo a Los Angeles che ha ripreso la polizia mentre picchiava quel nero?”. Shelton’s satire certainly evolved, yet it still preserved a keen eye on socio-political thorny issues and *Stampa Alternativa*’s collection encompassed all phases of his production, from his most recent invective to the production belonging to the counterculture’s years, only neglecting the more commercial *Idiots Abroad*. By contrast, Mondadori’s selection privileges stories targeting a wider public, such as *Idiots Abroad* and stories published from the late 1970s afterwards. As for *Comicon*, the house’s two anthologies aim to provide an essential overview of the whole “Fabulous” trio’s production so as to create a canon of Shelton’s art. These stories are included in a collection called “I Fondamentali”, defined as “riferimento definitivo per tutti i lettori” on the inside cover. In this respect, on the one hand, political references added to wink at a specific niche readership are avoided by both editors. On the other hand, since translation processes partake in canon formation, the materials excluded speaks volumes about the frame within which Shelton’s production is translated. Mondadori’s selection seems to have a penchant for a stereotyped and trivialised depiction of the “Fabled Sixties” as a period of escapism and goliardery, and even the scrimmage with police is read in the light of this light-hearted frame. By contrast, a small section on the comic strips belonging to the counterculture’s years is included in *Comicon*’s collection, though political references, stories about dynamiters and bombing, police headquarters’ assaults and fights against the “pigs” are left outside of its canonisation attempt. Of course, the rendering of comic strips so deeply imbued in a socio-historical context is no easy task and not all readers may grasp the figments of Shelton’s imagination and the relative satire. However, his works undoubtedly represent one of the best testimonies of that period, at least as for the comic medium, and deserve recognition and a better treatment for their sociocultural value.

¹¹¹ For a review of literature on the topic, see Tonry (2011); Chaney and Robertson (2013); Greene and Gabbidon (2013).

7.4. A Rebel Cat, a Repressed White Man and a Ranting Cartoonist

Although, as seen above, Comicon neutralised potentially politically-connoted terms (e.g., the replacement of “boojwah” with “fighetti”, “cops” normalised as “poliziotti”), as for the translation of Robert Crumb, it is noteworthy to highlight the appearance of far-right lexicon. In Chapter 6, the story “Fritz bugs out” has been already analysed in relation to dope consumption as the factor triggering revolutionary thought. The story is one of Crumb’s most widely reprinted works in Italy, translated in Milano Libri’s *linus* and *Fritz il Gatto* (both in 1972), Francesco Coniglio’s Acme (1993) and Mare Nero (2000), Repubblica (2005) and, more recently, Comicon (2015).

Original	Milano Libri (14)	Acme/Mare Nero (28)	Repubblica (36)	Comicon (46)
Revolt, Revolt! Revolt, you thick skulled idiots!	Sommossa! Sommossa! Sommossa! Sommossa! Forza, voi dementi teste di rapa!	Sommossa! Sommossa! Sommossa!! Sommossa!! Forza, teste di rapa!!!	Sommossa! Sommossa! Sommossa!! Sommossa!! Forza, teste di rapa!	Rivolta! Rivolta! Rivolta, maledetti testoni!
You have carried heavy burdens for the bosses! You have sweat your lives away for the bosses! The bosses, they ride around in limousines! The bosses, they’re eating	Basta con gli indugi! Con i tentennamenti! Avete sudato sangue per i padroni! E loro girano in limousine! I padroni mangiano aragosta con tartufi e ostriche ripiene!!	Basta indugiare! Tentennare! Avete sudato sangue per i padroni, e loro girano in limousine! I padroni mangiano aragosta con tartufi e ostriche ripiene!!	Basta indugiare! Tentennare! Avete sudato sangue per i padroni, e loro girano in limousine! I padroni mangiano aragosta con tartufi e ostriche ripiene!!	Voi avete portato pesi per i capi! Avete versato sudore per i capi! E i capi girano in limousine! I potenti mangiano fragole con panna!

strawberries and cream!				
Come the revolution there gonna be no more limousines! Come the revolution there gonna be no more strawberries and cream!	Con la rivoluzione basta limousines! Con la rivoluzione basta aragoste, tartufi, ostriche e tartufi!	Rivoluzione e niente più limousines! Con la rivoluzione niente più aragoste, tartufi e ostriche!	Rivoluzione e niente più limousines! Con la rivoluzione niente più aragoste, tartufi e ostriche!	Con la rivoluzione, basta limousine! Con la rivoluzione, basta fragole con panna!
There he is! He's the one who keeps the bosses in power! He's the one who's holdin' you down! The spiked boot of capitalism! The iron thumb on the heads of the proletariat!	Eccolo! Guardatelo il servo dei padroni! Lo scudo del capitalismo! Il walky-talky della stupidità! Il pugno di ferro in faccia al proletariato!	Eccolo! Guardatelo il servo dei padroni! Lo scudo del capitalismo! Il walky-talky della stupidità! Il pugno di ferro in faccia al proletariato!	Eccolo! Guardatelo il servo dei padroni! Lo scudo del capitalismo! Il walky-talky della stupidità! Il pugno di ferro in faccia al proletariato!	Eccolo qui! È lui che mantiene al potere i capi! È lui che vi tiene sotto gli stivali chiodati del capitalismo! Il pugno di ferro sulla testa del proletariato!
Let's go, ya commy rat!	Seguimi, topastro comunista!	Seguimi, topastro comunista!	Seguimi, topastro comunista!	Andiamo zecca comunista!
We shall overcome!	Vinceremo!	Vinceremo!	Vinceremo!	We shall overcome!

As stressed before, Acme's and Repubblica's translations are identical, with a slight variation

from Milano Libri's version, which likely served as a model. By contrast, Comicon provides an entirely new version of the text. In the first passage, Comicon's translation decreases the number of repetitions of the word "revolt", which in original is used to create an epizeuxis (in Milano Libri, "sommossa" is repeated four times, and the incitement "forza" is added), a rhetorical device laying emphasis on the key-term invoked by the 'stoned out' Fritz the Cat. Moreover, the curse "maledetti" is added to "testoni" by Comicon, whereas the other versions rather focus on the stupidity of those who do not partake in the revolt. In English, both "thick skull" and "idiots" reiterate the classeme of «stupidity». The original isotopy is reproduced by Milano Libri with "dementi" and "teste di rapa", the latter adding a jolly, amusing connotation to the utterance. Acme and Repubblica removed "dementi" and left the comical phrase "teste di rapa". In the subsequent passage, once again, the original text makes use of the rhetorical device of repetition to increase the emphasis on the speech: "the bosses" is repeated four times, creating an epistrophe ("for the bosses" at the end of the first two sentences) and an anaphora ("the bosses" at the beginning of the last two sentences). The epiphora ends a tirade thematising the effort of being submitted to the bosses with an isotopy expressed by the adjective "heavy", the noun "burden" and the phrase "sweat your lives away". The anaphora introduces the thematisation of "luxury", the nouns "limousine" and "strawberry and cream" being connoted by the classeme of «luxury» and partaking in the corresponding isotopy. As such, the isotopy of effort which characterises common people's identity in relation to the bosses is disjunctive with respect to the isotopy of luxury characterising the very bosses' identity.

The careful rhetorical construction of the speech is overlooked by all translations. In particular, Milano Libri, Acme and Repubblica replaced the first sentence "You have carried heavy burdens for the bosses" with a reference to hesitation: both terms "indugi" and "tentennamenti" participate in the creation of the isotopy of hesitation, which is disjunctive with respect to the revolt against the bosses advocated in the previous passage. Still, the second sentence is translated and the rendering of "sweat your lives" with the phrase "sudare sangue" is effective, as it preserves the connotation of vital sacrifice made to fulfil the bosses' demands. Comicon, in the first part, transposes both the epiphora ("per i capi") and the isotopy of effort ("pesi", "sudore"), though the latter is weaker than in the original due to the translation of an inferior number of sememes sharing such classeme. As for the second part of the balloon, both versions (considering jointly Milano Libri, Acme and Repubblica) do not reproduce the anaphora. The former uses a pronoun ("loro") and subsequently the

noun “I padroni”. The isotopy of luxury is preserved, though figures are changed: limousines, strawberry and cream are replaced by limousines, lobster, truffles and oysters, which are deemed more representative of an opulent lifestyle. As such, the isotopy is equally effective for the Italian audience. Comicon maintained the same figures of the original as well as the original anadiplosis (“for the bosses! The bosses”/“per I capi! E i capi”) but the anaphora is replaced by a variatio of “capi” with “potenti”. Overall, the translation is less emphatic than the original speech, whose repetitive style conveys a crescendo of pathos to Fritz’s call-for-action. Likewise, the subsequent balloon makes use of the same anaphoric construction by repeating “Come the revolution...”: in this case, only Milano Libri and Comicon carefully reproduced the same pattern with “Con la rivoluzione...” (though the former shows an oversight in the listing “aragoste, tartufi, ostriche e tartufi”).

When a police officer (in Crumb’s story too policemen are portrayed as dogs and pigs) approaches Fritz during his improvised political assembly, the cat calls him “the one who keeps the bosses in power”, “the one who’s holdin’ you down”, “spiked boot of capitalism”, “iron thumb on the heads of the proletariat” (likely a typo for “proletariat”). In this passage, Acme and Repubblica reprint exactly the same formulas of Milano Libri, “servo dei padroni”, “scudo del capitalismo”, “walky-talky della stupidità”, “pugno di ferro in faccia al proletariato”. The expression “walky-talky della stupidità” is added by the Italian translator in place of “he’s the one who’s holdin’ you down”, with no immediate correspondence with the original. When Milano Libri published the anthology in 1972, walky-talkies were gaining momentum as hand-held, portable, communication devices whose use extended from military purposes to personal and recreational exchanges, especially among children. In this respect, the translator hints at the police officer being a mere ‘repeater’ of stupidity, devoid of free will, a tool in the hand of the bosses. The other epithets are connoted with more transparent Marxist references (bosses, capitalism, proletariat), particularly “servo dei padroni”, “scudo del capitalismo”, “pugno di ferro in faccia al proletariato”, which are strongly imbued in the left-wing rhetoric of the time, widely understood – and broadly shared – by Milano Libri’s readership as well. As for Acme and Repubblica, readers may still understand the Marxist references, though familiarity with and responsiveness to revolutionary predicaments had certainly faded during the 1990s and 2000s. This estrangement comes to the fore in Comicon’s version, as the slur “servo dei padroni” is replaced by “è lui che mantiene al potere i capi”. As already evident in the aforementioned passages, Comicon translated the term “bosses” with the more general “capi”, which

completely fails to reproduce the quintessential, politically antagonist *classeme* expressed by “padroni”. In a 2015 article (the same year of Comicon’s publication) by Paolo Favilli, published in the newspaper *Il Manifesto*, the scholar addressed the expression “servo dei padroni” and the notion of “padroni” as phrases which accompanied political and syndicalist actions for a long time. They were part of the ‘armaments’ of the subaltern classes’ resistance as well as of their offensive within the class struggle discourse, characterised by a clearly emotional and only vaguely denotative value. Nowadays, Favilli lamented, the term “padrone” disappeared from political and syndicalist jargons. Modes of power increasingly became subtler and more pervasive. He spoke of a “dominio senza dominus” as a contradiction: even though “i padroni” disappeared from the Italian language in use, it does not mean that they disappeared from concrete social relations and active political practice. On the contrary, their absence in the public discourse is further evidence of their ideological dominance (“dominanza ideologica”). And while Comicon’s text shows how the rhetoric of “i padroni” lost its grip on the political discourse, far-right slang emblematically appears, for the first time in this genre, as the policeman belligerently addresses Fritz as a “zecca comunista”. In the original “rat” is used as a slur: the term was often employed as a derogatory term referred to hippies and radicals to emphasise their disgusting nature. However, rat is not exclusively used by far-right members. Conversely, “zecca” strongly connotes the speaker, in that it is uttered by far-right fringes only to insult leftists. This brief example illustrates a remarkable change occurred to the Italian language of politics in just forty years.

In Crumb’s comic strip, Fritz’s comrades end up beating the policeman, while Fritz manages to escape while singing “We shall overcome”, a gospel song which became one of the hymns of the Civil Rights Movement and, in general, a slogan of pacifist protests during the Sixties. In this case, only Comicon leaves the original slogan in English, while Milano Libri (and consequently the other publications) translated it with “vinceremo!”, i.e., the Italian version of Fidel Castro’s famous slogan “¡Venceremos!”. The two translations are semantically akin, yet Milano Libri’s choice is emblematic: the Italian translator’s frame of reference is not the Movement’s slogans and linguistic practices, but the Cuban Revolution, i.e., a class-conflict oriented and politically structured form of revolt¹¹².

¹¹²As a matter of fact, in 1969, even in America, members of the Students for a Democratic Society founded the Venceremos Brigade, inspired by the anti-imperialist ideals of the Cuban Revolution. However, in this case, Crumb’s Fritz is specifically reprising a generalist idea of the prototypical revolutionary agitator – in fact, “Fritz

Unlike Shelton's comix, this type of diachronic considerations are eased by the possibility to compare translations from different periods and contexts. Since Fritz the Cat was not accounted as one of Crumb's most provocative characters, it enjoyed wide popularity, meeting the curiosity around the art of the Father of the underground while at the same time avoiding hard-core contents.

Another story certainly sharing a similar level of success and a high number of translations is "Whiteman", which can be considered one of Crumb's sharpest satires of American society. In Chapter 5, the adventures of Whiteman were presented as an example of narrative revolving around the subtle, contradictory dynamics between civilisation and repression¹¹³. It is no coincidence that "Whiteman"'s first adventure opens the first issue of *Zap*, thus representing a sort of manifesto of the author's poetics and perfectly summarising his repulsion towards the lifestyle blatantly championed by the United States. In fact, Crumb (2005) never hid his 'bad blood' towards such forms of order and civilization as those endorsed by his country:

I hate most of what passes for civilization. I hate the modern world. For one thing there are just too goddamn many people. I hate the hordes, the crowds in their vast cities, with all their hateful vehicles, their noise, their constant meaningless comings and goings. I hate cars. I hate modern architecture. Every building built after 1955 should be torn down! I despise modern popular music. Words cannot express how much it gets on my nerves—the false, pretentious, smug assertiveness of it. I hate business, having to deal with money. Money is one of the most hateful inventions of the human race. I hate the commodity culture, in which everything is bought and sold. No stone is left unturned. I hate the mass media, and how passively people suck it up. [...] I hate all the vacuous, false, banal conversation that goes on among people. Sometimes I feel suffocated. I want to flee from it. For me, to be human is, for the most part, to hate what I am. When I suddenly realize that I am one of them, I want to scream in horror. (386)

Chapter 5 emphasised how, according to an idea dating back to Hobbes ([1651] 1991) and Rousseau ([1762] 1997), and subsequently re-elaborated by Freudian theories ([1905] 1995), Crumb blamed society for the suffocation of natural instincts with discipline and rules on

bugs out" originally appeared in *Cavalier* magazine from February-October 1968, a year prior to the advent of the *brigadistas*.

¹¹³ "Whiteman" was originally included in *Zap Comix* 1, and "Whiteman meets Bigfoot" in *Home Grown Funnies* in January 1971. Quattrocchi published both stories, the former in *Fallo!* and the latter in *Risoamaro* 1 and *Le Grandi Storie* (the page number will specifically refer to these editions) as paradigmatic examples of Crumb's "philosophical" works. Whiteman's first story was also published in *Head Comix* (with the domesticating title "Il Signor Bianchini"), in Totem's *Crumb Comics* 5, in Mondadori's anthology *Robert Crumb: Fritz il Gatto* and in Stampa Alternativa's *Zap Comix*. The second story, besides Quattrocchi's publication, can be found in Totem's *Crumb Comics* 1. In late November 2018, the story was republished in Comicon's *Collezione Crumb: Le Donne* with the title "Whiteman incontra Bigfoot". The present analysis was performed prior to the release of the volume and thus does not include references to the recent translation. It is a question of future research to develop a thorough study of Comicon's version and a contrastive analysis in comparison to the former.

account of a Faustian compromise in which civilization could only be achieved through the loss of freedom. Nevertheless, primitive urges, Freud warned, can only be tamed and never completely eradicated. According to Freudian repression theory, much like steam in a pressure cooker, they build up and fester to the point of causing a nervous breakdown, hysteria or aggressiveness. Whiteman is the prototypical American *petit bourgeois*, surrounded by an aura of greyness, and frustrated by family and job-related duties, bills, road congestion and the constant need to keep up appearances. Whiteman's twofold conflict is also the conflict which is shaking the whole traditional social system: he is torn between a struggle within himself, enduring in a miserable existence while trying to repress his primordial desires, and the much desired encounter with Otherness¹¹⁴. In this, the comic medium proves the adequate platform to develop such a multifaceted narration. Frames and page layout are rather conventional in the story, largely relying on regularity in page construction to recount the ambivalence within the character. It is a four-page story developed in a well-ordered grid of framed, almost same-sized panels, which somehow reflects the rigidity of Whiteman's mind-set. The only exception is the first panel, which covers a third of the page (including the title) and is unframed. The panel thus serves as an introduction to the character, with captions explaining how "Poor ol' Whiteman is on the verge of a nervous breakdown! He's a real product of the great depression!" and prompting how his story is actually "[a] story of civilization in crisis". In the panel, Crumb inserted several figures which participate in the description of Whiteman's crisis: his posture is hunchbacked and weary as he walks with difficulty and drenched in sweat; a mouse (a clear reference to Disney's Mickey Mouse, considered a symbol of mainstream, bourgeois comics by underground cartoonists) is running ahead of him while jeering; in a road packed with cars and noisy traffic sounds ("beep", "honk", "speech"), a bus displaying the sign "graylife tour" can be seen, with people taking photographs of Whiteman from its windows; finally, the background of Whiteman's exhausted walk is completed by a road sign with the writing "keep a tight asshole" and a hand coming out of the manhole cover. In his balloon, Whiteman laments his effort: "I've tried! God knows I've tried!". On a thymic level, the utterance conveys a dysphoric emotion,

¹¹⁴ The concept of Otherness in social sciences and humanities refers to the outcomes of a dialogical process in which 'I' shapes up their identity in dynamic opposition to 'you', while a dominant group constructs its identity as 'Us' through a binary opposition to their construction of 'Them', usually conceptualised through the stigmatisation of differences, which are rather regarded as 'failures', i.e. missing aspects of what *the* identity, 'Us', should be. 'Black man' is thus recruited as the Other of 'white man' (Fanon, 1963) while the Other of 'man' is 'woman' (de Beauvoir, 1952).

i.e., discontent. The pathemic disposition of the Subject “Whiteman” depends on the frustrating combination of “wanting-to” and “not-being-able-to” modalisations. As such, the balloon, the captions, the paratexts and all visual elements partaking in the panel construction make use of figures which may be thematised according to the isotopy of frustration.

In translation, onomatopoeias and paratexts are left in English, with the only exception of Milano Libri’s *Head Comix*, in which the sign “keep a tight asshole” is translated as “tieni il culo stretto”: this is meaningful because the publisher is seen prone to use vulgar language (“culo”) and because it is the only version making it intelligible to Italian readers the unrefined message suggesting Whiteman to be more uptight. As for the two captions, “a story of civilisation in crisis” is left in English by *Fallo!* and Totem, while Milano Libri rendered it as “una storia di civilizzazione in crisi”, Stampa Alternativa as “una storia di civiltà in crisi”, and Mondadori “una storia sulla civiltà in crisi”. In English, “civilisation” can refer to the civilising process as well as to the developed society. While the first translation focuses on the failure of the process, the others more correctly stress the decline of its outcome. The dominant isotopy is however preserved in both cases. As for the longer caption, they all depict Whiteman as “sull’orlo di un esaurimento nervoso” (Milano Libri, Stampa Alternativa, Mondadori), “sull’orlo di un crollo nervoso” (*Fallo!*), “al bordo di una crisi di nervi” (Totem), the latter opting for an unnatural expression “al bordo di”. Such a nervous breakdown is described as the “prodotto della grande depressione” (Milano Libri, Stampa Alternativa), “prodotto vero della grande recessione” (*Fallo!*) – where the marketing-oriented collocation ‘prodotto vero’ sounds most ironic, “conseguenza della grande depressione economica” (Totem) and “risultato della grande depressione” (Mondadori). Though using different synonyms, the isotopy is always preserved by reiterating the classemes of «economy» and «frustration» as well as the cause-effect relationship with the former sentence. Interestingly, Whiteman becomes “Bianchini” in *Head Comix* and a generic “uomo bianco” in *Fallo!* thus turning Whiteman into an ordinary man, a nobody, a casual passer-by.

