The authors of Contracultura Publishing: Self-portrayal and the graphic novel

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In Latin America, unlike Mexico, Chile, Brazil or Argentina, Peruvian comics have never been industrialised, only professionalised.¹ The comic-strip projects that gave us the first Peruvian characters became financially viable in the 1950s, but comics were a form of entertainment that never reached the levels of production needed for full financial autonomy from newspapers and magazines. In the past three decades, as the publishing of comics moved away from newspapers and magazines to books and fanzines, Peruvian comics have been incorporated in a process of novelisation similar to developments in countries more representative of the industrial comic strip, even if the local context means that Peruvian comics are still located within a very political tradition. This shift has come to the interest of literary, graphic and cultural academics and has given rise to projects such as that of Contracultura Publishing, founded in 2005 and the first publishing house to specialise in fanzine and graphic novel authors. This chapter will focus on how Contracultura's widening of authors' access to the publishing market has produced several ‘author privileges’ (Foucault 1991), including being able to display anarchism, success for women in a predominantly male medium, and participation in national and international author circles. The chapter also shows how the creation of small, local presses like Contracultura, which evidently do not provide financial stability, problematise the idea that
author privileges should be considered solely in terms of the economic importance of copyright in comic production.

How do these circumstances in which authors find themselves affect the Peruvian graphic novel in thematic terms? To answer this crucial question, I will first review the concepts of novel and author. Second, I will focus on interviews with four Peruvian comics authors, looking at their relationship with Contracultura and the publication of their work in book form. Their accounts, I suggest, demonstrate that their author privileges, despite low profitability, have granted them a degree of political enterprise that is central in the struggle over human rights in Peru. To conclude, I look at how these four authors portray themselves in graphic form in their work and whether such portrayals account for their privileges.

**Novelisation and the author**

In *Epic and the Novel*, published in 1941, Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1996) turned the study of the novel on its head as he considered it a genre devoid of operations or laws that dictate its inherent nature, unlike the epic, which is a genre tied to an absolute past, a model hero and a national epic language.® The graphic novel might also be described in opposition to the graphic epic of the heroes and superheroes of traditional comic books, which are tied to unreal temporal worlds and commanding nationalisms.

A product of transgressive and ironic laughter, Bakhtin refers to the novel as a runaway genre which incorporates a variety of artistic, everyday and ideological discourses in its prose with an open-ended present and a self-enquiring man; in short, the novel includes a combination of expressions typical of its author.

The possibilities of representation afforded to the author by the novel enumerated by Bakhtin make it possible to prevent the crystallisation of the genre. The author tends ‘towards that which is uncompleted’: the author can play any role he wants to in the work, playing out his life or alluding to a particular moment in it, taking part in the characters’ conversations, arguing with other real authors. But also, as the ‘author of the author’s image’ (Bakhtin 2000, 328), the author is part of that representation, who thinks differently from his characters or who is in dialogue with other works. Bakhtin reminds us that no author reaches that status in the epic. Adding the author to the main elements that determine the novelisation of a genre, it is evident that it becomes freer
and more flexible, its language renewed by incorporating a range of languages. It becomes dialogised, rife with irony and self-parody, and incorporates an ‘indeterminacy, a certain semantic open-endedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the open-ended present)’ (Bakhtin 2000, 323).

For Manuel Barrero, the author introduces characteristics that break with the model of comic books, which have no particular author and which are aimed at children:

The graphic novel is a comic strip in book form which contains a strip by a single author created specifically for this publication, it deals with topics in depth (aimed at an adult readership) and develops an extended narrative, without editorial or previously imposed format constraints, where characters grow in complexity until a closed ending is reached.

(Barrero 2013, 197)

This novelistic condition, derived from the author, is a slow and complex process of cultural transformation which presents tensions and the transgression of boundaries at a deep and structural level. For José Manuel Trabado (2013), there are four tensions produced by graphic novels, regardless of whether they are North American, European or Japanese: recognition of the author’s creative freedom as a result of having a poetics of their own; insight into the character’s slow reflectiveness; narrative as a source of memory, catharsis and liberation; and enough formal and symbolic complexity for self-portrayal. Without heroic and epic comics, the graphic novel ironically rereads the ‘cloak and dagger hero through introspection’ (Trabado 2013, 43), replacing him with an imperfect hero. Eddie Campbell suggests that contemporary comics require real-life stories because they are ‘more peculiar and intriguing’ than the well-known stories about made-up heroes (2013, 37).

