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Gender and Performativity in Webcomics

Gênero e performatividade em Webcomics

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Abstract: The remediation from comics to webcomics and flash animated comics will be explained highlighting the audiovisual modes they share with electronic literature works. Besides emphasizing the changes in the reading, publishing and commercial processes, the main aim of this article is to compare gender roles in characters of webcomics with the performativity and denaturalization theories by Judith Butler. In this study the author's freedom to deal with controversial topics such as sexuality and gender is seen as a possibility of exploration of gender and queer issues which have not been taken into account in previous research. Four webcomics about gender issues will be analysed emphasizing Judith Butler's concepts: *The Sisterhood* story from *SinFest* (2008) by Tatsuya Ishida, *Khaos Komix* (2007-2012) by Tab Kimpton, *YU+ME:dream* (2004), *I Was Kidnapped By Lesbian Pirates From Outer Space* (2006-2011) by Megan Rose Gedris and *The Gay Monsters* (2007) by Andy Bauer. Representing different subjectivities in a popular genre as webcomic defies traditional social conventions and popularizes the individual's acceptance of his or her own sexuality.

Palavras-chave:

Teoria de Gênero. Judith Butler. Quadrinhos Animados em Flash. Questões Queer. Sexualidade.

Resumo: A remediação de quadrinhos para webcomics e quadrinhos animados em flash será explicada destacando os modos audiovisuais que eles compartilham com obras de literatura eletrônica. Além de enfatizar as mudanças nos processos de leitura, publicação e comercialização, o objetivo principal deste artigo é comparar os papéis de gênero em personagens de webcomics com as teorias de performatividade e desnaturalização de Judith Butler. Neste estudo, a liberdade da autora, para lidar com temas polêmicos, como sexualidade e gênero, é vista como uma possibilidade de exploração de questões de gênero e queer que não foram levadas em consideração em pesquisas anteriores. Quatro webcomics sobre questões de gênero serão analisados enfatizando os conceitos de Judith Butler: *The Sisterhood* story de *SinFest* (2008) por Tatsuya Ishida; *Khaos-Komix* (2007-2012) por Tab Kimpton; *YU + ME: dream* (2004); *I was kidnapped by lesbian pirates from outer space* (2006-2011) de Megan Rose Gedris; e *The Gay Monsters* (2007) de Andy Bauer. A representação de diferentes subjetividades, em um gênero popular como webcomic, desafia as convenções sociais tradicionais e populariza ao indivíduo a aceitação de sua própria sexualidade.



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Introduction: Comics in cyberspace

During the history of literature the tools to transmit, distribute and preserve literature have never stopped evolving. It is surprising to notice that although literature has been read from many different media -stone, papyrus, ink, digital, etc- oral literature, which is the oldest one, still exists today and its existence remains owing to the work of storytellers. This example can be useful to reflect on the change of the literary medium as a necessary step to increase the number of readers who can have access to it, the distributions of the texts and their preservation. However, the incorporation of one medium does not necessarily involve the substitution of the other. It would be erroneous to consider that one medium -oral, printed or digital- exterminates the others; the new medium guarantees an open door to new possibilities of writing, reading and manipulating a text.

George Landow, pioneer of hypertext theory, studied the contrast of reading habits during his lecture at Complutense University of Madrid in 2010 when he described the perception of the listener of oral literature who was a witness in a public space, in contrast with the romantic feeling of the reader of printed literature during the nineteenth century when precisely writing became more intimate and introspective. Prof. Landow also commented on the change of reader's freedom to read books from the beginning to the end in printed literature and the change of the process with the use of hypertexts in computers, where he/she can move from one link to another and find concrete information with just one click.

Although one literary medium tends to predominate over the other, generally for preservation or commercial reasons, all forms of literature converge with others. Nowadays literature can be read from a computer; however publishing houses, libraries, bookshops and comics shops have not stopped producing and distributing printed books and comics.

Improving and refashioning the medium is necessary. Jay David Bolter has called "remediation" to the process of refashioning one media to another. "Remediation did not begin with the introduction of digital media. We can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation" (BOLTER, p 48). We share Jay David Bolter's view that electronic hypertext and *e-comics* are not the end of print; they are instead the remediation of print (46). Photography remediated painting, film remediated stage

production and photography, and television remediated film and radio. Despite considering the digital text an improvement of the printed text, Bolter admits that both media are necessary. In digital literature the passive reader becomes active and in interactive literature the reader plays a decisive role in the narrative.