Translations of the balloon are uniform: “Ci ho provato! Dio sa se ci ho provato!” (Milano Libri), “Ho tentato! Ho veramente tentato tutto!” (*Fallo!*, the only omitting the reference to deity), “Ho tentato! Dio lo sa che ho tentato!” (Stampa Alternativa), “C’ho provato! Lo sa Dio se c’ho provato!” (Totem), “Ci ho provato! Dio sa se l’ho fatto!” (Mondadori).

In the following panel, Whiteman admits his need of a “treatment”, translated as “cura” (Milano Libri, *Fallo!*, Stampa Alternativa), “psicologo” by Totem, making the link with

neurosis explicit, and “andare in pensione” by Mondadori, which is the only version correlating his distress not to social repression and pressure but to work. The omission of Whiteman’s psychological dimension is an evident manipulation: Whiteman’s problem is clearly not related to his job only, this being just part of a bigger issue which involves the whole social system he is imbued in. And, indeed, visual and paratextual elements suggest that the problem lies in the effort to keep self-control, through the ostentation of a chest-out posture in front of other people, his fake politeness as well as the captions “Whiteman always keeps hair in place” and “Whiteman has round the clock protection”. The captions are clearly ironical. Curiously, while the reference to hair is grasped by all translators (“capelli in ordine” by Milano Libri and Stampa Alternativa; “capelli lisci e a posto” by *Fallo!*; “pettinato con cura” by Totem, “capelli a posto” by Mondadori), thus unanimously rendering the classeme of «tidiness», the second is translated with completely diverging expressions, and even left in English by *Fallo!*:

Whiteman has round the clock protection (105)
Whiteman has round the clock protection (<i>Fallo!</i> , 37)
Bianchini ha i gemelli d’oro (Milano Libri, 39)
Whiteman non emette cattivi odori (Stampa Alternativa, 61)
Whiteman si sente protetto dall’orologio (Totem 3, 41)
Whiteman ha i denti protetti ventiquattr’ore su ventiquattro (Mondadori, 84)

While in the case of *Fallo!* the missing translation witnesses a general negligence towards minor textual elements, this simple caption suggests what was deemed representative of a white-man lifestyle by each translator: golden cufflinks, endowed with the classemes of «elegance» and «luxury», in Milano Libri; olfactory stimuli and, in particular, the classeme of «cleanness» in Stampa Alternativa, thus implying a comparison with hippies, usually associated to such classemes as «dirt» and «stench»; Totem’s watch, which may be associated to the classeme of «luxury» and also evokes lateness and deadlines, is linked to the classeme of «pressure», though presented as a ‘protector’ of the character; the classeme of «protection» can be found in Mondadori as well, in combination with the aforementioned classeme of «cleanness». To summarise, the square-world representative is tidy (e.g., “hair in place”), clean, wealthy, but also under pressure, and these features (alternatively highlighted by textual evidence in the different Italian translations) function as a protection for him. However, in that very panel, his weary posture, on a proxemic level, and his balloon, on a verbal level,

seem to suggest a disjunctive semantic route. For Whiteman, politeness is not natural but rather “such an effort”, translated as “un tale sforzo” (Milano Libri) “che sforzo” (Totem), “che fatica” (Stampa Alternativa), “così dura” (Mondadori), all sharing the classeme of «frustration» and partaking in the abovementioned isotopy. In this case, *Fallo!* anticipates the beastly transformation taking place by referring to a “sforzo sovrumano” written with a bold font. The adjective and the lettering suggest that what Whiteman is hiding is beyond humanity, as highlighted by the classeme of «beastliness» opposing ‘square’ society along all of his adventures. Indeed, frustration is only one of Whiteman’s faces and only one of the isotopies featured in the text. Though Whiteman has to keep up with social expectations, the strip also shows his twisted personality, alternatively seen as distressed, flaunting or on the verge of giving in to his wild side. Readers are guided into Whiteman’s mind by three dominant isotopies, which may fall under the labels of Eros, Americanism, being disjunctive with respect to the former but embedding the last one, i.e., Thanatos.

The compelling example regarding Eros analysed in Chapter 5 emphasised Crumb’s use of a zoom technique, with readers getting close-ups on Whiteman’s face as he starts revealing his true colours, by adopting an aggressive pose, his hair being no longer in place and his outfit dishevelled, and breaking his glasses with a hand, showing how his rationality gave in to brute force. Sexuality was associated to the classemes of «beastliness» and «aggressiveness», which are verbally and visually reiterated throughout the panels, and Crumb’s satire mocked the simplistic dichotomy sexual abstinence-civilization vs sexual freedom-animality, upon which American Puritan moralism is grounded. For this reason, Whiteman appeals to his American pedigree to “get a grip” (all refer to the verb “controllarsi”, with the exception of Stampa Alternativa which uses the synonym “darsi una regolata”) on himself, as he is “a grown man! An intelligent adult! With responsibilities!” (all referring to being an “adulto”, “intelligente” with “responsabilità”/ “responsabile”). While the American flag waves behind him with the White House in the background, he proudly states: “I’m an American!” (“Sono americano” by Totem, “Sono un americano” by all the others; only Totem and Mondadori do not reproduce the same lettering), with his nationality highlighted by a different font. “A citizen of the United States!” (“Un cittadino degli Stati Uniti” by all translators), he continues in the following panel and, as he walks away with confidence – back straight, chin up, chest out – some military aircraft whizzes in the sky. Indeed, those were the years of the Vietnam War, in which patriotism, militarism and the unbowed WWII heroes were glorified. The ‘true American’ imagery often took the form of

aggressive machismo, as illustrated by Whiteman fiercely bumping chest against chest with another WASP, by his “grrr grr” bellicose onomatopoeias and the balloon reciting: “A real hard charger! Step aside, buddy!”. The translation of this balloon strongly varies among the different Italian versions. They all downplay the reference to war to different extents – and all overlook that to American football – and rather focus on the general claseme of «toughness» in *Fallo!* and *Totem*, on «aggressiveness» in Mondadori, and, though ‘wrongly so’, on quite odd ideas of «beauty» in *Stampa Alternativa* and «social importance» in *Milano Libri*. These mistakes are particularly annoying as they do not enable the Italian readers to correctly make sense of the American way of life as it is unambiguously defined by the semantic traits of the balloon captions:

A real hard charger! Step aside, buddy! (106)
Un duro, uno che sa farsi strada nella vita. Tirati da parte stronzo! (<i>Fallo!</i> , 38)
Davvero un pezzo grosso! Spostati, cafone! (<i>Milano Libri</i> , 39)
Un bel pezzo d’uomo! Fatti da parte, bello! (<i>Stampa Alternativa</i> , 62)
Un vero duro! Fuori dai piedi! (<i>Totem</i> 3, 42)
Un vero pericolo della strada! Spostati, ragazzo! (Mondadori, 85)

Among all versions, *Fallo!* stands out for the higher level of verbal violence (e.g., the slur “stronzo”) with respect to the others, thus magnifying aggressiveness both in the way Whiteman talks and in the way he moves. Interestingly, the claseme of «aggressiveness», characterising Whiteman as a wild beast, is also reiterated in these scenes (through the posture, the attitude and the war aircrafts) and thus results to be the dominant feature defining Americanism as well. However, this is just a façade: the aggressiveness covers his repression and strictness is just a means to preserve his fragile order. Indeed, gazing directly at the readers, he confesses that if he did not maintain his rigid position all would be lost to him. Once again, the price he has to pay is a life of frustration and physical pain (he mentions headaches, indigestion, and heartburn). At that point, he finds solace in another symbol of the modern western society: Whiteman’s rumbling car. Only in *Totem* the onomatopoeias “gripe grumble mumble” are turned into a blunt commentary “che schifo di vita”, which does not match the image of the roaring car. However, it combines with the subsequent panels, in which Whiteman’s self-control wavers again owing to a traffic jam. This stressful episode re-awakens his “illicite desires” and “forbidden passion”: Whiteman’s repressed

violence explodes in the fifth panel of the page (saliently occupying a central position), where he displays a furious expression and gnashing teeth. Just as in the case of “Sex”, the word “Kill” appears above his head with a jarred lettering, it being the most salient element of the page and capturing the readers’ attention. Four small balloons come out of his mouth: “destroy”, “cut”, “slice”, “maim”. All translations preserve the original word “kill” with the exception of Totem, which intervenes on the image to re-write it in Italian, i.e., “Uccidere”. Totem is not new to visual manipulation but it is odd that the image was changed in the case of violence (especially since the word “kill” is easily intelligible by an Italian audience accustomed, for instance, to use the English borrowing “serial killer”), but not in the writing “sex” (as highlighted in Chapter 5). As for the small balloons, all Italian versions provide translations related to the dominant isotopies of violence and Thanatos: “uccidere”, “tagliare”, “mutilare”, “fare a pezzi” (Milano Libri); “uccidere”, “schiacciare”, “distruggere”, “devastare” (*Fallo!*), “spaccare”, “fare” “a pezzi” “mutilare” (Stampa Alternativa); “distruggere”, “tagliare”, “mutilare”, “castrare” (Totem); “distruggere”, “tagliare”, “affettare”, “storpiare” (Mondadori). Even in this list, Totem stands out for the use of the verb “castrare”, i.e., the mutilation of genitals, which has strong Freudian implications. On the whole, Totem’s translator never paid particular attention to Freudian references in Crumb’s comics, and thus the word choice may simply be explained in the light of the allure generated by the use of a sexually-connoted verb. This is consistent with its editorial policies, prone to display violence in all its most controversial facets, but ambivalent as for the theme of sex, either censored or only included as an allusion or a comical device, though avoiding graphic extremes.

In line with the countercultural depiction of the 1950s generation, the outburst of violence is quenched with a few drinks, though they only briefly delay the fatal disruption of Whiteman’s equilibrium. Indeed, as soon as Whiteman hears music from a parade¹¹⁵, he is faced with his direct antithesis, the “niggers”. Estren lamented the general “lack of sensitivity to the problems of blacks and other minority groups” (199) in underground comix. When represented, black people are not treated with hostility but comix showed limited concern

¹¹⁵ Robert Crumb, a music player himself, has always reserved a special place for black music in his works, where jazz and blues symbolise the freedom from restraints, the wildness of human nature. Collected music-related stories can be found in *R. Crumb Draws the Blues* (1995), while his trading card sets of early blues, jazz and country were collected in *R. Crumb’s Heroes of Blues, Jazz & Country* (2006). In Italian, all anthologies by Totem, Repubblica and Mondadori include some music-related stories. However, some dedicated collections exist as well: *R. Crumb disegna il blues* by Franco Cosimo Panini (1993), *Mr Nostalgia* by Comma22 (2008) and the most recent Comicon’s *Collezione Crumb 3: La Musica di Crumb* (2015).

for their cause, despite the social conscience of most underground cartoonists. In point of fact, Crumb seems to be more interested in representing black people as the nemesis of white people, mostly of white men. They are ‘used’ to trigger a response in racist white middle-class society, this being either a sexual response, as in the case of Angelfood McSpade, or a fearful one as in Whiteman’s encounter with the black parade. Indeed, his first reaction in front of black men is determined by another primordial impulse, «Fear» – the word being written in a wavering handwriting – since he is forced to engage with something he did not foresee in his self-centred path, i.e., Otherness. The translation of fear is “terrore” in *Fallo!* and Totem, “paura” in all the others. All tried to reproduce the original lettering.

The background of the last page (108 in the original) changes from white to black, with Whiteman’s counterparts camouflaging in the darkness of the night. As the protagonist tries to escape in shame and fright, the black figures try to pull his pants down and laugh at him. It is worth mentioning how, even in this passage, *Fallo!* shows a higher degree of verbal violence. For instance, as one of the black men tries to pull Whiteman’s trousers off, he says:

Off they comes Whiteman! (106)
Il bianco porco! (<i>Fallo!</i> , 40)
Via questi, ecco qui Bianchini! (Milano Libri, 41)
Di si galano Whiteman! (Stampa Alternativa, 64)
Ecco fatto, Whiteman! (Totem 3, 44)
Vengono giù, uomo bianco! (Mondadori, 87)

Fallo! adds “bianco porco”, i.e., in perfect line with the counterculture’s slang referring to WASP people, as highlighted in the previous pages. The original panel does not entail a specific political attack as the parade is simply making fun of Whiteman’s frightened reaction. However, in line with *Fallo!*’s magnification of Crumb’s political role, the label “pig” implies a further charge: Whiteman is a white, fascist, middle-class man. Mondadori does not address Whiteman by his name. They use the general category “uomo bianco”, i.e., white man. In another balloon, a member of the parade actually calls Whiteman “whitey”, which is translated as “biancuzzo” by Milano Libri, “sbiadido” by Stampa Alternativa, “bianco” by Totem and Mondadori, while *Fallo!* did not translate the epithet. As noticed in the case of Angelfood’s speech, Stampa Alternativa renders jive by mangling Italian words, a choice which aims to stress a stereotypical racial representation rather than translating the socio-

linguistic variety of English spoken by black characters. In point of fact, given the impossibility to translate jive effectively, the other translators did not make any attempt to manipulate or lexicalise improper pronunciations, with the exception of Mondadori which in certain balloons makes use of such apocopated words as “scolta”, “tranqui” and the Roman dialect “nnamo”.

In opposition to the jokes of the black parade, on a thymic level, Whiteman reacts with an outburst of terror, a pathemic state conveyed by the posture adopted as he invokes respect for his dignity and family (“dignità” and “famiglia” in all translations). By seeking the readers’ empathy, he looks directly at them (Demand position) and asks: “How could they do this to me... I’m Whiteman!”, where “Whiteman” is rendered as “uomo bianco” and “bianco” only in Mondadori and *Fallo!*, respectively, which explicitly establish a racial question. In the central panel, two of the black men answer his question: “You jis’ a NIGGER like evva body else!” and “No more! No lesse, mutha!”, translated as:

You jis’ a NIGGER like evva body else! – No more! No lesse, mutha! (106)
Sei solo un NEGRO come tutti noi, COGLIONE! – Né più ne meno, coglione! (<i>Fallo!</i> , 40)
Tu non sei che uno sporco NEGRONI come tutti gli altri! – Né più ne meno! (Milano Libri, 41)
Sei zolo un NEGRO gome duddi gli aldri! – Né biù né meno, goggo! (Stampa Alternativa, 64)
Tu sei solo un lurido NEGRO come tutti noi! – Proprio così! (Totem 3, 44)
Te sei solo un negro come tutti quanti – Né più ne meno, fratello! (Mondadori, 87)

With the exception of Milano Libri’s use of the surname “Negroni”, in opposition to “Bianchini”, to avoid the racial slur, all translations make use of the term “negro”, which in Italy has a derogatory connotation. Even in this case, *Fallo!* increases the level of verbal violence by calling Whiteman “coglione” twice. In the original, black people are not so aggressive towards the protagonist. Accordingly *Fallo!’s* translator just cannot help irritating and offending the ‘square’ society, no matter what was actually conveyed by the original text, carrying thus out the systematic simplification of complex meanings and mixed feelings. An outcome which does not significantly differ from that of censorship. Another element to be noticed is that Milano Libri and Totem add the classeme «dirty», conveyed by the adjectives

“sporco” and “lurido”, which is not present in the original. This claseme is disjunctive with respect to the «tidiness» of the previous pages, thus exposing the inconsistency of Whiteman’s internalised white-black dichotomy and the hopelessness of his efforts to be clean and in order. In this understanding, such semantic addition is consistent with the deconstruction of Whiteman’s mind-set. This passage is, in actual fact, fundamental to understand the author’s poetics. Crumb’s art is definitely not politically correct and glides on the knife-edge between satire and insult. When misunderstood, it has even been labelled as racist and offensive. In “Whiteman”, for instance, black characters may appear as racist caricatures on account of such features as big, round noses, wide-open circular eyes, exaggerated lips, and bright, white smiles. However, Crumb is actually satirising the infamous ‘blackface’ iconography white people have used since the nineteenth century, first as a theatrical make-up, then in film, cartoons, advertising and logos, thus contributing to the spread of racial stereotypes. The choice to use ‘blackface’ (also employed for Angelfood’s portrayal) serves the purpose of providing a satirical look at how Whiteman, and society at large, would depict black people as identical, caricature-like figures, deprived of any distinctive facial feature and, by extension, of their own identity as individuals. The core of Crumb’s invective against this viewpoint lies precisely in the exclamation “You jis’ a NIGGER like evva body else!” positioned in the most salient position of the page. Ironically, these words clash with Whiteman’s belief to stand out and above the undifferentiated parade of black people. Ultimately, his construction of Otherness crumbles under the realisation that he is just like ‘them’ – “No more! No lesse, mutha!” – or better said, that no Us-Them dichotomy has ever existed.

Ultimately, the black men try to establish a connection with Whiteman through music and the story has an open ending with the parade leaving as he asks himself (and his readers) whether he should “join the parade” or not. As stressed before, Whiteman makes his choice in “Whiteman meets Bigfoot” in which his commitment to the ‘square’ world is challenged by the encounter with Yetti. By looking over the reiteration of the isotopies pinpointed in the previous story, the recurring presence of the same figures is evident ever since the very first pages. In the same rigidly ordered grid of panels, readers encounter a frustrated Whiteman, still stuck in the traffic, overwhelmed by the stressful obligations of his bourgeois life and unfulfilled with his family and job. His wife and children are perfectly integrated within civilized society, the former serving as a constant reminder of Whiteman’s duties, the latter preferring television and commodities to the camp organized by their parents.

Ultimately, the whole family condition recalls Marx's concept of commodity fetishism (1867) (1990), especially appreciated by countercultural authors through Marcuse's elaboration in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), who believed that consumerism had commodified social relationships and values. And, indeed, job, bills and cars are the only topics of conversation between the couple. Bigfoot's kidnapping of Whiteman forcefully breaks this vicious circle and Whiteman is thrown again into the domain of Otherness, where the impulses he strives to suppress are freely displayed. In the end, if in *Zap*'s story Whiteman is unsure as to whether stay on the straight and narrow or abandon himself to the carnivalesque elation of the black parade, in "Whiteman meets Bigfoot" he decides to return to the forest and give free rein to his desires, adopting the 'hippie' looks he was mocked for once returned in the straight world, after the first kidnapping. Thus, in front of the crisis of the American civilization, the ending narrates the very rejection of society counterculture purported. Indeed, Roszak (1969) opposed the notion of technocracy, charged of corrupting modern society, to an idea of countercultural revolution starting from the abandonment of WASP values as a whole with the aim of recovering the bond with nature and among humans. As maintained by Charles Reich (1970), the revolution advocated during the Sixties promised "a higher reason, a more human community, and a new and liberated individual. Its ultimate creation will be a new and enduring wholeness and beauty — a renewed relationship of man to himself, to other men, to society, to nature, and to the land" (3). Crumb's poetics is deeply embedded in this anarchist, environmentalist and emancipatory discourse and the exploration of the contact zones between white men and their supposed counterparts — black, feminine, uncivilized—represents a leitmotif in his production. In this sense, both stories may be considered the epitome of some of Crumb's recurring themes and tropes, e.g., the dialectics between opposed worldviews, the fondness for black music and the fantasy of the big female. A very careful translation would therefore be needed in order to make all this intelligible to the Italian audience.

