

We don't need another hero, do we?

Researching heroism from a cultural perspective

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Abstract:

This article addresses different aspects of heroes and heroism and it offers an introductory analysis of approaches to heroism, which may be relevant for the articles in this issue of *Academic Quarter*. These approaches are all from a culturally theoretical perspective. They encompass a discussion of an ontological need for heroes. The sections of the article are also about mythological heroism, the hero's quest as a narrative principle, heroes as historical agents and modern heroism. The latter is also of a reflexive and critical nature and under the heading of "the besieged hero", it includes a discussion of the problematic figure of the superhero as found in blockbuster movies.

Keywords: heroism, mythological hero, superheroes, reflexive heroism, besieged heroism.

As the first article in this issue of *Academic Quarter* about heroism we give an analysis of forms of heroism, historical and contemporary. The analysis contains shifting attitudes through time to heroes and heroism.

To kick off we consult popular culture of the 1980s as a period that has resurfaced in the landscape of contemporary culture. From the echo of the 1980s we hear the voice of pop icon Tina Turner singing, "We don't need another hero." These words were part of the theme score of the post-apocalyptic action movie *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Miller 1985). In the movie the actor Mel Gibson plays the lead role of "Mad" Max Rockatansky, who does his best to help and keep safe the undefended citizens of a scattered society. However, Mel Gibson's take on the hero character was arguably that of an anti-hero. The song may refer to the notion that we don't need heroes, because heroes stir up trouble and might not guarantee any state of equilibrium in the society the hero is part of. As demonstrated in the blockbuster movie franchise *Lethal Weapon* Mel Gibson contributed to this notion of an anti-hero as war veteran and police officer Martin Riggs (Warner Bros. Pictures 1987-1998). The hero is flawed or conflicted in regard to the role of being both protector and protagonist. And yet the hero still manages to protect and serve his community and partner.

Two decades later movie Director Christopher Nolan made hard-working police commissioner Jim Gordon voice the need of a hero, whom the shattered society does not need but deserves (*The Dark Knight*, 2008). In the movie *The Dark Knight*, commissioner Gordon's last act is to disavow the protagonist and friend that helped to secure a significant measure of peace and order in the dark and disturbed fictional city of Gotham. But Batman keeps coming back, alongside a range of heroes and superheroes, who defend ordinary people against villains, supernatural beings and intergalactic antagonists, and in some cases even the ordinary people themselves. Why is there a need to have heroes and continued production of narratives about heroes? This is a central theme and research question of this article. In this article we explore the concept of the hero and heroism as cultural phenomena and their historically changing shapes, representations. We also address narratives about heroes and heroism that are relevant to our current time. It is part of the argument of this article that the symbolic representation of this he-

roic protagonist changes over time. In war time, we need heroic protagonists that defend our way of life. In peace time, we need heroic protagonists to ensure some measure of fairness, right and order. And in our own lives we need protagonists to inspire us in how to lead a good life, even up until the end.

The culture of heroes and heroism?

As a point of departure for this article we adopt the position proposed by Jela Žižek (2016). Heroes and heroism are a cultural phenomenon that are both the object of admiration and of ambivalence. We know that heroism is an absolute good. Our myths and current media news stories tell us so. We need heroes and heroism as an ontological category that makes us believe in the direction that our lives are taking us and gives us hope for the future. But at the same time heroism is foolish. In the fictional universe, super/heroes act out of a principle of selflessness and often encounter impossible situations and dangers. The number of casualties in the movie universe of heroes demonstrates that you need certain unique skills in order to cope with life. Take the example of the Marvel Cinematic Universe blockbuster *Infinity War* (Marvel Studios 2018), in which the antagonist Thanos with godlike powers kills trillions of human beings with a snap of his fingers. In everyday life the dangers of 'stepping up' are more likely to merit the obituary section of press media. For Žižek, superheroism is foolish, or more precisely the genre is stupid. Because we know, as an audience, and as individuals, that the superpowers involved are fake (regardless of what the engineering sciences envision). But nevertheless, Žižek concludes, the belief in heroes and heroism are something we need. The act of heroism and the individual hero is needed to inspire but also to warn us of an unjust society. It is important to 'step up' and confront matters of conflict or things that are not fair and just. To enter into conflicts is important, even though it may very well implicate the individual and even endanger ourselves. This is what the audience of movies, fiction and press news knows: Happy endings are only certain in the fictional universe of (super)hero narratives. If we take one step back and contemplate the notion of the hero/heroism it is possible to place heroes and heroism as an integral part of diverse kinds of narratives. This narratological aspect of heroes, can be ascertained from the tendency of literary narratology to use the

terms hero and protagonist interchangeably (Abrams 1971, 128; Cuddon 2014, 329, 565). In stories and in news reports audiences as ordinary people look for the goodies and the baddies, and in some cases even the agents in between.

