

“A Word to You Feminist Women”: The Parallel Legacies of Feminism and Underground Comics

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In one of his (in)famous, inflammatory comics from 1971, R. Crumb addressed critics who protested the treatment of women in his work, invoking his right to self-expression with a profanity-laced diatribe addressed to “You Feminist Women.” Crumb ranted:

Would you like me to stop venting my rage on paper? Is that what you'd like me to do, all you self-righteous, indignant females? All you poor persecuted downtrodden cunts? Would you rather I went out and raped twelve-year-old girls? Would that be an improvement? Well, listen, you dumb-assed broads, I'm gonna fucking well draw what I please to draw and if you don't like it, fuck you!

(Crumb 1971)

In the comic, Crumb invokes the right of free expression as authorization for his “venting,” implying that the alternative is the sexual assault of children, and, furthermore, suggesting that the fault, if any, rests with the “dumb-assed broads” of the feminist movement for failing to recognize the value and import of his comics. The underground comix movement, led in large part by Crumb, opened up new avenues of self-expression through graphic narratives, smashing taboo subjects, encouraging self-reflection, and unlocking novel spaces for comics creators. However, underground comix were also, by and large, the province of white male creators, and many perceived the movement as a hostile, misogynistic environment, as reflected in images such as those depicted in Crumb's works and the sentiments articulated in his words. Yet Crumb certainly wasn't the only public figure challenging “You Feminist Women,” for at the same historical moment, second-wave feminism, or “Women's Lib” as it was often known at the time, was in full swing, inspiring both praise and condemnation from the community at large. How did the parallel movements of second-wave feminism and underground comix, which both set out to challenge the received wisdom

of the status quo, intersect and interact, and what are the legacies of these movements in contemporary graphic narratives? This chapter focuses on second-wave feminism and the underground comics movements of the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the ways in which these groundbreaking efforts, sometimes aligned and often in opposition, opened up innovative spaces for comics creators.

Before launching into an examination of these sometimes analogous and frequently antagonistic campaigns, it is important to recognize the inequity of lumping all female comics creators of the 1960s and 1970s (or of any time for that matter) together as a singular, homogeneous group and attempting to essentialize a general response or unified positionality of “female comics creator.” As one would expect, even a cursory glance at the work of women working in comics before and after the underground movement reveals a wide diversity in genre, style, and subject matter. Trying to impose a consistent female narrative on comics of the time or any time would be counterproductive and belittling. Furthermore, while this piece (very briefly) surveys the feminist movement, particularly second-wave feminism, many women did not and do not self-identify as feminists, even as many men do. Therefore, it is important not to simplify an individual’s experiences with broad generalizations. Rather, the goal here is to productively explore the ramifications of feminism as a social movement on comics creation in tandem with the effects of the underground comix scene.

While “feminism” as a term arrived in the nineteenth century in France (Berkeley 1999, 6), the term wasn’t used regularly until the latter half of the twentieth century in the United States. In her book, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in America*, Kathleen Berkeley notes that while feminism is frequently perceived as a monolithic entity, the reality is far more complicated:

Like almost all social movements, the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was multifaceted. Feminists differed according to ideology, strategy, goals, and style. Unfortunately, however, the more liberationists pushed the radical button, the easier it became for the media and the public to assume incorrectly that there was a fixed and unalterable division between mainstream, liberal equality feminism (which emphasized political and legal reform) and avant garde, radical liberation feminism (which stressed revolutionary socioeconomic and cultural changes).

(1999, 52)

Christine Stansell further argues that “feminism has encompassed a wide variety of social views and positions, sometimes antagonistic to one another” (2010, xiv). While the more mainstream strand of feminism attempted to

work within the system to bring about improvements in the lives of women, the more radical wing argued against the system altogether.