In Chapter 5, drawing on Pratt's theory (1991), Whiteman's comics were framed as the narration of a contact zone in an historical period when identities and paradigms were being renegotiated: the American social system was no longer seen as the best possible one; the WASP canon was jeopardized by the claims of increasingly pugnacious minority groups; family and job-oriented lifestyles were no longer the targets of younger generations. In this respect, isotopies served as guidelines to the hermeneutic process of thematisation of the manifold contact zone between Whiteman and Otherness, in which Crumb's irony emerges

with all his sharpness. Whiteman is supposed to live the so-called American Dream, in a country which self-proclaimed a beacon of freedom and land of virtually endless possibilities. Nonetheless, the isotopic path highlighted suggests how he actually is a self-repressed and frustrated individual. The price to pay for the only apparent freedom America granted him is the censorship of his inner self and, indeed, readers soon learn how, behind his 'true American' façade, Whiteman's primordial desires are hidden: lust and violence, Eros and Thanatos, are the actual dominant isotopies of the two narratives. Conversely, Otherness, in the form of blackness and wildness, is abhorred and marginalised by the dominant society, either imprisoned in the stereotyping and disparaging labels of 'nigger', 'beast', 'monster', or in an authentic cage in the case of Yetti. The very concept of Otherness is a 'square-world' construct which is rejected by the two categories supposedly antagonising Whiteman ("You jis' a NIGGER like evva body else!"). In the light of such multi-layered reading of this type of narratives, an 'all-inclusive' tool like isotopy certainly helps disentangle these interactions and analyse how they are rendered in translation. Given the textual density, it should not surprise that Whiteman is one of the most famous characters of the whole underground comix era and certainly one of the most frequently translated. Despite some not banal divergences in translation (e.g., the increased verbal violence in *Fallo!*, bizarre secondary isotopies emerging from the addition of new classemes), the disjunctive relationship between violence (the "kill" instinct) and frustration as well as the original dominant isotopies are somehow preserved in all translations. However, the most complex elements coming to define the nature of violence are lost on account of the normalisation and generalisation of language and the erasure of specific frames. Chapter 5 emphasised how the thematisation of sex was often hindered by censorious acts but no direct censorship of violence against Yetti was assessed. Likewise, in the present analysis, the original signification process shaping the racial opposition between Otherness (black people) and the 'square' world is reconstructed in translation, despite the isolated case of Milano Libri's reticence in using such explicit slurs as "negro".

In this regard, "Whiteman" represents a fair example of how Crumb's canonisation as a 'commedia sexy all'italiana' author should actually be kept at bay. Like in most of Crumb's works, here sex is presented in its most animal facets and primarily serves the purpose of developing a social commentary. In fact, "Whiteman" was also included in the anthology *R. Crumb's America*, a volume edited by Last Gasp in 1995, in which the author's most politically committed reflections on America's socio-political situation are collected – in comic form,

needless to say. Harvey Kurtzman, Estren maintained, was no fan of Crumb’s political tirade as they turned him into an “old-man *bore*” (177). And as argued before, underground comix were criticised in that they did not propose concrete solutions to social concerns, merely satirising the negative sides of cultural and countercultural lifestyles without providing practical alternatives. However, underground comix were willingly conceived as the *pars destruens* of a countercultural critique. In this respect, such works as Crumb’s “It’s really too bad” and “Let’s talk sense about this here – Modern America” are constructed as a series of panel negatively portraying American society and pessimistically foreseeing its apocalyptic future. The back cover of Last Gasp’s anthology stated that Crumb narrated “the failure of the American Dream”, the same American Dream Whiteman ultimately rejects in favour of a more authentic and unbound life at the margins.

These types of works did not meet the same popularity of Crumb’s humorous comic strips. For example, the nihilist narration of “It’s really too bad”¹¹⁶ was translated only in Quattrocchi’s *Fallo!* (6-10) and subsequently reprinted in Malatempora’s *Le Grandi Storie* (31-35). The comic strip is not conceived as an actual narration but as a series of screenshots of America’s decay. Each micro-story presents one of Crumb’s recurring topoi: on a visual level, military aircraft cutting through the sky, traffic jams, factories polluting the air, faceless humanoids hypnotised by the television, a sombre couple unable to dialogue, crowds of people on the street and lonely men at home, a pacifist wrestling with policeman, alienated men dreaming about headless (and identity-less) women’s bodies, a cheerful boy turning into a unhappy adult and a grumpy old man, the return to uncontaminated nature as the only way out of social decay and greyness. On a verbal level, *Fallo!*’s translation confirms the anthology’s tendency to increase the level of verbal violence, as exemplified by the following utterances:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>
Yes, it’s really too bad, the way things worked out... (96)	Va male, va male... è finito tutto in merda...(31)
I dunno..is it? Maybe it is a system... (98)	Non so... che cazzo... il sistema...(33)
...just sit and do nothing...(100)	...sedersi e non fare un cazzo... (35)

¹¹⁶ Originally from *Despair* (1970) and reprinted in *Complete Crumb Comics 6: On the Crest of the Wave* (96-100).

While Crumb's original texts are unexpectedly devoid of slang terms and swearwords, the changes occurring *Fallo!* may be accounted for by Quattrocchi's attempt to promote the publication as a harsh, irreverent and antagonistic countercultural magazine. Overall, the translator seems to share Crumb's sensibility. The reference to the "neurotic" (96) modern world is preserved ("è tutta una nevrosi", 31) as well as the author's fatalism ("Why go on living?" and "there's no escape", 97, translated as "inutile vivere" and "non c'è scampo", 32). In several passages, the story echoes Guy Debord's radical Marxist thought and, in particular, the ideas developed in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967): a veil of illusion is covering modern society and people no longer experience authenticity, since capitalism turned everything, including social relationships, into a commodity. Mass media and advertising shape people's way of seeing and thinking through spectacularising lenses and this fosters increasing levels of alienation. Chapter 2 investigated how countercultural rebels could escape this illusion through cognitive dissonance. However, Crumb's work seems to be disillusioned and pessimistic about such possibility, since the lumpen proletariat (an exaggeration for the working class being portrayed here) seems to have lost its cause, defeated by the mesmerising and standardising power of media and, particularly, of television, ("E per il lumpenproletariato non c'è più speranza?") and "real experience is replaced by fantasy. The individual is rendered helpless by impossible longings...". In this passage, the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism is clearly at the basis of the Italian translation: "Le esperienze reali sono sostituite da quelle prefabbricate. L'individuo è schiacciato da voglie di plastica". Neither the original nor the image (showing the aforementioned crowd of men thinking about female bodies) explicitly refer to 'plastic longings' and 'prefabricated' experiences. The translator is thus adopting an ideological frame recalling Marx's thought with an awareness possibly stronger than that of the original, which only alludes to this framework. In fact, the strip is quite disillusioned about the very possibility to espouse any ideology:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>
The workaday world must go on... be it capitalism... or communism... or any system or non-system... (98)	Il mondo del lavoro intanto va avanti! Che sia capitalismo...o comunismo... o un ismo o un altro ismo...(33)
Is dis a system? (98)	Cos'è un ismo? (33)
They seek security in movements and in the thrill of violating each other... (100)	Cercano appagamento nel moto, e nell'azzannarsi l'un l'altro... (35)

In the first two passages, where Crumb reveals his scepticism towards all systems, from capitalism to communism, the Italian translator replaces the notion of system with the suffix “-ismo” which is generally – and at the time used to be more frequently – applied to movements, doctrines and philosophies. Thus, the sentence maintains a general, anthropological scepticism towards any form of dogma, no matter if stemming from the square world or radical politics. In the following page, in the panel showing the brawl between a policeman and a pacifist, Crumb argues that movements grant security and thrill in violence. It is a strong statement from a member of the counterculture, as he is implying that many of his comrades are attracted by an ideal of communion found in antagonising other people rather than by a true commitment to the countercultural cause. In this passage, the Italian translation adds the classeme of «beastliness», already belonging to “Whiteman”, conveyed by the verb “azzannarsi”, as if movements were only another façade of middle-class society, moved by the same impulses. The verb increases the level of verbal violence of the text by adding a beastly, furious connotation to the panel, in line with the aggressiveness of verbal swearwords used by the translator.

Another tirade sharing the same feelings and “arthology” (Groensteen, 2007) of “It’s really too bad” is “Let’s talk sense about this here Modern America”, originally from *Arcade 2* (summer 1975) and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 10: Crumb Advocates Violent Overthrow* (1994, 98-102). In front of the slowdown and progressive trivialisation of the underground comix phenomenon in the mid-1970s, which was losing the original spirit in favour of a high volume of low-quality works, cartoonists Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith founded *Arcade* with the ambition of elevating comix to a more mature realm of adult comics with artistic and literary value. Crumb partook in this short-lived experience (seven issues in 1975-1976), and “Modern America” already shows the early signs of the post-smut revolution phase: images progressively leave room to long captions including personal reflections and self-caricatures of an angrier and more meditative Crumb replace his ‘horny’ extravagances and humorous punch lines. Of course, these traits will never be completely abandoned, as his art proved constantly evolving and reinventing itself.

“Modern America” was published in Italy in the sixth volume of *Totem* and in Mondadori’s anthology, in the “Biographix” section (104-108), i.e., only in publications aimed at a wider public. Starting with a quote of the Revelations about the Armageddon, it immediately expresses Crumb’s nihilism towards the future of the country he described as:

“America the cruel bully”, “America the glutton”, “America the greedy”, “America the ugly”, in combination with images showing war, obesity, landscape disruption and cityscapes ruined by aircrafts, advertising signs and traffic congestion. While Mondadori’s translation conceives America as “bullo crudele”, “divoratrice”, “avida” and “orrenda”, Totem opts for “sicario crudele”, “ingorda”, “verde” and “brutta”. The choice of “verde” instead of “avida” may be explained as a misreading of “greedy” for “green”, in combination with the image showing a forest soon to be destroyed to build new villas, which likely hypnotised the translator. The point of the story is that Crumb does not find anything to save in his homeland. Crumb criticises anyone, from capitalists all the way to radicals, white people as well as minority groups. He despises “these kids today” (translated by both as “Ragazzi di oggi”) who live “for the moment”, mistakenly translated as “per il movimento” by Mondadori: in 1975 the movement was already dismembering and Crumb was referring to the lack of future perspective of the new generation – in two years British band Sex Pistols’ *God Save the Queen*’s refrain “No future” will become the slogan of the punk subculture. Mondadori’s translator likely misread the noun and, unaware of what Crumb was actually criticising, translated the phrase as if it were a sign of his departure from the 1960s ideals. As observed multiple times, Crumb was no hippie and no radical and this very comic strip does not hide his contempt for radical ideologies. However, this milieu was Crumb’s affiliation and such criticism should be read as a symptom of delusion rather than of dissociation. When the author ironically tries to set his own political program, he finds himself overwhelmed by the high number of demands and protests, as portrayed by the dozens of contradictory signs waved in a march in the fourth page. Mondadori does not translate the signs, relying on the suffocating image of the crown the task of conveying the meaning of the panel, while, in this case, Totem is careful to translate each sign.

The actual alarm Crumb wants to launch lies in the “apathy and indifference” following this confusion (translated with “apatia e indifferenza” by both translators):

Original (107)	Totem	Mondadori (107)
Does America yearn for strict discipline? Are the people tired of hedonism?	Desidera l’America una rigida disciplina? È stufa la gente dell’edonismo?	L’America desidera una disciplina ferrea? La gente è stanca dell’edonismo?
Will a new great “leader” emerge to tell us what to	Sorgerà un nuovo grande leader che ci dirà cosa	Sorgerà un nuovo “leader” a dirci cosa fare?

do?	dovremo fare?	
We call for a return to the values that made this country great! And we mean business!	Noi vogliamo il ritorno di quei valori che hanno fatto grande questa nazione! E ci riferiamo al mondo dei soldi!	Chiediamo un ritorno ai valori che hanno reso grande questa nazione! Ovvero gli affari!

Both texts show a literal translation of the original text, with Totem even making use of the same interrogative structure (verb+subject) of the English version, which is not so common in Italian. On a content level, the passage signals the end of “hedonism”, i.e., the cult of pleasure which, to some degree, characterised the countercultural experience as well. The series of questions seems to imply a greater question, i.e., whether America is willing to sacrifice its freedom in favour of a new business-oriented dictatorship; and, indeed, the last panel of the story shows a clown with swastikas instead of eyes driving a car against the bottom of a woman. This seems to be the main concern of the author who, as suggested at the beginning of the narration, is in the middle of a “love me or leave me” relationship with his country – ultimately selecting the latter option and moving to France. This story even recalls a “make this country great” rhetoric which will be the slogan of Ronald Reagan’s and, more recently, Donald Trump’s conservative turn: the slogan “Make America Great Again” is extremely similar. Another point to be made regards the fact that both translators failed to reproduce the sense of the idiomatic expression “do business” – which is, “we are very resolute; we are very serious about this intention of ours!” – and rather focused on the isotopy of commercial business.

As for Trump, in the post-underground comix era, Crumb even created a comic strip against the current President of the United States. Indeed, in November 1989, he published “Point the Finger” in the third issue of *Hup*, republished in *R. Crumb’s America* in 1995 (83-88). He depicted Trump as “one of the most evil men alive”, “one of the more visible of the big-time predators who feed on this society” and argued that “this crass and venal character is so arrogant he seeks out the spotlight and publicly boasts of his disgusting exploits!” (83). A translation of the story can be found in Totem’s seventh issue with the title “Denuncia”. The aforementioned passages are translated as “uno degli uomini più perfidi che esistano”, “il peggior parassita che sfrutta la nostra società” and “questo personaggio volgare e cinico è così arrogante che arriva a vantarsi pubblicamente delle sue imprese ripugnanti”. After Crumb’s harangue against his illicit traffics and power abuses, there follow two endings of

the story: one in which Crumb is arrested, and another in which he wins the argument and Trumps is thrown into a toilette. The actual ending of the real-life story was impossible to foresee at that time. Crumb could hardly imagine Trump's candidature and his subsequent victory in the 2016 presidential race but hinted that his business-oriented mind-set and charisma could be attractive (in one of the endings he manages to seduce the two girls who served as Crumb's accomplices). In this respect, the analyses Crumb developed through the comic medium proved extremely accurate and not so far from the present situation. Under the façade of a trivial "sex-comics" author, he actually carried out a deep reflection and, in fact, even stories which, at first glance, may look like a jumble of casual sex, drug abuse and unjustified violence include *in nuce* a clever commentary of society. As stressed in Chapter 5 and 6, sex and drug-related contents have always paved the way for socio-political reflections, though this side of Crumb's art has been frequently overlooked. In translation, his works have been either forced into a wrong frame (e.g., 'commedia sexy all'italiana' and 1970s-80s pornographic comics) or simply selected so as to tailor more commercially viable products addressing an audience who look for easy solace and eschew in-depth multi-layered readings.

Going back to "Modern America" and extending these considerations to "Point the Finger", one may ask why such narration found their place in Totem and Mondadori, and not in underground magazines and alternative anthologies, such as Malatempora's *Le Grandi Storie*. The actual reasons are arguably impossible to know but it is likely that the latter did not specifically focus on comic strips so deeply engrained in the American context – even seemingly rejecting radical militancy as well as despising sexual/racial minorities – and privileged stories whose message could be easily widened onto the Italian underground niche audience. For the same reason, also a mainstream publisher – e.g., Mondadori – can legitimately publish a political work like this, since it is perceived as a satire against a distant and by now almost forgotten cultural system as the American one back in the 1970s. Even though Crumb's socio-political horizon is actually more universal and not necessarily focused on the US mid-1970s context, it can be presented as though it were. As for Totem, the choice should not surprise since such publisher, despite the questionable translation choices, tried to provide a honest overview of Crumb's multifaceted production with no distinction on a content level.

In general, it may be argued that independent publishers and translators focused on militant works fitting their causes, often exaggerating verbal violence, banalizing their targets and adapting contents to the Italian political scenario. Quattrocchi in the preface of *Fallo!*

explicitly argued that Crumb was “il più violento, irriducibile, incazzato e terribile” among the underground cartoonists and likely projected his own resentment and rage onto the American author’s comics: indeed, through its verbal violence and its harsh word choices, *Fallo!*’s translation exudes Quattrocchi’s anger towards all the “-ismi” of the Italian socio-political context. Conversely, mainstream publishers, more interested in the commercial value of such translations, provided translations which sometimes show too poor a background knowledge to fully grasp the subtleties of certain meanings and avoided any sort of political endorsement, thus omitting any *a priori* satirical edge. The next chapter will focus on one of the thorniest issues regarding the underground satire, i.e., religion, assessing how it was thematised in comix and thus imported into Catholic Italy.

Chapter 8. COMIX AND “COSMIK DEBRIS”¹¹⁷: INSIGHTS ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALISM

8.1. The Mystic Revolution: Enlightenment and Dark Sides

Religion represented a controversial issue within both the social thought of the counterculture and the underground comix production. The reaction to religious matter was twofold. On the one hand, young rebels despised all forms of bigotry and conservativeness. In particular, Chapter 1 highlighted the critical role the Catholic Church played in establishing censorship bodies (and self-censorship) regulating the contents of media and, in general terms, religious institutions epitomized the bastion of conservative American values. On the other hand, spiritualism and counterculture were not so closed-off. Prominent countercultural heroes such as Mario Savio of the Free Speech Movement and Tom Hayden of SDS were raised as Catholic, and it should be remembered that several radical priests (such as James Groppi, Malcom Boyd, Daniel and Philip Berrigan) joined the anti-war movement. Moreover, rebellion was conceived as a spiritual quest. Roszak's postulations showed a mystical verve as he declared that “[t]he stronger the mystical sensibility, the stronger the longing for anarchist brotherhood and sisterhood” (54). Accordingly, Anderson (1995) pointed out that “[a]s institutions and authorities appeared to be faltering, many asked: What is moral? What is amoral? Their answers and experiments took them on a voyage that ranged from Astrology to Hare Krishna, to LSD, to Taoism, to Zen-and back to Jesus”. (267). In point of fact, the problem lied in “established altars”, not in the lack of spiritualism. The Sixties even saw the emergence of underground churches, such as the Hip Protestants' Submarine Church Action Network in the Bay Area, the Christian Freaks' Living Room Coffee Shop in Haight-Ashbury, and the Jesus People, reuniting young dropouts and hippies unwelcomed by their parents with the promise that “Jesus loves you”. Underground churches aimed to preach a form of theology close to the primitive forms of devotion, but free of conservatism and formalities. Even the concept of deity was fluid, since, in their view, religion was a matter of discovering the inner self while experiencing such values as love, solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood. This spiritual quest often conflated precepts from different sources, from Western interpretations of Eastern philosophies, particularly Zen Buddhism and Hare Krishna's variant of Hinduism, to fundamentalist explanations of

¹¹⁷ Title of a 1974 song by Frank Zappa from his album *Apostrophe (°)*.

Christianity.

However, the experience of communes and the appeal mysticism had on hippies ultimately degenerated in the boom of religious cults. Brake (1985: 103-104) argued that, by the mid-1970s, about three million young people between eighteen and twenty-five years old were involved in over 3,000 cults (with different sizes and national or international links): these organizations revolved around the charismatic figures of gurus and self-proclaimed messiahs, who exploited the naive minds of thousands of homeless hippies, recruiting them with proselytism from the streets and promising a secure refuge, a communal life experience and the exploration of consciousness-raising techniques: “[c]ults provide meaning, direction, security and a purpose in life for those who found such things lacking in the wider society. By force, both physical and psychological, members surrender ties and relationships outside the cult” (ibid.). Cult followers were appointed to raise funds for the organizations and recruit new members. This was achieved by various forms: begging, preaching on the street, often offering sexual favors or, as Children of God’s leader David Berg called it, “Flirty Fishing”. The “law of love” was exploited and perverted by these messiahs, ultimately degenerating in a network of teen prostitution which tarnishes the name of many of the religious organizations born in that period (and in some cases still alive). To summarize Brake’s account on the topic (ibid.), subjugation and cult appeal can be illustrated according to the following keywords:

1. FAMILY: “Atomised individuals, often rootless and homeless, isolated from family or support networks, join a cult which becomes a substitute family, and indeed often calls itself by a familial name”.

2. ISOLATION: “Isolation occurs within the cult because information is strictly controlled as the recruit becomes absorbed in cult-related activities. A formal declaration renouncing the recruit’s previous life may be insisted upon”.

3. BRAINWASHING: “The recruit learns a new language, a new value system, and will often wear a new, distinct costume, all of which assists in the forging of a new identity. A different primary group combined with intense indoctrination literally programme the new recruit into the new life”.

4. DEPENDANCE: “A regressive dependence is encouraged, leading to an uncritical acceptance of the cult leader and his rules. One’s previous life is used to illustrate one’s previous lapses, and the symbolic universe of the cult member is systematically reorganised. The attention of the recruit is monopolised, pro-cult information systematically

reinforced, and resistance to outside influence taught”.

5. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: “Total acceptance is demanded, and this means total acceptance of material and sexual exploitation, in the sense that the male/female roles in cults are highly traditional, as is the division of domestic labour. Members then joyfully cooperate in their own exploitation”.

