

## No Longer In-Between: Towards a Social Abstraction in Comics Exhibitions

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Discourse on comics abstraction has largely focused on the formal qualities of comics, that is, abstraction in terms of the panel (representation) and sequence (narrative). While, like in other media discourse, formal abstraction proves a consistently interesting and multi-faceted line of inquiry, especially in terms of the limitations of representation and the narrative impulse, in this paper I propose to expand the discourse on comics abstraction beyond the panel and sequence—abstraction in comics—to the social space—abstraction of comics. In defining abstraction pluralistically, this paper suggests a social abstraction of comics as a means to withdraw from comics' intermedial in-betweenness, which works to both ingratiate certain comics into the classification of literature and exclude them from art as, at best, mere inspiration, and at worse, kitsch. I argue that a social abstraction, achieved through withdrawing from the discourses on literature and art, particularly in terms of comics' material embodiment on the page and in the book, can be instrumentalized to move closer to a means of thinking of and exhibiting comics in a manner that engages with their affective qualities as opposed to their perceived cultural position or physical substance. Through an examination of commonly employed tropes in contemporary comics exhibitions, I propose a critique of the didactic impetus to explain what comics are and a turn towards an examination of comics' self-reflexivity—what comics do. Rather than a simple attempt to culturally elevate comics, I argue that such a shift can further foreground comics' modes of representation and narration in refocusing attention on comics as comics.

### Kurzbiographie

Dr. Erin La Cour is a Lecturer in English Literature and Visual Culture at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and holds a PhD from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, with a thesis entitled "The 'Graphic Novel': Discourses on the Archive" (2013). She acted as project advisor for the sequential art exhibition "Black or White" (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2013), is a former editor of the *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art*, and is currently a book review editor for *Early Popular Visual Culture*. She is also the co-founder and co-director of Amsterdam Comics ([www.amsterdamcomics.com](http://www.amsterdamcomics.com)), and has published a co-edited anthology, *Comics and Power: Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects, and Communities* (Cambridge Scholars, 2015), and a co-edited volume of *Image [&] Narrative*, "Comics in Art/Art in Comics" (2016). Her current research focuses on both the intermediality and mediality of comics in several socio-historical cultural milieux. Her most recent publications on these topics include "Comics as a Minor Literature" (*Image [&] Narrative*, 2016), a forthcoming book on the in-betweenness of comics, and a co-edited volume, with Dr. Simon Grennan and Rik Spanjers, on key terms and critical theory in Comics Studies.