Session 1: Feminist and anti-feminist expressions

1. “A story of being seriously pissed off.” Anti-feminist subversion of comics intertexts and manufacturing political controversy
   Oskari Rantala, University of Jyväskylä

In the parliamentary elections held in 2019, the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) defied expectations and became the second-largest party in Finnish parliament. Despite some severe challenges during the prior term, such as splitting in two after a contested leadership race, the nationalist and populist party succeeded in increasing their number of seats.

A significant component of the successful campaign was a video ad titled “V niin kuin ketutus” (“A story of being seriously pissed off”). It caused controversy and was a topic of heated discussion for some weeks due to depiction of violence and the presentation of immigrants as sexual predators. Nonetheless, it was viewed nearly half a million times before the election and one of the actors was elected to the parliament.

From the perspective of comics studies, the narrative short film is interesting especially because of its intermedial relations with comics. The film depicts a dystopian Finland governed by corrupt politicians and overcome by high levels of immigration, but this dystopia is situated inside the storyworld of a comic book that party leader Jussi Halla-aho is reading in the film. Furthermore, the film is an extensive homage to V for Vendetta, a classic comics work by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (1982–85, 1988–89) and its film adaptation by James McTeigue and the the Wachowskis (2005). Whereas the original dystopian comics work takes a strong political stand against prominent English fascist movements of the time as well as austerity and anti-LGBTIQ policies of Thatcher’s conservatives, the film adaptation is more concerned with the erosion of civil liberties in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent “War on Terror”.

In my paper, I discuss the ways in which the narrative strategies and aesthetics of these works are appropriated and the politics subverted to advance an anti-egalitarian, anti-feminist and anti-immigrant agenda and manufacture exploitable political controversy in the contemporary media landscape.

2. Kullervo as a Finnish myth of (toxic) masculinity
   Katja Kontturi, University of Jyväskylä

This paper studies the two Finnish comic adaptations of the story of Kullervo from Finnish national epic, Kalevala. The comics, both titled Kullervo, take visually quite a different approach of the story of a slave turned avenger. Gene Kurkijärvi’s Kullervo (2009) is set in a dystopian Helsinki where cyberpunk-styled gangs take drugs and fight violently. Somewhat dehumanized characters have replaced parts of their body with mechanical limbs. On the other hand, Marko Raassina’s Kullervo (2016) takes place in ancient times based on the clothing and the habitats of the characters. Naivistic drawings tend to hint that the story is meant for younger audience, although Raassina hides some quite violent action behind the simple, humoristic panels of his.

My aim is to study the character of Kullervo based on the description and the story in Kalevala, and compare it with these two adaptations. My questions are, how these adaptations reuse and adapt the visual imagery and the myth of Finnishness, and what sort of forms these interpretations take? What kind of imagery has survived and what changed due to changes in the society and culture? Concentrating in Kullervo, I will study the interpretations of his superhuman character, the
violent acts towards his uncle’s family, and his relationship with three women: his mother, the wife of Ilmarinen, and his sister. The tragic story of Kullervo is that he sleeps with his sister unknowing their blood ties.

This paper is a part of my postdoctoral research that deals with modern day comic adaptations of *Kalevala*. I am interested in the illustration tradition of *Kalevala*, especially the impact Gallen-Kallela has had. My scientific framework is based on comics studies, adaptation studies, culture studies as well as transmedia studies.

3. **Discussing sexual play and normativity in Sunstone**
   Susi E. Mikael Nousiainen, University of Jyväskylä

The representation of sexual relationships in a comic can change norms by creating more diverse narratives. In my presentation I consider if the representation of sexual power exchange relationships in comic book series *Sunstone* can develop a feminist picture of BDSM. The presentation is based on my master’s thesis in Literature, published in University of Jyväskylä. *Sunstone* is a five album series by Stepan Sejic, published originally at https://www.deviantart.com. The main characters Lisa and Allison meet at first in the context of BDSM play but later fall in love and re-define their relationship. One of the important views in *Sunstone* is how the sexual play is seen (and named by the characters) as a form of geek culture, as a game or play, and also a normal part of people's’ life.

In my presentation I view *Sunstone* using hermeneutic close reading as the method. I consider how BDSM as a phenomenon is pictured by focusing on the spaces/states of play versus not-play. For example the way Sejic shows simultaneous pictures of the characters as “themselves” and in their BDSM roles can bee seen as a representation that underlines the equality and consent of all participants. As one tools for analysis I use the idea of hermeneutic pictures and my theory is mainly based on the work of Katja Kontturi and Randy Duncan. My main statement is that *Sunstone* can be read as a representation that opens norms concerning sex and sexuality, and can deconstruct the culture of normal and non-normal sex.

On the other hand I point the normativity in the comic. It is targeted for a very mainstream audience. Therefore it’s interesting to observe how there are shown only able and conventionally beautiful cis-bodies and the absence of male homosexuality is distinct.

4. **Feminist information and empowerment confronting online misogyny: Johanna Vehkoo and Emmi Nieminen’s Vihan ja inhon internet**
   Ralf Kauranen, University of Turku
   Olli Löytty, University of Turku

*Vihan ja inhon internet* (“The Internet of Hate and Loathing”, 2017), written by Johanna Vehkoo and illustrated by Emmi Nieminen, is a work of comics journalism that explores the phenomenon of online hate directed at women in Finland. The large, almost 150 pages long, colourful comics album is divided into four parts, which, respectively, approach the targets of online hate, the researchers and research concerned with the phenomenon, the perpetrators of hate, and, finally, the parties offering help to the targets of hate speech and campaigns. Despite the fictional stylistic devices utilised in the album, such as magical realism and animal fables, the story is based on interviews and other forms of research.

The comic draws on several transnational or global generic conventions in comic art. The first part of the book, based on and quoting interviews with women who have been targets of hate speech, represents a form of life-writing, though focusing on a small part of the women’s lives. Life-writing and especially autobiography have been central comics genres for social groups who otherwise have had trouble making their voices heard in society (Køhlert 2019, 3–8). In the tradition of feminist comics, this tendency is clear from the onset of US underground comics (or comix) in the 1960s and
1970s. As a journalistic work, the comic obviously taps into the growing field of comics reportage and journalism.

In our presentation, we will analyse how the feminist politics against the misogynist hate speech is expressed through the comics medium. *Vihan ja inhon internet* contains both more straightforward narration, such as the presentation of the cases of individual women’s experiences, and pages focused on providing information, such as a spread that offers a list of advice on how to proceed if one is being harassed on the internet. Although *Vihan ja inhon internet* is a journalistic work, it offers a strong message of feminist empowerment.