Trina Robbins, one of the most prominent historians of women in comics history and herself a prominent comics creator, recalls that in the 1960s and 1970s, “the real women’s liberation movement was changing the lives of real women. Interestingly, the growth of the feminist movement paralleled that of the new underground comics movement” (1999, 83). As feminism(s) worked to change the American political landscape, at the same time comics creators rebelled against middle-class, mainstream morality as represented by the Comics Code (for more on the history of underground comix, see Rosenkranz 2008). Charles Hatfield posits that “underground comix conveyed an unprecedented sense of intimacy, rivaling the scandalizing disclosures of confessional poetry but shot through with fantasy, burlesque, and self-satire” (2005, 7). In *Graphic Women*, a study of autobiographical comics by several female creators, Hillary Chute links underground comix and feminism explicitly, contending that:

The growth of the underground commix movement was connected to second-wave feminism, which enabled a body of work that was explicitly political to sprout: if female activists complained of misogyny of the New Left, this was mirrored in underground comics, prompting women cartoonists to establish a space specifically for women’s work.

(2010, 20)

Thus, Chute suggests that underground comix and second-wave feminism influenced one another, with feminism paving the way for openly political discourse in the creative arts, while underground comix proffered a form perfect for self-examination and analysis, echoing the notion that the “personal is political.”

Some comics creators of the time seemed to move between the underground comix scene and feminist thought with more ease than others. New York native Aline Kominsky-Crumb (b. 1948) moved to San Francisco in the early 1970s and found a place in the underground comix community, creating what Priscilla Frank states was the “first ever autobiographical comic made by a woman” with “Goldie” in 1972. In an interview with Frank, Kominsky-Crumb remembers that early time, the tension she felt between feminist thought and underground comix, and how she found her own place:

There were two factions: militant feminists who wanted nothing to do with men and women who wanted to be strong and independent but sexy too. That’s who I aligned with. I was very conscious of the entire feminist movement, but I realized there was an extreme part of it I couldn’t relate to.

“Goldie” is representative of Kominsky-Crumb’s interest in what Hillary Chute calls the creator’s “uninhibited representations of her own forceful sexuality in a light that is not always palatable, or favorable,” and depicts Goldie masturbating with various vegetables. (Chute 2010, 30).

Kominsky-Crumb continued her work throughout the 1970s and beyond, showcasing a raw, unvarnished authenticity through publication in *Wimmen’s Comix*, *Manhunt*, and *Arcade* (Chute 2010, 32). Kominsky-Crumb was also incredibly influential in promoting comics, editing *Weirdo* and founding *Dirty Laundry* with her husband Robert Crumb. While Kominsky-Crumb considered herself a particular kind of feminist, she also felt at ease within the underground community, despite the hate mail she received from Robert Crumb’s fans. Interestingly enough, even with her influence and legacy, Kominsky-Crumb has received very little historical or scholarly attention, and, as Chute points out, “her underwhelming reception contrasts markedly to that of her husband, cartoonist Robert Crumb, who has been canonized exactly for writing the darker side of (his own) tortured male sexuality” (Chute 2010, 31). It would seem that some readers, perhaps uneasy with this explicit and grotesque sexuality from a female, have neglected Kominsky-Crumb’s impact, while others, possibly considering her an interloper in the underground comix scene, willfully ignore her contributions.

Like Kominsky-Crumb, Melinda Gebbie was similarly working in the San Francisco underground comix scene in the 1970s, and for that matter, she is similarly frequently overlooked in favor of her collaborator and husband Alan Moore. However, Gebbie was an important contributor to underground comix, particularly for her erotic work *Fresca Zizis*, which was published in 1977 by Last Gasp and subsequently banned in the United Kingdom as pornography. Gebbie eventually moved to the UK where she illustrated Moore’s controversial trilogy *Lost Girls* (published 2008), an erotic reimagining of the sexual awakening of literary heroines Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy (Moore and Gebbie 2008). Gebbie indicates a complicated relationship with second-wave feminists, most of whom vocally decried pornography, while she was keenly interested in depicting female sexuality in a constructive light, paving the way for numerous third-wave feminists who have embraced “sex positive” or feminist pornography. In an interview with MDMB (Monkey Do Monkey Be), Gebbie reflected, “Feminism was a kind of an incomplete monster, a bit like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, you know, it had potential life, it certainly was very affecting, but it wasn’t very well made” (MDMB 2013). It would seem

that for Gebbie the feminism of the time was created with good intentions and served as both inspiring and “affecting,” but ultimately it was not the creation she had hoped it would be.

