

CFP: Graphic Narratives and Trauma, MLA 2022 **(15.03.2021)**

Discussion published by Elisabeth Krimmer on Friday, February 12, 2021

This series of panels explores the representation of trauma in German-language graphic narratives. Recent decades have seen an increase in graphic narratives that deal with various traumatic experiences, including trauma related to warfare, genocide, terrorism, racism, sexual violence, domestic violence, illness, disability, migration, natural disasters and climate-change related suffering. Indeed, some scholars have argued that graphic narratives are particularly well-suited to portraying traumatic experiences through the lens of individual memories. Hillary Chute, for example, has suggested that the “fragmentary and condensed form” of comics panels corresponds to the fragmentary and condensed nature of traumatic memories. Because graphic memoirs both show and tell, they push “on conceptions of the unrepresentable” and capture what might otherwise be considered “unsayable.” Similarly, Gillian Whitlock states that “comics has a distinctive role to play in the work of representing traumatic memory and may be partly adept at finding room to maneuver amid spaces of contradiction and extreme states of violent contestation.”

We encourage submissions that parse the representation of trauma in fictional and non-fictional graphic narratives. Possible topics include, but are not limited to the following issues:

- How do graphic narratives relate to a visual archive of trauma?
- How do comics address issues of gender and race in representations of trauma?
- How do nonmainstream graphic narratives give voice to individual, highly personal experiences of trauma?
- How do these texts negotiate the aesthetics and ethics of trauma?
- How do varying conceptualizations of temporality impact the representation of trauma?
- How can the language of comics, exemplified by concepts such as iconic solidarity (Groensteen), subtend notions of social justice (see the 2020 double issue of *Seminar* on social justice, www.utpjournals.press/toc/seminar/56/3-4)?
- Does graphic narrative’s oft-cited proclivity for self-reflectivity and realism enhance or diminish its capacity to bear witness to trauma?
- How do the formal and aesthetic features of comics (e.g., the gutter, the reader’s habit to form single panels into a coherent whole) impact our understanding of trauma?
- In which ways are graphic memoirs invested in what Leigh Gilmore calls “the ethics of testimony”? Do they indeed form part of an “alternative jurisdiction”?
- How does the democratizing potential of comics, evidenced in an artist’s

ability to produce substantial work without much funding (for example, through serial online publication), encourage the telling of stories that would be marginalized in mainstream media?

Please submit 300-word abstracts and a short bio to Elisabeth Krimmer (emkrimmer@ucdavis.edu) by **March 15, 2021**. If your proposal is accepted, you must be an MLA member by April 7, 2021. You may only have two roles at the convention.