### Session 2: Sexual agency and sexual abuse in comics

#### 5. Reframing the story: Isolation and community in two contemporary graphic narratives about sexual violence

*Raisa Aho, Tampere University*

In my presentation I will analyse how each work uses comics specific means of storytelling and depiction to show isolation on hand and community building potential on the other. I will concentrate on the role of panels, their borders, as well as visual and spatial metaphors and speech bubbles.

The works are Ulli Lust’s *Heute ist der letzte Tag vom Rest deines Lebens* (2009; “Today is the last day of the rest of your life”, 2013) and Una’s *Becoming/Unbecoming* (2015). Both are very much rooted in specific historical moments and specific geographical locations (Italy in the early 1980’s and Yorkshire in the 1970’s, respectively) while also reflecting on how individual stories relate to more general feminist concerns.

In Lust’s memoir, Ulli hitchhikes to Italy with her friend Edi in 1984. During the trip Ulli is repeatedly sexually harassed and abused and raped twice. She tries desperately to carve out a space for herself in communities where roles for women are limited to the virgin/whore-dichotomy. The result is Ulli’s isolation, anger and fear.

In *Becoming/Unbecoming* on the other hand, the sexual abuse of the autobiographical I happens against the backdrop of the hunt for the so called Yorkshire ripper, aka the serial killer Peter Sutcliffe. Una reflects her experiences to the prejudices plaguing the investigation. Una’s isolation is shown via her lonely figure either lying alone in her room or walking towards an unspecified goal in different landscapes. For Una, there’s however of the chance to break free from the isolation, which Ulli seems to lack. In *Becoming/Unbecoming*, the recurring motif of the globe and the metaphorical use of the speech bubble create a possibility of connection to others who have suffered similarly.

#### 6. “Who are you crying for?”: Sexual abuse and the ethics of empathy in Nina Bunjevac’s *Bezimena*

*Dragoș Manea, University of Bucharest  
Mihaela Precup, University of Bucharest*

Serbian-Canadian cartoonist Nina Bunjevac’s third book, *Bezimena* (2018), embeds child sexual abuse and murder in an improbable geography where myth and fairy tale work together to create an otherworldly atmosphere, by turns mesmerizing and horrifying. Bunjevac’s previous work (*Heartless*, 2012 and *Fatherland*, 2014) testifies to her continued commitment to exploring issues that are relevant to the feminist project, such as domestic violence, abortion, sexual assault, and discrimination against female immigrant workers. Inspired by two attempted sexual assaults that Bunjevac herself nearly escaped when she was a teenager, as she explains in an afterward that anchors the book firmly in lived reality, *Bezimena* asks important questions about the conditions that contribute to the emergence of a male perpetrator capable of committing the repeated rape and murder of young girls. Bunjevac’s decision to prioritize the perspective of the perpetrator works together with the explicit visuals (many of which quote from classic fetish and bondage imagery) to
create an ethically precarious position for readers, one that allows for the mobilization of empathy for the perpetrator, as well as a concurrent dispersal of guilt and responsibility.

The context of the final question of the book, “Who are you crying for?,” repositions the entire ethical premise of the narrative by suggesting that responsibility for perpetration may lie both within and without the body and consciousness of the perpetrator himself. In conversation with feminist and perpetrator studies scholars such as Saira Mohamed, Nickie D. Phillips, and Laura L. Finley, as well as comics scholars working on sexual violence (such as Olga Michael, Laurike in ‘t Veld, Sandra Cox, and others), this paper explores the premises of the final question of the book and asks whether Bezimena’s multiple strategies of representation can advance the contemporary debate on child sexual violence and perpetration.

7. **For sex-positivity: Sexual agency, polyamory, and pleasure in Ulli Lust’s *Wie ich versuchte, ein guter Mensch zu sein***

   Anna Vuorinne, University of Turku

Sex and sexuality have always been at the heart of the oeuvre of Ulli Lust, the most famous and critically acclaimed female comics artist of the German-speaking world. From her early mini-comic series “Springpoems” (1999–2005) to her autobiographical master pieces *Heute ist der letzte Tag vom Rest deines Lebens* (2009) and *Wie ich versuchte, ein guter Mensch zu sein* (2017), Lust has explored the intersecting personal, social, and cultural facets of sex with a specific focus on female gender and sexuality. In her influential study on autobiographical comics by women, Hillary Chute (2010, 61) notes that comics invested in portraying female life often depict how, “in dominant social formations, female sexuality is composed of both pleasure and degradation”. These both sides of female sexuality are thematized also in Lust’s work, where sexuality is a source of pain and trauma as well as pleasure and joy.

While there is a lot of insightful scholarship focusing on the painful and/or ambivalent sides on female sexuality in autobiographical comics (this includes also the few articles written on Lust’s work, see Kupczynska 2013; Remonato 2013; Hochreiter 2014; Vuorinne 2018), less attention seems to be given to the pleasurable and positive aspects of female sexuality. In my presentation, I hope to contribute to the latter strand of inquiry by discussing how Lust’s comics, and her latest work, *Wie ich versuchte, ein guter Mensch zu sein*, in particular, advocates the idea of feminist sex-positivity by celebrating female sexuality and normalizing the diversity of sexuality and sexual behavior.

*Wie ich versuchte, ein guter Mensch zu sein* tells about a love triangle between the autobiographical protagonist Ulli and two men while portraying her life in her twenties. The story engages specifically with the questions of sexual agency, polyamory, and pleasure. In my presentation I will examine how these three topics are explored both verbally as well as visually. Firstly, I will discuss how the autobiographical narrative renegotiates the norm of passive female sexual agency by portraying its protagonist as an active agent with her own needs and desires. Secondly, I will explore how the narrative challenges the norm of monogamy by depicting polyamory and providing a multifaceted discussion on its conditions. Finally, by analyzing the visual portrayal of sex and desire I will show how Lust’s comic deploys the visual and spatial features of comics to give expression to female pleasure, often absent from mainstream (audio)visual erotica/pornography. Drawing on feminist sex-positive theory (e.g. Rubin 1992; Fahs 2014) as well as studies on autobiographical comics (e.g. Chute 2010; El Refaie 2012; Byrn Køhlert 2019) and erotic/pornographical comics (e.g. Shamoon 2004; Roberts 2015; Hall 2016) the article shows how graphic storytelling may challenge normative ideas of sexuality and work towards positive understanding of sex and sexuality.
Keynote lecture 1

The narrative complexity of showing and telling sexual violence – Kati Kovács’s comics as a test case
Leena Romu, Tampere University

In recent years, sexual violence has become a heated topic in cultural debates. Feminist comics artists around the world have participated in them by sharing their thoughts and experiences on the matter in several anthologies (e.g. India: Drawing the line, 2015; Sweden: Draw the line, 2017; US: Drawing Power, 2019). In my talk, I will examine what kinds of visual and verbal strategies comics artists use when representing a difficult and potentially triggering subject matter. Drawing from a wide range of examples from comics and existing comics research, I will explore what kinds of problems, challenges, or possibilities the form of the medium provides for representing sexual violence. Comics as a medium enables playing with different modes of narration, such as showing and telling, but the formal qualities of comics makes it also possible to leave the violence unrepresented, for example, in the space of the gutter. To complicate the matters of showing, not-showing, telling and not-telling, I will introduce the comics of Kati Kovács, a Finnish cartoonist who has been making comics for over 30 years. Kovács has depicted sexual violence in her comics since her first album (Vihreä rapsodia, 1994, “Green Rhapsody”), and her comics provide an illustrating test case for thinking about the medium-specific affordances and restrictions of comics for representing sexual and gendered violence.