As with Gebbie and Kominsky-Crumb, the aforementioned Trina Robbins (b. 1938) was also working in the San Francisco area at the time, creating groundbreaking comics that challenged taboos and explicitly expressed feminist themes, and, though they took differing paths and created very different comics, they all faced rejection from feminist *and* underground circles. In her book *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of Women’s Comics from Teens to Zines* (1999), Robbins remembers being inspired by a “psychedelically decorative strip called ‘Gentles Tripout,’ signed by Panzika. Two years passed before I discovered that Panzika was a woman, Nancy Kalish. But with that exception, underground comics in the 1960s were an almost exclusively male field” (1999, 85). Drawing encouragement from Panzika, Robbins set out to create comics and promote female comics creators. Robbins recalls, “most of the male underground cartoonists understood as little about the new women’s movement as the newspapers did, and reacted to what they perceived as a threat by drawing commix filled with graphic violence directed mostly at women” (1999, 85). Robbins responded by contributing art and comics to the feminist newspaper *It Ain’t Me Babe*, and in 1970 she successfully brought together a group of similarly minded female creators, including Willy Mendes and Lisa Lyons, spinning off “the first all-women comic, also called *It Ain’t Me, Babe*, subtitled ‘Women’s Liberation’” (1999, 85). Robbins followed up on the success of *It Ain’t Me Babe* by helping to launch the Wimmen’s Comix Collective, which created the continuing anthology *Wimmen’s Comix*, featuring rotating editors and contributors. *Wimmen’s Comix* ran from 1972 to 1992 and showcased numerous influential comics artists, including Lee Marrs, Roberta Gregory, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Joyce Farmer, Mary Fleener, Carol Lay, Melinda Gebbie, and Phoebe Gloeckner. The series, re-released by Fantagraphics in 2016, undoubtedly influenced and inspired a generation of comics creators.

Robbins wasn’t alone in her work to spotlight female comics creators, for, unbeknownst to the Wimmen’s Comics Collective, Joyce Farmer and Lyn Chevely were also working to create an all-female comics anthology and succeeded in publishing *Tits-n-Clits* just three weeks before *Wimmen’s Comix* appeared, also in 1972. The series ran for fifteen years, at times changing its name to *Pandora’s Box* to avoid pornography charges (Robbins 1999, 88). Although their philosophies and approaches to feminism differed, Roger Sabin claims that these feminist comics collectives

were using their strips to protest about a number of related issues: obliquely, about being excluded from the male-dominated underground (especially the big anthologies, which they claimed had a “Boys Only” atmosphere) and about the sexism that was rife in the movement (particularly commix by Wilson, Crumb and Spain); and more directly about women’s politics generally.

(1996, 105)

For her part, while she was an early contributor to *Wimmen’s Comix*, Kominsky-Crumb grew, according to Chute, “frustrated by what she perceived as an almost superhero-inflected glamorization of women under the auspices of feminism” of these anthologies, and broke off to cofound *Twisted Sisters* with Diane Noomin in 1976, a series which ran irregularly until 1994 and “resolutely deidealized” images of women (2010, 24).

Joyce Brabner (b. 1952) was an influential comics writer and proponent committed to her own kind of activism, working with husband Harvey Pekar on nonfiction comics that highlighted her political positions. In addition to working on and promoting Pekar’s *American Splendor*, Brabner helped create *Real War Stories* (1987–1991) with Lou Ann Merkle, and *Brought to Light* (1989), among many other projects. Brabner, who defined herself as a feminist and an activist, used her comics to reach a wider audience and lobby for change. Yet she, too, is often overshadowed by Pekar. When asked in an interview with Jillian Steinhauer if she had “put her career on hold” to raise a child and help Pekar, Brabner pointedly replied, “What’s feminist is choice” (Steinhauer 2016).

