



FRAGMENTS OF ANGER

A COLLECTIVE ACCOUNT OF ITALIAN YOUTH PRECARIOUSNESS IN *LA RABBIA*

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Uno degli elementi distintivi delle giovani generazioni italiane è la crescente precarizzazione sia esistenziale che lavorativa. La mancanza di certezze economiche e la sensazione d'impasse derivante dalla difficoltà a proiettarsi nel futuro sono dunque diventate caratteristiche alla base di molte narrazioni giovanili odierne. L'articolo analizza la rappresentazione del problematico rapporto tra giovani e lavoro tramite un medium in equilibrio tra due mondi, quello grafico e quello verbale: il racconto a fumetti. Opera al centro dello studio sarà la raccolta di fumetti *La Rabbia* (Einaudi, 2016), frutto della collaborazione tra autoproduzione ed Einaudi che in otto racconti dà voce alle principali inquietudini della suddetta "generazione precaria". Tracciando le radici dell'autoproduzione in Italia a partire dalle innovazioni in campo artistico e culturale del Movimento del 1977, l'articolo investiga le potenzialità formali del fumetto di esprimere la frustrata rabbia giovanile incentrandosi su due aspetti: come la peculiare forma frammentaria del medium si presti a rappresentare la disgregazione e l'incertezza dei nostri tempi, e come il fumetto autoprodotta getti luce sulla tensione tra narrazione individuale e collettiva proprio in virtù della sua libertà espressiva e complessità formale.

One of the distinctive elements characterizing young Italian generations is the overwhelming sense of job insecurity and existential precariousness. The lack of economic certainties and the impasse deriving from the difficulty in projecting oneself into the future have therefore become crucial characteristics in many youth narratives. The article analyses the representation of the problematic relationship between young people and precarious work through a medium in-between two worlds, the visual and the textual: comics. The study investigates the underground collective comic *La Rabbia* (Einaudi, 2016), outcome of the collaboration between *autoproduzione* and renowned publishing house Einaudi, which in eight stories voices the main anxieties of the so-called "precarious generation". Tracing the birth of Italian *autoproduzione* back to the artistic legacy of the 1977 Movement, the article investigates the formal affordances of comics to express the discomfort of youth, and focuses on two aspects: first on how the peculiar fragmentary form of comics lends itself to represent the fragmentation and uncertainty of present times, and second on how self-produced comics employ their artistic freedom and formal complexity to problematize the tension between collective and individual forms of enunciation.

I COMICS: A MEDIUM FROM THE MARGINS

In the last decade the popularity of comics in Italy saw a consistent upraise, to the point that the most prestigious Italian literary prize, the Premio Strega, saw among its finalists two cartoonists, Gian Alfonso Pacinotti, known as Gipi, and Michele Rech, known as Zerocalcare. The acknowledgement of comics as worthy recipients of such prize is a clear epitome of the rise of comics' cultural capital; an issue that, nevertheless, has been at the center of many problematic debates since the medium's very onset. In North America and Europe, the comic book was (and to a certain extent, still is) perceived as childlike and mostly tackling lowbrow topics, hence casting the medium as unworthy of proper critical attention.

In Italy, one of the first attempts of seriously analyzing comics, and mass culture more broadly, is Umberto Eco's foregrounding *Apocalittici e Inter-*

grati (1964),¹ in which the semiologist problematizes the clear-cut distinction between low-brow and high-brow culture. As later reiterated by comics scholar Charles Hatfield «Vilified, often misread, ill-understood, the comic book in its heyday inspired a tremendous degree of cultural anxiety».² Harsh criticism towards the comic medium was issued from both sides of the Atlantic ocean: the American Comics Code Authority enacted a rigid censorship which imposed specific restrictions in terms of the themes and visuals that cartoonists could address, and France established the *Commission de surveillance et de contrôle des publications destinées à l'enfance et à l'adolescence* in 1949, which contributed in the process of infantilization of comics, thus relegating them to the margins of low-brow pop-culture.³ These restrictions sanctioned the long-lasting association of comic books with children, since their content had to avoid topics that could be related to violence and/or politics.

In response to the demonization of the medium, the decade of the Sixties in both America and Europe witnessed crucial developments in two areas: on the one hand, the field of semiological studies became increasingly interested in investigating the art of comics, of which Eco's aforementioned essay is an epitome; on the other hand, the production of comics themselves saw multiple changes, the most relevant being the renewal of the superhero genre under the supervision of Spike Lee at Marvel, and the emergence of the US underground comix movement. Since the focus of the present analysis is a graphic anthology influenced by the subversive legacy of the underground comix movement, it seems worth recapitulating the relevance of this movement and its effects on Italian comic production.

Although underground comix were born as a counter-model to the socioeconomic ethos of the mainstream and puritan comic book industry, the emergence of countercultural comics specifically tied with the need of youth to rebel against the American political conservatism and consumerist mindset.⁴ The countercultural wave that spanned throughout the Euro-American world in the Sixties and Seventies therefore represented a perfect time for the introduction of new forms of creative communication, such as independently produced 'zines and comics focusing on self-expression and tackling politicized and taboo subjects such as sexual liberation, drugs, addiction, and alternative lifestyles that counterposed the morale of bourgeois society.⁵

¹ UMBERTO ECO, *Apocalittici e Integrati*, Milano, Bompiani 2008.

² CHARLES HATFIELD, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi 2005, p. 6.

³ In 1954 the book *Seduction of the Innocent* by Frederic Wertham played a pivotal role in demonizing the medium of comics, and Wertham's views consistently contributed to the institution of the Comics Code Authority in 1954. See FREDERIC WERTHAM, *Seduction of the Innocent*, Reissue. Port Washington, Kennikat Press 1972.

⁴ JEAN-PAUL GABILLIET, «Underground Comix and the Invention of Autobiography, History, and Reportage», in *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel*, eds. JAN BAETENS, HUGO FREY, & STEPHEN E. TABACHNICK, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2018, pp. 155–170.

⁵ STEPHEN DUNCOMBE, *Notes from Underground: 'Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Portland, Microcosm Publishing 2001.

