

Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies

Call for Papers: German Comics and Graphic Literature

While contemplating the sequential art of Rodolphe Töpffer, the Swiss grandfather of modern comics, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe made an insightful observation on the potential of the medium. He commented that “[i]f Töpffer did not have such an insignificant text before him, he would invent things which would surpass all our expectations.” Since that historic remark in 1830, Goethe’s assessment of comics’ potential has manifested globally. Today, comic art is regarded as an important transnational medium that broaches a range of subject matter, engaging both regional and global themes. In German-speaking Europe, in particular, graphic narrative has emerged as an essential form to examine German history and memory while representing the experiences of marginalized groups.

The multimodal dimensions of the comics medium renders it a unique form through which to discuss social justice and human rights issues. With its history of radical politics worldwide and ability to visualize bodies, comics draw attention to issues of representation – as well as to representation itself – in ways unlike other media. Through visualization and spatial and temporal fragmentation, the articulation of social justice themes – as well as our reading experience of them – differs dramatically from their engagement in more traditional texts. Visual cues of ethnicity, gender, class, religion and ability are not easily flattened into single-issue subjects, making comics fundamentally intersectional, while the history of the form itself asks readers to question assumptions, stereotypes and the impact of specific narrative strategies on social justice issues. Moreover, comics demonstrate why representation matters, communicating experiences that are often difficult to translate into words alone, such as chronic illness, depression, oppression, trauma and silence. Finally, through comics written by and about the LGBTQ community, people of colour and other minority groups, authors and artists are able to communicate subjective experiences of oppression and segregation visually, contributing a first-person perspective into larger discourses of inequality, bigotry or discrimination.

This special issue of *Seminar* seeks to demonstrate the diverse themes of German comics studies with a particular interest in social justice and human rights issues. How do German-language comics and graphic novels engage ethnicity, class, religion and ability through form and content? How are German-language comics and graphic novels in dialog with comics outside of German-speaking Europe through their social justice and human rights concerns? And what work do German-language comics and graphic novels still have to do?

We welcome submissions with a variety of focal points in German, Austrian and Swiss comics and graphic literature, including but not limited to the following:

- comics and the experience of migration and displacement
- comics and the representation of ethnicity and racialized identities
- comics and the representation of marginalized or persecuted communities
- graphic medicine and the representation of disability in comics
- comics and LGBTQ rights and representation
- comics and social justice work/activism
- political cartoons and caricature
- teaching social justice and human rights issues with comics and graphic narratives in the post-secondary German Studies curriculum

Please send a 500-word abstract and short bio to Biz Nijdam (biz.nijdam@ubc.ca) and Charlotte Schallié (schallie@uvic.ca) by June 15, 2019. The editors will notify contributors by June 30, 2019 and final submissions (5000-9000 words; MLA 8th ed.) will be due no later than December 1, 2019 (preferably earlier). Submissions are welcome in English, French or German.