Feminism is, of course, all about choices. And while, once again, these varying perspectives on Women’s Liberation differed in their philosophies and approaches, unfortunately, according to female cartoonists of the time, their efforts all seemed to be met with disdain by mainstream feminists. In her article “Feminism Underground: The Comics Rhetoric of Lee Marrs and Roberta Gregory,” Margaret Galvan asserts that “the feminist movement did not so easily support the comics medium that Wonder Woman called home” (2015, 204). In an interview with Bill Sherman of *The Comics Journal*, Robbins reflects that it was “really weird the way leftists and militant feminists don’t seem to like comix. I think they’re so hung up on their own intellect that somehow it isn’t any good to them unless it’s a sixteen-page tract of gray words” (Sherman 1980, 54). In an interview with Jessica Lipsky, Lee Marrs, creator of the notable work *Pudge, Girl Blimp*, shared that “the women’s movement in the beginning didn’t have any sense of humor in itself, which is sad but typical. [. . .] We got totally rejected by the women’s movement for

the most part” (Lipsky 2016). According to Lipsky, “in a particularly hurtful example, feminist magazine *Ms.* refused to run *Wimmen’s* ads” (2016).

Perhaps as a result of this “outsider” status in both feminist and underground circles, these important, influential comics have rarely been studied, which is another example of an unfortunate double-standard, for these comics most certainly bear additional examination, both for historical research and to further our understanding of the craft and form of comics. In *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Paul Lopes stresses that “This first generation of female comic-book rebels unquestionably laid the groundwork for future generations of women artists to intervene and attempt to transform the field of comic books” (2009, 17). And, indeed, these self-identified feminists inspired another generation of comics creators, in spite of the lack of attention paid to them by scholars and publishers.

Sam Meiers insists on the importance of female creators in the underground comix movement, in spite of this pronounced lack of attention, drawing comparisons with the larger misogynistic tendency to pointedly ignore the contributions of women to the counterculture: “The delayed acknowledgement of women’s existence in the underground commix movement in the early ’70s mirrors the experience of women in the counterculture more broadly. [. . .] In each case, a women’s cultural separatism contributed to this process of recognition, though it was and remains a hotly contested feminist strategy” (Meiers 2016). As Meiers suggests, the value of the strategy of separatism, or isolating women and their work from culture at large, was and is a highly charged issue within feminist circles.

One creator who was determined to document women’s contributions to the underground comix movement, and to comics in general, was Trina Robbins, who has doggedly chronicled female comics creators in a series of historical books, including *A Century of Women Cartoonists* (1993), *The Great Women Superheroes* (1996), *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of Women’s Comics from Teens to Zines* (1999), *The Great Women Cartoonists* (2001), and *Nell Brinkley and the New Woman in the Early 20th Century* (2001). Robbins has fittingly been dubbed a “herstorian,” and she has also made her mark writing graphic biographies of famous historical women, such as *Elizabeth Blackwell: America’s First Woman Doctor* (2006a), *Hedy Lamarr and a Secret Communications System* (2006b), and *Lily Renée, Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer* (2011), while continuing to draw comics, including the *Chicagoland Series*. Furthermore, she was the first woman to draw *Wonder Woman* for *The Legend of Wonder Woman*, a 1986 limited series for DC, and she later teamed with artist Colleen Doran to write *Wonder Woman: The Once and Future Story*,

a 1998 special issue addressing domestic violence. Throughout her career Robbins has been steadfastly promoting female comics creators and her feminist ideals through historical and creative endeavors.

