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**Design Doctoral
Conference '18**
Transgression

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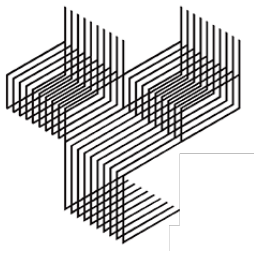
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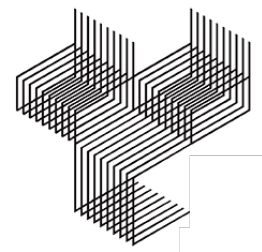
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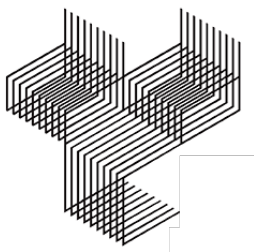
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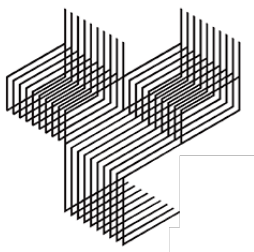
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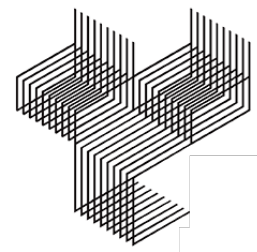


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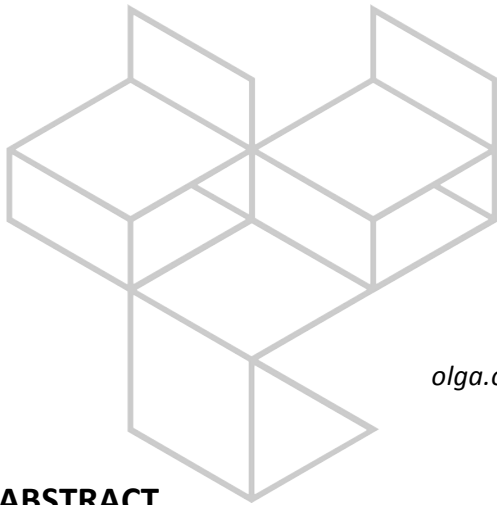
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Guido Crepax – Valentina: The Shape of her Time



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ABSTRACT

The paper will focus on the analysis of Guido Crepax revolutionary comic book character Valentina that belongs to the golden age of the Italian comic-book genre fumetto. The aim is to explore whether Guido Crepax Valentina character was a "living doll" filling male fantasies of her creator or she was a woman empowered by her author struggling for many of the values of the women's culture that feminists today are trying to introduce into the mainstream. It also addresses research questions that focus on comic books and gender and empowerment at the decade of sexual liberation. Through Valentina case study the present paper is going to study an approach on the concept of woman in comics, and touch the border of female empowerment issue in contemporary world taking in consideration that her revolutionary strong and independent figure was born in a society where women have been frequently viewed as passive and represented as inferior to men and where questions of sexuality were considered taboo. Despite the fact that she angered some feminists by the way she was portrayed as an object of male gaze or a damsel in distress, there is nothing anti-feminist about Valentina. The aim here is to uncover feminist themes in the stories of Valentina and to explore what empowered her and made her a contemporary icon of style and symbol of liberated women.

Keywords: Crepax, women representation, Valentina, Italy, comic books, 1960s

INTRODUCTION

Comics as a form of visual culture and especially adult comics are part of the cultural landscape (Roger, 2013, p. 2). Comic books with adult, sexual and erotic content has always attracted an enormous amount of critical and academic attention. Originally, women played a very small role in comic books, there were a lot of "men but very few equivalent female characters, particularly in Italy. The common gender role stereotypes in comic books implicated that men were courageous and capable to succeed independently. Emerged in Italy in the mid-Sixties adult comics better known as the fumetti neri (the black comics) is explained by many scholars by Italian economic boom that put in question the authority of traditional moral institutions and creates a niche for new complex storylines reflecting the times. Fumetti neri phenomenon Roberto Curti explains, "was not only a nod to the noir genre (which they partly fit into) but it implied something sordid, vulgar and morally reprehensible. Something evil" (2016, p. 13).

