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Trans Web Comics

Transition Stories, Switch-Around, Personal Histories, Theory, Incidentals and Gag Strips

by Laura Seabrook

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A Scene from Venus Envy, by Erin Lindsay. "It's a tribute to Erin's writing and drawing that Venus Envy has built up such a following."

It was late last year that I had "artist's block". I was working on my Honours project - a "Transsexual Tarot Deck" and it seemed too important and I just couldn't do any more. My solution was do something for fun, and in this case what I did was create a "Web Comic" (an anthology series, where I do stories of all kinds). Web Comics, or Online Comics, are comic strips accessible by the net, in particular the World Wide Web.

Bring on the comics that show us for who and what we are, and show transgendered people and behaviour as a part of what it means to be human.

Now I find it most peculiar that (including myself) I know at least five trans folk who have all lived for prolonged periods in Western Australia, worked for the old Department of Social Security, and are also cartoonists (among other forms of creativity). Now not all these trans people are out - some are still living "under the radar" - and that's a pity because if they were more open and wrote and drew about their experiences, maybe we'd be better off for it.

I got the idea of doing my own from three sources. One of those friends casually mentioned in an email that they were thinking of doing a web comic, I discovered a Manga digest in the local library called Mega Tokyo (collected reprints from the web version), and through one way or another, came across a web comic called *Venus Envy*. You'll find the first somewhere in my links page at my web comics site; the second is a slick web comic about

computer gaming, cosplay, and related fantasies that was later published as a paper comic; and the last is an ongoing light comedy/drama about Zoe, who used to be Alex.

Venus Envy in fact typifies the best of a number of web comics that are either about transgender topics, and/or drawn/written/created by transgendered creators. Both of these are really important. Most humans like to read or see stories that they can relate to, about people like themselves, and trans folk are no different.

As Liz (who runs Second Life Bookshop where I read Tarot) pointed out to me the other day, there's more to Trans/Queer media than just anthologies, autobiographies and histories. Bring on all the varied tales of being that we see in the mainstream: the romances; thrillers; adventures; murder mysteries, humorous tales and so on. Bring on the comics (web or otherwise) that show us for who and what we are, and show transgendered people and behaviour as a part of what it means to be human.

That's where the web comics come in. They can be easy (and free) to make, and even easier to read. You don't have to have a Bachelor's in Visual Arts (like me), nor does the artwork have to be of a particular type, but the work has to be inspired. Otherwise even if viewers check it out, will they come back? There are many web comics that ran for a short while until either their audience or creators lost interest. If you think you can't draw well enough, that's okay too. Drawing comics is an art form where, the more you do, the better you can get. Practice makes perfect. And even if you can't draw at all, you can still write, and get someone else to draw it for you.

Many web comic creators do their original artwork by hand, and then scan it in to computer and further colour/embellish it as they need. There are free hosts like Comic Genesis who will provide a space and domain name for your web comic - all they ask is that you are consistent in producing one. Also out there are online tutorials, free software (such as Gimp and Filezilla), and related forums that can be used and accessed to make and maintain a web comic. In most cases, all you need to read a web comic is a browser and access to the web, and if you don't have your own connection, you can probably use one via your local library. There's no excuse in not checking these comics out.

So what's out there? Trans web comics generally come in six varieties: transition stories; switch-around; personal histories; theory, incidentals; and gag strips.

Venus Envy by Erin Lindsay is a good example of the first type. The series, which started out as a gag strip, soon became the ongoing saga of Zoe's gender transition while a teenager at high school. It's a tribute to Erin's writing and drawing that Venus Envy has built up such a following. The thing is that Zoe is a well rounded, believable character, and the supporting cast are consistent and the stories

involving.

In the space of one strip, Erin has featured not just M.T.F.s, but F.T.M.s, Gays and Lesbians, Cross-dressers, and a whole range of other types of characters (and all at one high school, too!). The strip also has a web forum and a Yahoo group, both of which discuss not only the strip itself, but other topics related to transgendered issues.

Closet Space by Jean Dolari is another transition story. The artwork is good, and Jean last year organised a trans-death-remembrance strip across several web comics. Most transition stories seem to be focused on a teenage or young protagonist, and drawn by young transgendered artists. I find this most encouraging.

Venus Ascending by S. Belmar is a spin-off of *Venus Envy*, and is an example of a trans gag strip. All the characters are derived from the original story, but placed in a science fiction setting instead. It's a strange mixture that works, especially if you are into Science Fiction in any way. There is a loose storyline, but it is subordinate to the gags. *Transe-Generation* by Matt Nishi, is another gag strip, this time from an F.T.M. viewpoint. Sometimes the gags are a bit coarse, but they are almost always funny.

Misfile by Chris Hazleton is an example of a "switch-around" strip. Unlike *Venus Envy*, where the main character is actively choosing gender transition, in *Misfile* they change gender as a result of a "heavenly misfile". Thus it is not by choice, but fate that they must adapt to this state, and the focus is really on the difference between what society expects from different genders. Other "switch-around" strips include *Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki* (manga style adventures with trans-by-magic character) and *Abstract Gender*, where two teenage boys are turned in girls after visiting a haunted house. *Second Stage* by Shannon Strobel is more in the way of a personal history.

Yes, there is an ongoing character who seems closely related to the creator, but there isn't a storyline as such, other than what just happens, either to the character or the creator. My own *Hypergraphia* is much like this, featuring segments from my life, whereas readers of *Polare* will be familiar with my own *Queer Stuff* (queer theory), which I have also ported over to the web.

Then there are strips where the trans characters or themes are just incidental to the strip. *AstroGirl X2* by Astrid Johannsen is beautifully drawn, and the character just happens to be a post-transition post-modern lesbian. In many ways it's also more of a gag strip. In *Happy but Dead* one of the male characters became female after being involved in a dodgy research project, but this was overshadowed by his later dying and then being thrown out of hell! *Triquetra Cats* features three transsexuals, each of whom protect a ring that the bad guys want and *The Watch* is more a *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* type strip, but one of the main character's abilities is to swap other character's genders for them. *My Life in Blue* seems to be about queer characters of all sorts in all meanings of the word!

The web comics mentioned above are just a small sampling of what's out there. I list the web links below, so go have a look for yourselves. If you like what you see, give the creators some feedback, and maybe they'll make more. Also, you might want to get involved in the various forums and mailing lists that support them. If nothing else, check out the links pages of each, as you'll find references to plenty of other web comics not included for the sake of brevity. If you're really keen, do your own (and if you do, tell *Polare* about it so that we all know about it)!

Web Comics

[Closet Space](#) 
[Laura Seabrook's Web Comics](#) 
[Mega Tokyo](#) 
[My Life in Blue](#) 
[Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki](#) 
[Triquetra Cats](#) 
[Venus Ascending](#) 
[Venus Envy](#) 

Web Comics Directories

[Comic Genesis Index](#) 
[The Web Comic List](#) 

References

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Reinventing comics: How imagination and technology are revolutionizing an art form by Scott McCloud; New York : Perennial, 2000; I.S.B.N.-13 978 0060953500
Webcomics by Steven Withrow & John Barber; Lewes, East Sussex : Ilex, c2005; I.S.B.N.-13 978 1904705502

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