Today, Robbins continues her efforts to promote women, but after the 1970s second-wave feminism was on the wane, and, according to Christine Stansell, “the fireworks of women’s liberation spluttered out in the 1970s with the fall of the New Left and the depletion of millennial expectations. But the way of seeing the world bequeathed by radical feminism, the great refusal to proceed with business as usual, endured in the psyche of a generation of daughters” (2010, 228). Still, Gail Collins reports that “While surveys showed that young women believed the women’s movement had helped – and was in fact helping – to improve things for their sex, they shied away from calling themselves ‘feminists’” (2009, 331). Although the term “feminist” had fallen out of favor in the general public, a third-wave of feminism rose up in response to what many perceived as the failures of the second-wave approach. Third-wave feminism, a term coined by Rebecca Walker in her 1992 article for *Ms. Magazine* entitled “Becoming the Third Wave,” promoted a global feminism and endorsed a more inclusive movement that embraced people of color as well as the LGBTQ community, responding to criticism that the second-wave was heterosexist and largely ignorant of the needs and desires of people of color.

As feminism evolved so too did the underground comix movement, which gave way to the alternative comics scene. Thus, as Charles Hatfield observes, “though driven by the example of underground comix, many alternative comics cultivated a more considered approach to the art form, less dependent on the outrageous gouging of taboos (though that continued too, of course) and more open to the possibility of extended and ambitious narratives” (2005, x). These highly “ambitious” narratives were fully realized in 1986, the year that ushered in a new appreciation for what many were calling “graphic novels” a gentrifying term for highly regarded comics including *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller.¹

The influence of third-wave feminism and the alternative comics scene are visible in the works of several innovative creators, including Phoebe Gloeckner, Alison Bechdel, and Marjane Satrapi, to name but a few high-profile names

1 While many in the field and the popular press use the term “graphic novel” for long-form comics addressing adult audiences, I prefer to use “graphic narratives,” which I feel is more appropriate for encompassing the wide range of narratives told in comics form, some of which are, in fact, novels, while many others, such as nonfiction texts, are not.

among many. In *Graphic Women*, Hillary Chute studies the autobiographical comics of Lynda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Phoebe Gloeckner, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, and Marjane Satrapi. Chute asserts that alternative comics were a particularly important moment for individual artists, and in particular female comics artists, to represent themselves through comics, noting, “there is a new aesthetics emerging around self-representation: contemporary authors, now more than ever, offer powerful nonfiction narratives in comics form. Many, if not most of these authors are women” (2010, 2). Chute suggests that this approach is a way for women “to put the body on the page” (2010, 10), representing a creator’s life and body through the unique form of comics. In Chute’s analysis, these particular autobiographical comics by women are “anchored in traumatic history [. . .] and suggest that we need to rethink the dominant tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility that have tended to characterize trauma theory” (2010, 3). Therefore, although the creators take various approaches to the subject matter, some preferring an oblique perspective with others choosing an extremely up-close point of view, Chute believes that the form of autobiographical comics allows these female creators to depict that which has remained hidden and invisible, the real and true traumas of women’s lives.

However, not all readers appreciate graphic memoirs. For one, Trina Robbins commented on the many female creators of the 1990s, arguing that “the commonly accepted stereotype has been that women cartoonists produce autobiographical comics. Indeed, many of them do, and much of their subject matter ranges from vaguely depressing to very depressing” (1996, 129). In an interview with *The Comics Journal*, Robbins further argued that “most comic book memoirs are so annoying,” while speculating that “So many women’s autobiographical comics are depressing, and so many are about dysfunctional families, that it is tempting to believe that dysfunctional families breed women cartoonists” (1999, 127). Robbins is not alone in her disdain for these somber and introspective works. Monica Johnson reflects, “The ’90s should be my generation of comics, but the times were so heavy with identity politics that, even as an angsty, artsy teenager, I found it all to be off-putting. The comics were either too dark, too gruesome, or too didactic” (Johnson 2016). These autobiographical comics, influenced by the seriousness of third-wave feminism and alternative comics, were frequently somber, melancholy meditations of the self, dark in tone and style.