The above-mentioned narratological fusion of the terms protagonist and hero is elaborated systematically with regard to genres and their historical development by Frye (1957/1973). In his system and hierarchy of the tragedy genre, the hero/protagonist is marginalized or expelled from society. In mythic tragedy, the hero is a god such as Hercules or Christ, and in high mimetic tragedy, the hero is a noble human such as Othello, whereas in low mimetic or domestic tragedy, the hero or protagonist is a human who suffers a tragic fate, as Tess of the d'Urbervilles or Little Nell.

At the bottom of Frye's hierarchy, there is the tragic, ironic mode with a protagonist or hero, who fails such as Job or the hero of Kafka's *Trial*. (Frye 1957/1973, 35-43). In comedy, the hero is integrated in society. With regard to the concepts of the reflexive modern hero and the besieged hero, which will be discussed later in this article, Frye's ironic mode, both in tragedy and comedy, is pertinent. In both modes, the hero is challenged. In the tragic mode, the hero may suffer persecution from a society that is ethically and ideologically wrong, and in the comic mode, the hero is ethically problematic himself and partially outside society, as Sherlock Holmes. (Frye 1957/1973, 45-49).

The article argues that an understanding of heroes and heroism needs to address different stages in cultural transformations: The mythological, the modern, the reflexive modern and the besieged modern. In this article this distinction is inspired by the works of current sociologists who all address the "precarious" or "volatile" nature of our global society and the interactions in the "global village" and the cultural identities we need to consider (Beck 1997, Giddens 2000, Bauman 2007, Žižek 2000, 2008, 2011). To understand what fuels, necessitates or makes these transformations possible is a research question or a set of questions that this article in itself is unable to answer. In different disciplines (e.g. history, anthropology, sociology, psychology) the transformation from one "era" or paradigm is enacted or invoked on the grounds of different epistemic elements (e.g. conflicts, revolutions in research, or social/natural catastrophes). This is also why these cultural transformations

of *the hero* and the principle of *heroism* may overlap and even co-exist in so far as historical aspects are reflected in newer transformations. Carlyle's categorizations of heroes (Carlyle 1840) consisted of:

- The Hero as Divinity with Odin as a case
- The Hero as Prophet with Muhammad as a case
- The Hero as Poet with Shakespeare as a case
- The Hero as Priest with Luther as a case
- The Hero as Man of Letters with Rousseau as a case
- The Hero as King with Napoleon and Modern Revolutionism as cases

A hero figure could be read as mythological heroism, modern heroism as well as reflective heroism simultaneously. This explanation of transformation may be criticized for being both ethnocentric, academic, and not being aware of the diversity and complexity of cultures around the world. However, this framework of understanding hero(es) and heroism can be defended to merit as an interpretation helpful in the endeavor of explaining, how and why heroes and heroism are relevant subjects of scholarly research. Or, why heroes persist and endure, even though we as individuals may be reluctant to participate in society as heroes.

The following analysis of the dimensions and differences connected to notions of heroes and heroism is inspired by the aforementioned sources of insights into the changing conditions and paradigms for cultural production of representations and notions of our subject. This framework may be criticized for being too general and excluding particular cases of unique instances relevant to the subject. However, the point of the framework is to propose a possible way of distinguishing between overall differences.