Session 3: Visualising the (wo)man

8. The questions of feminism, Fun Home, and form in Wanda Hagedorn’s graphic memoir Totalnie Nie Nostalgia
Malgorzata Olsza, Adam Mickiewicz University

In her 2017 graphic memoir entitled Totalnie Nie Nostalgia [“Totally Un-Nostalgic”], illustrated by Jacek Frąś, Wanda Hagedorn tells the story of her childhood and adolescence rooted in the grim realities of communist Poland of the 1960s and 1970s. Inspired by her reading of Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home, Hagedorn in an uncompromising manner examines her, as she puts it, “depressive-pressive-repressive” upbringing. The memoir chronicles Hagedorn’s development from the victim of psychological, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to a woman who finds in herself the courage to challenge gender and social norms.

In my analysis of Hagedorn’s memoir, I will focus on the following issues, moving from the political, through the formal, to the personal:

- The perspectives of Western and Central European feminisms. As an adult, Hagedorn emigrated to Australia and worked in NGOs, raising awareness of gender-based violence. She thus writes her memoir from the “adult” perspective of “Western feminism,” quoting Kate Zambreno and Julia Gillard’s “Misogyny Speech.” Respectively, she also draws on her “childhood” perspective of Central European feminism, which has been shaped by different cultural, political, and social factors (Watson 1992, Goldfarb 1997, Olsen 1997).
- Intertextual and intervisual relations with Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home (one of Hagedorn’s main inspirations), especially as regards portraying the adolescent self in relation to the dominant father.
- Visual metaphors of trauma and emancipation employed in the memoir (including the recurring images of a charging rhinoceros, the images of the severed head of Hagedorn’s father, the role of the color palette) in keeping with the fact that while many autobiographical comics by women deal with traumatic experiences, “the authors do not project an identity that is defined by trauma” (Chute 2).
• Self-portrayal, self-acceptance, and visual representation of the female “beautiful/ugly” body, which has been presented in the memoir as an integral part of growing feminist awareness (Grosz 1994).

Ultimately, I shall argue that Hagedorn’s memoir not only demonstrates the power of female vision in comics, but also does so from a unique transnational perspective.

9. The perfect victim: Reading victimhood in rape narratives in Indian comics
Shromona Das, Jawaharlal Nehru University

This paper is a feminist enquiry into the image of the grievable victim of sexual assault in the nation state of India; it is also a critical analysis of what it means to depict trauma, graphically, in this political climate where the rhetoric of women’s empowerment is constantly been strategically adapted within the Saffron camps of extremist Hindu forces. On the other hand, a specific kind of rhetoric, which survivors of sexual assaults have used in recent times as part of the transcontinental avalanche of the #MeToo movement, has also been vehemently criticised by a school of Indian feminists. What unfolded as an episodical battle between feminists in India over the issue of the #MeToo movement also upholds one kind of victimhood over the other. Priya’s Shakti feeds into a Hindu religio-political discourse of empowerment, Hush leans towards a narrative of avenging, and thereby negotiating with trauma, both of which have been criticised by pioneer figures of contemporary Indian feminism. I believe, as a feminist, I am faced with a dilemma regarding the reading of victimhood in contemporary India. As a participant in the #MeToo movement, I do not wish to foreground a purely objective view in this paper, but rather posit myself within the argument.

In her seminal work on postcolonial feminism, Indian feminist Rajeswari Sunder Rajan reads the popular Tamil story “Prison”: the story revolves around Bhagirathi, the female protagonist, who survives rape and tries to negotiate with the trauma. In Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism (1993), Sunder Rajan offers a critical reading of a Brahminic victimhood that has been consolidated in the popular Hindu imagination through “…the legendary figures of Ahalya and Sita from Hindu mythology, women raped and abducted, who are forced to establish their chastity through miraculous tests or prolonged ordeals.” The process of associating the woman victim readily with the mythic figures of Sita and Ahalya, I argue, is doubly problematic: on one hand it dissolves the trauma of rape through the reinstated chastity and domesticity; on the other, it elevates the survivor to a mythic order, stripping her off of any individuality and robbing her off any agency. Sita’s, Ahalya’s and Draupadi’s resurrection is in their successful silencing. Trauma removed and pain forgotten, they can only be accepted back once they “cure” themselves of the memory of assault. In doing so, the dominant image of the “ideal” survivor is synthesised and kept alive in the public imagination; that image is disassociated from any contemporaneity, temporarily or identity. I read the image of this “ideal” victimhood with reference to the comics series Priya’s Shakti and Pratheek Thomas’s graphic narrative Hush(2011). I do not wish to insist on an objective viewpoint, but emphasise that this paper stems out of a personal political engagement. I wish to posit the reading of my own comics on the #MeToo movement and discuss my immense urge and severe unease while putting forth a visual representation of victimhood- and seeking that very act, as a point of departure- and a way of challenging the idea of an ideal victim.

Session 4: Artist panel

10. Animation and radical body art-reaching beyond the border
Mētra Saberova, London South Bank University

With this presentation I want to talk about the visual imaging found in comics as a useful method to deal with ethically charged issues, specifically, concerning the female body. I will be using my own art practice as a case study to showcase the power of visual and fragmented storytelling as a way how to
ease the discussion towards topics that might be too hard to digest otherwise. As a disclaimer, I must
profess I use hand-drawn animation not comics as my medium of choice. I started using animation
when I was still doing my MA Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in London. I moved to London from
Riga, Latvia just after I had gained my infamous status as a radical artist after coming out publicly
about my childfree identity and tubal ligation procedure in Thailand. That is, permanent
contraception, basically vasectomy for women with much smaller possibility for a reversal procedure.
If throwing out in the open such an unexpected fact of a medical operation seems a bit shocking to
you, can you imagine trying to present my next project, hymenoplasty, that is, surgical restoration of
hymen, to my course mates and the Fine Art department? So, what did you do during the summer? I
got my hymen “fixed”.