By briefly recapitulating the socio-political processes that fostered the birth of Italian countercultural comics, the present study investigates the political and artistic relevance of Italian *autoproduzione* (autonomous publishing) today by focusing on a so-far unique collection of comics: the anthology *La Rabbia* (2016).⁶ Outcome of the collaboration between underground⁷ *autoproduzione* and high-end publishing house Einaudi, *La Rabbia* is composed by eight comics by eleven authors and cartoonists from the Italian countercultural scene. This artistic collective is drawn together in the attempt of expressing, each through their own personal narrative and graphic style, the «abstract feeling of fury»⁸ of an entire generation, which shared generational identity rests upon the bitter awareness of being part of a multitude of precarious young individuals whose future and aspirations have been stolen.⁹

The article investigates the reasons behind the choices that led a group of artists belonging to the so-called «precarious generation»¹⁰ to employ comics as means of collective expression, and how it ties in with the medium's peculiar formal features. The first section of the article recapitulates why *autoproduzione* in comics, stemming from the countercultural movements of the Seventies, became a complementary form of expression to youth contestatory occurrences, that persists in Italy up to present times. The analysis then addresses the social and cultural background that saw the birth of multi-authored comic *La Rabbia*, investigating how the anthology draws together a multifarious yet choral narration of the widespread feeling of anger characterizing Italian youth. The last two sections close-read two comics from the graphic anthology that specifically address the problematic issue of the precarization of life and work affecting Italian young adults today. Although this theme permeates almost all stories from the anthology, the two selected comics *Almeno un'ora in più* and *L'Attesa* have been deliberately chosen as epitomes of how the authors interpret the same topics – namely rage and precarity – through extremely different narrative and graphic styles, in line with the main rule of autonomous publishing: the author's self-determination and unconstrained creativity.¹¹

⁶ VALERIO BINDI e LUCA RAFFAELLI (a cura di), *La Rabbia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2016.

⁷ Following Duncombe, Italian underground culture and comic production is hereby interpreted as «a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer capitalism». S. DUNCOMBE, *Notes from Underground*, cit., p. 10.

⁸ LUCA RAFFAELLI, *Introduzione*, in *La Rabbia*, cit. All translations from *La Rabbia* are mine.

⁹ CHIARA MILAN, *Rebelling Against Time: Recreational Activism as Political Practice Among the Italian Precarious Youth*, in «American Behavioral Scientist», 63 (2019), pp. 1519-1538.

¹⁰ LORENZO ZAMPONI, *The Precarious Generation and the Natives of the Ruins: The Multiple Dimensions of Generation Identity in Italian Labor Struggles in Times of Crisis*, in «American Behavioral Scientist», 63 (2019), pp. 1427-1446.

¹¹ L. RAFFAELLI, *Introduzione*, cit.

2 BIRTH AND LEGACY OF ITALIAN *AUTOPRODUZIONE*

In the introduction to *La Rabbia*, Luca Raffaelli states that all that remains of the countercultural movements of the Seventies from an artistic point of view is

one red thread: comics. [...] Self-produced comics, comics as an intense expression of a personal and collective malaise, comics as a search for identity. The connection is evident: certain spasms, provocations, discomforts, certain visions, measures, and digressions were planted at the time and we can now find them all here, in the disruptive and independent festival Crack!¹²

The Seventies in Italy were defined by laborers' growing precarity and the subsequent rising of political awareness among the working class, who, together with youth culture, students and feminist movements formed alternative networks of dissent towards the socio-political status-quo. In 1977 a widespread wave of protests reacted to the crucial societal mutations that were occurring in Italy at the time, among which the radical shift towards flexible modes of employment and the rising exploitation of precarious labor.¹³

In those years Italian counterculture found fertile ground in the experimental creation and circulation of art, literature, and music, wherein comics, inspired by the American underground comix movement, constituted a privileged medium for politically subversive ideas to proliferate. Comics were therefore employed as a direct expression of the political turmoil occurring in Italy at the time and started to openly criticize Italian political parties such as the Italian Communist Party.

Starting with the magazine «Linus» (1965), where some of the members of what will later become the collective of cartoonists constituting «Cannibale» moved their first steps,¹⁴ Italy saw an increase of countercultural and self-produced comics and fanzines such as the 'zine «Re Nudo» (1970) and the aforementioned «Cannibale» (1977).¹⁵ As also underscored by scholar Fabio di Pietro, «Cannibale» was in line with most of the countercultural and artistic production of the Seventies, which ideologically refused ties to mainstream forms of communication and operated outside of consumerist logics, favoring unconstrained freedom of expression and artistic self-determination.¹⁶

¹² Ivi, p. VI.

¹³ SIMONE CASTALDI, *Drawn and Dangerous: Italian Comics of the 1970s and 1980s*, Jackson, The University Press of Mississippi 2010.

¹⁴ Amongst these talents we find Andrea Paziienza, considered the most avant-gardist and eclectic cartoonist of the Italian Movement of 1977, Stefano Tamburini, Filippo Scozzari, Massimo Mattioli and Tanino Liberatore.

¹⁵ S. CASTALDI, *Drawn and Dangerous*, cit., p. 55.

¹⁶ FABIO DI PIETRO, *Fumetti cannibali: immaginario e media in una generazione degli autori italiani del fumetto*, Napoli, Liguori 2009.

Comics and independent ‘zines hence became the cheap and accessible medium *par excellence* that could convey radical political ideals; a crucial aspect of countercultural comics consists of the agency of the author-artist in autonomously producing subversive material able to challenge hegemonic power structures and discourses. As Fredrik Byrn Køhlert asserts, underground comic artists contributed to create

an entirely new context for comics – one that amounted to an artistic revolution in both form and content that revealed the comic book as capable of expressing everything from deeply personal issues to revolutionary politics.¹⁷

The generation of Italian cartoonists of the Seventies shed light on unexplored features of the comics medium, using its marginal status as pivot to provide a sense of rupture with normative society. Appropriating the «personal is political» statement, these authors cast light on the political affordances of the medium of comics. Indeed, one of the most important political functions of alternative and independent comics production is to provide cohesion for a group of people who perceive themselves as alienated from, or even endangered by, a dominant culture. These cartoonists focused on collective concerns such as counting as an individual, the means to build a supportive community and a meaningful life, without possibly undermining the importance of producing something uniquely yours.¹⁸

The renewed interest in comics’ *autoproduzione* in the Nineties came at a time characterized by the consolidation of neoliberalism and the subsequent surge of unemployment and of hyper-exploitation of workers; starting from the Eighties, privatization, aggressive competition and the flexibilization of labor not only contributed to drastically change labor practices, but also facilitated the dismantlement of social and affective bonds among individuals. According to autonomous thinker and philosopher Franco Berardi, the beginning of the Eighties represented an «astonishing overturning of the political front» that saw the «sweeping victory of the capitalist offensive after years of social autonomy», ultimately leading to increasing «[p]rivatization, competition, individualism» – issues that persist today and absorb the lives of younger generations, among which we find the authors and protagonists of *La Rabbia*.