At such a deep level, real life splits man’s epic integrity in comics. Bakhtin states that the novel disintegrates it in various ways. The first and fundamental one is between the external and internal man, since in the novel ‘the subjectivity of an individual becomes an object of experimentation and representation’. Another more specific way is splitting man as seen by himself from man seen through the eyes of others. In this way, a newer and more complex integrity for man is created, just as endowing him with ideological or linguistic initiative also divides him.
The nature of his image changes, therefore, as it creates ‘radical restructuring of the image of the individual’ (Bakhtin 1996, 56).

The incorporation of comics into modern expressive writing by means of the book has produced new authors and a new positioning within the hierarchies and cultural values which transcend personal poetics. Understood in this way, writing is not restricted to the act of writing nor to the mere graphic manifestation of what somebody wishes to express; instead, following Foucault, the writing of our day – *écriture* – entails a profound attempt to consider the general condition of a work, the space it occupies and the time in which it is deployed. Projected towards the psychodynamics of writing (Ong 1982), this attempt enables an increasingly articulated introspection which opens the psyche up to a world that is different to itself because it is objective and external to the inner self, as opposed to the world of subjectivity.

Writing as a producer of subjectivity is, then, the conditioning medium for the development of prose and of the silent reader and, as such, it restores the presence of the author. The novel is a product of writing. Foucault explains this transformation into book form as a relationship between writing and death, which the epic does not present due to its oral nature. The aim of the epic is to perpetuate the hero’s immortality, repeatedly remembering his story, while written literature is designed to perpetuate the existence of its author. Writing is no longer linked to the sacrifice of the hero who obtains glory and remembrance in exchange for his death, but to the sacrifice of the real person writing the novel, so that they can be replaced by the produced author. In exchange for his disappearance, the flesh-and-blood author leaves his glory and remembrance to his ‘author’s name’. There was a time, then, when accounts, stories, epic poems and comedies were received and valued without questions over their authorship being posed, in much the same way as superhero comics. But literary and comic strip discourses conceived from writing and the book, from the novel, cannot be accepted without knowing who has written them and in what circumstances. In the case of industrially produced comics, among which epic genres predominated, anonymity was not a problem. The age of legends and epic poems was enough to guarantee its acceptance. As for comic books, characters’ popularity, which created approval, was manipulated by press agencies and publishing houses and by the conventional codes of the works. With the emergence and consolidation of the author within the world of comics, the control of meaning, status and value moved from the syndicate to the individual, just as in literature the author replaced the character. Once established, the presence of the author accounts for the modifications
and even the contradictions that arise between a series of texts, as can be seen in the various lines of Juan Acevedo’s work or in the difference between Jesús Cossio’s fanzines and documentaries (which is not to say that each of his works does not hold within it a certain number of signs which point to his authorship).

The authors, graphic novels and Contracultura Publishers

*Hola Cuy* was the first Peruvian comic-strip compilation published in book form, released in 1981. After that, in a context of social fracture, Peruvian comics were sustained by fanzines and political projects until the emergence of the first of the publishing houses that specialised in graphic novels and compilations for adults in 2005. I have selected four authors published by Contracultura as part of my analysis of their links with the graphic novel: Juan Acevedo (b. 1949), Jesús Cossio (b. 1970), David Galliquio (b. 1969) and Avril Filomeno (b. 1973). All of them have been interviewed because of their prominence in the publishing market (the first three boast the largest number of copies sold while Avril Filomeno, together with the publishers, set up the first all-female space for comics) and because of their historical position in relation to fanzines, which is key to understanding the Peruvian graphic novel and its authors.

Juan Acevedo is Peru’s most important and representative comics writer; Jesús Cossio has developed, if not established, the documentary comic in the Andean region, if not in Latin America at large; one of the most prolific fanzine and graphic novel authors, David Galliquio has published the largest number of books with Contracultura; and Avril Filomeno has promoted and created comics and fanzines in La Paz and Lima and was in charge of Peru’s first anthology of female comics authors. These four authors are well known to comics consumers, who readily associate their work with their names. Through this operation, not only does the consumer of the texts identify the authors but their names also describe them, placing them within a cultural hierarchy, in much the same way as they have been intentionally introduced in this paragraph.