According to counterculture’s critics Heath and Potter (2004), it was paradoxical how so many hippies, while trying to break free from the rules of mainstream society, ended up in secluded communes recreating the oppressive systems they abhorred. The idea of communal living arrangements was grounded on mutual sharing and cooperation with no need of regulation, but ultimately led either to conflicts or to the reproduction of hierarchies. In a way, cults are considered one of the reasons for the failure of the hippie experience. As Anderson put it: “Whatever fantasies were being toked up that autumn, they floated away as the mainstream press broke a cold-blooded story from California: ‘Sharon Tate, Four Others Murdered,’ proclaimed the Los Angeles Times: ‘Ritualistic Slayings’. To many in the establishment, this was the beginning of the end of the hippies-and of the sixties” (271). When Charles Manson’s cult, known as The Family, was incriminated for the murder of five people, among whom was the director Roman Polanski’s pregnant wife, ‘square’ media and popular opinion promptly pointed the finger at the whole hippie world, with opinion polls indicating that hippies, together with Communists and prostitutes, were considered the most harmful groups in the nation.

Underground cartoonists’ position with respect to religion was mixed but, it goes without saying, always outspoken. Religion in comix was conceived both as thematization and as a set of recurring figures used to endorse a specific subversive, emancipatory and anti-establishment view. For the first time in the history of comics, underground artists focused on social criticism conveyed through personal experience, particularly through the representation of the clash between a self-righteous and conservative public dimension and individual emotions and inner drives. *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) by Justin Green arguably represents one of the most effective examples of this kind of works. Through brilliant use of cultural icons, fetish imagery, ingenious page composition and candid narrative, this work is a sort of confession box for the author’s battle as a child to unlock the chains of dogmatic religious indoctrination and attain mature freewill. This work is considered the first autobiographic graphic novel and revolutionized underground comix with an intimate turn, showing how the manifold nature of comics could be used for the

purposes of introspection and self-analysis. The protagonist is not a superhero, or a superhero's parody, but the author himself, struggling to conciliate the traumas caused by his rigid Catholic education and his urges and perversions. As the analysis of Robert Crumb's works will demonstrate, Green's work served as a model for the development of the second, more introspective, phase of Crumb's "poetics". It will also represent a source of inspiration for Art Spiegelman, who will explore the personal history of his family in relation to Hebraism. The point here is that comix, besides their hyperbolic and garish art, put on stage the thorny issue of humankind in connection with religiosity and its degenerations in a profound and intimate way. A generation in spiritual crisis, deeply shocked by the Vietnam War experience, could easily relate to Green's work, as well as to the whole current of autobiographical comix which will develop during the 1970s.

Among the recurring satirical representations of religious themes, several underground cartoonists independently created stories on the Incarnation of divinity and its return to the modern world to save humans from their state of decrepitude; however, whenever Jesus Christ attempts to preach sentiments of love and brotherhood, his message is always misinterpreted, even mocked by those who paradoxically claim to be true believers and blindly follow the holy scriptures, though ultimately eschewing their moral teachings and failing to recognize the Messiah. This motive recalls the poem "The Grand Inquisitor" included in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880). And this was also a leitmotiv of the period as demonstrated by Anderson's quote of a hippie claiming: "[d]id you ever happen to think what would happen if Jesus were to come down to earth again. What would the typical American think? He would probably be thinking, 'Look at that disgusting hippie. Probably high on something, preaching peace, happiness and goodwill'" (268). Among the authors dealing with this topos, Frank Stack, with the pen-name of Foolbert Sturgeon, rewrote several parables and episodes from the Gospels in his witty satirical comics *The Adventure of Jesus*¹¹⁸, started in 1961 while serving in the army, and then continued while finishing the master's degree at the University of Wyoming, in Laramie. Jesus closely resembles a hippie, with the sense of humor and the feelings of a man, his same

¹¹⁸ The early *Jesus's* strips were published in counterculture publication *The Austin Iconoclast* and *The Charlatan*, in Shelton's fanzine *The Rag* and the University of Texas humor magazine *The Texas Ranger*. Shelton subsequently edited a single volume (in only 50 copies), whose clandestine copies were printed in the law school library in 1964 with the title "The Adventures of Jesus by F.S.". Shelton and Jaxon's Rip Off Press then published Stack's works in three issues: *The New Adventures of Jesus* (1969), *Jesus Meets the Armed Services* (1970) and *Jesus Joins the Academic Community* (1972). In 2006 Fantagraphics published the collection of Jesus's adventures in *The New Adventures of Jesus: The Second Coming*, which included unpublished works by the author.

thoughts, fears and misadventures. But in the world of pharisaic America, actual Christian values are not accepted and collide with the cult of pragmatism of those who mistake Jesus Christ's message for a 'free love' freak slogan. Many stories end with Jesus beaten up by folks or cops, with obvious political subtexts. The Army experience was crucial for Stack's development as an underground cartoonist: "I had a lot of fury pent up at being in the Army, and was feeling very anarchistic at the time. [...] Jesus's behavior represented a perverse, but very personal rationale for me, and I used to chuckle to myself as I did the stories" (quoted in Estren, 1974: 165). Another fundamental aspect which influenced Stack's production is the already-mentioned conservative climate of the Bible Belt, in which such magazines as the *Ranger* were besieged by censorship – e.g., the entire staff of the 1961-62 *Ranger* was fired for using an illustration with the f-word in an article on freedom of the press. In Texas, in particular, religion was at the center of social and political life. For this reason, the author claimed that his religious cartoons had a social function: "[w]hen I first started drawing Jesus cartoons, I was young and I sort of believed in the power of satire. I wasn't necessarily trying to get people not to believe in a religion. It was all right with me if that happened, but that's not what I was trying to do. What I was trying to do was encourage people to question" (interview with Jim Ottaviani, 1996: 99). The underlying feeling beneath his satire was ultimately the disgust towards the conformism and the uncritical and biased acceptance of dogmas which caused social discrimination and made people lose sight of any spiritualism and ethics.

Always in Texas and always in the "Texas Mafia" milieu, in 1964, Jaxon published a 42-page comic book entitled *God Nose (Snot Reel)* — playing with the pronunciation "God knows's not real" — which collected hilarious philosophical discussions between God and humans on the hot topics of the day, from birth control to racism, even questioning his own conceptions. The comic book was representative of the artistic ferment in Austin, especially regarding religious belief, whose rigidity was incompatible with the counterculture in bud: "God Nose is my own personal 'dance of death' between the old Puritanic value system and the new, emerging cosmic consciousness" (interview with Bruce Sweeney, 1980: 5), the author claimed.

As for the notion of 'cosmic consciousness', comix truly shared a certain vein of that peculiar form of mysticism which characterized the whole counterculture. John Thompson¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ His titles include *The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You* (1969), *Kukany Comics 1* (1969; "Kukawy" is a Greek word meaning Cyclops), *The Book of Raziel* (1969), *Tales from the Sphinx 2* (1972) and *Eternal Comics* (1973).

is arguably the most famous cartoonist working specifically on this topic. The comic medium, in his view, represented a non-conventional tool to communicate his message and express his mystical ‘trips’:

In *kingdom of heaven is within you comix*, I played with trying to avoid the usual Cartesian rational linear sequential mode of cognition. Western mystical systems are invoked in juxtaposing patterns which resolve the polarity between SET & RANDOM. The usual structure of Cartesian systematics is transcended for an attempt towards infinite statement. I am conscious of the fact that these works can serve as a mirror to the self-principle. The viewer as relative evaluator puts the value into these things. Thus they are mirrors of consciousness. Some people think they stink. Some folks think they hold great cosmic truth. Some think them obscene. Some are bored. Some are scared. Your reaction to them is relative to your frame of mind. This is obvious. (quoted in Estren, 172)

Underground artists also brought their irony into hippie mysticism: Jay Kinney, for example, created *Mysticism for you and me* to joke around psychedelic induced mysticism, which he was familiar with. A unique figure in the field of mystic comics is Zap collective’s Rick Griffin who became a Born Again Christian. His conversion was documented in *The Man from Utopia* (1972) and permeated his comics and psychedelic poster production until his tragic death in a motorbike accident in 1991, his last work being a self-portrait entitled *Heaven’s Gate*. Griffin managed to balance his religious persuasions and his iconoclastic art, Christian symbolism and sexual undertones. On the other hand, other artists’ use of irony was sharper, especially when directed to religious extremes. In general, as Estren stressed, “the underground cartoonists’ social satire is always directed at one topic: people and their human frailties” (168). In this sense, human bigotry, narrow-mindedness and blindfold reliance on perverted religious or pseudo-religious institutions are questioned, rather than spiritualism per se. The harshest criticism was directed not against faith as a whole, but rather against its exploitation, “against people who pervert religion for their own personal gain, or who have forgotten the basic precepts of brotherhood and loving your neighbor in their urge to wave the American flags and Bibles at anyone wearing a beard” (ibid.: 164). The problem did not lie in believing in a God or being atheist, but in the use of religion as an instrument of control, exclusion – rather than inclusion – repression and censorship.

In Italy, the disregard towards such works as *God Nose* and *The Adventure of Jesus*, in which the reference to Christianity is explicit, may be explained in the light of Lefevere’s (1992) idea of “patronage” as “the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature” (15). Patronage covers three elements,

ideology, economics and status, which interact with each other and influence the distribution of a work. In this case, the translation of these texts may be obstructed by the lack of patronage by the Catholic environment as well as by the radical left. Just as conservative groups may deny their support to comics satirizing religion, the orthodox, Marxist and atheist Italian milieu may have overlooked these authors on account of their maverick attitude, which does not condemn religion as a whole and rather offer an amusing – and amused – parody of the theme. The feelings behind these works are not blasphemous or desecrating per se and, transcending comics, have to be interpreted according to the cultural frame of that time, particularly of such experiences as the Church of the SubGenius, founded in the United States with parodistic intents, mixing Lovecraftian mythology and Christian references – their main deity being the extraterrestrial creature Jehovah 1. Such artists as Crumb and Shelton's collaborator Paul Mavrides are notorious supporters of the Church, but the climate of goliardery surrounding religion was all-encompassing. In general, American multiculturalism favoured a certain emancipation and freedom of belief, which tolerated other confessions and prompted spiritual quests – either ludicrous or committed – beyond the Protestant and Catholic faith. In Italy, however, given the influence of the latter in secular matters, the issue of religion was tackled with less amusement and more anger and resentment. It is a hot field of debate and, as such, while sex was easily welcomed within the goliardic frame of the 'commedia sexy all'italiana', religious satire was appreciated as long as it fitted a frame of open contestation and dissent: a laugh *of* the caricature of Jesus, not *with* it, a joke *about* the word of God, not *through* the word of God. By extension, what happened to much of the underground religious satire resembles the fate of Monty Python's sketch comedy, still underappreciated in Italy, despite its artistic quality and worldwide success. Indeed, their anarchy and resistance to any form of authority and artistic constraint perhaps increased the difficulty to position them within a fixed frame and could not win the sympathy of either conservative or radical groups.

Going back to underground authors, the absence of translations of religious satire by such authors as Jaxon, Stack and Green does not mean that Italian translations are devoid of religious references. However, by looking at what types of works tackling the issue of religion were translated in Italian, one should argue that only works of denunciation or, conversely, works free from religious satire were printed. In this regard, it was already mentioned that Mondadori published Crumb's *The Book of Genesis* in 2011 and the original pages were displayed at the 2013 edition of Venice's Biennale. However, this work does not belong to

Crumb's underground production and provides a literal transcription of the Bible's verses. Far from being a biting satire of the Holy Scripture, Crumb's *Genesis* is a work even the conservative fringes could easily appreciate for its artistic value.

8.2. Hard-Knocking Crumb: Violence and Religion

As for Crumb's comix translated into Italian, his position towards religion is rather peculiar, since he directed his satire against both fundamentalisms – he was scarred by the rigid Catholic education he received as a kid – and counterculture drifts, particularly gurus (as epitomized by the character of Mr. Natural) and cults.

References to Christianity are generally present as part of broader narrations. For example, Savelli's *Fallo!* translated "It's Really Too Bad", originally from *Despair* (1969) and collected in *The Complete Crumb Comics 5: Happy Hippy Comix*. In one of the panels presenting the decadence of the modern world, Crumb develops the abovementioned *topos* of the Incarnation of divinity returning to Earth to save humans from their collapse. The idea underlying the panel is that Christian values are not accepted and collide with the cult of pragmatism of those who mistake Jesus Christ for a hippie. As the compositional meaning analysis of images suggested, the information value changes with the shift from the centre to the margin, from the most salient position (occupied by Jesus, surrounded by a halo) to the collateral figures (the men menacing him). This structure, as well as the *topos* represented by Crumb cannot but homage a similar panel included in Frank Stack's *The New Adventures of Jesus: Some Other Comings* (1968) – unpublished in Italy – in which Jesus, even in this case saliently positioned at the center of the panel and surrounded by a glowing halo, returns to Earth only to be surrounded by armed cops screaming "Off the street, hippie!", excrements and trash of the street. All these elements return on a graphic as well as verbal level in Crumb's work. In particular, the texts recite:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>
Caption – Saints have come to show us 'the way' only to have their asses stomped into the dirt!	I santi che sono venuti per darci l'esempio ci hanno lasciato le penne!
Beat th'shit out of him!	Menalo, menalo!
Fucking queer!	Stronzo pederasta!

Goddamn weirdo beatnik commie!	Sporco drogato capellone comunista!
Jesus – Peace, my brothers!	Pace, fratelli!

In the caption box introducing the cartoon, the reciter establishes an opposition between the classemes of «divinity» (“saints”) and «goodness» (“the way”) and the classemes of «vulgarity» (“asses”), «violence» (“stomp”) and «dirt» (“dirt”). By contrast, the Italian caption opposes the classeme of «death» (“lasciarci le penne”) to the classemes of «divinity» (“santi”) and «goodness» (“l’esempio”). On a connotative level, the clause clearly refers to the sacrifice of Jesus, crucified to expiate humans’ sins, rather than emphasising the humiliation he would suffer from having his ass” stomped into dirt.

Moreover, in the original, the opposition divinity-vulgarity and goodness-dirt is followed by a chain of disjunctive isotopies within the cartoon: on the one hand, the figure of Jesus, as well as his salient position at the centre of the cartoon surrounded by the halo on a compositional level, his sign of peace on a proxemic level, and the balloon reiterating the concepts of peace and brotherhood partake in the isotopy of “goodness”; on the other hand, the verbal violence of such expressions as “beat”, “shit”, “fucking”, “goddamn”, the aggressive facial features and the posture of the men, typical American white males, surrounding Jesus create the isotopy of «violence» opposing that of «goodness». On a metaphoric level, the panel construction suggests how «goodness» (at the centre – with a greater information value) is surrounded by «violence» (at the margin – with a lower information value). In this case, in Italian, the disjunction is preserved, with the goodness of Jesus opposing the violence of those who scream “menalo”, emphatically repeated twice, and call him “stronzo”. Here it is interesting to question the epithets referred to Jesus: in the original he is called “queer”, “weirdo”, “beatnik” and “commie”. In Italian, he is called “pederasta”, “sporco”, “drogato”, “capellone” and “comunista”. The classemes of «homosexuality» (“queer”, “pederasta”) and «politics» (“commie”, “comunista”) remain, though the English version is less formal and prefers slang terms. The Italian version uses a much more literary “pederasta” instead of a more appropriate slang slur (e.g., “frocio”) and does not have an equivalent for the abbreviation “commie”. However, as for the translation of “weirdo” and “beatnik”, *Fallo’s* version opts for the classeme of «dirt», conveyed by the adjective “sporchi”, which is connected to a reference to drugs and to the term “capelloni”. The latter corresponded to the way the Italian beats were identified, recognisable for their long hair symbolising their non-conformism just as the American hippies. The term “beat”

was well known and used within the underground environment, devoid of any derogatory meaning since it was used by the people revolving around the magazine *Mondo Beat* (1966-67)¹²⁰ and adhering to its principles. By contrast, “capelloni” was often used by “square” society to mock their look. Going back to what emerged in Chapter 6 as for drugs, the addition of the term is rather interesting as, in Italian, the quality referred to Jesus is that of being a drug addict, with all the (countercultural) connotations of (self-) marginalisation and rejection of society, as epitomised by the following pages including the story “Ducks Yas Yas”.

What this panel seems to suggest is that Jesus shares the same experience counterculture’s members did. Crumb’s satire is not directed against the religious figure per se, but at those who use violence against Jesus (just as against any of his countercultural comrades) and then possibly claim to be true Christians, blatantly showing off their faith.

In this regard, a whole comic book was dedicated to the denunciation of the hypocrisy of orthodox Christianity and Church, i.e., *Tale from the Leather Nun* (1973). The comic book collects stories by Dave Sheridan, Robert Crumb, Jaxon, Spain Rodriguez, Pat Ryan, Roger Brand, and it can be considered the peak of blasphemy ever reached within the underground scenario, arguably competing only with Wilson’s *Felch Comics*. Despite the solid work made by all these authors, the only story translated into Italian is Crumb’s “The Adventures of R. Crumb Himself”, also published in *The Complete Crumb Comics 9: R. Crumb Versus the Sisterhood* (1992), which was included in Totem’s *Crumb Comics 6* (1999). The story starts with the caricature of Crumb singing “Jeeziz loves me this I know for thum Bible tells me so”, from the Christian hymn “Jesus loves me”, while having a quiet walk. For all the narration, Jesus is always called “Jeeziz” by the cartoonist, though this is not preserved in translation, with the exception of the hymn left in original – a choice likely accounted for by the impossibility to maintain the same satirical effect in Italian without making use of dialectal items (e.g., “Oggesù”) which still do not share the same effectiveness of the original. He finds the writing, “National School of Hard Knocks” (above a swastika and a dollar symbol), which he think of as “a good place”. In Italian the balloon translates the sign as “Scuola nazionale di colpi duri”, defined “interessante”, rather than relating it to the classeme of «goodness». In the subsequent panel, cartoon-Crumb is taken in by a menacing nun, who kicks him before a policeman, a judge and a seemingly refined middle-class man, claiming: “Here’s a new kid!

¹²⁰ For a review on *Mondo Beat* and further insights on radical and alternative magazines see Enchaurren and Salaris (1999), particularly Chapter 4 and Chapter 7.

Work'im over good!". The Italian translation is "Eccovi un nuovo alunno! Trattatelo bene!". The classem of «goodness», reiterated in the original, appears in the translation as well. The disjunction emerges as, in addition to the nun, Crumb is also beaten by the three men. As violence escalates on a visual level, on a verbal level the men list all the virtues the "kid" should learn, from honesty, respect, love, etc.: on an isotopic level, verbal and visual figures, respectively reiterating the thematic isotopies of «goodness» and «violence», creating an oxymoron which is preserved even in the Italian version. The story develops in a longer sequence of panels the very disjunction already sketched out in the abovementioned panel from *It's Really Too Bad*. In addition, here cartoon-Crumb is treated as a student who must learn the precepts required to be a good citizen. However, his "graduation" ("diplomarsi") consists of an emasculation with an axe, held by the nun while reciting the Lord's Prayer. At that point, Crumb's submissiveness turns into an outburst of violence, paying off in spades what the incarnation of justice, police, bourgeois prudery and religion made him suffer:

Original	Totem
'fraid not bitch!	Non ti temo, puttana!
Here's one for Jeeziz! Eat nun's brains ya dirty slob!	E questo in nome di Gesù! Mangiate cervello di monaca, brutti bastardi!
This gives me a hard-on!	Ora faccio sul serio!
Take your "education" and shove it up your rectum... like, sideways! Wow! Wot a fuggin' bummer!	Tenetevi la vostra "cultura" e mettetevela nel culo! Che schifo di storia!

In these passages, Totem's translation detaches from the original in several points. For instance, the first excerpt differs in both the higher register of the character ("fraid not" versus "non ti temo") and on a thymic level, since the translation introduces the disphoric emotion of fear, whereas the original uses "fraid" in the ironic sense of "regretfully" (therefore, the disphoric emotion of regret). In the subsequent panel, Crumb has decapitated the nun with her own axe and throws her head to the three men who previously tortured him. The scene is depicted with graphic detail and the speech balloon claiming "Here's one for Jeeziz!" is translated with no sign of omission by Totem, both on a visual and verbal level. However, the balloon where Crumb admits to be aroused by such a violent act is erased and replaced by a very different: "Ora faccio sul serio". The explicit reference to the sexual

sphere is cut from the scene, thus censoring the blasphemous provocation.