Comics’ legacy in being a privileged form of expression to contest the dominant status-quo is still visible in the Italian countercultural *milieu*. In *Il potere sovversivo della carta* (2014) comic author Sara Pavan investigates the renaissance of the Italian independent comic scene that characterized the first decade of the twenty first century;¹⁹ according to Pavan, at a time where cultural production has been subdued by Capital, the scene of independent comics production comes into play to fill the void left by a market entirely devoted to sheer profit-driven logics.²⁰ As also reiterated by Davide

¹⁷ FREDERIK BYRN KØHLERT, *Comics, Form, and Anarchy*, in «SubStance», 46 (2017), pp. 11-32.

¹⁸ S. DUNCOMBE, *Notes from Underground*, cit., p. 19.

¹⁹ SARA PAVAN, *Il potere sovversivo della carta*, Milano, Agenzia X 2014.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 9.

Toffolo in the preface to Pavan's book «*Autoproduzione* is an insurgent action. It has something to do with self-determination. It represents an autonomous decision on the form and content of the commodity».²¹

One of the first organizations that from 1996 to 2002 promoted underground culture in Italy is the Happening Internazionale Underground, a non-profit festival devoted to alternative art, graphics, comics, and independent publishing. The first decade of the new millennium indeed represents a turning-point for independent publishing and underground festivals, starting with the inauguration of the Paduan Sherwood Comix Festival in 2004. The surge of interest in independent publishing in the early Two-Thousands led the most renowned Italian comic festivals, Lucca Comics&Games and COMICON in Naples, to introduce areas entirely dedicated to alternative and underground publishing and to independent collectives of comic artists.²² Furthermore, the emergence of new comics festivals such as Borda! Fest, UÈ, BilBolBul and Treviso Comic Book Festival, all with their own areas dedicated to alternative and independent publishing, has further cast light on the relevance of *autoproduzione* in the scenery of Italian comics production.

Centri sociali (social centers), autonomous or occupied spaces operating from peripheral areas and offering heterogeneous forms of political community, play a crucial role in disseminating counterculture through the *autoproduzione* of comics and 'zines. It is thus unsurprising that social centers are among the *milieus* that most welcome alternative forms of artistic and cultural production, also in the field of comics. In fact, the leading event of underground and DIY comics production is Crack! Fumetti dirompendi, founded in 2005 and which today has become the biggest window of underground and self-publishing in Italy.²³ Located in the Roman social center Forte Prenestino, Crack! perpetuates the creative and political legacy of the subversive comic production of the Seventies. The central aim of the festival is to free the art of comics from all its possible creative constraints, and to foster a shared space where authors, collectives and small publishers come together and form a communal physical and mental place for unbound creative energy.

These autonomous spaces create forums for open public discussion and engage in active forms of support for disadvantaged categories, their aim not being «to seize power, but to help break up existing power structures».²⁴ Social centers perform alternative socio-political models of

²¹ Ivi, p. 13. My translation.

²² In the Nineties Rome hosted most of the collectives of independent comics authors, such as Kerosene (1998) and Lampi Grevi (1999), the latter founded by renowned cartoonist LRNZ. Other relevant collectives and independent 'zines are Canicola (2004), now an established cultural association in Bologna, and the more recent Ernestvirgola (2007) and Teiera (2010). For a detailed account of Italian *autoproduzione* in the last two decades see MICHELE GINEVRA, *20 anni di fumetti autoprodotti, in 1998-2018 Vent'anni di Fumetto in Italia*, a cura di ALINO, RAFFAELE DE FAZIO, e EMANUELE SOFFITTO, Napoli, Comicon edizioni 2018.

²³ S. PAVAN, *Il potere sovversivo della carta*, cit., p. 98.

²⁴ PIERPAOLO MUDU, *Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism: The Development of Italian Social Centers*, in «Antipode», 36 (2004), pp. 917-941, p. 937.

organization, mostly informed by mutualistic and horizontal principles,²⁵ thus clashing directly with the competitive and individualistic principles of neoliberal governmentality. In line with the No-Global and Euro Mayday protests of the early Two-Thousands, these alternative spaces were also among the first to foster debates and alternative understandings of «the partly subversive knowledge of the precarious, in the communicative search for a common ground with a view to facilitating a political constituting».²⁶

In front of the increasing precarization of life and the individualizing practices promoted by neoliberal ideology, the politics of engagement of social centers aims to promote an alternative reality based on a cooperative rather than a competitive model, hence developing creative forms of communal living. Initiatives of underground culture and autonomous publishing such as Crack! contribute to reinvent creative forms of dissent where community is produced through actions and grassroots forms of organization promoting inclusivity and offering a safe space for the many marginalized subjects overlooked by neoliberal policies.²⁷

3 *LA RABBIA: A VISUAL CHORUS OF DISSONANT VOICES*

Autoproduzione as act of resistance against profit-driven logics has benefited from the existence of countercultural spaces fostering the circulation of alternative comics and underground culture. Nevertheless, one of the risks for autonomous publishing is to remain confined within its own niche, reason why some critical voices have started questioning the potential of *autoproduzione* as long as it constrains itself within enclosed and self-referential boundaries. For instance, cartoonists Roberto La Forgia and Francesco Cattani address the issue that *autoproduzione* risks to compromise the ultimate goal of comics: that of being read by a wide audience.²⁸ If on the one hand the self-referentiality of autonomous publishing can offer unconstrained artistic freedom and enhance self-determination, on the other hand it can lose the essential aim of speaking to wider audiences and of raising awareness about the problematics deriving from a society merely devoted to profit and competition.