Mythological heroes and heroism

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949, has been influential despite its criticism (Elwood 1999) of being eclectic and inaccurate in its use of source material, and criticism of being gender specific in its focus on masculinity (Murdock, 1990; Frankel 2010). Campbell's work is placed precariously between folklore, with focus on myth, and narratology, and it has strong links to Jungian archetype theory (Jung 1968), and also the

Freudian psychoanalytical couch is quoted by Campbell as a source (Campbell 1949/1975, 14). Campbell also includes "the rituals of primitive tribes and great civilizations of the past" (18) as his empirical material. Campbell's construction of the hero rests on what he calls a monomyth, which is ahistorical and acultural in the sense that it applies to all historical periods and all cultures. This is possible, he claims (Campbell 1949/1975, 13-20; Hansen, 2009) because the myth is based on the human mind itself, and the arguments for this are placed in psychology and psychoanalysis as well as in comparative mythology.

The all-inclusive nature of Campbell's take on the hero is apparent from the list of mythic heroes. Among many others, they are Theseus, Ulysses, Prometheus, Jason, Buddha, Moses, Jonah, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Osiris, the Irish Finn MacCool and Cuchulainn, Rip van Winkle, the Eskimo Raven, Jack the Giant Killer, and Charlemagne. These hero figures all partake in the same quest pattern of the monomyth. The narrative structure of this monomyth is an elaboration of its nucleus, separation – initiation – return, and it is circular: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." (Campbell 1949/1975, 31). The heroic quest pattern contains the same number of steps; however, the specific functions or steps can be attributed to different agents. For instance in the step of The Whale's Belly, in which the hero is swallowed by a huge monster, there may be Jonah swallowed by a whale, the Eskimo trickster-hero Raven, Finn MacCool swallowed by a Celtic *peist*, Little Riding Hood by a wolf, and in a Zulu myth the swallowing monster is an elephant.

In the last chapter of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "The Hero Today" Campbell quotes Nietzsche who in turn argues that "Dead are all the gods", and because of "the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research" the dream-web of myth has fallen away (327). The hero figure of the monomyth may have fallen away as an ontological possibility; but it lives forcefully on in fiction and mass media. The narrative structure of Campbell's monomythical hero and its tropes have subse-

quently been translated by Christopher Vogler (1992/1999) into Hollywood blockbuster film narratives. Furthermore, Hollywood employed the hero quest as a narrative structure even before Vogler's manual for screenwriters, *The Writer's Journey. Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (1992/1999). For instance, in Disney's *Pinocchio* (1940), based on the Italian children's book from 1881, the eponymous character is swallowed by the giant whale Monster, and he finds his Geppetto living in its belly. Vogler codifies Campbell's monomyth as a screenwriting tool. His book contains a worksheet to help the scriptwriter along (303). Vogler stresses that this structure is more than a "dictatorial mandate" and not "formulaic" (xv, xiii), and in his inspirational catalogue of heroes, he stresses that a hero is more than a warrior. He suggests the hero could be "pacifist, mother, pilgrim, fool, wanderer, hermit, inventor, nurse, savior, artist, lunatic, lover, clown, king, victim, slave, worker, rebel, adventurer, tragic failure, coward, saint monster" (xviii). The hero quest structure is particularly prevalent in the fantasy genre (Christensen 2011), but Vogler's examples span many film genres with the titles *Titanic* (1997), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Full Monty* (1997), as well as the *Star Wars* films, and many more.

Campbell's structure of a hero's quest lives on from its place as a monomyth in many mythologies, and religions and in folklore. They may have lost their primary ontological functions, but as Vogler's work illustrates they live on at a narrative level in popular entertainment.

Heroism as a historical agent

Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841/2013) portrayed great men or heroes and their roles in history. Carlyle's views were to some extent shared by Friedrich Hegel and Max Weber, whereas e.g. Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer adapted a wider scope to the forces forming history.

In the chapter "The Hero as King", as a system of government Carlyle raises the ideal of the ablest man as leader, which he sees as a welcome alternative to parliamentary democracy: "Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there; raise *him* to the supreme place, and loyally reverence him: you have a perfect government for that country: no ballot-box, parliamentary eloquence, voting,

constitution-building or other machinery whatsoever can improve it a whit." (Carlyle 1840, 182) Yet, Carlyle is quick to point out that this is only an ideal that cannot be reached: "Alas, we know very well that Ideals can never be completely embodied in practice." (182) On the contrary, Carlyle elevates the regicide Oliver Cromwell to a great man of history (197, 195). Napoleon, too, is one of Carlyle's heroes as king, though he finds Cromwell greater (218). Carlyle's heroes do not only belong within the political realm. His heroes are also divinity, prophets, poets, priests, men of letters, and it is these heroes, who shape history:

Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these. (Carlyle 1840, 1-2)

Hegel shared Carlyle's admiration for Napoleon. In a letter he wrote: "I saw the Emperor—this world-soul [Weltseele]—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it^{fi}." (Hegel 1970, 119) In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel subscribes to the idea of an individual causing history to progress: "At the summit of all actions, including world-historical actions, stand individuals. Each of these individuals is a subjectivity who realizes what is substantive. He is a living embodiment of the substantive deed of the world-spirit, and is, therefore, directly identical with this deed." (Hegel 1820/2001, 268) It can be argued, that some cultural consequences of the hero as a historical agent can be viewed critically. As a symbol the superhero may be interpreted in ways that either enforce or challenge society. In the superhero universes hope is a cultural consequence, but at the same time the actions of the

superhero are also destructive. The Avengers take part in reducing New York City to a war zone (2012), and Superman violates his vow not to kill *Man of Steel* (2013). In *Superman: Red Son* (2003) the superhero enforces a communist society. Cultural consequences are a matter of interpretation.

In contrast, Karl Marx did not see history being formed by heroic individuals. In the Marxist theory of historical materialism, the historical agent was the class struggle. In the introduction to Friedrich Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892), historical materialism designates "that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another." In 1896 Herbert Spencer shared this view of history in the way that he inscribed great men in it, so that they themselves were products of history: "You must admit that the genesis of a great man depends on the long series of complex influences which has produced the race in which he appears, and the social state into which that race has slowly grown. ... Before he can remake his society, his society must make him." (Spencer 1896, 31)

Modern heroes and heroism

Until this point of the article, heroism and the heroic agent has been presented both as myth and as historical agent, and also as a popular narrative device in film making, e.g. through Vogler's work on film manuscripts, as argued. The modernization of heroism can both be explained by modern media and popular culture, or in effect through the capitalization of cultural content (Arnaudo 2013, Bahlmann 2016). We need heroes to keep the cultural production of value going. In the 1970s, Umberto Eco presents his semiotic analysis of *The Myth of Superman* (Eco 1972/1984). As a case Eco demonstrates a basic formula of how heroism is portrayed and represented following the lines of what has already been touched upon in this article.

One of Eco's points is that the "hunger" for heroism in entertaining narratives is a hunger for redundancy. In a society of increasing complexity, be it objective or perceived, the need for steadiness or an ontological base becomes important. But Eco does not diagnose the audience for (super)heroism as neither passive nor bewitched.

This conclusion is supported by Jela Žižek's reading of comic book superheroes. As Žižek writes: "The true lie resides precisely in the attempt to throw off the disguise and show a realist story." (Žižek 2016, 869) In Žižek's interpretation, the introduction of personal development of the hero characters and delving into the personal conflicts of the heroes is a way to cloud the cultural value of heroes. And in effect to counter the theme "we don't need another hero". As she notes: "This last stance is the only ethical one, more ethical than superheroes themselves are: it advocates complete fidelity to the genre regardless of its many flaws." (Žižek 2016, 873). What both Eco and Žižek point to in relation to understanding modern hero/ism is the balance of redundancy and complexity. The premise is that (super)heroes are human with flaws and personal conflicts. They are not to be identified with because they have the mythological awe and powers beyond human capabilities. The authority by strength is something that modernization has pointed out as something to be critical of.

There is one element of modern hero/ism that neither Eco nor Žižek directly deal with. This element is the commodification of heroes. Modern heroism still refers to the principles of sociological thoughts on heroism. But the modern hero enters into an ongoing reproductive circulation of book and newspaper pages, radio broadcasts and movie and TV-screen appearances. Since the 1940s, it is evident that superheroes, understood as defenders of justice and a liberal way of life, overall have been a profitable and expanding business. Producing narratives (plus toys and merchandizes) of superheroes with godlike or extraordinary powers and abilities proved to have both an ideological and economical value. Even news stories reporting on the extraordinary acts of ordinary people turn the hero into a commodity. In this sense, the turn to modern hero/ism represents the creation of contemporary fictional characters situated in current societies and not in any mythological time. An example of this is presented in the MCU *Endgame* when the 'smart' Hulk takes a selfie with some children (Marvel Studios 2019). Even though the super/hero is 'so super' he is human enough (or 'reachable') enough to entertain or the fans.