This point is crucial in the hermeneutic process of translation of Crumb's work. In his analysis of violence in comix, Estren (141) raised an interesting point. Such theorists as G. Legman in his *Love and Death* (1949) argued that comics lingered in a continuous representation of graphic violence to sublimate the sexual urges repressed by American conservative culture. Legman opined that violence excesses are but a consequence of sexual censorship since "there is *no* mundane substitute for sex except sadism" (9, emphasis in the original). This posture, as previously argued, is grounded on Freud's theory of repression, according to which primitive sexual desire are suffocated in a pressure cooker, ready to explode with potentially disastrous consequences. What Estren highlighted is that violence in comix should have dwindled on account of the sexual freedom they have at their disposal. Conversely, as demonstrated in several examples, it is precisely in the light of such lack of restrictions of the medium that violence reached some frightening degrees: in part as a reaction to the 'castration' of the EC line as well as of all institutions limiting individual freedom, in part since the world outside the comic grid was far more savage, underground works constantly coupled violence with sex; they were not substitute but rather 'partners in crime'. Erasing the bond between Eros and Thanatos, excluding the former and not the latter, is part of a censorious act towards underground production. The attack directed at religious authority is sharper precisely on account of the sexualisation of the violent act. Just as highlighted in Chapter 5, sex, in his crudest and most visceral form, was used to provoke, to annoy and to disgust self-righteous – yet no less sadistic – minds. In this case, the omission conforms this trend of blackening sexual urges in favour of gratuitous violence.

The last page of the story shows Crumb running away while denigrating "education". Totem, in this case, refers to a broader and all-encompassing notion of "culture". Just as seen in 4.2, the expression "wot a fuggin' bummer" is a good example of drug-related slang ("bummer") with the lexicalised pronunciation of "wot" and "fuggin'". In Italian version could not find an equivalent, though the classem of «negativeness» is preserved by "schifo", and the expression "che storia" is frequent in the Italian youth slang. The story ends with Crumb finding a weapon-dealer, selling him a bomb to the explicitly Nazi headquarter of "education" (the swastika symbol is at the centre of the tympanum on the front of the temple-like building) and then enrolling to the "School of Hard Knockers" ("knockers" being a slang word for breasts), creating a pun with the previous "School of Knocks". Totem retranslates the paratext as "Scuola di colpi duri", missing the wordplay and as Crumb admits

to be “a male chauvinist pig”, turns him into a “fottuto nazionalista, un porco”. The inconsistency between him being a nationalist – in translation – and having just bombed the headquarters of ‘square’ culture just as a Weatherman Underground would have done is completely overlooked. The balloon showing him naked with two girls is left uncensored on a visual level, unlike the past blackening episode. The balloon, however, is turned into a militarist sentence: “Ehi, pupè! Dov’è che ci si arruola? La marina mi chiama!”, whereas the original balloon recites “Hi gurls!! Where do I enroll?” and adds the salivary onomatopoeias “slaver” and “drool”. The change made in-text explains the change of “chauvinist” into “nazionalista”, but the modification is as severe as the former omission of the sexual reference of the previous page. Crumb is neither militarist nor nationalist. And this is a fact. Moreover, he is responding to an emasculation attempt of his cartoonish alter-ego, i.e., an attempt to repress his sexual urges, with his overt sexualisation and his self-denunciation as a “chauvinist” and a “pig”. The modification made by the translator is likely the result of a negligent reading of the original text (e.g., the possible confusion between the multiple meanings of the verb “to enroll”) as well as of the lack of the adequate frames to interpret Crumb’s poetics as well as of a shared sensibility of the meaning-making processes behind the comic narration. The translator merely aimed to give a catchy, humorous ending to the story. The image was deemed self-sufficient and the verbal component was likely considered redundant. It did not matter whether Crumb was a chauvinist or a nationalist since the image was funny per se and fitted the frame in which Crumb’s comics were forced into, i.e., the funny stories of a ‘naughty kid’ – a comic version of Alvaro Vitali’s Pierino, protagonist of a series of ‘commedia sexy all’italiana’ films – rather than a committed author. However, beside casual violence and nudity, the corrective abuses of authorities only served to (literally) strip naked his inner violence (the beheading and the bombing) and deviant impulses (the enrolment in the “knockers” school). As such, the story is a charge against the education system, especially the Catholic one, not a call for enrolment in the marines.

Crumb himself refers to the story as a way to vent “that pent up childhood rage towards the nuns”, since he suffered from the strict discipline of the Catholic school he was sent to as a child:

I had such a heavy Catholic brainwashing when I was a kid and I’ve been dealing with it ever since. It doesn’t ever completely go away, no matter how intellectual you become later. [...] Remember the movie *The Exorcist*, that came out in 1973? [...] I felt really stupid, but it got me in such a deep way that I realized that I’m not past all that Catholic crap at all (Holm, 2004: 197).

Even in his 1980s works on self-analysis, Crumb included his Catholic upbringing – and the repression of desire preached at school – as one of the factors accounting for his psychosis and sexual deviancy. In *My Troubles with Women*, originally from *Zap Comix* 10 (1982), he dedicates a panel to the memory of a nun praising his behaviour with a holy card. The work itself is presented as “Another ‘true confession’ by your favourite neurotic cartoonist” and, in the panel in question, he maintains that “Catholic school added new twists to my psyche”. As a sign of the popularity of this work, three different translations of the passage exist, edited from Acme’s *Io e le Donne*, Totem’s *Crumb Comics* 1, and the more recent Comicon’s *Le Donne*:

Original	Acme	Totem	Comicon
Another ‘true confession’ by your favourite neurotic cartoonist –	Un’altra ‘vera confessione’ dal vostro fumettista nevrotico preferito –	Un’altra ‘true confession’ del nostro disegnatore nevrotico prediletto...	Un’altra ‘confessione sincera’ dal vostro fumettista nevrotico preferito...
Catholic school added new twists to my psyche...	La scuola cattolica turbò di brutto la mia psiche...	La scuola cattolica mi arrovellò ancora di più il cervello...	Le scuole cattoliche non aiutarono di sicuro...

The influence of Catholicism is evident since the first sentence in which Crumb refers to his story as “true confession”, the term “confession” being connoted with a religious undertone. Here it is interesting to notice that Totem left the term in English. This choice may be linked to a desire to establish a contact point with the cinematographic (e.g., *True Confession*, 1937, translated as *La Moglie Bugiarda*; *True Confessions*, 1981, translated as *L’Assoluzione*) and literary (e.g., John Gregory Dunne’s *True Confessions*, 1977, translated as *Verità Confessate*) tradition. In this case, however, Totem’s intervention does not affect the meaning of the text. All three translations preserve the reference to psychoanalysis conveyed by the adjective “neurotic” (“nevrotico”). Indeed, in the image below the title Crumb’s caricature is narrating his story to a Freudian-like therapist. With a debrayage, the narration shifts to Crumb’s childhood, in which he recounts how his personality was “unsavory” (“strano”, “morboso”, “sgradevole”) since the beginning. What worsened the situation was his enrolment into a Catholic school, charged with the “new twists” of his psyche. Just as “unsavoury” was translated with

“sgradevole”, here Comicon completely removes the reference to neurosis and psychoanalysis, despite being crucial to the understanding of the story. The translation maintained that Catholic schools did not help, yet there is no actual charge of the worsening effect they had. The antecedent translations were more careful with this crucial notion, referring respectively to “psiche” and “turbare”, and “cervello” and “arrovellare”. The paradox is that, while Crumb perceived his personality as negative, the nun awards him for his positive behaviour and a halo is drawn above his child version’s head. A last element to emphasise is that a caption box close to the nun’s cross signals that that is a “dangerous weapon”, translated as “arma pericolosa” by Acme and Totem, and “arma letale” by Comicon, with an unavoidable reference to the homonymous action film saga. Both attributes describing the cross as a “weapon” and “dangerous” share the classeme of «violence», reiterating the isotopy which characterises believers in all of Crumb’s comics dealing with the topic of religion. Worshippers, not religion per se, are inherently violent. Crumb points the finger at them and at their perversion of religious precepts.

In this regard, *Thrilling Murder Comics* (1971) included Robert Crumb’s four-page infamous work “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” in which he illustrated his satire against gurus’ and cults’ violence and sexual exploitation, mixing the reference to the Rolling Stones’s homonymous song with a personalised version of Charles Manson’s Family. The result is one of his most misogynistic stories he ever created – which caused the anger and the total disapproval of feminist cartoonists. In his dialogue with the Phantom Psychiatrist, Estren maintained the idea that in comix “sex is violence” (141) – though not necessarily the other way around. In comix, the protagonists never make love. Sex is always, irremediably, violent. A postulation quite poignant, especially because it refers to a period in which the power of love was supposed to heal a rotten system. For the underground artists, love did not exist, if not in the form of primitive, lewd sexual intercourses. And communes, cults, gurus preaching their “Power of Love” messages were most likely charlatans talking advantage of naïve minds of young dropouts.

The story of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” presents in four pages the technique the guru uses to recruit a new member and the escalation of violence leading to a carnage of young girls following his orders. The first, powerful splash page presents an extreme close-up a Jack’s face. The caption introducing the story sounds extremely provocative:

Original	Totem
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He's here! He's here! After nineteen hundred and seventy years of blasphemy against Christ... all the shame... all the guilt... they can't hide it any longer! It's the Second Coming! It's... JUMPIN' JACK FLASH!	Eccolo! È lui! 1970 anni dopo la crocefissione di Cristo... quella infamia... quell'oltraggio... è impossibile continuare a negarlo! Lui è tornato! Lui è... JUMPIN' JACK FLASH!
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In the original, the text begins with an emphatic anaphora “He’s here! He’s here”, not reproduced in Italian. An even more consistent change is that the original refers to a period of “blasphemy” against Christ which lasted 1970 years, arousing such emotions as “shame” and “guilt” now that the Messiah’s Second Coming has arrived. On a thymic level, the pathematic condition the reciter refers to are disphoric passions, both being durative from the point of view of aspectuality and relating to a not-being-able-to (undo) modalisation. The translation not only does not refer to “blasphemy” in general but to the specific moment of Christ’ crucifixion, it also changes the passional states involved into “infamia” and “oltraggio”, still disphoric ones, but terminative and relating to a wanting-to (offend) modalisation. This also modifies the attitude towards the new Messiah: while the original text conveys a pathemic sense of mortification for the blasphemy and the sin ingrained in humankind, one which is ready to outburst, the latter refers to a specific offence caused to Christ, at a given moment in a given time – which is even chronologically inaccurate since Christ was crucified when he was 33 years old, not in year zero.

Below the title, Jack’s face and his hallucinated eye look directly at the viewers, i.e., the sinner who should repent. The interactive meaning of images according to Kress and Van Leeuwen’s model, image act, social distance and perspective were taken into account. As for the former dimension, considering represented participants’ gaze direction, it was argued that, if they look directly at the viewers’ eyes (Demand), a vector establishes a visual form of direct engagement between the two parts. In this case, the Demand position of the character is emphasised by the oversized dimension of his eyes, staring at the readers with a mesmerising power. A sustained, direct eye-gaze is perceived as powerful and elicits strong responses in the interactive participant, including fear. The power of direct gaze is perhaps unmatched by any other non-verbal cues, influencing power relationships between the participants. Jack is trying to hypnotise readers, addressing them directly, through his words as well as through his eyes. As for social distance, it was related to the different sizes of frame,

in this case a close-up, demolishing the figurative distance between the character and the readers: indeed, the closer the represented participant, the greater the engagement of viewers. Finally, the perspective of the image, i.e., the angle towards which represented participants are viewed, is neutralised: the image is Objective, with a directly frontal angle which suggests that the participants are on an equal power level. Kress and Van Leeuwen even maintained that the viewers are disregarded in Objective images, as their aim is to reveal the essence of the represented participants.

Below him, the girls participating to the cult are represented in adoration of what they consider “god”. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen’s model, conceptual representations define the structure of represented participants. In particular, classificational processes establish a (in this case overt) taxonomy in which a set of participants play the role of Subordinates (the girls) with respect to another participant, the Superordinate (Jack). This type of conceptual arrangement connects the Superordinate and the Subordinates through a single-levelled tree structure, with an oversize Jack towering over the smaller figures of the adepts, fully hypnotised by his charisma. Indeed, his words aim to be even more mesmerising, a sort of mantra which he is going to repeat over and over to his recruits gazed with those very hallucinated eyes: “I am Jack and Jack is me... all are one... you are me... you are Jack... Cease to exist... Kill the ego... become nothing... become me...”. The translation of this passage, just as of several other mantra-like balloons, selects some of the orders Jack gives and omits others: “Io sono Jack e Jack sono io... tutti siamo uno... tu sei io... tu sei Jack... cessa di esistere... uccidi il tuo ego... trasformati in me...”. In this case, not only such phrases as “Jack is me” and “you are me” are poorly translated (“Jack sono io” and “tu sei io” are inadequate and lose much of the mystic/esoteric connotation of the original) but the imperative “become nothing” is also omitted. In the balloons, the references erased often regard the core of the philosophy behind Jack’s cult, i.e., Freudian thought: “forget Self... forget ego...”; “I am mindless”, “highest state of being”. Some other references are reduced “mindless cosmos” simply becomes “cosmo”, “I am the mindless one... death is ego” becomes “Ma sono impura”, completely replacing the focus of the clause. Such central notions as “egolessness” and “self-realisation” are turned into “depersonalizzazione” and “illuminazione”, the latter being not wrong per se but losing the critical classeme of «identity». Rather than deliberate censorship, even in this case the translator’s lack of adequate frames of interpretation caused the loss of crucial information for a full rendering of the new Messiah’s mantra, all revolving around the killing of the ego. Just as the translation

choice “illuminazione” is far from being wrong, the cuts do not hinder the comprehension of the message, since the ego is still mentioned, but denote the lack of adequate frames of interpretation and the negligence in developing a thorough philological work. Since Crumb’s art in Italy is immediately connected to sexual contents but not to their psychoanalytical dimension, often disregarded in translation, Totem’s translator did not pay attention to such notions as “ego” and “self”. However, what misses is the rhythmic cadence of the repetition of these terms, willingly hammering and redundant, as part of a hypnotic process. Some flaws on the level of reading the texts (e.g., “accept the truth” becoming “eccetto la verità”) seem to confirm a certain negligence in the translation process, as if the translator was the first to be hypnotised by the drawings, thus overlooking words. Since images are fully explicative of what is going on, Jack’s mantra may have been deemed superfluous, almost ancillary to the graphic reproduction of the spiral of violence and sex characterising the core of the story. Indeed, while all dialogues simply repeated the same phrases, on a visual level, after the powerful first page, the crescendo of action was proceeding at a different rhythmic pace, with a rapid escalation of ‘smut’ going on. The translator may have considered unimportant the literal rendering of all the mantra, though what is cut off is actually the core of Crumb’s poetics. Fortunately, by looking at the keywords regarding the creation of cults which were listed at the beginning of this chapter, all the sentences framing the method of entrapping of the cult’s recruit are preserved, though often with weaker, more synthetic solutions:

- Family: e.g., “Come... you are now one of the family!”; “Vieni! Ora farai parte della famiglia!”
- Isolation: “Give up everything...”; “Tira fuori tutto...”, though in this case the Italian text diverges from the original; “Cease to exist...become one with me”; “Ora cessa di esistere...sii uno insieme a me”
- Brainwashing: e.g., the syllogism: “I am the Messiah...you are me... therefore, you are the Messiah...” and the consequent answer “I am the Messiah...”; “Io sono il Messia... tu sei io... perciò tu sei il Messia...” “Io sono il Messia...” (though, as stressed above, the choice “tu sei io” is debatable).
- Dependence: e.g., as he prepares to receive a fellatio while seating on the naked body of another girl used as a throne: “And now, as an act of submission and Christian humility, I shall feed one of you”, “E ora come prova di umiltà Cristiana darò da mangiare a una di voi!”; “Only total submission brings total bliss!”, “solo la sottomissione da totale beatitudine!”.

- Sexual exploitation: girls are forced to eat faeces (“I shit on your face”, “Eat of my shit”; “Adesso caco sul tuo viso”, “Assaggiata” – a translation choice which erases the Eucharistic connotation of the original), perform a fellatio (“taste the very essence of the life force”, “riceverà l’energia vitale”), and they kill each other with a knife while he abuses all of them (dead and alive).

The final panel, after the carnage is accomplished under the mantra “love is death”, shows Jack on the top of a pile of dead bodies, all raped as indicated by the seminal fluids on their genitals – which in this case are not censored graphically. He is still abusing one of the bodies, spreading the girl’s legs so as to form a sort of triangle together with the balloon over his head. He is saliently at the centre of the triangle and once again looks directly out of the page with a smile. His balloon recites:

Original	Totem
I am you... anything you see in me is you.. when you can admit that, you will be free... I am just a mirror...	Io sono te... tutto ciò che vedi in me è in te... io sono solamente uno specchio!

The look he gives to the interactive participants matches his declaration of complicity. The readers, he said, are just like him, equally manipulative, violent and deviant. They just need to admit it and free themselves from any constraint. This last point, however, is omitted in translation, consciously or not. In this spiral of violence coupled with sexual abuses, what offended most was the victim-blaming caption box included below the panel in which the reciter maintains that this story ultimately proves that “women are no goddamn good”, translated as “le donne, perdio, sono un vero disastro”. The blasphemy “goddamn” is rendered as a simple oath “perdio”, but the provocatively anti-feminist message is kept. Overall, Totem’s translation are characterised by a selection of the content to render. The translator constantly seems hypnotised by the power and magnetism of Crumb’s images, leaving them a dominant role in the process of signification, while utterances are generally translated without the necessary attention. Again, words are treated as ancillary appendixes, as if they could not add much to the narration. However, in the clever use of words and witticism lies the key to interpret Crumb’s images beyond their superficial graphic impact. Besides, the criticism towards women, Jack’s story is a story of abusive manipulation, of

perversion of psychoanalytic basic rudiments to achieve the control over naïve, impressionable minds. This issue recurs with endless variations in Crumb’s comics, since his early works. Thus, his translations cannot overlook the evolution of a poetics dating back to the first apparition of Mr Natural (*Yarrowstalks* 1, May 1967).

As for the latter, with his yellow tunic clearly reprising the Yellow Kid, and a sardonic attitude resembling the other ‘divine’ frolicker God Nose (preceding Mr Natural of a few years, since its publication date is 1964), Mr Natural is one of the most famous characters born from Crumb’s pen, who conceived him as a caricature of the prototypical gurus widespread in America during the Sixties. His stories frequently focus on the satire of spirituality and faith, filtered through the witticism of the yellow-vested sage.

In a comic strip published for the *East Village Other* in February 1968, entitled “Mr Natural Meets God”, and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 5: Happy Hippy Comix* (1990), the guru, following a car accident, goes to Heaven, where the Christian God himself is waiting for him. The strip was published in Italy already in 1973, as part of Milano Libri’s *Head Comics*, with the title “Mr Natural vede Dio”, and subsequently republished by Stampa Alternativa in 2004 (28) and Comicon in 2017 (38), both entitling it “Mr Natural incontra Dio”. As he is in the presence of God, he claims:

Original	Milano Libri	Stampa Alternativa	Comicon
Well, I’ll be a son of a gun! So you’re God!	Bene, e io sarò un mascalzone! Così lei è Dio!	Beh, che io sia dannato! Così lei è Dio!	Beh, che mi venga un colpo! Così tu sei dio!

The original expression “son of a gun” is a colloquial epithet with a friendly connotation. Among the different translations, Stampa Alternativa’s version stands out for the use of the phrase “che io sia dannato”, inserting the claseme of «damnation» in a discourse about deity and Heaven. Even from this simple choice, the provocative nature of the publication is evident. Comicon’s pun generated by “che mi venga un colpo” is triggered by the fact that Mr Natural is supposed to be dead, whereas Milano Libri provides a translation closer to the original. Despite God’s welcoming attitude Mr Natural defines Heaven “corny” and “outdated” as a concept, translated as “sdolcinato” and “antiquato”, “sdolcinato” and “datato”, “una roba già vista” and “sorpasata”, respectively. While all translations agree in the rendering of “outdated”, “corny” according to OED can be defined as “rustic or

unsophisticated; tiresomely or ridiculously old-fashioned or sentimental; hackneyed, trite; inferior”. As such, both “sdolcinato” and “roba già vista” grasp one of its meanings, yet the adjective also possesses a connotation of ridiculousness and inferiority in its being clichéd. Of course, God reacts by kicking the guru back down to Earth and then condemning him to Hell.

