



« Le nin et le géant » (sic.), drawn by the 7-year-old Colette Boermans, Brussels, c. 1936.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Children's Drawings in Comics

Dessins d'enfance dans la bande dessinée

Special issue edited by Maaheen Ahmed and Benoît Crucifix*

Argument

Commonly considered for children, comics have a particular link to children's drawings. Since at least Rodolphe Töpffer, who in 1848 praised the "liveliness of movement" of the little men doodled in the margins, children's drawings have often been admired by cartoonists. As Thierry Smolderen suggests, a deep tradition of caricature and satirical drawing made a place for "clumsy, childish, spontaneous drawing" (2009: 33) long before its lasting integration into the artistic avant-gardes. At the turn of the twentieth century, children's drawings became the object of new attention and new discourses (Higonnet 2009). Caught between pedagogues, psychologists, painters and writers, the child is shrouded in adult knowledge, as Emmanuel Pernoud argues in a masterful inquiry into understandings of children's drawings at the dawn of the avant-gardes: "children's drawings are not looked at for themselves: they are *known* before they are *seen*, and childhood is pinned onto a common notion" (Pernoud 2003: 214).

This special issue examines different ways of looking at and thinking about children's drawings in the history of comics. The diversity and multiplicity of interactions between

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comics (as a cultural object produced for children) and children's drawings (both as objects of adult discourses and as children's productions) offer a vast field of inquiry. This thematic issue of *Comicalités* invites contributions along three interlocking angles.

1. Childish Polygraphy

A first angle explores children's drawings as a stylistic, aesthetic and iconographic register. The "childishness" associated with comics affects its graphic design, sometimes in a completely self-conscious manner (Ahmed 2020), as well as the criteria of competence, of what makes "good" or "bad" drawing. These aspects have been treated in different ways throughout comics history, relative to specific contexts of publication and circulation.

Children's drawings have quickly emerged in comics as a quotable graphic vocabulary. It is indeed common to find "clumsy" drawings attributed to children; this pseudo-graphic technique is already found in Cham's *Un génie incompris* (1841) and has remained in use to generate a variety of effects already outlined by Thierry Groensteen (2003). In this "play of delegated graphiators" (Berthou & Dürrenmatt 2019 : 226), children's drawings are rarely autonomous images and their reading is framed by other images and texts that accompany their interpretation.

Which ideas of childhood are established in these imitations and on what conceptions and models of children's drawings are they based? How are children's drawing practices imagined? What mediations accompany such uses depending on their editorial contexts? Which issues are raised by these stylistic ruptures and these techniques of quotation and appropriation?

2. Drawing Pedagogy

A second angle will focus on the editorial and pedagogical frameworks that structure young readers' interactions and "school" them into drawing. Jessica Kohn (2018: 426-438) has already described the implicit constructions of the cartoonist profession present in the various technical and stylistic lessons found in comics periodicals. Contests, publications of submitted drawings, didactic exercises, and games regularly invite readers to pick up the pen, scribble in their magazines, or trim them into small graphic objects.

These modes of playful and pedagogical interaction, where reading extends into an initiation to drawing, are still by and large unknown in comics studies, in contrast to the widespread interest in the active participation of the reader at a cognitive level. In which ways do such rubrics connect comics reading and drawing practice? Which conceptions of drawing are conveyed?

The invitation to drawing, emanating from an editorial project, sustains a complicity with the reader while conveying images of the profession and particular drawing conventions. What are these images? How do these forms of interaction through drawing vary depending on different periodicals, formats, and cultures? How have they evolved over the history of comics? How do they relate to old or new ways of segmenting life into ages and thinking about children's cultural production? According to which criteria are children's drawings looked at and evaluated and how can they be compared to the place of drawing and images in education?

3. Children's Own Comics

If the first two angles are mainly concerned with adult perspectives on children's drawings, this third section invites us to study children's own productions. These are ephemeral objects, difficult to access and poorly preserved bodies of work, but such archives raise new questions about children's creation and the history of reading practices in comics.

In making their own comics, children extend their reading experience and rework those images by means of imitation, copying, adaptation; or by scribbling and coloring in their magazines and books. These children's comics are traces of individual lives and of a shared culture, witnesses of children's social worlds that are partly sustained and organized by forms of editorial interaction in periodicals. Beyond the editorial frameworks that guide children's drawings, it is necessary to distinguish between authorized and unauthorized practices: the gestures of cutting out, coloring, and scribbling go beyond the sanctioned forms of interaction and put the medium to different uses and other purposes.

How does the practice of drawing and the making of comics extend a serial reading experience? How do children integrate and replay encyclopedias or architexts of popular genres¹? What is the influence of childhood drawings on the professional practice of adult cartoonists? Children's and teenagers' fanzines are also intriguing in this respect: in which contexts are they produced and how do they circulate? How do they replay the editorial codes of comics magazines and newspapers?

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Based on these three interlocking angles, this special issue seeks to describe and understand the role played by drawing in the relationship between comics and children audiences, following distinct logics of appropriation, interaction and incorporation. The scope of the issue is of course not strictly limited to these main lines of inquiry and also seeks out contributions that engage more broadly with the theme of children's drawings

¹ On "encyclopedia of popular genres," see Matthieu Letourneux (2017).

and comics. Similarly, there are no restrictions on chronological and geographical scales. The issue hopes to foster a diversity of methods and approaches: iconographic analyses and visual studies, close-readings and case studies, narratology, discourse analyses, anthropological approaches and ethnographic observations, cultural history of childhood, cognitive sciences and cultural psychology.

Practicalities

This call for papers is open to all researchers, regardless of their status and origins. Abstract submissions should include two separate documents :

- A short bio-bibliographical notice.
- An anonymized abstract in French or English of no more than 3000 characters (with spaces). The abstract will present the theoretical positioning and the corpus, as well as the main conclusions that are expected.

We are also open to formats other than the standard scientific article and welcome shorter forms : interviews, short articles, presentations of archival items, etc.

Abstracts will be evaluated anonymously by the editorial board of *Comicalités*: after acceptance, and with possible suggestions, the article will be written for a total size varying between 15 000 (for shorter forms) and 50 000 (for standard articles) characters, with spaces. Abstracts should be sent before **December 15, 2021** to: maaheen.ahmed@ugent.be / benoit.crucifix@ugent.be

Completed articles will be sent by **June 1, 2022**.

Suggested bibliography

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