According to Laura Borrás: "When there is innovation there is always an apocalyptic debate about the future systems of the transmission of knowledge" (Trans. From Spanish, BORRÁS, p 27) this is the argument that Laura Borrás uses to explain why so many scholars reject the adaptation of the new technologies in writing and studying electronic literature. In this late age of print, the two technologies, print and electronic writing, still need each other.

In the case of comics, high quality printed comics and graphic novels have been expensive for decades, some of them which were not commercialized in the country of the reader were really difficult to find. The comic boom of the '90's comics collection became an obsession, due to the exclusivity comics readers and panapictographists bought comics and put them in protective plastic envelopes unread to preserve them in "untouched" condition. The boom period began with the publication of titles like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* as well as "summer crossover epics" like *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and *Secret Wars*. The collector's interest for keeping the pristine condition for potential financial gain was initiated when publishers used techniques such as variant covers, *polybags* and *gimmick* covers. These techniques made some comics copies unique and speculators would buy a series of copies to sell them with a highest price in the future.

Undeniably, in the process of digitalization of comics there is an economic interest in commercializing *e-books* and Ipads. For many people Webcomics and Flash Animated comics are making the decay of the printed comic industry easier. However, creating and reading Webcomics does not mean the substitution of the digital media for the printed one, but rather a method of taking advantage of the new resources that provide positive elements such as: rapidity, visual and audio modes. There is no need to become technophobic nor technophilic to study Webcomics and Flash Animated comics, the digital medium is a tool to permit open publishing and free distribution.

Webcomics and flash animated comics

According to Turner-Maier, Jason, a student from Stanford University, a webcomic (also called *e-comic*) is "a comic which is posted on the web" (TURNER-MAIER, Jason, When Serious Things Happen in Funny Webcomics). On the one hand we can find classical comics online, printed comics which have been created in a printed medium and are presented in a digital one. For example *Calvin and Hobbes* webcomic. On the other hand we find original webcomics which have been created to be displayed on a computer like *HeroGirls* and *Khaos Komix*.

Most webcomics are made in the style of newspaper comic (frequently in black and white and in three-panel format), series like *Templar Arizona*, *The Rainbow or Orchid*. Others like *Scary Go Round* or *Questionable Content* show that hybridities between the two formats, like daily pages of a comic with punchlines, work extremely well.

Appart from drawings scanned into digital media and stories born in a computer, writers and artists have progressively taken advantage of the resources of the new technologies and created hypercomics. Hypercomics may include sounds, animation, non-linear navigation, etc. All of them include features that are not directly reproducible in a print format. Some famous hypercomics are: *The Aweful Science Fair* (2000) by Jasen Lex, *Ray Murphy Detective of Dreams* (2003) by FuFu Frauenwahl or *After Days of Passion* (2005) by Antony Johnston and Ben Templesmith (considered one of the internet's earliest examples of non-linear narrative).

In comics with flash animations there are Internet cartoons, generally they include audio modes and are close to the video or film genre. The difference between webcomics and flash animated comics is that the first ones are presented in comic strips while flash animated ones have animation, sound or music and are created in series.

Both webcomics and hypercomics offer readers the possibility of reading the classical Marvel stories and enjoy thousands of underground comics of high quality in some cases and poor in others, created by a range of artists, from beginners to professionals. However, fanatics and experts of webcomics doubt whether they are profitable for artists. Frank DelBruck from the collective *hypercomics.net* explains why printed comics are more profitable than online comics:

Webcomics [...] are a product firmly in the realm of the information economy. Comprised solely of digital information, webcomics have zero physical presence

and are infinitely reproducible for no extra cost. Being so cheap to produce makes webcomics (as an end product) that much more difficult to monetize. Attempts to create a system of paid content [...] have been to a large extent unsuccessful. (DELBRUCK, n/p)

Hypertext fiction works have inherited many elements from comics: visual content, sequential stories, collaborative works, ludic purposes and approaches to youth and children literature in some cases. Hypermedia -hypertexts which include images and animation- have been created using elements of comics: images, semiotics, fragmented language and serial narratives. For instance, in *Dollspace* (2001) by Francesca da Rimini, comic, manga and *hentai* images are used as symbols of how erotica is represented in Asian countries where many children, especially female, are victims of sexual exploitation. In the series of multimedia and interactive hypertexts *Inanimate Alice* (2005-) by Kate Pullinger there are serial narratives and the text which appear floating in the air like in speech balloons in comics.