Mr Natural’s spirituality is the alternative to such a hackneyed concept of religiosity. In another seven-page story simply entitled “Mr Natural” and originally published in *Mr Natural 2* (1971), the same year of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”, Crumb presents Mr Natural’s cult, the Mr Naturalists, in opposition to the Snoid’s cult, the Snoidians. In addition to Comicon’s (2017: 119-25) dedicated anthology, the story was translated in Savelli’s *Fallo!* and Totem’s *Crumb Comics 5*. In a box next to the title, Mr Natural presents himself as “I am the greatest!”. While Totem and Comicon opt for “Sono il migliore!” and “Sono il più grande!”, Savelli magnifies the religious implication: “Sono io, il vero Dio”. As for Mr Natural’s followers, the Mr Naturalists, *Fallo!* calls them Mr Natural Fans, while the others opt for Misternaturalisti. They define themselves as “interns”, which is translated as “quelli che hanno la luce”, “iniziati”, “tirocinanti”, the latter arguably representing a term too modern to be referred to a Sixties’ cult. They offer to the new recruit a glimpse of the guru’s messages, such as:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Totem	Comicon
It’s really fun, and such a good feeling to save a “bunky” from his or her “shoes”! (Book four, chap. 12, vs. 7-16).	È divertente e da un senso di gioia salvare il fratello e la sorella [Libro quarto, cap. 12, vv. 7-16]	Si,uno si sente felice quando “salva un’anima caduta nel fango” (Libro IV, cap. II, vs 7-16)	Non è solo divertente, a ti fa stare bene, quando togli un “babbione” dai suoi “stivali”! (Libro 4, c. 12, vv. 7-16)
This month’s slogan is “Rap with the working people!”	Lo slogan di questo mese è: “Parliamo con la gente che lavora!”	Lo slogan del mese è: “Salviamo le masse lavoratrici!”	Lo slogan del mese è: “Andare verso il popolo!”

In the first excerpt, the noun “bunky” refers to “one who shares a bunk with another”, which in prison slang comes to define the “cell-mate”. In this sense, interestingly, *Fallo!* emphasises

the classeme of «nearness» with “fratello e sorella”. Totem renders the classeme of «transgression» with “anima caduta”, which also shares the classeme of «sacrality» with the verb “salvare”, thus creating an isotopy of religion, also emphasised by the Bible-like bibliographic reference. Comicon’s solution rather stresses the classeme of «dumbness» of the people, omitting the verb “salvare” in favour of “togliere dagli stivali”, i.e., remove from the usual condition: the impression is that Comicon’s text is more inclined to keep comic aspects thus overlooking any social message. Even in the subsequent passage, the slogan clearly mimics a prototypical radical and pro-Marxist catchphrase which *Fallo!*’s translator, sharing an akin sensibility, renders as “Parliamo con la gente che lavora!”, which sticks to the original message, despite the elevation of the register with the translation of the slang “rap” with “parlare”. Overall, Totem’s translation is akin to the English original, though “masse” is a term which is often negatively connoted. Comicon uses the generic noun “popolo”, omitting “working”, which obviously is politically connoted and thus essential to the understanding of Mr Natural’s credo. Indeed, the cult opposes the pro-Nazi cult of the Snoidians, which displays a swastika in their flag. Among the insults with which the two groups address one another:

Original	<i>Fallo!</i>	Totem	Comicon
Mr Naturalists – Those id worshippers! Perverts! Criminals!	Quegli adoratori dell'id!!! Pervertiti! Criminali!	Quei maledetti criminali razzisti!	Quegli adoratori dell'id! Pervertiti! Criminali!
Snoidians – Haw! That bunch of wimpy-simpy faggio- queeros!	Ah, quella setta di stronzetti pederastini maledetti!	Bene! Ecco quei luridi froci e figli di puttana!	Haw! Quel mucchio di frocetti frignoni!

In the first passage, Totem’s version is the one detaching most from the original: as occurred in several other examples, such as the aforementioned “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”, the reference to psychoanalysis is omitted as a whole: the Mr. Naturalists are charging the Snoidians of perversion due to their worshipping of the “id”, the source of human’s basic, instinctual pulsions, of their aggressive and sexual drives. As stressed before, the Snoid is the embodiment of darkest side of Crumb’s mind. And the very notion of release of the id is a

core theme of the countercultural thought, or better said of a part of it. The opposition between militant Mr Naturalists, devoted to the spiritual ascent and the proselytism to the working people opposes a cult based on violence and depravity. However, once again, Totem translator's attention was drawn to the image, rather than to the words of the original. And since the image of the swastika undoubtedly recalls Nazism and racist violence, the whole sentence is turned into "Quei maledetti criminali razzisti!". In this case, the translator performed an intersemiotic translation, rendering through the verbal code what the image conveyed, at the expense of the contents of the original text. By contrast, the derogatory epithets referred to the Mr Naturalists are the recurring insults often encountered whenever the 'square' world addresses the hippies. Since the "id worshippers" thought of themselves as strong, violent and virile, their counterpart was labelled as "wimpy-simpy", "faggo-queero": given the negative connotation associated to homosexuality as anti-virility, all slang terms share the classeme of «weakness», coming to connote the whole 'hippie-like' cult. In this case, *Fallo!* opts for a series of diminutive "stronzetti" and "pederastini", adding the classeme of «damnation» with the insult "maledetti". Conversely, Totem uses the harsher "froci" and "figli di puttana", adding the classeme of «dirt» with the adjective "luridi". Comicon, in contrast, translate the terms as "mucchio di frocetti frignoni", in which the adjective "frignony" renders the English "wimpy", underlying the fact that crying is a sign of weakness. As for *Fallo!* and Totem, interestingly, weakness comes either with damnation or with disgust, the latter entailing one of the isotopies most frequently found in underground texts.

The humorous outcome of the story is that both Mr Natural and the Snoid, in front of the brawl between the respective cults, decide to leave for the desert. Neither is interested in politics or on the establishment of an actual cult, and they were rather enjoying making fun and possibly take advantage of their own worshippers. Therefore, as soon as the quarrel began to be serious, they both abandon their devotees and leave.

8.3. "Hung Up On A Dream"¹²¹: Translating Richard Corben

The dichotomy between id-worshippers against "naturalists" developed in Crumb's Mr Natural's strip is also at the core of Richard Corben's "When dreams collide", originally from *Up From the Deep* 1 (May 1971). The story revolves around the collision between

¹²¹ Title of a 1968 song by The Zombies, included in the album *Odessey and Oracle*.

ideologies in an oneiric dimension, in which the thorny issue of the coexistence of religion, counterculture and id come to the fore. Richard Corben is a master of horror comix and, among others, collaborated to such titles as *Slow Death* and *Skull*, as well as to his own anthology *Fantagor*. In this seven-story his gory imagery and sophisticated art serve the purpose of bringing to life the discrepancy between the sanctimonious Christian rhetoric and the mistreated hippie reality. The narration follows the encounter of a priest and a young hippie girl in a dream they happen to share after falling asleep on the same bus. The priest, victim of his own God complex, wears a super-hero costume with the capital letter “G” on the chest and begins a carnage of people he deems pagan sinners. By contrast, the hippie girl conceives the same oneiric dimension as a sort of Eden, where she can roam naked among animals and plants. The reckoning between the two climaxes with her slapping the priest to stop his aggression, waking up both of them and revealing the man’s true colours as he verbally attacks her in front of all the other bus passages.

Despite the controversial theme of religion, the graphic violence in the dismemberment of sinners, and the exhibited nudity of the full-figured girl, the story was published in the July 1976 issue of the magazine *linus* (title: “Quando i Sogni si Scontrano”), without explicit censorship of images and with a translation displaying a shared semantic sensibility between author and translator as for the rendering of the religion-violence coupling. In point of fact, violence is expressed by the visual code, whereas the verbal one is appointed to describe the supposedly holy mission of the priest, thus establishing a disjunctive relationship between words and images. The translator was appointed to render the key-words referring to the sacral nature of the priest’s mission, in opposition to what he perceived as “pagan”: the priest claims that is “holy duty” is required since “the universe is rotten with evil sin”, i.e., what he refers to as “pagan rites”, “graven image”, “corrupted” bodies, “pagan witch”. In Italian all these key-words are rendered: “sacro dovere”, “l’universo è corrotto dal peccato”, “riti pagani”, “idolo”, “corpo corrotto”, “strega pagana”. A powerful panel in which the priest self-proclaims himself as God is translated preserving all the impact of the original: the muscle-bound superhero, with his fists high towards the sky, still dripping the blood of his victim, shouts: “Priest man?... I’m not a priest man; I’m GOD”, with the word “God” drawn in an oversize font occupying much of the balloon and of the top portion of the panel. In Italian, the text is: “Un prete?... Io non sono un prete.. sono DIO!”. Even the same ellipses and punctuation are preserved in the translation of the most poignant panel of the story, with the man, releasing his unconscious desire in the

dream-sequence, claiming his divine nature. The lettering of “God” is redrawn to render the Italian “Dio”. The editors of the magazine intervened on a visual level on the paratext of the story, by changing the title in the Italian equivalent, trying to reproduce the original wavy font, and by replacing the letter “G” with “D” in the priest’s super-hero suit.

Though the opposition religion-paganism is adequately rendered and matches the graphic depiction of violence and abuses of the priest, the underlying signification pathway referring to the psychoanalytical dimension of the story is not fully grasped by the Italian translator. In point of fact, the whole narration is clearly influenced by Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, 1961). In general, as previously highlighted in several examples, the hermeneutic frame of psychoanalysis is often missing in the Italian translations. This occurred to Crumb’s comics, as well as to Corben’s work. For instance, the notion of “id” is replaced by a more widely understandable “io” in the following passage:

Original	<i>linus</i>
You poor fool! That is just a figment conjured up by your twisted id!	Povero scemo! Questa è solo l’immaginazione del tuo io contorto!

In the original, it is explicitly described how, in the real world, the priest tries to conceal his inner drives behind a seemingly benevolent attitude. However, dreams are the place where the id takes the lead, not the “io” in general. This dream-dimension is connoted by the classeme of «fantasy» (“figment”) and «magic» (“conjured up”). Therefore, nothing is real. And the priest is called a “fool”, which could mean “scemo” as in translation but also recalls the domain of insanity, precisely because he can no longer distinguish what is real from what is imagined. His id overcame his ego, i.e., the component of the psyche acting according to the reality principle to mediate the id’s drives. Therefore, the translation of “id” is essential in this excerpt, whereas “io” is a more general concept which does not encompass the full meaning of the original message. And the collision between reality and dream, between ego and id, causes the final outburst of verbal violence in the real world:

Original	<i>linus</i>
God damn you bitch!	Maledetta puttana!

In original, the blasphemous swearing “God damn” represents a violation of a religious

taboo, i.e., taking God's name in vain. Indeed, as Melissa Mohr (2013) explained in her analysis of swearing in English: "The third commandment doesn't just forbid false or vain oaths, however—it prohibits any abuse of God's name, any reference to him that is not respectful, that doesn't acknowledge his majesty" (62). In the dream, the priest dismembers with his bare hands two boys just for having violated the commandment with the exclamation "Oh God!" and, therefore, the translation of the blasphemy in Italian is essential to render the disjunction between the priest murdering supposed sinners for pronouncing God's name (though in a vain oath with no blasphemous intent), and the priest swearing in the end. However, in Italian the blasphemy is replaced by a sexual slur, according to a frequent trend in Italian translation, which will be detailed below.

The choice to publish this work in ultra-Catholic Italy during the 1970s still represents a sign of the turmoil of that time, in which the political commitment of certain groups required a detachment from Catholicism. As for comix, the position of such underground artists as Crumb, Corben, Stack and Jaxon, does not involve a proper condemnation of religion as a whole. What was rather on the stand was the attitude of clergymen, nuns, believers, their conformism and the uncritical and biased acceptance of dogmas which paradoxically fuelled violence, caused social discrimination and make people lose sight of any spiritualism and ethics.

8.4. Taking *His* Name in Vain: Blasphemous Translations

In Italy, when dealing with religious contents, the underground/alternative scenario seemed to have a proclivity for blasphemy rather than for an unbiased, thought-provoking reflection on the topic. Just as American comic arts swung between censorship and blatant display of sex, in Italy the theme of religion, at least as for the selection of comix translated, was either disregarded or subjected to a biting satire and crude blasphemy, rather than sensibly investigated. This is especially true for *Stampa Alternativa* and *Malatempora*, which printed such controversial works as "The Felching Vampires Meet the Holy Virgin Mary" (included in the third issue of *Snatch*), "Angels & Devils" and "Wanda and Tillie featuring Jesus Christ" (included in *Sporche Storie*) all by Wilson, and magnified the blasphemy of dialogues in all their publications, increasing the verbal violence of swearing with respect to the original.

As for "The Felching Vampires Meet the Holy Virgin Mary", the story is part of the infamous *Felch Cumics*, which on the original back cover proudly proclaimed to be "Lower

than *Snatch*". As seen before, such fanzines as *Snatch* and *Felch* made use of disgust to desecrate all taboo topics belonging to the American culture. In "Shit Hell Fuck" by Robert Williams the creation of people was associated to the sexual intercourse of a "mais turd" and "vaginal mucus". In the present story the (rectal) birth of Christ is related to the rape of the Virgin Mary by a couple of vampires, and Christ his self is said to be a vampire who actually died with a wooden stake into his heart. Jakini's 1996 edition of *Snatch* included this story in an uncensored version. The original title recalls Justin Green's "Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary" and in a footnote Wilson explicitly pays homage to the comic book. In Italian, the title is left in English, with a translation above the first panel: "I 'Felching Vampires' incontrano la Santa Vergine Maria". All the first panels, in which the vampires Bramley and Wetzl (in Italian Igor and Vladimir) are raping and draining a girl, are constructed with clear Christian reference in the background, full of crosses formed by wooden stakes and even with a man casually crucified behind them. All serve as a premonition of the subsequent events: while Joseph and Mary are having a walk, the two vampires decide to rape the latter, realising that her halo indicates that she is a virgin. On a linguistic level, all scenes are described with clinical detail and translated accordingly, no sign of omission or mitigation being detected. For instance:

Original	<i>Snatch</i>
Mary – Oohhh and that funny feeling... what can it be... Oh! Oh!	Oohhh che curiosa sensazione... ma cos'è... Oh! Oh!
Vlad – Just enjoy it or I'll brain ya with this rock.	Fa la brava o ti apro la testa con questa pietra.
Igor – Now that you're all bound and gagged you can watch ol'Wetz and I dip our wicks into both ends of your flustered squeeze. Not to mention some blood-suckin' and felchin'...	Ora che sei legato e imbavagliato per bene guarda il vecchio Vlad ed io come lo ammolliamo nei buchi bagnati della tua bella, per non parlare dei litri di sangue e del felch...

A first element which may deceive a translator is the adjective "funny", usually associated to amusing occurrences. However, as the OED explains, the adjective in its colloquial uses can be considered "Odd, peculiar, strange; interesting, surprising, unexpected", but also "Unusual in a way which causes suspicion or unease; deceptive, dishonest, unethical; (also)

inappropriate, improper”. The Italian translation for the term is a neuter “curiosa”, without connoting either negatively or a positively the phrase. In general, the scene is rather comical, considering that in front of a rape and murder menace, Mary’s reaction seems too collected, almost unflappable, suggesting naivety rather than actual fright. As for Vlad’s threat, the original imperative is “enjoy”, while in Italian the phrase “Fa la brava” is closer to the meaning of “Behave”: given the attitude of the Holy Virgin, this choice emphasises even more her naivety as she is treated as a child rather than as a woman. In the last excerpt, the phrase “dip our wick” becomes “ammolliamo”, both sharing the claseme of «liquid». By derivation, the latter likely influenced the translation of “both ends” with “buchi bagnati”, creating an isotopy of liquidity, which is consistent with the dominant theme of the anthology, i.e., the sexual practice of felch – defined by the OEC as: “to remove orally semen ejaculated into the anus of (a partner)” – which is nominated in the subsequent line together with the blood-sucking activity typical of vampires (still reiterating the isotopy of liquidity). A last element to comment is that the Italian version omits the translation of “flustered”, which defines her being confused and caught off-guard – a condition consistent with Mary’s reaction – but is also used as a slang form to indicate sexual frustration, which may therefore mock Joseph’s implied inability to satisfy her. It is possible that the translator decided to omit the term in the impossibility to disambiguate it. In any case, the overall signification is clearly reproduced and the story reaches one of the highest level of blasphemy of a content level in comics.

Wilson reserved no kinder treatment to Jesus in his comics. “Wanda and Tillie featuring Jesus Christ”, originally from *Zap* 6 and republished in *The Mythology of S. Clay Wilson – Demons and Angels* (31-32), is a two-page story narrating how a pair of lesbians, while looking for a male partner to satisfy their urges with (the poster of Shelton’s Fat Freddy looks at their sexual intercours with fright), ultimately kill their friend Howard and abuse his dead body, after he refused to open the door and interrupt his sexual intercourse with another woman. With a debrayage, Wilson shifts the narration to a panel completely decontextualized with the rest of the story, featuring Jesus, clearly recognisable for the halo, the crown of thorns, the tunic and the long hair. On a visual level, he is shown from behind, while performing a fellatio to Satan, whose genitals and torso emerging from darkness are the only thing visible, since he is a giant. The caption recites: “In the time/space warp, Jesus Christ gave head to Satan”. The Italian translation of the panel is: “Nel frattempo, G. Crysto si arrende a Satana...”. Two elements are worth noting: on the one hand, the name of Jesus Christ is

written with a different spelling, either with a mocking intent or to mitigate the blasphemy of the scene omitting the full name – though it is still clearly recognisable; on the other hand, the explicit action “gave head” is translated as “si arrende implies Christ’s defeat by Satan after witnessing the depravity on Earth. It is also possible that the translator mistook “give head” with “give up”, though. With an embrayage, readers return to Wanda and Tillie’s storyline, and show one of the women performing a fellatio as well, in this case to Howard’s dead body. A parallelism between the two scenes is constructed, downgrading the figure of Christ to human immorality. To make things worse, before and after the “time/space” shift, women during sexual intercourses screamed “Christ!” (literally translated with the profanity “Cristo!”), thus implying that he was evoked (and present) all along. The replacement of the verb add a connotative dimension of struggle to the narration, conveyed by the homonymous claseme inherent in the verb “arrendersi”. The image is appointed to express sexual meaning with graphic detail, while words aim to communicate that, in the struggle between Good and Evil, the latter always win in Wilson’s world: indeed, Jesus ultimately gave in to temptation and sinned, just as humans did. Chapter 3 mentioned Borodo’s (2014) investigation on the translational transformations of original texts due to the influence of images and, in particular, on the strategy of expansions. Borodo maintained that liberal translations often introduce new meanings which were not expressed by the verbal mode, but are consistent with the visual mode and the meanings conveyed in the original text. In this case, though weakening the blasphemy inherent in the sexual act, the translator’s change of the verbal component disambiguates a crucial element in the text, i.e., the fact that Jesus failed in his redemption purpose, a fact which is just as blasphemous as the original. In addition, through the support of the visual device, no meaning is completely lost. However, Malatempora’s edition is affected by the poor quality of the print, which renders the scene slightly dark and difficult to grasp in all the original detail. Of course, this is not an episode of blackening, as the sexual act is still visible, but in this and other panels, low quality hinders the appreciation of Wilson’s work.

Following the same thematic development, in Malatempora, “Angels & Devils” (originally from Zap 6 and republished in *The Mythology of S. Clay Wilson – Demons and Angels*, 23-30) presents a slice of life in Heaven and Hell, between those who follow the ten commandments – though with a certain malice – and those who transgress them. The story is not reprinted in its full version and only a selection of five out of eight pages are printed.

In fact, the focus of the publication seems to be giving a glimpse of the author’s blasphemous art rather than narrating stories.

In full Wilson’s tradition, devils are here presented as depraved and libidinous creatures:

Original	Malatempora
A gaggle of devils lounge about, a few torturing a tart... others babble with fetid breath at each other, sceming acts of future evil.	Una ghenga di demoni sgavazza... alcuni torturano una puttana,... altri si raccontano skifezze orende alitando <u>fetore</u> ...progettando misfatti... hi hi hi...
Elsewhere, timid martyrs were forced to suck the canes and walking-sticks of the devils’ elders	Altrove, timidi martiri vengono costretti a sukkiare mazze e bastoni dai demoni più vecchi
At a party, we find a whole slew of devils, bowing and scraping before another, as if he were God.	A un party, troviamo una ghenga di demoni, che ne adora un altro, come se fosse Dio
Shoot a cross and you win a Bible to wipe your dismal ass with... hee huk	Chi becca la croce vince una Bibbia per pulircisi il culo! Ha ha!