Trying to talk about my practice is pretty hard as I constantly have to add more and more lengthy
descriptions about the medical procedures themselves. There is no way to get to the rewarding part
of the reasoning behind the art practice. That is why, during the next 20 minutes I will be telling you
all about how with the medium of animation I am trying to bridge the gap between shock and
understanding, fixed stereotypes and fluid imagery, site-specific media attention and fitting into
international context.

11. Spaceship to the unknown
Juliana Hyrri

“We’re leaving on a spaceship to Finland,” exclaimed three-year-old me to the kindergarten teacher,
not knowing what was actually meant by the phrase. The year was 1993 when my family left behind
a Russian speaking city on the northeastern coast of newly independent Estonia.

* * *

How much does integration into a foreign culture in early childhood determine the individual,
their identity, choices, and quality of life? As I grew older for understanding what had happened, I fell
in a crisis: who am I? Why do I not fully identify with any particular culture and what do my origins
mean to me? Am I the intruder, the outsider, the Other?

Culture can be considered as a multifaceted framework of values, beliefs and concepts that also
guides individuals' opinions. Cultural identity is a constantly evolving state of “becoming” through
the past – it has a similar construction as the concept of narrative identity. Through narratives,
individual searches for their own understanding of themselves and seeks for their place in the world.

It has been written in the scholarly literature of various disciplines that the comics artist’s self-
portrayal character is constructed in relation to cultural expectations such as gender, ethnicity, age,
and social class. The environment strongly influences our own interpretation of our bodies, as we
mirror ourselves in relation to our environment, where the margin set by default has a different
starting point from that of a culturally dominative, white, cisgender, heterosexual male.

Currently, I am working on an autobiographical comic based on my and my family’s subjective
experience of adaptation to another culture, therefore, the following questions have raised my
interest and urge of further discussion on the topic for example in a panel format. How does
autobiographical comic as a method allow one to portray the subjective experience of otherness?
What are the specifics and problems of this type of narrative? How does temporal proximity affect
how experience is drawn?

12. Women in art history
Taina Hakala

My presentation is about my long comic project about finnish painter Helene Schjerfbeck (1862-
1946). The comic is about her life, including the struggle between family responsibilities. Schjerfbeck
was an unmarried daughter who had to take care of her mother and her own career. She had a great
will to continue painting all her life, despite many challenges with health and economy.
In my comic I also include a lot of information about women’s situation in the art world at the time: how they paid double prices for studies, still got less teaching than men and back home, they got smaller grants and stipendiums. Women were in many ways taught to become amateurs, and then blamed in critiques for being weak by nature.

I started this project in 2018, and I work on it the best I can and keep applying for funding. I plan to publish the album in 2022 when it’s 160 years after Schjerfbeck’s birth.

13. “Money, race, gender, and economics in comics” 2014-2016 – Investigating and drawing the power structures in comics on our own
Johanna Rojola

I was participating and partially managing a research and comics project, “Money, race, gender, and economics in comics” in 2014-2016. My presentation is about the aims, methods and results of this project. I also provide a critical look on what went wrong, as the results are still not published. Yet the project did change our lives: radicalized some of us, made us see how we were individually tripping on power structures; the actions we took to change those structures and create space for those who are shoved to the margins of comics.

In 2013 I found out about the investigative comics published in https://truthout.org/series/ladydrawers/ made by journalist Anne Elizabeth Moore and the members of Ladydrawers of Chicago collective. Working in the Helsinki Comics Center at the time, I proposed we invite Moore over: she was heading to Europe anyway. In January 2014, she presented her work and gave a workshop on her research-based comics to members of FEMSKT, a Finnish feminist comics network that had been just founded couple of months earlier in 2013.

We had workshops in Helsinki January, September and November 2014, in Chicago summer 2015 and in 2016 in Detroit and Saari residency. During these meetings we defined what should be researched and how, decided and learnt the methods, created and translated the survey questionnaire and published it online, gathered the results, crunched the numbers, analyzed the results, wrote the scripts and drew them into comics.

I will present samples of the 60 pages of the unpublished comics. There is a open databank our survey and great plans for the future next steps. Artist roundtable participant H-P Lehkonen took part in most of the workshops and has agreed to participate in the Q&A after my presentation, thus filling the gaps in my memory.

14. The underground of fanzines
Rakel Stammer

I present my research into the European underground comics and print community conducted in 2015 - 2019. I have during this period visited multiple festivals, often taking place in squats, in Rome, Hungary, Germany, Serbia, Spain and connected with other zinemakers, printmakers and cartoonists across Europe. In 2016 I wrote a piece about my travels for Underlandet (a swedish project aimed at enhancing experimental comics), in which I discussed the intersections of capitalism and art within these alternative spaces, in comparison to the Swedish scene. I have attached my paper, which was later published again in HYSTERIA - and international feminist journal on art and activism) for you to see and can briefly summarize it: In the text I explore the gatekeeper mentality that exists in the art scene and how this relates to capitalism, what happens to political art when it is sold in a market place, the importance of spaces that offer themselves to art and the radical potential in having cultures that are based on participation, rather than consumption. I have since elaborated on my ideas and started focusing more on connecting with queer and female artists, within this “underground art scene”, and will be giving a lecture in Valencia this January about feminist organizing within the community of zinesters and print makers. What I propose is to make a presentation in which I elaborate on the necessity of anti-capitalist analysis within feminist organizing and how those who seek to adress both the problems within the established institutions
and their elitist organizing, and the underground and their often highly sexist and toxic power structures, find themselves alienated from both places. I wish to discuss a radical feminist future for comics that seeks to go beyond both.

Session 5: Gender perspectives on comics in Italian and German

15. Background stories in Gina Siciliano’s *The Life and Times of Artemisia Gentileschi*
   Rebecca Scherr, University of Oslo

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was an Italian Baroque history painter, and is today the most well-known female artist from that time. Her *Judith and Holofernes* (1610), hanging in the Uffizi gallery, is considered a feminist masterpiece because of the matter of fact, powerful way that Gentileschi portrayed Judith and her maid cutting off Holofernes’ head. Rediscovered first in the early 1900s after centuries of neglect, Gentileschi’s life and art has, in the past forty years in particular, become the subject of overtly feminist scholarship, novels, films, plays, art installations, TV shows, and even an opera. One could say there is a small Artemisia Gentileschi industry, and that she has become a veritable “pre-feminist” icon. And now Gina Siciliano has added to the feminist retellings and with her graphic novel *I Know What I Am: The Life and Times of Artemisia Gentileschi* (Fantagraphics 2019.)

Gentileschi’s fame is as much a product of a court case in which her father successfully sued a family friend for raping her, as it is on the rarity of her life as a moderately successful female artist in 17th century Italy. Every fictional and historical work about her places great emphasis on the rape and the subsequent trial as in some ways inextricable from her development as an artist and for the themes she tackled in her paintings. Siciliano’s comics adaptation adds very little to the information about Gentileschi’s life: it is a very text-heavy work based on the available historical sources, about half of the graphic novel focuses on the relationship between Artemisia and her rapist turned lover Antonio Tassi, and the last part of the book follows her life as an independent artist after the trial.

