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»It[']s a Relief!«

Verbal Aspects of Aline Kominsky's Style

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With her early comic strips often described as blunt and taboo-breaking, Aline Kominsky[2] was a pioneering figure of San Francisco's 1970s *underground comix* scene. Yet broad critical attention for her work set in much later. In recent years, Kominsky's work has been lauded for its mixture of *punk* and *chic*. Building on this late critical success, I aim for a reading of self-reflexivity and language in Kominsky's œuvre as specifically relating to artistic style. The present essay acknowledges the obvious significance of formal features (thickness of lines, shading, etc.) for style in comics and graphic storytelling. Yet its main focus is on verbal aspects of style. This in turn includes the relevant discourses, i.e., the question how readers react to, and how Kominsky has her own characters and autobiographical avatars talk about, artistic style. Inevitably, this will touch upon how Kominsky's œuvre often breaks with taboos, in both content and form.

To start with, let us dwell on this *obvious significance* once more. A prominent way for Kominsky to reflect on artistic style is through drawing. Kominsky has frequently published collaborative comics with other artists. This has included Diane Noomin as well as Robert Crumb, her husband since 1978. Both in her individual work and in her collaborations, Kominsky has style occupy center-stage aesthetically. »A Couple a' Nasty Raunchy Old Things« (2012c [1997]) is a strip that illustrates this. In this strip, the avatars of Kominsky and Crumb are joined by a relatively realistically outlined Zorro—later revealed as a stand-in for Peter Poplaski—and subsequently by the avatars of Art Spiegelman and Charles Burns (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997]). By the visual styles in which they appear, the three characters (Poplaski, Spiegelman, Burns) bear the traits of the three respective real-life comics artists, which in turn adds to the various meta-comments in the strip. Many other Crumb-Kominsky collaborations equally reflect on choices of style. Kominsky and Crumb often share the panel with their drawings, a phenomenon Tahneer Oksman describes as two styles »bump[ing] up« (Oksman, 54) against each other. In other works, they draw each other in such a way that one artist is more dominant than the

other (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012a, 165, 259–264); or they include the experiment of reversed roles: Kominsky draws Crumb, Crumb draws Kominsky (Kominsky Crumb/ Crumb 2012a, 78).

Highlighting Verbal Aspects

Departing from this obvious significance, how can we diversify our discussion of style in Kominsky's œuvre—and perhaps, of style in comics more broadly? With a view to a recent edited collection, *Style(s) de (la) bande dessinée* (2019), the question becomes applicable and specific. Why would the editors, Benoît Berthou and Jacques Dürrenmatt, talk about »style(s)«, i.e., use the term both in its singular and plural forms? Berthou and Dürrenmatt tackle this rhetorical question head-on in their introduction (7–10). They defend the point of view that whoever thinks theorizing style is a quick-and-easy project is unlikely to do it justice. The challenge the editors were facing was to make sense of style in comics without foregoing all previous approaches to the medium. These approaches had attempted to inscribe comics in the context of literary history, to study the proper traditions of comics genres, to analyze comics structurally and semiotically, to zero in on medial aspects, or to focus on connections between comics and other forms of artistic expression. In all of these contexts, the editors contend, style was by and large viewed with a negative connotation, unless it was ignored in the first place (7).

The reason for negative views may lie in the discourses on style in other forms or artistic expression, according to Berthou and Dürrenmatt (7–8). Here, the editors see style as used in a differential and judgmental fashion. In a classic conception, the ›natural‹ artist is characterized by their capacity of having style fall into place, as it were: given their talent, they know what tools to use and how to use them in a given situation, and that this particular use is the only one that will make for a unique and meaningful work of art. In contrast to would-be artists, who are overusing *manière*, thereby creating a *mannered*, that is, pretentious result, the ›natural‹ artist only uses select forms of *manière* and combines them in idiosyncratic ways (8). Yet Berthou and Dürrenmatt go on to stress that these are ideas of the past. Comics pioneer Rodolphe Töpffer and his followers transferred such ideas into the world of comics, or proto-comics, in a time when the complexity of mass serialization and collaborative production was not yet the theorist's biggest concern. As this complexity developed over time and still progresses, however, it has become increasingly important to allow for a discourse on style and styles, i.e., for singular and plural alike (9–10).