Each author plays a clear role in relation to their works and their discourses: to begin with, they play a classifying role. The way Juan Acevedo remembers the association of the work with its author is an example of this: ‘In the case of *Paco Yunque* by César Vallejo, it’s a short story which I adapt with a personal stamp that people recognise: *that’s*
Juan’s Paco Yunque. How is that character going to come to life, how is it different from the Paco Yunque drawn by Carlos Jiménez or from other Paco Yunques that might have been made? I gave it a personal stamp. In that case I am the filter through which it reaches people, especially children’ (Acevedo 2018). Any of the names of these four authors would allow for a regrouping of a certain number of texts, defined in such a way that some are excluded, some placed in opposition to others. But though there may be several different ways of regrouping them, the typical one is by graphic style. In the case of Avril Filomeno, her name is associated with her own specific way of drawing characters, their eyes, their faces and their bodies. In Cossio’s case, it is his documentary line; in Galliquio’s his neighbourhoods. For the author themselves, their name establishes a relationship of homogeneity and graphic filiation between their comics, just as it does for their readers.

For this study, it is even more relevant that, while an author’s name serves to characterise the artwork, it is their discourses that endow them with the name of the author. Benjamín Corzo, director of Contracultura, has said about Jesús Cossio and Juan Acevedo:

In Juan’s case, in Jesús’s . . . they have a discourse. In other words, a combination of coherent ideas, which they can explain well. That is a fundamental aspect for everything, as in the recent book fairs, those who sell the most are those who, beyond their books, are themselves characters.

(Corzo 2018)⁵

Jesús Cossio himself was clear in his interview about his professional responsibility over his discourse; when asked about his relationship with academic contexts, he said that they had influenced his preparation, reading, analysis and awareness of how to express himself (Cossio 2018). David Galliquio claims that he does not consider himself an author – although he knows that his main character, Lito the Dog, is well known (Galliquio 2018). It is not just about recognising the artwork but about identification with its marginal nature. In the case of Avril Filomeno, she feels acknowledged as a fine art author rather than an author of comics (Filomeno 2018). That is because, despite succeeding in creating a publishing space for comics by female authors, she earns her living as an artist, within painting, pottery and other forms of expression. The case of Juan Acevedo is unique because he had the awareness and intention to become an author of political and existentialist comic strips three
decades before the birth of Contracultura and he managed to achieve recognition for his discourse. For the latter, he refers to the emotional element that his projects aimed at:

I wanted to do humour, but I also wanted people to think, I wanted to move the reader. So that people could laugh, but so that they would be moved by what was being told. . . . [F]or the cartoonist it was enough to monkey around and make a joke, but I wanted to unsettle, to make misery felt.

(Acevedo 2018)

Acevedo’s discourse is, as described by Foucault, the discourse of an author and it is a long way from being indifferent or oppressed expression. These words must be received in the same way as, and in relation to, irony, and as a discourse that is given the status of political and social commitment in Peruvian culture. This is how Juan expresses the characteristic style of his comics which, at the same time, is associated with a certain combination of Latin American liberation discourses within Peruvian society and within a culture linked to art, the press and social critique (Kruijt 1991, 107). His name is not located within the narrative of his work but in the rupture that his uniqueness establishes. He is the oldest author in Corzo’s publishing house. Ironically named and with this ironic profile in mind, Contracultura lay down acceptance criteria for graphic novels by young people interested in garnering enough appreciation as authors to gain access to the media and to the international festivals circuit. Contracultura’s first requirement for publication is that whether written by young people or by established authors, the works should ‘sound’ like rock music, ‘with a strong, anti-establishment personality, one which should move the reader’ (Corzo 2018).

The authors were asked about this direct link that Corzo believes exists between book format and authorship, to find out the extent to which it had had an impact on the creation of their work and, in turn, on their discourses. The question was asked on several occasions during each interview, sometimes being rephrased by replacing the word ‘book format’ with ‘graphic novel’ or enquiring about the fanzine format. Juan Acevedo and Jesús Cossio agree that the book influences the design of their works, although not in a way that detracts from it. When Cossio was asked about the design for Barbarie, about whether he first considered a book about the conflict or whether the seriousness of the conflict should be represented in a book, he replied that he thought
both questions were inseparable. Acevedo took the same view when asked about the story of Túpac Amaru II, Anotherman or Paco Yunque itself. Both authors described format and story as a unit, suggesting a correspondence between discourse and format types. David Galliquio directly stated that the ‘graphic novel comes out as a book’. The dissident response came from Avril Filomeno, who says that she has never stopped doing fanzines, even in the case of her graphic micro novel, Qué ciudad de locos, co-written with Bolivian author Alejandro Archondo (2006). Filomeno’s replies show the extent to which she associates her ironic creation with fanzines.

