

GUILLEM CIFRÉ. CAIRO. ED. NORMA. BARCELONA, 1983

THE COMIC OF THE EIGHTIES

TAKEN AS A WHOLE, THERE IS NOTHING TO COMPARE WITH THE WORK PRODUCED IN THE FIELD OF COMICS DURING THE EIGHTIES. WHAT CHARACTERIZES THE PERIOD IS THE COMBINATION WHICH CREATED A DYNAMIC VARIETY AND RICHNESS AND AN URGE TO COMMUNICATE. OUR MODERN COMIC TOOK SHAPE DURING THESE YEARS.

IGNASI VIDAL-FOLCH JOURNALIST



JOSEP M. BEA. 1984. TOUTAIN ED. BARCELONA, 1980

During the eighties our comic strip underwent a revolution whose results made up the most intellectually stimulating and freely creative period in the entire history of comics in our country. This might be open to question if we judged the work individually, but, taken as a whole, there is nothing to compare with what was produced during those years. What characterizes the period is the joining of a number of individual efforts to create a situation—I don't know if looking back provokes nostalgia—whose variety and richness, and the energy and urge to communicate surrounding it, seem to have been lost forever. These were the formative years of our modern comic.

Although the previous generation of illustrators, which centred on the critic and promotor of *Bang*, Antoni Martín, had already

tried to dignify the comic as a means of communication, more than just a simple commercial and industrial product, illustrators such as Carles Giménez, Adolf Usero, Lluís Garcia, stimulated by the scriptwriters Víctor Mora and Felipe Hernández Cava, had set out to attack the establishment from the short-lived pages of *Trocha*—to name just one more of the magazines representative of this transition period. It was at this time that the internal debate on the meaning, value and possibilities of the comic strip found its way into professional circles and the press in general, and made the comic a part of fashion. Those were the days of “postmodernity”, and the spirit of the age, which gave support to the marriage between classical and avant-garde trends and stood up for the so-called minor genres, was as important a feature in our comics as the artists’ skill itself.

Financial difficulties, the arrival of the crisis, the precariousness endemic to the industry, the weariness of those writers and illustrators who obstinately insisted on eating twice a day and even, some of them, of having high tea on Saturday afternoon... in short, the siren song of other more prosperous-looking media and other causes, such as the difficulty of our artists’ work being understood and accepted on the other side of the Pyrenees, in France and Paris, where the continent’s aesthetic and technical criteria are hatched and imposed—all this, as I say, went against the new comic, which formed around the dialectic between two magazines: *El Víbora* (thesis) and *Cairo* (antithesis).

Before that, as I said, there was *Bang*, there was the Marxist cartoon strip *Trocha* (with its bearded, wrinkle-nosed



MONTXO ALGORA. STAR. PRODUCCIONES EDITORIALES. BARCELONA, 1977



VICENTE SEGRELLES. CIMOC. ED. NORMA. BARCELONA, 1984

artists and writers, always poised to pounce on any kind of frivolity or fun) and there were also other attempts to dignify the medium: Juanjo Fernández, from the pages of *Star*, and the group of marginal illustrators of *El Rollo enmascarado*. The former imported the American underground comic, while the latter looked for a local variant. When the people at *El Rollo* got tired of selling their magazine in the Rambla, the centre of Barcelona's street-life, the unusual architect Josep M. Berenguer made his providential entrance and, with the idea of gathering up the survivors, started the magazine *El Vibora*.

El Vibora was –and I say “was” because, though still published every month, the magazine is only a shadow of its former self– a serious attempt to introduce the philosophy and the work of marginal names into the commercial market, an attempt at normalization. The issues dealt

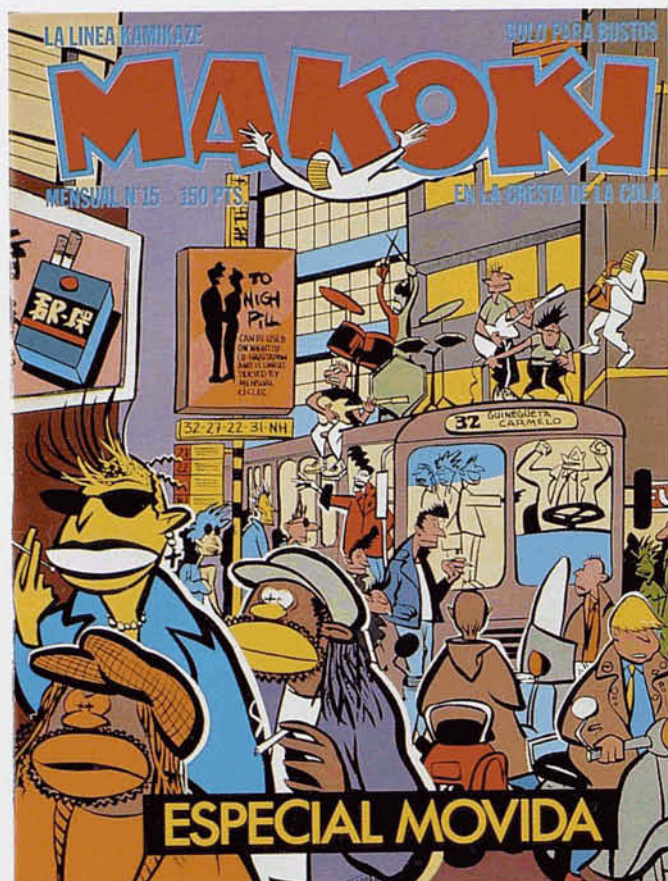
with on its pages –young people, sex, drugs and confrontation with authority– brought a breath of air which, if not fresh, was at least new. Each page spoke of the real world, though with a certain bias towards more sordid and less favoured sectors of society, understandable after the years of censorship. It's hardly surprising that *El Vibora* should have made a place for itself amongst the favourite reading of the inmates of Barcelona's “Model” prison.

