



Gesellschaft für Comicforschung

## **The Spaces Between: Negotiating Gender and Race in Transdisciplinary Comics Collaborations**

*Susan Merrill Squier (Penn State University)*

In this talk, I will consider how comics produced by transdisciplinary collaborations negotiate gender, race, and diversity issues both in the process of creation and in the comic that results. My talk will be based on email and personal interviews with three collaborative teams, from Berlin, Glasgow, and Melbourne Australia respectively, carried out during 2018.

Scale-Free Network, in Australia, created *The War Inside*, about bacterial dysentery in World War I; a collaborative team at the Wellcome Institute for Molecular Parasitology focused on the impact of microscopic organisms on the human body, creating comics that range from *Parasites to Malaria*, *Sleeping Sickness and Toxoplasmosis*; and a collaboration between artists and designers, scientists in a number of different fields, and an expert in pedagogy focused on health in terms of the Anthropocene and climate change.

All of these comics deal with health and illness (issues that are themselves profoundly gendered and raced), yet they do so at three different scales: the scale of the molecule and cell; the scale of the organism; and the scale of the planet. They deliberately incorporate perspectives and representations that are diverse in terms of gender, race, and species. Reflecting the comics medium's embrace of a marginal and transgressive position, these comics challenge the acceptance of arbitrary spaces between living beings at whatever scale, identity position, gender or race. While the time available permits only a quick look at each collaboration, I intend to argue that as these three projects reveal, a focus on gender and diversity in comics production and representation requires an attention to scale, perspective, and narrative mode.

### **Kurzbiographie**

Susan Merrill Squier is Brill Professor Emeritus of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and English at Penn State University, where she also served as Acting Director of the STS Program. She is the author or editor of ten books, including *Epigenetic Landscapes: Drawings as Metaphor* (2017), *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* (2015), *Babies in Bottles: Twentieth-Century Visions of Reproductive Technology* (1984), *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine* (2004) and *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture: A Partial Alphabet* (2011). She has been scholar in residence at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin (2015), the Zentrum für Literatur-und Kulturforschung (2014), The Bellagio Study and Conference Center (2001), Visiting Distinguished Fellow, LaTrobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and Fulbright Senior Research Scholar, Melbourne, Australia. She is Advisory Board Member of SymbioticA Biological Arts (Perth) and of SLSA. She is a section editor of *Reproductive BioMedicine and Society*, and a member of the editorial boards of *Configurations*, *Literature and Medicine*, *Journal of the Medical Humanities*. Her co-edited special issue of *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science and Technology* on "Graphic Medicine" was published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2014, and she is co-editor of the book series *Graphic Medicine* at Penn State University Press.



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She serves as co-organizer of the international series of annual conferences on comics and medicine, which have taken place in London, Chicago, Toronto, Brighton UK, Baltimore MD, and Riverside, California.