It is for this reason that *La Rabbia* can be considered a novel and welcome experiment: the anthology is the outcome of the collaboration between renowned publishing house Einaudi and *autoproduzione*. The open collaboration between Einaudi and autonomous comic production allows for this otherwise marginal cultural scene to come to the forefront and address mainstream audiences. Valerio Bindi, co-founder of Crack! and curator of *La Rabbia* together with Raffaelli, states in an interview that

This is indeed a very peculiar collaboration, yet unsurprising: the authors who have crossed, participated in, founded, and lived Crack! at Forte Prenestino have become a reference for comics publishing in

²⁵ C. MILAN, *Rebelling Against Time*, cit., p. 1522

²⁶ ISABELL LOREY, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. London, Verso 2015, p. 8

²⁷ P. MUDU, *Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism*, cit., p. 922.

²⁸ S. PAVAN, *Il potere sovversivo della carta*, cit. p. 82.

[Italy]. The newest and most interesting thing for us was to think in terms of a comic book produced in a prestigious series of narrative fiction.²⁹

La Rabbia therefore becomes a means to circulate *autoproduzione's* alternative ethos outside of its countercultural *milieu*, eventually voicing one of the generations that most has suffered the consequences of the increasing aggressiveness and competitiveness of neoliberal society: the so-called *generazione precaria* («precarious generation»)³⁰. The graphic anthology focuses on the general discontent affecting younger generations, whose frustrated disappointment with society is heterogeneously addressed through the interpretation of the feeling of anger. Co-author Bambi Kramer describes this feeling as a toxic rage that poisons those who harbor it, which transforms revolutionaries into outcasts and disengaged *long-term adolescents*.³¹

Kramer's words are symptomatic of the social disillusionment and political disenchantment of her generation, and cast light on the difficult seek for independence given the fragmentary transition to adulthood favored by precarious employment.³² Through a dreamy narrative populated by monstrous figures, Kramer traces the genealogy of the repressed feeling of anger back to the dramatic events that occurred in 2001 during Genoa's G8, where police brutality and institutional power repressed the collective, furious energies of her generation, which anger is now compressed and without redemption, any attempt of rebellion reduced to «refusal, risk and exhaustion».³³

Moreover, the harshening of the economic recession which followed the 2008 global economic crisis particularly affected young people, fostering a process of presentification that shifted the perception of agency and vulnerability among youth.³⁴ Throughout the years, the precarious generation became an emblem of Italy's dysfunctionality, where «uncertainty and insecurity [had] reduced structural opportunities and motivations to collective action».³⁵ This coincided with a process of individualization perpetuated by modern capitalism, which undermined the ties with traditional networks such as family, neighborhood, friendship and trade unions. Young individu-

²⁹ NICCOLÒ DE MOJANA, *8 domande agli autori de La Rabbia*, «Fumettologica», 8 novembre 2016, url <https://www.fumettologica.it/2016/11/rabbia-einaudi-intervista-zeroalcare/> (accessed on 14 January 2021). My translation.

³⁰ L. ZAMPONI, *The Precarious Generation and the Natives of the Ruins*, cit.

³¹ BAMBI KRAMER, \ 'krəʃh\, in *La Rabbia*, cit., p. 42.

³² CARMEN LECCARDI, *Young People and the New Semantics of the Future*, in «SocietàMutamentoPolitica», 5 (2014), pp. 41-54.

³³ B. KRAMER, \ 'krəʃh\, cit., p. 42.

³⁴ PAOLA REBUGHINI, *A Vulnerable generation? Youth agency facing work precariousness*, in «Papeles del CEIC», 1 (2019), pp. 1-17.

³⁵ LUCA ALTERI, CARMEN LECCARDI, AND LUCA RAFFINI, *Youth and the reinvention of politics: New forms of participation in the age of individualization and presentification*, in «Partecipazione e Conflitto», 9 (2017), pp. 717-747, p. 726.

als have thus seen themselves slowly deprived of strong relational ties, their quality of existence being deteriorated not only on the economic level, but also on the affective and psychological one.³⁶

This socio-political scenario is where the anger emerging from the graphic fragments of *La Rabbia* bears its roots. *La Rabbia* draws together eleven «heterogenous new adults»,³⁷ all tied to both *autoproduzione* and Crack! festival: Bambi Kramer, Vincenzo Filosa and Giusy Noce, Hurricane, Laura Nomisake and Annalisa Trapani, Federico Primosig and Tso, Ratigher, Sonno, and Zerocalcare, the latter being the shining star of the current comic scene in Italy. Through eight unpublished graphic narratives, the authors of *La Rabbia*, each with their own distinctive visual and narrative style, express the collective sentiment of political disenchantment and anger. As Raffaelli explains in the introduction, *La Rabbia* contains unconventional comics where the traditional rules of comic art (such as the division into panels, or the balance between text and drawing) are not always present.³⁸

Visually speaking, among the least conventional comics within the anthology we find the dreamlike and allegorical narrative of Kramer's aforementioned «*krash*», where the page division into panels is utterly absent, balloons are inexistent, and images largely prevail over text. The other atypical comic from the anthology, where the traditional comic layout is alternated with multiple double-page spreads that alter the temporal reading span, is Nomisake and Trapani's *Almeno un'ora in più*, focus of the next section. Following Crack!'s philosophy, the anthology thereby employs comics in all their kaleidoscopic formal freedom: Giusy Noce and Alberto Filosa in *Torrespaccata* choose a Nipponese aesthetic and a more classic panel layout, Bambi Kramer's «*krash*» can be read as a visual stream of consciousness inhabited by Bosch-like creatures, while *Ballate in ritardo* by Sonno braids together unrelated splash panels and pages creating an entirely illogical narrative, where the only constant are the diverse shades of anger present therein.

The stylistic and narrative differences of the eight comics constituting *La Rabbia* cast light on the multiple ways in which comic art unfolds, where the different aesthetic features and the formal multimodality of the medium «present[] the reader with a surfeit of interpretative options, creating an experience that is always decentered, unstable, and unfixable».³⁹ The authors' stylistic heterogeneity is exposed to the reader already from the front cover of the anthology. In a page made of eight fragments, the cover of *La Rabbia* puts the reader in front of the different aesthetic styles characterizing the authors' narratives (Fig. 1). Interestingly, the cover also draws attention to the fragmentary nature of the medium, hence recalling the idea that each author, despite using their unique visual and narrative styles, belongs to a collective piece of art created through the juxtaposition of coexisting differences.

³⁶ ULRICH BECK, *Risk society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage 1992.