There is certainly a discussion to be had about the ways that feminists have used Artemisia Gentileschi’s art and life towards their own purposes. Siciliano herself explicitly links her interest in Gentileschi to what she sees as their shared status as survivors of sexual abuse: “After years of struggling to heal from my own history of sexual abuse, I wondered if perhaps we have to look back to move forward” (viii). While I will touch upon and problematize the feminist politics of drawing such lines between experiences across centuries, that will not be my central focus. Instead, I will mainly discuss how, in the first half of the book, Siciliano’s depictions of the built environment as she leads up the rape scene tell a larger story within the immediate story about how rooms, windows, doors, and streets—the material of the lived environment—literally and figuratively shape women’s lives, experiences, and bodies. This is a powerful dimension of the graphic novel; that is, how the supposed background of the frames can be just as important as the figural foreground, in how the background can tell overlooked yet overarching stories about “who a world is built for” (Sara Ahmed, blogpost, “Feminist Killjoys,” 31 October 2019.)

   Camilla Storskog, University of Milan

   “As all the three of us were women with a burning desire to fulfil a creative and personal need, it was all too obvious that the issue of feminism should hit close to home.”
   (Travagliati, http://www.encyclopedialedellobbino.it/biografie/ada-turin/)

With these words Adela Turin, Nella Bosnia, and Francesca Canterelli presented their new-born publishing house *Dalla parte delle bambine* (“On the girls’ side”) in 1978. Inspired, not only nominally, by Elena Gianini Belotti’s influential essay on the social conditioning and its effects on the
stereotyped role of girls (Gianini Belotti 1973), the three founders made it their mission to publish feminist literature for children. In line with this project, the comic artist Cinzia Ghigliano was commissioned with the creation of a graphic novel (Ghigliano 1978) based on Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House with its iconic female protagonist (Ibsen 1879). My paper wishes to explore the visual glossary in Ghigliano’s Nora. Casa di bambola and its entanglement of references to the portrayal of women in the art history of the late 19th and early 20th century (the Pre-Raphaelites, the Vienna Secession, le style Mucha), which seem to inform the reader of a heroine collecting and exposing “various historic versions of womanliness” (Langås 2005, 162). Special attention will also be given to the process of adaptation through which the story has been transferred not only across media borders but also transnationally, from its Norwegian setting in the 1870s to the graphic novel’s Parisian belle époque, and to the new surroundings and the cultural climate of second wave feminism in the Italian 1970s.

17. Theorizing visualities of gender and feminism in German-language comics

Marina Rauchenbacher, University of Vienna
Katharina Serles, University of Vienna

When the German translation of Liv Strömquist’s Kunskapens frukt (2014) was first published in German as Der Ursprung der Welt (“the origin of the world”) in 2017, it quickly gained a wide readership and public acknowledgement within the German-speaking realm. Various German newspapers published reviews on its ‘rehabilitation of the vulva’ (cf. Der Spiegel 9. 5. 2017) or on its influence on the ‘comeback of the vulva’ (cf. Die Zeit 18. 20. 2018). Its reception coincided with the #metoo-movement and other popular feminist publications such as Untenrum frei by Margarete Stokowski (2016, “go commando/free”); two translations of earlier books/series by Strömquist followed: Der Ursprung der Liebe (2018; Prins Charles Känsla 2010) and I’m Every Woman (2019; Einsteins fru 2008 and Einsteins nya fru 2018). Kunskapens frukt’s success within German-language contexts makes it an apt reference for the analysis of German-language comics on feminist issues. In our talk, we will focus on two crucial works: Patu’s and Antje Schrupp’s Kleine Geschichte des Feminismus im euro-amerikanischen Kontext (2015; 4th, extended edition 2018; A Brief History of Feminism, transl. by Sophie Lewis 2017) and Katja Klengel’s Girlspaining (2018).

Our elaborations are embedded in our four-year research project Visualities of Gender in German-Language Comics (https://gendercomics.net/en). This project, conducted at the University of Vienna and funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), follows the assumption that comics (re)produce and challenge diverse and substantial ‘visualities of gender.’ ‘Comics’ as a medium is not only based on binary gender systems and conventional body concepts, aligning to sociocultural standards of beauty and stereotypical role definitions, but identifies the body as a medium for cultural inscriptions, specifically scrutinizes gender norms, and establishes visual registers of gender.

In order to grasp Strömquist’s transnational influence, we first strive to contextualize the reception of Kunskapens frukt within the German-speaking realm, outline its commercial success and point to specific characteristics of the German edition such as the evident art quotations of cover and title in contrast to different editorial choices for other translations of Kunskapens frukt. This will help us define the specific cultural context we are dealing with.

Secondly, we will provide exemplary comparisons between Kunskapens frukt and Kleine Geschichte as well as Girlspaining. Both works introduce, summarize or at least allude to different feminist discourses and strive to establish narratological choices similar to Kunskapens frukt: Kleine Geschichte, e. g., develops a documentary as well as playful educational tone resembling Kunskapens frukt’s cultural-historical elaborations, while Girlspaining above all mirrors Kunskapens frukt’s anecdotal and humorous approach. All works cite, reproduce and – to some extent – criticize gender discourses.

Drawing from these elaborations we will address the following questions aimed at delimiting the area or genre of German-language ‘feminist-theory-comics’: Which educational or didactical claims do these comics have? When and how do the comics apply satire/humour? What is the function of
18. Ambiguous gender identities in German comics
Anna Beckmann, Free University of Berlin

In my dissertation project I examine stagings of unreliability and ambiguity in comics, drawing on theories of unreliability in literature and film studies and on transmedia narratology. The concept of unreliability offers a way to investigate the interrelations between narratives and society, because the production and recognition of these narratological strategies is connected to societal norms and reader expectations. Especially when looking at representations of gender, race and memory/trauma, graphic narratives tend to use narratological strategies of ambiguity to question presumably given concepts.

Much recent works on feminist Graphic Narratives has focused on similar themes and motifs in feminist comics. That is why there are a lot of story-oriented analyses. Much attention has also been devoted to the genre of autobiographic comics and live writing. In my talk, I want to take a look at a selection of German-speaking comics which are dealing with ambiguity of gender and take a closer look at one example.

Based on these exploration I want to show which possibilities the comic specific aesthetic offers for queer presentations of gender. I aim to identify how the specific mediality of comics is particularly suitable to represent narrative strategies of ambiguity that question our ideas of strict gender roles.