Going through their published work with each of the authors and reviewing the book format, in most cases they were described as compilations, as in El cuy and Pobre Diablo by Juan Acevedo, which were published in magazines and newspapers for many years and whose strips and pages are grouped together by set characters in a book (Acevedo and Munive 2015); or as an anthology by different women authors such as Venus ataca (Various authors, 2010). In the cases of Cossio, Filomeno and Galliquio, the compilation maintains its links to the fanzine, a product of the photocopier, equivalent to Lima’s underground comix. The transition from fanzine to graphic novel is the transition from the serialised novel to the book or, as Filomeno prefers to call it, the ‘de-luxe fanzine’.

The fanzine poses the issue of length, close to that required by a book to merit a spine and a hard cover even if those elements are irrelevant to this particular format. Length is fundamental to the comic from its inception, as artists were paid by the strip or the page. In the era of the graphic novel, however, payment in Peru is by low-cost book rather than by page. Out of the authors interviewed, David Galliquio is renowned for his ability to write works of great length (160 pages, for example), while Acevedo and Cossio prefer long episodes or chapters more akin to the comic book or album, albeit longer than the fanzine preferred by Filomeno.

This fanzine format lacks a formal canon or established length because, before the book, it emerged when comix were tuning in to ‘the radical sensibilities of the Vietnam-era counterculture’ (Hatfield 2005, 11). The main irony of the underground comix movement was the way it imitated the format of comic books produced by large industries. Robert Crumb’s Zap Comix proved that it was possible to produce comics outside of the industry and its self-censorship code (Magazine Association of America 1955). The emancipation of comix prior to the book paved the way to authorship for two reasons. The first is that, with ‘the radical reassessment of the relationships among publishers, creators,
and intellectual properties [...] it was the first movement of what came to be known among fans as “creator-owned” comic books – and creator ownership was prerequisite to the rise of alternative comics’ (Hatfield 2005, 16). The second was the fact that comix valued the production of the solitary illustrator over team work or the assembly line. In essence, says Hatfeld, ‘comix made comic books safe for auteur theory’ as it fit ‘with the idea that cartoonists were expected to express themselves singly, just as a poet is typically presumed to speak with a lone voice’ (2005, 16). In time, alternative comics went over to direct market comic shops in the US, Canada and various European cities, which sell graphic novels and fanzines. That is how they became detached from the cultural and political preoccupations which brought them to life in the underground movement.

The Peruvian fanzine does not revolt against a prior industry but rather finds a model of protest in the North American underground movement, which in the 1980s was inextricably linked to violence. It must be added that the movement’s actions and publications were endorsed by a group of young artists who intervened from concert stages and via the DIY aesthetic of flyers. The ‘under’ movement has been studied by Shane Greene in his punk book Punk and Revolution: Seven More Interpretations of Peruvian Reality (2016). In Interpretation #5, ‘The Worth of Art in Three Stages of Underproduction’, Greene offers a rather blunt description of the context of political chaos midst a ‘total economic crisis’ within which the movement broke out:

Curbs were covered in trash and dog shit. Street recyclers rode around on three-wheeled carts, picking up junk and reselling to street vendors that resold it as junk elsewhere on the street. Migrants erected thousands of precarious domestic structures on recently occupied sandy hills overlooking the city’s colonial center. There was also hyperinflation upward of 2000 percent and a total liquidation of middle-class incomes after Alan García assumed the presidency in 1985. Indian cadavers were piling up in mass graves in the Andean provinces and showing up on daily newspaper covers. Executive-ordered military massacres of rioting political prisoners were something you learned to expect in Lima detention facilities. Disfigured corpses, once the bodies of journalists mistaken for militants, laid out in a line on a frigid mountain landscape: this image would be burned into your brain.

(Greene 2016, 112–13)
Surrounded by death and violence, the Peruvian fanzine started as a profound form of protest with underground rock as its protagonist, followed by comics. Its creators could be professional or amateur artists, like David Galliquio. Up until the mid-1990s, this movement produced and exchanged fanzines in central Lima’s countercultural spaces, such as the well-known Jirón Quilca. In his origins in the working-class quarter of La Victoria, Galliquio finds links to the work of Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton, the Mexican 1960s, and the Spanish 1980s, all of which led him to the discovery of the concept of the underground, subculture, punk and fanzines (Galliquio 2018).