There are many elements in electronic literature which have been clearly inherited from comics. Stephanie Boluk criticizes the absence of webcomics in Katherine Hayles definitions of literary genres of electronic literature and in ELO organization:

There are notable exclusions from Hayles's discussion of electronic literature. Collaborative artistic projects or forms that tend to be more consistently associated with popular traditions such as webcomics, fan-fiction, gif building, and meme generation, are not - for a number of disciplinary reasons - part of the canon that ELO is building. This is not an insignificant issue, as the setting aside of collaborative, serially constructed works from the field of the literary reinscribes into new media forms a Cartesian model of authorship that is the legacy of the print monograph" (Boluk, "Anthological and Archaeological Approaches to Digital Media: A Review of Electronic Literature and Prehistoric Digital Poetry").

Webcomics and flash animated comics offer quality texts whose context challenges the conventional social and political ideologies of the most important institutions. As a subculture, they use humour and irony as weapons to destabilize the norms and invent worlds in which those who are marginalized -outcasts- can become heroes, and their positive sense of humor comforts misunderstood readers.

Webcomics and flash animated comics publication

Flash animated comics offer many benefits to the writer and reader. Firstly, there is not any editor, the writer is free to publish any comic of any political, social or controversial content.

Newspaper comic strip artists can view their work as a product or a commodity more than as art. Webcomic and flash animated comics artists or writers publish freely for art's sake, there is not any economic incentive but a creative, ludic, artistic and non-lucrative interest. According to Jason Turner-Maier there are also benefits in the format: "The constraints of the newspaper medium often suffocate creativity and innovation. It is hard to be different and try new things when you are allotted only a small 2"x6" rectangle. Furthermore, editors usually discourage a strip from changing as this might endanger their reader base" (n/p).

Secondly, it has been said that the web fosters creativity: sound, animation as well as interactivity. The classical onomatopoeic sounds of comics have always been the precursors of cinema and in the case of flash animated comics the creative writer can innovate with new hybridizations: video-comics, animation, video-games webcomics, etc.

Thirdly, publishing comics have traditionally been a long and slow process. Printed comics and comic strips are serialized in comic magazines and newspapers. Surprisingly, the fact of publishing comics online offers fast publishing and updating. This digital medium permits young, unknown and freelance writers and artists to publish their creations and being read all over the world.

Low cost is another advantage of making webcomics, the only necessary materials are a computer, design programs and Internet connection. According to Scott McCloud, in *Reinventing Comics* –which publication coincided with the Webcomics explosion 1.0.-: "the path from selling ten comics to selling ten thousand comics to selling ten million comics is as smooth as ice" (188). McCloud described the three areas where computer technology and comics could intersect: digital production (producing comic art on the computer), digital delivery (publishing comics online), and digital comics (creating comics specifically designed for the Web). In the recent history of webcomics (1985-present) new genres have been originated: computer/technology strips and gaming strips. Webcomics are in an experimental process, writers play can play constantly with the form –using different programs, publishing digitally and in printed medium too, mixing genres (romance, history, autobiography, humor, science-fiction, etc), working collaboratively and the innovation of the readers' participation in the elaboration of the comic plot.

Jesse Reklaw began in 1995 the dialogue between reader/creator which is currently so characteristic of the webcomics world. In his website *Slow Wave* he invited readers to email him descriptions of their dreams and he adapted them into four-panel strips. The possibility of real time communication between reader and writer did not exist before the arrival of the communication on the Web. Nowadays it is a common factor of webcomics the social engagement where readers can post comments, read an artist's commentary or purchase merchandise.

Denaturalization of gender in webcomics and flash animated comics

The object of study of this article is webcomics and hypercomics dealing with gender issues. Previous researches on webcomics and hypercomics have focused on the variety of genres of this phenomenon: comedy, parody, science fiction, fantasy, steampunk, post-apocalyptic, romance and horror. In other publications experts have analysed webcomics categorized from the nationalities of the creators: British, American, Australian, Canadian or Japanese. And finally, other volumes explore particular strategies used in hypercomics: pixel-art or *infinite canvas*, this is, a series of design strategies based on treating the screen as a window rather than a page, an idea suggested by Scott McCloud in *Reinventing Comics* (2000) which have been put into practise by several experimental artists. However, the question of gender in webcomics and hypercomics is still an unexplored area of research.

