Comics meets street art in the media cities of the bande dessinée. Examples from Brussels and Geneva

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Abstract

Comic media exists in historical and geocultural variations. The historically dynamic identity formation of comic media in some geocultural versions is accompanied by the emergence of mediatic hybridisations that manifest themselves in a street art activity. In this article, we examine these comics-based hybrid media and their use from a media theoretical perspective in the context of two different media cities of the Francophone bande dessinée. In Brussels and Geneva, the institutionalisation of comics has been partially different, but both cities have seen a significant role in hybrid media related to street art. In Brussels, this is the case with comic murals, which have a canonising function and also generate tourist activity. In the case of Geneva, the importance of comic posters and comic-style street signs linked to political communication, civic education, and campaigns by NGOs is striking.

Keywords: bande dessinée, Brussels, comic poster, comic mural, media city, Geneva

1. Introduction - Media theory background

1.1 Media identity, cultural variations, hybridisations

Following the recommendations of institutionalising comics studies, we can consider comics as graphic literature, art, and media. In the first case, we follow the example of Rodolphe Töpffer, a Geneva-based teacher of literature and rhetoric, considered to be the "inventor" of the comics (Kunzle, 2007; Groensteen and Peeters, 1994), who had treated his works and albums as "littérature en estampes", printed literature based on reproductions of picture-text narratives, and thus as graphic literature (Töpffer, 1994). Later, in the 20th century, comic books were also examined as 'paraliterature', on the margins of the 'high' literary establishment, of literature in the narrower sense. If we focus on the mode of expression rather than on institutionalisation, we can even consider comics as 'drawn literature', following Harry Morgan (2003).

In recent decades, and decisively following the success of graphic novels in bookshops, a large part of the literary establishment has become open to comics, and in many countries, comics are included in literary education and literary journals. Nowadays, thanks to graphic journalism, which has the characteristics of slow journalism (Le Masurier, 2020), comics reportage is being introduced as a press genre. At the same time, comics are also present in the art establishment as a 'ninth' art, a specific form of expression and a specific set of meaning-making processes. For example, in specialised museums and galleries, as well as in institutions with a more general profile that open their doors to comics. A good example of how a literary and an artistic approach

can be interwoven is Riad Sattouf, who has also produced autobiographical graphic novels and comics reportages, and whose life exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 2018.

However, a significant number of comics scholars are not primarily literary critics or art critics but rather have a professional background in media studies. This is no coincidence, since the fact that comics as popular culture is a social resource, nevertheless, a medium in its own right, is an argument in favour of studying it as a medium (Dacheux, 2009: 12). The media institutions for the production, distribution, and dissemination of comics can be well identified, as can the media texts (comic products) that these institutions produce, as well as the audiences, uses and social practices of comics as a media (Maigret and Stefanelli, 2012).

Whether we study comics as a medium, art, or literature, it is important to take into account that they exist in historical and cultural variations. Following Paul Ricoeur, André Gaudreault, and Philippe Marion, we can say that it has a historically dynamic identity, since it has been in a state of flux since its birth in the 19th century, it does not remain the same, but it does not become completely different (Gaudreault and Marion, 2000: 31-33). It has changed in different literary, artistic, and media cultures, in different genres, and in hybridisation with different media (such as the novel, the printed press, cinema, the poster, television, the video blog, etc.).

In addition to the Japanese manga (and Korean manhwa), the European francophone bande dessinée and North American comics, which are leading in terms of institutionalisation and industry importance, many variations of comics as a medium has emerged, and these geocultural variations are not uniform in themselves. There are also many links between them, and often the dynamic identities of the cultural versions of comics are not separate. A multiplicity of geo-cultural spaces, mediatic arrangements, and of temporal-historical variations thus characterise comics as a medium.

There are two general trends in the identity formation of comics media today. On the one hand, digitalisation, digital comics, webcomics, the encounter with digital media, and the Internet are decisively shaping the identity of comics as a media. This has favoured the emergence of several comic-based hybrid works, from Instagram comics to video games, animation or hyperdocumentary works to comics incorporating augmented reality techniques (for more on the Francophone digital comic, the bande dessinée numérique, see Lukács and Maksa, 2022). Traditional comics exist in different geocultural varieties, which often differ greatly in terms of genre, audience, and graphic style, and digital comics are no different. The North American webcomic, the Korean webtoon, the Francophone bande dessinée numérique and their modes of use also differ widely, while all are characterised by a high degree of internal diversity (Paolucci and Baudry, 2016).