Reflexive modern heroism and the besieged hero

If we return to the final movie instalments of the Avenger franchise (*Infinity War* 2018, *Endgame* 2019), concluding the Marvel Cinematic Universe that started with the movie *Iron Man* (2008), the complete story arc tells a tale of a happy ending. Order is restored. Tears are being shed, because order demanded sacrifices. Honor is acknowledged and celebrated. Even though the fictive world of the MCU is not the same, closure has been somehow achieved. One lesson learned, or rather repeated, is that no order can be accomplished without victims and losses. And that the loss of a superhero leaves a mark on all of us. How to move on from that experience?

Reflexive modern heroism is not defined by the loss of the super/hero and the following grief and mourning by neither the public nor the fellow superheroes, their family and friends. The experience that the super/hero can die still resonates in the notion of modern heroism. Reflexive modern heroism is not defined by any subjectivization or psychological profiling of the super/heroes. Learning about the thoughts and personal life of the super/hero is in itself not reflexivity. The term "the reflexive modern" is borrowed from sociology (Beck 1997, Bauman 2007, Žižek 2011) and it intends to describe notions of "serious doubt" accompanied by an experience that both revitalizes and revises the labour of Sisyphus from Greek mythology. In sociology the term "reflexivity" means both the ability to tap into the increased global flow of information and based on that create knowledge relevant to our individual lives, thus making us able to make informed decisions and create a coherent and hopefully fair society (Giddens 2000). However, reflexivity also means something darker. Reflexive modern thought points to the fact that our actions based on knowledge and both careful and rash considerations become part of the exact threat or problem that calls for the help or intervention of both super/heroes and the principle of heroism. One sign of reflexive modern heroism is doing something by doing less, or even nothing. Because, does it really matter?

In much of his work, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes and talks about the need for a collective moral authority (e.g. Žižek 2000, 2001, 2008). This authority is established by doing something, instead of simply doing nothing. and not elapsing to do nothing. At the same time Žižek points to the many difficulties of establishing such an authority without conforming to specific ideologies and the

expectable actions. For Žižek, the super/hero cannot ensure collective moral authority, not even by example. For Žižek the super/hero does not represent an agent as tool for establishing order and authority, but instead represents the problem or the phenomenon that needs to be combatted. This means that when super/heroes appear, the problem we know that we have to deal with is actualized, and when the (super)heroes appear in either work clothes or colourful outfits, their actions call to us and include us in the problem. Collective moral authority cannot be achieved by the super/heroic act in itself, not even by a group of superheroes. The following example illustrates elements of what reflexive modern super/heroism entails. In Sam Raimi's movie *Spider-Man 2* (2004), citizens of New York stand up for the masked teenage superhero (the student and newspaper photographer Peter Parker) after he has successfully stopped a runaway train. The exhausted Spider-Man has collapsed and his foe, the totemic Doctor Otto Octavius, demands the body of Spider-Man handed over. But the citizens in the tram stand up and tell Doc Ock: *"If you wanna get to him you're gonna have to get through me. And me!"* (Raimi 2004) The one citizen first to voice this stand against the villain is a big man, a worker, and he is quickly followed by the other people in the train. But what is interesting in relation to a reflexive modern take on super/heroism is that the big guy does not seem confident. Though he is big (for a human) and that his size may be the reason for him to be the first to confront the super villain, most probably the worker has realized that the collective strength of all the other passengers combined will not be enough to exercise collective moral authority: Leave the kid alone! In that exact moment the protected becomes the protector but with the knowledge that the group is not able to mobilize the necessary strength to be successful.