³⁷ B. KRAMER, «*krash*», cit., p. 42.

³⁸ L. RAFFAELLI, *Introduzione*, cit., p. vi.

³⁹ C. HATFIELD, *Alternative Comics*, cit., p. xiv.

Being comics a fragmentary system constituted by multiple formal and aesthetic features, Scott McCloud has pointed out that one of the pivotal characteristics of the medium necessarily lies in the reader's ability of connecting this multiplicity of visual and textual fragments,⁴⁰ which are not always displayed in a coherent structure within the page but, rather, can be (dis)organized and distributed into a «networked mode that allows each panel to hold privileged relations with any other at any distance».⁴¹ Thus, by pulling together different stories and narrative styles, a multi-authored

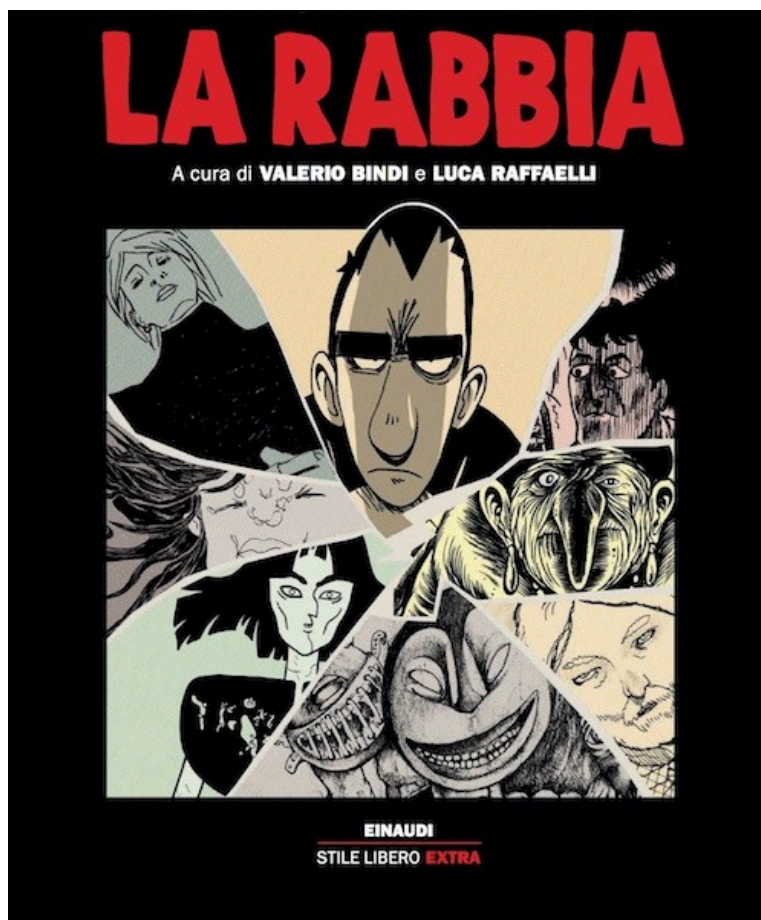


Fig. 1 – (CC) *La Rabbia*, cover.

comic as *La Rabbia* inevitably hinges on the reader's ability to connect and make sense of its multiple forms and fragments, hence underscoring the potential of comics to unsettle homogenous and linear progress in favor of an alternative reading experience characterized by multiplicity and hetero-

⁴⁰ SCOTT MCCLOUD, *Understanding Comics*, New York, HarperPerennial 1994

⁴¹ THIERRY GROENSTEEN, *The System of Comics*, Jackson, University of Mississippi Press 2007.

geneity on the one hand, while reinstating individual artistic freedom on the other.⁴² As also reiterated by Hatfield, the strength of comics lies in their very heterogenous and fragmentary nature, which multiple tensions open to «various interpretative options and potentialities»⁴³ and can thus possibly become a productive space for new, dissonant voices to emerge.

4 ASPHYXIATING PRECARIETY IN *ALMENO UN'ORA IN PIÙ*

Let us now turn to the two comics chosen as epitomes of the narratological and stylistic differences utilized to tackle the feeling anger stemming from the condition of precarious employment. Rage, although being addressed by the eight authors not solely through the lens of socio-economic precarity, is the emotion that draws together younger generations, whose identity is based on shared social and economic conditions. For instance, following Zamponi the Global Economic Crisis of 2008 further contributed to threaten the lifestyle and the professional and personal expectations of individuals coming from different social backgrounds, eventually paving the way for a shared generational experience.⁴⁴

The cartoonists of *La Rabbia* find themselves united by the feeling of anger towards the society shaping their precarious and increasingly individualized lives. The themes of precarity, individualism and the overall lack of structural socio-economic opportunities indeed underlines most of the stories of the anthology. For example, Noce and Filosa's comic *Torrespaccata* portrays the angry solitudes constituting the hectic environment of Rome, populated by spectral, nameless characters who seem to be connected only through their smartphones, whereas Primosisig and Tso elaborate in their comic *Oggetti smarriti* how the act of erratic wandering, embodied by an Italian expat who left for Sweden in search of better employment opportunities, becomes today a possible existential key to the impermanence and uncertainty of lived experience. Although the feelings of precariousness and social isolation are tangible within both comics, the narration never directly associates the emotion of frustrated anger deriving from individualization and precarity. It is up to the reader to seek and interpret anger in the interstices of the isolating, asphyxiating practices of everyday life.

Socio-economic precarity and individualization appear as the direct source of youth's anger in the collaborative comic *Almeno un'ora in più* by Annalisa Trapani (dialogues) and Laura Nomisake (visuals). The protagonist of *Almeno un'ora in più*, a precarious young worker called Silvia, is forced to cancel her scheduled scuba diving holiday after getting a last-minute call from her employer asking to work extra hours. Silvia, whose contract expires at the end of the month, finds herself cornered and is forced to overwork rather than taking time off. The comic starts by posing the reader in front of the reasons for Silvia's choice, almost as to justify her submissive attitude. The opening page consists of five quasi-identical sequential strips showing Silvia's fixed expression which seem to reflect the protagonist's monotonous routine dominated by a job she dislikes. The visuals are alter-

⁴² F. BYRN KÖHLERT, *Comics, Form and Anarchy*, cit., p.26.

⁴³ C. HATFIELD, *Alternative Comics*, cit., p. 36.