Perhaps one of the most notable examples of this painful, poignant introspection that might prove challenging for readers is the work of Phoebe Gloeckner, probably the clearest link between the underground comix

movement and contemporary, third-wave feminist thought. Gloeckner, born in 1960, grew up in San Francisco surrounded by the greats of the underground scene, including Robert Crumb, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Diane Noomin, and Bill Griffiths, and she references these figures frequently in her comics. Gloeckner studied medical illustration at the University of Texas, a fact very much in evidence in her finely detailed and incredibly accurate drawing style. Her pieces appeared in *Wimmen's Comix*, *Twisted Sisters*, and *Weirdo* before she published the long-form, autobiographical fiction narratives *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (1998) and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2002). Her comic art features young female protagonists experiencing sexual abuse, drug use, and a great deal of trauma rendered in meticulous detail, and, as a result, her books have been repeatedly banned from school libraries across the country. In *The Diary*, Gloeckner directly references Crumb's influence, reproducing a sketch Crumb drew in heroine Minnie's notebook, an act which Meisha Rosenberg argues, "asserts the diarist's artistic lineage at the same time that it inscribes Crumb as a dirty old man, aligning him with other characters in the text who violate Minnie" (2007, 398–399). Gloeckner demonstrates the underground's preoccupation with forbidden subjects, rendering a young woman's sexual abuse with disturbing, exacting detail, and promoting what Chute names an "ethical feminist project that takes the crucial risk of visualizing the complicated realities of abuse" (2010, 75). In her individuation and introspection Gloeckner exemplifies the best of the underground's concerns, and in problematizing stereotypes of female sexuality while forcing the reader to witness abuse, Gloeckner offers an unflinching, feminist point of view.

Alison Bechdel (also born in 1960), like Gloeckner, shares an unblinking and unvarnished depiction of the self: flaws, foibles, and all. This is, of course, a trait carried in the genetic code of the underground, but Bechdel also exemplifies feminism's third-wave goal of including the LGBTQ community, in contrast with earlier critiques that second-wave feminist movement held something of a myopic heterosexism. Bechdel launched her career with the long-running, fan-favorite comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, which ran from 1983 to 2008 every other week in a variety of alternative weekly papers (and in sporadic installments thereafter), but it wasn't until publication of her long-form graphic memoirs *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) and *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* (2012) that she received widespread national attention and praise. In these virtuoso texts, Bechdel uses an incredibly skilled style to explore her development as an artist and individual in relation to her father in *Fun Home* and her

mother in *Are You My Mother?* Bechdel seamlessly weaves together a highly literate and literary narrative text with carefully inked images from her childhood, shaded with a bluish-gray wash. In her article “Alison Bechdel and Crip Feminist Autobiography,” Cynthia Barounis argues that Bechdel presents a feminism of community and companionship, rather than protest, suggesting that, “while *Fun Home* does provide a rich documentation of Bechdel’s participation in lesbian feminist politics during the early 1980s, the narrative tone maintains an ironic (though affectionate) distance from the movement’s militant energy” (2016, 142–143), and, furthermore, Barounis believes that in realistically depicting her struggle with mental illness, including depression and obsessive-compulsive behaviors, Bechdel advocates for “a crip-feminist model of creative interdependence,” in which she “presents disability in these instances not as the outcome of artistic failure, but as facilitating new modes of creative expression” (2016, 158). Bechdel thus offers her candid self-analysis as an example of a new kind of artist, and a new kind of feminism, marked by creativity, connection, and acceptance.

As third-wave feminism set out to be more inclusive, many feminists moved away from a focus on the Western world, opening up the movement to a wider vantage point. Christine Stansell explains that the term “global feminism” first appeared “in the age of Reagan, appearing in the title of a 1983 workshop in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on ‘sexual slavery’” (2010, 357). Perhaps fueled by this desire to champion feminism across the world, many feminists lavished praise on Marjane Satrapi’s graphic memoirs including *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (first published in the United States in 2003), *Persepolis: The Story of a Return* (2005), as well as her works *Chicken with Plums* (2004) and *Embroideries* (2006), despite the fact that the creator has proclaimed on numerous occasions, as she did in an interview with Arash Ghadishah, “I am absolutely not a feminist.” *Persepolis*, originally published in French, documents Satrapi’s experiences as a young girl growing up in Iran during the 1970s and 1980s. Her narrative blends youthful recollections with historical information detailing the Islamic Revolution. Satrapi’s simple, black-and-white drawing style is quickly recognizable, and, according to an interview with Alex Billington, was inspired by underground comix, “in which for economical reasons, you work in black and white. Because printing in black and white costs less than in color” (Billington 2008). Satrapi’s unadorned artistic style, coupled with the stark, black-and-white color scheme, evokes her childlike perspective as a narrator and figure moving back and forth through time.