The publishing journey of the fanzine from the late 1980s up until the appearance of Contracultura in the mid-2000s can be traced through the Galliquio and Corzo interviews (Galliquio 2018; Corzo 2018). In 1986, there was no internet and circumstances did not allow fanzine authors to get to know each other. It was on his own initiative and because he was attracted by urban music that Galliquio went to those places in Central Lima where he came across fanzines, a format that allows for writing and publication without erudition, out of interest or out of love (Galliquio 2018). In terms of acquisition and reading, the fanzine’s circulation was limited because it would be quickly discarded, and its print run was small because photocopiers were still scarce and places with public reprographics services were few and far between. The first major change in the development of the fanzine occurred around 1994 when Peru’s oldest and most prestigious newspaper, *El Comercio*, together with the Calandria Association, organised a comic-strip competition. This competition is how Galliquio met Cherman Kino, Jesús Cossio, Álvaro Portales, and Renso and Amadeo Gonzales. In this context, Cherman published *CRASH, BOOM, ZAP (CBZ)*, the first professional fanzine: the print run was 10,000 copies and it was delivered for free in Peru’s major cities, a mode of distribution that was true to the ‘under’ aesthetic. The criteria for publication was that each author should create and maintain a set character throughout the various issues.

Peruvian comics during this period never managed to become an industry, only a profession. The North American industrial model involved staff illustrators, syndicates, mass media, mass distribution and sales, as well as form and content codes and conventions. Such an industry did not materialise, only a sporadic professionalisation which produced the long-term financial viability of some comics projects.

Peruvian comic strips had begun, as in most cities worldwide, with localised entertainment humour in magazines with a large circulation, even though in Lima they did not manage to survive in the
press (Sagástegui 2003, 9–13). Comics later reappeared not as strips but as political cartoons, which ironically relativises the conventional use of strips and of fiction to give way to satire, political context and art nouveau. *Monos y Monadas* (1905–8), for example, the most refined of ironic magazines at the time, lasted only three years and had a small print run. As an attempt to create a magazine for children, the publication *Palomilla* appeared three decades later in 1940, a ‘chiste’ (joke, as the comic book was known in Peru). Young amateur authors who sent in their first homemade adventure comics formed a generation which later developed the two largest professional projects of nationalist comics: the newspaper *Última hora*’s 100 per cent Peruvian strips (1952–68) and the great Catholic children’s magazine *Avanzada*. Rubén Osorio, Hernán Bartra, Javier Flórez del Águila, David Málaga and other illustrators were the authors of the first comic strips and of the sustained production of *chistes* for more than a decade. Peruvian readers had never before seen themselves stereotyped in early characters like Juan Santos, Serrucho, Boquellanta, Sampietri, Coco, Vicuñín or Tacachito. Without a doubt, these stereotypical male protagonists represented the political views of General Manuel Odría’s regime, although they transcended it inasmuch as they embodied certain consequences of developmentalist thought which the US government had inculcated in Latin America after the Second World War: a first world country should have industrial self-sufficiency and a deep sense of national pride. Accordingly, the autochthonous Sampietri bid farewell to Disney characters and cleared a path for Peruvians from the city, the countryside and the jungle into comic strips. We know from the letters to *Última Hora* that Peruvians enjoyed laughing at their bad habits. Nowadays, these comic strips are studied as cultural representations from the point of view of contemporary political canons, but so far no study of how they themselves constituted cultural change has been carried out. The attention the comics received and readers’ identification with nationalist tropes resulted in their sustainability over time. Even though these conventional comics authors went on to work freelance in newspapers and school magazines, which is close to an industrial model, it was never thought necessary to create an agency or for the publishing house or the press to be the owner of the characters. The authors owned their creations. Osorio and Bartra, for example, who signed as Osito and Monki, kept the rights to their comic strips so that, although they had been first paid for them by the Pontifical Missionary Organization, they were able to republish them in newspapers like *El Comercio* or *Expreso* during the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces.
Monos y Monadas (1978) was first published 20 years after the creation of the Peruvian character types, towards the end of the second of two military regimes (Villar 2016). A political project led by artists, writers and cartoonists, the publication considered the raising of political awareness through art and irony necessary for addressing various urgent social conflicts. This project was continued some 10 years later when several of its authors came together again, first with the magazine El Idiota, and later with ¡No!, a supplement of Sí magazine. It was also at this time that Juan Acevedo led his popular comic-strip workshops in Lima and in Ayacucho, part of that same ideological project. The fanzine emerged following the decline of such aims, during the armed conflict. A photocopied, folded and stapled piece of paper without a cover, the fanzine criticises the wider social system, not everyday politics. It is an aggressive, countercultural medium which resents costumbrista traditions and political satire. It is the art of urban culture and resistance. After the artistic exploration of the previous political project, CBZ was the first professionalisation of countercultural comics. Emerging within a growing concerts market, 10 years later it circulated in local fanzine fairs, and 10 years after that, international comics festivals. When CBZ lost its funding, marking the end of an era, the Gonzales brothers managed to turn the collective fanzine Carboncito (2001) into a magazine. The first of David Galliquio’s books to be published by Contracultura was Lito the Dog (2009), a character developed in CBZ and in Carboncito.

