

CFP: Comics and Memory

A Nordic Network for Comics Research conference hosted by Ghent University in collaboration with the University of Liège (ACME) and KU Leuven

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Introduction

“Memory is tabooed as unpredictable, unreliable, irrational”, deplored Adorno more than half a century ago (122). Although nowadays the study of memory has established itself, memory remains an untamable beast, broad and interdisciplinary in its scope. This conference seeks to understand memory, and more specifically the relationship between comics and memory, by welcoming papers on the following three lines of inquiry:

1. Personal memory

Research on comics and personal memory has traditionally focused on the genre of autobiography, in no small part because of the connection which exists between autobiography, the graphic novel and issues of media and genre legitimacy. In addition to the relationship between the semiotic hybridity of comics and the representation of reality, the confessional, the quotidian and the genealogical aspects of autobiographical graphic narratives have received sustained attention at conferences, in books and in scholarly articles (e.g. Chaney 2011, Chute 2010, Hirsch 1992). Honoring the existing tradition of work on the relationship between comics and memory from the point of view of autobiography, this conference seeks to take a new perspective on the topic of personal memory and comics. It does so by foregrounding questions pertaining to personal memory and creativity. It draws attention to the relationship between personal memory and the imagination by thematizing the concept of the internal world and to the relationship between personal memory and humor through the foregrounding of the notion of idiosyncrasy, which may be linked to the narrative effect of ‘weirdness’. It also emphatically thematizes the connection between the personal memories of readers and the creative reception of comics and graphic novels as highlighted by recent scholarship on comics and culture (Gibson 2015).

Keywords: autobiography, autofiction, readers’ memories, creativity, reception, internal worlds, idiosyncrasy, weirdness

2. Memory of the medium

Given the long history of comics as a supposedly ephemeral and disposable product, the medium has sometimes been thought of as an “art without memory,” as Thierry Groensteen once put it when referring to the lack of reprints (Groensteen 2006: 66; Berthou 2011). Ten

years later, partly through the institutionalization of the graphic novel, lavish reprints and coffee table editions occupy a considerable amount of shelf space in specialized and general bookstores, feeding into a widespread “nostalgia industry” (Baetens and Frey 2015). Undoubtedly, the roots of this trend go back to a strong collector and fan culture, which, initially sparked by the twin engines of ephemerality and seriality, would bloom in the 1960s and 1970s, as comics fans strived to recover the memory of the medium and penned the first histories of comics. With the emergence of the graphic novel and the legitimation of comics, processes of canonization have become a critical issue for comics studies (Pizzino 2015). Over the last two decades, this contemporary revaluation and interrogation of what is worth remembering in comics makes the issue of the memory of the medium, together with the processes, agents, institutions and actors that are involved in its formation and transmission, all the more salient.

Keywords: heritage, canonization, historiography of comics, fandom, reprints, nostalgia, intermediality, archive

3. Collective memory

Although comics often seem intensely personal due to their individualistic drawing styles, they can also serve as reflections of the collective memory of the contexts of their production and, in the case of comics on historical events, particular moments and figures from the past. A prominent example in French-language productions from the last decade is the Great War and the alternative stories built around it (Ahmed, Lund and Ribbens 2015). Similarly, 9/11 is a recurrent theme in recent English-language comics and has already attracted considerable academic interest (e.g. Bragard, Dony and Rosenberg 2011). Owing to their frequent positioning in the margins of culture, comics can provide insight into the possible schism - and overlaps - between memory and history (as concretized by Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*). Besides analyzing the presence of, and possible tussle between, collective memory and history in comics, the influence of the contexts of production and reception - underground, alternative or mainstream - call for further attention in the emerging research on memory in comics.

Keywords: historical events and personalities, memories of spaces (urban memories), memories of communities, *lieux de mémoire* and commemoration

We are happy to confirm a keynote address by Mel Gibson (Northumbria University).

Selected papers presented at the conference will be considered for publication in an edited volume at the Presses Universitaires de Liège as part of the [ACME series](#).

Kindly send abstracts of 250 words (as both MS Word and PDF files) by **1 September 2016** to: Maaheen Ahmed (maaheen.ahmed@ugent.be), Benoît Crucifix (benoit.crucifix@ulg.ac.be) and Charlotte Pylyser (charlotte.pylyser@kuleuven.be)

Organizing committee

Maaheen Ahmed (UGent)
Benoît Crucifix (University of Liège/UCLouvain)
Charlotte Pylyser (KU Leuven)

Scientific committee

Björn-Olav Dozo (University of Liège)
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Fabrice Préyat (Université libre de Bruxelles)
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