As fumetti neri are not the main focus of this paper, we are going to briefly explain their concept because they are very important in context of the broader movement toward adult comics in Europe, especially in Italy. In 1962 mysterious Diabolik, by Angela and Luciana Giusani, introduced a new genre and a new format (128 pocket-sized pages, two panels per page) and gave birth to fumetti neri. For the first time, the hero of a comics series was a cold-blooded criminal, that was in many ways the opposite of an American superhero. His partner in love and in crime was beautiful Eva Kant, whose facial features were inspired by Grace Kelly. At the beginning, Eva Kant was staying in the shadow of the King of Crime, but with time she started being independent and has become a character in her own right, a heroine and one of the most famous female comics characters in Italy and a symbol of the emancipated woman. Differently from Crepax's Valentina Eva is a real inseparable companion to her partner Diabolik in crime and in life, very cool, autonomous and intelligent, she has probably

gone through the deepest evolution through time, even more than her partner. Fumetti neri created a big fuss but by the end of the 1960s their boom was over. Most of them disappeared as quickly as they popped up.

It's interesting, that the official birth of the fumetto nero coincides with the birth of horror / thriller hybrid genre known as the giallo, or Italian Gothic Horror¹. Those films were characterized by the centralising female characters, seen as dominating and enslaving figures, who seduce and kill, attract and repel (Curti, 2016, p. 6). The genre movies, in fact, have a lot in common with fumetti neri genre and also have their roots in the mentality towards women in Italy. A super-antihero comic book Diabolik was adapted for the screen by Mario Bava in 1968 and as Roberto Curti (Ibid, 2016, p. 104) notes, the film was not a reinvention of a comic book, but a "reimagination of it as seen by the common man".

Daniele Barbieri² (1995, p. 2) characterized the 1960s by two particular phenomena: birth of so called fumetti neri and interest from an intellectual world³. According to Marrone & Puppa (2006, p. 790) the 1960s were also a decade of birth of the fumetto d'autore (auteur comics) and Guido Crepax is well known for his revolutionary approach in the history of European comics. This new type of comics pioneered by Linus presupposed a new kind of reader. In fact, according to Castaldi (2009, p. 13) the appearance of the magazine Linus in 1965, whose contributors included Italian intellectuals such as Oreste del Buono, Umberto Eco and Elio Vittorini was a shift towards high culture. Crepax began contributing to the seminal Italian magazine Linus in 1965. With Valentina, his most popular character, the author introduced erotica to highbrow adult comics (Castaldi, 2009, p. 26). Roberto Curti (2016, p. 136) explains, that it was Umberto Eco that started taking fumetti seriously as an art form and began investigating them with tools that before were dedicated to "serious literature", which surprised Italian intellectual world.

The present paper is a part of our current thesis devoted to analysis of *comics* of 1960s and 1970s era and depiction of idealized women at the time of sexual liberation, also focusing on gender roles and status of heroines, their beauty types, body languages and sexuality. This article is focused on Guido Crepax female protagonist Valentina and aims to narrow the analysis to the author's approach to female representation and empowerment. Beppi Zancan (Crepax & Gallerani, 2010, p. 144) argues that it would be an error to consider Crepax an author of adventurous comics stories or erotic fumetti, because his own genre lies in between, polarizing adventurous aspects of eroticism and erotic aspects of an adventure⁴. Umberto Eco points out, that with Crepax changed the relationship between time and space in comic books (2010, p. 65). Crepax, in fact, reinvented the layout of the page and set his own innovative cinematic language bringing freedom into the narrative and page composition that differentiate his stories from the traditional ones.