To put this *plurality* into practice, Berthou and Dürrenmatt did not stick to the format of the conventional edited volume. Rather, they invited twenty authors to team up in various permutations and compose the eight articles that make up the volume. The approaches

range from historical to aesthetic to sociological. The collection's first part is concerned with the analysis of styles in collaborative comics as well as with the questions of how an author's style is a child of its time (both in its production and reception), and whether a particular style can be passed down from one generation to the next. The succession of chapters in the volume's second part implicitly gestures towards implied subjectivity (cf. Etter 2017, 98–99). The chapters move from the *immediately personal* as a topic of interviews and self-representations via creators' experiments (e.g., a comic strip incorporating other art forms, or a comic strip as stylistic potpourri) all the way to the *meticulously planned* page architecture as a stylistic device. We may summarize this overview by reminding ourselves of the variety of visual elements artistic style comprises. In my view, artistic style covers such aspects as drawing style, lettering, the combination of text and image on a page, and page layouts (see also Etter 2017, 94; Etter 2020).

And it comprises verbal elements as well. To return to Kominsky, verbal forms of self-reflexivity run like a common thread through her œuvre. For instance, when her idiosyncratic artistic style had garnered negative response in the early *underground* years, the artist created characters that reflected on this response (see also Chute, 29-31; Bagge, n.pag.; Kominsky 2007, 336). Hillary L. Chute dedicates a chapter to Kominsky in her monograph *Graphic Women*, in which she shows how the artist downright »forces readers to consider the issue of subjectivity and self-representation« (53). The autobiographical avatars in Kominsky's œuvre often break the fourth wall and address us as readers; in their statements, they either imply or explicate that the seemingly primitive, scratchy, untutored, and messy drawings are inspired by forms of visual expression from outside the realm of comics (Chute, 47–48).[3] One of the scenes that Chute dwells on poignantly contemplates how linguistic choice, narrative voice, and other aspects of artistic style intertwine. The autobiographical avatar here summarizes her move to a different city as clamping the umbilical cord and claiming agency; she proclaims to insist on creative freedom and on *inscribing* herself *into* her own autobiographical realm: »I set out to *live in* my style« (qtd. in Chute, 36, emphasis mine).

If verbal elements are to be of importance, this asks for a close reading of Kominsky's language. Creative spelling, non-conventional punctuation, the use of a stereotypically non-rhotic Long Island dialect (»on the Intahnet«, Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012a, 180)[4]: all these are characteristics of Kominsky's lambent use of language. Less evident is the subversion of conventions through specific idioms. When self-deprecatingly deploring her bad cooking skills (Kominsky Crumb 1990b), the Kominsky avatar does not refer to the result as lacking in *smell* or *taste*. Rather, the visual aspect of the pan's content—visible to the reader as a dark mishmash—is highlighted when she rhetorically asks why »this« does not »look right« (Kominsky Crumb 1990b, 84). The panel condenses contemplation: where other senses ought to matter, we still judge things and people by their looks.[5]

It also asks for an analysis of the language with which Kominsky's characters immediately reflect on style. Collaborative comics are a suitable place to start out from. The Zorro episode mentioned above (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997]) is replete with allusions and puns, especially in the part where Robert Crumb's avatar is absent—taking a nap, as we learn. For instance, a label pointing towards Kominsky's avatar explicitly highlights that its drawing style is the result of collaboration; at the same time, the label toys with the polyvalence of Spiegelman's first name. It reads »Aline pencilled by Art« (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997], 190) and stands immediately after Aline's wish to have the »two talented cartoonists« (i.e., Spiegelman and Burns) assist her in her drawings. After complaining about the quality of drawings in the scene, the Burns avatar states that he is now returning to his (activity of) »Drawing with Art« (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997], 192). Both statements hint at Spiegelman's involvement and at the previously uttered call for artistic improvement.