⁴⁴ L. ZAMPONI, *The Precarious Generation and the Natives of the Ruins*, cit., p. 1433.

nated by Silvia's words, each sentence expressing the fluctuating sentiments of anger and frustration toward her employers (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 – (CC) Annalisa Trapani/Laura Nomisake, *La Rabbia*.

In the following page Nomisake expands the scene into a double spread, thus inviting the reader to pause and plunge together with Silvia in her dissatisfaction: on the right, we find the protagonist immersed underwater, a choice that metaphorically transforms the long-awaited scuba diving into a sense of overwhelming suffocation (Fig. 3). From pleasant element, water becomes the epitome of Silvia's asphyxiating condition. On the left page, the happy memories constituting the planning of her holiday, such as buying a new swimming suit or discussing the upcoming trip with her friends, become fragmented panels juxtaposed to a close-up of Silvia's drowning, which occupies the entire right page and immediately catches the reader's eye.



Fig. 3 – (CC) Annalisa Trapani/Laura Nomisake, *La Rabbia*.

The comic follows an unconventional narrative structure, where Trapani's dialogues often intermingle with Nomisake's drawings, neither being regularly constrained by balloons or frames. The comic strips are not always linearly distributed within the narration, where we see multiple panels alternated with either splash panels or double spreads. The stylistic choice of seldomly employing the traditional comic page layout requires the reader's further effort of braiding together the fragments on the page, thus inciting a decoding that allows for translinear and plurivectoral readings.⁴⁵ In the comic the panels within pages thereby become «a connected space, not reliant on a chain-like sequence linearly proceeding from point to point... [creating] associations that stretch web-like across the page braiding fragments into a cohesive whole».⁴⁶ The visual and textual fragments are often juxtaposed without a clear-cut sequential order and are presented in scattered multiple panels, inviting a tabular (or synchronic) decoding that, as Kai Mikkonen puts it, «encourages a nonlinear, or not only sequential, reading of the panels and where, thus, the whole of the spatial arrangement merits a more global look and appreciation».⁴⁷ It can be argued that this formal choice reflects the collaborative nature of the medium, where the reader's agency is crucial in making sense and logically putting together both the multimodal fragments within the single comic, and ultimately braiding the different stories of *La Rabbia* into a cohesive whole.

In *Almeno un'ora in più*, the reader is invited to share the fragmentary and chaotic unfolding of the protagonist's feelings of frustration and anger through the unconventional entanglement of words and images. For exam-

⁴⁵ T. GROENSTEEN, *The System of comics*, cit., p. 130.

⁴⁶ NICK SOUSANIS, *Unflattening*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2016.

⁴⁷ KAI MIKKONEN, *The Narratology of Comic Art*, Oxon, Routledge 2017, p. 36

ple, a double spread showing a series of anonymous houses and buildings, alternated by scattered frames containing the reflections of the narrative voice, temporally slows down the narrative and invites the reader to share the sense of impasse and isolation of the protagonist (Fig. 4). Work has become the main activity of Silvia's life, and her precarious situation forces her to comply to her employer's demands. Not even her home is perceived as a comfortable, personal space, but becomes an ensemble of «fake walls that reassure us only when we are silent. Without ever talking. So not to contaminate each other. Isolating ourselves in cyclic routines and suffocated by virtual availability. Searching for time in the interstices of sleep».⁴⁸

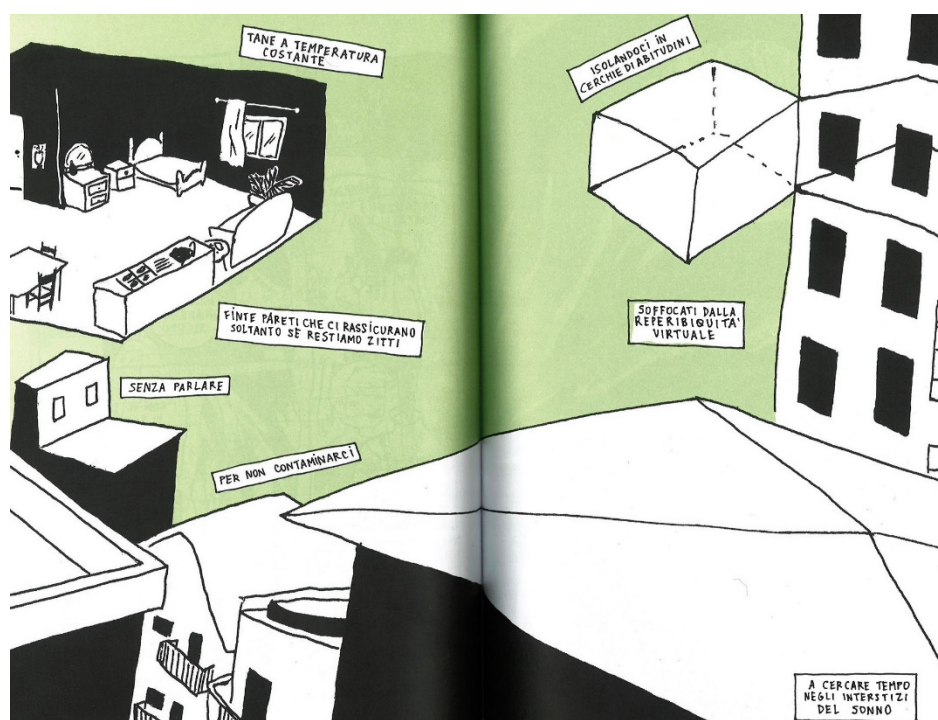


Fig. 4 - (CC) Annalisa Trapani/Laura Nomisake, *La Rabbia*.

Following these panels, the reader dives into an abstract sequence of black and white double spreads, where the narrating voice reflects on the self-destructive nature of conducting such enslaved lives, and on the impossibility of melting together with the «digital universe we ourselves have built», that instead of drawing us closer «traps us in the law of the strongest, where no other human being can become a friend».⁴⁹ Trapani and Nomisake hence address the increasing sense of detachment and affective fragmentation that younger generations are experiencing due to their precarious lives.

⁴⁸ A. TRAPANI e L. NOMISAKE, *Almeno un'ora in più*, cit., p.107.