I want to explore how narrative strategies of ambiguity are used to challenge gender concepts in feminist comics. Thereby I will show that the question what a feminist comic is has to be extended by the question how feminist comics work and what the critical potential of feminist or queer graphic representation is. Therefore I will concentrate on the question concerning the discourse of comics. My focus here is especially on the representation of non-binary figures or figures who challenge the expectations of femininity. The analysis will examine the representation of corporeality as well as structure of narration and focalization. Especially I am interested in the power relation which are related to representations of gender and how the selected examples reflect power structures in the graphic representation and narration.

19. Safety in numbers – challenging norms in the Swedish field of comics
Gunnar Krantz, K3, Malmö university

The radical shift in gender representation among Swedish comics artists during the 2000s (Lindberg 2014) is often described in quantitative terms, by comparing gender balance in publications, students accepted at comics educations, sales figures, critical attention in the media and so forth. Even though this shift is evident there has, as Robbins (1993) points out, always been women working in the comics business and in Sweden many of them have been successful, like Ingrid Vang Nyman, Birgitta Lilliehöök, Cecilia Torudd, Joanna Rubin Dranger and Lena Furberg, to mention a few. But since comics like theirs were coded as children’s-, girls- or women’s-, they were (up until recently) of little or no interest to the dominant pretenders on the field, where cultural capital was measured by the size of comics collections, encyclopaedic knowledge of (foremost American) comics and power of consecration as critics, editors and jury-officials.

This however, does not mean that these pretenders were unaware of the unequal gender representation or abstained from discussing it. On the contrary. The question of “the absence of women in comics” have been a recurring theme ever since the early 70s, giving evidence of one of Broady’s “rules of thumb” in identifying an autonomous cultural field; the ability to translate themes
and discourses imported from the outside into the field’s own logic (1998, s. 19ff). In my paper I will present how this discourse has evolved since the early 70s and some of the key-factors that were involved in the radical shift mentioned above, including the comics collective Ink Angels (founded in 1999) and the use of Guerrilla Girls tactics as a way to challenge male norms of quality.

20. Challenging gender norms through comics in the classroom
   Lars Wallner, Linköping University
   Robert Aman, Linköping University

This presentation explores how students and a teacher in a Swedish secondary school do gender talk with comics. Previous literary research on comics have shown them to be both a reinforcement of existing stereotypes as well as a potential tool for problematizing gender. However, much of the existing research on comics in education has been more interested in exploring what boys and girls like to read, rather than investigating what gender work can be done with the material. Therefore, using conversation analytical methodology, we have documented situated classroom talk through video observations and participant talk and embodied interaction is analysed with a focus on how gender is socially constructed in educational practice. In relation to comics, three different aspects of gender talk are displayed and discussed in the groups. Results indicate that students are capable of seeing past the gender stereotypes in comics. We show how students first identify gendered characteristics and behaviour in the materials, deconstruct aspects of these gender differences, and criticize them. Use of comics enable students to discuss characters that they are familiar with since early childhood to deconstruct gender aspects and relate this to everyday events. The gender binary of this particular comics material could be viewed as problematic, but students work with what they have – were we to use more gender fluid representations in comics, perhaps it would give students other perspectives on gender. We see a vital opportunity here to continue to use, and further expand, comics as a tool to discuss norm critique in the classroom.

21. Feminist comics, the next generation – Intersectionality in practice
   Sara Telem, University of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack)

This paper will discuss the ways in which master students working with comics at Visual Communication, Konstfack, use and challenge existent narratives of Western comic traditions. The material consists of degree projects carried out between 2018–2019, and the students’ own Diva-published documentations of and reflections on their processes (known as DROPs, as in Documentation of and Reflection on Process).

Since I started my position at Konstfack in spring 2018, twelve master students have graduated with degree projects within sequential storytelling, working with graphic novels and short stories, enrutningar (single panels), picture books for adults and visual poems. In the spring exhibition of 2020, six students will present works within these genres.

The student body at Visual Communication is international with students from, and/or with family ties to Thailand, Mexico, Syria, Jamaica, Germany, England, Denmark and Sweden et al. Thus their stories, often firmly rooted in autobiographical narratives, make visible and negotiate embodied experiences and sensitivities shaped both locally and transnationally, offering insightful perspectives on questions of post- and neocolonialism, decolonialism, feminism, race, class and gender. They are stories both of roots and routes, intertwining complex and conflicting narratives of longing, freedom, far-aways, and homecomings.

In their projects and DROPs, students bear witness about how their stories, bodies, background, or disabilities have not been given space or even been acknowledged in previous education. To give an example: talking openly about homosexuality or colorism in a Thai educational context can be very hard, if not impossible. The consciously norm-challenging and – creative setting at Visual Communication, Konstfack, becomes a window of opportunity to do so. At the same time and just as importantly, the student’s culturally rooted practice and perspectives questions, extends and
reshapes this window, offering the opportunity for other students and teachers to see the world, and their works, anew.

22. Super(anti)heroines: The threatening and revolutionary force of superwomen
Marco Favaro, doctoral student, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg

Superheroines are paradoxical figures: they are empowering, and yet hypersexualized, strong and independent, and yet they fight for a society in which women are subordinate to men. “The female superhero originates in an act of criticism – a challenge to the masculinist world of superhero adventures”, writes Lillian S. Robinson in *Wonder Women*. However, at the same time, as superheroines, they should embody the values of the society they are protecting, that means they embody the status quo and confirm its stereotypes; but in a prevalent male chauvinistic society, where men are in power and women must fight for their rights, how can they protect this kind of status quo?

Thus, an ambiguous situation is created in which the status quo comes at once protected and questioned. In the superheroine “stereotype and innovation work together” concludes Robinson. Even if they are objectified, drawn with hypersexualized bodies, provocative, with revealing clothes, superwomen always keep an antiheroic element, disruptive, potentially revolutionary – even monstrous when it appears in villainesses.

“The ambitious woman and the heroine are strange monsters”, writes Simone De Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Like antiheroes, superheroines are dangerous threats to the status quo; they challenge our stereotype about women and superheroes. Their hyper-sexualization appears then as a way to control them, to exorcise their potential threat.

“In this modern era, the hero is a heroine; however, this 21st Century heroine still more closely resembles the antiheroic archetype”, writes Cynthia Lyles-Scott. Is it true? Are superwomen, today, still extremely antiheroic? How are they challenging our concepts of “hero” and “heroine”? I will try to answer these questions: through the analysis of characters like Wonder Woman, Jessica Jones, the new Ms. Marvel and Catwoman, and referring to the philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, I will focus on this antiheroic aspect of superwomen in comic books and its dialectic with the most normative and stereotypical ones.