There are several other instances of the characters' play on words as the scene unfolds. Consider how Charles Burns' avatar expresses his desire to »rule out the *borders*« (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997], 191): crucially, he does so just one page after the amenities of particular nations—France vis-à-vis the United States—have been highlighted. Another instance is found when the Burns avatar effectively parallels the quality of his drawing with his psychological stability: in an explosive moment of emotional and aesthetic liberation, the avatar rids himself of the others' drawing styles and enters his own »soothing« surfaces of »black ink«—though he then immediately regresses again, now seeing the need to reassure the others: »Oh! I'm fine...*Fine! Really!*« To the very end of the page, the series of subtle puns continues. Seeing how short-lived Burns' moment of liberation was, Kominsky comments on more than just three-dimensionality when she ponders that »he has almost no relief« (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012c [1997], 192).[6]

As is revealed when we revisit these collaborative comic strips, they cannot be reduced to *style as drawing style*. Collaborations and formal experiments are also an invitation to reflect on voice and agency. As Oksman argued, scenes in which each artist draws themself render evident that identifications of style are dependent on »delineations and articulations of boundaries between self and other« (Oksman, 54). At the same time, the self-same set of collaborations highlights the *difficulty* of such delineations, Oksman asserts. Especially by means of elements that are not easily attributable to one person or the other—e.g., background elements, panel borders—the collaborating artists »question the boundaries between self and other, artist and muse, creator and collaborator« (Oksman, 54).[7] Focused on Kominsky, Chute contends that the artist toys with a »non-continuous self-representation [which] unsettles [...] subjectivity« and yields an »unfixed, nonunitary, resolutely shifting female self« (Chute, 31).

Gender, Bodies, and Discursive Contexts

To reflect on Kominsky as a *female* artist—an artist who not only enters the relatively male-dominated 1970s scene but dares to insist on a *resolutely shifting female self* in her œuvre—is to reflect on the discourse of style as forged by historical context. One of the chapters in the Dürrenmatt/Berthou volume addresses this very topic. As part of the volume's section on the question of real-world circumstances that shape style and are shaped by it, the chapter »Faire genre« invites readers to think about connections between style and gender in the world of comics (Bréan et al.).[8] Far from reducible to the intrinsic talent of an author, style is also pertinent *beyond* the creation of a work in a narrow sense of the term, the article's six co-authors highlight. Based on a number of historical examples, especially comics by female creators, they argue that close scrutiny of a style entails retracing the phenomena of *faire style* and *faire genre*. This latter expression obviously insinuates ›doing gender‹, yet together the two expressions are productively multilayered: French *genre* translates to gender and genre alike; *faire* can be understood to mean both making and doing, i.e., both creating and carrying out. With reference to chapters in the history of Francophone graphic storytelling—from 18th-century bourgeois drawing via the systematically underestimated role of female comics authors prior to 1968[9] to the foundation of the *Collectif des créatrices de bande dessinée contre le sexisme* (2005)—the authors ultimately show that our analyses of a given style ought to take into account the factors of its being identified (or not); the possibility of its acknowledgment and, potentially, critical acclaim; and the ways in which it is distributed as a brand throughout the world of comics, and beyond (Bréan et al.).[10]