⁴⁹ Ivi, pp. 110–111.

life and leisure time, implying «an abandonment of vital social functions»,⁵⁰ and existential precarization is slowly transforming others into distant figures, described by the narrating voice as fearful «anxiety-chewing shells».⁵¹

The comic ultimately draws attention to the drastic psychological effects of social alienation, aggressive competition, and precariousness. Once again following Berardi

Depression, panic, unhappiness, anxiety, fear, terror – these are the affective conditions of contemporary labor, the “psychobombs” of cognitive capitalism. [...] Nonetheless, we actively submit ourselves to this regime; this is the perversity of contemporary culture. Of course, the vast majority has no choice – these are the structural conditions of work.⁵²

Braiding together words conveyed in the form of a stream of consciousness with visual elements, *Almeno un'ora in più* offers a chaotic visual account of the frustrations and struggles for social interaction in a world dominated by the waning of affect, precarity and widespread existential uncertainty. Trapani and Nomisake convey the suffocating unhappiness and overwhelming uncertainty characterizing the lives of the precarious generation, individuals who are therefore reduced to empty shells devoured by anxiety. The authors rely on the collaborative nature of comics, where the reader's agency is triggered in order to logically connect the chaotic visual and textual fragments of the story.

5 L'ATTESA: THE IMPASSE OF VIOLENT ANGER

Confirming *La Rabbia's* purpose of drawing together a range of unique and diversified accounts of generational identity, it is with a very different narrative and graphic style that Hurricane, pseudonym of Ivan Manuppelli, closes the anthology. *L'Attesa*⁵³ narrates the theme of youth unemployment and precarity through a dystopian and gruesome account. Following a more traditional layout, the narrative is conveyed through sequential panels logically distributed throughout the page. The story projects the reader in an undefined future where young precarious workers are being enslaved by the dominant class of the *rassicuranti*, composed by decrepit elderly people. *Rassicuranti* have become quasi-immortal beings thanks to the invention of the *Succhiavita* Beghelli, a disturbing device able to nourish the elderly by depriving young individuals of their own youth. Moreover, the *rassicuranti* have forced younger generations to either join the ranks of «the precariat», thus entering «[...] a status that offers no sense of career, no sense of secure

⁵⁰ FRANCO BERARDI, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e) 2009, p. 213.

⁵¹ A. TRAPANI e L. NOMISAKE, *Almeno un'ora in più*, cit., p.104.

⁵² FRANCO BERARDI, *After the future*, Chico, AK press 2011, p. 5.

⁵³ HURRICANE, *L'Attesa*, in *La Rabbia*, Torino, Einaudi 2016.

occupational identity»,⁵⁴ or to go into an undefined period of hibernation until suitable working positions are available.

The protagonist of the story belongs to the multitude of temporary workers and is waiting to be assigned to a hibernation cell, in the hope of being de-frosted once working opportunities are more favorable. While distributing flyers promoting the total sale at a shopping mall, the protagonist, who in light of his employment will be later given the codename Svendita Totale, finds himself cornered by a couple of *rassicuranti* attracted by the zeal he is putting into his job, who eventually decide to feed on the unfortunate youth (Fig. 5). As the figure shows, the graphic trait employed by Hurricane is purposely grotesque and aims to repel viewers from what they are seeing. The two elderly people become more disgusting as they attempt to suck out life from the protagonist, with close-ups of their wrinkly skin, distorted faces and toothless mouths. Furthermore, the use of the traditional formal features of comics is reiterated when the onomatopoeic sounds «cronch», «swiss» and «stump»⁵⁵ are visualized.



Fig. 5 - (CC) Hurricane, *La Rabbia*.

⁵⁴ GUY STANDING, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London, Bloomsbury 2011, p. 24.

⁵⁵ HURRICANE, *L'Attesa*, cit., p.278.

Interestingly, the fact that the protagonist is a *temporaneo* is what makes the young man so «tasty» for the elderly couple, to the point of attempting to cannibalize him without the *Succhiavita* Beghelli. It thus appears that the radical uncertainty of the protagonist's life is what mostly appeals the elderly: in fact, it is thanks to this constant «state of insecurity»⁵⁶ that the *rassicuranti* are able to keep youth in such a vulnerable condition, making them ready to be consumed in order to endlessly extend the elderly's lifespan. The man is eventually saved by the irruption of a young woman, who kills the old couple and leads the protagonist to safety. The mysterious woman is Guacamole, a member of the underground resistance that is planning to overthrow the supremacy of the *rassicuranti*, not without first convincing her mother that she is attending the umpteenth unpaid internship in London.

Together with other young escapees, Guacamole plans to attack the Reforms Palace, where the government of *rassicuranti* is gathered to sanction new measures to deal with the economic crisis. Underneath the Palace, an unending queue of obsequious *temporanei* is waiting for a chance to prove themselves worthy of employment by reciting their CV as clowns in front of a feasting banquet of geriatrics (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 – (CC) Hurricane, *La Rabbia*.

The gruesome scene is displayed as one of the few double spreads of the comic, a stylistic choice which functions as a narratological pause and invites a synchronic reading of the whole composition. Readers are transformed into visual witnesses of the horrid scene and are thereby invited to reflect and absorb the appalling scenery: a multitude of wrinkly old people

⁵⁶ The expression draws from the homonymous title I. LOREY, *State of Insecurity*, cit.

fasting on dead babies, sniffing decapitated youths' heads and venting their bodily needs on the masses below. The position of power of the decaying elderly is graphically reiterated through their posh robes, all men being in suits and women wearing furs and valuable jewels. In these pages Hurricane displays the corrupted and toxic power of capital, exemplified by the waiter offering panda tartare, hinting to the ecologic crisis induced by putting profit in front of environmental awareness, or by the figure of the Monopoly man, emblem of capitalism, who is gorging on banknotes together with two men resembling a vulture and a shark. The economic crisis affecting the lives of the precarious generation hereby becomes a sheer source for casual conversation, in ironic contrast with the men's act of binge-eating money.

