

Comics

(Part of the introduction of the exhibition about Comics created by Croatian artists Bruno Budrovic and Josip Majic in the Miroslav Kraljevic Gallery, Zagreb, 1995.)

Comics appeared officially in the United States in the second half of the 19th century - not by chance in the age of onset and strong affirmation of the mass media: photography and film.

The comics are an important cultural phenomenon and that was explained to us in the 1970s thanks to several theorists of visual communication. Special thanks goes to the very respected Dr Vera Horvat- Pintaric, as she made of it an object of wider interest, singled it out of “despised consumer goods” and introduced it to the Faculty as a subject of study (with posters, photography, film, television, commercials, video, thus normally “academic” science was not dealt with) .

The beginnings of local comics are associated with the work of Andrija Maurovic just before the World War II and in the late fifties. During the sixties and seventies in particular, youth newspapers have paid more attention to the comics (“Polet”, “Students’ Journal“) and the outputs of these circuits resulted in the “Third generation” of authors of comics who are now well-known in the world: Mirko Ilic, Igor Kordej, Ninoslav Kunc, Kresimir Zimonic, Radovan Devlic - all former members of the authoring group “New Frame” (Novi kvadrat). There is also a number of other regional groups, “Tuš grupa”, “Sarst”, “Fons” and others. We should mention individual creative experiences of Josko Marusic, our most important socially engaged author of comics.

Meanwhile, apart from these unconventional and socially engaged comics that the poor editorial policy ignored, there was also a rush of bourgeois comics “for leisure”, from the “kitchen” of the worldwide commercial comics (drastic bourgeois individualism of the “Superman”), whose readers tend to have characteristics of creative impotence and laziness of spirit, and refuse any deliberated comics.

The Italian theorist Umberto Eco, one of the renowned scholars of mass media, including comics, analyses the complexities of the media in his book “The Interpretation of Steve Canyon”, which can be recognized on the semantic (symbolic), ideological and anthropological level.

The basic element of semantics of the comics is a conventional sign of “the bubble” that accompanies the standardization of a mood: if it ends with the sharp edge, leading to the person who talks, “the bubble” means “direct talk”, then if it ends in a series of bubbles, it indicates “the reflective discourse”, and finally if the “bubble” has serrated edge then it indicates excitement, fear, etc.

A graphic sign is also an important element, especially used in the sonorous service as an onomatopoeic extension resource of a language (eg. “zip” of a bullet, “gulp” of an astonishment), but it is often taken from English and put into other languages, losing direct contact with the meaning (“smack” or blow of a fist).

These semantic elements constitute a particular grammar of cadre, referring to the impact of the film, especially the form of montage. However, the comic has the original montage: not achieving a steady flow with fixed frames as a movie, but it is achieved through ideal

continuity of breaking the continuum of basic elements that the reader in imagination connects and sees as a continuum. Such elliptical process, from the standpoint of communication means programmatic removal of redundancy, hence allowing a high information capacity.

Formal structure (frame, montage) may be the subject of irony: exiting from the frame, intervening in the frame, establishing a direct relationship between the characters and the author.

It is an obvious fact that the comics affected the film as well. The example is Goddard's style, where the film language is shaped by pure and simple juxtapositions of film images. Here, we can also add an influence of Futurism on the comics, and the impact of comics on pop art in the work of Lichtenstein, who changed comics convention to representation ("Wall explosion", "Wham").

At the ideological level, there is a type problem; "Comics cannot create types", claims Eco, "but only standards", since the only thing that it can communicate is utter conformity, therefore it is able to just confirm what is already known (and this is a characteristic of mass media in general). It is mainly about the American model of the average person, as the ideal citizen of mass society: the happiness and spending are the symbols of prestige. The author offers standards because he is forced with daily or weekly comics sequels, so the recognizable stereotypes are mnemotechnical help that the reader can be provided with. It is clear, therefore, that the comics that are not in sequels are of greater validity and maturity. Concerning the importance of stimuli in comics and related interpretations where there is a psychological reality separation, there is the question of risk as well, which a healthy person overcomes and integrates, but not the one with personal identity crisis.

Eco concludes that the task of cultural anthropology is the development of ideological declaration relating to the value system of beliefs and behaviors of an industrial society (eg. the American Way of Life). Eco stresses the emphasized feature: a remarkable development of humor in mass culture, which testifies, he said, about the rise of nihilism and its antidote – the games and entertainment.