The first excerpt from a caption box shows how the devils’ foulness is magnified in translation. The verb “babble” is translated with “si raccontano skifezze orende”. Among the meanings of “to babble” suggested by the OED, “To talk excessively or inappropriately” and “To utter inarticulate or indistinct sounds” seem the most adequate for this sentence, also in the light of the scene showing them mumbling about putting fishing hooks on candies for children. The Italian translation translates “babble” as a generic “raccontare”, but adds the object “skifezze orende” which is absent in the original. The expression shares the classemes of «disgust» which, as we know, forms part of the dominant isotopy of disgust characterising all of Wilson’s opus. The writing of “skifezze” with the “k” instead of “ch” is part of the translator’s idiolect. As previously stressed, this can be related either to a youth slang popular in Italy after the spreading of telecommunication (especially SMS and the Web) or to the deviant ortography adopted during the Years of the Lead with a contestatory purpose (e.g., “Kossiga”). This phenomenon is evident even in the subsequent passage, in which the verb “succhiare” is written in the form “sukkiare”. The misspelling error “orende”

instead of “orrende” is another idiolect form used by the translator in several passages of the anthology, and thus cannot be considered a typo. It is possible that the translator wanted to recreate the demon’s mangled language and extended its use to the reciter, to emphasise the “babbling” style of the whole comix. In addition, in the phrase “fetid breath”, the adjective is surrounded by stylised rays, creating a sort of halo which emphasises the salience of the repelling word, also partaking in the isotopy of disgust. Another element to notice, is that the Italian caption ends with a laugh “hi hi hi”, as if the reciter was giggling at the scene, being an accomplice of the devils’ spitefulness. Likewise, in the last balloon included in the table, the demon’s verses “hee huk” are translated as a laugh “ha ha”, emphasising the mischievous nature of the giggling demons, and making them comical rather than evil characters, though, as exemplified in the abovementioned excerpts, they are guilty of a series of blasphemous act towards martyrs and God himself. In this regard, with the exception of the omitted adjective “dismal” referred to “ass”, all sentences are thoroughly translated, a sign of the shared semantic sensibility between Wilson and Malatempora’s translator as for the rendering of the intertwined relationship of disgust and profanity, the latter being thematised by such figures of the raped timid martyrs, the desecrated Christian symbols of the cross and the Bible, and the reference to the adoration of a false idol. The translation of the phrase “bowing and scraping”, meaning “to show too much politeness or attention to someone” according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, with “adorare” is an interesting solution as the Italian verb features the classeme of «sacrality», establishing a disjunctive relationship with the profane act taking place on a visual level, since the devils are adoring the genitals of a huge demon.

As for the daily routine of angels, their sanctity is undermined by not-so-hidden impure thoughts, especially concerning God:

Original	Malatempora
I’ll kiss his feet and lick between his toes...	Gli bacio i piedi e glieli lecco fra le dita!
I’ll blow his horn so hard his eyes will become vacant and then... Greek poetry...	Glielo succhio così forte che gli vien fuori il bianco degli occhi!!
I’m gonna request punishment with this whip soaked in Yak come...	Mi farò punire con questa frusta imbevuta di sborra di Yak!!
You’re so far out God!	Dio picchiami!

Ooooh! My Christ bleed on me ... ohh!	Ooooh!! Cristo! Sanguina su di me! Ohhh!
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Even in these excerpts, on the whole, the translator provided a literal translation of the original balloons. An exception can be found in the second passage, in which the phrase “Greek poetry” is omitted and “his eyes will become vacant” is rendered with “gli vien fuori il bianco degli occhi”, with a clear allusion to the while and the “coming out” action of seminal liquid. This solution seems to suggest an increase in the emphasis put on the sexualisation of God and angels with demystifying purposes. Indeed, being sex an impure act, the correlation of sexual deviancies with religion serves to outrage the latter. By extension, the exclamation “You’re so far out God!”, which in the original uses a typical 1960s slang adjective as an attribute of God, is replaced by “Dio picchiami!”, turning the relation between God and the angel in a BDSM intercourse, just as in the passage above, in which another angel hopes to be whipped. On a visual level as well, angels are no less corrupted than demons, sharing many of their facial features, their bad habits of smoking and drinking beer, and the huge breasts in the case of females, wearing provocative, almost transparent tunics. Ironically, Wilson describes them “indulging in no merriment” (translated as “mica si divertono”). In point of fact, angels do not linger in the pleasure of the flesh simply because they seem masochists, preferring to be punished by God and worship him with lewd flattery. In Italian all these elements are magnified in translation, stressing the blasphemy inherent in the story whenever possible. Moreover, in the last example considered, the phrase “My Christ” in the sentence “My Christ bleed on me” is turned into an ambiguous “Cristo!” which could be an invocation as well as a swearword in Italian. As regards swearing, the story is not devoid of explicit curses, casually pronounced by the devils:

Original	Malatempora
Christ on a crutch!	Cristo in croce!
Jesus H. Christ!	Gesù bambino in croce!
Motherin’ fuckin’ Christ shit! Ooohh Felchin’ Mighty!	Porca di una porca Madonna in croce!
Goddamit!	Col cazzo!
Sufferin’ Jesus!	Yargh!
Pretty good Goddamned head...	Un pompino mica male!

In the original, four curse words regard Jesus Christ, while the other two are variations of “Goddamn”. In Italian, the translator opted for a humorous rendering of swearing through an epistrophe. All curses end with “in croce”, applied to Jesus Christ and to the Virgin Mary. The other swear words are changed into vulgar comments or onomatopoeias. However, this is far from representing a censorious act. It rather points at emphasising even more the epistrophic construction of the first three expressions and, on the contrary, Malatempora’s anthology in some cases seem to purposedly add blasphemous phrases, even when absent in original, to increase the provocative power of the stories. Two “Star-Eyed Stella” stories well exemplify this trend, the second being available in comparison to Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap* translation (analysed in Chapter 5):

Original	Malatempora
Sonnabitch nnnnggg Goddamn fuggin bitch!! (172)	Puttana Madonna! Aghh!!
Jesus! Fuck! (132)	Cristo! Che cazzo!
Shit fire! (134)	Cristo!

Original	Stampa Alternativa	Malatempora
Holy shit! Bad ass news!	Dio cane! Brutte nuove!	Cristo sekko! Dio maiale!
Two more guards, and a pair of nasty ones!	Altre due guardie, e di quelle pessime!	Altre due guardie e guarda che facce di cazzo!
Good Christ!	Cristo Santo!	Gesù Cristo!

These excerpts show how both translators magnified the use of profanities and blasphemies¹²². In general, in English swear words revolving around deity are not as harsh as in Italy¹²³. Such expressions as “Holy shit” and “Good Christ”, as well as the aforementioned “Goddamn”, are not equivalent in meaning and connotation to the Italian “Puttana Madonna”, “Dio cane”, “Cristo sekko” and “Dio maiale”. As Mohr stressed:

People use the divine name today in imprecations like “God damn it, he took my parking space!” or a simple “Jesus Christ!” upon, say, surveying the wreckage of a living room

¹²² The former include words such as “damn”, “hell” or using the name of God in vain (Kaye et al., 2009: 7). The latter, instead, are direct offences against religion, e.g., “goddamn” (Jay, 1992: 3).

¹²³To delve into the research of English swearwords, see Hughes, 1991 and 2006.

after four toddlers have passed through. And nearly everyone uses “Oh my God” (helpfully shortened in text-speak to OMG). These are not oaths per se, but they still misuse God’s name, calling on God for trivial purposes or in demeaning circumstances. As with the Host’s oath, these words have been more or less emptied of content, of what linguists call “referential meaning”—they are nonliteral uses. It doesn’t matter, though, that most people who use these phrases don’t intend to dishonor God. (62)

Several studies indicated that in certain cultural contexts naming God in vain can be deemed more abusive than sexual and racist epithets (Hughes, 1991; Gorji, 2007). This is sometimes true in Italy as well, since the long-lasting Catholic heritage influenced the perception of religious offences, accounted as the worst type of insults and cultural taboo (Nobili, 2007; Tartamella, 2009). In fact, in Italy blasphemies uttered in public could be fined by law (but usually are not). In particular, the Italian law n. 205 of 25 June 1999 states: “Chiunque pubblicamente bestemmia, con invettive o parole oltraggiose, contro la Divinità, è punito con la sanzione amministrativa da euro 51 a euro 309. [...] La stessa sanzione si applica a chi compie qualsiasi pubblica manifestazione oltraggiosa verso i defunti”. At the time, *Stampa Alternativa* published *Zap* and the *Freak Brothers’* anthologies, blasphemy was punished by the penal code as a crime “concernenti la polizia dei costume” according to a law established in 1930 under the fascist regime (article 724). Until 1984 it referred only to the Catholic religion, but following the revision of the Lateran Treaty in the Villa Madama Treaty, Catholicism stopped being Italy’s state religion, the extension to other credos was discussed, with a recognition in 1995. Several controversies regarding the clash between freedom of expression and blasphemy emerged even in recent times. For instance, Artist Xante Battaglia was fined for a 2015 work consisting of three panels, showing Pope Benedict XVI, his young secretary, and a penis in the middle. Street artist Hogre was charged for the controversial works “*Ecce Homo Erectus*” (showing a paedophile Jesus with an erected penis and a boy bowing before him) and “*Immaculata Conceptio IN VITRO*” (a couple composed of two women holding their child in their arm), two satirical posters put in bus stop advertising spaces in Rome in 2017. In 2006 three cartoons published on the website www.eretico.com depicting the Pope and other Catholic ecclesiastics involved in sexual intercourses were charged of religious vilification towards Catholic authorities. The Court of First Instance, however, stated that the publishers of the website were exercising their right to the freedom of expression and the cartoons were not obscene material, but satirical, and the publishers’ aim was not to offend religion but to satirise such leading figures as the Pope in a website

reuniting a mainly atheist and agnostic community, and not Catholic believers¹²⁴. Even today blasphemy is a thorny issue in Italy¹²⁵.

As for translation, Giampieri (2017) proposed an analysis of profanities and blasphemies in English-Italian dubbing. In her case-study on the film *Ted 2*, she revealed that, disregarding the utterance “Oh my God” and similes, no insult related to religion was translated into Italian, with a sheer censorship of all religious innuendoes (not just blasphemies but also “Jesus” and “Jesus Christ” profanities) present in the original, either converting them into either sexual or scatological slurs or wholly disregarding them. The perception of religious swearwords as one of the strongest taboos in Italy is shared by practising people and atheists (Tartamella, 2009: 130). This is crucial to understand how, in the case of underground comix translated by alternative publishers, declaredly anti-clerical and blatantly provocative, an inverted trend is observed, i.e., religious swearwords are used, even when absent or milder in the original. A hypothesis could be that, although atheists, they perceived these insults as taboos, and conceived their magnification as the ultimate act of spite against authorities. Indeed, this was not just the isolated case of Malatempora’s *Sporche Storie* and Stampa Alternativa’s *Zap*, but a common feature of most Italian independent and countercultural publications, to minor and major degrees.

Among the works included in Crumb’s 1981 anthology *Le Orribili Ossessioni*, another example seems to confirm this trend, i.e., “Testa d’Uovo e le Donne Avvoltoio” (38-52), a story originally entitled “Eggs Ackley Among the Vulture Demonesses” and published in *Big Ass Comics 1* in June 1969 and republished in *The Complete Crumb Comics 6: On the Crest of a Wave* (8-22). The narration revolves around the travelling egg salesman Eggs Ackley, one of the first characters ever created by Crumb, and his encounter with female vultures, particularly with their queen. The story exemplifies Crumb’s excesses in the representation of violence against women (though zoomorphic in this specific case), who are beaten, choked, raped and ultimately return to the male protagonist, still begging for more violence and sex. The text is full of profanities used as interjections and exclamations which are so ingrained in everyday lexicon that they are frequently used with no explicit spiritual connotation. The abundance of these phrases and interjections in the context of this story serves a humorous purpose and both versions seem to follow a common thread:

¹²⁴ For a detailed comment on this ruling, see Siracusano (2011).

¹²⁵ For an overview on the topic, see Webster (1990); Ivaldi (2004); Bonetti, (2000); Nash (2007); Capuano (2007); Gianfreda (2011).

Original	<i>Le Orribili Ossessioni</i>
Jeez (9)	Bontà divina! (39)
Omigod (10)	Santo Dio (40)
Holee shit (14)	Vergine putana (44)
Jeeziz! It won't break! (18)	Buon dio! È duro! (18)
Holy shit! (19)	Accidenti! (49)
Oy vey! (52)	Oh Dio! (22)

Among these examples, the use of the Italian blasphemy “Vergine putana” (with the typo “putana” instead of “puttana” likely reflecting the Northern-Italian tendency to skip double letters) certainly catches the attention. On a visual level, Crumb constructed the story by using a neutral layout pattern, what Groensteen (2007, 2013) would define “waffle-iron” grid, in which same-size panels are disposed in order and convey a sense of stability and regularity in the rhythm of narration. The panel in question, introducing the queen of vultures, breaks these regular “beats”, as it occupies half of the page. Its oversized dimension is coupled with the oversized dimension of the queen sitting on her throne, portrayed as a majestic figure with an extremely aggressive look, dressed with studs and surrounded by a light, terrific halo, while pointing her finger and staring down on the homunculus at his feet. A vector is established between the queen and Eggs Ackley, with the gaze, gesture, and angle also conveying the idea of her being in a position of power with respect to the sweating, fragile man on the ground. Even her squeak, written with a jagged font, sounds fearsome despite its unintelligibility. The fact that the queen’s supremacy lasts just long enough to turn the page tells a lot about Crumb’s sense of humour: indeed, in a couple of pages, Eggs Ackley manages to submit her and, as he discovers that she is still a virgin, brutally rape her (18/48). In this sense, the Italian expression “Vergine putana” may even appear to be an ironic proleptic addition by the translator, which anticipates what is going to happen. This hypothesis may be confirmed by the fact that “holy shit” is subsequently translated as “accidenti” and not with a blasphemy. In this case, it is the French version the one which

originally employed the coarse word “Pute Vierge”. It is likely that the Italian translation not only wanted to follow this pathway, but also to magnify the use of blasphemy in order to strike religious authorities, especially in a publication like *Le Orribili Ossessioni*, which clearly meant to be excessive and provocative.

By looking at other fanzines and independent publications, in *Big Comics*, no blasphemies are present, but in “Captain Guts” the profanity expression “Cristo” is used, translating the English “Jesus”. This profanity, however, is almost completely emptied of the original referential meaning and is not perceived as harsh as blasphemy. As for the latter, in *Cannibale*, blasphemy is included in Justin Green’s “Th’ Kiss Off”, originally from *Bijou Funnies* 6 (September 1971). For instance, as the protagonist is kicked out of a taxi he claims:

Original	Cannibale
Cogga suggin mudduh fux sonna bitch	Ma mannaggia la Madonna ‘rcoddio cane merda!!!

Contrary to the trend emphasised by Giampieri, here a slang chain of sexual slurs is turned into a chain of blasphemies in Italian, insulting both the Virgin Mary and God. Likewise, in Iron’s and Veitch’s story from *Deviant Slice 2* analysed in Chapter 6., profanities and blasphemies are frequently used:

Original	Cannibale
Good God! Is that you Vince?	Cristo santo! Sei... sei tu, Vince?
God damn Lenny! Thass some good shit!	Mapporcoddio, Lenny! Che razza di roba!
Man, this old sky mask...	Boiaddio... sta vecchia ciuffa da sci...

In this case, the oath “good Good” is translated with the profanity “Cristo Santo”, while actual blasphemies are used to translate “God damn” as well as such a non-derogatory exclamation as “man”. In this story, the use of profanities and blasphemies surely increases the level of coarseness of the narration. It most certainly provokes sanctimonious readership, but also communicates the underlying roughness of the world represented, one which ideal readers could recognise as familiar.

By looking at Shelton’s translations, similar considerations could be made, also taking advantage of the possibility to compare different translations of the same passages. Starting

from profanities, Shelton’s “The parakeet that outwitted the D.E.A.” (1977), translated as “Il Pappagallo che fregò la Narco” in *Riso Amaro* 1, “Il parrochetto che ha fregato la D.E.A.” by Mondadori, “Il parrochetto che diede scacco alla D.E.A.”, gives the possibility to compare the translation of the euphemistic profanity “I’ll be darned” in different editorial realities:

Original (344)	<i>Riso Amaro</i>	Mondadori (126)	Comicon (63)
I’ll be darned! It’s loaded to the gunwales with real dope!	Cristo! Ma questo aereo è pieno di roba vera!	Che io sia dannato! È carico fino all’orlo di roba vera!	Ma porc... è pieno come un uovo di droga!

Interestingly, *Riso Amaro* used the profanity “Cristo”, which, as said can be considered a certainly unpolite exclamation, but almost emptied of the originally profane content. Mondadori opted for a self-malediction, in line with the original profanity, whereas Comicon curiously opted for “Ma porc...”, apocopating what could be either a blasphemy or a sexual or scatological slur. It is up to the readers’ sensibility to guess what kind of swearword would be used by Phineas. In another story, “The Death of Fat Freddy” (375-80) drawn by Mavrides and published in 1980, much less is left to imagination. Even in this case, three different translations (all entitled “La Morte di Fat Freddy”, though *Stampa Alternativa* changes the authors name in Frenx Shelton and Antony Mavrides) are available from *Stampa Alternativa*’s *L’Erba del Vicino* (23-28), Mondadori (157-162) and Comicon’s *Grass Roots* (95-100). In this case, *Stampa Alternativa*’s use of blasphemy clearly stands out with respect to the other:

Original	<i>Stampa Alternativa</i>	Mondadori	Comicon
Oh my Ghod! Franklin! (376)	Dio cane! Franklin! (24)	Oh mio Dio! Franklin! (158)	Oddio oddio! Franklin! (96)
He’s deader’n fucking Hell, all right!	Porcoddio! È proprio secco! (24)	È più morto del dannatissimo inferno! (158)	Eh, sì, più morto di così non si può! (96)
Aw Hell! (160)	O Cristo!	Oh diamine!	Cribbio!

Oh, God, I'll never smoke that stuff again! I promise! (380)	Dio cane, non fumerò più di quella roba! Lo giuro! (28)	Oh, Dio, non fumerò mai più quella roba! Lo prometto! (162)	Dio, te lo giuro! Non fumerò più quella roba! (100)
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In the story, the oath “oh my God” in English as well as the Italian equivalents “Oddio” and “Oh mio Dio” have no profane meaning. However, *Stampa Alternativa* adds a blasphemy to the balloon, with the clear aim of shocking and increasing the harshness of the episode. Likewise, in the subsequent panel, Franklin’s reply begins with another blasphemy. While Mondadori reproduces the original hyperbole with the profanity “dannatissimo inferno” (which in Italian does not have a particularly offensive meaning), *Comicon* wholly avoids any religious reference. In the subsequent passage, the profanity addressing Hell is translated with a reference to Christ in *Stampa Alternativa*’s text, and a milder exclamation in the other two. Finally, in the past page, while the oath “Oh God” is rendered literally by Mondadori and *Comicon*, *Stampa Alternativa* adds another blasphemy. The operation carried out by *Stampa Alternativa* in this regard clearly aims to increase the level of anti-clericalism and render even more provocative the satire of the original. It is no coincidence that blasphemies are used in one of the few *Freak Brothers*’s adventures centred on religion. In point of fact, Shelton’s position towards Christianity is not as harsh as Crumb’s or Wilson’s. He rather treats religion as another topic to joke about, as a part of the life of many Americans and, as such, as a theme casually touched upon during the trio’s hijinks. However, these mentions are not comparable to Crumb’s aforementioned panels, but rather present goliardic reprises of the theme. For example, the opening panel shows the fake-priest called to celebrate Fat Freddy’s funeral reading the Bible upside down. Moreover, his name is John the Blabtist, called Giovanni Sbattista, John il Battista, Giovanni Fattista, “uomo di dio” leader of the “Chiesa cosmica dell’incertezza universale” who mistakes the Bible for one of Shakespeare’s works and read that as a prayer. In translation, interestingly, *Stampa Alternativa* added the prefix “s-” to the biblical reference to “Giovanni Battista”, which conveys a contrary action: just as the biblical John baptizes, this John deconsecrates. Mondadori opts for preserving the original name, thus making the biblical reference less obvious, whereas *Comicon* emphasises the humor underlying the original pun, by adding a reference to the “stoned” condition of the celebrant and, in general, to the dominant theme of the *Freak Brothers*’ adventures. Even the wake preceding Fat Freddy’s funeral becomes an occasion to make business, which the

caricature of Crumb, Aline Kominsky, Wilson and other cartoonists coming to collect the money Fat Freddy borrowed from them. This is certainly far from Christian morality, yet it cannot be considered blasphemous. In point of fact, Shelton's religious satire is subtler, e.g., in "Phineas' Big Show" (566-71), published in *Storie di Fine Secolo* (1998) when Phineas vomit something resembling the face of Jesus, everybody blindly starts praising the vomit as the Lord's miracle and fighting each other over the spot. In this case, Shelton mocks nonsensical hysteria, but not religion.