Another noticeable trend in contemporary comic book cultures is the placing of comics in the space of personal encounters, in galleries, museums, comic book events, festivals, or even street art. Cultural diversity is also often accompanied by media hybridisation. In what follows, we will examine how, in the context of Brussels and Geneva as (comics) media cities, comics, and especially the Francophone bande dessinée (BD), are hybridised on the streets, and what comics-based hybrid media have emerged and become locally important over the last few decades. In the case of Brussels, the focus will be on comic murals and related guidebooks, and in the case of Geneva on comic posters and comic-style street signs.

1.2 Media cities – “comics cities”?

Media geopolitics, popular geopolitics, and transcultural communication approaches to space, power, and media are keenly interested in the global trends shaping cultural industries and media cultures, the ‘crossing of borders’, translocal organisation, networking, transcultural flows, and cultural hybridisation processes that characterise media globalisation. At the same time, they are attentive to the spatial concentrations of power that are also manifested in economic and cultural terms. Media cities can be seen as such densification, which is addressed both by research on transcultural flows of globalisation (Hepp, 2006) and by geopolitical studies of the media (Boulanger, 2014). In general, we can speak of media cities in two interrelated senses.

On the one hand, these localities specialise in media production and media economic activity, ranging from traditional film industry hubs to the more recent media cities in the

Middle East - some of which include hundreds of media, IT, and telecommunication companies. On the other hand, global cities which, while not necessarily the largest in terms of population, are both financial and intellectual, cultural centers, often home to media, IT, and advertising companies, places of development and experimentation, university centers, popular migration destinations, and media economies and cultures that benefit from the concentration of highly skilled labour. In these cities, culturally diverse environments and high-quality training facilities inspire creators of content production, as well as audiences and media users. Some of the global media cities are also "comics cities", in the sense that they demonstrate the sophistication and high spatial concentration of comics institutions, as well as the diversity of local comics culture and the power of local comics culture to shape collective identity.

Regarding the Francophone bande dessinée, Paris is certainly a case in point, but Brussels and Geneva, which can be considered comics cities, also show some of the characteristics of global media cities. Paris and Brussels are not only centers of comic book publishing but also distribution with their many specialised bookshops. In addition to its publishers and shops, Brussels is also a comics city because of its comics museum and archive (Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée), its comics murals, the distinctive graphic style of the Brussels School and the concentration of comics professionals. Geneva can be considered a comics city because of, among other things, its excellent public collections, the comics culture that permeates the everyday life of its citizens (the tradition of comic posters considered Genevan, comics communication campaigns), and the intensive presence of creative comics professionals.

An imaginary map of Francophone comics would also include smaller towns, far from being global media cities, their comics city character more akin to the narrower meaning of media city. Angoulême, a small town in the west of France, is the venue of the most important Francophone comics festival and is home to a major collection of French comics museums in the Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image. Grenoble is home to Glénat, a pioneer and major player in French manga publishing, and the publisher a lot of of the most popular contemporary series. Louvain-la-Neuve in Wallonia as a university city, is not only a major center for comics research but also an important city for the European bande dessinée, thanks to the various events related to comics and the Musée Hergé, founded in 2009 and dedicated to the creator of Tintin and other series. Outside Europe, Montréal has traditionally been a city of comics for the Francophone bande dessinée, and more recently Abidjan, Kinshasa, and Yaoundé, for example, also have some comics city characteristics (Cassiau-Haurie, 2013).

2. Brussels

2.1 The Belgian bande dessinée

As we have seen, several cities can be mentioned when thinking about the francophone cultural versions of comics. However, the most striking aspect in the context of tourism is the complex relationship between Brussels and the Belgian comics (https://www.visit.brussels/en/visitors/plan-your-trip/comic-strip-trail). Alongside Japan, Belgium is perhaps the country with the strongest and most widespread institutionalisation of comics in the world. Many factors have contributed to the success of the Belgian institutional system in the twentieth century. One is the mass production of comic albums by large companies in the printing industry. At the initiative of the large publishers, the publishing of albums became a regular feature in the mid-twentieth century, and the book medium helped to preserve and commemorate comics, which were later to become cultural heritage. Another important element, the support of the Catholic Church and Catholic intellectuals, is the fact that the boom in Belgian comics in the 1930s, which was largely concentrated in the Catholic press, can be understood as a local and then broader Francophone response to the North American comics that became popular in Europe in the first half of the last century. The emancipation of Belgian high literature in schools took place almost simultaneously with that of paraliterary genres, such as bande dessinée, which was increasingly seen as its own (Lits 2001, 60-67). It probably took a combination of many other factors, the work of excellent cartoonists and an audience sensitive to comics for BD media to become a major shaper of collective identities in Belgium.