The selected decade and a character are important for the following reasons. First, this period was marked by social and economic changes and women's liberation movement that changed their roles in social, cultural, political and economic life and made women feel equal to men by giving them certain rights and services. Second, because before 1960s women characters in comics in Italy were quite scarce and were seen as secondary. Guido Crepax's Valentina as a protagonist of her own comic strip and representative of the liberated middle-class women, presented to the readership a revolutionary, highly independent and sexually liberated woman. She is more than a sex symbol and according to Laterza and Vinella (1980, p. 197) can be considered a very Italian protagonist⁵, one of the most complex and sensual women in Italian comics. "An independent woman, a fashion photographer who moved in the chaotic, superficial world of contemporary Milan, Valentina had a darker side which emerged more and more among the years" (Curti, 2016, p. 137). Peculiar elements that so much influenced Crepax's narration also gave birth to the liberated consumerism of the following years and the hunger for novelties, especially the ones coming from abroad, because they represent modernity (Guzzetta & Zaghini, 2009)⁶. With Valentina Crepax told a story of Italian society referencing its art, culture, literature, fashion and cinema, that influence one another, appear reunited all together in the same work. Valentina, a protagonist of her own story with time passing experiences a significant transformation and becomes more psychologically mature.

¹ Giallo -is a 20th-century Italian thriller or horror genre of literature and film. It usually has mystery elements and is often combined with slasher, crime fiction or, less frequently, supernatural horror elements.

² Daniele Barbieri, professor of Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna

³ Translation of the original citation is my own: Gli anni Sessanta sono caratterizzati da due fenomeni in particolare: il fumetto cosiddetto "nero" e l'interesse del mondo intellettuale.

⁴ Translated from the original: Sarebbe un errore considerare Crepax un autore di fumetti avventurosi come sarebbe un errore considerarlo autore di fumetti erotici (e non pornografici, con confondiamo). La sua produzione si colloca a metà di questi due generi, polarizzandosi sugli aspetti avventurosi dell'erotismo e su quegli erotici dell'avventura.

⁵ Translated from the original: Può essere considerata una eroina italiana.

⁶ Translated from the original: Il personaggio di Valentina ha attraversato quattro decenni di storia del paese, eppure la «moretta» e il suo autore sono, prima di tutto, creature degli anni Sessanta. Gli elementi peculiari di quel periodo, che più hanno inciso sulla narrazione crepaxiana, sono l'abundantia materiale, che scatenerà il consumismo sfrenato e liberatorio dei decenni successivi, la fame di novità (soprattutto straniere).

SIXTIES OF AN ECONOMIC BOOM AND WOMEN VALUE

Clark and Senn (2011, p. 3) call the Sixties in Italy “an explosive period”. Characterized by social, cultural and economic changes. Emerged in Italy in the mid-sixties fumetti neri flourished, naturally giving way to eroticism in women’s struggle towards consciousness and autonomy (Guzzetta & Zaghini, 2009, p. 12). Simone Castaldi finds the success of fumetti highly paradigmatic, because profound cultural and social changes provoked the changing of target audience in the Italian mass media (2009, p. 19). Though, it is not surprising that the majority of the protagonists of fumetti titles were women. Unpredictable and innovative they were depicted in their visual and contextual extremes.

Through history, traditional patriarchal system that dominated in Italy for several centuries saw women submissive and dependant on men (Cottino-Jones, 2010, p. 4). Moreover, the censorship was consistently conservative in questions of morality particularly focusing on feminine ‘purity’ and prescribed a de-sexualized presentation of the female figure especially in concern to their role in family and society. Before the ‘60s the identification of female body as spectacle was an issue of concern for the Catholic establishment but the loosening of censorship would allow women to struggle for transforming their traditional roles. Laterza and Vinella (1980, p. 144) argue that the social atmosphere was artificially eroticized by advertising, cinema and fumetti, which often made a negative impact on emotional sphere and sexuality of people making sex available product of consumerism. Also, the idea of eroticizing a female body was increasing, separating reproduction from sexuality. Madrid (2009, p. 115) calls it “a new era of sexual freedom and expression”. Nonetheless, many Italian women were unwilling to accept their submissive position in society, they wanted to have a choice and take control over their bodies and lives. With changing of times women in fumetti like in real life were not satisfied any more with their secondary positions.