El Vibora's solidest pillars were Nazario, Martí, Pons, Gallardo and Mediavilla. The Andalusian Nazario, a former teacher in Seville and founding father of *El Rollo enmascarado*, became what he had always wanted to be: the scribe who sided with the homosexuals and transvestites in the port district of Barcelona: the Rambla and the Red Light District. Just about every frame on his pages rejoiced in its detailed representations of the male sex organ. Some pseu-

do-thriller scripts –whose protagonist, Anarcoma, was a transvestite detective– provided a feeble pretext for this work. Something to bear in mind is that Anarcoma did cross the border: the album with this character's adventures could be bought... in the sex shops of the capitals of Europe.

Martí, for his part, in a Chester Gould style, told the adventures of *Taxista*, an anti-hero with muddled ideas, against an extraordinarily effective backdrop of shanty towns, thievery and “España negra”.

Pons adopted the chiaroscuro of Eisner's *Spirit* to revive in comic strip the nineteenth century serial writers' accounts of life in the working-class districts. This formula doesn't seem to me to have given particularly spectacular results, but the public, who didn't feel the same way, forced Pons to work overtime as script-writer to new illustrators and to create a private “Estudi” that would provide an



MONTESOL. MAKOKI. ED. LA CÚPULA. BARCELONA, 1982



MARISCAL. COMPTOT. ED. COMPTOT SA. BARCELONA, 1985

outlet for the multitude of ideas that filled his imagination.

Finally, Gallardo and Mediavilla also found in *El Víbora* the vehicle for the archetypal hero of our modern comic: Makoki, an escaped lunatic who hung around the port district of Santa Maria del Mar in search of drugs and laughs, and who was always fighting the fear-some police inspector Loperena. Thanks to the narrative talent and unbridled imagination of Mediavilla and Gallardo, Makoki managed to create a world of its own, rich in secondary characters, each with his or her own mental hangup, but frankly entertaining taken as a whole. Makoki tried, using the most extemporaneous and effective methods, to bring order into that chaotic and licentious world.

Over the years, *El Víbora*'s thesis became repetitive and boring. It was time for the antithesis. *Cairo*, the new magazine

which echoed and reinforced the formulations of the Franco-Belgian "clean line", waged a totally commercial war against the sexist enormities of *El Víbora*. And it did so with the introduction of new European talents like Chaland or the Italian Giardino, successfully redeploying Roger and Gallardo (who divided his energies between the inner-city hero Makoki and a *Pepito Magefesa* who brought to life the world of contemporary art and design, pioneering the narrative frontiers of the comic) and opening the way for the innovative illustrators of what was called the "Valencian school": the Franco-Belgian-inspired Torres, the almost abstract Micharmut, Sento, Mique Beltrán, etc.

Thesis and antithesis exchanged manifestos, declarations, exhibitions, dialectic combats, the odd scuffle and (remember that Barcelona is still a small city where everybody knows everybody else) a few

good laughs. The battle between the "clean line" and what was known as the "crude line" ended with the latter's victory and the desertion of the *Cairo* management team. But it was to be a pyrrhic victory. Drugs, the occasional death and boredom eventually stole away *El Víbora*'s most original contributors. To get an idea of the inventiveness and originality of our comics during those years, there are albums which today, looked at and read across the years separating us from that urgent expression, "for immediate publication", are still funny. I mean, for example, all the *Col·lecció Complot* albums, all the *Makoki* albums, *La noche de siempre* and *Fin de semana* (by Montesol and Ramón de España) and Martí's *Taxista*. Some of these writers and illustrators, having emerged from disreputability, have had their work recognized with prizes at the "Barcelona Comic Salon". ■