Nowadays, the work of these important creators is also present through particularly extensive scientific research, various acts of cultivation, and the Belgian Comics Centre,

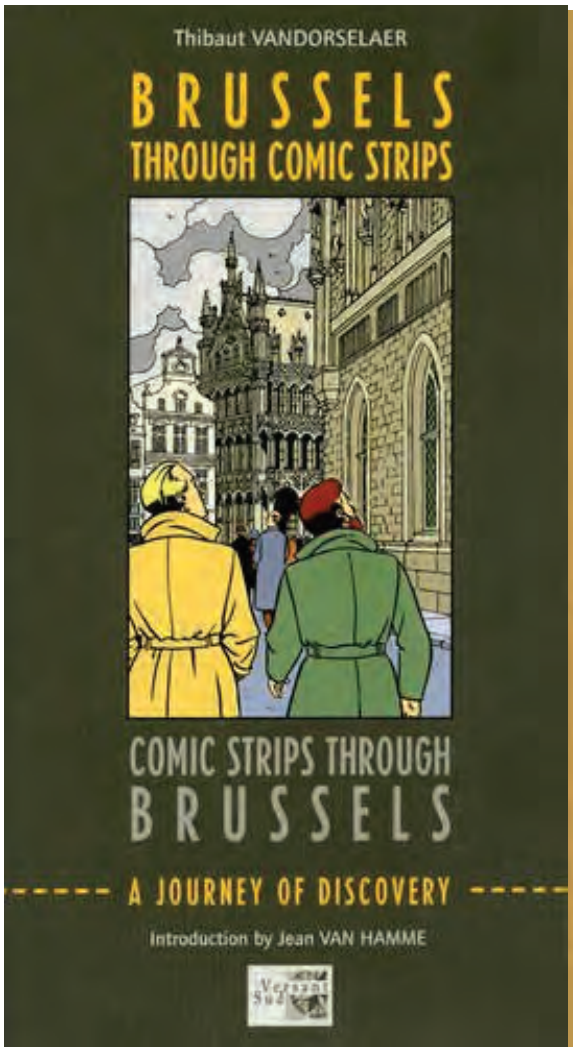

Fig. 1: Cover page (Vandorselaer, 2004)