In Italy, just as in patriarchal culture, female body was seen as the object of the male gaze. Annette Kuhn (1990, p. 11) argues that this way of seeing a female body as object of desire goes deep with its roots into the history: “Whenever we look at painted, drawn, sculpted or photographed images of women, it is important for us to remind ourselves that images of women have traditionally been the province and property of men”. It is echoed, Kuhn suggests, in a particular convention of photographic pornography, namely the fragmentation, within the image, of the human body. In pornography, photographs are often composed in such a way that a particular bodily part is greatly emphasised (1990, p. 36). However, what makes something pornography is not easily agreed on. Hans-Jürgen Döpp states that “pornography is a judgmental term used by those who remain closed to eroticism” (2014, p. 149). Also Berger (1972, p. 19) outlines that when reproduction destroys the uniqueness of the image. As a result its meaning changes or, in other words, its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings.

Feminist film critic Laura Mulvey uses Freudian psychoanalytic theory and reveals that a major source of pleasure for the viewer is scopophilia -- the pleasure in looking and in being looked at. Originally, Freud in his “Three Essays on Sexuality” suggested scopophilia as component instinct of sexuality, that centre around the voyeuristic activities of children (Mulvey, 1975, p. 835). In Crepax stories a voyeuristic gaze of the reader together with the author enters intimacy of the fragmented scene and explores the most intimate parts of female interiority, her sexuality frontiers and psychology. Umberto Eco (2008, p. 65) says, that in the medium of comics the reader has to collaborate even more than in cinema because he has to do the work of filling the empty spaces between panels with his imagination.

Slovenian cultural philosopher Slavoj Žižek totally disagree with Mulvey and suggests that women actively objectify themselves to seduce men (2013, p. 8). He provocatively argues, that “When women dress provocatively to attract a male gaze, when they “objectify” themselves to seduce them, they don’t do it offering themselves as passive objects: they are the active agents of their own “objectification,” manipulating men, playing ambiguous games, including the full right to step out of the game at any moment even if, to the male gaze, this appears in contradiction with previous “signals” (2018).

CREPAX

The 1960s were an era of Pop Art all over the world and it was very much influencing comics. With the appearance of the magazine *Linus* in 1965, where one could see works of Oreste del Buono, Umberto Eco and Elio Vittorini, intellectuals started looking at comic books in a different way, no longer considering them as a lower form of entertainment, but as an art form (Curti, 2016, p. 19). Italian society has changed considerably, as have its ideas about women and sex. Guido Crepax is known for his pioneering approach with his creation *Valentina* as representative of the liberated woman of the '60s.

According to Umberto Eco, the biggest innovation of Crepax was not his drawing capacity but a new syntax of the page. Roberto Curti (2016, p. 137) confirms, “He destroyed the comics “traditional syntax” by [...] splitting up the linearity of action into myriad of fragments, while at the same time dividing human body into multiple portions, in a sort of parallel to cinema experimental use of the split-screen format”. Crepax designed extremely detailed strips with a precision of an architect building a project, destroyed and deconstructed them

by creating a new structure and liberating his characters from a restricted spaces. Crepax used visual fragmentation, similar to fragmented rhythms of jazz, in composing his pages and through his outstanding approach where the panels are divided into many geometric shapes, that Favari (1996, p. 104) compares to Mondrian paintings the author goes beyond stereotypical erotic representations. By paying attention to strong details and particulars, he gives rhythm to the story, increasing its expressive strength. With this form of communication, which is very close to the narrative styles of the films by Godard and Truffaut the author created and reproduced a physical sensation through the medium of comics. The narration is intended to slow time down and often uses a flash-back referencing cinema. The moments and bodies are often broken into endless fragments and those disparate elements are remixed and reclaimed in order to create distinctly original sequence. The time is often expressed through perspective and composition rather than solely through panels. Daniele Barbieri in his book "Linguaggio del fumetto" (1991, p. 158) says, that there's not much of action happening on Crepax panels but there's a great capability of author to transmit an emotional state of the character through the sequence.