Indeed, this reflection on *faire style / faire genre* confirms Chute's earlier analysis of Kominsky's work. Regarding the *underground* years, Chute points out that early readers' letters that negatively reacted to Kominsky's style often had to do with gender and the body—and they often came with an overtly sexist or misogynist tone (cf. Chute, 31). In her contribution to the present special issue, Véronique Sina takes up this point. She discusses Kominsky's specifically non-idyllic depiction of bodies and body parts—the nude body during late stages of pregnancy, close-ups on the avatar's vagina during masturbation—as one of a myriad of ways in which the artist questions taboos and breaks with conventions. As Sina demonstrates, such portrayals are part of Kominsky's creative plea for a decolonized body (particularly, decolonized *female* body) and for artistic expression that deconstructs normativity and stereotypes (cf. Sina 2020b). With reference to Kominsky's entire œuvre, Chute describes how the artist insists on »the complexities of sexuality«, for instance, by »mix[ing]« depictions of »degradation and pleasure« (35, 51). To quote Chute again, Kominsky makes use of such a mix to display her artistic agency in the present, without shying away from puzzling and disturbing effects.[11] What unites Kominsky's »portrait[s]«—playful, puzzling, or disturbing—is her insistence on directness in terms of body images; the artist »demonstrates [an] unflinching focus on the messiness« of bodies and on their »deidealized« portrayal (51, 38, 45).

The *deidealized* or *messy* body may be linked to Kominsky's reflection on the act of drawing and telling a story. To summarize two examples discussed by Chute, this happens when the embodiment metaphor is taken to extremes so as to allot a face to the character's inner voice (Chute, 44) and when Kominsky reflects on the »casual viciousness« of violence (41)—by using potentially disturbing contrasts, for instance, between the opulence of ornamental patterns and the depiction of sexual assault (36–37, 40). The list could be continued with a range of panels dedicated to artistic output as a form of bodily agency. In parts of her work, Kominsky reflects on the physical experiments and *gedankenexperiments* of, e.g., drawing with her foot (Kominsky Crumb et al., 52) and drawing figures that have no hands (Kominsky Crumb et al., 68).

The clothing of bodies equally occupies a prominent role in Kominsky's comics. Her characters repeatedly suggest that style in comics is not categorically distinct from style in fashion (see, e.g., Kominsky Crumb 2007, 326–332).[12] In a comic strip from 1994, an autobiographical avatar rejoices at the thought that keeping her clogs has finally paid off, as they are »in style again«, only to realize shortly that they »don't go with« the outfit she is wearing (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012a, 164). This comic strip and the myriad of others in which the avatar appears in swiftly altering wardrobes suggest that style, in both drawing and fashion, may be bound up with the realms of convention and hegemony. Some elements are said to ›fit‹ a certain outfit but not another, they are said to ›fit‹ a certain era but less so a later or earlier one.

Kominsky's avatars reflect on how looks induce judgment. They may participate in the practice. They may also address it by taking a critical distance. An autobiographical strip from 1989, titled »Growing Up as Arnie's Girl« (Kominsky Crumb 1990a), is concerned with judgment as harassment. The avatar's father, presented in this and several other scenes as emotionally abusive (see also Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012a, 125, 178, 196), here comments on the perceived futility of young Aline's *maquillage* activities (Fig. 1). While Aline declaredly »tried to [...] disguise [her] flaws...« in front of the mirror, he peeks through the door, insulting and urging her at the same time: »Hurry up in there gawgeous... *ya can't shine shit!*« (Kominsky Crumb 1990a, 171). On a surface level, the father is using a complacently vulgar expression to disenfranchise young Aline's *looks*—›hard though one may try, it is impossible to beautify feces‹. As if this were not harrowing enough, Kominsky recollects the exact idiom in the comic strip. This recollection leads to a second, a deeper level: the father, and perhaps parts of young Aline's surroundings with him, disenfranchise young Aline's *abilities*: ›hard though *you* try, *you* will not manage to shine *anything*, no matter what it is‹. The feces are now a stand-in for ›no-matter-what-it-is‹, turning the statement into a different direction: applying make-up as a conventionalized (and habitually, gendered) form of painting surfaces and drawing lines. As outlined in the strip, the problem lies in the normative audience, an audience consisting of people who stop by and consider themselves entitled to judge the result.[13]

Fig. 1: Multi-layered recollection of verbal abuse (Kominsky Crumb 1990a, 171).