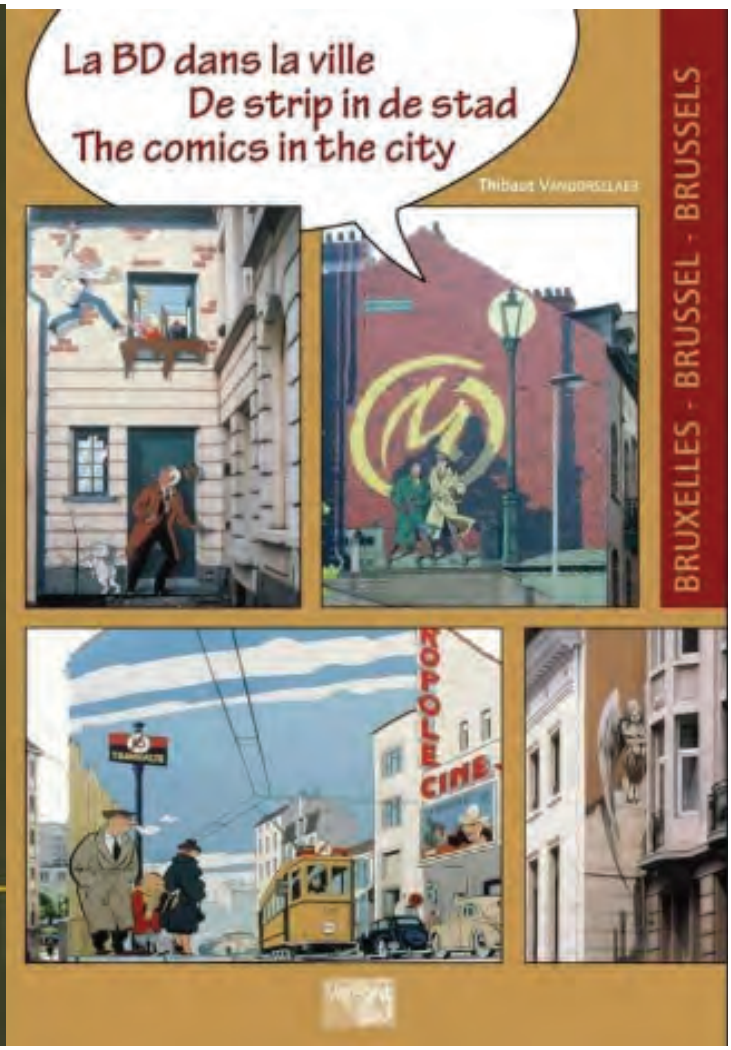

Fig. 2: Cover page (Vandorselaer, 2007)

the Centre belge de la Bande Dessinée (CBBD), founded in 1989, which houses a comics museum with more than 200 000 visitors a year. Especially after the turn of the millennium, significant tourism, a lively tourist activity, was organised around mural paintings, sculptures, reliefs, artists' birthplaces and tombs, and especially museums. In addition to the CBBD in Brussels mentioned above, the Hergé Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve, which opened in 2009, in connection with the 80th anniversary of the first publication of Tintin, is also worth mentioning.

2.2. Cultural guides and comic strip murals

Thibaut Vandorselaer's cultural guidebooks on Brussels, the Belgian capital, published in the decade after the turn of the millennium, can draw our attention to how the city and the comics, becoming each other's medium, both carry and shape each other (Vandorselaer, 2004, 2007). What makes the study of these publications topical is the fact that many tourist and cultural websites in Brussels still recommend the places and itineraries they suggest, now extended to include works created since then (https://www.bruxelles.be/parcours-bd; https://www.parcoursbd.brussels/en/; Coupez 2023).

Thibaut Vandorselaer, a tourist expert with a passion for comics, has also written a guide to Bruges and Damme, as well as to Paris. These are exclusively about one-way representations, as their titles imply: *Bruges and Damme Through Comic Strips* and *Paris, la capitale redessinée en BD*. The author's very first comic guide, *Brussels through Comic Strips - Comic Strips through Brussels* (*Bruxelles dans la BD. La BD dans Bruxelles*), published in 2004, can, unlike the above-mentioned books, and because of the specificity of the city, take greater account of the two-way mediation, which it does. For Brussels has become, as Jean Van Hamme writes in the foreword to the guidebook, a source of inspiration for the comic strip' (Van Hamme, 2004: 5). But how did Brussels become the vehicle for the comics?

In Brussels, there are major bande dessinée publishers, specialised shops, festivals, exhibitions, and public lectures on comics. Many of the BD artists and screenwriters have created, studied, and lived in the city. It is no coincidence that there is talk of a 'Brussels School', whose greatest achievement in comics history is probably the development and dissemination of the ligne claire graphic style.
Perhaps even more interesting for the city-bande dessinée relationship, dozens of murals depicting comic book characters have been installed over the last three decades or so, first in Brussels, mainly in the city center, but later in the outskirts of the capital and other Belgian municipalities. The Brussels actions are characterised by the fact that the mural was nominated by the city, the Belgian Comic Strip Centre, and the city itself. The selection criteria included Belgianness, relevance to Brussels, national or international fame, and comic historical significance. (After the millennium, the number of works by Francophone but non-Belgian artists on the walls increased, and the selection process moved towards a Franco-Belgian canon.)
Thibaut Vandorselaer's 2004 guidebook on Brussels invites us (or accompanies us or recalls us - all three are typical uses of the guidebook in different time contexts) on walks through Brussels that include both Brussels locations depicted in comic strips and comic murals. On the one hand, the sites of Brussels were created through the medium of comics, which emphasise the relationality of the representation. It is a mosaic of Brussels, made up of sites represented in different ways in a variety of graphic styles and stories. The publication then confronts the reader with quotations from the Brussels of comics fiction worlds that appear as openly fictional worlds, encouraging them to 'retrieve' them. On the other hand, murals are used as vehicles for comic book quotations and allusions, and photographs of the comic murals are shown.
Thibaut Vandorselaer's second trilingual publication, *La BD dans la ville* (*The Comic Strip in the City*), published in 2007, now focuses on these murals alone. This guidebook is also an exhibition-catalogue-style guide to the comic murals and sculptures that, at least in this publication, become the city's collection. Of course, the partly photographic mediation is not negligible here either, since the framing of the photographs largely deprives these comic strip murals of their surroundings, of the 'peritext' that is the built and lived environment of the city - for example, the passers-by, the comic strip tourists following the route or the homeless lying on the ground are absent from these images. The publication does, however, include details of the works, brief descriptions of them, largely thematic, and precise addresses and map representations to help "retrieve" them. Taking into account the experience of recent tourist websites, we can say that Thibaut Vandorselaer's Brussels publications could be the starting point for a kind of production of locality (Appadurai, 1996: 178-199), in the sense of a canon creating of places and comics. They are at once readings of space and of the bande dessinée tradition.