Luca Raffaelli points out, that in order to understand the social-cultural situation in Italy of the time one can read Valentina's stories: geometrical lines of the arm-chairs and carpets, the paintings, discussions about the arts, fashion and psychoanalysis transmit certain intellectual snobbism and spirit of the time⁷ (Ibid, 2003, p. 7). In fact Crepax drawings are characterized by strong real references and reflect the time better than documentaries or magazines of those years. In his strips Crepax passes through Manet, Magritte, Picasso, Masolino da Panicale and Klein, Bacon and Cansagra, Rembrandt and Tadini, Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright, Noguchi and Nevelson, to mention a few. It is not by coincidence that Valentina's partner Philip is called Rembrandt. He even dedicated two of Valentina's stories to Kandinsky and Moore, integrating their art into the narrative (Crepax & Gallerani, 2010, p. 53).

Today, the influence of Italian master and his most celebrated creation is apparent in the works of contemporary cartoon artists like Frank Miller⁸ (Sin city) and Paul Pope⁹ (Tank girl). Pope (Booker, 2014, p. 1691) confirms that Crepax had a big impact had on his art and pays homage to the artist in terms of Fantagraphics exhibition in New York in May 2016. The exhibition took place in New York - U.S.A at Scott Eder's Gallery to promote Fantagraphics Crepax collection with original tributes from international artists. Most of the Crepax's work has been unavailable in the States, but U.S. publisher Fantagraphics took a careful approach to Italian comics master's work. The publisher collected and translated Crepax stories and announced a 10- book series of hardcover graphic novels to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the creation of his character Valentina. This exhibit was the first to bring the Italian artist's works to the public.

For many years Valentina was almost unknown to an English speaking audience: Crepax stories were little known in the US and almost unknown in Britain - the strip made a brief appearance in Continental Film Review magazine¹⁰ around 1970. Now it is available to UK readers, thanks to printed in two oversized hardcovers from the Evergreen imprint of Taschen. In the U.S.A. in 1980, an American Heavy Metal magazine¹¹ reproduced Valentina, and they used blue ink on a grey background so the comics came out visually unreadable.

In 1973 Valentina was made into a feature film by Corrado Farina, called *Baba Yaga* with a French actress Isabelle De Funès as Valentina (Lentz, 2004, p. 94). In 1989, an Italian erotic thriller TV series based on the character was broadcast across Europe (but not in the UK). AS it was mentioned before Crepax's action and multiplication of point of view has a cinematic style easily transposed to the big screen.

VALENTINA – A WOMAN OF HER TIME

Dressed in high Milanese style, highly seductive and charming, Valentina became an icon for many women who came to identify with her. Although, for many feminists she has been a controversial figure – "a monster to fight with or an idol to be proud of" (Ibid, 2010, p. 116)¹². Italian journalist Maria Laura Rodota (Ibid, 2010,

⁷ Translated from the original: Basterebbe infatti «guardare» un solo episodio di Valentina per ritrovarvi tutte le varianti socioculturali del periodo: le linee geometriche delle poltrone e dei tappeti, i quadri, le discussioni colte improntate all'arte, alla moda, alla psicanalisi, che tradiscono «un certo snobbismo intellettuale e di sinistra.

⁸ Frank Miller (born January 27, 1957) is an American comic book writer, novelist, inker, screenwriter, film director, and producer best known for his comic book stories and graphic novels such as Ronin, Daredevil: Born Again, The Dark Knight Returns, Sin City, and 300.

⁹ Paul Pope (born September 25, 1970) is an American alternative comic book writer/artist.

¹⁰ UK-based 'international' film magazine devoted to foreign films

¹¹ Heavy Metal - An American adult illustrated a science fiction and fantasy comics magazine, known primarily for its blend of dark fantasy/science fiction and erotica.