In the most recent anthology on the Freak Brothers, *Fifty Freakin' Years with the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, published in 2017 to celebrate the fifty years since the publication of the Freak Brothers' adventures in the Austin weekly underground tabloid newspaper *The Rag*, Shelton worked on new storylines for the brothers. In two stories, "Phineas becomes a suicide bomber" and "Fat Freddy gets religion", religious matters are tackled. The former, even though not directly, mocks kamikaze as Phineas tries to fight capitalism by becoming a suicide bomber. In the other, Fat Freddy tries all religions, but constantly fails to meet the required levels of commitment and ultimately, after meeting all gods, from Zeus to Jehovah, to the Holy Trinity to Mohammed after trying some acid, he decides to worship Tall Toad beer's mascot. In another story, "Mr. Natural meets Fat Freddy", Crumb's guru bows in front of Freddy's temperament and mantra "Who the fuck gives a shit". Therefore, Shelton's comix are not devoid of religious and spiritualist references, though they not reach the peaks of blasphemy of their comrades, just as his work did not display the same degree of obscenity.

As such, Stampa Alternativa's additions in terms of blasphemy seem to be motivated by the influence of the Italian cultural context, one in which the interjection of Catholicism is so strong that it triggers the anti-clerical reaction of atheist publishers. And precisely because the power of religious swearwords is well known by both believers and atheists, the translator decided to magnify this aspect in the translation of underground comix, perceived as the role model in the fight for freedom of expression. It is undeniable that the theme of religion and the graphic representation provided by several authors is clearly aimed at disturbing, deconsecrating, and arousing disgust in potential readers. Such publishers as Maltempora and Stampa Alternativa were keen on publishing stories capable or prompting visceral reactions. Blasphemy has the power to engender opposite reactions, to polarise readers: it generates the indignation in conservative audience, but also laugh in those who share the same sensibility. In fact, the shock between sublime and deity and degradation of

power is liberating, and in that it is a trigger of a genuine laugh.

Religious satire precisely teases the incongruence between a perfect God and an imperfect world. But religious satire, as it was conceived by the underground authors, goes beyond this: it reflects a pragmatic and sceptical instinct, emphasising the risks and slippery slope of a conception of religion as a mythical past set against an unfitting, inadequate present, doomed to feel nostalgia of a perfective condition that never was and will never be. And while lost in this malaise, while the myth of religion is blindly worshipped, the very value it originally purported are never actualised. The same people who believe in God misinterpret his message. For this reason, Jesus coming back on Earth is not recognised, clergymen preach love and brotherhood but ultimately seek violence against those who are different or weaker. In Italy, this myth had permeated the identity and the secular institutions of the nation. In front of the possibility offered by the underground, anti-clerical publishers could not resist the temptation to express their angst with vigour, laughing not just of religious institutions but of deity itself. While publishers aiming at canonising underground authors through mainstream circuits by levelling what was perceived as an excess, the harshness of independent publisher's translations could be read as an attempt to gain new spaces of freedom for Italian comics (imported but not exclusively). As Jakini pointed out in the introduction of the 1996 *Snatch* anthology: "gli autori contemporanei non godrebbero di quella libertà di espressione che oggi sembra quasi scontata". This is a key point: the demand of outright freedom of expression at all costs gave momentum to the underground phenomenon, but also influenced the experiences abroad. And this notion will be the trait d'union leading to the conclusions of this dissertation.

CONCLUSION

According to Eco (2003) translating amounts to “dire quasi la stessa cosa”, an outcome which follows, “un procedimento che si pone all’insegna della negoziazione” (10). A translator knows that something is irremediably lost in the process. Semantic fields vary, syntax rules do not match. Moreover, it is difficult to transfer an entire cultural heritage into another context and, as such, it is not always possible to convey implicit connotations to target readers.

Paul Ricoeur (2008) highlighted how translators have to abandon any dream of perfect translation and accept the difference between source and target texts and contexts. And the translator’s job is no easy task precisely because it is by its very nature doomed to sacrifice something. Each attempt to translate a text is arguably a Beckettian (1983) attempt to “fail better”. In the case of many of the translations commented in this dissertation, unfortunately, translators often had the chance to fail better and eventually failed ‘worse’. Crumb’s “Fritz bugs out” was translated four times and republished six by Milano Libri (*linus* and *Fritz il Gatto*), Francesco Coniglio’s Acme and Mare Nero, Repubblica and Comicon. The first story of Whiteman was translated five times by *Fallo!*, Milano Libri, Stampa Alternativa, Totem and Mondadori. Several other stories received multiple translations. And yet few attempts to “fail better” were made. Translation is never perfect and always perfectible; it is an approximation which will never reproduce the original text, though it can aim to be as effective as possible in its ‘failure’.

As far as underground comix are concerned, however, translators often did not work on the improvement of previous versions by carrying out philological investigations and developing some awareness about the style and isotopic lines to focus on. In the worst cases, they merely reproduced former translations, thus reiterating the same inaccuracies and errors. For instance, *Risoamaro* and Totem’s translations of “Whiteman meets Bigfoot”, carried out within two decades, show that such time span was not enough to improve Crumb’s exclamation, “Good Lord! Woulja look at that cunt!” as the former solution, “Gesù! Madonna! Guarda che fica!!!”, proves better than the latter: “Che mondo sconosciuto!”, in which the verbal manipulation is even accompanied by a visual censorship of the image. As Chapter 5 stressed, a story denouncing middle-class’ repression and commodity fetishism in favour of an unrestricted life at the margin became a wildlife version of a typical ‘commedia

sexy all'italiana'. The lack of adequate social and cultural frames prompted a poor understanding of Crumb's texts and the failure in reproducing them.

Umberto Eco (2002) maintained that: "tradurre significa interpretare, e interpretare vuol dire anche scommettere che il senso che noi riconosciamo in un testo è in qualche modo, e senza evidenti contraddizioni cotestuali, il senso di *quel* testo. Il senso che il traduttore deve trovare e tradurre [...] è soltanto il risultato di una congettura interpretativa. Il senso non si trova in una *no language's land*: è il risultato di una scommessa" (138). Gamblers/translators are appointed to understand the frames within which a given text has to be interpreted, though avoiding any improper and even problematic overlap between references, expectations and scripts of source and target cultures. Eco believed that translators are asked to reflect on "quello che il testo dice o suggerisce in rapporto alla lingua in cui è espresso e al contesto culturale in cui è nato" (123). A common error in translation practice is to approach a foreign text, whether a comic strip or a novel, as an *unicum* and not as the outcome of a given culture (all the more so in a counterculture) and the author's peculiar artistic and personal path; in a word, to overlook the context within which a work was first conceived.

Likewise, Cavagnoli (2012a) argued that equivalence is not the final aim of translations: these are not about looking for what an author would have written if he/she were using another language or belonging to another culture "perché una lingua è una cosa sola con la nazione in cui è nata e nessuno possiede la propria lingua in modo meccanico" (79). Conversely, translation is about interpreting a text – its frames and dominant isotopies – and make the audience feel and learn about the difference and the distance separating the original text (and its culture) from them, an encounter which should occur far from their comfort zone – as postulated by Schleiermacher ([1813] 2002) and Venuti (1995). Interpretation entails a process of negotiation and the choice of the connotative meanings which should be transferred or left dormant (Cavagnoli, 2012b: 85-86). Berman (1999) argued that texts do not require a literal rendering but a quest beyond words to give a concrete shape to conjectures and hermeneutic hypotheses thus reproducing the style of the author. In this understanding Berman lamented the ethnocentrism of translations in interpreting the Foreign with one's own categories.

It may be argued that in the case of comix the source culture was wholly overlooked, often on account of the translator's negligence and the hypnotising power of images which were deemed 'enough' to convey meanings, disregarding the connotative meanings conveyed

by words. As a result, translations either completely detached from the original text – often replaced by actual descriptions of the images – or tried to stick to it with a literal, style-less and sometimes unnatural translation in a ‘macaronic’ Italian.

In this respect, translating comix is not about saying what Shelton would have said if he were in Italy, even though the frames in which *The Freak Brothers* were conceived may not be too distant from Arcana’s or Stampa Alternativa’s. When translators tried to render foreign elements with adaptations, the result was farcical and grotesque: jive or west-coast slang were often translated with lexicalised wrong pronunciations or with Italian dialects. These choices entail assimilation processes which ultimately result in extreme forms of ethnocentric translation: hearing the Freak Brothers speaking with a Roman accent not only erased the original specificity; it domesticated the text to the point of making its language a variant of Italian. The adaptation of stories to the Italian context has a similar outcome: though in the case of *Fallo!*, Arcana and Stampa Alternativa it stemmed from the will to move comix closer to the Italian underground milieu (and its readers), the result is an outright domestication of the original text.

Of course, it should be remembered that the translator is not the only one making choices about a translation. And, according to Cavagnoli (2012b), Italian publishers tend to privilege domesticating strategies asking translators for smooth and easy reads. Translators are encouraged to avoid semantic ambiguities, use a clear syntax and normalise language. Venuti (1996) argued that the dominant governing translation is a popularising aesthetic which “demands that literary form not only be immediately intelligible, needing no special cultural expertise, but also transparent, sufficiently realistic” and requires “fluent translations that produce the illusory effect of transparency, [...] avoiding any dialect, register, or style that calls attention to words as words and therefore pre-empts the reader’s identification” (92). Translation choices made for the sake of readability and, consequently, commercial viability are evident on several occasions throughout this corpus, not just in the more evident Italianisation of toponyms, proper names and cultural reference. In general, translations often tended to overlook semantic nuclei which are understandable only on a deep level of engagement in the reading activity to favour fluency and transparency.

Cavagnoli (2012a) maintained that the imperative of making texts fluent and easily accessible to readers may be true in the case of mass literature, since authorial style and cultural specificities do not play a crucial role. Comics used to be considered lowbrow literature and this likely accounted for the lack of consideration verbal texts received in the

translation process. In fact, underground comix acquired their fame exactly by virtue of a peculiar style and distinguishing cultural specificities. This dissertation highlighted how underground comix proved their artistic value as well as their role as effective testimony of such a relevant cultural and social phenomenon as the counterculture. In Italy, the transmission of these works represented a missed opportunity, since translations lacked the adequate attention and competence to make such production and its complexity available for an Italian readership. No less than in the case of novels and poetry, stylistic and content banalisation, the erasure of register variation, the neutralisation of connoted utterances and the smoothening of the authors' roughness determined an invaluable loss in textual complexity and silenced the appropriate frames of reading in way that reminds the outcomes of censorship. However, translators of underground comix showed a lack of curiosity and hermeneutic competence. They underestimated the readers of the comic works. On the one hand, translators took it for granted that readers had no interest in unconventional texts and unfamiliar themes. On the other hand, this attitude may be connected to the perception of comics as second class publications, a bias which certainly affects translations – though the medium is progressively freeing itself from this stigma. Translations and their negotiation processes can enrich the original text as well as its readers. However, in our corpus the transfer resulted in an erasure of contents and a loss of textual complexity, a missed chance to enrich the readership's knowledge.

Moreover, it was stressed how the loss of contents was often the consequence of incompetence and negligence rather than a deliberate choice, as translators were unable (rather than unwilling) to reproduce the original complexities, subtexts, and cultural references thus banalising and even debasing them. The point is that such a reduction and banalisation processes yield the same results of deliberate censorship. This is, I believe, a major conclusion of this dissertation: the contrastive analysis of the corpus highlighted how, in addition to a deliberate and conscious form of censorship, a subtler form of silencing exists and affected the reception of comix.

In this regard, Billiani argued that censorship is “multifaced” and “polymorphous”, “institutional” and “self-imposed”, and regards the repression of intellectual freedom and the manipulation of information, imposed by “dictatorial regimes” or stemming from “seemingly ‘neutral’ scenarios” (2-3). In this respect, the concept of censorship does not refer solely on “blatant forms of repression”, but comes to define “both overt and diluted forms of control” (3). Billiani's definition of censorship is: “censorship is a form of manipulative

rewriting of discourses by one agent or structure over another agent or structure, aiming at filtering the stream of information from one source to another. Because translation often, though not always, makes the source culture visible within, and accessible to, the target culture, translated texts tend to attract censorial intervention” (ibid). The study of translations involves not just a focus on the visibility or invisibility of the translator, but also on the accessibility of socio-cultural, political, aesthetic references (Billiani, 2007; Gouanvic, 2002; Inghilleri, 2005) in cross-cultural communication. The criteria according to which censorship acts may be set by a visible dominant body, but also by a system of social conventions on a public and personal level. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu’s and Michel Foucault’s theories proved particularly useful in framing the issue of censorship in translation.

Bourdieu (1979) argued that the habitus of the field in which a translation circulates may inform on censorship processes. The habitus is a system of tastes, thoughts, beliefs linked to the social structure. He defined habitus (1980) as “structures structurées prédisposées à fonctionner comme structures structurantes” (88). The habitus guides behaviour and thinking, the formation of a social practice as well as its perception. By claiming that censorship is related to the habitus of a given field, Bourdieu (1982) refers to a network of relationships which may be political, cultural, intellectual etc., and in which censorship is structural:

Une censure constituée par la structure même du champ dans lequel se produit et circule le discours. Plus ou moins “réussie” selon la compétence spécifique du producteur, cette “formation de compromis”, ... est le produit de stratégies d’euphémisation, consistant inséparablement à mettre en forme et à mettre des formes: ces stratégies tendent à assurer la satisfaction de l’intérêt expressif ...dans les limites de la structure des chances de profit matériel ou symbolique que les différentes formes de discours peuvent procurer aux différents producteurs en fonction de la position qu’ils occupent dans le champ, c’est-à-dire dans la structure de la distribution du capital spécifique qui est en jeu dans ce champ.
(168)

The notion of structural censorship was thus reformulated by Billiani: “the implicit social control that is exercised by the various habitus which circulate in as well as structure a given field of cultural production” (8); it therefore differs from institutional censorship or repressive rules, as it rather relies on “a set of unwritten rules”, reinforced by the habitus of the agents of a given field.

Still, both forms of censorship depend on power structures, as in Foucault’s main argument in *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975). In his view, punishment and control

entail a visible and invisible form of disciplinary power (embodied by the Panopticon architectural figure), and thus an explicit censorship as well as a pervasive self-censorship acting in the back of the agents' mind. In the light of these theories, Billiani argued that “the sociology of structural censorship reaches beyond written norms”, i.e., beyond active censorship determining dominant discourses, and acts against the “disturbance provoked by foreign voices” (22).

It was previously argued that, in the translation of isotopic lines Italian comix translators generally avoided the introduction of new frames, rather reproducing those of the target culture, although not corresponding to those of the source culture, and forcing the subtle, varied facets and nuances of original texts into them. This form of domestication results in structural censorship: cultural specificities, in all their multifaceted nature and – why not – contradictions, are rejected in favour of somehow easier and therefore ‘reassuring’ translations. Structural censorship is exemplified by the erasure of the jargon of counterculture (e.g., the systematic disregard of the distinction between dope and drugs and other dope-culture notions, and the downplayed reference to war and aggressiveness in connection to Americanism being very telling examples) and the reduction of the linguistic and cultural essence of the possible worlds narrated. The fact that crucial references to counterculture, its slang and identity are overlooked is indicative of the translator’s misrepresentation of the adequate frames to interpret the comics as well as the wrong audience design by both translators and publishers. This is a very frequent mistake by Italian translators who tend to imagine the educational and cultural level of their readers to be lower than it actually is and, by so doing, ultimately fail to increase such level and actually partake in its downgrade.

Another noteworthy element is how the Italian reaction to such themes as religion and sex in comics differed from the American. In the latter case, sexual contents generated discomfort and society reacted by trying to conceal the theme and relegating it to a private sphere, deeming any potential reference to carnal intercourses and nudity obscene. Conversely, the attitude towards religion was more relaxed and, since different spiritual philosophies, cults and beliefs permeated society and coexisted, the religious discourse was tackled with less anxiety. Consequently, underground cartoonists were harsher in demolishing sexual taboos through smut comics than in dealing with religious beliefs, with the exception of clericalism giving rise to bigotry and abuses and with cults exploiting gullible teenagers. In Italy, sexuality was not condemned per se as long as it was framed within a

comedic genre: 'commedia sexy all'italiana' was not looked upon as obscene material and such comics as *Lando* or *Il Montatore* could easily be purchased on the newsstand. In opposition to the episodic erasure of panels and censorship of visual elements which can be considered a case of overt censorship, Italian translations tended to put unnecessary emphasis on sexuality, though disregarding its political value and its role of denunciation, and emphasising a superficial, comical and light-hearted hermeneutic reading. Just as in the case of drugs, whose political and subversive role was annihilated by framing the theme within the context of flippant hedonism and 'wacky' storylines, the 'commedia sexy all'italiana' frame obscured more complex isotopies (e.g., the psychoanalytic, Marxist, nihilist, feminist, eco-critical ones), hyperbolic and unrealistic characterisations were preferred to more realistic ones, and in general the political value of dialogues was filtered through banalising frames. Chapter 5 showed how Crumb is less pure an underground artist than Wilson, and still both authors suffered major distortions in Italy. Wilson's art remained within the underground and did not receive the massive attention which led Crumb's comics to be translated over and over, with the consequent increase in manipulation of contents. By walking the line between overground and underground, Crumb became the primary target of censorship in the US during the counterculture period as well as the victim of structural censorship in translation, his texts being the most consistently misinterpreted and trivialised. Other authors' texts suffered from minor forms of re-editing but also received less attention from Italian publishers.

As for religion, while mainstream publishers avoided explicitly satirical references, the independent publishers' approach was twofold: they either disregarded works making satire of religion without showing the necessary (in their view) contempt or added blasphemous accents wherever possible. In particular, anti-clerical publishers could not resist the temptation to mock deity and show off their provocative antagonism to the religious establishment. The asphyxiating presence of the Catholic Church in Italian culture triggered harsher reactions and the blasphemies present in independent publisher's translations could be read as a perhaps naive attempt to gain new spaces of freedom of expression for Italian comics, comprising both translations and original works. This is similar to what happened to the translation of political satire: independent publishers enhanced political violence, anti-authoritarian slogans and contents which were easily transferrable from the American to the Italian context (e.g., "pigs" or the numerous adaptations of the *Freak Brothers*' most violent comic strips into the Italian context). Conversely, mainstream publishers and houses recently

approaching the industry opted for a neutralisation of potentially politically-connoted terms (e.g., the replacement of “boojwah” with “fighetti”, “cops” normalised as “poliziotti” in the case of Comicon), though it is noteworthy to highlight the first ever appearance of far-right lexicon (“zecca comunista”).

The point, I would like to argue, is that the original meanings are lost in both cases. Crumb, Shelton, Wilson, Irons, Veitch, Corben, Bodé, Kominsky, Jurras, Mars, Farmer, Cory, Gebbie, Robbins, and Welz all suffered from the loss of meaning of their comix, and all remained stuck in the middle of a transfer process which in a way or another suffocated the signifying kernel of their works. Translation, which was supposed to amplify their voices, ultimately silenced them, covered them with the dull ‘noise’ of editorial policies, ideologies and inadequate frames which turned into a manipulation. By their very nature, underground comix have always escaped compromises, censorship and frameworks, especially when imposed by the ‘overground’. As such, translation should not usher in the implementation of structural censorship of comix. This research accordingly advocates the need to approach underground comix from a new, more conscious perspective, one encompassing their social and historical value. In turn, translators should follow the isotopic pathways these inhibited, impolite, ebullient artworks are pointing at and, in doing so, they should enhance rather than constrain their free spirit. George Orwell’s 1970 unpublished “The Freedom of the Press” preface to *Animal Farm* recited: “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear”. Perhaps the time is ripe to tell Italian readers of comics something they do not want to read.

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