



UNIVERSITÉ  
DE LORRAINE

crem  
centre  
de recherche  
EA 3476 sur les médiations  
communication, langue, art, culture

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### International Conference

### *Autobiographical Experience and Genre Comics*

### *Self-narratives in Constrained Contexts*

### *Comics traces of Jack Kirby's war in Moselle*

Metz, 9-10<sup>th</sup> November 2017

In 2017, Jack Kirby would have been 100 years old. In September 1944, as a soldier of the US Army, he fought in Moselle, near the city of Metz. For the centenary of his birth, the Département de la Moselle chose to dedicate the year 2017 to the evocation of the creator and his work, through a series of events and exhibitions. This initiative raises the question of the relation between the hazards of Kirby's life and the nature of his work, mainly produced within the constraints of the comic book industry and its genres. The American writer Glen D. Gold (2015: 67) notes « something we tend not to think first when evaluating Jack Kirby's artistic intent: Kirby killed Nazis, and he did it in hand-to-hand combat ». How did this experience translate into Kirby's comics? For Gold, the anguishes of Captain America in the 1960s, so close to the post-traumatic stress disorder of veterans, offer an answer to such questions. This conference intends to take the example of Jack Kirby as a starting point for a more *general discussion on the conditions and forms of the expression of autobiographical experiences within the constrained contexts of genre comics*.

In comics, autobiography had a late development. Except for a few pioneering but isolated works (Grove, 2004), autobiographical comics only really started in the 1970s in the United States (Hatfield, 2000; Gardner, 2008; Gabilliet, 2010, 2012; Kunka, forthcoming) and in the 1980s and, more strongly, in the 1990s in France (Groensteen, 1996, 2014; Beaty, 2007). They've since become a well-established part of contemporary comics and critics have described their many variations, in practices (autobiographical narratives, memoirs, autofiction, diaries, blogs...) as well as in themes (war and persecution, childhood, love life, professional life... – Groensteen, 2014).

Historically, autobiography in comics was developed against the “fictional vocation” of the mainstream production (Mao, 2014), as a “distinctive device” against commercial comics (Beaty,

2007) and their genre series. The theoretical and critical production reflects this opposition of autobiography to genre comics: most of the analyses dealing with autobiography in comics focus on works published since the 1970s and 1980s and the advent of the autobiographical comics trend (Alary, Corrado, Mitaine, 2015; Beaty, 2007; Dürrenmatt, 2013; El Refaie, 2012; Groensteen, 1996; Hatfield, 2005; Mao, 2013, 2014; Tolmie, 2013; *Studies in Comics; Biography: Autographics...*).

This conference wants to go beyond such a focus on this historically and symbolically situated form of autobiography, in order *to consider other places and other times of the “autobiographical space”* (Lejeune, 1975: 41-43) in comics. *What can be said about autobiography –or, more precisely, the expression of an autobiographical experience– before autobiography, i.e. before it was constituted as a specific genre inscribed in specific attempts at distinction?* To consider this question is to try to identify the places and the conditions in which self-narratives could be produced before an “autobiographical assertion” (Dürrenmatt, 2013) was possible. It’s a matter of understanding how creators could tell stories about themselves within a context of editorial constraints setting genres, forms and formats. The aim is to specify how the “referential pact” (Lejeune, 1975) of the autobiography is expressed in such a context.

Exploring the « autobiography without autobiography » (Baetens, 2004) implies *to study the strategies the creators have to adopt in order to play with their contextual constraints*. Strategies such as:

- *transposition* : for example, adapting the self-narrative to the super-hero genre, like Kirby did, or to a humor-type of comics, such as Dimitri’s *Le Goulag*. The ironic evocation of the professional life of comics creators is a frequent form of such humorous transpositions: *Scribbly* (S. Mayer), *Pauvre Lampil* (R. Cauvin and W. Lambil), *Le Gang Mazda* (C. Darasse, B. Hilaire, Tome);
- *appearance in the diegetic universe* (Muñoz and Sampayo in *Alack Sinner* – Groensteen, 2013, Stan Lee and other Marvel creators in this publisher’s comics);
- *changing the focus of the narrative*: telling a “collective and social” story (Mao about Binet and C. Gimenez), instead of an individual and intimist one;
- *externalizing the autobiographical elements*: these elements can be presented out of the work itself, in its paratext (Genette, 1987) or in peripheral publications (J. Kirby’s autobiographical short story in *Argosy*, K. Nakazawa wrote a textual autobiography in parallel to his *Barefoot Gen*);
- *taking advantage of editorial margins* (S. Glanzman’s war stories, *USS Stevens*, as back-up stories in DC Comics war titles);
- *personalizing the narrative through the expressivity of an idiosyncratic graphic style* (Marion, 1993).

Another aim of this conference is *to contextualize the practices and to identify the constraints induced by the production context*. Constraints such as:

- *formal constraints and narrative conventions*;
- *format constraints* (length, distribution network, intended audiences);
- *production constraints* (division of labor, collective action and coordination (Becker); promoting series or brands over creators);
- *legal constraints* (such as specific prescriptions for youth publications – Crépin, Groensteen, 1999);
- *the state of the comics field* (Boltanski, 1975 – its degree of autonomy or heteronomy, the realm of the possible in the field);

Proposals on Jack Kirby and/or war experiences are welcome. Yet the thematic scope of the conference is open, as shown by the given examples, to all editorial and aesthetic traditions, to all dimensions of the autobiographical experience and of its constrained expression.

#### **Schedule** (subject to changes)

- Deadline for the reception of proposals: 30 June 2017
- Deadline for confirmation of acceptance: 14 July 2017
- Conference: 9-10 November 2017
- Deadline for the reception of texts: February 2018
- Evaluation of the texts: April 2018
- Deadline for the reception of definitive texts: May 2018
- Publication : June 2018

#### **Submission guidelines**

Proposals have to be sent before the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 as abstracts in English or French (max. 3000 signs, in .doc format) to Jean-Matthieu Méon ([jean-matthieu.meon@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:jean-matthieu.meon@univ-lorraine.fr)). A short bio-bibliographical notice, indicating the academic situation, the university, contact details and research interests of the author has to be joined to the proposal as well as a list of recent publications.

#### **Coordination**

Jean-Matthieu Méon, Crem, Université de Lorraine

### Scientific committee

Jan Baetens, MDRN, Université de Leuven (Belgium)  
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