The ensuing panel—along with strips relating the same episode[14]—explores the avatar’s escapist response to her surroundings. For some time, she goes through experiences linked to college life, alcohol, »drugs«, teenage pregnancy, and the act of »r[unning] away« (Kominsky Crumb 1990a, 171). In the long artistic run, we learn, Kominsky did not accept that her father’s comment would pass without a comment of hers. One of her avatars (Kominsky Crumb/Crumb 2012a, 144) transfers the father’s expression to a different context; she opines that if anything is excrementitious it is the supposedly neat and well-rounded aspects of mainstream comics culture. »God, I hate that superhero shit!« she exclaims and goes on to declare what I read as a condensed chapter of Kominsky’s ongoing artistic manifesto: »[T]he more personal, revealing and sniveling, the more interesting...« (144). By this statement, Kominsky evokes a trope of *underground comix* practice—prominently propagated in the Centerfold Manifesto (Griffith et al.)—and connects it to questions of style (on this topic cf. Kupczyńska 2019).

Such a manifesto chapter draws on political circumstances. It implies a discussion of audiences that may not be aware of how their supposedly formalistic and aesthetic judgments reflect on positionality. At the same time, a manifesto chapter of this kind may also

serve as an invitation for the celebration of uninhibited artistic expression. In interviews, Kominsky has spoken about the »other women like [her]« whose encouraging letters inspire her (Chute, 39). Indeed, this real-life community seems prominently addressed in her autobiography, as she gives extended advice for various forms of creative output.[15]

Playful Relief-and-Response Cycles

In a conversation with Zaro Weil that forms the fifth and final chapter of Kominsky's autobiography *Need More Love* (2007), Kominsky appears to elaborate on her ongoing manifesto. She states that she is »willing to expose [her]self and provoke a reaction in both life and art« (341). Crucially, she sees a »seamless« continuation between various forms of expressiveness; when asked about »decorating [one]self« (for instance, through fashion), »[one's] environment« (for instance, through a house's interior design), and »[one's] art[work]«, she opines that there is no fundamental distinction (352). Prompted to comment on her »personal style« in fashion (328), Kominsky holds:

> I pick and choose from various things and take what I like, without having to justify or rationalize everything that I do. It might be a designer item that looks good on me: I'll mix that with a dress I made from a bedspread, and something else I found in a clothing swap meet, then another thing I bought in a midprice store, and I'll use all those elements to create my particular ›look‹. I know exactly where I'm going with it, the picture is already formed in my mind—I have a very definitive style. (Kominsky 2007, 328)

In essence, it is as though Kominsky here anticipated Chute's descriptive phrase of the *resolutely shifting female self*. This does not just happen on the level of the multifaceted wardrobe that may combine a »designer item« with a make-shift item. Her »very definitive style« also extends to other forms of creative expression, and hence playfully rides on the idea which Oksman would later describe as *questioning the boundaries*. Sometimes there is no reason for a categorical distinction between designer and model, Kominsky's statement suggests.

In this interview, Kominsky reaches out. She combines a description of her own practice with an encouragement towards others—the readers—to pursue their projects and live their creative independence. This includes various intertwined credos. To stop »caring [...] about« and stop »worrying about« what is currently »in style« (328). Rather, to find »[your] personal style« and »do your own thing« (328, 329). To do so by building on recollection of the natural world (328), architectural memories (353), family history (333), body positivity (346–348), wisdom and experience (326–328); by avoiding the allure of cuteness (341) and the restraints of commercialism (338–344) all the while maintaining functionality (352); by remaining fearless of setbacks (353), since, ultimately, we »owe it to other people« to make an effort (346). Readers will manage to develop a sense of »[their] own style« if they »listen«

to her advice (353). In essence, Kominsky has the finale of her autobiography culminate in a community-building manifesto chapter with regard to style and personal expression.