But these cultural guidebooks largely forget the cultural processes that make this production of locality possible. For example, francophone globalisation, or more precisely 'mondialisation', of which popular comic strips produced in Belgium may have been a key player. Cultural theorist Jan Baetens warns that the great classics of Belgian francophone comics of the mid-twentieth century are mostly characterised by a lack of explicit references to specifically Belgian historical and social themes (Baetens, 2006:184-185). The Brussels comic murals, on the other hand, also 'relocalize' the more 'mondialized' Belgian comics.

Fig. 3: Boule et Bill (Billy & Buddy) comic mural in context (Author)

3. Geneva

3.1. Geneva as a comics city

Geneva has become a comics city over the last few decades. This is reflected not only in the rich supply of comics available in bookshops, or public collections open to Geneva citizens, libraries, and galleries, but also in the pervasive street presence of comic-style posters, signs, and murals in everyday life in Geneva and the institutional recognition of the 'ninth art'. Geneva prizes for comics creators, exhibitions, and other comics events with a high profile in the local media, and the creation of a specialised higher education institution, the ESBD (École superieure de bande dessinée et d'illustration de Genève), which was launched in September 2017, are all signs of this recognition. Geneva's residents, decision-makers, cultural institutions, political parties, local businesses, and NGOs also regard as their own tradition important local players in the nearly two centuries of history and contemporary development of comics. Although the word 'Genevan' may refer to the city, it is more appropriate to use it in the context of the 'République et canton de Genève', since it does not detract from the importance of the municipalities beyond the administrative boundaries of the city in the narrower sense, such as Carouge, which is itself a comics city.

Fig. 4, Fig. 5, Fig. 6: Zep comic-style signs in Carouge (Author)

Fig. 5, Fig. 6: Zep comic-style signs in Carouge (Author)

3.2. Media history and contemporary media cultural context

Geneva's emergence as a comics city results from an exciting media history. Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) is the best-known nineteenth-century early comic book creator in Geneva. There are influential works in the Francophone and North American tradition of international comics studies that consider Rodolphe Töpffer the "father" or "inventor" of the modern comic book (Kunzle, 2007; Groensteen and Peeters, 1994). Although the time and circumstances of the birth of comics media are debatable, one thing seems very likely: Rodolphe Töpffer was the first theorist of comics. This artist of a very varied oeuvre, a professor of rhetoric and literature at the Geneva Academy founded by Calvin (the forerunner of today's Université de Genève), a tireless debater of local political life, an educator who combined pedagogy with tourism, even found the time and energy to reflect on this particular form of expression and the new media that was being born, in addition to drawing comics. He argued for a clear graphic and narrative style – attempts to achieve the latter were later seen in the cartoonists of the style that the Dutchman Joost Swarte called ligne claire, the most widely recognised of whom was the Belgian Hergé, mentioned above in connection with Brussels.

The ligne claire also became an important style for comic book artists and audiences in Geneva, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century, when, in the context of the rich poster tradition in Switzerland and Geneva, a comic strip-based media movement was institutionalised, which was seen by the local community, considered as Genevan and assumed/reflected as being linked to the local, the comic poster (affiche BD). On the one hand, the activism of civic education and social sensitisation organisations, and on the other, the demand for posters in the referendums of the Swiss political establishment, which allowed direct democracy to take hold, helped the spread of comic posters in the Republic of Geneva. The best-known Geneva cartoonist in the comic poster context, Exem, or Emmanuel Excoffier, also created works in the ligne claire style, which were aimed at mobilisation. The prevalence of the Geneva comic poster, now officially regarded as an intangible Swiss cultural heritage and a 'living tradition', is shown by the fact that there are almost two thousand posters by more than fifty artists from the period 1969-2010 (Traditions vivantes, 2018: 4). Although Geneva is not traditionally a major centre of comic book publishing, as Brussels and Paris are in the Francophone world, this specific encounter between the poster and comic book, in social communication uses and in everyday life, makes it an important city in the history of comics.