While Satrapi is happy to connect her work to the underground movement, she rejects the feminist label. However, despite Satrapi's protests, in her article "The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*," Hillary Chute asserts about *Persepolis* that "the content is keenly feminist" (2008, 94). Chute further contends, "we may understand the text as modeling a feminist methodology in its form, in the complex visual dimension of its author's narrating herself on the page as a multiple subject" (2010, 94). In "Out of the Family: Generations of Women in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*," Nancy K. Miller also looks to *Persepolis* as a feminist text and, in particular, a third-wave feminist text, which may, according to Miller, offer a new way of seeing for earlier generations:

If feminists of Heilbrun's lonelier generation did not have books waiting for them, 1970s feminists do: we have the work of younger writers who, like Satrapi, are capable of looking back to feminist precursors and who can inspire us to look forward to places we might not be able to occupy ourselves, except in our imaginations.

(2007, 27)

Thus, in spite of the creator's affiliations (or lack of them), feminist scholars claim Satrapi's work as emblematic of a global, third-wave feminism.

Satrapi's resistance to feminism and being labeled a "feminist" was, as previously noted, not at all unusual in the years following the 1970s, and this resistance certainly comes into play for many contemporary comics artists. In "Draws Like a Girl: The Old-School Feminist Interventions in the World of Comics and Graphic Novels," Alisia Grace Chase points out:

To revisit the basic feminist understanding that one's gender may still provide a stumbling block to parity is often viewed as archaically tiresome, and one risks being labeled by one's own peers as "completely obnoxious, shrill, annoying, outdated old-school feminist" to use the exact wording of one young female cartoonist.

(2008, 62)

Chase argues against this distancing from the tenets of feminism, positing "young women in comics and graphic novels can acknowledge that they could only afford to be post-feminist in a post-patriarchal era, and that despite pacification, placation, and enormous numbers of them working in the field, 'old-school' sexism necessitates 'old-school' feminism – for what is erased is bound to be forgotten" (2008, 82). Chase points to another key female comics creator, Lynda Barry (b. 1956), as exemplifying the feminist notion of "the personal is political," yet interestingly enough Barry has denied connections to both underground comix and feminism.

In a personal interview I conducted with Barry, she explained, “There were just a handful of people doing stuff that weren’t in the R. Crumb group. We’re like the generation right after R. Crumb. Not generation maybe age-wise, but of comics. [. . .] So I’ve never really felt like I was in a particular group” (Kirtley 2006). Furthermore, in an interview with *Mother Jones* magazine, Barry’s friend and fellow creator Matt Groening acknowledged:

when I met Lynda Barry, she, by the work she was doing, showed me that you could do anything, that you could really play with convention and with structure, and at the time I was very much influenced by underground comics, by Robert Crumb and all those guys, and what Lynda did I thought was more personal and funnier and not quite as – it didn’t fight the same battles the underground cartoonists were fighting, and she was probably my biggest inspiration.

(Doherty 1999)

For her part, Barry espouses the value of the personal, though she isn’t necessarily sure of her link with feminism, as she told Mary Hambly in an interview: “I’d say my work is almost exclusively about being a female in a real average way . . . So I would want to say, ‘Yes, I am a feminist,’ but I think the Feminists would say I was out of my mind” (Hambly 1982). Yet, for all her concerns about feminist critique, Barry’s work does represent many important tenets of second-wave feminism in the emphasis that for each person, “The ordinary is extraordinary. The ordinary is the thing we want back when someone we love dies or leaves or falls out of love with us” (Barry 2008, 164).