To conclude, we have seen how Aline Kominsky creatively reflects on both negative and positive response to her artistic style. Her œuvre uses verbal commentaries to highlight style as a phenomenon that succumbs to conventions and is co-created and co-evaluated by readers and beholders. The following example encapsulates this point. It is an excerpt from the Kominsky-Crumb collaboration »Aline’n’Bob in Our Lovely Home« (1988) and may be read as alluding to various sorts of reaction, negative and positive, to Kominsky’s work.

Fig. 2: Self-Reflexivity and the Ambiguity of »Relief« ([Kominsky] Crumb/Crumb 2012b, 124).

The pair of panels (Fig. 2) shows the *Aline* avatar wooed by the *Robert* one, with a chiastic structure that puts the twice-appearing Aline in the middle—first like a Madonna dropping her gaze, then like an emphatically physical figure dropping her husband. Aline states in one speech bubble that she is glad her husband »subdue[s] [her] rambunctious personality« and follows up with a condensed statement: »It[’]s a relief!« Crucially, the next panel not only shows the same avatar displaying her physical prowess to contrast said statement. It also includes text elements that serve as comments on the first panel’s drawing styles, written in two different handwritings and signed »A.« and »R.«, respectively. While »A.« complains about the fact that her drawing of the Aline avatar’s face was touched up by »R.«, the latter explains his urge by the fact that the drawing had been »too... *minimal*«. The directionality of the first text element’s borders, and more specifically, its arrow pointing back into the center of the first panel, suggests a parallelism. It invites us to read the adjacent speech bubble again. At least sometimes, cross-hatching around silhouettes brings figures to life and makes them

three-dimensional; at least sometimes, drawing autobiographical comics has the potential to relieve those involved of emotional burdens. Once again we end up at the double-edgedness of *relief*. Self-representation in comics means moving inwards and moving outwards simultaneously, the two panels appear to suggest.

Perhaps this is one of the tacit reasons for which the pair of panels was later chosen for the inner cover of the anthologies *The Complete Dirty Laundry Comics* (2003) and *Drawn Together* (2012): they capture a playful approach to artistic style. Taken together, the *maquillage* and the *relief* examples highlight the import of looks—looks which may kindle comments and thus come with a problematically normalizing bent. As though responding to this bent, the Kominsky avatar in the *relief* example offers a particularly thoughtful take on negative responses and ill will as countered by artistic output and reclaimed agency.

When analyzing stylistic matters in Aline Kominsky's œuvre, it is critical to include the aspect of language. My attempt was to use a poignant last example—the *relief* one—to drive home this main argument. Instead of dwelling on these points any further, I close the essay on two methodological questions that I kept—and keep—critically reminding myself of. The first one follows Leah Misemer's recent call (2019) for comics scholarship that historically contextualizes and acknowledges how production processes (e.g., community-based copy-editing) shape the final product. It is the question what toolsets are helpful to study individual artistic style while doing justice to comics as based on communities and co-creation, i.e., while circumventing a focus on a small number of artists in relative isolation. The second question is an old one that remains pertinent especially for autobiographical comics and their paratexts, such as interviews and prefaces. When we acknowledge an artist's playfully shifting persona, this helps us make sense of seeming contradictions, e.g., when the artist presents clothes shopping as empowering and deflated in one and the same interview. Yet we still face the question what toolsets are helpful in order to include an œuvre's rich paratext, without stepping into authorial intentionalism and without trivializing somebody's personal experience. This critical reminder is also an outlook—an invitation for further elaboration on Kominsky's style, and on verbal aspects of artistic style in graphic storytelling more broadly.

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1] For their helpful feedback on previous versions of this essay, I wish to thank the editors of this Special Issue, the journal's editors, as well as the colleagues present at academic events in Cologne (May 2019) and Schwarzenbach an der Saale (October 2019).