¹² Translated from the original: Patrizia Carrano cit..Per molti anni Valentina é stat di volta in volta considerate dale donne piu ribelle e determinate un demone da combattere o un' alleata di cui essere fiere.

p. 81)¹³ in her article “Si, Valentina siamo tutte” says, that to understand well the influence of undressed Valentina on young minds one should first understand the influence on them of Valentina dressed up. Valentina was, Rodata points out, an iconic role model for young boys and girls filling their adolescent fantasies. They associated themselves with her and dreamt of becoming in the future independent women and having the same work as she had, her car, her house, her clothes, etc. everyone wanted to copy her life. Some could buy it, those, whose parents were reading the magazine, could see it at home or at friend’s apartments. But in any case, a reading of Valentina was a private, secret pleasure, because it was a prude generation in cultural and other aspects.

Valentina was born on the pages of the magazine *Linus* in 1965, at that time the icon of femininity was sensual blond Brigitte Bardot. The first episode was entitled “La Curva di Lesmo” (referring to a curve of the Italian Formula 1 Grand Prix of Monza) and was focusing on her partner, Art critic Philip Rembrandt, also known as Neutron, who possesses the paranormal capacity of freezing people with his penetrating gaze (Favari, 1996, p. 104). At the beginning she was only a secondary character but soon she overshadowed the original protagonist and stole the scene. Oreste Del Buono (1968, p. 196) exclaims: “Valentina is the one who counts now! The world goes around her.”¹⁴ We can see, that the stories of Crepax always take place on three different narrative levels: reality, dream and memory happening at the same time. Valentina often drifts from reality into a dream, confusing and mixing them together. Her adventures are suspended between erotic sadomasochistic fantasies displaying sensual naked body (often in her fetishistic outfits) and a mysterious surrealism. Laterza and Vinella see her as a complex sophisticated character that is different from Jean-Claude Forest’s Barbarella¹⁵ is impertinent and perverse. On the other hand, it is from Barbarella that she took her openness to love. The same scholars explain her tortures and her constant bondage within the narrative by projections of her intimate anxiety (1980, p. 198). For Crepax the dream and the comics medium itself as an instrument, to explore orifices with nothing more than sequenced drawings.

A beautiful photographer with her famous black bobbed hairstyle was visually based on the silent film star of the nineteen twenties Louise Brooks, and also on Crepax’s own wife Luisa. The last becomes evident when you see pictures of her and notice her physical resemblance to the fictional Valentina. They even had birthday at the same day and she also used to pose for some of the drawings. Unusually for a comics heroine, she grew older during the series¹⁶ together with her author and she lived her existence like real people do: at the age of thirteen she was struggling with anorexia nervosa, then her parents disappear, she is experiencing first love and finds first job as a photographer. She is also suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder, and terrible nightmares which is a sign of an unstable personality. Crepax explained that he was frustrated by the lack of realism in a medium where everyone was always young: “*I wanted to change a tendency. I never liked the fact that cartoon characters never get old. I wanted to create a different heroine, a woman that would live her time like we live ours* (Guzzetta & Zaghini, 2009)¹⁷.”

There’s a theory is that Valentina is in fact Crepax’s alter ego. The author put a lot of his own personality and his lifestyle into the character of Valentina (Crepax & Gallerani, 2010, p. 20). Crepax has always had a special bond with his protagonist. The author was so much fascinated by his creation that he was even ready to become her obedient servant. “Madame Bovary is me, said Flaubert, “Take me, Valentina: I am yours”, said Crepax. Though, he went away from a protagonist that could hypnotise the world (Neutron) to the one that hypnotised own creator and the last could not do but confess his most secret desires (Raffaelli, 2003, p. 9)¹⁸. In her world created by Crepax she provides an imaginative surreal erotic landscape for both creator and reader to escape into. Gabriela Seveso notes, that Valentina was a character oriented to male readers rather than female (2000, p. 155). Crepax was very much attracted by the contradictory aspects of women psychology. So he challenged himself by creating a young woman character and identifying himself with her and portraying women’s sexual fantasies for all to see. Therefore it is clear that these fantasies are not Valentina’s, but those

¹³ Translated from the original: Per capire l’influenza su di noi ex-ragazze di Valentina nuda bisogna tenere conto coanto (forse di piu) ci ha influenzato la Valentina vestita. Il noi é molto relativo: riguarda due/tre generazioni e alcuni gruppi circoscritti; le adolescenti che compravano *Linus*, le ragazze i cui genitori leggevano *Linus* e quele che trovavano *Linus* a casa degli amici. La lettura dei fumetti di Valentina era – trattasi di generazioni prude su queste cose, per motivi, anagrafici e culturali, ora chissa – un piacere strettamente privato.