It is from this comic tradition, often politically and socially sensitive, that one of the most popular contemporary bande dessinée album series, Titeuf (drawn in a modernised ligne claire style), and its creator, Zep (Philippe Chappuis), who is also from Geneva and who also drew comic posters, are built. The school of Titeuf, the 10-year-old boy in the comic albums, bears a striking resemblance to a real school in

Fig. 7: Carouge as seen by Tirabosco (2004)

Fig. 8: Photo of Carouge (Author)

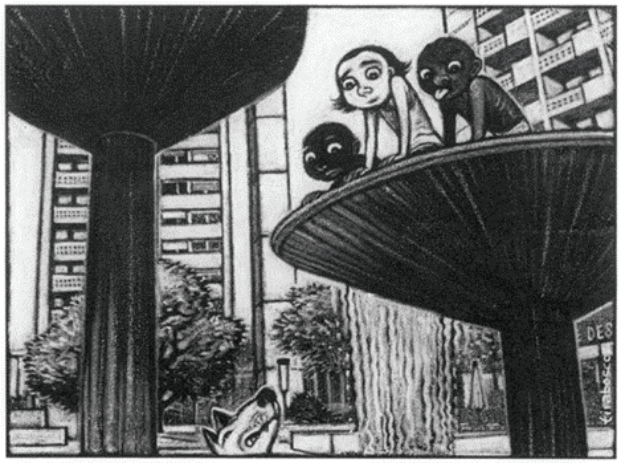

Fig. 9: Carouge as seen by Tirabosco (2004)

Fig. 10: Photo of Carouge (Author)

Carouge (Ecole primaire Jacques-Dalphin), with its characteristic chestnut trees in the courtyard, and around the building of this school in Carouge there are several comic-style signs drawn by Zep - with the intention of civic education. Created for the municipality of Carouge, the comic-strip-style signs used in communication campaigns are a reflection of the everyday life that surrounds them. The pictures on the boards show potentially conflictual everyday situations and how to avoid them. The texts playfully, and sometimes ironically, draw attention to everyday problems such as littering, noisy nights, dog waste management, etc. The comic-style sign is suitable for highlighting everyday phenomena, distancing them, for creating an interpretative perspective, through a graphic style and humour reminiscent of popular comics genres.

The appearance of Geneva and Carouge in comics could be the subject of a separate study. Perhaps one of the most exciting Geneva comic artist in this respect is Tom Tirabosco, who moved away from the ligne claire tradition by using the technique of monotype, which is on the borderline between painting and graphic art, while also creating posters. His album Carouge offers an imaginative representation of geographically retrievable places (Tirabosco, 2004). Tom Tira-

bosco, as President of the Swiss Professional Association of Comic Strip Authors, was also involved in the founding of the École superieure de bande dessinée et d'illustration de Genève.

3.3. Comic posters

The comic poster, a hybrid medium, has a prominent role in local media history and contemporary media culture in Geneva. To a significant extent, this role is reflected through political communication practices. Swiss democracy, considered a model, is a 'middle-way', 'semi-direct' political system (Golay & Mix & Remix, 2008: 39), where citizens elect representatives, but where there is also a large space for direct democratic participation. This arrangement requires something different from the actors and media of political communication than a predominantly representative system (Windisch 1997, 2007). In Switzerland, citizens can regularly decide directly four or five times a year. They then vote on a so-called 'popular initiative' (initiative populaire) or decide by 'referendum' on the fate of laws and ordinances already voted on by their representatives. Referendums are preceded by a debate, and the debate favours certain media and genres.

One of the most interesting developments in the encounter between direct democracy and the media is the political comic poster, which has been spreading mainly in Geneva in recent decades. The demand for posters for relatively frequent referendums may also have contributed to the institutionalisation of a specific hybrid medium, considered Genevan and with an assumed/reflected local connection, or, from another perspective, a specific cultural version of the comic media, the comic poster, by the comic artists and audiences in Geneva, turning to the poster tradition in the last third of the twentieth century. Comic poster receives differentiated attention from local media and culture makers (Herbez, 1991).