2] Alternative names the artist has used in her work include Aline Kominsky Crumb, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Aline Crumb, Aline Ricky Goldsmith Kominsky-Crumb, and Alien Cazinski-Crump. If I restrict myself to one version in the present article, I do so in the hopes of a smoother read; the same goes for the fact that with respect to primary works, ›all caps‹ text portions will be quoted with a combination of upper-key and lower-key letters.

3] In addition to various visual influences, Kominsky has mentioned a »style [...] of Jewish storytelling« that she saw as pervading the culture of 1950s East Coast stand-up comedy and which, especially via one of her grandfathers, shaped her own use of humorous self-deprecation (2007, 333).

4] On punctuation see also Chute, 35; on this variety of English see Sina 2019, 445; Sina 2020b.

5] As though to highlight synesthetic playfulness once more, the avatar adds that this is a surprise since the recipe she followed *sounded* right (Kominsky Crumb 1990b, 84).

6] As the scene includes repeated references to anti-Semitism, an extended reading of this utterance could link it to the teenagers’ emotional distress as portrayed in Kominsky’s »Nose Job« from 1989, discussed, e.g., by F. K. Clementi (2013), Tahneer Oksman (2016), and Véronique Sina (2020a; 2020b). The same is true for both punny and serious evocations of artistic expression as fulfilling a need (see Bagge, n.pag., and the *relief* example towards the end of the present essay).

7] The methodological conundrum inherent in the present project is proof of this: we can never know for certain at what point strengthening an argument about *Kominsky’s œuvre* with the examples from her *collaborations* becomes a stretch; it often is not evident ›who‹ of the collaborators drew/wrote ›which‹ parts.

8] Comics scholarship interested in aspects of gender and intersectional feminism has repeatedly evoked this connection; cf. Chute; Kupczyńska 2014; Oksman; Sina 2019: and, with a focus on collaborative comics, Misemer.

9] The chapter mentions the recent doctoral thesis of one of its six authors, Jessica Kohn, as the source for empirical data (cf. Kohn).

10] This argument is convincingly driven home with specific examples of female artists in the first part of the chapter (296–311). In the spirit of constructive criticism: one would have wished for these examples prominently to inform the second and third parts as well (311–343), especially where collaborative manifestos are touched upon (e.g., 328–329).

11] For instance, a seemingly casually drawn strip may include the depiction of spousal rape (cf. Chute 39–41).

12] It would deserve further elaboration to see how this interest in fashion connects Kominsky to Trina Robbins, who has been described as something like her personage of contrast in the early days of feminist comics collectives (Chute, 37–38; Kirtley, 274–277; Stuller; Kupczyńska 2020). Interestingly, a few among Kominsky’s excerpts and statements relating to fashion read as though she were perpetuating the very aspects she previously described as clichéd in the works of Robbins and her colleagues. The tension between views on creative communities as empowering on the one hand, and as limiting or stigmatizing on the other, is not a topic of the past, as a comparable example from France reminds us (Bréan et al., 296–311). (And it goes without saying that such elaborations might build on existing literature that illustrates how gender in the realm of comics is yet more complex than the male artist / female artist dichotomy suggests.)

13] The panel is multilayered in its visual-verbal interaction as well. The extra layer of foundation makeup Aline hopes for (»more pancake«) might flatten, streamline, or obscure her »flaws« such as spots and nevi. At the same time, the depiction of the scene is *personal in*

style precisely because it *evades* flattening and streamlining: most of the panel is marked by Kominsky's meticulous patterning that sometimes turns into pointillism, from the two faces (three, counting the reflection in the mirror) to Aline's top and hairbow to the dark wall below the mirror.

14] For a discussion of the scene as part of »Goldie—A Neurotic Woman« (1972), cf. Oksman 105–118; Frahm 12. Kominsky furthermore revisits the scene in her autobiography, recalling her father's hateful comment as »the cruelest thing ever said to [her]« (Kominsky 2007, 74).

15] Admittedly, the aspect of sex/gender does not transfer one-to-one here. Although some statements in this part of the autobiography appear to be gendered, the overall audience is never explicitly described as restricted to women.