¹⁴ Translated from the original: Chi conta È Valentina, il mondo ruota intorno a lei...

¹⁵ Barbarella is a character created by Jean Claude Forest. First appeared in *V Magazine* in 1962 with her fantastic science-fiction adventures (Laterza & Vinella, 1980, p. 148)

¹⁶ The last episode was published in 1995.

¹⁷ Translated from the original: “ho desiderato invertire una tendenza. Non mi erano mai piaciuti gli eroi eternamente giovani [...] Ho voluto creare un’eroina diversa, una donna che visse il “suo” tempo, così come tutti noi viviamo il nostro”.

¹⁸ Translated from the original: Crepax è stato pronto a farsi trascinare dalla sua forza, e a voler diventare il suo umile schiavo. “Madame Bovary sono io”, disse Flaubert. “Prendimi, Valentina: sono tuo, disse Crepax. E così si passò da un personaggio che avrebbe ipnotizzato il mondo (Neutron) a un altro che ipnotizzava il suo autore, e il suo autore non aspettava altro per confessare i suoi desideri segreti .

of her author who was a man. She is not an exhibitionist but her author probably is a lot more (Laterza, Vinnel-Ia, p.198). For Crepax the dream is another narrative instrument that helps explore the most hidden secrets of the characters and reveal their thoughts and liberate their fantasies (Crepax & Gallerani, 2010, p. 41)¹⁹. The author is revealing Valentina's private thoughts and sexual sadomasochistic fantasies to the reader as dreams and desires of a contemporary woman imaginings, but in the end he portrays his own dreams.

She has an almost tangible presence as the author gave her an identity card. This official document (appeared in an Interview with Valentina in 1972) contains some personal data: Valentina Rosselli, named after the antifascist heroes Rosselli, born 25th December 1942, living in Milan in Via De Amicis, at the address of her author and works as a fashion photographer, a rather revolutionary job for a woman in those times. She is quite tall for the normal parameters of the Sixties (172 cm in height) and is single. Crepax even included the most intimate moments from Valentina's life, such as marriage to her partner Phil and the birth of her son Mattia in 1970. Patrizia Carrano (Crepax & Gallerani, 2010, p. 117) in her article "Valentina e il femminismo" says about Valentina that, "her imperfection means she is made of flesh and not of paper. So she is alive"²⁰.

Everything in Valentina's stories has a maximum visibility, a character herself, snobbish environment of Milan, friends and a real world of her creator. Her complex, independent personality, led many women to identify with her and men desire her. A mystique figure of an emancipated woman that lives in a dimension that is beyond the time, the fact that many critics confirm, she is reflecting the history of Italian costume of the past century, an evolution of fashion, literary tendencies and political changes of the era (Mollica & Crepax, 2012, p. 11)²¹.

Oreste del Buono (1968, p. 196) writes, that she made her revolution inside the "fumetto" and this revolution had a great impact to all the fumetti genre from the title to the structure.²² Differently to other female figures of the "fumetto nero" genre Valentina is constantly balancing between imagination and reality, but at the same time living a real life and never hidden her neuroses and her mental obsessions. As Seveso (2000, p. 155) point out: "Valentina is not a seduced adventurer: rather, she could be defined an adventurous seducer..."²³.

Nowadays, Valentina continues to be a contemporary icon and a bearer of timeless aesthetics. She is present in many exhibitions, dedicated to her and her author around the world, among which are, "Valentina Movie" was the first exhibition paying homage to Valentina and her author, happened in Rome in May 2012, curated by Crepax Archive and Italian journalist Vincenzo Mollica and housed in Palazzo Meeting, "Ritratto di un Artista" (Portrait of an Artist) in Milan on the 10th anniversary of Crepax passing and 80 years after his birth, organized by Caterina Crepax in Palazzo Reale in 2013. The same year, in Brussels, Champaka Gallery organized a selling exhibition Fragments of Valentina. The exhibit in New York - U.S.A at Scott Eder's Gallery was also mentioned above.