The privileges of being a book author

An author is not just the owner or parent of a work. Foucault demonstrated that the term refers to diverse privileges in our book cultures. Author privileges are the modes of circulation, valuation, attribution and appropriation that a culture gives to their work. These manifest themselves directly, as well as in other ways, in financial terms. But in comics production, questions of copyright have produced a tension between low-profile authors with a regular income and more visible authors subject to the financial vicissitudes of the independent market. Within this context, and despite economic differences, the interviews show several common traits in the privileges which Peruvian book culture assigns comics authors.

Juan Acevedo is the only comic-strip author who claims to have been able to make a good living out of comics (Acevedo 2018). That was especially so when working as a magazine editor, such as for the ¡No!
supplement, or when he was hired by institutions such as the Centro de Estudios para la Acción por la Paz (Centre for Peace Studies) or the Rädda Barnen foundation to put together anthologies or comic books on human rights topics. Despite not being paid enough to support him outright, signature works such as Paco Yunque and Túpac Amaru have provided a significant income. After studying history of art, his professional career began as a public employee at the San Marcos History and Art Museum, then at the National Institute for Culture, later as head of the Ayacucho School of Fine Art and finally at the Ministry of Education. With the support of these institutions, Acevedo managed to hold popular comic-strip workshops to develop spaces for political reflection. By the time these workshops came to an end, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces was no longer under the leadership of General Juan Velasco Alvarado but under Francisco Morales Bermúdez, who set about dismantling the first administration’s progressive national system. The methodology underpinning the popular workshops was published by the Ministry in the book Para hacer historietas (Acevedo 1978), though the book was immediately recalled when they realised that Acevedo was a dissident. Acevedo’s five years in public administration came to an end in 1978, when he gave up being a bureaucrat and was taken on as editor of the culture section of Marka magazine. He managed to make a living from the daily strip Aventuras del Cuy, saving enough to buy a car. Shortly afterwards, Morales Bermúdez would become a character in the strip Love Story. The manual for the workshops has been translated into English, German and Portuguese and he repeated the workshops in various cities in Latin America, all of which have contributed to the universal intellectual and artistic recognition of his contributions to comics. Nowadays he thinks of himself as the author of the comic strip El cuy in the newspaper El Comercio, addressing history, different forms of abuse, and discrimination. He sees himself publishing more strips than books, as books tend to be compilations. At the 2018 Lima International Book Fair, Juan Acevedo was celebrated by the Peruvian Chamber of the Book, the general public and the comics authors of the CBZ generation for his oeuvre and his political irony.

Cossio’s irony and privileges are different. Even though he cannot make a living from comic strips alone, his documentary comics are valued culturally and academically. He started his work at a time when Peruvian politics had changed radically after the armed conflict: socialist, left-wing ideological stances were no longer associated with just the causes but also with the terrorism of Sendero Luminoso, an association referred to as ‘terruqueo’ (Rivas 2018) by
those who support the prevailing extractive economic model. Cossio’s documentary comics are usually about the ‘terruqueada’ (terrorised) population, one which fights for the right to basic living conditions. Invited by various institutions dedicated to establishing reparations for victims of the armed conflict, Cossio facilitates workshops in villages and cities. He has made his name doing this kind of work, although he would like to be appreciated for the comics themselves: ‘many things happened because of circumstances and it was something I had to do for economic, format or circulation reasons rather than artistic ones’ (Cossio 2018). While he has no idea of the extent to which his work circulates in an academic context (see Milton 2014 and 2017), he recognises that it is one of the most fruitful spaces for him, as he is constantly being invited to give talks or interviews at universities and as part of comics discussion forums.