The Geneva comic posters are usually iconotexts intended primarily for public space; if they are in private space, they are oriented towards public space. The poster, like the comic strip, embodies a duality of textual and visual devices. Like its two original media, the comic poster can be classified as an iconotext, to use Michael Nerlich's term (Nerlich, 1990: 268). This expression describes a juxtaposition of text and image, without establishing a hierarchy between the devices. The iconotext is thus a unit of mixed character, whose two components are in a dialogical relationship. In the case of the comic poster, this complexity is multi-layered, since it originates from two media, each of which brings together text and image. The visual and the textual are inextricably linked in comics, as they complement each other. The reader receives information on two communication channels, through textual elements and images. A poster, whether political, cultural, or advertising, works in the same way: it aims to convince through both visuality and textuality. Despite some points in common, it would seem that posters and comics are quite different in terms of their medial dimensions, for example, their technical devices, their conditions of distribution, or the nature of their supports. These different parameters influence the meaning of the message conveyed, and transform the mode of reception too, since the narrativity of a medium feeds on its mediativity (Marion, 1997: 84). The two media of the poster and the comic strip are capable of merging into a new medium with a narrative capacity and its own mediativity, an amalgam of the characteristics of these two resource media.

A comic poster is a poster that bears traces of "comic bookness", for example by showing parallel or successive events in a comic book-like "simultaneous" way and/or by evoking a comic art graphic style or genre. The identification of comic bookness also requires the media-cultural presupposition that the recipient recognises as a 'comic book-like' representation, for example, the tabular layout, the narrative image, or the ligne claire graphic style favoured by the cartoonist Exem (Emmanuel Excoffier), most often mentioned in connection with comic posters, and usually associated with the Brussels school of bande dessinée. Comic posters are often media texts with a mobilising function, where the displacement of the comic medium is intended to attract attention (often achieved by compositions that evoke comic book album covers) and to generate sympathy by emphasising the relationality of the image. For Exem, ligne claire means both transparency in graphic style (mostly lack of shadows, few colour variations, but bright colours, strong lines) and clarity of thought that can be clearly conveyed (Exem cited in Herbez, 1996: 77). This interpretation of 'clarity of line' can be linked to the need to express the opinions

dictated by the yes/no logic of referendums. The result is a polemical iconotext that attracts attention in the public square precisely because of its colourfulness, but also because of its - at least apparent - transparency. On the other hand, posters that exploit the comic-book-like quality of the meticulously crafted posters can also make the viewer linger, for example by placing events that take place one after the other or in parallel, as if on a comic-book page, in the space of a poster.

One of Exem's works published in September 1988 is usually regarded as a milestone (Exem, 1988; Herbez, 1996: 8; 2005: 47-50; Exem's works on the Internet: ccsa. admin.ch). Probably also because this poster could become an emblem of effective civic politics, even in the face of professional politicians and the interests and power of the economic elite. The demolition of the Paquis Baths, which is extended into Lake Geneva, was finally prevented by the referendum for which this poster was one of the campaigning tools, even though almost all political parties argued in favour of its demolition. Here, Exem combines the ligne claire style with references to poster art in Geneva between the two wars, thus also referring to the period when the spa was built. On the poster, an octopus is emerging from the water and destroys a building that the people of Geneva would recognise as the Spa of Paquis. This is made clear by the inscription: "NOT for the demolition of the Baths of Paquis." The octopus is reminiscent of the political poster iconography of the first half of the last century when it was customary to personify political forces as monsters, to depict their sprawling, omnipresent power with octopus arms. The font of the caption on the poster, which marks a turning point in the era, is also a reference to the 1930s, as it recalls the work of the Geneva poster artist Noël Fontanet.

Geneva, "staged" in the political comic posters of the last four decades, is mainly Geneva's public spaces, threatened by destruction and privatisation. In this context, Exem's octopus appears later on the walls of Geneva: on the poster against the conversion of the Wilson Palace into a hotel, and then as a reference to the plight of tenants, personifying impersonal capital - a similar process in the Geneva cartoon, with the depiction of a rat in one place and a zombie in another. (While later appearances of the octopus sometimes break with the depiction of it as a strangling, destructive monster.)