The main interest of mainstream publishers has been to commercialize their comics making them appealing and fashionable for new readers and fans. However, webcomics and hypercomics artists do not need to be evaluated by editors or publishing houses and can allow themselves to use their imaginations to reflect their personal inquiries and interests: “Webcomics artists have the opportunity to move in unexplored directions without fear of alienating a paying audience” (SHREB, 2011). As a result, controversial topics can be found across the Internet: sex and gender, religion or politics. In this diversification of themes we find that feminists and the LGBTQ communities raise their voices. The former use humor and parody as a strategy to defend women’s rights and the latter popularize alternative sexualities.

In this study some webcomics and hypercomics will be analysed using semiotic principles as the convenient methodology which is generally chosen for comic studies. The cultural and linguistic signs of these webcomics will be compared to the concept of performativity by the

queer studies main theorist Judith Butler. The following selection of webcomics and hypercomics covers various gender views: a feminist approach making fun of patriarchal ideologies in *The Sisterhood* story from *SinFest* (2008) by Japanese-American comic strip artist Tatsuya Ishida, homosexual experiences between adolescents in *Khaos Komix* (2007-2012) by Tab Kimpton, lesbian stories in *YU+ME:dream* (2004) *I Was Kidnapped By Lesbian Pirates From Outer Space* (2006-2011) by Megan Rose Gedris and subversive identities of gays, transgender and drag in *The Gay Monsters* (2007) by Andy Bauer.

The authors of these webcomics -having been influenced or not by the performativity theory of Judith Butler-question gender roles as showing a paradigm between what institutions impose and the personal sexual experiences or individuals. Judith Butler developed her theory using psychoanalysis and phenomenology as starting points criticizing theories by Jacques Lacan, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, George Herbert Mead, etc-, structural anthropologists -Claude Levi-Strauss, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, etc.- and speech act theory -particularly the works of John Searle and J.L. Austin- in her understanding of the "performativity" of the individual identity. According to John Searle, illocutionary speech acts are those speech acts that actually "do" something rather than merely represent something. Butler uses the example of "I pronounce you man and wife" of the marriage ceremony. In making that statement, a person of authority changes the status of a couple within an *intersubjective* community; those words actively change the existence of that couple by establishing a new marital reality: the words "do" what they say. In these performative utterances "saying" something means "doing" something, rather than simply reporting on or describing reality. As Judith Butler explains, "Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (BUTLER, 1993, p 13). A speech act can produce that which it names, however, only by reference to the law (or the accepted norm, code, or contract), which is cited or repeated (and thus performed) in the pronouncement.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity is inspired from J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and Jacques Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context" (1971) as well as Paul de Man's notion of "matalepsis" in *Allegories of Reading* (1981), Butler revolutionized the concept of gender creating a fusion of feminist insights into linguistic theories.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity*, Butler denaturalizes gender categories by proposing that they are performative; That is, gender is part of

an overall structure of power that can be disrupted by individual agency (SOTELO, p 342)

According to Butler no identity exists behind the acts that "express" gender, and these acts constitute the illusion of the stable gender identity, which can be false. If the appearance of "being" a gender is thus an effect of culturally influenced acts, then there is not an universal gender: constituted through the practice of performance, the gender "woman" (like the gender "man") remains open to interpretation and "resignification."

Judith Butler argues that when performing the conventions of reality the artificial conventions appear to be natural and necessary. Butler concerns herself with those "gender acts" that similarly lead to material changes in one's existence and even in one's bodily self: "One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well" ("Performative", p 272).

Performativity according to Butler means that words have power on people's minds. Repetition and rituals of what is considered "male", "female" and sex are inserted in our minds and bodies. Performativity permits the naturalization of the position of the subject to reproduce what is "named".

Butler states that gender "is a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were" ("Performative" 272). That style has no relation to essential "truths" about the body but is strictly ideological. It has a history that exists beyond the subject who enacts those conventions:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again." ("Performative", p 272)

As Butler affirms, "If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express" ("Performative" 278). For this reason, "the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations" ("Performative", p 278).

Judith Butler proposal is to "denaturalize gender", that is to say to counteract normative violence of the ideal sex and do not permit the domination of the ordinary and traditional discourses on sexuality. This denaturalization of gender gives researchers the clue to interpret these webcomics and flash animated comics about feminist and queer subjects.