Avril Filomeno studied art at the Fine Art National Academy of La Paz. She witnessed how a group of French amateurs together with the Simón I. Patiño Foundation succeeded in opening a comics café (‘c+c espacio’), which was later replaced by the city’s comics library (Filomeno 2018). That process, which started in 2002, was furthered with the organisation of the international comics festival, ‘Viñetas con altura’, which attracted young artists and art students like Avril, as well as writers and intellectuals. The foundation adopted comics as a mode of expression for working with adolescents from marginal urban areas, and the first fanzine workshop took place in 2003 with Avril in charge. Renowned as an artist, her fanzines have always been included in the cultural circuit for their quality despite their discourse and aesthetics of protest. She has led two major projects as a comics author. The first was the exhibition Fiesta pagana held in La Paz (2007), an event for comics authors whose aim was to work on the fiestas of Western Bolivia in colour. The tenth anniversary of the publication of the accompanying book was celebrated with an exhibition in Colombia and with the publication of a new collective book about La Paz. The second was the first publication of women comics authors, Venus ataca (Various authors, 2010), which was published in Peru. Together with Contracultura she also organised Peru’s first international festival of comics by women. She currently facilitates workshops for women in a community which confronted Sendero Luminoso.

David Galliquio does not offer art workshops; in fact he prefers not to work as a comic-strip writer as he would not be able to cover his expenses by doing so. He wants his work to be looked after and preserved,
which is why he publishes his comics in books. ‘Lito the Dog’, an ‘under’ steeped in urban violence, is one of the 10 most renowned characters in Peruvian comics. He knows that his comics can be found in the School of Art and Design of the Universidad Católica. His readers, ‘under’ readers, fanzine readers, often ask to interview him. The representation of the city of Lima in his comics constitutes his author discourse. He does not feel he has any privileges: ‘I know that here you won’t get rich or become a millionaire making books. I would love for it to be so, I would give up my miserable job, but it isn’t. We are in Peruland and reality is different, here those who make comics make them because they really like and enjoy it’ (Galliquio 2018).

The four authors present a range of critical discourses and, when working in conjunction with the political focus of certain institutions and magazines, receive fair remuneration for their work as comic-strip creators. But publishing books does not significantly alter their income.

Contracultura constitutes a milestone in the evolution of Peruvian comic strips as the first graphic novel imprint and publishing agent. But it is only allowed to pay, by law, 10 per cent of author royalties. By means of a verbal agreement and not a written contract, the publisher pays an advance of 5 per cent and submits the remaining 5 per cent once sales conclude. The informality of publishers in the Peruvian sales system, whether international groups or small local ones, was pointed out by all interviewees. In the case of an anthology of 10 women authors, for example, none of them is paid enough to cover their weekly expenditure. Only by publishing weekly in the press, like Acevedo, can comic-strip authors make a living. The privileges which graphic novels grant Peruvian comics authors, therefore, are not economic but political: (i) they provide the author with the privilege to articulate a critical and radical discourse against conditions of poverty and violence without being censored; (ii) they provide the author with the ability to interact with national and international institutions related to comics, books and human rights; and (iii) they provide the author with the means to teach political reflection via graphic expression workshops to people affected by violence and poverty.

When these authors draw themselves, they may or may not draw these privileges. Whenever Juan Acevedo is closely related to the characters he draws, his hair appears untidy: Anotherman, Humberto the dog and Luchín González are three characters in political comic strips. Anotherman is a graphic novel in which the masked hero confronts his father, who turns out to be the Devil and the head of the infernal
Peruvian state. Humberto is Cuy’s sidekick, an autobiographical comic not of Acevedo but of the Peruvian Left of the 1970s (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Humberto the dog, an untidy character associated with the author Juan Acevedo in his popular comic strip *El cuy*. © Juan Acevedo

Figure 5.2 The main character of *Mala Onda* who has the physical features of author Jesús Cossio. © Jesús Cossio

*Luchín González* is the first comic to narrate the armed conflict and the atrocities that took place. The dishevelled hair, therefore, represents Acevedo’s political freedom, and he remembers it through a drawing: ‘He’s a guy with hair like this [gestures to indicate dishevelled hair], just a brushstroke, “they say I’m an anarchist” and then he adds, “they can all go to hell”’ (Acevedo 2018). Jesús Cossio points out that he does not have an autobiographical character because he is interested in going
beyond himself to create a more universal character (Cossio 2018). He cites *Mala Onda* (2016) as an example, in which the main character caricatures his physical features, as well as his way of mocking Facebook posts (**Figure 5.2**). It conveys the performance of an author who ridicules without being censored, who is not afraid of showing his antipathy. Rather than political, the context is outright psychological, as posts in that particular social network refer to ‘statuses’ and ‘topics’ which the participant claims to be feeling or thinking about. The humour mocks spoken behaviour on social networks.

David Galliquio does draw himself, creating a character of himself as a comic-strip illustrator (**Figure 5.3**). He describes the character ‘as a fat fool, bored with problems, a bit neurotic and with a fear of society’ (Galliquio 2018). The character laughs at himself and wants others to laugh with him. The author has the ‘under’ privilege of clumsiness, artisanship, untidiness and misshapenness.