If it is possible to talk about or to positively identify a reflexive modern take on super/heroism, it may be traced or spotted in situations like this one. Behind the worker's hesitation is the reflection or assessment that it is morally right to stand up, but is it really possible? The notion of doubt is not new to super/heroism in its many forms throughout history, maybe excluding the mythical hero. Reflexivity becomes apparent in moments of hesitation, moments of doubts, and even despair. In a more humorous fashion this is presented in the Disney Pixar animated movies *The In-*

credibles 1 and 2 (Bird 2004, 2018) with the notable difference that the attempt (or rather the success) to create collective moral authority comes from the family and not any group of citizens in a train. In the case of Spider-Man, the citizens get their faith, their *communitas* or collective ethos, rewarded. Spider-Man surrenders and in effect saves the day.

Reflexive heroism is a tough choice, echoing feelings of disbelief and the interdependent and interchangeable roles of protector and protected. This in itself is not a new insight into the study of super/heroes in popular and everyday culture. But if we turn to the sociological thought of both Zygmunt Bauman and Slavoj Žižek another aspect appears (Bauman 2007, Žižek 2011): The lack of closure and cathartic release. This sensation or awareness (of being a super/hero) might be described with the notion of being “besieged” (Bauman 2007). It points to a state of cultural awareness and self-awareness in which the very cause that the super/hero(in)es stand up to confront is insecure, or uncertain. In this article it will be a considerable detour to outline in detail the relation between reflexive modernity and postmodernism, but one point can be made. In postmodernism, the “Grand Narratives” were claimed insufficient to guarantee a fixed relation between concrete signs and any “grand order” or meaningfulness. This split was considered to many a liberation from older ideologies, and the split was explored with a kind of playfulness and hope for the formulation of new meanings. An early example of this would be the camp 1960s version of *Batman* (20th Century Fox Television), to some extent the 2010s cartoon tv-series *Teen Titans Go* (Warner Bros. Animation, DC Entertainment), and maybe the more current *Deadpool* franchise (20th Century Fox). In reflexive modernity, this split persists, but the exploration of it is no longer playful. It is to some degree rather fearsome, and the super/hero is confronted with meaninglessness (Žižek 2008, 2011). As mentioned earlier doubt in itself is not something new for the super/hero, but for the besieged super/hero the doubt cannot be resolved or reduced because the action of the super/hero is part of the problem the super/hero is confronting and combating. The superheroine Jessica Jones could be one example of a besieged super/hero (Marvel Comics, Netflix). She is extremely conscious of her flaws and limits and at the same time doubtful of the value of her possible efforts. This ‘double doubt’, paves the way for

a reversal of sympathy (are hero/in/es really helpful), guilt (what about those antagonists I vanquish), alienation (do I really belong) and disillusion (does my effort really matter)? This statement or claim is formulated as a question as it deserves further analysis and conceptual development (e.g. discussing the relationship between reflexive besieged heroism and Frye's ironic heroism mentioned earlier).

Conclusion

What does it take to be a super/hero? Is it possible to pinpoint one single formula for heroism in our times? As we have demonstrated, heroes have persisted throughout the course of time in various but overlapping forms and transformations. We have argued that the notion and conditions of heroism have changed. The concept of the hero has been relocated from religion and myths to blockbuster film franchises, and heroes are no longer exclusively seen as historical agents. Also, the blockbuster superhero universe has been beset by hesitation and doubts about the societal status of heroes. The trope of the always male hero is correspondingly challenged. Our research question: "Why this need not to have heroes, while still producing narratives about heroes?", has provided an answer in itself. The need for heroes is a need for narratives about heroes and not just "another hero", narratives which no longer contain the ontological answers of the heroes of myth and history.

To conclude, the initial words sung by Tina Turner, "we don't need another hero", was the voice of the public, the citizens, who suffer but still hope. What we may factor in or acknowledge in relation to a besieged heroism is, that now the words are voiced by the heroes themselves: Do we need us? This question is answered by popular culture and the cultural industry with a promise of new productions, new representations. And not to forget an ever-growing fan base that admire and mimic the hero(in)es of our time.

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Note

- [i] *den Kaiser—diese Weltseele—sah ich durch die Stadt zum Rekognoszieren hinausreiten; es ist in der Tat eine wunderbare Empfindung, ein solches Individuum zu sehen, das hier auf einen Punkt konzentriert, auf einem Pferd sitzend, über die Welt übergreift und sie beherrscht*. Hegel, letter of 13 October 1806 to F. I. Niethammer, no. 74 (p. 119) (Hegel 1970).