Barry furthermore depicts the inclusivity of third-wave feminism and the emphasis on exploring difference as she depicted her complicated relationship with gender, race, and class in the “autobifictionalographic” collection *One! Hundred! Demons!* In fact, throughout her career Barry has worked in many forms, including novels, plays, fine art, and, of course, comics, from her weekly strip *Ernie Pook’s Comeek*, which ran from 1979 to 2008, to her autobiographical *One! Hundred! Demons!* in 2002, to the “how-to” manuals *What It Is* (2008) and *Picture This* (2010). Barry seems to have transcended labels, somehow working outside the debates, in the process creating an incredible oeuvre devoted to exploring female experience through multiple lenses while resisting categorization. Barry has now turned her focus to pedagogy, encouraging readers and students to create their own images not for profit but for the joy of creation, paving the way for the next generation of creators.

Françoise Mouly (b. 1955), like Barry, has played a crucial role in inspiring comics creators, particularly those influenced by second- and third-wave

feminism. Mouly also shares an unfortunate tradition of being overlooked in favor of her male partner, Art Spiegelman. When comics scholar Jeet Heer was writing about Spiegelman, he was quick to relegate Mouly's role as the co-founder and co-editor of *Raw* (and current art editor of *The New Yorker*) to the sidelines. Heer suggests, "Beyond the shadow cast by Spiegelman's fame, Mouly's invisibility springs from her gender, her profession and her milieu" (2013, 7). Heer corrected the original oversight with the book *In Love with Art: Françoise Mouly's Adventures in Comics with Art Spiegelman*, which chronicles Mouly's astounding career, in which she fostered alternative comics creators through *Raw*, helped shape some of the most influential covers of *The New Yorker*, and simultaneously fostered fresh talent and reached out to new readers through the *TOON Books* comics for children. In an interview with Sarah Boxer, Mouly commented, "I'm very proud. I will claim as my legacy the broadening of the field to include more women." Mouly places herself as the benefactor of trailblazers such as Kominsky-Crumb and Robbins, and stated in an interview with Meg Lemke that "I entered a field that was quite misogynistic; it was almost laughable" (Lemke 2014). For Mouly now, though, her focus is on broadening the feminist movement to be more inclusive, a key tenet of third-wave feminism. She reasons, "what we need to do, is to welcome men into our world. [. . .] That's how women can shift things. Not just by getting engaged on the same level as men, but by being open-minded about men" (Lemke 2014). Mouly is ever-mindful of misogyny while working toward gender equality for men and women alike, inspiring a tremendous legacy of innovation in comics.

Mouly and Barry worked to forge their own paths, aware of but not bound by labels or movements, and while it is absolutely imperative to chronicle and celebrate female cartoonists, as Trina Robbins has, lest their legacy be lost, as even this short survey suggests, it would, once again, be a mistake to lump them together as a singular group in style or substance. In *Reinventing Comics* Scott McCloud cogently argued:

Paralleling nationwide revolts against the conservative status quo, women cartoonists of the "underground" period created works that were raw, emotionally honest, politically charged and sexually frank [. . .] today's field of women cartoonists, as a whole, though a minority still – are far too numerous and their work far too varied, to classify as any one kind of "movement."

(2000, 102)

Indeed, concentrating on the "novelty" of female comics creators diminishes the inspiring history and important legacy of women cartoonists who produce

fantastic works that defy categorization. Studying the history, it is undeniable that the underground movement opened up new territory for all comics artists, inspiring creators to turn inward, fashioning new kinds of comics that challenged societal expectations in both form and content. Furthermore, it is clear that “You Feminist Women” addressed by Crumb also played a significant role in the evolution of contemporary comics, as feminism invited artists and authors to investigate the importance of one’s own experience, confront inequities large and small, and, in the process, render a more comprehensive understanding of the problems of society, all while depicting a vision of a new world marked by possibility and promise.

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