Jean-Jacques Giroud has an ingenious example in which he compares an anti-communist Fontanet poster from the 1930s with a pair of posters made by Exem for the Labour Party. Both works confront the viewer with a vision of the future associated with forces considered to be left-wing or extreme left-wing, only with the opposite sign (Giroud, 1996). The composition and visual rhetorical techniques also show similarities in other cases, if we look at Fontanet's work mobilising against women's suffrage (retrievable, along with other works by the artist, from the Swiss Poster Collection website: http://ccsa. admin.ch), or a 1937 poster in support of a popular initiative to ban the Masonic movement (rejected by vote).

"Semi-indirect" democracy helps opinion genres to flourish. In the case of Switzerland, this is demonstrated by the mobilising posters. In Geneva, building on the local media culture tradition, the poster has merged with the comics. However, Exem's other work in particular shows that Geneva's comic poster artists are not only commissioned for referendums, but also regularly take part in other campaigns, such as the communication practices of international organisations or local NGOs. For example, the Centre Social Protestant in Geneva ran five campaigns that were largely built in a comic-book poster medium (Herbez, 2005: 54).

4. Conclusion

In recent decades, following the growing popularity of graphic novels, comics are no longer considered to be only a graphic style, but there has been a certain shift towards the hybridisation of comics with different mediums (e.g. novel, printed press, cinema, the poster, television, the video blog, etc.) in the popular culture. Thus, comics can be treated as graphic literature, art, and media. Taking into account the two major trends in the identity-forming of comics media today, besides digitalisation, the culture of placing comics in the space of personal encounters (e.g. galleries, museums, comic book events, festivals, street art, etc.) is emerging. Some of the global media cities are also "comics cities", meaning a high spatial concentration of comics-related activities (comics institutions and the diversity of local comics culture for instance), which can used as a tool for shaping collective identity.

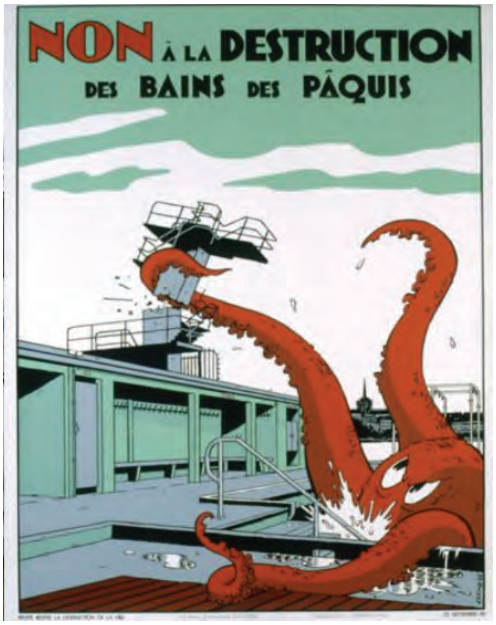

Fig. 11: Non à la destruction des bains des Pâquis (Exem, 1988)

Fig. 12: Exem posters on the street in Geneva (Author)

Both Brussels and Geneva can be considered as comics cities as well as media cities, with their significant comic culture in terms of specialized publishing houses, bookstores, shops, museums, archives, and educational institutes, and their impact on certain elements of urban art, tourism, and political decision making. In the case of Brussels, the most striking aspect of Belgian comics concerns street art murals and related tourism. In the process of creating those murals, selection criteria include among others the relevance to Brussels, national or international fame, as well as comic historical significance. Some of the many aspects that have contributed to the success of Belgian comics are the Francophone response to the North American comics that became popular in Europe in the first half of the 20th century, and along with the institutional system, with contributors such as the CBBD in Brussels and the Hergé Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve. After the new millennium, significant tourist activity was organised around comic murals, sculptures, reliefs, artists' birthplaces and tombs, and museums. In 2004, Thibaut Vandorselaer's inspirative book on the Brussels comic strips murals was published, and became the ultimate guide of comic-related street art works and thus an important step toward canonisation of comics. The greatest achievement in comics history of the so-called 'Brussels School' is the development and dissemination of the ligne claire graphic style. This style also became important among comic book artists and audiences in Geneva, in the context of the Swiss comic-style poster tradition, which is related to civic education (such as Zep's comic-style signs in Carouge), activism, and political referendums (e.g. Exem's posters for Baths of Paquis referendum). The Geneva comic posters are now officially regarded as an intangible Swiss cultural heritage and a 'living tradition', with the production of almost two thousand posters by more than fifty artists from the period 1969-2010.

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