In the feminist and humoristic comic strip called "The Sisterhood" from Tatsuya Ishida's *SinFest* a woman sees a *boolean* matrix everywhere just like in the 1999 science fiction action film *The Matrix* directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski and starring Keanu Reeves. A strange woman wearing black glasses and riding a motorbike teaches the protagonist, a young ordinary woman what is patriarchy about, in a satyric fashion. One of the most significant sentences which refers to patriarchy in this webcomic is: "It keeps people looked in rigid roles" (ISHIDA 2008). This statement denaturalizes gender roles which have been so often considered as biological and universal replacing this idea to name them "rigid roles". As feminists have stated for decades gender is not natural, it is a social construction. Simone de Beauvoir claimed her famous statement: "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" in her essential book for feminist theory *The Second Sex* in 1949. Women and men have biological differences but social constructions have created a series of roles which are repeated from generation to generation. As Judith Butler states: "performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (BUTLER, 1993, p 95).

Taking a look carefully at the words which represent the matrix in the webcomic imitating those of the film, it will be seen that the content is symbolic. In the first panel the woman is surprised watching words floating, these words are: "Vamp, Lolita, Diva, Princess, etc". All these words correspond to the image of women that mass media and literature have injected into society's imaginary of what means to be "female". When the girl watches other people walking on the streets and driving their cars she is paralyzed by the messages: "Cook, clean, wash", "get me a beer", "diamonds are the girl's best friend", etc. When the girl of the ponytail wearing glasses appears, we can read the word "Feminazi" on her, this would be the word that any person without any knowledge of feminism would call her. In the panel of the "Workplace" the words are: "dress code" and "sex joke" which are some of the complexities that women and men find at their workplaces where they have to "act" and "pretend" to be like others in order to be accepted, from a Butlerian interpretation here we have a direct example of "performativity". At school female and male receive the insults and stereotypes

expressed in this webcomic: "boys don't cry" and "girls are weird". At the end of this period of surrealist reflection the "Matrix" woman tells the protagonist: "You can see" like in a science-fiction movie, the matrix words and sentences are those whose people would tell her. now she knows that we live in a sexist world: "man hater", "dyke", "hysterical", "can't keep a man", etc. This webcomic parodies gender stereotypes using the matrix as a metaphor of how our reality is covered by patriarchal codes.

The second example, *Khaos Komix* by Tab Kimpton focuses mainly on gender issues: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, faggotry, homophobia, transgender issues, gender consent, body issues, abuse, hate, love and friendship. According to the author the name "Khaos" is an allusion to the variety of sexual and affectionate relationships that the protagonist can have and the "gender blending". The eight characters of the story are young people living a period of change and search for sexual identity.

Steve's Story shows how social conventions determine what is female and male in sexuality and how the individual seems to be obliged to have a different behaviour in private and public spaces. In the story an adolescent is discovering his sexuality and he has many contradictions about how he should interact being what society considers "male" and how he should act in his "gay" identity. Again we are going to pay special attention to performative acts:

At the beginning of the story Steve meets his new friends at high school. From the very first day when he meets Mark, the latter hugs him and the others explain that this is a common gesture coming from him, he is a very affectionate person, it might be shocking for the reader to see how a young man embraces another which is the kind of act that generally girls do. His other friend Jamie is the one that society would consider more "masculine" as his use of language reveals and aggressive attitude. Steve, the protagonist, enjoys cooking which is an attribute which has been considered "female housework". When Steve and Mark get really close, Steve's father asks his son if he is gay, Steve denies it feeling completely embarrassed about it. He discovers gay sex from the Internet, and one day when he and his friend are drunk they have their first homosexual relationship.

Steve prefers to call himself "bisexual" because calling himself "gay" sounds pejorative for him because he has always heard this word being used as an insult. Here, performativity

theory by Judith Butler is present; words imply “action” and the protagonist does not want to admit his personal feelings because of fear of social discrimination and prejudices.

When the protagonist has a homosexual relationship with his friend, after sex his friend who used to be a talkative, affectionate and sociable person, feels depressed and do not talk to anyone. When his friend tries to help him he acts aggressively claiming that he is not a female being who needs consolation and comfort. Steve’s main desire is to cheer up Mark who looks depressed and is resented, and their other friend, Jamie -the masculine model- suggests that Mark should find a girlfriend, Amber, a girl. Steve imagines them together as a normal couple to try to not feel guilty anymore for the homosexual relationship that he is responsible for. Here, as Judith Butler describes, society has set the rules of seeing heterosexual relationships as natural ones.