The only possible end to the gruesome scene lies with the Resistance, whose goal is to overthrow and destroy the dominant geriatric class that has dismantled all their hopes and expectations. Nonetheless, *L'Attesa* seems to criticize youth: instead of collectively rebelling against the status-quo, most of the members of the precarious generation appear as being subjected to, and to a certain extent compliant with, power. Youth voluntarily queues to beg for employment and to be publicly humiliated, instead of coming together and fight to find a valuable alternative to capitalism's toxicity. Hurricane underlines how the de-structuring and individualizing effects of neoliberalism, together with the increase of personal risk in decision-making and the rise of competitiveness, have overall undermined collective agency, especially on the political level.⁵⁷

Thus, in an exasperated context of uncertainty and precariousness, where not only has the dominant class undermined the structural opportunities and motivations to collective action but is literally fasting on the bodies of the precarious generation, Hurricane's dystopian comic offers a polarized situation: either political apathy, or collective violence. The desperate attempt of the Resistance to overthrow power thus resolves to a brutal act of terrorism. Disseminating death like in a splatter film, the Resistance manages to get through security and to enter the elevator leading to the highest floor, where the repulsive *rassicuranti* are still feasting on their peers. However, once Guacamole, Svendita Totale and another member of the Resistance, Cineblog, arrive to the last floor the elevator does not open, therefore accomplishing the ultimate slur: the characters are unable to perform the final act, they are forced to *wait*, emblematically stuck in a cramped space representing the impasse they are destined to.

The fierce anger of the three characters, echoing that of an entire generation, does not find a relief valve through violence and is eventually compressed, suffocated within the congested space of the elevator. Cineblog's desperate cry of having been deprived even of the chance of becoming a terrorist sheds light on the ultimate failure of associating change with violence: according to Berardi, since pure violence pertains to the domain of Capital, the true act of rebellion towards the status-quo consists of refusal, which calls forth «a big wave of withdrawal, of massive dissociation, of desertion from the scene of economy, of non-participation in the fake scene

⁵⁷ ANDREA PIRNI e LUCA RAFFINI, *The Re-elaboration of the Collective Sphere. New Paths of Sociality and Groups-formation Among the New Generations*, in «Partecipazione e Conflitto»,⁹ (2016), pp. 799-823.

of politics».⁵⁸ In the comic, the final act of refusal in participating in the toxic system of Capitalism is to commit suicide, which becomes the last available option for the protagonists. The despair of Cineblog is symptomatic of the wider feeling of his generation, that of being doomed to an eternal impasse, where the suicidal act suggests that «humankind has run out of time, and despair has become the prevalent way of thinking about the future».⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the young protagonists are deprived even of the agency of committing suicide as ultimate act of refusal: in fact, when Cineblog pulls the trigger, nothing happens. The gun is broken, and violence itself thus proves entirely pointless. The comic's last page visually conveys the sense of defeat and isolation of the three protagonists. A white page with only a central panel shows the resigned youths, who are now fully aware of their defeat: «What are we left to do now?» asks Cineblog, to which Svendita Totale emblematically answers «what we have always done...we wait» (Fig. 7).⁶⁰



Fig. 7 – (CC) Hurricane, *La Rabbia*.

Anger transmuted into violence as agential aggregator is thus useless and immobilizes the characters in the impasse of the present crisis. Although drawing together the protagonists of the comic, violence is depicted as a destructive force that ultimately leaves the characters in a solitary condition. If no true form of solidarity is implemented, if individuals remain isolated in harboring their sentiments of devastating rage, they fail to offer a radical alternative to the individualizing, aggressive and violently competitive environment they are living in. Their collectivity seems based on the wrong premises: destructive anger rather than sympathetic affect, which might bring them together in an act of collective refusal.

⁵⁸ F. BERARDI, *After te Future*, cit., p. 115.

⁵⁹ F. BERARDI, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the pathologies of the post-alpha generation*, London, Minor Compositions, 2009, p. 82.

⁶⁰ HURRICANE, *L'Attesa*, cit., p. 311.

As also suggested by Isabell Lorey, instead of subduing or merely reproducing the violent dynamics of power, members from the precarious generation should look at the shared condition of their precarized existences as a common ground to break through the isolation and individualization of neoliberal society, with the aim of creating existential and collective alternatives to the dominant status-quo.⁶¹

6 CONCLUSION

La Rabbia is an original and welcome collaboration between independent *autoproduzione* and mainstream publishing industry. Its aim is to draw attention to the widespread sentiments of discomfort and anger that run through and feed the resentment of younger generations. The graphic anthology casts light on the world of autonomous and independent publishing, which questions mere profit-driven logics while promoting unbound creativity, ultimately offering an alternative platform to voice youth's frustrated anger. The overall feeling that emerges from *La Rabbia* is that of the asphyxiation of an entire generation that has seen its dreams and aspirations shattered.

The present analysis shed light on how, on the one hand, *La Rabbia* stresses the importance of the authors' creative autonomy and freedom, while on the other hand aims at creating a collective work intertwining artistic and subjective differences. By working together, sharing the same creative spaces and experiences, refusing copyright while maintaining unbound authorial control and mastery over their work, the authors of *La Rabbia* embody a creative community that blurs the boundaries between individual and collective. The collaborative nature of the work is enhanced by understanding comics as being

the product of one or more organizing artistic consciousnesses, [where] the interpretative surfeit presented by its various formal elements can thereby be seen as radically empowering for the reader, opening up new spaces and opportunities for meaning-making.⁶²

Most importantly, through its hybrid form and heterogeneous narrative styles, *La Rabbia* ultimately employs comics as a «playful and non-hierarchical space»⁶³ that engages readers in actively unravelling meaning by connecting its multiple graphic and textual fragments. As an *ensemble* of coexisting differences, the peculiarity of *La Rabbia* is that of problematizing the notion of the fragmentary itself. The graphic anthology casts light on the tension between comics' fragmentary form, that conceivably disturbs a cohesive unity, and the medium's collective potential, where multiple voices and styles coexist within the same narrative space.

By conveying the uncertain and fragmentary lives of the precarious generation through an unstable and fractured medium, *La Rabbia* welcomes

⁶¹ I. LOREY, *State of Insecurity*, cit., p. 92.

⁶² F. BYRN KØHLERT, *Comics, Form and Anarchy*, cit., p. 16.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 21.

other dissonant voices, with the awareness that comics are able to «braid together different visions»⁶⁴ and can possibly help readers feel part of a community based on the shared condition of our fragmentary, precarious lives.

⁶⁴ VALERIO BINDI, *Outro*, in *La Rabbia*, Torino, Einaudi 2016, p. 310.

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Comics; underground comics; counterculture; work; precarity; youth; individualization; generazione precaria; fragment; autoproduzione



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