



Call for Papers

Graphic Realities: Comics as Documentary, History, and Journalism

International Conference

22.-23.02.2018, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen/GCSC

While comics have traditionally been associated with fictional, especially funny and/or fantastic stories, they have in recent decades become a major vehicle for nonfiction, as well. This development coincides with a time that has been described as ‘post-truth’, in which established news media face a crisis of confidence. The turn towards comics is a turn towards a medium, which inherently promotes simplification and exaggeration. Cartoon imagery thus immediately exhibits the subjectivity of the artist and her or his interpretation – but what could be considered a hindrance towards factual reporting has become an important resource. The overt display of subjectivity and medial limitations as a show of honesty has been described as an authentication strategy of graphic nonfiction. In contrast to formats based on camera-recorded images like photography and film nonfiction comics cannot lay claim to indexing premedial reality. Rather, individual graphic styles index their own creator who as witness becomes the main authenticator. Thus, comics shift the weight of authentication from medial prerequisites towards their authors and artists and thus the textual properties referencing them. One of the questions that will be discussed at the conference is thus the relation of inherent medial properties of comics as vehicle for nonfiction.

While among graphic nonfiction life writing in particular has received widespread scholarly attention, this conference will focus on recent approaches to comics as documentary, history, and journalism. As opposed to graphic memoirs in which authors reflect upon their own lives and experiences, these works focus on the lives and experiences of others. Thus, authors and artists need to do justice towards their subjects, as well as to their own experience and negotiate their own voices within their stories. This becomes especially relevant as a majority of graphic reportages centers around highly traumatizing crises and catastrophes, such as war, displacement, natural disasters, and oppression. The conference is intended to explore how

authors and artists utilize the medium of comics for nonfiction and address these ‘graphic realities’.

Invited Speakers:

- Prof. Dr. Jörn Ahrens (Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen)
- Dr. Nina Mickwitz (University of the Arts London)
- Prof. Dr. Dirk Vanderbeke (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)
- Prof. Dr. Wibke Weber (Züricher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Winterthur)

Submission for talks should address one or more of the following questions:

- How is the medium of comics employed for reportage, history writing, and to report on war, crises, and trauma?
- Which narrative and aesthetic strategies do authors and artists employ to present and authenticate their comics as nonfiction?
- How do the genres of ‘documentary’, ‘history’, and ‘journalism’ in comics relate to each other and how do they relate to other genres of graphic nonfiction such as ‘life-writing’ or educational formats?
- Does the medium of comics inherently support nonfictionality, or does it depend on con- and paratextual framing practices?
- How do different ‘transfer media’ such as comic books or webcomics affect the potential of comics for factual reporting?
- How and to what extent is nonfictionality created through intermediality, especially with regard to more conventionally ‘factual’ media such as photography and film?
- In how far do different comics traditions differ transnationally and -culturally with regard to their status as nonfiction?

Please submit your proposals (no longer than 300 words) for talks (20 min) and a short CV including your affiliation to graphicrealities@gcsc.uni-giessen.de until **November 3rd, 2017**.

The conference is organized as collaboration between the International Centre for the Study of Culture Giessen (GCSC) and the Comics Studies Working Group (AG Comicforschung) of the German Society for Media Studies (GfM) by Laura Schlichting (Justus-Liebig-University Giessen) and Johannes C. P. Schmid (University of Hamburg).

A membership in the Comics Studies Working Group is not mandatory for participation.