After *Steve’s Story* the reader will find *Mark’s Story*, this postmodernist technique of telling the same experience narrated by different characters is characteristic of electronic literature and webcomics. The multiple points of view invites to reflect on subjectivity and relativism, this narrative strategy shows how readers cannot trust the confessional activity of a narrator because his view of reality is influenced by his own thoughts. Steve tries to guess what Mark thinks and how he perceives reality, interestingly the reader discovers that sometimes Mark’s thoughts and feelings are not exactly how Steve –this unreliable narrator- had told.

Thanks to the character's and the protagonist's parents acceptance of the homosexuality of his son the readers can tolerate all the gender reactions. There are some performative actions in the character's behavior. Some performative reactions would be Jamie's insults to Mark calling him a fag, with this act he is pretending to be "male" using a homophobic insult. Other significant performative act is Mark showing anger to Steve after their first sexual experience. He compares himself with a woman in some occasions in the story, taking for granted that, gestures, body positions and sensitivity are women's attributes. The phantom of "compulsory heterosexuality" haunts Steve and Mark in the middle of the story and they try to date girls thinking that it would be more acceptable for the others and themselves. Compulsory heterosexuality is a condition that theorist on gender issues such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Anne Fausto Sterling have criticized as a social imposition which only brings unhappiness, confusion, lack of self-esteem in those who suffer from it and who can be victims of homophobia.

In *Khaos Komix* forum readers can comment on the stories and characters. This collaborative interpretation of the webcomic contributes to a more complete understanding and the possibility of sharing impressions with others. This webcomic has a pedagogic intention and could be used for teaching purposes especially in gender and sexuality seminars and in anti-homophobic campaigns.

In Megan Rose Gedris webcomics we find queer ideologies. She vindicates lesbian women's rights and depicts women's empowerment sometimes with a dramatic tone in *YU+ME:dream* and from an aggressive radical perspective in *I Was Kidnapped By Lesbian Pirates From Outer Space*.

YU+ME:dream won the second Queer Press Grant from Prism Comics which allowed Gedris to publish the first collected volume of the series. In this webcomic, the protagonist, called Fiona, lives with her father and stepmother Elizabeth. She suffers the bad treatment from her classmates at the Catholic institution where she studies. She falls in love with Lia, a female friend, she considers that this choice cannot be punished and she has the right to go out with a girl when she sees that a friend of her is gay. Here there is again a performative act, the individual approves the action because of mimesis of other's action. However, during a school dance, Fiona is revealed to be in a coma induced hallucination. Fiona tries to commit suicide because her mother also killed herself when Fiona was only four. When Fiona awakens from her coma and goes back to Dreamworld, she tries to find Lia once again.

I Was Kidnapped By Lesbian Pirates From Outer Space is inspired from the 50s pulp and 60s Lesbian Pulp Fiction comics. In this webcomic male characters are portrayed as stupid and their acts are absurd, lesbian pirates are intelligent and powerful. The author created the webcomic with the aim of criticizing the sexism and misogynist view of pulp fiction comics made by male writers. These lesbians live in a spacecraft which is a symbolic Isle of Lesbos, this can be interpreted following the semiotic value of how they express surprise, instead of saying "Oh my God" they say "Sapho" echoing the Greek Lesbian poet. For readers it is difficult to find this webcomic really amusing because it is more radical than others and its ideology corresponds to the separatist feminist lesbian one. In these feminist webcomics the use of irony and blasphemy work as feminist weapons. The use of these techniques have been vindicated by Judith Butler. According to Rosi Braidotti: "As Judith Butler lucidly warns us,

the force of the parodic mode consists precisely in turning the practice of repetitions into a politically empowering position. Parody can be politically empowering on the condition of being sustained by a critical consciousness that aims at the subversion of dominant codes" (112).

In the flash Animated comic *The Gay Monsters* there is a parody of the conventional idea of homosexuals and transgendered people who are portrayed as monsters. Butler used the figure of the drag as the exaggeration which shows that gender is always performed, in this comic gender is seen as a carnival and identity and sexuality can be interchanged.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to highlight the fact that all webcomics which are published online are making readers easier to have access to them and to know them in a fast way. The comic genre is being remediated and brought back to the reader's interest in the online format. Publishing and selling webcomics online is also beneficial for the writer because, on the contrary of what can be assumed, is more profitable.

The gender question is presented as a complex social construction and individuals try to find affection and power by overcoming trauma and embarrassment. Humor and parody are convenient strategies to deal with the social stigma of feminists and the LGTB collective.

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