

Editorial

1 Superhero films are, despite their commercial appeal across the board, often seen as a boys' club. Yet, as the submissions to this issue show, the club is a complex and complicated one filled with ideals so unattainable that not even the titular heroes can fulfil them. This issue of *gender forum* therefore engages not only with superheroes, but primarily with the crises of masculinity negotiated in the superhero films of the past twelve years, starting with *Batman Begins*.

2 Annette Schimmelpfennig's article "Capitalism and Schizophrenia in Gotham City – The Fragile Masculinities of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*" examines the series' various presentations of masculinity and their dependency on gadgets and 'theatricality'. The success of a man's performance of his masculinity is measured in how convincing he is as either hero or villain and in his exertion of power. Schimmelpfennig thereby argues that the men in the three installments are stereotypes that cater to a heteronormative world view and constantly need to reassure their compulsory heterosexuality and gender affiliation to persist within the society of Gotham. By contrasting the films' protagonist Bruce Wayne and his superhero alter ego Batman with the villains, she concludes that the masculinities are fragile because they strongly depend on money, physical strength and control over other, physically and financially weaker people, otherwise they are not of value for the predominant heterocentric, capitalist community. Furthermore, she observes the subordinate role of femininity in the films which again emphasize the films' focus on the desire for a hypermasculine saviour. Schimmelpfennig consequently stresses that the city (and through it the films themselves) requires an immaculate masculinity that is as good as unattainable and promotes obsolete role models.

3 In "Iron Man as Cyborg: Between Masculinities", Evdokia Stefanopoulou examines the mass proliferation of superhero movies since the turn of the century. The gender issues in superhero movies are often accompanied by the common observation that the vast majority of superheroes are men and the rare presence of women is marked by their placement in a supporting role, thus reproducing a patriarchal ideology. Although this phenomenon can indeed be characterized as an excessive demonstration of masculine power and superheroes can be seen as mythical figures of a technological patriarchy, Stefanopoulou suggests an antithetical reading. Her approach examines the overstated "technological sublime in human form" (Wasielowski 66) as a sort of divergent embodiment of subjectivity containing the notion of the cyborg as described by Donna Haraway. It entails its own blurring of the

ontological boundaries (161), therefore projecting its own existence as a social construction. Deploying this approach, she examines the gender representations in the *Iron Man* trilogy (2008, 2010, 2013) not as demonstration of patriarchal power, but as masculinity in crisis, a masculinity undermined by its excessive technological look and its status as a constructed fabrication. A close analysis of the three texts and a special focus on gender representations will demonstrate how the technological subjectivity of Iron Man and the ironic performance by Robert Downey Jr. actually undermines the surface super-masculinity of the character.

4 Yen-Lian Liu writes about “The Masculine Masquerade of Superheroes in *Watchmen*”. He proposes that the image of many American male superheroes is represented as ‘phallic’ in their costumes. Even though it is a long-term reality that the representation of superheroes often connotes an ideally mythic but essentially un-realizable embodiment of men, such a costuming more often than not involves, as Harry Brod sees it, a process of men’s conscious self-masquerade. How well, or how falsely, do male characters accommodate themselves to their masculine costuming as superheroes? How does this costumed heroism affect men’s lives, both in public and in private? *Watchmen* examines this relationship with regard to the metaphorical representations of the bodily images of men and their associations with justice and masculinity. If the actualization of superheroes in the reality of *Watchmen* debunks heroism itself, then the graphic representations of those male superheroes’ masculine but masked bodies also belie an apotheosizing but simultaneously dehumanizing dimension through such a male masquerade. By juxtaposing the different representations and embodiments of male superheroes in *Watchmen*, the article focuses on how men’s negotiations between a performative identity and an unmasked selfhood are relentlessly exposed and problematized. Accordingly, the artificiality of men’s masculine images is not only highlighted in the graphic representations of *Watchmen* but also subversive to the conventional notions of super-heroic male embodiments.

5 The issue’s final contribution is Nicole M. Rizzuto’s review of Kristen Hogan’s 2016 book *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, published by Duke University Press.