When creating Valentina, Crepax borrowed quotes from all forms of art and referenced design and fashion of his time. Today Valentina is a great inspiration for contemporary artists and designers. Valentina continues her adventures in a partnership with fashion houses and brands. Furniture, jewellery, clothes are created to pay homage to Valentina and are using her image for their promotional campaigns. To mention a few, Iceberg's Spring/Summer 2012 collection featured a few tops with Valentina's face, the fashion legswear and lingerie brand Wolford has chosen the sexy heroine for her beauty and sensuality, a perfect mix of elegance and transgression. We can see Valentina in the glamorous collection of tiles by Del Conca, featuring classic black and white, in Giuseppe Canevese furniture collection for Ennezero brand, Italian designers Andrea Radice and Folco Orlandini have developed the 'Valentina' line of furniture.

CONCLUSION

Italian fumetti are not only a medium of entertainment, but they need to be studied in the context of Italian cultural and political situation of the era. The main objective of this paper was to study a revolutionary and progressive approach to female representation at the time of Italian economic boom and to present a preliminary discussion about the women characters of fumetti neri and their empowerment. The aim here is to ex-

¹⁹ Translated from the original: Per Crepax il sogno è un ulteriore strumento narrative che consente di esplorare lamente dei personaggi fin negli angoli più nascosti, svelare i pensieri, o semplicemente liberare la fantasia.

²⁰ Translated from the original: La sua imperfezione la rende di carne e non di carta. Quindi viva.

²¹ Translated from the original: Una figura mitica di donna libera e inafferrabile che vive in una dimensione fuori dal tempo – come affermano alcuni critici come suggerirebbe l'incoruttibilità del suo corpo – o è più giusto ricordare che le sue storie sono piene di riferimenti precisi all' storia del costume italiano del secolo scorso e ci raccontano l'evoluzione della moda, le tendenze letterarie e i mutamenti politici di quegli anni.

²² Translated from the original: Il personaggio femminile di Crepax ha realizzato la sua rivoluzione all'interno del fumetto e tale rivoluzione riguarda ormai tutto il fumetto dal titolo alla struttura.

²³ Translated from the original: Non è avventuriera sedotta: caso mai potrebbe essere definita, al contrario, una seduttrice avventurosa.

plore Valentina character created by Guido Crepax in a stereotypically male world of comics. As it was said before, Crepax made a revolution inside the comics medium with his playful cinematic montage reminiscent to the rhythm of jazz. It is not a drawing capacity of the author that charmed intellectuals of the time and still impresses readers and artists around the world but his freedom and capacity of creating a movement through narrative.

She was admired for the capacity of showing off her own life without many inhibitions. Millions of readers around the world fell in love with her body and her stories. Somehow, we can consider Valentina a "living doll" controlled by her male creator and depending on his will but differently from her predecessors (Sweet Gwen-doline or Phoebe Zeit-Geist) she is very human and autonomous and is never a passive unconscious victim of tortures. Her sexual fantasies reflect on social -cultural and political changes of the 1960s, particularly with regard to sexuality. Crepax created his introspective and sensual character in a time of extraordinary social, cultural and economic transformations and sexual liberation. Constantly analysing himself and portraying his own dreams the author writes his psychological diary and creates an intimacy between the character and the reader. Through her dreams and doubts Crepax explores interiority of real women that follow their own carnal desires and make society anxious. With pen and ink he studies their psychological, physical, and also emotional problems. Valentina can be very submissive, an object of desire and at the same time she is very powerful and confident, a subject of her own will. She always does what she wants and this is very empowering. Her sado-masochistic fantasies dissolve the boundaries between private and public, gender and sexuality and can be seen as a symbol of emancipated female sexuality.

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