

Call For Papers

Spaces Between – Gender, Diversity and Identity in Comics

13th Annual Conference of the German Society for Comics Studies (ComFor)
University of Cologne, 17/09/2018 – 19/09/2018

For decades, comics have been perceived as a mass phenomenon situated in popular culture, which manifests, establishes and perpetuates stereotypical (gender) representations. Hence, the image of a particularly helpless, passive, but all the more attractive female victim is at home in the repertoire of the medium no less than the representation of a radiant, muscular, white, heterosexual hero, whose first duty consists of protecting the world and its inhabitants from catastrophe. In this sense, comics might seem alike to other forms of mass media in the age of mechanical reproduction and their tendency towards generalisations and clichés. From a historical perspective, reactions to the worldwide anti-comics campaigns of the 1950s, including self-censorship among numerous comic book publishers, also exemplarily point to heteronormative and xenophobic tendencies within mass media comics culture, which was in turn long reflected in the demographics of its readership. However, as a popular and oftentimes marginalised medium, comics never completely became one with this role of a (reactionary) stabilising force. Rather, comics are imbued with a socio-political dimension that has always encouraged comics artists to use the spaces between in a creative way, and to question and subvert (social) norms.

Comics are both visual and sequential art: they constitute a visual medium that is defined by the sequence of its static images as well as by the spaces between the panels. Hence, the succession of sequential images in comics is by no means seamless. Rather, the conglomeration of (blank) spaces interconnects and separates them at the same time. These ‚spaces between‘ might be used or construed as a reference to a realm of the ‚unshown‘, wherein notions of a final, self-contained truth are renounced and alternative worldviews that challenge the social status quo are enhanced. At the same time, the theme of the planned conference on ‚spaces between‘ refers to the hybridity and ambiguity of the art form that combines picture and text: As an ‚inter-medium‘, comics constitute a transgressive form which resists common classifications and mechanisms of exclusion based on hierarchical and hegemonic structures. In this respect, comics have the potential to destabilise and blur binary oppositions such as subject/object, nature/culture, man/woman, authentic/artificial, good/bad, normal/abnormal or black/white that are usually perceived as ‚natural‘ and ‚given‘. In certain circumstances, the medium thus has the potential to break up rigid dichotomies, and to open up spaces for the representation of ‚shades between‘ – of fractions, differences and diversity.

The 13th annual conference of the German Society for Comics Studies will examine this productive potential of comics by uncovering and analysing different forms of the 'spaces between' within the art form itself, but also within its production and its audience. The internationally and interdisciplinarily assembled talks will focus on the question how gender, identity and diversity are represented and negotiated in sequential art. The conference topic *Spaces Between – Gender, Diversity and Identity in Comics* will draw our attention to the nexus between the medium of comics and categories of difference and identity such as gender, dis/ability, age, and ethnicity, in order to open and deepen an interdisciplinary conversation between comics studies and intersectional identity studies within the international comics studies community. In this respect, the 13th annual conference of the German Society for Comics Studies will not only contribute to the disclosure of exclusions, power structures and (hetero-)normative allocations in comics, but will also critically analyse their socio-political and communicative forms of (re-)production.

Potential topics for contributions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- constructions of gender in comics
- the interplay of gender and genre in comics
- conceptions of identity and their (de-)construction in comics
- intersectionality and comics
- the (re-)production and constitution of difference and power structures in comics
- manifestations of heteronormative structures and allocations in comics
- mechanisms of hegemonic exclusion(s) in comics
- *queerness* and comics
- historic dimensions of identities in comics
- diversity and normalisation processes in comics
- race, class and ethnic stereotypes in comics
- comics and postcolonial studies
- body images in comics
- representations of dis/ability in comics
- the interrelation of comics, health and corporeality in the realm of *graphic medicine*
- economies of difference: gender, identity and diversity on the (international) comics market
- spaces between, centres and peripheries: transnationality and diversity in comics culture

Open Workshop:

Beyond the discussion of each year's special topic, the German Society for Comics Studies aims to further co-operation and dialogue in all areas of comics research. The 13th Annual Conference in Cologne will therefore continue an open workshop format that allows researchers to present and gather feedback on on-going projects within comics studies in all stages of development, and without any thematic restrictions – not limited to the conference topic. The invitation stands for colleagues in all phases of academic careers to discuss any projects on which they are currently working.

Submissions and contact:

Please address your **abstracts** of roughly 300 words plus a short biography (as a word and pdf file) no later than **April 1st 2018** to: comfortagung2018@gmail.com

Contributions to the conference will be accepted in English or German and should not exceed 20 minutes. The presentations in the open workshop are limited to 15 minutes.

We plan to publish selected contributions in an edited volume.

Participants are not required to be members of the German Society for Comics Studies. Contributions from non-members welcome!

For further information see:

<http://www.comicgesellschaft.de/en/category/comicgesellschaft/jahrestagungen/>

Conference organizers:

Véronique Sina (University of Cologne, Department of Media Culture and Theatre)

Nina Heindl (University of Cologne, Department of Art History)

Christine Gundermann (University of Cologne, Department of History)