Session 7: Women War Witnesses

23. Panel on war comics by women: Challenging genre and gender norms while doing justice to the past
Warda Ahmed, University of Turku
Ainur Elmgren, University of Helsinki
Reetta Laitinen, Finnish Comics Society
Tiitu Takalo

Even though a hundred years have passed, women’s experiences of wars and conflicts are still peripheral in the national collective memory, which is dominated by movies and novels written by men about men. Our comic, *Sisaret 1918* (Sisters 1918), published by Arktinen Banaani in 2018, aimed to give voices and faces to these marginalized women and children in the Finnish civil war of 1918. The project started with the call of voices from the past. Archivist Reetta Laitinen found eyewitness accounts by women from the Finnish civil war of 1918 in Kansan Arkisto, an archive of the left-wing labour movement in Finland, and corresponding material in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society. The accounts from different regions and sides of the conflict became the raw material for ten comics by ten artists, representing the individual voices and viewpoints of ten women and children. Our panel consists of five team members, who will discuss how and why our work possibly challenged dominant, male-focused narratives of war, and what kind of challenges we faced in our attempts at representing the voices from the past. This included editorial choices, as
Reetta Laitinen was careful to select narratives that would be suitable for adaptation to the comic format. Other choices were the result of collective consensus, for example restraint in the depiction of violence. We will also discuss our work methods, research as a collective process, and our individual reflections on how to represent these highly subjective, sometimes unreliable witness accounts of a painful and unresolved historical trauma. Finally, we reflect on the reception of the comic during the centennial commemorations of the civil war in Finland 2018. Sisaret 1918 was awarded the Sarjakuvu-Finlandia prize in 2019.

**Keynote lecture 2**

**Challenging binary categories of gender, sexuality and corporeality through metaphor in autobiographical comics**  
Elisabeth El Refaie, Cardiff University

This talk uses examples from a range of autobiographical comics to demonstrate that (verbo-)visual metaphors can provide an effective means of unsettling entrenched binary categories such as male-female, straight-queer, normal-abnormal, and healthy-sick.

Metaphor, which I define as any representation that invites us to consider one kind of thing in terms of another, may take many different forms (El Refaie 2019). The most explicit type in comics are ‘pictorial metaphors’, which use images of concrete things to stand for something else (e.g., a deflated balloon for depression). However, the arrangement of visual elements on a page is also able to convey metaphorical meanings by drawing on the experience of our bodies in space, while stylistic features such as colour or quality of line may sometimes conjure up emotions or non-visual sensory perceptions.

Unlike literal descriptions, which threaten to destroy the ‘fruitful ambiguity’ (McGilchrist 2009: 180) of human experience by forcing it into explicitness, metaphors are able to open up meanings that are ‘extralingual, unconscious, and therefore potentially new and alive’ (p. 117). I will argue that this potential of metaphor is used to good advantage by many autobiographical comics artists whose work centers on gender and body politics, in particular.

**Session 8: Women in Asian comics**

**24. In search of the ‘common woman’**  
Shambhavi Singh, Aalto University

In the age of Instagram, facebook, online blogs and portfolios, everyone seems to have a chance to voice their opinion. Yet how many voices are heard? Whose voice is legitimate and must be heard, can often be determined by the platform or channel through which it reaches us. Where newspapers have been crucial sources of informing us about our daily politics, political cartoons have played an important role in commenting upon this day to day politics. Within this context, India’s struggles with its politics, its social change can be seen reflected in the political cartoons of its national and regional newspapers. The most prominent voice in this space has been that of the late RK Laxman. ‘The Common Man’ was a cartoon character created by RK Laxman in 1951. It portrayed the average Indian as a witness to democracy in the making representing the aspirations and troubles of the average Indian. Needless to say, ‘The Common Man’ is also a man. Laxman’s cartoons much like those of his contemporaries and even the ones today, are devoid of the presence of women’s issues as a prominent subject in the political rhetoric.

For this symposium, I would like to present a series of visuals that trace this very absence of women’s voices in the history of Indian political cartooning. The presentation will reflect upon the following:
15

• The social and the political as compartmentalized through editorial cartoons (political) and pocket cartoons (social), where women’s issues have often been categorized in the social (practice of sati, dowry, child marriage, female feticide, etc.) divorced from the political;
• How technology has aided in negotiating these divisions;
• The struggles that still remain.

25. Exploring the F in P: Feminism in contemporary Pakistani comics
Wajeehah Aayeshah, University of Melbourne

Contemporary Pakistani comics have a strong element of feminism. This is evident through both, the lead female characters and the storylines. This is contrary to most of the mainstream female representation in contemporary Pakistani media. The majority of which either portrays a damsel in distress or a rebellion female facing dire consequences of her strong headedness. Whereas, in the comics, most of the female characters are dynamic, leading their storylines, or directing the storylines of those around them. These characters are athletes, critical thinkers, social activists, fighters, teachers, players, etc. They aren’t juxtaposed as a subservient character to a stronger male lead. All these characters are fighting villains of a sort, be it social injustice, poverty, extremist organisations, or criminals. Most of these characters have a comfortable relationship with violence. They also have a close relationship with their loved ones.

The female characters in Pakistani comics, like the comic themselves, are an intersection of Pakistani culture as well as western literature. This adds a layer of liminal hybridity to the character design as well as the narrative. This paper explores three main points. First, what sort of feminist elements are present in Pakistani comics. Second, can the feminism represented in these comics be distinguished as Pakistani feminism? Third, what would be some unique features of Pakistani feminism?

The discussion in this paper is based on data collected from two research methods. Narrative analysis of Pakistani comics including Raat, Reality Girl, Team Mahafiz, Bloodlines, and Passban, and in-depth interviews with artists and writers of these comics. This paper will contribute to the emerging discourse about contemporary Pakistani comics and feminism.

26. Christian allegory and feminist re-contextualization of Puella Magi Madoka Magica
Henri Nerg, University of Jyväskylä

My presentation will examine how Christian allegory is expressed in Puella Magi Madoka Magica and how it re-contextualizes the stories of the Bible from a feminist perspective. The presentation is based on my master’s thesis which I finished in spring 2019.

Puella Magi Madoka Magica is a Japanese transmedial franchise which originated as an anime and manga series in 2011. The original story tells the story of a 14-year-old girl Kaname Madoka who encounters a creature called Kyubey. He asks Madoka to make a contract with him and become a magical girl fighting against witches in exchange of a wish. However, the life of a magical girl is not what she naively expected.

My presentation will concentrate on what elements make Madoka Magica a Christian allegory, how they are represented in the context of manga and anime and how they can be read as a feminist re-contextualization and counterstatement of Christian myths. I also find interesting parallels between Madoka Magica and another famous feminist counterstatement of Christianity, Philip Pullman’s novel series His Dark Materials.