**Figure 5.3**  David Galliquio as his own character. © David Galliquio
From the first time Avril drew herself, she depicted herself naked. The situation was not erotic; she just dispensed with drawing clothes. It was an act of liberation, given that in Bolivia ‘she would appear as a stuffed turkey amongst jackets and scarves’. During the interview, Filomeno enumerates the details of the caricature: ‘with my big nose, the little bags under my eyes, my tummy, my big calves, that image in which I have gradually fine-tuned my gestures’. She did not intend to be recognised but to reach maximum self-expression. The author did not say what she meant by maximum self-expression but later in the interview, referring to a poem in comic form by Carlos López Degregori, she remembered that he drew a man naked because that meant only thoughts remained (Figure 5.4). As this was how she realised that her naked characters were abstract ruminations, this may constitute the author’s ‘maximum self-expression’, allowing her hidden privilege to emerge from under layers of censorship: the privilege to abstract.

![Figure 5.4](image.png)

*Avril Filomeno’s self-portrait for the anthology *Venus ataca.* © Avril Filomeno

**Conclusions**

In countries with a comics industry, the book brought with it copyright, which up until then had belonged to the syndicate, as well as the valuing of individual over assembly-line production. In that way the author’s discourse and name became novelised. Authors left behind the epic
or localised heroes of comic strips and became valued as creators of profound writing, joining a publishing market system similar to the literary market. In the Peruvian case, where comics authors always kept copyright and where very few of them were able to devote their professional lives to comics, the introduction of book format comics has not created a noticeable economic change (as with the literary market) but it has favoured the author’s political value, something that comics authors prior to Juan Acevedo did not have.

None of the authors interviewed for this chapter have achieved financial sustainability with novelised comics turned into books. But they have managed to obtain three political privileges, namely: to critique without being censored; to connect comics to human rights struggles; and to expand comics as a political tool. However, when it comes to authors representing themselves, only Acevedo does so to any great extent, as a character with the privileges mentioned, even though he does not advertise the fact. The rest of the authors, while all of them recreate themselves in characters who reflect and criticise with complete freedom, focus on depicting their cultural privileges more than their political ones, relating comics to their own thoughts and sharing them as an expressive tool.

Thus, although the role played by Contracultura has not had the once-desired economic impact, it has contributed to the novelisation of authors who know themselves capable of representing the country’s existential, social and political conflicts from their subjective point of view. And it has helped those authors participate in a wider community of festivals and exchanges with Latin American authors who share political discourses from the margins of art, testimony and Latin American culture.

Notes

1 For an overview of the disparity in comic production in Latin America, see the chapters by Laura Vazquez and by Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed and Daniel E. Aguilar-Rodriguez in this volume.

2 Genres are agreed categories of classification. Within the tradition of literary studies, it is possible to distinguish two main classifications. The first, which stems from Aristotle, divides literature according to its form of representation: epic, lyric, drama. The second classifies fiction according to theme and is contemporaneous with the book: horror, science fiction, Western. They often coincide: drama is divided into tragedy and comedy, for instance. In the case of comics studies, the second category is used as genre and the first as ‘format’ (Trabado 2013; Cossio 2018).

3 We might consider a fifth tension: several authors have referred to the discomfort produced by the resignification of certain comics as ‘graphic novels’ because they see the term as expressing a value judgment and as establishing indeterminate criteria for a superior comic format. The
arguments of Hatfield (2005), Jan Baetens (2008), Pascal Lefèvre (2013) and Barrero (2013) on this hierarchy have updated debates around auteur theory from the 1970s (Cuevas Álvarez 1994), which tried to establish structural criteria for film as a product of an author. Similar efforts to determine criteria in relation to comics can be found in the work of Scott McCloud (1993), Trabado (2013), Roger Sabin (2013), Santiago García (2013) and Eddie Campbell (2013).

Reviewing auteur theory, Michel Foucault displaces the search for structural and ideological patterns in the work of the author by looking at the instrumentalisation of the author as a means of classifying their works (Cuevas Álvarez 1994).

For more on the role that comic-book stores, festivals and other events can have in relation to the new scene of graphic novels and fanzines, see Uribe-Jongbloed and Aguilar-Rodríguez’s chapter in this volume.


The publication was made up of an elite group of visual and literary artists, notably Leonidas Yerovi, Abraham Valdelomar, Jorge Vinatea Reinoso and Julio Málaga Grenet.

There has been no study of the generational influence of this topic in the interpretation of the Internal Armed Conflict.

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