Madoka Magica is one of the most economically profitable and critically acclaimed franchises of Japanese popular culture in the 21st century. By defying conventional genre elements it has gathered a strong fanbase in different consumer groups, transcending the traditional shōjo demograph of 9-14-year-old girls. It has been a subject of several academic articles (Butler 2018, Cleto & Bahl 2016, Shen 2014); however, as far as I know, no academic study concerning Christian allegory and feminist re-contextualization has been made. As Japanese popular culture is becoming more and more
popular in the West as well, more academic studies should be conducted in order to understand a unique, complex and interesting phenomenon.

Session 9: A multidisciplinary study of feminist comic art. Presentation of research project funded by the Foundation for Baltic and Eastern European Studies (Östersjöstiftelsen)

27. Anke Feuchtenberger’s comics semiotics: Deconstructing feminine myths in “Rosen” and “No Roses”

Biz Nijdam, University of British Columbia

In her 1922 poem Sacred Emily, Gertrude Stein writes “A Rose is a rose is a rose.” Within this text and several of her subsequent poems, Stein continually returns to this formulation to playfully undermine the symbolism of the rose in literary traditions. With the repetition of the symbol of the rose—as an object, a name, a metaphor and a symbol—Stein asserts that despite literature’s propensity for infusing this one type of flower with romantic meanings, it is in fact, just a rose. Like Stein’s application of the same imagery, East German graphic artist Anke Feuchtenberger’s pair of graphic narratives “Rosen” and “No Roses,” titled in German and English respectively, also attack the metaphorical attachments of the rose to make a statement about the arbitrariness of its—and other gendered symbols’—signification. By engaging the symbol of the rose in “Rosen,” Feuchtenberger calls forth its associations with love and romance, only to deconstruct these conventions and disassemble its significations in the following graphic narrative, “No Roses.”

This paper looks at the semiotics behind Feuchtenberger’s “Rosen” and “No Roses” through the methodologies developed in Roland Barthe’s Mythologies (1957) and Thierry Groensteen’s System of Comics (2007) and Comics and Narration (2013). By applying tradition semiotics and comics semiotics to this pair of graphic narratives, I argue that Feuchtenberger’s comics deconstructs traditional male/female dichotomies to redefine the symbols of femininity and masculinity. Through “Rosen” and “No Roses,” she ultimately disentangles the signifieds, signifiers and signs of love, domesticity and romance, complicating contemporary conceptions of gender, relationships and heteronormativity.

28. The Russian comic art of Varvara Pomidor

Jose Alaniz, University of Washington

Since their rocky origins in the tumultuous 1990s, post-Soviet Russian comics have weathered a shattered economy; domination of the market by foreign brands; and deep public disdain for the form as inherently frivolous. Much of the material produced in this era—in such genres as science fiction, adventure and humor—proved of such shoddy quality as to confirm Russian preconceptions of comics as subliterate trash. With the autobiographical work of Nikolai Maslov in the mid-00’s the tide began to turn; unfortunately, Maslov could only publish his comics abroad. But partly as a reaction to Putinism, a wave of “serious” graphic narrative has definitively crested—with women artists leading the way.

St. Petersburg’s Varvara Pomidor (b. 1975) graduated from the Nikolai Roerich Art Institute and the St. Petersburg Art and Industry Academy. She also took a course in printmaking and photography at the Georg Simon Ohm Fachhochschule in Nuremberg, Germany and later served as art director of the design studio Mediamama. From book illustration and design, she eventually turned to comics. Her work is characterized by a whimsical, child-like but at the same time disconcertingly adult sensibility; her stories at times touch on questions beyond the personal, to tragedy and historical trauma.

Among her most celebrated recent works: a collaboration with French artist Francois Ayroles on the dual travelogue St. Petersburg-Bordeaux (2013), produced to commemorate 20 years of sister-
city relations. In her story/cycle *Pravda* (2010), Pomidor combines memory fragments, politics and collage to depict a late Soviet-era childhood. Painting on a background made up of clippings from the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* (“Truth”), Pomidor counterbalances the ordinary events of her young life and that of her relatives with the grand narrative of history. The effect is comical and at times chilling; as young Varya uses the latrine, she seems to gaze into the newspaper (showing portraits of apparatchiks) that lines the walls: “I froze in the dark. If you looked long and hard, you’d start to feel as if you were seeing something more than was there.” Elsewhere, she makes a caustic remark on Leonid Brezhnev’s death: the newspaper headline “Overwhelming grief” and a public display of mourning are juxtaposed with the little girl brushing her teeth: “For me it was the most ordinary day.”

Along with Viktoria Lomasko, Lena Uzhinova, Julia Nikitina (a.k.a. Ner-Tamin) and Olga Lavrenteva, Pomidor represents a new post-Soviet generation of Russian women comics artists unaffected by their predecessors’ discomfort with the medium due to its Soviet-era demonization as bourgeois trash. These artists in fact form a vanguard changing the popular perception of comics in Russia to something more akin to the medium’s acceptance and appreciation in Europe, America and Asia.

29. **Swedish feminist comics at the turn of the millennium: Åsa Grennvall and Joanna Rubin Dranger**

Anna Nordenstam, Gothenburg University
Margareta Wallin Wictorin, Karlstad University

This paper explores the ways in which graphic life narratives by the Swedish comics artists Åsa Grennvall and Joanna Rubin Dranger have shaped and been shaped by aesthetic, social, political, and cultural interactions that reach across national boundaries in an interconnected and globalizing world (Stein, Denson, and Meyer eds. 2013). Grennvall has drawn from punk, goth and do-it-yourself aesthetics in her early fanzines and comics albums such as *Det känns som hundra år* (“It feels like a hundred years”; 1999), *Mie* (“Mie”; 2000) and *Sjunde våningen* (“Seventh floor”; 2002). Her works have been translated into e.g. English, Finnish, French, and Korean. Rubin Dranger uses an elaborated visual metaphorics in her black and white comics “Fittflickan” (“Pussygirl”; 1999), *Fröken Livrädd & Kärleken* (“Miss Scaredy-Cat and Love”; 1999), and *Fröken Märkvärdig & Karriären* (“Miss Remarkable and Her Career”; 2001, translated to English in 2003).

These comics artists are part of the transnational wave of autobiographic/autofictional comics where especially women have been at the vanguard of creating a new aesthetics around self representation (Byrn Køhlert 2019, Chute 2010, Ernst 2017, El Refaie 2012). The genre has a potential as feminist art activism and creative emancipation and gives both the artist and the reader a venue for affective and political work/activities, such as heal, undo and redo (Tolmie 2013). Grennvall and Rubin Dranger, as well as other female comics artists that published life narratives around the millennium turn, elaborated on carefully selected themes, such as love, demands on women, and gender based traumatic experiences. This paper argues that there are connections and intertextualities between these early creators of Swedish life narratives comics and female comics creators in other parts of the world, especially the American artist Debbie Dreschler and the Finnish artist Tove Jansson.